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The Price of CPEC

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The CPEC is precious whether it amounts US\$ 46 or US\$ 62 billion. It is the largest project between Pakistan and China and the biggest ever taken in human history between two sovereign States and these sovereign countries are Pakistan and China.

The sacrifices of Chinese nationals in Pakistan are not a new phenomenon. In building the world's eighth wonder, the Karakoram Highway (KKH), many brave Chinese workers laid down their lives. The Yadgar Cemetery located on the Gilgit River, ten miles from Gilgit, hosts at least, 140 graves of Chinese workers. Deaths from both sides were even over 5,000 but the work never stopped and continued till its completion and inauguration in 1986 for public traffic. The buried are the heroes of the KKH and the real architects of Pakistan-China relations.

The length of the KKH is around 1,300 km, which means that at least 4 workers laid down their lives for every kilometer of road construction average. Even this price was paid for the symbolic and historic friendship between the two people. Lofty and un-accessible mountains and harsh weather conditions of the Himalaya could not prevent them to carve out the KKH. Both people could complete any miracle.

The CPEC is not a challenge for them. The CPEC miracle is an easy job. The price of the CPEC is much more compared to the KKH and both sides are committed. They have finances and sturdy will. Terrorism and threats could not stop them building connectivity from Kashgar to Gwadar. This is the vision of President Xi Jinping and he has no doubts about it. He envisions a global connectivity and the revival of the ancient Silk Road by starting first from Pakistan to connect Xinjiang with Gwadar. Both countries are ready to embrace natural and man-made casualties to complete the dream of connectivity.

The first causality on the CPEC has taken place. It is highly unfortunate that two Chinese teachers engaged in the teaching of Mandarin language and themselves learning Urdu language in Quetta have been abducted on 24 May and on 6 June news broke out that they were killed by IS affiliates. The story broke by Amaq news agency, an affiliate of the IS. The story is yet not confirmed by Pakistani or Chinese authorities. This looks the same old tactics of the Al-Qaeda and Taliban, kidnapping and beheading captives in Afghanistan and tribal areas in Pakistan.

The situation is alarming and grave. A recent report from the Pentagon also predicts that China will expand its military reach and it could construct military bases in Pakistan to protect Chinese nationals. Pakistan and China do not roll back on CPEC projects and their commitments and pledges on it. They could take all possible measures to protect Chinese nationals working on CPEC projects.

The military launched an operation on caves complex in Mastung in Quetta to get released these captives by the beginning of June. At least 25 of terrorists were killed by Pakistan army. The captives were not Baloch insurgents and separatists. They are IS affiliates, whose task is to create law and order from Kashgar to Gwadar to threaten CPEC projects.

Indian and Afghan intelligence agencies are mainly engaged in these activities as IS has gained strength in Afghanistan to gain a foot-print for its terrorist acts. India has its increased presence in Afghanistan. In this region, their target is the CPEC and Xinjiang separation from China. Pakistan is a strong pillar on China's western border to guarantee its stability.

The centrifugal forces launched efforts within Pakistan to target China and its goals of commitment of the CPEC. To Beijing-based *Global Times*, terrorists are trying to get publicity or ransom for their cause by abducting Chinese nationals on Pakistan's soil. They are trying to establish a foot-print in Balochistan, home to CPEC projects such as Gwadar Deep Sea Port, Gwadar International Airport and roads connecting to Kashgar. Pakistan army is launching the Operation Radul Fasad to target IS terrorists and their affiliates.

While commenting on the news about the two Chinese nationals' abduction in Quetta, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, Hua Chunying, told a news briefing that the incident would not have any impact on the security of projects being constructed under the CPEC. This is the old same resolve when the Karakorum was built. Both countries are committed to tackle the CPEC terrorist challenges in all manifestations.

It's also time to see if a new connection has been set up between IS and RAW and NDS for CPEC sabotaging activities. The Iranian involvement also cannot be ruled out. A recent report by Renmin University's Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies and Caijing magazine after a two-week field trip to CPEC sites including Gwadar port and the Bin Qasim coal-fired plant had referred to India's so-called role in trying to destabilize the CPEC.

India's support to separatist forces in Balochistan, its diplomatic offensive against Islamabad and involvement in Chabahar port of Iran are factors that could impact the development of the CPEC, the report warned. The Government and its law enforcement authorities should look into these threatening developments by the saboteur of CPEC. Prior to this abduction, a number of incidents took place involving RAW and NDS.

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