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Issue Brief

Providing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor a Security Blanket

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The \$46 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) megaproject is said to be a game changer that could promote and enhance prosperity, growth and development not only in Pakistan and the Western part of China but also the entire region. However, there are many security-related threats related to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Uighur militants from the Xinjiang province in Western China under the banner of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) have targeted Chinese citizens, workers and engineers in the past. On the Pakistan side, the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other militant outfits have been targeting Pakistani population and entities. Pakistan's security forces have persistently fought these militants in the North Waziristan Agency with the commencement of the military operation Zarb-e-Azb in July 2014, which has significantly resulted in weakening the operational capability of the ETIM. Chinese President Xi Jinping acknowledged this during his visit to Pakistan in May 2015 and lauded the Pakistani military's efforts and termed the result of the operation a 'game changer' for peace and stability in the region. The Chinese President vowed to stand by Pakistan in all its endeavours and fight against terrorism.

Another source of security threat to the corridor are small Baloch elements, who feel that the various development projects in the province will have no benefits for the province. Thus, there is a need to reduce the power play among tribal heads and forge consensus among different political forces to ensure that the CPEC is seen as a win-win project that would primarily benefit the people of Balochistan.

India's objections to the CPEC openly expressed by the Indian leadership also pose a threat to this mega project. Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said at a press conference on May 31 that Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to Beijing on May 15 conveyed India's reservations on the CPEC to Chinese Premier Li Keqiang stating that it was "unacceptable" for India. On May 5 at the General Headquarters in Rawalpindi, the armed forces of Pakistan met and determined that RAW was behind the terror attacks in Pakistan. Foreign Secretary Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry confirmed this during a press conference on May 14 and stated that Pakistan was cognizant of India's campaign against the project and its plans of sabotaging the entire venture. China has strongly dismissed Indian apprehensions about the CPEC saying it is purely a project for economic cooperation between China and Pakistan. India's objections are baseless. But they do raise questions about its intentions as well as about its plans to undermine the project. Pakistan has to be prepared.

On April 21 the army announced that a new force named 'Special Security Division' which will be headed by an officer of Major-General rank will be formed for the protection of the CPEC projects and the

Chinese workers associated with them. The announcement came after Chinese President Xi Jinping's trip to Islamabad in April. The 10,000 force of security personnel has been trained to guard more than 15,000 Chinese workers on this route. They will be deployed to guard key projects linked from Hyderabad to Karachi and Gwadar through the East Bay Expressway along the coastal line.

In addition to these steps, on May 13 at an All Party Meeting chaired by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, a consensus was reached among Pakistan's political leadership to set up a special bicameral parliamentary committee for supervision of the CPEC project. One of its main purposes will be to address the concerns of all the provinces and political parties regarding this project.

On June 10, the Chief of Army Staff, General Raheel Sharif met the Chinese Vice Minister of Ministry of State Security Dong Haizhou at the General Headquarters in Rawalpindi where he assured the Chinese guest that maximum security had been put in place for the completion of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. On the same day an agreement was signed between China Ship Trading Company (CSTC) and Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA) in Islamabad. According to it China will provide six patrol ships to Pakistan Maritime Security Agency for the protection of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and to prevent illegal activities in the sea that threatened to foil this project.

On July 25, General Raheel Sharif visited Panjgur and Turbat in Balochistan and inspected a part of under-construction road network as part of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) by the Frontier Works Organisation (FWO). During the briefing, the COAS was apprised that as many as 11 units of FWO have been employed in Balochistan for construction of 870km long stretch of roads at five different locations simultaneously. Out of these, 502km of roads have already been completed. These roads are important because they will provide a link to the Gawadar Port with the rest of Pakistan at Chaman and the Indus Highway. The army chief applauded the FWO's efforts and emphasised the importance of the corridor in bringing prosperity to the region. He also added that Pakistan was well aware of the threats and campaigns against the project and avowed that the armed forces were prepared to turn this corridor into a reality under all circumstances.

The Pakistan leadership has strongly stated that it is aware of Indian plans to sabotage the CPEC and has vowed that along with China it is committed to implementing the project. A better understanding between Islamabad and Kabul is crucial for achieving greater border security; and peace and stability in Afghanistan are vital if China and Pakistan want to maximize the benefits of the CPEC. China and Pakistan should not wait around for the security situation to improve. Instead they should continue to

complete the projects without any interruption. Furthermore, it should be made clear to the people of Balochistan that this project will immensely benefit them. This will further facilitate speedy completion of this project. As a matter of fact this corridor is a catalyst for counter-terrorism cooperation between China and Pakistan. Hence both countries should focus on not only strengthening the existing security measures but also to make sure that the people of China and Pakistan want the same thing: to ensure successful and timely completion of the CPEC.