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Benefits, Regional and Internal Challenges Being Faced in Pakistan

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Exercise Solo Flight

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CHINA PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR (CPEC): BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES FOR PAKISTAN

AIM

This paper will analyze the benefits and challenges of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) for Pakistan. It will discuss the benefits of CPEC for Pakistan and its positive impact on the energy crisis, infrastructure development, economy, poverty reduction, and regional development. Further, various internal challenges will be discussed, such as lack of national consensus, lack of transparency, poor security situation, a struggling economy, etc. Lastly, external challenges such as the situation in Afghanistan, the Indian hostile design towards CPEC, and USA's concerns over CPEC will be discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang announced the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) concept in May 2013.¹ The fundamental idea behind CPEC is that it involves the development of roads, pipelines, and railways to connect Gwadar Port in Balochistan, Pakistan, to Kashgar, China.² The total worth of the Chinese investment under CPEC is \$62 billion.³ The agreements were formally signed in 2015 when President Xi Jinping visited Pakistan.

This paper aims to analyze the CPEC's background, its benefits for Pakistan, and the main challenges Pakistan faces in completing CPEC. As a large-scale initiative, it is essential to identify

¹ Reuters. (2013, May 23). *Li Keqiang urges the development of the 'China-Pakistan economic corridor.'* Retrieved from South China Morning Post: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1244267/li-keqiang-urges-development-china-pakistan-economic-corridor>

² Reuters. (2015, April 20). China's Xi Jinping to visit Pakistan and invest \$46 billion. Retrieved from D.W.: <https://www.dw.com/en/chinas-xi-jinping-to-visit-pakistan-invest-46-billion/a-18393074>

³ Hussain, F. &. (2017). China-Pak economic corridor (CPEC) and its geopolitical paradigms. *International Journal of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Education*, 79-95.

and analyze different aspects and implications of CPEC to understand the challenges Pakistan faces in its successful completion. This paper will also highlight the history of CPEC with the Chinese "Belt-Road Initiative" (BRI) and why China decided to spend a considerable amount of money and resources on Pakistan.

CPEC can positively impact the regional economy, employment, infrastructure development, poverty reduction, and regional connectivity. However, Pakistan faces numerous external and internal challenges in completing CPEC.

DISCUSSION

Background of BRI

The Belt and Road Initiative also called “One Belt, One Road,” is a large-scale investment project that aims to enhance the regional connectivity of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East via sea and land. President Xi Jinping first introduced the multi-billion-dollar project in 2013.⁴ BRI involves more than 65 countries. It contains numerous projects and economic corridors like the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), the Northern Corridor, and CPEC to connect Kashghar in China’s Xinjiang province and the Arabian Sea via Pakistan.⁵

CPEC Overview

CPEC has the potential to transform Pakistan into a connectivity hub and benefit all of Pakistan's neighboring countries, including India, Afghanistan, and Iran. The \$62 billion

⁴ Yu, H. (2017). The motivation behind China's 'One Belt, One Road initiative and establishment of the Asian infrastructure investment bank. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 353-368.

⁵ Dave, B. &. (2018). China’s silk road economic belt initiative in Central Asia: financial and security implications. *Asia Europe Journal*, 267-281.

investment is divided into four main sectors: energy, infrastructure, railway, and Gwadar. Figure-1 shows the CPEC investment breakdown:⁶

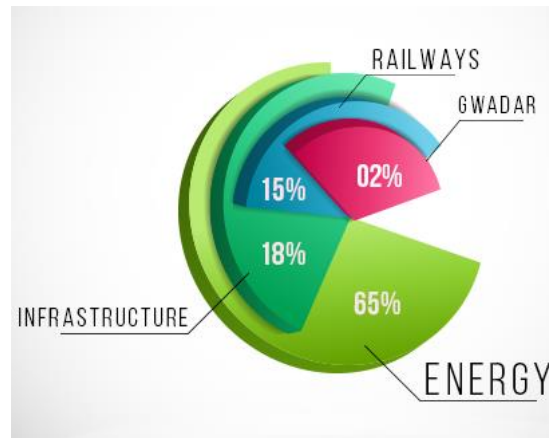


Figure 1: CPEC Investment Breakdown

In 2015, Pakistan and China jointly developed the Long-Term Plan (Figure-1) for CPEC (2017 to 2030).⁷ This ambitious plan revolves around executing projects across various sectors in Pakistan under the umbrella of CPEC.

The primary incentive behind Chinese investments in Pakistan is China's dependency on hydrocarbon for its ever-increasing energy requirements. About 85% of the oil supply passes through the Indian Ocean into the Chinese Pacific Ocean port.⁸ Any disruption in this supply chain can adversely impact China and its economy.

CPEC provides an opportunity for China to mitigate the risk of any potential disruption by creating a shorter supply route and access to the Indian Ocean to monitor the naval activities of

⁶ E-Build Pakistan. (2021, July 16). CPEC: The History, The Projects, and The Benefits. Retrieved from E-Build Pakistan: <https://ebuildpakistan.com/blog/cpec-the-history-the-projects-and-the-benefits/>

⁷ CPEC Authority. (2017). Long Term Plan For China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (2017-2030). Retrieved from CPEC Authority: <http://cpec.gov.pk/long-term-plan-cpec>

⁸ Chen, X. J. (2018). Betting big on CPEC. Connecticut, Trinity: Trinity College. Retrieved from. (2018). Betting big on CPEC.

India and the USA.⁹ The completion of CPEC will shorten the transportation distance between the Persian Gulf and China's mainland from 16,000 km to 2,500 km.¹⁰ It will significantly boost China's economy through global trading.



Figure 2: Long-Term Master Plan of CPEC

CPEC Routes

The three main routes in CPEC are the Eastern, Central, and Western routes (Figure-3).¹¹ The shortest route is the Western route, commonly called the Western Alignment, which passes through Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK).

⁹ Rehman, O. U. (2021). Optimality study of China's crude oil imports through China Pakistan economic corridor using fuzzy TOPSIS and Cost-Benefit analysis. *Transportation Research Part E: Logistics and Transportation Review*, 102246.

¹⁰ Hussain, F. (2020). Geostrategic Imperatives of Gwadar Port for China. *The Korean Journal of International Studie*, 145-167.

¹¹ Dawn. (2015, May 15). Eastern, Central, and Western are the three main routes in CPEC. . Retrieved from Dawn: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1182074/ahsan-reveals-three-routes-of-corridor>

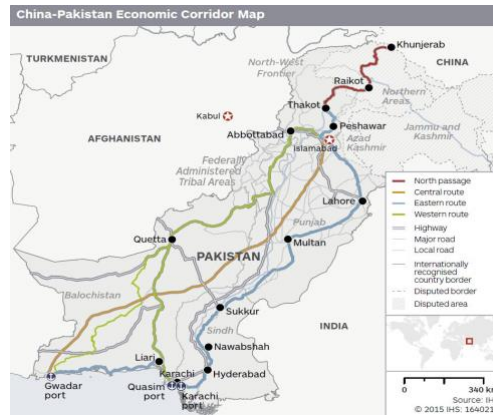


Figure 3: Western, Eastern, and Central Routes of CPEC

The Eastern Alignment starts from Gwadar, passes through Lahore, Multan, Karachi, and Sukker, and ends at Khunjerab. The Eastern route is the longest and comparatively safer route of CPEC.¹² The Central route also starts from Gwadar and passes through Dera Ghazi Khan, Bannu, Kohat, and Peshawar.

These routes pass through Pakistan's provinces and run through various cities. Each route faces a different set of challenges. Generally, the Western Alignment is considered the most unsafe route due to security issues in Balochistan and KPK.¹³

Importance of Gwadar Port

Gwadar Port is the most critical part of CPEC because it connects Central Asia, West Asia, and South Asia. It became operational in 2007 and currently handles only commercial shipping.¹⁴

¹² Iqbal, K. (2017). Significance and security of CPEC: A Pakistani perspective. *China Int'l Stud*, 132.

¹³ Nasar, N. U. (2018, March 8). Politics Surrounding CPEC. Retrieved from CSCR: <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/politics-governance/politics-surrounding-cep/>

¹⁴ Ebrahim, Z. (2021, August 11). Pakistan's key CPEC port is far from the trade hub vision. Retrieved from The Third Pole: <https://www.thethirdpole.net/en/regional-cooperation/pakistan-gwadar-port-long-way-from-trade-hub-vision/>

Under the CPEC, the Gwadar Port will provide strategic leverage to Pakistan and avoid interference from India because it is far from other Pakistani ports like Karachi and Port Qasim.

Gwadar will also enhance Pakistan's cooperation with other energy and oil-rich countries like Kazakhstan. Besides boosting trade activities, the Gwadar Port will also provide at least two million jobs in Balochistan.¹⁵ A high employment rate and infrastructure development that involves upgrading schools and hospitals will improve Balochistan's living standards.

CPEC's long-term plan also includes the development of Gwadar Smart Port City and the construction of expressways and large-scale power plants that will establish Balochistan as an economic center and improve Pakistan's economy through increased trade, tourism, and revenue activities.¹⁶

Benefits of CPEC

CPEC is a game-changer for Pakistan because it can positively impact transportation, economy, energy, trading, manufacturing, and other industries. It is a unique opportunity for Pakistan to get connected with the massive markets of China and Central Asia. CPEC aims to create 7,00,000 jobs and increase Pakistan's yearly growth rate by 2.5%.¹⁷ Following are the significant benefits of CPEC due to which it can improve Pakistan's growth rate and play an essential role in economic development:

¹⁵ Geo News. (2016, July 5). CPEC to create nearly 2 million jobs. Retrieved from Geo News: geo.tv/latest/108994-CPEC-to-create-nearly-2-million-jobs

¹⁶ CPEC Authority. (2020). Gwadar Smart Port City Master Plan. Retrieved from CPEC Authority: <http://cpec.gov.pk/project-details/63>

¹⁷ Haq, R. &. (2016). Impact of CPEC on social welfare in Pakistan: A district-level analysis. *The Pakistan Development Review*, 597-618.

Resolve Energy Crisis

Energy is critical for the success of any country because it runs industries and creates development and growth opportunities. Pakistan faces a severe energy crisis due to drastic population growth and rising industrial demands. Moreover, political instability, lack of efficiency, and mismanagement of its resources are the main reasons Pakistan has not successfully overcome its energy crisis.¹⁸

Under the CPEC, China will help Pakistan progress in the energy sector and overcome the energy crisis. The energy-related projects are worth between \$35 and \$37 billion and are based on wind, solar, and hydropower generation of 16,400 megawatts. China also announced its plan to set up ten energy projects of 6,600 megawatts in the Thar Desert and convert this region into an energy capital.¹⁹

Infrastructure Development

Infrastructure is a critical part of CPEC because it consists of several projects to develop roads, ports, motorways, and highways. Large-scale infrastructure development will improve Pakistan's connectivity with the rest of the world and remove trade barriers.²⁰ Completing CPEC will modernize Pakistan's infrastructure and help industries supply manufactured products faster and easier.

Countries with developed infrastructure are also attractive for industries like agriculture, manufacturing, and services, creating more employment opportunities for the locals. Besides small

¹⁸ Kessides, I. N. (2013). Chaos in power: Pakistan's electricity crisis. *Energy policy*, 271-285.

¹⁹ Iqbal, S. C. (2019). Projecting impact of CPEC on Pakistan's electric power crisis. *Chinese. Chinese Journal of Population Resources and Environment*, 310-321.

²⁰ Wolf, S. O. (2021). *China-Pakistan Economic Corridor of the Belt and Road Initiative*. Berlin: Springer.

and medium-sized businesses, CPEC will help Pakistan attract multinational enterprises through its economic and industrial free zones.²¹

Economic Development

CPEC can help the struggling economy of Pakistan become healthy and stable in the long run.²² Since CPEC consists of numerous different projects; it will create multiple opportunities for Pakistan to revive its industries and achieve sustainable economic growth.

CPEC will help overcome psychological barriers to foreign investment flows from international players because direct foreign investment is imperative for Pakistan's economic growth. The long-term economic benefits of CPEC will stabilize the national economy and benefit people at the grassroots level.

There are numerous transportation and energy projects under CPEC. Such initiatives will allow Pakistan to slowly move to a reliable logistics hub capable of handling goods from South Asia, Central Asia, China, and neighboring countries.²³ Ultimately, a robust economy will allow Pakistan to emerge as a significant and influential country in South Asia.

Regional Development

CPEC is called “the crown jewel of BRI” because it can bring much-needed regional development in South Asia and allow Pakistan to have independent foreign relationships without the USA's influence.²⁴ Furthermore, if India's concerns are addressed and common ground is

²¹ Husain, I. (2018). CPEC & Pakistani economy: an appraisal. Karachi: IBA.

²² Ahmed, A. (2016). FATA after operation Zarb-e-Azb. Defense Journal, 22.

²³ Ahmad, M. (2020). Developing a Competitive Agriculture and Agro-based Industry under CPEC. China's Belt and Road Initiative in a Global Context, 227-269.

²⁴ Ahmed, J. (2021, January 7). CPEC: A Crown Jewel of BRI. Retrieved from Daily Times: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/710898/cpec-a-crown-jewel-of-bri/>

reached, CPEC can help normalize Pakistan's ties with India and neighboring countries to improve the entire region's socio-economic status.²⁵

Poverty Reduction

CPEC is one of the most significant projects Pakistan has ever taken to minimize poverty and lift millions of Pakistanis out of poverty. Since CPEC deals with many projects in different industries like textile, industrial parks, energy, dams' construction, and infrastructure, it will generate employment for people of all ages and backgrounds having varying skill sets.²⁶ The long-term plan of CPEC also involves establishing state-of-the-art hospitals and training institutes in underdeveloped regions.²⁷

Provincial Development

Currently, the provincial and federal governments have significant disagreements regarding developing the Western Alignment and Eastern Alignment.²⁸ However, after its completion, CPEC can stabilize the region and bring peace to all provinces in Pakistan. The development of Gwadar Port will establish Balochistan as a vital part of the CPEC. Moreover, the projects under CPEC create employment opportunities in all provinces of Pakistan.²⁹

²⁵ Wagner, C. (2016). The effects of the China-Pakistan economic corridor on India-Pakistan relations. Berlin: German Institute for International and Security Affairs (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik).

²⁶ Ullah, W. N. (2021). Relationship of Transport Infrastructure, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Elimination of Poverty: A Case of Hazara Division. *Journal of Management Research*, 68-81.

²⁷ Mumtaz, D. N. (2018, February 25). Healthcare and CPEC. Retrieved from Daily Times: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/206894/healthcare-and-cpec/>

²⁸ Hameed, M. (2018). The politics of the China—Pakistan economic corridor. Palgrave Communications, , 1-10.

²⁹ Rashid, S. Z. (2018). Employment outlook of China Pakistan economic corridor: A meta-analysis. Working Papers-Centre of Excellence CPEC. Islamabad, Pakistan.

Pakistan's regional importance

Pakistan has an important geographical location for regional connectivity, which can benefit from infrastructural development and the completion of large-scale roads, railways, and oil and gas pipelines under the CPEC.³⁰ Furthermore, progress in infrastructure, energy, economy, agriculture, I.T., tourism, and healthcare will increase Pakistan's regional importance.

CPEC is called the game changer for Pakistan because it is expected to create thousands of new jobs that can mitigate the country's severe unemployment issue. The success of CPEC will also encourage other foreign countries and organizations to invest in Pakistan. These results will eventually give a significant boost to Pakistan's economic activity.

Challenges

There is a wide range of challenges Pakistan faces in the timely completion of CPEC. Most experts agree that political instability, concerns about the debt trap, security issues, and administrative problems are the most significant challenges in completing this massive project.³¹

CPEC's success is mainly dependent on geopolitical stability, the role of Pakistan's neighboring countries, political conditions, and other similar factors. It is vital to analyze and address Pakistan's challenges in completing CPEC to find potential solutions and maximize benefits by ensuring the post-completion goals are achieved. Subsequent paragraphs will assess various internal and external challenges to determine their overall impact on CPEC's progress and success.

³⁰ Garlick. (2018). Deconstructing the China–Pakistan economic corridor: pipe dreams versus geopolitical realities. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 519-533.

³¹ Sultan, M. F. (2019). Analyzing prevalent internal challenges to china's Pakistan economic corridor (CPEC) through public opinion. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, 1-9.

Internal Challenges

Pakistan has to deal with critical aspects like security challenges and political instability to ensure CPEC's stakeholders do not lose confidence in the country's ability to complete the corridor successfully.

Lack of National Consensus

Pakistan has been a politically unstable country since its foundation. Different political obstacles can adversely impact the success of the CPEC projects. The majority of the political parties agree that CPEC is critical for the growth of Pakistan's economy and infrastructure. Yet, political parties have significant disagreements in selecting the best route and resource allocation to complete projects under CPEC.³²

Underdeveloped provinces like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan have accused the Federal Government of preferring the Eastern route over the Western route based on security concerns.³³ Even though the Federal Government has denied such allegations, funds allocation shows that more resources have been allocated to the Eastern route than the Western route.³⁴

Pakistan's political instability shows that the parties often prioritize political goals over national interest, making resource allocation controversial. The governments have taken steps like holding an All-Party Conference in 2015 and introducing the “One Corridor, Multiple Passages” to build national consensus. However, the country's history of political clashes that cause poor

³² Ali, A. (2015). China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): Prospects and challenges for regional integration. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Studies*, 1-15.

³³ Hussain, E. (2017). China–Pakistan economic corridor: will it sustain itself? *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 145-159.

³⁴ CPEC Authority. (2019). Consensus Reaches Between Federal and Provincial Government To Make CPEC A Success For Prosperous Pakistan. Retrieved from CPEC Authority: <http://cpec.gov.pk/news/15>

execution of developmental projects still raises concerns that the provincial division and lack of political consensus will negatively affect the CPEC.³⁵

Lack of Transparency

The lack of transparency is another challenge faced by Pakistan in the execution of CPEC. Internal political parties and other stakeholders have raised serious concerns that only the prime minister and his close cabinet members make decisions about all CPEC-related projects.³⁶ Such secret deals and policies erode the stakeholders' trust and discourage investors from coming into the country.

Furthermore, the lack of representation of all provinces in the decision-making process aggravates the issue of provincialism because the smaller regions will not benefit from CPEC as much as the larger provinces.³⁷ The Government has formed a special Parliamentary Committee and CPEC Authority to address these concerns.³⁸

Transparency and corruption issues in CPEC projects came to the forefront in 2020 when the CPEC Authority chairman was involved in massive corruption allegations. He had to step down from the chairmanship as a result.³⁹

³⁵ Wolf, S. O. (2020). The China-Pakistan economic corridor of the Belt and Road Initiative concept, context and assessment: Springer: Switzerland.

³⁶ Small, A. (2020). Returning to the Shadows: China, Pakistan, and the Fate of CPEC. Fukuoka: Kyushu University.

³⁷ Javed, U. (2016, October 24). CPEC and the provinces. Retrieved from Dawn: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1291834/cpec-and-the-provinces>

³⁸ CPEC Authority. (2019, May 3). Parliamentary Committee on China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) met. Retrieved from CPEC Authority: <https://na.gov.pk/cpec/?q=node/80>

³⁹ Noorani, A. (2020, August 27). Bajwa's family business empire grew in four countries in sync with Asim Bajwa's rise in military. Retrieved from FactFocus: <https://factfocus.com/politics/1756/>

Such allegations and controversies further damage the transparency of CPEC and adversely affect the relationship between Pakistan and China, which is critical for the successful completion of CPEC.

Security Issues

Economic development requires a stable and safe environment, so the security conditions in Pakistan directly impact how fast CPEC will be completed. However, Pakistan has faced severe security issues in the likes of insurgency and terrorism since 9/11.⁴⁰ These issues have already destabilized the country and discouraged foreigners from investing in the past.

The security issues in Pakistan come as a direct result of the fact that many different terrorist and separatist groups operate over a broad region from Xinjiang in China to Gwadar in Pakistan.⁴¹ The Government of Pakistan and military and security agencies have taken steps to counter such terrorist attacks and establish a peaceful environment.

In 2013, Pakistan's Government and Armed Forces introduced a country-wide counterterrorism operation called Zarb-e-Azb under the National Action Plan to root out terrorism. It was a significant success that brought peace to North-West Pakistan.⁴²

Operation Zarb-e-Azb was followed by Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad, an ongoing counterterrorism mission.⁴³ Many operations were launched against perpetrators under Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad. For example, capture terrorists who conducted the 2017 Gwadar shooting in

⁴⁰ Afzal, S. I. (2012). Terrorism and extremism as a non-traditional security threat post 9/11: Implications for Pakistan's security. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*.

⁴¹ Haider, Z. (2005). Sino-Pakistan relations and Xinjiang's Uighurs: Politics, trade, and Islam along the Karakoram highway. *Asian Survey*, 522-545.

⁴² Ahmed, R. &. (2016). Impact of CPEC projects on the agriculture sector of Pakistan: Infrastructure and agricultural output linkages. *The Pakistan Development Review*, 511-527.

⁴³ Khan, M. U. (2017). Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad and its Parameters of Success. *Defense Journal*, 26.

which ten laborers were shot and killed.⁴⁴ Security agencies will have to continue to play a proactive role in protecting CPEC even after completion.

Security Issues in KPK

Development in KPK is significant for completing CPEC's Western Alignment, which includes constructing 1,153 kilometers of road in KPK, Balochistan, and Punjab.⁴⁵ The focal part of the Western Alignment project is a 458 kilometers long Hakla-Dera Ismail Khan Motorway.⁴⁶ This motorway ends in Dera Ismail Khan, a city of KPK that has faced many terrorist attacks over the years, including two back-to-back attacks in July 2019.⁴⁷

Due to severe security threats to the Western Alignment, Pakistan is inclined to complete the Eastern Alignment first. Otherwise, continuous terrorist attacks on the Western Alignment can derail the entire CPEC.⁴⁸ One of the most recent examples of how security issues can adversely impact CPEC is a terrorist attack on the Dasu hydropower station in July 2021 that resulted in the death of 10 Chinese workers. As a result, China halted the construction for several months.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Al Jazeera. (2017, May 17). Gunmen kill ten laborers in Balochistan's Gwadar. Retrieved from Al Jazeera: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/5/13/gunmen-kill-10-labourers-in-balochistans-gwadar>

⁴⁵ Abbas, G. (2017, July 17). Govt decides to extend the western route of CPEC to Gilgit. Retrieved from P.T. Profit: <https://profit.pakistantoday.com.pk/2021/07/17/govt-decides-to-extend-western-route-of-cpec-to-gilgit/>

⁴⁶ Global Village Space. (2021, February 23). CPEC's western route alignment is near completion. Retrieved from Global Village Space: <https://www.globalvillagespace.com/cpecs-western-route-alignment-near-completion/>

⁴⁷ Bureau of Counterterrorism. (2020, January 1). Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Pakistan. Retrieved from Bureau of Counterterrorism: <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2019/pakistan/>

⁴⁸ Javaid, U. (2016). Assessing CPEC: potential threats and prospects. Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan.

⁴⁹ Malik, A. A. (2021, July 18). Dasu Dam Project: Employment termination notification canceled. Retrieved from The News: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/865822-dasu-dam-project-employment-termination-notification-cancelled>

Maritime Security Challenges

Pakistan faces numerous maritime security challenges like smuggling, terrorism, and threats from India's naval activities.⁵⁰ These security issues threaten the Gwadar Port, a vital point for the successful completion of CPEC. There is a long history of terrorist activities in Gwadar and Balochistan that may hamper the progress of CPEC.⁵¹

The most recent attack was in January 2022, when the BLA attacked Gwadar Port and killed 10 Pakistani soldiers.⁵² Such attacks negatively affect the development of CPEC and the relationship between the two countries, as China has urged Pakistan to implement stricter security protocols and prevent such attacks.⁵³ On the other hand, maritime security will also be crucial for the smooth operation of the Gwadar port. China and Pakistan have established Task-Force-88 to deal with naval issues and improve maritime security through state-of-the-art ships, drones, and surveillance equipment.⁵⁴

Combined Effect of Security Issues

Pakistan is facing security issues on multiple fronts. The security issues of Pakistan, especially Balochistan, threaten the completion of the CPEC.⁵⁵ The rise of the Taliban and terrorist groups like Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) pose serious security challenges to the successful

⁵⁰ Rizvi, M. H. (2018). Maritime Security Cooperation in Indian Ocean Region: Challenges and Opportunities.

⁵¹ Gholizadeh, A. M. (2020). A geoeconomic and geopolitical review of Gwadar Port on belt and road initiative. *Maritime Business Review*.

⁵² Yusufzai, G. (2022, January 22). <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/ten-pakistani-soldiers-killed-insurgent-attack-army-says-2022-01-28/>. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/ten-pakistani-soldiers-killed-insurgent-attack-army-says-2022-01-28/>

⁵³ Dawn. (2021, August 22). China wants 'practical' steps taken to prevent attacks. Retrieved from Dawn: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1641939/china-wants-practical-steps-taken-to-prevent-attacks>

⁵⁴ Dawn. (2016, December 13). Pakistan Navy's special 'Task Force-88' was set up to guard Gwadar port's sea lanes. Retrieved from Dawn: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1302102>

⁵⁵ Ahmad, R. M. (2020). Revisiting the potential security threats linked with the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). *Journal of the International Council for Small Business*, 64-80.

completion of CPEC. Similarly, separatist insurgency in Balochistan has also led to a significant increase in violence in Balochistan. Many other groups like East Turkestan Islamic Movement, ISIS, BLA, Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF), and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) continue to carry out terrorist attacks in Pakistan and, in some instances, against CPEC.⁵⁶

Despite the success of counterterrorism operations, China has expressed deep concerns about the security of Gwadar and the existence of terrorist networks throughout Pakistan.⁵⁷ Ultimately, security issues in Pakistan are likely to delay the completion of CPEC and cause considerable financial loss.⁵⁸

CPEC and Baloch Nationalism

Balochistan is Pakistan's largest province by area and is considered one of its most important areas because it is rich in energy and natural resource. However, instead of developing Balochistan, the Federal Government exploited its natural resources without giving sufficient compensation.⁵⁹ The constant exploitation and lack of development have led to several nationalist and separatist groups forming in Balochistan.⁶⁰ As per Asia Terrorism Portal, there have been 2207 fatalities from 2016 to 2022 (Table-1).

Years	Civilians	SFs	Terrorist	Not Specified	Total
2016	191	154	233	58	636

⁵⁶ Kumaraswamy I, P. R. (2007). Terrorism in South Asia: The Changing Trends. South Asia. Journal of South Asian Studies, 7-24.

⁵⁷ Felbab-Brown, V. (2020). A Bri (edge) Too Far: The Unfulfilled Promise and Limitations of China's Involvement in Afghanistan. N, June 4. Washington: Brookings Institution.

⁵⁸ Bhutto, S. (2022, February 8). What is the future of the CPEC project after delays? Retrieved from the news: <https://mmnews.tv/what-is-the-future-of-cpec-project-after-delays/>

⁵⁹ Ahmed, M. &. (2015). Political Economy of Balochistan, Pakistan: A Critical Review. European Scientific Journal.

⁶⁰ Noraiee, H. (2020). The Baloch nationalism in Pakistan: Articulation of the ethnic separatism after the end of the Cold War. Journal of Eurasian Studies, 72-85.

2017	181	78	82	0	341
2018	234	75	65	9	383
2019	83	54	43	0	180
2020	84	94	37	0	215
2021	111	107	90	0	308
2022	19	70	55	0	144
Total	903	632	605	67	2206

Table 1: Fatalities in Balochistan (2016 - 2022)

Gwadar Port in Balochistan is key to the success of CPEC. Baloch insurgents have often attacked Gwadar, blown up gas pipelines, and shot Chinese engineers and workers over the years.⁶¹ The primary goal of these attacks is to prevent the completion of CPEC without getting complete independence of Balochistan.

Aside from the insurgents, mainstream political parties like the Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) have also strongly criticized CPEC due impartiality of the Federal Government, demographic imbalance in the shares of CPEC projects, lack of representation, and lack of job opportunities created for the local Balochis through CPEC.⁶²

The ethnic-sectarian issues in Balochistan often lead to conflicts and create instability in the province. Furthermore, terrorist hideouts and criminal elements along the Pakistan-Iran border in Balochistan are also a matter of grave concern.⁶³

⁶¹ Garlick, J. (2018). Deconstructing the China–Pakistan economic corridor: pipe dreams versus geopolitical realities. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 519-533.

⁶² Zareef, M. H. (2021). A Study of the Impacts of Political Parties on Good Governance: A Case Study of Balochistan. *Progressive Research Journal of Arts & Humanities (PRJAH)*, 117-128.

⁶³ Yaseen, Z. &. (2018). Extremism in Pakistan: Issues and challenges. *Journal of Politics and International Studies*, 31-42.

Overall, Baloch Nationalism and security issues pose a significant challenge for Pakistan in ensuring the safety and security of the Western Alignment because CPEC cannot be efficiently completed without a stable Balochistan. Terrorist attacks and protests in Balochistan have already delayed CPEC projects multiple times, increasing debt and financial losses.⁶⁴ Therefore, Pakistan has to focus on resolving such conflicts for the smooth completion of CPEC.

CPEC and KPK

KPK is a less developed province of Pakistan. The Federal Government's decision to focus on the Eastern Alignment of CPEC drew severe criticism from the political parties and citizens of KPK.⁶⁵ These parties claim that the Federal Government changes the original route of CPEC to ensure Punjab gets the economic and other benefits of CPEC.

Political leaders from KPK favor the development of the Western route of CPEC to ensure backward regions like the KPK and Balochistan can extract benefits from it. However, China also favors the Eastern Alignment due to security issues on the Western route.⁶⁶ Such disputes and disagreements adversely impact the completion of CPEC, so the Federal Government of Pakistan and Chinese authorities need to address these concerns. Alienating an entire region can delay the implementation of CPEC and intensify political instability due to provincialism.

⁶⁴ Baloch, S. M. (2021, August 20). Protests in Pakistan erupt against China's belt and road plan. Retrieved from The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/aug/20/water-protests-in-pakistan-erupt-against-chinas-belt-and-road-plan>

⁶⁵ Akhtar, N. K. (2021). Exploring the Determinants of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Its Impact on Local Communities. SAGE Open.

⁶⁶ Mengal, S. (2016). CPEC route controversy: Problems and opportunities. Balochistan Review.

Economic Issues

Multibillion-dollar investments in Pakistan come with their own set of issues and complexities, especially financial challenges. A primary reason behind the unhealthy trends is that institutions in Pakistan suffer from a lack of transparency, corruption, and poor governance.⁶⁷ Furthermore, there have been serious concerns that China has favored Chinese contractors instead of providing the promised job opportunities to Pakistanis.⁶⁸

Official reports also show that Pakistan's government officials tend to easily give in to the Chinese demands and accommodate Chinese firms in the large-scale CPEC projects, which often leads to resentment among institutions and unfavorable deals for Pakistan's economy.⁶⁹

The lack of financial transparency has raised doubts amongst various stakeholders. Pakistan and China developed a long-term plan for CPEC, but they have not achieved maximum transparency about project management and capital allocation.⁷⁰ It is critical to have a sustainable long-term strategy that will facilitate the national institutions of Pakistan and local investors. It will help stabilize the economy of Pakistan and timely completion of CPEC.

Debt Trap

Debt trap diplomacy, a term coined by two Harvard University students in 2018, is a new term China gets associated with.⁷¹ According to the debt trap or 'debt book diplomacy,' China gives

⁶⁷ Javaid, U. (2010). Corruption and its deep impact on good governance in Pakistan. *Pakistan Economic and Social Review*, 123-134.

⁶⁸ Syed, J. (2020). Ethics and governance norms in cross-cultural projects: implications for CPEC and other China-Pakistan projects. *China's Belt and Road Initiative in a Global Context*, 75-87.

⁶⁹ Katharine Adeney, F. B. (2021, May 24). How China and Pakistan Negotiate. Retrieved from Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/05/24/how-china-and-pakistan-negotiate-pub-84592>

⁷⁰ Waheed, Z. (2020). Linking Ambitions, Transparency, and Institutional Voids to South-South Funded CPEC Project Performance. *China's Belt and Road Initiative in a Global Context*, 89-116.

⁷¹ Sam Parker, G. C. (2018). *Debtbook Diplomacy: China's Strategic Leveraging of its Newfound Economic Influence and the Consequences for U.S. Foreign Policy*. Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs.

risky loans to companies with a bad credit portfolio to trap them in a vicious cycle of debt. In return, China gets strategic leverage or stake in the country, which it can later use to extract numerous benefits.

It is worth considering the possibility that CPEC can be a debt trap for Pakistan because it is the highest Chinese investment, with a total estimated cost of \$62 billion.⁷² Generally, people view CPEC as an economic game-changer that will build an extensive network of roads, railway tracks, and bridges and significant progress in the power and energy sectors.

However, concerns about CPEC being part of China's debt-trap diplomacy are valid (to some extent) because of the high-interest rates of about 5.2% that China will charge; for example, the Karot Hydropower project is a case in point. At the same time, an ordinary loan from Chinese financial institutions has an interest rate of 4.2%.⁷³ On the other hand, some analysts do not consider CPEC as a debt trap since Pakistan will receive the assistance of up to \$27.3 billion.⁷⁴

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Pakistan owes \$24.7 billion to China, 27% of Pakistan's total debt.⁷⁵ The additional debt CPEC will cause can be a significant challenge for Pakistan's economy in the long run, especially when there are no specific debt repayment plans.

⁷² Shaikh, R. &. (2021). China's Debt Trap in Pakistan? A Case Study of the CPEC Project. *South Asia Research*, 399-414.

⁷³ Javed, T. (2021, October 12). CPEC and AidData's revelations: A Test for PTI's Government. Retrieved from CSCR: <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/trade-economics/cpec-and-aiddatas-revelations-a-test-for-ptis-government/>

⁷⁴ China Power Team. (2020, August 26). How Will the Belt and Road Initiative Advance China's Interests? Retrieved from China Power: <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-belt-and-road-initiative/>

⁷⁵ Younus, U. (2021, May 26). Pakistan's Growing Problem with its China Economic Corridor. Retrieved from United States Institute of Peace: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/05/pakistans-growing-problem-its-china-economic-corridor>

Some economists and financial experts also argue that BRI projects fueled the collapse of Sri Lanka's economy.⁷⁶ Pakistan's economy is likely to remain without any economic assistance from China or other world organizations like the IMF.⁷⁷ Pakistan has even larger projects under CPEC, leading to ever-increasing debt.

Geographical Challenges

The completion of CPEC also depends on how Pakistan will handle various geographical challenges caused by factors like harsh climate conditions in Northern areas, rugged terrain, and regular landslides. The Karakoram Highway joins Northern Pakistan to China through the Himalayas. However, it cannot function from December to April due to heavy snowfall.⁷⁸ This will adversely impact the business and trading channels during these four months. If the authorities want to keep the Karakoram Highway operational during this period, they will have to spend significant resources. However, they will put an additional strain on Pakistan's otherwise fragile economy.

Gwadar-Kashgar Pipeline is another major project under the CPEC. It is a crude oil pipeline from Gwadar to Kashgar that has the capacity of transmitting one million barrels per day. However, its completion requires a massive financial investment of \$10 billion.⁷⁹ Moreover, the mountainous terrain causes additional technical issues for the Gwadar-Kashgar pipeline.

⁷⁶ Global Times Staff. (2022, April 7). Accusations over China creating a 'debt trap' in Sri Lanka were an organized smear by the West and India against BRI. Retrieved from Global Times: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202204/1258752.shtml>

⁷⁷ Haider, M. (2022, April 14). Debt payment to exports ratio highest in Pakistan, Lanka: W.B. Retrieved from The News: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/950175-debt-payment-to-exports-ratio-highest-in-pakistan-lanka-wb>

⁷⁸ Maqsoom, A. A. (2021). Landslide susceptibility mapping along the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) route using a multi-criteria decision-making method. *Modeling Earth Systems and Environment*, 1-15.

⁷⁹ Lixia, Y. (2021). Belt and Road Initiative and China's Energy Security: Can China be More Energy Secured? *Energy Security in Times of Economic Transition: Lessons from China*, 151-160.

Tax and Power Tariff Issues

China has expressed grave concerns about the electricity cost, tax fees, and power tariff issues in Pakistan because these issues affect the implementation of energy projects under CPEC.⁸⁰ According to the agreement between China and Pakistan, the equipment imported to China must be exempt from sales and withholding tax.

However, Pakistan's Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has taken much time to process these applications, which has frustrated Chinese authorities, who expressed their reservations about Pakistan's interest and ability to comply with the deadlines.⁸¹ Delays in FBR approvals mean delays in project construction and completion, derailing the entire CPEC timeline.

Renewable energy cost is another problem for Pakistan. The overall cost of renewable energy is decreasing in the international market. The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) is responsible for reviewing the fuel tax and tariffs in the global market.⁸² Pakistan's stance is that it is impossible to keep the renewable energy tariff at the same level throughout the development of CPEC. Similarly, Chinese authorities have concerns that a significant decrease in renewable energy tariffs will negatively affect the project's cost-effectiveness.⁸³ It will also discourage investors and impact project completion based on CPEC agreements between China and Pakistan.

⁸⁰ Kiani, K. (2021, September 24). Pakistan and China agree not to alter tariffs on power deals. Retrieved from Dawn: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1648054>

⁸¹ Jamal, N. (2021, August 3). Chinese power firm alleges FBR's role in delaying shipments. Retrieved from Dawn: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1638476/chinese-power-firm-alleges-fbr-role-in-delaying-shipments>

⁸² Ishaque, H. (2017). Is it wise to compromise the renewable energy future for the sake of expediency? An analysis of Pakistan's long-term electricity generation pathways. *Energy strategy reviews*, 6-18.

⁸³ Latif, K. R. (2020). Analysis of energy crisis, energy security, and potential of renewable energy: Evidence from Pakistan. *Journal of Accounting and Finance in Emerging Economies*, 162-182.

External Challenges

Pakistan also faces different external challenges and threats to CPEC, mainly arising from the concerns and reservations of the international community, especially Pakistan's neighboring countries.

Regional factors also affect the CPEC projects. Political instability in Afghanistan, India's concerns about CPEC, and U.S.'s approach toward CPEC can have various negative consequences on the project.

India's Disapproval of CPEC

India has expressed reservations about CPEC at multiple international forums due to the CPEC route.⁸⁴ A significant part of the CPEC runs through Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir, part of the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir. India does not want Pakistan to upgrade the constitutional status of Gilgit-Baltistan and have China's stakes in Azad Kashmir.⁸⁵

Fake news and propaganda coming from India about regional instability can also hamper the progress of CPEC.⁸⁶ Most political, and security experts agree that India views CPEC as China's strategy to gain access to the Indian Ocean and obtain significant influence over the sub-continent via Gwadar Port and other CPEC projects.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Perwita, A. A. (2019). The Modi Factor: The Role Of Narendra Modi's Idiosyncratic Factors In India's Foreign Policy Responses Towards China Pakistan Economic Corridor. *Andalas Journal of International Studies (AJIS)*, 117-142.

⁸⁵ Wolf, S. (2016). China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and its impact on Gilgit-Baltistan. *Saint-Josse-ten-Noodle: South Asia Democratic Forum (SADF)*.

⁸⁶ Mujtaba, G. &. (2016). *Economic Sanctions on Pakistan under International Law; a Challenging and Threatening Propaganda against CPEC*. Lahore: Punjab University Law College.

⁸⁷ Hussain, S. (2017, April 12). China's CPEC investment in Pakistan reaches \$62 billion. Retrieved from Mint: <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/dB5tQKISoKNrvl7EwDPFbP/Chinas-CPEC-investment-in-Pakistan-reaches-62-billion.html>

Pakistan authorities have also accused India of engaging in anti-state activities to disturb the construction of CPEC by funding the Baloch insurgents and other terrorist groups, especially in KPK and Balochistan.⁸⁸ The fact that an Indian spy, Kulbhushan Yadav, was arrested in March 2016 further backs up these accusations. He confessed to India's involvement in destabilizing Balochistan, KPK, and Karachi to hamper the development of CPEC.⁸⁹ Therefore, terrorist activities from neighboring countries are a severe challenge for Pakistan as it is already overwhelmed with external and internal security issues.

USA's Approach Towards CPEC

Generally, the USA has supported CPEC as a multilateral project that promotes regional economic connectivity that can later include other South Asian countries.⁹⁰ However, the USA has expressed concerns about CPEC being a debt trap for Pakistan that can help China gain leverage over Pakistan and use the country to influence the socio-political climate of the sub-continent.⁹¹

The Chinese development of Gwadar Port is also seen as a potential threat to the U.S. naval forces' domination.⁹² The USA has always fostered good ties with India to curtail the increasing Chinese influence, especially in the Indian Ocean.⁹³ However, CPEC is a unique opportunity for China to increase its maritime presence in the Indian Ocean.

⁸⁸ Latif, A. (2021, October 24). Pakistan accuses the U.S. of trying to derail China's economic corridor project. Retrieved from Anadolu Agency: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/pakistan-accuses-us-of-trying-to-derail-china-economic-corridor-project/2401174>

⁸⁹ Ali, S. (2016, December 31). Pakistan sends a dossier against alleged RAW spy Kulbhushan Yadav. Retrieved from Deccan Chronicle: <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/world/neighbours/311216/pakistan-sends-dossier-against-raw-spy-kulbashan-yadav.html>

⁹⁰ Jia, C. (2017). New trends of U.S. policy toward South Asia: challenges to CPEC. IPRI, 95-121.

⁹¹ Shaikh, R. &. (2021). China's Debt Trap in Pakistan? A Case Study of the CPEC Project. South Asia Research, 399-414.

⁹² Hussain, F. H. (2021). China-Pak Strategic Entente With Respect To Search For Reciprocated Security Through Gwadar Port. Psychology and education, 3320-3333.

⁹³ Brewster, D. (2014). Beyond the 'String of Pearls': Is there really a Sino-Indian security dilemma in the Indian Ocean? Journal of the Indian Ocean Region, 133-149.

The USA has not taken any strict stance on CPEC publicly. However, there are concerns among Pakistan's authorities that some western countries might be helping Baloch militants to destabilize Balochistan and derail CPEC with the help of local nationalist groups.⁹⁴ If these allegations are true, such tactics can derail CPEC and negatively impact Pakistan's relationship with the USA.

Instability in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is known for political instability and terrorist activities, often negatively impacting neighboring countries, including Pakistan.⁹⁵ Security analysts have expressed concerns that the Taliban's Government in Afghanistan can inspire the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) to carry out more terrorist activities. Furthermore, mismanagement of the Pak-Afghan border leads to an influx of undocumented refugees and terrorists that create security issues for Pakistan and disrupt CPEC.⁹⁶

Regional Geopolitics

The successful completion of CPEC also depends on South Asia's regional politics. India and Afghanistan are two major countries that directly impact Pakistan's stability and investment projects like CPEC.⁹⁷ India's constant criticism of CPEC has raised concerns about the feasibility and viability of this project to turn Pakistan into a regional connectivity hub. However, a lack of cooperation from neighboring countries and security threats from India can put the entire project at risk.

⁹⁴ Syed. (2017). Terrorizing the Belt and Road: A critical analysis of security threats to Chinese nationals and businesses in Pakistan. L. UMS Working Paper: CPMI/2017/11/2).

⁹⁵ Borthakur, A. (2017). Afghan refugees: The impact on Pakistan. Asian Affairs, 488-509.

⁹⁶ Hussain, F. K. (2021). Dynamics of Regional Geopolitics and Challenges to CPEC: The Afghan and Iranian Perspectives. Ilkogretim Online.

⁹⁷ Butt, K. M. (2015). Impact of CPEC on regional and extra-regional actors. The journal of political science, 23.

Furthermore, Iran has also expressed concerns over the development of Gwadar because it is viewed as a direct competitor to Chabahar Port.⁹⁸ Pakistan's efforts to address these concerns were unsuccessful. Pakistan will have to address Iranian concerns as soon as possible.

Cumulative Impact of External and Internal Challenges

The combined impact of external and internal challenges can derail the completion of CPEC due to unnecessary delays, financial losses, foreign interference, and loss of trust in Pakistan's ability to execute a large-scale project like CPEC.

Pakistan authorities must focus on inclusivity and address the concerns of marginalized regions like KPK and Balochistan to mitigate the ever-growing insurgency in these areas.⁹⁹ Furthermore, counterterrorism operations like the ongoing Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad prove to resolve Pakistan's serious security problems effectively, so there is a great need for such operations to be more proactive in preventing terrorist attacks.¹⁰⁰

Overall, the international concerns about CPEC and domestic issues have far-reaching adverse effects on CPEC projects and potential foreign investments in Pakistan.¹⁰¹ The possibility of failure of a massive undertaking like CPEC can erode the investor's trust in Pakistan's ability to protect, implement, and complete any large-scale project in the future.

⁹⁸ Singh, S. &. (2019). Geopolitics of ports: Factoring Iran in India's counterbalancing strategy for "Sino-Pak Axis." *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 169-182.

⁹⁹ Chodha, S. (2019). *Pakistan's Internal Security Challenges and The Army's Ability to Overcome Them*. Vij Books India Pvt Ltd. Vij Publishing Group: New Delhi.

¹⁰⁰ Basit, S. H. (2019). Terrorizing the CPEC: managing transnational militancy in China–Pakistan relations. *The Pacific Review*, 694-724.

¹⁰¹ Ali, Y. S. (2020). The economic viability of foreign investment in railways: a case study of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). *The Engineering Economist*, 158-175.

Conclusion

The CPEC brings opportunities for Pakistan and the entire region through economic and infrastructural development. It will also fulfill China's energy requirements agenda and increase its influence in the region. As discussed above, Pakistan faces numerous challenges in completing CPEC, so both China and Pakistan need to work together and develop practical solutions to resolve these challenges.

Overall, CPEC is Pakistan's golden opportunity to improve its future and address existing challenges like security issues, provincialism, and international concerns about the feasibility of CPEC. As discussed in this paper, infrastructural development is not enough to fully yield the benefits of CPEC. Instead, CPEC authorities need to have comprehensive strategies and maximum transparency to face current challenges, complete CPEC successfully, and achieve its three goals: economic growth, development, and regional connectivity.

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