

## Dynamics of Pakistan-China Relations

Dr. Moonis Ahmar<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

*This paper examines the dynamics of Pakistan-China relations from four perspectives: first, historical; second, strategic and security; third, economic; and fourth, futuristic. For Pakistan, China is a role model as far as social and human development is concerned. Turning around the economy of China within one generation is a lesson that needs to be learned by Pakistan. Almost five decades ago Pakistan was quite ahead of China in economic growth rate per capita income and other indicators of economic development. Regrettably, the gap between China and Pakistan in key sectors of development has widened with the passage of time. Today, China is the world's second largest economy whereas Pakistan is still trailing in the developing world.*

**Keywords:** CPEC, Gwadar seaport, Karakoram Highway, One-Belt One Road (OBOR), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), United Nations (UN).

### Introduction

China is the only neighbor of Pakistan which has conflict-free relations with Pakistan since the inception of Sino-Pakistan ties in 1951. Over a period of more than six decades, geo-political and geo-strategic transformation in the South and the West Asian regions generated

---

<sup>1</sup>Prof. Dr. Moonis Ahmar is a Meritorious Professor of International Relations at University of Karachi.

opportunities and prospects for the deepening of ties between Beijing and Islamabad. Beijing's economic and military assistance to Pakistan since the 1960s and now launching of US \$ 46 billion (later on enhanced to US \$ 62 billion) China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in 2015<sup>2</sup> is considered as a landmark and a milestone in furthering their age old relations.

This paper examines the dynamics of Pakistan-China relations from four perspectives: first, historical; second, strategic and security; third, economic; and fourth, futuristic. Furthermore, following questions have been raised and analyzed in this paper.

1. What are the dynamics of Sino-Pakistan relations and how the two countries have maintained a level of understanding?
2. What are the strategic, security, political and economic aspects of Sino-Pakistan relations?
3. How Sino-Pakistan relations impact on Indo-Pakistan and Pakistan-US ties?
4. What is the role and impact of CPEC on Sino-Pakistan relations?
5. How Sino-Pakistan relations impact on the South Asian landscape?
6. What is the future of Sino-Pakistan relations?

The paper also examines the dynamics of Sino-Pakistan relations particularly in the context of CPEC and its long-term implications on the economy and politics of Pakistan.

### **The Depth and Rationale of Sino-Pakistan Ties**

The depth and rationale of Sino-Pakistan relations could be gauged from the fact that Pakistan was amongst the first few countries which had recognized the Communist People's Republic of China (PRC). Ironically, Pakistan, an Islamic state, felt uncomfortable with a country

---

<sup>2</sup>The time line of CPEC is from 2015-2030.

whose ideology based on Communism contradicted with its own ideology i.e. Islam. Pakistan also joined the Western sponsored anti-Communist security alliances of the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and the South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO). This policy still did not fracture ties between pro-American Pakistan and anti-American Communist China. In a landmark 1963 border treaty with China, Pakistan ceded a part of its Northern territory and also became the first non-Communist country to operate direct flights to Peking, the capital of communist China.

According to Masood Khan, Pakistan's former Ambassador to the People's Republic of China and current President of Azad Jammu & Kashmir: "The Pakistan-China Treaty for Friendship and Cooperation and Good Neighborly Relations is a key instrument which enables us to strengthen our strategic, economic and cultural relations. A Joint Economic Commission (JEC) helps us stimulate the growth of our economic and trade ties."<sup>3</sup> A periodic review of the progress in different projects, sponsored by China in Pakistan particularly CPEC, tends to ensure further opportunities in deepening fruitful relations between the two age-old allies. According to an American researcher, "the genesis and early development of the Sino-Pakistan strategic partnership was framed by the Cold War, the Indo-Pakistan conflict, and Sino-Indian rivalry. American and Soviet aid to India during the 1962 Sino-Indian War supplied the impetus for China and Pakistan to pursue closer strategic ties. Nevertheless, cooperation in military and security affairs continues to be the central pillar of the Sino-Pakistan relationship. Furthermore, there is no mistaking the fact that China by virtue of its economic and political heft dominates the relationship and drives the bilateral agenda."<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>Masood Khan, "Pakistan-China Friendship: A Milestone," *Dawn*, April 20, 2015.

<sup>4</sup>John Calabresse, "Balancing on the Fulcrum of Asia: China's Pakistan Strategy," *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs*, Vol. 27/28, no. 1/2 (2014-2015), 2-3.

Furthermore, as rightly stated by the former Ambassador of Pakistan to China Riaz Mohammad Khan;

On 9 January 1950, four days after India's decision, Pakistan recognized the newly established People's Republic of China and opened its mission in Beijing one year later. Following a decade of tentativeness in relations, tinged with suspicion but not hostility, the two countries began to forge a close relationship of understanding that has been remarkably constant despite the vicissitudes of international politics, momentous transformation of the global political landscape two decades ago, changes in domestic fortunes, and a succession of government.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore,

The currents of history that had shaped the new direction related to the souring of Sino-Soviet and Sino-Indian relations by the beginning of the decade of 1960s and prompt US overtures to come to India's help with offers of military assistance following the latter's border skirmishes with China in October-November 1962. But friendship with China struck roots in the popular ethos in Pakistan when China stood unambiguously by Pakistan during and after the 1965 Indo-Pakistan conflict.<sup>6</sup>

In the arena of trade, commerce, and economic assistance, China has been a major source of help to Pakistan particularly in building its infrastructure and industrial base.

In its essence, "China's economic assistance is mostly in the shape of grants and loans for projects. Several high-profile projects have been

---

<sup>5</sup>Riaz Mohammad Khan, "Pakistan-China Relations: An Overview," *Pakistan Horizon* Vol. 64, no. 4(2011), 12.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

launched since the early 1970s such as the construction of the Karakoram Highway (KKH), the Heavy Mechanical Complex (HMC) and Heavy Foundry & Forge (HFF) in Taxila, the Machine Tool Plant in Karachi, Gwadar port, nuclear power plants at Chashma, in addition to a number of similar projects in the defense production sector, including the Heavy Rebuild Factory which later became Heavy Industries Taxila (HIT), which has developed the Al-Khalid tank. These projects have a symbolic value and are an obvious contribution to the economy and defence of the country.”<sup>7</sup> No other country, except the People’s Republic of China has a positive mark on Pakistani state, society, economy, infrastructure, and defence. That is the reason why when the United States criticizes CPEC, it is asked why America, unlike China, did not assist Pakistan in the development and modernization of its infrastructure and industrial base. Unlike China, the US has a minimal mark on Pakistan’s road to development in the key sectors ranging from energy, roads, highways, railways, water resources, and commerce.

Yet, it is only after the launching of CPEC that some concerns are raised in Pakistan about the environmental, political and economic implications of that project because of two reasons: First, it is argued that the Chinese investment in Pakistan, particularly in the energy sector will have serious environmental repercussions because of the use of fossil fuel particularly coal for power generation units. Furthermore, thousands of Chinese trucks and trawlers using the Gwadar-Kashgar route will cause enormous pollution. Reservations held by Baloch nationalists about the demographic transformation in Gwadar port because of the influx of non-locals also tend to augment the level of political discontent in the province of Baluchistan. Second, the reported US \$ 62 billion CPEC project will put a burden on

---

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 19.

Pakistan's economy in the long run as the country will have to return the amount along with interest.

Realistically speaking, moving on to the foreign policy arena, the essence of the policy of bilateralism was a shift from the policy of alliances to promoting interaction and cooperation with Communist/Socialist countries and those belonging to the emerging Third World. According to Swaran Singh, an Indian academician writing in his book, *China-South Asia: Issues, Equations, Policies*;

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto clearly stands out as being the architect of China-Pakistan nuclear cooperation and also the architect of Pakistan's nuclear policy and programs. As Pakistan's Foreign Minister during 1963-66, he had been largely responsible for laying the foundation of China-Pakistan defense cooperation.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, the 1962 Sino-Indian War and Peking's tilt in favor of Pakistan during the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war further deepened relations between the two neighbors. Hence, it is argued by an Indian writer that, "China-Pakistan relations have been initiated by the normal considerations of improving and expanding the two-way interactions among states but it certainly developed and flourished on the simple strategic axiom: the enemy of my enemy is my friend. The usual line of analysis harps on interest complementarities. China and Pakistan used each other to neutralize India's growing military capabilities and the proximity and geographical consideration cement their relations further."<sup>9</sup> According to Swaran Singh, "What particularly makes the China-Pakistan relationship an enigma is the divergence in their

---

<sup>8</sup> Swaran Singh, *China-South Asia: Issues, Equations, Policies* (New Delhi: Lancer's Books, 2003), 191-92.

<sup>9</sup> Anindyo J. Majumbar, "The changing Imperatives" in Swaran Singh (ed.), *China-Pakistan Strategic Cooperation Indian Perspective*, (New Delhi: Manohar, 2007), 36.

political systems, social cultures, overall size, level of development and the consequent absence of viable reciprocity in their interactions and mutuality in their interests and policies.”<sup>10</sup>

China emerged as a major strategic ally of Pakistan, much to the chagrin of the US and the then Soviet Union. China became a major supplier of military hardware to Pakistan in the backdrop of the US arms embargo on Pakistan following the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war. China assisted Pakistan to construct the Karakorum Highway (KKH), also called as the eighth wonder of the world from Havalian to Khunjrab at the border of Pakistan and China. KKH promoted not only trade between China and Pakistan but it also became the basis of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) linking the Chinese city of Kashgar to the Pakistani port of Gwadar. China also assisted Pakistan in various industrial and energy projects including the modernization of infrastructure. More so, all the Pakistani and Chinese leaders since the establishment of their diplomatic relations on May 21, 1951 have maintained consistency and ownership of their age-old ties. However, it is true that after the demise of the Chinese leaders Mao Tse Tung and Chou En Lai, the Chinese foreign policy pursued the path of pragmatism by following a neutral approach on various conflicting issues including Jammu & Kashmir. The Chinese leaders advised Pakistan to follow the option of dialogue instead of confrontation with its eastern neighbor.

### **Realities in Sino-Pakistan Relations**

Pakistan’s perspective on its relations with China is based on three major realities: First, China is Pakistan’s trusted, tested, and a dependable ally despite the shift in China’s policy on Jammu & Kashmir from overt support to ostensible neutrality. Pakistan continued to maintain its cordial and close ties with Beijing and firmly supported

---

<sup>10</sup> Swaran Singh, “Introduction” in Swaran Singh (ed.), *China-Pakistan Strategic Cooperation Indian Perspective*, (New Delhi: Manohar, 2007), 17.

China in dealing with Islamic extremist groups particularly, Islamic Movement of Eastern Turkestan. Pakistan holds the view that since China is a permanent member of the UN Security Council and is the world's second largest economy; it can be of an enormous use for Pakistan in order to counter India, particularly its drive to join the Nuclear Supplier Group and the UN Security Council as a permanent member.

Secondly, it provides a win-win situation for both China and Pakistan. Both have been mutually beneficial to each other since the inception of their diplomatic relations. Pakistan's perception of China is based on genuine feelings of trust and confidence. Therefore, the perception shared by both in China and Pakistan is, "relations between the two countries are taller than the Himalayas and deeper than the ocean."

Third, China also ensures space for Pakistan at different international fora in order to deal with India and its attempts to isolate Pakistan. Interestingly, People's Republic of China, whose membership application in the UN was consistently vetoed by the United States from 1949 till 1970 and till the time the Nixon administration patched up with Beijing following secret visit of the then American National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger to Peking in July 1971, used its first veto after becoming a member of the UN in October 1971 against the admission of Bangladesh in the fall of 1972. China used its first veto on the insistence of Pakistan as Bangladesh's membership to the UN was blocked by China till the time Pakistan had not recognized Bangladesh in February 1974. According to Riaz Mohammad Khan,

The events of 1971 were a test for Chinese diplomacy and its relations with what was left of Pakistan. From a larger perspective, it clarified and set the political parameters of the relationship and, at the same time, underscored realism rather than emotionalism in China's approach to

its foreign relations under Premier Zhou Enlai that continues to prevail in post-Mao Zedong China. The Chinese leadership was deeply disappointed with Islamabad's handling of the 1971 political events. In January 1972, following his remarks welcoming Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, who came to Beijing after taking over as President, Premier Zhou Enlai, addressing the Pakistani press, publicly stated that China did not provide arms (to a country) to be used against its own people.<sup>11</sup>

China was also supportive of Pakistan in the meeting of the UN Security Council held in August 2019 and January 2020, to discuss the situation in Jammu & Kashmir. Beijing was also considerate about endorsing Pakistan's position in the meeting of Financial Action Task Force (FATF)<sup>12</sup> to remove Islamabad from the grey list. On these grounds, the age-old history of Sino-Pakistan relations is a reflection of political will, determination, trust, and confidence held by the two sides with each other. The all-weather and time tested relations between Pakistan and China, regardless of variation in their political and ideological thinking provides some space to Islamabad. Though the 19<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit, scheduled to be held in Islamabad in November 2019, was sabotaged by India and Pakistan was consequently isolated, yet the Chinese support in the region continued.

### **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor**

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is under Beijing's gigantic project entitled, "One Belt One Road" renamed as "Belt and Road (BRI)." It is to promote trade between China and different regions of the world. According to a Chinese scholar, Li Xiguang,

---

<sup>11</sup> Riaz Mohammad Khan, 12.

<sup>12</sup> "China Reacts to FATF's Move of Placing Pakistan on Grey List" *The News*, June 29, 2018.

The rise of China along OBOR is not based on its economic power, but on its cultural power. Historically, the rise of an empire along the Silk Road had its cultural sphere of influence. It helped the governance and transportation reach even the farthest frontier and helped the mainstream culture affect the farthest border region. It connected the farthest countries where trade can be connected.<sup>13</sup>

He further argues that,

The CPEC, the hub of OBOR, links the belt in Central Asia and the road with the Indian Ocean. The region around the CPEC has seen the rise of previous world cultural centers. This is the same area where the ancient world influenced China and China also influenced the world. The ancient Silk Road civilization encompasses countries that include Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Iran which have been portrayed in Yu Gong as parts of Suifu and Yaofu. With these countries, China needs to maintain regional relationship and political alliances. Constructing a civilizational sphere across OBOR is reshaping China's geopolitical and geo-civilizational sphere of influence. Though the Silk Road is an economic zone, it is more a cultural zone.<sup>14</sup>

Pakistan's perspective on its relations with China is also based on the premise that CPEC is equally in the interest of both Beijing and Islamabad. China's projected investment of US \$ 62 billion on

---

<sup>13</sup> Li Xiguang, "Building a New Civilization One Belt One Road Initiative" in Minhas Majeed Khan, Ahmad Rashid Malik, Saira Ijaz, Ume Farwa (eds.) *China-Pakistan Economic Corridor A Game Changer* (Islamabad: The Institute of Strategic Studies, 2016), 6.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 8.

infrastructure, energy, and other projects under CPEC will provide China a shorter access for its exports and imports from Europe, the Middle East, and Africa via the Pakistani port of Gwadar than from its ports located in East and South China Sea. Trade from Gwadar will cut the distance for China to at least 40%. The process of modernization and industrialization in Pakistan will also get an impetus through CPEC but it is also the beneficial and advantageous position of China which will be secured through CPEC which culminated into Beijing's large-scale investment in Pakistan. Those who have a positive approach on CPEC called it a "game changer."

Yet, another perspective that prevails in Pakistan concerning CPEC is based on reservations, concerns, and fears that Baluchistan, where the port of Gwadar is located and which is the focal point under CPEC, will not be a beneficiary from that corridor. Likewise, the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) has alleged that the Western route which will benefit the smaller provinces of Baluchistan and KPK, is not being given due consideration and efforts are being made to give preference to the Eastern route which will largely benefit Pakistan's biggest province of Pakistan, i.e. Punjab. Linked to this criticism, which is launched against CPEC, is also a perception that US \$ 62 billion committed by China for CPEC is mostly composed of loans which Pakistan will have to repay thus augmenting its foreign debt to an alarming proportion. The deepening of Sino-Pakistan ties encompassing the whole gamut of economic, political, security, and strategic arena however got an impetus with the strengthening of mutual trust and confidence.

Therefore,

Over the past several years, China has sought to leverage Pakistan's geostrategic advantages in order to counteract transnational threats to its own domestic stability, bolster its energy supply security and buttress its transformation

to a global power. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the most recent and by far the most ambitious effort by China to deepen its longstanding and resilient strategic relationship with Pakistan.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, “China’s recent and ongoing efforts to deepen the Sino-Pakistan strategic partnership have been informed by three considerations: 1) unresolved issues between Beijing and New Delhi, 2) misgivings about the US reluctance to the Asia-Pacific and suspicion of Washington’s growing ties with India, and 3) concerns over the stability of its western border.”<sup>16</sup>

How will the Republican administration under President Donald Trump view the CPEC and growing Chinese influence in Asia is yet to be seen. Indo-US nexus to counter China is certainly an option that is being exercised by the Trump administration.

On November 21, 2019, the US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Alice Wells in a conversation at the Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington DC criticized CPEC. She particularly raised her concern that Pakistan’s debt will mushroom as a result of Chinese loans granted to Pakistan under various CPEC projects. During her visit to Islamabad on January 22, 2020, Alice Wells speaking before a gathering composed of members of civil society and academia alleged that there was no transparency in CPEC projects, claiming Pakistan’s debt burden was growing due to the Chinese financing.<sup>17</sup> She also stated in her talk that CPEC projects were awarded to blacklisted firms. The US diplomat also underlined the long-term effects in Pakistan of China’s “financing practices” and urged Islamabad to examine “the burdens that are

---

<sup>15</sup> John Calabresse, 1.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>17</sup> “Blacklisted Firms Got CPEC Project Contracts,” IANS, January 22, 2020, also see, “CPEC to Push Pakistan Deeper into Debt Burden, Cautions US” Dawn, November 23, 2019.

falling on the new government to manage with now an estimated US \$ 15 billion debt to the Chinese government and US \$ 6.7 billion in Chinese commercial debt.”<sup>18</sup> However, the Chinese ambassador to Pakistan Yao Jing rebuffed American allegations against CPEC and termed the flag ship project as a win-win situation for both China and Pakistan.

A statement issued by the Chinese embassy in Islamabad rejected the concerns and allegations of Alice Wells by pointing out that,

We noted that during her recent visit to Pakistan, Ms. Alice Wells Acting Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs of the US State Department, made negative comments on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor again. The comments hold nothing new, but the same cliché in her speech in November 2019, which has been repeatedly rejected by China and Pakistan. However the US side still ignores the facts and is obsessed with the story it made for the CPEC. We would be more than glad to see the US develop its relationship with Pakistan, but we strongly oppose the US interference into China-Pakistan relations and the CPEC. Although you can never wake up a person who is pretending to be asleep, we have to make our position clear and reject the negative propaganda by the US. We must not let the truth be distorted and the lies run wild.<sup>19</sup>

The government of Pakistan also expressed its displeasure over the remarks of Alice Wells about CPEC and termed Sino-Pakistan relations above such accusations.

---

<sup>18</sup> “Allice Wells’ Remarks another Doomed Attempt to Defame Sino-Pak Relations: Chinese Embassy,” *Dawn*, May 21, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> “Chinese Embassy Rejects Allice Wells’s Remarks on CPEC,” *INP*, January 22, 2020.

Nevertheless, since 2015 China-Pakistan Economic Corridor emerged as a major area of cooperation between the two strategic neighbors. What is CPEC and how it will have implications on Sino-Pakistan relations and on the regional and international scene needs to be analyzed in some detail. CPEC primarily reflects China's innovative policy of "One Belt One Road" integrating Europe and Asia for augmenting commercial and trade ties among the countries of the two continents. According to a noted Pakistani defense analyst,

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is going to take a positive turnaround both for Pakistan and the Western region of China. It represents two major trends in China-Pakistan relations: A long experience of sustained cooperation in the economic domain over the last six decades has given sufficient confidence to the two countries to undertake such a major project; and the shared aspirations for a prosperous and stable future for the people of both countries.<sup>20</sup>

For Pakistan, CPEC may be a "game changer"<sup>21</sup> because the multipurpose project spanning over a period of more than one decade will unleash the process of development and modernization in the less developed areas of Pakistan like Baluchistan and the Western region of China. Therefore,

CPEC is a well thought out and well-crafted concept and project to unleash the process of meaningful cooperation between the two neighboring countries as for the benefit of China and West, Central and South Asia. Based on the

---

<sup>20</sup> Hasan Askari Rizvi, "The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Regional Cooperation and Socio-Economic Development," *Strategic Studies*, Vol. 34, no. 55, (Winter 2014 and Spring 2015), nos. 4 and 1,1.

<sup>21</sup> Moonis Ahmar, "CPEC as a Game Changer?" *The Express Tribune*, November 29, 2019.

notion of a win-win situation, the strategic meaning of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor needs to be defined and examined from historical, economic, cultural, and geo-political perspectives.<sup>22</sup>

According to Lu Shulin, former Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan from 1999-2002,

To China, the significance of CPEC is very obvious. We know that after 30 odd years of reform and opening, the Eastern part of China has undergone tremendous changes and the Western part of the country has achieved remarkable progress. But compared with the Eastern part, it is still lagging behind. Now the country is vigorously pushing forward the strategy of developing the Western part so that a balanced development will be achieved between the Eastern and western parts of the country and China's long-term stability will be guaranteed. We know that seven provincial areas of China and especially Xinjiang are far away from the coast of China. The import and export of Xinjiang rely on the ports of China which are 4 or 5 thousand kilometers away and again through more than ten thousand kilometers sea route it conducts trade with Asian, European and African countries. The transport costs are quite high. Once CPEC is completed, the foreign trade of Western China, especially Xinjiang, could be conducted through Gwadar which is only about two thousand

---

<sup>22</sup>Moonis Ahmar, "The Meaning of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor," *Strategic Studies*, Vol. 34, no. 55 (Winter 2014 and Spring 2015), nos. 4 and 1, 36.

kilometers away from Kashgar. The distance from shipments would be greatly reduced.<sup>23</sup>

He further argued that,

In order to construct the CPEC, the two countries must be interconnected. This includes four aspects: information connection; road connection, railway connection, and pipeline connection. In order to achieve information connection, the Pakistan-China cross border fiber optic cable must be laid. In order to achieve road connection, the roads of our two countries must be upgraded and mutually connected. In order to achieve the rail connection, the railways of the two countries must be upgraded and mutually connected. In order to achieve a pipeline connection, the oil and gas pipeline must be laid between our two countries.<sup>24</sup>

The ambitious Chinese approach envisaged under CPEC has short-term, medium-term and long-term plans from 2015 till 2030. In fifteen years' time, China expects its trade via Kashgar and Gwadar to expand substantially thus causing enormous economic and infrastructural changes in both Pakistan and its Western region.

---

<sup>23</sup>Lu Shulin, "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: A Flagship and Exemplary Project of One Belt and One Road" *Strategic Studies*, Vol. 34, no. 55 (Winter 2014 and Spring 2015), nos. 4 and 1, 168.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.,169. Lui Shulin further elaborates the importance of CPEC by stating that, "the construction of CPEC is an important component of the great strategy of "One Belt and One Road (OBOR). The CPEC is the flagship project. China reached agreement with India on the building of Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor and reached agreement with Pakistan on the building of CPEC in May 2013. And in September the same year, President Xi Jiping proposed the building of Economic Belt of Silk Road during his visit to Kazakhstan and made the proposal of building 21<sup>st</sup> century Maritime Silk Road when he visited Indonesia and Malaysia. In such a short period of time, China put forward a series of proposals reflected in the strategic thinking and the overall plan for further reform and opening under the same situation."

The Indian perception about Sino-Pak communication linkages is reflected in a paper by Virendra Sahai Verma in Swaran Singh's edited book, *China-Pakistan Strategic Cooperation Indian Perspective* in the following words:

Karakorum Highway and now Gwadar Port project which are on either end of Pakistan's geographical limits, are the foundations for a long term vision of Sino-Pakistan relations. The Gwadar Sea port is strategically located to pave the way for strengthening Pakistan's economic relations with China ad Central Asian Republics providing access to warm waters of the Arabian Sea through land access via Karakorum pass.<sup>25</sup>

Pakistan has made it clear that CPEC is not against the interests of any country but is a pillar as far as regional connectivity is concerned. Pakistan is amenable to the inclusion of other countries of the region such as Afghanistan, India, and Iran in CPEC. Furthermore, Russia has also expressed its interest to seek the possibility of joining CPEC. Therefore, apprehensions on the part of India or any other country about CPEC lacks a rational basis. Furthermore, Pakistan has invited other countries to join CPEC for the advancement and modernization of trade and communication linkages.

Whether CPEC will be a "game changer" in the region or unleash the process of modernization in Pakistan depends on how different items of projects are implemented. Two realities will determine the future of CPEC and Sino-Pakistan relations in the years to come: First, the capacity and capability of Pakistan to give a practical shape to projects particularly those related to energy and infrastructure; and second, China's response to the political fallout of CPEC particularly in Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). These two provinces of

---

<sup>25</sup>Virendra Sahai Verma, "The Korakoram Highway" in Swaran Singh (ed.), *China-Pakistan Strategic Cooperation Indian Perspectives* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2007), 331.

Pakistan have reservations about CPEC for different reasons. The nationalist groups in Baluchistan consider CPEC as an attempt made by Punjab to exploit the resources of their provinces and to turn the Baluch population as a minority by settling people from Punjab. Whereas, KPK argues that the federal government is concealing the essential details of corridor by not giving priority to the western route which passes from the backward regions of Baluchistan and KPK.

### **The Way Forward**

As mentioned earlier, a great degree of consistency could be found in Sino-Pakistan relations since the inception of their diplomatic ties in 1951. Sixty eight years of all-weather tested Sino-Pakistan relations however need to pass through crucial moments in the years to come. A major test case in the future of Sino-Pakistan relations is CPEC because of two main reasons: First, unlike the past ideological leadership of China, the people at the helm of affairs since 1979 are highly pragmatic in nature and firmly believe in result oriented ties. If Pakistan is unable to deliver in implementing different segments of projects under CPEC, there is all the likelihood that China may pull out and invest in some other country or region. That has put the onus on Pakistan. In order to ensure security for thousands of Chinese workers involved in different CPEC projects in Pakistan, Islamabad has taken extra-ordinary security measures by raising a separate force to protect Chinese workers from any type of subversive or terrorist acts. It is the issue of stability in Baluchistan which has also worried Chinese as they do not want their involvement under CPEC to be at stake. Second, the environmental fallout of CPEC is also a major source of concern in Pakistan because of coal based energy projects having serious environmental hazards. Furthermore, the possible traffic of heavy trucks, tankers shipping Chinese goods to the port of Gwadar will damage roads and infrastructure. Periodic maintenance of roads carrying Chinese goods will have to be ensured.

For Pakistan, China is a role model as far as social and human development is concerned. Turning around the economy of China within one generation is a lesson that needs to be learned by Pakistan. Five decades ago Pakistan was quite ahead of China in economic growth rate, per capita income, and other indicators of economic development. With the passage of time, the gap between China and Pakistan in key sectors of development has widened to an extent that currently China is the world's second largest economy.

Therefore, "China's efforts to develop the energy aspect of the CPEC have coincided with its entry into Eurasian gas pipeline politics. Seeking to cash in on Pakistan's growing appetite for energy, Petro-China, a subsidiary of China National Petroleum Company (CNPC) along with Petroleum Brunei and Petronas of Malaysia, among others, has expressed interest in exporting LNG to Pakistan. The CPEC, like OBOR, was launched with great fanfare and hailed by Chinese officials as a pathway to progress, a game changer, and a boon to the region and a benefit to the entire world. The rhetoric surrounding the launch of the CPEC thus conveys the image of a self-confident, assertive China determined and increasingly capable of reshaping the economic and geo-political architecture of Eurasia to its advantage, and of a friendship between China and Pakistan that is unbreakable and a shared future that is unbounded."<sup>26</sup>

If CPEC has deepened Sino-Pakistan relations in the contemporary era, Islamabad is also conscious about extremist Islamic groups in the Western Chinese province of Xinjiang where Uyghur Muslims resent demographic transformation of their region by the influx of Han Chinese.

The role of Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) against what they perceive as colonization of Xinjiang by China needs to be

---

<sup>26</sup> John Calabresse, 8 and 10.

viewed as a major source of instability in what is called as China's "soft under belly." Therefore,

The fact remains that Pakistan has been deeply conscious of Chinese concerns and has ongoing active cooperation with China for both intelligence sharing and neutralizing ETIM. Hasan Mahsum, the leader of the separatist movement, was killed by the Pakistani forces deployed in areas adjoining the border with Afghanistan, and a number of other well-known ETIM members were captured and handed over to the Chinese.<sup>27</sup>

Pakistan's approach and policy to seek China's support for issues central to its security and international presence is manifested in the maintenance of high level contacts. For instance, "at the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament, which discusses and negotiates arms control issues, and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna, where Pakistan has important nuclear related positions to defend, the two countries maintain close coordination."<sup>28</sup> China has successfully prevented India's efforts to seek a seat in the UN Security Council as a permanent member and also in the past scuttled India's efforts to ban the chief of Jaish-e-Mohammad Maulana Masood Azhar in the UN Security Council's sanction committee. Only lately, China changed its stance with the connivance of Pakistan whereby ban on Maulana Masood Azhar was imposed last year. Furthermore, China has also opposed India's bid to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). China's support to Pakistan initially as an observer and then as a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is another example of deep rooted understanding between the two neighbors.

The impact of Sino-Pakistan relations on the South Asian landscape is not difficult to gauge. Pakistan is an ardent supporter of China's

---

<sup>27</sup> Riaz Mohammad Khan, 16.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 15.

admission as a permanent member of SAARC to the detriment of India. Pakistan and China have offered other South Asian countries to join CPEC and benefit from Beijing's policy of "one belt one road."

As far as the future of China-Pakistan relations is concerned, it seems the two countries in view of mutually beneficial relationship will continue to pursue a policy of constructive engagement.

Again, one needs to examine the historical dynamics of Sino-Pakistan relations while understanding the present and the future course of relations between the two neighbors. Pakistan needs to learn from the 'miracle' of China that how it progressed and developed from a poor, illiterate, and backward to a modern and successful country. It is the leadership, planning, and work ethics that are central to the progress and development of any country. Pakistan, while having deep rooted relations with Beijing needs to make use of the skills and expertise of China in the arena of development and progress.