



## RESEARCH PAPER

### China Pakistan Economic Corridor: Explaining U.S-India Strategic Concerns

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Received:</b> August 11, 2021</p> <p><b>Accepted:</b> December 22, 2021</p> <p><b>Online:</b> December 25, 2021</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> BRI, China, CPEC, India, Pakistan, Silk Road, Strategic Concerns</p> <p><b>*Corresponding Author:</b> nasreen.akhtar@iiu.edu.pk</p>	<p>Regional and International political and economic landscape is being changed owing to China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)-the new security paradigm has taken place-that has increased the strategic concerns of the U.S. and India. This research paper attempts to re-examine China-Pakistan relations in the new emerging geo-political compass. This paper has investigated the question that how regional, and global developments have impacted the China-Pakistan relationship? And why China - Pakistan have become partners of CPEC? In the global context, this paper assesses the emerging International Order, Indo-U. S strategic narrative vis-à-vis CPEC, and the containment of China through the new alliances and their impacts on China -Pakistan vis-à-vis the Belt Road Initiative (BRI). Quadrilateral (Quad) alliances is shaping the new strategic political and security paradigms in the world politics.</p>

## Introduction

Ever since China's independence, Pakistan was among the first countries to recognize her and since then Pakistan and China have advanced cooperative "strategic" relationship. Both countries have different culture, political system, and ideologies- but system and societal structure never affected their relations. China supported Pakistan on various issues, such as supporting it in building nuclear programs or providing the military with warfare or financial assistance. We have seen the major features of China's "foreign policy has been the continuity of its efforts to maintain its good relations with Pakistan" (Brands, 1975). China has always cooperated and kept close and persistent relations with Pakistan. China, since the year 2000, has kept the international market in its focus and after joining World Trade Organization (Lee, 2018), aims at active participation in the global market by increasing its exports and trade around the world. China-Pakistan relationship is seen as a benchmark transformation since 2013, as it witnessed the bilateral relations expanded from defense to economic tie (Yaseen, et. al. 2017).

China -Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) seems to be pivot that has increased Chinese investments in Pakistan's energy and infrastructure sectors. However, increased interdependence between these two countries is also witnessing a major political shift in the South Asian region. China -Pakistan are fluctuating the geo-politics of the region from geostrategic competition to geo-economics cooperation. Although the main driver behind this change is China as Belt Road Initiative (BRI) countries account for 40 percent of the global GDP, 65 percent of the world's population, and 75 percent of the known energy reserves (Sacks 2021). However, Pakistan offers an important location that can work as a kingpin for regional connectivity through pipeline projects, ports, and road link and railway line. This is the major goal that China has launched multiple projects in Pakistan such as motorways, railways, and a new Seaport at Gwadar. Other global projects of China, beneath BRI, are in Sri Lanka, a forest city in Malaysia, a hydropower plant in Uganda, a motorway in Serbia. These projects are sections of major project known as BRI- an extensive, two-tiered land and sea project- CPEC is one of them. This mega project aims to connect China via rail, road, and Sea to 72 different countries (OECD Business and finance outlook 2018). BRI initiative is a reflection of the "great ancient Silk Route" (Wizarat 2014; Muzaffar, et. al. 2018). BRI and CPEC both ventures would determine China's existence as a global and dominating power.

Pakistan is the most important beneficiary under China's global initiative (BRI) through its flagship project CPEC. CPEC has attracted the skepticism of regional and extra regional states [India-US] -they want to contain China- Pakistan. China-Pakistan are collaborating closely to keep CPEC functional. The main questions in this paper are; how CPEC has become flagship project of BRI and what it provides to Pakistan and why does CPEC upset U.S-India to counter China? How are the US and India collaborating in upsetting the CPEC? In this article we will discuss a brief background of BRI that includes Pakistan in one of its pilot projects- CPEC.

### **Belt Road Initiative: Global Outlook**

BRI has set the new geo-economic game in the contemporary world- trade and export has been imperative instrument in developing harmony and peace among the states "routes developed over time according to shifting geopolitical context throughout history" (UNESCO <https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/about-silk-roads>) In the past special routes were edged in the world - that included land and Sea. These routes became a vibrant trail for the multiple objectives- trade, exchange of goods, people to people contact, and cultures. Heavy silk was traded from one of the land routes (Kenton 2020) thus it was called the "Silk Road" or "Silk Route". Silk Road was weekend in the present century, China, after the end of the Cold war decided to revive this route- (Chan 2019) in 2013 the concept of BRI was put forward by the then Chinese President Xi Jinping -the main objective of this extended route was to connect Asian, European and African countries to promote trade and transportation between them. It is the most prevalent and expensive project in the contemporary complex world. The estimated cost is expected to be between 1 to 8 trillion dollars. BRI is a project that aims at the interconnectedness of three continents of Asia, Europe, and Africa comprising of six corridors. The BRI is made up of six corridors; New Eurasian land Bridge Economic Corridor, China, Mongolia, Russia Economic Corridor, China Central Asia West Asia Economic Corridor, China, Indonesia Peninsula Economic Corridor, and China Pakistan

Economic Corridor. CPEC, however, is the most important corridor of BRI which involves both China and Pakistan.

CPEC creates a foundation for cooperation; helping in industrial and infrastructural sectors. Via CPEC China would be able to develop its underdeveloped parts. Many analysts view BRI as an opportunity that would change the fate of developing countries and their people. BRI is a worldwide megaproject that aims at regional integration, expansion of economic global market, and strengthening infrastructure, trade, and investment in the most developing states. BRI is viewed as a platform to benefit all countries regardless of being rich or poor, weak, or strong or large or small, this project provides room for all countries to take part in the global market (Roman 2019; Nazim, et. al. 2018). BRI has definite goals- it tends to promote coordination, worldwide connectivity, promotion of economic policy, and the nations engagement in defined areas. These are the causes which have exasperated U.S and India and compelled in making the new alliances called quadrilateral. We have discussed about the new nexus between the U.S and India in this paper. Their nexus aims to influence China's interests at regional and global levels. Since Pakistan is China's partner in CEPC the U.S.-India alliances would also upset Pakistan's interest.

### **China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**

CPEC is considered the main pilot project of BRI – it is also known as the flagship project of BRI and provides the critical maritime routs to connect the world. This corridor means a strategic opening to the Arabian Sea and “provides a key land route to China to access the warm water of Arabian Sea and Arabian Sea is strategically significant for India- it major ports are located in Arabian Sea” (Anonymous 2020). CPEC aims to connect the Xinjiang province to Pakistan's Gwadar deep Sea port to loom the global influence of China by expanding infrastructure and development.

Gwadar port is vital to China's connectivity in achieving BRI's fundamental objectives and port will help China “to become a world power”, (Anonymous, 2016) . This port would facilitate the transportation of oil and gas from Gwadar to China in a short time from the Gulf region- China imports energy resources from the Middle East through the Strait of Malacca where the strong naval presence of the United States (U.S) is considered a threat to its energy security- because the US considers the Strait of Malacca as a critical juncture of international trade (Sliwinski 2014). Thus, in future China may face predicament in Strait of Malacca-Gwadar port, therefore, would protect China's interests- this port is a future of Pakistan and Pakistan would also benefit. BRI's main component is CPEC -CEPC 's heart is Gwadar (Anonymous 2016) and Gwadar port is the main component of CPEC (Maqbool2021). The coastline of Pakistan is very crucial from where China can project its naval power to extend its reach from the Indian Ocean to the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea (Garare 2018). Therefore, both China and Pakistan would promote their interests via CPEC and its operationalization would strengthen Pakistan economically and China would enjoy a much more global economic, political, security, and strategic extension.

The present partnership of China- Pakistan is reflecting old and persistent relationship. Both face the adversary at regional and international level- their friendship is commendable in the contemporary complex world. Chinese former prime minister, Wen Jiabao, terms China-Pakistan relations; that “both withstood the test of internationally changing situation and have become a model of living amity among countries” (Khalid 2013). Both the countries have survived the hard times such as the Cold war, diplomatic isolation of China, wars with India, worsening relations with the Soviet Union, and the U.S-led war on terror-these ups and down have always provided opportunity to the two friends to improve and strengthen their ties.

In the beginning, Pakistan and China shared common enmity with India. However, with time, the two states have grown into global strategic and economic partners. China Pakistan Economic Corridor has further transformed the relations between both countries from a narrow South Asian security framework to a broader global context.

CPEC is the most important epicenter of BRI with a deep seaport at Gwadar in Pakistan as its cornerstone. Therefore, the strategic and economic partnership has cemented the relations between Pakistan and China strongly that both the states are enjoying. Prime Minister, Imran Khan in an interview with Aljazeera claimed that the “economic future of Pakistan is tied to China” (Aljazeera 2020), indeed, Pakistan’s explicit and official stance has annoyed some regional and extra-regional force. Hence, Pakistan and China friendship continues despite many global challenges and impediments. Their partnership recently is “witnessing a deep understanding and transformation into a strong military relationship”, (Business Insider India 2020).

China has transformed itself from a regional power into a global power with the twist of the century and Pakistan is the central point of its rise. Pakistan also needs China to support diplomatically at international platforms- support over the Kashmir dispute, economic stability, and economic investment in Pakistan. Pakistan is enjoying the most imperative natural geostrategic position that China or the U.S may not ignore- and it is also an important challenger and traditional rival to China’s competitor India. Pakistan is an important gateway that connects the Muslim world. China views Pakistan as an important country that can help in eradicating the militancy from reaching its Northwestern region of Xinjiang where a Muslim minority of ethnic Uighurs are seen by Beijing as the most important threat to its domestic stability –as both China and Pakistan aware that separatists involved in the Chinese region of Xinjiang had links with group based in FATA (Ahmad, 2012). In contemporary global political and security environment China deems Pakistan as an important player to secure stability at regional and global context-both countries are already “collaborating in a number of sectors especially defence, trade, and energy sectors” (Zeb 2012).

Presently, China-Pakistan relations have taken a new shape in South Asian region owing to Afghanistan crisis. Pakistan plays an important role through its traditional influence over the Afghan Taliban where China wants to extend CPEC project to gain more connectivity and access the world’s markets. Afghanistan shares its border with Central Asian states which pave the major gateway toward Europe- Central Asia, as the U.S former

National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski said would to be the “center of world power” (Aljazeera 2003).

CPEC is not only an economic tie between the two traditional partners also reflects the strong brotherhood between China and Pakistan. Many states have disputes with their neighboring states-but China and Pakistan do not have territorial or other conflict-territorial border was resolved amicably in 1963. Though both states have shared mutual strategic interests but CPEC, known as flagship program, has cultivated the scope of mutual cooperation and partnership between China and Pakistan. Increasing and extending ties of the two countries has greatly alarmed China’s historical rival and its critic is “seen in geopolitical perspective-Alice Wells, the State Department Official, alleged that the firm blacklisted by the World Bank got CPEC contracts” (Dawn 2020).

CPEC has resulted in the transformation of warmed relations between both the countries into mutual benefits and economic integration. It is important for the economic stability of Pakistan to countering China-Pakistan common enemy, India, and support Pakistan from going into another wave of militancy. CPEC is helping in bringing back the investment opportunities in Pakistan when the country was reeling from the wounds of militancy and the War on Terror- CPEC has brought \$25billion of direct investment to Pakistan (AFP,2020) which is a major achievement.

The first phase of CPEC worth \$19 billion has been completed (Khan 2021). The second phase of CPEC aims at further enhancement towards cooperation between Pakistan and China in different economic sectors that have been included in the project-public and private model. To boost industrialization in Pakistan is the main purpose of this project. Exclusive Economic Zones in Pakistan are introduced in each province to boost up the socio-economic condition of Pakistani people- Rashakai [Khyber Pakhtunkhwa], Dhabeji [Sindh province], and Faisalabad [Punjab province] of Pakistan have already been identified as the first three preferred economic zones of Pakistan (Khawar 2020). In the first phase of CPEC energy demands of industrial sectors have already been catered therefore these special economic zones are aimed to relocate the industries from China to Pakistan (Khawar 2020). To develop human resources in Pakistan, technical institutions would also be developed along with industrialization so that job opportunities for youth could be increased to fulfill the requirement of the industrialization wave in the country. The installation of a new transmission system in the second phase of CPEC would enhance the potential of energy projects and decrease the line losses of electricity in the country.

The second phase of CPEC is also comprised of a dry port at Havelian which would boost the trade between Pakistan and China (<http://cpec.gov.pk/project-details/31>). It aims at increasing the role of heavy mechanical complex in Pakistan so that heavy mechanical import should be stopped, and the development of indigenous mechanical complex can take place in the country. Another very important project under the second phase of CPEC is to revamp the total railway infrastructure of Pakistan (Shehzad 2021). A new railway track from Peshawar to Karachi would be linked at around 1870 km. this new railway system would be fenced to increase the security of the infrastructure. The second phase of CPEC is also emphasizing agriculture sector to boost Pakistan’s the agriculture sector of the country to ensure sustainable prosperity and development (Xinhua 2021).

This section aims at the introduction of heavy machinery in agriculture. Resultantly this would also aim at conserving water resources and reduce water wastage in the agricultural sector. The mechanization of agriculture and farms in Pakistan would increase the output and boost agricultural growth in Pakistan. Henceforth, the second phase of CPEC would strengthen the political, economic, and strategic relations between China and Pakistan.

### **CPEC: Regional and Global Strategic Concerns**

Regional and global powers [U.S-India] have deep concerns regarding CPEC. Since CPEC is considered BRI' flagship several scholars and professionals are investigating CPEC's pros and cons. The CPEC is aimed to be an investment and an economic project between the two states which would provide opportunities to the people of Pakistan -but for China as well (Naveed & Riaz 2014). The scholarly views strengthen the liberal approach that mutual assistances and cooperation transformed the relationship between the two countries, particularly in the social and economic field. Durable relationship, between China and Pakistan, were developed after considering India as a common rival in 1962-when India and China fought war on border issue. The post- 9/11 incident brought the both friends closer to face the regional and international geo-strategic challenges. Currently China and Pakistan increased cooperation in several areas; security, political and economy (Zeb, 2012).

Bilateral relations between China and Pakistan are now beyond politics- relations are increasing and CPEC is playing an ultimate role between the two old friends. The existing nature of tie is inviting major powers (Faisal, 2020) to revisit their ties vis -a -vis China and Pakistan. The strategic balance of power in South Asia has taken turns due to Indian military build-up power and the U.S increasing concerns in the region- since China has dominated in South Asia- CPEC has established China's dominance and an effective role in the region and world. In the global context, the U.S and India both have deep concerns on China's expansion. The U.S policy of "countering" China's influence- when staying in Afghanistan (Dar, 2020) - raised China's concerns- but the U.S departure provides opportunity China to surpass its routs via South Asia- CPEC- connects China to the Indian oceans and South China sea-both are the critical junctions not only for China also the U.S and India claim their legitimate stakes. CPEC also provides opportunity to Russia (Khalil2021) that would strengthen economic and strategic ties between China, Russia and Pakistan- Both China and Pakistan are open to accept the participation of the third parties (Faisal, 2019), strong regional connectivity would make the regional affluent and developed. But on the other hand, China's influence would challenge India's dominance and the status of rising regional power in South Asia.

Divergence and convergence interests determine the relationship between the states. Owing to convergence of interests Pakistan has been a strong partner of the US- during the cold war. Both separated after the disintegration of the erstwhile Soviet Union. The incidents of 9/11, once again, brought closer the U.S and Pakistan. Both needed each other to achieve their fundamental objectives. India, despite its neutrality, has been close and important country to the U.S- India enjoyed economic and security relations with U.S without being a close strategic partner. The sole purpose of Indi-U.S relations has been to

neutralize China- India-China rivalry and India-Pakistan hostility developed the U.S interests in South Asian region.

However, the 9/11 incidence nurtured the U.S-India close nexus- both countries developed their consensus on fundamental issues; extremism, terrorism, and China's dominance at regional and global level- " the US has opened all military and technology door to India-U.S political and military support encourage India its bellicose behavior Pakistan (Akram, 2016) " and China. China and the U.S have evolved rivalry over the past many years. China, after 9/11, has been developing its worldwide economic policies and modernized its military. Current China is more "strong and powerful"- it is threat to India's hegemony in region (Pawar,2020) and great challenge to the U.S order- so the U.S must maintain the world's most powerful, agile, and sophisticated technologically military while enhancing security cooperation ,grounded in common interests and shared responsibility ,with allies and partners (U.S. Department of State 2020). From South Asian region India is the most suitable partner that would help the US in containing China. CPEC has greatly upset the U.S and India.

### **China- US Antagonism and Impacts on CEPC**

Over the past many years U.S-China antagonism has taken deep root. Both countries had good relations during Clinton era-but divergence of interests widened a gulf between China and the U.S. China-Pakistan relations have never been encouraged by the U.S. But China-Pakistan continued their friendship and ignored the U.S concerns and rage

Historically, Pakistan has been a strategic ally of the U.S- Pakistan assisted to shape the new diplomatic relationship between China and the U.S. In the present environment the US, world power, views the expansion and growth of China with great concerns. China's conflicting relations with the U.S and India successfully helped both rivals [U.S-India] to develop a strong anti- China ties. India and the U.S nexus are posing great impediments for both China and Pakistan as later is the main party in BRI. The U.S wants to contain China-though president Obama said that "we don't want to contain China" (Tiezzi, 2015) but post-Obama U.S foreign policy has become China centric policy. President Trump and Biden both want China to be contained in every region. CPEC is the way to connect to the Indo-Pacific Ocean where the U.S has its allied- Japan, Australia, and India. This alliance is known as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or also known as Quad- is an informal security alliance between the U.S, Australia, Japan, and India to counter China in the Indo-Pacific. Second quad, led by the U.S, comprises Israel, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and India. Third quad, AUKUS, brings Australia, United Kingdom, and the U.S to counter China's rising strategy (Rasheed, 2020). China's rise and growing influence in the region has brought the four states closer to each other (Basu. 2019). The U.S has developed a comprehensive plan to influence BRI CPEC not only regionally but also globally.

The US has imitated an idea against China -is the development project of Build Back Better World (B3W). President Joe Biden held a meeting with other G7 countries to build an innovative infrastructure focusing at low- or middle-income countries against China's BRI project to boost up the economy of these countries. The US has concerns over Pakistan's economy as well and urges to develop its own (U.S Embassy and Consulates in Pakistan,

2019). But on the other hand, the US never criticized India's sabotaging act in Pakistan which is destabilizing Pakistan's economic and social infrastructure. In August 2021, an attack on Chinese engineers in Pakistan was planned by India (Dawn 2021), this was not the first attack that targeted the Chinese nationals- several attempts were made to scare the Chinese workers and officials (Mehsud, 2021).

CPEC is under attack because China-India rivalry is known globally. India is being encouraged by the strong competition between China and the U.S. Thucydides trap offers good explanation about the *conflictual* relations between China and the U.S (Peters 2020) in which threat to the existing hegemony by the emerging global powers in the world order leads to terrible vicious circle which lead into war between the two advance countries. China's increasing influence, and global economic expansion, has helped it to rise and challenge the world's last remaining superpower- the U.S. China's dominance via its flagship [CPEC] or BRI is challenging the U.S world order. Consequently, the US is applying every possible means to surround China's growth along with protecting its position as a global hegemony. This includes implementation of the trade tariff [war ]- by putting high tariffs on China's goods the U.S wanted to press the China's economy in retaliation the later too did the same on the U.S goods – trade war in fact failed to affect the China's economy (Zhang & Vortherms, 2021) . Hence, trade war between US and China impacted the global economy, and the trade war (Steinbok. 2018) shifted to tech- war where once again China seems narrowing the gap with US technological supremacy. The U.S strategy to pressurize the China's policy of BRI and CPEC, so far, has not succeeded to achieve its global goals vis-à-vis China.

The US has announced official policy of China's containment - the Biden administration announcement of new project in coordination with the G7 countries against BRI, by launching a joint infrastructure program 'Build Back Better' plan also known as B3W. This project wants to create a rival or at least competitor of China's BRI because later poses significant threat to prominence of the U.S and its allies in geo-political and economic arena (Global Village Space, 2021). NATO alliance and European countries has also declared China a security threat which has made China more assertive towards Western world. China has declared that the time when small group of countries decided the fate of world has ceased to exist. It has also tried to counter Quad alliance in Asia-Pacific region by strengthening its navy and modernization of military and nuclear forces. Hence, all these developments are bound to negatively impact the relations of Pakistan with China or Western countries as the room for diplomatic maneuvering between both sides would shrink with the increase of great power competition. The first time in the history of U.S the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) announced its mission called "China Mission Center" exclusively on China (Aljazeera, 2021). CIA's Chief has said that "CIA will deploy more officers, linguists, technicians, and specialists in countries around the world "would collect information to counter China (Harris 2021). China-U.S rivalry is not about the South China Sea or they do not have a particular tension in Indo- Pacific –both countries have designated interests and would not withdraw from their peripheries. Pakistan is a close ally of China – the U.S strategy and collaboration with India would impact Pakistan's interests.

### **CPEC and India's Strategic Narrative**



China-India, since 1962, has developed strong rivalry. India keeps her eyes close to look China's developments and military modernization. China's shift towards Pakistan is a great setback to India. China-Pakistan strategic relations are considered a great threat to India-thus India has posed a grave threat to CPEC "by distributing Rs 22 billion for promoting and carrying out terror activities in Pakistan" (Marwat, 2020). CPEC is viewed an economic game changer for Pakistan and the region. India is all focused to get regional superiority in South Asia, Pakistan and China "both share common objectives to prevent India's rise", (Ranado, 2021). India openly and officially criticizes CPEC- as Pakistan has handed over the Gwadar port to China which now will have an edge for China to access the Indian Ocean to "actualize a commercial base support in the Indian Ocean Region" (Mukherjee, 2018) which would uplift the Chinese blue water navy (Singh, 2015). To counter China, India has operationalized Chahbahar Iranian port that may not be productive as Gwadar port is. India-China direct conflict at Ladakh in 2020 has compelled Indian establishment to reevaluate its relations and foreign policy. Recently, India has joined the U.S led quadrilateral (Quad) alliance which would converge the members interests vis-à-vis China in Asian countries- Quad is also called "Asia's NATO" (Basrur & Kutty, 2021).

CPEC is a part of BRI which is a massive and worldwide project and tends to uplift the entire region to serve China's objectives- all Quad members; Australia, Japan, US and India, would influence BRI and its expansion around the world and coordinate the policies in the Indo-Pacific Region (Puthran & Baruah, 2020). The objective of this research is to explain the significance of Pakistan's China relationship as Pakistan is already beginning to feel a lot of changes not just economically but also politically, socially, and in terms of security. CPEC thus remains at the forefront of heated debates on current affairs and attracts the opinion and attitude of the United State towards the Pak-China relationship. This research will also highlight how important CPEC is to BRI.

## **Conclusion**

Globally, the United States is being threatened by the growing influence of China in all over the world- to counter China and its expansion U.S is making alliances which involves India- the major regional rival of China. Pakistan, however, is striving to maintain cordial relations with both the U.S and China, despite the rising tensions between both states. Pakistan has been a very close partner of the U.S during the Cold War and played fundamental role in Afghanistan in defeating the erstwhile Soviet Union empire. The U.S also provided Pakistan with military and economic assistance. Post-Cold War era increased gulf between Pakistan and the U.S.-and the power vacuum was filled by China which never disappointed Pakistan.

China has remained a steadfast ally of Pakistan which has stood with it in times of thick and thin. CPEC is one such example. Pakistan is of great importance to both countries because of its strategic positions and both U.S and China have their interests in which Pakistan can play a pivotal role. It is a challenge for Pakistan to carry out workable relations with the U.S while maintaining its iron alliance with China. India as a great rival of China and Pakistan has made alliances with U.S- this new regional and global nexus would increase instability at regional and global level.

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