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## **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): The Road to Indian Ocean and its Geopolitical implications for the India-Pakistan Strategic Relations**

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### **Abstract**

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is fraught with serious geopolitical risks when we look at the ongoing geopolitical dynamics through the theoretical perspective of ‘geography of conflict’. The theoretical approach is inspired from the works of Robert D. Kaplan. The paper argues that the China’s growing footprint on the Gwadar port and its struggle for strategic control over the Western shores of the Indian Ocean would directly affect the border disputes between Pakistan and India and would make them a flashpoint of conflicts. It also finds that the CPEC has made the cold war between India and Pakistan more volatile in nature. This time United States has strategically allied and close to India against Sino-Pakistan nexus due to CPEC.

**Keywords:** CPEC, indian ocean, gwadar, geopolitical, security

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### **1. Introduction**

The South Asia’s security dilemma in the nuclear age has entered to an uncharted and treacherous path. The changing geopolitical scenario has increased the security risks between the nuclear power rival states of India and Pakistan. The Sino-Pakistan entente cordiale has been viewed by India as a strategic encirclement to its power. Due to entente cordiale with Pakistan, China has been extending its imperial influence in the Indian Ocean and offsetting India’s dream to be as pivotal power in the region. The Chinese footprint on the Gwadar port and its growing influence in the Indian Ocean has given a new dimension to the strategic rivalry between Indian and Pakistan. Robert D. Kaplan said that as technology has shrunk geography it has made the world more claustrophobic and anxious. The connectivity will give impetus to wars; and the conflicts in one geographical region will be easily proliferated to other regions. For him, the world has become a spider web and if you pluck one string the whole network vibrates. The recent India’s historical move to abolish the autonomous status of Kashmir by revoking Article 370 seem to be a reaction to the overall changing geopolitical scenario of South Asia. The Indian Ocean has an immense geopolitical significance for the great powers and it will “expose the contours of power politics in the twenty-first century”<sup>[1]</sup>.

In 2013, Pakistan and China signed a historic deal of CPEC. The multibillion project of CPEC would connect Pakistan’s Arabian Sea port of Gwadar with the landlocked region of Xinjiang, the Western part of China. The overall route is 2,700km that will provide China a direct access to warm waters of Arabian Sea. CPEC is hailed in Pakistan as a game changer in geopolitical sense; and Chinese consider it a Jewel in the crown of its grand

strategy of connectivity of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). BRI aimed to connect Asia, Europe and Africa through roads, rail lines, and ports with an expected cost of 1 trillion. In the grand ambitious project of BRI the Chinese regarded Pakistan as “the central link between the maritime and overland Silk Roads”<sup>[2]</sup>. The geopolitical significance of CPEC is due to the all-weather deep channel port of Gwadar. The Gwadar has become part of Pakistan in 1958. It was underdeveloped and neglected region and its geopolitical significance increased for Pakistan due to the CPEC project<sup>[3]</sup>. The Gwadar port would help China to secure maritime energy routes and project power in the Persian Gulf, and Horn of Africa way up-to the Cape of Hope. China is so much interested in Gwadar that one day it would be the “new Shanghai of the West.”<sup>[4]</sup> CPEC entails serious security concerns for India and United States. Pakistan has entangled itself in the new cold war by aligning with China against the Indo-US grand nexus which aimed to contain Chinese hegemony in the region. The fall-out of this cold war will deeply affect Pakistan and India relations.

### **2. Historical view on struggle over Indian Ocean**

In the Indian Ocean, the fifteenth century struggle for supremacy over maritime sea lanes have returned with ferocious security competition among the great powers: India, China and United States. Before the conquest of Asia by the European powers the Indian Ocean would bustle with intense commercial trade. It was a diverse social and cultural arena of the main trading civilizations: Indo-Arabic, the Hindus, the Chinese, and

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<sup>1</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, “Center Stage for the Twenty-First Century: Power Plays in the Indian Ocean.” *Foreign Affairs*, No.2 (2009),p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Brahma Chellaney, “China’s Silky Indian Ocean Plan”, *China & US Focus*, May 11, 2015, <https://www.chinausfocus.com/finance-economy/chinas-silky-indian-ocean-plans> (accessed 14 May, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Kaisar Bengali, *A Cry for Justice: Empirical Insights from Balochistan*. (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Frankopan, *The New Silk Roads: The Present and Future of the World* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2018), p. 113.

Indonesians<sup>[5]</sup>. The trading civilizations of Asia did not claim any exclusive sovereignty over the Indian Ocean and that's why shared and flexibly concept of control over maritime routes made it a hub of commercial trade<sup>[6]</sup>. The golden age of shared sovereignty came to an end when the Ming China (1368-1644) rulers directed power to the seas and extended hegemony over it. In the years from 1405 to 1431, when China was bringing Indian Ocean under its hegemony it was one the great naval power of Asia. It had almost 3,800 naval ships, of which, included 1,350 combat vassals<sup>[7]</sup>. During that time Chinese Admiral Cheng Ho commanded over the Indian Ocean and brought the littoral states under the suzerainty of Chinese tributary system. He used force in Ceylon in 1411 when its rulers refused to bring their state under the Chinese tributary system<sup>[8]</sup>. In 1433 Chinese abandoned expeditions to Indian Ocean as the Nanjing faced threats on its Northern border from the looming power of Mongols. The military campaigns against the Mongols had caused drained on the Chinese economy<sup>[9]</sup>. The memory of Cheng-Ho expedition still vividly survived in the Chinese leadership and strategic thinkers. They propagate it in the public that once Chinese had suzerainty over the Indo-Pacific littoral states and these states submitted to Chinese hegemonic power<sup>[10]</sup>. The control over Indian Ocean has been a part of strategic approach of imperial China both for energy and security reasons. China has been actively engaged in developing deep-sea ports in Piraeus, Gwadar, Djibouti, Colombo, and Malacca. The CPEC project which is all about the road to Gwadar is part of grand Chinese policy to gain strategic and economic dominance in the Asia-Pacific. The control over Indian Ocean lies at the heart of the emerging Chinese empire<sup>[11]</sup>. "Gwadar is part of a much bigger Ambition, driven by President Xin Jinping, for China to become a maritime power<sup>[12]</sup>."

#### a. British Raj and its Legacy

The fate of the Indian Ocean from peaceful trading culture changed into a zone of contention as European powers turned their gaze over the navigable landscape of India Ocean. The first European state that monopolized the sea lanes of Indian Ocean was Portugal in the sixteenth century. The Portuguese maritime empire in Indian Ocean was ideological driven as they were religiously motivated to drive Islam out of the Indian Ocean.<sup>13</sup> In order to control maritime sea lanes Portuguese established fortified naval forts along the coast of Indian Ocean: Cochin

(1503), Cannalore (1505), and Goa (1510), Malacca (1511).<sup>14</sup> After the conquest of Malacca, Portugal became the unchallenged master of the Indian Ocean<sup>[15]</sup>. Since Sixteenth Century up-to the end of the British Raj in India in 1947, the Indian Ocean was under the control of the European powers. Since nineteenth century up-to end of the British Raj, the Indian Ocean was a British lake. The British Empire from Africa to East Asia was sustained through the imperial control of the Indian Ocean. India, on the other hand, under the colonial rule of British emerged as maritime power of the Indian Ocean in Africa, Middle East and East Asia and shared the burden of imperial conquest. "For much of South Africa, especially Natal, for Central and East Africa, for the Arabian and Gulf Coasts, for the Islands of the Indian Ocean, for the Malayan Peninsula and beyond, the ties of empire ran not only to London but also to Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras<sup>[16]</sup>. British expanded its empire by the help of Indian soldiers. The Indian forces were cheap and could better fight and survive in the tropical climates and their death would not bring uproar in London<sup>[17]</sup>. Indian battalions participated in the conquest of Mauritius, Ceylon, Singapore, Hong Kong and North China<sup>[18]</sup>. In the First World War almost 1.3 million Indian soldiers fought on the side of British Empire. India was an "imperial center" in the arena of a vast Indian Ocean.<sup>19</sup> During the Second World War two million Indians army fought on the side of British. Indian army was engaged worldwide in the global war<sup>[20]</sup>. The British Empire transformed the strategic thinking of India about Indian Ocean. The post-colonial India treats it as a most important strategic reality for the rise of India as a strong Asian power. The modern India's foreign policy ambitions and agenda are inspired from the British Raj quest "to base a regional order on the balance of power in an arc stretching across the world, from the Middle East to Singapore, and then north to Afghanistan"<sup>[21]</sup>. The post-colonial state of India adopted neo-Curzonian policy as a foreign policy agenda<sup>[22]</sup>. The Indian viceroy Lord Curzon considered Western frontiers of Indian Ocean as a prized geopolitical reality to project power in the Persian Gulf, Middle East, Suez Canal and Africa. In the British imperial imagination the Indian Ocean was a jewel in the Crown. It was a vast space on the map and hugely prized frontier for the Raj. The European imperial rule put an end to the concept of shared power and shared layers of sovereignty in the Indian Ocean and that "has lingered on as colonialism's most poisonous legacy in the post-colonial era<sup>[23]</sup>."

<sup>5</sup> K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilizations in The Indian Ocean: An Economic History For The Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> K.M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance*. (London: George Allen & Unwin Press, 1953), p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 44.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>9</sup> Jakub. J. Grygiel, *Great Powers and Geopolitical Change*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), p. 150.

<sup>10</sup> James R Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara. "Chinese Naval Ambitions in the Indian Ocean". *The Journal of Strategic Studies*. Vol.31. No.3 (September 2008), p. 373.

<sup>11</sup> Robert D Kaplan, "America Must Prepare for the Coming Chinese Empire", *The National Interest*, June 17, 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/america-must-prepare-coming-chinese-empire-63102> Accessed 18 June 2019.

<sup>12</sup> James Kynge & Farhan Bokhari, "How China Rule the Waves", *Financial Times*, January 12, 2017, <https://ig.ft.com/sites/china-ports/> accessed June 10, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance*, op. cit, p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Rise & Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), p. 53.

<sup>15</sup> Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance*, op.cit, p. 41.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas R. Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in The Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>20</sup> Yasmin Khan, *India at War: The Subcontinent and The Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 20.

<sup>21</sup> Henry Kissinger, *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History* (London: Penguin Books, 2014), p. 207.

<sup>22</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and The Future of American Power*. New York: Random House, 2010), pp. 182-190.

<sup>23</sup> Leila Tarazi Fawaz & C. A. Bayly, *Modernity & Culture: From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 378.

### b. India's Monroe Doctrine

India looked at Indian Ocean through a strategic lens of Monroe Doctrine. India has been very ambitious to be a hegemonic power of the Indian Ocean. As India has not been a powerful maritime power so it accepted de facto control of the Indian Ocean by the powerful US navy and developed military alliance with her. The presence of US navy is considered by India as pivotal both for its security and economic development.<sup>24</sup> The Monroe Doctrine was presented by American President James Monroe in 1823. The purpose of the Doctrine was to bring the Western Hemisphere under US hegemony and set it free from the influence of European powers. It prevented the countries of the Western Hemisphere to form any alliance with outside powers<sup>[25]</sup>. Like US in the Western Hemisphere, India strives to assert hegemony over the Indian Ocean from the East Indies to the Horn of Africa and tried to prevent the rise of peer competitor<sup>[26]</sup>.

### 3. Gwadar Port and A New Cold War

The rise of China posed a serious security challenge not only to India's hegemony in the Indian Ocean but US as well. Chinese have revived the Ming dynasty's ambitions in the Indian Ocean. Control over Indian Ocean will help China to rise as a strong Indo-Pacific power. China has been developing into a grandiose empire however Chinese denied it. They are building ports and naval bases in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Djibouti all around Indian Ocean. The strategic port of Gwadar will help China to project power in the Western reaches of Indian Ocean. This will become a crucial staging post for China's to take off as naval power, extending its reach for the Indian Ocean to the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea<sup>[27]</sup>. Gwadar port will be crucial for the Chinese empire to counterbalance US and India's naval powers. China could monitor maritime activities on the choke point of the Strait of Hormuz. In the long run it will make China a hegemonic power in the Persian Gulf<sup>[28]</sup>. "Gwadar by no means represents a trump card for China, either in energy security or military terms<sup>[29]</sup>." China has a deep strategic interest in Western reaches of Indian Ocean to better safeguard its maritime interests. That's why China is expanding its military influence to the westward<sup>[30]</sup>. India feels strategic encirclement by Chinese Naval power. The Pakistan-China emerging nexus in the Indian Ocean and regular joint naval exercises may curtail the India's influence in the Arabian Sea in the future<sup>[31]</sup>. New Delhi in order to counter China and Pakistan in the Western shores developed Chah Bahar port in Iran near the chokepoint of Strait of Hormuz. The work on the Gwadar port started in 2001. India also wants to connect hydrocarbon rich Central Asian states and Afghanistan with Indian Ocean through Chah Bahar port. She developed transit corridors in Iran and Afghanistan for that

purpose. Both Gwadar and Chah Bahar ports may one day be linked through roads, railways and pipelines with oil and gas rich countries of Central Asia<sup>[32]</sup>. India since the British Raj gave much strategic value to maritime sea routes on the Western shores. During British Raj the control over the Western shores strategically helped India to control affairs in Persia, Middle East and East Africa. The Persian Gulf was accorded high geostrategic value during the Raj. The presence of Chinese vessels in the Gwadar Port will affect power dynamics in the Arabian Sea and will embolden security competition between India and China<sup>[33]</sup>. Gwadar port will challenge India's maritime influence in the Indian Ocean.

China has been taking advantage of the very emotional and volatile rivalry between Pakistan and India. Pakistan has stood up to challenge India as a status quo power. China is using Pakistan as a strategic tool against its peer competitor India<sup>[34]</sup>. China regarded India as a strategic rival and since 1963 allied firmly with Pakistan to counter and contain the common enemy<sup>[35]</sup>. The strategic entente cordiale of China and Pakistan contained India geopolitically. Through Pakistan, China would better offset "India's inclination to cooperate with Russia in regard to Afghanistan and Central Asia<sup>[36]</sup>." The strategic relations between Pakistan and China, and the ambitious project of CPEC have also caused strategic concerns for US. US regarded Persian Gulf as strategically important and will counter China in the Western shores. Strait of Hormuz has already been seeing growing escalation between US and Iran as the latter recently disrupted the maritime routes by attacking on the oil tankers. US Defense Secretary James Mattis objected to CPEC that it passes through disputed territories. He warned "there are areas where, also, strategically, we need to confront China where we think it's unproductive the direction they are going in<sup>[37]</sup>." Washington has showed a serious concern in the Pentagon report on military development of China. According to the report China was building military bases in Pakistan. Pakistan purchased eight submarines from China worth \$ 3 billion.<sup>[38]</sup> The report raised objections on the OBOR that it "will drive military basing through a perceived need to provide security for OBOR<sup>[39]</sup>." US view CPEC through a strategic lens and consider it a problematic geopolitical development for it would help the strategic competitor China to extend its influence in South Asia, Central Asia and in the Indian Ocean. That's why CPEC is closely monitored by the US due to its geopolitical reasons. In the words of Seigfried O. Wolf "both BRI and CPEC presents China vision of creating a comprehensive economic, political, and culture networks so as to promote multi-dimensional connectivity and

<sup>24</sup> James R. Holmes & Toshi Yoshihara, 'India's Monroe Doctrine and Asia's Maritime Future.' *Strategic Analysis*. Vol.32. No.6. (2008),p. 1003.

<sup>25</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. Updated Edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), p. 247.

<sup>26</sup> Kissinger, *World Order*, op. cit., p. 205.

<sup>27</sup> Andrew Small, *The China Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Holmes, 'China's Naval Ambitions in the Indian Ocean', op. cit., p. 379.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 379

<sup>30</sup> Mike Chia-Yu Huwang, 'A New Game Started? China's Overseas Strategic Pivots in the Indian Ocean Region'. *China Report*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (2018), p.272

<sup>31</sup> Prakash Pannervelam, 'Maritime Component of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). India China Competition in the Arabian Sea.' *Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India*. (2018):.pp.7-8.

<sup>32</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power* (New York: Random House, 2011), pp. 13-14

<sup>33</sup> Pannervelam. 'Maritime Components of CPEC', op. cit, p.10

<sup>34</sup> J. Mohan Malik. "South Asia in China's Foreign Relations." *Pacific Review*. Vol.13, No.1. (2001), p. 85.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>36</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, 'A Geostrategy for Eurasia, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 76. No. 5 (1997), p. 61.

<sup>37</sup> 'CPEC passes through disputed territory: US.' *The Dawn*, October 7, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1362283> (accessed 6 July 2019).

<sup>38</sup> *Office of the Secretary of Defense, 'Annual Report to Congress. Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019.'* p. 27.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 1

cooperation among the participating countries and bounce back the influence of both the US and India in the Asia-Pacific <sup>[40]</sup>.” Pakistan has entered into a new cold war and joined the Chinese camp against strategic alliance of US and India. How the CPEC project and the road to Gwadar will affect Pakistan and US relation and its impact of security conditions of South Asia could better be understood if we critically glance at the ongoing Sino-US cold war. US are committed to contain the growing power of China to prevent its rise as regional hegemon. Washington and Beijing have been engaged in intense security competition which led to a new cold war. “Across the board rivalry with China is becoming an organizing principle of US economic, foreign, and security policies <sup>[41]</sup>.” US behave towards China the way she treated USSR during the cold war after World War 2. China is bent on to eliminate US power in the Western Pacific to be a real hegemonic power in the South and East China Sea <sup>[42]</sup>. The military modernization of China became a serious security issue for US and India. The Chinese hypersonic glide missiles, stealth aircrafts, quite submarines, and anti-ship missiles have posed a formidable challenge for US naval power in the Western Pacific. China does not need a large a large navy to counter US hegemony but is “building a very different kind of “anti-navy” navy, designed to keep US air and naval forces out of Western Pacific <sup>[43]</sup>.” China wants complete control over South China Sea to gain a better strategic control over the Indian Ocean as South China Sea is connected with Indian Ocean through the Malacca, Sunda and Lombok straits <sup>[44]</sup>. US definitely view China’s presence in the Western shores of Indian Ocean as a security threat to its naval power in Indian Ocean, and the growing Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean will ultimately pose security threats for US in the Western Pacific. Given its rich geopolitical importance, China has long been interested in the Gwadar port and wants to make it “a stronghold for Chinese business and military operations <sup>[45]</sup>.” Through Gwadar, China would monitor maritime activities along the Strait of Hormuz which would embolden security threats for US naval presence in the region. Like US, India also considers Chinese growing presence in the Western shores of Indian Ocean as a maritime security threat to its geostrategic interests. For Indian strategic thinkers, Pakistan is determined to give China military bases along the coast of Indian Ocean. The strategic naval bases “will perform a number of functions from hosting PLA navy to Chinese satellite tracking <sup>[46]</sup>.” Further this will put in perils the India’s Monroe Doctrine. As India feels encircled it is pushing hard to increase its influence in the Indian Ocean. Above all India gives much attention to

what’s going on in the Indian Ocean. New Delhi in order to counter growing presence of Chinese in Indian Ocean, vowed to build 200 naval ships and nuclear powered submarines by 2027 <sup>[47]</sup>. “Indian warships have deployed to the South China Sea and Chinese warships have maneuvered throughout the Indian Ocean. A new strategic geography of rivalry now exists between China and India <sup>[48]</sup>.” India vociferously objected to CPEC project and claimed it passes through disputed territories. For Shivshanker Menon, a Senior Indian Diplomat, CPEC would solidify Pakistan claims on the territories of Gilgit-Baltistan (G.B) which Indian claimed as a part of greater India <sup>[49]</sup>. India considers CPEC as a violation of its national sovereignty. India view CPEC through a strategic lens. China and India have border disputes and they fought a brief war over it in 1962. The disputed territories in the Himalayas region of Aksai Chin and Ladakh still have remained the source of contestation between the big powers. They inherited the disputed borders legacy from the great game of the imperial powers of Russian and British <sup>[50]</sup>. India think CPEC would solidify China’s hold on the disputed regions. For India, the road to Indian Ocean through CPEC will help China to achieve strategic gains in the Himalayas. New Delhi showed apprehension about the growing presence and influence of China in South Asia. CPEC will increase strategic rivalry between India and China <sup>[51]</sup>. The strategic competition over the Indian Ocean and “and the overlapping naval spheres of interests compound the border issues in the Himalayan north that are still outstanding <sup>[52]</sup>.”

#### 4. India and Pakistan Rivalry in the Nuclear Age

The CPEC has emboldened security competition in South Asia and its ultimate affects will be deeply felt over India and Pakistan relation which already have deteriorated to a new low. The cold war in South Asia has turned a dangerous turn for it has been played under the shadow of nuclear weapons. Both countries went nuclear in May 1998 but nuclear weapons could not deter both states to wage limited wars, cross border terrorism and proxy wars. The Pulwama attack, on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019, in Indian held Kashmir on the military convoy which cost the lives of 40 soldiers presented a best case on the vulnerability of security conditions in South Asia. India considered it as an assault on its sovereignty in a frenzy of hyper nationalism. New Delhi blamed Pakistan for that terrorism without giving any evidence. In retaliation India sent jet fighters equipped with 1,000 lb bombs into the heart of Pakistan and attacked selected targets. “Indian jets had appeared to come within 100 km of Islamabad, the

<sup>40</sup> Sigfried O. Wolf, *The China Pakistan Economic Corridor of the Belt and Road Initiative: Concept, Context and Assessment* (Brussels: Springer Press, 2019), p. 66.

<sup>41</sup> Martin Wolf, ‘The Looming 100-Year US-China Conflict.’, *Financial Times*, June 4, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/52b71928-85fd-11e9-a028-86cea8523dc2> (accessed 5 June 2019).

<sup>42</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, ‘A New Cold War Has Begun.’ *Foreign Policy*, January 7, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/01/07/a-new-cold-war-has-begun/> (accessed 6 July 2019).

<sup>43</sup> Paul Bracken, *The Second Nuclear Age: Strategy, Danger, and the New Power Politics* (New York: St. Martin Griffin Press, 2012), p. 207.

<sup>44</sup> Kaplan, ‘America Must Prepare for the Coming Chinese Empire, op. cit.

<sup>45</sup> Huang, ‘A New Game Started?’, op. cit., p. 275

<sup>46</sup> C. Raja Mohan, ‘As Beijing Races Ahead in Quest for a Military Footprint.’ *Carnegie India*, May 7, 2019, <https://carnegieindia.org/2019/05/07/as-beijing-races-ahead-in-quest-for-military-footprint-delhi-has-some-catching-up-to-dopub-79083> (accessed 6 July 2019).

<sup>47</sup> ‘Who Rule the Waves ?.’ *The Economist*, October 17, 2015, <https://www.economist.com/international/2015/10/17/who-rules-the-waves> (accessed 7 July 2019).

<sup>48</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, ‘The Post-Imperial Moment Moment.’, *The National Interest*, April 22, 2016, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-post-imperial-moment-15881>

<sup>49</sup> Shivshanker Menon, ‘The Unprecedented Promises and Threats of the Belt and Road Initiative.’ *The Wire*, April 24, 2017, <https://thewire.in/external-affairs/the-unprecedented-promises-and-threats-of-the-belt-and-road-initiative> accessed 28 June 2019.

<sup>50</sup> see Alastair Lamb, *The China-India Border: the Origins of the Disputed Boundaries*. London: Oxford University Press, 1964.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Kugelman, ‘CPEC Today: China’s \$62 billion Gamble’, *South Asian Voices*, March 1, 2018, <https://southasianvoices.org/chinas-62-billion-gamble/>

<sup>52</sup> Robert D. Kaplan. “South Asia’s Geography of Conflict.”, *Center for New American Security*, August, 2010.

capital, without being intercepted<sup>[53]</sup>.” Given the long history of cross-border raids, cross border terrorism and acute border disputes between the two states since 1947, the cross border terrorism would be a recurring fact in the future. Narinder Modi Hindu nationalist regime view Pakistan “less as a strategic opponent than a threat to civilization<sup>[54]</sup>.” The recent historical move of Modi’s regime to revoke the autonomous status of Kashmir seemed to be a reaction to the changing geopolitical environment of South Asia. The China’s deep involvement in Pakistan through CPEC actually provoked India to take geopolitical risks. India claimed the CPEC violates the autonomous status of disputed territories of Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan. India’s revoking of Kashmir’s special status would give impetus to the militant-proxies in the region of Kashmir<sup>[55]</sup>. The terrorist attacks of non-state actors would give way to cross border raids between the nuclear-armed states. The second nuclear age spinning towards a perilous path and the two factors make it volatile. One is nationalism and the second is terrorism. The nuclear decision in the second nuclear age will be influenced by the masses and their passion<sup>[56]</sup>. The terrorism act will incite the states to overreact in order to assuage the popular sentiments. In the second nuclear age “it is better to think of terrorists as a catalyst to escalation<sup>[57]</sup>.”

Pakistan strategic thinkers and military generals believe that hybrid war has been waged by India to sabotage the CPEC project. For them, the ethnic uprisings, insurgencies whether it is in Baluchistan and ex-Federal Administrative Tribal Areas (FATA) are all alluded to as a result of new cold war and that India is bent on fomenting crisis in Pakistan. The CPEC could face backlash of militancy from the poorly governed and ignored areas of Pakistan like FATA, Southern Punjab and Balochistan. The terrorist and jihadist groups could take advantage of the poorly governed marginalized areas for a proxy wars<sup>[58]</sup>. Further, CPEC will reinvigorate regionalism and foment separatist movements in Pakistan<sup>[59]</sup>. For China, the success of the CPEC project and the dream of connectivity with Arabian Sea are contingent upon the peace in Pakistan overall and not just only in Balochistan.

Any dangerous situation Islamabad feels at home she pointed finger at India. Pakistan has developed Indian-centric rhetoric since 1947. The ethnic tensions, terrorist attacks and insurgencies all are believed to be happening due to India. For Pakistan’s military establishment narrative, India has been bent on destabilizing and fomenting crisis in Pakistan. The deep psychological effects of gory partition of subcontinent in 1947 shaped Pakistan’s anti-India attitude. The affects of partition will continue to inform the present and future<sup>[60]</sup>. International

Monitory Fund (IMF) uncompromising behavior and its reluctance to give grants to Pakistan; and the putting of Pakistan in the grey list of Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has been interpreted as a strategy by US and India to foil CPEC grand projects<sup>[61]</sup>. Pakistan’s military general Asim Bajwa said: “Our enemies know that they cannot beat us fair and square and this subjected us to a cruel, evil and protracted hybrid war<sup>[62]</sup>.” In the changing geopolitical landscape of South Asia, CPEC will further intensify proxy wars. It is widely believed that CPEC would bring instability in South Asia and would intensify security competition<sup>[63]</sup>.

## 5. CPEC and Controversies in Pakistan

CPEC is geopolitically all about Gwadar which is located in Baluchistan<sup>[64]</sup>. Its major aim is to connect China’s landlocked Xinjiang province with the Arabian Sea. Balochistan has a great strategic value due to its warm water shores. That is the reason Chinese investment within the CPEC “are dedicated to projects either in Gwadar or linked to Gwadar<sup>[65]</sup>.” During cold war, in 1980s during their occupation of Afghanistan, Soviet Union was committed to extend its power to the warm waters of Arabian Sea through Gwadar. It was due to containment policy of US that Russia could not materialize its ultimate dream to reach to the shores of Arabian Sea. America since the very beginning of the creation of Pakistan in 1947 considered it as an Islamic buffer state against communism. When Soviet occupied Afghanistan in 1789, Balochistan became a hub of cold war and US was actively engaged to stem the expansion of Russian to warm waters. As Pakistan was strategic partner of US during the cold war against Russia so the Western powers flooded the region of Balochistan with military supplies through the authoritarian military regime of Pakistan<sup>[66]</sup>. China also has a strategic concern for great powers involvement and proxy wars in Balochistan. “Soviet help to Baloch agitation was raised by Chinese as subject of concern as long ago as the 1970s, and the involvement of Americas, the British, and (especially) the Indians in backing the Baloch nationalists has been a source of finger-pointing for many years<sup>[67]</sup>.”

CPEC is considered as controversial project in geopolitically pivotal regions of Pakistan. Pakistan has been facing insurgency in Baluchistan since decades. Baloch nationalist viewed CPEC as an encroachment on their land and rights. For them, it would cause demographic imbalance in the region as the influx of the outsiders from Punjab and other part of Pakistan will marginalize them and would cause their cultural extinction<sup>[68]</sup>. By 2048, the Chinese expats would outnumber the Baloch in their own native land<sup>[69]</sup>. They consider CPEC “as an instrument of exploitation

<sup>53</sup> ‘On Perilous Ground: Skirmishing between India and Pakistan Could Escalate.’, *The Economist*, February 28, 2019, <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2019/02/28/skirmishing-between-india-and-pakistan-could-escalate> accessed 25 June 2019

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Michael Kugelman, ‘India’s Sudden Kashmir Move Could Backfire Badly’, *Foreign Policy*, August 5, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/08/05/indias-sudden-kashmir-move-could-backfire-badly/> accessed 6 August 2019.

<sup>56</sup> Bracken, *The Second Nuclear Age*, op. cit., p. 117.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 117-118

<sup>58</sup> Wolf, *The China Pakistan Economic Corridor*, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 324

<sup>60</sup> C. Christine Fair, *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army’s Way of War*. (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.65.

<sup>61</sup> Munir Akram, ‘Pakistan & Sino-US Cold War.’, *The Dawn*, June 9, 2019 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1487040> (accessed 20 June 2019).

<sup>62</sup> ‘Hybrid War imposed on Country to Internally Weaken It, Says Bajwa’. *The Dawn*, April 15, 2018. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1401747> (accessed 15 June 2019).

<sup>63</sup> Wolf, *The China Pakistan Economic Corrido*, op. cit., p. 322.

<sup>64</sup> Panneerselvam, ‘*Maritime Component*’, 7

<sup>65</sup> Wolf, *The China Pakistan Economic Corrido*, op. cit., p.139.

<sup>66</sup> Adeel Khan, ‘Baloch Ethnic Nationalism in Pakistan: From Guerrilla War to Nowhere.’ *Asian Ethnicity*. Vol.4, No.2 (2003), p. 291.

<sup>67</sup> Small, *The China Pakistan Axis*, op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>68</sup> Asim Sajjad Akhtar, ‘Balochistan vs Pakistan.’ *Economic & Political Weekly* (2007),p. 76.

<sup>69</sup> Logan Pauley & Hamza Shad, ‘Gwadar: Emerging Port City or Chinese Colony?.’ *The Diplomat*. October 5, 2018,

and foreign occupation of their homeland as well as an attempt to further marginalize the native Baloch people in the name of economic development<sup>[70]</sup>. Baloch nationalist consider Pakistan as colonial state which has trampled on their resources and identity<sup>[71]</sup>. Owing to the disturbed security condition and the ongoing insurgency in Baluchistan, the province is under the de facto control of the military. The civil Administration appeared to be dysfunctional<sup>[72]</sup>. Modi raised the Balochistan issue and warned against the ongoing geopolitical development<sup>[73]</sup>. India could take advantage of the ongoing disturbed situation in Baluchistan. She could use it as a weapon to weaken Pakistan internally. The Baloch insurgent groups regularly attacked on Pakistan's security forces and Chinese nationals for they consider them as occupiers of their resources. The military operations could not suppress the voice of Baloch nationalists; rather it has fanned fire to insurgencies. The China realized the gravity of situation in Balochistan but she is committed to invest in the region for a prized geo-political gains<sup>[74]</sup>. Pakistan realizes that in the new cold war the rival powers could stoke ethnic tensions and regionalism in Pakistan. Besides Balochistan, the other geopolitically significant region is Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), which will connect Pakistan to the Xinjiang region of China. GB showed serious concern over the CPEC. The civil society members and political representatives of GB raised their voice that Islamabad did not take on board the people over the CPEC and that state forcibly took over land from the people for CPEC without their consent. The displaced people were not compensated and the state did not help them relocated. The taking over land arbitrarily by the state authorities brought further distress in the public against the state. The forced acquisition of land, and ignoring the consent of the people made CPEC a controversial project in GB<sup>[75]</sup>. As GB does not have adequate representation in Parliament and constitutionally not integrated in Pakistan, that is the reason the region has not been consulted by the center and people have no say in the planning and consultative projects of the CPEC.<sup>76</sup> For China, GB is the gateway of connectivity with Gwadar. It provides a main artery of connectivity of Pakistan with China. Due to its geopolitical significance, China wants a hold over the region. According to Selig S Herrison, an expert on South Asian affairs, Islamabad gave a de facto control of the strategically

important region of GB to China, and Herrison called this development an unfolding of geopolitical crisis<sup>[77]</sup>. There is a dearth of debate in Pakistan about the geo-political implications of CPEC. There is a lack of debate in Pakistan what are the real Chinese ambitions in South Asia and in the Indian Ocean. No open criticism is allowed in Pakistan about the CPEC geopolitical grand plans. To criticize it is regarded as anti-national agenda. CPEC has made Pakistan a debt ridden to China and due to it the external debt increased from 62 \$ billion to 97 \$ billion. It has made Pakistan less competitive globally<sup>[78]</sup>. Pakistan would get very little out of Gwadar as 91 percent of the revenue from the port will go to China over the next 40 years, and Balochistan would get no reserved revenue<sup>[79]</sup>. The local people of Gwadar have adversely affected economically from the grandiose land acquisition by Pakistan's military-linked institutions and their forcibly displacement from the region which gravely affected their means of livelihood<sup>[80]</sup>. "The shining Gwadar of official description seems like a mirage – one that haunts the town's residents amid security cordons, poverty, and illiteracy, economic and political marginalization<sup>[81]</sup>." Overall Pakistan's economy has been facing severe recession. Due to declining export, acute fiscal deficit, and rising inflation Pakistan rupee has depreciated and lost 50 percent value against the dollar since 2017<sup>[82]</sup>. In the words of Andrew Small, an expert on Pak-China relations, "CPEC is geopolitically controversial scheme that will load Pakistan with debt, leave it to in-hook to China and stoke internal divisions"<sup>[83]</sup>. The experts believe that CPEC is a geopolitical controversial project and stands on shaky legal grounds. It will make Pakistan too dependent on imperial power of China and the latter is interested to make the former a tributary state<sup>[84]</sup>.

## 6. The Perilous Future

The CPEC and the road to Indian Ocean are fraught with serious geopolitical risks. The Chinese naval build-up and mega investment in the Gwadar port has opened a new front of geopolitical struggle between the archrivals India and Pakistan. The Indian Ocean now has become an emerging 'contested space' for India and Pakistan<sup>[85]</sup>. The growing Chinese influence in the Gwadar and Arabian will have serious bearings on the overall geopolitical environment of South Asia. The India's Pulwama

<https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/gwadar-emerging-port-city-or-chinese-colony/> (accessed 28 June 2019).

<sup>70</sup> Sigfried O. Wolf, *The China Pakistan Economic Corridor*, p. 225.

<sup>71</sup> Asim Sajjad Akhtar, 'A Tortured History: Federalism and Democracy in Pakistan.' *Institute of South Asian Studies*. No. 216 (2015), p. 6.

<sup>72</sup> International Crisis Group, 'China Pakistan Economic Corridor: Opportunities And Risks.' *Asia Report*. Brussels. (2018)p. 21.

<sup>73</sup> Andrew Small, 'First Movement: Pakistan and the Belt and Road Initiative.' *Asia Policy*. No. 4. (2017), p. 81.

<sup>74</sup> Muhammad Akbar Notezai, 'Will Balochistan Blow Up China's Belt and Road?', *Foreign Policy*, May 30, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/30/will-balochistan-blow-up-chinas-belt-and-road/>

<sup>75</sup> 20 Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), 'Aspiration for Identity, Integration and Autonomy: Report of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan fact-finding Mission to Gilgit-Baltistan', March, 2017. P. 21-22

<sup>76</sup> Afzal Ali Shigri, 'No Space for GB on CPEC Table', *The Dawn*, January 11, 2016, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1232094> (accessed 20 June 2019).

<sup>77</sup> International Crisis Group, 'China Pakistan Economic Corridor: Opportunities And Risks.' *Asia Report*. Brussels. (2018)p. 21.

<sup>78</sup> 'Why Imran Khan is Unlikely to Make Life Better for Pakistanis.', *The Economist*, January 12, 2019,

<https://www.economist.com/briefing/2019/01/12/why-imran-khan-is-unlikely-to-make-life-much-better-for-pakistanis> (accessed July 3 2019).

<sup>79</sup> Adnan Aamir, 'China Belt and Road plans dismay Pakistan's poorest province.', *Financial Times*, June 14, 2018,

<https://www.ft.com/content/c4b78fe0-5399-11e8-84f4-43d65af59d43> (accessed 15 June 2019)

<sup>80</sup> Maqbool Ahmed, 'The Mysterious Case of Land Acquisitions in Balochistan.', *The Herald*, November 23, 2018, <https://herald.dawn.com/news/1398696> (accessed June 4 2019)

<sup>81</sup> Maqbool Ahmad, 'CPEC: Hope and fears as China comes to Gwadar', *The Herald*, March 14, 2017, <https://herald.dawn.com/news/1153685> (accessed June 4 2019)

<sup>82</sup> 'Pakistan PM Khan hit by Strikes over IMF Programme.', *Financial Times*, July 14, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/a49fa9d6-a622-11e9-984c-fac8325aaa04> accessed 16 June 2019

<sup>83</sup> Small, 'First Movement', op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>84</sup> 'CPEC Stands on Shaky Legal Ground: European Researcher', *Business Standard*, July 18, 2019, [https://wap.business-standard.com/article-amp/news-ani/cpec-stands-on-shaky-legal-ground-european-researcher-119071800766\\_1.html?\\_\\_twitter\\_impression=true](https://wap.business-standard.com/article-amp/news-ani/cpec-stands-on-shaky-legal-ground-european-researcher-119071800766_1.html?__twitter_impression=true)

<sup>85</sup> Frankopan, *The New Silk Roads*, op. cit, p.131.

style military attacks in Pakistan and the revoking of Kashmir's autonomous status presents a larger picture of the overall changing geopolitical dynamics. Robert D. Kaplan's notion that the greater connectivity through advancement of technology will exasperate the geopolitical flashpoints and the conflict in one region will affect the overall geopolitical landscape. "The world now is on a taut string as never before. You pluck one part of the web, the whole networks vibrates <sup>[86]</sup>." In the case of South Asia, the connectivity through CPEC would make the issues of disputed borders and territories more volatile and would give impetus to arms race in the region. India claimed CPEC violated her sovereignty as it passed through disputed territories. When Sino-Pakistan in 1964 made a secret agreement of connectivity between Xinjiang and Gilgit and when the plan was materialized in the form of working on the construction of Karakoram Highway in 1967 then Indian government strongly objected to it. The Karakoram Highway changed the strategic outlook of the Northern frontiers and provided a main link of connectivity between Islamabad and Central Asia <sup>[87]</sup>. The India's abrogation of special status of Kashmir may be viewed as a reaction to the ongoing geopolitical development in the region. Pakistan considers Kashmir as a jugular vein and vowed to defend it to the death. Pakistan has realized that India's imperial ambitions are that to take all the territory of Kashmir including that of Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) which is under the control of Pakistan. Imran Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan, gave a clear message to India in his speech: "Modi, you can't enslave Kashmiris and as for your plan in AJK to teach Pakistan a lesson, be ready, I repeat we will counter your brick with a stone <sup>[88]</sup>." The rising tension between the nuclear states may escalate into a grave regional crisis, given the changing geopolitical scenario. Due to the claustrophobic geography, the contested space of Indian Ocean has made contested space on the Himalayas and Kashmir more critical than it was ever before. The India has a backing of the US because of China factor. The US considers China as a strategic rival and India as an ally and bulwark power against China.

## 7. Conclusion

The geo-strategic completion over the Western shores of Indian Ocean due to CPEC will intensify the geopolitical rivalry between India and Pakistan. CPEC will make the border dispute between the arch-rival nuclear power states more volatile. The reason is that due to the communication revolution and technology the 'world map is now smaller and more claustrophobic, so that territory is more ferociously contested, and every regional conflict interacts with every other as never before <sup>[89]</sup>.' China has been using the territory of Pakistan to extend its imperial power to the Western shores of Indian Ocean to project power in the Arabian Sea, Strait of Hormuz, and East Africa up to the shores of Cape Hope. As China feels secured internally and faced no serious threats to its western border, it has concentrated its power to control maritime sea lanes in the Indo-

Pacific. China has an ambition to control the seas since the Cheng Ho expeditions. But, U.S and India are committed to prevent the rise of China as a hegemonic power. US have a geopolitical interest to prevent the rise of China and will go any length to contain it. Washington behaves towards China the way it contained USSR in the twentieth century. Both India and U.S have strategic concerns over CPEC as they view it a security threat to their power in the Indo-Pacific. Further, India considers geopolitical development of CPEC as a threat to its sovereignty. CPEC has put in perils the India's Monroe Doctrine of the Indian Ocean. Further, CPEC has been passing disputed territories which made it fraught with geopolitical risks. The contested space of the Western shores between the rival states will make the border disputes a flashpoint of conflicts. The 'geography of conflict' between Pakistan and India is building up due to the geopolitical nature of CPEC. The Scott D. Sagan, a nuclear security analyst, aptly said: "Future military crises in South-Asia are likely to be nuclear crises <sup>[90]</sup>." The geopolitical implications of CPEC have been ignored by Pakistan's security analysts and state media narrative. In the age of populism and nationalism the intense security competition and ongoing cold war will have serious repercussion for the security and peace in South Asia.

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