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The Alternative Theory of Co-Existence

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CPEC is a prize many would like to share – so lets

Islamabad has always been considered a rival and a country threatening Afghan vital internal stability and seeking influence in that country. This is the crux of the past 70 years of Pakistan's experience with Afghanistan.

In the face of a multi-polar world of conflicting interests, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is proving to be an incarnation of providing an alternative theory of peaceful co-existence. Many a time, alternative theories can solve one's issues better than the orthodox and accepted theories. Let's work on a different theory and solution to find out Pakistan's myriad security and development anguishes.

Here we argue differently from our traditional arguments.

Afghanistan is not indispensable for Pakistan

It has remained a burden on Pakistan's security and economy for seven decades. Over the past 37 years, Pakistan hosted over 4/5 million Afghan refugees on humanitarian grounds but this did not alleviate the status of Islamabad in the eyes of unrewarding Kabul decision-makers since 1979.

Islamabad has always been considered a rival and a country threatening Afghan vital internal stability and seeking influence in that country. This is the crux of the past 70 years of Pakistan's experience with Afghanistan. In return, Pakistan's helping hand toward Afghanistan resulted in inviting terrorism inside Pakistan, becoming a safe haven for terrorist breeding, arms supply, and circulating fundamentalist tendencies in a democratic and liberal Pakistan that emerged on the basis of the two-nation theory and guiding principles of Quaid's vision of a peaceful existence and good neighbourly policy.

Pakistan squandered precious time in correcting these misperceptions and mending ties with Afghanistan, providing it with transit-trade facilities and deregulating border and a number of other kind gestures from time to time. It is time to reassess Pakistan's priorities toward Afghanistan.

Pakistan needs to work on four fronts

First, the Durand Line should be tightly regulated by electronic and bio-metric means. If Afghanistan does not accept the Durand Line, it may go to the United Nations instead of continuously blackmailing Pakistan. Second, all unregistered Afghan refugees living inside Pakistan should be deported immediately by military force to strengthen the security of Pakistan at a time when CPEC projects are underway and Chinese workers are engaged. The security of Chinese workers against Afghan and Indian secret agencies sabotaging activities needed to be beefed up. Third, there is no need to counter the growing Indian influence in Afghanistan. Fourth, the hostage theory should be buried – the counter-offensives of Afghanistan and potential Indian influence. Pakistan can have an alternative theory – peaceful co-existence under the CPEC.

The CPEC geography is not made by Afghanistan nor by the dictation of India. Time has gone when invaders entered India via Afghanistan. History doesn't always repeat itself. Sometime it changes and changes fundamentally. China is in the northwest of Pakistan and a source of guarantee to Pakistan's integrity and stability. The CPEC has brought about a fundamental sea-change in the region. A new Pakistan is unveiling. The CPEC provides all alternative solutions to Pakistan's geography, economy, and security. Pakistan needs to work on that.

The route connecting Pakistan via Xinjiang would be secured and profitable, opening a new geographic and economic panorama and outlook that remained unveiled for centuries because of ignorance and lack of initiatives of connectivity.

The CPEC has been writing new pages of history. Unlike the old theme, it is not the history of invasion, looting, and domination. It is, instead, replete with cooperation, connectivity, sharing of development experiences, ending backwardness, and alleviating poverty that existed for centuries. It is cultural assimilations among nations.

Utilise the game-changer

The CPEC is introducing a new economic geography to this region and especially to Pakistan. The construction of the new routes are underway. They would connect Pakistan with Xinjiang and from here Pakistan can access the six Central Asian markets without going through the Wakhan Corridor to link up to Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan. Xinjiang could connect Pakistan with Russia and Mongolia through the China-Mongolia-Russian Corridor and onward to Europe. The route connecting Pakistan via Xinjiang would be secured and profitable, opening a new geographic and economic panorama and outlook that remained unveiled for centuries because of ignorance and lack of initiatives of connectivity.

The Chinese Belt and Road initiative is opening up this century's closed corridor of human integration. Pakistan would be the first and primary beneficiary among all nations along the Belt and Road. That is why the CPEC is often termed as multi-fold game-changer in the region. It is going to change this game – the Afghan's perpetual reluctance toward Pakistan since its inception. The CPEC has the capacity and potential to minus the role of Afghanistan influencing Pakistani politics, foreign policy, economy, and security in the post-CPEC era.

China and Pakistan have been repeatedly inviting Afghanistan to join the CPEC. There are diplomatic/official statements from Kabul in support of the CPEC but these are often marred by Indian influence on Kabul. The Afghan Government has the choice either to go by its official statements on CPEC or to amuse by the Indian influence. Beijing and Islamabad could only be supportive.

Afghanistan could be an easier access for CPEC projects but the civil war inside and the changing attitude of decision-makers in Kabul could always be counter-productive for achieving CPEC goals. If Afghanistan left out of the CPEC and Belt and Road initiative, it would stay in the conundrum and riddle in mystery of its "landlocked terrorism" under the influence of India without looking for any alternatives to end its miseries and go for prosperity.

In short, the CPEC is a “blessing in disguise” for Kabul but the leadership has probably lost the capability to comprehend the unforeseen wisdom of CPEC connectivity because of its 37 years of looming internal crisis of civil war. The Kabul leadership must try to grasp the idea of a “win-win cooperation” and “game-change” concept that the CPEC holds for the region. The implementation of the alternative theory of peaceful co-existence and global connectivity would leave Afghanistan in a dark and absolute lurch and ditch it forever. It is time to act and rethink as whimsical and zigzag policies of Kabul will not help it at all.

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