





An Analysis of the Security Perspectives of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

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ABSTRACT

The Ocean domain is the main sector of marine protection. It is a miscellaneous variety that encloses a host of marine elements ranging from pollution at the seas, vessel safety, regulation of marine boundary, search and rescue, maritime health, and the climate change and its impact on water bodies. This paper investigates the consequences of the giant influence of the feud in the Indian Ocean on the CPEC's sea security. The triumphant commission of this scheme bears immense consequence for Pakistan's birth of a new era for economic prospects. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor underpins the mega project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), whereby the Pakistan Navy has a central position in dispelling these rooted hazards. Similarly, it has a key part in varying anomalous perils like sea and ocean terrorism, separatism, human and drug trafficking, unlawful fishing, and protecting the oceanic resources of Pakistan. It has a huge role in growing the "blue economy" and contributes to the greater socioeconomic maturation of Pakistan. Ultimately, water diplomacy is the novel possible spot where the Navy resolves confrontations and fosters regional connectivity. This study collects secondary data via reliable document sources including journals and published research papers, which play a vital role in basing the data and investigation for this study. Likewise, the project CPEC poses many regional tensions, non-traditional challenges, and security protection in the form of terrorism, separatism, drug and human trafficking, and illegal fishery. These outcomes and future possibilities of the CPEC have enriched the activeness of Pakistan's navy into power.

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1. Introduction

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the nodal point in the chain of projects conceived under China's multi-trillion Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) connecting the land-based economic belt to the sea-based 21st century Maritime Silk Road (MSR). The investments under CPEC are a much-needed booster for the economy of Pakistan to develop its road and railway infrastructure, modernize its communication network, meet up with its energy demand in addition to create job opportunities for its huge young population. It is China's attempt to 'bail out' its 'all-weather friend' and to ensure its energy security (Khatti, Rasool, & Keerio, 2023). Furthermore, it promises to develop the left-behind area of Pakistan particularly Baluchistan, making Gwadar, famously known as the jugular vein of the CPEC, a modern-planned city having state of the art port, stadiums, airport, hotels and related infrastructure (Rasool, Keerio, & -, 2023). This strategic port city has assumed the centrality in the CPEC and is termed as 'jewel in the crown of CPEC' with generous Chinese investments aiming at making it an economic hub (Majeed, Anwar, & Bashir, 2023). Both Pakistan and China aim at making this port a hub of commercial activity not only for Pakistan but

also for the neighboring countries and the landlocked states in the region. It supplements the newly assigned policy of Pakistani policymakers to prioritize geoeconomics over geopolitics and geo-security (Imran, Sattar, & Alam, 2024). With regards to CPEC and particularly with the development of Gwadar port, Pakistan has entered into a new phase of history (Sajjad et al., 2024). Hence, its smooth execution and security is of immense significance not only for Pakistan and China but also for the region.

There are host of traditional and non-traditional threats capable of destabilizing the security situation in the Indian Ocean and disrupting the CPEC having adverse local, regional and global impacts owing to the Indian Ocean being energy lifeline of more than half of the world and its proximity to Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz. This complex scenario has enhanced the role of military and other allied security agencies. With the logistical, communication and security support, Pakistan can successfully build the projected infrastructure, meet the objective of the CPEC and explore its full geographic potential. Since Pakistan is an important Indian Ocean littoral state, it has wide resources at its disposal owing to its vast coast and fertile naval territory. To fully exploit the blue-economy potential and in the development of Gwadar, Pakistan navy has a crucial role. In addition, it has a responsibility to counter the conventional and non-conventional threats at the same time to make BRI, the connectivity giant, a success story. The Chinese President Xi Jinping in his keynote address in Belt and Road Forum called for new international relations and global order based upon 'win-win cooperation' while discussing the BRI which is his signature foreign policy project (Khatti, Rasool, & Shaikh, 2022). It promises more than \$1 trillion in 10-years, embracing over half of the global population, 30 percent of world economy and a long-term commitment of \$5 trillion in terms of infrastructure investment (Bunnak et al., 2024). As this ambitious project was launched, almost all the South Asian states except India welcomed it owing to their war-torn, poverty-ridden and western-influenced economies, hence it was popularly termed as "Chinese version of Marshall plan" (Iqbal, 2018). With almost 139 member states, it has become truly global and has forged a not-so-easily reversible link between China, Europe, Africa with rest of Asia (Pagán Sánchez, 2025). Being a flagship project of the BRI, the CPEC has got significant attention in world politics keeping in view the geostrategic location and geo-economic potential of the corridor. It became a hot topic for discussion in both eastern and western academia, media and official circles. States took positions on the perceived project as it was welcomed by the most of regional states and at the same time opposed by India and the United States (Rasool et al., 2024).

India, a major power in the region, is a significant missing link in the Belt and Road Initiative. It boycotted the Belt and Road Forum, 2017, Indian foreign ministry issued a detailed statement criticizing and questioning the key contours of the BRI and objected certain perceived projects. India entered into an agreement with Pakistan's neighbor Iran for the development of its South-eastern Chabahar port a few miles away from Pakistan's Gwadar port giving it an important leverage in Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics (CARs) (Shah, 2025). India considers itself the sole guarantor of security in the Indian ocean and it has converged its interests with the US which has a significant presence in the Indian ocean particularly in the Strait of Hormuz and Diego Garcia. In order to secure its maritime interests and investments, China has also intensified its naval presence in the Indian ocean (Liu, Schindler, & Liu, 2020) and focused to become a blue water navy. As both China and India are expanding their presence and influence in the Indian ocean, their interests are increasingly colliding between both the states and it has given rise to great power competition between China and India in the Indian ocean rim in which the latter has been allied with the United States under its 'Indo-Pacific policy' which evolved into the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIPS)' lately (Ullah et al., 2024). In addition to great power politics, there are certain local, non-state irritants posing serious challenges to China-Pakistan relations and the execution of the CPEC projects (Malik, 2017). Consequently, the Pakistan Navy (PN) and the Maritime Coastguard has a major traditional and non-traditional role to play in the region for ensuring maritime security, maintaining stability for the smooth flow of sea routes and exploitation of the 'blue economy' potential in the Ocean to the fullest (Wolf, 2017). Since the announcement of the CPEC, PN is joining hands with the Peoples' Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in the Indian Ocean to protect its maritime interests and to consolidate its power in the Ocean and to safeguard the CPEC-related infrastructure and sea routes (Khatti, Rasool, & Shaikh, 2022). However, the study is focusing on Afghanistan in Central Asia, which pens down Afghanistan as a buffer state, circumnavigating its impact with the challenges and future upcoming hiccups. It plays the main role in accentuating Afghanistan's unique voyage with the Taliban regime, which targets to globalize the South Globe under untrained leadership. Besides, the interregional tensions, federal crises and state

within state narratives are the discourses in the study (Rasool et al., 2024). This study is more deepened into the bucolic of CPEC.

Therefore, the investigations mentioned earlier together foster a worthwhile understanding of the consequences and significances of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), offering focal propositions for manyman i.e., researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, to navigate the thorny outcomes and prospects presented in this enterprise of new Chinese order.

1.1. Hypothesis of the Study

H1: How can the control stability in the IOR influence the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)?

H2: How does the Pakistan navy play its role in the successful execution of the CPEC in the region?

1.2. Theory Structure

According to the nature of current study, to understand the behaviors of the littoral states in the Indian ocean, the broader theoretical framework of realism will be employed as the topic under discussion purely based upon the "hard politics". According to neorealist claims, states tend to maximize their power in order to ensure their survival (Rasool et al., 2024). According to defensive realist perspective, ultimate goal of states is to protect its interests in which 'survival' is the key ambition by equalizing its power with its rival states. States tend to maintain appropriate balance with the potential contenders. On the other hand, offensive realists contend that states' goal is to ensure their survival by 'domination' in which regional domination is the first step. The growing competition of China and India in the Indian ocean and the impacts that it could have on the CPEC is a fit case of offensive realist framework. Similarly, it also qualifies the growing tension between China and the US (Khatti, Rasool, & Shaikh, 2022). Furthermore, the historical animosity of India and Pakistan and its impact on the CPEC can best be analyzed on the assumptions of realism. Under these assumptions, the extended role of Pakistan navy will be analyzed. It will look at the challenges to the CPEC and also explore the new roles and the areas created for the PN in the perspective of the successful execution of the CPEC.

2. Applied Methods

Furthermore, documentary analysis has been utilized in this qualitative research. To be precise, it does not relate to whole scope of the rivalries between the concerned parties and the overall dynamics of relations between China and Pakistan. Furthermore, since the CPEC was officially announced in 2015, so it limits the time frame of the study underway. Finally, in order to understand the challenges to the CPEC and enhanced role of Pakistan navy, thematic analysis has been employed for the reduction and organization of the qualitative data. There are three approaches to the content analysis i.e., conventional, directed and summative (Rasool, Keerio, & -, 2023). All available primary and secondary sources have been exploited during this course of research to collect qualitative data. The primary sources consist of official statements, foreign affair briefings, official reports, naval doctrines, security policies, official papers, government publications, official websites, United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and naval archives (Charan et al., 2024). On the other hand, secondary sources consist of Chinese, Indian, Pakistani and the United States' think tanks, books, journal articles and reports.

3. Analysis of the Findings

This article consists of three parts: first part briefly discusses the geostrategic and geopolitical significance of the Indian Ocean and the evolving power dynamics in the region. Second part highlights the CPEC as an important link in the China's BRI project. It explores the challenges that the CPEC is facing in the given geostrategic environment in the Indian Ocean Rim. Third and the final part sheds light on the traditional and non-traditional role of the Pakistan navy with regards to the CPEC. It discusses the role of PN in the light of the opportunities offered by the CPEC in the overall socio-political development of Pakistan.

3.1. Geopolitical Context in The Indian Ocean

China is on the way to become world's largest navy in 2030s (Khan & Khalid, 2018). China has made the Indian Ocean an important feature of its foreign and defense policy, and has strengthened its commercial and naval footprints in IOR owing to its immense geo-strategic and geo-economic significance (Ahmed, 2019). The manufacturing-based China's economy depends on the uninterrupted flow of their trade particularly oil in the Indian Ocean. It relies heavily upon the oil imported from Middle East for its sustainable growth. China was a net exporter of oil in 1990s, now

it is the world's largest importer of oil and petroleum products. Almost 84 percent of the China's imports of oil pass through Strait of Malacca (Malik, 2017). The 19th century strategist Alfred Mahan stated that controlling sea by naval supremacy and maritime commerce entails much sustainable dominance in the world, in comparison to land resources as "nothing facilitates the necessary exchanges as does the sea". The recent shift of conflicts from land to sea can be attributed to the historical significance of waterways in the global politics. Progress of humanity has long been associated with waterbodies, as new civilizations emerge from them.

With the rise of nation-states and owing to the fact that there are limited resources on earth, the exploitation of water resources has become institutionalized. In spite of modern means of communication, transportation, and technological innovations, sea remains the most cost-effective medium of trade. It provides the essential trade routes particularly that fulfil today's growing energy needs. 80 percent of global trade passes through the sea and the total volume of world ocean economy is around US\$1.5 trillion per annum (Akhter, 2018). Furthermore, the water offers plenty of natural resources that contribute to the socio-economic development such as there are over 350 million jobs that are related to fisheries globally. According to an estimate 34 percent of world crude oil will be exploited from offshore fields by 2025. Spykman in his 'Rimland' thesis asserted that the powers controlling the rimland dominate the world and domination in Asia starts with the domination in Indian Ocean Rim owing to various critical access points in it like the Suez Canal, Bab el-Mandeb, Strait of Hormuz, and Strait of Malacca and water bodies like Arabian sea, Bay of Bengal, Red Sea, Mozambique Channel, Gulf of Oman and its passage to 80 percent of the global trade and is home to 2.49 billion population (Khan, 2015). It provides a medium of transportation of two-third world shipments, in particular from Persian Gulf oilfields which contains approximately 40% of the Global oil making it an important SLOCs. Mahan while elaborating the significance of navy stated that when a state gets its land borders fully secured and it no more needs to defend them, at that moment that state has the maximum potential for strengthening its naval muscles. China does not have any significant naval or maritime tradition owing to its land-based insecurities. However, in the past few decades, it is increasingly strengthening its footprints in the waters as its land borders have been secured. It is a narrow strip of nearly 22-mile width, and at its narrowest point it is 2.5km.

All the oil (Hussain, 2017) and gas from the Iranian plateau and Arabian Peninsula have to go across the Indian ocean through the strait of Malacca and to the East Asia (Malik, 2017). This chokepoint is bounded by the states that are either ally of the United States or share links to it in anyway. It has long concerned China for the safety of its sea routes and smooth oil supply which is exacerbated due the lack of direct access of China to the Indian Ocean. To consolidate its position in the Indian ocean, China is building a series of ports in the ocean under BRI, a signature foreign policy project of president Xi Jinping aimed at connecting China with Southeast Asia, South Asia, Middle East, Africa and the Europe, and in this strategic overture, Pakistan is a 'zipper' connecting these regions with the Russia-led EEU (Rasool, Keerio, & -, 2023). China's public and private companies and bank will fund and build extensive road, railways, pipelines, optic fibre network and develop ports throughout the region. In addition to secure its position in the Indian ocean for the security of its energy supply, another key aim of this project is the development of the western part of China and control the ethno-nationalist movements there. This part of China is resided by Uighur Muslims having Turk ethnicity. Under BRI, China aims at deepening the link with its western part and developing this region to emancipate the marginalized communities (Martadinata, Hadianto, & Risman, 2024). There are currently almost 139 Sub-Saharan African, North African, European, East Asian, South Asian, Latin American and Caribbean countries that have recognized and joined this project making it a truly global initiative having 40 percent of the world GDP and 73 percent global population. Though the BRI does not pass through all these 139 countries, however, these countries recognize this project and have shown their willingness to coordinate with China in this endeavor (Gul, Shad, & Imran, 2024).

The 1st BRI summit was attended by representatives from more than hundred countries to which the UN Secretary General also attended and termed the BRI project similar in its aim of 'connectivity' to the 2030 agenda and called China "central pillar of multilateralism" (Shih, 2018). The BRI projects have attracted the US allies such as Greece, South Korea, New Zealand KSA, Italy and UAE. A parameter for the importance that China attaches to this ambitious project is that China has incorporated it in Communist Party's constitution (Hussain, 2017). The BRI project is primarily explained by China as having economic and commercial contours. It aims at infrastructural,

financial, trade and people-to-people connectivity linking East Asian states with the Central Asian Republics (CARs) and to the Africa and Europe reviving the Old Silk Road. It will help China diversify its energy imports, helping it to escape its Malacca dilemma and ensure its energy security (Rasul et al., 2024). In addition, it would shorten the distance for China in its route to Arabian Gulf, as the distance between Gwadar and Xinjiang is 3000km while if Chinese import go from Sea lanes via Strait of Malacca, it is 12000 kilometers (Shah, 2025).

3.2. Economic Growth

Pakistan navy has an important role in securing and stabilizing the Indian ocean to safeguard the investment made under the CPEC to boost the blue economy sector for the socio-economic development of the country. Similarly, the role of Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA) is prime in the development of blue economy in Pakistan. Being the only law enforcing agency in its maritime borders, it has a major role in protecting the maritime interests of Pakistan (Khatti, Rasool, & Shaikh, 2022). The final domain of maritime security is the economic development. Firstly, Navies have a major role in social and economic development of any state. By averting the threats to national security and marine environment, states have the potential to get economic gains from the sea in terms of 'blue economy' (Ali, 2020). The concept of 'Blue economy' encompasses exploitation of maritime resources such as shipping, fishing, and support for the oil, gas mining and mineral industries has gained immense significance in today's world. It also underpins the sustainability and maintaining the health of these resources for future generations. Pakistan shares over 1000-kilometer maritime coast in Indian Ocean Rim (IOR), covering an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of about 240,000 Sq. km which was further extended in 2015 after the ruling of the UNCLCS (HAMMAD, 2021).

Owing to these geographical features, Pakistan has a huge maritime potential and prospects for blue economy, the exploration of which requires more stability in the region for large-scale investments. Pakistan is underperforming in terms of its maritime sector because it is financially and technologically scarce of resources. Current projection of maritime revenue of Pakistan is \$183 million which is far below its potential and many a times less than its neighboring countries like India and Bangladesh. However, the China-Pakistan cooperation promises the development of maritime sector and blue economy of Pakistan (Askari, Tahir, & Shaheen, 2020). Secondly, though Pakistan navy is a formidable naval power, it has yet to achieve the status of a maritime power as committed in its first comprehensive Maritime Doctrine in 2018. 'Maritime power' is a much broader term which includes both military and non-military potential. In terms of military component, PN has extensive naval, maritime security and law enforcement capability. With regards tonon-military capabilities, there is a broad domain of merchant shipping, coastal communication infrastructure, shipbuilding and repair, fishing, ports and harbors. In latter area, PN has an extensive opportunity to explore. Though Pakistan has 95 percent of its trade via sea routes yet it has very lowpotential of ship building. Only 16 percent of Pakistan's trade is carried out by its flag carrier ships. The key model before Pakistan in this regard is that of rapid modernization of Chinese navy (PLAN) and aspiration of becoming a blue-water navy which has played the role of frontrunner in the Chinese socio-economic development. In addition to an indigenous shipbuilding industry, the PLAN has acquired a range of new weapon technologies including submarines, anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs), anti-shipballistic missiles (ASBMs) and aircrafts and for support of this artillery, it has developed C4ISR (command and control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) systems. To complement all this modernization, China has made efforts towards maintenance of its logistics, naval doctrines, education, quality and training of its personnel in addition to various naval exercises.

4. Conclusions and Outcomes

The most significant part of the CPEC is Gwadar port which has prospect to become the commercial hub for the region owing to its lucrative geostrategic and geoeconomic situation. Though connectivity is a positive phenomenon, yet it has its own political and strategic ramifications as well. The CPEC in general and the BRI in particular have a host of traditional and non-traditional challenges in this regard. The US considers India counterweight to China in the region and it has placed India at a central position in its 'Indo-Pacific Strategy'. India considers itself the sole security provider in the India Ocean and dominates the IORA. BRI is an unprecedented connectivity project which has immense dividends for China and the participant states. Pakistan is an important nodal state in this link hosting a string of project sunder the CPEC. It promises to connect Pakistan with Eurasia and much-needed investment in its energy, transportation and related sectors. However, it also shares the 'Quad' forum with the US, Australia and Japan which aims at containing China and has also conducted naval exercises in the South China Sea. The US announced its own version of

investment plan, B3W, for the poor and middle-income countries at the G7 summit. Furthermore, the CPEC has huge non-traditional security challenges in the form of terrorism, separatism, drug and human trafficking, and illegal fishery. These eventualities and future prospects of the CPEC have enhanced the role of Pakistan navy manifolds. In perspective, Pakistan should put forward a comprehensive maritime commercial policy highlighting its Continental Shelf in the Indian Ocean as its core interest and should give PN a leading role in it.

Pakistan navy has to aim at becoming a major maritime power in the Indian Ocean. Maritime power comprises of much more than naval power as the maritime consists of a large and influential coastguard, merchant marines and fishing fleet, a world-class shipbuilding industry and capability of exploiting marine resources such as fishing, oil, gas etc. For instance, the PLAN has since assuming the role of great maritime power in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean has contributed to a great degree in China's socio-economic development and becoming great power. In order to promote Pakistan's soft power abroad under Maritime diplomacy, Pakistan has to build upon the soft issues like cultural tourism and climate change and enhance its outreach abroad and converge other regional states under this initiative. It will improve Pakistan's soft image as well as give it some relief as it is the 5th most climate-vulnerable country in the world. Pakistan should lobby to get the membership of the IORA. In order to achieve greater regional connectivity and security of Pakistan's maritime boundaries and particularly CPEC, Pakistan has to build naval alliances in region. It should boost its diplomatic relations and naval exercises with the Indian Ocean littoral states in order to counter or negotiate with the IORA which is dominated by Indian influence. Pakistan should refocus its 'Vision East Asia Policy' as CPEC necessitates an attention towards relations with the East Asian states for the greater regional connectivity and security of the CPEC. The CPEC provides access and corresponding opportunities for Pakistan to these eastern states. Pakistan should negotiate with China for access to its ports as there is a precedent whereby China has provided access to Nepal to four Chinese-controlled ports. It can provide Pakistan access to the 'Asian Tigers', and can boost the economic and military relations between them.

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