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## CPEC: A Vigour behind The New Regional Order in South Asia

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### Abstract

*The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) considers a nodal part of China's grand Belt and Road Initiative that connects China to Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. CPEC also brought a multi-dimensional Shift in South Asia's geopolitics with its pledged investment in the infrastructure and energy sector that helped to overcome the energy shortage and significantly boost Pakistan and other neighbouring countries in the future. Meanwhile, in the quest to promote regional connectivity, new competition dynamics between countries are emerging. Several economic corridor projects are being headed to advance their particular interests by various countries in South Asia. Moreover, the growing importance of CPEC also affects the geopolitics and realignment of South Asia forces. The estrangement between Pakistan and the United States and India's increasing tension has led Pakistan to increase its dependence on China. On the other hand, the Indo-US partnership is also a strong factor behind the region's insecure environment. The growing aspirations of the economic giant, China is likely to have a lasting impact on the South Asian states' regional security and economic development. China and Pakistan have frequently reiterated that CPEC is an economic corridor and a significant stabilizing factor in South Asia's volatile and uncertain regional security paradigm. However, South Asia's security has always been in transition due to the simmering and unpredictable situation in Afghanistan and other regional issues such as war against terrorism and unresolved territorial disputes. In this*

*prevailing security situation, it is pertinent to find how the CPEC project affects the existing regional order and brings the changes in South Asian states' security.*

**Key Words:** China Pakistan Economic Corridor, China, the United States, regional order, South Asia, free and Open Indo-Pacific

## 1. Introduction

China and Pakistan have developed strong political, military, and strategic connections. Both countries have made it a point since the start of the century to mend their economic connections. That year, both countries decided to proceed with their ambitions to establish the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), reinvigorating their economic ties. In addition to connecting other Asian sub-regions, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) can improve the region's economic and strategic environment. CPEC, on the other hand, is feared by some regional and extra-regional entities [1]. President Xi Jinping of China inaugurated the \$46 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor in April 2015. (CPEC). Aiming to strengthen regional connectivity between Pakistan and China, OBOR aspires to connect Eurasia. A combination of CPEC and OBOR would certainly have strategic implications for Pakistan and the region. Pakistan sees this tunnel as proof of its unshakable ties to China.

The two countries' bilateral relationship is marked by significant cooperation and strategic interest convergence. A successful project would benefit Pakistan's energy-scarce economy and internal security. Given Pakistan's proximity to Afghanistan and ongoing tensions with India, a geopolitical impact assessment of the corridor is required. Inter-border conflicts, terrorist claims, and the Kashmir war show distrust and animosity between India and Pakistan [2]. Pakistan and China have had to strengthen and expand their commercial connections to preserve their success. The 2013 China-Pakistan Economic Corridor deal elevated their strategic and economic cooperation. In the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is vital to improving regional connectivity and growing trade. The CPEC will link regional economic players. It will connect economic centres or hubs in densely populated urban areas. Its roadways, paths, and offshoots will eventually affect its neighbours. CPEC is unquestionably a geostrategic concept that may economically benefit the entire region Others may be concerned about this suggestion, which they regard as a danger to their political and strategic interests.

Economic corridors are vital for business and regional integration in today's global economy. Economists define economic corridors as the status, laws, and conventions that control and drive trade between persons and across borders. These corridors connect several economic participants in an area. They're supposed to stimulate regional economic activity and promote regional growth. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is currently strengthening bilateral business connections. CPEC's speedy completion reflects the two countries' long-standing friendship. CPEC is a major geostrategic zone in South Asia. It will connect China, the Middle East, and Europe via Pakistan. Connecting Kashgar (Xinjiang) to Gwadar (Baluchistan) will enhance trade and tourism. The 2,500–3,000 kilometer Kashgar–Gwadar route should be finished by 2030. Beyond connecting two projects, the CPEC is a key component of China's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) plan, which seeks to improve economic connectivity between Asia, Europe, and Africa. A new economic paradigm, CPEC is China's crown jewel effort. The corridor will boost China's business connections with other countries in the region. The Malacca Straits can help China improve its energy security and reduce its reliance on the US or Indian navy blocking the passage [3]. As part of China's Western Development Strategy, CPEC will also help the poorest region of the country's northwest grow (WDS). According to Obama's 2012 regional plan, Pivot to East Asia, the corridor is significant for Sino-US strategic competition in Southeast Asia. To promote Gwadar as a regional trade and commercial centre, the CPEC will help Pakistan's economy recover. CPEC will build roads, railroads, and Gwadar's international airport. CPEC would reduce terrorism, extremism, and separatism [4]. The CPEC would enable Pakistan and China to conduct combined naval exercises, training, and anti-piracy operations. This would help maintain regional power balance.

### 1.1 Objective of the Study

This article emphasises a few crucial points. First, based on current strategic developments in South Asia, China looks to be the only country capable and ready to confront security concerns while maintaining peace and stability in the region, especially now that China's geoeconomic plan and win-win approach are beginning to bear fruit. The CPEC will only succeed if regional parties, especially India and Pakistan, engage in healthy and forward-thinking dialogue. The essay looks at the risks and benefits of CPEC for South Asian countries, the long-standing rivalry between New Delhi and Islamabad, and the emerging Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor (IPEC) as a counter-measure to CPEC. It then discusses how the CPEC can help shape the new regional order in South Asia. In order to transform South Asia into a "community of shared future," it concludes by urging all regional parties to be more transparent, constrained, and consult.

## 2. The Spill Over Effect of CPEC on South Asian Region (Benefits and Countermeasure)

Contrary to expectations, China's BRI has taken a country-by-country strategy. The old friendly relationship between China and nuclear-armed Pakistan gives BRI an edge in South Asia. De facto, India rejects this move. In response, China may have to modify its long-term regional goal. China denies using the BRI to achieve long-term geopolitical ambitions. However, China believes India will engage in additional BRI operations [5]. China is trying to persuade India that cooperating with China is in its best interests. President Xi has kept in touch with Modi, and China has distanced itself from the India-Pakistan spat. China has increased the number of Indian student and artist scholarships. China's relations with Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, and Afghanistan [6]. All of these countries are in different stages of their relationship with China. Bangladesh, for example, is concerned about Chinese involvement in Sri Lanka's debt-ridden Hambantota port.

As a result, China has increased its participation in Bangladesh in sectors such as education and culture. Bangladesh's biggest military supplier is China. The BRI includes the 6.4 kilometre Padma Bridge [7]. Unlike India, China does not regard Nepal as a big brother. China has no access to India's ports and has offered Nepal access to its four major ports [8]. A billion-dollar development commitment from Xi Jinping. The Maldives rely on tourism. To reward or punish the Maldives through tourism is thus possible [9].

Despite pledging to uphold its "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence," China sent a navy ship to the Indian Ocean to protect a pro-China government in the Maldives. An Afghan invasion could jeopardize China's safety. The recent US-Taliban deal means US army withdrawal. Precisely, China is preparing for future security. One option is to increase Chinese investment in post-conflict reconstruction and economic projects. A railway may connect Kandahar to the CPEC [10]. After the US pulls out, Beijing may push for global intervention, including UN peacekeeping missions. The BRI increases the risk of regional destabilization. The Maritime Silk Road and the BRI's three key overland projects in South Asia (CPEC, BCIM-EC, and THC) can accommodate both dimensions [11]. These four programs have various ramifications to South Asia.

### 2.1 China Pakistan Economic Corridor and Benefits to South Asia

South Asia has always been volatile. It has fought two nuclear powers over its borders for decades. The BRI, which focuses on a regional project, the CPEC, has boosted China's involvement in the region. The CPEC needs regional connectivity and cooperation to succeed. There is full economic, transportation, and energy connectivity to South, West, and Central Asia [12]. Foreign policy adviser to former Pakistani PM Nawaz Sharif Sartaj Aziz argues Pakistan sits at the intersection of South, West, and Central Asia. A regional transshipment hub by 2050, says Gwadar. This, according to Mr. Aziz and other strategic thinkers [13]. Several countries back the CPEC. Afghanistan approved the CPEC because it needed massive foreign aid and financing. In the trade

and transit between Central Asian nations and the world. The CPEC will help Afghanistan achieve economic self-sufficiency and long-term prosperity as the US military withdraws, limiting Western security and financial aid.

A similar extension of the CPEC would benefit India and Iran. As long as India-Pakistan and Afghanistan are at peace, Northern India will easily establish commercial and investment relations with these countries and Europe. The CPEC will assist Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan economically by addressing regional tensions [14]. Iran's economic and diplomatic autonomy have grown since sanctions were eased. This will promote regional cooperation, peace, and stability while enhancing the CPEC's potential. Ideological and cultural clashes hamper South Asian expansion [15].

With its western partners (Iran and Afghanistan) and its eastern neighbour, Islamabad should liberalise economic relations (India). The same goes for India and Pakistan in bilateral and regional relations. Pakistan has also shown its openness to assist Afghan peace talks and work with India to resolve the Kashmir issue. China aided the Afghan government and Taliban in the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) [16]. The CPEC can only succeed if Indo-Pak relations are normalized and the trilateral relationship between Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan is constructive. India hinders the CPEC due to Pakistan's power and security rivalry. Surrounding strategy and BRI diplomacy rely on India and its neighbours. The zero-sum game has dominated regional diplomacy for decades [17]. Regime shifts in New Delhi or Islamabad would probably trigger regional chain reactions.

A new regional alignment has emerged, with India aligning more closely with the US and Japan. The China-Pakistan vs. US-India axis appears to be playing out on the subcontinent. But there's more. Amid recent regional tensions, Beijing and New Delhi have managed previous confrontations well. It is unclear what India thinks of China's BRI. China and India enjoy a good trading relationship [18]. Analysts and politicians believe China's industrial and infrastructure investments will help India's manufacturing economy. New Delhi has shown a stronger interest in formalising economic ties with China in recent years, particularly in technology. "India makes software, whereas China makes hardware," says China specialist Adam Segal [19]. To catch up, some Indian critics claim that New Delhi is "constantly looking over the Himalayas at China." Its per capita income exceeds India's. With a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, Beijing is routinely employed as a political power broker in crises like the North Korean nuclear issue. In certain circles, "aligned containment of China" misrepresents US-Indian relations with China. No interest in limiting China, according to Anupam Srivastava, Executive Director, Center for International Trade and Security, University of Georgia. India and China have occasionally worked together. Both countries have recently signed agreements to increase investment, tourism, film, and banking cooperation, helping to elevate their economic exchange. As a result, Beijing and Delhi are putting aside their disputes to focus on other issues [20]. "Neighbours naturally disagree,"

remarked Chinese Ambassador Luo Zhaohui. For now, we should resolve our disagreements and work together.”

## 2.2 China Pakistan Economic Corridor and Countermeasures and Risks to South Asia

The US government has given the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor (IPEC) \$113 million. Washington expects the BUILD Act-2018 to increase regional trade and connectivity programmes funding. OPIC and USAID's Development Credit Authority are merging, according to Secretary Pompeo. Chinese contempt of Washington's Indo-Pacific Plan It's better to act than to shout, said Geng Shuang, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesman. But Mr. Geng warned against expecting too much from a large power outside the region. It would be great if Australia, Japan, and the US increased regional infrastructure spending, but they have. These countries can support and grow the region [22]. It's a "diplomatic gesture," says Teng Jianqun of Beijing's China Institute of International Studies. Renmin University's Shi Yinhong recommends a diplomatic solution to China's foreign aid and investment problems. "Infrastructure projects in poor countries never attract investors," he says. And hazardous. There are failures even in China. Additional partners, according to Bai Ming of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation (CAITEC) [23]. A daring initiative, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), can reshape regional and global power relations.

The campaign's economic focus has unnerved Washington and New Delhi. A nexus of competition and collaboration exists between the two countries, notwithstanding Beijing's positive-sum agenda. Former US Deputy Secretary of State Bill Burns stressed the need of Sino-US cooperation for the region's and global economy's future. Former Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs from 2013 to 2017 Daniel Russell says a new global governance paradigm that fosters healthy competition and cooperation on important issues is required. The Chinese government concurs. He expects Sino-US ties to be competitive but not zero-sum. The BCIM, an economic corridor linking Bangladesh, India, and Myanmar, is also being built by China. Mr. Geng Shuang calls the CPEC and BCIM economic corridors BRI initiatives. CPEC prioritises regional collaboration, infrastructure investment, economic development, and financing [25].

China must maintain its neutrality in the decades-long competition between India and Pakistan, while simultaneously encouraging genuine peace discussions. The BRI and CPEC benefit from a peaceful and stable neighborhood as multi-stakeholder initiatives. Trump's "America First" philosophy limits Washington's global influence. New thinking and new approaches are required, according to Beijing. A series of Chinese-led regional connectivity programs aims to foster mutual understanding and trust on the subcontinent through economic, political, and cultural exchange. With a \$113 million down payment compared to the CPEC's \$62 billion, it's safe to say Washington's IPEC is still in its infancy [26]. Unlike China's BRI, the IPEC is a symbolic alternative. The IPEC's geopolitical dimensions may obscure the region's physical, institutional, and human links.

### 3. Theoretical Approach to Study

CPEC is part of China's 21st-century OBOR program, which promotes economic growth, regional connectivity, and worldwide influence. The motivations of CPEC can be described by realist and liberal internationalist geopolitical theories, as both rivalry and cooperation drive state behaviour.

#### Liberals' Approach

China's relationship with Pakistan and its foreign policy ideals of non-interference and non-aggression are cited by liberals. One of the five values is “equality and mutual benefit.” In line with this notion, reciprocal benefits and the economic utility of investments are presumably essential factors. Investing in nations like Pakistan might help China position itself as a global superpower that invests in human capital, businesses, and infrastructure without infringing on sovereign governments' rights [27]. As a major power, China may be striving to build goodwill with countries like Pakistan.

#### Realists' Approach

According to realists, economic interests explain China's motives. By building a corridor from Kashgar to Gwadar, China might gain the quickest access to the Arabian Sea via Pakistan. Other routes are unviable due to China's lack of geographical proximity to states ready to permit safe transit of its products and services. Because they hinder China's access to the Arabian Sea, neighbouring Southeast Asian nations are unsustainable. India is unlikely to help due to ongoing territorial disputes with China. Thanks to its close links with China and proximity to the Arabian Sea, Pakistan has the most promising profile. With access to the massive oil reserves of the Middle East, China can buy oil and export goods and services to new markets.

Gwadar's development allows for improved connectivity with regional financial hubs like Dubai, which China would find appealing to establish its presence in the Persian Gulf. The Arabian Sea is part of the OBOR Maritime Silk Route, allowing China to connect with the Middle East commercially and diplomatically through Pakistan. In conclusion, both economic and security interests drive Chinese involvement in Pakistan. One alternative is to use the OBOR strategy to grow the country and outsource its manufacturing capabilities. Other advantages include low-cost labour markets in Pakistan and a safe passage for Chinese goods and services to the Middle East.

Since 1951, when diplomatic relations were established, Pakistan and China have maintained a close relationship. However, economic progress has been hampered by decades of violence, macro-management issues, and an energy-scarce economy. Massive foreign direct investment is critical for the state and investors to capitalise on shortcomings and repair the country's devastated energy industry [28]. China is seen as the most reliable investor because of the close Sino-Pak connections, especially because other regional and global governments have proven tough to deal with. Compare this to Pakistan's view of China as a benign force that could help it build its economy, upgrade its infrastructure, and resolve its energy problems without resorting to diplomatic coercion. While China has applauded the Pakistan Army's efforts to combat militancy, the United States has requested that the Haqqani Network and other terrorist groups operating in Pakistan be dealt with more harshly [29]. The 2011 Bin Laden raid and ongoing US requests for Pakistani cooperation against Islamist groups have eroded Pakistani-American trust in favour of China. Pakistan has had issues with its neighbours in the current geopolitical situation. There are difficulties with India, mistrust with Afghanistan, and internal security disagreements with Iran [30]. Furthermore, unlike China, tensions with the US on counterterrorism have risen over time. CPEC is a more important alternative for Pakistan than US or Iranian investment because of the trust and mutual respect that characterise the Sino-Pak relationship.

#### **4. China Pakistan Economic Corridor as a Vigour behind New Regional Order in South Asia**

South Asia is the world's least integrated region. Even after 70 years, Indo-Pak hostilities persist and negatively impact regional integration. Central regional powers' unfriendly environment and security difficulties hinder economic cooperation and regionalization. South Asian nations' financial and strategic cooperation might make this region a major global industrial cluster. The infrastructure development has facilitated trade activities and regional connectivity. Border infrastructure is therefore crucial for regional integration. BRI aims to improve economic connection between Asia, Africa, and Europe via land and marine routes [31].

The project's goal is to connect regional economies, enhance trade, and strengthen the industrial, agricultural, and social sectors. This is a win-win situation for everyone. Iran, Afghanistan, CARs, and India should all join. The CARs only outlet is through Russia, which is longer and more expensive than Gwadar. So it benefits Afghanistan, CARs, and Iran. Iran sells both to China. For the Greater regional integration, the CPEC will foster economic interdependence, collaboration, and connectivity, hence improving regional political stability and security. Russia and Central Asian countries want to use CPEC routes to access the Arabian Sea and beyond for commercial, economic, and trade purposes. CPEC will strengthen economic ties between China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, India, and the CAR. It will help Indo-Pak and Afghanistan improve their relations. Iran is also interested in some Chabahar arrangements. Pakistan will also be a hub for regional trade between East, West, South, and Central Asia.

Economic growth and regional integration can be boosted by integrating CPEC, BCIM, Gwadar, and Chabahar. With the launch of CPEC in April 2015, the geopolitics of the eight-country South Asian region transformed. Pakistan and India both possess nuclear weapons and have been at conflict with one another since 1947. The region occupies an area of 4.5 million square kilometres and is home to 1.749 billion people, or over one-fourth of the world's population [32]. Due to the region's geostrategic significance to regional and global powers, policymakers and academics have engaged in vigorous debates about its politics, economy, and security. China and Pakistan's security attitudes have shifted in response to South Asia's geopolitical landscape events. There is considerable consensus in India that the United States and India are twenty-first-century "natural friends" or "indispensable partners" [33]. Washington's regional geopolitical objectives include preserving de facto hegemony, eliminating terrorism in Afghanistan, and containing rising China through relationships with neighbouring governments.

The US president referred to China as a "strategic rival" rather than a "partner." As a result, China has consolidated Indo-US strategic collaboration [34]. India is a regional power with strategic ties to Afghanistan and Iran. They are likely to collaborate to compete with CPEC [35]. According to observers, the Indo-Iran agreement is an attempt to delegitimize the strategic and economic significance of Gwadar. On the other hand, similar interests are mending old rifts, with Russia recently expressing interest in joining the CPEC, a move welcomed by Pakistan and China. By reframing national interests, Cold War animosity can be transformed into friendship. Pakistan agreed to Russia's wish to join the CPEC, and Moscow vowed to supply the country with military hardware and weaponry [36].

Despite Pakistan's neighbour's commitment to Afghan peace, India and the US accuse Islamabad of harbouring terrorists. China has emerged as a prominent participant in regional political and security concerns in response to the Indo-US tensions. China, Afghanistan, and Pakistan recently met in Beijing for a trilateral conversation. The Beijing meeting covered counter-terrorism, peace, and regional connectivity, among other issues. Finally, China's foreign minister declared that Pakistan and Afghanistan have agreed to enhance cooperation and resolve problems [37]. The trilateral dialogue reflects China's goal to restore regional peace and stability through peace talks and economic development. Pakistan must incorporate Indo-Afghan influences and develop a security policy independent of external involvement. China can assist Pakistan by training Pakistan's CEPC combat units. Both countries must also cooperate on intelligence gathering and launch Ariel to monitor security dangers associated with the CPEC project.

According to estimates, CPEC will generate 2.32 million direct jobs [38], which the Pakistani government should divide evenly among four sectors. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor was conceived as a worldwide platform for regional and global integration. By focusing on BRI with a specific emphasis on CPEC, China has introduced new ideas and facilitated exchanges, debates, and discussions on critical factors

that can aid in the development of sustainable growth, poverty alleviation, and trade and finance expansion. To begin, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor offers a new platform for regional integration that complements China's Westernization efforts. As reforms proceed, China seeks to assist its neighbours and contribute to shared growth. China is developing six economic corridors, including the China–Mongolia–Russia Economic Corridor, the China–Central Asia–West Asia Economic Corridor, the China–Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor, the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor, the Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar Economic Corridor, and the New Eurasian Land Bridge [39]. Afghanistan and Iran have indicated an interest in joining the CPEC. Afghanistan and Pakistan are both reliant on the CPEC. Apart from that, President Hassan Rouhani met with former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on the fringes of the UNGA session and promised to joining the CPEC [39]. The corridor benefits India and Central Asia.

The Central Asia-Pacific Economic Corridor (CPEC) promotes economic development in Afghanistan and Central Asian nations. CARs may transport their natural resources via transit trade and pipeline networks, and their goods can be easily delivered to Middle Eastern and European countries via Gwadar Port [40]. Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan can potentially use CPEC to export natural resources to India and Pakistan. Suppose India and Pakistan can agree on regional integration and connectivity. In that case, the CPEC may be extended to India via subsidiary lines from Punjab and even Kashmir, relieving the mutual security concern.

## 5. Conclusion

The CPEC can boost the South Asian region's economic growth and development. The increase of transportation connectivity has multiplied production and trade. However, in South Asia, suspicion and hostility have hampered regional integration and transportation cooperation. In recent years, Pakistan has prioritized transportation infrastructure development to improve national and regional connectivity. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a North-South trade and transit corridor that places a premium on infrastructure and industrial development. Connecting Pakistan's western and eastern neighbours, Afghanistan, Iran, and India, to the CPEC would facilitate the management of regional politics. Additionally, it would provide Pakistani and Chinese enterprises with access to Afghanistan, Iran, and India's markets. Regional cooperation within the SAARC framework can begin to connect Afghanistan and India to lower trade barriers, connect road and railway networks, and boost commerce, resulting in regional economic cooperation.

Pakistan can consolidate bilateral ties with Iran while also adhering to the ECO and EU trade frameworks. East-West ties with Pakistan's neighbours may help the two countries build trust and confidence in the future while strengthening Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan and deepening its current ties with Iran. Finally, the CPEC might be established as an inclusive organisation that welcomes all actors willing to

contribute positively. As a result, Pakistan's leadership may be able to work toward national reconciliation and peace. To accomplish this, it may be necessary to marginalise and suppress the interests of smaller provinces, eliminate provincial rivalries, and establish an inclusive and transparent decision-making process. Measures should be implemented to ensure that revenue generated by CPEC and related projects is distributed evenly across provinces. In other words, the federal government should be concerned about local issues, particularly those affecting Balochistan. Its current policy of zero tolerance for any form of protest in Balochistan, combined with a punitive military response, is likely to exacerbate the situation, endangering Chinese employees and projects. The continued assault on Chinese employees bolsters this theory. Islamabad must bear in mind that "peace does not bring development; rather, development brings peace" in this regard. The province's dream of having a fully operational Gwadar port, which might transform it into a vital energy conduit in the region, can be realised only once Balochistan regains peace and stability. Islamabad predicted that improving socioeconomic conditions would aid the conflict-torn region in achieving peace and reconciliation in that situation.

On the other hand, the Karakoram Highway Tensions have done nothing to alleviate tensions between Shia and Sunni communities. On the contrary, tensions have increased. Pakistan's foreign policy must be rethought significantly on a regional level to maintain cordial relations with its neighbours. Islamabad will face difficulties securing CPEC cooperation as long as it is perceived as untrustworthy. India, too, needs to discuss and express its position on the CPEC. Any debate should be factually accurate in assessing policy alternatives and free of emotional arguments. This will be challenging, given New Delhi's concerns that participation in the CPEC will effectively legitimise Islamabad's claims to disputed territory, further complicating India's situation. Without addressing these concerns, the CPEC will neither be a "game changer" for regional connectivity, collaboration, and integration, nor a watershed moment in Pakistan's troubled economic, social, and political development.

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