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CPEC and BRI Nexus

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Pakistan Emerging Heartland of Regionalism and BRI

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Abstract

This chapter examines how Pakistan is becoming a major force in the new regionalist landscape, especially in relation to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Pakistan's geostrategic importance is becoming more widely acknowledged as regionalism gains traction worldwide due to the establishment and prosperity of institutions like the European Union, ASEAN, and NAFTA. Pakistan is a crucial component of regional and transregional connectivity due to its location at the meeting point of South and Central Asia and close to the economic superpowers of China and India. Historically, a nexus of great power politics, China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative and changing global power dynamics have given it new significance in the twenty-first century. One of the main BRI initiatives, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), has confirmed Pakistan's position as a key player in promoting connectivity and economic integration in Eurasia. By serving as a gateway for landlocked nations like Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics, Pakistan has the potential to develop into the hub of regionalism by promoting economic cooperation, trade, and energy flow throughout Asia.

Keywords: CPEC, Regionalism, Belt and Road Initiatives

Regionalism and Pakistan

The concept of regionalism has become a significant global phenomenon since

the dawn of this ongoing century. Approximately, all the realms of mother earth are converging towards the phenomenon regionalism, entire world consists of numerous regional organizations, and the list of those organizations is long. Among all, the most well-known and successful regional organization is the European Union (EU), which is the banner man and one of the successful paradigms of regionalism, some of the other successful regional organizations of the world are NAFTA, ASEAN and OAF respectively. Presently, there is hardly any realm in the world that does not feature a regional organization. Pakistan has remained at the crossroads of great power politics for the last couple of centuries. However, Geopolitical developments at the turn of the twenty first century and the global shift in power dynamics in the context of the Asian Century has revitalized the geo-political and geo-economic importance of this god gifted country Pakistan. This chapter investigates the centrality and importance of Islamic republic of Pakistan in a historical and contemporary perspective. The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), envisions regional integration as a major goal in this twenty first century, which is one of the great yeoman services to the world in general and adjacent regions in particular. Pakistan is one of the geographical pivot and an offshoot of the Eurasian region as well, has once again reemerged as a lynchpin for regional and extra-regional integration after the prelude of BRI and CPEC projects (Abid & Ashfaq, 2015). Moreover, Pakistan is situated at the junction of Central Asia, South Asia, and between two of the emerging economic giants namely, China and India. After the revival of Chinese ancient silk route through this country, it can play a significant role in the attainment of regionalism goals. Besides, being an intersection, since ancient times, Pakistan has been strategically instrumental as a transit passage, connecting the adjoining and bordering landlocked states of Asia like, Afghanistan and Central Asian republics respectively (Rizvi, Khan, & Elahi, 2022).



Source: eurasiareview.com

The Theoretical Understanding of the Centrality of Pakistan

Geographically, a state or a country accrues prominence for many reasons, like its strategic positioning, abundance of required natural and nurtured resources and the very proximal location of that particular country. Pakistan is bestowed with all those factors, due to which it has acquired a central placement in the world. Since the dawn of civilization, the region of Pakistan has had remain a central pivot. It remained home to some of the great ancient civilizations of the world, like Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa; these ancient civilizations were some of the few sophisticated civilizations in the known antiquity (Sial, 2014). The region, which now comprises Pakistan, has embraced all the features of some of the great ancient civilizations; for example, one can find the influence of Persian civilization and Greek civilization as well over here. During the Great Game era this region was the focus and locus of nineteenth century great powers. Moreover, since its inception as an independent state, Pakistan has begat more attention and interest of some of the regional as well as global powers the total geographic area of Islamic republic of Pakistan is seventy-nine. Six (79.6) hectares (Fredholm, 2015). When it comes to the topographical division of Pakistan, its landscape is an uneven one. Its topography consists of rouged mountains, fertile plans and sea basin areas. Its huge mountains in the Gilgit Baltistan region are home to some very precious resources like some of the rare minerals and freshwater resources and this region is also known as the best tourist destination. Besides, the central fertile plans of Pakistan are best known for its agriculture products. Moreover, the existence of Pakistan at the very junction of some of the great regions (Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia) speaks of its geographical prominence and importance. The uneven but very unique terrain of Pakistan accrues the strategic depth of Pakistan. Population wise

Pakistan is the fifth largest nation in the world and out of its total population majority is young (Gill & Iqbal, 2021).

The central positioning of Pakistan is a complex and significant conception that includes its geographical positioning, its geopolitical role, and her geostrategic importance in the regional as well as and on the global stage. Some of the key aspects, which make Pakistan a pivot in geopolitics and geo-economics are as under, which are very vital for her centrality (Heidkamp, Morrissey, Germond-Duret, & Rourke, 2022).

Geopolitical Placement of Pakistan: the geographical placement of Pakistan is strategically very crucial. Its immediate neighbors are India, China, Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asia. On the southern side its closest association with the great Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea gives it significant geopolitical meaning, especially for trade routes and access to crucial waterways (Khalid, 2022).



Source: vecteezy.com

Regional Dynamics and Pakistan: Pakistan is one of the blessed countries, which is situated at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Moreover, Pakistan influences these regions politically, economically and culturally. Besides, it's one of the main players in regional political dynamics, especially in relation to the regional dynamics between China and India, particularly, the stability and peace situation in Afghanistan mainly depends on the involvement of Pakistan. Furthermore, the melting and boiling point of the world namely Middle East has close affinity with Pakistan as well. Pakistan is one of the main stakeholders of Middle Eastern affairs (Khalil, 2017).



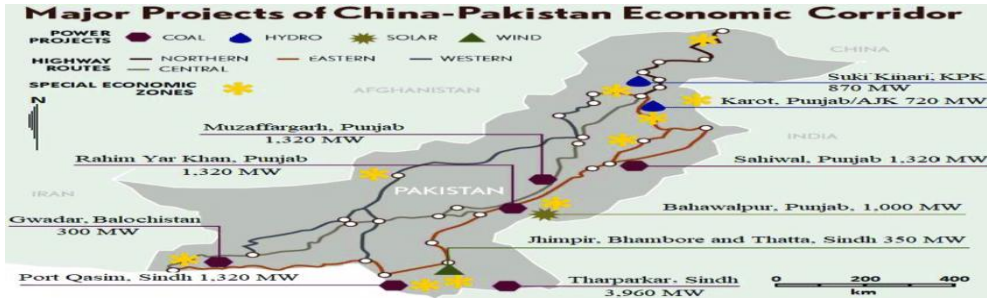
Source: shutterstock.com

Global Security and Defense: Pakistan's strategic placement effects global and regional security dynamics simultaneously. Since its inception Pakistan been one of the main players in global security concerns and its central role as the front-line state against terrorism and specifically due to its active role in counterterrorism activates, particularly in relation to Afghanistan (Bhattacharjee, 2015).



Source: dailytimes.com.

Economic Centrality: Pakistan is bestowed with many natural resources and economic potentials. One example is the ongoing economic game changer namely, The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). CPEC is a leading venture of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The prelude of BRI has further underlined Pakistan's centrality in regional and global economic developments. Amongst all BRI sub projects, CPEC is very vital and significant for China, it aims to create economic corridors through infrastructure development, boosting trade and connectivity between China, Middle East and the Arabian Sea (Yaseen, Afridi, & Muzaffar, 2017).



Source: researchgate.

Nuclear Capability: Pakistan is one of the nuclear powers and the only Muslim Country to have nuclear capability and it has vital consequences for regional and global security. Pakistan’s Nuclear arsenal and its geopolitical placement has there for added another layer to its strategic centrality, especially in the context of South Asian security dynamics (Wu et al., 2021).



Source: minutemirror.com.pk

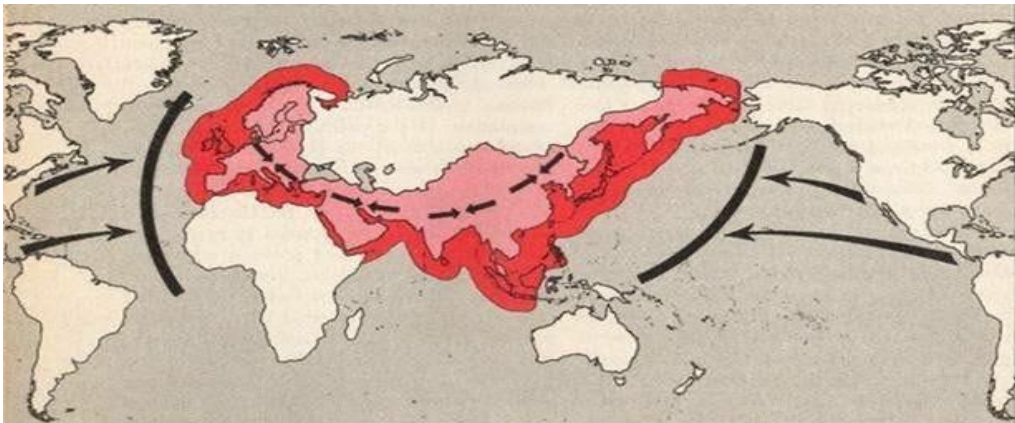
Pakistan’s Strategic Arsenal

Religious and Cultural Hub: Pakistan is regarded as the banner man of Islamic world. It came to inception in the name of Islam, Pakistan weld and plays an important role in the Muslim world. It has strong historical, cultural, and religious bonds that contribute to its centrality in the Islamic world as well. No one can contest the centrality of Pakistan in regional and global dynamics. Its place in various political and economic alliances, its relations with neighboring countries, and her participation in regional affairs further underlines its significance beyond doubt



Source:google.com

Conceptualization of Chinese Belt and Road Initiative



Source: sangar.info

Chinese Belt and Road Initiative Blueprint

The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative known as BRI, was officially proclaimed in 2013. Previously BRI was known as the ‘One Belt, One Road’. Basically, BRI is arguably one of the milestone achievements of Chinese Premier Xi Jinping. Moreover, Chairman Xi, s impulses for starting this titanic project were to strengthen his name and determinations in Chinese political history, developing soft and reverberating image of the Middle Kingdom (China). Whereas a major scholarship understands that this gigantic project BRI could decide the future of China. Though, the BRI proponents, ministers, and the heads of Chinese government are very optimistic about the miracles of the BRI project, and they claim that China is already benefiting from the Belt and Road initiative (Afzaal, 2020).

Moreover, the BRI is a revivalism of Chinese ancient Silk Route that used to connect China to other realms of the world, especially, entire Asia, the Mediterranean area, Europe, Middle East and Africa. Covering many

continents and connecting as many of the states of the globe. Furthermore, the basic aim of BRI project is to recover ancient Chinese trade routes, nurturing global connectivity, economic development, and cultural exchange between all stakeholders of the BRI (Weidong, 2017).



Source: trends research.org

Belt and Road Initiative

Historical Context of BRI:

To conceptualize the Belt and Road Initiative project, it is important to comprehend its historical context in the Chinese ancient Silk Road, Silk Route was facilitator of trade and cultural exchanges amid the Eastern and Western world. Basically, The BRI got its stimulation from the historical legacy of ancient silk route.

The central modules of the Belt and Road Initiative

The Belt and Road Initiative contain two main components; the first component is the Silk Road Economic Belt, and the second component is twenty First Century Maritime Silk Road. The first component namely, the Silk Road Economic Belt aims on land-based connections, bridging Central Asia, including Pakistan, the Middle East, and Europe. Whereas the twenty first century Maritime Silk Road prefers the maritime routes, which will connect China to the vibrant regions of Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa, and Europe with the help of various oceanic network of ports and shipping ways (Zhao, Sun, & Webster, 2022).

The main motivations for the prelude of Belt and Road Initiative

The numerous motivations which encouraged China's pursuit of the Belt and Road Initiative are as under.

Economic Expansionism: Generally, The BRI will provide an exist for China to enhance its economic influence on global level by devoting and developing massive commercial infrastructure projects in partner states.

Overproduction: presently, the Chinese industries are producing beyond its own market consumption, the BRI initiative will help address issues of overcapacity in Chinese industries, such as construction and manufacturing, by providing opportunities for companies to participate in overseas projects.

Geopolitical Calculations: The BRI will also increase China's geopolitical ambitions by nurturing strategic partnerships and increasing its presence in strategic regions of the world.

Successes of Belt and Road Initiative

Since its beginning the Belt and Road Initiative has attained noteworthy successes in terms of its infrastructure development, economic ties, and diplomatic recognition by the world community. So far, several related projects, which include the latest railways tracks, strategic ports, and special economic zones, have been completed under BRI initiatives, which aim to cultivate a culture of increasing connectivity and trade between partaking states. Since then, the Chinese BRI investments have encouraged economic growth amidst the participating countries, and it is contributing to reduce poverty and job engagement in the participating countries (A. Hussain & Ullah, 2023).

Challenges and Obstacles for Belt and Road Initiative

Notwithstanding the huge successes of BRI, it is also facing a variety of challenges and obstacles, which are as under.

Debt Sustainability: Some partner countries are facing challenges in paying the loans associated with BRI projects.

Environmental Factor: The large and titanic infrastructure projects associated with the BRI have raised environmental concerns, which include deforestation, habitat degradation, erosion, and the menace of pollution.

Last but not the least, The Belt and Road Initiative is one of the modern harbingers of prosperity wellbeing and it is also a testimony to China's global vision for connectivity, economic development, and cultural exchange. Though, it has achieved noteworthy milestones but the challenges and criticisms on the BRI highlight the need for careful consideration of the social, economic, and environmental implications of the projects as well. Arguably,

with the passage of time the BRI initiative will continues to progress and its impact on the geo-economic and geopolitical landscape beyond doubt will figure the narrative of China's role in the twenty first century (A. Hussain, Jaffar, & Hussain, 2024).



Source: eurasiareview.com

Bald Eagle VS Red Dragon

Pakistan the emerging Heartland: A Pivot for Regional and Extra Regional Integration

Literally, the term heartland is basically used to describe anything which is the epicenter or middle spot of a state, realm or region. In this context Pakistan is the emerging heartland of the world in general and Asian region in particular. Besides, in the discourse of political science, the term "heartland" is connected with the concept of a strategic geographic location that is very significant for the control and supremacy of a particular region or a state. Moreover, the conception heartland is associated with the famous 20th century British geopolitical theoretician Sir Halford Mackinder.

Halford Mackinder Heartland Theory

Halford Mackinder (1861 to 1947) was one of the leading and famous British geographers and geopolitician. Additionally, Mackinder is best known for his geopolitical theories, mainly for his conception of the "Heartland Theory" which he published in his famous masterpiece "Democratic Ideals and Reality" which was published in 1919. Mackinder's Heartland theory suggests that who rules the Eastern Europe will rule the Heartland, whoever rules the Heartland will rule the World Island, and whoever rules the World Island will rule the world.



Source: thegeopolity.com

Halfords Heartland

Pakistan the emerging Heartland of the World:

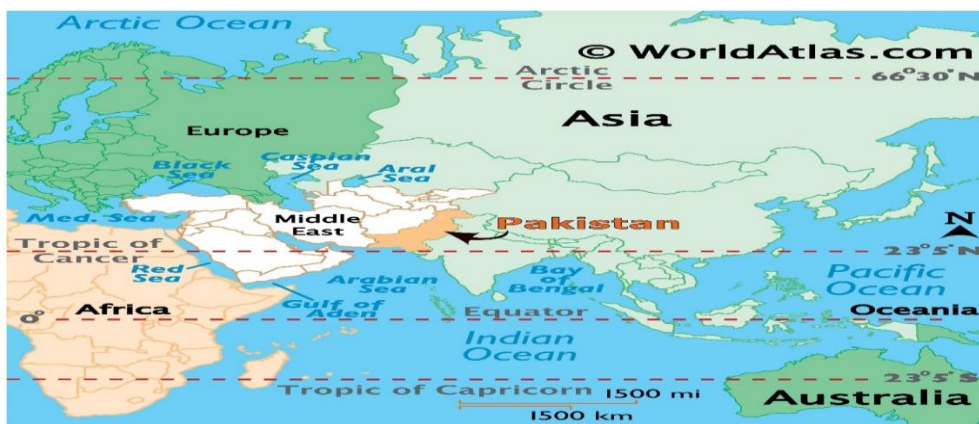
With the passing days, Pakistan is converging itself into one of the significant and very vital geopolitical and geo economic arenas of the world, in other words it is becoming the emerging Neo Heartland of the world. While on the other hand, portraying Pakistan as the emerging heartland one must bear in his mind the associated potentials of Pakistan which are numerous, for example, its booming economy, the geographical proximity of Pakistan with some of the key countries and regions of the world, its massive demography, unique culture, and its strategic positioning in the world map. Pakistan is one of the bestowed countries of South Asia, which has a great economic potential, one of the rich cultural heritage and diverse landscapes starting from lofty mountains to seashore (S. Hussain, Ali, & Qamar, 2023). However, Pakistan is facing many challenges, but it has all the vast potentials that, if harnessed efficiently, it can contribute a better part in the sustainable development and prosperity of the world and Asian region respectively. Pakistan stands at a critical juncture with enormous potentials, and it is these potentials it can pave the way for sustained growth and development, and Pakistan can become a dynamic player on the world stage.

Strategic significance of Pakistan in regional and extra regional Integration

Pakistan is one of the significant countries, which is blessed with a unique geographical placement, and it has remained the banner man in promoting regional and extra regional integration activities in the near past. Metaphorically, Pakistan is known as the fulcrum of entire Asian continent and it is also one of the strategic pivots, where Middle East, South Asia and Central Asia meet. Furthermore, Pakistan, holds enormous strategic importance in the areas of regional and extra-regional integration. Its exceptional geographical positioning, economic potential, and its geopolitical role make it one of the central players in promoting cooperation, connectivity,

and stability among all member states. Pakistan, shares borders with India one of the economic giants to the east, its western boarder connects Afghanistan and Iran, People Republic of China to the north, and towards south it is Arabian Sea. Pakistan's geographical placement makes it one of the gateways between South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is one of the leading projects of Chinese Belt and Road Initiative known as (BRI), CPEC highlights Pakistan's key role in bringing closer the economically vibrant regions of East Asia and the Middle East respectively (Hussain Mirza & Kumar, 2023).

Moreover, Pakistan's economic potentials further make it one of the key players, its huge consumer market and its varied natural resources make it one of the vital partners for regional and extra-regional economic cooperation. Pakistan's Gwadar Port is a deep seaport on the Arabian Sea, which a hub in enhancing maritime connectivity. Besides, Gwadar port and CPEC are not just facilitating trade between China and Pakistan, but they can also open up new trade routes for India, Central Asian states and other stakeholders. These initiatives make Pakistan one of the epicenters for the regional and extra regional integration (Shahid, Khan, & Zain, 2024).



Source: hotzgirl.com

Pakistan's geo strategic significance is not confine to its geographical and economic features, moreover, its diplomatic influence also adds another layer to its prominence. Pakistan's active commitment in regional forums namely, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation SAARC and Organization of Islamic Countries OIC and some of the extra regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization SCO and prospective member of BRICS, make Pakistan one of the influential and responsible player policies. Last but not the least, Pakistan's strategic placement in both regional and extra regional integration is manifold and it

cannot be underestimated. Pakistan's distinctive geographical location, its economic potential, its vital role in safeguarding regional stability, and her diplomatic influence jointly makes it a harbinger for regional and extra regional connectivity and cooperation. As we all know that our world is becoming highly interconnected and dependent, recognizing and harnessing Pakistan's strategic importance becomes very important for promoting economic growth, stability, and peace across the broader region. Lastly, Pakistan's acumen to circumnavigate complex geopolitical challenges and promote collaboration will undoubtedly shape the path of regional and extra regional integration in the years to come.



Source: researchgate.net

Conclusion

Pakistan is actually the emerging heartland of regionalism and BRI, because it one of the indispensable and significant countries which have all the required potentials and prerequisites to promote interdependency and connectivity. Moreover, Pakistan is one of key bridges which promotes connection between Central Asian, China to India and Middle East, besides, the geographical placement of Pakistan cannot be underestimated. Even the leading world hegemony, like China and USA and others realize and recognize that Pakistan is one of the global strategic junctures and epicenters of the present world. The strategic significance of Pakistan underpins its vital role in regional and global politics respectively. Additionally, since the dawn of the 21st century all great powers of the globe are relying more and opting soft power politics instead on hard power politics. The central tenets of soft power politics are stable economic wellbeing and interdependence among all states, in this regard, Pakistan offers much more economic and soft power opportunities which can be utilize for the economic well-being of the world in general and adjacent

regions particularly. For example, Pakistan provides China the short and reliable exist into the Middle East. As we know that Middle East which is very crucial for the development of China. China can use the CPEC corridor via Pakistan to reach the lifelines of world economy, like the Strait of Hurmuz and the Suez Canal, through these straits China can access Africa and Europe. Besides, Pakistan has the ability and opportunity to give regional and global access to the landlocked republics of Central Asia and other landlocked countries like Afghanistan. On the other hand, another regional player namely India, is one of the emerging economic powerhouses, to enhance its economy, India needs the natural resources especially, the vast deposits of coal and natural gas of Central Asian Republics, Pakistan has the required ability to provide India access to Central Asia.

Pakistan is holding the required privileges of promoting regional and extra regional integration if satisfactory attention paid to the significance of this emerging new heartland country namely Pakistan beyond the sentimentality of real politics. Pakistan is one of the actual geographical junctures in the globe that has the adequate abilities to disseminate and foster regional and extra regional integration and development and dampen the vendettas among the competing great powers.

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