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REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY: A CASE STUDY OF CPEC AND ECO

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ABSTRACT

Regional interconnectivity through political socio-economic and technological means leads towards regional prosperity, development, and regional stability. The purpose of this paper is to explore the potential role of linking CPEC and ECO, as well as the potential and challenges that may arise. According to the paper, CPEC and ECO have an open model of regional interconnectivity that leads to regional growth, development, and stability. It gives the idea of the prospects that interconnectivity of CPEC with ECO will bring to the entire region

INTRODUCTION

The Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) was set up as a three-sided plan among Pakistan, Turkey, and Iran in 1964. The point of RCD was to fortify their collaboration in the fields of financial turn of events, exchange, transportation, correspondence, rail lines, industry, and banking among part states. Nonetheless, various monetary, political, and regulatory challenges halted the progress. Following twelve inadmissible years, the three provincial Heads of State held a culmination in Izmir (Turkey) in April 1976, making changes to the RCD objectives. This improvement was upset because of the Iranian Islamic revolution in 70s. A fresh breath of life was given to the organization when six recent independent countries of Central Asia - Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, applied for the participation of ECO alongside Afghanistan. The acceptance to

these countries was given formally in May 1992 meeting held at Islamabad. This arrangement has open fresh leaf throughout the entire existence of ten part states associating in Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO hence), the area boast huge number of natural resources with 440 million population in terms of human resources. (Hooman, 2009:303). ECO is an important component in connecting South Asian countries to central Asia. Pakistan is located at the junction, connecting the land-locked central Asian countries to warm waters of Indian Ocean. Corruption, underdevelopment, and weak connectivity are among the socio-economic, political, security, and development challenges that South Asia and Central Asia face.

The need of the hour is to evaluate the history of ECO to identify the challenges and opportunities concerning ECO on multi-dimensional level and address the constraints halting the prosperity and resolve the stability issues of the region. Regional connectivity, prosperity and development are inextricably linked to multi-dimensional interconnectivity and interconnectivity while mutual growth, political stability with economic growth are the main objectives of interconnectivity. Solid economic arrangement accompanied by strong political will generate inexhaustible resources to pursue strategic objectives in the regional policies effectively. Strong economy generates stable states, and these strong economies are born by being part of the inter and intra-regional interconnectivity. In this scenario Pakistan can be such pivotal state, due to her geographical location she can be the leader in regional trade and energy corridor by providing the necessary connectivity to landlocked Central Asian countries.

ECO translates Pakistan's dream of regional interconnectivity. This research paper shades light on the role of ECO with respect to regional interconnectivity. ECO serves the purpose of connecting Central Asian states to South Asian region in it lays its importance and need. It connects the energy rich countries of Central Asia to the world market through Pakistan's warm waters. However, regional economic, social, and political interconnectivity must be a prerequisite for this form of interconnectivity. In this paper, an attempt is made to understand the idea of multi-dimensional regional interconnectivity, its various types, and the one that ECO provides to the region.

China being the second greatest economy along with consumer of energy on the planet and security of the oil transportation network stays the fundamental thought of China's strategic policy. China imports about 83 percent of its oil by sea, with 77 percent passing through the Malacca strait, which may be an obstacle for China. Some factors, such as China's neighboring conflicts, pirate theft incidents, and global politics, makes the Strait of Malacca, vulnerable spot for China, with the potential to halt economic growth if unexpected events occur. The Strait of Malacca is home to roughly 60% of all pirate attacks in the world. The involvement of the Indian and US fleets in the Malacca strait raises significant safety issues, and any unexpected act could disrupt China's trade and investment supplies. China needs to gain access to deep water via Pakistan in order to resolve these obstacles. The CPEC will connect the cities of Kashgar of Western China with Pakistani Gwadar Port by building a road and rail transportation system. Kashgar has excellent financial prospects due to its proximity to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and Central Asian local markets.

Geographically, Pakistan is vital and has pulled attention of numerous world forces for monetary, political, and energy interests. Pakistan borders in its Northwest with China, from East to India, from West to Afghanistan, from Southwest to Iran, and in South the Arabian Sea. It is the passage to Central Asian and Middle Eastern countries and assumes a fundamental part in transportation economy. Additionally, Pakistan fills in a travel course to non-coastal countries, such as Afghanistan and Central Asian states, to exchange by giving passage to the overall markets via the Arabian Sea.

The deep seaport Gwadar of Pakistan is arranged at the entrance of the Persian Gulf, near the Strait of Hormuz that is the third drawn in course, running 35% of world ocean trade. This route is extremely appealing to China for handling its ocean trade difficulties and associate Western China to the world by territorial and financial means. Pakistan is likewise a fundamental piece of China's New Silk Road Initiative "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)". Pakistan can be a significant accomplice for this activity that contains territorial and ocean courses. (Alam, K. M., Li, X., and Baig, S. 2019)

China requires an active trading course to the Europe and Middle East that is short, practical, and secure, and this CPEC can abundantly offer this desirable route to China to reach Europe and Middle East. A huge impact can be expected on world trade via CPEC

Regional Interconnectivity: The Concept

Regional connectivity via regional development of political, social, technological, and economic is referred as regional interconnectivity. It helps in diverging efforts to cooperate and compete with efficiency in terms of global economy. Regional interconnectivity, according to the theory of economic interconnectivity, is a mechanism by which tariff differences, quantitative constraints, and bans on product logistics between countries or nations are eliminated. (Balassa, 2008). Regional interconnectivity encompasses both economic as well as political issues because political willingness does propagate the initial stages in financial interconnectivity and by the same token economic gains are the ultimate goals, the political unity must arise as the next step (Balassa, 2008). In the wake of aftermath of World War II, the financial benefits of interconnectivity were the primary motivations for maintaining interconnectivity in the post-World War II period. Many economic issues can be solved by political means and processes. For example, taking advantage of regional trade potential necessitates a decision-making process, and acting on any issue contributes to a political matter.

Regional economic interconnectivity is of different levels. Free-trade area is the most basic form, for example, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) removes or significantly decreases tariff and quantitative barriers among its partners, while each and every country maintains its own tariffs for non-partners. Same is the case with Customs union in regional interconnectivity in which tariffs amongst participating states are given up by adopting a consistent rate of tariff rate for non-participating members while the common Market helps

the cooperation by adopting the free movement of materials and manpower. Common economic and monetary policies are another form of regional interconnectivity. This requires a mature level of political willingness among the participating nations where each country gives up unanimously on few of the tariffs and non-tariff barriers by initiating a common currency and monetary policies (Moon, 2016). Usually, interconnectivity on regional level is initiated by individual states distinguished by their levels of interconnectivity on regional level and how much are they involved.

European mode of regional interconnectivity presents significant answers for the Central and South Asia regions via European mode of interconnectivity which alludes to close form of regionalism or tight form of interconnectivity in establishing multi-national institutions. However Open regionalism may not require the said type of interconnectivity. Even though the participating countries will be required to show strong willingness and determination to undertake the task of regional interconnectivity to successfully overcome the hurdles in integrating socio-political, technological, and technological endeavors on European pattern. It's a kind of breakthrough for all the individual states at the wake of regional interconnectivity and connectivity. Each and every region's growth is dependent upon many socio-political, economic, and technological factors and assets enrichment factor must not be neglected.

The integrated regions by ECO i.e. Central and South Asia, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, turkey, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan owns large quantities of mineral resources along with producing the most needed agricultural raw products like cotton and various grain in difference to Europe. This region need not to bother with any Outrages Plan yet simply needs genuine endeavors with respect to national governments to incorporate these areas while supporting territorial and intra-local financial joining by solid political initiates. Along the line of political willingness, safe conditions with harmony by the improvement of relationship must be built up. The accomplishment of Connectivity into reasonable advancement in development of resources relies upon facilitated endeavors and interconnectivity among all the partners with and within region. ECO provides interconnectivity to energy resources countries the access to the energy deprived markets. The organized endeavors with respect to connectivity induce linkage of markets reduce cost of manufactured goods interconnectivity on regional level helps blend with other participating states, Extreme interconnectivity maintains each participating country's stakes for maximum cooperation for regional stability, which results in rigorous conflict resolution and strategies to resolve future conflicts. ECO's mode of interconnectivity in the given region not only helps in strengthening regional trade and economic growth but also interconnects various regions internationally. This mode of territorial connectivity enables uniformity in the participating states to develop regional interaction, to maintain economic independence and effectively interconnect with global economy. Regional interconnectivity must be on the basis of socio-economic, politico-technological basis in order to hammer out most of its potential for the participating nations.

Prospects of Interconnecting CPEC with ECO

Economic growth and development through interconnectivity is the trick of the trade in this era. Connecting CPEC with ECO provides an important opportunity to the integrated states with and within the region and with other regions. The main agenda of regional interconnectivity is connectivity on the basis of socio-economic, politico-technological levels. It enables the region for quick interconnectivity on regional level through functional growth. As proposed by Functional theory one area of interest culminates into other areas of interest in the forerun. Likewise in European Union the assistance in coal and steel industries provided the stimulus for further regional interconnectivity. Functional interconnectivity is the driving force behind regional development (Greene, 2011).

Likewise, Afghanistan, South and Central Asia, and, Iran, and all territorial partners of ECO must adhere to the standard reason for economic cooperation while participating in oil pipelines as a useful zone for energy exploration, defence, and peace. Apart from the economies the ECO region has similarities in the form of common culture, religion, history and geographic connectivity, these results in profiting all the countries participating in the arrangement. For instance, Kazakhstan, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan are hydrocarbon producing and trading nations while Turkey and Pakistan are hydrocarbon importing nations. The Central Asian Republics are blessed with huge hydroelectric force. Pakistan an electricity hungry country is always deprived of local electricity she can avail herself of the electricity from central Asian countries. The underdeveloped energy sector in Afghanistan contributes to poor economic and social growth. Tajikistan and Kyrgyz Republic have huge undiscovered hydropower surplus assets comparative with their necessities, which might be formed into territorial power plants. There is gigantic potential for collaboration in this sector. Similarly, Kazakhstan and Pakistan excel at selling agricultural by-products like rice, wheat, vegetables, and fruits while these products are imported by Turkey and Iran. Pakistan has a highly developed textile industry while states like Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are struggling to establish a solid textile industry in their respective areas in which Pakistan can help them. Likewise, Pakistan can take assistance from Turkey for automobile industry. There is a huge potential in the industry-to-industry trade within the region which must be exploited. Kazakhstan and Pakistan can build their exports of agrarian items like rice, fruits and vegetables to Iran and Turkey.

Interconnecting of CPEC with ECO hails for a kind of regional interconnectivity that is beyond the economic trade block. ECO's structure of economic interdependence and economic interconnectivity in this multi-polar world reflects a humble arrangement of various sectors of developing economies and established countries with an open arrangement with a greater degree of ease in pursuing their independent foreign policy. ECO does not offer close regionalism which imposes protecting measure to limit nonparticipating countries to trade in the markets of regional countries. ECO rather offers open regionalism by giving impetus to the trade and commerce on international level. Instead of trade emancipation as its key salient feature, the benefit of this form of open regionalism is that there are no elements left or discriminated against

non-participating members or states residing in extra-region. The model of open regionalism or regional interconnectivity means a step-by-step arrangement rather than an isolated arrangement to cut the world economies from the regional states. As this is an out-ward oriented model so it increases regional and as well as intra-regional trade through reaching international markets, by addressing not only economic but also political, social, and technological sense (Niekerk, 2005).

Central Asian nations have progressively looked to get to local markets like China, Pakistan, India, and the nations in the West Asia, consequently the CPEC fills in as a vital open door for the five Central Asian nations to get entrance and more seriousness in those business sectors; Pakistan additionally wants to get to the enormous natural recourses and business hubs of Central Asia through Afghanistan. Similarly, CPEC gives tremendous opportunities to Central Asian states, so that every one of its partner has indicated revenue in joining the CPEC and looking for local interconnectivity. Despite the enormous capability produced by CPEC and the greater part of Central Asian nations that CPEC could create, there stays some pessimism about the forecasting advancement of the venture. A significant concern is the continuous unstable situation in Afghanistan, which is the easiest way to join Pakistan with Central Asia, and in this way via the CPEC.

Persisting tense Pak-Afghan ties and instability in Afghanistan has present long haul difficulties to the interconnectivity between Pakistan and Central Asia, consequently influencing the effort of the CPEC. CPEC connects ECO region by excluding Kabul from the narrative directly from China avoiding any potential security threats. CPEC can carry more advantages to every single territorial partner on the off chance that they work intently together on notable international and safety issues and delivers advancing interconnectivity and peace.

CPEC and ECO are surrounded by huge supply and demand markets which serve the best supply chain for the poorly connected regions of South and Central Asia. Poor quality of transport and interconnectivity in trade facilities has resulted in less local interconnectivity in Central and South Asia (World Bank Report, 2016). Especially for landlocked countries the transportation development and infrastructure are being regarded as a vital factor to reduce the cost of transport of manpower and stuff with an increase in competitiveness (Llanto, 2015). Connecting CPEC with ECO identifies the new ever-growing needs of regional and international politics by promoting a sophisticated system of affairs, updated and need-based interaction for socio-politic, technological and economic development through interconnectivity.

Interconnectivity of CPEC with ECO ensures in gaining of trade for regional states with increase in investment and returns through market expansion by providing access to regional and international markets. Regional interconnectivity is a political choice as it involves political decision making which ultimately leads to socio-economic and technological interconnectivity. Thus, regional interconnectivity on economic basis can only be achieved once political harmonization is achieved.

Role of Regional Interconnectivity in Security

The current situation of the world depicts a more multi-polarity in the international arena where regional states and their surroundings matters a lot and regional interconnectivity is identified as a decisive power in peace and security. The solutions to regional prosperity and peace must include socio-politico, technological and economic interconnectivity. The socio-politico, technology and economic crisis move beyond borders affecting countries with and within region therefore crisis resolution and conflict management must be resolved by including regional states in the decision making process which will expand the contours of regional interconnectivity. The conflicts of this new era are beyond borders, and it requires measures to cope beyond the borders over here regionalism plays its role in global security (Bradley and Felício, 2006). As a matter of fact, neighboring countries seems to have frequent intervals of conflict, so regionalism reduces the incidence of war (Husain, 2016).

A strategic corridor for instance ECO works on the principle of multi-dimensional level, promoting interconnectivity, regional prosperity, and peace (Ahmar, 2015). Connecting it with CPEC will bring wonders. A simple observation is the example of European Union rise in one of the most established region of the world since World War II. The constant wars which plagued European nations came to halt when they developed economic interdependence among each other and found the stability in their politics. The real agenda of prosperity and peace was at last achieved. According to S W Polachek, “a doubling of trade between two countries lowers the risk of conflict between them by 17 percent” (Polachek, 1992). The Romanian scholar, David Mitrany, the initial propounded the concept of having shared interest in an enterprise on the basis of mere agreements will not bring peace but shared interest must be addressed on multi-dimensional levels (Tripathi, 2012).

CPEC is significant for the methodology of safety through improvement with regards to China and a few investigators calls it as passage of harmony. China thinks about that upgrade in security and financial aspects are interrelated and advancement in one can supplement the other. CPEC can lighten a portion of the homegrown security worries of China originating from its prevalently Muslim area of Xinjiang in the western China. The territory has seen a portion of the most noticeably awful fear monger assaults on Chinese land. The East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) that has asylums in Pakistan-Afghanistan lining locales is viewed as answerable for the psychological oppressor exercises in the terrain China. Investigators accept that the monetary turn of events and business openings in the area would lessen the help for fanatic philosophies around here. A prosperous state requires tranquil neighboring countries and the CPEC can be a stimulator of harmony and success to the patio of China in the areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan (Af-Pak). China accepts that the financial venture would carry inward dependability to Pakistan. The lining belt of Af-Pak, that is accepted to be the asylum for some, banished aggressor associations including ETIM, will be so opened with expanding monetary possibilities around there. By handling jihadi associations in adjoining Pakistan, China desires to all the more likely secure their own domain. As the insights delivered by a Pakistani paper recommend that CPEC would create more than 2 million

positions for the joining forces nations. Along these lines, CPEC addresses China's global just as homegrown endeavors to convey security through improvement.

CPEC is critical to China's security through development policy, and some analysts have dubbed it the "Peace Corridor." China believes that security and economic growth are intertwined, and that each should complement the other. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has the potential to alleviate some of China's national security concerns regarding the majorly occupied by Muslims the province of Xinjiang in western China. The province has been the site of some of the most heinous infiltration on Chinese soil. The East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), which has safe havens in Afghanistan and Pakistan, is blamed for the attacks. Analysts agree that the region's economic growth and job prospects would reduce the region's support for radical ideas. A rising country needs friendly neighbours, and the CPEC has the potential to bring stability and prosperity to China's cause in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Af-Pak). China claims that the increased funding will help Pakistan achieve security and stability. The border areas of Af-Pak, which is thought to be a haven of many banned militant groups, including ETIM, will be bolstered by the region's improving financial prospects. China hopes to improve the security of its own territory by combating jihadi groups in neighboring Pakistan. According to statistics published in a Pakistani newspaper, CPEC will create over 2 million jobs in the collaborating countries. As a result, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) reflects both China's domestic and international efforts to provide stability through growth. (Rahman, S. U., & Shurong, Z. 2017).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In order to begin with the projects of mutual interest or the areas which needs most interconnectivity at the moment is electric power, gas and oil pipelines and its transportation. Projects like TAPI, IPI and CASA 1000 are important to regional interconnectivity and ensuring regional development peace and prosperity eventually.

Security and peace go hand in hand for the region to integrate and materialize the developmental objectives of the regional arrangement. Peace and Security components are imperative to incorporate in order to achieve regional interconnectivity it must be added as a mutual agreeable arrangement on security grounds.

Priority should be given to the geo-economic policies by regional powers because only that can deliver smooth and rapid regional interconnectivity, increasing the size of the economy for participating states and forming more economic zones . In the end, massive trade diversion would overtake smaller inter-regional trade providing prosperity to smaller regions with big trade opportunities.

The political and social environments in Central and South Asia are tumultuous, which makes economic growth difficult. These regions must work together and organize with their neighbors in order to break the cycle of economic stagnation; with regional interconnectivity, these landlocked

countries will flourish and give back to the world through improving their economies.

In the ECO, interconnectivity is critical, and CPEC may play a key role in this regard. CPEC could act as a glue that holds ECO countries together. It also gives ECO the requisite connectivity to meet its commodity transportation needs from landlocked Central Asian countries to the rest of the world. CPEC can bridge the supply chains of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Middle East, China, Central Asia, and South Asia. Once implemented, CPEC and ECO will enhance resource efficiency in the region.

The ECO area must finish its project milestones with vigour and settle conflicts on a case-by-case basis. State governments must cooperate not only economically, but also politically, socially, and technologically, because regional interconnectivity can only be achieved this way.

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