



CPEC CONNECTIVITY AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION: A MAHANIAN OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIC AND GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project within China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aims to enhance connectivity and foster regional integration across South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. This study examines the economic and geopolitical implications of CPEC for Pakistan, analyzing its impact on national development, regional power dynamics, and Pakistan's strategic orientation. Using qualitative methodology, the research gathers insights from diverse stakeholders to address both the economic opportunities and geopolitical challenges associated with the initiative. CPEC's primary goal is to establish a network of pipelines, railroads, and highways linking China's Xinjiang region with Pakistan's Gwadar Port in Baluchistan, thus providing China with a strategic alternative

to the Malacca Strait. Drawing on Mahan's naval theory, which emphasizes the significance of maritime dominance for national prosperity, the paper explores China's motivations and the strategic rivalry involving India and the United States. The analysis relies on secondary sources, including government reports, academic publications, and policy studies, to evaluate CPEC's multifaceted impact. The findings underscore that while CPEC has the potential to transform Pakistan's connectivity and economic landscape, its success requires proactive measures by Pakistani stakeholders to address both internal and external risks. Effective governance, inclusive policies, and sustained regional cooperation are essential to realizing CPEC's promise for sustainable growth and regional stability, thereby aligning with the evolving geo-economic landscape of Pakistan.

KEYWORDS

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)

INTRODUCTION

BRI Belt and Road Initiative a vast infrastructure project aimed at strengthening connectivity and fostering economic cooperation throughout Asia and beyond, includes the CPEC as a crucial element. By enhancing the energy and transportation networks, the (CPEC) is anticipated to increase commerce, draw in foreign capital, and spur economic expansion in both nations. As part of CPEC, power plants, and transmission lines are being built in Pakistan, which will assist in alleviating the nation's energy scarcity and increase the country's population's access to electricity.

CPEC aims to establish a network of infrastructure projects between the Chinese city of Kashgar and Pakistan's Gwadar port. This massive endeavor involves a network of roads, railroads, pipelines, and energy-related projects to increase connectivity and boost regional economic growth. The ambitious initiative has the potential to fundamentally transform the economies of both China and Pakistan. One of the primary goals of the CPEC is the construction of Gwadar Port, which has the potential to develop into a major regional center for commerce and business, giving China essential access to the Arabian Sea. The 2013 launch of the CPEC initiative marked a dramatic shift in the relationship between China and Pakistan. Before this, the two nations enjoyed a fruitful and protracted partnership that lasted for more than 50 years. CPEC stands out due to its enormous scope and magnitude. Over 15 years, power

plants, highways, and railroads would be constructed as part of this \$62 billion project that would wind through the middle of Pakistan. These developments build upon previous agreements between China and Pakistan in the fields of energy, infrastructure development, and military cooperation (Sheila, 2021).

At the heart of the CPEC's geostrategic significance is the port of Gwadar, a strategically significant jewel hidden away on the beaches of the Indian Ocean close to the entrance of the Persian Gulf. China was granted an operational lease for 40 years (Sheila, 2021). Beijing's \$1.62 billion investment in Gwadar demonstrates its geopolitical strategy. This port will serve as the entry point for the CPEC, which will link it to Kashgar in western China.

Eventually, Gwadar might become a transshipment hub to fulfill China's oil needs while avoiding the strategically significant Malacca Strait. Furthermore, Gwadar serves as the gateway for China's land and maritime silk routes, which link the country to other regions and Central Asia. Even if commerce is its primary goal, it has the potential to develop into a naval station, which would heighten competition in the Indian Ocean.

The CPEC has enormous geopolitical significance beyond just bilateral relations because it aims to bring South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East together. By increasing regional trade, luring foreign investment, and promoting economic interdependence, this integration may reduce regional conflicts and encourage cooperation. For example, the construction of Gwadar Port positions it as a significant maritime gateway and facilitates transshipment for the neighboring landlocked states.

The rise of China and its rivalry with the United States have been the most important geopolitical developments of the twenty-first century. No country on the planet can ignore the two superpowers' competitive coexistence, especially in the Indo-Pacific region. The outcomes of this global movement are the Indo-Pacific, the Quad, and FOIP (Free and Open Indo-Pacific) (dfat.gov.au, 2024). Despite the goals and interests of the US, Japan, India, and Australia, there are many areas where they overlap with China, ASEAN, and Europe (CFR.org, 2023).

Pakistan's geopolitical orientation plays a critical role in shaping global politics and defining regional stability. Pakistan's geopolitical significance stems from its advantageous location at the confluence of the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia. This region is a vital component of global commerce networks due to its strategic location near vital commercial routes such as the Arabian Sea and the Strait of Hormuz. CPEC positions the nation as the hub of the wider Belt and Road and has established itself as a significant route for economic

integration between the Eastern and Western regions and Road Initiative (Umair, 2023).

In a broader sense, the United States' challenges to China's geopolitical objectives in East Asia must be taken into consideration when analyzing the CPEC. China believes that by moving west, it can increase its strategic area in the face of these challenges. Pakistan is an important link between South Asia, the Middle East, and China's Central and Asian regions.



*Figure 1 Strait of Hormuz, a narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf where 21 million barrels of oil pass through every day
source: Business Insider*

In terms of the geographical scope, China was virtually nonexistent in the Indian Ocean ten years ago. However, China is currently making significant investments in the Indo-Pacific region's orderly maintenance via military and diplomatic measures. China, on the other hand, stated in its May 2015 Defense White Paper its goal to become a major maritime power by developing and projecting its naval might well beyond its borders. The theory of Mahan's Sea Power is employed as a gauge to evaluate China's objectives and the potential for sea power in the Indian Ocean. Therefore, the research questions that directed the study were whether China can realistically aim for predominant sea control expeditiously and whether China can overtake the US Navy as the dominant navy.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The development of the CPEC, through its expansive network of pipelines, railroads, and roads connecting China's Xinjiang region to Pakistan's Gwadar Port, will significantly enhance Pakistan's energy security, improve transportation and logistics infrastructure, and increase economic competitiveness. However, the success of the Chinese initiative in achieving these objectives will be contingent upon addressing both internal challenges, such as effective management and inclusive development policies, and external geopolitical complexities, particularly the strategic rivalry between China and the United States and power dynamics with India. The strategic shift from reliance on the Malacca Strait to Gwadar Port will alter regional power balances and influence economic and geopolitical outcomes in the region, necessitating careful planning and proactive engagement by Pakistani stakeholders to maximize CPEC's benefits and ensure sustainable regional growth and stability.

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

- To evaluate the impact of CPEC's infrastructure development on Pakistan's energy security and economic landscape, identifying internal challenges and proposing strategies to enhance project success.
- To analyze the strategic implications of CPEC on global maritime trade, particularly the shift from reliance on the Malacca Strait to Gwadar Port, and its effects on geopolitical dynamics involving China, the United States, and India.
- To assess the significance of Gwadar Port through the lens of Mahan's Theory of Sea Power and examine how inclusive development policies and regional cooperation can enhance CPEC's effectiveness.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

This research is significant as it explores the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) within the broader geopolitical and economic dynamics of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. CPEC is a transformative project with the potential to reshape Pakistan's infrastructure, energy security, and connectivity with global markets, contributing to economic growth and regional stability. Furthermore, CPEC's development of Gwadar Port aligns with Mahan's Theory of Sea Power, highlighting the strategic importance of maritime dominance and control over key trade routes. This study offers insights into how CPEC's success could influence regional power structures,

potentially altering the balance of power among China, the United States, and India.

SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

The scope of this research encompasses the multi-faceted impact of CPEC on Pakistan's economy, energy security, and geopolitical positioning. It addresses the strategic significance of Gwadar Port, situating it within the framework of Mahan's naval theory, and explores the implications for Pakistan's relationships with neighboring countries and major powers. Additionally, this study examines internal barriers to successful CPEC implementation, including governance, policy, and infrastructure challenges, while proposing strategies for Pakistan to maximize the benefits of CPEC. This research provides a comprehensive analysis of CPEC's potential to advance regional integration while underscoring the complexities and challenges that must be navigated to achieve sustainable progress.

CPEC AND PAKISTAN

Pakistan is a key partner for China, connecting them to Central Asia, Southern Asia, and the Middle East. They have developed strong bilateral trade and economic ties since 1963, with China becoming Pakistan's major trading partner (Pakistan House, 2016). The CPEC represents a new model of cooperation. Both countries signed Free Trade Agreements in 2006 and 2009, enhancing coordination and strategic communication (Pakistan House, 2016). There has been progress, corruption, delays, and other problems, like as security and environmental concerns, have plagued CPEC, as they have plagued many other BRI projects. The port of Gwadar, which was meant to serve as a flagship establishment, is currently deserted and shows no signs of freight entering or leaving.

That is mostly related to Pakistan's economic issues. Earlier this year, it was on the verge of default due to a weak currency, rising inflation, and slow development. While companies were closing their doors and textile workers were losing their jobs due to a lack of raw materials or energy, officials were finding it difficult to pay for the imports required to construct the CPEC infrastructure.

Industrialization and Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are two of the most important areas of cooperation—possibly the most important for job creation and economic growth. China has consented to establish one provincial economic zone in each of Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Punjab before

developing the other six that Pakistan has so far suggested. In the Faisalabad area of Punjab, work has already started on the largest industrial city, known as M3.

China's economic reforms in the 1980s included special economic zones, which were governed by export-oriented and free-market laws and practices such as tax breaks and favorable treatment for foreign investment. Tax breaks and other incentives, together with Pakistan's GSP+ access to the EU, are expected to draw Chinese producers and investors to the CPEC.

Pakistan faces challenges in attracting Chinese investments because of its unstable economic situation and a track record of broken promises to Chinese companies operating in the electricity industry. The reluctance of Sinasure (SINOSURE, 2001), a Chinese insurance business, to fund new projects exacerbates the hesitancy of Chinese investors and causes a notable delay in the start of these endeavors. Furthermore, the creation of special economic zones—a crucial element of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor—has stagnated.

To attract Chinese investment, Pakistan is constructing most plants with Chinese equipment and many will be Chinese-owned. The increase in wattage for the national grid is expected to counteract the decline in economic productivity caused by frequent power outages. However, the slow pace of implementation is a significant concern. Furthermore, according to International Monetary Fund (IMF) assessments, Pakistan's repayment obligations—comprising debt payments and guaranteed investor returns (17 percent for power projects)—are likely to absorb a substantial portion of foreign direct investment and other external funding. This absorption is anticipated to widen the current account deficit (Aamer, 2023).

Many developing nations, particularly in South Asia, now find themselves in a complex financial situation similar to Pakistan's. Since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has emerged as the primary lender and a vital source of investment for numerous countries in the region. As the BRI continues to evolve, these nations are increasingly grappling with the implications of their substantial financial ties to China.

The scope of China's lending extends far beyond Pakistan, with many of its neighbors experiencing comparable challenges. As the world's largest bilateral creditor, China's financial influence has grown significantly, particularly among developing countries seeking infrastructure development and economic growth. This widespread reliance on Chinese funding has led to a shared predicament for multiple nations, especially as they navigate the evolving landscape of international debt and investment.

In July 2023, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a \$3 billion rescue plan.¹ However, Pakistan still owes China a third of its \$100 billion in external debt. Furthermore, Pakistan is not the only nation in this situation (Aamer, 2023). Since the BRI's start, China has emerged as the largest creditor and a vital source of investment for many developing nations, and as it develops, many of Pakistan's South Asian neighbors are increasingly finding themselves in the crosshairs (Aamer, 2023).

Another significant aspect driving up the cost of CPEC projects is security costs. According to Pakistan's media report, Islamabad has once more delayed approving an Rs36 billion project that would have given security to Chinese nationals working on the multibillion-dollar ML-I project.

Pakistan's Ministry of Planning released Pakistan 2025, a roadmap for economic growth, in 2014. The document states that Pakistan's goal is to go from being a lower-middle-income country to an upper-middle-income country by 2025 (Michael, 2016). Pakistan wants to draw in more foreign investment to accomplish this aim. By building energy projects and other types of infrastructure, the nation hopes to boost its GDP overall, provide job opportunities for its citizens, and enhance governance (Michael, 2016).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Alfred Thayer Mahan's Theory of Sea Power, developed in the late 19th century, is a foundational theory in maritime strategy and international relations. This study draws on Alfred Thayer Mahan's Theory of Sea Power, which argues that national power is closely tied to control over maritime trade routes and naval dominance. Mahan's theory provides a strategic lens to assess the geopolitical significance of Gwadar Port within CPEC, as well as China's reduced reliance on the Malacca Strait by redirecting trade through Pakistan. The framework also incorporates elements of regional security and interdependence theories in international relations to understand how CPEC influences power dynamics between China, the United States, and India, positioning Pakistan as a pivotal player in the evolving geo-economic landscape. By grounding the research in these theories, the study examines CPEC not only as an economic initiative but also as a strategic maneuver within a broader international rivalry over trade routes and influence.

The analysis is organized into thematic areas, focusing on CPEC's impact on Pakistan's energy security, internal challenges, and strategic implications. The qualitative approach allows for a detailed exploration of the multidimensional effects of CPEC, helping to identify policy recommendations and strategies that

can address both economic and geopolitical concerns. This approach ensures a holistic understanding of CPEC's potential for fostering regional cooperation, sustainable growth, and long-term stability in Pakistan and the broader region.

CPEC THROUGH THE LENS OF MAHAN Geopolitical Shifts in Indo-pacific region

Beijing's aspirations to become a superpower are the primary motivating force for China's decision to use both Mahan and Corbett. The United States was only getting involved in international politics when Mahan developed the idea of naval power in the nineteenth century. Mahan's famous "Sea Power" concept, which emphasized the necessity of establishing maritime control before making a major impact on the international scene, inspired the US during its formative years. For US leaders like Theodore Roosevelt, who aimed to make the US a major player in the world, this idea struck a deep chord. In a similar vein, Chinese strategic theory has accepted Mahan's ideas, seeing the importance of maritime might in accomplishing more general geopolitical goals.

Alfred Thayer Mahan highlighted the significance of maritime power as a key element in geopolitics. Mahan differed from other thinkers of his time in a number of significant areas, most notably from Frederick Jackson Turner on the idea of the frontier and Halford Mackinder on the potential decline of maritime power and its replacement by land transportation power. The Dutch-American philosopher Nicholas Spykman found a rather Solomonic middle ground between Mackinder and Mahan. Writing throughout the 1920s and World War II, he contended that the actual struggle for dominance in the 20th century would occur in the "rimland" (also known as the "Inner Crescent") encircling Eurasia, where Land Power and Sea Power converge in a region akin to a geopolitical estuary (Brandon, 2023).

Mahan believed that nation-states that became great powers did so because they had mastered maritime power, starting with the Age of Exploration. He further argued that, in both times of peace and war, the ability to handle commercial activities that depend on seaborne transportation was essential. He regarded that a nation would become a hegemonic force if it developed a fleet capable of eliminating an opponent's main force in a single battle (Brandon, 2023).

Mahan partially grounded his opinions in an examination of the wars raging in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially those involving France and Great Britain. It is worth noting that Mahan's core belief about the significance of sea power was rooted in the idea that economic competition lies at the center of all national rivalries. He emphasized that nations with access to and control

over major sea routes would have strategic and economic advantages, allowing them to protect trade and secure resources. With the ongoing development of Gwadar Port under the CPEC, China may be able to expand its naval presence in the Indian Ocean by using it as a key naval station. Mahan's thesis emphasizes how crucial it is to have a powerful navy to defend trade routes and project power—a feat China might accomplish by utilizing the CPEC.

Mahan's idea suggests rivalry for dominance of key areas as well. One way to view the growth of CPEC is as a counterbalance to India's power in the Indian Ocean and its regional alliance with the United States. CPEC, which is China-Pakistan's strategic partnership, might be seen as an attempt to establish regional supremacy, which would be consistent with Mahan's theory of using strategic partnerships to increase naval strength. Mahan linked naval power to a nation's economic and industrial base, arguing that strong commercial shipping and manufacturing sectors were critical for supporting a powerful navy. The United States and India have formed a strategic alliance to limit Chinese influence. To link South Asia with Central Asia through the Chahbahar port (Geopolitical Monitor, 2019). With the trans-border route between Iran and Afghanistan, New Delhi expanded its cooperation with both countries. But compared to the proposed Indian corridor, the CPEC is more important for regional connectivity and economic development (Hussain, 2020).

The location of the Indian Ocean is distinct. States today are watchful of the channels by which trade is carried out and are ravenous for energy to support their economy. China and India desire to continue to rule over the Indian Ocean. To demonstrate their power in the Indian Ocean region, both states are putting up infrastructure, military, and economic initiatives. China's expanding ties with its surrounding states are causing India difficulties, and India is becoming concerned about China's expansion within its borders (Fakhar, 2017). Mahan stressed that a strong navy, especially with a powerful fleet of battleships, was essential to national defense and to project power beyond a nation's borders. Consequently, India is forming military and covert defense partnerships with the USA, Japan, Australia, Russia, and other countries to contain China. This power struggle fuels the wedge between China and India. Due to China and India using minor nations as a means of counterbalancing each other, this competition has the potential to upset the entire South Asian region. As they cannot perceive any damage to their trade channels, the international actors are observing the situation with hawk eyes.

Gwadar Port, which is near the Strait of Hormuz, one of the most strategic chokepoints in the world, is consistent with Mahan's focus on commanding key

maritime sites. China and Pakistan will now be more effectively controlling marine trade in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea due to Gwadar. Mahan stressed the importance of controlling important sea lanes. China's access to the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea is improved by CPEC owing to Pakistan's Gwadar Port. China may now go directly to the Middle East and Africa through this port, avoiding the increasingly treacherous and longer Malacca Strait (Britannica). This is consistent with Mahan's emphasis on strengthening national power through control of important maritime routes.

China can now access the Indian Ocean through the port, avoiding the Malacca Strait, a small-scale route that poses a serious risk to the country's oil supply line. This is consistent with Mahan's suggestion to secure diversions to lower strategic risks.

This study analyzes Mahan's theory of sea power to describe how the future maritime environment in South Asia would change as a result of global actors vying for dominance in the Indian Ocean and the formation of two separate power blocs, led by the US and China (Asma, 2022). It also addresses how the littoral regions of the Indian Ocean would position themselves in the competition between these superpowers. Future power realignment in South Asia may be understood by taking a close look at the economic interests of the Indian Ocean coastal regions through the BRI and the advantages of forming a strategic alliance with the US. The study concludes that to guarantee its energy needs, China would probably work with BRI partners to create cooperative marine security arrangements. These partners will then become Chinese friends. Similarly, South Korea, Japan, and India.

According to Mahan, maritime trade is also crucial for commercial expansion. Mahan, in contrast to Turner, did not regard the frontier as a demarcated, albeit slowly shifting, line signifying the farthest limits of a nation's power or existence. Having served as a naval officer, Mahan believed that sea power was essential for both military and economic prosperity. Mahan made a novel suggestion for the time, suggesting that nations should use their resources to build maritime machinery that could support both military and commercial endeavors when they were not at war. He highlighted the highway function of the sea and contended that any nation could use sea power because he thought it was fundamental to world history over the two and a half centuries prior, rather than incidental. As a result, the CPEC, which runs through the center of Balochistan, provides Chinese energy with an alternative path (Ahmad, 2017). Mahan downplays the significance of land and air power, which have grown more important in contemporary warfare, by emphasizing maritime power. The

Belt and Road Initiative's focus on developing land-based economic corridors and connecting landlocked countries including; digital infrastructure, rail, road, energy, and Maritime Silk Road, challenges Mahan's emphasis on naval power as the primary driver of global influence. Nonetheless, Baloch sub-nationalism has become crucial in the modern world due to China's strategic moves towards the Indian Ocean and the US's strategic pivot from the North Atlantic to the Asia Pacific area.

Reducing Malacca Strait Dependence through Gwadar and Regional Ports

China's strong dependence on energy, especially oil, is what drives the country's rapid industrial growth. In 2017, China surpassed the United States to become the world's largest importer of oil. In 2018, imports accounted for roughly 70% of the nation's oil needs; by 2040, the U.S. Department of Commerce anticipates that this percentage will rise to around 80% (David, 2017). The enormous economic machine of the nation was dependent on foreign oil, which led to the situation known as "The Malacca Dilemma," which was first mentioned in 2003 by then-president Hu Jintao (David, 2017).

Angola and the Middle East provide China with the majority of its imports. Presently, the Strait of Malacca—a slender waterway that separates the Malay Peninsula from the Indonesian island of Sumatra—is required to carry 80% of China's oil exports (David, 2017). The Strait of Malacca becomes an inherent strategic chokepoint since Singapore, a significant US ally that regularly takes part in US naval drills, is situated at the mouth of the strait's eastern opening. A competitor country might simply block the Malacca Strait in the event of a conflict, shutting off China's access to vital energy resources (David, 2017). The closest substitute is the Sunda Strait, although big, contemporary ships shouldn't use it as a passageway because of its shallowness and narrowness. Other options are the Straits of Makassar and Lombok.

To reduce its heavy dependence on the Strait of Malacca, China has undertaken strategic infrastructure projects. These include the construction of oil and gas pipelines connecting Myanmar's Bay of Bengal coast to China's Yunnan province, allowing energy resources to bypass the Malacca Strait. Additionally, China has established pipeline connections with Kazakhstan, providing direct access to the oil-rich Caspian region. These initiatives aim to diversify China's energy supply routes and enhance its energy security by creating alternative pathways for resource imports (David, 2017).



Figure 2 source: <https://bpr.studentorg.berkeley.edu>

China can now completely avoid the Malacca Strait due to the Gwadar-Xinjiang pipeline, which is its main advantage. Tankers carrying crude oil from the Middle East could easily dock in Gwadar, where it would be extracted and then piped to China. If the Iran-Pakistan Pipeline is connected to Gwadar, it might open up another channel for the Chinese industrial machine to import energy, thus boosting the security of its energy supply. In the event of a crisis in the Strait of Malacca, this option—while somewhat costlier than others—maintains China's connection to Middle Eastern oil supplies securely and effectively.

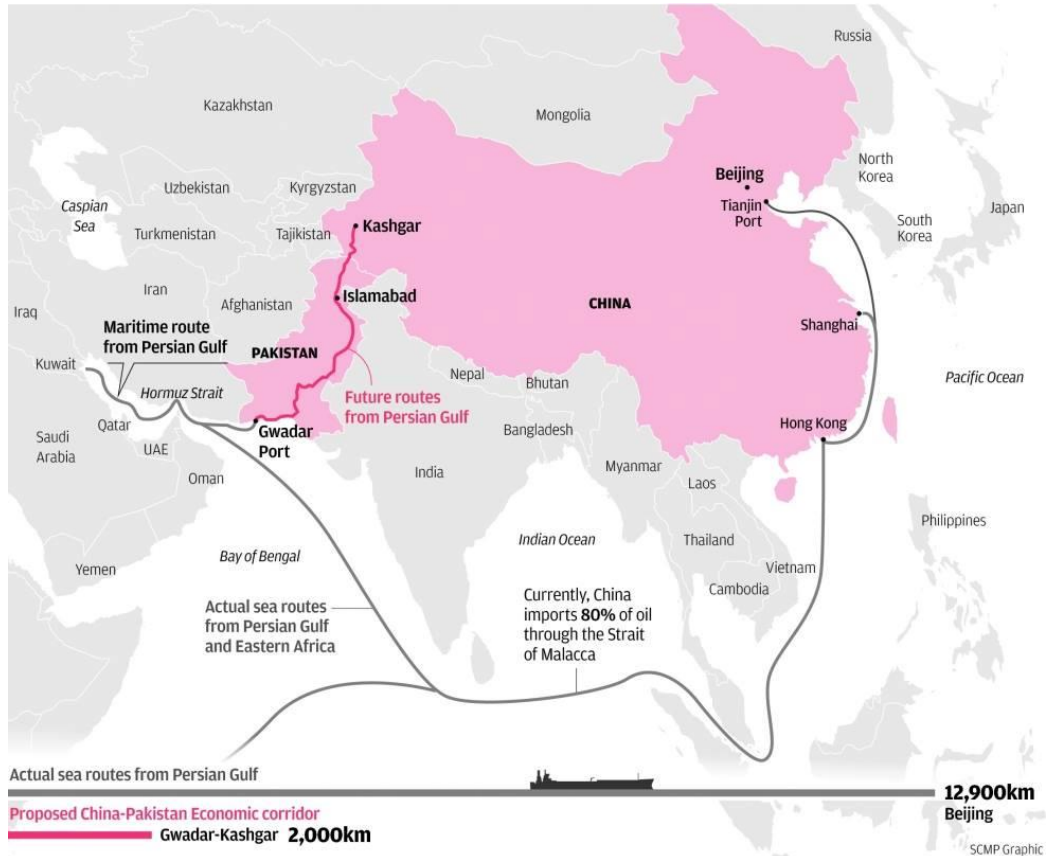


Figure 3 <https://bpr.studentorg.berkeley.edu/2019/08/26/the-malacca-dilemma-a-hindrance-to-chinese-ambitions-in-the-21st-century/>

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a huge project having significant effects on the sociocultural, geopolitical, and economic spheres. In terms of the economy, CPEC aims to reshape commercial ties, advance infrastructure construction, and encourage economic progress in Pakistan in line with the ideas of infrastructure-led economic growth. In terms of geopolitics, CPEC has already altered regional rivalries and alliances, offering Pakistan chances for collaboration and strategic realignment but also adding complexity to South Asian geopolitics.

According to Mahan's theory, CPEC may be seen as a strategic project that takes into account larger geopolitical and military factors in addition to

economic ones. In line with Mahan's emphasis on the strategic significance of sea power and control over vital trade arteries, the development of Gwadar Port and the related infrastructure not only improves regional connectivity but also positions China and Pakistan as major players in the control of important maritime and overland trade routes.

The interdependence of geo-economics and geopolitics is highlighted by Pakistan's growing geopolitical prominence as a pivot in the region, made possible by its strategic position and CPEC investments. Sociocultural, CPEC has addressed regional differences in Balochistan, prioritized accountability and openness, and brought about governance improvements. Although Pakistan's economy requires fundamental improvements, the climate for emerging countries is becoming increasingly difficult due to global developments.

Pakistan already seems to be attempting to weigh its alternatives for averting potential difficulties, such as trading energy for the Chinese yuan with Russia and engaging in barter commerce with Afghanistan. Economists, chambers of commerce, the Pakistan Business Council, trade associations, and other stakeholders in the business community should be consulted. A new structure for CPEC special economic zones and development projects should take their concerns into account. Employ local workers and make sure that labor laws and policies are followed in CPEC projects.

As Pakistan's democratic transition nears a significant milestone—the completion of a full term by a second consecutive elected government—its successor should take advantage of the newfound authority, influence public opinion regarding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and enact policies that prioritize the welfare of Pakistani citizens.

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