

The Geopolitics of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and India's Response

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Abstract

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is an economic corridor that would connect China's northwestern region of Xinjiang to the port city of Gwadar in Pakistan. This corridor is expected to cost several billions of dollars. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a prime example of China's long-term geopolitical objectives in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) poses serious geopolitical and security challenges for India. Concerns over India's territorial integrity and the region's increased militarization, as well as China's naval development in the Indian Ocean, present formidable obstacles to the pursuit of geopolitical objectives in the region. Since India is one of the key players in the South Asia region, an effort is made in this study to investigate the geopolitical and security effects that the CPEC might have on India. In this paper, an attempt is made to explore the geopolitical and security repercussions that the CPEC might have on India since India is considered one of the major players in the South Asia region.

Keywords: Geopolitics, CPEC, South Asia, Indian Ocean region, Malacca Dilemma,

Introduction

The idea of geopolitics has been around nearly as long as the modern state itself. As per geopolitics, the geographical location, space, size, and natural resources of a state all contribute to determining that state's political position in relation to the rest of the globe. It is founded on the extensive basis of geography, in particular political geography, which can be defined as "the science of political space of organisms and their structure" (Scholvin, 2016). In layman's terms, geography plays the most crucial part in the process of formulating policies and ideas, which either hinder or facilitate the activities of governments in the global realm (Cohen, 1964). During the time of the Cold War, when history witnessed two dominant powers—namely the United States and the Soviet Union—competing to expand their spheres of influence, geopolitics emerged as the most prominent phenomenon (Mackinder, 1904).

A fresh lease on life was breathed into the concept of geopolitics in the modern era by the growth of China and its shifting position in world politics. It is expected that the project will connect China to sixty-five countries all over the world, helping 4.4 billion people through 40 percent of world GDP and garnering new friends and allies for Beijing (Hussain 2016). Although China forcefully denied the geopolitical connotations of the project by exposing geoeconomic factors, the doubters claim that it would provoke a geopolitical confrontation. For example, the US and Japan are reluctant to join BRI, while simultaneously, India highlighted its apprehensions over the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is a flagship project of BRI (Hussain and Jamali, 2019). Thus, the CPEC project has the ability to change the geopolitical landscape within the enhanced interconnectedness of

the infrastructure projects, including roads, trains, and ports across different regions, especially in South Asia (Khan, 2018). The flagship project might help Pakistan integrate more entirely into the regional economy and, at the same time, extend China's strategic influence from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea. Although the principal objective of CPEC is regional cooperation and integration, other regional players, including USA, India and Japan, are considering it as a dream project of China to preserve its supremacy in the South Asian region. The purpose of this article is to study the geopolitics involved in the development of CPEC's economic and infrastructure projects, as well as their repercussions on India.

CPEC and a New Bonhomie of China-Pakistan

The BRI was conceptualized by Chinese President Xi Jinping. It was officially announced during his 2013 trips to Kazakhstan and Indonesia. The project has two primary domains: the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road of the 21st Century (Hussain, 2019). China has the most population of any country in the world. In addition to this, it is a rising power that is rapidly expanding its economic influence. By doing so, its indigenous natural resources are continuously drying up, which has been expanding Beijing's requirement for imported energy and gas resources to upsurge the country's already robust economic progress. (Hussain, 2019). When compared to other corridors, CPEC is centred on only one country, Pakistan, because Pakistan is abundant with geostrategic location which connects energy-affluent Central Asia and the Middle East with energy-starved South Asia. Therefore, CPEC is expected to reduce the distance between China and countries in the Middle East that are rich in oil by around 13000 to 2500 kilometres. Additionally, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) creates a safe passage and lessens the impact of the so-called 'Malacca Dilemma.' At the moment, seventy percent of China's energy supply travels through the Strait of Malacca, which is controlled by both Indian and American naval forces. This creates an ongoing security risk for China. The fact that China is so dependent on the Malacca Strait presents significant obstacles to energy security. In addition, disruptions to the flow of crude oil to Beijing are more likely to occur in the periphery because of the increased likelihood of unforeseen circumstances. Any act of piracy, oil spills, or shipping catastrophes would all intersect with traffic via the Strait, which is a massive concern for policymakers in Beijing to worry about (Brutlag, 2011). As a result, the primary goal of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is to solve the Chinese Malacca Dilemma by providing Beijing with an alternative route. It will shorten the energy and commercial route from Gwadar to Kashgar in China from around 12,000 kilometres through the water to approximately 3,000 kilometres via land (Akram, 2016). The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has enormous potential for China in both the geopolitical and economic spheres. Its primary objective is to transform China from a country bordering only one sea into a nation bordering two seas, thereby avoiding the disruption of trade worth four thousand billion dollars through the Malacca Strait and other potential bottlenecks (Mahmood, 2016).

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a game-changing project for Pakistan. It comprises better communication and commerce ties between Pakistan and China through a network of road, rail, fibre optic cable, energy pipelines, and power production projects. The plan calls for an investment of 62 billion dollars which will be paid by China. It is hoped that this would make the region more prosperous. Pakistan has stated that one of the goals of the CPEC is to swiftly improve its infrastructure in order to develop its economy. This would be accomplished by the construction of multiple energy projects, new transportation networks, and special economic zones. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) plan calls for the construction of an extensive network of highways and railways that will span the length and breadth of the country, which has a population of over 220 million people and is the fifth most populated in the world.

For example, the new port that is being created in Gwadar is connected to the one in Karachi, and the two ports are going to be connected to places farther north in western China and Central Asia. The plan for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) includes the construction of a highway that is 1,100 kilometres long and will connect the major cities of Karachi and Lahore. Additionally, the Karakoram Highway will be completely reconstructed and overhauled from

Hasan Abdal to the Chinese border.

The main railway line from Karachi to Peshawar is also being renovated so that trains will be able to run at speeds of up to 160 kilometres per hour. In the not too distant future, Pakistan's railroad system will also be expanded so that it may link up with the Southern Xinjiang Railway in Kashgar, China.

Security Implications for India

The significance of the CPEC was examined through the prism of geopolitics in the prior sections. The purpose of this section is to highlight the growing security implications that CPEC would have for India. The South Asian superpower is trapped in by two historical rivals, both of which it has engaged in conflict with in the past. India believes that China and Pakistan are using CPEC as a tool to undermine India's influence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). This section will investigate the ways in which the CPEC presents a threat to India's national security.

The Indian government expressed concern over the Chinese investment in CPEC projects, most of which were located in Gwadar Port. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) passes through Gilgit-Baltistan, which is located in the portion of Kashmir that is administered by Pakistan and is a hotly contested territory between India and Pakistan. The entire Kashmir region is regarded by India as an inseparable component of its own territory, and the Indian government views Pakistan's rule over the western portion of the region as illegitimate. Therefore, India considers this territory to be part of the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) region (Gill, 2020).

Therefore, the leadership regards CPEC as an incursion into its territorial sovereignty, and they believe that China is attempting to encircle India through economic and commercial activity along the country's border. Experts in foreign and security policy underline that the port of Gwadar has minimal potential for economic growth and that it is planned to become a prospective military base for the Chinese expansionist naval fleet and activities throughout the Indian Ocean. Because the land is seen to be the physical 'umbilical chord' linking China and Pakistan (Singh, 2013), and because it is a critical part of the CPEC, China does not want the matter to be resolved in favour of India. This is one of the factors that is aggravating the situation. To make matters even more challenging, in 1963, as part of a deal known as the "Sino-Pakistani boundary agreement," Pakistan handed over to China thousands of square kilometres of the area that India regarded to be a part of India's territory in the PoK. (Lamb, 1964; Gill, 2020). This agreement is not recognized by India since the country views it as a direct threat to the sovereignty of its nation as well as its national security concerns. The participation of China in the historical issue causes India to experience an increasing amount of resistance. In addition, there have been claims of an increased presence of Chinese forces in the contentious region of Kashmir, also known as the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) by India (Chansoria, 2016). This could be interpreted by China as a means through which it can protect its interests in the CPEC project.

India was the only South Asian country that choose not to attend the BRI forum that was hosted in Beijing to voice its reservations on CPEC. This decision was made because of the concerns that were discussed above. Both China and India are establishing themselves as major countries and are showing their strength in the Indian Ocean. However, from New Delhi's point of view, the Indian

Ocean is a region under its sphere of influence; hence, it is unable to ignore Chinese incursions that threaten to violate its lawful claim.

In addition, India is concerned that when CPEC will be fully operational and it will start generating dividends for China and Pakistan, it will most likely internationalize the fundamental problem of Kashmir. This causes India a great deal of anxiety (Dar, 2018). Due to the fact that the Kashmir dispute lies at the centre of the South Asian security conundrum, the passage of CPEC through the disputed territory in question represents more of a challenge to India's national sovereignty than anything else. Although China is adhering to a policy of non-interference at the moment, India maintains that in the not too distant future, Beijing may shift its stance and may try to convince New Delhi to resolve the dispute in accordance with UN resolutions.

India's Response and Changing geopolitics of the Indian Ocean

It is impossible for India to put any kind of restrictions on Chinese activity in the Indian Ocean. In spite of this, India is bolstering its military might and working more closely with other states in the area in an effort to contain China's expanding influence. Both India's domestic and international agendas place a significant emphasis on the region known as the Indian Ocean.

India has an inherent geographic advantage over China in the area encompassing the Indian Ocean. In contrast to China, it is situated in the north-central part of the Indian Ocean; as a result, the entire breadth of the Indian Ocean is within easy reach of the Indian navy. The Indian armed forces, particularly its navy, have been highly active in influencing the strategic affairs of the Indian Ocean over the course of the past several decades.

It is now widely recognized that the rise of India's naval force in the new millennium and the country's active maritime engagement in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) are significant contributors to the formation of the region's geopolitical dynamics (Brewster, 2016). India has, over the course of many years, worked to cultivate stronger relations with countries that are located in the western Indian Ocean, such as Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique (Gurjar, 2019). During the 1980s, India was also quite active in providing assistance to the governments of the Maldives, Seychelles, and Mauritius in their fight against potential subversive activities (Singh, 2017). India had established listening stations in the region for the purpose of gathering intelligence, and the country is interested in constructing major infrastructural facilities in island republics such as Seychelles and Mauritius.

Since 2008, the Indian navy has been participating in anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia, much like China has been doing so. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Mozambique, Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan are just a few of the countries in the region where Indian troops have been stationed. India has been an active participant in the peacekeeping operations in the region (Mukherjee, 2015). India faces a number of severe problems as a result of China's growing economic and political dominance as well as its expanding naval activities in the Indian Ocean. New Delhi considers the Indian Ocean to be its natural sphere of influence. Thus, it would be highly concerned if an adversarial external power, such as China, were to establish a powerful and long-term military presence in the area. As a result, India is concerned about the rising number of Chinese naval actions in the Indian Ocean as well as the presence of Chinese personnel in Hambantota (Chaudhury, 2019). India has a two-pronged plan to oppose the activities of China. First, it will interact with other regional states that share its views and create strong ties with them. Second, it will build its own diplomatic, economic, and naval strength to be in a position to shape the politics of the region.

To begin with, Indian diplomacy has become more active in the Western Indian Ocean as a direct response to the growing influence of China in that region (WIO). The Indian Ocean tour that Prime Minister Modi took in 2015 included visits in the strategically positioned island states of Sri Lanka, Seychelles, and Mauritius. These trips took place very recently. The purpose of these visits was to strengthen India's leverage and counteract the growing influence of China in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). India has articulated its vision for the Indian Ocean as Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), which stands for "Security and Growth for All in the Region." This was done to emphasize the significance of the Indian Ocean for India's foreign and security policy (Kumar, 2017).

Since 2007, the Indian navy has been the primary organizer of the Indian Ocean Naval

Symposium (IONS), a gathering that brings together naval forces from throughout the Indian Ocean Region. In addition, during the past ten years, India has revitalized the Indian Ocean Regional Association (IORA), an organization whose mission is to foster regional collaboration. The India-Africa Forum Summits (IAFS), which were first held in 2008, provide an additional role in assisting India in engaging with littoral African governments in the Indian Ocean. As a result, IONS, IORA, and IAFS play a significant role in strengthening and broadening diplomatic, developmental, and security-related ties with major governments in the Indian Ocean region in general and states in the Western Indian Ocean region in particular.

India had inked a deal with the government of the Republic of Seychelles in 2015 to construct a naval station on the Assumption that the Island is marking a significant step forward in its involvement with the Indian Ocean Region. The establishment of such a station would have provided India with a stable foothold in the western part of the Indian Ocean. It would have improved India's ability to protect its interests and exert more power in the area.

It is impossible for India to put any kind of restrictions on Chinese activity in the Indian Ocean. In spite of this, India is bolstering its military might and working more closely with other states in the area in an effort to contain China's expanding influence. India is working to improve its connections with the most critical states in the region of Southeast Asia, such as Vietnam and Indonesia. The Indian navy has been increasing the amount of cooperation it has with other naval forces in the region, such as those of Singapore and Japan. France and Oman are the other two countries with whom India has signed support agreements for logistics (Pant, 2018). Both the Indian and the American navies collaborated with one another on a variety of problems and had a similar view of the security of the region. These navies have a vested interest in containing the expansion of Chinese power and are concerned about the expanding scope of Chinese naval operations (Guha, 2016). As a result, in 2017, India, the United States of America, Japan, and Australia initiated what is more often referred to as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. This came about as a response to the growing level of security competition in the Indian Ocean involving China (Prakash, 2017).

Second, as part of India's aim to build up its naval strength, a modernization programme for the Indian navy has been underway for some time now. This effort is expected to improve India's ability to project power and influence politics in the Indian Ocean Region. India has been steadily collecting and creating the necessary naval platforms in order to fulfil its long-term goal of constructing a blue-water navy (Scott, 2006). At the moment, the Indian navy makes use of an aircraft carrier called the INS Vikramaditya, and it is anticipated that the second aircraft carrier, the INS Vikrant, will be inducted into service very soon (Beckhusen, 2018). In a similar vein, a nuclear-capable submarine called INS Arihant has just finished its first deterrence patrol, and a second nuclear submarine is currently undergoing sea trials. These platforms are essential for bolstering maritime security and force projection in the region, which is necessary for preserving India's extensive maritime interests.

By participating in defence diplomacy, the Indian navy has the potential to serve not just as a valuable tool for achieving political and diplomatic goals but also to fulfil its primary mission of preserving maritime safety. The states that make up the IOR are pleased by the expansion of India's naval capability and do not necessarily view it as a threat. For instance, India had provided assistance to Mozambique's navy in order to ensure the safety of attendees at the summit of the African Union (AU) and the meetings of the World Economic Forum (WEF), which took place in 2003 and 2004, respectively (Chaudhuri, 2016). When compared to the Chinese navy, which operates in the Indian Ocean, a significant distance from its continent, the geographical and logistical advantages enjoyed by the Indian navy are absolutely clear. The question of whether or not India can turn these advantages into an actual maritime power in order to counteract the growing influence of China in the Indian Ocean remains unanswered, though.

Conclusion

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor was envisioned to further enrich the economic and trade relations within South Asia, especially between Pakistan and China, through the development of multiple connectivities,

energy, and telecommunication projects. This was to be accomplished with the goal of creating a China–Pakistan Economic Corridor. Although the project is purely economic in nature, strategic rivals such as India and the United States argue that it holds wider geopolitical and geostrategic consequences for regional and global actors. In addition to the well-known economic benefits that it has been marketed to achieve, the corridor possesses powerful geopolitical qualities that brings into light the strategic interests that China and Pakistan have in the Indian Ocean. These features are hidden from public view. The geopolitical dynamics of South Asia, which is already in the process of forming new alliances, have already been transformed as a result of the execution. India and the United States have developed plans to contend with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and to restrain the growing influence of China. In spite of India’s responses, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) continues to pose significant threats to India’s national security. These threats stem primarily from the inclusion of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in the project, the increased competition between the Chinese and Pakistani navies in the Indian Ocean, and the potential establishment of a Chinese military base in Gwadar. These repercussions are in direct conflict with India’s power aspirations and its interests in the Indian Ocean Region. India must continue to maintain its stance that it would not accept the inclusion of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in the CPEC and work to devise a strategy that will allow it to operate as a counter-weight to the CPEC in the region. In addition, India must utilize diplomacy to engage with its regional and extra-regional neighbours on the subject of the dangers of committing to the CPEC, which may in the future generate strategic rifts in its relations with those neighbours. In the end, if India participates in the massive construction project, it would pave the way for new opportunities for regional connection, economic growth, and the end of the animosity that has existed amongst regional competitors for the past many decades.

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