

Indian narrative on CPEC: A historical perspective

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The China Pakistan Economic corridor (CPEC) is a mega development project proposed to link South Western Pakistan Gwadar port with Chinese northwestern sovereign region of Xinjiang. The corridor is aimed to connect via strong communication networks across Pakistan and Xinjiang. Estimated to complete in a span of three years this giant development corridor will be a strategic game changer in the region by making Pakistan economically stronger than ever before.

CPEC Project has raised many concerns in the Indian establishment, most of which have their source in India's relations with the Chinese since the 1950's and with Pakistan ever since the two countries came into being in 1947, after winning independence from the British. So far the Indian Government has raised objections to the unveiling of the planned corridor that links Gilgit Baltistan, to Chinese Kashgar via the majestic Karakoram highway, and then to the Pakistani mainland, through its North-Eastern realm and down to its Arabian Sea port of Gwadar.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has showed his fears over CPEC plan during a 90 minute session with Chinese president Xi Jinping at seventh BRICS summit concluded recently in Ufa, Russia. Modi, has repeatedly shown his grievances to quit CPEC in the recent past right from unveiling of the mega project.

China is considering the rich energy and natural resources accessible to be exploited in Central Asia. A United States finding in 2010 calculated that Afghanistan is sitting onto mineral resources worth of one \$ trillion. Some of these abundant natural resources ores disseminate into Pakistan's Balochistan and this partnership could be utilized to transport these resources beside oil and gas.

Indian official position so far is one that of displeasure of a permanent link-route, an international highway, inside a territory it claims as part of its Jammu & Kashmir State. This is a clear and present vis a vis the Chinese viewing the entire J&K as a disputed territory, and virtually appreciating Pakistan's claim on it. And this is not the only catalyst straining Sino-Indian relations, across the long border shared by the two countries, from Greater Himalayas in the Ladakh & Himachal region to the eastern end, which was previously termed North-Eastern Frontier Area (NEFA). The two Asian giants have fought a war (1962) and many skirmishes over their rival claims on the territory, Chinese claims seek to reject Indian claims given these territories were either absorbed recently, Ladakh by the Dogras in 1834, and the NEFA territories by the British, in 1914 if you trust the British, or 1935, if you trust the Chinese. Indian territorial claims are therefore recent and a result of imperialism, which India itself claims to have won independence from.

While the fate of the many territories of Jammu & Kashmir State couldn't be determined in 1947 or subsequently, regardless the wars that Indians and Pakistanis fought over it, or even the militant struggle that erupted in the Kashmir valley in the 1980's, growing through decades of Indian misrule in that state and in part also thanks to the growing influence of political Islam, which arrived with the defeat of the Soviets in Afghanistan and most importantly the Iranian revolution, that saw certain geo-political dynamics gathering momentum, and are now seriously threatening peace and stability of countries from Tunisia to Afghanistan. And in 1963, when the border agreement between China and Pakistan had 5000

square miles of territory ceded to the Chinese, which is the Karakoram region, the Indian government protested strongly. In a nutshell, the problems which the Indian government has, arises from its view of the territory now held by the Chinese as its own and the Chinese counter-claim over the territory held by India, of course, in addition to the Indo-Pak tussle over Kashmir. The following statement by the Indian Foreign Minister, Sushma Swaraj, defines the Indian position:

“Government has seen reports with regard to China and Pakistan being involved in infrastructure building activities in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), including construction of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Government has conveyed its concerns to China about their activities in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, and asked them to cease such activities.”

While the three states have continued with their long-held positions on border and territorial disputes, with only Pakistan and China converging towards addressing economic and commercial opportunities, given the potential that collaboration across the two countries holds, there is a need to some degree of rapprochement, in equations where India is a participant. China, a major economic power, with a strong manufacturing base, which caters to virtually the entire world, is looking for delivery routes to its markets in the west, in Africa West Asia and Europe and also markets within Central & South Asia. And there are possibilities of trade of commodities, goods and materials, produced and available in the countries of these two regions, that can boost the prospects of commerce and economic cooperation.

Such cooperation stands to benefit the populations in the region, and possibly even revive the old silk route, which continued until during the Mongol period. While it is true that there are serious differences over disputed territories in the CPEC, however it can create an environment that will address many issues, mostly economic, and also promote trade, helping re-mediate long pending issues. Kashmir is the centerpiece to the future of the CPEC project and its prospects for bringing peace and economic growth, advancement of living standards, making remote and far-flung regions accessible.

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