The Geopolitics of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor(CPEC) and its Security Implications for India

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The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a multi-billion dollar mega project in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) that would connect the city of Kashgar in China's northwestern region of Xinjiang to the port city of Gwadar in Pakistan's province in Balochistan. A significant milestone for the project was reached when the management of the Gwadar Port was given to Chinese Overseas Port Holdings in 2013. In 2015, President Xi Jinping arrived in Pakistan to cement the development of the CPEC by signing agreements that amounted to USD 46 billion of investments. The CPEC is seen to be of high economic relevance to Pakistan as the investments would be a crucial foundation to its national development. However, this paper intends to go beyond economics and look at CPEC through the lens of geopolitics. When completed, the CPEC would outline China's long term geopolitical plans in the Indian Ocean which could alter the region's security environment. However, both China and Pakistan are faced with a series of challenges that hinder the maximization of the project; nevertheless, the CPEC still has serious security implications for India that it must address. Issues that encompass India's territorial integrity and the naval build-up of China and Pakistan in the Indian Ocean significantly challenge its strategic and geopolitical interests in the region. India is thus opposed to the development of the CPEC in its backyard and must craft a strategy that would serve as a counter-weight in the region.

Key Words: CPEC, India, China, Pakistan, Geopolitics

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BACKGROUND AND IMPORTANCE OF CPEC

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is located at the intersection of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. It is thus a major project of the Belt and Road initiative (BRI) (Indian Ministry of External Affairs 2016). The CPEC is now approximately a \$60 billion project which serves as a major cornerstone in China-Pakistan strategic partnership.

The project received a significant push in 2013 when former President Asif Ali Zardari transferred the contract of operation of the Gwadar Port from the Port of Singapore Authority to China. In the same year, a series of high-level meetings between China and Pakistan took place. The year 2015 became a crucial turning point regarding the development of the CPEC. President Xi Jinping arrived in Pakistan and initiated a plan to develop energy and infrastructural projects. He also oversaw the signing of a series of agreements for the CPEC that amounted to USD 46 billion at that time.

WHAT IS THE CPEC?

The CPEC aims to connect Kashgar, a city in China's northwest region of Xinjiang, to Pakistan's Southern port city of Gwadar in Balochistan by a network of railways, highways, airports, and energy pipelines for trade and tourism purposes (Salik 2018, 149). The CPEC has also been advocated by both China and Pakistan to improve economic regionalism and connectivity (China Pakistan Economic Corridor, n.d.).

Looking into economics, the CPEC has several important contributions. First, it would put Chinese infrastructure companies that are facing a rigid domestic market to work; second, it would catalyze the development of new production chains at the regional level with China at the center; third, it would serve as a crucial stepping stone to provide development in poor and politically unstable parts of Pakistan which would help in stabilizing the conditions of the troubled country (Brewster 2016)

Going beyond economics however, this paper will look into the geopolitical properties of the CPEC which has the potential to significantly alter the political landscape of the IOR. The next section will provide a framework for geopolitics which would serve as a lens for the analysis of its geopolitical dimensions.

GEOPOLITICS AS A FRAMEWORK

Geopolitics has been used as a framework for understanding international politics since the time of the Ancient Greeks and Eastern philosophers. However, as the dynamics of international politics changes throughout the years, so does the concept of geopolitics. Considering that these changes are taking place, it would be expected to have a number of definitions attached to the concept of geopolitics.

The first definition offered by political geographers Van der Wusten and Dijkink is three-pronged and would be vital to the understanding of the paper. The definition can be seen in three parts, first, geopolitics is ‘a type of analysis using data concerning the international position of a country in light of its geographical features’; second, it is ‘a set of rules applicable in conducting statecraft based on such analyses’; and third ‘a discourse, a sustained argument, that describes and evaluates a country’s position in the world, possibly based on such analyses and the application of such rules (van der Wusten and Dijkink 2002, 21).’ This three-pronged definition thus explains why China and Pakistan are forging closer partnerships in the Indian Ocean. Second, this definition also helps to understand why India is affected by the increasing presence of the Chinese and Pakistan navy in the Indian Ocean given the vulnerability its geographic position. Third, the location of the CPEC further shows how it can alter the regional map of the Indian Ocean through the lens of geopolitics.

A second key definition of geopolitics which would be vital to the study of this paper is that it is the practice of states to control territory and extract resources (Flint 2006, 13). An application of this definition would be the involvement of China in the Indian Ocean in order to enhance its energy and strategic interests. Another application would be the territorial conflict between India and Pakistan over Jammu and Kashmir since their partition in 1947.

A third crucial definition to understand the multi-sided dimensions of geopolitics is that it does not only involve states competing against each other; in fact, it also encompasses the struggle of territory within a state (Flint 2006,16) brought by conflicts between races or ethnicities among others. An example and application of this definition would be of the clashes between the Muslim population of China and the Han Chinese or the conflict between the Baloch ethnic minorities and the Federal Government of Pakistan.

As the types of territorial conflicts continue to broaden, the concept of geopolitics would similarly be stretched to accommodate these changes. The development and proliferation of technology, the scarcity of resources and the overlapping interests of state and non-state actors tend to complicate and

further mold the meaning of geopolitics. It is thus necessary to remain sensitive to these changes to further enhance the study and framework of geopolitics.

THE GEOPOLITICS OF THE INDIAN OCEAN

Before going into the heart of the study, it is important to first understand and define what the Indian Ocean is and what is its geopolitical relevance. This will help understand why the CPEC was initiated in this geographic space.

The Indian Ocean was not always the center of global geopolitical discourse. In the earlier decades of the 1900s the Indian Ocean was seen to be a neglected geopolitical space among the powerful states; however, since the end of the 1960s, the Indian Ocean and its bordering countries have been established in the forefront of geopolitics and geostrategy (Bouchard and Crumplin 2010, 27). It is a region of great diversity and contrasts in terms of politics, population, economy and environment, as well as being a complex geopolitical framework where foreign powers and local states' interests deeply intermingle.

Geographically speaking, the IOR is defined as the Indian Ocean itself, with all of its tributary water bodies such as the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, the Andaman Sea and the Strait of Malacca, 38 coastal states, as well as 13 land-locked states for which the transit to and from the sea is mostly oriented towards the Indian Ocean (Bouchard and Crumplin 2010, 33).

One very crucial geopolitical element of the Indian Ocean which has served as a cornerstone for the establishment of the CPEC is the abundance of energy resources. According to the Journal of the Indian Ocean Region, more than 80 percent of the world's seaborne oil trade passes through the Indian Ocean choke points – 40 percent through the Strait of Hormuz, 35 percent through the Strait of Malacca and 8 percent through the Bab el-Mandab Strait.

Now that a proper overview has been given about the Indian Ocean and the greater IOR, it would be beneficial to discuss how the CPEC can serve as major factor that could alter the geopolitical landscape of the region.

THE GEOPOLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF CPEC

The CPEC may have important economic properties; however, many agree that its geopolitical dimensions are well emphasized. Dr. Jeremy Garlick, an expert in China affairs shares this perspective as well. He points out that the primary geo-economic concerns lie on the poor infrastructure and limited financial resources

of Pakistan which means that this project will be very expensive for China; furthermore, there is no guarantee whether Pakistan will be capable of paying these loans back on time. All this reflects the ambiguity of the initial economic gains of the project (Garlick 2018,520). That being said, the corridor would have to maximize its use as an agent of regional economic integration to be able to at least break-even in profit during the initial stages of its operation.

Looking through the lens of geopolitics, however, it is evident that China and Pakistan's engagement in the Indian Ocean through the CPEC fulfills a wide array of geopolitical interests for both states.

THE GWADAR PORT

The Gwadar Port is the third most important deep sea port in Pakistan and is located in the intersection of sea shipping and oil trade routes. This means that the port will be connecting three regions: South Asia, West Asia and Central Asia (Conrad 2017, 56). It will also provide China with direct access to the IOR through the Arabian Sea. Pakistan would also be strategically placed and would have major geopolitical importance in the region. Additionally, the port is said to benefit other landlocked neighboring states with natural resources by having the opportunity to transport their resources to the port and to the rest of the world (Conrad 2017, 56).

The Gwadar Port will be very useful for Pakistan to effectively monitor the sea lines of communications (SLOCs) originating from the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. This would provide Pakistan with strategic leverage over India, due to the latter's distant proximity to the Gwadar Port in comparison to the other two ports in Pakistan (Conrad 2017, 56).

CPEC AS A DRIVER FOR CHINA-PAKISTAN NAVAL COOPERATION

China's crude oil needs have doubled from 1995 to 2006 and is expected to double again in the next fifteen years (Kaplan 2009, 20). This has become a crucial catalyst for China to invest heavily on the CPEC to lessen its dependence on the Strait of Malacca and at the same time increase its strategic footprints in the Indian Ocean to secure its crucial SLOCs. As a result, the roles of both the Chinese Navy and the Pakistani Navy have expanded since the Gwadar Port became an important pillar of the CPEC project (Panneerselvam 2017, 43). In order to protect the energy and economic corridor from any threats, both countries have stepped up their naval collaboration.

The CPEC – the only bilateral corridor among the several corridors of the BRI (Weidong 2017, 4) is a symbol of the “all-weather” partnership between China and Pakistan. The development of the CPEC is paralleled to the increase

in naval activities between the Pakistan Navy and the Chinese Navy in the IOR particularly in the Arabian Sea. In 2015, both countries signed a number of agreements related to the CPEC project and also decided to elevate their relationship to “All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership (Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015)”. This elevation highlights the critical and strategic nature of China-Pakistan relations and how this partnership is expected to grow for the coming years. The naval engagement between the two navies further improved when Pakistan decided to buy equipment from China to upgrade its naval force (Panneerselvam 2017, 43).

The CPEC can be seen as a platform that would allow China to increase its naval presence in the IOR. At the same time, the mega project would also enhance the role of the Pakistani Navy in the region. As a result, both states are expected to increase their maritime cooperation to not only safeguard the developments surrounding the CPEC but to increase their geopolitical stake in the IOR.

COUNTERING US AND INDIAN INFLUENCE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

The Indian Ocean has become an important domain for maritime affairs. Since the Cold War, the United States has been the most dominant naval power in the world (Mishra 2017, 73). Throughout the years, the US began embracing a more cooperative approach vis-à-vis certain states. Ties between India and the US are seen to grow stronger and their naval cooperation has also significantly developed. The formation of the Indo-US naval steering committee became a starting point for India-US maritime cooperation (Mishra 2017, 73). This was followed by the start of the Malabar naval exercises between India and the US which has the potential to attain quadrilateral portions involving Japan and Australia.

China’s quest to enhance its comprehensive national power in the IOR has been catalyzed by US dominance in the Western Pacific through its so called “Asian Rebalance Strategy.” This strategy is perceived by Beijing to be a containment policy designed to limit its influence in three levels: economic, diplomatic and military (Khurana 2016, 14). The United States during the time of President Obama spearheaded the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) which created trade zones that had rules grounded in favor of the United States. This became a significant challenge for China economically. However, the current administration under President Trump withdrew from the TPP and forwarded a more aggressive position through a direct trade war against China. In terms of military and diplomacy, the US has formidable treaty allies in the Pacific in addition to a number of military bases. This environment provokes China’s

power projection capabilities in the Pacific. As a result, China has started redirecting its attention towards the Indian Ocean to offset its strategic losses in the Pacific.

Although India has been concerned with the issue of strategic autonomy, the active involvement of China in its backyard further pushed India towards the US. As a result, India looks to the United States as a potential balance vis-à-vis China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean. Both states have also expressed their desire to share information regarding Chinese ships and submarines in the Indian Ocean (Mishra 2017, 78).

China thus seeks to use the CPEC as a tool to connect with the states in the IOR and strengthen its political and economic engagements with them in addition to establishing a more permanent presence in the region. The CPEC is a highly expensive and ambitious project; however, as established in the earlier sections, its geopolitical dimensions are well emphasized. China's long term plan to become a key player in the IOR entails less strategic risks in exchange for excessive financial expenditure (Garlick 2018, 521). The establishment of the CPEC in the IOR provides a key opportunity for China to achieve power status. This status is driven by four foreign policy objectives of China: 1) influence 2) policy shaping 3) access to information 4) seizing opportunities (Khurana 2016, 4)

PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC POLICIES

Pakistan has strongly supported the CPEC because of the great geopolitical and economic benefits it would gain from the project. One of the primary geopolitical factors of the CPEC would be the elevation of the status of Pakistan as a key regional player in the IOR. The corridor will allow Pakistan to develop and ferment trade and political relations with Central Asia, Europe and the Middle East (Hussain and Hussain 2017, 82). Extra-regional states such as Russia, Turkey and the Central Asian Republics (CAR) have shown their interests in CPEC; in addition, regional neighbors such as Afghanistan have also been showing keenness in taking part in the mega project. This interest developed by various states can be tapped by Pakistan to boost its foreign relations with them.

Pakistan will also significantly benefit from the investments China will be pouring into the country. These investments will greatly improve its national policies particularly towards the infrastructural sector. The CPEC will also have an effect on the economic vulnerability of the Balochistan region which is seen as a problematic area by the Pakistani Federal Government. The inflow of investments is said to develop the region and provide employment opportunities for the local residents (Salik 2018, 150). However, there are doubts and contestations regarding these guarantees for the people of Balochistan.

ENERGY SECURITY

The CPEC is an important avenue for both China and Pakistan to achieve energy security in various ways. The CPEC will provide China an alternative to the Strait of Malacca. About 80% of Chinese trade and energy imports travel through the Strait of Malacca from the Middle East (Shaofeng 2010, 2). Complicating the issue further is that these sea routes are also being patrolled by the US Fleet and the Indian Navy. The CPEC will not only serve as an efficient alternative route to secure China's energy imports but also provide it with an entry point to the Persian Gulf. The heavy reliance of China on the Strait of Malacca has become a problem that the CPEC seems to provide a solution for.

Pakistan on the other hand is currently facing a severe and multifaceted energy crisis. Shortages in electricity have exceeded 7,000 megawatts in 2011; additionally, the gas shortfall is at 2 billion cubic feet per day (Aziz and Ahmad 2015). The energy shortage of Pakistan has been estimated to cost around 2 percent of the annual GDP. The reasons for this widening deficiency include a variety of factors such as governance, investment plans and the capacity to develop a formidable infrastructural sector. CPEC is seen by Pakistan as a chance to address its energy deficiency. The energy projects of the CPEC of very significant value. The initial allocation of budget sets the energy projects at a high pedestal – \$35 billion out of the \$50 billion would be invested on these projects (based on a 2017 study) (Dadwal and Purushothaman 2017, 515). The CPEC investments are said to add 10,400 Megawatts to Pakistan's energy grid through coal, nuclear and renewable energy projects (Government of Pakistan 2016, 251). The energy projects are categorized in four phases with their respective deadlines: 1) Early harvest (priority) energy projects (2018) 2) short term projects (2020-2023) 3) Midterm projects (2025) 4) Long term projects (2030). However, there have been delays and changes of plans for some energy projects due to issues of cost and feasibility.

More recent updates indicate that a large amount of projects under the CPEC have been delayed and have gone passed their deadlines in Pakistan (Rana 2019). Additionally, the current Imran Khan-led government of Pakistan has also put a major energy project on hold which was supported by the previous administration. During the 8th Joint Coordination Committee (JCC) meeting held on December 2018, a Pakistani delegation led by Minister for Planning and Development Makhdoom Khusró Bakhtyar made a proposal to remove the Rahim Yar Khan imported fuel power plant (1,320MW) from the CPEC list (Kiani 2019). This removal puts the status of other energy projects of the CPEC under the spotlight.

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES OF THE CPEC

The CPEC is truly an ambitious project that encompasses political, economic and strategic dimensions. However, it is important to note that the success of the project lies on several factors. Since 1947, Pakistan has been facing a number of internal constraints that range from domestic politics, economic capacity, ethnic conflict, energy deficiency and strained foreign relations within its region. These factors would greatly affect the viability of the CPEC project considering that a significant amount of investments are being made in Pakistani territory. China also faces constraints within its own borders. The Xinjiang Province would be a crucial geographical point for the CPEC. This means that the peace and stability of the region would play an important role in maximizing the CPEC. Like Pakistan, China has been witnessing an ethnic unrest in the province due to the conflict between its Muslim Uighur population and the Han Chinese. These issues serve as an overall challenge for the maximization of CPEC. This portion would provide a deeper understanding of the aforementioned factors.

TOPOGRAPHY

The conditions of the physical structures to enhance connectivity between Pakistan and China are quite problematic. The Karakoram Highway is a 1,300-kilometer (810 mi) national highway which extends from Hasan Abdal in the Punjab province of Pakistan to the Khunjerab Pass in Gilgit-Baltistan, where it crosses into China and becomes China National Highway 314. The highway is a utilized transport infrastructure which is part of the CPEC project; however, it (Karakoram Highway) is plagued with mountainous terrains that rise up to 5000 meters above sea level. The area is also prone to landslides and harsh environmental disasters which make it a perilous avenue for travel. These problems can be solved; however, the technical solutions are financially straining due to the high cost involved in its construction (Khan and Liu 2018, 5). This serves as a major challenge in maximizing the potential of the CPEC.

PAKISTAN'S POLITICAL STABILITY

Pakistan's internal political situation is complicated. The discord between civilian-military regimes has widened the gap for peace in the country. There has been a constant cycle of the military seizing power from the civilian government which is followed by civil unrest and public discontent which would eventually result to the military 'allowing' the civilian government to take charge again (Purl 2007, 53).

The military ruled Pakistan for 30 years (1958-1971, 1977-1988 and 1999-

2008) and tarnished the authenticity of the constitutional state. The army dissolved the National Assembly four times which led to the devaluation of the status of the parliament (Waseem 2011, 5). Up to this very day, the legislature is seen as a secondary role in the political system. The military continues to play an active role in Pakistani politics today which further complicates the political environment of the country. The political stability of Pakistan is crucial to the function of the CPEC. The continuous political issues in Pakistan may put a dent on the legitimacy of the economic corridor.

Pakistan has also been facing issues of inter-party conflicts ever since its independence in 1947. The country has five major ethnic political parties mainly: Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N), Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (Party of Islamic Scholars, JUI), Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (Pakistan Justice Movement, PTI) and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (United National Movement, MQM). Punjab is the most populous province in Pakistan and the Punjabi-led PML-N faces issues of dominance vis-à-vis the other political parties.

After the signing of CPEC in 2015, several political parties and elites in Pakistan criticized the PML-N for diverting the Chinese investments to Punjab (Ahmed 2018, 8). The PTI led by Imran Khan who is now the Prime Minister of Pakistan called for an All Parties Conference to discuss how the CPEC can profit all of Pakistan's provinces equitably. The Federal Government's representative Minister Iqbal stressed that 'CPEC would benefit all the provinces of Pakistan including Gilgit-Baltistan (Ahmar 2015, 38)'. Despite these discussions, it is clear that there is still a growing tension between the political parties and that the Federal Government has not done much in mediating the tension and addressing the concerns of the provincial governments of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunakhwa who have been significantly marginalized by the major parties (Ahmed 2018, 2). Legislators from the PPP have clamored over the constitutional status of Gilgit-Baltistan and stated that making it constitutional province of Pakistan is a crucial prerequisite for CPEC (Ahmed 2018, 9).

Pakistan's internal political situation is significantly linked to the success of the CPEC. The discontent shown by various political parties across the country regarding the transparency in decision-making process of the CPEC not only questions the project's legitimacy and long term sustainability, but also creates uncertainties for China and its interests. If the political situation continues to degrade, China may either pull-out or delay the projects taking place in Pakistan. In addition, the CPEC is a long-term project and the changes in Pakistan's political leadership would also impact the trajectory and momentum of its development.

ISSUES OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

Both China and Pakistan face ethnic conflicts within their respective borders. Pakistan has been facing insurgency through guerilla warfare by the people of Balochistan and China faces its own ethnic dilemma with the frequent clashes between the Han Chinese and the Uighur population of China. What makes this issue interesting is that the two geographical points that are linked by the economic corridor are where these groups reside – the Baloch community is concentrated in Balochistan and the Uighur community is concentrated in the Xijiang. Both locations are absolutely crucial for the success of the CPEC, and with constant unrest and apprehension, that very success is tested.

Balochistan has been facing a number of bomb blasts, random killings, sabotages and other forms of violence as a response of the ethnic Balochi towards their overall marginalization in Pakistan. Balochistan is the poorest province in Pakistan based on per capita income; however, the resources in the province fuel the needs of the rest of Pakistan. Ironically, the Federal Government continues to state how Balochistan is an economic liability; however, the province supplies Pakistan with 80 percent of its gas requirements (Bansal 2008, 187) and is also abundant in coal and other precious natural resources. The Baloch nationalists strongly object the Federal Government's continuous and unjust exploitation of the province's resources. Another factor for unrest is erosion of autonomy of the province which goes against 1973 Constitution of Pakistan. Baloch leaders argue that the province has been constantly manipulated and segregated in political and economic affairs. Furthermore, mega infrastructural projects such as the CPEC that guarantees the generation of employment in the province is seen by the Baloch people as a means to 'colonize' and exploit their land and resources. These general issues have resulted in a troubled security issue for Pakistan. In addition, the security of Chinese workers and engineers in the province are also at risk which causes further problems for China and the overall CPEC project.

The conflict and struggle between the Muslims (primarily the Uighur) and Han Chinese have been going even before the communist takeover in 1949. Xinjiang is geopolitically important and crucial to Beijing. The territory borders eight countries (Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, India and Pakistan) and is the site of China's nuclear weapons tests (Shichor 1994, 72). The Muslim population in Xinjiang attributes to 60 percent (with the Uighur as the largest ethnic Muslim community) of the entire province's population (Shichor 1994, 72). The region constantly experiences violent clashes between the Muslim community and the Han Chinese which can be attributed to the former's opposition and dissatisfaction towards Beijing's manipulative and marginalized approach towards Xinjiang and its Muslim population. The

domestic situation in Xinjiang and its ethnic Muslim population greatly impact Beijing's geopolitical and economic interests most especially the long-term sustainability of the CPEC project.

SECURITY IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

The previous sections highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of the CPEC through the lens of geopolitics. This section aims to underscore the CPEC's security implications for India. The South Asian giant is sandwiched between two historic adversaries who it had fought wars with. India perceives the CPEC as a mechanism of China and Pakistan to provoke India's interests in the IOR. This section would look into how the CPEC poses as a security challenge for India.

TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY: THE CASE OF KASHMIR

The CPEC runs through Gilgit-Baltistan in the Pakistan-administered Kashmir which is a severely contested territory between India and Pakistan. India considers the entire Kashmir region as an integral part of its territory, and Pakistan's control over the western portion is seen as illegal. India has thus defined this area as the Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK).

What aggravates the situation is that China does not want the issue to resolve in India's favor because the territory is considered to be the physical "umbilical cord" between China and Pakistan (Singh 2013, 1) and a crucial element for the CPEC. To make matters more complicated, under the so-called Sino-Pakistani boundary agreement of 1963, Pakistan ceded thousands of square kilometers of what India considers as its territory in the PoK to China (Lamb 1964, 299). India does not recognize this agreement and sees this as a direct challenge to its national sovereignty and security interests. The inclusion of China into the historic dispute becomes increasingly more troublesome for India. There have also been reports of an increased presence of Chinese troops in the disputed area of Kashmir or what India refers to as the PoK (Chansoria 2016, 70). This could be seen as a way for China to safeguard its investments for CPEC.

NAVAL PRESENCE OF CHINA AND PAKISTAN IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

The Indian Ocean is a very important component of India's national interest and foreign policy. The first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru in March 1958 stated, that "whichever power controls the Indian Ocean has India's sea borne trade at its mercy apart from its independence (Singh 1992, 1)". India has

evolved its policies towards the region and aims to play a more crucial role in asserting itself as an important player. India's power ambitions in the Indian Ocean project the belief that the Indian Ocean is "India's Ocean (Scott 2006, 99)." The CPEC is seen by New Delhi as a way for China to have a dominant and more permanent maritime presence in the Indian Ocean. Moreover, the build-up of Chinese and Pakistani naval ships and their joint exercises in the Arabian Sea add to the security implications for India brought by the CPEC.

India is concerned by the intensifying degree of joint naval activities between China and Pakistan in the Indian Ocean. These activities have the potential of disrupting the peace of the IOR and significantly challenge India's security and energy interests. If China continues to build on its naval capabilities in the Arabian Sea, it may result to controlling the Strait of Hormuz through the seaport of Gwadar.

Additionally, The CPEC has the strategic potential of becoming a military base of China. Though Beijing tries to downplay these controversies by labeling its project as commercial, India is still cautious of the possibilities of China's long term strategic plan in the IOR. If the Gwadar port would be converted into a military base of China, it would provide the Chinese Navy with a permanent platform in the Indian Ocean. This would become a challenge to India's regional diplomatic and military capabilities (Kanwal 2018).

CONCLUSION

The CPEC is a multi-billion dollar mega project that would connect China's northwest region of Xinjiang to Pakistan's Balochistan Province. Aside from the known economic benefits it has been promoted to attain, the corridor possesses strong geopolitical properties that highlight the strategic interests of China and Pakistan in the Indian Ocean. However, the path towards its development is hindered by a number of challenges that prevent both China and Pakistan from maximizing the CPEC's full potential. Ranging from topography to ethnic conflicts and political conditions, these challenges constrain not only the process of the development but also its legitimacy. Despite the obstacles, the CPEC still has serious security implications for India, particularly, the inclusion of the PoK, the provocation of the Chinese and Pakistani Navies in the Indian Ocean and the possibility of having a Chinese military base in Gwadar. These implications collide with India's power ambitions and interests in the IOR. India must remain consistent with its contestation of the inclusion of the PoK and craft its own strategy to act as a counter-weight to the CPEC in the region. Additionally,

India must diplomatically engage with its regional and extra-regional neighbors regarding the perils of committing to the CPEC which may cause strategic rifts in relations with India in the future.

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