

The Impact of Silk Road on China-Pakistan Relations and Concern about China's Geo-economics

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Abstract

The paper deals with the modern China-Pakistan relations, political-economic situation in Pakistan, and, most importantly, the whole region's security. The essence of the paper is that nowadays Pakistan is not considered a safe country since there is noticed a steady increase of Islamic groups in the country. We have to highlight that in some remote areas of Pakistan the level of education is low and leads to the economic hardships, hence, creating the ground of radicalization: younger people are joining radical movements that threaten not only the region but also neighboring countries and Chinese projects. However, China manages to create a friendly relationship and implements many high budget projects in Pakistan.

The paper aims to describe the geopolitical situation in Asia, to highlight the impact of China's projects over the existing tough economic situation in Pakistan and to analyze the prospects of China's investments in the region. As well as to underline the insecure situation in Pakistan, and search the ways to improve it and find the connection between economic hardships and regional security.

The paper mainly uses an analysis method based on the study of historicism, books, documents, and empirical materials. The basis of the source represents books, scientific articles, press materials, and documents published on official websites. The work is focused on China's 5th "Sino-Pakistan Economic Corridor", which is a good chance to overcome existing poverty and improve the image of the country.

Keywords: Modern Demography, Islam, Economic Corridor, China, Pakistan, Silk Road

INTRODUCTION

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Those who are concerned about a geo-economic view of China's foreign policy usually focus on the use of economic policy instruments by the Chinese authorities to achieve more general foreign policy or geostrategic goals (Drezner, 1999).

This approach is vividly illustrated by the work of the Indian specialist in international relations Brahma Chellani. According to his view, "China's aspiration to impose its own rules in Asia is no secret to anyone. All major projects, starting from the initiative "One Belt - One Road" to the establishment in Beijing of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, are slowly but steadily bringing China closer to its strategic goal - building China-centric Asia (Chellaney, 2016). In the words of Chellani, there is a characteristic concern with the geo-economic approach that Beijing uses initiatives to strengthen its political and geostrategic positions. According to some analysts (which share the principles of the geo-economic paradigm), if China's strategy is not balanced by adequate measures, it will consolidate its leading position in the major part of the Third World (Blackwill, 2015).

The economic relations of China with other major countries - exporters of raw materials, such as Russia and Australia, are also accompanied by concern about China's growing political and geostrategic influence.

Historical Source about the Term "Silk Road"

The Silk Road interpenetrates the Eurasian continent and appears in the center of world history. It connects Mongolia, Tarim and Dzungaria basins, Tibet, Pamir, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and other regions of Eurasia thus making them interdependent. The term "Silk Road" was introduced by the German geographer Richthofen. In 1877, he wrote his 5-volume masterpiece "China, the Results of his travels" (1877 - 1912) (Minvei, 2005). The old Silk Road arose during the time of Emperor Wu Di, who, under the onslaught of the nomadic people of the Hunny, sent his dignitary Zhang Qian to search for their enemies Yuechzhey, who migrated westward, to establish allied relations with them. During his trip 138-126 BC. Zhang Qian reached Bactria and saw the horses in the Fergana Valley that struck him with their beauty. He reported to the emperor about the

absence of silk-weaving craft in other countries and advised the emperor to export the silk abroad in exchange for beautiful horses, as well as sweet fruits, wine, alfalfa, etc.

Silk in the West was highly valued for its ability to withstand universal calamity - intrusive insect parasites. Thus, besides successfully establishment the relations between China and the Hellenistic states of Asia, Zhang Qian managed to gather information about Parthia and India. After the discovery of Zhang Qian, the road to the west began to grow and develop through economic and cultural exchanges, political and military operations with Europe, Persia, the Arab world, Central Asia and India, and creates a unique trade route – under the name - Silk Road. In those ancient times, no one could predict the importance of the term in the future modern world.

Six Economic Corridors

On May 27, 2015, a permanent member of the CPC Politburo Committee, Deputy Prime Minister Zhang Gaoli in Chongqing entered the opening ceremony on the ASEM Industrial Relations Dialogue (Asia-Europe Forum) announced the construction of 6 economic corridors, which should expand the geography of the Silk Road Economic Belt project, for the first time explicitly, stated that China plans to invest about 900 billion dollars in 900 projects in 60 countries. The project will be funded by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Silk Road Fund (Yanbin, 2017). The corridors have the following directions:

1. Chinese-Mongolian-Russian Economic Corridor
2. A New Eurasian Land Bridge
3. Sino - Central Asia - West Asia Economic Corridor
4. Sino-Pakistani Economic Corridor
5. Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor
6. Sino-Indochinese Economic Corridor

It is worthy to say that in his speech the minister highlighted that all the above-mentioned corridors will be interconnected.

Thus, the six main economic corridors became the main tasks of building the “Economic Belt of the Silk Road” for the bright future. And six large economic corridors became material carriers of the project “Economic Belt of the Silk Road”.

Modern Demography and its Future Aspects

According to Y. Xu and L. Zou' paper about the Geopolitical Religions and China's foreign policy we can say that for many years the territory of the Islamic world forms a huge east-west 'Islamic corridor,' which extends from North Africa, West Asia, and Central Asia to South Asia and Southeast Asia (Xu&Zou, 2013). Considering the L. Fuquan research, Islam is today one of the most influential and widely distributed religions in the world. According to the Pew Research Center, in 2010 there were more than 1.6 billion Muslims, with the percentage 23.4% of the total population of the world and were widely distributed in more than 190 countries. It is worthy to say that more than one million Muslims live in the world's seventy-two countries, as for Asia itself which is geographically close to China, the percentage of the Muslims here constitutes 62.1% (Fuquan, 2018). As for the current 2020 year it raises and approximately is 1.9 billion. Here is seen the steady growth of the Islamic population. As for Pakistan according to the World Population Review 2020 its population consists of 220,892,340 and 96.50% of Muslims. As for the China among the population of 28,127,500, Muslims are 1,439,323,776, which is 1.73%. So it is obvious that Muslims here are in the minority (World Population Review, 2020).

It is worth to say that nowadays, due to Muslims' high birth rates, Islam is one of the rapidly growing religions in the world. Thus, according to the research conducted by Pew Research Center by 2030, the number of Muslims will reach about 2.2 billion, which will constitute the 26.4% of the whole world's population; (Pew Research Center, 2011) and by 2050, the number of Muslims will reach up to 2.8 billion, it means that in percentage it will reach 30% of the world's population; and in 2070, the percentage of the both Muslims and Christians will roughly constitute 32.3% of the world's total population. According to the percentage and number of Muslims we can claim that Islam may replace Christianity and became the world's largest religion (State Council The People's

Republic of China, 2015). Very characteristic in this regard is the situation in the UK. If in 1981 the number of Muslims (immigrants from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh) was estimated at 750 thousand here, now there are about 3 million, and the number of births in the UK itself is at least 50% of this number. According to forecasts, by 2050 there will be no “ethnic majority” in Britain; it will be washed away by interethnic marriages and the import of foreign labor (Chetverikova, 2005).

China claims that it is focused on the development of the framework and proper strategy consisting of two main directions – land-based - “Silk Road Economic Belt” and ocean-going - “Maritime Silk Road”, and as well as on economic integration among countries between China and the rest of Eurasia and mutual political trust of included partners (Fuquan, 2018).

Since the Muslims are the followers of Islam and appreciate its cultural values which are deeply reflected in the Islamic countries’ politics, economy, and diplomacy, China has to understand and respect Islam and needs a solid ground for harmonious communication with the Islamic countries.

It is worth saying that Islam has a great impact on the economic relations between China and Islamic countries. We can highlight two types of Muslim economy: Halal food and Islamic finance, which have great potential for development. Islam regulates and dominates the Muslim’s economy and primarily serves its followers. Chinese Muslims greatly benefits from China’s developing Muslim economy and can be included in many of China’s projects.

China-Pakistan Relations

One of the most important direction which has to be highlighted among the Six Economic Corridors of Silk Road is the Sino-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The Beijing-allied military and China consider Islamic terrorists as a threat to their projects, making it likely for both entities to be against any Islamic hardliner group seizing power. But there is a thought that the project known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), will potentially improve security and political instability in Pakistan, thus tackling the terrorist threats as

well. However, Global Times reported that deteriorating security conditions in Pakistan ahead of the elections are expected to get worse, threatening Chinese projects and citizens in the Muslim country.

While China has long faced an Islamic terrorist threat from Pakistan, it continues to provide military assistance to Islamabad as the top weapons provider to the Pakistani military.

The Global Times claimed that China has no intention to interfere in Pakistan's domestic affairs. Under the Belt and Road initiative, an increasing number of investors from China and other countries are coming to Pakistan for business opportunities, laying the basis for the country's sustainable development. Indeed, Pakistan is still perplexed by a fragile economy and turbulent politics. Overnight success is unrealistic in the country's development, and it will take time for Pakistan to progress and gradually realize economic prosperity and political stability. China, with its Belt and Road initiative, is providing Pakistan with opportunities to develop (Mora, 2018).

A great role in geographical distribution is played by Pakistan's, thus the security assurance in the south and north depends on the effective interaction between the country and "One Belt One Road" and their proper relations. Another very important strategic concept can be considered the Bangladesh-China-India-Burma (BCIM) Economic Corridor and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which can create the certain connections of "One Belt" and "One Road", and the "two corridors". One can not claim that the security of the above-mentioned projects is obvious, however, a "pivot" state plays a certain role in the real effective interaction. It should be said that the "One Belt One Road" mainly includes India and Pakistan in South Asia. It is well-known fact that the relations between China and India have not been friendly: they are disputing about their territories for quite a long time, and in this respect, China has to pay attention to Pakistan's vital role, since India-Pakistan relations leave much to be desired too.

As L. Haiquan mentions, in its "One Belt" project, China can use Pakistan's influence on Afghanistan and its geopolitical conditions, including Eastern Turkistan Islamic

Movement (ETIM) forces in the Central Asian region and various terrorist organizations, to ensure the safety of western China (Haiquan, 2017).

China's Xinjiang Province has the border with Pakistan, at an altitude of over 15,000 feet. Which is a China's corridor through the Karakoram Highway to the seaport at Gwadar in Baluchistan on the Indian Ocean. The larger project in the territory of Pakistan is called the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, CPEC. It is a very profitable project for Pakistan since China aims to fund about \$60 billion on the development of Pakistan's infrastructure.

CPEC also has a few more non-economic plans in Pakistan – the implementation of cultural and civil projects. One of the initiatives is called the Safe Cities, it means that it aims to guarantee the safeties of Chinese workers from radical groups in every Pakistan's city. The direction of Safe Cities is to build new safe buildings in the urban centers, to train local police and military on anti-terrorist and bomb detection techniques, and to use the cameras in all Pakistani cities. The project has already a successful start in Islamabad, however, its future in such a city as Peshawar is vague, since the city is mainly populated by the Pashtuns and is considered as an assertive, Taliban rebellion center. Here is worth to say that several terrorist attacks have happened in Peshawar in a couple of years ago. A. Corr in his work claims that while this project will no doubt create safer cities, many are concerned that much of the traditional areas of some of these historic cities will be destroyed to build newer, albeit safer, neighborhoods (Corr, 2017).

CPEC has already successfully started to implement its few projects. As G.Farr writes working on extending and improving the Karakoram highway has begun and Chinese workers are now working on expanding the port in Gwadar. There will soon be over 15,000 Chinese workers in Pakistan (Farr, 2017). However there is much to do, for instance, the road from the Chinese border to the port of Gwadar and a few projects are still in progress.

The Project of a Safe City

In August 1947 India and Pakistan gained independence, by a nationalist struggle lasting nearly three decades. As C. Bates states that the conflict set a vital precedent for the negotiated winding up of European empires elsewhere. Unfortunately, it was accompanied by the largest mass migration in human history of some 10 million (Bates, 2011). It is worthy to highlight that more than one million civilians died as a result of riots and local fighting, particularly in the western region of Punjab which was split into two parts. The decision to split colonial India into two separate parts creating two states – from one side population of Muslim majority (Pakistan) and the other hand population with the Hindu majority (India) can be considered as the outcome of the conflict between the nations' elites.

Pakistan is a Sunni Muslim country with its Islamic rules and doctrines. However, there is a small group of Christians and the Shia Muslims minorities in the country, whom they consider heretics and idol-worshippers. Even though Islamic political parties have always been active, a new kind of Islamic militancy such as the Tehreek-e Taliban, the Lashkar-e Jhangvi, etc. has managed to emerge in the last decades. These locally or regionally based organizations and militant parties include homegrown groups and many other small radicals, which have specific internal to Pakistan agendas. The mentioned groups are in strong opposition to foreign intervention, and China is not an exception for them.

As it is usually the Radical Islamic movements or groups occurred as a result of profound disappointment with the existing political and social situation in Pakistan. Some have called Pakistan a “failed state” since the government can not cope with the existing violence. However, the dissatisfaction of certain youngsters in Pakistan is a major reason for the turn towards radical Islam. The not less important reason is the lack of education and poor economic situation that hitch young men to exercise their anger and dissatisfaction towards minorities and outsiders.

There are some thoughts that, these Islamic groups can be considered as a danger for the Chinese projects in Pakistan. But if China's plan to sponsor a project called “safe cities” in Pakistan will install scanners and explosive detectors to cover major roads, case-prone

areas, and crowded places in urban areas to conduct real-time monitoring and 24-hour video recording, it will improve the situation. There is a plan to build a pilot safe city in Peshawar, which faces a fairly severe security situation in northwestern Pakistan. According to certain sources, Peshawar is primarily populated by the Pashtun minority and is a center of the Taliban insurgency. Despite that Pashtuns are in minority, we have to admit that it is a great power. The safe cities program will then be rolled out in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan, Lahore, the capital of the Punjab province, and Karachi, the main port city of Pakistan. These three cities are above all the three most important political and trade nodes to the government of Pakistan. They are the country's center of economic and political gravity (Corr, 2017).

CONCLUSION

According to the above-mentioned facts, it is obvious that nowadays, religion plays a great role and has an effective impact on China-Pakistani relations. The Belt Road Initiative not only creates a great opportunity for China to establish and develop its relations with the Islamic countries but at the same time, it represents a very unique chance for the countries, especially for such country's as Pakistan to improve their economic situation and stability. There is good potential for the China and Islamic countries in the field of economy. However, special attention should be paid to the religious and cultural exchanges since these two have a direct and certain impact on the mentioned countries' future collaboration. Besides the fact that these relations have a slow, however steady pace still it is evidenced that there is a lack of sufficient mutual understanding. It should be highlighted that for certain reasons, the Chinese fail to understand the prejudices of Islam and its countries. Thus China and Islamic countries urgently need to expand religious and cultural exchanges to obviate mutual misconception. A not less important role in cultural diplomacy which always has a good impact over certain problems and delusions.

China has a significant and valuable initiative to invest billions of dollars in Pakistan since it will lead to the improvement of existing hardships. It will certainly create jobs that will have a positive reflection on the community's well fare. Here we can claim that China's

project can be successful if the country convinces the Pakistani people that it will bring to the country economic growth and political stability. If the project will have success it will have a good impact on the whole region. China has a chance to improve the situation if it conducts proper policy, however, it demands a lot of afford and needs time as well.

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