



Implications Of The 'Belt And Road Initiative (Bri)' For Foreign Policy Of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Belt and Road Initiative is a mega project of China's ever growing economic expansion in the region with CPEC as its flagship project. While investing a huge amount for the reconstruction of ancient silk rout and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, China is not only providing routs for global trade by connecting three continents, but also rising peacefully to a global power. Tilting the world to multi polar system, the BRI has great impacts for international relations. This paper is analyzing the impacts of BRI on Pakistan's foreign policy and its position in the region. For this purpose qualitative method has been used. Qualitative data regarding BRI and CPEC has been collected form newspapers, journals articles and internet and analyzed in the light of TV and newspapers interviews of Chinese and Pakistani government representatives. It is concluded that BRI has important implications upon Pakistan's relations with other countries especially USA, India, Russia and Turkey and that such implications have positive change for Pakistan with regard to its economy, security and politics.

Key Words: BRI; Foreign Investment; China; Pakistan, Foreign Policy

INTRODUCTION

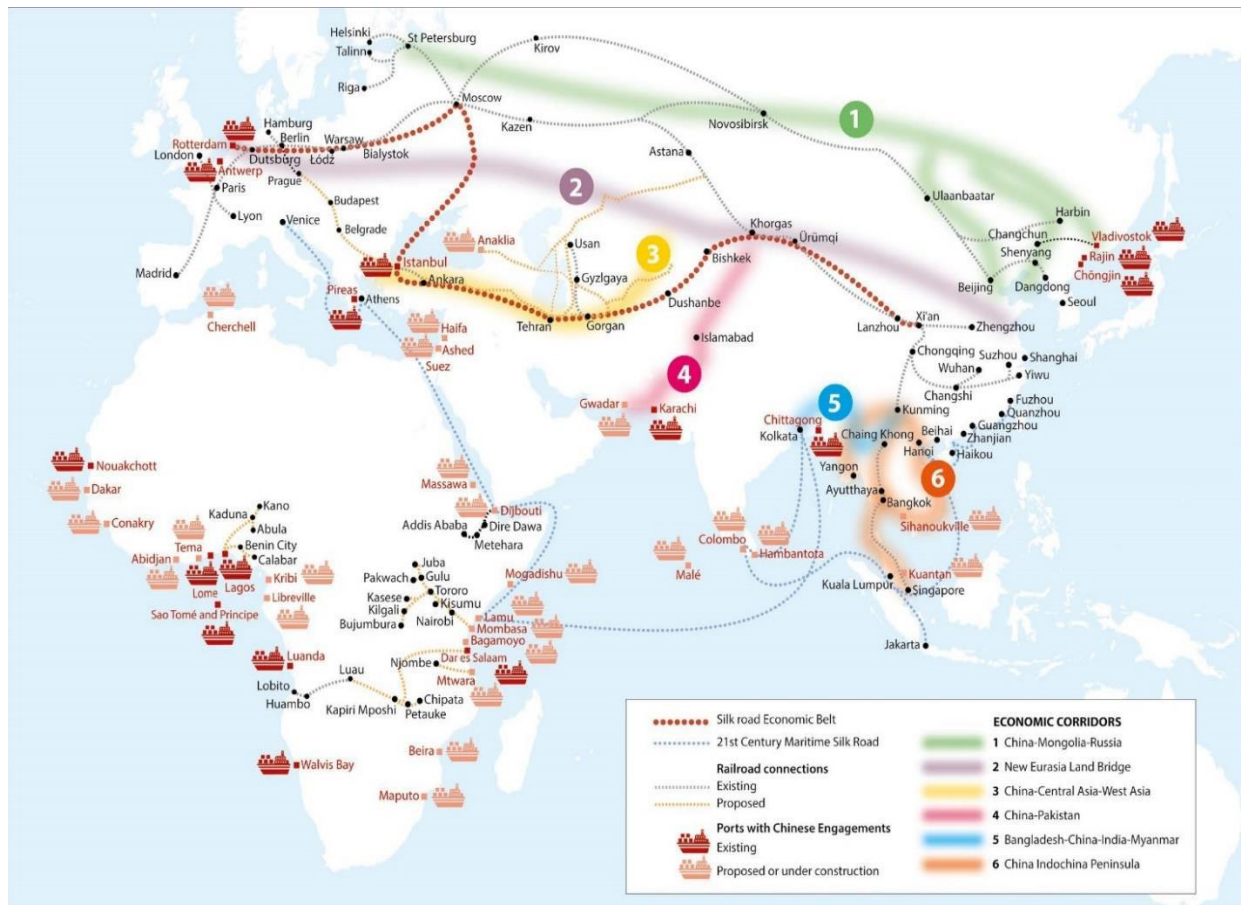
A state's foreign policy is based on self interest and self interest or national interest is the core objective for which foreign policy is used as a tool. Self interest may be different for different states and may be change according to the time and environment however the main interest of every state is security, integrity and economic development. Same is the case with Pakistan which came into being on the name of Islam, a weak state having a long border with its enemy (India), threatening to engulf it anytime. The main focus of Pakistan's foreign policy was to "secure its national identity, territorial integrity and independence against domestic and external challenges" as by self it respects the sovereignty and independence of other states and does not interfere in other's internal affairs. It believes on peaceful coexistence and wants brotherly relations with Muslim countries. Pakistan adopted an independent foreign policy on the principles of Non-alignment however its ultimate interest of security and economic needs brought it closer to the West, specially the USA. US provided it security and financial assistance in the shape of aid and debt under the defense agreements (SEATO & CENTO) and used Pakistan for its own interest in the cold war. As a Muslim country Pakistan developed good relations with all the Muslim states and its neighbors but traditionally relations with the West and particularly the United States of America (USA) remained the core element of Pakistan' foreign policy. However USA has fulfilled its interest from Pakistan in the name of "War on Terror" and left Pakistan alone while tilted towards India. Pakistan is trying to establish good relations with Russia. China has always provided diplomatic and economic support to Pakistan in critical situations and their friendship is considered as "higher than Himalaya, deeper than ocean and sweeter than honey". In the 21st century China is growing as an economic and political power mainly due to its "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)" and therefore has deep impact on the foreign policy of debt recipient countries in the region. This also persuades the foreign policy of Pakistan which shifted its dependence from west to the east. This paper will analyze implications of BRI on Pakistan's foreign policy.

LETERATURE REVIEW

The "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)" also known as "One Belt One Road (OBOR)" is actually the reconstruction of historical trade route (the Silk Route) by China to connect the three Continents of Asia, Africa and Europe by land and sea routs in order to develop regional integration, improve economic growth and increase trade in the region and to benefit the world from the peaceful rise of China. BRI consists of a "Silk Road Economic Belt" that connects China with "South Asia, South East Asia, Russia, Central Asia and Europe" by land, a "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" that links China's coastal regions with "South Asia, South East Asia, the South Pacific, the Middle East and Eastern Africa, all the way to Europe" by sea route and the six important corridors having the following names and countries;

1. The first corridor is called “the New Eurasia Land Bridge” and it is consisting of rail road to Europe through “Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Poland”.
2. Second corridor is named as “China, Mongolia, Russia Economic Corridor” consisting of rail links as well as land road.
3. Third corridor is “China, Central Asia, and West Asia Economic Corridor” connecting to “Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, and Turkey”.
4. Fourth corridor is “China, Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)” which connects the Xinjiang (landlocked) Province of west China to Gawadar Port of Pakistan and also serves as a junction for both the silk routes.
5. Fifth one is “China, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar Economic Corridor” which is “likely to move more slowly due to mistrust over security issues between India and China”.
6. Sixth is “China Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor” passing through “Vietnam, Thailand, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Malaysia” (see figure).

This plan covers more than 70 countries, consisting of 64% of world’s population with almost one third of world’s GDP and requires an investment of over 26 trillion USD. The project comprises of roads, railways, power grids, ports, air ports and telecommunication networks. This is a comprehensive financial drive of China which reforms the external sector of China’s economy. Beside infrastructure this initiative has major priorities of policy coordination, free trade, economic integration and people to people contact.



OECD. (2018). China's Belt and Road Initiative in the Global Trade, Investment and Finance Landscape. OECD Business and Finance Outlook. OECD Publishing, Paris.

COUNTRIES INVOLVED IN BRI

Overall, 65 states are involved in the BRI. They include; “China, Mongolia, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Vietnam, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey and Ukraine” (Hui, et al., 2018).

ATTRIBUTES OF BRI

- **Territorial Integrity;** BRI will integrate the less developed territories and guide them for better economic policies to make them capable to transform their market economies into competent financial hub.

- **Access of China;** It will connect China with Central Asia Europe through three corridors of north, south and central Xinjiang. The Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar corridor will make the entrance of China's landlocked Yunnan province to the Bay of Bengal (Chowdhury, 2013).
- **Size and Scope;** the economies of BRI countries account almost one-third of world GDP and trade, and almost two-thirds of the global population but some of which live below poverty line especially in Kenya, Laos, Djibouti and Uzbekistan. The BRI projects have the potentials to improve the lifestyle of a huge population and contribute to global welfare.
- **Boosting Trade and Commerce; Recently** the export of BRI economies has almost been doubled but still trade of some countries “like Nepal, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Laos” is very weak mainly because of weak policy and lacking of infrastructure. BRI has the potentials to fill such gaps for boosting international trade and commerce by integrating such weak economies to the global economy.
- **Improving links; China and Asia is** currently receiving goods from Europe in about 30 days through ships. This time can be reduced to half by shipping goods through train but it will costs much more. This priority between saving time and money has delayed trade activities. BRI is improving the capacity and network of railways and other transport infrastructure that will lead to international trade, improved investment, and enhanced growth in BRI economies. BRI projects will have to make trade easier by construction of the world’s essential economic corridors.

CHALLENGES TO BRI

1. The Belt and Road Initiative is facing impediments like conflicting political systems and views, the economic availability for the cross-border projects, and the absence of a basic control system (Huang, 2016).
2. BRI economies have restrictive policies regarding foreign direct investment which are very time consuming and long processes. That needs cooperation and policy reformation for development.
3. Risk of corruption; in such a large project of infrastructure, there are a lot of risks related to corruption, political, social and environmental issues. These are expecting from the BRI countries having weak governance. Such risks are required to be identified in order to escape from such problems in the future.
4. The weak economies of BRI countries cannot afford such heavy investment in the project for which they have to arrange loans. Therefore there is a possibility for the developing countries to be trap under debt burden.

FINANCING THE BRI

China believes in the prediction that trade in the future will be taken place through land roads. In this regard it is investing globally in the Belt and Road initiative. This will also fulfill

the dream of China's peaceful rise as presently sustainable economy is the criteria for power and position in the international structure, instead of military capability. Therefore US hegemony is in danger from "the economic rise" of China. China has secured a huge stock of gold and foreign exchange from its trade and now she wants to utilize those surplus resources in the developing countries which will in turn provide markets for her exports and increase its influence in the region. This is a multilateral project aimed at enhancing the economic integration and cooperation. It is funded by the Chinese-led "Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) New Development Bank and private institutions".

CPEC

CPEC is bilateral agreement between China and Pakistan for which China is investing 56 Billion USD in proper mechanism involving foreign direct investment, easy loans, and grants. It will develop the infrastructure and communication system in Pakistan by establishing roads and railways with economic and industrial zones that will enable Pakistan to perform as a center of trade and commerce. This will lead to cooperation, stability and peace in the region. This is a channel of new Maritime Silk Route that links three billion people in Asia, Africa, and Europe. It reduces the distance as well as the risk of energy supply in the "Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, the Strait of Malacca and the disputed zones of the South China Sea" to almost one-third distance with a comparatively protected passage through Khunjarab Pass into the Xinjiang province leading towards Inner China. At the same time it will make available huge market to china along the route of commodities carrying to abroad Asia requires an investment of USD 26 trillion in infrastructure up till 2030 (Asian Development Bank, 2017), and China is surely helping them to give some of this. This Chinese investment will have good impact on the involved countries as the most important feature of the BRI is mutual benefit. This will help to widen markets for China's products in the long term and to improve industrial excess capacity in the short term.

The aim of CPEC was both to transform Pakistan's economy by advancing its road, rail, air [transportation](#), communication and energy systems and to connect the deep-sea Pakistani ports of Karachi and [Gawadar](#) to China's [Xinjiang](#) province (west China) and beyond through land routes. CPEC is a part of "One Belt One Road" initiative of China consisting of "Silk Road Economic Belt" and the 21st century "Maritime Silk Road" which connects China with Central Asia, the Middle East, South Asia, Europe and Africa. (Small, 2016) This route will facilitate passage of goods and services between China and Pakistan and will expand trade potential and increase energy security of the region and will provide development opportunities to the people of China, Pakistan, South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East. It is a mega project of international standard that will deeply influence regional economy; therefore it is considered a "Game Changer" and a "Fate Changer" for both the partner states (khan, Malik, Ijaz, & Farwa, 2016). It will provide new economic opportunities, employments, reduce

poverty, and attract foreign investment in Pakistan. Although the main focus of CPEC is on building of infrastructure and development of energy sector for which \$33.8 and \$11.8 were invested however it has cultural dimensions too (Malik, 2014). All the actors involved in CPEC have their own interests. China is investing billions of dollars because she wants to get access to hot water of Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf and to build the multidimensional project of “One Belt One Road” initiative, to connect western parts of China to South Asia, Central Asia, and Europe through Silk Road. This will save time and transportation cost of China as its shipments take 45 days to reach China that will then reach in 10 days with reduction in thousands of miles distance (Naseem, 2015). This will enhance China’s economic, political and social influence internationally. That is why China did not cancel it despite of huge security challenges.

IMPACTS ON PAKISTAN’S FOREIGN POLICY

Historically Pakistan tried its best to have good relations with both China and the USA. However USA’s suspicious attitude has shown mistrust upon Pakistan after fulfilling its interest that it is not doing enough to root out terrorism. US policy towards South Asia having intention to established strong relations with India and imposing penalties on Pakistan, further pushed Pakistan to strengthen its strategic relations with China. As a reaction to America’s financial and military sanctions, being a debt recipient country, Pakistan has started looking for other international opportunities and possibilities; however its relations with China are time tested. America forced Pakistan to “do more” by halting military aid, and limited its economic favor, this provided chance to China, who assured support and cooperation and appreciated its effort for counterterrorism. This led China to increase its economic footprints here. Pakistan received a debt of \$ 5 billion from Chinese monetary institution during the fiscal year 2017-18. Moreover China has invested a huge amount in the form of CPEC which is greater investment than US investment here and also has more bilateral trade agreements. China has planned to invest \$ 60 billion over 15 years under CPEC agreement, which is expected to have great impact on Pakistan’s economy.

The attitude of United States is now critical towards “strategic component of CPEC” as it is considered as an alternative to United States military and financial aid. Presently there is some anxiety about the United States-India policies about CPEC. In every dispute US favors India as compare to Pakistan. Both the countries have common geo-strategic interest in the region which have united them and are trying to coerce Pakistan by using “grey hybrid warfare techniques” and other actions. Indian media is propagating against Pakistan. However in order to protect its heavy investment in Pakistan, China is more anxious about security and political stability in Pakistan. It also wants peace and stability in Afghanistan, because insurgency in Afghanistan will affect the peace process in its Xinjiang Region. If India joins CPEC, this will lead to decrease in the tension in the region.

AMERICAN APPROACH

Being a super power USA is predicting an unwanted change in the world order in the shape of BRI and CPEC that will challenge the hegemonic position of USA. The American scholars call the emergence of China as the “shift of power from West to East” and therefore do not want Pakistan to tilt towards China in case of CPEC. USA is making plans to oppose every scheme, initiated or backed by China that is why it is pressurizing the government in Pakistan by declaring CPEC as totally burden upon Pakistan’s economy (New York Times, 2018). They fear Pakistan that like Hambantota in Sri Lanka, CPEC is also initiated with loans and ultimately it will be converted into equity because the financial condition of Pakistan is not that much strong to pay back that loan. Finally China will own the whole CPEC and that 91% of Gawadar’s revenue share will be given to China for 40 years. According to the US views, CPEC will increase debt burden on Pakistan on the basis of loan interest and energy cost which will effect local industrial sector public life in Pakistan (Nadia, 2017). In case of failure in returning of loan Pakistan may give the ownership of its territory to China. In short the US is feeling threat from BRI that may challenge its global order and it sees CPEC as a game changer for its strategy towards Asia, therefore generate enormous diplomatic problems for Pakistani diplomacy to formulate a balanced view (waseem, et el, 2018).

INDIAN APPROACH

India is the regional rival of Pakistan and presently America is helping India militarily, economically and diplomatically to compete China in the region. Due to this rivalry with China and Pakistan India is opposing CPEC. India is directly creating obstacles and criticizing it especially in the case of Gilgit Baltistan, which is the gateway for CPEC to enter in the northern Pakistan and which belongs to Jammu and Kashmir, a disputed region between Pakistan and India. Indian scholars say that China is utilizing Pakistan’s rivalry with India, to achieve its hegemonic interests and encircling India through supporting Pakistan, economically and militarily. They thought the Chinese military presence in Indian Ocean as a threat that china has encircled it. They criticized CPEC on the ground that this is a plan of china to snatch Pakistan’s vital assets as China has surplus Industrial capacity and unemployed skilled personnel, who will be utilize in CPEC. They argued that Pakistan was expecting about 50 thousand jobs to be offered in the first phase but China hired its own workers who were more skilled and only few workers from Pakistan were employed because they could not compete the Chinese workers.

In addition Pakistan arranged almost 15 thousand security forces for the protection of Chinese workers of CPEC. Moreover the Chinese companies have given tax relaxation which will affect negatively the local industries and this route will get access to market to China only because Pakistan has no reverse traffic to Xinjiang to approach the Chinese market and this means no foreign exchange for Pakistan. They further say that China is capturing Pakistani land under CPEC to fulfill its own agricultural needs. In short the main aim of Indian foreign policy presently is to halt the way of CPEC. She is more involved in Chabahar port of

Iran in order to minimize the importance of Gawadar port (Ishaque, Waseem. Safia and Aman Ullah, 2018). She cannot afford the development of Pakistan as the main objective of CPEC is to improve the economy of Pakistan. India is feeling threatened that the economic development in Pakistan will lead to an increase in its military spending which can challenge India's arms capability. Moreover the Chinese economic support will strengthen Pakistan's economy due to which it would have no more interest to enhance economic cooperation with India. In order to spoil the relations between China and Pakistan, and to hinder CPEC, India backed terrorist groups in Pakistan to attack Chinese workers many times (Wagner, 2016).

RUSSIA

Although initially the relations between Pakistan and Russia were not very good but since 9/11 there ties have become better. Russia has the ambition to expand its economic influence towards the east and for this purpose CPEC can help it. Russia has good relations with China and wants to take full advantage of BRI which is to create economic supplements for each other. Pakistan has invited Russia for investment in CPEC. Russia is also interested in CPEC as it has a dream to have access to warm water for which it had invaded Afghanistan 40 years ago. Now it's dream is materializing through CPEC in a very peaceful manner. Therefore it has established trade relations with Pakistan and is cooperating Pakistan in defense sector. It is an energy rich country and has promised Pakistan for cooperation in energy enhancement.

MIDDLE EAST

Pakistan has brotherly relations with Middle Eastern states mainly because of common history and culture. All are members of OIC and trading partners of Pakistan. Saudi Arabia being religious leader and rich in oil is respected for Pakistan and wants bilateral cooperation with it. It also supported Pakistan for its nuclear tests and war against terror and having close trade relations and military partnership with Pakistan. It has invested a huge amount in the construction of oil refinery in Gawadar. However due to its good ties with India, Saudi Arab is not supporting Pakistan for Kashmir issue. Recently on August 4, 2020 the Pakistani foreign minister Shah Mahmood Quraishi delivered a statement that "I am once again respectfully telling the OIC that a meeting of the foreign ministers is our expectation," on television news, and "If you cannot convene it, then I will be compelled to ask Prime Minister Imran Khan to call a meeting of the Islamic countries that are ready to stand with us on the issue of Kashmir and support the oppressed Kashmiries." This statement annoyed Saudi Arabia and it withdrew a 1 billion dollar interest free loan to Pakistan that it had extended in November 2018 as well as denied the renewal of oil payment scheme of same package. However Shah Mahmood Quraishy later on cleared that OIC has fully supported Kashmir and has passed resolutions on it which cannot be denied (Hashim, August 28, 2020).

Turkey is Pakistan's partner in ECO and diplomatic supporter especially on the cause of Kashmir. Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Kuwait, Yemen, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Iraq etc. all has brotherly relations with Pakistan. The BRI is passing through Middle Eastern states which is integrating the region and providing opportunities for mutual trade and investment. China is present in Middle East commercially and through its investment in the region. Now due to BRI and import of energy it is growing as an important trading partner of several countries in the Middle East and has signed double tax treaties with them. It is near to become a central naval power in the region but still china hesitates to interfere in the security problems and avoids from American style approach. It did not compel its partners to reform their governments etc. even is silent about US approach of interference in the region and this is the reason of its attraction for the Middle Eastern states. However its prominence and growing military presence in the region will ultimately involve it in its security issues that may lead to two opposite blocks backed by Beijing and Washington for influence in the region (Sachs & Huggard, 20 July 2020). The example is the US-Israel event as China has trade relations with Israel and is investing in their infrastructure, telecommunication and Haifa port but recently the US pressurized Israel to reject Chinese "bid to run Israel's largest desalination plant" and to cancel its deal with China about selling of three falcon aircraft as well as returned other aircrafts without repairing, only because of the fear of Chinese economic advancement. This raised the great power competition between china and USA that can change the political climate in the region. Moreover the US president Donald Trump led a deal between UAE and Israel for normalizing their full diplomatic relations and expressed that he expected such deal from other pro western countries of Middle East. This was very shocking for other Islamic states and Pakistan expressed that this will have "far reaching implications" (Siddiqui, August 15, 2020).

IRAN AND AFGHANISTAN

Iran and Afghanistan are the neighbors of Pakistan. China and Pakistan are Ally of Iran. China has interest in Iran's oil and gas industry therefore it is upgrading Tehran-Mashhad railway which is connecting China and Iran passing through Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan, Uzbekistan and Turkamanistan. That will link Turkey and the Eastern Europe in the West of Iran and Chabahar port of Iran in the South. Thus the BRI has integrated the RCD (now ECO) members which will strengthen their economic, cultural and political ties. Pakistan and Iran wants peaceful Afghanistan which has been suffered from terrorism and wars almost the history. Afghanistan is a land locked country and CPEC is a golden opportunity for its access the Indian Ocean. It can develop its trade through Gawader Port thus leading to economic prosperity and ultimately to peace and stability. Pakistan and China are thinking to extend CPEC to Afghanistan and take it into confidence as US and India have great influence in Afghanistan and they are spying China and Pakistan through Afghanistan.

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CPEC is an important route of BRI that is making trade easy between China and Asia Pacific to Afro-Europe. It is contributing to a network of ports that are spread over from Gawadar to Pacific and in the west to the Mediterranean Sea ports of Africa and Europe thus linking the three continents. This will have good impacts on the foreign policy of Pakistan towards Africa and Europe because it has the potentials to increase trade and provide win to win opportunities to those countries to invest here. Recently Pakistan is an important partner of EU and BRI will enhance their relationship as Pakistan has invited the European States especially Germany, Italy, UK and Spain for investment and mutual Trade (OBORTUNITY, 30 January 2020).

SOUTH ASIA AND CENTRAL ASIA

Pakistan has good relations with these countries and now it is expected to be developed due to BRI. CPEC under BRI has created opportunities to materialize the dream of economic integration for the south Asia and Central Asia. Both the regions are the neighbors of Afghanistan and want peace in it for regional security and stability. The BRI is expected to change the geo-politics of both the regions and their integration may lead to a block in the future (Khan, 28 July 2019).

CONCLUSION

The “Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)” or “One Belt, One Road (OBOR)” is a grand International useful program for China as well as for all the associated states. CPEC is vital component of BRI. It has the advantages of decreased distance that ultimately reduces the duration for supply, and the advanced transportation system having safe passage benefit the Chinese export company which is the main requirement of the expansion of Europe and the China business market. It is evidenced from the report of “Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China” that the business volume of China with the “Belt and Road” countries raised speedily in 2017. The BRI involved states are becoming one integrated block and the US influence is removing. It is the integration of the three continents that will develop cooperation, trade and economy. China is planning to initiate BRI own currency instead of dollar. Like others it has impacts upon the foreign policy of Pakistan. As earlier the foreign policy of Pakistan was pro-western particularly pro American but now the scenario has totally changed and Pakistan has shifted its concern towards China. Now it’s relations have been stabilized with Russia and Iran which was not expected by the America. In Middle East the Arab-Israel agreement has change the scenario. Malaysia is hosting another organization against OIC which reduces the influence of Arabs from the Muslim states. In fact the world is going towards block system again as was in the cold war situation. Pakistan is aligned with China, Russia, Turkey and Iran against the USA, India and Israel. USA is helping India to counter China in the region. As foreign policy is the game of interest therefore Pakistan is also serving its interest. It feels secure with China against India and USA. China and Pakistan is doing trade in the local currency and now Pakistan can pay its loan to China in Pakistani

rupee. Its infrastructure is developing and its importance is increasing for other countries for investment and trade because of CPEC.

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