

ECONOMIC DEPENDENCE THROUGH CONNECTIVITY: A PATH TO ENDURING PEACE

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Abstract

Pakistan has always remained an important country in world politics, even with its economic issues. The world is moving towards connectivity, and those projects are overshadowing other emotional or ideological considerations primarily because economics and the mouths to feed in the country by the state have taken precedence over other derivatives. Moreover, the distribution of resources in the world and the need of a particular country that can only be fulfilled by holding resources of other states has pushed the mindset into economic collaboration, and that has provided stimulus to develop infrastructure and connectivity projects to inflate national economic health. This paper explains the above-mentioned phenomenon from Pakistan's perspective and how various connectivity projects are important and a confidence booster for Pakistan to pursue a path where economies are intertwined. This paper also highlights the challenges and illustrates, through various projects, the importance of such connectivity projects. To conclude, this paper will present some policy considerations and conclude that Pakistan must clear the path for foreign investors to make these projects a complete success, and in return, these projects will make Pakistan a success in the economic arena.

Keywords: Pakistan, CPEC, Connectivity projects, US, China

International Connectivity Projects: Bridging Borders for Economic Growth

This paper will examine analytically how Pakistan is trying to participate in various connectivity projects and, in that way, endeavour to remain and further augment its relevance in international and regional politics. On the other hand, India is executing its own kinetic efforts to bypass Pakistan through its own connectivity projects. This Indian approach enables Pakistan to give impetus to its efforts to engage the key players with its connectivity initiatives so as to keep Indian influence out of its vicinity.

Pakistan is facing an existential crisis in the form of Eco-fare. The new bailout for Pakistan seems to be the connectivity projects, which, due to Pakistan's strategic location, have allowed it to become relevant in the thick of things. Pakistan has always remained under peril from its eastern neighbour, and the same is the case even today. Any project or idea that could help Pakistan to sustain in the contemporary competitive environment is shadowed by its apprehensions of India. India is also a tremendous motivating factor for Pakistan and makes it think out of the box, so as to stay at par, if not ahead of Indian designs.

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At present, Pakistan is lagging in various aspects, particularly in the facets of economics and commerce, but the trump card that Pakistan has up its sleeves is its geographic location, which allows it to get connected with the world and pave the way for the world to get connected via Pakistan. Pakistan realizes, and it must capitalize on the fact that it does not have a research and development sector working for it, if at all, that through innovation, Pakistan would stand among the developed nations list, and rather it is this connectivity that could make Pakistan a hyphen that keeps major economic powers together at the world stage.

Pakistan is situated in an environment where connectivity projects are not just economically beneficial but also have importance in inter-state relations, especially in the context of its neighbouring countries. For Pakistan, China is more of a donor that Pakistan depends on during a crisis. This paper aims to address the following questions. Will the Indo-Pacific region become a battlefield of US-China rivalry? And how do the dynamics between BRI¹ and FOIP² impact the region? It argues intense strategic rivalry between China and the United States is likely to occur and intensify in Southeast Asia, largely because both China and the United States appear to woo this region for geostrategic influence.

Connectivity initiatives & projects³ play a significant part in foreign policy, particularly in dealings with neighbouring states. These initiatives aim to enhance commerce, trade & people-to-people contacts, contributing to global and regional economic integration. Indulging in the importance and details of these projects is vital to grasping their impact on the connectivity landscape of the globe.

India Promoting Connectivity for Regional Integration

- **Economic growth vis-à-vis connectivity:** These efforts aim to improve trade, business, and connections between states, which aid in India's effort to connect countries that are economically potent in the world. ⁴
- **Regional Connectivity in South Asia:** South Asia's connectivity is crucial for the broader Indo-Pacific region and global interactions for India. Besides physical connections, trade, digital links, and people-to-people relations shape the Indo-Pacific.
- **India's Act East Policy and Lines of Credit:** India prioritizes connectivity with neighbouring countries, except Pakistan. Indian initiatives contain Lines of Credit to over sixty states and the Act East Policy for regional integration.
- **Connectivity Projects in Myanmar and Bangladesh:** Indian projects focus on inland water transport, rail and road links, and energy connectivity. Though this

concept has taken a dramatic turn after the ouster of ex-Bangladeshi Prime Minister Haseena Wajid. India was looking at her to do more in the context of India-Bangladeshi relations, but now the tide has turned and it will be increasing difficult for India to keep Bangladesh under its fold and remain a colonial power over it.

- **Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTP):** This association connects eastern India with Myanmar's Sittwe Port; whereas its modes of transport are Waterways, roads, and railways.⁵
- **India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway (IMTTH):** India's main objective is to link Moreh (India) – Mae Sot (Thailand) – Bagan (Myanmar).⁶
- **Connectivity Projects in Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal:** Schemes involve cross-border rail links, infrastructures, bridges, and integrated check posts.
- **BBIN Agreement:** The Purpose is to enable cross-border automobile movement. The states that are participating are Bhutan, Bangladesh, India, and Nepal. Efforts are made to develop inland waterways and petroleum products pipelines.⁷
- **Connectivity towards India's West:** It seeks alternative routes like the air freight corridor to Afghanistan, primarily to disengage Pakistan in the neighbourhood and isolate it from its neighbours. The development of Chabahar Port of Iran is part of the same scheme of things that aims to connect India with Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan.
- **Connectivity to Central Asia:** The Ashgabat Agreement is a multilateral transport agreement aimed at facilitating transit and transport cooperation among the participating states located at Central Asia. This agreement aims to improve associations among states across the Eurasian region and link them with other transportation routes like the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)⁸. Furthermore, it intends to create a transit corridor to enhance connectivity and trade between Central Asia and the broader region, including South Asia and the Middle East. The Participating Countries include Turkmenistan, India, Kazakhstan, Iran, Uzbekistan, and Oman.
- **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC):** It simplifies transportation ways from India to Russia and Europe through the Middle East via Iran and further to Central Asia.
- **Maritime Connectivity in the Indian Ocean:** India has invested in maritime and aviation infrastructure in the Maldives and Sri Lanka. Its Efforts include railway development in Sri Lanka and enhancing connectivity with the Maldives.

- **Connectivity Efforts with Indonesia:** Indonesia & India collaborate to promote connectivity between Sumatra and the Andaman Islands. Strategies include developing the Sabang port⁹ and launching direct shipping routes to Vietnam.
- **Multidimensional Connectivity Initiatives:** India used to encourage connectivity in regional groups like ASEAN¹⁰, BIMSTEC¹¹ and also SAARC but as the SAARC included Pakistan and the next session of SAARC was to be held in Pakistan so India decided to wind up the association and at the moment SAARC is non – existent. Efforts include negotiating agreements on maritime transportation and lengthening the Trilateral Highway. To quote an example: Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM)¹² expected to connect Kolkata (India) to Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Kunming (China). [UPSC 2023]. The Objective is to foster economic cooperation and connectivity.
- **Financing Connectivity:** India welcomes the role of institutions like the AIIB¹³ & the New Development Bank in stimulating connectivity. Private sector involvement is critical for meeting the massive difficulties of connectivity infrastructure.

Relevance of the CASA-1000 Project

As far as the vision goes, CASA-1000 is an aspiring renewable energy infrastructure construction project that will procure 1,300 megawatts of excess electricity from Central Asia to high-demand electricity marketplaces in South Asia through first-hand energy infrastructure. The most enticing factor is that each participating region gains from this project. This transnational, multi-donor infrastructure project enlarges renewable energy access in South Asia and Central as a, delivering substantial profits to regional power grids and easing private energy users in the region. Through their collaboration on CASA-1000, the states of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan are harnessing clean energy, constructing a collective regional electricity market, fighting climate change, and improving the standard of living for their inhabitants.¹⁴

Tashkent, Uzbekistan - Highway

Since the highway's launch, China has funded at least 112 projects in Central Asia¹⁵. Many of the projects were aimed at boosting conveyance and connectivity, such as the Qamchiq mountain highway. The highway connects Tashkent (Uzbekistan's capital) with the Ferghana Valley and reaches southern Kyrgyzstan and northern Tajikistan.

China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railroad

The proposed 325-mile line will transport passengers and freight between Kashgar in China's Xinjiang region and Andijan in Uzbekistan by way of Karasu, Kyrgyzstan¹⁶. Yicai Global, a Chinese state-backed English financial news site¹⁷, stated that the railway will give nations in Central Asia the shortest and most conveniently reachable passage to global markets, describing it as a bridge between Europe and Asia. China believes that the new connection will “accelerate the West China Development Project” and “promote the development and use of oil in the Central Asia and Caspian Sea areas, open up new sources of oil imports to China and change the country's energy development strategy”.

Minerals, Trade and Beyond

Extraction, treating and conveyance of natural resources, including minerals, signify a large chunk of Chinese investment in Uzbekistan, which amounted to \$3.8 billion in 2022, just behind Russia's \$4.8 billion¹⁸. A second large zone of investment is transport infrastructure generally for trade purposes to develop regional connectivity, however, Beijing is also focusing on agriculture & technology. That will lead to investments in learning and capability, a boost to long-term expansion welcomed by Central Asians. Furthermore, Beijing no longer regards Central Asia as just the source of raw materials. It is quickly becoming an industrial base. For example, in Uzbekistan, where mainly inhabitants are employed, include the Pengsheng industrial park, the SCO Center for Agriculture in Sirdarya, the Nukus Herbal Technology pharmaceutical producer, the import-export Lanextract Sino-Uzbek joint undertaking in Karakalpakstan (autonomous republic of Uzbekistan, situated at south east & south west of the Aral Sea), and the Uzbek-Chinese electric vehicle production cluster in Jizzakh.

Roads and Transport Infrastructure

Ground transportation systems like bridges, roads, terminals, tunnels, railways & mass transit systems are often mega-projects. Numerous large airports and terminals used for airborne travelers and cargo shipping are built as megaprojects.

North American Megaprojects

As we are discussing region-wise prospects and projects, one of the most viable and noticeable is the North American projects because the US has more to lose than any other country in the world if it lags in the economic sphere, being the apex economic power in the globe, hence the importance for it to stay connected to the world is immense and may be more so than others.¹⁹

US Initiatives for Connectivity: United States initiatives focus on the digital economy, energy, and infrastructure. For instance, the BUILD Act²⁰, the Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development (BUILD) Act of 2018, signed into law by ex-US President Donald J. Trump on October 5, 2018, fuses the Development Credit Authority (DCA) of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) into a restructured US International Development Finance Corporation. The US International Development Finance Corporation (USIDFC) will catalyse private-sector development, market-based, spur economic growth in less – developed states & further the foreign policy interests of the US²¹.

Inside the US, there are many examples that the states have been connected with each other with similar initiatives, and they are not for tourist consumption, but actually commerce overwhelms these initiatives. For instance, Vancouver's new Port Mann Bridge²² was constructed, and the rationale was service improvements, and coordinated transportation infrastructure is essential throughout the region to address both current and future transportation necessities and to realize potential economic growth opportunities from increasing trade²³. Baluarte Bridge under construction, 2023²⁴. It was envisioned to single-handedly compensate for the deficiency of connections between the east & west of Mexico. It was opened in January of 2012, the Baluarte Bridge is an extremely significant infrastructure for economic growth & tourism in Mexico. The construction forms part of the highway that now substitutes the dangerous, serpentine road in the north of the realm known as the Devil's Backbone. For car drivers, the bridge has reduced the ride time between Mazatlán, on the Pacific coast and Durango, in the center of the state, from six hours to 2 hours 30 minutes²⁵. San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge (2013)²⁶ is the area's workhorse bridge, transporting more than a third of the traffic of all of the state, maintained bridges combined²⁷. Evergreen Point Floating Bridge, when it was opened, was named the world's longest floating bridge by Guinness World Records. This bridge is a vital transportation link providing an efficient and safe route across Lake Washington²⁸. These are projects that are important for commercial activity and other private commutes.

Certain Infrastructure Projects in the Middle East & North Africa (MENA)

Important investments in a number of MENA states focus on markets that have been a driving force in the region's growth. The two most prominent instances are the new trans – shipment hub of the Suez Canal Development Project and Tanger-Med Port²⁹, which continue to facilitate internal and cross-border transport as well as trade and play a vital role not only for the economic growth of Egypt and Morocco but also as a whole for the Mediterranean region.

The Suez Canal Area Development Project³⁰ encompasses three main components aimed at reinforcing the position of the Suez Canal as a global maritime trade route and developing its potential for investment magnetism and export-oriented growth:

- The “New Suez Canal”, involving a main expansion to increase capability and allow ships to navigate in both directions at the same time, which reduces waiting hours from 18 to 11 for most ships and increases twofold the capacity of the Canal from 49 to 97 ships a day. This project is likely to lead to enlarged transit capacity and increased industrial activity in the area, which will raise the international profile of Egypt as an international industrial and logistical hub.
- The “East Port Said” development project³¹, involves the construction of a 9, 5-km side channel bypassing the Suez Canal entrance, port enlargement works, a new industrial zone & logistics center as well as four new East-West tunnels to increase cross-canal connectivity and link the Sinai Peninsula to mainland Egypt.
- The “Suez Canal Economic Zone” (SCZone) was established on 461 km² of land and six maritime ports, which are strategically situated along the international waterway with the shortest access to ports, to serve as a global logistics hub & areas for light, medium & heavy industry as well as commercial & residential developments.³²

Tanger MED is situated 40km east of Tangier, Morocco. Tanger Med is the largest cargo port in the Mediterranean and in Africa by volume. The port represents a main logistics & industrial hub and a gateway for Morocco’s imports & exports, connecting to 186 ports globally³³. The first phase of the project (Tanger MED 1) entered into service in 2007 with a primary capacity of over 3.5 million shipping containers, whereas the second phase (Tanger MED II) was completed in 2019 at a cost of 1.5 billion USD & increased capacities to 9 million containers. The project is part of Morocco’s diversification plan to invite new investment & create jobs by offering various investment incentives, access to free trade agreements, skilled labor, as well as well-connected logistics to firms eager to relocate their production. Tanger MED currently hosts around 900 establishments in four industrial zones around port facilities, creating over 70,000 jobs. Nearly half of these establishments are European & are linked to the automotive sector, making Tanger MED the chief manufacturing hub of vehicles in Africa & MENA³⁴. Today, the automotive sector is Morocco’s largest exporting sector. The two most influential car companies are Renault Tanger Med & Peugeot, which are now assembling new automobiles & engines to export to the EU & African markets.

Volga-Don Canal

Canal linking the Don River the lower Volga River with at their closest point in south – western Russia. The canal goes from Kalach-na-Donu, on the eastern shore of the Tsimlyansk Reservoir, for 63 miles to Krasnoarmeysk on the Volga instantly south of Volgograd. There are thirteen locks along its route, which drops 289 feet to the Volga and 144 feet to the Don. Three reservoirs namely, Karpovka, Bereslavka & Varvarovka, occupy 45 km (28 miles) of its length³⁵. The Volga-Don Canal remains the only water connection between the Caspian Sea region and the world oceans. As a result, it plays a key part in the economies of southern Russia, the South Caucasus and the economically important Central Asia³⁶.

BRI in Central Asia

The conclusions indicate that the trade promotion & industrial development are the sectors where there is the most BRI-related activity in Central Asia³⁷. The total number of projects in these areas estimates the number of projects in all other areas combined. These sectors also obtain the most investment. In terms of the number of implemented projects, roads are the second key sector, followed by energy. Though due to larger project sizes, energy receives more funds than roads. The mainstream Chinese projects in Central Asia are bilateral. Pakistan, with its strategic location and connections with China and a long-lasting desire to connect with Central Asia, now sees this opportunity as nothing short of a blessing³⁸. Central Asian states have also expressed their willingness to connect to the world through Pakistan, and that will benefit not only Central Asian states as a whole but also China, which would like to lead a strong and well-knit neighbourhood where China remains the Hyphen and gains the most economically from the arrangement.

BRI and China Vis-À-Vis the Far East

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is China's grand strategy to revive the ancient trade routes across land & sea. Under the BRI platform, Beijing has vowed to invest billions of dollars in infrastructure sectors across Eurasia (Economic Belt) and the Indo-Pacific (Maritime Silk Road)³⁹. Without a doubt, the huge investment, together with China's growing power in both economic and military domains, has inevitably generated momentous geostrategic ramifications in regions where geopolitical contestations between China & the US are already on the rise.

1. In the eyes of many notable Chinese analysts, the BRI is more for defensive purposes; primarily serving as a direct reaction to the ex-US President Barack Obama administration's "strategic rebalance⁴⁰" in the Asia Pacific region in 2011.

2. Irrespective of the inspirations behind BRI, be they domestic, economic, or geopolitical, the BRI has produced noteworthy regional strategic consequences. To counter the influence of BRI, the US has become more resolute to promote the Free & Open Indo-Pacific strategy (FOIP). That was introduced by Japan in 2007. Aware of the impact, China has repeatedly highlighted that its BRI was not meant to counter FOIP⁴¹.
3. Yet, China barely uses or adopts the 'Indo-Pacific' concept⁴² openly. Apparently, BRI and FOIP are often compared & treated as tools of rivalry to counter each other's influence.

South East Asia: China's Perspective

Located at the very centre of the Indo-Pacific region, Southeast Asia has long been registered as a strategically significant region for China's foreign relations & national security. A stable & positive relationship with the region will serve a sum of China's interests such as expansion of its maritime economy, energy security & maritime claims in the South China Sea. Compared to other regions in China's neighbourhood, such as Northeast Asia, Central Asia & South Asia, Southeast Asia has the most diverse collaboration (political, economic & cultural) with China. Furthermore, the centrality of ASEAN in regional multilateralism & its stated neutrality in great power competition adds to its geostrategic position to China⁴³. To secure a robust association with Southeast Asia⁴⁴, Beijing has been conscientiously using economic diplomacy since the early 2000s to woo nations in this region.

In the process, Beijing's growing economic influence in the region has helped form an evolving, diverged regional order with US leadership in regional security & emerging Chinese centrality in regional economics.

However, due to Beijing's assertiveness in the South China Sea, the US adopted the Pivot to Asia strategy (which was later renamed as a 'strategic rebalance') to counter the growing challenges in the region. Chinese scholars point out that the US policy of Pivot has mitigated China's influence & created challenges in its regional security environment.

In the oceanic area, China perceives the involvement of Washington in the South China Sea dispute⁴⁵ as a hazard to its attempt to negotiate the Code of Conduct for the maritime dispute. In the Mekong, the US improved and strengthened its ties with the Mekong republics at the bilateral & sub-regional levels. The US has been using the Lower Mekong Initiative⁴⁶ to influence H₂O governance and strengthen its non-traditional security role in zones such as law enforcement, humanitarian assistance & disaster relief. In reply to the Pivot, Chinese President Xi Jinping suggested a new Asian regional security

vision, calling for a security based on ‘an Asia for Asians’⁴⁷ at the Conference on Interaction & Confidence Building Measures in Asia.

In 2017, China handed out a white paper on Beijing’s policies on Asia-Pacific security cooperation. Once more, it is focused on the creation of an Asian regional security framework in an attempt to weaken the US role in Asian security⁴⁸. Comprehending the intimidating challenges in preserving relations with the region, especially in the South China Sea dispute, Beijing has attempted to use BRI as economic statecraft to enhance mutual trust. The BRI was also partially a countermeasure to the ex US president Obama administration’s Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) scheme, which many analysts perceived as an effort to contain Beijing’s growing economic influence⁴⁹.

To incentivize other countries to participate in the BRI, Beijing highlighted the BRI’s benefits for the long-term economic development of many countries. Beijing leaders, media & analysts have reiterated that the BRI can sustain and revitalize globalization by improving infrastructure connectivity & by promoting regional & global trade. They also claimed that the BRI is part of Beijing’s efforts to provide public goods. For instance, Beijing proposed the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC)⁵⁰ as part of the BRI in Southeast Asia. It has supported projects related to poverty reduction, growth of small & medium sized enterprises, agriculture, training in water resource management & education under the LMC. The development of Beijing’s influence through economic statecraft, as well as its assertive activities in the South China Sea, has produced remarkable geopolitical repercussions in Asia & beyond. Explicitly targeting the BRI, ex US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson cautioned China’s BRI was a form of “predatory economics” that uses debts to acquire strategic assets & political influence over debtor states⁵¹.

In 2017, the US National Security Strategy implicitly mentioned that the BRI was Beijing’s attempt to “displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region”. Former U.S. Vice President Michael Richard Pence stated at the Hudson Institute in October 2018 that China’s port investments “may soon become a forward military base for China’s growing blue-water navy”. So, Washington should strengthen partnerships across the Indo-Pacific region to “advance our vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific”⁵².

The 2019 US Department of Defense Indo-Pacific Strategy report also emphasized that the US is seriously concerned about “China’s potential to convert unsustainable debt burdens of recipient nations or sub-national groups into strategic & military access”. In general, BRI is perceived to serve as a daunting challenge to the US strategic position in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in Asia⁵³.

Like Washington's refusal to join BRI, India has openly opposed the BRI due to security & geopolitical concerns. It has been said that China's maritime investments in Indian Ocean countries such as Myanmar, Pakistan & Sri Lanka would inevitably pose threats to India's security. Thus, regional countries, especially the major players, have been planning new strategies & policies in reaction to Beijing's growing clout. The US has reportedly begun financial arrangements in cooperation with allies & partners to counter China's BRI financing. For instance, the US Chamber of Commerce's US-India Business Council, along with the US-Japan Business Council, launched the Indo-Pacific Infrastructure Trilateral Forum to promote the private sector in India⁵⁴.

Washington also launched the Better Utilization of Investment Leading to Development (BUILD) Act to counter China's BRI in the Indo-Pacific region⁵⁵. To further engage with the region & perhaps compete with China, the US announced an investment package of US\$113 million for technology, energy & infrastructure initiatives at the ASEAN ministerial level meetings in August of 2018⁵⁶. The US also pledged nearly US\$300 million of new security funding for Southeast Asia. China's strong push into Southeast Asian infrastructure financing & development has spurred Japan's economic activism in the region. Japan has launched its Partnership for Quality Infrastructure scheme, increased the lending of the Asian Development Bank & co-launched the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor with India to cover the Indian subcontinent, Africa, the Middle East, & sub region of Mekong. Furthermore, these attempts include a trilateral cooperation agreement between India, Japan & Vietnam in December 2014⁵⁷.

Although analysts may argue that the number of economic packages planned and executed by Australia or India will not match China's initiatives in Southeast Asia which can diversify economic relations of the region. The regional consequences show that major regional players are seriously disturbed by the increasing influence of BRI. The FOIP strategy, initiated by Japan as early as 2007 but now actively promoted by the US with support from its allies & partners, is perhaps the most noteworthy geopolitical reaction that other powers in the region have forged to mitigate the influence of Beijing. There are few official statements on FOIP from Chinese leaders; though, in March 2018, the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi told media personnel that the Indo-Pacific model is "like the sea foam in the Pacific or Indian Ocean" and that it "may get some attention, but soon will dissipate"⁵⁸.

The matter of an almost official silence on the concept of the 'Indo-Pacific' has shown China's unwillingness to acknowledge this concept in place of 'Asia Pacific'. Most Chinese policy analysts share a common viewpoint on FOIP. They approve that FOIP under the ex US President Donald John Trump's administration is a continuation of Obama's Pivot to Asia, which is to contain China's rise by strengthening the US security

network of allies & strategic partners in the Indo-Pacific region. At the initial stage, most Chinese academics agreed that FOIP lacked substance & implementation. Though FOIP reflects a shared idea among the original Quad members⁵⁹, there is little consensus about the content & implementation of this grand strategy. Hence, the actual adverse impact on China would be relatively limited. Still, as the consequences evolve, they regard FOIP as a “basis” of activities for mitigating China’s influence and believe that the impact should not be underestimated.

In the economic showground, for instance, the Mekong states that have received many economic benefits from China’s Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC)⁶⁰ expressed their support for the implementation of Japan’s FOIP concept in 2018. A more upsetting matter to China is the security pressure placed on by the Quad, where in a recent meeting the leaders of the four states have again decided to continue cooperation in order to keep China at bay and create further issues so that China may not find it smooth sailing in their areas of interest. Different from FOIP that has a geo-economic rationale, Quad showcases the security dimension of this foundation. Some Chinese academics suggest that the promotion of the Quad would increase competition and conflict induced by the US-controlled security network, resulting in disturbance to regional stability in the future. Facing these tasks, Beijing has adopted various strategies to lessen the pressure posed by FOIP in the region. China not only improved its liaison with Japan by promoting cooperative investment in the third market but also improved strategic detente with India. In Southeast Asia, one of the steps was China’s effort to hasten the negotiation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)⁶¹. Some Chinese policy analysts even openly propose China’s involvement in the Comprehensive Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) to strengthen its position in the region⁶².

The BRI, especially, has continued to be perceived as Beijing’s most useful strategic tool in response to the FOIP. It has been overtly seen in the Second Belt and Road Forum, April 26, 2019⁶³. To reduce geopolitical strains and doubts, Chinese headship downplayed the BRI hype & dismissed geopolitical implications by redefining the commercial features of the initiative at the forum. Further major powers’ criticisms have led Beijing to also consider improving transparency, rules & standards in the execution of BRI projects. This stems from China’s realization that the spread of BRI projects has ensued in regional pushback, as seen in the annulment of projects in Malaysia & downsizing of projects in Myanmar. The regional pushback will ultimately hurt its strategic interests in the region. Though alternative initiatives by other countries arising from rivalry with BRI may offset the attraction of the Chinese BRI, China will continue to build networks of economic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region through the BRI in Southeast Asia. There are three main roles for the BRI to carry on to play. Firstly, many Chinese analysts indicate that Beijing is more confident of the realization of BRI in Southeast Asia than in other regions.

Notwithstanding the pushback of some of the projects in Malaysia, the reality is that most Southeast Asian countries have not publicly joined the US to resist or antagonize China, even on concerns related to the South China.

South China Sea Politics in Perspective

On the likelihood of some regional countries wanting ASEAN as a group to be more closely affiliated with the FOIP, Beijing may be able to leverage its better relations with a few mainland Southeast Asian countries. For instance, China has conducted the annual Sino-Cambodian humanitarian assistance & disaster relief exercise (Dragon Gold) since 2018⁶⁴. It was interpreted as Cambodia's estrangement from the US after Phnom Penh also suspended the Angkor Sentinel exercise (an annual bilateral military exercise) with the US in 2017⁶⁵. Secondly, China is keenly aware that the lessening leadership role of the US in multilateral economic collaboration is likely to create opportunities to further fuse its influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Since the US has pulled back from previous commitments to move away from institutionalized regional and global engagement, Beijing has taken the opportunity to capitalize on this abrupt change. Beijing appears to have committed more resources to Southeast Asia than the US. In contrast, the 'America-First' narrative of the ex-US President Trump administration is further eroding US credibility⁶⁶. The Trump administration abandoned the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), retreated from some multilateral institutions & even threatened to wage trade war against its allies. The uncertainties of US commitment have prompted Japan to support Beijing's economic push for a third market collaboration.

The questionable commitment to exact economic returns of FOIP also drives Southeast Asian states to adopt a 'wait-and-see' attitude. Third, Beijing sees the BRI as a potential tool to prevent Southeast Asian nations from forming a coalition against it. Or, economic cooperation will at least help coax most regional countries to preserve a neutral stance towards the Indo-Pacific vision. It is clear that ASEAN and its member countries were reluctant to endorse FOIP under US leadership.

When ASEAN issued the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). Indeed, AOIP contains elements that are shared with BRI, such as inclusiveness and economic cooperation.

CPEC & Gwadar

CPEC provides an apt answer to the critics who raise a finger at Pakistan for not investing or providing it enough opportunity to allow it to sustain and grow economically in its province, namely Balochistan. Had that been the case, then China would not have been allowed to bring in finance to develop its infrastructure. Gwadar has the capacity to replace Karachi by becoming the new economic and industrial hub of Pakistan, which

could display the economic prowess of the country. The infrastructure and investment will bring economic opportunities to the people of the area, while analysts believe that it has the potential to become the new Dubai⁶⁷.

CPEC Is More than Just a Regional Integration Initiative

CPEC is a trans-regional project, meaning Central Asia, West Asia (Middle East and Russia), and South Asia all converge into a single project, and it will turn Pakistan into a pan-Eurasian country. Russia and China share a narrow border near Xinjiang, where they are constructing two pipelines so southern Siberia can be connected with the Altai corridor to Xinjiang, which can take it into Pakistan and via CPEC routes, and from there it can connect with Iran and further to the Middle East and Africa. In 2006, Russia's state-owned Gazprom - the world's largest producer of natural gas - and the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC)⁶⁸ signed an agreement aimed at implementing construction of a proposed 2,600km natural gas pipeline running from northwest Siberia southward through Altai, over the Kanas Pass into China⁶⁹. Iran has already expressed a desire to join CPEC, which has antagonized India. Iranian natural gas, which is the second largest reservoir, could be connected to China, which means that China will not be dependent on the Malacca Strait anymore, China will be able to trade with the Middle East and Europe through CPEC, and that will render every challenging manoeuvre or project ineffective⁷⁰.

Evolving CPEC

Many names were given to it, first it was A Plan, an Initiative, BRI, and OBOR. CPEC is intrinsically designed for Xinjiang province, which can become instrumental in tackling issues of extremism in the area, and also, when the big companies start investing in the region, it will create more opportunities for the local populace. Obama's rebalancing strategy made China look westward; almost at the same time, China and the Philippines' dispute in the South China Sea made China look for other options in Central Asia and Pakistan⁷¹. China expects that CPEC becomes an open invitation for international industries to invest in China as this project's smooth running and performance will also display to the world that Chinese can accomplish projects of such magnitude and can run them efficiently, furthermore, Chinese companies particularly state owned which are trying to compete with global companies can catch up at that level and can make a mark internationally with such massive scale undertakings, thirdly, energy security for China is paramount and oil from Middle East will use the same route⁷².

Pre CPEC, the discussion revolved around evaluating the project as 'lacking substance' and that it was India centric while, now that the project is becoming a reality; the new discussion is about economic gains, people to people contact and cultural ties as

governments in Pakistan is more inclined to open Chinese study centres, academic exchange programs to China and encouraging students to learn mandarin which could bring more appreciation and understanding of the two cultures.

CPEC can be analysed under the following three heads. 1) In real economic terms, viz., building of Gwadar city, energy and real estate booming 2) Political stability...even though there are issues but reassuring that Pakistan is safe 3) Pakistan's perception globally, e.g., British, French and Iranian governments are willing to become part of CPEC, so there is a genuine interest in business community. Initiation of energy projects under the CPEC has relieved Pakistan from this shortfall to some extent by enhancing the generation capacity to 22,797 MW⁷³. Once the energy projects are completed, it will help Pakistan get consistent and cost – effective energy supplies which is the backbone of economic prosperity.⁷⁴

Sustainable consensus on the CPEC plan is a debate in the political arena because indigenous political stakeholders are desirous and keen on gaining from Chinese capital for their eco-political benefit. To be more specific, the areas that the CPEC routes will be passing through, it will bring business and value to lands, while, business related activities around it will also increase manifold; therefore self-proclaimed stake holders are trying to divert the routes and are desirous that it must pass through or near to their lands for the aforementioned reason which will also give them substantial personal & political advantage. Route is not a point of acrimony among political stakeholders of any area; rather, they seem to be reaching a compromise because, at the end of the day, everyone wants the project to be completed, as there is no downside to it anyway.

Global Pivot State

Pakistan, over the years, has played a pivotal role and has now become the pivot of the world once again. CPEC has far-reaching effects for the Persian Gulf and Pacific Rim, going all the way to Indo – Pacific up to the Middle East and Africa. China's new grand strategy envisages that it should pursue its rise and should stress new associations with the Eurasian land mass and the continent at large. Pakistan and the Chinese governments also foresee that, by contemporary arrangement, they can not only solidify their strategic partnership but also get domestic support in the political and military spectrum. China is trying to link itself with the Islamic world through land and sea, as CPEC allows it a path to the Islamic heartlands⁷⁵. Most Chinese support CPEC, while analysts believe that it is an opportunity to gain world dominance. CPEC is the best way for China to counter the US's pivot to Asia or its rebalancing policy, including TPP⁷⁶. China will get good results from its overproduction capacity by finding new markets in southern and southwestern areas and in return they will provide vital substance for Chinese long-term growth while China is

relying on its all-weather friend that it will protect their investment and interests for which Pakistan has taken measures which reassures its commitment to the project⁷⁷.

Policy consideration

- It is important to clarify the regulatory framework for infrastructure development and investment to provide potential investors with flawless, transparent, foreseeable and reliable policies and regulations.
- There has to be a strategy for national and regional trade and then it is imperative to ensure that infrastructure strategies are well aligned with those national trade, regional trade and development strategies, including logistics development, investment and broader regulatory restructurings.
- Streamline or remove restrictions to foreign investment in the energy and transport sectors. In cases where such policies are considered necessary to address national development objectives, governments should ensure that they are not more restrictive than needed.
- Foster dialogue between the public and private sectors. There is significant scope for the private sector to become more engaged in infrastructure development in the region and policy development in the national sphere. The public sector should work more closely with private stakeholders to address bottlenecks in the investment climate and build appropriate domestic regulations that foster competitiveness, particularly in backbone service sectors.
- Strengthen capacity and co-ordination across ministries and related entities involved in infrastructure planning and prioritization. Infrastructure in the region is often developed in silos and not always integrated with other types of policies such as industrial development strategies.

Conclusion

Connectivity is more than for economic gains, it has become linchpin in global politics and relations among states which means the more you are connected with each other, the more a state will have stakes in survival of other nations and that is how it will be able to survive in this growing dependent world. As already it is seen that now the states are choosing sides on the considerations of economics rather than ideology or emotions. The thing with connectivity and economic activities where countries are falling on the economic battlefield is the conjecturing that goes on inside the policy making circles of any country. There has to be a potent and competent analytical and executive branch which could get to policy decision and then implement it effectively. Once this happens there is every likelihood that any country and especially a country like Pakistan which is strategically important to the world, will lead the economic domain of the region.

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