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Prospects of China's BRI on Pakistan's National Integration

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Abstract

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a comprehensive plan for uplifting socio-economic advancements, and to promote regional integration at the global level .In South Asia, one of the BRI's plans, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has the potential to exacerbate not only the regional integration but to augment Pakistan's national integration. CPEC is considered as a 'game changer' by both China and Pakistan due to its geo-political and geo-economic implication. Presently, CPEC has generated misgivings between center and provincial governments of Pakistan. This paper evaluates the impact of CPEC to redress inter-provincial and federal-provincial disparities through compromises and dialogues. To comprehend the association between economic development and national integration, the theory of nation-building provides understanding to identify the main proponents of this debate.

Keywords: *Belt and Road initiative, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. CPEC, Pakistan's National Integration, China-Pakistan relations, CPEC and Nation-building.*

Introduction

The Post-Cold war scenario has compelled the states to reformulate their strategies to comprehend the upcoming challenges. In this connection, China reformed its strategy and planned to follow the policy of peaceful rise and to emphasis on economic development (Yuan, 2011). China's plan of economic development exacerbated its economy up to the GDP of around 10% (China's Economic Rise, 2019). For upholding the existing economic progression, China initiated a comprehensive plan with the name of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).China's BRI is not considered as a common trade route but it is a wide-ranging plan and an economic idea to open multiple planned projects by silk route to establish a community that bears common interests, obligation, and destiny (NDRC, 2015).China's BRI is the expansion and revival of ancient Silk Route and comprises on two mega projects: land-based Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and sea based 21st Century Maritime Silk Route Economic Belt (CMSR), (Wolf, 2020). SREB provides connectivity between Asia and Europe and comprises on six economic corridors.Six corridors of SREB are (1) Northern Corridor provides connectivity between China and Europe via Russia (2) the Central Corridor connects China with Europe through Iran and Turkey and is based upon both land and sea roots (3) China-Magnolia-Russia Corridor (4) China-South East Asia mainland Corridor (5) Bangladesh-China-Myanmar-India Corridor (BCIM) and (6) China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), (Wolf, 2020).BRI is a gigantic project and it will encompass around two third of world's population with the estimated cost of 1000billion USD (Wolf, 2020).BRI invigorates the probabilities of Asia's rise in near future.

It is anticipated that Asia's economic progression is expected in the mid of this century (ASIA, 2050).BRI is mainly focused on Asia with more than 40 Asian states. In South Asia, two projects of SREB: Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Corridor (BCIM) and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) have the potential to comprehend socio-politico-economic apprehensions and promote interstates cooperation and trust within the region (Ali, 2016). For Pakistan's national integration, CPEC is directly concerned with this research. China has allocated a heavy investment package of around 62 billion USD for CPEC (Butt and Butt, 2015). The key to success of CPEC is directly concerned with Pakistan's center-province relations. The persisting disagreements between center-provinces relations relating to CPEC might create interruptions on the way to the timely completion of CPEC and intensify the sentiments to disrupt the process of national integration in Pakistan. Within this debate, this research intends to give the answers of the questions:

- What are the main qualms between center and provinces about CPEC?
- What are the initiatives taken by the state to comprehend center-provinces discrepancies?
- What are the main challenges on the way to the completion of CPEC?
- What will be the main inducements due to which CPEC would be mutually advantageous to the center and provinces and strengthen national integration in Pakistan?

This debate revolves within the theoretical framework and the theory of nation-building provides understanding to grasp this research and provides acumens to answer the given questions.

Theoretical Clarification

To evaluate the role of CPEC on Pakistan's internal political stability and national integration, the theory of nation-building provides theoretical explanation to comprehend the leading concerns about Pakistan's domestic political snags and the role of CPEC in intensifying the process of national integration. Nation-building is defined as 'the formation of a common national character in a specified geographical location, based on shared culture and language' (Goldsmith, 2007). It is generally presumed that external actors play minimal role in the process of nation-building as Hopp and Kloke-Lesche (2005) explicate, 'it is an independent process in which external actors have limited role in increasing nation-building despite sharing financial resources'. Under such condition, state-building is considered as the central character of nation-building as the organization of economic cooperation and development defined, 'it is an endogenous process to augment legitimacy, institutions and capacity of the state determined by state-society relations' (Goldsmith, 2008). Likewise, state-building is based on political process to negotiate power relations and state-society dealings among political elite and social groups (Goldsmith, 2008). State-building is further elaborated by the Department of International Development UK, in a policy paper published in 2009 as; 'the main focus of state-building is to strengthen the relationship between society and state, and to establish operative ways to facilitate this relationship' (Building the State and Securing the Peace, 2009). During the process of state-building, the political elite must perform multiple dealings and the ultimate objectives

of these are to augment domestic politics as per desires of social groups. Under this condition, the foreign policy of a state has direct impact on domestic politics and Katzentein (1976) elaborated the correlation between foreign and domestic policies as, 'the main objective of foreign policy is to upraise domestic policies according to the existing international political economy'. Usually, it is anticipated that domestic politics and international politics have significant impact on each other and certain key elements, such as trade, war, and ideologies, are placed to shape political developments (Gourevitch, 1978).

The states must perform dual responsibility to deal with the domestic and international concerns simultaneously and many of the international dialogs are conceived as two-level game: national level and international level. At the national level, the domestic groups intend to protect their interests by mounting pressure on the governments and the political elite seek power by establishing coalition with these groups. At the international level, the national governments intend to minimize the adverse impact of foreign developments and maximize their ability to satisfy the domestic groups (Putnam, 1998).

So, the contribution of state-building in engrossing nation-building is obvious and the two-level game has further endorsed the importance of foreign progressions on the way to political stability and national integration. Within this discussion, BRI's CPEC has attained center stage at both national and international level in the context of Pakistan's national integration. The succeeding sections of this research investigate main disruptions on the way to Pakistan's political stability and disturb national integration and explores the contribution of CPEC in intensifying Pakistan's national integration.

CPEC: An Overview

The idea of CPEC was initiated by China in 2013 during a visit of Chinese Premier Li to Pakistan. In April 2015, both China and Pakistan signed 51 agreements including 5 extra-large projects and Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs), (Butt & Butt, 2015). CPEC is a bilateral agreement between China and Pakistan and mainly based in Pakistan. The completion of the projects under CPEC are planned in three phase, first phase by 2017, second by 2025 and third by 2030 (The News, 2014). CPEC is focused on four areas of investment, energy, infrastructure, industry, and Gwadar Port. In energy sector, Pakistan was the victim of heavy energy crises in near past and now has overcome on power shortfall due to China's investment (Chung, 2017). The CPEC infrastructure encompasses on the construction of multiple roads and railway projects from Gwadar to Kashgar with the distance of 2500/3000 km.

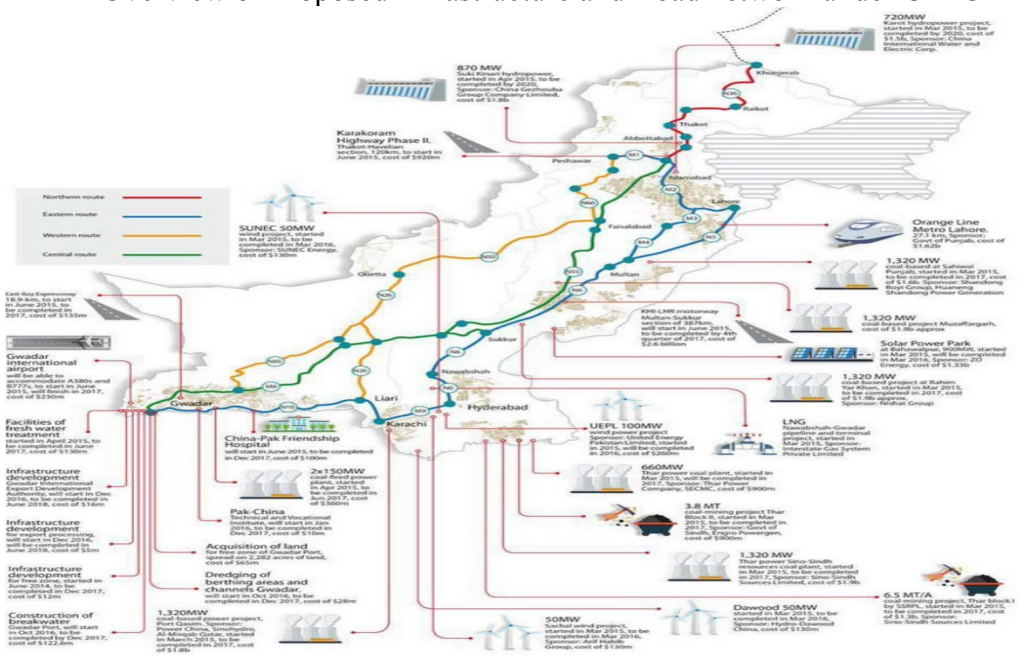
Presently, three main land routes i.e. Western Route (Kashgar to Gwadar via Khunjerab, Peshawar, D. I. Khan, Zhob and Quetta), Central Route (Khunjerab, Peshawar, Kohat, D. I. Khan, D. G. Khan and Ratodero), and Eastern Route (Khunjerab to Gwadar via Islamabad, Lahore, Sukkar, and

Karachi), are under construction with an estimated cost of 5330 million USD (CPEC, 2021). The remaining regions of Pakistan will also relate to these routes through express and motor ways accordingly. Similarly, a rail link has planned from Gwadar to Khunjerab with an estimated cost of 2.3 billion USD (Hussain, 2014). For the development of industry, Special Economic Zones (SEZ's) with special tax exclusion and economic reforms are planned in all the provinces of Pakistan. Total 46 sites for SEZ's are identified and 9 sites are professed priority zones (Ahmad, 2017).

Gwadar is a lynchpin that China has allocated heavy budget for operationalizing the port. According to Mushahid Hussain Syed (Chairman, CPEC Parliamentary Committee), 'if CPEC is the flagship of BRI, then Gwadar is the heart CPEC' (Bozdar & Kazmi, 2016). China is increasing the holding capacity of Gwadar port up to 200,000 dead weight tonnage (dwt) for oil tankers and 100,000 dwt for dry cargo (Ishaq, 2016).The master plan for the construction of Gwadar port is projected in two phases, short and long term. The short-term plan (2005-2020) is estimated for holding 42-65 million ones while, long-term plan (2021-2055) is designed to handle 321-345 million tones with dry cargo, oil, and gas as the main supplies (Gwadar Port Master Plan, 2006). The Proposed infrastructure and three main land roots of CPEC are indicated in Figure 1.

Figure: 1

Overview of Proposed Infrastructure and Road network under CPEC



Source: www.pu.edu.pk/images.journal/pess/PDF-FILES/9_V54_SUM2016 accessed on February 23, 2021.

The aforesaid projects of CPEC except Gwadar port are planned to establish in all the provinces and Gwadar port relates to almost all the parts of Pakistan through road and rail networks. The development of these projects has created doubts among center-provinces and within the provinces. To gratify the domestic actors within the context of state-building for obtaining

national integration according to the theory of nation building, the central government has planned multiple initiatives and the outcomes of these are examined in coming sections.

CPEC: Challenges and Implications

Planning and investment criteria in the given areas of CPEC by the central government with the coordination of China have created serious concerns among the small provinces i.e. Baluchistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Sindh. The infrastructural developments of CPEC were criticized by these small provinces as they objected the central government to divert China's investment to Punjab province (Riffat & Miani, 2016).According to original plan of CPEC, it was decided to prioritize the backward areas of Pakistan (KPK and Baluchistan) and these regions comprise on the one of the shortest routes (Western Route) among the aforementioned three land routes of CPEC (Boni & Adeney, 2020). On the contrary, despite prioritizing Western Route, the construction of Eastern Route was given preference and it mainly comprises on the Punjab province which is the bone of contention between Punjab and the remaining provinces of Pakistan. The construction of Eastern Route was justified in a report presented in Senate of Pakistan as, 'the route is largely according to the existing road and rail links and China also emphasizes to work on the persisting infrastructure without constructing new one from scratch' (Senate of Pakistan, 2018-19). These clarifications could not convince the political elite of the remaining three provinces as, Sardar Akhtar Mengal from Baluchistan province expressed, 'CPEC has created job opportunities in Punjab due to ongoing multiple projects which include highways, industries, power projects, railway lines and other mega projects, but Baluchistan is carving for roads, portable water, health and education for the last 70 years', (Mengal, 2017). As the dominant political party in Sindh province, The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has also raised concerns on the distraction of Western Route of CPEC through Sindh (Riffat and Miani, 2016). Similarly, Pervaiz Khattak (Chief Minister of KPK during 2013-2018) stated that the federal government did not allocate even a single penny to KPK for CPEC, that has shattered his trust on central government (Khattak, 2016).

Transparency is a main characteristic of nation-building (Fukuyama, 2004), and it is the key objective of this research. For sustaining the transparency in the projects of CPEC in response to provincial assertions, the federal government decided to construct Western Route on priority basis and is finally transformed into 6 lane motor way (Haider, 2015-2017). Likewise, the allocation of CPEC funds were taken place to gratify the stakeholders as 6.1 billion USD were allocated to Punjab, 7.1 billion USD to Baluchistan, 11.6 billion USD to KPK and 11.5 billion USD to Sindh province (Bozdar and Kazmi, 2016). As for the SEZs are concerned, the initial plan was to setup seven each in Punjab and Baluchistan, three in Sind, eight n KPK and each in Gilgit Baltistan (GB) and Islamabad. This plan was revised after the visit of chief ministers of all the provinces to China in 2016 and decided nine SEZs to each of all the provinces, four each of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and GB, and two for Islamabad (Nigar, 2017).

The establishment of energy projects is also a source of center-provinces disagreements. The location of energy projects does not matter because their production is added to national grid and is nationwide distributed (Khan, 2016), but their installations create employment opportunities and establish infrastructure for work force i.e. roads, health and education, indicate that the location has the consequence. Thus, the Baluch nationalists demanded these projects to upraise the socio-economic conditions of the backward areas of Baluchistan (Baluch, 2016). For maintaining the transparency, Ahsan Iqbal (former minister for planning and development) gave assurances to smaller provinces during an all parties conference held on January 10, 2016 in Islamabad, that 'smaller provinces will be given more financial resources than their due shares' and proclaimed that Baluchistan is allocated comparatively more funds spent in Punjab (Khattak, 2016a).
For the development of Gwadar port, two regulatory bodies: Gwadar

Development Authority (GDA) and federally controlled Gwadar Port Authority (GPA) were originated and for the construction of mega oil city, GDA has acquired around 80,000 acres (Sial, 2019). The establishment of Gwadar under CPEC has shaped doubts among the political elite of Baluchistan as, Dr. Abdul Malik (former chief minister of Baluchistan) expressed five apprehensions about Gwadar (Sial, 2019):

1. Gwadar port might disturb the demographics and Baluch identity.
2. The persistence of ambiguity about the revenue of Gwadar, whether it would be given to Baluchistan or center.
3. Jobs must be given to Baluchi people on priority basis in Gwadar.
4. The administrative control of Gwadar port should be delegated to Baluchistan.
5. Business opportunities in Gwadar must be provided to local people.

Administrative and revenue control on Gwadar port are the most crucial factors among the said concerns and to comprehend these, the central government introduced 18th amendment in the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973. Before 18th amendment, the central government had the authority to over-ride any legislation relating to center-provincial relations and for this purpose, a concurrent list was maintained (Boni & Adeney, 2020). After 18th amendment, Federal Legislative List (FFL) replaced the concurrent list and it comprises on two parts. Part 1 is exclusively related with the subjects controlled by the federal government. Part 2 includes the subjects controlled by Council of Common Interests (CCI) and directly concerned with CPEC, railways, electricity, national planning and national coordination and ports (Adeney, 2012). CCI is not a new council and was framed along with the formulation of the constitution of 1973, but it remained unfunctional during 1975-2017, and only 33 meetings were held during this period (Council of Common Interest, 2017). The mandate of CCI is to ensure the impartial distribution of resources among the provinces with the coordination of planning division, central and provincial governments. Prior to signing CPEC agreements, CCI meetings were held on irregular way. In March 2015, the CCI meeting was held

headed by the Prime Minister and serious objections were raised from the provinces about provincial budgets, water and natural resources, and it was promised to comprehend the issues on priority basis (Inter Provincial Coordination Division, 2015-16).

These developments indicate that the central government made conciliations with the domestic political groups for satisfying and maintaining the transparency among them and these are pre-requisites for state-building in the context of nation-building through CPEC.

Hurdles on the Way to Nation-Building

Despite the initiatives of central government to grasp center-provinces discrepancies on energy, infrastructure, SEZs and Gwadar port, confusions persist among the smaller provinces. Furthermore, some snags also occur on the way to nation-building and exacerbate center-provinces strains and without addressing them, it would hardly workable to engender conducive environment among the domestic groups.

Some features of federal system of Pakistan are the sources of grievances between smaller provinces and the Punjab province. The allocation of seats in Pakistan's National Assembly is based on population. According to the census, Punjab comprises on around 53% of the overall population and thus obtains majority of the seats in Assembly. By this way, the dominance of Punjab province remained institutionalized in the state's institutional architecture even during and after military regimes (Adeney, 2009). Such Punjab's dominating posture provided it the pivot of power in Pakistan. The financial resources were allocated based on population during 1971-2010. By this way, Punjab was given the maximum finances that resulted suspicions among the remaining provinces. Similarly, Punjab was given preference for installing energy projects and the construction of road networks under CPEC that exacerbated the discrepancies between Punjab and smaller provinces and generated impediments on the way to nation-building.

Security of the projects under CPEC has been a main source of concern for both China and Pakistan. Prior to initiate the CPEC in 2015, China demanded assurances from Pakistan about the security of the projects. In this connection, Pakistan pronounced to set up Special Security Division (SSD) with the coordination of Pakistan Army and nearly 10,000 soldiers were deputed for the security of CPEC under the command of two-star general (Gull, 2017). SSD started 'Operation Zarb-e-Azb' against terrorism across the country in December 2014. The remarkable achievements are in the credit of SSD as it was reported that the decline of 45 percent in terrorist attacks were observed in 2015 as compared to attacks in 2014 (Iqbal Anwar, 2016). By improving security circumstances, Pakistan has created conducive environment for investment under CPEC (Gull, 2017). It is worthwhile to mention that the funds were allocated to SSD through provincial budgetary expenses and by imposing charges on electricity consumers (Kiani, 2017). Provincial budgetary constraints and additional electricity charges due to SSD have become another source of center-

provinces tension that disrupted the progression in nation-building. Likewise, a proposal was initiated by Pakistan Military to create a CPEC Authority (Ghuman, 2016). The proposal was relegated by the minister for planning division and it was argued that the establishment of such authority would slow down the progressions on CPEC (Boney and Adeney, 2020:451). However, besides discontent, the CPEC Authority was established through an ordinance and Gen (retired) Asim Bajwa was appointed as the chairman (Naseem, 2019).Civil-military relations in Pakistan always remain source of discontent while discussing center-provinces relations and military's involvement in CPEC triggered center-provinces disdains that has disturbed the process of nation-building.

Baluchistan is the least developed and most marginalized province and Baluchs presume that CPEC would further disregard them through the induction of non-Baluchs that might disturb the local demographics. Thus, the Baluch Liberation Army (BLA) criticizes the wealth distribution formula relating to CPEC (Bhardwaj, 2017). The population of Gwadar is estimated nearly 70,000 in 2014 and increase in population due to CPEC projects will likely around 2 million by 2036, that will comprise on non-Baloch workforce from China and Pakistan (Fair, 2017).It is estimated that nearly 25,00 families have been displaced within Baluchistan due to CPEC projects (Wolf, 2017), that fueled the Baluch insurgency and germinated grievances in Baluchistan and hamper the process of nation-building.

Way Forward

As major stakeholder, China is worried about Pakistan's opposition on CPEC and became upset due to lack of consensus on the projects of CPEC in Pakistan. The principles of China's foreign policy are based on non-interference, but China cannot become irrelevant in the case of CPEC (Riffat & Mani, 2016). China demanded Pakistan to address internal discard on CPEC. In this connection, China's embassy in Islamabad approached variety of people, including chiefs of defense forces, parliamentarians, political leadership of the sitting government and opposition, and judiciary to deal with the irritants on the way to the projects of CPEC (Ghuman, 2016). For facilitating the central government in dealing with smaller provinces, China revised the plan of CPEC and expanded it to all the regions including the tribal areas of Pakistan (Shulin, 2014).By this way, with the consent of China, Pakistan succeeded to develop a consensus among all the political parties to endure Pakistan-China friendship and to evade politicizing the projects under CPEC (Irshad et al, 2015).The consensus of political elite on CPEC projects indicates the implication of state's two-level game as at the national level, all the stakeholders were convinced to endorse CPEC and at the international level, the state (Pakistan) earned to eradicate the adverse impact of China's developments on CPEC by satisfying the domestic groups. Moreover, this consensus is not sufficient for cultivating the process of state-building in the context of theory of nation-building and following initiatives would have significant impacts in endorsing nation-building:

- The concerns of smaller provinces relating to infrastructure must be addressed on urgency basis especially the delay in the construction

of Western Route has precipitated the apprehensions in center-provinces relations and it might be comprehended on earlier basis.

- The role of CCI for the allocation of funds is obvious according to the 18th amendment in the constitution of 1973 and additional financial resources will be required to the most backward areas especially for Baluchistan province. It is the prime responsibility of the central government to activate the role of CCI in true latter and spirit. The ethno-nationalistic tension in Baluchistan might be curbed by providing the jobs to Baluchs especially in the project of Gwadar port.
- Pakistan army is playing marvelous role in providing the security to the projects of CPEC. However, its involvement in the administrative affairs of CPEC might become the source of mistrust while promoting nation-building. Thus, army should be limited to security related issues of the CPEC
- CPEC is providing the golden opportunity to Pakistan for uplifting its economy especially for its backward areas. In this regard, it is the main responsibility of the central government to take on board to all the stakeholders as per criterion of the theory of nation-building through dialogues and compromises that will ultimately endorse Pakistan's national integration.

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