

IMPORTANCE OF CPEC A CROWN JEWEL OF BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE (BRI) FOR CHINA AND PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

For the last two decades, China has been advancing rapidly in multiple sectors compared to the years of progress before 2000. Despite opposing views from the U.S. regarding the progress of China, it is a fact that China is the rising power in the current globalized world. Beijing applies many strategies and programs to achieve success and the world's predominant status. In continuation of its plans, China introduced a global connectivity and development program, namely One Belt, One Road (OBOR), renamed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), in 2013. The BRI is the biggest project in human history by a single country. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a flagship project of BRI. It is considered the testing ground for the initiative's success. The Gwadar port project under the CPEC plays the role of a gateway for China toward Central Asia and the Middle East. China can export and import its goods quickly via this shorter and cheaper route. Therefore, the success of the CPEC keeps much significance for Beijing and Islamabad. Likewise, CPEC will prove the authenticity, reliability and credibility of BRI. For this reason, China is trying its best to complete the CPEC within a projected time. However, many countries raise questions about the authenticity and reliability of CPEC and BRI. However, despite negative connotations, the project's progress is evident.

Keywords: CPEC, BRI, Realism, Dominance, NSR, FDI, Energy, Security.

INTRODUCTION

President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping, unveiled a comprehensive investment plan on April 20, 2015, during an official visit to Islamabad (Landry, 2021). The signature financial assistance amount of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is an estimated U.S. \$ 63 billion, about twice the volume of the FDI (*Foreign Direct Investment* - FDI) to Pakistan for the entire last decade (Idress, 2018). It connects Kashgar, the largest city in the western part of the Chinese autonomous region of Xinjiang, and the port of Gwadar, on the southeast coast of Pakistan. In addition, it has negotiated resulted in the construction of highways, railways and telecommunications networks, energy infrastructure, and large commercial zones (Zia, Malik, and Waqar, 2018). Furthermore, under this project, Pakistan and China signed 51 agreements on Chinese investments in this country, the port of Gwadar in the Baluchistan province of Pakistan is one of them (Ali, 2020). By operationalizing the Gwadar port, China could avoid many issues the present route faces. Additionally, it decreases the costs and travelling distance (Muhammad & Long, 2020). Meanwhile, many other projects are planned, such as power plants, a solar energy park, wind and hydroelectric power projects, and even a gas pipeline (Shahid, Ullah, Imran, Mahmood, & Mahmood, 2020).

The CPEC has been nicknamed a geopolitical game-changer in the wider South Asian region or a flagship for the One Belt, One Road initiative (Khan, Changgang, Ahmad, & Wenhao, 2018). At present, vital oil supplies in China must weigh a journey of at least 10,000 km by shipping and at least another 4.5 thousand-kilometre from the eastern to western borders of the country. In this regard, a 2.5-thousand-kilometre corridor in Pakistan would, in some cases, save up to 12,000 km. Another significant security advantage is that most of this route would pass through the Pakistani territories. The Chinese president was even marked as "his own brother's home" during his visit to Pakistan (Ali, Jianing, Musawar, Shah, Kausar, 2017). In this regard, the project's benefits for both nations are also calculated at the socio-economic level. Under the project, new job opportunities are expected to help reduce the long-term high unemployment rate and the still large numbers of people living below the poverty line in Pakistan.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The realist school of thought will be entertained as a theoretical framework to look over the CPEC as a crown jewel of China's BRI. Historically realism can be dated back a thousand years, and Thucydides is its founding father (Korab-Karpowicz, 2010). Realism has been an integral part of international relations theory for hundreds of years. Additionally, Hans Morgenthau made some significant contributions to realism by establishing six principles on how international relations occur. He claimed that the international community had two options to bring about peace. First, the global system can be peaceful if states allow each other to pursue their interest freely. Second, nations form international agreements to silence the desire for power by any country (Morgenthau, 1967). According to the realist, the world is anarchic and a breeding ground for competition. They look at the structure and realities of the world rationally and suggest states behave and act accordingly if they want to develop, succeed and progress. In this regard, China has been growing in military and economic sectors and allowing all states to pursue their interests and forming international agreements with many states under its development program, such as BRI. Beijing has adopted a realist approach by starting CPEC under the BRI as a fast-growing nation. It has realized that its neighbouring states and region's development, peace, prosperity, and stability are vital for its project's progress. Hence, the stability and peace in the region will provide China with a massive market for its many industrialized products. Likewise, Pakistan has also adopted a realist approach by becoming part of BRI. Islamabad has also realized that it has suffered substantial economic, political, social and religious losses by becoming the part of American block. Therefore, it wants to increase its cooperation with China through CPEC and other mutual benefit agreements.

CPEC Generates a Win-Win Situation for Pakistan and China

Beijing and Islamabad believe that a well-crafted and well-thought-out project of the CPEC will provide them with a win-win situation. Both countries will benefit according to their shares, commitments, responsibilities and cooperation. Moreover, China aims to spend a massive amount of money in different stages of CPEC, which will also become helpful in the up-gradation of the underdeveloped regions of the country. One of the most significant factors of the BRI is the progress of underdeveloped areas in both the countries, namely the Balochistan province of Pakistan and Xinjiang of China. It is considered the policy or strategy to solve the biggest unemployment problem by giving birth to massive employment opportunities (Ahmar, 2014). Furthermore, by strengthening and developing the underdeveloped areas of the countries, both China and Pakistan will internally become more stable (Khan, & Nawaz, 2021). The internal stability of the state plays a vital role in establishing political and economic relations among countries.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is the ship insignia of BRI, counting on the maximum support of Beijing (Lim, 2019). In this regard, both the countries are determinant in analyzing the particularities and the challenges for the project's development. Furthermore, China and Pakistan have historically enjoyed a friendly relationship; however, economic aspects have not been the rectors of that relationship, which is why this project represents a massive opportunity for both countries (Ali, Hussain, Akhtar, & Batool, 2021). In addition, Pakistan's history has remained closely linked to the countries of the West led by the United States. Therefore, its tilt toward China and integration and regional cooperation under CPEC represent an opportunity to integrate and open economic and diplomatic opportunities between Beijing and Islamabad (Khan, & Nawaz, 2021).

CPEC is equally beneficial for Pakistan because the country's energy sector has presented problems in meeting the needs of this sector since 2004 due to problems in infrastructure (Rauf, 2019). This project is presented as a solution to this problem because the 3,000 km road network would generate 16,400 megawatts of electricity. In addition, the BRI will benefit local industry because it expands access to new and larger markets in the region and Europe, which encourages the development of better products to be more competitive (Pechlaner, Thees, Manske-Wang, & Scuttari, 2021). Therefore, one of the project's objectives is to improve the manufacturing industry in Pakistan. The CPEC projects would add 400,000 jobs for the 36 ongoing projects for 2030 to the portfolio of Pakistani employment, boosting the GDP of Pakistan an approximately 2-2.5%. Hand in hand with job creation, the goal is to improve the country's poverty levels (Rauf, 2019).

Investments in Pakistan intend to create jobs, reduce anti-state sentiment and generate public resources for further improvements in law and order. In short, CPEC is presented as a desirable commercial alternative for both countries not only in commercial terms but also in terms of security.

That is why this corridor seems to represent one of the concepts that have been mentioned on numerous occasions, the win-win cooperation (Hassan, 2020). The CPEC is one of the essential parts of BRI, which provides multiple opportunities and advantages to Pakistan and China. The project ensures Pakistan's economic development and prosperity throughout the country, mainly in Pakistan's most underdeveloped province, namely Baluchistan. Beijing keeps the status of the world's second-largest economic power in which the role of its economic policies and strategies plays a significant part. Moreover, the PRC has been following the leap forward policy concerning its monetary affairs, which aims at the economic and social campaign through the reconstruction process (Ibrar, Mi, Rafiq and Ali, 2019).

Importance of Gwadar Port for China and Regional Connectivity

At present, however, the expansion of the port infrastructure of the coastal town of Gwadar remains a major strategic project. It occupies a key position in the *Maritime Silk Road (MSR)* context and in the Chinese *string of pearls' strategy* of building clues for the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC). Among the most frequently mentioned "Chinese pearls" lies the Hainan and Woody Islands in the South China Sea (SCS) and then the ports Kyaukpau. Moreover, its exceptional geographical location is only about 400 km from the Strait of Hormuz. It accounts for 40% of all maritime oil transports and provides an invaluable strategic potential. The importance of the Gwadar Port and the whole CPEC is only further strengthening the Sino-Pakistani alliance while opening the Muslim country's gates to deeper cooperation with the Middle East and inland post-Soviet republics in Central Asia (Mastura, 2018). As one of the largest energy consumers, China imports up to 80% of all oil by maritime trade across the Indian Ocean and the Malacca Strait to the South China Sea to its shores. However, after completing the Gwadar port, Beijing could import most of its oil through this route and save time and money.

The port of Gwadar is the pivot to the Middle East, Central Asia, Europe, and Africa. Furthermore, it will be instrumental in supporting regional connectivity. Moreover, "The projects associated with the development of Gwadar aim to train the province of Baluchistan to its full economic, social, and technical and energy potential, integrating within the economic framework of Pakistan and China". Therefore, this port is of immense geostrategic importance for China as it will significantly shorten the Asian giant with the Persian Gulf and the African continent. It is important to note that projects related to this economic corridor are being carried out by agreement of cooperation bilaterally between the Ministry of Planning, Reform and Development of Pakistan and the National Development and Reform Commission of the People's Republic of China (Plan, 2017).

Pakistan's Energy Crisis Solution through CPEC

Pakistan could achieve the apparent benefits of CPEC through Pakistan-China Economic and Energy Corridor (PCEEC). The critical electricity shortage is an alarming issue for Pakistan. However, the energy crisis will disappear shortly through dozens of diverse energy projects worth U.S. \$ 35 billion under the CPEC. FDI inflows are then trying to encourage the government proposals to establish special economic zones, mainly along with the planned significant road and rail networks (Shaikh, Ji, & Fan, 2016). These will stretch in several directions and link the southern provinces of Sindh and Baluchistan through Punjab and Pashtun territory to the northern high mountain of Karakoram (Fazzini, 2018), a symbol of the Chinese-Pakistani bond since the late 1970s. According to the data shown at the Ministry of Planning Development and Special Initiative, ten power plants have been completed, which add up to 9,520 MW of electricity to the national grid, and 21 are under construction. The most recently completed project under CPEC is Matiari to Lahore±660 KV HVDC Transmission Line Project.

Pakistan's Security Issue and CPEC

In the context of Pakistan's geopolitical priorities, the CPEC could help stabilize the country's security situation significantly, even in the longer term. Pakistan has been going through various external and internal security problems (Khetran & Khalid, 2019). The external security challenges for Pakistan include the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the hostility of the U.S. and India towards CPEC and China. External powers such as Washington and New Delhi want to sabotage the CPEC and BRI because of their interests. America wants to counter China and its increasing influence, while India wants to counter Pakistan's progress and development. In this regard, India's involvement in many terrorist activities within Pakistan has generated severe security issues for Pakistan. Similarly, some

people in distressed living conditions are likely to seek comfort under the wing of radical and criminal organizations that give birth to internal security problems. These tendencies in Pakistan represent a pressing problem, particularly separatist activities in Baluchistan.

Moreover, forces of various offshoots of Islamic groups and movements operate in the northwestern border region of the country. This risk, materialized in several cases by the kidnapping of local and Chinese construction workers, thus threatens the planned completion of all projects by 2030. However, Pakistan has completed many first-phase projects of CPEC (Ahmed, Mi, & Fernald, 2020) despite the difficult situation created by external and internal security challenges. Therefore, this economic corridor is proposed as alternative security. However, numerous ethnic conflicts affect the areas that will unfold the project. Many group militants of these conflicts take refuge on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan to seek support from group terrorists such as Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Both the nations have identified these groups as a latent threat to the economic interests of Beijing and Islamabad. Therefore, CPEC represents an international extension of China's efforts to provide security through economic development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One Belt One Road (OBOR) or Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), or New Silk Road (NSR), a multi-billion-dollar project, is the biggest project of human history by a single country. It connects the three continents of the world at the initial stage, namely Asia, Africa and Europe. Furthermore, by engaging and increasing political, economic, social, and cultural ties with various nations, China wants to introduce its model to make the world a better place for nations going through various problems. In this regard, Beijing launched BRI to engage and interact with multiple nations to present its development plans for progress, peace, stability and mutual understanding among various countries on multiple continents. Meanwhile, according to China, one of the significant objectives of BRI is to help and get the developing and unstable nations of Asia and Africa continents out of poverty, instability, and unemployment.

As for the importance of BRI for China is concerned, it is the highest priority of the Chinese government to make this initiative successful at any reasonable and affordable cost. Xi Jinping, the paramount leader and General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, during his visit to Kazakhstan, announced the Silk Road Economic Belt strategy, and it is considered the centrepiece of his foreign policy. Moreover, the initiative's incorporation can judge the importance of BRI into the Constitution of the People's Republic of China in 2017. Therefore, the project keeps economic or financial significance for China. Similarly, it is also considered the belief, emotions and quest for making the world a better place by getting the people out of poverty, devastation, destruction, unemployment, underdevelopment, instability, terrorism, sectarian conflict and many other harmful things to the society and its inhabitants. Therefore, China's policies for the development of the world are considered by its people to be "the People's Republic of the Future".

Meanwhile, to further continue the critique of the opponent of China and its initiative, almost ten years back, there were famous stories about ghost towns in China. The Chinese real estate sector had built massive cities in the country's desert areas. Therefore, stories were roaming within China and other countries that Beijing built the ghost towns in an enormous amount, and no one was living in them. However, over the years, increasing urbanization and industrialization and people's demands have converted those ghost towns into thriving urban centres such as Zhengzhou. Similarly, there is various news about the BRI that China has been building and constructing infrastructure in the deserted areas, which will prove useless and resultantly harm China and its partner countries. At the same time, Beijing keeps a firm belief in the success of its strategy, policy and planning by reminding the stories of ghost towns. Beijing considers the current situation and gives similar dynamics to old stories about ghost time. However, China believes in the strategy of the field of dreams regarding infrastructure building, according to which it has strong confidence that if we build it, they will come. In this regard, China applies the same policy concerning the BRI through building infrastructure early that provides the supply ahead of demand and demand will catch up.

In addition, opponents of China and BRI also propagate the narrative against China by dubbing it the war of perspectives. West, mainly the U.S., has propagated China as an authoritarian state that applies undemocratic and narrow-minded policies and strategies against the liberal and civilized people. At the same time, China considers it easy and suitable for the U.S. to oppose Beijing by creating and

generating evil sentiments against it. Instead of directly fighting against China because it would be more difficult for the U.S. to say that its war is with China as a nation. In contrast, many writers consider it the war of ideologies and dominance where both the countries compete to introduce their plans and strategy for the world's progress, development, and stability to increase the circle of their influence.

Every Empire, Imperial power, Dynasties, state or any other kind of rule has constantly introduced its plans, strategy, policies and methods of progress, development, stability, peace and engagement with the people of the other parts of the world. Such as, the Roman Empire considered that by building roads and highways, which would help them and be helpful for the commercial and military activity, it could spread and expand its influence to various regions of the world. Similarly, the United States of America also used strategies, plans, policies, and projects in history, such as the Marshall Plan after World War II, which aimed to reconstruct war-torn, destroyed and devastated Europe. Most of the writers say it worked through the US Marshall Plan. As a result, devastated Europe was rebuilt again and became stable to engage with other countries concerning various political and economic matters. The confidence and trust of European nations in the U.S. increased; therefore, they sided with it by making an alliance and engaging in multiple social, political, economic and trade-related matters. At that time, both the U.S. and Soviet Union applied various strategies, plans, and policies to get more and more influence. The U.S. Plan worked in a better way than the policies and planning done by the Soviet Union; resultantly, most of the European states started attracting the U.S., limiting the influence of the USSR.

Every state tries to dominate and increase the circle of its influence. Therefore, there is no strange thing if China introduces and gives a plan through which countries can benefit. China is also doing the same through BRI. It offers the world's people a more suitable, stable, developed, prosperous future. Suppose the countries throughout all continents of the world consider China's plans, strategies, and projects as convenient, affordable, and beneficial for their people compared to the U.S. In that case, it shows that states would show their tilt towards China because China has explored the gap left by the U.S. and tries to fill the gap and grey areas and invest as well as boost those sectors for the mutual and shared destiny of not only China but also the whole world. However, there is a difference between the US Marshall Plan and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) concerning the pace, scale of activity, and project nature. In this regard, Beijing is investing hundreds of billions of dollars in Europe and worldwide.

China is considered one of the significant countries concerning the real estate business, and it keeps the world's leading construction companies. In this regard, looking from the economic dimension, Chinese industries have an enormous capacity to produce steel and cement; therefore, the presence of a massive and excess amount of such material requires markets. So, Beijing needs to increase and improve its exports and production capacity to fulfil the needs and demands of the people, including its national interests. Moreover, by finding the gaps and grey areas where other dominant and influential powers do not give much focus, China wants to fill that vacuum created by the countries that run the world according to their socially constructed structure. Therefore, Beijing has been passionate and challenging to work to develop new markets and new profits for its massive business to fill the gap.

The CPEC project carries much importance for Beijing because it testifies to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the South Asian region. During the Han Dynasty of China, Silk Route was used for trade and cultural relations among various parts of the world, and it is considered the oldest trade route. The CPEC will revive the ancient Silk Route that connects China with Britain through the Indian subcontinent, Asia Minor, Africa, Greece and Rome. Moreover, Pakistan keeps an important geostrategic location, and as soon as CPEC is completed, that will make it a hub of international trade and connectivity. Moreover, China also knows that all opponents and critiques of its initiative have attentive eyes over the success of the CPEC because it also assures the success of BRI. Therefore, China will try its best to complete the CPEC project in the estimated time. According to Beijing, the critiques and opponents of the BRI are not taken as negative connotations. However, it is looked at as positive elements that provide us boost and seriousness, resultantly increasing our strength and potential to complete the CPEC and the whole BRI project successfully.

CONCLUSION

The striving project of Chinese investments is considered a blessing for Pakistan. Islamabad and Beijing are crucially interested in CPEC project implementation because it brings significant economic benefits

for both countries. The Gwadar port, one of the significant projects under CPEC, keeps essential geostrategic significance for China, Pakistan, and the whole region. The CPEC route will provide China with an opportunity to trade its goods faster and cheaper way, resultantly increasing China's economic and political influence in and on other continents of the world. Transit of goods to Europe and raw materials from Asia and the Gulf region will be significantly shortened, contributing to the decline or stopping price increases. In addition, China will be able to gain the capacity to control the entrance to the strategic Strait of Hormuz through the Gwadar port. China has been struggling to surpass the USA through achieving the dominant status in the world of nations. The rise of China mostly depends on the policies and actions of the present Chinese government, which has concluded projects such as the CPEC, a flagship project of BRI.

Apart from this, many analysts believe that in the rise of China, the BRI's allied projects, such as the CPEC, keep considerable significance. The economic and geostrategic factors are among the most important factors that could play a vital role in China's rise towards the dominant world status. Beijing shows very active engagement even with the states with various issues. China has invested a considerable sum of money in unstable and underdeveloped countries, and its investment money can bear huge losses. Knowing about all these difficulties and problems, Beijing is glad to invest in those nations because of its commitment and national interest. The weak and underdeveloped countries need China for their economic and infrastructure development, creating a sense of dependence on each other.

Further explaining the situation of Pakistan, China knows thoroughly about the internal conditions of the country, which can have adverse effects on the successful completion of CPEC, a crown jewel of BRI. Even though China is actively involved in the completion of CPEC, it knows the successful completion of the project will pave the way for the Chinese economy to reach its peak. That ultimately would be helpful for it to take the position of dominant world power. Likewise, Pakistan wants to continue the project of CPEC even though the pressure from the side of the United States, India and other entities which do not like the rise of both Pakistan and China as a dominant power in global affairs. Hence, Islamabad also does not want to waste the opportunity given by China. It firmly believes that CPEC provides an opportunity to solve the country's long-lasting economic and social issues. Resultantly, the project could bring peace, prosperity, development, and employment all over the country.

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