



CPEC and Balochistan: Challenges to Security

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Abstract: CPEC is integral to the development, prosperity and security of Pakistan, the geo-politics and geo-economics of the region and the vision of the Belt and Road Initiative connecting three continents. Balochistan province is the most important for the realization and perpetuation of this project. The internal security of Balochistan and the involvement of various regional actors complicate the security matrix posing the biggest challenge to the project. However, the project can ensure the security of Balochistan. If neighbouring countries are involved in the development and prosperity of the project it can revolutionize the future of the project. The role of Iran is the most important as it was the major competing country having a role in Afghanistan and close ties with India. Iran joining the project can neutralize major threats to the CPEC. This study is aimed at analyzing the security of CPEC in Balochistan through the matrix of regional actors' interests.

Key Words: CPEC, Balochistan, Western Route, Geo-politics, Geo-economics

Introduction

China Pakistan Economic Corridor is the flagship project of China's New Asian Security vision encapsulated in the Belt and Road Initiative. The vision of President Xi is to share the development in the region and in Asia and transform the security apparatus based on shared prosperity and converged interests of the Asian nations with respect to the rights of all nations and reducing the interests of the extra-regional actors complicating the security matrix of the largest continent. The huge network of roads, railway lines and sea lanes of communication aims at revolutionizing global trade. CPEC is the lynchpin of this project connecting the roads and railway network with sea lanes of communication in the Indian Ocean. Gwadar is the strategic chokepoint which can bring this great dream into reality being the deep sea port at the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz, overseeing the global oil trade, and reducing China's oil trade distance

to 2,500 Km from 12,500 Km through the Indian Ocean to its eastern ports.

Balochistan province is in the most important strategic position benefitting from this project yet there are various challenges within this province hindering the development and later smooth functioning of this project. The security dynamics of Balochistan are tightly knitted with the underdevelopment it faced over the decades and its fractioned relationship with the federation. The military uprisings, insurgencies, political instabilities and abject underdevelopment in the province have already involved the role of various regional and extra-regional actors destabilizing the security and political landscape of Pakistan. CPEC is a historic opportunity to achieve landmark milestones in the development, security and political stability in this province. However, there are variously internal and external factors posing a big challenge to the security of CPEC in Balochistan. The insurgent groups on the soil, the role of India as a

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destabilizing factor and the situation in Afghanistan have direct impacts on the security of CPEC in Balochistan which this study aims at analyzing. The role of Iran is of paramount importance in this calculation. Iran could pose the biggest threat if left out of this project and by a strategic alliance with India and can be a big stabilizing factor if successfully comes under the folds of economic development and regional connectivity this project is brewing.

Historical Overview of Balochistan and Accession to Pakistan

"Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan in terms of area and the smallest in terms of population. It had a tribal structure and was least developed when measured against the socio-economic standing of other provinces. Balochistan had abundant natural resources but apart from an unskilled population, insurgency and extremism are obstacles in exploiting those resources" (Kishwar 2016). The Federal government in general and the provincial government in particular failed to develop the capacities of the population. According to the PILDAT report of 2012, it had a 51.5% of literacy rate with a thin rate of urbanization. It had a high unemployment index of 20% and the lowest GDP per capita when compared to other provinces of Pakistan.

After the establishment of Pakistan, Balochistan and its princely states i.e. Makran, Kharan, Les Bela and Khan of Kalat acceded to Pakistan in March 1948. The Khan of Kalat acceded to Pakistan on the condition that defence, foreign relations, finances, and currency would be vested in the federal government but the province would remain autonomous. These princely states were termed as Balochistan States Union in 1952. The territory of Gwadar was owned by the Sultanate of Oman. The Gwadar was purchased from Oman in 1958 and was merged into West Pakistan. After the dissolution of West Pakistan which was formed in 1955, former state unions, the Chief Commissioners Province of Balochistan were combined to form a new province. Gwadar was also incorporated in Balochistan.

Today Balochistan is a vanguard of geostrategic happening, historically divided

between Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The dominant ethnic groups are Baloch and Pashtun, the other ethnic & settlers groups include Brahuis, Hazaras, Punjabis, Sindhis, Turkmens, and Uzbeks. The majority of the population is Sunni

Muslims followed by Shia Muslims and Hindus in some parts of Balochistan. The oldest civilization of Mehrgarh lies on the kacchi plain of Balochistan. Due to the historical processes and failed debate over their rights to resources, Balochistan is an unending tale of socio-economic, political, and development lapses. Although Balochistan is blessed with an abundance of explored and unexplored natural resources, there have been continuous waves of insurgencies that created hurdles in its development.

The first insurgency broke out right after the decision of Khan of Kalat to accession with Pakistan which was opposed by his brothers. In 1955, Nawaz Nauroz revolted against the central government's decision to merge the states of Balochistan under one unit policy. The one-unit policy merges all the provinces of West Pakistan into a single unit which abolishes the titles of the tribe's leader. In 1960, the tribe leaders demanded that they should be given a share from the Gas royalty. In 1970 the situation normalized after the dissolution of one unit and Balochistan receives a royalty on gas and its share of the Gas Development Surcharge (GDS) on account of its ownership of gas.

The other factor which contributed to the conflict is the mistrust between the bureaucracy and the Baloch people. The rule of a military bureaucracy further accentuated the mistrust. National Awami Party won the election in 1970 and had a manifesto to create employment opportunities for local people. During the election campaign, the party promised to bring the fruits of development to the province but unfortunately despite winning the hearts of the locals it was being removed from the government by the federal government.

After the separation of East Pakistan in 1971, the separatist groups strengthened and gained support from India, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto imposed martial Law. Things came under control and there was no significant uprising during 1980-90 but only

sporadic attacks by rebels. The next wave of insurgency included sectarian and ethnic

elements into it and rebels started attacking the ethnic and cultural minorities.

Table 1. Uprisings in Balochistan

Insurgency	Factors	Remarks	Support
1948	The accession agreement btw Pakistan and Khan of Kalat was not accepted by his brothers.	Prince Karim surrenders to the Pakistan government after one year.	No local support
1955	The Merger of Balochistan in West Pakistan under One unit policy.	Nawab Nauroz was arrested along with his companions.	No local support
1963-71	Demands the share in GAS royalty and restoration of Balochistan's status as a province	Elections were held and the abolition of one unit	Baloch Rebels were largely suppressed. The establishment of the Baloch student organization.
1973	Military assistance by Iraq and Afghanistan	The government imposed Martial law.	The intervention of external actors begins.
1973-74	Policemen were killed by Balochi rebels. Samad Khan was assassinated in Quetta.	Bhutto declares ceasefire and amnesty for rebels.	Baloch rebels fled to Afghanistan
1975-77	Locals and soldiers were killed by rebels in different parts of Balochistan.	Government suspend the Balochistan administration and provincial assembly and suppressed the rebellion in 1977	The Balochi Peoples Liberation Front (BPLF) was formed.
1985-2000	Baloch and Pashtuns Clashes	The provincial assembly was dissolved	The beginning of the Ethnic and Sectarian element in the Balochistan crisis.
2000-2007	BLA conducted attacks on soldiers, and non-Baloch minorities. Nawab Akbar Bugti was killed	The government launched a Military offence against BLA.	Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) Was founded
2008-Present	Baloch rebels find support from India. Kalbhoshan Yadav Indian spy was arrested.	General Raheel Shareef Launched Operation and offered an amnesty scheme. Lots of Rebels leaders surrendered.	Involvement of External and Internal actors in destabilizing Balochistan.

The deprivation accompanied by frustration makes it a real challenge for the decision-makers at the Centre. In such conditions when genuine projects such as CPEC are being suspected by the locals, the real challenge for the federal government is to address their unanswered questions and satisfy them about the utility and advantages it offers to the locals.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Western Route

CPEC is termed as the axis of growth by the Long term Plan signed between the governments of Pakistan and China. The Long Term Plan (2017-2030) sets three targets for the plan execution of the corridor: the short-term

projects which are scheduled to be completed by 2020, the medium-term projects to be completed by 2025 and the long-term projects which are to be completed by 2030 (LTP, 2017, p. 4). The corridor covering the entire Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China and entire Pakistan enjoys a unique geo-strategic location that has the potential to implicate positively the whole of South Asia and beyond the region too. The 'core one' of the corridor projects the "one belt" including Kashgar, Tumshuq City, Atushi City and Akto County in Kizilsu Kirghis autonomous prefecture of Xinjiang region. In Pakistan, the core covers the areas in Islamabad, Punjab, KPK, Balochistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan. The

"three axes" refers to the horizontal axes connecting Lahore and Peshawar, Sukkur and Quetta, and Karachi and Gwadar. The third component of the spatial layout is the "several passages" through railways and highway trunk roads from Islamabad to Karachi and Gwadar (LTP, 2017, p. 4).

During the last five years, bilateral trade between Pakistan and China has had an annual growth of 18.8% and China has become the biggest source of foreign investment for Pakistan (LTP, 2017, p. 5). The major cities covered under the project are Kashgar, Atushi, Tumshuq, Shule, Shufuq, Akto, Tashkurgan Tajik, Gilgit, Peshawar, Dera Ismail Khan, Islamabad, Lahore, Multan, Quetta, Sukkur Hyderabad, Karachi and Gwadar (LTP, 2017, p. 4).

CPEC Projects in Balochistan

The projects under CPEC which are Balochistan specific were announced by the Chinese ambassador on 5th October 2016. The road projects under this are Khuzdar-Basima Highway (N-30), D. I. Khan-Quetta Highway (N-50), Gwadar Eastbay Expressway I and II, Gwadar International Airport, Gwadar Smart Port City, Hubco Coal Power Plant, 300 MW Power Plant, Master Plan and Expansion of Multipurpose Terminal including Gwadar-Nawabshah LNG Terminal and Pipeline, Gwadar Free Zone, Fresh Water Supply for Gwadar City, Treatment Plants for Gwadar City, Gwadar Hospital Upgradation, Breakwater and dredging Wastewater in Gwadar, Gwadar Primary School

and Gwadar Vocational Training College (Zaheer et al., 2019, p 167). The Railway network is integral to this project and special

attention was given to upgrading the railway system in this province to connect this track to Kashgar. The first new railway line will be constructed from Gwadar to Pasni via Ormara and Liara. The second line would connect Gwadar to Jacobabad and Spezand via Basima and the third line will be constructed to connect Bostan to Darya Khan via Muslim Bagh, Zhob and Dera Ismail Khan. These railway lines will then be connected to the mainstream railway lines of the country from Taxila to Khunjera through Khunjerab Railways. Crossing into China these railway lines would connect the Lanzhou-Xinjiang Railway of China for linking Urumqi, Kashgar, Lanzhou and Gansu (Zaheer et al., 2019, p, 167).

Gwadar Port is the major point of CPEC connecting the Arabian Sea to Kashgar and broadly connecting the sea lines of communication with the road and railway network. Almost USD 250 million has been spent up till now according to Zhang Baozhong, Chief Executive Officer of China Overseas Port Holding Company. There is an acute water shortage in the city which is being dealt with on priority and Rs. 1.95 billion has been spent on desalination plants which will provide 5,000 gallons of water per day. Power shortage is another challenge of this city which is controlled through the construction of a 300 MW coal-based power production unit with a cost of USD 542 million. In 2015, free trade zone was established in Gwadar that was joined by nine companies immediately and 30 firms joined it later. Hang adds that twice the number has joined too and half of them are from Europe. Pak-China Friendship Hospital with USD 100 million is under construction by China (Gwadar port to be..., 13th June 2020).

Table 2. Security Challenges to CPEC in Balochistan

Internal	External
Separatist Group/ Insurgency	Baloch India
Socio-Economic Issues	UAE (perceived Gwadar port threat to a monopoly over trade)
Security	Afghanistan

Source <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/461c/f8f196a10ed90e06bd2f563b637bc03b7d0b.pdf>

The other factor behind the discontent in the province is pervasive poverty and stark underdevelopment. Due to the historical

experiences of uneven distribution of revenues, the locals doubted the CPEC whether will benefit them or not. The unskilled

population with a low literacy rate is a serious source of concern that the stimulation of foreigners into Balochistan under CPEC will leave Baloch more deprived and penurious.

The Baloch people are now concerned about the projects under CPEC in particular which they deem would not benefit Balochistan overall. The recent rhetoric in Balochistan delineates the anger and discontentment among the people. In December 2018 a briefing was given to the Balochistan cabinet in which it was revealed that only 9 % of the total project investment was in the province which was 5.5 billion. Until then no considerable progress was made on the western projects which are mainly confined to Gwadar. Outside Gwadar, the roads of the western corridor did not see any progress yet (Husain, December 11, 2019). Five years prior to 2018 only the Gwadar port and Hubco coal power projects were approved for the city (Shahid, December 10, 2018). On this issue, the politicians of the ruling party also voiced concerns (Kakar, December 15, 2018). Former Chief Minister of Balochistan Dr Abdul Malik Baloch believes that if local communities are included in CPEC projects more it would help to address the issues of the Baloch people (Ex-CM wants greater..., February 10, 2020).

The significance of Balochistan to China's vision of the Belt and Road Initiative and CPEC is so vital that China directly held talks with angry Baloch tribal leaders. The policy of non-interference which China maintained for about half a century was left behind in this case. They held secret talks with tribal elders for various months and persuaded various young militants to lay down their weapons on the promise of financial benefits (China in talks..., February 20, 2018). A separatist leader in the past Dr Jumma Khan Marri stated that projects like CPEC would change the fate of Balochistan. He addressed a gathering on the telephone from Moscow where he said that opposing this project would not only be against Pakistan but also against Balochistan (Former Separatist leader..., April 5, 2018). Right after the project was announced the smaller provinces raised objections to the distribution of the benefits of the project. Since the day of the start of the project, there was a lot of discontentment in the pursuit of projects on the western route (CPEC & Balochistan, April 15, 2015). In 2018, Chief Minister Jam Kamal surfaced the fact in

the Balochistan Assembly that if Gwadar and HUBCO were excluded Balochistan remains left only with one per cent (Shah, December 21, 2018; Shahid, December 22, 2018). There is also a fear in Baloch people regarding the presence of the Pashtun population that migrated from Afghanistan and mainly settled in northern Balochistan that the distribution of the resources emanating from the CPEC would not reach majorly to the Baloch people in presence of these refugees (Balochistan will be..., October 10, 2016).

Role of India and security of Balochistan

Pakistan and Iran enjoyed exemplary brotherly relations in the past until the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The rise of the Shia theocratic regime in Iran since then has spilt the sentiment of fear in Sunni-majority Pakistan. Iran and Pakistan share the Balochistan area. About 1.6 million Baloch, which make up 2% of the Iranian population, resides in the Sistan Balochistan area of Iran which is subject to strict control by every succeeding regime since then. India gives special attention to Pakistan's western neighbours in the words of Sunil Dasgupta Pakistan enjoys the advantage of terrain on the eastern front which India could enjoy if attacks Pakistan from the western border (Dasgupta, 2004, p.23). India always tried to maintain a presence in the western neighbours of Pakistan which were delineated from its policy in Afghanistan too since the creation of Pakistan. In 2017, India launched the "Look West" policy which is aimed at establishing sustainable relations in the Middle East (Sohail & Iqbal, 2017, p. 84).

The consideration of defence and military cooperation between India and Iran started right after the rise of the theocratic regime as Pakistan enjoyed very close brotherly relations with the Pehalvi Dynasty before that. In 1983, Indo-Iran signed Joint Commission but a Memoranda of Understanding on defence was signed in 2001. The historic Tehran Agreement was signed in January 2003 which paved the way for future defence cooperation at an unprecedented scale. It was then decided that India would be able to use Iranian bases in case of war with Pakistan (Sohail & Iqbal, 2017, p. 84). Pakistan's trade relations with Iran are lagging behind India which is a serious question of

Pakistan's foreign policy preferences towards Iran. The basis of this is certainly the pressure Pakistan faces from Saudi Arabia and the US not to engage with Iran. Pakistan and Iran signed a preferential Trade Agreement with Iran in 2004 which was not ratified until 2006. In 2015, Pakistan's exports from Iran were USD 32.29 million and imports of USD 260.89 million (Sohail & Iqbal, [2017](#), p. 86).

Role of Afghanistan

Afghanistan has been the chessboard of a geopolitical tussle between the regional and extra regional power on the one hand and the struggle for power between the dissenting groups including the Taliban and the Afghan government on the other hand. The instability and security paradigm of the country has a lesser scope for any sort of economic connectivity. China's growing economic interest in the region in the shape of CPEC (OBOR) holds an immense prospect for Afghanistan to boost its economy. Afghanistan being a landlocked state can play the role of a transit hub for energy trade between South Asia and Central Asia. Since 2005, there have been talks between Turkmenistan, and Pakistan for Gas-Pipeline but for any such project to allow Afghanistan Central space, peace must be restored in the region along with the development of critical infrastructure (Akhtar, [2019](#)).

The inclusion of Afghanistan in CPEC can only be materialized if a stable representative government is placed at a centre with the consent of the majority of the dissenting groups. For the realization of this initiative, peace talks between the stakeholders are a prerequisite. Since 2014, China has injected its military support in order to combat militancy in Afghanistan which will in turn impact the security and stability of its western region. Ensuring security in Afghanistan will contribute to stability in the country also in the region. The peace and stability in Afghanistan will pave the way for economic integration which has many folds implications for Pakistan. Firstly, millions of Afghan refugees that Pakistan was hosting for decades will be able to go back to their homeland and reap the benefits of the new economic vistas created by economic integration. The peaceful repatriation of Afghan refugees will ease the burden on

Pakistan's economy. Secondly, improved bilateral relations will provide Pakistan with an excess to the Central Asia States via Afghanistan and some progress in this direction has been achieved as the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Sher Khan- Ninipayan border route as a potential trade route has been recognized by Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan. Thirdly, cooperation on economic integration supplemented by improved security will be a win-win situation for both countries. The bilateral cooperation will be helpful for the elimination of militancy and ensure regional development.

A transit trade agreement for the facilitation of the movements of goods between Pakistan and Afghanistan had been signed in 1965 and was brushed up in 2010. Pakistan opened five key routes for trade and transit in 2020 including Gwadar Port, a nerve centre of CPEC to facilitate the import and export of Afghanistan.

CPEC a unique model of connectivity, trade and development entered into its second phase of development, the impending withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan is sharpening the focus on the second phase of the CPEC, which appears to have been fused with a larger regional plan involving Afghanistan and Central Asia (Aneja, [2020](#)).

China, Afghanistan and Pakistan's foreign ministers recapped in a meeting held in 2019 that trilateral cooperation should be pushed forward under the OBOR and are willing to expand CPEC to Afghanistan. China has a geo-economic interest in Afghanistan and its reserves of copper, rare earth, new energy vehicles, and the feedback of batteries are one of the drivers of China's engagement in Afghanistan. The economic engagement and trilateral cooperation under the CPEC have prospects and a win-win game for all the actors involved.

The inclusion of Afghanistan into CPEC holds immense Economic and security Prospects of CPEC for Pakistan -Afghanistan - China. The construction and building of new roads by Pakistan will provide Afghans to get access to the south Asian market which will increase its export. With the augmenting trade and investment opportunities, Afghanistan will be able to stabilize its economy. By Joining

the CPEC, Afghanistan will get access to the market in China, CAR and then to parts of Europe to diversify its trade products. For any economic investment to be successful peace and stability in Afghanistan are inevitable. China is supporting peace negotiations among stakeholders. A peaceful and stable Afghanistan will be a promising avenue for investors. Afghanistan's geo-strategic location and its untapped mineral resources add value

for future China-Afghanistan economic engagements. China has signed an agreement with the Afghan government for over \$3 billion to Mes Aynak (2nd largest copper deposit). The trilateral cooperation under the CPEC will augment security, and stability in the region and the development of the infrastructure leads to economic development and connectivity.



Role of Iran

Iran was the foremost country which recognized Pakistan after its inception and remained at most cordial relations until the Islamic Revolution. The social and sectarian divergence emanating from the new political and social reality in Iran and Pakistan's evolving proximity with Saudi Arabia for Jihad in Afghanistan deteriorated the balance of good relations with Iran. The development of regional dynamics of the twenty-first century requires the cooperation of Pakistan and Iran. Iran's development of Chabahar port with India's prominent role and Pakistan's close ties with the US hindering Pakistan Iran trade and cooperation remained major irritants.

The China-Iran Strategic Partnership Agreement in 2020 can be termed the most important political and economic development of the region. The USD 400 billion for 25 years in Iran's infrastructure, trade and Banking sectors is a fresh breeze for the sanctions-hit country for decades. It is a win-win situation for Iran in terms of investment, for China in form of cheap Iranian oil and for Pakistan to become a trade transit hub for Chinese trade and energy supplies and put pressure on India from all sides (Tayyab and Zabin, 2020).

Recommendation

Policy of Inclusivity

CPEC, a multi-billion dollar project anticipated as a game changer not only for Pakistan but for the entire region. Balochistan a province of untapped resources will benefit from the CPEC if Pakistan's government adopt the policy of inclusivity by including the locals in CPEC

projects and governance restructurings. "If CPEC is completed and sustained without the inclusivity of locals, in time it can become a cause of grievances which can heighten the tensions again in the region or if it is not completed or remains confined to developed areas, it will further create resentment and strengthen the inequality rhetoric. The fact remaining to be established is that the prime actors and benefactors of this project must be people of Balochistan or for that the People of Pakistan" (Raisani, 2019).

Development Policy

For the socio-economic uplift of the locals' government should debut a development policy with a primary focus on communication, education energy, agriculture, water & sanitation among other sectors to bring Balochistan to the socio-economic mainstream of the country. The Development policy should be implemented by the provincial government and federal government where requires through the Public Sector Development Programme (PDSP). The special economic zones (SEZ) in Bostan and Hub in Balochistan are being established to aid in the socio-economic uplift of the province. It is expected to create 90,000 jobs in 211 industrial units. Out of 90,000 jobs, 15000 jobs would be created directly and 75000 indirectly, the official documents of the project showed (China Pakistan Economic Corridor, 2020).

Dialogue for Appeasement

CPEC aims to bring peace and prosperity, and development to the province but it can only be materialized by countering the internal and external threats to it. Baloch nationalists are

critical of CPEC and objected that it might convert them from majority to minority. Owing to these grievances, BLA has conducted attacks on security forces and Chinese in coastal areas of Balochistan to sabotage CPEC.

The socio-political milieu of the province has been shattered through political engineering manoeuvred by internal and external actors. The human rights issues that were justified as a necessity of conflict look out of place in the new narrative of stability and peace. It is pertinent and indeed a necessity to initiate a dialogue that deals with the relationship of state, society and nature of development in the region because hushing the voices of the polity and civic activism is having

an adverse effect on the organic growth of society and politics in the province, which can aggravate once the situation of CPEC becomes clearer and prevalent (Raisani, [2019](#)).

To this end, the government of Pakistan is working on a two-pronged strategy. The first strategy is the use of military power to subdue decades-old insurgency in the province as a part of the National action plan (Munir, [2016](#)). The second is related to the process of appeasement by bringing estranged elements into the mainstream. Both strategies are producing positive results with the decline of terrorist attacks in Pakistan particularly in Balochistan.

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