

# CHINESE VISION OF ONE BELT ONE ROAD AND STRATEGIC DIMENSIONS OF CHINA PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR

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*"Whoever controls the Indian Ocean dominates Asia. This ocean is the key to the seven seas in the twenty-first century, the destiny of the world will be decided in these waters".<sup>1</sup>*

Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan

## Abstract

Since last three decades, China has successfully adopted foreign policy of non-confrontation and has laid undiluted emphasis in pursuit of her political and economic interests. Resultantly, China has emerged as second largest economy of the world. One of the most fascinating manifestations of China's rise is the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, running overland along the Silk Route Economic Belt (SREB) and through the seas along Maritime Silk Road (MSR).

**Keywords:** China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Land Bridge, Strategic Patience, Game Changer.

## Introduction

In pursuit of her national objectives<sup>2</sup>, China has successfully explored alternatives and working on regional economic connectivity. To protect her economic interest, China is keenly integrating shoreline nations of the region. CPEC is OBOR's<sup>3</sup> hinge and the first of its six envisaged corridors. Based on only a small part of total OBOR investment, CPEC is a multi-sector development framework. China's gains from CPEC are likely to be a whole lot more than its investment. For Pakistan, CPEC promises to bring huge economic and geo-strategic spin-offs.

Competing interests between China and US will lead to assertive behaviours in pursuance of geo-strategic interests. US rebalancing Policy has impacted geo-politics of entire region including ASEAN, Japan and India. Pakistan enjoys geo-strategic significance in South Asia; it has traditional ties with China and maintains balanced relations with US as well.

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US rebalancing of Asia vis-a-vis geo-economic ventures<sup>4</sup> of China at one end offers Pakistan greatest opportunity but *places her diplomacy to a great test* warranting wholesome and integrated response.

## Geographical Significance and Regional Geo-Strategic Construct

Integrated oceans spaces in Asia Pacific (AP) and Indian Ocean Region form Indo-Pacific Region, which has smaller sub regions having 60% of the world's population. AP includes Russia, Northeast Asia (Korean Peninsula and

*"Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island commands the world".<sup>1</sup>*

Japan), China, Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Philippines, Cambodia, Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia), Oceania (Australia and the nations of the Pacific from Papua New Guinea east, but not the Malay Archipelago or

Indonesian New Guinea) and South Asia<sup>5</sup>. Whereas, Indian Ocean Region neighbouring Asia in its north, Africa to its west, Indo-China to its east while Antarctica to its south contains fifty one coastal and thirteen landlocked states which include twenty six Indian Ocean Rim states, five Red Sea states, four Persian Gulf states; and in dependent landlocked states it includes Afghanistan, but excludes Central Asian states.<sup>6</sup>

Russia, Western China, Central Asian Republics (CARs), and part of Pakistan and Afghanistan join to form *Mackinder's Heartland* (pivot area). Main heartland, stretching from the Volga to the Yangtze and from the Himalayas to the Arctic is the region which in 1919, Mackinder summarised in his theory as "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island commands the world".<sup>7</sup>



## Strategic Nerve

Five main trade routes navigating through the Lombok, Ombai-Wetar Strait, Makassar Strait, Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea, and six major ice free harbours (Subic of Philippines, Incheon of Korea, Kaohsiung of Taiwan, Shanghai of China, Singapore and Hong Kong) of the world make this region as strategic nerve. The region provides an ideal route to the international trade joining East Asia to Middle East making it a maritime highway “*Super Region*” due to the growing economic, geopolitical and security connections. Out of 5 strategic chokepoints<sup>8</sup> across the globe, Strait of Malacca is the key maritime chokepoint in Asia.<sup>9</sup> Around 70,000 to 80,000 ships in a year (around 600 vessels everyday) passes through this important shipping route that makes around 1/4<sup>th</sup> of world trade.<sup>10</sup> Although The ‘Strait of Sunda and Lombok’ located between Islands of Java and Sumatra; and Bali and Lambok respectively are considered alternative routes to the Strait of Malacca but in addition to adding another 3.5 days of shipping time, the straits have serious navigational and shipping facility issues.

## Economic Hub

Economic developments transform the region into global economic and strategic centre of gravity. The region has 20 economies out of 188 economies of the world with an accumulated GDP of \$67 trillion - 60% of world economic output.<sup>11</sup> Six out of world’s top economies are located in this region with China and Japan are ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> largest economies of the world.<sup>12</sup> It is a logistic lane for oil and gas supplies from Middle East and North Africa. This reliance also creates a sense of vulnerability among the countries in the region which has influenced diplomacy and mutual integration, as well as triggered naval modernization.<sup>13</sup>

Indian Ocean Region continental shelves despite being rich in minerals including Tin, Gold, Uranium, Cobalt, Nickel, Aluminum and Cadmium are yet to be explored - 40 types of raw materials used by US industry are supplied by the Indian Ocean.<sup>14</sup>

## Geo-political Landscape

Economically rising China, ambitious India, assertive Japan, resurgent Russia and US pivot have brought great uncertainties in the Region. Peace and prosperity of the region in specific and of the globe in general is largely

associated with the nature of mutual relations between these major powers. Any mis-calculation or irrationality may turn the Asia-Pacific or Indo-Pacific region a critical flashpoint.<sup>15</sup> Emerging out of Sino-US, Sino-Indian or Indo-Pak affray,

***Control of Strait of Malacca facilitates speedy inter regional shifting of forces from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean Region.***

volatile regional stability has transpired into a complex myriad of wide ranging geo-strategic and geo-economic challenges starting from disputed island and shoals in north China Sea to Gulf of Aden.<sup>16</sup> Control

of Strait of Malacca facilitates speedy inter regional shifting of forces from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean Region. Beijing views US rebalancing approach in league with India focussing on containment of China."

## **Geo-Strategic Construct**

### **US Rebalancing Strategy**

US remains sensitive to rise of any power that can influence geostrategic areas of the world. Maintaining strong influence in Asia-Pacific region is a crucial part of US strategy. The Korean and Vietnam wars are pertinent examples that the US has the tendency to opt for conflict to restore its vision of balance in the region. Post-Cold War, US remained focussed in Euro-Asia and after 9/11 in the Middle East and Afghanistan; meanwhile, China had been consistent in peaceful rise, pursuing its political and economic interests. US took this development as alarm and a potential challenge to her hegemony in the region. Although US has been reinforcing its regional alliances and off late US has taken a clear shift from Euro-Asia to Asia-Pacific with extension to Indo-Pacific. US has devised a strategy that aims at reinforcing the advancement of other nations around China's periphery as a way of "weaving the net" that produces a "moderating effect on Chinese behaviour."

## **Strands of US Policy of Asia Pacific and Indo Pacific Region Diplomatic Dimension**

- Influencing military and trade relations, ensuring access to natural resources and markets and ensuring the security of Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) and maritime checkpoints.
- In Defence strategy and policy, US is considering carefully the changing strategic nature of the Indian Ocean region. Concurrently, it takes a

multi layered and multilateral approach to maritime cooperation In the region to counter China,

- Strengthening diplomatic relations with her allies Japan, South Korea, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia and Australia. Cultivate special relationship with Taiwan, Vietnam and Singapore.
- Growing relations with India, Japan and Australia providing diplomatic leverage to affect the rise of China.

### **Economic Dimension**

- Increased economic collaboration with multilateral institutions such as ASEAN and APEC.
- Pursuing Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) to counter regional trends of greater economic integration, which excludes US.
- Seeking improved economic ties with Japan, Singapore, Myanmar and Indonesia.
- Backing India's "**Look East**" efforts that include Indian renewed dialogue with Japan and Australia with a vision for economic integration and political stability of South and Central Asia, assigning India the role of regional sentinel and net security provider.

### **US Assertive Behaviour**

- Expanding military presence in Asia-Pacific, Australia, New Zealand, and US Security Treaty (ANZUS) has been revived.<sup>17</sup> US is building a naval base in Singapore and establishing military-political partnership with Vietnam.
- Deepening her alliances with South Korea and operationalizing integration to facilitate combined capabilities.
- US and India have agreed on a new 10-year military cooperation agreement "2015 Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship", and have agreed to amplified partnership in maritime security and development of Indian naval muscles.
- In March 2016, the Philippine announced opening of five of her military bases to US forces under the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). These locations also include "Antonio Bautista Air Base" on Palawan Island which is directly adjacent to the disputed Spratly Islands.<sup>18</sup>

- Deployment of US Pacific Command (USPACOM) with the largest of all US naval fleets has been realigned to strengthen its position around Strait of Malacca.

## Chinese Interests in the Region

### Security of SLOCs

Shen Dingli, a professor at Fudan University in Shanghai, asserts that “It is wrong for China to believe that we have no right to set up bases abroad. It is not terrorism or piracy that’s the real threat to China. It’s the ability of other states to block China’s trade routes that poses the greatest threat.”<sup>19</sup> China needs energy security for her economic growth. China is the largest importer of crude oil and gas energy in the world.<sup>20</sup> 80% of Chinese oil imports are shipped through the Straits of Malacca.<sup>21</sup> China considers SLOCs vital for her national interest. Presently, Chinese energy without any effective apparatus for security of her SLOCs is with a serious vulnerability and in any conflict with regional countries or US, supply of oil to China can easily be disrupted.

### Naval Build-up

China is developing navy to extend sea control till second island chain by 2020 and attain blue water navy by 2050.<sup>22</sup> In mid-2015, the latest Chinese Defence White Paper plainly signalled “China’s ambition to become a maritime power and one not confined to East Asian waters”.<sup>23</sup> China is already becoming much more assertive in its maritime and territorial claims, indicating its rightful concerns.



## Chinese Views of US Rebalancing Strategy

China views US realignment of its connexion with South Korea and Japan as crafting an anti-China alliance in Northeast Asia. China takes US invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, Indo-US strategic partnership with India and the recent nuclear deal with Iran as counteracting the Chinese influence in South Asia. Zbigniew Brzezinski in his book "The Grand Chessboard" is of the view:

"US is burying hatchet with Iran to control / enhance influence in Eurasia. For America, the Chief geopolitical prize is Eurasia and America's global primacy is directly dependent on how long and how effectively its preponderance on the Eurasian continent is sustained. It is not in America's interest to perpetuate American-Iranian hostility."<sup>24</sup>

## China's Response Strategy

China has the potential to become world's largest economy by 2025; China's military capability may be close to matching that of the US by 2045.<sup>25</sup> This necessitates China to adopt concrete measures to counter US Rebalancing.

## Maritime Silk Road Initiative, OBOR and Open Sea Protection

In 2013, China embarked upon an elaborate, extensive geo-political and geo-economic strategy that facilitates its peaceful rise coupled with articulating a indirect response to US strategic initiatives in Asia Pacific. It is commonly named as the "21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR) and One Belt One Road (OBOR) (comprising 6 land corridors)". Main salients of OBOR are as under:-

- Land infrastructure development includes construction of approximately 80,000 km of Belt, rail links, with a major route running from western China to Russia and Europe. Other routes join Southern China to South East Asia and Xinjiang province has been linked with Pakistan's port of Gwadar.
- The Sea route focuses on the development and extension of port facilities along string of pearls particularly in South East Asia from China to Europe, and China to Kenya to integrate Africa.
- Beijing is allocating up to \$1.4 trillion to finance wide array of infrastructure projects. Besides the fund releasing, China is

endeavouring to lower or remove trade barriers and other obstacles to economic integration with regional countries.

- An initial \$50 billion has been provided to the recently established Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which is projected to have at least \$100 billion in funds. Silk Road Funds have already released \$40 billion for projects in Central Asia. China is financing \$46 billion in CPEC. China has already made an initial contribution of \$10 billion to the BRICS-led New Development Bank. The China Development Bank has declared that it will fund up to \$1 trillion in OBOR projects.<sup>26</sup>

The venture envisions development of massive infrastructure to link China by land and sea with Eurasia and Africa. China is making enormous investment in infrastructure expansions as well as increasing trade and economic assistances. Chinese President Xi Jinping announced \$40 billion Silk Road funds in November 2014 for development of MSR.<sup>27</sup>

## **India's Emerging Role in Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Indian Endeavours**

The Indian geo-strategic location is akin to a large aircraft carrier jutting out in Indian Ocean and gives her a complex mix of opportunities as well as critical security threats. With 7% economic growth rate, India is one of the emerging economies of the world.<sup>28</sup> With over 90% sea based oil supplies and possessing sizable waters of Bay of Bengal, Indian Sea and Arabian Sea; India considers Indian Ocean as backyard. In addition to protect over 7,000 Km long coastal boundaries, India endeavours to maintain regional hegemony; protect important SLOCs for trade; ensure sustained development and exploration of marine resources; and block the undue influence of extra-regional powers in Indian Ocean Region. Terms coined in reference to “*Look East*”, “*Act East*”, “*Look West*”, “Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)”, “*Indian Ocean Zone of Peace (IOZOP)*” and “*Indian Ocean Naval Symposium*” coupled with Indo-US, Indo-Japan and Indo-Australian diplomatic rapprochements are few strategic initiatives for meeting the grand policy means in Indian Ocean Region. ‘Chahbahar Port’ of Iran is critical to India for counter-balancing Chinese, alongside seeking access to energy rich Iran and open ‘*North South Trade Corridor*’ for reaching up to Central Asian States.<sup>29</sup>



## **Indian Strategic Orientation**

India's strategy for the Indo-Pacific region draws convergences with the US pivot as it allows her leverages in Indian Ocean and check Pakistani and Chinese naval presence acting as a policeman for maritime stability. She espouses a permanent blue-water naval presence in both the western and eastern theatres of the Indian Ocean. India's maritime sea denial is predominantly oriented towards the importance of denying China's South China Sea Fleet an operational domain in the Indian Ocean.

## **Russian Interests in the region**

Since 2009, Russia has placed Asia Pacific at priority of its foreign policy. Russia is pursuing hard to develop Siberia and the Far East provinces. With rise in global economic predominance of Asia-Pacific, Russia has revived political and economic cooperation with regional countries. Such revival forms basis of multipolarity which worries US the most. Russia has been associated within framework of the 2001 Russian-Chinese Treaty of Friendship. Russo-Chinese relations have grown deeper after EU imposed sanctions on Russia in result of Ukraine crisis. Moscow has initiated cooperation with Beijing on energy, defence, and agricultural trade and investments.

## **Endeavours of Asian Pacific Countries**

### **Japan**

Japan is also following an assertive foreign policy towards China. Tokyo is considering transfer of defence equipment and latest weaponry to the Philippines. Japanese and Filipino troops have conducted number of joint maritime exercises near disputed waters of South China Sea. In April 2015, US and Japan issued defence cooperation guidelines which allow greater Japanese autonomy in security affairs while presenting China as the competing power. Indo-Japan enhanced security and economic partnership and Japanese establishment of base in Djibouti is more of Indo-Pacific in character.

### **ASEAN Countries**

Despite historical ties with US, South East Asian states seek out Chinese economic integration. However, some of these countries may encourage permanent Indo-US involvement for balancing out Chinese dominance.

## Australia

Australia-US alliance has grown further. Australia has strong diplomatic relations with Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia. Its relations with Japan and South Korea have also been strengthened in couple of years. Under Australia-US Free Trade Agreement 2005, trade between two countries has increased by 74% and services trade by 48%.<sup>30</sup> US and Australia signed a partnership agreement to provide improved intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities.

## Overview of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on CPEC Long Term Plan was signed on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2013 in Beijing. It is a 15-year-long project to be completed in 2030, and a comprehensive developmental framework. CPEC is breath-taking in its ambition because, in one giant leap, it aspires to convert an existing road into a multimodal economic corridor<sup>31</sup> involving investment of over \$ 46 Billion in energy, infrastructure and industrial projects in addition to development of Gwadar Port.

CPEC, a trans-regional project, will benefit three billion people of the region through enhanced regional connectivity and it promises positive impact on all regional countries. If this enormous potential is turned into opportunity it will enhance geographical linkages with recurrent exchanges of growth and people to people contact, enhancing trade activity, producing and moving energy to have more optimal businesses. The enhancement of co-operation by win-win model will result in well connected, integrated region of shared destiny, harmony and development. CPEC does promise to become an unprecedented opportunity to enhance Pakistan - China military, economic, political, societal and environmental security<sup>32</sup> but this monumental opportunity is wrapped in multiple layers of threats.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), being one of the first amongst the six OBOR corridors, is receiving a Chinese investment worth 46 billion dollars and a further injection of \$ 1.6 billion<sup>33</sup> agreed in August 2015. Construction of the CPEC is already well underway and gaining momentum with hundreds of kilometers of roads already constructed. The projects include more than \$ 1 billion worth of projects to bring Gwadar Port to international standards; \$ 33.8 billion and 16000 MW worth of energy projects;<sup>34</sup> \$ 11.8 billion in

infrastructure projects; and long term industrial cooperation.<sup>35</sup> CPEC spans 15 years, 4 phases, 51 projects, aligned along 3 routes.

### **Strategic Importance of Gwadar Sea Port**

Gwadar as western most pearl in Indian Ocean, effectively dominates Strait of Hormuz and serve as most critical outpost from Indian Ocean to Middle East. It is a natural gateway for an important artery of OBOR via Pakistan to Western China and via Afghanistan<sup>36</sup> to Central Asia, projecting Pakistan as a 'South Asian Gate Keeper for Southern, Central and Eastern Asia'. This land route to China is aimed at enhancing energy security and reducing China's dependence on the Malacca Strait chokepoint. The importance of Gwadar Port has further increased manifold with geo-strategic construct evolving world order and energy based politics.

Exploiting gains in present milieu, Pakistan is rapidly elevating Gwadar project. From a defence perspective, Pakistan Navy would find it easier to operate closer to the Gulf thus enjoying relative advantage against the Indian Navy. China would be able to monitor her SLOCs originating from Persian Gulf.<sup>37</sup>

Gwadar is the pivot of this corridor and the most viable and economical access for landlocked Afghanistan, Central Asia connecting Asia Pacific region with Indian Ocean and Europe through a combination of sea and shortest land access for 20 countries. Trade routes have historically been a source of great social interaction. Christianity, Buddhism and Islam all spread through traders but with the passage of time some became less frequented and ultimately died such as Silk Road and Amber Route. CPEC's utility is projected to be enduring especially in view of its connectivity with MSR (akin to Grand Trunk Road paved by Sher Shah Suri from Delhi to Central Asia) as it is the shortest and the best alignment from China, Asia to West and East to Mediterranean.

### **Comparison with other Corridors of OBOR**

In Chinese OBOR enterprise, southern route is the best and the most critical gateway. Some of the distinct advantages being offered by CPEC over others routes are as under:-

- Dictated by geography, CPEC figures out as the shortest as well as the most viable route getting integrated into Maritime Silk Route (MSR) through Indian Ocean as a flagship project. Through CPEC, Pakistan in

fact becomes a '*Land Bridge*' or a '*Modern Day Suez Canal*' with unrestricted and assured availability of (the only available deep sea port in the region) port facilities for Chinese trade and quest for cheaper energy import (Chinese progress is dependent on energy import as China imports approximately 60% of its energy from gulf region.)

- CPEC assumes fundamental importance in sustaining Chinese economic miracle of sustained double digit GDP growth in highly competitive markets. With the shortest land and sea access to China, CPEC has the potential to completely replace the current trade route for south/west Asia and Europe involving only 2000 Km of land journey unlike journey of 4000-5000 Kilometers from eastern port cities to Uighur region of western China and reducing the long arduous sea voyage through Malacca Straits.
- It is only CPEC which connects Central Asia with the South and West Asia and onwards to Middle East, Africa and Europe.
- CPEC has the unique potential to sustain Chinese growth by utilizing youth bulge of Pakistan with median age of 25. Moreover, Chinese major worries of environmental degradation and meeting international obligations for limiting greenhouse effects can be addressed by utilizing sparsely populated vast rocky landscape of Balochistan with contiguity to Indian Ocean.

## **Perspective of Global Players over Chinese Economic Ventures**

Although Chinese economic ventures including CPEC are nor in direct conflagration with any of the regional country and propose win-win alignment yet, there exists global geo-economic and geo-political divergences. Some of the most relevant global players perspectives with reference to CPEC are as under: -

- **USA:** The larger geopolitical context of CPEC is characterized by western concerns about the rise of China as a potential challenger to the US led global order. Hence US will be inclined to view CPEC as essentially a geopolitical response to its dominance and its pivot to Asia.

This antagonistic perception may lead to negative consequences that Pakistan will have to be prepared to deal with.

- **Russia:** Resurgent Russia is balancing eastward and the intrinsic leverages and economic imperatives of Pakistan, China and Russia seem to supplement each other well.
- **EU:** Despite its close geopolitical affinity with the US, EU is likely to continue to maintain a largely development centric foreign policy based on positive economic engagement with China. Chinese have offered a so appealing model that hardly a country can resist. EU itself is a legendary example for intra-regional connectivity. In a significant development, the United Kingdom has become a partner in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and agreed to provide \$121.6 million in grant to fund construction of Burhan-Havelian Expressway, which falls on the northern route of the corridor).

## Regional Perspectives

CPEC development framework's politico-economic ramifications offers enhanced regional cooperation, wider and deeper socio-economic development and likely to positively affect security situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Nations afflicted with simmering socio-economic, religio-ethnic and political conflicts in Central Asia and Eastern Europe are viewing this Chinese initiative as an apt response and viewing economic integration with China as one pill for most of their ills through intensification of globalisation. Nevertheless, some of the regional players view it as an endeavour to marginalize their influence in the region. Stiffest resistance from negative quarters is envisaged during the initial development stage of CPEC. Varying perspectives of regional countries about the CPEC framework is covered below:-

- **India:** In strenuous response, India has publicly opposed CPEC development and objected the alignment of route passing from the so called disputed territory of Gilgit Baltistan. India has repeatedly asked China to respect other's strategic interests and called for specific actions to "*prevent growth of negative perception*".<sup>38</sup> Moreover, Indian heavy investment of US \$ 500 Million<sup>39</sup> in phase-1 of development of Chahbahar is being considered as counter weight to Gwadar.
- **Afghanistan:** Afghanistan may evade internal collapse, but volatile internal security situation is not likely to have a stabilizing effect on the

region. Relentless violence in Afghanistan will continue to impasse the expansionary potential of CPEC to Central Asia. Therefore, it is necessary to intensify Afghan-reconciliation process and efforts leading to stability. The prospective trickle down effects of CPEC in the shape of its lateral expansion would definitely fetch positive dividends for Afghanistan. Likewise, Chinese stakes in the corridor and her relevance for Afghan regime are also likely to attract positive response from Kabul.

- **Iran:** While our long-term cooperation with Iran will remain hostage to the wider Middle East turmoil, lifting of nuclear sanctions offers some opportunities for cooperation around the CPEC framework. On 21 September 2016, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani in meeting with PM Nawaz Sharif during United Nation General Assembly (UNGA) session and later on 4 October 2016, Consul General of Iran Mohammad Hossein Bani Assadi during his visit to Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) have publicized Iran desire to be part of CPEC.
- **CARs:** In terms of regional integration, Russia's enhanced engagement with Central Asian states and Afghanistan increases Pakistan's relevance as a regional hub and opens up possibilities for a meaningfully multi-vector foreign policy.

### **Strategic Dimensions of OBOR / CPEC**

Since its announcement, OBOR initiative is acting as a catalyst for heralding some of the important regional developments. Some of the fundamental benefits of this mega enterprise are as under:-

- Chinese OBOR vision aims at harvesting the dividends of globalization through strategic interconnectedness in Asia, Europe and Africa. OBOR envisages connecting hydro carbon supply reservoirs, manufacturing giants, consumer communities and demand nodes for realizing the dream of 21<sup>st</sup> century as Asian century also being branded as the Marshall Plan of Asia and harbinger of new centers of power.
- OBOR with multiple connecting off shoots is expected to foster regional integration in South, East, West and Central Asia by connecting developing countries with the developed countries in a strategic interconnectedness model as stakeholders (with a win-win situation, instead becoming a cold war client, satellite or a dominion) like never before.

- Regional integration fostered by OBOR can end up geo-political mess by projecting geo-economics over geo-politics in South Asia as well similar to other economically integrated regions.
- OBOR / CPEC give multiple options (strategic flexibility and cushion for conflict avoidance) to China in pursuit of her vision of 'Peaceful Rise' circumventing Pacific / South China Sea.
- With the baggage of century of humiliation at the back of mind, so far Chinese have outwitted US and rest of the world in focused pursuit of her national security imperatives through successful mitigation of threats at policy tier (avoiding conflict) by coining universally appealing visions of 'Harmonious World' and 'Peaceful Rise'. OBOR / CPEC becomes tangible and apt manifestation of Sun Tzu famous maxim saying, ***For to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.***<sup>40</sup> This by all means is a strategically brilliant use of soft power and synchronized application of statecraft / elements of national power a socio-economic response to the US dominated world order.
- OBOR / CPEC is an apt example of guiding principal of Chinese Foreign Policy and Confucius ideals as alluded by Deng Xiaoping's counsel of 'Doing Things Calmly' reflecting China's official stance of a 'Defensive Security Outlook' in the face of all kinetic or non-kinetic threats.<sup>41</sup>

## **Challenges for Pakistan Emanating From Chinese OBOR Vision**

In the context of Chinese rise and its challenge to western hegemony, CPEC has a pivotal role to play. Formidable challenges emanating from Pakistan's integration into Chinese OBOR Vision due to its irreplaceable strategic location can only be understood with geo-strategic prism. Prima facie OBOR / CPEC is a benign economic enterprise; nevertheless, facilitating China in her elevation to a super power status heralds a multitude of inevitable and critical geo-strategic challenges. Some of the important challenges are discussed in succeeding paragraphs.

Zhu Rongji former Prime minister of China laid the foundation stone of Gwadar Port along with General Pervez Musharraf on 23 Mar 2002.<sup>42</sup> His view was that every super power had access to the sea on all sides of its borders like the USA has an east coast and a west coast. For China, Pakistan is its West coast.

Thus economically, Pakistan can be to China what California is to the USA. Pakistan is China's West Coast and no other country can play that role; hence need to seamlessly integrate the economies of Pakistan and China.<sup>43</sup>

### **Fundamental Importance of Pakistan's Geo-Strategic Location in Chinese Response to US Rebalancing in Asia and Pacific**

Freedom of navigation in Asia Pacific and protection of global commons with concomitant containment of China through trans-pacific partnerships and active military signature is a strategic imperative for US. Pakistan by virtue of its geo-strategic location offering the most viable alternative to South China Sea as well as Malacca strait dilemma gets inextricably linked in geo-strategic calculus of Pacific as a pivotal state in Chinese response to US strategic encirclement of China. Harvesting of geo-strategic dividend of Pakistan's location by Chinese is bound to precipitate some serious consequences as it directly contributes towards virtual death of US Pivot to Asia and Pacific. Much more proactive response than mere demonstration of '*Strategic Patience*' (as Pakistan is no more exclusive from Pacific calculus) would be required (Pakistan will either have to intelligently balance out and address US concerns with a proactive diplomacy or brave out US wrath, much desired by its Eastern neighbour. It is also widely believed that India is intelligently manipulating Sino-US rivalry to its own advantage). Oversimplified view of CPEC being projected by some quarters as a simple and win-win rhetoric (for economic benefit only carrying no hidden agenda) for all needs a reality check. Some of the ramifications for Pakistan may unfold as under:-

### **Kinetic Challenges**

- Increased violence on our Eastern Border (Line of Actual Contact, Line of Control and Working Boundary).
- Increased terrorist activities all over the country especially in GB and Balochistan.
- Violent provocations by ANA or ISAF / NATO on western border for causing national embarrassment and giving a policy message to Pakistan. Prevailing Afghan conundrum suits those averse to CPEC for breeding and projecting insecurity.
- With Modi's hawkish approach, India will exercise all her leverages on Pakistan's eastern border, west (using Afghan bullies) and south (using



Iran and Indian Naval presence in Indian ocean) coupled with water aggression to penalize Pakistan for joining OBOR and constructing CPEC (Modi's brazen intent can be deciphered from his speeches being a major foreign policy vehicle).

- Increased signature of Extra Regional Forces, Indian Navy and US Navy in Indian Ocean.
- Luke warm international response to Indian hoax of surgical strikes in Kashmir by terming it as new normal may encourage Indian side for undertaking such venture in future.
- Targeted violence against Chinese nationals working on CPEC related projects or residing in Pakistan and outright support of East Turkestan Islamic Movement by hostile intelligence agencies.

### **Policy/Non-Kinetic Challenges**

Pakistan is at crossroads in balancing out competing strategic interests of key regional and global players.

### **Managing Derailing Forces**

It is estimated that once successfully completed/functional, the CPEC project is expected to lift Pakistan's economic and geo-political ranking with envisaged increase in GDP by 15%. Being a 'Game Changer' for region in general and for Pakistan in particular; CPEC becomes a nightmare and an appalling enterprise for those inimical to envisage a financially and strategically autonomous and stable Pakistan, hence expected to keep germinating/cultivating troubles consistently.

Not Russia but China is unambiguously figuring out as a potential challenger to US dominated hegemonic world order and by far the most formidable post-cold war challenge for US led global order US commitment to calibrate China's rise through a complex myriad of politics, diplomacy, strategic and economic and cultural leverages is no more secretive as US strategic foresight views OBOR/CPEC only a means to end and not an end in itself. John J. Mearsheimer in his book, "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics," asserts that 'the most dangerous states in the international system are continental powers with large armies.' Nevertheless, US considered Chinese threat manageable as long as it remained confined to land and Chinese ambitions of building a blue water navy did not become public.<sup>44</sup>

## **Handling Indian Offensive Posturing**

Since getting identified as one of the key state in Chinese OBOR enterprise, Pakistan is being projected as potential global turnaround story. With enhanced economic and strategic relevance, stable Pakistan has always been an enigma for India. Therefore, alongside US, most of the external challenges get linked to Indian opposition with tacit support from actors averse to China's rise. Sensing a serious setback to Indian design of isolating Pakistan, growing Indian political and diplomatic frustration is already getting clearly manifested in the form of increased endeavours for fuelling instability and violence in Pakistan.

In a bid to regulate Chinese aspirations, thriving Indo-US Strategic nexus is adding fuel to already volatile regional situation. Massive US military and civilian aid is rapidly unsettling regional stability and balance of power in South Asia.

## **Accentuated Regional Dissensions and Aggravated Geo-Political Alignment Dilemma for Pakistan**

Somewhat similar to the legacy of cold war division, regional convergences and divergences have started getting played in more unequivocal manner than ever. Setback to US efforts for securing NSG membership for India due to Chinese opposition is a case in point.

Dilemma for Pakistan is far more complex than others as it has to manage US / west as an ally in global war on terror on one hand and perennially belligerent India on other hand while pursuing its thriving strategic partnership with China.

Iranian legacy of projecting Chahbahar as a strategic competitor and a viable alternative to Gwadar now stands a better chance of success than yesteryears of isolation/sanctions. Iran is proactively pursuing bilateral and multilateral international engagements including development of Chahbahar port by India since lifting of sanctions as a matter of policy.

## **Conclusions**

CPEC poses serious and sustained tests for policy makers in Pakistan. The first few years of mega enterprise of OBOR / CPEC are critical for its success. Nevertheless, after successfully negotiating the testing time, the world at large is expected to reconcile and make peace with its success.

This paper flags the geo-strategic challenges faced by China and Pakistan so that contours of a wholesome Sino-Pak response can be figured out based on shared threat perception.

Pakistan as well as China together should realize each other's obligations, compulsions and limitations in mitigating threats and challenges en-route by forces inimical to this mega enterprise. No amount of diplomatic skills can be qualified as enough for managing challenges and harvesting dividends of this super strategic venture.

CPEC is undoubtedly a '*Game Changer*' and a solid foundation to finally consolidate over 6 decades of Pak-China strategic partnership with a shared world-view. Stint of interesting time seems to be in full swing, wherein slogans of "Pak-China friendship being branded as sweeter than honey, higher than Himalayas and deeper than oceans" has started getting manifested into irreversible geo-political, geo-strategic and geo-economic integration with a shared Pak-China destiny in the form of OBOR/CPEC.

With materialization of CPEC, much awaited time for leveraging Pakistan's geo-strategic location with contiguity to Heartland as well as Rimland has arrived as India's further growth is hostage to trade/energy transit. This leverage can be used to incentivise India for resolving all pending issues bilaterally.

Successful operationalization of CPEC may not leave any other option with Indo-US nexus except to reconcile with ground realities and bandwagon the regional integration drive for reaping economic dividends converting Pak-China win-win into a multi-win.<sup>45</sup> Hence a lot of resilience during testing times would be expected out of both the partners till logical fruition of enterprising CPEC venture.

With the preceding debate on OBOR/CPEC, it can be safely concluded that this is not merely an economic enterprise but a '*Comprehensive National Security Undertaking*' and a magic pill for most of the ills (if not all) for both the countries surfing the tide of globalization through strategic connectedness instead of containment for achieving ends of national security. While CPEC has added to Pak-China security demands in the short term, its successful development will surely enhance comprehensive national security for both in the long term. Comprehensive security concept based on geo-economics and shared

stakes is a more sustainable model than conventional security based on realpolitik and geopolitics. Trading with India and other competing powers including US as the largest trade partner amply demonstrates Chinese multilateralism. It is envisaged to be a mix of conventional and unconventional means of achieving ends of national security.

## NOTES

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