

## Securitization of China Pakistan Economic Corridor Amid India China Rivalry

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### ABSTRACT

China Pakistan economic corridor (CPEC) is the flagship project of the Belt and Road initiative (BRI). The project has been considered the guarantor of Pakistan's economic development and has the potential to significantly improve the Pakistan gross domestic product and to transform Pakistan economy from import driven to export driven. Since the project has been under various impediments particularly in the domain of security, there have been several attacks on the Chinese personal working on the projects and its installations, majorly prompted by the Indian backed proxies and non-state actors in Pakistan. The Potential threats to the success of CPEC have been enhanced due the growing and intensifying India china rivalry. The securitization of the CPEC from all potential threats is a matter of national interest and ensuring national and economic security. This paper highlights the importance of CPEC for Pakistan's economy, potentials threats to the CPEC emanating from the Indian backed-proxies, discuss security measures taken to address these concerns and suggests a strategic path forward for the project securitization.

**Keywords:** CPEC, BRI, Economic development, Indian-backed proxies, Securitization, Export driven economy, Non-state actors.

### Introduction

Pakistan has strategic and cordial relations with china and this relationship has been broad dimensions and deepening cooperation. One of the areas of mutual interest is economic cooperation and economic development of Pakistan, CPEC is one such project. The project entails 62-billion-dollar investment in Pakistan across various sectors. The first phase of the china Pakistan economic corridor includes 3000 km of road networks connecting Pakistan Gwadar port to the Chinese city of kashghar in the xinjing region. It also includes the building of various power projects across Pakistan to ensure energy security of Pakistan. The first phase of the china Pakistan economic corridor has been completed successfully.

The second phase of the china Pakistan economic corridor is considered vital for the economic transformation of Pakistan. Second phase of the china Pakistan

economic corridor is about industrialization and bringing foreign direct investment across multiple sectors. Pakistan has established Five special economic zones in which investments are welcomed all across the world through special incentives. There have been significant developments in the second phase of china Pakistan economic corridor. Special economic zones have attracted investments in various sectors particularly in the information technology, engineering and agriculture. The success of the china Pakistan economic corridor is highly depending on the success of the second phase of the project.

CPEC has confronted various challenges and impediments. The most significant challenge is the security challenge. The extent and scope of the project makes it even more vulnerable to various security threats. Various attacks have been carried out on the Chinese and Pakistani nationals working on the CPEC. These attacks have been carried out by different non state actors. The investigation of these attacks revealed the indolent of the Indian backed proxies and local non-state actors influenced by Anti-CPEC ambitions. The primary aim of these attacks is to sabotage the CPEC's second phase and hurt the vital economic interests of china and Pakistan.

Security challenges have significantly impacted the progress on the second phase of CPEC. This challenge has also provided Pakistan the opportunity to revisit the security strategy of the project. The security aspect of the CPEC has become more prominent due to the growing India china rivalry. The competition and rivalry between India and china in the region has been growing after the border skirmishes in Laddakh region. India has always showed its opposition to the CPEC and currently intensifying its malicious design through propaganda warfare and attacks to deter the progress and future investment under the CPEC.

### **The Concept of Securitization**

The theory of securitization explains any potential threat that could be considered a threat to national security by the political leadership and policy makers of the State. These threats may be political or armed resistance by various non-state actors or it could be economic hindrances by external factors (Šulović, 2010). Apart from this, direct or indirect interference of another state in state affairs can also be taken as a threat in this regard.

The mechanism of Securitization of CPEC involves the creation and execution of comprehensive procedures aimed at protecting the CPEC against dangers from both internally and externally. Internally, these actions seek to mitigate possible threats including terrorism, political unrest, and local opposition by enlisting the assistance of Pakistani security forces, intelligence services, and local communities (Banik & Lüder, 2020) . When looking outward, the emphasis changes to reducing the risks associated with geopolitical tensions, border disputes, and regional crises. Successful securitization necessitates international collaboration,

diplomatic involvement, and the construction of strong defenses to safeguard CPEC assets, guaranteeing the project's continuous advancement and prosperity.

## **CPEC pivotal to Pakistan's Economic Security**

Pakistan has been bestowed with remarkable geo-strategic location. It has ideal geography to connect central Asia and West Asia with South Asia. The ideal geographic location is in the form of "Raw advantage" and this raw advantage must be utilized in line with contemporary consideration to transform Pakistan economic outlook. Pakistan has not been able to fully capitalize on its vital geo-economic position. It has been occupied with geo-Political turmoil in the region and has not been considering the economic damage to the country. CPEC has provided that opportunity to transform Pakistan's economic outlook and prioritize economic security.

Pakistan has launched its first National Security Policy (NSP) in 2022. The policy demonstrated a significant shift from geo-strategic to the geo-economic. The shift aims to prioritize the economic security and the human security. Pakistan has CPEC as priority project which could be the game changer in the aspect of ensuring economic security. The pivotal role of the CPEC in Pakistan economic security is evident through the significant investment in the domain of infrastructure development and industrialization (Ismail & Husnain, 2022). CPEC has also played its role in improving human security by people-centered approach of prosperity and human development.

CPEC is pivotal to Pakistan's economic security because it disseminates the untapped potential of Pakistan's geo-economic position. It is a strategic economic project aiming at the regional connectivity for the economic development of Pakistan (Javed & Ismail, 2021). It enables Pakistan in enhancing integration with the region and attaining economic prosperity and development. CPEC initiative has been playing crucial role in the development of infrastructure and human resources. This leads to the improvement in trade and economic activity across various sectors particularly information technology, Science, tourism and agriculture (Fazal et al., 2023).

CPEC impacts and outcomes have been very remarkable on economic development and capacity building.

## **First Phase Outcomes**

### **I. Energy**

New electricity generation capacity of 5300MW has been installed. Transmission lines of 880 KM have been completed. Various project of 3500MW are under implementation Phase. Number of projects are also planning phase. The focus of these projects is to generate environment friendly renewable energy.

## **II. Transport Infrastructure**

Under CPEC 1800 km of new motorways and highways have been completed and functional. Various urban mass transit projects have been completed. An optic fiber cable of 820KM has been laid to boost information technology infrastructure. An International airport project at Gwadar is completed. There are various upcoming railway infrastructure projects one of them is “Main line” ML-1 railway project comprise of esteemed 1700KM railway network. This project will significantly boost the logistic capacity and capability of Pakistan railway.

## **III. Regional Connectivity**

CPEC has enhanced Pakistan’s regional connectivity structure. It provides excellent route for transport and energy corridor for Central Asia and West Asia. These are various regional energy connectivity prospects have been planned like TAPI project CASA-1000 electricity project.

### **Second Phase**

The successful completion of first phase of CPEC has resulted in significant improvement in capacity building for industrialization. Energy and infrastructure projects in the phase one are the main catalyst for industrial development and economic progress. Second phase of the CPEC will enable Pakistan to boost its industrial and manufacturing output through the development of special economic zones and attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in special economic zones. Second phase of the CPEC has following paramount.

#### **i. Industrial Cooperation**

In second phase of the CPEC, there are total five special economic zones including a Gwadar free trade zone being developed in priority. The purpose of all these special economic zones is to attract local and foreign investors for investment across various sectors. All these special economic zones offer special incentives for investments and being facilitated by the board of Investment and CPEC authority for the establish of new industry, investments are opened for all over the world. Special economic zones offer attractive investment including ten years’ tax holiday, zero import duty on plant and machinery and facility of 100% profit repatriation. CPEC authority has setup “Investment Facilitation Center” Plug and Play environment being created in special economic zones for the expeditious implementations.

#### **ii. New Areas of Cooperation**

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The scope and spectrum of the second phase of CPEC is broad and Flexible. New sectors and areas of cooperation are being developed. The aim is to modernize the existing sectors and capitalize on the untapped potential of those particular sectors. Followings are the sectors in which cooperation is being enhanced for the upgradation and modernization for the sectors.

- a) Cooperation in Science and Technology
- b) Information Technology
- c) Agriculture

### **China India Rivalry Augmenting the Security Threat to the CPEC**

World has been witnessing a transformable change in the power structure. The rise of China has triggered a great power competition and the Geo-Political confrontation. United States in Particular and West in general has embarked on the journey to contain and compete with China (S. M. Ali, 2020). They have considered India as a regional counter weight to China and have been aligning with India in various global and regional initiatives to contain and compete with China. The reemerging of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) has been viewed by China as the Cold War mentality and initiatives to contain China (Shah, 2023). India's convergence with West regarding containment of China has resulted in strained relationship with China. The bilateral Issues between China and India particularly border tension and skirmishes has provided an impetus in developing the rivalry and competition. The border issues between the two countries has been longstanding but the recent tension have not been resolved after several rounds of negotiations (Boni, 2021).

CPEC has been the flagship project of China's BRI. It aims at the enhanced regional connectivity and economic development. India is the only country in the South Asia which refused to join the BRI and disregarded the initiative of regional connectivity. It has raised objections on CPEC, Cutting the false claims of sovereignty over the land. Pakistan and China has outrightly rejected the claims and highlighted that India's objections and opposition are not in line with the United Nation's standing on the Issues. India's opposition to the BRI particularly CPEC is evident through its blocking the joint resolution of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) during the 2023 annual Summit. The joint resolution stress the need for enhanced regional connectivity (Landberg, 2019a).

India China rivalry has been manufacturing in many areas particularly in China's global and regional connectivity project. India has also been part of some rival alternative connectivity project both at land maritime domain. India's rivalry and competition with China pose a significant threat to the success and progress of the various connectivity project particularly CPEC. Among all the threats to the success and progress of the CPEC the security threat is paramount. The progress on the CPEC has been halted and delayed several time due to the attacks on the Chinese and Pakistani Nationals. The project installations have also been under various security threats. China India rivalry and competition has enhanced the

level of security threats to the CPEC. This security threat has been at the forefront of Pakistan national agenda (Landberg, 2019b).

India has employed hybrid war strategy against Pakistan. The primary objective of this is to harm Pakistan's economic interest. CPEC is at the forefront of its malicious design against Pakistan. It has been targeting CPEC through propaganda and sponsoring terror attacks. The release of European Union disinfoLab findings demonstrated India's heinous design (S. Ali et al., 2022). It has also lobbied at the various international forums particularly in FATF to harm Pakistan's economic interests (Dar, n.d.). India has been sponsoring terrorism in Pakistan by founding and controlling non-state actors. Pakistan has unveiled and thwarted several terror networks linked to India. It has arrested India's serving naval officer which validates India's sponsor terrorism against Pakistan. India has also been collaborating and assisting Baloch separatist movements and Tehrek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). These two banned outfits have been involved in multiple terror attacks in Pakistan. Most of these attacks were against CPEC and directly impacted the progress and success of CPEC (Verma, 2020). India's malicious design against Pakistan and the China India rivalry and competition has augmented the security threat to the progress and success of CPEC.

### **Securitization of CPEC**

CPEC has been under security threats and propaganda of misinformation since its inauguration back in 2015. The project facing propaganda worldwide by the Chinese rival states, propagating it as a "Debt Trap" in which China will get the maximum and that will be caused unbearable burden of Chinese debt to dwindling Pakistan's economy (Afzal & Naseem, 2018). Apart from this propaganda a number of attacks on Chinese interests in Pakistan specifically linked to the CPEC have been reported. Different Indian backed terrorist groups have been actively engaged in targeting CPEC infrastructure. Terrorist organizations Like Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA), Baluchistan Liberation Front (BLF), United Baloch Army and TTP have been actively involved in attacks on the Chinese personals and CPEC installations (Verma, 2020). These terrorist organizations have their safe hideouts in Afghanistan and Iran, from where they are operating. Pakistan has been in contact with concerned governments to eradicate this potential threat. The recent operation "Marag bar SarMachar" conducted by Pakistan Army in Iranian province Sistan against terrorist involved in cross border terrorism indicates Pakistan's strong containment approach against factors involved in terrorist activities in Pakistan.

The securitization of the CPEC is paramount, given its strategic importance and the various security challenges it faces. Chinese concerns over the security of CPEC primarily revolve around ensuring the safety of their investments and personnel in Pakistan, as well as safeguarding the uninterrupted flow of goods and resources along the corridor. It is important to address the concerns of the local

population along the CPEC route to address support and resentment about potential destabilizing factors, including environmental damage and land acquisition (Zhongxing, 2023). To secure CPEC infrastructure and counter security threats from insurgent groups, criminal elements and foreign interference, Pakistan's security apparatus including Special Services Division, Task Force-88, Pakistan Rangers, Levies and Frontier Corps. These organizations work together to offer all-round security coverage to guarantee smooth development and operation of CPEC projects while maintaining regional stability (Khan, 2016).

Pakistan has established special security apparatus to securitize installations under CPEC.

### **1. Special Security Division (SSD)**

The purpose of the SSD is to safeguard CPEC workers and projects. SSD, which is made up of civil wings and army battalions, works with law enforcement and other security agencies to guarantee safety along the CPEC route.

### **2. Frontier Corps**

Securing CPEC enterprises in Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces is the responsibility of the Frontier Corps (FC). Their knowledge of the local environment and people helps them efficiently tackle security risks.

### **3. Pakistan Ranger**

The deployment of Pakistan Rangers in the provinces of Punjab and Sindh enhances the security of the CPEC infrastructure in these regions. Their principal function in border security is in line with defending important transit corridors that are essential to CPEC.

### **4. Levies Force**

Baluchistan The locally recruited force known as levies is essential to preserving law and order in Baluchistan, the location of several CPEC projects. Their understanding of the local populace and terrain enhances security measures.

### **5. Task Force-88**

Gwadar Port, which is essential to the CPEC, is protected by enhanced coastal security measures. Maritime security agencies along the CPEC route will collaborate with improved surveillance to guarantee the protection of maritime infrastructure.

When taken as a whole, these security divisions give CPEC a multi-layered security framework that tackles a range of dangers and obstacles to its efficient execution and the advancement of regional connectivity and economic prosperity.

### **Internationalising the Security Challenge**

Since CPEC has been facing number of challenges internally and externally, the containment of these challenges requires a comprehensive diplomatic approach addressing the issue by engaging regional and International stakeholders and forums. Internationalizing the security problem will help Pakistan to counter Indian propaganda against CPEC. It is crucial engaging with regional stakeholders like Afghanistan and Iran to mitigate cross-border terrorism and security concerns. Furthermore, the security of Gawadar infrastructure and to keep Indian aggression away from Bay Pakistan should use the influence of multinational task forces in maritime security. Pakistan is member state of Task Force-150 and Task Force-151, using the influence of these maritime International buildups Pakistan can neutralize Indian aggression. Pakistan should establish a comprehensive mechanism of intelligence sharing among regional stakeholders to minimize cross-Border infiltration and to safeguard CPEC infrastructure and regional stability.

A comprehensive diplomatic approach addressing the issue by including regional and international stakeholders and forums is necessary to mitigate the challenges that CPEC has been facing, both internally and externally. Internationalizing the security issue will assist Pakistan in fending against Indian disinformation over the CPEC. Developing relationships with regional actors like as Afghanistan and Iran is essential to reducing the threat of cross-border terrorism and security issues. Furthermore, Pakistan should leverage the power of multinational task forces in marine security to protect the Gawadar facilities and deter Indian aggression from infiltrating the Bay. As a participant in Task Forces 150 and 151, Pakistan is able to counteract Indian aggression by using the influence of these international marine buildups. To reduce cross-border infiltration, protect the CPEC infrastructure, and maintain regional peace, Pakistan should set up an extensive system of intelligence sharing among regional parties.

### **Modern Technology a Paramount Security Apparatus**

To create all-encompassing policy suggestions to enhance the security of the CPEC in a multitude of domains, including intelligence gathering, cyber security, space security, law enforcement agency-central government coordination, and the strategic use of drone technologies. Tests are recommended. Cyber security is the top priority in order to safeguard CPEC's infrastructure and data integrity from ever-increasing cyber threats. Pakistan should invest heavily in cutting-edge cyber security technologies and prioritize developing a robust cyber defense. In order to identify vulnerabilities and weak areas in the digital infrastructure supporting CPEC operations, regular cyber security audits must to be carried out. The creation



of specialized Cyber Emergency reaction Teams will ensure a prompt and efficient reaction to cyber incidents, hence mitigating any potential delays in CPEC activities. The implementation of National Cyber Security Policy 2021 in its true sense would be effective to combat emerging cyber-security threats. Pakistan should collaborate with China to benefitting its Great firewall cyber technologies for the purpose of monitoring and surveillance of suspicious cyber activities.

Geographic Information system (GIS) are now consider very important for aerial surveillance, satellite imagery, imagery and remote sensing technology can be used as an effective weapon for counter-terrorism in Pakistan. Identifying potential hideouts and movements of militants can be very helpful for security agencies to provide security shield to CPEC. Apart from this effective use of Drone technology can be very useful to securitize CPEC infrastructure. Pakistan is currently using home-made drone technology for border security; high resolution cameras, thermal imagining and night vision capabilities make these drones even more effective. Pakistani Burraq and Shahpar drones are equipped with night vision technology. Additionally Pakistan has acquired its CH-4 and Wing Loong II drones from China which are equipped with advanced technology. The use of drone technology is not only effective in preventing border infiltration, but it is also very useful for the security of CPEC infrastructure and monitoring the movement of militants.

The most important is mutual coordination between various security agencies and policy makers so that there is no delay in decision making and its implementation. Due to the lack of integrated communication network between various anti-terrorism agencies in Pakistan, counter-terrorism operations are failing to yield desired results. There is a need for setup within National Security Committee (NSC) to provide coordination in CPEC security, border infiltration and counter-terrorism operations. Intelligence sharing with regional stakeholders on regular basis, and counter terrorism exercises would be effective in this regard. Information sharing and mutual coordination can not only help in taking immediate and effective actions, but also prevent terrorist incidents in the future.

## **Conclusion**

Pakistan has the game changing project in the form of CPEC to capitalize on its geo economic potential. CPEC enables Pakistan to transform its economy and emerge as a nucleus of regional connectivity project. The project has been subjected to various security challenges amid the global and regional geopolitics. The country has a tedious task of insulating the CPEC from any security challenges.

The national security policy of Pakistan emphasizes the economic security and people centric policies. CPEC is vital project for Pakistan economic security and the development and prosperity of the people. Therefore, securitization of the CPEC is national security objective. All the stakeholders of policy formation

should develop a comprehensive policy in this regard with consensus. The implementation of the polices will ensure the success and development of the CPEC.

Pakistan ought to take proactive measures to involve regional entities such as Afghanistan and Iran in order to reduce security threats and stop Indian stooges from undermining CPEC. Key tactics in discouraging hostile activity and advancing regional stability will be fostering diplomatic communication, strengthening border security cooperation, and increasing economic interdependence. Through the establishment of robust connections and cooperative alliances with adjacent nations and regional players, Pakistan may efficaciously augment the security milieu enveloping CPEC and guarantee its enduring prosperity and durability.

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