

Article: Indian response towards China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: An open challenge to bright future of region

July 27, 2023



Afshana Naeem

The growing influence of South Asia in world affairs due to its geo-political and geo-strategic importance has embroiled the regional and international actors in a competition. The major concern of the US and its allies in South Asia is to counter the Chinese influence, particularly the mega development projects, BRI and CPEC. Along with BRI and CPEC the rivalry between the two major powers of the region – Pakistan and India has also gained more momentum. A myriad of factors are responsible for the rivalry between the two contiguous states but the main factor is Kashmir dispute. India wants to maintain its de facto control in Kashmir only through the hard power tactics. This issue is a major contention for the perilous nuclear arms race between the two adversaries.

Beijing claims CPEC as the mega project of the 21st century aiming to bring peace and stability in the region and to boost trade by enhancing the maritime connectivity through Pakistan and thereby strengthening its economy. However there are multiple challenges for this mega development project. India views Pakistan as its adversary and hence aids and abets the actors intending to create unrest and instability to continuously counter the CPEC in multiple ways. They are using non-state actors to sabotage the projects and are directly engaged in subversive activities

in Balochistan, Sind and ex FATA to destabilize Pakistan, as is evident from the arrest of Kulbhushan Jadhav.

India considered herself as a hegemon in the region and they don't want CPEC and BRI to succeed peacefully. They perceive the Chinese presence and its growing influence in the region a threat to them. India considers that the Indian Ocean belongs to them and they want to maintain dominance and they don't want to accept any other state's influence in the maritime territory. They assume that the CPEC connects China with the Gwadar Port and through which China will get direct access to the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. India wants to control the Arabian Sea and they don't want to accept Chinese involvement in the waters. Moreover, India is upset with the CPEC as the Gwadar Port is very near to Strait of Hormuz through which India exports its oil. They think the presence of China in the Port can contribute to serious problems for their economic and energy Security.

The main reason why India stayed away from CPEC since its very inception is the Kashmir dispute, where merging of Pakistani and Chinese territorial frontiers will internationalize the Issue, which India certainly doesn't want. Furthermore, India anticipated that after completion of CPEC the naval cooperation and interoperability between CPEC countries will become closer and they consider it as a threat. So India earlier did not pay any attention to maritime policy with regards to China but after the initiation of CPEC they are paying more attention and have upped the ante and are unremittingly working to improve it.

China is actively working with all Asia-Pacific countries to enhance the economic and trade connectivity of the region through the Belt and Road Initiative. Multiple regional and extra-regional countries are cooperating with China through BRI. The rise of the Chinese economy and its focus towards the South China Sea and Indian Ocean has created debates between India, USA and its allies. After the starting of BRI and CPEC they have been paying more attention in the Indian and Pacific Ocean.

The US wants to maintain its economic and military supremacy in South Asia so the US and India have signed multiple agreements including the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) and military alliances to counter Chinese Interests. India is the central pillar of the US vision for the Indo-Pacific. One of the main objectives of the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor (IPEC) is to stop China in the region through BRI, with the help of India and other allies.

The QUAD was initiated before the initiation of BRI and CPEC and they don't have officially declared it as an alternative or rival of BRI but without clarifying its objectives both the states India and US along with its QUAD members work jointly and are creating hurdles to the BRI and CPEC.

Furthermore, India is also trying to counter Chinese influence beyond the region through soft-power tactics with the help of its alliances. They are trying hard to increase the members of Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) and have started propagating that China is communist country and India is a democratic country, so they have to join the AAGC. Moreover, India is of the view that AAGC funds are more transparent as compared to BRI. However India failed in using such

tactics against CPEC because CPEC got much attention from the world and many countries wished to join the project.

India has spent billions of dollars in Afghanistan and Iran to counter the Chinese influence in the region. The Political instability and insecurity of Afghanistan is also a major threat to CPEC. The Indian tactics to counter CPEC also included the former pro Indian government in Afghanistan. They had a lot of support from previous Afghan governments and now they have been working very hard to gain their trust and the same support from the Taliban government. It's pertinent to note that CPEC is intended to work together for the peace, prosperity and socioeconomic advancement of the region. The Indian opposition of the project is in fact the opposition to the bright future of the region. Hence, both the states China and Pakistan need to play an important role in restoring peace and stability in Afghanistan as well. The political stability of Afghanistan is in favor of the region and can play a vital role in completion of the CPEC project.

The writer is an LLB student at International Islamic university, Islamabad.

<https://www.kmsnews.org/kms/2023/07/27/article-indian-response-towards-china-pakistan-economic-corridor-an-open-challenge-to-bright-future-of-region.html>