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Impact of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor on Nation-Building in Pakistan: A Case Study of Balochistan

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ABSTRACT

Since the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the state has been struggling in nation-building efforts because of mainly ethnic differences in the country. This is most evident in Balochistan, Pakistan's largest province, which has been suffering from insurgency since the late 1950s. Being home to the Gwadar Port, there is a growing Baloch resistance to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) since 2015. This situation necessitates a thorough examination of how the locals view and have reacted to the CPEC. This research investigates Baloch reactions to the CPEC and how the federal and provincial governments as well as Beijing have tried to address these challenges. China's investment is seen by the Baloch as neo-colonialism—something they must fight at all costs. Therefore, the CPEC, and particularly projects like the Gwadar Port, have added to the locals' grievances against the state, reflected through an increasing number of terrorist attacks in Balochistan.

KEYWORDS

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor; Pakistan; China; Balochistan; Baloch insurgency; Nation-building; Gwadar Port

Introduction

Since Pakistan's independence from the British Raj in 1947, ethno-nationalist fervour has not only restricted nation-building activities but has also led to resistance, even violence, in different parts of the country. The founding fathers of Pakistan tried to forge a common identity using religion (Islam) as a tool that could unite various ethnic groups, including Bengali, Baloch, Sindhi, Pashtun, Punjabis and Mohajir. Despite a national Islamic identity and Pakistan becoming an Islamic republic in 1956, Pakistan's nation-building project has failed to unite various ethnically divided groups into a uniform identity.¹ While the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan focuses on promoting a common religious identity, ethnic differences and ethno-nationalism continue to divide the nation.² In the past, this played a role in the shape of insurgency in East Pakistan and ultimately led to the disintegration of Pakistan in 1971. The state's problems, however, did not end then as it continues to face an insurgency in Balochistan. Pakistan is a complicated country fractured by class and ethnicity.³ Pakistan is divided into five administrative units, namely Punjab, Sindh, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB). Each unit is named after predominant ethnic

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¹The name of the country in all three constitutions (1956, 1962 and 1973) was adopted as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Islam is the state religion as per the 1973 Constitution.

²Claude Rakisits, 'National Integration in Pakistan: The Role of Religion, Ethnicity and the External Environment' (PhD, The University of Queensland 1986); Ayesha Jalal, *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics*, (Harvard USA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

³Natasha Underhill, *Countering global terrorism and insurgency: calculating the risk of state failure in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq* (Palgrave Press, 2014), p. 83.

group belonging to the region; for example, the Baloch making up the majority in Balochistan. Managing this diverse ethnic make-up has been challenging for the state since its inception.⁴ Even the common religious identity across the country is itself divided into different sects like Shia and Sunni. As a result, Pakistan has largely remained an ‘unachieved nation’ due to failed nation-building projects.⁵ Within this context, it is important to see how the locals in Balochistan have reacted to massive investments from China under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). These local reactions are entangled with Balochistan’s colonial legacy and the history of how Pakistan has governed the region. China’s investment, facilitated by the federal government of Pakistan, is seen by the Baloch as a modern kind of colonisation of their land and people—something they feel they must fight at all costs.

In this article, we analyse the first 8 years of the implementation of the CPEC in Balochistan (2015–2023) to assess how its various projects have been implemented and received by the Baloch, and indeed how these ostensibly ‘nation-building’ projects are contributing to or perhaps constraining the formation of a coherent national identity and state. A case study of Balochistan is particularly important because the province is home to the centrepiece of the CPEC, the Gwadar Port. The CPEC has been controversial from its inception in 2015, especially in Balochistan, and this study offers insights to understand the nature of challenges restricting various CPEC projects. The CPEC continues to face opposition in Balochistan where Baloch insurgents have launched attacks to harm CPEC projects. In addition to the Baloch insurgency, there is a growing dissatisfaction among the Baloch who feel that they have not been included, for example through consultations, in CPEC projects including the Gwadar Port.⁶ While the CPEC is largely driven by China, we believe that the government of Pakistan needs to be cognizant of its various impacts on nation-building in the country. As this study argues, the CPEC has led to some major challenges in connection to nation-building but this is also an opportunity to address socio-economic grievances in Balochistan.

Like many postcolonial states, Pakistan began its state-building process with some basic institutional inheritance, for example, in the shape of civil-military bureaucracy and parliamentary democracy. However, the journey for this new country was tough in the beginning because of minimal administrative capacity and the absence of basic state institutions like a supreme court. Pakistan inherited a single functional state institution, now called the Pakistan Military Academy. Pakistan inherited civil and administrative institutions but failed to establish them to the best of their capacity until recently. This delay could be explained by prolonged periods of military regimes and a lack of political will during civil governments. A handful of government officers, who were previously working with the British Indian civil service, chose to migrate to Pakistan, however, most state officials (including judicial staff) in Pakistan were amateurs. This weak institutional capacity, therefore, had minimal impact on the people of Pakistan from diverse ethnic groups, which otherwise should have integrated them into civic society.⁷ Over 75 years since its inception as an independent state, Pakistan is still failing in terms of state-building. In Pakistan, the state does not enjoy a monopoly over the use of violence across the country as several non-state actors, such as the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan continue to question the legitimacy of the state in parts of KP and Balochistan.⁸

The formation of a single national identity is seen as a central component of nation-building. Goldsmith, for instance, provides a definition of nation-building as the process of creating a unified national identity within a specific geographic region, founded upon a shared language and culture.⁹ As

⁴Christophe Jaffrelot, *Pakistan: Nationalism without a Nation* (London: Zed Books, 2002), p. 7; Meirav Mishali-Ram, ‘When Identity and Politics Meet in Strife-Torn Pakistan’, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 21(3), (2015), p. 313.

⁵Jaffrelot, *Pakistan: Nationalism without a Nation*, p. 7.

⁶Adnan Aamir, ‘Rural Pakistan voices dissatisfaction over Belt & Road’, *Asia Nikkei*, December 31, 2018, (accessed November 4, 2023, <<https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Belt-and-Road/Rural-Pakistan-voices-dissatisfaction-over-Belt-Road>>).

⁷Ayesha Jalal, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia: A Comparative and Historical Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 18.

⁸Seema Khan, ‘The Mélange of Violence in Balochistan: Regional Context and External Factors’ (PhD, Deakin University, 2021), p. 2; Lawrence Ziring, ‘Weak State, Failed State, Garrison State: The Pakistan Saga’, in *South Asia’s Weak States: Understanding the Regional Insecurity Predicament*, ed. T. Paul (California: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 170–171.

asserted by Hopp and Kloke-Lesche, nation-building transcends mere efforts to establish functional institutions and infrastructure, instead representing an internally driven, autonomous progression in the development of a nation, with limited external involvement.¹⁰ Consequently, state-building is regarded as a pivotal element within the broader framework of nation-building. National identity in Pakistan is synonymous with a religious identity (Islam) which enjoys constitutional protection. However, the people of Pakistan have refused to surrender their ethnic identities over their national identity despite most Pakistanis being Muslim. Johnston argues that national identity ‘may not, in itself, have any general tendency to strengthen support for redistribution, but it may do so for those aspects of the welfare state considered to have played a particularly important role in nation-building’.¹¹ According to the *World Social Report 2020* by the United Nations, state institutions build trust between the state and its people.

Without appropriate policies and institutions in place, inequalities concentrate political influence among those who are already better off, which tends to preserve or even widen opportunity gaps. Growing political influence among the more fortunate erodes trust in the ability of Governments to address the needs of the majority. This lack of trust, in turn, can destabilize political systems and hinder the functioning of democracy.¹²

Questioning the writ of state means denying the state authority. And a state that is unable to impose its authority due to its economic, political and administrative fragility; its partially functional institutions; and its uneven modernisation loses its citizens’ trust. People develop grievances against a state when the state is unable or unwilling to meet the needs and/or demands of its citizens. These grievances can be linked to inequitable distribution of opportunities—political, economic, administrative, and social. This has particularly been the case in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan where structural violence was viewed as a major cause of instability in the shape of terrorism.¹³ Brown believes that ‘unequal access to resources such as land and capital and vast differences between standards of living’ creates a conflictual environment and drives marginalisation and discrimination.¹⁴ Similarly, Falk also blames unequal development for intra-state conflicts.¹⁵ Gurr characterises this relationship as one where the ‘intensity of political violence’ is directly proportional to uneven development or deprivation.¹⁶ Posen argues that inequitable development can lead to challenges by marginalising many segments of society.¹⁷ The absence of equal opportunities is a recipe for conflict and obstructs the formation of a uniform national identity and weakens the state—society relationship. Similarly, Heraclides suggests that ‘modernising’ a state in an even manner decreases the likelihood of sub-groups and sub-identities.¹⁸ This approach has been followed by many welfare states, where the individual’s needs are prioritised,¹⁹ and is also a rationale behind China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as Beijing aims to develop its lesser developed regions, for example Xinjiang, by revising the ancient Silk Road.²⁰

⁹Arthur A. Goldsmith, ‘Does Nation-building Work?’ in *Governance in Post-Conflict Societies—Rebuilding Fragile States*, ed. D. Brinkerhoff (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 26–7

¹⁰Ulrike Hopp and Adolf Kloke-Lesche, ‘External Nation-building vs. Endogenous Nation-forming: A Development Policy Perspective’, in *Nation-building: A Key Concept for Peaceful Conflict Transformation?*, ed. J. Hippler (London: Pluto Press, 2005), p. 139.

¹¹Richard Johnston, Keith Banting, Will Kymlicka and Stuart Soroka, ‘National Identity and Support for the Welfare State’, *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique* 43(2), (2010), p. 349.

¹²*UN World Social Report 2020*, (New York: United Nations Publications, 2020), p. 4.

¹³Khan Zeb and Zahid Shahab Ahmed, Zeb, ‘Structural Violence and Terrorism in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan’, *Civil Wars* 21(1), (2019), pp. 1–24.

¹⁴Michael Brown, ‘The Causes of Internal Conflict: An Overview’, in *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict*, ed. Michael Brown et al. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001), p. 11.

¹⁵Richard Falk, ‘Framing an Inquiry’ in *Weak States, Strong Societies: Power And Authority in The New World Order*, ed. A. Saikal, (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2016), p. 17.

¹⁶Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015) pp. 15–17.

¹⁷Barry R. Posen, ‘The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict’, *Survival* 35(1), (1993), pp. 27–47.

¹⁸Alexis Heraclides, *The Self-determination of Minorities in International Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1991).

¹⁹Johnston et al., ‘National Identity and Support for the Welfare State’.

This article is based on archival research involving official statements, policy documents, and media reports concerning the CPEC from its inception in 2015 to 2022. We collected these data through a variety of sources, including the National Archives of Pakistan (Islamabad) and official websites of the CPEC Authority. Our particular emphasis is on the analysis of not just official statements, such as press briefings from Beijing and Islamabad, but also reactions from Baloch nationalist and militant groups in Balochistan. We collected those through relevant official websites, such as ministries of foreign affairs of China and Pakistan, and media reports. The article argues that the inclusion of locals in decision making and their involvement in developmental projects will reinforce a 'centre—periphery' bond (that is, between the Baloch and decision-makers in Islamabad) while strengthening the state—society connection. Doing so will leave little space for internal and external spoilers to manipulate and instigate local, often violent, resistance to nation-building. This article also contends that if the causes of the local protests in Gwadar are not addressed properly, the dissatisfaction and distrust could reinforce the separatist agenda. This article will further address the issue of land acquisition in Gwadar for the CPEC as this is a major contention between the state and the locals who see it as a forcible acquisition of their land.²¹

The article begins with a brief history of the strained relationship between Balochistan and the federal government of Pakistan. It then moves on to discuss the CPEC in relation to this history. Unlike previous development initiatives, the CPEC offers numerous and massive investment opportunities for Balochistan—something that has the potential to develop the province with a focus on human welfare. It is therefore important to examine its progress in its initial phase to see how various CPEC projects in Balochistan have been rolled out and how the locals feel about them.

Balochistan: An Overview

Some historical background is important to understand economic and political marginalization in Balochistan. Considering weak state—society relationship, particularly in Balochistan where the locals have historic grievances against the state, it is important to be aware of the context to be able to understand changes following the CPEC.

At its independence, Pakistan faced the challenge of uneven development among its provinces. The development approach under the British India Raj focused on topography and the economic potential of regions, and based on this approach certain regions were more developed than others. This was particularly noticeable in the manner in which the British Raj laid out the railway infrastructure to extract agricultural commodities and raw materials from across the Indian Subcontinent.²² Then Balochistan and the princely states (Kalat, Makran, Lasbela and Kharan), due to their terrain and the lack of economic potential, remained outside of the British infrastructural development plans.²³ Pakistan inherited Balochistan with no modern infrastructure or state institutions except for a few communication lines, such as military garrisons that had served British strategic interests.²⁴ The British Raj administered Balochistan through a political agent and a few selected *Sardars* and kept the periphery distanced from the centre. Since its independence, the state of Pakistan also ignored the significance of mainstreaming peripheries, which is a major cause of grievances in Balochistan. Instead of reaching out to the people, the federal government left the administration of Balochistan in the hands of *Sardars* with little or no accountability. This paved the

²⁰Arif Rafiq, *The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Barriers and Impact*, The Asia Center at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), 2017, p. 25, accessed August 22, 2022, <<https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/pw135-the-china-pakistan-economic-corridor.pdf>>.

²¹'China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Opportunities and risks', Crisis Group, June 29, 2018, <<https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/pakistan/297-china-pakistan-economic-corridor-opportunities-and-risks>>.

²²Aditya Ramesh and Vidhya Raveendranathan, 'Infrastructure and public works in colonial India: Towards a conceptual history', *History Compass* 6(18), (2020), p. e12614, <<https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12614>>.

²³Khan, 'The Mélange of Violence in Balochistan', p. 50.

²⁴Farhan Hanif Siddiqi, 'The Political Economy of the Ethno-Nationalist uprising in Pakistani Balochistan 1999–2013', in *The political economy of conflict in South Asia* (pp. 57–74), ed. A. A. Wijeweera, (London: Palgrave 2015), p. 158.

Table 1. Inter-provincial comparison of socio-economic indicators

Indicators	Sindh	Punjab	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Balochistan
Multidimensional poverty ²⁵	49%	31%	43%	85%
Maternal mortality rate (Maternal deaths by 100,000 live births, 2019)	224	157	165	298
Doctors per thousand	39.67	44.39	12.99	2.95
Literacy	55%	62%	53%	41%
Schools	6,040	1,738	161	683
Universities	266	356	195	8
Public sector development funding (PKR millions, 2015–2016)	2,082,333	3,068,653	1,283,447	223,354
Size of economy KR (Percentage of national economy)	3,192.50 (30.0%)	5,757.00 (54.1%)	1,380.90 (13.0%)	313.70 (2.90%)
Distribution of National Assembly seats	75	183	43	17
Senate	23	23	23	23
Judges in the Supreme Court of Pakistan	5	7	3	1

Source: Compiled by the authors from multiple sources.²⁶

way for structural violence as can be seen by comparing socio-economic indicators of Pakistan's four major provinces (see Table 1).

During the British Raj, Balochistan served as a buffer zone to safeguard British strategic interests in the region and so did not receive development opportunities compared to other regions. Even after the independence, this province remained largely unchanged. The centre's negligent policies towards Balochistan have kept it underdeveloped but this has also to do with domestic politics. For any political party that aims to make a government in the centre, Punjab (the largest provinces in terms of population) remains a priority due to its large population and the number of seats in the national parliament.²⁷ According to the 2017 census of Pakistan, Punjabis comprise the largest ethnicity in the country with over 80 million in comparison to the 12 million Baloch.²⁸ Hence, out of the total of 336 national parliament seats, there are 173 seats for Punjab and 20 for Balochistan.

There is a strong correlation between the longstanding grievances of the Baloch population and their concerns about the CPEC. Due to the historical unequal distribution of resources. There are already serious concerns in Balochistan in relation to the unequal distribution of CPEC projects,²⁹ and the locals in Balochistan are worried that the CPEC would lead to some demographic unbalance due to the settlement of non-Baloch in the province.³⁰ Baloch militants have been reacting, albeit violently, to the presence of non-Baloch persons in the province. This was the case before the CPEC as many non-Baloch were pushed out of the province.³¹ Since the start of the current wave of insurgency, over 1,200 non-locals (mostly Punjabis) have been killed in Balochistan.³² Baloch

²⁵Multidimensional poverty is a measurement beyond monetary deprivations, which was the only point to be taken in consideration previously. It includes access to education, food, health and other essential needs for a person to progress.

²⁶Inayat Kalim, Zohra Jabeen Naqvi, and Muhammad Mubeen, Socio-economic Disparities in Balochistan: Assessing Structural Etiology, *Global Economics Review (GER)* 3(1), (2018), pp. 134–154; doi: 10.31703/ger.2018(III-I).14 (accessed 4 June 2022); Vikram Kumar, Bibi Shazia Ali, Erum Chodry, Shehryar Khan, Naveed Ur Rehman Durrani, Syed Rehan Ali and Kamran Baig, 'Quality of Neonatal Care: A Health Facility Assessment in Balochistan Province, Pakistan', *Cureus*, 14(3) (2022) Quality of Neonatal Care: A Health Facility Assessment in Balochistan Province, Pakistan—PubMed (nih.gov), (accessed June 4, 2022); National Institute of Population Studies and The DHS Programme ICF, *Maternal Mortality Survey 2019: Key Indicators*, accessed June 4, 2022, <<https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/PR128/PR128.pdf>>.

²⁷Khan, 'The Mélange of Violence in Balochistan', p. 102.

²⁸Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2017, <<https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/population/2017/tables/balochistan/Table01p.pdf>>.

²⁹Shahid Mahmood, Muazzam Sabir and Ghaffar Ali, 'Infrastructure projects and sustainable development: Discovering the stakeholders' perception in the case of the China—Pakistan Economic Corridor', *PLoS One*, 15(8), (2020), pp. 1–17.

³⁰Hakeem Baloch, 'Baloch women protest on the streets of Gwadar against Pakistan oppression and China's CPEC', *OPINDIA*, December 4, 2021, accessed April 10, 2022, <<https://www.opindia.com/2021/12/baloch-women-protest-gwadar-pakistan-oppression-china-cpec-read-details/>>.

³¹Imtiaz Ali, 'The Balochistan Problem', *Pakistan Horizon*, 58(2), (2005), pp. 41–62.

³²'Settlers—caught in crossfire', *Dawn*, June 28, 2011, accessed June 4, 2022, <<https://www.dawn.com/news/640059/settlers-caught-in-crossfire-2>>.

nationalists' animosity towards Punjabis is heightened due to their dominant presence in civil and military institutions because of being the largest ethnic group in Pakistan.

These deep-rooted grievances do influence the CPEC that relies on major projects in Balochistan. According to the Baloch nationalists, the CPEC is a worrisome development as this might lead to further exploitation of the province's natural resources and loss of land.³³ Baloch nationalists believe the CPEC will incentivize Punjabi settlers who have the skills to take up jobs in Balochistan.³⁴ They refer to it as 'neo-colonialism' of their land by the Punjabis in collaboration with China.³⁵ Self-exiled leader of the Baloch Republican Army, Brahmdagh Bugti, criticized Chinese projects in Balochistan by labelling them as colonial ventures that 'must be resisted'.³⁶ The CPEC is often referred to as the 'China-Punjab Economic Corridor' by Baloch nationalists. Due to this fierce criticism and resistance, Islamabad and Beijing were made to revise the original CPEC plan to ensure equal distribution of CPEC projects or dividends across the country.³⁷ Within this context and through our analysis underneath, we argue that the locals' grievances must be addressed in Balochistan through confidence building measures to ensure the success of the CPEC.

The CPEC with its goal of economic prosperity and better living standards can potentially overcome some local grievances. The CPEC, which is frequently referred to as a game changer in Pakistan,³⁸ will not be able to achieve its goals unless all stakeholders benefit equally, especially the most marginalised in Balochistan. This is because the peace and stability of Pakistan are important for the success of the CPEC. To achieve support in the restive province of Balochistan, it is important to focus on strengthening state—society relationship, not just for the success of the CPEC but for building a strong nation in Pakistan.³⁹ Islamabad treats the CPEC as an opportunity that can bring shared progress, development, connectivity and as a project that can address the decades-long Baloch grievances about economic marginalisation.⁴⁰ However, as the former Pakistani Ambassador Sherry Rehman (2019) argues, realising these benefits is not possible unless the government of Pakistan achieves the 'three Cs' – 'capacity, coordination and consensus'.⁴¹ Despite the announcement of several projects in Balochistan, the state is unable to build sufficient consensus on the CPEC by winning the trust of the Baloch who largely view China and Pakistan's joint efforts with scepticism.⁴² For them, development projects are the government's strategy to subjugate the local Baloch at the cost of developing other regions, such as Punjab.

³³Hari Prasad and Wil Sahar Patrick, 'Pakistan Faces Rising Separatist Insurgency in Balochistan', *Newsline Institute for Strategy and Policy*, January 24, 2023, accessed February 18, 2023, <<https://newlinesinstitute.org/pakistan/pakistan-faces-rising-separatist-insurgency-in-balochistan/>>.

³⁴Yogesh Gattani, 'The Resilience of Baloch Insurgencies: Understanding the Fifth Period', *E-International Relations* February 2, 2021, accessed April 9, 2022, <<https://www.e-ir.info/2021/02/02/the-resilience-of-baloch-insurgencies-understanding-the-fifth-period/>>.

³⁵Shakoor Ahmed Wani, 'The New Baloch Militancy: Drivers and Dynamics', *India Quarterly* 77(3), (2021), p. 488.

³⁶'Colonizing Balochistan—Chinese Investments in Pakistan Spreads Outrage in Poverty-Stricken Balochistan', *The Eurasian Times*, July 16, 2020, accessed March 4, 2022, <<https://eurasianimes.com/chinese-investments-in-pakistan-spreads-fear-of-colonizing-balochistan/>>.

³⁷Sumera Lashari, 'China-Punjab Economic Corridor: Countering the Myths', *Voice of Balochistan*, November 11, 2017, accessed August 12, 2022, <<https://voiceofbalochistan.pk/opinions-and-articles/economic-development/china-punjab-economic-corridor-countering-myths/>>; Zahid Shahab Ahmed, 'Impact of the China—Pakistan Economic Corridor on Nation-Building in Pakistan', *Journal of Contemporary China* 28(117), (2019) p. 411.

³⁸Sultan M Hali, 'Regional and Global Scenarios of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor', in *China—Pakistan Economic Corridor: A Game Changer* (pp. 34–61), ed. Minhas Majeed Khan et al. (Islamabad: Institute of Strategic Studies, 2016), p. 34. accessed June 13, 2022, <https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CPEC_Book_2016.pdf>.

³⁹Nadeem Akhtar, Hidayat Ullah Khan, Muhammad Asif Jan, Cornelius B. Pratt and Ma Jianfu, 'Exploring the Determinants of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Its Impact on Local Communities', *Sage Open*, (2021), p. 2, accessed June 13, 2022, <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/21582440211057127>>.

⁴⁰Ibid., p.1.

⁴¹Sherry Rehman, 'CPEC 2.0: The Promise and the Peril', *Dawn* September 1, 2019, accessed June 13, 2022, <<https://www.dawn.com/news/1502790/cpec-20-the-promise-and-the-peril>>.

⁴²Haron Janjua, 'Militant attacks put pressure on China's Pakistan plans', *DW* February 16, 2022, accessed April 12, 2022, <<https://www.dw.com/en/pakistan-militant-attacks-in-balochistan-put-pressure-on-chinas-infrastructure-plans/a-60796264>>.

It is important to address structural violence in Balochistan to remove hurdles constraining the CPEC. Erstwhile scholarship on structural violence found this to be a major factor responsible for terrorism in former Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan.⁴³ This violence is attributed to factors such as unequal access to resources, such as land and capital, as well as substantial disparities in living standards, which create a breeding ground for conflict, marginalization, and discrimination. The absence of equal opportunities not only fuels conflict but also hinders the establishment of a cohesive national identity and weakens state–society relations.⁴⁴ Heraclides suggests that pursuing a more balanced and even process of modernization within a state can reduce the emergence of sub-groups and sub-identities.⁴⁵ This approach has been adopted by numerous welfare states, prioritizing individual needs and is also a foundational principle of the BRI, where Beijing aims to promote the equitable development of its less developed regions, such as Xinjiang, by revitalizing the ancient Silk Road. By focusing on the CPEC, this article will also examine how Beijing is approaching the development of Pakistan's least developed region, i.e. Balochistan.

The CPEC and Balochistan

Launched in 2015, the CPEC offers Pakistan opportunities for economic development. The CPEC's US\$62 billion investment from China is crucial for developing an economic corridor comprising of 3,000 kilometre route of roads and rail links, power plants, and the development of the Gwadar Port.⁴⁶ The corridor connects the Chinese city of Kashgar (Southwestern China) to the port of Gwadar in Balochistan (Southwestern Pakistan).⁴⁷ Facing its ongoing economic challenges, Pakistan is badly in need of foreign investment and China needs more markets for its goods and additional maritime routes through the Arabian Sea. Hence, the CPEC is of mutual interest to Beijing and Islamabad.⁴⁸ Despite challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the deteriorated security in Pakistan, the CPEC is making progress. This progress has been slow as only half of the promised funding under the CPEC had reached Pakistan by October 2022. The slow progress has been a matter of concern for Pakistan and Beijing since 2021,⁴⁹ but still the CPEC continues. As per the CPEC website,⁵⁰ most projects planned under Phase-I are either completed or near completion (see Table 2). Phase-I is largely focused on major infrastructure and energy needs. Major energy projects (such as coal-fired power plants in Sahiwal (Punjab), Port Qasim (Karachi), Hub (Balochistan), Thar coal power project, Quaid-e-Azam Solar Park in Bahawalpur) and some smaller wind and solar energy projects have been completed (see Table 2). Additionally, an 878-kilometre, Matiari-to-Lahore transmission line project (a high-voltage direct current line operating at ± 660 kilovolts) has also been completed with the capacity to provide 4,000 megawatts of electricity.⁵¹ While Phase-I of the CPEC caters to an urgent energy need with infrastructure, Phase-II (industrial and agricultural cooperation) is the job creation phase, in which special economic zones are to be established so industries from China can be relocated to Pakistan.

⁴³Zeb and Ahmed, 'Structural Violence and Terrorism in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan'.

⁴⁴Brown, 'The Causes of Internal Conflict: An Overview' Falk, 'Framing an Inquiry'; Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*.

⁴⁵Heraclides, *The Self-determination of Minorities in International Politics*.

⁴⁶Gopalan Balachandran, 'China Pakistan Economic Corridor', in *India's National Security Annual Review 2015–2016*, ed. S. Kumar. (2017), p. 283. accessed January 23, 2022, <<https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy-b.deakin.edu.au/lib/deakin/reader.action?docID=4710570#>>.

⁴⁷Naufil Shahrukh, Shahzad Hussain, Tuba Azeem and Samand Khan, 'Coastal Communities of Balochistan vis-à-vis CPEC: Mapping Perceptions and Socioeconomic Issues' *Policy Perspectives*, 17(1), (2020), p. 53.

⁴⁸Mahmood et al., 'Infrastructure projects and sustainable development'; Shahrukh et al., 'Coastal Communities of Balochistan vis-à-vis CPEC'.

⁴⁹'The CPEC slowdown', *Pakistan Today* September 18, 2021, accessed November 4, 2023, <<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2021/09/18/the-cpec-slowdown/>>.

⁵⁰<http://cpec.gov.pk/progress-update>

⁵¹'Phase-II of CPEC, flagship BRI project, much broader in scope: Pakistan Ambassador to China', *Global Times*, January 16, 2022, accessed March 17, 2022, <<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202201/1246043.shtml>>.

Table 2. Details of completed CPEC projects (2017–2022)

	Projects	Completion data
1.	1,320 MW Sahiwal Coal-fired Power Plant	28 October 2017
2.	1,320 MW Coal-fired Power Plant at Port Qasim Karachi	25 April 2018
3.	1,320 MW China Hub Coal Power Project, Hub Balochistan	14 August 2019
4.	660 MW Engro Thar Coal Power	10 July 2019
5.	1,000 MW Quaid-e-Azam Solar Park (Bahawalpur): 400 MW project completed	August 2016
6.	50 MW Hydro China Dawood Wind Farm, Gharo, Thatta	5 April 2017
7.	100 MW UEP Wind Farm, Jhimpir, Thatta	16 June 2017
8.	50 MW Sachal Wind Farm, Jhimpir, Thatta	11 April 2017
9.	100 MW Three Gorges Second and Third Wind Power Project	9 July 2018
10.	Matiari to Lahore \pm 660 KV HVDC Transmission Line	1 September 2021

Data source: CPEC Website.⁵²

Table 3. Details of ongoing CPEC projects, as of December 2022

#	Projects	% completed/progress
1.	1,320 SSRL Thar Coal Block-I 7.8 mtpa & Power Plant (2 \times 660MW) (Shanghai Electric)	66
2.	330 MW HUBCO Thar Coal Power Project (Thar Energy)	73
3.	330 MW HUBCO ThalNova Thar Coal Power	51
4.	884 MW Suki Kinari Hydropower, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	70
5.	720 MW Karot Hydropower Project, Azad Kashmir	90
6.	300 MW Coal-Fired Power Project at Gwadar	Land acquired

Data source: CPEC Website.⁵⁶

The completion of the second phase is a major step in terms of regional connectivity and economic integration.⁵³ Critics like Adeney and Boni are of the view that the economic benefits of the CPEC are highly tilted towards China.⁵⁴ Contrary to these claims, it is worth appreciating some key factors like the small size of Pakistan's economy and the dominance of China in the CPEC as the investor. Pakistan is a consumer market and depends on imports whereas China is a global supplier. Trade imbalances are clear from the figures. The total bilateral trade between the two countries in 2021, as per the data released by the General Administration of Customs (GACC) of China, was US\$27.8 billion with Pakistan's share of export being only US\$3.58 billion. There is a significant increase of 68.9% in exports to China since the China-Pakistan Free Trade Agreement was signed in 2019.⁵⁵ There are numerous ongoing projects that will further increase the economic activity under the CPEC (see Table 3).

Besides focusing primarily on infrastructural development, the CPEC focuses on job creation. As the economic activities have picked up pace, Pakistan realizes that it has a gap in terms of skilled workforce to meet the demand created by the CPEC. As a developing country with limited work opportunities, most of Pakistan's skilled workforce migrates. According to an estimate, over six million highly qualified and skilled professional migrated from Pakistan during 1971 and 2022.⁵⁷ To address the shortage of skilled workforce, some initiatives have been launched in the shape of vocational training programmes have been implemented. In Gwadar, the Pak-China Technical and Vocational Institute (PCT&VI) was launched in September 2021. This institute started training programmes in 2022 and since then many students, including women, have graduated. By the end of 2022, around 50 women had completed a six-month course at the PCT&VI.⁵⁸ China is very keen to expand the scope of the PCT&VI by offering courses that create jobs for the locals. To this end, in January 2023, China and Pakistan reached an agreement to uplift

⁵²<<http://cpec.gov.pk/progress-update>>.

⁵³CPEC Phase-II much broader, *The Express Tribune*, January 18, 2022, accessed March 17, 2022, <<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2339196/cpec-phase-ii-much-broader>>.

⁵⁴Katharine Adeney and Filippo Boni, *How China and Pakistan Negotiate* (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Publication Department, 2021).

⁵⁵'Exports to China surge 69pc to \$3.6bn in 2021', *Dawn*, January 23, 2022, accessed May 30, 2022, <<https://www.dawn.com/news/1671029/exports-to-china-surge-69pc-to-36bn-in-2021>>.

⁵⁶<<http://cpec.gov.pk/progress-update>>.

⁵⁷Sultan Ayoub Meo and Tehreem Sultan, 'Brain drain of healthcare professionals from Pakistan from 1971 to 2022: Evidence-based analysis', *Pakistan Journal of Medical Science*, 39(4), (2023), pp. 921–925.

⁵⁸'50 women complete six-month course at Pak-China vocational institute', *The Nation*, September 19, 2022, accessed February 1, 2022, <<https://www.nation.com.pk/19-Sep-2022/50-women-complete-six-month-course-at-pak-china-vocational-institute>>.

the PCT&VI through a collaboration involving Shandong Institute of Commerce and Technology, Gwadar Port Authority, the University of Gwadar and China Overseas Ports Holding Company.⁵⁹ Considering the significance of Balochistan coastal line, which is about 1,129 kilometre extending from Hub towards the north to Jiwani (near the Iranian border) in the west, there is a special focus on the Makran Coastal Highway, the development of the Gwadar Port, and the Gwadar City Project. Nearly 50,000 people are engaged in fisheries and related economic activities for their basic livelihoods. An estimated figure suggests that the fishing catch is 1.2 million metric ton. The fisheries sector contributes about 1% to the total GDP of Pakistan, the equivalent 30% of Balochistan's GDP.⁶⁰

There is a greater realization in Pakistan that it must increase its exports. This is particularly crucial in terms of meeting the potential of bilateral trade with China by increasing exports of local commodities, including food and agriculture, to China.⁶¹ In bilateral exchanges during 2021–2022, China and Pakistan also agreed to establish special economic/industrial zones and Chinese business centres in Pakistan. The Bostan Industrial Zone is one of the few developmental projects in Balochistan. The Bostan Industrial Zone, spread over 1,000 acres in the district of Pishin, is adjacent to Quetta (home to sufficient skilled labour), Qila Saifullah (famous for livestock, fruits, and vegetables), Ziarat (famous for dry fruits, apple and grapes) and Qila Abdullah (with a climate suitable for fruits and vegetables).⁶² In addition, during his visit to Gwadar in July 2021, former Prime Minister Imran Khan launched the Gwadar Free Zone—a project under the Phase-II of the CPEC. The construction on the free zone has already started.⁶³ Once completed, the Gwadar Free Zone will likely generate more business and employment opportunities in the city.

Now that the projects under the CPEC are underway, it is crucial to assess how locals have reacted to them, particularly in Balochistan. The federal and provincial governments claimed that the CPEC is crucial for Balochistan's development and its better connectivity with the rest of Pakistan. The Makran Coastal Highway project, connecting Karachi to Gwadar, and a 19.49-kilometre East Bay Expressway, were launched in 2017 by the China Communications Construction Company in Gwadar, and they are now completed.⁶⁴ But still, the lack of basic utilities (such as electricity, gas, water and the internet), hinder the completion of the project. The biggest hurdle is convincing the Baloch that the CPEC is for their benefit as well as for the rest of the country. As Islamabad has not been able to address Baloch grievances, there are militant groups hindering the CPEC with terrorist activities (see Table 4). Pakistan faces a resurgence of violence along the western route of the CPEC in Balochistan where insurgents continue to harm the interest of the state of Pakistan that they view as the main oppressor.⁶⁵ They fear that skilled labour from other parts of Pakistan will come to the tiny remote area for jobs, snatching their share and turning them into a minority in their own homeland.⁶⁶

To contain the state's increasing involvement in Balochistan and particularly in Gwadar, Baloch separatists have carried out several attacks on CPEC projects and workers or those sites.⁶⁷ The attack on the Pakistan Army's checkpoint in Kech district in Balochistan near the Iran border on 28 January 2022 that killed ten soldiers is a continuation of Baloch insurgents' mission against the state of Pakistan. The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), Baloch Republican Army (BRA) and Baloch Students Organisation (BSO) frequently

⁵⁹'Joint operation agreement of Pak-China Technical Vocational Institute signed', Pakistan Today, January 9, 2023, accessed February 14, 2023, <<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2023/01/09/joint-operation-agreement-of-pak-china-technical-vocational-institute-signed/>>.

⁶⁰Muhammad Noman, Yong Tong Mu, Muhammad Mohsin and Ana Mehak, 'An economic analysis of fisheries sector of Balochistan, Pakistan: current status and future potential', *Indian Journal of Geo Marine Sciences* 47 (9), (2018), p. 1727.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²'Bostan Special Economic Zone'. CPEC Authority, 2022, accessed November 4, 2022, <<http://cpec.gov.pk/project-details/55>>.

⁶³PM Imran launches various mega projects in Gwadar, says govt focusing on 'neglected areas', *Dawn* July 5, 2021, accessed July 23, 2022, <<https://www.dawn.com/news/1633343>>.

⁶⁴Expressway to link Gwadar with highways, *The Express Tribune* June 8, 2022, accessed June 23, 2022, <<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2360544/expressway-to-link-gwadar-with-highways>>.

⁶⁵F. M. Shakil, 'Meet the militants chasing China out of Pakistan: Ethnic Baloch insurgents are increasingly targeting Chinese interests and nationals working on Pakistan's Belt and Road', *Asia Times* January 11, 2021, accessed February 18, 2022, <<https://asiatimes.com/2021/01/meet-the-militants-chasing-china-out-of-pakistan/>>; Janjua, 'Militant attacks put pressure on China's Pakistan plans'.

⁶⁶Rafiq, *The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Barriers and Impact*.

⁶⁷Shakil, 'Meet the militants chasing China out of Pakistan'.

Table 4. Data of prominent insurgent/terrorist attacks in Balochistan (January 2018– September 2022)

S.No	Target	Type of attack	Location	Year	Impact
1.	Bus carrying Chinese engineers	Suicide attack	Dalbadin, Balochistan	August 2018	Five people, including three Chinese
2.	Chinese Consulate	BLA attacked	Karachi, Sindh	November 2018	Four local staff killed
3.	Pearl Continental Hotel	BLA militants	Gwadar, Balochistan	June 2019	Five people killed and six injured
4.	Pakistan Stock Exchange (three Chinese companies at the time owned 40% of the stakes)	BLA	Karachi, Sindh	June 2020	Two security guards and a police officer killed; Four BLA militants also killed
5.	Serena Hotel	Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)	Quetta, Balochistan	April 2021	Five people killed and 12 wounded
6.	Check post	Baloch Liberation Front (BLF)	Kech, Balochistan	January 2022	17 soldiers and a BLF militant killed
7.	A roadside IED bomb blast	BLA	Mat area of Dera Bugti, Balochistan		Four people killed and 10 injured
	A grenade attack	BLA	Dera Allahyar town of Jaffarabad district, Balochistan	January 2022	17 people, including two police officers, injured
8.	Bomb blast	Baloch Nationalist Army (BNA)	Lahore, Punjab	January 2022	Three people, including a child, killed and over 25 injured: Six BNA militants killed
9.	Suicide attack	BLA	Confucius Institute, the Karachi University	April 2022	Four people, including three Chinese teachers and a Pakistani driver, killed

Source: Compiled by the authors from multiple sources.⁶⁹

attack state infrastructure, innocent civilians and law enforcement agencies. A report from an Islamabad-based think tank, Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), reveals an alarming trend of growing attacks on the CPEC. Almost 74 attacks throughout Pakistan were carried out in 2021. BLA, BRA and the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) were mainly responsible for those attacks.⁶⁸ BLA, BRA and other local offenders have targeted civilians, both Chinese and Pakistani, to show their opposition to the CPEC (see Table 4).

Baloch insurgents have increased their attacks inside and outside of Balochistan. Those attacks are also targeting CPEC and related projects involving China. Shari Baloch—a female suicide bomber of the BLA attacked the Confucius Institute at the University of Karachi on 26 April 2022 in which three Chinese teachers were killed.⁷⁰ The intensity of attacks on security forces, Chinese skilled labour and infrastructure projects by Baloch separatists has increased. The renewed spate of violence in Balochistan is a matter of concern both for the investor (China) and the recipient

⁶⁸Ashish Dangwal, 'Baloch Rebels Claim Responsibility For Attack Near China-Funded Gwadar Port; Pak Army Says 10 Soldiers Killed', *The Eurasian Times*, January 29, 2022, accessed April 12, 2022, <<https://eurasianimes.com/balochistan-rebels-claim-responsibility-for-attack-pak-army/>>.

⁶⁹Aniruddha Dhar, 'Balochistan Liberation Army claims Karachi attack and 1st woman suicide bomber', *The Hindustan Times*, April 26, 2022, accessed August 22, 2022, <<https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/karachi-university-blast-balochistan-liberation-army-claims-attack-101650972680484.html>>; Muhammad Akbar Notezai, 'Chaos in Afghanistan Threatens CPEC', *The Diplomat*, July 19, 2021, accessed April 12, 2022, <<https://thediplomat.com/2021/07/chaos-in-afghanistan-threatens-cpec/>>; Dangwal, 'Baloch Rebels Claim Responsibility For Attack Near China-Funded Gwadar Port'; Shah Meer Baloch, 'At Least 21 Dead After Pakistan Army Clashes with Militants for Third Day', *The Guardian*, February 5, 2022, accessed April 12, 2022, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/04/pakistan-army-clashes-with-separatist-militants-for-third-day>>; Ghalib Nihad 'ISPR says attacks repulsed in Balochistan's Naushki and Panjgur; 4 terrorists killed', *Dawn*, February 2, 2022, accessed April 12, 2022, <<https://www.dawn.com/news/1672907>>; Syed Raza Hassan, 'Seven die as "separatist" gunmen attack Pakistan Stock Exchange', *Reuters*, June 29, 2020, accessed April 12, 2022, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-pakistan-attacks-idUKKBN2400IF>>; Janjua, 'Militant attacks put pressure on China's Pakistan plans'.

⁷⁰Dhar, 'Balochistan Liberation Army claims'.

(Pakistan).⁷¹ It is imperative to earn the support of local communities if the government of Pakistan is to successfully complete this mega project. While analysing the reservations of local people, and their dissatisfaction with the government's land acquisition for various projects under the umbrella of the CPEC, Mahmood, Sabir and Ali found mixed results.⁷² According to their study (which does not specifically focus on Balochistan), people sold their lands, which were either part of or nearby proposed special economic zones and energy projects in pursuit of a better life through more job opportunities. However, they became discontented by the absence of meaningful change in their financial status and the lack of job opportunities. Although many locals had voluntarily sold their land for various CPEC projects, the influx of skilled labour from China and other parts of Pakistan has increased their fears and apprehensions.⁷³

Also of concern is the displacement of Baloch fishermen and damage to the marine environment of the 750-kilometre-long coastline in Balochistan.⁷⁴ This coast is rich in marine life and many (nearly 70%) of the locals depend on fishing for their livelihood.⁷⁵ The locals increasingly find it difficult to catch enough fish as they are losing their access to much of the coast under the new Gwadar Smart Port City Master Plan. The Gwadar Development Authority has built two fish-landing harbours for the local in Sur Bandar and Peshukan, 40 kilometres away from Gwadar, but these are insufficient to meet the needs of all fishermen as the two harbours can accommodate only 2,200 small boats.⁷⁶ The loss of their only source of income has exacerbated existing fears and grievances, forcing these groups to protest in Gwadar.⁷⁷ The protest in November 2021 was dissolved after the federal government's assurances that it would increase access to water, electricity, health, education and other facilities for the fishermen in the area.⁷⁸

The issue of land acquisition has received a lot of attention in the international and local media. The government has been using the 1894 Land Acquisition Act to acquire land in Gwadar and elsewhere for the CPEC. For a project of this scale, it is not surprising that the state had to acquire massive lands from private owners. In Gwadar alone, the state has acquired 2,200 acres for a free trade zone, around 290,000 acres for the Gwadar city project, and 160,000 acres for residential projects.⁷⁹ Then there are ongoing construction projects like the largest airport in Pakistan, the New Gwadar International Airport, for which 4,300 acres of land was acquired.⁸⁰ All this has happened without any consultation with the locals in Balochistan.⁸¹ Although protests were directed at the local government, they can be seen as signs of discontent with China-funded CPEC and the state of Pakistan. To defuse the situation, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Zhao Lijian, issued a statement in which he highlighted that Beijing and Islamabad were cooperating for the welfare of local people.⁸² Land acquisition in Gwadar for the CPEC project is characterised as forcible acquisition at reasonable market rates by the CPEC management (Chinese and Pakistani authorities). The reality is different as

⁷¹Hali, 'Regional and Global Scenarios of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor', p. 53.

⁷²Mahmood et al., 'Infrastructure projects and sustainable development'.

⁷³Shahrukh et al., 'Coastal Communities of Balochistan vis-à-vis CPEC', p. 57.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 54.

⁷⁵Adnan Aamir, 'Developing Gwadar-II', *The News*, June 19, 2022, accessed November 11, 2022, <<https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/966989-developing-gwadar-ii>>.

⁷⁶Shahrukh et al., 'Coastal Communities of Balochistan vis-à-vis CPEC', p. 66.

⁷⁷Sana Jamal, 'Pakistan: Gwadar fishermen end month-long protest after government accepts demands', *Gulf News*, December 17, 2021, accessed January 22, 2022, <<https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/pakistan/pakistan-gwadar-fishermen-end-month-long-protest-after-government-accepts-demands-1.84462294>>; Saleem Shahid, 'PM Imran assures Gwadar protesters of action against illegal fishing', *Dawn*, December 13, 2021, accessed January 22, 2022, <<https://www.dawn.com/news/1663467>>.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹'China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Opportunities and risks'.

⁸⁰Adnan Aamir, 'Is it wise for China to build Pakistan's largest airport at Gwadar?' *The Asia Dialogue*, May 21, 2019, <<https://theasiadialogue.com/2019/05/21/is-it-wise-for-china-to-build-pakistans-largest-airport-at-gwadar/>>

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²'Protest in Gwadar against Chinese fishing trawlers is "fake news": FM', *Global Times* November 30, 2021, accessed May 12, 2022, <<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202111/1240286.shtml>>.

the 'locals sold their land at throwaway prices to real estate developers, but the property value skyrocketed after the developmental projects under the CPEC'.⁸³ The government could intervene to improve the locals' concerns by providing suitable land to mitigate some of these harms.⁸⁴ It would be prudent, therefore, to compensate the locals as a gesture towards sustainable development. Further, the local ownership or land rights can be protected through legislation to prevent non-locals from acquiring land in Balochistan.⁸⁵

The security challenges and the lack of smooth hinterland connectivity for national transit cargo are additional bottlenecks in transforming the Gwadar Port into a state-of-the-art international cargo transit hub.⁸⁶ Securing areas surrounding the CPEC projects across Pakistan, especially in Balochistan, has been problematic. The law enforcement agencies in Balochistan, particularly the Frontier Corps (FC), have a special mandate to provide security to the people working on the CPEC and its accompanying projects against any threat, including terrorism. The Pakistan Army has a Special Security Division (SSD) to provide security for CPEC projects, while the Pakistan Navy's 'Force Protection Battalion' guards the Gwadar Port.⁸⁷ Pakistan's security agencies, especially the army, have been primarily responsible for securing the CPEC but such arrangements, including fencing and security checkpoints, have been rejected by the locals in Balochistan.⁸⁸ Such authoritarian measures are destined to face resistance as the locals are not included in the decision making.

Nation-Building and the CPEC

In addition to analysing CPEC's economic and strategic relevance, this article builds on the existing scholarship in terms of the CPEC as a form of nation-building in Pakistan.⁸⁹ The CPEC has a potential to be transformative if it is carried out in an open and equitable manner by providing equal benefits to all Pakistanis. It has a potential to unite unhappy, resentful, and deprived people into a civic nation. The federal government appears to have realised the need to address the socio-economic grievances of communities opposing the CPEC. This was demonstrated in a CPEC security briefing chaired by Minister Ahsan Iqbal in May 2022. At the meeting, Iqbal said that the National Counter Terrorism Authority should advise the government in terms of 'addressing socio-economic grievances of the people that may if left unaddressed translate into security challenges'.⁹⁰ The tension between Punjab and Balochistan against the backdrop of the locals' (the Baloch) age-old grievances against the centre could be ameliorated by ensuring more CPEC benefits are provided to Balochistan, which holds a key place in the CPEC because of the Gwadar Port. Moreover, benefits of the CPEC could be manifold if it creates a secure environment of inclusivity and offers equal opportunities to all. Ahmed foresees the CPEC as a nation-building project that could forge a cohesive bond able to integrate Balochistan into the nation-state through sustainable development.⁹¹ Similarly, Khan refers to the CPEC as more than a connectivity tool but as a project that can improve the lives of the local through economic opportunities.⁹²

⁸³Mogin Khawaja, 'Gwadar: An unfulfilled dream', *The Express Tribune*, February 27, 2011, accessed October 1, 2022, <<https://tribune.com.pk/story/122720/gwadar-an-unfulfilled-dream>>.

⁸⁴Bahukutumbi Raman, 'Unrest in Balochistan', *Outlook*, February 3, 2022, accessed October 1, 2022, <<https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/unrest-in-baluchistan/221573>>.

⁸⁵Khan, 'The Mélange of Violence in Balochistan', p. 175.

⁸⁶Shabnam Gul, Waseem Ishaque, and Muhammad Faizan Asghar, 'Impact of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) on National Development and Integration in Pakistan', *Global Political Review*, 6(1), (2021), pp. 50–65.

⁸⁷Maham Hameed, 'The politics of the China—Pakistan Economic Corridor', *Palgrave Communications*, 4(1), (2018).

⁸⁸Khan, 'The Mélange of Violence in Balochistan', pp. 175–176.

⁸⁹Ahmed, 'Impact of the China—Pakistan Economic Corridor on Nation-Building in Pakistan', p. 401.

⁹⁰'Security review meeting on CPEC to be held every month: Ahsan Iqbal', *CPEC Authority, Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives*, May 6, 2022. accessed February 15, 2023, <<https://cpec.gov.pk/news/222>>.

⁹¹Ahmed, 'Impact of the China—Pakistan Economic Corridor on Nation-Building in Pakistan'.

⁹²Mohammad Khan, 'Domestic and External Dimensions of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor', in *China—Pakistan Economic Corridor: A Game Changer* (pp. 86–109), ed. M.M Khan, A.R Malik, S. Ijaz & U. Farwa (Institute of Strategic Studies Press 2016), p. 92.

Pakistan is yet to overcome challenges both at home and at the international level to fully operationalise the projects associated with the corridor. While competitors of both China and Pakistan may seek to consolidate their strategic interests in the region by sponsoring the separatist terrorist groups in Balochistan as a policy of containment by proxies, internal threats are more significant risk. External challenges are usually linked to geo-strategic positioning or as Garlick refers to it as China's 'geopositional hedging',⁹³ but the larger threat to its successful completion is internal, and this needs immediate attention. Critics like Garlick refer to the CPEC as a mythological project, which has no economic value, and mainly aims to establish China's presence in the Indian Ocean Region.⁹⁴ To counter such anti-CPEC narratives and to address domestic political issues, Pakistan has to build a pro-CPEC narrative that can convince the people of Pakistan that this massive investment will enable Pakistan—a country with the fifth largest population in the world⁹⁵ – to uplift the socio-economic condition of the poor masses. Pakistan needs to satisfy its people prior to making a case for international audiences.⁹⁶

A month-long protest by the local people in Gwadar in 2021 and recent sit-ins by Haq Do Tehreek (Gwadar Rights Movement) at the start of 2023 are expressions of discontent and distrust. Locals feel alienated and excluded from the decision-making process. Analysts like Garlick⁹⁷ criticise the 'high security, fortress-like set-up' for Chinese workers in Gwadar, and the non-disclosure of details of CPEC's agreements. He is of the view that in there is 'an enclave constructed without neighbouring communities in mind' in Gwadar, which is discriminatory and tantamount to the locals' isolation from the project.⁹⁸ His criticism cannot be dismissed, given the frequent protests in Gwadar and attacks by separatist militants in various parts of the country, which give sceptics yet another reason to doubt the corridor's sustainability. Furthermore, the issue of land acquisition and displacement could have been settled at the district level (the Gwadar Development Authority) and at the provincial level (the Department of Fisheries) but corruption and mismanagement prevented an amicable resolution to the matter. Incapacitated and weak institutions created anxiety among the locals, worsening the issue.⁹⁹

The Pakistani state is expanding its reach in Balochistan's periphery districts as part of its ongoing state-building efforts. Education is the most powerful instrument for engaging the youth, and the province administration has constructed many university campuses in remote parts of Balochistan, including Turbat, Loralai, Gwadar, and Zhob. Locals can only participate in industry and other development projects if they are equipped with the required knowledge and skills to do so. More so than degrees, technical education is required to ensure that graduates are immediately employable.

The CPEC's impact is not limited to the socio-economic uplift of the country but it can also potentially instrumentalise the nation-building process in a country as ethnically diverse as Pakistan. The importance of investing in education and technical skills to raise the status of the Baloch youth can dissuade them from separatist activism. Economic growth, based on knowledge and skills, will not only alleviate poverty and inequality but also lessen the discontent and alienation felt by the Baloch people, reinforcing the nation-building phenomena.¹⁰⁰ The federal and provincial governments are building more technical campuses across Balochistan to upskill unemployed youth. Skills

⁹³Jeremy Garlick, *Reconfiguring the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor*, (Routledge, 2021), p. 58.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁹⁵<<https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/>>.

⁹⁶Hassan Aslam Shad, 'CPEC's transformational promise for Pakistan'. *Global Village Space*, January 18, 2022, accessed January 21, 2022, <<https://www.globalvillagespace.com/cpecs-transformational-promise-for-pakistan/>>.

⁹⁷Garlick, *Reconfiguring the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor*, p. 30.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁹⁹Shakeel Ahmed Ramay, 'CPEC and future of investment' *The News*, December 28, 2021, accessed January 20, 2022, <<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/920508-cpec-and-future-of-investment>>.

¹⁰⁰Seema Khan, *The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: A Flashpoint of Regional Competition*. *LSE Ideas*. London School of Economics, accessed October 1, 2022, p. 6. <<https://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/events/2022/05/china-pakistan/chinapakistan-economic-corridor>>.

development and capacity building can accelerate and enhance socio-economic improvements by making local people employable and available to CPEC projects. Education and employment are key factors in removing the threat of extremism, terrorism and other radicalised ideologies from society.

Additionally, the role of the Pakistan Army cannot be ignored. It has established cadet schools in the heart of Balochistan,¹⁰¹ including in areas such as Dera Bugti, Qila Saifullah, Pishin and Loralai. While such educational initiatives target young people, more needs to be done to engage locals, especially those who are out of schools. While the state has taken steps to address this by establishing technical and professional institutes in Gwadar and Quetta, they are not enough. Large amounts of funds have been released for these initiatives but, because they are processed by the local political elite, they are rarely distributed to the majority of local citizens. The federal government must ensure that the allocated budget is spent on the people and not held by political elites. The transparent handling of funds is possible if the election of representatives is transparent. The federal government should work expeditiously with the locals to minimise the role of the political elite, and this can only be done by strengthening state institutions and maintaining law and order. This article suggests that the process of integrating the local population of Balochistan should be a top priority of the federal government. The article also contends that involving locals in decision-making and their participation in development projects will enhance the ties between the state and society. Hence this will improve the relationship between the centre and the periphery in the case of Balochistan. As a result, there will be little room for internal and external saboteur activity to influence and mobilise locals against the CPEC.

Conclusion

Despite reservations about its implementation, when assessing and analyzing the CPEC, it is vital to highlight that it not only addresses Pakistan's immediate needs for economic infrastructure, but it also paves the way for Pakistan's future prosperity and provides an opportunity to address grievances of marginalized groups like the Baloch in Pakistan. It is a project that could potentially build a nation, but it largely depends on the will of the state to develop and sustain a political consensus at provincial and federal levels in favour of the CPEC. This can be done through union council level consultations in Balochistan by engaging with the local communities and leadership.

Prior to the CPEC, the federal government used to justify its lack of budgetary allocation for peripheral areas by saying that it lacked sufficient funds. This position is difficult to maintain in relation to Balochistan because of the centrality of Balochistan in the CPEC. Besides some symbolic projects providing capacity building programs and jobs to the locals, the state has ignored the importance of bringing the larger Baloch population on board for crucial projects, such as the land acquisition for mega projects in Gwadar like the new airport and the Gwadar Port. Based on the assessment carried out in this research, the negative impacts of the CPEC on nation-building in Pakistan are noticeable, such as through direct attacks on CPEC and Chinese citizens, and they demand urgent actions from not just the state of Pakistan but also from Beijing. While China can provide more funds for schemes, such as vocational training and development programs in Balochistan, Islamabad needs to increase its efforts to address the locals' grievances. There is an historic mistrust of the state as local elites corrupted state institutions. It is important to acknowledge the mistakes of the past by addressing current socio-economic grievances. This is crucial because the local insurgents use the grievances against the state. As our analysis has shown, the CPEC has been controversial from the start as people in Balochistan shared doubts about how they would be benefitting from it compared to other provinces of Pakistan. Baloch insurgent

¹⁰¹ <<http://emis.gob.pk/website/CadetAndResidentialCollages.aspx>>.

groups have posed the biggest threat to the CPEC in Balochistan and continue to attack sites and individuals, including the Chinese citizens, linked to the CPEC. Security measures alone would be insufficient to deal with the locals' opposition which is reflected through regular demonstrations and terrorist attacks.

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