

Hardware and Software Aspect of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Domestic and Regional Challenges

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Abstract

The launch of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is seen as a golden opportunity for Pakistan's economy and development sector. The overall idea behind Chinese investment in the several economic corridors along the route of Belt Road Initiative (BRI) and related infrastructure development projects is to create more opportunities for trade, economic interdependence, and integration with different regional actors. However, the various challenges associated with such megaprojects cannot be ignored. The paper, therefore, reviews the challenges faced by CPEC under two different lenses. The first lens deals with the types of challenges i.e., hardware (quality of infrastructure and logistics network) and the second lens view software (policy and regulatory framework) it deals with the levels at which challenges are being confronted i.e., domestic, and regional. The paper builds its rationale on the theoretical paradigm of Surplus Recycling Mechanism (SRM) and inclusive and extractive institutions. The findings of the paper suggest that Pakistan is lagging in the effective development of both hardware and software aspects, which pose some serious challenges for the successful implementation of CPEC. If Pakistan desires to extract maximum benefit from the project, without compromising on the principles of its national interest, security, and sovereignty, then it needs to devise an action plan to address its internal flaws by bridging the hardware and software gap and putting in place an inclusive institution and a strong national security infrastructure to minimize the chances of external threats.

Key Words: CPEC, Hardware, Software, Infrastructure, Policy, Security, Pakistan

Introduction

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) initiated in 2013 is the flagship project of One Belt One Road (OBOR). The CPEC projects include the development of Gwadar Port, strengthening connectivity via road, rail, and fiber, strengthening energy infrastructure, and development of Special Economic Zones (SEZ). The objective is to ensure benefits both for China and Pakistan and ensure means of all-encompassing growth and regional harmonization (Arrfat et al., 2017). CPEC is tagged as a game-changer for Pakistan's economy on many counts. Firstly, it provides ample opportunity for trade with neighbors, which previously was an intricate task because of

poor connectivity. Secondly, it has helped the energy sector to overcome its shortcomings and in recovering from an energy-deficient sector to energy sufficient sector. This is considered as a real boost for the industrial sector whose productivity was badly affected by the frequent power shortages. Thirdly, CPEC projects can play a vital role in bringing regional adversaries closer by offering them better trade incentives. Fourthly, it is believed that CPEC will boost revenue from around US \$1.5 billion to \$1.9 billion that will further increase to US \$5 billion in 2022. Such a huge amount of revenue will fortify Pakistan. Although above mentioned expected advantages of CPEC are significant however the extraction of these benefits could be challenging as Pakistan is dealing with many difficulties to implement this project. The idea of existing dangers to CPEC can be segmented into two categories i.e., domestic, and regional challenges. The domestic challenges are an outcome of inept leadership and extractive institutions inherited from the colonial powers whereas the regional challenges emerge out of unfriendly and hostile relations with neighboring countries. From this understanding the challenges to CPEC can be categorized into two types:

1. One, the hardware that deals with logistics network and available infrastructure facilities and its quality. The maintenance of the hardware aspect is mandatory as it plays a vital role in the smooth flow of trade goods.
2. The second is the software aspect that deals with the trade policies, procedures at borders, ease of doing business, tariff and non-tariff barriers, trade agreements, dispute settlement, safeguards), which are crucial to making the hardware work efficiently. In short hardware and software are complementary and essential in the production process.

This study primarily focuses on identifying these existing constraints and potential threats to CPEC, followed by some viable options for the involved stakeholders to achieve the goal of enhanced connectivity and integration. It is argued in the literature that there is no exclusive or single right approach to assimilate economies with regional and global markets as the integration speed and patterns may vary across the regions. Previous experiences, like that of European Union (EU), proves that it is the economic coordination that results in political participation. Therefore, to ensure economic integration, an institutional approach was formulated. Under this approach, strong institutions were set up with all key stakeholders as its participants. All these approaches were successful, but the major role was played by governments and their economic policies (Kuroda et al., 2007). To address the present challenge of regional integration and to reap the maximum benefit of CPEC both government and policymakers need to be more active and outcome-oriented than they have been in past. From a stability and security point of view, efforts should be made to forge strategic partnerships with the key stakeholders and work on opportunities for regional cooperation and integration (De & Iyengar, 2014). To overcome the hardware challenges, Pakistan should make some concrete efforts in improving its infrastructure and encourage public-private partnerships and building partnerships with technologically advanced countries to assist in the development of good quality infrastructure. To overcome the software challenges, Pakistan should follow and implement the framework of inclusive institutions (De & Iyengar, 2014).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used in the study is referred to as the hardware and software approach. This is a new conceptual framework introduced in the context of economic corridors. The framework has been used by leading international organizations like the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and Food and Agricultural Organization of the United States. The approach identifies two key factors of production i.e. hardware and software. Hardware includes physical labor, traditional physical capital, transportation networks, energy grids, institutional infrastructure. The availability of hardware is vital as it serves as the main catalyst of economic development. From an economic corridor perspective, the hardware deals with the mega physical and infrastructure projects. The theory of Surplus Recycling Mechanism (SRM) coined by Varoufakis compliments the approach of hardware and the objective behind the launch of economic corridors. According to this theory the states divert their excess production towards larger markets in the near periphery. The development of new infrastructure under BRI will likewise divert trade flows to new corridors, shifting the world center of economic gravity and creating new centers of international economic activities in a more multipolar world. The software aspect deals with the planning stage at the beginning of the production process (Lffirartes -Dewey, 1988). The software also deals with the planning and management of the projects to ensure the desired production/output. The software approach is linked to the availability of institutions, protection of property rights, effective law enforcement, and efficient bureaucracies, together with a broad range of norms and civic mores as they are strongly correlated to better economic performance over time (Relations, 2012). Moreover, it is argued in the literature that growth-enhancing structural changes are observed when institutions of production (industrial policies, tariffs, subsidies, etc.) and institutions of exchange (property rights, rule of law, etc.,) are enforced by the state (Constantine, 2017).

The software aspect/challenges can be better explained under the paradigm of institutional differences among countries colonized by Europeans. The theory characterizes institutions in two different types i.e., inclusive institutions and extractive institutions. The idea of inclusive and extractive institutions is used to highlight different patterns of economic development. According to Acemoglu and Robinson, “inclusive economic institutions... are those that allow and encourage participation by the great mass of people in economic activities that make the best use of their talents and skills”. Doing Business Index, Fragile State Index and Corruption Perception Index contribute to measuring some properties of social capital and institutions of a country (Samarasinghe, 2019). The term extractive institutions refer to the institutions that are driven and controlled by the political elite to maximize their gains. As conceptualized by Acemoglu and Robinson, “attractiveness” refers to the features of institutions that affect citizens’ and firms’ protection against forms of public abuse: for instance, lack of law and order and insecure property rights negatively affect agents’ ability to appropriate the fruits of their efforts and to participate in a level playing field, while they facilitate the creation of rents and expose the same agents to government expropriations for the benefits of minorities (Fracasso et al., 2018). Addressing hardware and software challenge is a strenuous task and it will require a lot of input from all the sectors. The infrastructure sector will require new funds and investment to meet the efficiency level. However, this is just one side of the coin. The second is the software

aspect that demands revision of already existing policies and governance, to ensure that new investments translate into better infrastructure services (Samarasinghe, 2019).

Current Impediments in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

New projects and heavy investment projects are often accompanied by a lot of challenges that might thwart the outcome of the projects. Some of the plausible causes behind these disruptions are the inconsistency of the policymakers, poor infrastructure, poor logistics, lack of institutional capacity, lack of effective implementation, ineffective approach towards currency conversion, and development of economic zones. The same issues are prominent in the CPEC as well (Arrfat et al., 2017).

Hardware Challenges

Hardware challenges are often linked to poor physical infrastructure and logistics networks that include electricity, telecommunications, a network of roads, railways, etc. According to the World Bank, one of the factors of low productivity of almost every sector in Pakistan is undersupply of physical infrastructure (Jan et al., 2012). According to the Asian Development Bank report and its analysis, investment in infrastructure has never been a priority. Pakistan has been more focused on strengthening its defense sector, debt servicing, and general administration. This ignorance towards the sector has further resulted in the deterioration of physical infrastructure and its quality. The country currently is equipped with the challenge of outdated means of transportation, shortage of water, and energy shortfall. Moreover, the falling quality standards of infrastructure in Pakistan have further affected its position in ease of doing business and business competitiveness. This has contributed to the poor infrastructure, frequent energy shortages, and poor logistics facilities have lowered the productivity of local industries. It is also believed that underperforming infrastructure is responsible for lower gross domestic product (M. A. M. Khan, 2020). International reports on infrastructures also reinstate the fact that Pakistan is lagging on the global list because of its poor infrastructure. Pakistan stands at 110th position in the overall infrastructure ranking of 137 countries. The table shows the deterioration in the quality of transport infrastructure in Pakistan over time.

Table 1: Pakistan's Global Ranking in Infrastructure

Indicator	2010–11		2017–18	
	Rank (out of 139)	Score (1–7)	Rank (out of 137)	Score (1–7)
Quality of overall infrastructure	110	2.8	110	3.0
Quality of roads	72	3.8	76	3.9
Quality of railroad infrastructure	55	3.1	52	3.3
Quality of port infrastructure	73	4.0	73	4.0
Quality of air transport infrastructure	81	4.3	91	4.0
Available airline seat kilometers*	48	345.6	46	551.3
Quality of electricity supply	128	2.1	115	2.9
Mobile telephone subscriptions**	107	57.0	125	71.4
Fixed telephone lines	115	2.2	114	1.6
Lack of infrastructure as most problematic factor in doing business recognized by people (%)	4.7	--	4.4	

*Scheduled available airline seat kilometers per week originating in Pakistan (in millions).

** Number of mobile cellular telephone subscriptions per 100 people.

Source: World Economic Forum (2011, 2018).

Condition of National Highways, Motorways and Express ways

Pakistan's road network of 263,000 km consists of about 12,500 km of national highways, 93,000 km of provincial highways, with the remainder classified as either district or urban roads. The national highway network, which is less than 5% of the total road network, caters to about 80% of commercial traffic. The National Highway Authority (NHA) is responsible for national highways, including access-controlled motorways and expressways, while provincial and district administrators are responsible for provincial highways and district roads. Despite the high reliance on road transport, the quality of the road infrastructure causes severe capacity constraints. Although the quality of the national highways has considerably improved, thanks to continuous investments and better road asset management, the overall condition is wanting—only 56% of highways are assessed as being in good or fair condition. The motorways are maintained much better—35% are in good condition and 65% in fair condition—thanks to access control of overloaded trucks, and nonmotorized and slow-moving traffic. The condition of the provincial highways is worse than that of the national highway network. Many are either permanently impassable or subject to closure during bad weather.

Quality of Railway Infrastructure

To assess the hardware challenges in the implementation of CPEC projects it is important to have a quality overview of the already existing infrastructure. According to Ministry of Finance Report, Pakistan railway network spreads to 7,791 KM. Pakistan railway is falling behind in meeting international standards in terms of trade and freight services. On international level 50% of cargo is traded through railway networks whereas in Pakistan rail share is just 5%. One of the plausible causes of this poor performance can be attributed to poor infrastructure, poor maintenance, low investment, and budget share for the railway sector (Economist, 2019). World Bank has conducted several surveys on the transport sector of Pakistan and the findings are not very satisfactory. According to one of the World Bank social assessment reports on Karakoram Highway N-35, one of the planned CPEC infrastructure projects, the Construction activities, particularly excavation and movement of haul truck and machinery may disrupt the existing tracks leading from the main road to settlements which will limit the accessibility of the local population to the main road (*Highways Rehabilitation Project*, 2007).

Inadequate Cargo Facilities

The cargo facilities are also not up to the mark. According to government of Pakistan report there are a total of 46 airports out of which 10 enjoys the status of international airports. Out of 46 airports 42 are owned by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) that are used for both domestic and international operations. Whereas the remaining 22 have been closed or sealed due to several reasons. PIA is handling 87% of passenger and freight traffic along with other airlines. Due to high freight charges, inadequate Cargo Facilities at airports, are not helping to use air route for trade. Custom procedures are cumbersome. The gap is filled by international airlines (Economist, 2019).

Inadequate Port Facilities

Pakistan is blessed with the 1046-kilometer coastline along the Arabian Sea. The coastline is divided into Makran Coast spreading over 800 kilometers and Sindh Coast extending up to 246 kilometers. Pakistan, so far, has developed three big ports namely Karachi port, Gwadar port and Muhammad Bin Qasim port. Muhammad Bin Qasim port or Port Qasim is one of the oldest ports

of Pakistan whereas Karachi port is the busiest among all. "One of the main areas of concern is the constraints at the ports due to increasing traffic and the resulting congestion" but other obstacles also include limited storage facilities at ports, non-utilization of a specialized oil pier, excessive sampling and testing times, use of oil piers by non-oil tankers and low pumping rates of oil and non-oil tankers. In a broader perspective, Karachi as well as Bin Qasim ports handle the greatest piece of imports and exports (95%) and these are situated at southern parts of the country. However, in current situation where Gwadar port is not fully functional, most of the trade is conducted through Karachi port. Additionally, owing to insufficiently advanced framework of such ports, they are inadequate in ability to control the busiest port activity (Idrees, 2020).

Infrastructure and Incremental Development in Gwadar

Gwadar which is going to serve as a connectivity hub is also lagging in the development of quality and effective infrastructure and provision of basic social services. The current challenged equipped by the Gwadar port can be identified as poor connectivity, lack of infrastructure for managing water and sanitation, no health, and educational facilities. There is acute water shortage. To overcome this shortage water is brought through tankers from Turbat, the transportation costs for which are high. It is argued that other than attracting new residents and business the city should be highly capable of retaining its population by providing them state of the art infrastructure and community facilities (Naveed et al., 2019). Under the revised master plan for the port under CPEC, Gwadar was to handle about 100 million tonnes (110.2 million tons) of cargo in 2017 but it failed to achieve the desired goal. There can be multiple reasons for this. For example, there is only one major shipping company, COSCO that is carrying the construction materials for the China Pakistan Economic Corridor. Secondly, the port also lacks connectivity with Pakistan's national road network. This lack of connectivity would make business through Gwadar difficult and costly. Thirdly, the port has not a dedicated highway to cater the transporting requirements of the post. Currently, Gwadar Deep-Sea Port is connected through a narrow 16 feet wide thoroughfare of Gwadar town at the West-Bay. All the trawlers/trucks loaded with imported shipments pass through this strip causing disruption of normal traffic.

Inefficient Transport Sector

The transport and the trucking sector of Pakistan is slacking in contending with the worldwide guidelines. World Bank has conducted several reports on the transport industry of Pakistan. According to the world bank calculations the inefficiencies of the trucking sector are calculated to be 2.62 billion US \$ each year. Out of this 2.62, comprising mostly of USD 1.04 to 1.57 USD billion every year in additional fuel cost and diesel endowments, USD 0.52 to 0.61 USD billion every year in additional road user costs and a USD 0.44 billion every year on poor infrastructure (Arrfat et al., 2017). There are 500,000 enrolled trucks working in Pakistan, out of which the larger part is out of date old vintage trucks with unbending suspensions. They have restricted paces and are hefty on fuel utilization. This makes them exceptionally wasteful as far as time and cost. Most of the truck proprietors have undocumented trucks who do not follow guideline and are inclined to over-burdening. This increases the risk of road accident, spoilage, damage to roads, bridges, highway infrastructure which give 2% loss to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on average (Economist, 2019).

Software Challenges

Software challenges can be discussed in terms of tariff and non-tariff barriers, strict quality standards, sensitive lists, lengthy procedures and waiting periods at the border, strict visa policies. The amalgamation of these factors results in increasing both the absolute and relative cost of a trade.

The report compiled by World Bank Group unpacks four of the critical barriers to effective integration and to resolving the unmet potential in trade in South Asia, as follows:

1. Nontransparent and protective tariffs, especially para tariffs, are taxes levied on imports, but not on domestic output. These para tariffs, along with the widespread exclusions from tariff preferences in the form of sensitive lists have rendered the region's free trade agreement ineffective (Naveed et al., 2019).
2. Real and perceived non-tariff barriers, which exacerbate the trust deficit and affect growth of trade. These are examined through the lens of specific products and trading relationships.
3. Higher costs of connectivity, arising, for example, from restrictive bilateral air travel agreements.
4. The broader trust deficit, which has affected the overall South Asia integration effort.

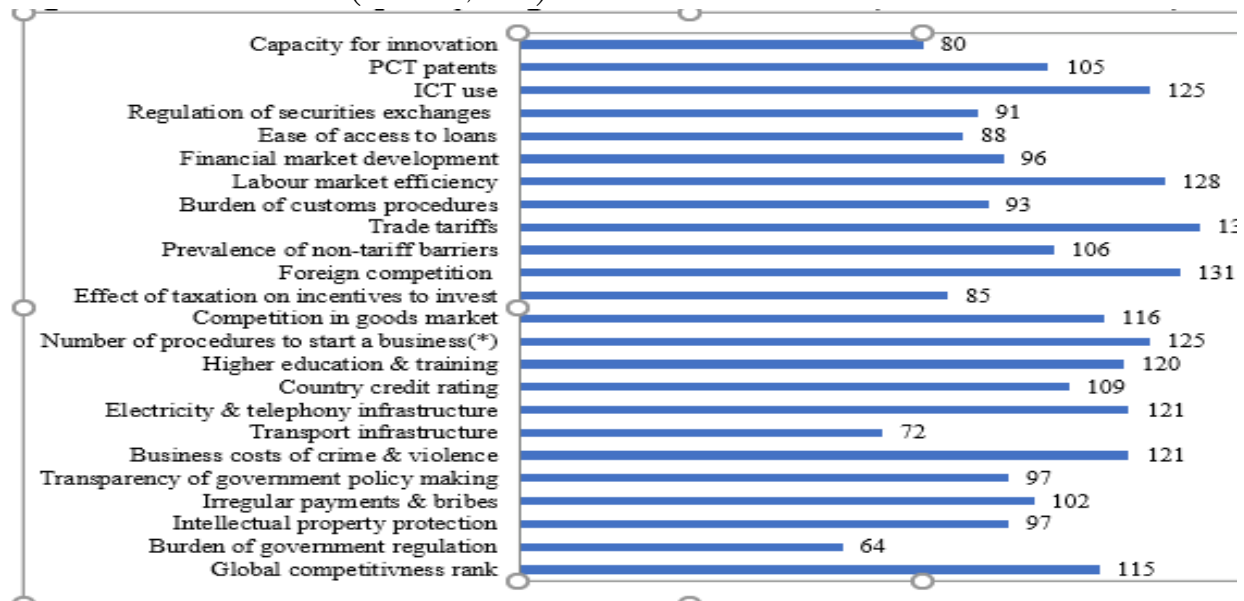
Paradox of Trade-Protectionism

One of the significant software challenges lies within Pakistan's protectionist trade policy. According to one of the World Bank report, Pakistan is the seventh most trade protectionist country in the world (Protectionism, 2019). By protectionism, it is meant that local industries are offered protection and safeguarded against foreign competition. Protectionism is listed as a challenge as it limits imports as well as participation by global value chains and thus chances of growth and specialization (The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the Growth of Trade, 2020). Adam Smith in his book *The Wealth of Nations* is also of the view that protectionism hurts the economy in the longer run. Protectionism weakens domestic industry, their innovation, and their ability to compete with international standards. As a result, domestic products decline in quality. However, in the case of trade between China and Pakistan, the phenomenon of trade protectionism is more complicated because China has been flooding Pakistan's market with its cheap products, thus, affecting the local industry of Pakistan because local manufacturers of Pakistan are unable to compete with price offered by the Chinese companies for their respective products. Consequently, local Industries of Pakistan are at high risk due to heavy dumping of Chinese cheap products into the Pakistani market. Textile products, shoes, chemicals, steel, and iron in which Pakistani local industry was giving a reasonable output but now those products are also being heavily imported from China. Resultantly, a paradoxical situation has emerged regarding trade protectionism in Pakistan and dealing with protection of domestic industries has emerged as a serious challenge in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor should be taken seriously (Mukhtar, 2016).

Difficult Administrative Procedures

The second significant software challenge to CPEC projects can be in the face of difficult administrative challenges. The administrative challenges can be identified as corruption, taxation, restrictive labor, unskilled labor, difficulties in accessing finance, inadequate infrastructure, inefficient bureaucracy, and complex foreign currency regulations regime. According to the World Competitiveness Report of 2017-2018, Pakistan is ranked 115th out of 137 countries and the

reason behind this poor ranking is difficult administrative procedures. These difficult procedures negatively affect Pakistan's economy. The global competitiveness ranking points out that major issues of weak administration are directly under the control of the government—for example, the numerous approvals required to start a business, the prevalence of corruption, and high tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade (Schwab, 2017).



Source: World Competitiveness Report 2017-18.

Lack of Good Governance, Inefficient Bureaucracy and Corruption

Pakistan has also not been very lucky in installing models of good governance at home. Indeed, Pakistan politics has been mired by corrupt clientelism and has been driven more by patron-client politics. The absence of good governance and bureaucracy serving the interest of few has added to the entrenchment of reactionary forces into the political-administrative system of the country, resulting in poor social economic development of the country. Similarly, the state institutions have failed to perform their tasks with efficiency. For example, the failure to collect taxes. Other than this economic power and market control is considered in the hands of few leaving less room for open competition and transparency. The existence of such extractive institutions will also affect the mega project of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (Wolf, 2020).

#	Parameters	China	Pakistan	Difference
1	Property rights	53	115	(62)
2	Intellectual property protection	49	96	(47)
3	Diversion of public funds	43	66	(23)
4	Public trust in politicians	27	62	(35)
5	Irregular payments and bribes	49	102	(53)
6	Judicial independence	49	80	(31)
7	Favoritism in decisions of government officials	20	62	(42)
8	Wastefulness of government spending	19	58	(39)
9	Burden of government regulation	18	64	(46)
10	Efficiency of legal framework in settling disputes	45	83	(38)
11	Efficiency of legal framework in challenging regs	30	69	(39)
12	Transparency of government policymaking	45	97	(52)
13	Business costs of terrorism	80	130	(50)
14	Business costs of crime and violence	64	121	(57)
15	Organized crime	79	127	(48)
16	Reliability of police services	60	116	(56)
17	Ethical behavior of firms	49	79	(30)
18	Strength of auditing and reporting standards	71	110	(39)
19	Efficacy of corporate boards	126	121	(5)
20	Protection of minority shareholders' interests	38	109	(71)
21	Strength of investor protection 0-10 (best)	102	26	76

China-Pakistan Free Trade Agreements

The Pakistan Business Council (2013) studied the implications of the Pak-China free trade agreement by comparing tariff reduction modality of both countries with each other and with the rest of the world. They find that ASEAN countries are enjoying equal or even higher tariff concessions as compared to Pakistan and no special concessions offered to Pakistan. China benefited more from this agreement because concessions provided to China by Pakistan under the FTA are more favorable as compared to those offered by China to Pakistan. In Pakistan's imports, China had been sharing importantly, even before the FTA was signed and after the FTA execution in 2007, it has significantly enhanced its ranking. In 2012, it was sharing 15% of Pakistan's overall imports from the world as contrast to 9.8% in 2006. Nevertheless, Pakistan's share to China's imports from world did not observe any considerable rises in this time period, it was raised from 0.06% to a simply 0.18% (Uzair & Nawaz, 2020). The trade deficit doubled from 2.4 to 4.8 billion dollars in 2011 with China. This analysis highlighted that no doubt Pakistan's exports have been expanded due to the agreement but not as much as the exports of China. Thus, strategic steps call for detailed sectoral analysis to counter the problem of the trade imbalance (Commer et al., 2017).

Civil Military Clashes

Another factor that has been playing a dominant role in Pakistan's politics since its inception is the civil military clash. The civil military conflict is the byproduct of competition for political power between the civilian government and military leadership. Both the state institutions since independence have been indulged in a tussle to be the sole governing bodies of the state. Both exploited the opportunities to weaken the control of the other over the bureaucracy. The complete of the bureaucracy either by civil government or military without cooption is not accepted by contending parties. The attempt by any side to take leverage over the other has further increased the chances of interventionism into the political realm with generally negative consequences (Uzair & Nawaz, 2020).

Dumping of Chinese Commodities in Pakistan

Other than internal challenges, CPEC is posed with regional challenges. The initiation of CPEC is considered a strategic move that gives Pakistan the status of an economic pivot. This paradigm shift is equally worrying for the regional and extra-regional stakeholders. There have been reported incidences where India is found guilty of sabotaging the CPEC projects to thwart its implementation. India has raised some serious reservations on the project of CPEC. Some have perceived CPEC as a positive tool for regional stability whereas some are skeptical keeping in view the unresolved territorial conflicts in South Asia.

Institutional-Organizational Problems

As discussed earlier, CPEC has introduced several opportunities and challenges at the same time. CPEC has been instrumental in overcoming the energy sector crisis. However, at the same time there are some internal energy sector crises and differences within institutions that CPEC is not scheduled to handle. For instance, the problem of circular debt is evidence of the fact that there are flaws and inconsistencies on part of the national stakeholders in keeping pace with the demand supply requirements of power services. There are massive payment arrears at every stage of the generation, transmission, and distribution system. Consumer tariffs are insufficient to pay for the operation and functioning of the electricity system. This in turn increases arrears and suppliers of fuels and independent power producers go unpaid. This has undermined the viability of firms at every stage and their ability to continue functioning in the market (McCartney, 2022).

Regional Challenges

Indian Illegal Annexation of Kashmir

The first and foremost regional challenge that is hindering the implementation of regional connectivity is the unsettled disputes between India and Pakistan. The political and security atmosphere in South Asia has remained extremely tense this year because of India's hegemonic moves in the disputed valley of Jammu and Kashmir. Gilgit-Baltistan stays an incomplete business of the Indo-Pak Partition, with the district being hauled into the Kashmir debate between the two states attributing it as a piece of the province of Jammu and Kashmir in 1947. India has raised a question on the route of CPEC as they claim that CPEC passes through a region New Delhi claim as its own, one which remains part of a disputed territory. Meanwhile, separatists in Indian-administered Kashmir have warned Islamabad against the constitutional mainstreaming of Gilgit-Baltistan, saying that such a move would be a "betrayal of Kashmir" (The Diplomat, 2019). The regional organizations have failed to deliver their task especially when it comes to normalizing

relations between India and Pakistan. The conflictual interest of the member states within the organization has also undermined its credibility. For example, the issue of granting China a full member status in SAARC has created a difference between the member states. The decision of giving China a full membership status is hailed by Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan whereas India has dissented it. According to India the granting of full membership status to China will increase its influence in the region which is detrimental to India's interest in the region.

Geo-Politics of Afghanistan

The second foremost threat to China Pakistan Economic Corridor is posed by the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan. The ongoing struggle for power between the Afghan government and the Taliban has further worsened the situation. In this ongoing tussle of power, the Taliban have emerged to be a more powerful and influential force in terms of control as compared to the Afghan security and allied forces (H. U. Khan, 2019). Afghanistan has remained geopolitically vital for states like Russian Federation, United States, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and India. The involvement of these stakeholders can increase the chances of conflict in the region thereby posing threat to BRI, particularly on the CPEC and the Silk Road Economic Belt (Safi & Alizada, 2018). Strategist views India's involvement in Afghanistan with a suspicious eye and reliving memories of Afghan-India cooperation against Pakistan during the Cold war (*Evolving Situation in Afghanistan: Role of Major Powers and Regional Countries*, 2016). Some of the smaller projects being undertaken by India include; funding for the Afghan Ministry of Health to build and maintain medical clinics, construction of cold storage food warehouses in Kandahar, establishing an agricultural university and a mining school, restoring the Stor palace, training the Afghan army officers and policemen, 1,300 annual college scholarships and training grants for civil servants, 20 Indian technical advisors in Afghan ministries under a trilateral agreement with the UNDP, and capacity building for Afghan ministers (House, 2013).

Rise of ISIS

Another significant challenge posed to the security of CPEC is the rise of ISIS in Afghanistan. The presence of ISIS is an equal threat for all the stakeholders involved in Afghanistan ranging from the Taliban, the allied forces, to the neighboring countries. The concept of ISIS was launched in 2015 and since then it has increased its foothold in Afghanistan. The group has been involved in several violent clashes. The objective of ISIS and the Taliban is to assume control over territory. According to the available figures ISIS has conducted 100 violent operations on the general masses and around 200 of its operations were conducted against the security forces. It is the brutal rise of ISIS that has pushed the US and Afghan Taliban to the dialogue table. It is believed that if ISIS becomes more powerful and gains more territorial control in Afghanistan then there are greater chances of instability in Central Asian Republics, Pakistan, Iran, and even Russia. For Pakistan, the implications of unrest are even greater. The timing of CPEC is a blessing for Pakistan's war-torn economy. However, it is believed the current geopolitical settings in Afghanistan would pose a serious risk to the implementation of CPEC projects. Pakistan and China recognizing the significance of Afghanistan and its location invited Afghanistan to become a potential member of CPEC. A dialogue was held between Pakistan, China, and Afghanistan in 2018 in which Afghanistan was termed as a connection among the regions of South and Central Asia. A few analysts recommend that it is the ideal chance to connect with Afghanistan in the task since the

odds of a quiet political settlement are more noteworthy than any time in recent memory. Anyway, the deteriorating security circumstance and vulnerability is a significant obstacle in way of Afghanistan's commencement into CPEC. Pakistan has grave worries about the connection between the ISKP and Pakistani Taliban. ISIS according to some reports is also involved in the kidnapping and killing of Chinese workers in Baluchistan. This means that the ISIS factor is real and cannot be ignored. The impetuses driving opposition to CPEC include the issue of maltreatment of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang. Second is simply the significance attached to CPEC, any fear-monger movement executed would assemble the greatest media inclusion which is profoundly gainful for the culprits to project its image. This alarmed the Chinese and Pakistani authorities to review CPEC from a security point of view (H. U. Khan, 2019).

Hybrid and proxy war

Pakistan's geographic and geostrategic location is an asset and as well as a liability. Since 1947, Pakistan has been facing major internal and external challenges. Though these challenges are not new, they add complexities to existing paradigms. It is no secret that India's notorious intelligence agency, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), has been carrying out covert operations inside Pakistan through proxies and terrorist networks that fall within these parameters for a very long time now. In 2013, the Indian Army chief General Vijay Kumar Singh admitted that following the 2008 Mumbai attacks, the Indian army raised a Tactical Support Division (TSD), which carried out bomb blasts in Pakistan, and doled out money to the separatist elements in Baluchistan. In March 2016, when Pakistan's intelligence and security agencies unearthed the largest clandestine RAW network to date, which had been involved in sabotage, espionage, and terrorist activities. The arrest of Kulbhushan Jadhav, an Indian Navy officer in Baluchistan vindicated Pakistan's position that it has been facing hybrid and proxy war from neighboring countries. The primary reason for the initiation of this war to disrupt the peace and stability of the country moreover to stall the progress of the multibillion CPEC project. Therefore, it is high time for the country's state institutions to formulate an overarching strategy to deny the space to the enemy who is trying to invoke ethnic, religious, political sensitivities to hinder the wellbeing of Pakistan.

Domestic Challenges

Political Instability

No country in the world can progress economically without achieving political stability. The history of Pakistan is marred with military rules and quasi-democratic setups, but for the last four decades, Pakistan has generally remained unstable, both internally and externally. After the inauguration of the CPEC projects in 2015, the national and international pundits opined that this massive investment would help Islamabad to attain a degree of political stability. But we have witnessed to the contrary (Javaid & Chawla, 2019). Since 2015, Pakistan has remained politically unstable due to several factors. Pakistan's then opposition party, Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) led a massive protest movement, and staged a 100+ day sit-in protest, against what they claimed were "rigged elections" of 2013, along with the Pakistan Awami Tehreek, and finally, the emergence of the Panama Scandal proved fatal for former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's PML-N government. Moreover, the growing discord between the civil-military relations further added fuel to the fire. The aforementioned events badly affected the implementation of the CPEC, as a consensus was

missing due to the prevailing political discord (Zahid Ullah Khan & Majeed Khan, 2019). That said, in 2018 there was distant hope that after general elections, the political situation would improve, and the country would stabilize, but that proved to be a fallacy. Imran Khan's party, PTI, emerged as the leading seat taker, but it received a thin margin, however, they managed to form coalition governments in the Center and KPK, as well as Punjab and Baluchistan. In August 2018, the PTI along with its coalition partners took up the reins of the government, and since then a sharp change has been observed where governance is concerned. The Pakistan People's Party formed its government in the Sindh province. In a nutshell, the political stability in Pakistan is a key to the success of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, It is imperative for all stakeholders to achieve a consensus on vital issues and resolve political differences amicably, and through negotiations, rather than resorting to protests and strikes.

Domestic Economy

CPEC funding is not a Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) but it is a loan that Pakistan has taken from China and that loan will recover from the proceeds of the CPEC. Money will be taken from old investors to pay off new ones; CPEC will remain a pipe dream. From a domestic point of view, the local industry and its products will suffer a setback. Under CPEC the Chinese companies would be given more access at borders and in the local market. This openness can result in Walmart-effect on the Pakistani industry, which may destroy what is left of it. To make CPEC a success and save the local market Pakistan must offer more incentives to local businesses and frame an effective strategy for the promotion of its products. For instance, India framed the slogan Made in India (LSE, 2019).

Terrorism and militancy

The presence of violent extremist organizations in the region is a direct threat to not only domestic peace and security but pose a danger to the inter-regional connectivity project. Historically, Pakistan has been plagued with political instability, turmoil, and religious violent extremism. The situation further exacerbated following the US war on terror, the country became a fertile ground for the recruitment of local and global jihadi organizations. Many terrorist organizations such as the Tehreek-e- Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, Al Qaeda (AQ), Islamic State Khorasan Chapter (IS-K), East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) are located in Afghanistan, bordering the Pakistan-Afghanistan region; and pose a vital threat, not just to the political and economic stability of the region, but for to the CPEC as well (Ahmad et al., 2020). The recent wave of terrorism and militancy has harmed the CPEC projects. Most importantly, the terrorist attack conducted by the Baluchistan Liberation Army on the Gwadar Pearl Continental hotel does not bode well for the security and stability of the CPEC. After this terrorist incident, the Director-General ISPR. Major General Asif Ghafoor said that the Pakistan military had raised a whole division-size force to protect the project and they were planning to deploy another division for this purpose (The News, 2019). Nonetheless, Pakistan's armed forces and the Special Security Division of the CPEC are making every effort to provide a safe and stable environment to Chinese workers, investors, and businessmen, but still, the threat matrix in the province remains complex. Keeping in view the scope and dimensions of the CPEC project, it will be vital for the government of Pakistan and the law enforcement agencies to deny the space to terrorists and

militant organizations to impede the economic progress of Pakistan. Peace and stability in the country is a linchpin to the steady progress and completion of CPEC projects.

Provincial discord and local community's grievances

The CPEC has been embroiled in one controversy or another, since its inception whether it was the lack of transparency, corridor routes, or allocation of the CPEC projects to provinces. However, this issue to some extent has been resolved over time, and as far as the major political parties are concerned, they are on board and fully endorse the CPEC projects. That said, the biggest challenge for the federal, and provincial governments is to address the local community's grievances, especially where jobs, education, and health issues are concerned. The unresolved grievances of the Baluchistan people and their struggle against the federation can be another significant challenge to the execution of CPEC and its related projects including the Gwadar Port. Numerous non-local people, organizations, and worldwide organizations have been attacked in Baluchistan. A discussion is now going on in the native people of Balochistan that the CPEC will profit just the Chinese interest but also change the demographics by turning Balochis into a minority (Balochistan, 2018). In the Baluchistan province, local people have genuine grievances regarding the operationalization of the CPEC projects. For this purpose, the provincial government needs to address these problems, and formulate an integrated developmental approach in which all stakeholders including government departments, politicians, civil society leaders, community elders, and local NGOs are to be brought on one page to take maximum advantage of C-PEC for community development. Generally, local communities are dependent on the local environment and natural resources, therefore the government needs to find innovative means to improve their livelihood. In this context, small-scale farming, orchards, livestock grazing, limited mining, and fishing in coastal areas may improve the community's economic conditions. Addressing the grievances of Baloch individuals is basic for the accomplishment of the CPEC and that should be possible through a rational approach of incorporating the most un-coordinated Balochistan and its kin in the political interaction of Pakistan. Political and financial hardship is one of the significant reasons for the uprising in Balochistan and meeting these hardships is relevant for the harmony in Balochistan. The CPEC will likewise go through some areas of FATA and in the future, the expansion of CPEC to Afghanistan relates to security and stability. Hence, the security of Gwadar and the entire locale is a genuine worry for China and its inclinations in Balochistan. Notwithstanding the Balochistan issue, individuals of Gilgit Baltistan are additionally requesting their part in the CPEC.

Lack of Transparency

Another significant challenge associated with the grand project of CPEC is the lack of transparency and secretiveness on behalf of the ruling government. This secretiveness has raised concerns and reservations amongst the opposition benches and other important stakeholders. Moreover, during the initial days of CPEC, it is generally believed that CPEC is directly controlled by the Prime Minister and some of his very close allies. This incongruity has led to the demand of making all CPEC related agreements open. Moreover, the provincial governments have complained that they are not taken on board on decisions regarding CPEC neither they are briefed about their share in the project. To address the issue the government instituted a Parliamentary Committee in September 2015 to oversee the project (Hussain, 2017).

Current Requirements for Peace and Stability in the Country and Region

The model of economic interdependence can be utilized as an analytical tool to address the requirements of peace and stability of Pakistan in general, and the South Asian region. The theory of economic interdependence argues that through trade the interest of conflicting parties can be merged which will ultimately give peace a chance. After the Second World War, the concept of economic interdependence gained momentum because of the belief that "Peace lies in the natural effect of trade." Pakistan, suffering from continuing energy shortfalls and narrow trade with its hawkish neighbors will be better-linked, and become energy-sufficient. A Pakistan-aligned road network will enable contacts among Pakistan's neighbors on its West and East. India and Iran look to the corridor as a tool of closer incorporation with each other's economy. Even though the CPEC simplifies the movement of goods and services in the region, China's contribution to the region's economy turns rivals into stakeholders in preserving peace and stability in the South and Central Asian regions. In many ways, CPEC is a boon for Pakistan's economy that has been suffering from a law-and-order crisis, export stagnation, under-investment, and chronic energy shortages, and failing state institutions. The CPEC seems to be the cause of prosperity, economically strengthening, communication, and trade. The statistics provided by the Pakistan Economic Survey in 2013-14, the total volume of trade increased between Pakistan and China from \$4.1Billion to \$9.2 billion in 2016-2017 which represents a 124% increased. At the same time, China exports also increased to 1% and Pakistan exports increased by 400 % from around \$600 million in 2006-7 to \$2.6 billion in 2013-14.

Recommendations

Hardware	Software
In terms of improving its infrastructure facilities, Pakistan should focus on rehauling its physical infrastructure, updating its logistics industry to meet the international standards.	To address the physical and infrastructure and transport challenges a separate ministry for the transport and logistics should be formed. A separate ministry would result in addressing the sector specific challenges.
Pakistan also needs to build the capacity of its transport sector. The capacity building can be done by improving the quality of trucks and other heavy transport. This can be done by introducing auto transmission and higher axle load with higher horsepower.	To address the registration challenges faced by the trucking industry, the registration process should be made easier and less time consuming. The creation of a database on vehicles in general and trucks would also facilitate motor vehicle examination.
Pakistan should look towards modernizing its transport system by the use of technology to ensure speedy delivery of products to the market and in time.	Yearly assessments and evaluation of the physical infrastructure and transport sector should be conducted annually or biannually, and projects should be given to the ones who has been performing at excellence.

Other than just investing in the new infrastructure, Pakistan should also pay attention to the maintenance of the already existing infrastructure.	Pakistan government should give leverage to public-private partnerships in context of infrastructure provision and its maintenance.
Pakistan to meet the infrastructure standards needs a lot of trained and skilled manpower. Pakistan, therefore, should look upon its labor as a source of revenue generation.	To have trained and efficient workforce, Pakistan should encourage setting up of vocational and training centers.
To secure its energy sector, Pakistan should make use of efficient technology and quality material to minimize line losses. Moreover, the location of grid stations also needs to be revisited.	National Electric Power regulatory authority should also take stringent measures to control the ever-increasing circular debt. Policy is already available in the form of 2013 Energy Policy. All it requires from the government is sincere efforts to implement the framework in its true spirit (Tauhidi & Chohan, 2020).
Other than building physical infrastructure like new roads and railway networks, etc. Pakistan should also install a financial infrastructure that deals with the financing of new construction projects and other activities like expansion and rehabilitation of the already existing infrastructure.	Banking sectors also need to upgrade its efficiency engagement in SWAP agreements, Moreover Banks should also provide financial support to new entrants in the market.
Pakistan should also focus on developing both road and railway linkages with immediate neighbors and key stakeholders in the CPEC. Another option to avoid delays and congestion is to build a separate freight corridor on railway tracks.	Strengthen the institutional capacity of infrastructure sector agencies. Pakistan should enhance the capacity of its freight sector to provide better access to trading partners. Pakistan in this regard should also revise its trade policies to attract more business and investors.
Pakistan should look towards integrating different modes of transportation giving preference to railway for long distances where they are more efficient and sustainable than road transport	In this regard Pakistan should authorize funding to SMEDA to create new organizational development plan in line with the stipulated goals and targets.
Pakistan to cater for the needs of CPEC should look towards securing alternate routes and alternate energy resources. This will help in attracting more business activities.	Pakistan should maintain a liberalized trade regime that is not injurious to local industry (appropriate antidumping stance) and capacity to promote modern custom procedures that strengthen internationally competitive supply chains (Sánchez-Triana et al., 2014).
Upgrading and rehabilitating the national road network and railway links that connects	From a software perspective all the key stakeholders who are involved directly or indirectly in the CPEC projects should be

cities particularly industrial clusters to each other must be a priority.	taken into confidence by promising them a win-win situation.
	Setting co-ordination incentives with the provincial governments, establish strong accountability mechanism and encourage public discourse
	Pakistan requires a competent, honest, and efficient bureaucracy to administer the interventions and a clear-sighted political leadership that consistently place high priority on national interest and economic performance.

Conclusion

The China Pakistan Economic Corridor is a timely opportunity for Pakistan. To turn it into a complete success is the ultimate responsibility of Pakistan. Pakistan must take concrete measures to safeguard the CPEC projects by addressing the hardware and software challenges in the most efficient manner. For instance, to address the hardware challenges Pakistan can look towards partnering with countries that have developed infrastructure and can help Pakistan in improving its infrastructure facilities. Models like Public-Private partnerships can be handy to build communication and transport routes. To address the challenges of political instability, provincial discord, and local grievances, Pakistan’s political leadership must take the lead, and resolve these issues through negotiation, and an incentive-based approach. On the security front, extremists, militant, and terrorist organizations who pose a serious threat to the CPEC projects must be dealt with an iron hand. To progress and move forward, the country must take decisive steps to eradicate the nefarious ideologies from its soil. Therefore, it is vital for the state and people of Pakistan to stand united in the face of these challenges and controversies which pose a threat to the CPEC and Pakistan-China strategic cooperation. In conclusion, we present here but an overview of possible trajectories which might come into existence if no comprehensive EC concept is applied. By suggesting a broad range of indicators and characteristics, this paper should not only be understood as a suggestion for a comprehensive analysis of the CPEC but also as a contribution to a wider conceptual framework regarding sustainable development of EC.

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