

Balochistan's Potential under CPEC: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract: The underrepresented province Balochistan which is the largest province of Pakistan area-wise the smallest province in terms of population is the epitome of the China-Pakistan Economic Project CPEC a flagship project of China's led Belt and Road Initiative BRI. Balochistan's natural resources and its geostrategic location remained failed to mitigate the deprivation of the province. However, CPEC is a ray of hope for the province, capitalizing untapped natural resources will result in bringing development and prosperity. Currently, 51 metallic and non-metallic minerals have been discovered in Balochistan. The province is termed "the fruit basket of Pakistan". Addressing water scarcity, power shortages and constructing crop-specific zone under CPEC will augment production. Coastal areas of the province are massively rich in the production of lobster, shrimp, and cuttlefish and have scintillating sceneries that could be exploited under CPEC to enhance the tourism sector. However, there are innumerable challenges to the CPEC such as separatist movement, lack of advanced education, poor road infrastructure, erosion of democratic values, non-implementation of the 18th amendment, and the role of external actors. In this paper, mixed research method

would be applied by using both primary and secondary data. This paper will shed light on Balochistan's potential under CPEC and will comprehensively analyze the challenges to CPEC.

Keywords: *SEZs, Blue Economy, Natural Resources, Tourism, Fruits, Agriculture Sector*

Introduction

The year 2023 marks a historic decade of CPEC. Over a decade, CPEC played a catalyst role in cementing Pakistan's economic growth, and sustainable development most impotently it improved the soft image of the country. (S.N. Gilani, 2023). Prior to the mega project, Pakistan remained to be seen in the lenses of terrorism and extremism by the foreign investors. Currently, CPEC has changed the perception of foreign investors, they are willing to invest in the country. China's mega project has turned Pakistan into a safe destination for investment. Ostensibly, the economic and political benefits of CPEC are heading the country towards prosperity and development. Under CPEC, steep economic rise, modernization in the infrastructure and job opportunities are witnessing rapid progress. (Saddam Hussain Samo, 2020)

On the other hand, Balochistan remained deprived and marginalized since the inception of Pakistan. The questions arise here: will CPEC be a game changer for Balochistan too? Will it in a true sense transform the destiny of the destitute people of Balochistan? In the past, Balochistan too possessed mega projects such as Reko Diq, the Saindak copper-gold project and the Gwadar port project. Will CPEC be different from the previous projects? Currently, the inhabitants of Gwadar lack basic facilities like healthcare, clean drinking water, and enough educational institutions, suffering prolonged power outages in scorching summer. (Dawn, 2018).

Gwadar is considered as the heart of CPEC but populaces in the heart of CPEC believe they are being cut off from the mega project. The "Haq Do Tehreek" (Gwadar Rights Movement) led by Maulana Hidayat ur Rehman, is gaining popularity by leaps and bounds. The protest led by him blocked the Gwadar East Bay Expressway which is a main artery connecting the port to the country's major

highway network (Somaiyah Hafeez, 2023) Maulana Hidayat ur Rehman, argued that people were protesting over their genuine issues encompassing a high numbers of security checkpoints, and illegal trawling in Gwadar's water. "Illegal trawling has deprived local fishermen of their livelihood and if the provincial government was serious, it can easily put an end to this issue" He added. (Behram Baloch, 2022)

Arguably, without Gwadar CPEC will be a non-starter. Balochistan the largest province of the country lags far behind, in terms of advanced education, railway and road infrastructures, and health facilities. The province continued to be ignored since the inception of the country (Bashir, Muhammad Arshad, Sadia Barech, 2019) overlooking further would cause a great deal of damage to CPEC and national integration. CPEC appears to be the last resort to eliminate deprivation and marginalization of the province. Balochistan is blessed with abundant potential to capitalize on its natural resources, blue economy, agricultural and livestock sectors building Special Economic Zones SEZs under CPEC will pave the way for prosperity and regional connectivity. This paper, thus, is exploring both opportunities and challenges to CPEC in Balochistan.

Research Methodology

Mixed research method is applied in paper by using both primary and secondary data. The primary data has been collected from renowned politician academician and journalist from Balochistan. Researchers conducted interviews with young Baloch students of the university in a bid to gauge their perception of CPEC. The paper gives more focus to the primary data with the aim of assessing ground realities of the mega project.

Balochistan's Potential under CPEC

Promising Agriculture Sector

The agriculture sector is the main component of the province's economy. This sector is exceedingly promising and horticulture is the leading sub-sector within agriculture producing grapes and apples. Balochistan is called the "fruit basket of Pakistan", producing 90 per cent of national products such as grapes, cherries and almonds and 60 per cent of peaches, pomegranates and apricots. Most

considerably, Balochistan produces 70 per cent of dates and 34 per cent of apples. More than 0.3 million tones unique varieties of apples are annually produced. The province also has 130 varieties of dates which could prove instrumental in earning foreign exchange through exports. Makran division produces approximately 4, 25,000 tons of dates annually. Ironically, the province does not have a share in the national export of dates. Making modernization in the agriculture sector, granting subsidies to the formers and solving water issues will encourage them to enhance fruit production. CPEC will enable them to export fruits to the international market. (Dost Muhammad Barrech, 2022).

Nearly, 75 per cent of the people of the province live in rural areas depending on the agriculture sector. The crops are contributing 62 % to the gross farm income. Agriculture sector has been employing 67 % of the province's total force. Jafarabad, Naseerabad, Usta Mohammed and Dera Murad Jamali are agriculturally based regions. Needless to say, only Naseerabad district has a perennial system of irrigation. The rest of the regions primarily depends on Karezat, rain, and tube wells for irrigation. Unfortunately, the province's 11.77 million acres of land are still lying arid and uncultivated. Pakistan can espouse the trajectory of China under CPEC by implementing a Chinese development model to cultivate 11.77 million acres of land that by and large will change the density of the destitute formers of the province. (ZTBL, 2018)

Livestock market

Livestock is an extremely important sector of Balochistan's economy, and capitalizing on it under CPEC would prove fruitful. The province contributes 52.0%, 41.0%, and 22.0%, of the country's sheep, camels, and goats respectively. It also contributes employment of nearly 66 per cent of households in the arid regions. Livestock appears to be a blessing in disguise in those regions which are not suitable for cultivating crops. The growing population and rising living standards of the people demand pure milk and meat production. (Prof Dr Muhammad Subhan Qureshi, 2022) The livestock sector has an enormous potential to contribute nearly 50 per cent to the province's Agriculture GDP and more than 10 per cent of the overall Provincial GDP. Dr Afzal, a livestock expert at Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) maintained that the province had a

huge potential that could become the largest entrepreneur of the livestock industry on account of the growing demand for halal food in Muslim countries. He argued that he had suggested the provincial government to prioritize the sector in a bid to enhance meat export to Muslim countries. "Promoting meat export at the government level will boost the provincial economy and create employment opportunities in Balochistan" Dr. Afzal added (The Nation, 2023).

The province is constituting the country's almost 40 per cent livestock population, and approximately 70 per cent population directly or indirectly is linked with the sector. The socio-economic conditions of 70 per cent of people could be improved under CPEC by investing massively in the sector bringing innovation in the industry addressing issues of inaccessible veterinary services, insufficient water and fodder availability, proper marketing and inadequate grazing pastures. (The Express Tribune, 2019) Meanwhile, the fisheries sector provides nearly 400,000 employments to the people. Fisheries have the potential to generate 70 per cent of local employment for the local people in the coastal areas of Balochistan. The sector is earning US\$ 8 million by exporting fish products to the international market. Modernization of the fisheries sector under CPEC will usher a path of prosperity in poverty-stricken Balochistan (Daily Mirror Quetta, 2023)

Blue Economy Potential

The blue economy is generated through utilizing the potential of oceans. The global oceanic activities in 2010 were estimated to be nearly \$1.5 trillion, and is foreseen to reach \$3 trillion by 2030. (OECD, 2016). It is predicted that blue economy would create \$ 24 trillion dollars in financial activities encompassing new resources and jobs. (World Wildlife Fund, 2015). The coastal regions of Balochistan spanning 750km from Goth Haji Alano on the Eastern border with Sindh province to Jiwani on the Western border with Iran's Gwatar Bay, are rich in marine resources. The fisheries sector in the area is undeveloped. It remains a crucial source of livelihood for much of the local coastal settlement population. (CPEC Official Website, 2018)

The province has non-living marine resources including shale gas, hydrocarbons and minerals, oil reserves and gravel. The above-mentioned resources are essential for

economic global flows. Apart from Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), it is likely to create economic opportunities. The available species in the Arabian Sea including cetaceans, fish, porpoises, sea turtles, and whales are the great assets of the blue economy. Corals, Seaweeds are being unprecedentedly consumed by people for medical purposes. (Maliha Zeba Khan, 2020) Pakistan under Balochistan has the sixth world's largest mangrove areas which are believed to have been contributing US\$ 4 billion to annual export earnings. There have been scintillating sceneries in coastal areas of Balochistan. Under CPEC Building of Public Sector Development Programs (PSDP) near Makran Coastal Highway would generate immense economic opportunities.

The sea beaches of Gwadar, Hammerhead, and Astola Island would promote tourism in the region. As far as the report of the World Travel & Tourism Council WWTC is concerned, "Travel & Tourism sectors contributed US\$8.3 trillion to the global economy and supported 313 million jobs in 2017. This was equal to 10.4% of the world's GDP, and approximately 1 in 10 of all jobs". Capitalizing on the scintillating sceneries and historical sites of Balochistan under CPEC will encourage foreign and domestic tourists to visit the areas resulting in job opportunities and prosperity. (Dost Barrech, 2019)

Natural resources

Balochistan's geo-strategic location and its natural resources have remained a cliché. Both are supposed to be calculatedly materialized under CPEC (Waseem Sadiq et al, 2022). The province is blessed with Over US\$1 trillion worth of natural resources including Copper, Gold, Oil, Black pearl, Chromite, Valuable Stones, and Natural Gas. (The Balochistan Point, 2021) The provincial government has already shown interest in tapping the natural resources of the province under CPEC and wants Chinese companies to kick-start a boom in its mining industry. Arguably, mineral extraction is a contentious issue in the province. The indigenous people are unhappy believing that province has vast mineral wealth despite it remains poor. The extraction of natural resources is one of the leading factors behind the intensification of the insurgency. Balochistan has a massive natural gas industry but large-scale mining continued to be unsuccessful to take off the resources. However,

proper extraction of resources under CPEC and giving due rights to the province would erode insurgency. (Gul Yousufzai, 2019)

Imminent Challenges to CPEC in Balochistan

The fifth Baloch insurgency is a formidable threat to CPEC. The prevailing insurgency is the most lethal as compared to the previous four waves. The current insurgent wave, unlike the previous insurgent waves that mainly demanded political autonomy wants separatism that could cause a big blow to the mega project in the foreseeable future. The previous four waves were only confined to particular areas or regions of the province but the current insurgency is spread across the province. Unlike, the previous waves that depended on Baloch tribal structure, the current wave is attracting the educated middle class and youth who believe in socioeconomic marginalization, genuine ethnic grievances of political exclusion, and everyday humiliations on the pretext of security and structural discrimination. The recruitment of women in the insurgency and training them as suicide bombers have transformed the movement, using new tactics to disrupt CPEC (Abdul Basit Khan, 2023)

There has been a trust deficit between Federal and Provincial governments as far as CPEC is concerned. The trust deficit will damage the progress of CPEC. The Baloch Nationalist leader Akhtar Jan Mengal said he had extensively studied CPEC projects and could not find anything for Balochistan and all economic dividends were granted to Punjab. He reiterated "take my word for it, CPEC will turn out to be no different than the East India Company. The Chinese with their huge population and all, will make Pakistan look not like a country but China town". (Tilak Devasher, 2019) Ihsan Iqbal the current Minister of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives for the Government of Pakistan once said that making public the CPEC projects including Gwadar without the permission of China was simply out of the question nor could the project be shared with the government of Balochistan. (Sana Baloch, 2016)

Political engineering in Balochistan is yet another big challenge to CPEC. According to experts Balochistan Awami Party BAP which was manufactured overnight before the General Election of 2018 poses a grave threat to democratic

values. Leaders' selection without transparent election gives them ample opportunity to plunder the treasury of the province resulting in bad governance hindering CPEC projects. (Asad Hashim, 2018). The 18th Amendment truly is a great milestone in the polity of Pakistan. The non-implementation of the 18th amendment is causing further deprivation, obstacles to CPEC and erosion of democracy in Pakistan in general and Balochistan in particular. Qamar Javed Bajwa, Former Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan opined that the 18th amendment was a bigger threat than Sheikh Mujeeb's six points. (Syed Badrul Ahsan, 2020)

The poor road infrastructure in the province will put the future of CPEC in jeopardy. According to National Highway Authority NHA, the death casualties in Balochistan are higher than that in terrorist incidents. Annually more than 6 thousand people are being killed in traffic accidents in Balochistan and more than ten thousand are wounded in traffic accidents. Ironically, in the whole province, there is no motorway. The annual figure of 6 thousand death casualties in traffic accidents invalidates claim of CPEC as regional connectivity and prosperity. (Dost Barrech, 2020). Bear in mind, in the province merely 25 per cent populous have access to electricity compared to 75 per cent rest of the country. The total demand for electricity in the province is around 1800 MW. Surprisingly, transmission lines are unable even to carry more than 650 MW. The surplus electricity on account of inadequate transmission and non-connectivity to the national grid is unlikely to benefit the indigenous people. While 80 per cent people of Balochistan do not have access to the indigenous gas of Sui including in Gwadar. The poor power sector makes people suspicious of CPEC's progress. (Tilak Devasher, 2019)

Balochistan is at the top in illiteracy rate. The literacy rate in the province is less than 43.58 per cent. In the era of globalization, science & technology having only 43.58 per cent would lag the province far behind in the race for progress. Expecting to make success under CPEC with the highest illiteracy rate is wishful thinking (The Nation, 2022). Ostensibly, climate change is a bigger threat than terrorism and extremism. The province has been witnessing impacts of climate change. Balochistan being the largest province will have to face more destruction caused by climate hazards. The 2022 floods wrecked, homes, buildings, bridges, and highways

and ruined communications lines. Quetta the capital of Balochistan was almost disconnected from the rest of the country for nearly two months.

There had also been suspension of train operations for nine months due to the damage to the bridge in the district of Bolan. According to the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) reports nearly 36,469 homes were damaged throughout Pakistan, with Balochistan accounting for 60% of the losses. The floods damaged 800 schools, 600 of which were in Balochistan. The projects of CPEC are extremely likely to be damaged by climate change as the province is quite vulnerable to climate change nor does the province have a climate resilient policy. (Dr. Tauseef Javed, 2022)

It is a fait accompli, Balochistan is blessed with natural resources and geopolitical location. It stayed a crossroads of cultures, civilizations and the epicentre of great powers' competition. Balochistan cannot remain immune to the prevailing great power competition between the US and China. Both parties have an obsession with Balochistan. The US and India are engaged in containment of China by creating troubles in the Chinese peripheries. CPEC is the Achilles' heel of China and Pakistan. If the former completely jump on the bandwagon of the latter, Washington might support the insurgent groups in Balochistan to make CPEC unsuccessful. (Dr Muhammad Khan, 2022)

The followings are answers by the respondents who in their interviews answered the questions shedding light on both opportunities and challenges to CPEC in Balochistan.

- I. What potential does Balochistan have which could be materialized under CPEC?**

Respondent I

The first main potential of Balochistan is its geo-strategic location. The coastal areas of Balochistan are in proximity to the Strait of Hormuz. Balochistan connects Pakistan with Iran and Afghanistan. The geo-strategic importance of Pakistan primarily lies in Balochistan. CPEC can get maximum benefits from the geo-strategic location of Balochistan. When it comes to connectivity of CPEC

with regions like the Middle East, and Afghanistan, it is only possible through Balochistan. Secondly, potential of Gwadar port can be materialized as it is located in a deep sea. Gwadar port is naturally made port engulfed by the mountains. It also remains crucial in the context of defense. Therefore, the port is chosen in future it would remain a successful port. Thirdly, there is no scarcity of land in the province, if economic activities are expedited the land of the province will become more fruitful. Last, but not the least, Balochistan is blessed with untapped mineral resources. The reserves of Sui Gas have been exploited. In Saindak coal and copper are extracted. Work is under in the Reko Diq. Chinese are engaged in Duddar and, Lasbela inland mining. There are abundant minerals, oil and gas that could be exploited under CPEC.

Respondent 2

Since the inception of CPEC, we demanded the Western route, the components of the Western route comprised energy zones, energy parks, industrial zones sub-corridor connecting Balochistan with Central Asia. Sub-corridors should have been built on the Afghanistan border in Shorabak district in Afghanistan bordering Pakistan, Chaman, Badini, Qamar Din Karez, and Angur Ada in erstwhile FATA. The aforementioned routes would certainly have contributed massively to the promotion of trade and regional connectivity. Chaman border is closed where on daily basis 20 to 25 thousand people had to cross the border and other main routes on the Durand line are mostly closed.

Respondent 3

The first potential Balochistan has its vast area that areas could be used for different purposes under CPEC apart from industrial purposes. Whenever people talk about CPEC they think it is about trade, infrastructure and roads. But the main component is the power sector. China has already developed different power-generating projects in Pakistan. They had to generate power through coal in Balochistan as well by keeping in view the economic environment goals set in Paris. But they are not making power coal projects in Balochistan. However, they can also generate wind power plants in the province. Balochistan has a very small population the small population can come as a strength in poverty alleviation. Poverty

alleviation is a main component of CPEC. More sustainable goals could easily be achieved in Balochistan in poverty alleviation.

Respondent 4

Balochistan has the potential of generating renewable energy amid climate change observed at an unseen pace. Similarly, Balochistan also has potential to generate solar energy. In terms of agriculture, the green belt of Balochistan i.e., Naseerabad Division adds to the provincial power potential of Balochistan. However, due to a lack of agricultural innovation, irrigation issues, climate change, deadly monsoon season and governance failure, it has not been capitalized by the successive administrations.

Respondent 5

Balochistan possesses a very pregnant position of strategic geographic location for this Chin's dream. If there is countering policy and its implementation for the freedom fighters of the Baloch nation who are continuously attacking and disturbing the project inside the province, then there will be a successful projection of CPEC. If it gets a successful projection, it can also contribute to the development of various sectors such as; the development of infrastructure, the energy sector, the importance of Gwadar port, and so many projects that can change the fate of the people of the Balochistan. This mega project can shape the barren lands of Balochistan as the developed infrastructure, a new road map to institutional and academic upgradation, a series of development and enhancing the routes of Gwadar port.

2. Are you satisfied with the CPEC project in Balochistan? If not, why?

Respondent I

The obvious answer certainly is no. Since its inception, CPEC has been projected as a game changer that can change the destiny of Balochistan and Gwadar. But the ground reality is entirely different. The majority of the people in the province are disappointed with CPEC. I believe that there are three main reasons why people are unhappy with CPEC. Firstly, the main component of the CPEC was infrastructure development. There is no infrastructure development, there is no

major road, railway line, or mass transit project. There is only an East Bay Expressway of 16 KM connecting Gwadar port with Makran Coastal Highway which is made purely for port usage. It does not benefit the common man. Makran Coastal Highway was constructed in 2006 before CPEC. The road between Quetta to Zhob and Dera Ismail Khan is also constructed with funding from Asian Development Bank ADB. The construction on the Quetta-Karachi highway which is also called a “killer highway” is quite slow due to insufficient resources.

Quetta-Karachi highway could have been constructed under CPEC as it is a hub of connectivity. Unfortunately, it did not happen. If a cargo comes to Gwadar on a mass level, currently there is no connectivity. And there is no railway line in Gwadar nor is there any plan for a railway in the coming 10 to 15 years. Makran Coastal Highway and road between Gwadar, Turbat, and Panjgur Surab, in these two routes it is impossible to pass big cargo. Secondly, CPEC has not generated jobs in Balochistan. Though Pakistan and China make tall claims of job creation in the province on ground such claims are unverifiable. Recently, in the new Gwadar International Airport, there were recruitments on contract basis jobs. Out of 60 candidates, merely 4 candidates were from Gwadar. Most of the employees in the ports were non-locals. Thirdly, CPEC investment has not contributed to the local economy of Balochistan. In the port construction, even Chinese brought raw materials from China. Chinese do not buy local items even fast-moving consumer goods such as shampoo and tissues papers are brought from China which is damaging the local economy badly.

Respondent 2

When CPEC was initiated Balochistan was an epicentre of the project like Gwadar port, Western route building economic zones, industrial zones, sub corridors fibre optical. Unfortunately, over a decade, Balochistan did not get the anticipated projects except a few projects in Gwadar like Gwadar International Airport, and Expressway. From 2013 to 2018 major projects of CPEC operated in Punjab and Sindh. We witnessed the creation of the Metro, Green Line Train and Solar Park in Bawalpur, the Motorway between Karachi to Hyderabad, Motorway between Sukkur to Multan. All major projects were initiated in Punjab. It was promised

that the Western route was the shorted route and more effective environmentally. I believe so far Balochistan has not benefited from CPEC.

Respondent 3

I worked in CPEC unit government of Balochistan for eight months as a research consultant. During my tenure, I learnt CPEC progress was dissatisfactory in Balochistan. But when it comes to Gwadar CPEC has tremendous progress established many institutions under CPEC, hospitals, vocational training centers, and free economic zones. When we go beyond Gwadar, progress is very slow. I do not blame China for slow progress but I blame government of Balochistan. There is another project named twin cities of China, they initiated two such projects one was to convert Quetta capital of Balochistan a twin city of province's capital city. But project is still on paper and there is slow response from Federal and Provincial governments. Balochistan government also failed to initiate research projects under CPEC. Punjab has done far better than Balochistan in poverty alleviation. Balochistan being the poorest province has not achieved desired goals. Punjab established different universities one of the universities Mir Chaker Khan Rind University in Dera Ghazi Khan was established under CPEC. We so far have not done such things.

Respondent 4

CPEC projects have lost legitimacy in Balochistan and people have no more faith in the Chinese-led mega project. China is accused of importing Chinese to Balochistan. The state of Pakistan is said to have installed a clear apartheid in Gwadar. Chinese presence in Gwadar has led several to argue that Beijing may convert Gwadar port into a naval base for power projection in the Arabian Sea during war times leaving strategic insecurity in the people of Balochistan. China has not harnessed the untapped potential of Balochistan's energy sector. All Beijing-funded nuclear power plants are outside the province of Balochistan. Among several economic zones, only one special economic zone is in Balochistan.

Unlike railway route spanning from Karachi to Peshawar known as MLI, no railway tracks laid in Balochistan. Similarly, like motorways such as Sukkur-Multan Motorway, none of such projects is established in Balochistan. CPEC has

also failed to train Baloch youth and provide employment to locals and Chinese scholarships. Balochistan needs CPEC but it must be harnessed in a proper way for the development of the province.

Respondent 5

CPEC is a vast project of China containing billions of dollars to be invested in the project, but all the investment and projection of developmental ideas will not work for the indigenous Baloch. The project may be vast, full of dreaming investments and a game changer for Pakistan but it will not flourish as much as possible as the two states are looking for. Baloch insurgents and a common Baloch will never accept any illegal exploitation of resources of their land. The common Baloch even may be illiterate in terms of well-educated and academic knowledge but he/she will not accept the unjust shares. The values and share according to a common Baloch should be transferred to Baloch land and China will not be allowed to have Chinese settlement in the land.

3. **What challenges including traditional/non-traditional threats do you see for CPEC in Balochistan in the near future?**

Respondent I

The biggest threat to CPEC is the Baloch militant group and Islamic militant groups in the shape of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan TTP and Islamic State IS. Baloch militant group has openly waged a war against CPEC threatening China carried out attacks not only in Gwadar but also in Karachi. Attacking the Chinese consulate and Confucius Institute in Karachi symbolically showed China that they would attack them in future too. China has a 40 per cent share in Pakistan Stock Exchange PSE attacking PSC was a lucid message to Beijing by the Baloch militant group. In the Makran division, Baloch militants are quite active, the Chinese presence is only in Gwadar due to security reasons.

TTP recently has also made a shadow province in Kalat and Makran. They might carry out attacks against CPEC in the near future. TTP's tactic is different from those of Baloch militant groups. They attack the Chinese but do not claim responsibility. They launched attacks against the Chinese ambassador in Quetta

Serena Hotel and attacked Chinese engineers in Dusso, Gilgit-Baltistan but did not accept responsibility. Though IS so far has not carried out enough attacks against Chinese and is also a formidable threat to CPEC. IS kidnapped a Chinese couple in Quetta their dead bodies were recovered from Mastung. There is no free movement of Chinese in Quetta city one can hardly find a Chinese in Quetta.

The deteriorating situation in Afghanistan cannot be ruled out. The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan on August 15, 2021, embarked on a path to further instability in the country. There is uncertainty in Afghanistan, there might be another war which will have spillover effects on CPEC in Balochistan. Non-traditional threats are also affecting the province and CPEC projects. Poverty and illiteracy are in full swing. CPEC requires enabling environment human resources and capital which are lacking in the province. The capital should have been developed by CPEC but remained failed. Climate change might cause obstacles for CPEC there has been frequent rains, floods, and irregular temperature disrupting CPEC plans. Water shortage is a chronic problem, there have been protests in Gwadar and Makran demanding drinking water. One decade has been completed under CPEC but the government so far has not built a desalination plant in Gwadar which could fill the needs of the city.

Respondent 2

The US will not accept Chinese growing influence in the region, particularly in Balochistan. Baloch insurgent groups will indeed pose a threat to CPEC. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf PTI government converted CPEC into a sealed pack. Many projects under PTI government were stopped. The incumbent government resumed some CPEC projects, but Balochistan does not get enough projects and economic dividends.

Respondent 3

The first threat that comes to our mind is the security threat which exists not only in the province but in the whole of Pakistan. From the geo-political perspective, the US does not appreciate the project, trying to use different political tactics to sway us away from CPEC. The poor governance in Balochistan is also a big challenge to CPEC. Due to our poor governance, we have disappointed China on

many occasions. Poor governance can go against us. The economic crisis the province is confronting is putting cost of production of every project like the province has taken many soft loans from China. The cost has gone so high that we need more money if we do not get those funds, we will not be able to complete our projects. In the coming few years we have to repay the loans we have taken from China which appears to be a big threat. We still do not understand CPEC is more about research, and power generation relating to sustainable cities than only having trade routes and developing certain infrastructures.

Respondent 4

India is a grave threat to CPEC, it will have issues with the China-Pakistan cooperation. The US wants to encircle China geopolitically, it has been repetitively mentioned by the Americans that they would do with the help of allies and like-minded states. CPEC helps China evading this encirclement thus making the US antagonist against it. Given infamous Chinese loan conditions and debt trap policy coupled with Western propagation, CPEC will have international critiques from the international communities. The economic weakness of Pakistan will also affect CPEC. Political instability in Pakistan will undermine CPEC. Arguably, Pakistan has no unified political spectrum on CPEC or all-party consensus. For example, PTI's role in CPEC was unfavorable to CPEC. The people of Balochistan are agitated against CPEC. Propaganda against CPEC by the West and India will also affect CPEC.

Respondent 5

CPEC will face troubles and can persistently be disturbed by traditional and non-traditional threats. The first issue is the political instability of Pakistan, the inflation, governmental changes and their policies towards CPEC. The US lobby has a great effect on the project. These issues concern Baloch freedom fighter and their continuous attacks on Chinese civilians.

4. The fifth separatist insurgency is posing a formable threat to CPEC. How do you view the fifth separatist insurgency as far as CPEC in Balochistan is concerned?

Respondent I

From 2002 onwards, Baloch militant group had a fear of settlement of the Chinese and non-locals as construction of Gwadar port was underway. Gwadar will become a major city like Karachi and Baloch will be converted into a minority in their province. Due to that fear, the current insurgency has evolved. I believe the insurgency relates to identity and Gwadar port. In 2015 when CPEC was started in the province, the Baloch militant group observed that the Chinese are coming overwhelmingly to Balochistan. In 2017 and 2018 they triggered a war in 2018 they attacked Chinese engineers in Dalbandin. In the same year, they attacked the Chinese consulate followed by attacks in Gwadar. As a result, Pakistan started militarization to counter the Baloch militant. They built Special Security Division in Gwadar and built FC South to focus on Turbat and its surrounding areas. The militarization has bolstered the insurgency because people have become sick of militarization and started reacting by joining the insurgency. Though militarization is attributed to protecting CPEC, it has produced counter results.

We have seen protests in Gwader led by Mulana Hidyat Rehamn. Unless there is insurgency in Balochistan the success of Gwadar port is doubtful. I can claim that insurgency is one of the biggest problems. Chinese understand this and started negotiations with Baloch separatists. But negotiation remained unsuccessful. China has been pressuring Pakistan to deal with the insurgency. Pakistan's approach is pretty clear it is handling the issue militarily. It is a low-scale insurgency and will be going on. It cannot be wiped out completely. In a year if they carry out one major attack it would cause a great deal of damage to Chinese interests. The threat of insurgency will be prevailing and is a formidable threat to CPEC.

Respondent 2

No doubt, insurgency is a threat but there is no project on the ground. The state so far has not solved the issue of drinking water in Gwadar. There is almost no representation of Balochistan in the Planning Commission and Pakistan-China Joint Committee and CPEC Advisory Committee. China and Pakistan need to ponder over Balochistan and should build a Western route and sub-route of the Western route in a bid to alleviate poverty in the province.

Respondent 3

The current insurgency has a very interesting trajectory, there have been certain spikes in insurgency and then go quiet for some time. A few years back insurgents decided they would not attack civilians and would be attacking law enforcement agencies. When they attacked the Chinese in Karachi with a suicide bomber gave a clear message that they had changed their tactics and would also be attacking civilians. This time they also attacked police and tried to exert pressure by carrying out suicide attacks. Recently, one of the main successes of the government was the arrest of one of its top leaders. He gave information about the camps where they operated. The government was successful in marginalizing their camps. I believe solution is not in military intervention. We have to create an environment for the people living in Balochistan in environment where they must believe they are being treated fairly their apprehensions are being addressed.

We have to create a new social contract for those who live in Balochistan either Baloch, Pashtoon, Hazara, Sindhi, or Punjabi. The above-mentioned ethnic groups in Balochistan face ill-treatment compared to other parts of Pakistan. The most crucial part of addressing the insurgency lies in addressing the issue of missing persons. The suicide bombers that below herself in Turbat a few days ago belonged to a missing person's family. They are very vulnerable and can easily be exploited by the insurgents. China already knew that we were facing insurgency but they still agreed to come to Pakistan. Beijing was not very much concerned about insurgency and currently is worried about the situation.

Respondent 4

The fifth insurgency of the Baloch separatist movement began after 2000, when Baloch prominent leaders, student leaders and civilians became the center of mass killings. This phase changed and modernized the Baloch movement inside Balochistan. Student leaders who were politicizing the common Baloch and were spreading awareness of Baloch's rights to claim natural resources were plundered. They turned themselves into a separatist movement and soon the movement came into the hands of student leaders. They started attacking the Chinese civilians and officials to counter BRI and CPEC. The fifth phase dramatically changed

misinterpretations of people and scholars to take a new perspective on this movement. The attack on Pearl Continental Gwadar. The attack on Chinese teachers along with the Confucius Institute at the University of Karachi by a female suicide bomber posed a grave threat to CPEC.

Conclusion

The year 2023 marks a successful decade of CPEC. The mega project is termed as a game changer for Pakistan. Gwadar and Balochistan are a starter of the mega project. The province, thus, should have a greater share due to its geo-strategic location and vast area. As the saying goes that "nearer to the church farther from God". Over a decade, there have not been ample economic dividends, and the policymakers of the country need to ponder over the untapped potentials of Balochistan under the mega project. The vast area, including Balochistan's natural resources, agriculture, livestock, blue economy, and tourism sectors should be exploited that by and large will usher a path to development and prosperity in the province. Arguably, CPEC is a last resort of Federal and Provincial governments to mitigate the grievances of Balochistan. If CPEC remains ineffective in addressing deprivations of Balochistan, it will have severe implications for national integration.

Ostensibly, there are innumerable threats to CPEC in Balochistan. Challenges such as insurgency, non-implementation of the 18th amendment, political engineering, water scarcity, non-modernization in agriculture and livestock sectors, poor governance, and spillover effects of instability in Afghanistan over CPEC require a great deal of reassessment. Balochistan is not only special for Pakistan but also for great powers. The growing pre-occupation of the US, China and India cannot be ruled out. They are keenly taking an interest in CPEC and Balochistan. The future of Pakistan and Balochistan lies in the success of CPEC. Tim Marshall in his fascinating book "Prisoner of Geography" rightly articulates that "There is no Pakistan without Balochistan". Against this backdrop, a former Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan General Qamar Javed Bajwa maintains that "Pakistan is incomplete without Balochistan". It is not an exaggeration to say that Balochistan is a nervous system of Pakistan. It, thus, requires special attention under CPEC.

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