

The Geostrategic Significance of Pakistan and its Relevance in 21st Century: A Case study of China Pakistan Economic Corridor

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Abstract

Pakistan had been one of the most important country in the region of South Asia in terms of her strategic location and the almost five decades of cold war bear witness of this significance as an important ally of USA against the spread of USSR till 1991. The 21st century brought new challenges and opportunities in the shape of globalization, China as an emerging super economic giant and a predicted super power in the future. In this regard Pakistan had to face and change her policy towards the world and adjust herself to new realities. Here CPEC became an opportunity for Pakistan to converge and shift her geostrategic significance in to geo-economics significance to find new alliance at regional and international level and also a new market for her products. The China Pakistan Corridor is a one part of China's grand project of One Belt One Road. The CPEC project is not only going to bring economic opportunities for Pakistan but will become a game changer for the whole region by all means in the long term.

Introduction

China has been among very few countries who had experienced a high GDP growth in last four decades which brought her in to the eyes of the world as an emerging new super power of the world. the Global financial crises of 2007-8 and the war on terror provided an ample time to China to increase her influence in world chess board via various strategies in which CPEC is one such project which just initiated in the backdrop of China in Pakistan, an immediate neighbor of her. In last two decades China has precisely focused on two things. Internal growth and improving and strengthening her relations with the all major regions of the world. For this the president Xi Jinping used a slogan of constructive relations and engagement with all nations of the world. In this regard South Asia comes as a priority to engage with and today's engagement of China is clear from her policies and interests in the region. Mr. Xi visited all major nations in South Asia and initiated huge projects to connect the South

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Asian region with China for trade and stability objectives. In this regard the former President of Pakistan Pervez Musharraf and Chinese President Hu Jintao held their first meeting to for this great project. He again visited Pakistan in 2006 and made a joint declaration and highlighted the areas of cooperation. Both the nations signed a free trade agreement. This agreement increased the volume of trade manifolds from only a \$ 1 billion dollar in 1998 to \$15 billion dollar in 2015. (Vandewalle, 2015)

The New Silk Road: One Belt One Road Initiative and China's Emergence as a Global Power

“The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as the One Belt One Road (OBOR) or the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road” is one of the greatest infrastructure and development projects initiated by the Chinese government in different parts of the world to connect them with china. The prospected completion year of the project is 2049. It will connect Asian countries, Africa, Europe. The connection of China with the world will be via two routes, the land routes and the sea routes. The Chinese government officially calls the project as connectivity at regional level and brighter future of China in the future. (Wang. 2015) along with that China has also started many other regional and international level projects to challenge the supremacy of USA in world affairs such as Naval bases in the shape of “string of pearls” and Asia infrastructure and development Bank. Under the project of String of Pearls, she is said to construct a series of naval bases in Burma, Sri lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh to keep on check on India in the India Ocean region and the ocean itself. In Africa she has contracted a naval base in Djibouti which shows her deep financial and strategic interests in the African region and has also made strategic moves in the South China Sea to compete and balance the power with USA. (Xu 2015) in this regard CPEC is one such project that has a geo-strategic and geo-economic significance.in fact the academicians call it the convergence of geostrategic interests in to geo economic interests which for sure has increased the importance and relevance of Pakistan in this new are many folds.

The Game Changer: China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

China Pakistan Economic Corridor is the largest investment by any foreign nation in Pakistan since 1947. It is a \$ 62 billion worth series of projects ranging from infrastructure to energy across the country to boost up the economy. It will not only boost up the economy but will modernize the economy too with the help of China who will be provided Special economic zones for industrial investment. Former President Mr. Asif Ali Zardari met with Chinese Premier and discussed the plan of the meeting in 2013.

Negotiations continued in the PML (N) government too and finally in November 2014 China announced her interest in Pakistan for investment and in April 2015 Xi Jinping visited Pakistan and announced the \$46 billion CPEC project the project will increase the GDP growth by 1.5% every year in coming three years. CPEC will improve the infrastructure of Pakistan and will brighten and improve the image of Pakistan at international level and will attract other investors to Pakistan. Cumulative effect on the economy will be 2% and will increase the GDP growth to 6 % (Ramay 2017).

The Geography of Corridor

It is the largest project in the history of Pakistan and will pass through all Pakistan. It includes the huge highways, roads, railway links who will start from the port of Gwadar and will go all along to the Chinese border in the extreme north of Pakistan in the Kashgar region. It will pass through all four provinces of Pakistan, the regions of Gilgit Baltistan finally reaching to Khunjrab pass and finally will go beyond Pakistani border and will enter China. The two alignments of CPEC have been well described by Safdar Sial, a political analyst in Pakistan institute of peace studies.

The Eastern Alignment: China and Pakistan both have decided to construct the eastern alignment of CPEC due to some specific reasons. Firstly, the Chinese companies mainly associated with construction are more interested in the Building-Operate-Transfer (BOT) basis. Secondly, in terms of security it is more viable. The corridor in the eastern alignment will pass from specific and secure areas from the province of Balochistan and KPK. This planning of corridor was criticized by the political leadership of the provinces of Balochistan and KPK as well as they have the point of view that is alignment will reduce the development chances in the region.

The Western Alignment: this is considered as the original alignment and it runs from the Gwadar port through Balochistan southern districts and some parts of southern Punjab as well and finally enters back in to the province of KPK via D.I. Khan. It was deferred unless the eastern alignment will be completed. It will connect to Islamabad than to Abbottabad and finally will connect to eastern alignment. It will also become a source of connection to Afghanistan via Chaman and to Iran via Quetta and Kohe e Taftan link too. (Sial 2015)

CPEC: The Strategic Significance

CPEC is a part of the grand plan of China through which she intends to connect itself with the world. The Chinese President has announced to connect China with the world via three major corridors via Central Asia, South Asia and

another one is Bangladesh-Myanmar-India-China corridor. Through Pakistan China will find a trade route to her Xinjiang province and through later she will connect the Yunnan province with Bay of Bengal. As on one side if China will find an opportunity to connect her land with the outer world on the other side it will make Pakistan as a hub and Centre for economic activities in the region and will increase her role in regional affairs. The special economic zones will attract investment and will help in connecting the entire region. In fact it is anticipated and predicted by political analysts that it may connect Afghanistan with India via Pakistan and will bring much strategic control in the hands of Pakistan. Though it seems too early to predict it but in the long run the project seems workable in that regard. But one thing is for sure this convergence of geo-economics and geo-strategic will bring peace and stability in the region of South Asia.

In this project Gwadar is considered as the heart of the Project. It is one of few emerging, strategically and economically one of the most important ports in the world. It is situated near strait of Hormuz from where 40% of the oil flows to different parts of the world. Without Gwadar port the whole project of CPEC cannot be imagined. Today lack of infrastructure energy issue have engulfed Pakistan in a series of issue and this lack in infrastructure cause about 3.555 GDP loss to Pakistan's economy every year. So the CPEC projects will not only connect China with the world via Pakistan or will connect Pakistan with China rather it will connect the entire Pakistan with itself too. All major cities and provinces will be connected and transportation will be easy. All markets will be connected at national, regional and international level. (McCartney 2018)

Dr. Rifaat Hussain, A Pakistani Scholar has deeply analyzed the strategic significance in one of his paper *Sino-Pakistan Ties: Trust, Cooperation and Consolidation*. By arguing that, By arguing that, the region of south Asia despite all potential remains an isolated region due to lack of connectivity with the world. When the Chinese prime minister visited Pakistan he suggested the Shake hand via Himalayas by saying that for better development there is a big area for cooperation and development rather than fighting. Both Pakistan and India consider themselves as partners in the broader spectrum of the region. This development and cooperation may play a vital role in the world at international level. He also offered to resolve the energy crises in Pakistan by offering Chinese help via investment and also mentioned other areas where cooperation can change the fate of Pakistan and of the whole region. Here new area of cooperation was finally found after the 2013 election and the grand project of CPEC was proposed to Pakistan. (Rifaat 2015)

China's mega investment across the world including the CPEC can be seen with the special reference and perspective of her desperate energy needs for the fast economic growth for which she has to develop political relations with the energy producing nations across the world. In the last decade she has started constructing different deep-sea ports famously known as the string of pearls in south Asian countries such as Gwadar in Pakistan located on the very edge of the Arabian Sea, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. The Hambantota of Sri Lanka located in Indian Ocean and Chittagong of Bangladesh in Bay of Bengal. China has the strategy to develop, construct and connect all these ports with her western and southern provinces.

Challenges for CPEC

The CPEC faces both internal and external threats. From separatist to interventionist threats from regional and international powers. Pakistan which is being hard hit by the menace of terrorism in its western provinces have created great dangers for the security of Pakistan in general and CPEC project in particular because as it is said the success of CPEC will become a game changer and will give a Pakistan a dominant role in the politics and strategic maneuverings of the region. That is ah there are some certain elements inside and outside Pakistan want to disrupt the project through violent means.

The Security Threats

The changing regional security dynamics are of great danger to the success of CPEC. Security threats from competing and enemy countries are threat to the projects as well as the international threats by major powers who see their interests disrupted in the region due to China's growing influence in the region and via Pakistan and her global access. This threat was very seriously perceived by Pakistan and China that is why Pakistan has planned to create a special security force of 12000 men who will work as a battalion to make sure the security of the project and other projects related to it. It will be made up of nine army battalions and along with the six CAF wings a Major General will head it. There is a separatist threats from Baloch insurgents as well who want a free Baloch state and for that they time to time use violence to disrupt the CPEC project. In 2005 they attacked Chinese works by a bomb blast. Another suicide attack was used against Chinese workers in Chaghi district in 2018. (Haider 2015).

CPEC Significance for Other Regional and International Nations.

Today almost all regional countries have shown their interest in the CPEC project. It will not only unleash economic opportunities for Pakistan alone the essence of the project is it will provide opportunity to many regional and

international countries too and most important thing is it will be a regional peace maker too. (Khiani 2018). The Central Asian Republics have showed great interest as they all are land lock nations so CPEC will provide them land route to the Gwadar port through Afghanistan and later to the open world. Iran and Saudi Arabia have also showed their interest in this mega project as both are not only close in terms of relations with Pakistan but enjoy great deal of relations with China too so their investment will contribute in the peace in the region and will also affect their interests in a cordial way and will make the peace builders in the regional too. Another great nations is Russia who wants to join the project and wants to contribute in the progress of the region and will of course benefit Pakistan by all means when Russia will become a stake holder in the region. The EU nations are very eager to join this venture too when the Foreign Secretary of UK visited Pakistan he not only praised the project but also suggested the British investors to invest in it. Same type of interests have been shown by Turkey and France too. Romania is another nation in Europe who showed their interests in the project too. (Arshad 2019)

Conclusion

The above discussion concludes this that CPEC is going to become a game changer not only for Pakistan but for the whole region and it will increase the significance of Pakistan many folds also this mega project will bring billions of dollars' worth investment in Pakistan by making it one of the most attractive countries in the region. Equally this project will play a significant role to strengthen Pakistan China relation. Pakistan will also find a new ally and will be able to balance the strategic balance in the region against India and will also reduce her dependence over USA. CPEC will also make Pakistan a dynamic country in the world and will play a significant role by improving her soft image at international level. It will also provide an opportunity to the land lock nations such as Afghanistan and other Central Asian Nations who from a long time aspiring to sell their natural resources in the world market but have failed due to the absence of any safe path but now CPEC will provide them this opportunity and this on the other hand will increase the role and influence of Pakistan many folds in the coming future and will make her one of the key game changing country in the south Asian region.

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