

Geopolitical Paradigms of CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor): Challenges and Opportunities

Muhammad Rehan Akram	M. Phil Scholar, Department of International Relations, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan
Ghulam Mustafa	Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan ghulammustafa@gcuf.edu.pk
Muhammad Taimoor	M. Phil Scholar, Department of International Relations, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan
Muhammad Waqas Anwar	M. Phil Scholar, Department of International Relations, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan

Abstract: *The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a cornerstone of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), signifies a profound geopolitical shift in South Asia and beyond. This transformative project connects Pakistan's Gwadar Port to China's Xinjiang province, addressing China's strategic vulnerabilities, such as its dependence on the Malacca Strait, and enhancing Pakistan's economic and geopolitical leverage. CPEC encompasses vast infrastructure projects, energy solutions, and special economic zones, promising economic growth, regional connectivity, and energy security for Pakistan. However, it also poses challenges, including security risks in Pakistan's Balochistan province, political instability, and environmental concerns. Regionally, CPEC has intensified India's concerns about territorial sovereignty and China's expanding influence, prompting closer U.S.-India cooperation aimed at counterbalancing China's regional dominance. The corridor's strategic implications extend to global power dynamics, reshaping alliances and raising concerns about debt sustainability and environmental impacts. This paper explores the multifaceted geopolitical paradigms of CPEC, its implications for China and Pakistan, and the opportunities and challenges it presents for South Asia and the global order.*

Keywords: CPEC, BRI, Geo-Political Importance, Gwadar Port

GEOPOLITICAL PARADIGMS OF CPEC

Strategic Significance of CPEC

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is one of the largest and the most strategic projects this millennium and has enormous geo-political and geo-economic importance especially for the two countries involved but also for the whole region of South Asia and beyond. Unlike other projects of BRI, CPEC is not only a construction project but a venture in many forms and orientations meant to redesign the boundaries of trade and strategic power in Asia (Siddique & Shafqat, 2021). CPEC links Gwadar Port in the province of Balochistan of Pakistan to the Xinjiang province in Western China; CPEC has pledged to improve the transit and connectivity, spur economic growth and development while fortifying geopolitical relations in a manner that may reshape the flow of power within the region.

The best and most obvious way of understanding the importance of CPEC is by noting that it serves

two major purposes. On the one hand, it is developed for the economic cooperation between China and Pakistan oriented in the promotion of the trade and investments flows, On the other hand, it can be viewed as the means of ensuring the strategic geopolitical interests of two states and their impact upon the world scene. For China, CPEC offers a solution to one of its most pressing strategic concerns: the expose of some key energy delivery channels (Bian, Wang, Xu, & Zhang, 2021) . The Malacca straits is a confined waterway and busy channel through which most of the China's Middle Eastern oil and natural gas transit. However, the strait is a choke point, it can always be closed or threatened in situations of hostility or instability. Because of those imports' significance for maintaining China's economic development and industrial base, the security of supply has always been a major concern for Beijing. As it is, by providing an overland link that extends to Gwadar port, CPEC offers China an avenue to avoid the Malacca strait and straight access to the Arabian Sea. This greatly minimizes the risks its current dependency on such hazardous sea corridors poses to its energy import needs and helps propose a safer and more reliable supply line.

In addition to meeting the energy needs China also considers CPEC as an opportunity to deepen its influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region. Opinion: First, this corridor also sharpens China reach in Pakistan second, it also situates China as a dominant actor in the region's geopolitics. With such arrangements by funding Pakistan's infrastructure needs, China is strengthening its economic and political relationship with a South Asian strategic partner while at the same time gaining better access to the Indian Ocean region, a critically essential region for international commerce. Thus, ensuring the presence in Gwadar Port China obtains a strategic entry point to the Arabian Sea which is one of the most impressive zones for the shipping industry (Khan & Omid, 2023). It helps to build up China's capabilities for asserting presence in the Indian Ocean, while challenging other regional actors, most notably India and the United States. That is why Gwadar is situated near the Strait of Hormuz through which a third of the world's oil supplies pass; it allows China to advance its strategic goals.

For Pakistan, the attached stakes with the CPEC are not different, but perhaps even greater. The project is characterized as a unique historical chance to turn the fate of the country from an economic and geopolitical perspective. This paper will demonstrate that Pakistan has been experiencing economic decay and energy deficits, low capacity, and absence of foreign direct investment that limited its growth and caused a decline in the country's power status. CPEC, on the other hand, holds the key to changing this trend by attracting a huge FDI from China and enhancing the physical and energy infrastructure of the country and increasing industrial production (Rehman, Ali, Ahmed, & Khattak, 2021) .

The construction of Gwadar Port is one of the key predicates for the Pakistan position as the global trade power. This paper focuses on the new Chinese 'Silk Road' project that has turned the historically insignificant fishing port of Gwadar into one of the main nodes of this system through investments in its port and infrastructure of roads and related facilities. Besides linking Gwadar to China's western regions and opening direct sea routes for imports and exports besides providing Pakistan easy access to the international markets CPEC also directly links Pakistan to markets in Middle East Africa and Central Asia (Hussain E. , 2020) . It enables Pakistan to effectively be a connector country for China, enhance the country's centrality in global supply and distribution channels substantially.

The government believes that by opening new opportunities for business and investment, by creating new employment opportunities, by enhancing the transport and energy infrastructure of Pakistan, CPEC are going to contribute positively to the growth of the economies of the country. Integral to the project is infrastructure through which highway, railway, and pipelines passing through Pakistan from the Arabian Sea coast to the Chinese border. These massive webs of infrastructures are made none only for the purpose of boosting internal connectivity but also to support international trade and investment. However, the investment component of CPEC only includes a few energy sectors targeting Pakistan's perennial problems of power crises, which have negatively impacted industrialization and export competitiveness in Pakistan for years (Mushtaq & Waleed, 2023). Generating capacity of Pakistan by

utilizing coal, hydroelectric, wind and solar power plants under CPEC is likely to enhance the portfolio and avoid power prophesied power deficits that may further encourage industrialization. The manufacturing sector may grow, and Pakistan become more productive due to improved energy supply; exports will increase, and the economy will grow.

CPEC has benefits for Pakistan that have been to lure multinational corporations and foreign investors through establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) along the CPEC. These SEZs are meant to offer different stimuli to the business ventures in terms of the tax exemptions, simple administrative processes, and markets for the land and services (Mwansa, Shaikh, & Mubanga, 2020). To foster sustained industrialization, efficiency and absorption of know-how, Pakistan has identified these zones to cluster related industries. Through FDIs along with better infrastructure and energy availability, many thousand people are going to get employment, standard of living is going to increase, and it is going to add to the improvement of economy of Pakistan.

Geopolitically as well, CPEC is of great importance to Pakistan given that the project is not innocent of strategic political advantages. Because of close affiliation to China, Pakistan can assert itself in the balance of power in South Asia especially regarding India. The collaboration of Pakistan and India based on historical animosity that characterized most of South Asia regional politics and both countries seeking hegemony in the area (Bhatnagar & Ahmed, 2021). India, as the larger and the more developed country economically, has always had more power in the region of South Asia. However, CPEC is an important approach to Pakistan to keep up India's regional hegemony by strengthening its strategic cooperation with China.

This paper also establishes that the political consequences of CPEC are not only limited to the South Asian region as they have invited reactions from other players on the international stage including the United States and India. India has been quite vocal in its criticism of CPEC more so because the line traverses through Gilgit-Baltistan which according to India is a part of occupied Kashmir in the larger issue of the Indian occupied Kashmir (Sangkar & Huda, 2023). The India regards CPEC as a geopolitical threat to it and as a part of an elaborate bid by China to surround India via the formulation of economic and military agreements with India's neighbors. Further, India considers China's increasing power in South Asia exemplified by CPEC as a direct threat to its influence in the region.

In response to China-Pakistan alliance, India has tried to diversify and intensify its strategic relationship with the United States. Laxman, The US-India strategic partnership has been aimed at counterbalancing the Chinese ascendancy in the world especially with regard to the Indo-Pacific strategy (Hanif & Sharif, 2021). India and the US both have interests with regards to the rising Chinese aggression in the Indian Ocean as well as in Asia Pacific region. The US has historically dominated this region and China's increasing engagements in the region have been seen with skepticism by the US to whom India's attempts at balancing the Chinese expansions are seen as helpful. This strategic competition has rub to escalate tensions between two camps, China-Pakistan axis, and India-United States axis along CPEC which is being seen as strategic point of interest in South Asia.

All the same, just like any other project, CPEC is not without its pull of hurdles to its overall effectiveness. One of the challenges that stand in the way of the implementation of the plan of work is the security issues in Pakistan, and most especially, Balochistan where many of the CET infrastructure are being implemented. Balochistan has been plagued with long standing insurgencies and different militant groups have been against the development of companies for CPEC projects (Mujahid, 2022). These have targeted workers and installations, thus giving investors cause to fear for their investments, and development agencies to worry about the sustainability of developmental projects in the region. CPEC security has emerged as crucial for Pakistan where the government has deployed military and security forces to guard the corridor.

Second, political instability in Pakistan also presents a major threat in relation to the accomplishment

of CPEC since security challenge is only one element of the puzzle. It has witnessed political instability often switches its governments and policies within few years. This can only serve to exacerbate the situation by softening the decision-making process, flaring policies on and off and generally underestimating the long-term commitments to a project. Sustainability of government policies and effective political stability is crucial for transmission, implementation and sustainability of CPEC more so given the fact that many of the projects are long term infrastructure projects (Azam & Falki, 2023). However, there are a few challenges to the continuity of CPEC for instance the effects of the environment. This automatically leads to the construction of new coal-based power plants which, though rids Pakistan of energy crises, further surmises the question, does it cause enhancement in carbon di oxide emission and air pollution. Second, mega infrastructure venture poses threats to biodiversity and demographic invasions. Mitigation of these environment imbalances will be equally important if CPEC must not be economically gainful but also environmentally sustainable in the longer run.

CPEC is under external threats from regional and global powers who see this development as an existential threat to their dominance. Since India has vehemently opposed CPEC saying it violates its sovereignty, and is increasing its cooperation with the United States, the absent of a clear signal from Islamabad could possibly hamper the implementation process. Security threats by these powers to the China-Pakistan axis complicate an already strained geopolitical environment with respect to CPEC, further. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a project of great relevance both for China and Pakistan (Khan & Khan, 2019). For China, it can address its energy security issues and at the same increase China footprint in the South Asian and Indian Ocean region. For Pakistan itself, CPEC is a veritable silver bullet that is capable of engineer a positive change of its economic trajectory and its status in the world realm. However, the economies of the two countries will only be supplemented if both countries overcome numerous challenges including security risks of the CPEC.

1.2. Geopolitical Impacts of CPEC

The political roles and significance of the CPEC project go far beyond the bilateral cooperation between China and Pakistan because the project directly affects the balance of power within South Asia, thus attracting interest of the significant regional and global powers including India and the United States. With the help of CPEC China and Pakistan have become the true allies, and this new dimension added in the already entangled politics of South Asia (Zoonia, 2023). Largely an infrastructure and economic endeavor undertaken as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, this project goes beyond mere commercial partnership, being a geopolitical reorientation that has significant implications for international politics.

However, it is highly relevant when one looks at it through the perspective of India's strategic insecurity. Through CPEC, China enjoys strategic influence severally over India's strategic and vital domain of great interests in South Asia. New Delhi has especially been uncomfortable since CPEC passes through the Gilgit-Baltistan territory, which is a part of the disputed Kashmir. Like Pakistan, India also lays territorial claim over entire territory of Kashmir and including Gilgit-Baltistan area. The creation of infrastructure projects in this disputed area remains a significant concern; while building them, India has been predominantly against (Nobil, 2022) . To India CPEC violates its territorial integrity because the physical infrastructure includes roads, pipeline and others passes through Gilgit Baltistan which is an Indian Territory. This has raised diplomatic tensions with both China and Pakistan since India sees CPEC as approval of the Pakistani occupation of the area.

CPEC brings the developmental dynamics to Pakistan to enhance the economic and military power of the country unfavorable to India. Traditionally they have been competing on military power, territorial control, and as aspirants to regional super-power status in South Asia (Aslam, Ain, Khan, & Naseem, 2024). Efforts on the construction of CPEC also have positive impact where Pakistan's economic infrastructure, its energy security and improve industrial transformation and therefore, enhanced Pakistan's national power. India considers these trends as unfavorable for the balance of power in the

region because, in effect, they help Pakistan. The economic growth that CPEC has provided Pakistan, may also help Pakistan to augment its military expenditure, thus, intensifying the security dilemma between two countries.

Politically and strategically CPEC is viewed from India as part of China's string of pearls strategy to surround and dominate India. China's increasing presence in South Asia, especially through infrastructure investment such as CPEC, is considered by India as an attempt to reduce its presence in South Asia (Rashid, Ikram, & Naeem, 2023). India has always been anxious about the growing Chinese footprint in the Indian Ocean region and the establishing strategic relationships with India's neighbors, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bangladesh. Facilities made for construction of ports, railway and road under CPEC has given China better connectivity with Indian Ocean which is considered strategic ocean by India. This increased access challenges India's dominance over routes that are bio strategic and absolutely crucial for the entire South Asian and spiking sea trade.

Several developments regarding naval strategy also add to Indian concern – the String of Pearls refers to the list of Chinese-funded projects in ports all across the Indian Ocean, starting from Sri Lanka to Myanmar and even Pakistan. Among these measures, Gwadar port built under CPEC is an integral part of this strategy. Moreover the port can also be developed into Chinese naval base in the future if the Chinese desired. India regards those advancements as part of China's tactical plans to build an array of partners and infrastructure that would cap India's potential influence across the region. This has ensured that India looks for friends elsewhere in the region and internationally to check the growing Chinese might. Due to CPEC and the wider strategic plans spearheaded by China, India has endeavored to bolster own coalitions, specifically that with America (Shaheen & Mu, 2023). India has always had a policy of neutrality and does not favor either the Western or Eastern sides. However, in the current generation and due to China's increase in dominance, India has shifted alliance to the United States establishing a strategic alliance that considers the dominance of China. This sponsorship has been well illustrated in the so-called Indo-Pacific region, where both India and the United States of America have sought to foster a free and open seas strategy in response to China's aggression.

Like India, the United States has been a keen observer of all events regarding CPEC. Laying into its wider apprehension about the growing Chinese power through the belt and road venture, the US sees CPEC as an important piece of the China's tactic to push its tentacles further into South Asia and Indian Ocean region. For USA, CPEC is not a mere economic project, but Chinese attempt to redesign a geographical sphere that was long determined by American political parameters. The main appreciation with reference to CPEC is the defeat of parity that it introduces in South Asian, Central Asian, and, in general, the Indian Ocean zone, which has been historically dominated by the US influence. From the American point of view, it is viewed as another aspect of the Chinese ambition to counteract the American dominance in important world continents (Ibid). Considering CPEC is an integrated member of the Belt and Road Initiative, its main goal is to construct a comprehensive network of roads, trade and communication, infrastructure, and cooperation relations that spread China over Asia, Europe, and Africa. These developments raise concern for the US because they may dilute American power and control of strategically significant areas in the international system such as South Asia and the Middle East.

Its strategic consequences are more alarming for the US in terms of regional stability due to the CPEC project. Pakistan and US relations have a rich background, especially during the cold war period and contemporary war on terrorism. Pakistan had always been a strategic partner of the US in the global fight against communism in South Asia or with the war against terrorism. However, the formation of a more intimate strategic partnership of the two nations due to the CPEC project has confused the Pentagon and Washington about Pakistan's future political policy (Rasool, 2024). Currently, due to the deepening relations between Pakistan and China, some people perhaps speciously suggested that Pakistan is changing its alliance with the USA more towards China.

This change in the strategic alliance of Pakistan has added a new issue for the United States and Pakistan partnership, HI This change in Pakistan strategic approach has tensions the relations between US and Pakistan in the recent years. The US has had a concern due to the security threats following the insurgent and militant activities in Pakistan's Balochistan province where Gwadar numerous other infrastructure development projects are sited. Security of these projects is key to both China and Pakistan though the US has some doubts about the safety of the projects in the long run. Security threat by militants to attack upon CPEC installations or disrupt movement of goods through the corridor is one of the challenges to CPEC success. The United States is wary of the CPEC debt for Pakistan which will increase the existing debt burden (Iqbal & Javaid, 2020). Like the other countries involved in BRI model Pakistan, has borrowed considerable amount to fund infrastructure projects under CPEC. Opponents of the plan claim that it might result in the countries getting entangled in the "debt economic model," and in return for fresh loans, must surrender valuable infrastructure such as ports, or resources like minerals to China. The US governments have advised countries that formed partnerships with it in the BRI, such as Pakistan, to be wary of the costs of these projects in the future. Washington is most worried about Pakistan retreating more to Chinese credit owing that it is a matter of concern from sovereignty point of view.

The enhancement of the strategic cooperation between China and Pakistan under CPEC also has significant impacts to Sino-US relations. Washington and Beijing have been in a very sensitive, often tense, and bitter position as the US looks to counter China's rise and assertive behavior in East Asia, South Asia, and the Indo-Pacific region. The US's perceived CPEC and a BRI hugely, as an endeavor of China to assert in these regions, dominance that used to belong to America. The US on its part has had to try and enhance cooperation with countries like India, Japan and Australia and hence created the Quad or the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue as a relative to China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region (Rafique & Shah, 2024). Geopolitical consequences of the CPEC are multi-layered and numerous, they have not only re-defined the bilateral relations of China and Pakistan but also brought changes in regional and global political geography. For India, CPEC is perhaps one of its biggest foes in operation, challenging its regional dominance and threatening its sovereignty in parts of Kashmir. Interestingly, India sees CPEC as an experiment of 'string of pearls' policy of China to surround and compromise India's sovereignty and influence, making it seek America and other world powers embrace. For America, CPEC is seen as an important tool of Chinese expansion in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region which has raised political stability concerns both for the Pakistani ally and more broadly for the strategic direction of the United States. Nonetheless, if CPEC is to progress further the geopolitical impacts of the project increase, the destiny of South Asian and the international relations may shift significantly.

1.3. Opportunities and Challenges

The China Pakistan Economic Corridor is packed with great many strategic and economic benefits of strategic importance for China as well as for Pakistan simultaneously it has great many challenges that may act as a barrier towards realizing its indefinite success. Undoubtedly the prospects of CPEC in terms of economic growth infrastructure development and regional integration and connectivity cannot be overemphasized but there are several important areas of concern that may undermine the implementation of the project. These challenges mainly focus on the security threats, political risks, and environmental factors that must be addresses to ensure that the CPEC delivers its intended impacts (Kuszevska & Nitza-Makowska, 2021). More importantly it is advocacy that the two governments of China and Pakistan fully understand these challenges as their ability to manage and contain them shall go a long way in enhancing this strategic cooperation of a lifetime.

Now, one of the biggest issues with regard to CPEC is the security threats in Pakistan, especially in Balochistan province where Gwadar Sea port is situated and where most of the infrastructure projects are planned. Balochistan is among those provinces of Pakistan, which has always remained a troubled

province that has witnessed insurgencies militancy and separatism in the past. Many groups have fought the Pakistani state for over sixty years now for more autonomy in Balochistan if not total secession as in the case of the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA). This insurgency is a direct threat to CPEC as most of the infrastructure such Road, pipelines and energy projects are targeted areas for insurgents are mostly engage in (Ahmed, Fayaz, & Khan, 2022). These groups have threatened both local and foreign workers participated in CPEC, which creates a lot of concerns relating to the safety of the personnel and what they are doing in the project front.

Security threats related to CPEC are even accentuated with involvement of other militia operating in Pakistan such as Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other militant groups which have history of attacking the state structures and infrastructure projects. They regard CPEC as an instrument of fresh imperialism and neoliberal economic domination in the region and have staged various attacks against its development to challenge Chinese colonization of the corridor. It has therefore dawned on the Pakistani government to ensure the protection of the CPEC projects; thus, mobilizing thousands of military and paramilitary forces to protect the corridor as well as Chinese and Pakistani employees (Surahio, Mahesar, Baloch, Kovalev, & Soomro, 2023). A Special Security Division (SSD) to solely look after the security of the CPEC has been set up which shows how much the government values the security of the project.

Even so, unfortunately, the state of security in Balochistan and other areas of Pakistan has not improved much. The topography of Balochistan is least suitable for any military strategy because the country is a high-altitude region and due to the severe insurgency the composition of which has been entwined deep in the region it is hard for the Pakistan military to uproot the militias completely. This evident unrest constant threatens the progress and stability in the functioning of CPEC projects. Some negative impacts on the development of the corridor involved increased costs to the project, time overruns resulting from issues to do with security, and interruptions of the movement of products and services along the corridor. Furthermore, due to perceived security threat, there is potential of development of insignificant foreign investment in CPEC related projects in the SEZs as well as other industrial zones because one of the aims of the initiative is to encourage foreign investors on the back of enhanced security in the SEZs (Askari, Saeed, & Mahmood, 2024).

Other than the security threats, another problem to the implementation of CPEC has also been induced by political instability in Pakistan. Pakistan has always seen swift government changes, internal political conflict, and institutional amplitude shifts. These factors have led to poor policy coherence, which is now inversely proportional to the growth and development of CPEC projects. Successive changes of government by the ballot or by the bullet plus internal political turmoil have been major factors that have contributed to time overruns and or fluctuating project delivery. Many new governments in Pakistan have set their priorities and developed their own separate agendas, which sometimes have adversely affected concentrations and money spent on CPEC-related projects (Hassan Y. U., 2020) . For instance, conflict of interest within the political leadership regarding the provinces of Pakistan to secure the projects of CPEC resulted in tensions between Islamabad and provincial governance, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa particularly.

Lack of local political support for CPEC has also been an issue for the delays and hiccups suffered by this project. Critics also allege that political groups within Pakistan attempt to make most of the projected profit of CPEC for their regions while neglecting other backward areas like Balochistan and Sindh province for instance which is overshadowed by Punjab province in terms of the infrastructural developments the CPEC funds will foster. These political tensions have resulted in Demonstrations and political constraint adding pressure on the implementation CPEC. Furthermore, the CPEC has been politically exploited by some opposition political parties where they complain that the government in power is inept to manage the project well or maybe in some cases they point at the China that the government has a given a raw deal with (Huda, 2022). Such political controversies have dampened the

pace of some of the CPEC initiatives since the vital decisions about its projects' execution mechanisms, financing, and policy backing have been held up or hindered by politics.

That is a long-term CPEC can only be made successful and sustainable in Pakistan providing political stability and policy support to the corridor. In particular, its absence raises the probability of new delays, expenditures' growth, and improper management even higher. The outcomes of CPEC will not only depend in the construction of the physical assets, but also in the political commitment towards its sustained implementation. In turn, this entails the Pakistani government coming up with elaborate strategies that would help solve the matters concerning the local political parties, fairly distribute resources so as to ensure fairness and work on engaging all the stakeholders that are involved in the implementation of the CPEC. It also demands sincerity and good governance since the ills of corruption and inefficiency could deter the benefits envisaged in the project. However, another robust issue that is affecting the ability of CPEC to deliver its intended goals is the social cost associated with the development of infrastructure and energy projects under the corridor (Kakar, Shabbir, & Mustafa, 2021). Although CPEC is one initiative aimed at providing solution to Pakistan's chronic energy problem through the addition of power generation capacity, the use of large scale coal firing power plants has been a major controversy due to its implication in adding to carbon emissions and environmental unsustainability in the context of climate change. However, energy issue remains the biggest challenge on the social and economic growth of the country, with power blackouts and rationing common in the country particularly during summer. This problem is addressed in CPEC through investment in new power production capacities, including many coal-based power plants. Yet, the use of coal, which is a high carbon emitting fossil fuel has raised concerns on environmentalism of such projects.

There has been a lot of negative reaction regarding CPEC, particularly construction of coal-based power plants that started in Pakistan as with most investment in power plants around the world coal investments received criticism from groups and activist of climate change and reduction of greenhouse gases. Pakistan has not yet experienced the effects of climate change since temperature increases, variability in rainfall, and the frequency of the natural calamities creating significant threats to Pakistan's agriculture, water sector, and economy. The envisaged new capacities of thermal power plants using coal would only worsen these difficulties regarding emissions of air pollutants and greenhouse gases (Zhang, Da, Zhang, & Fan, 2021). This is rather worrisome especially since Pakistan is among the nations that have the largest effects of climate change occurrences, yet it is a small emitter of greenhouse gases. Besides air pollution, the Physical development part calls for infrastructure like highways, railways, industrial zones, etc., proposed under CPEC could pose negative effects on environment and biodiversity. Some \$46 billion of the projects are being constructed in areas that remain sensitive to the environment, and the three main aspects of construction such as roads, pipeline, and industrial premises pose a threat to the alteration of wildlife areas, deforestation and general reduction of environmental impact. These considering the destructive impact which these subjects pose to the environment when implemented as part of the CPEC hence putting into contention the sustainability of CPEC and its ability to accomplish Pakistan's environmental policies.

Environmental considerations and the overall growth of the respective national economies is one of the most important and difficult concerns that China and Pakistan will face as they progress with CPEC. It is true that the world needs economic growth and energy security, but the point of CPEC should not be achieved at the cost of the environment. This needs a fresh and more diversified approach to energy generation, the primary focus of which should be solar and wind energies; two quickly developing kinds of power which can supply Pakistan's energy requirements in a far more environmentally friendly manner than damaging coal. While there are many renewable energy projects proposed under CPEC today, the scale required to reduce Pakistan's reliance on coal and build a sustainable energy future has to be created. Thus, the overall environment impact assessment for CPEC projects is the need to carry out EIAs for all projects of CPEC for both China and Pakistan to ensure that risks associated with the

environment have been identified and measures towards the management of these impacts have been developed (Khalid, Ahmad, & Ullah, 2022) . This relates to efforts to conserve wildlife, avoid the cutting down of trees and avoid pollution. If it then acquaints the planning and implementation of CPEC projects with environmental sustainability, it will become possible to achieve deliberate and significant goals for the Pakistani people and for the country's environment in the perspective of CPEC.

Despite the vast potential of socioeconomic and economic benefits and regional connectivity as well as energy security, CPEC has to confront a number of major challenges. Insecurity threats, especially in Balochistan province, represent a clear and imminent threat to the effective implementation of the corridor while policy stability in Pakistan could be affected by political instabilities leading to long periods of project procrastination. There is also a question of sustainability – where do thoughts of environmental preservation go when they consider the proposal of using coal sources – or the impact to the ecosystems of the area in the interests of the company? It has emerged that for CPEC to be successful, both China and Pakistan must overcome these challenges through security's polity and environment. In this way, they can make sure that the scope of CPEC is effectively reached for the purpose of the global economic revolution, which is profitable for both nations, also maintaining the environmental and stable conditions of the region.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor means a phenomenal shift in the modality of South Asia. For China the project provides a secure source of energy and increases its strategic stakes in a geographically strategic region. For Pakistan, it gives economic growth formula as well as add advantage over India on geopolitical front. Nonetheless, many challenges are hindering the long-term success of CPEC some of which include the following: Security risks; Political instabilities; and Environmental factors. That is why as the CPEC adapts and grows the geopolitics of the region will be profoundly influenced by this project. It has despite this changed the power balance in South Asia, elicit responses from some key players on the globe and realigning the power structures. To a future next CPEC will prove itself as central to economic political and strategic destiny of region.

Conclusion

CPEC stands as a transformative initiative with far-reaching implications for South Asia and the global geopolitical order. For China, it addresses critical energy security concerns and enhances its strategic presence in the Indian Ocean region. For Pakistan, it offers unprecedented economic opportunities, infrastructural development, and a means to counterbalance India's regional dominance. However, challenges such as security risks in Balochistan, political instability, and environmental concerns threaten its sustainability. Regionally, CPEC has intensified strategic competition, particularly with India and the U.S., reshaping alliances and power dynamics. Despite these challenges, CPEC has the potential to redefine regional connectivity and global trade networks. Its success will depend on mitigating security and environmental risks, fostering political stability, and ensuring sustainable development. As CPEC evolves, it will continue to shape the economic and strategic future of South Asia, positioning itself as a pivotal element in the global balance of power.

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