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# China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: A New Great Game in South Asia

*Abdul Hamid Sheikh*

## **Abstract**

*The paper deliberates on the most controversial projects like the 'New Silk Road Initiative' (NSRI) and the 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI), which have brought South and Central Asia into the limelight, and the stage has been set for the New Great Game. The NSRI is intended to integrate South and Central Asia with conflict-ridden Afghanistan so that the country can achieve economic sustainability and lasting peace. It seeks to renew the Ancient Silk Route to open up new markets and economic opportunities for boosting economic growth, creating new jobs, attracting foreign investment, and ensuring regional stability in Afghanistan and Central Asia. However, the BRI is intended to ensure a strong economic and political position for China in South and Central Asia. China's BRI became a big challenge to the United States NSRI and is emerging as more productive, beneficial, and successful. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a 'flagship project' of the BRI, which can promote economic integration between South, Central, East, and West Asia. This bilateral agreement has the potential to become a multilateral project as the corridor has the prospective road extensions to link Afghanistan, Iran, and India for regional integration.*

**Key Words:** *Economic Cooperation, New Silk Road Initiative, Afghanistan, Stability, Central Asia, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, Belt and Road Initiative.*

## **Introduction**

The geopolitical realignments in the South Asian region have altered the security paradigms for China and Pakistan. India and the US have developed a robust strategic partnership based on common interests of the 21st century, and there is a broad consensus in India that Washington and New Delhi are 'natural allies' or 'indispensable partners' (Teja, 2014). India is determined to achieve high economic growth and become a regional hegemon, whereas Washington's strategic interests in the region are bound to include maintaining de-facto hegemony, eradicating extremism from Afghanistan, and containment of rising China through shaping alliances with the regional powers.

President Bush called Beijing a 'strategic competitor' rather than a 'strategic partner'. Thus, the China factor has been playing a fundamental role in strengthening the Indo-US strategic partnership (Fani, 2009). China possesses a growing leverage in the emerging geo-political and geo-economic spheres of Central and South Asia. Beijing has placed huge investments in mining and construction in Central Asia and Afghanistan. China's role is crucial and linked to its internal energy deficiency. The 'Silk Road Economic Belt' and the 'Maritime Silk Road,' collectively known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also referred to as the 'One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative,' is the main expression of China's 'New Silk Road' strategy. Central Asia, which is in the heart of the Silk Road, is experiencing diverse economic, political, and ideological revivals in the transitional development context. At the geopolitical level, Central Asia once again has become the center of the global powers' attention. Redistribution and control of the world resources are the top priorities as in earlier times with the consequence that the 'Great Game' has transformed into the 'New Great Game'. The Chinese believe that Central Asia was not only a part of the post-Soviet system but also of the Muslim world. Beijing increasingly cherishes building a privileged partnership with Central Asia (Peyrouse et al., 2012) as well as with Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan (Kemp, 2010) to diversify its role in the newly growing regional competition and cooperation setups. The BRI aims to increase connectivity so as to enhance trade flows and spur long-term regional economic growth and development, benefiting all those involved (Bandey, 2011). Although China rejected the geopolitical connotations of the project by illuminating geo-economic aspects, the skeptics contend that it would trigger geopolitical conflict. So, the US and Japan are reluctant to join BRI, and simultaneously, India raised its apprehensions over the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Hussain, 2017)

### **The New Silk Route**

Silk Route is a network of interlinked trade routes across the Afro-Eurasian landmass connecting East, South, and West Asia with the Mediterranean and European world, as well as parts of North and East Africa. Besides commodity exchange, the Silk Route was instrumental in linking peoples, communities, and nations with one another for artistic, scholarly, cultural, religious, and spiritual pursuits. The New Silk Road as an idea of integration and cooperation, peace and mutual understanding, has been well received by various international conferences and seminars at scientific institutions. As a result, the theme of the revival of the Silk Road corresponding to contemporary needs is gaining popularity in the international arena. Moreover, the Silk Road represents a symbol of a unique way to build dialogue and communication systems in sociocultural, economic, and political spheres. There is a strong momentum for the re-opening of the Silk Route. One of the responses to the new century's challenges is to create networks of new

infrastructural and trade linkages on both regional and macro-regional levels and conceptualize them in new geo-political and geo-economic settings. Expanding markets and input sources beyond national boundaries is one of the key characteristics of regional integration. One can expect higher economic growth and improved human welfare through expanded and shared markets for goods and services. The objective of inter-state integration is to establish a framework for coordination and greater integration for mutual benefits, including security (Mill, 1948). Multi-dimensional cooperation, both at the state and non-state levels, is essential for jointly addressing economic, political, social, cultural, environmental, security, and other issues. Regional integration initiatives, according to Luk Van Langenhove and Philippe De Lombaerde (2007), should fulfill the following few important conditions: strengthen trade integration at the regional level; create an appropriate environment for private sector development; develop infrastructure for economic growth; develop strong public sector institutions and good governance; reduce social exclusion and promote an inclusive civil society; contribute to peace and security in the region; create awareness about clean environment; and strengthen intra-regional interaction within the global orbit. The revival has become most important for physically reconnecting Central and South Asia over Afghanistan to boost regional and global peace and development. The geo-strategic importance of Central Asia, the heart of the Ancient Silk Route, has enormously increased over the past few decades. The revival of the Silk Route has gained importance because of economic, political, and security-related reasons.

The US aimed to end the Afghan conflict through the country's economic empowerment. This is why Washington managed, amid conflict, to provide billions and billions of \$USD for the country's economic reconstruction. The US also encouraged international tendering for the exploration of Afghanistan's mineral wealth worth trillions of \$USD. The New Silk Road Initiative (NSRI) is a part of the US scheme to integrate energy-rich Central Asia and energy-deficient South Asia through and over Afghanistan and to reconstruct significant infrastructure links broken by decades of conflict. The US has funded university studies for hundreds of Afghan students across Central Asia, sponsored the Central Asia-Afghanistan Women's Economic Symposium and the South Asia Women's Entrepreneurship Symposium in support of thousands of women entrepreneurs and business owners, and organized trade delegations, meetings, and conferences in Almaty, Islamabad, Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif, and Termez - resulting in over \$15 million in trade deals ("US Department of State"). However, China came forward with Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to enhance connectivity with neighboring countries. Beijing has been trying to reduce its exposure to security risks and possible disruptions to its oil and resources supplies from its eastern coastal regions and beyond by building east-west pipelines such as the Kazakhstan-China and Central Asia-China pipelines (Rana &



Chia, 2014).

### **The Belt and Road Initiative**

The Chinese New Silk Road policies aim to enhance connectivity with neighboring countries. In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed to build the strategic idea of the ‘Silk Road Economic Zone’ and ‘Maritime Silk Road’ in the twenty-first Century with Central Asia, collectively referred to as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Under this strategy, energy and transport infrastructure projects are to be developed in cooperation with neighboring countries. A Maritime Silk Road is also to be developed, focusing on the littorals of Southeast Asia (Rana & Chia, 2014). There are important differences between the Belt and the Road with implications for both Chinese and foreign firms. The Belt is a land corridor that crosses Central Asia, reaching Europe and connecting two of the world’s largest economies, China and Europe. The route will emerge as a major logistics corridor and create new opportunities for both Central Asia and Eastern Europe. The Maritime Road is a densely populated consumer and industrial opportunity. Like the landlocked Belt, it also connects China and Europe, yet it crosses Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and East Africa. Multinationals from all countries will find significant opportunities over the coming decades (Mckenzie, 2017). The rationale for ‘Go West’ and the New Silk Roads policies is not solely economic. China has also been trying to reduce its exposure to security risks and possible disruptions to its oil and resources supply from off its eastern coastal regions and beyond by building east-west pipelines such as the Kazakhstan-China and Central Asia-China pipelines. The Sino-Burma gas pipeline has been inaugurated. In both goods and energy trade, the overland transport corridor is unlikely to account for more than 5-7 percent of China’s total trade with Europe for a long time in the future. It will, however, certainly curtail China’s over-reliance on China’s dependence on sea lanes in the South and East China Seas.

The idea of the BRI was to forge closer economic ties, deepen cooperation, and expand development in Eurasia. In early 2015, the contours of Beijing’s strategy began to emerge as China’s leadership laid out plans for this ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’ crossing through Central Asia, and a ‘Maritime Silk Road’ crossing through Southeast and South Asia. Both have been portrayed as an opportunity to reshape the economic and political order in Central Asia and the Asian Pacific by promoting a network of trade routes, political cooperation, and cultural exchanges. The BRI constitutes an effort to counterbalance the US ‘pivot to Asia’ and American attempts to ‘dominate’ the region. Chinese policymakers consider the BRI as a mechanism to promote peace and stability in the region by strengthening China’s bilateral relations with its neighbors and developing international organizations not dominated by Western powers (Zimmerman, 2015). The Chinese vision of the BRI has been depicted by regional economic integration theorists.

Charles Pentland (1968, p. 10) states that integration is ‘the process whereby two or more actors form a new actor... Original actors were taken to be nation-states, but the ‘new actor’ needed not to be a state in the same sense.’ Nevertheless, the most important objective of political integration was to establish flexible, task-oriented international organizations, which could better fulfill human needs than the direct needs of the nation-states and, thereby, scale down the scope of international conflicts (Heinonen, 2006). According to the Chinese President Xi Jinping as of January 2017 over 100 countries and international organizations have responded well to the initiative and over 40 have signed cooperation agreements. Already, BRI-related projects involving over \$900 billion are underway. However, it is worth noting that the Asian Development Bank estimates that by 2030, the initiative will cost over \$22.6 trillion. In any case, the Initiative has received an immense amount of positive reactions (“The Belt and Road Initiative”, 2017).

China uses the BRI to increase its regional influence and play a larger leadership role. It was around mid-2014 that President Xi Jinping began pushing the mantra of ‘Asia for Asians.’ China began invoking a sense of regionalism and creating a space for itself to lead by presenting new solutions to regional issues. China stressed on the people of Asia to run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia and uphold the security of Asia (Baruah, 2018). The objective of inter-state integration is to establish a framework for coordination and greater integration for mutual benefits including security (Mill, 1948). Karl Deutsch (1968) defined this regional integration as a relationship among units in which these are mutually interdependent and jointly produce system properties that they would separately lack. Luk Van Langenhove and Philippe De Lombaerde (2007) describe it as a worldwide phenomenon of territorial systems that increases interactions and creates new forms of organization that co-exist with traditional forms of state-led organization at the national level.

The regional development aspect of the BRI is one of China’s most important economic policy objectives. In 2014, the BRI was officially incorporated into China’s national economic development strategy at the Central Economic Work Conference, the annual agenda-setting economic summit for policymakers (Cai, 2017). One can expect higher economic growth and improved human welfare through an expanded and shared market for goods and services. Economic integration encompasses measures designed to abolish economic discrimination between partner national states. It can also be represented by the absence of various forms of discrimination between national economies (Balassa, 1961). According to Allen (1963), the basic ingredient of any integration is the elimination of barriers to trade among two or more countries. There is a demand in both China and South Asia for gas and electricity, which is abundant in Central Asia. Therefore, energy cooperation and energy infrastructure connectivity have been important topics under the BRI, which already provides other infrastructure (both hard

and soft) for regional and extra-regional connectivity. Afghanistan will certainly have a significant role in energy cooperation between Central Asia and South Asia - a role that has been recognized, with several energy transmission projects underway. China's trade with the Central Asian region has grown dramatically in recent years, from roughly \$1 billion in 2000 to over \$50 billion in 2013. China identifies transportation bottlenecks as a primary barrier to regional economic integration. In its initial stages, the Silk Road Economic Belt is being framed as a series of transportation, energy, and telecommunication infrastructure projects. According to Wang, the BRI is both 'much older and much younger' than the Marshall Plan, older in that it embodies the 'friendly exchange' of the ancient Silk Road and younger because it is 'born in the era of globalization,' and is thus 'not a tool of geopolitics' (Wuthnow, 2012: 7).

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

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which links Kashgar in Xinjiang with the Port of Gwadar, has been called a 'flagship project' of the BRI. This project is also the clearest example of how the BRI's geo-strategic rationale intersects with its economic drivers (Cai, 2017). A strong realist, Grieco, holds that states share common interests and undertake negotiations on rules constituting a collaborative arrangement. The weaker partners look to it for the expression of their voice and invocation of protection from their strong partners (Grieco, 1995). Chinese experts characterize the CPEC as an effort to increase Pakistan's economic resilience and encourage stability, as well as a way to reduce China's dependence on petroleum passing through the Malacca Straits from the Middle East to China. China has also long worked with Pakistan to isolate Uighur militant groups in the region and dissuade other extremist groups from supporting them. As China has increasingly developed an Afghanistan policy outside its relationship with Pakistan, it has also started to pursue more direct methods for applying pressure to Uighur militants in the region, including direct engagement with Afghanistan (Zimmerman, 2015). China can address the internal security problems in Xinjiang through economic development - as Gwadar is the closest seaport to the landlocked western region. Beijing realizes that substantial investment and trade will promote economic growth and stability, thus alleviating socio-economic disparity in the region (Bhattacharjee, 2015).

Besides peace and economic stability in Xinjiang, the Gwadar port offers Beijing an advantageous position in the energy-rich Caspian Region. The corridor provides an important trade route linking Xinjiang to the energy-rich Central Asian states through the Gwadar port for energy and trade exchange (Cai, 2017). Professor An Ran, Director of the India-Pakistan Research Centre, made the following statement:

CPEC determine to minimize security threats, especially stemming from the western

region of Xinjiang. China hopes that economic and infrastructure development can achieve security in the vulnerable region. Investment in infrastructure intends to create jobs, reduce anti-state sentiments and generate public resources for additional improvements in law and order. By tackling the threat of terrorism in Pakistan, Beijing hopes to bolster security on its territory (as cited in Hussain & Jamali, 2019: 306).

The success of China's regional economic ambitions depends on stability within Afghanistan. There is a general agreement over the importance of stability in Afghanistan to the success of Beijing's regional economic ambitions. China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi articulated during his visit to Kabul in 2014 that China believes peace and stability in Afghanistan to have an impact on the security of Western China and the tranquility and development of the entire region (Zimmerman, 2015).

The corridor has various projects, including electricity generation, development and rehabilitation of road and rail infrastructure, the establishment of special economic zones, educational and health institutions, and port development. The investment in CPEC-related projects is equivalent to Pakistan's total inward investment since 1970 and is nearly six times the \$7.5 billion US aid package. A 5-year plan of CPEC revealed that it would value 17% of Pakistan's GDP and would enhance the existing strategic cooperation between China and Pakistan (Hussain & Jamali, 2019). The proposed corridor enhances the connectivity options of China and Pakistan with the Middle East, West Asia, Central Asia, and ultimately Europe (Rizvi, 2015). The major routes in this project include the western route, which runs through Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces via Turbat, Panjgur, Qalat, Quetta, Zhob, Dera Ismail Khan, and then to Havelian. This route can be linked to Afghanistan and Iran through Chaman and Taftan, respectively (Abid & Ashfaq, 2015). The eastern route originates from Gwadar and runs through mainly Sindh and Punjab via Karachi, Hyderabad, Sukkhar, Rahimyar Khan, Multan, and then Havelian. The central route crisscrosses the country from Gwadar until Havelian via different cities of Baluchistan, Sindh, and Punjab provinces, including Khuzdar, Sukkhar, D.G. Khan, Mianwali, and Taxila. An extension from Taxila via Peshawar and Torkham will eventually connect Jalalabad in Afghanistan. From Havelian, a northern route that is common to all connects Kashgar via the Karakorum Highway (Hussain, 2016). Besides these physical links, the officials and stakeholders have identified over 40 sites from Khunjarab to Gwadar for establishing Special Economic Zones and industrial parks along the CPEC routes. These zones are expected to encourage foreign investment and boost the industrialization process by helping to generate local employment (Hussain, 2017). Gwadar Port holds the central place of this project as the port would only enable the project to become an energy corridor (Hussain, 2016). The CPEC connects China directly to the Indian Ocean and the region of the Middle East from the deep Gwadar Port, reducing its dependence on the South China Sea as it is becoming a contested territory

between various regional and global actors and can be choked any time by the competing powers in the Asia-Pacific region. The CPEC trade route will reduce the existing maritime distance of 12,000 kilometers between Beijing and the Persian Gulf by shrinking it to a 3000-kilometer land route from Kashgar to Gwadar (Ali, 2016). The new routes will enable China to import oil from the Middle East and Africa in 10 days as opposed to 45 days shipping time (Hussain, 2016). The project is expected to reduce transportation costs to 1/3rd, and China can save about US\$6 million every day, amounting to \$2 billion for one year, even if it uses the CPEC route for only 50% of its oil imports (Hussain, 2017). Gwadar port offers Beijing an advantageous position in the energy-rich Caspian Region. The corridor provides an important trade route for linking Xinjiang to the energy-rich Central Asian states through Gwadar port for energy and trade exchange (Perveen & Khalil, 2015).

CPEC is also very important to Pakistan for moving out of economic stagnation as this project (US\$46 billion) offers a special opportunity for Pakistan to address some of the main roadblocks to its economic growth like the energy crisis, poor communication and infrastructure, and less foreign investment. There is a broad consensus across the society in Pakistan on the enormous potential of CPEC for promoting economic growth in the country (Hussain, 2017). The persistent energy crisis in Pakistan affects the overall economic growth of the nation. The energy shortage causes a loss of about 2% of GDP annually (Aziz & Baseer, 2015). The establishment of new power plants with US\$34 billion will also revive existing industries such as textile and agricultural activity and thus can contribute to alleviating the strained socio-economic conditions of the people (Hussain, 2017). The project will prove a game changer and will make China a real stakeholder in Pakistan's stability and security. It is a win-win situation for both China and Pakistan. Pakistan would also benefit from the Special Economic Zones being established along the planned routes. The infrastructure and social development Projects under the CPEC will start a new chapter of economic development in Baluchistan, which is ranked second with an estimated \$7.1 billion under the initial CPEC investments in transportation, energy, and development of Gwadar city and port. CPEC will thus transform Pakistan into a gateway of trade and energy supplies to and from Central Asia, West Asia, and Europe via overland routes (Khetran, 2017). These

Special Economic Zones could become competing places for manufactured goods, agriculture, and the services sector. Likewise, by drawing investments into more export-oriented industries and internationally competitive manufactured goods, Pakistan will be able to turn the existing trade deficit in its favor. As CPEC routes pass through the backward and remote areas, especially Baluchistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Gilgit-Baltistan, they will receive progressive development. The mining industry of Baluchistan can grow as Baluchistan is rich in mineral resources. Likewise, the region of Gilgit-

Baluchistan, known for its fresh fruits, such as cherries, apples, and apricots, would be able to export the perishable items by making use of the upgraded transport infrastructure. Similarly, the development of the infrastructure will help to boost the tourism sector (Hussain, 2017). The promotion of socio-economic development through this project could bring peace and stability to Pakistan in general and specifically to the backward province of Baluchistan, making it economically viable and sustainable. The separatists of Baluchistan have been using resource exploitation and deprivation slogans as a major tool for mobilizing public support for sub-nationalism. The development of communication infrastructure will facilitate the socio-economic development of the local people by supporting medium and small-sized industries. This boost promises to reduce unemployment and improve the literacy rate and living conditions of the local populace (Perveen & Khalil, 2015).

The CPEC offers the best opportunity for Pakistan to grow its trade with Central and South Asia, including India. Besides serving as a gateway and thus realizing huge transit revenues, Pakistan can fulfill its energy needs from resource-rich Central Asia via Afghanistan. Similarly, through improved infrastructure, this project can provide landlocked countries the shortest access in comparison to Iran and Turkey, for transporting their goods and power resources to the regional and world markets. (Ali, 2016). Hasan Daud, Director of CPEC, says:

The corridor is beneficial for regional countries including India and Central Asia. CPEC is highly beneficial for its trade expansion to access the markets of Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics. For the transportation of their natural energy resources, CARs can be facilitated with transit trade and pipeline routes by Pakistan; and their goods can be smoothly exported to the Middle East and European states via Gwadar Port (as cited in Hussain, 2019, p. 321).

Thus, CPEC, which is a bilateral agreement at the moment, has the potential to become a multilateral project as the corridor has the prospective road extensions to link Afghanistan, Iran, and India for regional integration. The Chinese Ambassador is very optimistic about CPEC's potential for socioeconomic development. He stated that CPEC projects-related jobs will transform the living standards of local inhabitants and will empower them to stand against terrorism. He advised that officials in the Pakistan government take a holistic approach to the distribution of projects among provinces. The constructive and positive approach will mature the unity and cohesiveness among federation units, and prove to eliminate the misperception that CPEC is a China-Punjab project (Jing, 2019). Ahmar (2015) has evaluated the strategic meaning of CPEC in three aspects. In his opinion, the corridor is the brightest example of the long-lasting friendship between the two countries to help bond and strengthen the China-Pakistan time-tested relationship. The strategic location of the economic corridor will be an efficient and

capable source in the shipping of millions of tons of goods from China to Africa, the Middle East, and Europe via the Gwadar Port. Similarly, the economic corridor will pave the way for billions of dollars in investments in the country, including the most deprived areas of Pakistan (Ahmar, 2015).

### **Implications of Regional Integration**

South Asia is considered to be the least developed region based on socioeconomic and infrastructure development indicators, this region somehow has not witnessed the potential foundation to enhance regional stability and integration for boosting its economic cooperation and infrastructure development. The geo-strategic position of the region makes it vibrant for regional and global powers. Since the commencement of CPEC in April 2015, geopolitics has taken new directions in South Asia. The former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif, termed it a ‘Game Changer’ for Pakistan and the entire region. Similarly, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi described it as a ‘flagship project’ of BRI (Hussain & Jamal, 2019, pp. 311-12). The nascent BRI illustrates the transformative geopolitical implications of China’s rise. Beijing has played an active role in the run-up to the Afghan endgame, as it has aspired to assume a greater role in Afghanistan after the U.S. military withdrawal. China is likely to deepen its strategic partnership with both Pakistan and Afghanistan to form a ‘Pamir Group’ and establish a new Silk Road linking the Caucasus to western China (Haider, 2020). China has emerged as a dominant stakeholder in regional politics and Security. Beijing initiated and hosted the foreign minister-level trilateral dialogue among China, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The meeting was held in Beijing to discuss counter-terrorism efforts, peace, and regional connectivity. In the end, the Chinese foreign minister stated that Pakistan and Afghanistan had agreed to increase cooperation and address their differences appropriately. The trilateral dialogue reflects that being a responsible regional player, China wants to restore peace and stability in the region through holding peace conferences and economic development (Hussain & Jamal, 2019).

The Indian observers believe that CPEC is a Chinese move to expand its influence in the wider Indo-Pacific region to achieve a strategic hold of India in South Asia (Ranjan, 2015). India, as a regional power, has raised concerns over Chinese involvement in Pakistan. New Delhi argues that China is violating its sovereignty and territorial integrity by investing money in projects running through the disputed territory, ‘Pakistan Occupied Kashmir’ and Gilgit Baltistan (Ishaq & Ping, 2017). To reverse Beijing’s decision, Indian leadership has strongly objected to the project, which is rejected by China through highlighting the economic aspects of CPEC (Hussain & Jamal, 2019). India fears that to provide the CPEC project with legal cover, Pakistan is looking to upgrade the constitutional status of Gilgit-Baltistan and legally admit the region as the fifth province

of Pakistan. Although Pakistan has not yet affirmed the legal integration of Gilgit-Baltistan into Pakistan, such statements have been jotted by Pakistan. Moreover, India views Chinese firms' involvement in development projects in Pakistan-administered Kashmir as Chinese support of Pakistan's claim on the territory. Thus, India is worried that this project in Gilgit-Baltistan will give legitimacy to Pakistan's control over this area. Indian analysts also claim that several thousand Chinese personnel working on these projects belong to the engineering corps of the People's Liberation Army. India views the presence of these personnel as another potential military threat to India's security interests and considers it as a Chinese expansionist agenda in the region (Hussain, 2017). It is (Gwadar Port) viewed with suspicion regarding its effect on the maritime balance of power in the Indian Ocean. India also fears that China wants access to the hot water of the Indian Ocean to take control of the trade routes and South and Central Asia energy resources. China can also use the Gwadar Port as a naval base to contain Indian influence in this region. Chinese investment in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Nepal increases Indian concerns (Ishaq & Ping, 2017). Moreover, India fears the encirclement of India by the so-called 'string of pearls strategy' through China's involvement in the development of a series of strategic naval ports in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Bangladesh (Hussain, 2017). China's proceedings and objectives in this direction are seen as a deliberate attempt to encircle India (Ishaq & Ping, 2017). Parallel to the CPEC project, China has assured Pakistan of a supply of eight submarines around US\$4 billion to \$5 billion in military hardware.

However, this project became the cause of the dissociation between the US and Pakistan. However, President Trump took the most stringent approach to deal with Pakistan. He claimed, 'we have been paying Pakistan billions and billions of dollars. At the same time, they are housing the very terrorists that we are fighting. But that will have to change. And that will change immediately' ("The Atlantic", 2017). He categorically stated that the US administration would not 'be silent about Pakistan's safe havens for terrorist organizations, the Taliban, and other groups that pose a threat to the region and beyond' (Bhattacharjee, 2017). On the other hand, Trump announced to further strengthen the American strategic partnership with India and requested New Delhi to play a greater role in restoring peace and stability in Afghanistan. India and the US have common interests to constrain the rising Chinese threat, and Trump has amplified the Indo-US strategic partnership. His speech to American soldiers deployed in Japan recognized the Indian greater role in the region. He implanted the idea of the Indo-Pacific by accepting the Indian influence far beyond the Chinese backyard and the tiger economies of East Asia. The new rhetoric of American foreign policy can be seen as the Trump administration's interest in engaging New Delhi for its ambitions to encircle Beijing (Khan, 2017). Before the visit of President Trump to New Delhi, the U.S. Secretary of



State Rex Tillerson presented the idea of 'Road and Port Connectivity' to his Indian counterpart. The fundamental motive behind the 'Road Connectivity' is to connect India with Central Asia and the rest of South Asia, while the port connectivity is planned to be implemented through the Indo-Pacific strategy under the strategic partnership of Washington and New Delhi. The reason for the D'état of Indo-Pacific strategy is to gear up the role of India in the regional political and security affairs of the Asia-Pacific. The conceptualization of the Indo-Pacific would mean the beginning of a new wave of conflicts in the Asian region where India would act as the major US ally (Khan, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

The Silk Road is an idea of integration and cooperation, peace, and mutual understanding. Moreover, the Silk Road represents a symbol of a unique way to build dialogue and communication systems in sociocultural, economic, and political spheres. The revival of the Silk Road depends on cultural and economic integration as well as globalization. Central Asia is experiencing diverse economic, political, and ideological revivals. At the geo-political level, Central Asia has once more become the center of the world powers attention as redistribution and control of the world resources are the top priorities. Central Asia and its counterparts are primarily concerned about stability and peace in this geo-political space. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor carries greater geo-political and geo-strategic implications for regional and global actors. It has altered the geo-political dynamics of South Asia, where new alliances are in the making. India and the US have devised strategies to contain expanding Chinese influence and compete with the CPEC.

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