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China Pakistan Economic Corridor: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The major objectives of the research are to identify any dangers and challenges related to the development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), as well as to shed light on the benefits that Pakistan receives from the CPEC.

Research Gap: Within the scope of the research, various threats and challenges are identified. These include cyber security threats, geopolitical conflicts, and terrorist acts.

Design/Methodology/Approach: In this study, the author used the qualitative research method with exploratory and analytical design which is based on the primary and secondary data sources.

The Main Findings: The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has the potential to bring about huge economic benefits for both countries; nevertheless, the resolution of security concerns is essential to the success of this endeavor. It is possible to acquire a better understanding of the strategic advantages and anticipated benefits that will accrue to both China and Pakistan as a result of the pursuit of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) by adopting the rational choice paradigm. Additionally, the study highlights the need of constant diplomatic efforts, strategies for conflict resolution, and collaboration with regional parties in the management and mitigation of security concerns. This is done to guarantee the sustained growth of the (CPEC).
Theoretical / Practical Implications of the Findings: The research makes use of Rational Choice Theory as its conceptual and theoretical framework to get an understanding of the reasons and choices that China and Pakistan have made in their pursuit of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Rational Choice Theory suggests that governments, international actors, and decision-makers make rational decisions to achieve the best outcome and avoid failure. This theory is used to explain why China invests in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Pakistan becomes a partner of this project. It delves into the reasons why they are in this game.

Originality/Value: The abstracts demonstrate the contribution of the research that has rarely/never been done before.

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1. Introduction

In the 21st century, a worldwide strategic environment has formed, promoting the growth of regional and global alliances in both economic and strategic domains. This context fosters cooperation among nations in

economic and strategic domains (Anwar, 2010). The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a bilateral initiative that will have a transformative impact on the region's political and economic landscape and the global stage. (M. Z. U. Khan & Khan, 2019) This project aims to provide a connection between Kashghar in China and Gwadar in Pakistan. This project will provide substantial advantages for both China and Pakistan. The project is estimated to cost \$46 billion and will be finished by 2030. The One Belt One Road (OBOR) program, spearheaded by China, includes the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as one of its components. China made its largest overseas investment via the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Once finished, CPEC is expected to have a significant impact on global economic and strategic policies. This investment is also anticipated to contribute to the prosperity and strength of Pakistan (Abid & Ashfaq, 2015). The project will have a significant impact and provide many trade routes connecting China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Central Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is of utmost importance to Pakistan as it would significantly enhance the country's economy. The anticipated results of the CPEC include fostering interpersonal connections and cultural interchange to facilitate inter-civilization communication, as well as coordinating diplomatic tactics to cultivate a friendly and harmonious neighborhood. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has significant relevance for Pakistan, China, and the rest of the globe (Rizvi, 2014). Research indicates that CPEC is crucial for global development and is considered the future of the world. The analysis indicates that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will have a positive impact on around 3 billion people residing in China, South Asia, and Central Asia. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) cannot only empower Pakistan and China but also the largest population in the world residing in Asia, including India. However, India has expressed concerns over the CPEC and the strengthening relationship between Pakistan and China (Gill, 2019). Upon completion of the CPEC and its associated projects, Pakistan will serve as a prominent commerce center connecting China, the Middle East, and Africa. Primarily, commerce should include the conveyance of oil from the Middle East to Gwadar, a location positioned on the periphery of the Gulf.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

In this research, the conceptual and theoretical framework is dependent on the rational choice theory. This theory enlightened the cause of why China is persuaded to make this project, why China is eager to invest, and why Pakistan is in this collaboration to build CPEC. This theory will describe the interdependence of both countries to fulfill their national interests by making CPEC. The CPEC depends on the Rational Choice Theory.

2.1 Rational Choice Theory

The study necessitates the use of rational choice theory to analyze and elucidate the actions and behaviors of various entities such as nations, and international players including intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, and multinational corporations. All of these performers have works that are indescribable, functioning and thinking and reacting much like a human person. The study aims to investigate the decision-making process of the leaders of Pakistan and China, as well as the stakeholders, regarding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and other related projects. This decision-making process can be well-understood by the researchers and students of political science and international relations who in turn can make predictions about their behavior towards CPEC. To make the study even better, the rational choice theory will be used to investigate other sides of CPEC.

Balancing Theory and Evidence: A balanced approach involves integrating Rational Choice Theory (RCT) with empirical evidence in a way that each enriches the other. Rather than relying solely on RCT to explain the decisions, use it as a lens through which to interpret the evidence, while allowing the evidence to challenge or refine the theory.

By adopting this balanced approach, the paper would effectively demonstrate the interplay between theory and practice. It shows that while Rational Choice Theory can offer significant insights, real-world scenarios are often influenced by factors that require a broader analytical perspective. This approach ensures that the

analysis is theoretically robust and empirically grounded, leading to a more well-rounded and insightful conclusion.

Rational Choice Theory (RCT) posits that individuals make decisions by optimizing their benefits, typically in terms of utility. Originating from classical economics, it has been influential across disciplines like economics, political science, sociology, and criminology.

2.2 Foundational Works

RCT's roots lie in the works of Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham, who introduced ideas of self-interest and utility maximization. In the 20th century, John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern formalized these concepts through game theory. Gary Becker expanded RCT into non-economic areas, arguing that rational choice underlies a wide range of human behaviors.

2.3 Applications in Various Disciplines

In political science, James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock applied RCT to political decision-making, emphasizing rational calculations in "The Calculus of Consent" (1962). In sociology, Jon Elster defended RCT's value while acknowledging its limitations in capturing complex social behaviors. In criminology, Derek Cornish and Ronald Clarke used RCT to explain criminal behavior as a rational choice to maximize benefits and minimize risks.

2.4 Rational Actor Model

A model used in international relations and political science to explain how states make decisions. It assumes that states act as rational unitary actors, making decisions to maximize their national interest.

Rational choice theory is a social science theory that deals with the behavior of individuals, organizations, and the state in connection to human behavior and social life. The idea can be explained by the logical decision of people and countries as well as their actions and interactions with others. Political interaction can be seen as a form of exchange, where individuals or states engage with each other if the benefits they expect to gain outweigh the costs associated with the interaction. If it fails to do so, the interaction between the two will no longer be feasible. The rational choice theory seeks to elucidate the motivations and decision-making processes that drive actors' behavior (Cornish & Clarke, 2016).

3. Literature Review

The bilateral relations between the two nations have never been put to the test in the way that they are now, Pakistan views China as one of its most valuable and enduring allies. The study must assess the reaction of Pakistan's political stakeholders. When the Author studies Pakistan's political stakeholder's response then there is a big sigh of relief at that point they all agree to build CPEC for the better future of Pakistan. And there is no opposition to this proposal. However, there are a few nationalist groups in Baluchistan (Hafeez et al., 2021). However, the Baloch people raised their voices because they believe they have not received the full benefit of developments in Baluchistan, such as the CPEC and the Gwadar port project. Although they are not opposed to the initiative entirely, they do want their fair part. The Baloch point of view is not opposed to China in this sense. They believe they should be given proper and due benefits or share with the Balouch people (YIGIT & Studies, 2019).

3.1 Bilateral Relations

If we talk about the political stakeholders of Pakistan they all wanted and were in favor of having friendly bilateral relations with China. As earlier our studies described there are no concerns about Pakistan's political parties and their point of view regarding China, this all indicates Pakistan's political stakeholders will preferably maintain or boost their policy toward China, and always make friendly relations with the neighboring country (Mahmood & Askari, 2022).

3.2 CPEC Routes Through Pakistan

The main highway will pass from the Gwadar Port through Turbat, Panjgur, Ratodero, Kashmore, Rajanpur, Dera Ghazi Khan, Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu, Kohat, to Peshawar, up to Hasan Abdal, and Khunjerab, then on to the Pakistan-China border. Nonetheless, currently, there are several alternative routes available in a bid for the segment. The Western government is mentioning an alternative route as the Eastern Route would start from Gwadar and transit through Turbat, Panjgur, Khuzdar, Ratodero, Kashmore, Rajanpur, Dera Ghazi, Multan, Faisalabad, Pindi Bhattian, Rawalpindi, Hasan Abdal, which will go to Khunjerab and China. The emergence of the Eastern Route in the media has propelled the issue of the Western Route, which is the name of the route from the northeastern Balochistan region. This route is proposed to pass through Gwadar- Turbat-Panjgur-Khuzdar-Kalat-Quetta-Zhob-Dera Ismail Khan-Bannu-Kohat-Peshawar-Hasanabdaland onwards to khunjrab and then to china. In terms of opportunity cost and compensation for displacement, the Western route appears to be the most efficient and cost-effective option, being the shortest among the alternatives. Conversely, the Eastern route presents a potentially higher financial burden. Many sections along this route would require enlargement and relaying to handle the anticipated traffic volume and making claims that existing portions would save time and money untenable. Additionally, the Eastern route carries the risk of political division, instability, and the potential to undermine the overall Corridor concept(Zhou & Esteban, 2018).

3.3 Eastern Routes

According to the author (Flew, 2012). If the Eastern Route is chosen because of security issues which are related to the Western and Central routes, then these immediate safety benefits may lead to future inter-provincial discord and political instability. Although security is a priority, the best way to deal with unrest is by giving people jobs instead of resorting to military action. Since the project is too important to be delayed any longer, it's necessary to settle this dispute as soon as possible and come up with a solution that will satisfy all provinces. Dera Ismail Khan-Sargodha-Lahore will be connected to the Lahore-Karachi Motorway.

Khuzdar-Ratodero-Sukkur will be the route of connecting with the Lahore-Karachi Motorway.

3.4 Cultural and Social Objectives of CPEC

This way not only the economic benefits are shared more equally but also it leads to national unity and long-term stability. Furthermore, the participation of local communities in the decision-making can be a way to reduce possible conflicts and at the same time get support for the project.

CPEC is not only a road network between two countries, CPEC is a complex system that includes different dimensions and issues. Society is in dire need of intellectuals, researchers, and students from different universities and think tanks to work together on its various dimensions. These dimensions are the logistics, transportation, and infrastructure development which is composed of railway lines, roads, ports, and airports. Apart from that, CPEC is also a political, social, and cultural exchange program that includes skill development and future employment. The other major spheres are agriculture, environment, climate change, and food security. In addition, economic stability and prosperity are also important objectives that want to be achieved through increasing international trade and investment through knowledge sharing. Through cross-border collaboration, we should be able to realize the whole potential of CPEC and at the same time create sustainable growth as well as regional cooperation. The initiative is also a chance for the development of academic and professional life, which will boost the global discussion on development. The better comprehension and the new solutions in these areas will be a great advantage to the long-term success of CPEC. These are the segments of CPEC that are important to discuss and will affect both countries so the need of people to people to contact is essential to deal in these fields (Ullah, Khan, Rahman, & Ullah, 2021).

3.5 External Challenges

India has become the biggest opponent of both Pakistan and China, and it is observed that India does not want China to flourish and does not want China to become South Asian Leader. As far as Gwadar port is concerned, India has some serious reserves on this by having a stance that Indian Ocean will be shadowed

by China and China will create its supremacy in the region. In reaction, India is working on Chahbahar port in Iran to compete with Gwadar port in Iran, and building its relations with Iran and Afghanistan to make influence in the region (Z. A. J. S. S. Khan, 2012).

Definitely, there are very serious unresolved territorial disputes between these three countries, and CPEC will be going through some of these disputed territories, but China unofficially asks India to be involved in this corridor (Kuszevska, Nitza-Makowska, & Affairs, 2021). In the course of his trip to China from July 3-8, 2013, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif emphasized CPEC as a vital economic project directed at benefiting the whole region, even India. This shows that both countries were keen to have India in this project and want trilateral relations for the betterment of the region (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003).

Recent literature paves the way to find out the related theories to CPEC which are going to be discussed. The author used the Neo-liberalism theory to illustrate the behavior of respondent states whose economy is going to be hit by this project and the second theory will be Rational Choice theory which will describe that both CPEC countries are interdependent for their benefits and national interests.

The above literature review discussed about the major challenges and opportunities of the China Pakistan Economic corridor. Discussing challenges, the author has concluded that there are two kinds of challenges related to CPEC, like external challenges from India, Middle East (Dubai), Iran, Afghanistan, and most of the biggest are the terrorist activists. Internal challenges like political instability, route controversy, provincial prejudice, and managerial corruption are the main challenges that can weaken this entire project.

4. Research Methodology

In this study, the author used the qualitative research method with exploratory and analytical design which is based on the primary and secondary data sources.

4.1 Exploratory & Analytical Design

Exploratory and analytical study relies on secondary data. It provides a base for the initial groundwork and it is a non-experimental study. The main purpose of the exploratory analytical study is to explore things without manipulating them. The purpose of the study is to link causes and results of the evidence of research. It defines the problems and suggests solutions but its results are not usually useful for decision-making this study provides significant insight into the given situation of the topic where research is being done (Barratt, Choi, & Li, 2011).

4.2 Data Sources

In this research, the author used secondary data sources that is books, journals, periodicals, research articles, newspapers, blogs, etc. have been consulted to get real insight into the dispute.

5. Importance for Pakistan

Pakistan places great importance on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) from various perspectives, including infrastructural improvement, economic development, and geopolitical orientation.

Firstly, Pakistan's economy experiences accelerated growth due to CPEC. Job creation, heightened industrial activity, and improved trade connectivity are all facilitated by the extensive infrastructure projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. These projects encompass the expansion of Gwadar Port, the establishment of energy-producing facilities, and the development of transportation networks. China's investment inflows not only bolster economic growth but also address pressing issues such as energy scarcity, creating a more favorable environment for enterprises to thrive (Eichengreen & Tong, 2006). The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been a major factor in the improvement of Pakistan's infrastructure and thus played an important part in its long-term development. The CPEC links China's northwest Xinjiang region with the Gwadar Port in southwest Pakistan by creating a net of roads, railways, and energy infrastructure. This strategic link makes Pakistan a major player in both regional and international trade as well as it greatly enhances the internal transit systems. The upgraded infrastructure

under CPEC facilitates the creation of more efficient commercial routes which in turn make Pakistan a more interconnected, competitive, and robust economy.

6. Strategic Significance of CPEC

Besides, the CPEC has political importance too and it changes greatly the geopolitical situation of the region. China considers the CPEC a crucial component of the larger Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), facilitating improved economic routes and connectivity from Pakistan's Gwadar Port to western China. Thanks to this strategically important link, China no longer needs to rely on lengthier and riskier maritime routes to access the Arabian Sea. This development enhances Beijing's geopolitical standing and expands China's economic influence in the area, allowing for diversification of energy imports and reducing the risks associated with traditional sea routes (Chung, 2018).

From Pakistan's perspective, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) represents a geopolitical advantage that promotes economic expansion. The corridor has closely aligned Pakistan and China, fostering strong diplomatic and economic ties. By addressing critical infrastructure gaps, this alignment not only supports Pakistan's economic progress but also enhances its diplomatic standing internationally (Ismail, 2014). Pakistan gains influence in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and solidifies its relationship with a major global economic force through CPEC. Furthermore, the corridor elevates Pakistan's geopolitical significance by positioning it as an essential transit hub for both domestic and international trade. Therefore, the strategic importance of CPEC lies in its capacity to alter the balance of power in the area, promote economic interdependence, and expand China and Pakistan's geopolitical influence.

7. Potential Threats and Challenges

The completion of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) brings about substantial economic prospects, but it also entails possible risks and difficulties. A major concern is the potential for terrorism, particularly in the Baluchistan region of Pakistan, where separatist groups have targeted infrastructure projects associated with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). These assaults pose a threat to the safety of the employees, hinder the pace of construction, and create an atmosphere of terror. Pakistan has increased the deployment of security troops to safeguard CPEC projects. However, the continual threat continues to pose a significant challenge (S. A. Khan, 2013).

The geopolitical rivalry between India and Pakistan is a big security problem because of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that goes through disputed territory. A part of CPEC goes through the disputed Kashmir region, which is famous for its historical instability. This is even more intricate when the possibility of escalation of hostilities between the two countries which can endanger this corridor's success comes into play. The existence of CPEC in this sensitive zone makes the security situation more complicated and thus, requires clever and well-thought-out diplomatic work to reduce the conflict risks. The stability and further development of CPEC should be guaranteed by taking proactive steps to deal with these geopolitical tensions (Daniels, 2013). Besides, there are also worries about the cyber-attacks that may risk the CPEC infrastructure. Being the main project of connectivity which is based heavily on digital technologies and communication networks, CPEC is very vulnerable to cyber-attacks that can break down operations, get access to sensitive data, or even destroy critical infrastructure. Hence, the strengthening of cybersecurity measures is a must for CPEC to be able to withstand these new challenges. The mutual help between China and Pakistan is the key to solving these problems properly. To sum up, CPEC has a lot of security problems such as cyberattacks, political conflicts, and terrorism. The right response to the development of the economic corridor is well-coordinated and strategically planned. Both nations should join forces to strengthen security measures and deal with these different risks, thus making CPEC a real regional project (Burgos Cáceres & Ear, 2012).

8. Discussion

Rational choice theory, the key notion in economics and political science, gives useful information on how individuals and states make their decisions by rational calculation of costs and benefits. This structure is

very helpful in explaining the reasons and choices behind the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). China sees the huge investments in CPEC as a wise decision to protect its economic and strategic interests for years. Thus, by helping the economic development of Pakistan, China not only gets a reliable partner and market for its goods but also creates a strategic way to get into the Arabian Sea through Gwadar Port. Pakistan is the most suitable country to engage in CPEC because it fits perfectly into its rational economic decision-making process aimed at solving development challenges. The more China invests in and brings its knowledge to Pakistan, the less these infrastructure problems which are mainly related to energy and transportation will be. This logical decision is made because of the possibility to get economic growth, job creation, and improved trade connectivity. Besides, using the CPEC project which is a part of China's Belt and Road Initiative with Pakistan as its participant. It will be an additional strategy to expand the economic and geopolitical alliances for Pakistan beyond this region. Therefore, rational choice theory is a tool for understanding the measured choices of both China and Pakistan in implementing CPEC. These decisions are made for common interests and strategic reasons. The two sides, China and Pakistan have both done a lot to ensure the safety of CPEC facilities and personnel in response to security threats. The Pakistani government has increased security forces along the corridor, especially in areas like Balochistan province which is where the attacks are most likely to happen. The improved coordination between the Chinese and Pakistani security forces leads to a single and efficient reaction to all possible threats. Besides, the main causes of regional conflicts that are being tackled include socioeconomic disparity and dissatisfaction to form a more stable environment for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The use of diplomatic methods to involve the regional players and solve the problems with India is also vital for this corridor. Hence, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor between China and Pakistan is a good example of how to sensibly solve security problems while building up an integrated economy.

9. Conclusion

The Pakistani government has increased the number of security forces along the corridor, especially in such places as Balochistan province where attacks are more probable. The cooperation between Chinese and Pakistani security forces has been enhanced which is why they can act as one when there are any possible threats. Besides that, the main causes of regional conflicts such as socio-economic disparities and grievances are also being addressed to provide a more stable and suitable development environment for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The diplomatic actions that are to be taken to bring the regional stakeholders together and reduce the tension with India will also play a key role in the security and success of this corridor. Hence, China and Pakistan's cooperation on CPEC is a perfect example of their comprehensive approach to economic development which also takes into account the security issues in rational and strategic ways. This flexible strategy requires continuous diplomatic efforts, efficient conflict resolution mechanisms, and a deep knowledge of regional situations. The attainment of the balance between the security that is so necessary and at the same time, economic development needs constant cooperation, flexibility, and a firm resolves to deal with the root causes of instability. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor will be determined by the way how effectively China and Pakistan can work with other regional actors to control and resolve these security issues.

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