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The Effects of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) on Regional Geopolitics

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Abstract

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) brings a multidimensional shift in regional geopolitics. The objective of this study examines the changing dynamics in regional geopolitics regarding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) by analyzing the theoretical spectrum of the geopolitical theories of Heartland and Rimland. This paper hypothesized the economic gravity of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor could potential to develop a favorable geopolitical environment across the region. In sum, the outcomes of this research, the CPEC could transform the regional geopolitics from conventional to critical as converting the current hostile geopolitical environment into favorable geopolitics regarding its geo-economic potential. Resultantly, CPEC will convert the economic vulnerable, and war turn zone into economic well-being, peace and stable region.

Keywords: CPEC; Heartland Theory; Rimland Theory; Regional Geopolitics; Geo-Economic.

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1.Introduction

Greece introduced the geopolitical way of thinking in ancient times. Aristotle derived the political framework regarding the Greek and neighboring regions or states in the context of climatic situations. This way of thinking in social science was progressed in the contemporary period when geopolitics became the critical approach in the study of international relations (Scholvin,2016). The foreign policy experts accepted that the significant value of geopolitics in the contemporary era, and it is an inferential tool of Political studies. The detail examination of international relations regarding the geographical location is the central theme of geopolitics. Nichols (2017) reports that the analyse of CPEC with a geopolitical lens is the outcome of this corridor as a geopolitical shift in the region (Nichols,2017). This research examines and explores the possible way of CPEC to transform the regional geopolitics from conventional to critical as converting the current hostile geopolitical environment into favorable geopolitics. Such as Pakistan-India Paradoxes, unstable Afghanistan and the Indo-United States nexus against Sino-Pak would be turned into a geo-economic triangle of Sino-Pak-India; a stable Afghanistan, and regional integration. The pilot project of the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) CPEC is designed to enhance regional connectivity among Sino-Pak and Eurasia belt. President Xi Jinping inaugurates the project of CPEC during his official visit to Islamabad in April 2015. According to the World bank economic corridor (CPEC) is bound to have several implications on Pakistan and regional geopolitics, especially its enormous investment and link with OBOR (Bank,2015). Rifaat (2016) claimed that CPEC is an icon of a formidable relationship among Pak-China, and it could enhance economic growth, internal stability, and overcome the current energy crisis in Pakistan. For regional comprehensive, Pakistan's strategic alliance with China, constant conflicts with India, and geographical proximity with Afghanistan need a geopolitical assessment of CPEC and its likely consequences across the region (Rifaat,2016). Pakistan is located in the middle of collaboration and competition powers of Asia that embrace South, West, and Central Asia. The world politics focus on these mega-regions of Asia since the US war in Afghanistan, raising China, ambitious hegemonic India, and resurgent Russia. Pakistan sits between these regional geopolitical dynamics, which will effects the regional geopolitics.

In the context of these geopolitical dynamics, this study will examine the significant aspects of CPEC. Firstly, it will shed light on materials, methods, and the theoretical perspective. Then it will identify the regional issues and geopolitical disputes such as Pak-India paradoxes, Unstable Afghanistan, US interest in the region, and Indo-US nexus. Furthermore, this paper will analyze and hypothesize the economic gravity of CPEC can potential to design a favorable geopolitical environment across the region. In this regard, it will identify and examine that the CPEC could be a stabilizing factor for regional stability and economic development via establishing a geostrategic and geo-economic triangle of Sino-Pak-India and make sure the regional integration. Finally, the article concludes and summarized the key findings of the paper.

2. Materials and Method

The content method has been applied to this study. Content analysis is a systematic technique that provides a method for qualitative and quantitative analysis of an object of information, generally the text. Content analysis is a research method that is used to identify patterns in registered communications. To perform the content analysis for this research, a systematically collect data from a set of texts, which can be written, and verbally (Interviews). Data collection mainly relied on in-depth individual interviews and secondary sources. Secondary data sources contribute to corroborate the interviews, and review of the literature.

This paper draws its research from primary and secondary data sources such as, working papers, think-tank studies, academic journal articles, statements, books, and face-to-face interviews of field experts who have used it whenever necessary. Four individual in-depth interviews were conducted for this research, and these interviews were taken from different field experts of politics, economics, geography, security, media, and international relations. The collection of data through interviews with essential information which were structured based. The respondent one, Mr. Khalid Mehmood, has served as an ex-ambassador of Pakistan to China, Mongolia, KSA, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Romania, etc. At present, Mr. Khalid Mehmood is serving as Chairman of ISSI (Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad), a leading think-tank institute of Pakistan and President of an ex-ambassadors union of Pakistan. Remaining other interviewed respondents is also related to the key positions in the fields of academia, politics, economics, security, and media.

The nature of interview questionnaires has a structure-based and prepare well in advance. The selection of interviewers' panel had been very careful to obtain valuable and appropriate information regarding the research questions.

3.CPEC: Geo-economic Interplay of the Geopolitical Theories of Heartland & Rimland

The Concept of Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) has an opportunity to be a test of Heartland and Rimland geopolitical theories in the 21st century. Both theories are integrated into the two main components of BRI (Banerjee,2016). Mackinder presented his theory on geopolitics entitled "Heartland Theory" in 1919 and mentioned the USSR, Afghanistan, Iran and the Western part of China in the pivot region. Mackinder summarized that "who rules the East Europe commands the Heartland, who rules the Heartland commands the world island, who ruled the world island commands the world" (Mackinder,1919). Halford Mackinder presented the theory on geopolitics in different steps in the early twenty century. In 1904, he gave the theory with the titled as "Pivot area," and he reshaped it as "heartland" in 1919, and then he further rephrases with the titled of "rekindled" 1943 (Elahi,2015). Chin-Chung (2016) reports that the theory of Spykman's Rimland is similar to theory of Mackinder's Heartland regarding taking control of the Eurasian continent. However, Spykman described that Eurasia's Heartland is incapable of the center of world's power due to unsuitable climate conditions for human habitation. The Rimland is the richest and densely populated area starting from Western Europe to the West Asia, Pakistan, India, East Asian region, China's cost area, and the Far East of Russia. Spykman believed that the Eurasian power center is in the Rimland, and controlling the Rimland would allow controlling the Eurasian continent (Chih-Chung,2016). According to Spykman "who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia, who rules the Eurasia controls the destinies of the world" (Spykman and Nicholl,1944).

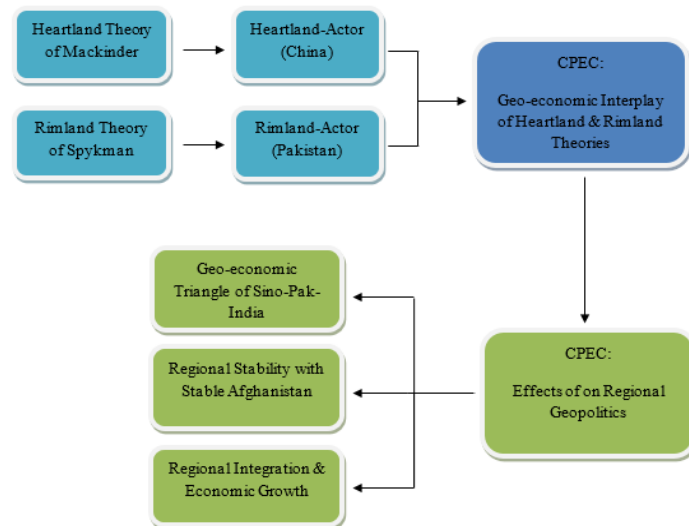
Scholvin (2016) contends that the main powers of twenty century had accepted the importance of the classical theories of geopolitics Heartland and Rimland in the context of superiority on others. The US strategy of control is based on the Rimland theory, which is proved that during the cold war. According to this theory, the US has controlled sea routes and

restricted to USSR for access to the most accessible sea routes. In this scenario, Pakistan has a significant role for the US. In 1979, the USSR had attacked Afghanistan to counter the US strategy and controlled on the part of Rimland, however due to overestimated geopolitical moves the result as a disintegration of the USSR. The South Asian States, particularly Pakistan, is an essential part of Asian Rimland, which has a vital significance for landlocked countries to eliminate the geographical barriers. The theory of Rimland is more significant rather than the theory of Heartland. With the reference of Heartland theory, Kaplan contends that China has hugely favorable geographic circumstances to rising as a global power. The construction of Ports by China besides the Indian Ocean might be operating as economic development poles. Moreover, these ports provide an opportunity for Chinese companies to invest in the free trade zone. For instance, the Port of Gwadar is a free trade zone (Scholvin,2016).

The objective of application these theories is not a conventional way of the superiority of Rimland over Heartland or vice versa; rather, the rational regionalism in strategic and economic terms among geographically proximate countries of South Asia and neighboring regions. In light of these theories, Pakistan has stand in Rimland and China has stand in Heartland. The CPEC is going to the geo-economic interplay of the theories of Heartland and Rimland. Elahi (2015) asserts that the geostrategic interplay of geopolitical theories is not conventional ascendancy of Rimland over Heartland or vice versa; somewhat, the rational regionalism in strategic and economic terms. The CPEC is a cost-effective project for Heartland actors such as China and land-locked CARs (Central Asian Republics) to access the ocean, and it will offer to spread out the network of energy pipelines from North to South. In this regard, the CPEC project prompts a move from classical to critical geopolitics. The critical geopolitics focuses on cooperation, strategic alternatives, and regional integration, while the classical geopolitics focuses on the geostrategic rivalry between theories of Rimland and Heartland. (Elahi,2015). A rational analysis of CPEC with a theoretical spectrum of Heartland and Rimland on the regional geopolitical landscape is justifying that the era of competition between the theories of Mackinder and Spykman gone now. The BRI and CPEC will be infusing a new phenomenon in the theories of Heartland and Rimland via the first trade corridor that connects the North with South, East, and West regions. CPEC

is a strategic and cooperative interplay between Heartland and Rimland actors as this new phenomenon is a significant input in the strategic plans of Mackinder and Spykman, as well as a curative key for regional issues. Moreover, it will prompt a shift from strategic rivalries to strategic alternatives and regional integration.

Figure (1): Model CPEC-Geo-economic interplay the Geopolitical Theories of Heartland & Rimland



4. Geopolitical Controversies in the Region

Pakistan is located in the middle of collaboration and competition powers of Asia that embrace South, West, and Central Asia. The international politics focus on these mega-regions of Asia since the US war in Afghanistan, raising China, ambitious hegemonic India, and resurgent Russia. Pakistan sits between these regional geopolitical dynamics, which has effects on the domestic and foreign policies of Pakistan. Rifaat (2016) reported that Pakistan had complicated relations with its neighbors (except China) in the contemporary regional geopolitics. The trust deficits with Afghanistan, conflicts with India, frictions with the US, and disagreements with Iran are fundamental dynamics of regional geopolitics. The CPEC will have significant effects on the stability in Pakistan and the Chinese aim of economic spreading out as well (Rifaat,2016). Rana and Mehmood (2015)

contend that the Sino-Pak relationship has been a constructive factor for the regional balance of power. Pakistan is not equivalent with the regional economic giants China and India, while Pakistan provides an energy security line for China to counter ambitious hegemonic India. Currently, the Chinese foreign policy is focused on balance policy towards Indo-Pak. Resultantly, India becomes stronger in defense and economic terms (Rana and Mahmood,2015). China has an influencing factor in the South Asian regional geopolitics, which based on constructive engagement and friendly relations with most regional countries. The new developments in the regional geopolitics, the US recedes its power in South Asia and the surrounding region due to deterioration relations with Russia. China gets this opportunity to sustain the stability in this region. The US has some objections to the construction of CPEC, particularly in Gwadar port due to a strategic point of view.

Rifaat (2016) reported that the annual report of the Pentagon declared their concerns on Chinese investment in Pakistan in 2016. In this report, they assumed that China would set up navel logistics in Gwadar port. The US outlook these investments as a risk in the case of China boost up their armed forces in Pakistan (Rifaat,2016). Markey (2016) asserts that the US opposed the presence the naval power of China in the Indian Ocean to feel a threat to their supremacy and the US raised apprehensions regarding CPEC (Markey,2016). M Khan (2016) contends that the long-lasting relationship of Pak-US has been staggering over time as excellent, healthy, and sometimes even the lowest ebb. Contrary to the US and other powers, the Pak-China relation has enlarged over time (Khan,2016). Javaid (2016) claimed that the US wants to maintain its superiority in the region. For this purpose, the US has increased its relations with India. The primary objective of Indo-US strategic cooperation is the fact that the US desired to enhance the Indian power for the counter of the Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean (Javaid and Javaid,2016). Smith (2013) reported that there are many complications between China-India relations, and some of these complications are related to historical backgrounds as well as some are related to the present situation. From the historical point of view, the two countries have shared borders and disputed issues. In the current scenario, both countries want to increase their influence in the region due to their geopolitical goals (Smith,2013). Muhammad (2017) claimed that India has

worries about Chinese entrance in the Indian Ocean and increasing the Chinese power in the trade routes of South Asia and CARs. Secondly, the Indian has reservations on CPEC; in this regard, China may be used Gwadar port as naval purposes to counter the Indian power in regional politics. Besides, India involved in creating insurgency in Baluchistan to affect the proposed economic corridor as well as develop hurdles for Chinese to prevent their presence in the region (Muhammad Ishaq,2017). The South Asian states are greeting the Chinese investments in the regional sector except India because India has viewed these investments as a strategic threat in the Indo-Pacific and South Asian regions as well as the Chinese expansionist plan. Regardless, the Sino-India relations are enhancement during the last decade, and both states working together in some platforms such as (AIIB)Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (Ranjan,2015). Ashraf (2016) reported that India had continuously expressed their concerns on CPEC. However, China has offered to India to join the commercial project. China has also accepted the significant role of Indian in trade routes during the ancient times. In this context, the Indian has hesitant to make a decision. If India plays its decisive role, that will create an environment of regional cooperation. However, India has played a contrary position to sabotage the CPEC. In this regard, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) has been supporting the rebellions in Baluchistan. India has relied on the US to help her against the influential Chinese role in the region (Ashraf, 2016). Another significant player of Indian-led geopolitical game is Afghanistan. India is a substantial donor of Afghanistan in the neighborhood and develops its relations based on strategic objectives. In this regard, both countries signed an agreement to increase the defense and strategic relationship in 2011 (Hussain and Jamali,2019). In short, South Asia is still engagement in rivalries, especially, a paradox between the Pak-India. The long-lasting "War on Terror" in Afghanistan has another significant issue for regional countries. The unstable Afghanistan, constant rivalry between Indo-Pak, the US strategic goals in the region, and Indo-US nexus against Sino-Pak strategic alliance and raising China are the key geopolitical dynamics in the contemporary regional geopolitics.

5.Challenges on the Regional Front

5-1. Pakistan-India Paradoxes

The Indo-Pak has been rivals states since their independence, and Kashmir

dispute is the leading cause of rivalry between both countries. The Indian regimes drastically violation human rights in Kashmir valley for the last seven decades. Kashmir issue accentuates in 2016 when the Indian forces murdered of Burhan Wani. Presently, India attacked (Balakot) Pakistan, while Pakistani Air force downed an Indian jet fighter and detained the pilot. In this incident, China took an equitable stance and attempted to decrease the tension between Pak-India. India has worried about Pak-China relations in regional and international subjects, particularly the strategic relationship of both states. India has various concerns on the subject of CPEC. Hali (2016) reported that the Indian PM Narendra Modi registered their objections on CPEC during his official visit to China in 2014. However, Chinese President Xi stated that the economic corridor as a "commercial project." Still, he rejected the Indian objections on CPEC (Hali,2016). India was against the project of CPEC. It means that India recognizes the disputed status of Kashmir. If India engrossed for peace in the region, it would effort to settle the disputed issues. It is the best way for India to enlarge her progress in regional cooperation; otherwise, India gains development on a limited scale. The Sino-Pak has clearly stated that they are forbidden by any external power that wants to destabilize the CPEC.

Wagner (2016) asserts that CPEC will effects on Pak-India relation due to Indian concerns on the route of CPEC. It will pass through Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), which is a part of the Kashmir issue. The Kashmir is a disputed issue between Pakistan and India since their independence. Resultantly, CPEC will a negative impact on the relations of both states. However, on the other side, the positive impact is, CPEC will be providing an essential opportunity for Pak-India to resolve the Kashmir issue. Likewise, it would be helpful to determine the constitutional status of GB (Wagner,2016). Hussain (2017) contends that Pakistan wants to attempt to improve the legal status of GB and declare this territory as a legally provincial status. In the present scenario, Pakistan has not proclaimed the constitutional integration of GB with Pakistan due to the Pakistani stance on the Kashmir issue in international forums especially on United Nations (UN). India worries about the legal cover of CPEC; in this context, the Indian leadership has always raised their voice against CPEC. Indian FM, Sushma Swaraj, expressed that the project of CPEC is "unacceptable," which will pass via (GB) Indian-claimed territory (Hussain,2017).

“Off course India is becoming more and more belligerent you know serve in the recent past and the CPEC is becoming one of the irritants between Pakistan and India relations because Indian's are apprehensive that CPEC this connectivity between China and Gwadar will not only be used for economic activities but it would to also be used for military purposes so that's one of the concern strategic concerns of India despite the fact that Pakistan and China have not only retreated that it commercial and economic activity and venture and the project and they have also invited India to join it both the countries have and the according to some reports the Chinese are very much open to accepting the new countries, the neighboring countries to join CPEC. But certainly India has to oppose Pakistan at anything that has to do with Pakistan any initiative which can enable Pakistan to defend itself reserving India any initiative which can strengthen Pakistan will be taken by India as negative because India has been speculating and thinking with Pakistan is gradually getting weaker and weaker economically and it will be challenging for it to sustain a credible deterrence reserving India but now when see the spectrum that when they see through CPEC Pakistan's energy requirements will be fulfill, its industry will be expanding so they are getting concern about Pakistan getting stronger” (Fazal-ur-Rehman,2018).

In this scenario, Pakistan has blamed on India to sabotage the CPEC via her support of Bloch rebels as well as spending money and other resources to destabilize the law & order situation across the country (Gilani,2016). Geopolitically, India raises her influence and goodwill in the region as well as shall continue her anti-Pakistan agenda through the numerous agreements with regional and extra-regional countries such as Afghanistan, the US, UK, Russia, and CARs. As of 2019 Modi Regime utterly violation human rights in the Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) by imposing a presidential order regarding IOK integration with India. However, the people of Kashmir rejected this order and protested across the IOK valley to uplift this so-called order. The Modi regime imposes curfew in IOK since the 86 consecutive days until now to crush the protests. Pakistan is raising her voice against Indian aggression in IOK on international forums. In this regard, some other countries raised their voices in favor of oppressed people of Kashmir such as Iran, China, Turkey, and Malaysia.

5-2. Unstable Afghanistan

The geopolitical position of Afghanistan has magnetized the international

occupying forces, since the Alexander to USSR, and now the US-NATO war on terror (Grau and Gress,2002). Kanji (2003) reported that the US-NATO allies have been incapable of restraint the insurgency in Afghanistan. The Taliban has continued its attacks by using explosive devices and suicide bombers. Afghan Government failed to maintain the law & order situation across the country. This worse situation in Afghanistan has become a significant threat to the neighboring country Pakistan (Kanji,2003). Roy (2017) explained that China has interested to link with Afghanistan through the extension of CPEC. However, the security issues, along with the Pak-Afghan border, are significant hurdles for the economic corridor. China has pursued the involvement of Afghanistan to BRI as well as the Afghan government has many expectations of getting benefits from BRI besides, the various uncertainties to realize the potential of the initiative. Security issues and narcotics trafficking are the main reasons for unstable Afghanistan. The Afghan government has must ensure that his active role addresses these critical issues to building a prosperous state (Roy,2017). As of 2019, the Afghan war is one of the longest-running wars of the US. The security situation in Afghanistan has been worsening since NATO withdraws its forces from the Afghan war in 2015. Taliban again stronger on the various parts of the country and the security forces unable to control the worst security situation. The SIGAR (Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction) published a report on the security situation in Afghanistan in 2018. According to this report, only 53.8% of Afghan districts were under the control of the Afghan Government, Taliban insurgents controlled by 12.3%, and fighting for power is going on the remaining 33.9% between Government and insurgents. Approximately 45000, security forces have died since 2002 to 2014. It shows a clear picture of unstable Afghanistan (Norland,2019). In the meantime, the Trump administration appointed Mr. Zalme Khalilzad as a special envoy for war-torn Afghanistan to make sure of the peace process. In this regard, many sessions have taken between US and Taliban delegations to minimize the security issues across the country. Around 13,487 clashes between security forces and Taliban and 22,487 violent incidents reported in 2018 (Council,2019). The Afghan Government has must ensure that his active role to addresses these critical issues to building a prosperous state. The outcome of uncertainty in Afghanistan has suspicious of trade and economic corridors. Therefore, it is significant for

regional powers to perform their role rightly and ensure the prosperous economic development activities as envisioned by CPEC.

5-3.US Interest in the Region and Indo-US Nexus

America remains the main actor of regional geopolitics in the sub-regions of Asia. The US military presence in Afghanistan and strategic relations with India shows that her geostrategic goals and interest in the region. The growing Indo-US nexus is aimed to develop India as a power player of regional geopolitics to counter the Chinese presence in the Gulf region and the Indian Ocean. This policy has also provided a convenient umbrella for India to pursue her contrary goals against Pakistan. The US has developed its pressure on Pakistan to support the US interest in the region on geostrategic and geopolitical grounds and accepting the dominant role of India despite that Pakistan is geostrategic ally of the US in Afghan war (Tank,2013). The US supports Indian naval power against the rising influence of China in the Indian Ocean. Both countries signed a Civilian Nuclear Agreement in 2006, during the Present Bush administration (Javaid and Javaid,2016). Jia (2017) claimed that the friendship of US-India means to realize the big power dream of India via getting technology, arms, and investment from the US. Both countries focused their attention on the Indian Ocean, particularly in the South-China Sea. The Obama administration and New-Delhi government signed an agreement in 2015 entitled “joint strategic vision for the Asia pacific and Indian Ocean region” to ensure the protection of navigation affairs and maritime security (Jia,2017). Khan (2017) reported that during the Trump administration, the Indo-US strategic nexus is much stronger in regional geopolitics. President Trump recognized the superior role of India in local politics during his speech to the US deployed forces in Japan. The US is interested in engaging with India for his objectives to encircle China under the Trump Administration (Khan,2017).

“The US talks in double tongue, sometimes they says we are not against it and sometimes expresses reservations, but our answer is to them, this is an open venture you can become part & invest. CPEC is not against any country, these are not initiative against America it's a win-win situation for all, it's a shared prosperity for all countries whoever want to be part of it”(Masood,2018).

Furthermore, the US strategic and diplomatic support to India means encourage India to implement its anti-Pakistan agenda in the region. Markey

(2016) contends that the Indo-US nexus is considerable objections on the CPEC, and both countries have sought to found ways to sabotage it even that some American scholars have suggested that China minimizes its activities in Pakistan to reduce the regional tensions (Markey,2016). The Indo-US nexus considerably annoyed by CPEC and this nexus intends to sabotage it. Fifteen years ago, the Indo-US defense relations were limited level. In contrast, in the last seven to ten years, both countries have signed agreements in the defense sector around \$ 10 billion. The US is a leading defense supplier of India, and these nexus have been conducting several joint defense exercises. The Indo-US bilateral trade is significantly boosted up in recent few years. India is the ninth-largest trading partner of the US as of 2019. Both states have shared an interest in the regional geopolitics against Sino-Pak geo-economic alliance and economically raise China across the region.

6.Sino-Pak Strategic Alliance and New Economic Venture

The historical contexts of the Sino-Pak relations has place a great significant in perceptive their collaboration. They view their cordial relationship in the milieu of a real precedent of cooperation even in circumstances of big quandaries. Pakistan played an important role in favor of China to getting its valid right to become a permanent veto power member of United Nation Security Council as well as connect with Muslim countries (Bukhari and Rehman,2011). Dumbaugh (2010) explained that the Chinese government had always provided a firm support to Pakistan in strategic and economic level and particularly in Kashmir issue. The long-lasting relationship of Sino-Pak described as “higher than mountains and deeper than oceans” (Dumbaugh,2010). The Pak-China has time-tested friends and geostrategic allies in the region. Both countries have enjoyed decades of collaboration since their independence and share around 520 km long border. Recently, Sino-Pak agrees on the project of CPEC, which is a milestone project for both countries as well as for the regional perspective. The CPEC will reform the regional geopolitics of Asia by infrastructure development across the region, such as pipeline networks, highways and railways (Shah et al.,2015). The CPEC will open new economic and development opportunities for Pak-China, and it has several implications for the regional geopolitics regarding new commercial ventures in the region. Wolf (2016) contends that the CPEC will provide various opportunities for Sino-Pak to enlarge their

economic growth. For China, it will offer the chance to link with the Indian Ocean via Gwadar Port directly. It will be an alternative to Malacca Dilemma as well as the shortest route for energy supply. For Pakistan, CPEC will overcome the energy-deprived economy and infrastructure development. According to Chinese press briefings, China has no geopolitical intentions in CPEC. However, the New-Delhi Government claims that via CPEC China capable of increasing its influence in the region and countering the Indian power (Wolf,2016). This mega project recognizes the regional economic and political realities. In this regard, CPEC enhances the trade volume, industrial and socio-economic development among Pak-China and across the region.

7.From Geopolitics to Geo-economics

7-1. Economic Gravity of CPEC Can Reshape the Regional Geopolitics?

The Region of South Asia has an enormous population, which covers approximately 4.5 million sq km area. In 2015, the regional geopolitics of South Asia had taken a new direction after the initiation of CPEC. Roy (2017) asserts that CPEC has the potential to reshape the regional geopolitics. The CPEC will connect the South, West and Central Asia and Gwadar port has played a vital role among these commercial regions (Roy,2017). According to different analysts, the last two centuries were the centuries of Europe and the US. Asia will lead the 21st century in terms of international politics across the world. The cluster of huge demography and economic enlargement will make it possible to forward Asia (Burki,2012). Former US foreign minister Hillary Clinton said that "The future of politics will be decided in Asia" (Clinton,2011). Naseem (2014) contends that the up-gradation of Gwadar port will open many trading routes for Asian states, particularly for landlocked countries as well as China will access to the Middle East through the shortest route via CPEC. In this regard, the Gwadar port is "A gateway to Asia." It will be a positive effect on development in regional states such as Afghanistan and CARs (Naseem,2014). Youkang (2017) reported that the CPEC project would be junction of Asia via connecting the Indian Ocean with other Asian regions included land-locked regions. It will join the land routes with the Maritime silk route; in this regard, the CPEC is a vital project of BRI. CPEC will develop as an economic hub for the entire region (Youkang,2017). The CPEC is a game-changer project, specifically economic growth and generally geopolitical

developments across the region. It will be essential effects on Sino-Pak relations and regional states as well, such as Sino-India relations and Pakistan's relations with the US and India. Moreover, it will develop regional integration among China, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, and CARs, resultantly valuable geopolitical developments in the region.

Fakhar and Hussain (2017) reported that the Malacca Strait joins China with the international market via around 12,000 km long route. China imports around 60% of its energy needs via the Strait of Malacca, and its expected will be reached at 75% soon. It is an expensive sea route for the transportation of Chinese goods to the international market. The Malacca Strait is a narrow strip between Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia, and Singapore has strong relations with Anglo-American block as well as the Indo-US nexus raise their intervention in Malaccan Dilemma. Due to these geo-economic and geopolitical calculations, the Chinese need a cheap and safe route to link with the Middle East. The CPEC will provide this opportunity for China to connect with the Arabian Sea via only 3000 km, an inexpensive and safe route (Hussain and Hussain,2017). Brohi (2015) contends that the Sino-Pak has various trade agreements with Afghanistan and CARs, such as Quadrilateral Traffic in Transit agreement among Sino-Pak-Afghan and Kyrgyzstan and APTTA (Afghan-Pak Transit & Trade agreement). Inadequate transport infrastructure is a significant hurdle for the proper implementation of these agreements. As a pilot project of BRI, CPEC will overcome these hurdles by providing the chain of routes from Pakistan to regional countries (Brohi,2015). The CPEC offers an opportunity for India to connect with the energy-rich Central Asia market, and it has also provided a chance to faster implementation of the energy channel of IPI (Iran-Pakistan-India) gas pipeline to overcome its energy requirements.

“For some reason, Pakistan was under the fold of geostrategic importance either Pakistan was compelled either Pakistan head to remain under the influence of geostrategic compulsion. In that respect Pakistan never had a chance to turn its direction from geostrategic to geo-economics, so that is why, Chinese have given for Pakistan a significant opportunity to concentrate and focus on the geo-economics and the geopolitics” (Masood, 2018)

Youkang (2017) reported that the CPEC would become a strategic and geo-

economic bridge between the land and sea in the region. The CPEC will provide the shortest and cheapest trade route for land-locked Central Asia (Youkang,2017). Another significant aspect of CPEC is Cold War rivalry Russia has also expressed its interest to be part of it. The Sino-Pak welcomed to Russia to join this economic venture (Zaafir,2016). The CPEC will entirely transform the geo-economic and geopolitical landscape of Asia via its financial and strategic significance across the region. This corridor will boost up trade activities, technical cooperation, industrial development, economic growth, and people-to-people contacts among the regional states. In this regard, millions of peoples will benefit from CPEC. The current classical geopolitical environment approach of ascendancy over each other will reshape into a critical geopolitical strategy of regionalization in geo-economics terms.

7-2. Sino-Pak-India Triangle from Foes to Friends

The CPEC is passing through the disputed areas among these three countries. However, the rising of economic cooperation between Sino-India, mainly the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC), will be helpful to the Indo-Pak peace process. Ranjan (2015) asserts that the Changing scenario of the regional situation provides the opportunity to Indian think tanks for two options regarding the CPEC. Firstly, India continues its protest until it delays the construction of the project. Secondly, India plays a positive and constructive role in trilateral collaboration with Pakistan and China for the development of the proposed economic corridor. In the next stage, the small projects across the border could be connecting with CPEC and BCIM-EC. Resultantly, this will bring a stable environment for trade and commerce between Indo-Pak and China. Besides, the territorial disputes would not involve in the approval or denial of the CPEC. In the last phase, many trans-border mini economic corridors will establish between Pakistan occupied Kashmir (POK) and Indian occupied Kashmir. Besides, through the mini corridor, the Baltistan (Pakistan) will link with Kargil (India) (Ranjan,2015). Ahmed and Fatima (2015) reported that Pakistan was non-NATO (North Atlantic Territory Organization) ally of the US, as well as India, is also a good friend of the US. Nevertheless, the US shifted its foreign policy about Pakistan due to the increasing of Sino-Pak defense and economic cooperation. Currently, the US considers India as a loyal friend and Pakistan as an opponent (Ahmed and Fatima,2015).

“They Indo-Pak can take some steps to move forward. Because, today in this world collaborations and connectivity and alliance take you forward and enmity with other countries, to have strain relations will take us backward, so it is (CPEC) in the benefit of both countries India and Pakistan” (Masood, 2018)

Ranjan (2015) reported that China has offered to India on various occasions to join the projects of developments and regional connectivity. From the local perspective, the mutual development projects among China, Pakistan, and India, such as trans-border projects and ECs, can be undertaken through the exclusion of border disputes. The Pak-India has linked with each other for some industrial and transport purposes (Ranjan,2015). Ali (2015) explained that the abomination environment among the Indo-Pak could avert India to participate in CPEC. However, this economic corridor will develop regional cooperation if India will include in the project. It will also support to resolve the disputed issues among both countries. The Indian inclusion in CPEC will provide an opportunity for Sino-India to clear the misgivings about each other. In this regard, the trilateral collaboration between China, India, and Pakistan will be helpful for regional economic development. The CPEC is a cross-regional development project not only bilateral move point-out by China, such as Iran and Afghanistan also wants to be part of this economic corridor. India has shown its interest to reached CARs and Afghanistan through Pakistan. However, due to political issues between Indo-Pak, India has an investment in Chabahar port of Iran to get access to CARs to bypass Pakistan. However, Iran offered Pakistan to join the project of Chabahar port. Besides, Iran expressed that the Chabahar port is not as a competitor or against the Gwadar port (Ali,2015). Also, these linkages will be strengthening through the proper working of trilateral sides. Therefore, CPEC could develop a geo-economic triangle of China-Pak and India from foes to friends as economic partners in the region, which has significantly, change the scenario of regional geopolitics. The trilateral economic cooperation among these countries will be the first step for economic development and regional integration. Likewise, the commercial corridors, CPEC, and BCIM-EC will connect the region entirely.

7-3. Regional Stability with Stable Afghanistan

R M Khan (2015) contends that regional stability is, directly and indirectly, link with Afghanistan. Now the time, the regional powers should play a

significant yet neutral role for peace and security in Afghanistan as well as in the region. Afghanistan has an ideal geo-economic location, and peace will bring in Afghanistan via the mechanism of regional economic cooperation, mainly among the neighboring countries of Afghanistan. China has a desire for investments in Afghanistan; in this regard, both countries upgrade their economic ties recently (Khan,2015). Land-Locked Afghanistan can be the primary beneficiary of CPEC to improve its economic growth and stable the fragile economy by connecting with neighboring countries. The Peshawar-Kabul (265 km) motorway is a significant project of CPEC to integrate the economic activities via a link with Gwadar Port and regional states.

“CPEC will bring peace and stability in Afghanistan as could be as possible that the recipe is through national reconciliation in Afghanistan and peaceful solution is settlement in that country that will be helpful in better use of this CPEC” (Masood,2018)

Roy (2017) reported that Afghanistan had shown its interest in being part of CPEC in October 2016. This corridor will be providing various opportunities for Afghanistan to increase its trade activates across the region, thereby stabilizing its position in the region(Roy, 2017). Masood (2019) reported that the Sino-Pak invited Afghanistan to join CPEC, which would be a beneficial project for Afghanistan and regional countries. To reaffirm the potential and credible role of Afghanistan in the economic corridor, a trilateral dialogue held in 2018, among the Sino-Pak and Afghanistan. According to some commentators, the inclusion of Afghanistan into CPEC is the right decision at time due to the probabilities of a peaceful political settlement in recent times (Masood,2019). The successful implementation of CPEC required a better understanding of geo-economic and geostrategic issues between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The regional security is a concern with stable Afghanistan, and it is vital importance for stability in Pakistan as well as both countries have strategic importance for each other. Presently, the emerging scenario of the economic outlook is a novel and constructive for Pak-Afghan to improve their relations in diplomatic and economic terms through the venture of CPEC. The regional security is a concern with stable Afghanistan. In this regard, CPEC will provide an opportunity for Afghanistan and regional powers to overcome security issues via economic collaboration.

7-4. Regional Integration

South Asia is the least integrated region across the globe. Even after seven decades, Indo-Pak conflicts are remaining and have the worst effects on regional integration. The hostile environment and security issues between the central regional powers are significant problems for economic cooperation and regionalization. The financial and strategic collaboration between the South Asian nations could transform this region into a substantial industrial cluster in the world. MOHAN (2016) asserts that Infrastructure development is a critical driving force behind the economic development of Asia, and it has facilitates the trade activities and connectivity among the regions. Thus the cross-border infrastructure is a vital tool for regional integration. The vision of BRI is to enhance the connectivity over land and sea routes between the regions of Asia, Africa, and Europe for economic development (MOHAN,2016). Rabbi (2017) claimed that the CPEC is a game changer project for Sino-Pak and the regional countries. The objective of the project is to interlink the regional economies and increase the trade level as well as develop the industrial, agriculture, and socio-economic sector among the regional countries (Rabbi,2017).

“The Iran, Afghanistan, and CARs and whenever India decides now all should become part of it and for them also it's a win-win situation. The CARs so for their only outlet has been through Russia, which is long and more expensive, for them the shortest outlet is through Gwadar. So it is in the interest of Afghanistan and CARs as well as it's the interest of Iran. Iran exports to China from both ways. It means to be greater regional integration” (Masood,2018)

Ashraf (2016) contends that the CPEC will develop economic interdependence, cooperation, and linkages that will assuredly contribute to regional political stability and integration, which will improve the security situation. Russia and Central Asian countries have higher interests to use CPEC routes for accessibility to the Arabian Sea and beyond for promoting their viable commercial, economic, and trade interests (Ashraf,2016). CPEC will develop economic integration among the nations of China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, India, and CARs. It will provide an opportunity for Indo-Pak and Afghanistan to bring improvement in their relations with each other. Iran has also interested in some arrangements among the Chabahar

and Gwadar Port. Moreover, Pakistan will be a central place for regional trade among the East, West, South and Central Asia. The linkage of CPEC with BCIM-EC and Gwadar Port with Chabahar Port can promote economic growth and regional integration.

8. Conclusion

Geopolitics is a significant factor in international relations since ancient times in the state system. Pakistan is an essential player in the regional powers due to its versatile geopolitics, which can be numerous options for strategic and economic cooperation with regional countries. China is well aware of it and took this opportunity in April 2015, to sign an agreement with Pakistan under the title of CPEC. Initially, both countries have signed 51 MOUs around \$ 46 billion worth of projects regarding energy, infrastructure, Gwadar Port, and communication sectors, and now the project worth is around \$ 65 billion as of 2019. India is a critical player in regional geopolitics has many objections on CPEC. In this regard, the Indian Government argues that the economic corridor will pass through Gilgit-Baltistan, which is a disputed territory and part of the Kashmir issue as well as concerns on the Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean. However, the Chinese Government has rejected the Indian concerns via highlight the economic features of the corridor. The Kashmir issue and unconstitutional status of Gilgit-Baltistan is the main flashpoint between Pak-India and regional geopolitics. The US has strategic and economic supports to India to counter the growing Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean, especially after the initiation OBOR and CPEC. The US mixed signaling and Indian objection on CPEC indicate the Indo-US nexus in the regional geopolitics. Unstable Afghanistan is another significant factor of regional geopolitics, which has been a battlefield since the Cold War to War on Terror till now. In light of these geopolitical dynamics, South Asia is the most vulnerable region in the globe. The CPEC has the potential to transform the landscape of regional geopolitics from classical to critical through the geo-economic interplay of the geopolitical theories of Heartland and Rimland. This economic corridor connects the Heartland (China) with Rimland (Pakistan) as well as provides a chain of routes to link the other regions of the Pivot area with Rimland and Oceania. The geostrategic and geo-economic interplay of geopolitical theories transforms the regional geopolitics from a hostile environment to cooperation, resultantly, bring peace and stability,

economic growth, and regional integration based on inter and intra-regionally.

Significance of the Research

The CPEC will provide an opportunity for Sino-Pak-India to establish a geostrategic and geo-economic triangle that can provide a decisive support in constructing the Asian century of peace, prosperity, and socio-economic development. Sino-Pak and India can become the powerhouse of the globe due to their ideal geography, huge population, and economies. Moreover, the CPEC will provide a favorable geopolitical ground for Pak-India to resolve the Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan issues, and it can bring peace and development in Afghanistan as well as in regional wide. Overall, the CPEC will bring a significant geopolitical development regarding geo-economic interplay of regional powers rather than the conventional geopolitical ascendancy as well as constructive engagement in South Asia and other parts of Asia.

Limitations of the Research

The study has focused and limited to the numerous consequences of CPEC on regional geopolitics. This research suggests that the scholars could further research on the implications of CPEC regarding the geo-economic and regional security. In this framework, relations normalization between Pakistan and India and constructive relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan are critical and indispensable preconditions. Besides, it is need of the time for developing regional states fundamental reassessment, and an approach based on predominantly-security for all member states to build trustable cooperation for regional integration and economic development.

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