



## RESEARCH PAPER

### CPEC: Political and Economic Implications for Pakistan

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Received:</b> March 18, 2022</p> <p><b>Accepted:</b> June 27, 2022</p> <p><b>Online:</b> June 30, 2022</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> CPEC, Gwadar Port, Pakistan, Silk Route</p> <p><b>*Corresponding Author:</b>  aatir.rizvi@gcu.edu.pk</p>	<p>The purpose of this paper is to explore the political and economic implications of CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor) and to look into the new opportunities for Pakistan. CPEC has provided Pakistan with opportunities to enhance cooperation with China, Russia and CAR states regarding energy, economic and security requirements. Pakistan has changed its approach from pure realism to neo-liberalism in its international policies. This CPEC is providing Pakistan with new foreign policy options and it is tilting towards Asian Block. This CPEC will bring enormous development in the region in general and will take off Pakistan in particular, with the building of a network of roads, railways, highways and power generation plants all the way from Khunjerab to Gwadar. However, apart from its economic aspects, it will also bring some implications on Pakistan's domestic as well as, international politics. Pakistan will have to take stringent steps and adopt new proactive policy options in near future to get maximum benefit from this project.</p>

## Introduction

Pakistan has a unique geographical location, having being close to Gulf States due to its Gwadar Port, which makes it a qualified for serving these areas as a corridor for trade and energy and not only to be a bridge between South and Central Asian states but also, a trade destination and route for all those regions which are adjacent to it. Gwadar can transport oil and gas from Middle East and Africa to China and Russia as well as, Central Asian States. Whereas, gas and oil from Iranian and Central Asian States can also be transported to different regions through Pakistan. It is pertinent to mention here that, Afghanistan and Central Asian States, being landlocked countries, need access to ports for their energy dependency, and Pakistan can serve that purpose and can create a link for China and Russia to explore European markets through Gwadar port and for European states too, Pakistan can be perhaps most viable route for fulfilling their energy imports from Central Asian States. It is Pakistan which provides natural link between SCO states and Eurasian heartland. However, complex geopolitical and security situation in Afghanistan and in Pakistan itself has played hindrance for such outcome. Plus role of USA and India is another factor in this regard. The political implications of the CPEC can be examined with reference to three theoretical formulations of International Relations, including regional cooperation and integration; economic connectivity and the soft power. CPEC being a mega project, connecting Asia with Europe and other regions, has been attached with the interests of many states inside the region, as well as, outside the region, alongwith attached geopolitics (Muzaffar, Shah, & Yaseen, 2018 & Shah, Muzaffar, & Yaseen, 2020). More importantly, this project can be beneficial for Pakistan when it comes to its economy, attracting FDI and uplifting the socio-economic conditions of downtrodden areas of poor provinces of Pakistan. In this regard, different scholars have elaborated their views on the

factors impeding and supporting the project, which views are important to understand the political and economic dimensions attached to CPEC.

### **Literature Review**

Rizvi (2015) has stated that CPEC is going to be a positive turn-around both for Pakistan and China and has examined the backdrop of the CPEC and what it includes in the terms of roads, infrastructure, technical and energy domains. He has also discussed the challenges as well as, political and strategic implications of CPEC with reference to regional integration and cooperation, economic connectivity and soft power as opposed to military power.

Ahmar (2014) is of the view that CPEC is a well thought out and well crafted concept and project to unleash the process of meaningful cooperation between Pakistan and China. Apart from discussing the strategic significance of CPEC, he has discussed at length the challenges and impediments, ways to cope up with these challenges and future of this Corridor.

Fredholm, (2013) states that political development in South Asian region is un-ignorable for the major international actors owing to collective and mutual economic development and energy production of major countries like China, Russia and Pakistan. Author also talks about spirit of Silk Route and prospects for regional economic and energy alliance in the making.

Abid, and Ashfaq, (2015) have discussed at length the challenges and opportunities of CPEC for Pakistan. They are of the view that economy, trade, connectivity and infrastructural development will be enhanced due to CPEC in both states. Pakistan faces few challenges in this regard too, such as role of few political parties as anti-CPEC forces, Balochistan factor, KPK factor, security concerns and Indian issues. They have further provided few recommendations to overcome these issues.

Marketos, (2008) is of the view that Pakistan and China both have common agenda of securing resource flow. The author has laid emphasis on China's energy problem in a broader framework. Regional stability and securing multi-polarity are the other important concerns for both Pakistan and China.

As per Haas, and Putten, (2007) energy security is gaining importance in addition to military-political issues. Among SCO members a common energy approach is being developed along-with bilateral as well as, multilateral energy cooperation agreements, which is seen by West as a mechanism to threaten Western security interests and oust US Allies as well as, US from CARs. He has discussed the need for change in the role of SCO in this regard.

The Centre for Pakistan and Gulf Studies in its Round Table Report titled, "*Pakistan and the SCO: Building Common Understanding*" has explored the significance and challenges to Pakistan and analyzed contemporary strategic and geopolitical concerns related to regional connectivity and energy trade. In this region, Pakistan can act as a conduit between SCO countries and its neighbors due to two reasons; (a) it provides shortest possible route connecting CARs and Iran on one side and Russia, China and Indian markets on the other hand; and (b) it has a vital role in combating terrorism.

Khan, S. A. (2009) has stated that Pakistan's policy towards Central Asia has been shaped by energy, trade, transit, political and security concerns. Pakistan has always wanted to get access to Central Asia's energy resources and for this purpose ECO and Gwadar port are its hopes. Pakistan knows that for its policy to be successful it needs peace in Afghanistan, so it has always tried to have a stable pro-Pakistan regime there. Whereas,

many factors including external as well as, internal economic and political instability have been stumbling blocks in Pakistan's access to Central Asia (Muzaffar, & Khan, 2021).

### **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor**

As the international role of a nation is mostly determined by its location and geopolitical presence, hence Pakistan enjoys an important place being at the one end located at juncture of both energy rich and energy deficient states, as well as, being surrounded by emerging economic powers like India and China, along with rich in resources countries like Iran, Afghanistan and CARs. Being a natural link between China and South Asian states and Middle Eastern countries, Pakistan is strategically important state and this CPEC is a project which can strengthen these ties by connecting Gwadar to Kashgar. (Yaseen, Afridi, & Muzaffar, 2017). The corridor will cut around 12000 km route for the China and Middle Eastern states, as well as, will reduce 16000 km route to 2500 km, between South China Sea and Arabian Sea. CPEC, being a multidimensional project, not only includes roads, railway tracks, Gwadar port, economic zones and connectivity through fiber-optic cables, to name a few, but also infrastructure development alongwith motorways and completion of nine power projects, including Diamer-Bhasha Dam and Nandipur power project are attached to it. CPEC's implementation is divided into three phases:-

- (a) Short Term completed by 2017
- (b) Medium Term by 2025 and
- (c) Long Term by 2030.

To look after the implementation of CPEC projects a high level Joint Coordination Committee (JCC) was formed in July 2013. In short, CPEC will be implemented through '1+4 Cooperation' structure i.e. the Economic Corridor at the centre and the Gwadar Port, energy, infrastructure and industrial collaboration as the four key areas. It is a combination of cross-sectional components like infrastructure, trade, connectivity, transport, energy and services among others.

Proactive and pragmatic approach for Pakistan in the new millennium is mandatory, as far as its foreign relations are concerned especially after 9/11 and its indulgence into war on terror. It has successfully transformed its challenges into opportunities and has become a frontline state in international relations. It is constantly trying to improve its relations with all neighboring states including India and Afghanistan. Rehman, (2007) stated that change in Pakistan's Afghan policy has lessened major hindrances in its relations with Russia and CARs and Chinese help in this regard has helped Pakistan move towards economic cooperation. Hence, Pakistan's foreign policy emphasized on improved bilateral as well as, regional relations with neighboring states. For Pakistan, major benefits through CPEC can be infrastructural development, tourism and economic uplifting of downtrodden people.

### **Economic and Political Implications for Pakistan**

Once President Musharraf addressed the SCO Summit in Shanghai in 2006 and emphasized on Pakistan's importance in terms of geopolitical, strategic and economic terms, not only for itself but also for SCO countries. Pakistan being a natural link for connecting Eurasian heartland with South Asia can provide a route for trade and energy transfer for different regions. He further emphasized on Pakistan's commitment to become an economic hub connecting regions through roads, railway and ports. Following are some of the economic prospects for Pakistan:-

1. There are avenues for Pakistani businessmen for exports to China such as, gemstones of which China is a huge market.
2. CPEC will enhance cooperation in agriculture sector with greater transfer of technology in this field.
3. It will boost the transit trade opportunities for Pakistan.
4. It can be a game changer, as the huge investment will have considerable consequences for growth in terms of economy for Pakistan, as Chinese investment can lift GDP growth beyond 6% through direct impact, whereas indirect impact would be much higher.
5. CPEC will have a positive impact on the tourism industry of Pakistan especially in the Northern Areas, which are adjacent to Pak-China border.
6. The trade between both will reach to \$15 billion in next couple of years, which will have positive impact on stock market too.
7. China already has around 120 companies working in Pakistan, which figure will increase in near future.
8. Both countries have further signed many agreements having enormous economic effects on Pakistan.
9. Under CPEC roads like Karakoram Highway, Hunza-Raikot road, Raikot-Islamabad section of Karakoram Highway, Burhan-Mansehra Motorway, Islamabad-Peshawar Motorway will be connected to different small networks of the roads and a motorway connecting Lahore with Karachi having travel time saving, economic activities and connectivity impacts.
10. Supplementing the road link with a rail link is another essential ingredient of the CPEC.
11. Development of Gwadar is most priority aspect of CPEC, alongwith air port, expressways, breakwaters is important to understand the Chinese investment and Pakistan's future prospects.
12. Further, infrastructure for the Export Processing Zones and port related industries, with hospitals, training institutes and coal-based power plants are other aspects to be established soon.
13. CPEC will be instrumental for Pakistan while China's trade with Afghanistan and India and it can increase the market potential for Pakistan's exports to China in the fields of textile, agricultural products and minerals.
14. CPEC will help Pakistan overcome the energy crises. This will revive existing industries like textile and add an estimated 2 % to GDP (The Dawn, 26<sup>th</sup> April, 2015).
15. CPEC will help removal of poverty in the region and bring peace and prosperity among Pakistani provinces, if serious efforts are made from all the stakeholders within Pakistan.
16. It will further give an opportunity to Pakistan to act independently of the Western influence especially the US influence and will help for the normalization of its ties with India.

### **Challenges for CPEC**

The challenges faced by Pakistan can be identified as both, internal and external. Political unrest, security situation and administrative issues are considered some of the greatest challenges in the way of successful completion of the corridor. As this Corridor has opened many avenues for Pakistan and has given it a pivotal role in the region, so has caused great worries for its enemies both within and outside the country especially India and to some extent USA. Following are major challenges for CPEC (Rahim, Khan, & Muzaffar, 2018).

### **Security Threats**

Security is one of the most important and crucial aspects in this regard. The growing militancy and terrorist attacks in the region pose severe security concerns for both the

states and the completion of this project is becoming more and more challenging. The threats from East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM); Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP); Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ); ISIS; Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) and Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) are imminent and real. Therefore, Pakistan is going to provide a special security division comprising 12,000 men strong army battalions and Civil Armed Forces wings with Rangers and Frontier Corps.

### **Geography of CPEC**

CPEC passes through Balochistan, Punjab, KPK, Sindh and Gilgit Baltistan. The Eastern part is easy to build due to less security concerns, whereas Western part starts from Gwadar and runs through some Southern and Eastern districts of Balochistan, D.I Khan in KPK. It will have an added link to Afghanistan through Chaman and will connect to Iran through Quetta-Koh-e-Taftan link. The Khunjerab pass remains closed from November to May each year because of heavy snow. There is a strong resentment in different circles on bypassing the shorter route due to security concerns, as avoiding the marginalized areas due to security issues will create more issues for Pakistan, which needs to improve its law and order situation for getting maximum benefits in this regard.

### **Political and Economic Constraints**

Following are major variables in this regard:-

1. Pakistan's political instability and policy consistency is a main problem. However, it is a good sign that almost all major political parties have consensus over the relations with China and importance of CPEC. A minor segment of political parties in Balochistan is against it due to different reasons.
2. Present situation of Pakistan's unstable economy and its future aspects are also a major concern in this regard.
3. ANP, Baloch Nationalists and others have raised serious objections; even PTI and JUI (F) have shown inclinations to join hands with anti-CPEC forces. In this regard Balochistan factor and KPK factors are important where ethno-sectarian violence, insurgency, law and order situation, poverty, separatist people in Balochistan and concerns of KPK political parties that Federal government will divert the economic benefits to Punjab only, are most important issues to be addressed at priority basis.

### **Administrative issues**

1. Skill level of Pakistani workforce is not upto mark and if China is investing billions of dollars then it is Pakistan's responsibility to work on capacity building and meet deadlines for construction projects.
2. Political turmoil might happen in a year's time or so, which might adversely affect the project's progress. As we had seen the situation when Chinese President had to visit Pakistan and he had to cancel his visit. Hence, stable foreign relations and stability in the state is mandatory for Pakistan.
3. The land route between Pakistan and China has not been properly utilized by Pakistan and this disappointing reality has not been addressed properly till date.
4. Delays in issuing visas and clearance along-with heavy quarantine charges are other issues to be addressed at priority basis.
5. Karakoram Highway is vulnerable to earthquakes and landslides.
6. Pakistan needs to get itself clear in terms of trade with China as free trade has already affected certain sectors like paper, ceramics and electronics.
7. Recently, Pakistan's armed forces have kept strongest political role, which has not only been in decision making on the expense of 3 branches of governance, but also have built a governance structure quasi in nature (Dr. Siegfried O.Wolf), which may pose a serious

threat and undermine the autonomy in civil government's decision making at different aspects and stages of CPEC.

8. There have been serious apprehensions for India regarding Pakistan's influence in gas and oil trade, drastically affecting India's interests.
9. The narrative built over the years that India is an enemy and a threat for Pakistan's existence, is one of the major reasons, which does not allow good relation with India and Kashmir issue is something which is treated as a matter of life and death in Pakistan.
10. The biggest challenge is the volatile regions in Balochistan and China, which face considerable unrest. Balochistan Separatists' insurgency which has called for independence, has opposed the development of CPEC in the province.
11. The terrorist attacks by militant groups have been due to the support of CIA and RAW. This factor must be handled through effective policy making and its implementation.
12. On the economic front, greatest challenge comes from the competitor i.e. Iranian port of Chabahar, where India has made huge investment.
13. There are serious concerns of China over issue of tax, power tariff and electricity price in Pakistan, along with corruption, nepotism and inefficiency in public administration and political sector of the State.

### **Recommendations**

In order to get maximum benefit from CPEC, it is mandatory for Pakistan to look into its internal as well as, external relations and law and order situation. It is needless to say that relations with India also need to be normalized in some way, so that security situation can be improved, helping in improving economic outlook of Pakistan. Following can be recommended in this regard:-

1. All political parties must come at one page regarding CPEC and leave their political differences and agendas behind, for the sake of betterment of Pakistan.
2. It is the need of the time that Federal government and provincial governments must work jointly for the development of cultural, economic and political harmony and peace in the country.
3. The details of CPEC must be shared with all and made public and its benefits and challenges must be discussed with all parties and stakeholders.
4. The security issues must be resolved as soon as possible and the government must provide fool proof security to the foreign workers working on the project.
5. The work must be completed at day and night basis and further delay must be avoided as Pakistan has already wasted precious time.
6. Pakistan will have to adopt a proactive foreign policy to counter the international pressure.
7. Pakistan needs to work on increasing its pace in completing different associated projects, otherwise China will go for alternate options.
8. Safeguards are needed against corruption, pilferage of material and project payouts (Dr. Rizvi).
9. More attention is to be given to controlling internal violence and terrorism and provide security to different personnel working on the project.
10. The rational approach for the benefit of whole nation is to be adopted by all the political parties, as well as, governments and they need to bury their self interests for bigger national interests.
11. For Pakistan, a break from US block and adoption of regional approach is a must, as no nation can prosper and progress without having cordial relations with its neighbors and regional powers, where China becomes a natural option for Pakistan to opt.
12. Pakistan must quickly develop economic cooperation not only with Russia and China, but also with other major powers of the region.

13. Open discussion on Russian and Chinese fears in Pakistan must be held at different forums, so that a national consensus can be developed in this regard.
14. The forums like Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) can be used as an umbrella organization for coordination, which can significantly strengthen the strategic as well as, economic ties among these states. As admission of India, Pakistan and Iran into SCO can alter its agenda from beyond the confines of China-Russo cooperation in Central Asia (Lukin, 2015).
15. Pakistan for China and Russia can be an important partner in their efforts to maintain their own independence and to oppose Western pressure, so they themselves need Pakistan as their economic and strategic ally.
16. 16) Through its economic corridor, Pakistan needs to become self reliant as soon as possible and come out of the influence and interference of international donors. This will lead to political and economic independence and debt reduction.
17. 17) Pakistan should now make efforts for China's membership in SAARC, which will make this organization a balanced one and will neutralize the Indian influence in SAARC and will further help in regional peace and stability.
18. 18) Pakistan should make such policies with China and neighboring states that they must cooperate with it in the fields of economic investments, infrastructure, science, technology, culture and education and SCO can be used as a starting point.
19. 19) Through its emerging ties with China and Russia, Pakistan can counter India and its influence in Afghanistan can be minimized. This will lead to peace and harmony at the Northern border of Pakistan and will be helpful for the completion of CPEC and trade enhancement.

For Pakistan, there is a dire need to revamp its domestic policies and adopting pragmatic foreign policy. Transparency in CPEC related projects is a must for national government, in order to win the trust of Chinese government at the one hand and people at the other hand. The political, technical and financial aspects along-with security must be given priority. There has been great gap in Pak-China relations when it comes to technological advancement, business ethics, cultural orientation and political outlook. The knowledge and skill gap is another issue, so there is a need to lessen this gap through help of academia in order to work on energy, food and security related issues.

## **Conclusion**

If Pakistan wants to gain better geopolitical and economic positioning in the region, CPEC is the only hope and in-time completion of all the allied projects of CPEC is a must for Pakistan. This project, once completed, will provide Pakistan with the strength and opportunities to register it as key regional player. Gwadar port is a prime example of Pak-China ties, which can serve as leading energy and trade corridor, facilitating oil and gas flow, from one region to another, resulting into economic benefits for Pakistan. Yet, a catch is the security concerns for oil importing and exporting states, as safe passage is their first and foremost priority, which can only be ensured, once Pakistan settles its issues with its neighboring states and sincerely address the concerns of its internal people and political leaders of those areas, from where its routes and economic zones are to cross and established. For China and Central Asian States, this route will save money, days and lesser costs will ensure more profits and viability. For Pakistan, it will bring prosperity and business for local people and for neighboring countries, it will bring peace if serious efforts are made.

The shared interests among these states may provide basis for these states eventually to draw closer. Good relations with China, India and Afghanistan are necessary for Pakistan for economic and political reasons. For Pakistan, China is an important strategic partner along-with Russia who is gaining its lost position through progress and

open policies and is searching for new allies. Hence, these can turn into one of the centres of world influence.

CPEC demands Pakistan's cordial relations with neighbors and further strengthened relations with China. Right now Pakistan has adopted proactive and pragmatic approach to deal with its neighbors and other Central Asian states and is also using multilateralism to expand its engagement with its neighbors through different regional organizations like ECO and SCO. Pakistan's basic policy objectives are economic and commercial interests along-with creation of goodwill, political as well as strategic ties, for future relations. Pakistan wants to serve as trade and energy corridor in the region and for which basic infrastructure is developed. Now it needs, peace in the region for which it needs full support of China, whereas China needs Pakistan for its interests in the region. The time is perfect and if efforts are made in right directions to further improve Pak-China relations, the US influence in the region will be minimized and dawn of new era will see the increased role of Pakistan in confronting problems in terms of its expanding role in Central and South Asia.



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