

Research Article

CPEC: The Challenges, Political Impediments, Threats and the Development in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

CPEC is the most modern and advance venture in the history of Pakistan and China of bilateral economic cooperation. Chinese investment in Pakistan which ranges from \$46 billion in infrastructure and energy development. It is considered as a game changer in Pakistan. It is the initiative of china as a One Belt One Road. The corridor will connect Kashgar (West China) to Gawadar Port on the Arabian Sea. It will serve as a gateway to Central Asia, Middle east and Africa. It is likely to be considered as a major help in the development of stability in the region through economic integration. The project is a big challenge for China and Pakistan. This study will analyze the obstacles that can cause the trouble in the completion of the project as unstable situation in Afghanistan, competing interests of Iran and India, and the concerns of USA. The study is drawn from the wide range of scholarly, peer reviewed literature, academic journals, think tank reports and government sponsored studies. Insecurity and violence in Pakistan can cause the delay in the completion of CPEC project. This study will provide the recommendations for Pakistan to deal with potential hurdles in the completion of the project.

Keywords: CPEC, China, Pakistan. Challenges, Developments.

INTRODUCTION

The Sino-Pakistan friendship is not a new phenomenon, dating back to 1950 soon after the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) won its independence in 1949. The long history of relations between the two countries is based on mutual trust, sovereign equality, brotherhood, and cooperation. Leaders as well as the public in both countries describe the friendship as “higher than the Himalayas, sweeter than honey, and deeper than the sea. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is an umbrella project and a component of the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative announced in March 2015 by China’s National Development and Reform Committee (NDRC). With a Chinese commitment of U.S. \$46

billion in investment, the corridor will link Kashgar in Western China with the port of Gwadar on the Arabian Sea through a road and rail network of the eastern, central, and western routes from Gwadar(Ahmed et al., 2017).

The project aims at providing connectivity across Pakistan through highway and railway links accompanied by other developmental projects in energy, port, industrial parks, economic zones, and pipelines. The joint enterprise by China and Pakistan is intended to enhance investment, trade and economic cooperation. The project will be completed in three phases over 15 years.4 As the flagship project of the OBOR, the CPEC carries immense importance for both China and Pakistan

and will set the pace for the OBOR initiative. Pakistan and China see the CPEC as not just beneficial for themselves, but also for the entire region; it is therefore imperative for Pakistan to ensure its successful implementation (G. Nabi, Khan, Ahmad, Khan, & Siddique, 2017).

WHAT IS CPEC?

The CPEC connects China's Western Region Kashgar with the Pakistani port of Gwadar in the Southwest via Khunjarab Pass across the Karakorum Range traversing about 3,000 kilometers.¹⁴² Through the CPEC, China plans to invest around US\$46 billion in development deals over the next ten to 15 years,¹⁴³ which is equivalent to about 20 percent of Pakistan's annual GDP.¹⁴⁴ Of this sum, around \$34 billion will be invested in the energy sector to improve Pakistan's energy-system capacity by adding about 17,000 megawatts of electricity generation to the national grid. The CPEC is important for both China and Pakistan. As the world's largest oil importer—with the bulk of its oil imports from the Gulf States and Africa—China sees in the new route a guarantee of its energy security (Wang, 2017).

Moreover, through the CPEC, China intends to raise its impoverished western regions out of poverty, to help Chinese companies through state and bank lending that will return higher profits and also benefit the Chinese economy, and to secure easy access to efficient and dependable routes for the transportation of energy resources. The CPEC offers an opportunity for Pakistan to address most of its more entrenched structural problems and to raise the quality of life of its people. Pakistan, despite its huge native potential and its geographical significance, has been struggling over the past few decades to recover from economic turmoil. This state of affairs owes to a number of contributing factors, including the lack of internal security that discourages foreign investment and the energy crisis that has brought economic growth to a halt. Indeed, Pakistan's critical power shortfall causes losses of up to 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP)

annually. Likewise, the poor performance of the transport sector causes a loss of about 4 percent to 6 percent of GDP every year. The huge investment of \$46 billion in energy and infrastructure projects aims to enhance communication grid and equitable economic development within the country; the amount of investment in the CPEC equals the combined gross foreign direct investment into Pakistan since 1970 (Khan, 2017).

CPEC AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

CPEC developments are part of Chinese 'One Belt One Road' initiative, a hallmark of Chinese President Xi Jinping's foreign policy project. Drafted by China's NDRC in March 2015, the initiative intends to foster a new kind of global relationship, featuring win cooperation.¹³⁹ OBOR envisages new state-directed investments in the network of communication infrastructure, oil and gas pipelines, and other infrastructure projects in order to further economic integration and linkages not only across Asia but also to Africa and Europe. The Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road are the two segments of the OBOR initiative, and Pakistan, through CPEC as an extension of the Silk Road can act as a link for the two routes.¹⁴⁰ The CPEC's goal is to revive the ancient Silk Road trading route in order to achieve regional stability and economic integration in the globalized world.¹⁴¹ This chapter thus sets out to explain the technical and financial details of the CPEC project and its strategic significance for both China and Pakistan (A. Hussain, 2017).

The CPEC signifies a new kind of Sino-Pakistan cooperation having the potential to further strengthen their political and economic relationship through trade and development. The project has strategic and economic importance for both China and Pakistan and has the ability to eventually facilitate the creation of regional stability in South Asia. Ensuing paragraphs explain the strategic importance of CPEC for both China and Pakistan (Zafar & Nawaz, 2017).

SIGNIFICANCE FOR CHINA

For China, CPEC will provide easy and cost-effective access to the Indian Ocean and further to the Middle East and Africa through Gwadar Port.¹⁶⁴ The CPEC trade route will reduce the existing maritime distance of 12,000 kilometers between Beijing and Persian Gulf by shrinking it to a 3000-kilometer land route from Kashgar to Gwadar.¹⁶⁵ The new route will enable China to import such important supplies as oil from the Middle East and Africa in ten days as opposed to 45 days shipping time.¹⁶⁶ Also, the new route is expected to reduce the transportation costs to one-third of the current levels. China can save about US\$6 million every day, amounting to \$2 billion very year, if it uses the CPEC route even for only 50 percent of its oil imports (Hu, 2017).

SIGNIFICANCE FOR PAKISTAN

CPEC is equally important to Pakistan for getting out of the current economic stagnation. The projects worth US\$46 billion offer a special opportunity to Pakistan to address some of the main roadblocks to its economic growth such as the energy crisis, poor communication infrastructure, and narrow foreign investment. There is a broad consensus across the society on the enormous potential of CPEC for promoting economic growth in the country (Ahmed et al., 2017).

RESEARCH QUESTION

Though the CPEC holds promising opportunities for Pakistan's economic growth, potential challenges exist to its smooth execution, including regional instability, internal security and political impediments. Thus, this study asks: Which measures should Pakistan adopt to overcome the main challenges and threats?

LITERATURE REVIEW

REGIONAL DYNAMICS

Most scholars have expressed their concerns about various regional considerations in the

implementation of the CPEC project. These challenges extend from the prevailing regional environment in Afghanistan to competing interests of immediate neighbors like India and Iran.¹³ Some writers view the investment as having larger geopolitical implications. The huge Chinese investment in the region raises concerns from neighbors, especially from India, which is worried about China's growing influence and ambition in the Indian Ocean.¹⁴ India has also expressed its concerns over the CPEC route passing through Gilgit-Baltistan, which India claims as part of the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir.¹⁵ Moreover, Chinese firms' involvement in the Pakistani part of Kashmir is viewed by Indians as Chinese support to Pakistan's claim on the territory.¹⁶ Not incidentally, India is investing in Iran's port of Chabahar, 72 kilometers west of Gwadar port, as an alternate route and a gateway to access Afghanistan and Central Asia. The growing ties between China and Pakistan and the heavy investment in Gwadar by China is perceived by Indians as an obstacle to their ambitions to reach Afghanistan and Central Asia for a possible trade connection (Adil, 2017).

DOMESTIC CONSTRAINTS

Pakistan faces diverse security challenges, including religious extremism, sectarian and ethno-political violence, and law and order situations, which can pose serious threats to the execution of the CPEC.³² Various anti-state terrorist groups like Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF), and the militant wings of some political parties are potential threats and can target the Chinese interests as a tactic to malign the Pakistani state.³³ In a number of incidents, these terrorist groups have targeted Chinese workers and engineers in the past.³⁴ Moreover, the Chinese Uighur and ETIM militants in collaboration with the TTP present a key threat to Chinese interests in Pakistan.³⁵ However, the ongoing military operation, "Zarb-e-Azb" in

FATA, which has focused on the country's inaccessible areas in the western and north-western frontier regions, has weakened the operational capacity of all local and foreign terrorist groups including ETIM and Uighurs in recent months.³⁶ Similarly, any instability in Balochistan, where major development projects are underway, can hinder the execution of CPEC. Baloch insurgents oppose any such developments and have attacked many Chinese nationals in the past (M. Hussain, 2017).

PROBLEMS

Leaving aside the debate on the real motivation behind China's huge investment in the region, most scholars have agreed on the significance of the project. It will address the energy needs of both the countries, thereby creating the opportunities for sustained economic growth. My preliminary research, however, has shaped two major hypotheses about obstacles that may hinder the implementation of the CPEC project: the internal security situation and regional dynamics. Thus, first, the thesis hypothesizes that the internal security challenge is a major impediment to the execution of the CPEC project. The proposed western route runs through the challenging regions of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). Therefore, the security situation, including extremist militancy and nationalist insurgency fueled by anti-state actors to destabilize Pakistan, can disrupt the plan. Furthermore, I assume that political constraints like the lack of political consensus in Pakistan over the CPEC route can become a potential hurdle in the implementation of the project (Conrad, 2017).

POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

In 1950, the Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao Zedong, announced that the PRC would develop diplomatic relations "with any foreign government willing to observe the principle of equality, mutual benefit, and mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity."⁵⁵ Pakistan recognized the PRC by responding to the statement of Chairman Mao. As then Chinese

President Hu Jintao noted during a visit to Pakistan in November 2006, "Pakistan was one of the first countries to recognize China."⁵⁶ Pakistan was certain that the PRC had no hegemonic motives against its neighbor states. Also, both the countries established that there were no real conflicts of interest between them.⁵⁷ In addition, Pakistan has always supported the "One China Policy" and in September 1950, voted in favor of a resolution to restore the lawful rights of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations replacing the Republic of China (ROC) in the U.N. General Assembly.⁵⁸ Moreover, Pakistan also supported China's place as one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. In 1951, trade relations between the two countries were formally established;⁵⁹ they were further advanced as the two countries signed a trade agreement in 1953 (Chohan, 2017).

TRADE AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS

While perhaps not yet as deep as the political and military relationship, the bilateral trade and economic relations between China and Pakistan have grown steadily since the establishment of diplomatic ties. In September 1949, India's devaluation of its currency badly affected Pakistan's economy as Pakistan was importing coal from India for its growing industry in exchange for exporting cotton and jute to India.⁹⁸ China offered "coal for cotton," and Pakistan exported 97.2 million rupees' worth of cotton and jute to China for coal under the barter agreement of 1952. The first formal long-term trade agreement was signed in January 1963, whereby both countries granted (Chaudhri, 2017).

Most Favored Nation status to each other, thus establishing mutual trade and commercial links.¹⁰⁰ This foundation guided the establishment of the Joint Commission for Economy, Trade and Technology in October 1982.¹⁰¹ With globalization expanding, socio-economic considerations were given precedence in formulating geostrategic priorities.¹⁰² The changed regional and global environment urged both countries to expand economic ties to match

with the global and regional interdependency in trade and investments. The aim was to boost their economic relations to a level compatible with their political and defense relations.¹⁰³ Thus, a substantial increase in trade was observed as exports to China increased from US\$89 million in 1991 to \$456 million in 2000. Likewise, imports also increased from \$597 million to \$637 million during the same period (Hanjra, Bhatti, & Niazi).

Table 1. Pre-FTA Bilateral Trade between Pakistan and China (US\$ Millions)

Years	Exports	Imports
1999	180.72	446.72
2000	244.64	550.11
2001	289.38	487.02
2002	236.37	698.54
2003	259.64	957.33
2004	300.58	1488.77
2005	435.68	2349.39

(Hussain & Ali Shah, 2017)

Table 3. Financial Breakdown of CPEC Project

Project Details	Estimated Cost
Energy Sector	33.793
Transport Infrastructure	9.79
Gwadar Port including city and Gwadar region socio-economic development	0.793
Mass Transit Lahore	1.6
Fiber Optic Project	0.044
Total Cost	46.013

(Noonari & Memon, 2017)

CHALLENGES DURING CPEC

Despite the significance of CPEC for the region in general and for China and Pakistan in particular, the project is also confronted with various internal and external challenges. The success of the project particularly depends on regional geopolitical issues, especially India's position on the project and Afghanistan's instability. Internally, Pakistan must also deal with security challenges and political impediments, which may hinder the execution of the project. This chapter assesses both the external regional geopolitical dynamics as well as the potential internal and domestic

threats and the impediments in Pakistan itself that can affect the implementation of the project (M. Hussain, 2017).

REGIONAL GEOPOLITICAL DYNAMICS

Many security analysts have expressed their concerns that various regional factors may affect the implementation of the CPEC project. These challenges range from the prevailing regional environment in Afghanistan to competing interests of immediate neighbors like India and Iran.²⁰² The unstable situation in Afghanistan, India's suspicions about the initiative, as well as U.S. and Iranian concerns, can affect the mega-project negatively. In this regional context, this thesis section identifies and explains these challenges and conflicting interests (Chen, Deng, Jin, Samie, & Li, 2017).

INDIA

According to security analysts in Pakistan, India generally views its relationship with Pakistan as a zero-sum game and, thus, it resists any kind of advantage to Pakistan.²⁰³ More specifically, India's main objection to CPEC appears to concern the section of corridor that runs through Gilgit-Baltistan. Although KKH—the northern section of the corridor route—already passes through Gilgit-Baltistan, India has expressed its concerns over the CPEC route, which India identifies as Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, part of the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir that India claims as part of it (Chen et al., 2017).

AFGHANISTAN

While a stable Afghanistan is essential for the CPEC project to succeed, the security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated with the withdrawal from Afghanistan of a majority of the International Security Assistance Force under NATO in 2016.²³⁴ The political reconciliation process has not progressed either due to the Taliban's refusal to engage in the Quadrilateral Coordination Group comprising China, Pakistan, the United States, and Afghanistan—after the killing of its leader, Mullah Mansoor, in a drone attack by U.S. forces in May 2016.²³⁵ The spillover effects of this persistent instability could

undermine the security environment in both Pakistan and the western regions of China.²³⁶ Pakistan and Afghanistan under the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, therefore, must work together to find a practical solution to the problem (Roy, 2017).

IRAN

Iran's initial response to CPEC indicated that it was apprehensive about the development of Gwadar as a deep-sea port and considered the project as a rival to its Chabahar port in the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz, built with Indian assistance.²⁴⁹ Partially in response to Gwadar's proposed development, India, Iran, and Afghanistan signed an agreement in May 2016, forming a trilateral framework to expand Chabahar as a strategic port with India's investment of around US\$500 million.²⁵⁰ The project would give all three countries an alternate connection, bypassing Pakistan, for regional trade and access to the landlocked countries of Central Asia (Belal, 2017).

UNITED STATES

Contrary to the common perception in Pakistan, the U.S. government has not opposed CPEC. Rather its desire to see the CPEC as a multilateral project is an encouraging sign. Speaking of the project, a U.S. State Department official stated, "The planned corridor is one we very much support and is aligned with a shared vision of regional economic connectivity. Fundamentally, we hope that in the end it will not only be Pakistan and China. We hope eventually that it will include other neighbors as well, particularly Afghanistan, where we and the Chinese are also making common efforts."²⁶⁰ Still, the United States, aware of the perceived strategic ramifications of the CPEC project, views the corridor as having long-term risks (Pandey, 2017)

Thus, Chinese development of Gwadar port may face the U.S. government's opposition as operational control of the port gives leverage to Chinese naval power in the Indian Ocean, a potential threat to the supremacy in the oceans that

U.S. naval forces currently enjoy.²⁶¹ To deal with Chinese expansion in the region, the United States may be working on such policies as advancing its own New Silk Road Initiative, announced in 2011 to connect Central Asia to South Asia. The initiative is aimed at the regional integration of Afghanistan to support its economic growth.²⁶² Furthermore, to maintain its dominant position in the region, the United States is developing strategic ties with India. The Civilian Nuclear Agreement between India and the United States, signed by President Bush in 2006, and the growing U.S.-Indian strategic relationship in the last decade is evidence of the United States encouraging and supporting Indian naval power to counter the growing Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean (Ahmad, Ali, & Shah, 2017).

DOMESTIC CONSTRAINTS

On the domestic front, the internal security situation and the lack of political consensus in Pakistan are the two main challenges that may hinder the implementation of the CPEC project. If not handled appropriately, these impediments can affect national development and Pakistan's economic integration in the region as envisioned for CPEC (S. Nabi, 2017).

INTERNAL SECURITY

The major sources of security concern in Pakistan today are: religious extremism and radicalism perpetuated by Taliban militants in the tribal areas and KPK; sectarian and ethno-political violence in the metropolitan city of Karachi and Quetta; a nationalist insurgency in Balochistan, fueled and supported by foreign anti-state forces; and the law and order situation marred by acts of violence. World leaders and forums across the globe have praised and acknowledged the successful results of the operation. The Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism in the U.S. State Department lauded Pakistan's efforts and stated that Pakistan "remained a critical counterterrorism partner in 2015."²⁸⁵ Subsequently, the operation has been further extended to the urban areas with special

emphasis on Balochistan and Karachi to unearth a terrorist-criminal nexus. Law enforcement agencies with special integrated teams formed by Sindh Rangers, police, and intelligence teams carry out intelligence based operations to target terrorists, their supporters, sympathizers, and financiers. They have exposed and dismantled a number of sleeper cells in the urban areas that were being controlled by the terrorists from remote areas (M. Hussain, 2017).

Table 4. Fatalities in Terrorist Violence in Pakistan 2013–2016

Year	Civilians	Military	Terrorists	Total
2013	3001	676	1702	5379
2014	1781	533	3182	5496
2015	940	339	2403	3682
2016	612	293	898	1803

METHODS AND SOURCES

Qualitative research represents the methodology used in this thesis. First, it establishes the foundation for the topic by describing the historical perspective of China and Pakistan relations, including these nations' economic ties, to identify the circumstances that led to the initiation of the current project. Second, this thesis takes stock of the project in detail and highlights its significance for Pakistan in terms of prosperity and economic growth. Third, the thesis discusses the current internal and regional environment in order to identify the variables that may influence implementation of the project. Using the findings to infer possible implications, this thesis provides policy suggestions to deal with potential impediments in the implementation of the project.

CONCLUSION

Though CPEC presents greater avenues for broader regional cooperation, at least in the field of trade and economy, it also risks the creation of turbulence in the region, given the competing interests of the states in the area. The varying regional dynamics, conflicting interests, and a persisting state of suspicion and mistrust present a major hurdle in promoting regional integration.

Although the evolving regional dynamics can have an impact on the implementation of CPEC, both Pakistan and China are determined to make the project a success due to its enormous benefits for the region in general and for the two countries in particular. Analysts argue that the accommodating attitudes of all the regional countries can help build regional cooperation, and the CPEC thus can promote regional peace and stability through regional integration.

Sino-Pakistan relations have gradually evolved in every field in the long history between the two countries, including trade and investment. Nevertheless, the changed regional and global environments in the expanding globalization context have driven both countries to expand economic ties to match global and regional interdependency in trade and investments, thus bringing economic relations at par with political and defense relations. CPEC signifies a new kind of Sino-Pakistan cooperation with the potential to further strengthen the two countries' political and economic relationship through trade and development. The project has strategic and economic importance for both China and Pakistan and the ability to eventually facilitate the creation of regional stability in South Asia. CPEC has the prospects to bring peace and prosperity in the long run due to the attractive geo-economic aspect and the direct stakes of regional states in each other's stability. As a flagship of OBOR, CPEC can encourage other regional states, including CAR states, to engage in similar projects, thus stimulating regional trade and economic integration.

The projects worth US\$46 billion offer a special opportunity to Pakistan to address some of the main obstacles to its economic growth, such as the energy crisis, poor communication infrastructure, and narrow foreign investment. CPEC's anticipated socioeconomic development would bring peace and stability to the country in general and specifically to the restive and backward province of Balochistan by engaging youth in commercial activities, making the province more

economically viable and sustainable. The project is expected to increase employment opportunities, reduce poverty through progressive economic uplift of underdeveloped areas, and improve the socioeconomic outlook of the country by increased spending on education, health, and other basic services. Despite the significance of CPEC for the region in general and for China and Pakistan in particular, the project is confronted with various internal and external challenges.

The success of the project particularly depends upon regional geopolitical issues, especially India's position on the project, Afghanistan's instability and its spillover to Pakistan, and the trust deficit between some regional countries. Internally, Pakistan needs to deal with security challenges and political controversy with regards to route selection, which may hinder the execution of the project. Though the evolving regional dynamics can have an impact on the implementation of the CPEC, both Pakistan and China are determined to make the project a success due to its enormous benefits for the region in general and for both the countries in particular. However, the positive impact on the region depends upon the project's ability to extend beyond China-Pakistan borders for regional connectivity. Thus, through the policy of inclusion, Pakistan and China should rationally engage with involved actors and persuade them to become equal stakeholders instead of rivals in the project. Nonetheless, in the long run, timely and transparent implementation of the CPEC project in line with the aspirations of all the key stakeholders has the potential to elevate the socioeconomic condition of Pakistan and change the economic outlook of the region as a whole.

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