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Abstract: *China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the flagship project of the 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI). It enters Pakistan through the territory of Gilgit Baltistan, claimed by India as part of Jammu and Kashmir. India claims that CPEC violates its territorial sovereignty. Therefore, India totally rejected CPEC. Moreover, the world community accepts Jammu and Kashmir as disputed territory. Due to these reasons, CPEC has become a bone of contention between Pakistan and India. India evaluates CPEC as a key strategic project that will be an instrument in China's diplomatic clout. It will also be detrimental to the geopolitical supremacy of India in South Asia. While on the other hand, Pakistan considers CPEC her economic lifeline and negates Indian assertion as baseless. The research will address the Indian narrative and Pakistan's counter-narrative related to CPEC.*

Key Words: China, CPEC, India, Pakistan, Economic Cooperation, Security, South Asia

Introduction

CPEC was planned to link China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) with the South-west Gwadar port of Pakistan. It consists of rail, roads and communication projects between Pakistan and China. Political analysts label CPEC a 'strategic game-changer' for Pakistan and a lifeline for its economic sustainability.

India seems to have derived multiple concerns from CPEC. First of all, India objected to the path of CPEC that attaches Xinjian with the Indian-claimed territory of Gilgit Baltistan. India claims that Gilgit Baltistan is part of Jammu and Kashmir, an integral part of India. Therefore, China has no right to pass through Indian territory. New Delhi argues that Maharaja completely

yielded Kashmir and its affiliated territories like Gilgit Baltistan to India.

Indian officials often criticize CPEC on international forums. In 2015, ahead of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) meeting Indian prime minister criticized CPEC (Dunya News, 2020). In 2018, the Indian foreign secretary also criticized CPEC on the ground that it violates the territorial integrity of India because it passes through Indian land (Amir, 2020).

India anticipates multiple apprehensions from CPEC. First, India sees CPEC through the lens of less economic space. The following points are to be labelled as India's fears: (1) the buildup of Gwadar port (2) less space for India's economic expansion in the region (3)

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Deepening China-Pakistan integration implications for future geopolitical set-up.

The second fear for India emanates from the security point of view. India fears that China can use Gwadar for military purposes against India. Gwadar is very close to the Indian border as compared to China. Moreover, Gwadar is also located in a region strategically very important for oil carriage. India claims that China can use both options for Indian encirclement. Stimson Centre report further elaborates on the point that there appear considerable differences between Indian civil and military leadership over the issue of Gwadar as a naval base. The military personnel are more worried about the military purpose of Gwadar port. The security establishment particularly views the project through a 'security lens' (Hamza Tridivesh, 2016).

Pakistan totally holds the opposite perspective. Pakistan asserts that India's claim on Gilgit-Baltistan does not have United Nations Organization's (UNO) ratification. Pakistan also asserts that the Security Council grants the Kashmiri people the right to 'self-determination'. According to the UNSC resolutions, Kashmiri have the right to choose their status by plebiscite. So, India forcefully denied this right to the Kashmiri people.

Pakistan further holds the view that CPEC can no longer make Pakistan an economic competitor of India in the region. Pakistan's trade volume is also very less than China as compared to China's. China Economic Net quoted that there was a \$ 15 billion trade volume between China and Pakistan in 2019. This figure was earlier estimated at \$ 4 billion when the free trade agreement was signed (The Nation, 2020).

CPEC provided a fresh breadth for the ailing Pakistan economy. However, Indian assumptions are pointless on the fact that China-India trade volume is far greater than that of Pakistan. Pakistan further opines that an economically strong Pakistan is in favour

of India. Also, Indian high commissioner TCA Raghavan addressed a meeting at the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KPCCI), he said that India is not perturbed by growing China-Pakistan economic integration and not even by CPEC. He further elaborated that an economically strong Pakistan will bring regional stability and prosperity. He emphasized the necessity to bring mutual trust between the two countries (The Economic Times, 2020).

The third fear revolves around the theory that the ' Militarization of Gwadar Port' is happening and detrimental to the interests of India. Indian claims that China is building up a naval base in Gwadar. At the time of war, China can use it for a naval blockade of India and for offensive purposes. Pakistan vehemently rejects the Indian theory and considers it an interference in its internal affairs. Chinese Foreign Office official Hua Chunying said that Pakistan and China are long-term friends and cooperation in multiple fields. The normal military-to-military relation is in line with their international obligations (Gady Franz, 2016).

While taking statements from the leaders of the two countries, the article will try to explain the following questions: (1) What does India think of CPEC? (2) how does Pakistan derive its stance over CPEC? The research will also strive to put forward some suggestions in order to minimize friction between the two nations.

Gilgit-Baltistan Case

CPEC and India's Territorial Sovereignty

India completely denied CPEC recognition and acceptability. Her claim is based on the point that Jammu and Kashmir are an integral part of India. Addressing the public gathering at Raisina Dialogue, Narendra Modi said that the connectivity initiative can

be made successful and permanent only by respecting the sovereignty of other countries. In 2018, S Jaishankar informed Chinese officials that CPEC offends the territorial sovereignty of India because it runs through Pakistan-occupied territory (POK) (Amir, 2020). Gilgit-Baltistan is part of Jammu and Kashmir and Maharaja completely yielded Kashmir to India.

CPEC Will Popularize Kashmir Issue All Over the World

A Sweden Think Tank, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) elaborated on Indian apprehensions: India believes that CPEC will further entrench Pakistan-China friendship over the Kashmir issue. China will automatically defend Kashmir at international forums. It will be a decisive point because China has been neutral on the Kashmir issue since 1963. Internationalization will weaken the Indian stance on Kashmir (Shahbaz, 2017). Basically, India does not want the Chinese role in mediating the Kashmir conflict. Suchitra Vijayan explains to Al Jazeera that India is afraid of the internalization of the Kashmir issue, but with the progress of CPEC, it is happening (Fahad, 2017). India also fears that CPEC will make Pakistan stronger economically and can make regional order in favour of China.

The Authenticity of Pakistan's Claim

India claims Gilgit-Baltistan as part of Kashmir. However, this argument goes against the popular will. Shafqat Hussain, an anthropologist, said that the people of Gilgit Baltistan have delinked their association with Kashmir. They have no historical, ethnic or linguistic relationship with Kashmir. So, it should be detached from the fate of Kashmir (Kaitlyn, Hunzai, 2019).

Similarly, it is stated in the Human Rights Commission report that Gilgit-Baltistan's identity throughout history has

been completely different from Kashmir (Kailyn, Hunzai, 2019). Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly (GBLA) demanded to the federal government that Gilgit-Baltistan should be integrated into the rest of Pakistan (Shigri, 2016).

At the time of partition in 1947, Gilgit-Baltistan was partly under the control of the Kashmir government and partly under the British Empire. At that time, the 'great game' was happening between the British and Russia. The British government compelled Maharaja to lease out the Gilgit agency to them. From 1935 to 1947, the areas related to Gilgit remained under British control.

At the time of partition, the British government handed over Kashmir to Maharaja Hari Sing. Maharaja appointed Brigadier Ghansara Sing and General Scott as the new administrator on behalf of Raja. After the partition, the people of Gilgit-Baltistan rose up against the authority of Maharaja and Dogra rule (Shigri, 2016). The Indian government claimed that only Gilgit Scott revolted against the authority of Maharaja Kashmir, not the common people. However, it appears difficult for the Indian government to explain the success of the revolt against Maharaja without popular support. Also, it was given a privilege to the princely states to choose freely their accession taking into consideration of geographical, linguistic, ethnic and religious issues.

On 26 Oct 1947, the Maharaja of Kashmir forcefully acceded an 'instrument of accession' to the Indian government against popular will. The accession of Kashmir to India is also not approved by the UNO (Amir, 2020). Also, the UNSC resolution concedes the right of self-determination to Kashmir. According to the resolutions, they have the right to choose their fate freely under a plebiscite. Since then, India has denied them the right to self-determination. On the contrary, Pakistan respects UNSC resolutions on Kashmir.

Owing to this, the status of Kashmir is considered a separate entity in Pakistan. Under legal obligations, Pakistan has consistently denied them a right to legally participate in the state of Pakistan.

Moreover, the world takes Kashmir as a disputed territory. Wang Yi, the Chinese foreign minister, fully endorsed the Pakistani stance over the Kashmir problem. He said that CPEC is not directed to any country, not violates the territorial integrity of any country and is not contrary to China's stance on Kashmir (Krishna, 2017). Indian reluctance also indicated the point that she had consistently denied the right of self-determination to the people of Kashmir.

The international community has been consistently voicing the right of self-determination for Kashmir. Unfortunately, India resorts to violence and state torture for suppressing the voice of common Kashmiri. Her stance over Gilgit-Baltistan holds no legal and moral ground. Therefore, no justification accounts for India that CPEC violating its territorial integrity and sovereignty. Under the guise of territorial claims, India seems fearful of the growing influence of China in South Asia's geopolitical architecture.

CPEC as an 'Economic Counterbalance'

Media reports and official statements of India indicate that India is only disturbed by CPEC due to sovereignty and territorial integrity issues. However, India appears to have other issues with CPEC. In the broader context of South Asian geopolitical architecture, expanding economic interdependence between China and Pakistan seems to hit the major financial space of India. Traditionally, India views South Asia as her exclusive space. The new entrants like powerful China will ultimately shrink her space in South Asia.

CPEC and Potential Economic Challenges for India

The study of Indian official statements only reveals the point that India's concerns have been mostly related to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Gilgit-Baltistan. However, the issue of economic interdependence between China and Pakistan has been less evident in the official discourse of India. Political analysts point out some facts related to India's economic marginalization through CPEC. These issues have been related to China-Pakistan economic interdependence: (1) India dominates the economic framework of South Asia. The strong China-Pakistan economic partnership can also lure other small countries into the China-dominated economic framework. This will further shrink the economic space for China. (2) Pakistan will become the connecting node integrating West, south, central and East Asia, another nightmare scenario for India. India's policy towards Pakistan has been focused on an economically weak Pakistan. So that, Pakistan will not be able to challenge India at any level. CPEC will provide Pakistan with an opportunity to stabilize itself economically. (3) Gwadar is an emerging commercial deep-sea port. Gwadar's geostrategic importance will be a threat to the commercial supremacy of other ports like Mumbai.

A Pakistani Perspective

CPEC will likely make Pakistan-China economic partnership on firm ground. China Economic Net figures show that the bilateral trade between China-Pakistan was \$ 15.6 billion in the financial year 2019. This figure has gone from \$ 4 billion, analysts frame the 2006 free trade accord which boosted trade from a very low level (The Nation, 2020). However, China-Pakistan trade volume even at no level is touching the India-China trade partnership.

Livemint data shows that the China-India trade level was \$ 95.7 billion in 2018 and experts predicted a \$ 100 billion trade volume in 2019. Furthermore, the volume of bilateral trade is growing gradually touching new figures every year (Livemint, 2020). India is the largest trade partner of China in South Asia. China-Pakistan trade is also in no comparison to India. The data shows that China-Pakistan trade relations are not a threat to India's commercial supremacy in South Asia.

CPEC also brings contradictions in the official statements of India. India repeatedly announced that an affluent and economically stable Pakistan is helpful for Pakistan. TCA Raghavan, Indian High Commissioner said that India is not concerned over CPEC and its potential economic prospects for Pakistan. An economically beneficial Pakistan would bring regional stability and mutual trust between India and Pakistan. So, it would also be very helpful for regional stability (The Economic Times, 2020).

Sarmad Ashfaq also said that if CPEC goes on well, Pakistan would become a stable country. This will annoy India and America. So, CPEC and BRI are a threat to the hegemony of India and America (Sarmad, 2020). Sumit Walia writes that it has been the policy of the Indian government to divide Pakistan and make it an isolated entity which is paying dividends (Sumit, 2019).

In addition, India wants Chinese projects in Pakistan dysfunctional. He further says that if there is no economic development in Pakistan, it will not be able to repay the Chinese loans and in return, Pakistan will become a default country. We must work together economically and diplomatically. So Pakistan will not be able to stand as a secure country (Sumit, 2019).

India started to invest in Iran's Chabahar port possibly to counter the growing influence of Gwadar port. India's

estimated cost for Chabahar port is around \$ 100 million. Chinese media claimed that India wants to counter Gwadar Port (Amir, 2019). Political analysts also claim that Chabahar Port was initiated after one year after CPEC was started in 2016. It possibly started to hamper the growth of CPEC (Amir, 2019).

No doubt, CPEC will likely bring a crucial change in the economic prosperity of Pakistan. The propaganda or misperception of CPEC as an economic threat to India is exaggerated and out of an argument. China-India economic relations seem to have no parallel in South Asia. However, India views the project purely in traditional geopolitical terms. Prosperous and stable Pakistan will be a threat to the traditional hegemony of India in South Asia. India also dislikes the strong presence of China in its strategic backyard.

The ' Militarization of CPEC ' Theory

India also perceives CPEC through the lens of security implications for her. India's security establishment and intelligence agencies openly criticize CPEC on the grounds of security. Stimson Center report very clearly delineates the contradictions between civil and military establishments. It says that Indian security agencies are more sceptical of CPEC and its anticipated implications for Indian national security than civil administration. They view the project more in terms of security (Hamza, Tridivesh, 2016). There appear two main concerns related to CPEC expansion for India.

CPEC and Its Security Implications for India

India shows concerns over deepening military-to-military relations between Pakistan and China. CPEC is expanding this military interaction. Indian Defense Review wrote that ever since the initiation of CPEC, Chinese military presence has increased in

Pakistan to a new level. In 2017, the Chinese military paraded with the Pakistan military in Islamabad. This is the first instance the Chinese military ever paraded outside China (Kajal, 2018). For the sake of defaming CPEC, India wrongly tries to attach CPEC with security. The Times of India revealed that People's Liberation Army has positioned 3000 troops in Pakistan using local names. PLA would start a military wing in Azad Kashmir. Their main duty would be to look after the CPEC project (The Times of India, 2016). Srikanth Kondapalli wrote that the mounting presence of the PLA is the reason for apprehension in India (The Times of India, 2016).

China-Pakistan relations are not constrained to the military domain only. China is also building infrastructure all over Pakistan including Azad Kashmir. Gezhouba Company China has been allotted to build the Neelum-Jhelum project worth of 970 MW electricity. Moreover, the Chinese military frequently visits Pakistan for official duties. India appears to link CPEC with security. Another newspaper Hindustan Times also wrote that PLA would excavate Leepa Valley in Azad Kashmir. The purpose is to establish a road as a substitute to reach the Karakorum highway (Hindustan Times, 2016).

Through 'the securitization of CPEC, India aims at defaming the biggest infrastructure project ever started in Pakistan. Most of these reports are polluting the minds of common people. China-Pakistan military relations need not bring CPEC for expansion. These relations even predated CPEC.

Security Threat to India and Chinese Maritime Silk Route (MSR).

Indian depiction of BRI and CPEC resonates with the concept of 'String of Pearls' which pronounces the Chinese buildup of commercial ports around India as a security threat. India claims that BRI is a cloak under

which China plans naval encirclement of India. China distributed eight submarines to the Pakistan Navy (Gady, Franz, 2016). Sunil Lamba, Indian naval chief, criticized China for weaponizing Indian neighbours. He elaborated that Gwadar is intended to be a commercial port. If China uses it for military purposes, it will be a great concern for the future of Indian security. India is highly concerned with the developments related to China-Pakistan naval cooperation in Gwadar (The Nation, 2017). Parmeet Kajal wrote in Indian Defense Review that Chinese initiatives are a great threat to Indian national security. China is surrounding India with the Indian Ocean. The countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Myanmar also got naval vessels and a variety of aircraft from China (Kajal, 2018).

Indian analysts also share their views with the security establishment. Swaran Sing, a professor at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, said that neither Jiwani nor Gwadar would be the best choice for a base because it is situated very near to Chabahar port in Iran. New Delhi has devoted nearly \$ 100 million to Chabahar port to develop trade with Central Asia and Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan. Jiwani and Gwadar can become susceptible in case of a clash between China and India and Pakistan and Iran (Minnie, 2018).

Gwadar also implies a threat to the security of Gujrat. Gwadar is 400 nautical miles away from Gujrat. Kajal, an Indian writer, said that the occurrence of Chinese ships in Gwadar suggests a great danger to the western border of India, Gujrat. It will become insecure from the western side of the border (Kajal, 2018).

Is the 'Militarization of Gwadar' an Authentic Theory?

Western media has been propagating misinformation about Chinese initiatives in Pakistan. Following the beat of the West, India also spread propaganda against

Gwadar. The 'Militarization of Gwadar Theory' appears as a new propaganda war against Chinese initiatives in Pakistan. China claims that either it is the affair of Gwadar or the weapon supply to Pakistan, it has always been following international standards of weapon transfer. China does not commit any illegality in transferring weapons to Pakistan. Chinese spokesperson Hua Chunying commented on the transfer of the submarine to Pakistan, she said that China and Pakistan are close friends and have cooperation in various domains. Their normal military-to-military relation is in the domain of their respective international standards (Gady, Franz, 2016).

The emerging propaganda by Western and Indian media outlets has been labelling Gwadar as China's naval base. They opine that China wants Gwadar as a naval base to propagate its power in the Indian Ocean. China simply refutes these arguments that Gwadar's only purpose is only for commercial. Krzysztof Iwanek said that we can find no independent sources which corroborate the militarization of Gwadar. The stories of the South China Morning Post in 2018 caused some friction in the global media about Gwadar as a naval post. They did not quote specific sources and only secret and unidentified sources (Iwankey, 2019). India also created a hue and cry in the international media. India is also a USA ally in South Asia. America contracted a deal with India and provided it with 'Civil Nuclear Assistance'. It is argued by analysts that Pakistan has the same right to contract with any power. Pakistan has also the legal right to develop military-to-military relations with China.

Indian perspective over CPEC and Gwadar still revolves around the same fact of traditional geopolitics. The normal military-to-military relations between China and Pakistan are interpreted as a threat to world peace and security. Even some anti-China media outlets could not provide

cogent pieces of evidence against Gwadar as a naval base.

CPEC and the South Asian Geopolitics

India is a big country in South Asia. The small South Asian nations are not parallel to India in economic and political power. Less or more, they depend upon India for their economic and political needs. CPEC is often patented as a game-changer initiative. If BRI and CPEC proceed with normal speed, it is likely to fetch geopolitical changes in South Asia, particularly Pakistan. China's mounting relations with South Asian neighbours seem a bone of contention with India. Gulshan Sachdeva points out that India discusses BRI very much. The fulcrum of the discussion has been more focused on the geopolitical rather than development oriented. They discuss the impacts of BRI and CPEC in the neighbourhood and Indian Ocean littoral (Sachdeva, 2018).

The modern China-India relations tell the story of tension more elaborately. China and India are the rising powers within the same space of Asia. Their interests are often contradictory and sometimes conflictual. Grant says that there appears a huge inequity in economic development. Due to this India is afraid of the rise of China, while China has no fear of the rise of India (Grants, 2010). Because of their presence in the same region, there would be chances of chaos between China and India. Analysts also claim that the chances of their collision are maximum. Both are trying to occupy maximum space at the cost of others.

China-India relations consist of four Cs: conflict, competition, cooperation and containment (Joshi, 2018). Indian calculation revolves around the point that China is expanding its relations with small South Asian nations in order to undermine its power. China's normal trade and military relations with small South Asian states are interpreted in the media as China encircling India. While on the other hand, China takes

US-India relations as a challenge for its economic expansion. China perceives that the US ganged up with India to check its growth in Asia and elsewhere.

Indian government often claims that a Prosperous and stable Pakistan is in favour of India. Indian high commissioner also said the same statement in Pakistan. However, CPEC has become a soar point for Indian policymakers. They are more open and unanimous in criticizing CPEC even not the slightest care for Pakistan's national interests. Sarmad Ashfaq writes that the smooth functioning of CPEC and BRI is a soar point, particularly for China and India. Because a stable and prosperous Pakistan under CPEC would become a challenge to their hegemony in South Asia. (Ashfaq, 2019). All discussion shows that India is more interested in subservient Pakistan which is economically weak and politically fragile. So, the research indicates that India's CPEC approach is more oriented towards geopolitics rather than development and progress.

Conclusion

CPEC connects Pakistan's Gwadar port with China's Xinjiang region. It will make Pakistan economically strong and prosperous. Therefore, it will be a 'strategic game-changer' because Pakistan has never seen such a robust project ever. India is suspicious of CPEC. India claims that CPEC's location is through the territory claimed by it. Gilgit-Baltistan is considered part of Kashmir. So, the Indian administration has been raising concerns related to sovereignty and territorial claims. India totally rejected CPEC on these grounds. To sum up Indian allegations.

First, Indian claims that CPEC transverses through its territory of Gilgit-Baltistan. Second, it claims that China will possibly use CPEC for its geopolitical design. China's expanding network in South Asia is a threat to Indian supremacy. The

new economic and political framework under CPEC will likely challenge the Indian position in South Asia. Third, India blames China is constructing a naval base in Gwadar. This naval base will be used against India in moments of conflict. India thinks that it will be encircled from another side. It will also be a challenge for its energy security.

However, Pakistan vehemently counters India's arguments. First, it refutes that Gilgit-Baltistan is part of India. Neither the people of GB nor UNO SC resolutions accept India's version of sovereignty. So, the Indian claim holds no genuine ground related to the sovereignty issue. Also, UNSC resolutions requested India to hold a plebiscite for determining the popular will. India also denies this right to the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Second, India claims that CPEC has geopolitical agenda. If this is so, there is not concrete proof that China has used this agenda in other countries with expanding economic relations. Third, there is no cogent and independent evidence that China is building a naval port in Gwadar. Western and Indian media have been propagating this theory to malign China's expanding global economic network.

To sum up, India's approach has been oriented more towards geopolitical designs. India wants the status quo in South Asia and foreign entrants like China are soaring for Indian hegemony in South Asia. India also disliked China's involvement in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh and Maldives. The study of Indian media and literature will clearly show to the world that there seems no positive coverage related to Chinese-initiated projects in South Asia. If India wants to maintain its traditional status in South Asia, it will have to present an equal amount to small South Asian nations for development and an economic model as per excellence with China. So far, India has miserably failed to address these issues.

India will have to come out of the traditional thinking for the sake of connectivity in economically fragile South Asia. India's approach has been the main check behind the inactive South Asia

Association of Regional Cooperation Organization (SAARC). To fully utilize the scenario, India's secular behaviour will be very helpful in the economic prosperity of South Asia.

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