

## **Prospects of China's BRI on Pakistan's National Integration**

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### **Abstract**

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a comprehensive plan for uplifting socio-economic advancements and promoting regional integration at the global level. In South Asia, one of the BRI's plans, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has the potential to exacerbate not only regional integration but to augment Pakistan's national integration. CPEC is considered a 'game changer' by both China and Pakistan due to its geopolitical and geo-economic implications. Presently, CPEC has generated misgivings between the center and provincial governments of Pakistan. This paper evaluates the impact of CPEC to redress inter-provincial and federal-provincial disparities through compromises and dialogues. To comprehend the association between economic development and national integration, the theory of nation-building provides an understanding to identify the main proponents of this debate.

### **Keywords**

Belt and Road Initiative, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. CPEC, Pakistan's National Integration, China-Pakistan relations, CPEC, and Nation-building.

### **Introduction**

The Post-Cold war scenario has compelled the states to reformulate their strategies to comprehend the upcoming challenges. In this connection, China reformed its strategy and planned to follow the policy of peaceful rise and emphasize economic development (Yuan 2011:42). China's plan of economic development exacerbated its economy up to a GDP of around 10% (China's Economic Rise 2019). For upholding the existing economic progression, China initiated a comprehensive plan under the name of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China's BRI is not considered a common trade route but it is a wide-

ranging plan and an economic idea to open multiple planned projects by silk route to establish a community that bears common interests, obligations, and destiny (NDRC 2015). China's BRI is the expansion and revival of the ancient Silk Route and comprises two megaprojects: land-based Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and sea-based 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Route Economic Belt (CMSR), (Wolf 2020:6). SREB provides connectivity between Asia and Europe and comprises six economic corridors. Six corridors of SREB are (1) Northern Corridor provides connectivity between China and Europe via Russia (2) the Central Corridor connects China with Europe through Iran and Turkey and is based on both land and sea routes (3) China-Magnolia-Russia Corridor (4) China-South East Asia mainland Corridor (5) Bangladesh-China-Myanmar-India Corridor (BCIM) and (6) China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), (Wolf 2020:6). BRI is a gigantic project and it will encompass around two-thirds of the world's population with an estimated cost of 1000billion USD (Wolf 2020:7). BRI invigorates the probabilities of Asia's rise in the near future. It is anticipated that Asia's economic progression is expected in the mid of this century (ASIA 2050).BRI is mainly focused on Asia with more than 40 Asian states. In South Asia, two projects of SREB: the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar corridor (BCIM) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) have the potential to comprehend socio-politico-economic apprehensions and promote interstates cooperation and trust within the region (Ali 2016:2). For Pakistan's national integration, CPEC is directly concerned with this research. China has allocated a heavy investment package of around 62 billion USD for CPEC (Butt and Butt 2015:26). The key to the success of CPEC is directly concerned with Pakistan's center-province relations. The persisting disagreements between center-provinces relations relating to CPEC might create interruptions on the way to the timely completion of CPEC and intensify the sentiments to disrupt the process of national integration in Pakistan. Within this debate, this research intends to give the answers to the questions:

- What are the main qualms between centers and provinces about CPEC?
- What are the initiatives taken by the state to comprehend center-provinces discrepancies?
- What are the main challenges on the way to the completion of CPEC?

- What will be the main inducements due to which CPEC would be mutually advantageous to the center and provinces and strengthen national integration in Pakistan?

This debate revolves within the theoretical framework and the theory of nation-building provides understanding to grasp this research and provides acumens to answer the given questions.

### **Theoretical Clarification**

To evaluate the role of CPEC on Pakistan's internal political stability and national integration, the theory of nation-building provides a theoretical explanation to comprehend the leading concerns about Pakistan's domestic political snags and the role of CPEC in intensifying the process of national integration. Nation-building is defined as 'the formation of a common national character in a specified geographical location, based on shared culture and language' (Goldsmith 2007:7-26). It is generally presumed that external actors play a minimal role in the process of nation-building as Hopp and Kloke-Lesche explicate, 'it is an independent process in which external actors have limited role in increasing nation-building despite sharing financial resources' (Hopp and Kloke-Lesche 2005:139). Under such conditions, state-building is considered the central character of nation-building as the organization of economic cooperation and development defined, 'it is an endogenous process to augment legitimacy, institutions, and capacity of the state determined by state-society relations' (Goldsmith 2008:1). Likewise, state-building is based on the political process to negotiate power relations and state-society dealings among the political elite and social groups (Goldsmith 2008:2).

State-building is further elaborated by the Department of International Development UK, in a policy paper published in 2009 as; 'the main focus of state-building is to strengthen the relationship between society and state and to establish operative ways to facilitate this relationship' (Building the State and Securing the Peace 2009:4). During the process of state-building, the political elite must perform multiple dealings and the ultimate objective of these is to augment domestic politics as per the desires of social groups. Under this condition, the foreign policy of a state has a direct impact on domestic politics

and Katzenstein elaborated on the correlation between foreign and domestic policies as, ‘the main objective of foreign policy is to upraise domestic policies according to the existing international political economy (Katzenstein 1976:1-45). Usually, it is anticipated that domestic politics and international politics have a significant impact on each other, and certain key elements, such as trade, war, and ideologies, are placed to shape political developments (Gourevitch 1978: 882).

The states must perform dual responsibility to deal with domestic and international concerns simultaneously and many international dialogs are conceived as a two-level game: national level and international level. At the national level, the domestic groups intend to protect their interests by mounting pressure on the governments and the political elite seeks power by establishing a coalition with these groups. At the international level, the national governments intend to minimize the adverse impact of foreign developments and maximize their ability to satisfy the domestic groups (Putnam 1998: 433). So, the contribution of state-building in engrossing nation-building is obvious and the two-level game has further endorsed the importance of foreign progressions on the way to political stability and national integration. Within this discussion, BRI’s CPEC has attained center stage at both the national and international levels in the context of Pakistan’s national integration. The succeeding sections of this research investigate the main disruptions on the way to Pakistan’s political stability and disturb national integration and explore the contribution of CPEC in intensifying Pakistan’s national integration.

### **CPEC: An Overview**

The idea of CPEC was initiated by China in 2013 during a visit of Chinese Premier Li to Pakistan. In April 2015, both China and Pakistan signed 51 agreements including 5 extra-large projects and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs), (Butt and Butt 2015:26). CPEC is a bilateral agreement between China and Pakistan and is mainly based in Pakistan (Khan, 2016). The completion of the projects under CPEC is planned in three-phase, the first phase by 2017, the second by 2025, and the third by 2030 (The News 2014).CPEC is focused on four areas of investment, energy, infrastructure, industry, and Gwadar

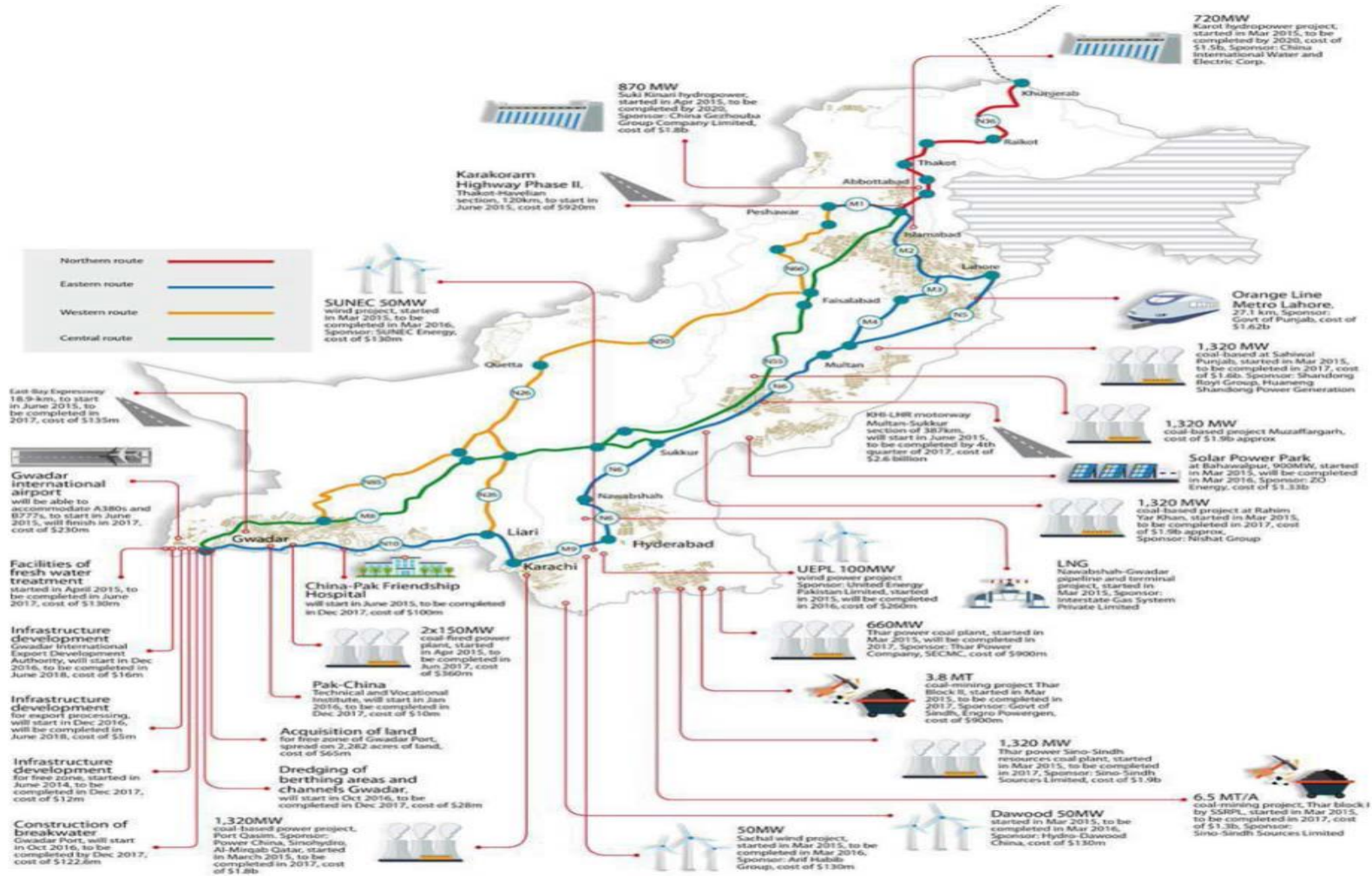
Port (Shah, 2018). In the energy sector, Pakistan was the victim of heavy energy crises in the near past and now has overcome a power shortfall due to China's investment (Chung 2017:5). The CPEC infrastructure encompasses the construction of multiple roads and railway projects from Gwadar to Kashgar with a distance of 2500/3000 km.

Presently, three mainland routes i.e. western route (Kashgar to Gwadar via Khunjerab, Peshawar, D. I. Khan, Zhob, and Quetta), central route (Khunjerab, Peshawar, Kohat, D. I. Khan, D. G. Khan, and Ratodero), and eastern route (Khunjerab to Gwadar via Islamabad, Lahore, Sukkar, and Karachi), are under construction with an estimated cost of 5330 million USD (CPEC 2021). The remaining regions of Pakistan will also relate to these routes through express and motorways accordingly. Similarly, a rail link has been planned from Gwadar to Khunjrab with an estimated cost of 2.3 billion USD (Hussain 2014:21). For the development of industry, Special Economic Zones (SEZs) with special tax exclusion and economic reforms are planned in all the provinces of Pakistan. A total of 46 sites for SEZs are identified and 9 sites are professed priority zones(Ahmad 2017).

Gwadar is a lynchpin that China has allocated a heavy budget for operationalizing the port. According to Mushahid Hussain Syed (Chairman, CPEC Parliamentary Committee), 'if CPEC is the flagship of BRI, then Gwadar is the heart CPEC' (Bozdar and Kazmi 2016:3). China is increasing the holding capacity of Gwadar port up to 200,000 deadweight tonnage (dwt) for oil tankers and 100,000 dwt for dry cargo (Ishaq 2016:128). The master plan for the construction of Gwadar port is projected in two phases, short and long term. The short-term plan (2005-2020) is estimated for holding 42-65 million ones while, the long-term plan (2021-2055) is designed to handle 321-345 million tones with dry cargo, oil, and gas as the main supplies (Gwadar Port Master Plan 2006: 25-26). The Proposed infrastructure and three mainland roots of CPEC are indicated in Figure 1.

**Figure:1**

Overview of Proposed Infrastructure and Road network under CPEC



Source: [www.pu.edu.pk/images/journal/pess/PDF-FILES/9\\_V54\\_SUM2016](http://www.pu.edu.pk/images/journal/pess/PDF-FILES/9_V54_SUM2016) accessed on February 23, 2021.

The aforesaid projects of CPEC except Gwadar port are planned to establish in all the provinces and Gwadar port relates to almost all the parts of Pakistan through road and rail networks. The development of these projects has created doubts among center provinces and within the provinces. To gratify the domestic actors within the context of state-building for obtaining national integration according to the theory of nation-building, the federal government has planned multiple initiatives and the outcomes of these are examined in coming sections.

### **CPEC: Challenges and Implications**

Planning and investment criteria in the given areas of CPEC by the central government with the coordination of China have created serious concerns among all the provinces in general and for the small provinces i.e. Baluchistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), and Sindh in particular. The infrastructural developments of CPEC were criticized by these small provinces as they objected to the central government diverting China's investment to Punjab province (Riffat and Miani 2016:15). According to the original plan of CPEC, it was decided to prioritize the backward areas of Pakistan (KPK and Baluchistan) and these regions comprise one of the shortest routes (Western Route) among the aforementioned three land routes of CPEC (Boni and Adeney 2020:454). On the contrary, despite prioritizing Western Route, the construction of the Eastern Route was given preference and it mainly comprises the Punjab province which is the bone of contention between Punjab and the remaining provinces of Pakistan.

The construction of the Eastern Route was justified in a report presented in the Senate of Pakistan as, 'the route is largely according to the existing road and rail links and China also emphasizes to work on the persisting infrastructure without constructing a new one from scratch' (Senate of Pakistan 2018-19). These clarifications could not convince the political elite of the remaining three provinces as, Sardar Akhtar Mengal from Baluchistan province expressed, 'CPEC has created job opportunities in Punjab due to ongoing multiple projects which include highways, industries, power projects, railway lines,

and other megaprojects, but Baluchistan is carving for roads, potable water, health and education for the last 70 years, (Mengal 2017). As the dominant political party in Sindh province, The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has also raised concerns about the distraction of the Western Route of CPEC through Sindh (Riffat and Miani 2016:16). Similarly, Pervaiz Khattak (Chief Minister of KPK during 2013-2018) stated that the federal government did not allocate even a single penny to KPK for CPEC, which has shattered his trust in the central government (Khattak 2016).

Transparency is the main characteristic of nation-building (Fukuyama 2004:21-22), and it is the key objective of this research. For sustaining the transparency in the projects of CPEC in response to provincial assertions, the federal government decided to construct Western Route on a priority basis, and it finally transformed into 6 lane motorway (Haider 2015-2017). Likewise, the allocation of CPEC funds was taken place to gratify the stakeholders as 6.1 billion USD were allocated to Punjab, 7.1 billion USD to Baluchistan, 11.6 billion USD to KPK, and 11.5 billion USD to Sindh province (Bozdar and Kazmi 2016:8). As for the SEZs are concerned, the initial plan was to set up seven each in Punjab and Baluchistan, three in Sind, eight n KPK, and each in Gilgit Baltistan (GB) and Islamabad. This plan was revised after the visit of chief ministers of all the provinces to China in 2016 and decided on nine SEZs for each of all the provinces, four each for Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and GB, and two for Islamabad (Nigar 2017:2).

The establishment of energy projects is also a source of center-province disagreements. The location of energy projects does not matter because their production is added to the national grid and is nationwide distributed (Khan 2016), but their installations create employment opportunities and establish infrastructure for the workforce i.e. roads, health, and education, indicating that the location has the consequence. Thus, the Baluch nationalists demand these projects to upraise the socio-economic conditions of the backward areas of Baluchistan (Baluch 2016). For maintaining transparency, Ahsan Iqbal (former minister for planning and development) gave assurances to smaller provinces during an all-parties conference held



on January 10, 2016, in Islamabad, that ‘smaller provinces will be given more financial resources than their due shares’ and proclaimed that Baluchistan is allocated comparatively more funds spent in Punjab (Khattak 2016a).

For the development of Gwadar port, two regulatory bodies: Gwadar Development Authority (GDA) and federally controlled Gwadar Port Authority (GPA) originated, and for the construction of the mega oil city, GDA has acquired around 80,000 acres (Sial 2019:9). The establishment of Gwadar under CPEC has shaped doubts among the political elite of Baluchistan as, Dr. Abdul Malik (former chief minister of Baluchistan) expressed five apprehensions about Gwadar (Sial 2019:10):

1. Gwadar port might disturb the demographics and Baluch identity.
2. The persistence of ambiguity about the revenue of Gwadar, whether it would be given to Baluchistan or the center.
3. Jobs must be given to Baluchi people on a priority basis in Gwadar.
4. The administrative control of Gwadar port should be delegated to Baluchistan.
5. Business opportunities in Gwadar must be provided to local people.

Administrative and revenue control on Gwadar port are the most crucial factors among the said concerns and to comprehend these, the central government introduced the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment in the constitution of the Islamic Democratic Republic of Pakistan in 1973. Before the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment, the central government had the authority to override any legislation relating to center-provincial relations and for this purpose, a concurrent list was maintained (Boni and Adeney 2020:446). After the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment, Federal Legislative List (FFL) replaced the concurrent list and it comprises two parts. Part 1 is exclusively related to the subjects controlled by the federal government. Part 2 includes the subjects controlled by the Council of Common Interests (CCI) and directly concerned with CPEC, with railways, electricity, national planning, and national coordination and ports (Adeney 2012:547-548). CCI is not a new council and was framed along with the formulation of the constitution of 1973, but it remained unfunctional during 1975-2017, and only 33 meetings were held during this period (Council of Common Interest 2017). The mandate of the CCI is to ensure the impartial distribution of resources among the

provinces with the coordination of the planning division, and central and provincial governments. Before signing CPEC agreements, CCI meetings were held irregularly. In March 2015, the CCI meeting was held headed by the Prime Minister, and serious objections were raised from the provinces about provincial budgets, water, and natural resources, and it was promised to comprehend the issues on a priority basis (Inter-Provincial Coordination Division 2015-16).

These developments indicate that the central government made conciliations with the domestic political groups for satisfying and maintaining transparency among them and these are pre-requisites for state-building in the context of nation-building through CPEC.

### **Hurdles on the Way to Nation-Building**

Despite the initiatives of the central government to grasp center-provinces discrepancies on energy, infrastructure, SEZs, and Gwadar port, confusions persist among the smaller provinces. Furthermore, some snags also occur on the way to nation-building and exacerbate center-provinces strains and without addressing them, it would hardly be workable to engender a conducive environment among the domestic groups.

Some features of the federal system of Pakistan are the sources of grievances between smaller provinces and the Punjab province. The allocation of seats in Pakistan's National Assembly is based on population. According to the census, Punjab comprises around 53% of the overall population and thus obtains the majority of the seats in the Assembly. In this way, the dominance of Punjab province remained institutionalized in the state's institutional architecture even during and after military regimes (Adeney 2009: 101). Such Punjab's dominating posture provided it with the pivot of power in Pakistan. The financial resources were allocated based on the population during 1971-2010. In this way, Punjab was given the maximum finances resulting in suspicions among the remaining provinces. Similarly, Punjab was given preference for installing energy

projects and the construction of road networks under CPEC which exacerbated the discrepancies between Punjab and smaller provinces and generated impediments on the way to nation-building.

Security of the projects under CPEC has been the main source of concern for both China and Pakistan. Before initiating the CPEC in 2015, China demanded assurances from Pakistan about the security of the projects. In this connection, Pakistan pronounced to set up Special Security Division (SSD) with the coordination of the Pakistan Army, and nearly 10,000 soldiers were deputed for the security of CPEC under the command of a two-star general (Gull 2017). SSD started 'Operation Zarb-e-Azb' against terrorism across the country in December 2014. The remarkable achievements are in the credit of SSD as it was reported that a decline of 45 percent in terrorist attacks was observed in 2015 as compared to attacks in 2014 (Iqbal Anwar 2016). By improving security circumstances, Pakistan has created a conducive environment for investment under CPEC (Gull 2017). It is worthwhile to mention that the funds were allocated to SSD through provincial budgetary expenses and by imposing charges on electricity consumers (Kiani 2017). Provincial budgetary constraints and additional electricity charges due to SSD have become another source of center-provinces tension that disrupted the progression of nation-building. Likewise, a proposal was initiated by Pakistan Military to create a CPEC Authority (Ghuman 2016). The proposal was relegated by the minister for the planning division and it was argued that the establishment of such authority would slow down the progressions of CPEC (Boney and Adeney 2020:451). However, besides discontent, the CPEC Authority was established through an ordinance and Gen (retired) Asim Bajwa was appointed as the chairman (Naseem 2019). Civil-military relations in Pakistan always remain a source of discontent while discussing center-provinces relations and the military's involvement in CPEC triggered center-provinces disdains that have disturbed the process of nation-building.

Baluchistan is the least developed and most marginalized province and Baluchs presume that CPEC would further disregard them through the induction of non-Baluchs that might disturb the local demographics. Thus, the Baluch Liberation Army (BLA) criticizes the wealth distribution formula relating to CPEC (Bhardwaj 2017:11). The population of Gwadar is estimated at nearly 70,000 in 2014 and the increase in population due to CPEC projects will likely be around 2 million by 2036, which will comprise the non-Baloch workforce from China and Pakistan (Fair 2017). It is estimated that nearly 25,00 families have been displaced within Baluchistan due to CPEC projects (Wolf 2017:93-123), which fuel the Baluch insurgency germinate grievances in Baluchistan, and hamper the process of nation-building.

### **Way Forward**

As a major stakeholder, China is worried about Pakistan's opposition to CPEC and became upset due to the lack of consensus on the projects of CPEC in Pakistan. The principles of China's foreign policy are based on non-interference, but China can not become irrelevant in the case of CPEC (Riffat and Mani 2016:17). China demanded Pakistan address the internal discard of CPEC. In this connection, China's embassy in Islamabad approached a variety of people, including chiefs of defense forces, parliamentarians, the political leadership of the sitting government and opposition, and the judiciary to deal with the irritants on the way to the projects of CPEC (Ghuman 2016). For facilitating the central government in dealing with smaller provinces, China revised the plan of CPEC and expanded it to all the regions including the tribal areas of Pakistan (Shulin 2014:173). In this way, with the consent of China, Pakistan succeeded in developing a consensus among all the political parties to endure Pakistan-China friendship and evade politicizing the projects under CPEC (Irshad et al, 2015:204). The consensus of the political elite on CPEC projects indicates the implication of the state's two-level game as at the national level, all the stakeholders were convinced to endorse CPEC and at the international level, the state (Pakistan) earned to eradicate the adverse impact of China's developments on CPEC by satisfying the domestic groups. Moreover, this

consensus is not sufficient for cultivating the process of state-building in the context of the theory of nation-building and the following initiatives would have significant impacts in endorsing nation-building:

- The concerns of smaller provinces relating to infrastructure must be addressed on an urgent basis, especially since the delay in the construction of the Western route has precipitated apprehensions in center-provinces relations and it might be comprehended on an earlier basis.
- The role of CCI in the allocation of funds is obvious according to the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment in the constitution of 1973 and additional financial resources will be required for the most backward areas, especially for Baluchistan province. It is the prime responsibility of the central government to activate the role of CCI in true letter and spirit.
- The ethno-nationalistic tension in Baluchistan might be curbed by providing jobs to Baluchs, especially in the project of Gwadar port.
- Pakistan army is playing a marvelous role in providing security to the projects of CPEC. However, its involvement in the administrative affairs of CPEC might become a source of mistrust while promoting nation-building. So, the contribution of the army should be limited to security-related issues of the CPEC.
- CPEC is providing a golden opportunity for Pakistan for uplifting its economy, especially for its backward areas. In this regard, it is the main responsibility of the central government to take on board all the stakeholders as per the criterion of the theory of nation-building through dialogues and compromises, that will ultimately endorse Pakistan's national integration.

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