

An Analysis of External Security Threats to CPEC and Pakistan's Response

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ABSTRACT

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is hailed as a flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The project was signed in April 2015, between Pakistan and China. CPEC is beneficial for both countries and has the potential to help Pakistan to overcome its economic issues. However, the project has certain challenges which pose serious threat to the progress and sustainability of this venture. This study focuses primarily on external challenges that the economic corridor faces. Broadly, the challenges discussed range from Sino-US rivalry, Indo-US strategic partnership, the Indian factor, instability in Afghanistan to the most challenging threat that is terrorism. Methodologically, a mix of qualitative and quantitative approach has been applied. For the primary data, interviews and surveys have been conducted and for secondary data, sources such as books, journals and news articles are used. To gain insight into the different challenges to CPEC, study and analysis of the data is carried out in order to measure the viewpoint of Pakistani public and intelligentsia. Four simple questions pertaining to external security challenges to CPEC have been constructed as part of the survey. The sample was chosen from international relations experts, CPEC analysts, government officials and students to obtain information that was relevant and credible. An involvement of significant number of M.Phils. and PhDs. in the study contributed to the credibility of the data and the balanced approach.

According to results, majority respondents viewed that terrorism, Indo-US alliance and instability in Afghanistan are major causes negatively affecting the progress of CPEC but Pakistan has the potential to mitigate all kinds of security threats. This research will be helpful to understand and respond to propaganda levelled against CPEC.

Keywords

CPEC, Sino-US rivalry, Indo-US strategic partnership, Instability in Afghanistan, Indian factor, terrorism

Introduction

There is a very strong political, military and economic bond between Pakistan and China. The relationship is often expressed in lofty terms such as "time tested, all-weather friendship, higher than mountains, deeper than oceans, sweeter than honey and iron brothers etc." Pakistan was the first Muslim and third non-Muslim state to recognize the "People's Republic of China". Pakistan developed its ties with China, with the opening of its embassy in Beijing on May 21, 1951 (Moonis Ahmar, 2015, p. 35-49). Since that time both countries are helping each other on major issues on international forums. Pakistan backed China in its bid to open up to the West and in gaining permanent membership of the UN Security Council. Pakistan has also supported China's position on regional issues like; Tibet, Taiwan and South China Sea. China has been helping Pakistan especially in economic and defense sectors. Both countries have improved their bilateral ties with the passage of time.

During 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Central Asia (Kazakhstan) and Southeast Asia

(Indonesia), raising the idea of jointly constructing the "Silk Road Economic Belt" and the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" commonly known as the "Belt and Road Initiative", which has drawn close attention from around the globe (Aoyama Rumi, 2017). Chinese President Xi Jinping stated that, "We will enhance friendship and cooperation with all countries in the world on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) on the basis of the five principles of peaceful coexistence." (Embassy of PRC in Ireland, 2017).

China's "Belt and Road Initiative" comprises of two components: the "Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB)" and the "Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI)", that were announced separately in 2013. BRI is part of the larger strategy of China to connect Europe, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Middle East and Africa by, railway lines, roads, maritime routes and energy infrastructure (Jean-Marc F. Blanchard and Colin Flint, 2017, p. 223-245).

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is regarded as "Flagship" project of BRI (Peter Cai, 2017). The concept of CPEC originated in recognizing the significance of Gwadar deep

seaport, which was developed in the 90s as a potential transit, transshipment and logistics hub for the region. The Gwadar port and its linkup with China (and Central Asia) was the perfect stimulus to carry the idea of BRI forward. Hence, after due deliberations, the CPEC was signed in Islamabad between Pakistan and China on April 20, 2015, in the form of various MoUs for 51 projects with a total worth of \$46 billion (Irfan Haider & Mateen Haider, 2015).

This venture is a continuation of Pakistani and Chinese arrangements that have been sought after over the previous decade to extend and develop customary Pakistan-China companionship and financial and business relations (Rashid Ahmad Khan, 2016). Massive infrastructure and energy programs included in CPEC are hailed as game changer for Pakistan. The then Prime Minister of Pakistan stated that, "The CPEC would not only serve as a game-changer for Pakistan but a fate-changer for entire region by helping it rid of economic deprivation and attain peace and prosperity." (Sophia Siddiqui, 2016).

In Pakistan, the CPEC projects are being managed primarily by the Ministry of Planning, Development and Reforms (PDR) and in China, the National Development and Reforms Commission (NDRC) manages CPEC related matters. The two sides established "Joint Cooperation Committee JCC (Co-Chaired by Minister PDR and Vice Chairman NDRC)" and five "Joint Working Groups" like; Planning, Energy, Gwadar, Transport Infrastructure and Special Economic Zones (Institutional Framework of CPEC, 2018). Later on, in 2019, both sides agreed to establish four more Joint Working Groups namely; Social and Economic Development, Agricultural Cooperation, International Cooperation & Coordination and Security (Institutional Framework of CPEC, 2020).

Because of the significance of BRI for overall progress and development of both Pakistan and China, its security has been an area of special concern for all the stake holders. Therefore, on April 21, 2015 Pakistan established a "Special Security Division" to provide protection to the infrastructure and particularly to the manpower, which is working on CPEC. Furthermore, on October 8, 2019, the government of Pakistan established a CPEC Authority to expedite

progress and improve coordination and management of CPEC related projects (Pakistan Today, 2019).

Literature Review

The economic corridors are integrated networks of infrastructure within a geographical area designed to stimulate economic development. Corridors may be developed within a country or among countries. Corridors exist in Asia, Africa, Europe and other areas. The "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the vision of Chinese President Xi Jinping", which he launched in 2013. This vision is the Chinese policy of globalization (K. J. M. Varma, 2018). They have incorporated six corridors in BRI and the CPEC is one of the corridors. These six corridors will connect China to South Asia, Central Asia, Middle East, Africa, and Europe.

Researchers, depending upon their background, express difference of opinion about the viability of CPEC. Some argue that CPEC is not a viable project and have serious issues and constraints in its execution, but the other side views "CPEC as game changer for Pakistan and for the entire region" with some challenges. If both Pakistan and China can mitigate the challenges, then this project will be fruitful. A group of analysts, primarily Indians and Western, believe that CPEC is just a tool for China to extend its hegemonic intentions.

Those researchers and analysts who argue that CPEC is not viable, have raised some questions and put allegations. According to this school of thought CPEC has serious challenges which Pakistan is unlikely to overcome. Some of these challenges include, lack of transparency and accountability in the project (Andrew Small, 2015), prospects of Pakistan becoming a colony of China and escalation of tension between Pakistan and India (K. S. Venkatachalam, 2017), Chinese military presence in Gilgit-Baltistan, China is not trust worthy partner (C. Christine Fair, 2017), China's desire to build naval base in Gwadar (Adnan Qaiser, 2018), most benefit going to China resulting in debt rise on Pakistan (Tilak Devasher, 2017), problems for local Pakistani industry to compete with Chinese products (Shabir Choudhry, 2017) etc.

The second school of thought argue that though CPEC is facing some challenges but both

countries Pakistan and China can manage these challenges. CPEC is a blessing for both the countries and all the factors are controllable. Pakistan and China have good bilateral relations and Pakistan has supported China in its difficult times. Similarly, China supported Pakistan in military sector and missile and nuclear program (Shakil Ahmad Ramay, 2016), Chinese investment loans are on low or zero interest rates and some projects are financed by Chinese banks (Daniel S. Markey & James West, 2016), the CPEC is a win-win situation for both Pakistan and China and would sustain itself (Ejaz Hussain, 2017). CPEC will remove the energy crises, infrastructure issues, eradicate poverty and bring development in Pakistan (Abid Massarrat & Ayesha Ashfaq, 2016). As per Western propaganda the Gwadar seaport is going to become a military and naval base, but Pakistan and China have no such intentions and they developed the port only for commercial purposes (Waseem Ishaque, 2016). CPEC projects, especially Gwadar seaport has the potential to change the fate of Pakistan (Mehmood Hussain, 2016). This group is fully aware of the foreign efforts to harm the project. Indian intelligence agency RAW has established a special cell to sabotage CPEC"; Kalbhushan Jadhav (RAW agent) confessed that he was funding militants and providing sabotage training in Balochistan (Dr. Umbreen Javaid, 2016), however, Pakistan security forces and intelligence services are capable of fighting the potential threats (Safdar Sial, 2016). Pakistan has already established a "Special Security Division" (Moonis Ahmar, 2015) to cater for the security and safety of Chinese workers.

Many of the scholars have analyzed the benefits of CPEC for both countries and for the whole region and predicted the future of this region in light of various challenges it faces. They have adopted the subjective approach and most of the material is opinion based and qualitative data has been used. This is an objective research, focused on the impact of external security challenges, utilizing both, qualitative and quantitative data.

Challenges to CPEC

CPEC faces multiple threats like; security, political, economic and social etc. both internal and external (Abid Hussain, 2017). The challenges include transparency in projects,

incompetency, demographic changes, cultural differences, territorial conflicts, religious extremism, ethnic issues, Indian factor, Indo-US opposition, Sino-US rivalry, instability in Afghanistan and terrorism. Terrorism has already caused immense loss to Pakistan's economy, infrastructure, social cohesion and human lives (Arshad Ali, 2014). It is essential for Pakistan not only to identify those challenges but also to mitigate their effects, if the project has to progress satisfactorily. Following is an attempt to understand some of the critical external challenges faced by the project.

Terrorism

Pakistan suffered economic losses of up to \$126.79 billion (directly and indirectly) including destruction of infrastructure, in the war against terrorism (Pakistan Economic Survey 2017-18). According to the report of South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) 2019, Pakistan has lost 63,898 citizens in terrorism. A wide range of militant outfits, consisting of local and foreign groups; Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) are reportedly active in the region. The East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and Uzbek militant groups especially have been targeting China.

On November 23, 2018 three terrorists attacked the Chinese Consulate in Karachi. In this terror attack two police guards and two civilians lost their lives along with three terrorists. Fortunately, no Chinese national was hurt (Asim Khan & Imtiaz Ali, 2018). The BLA accepted responsibility of the operation, declared Beijing as an "Oppressor" and warned the Chinese to leave or be prepared for continued attacks. (Al-Jazeera, 2018). Additional Inspector General of Karachi Police told media that, they arrested five terrorists having links with the terror attack and the intelligence reports show that the attack was carried out by Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), funded by Indian spy agency RAW, and was planned in Afghanistan (Sajid Rauf, 2019). Aslam Baloch (main accused of the attack), the Chief Commander of BLA was later killed along with five associates in an explosion in southern Kandahar province of Afghanistan.

On May 11, 2019 three terrorists from the BLA (banned militant group), attacked Pearl

Continental (PC) hotel in the port city of Gwadar (which is the gateway of CPEC). In this terror attack four hotel staff members and one Navy sailor were martyred and security forces killed all three terrorists. In an email to Al-Jazeera television, BLA took responsibility of the attack and said that, “our fighters have carried out this attack on Chinese and other foreign investors who were staying in the hotel” (Asad Hashim, 2019). Indian involvement in funding and supporting the Baloch separatist and militant groups is evident. Cdr. Kulbhushan Jadhav, serving Indian Naval Officer, who was arrested by Pakistan’s security forces, confessed that he was involved in funding and training the Baloch separatists to sabotage the CPEC project.

After the successful operations of security forces now Pakistan is much better and safe place to live. According to “Pakistan Security Report 2019”, terrorism reduced 13% as compared to the previous year. According to another security report, “militant attacks in Pakistan dropped to the lowest level during the last fifteen years, while 44 percent decline in suicide attacks has been observed as compared with the year 2018.” (PICSS, 2020).

Security situation in all cities of Pakistan seems to be improving, especially in Karachi, which is the industrial hub of Pakistan and has suffered badly in the past, due to security and governance issues. Jean Francois Cautain the Ambassador of the European Union (EU) in Pakistan said, “Security situation in Pakistan has improved, will attract foreign investment from EU.” On June 20, 2019 “International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) of the United Nations” restored the status of Pakistan as “Family Station” for its international staff (Naveed Siddiqui, 2019). The UN General Secretary acknowledged the efforts of Pakistan in mitigating terrorism and improving the security.

Sino-US Rivalry

US is deeply troubled by China’s rise. Both China and US are engaged in an economic war and putting tariffs on trade. This economic war has already ignited tension between both these countries (The Economic Times, 2018). The trade tensions have been visible since 2011, when the trade deficit between the two countries rose from \$273.1 billion to an all-time high \$295.5 billion in favor of China but escalated further after Donald Trump became President of the US in 2016 with

his slogan, “make America great again” (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020). In 2018, Trump administration imposed new tariffs worth \$34 billion on more than 800 Chinese products. In retaliation China imposed tariffs worth the same amount on 500 US products. In 2019, US imposed more tariffs worth \$200 billion on Chinese products. China reciprocated by announcing \$60 billion of sanctions on US products. President Trump said we are imposing more tariffs on Chinese products to encourage our citizens to buy local products. United States Commerce Department also included Huawei (Chinese telecom giant) to its foreign entity blacklist.

In “National Security Strategy 2017”, President Trump declared that US will contain the Chinese influence in the region. US blames China for stealing technology and ideas from the US. According to the President, this practice is causing immense loss to the US business especially in technology sector. They also accuse China of strengthening its military power to challenge and influence the existing international order. The same National Security Strategy alleges that:

China and Russia target their investments in the developing world to expand influence and gain competitive advantages against the United States. China is investing billions of dollars in infrastructure across the globe. China is using economic inducements and penalties, influence operations, and implied military threats to persuade other states to heed its political and security agenda. China’s infrastructure investments and trade strategies reinforce its geopolitical aspirations. China is gaining a strategic foothold in Europe by expanding its unfair trade practices and investing in key industries, sensitive technologies, and infrastructure. We will help South Asian nations maintain their sovereignty as China increases its influence in the region.

(The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2017).

It is clear that the United States is considerably worried by the rise of China. The US Secretary of Defense James Mattis told the “Armed Services Committee of Senate” that, “The One Belt, One Road also goes through disputed territory, and I think that in itself shows the vulnerability of trying to establish that sort of a dictate” (Anwar Iqbal, 2017). Since the United States considers

China as its main rival in the world, it has vowed to employ any means to contain China. The “US-China Economic and Security Review Commission” told the US Congress in a report that BRI has given an excuse to China to maintain its presence militarily in the countries where BRI is going to be built. The report recommended that Congress should create a fund to assist such countries around the world, where China is increasing its influence (Jane Lanhee Lee, 2018). As a sign of temporary relief, on January 15, 2020 President Trump signed a trade deal “Phase One” with Chinese Vice Premier Liu He in Washington. According to the deal, US was to relax trade tariffs on some Chinese products and in return China was to buy more than \$200 billion worth of US products. However, the situation aggravated again due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Alice Wells, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia criticized that most of the Chinese companies debarred by the World Bank are getting contracts in the projects under “China-Pakistan Economic Corridor” and there is no transparency in projects. CPEC is not an aid or assistance but it is a loan which will put more burden on Pakistan’s economy. In her opinion, Pakistan is a buyer of debt and being a friend of Pakistan, its US duty to make them aware of the lack of transparency evident in China’s business dealings under CPEC and BRI. But its Pakistan’s sovereign right to exercise policy choices, including its involvement in CPEC. She further added that US supports a strong, prosperous and independent Pakistan.

This not the first time a US official has criticized the CPEC. In July 2019, Mike Pompeo, the US Secretary of State, warned that “any potential International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout package for Pakistan should not be used to pay off CPEC loans”. He added, “Make no mistake; we will be watching what the IMF does.” (Reuters, 2018). The US is not happy with Pakistan and is trying to level allegations on CPEC in an attempt to create misunderstanding between China and Pakistan.

The Indian Factor

Pakistan and India have never been in a good relationship since the independence. India always tried to sabotage peace and development in Pakistan. Kashmir is the “unfinished agenda” of

partition of the sub-continent. It keeps Pakistan and India locked in their historic enmity. Pakistan sees Kashmir as its “Jugular Vein” and India calls it an “Integral Part”. Both countries have fought three wars on the Kashmir dispute. According to Perry Anderson (British Historian), “Mountbatten, who was officially supposed to neither exercise any influence on Radcliffe nor to have any knowledge of his findings, intervened behind the scenes, probably at Nehru’s behest, to alter the award. He had little difficulty in getting Radcliffe to change his boundaries to allot the Muslim-majority district of Gurdaspur to India instead of Pakistan, thus giving India the only road access from Delhi to Kashmir.” (Perry Anderson, 2013). Since that time both countries are in serious confrontation. Historically, Indian leaders never accepted the sub-continent’s partition.

On February 14, 2019 a suicide bomber attacked on the convoy of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir. In the attack 40 soldiers of CRPF, including the suicide bomber, were killed (India Today, 2019). After the incident India blamed Pakistan without any evidence. Pakistan denied Indian claims and demanded a fair inquiry. On February 26, 2019, Indian air force attacked Balakot in Pakistan Jammu and Kashmir, claiming that they killed hundreds of alleged militants at an Islamic school but this was a false claim. On the very next day, Pakistan air force shot down two Indian aircrafts and captured one pilot and naming the operation as “Operation Swift Retort”. Spokesman of Pakistan’s Foreign Office said in a statement, “Sole purpose being to demonstrate our right, will and capability for self-defense. We have no intention of escalation but are fully prepared to do so if forced into that paradigm. That is why we undertook the action with clear warning and in broad daylight.” (The Nation, 2019).

On August 5, 2019 India revoked the Special Status of Kashmir given under Article 370 of India’s Constitution and deployed thousands of military troops in Indian Occupied Kashmir IOK (Jeffrey Gettleman, Suhasini Raj, Kai Schultz & Hari Kumar, 2019). Since that day all means of communication have been blocked in the territory. There is a curfew in IOK and the Indian forces arrested so many innocent civilians. Such incidents continue to increase tension between the two nuclear neighbours.

India is supporting and funding those organizations which are working against Pakistan. The Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi accepted the fact that India was involved in funding Anti-State activities against Pakistan and he also mentioned that they will make every effort to destabilize Pakistan because stable and strong Pakistan is not in their interest. He also admitted that India was involved in separation of Bangladesh. Since Pakistan got independence, they had four wars with India and are still facing the hybrid warfare in different areas of Pakistan. Ever since Pak-China announced the economic corridor, India boosted up the anti-Pakistan campaign, with the encouragement of its new ally, the US. There is no doubt to say that India is not happy and creating every hurdle which is possible to minimize the benefits of this project. Recent revelations by the EU Disinfo Lab have further exposed the Indian designs vis-à-vis Pakistan and China (EU Disinfo Lab, 2020). India also has a known record of funding terrorism in neighboring states.

Pakistan security forces caught Indian spy Commander Kulbhushan Jadhav from Balochistan in 2016 and he confessed in his statement that he was working in Balochistan to support anti-Pakistan organizations like BLA to ignite sectarianism in the area. In his confessional statement he admitted:

I commenced intelligence operation in 2003 and established a small business in Chabahar in Iran as I was able to achieve undetected existence and visits to Karachi in 2003 and 2004 and having done some basic assignments within India for RAW. I was picked up by RAW in 2013 end. Ever since I have been directing various activities in Balochistan and Karachi at the behest of RAW and deteriorating law and order situation in Karachi, I was basically the man for Mr. Anil Kumar Gupta who is the joint secretary of RAW and his contacts in Pakistan, especially in Balochistan Student Organization. My purpose was to hold meetings with Baloch insurgents and carry out activities with their collaboration. These activities have been of criminal nature, leading to killing of or maiming of Pakistani citizens. I realize during this process that RAW is involved in some activities related to the Baloch liberation movement within Pakistan and the region around it. There are finances which are fed into the

Baloch movement through various contacts or various ways and means into the Baloch liberation (movement) and various activities of the Baloch liberation and RAW handlers go towards activities which are criminal, which are anti-national, which can lead to maiming or killing of people within Pakistan and mostly these activities were centered around of what I have knowledge is of ports of Gwadar, Pasni, Jewani and various other installations, which are around the coast damaging various other installations, which are in Balochistan. So, the activity seems to be revolving and trying to create a criminal sort of mindset within the Baloch liberation which leads to instability within Pakistan. In my pursuit towards achieving the set targets by my handlers in RAW, I was trying to cross over into Pakistan from the Saravan border in Iran on March 3, 2016, and was apprehended by Pakistani authorities while on the Pakistani side and the main aim of this crossing over into Pakistan was to hold a meeting with Baloch separatists in Balochistan for carrying out various activities, which they were supposed to undertake and carrying backwards the messages which had to deliver to Indian agencies (Geo News, 2017).

It is clear from the above statement that India is involved in sabotaging development in Pakistan. On May 22, 2020 fifteen terrorists belonging to TTP (Tehrik e Taliban, Pakistan) and Al-Qaeda attacked PNS Mehran Karachi. Two P-3C Orion surveillance aircraft (worth \$72m) were destroyed. The Special Services Group (Navy), carried out the counter-attack and cleared the naval base after the efforts of many hours. According to intelligence reports this attack was also planned by RAW in Afghanistan and their main target was to destroy the P-3C Orion surveillance aircrafts in order to undermine Pakistan's surveillance capabilities in the Indian Ocean. India also claimed that, the project (CPEC) stretches through areas which are claimed by India, such as Gilgit-Baltistan (Khurram Iqbal, 2017). India is also worried that because of CPEC, China will have direct access to Arabian Sea and more presence in Indian Ocean.

The Indo-US Strategic Partnership

India and United States have close bilateral defense and economic relations. The US considers

India as an attractive economic market and strategic partner in its rivalry against China. The two countries are expanding their bilateral relations to hedge the rise of China. In National Security Strategy 2017, US mentioned that, “We will expand our defense and security cooperation with India, a major defense partner of the United States, and support India’s growing relationships throughout the region.” (The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2017)

Dr. Fazal-Ur-Rehman believes that while CPEC is undoubtedly an economic venture and it is part of BRI which is about international connectivity and free flow of trade of goods; it certainly has some strategic security connotations as well. Hence it has significance in terms of Indo-US strategic partnership which is having regional repercussions and is being developed with a view to have regional management of politico-strategic affairs. In this context it is clear that CPEC and BRI are in conflict with Indo-US view of the regional order and are, therefore, trying to create hurdles in its smooth implementation. Both countries do not like Pakistan to gain economic independence because they think that Pakistan’s economic dependence on the western financial institutions especially IMF and World Bank should continue so that they can exercise some leverage over Pakistan. They duly understand that CPEC has the potential to lift Pakistan out of this dependence on Western financial institutions. From that point of view this is something which is strategically not in favor of US and Indian interest.” (Dr. Fazal-Ur-Rehman, 2019).

Instability in Afghanistan

Economic stability and peace are closely entwined. When you lose one, you are likely to lose another. Peace is a necessary prerequisite for trade, sustainable economic growth and prosperity (Dominique Strauss-Kahn, 2009). Afghanistan’s security situation is also a threat to CPEC because it has spillover effects on the region and Pakistan’s security is suffering because of Afghanistan’s instability since 1979, the Afghan war with Russia (1979-1989) and now with the US. Pakistan suffered because of war against terror, which is still going on. Peace and stability in Afghanistan are very important for not only prosperous Afghanistan but also for the entire

region. Since 1979, Russia-Afghan war, Pakistan’s economy is taking the burden of millions of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. As per the report of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) almost 1.38 million registered refugees are living in Pakistan at the moment. According to some other reports almost a million refugees are not registered in UNHCR (Asad Hashim, 2018).

On January 31, 2018 Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) released a report according to which, the Afghan government controlled only 229 districts, which is 53.8% of the total Afghan districts while 59 districts, over 12%, were under the Taliban control. In the remaining 119 districts, which is 33.9%, tussle for control continued between the Taliban and the Kabul government (Hafeez Ullah Khan, 2019, p. 181-189).

The US appointed Zalme Khalilzad as a special US representative for the peace talks with Taliban. Pakistan, in line with its policy of peace, played an important role in peace talks and held a few rounds of peace talks in country. The Kabul government wants the Taliban to talk directly with them but the problem is that Taliban do not recognize the Kabul government and therefore, avoid direct talks. They say that this government is not a legitimate government and does not have any power because the United States controls this government. So, they find it more appropriate to negotiate with the US, which has all the powers.

On February 29, 2020 an agreement was finally signed between the United States and Taliban in Doha (Qatar) to bring peace in Afghanistan. According to the deal in first 135 days, the U.S. and Afghan government were supposed to release 5000 Taliban prisoners and Taliban were to release 1000 Afghan security forces prisoners from their custody. Ultimately, the US and their allies would gradually withdraw their troops from Afghanistan (BBC News, 2020). This peace deal has once again brought hope of peace in Afghanistan and an opportunity to start a direct dialogue between Taliban and Afghan government.

The Kabul government thinks that Pakistan has control over Taliban and Pakistan is intentionally ignoring the Kabul government but Pakistan denied the claims. Pakistan seems not happy with Kabul government as they are closely aligned with

India. In 2017, the President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani said, “Our approach to internal peace is to own it through Afghan government-led processes”. In another statement about joining the CPEC, he said that Afghanistan would not join CPEC until Islamabad give land route access to India to trade with Afghanistan (The Express Tribune, 2017). The mistrust between Islamabad and Kabul is also a big hurdle in maintaining good relations. In 2018, Interior Minister of Pakistan Ahsan Iqbal claimed that India is using Afghan soil to destabilize Pakistan (Khyber News, 2018). Afghanistan traditionally depends on Pakistan and uses the Karachi Port and Port Qasim for its international trade. A bilateral agreement was signed between Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2010, which is known as “Afghan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA)”. On January 14, 2020 the first shipment of containers arrived at Gwadar Port for Afghanistan (Geo News, 2020). On this occasion the Chinese embassy in Islamabad said that, “CPEC and BRI are promoting regional economic ties” (Chinese Embassy Islamabad, 2020). Gwadar has crucial strategic location and Gwadar seaport has the potential to increase regional connectivity. Gwadar port offers shortest trade route to Afghanistan.

Pakistan has been able to largely contain the threats to CPEC in terms of security but still the root causes of security threats exist and the geopolitics of our relationship with our neighboring countries, which have been instrumental in creating threats for CPEC, is gradually turning in our favor. So, we can say that the security environment will experience some ups and downs but largely it will remain under control. But we should expect some kind of acts of sabotage and terrorism against the interest of Pakistan and China especially in projects which are related to CPEC.

Data analysis

To gain insight into the different challenges to CPEC, the study and analysis of the data is carried out in order to measure the viewpoint of Pakistani public and intelligentsia. Four simple questions pertaining to multiple aspects of CPEC have been constructed as part of the survey. The sample size was 150, chosen from international relations experts, CPEC analysts, government officials and

students to obtain information that was relevant and credible. An involvement of significant number of M.Phils. and PhDs. in the study contributed to the credibility of the data and the balanced approach.

Gender of Respondents

The gender is most important variable. In any study it is important to know the view of both men and women to increase the credibility of the study. In this research the gender has been divided into two sub-categories; male and female and coded into numeric data.

Male	Female
1	2

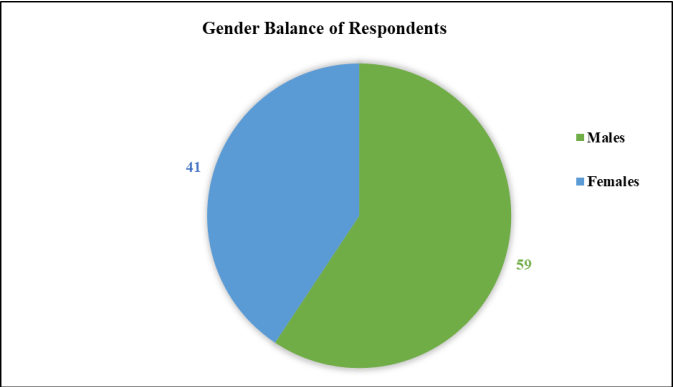


Figure 1. Gender Balance of Respondents
The above figure refers to the gender balance of respondents. Total respondents are 150 and out of 150 respondents, 59% are male respondents and 41% are female respondents.

Age of Respondents
The second variable is age. In this study age is divided into five sub-groups and coded into numeric data.

20-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70
1	2	3	4	5

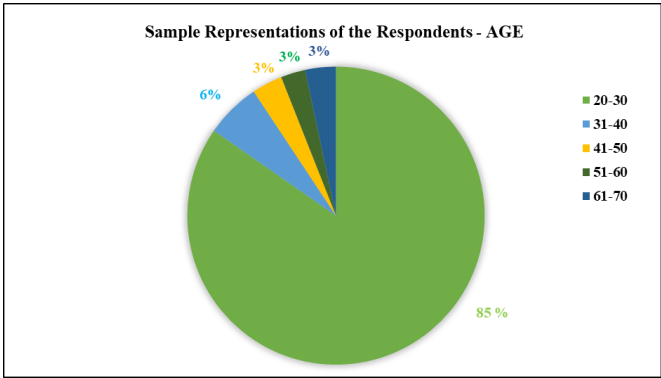


Figure 2. Age of Respondents

The above figure refers to the age of respondents. This data shows that majority 85% respondents belong to very young age. Total respondents are 150 and from these; 85% respondents belong to the first group (20-30). The second age group (31-40) has 6% respondents. The third age group (41-50) has 3% respondents. The fourth age group (51-60) has 3% respondents and the fifth age group (61-70) has also 3% respondents. Pakistan is blessed with youth and 64% population of country is under 29 years (Adil Najam and Faisal Bari, 2017).

Qualification of Respondents

The third variable is qualification. The minimum qualification of respondents in this survey is bachelor’s degree and the maximum are doctorate. In this survey, qualification has been divided into four sub-sets and coded into numeric data.

B.A/B. S	M.A/M.Sc.	M.S/M.Phil.	Ph.D.
1	2	3	4

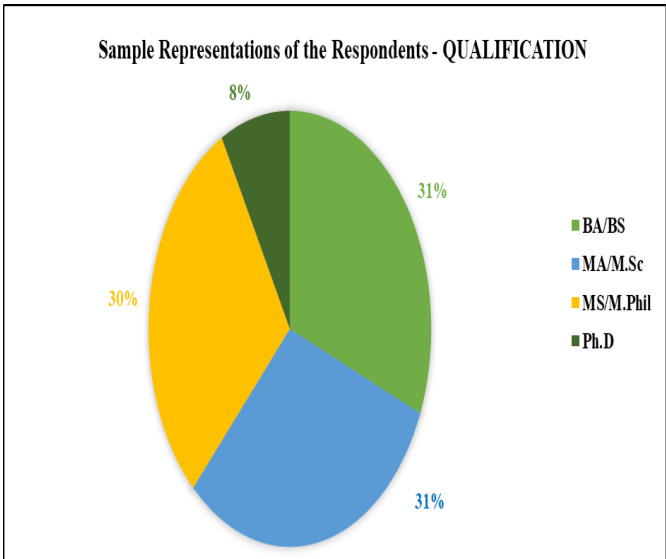


Figure 3. Qualification of Respondents

The above figure refers to the qualification of respondents. Out of 150 respondents the qualification of 31% respondents is BA/BS. The qualification of 31% respondents is MA/MSc. The qualification of 30% respondents is MS/M Phil. and the qualification of 8% respondents is PhD. The data shows that 92% respondents have almost equal share. As Pakistan has very small number of doctors in social sciences, especially in International Relations and Defense & Strategic Studies, that’s why they are only 8% of the total sample.

Profession of Respondents

The fourth and last variable is Profession. Profession of respondents is also a very important variable. Profession has been divided into three categories and coded into 1, 2 and 3. The first type is “Academia” and this means those persons, which are teaching in universities. The second type is “Student”, those who are studying in various universities of Pakistan at different levels. In here, “Other” means those who are working in Think Tanks and from some other departments like Armed Forces etc.

Academia	Student	Other
1	2	3

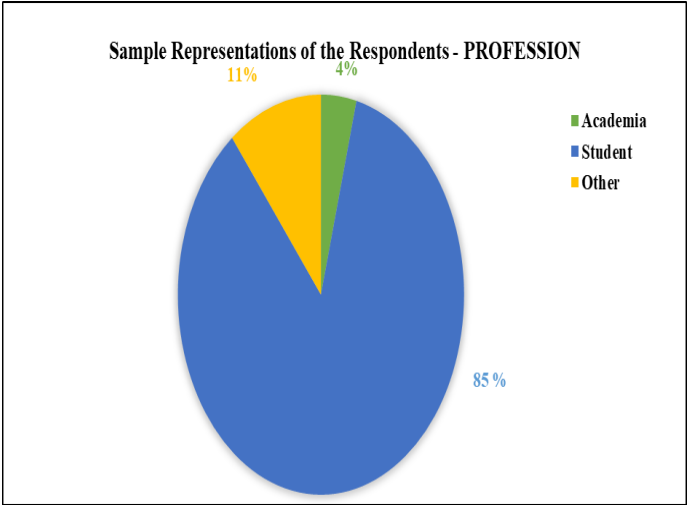


Figure 4. Profession of Respondents

The above figure refers to the profession of respondents. Out of 150 respondents the major chunk is from students. The profession of 4%

respondents is Academia. The profession of 85% respondents is Student and 11% respondents belong to various departments and institutions like; Think Tanks, Armed Forces etc.

Q-1: Do you think that Indo-US opposition to CPEC, negatively affects the progress of CPEC?

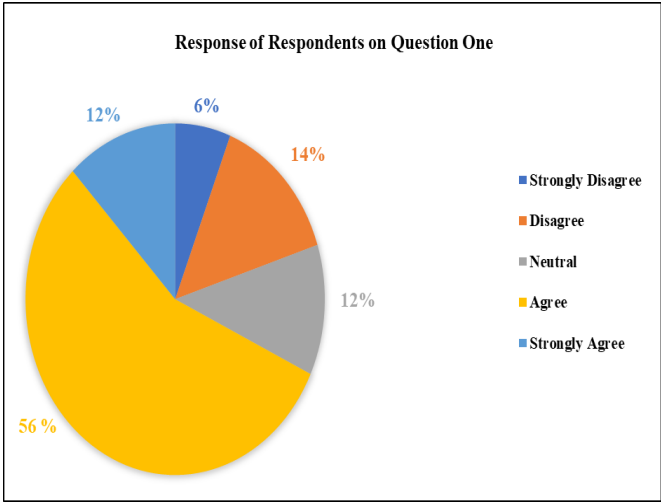


Figure 5. Effect of Indo-US opposition on CPEC
The above figure refers to question one. The data shows that majority 68% (56% + 12%) respondents think that Indo-US opposition has negative effect on the progress of CPEC. The survey substantiated that only 6% respondents “Strongly Disagree” and 14% “Disagree” with the statement. Twelve percent respondents are “Neutral” and 56% respondents “Agree” while 12% “Strongly Agree” that Indo-US opposition may have negative effects on the progress of the project.

Q-2: Do you agree that US policy of containment of China is strengthening Pak-China relations?

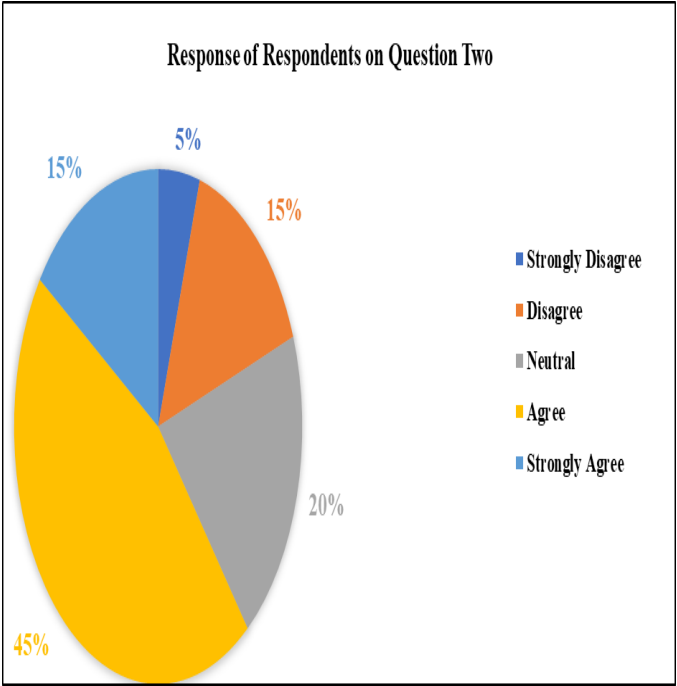


Figure 6. Role of US policy of containment of China in

Strengthening Pak-China Relations

The above figure refers to question two. The figure indicates that majority of respondents i.e. 60% agree (45%) and strongly agree (15%) that the US policy of containment of China is actually bringing China and Pakistan even closer to each other.

Out of 150 respondents, 45% respondents “Agree” and 15% “Strongly Agree” with the statement. On the other hand, 20 % respondents (15% “Disagree” and 5 % Strongly Disagree) think that US policy of containment has no influence in bringing the countries together. Twenty percent respondents remained “Neutral”.

Q-3: Do you think that instability in Afghanistan has impact on the progress of CPEC projects?

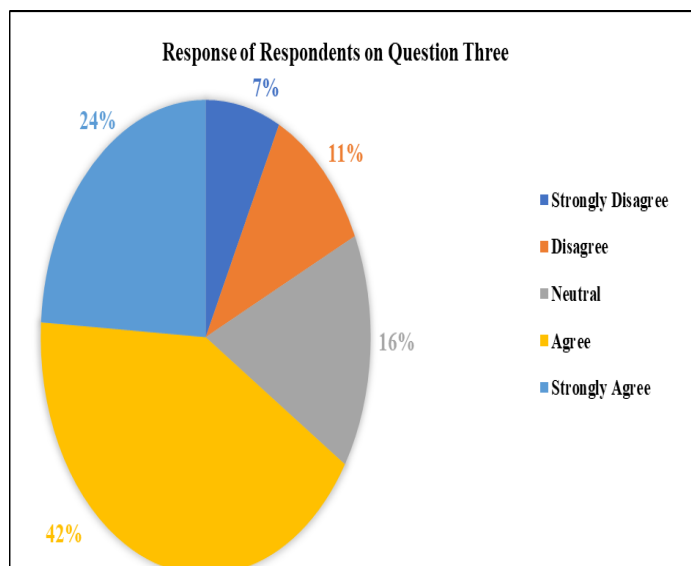


Figure 7. Impact of Afghanistan's instability on the progress of CPEC

The above figure refers to question three. The figure indicates that 66% respondents generally believe that instability in Afghanistan has negative impact on the progress of CPEC. Peace and stability in region are vital for the smooth processing of any project and especially for the CPEC.

The survey substantiated that 7% respondents "Strongly Disagree" while 11% respondents "Disagree" with the statement. Sixteen percent respondents are "Neutral"; however, 42% respondents "Agree" and 24 % "Strongly Agree" with the statement.

Q-4: Do you think that Pakistan can overcome Security threats to CPEC?

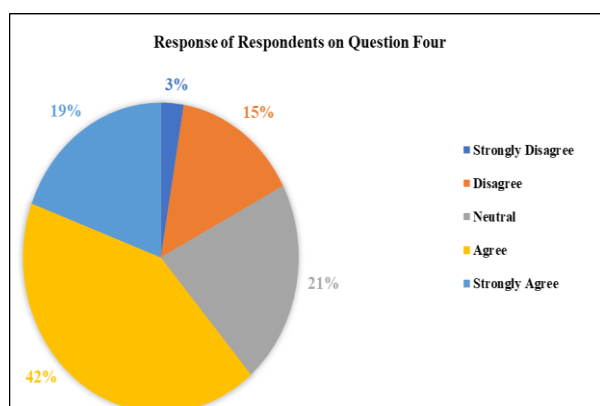


Figure 8. Pakistan's ability to overcome Security Threats to CPEC

The above figure refers to the question four. It is clear that a reasonable majority of respondents are optimistic and believe that, overtime, Pakistan's government and security forces have the potential to mitigate these threats.

The survey substantiated that 42% respondents "Agree" and 19 % "Strongly Agree" with the statement. Only 3 % percent "Strongly Disagree" while 15% "Disagree" with the statement. Twenty-one percent respondents are "Neutral" on the question.

It appears from the above survey that, at least, in the educated Pakistani community, there is awareness about CPEC and its related issues. Most Pakistanis, belonging to the intelligentsia, understand the threats faced by the project. However, at the same time, the majority is optimistic in believing that the country will be able to deal with these challenges.

Conclusion

Peace is a necessary prerequisite for trade, sustainable economic growth and prosperity. CPEC is a mega project which has the potential to interconnect the entire region and transform the economic potential of the countries. However, since the initiative is led by China, it is construed as a challenge to the existing global hegemons. Hence a number of threats, internal and external, emerge against CPEC, which need to be understood and mitigated. Whether it is the US proxy war in the region or the resultant instability, particularly in Afghanistan, or India's plans to acquire the status of regional hegemon, they all have security implications for Pakistan and CPEC. The survey shows that the educated Pakistanis are aware of the issues and the severity of the challenges. At the same time they have confidence in the emerging global order and the capacity of the state to resist these challenges. Pakistan's armed forces are experienced and well-equipped and they are quite capable of fighting against any sabotage activity. Pakistan and China have already taken many steps to ensure the sustainability of CPEC. There is a need to remain vigilant of the changing alignments in the region to protect national interest.

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