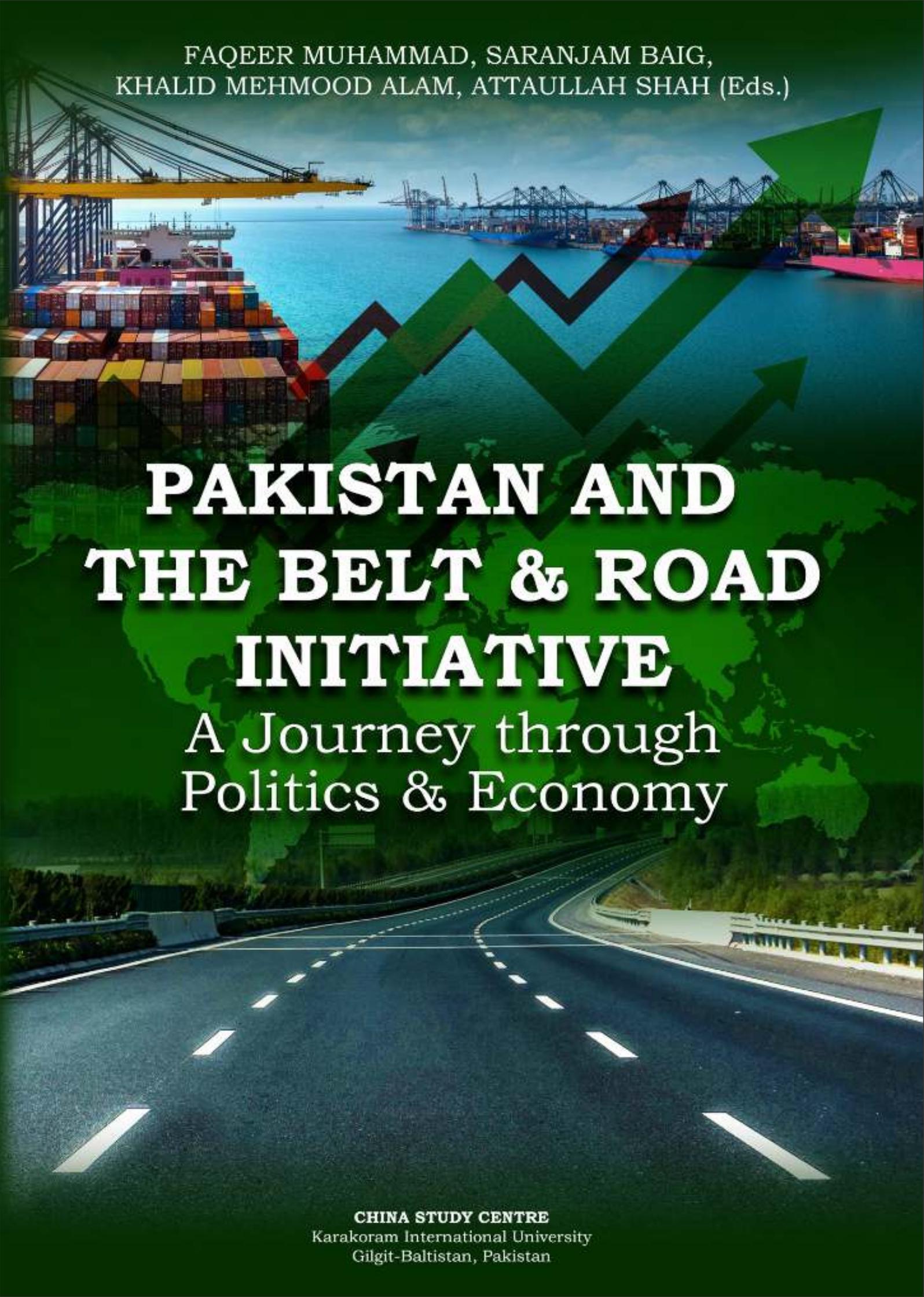


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PAKISTAN AND THE BELT & ROAD INITIATIVE

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CHINA STUDY CENTRE
Karakoram International University
Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan

Second Decade of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC-2.0): Introduction, Apprehensions, and Concerns

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Abstract

This chapter results from extensive discussions with intellectuals from various diplomatic and research institutions in Pakistan and China. These deliberations occurred during my visit with a delegation of diplomatic and academic experts from Pakistan, led by Ambassador Sohail Mahmood, Former Foreign Secretary of Pakistan and Director General of the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), in August 2023. The delegation included representatives from universities, diplomats, and media personnel. The chapter primarily focuses on the positive achievements of CPEC in its first decade while also addressing its challenges in its second decade. It was noted that the Chinese academia and diplomats have reservations about implementing mega projects under CPEC but remain committed to working with the Government and people of Pakistan to overcome any obstacles. Overall, the success of CPEC in its second decade (2024-2033) is contingent on Pakistan's economic and political stability.

The Unfortunate Incident of Besham (Dassu) Pakistan and the Immediate Response of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs

During my travels to China in March 2024 for a series of meetings, I was informed of a distressing incident involving a gruesome suicide attack on a Chinese convoy of staff working at the Diamer Bhasha and Dassu dams at Besham. This unfortunate event resulted in the death of five innocent Chinese individuals. Both nations have strongly condemned this incident and expressed their determination to work together toward the peace and prosperity of the region. The statement the Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson issued is provided below.

“China strongly condemns this terrorist attack. We express deep condolences over the lives lost and extend sincere sympathies to the bereaved families. China asks Pakistan to thoroughly investigate the incident as soon as possible, hunt down the perpetrators, and bring them to justice. Meanwhile, we ask

Pakistan to take effective measures to protect the safety and security of Chinese nationals, institutions, and projects in Pakistan. China is working with Pakistan on the follow-up work with an all-out effort. The Chinese Embassy in Pakistan has reminded Chinese citizens and businesses in Pakistan to closely follow the local security situation, take extra safety precautions, strengthen security measures, and do their best to guard against terrorist attacks.

That afternoon, Pakistani Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif visited the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan to convey condolences and sympathies to the bereaved families and the Chinese government. He strongly condemned the terrorist attack and said that terrorists' attempt to harm Pakistan-China friendship will never succeed. On the same day, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, the Foreign Minister, the Interior Minister, and several other political figures strongly condemned the attack and expressed condolences over the lives lost.

China and Pakistan are all-weather strategic cooperative partners and iron-clad brothers, and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) greatly contributes to Pakistan's socioeconomic development. No attempt to undermine China-Pakistan cooperation will succeed. China opposes all forms of terrorism and firmly supports Pakistan in fighting terrorism. China will work with Pakistan with an even stronger commitment to do everything possible to protect the safety and security of Chinese personnel, projects, and institutions in Pakistan.

Significant Achievements of the CPEC in the First Decade (2013-23)

As the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) advances, it is worth noting that the dividends of the mega projects are becoming more apparent despite the increasing resistance from that hostile towards the country. Before discussing the deliberations of the think tanks of the two countries, it is essential to highlight the significant achievements of CPEC in the past decade (Javed & Ismail, 2021). These achievements can be viewed from four perspectives: the Energy sector, Infrastructure and Development projects, the reinforcement of the Gwadar Port, and the establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) for industrial collaboration between the two nations. We will elaborate on each perspective.

Energy projects

Energy is the lifeline for the CPEC projects and development of Pakistan. In the first decade, fourteen energy projects have been completed, adding 10,000 MW to the national energy grid (Ul-Haq et al., 2021). The details of these projects are given in Table 1.

Table 1 Energy projects completed under CPEC in phase 1 (2013-2023)

S.NO	Project Title	Completion Cost (Million US\$)	Jobs Created	Financing	Supervising Agency
1	1320MW Sahiwal Coal-fired Power Plant	1912.2	1683	IPP	PPIB
2	1320MW Coal-fired Power Plant at Port Qasim Karachi	1912.2	1270	IPP	PPIB
3	320MW China Hub Coal Power Project, Hub Baluchistan	1912.2	1722	IPP	PPIB
4	660MW Engro Thar Coal Power Project Sind	995.4 (July 2029)	2500	IPP	PPIB
5	1000MW Quaid-e-Azam Solar Park (Bahawalpur) 400/600	520/780 (Aug 2016) 600 MW in prog.	231	IPP	PPDB/AEDB
6	50 MW Hydro China Dawood Wind Farm, Gharo, Thatta	112.65	28	IPP	AEDB
7	100MW UEP Wind Farm, Jhimpir, Thatta Sindh	250	54	IPP	AEDB
8	100MW Three Gorges Second and Third Wind Power Project	150	180	IPP	AEDB
9	Matiari to Lahore ±660 KV HVDC Transmission Line Project	1658.34	2212*	ITC	NTDC
10	720MW Karot Hydropower Project, AJK/Punjab	1720	4870*	IPP	PPIB
11	50MW Sachal Wind Farm, Jhimpir, Thatta	134	25	IPP	PPIB
12	330MW HUBCO Thar Coal Power Project (Thar Energy)	497.7	805*	IPP	PPIB
13	1320MW SSRL Thar Coal Block-I 7.8 mtpa & Power Plant - 2×660MW	1912.12	2000*	IPP	PPIB
14	330MW HUBCO ThalNova Thar Coal Power Project				

Source: CPEC Updates 2024

Infrastructure projects

Infrastructure development is a vital aspect of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which aims to facilitate the transport of goods and services (Alam et al., 2023). Six major projects have been completed in the first phase of CPEC, and five more are currently under construction. You can find more information about these projects in Table 2.

Table 2. Details of Infrastructure projects completed/ongoing under CPEC in Phase 1

S.NO	Project Title	Completion Cost (Million US\$)	Jobs Created	Financing	Supervising Agency
1	120km-KKH Phase II (Havelian – Thakot)	1315	5500	GCL	MoComm.
2	292 km-Peshawar-Karachi Motorway (Multan-Sukkur Section)	2889	28000	GCL	MoComm.
3	27 km-Orange Line Metro Train - Lahore	1626		GCL	MoComm
4	820 km-Cross Border Optical Fiber Cable (Khunjab – Rawalpindi)	44	1100		
5	Pilot Project of Digital Terrestrial Multimedia Broadcast (DTMB)	4			
6	297km-Hakla DI Khan Highway	122.181	6700		MoComm/NHA
	In Progress Projects				
1	305 km Zhob - Quetta (Kuchlak) (N-50)	66.833			

2	106km-Khuzdar-Basima Road (N-30)	PKR 19.19 billion			
3	146 km-Hoshab - Awaran Road Section (M-8)	PKR 26 billion			
4	153 km-KKH Alternate Route Shandur - Chitral Road	PKR 16 billion			
5	103 km-Nokundi-Mashkhel Road	PKR 7 billion			

Gwadar Port projects

One of the major components of the CPEC is the improvement of the Gwadar port to international standards (Asif, 2018). The port has been leased out to China and various mega projects have been completed in the first phase as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Details of projects completed at Gwadar port under CPEC phase-1 (2013-23)

S.NO	Project Title	Completion Cost (Million US\$)	Jobs Created	Financing	Supervising Agency
1	Development of Port and Free Zone	300	240	GoPak	MoMaritime
2	Gwadar Smart Port City Master Plan	4	90		
3	Pak-China Technical and Vocational Institute at Gwadar	10	249	Chinese Govt. Grant	GPA/MoMaritime
4	Pak-China Technical and Vocational Institute At Gwadar	10	250	Chinese Govt. Grant	GPA/MoMaritime

5	Gwadar Eastbay Expressway	179	2000*	GoP loan	MoMaritime
6	Pak China Friendship Hospital	100	40	Chinese Govt. Grant	P&D Deptt
7	1.2 million Gallon per Day desalination plant	12.7		Chinese Govt. Grant	
	Under Construction Projects				
1	Gwadar International Airport	230	3000	Chinese Govt. Grant	CAA
2	Necessary facilities of freshwater treatment, water supply and distribution	PKR 11.39 billion	1600	PSDP	GDA/P&D
3	300MW Coal-Fired Power Project at Gwadar	542.32	1000	China Comm Con Co, (CCCC)	PPIB
4	5MGD Water desalination Plan	PKR 5 billion		PSDP/ADP	GoB/GDA

Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and Industrial Cooperation

Out of the thirteen Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Pakistan, four are currently in the process of development. These include Rashakai SEZ in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Allama Iqbal Industrial City in Punjab, Dhabeji Economic Zone in Sindh, and Bostan Special Economic Zone in Baluchistan. Additionally, nine more SEZs are in the pipeline, including the ICT Model Industrial Zone, an Industrial Park on Pakistan Steel Mills land, the Mirpur Industrial Zone, Mohmand Marble City, and Maqpondass SEZ in Gilgit (Batool, Baig, Khalid, & Alam, 2024).

Deliberations of the Think Tanks in China and Pakistan on the CPEC

Part 1: China-Pakistan Relations in International Dynamics: Pakistan Study Centre Institute of South Asian Studies Fudan University Shanghai

- a. *Lecture by Prof. Lin Ming Wang¹, Assistant Dean and Director of Institute of International Studies Fudan University.*

China and US competition for expanding their influence and trade worldwide is enhancing. China's dream for the world and South Asia through the expansion of its relations and trade is one of the essential components of President Xi's policy. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the precursor for China's dream of becoming a global trade leader and creating global goods, which can lead to a prosperous and peaceful world. For creating a prosperous, peaceful, and culturally intact world, his approach is manifested in his three major initiatives, i.e., the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI), and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI). The Global Development Initiative calls for involving diverse nations and communities worldwide in his dream for global prosperity. Unfortunately, the world's development agenda is mainly concentrated in the already developed nations, and the various economic and financial institutions have no equity in the development approach. Global Security Initiatives make the security and integrity of all countries, smaller or larger, the most important for a peaceful world. Today, with the advanced countries' acquisition of weapons and other deterrence, the security of the smaller countries has become vulnerable. The Global Civilization and Culture Initiative has focused on respecting and conserving the nation's diverse cultures locally, regionally, and globally. These initiatives are focused on global peace and prosperity as a common global interest. China's emerging solutions are aimed at global goods. Under the evolving global dynamics, the relationship between Pakistan and China must become stronger with clear priorities and objectives. Pakistan and China must play an influential role in regional stability, peace, and prosperity. It was emphasized that this would require effective strategies for harnessing the mutual benefits.

¹ Lin Minwang is professor and assistant dean at the Institute of International Studies at Fudan University China. His main research areas include international relations in South Asia, with a focus on China-India relations, and China's foreign policy. He is the author of two books, *Choosing War*, and *The BRI and Geopolitics in South Asia*

b. *Prof. Zhang Jiadong²: Pakistan's Development Model and CPEC.*

Pakistan enjoys a large youth population, rich human and natural resources, good relations with global powers, attraction for Chinese investment, and a strong South Asian economy until 2006. It remained ahead of India regarding Per Capita income, GDP growth rate, poverty alleviation, etc. However, the situation reversed since then due to the non-continuity of the political governments and policies. While commenting on the positive aspects of CPEC, he underscored the investment in infrastructure but showed his concerns over the underutilization of resources, instability of governments, and financial crisis. Increasing debt service liabilities, decrease in multilateral foreign investment, etc., including Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), are some of the major concerns. He recommended stable political governments dominated by experts and technocrats, their continuity, and stronger collaboration with all parts of the world. The comments from both senior analysts revealed that China is highly optimistic about its approach towards a peaceful and prosperous future for the world and region. Pakistan, an important regional partner of China, must restore political, economic, and social stability.

c. *Ambassador Babar Mir³: Pakistan's Approach to regional integration as a partner of China:*

Pakistan strongly supports the vision of President Xi and his three development initiatives. In a situation where the United States leads the Western Countries, this overwhelming support from Pakistan has been highly instrumental for China. The United States, under different Quadrilateral (Quads) agreements with the support of Western allies in the Indo-Pacific region, is trying to contain the expansion of China's trade and commerce. Under these challenges, Pakistan's role is very important. However, due to its geostrategic position, Pakistan must continue its warm relations with the US. Pakistan can also bring the world powers China and the United States together to tackle global challenges.

d. *Prof. Guo Xeutang⁴ - "India's New Challenges to China-Pakistan relations and regional stability:*

² PhD and Professor of international relations, Dean of BRI Institute of Strategy and International Security, Director of Centre for South Asia Studies, senior researcher in Centre for American Studies, Fudan University, in Shanghai, China. He is a former diplomat in China's Embassy in India(2013-2015)

³ Former ambassador of Pakistan in Afghanistan and China

⁴ Deputy Director, Shanghai University of Political Science and Law and deputy director of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies at Shanghai University of Political Science and Law.

The Indian approach to neighborhood diplomacy is always based on hegemony and coercion. Externally, India has transboundary disputes with all neighbors on various issues. Instead of resolving these issues, India is adamant about the use of force and coercion. This approach poses serious challenges to regional stability as well. Internally, India has been dealing with its minorities with a highly discriminative approach. Their approach towards India's Illegally Occupied Kashmir (IIOK) has been the worst violation of the UN resolutions, which guaranteed the right of self-determination to the people of IIOK. Indians changed the disputed status of Kashmir and allowed people, mostly Hindus, to migrate from other parts of India to settle and buy property. These changes will jeopardize the demography of the IIOK, and gradually, the Muslim majority will become the minority in the region. For containing Indian atrocities and hegemonic desires of expansion, the role of Pakistan is vital. This necessitates economic and political stability and peace in Pakistan. With the rising tensions between China and India over border disputes, the role of Pakistan in this triangle is always balanced with a tilt towards China. Hence, peace and stability in Pakistan are inevitable for prosperous South Asia and the region.

e. Ambassador Sohail Mehmood; Challenges and opportunities for CPEC-2.0

The world has been facing significant challenges due to the pandemic, climate impacts, extreme poverty, and political disengagement. The war between Russia and Ukraine and, more recently, the Gaza war have further threatened the stability of the world. The weaponization of the countries has created arms race once again. The unregulated use of artificial intelligence (AI) and other technologies, as well as their use in war and development in the Indo-Pacific region, has made the region a flashpoint for global conflicts.

Some of the hopes and lights beyond the tunnel include the recovery of humanity from the worst pandemic and the allocation of sizable budgets for the Climate Fund, 15th March was declared as Islamophobia Day by the UN. For the success of BRI projects, China will need to develop positive engagement with all important global stakeholders, including the US and India. The Sino-U.S. relations must be restored on common global issues such as climate, Afghanistan, and SDGs with narrow differences. The two countries' friendship remained time-tested, strategic, and linked to mutual interests. Pakistan has strongly supported *The One China* policy on the question of Taiwan. Pakistan deeply appreciates President Xi's people-centered policies and dream for a better world and South Asia, as manifested in his three development initiatives. These initiatives are very positive precursors for the success of CPEC in its new decade as a source of further

strengthening bilateral relations, advancing the region's economic growth through the commercial use of Gwadar port, and initiating new energy and infrastructure projects. Despite all regional challenges, its extension to improve regional connectivity and peace is required. The open and inclusive nature of CPEC for third parties will improve its acceptability in the region. Both countries would need to strengthen their collaboration and exchange of secret information to counter terrorism in the region. On the concerns over the nefarious designs of India as a regional power, he dispelled the impression, as comparatively, the Chinese development model and growth philosophy is inherently indigenous. In contrast, the Indian design of acquiring regional hegemony is prompted by external forces led by the US, which cannot be achieved in the short and long run. Internally, society has been divided into a robust Caste System, strong bureaucracy, and widespread corruption. Religious extremism in the form of Hindutva is another significant challenge for India's national integrity. In this background, Pakistan needs to strengthen its national and global outlook through better political and economic governance and strategic partnership with all the global powers, keeping China at the top.

Part2: Third China Pakistan Think Tank Forum: Decade of CPEC-Review and Outlook”- at China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) Beijing

In the second part of the forum, a detailed discussion was held about the decadal review and outlook for the next decade, which Ambassador Sohail Mahmood led⁵. After one decade, the early harvest projects have given dividends to the people in the form of physical infrastructure, energy, SEZs, and job creation to more than 200,000 directly and indirectly (Shahzad, 2022). For the next decade, it will be imperative to take the following actions:

- i. Expedite the development of SEZs,
- ii. Resolution of the issues of IPPs,
- iii. Finalize the location of industries,
- iv. Curb negative propaganda through effective coordination and people connectivity,
- v. Starting the railway projects ML-1,
- vi. Improve the capacity of the people,

⁵ Ambassador Sohail Mahmood is serving as the Director General of the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI). Ambassador Sohail Mahmood has been a career Foreign Service officer with diplomatic experience spanning 37 years that included various assignments at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as Pakistan's Missions Abroad in both bilateral and multilateral arenas.

- vii. Extension of CPEC for regional integration and creating global goods through three initiatives of President Xi, GDI, GSI, and GCI.

Prof. Wang Honggnag⁶, Director CICR Beijing: Pakistan Socio-Political and Economic Programs and CPEC: He deliberated on the CPEC under the following challenges of Pakistan.

- i. *Pakistan's Political Challenges*, reflected in the international political struggle for power, political power-sharing controversy, and military intervention, directly impact the CPEC.
- ii. *Pakistan's economic crisis*, caused by structural imbalance, trade deficit, and balance-of-payment issues, has pushed the country into a vicious circle of low income, growing inflation, and poverty, which has also led to social unrest.
- iii. *Liquidity issues, such as depleting foreign exchange reserves, have made international trade and payment of external liabilities extremely difficult for the country.*
- iv. At the same time, the region has become a focus for power games to contain the expansion of China. Cross-border security risks are increasing, and Chinese nationals are significant targets, unfortunately.

On the positive side, he expressed satisfaction that the China-Pakistan friendship is continuing and strengthening despite all these challenges. However, internal political and economic instability challenges this friendship. He stressed the need for advocacy and high trust in CPEC. Pakistan needs to develop short-term and long-term priorities to resolve its internal conflicts.

Dr. Wang Shida⁷ covered three significant aspects in his speech.

1. *Leverage of China on Pakistan:*
He proposed rationalizing the restrictions on production policies, reducing the import tariffs, and giving export subsidies to encourage investors to move to Pakistan.
2. *Security-related Challenges:*
He also emphasized over-integrated efforts to improve the security of the Chinese, which requires the sharing of intelligence information periodically, and a wide range of contact channels may be used to this effect.

⁶ Dr. Wang Honggang, Research Professor, is Vice President of China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) and concurrently Director of the CICIR Institute of American Studies. Previously, he served as the Deputy Director of American Studies (2009-2014) and Director of World Politics Studies (2015-2018)

⁷ Dr. Wang Shida, Research Professor, is Deputy Director of the Institute for South Asian Studies at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) Beijing China.

3. *Geopolitical Challenges*

He explained the obstacles created by India for CPEC through malicious propaganda, which can be mitigated by extending relations with other countries by Pakistan and China to dispel India's negativity. He also stressed the role of Pakistan in bringing the two important countries of the region, Iran and Saudi Arabia, together by playing the role of linking pin.

In his concluding remarks, Ambassador Sohail Mahmood appreciated the better understanding between the two partners on regional and global issues. He shared that besides the Chinese, Pakistanis are also targeted in terrorist acts to jeopardize the CPEC and its advancement. Joint measures are required to curb these nefarious designs. He hoped that after the elections in Pakistan, the new government would prioritize the economic agenda for the country's prosperity. Structural reforms are inevitable to strengthen the country's economy, requiring strong political and social will. Pakistan has been supporting Afghanistan for many decades, and this support will continue to create regional peace and stability. He emphasized that Pakistan has repositioned itself with more tilt toward China in the new emerging geo-economics scenarios in the region. To mitigate the threats from QUADs, he recommended the following measures:

- i. Supportive statements for CPEC from the leaders from both sides, showing their firm resolve to continue with all the challenges, must be issued.
- ii. China's and Pakistan's trade relations need to be balanced, as they are more tilted toward China at present. This would require China to import some products from Pakistan.
- iii. China will need to invest backward and integrate with Pakistani producers to improve the quality of raw materials and products exported from Pakistan to China. This will also progressively require the Transfer of Technology.

The extension of CPEC to Afghanistan is a good decision, but the modalities must be further deliberated. Its further extension to Iran and Central Asia will improve regional integration, peace, and economic conditions.

The embassies of China and Pakistan must arrange seminars and workshops about CPEC in other countries to improve its image for global and regional prosperity and peace. The Think Tanks of both countries must work for a shared vision in the next 25 years at the Centennial celebrations in 2047/2048.

Conclusion

This chapter discusses two main parts of the question of the way forward for CPEC in its second decade (CEPC-2.0), i.e., the Sino-Pakistan relations in the global dynamics and outlook of the CPEC. Based on the deliberations of foreign policy experts and diplomats, the following significant conclusions are drawn:

1. China dreams of global peace, stability, and prosperity for common public goods, as reflected in the Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI). This, further superimposed by GDI, GSI, and GCI by President Xi, is faced with overwhelming resistance from the US. The various quadrilateral agreements formed in the Asia Pacific region by the US attempt to constrain China in the region. China, on the other hand, is pursuing a peaceful, non-conflicting approach.
2. China and Pakistan have had a strategic relationship for over seven decades. Pakistan needs to harness its natural and human resources through political and economic stability to play an influential role in the successful implementation of CPEC-2.0. China will always support a prosperous, stable, and peaceful Pakistan, which is inevitable for the region.
3. India plays a significant role in restraining China from continuing with the BRI for regional prosperity. Their hegemonic neighbourhood approach is creating challenges of instability in the region. In such situations, the latter can be a balancing force in this triangle because of India's conflicting approach towards China and Pakistan.
4. The world has faced unprecedented challenges like pandemics, wars, extreme poverty, climate impacts, and regional and global instability. China's approach to global prosperity and common goods is highly commendable.
5. Pakistan has already harvested the early dividends of CPEC in the form of better infrastructure, energy security, employment for youth, and China's commercial use of Gwadar port. Hence, the second decade of CPEC will usher in a new era of industrialization if both countries engage with the other stakeholders and include other regional countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan.
6. The Indian dream of regional hegemony cannot be exhibited due to internal and external conflicts and challenges. The Chinese development model, on the other hand, is indigenous and inherent, and it has been tested for more than five decades since the economy's openness.

7. For the next decade of successful implementation of CPEC, fundamental decisions on the SEZs, location of industry, curbing negative propaganda against CPEC, and capacity building of human resources will be required. Production policies with reduced import tariffs to encourage cross-border trade are also required.
8. To improve the security of the CPEC projects, intelligence information may be shared in real-time, and a wide range of contact channels may be established so that counteraction is taken in time.
9. Pakistan and China may also improve their bilateral relations with other countries in the region so that the projects can also engage them.
10. Pakistan will continue to support the *One China Policy* in line with China's apprehensions and support its extension of the CPEC to other countries. In this context, Pakistan can play a pivotal role in bringing together various regional nations.
11. The leaders of both countries should make bold and supportive statements, showing their firm resolve to continue with the CPEC.
12. The trade balance between China and Pakistan is more tilted towards China, and there are grievances from Pakistani traders. China must encourage the import of products and services from Pakistan. At the regional level, the cross-border trade between Gilgit Baltistan and Xinjiang provinces may be encouraged. Better facilities for customs clearance and quarantines may be provided.
13. The embassies of China and Pakistan must arrange seminars and workshops about CPEC in other countries to improve their image for global and regional prosperity and peace.
14. The Think Tanks on both sides may work together for 100 years between China and Pakistan (2047/2048) to decide their priorities.

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