

Sania Muneer *

Ammara Rabbani **

Asif Iftikhar ***

CPEC: Crafting a Rational Way towards Kashmir Dispute

Abstract

The china-Pakistan economic corridor (CPEC) project is a paramount investment by China under the framework of one belt, one road. CPEC invigorate the relationship between china and Pakistan by considering the new veracities of national and international politics with laying the foundation of highly systematic, advance and imperative interaction for promoting the development socially, economically, industrially, politically and strategically. The geo-economics dimension of CPEC is a rational step in crafting the way towards Kashmir conflict due to its geographically close proximity. Simultaneously, the CPEC route traverses Indian occupied Kashmir which is a bone of contention between two neighboring countries Pakistan and India since its inception. This constellation exhibits a new horizon, whereas CPEC could exert extra strain on bilateral relations of India and Pakistan. Contrary to this, the constructive role of CPEC is comprehensible by resulting a tranquil settlement of Kashmir conflict. This paper will examine the underlying debate on CPEC and the impact of enhanced cooperation between China and Pakistan on resolving Kashmir dispute. This paper is an attempt to answer the question if the success of CPEC could be functional in instigating the dialogue process for the resolution of 70 years old Kashmir dispute and historical analysis of China's policies toward Kashmir.. In the perspective of political economy, this gigantic project could have a negative impact if there is no peace and harmony in the region however, it can be more fruitful in accomplishing the desire objectives if it is dealt smartly.

Keywords: Jamu & Kashmir, Geo-strategic, India, Pakistan, China, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

Introduction:

The disputed territory of Kashmir is the key point along the One Belt one road (OBOR) as the road passes from the Gilgit-Baltistan which is part of Azad

* Sania Muneer, Faculty at School of Integrated Social Sciences, University of Lahore.

** Dr. Ammara Rabbani, Ph.D Research Scholar at the National Defense University, Islamabad.

*** Asif Iftikhar, Ph. D. Scholar, Department of Political Science, Minhaj University, Lahore.

Kashmir with little opposition from the locals. Indian resistance on China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is predominantly based on its stance to Gilgit-Baltistan region. Conversely, Beijing position on the matter was neutral to date but simultaneously, India has asked to become a part of CPEC and resolved the Kashmir dispute through negotiation with Pakistan.

Before it “China has always adhered to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, but that doesn't mean Beijing can turn a deaf ear to the demands of Chinese enterprises in protecting their overseas investments. Given the massive investment that China has made in countries along the One Belt, One Road, China now has a vested interest in helping resolve regional conflicts including the dispute over Kashmir between India and Pakistan. By playing the role of a mediator between Myanmar and Bangladesh¹, China can gather experience, which could perhaps serve as a prelude to future efforts by China to engage in regional affairs in South Asia and Southeast Asia.”²

The Outgoing debate and support on territorial dispute over Kashmir started between iron brothers, China and Pakistan when John Garver said in the beginning of 1964 China supporting the “Kashmiri people's war of self-determination”, a support interpret in the coming years to “material support to launch an insurgency” inside Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).³ China express to Pakistan in 1990 on Kashmir dispute was once “left over from history,” a chivalrous mode of saying it was not taking sides.⁴ Indubitably, the strategic cooperation of china and Pakistan is against the India such as the Karakoram Highway, conventional weapons and nuclear weapons.

In chorus, China is sitting in territory of Jammu and Kashmir which is claimed by India. Albeit, it's a reality its controlled position is entirely based on its expediency such as deal it as a bilateral dispute or continue her position as pro-Pakistan. The joint venture of CPEC between iron brothers is presenting the same scenario.⁵

China's embryonic Approach towards Kashmir:

CPEC is the project of \$56 billion which is the gigantic network of multiple development projects including motorways, hydropower, railways and economic booster to Pakistan in upcoming years. In last decades, the strategic relationships of Sino-Pak enrich in terms of defense and nuclear facets. Kashmir is the contentious conflict among the three nuclear (China, Pakistan and India) states; along with Jamu and Kashmir region is controlled by Indian armed forces which is against the will off majority.

China's approach towards Kashmir dispute between two rival countries (India and Pakistan) had a significant impact on regional stabilization and crises management struggle in the region of South Asia. China considers ‘Kashmir’ as a dispute between two neighboring countries and always supports the Pakistan's standpoint on Kashmir dispute⁶ and rejects the Indian claim “Kashmir is an integral part of India.” Bearing in mind this bone of contention, China's policies towards Kashmir varies with the passage of time. She suggests different mechanism and polices for

the resolution of decades old dispute over the time because of gradual changes in the policy of South Asia and improving relations with Western states.⁷

In September 2016, China raised its concern regarding the increasing tense situation in Kashmir and recapitulate her polices for peaceful resolution when nineteen Indian troops killed in a terrorist attack.⁸ The role and polices of China as a mediator in resolving the deescalate tension between India and Pakistan is more active in recent past than her 1960s belligerent foreign policy.

China's polices in the South Asian region faced the security threats in the early decades of Cold War from India and Indian alignment with Soviet Union which was the main rival of China. In 1962 after the Sino-Indian border war China became the part of anti-India military alliance with Pakistan. In 1950s China culminates her neutrality and turn as a vocal advocator of Pakistan stance on Kashmir. In 1963 Sino-Pakistan Frontier Agreement and Sino-Pak Boundary Agreement made China as a third party of Kashmir dispute. Additionally, making complex its capability to remain neutral which is mentioned in Article 6 of the Sino-Pak Boundary Agreement that "after the settlement of Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan the sovereign authority concerned will reopen negotiations with the Government of the People's Republic of China."⁹

In 1964 China supported Pakistan's standpoint on Kashmir and deserted her impartial position on Kashmir dispute in the same year.¹⁰ In the second month of the same year Ayub and Chou gave a mutual statement and exhibit the hope that Kashmir dispute would be resolved according "in accordance with the wishes of the people of Kashmir¹¹ as pledged to them by India and Pakistan"¹² Pakistan refuse to accept the Brezhnev Doctrine after the Tashkent Agreement because it was not in the interest of China¹³ During the 1965 war over Kashmir, China helped to craft the military approach and come up with the deterrence support of Pakistan against India.¹⁴

In this time, the foreign polices of China were in the support of self-determination and global nationalist movements, challenging and ideologically obsessed. Deng Xiaoping reconstructed the China's priorities in terms of economic development and established the relation with neighboring countries and charted the existing policy regarding the integrity on Kashmir dispute. Resultantly, the efforts of the Chines Leader Deng to stabilize the terms with India deliberately removed the intervention of China on the behalf of Pakistan.¹⁵ However, Deng's expressed his views on Kashmir dispute in 1980, that ... Kashmir ... was a bilateral issue left over from history between India and Pakistan, and should be resolved peacefully...¹⁶ Hence, the dogma of Chinese existing foreign policy and focus based on negotiation and dialogues and this tenet is considered the best possible way to resolve the global disputes. After 9/11 there was no change in China's policy over Kashmir but contrary to this after 2002 the relation between two rival neighbors India and Pakistan was conflicting, at this time Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs depict its official stand point on Kashmir issue:

"China's position on the issue of Kashmir has been clear cut. We have always maintained that the Kashmir issue is one between India and

Pakistan left over by history. China hopes that the two sides should seek new ways to appropriately solve the problem through peaceful exchanges and negotiations and refrain from military conflicts”.¹⁷

In present Scenario, China is hunting to enhance its investment in Pakistan however she is avoiding the major conflict with India which could threaten the increasing economic cooperation. Simultaneously to avoid the any major tension in 2015 Sino-Indian trade cooperation reached \$71.6 billion and in the same year, outpacing China-Pakistan trade which was estimated at \$19 billion. In the recent past May 2014 and 2016 China's investment in India valued \$956 million and President Xi Jinping assured to enhance the investment in India to \$20 billion in coming years. At the same time CPEC can generate a new equilibrium in terms of economic ties with India and Pakistan. But the India opposes and protests to Chinese investment over CPEC which route pass through Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Due to this emerging conflict over CPEC route China has not altered its formal position on Kashmir. Contrary to this, the enhanced interest in the stability of region has enlarged china's horizon which will bear fruit of CPEC.¹⁸

CPEC deluging effects on Kashmir:

Kashmir remains a stern part of CPEC Project as the route will pass through Gilgit-Baltistan which is claimed by India and Pakistan is part of Jamu and Kashmir. Kashmir is the key route to access Pakistan from China through Xinjiang. Although CPEC route is passing through this region but Beijing did not proposed any hydropower projects, economic scheme and infrastructure development strategy for this region under CPEC because of impending conflict. Stuck in a legal deadlock, the government of Pakistan did not invite any spokesperson from this region for meeting on the gigantic economic project of CPEC. Hence, this legal chasm increased trepidation not only for Pakistan but also for China if legal cover is not provided to Gilgit-Baltistan it can cause severe effects to the CPEC venture. In this regard, Pakistan is under the regional pressure to provide the constitutional status to Gilgit-Baltistan and China is also striving to grant it a legal cover for its investment under the CPEC. Albeit, it's a hard choice for Pakistan to grant the provincial status to Gilgit-Baltistan because there are insecurities inside Pakistan that New Delhi may use the alleged reason to legalize its claim on the Kashmir territory, via same constitutional procedure.¹⁹

On the other hand, India is highlighting the question its sovereignty and continuously emphasizing on the issue with iron brothers that CPEC project is not acceptable in Gilgit Baltistan region. Gen (ret'd) NC Vij an Indian Analyst stated “for India, this is a matter of concern not just because it is seen as an encircling move, but also because Chinese involvement and investments in PoK disturbs the status quo by making a material and substantive change in a territory over which India has a solid claim. Indian opposition to CPEC is, therefore, entirely justified.”²⁰ Bearing in mind the China's geo-strategic advancements under CPEC project, Indian policy makers proposed the military invasion in Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan administered Kashmir. In due course, after taking control over

contentious region India argued to built “a direct land link to Afghanistan and then to the Central Asian Republics, both of which are increasingly falling into the Chinese sphere of economic and political influence.”²¹

In such circumstances, Chinese analysts predict that China would find itself in danger if fight broke out on Kashmir dispute between two tense neighbors. Simultaneously, if China become conscious on the present constitutional limbo to Gilgit Baltistan and considered this region as a barricade to its economic goals than it can forced for peaceful resolution of dispute. In the security paradigm, the structures of economic route not only strengthen the improvement in road infrastructure for import and export but also regarding the geo-economic logistics and strategic cooperation. CPEC project protect the mutual interests of China and Pakistan in different spheres such as economic, security, energy and geostrategic cooperation. Sino-Pakistan cooperation in economic and military sector encourages Pakistan to consolidate its position in Gilgit-Baltistan and remain detrimental to the territorial claims of India.

Contrary to above all Indian think tanks policy makers has a political belief that Pakistan would be forced by commercial logic to connect India, which boost the Indian economy and every trade cooperation strategy will follow a North-South alliance towards India.²²

The Indian engagement in CPEC will turn to a greater advantage for New Delhi over Islamabad. On the other hand, “by embracing the east-west corridor through CPEC, Pakistan is not just abandoning its north-south trade alignment but also turning its back on the subcontinent and on South Asia. It sees itself as culturally in West Asia and strategically as located within the Chinese politico-economic zone. This means that irrespective of how impressively India’s economy grows in the coming decades, not only Pakistan but also the Central Asian states will not be interested in a South Asian economic linkage or integration.”

‘In such scenario, Kashmir will also be aligned with different countries because of its western and northern geographical boundaries towards China, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the existing borders could successfully force it to shun this geo-economic alignment for the past seven decades, and pushing it to follow a North-South alignment towards India, the region will seemingly not yield any significant economic benefits in wake of closed and impervious natural border.’

Above all discussion, the CPEC project may inversely work as a bridge between Pakistan administered Kashmir and India administered Kashmir and may have a spillover results on the weak economies of India and Pakistan. Although, the implementation of this prospect is entirely based on Indo-Pak relations. In the region of South Asia, CPEC gives the impression of realignment in terms of geo-economic, geo-politics and reviewing the relationships with different states bilaterally and multilaterally.

CPEC is a one belt one road project which connects the various Asian regions which potentially enhance the mutual dependence which leads towards the diffusion of impending disputes, support the regional integration and increased the

security. So, Beijing is playing an essential role in addressing the internal and external security challenges of Islamabad.

‘This geopolitical standing will effectively leave out India from an emerging geopolitical alliance with China, Pakistan and Russia as its principal drivers. India is effectively left with two options: Hope its predictions that the CPEC projects become nonviable to sustain the interest of Chinese investors in the long run comes true, or remain a fence watcher as the new geopolitics reality unravels. The latter seems not likely.’²³

CPEC is the resolution of Kashmir dispute:

CPEC will positively affect the resolution of Kashmir issue due to multiple reasons.

1. CPEC had a spillover effect on India-Pakistan relations and the Kashmir conflict.
2. **CPEC and role of international community:** Since the partition Kashmir dispute is awaiting for resolution. Pakistan always remains eager to find the solution of decade’s old dispute through mediator but India always opposed to disuses it bilaterally. Hence, in Kashmir the major trump chip of India has been its ‘so called vibrant democracy’ and gaining the world opinion in its favour. But, India lost this democratic chip in recent Kashmir elections. In terms of India and Pakistan relations it’s hard to imagine that bilateral talks are viable solution to resolve the Kashmir dispute while the negotiations and dialogues are suspended since long. However, the demand for the resolution of Kashmir conflict is growing by International community such as American influence with Pakistan is rapid eroding bearing in mind the chequered past relationships. Simultaneously, India also rejected the Turkish offer for the same cause but say no to China is a difficult task for India. Because China has massive interests in this region not for only reason she is neighbor but also due to economic corridor. Consequently, CPEC investor China will defiantly wish for peace and stability in the region which can only come true through peaceful resolution of Kashmir dispute. Apart from India CPEC is axis of all regional powers interest such as Russia has exhibited green signal in becoming part of economic corridor. In chorus, Iran has shown the same interest by trying to make sister ports (Charbahar port and Gawadar Port). Afghanistan may join this corridor because it’s a landlocked state. So consequently, when became economically useful and will gain the investment fruit then surely it will not be easy for India to stay secluded and deprived from economic benefits in the region. In above scenario, the joint expectation from CPEC for a peaceful and stable Asia to highlight the Kashmir dispute at international level and push India to resolve this core issue. Delhi’s policy makers should bear this fact in mind and act according to it because closing eyes like a pigeon is not a paramount solution of this dispute and delay in sensible solution extensively worst the relations.

3. **India's vested Interest:** In global village economic concerns prevails over the relations among the states. So in the case of Indian economic interest, India being a huge market for every product manufactured by any country has cemented its relationship with countries cutting across the divide. Bearing in mind this fact CPEC is one of the great game changers not only for China but particularly for Pakistan which has been a laggard in economy. Pakistan can use CPEC to bargain the resolution of Kashmir issue. India how reluctant it may seem this point has to join it due to economic interests and benefits it comes with for any country particularly in Asia. The ruling BJP government which has been pro business class can be pressed by them for better economic returns through CPEC. If tomorrow Ambani like businessmen feel that CPEC will multiply their returns for their products, they can chip in for friendly relationship with Pakistan.
4. **China meddling in the Kashmir dispute:** The change in Beijing's policy from non-interference to interfere in the other countries internal affairs is the immense opportunity for Pakistan. In this regard, the current mediation of China between Myanmar and Bangladesh over Rohingya issue in resolving the conflict is a sure sign for Pakistan that China will be ready to play its meddling role in the resolution of longstanding Kashmir dispute peacefully. Similarly the Beijing's support of Pakistan claim on Kashmir dispute also renders strength to the above argument. However, CPEC project will not only influence on geo-economics but also on geopolitics of South Asia through resolution of regional conflicts such as Kashmir conflict.
5. **First invest, next interfere:** CPEC project would have a great influence on the constitutional status of Gilgit-Baltistan region in Pakistan. As route of economic corridor passing through Gilgit-Baltistan which is claimed by India and prompted opposition of this route by New Delhi. Pakistan grants the special status to Gilgit-Baltistan. This region is part of Jammu and Kashmir which is disputed territory between India and Pakistan. The government of Pakistan introducing the series of reforms to improve the regional self-government of Gilgit Baltistan. Similarly CPEC project is an axis between China and Pakistan which will pressurize the aligned borders to resolve the Kashmir dispute which has the "nucleus" position in new venture.
6. **International organizations and CPEC:** In regional settings, Pakistan, India and China have shared borders on the one hand and China is developing friendly terms particularly with neighboring countries and generally with all in South Asian region on the other hand. In this regard China is capable to mould the regional milieu in any feasible circumstances. Kashmir conflict also linked with SAARC countries and

China's presence in SAARC as observer will be productive and quite helpful in resolving the dispute through regional cooperation.

Conclusion:

China Pakistan Economic Corridor is an opportunity which comes in-a century to let regional conflicts to retreat under the cover of profitable economic coalition that may increase life opportunities for the people of region. Pakistan Administrated Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan enclosure in one belt road one road project is a massive opportunity for the whole region and if India join this project than this economic promise can push the old rivalries to the side lines!

Notes & References

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