

Indian Narrative Over the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): A Perspective from Pakistan

Muhammad Nauman Akhter*

Department of Scholar International Relations, Shandong University, Qingdao Campus, Jinan, China

Abstract

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) makes up one of the largest foreign investments in the substructure of China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). CPEC has become an unavoidable disquiet in South Asia with particular regard to Pakistan-India relations. The distinct transport corridor between Pakistan and China passes over Jammu and Kashmir, a disputed territory between India and Pakistan since 1947. Additionally, the Indian policy elite also anticipates CPEC's economic and security implications for India. The emerging consensus in India appears that, far from being exclusively an economic and infrastructure development program, CPEC may be conceived as a long-term strategic initiative that seeks to convert China's current economic might into diplomatic influence. In comparison, Pakistan believes that CPEC will strengthen the economic, security and trade cooperation between China and Pakistan. Therefore, the paper attempts to answer the following questions: What is the Indian perception of CPEC? How does Pakistan attempt to shape the new narrative of CPEC? In the end, the paper will try to figure out some solutions for potential challenges.

Keywords: MCPEC • Economic cooperation • Security • Government

Introduction

CPEC is a mega-development project planned to link South-West Pakistan's Gwadar Port with the Northwestern Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), China. The corridor is designed to connect via secure communication networks across Pakistan and Xinjiang. This massive development corridor will be a strategic game-changer in the region by making Pakistan economically more robust than ever before.

CPEC has intumesced much security, economic and sovereignty concerns for India. So far, India has raised objections to the opening of the planned corridor that links Gilgit Baltistan to Chinese Kashgar via the grand Karakoram highway, and then to the Pakistani mainland, through its North-Eastern realm and down to its Arabian Sea port of Gwadar. New Delhi takes a stand that CPEC passes through the territory of Gilgit-Baltistan, violating the territorial integrity of India. Indian stance rests on the ground that the Maharaja of Kashmir entirely ceded Kashmir, including Gilgit-Baltistan, to India. In 2015, the Indian Prime Minister also criticized CPEC ahead of Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (BRICS) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summits. In July 2018, then Indian foreign secretary, S Jaishankar, told in Beijing, "CPEC violates Indian Sovereignty because it runs through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir" [1].

India also anticipates China's economic development program detrimental to its economic supremacy in South Asia. For India, the financial implications of CPEC can be summarized in the following points: the powerful China-Pakistan economic integration the strong position of Pakistan in the regional financial framework the construction of Gwadar port. From the security perspective, India portends that a naval base in Gwadar, as part of CPEC, will help China encircle India from the western side during any war-like situation. According to the report published by the Stimson center, "there is also a view that while the Indian government may have publicly protested the project, especially in recent months with tensions between both countries growing, those in the security

agencies are more skeptical about the project than the Indian Foreign Service and the political class. There appear considerable differences among various schools of thoughts with a member of the security establishment viewing the project more strictly from a security lens" [2].

While on the opposite side, Pakistan holds an opposite ground to that of India related to CPEC. Pakistan claims that India's entitlements on Gilgit-Baltistan can only be accepted if Kashmir's agreement to India is ratified as legal by the United Nations, which is still not the case. Pakistan claims that the United Nations Security Council's Resolutions (UNSC) "recognize the Kashmiris' inalienable right to self-determination through the democratic method of free and impartial plebiscite under the UNO auspices". Since the Kashmir dispute started, the people of Kashmir have continuously been denied this right [3].

Pakistan claims that India's economic potential has no comparison with that of Pakistan. In no way, CPEC could help Pakistan become an equal economic competitor to India. According to the official sources quoted by China Economic Net, China-Pakistan bilateral trade volume appears to be touching the figure of \$15.6 billion for the financial year 2019. The bilateral trade volume of both countries has jumped from \$ 4 billion under the 2006 free trade agreement. CPEC proves a spur for strong China-Pak economic integration. However, the relative bilateral trade volume of China-Pak shows that it appears significantly less as compared to that of India. So, at least strong China-Pakistan economic integration in no way can prove a losing factor for India. Officially, India declares that prosperous and developed Pakistan is highly beneficial for India. Even Indian High Commissioner TCA Raghavan, addressing a meeting of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KPCCI), said, "India is not worried over the \$ 46 billion economic corridors between Pakistan and China as an economically strong Pakistan would bring regional stability, underlining the need to remove misperceptions and restore mutual trust between the two nations" [4-6].

The 'Militarization of Gwadar Theory', Pakistan vehemently insists otherwise and claims it as a future commercial hub of the region. India's sprouting propaganda about the militarization of Gwadar, Pakistan considers it interference in its internal affairs. Commenting on the submarine export to Pakistan, then China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Chunying said: "China and Pakistan are neighbors of traditional friendship with close cooperation in various fields. The normal cooperation between the two sides in the field of military industry and trade is in line with their respective international commitment" [7].

Within the framework of two contradicting perspectives, the research

*Address for Correspondence: Akhter Muhammad Nauman, Department of Scholar International Relations, Shandong University, Qingdao Campus, Jinan, China, E-mail: raonauman123@gmail.com

Copyright: © 2021 Akhter MN. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

attempts to answer the following questions: What is the Indian perspective of CPEC? In response, how does Pakistan attempt to shape the new narrative of CPEC? Since the initiation of this project, a debate has been going on about its pros and cons concerning India's economic, security and sovereignty issues. The research will also mainly focus on the key areas where India's assertions on CPEC vary from that of Pakistan. Either India's claim has any validity, or it has just been an old ploy of the blame game, will also be the focus of our study. In the end, the paper will try to figure out some solutions for potential challenges [8].

The Case of Gilgit-Baltistan

New Delhi claims that CPEC passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK)

India rejected CPEC. India claims that CPEC violates its sovereignty and territorial integrity. At the occasion of the Raisina Dialogue, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that "only by respecting the sovereignty of countries involved, can regional connectivity corridors fulfill their promises and avoid differences and discord".¹ In July 2018, Indian foreign secretary Jaishankar told Chinese officials in Beijing that "the fact that CPEC is part of this particular initiative. CPEC violates Indian sovereignty because it runs through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK)". New Delhi insists that CPEC passes through the territory of Gilgit-Baltistan, violating the territorial integrity of India. Indian stance is based on the fact that the Maharaja of Kashmir entirely ceded Kashmir, including Gilgit-Baltistan, to India [9].

The internationalization of Kashmir issue and CPEC

A report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), a Sweden-based think tank, argues that Indian's antagonism to CPEC stems from its fear of the internationalization of the Kashmir issue. The report further explains the opposition, "There are considerable concerns within India that China, which has been neutral on Kashmir since 1963, can no longer be so now that its economic and security interests in these territories are growing at stake". Indeed, according to the report, India does not want a mediating role for China in the Kashmir dispute. Suchitra Vijayan, a New York-based lawyer expert on Indian's borderland, including Kashmir, told Al Jazeera: "India does not want to internationalize the Kashmir issue, but with Pakistan, China, and CPEC coming in, it happens". There also appears an implicit fear in India that CPEC, in the short and medium-term, could bring impressive economic growth for Pakistan and over the longer term, its strategic consequences could reshape the regional order in favour of China [10].

The UNO resolutions on Kashmir and popular will nurture Pakistan's claim

India continues to link the Gilgit Baltistan region as part of the state of J&K. However, the people of Gilgit Baltistan are not happy with this association. According to the anthropologist Shafqat Hussain, "the people of have tried to disassociate their fate from the fate of Kashmir, arguing that they have no cultural, ethnic, or linguistic relationship with the Kashmir people and that therefore the final status of the Gilgit-Baltistan should be resolved separately from the solution of Kashmir". Similarly, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan notes, "the populace of Gilgit Baltistan insists that through the history their region has had a status that has been completely distinct from Kashmir". On the base of these arguments, Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly (GBLA), which has passed resolutions, asking the federal government to integrate Gilgit-Baltistan as a constitutional province of Pakistan"? [11].

Pakistan also justifies its claim on the partition history of subcontinent. Gilgit-Baltistan was partly under the control of the state of Kashmir and slightly under the British paramountcy. Anticipating the Russian interference, the British government forced the Maharaja of Jammu & Kashmir to lease out the Gilgit agency to them. From March 26, 1935, up to August 15, 1947, Gilgit and its surrounding areas remained under British authority. The British government handed over the Gilgit agency to the Maharaja after the

announcement of the partition of India. On behalf of the Maharaja of Jammu & Kashmir, Brigadier Sing, along with General Scott, came to the Gilgit agency as the new administrator. After the partition, the residents rose against the Dogra government and announced accession to Pakistan. India claims that it was only Gilgit Scout that revolted against the authority, not the ordinary people. However, the Indian government would find little space in justifying the argument: How can a revolt get success without popular support? According to the instrument of accession, the princely states were given the unique privilege to accede to both India and Pakistan freely or to remain independent. They were, however, advised to adhere to the neighboring area, taking into consideration the geographical and ethnic issues [12-15].

Against the popular will, the Maharaja of Kashmir signed the 'instrument of accession' on Oct 26, 1947. Kashmir's accession to India is not legally ratified by the United Nations. And in the same way, how can India claim sovereignty over Gilgit-Baltistan? Moreover, most of the countries accept the Kashmir problem as a contentious issue. The United Nations Security Council's Resolutions (UNSC) "recognize the Kashmiris' inalienable right to self-determination through the democratic method of free and impartial plebiscite under the UNO auspices". Since the Kashmir dispute started, the people of Kashmir have continuously been denied this right. On the other hand, Pakistan still respects the UNO resolutions on Kashmir. Due to this fact, Pakistan has refrained from including Pakistan-administered Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan as official parts of Pakistan. Since the partition, this region enjoys a separate status from the rest of Pakistan [16].

The international community accepts Kashmir as a disputed territory. China's foreign minister Wang Yi's statement fully endorses Pakistan's claim over the status of Kashmir. He contradicted the Indian applications by saying, "it is not directed any third party, not relevant to disputes over territorial sovereignty and does not affect China's position on the Kashmir issue". If India is true to its stance, why does India avoid impartial plebiscite for the peaceful resolution of Kashmir? In this way, its claim over Gilgit-Baltistan can also be justified. Since the Indian occupation of Kashmir, there have been repeated calls from the International community to hold a plebiscite to determine the fate of Kashmir. Unfortunately, the Indian government persistently denies self-determination and rights to the people of Kashmir. From the instrument of accession to local and international opinion, everything goes against India's narrative over Gilgit-Baltistan. Therefore, no practical justification can validate the Indian claim that CPEC violates its "sovereignty" in Gilgit-Baltistan. It appears that India uses this ploy only to justify her differences with China. Otherwise, India does not have any genuine grievances against CPEC [17].

The Potential of CPEC as an 'Economic Counterbalance' to India

India's principal opposition to CPEC remains revolved around the sovereignty claim over the Gilgit-Baltistan. However, a robust China-Pakistan economic integration is also a scary scenario for India in the broader context of South Asia geopolitics. India portends that this mutual economic interdependence would likely to convert into a strong antithesis to the Indian status in the region. The purpose of this section is to assess India's economic threat perception concerning CPEC and its validity, either it is accurate or just an exaggeration [18].

CPEC poses key economic challenges to India, according to the Indian analysts

The contemporary Indian literature and official statements overwhelmingly focus on India's sovereignty related claim on Gilgit-Baltistan in the denial of CPEC. However, CPEC, as an economic counterbalance, also reverberates India's apprehensions. The anticipated financial implications of CPEC for India can be summarized in the following points: the first point, CPEC will introduce the powerful China-Pakistan economic integration. The second fear, CPEC, has the potential to bring Pakistan to the central position of the regional financial system. Integrating South, Central and West Asia with Pakistan through a web of rails, roads and telecommunications, Pakistan will likely play an essential role in CPEC related regional trade networks. The third anticipated economic fear which India keeps about CPEC is the development of Gwadar as the

commercial hub of the region. The Gwadar port in southwestern Pakistan is the spine of CPEC. Pakistan plans to make Gwadar a regional business hub with the help of China in the future. The Gwadar port is located at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, which holds strategic significance for oil transportation [19].

A Pakistani perspective of India CPEC-related economic apprehensions

Of course, CPEC will keep China-Pakistan economic integration on firm grounds. According to the official sources quoted by China Economic Net, China-Pakistan bilateral trade volume appears to be touching the figure of \$ 15.6 billion for the financial year 2019. The bilateral trade volume of both countries has jumped from \$ 4 billion under the 2006 free trade agreement. Despite this recently built secure commercial links under CPEC, China-Pakistan bilateral trade activity is less than that of India-China's. According to the data quoted by *Livemint*, China-India bilateral trade in 2018 was around \$95.7 billion, and it was predicted that trade volume would touch the figure of more than \$ 100 billion in 2019. Moreover, this bilateral trade is steadily growing every year. The bilateral trade volume between two giants of the world is far more than any country of South Asia. CPEC proves a spur for strong China-Pak economic integration. However, the relative bilateral trade volume of China-Pak shows that it appears very less as compared to India-China's. So, at least strong China-Pakistan economic integration in no way can prove a losing factor for India [20].

CPEC also exposes contradictions among Indian policymakers. On the one hand, the Indian government declares that prosperous and developed Pakistan is highly beneficial for India. Even Indian High Commissioner TCA Raghavan, addressing a meeting of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KPCCI), said, "India is not worried over the \$ 46 billion economic corridors between Pakistan and China as an economically strong Pakistan would bring regional stability, underlining the need to remove misperceptions and restore mutual trust between the two nations". While on the other, Sarmad Ashfaq writes about the Indian's apprehensions, "if CPEC works, Pakistan, a historical rival of India, would become a stronger and more stable regional and economic actor. This dismays not only India but also America, which views BRI and CPEC as a threat to its hegemony and superpower status". Sumit Walia writes about the Indian government policy towards Pakistan, "the current government's policy of isolating Pakistan in the world community is correct and paying dividends"

Moreover, for making Chinese investment in Pakistan dysfunctional, Sumit suggests, "if there is no industrial growth in Pakistan, payment of loans and Chinese investment return will break the backbone of its economy. We must work aggressively to keep Pakistan isolated diplomatically and economically, making it more difficult for Pakistan to secure loans". For countering Gwadar port, India started to build strategically important Chabahar port, located just 75 Km away from the Gwadar Port. India estimated to invest \$100 million in Chabahar port construction. Behind this massive investment, the Chinese media claims that the only apparent reason for India is to counter the Gwadar port. Analysts also claim that the timing of the Chabahar port construction is 2016; just only one year after the CPEC was started. It also indicates that the intention was to sabotage CPEC.

The above debate justifies the argument that CPEC will likely not pose any consequential impacts on the Indian economy. With its volume and perversity, the Indian economy, by any mean, appears far more significant and robust than that of Pakistan. However, the traditional geopolitical approach has been the main driver behind Indian aggressiveness towards CPEC. This antagonism contradicts the official Indian version that a prosperous Pakistan is in favour of India. If the Indian government thinks of CPEC as a remedy for the economic problems of Pakistan, this policy should be reflected in its practices

Will a new China-Pakistan road lead to a military boost against India?

Given its geographical proximity to both Pakistan and China, the Indian establishment figures out the security implications of CPEC for India. According to the report published by Stimson center, "there is also a view that while the Indian government may have publicly protested the project, especially

in recent months with tensions between both countries growing, those in the security agencies are more skeptical about the project than the Indian foreign service and the political class. There appear differences between various schools of thought with a member of the security establishment viewing the project more strictly from a security lens". India unfolds two types of security threats of CPEC: the land-based and the maritime [21]. **CPEC and its security implications for India**

Even the Chinese military parade in Pakistan is a source of concern for Indian analysts. For reference, the words of the Indian Defense Review are accurately quoted here: "ever since the construction of the corridor is started, the Chinese military presence in the area is also embarked. In 2017, Chinese troops marched in the parade of Pakistan's day in Islamabad. This was the first time when the Chinese military took part in any parade outside its country". For making CPEC controversial, the Indian media unfairly tries to attach normal Pakistan-China military relations with CPEC. *The Times of India* writes, "People Liberation army has also deployed almost 30000 soldiers under the local name in Pakistan. These military personnel would establish a security wing in Pakistan occupied Kashmir and would be deployed around the projects built by the Chinese companies". Kondapalli, Professor in Chinese Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, commented that overgrowing presence of PLA was a cause of worry for India [22].

The relations between China and Pakistan include all areas of life. It also covers infrastructure development in various parts of Pakistan. China also builds strategic infrastructure in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, i.e., China Gezhouba Company has been building Neelum-Jhelum 970 MW hydel power project. Moreover, Chinese military officials frequently visit Pakistan for various military engagements. Intentionally, India media tries to link these military engagements with CPEC. As the research has discussed the *Times of India's* Article, *Hindustan Times* also follows the same story, unfairly linking CPEC with normal security relations: "the intercepts also suggested that the PLA would be digging tunnels in Leepa Valley, located in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, with a goal to build the all-weather road as an alternative route to reach Karakorum highway. Experts consider the visit by PLA officials to be part of Beijing's 46-billion-dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, under which Gwadar port is linked to Chinese Xinjiang province via the Karakorum highway" [23].

India also interprets the Chinese Maritime Silk Route (MSR) as a security threat to Western India.

India resorts 'String of Pearls'² theory to justify her claim that Chinese intention is to encircle India under the guise of BRI. China has delivered eight modified diesel-attack submarines to the Pakistan navy. Then Indian Naval Chief Admiral Sunil Lamba called this deal a security threat to India. He said, "Gwadar was meant to be a commercial harbor and that if it is to be used by the Chinese PLA for defense purposes, it would be a matter of great concern for India. In future, if PLA navy ship operates from Gwadar, it will be a matter of concern, we will have to think of ways to mitigate the challenge". Under the pretext of growing China-Pakistan military relations, Kajal, an analyst in Indian Defense Review, succinctly elaborates the coming apprehensions for Indian national security. Kajal says, "These China activities are a serious security threat to India since China is encircling India into the Indian ocean. Chinese ports in Bangladesh and Myanmar also have got the naval vessels by China, and the armed forces of Sri Lanka also got patrol vessels and the varieties of aircraft from China along with the construction of Hambantota port by China" [24].

Indian scholars also appear unanimous in condemning the Chinese naval base in Gwadar. Their fears revolve around the concept that this naval base would be a security threat for Indian national security and Chabahar port in Iran. Sing, a professor at the School of International Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, further elaborates Indian position in the following words: "neither Gwadar nor Jiwani would be a wise choice for a naval base because of its proximity to the port of Chabahar in Iran, in which Indian has a big stake. New Delhi has invested more than \$100 million for two berths in the port on a ten years lease as a way to promote trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan. Potentially, both Gwadar and Jiwani can

become vulnerable to any stand-off between Pakistan and Iran but also China in Pakistan and India which is present in Chabahar”.

The construction of the Gwadar port also implies insecurity for the western border of Gujrat. According to the sources, the newly developed Gwadar port is only 400 nautical miles away from the Indian's west border of Gujrat. Kajal unfolds Indian apprehensions over the Gwadar port; he says that Gwadar port was meant to be a commercial port, but the presence of Chinese warships in the area implies a security threat to the Indian western border of Gujrat and India's investment in Chabahar port.

Is the 'Militarization of Gwadar Theory' a Hoax?

The 'Militarization of Gwadar Theory' has no independent and verifiable sources, mostly the western media sponsored propaganda campaign. The similar position China exhibits in its official pronouncements about CPEC. Either it is the case of Gwadar as a military naval base or supply of high-tech naval vassals to Pakistan, China claims, it has always been in line with the international standards of transfers of weapons. China committed no illegality in delivering weapons to Pakistan. Commenting on the submarine export to Pakistan, then China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying said: "China and Pakistan are neighbors of traditional friendship with close cooperation in various fields. The normal cooperation between the two sides in the field of military industry and trade is in line with their respective international commitment".

There also appears a widespread propaganda campaign, mainly in the western and India media, about how China plans to build a naval base in Gwadar for solely military purpose. Till yet, China denies these reports by saying that Gwadar construction is only for commercial purposes. Even independent sources corroborate this argument. Krzysztof Iwanek writes, "and can we find evidence that Gwadar is becoming a Chinese naval base? A sincere reply should once again be: no. In the last year, a few articles on this subject caused a wave of alarmist headlines across the global media (such as a South China Morning Post story published in 2018). What they had in common, however, is that they referred to unnamed sources (such as "close to the PLA), to the opinions of experts, and unverifiable sources (such as secret meetings between Chinese and Pakistani officials)". Primarily based on the above-discussed points, India's uproar over this issue has been entirely out of context and has no legal justification for it. India is the primary ally of the USA in South Asia. The USA contracted with India civil nuclear deal. Being a sovereign nation, it is the prerequisite of India to have military relations with countries close to their national interests. The same is the case of China-Pakistan military relations.

The discussion indicates that India's apprehensions are primarily based on traditional geopolitical thinking. The China-Pakistan military cooperation on Gwadar, if it exists or would come into being, in the words of the Chinese foreign ministry, is firmly in line with their respective international commitment'. In sum, India has no legal and moral justification for hurling criticism on CPEC under the guise of false security-related propaganda.

CPEC in the Larger Context of the South Asian Geopolitics

South Asia is a traditional place of Indian influence. Indian visualization of South Asia seems that outside stimulus for change or development is ultimately bent upon to undermine India's power. CPEC is often labelled as a game-changer project. If this project proceeds with continuity and success, it will likely bring substantial geopolitical and geo-economic changes in the South Asian region. China's relations with small South Asia neighbours appear at a high point for India. As pointed out by Gulshan Sachdeva, "because of the overwhelming emphasis on the CPEC in Indian discussion, the perceptions were mainly shaped by geopolitical dimensions of the BRI rather than broader development aspects. The major focus has been on the geopolitical impact of infrastructural projects in the neighborhood and Indian ocean region".

The Indian perception of the BRI has to be understood within the more extensive background of India-China relations. Grant elaborates the point, "at the moment there remains a huge asymmetry between two economic powers of Asia. As a result, the Chinese are relaxed about the rise of India' but 'the

Indian is much more nervous about the rise of China". China and Indian's economic status label them in the category of rising powers. They also happen to be located in the same geographical region. Naturally, they are bound to tension amidst their rising status. Joshi also explains the same point, "Since both are raising powers in the same part of the world, they are bound to be tensions". So, the rising economic status is also the source of mutual concern.

Many scholars have posited that India-China relations consist of four Cs: conflict, competition, cooperation and containment". As far as containment is concerned, it mostly appears in the psyche of both countries' leadership. India's leadership perception has overwhelmingly been stuck over the notion that China is encircling India by enhancing its relationship with the small South Asian neighbors, particularly Pakistan. Again, geopolitical thinking overshadows the mutual economic interests. In the same way, China's perception of India as a part of the US-led alliance against China in South Asia. So, mutual suspicion also adds negativity to their bilateral relations. Moreover, mutual fear also appears a vital negative factor for cooperation related to CPEC [1].

Indian official rhetoric time and again pronounces that prosperous and stable Pakistan favors India's national security. Indian policymakers perceive that economically stable Pakistan will act as a bulwark against the terrorists. While leaving rhetoric, the practices of the Indian government don't conform to its official statements. Indian strategic community is unanimous over the criticism of CPEC. Sarmad Ashfaq writes about the Indian's apprehensions, "if CPEC works, Pakistan, a historical rival of India, would become a stronger and more stable regional and economic actor. This dismays not only India but also America, which views BRI and CPEC as a threat to its hegemony and superpower status". Thus, a strong and economically stable Pakistan, occupying a central position in the regional trade networks, does not suit Indian interests. India only wants the subservient role of Pakistan in the region. India's CPEC policy reveals that its apprehensions are overwhelmingly shaped by the traditional geopolitical logic. On the one hand, India appears more focused on the enhancement of trade relations with China, while on the other; India is restricting China's trade with Pakistan with implicit and explicit aggression [11].

A Way Forward

Regardless of the sovereignty issue, economic, political and military ramifications of this initiative for India, it has several opportunities for the South Asian region. Pakistan will be better-connected and will hopefully facilitate trade between Pakistan's immediate neighbours on the east and west. Pakistan's near-at hand neighbours Iran and India need CPEC for closer trade integration with each other's economy. While the CPEC's boost of the regional economy turns adversaries into stakeholders in maintaining peace in the South and the Central Asian regions [5].

The Chinese understand that peace is the first prerequisite for the smooth and successful functioning of the CPEC, for which India, China, Afghanistan and Pakistan must work together. For the sake of Afghanistan peace, China is playing a leading role in getting various stakeholders together. For the protection of CPEC, China's role in the Afghan peace process will hopefully facilitate South Asian peace. India's concerns can be mitigated if all the regional and extra-regional countries take CPEC as an economic opportunity for South Asian prosperity instead of visualizing it in geopolitical terms. A troubled South Asia will thwart the success of CPEC.

Conclusion

CPEC is a mega-development project planned to link South-West Pakistan Gwadar Port with the Northwestern sovereign region of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, China. This massive development corridor will be a 'strategic game-changer in the region by making Pakistan economically more robust than ever before. CPEC project has raised many concerns in the Indian establishment. So far, the Indian establishment has raised objections to the opening of the planned corridor that links Gilgit Baltistan to Chinese Kashgar via the grand Karakoram highway and then to the Pakistani mainland North-Eastern realm and down to its Arabian Sea port of Gwadar. As not explicitly pronounced apprehension, the second reason for India's antagonism to CPEC

is the fear that China might use it to counterbalance the economic growth of India. It will likely create a web of the trading systems, as India perceives it, away from the traditional Indian sphere of influence. The third reason is that India sees it as a threat to its national security. India foretells that a naval base in Gwadar, as part of CPEC, will help China encircle India from the west side during any war-like situation. This fear is more explicit in Indian diplomatic circles that CPEC definitely would bring Chinese military footprint in the Indian Ocean.

Pakistan's counter-narrative depicts a scenario different from India's narrative. It claims that India's entitlements to Gilgit-Baltistan can only be accepted if Kashmir's agreement to India is ratified as legal by the United Nations, which is still not the case. In response to India's second apprehension, neither China nor Pakistan have shown any explicit aim to counterbalance the emerging Indian market through CPEC. In reality, India's economic potential has no comparison with Pakistan's. In no way, CPEC alone could help Pakistan become an equal economic competitor to India. India's third fear about the possibility of Gwadar as a Chinese naval port. However, Pakistan consistently denies these allegations and claims that Gwadar will only be used for commercial purposes. Moreover, Indian apprehensions over Chinese military build-up in the Indian Ocean cannot be justified because it is Pakistan's prerequisite to have military relations with countries of its choice.

To sum up, Indian's antagonism to CPEC seems strongly influenced by the traditional geopolitical factors such as China's rising diplomatic profile in South Asia, to maintain the status quo in favour of India militarily and economically and the fear of internationalization of the Kashmir issue. The Indian policy elite skillfully disguises them in matters like sovereignty claim over Gilgit Baltistan. The research also presents the historical data and proves that Indian application over Gilgit Baltistan is not endorsed by the UNO and contrary to the historical facts. Moreover, Indian implicit and explicit apprehensions over CPEC are nothing more than an exaggeration.

The research further argues that CPEC does not undermine traditional Indian influence. India's economic and military status is so disproportionate to Pakistan that the projects like CPEC cannot compensate for this imbalance. Moreover, CPEC is likely to bring prosperity for Pakistan but not undermining the influence of India. So, the Indian narrative over CPEC cannot be ruled out as genuine. India's inclusion in this project, setting aside traditional differences, would likely bring prosperity for the South Asian region. The least connected part of South Asia in the world needs projects like CPEC to be well-connected. In reality, billions of people await regional leadership's positive decisions to make South Asia prosperous.

References

1. Modi Meets Chinese President in Ufa reiterates Concerns over CPEC. *Dunya News*. (2020).
2. Amir, Adnan. *India's Opposition to CPEC on Shaky Grounds*. *Asia Times*, (2020).
3. Rana, Shahbaz. *Think tank explains why India loathes CPEC*, *The Express Tribune*, (2020).
4. Shah, Fahad. *Does the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Worry India*. *Al Jazeera*, (2017).
5. Krishnan, Ananth. *China rejects India's OBOR statement, says International support Speaks volumes*. *India Today*, (2020).
6. Howe, Kaitlyn and Izhar Hunzai. *The Politics of Exclusion*. *South Asian History Culture* 10 (2019): 14-27.
7. Shigri, Afzal Ali. *Legal Linkage with GB*. *Dawn*, (2020).
8. Afzal Ali, Shigri. *Revisiting our Gilgit Baltistan Policy*. *Dawn*, (2020).
9. Varma, K J M. *India-China Trade dips by nearly \$3 billion in 2019*. *Livemint*. 2019.
10. *Pak-China Trade Jumps to \$15.6 billion under FTA*. *The Nation*, (2020).
11. *Indian not Worried Over Pakistan-China Economic Corridor: High Commissioner TCA Raghavan*. *The Economic Times*, (2020).
12. Ashfaq, Sarmad. *Indian and America Collude to Disrupt the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor*. *Open Democracy*, (2019).
13. Walia, Sumit. *The Economics of CPEC: What are the Options for India*, *Sify.com*, (2019).
14. Hamzah Riffat and Tridivesh Sing Maini. *The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Strategic Rationales, External Perspectives, and Challenges to Effective Implementation*. *Stimson*, (2016).
15. Kajal, Parmeet. *China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Security Threat to India*. *India Defense Review*, (2020).
16. *Chinese Army spotted a long Line of Control in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir*. *The Times of India*, (2018).
17. *Chinese Army Troops Spotted along LOC in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir*. *Hindustan Times*. (2016).
18. Gady, Franz Stefan. *China Confirms Export of Eight Submarines to Pakistan*. *The Diplomat*, (2016).
19. *India Alarmed by China's Plan to Deploy warships in Gwadar*. *The Nation* (2017).
20. Chan, Minnie. *First Djibouti.... now Pakistan port earmarked for a Chinese overseas naval base*, *South China Morning Post*, (2018).
21. Iwanek, Krzysztof. *No Pakistan's Gwadar port is Not a Chinese Naval Base (Just Yet)*, *The Diplomat*, (2020),
22. Sachdeva, Gulshan. 2018. "Indian Perceptions of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative." *Sage Public* 55 (2018): 285-296.
23. Grant, Charles. *India's response to China's rise*. *Centre for European Reform*, (2010).
24. Joshi, Manoj. *Fresh overtures hint at a thaw in India China relations*. *Asia Times*, (2018).

How to cite this article: Muhammad Nauman Akhter*. "Indian Narrative Over the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): A Perspective from Pakistan." *Arts Social Sci J*, 12 (2021)