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| Article: | Belt Road Initiative (Bri): A Step Towards Regional Integration |
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ABSTRACT

The Belt and Road Initiative is a step towards regional integration. China aimed to integrate South Asia, East Asia with Central Asia and Europe. The BRI project consists of 7 Economic Corridors which are comprised of Roads, Railways and Pipelines. The natural resources in Central Asia intend to be utilized under the BRI project. Despite the fact, China in the future will dominate the world economy. The dollar would be replaced with the Renminbi. India being a rivalry with China is also included in one of its economic corridors. Regional integration is a Chinese policy by using Gwadar Port being nearer to Chabahar Port of Iran and also to Dubai. China now being a host of BRI project will integrate China with South Asia, Central Asia, Middle East, Europe and Africa by land routes rather than that water route because of low cost, less time consuming and to avoid American threat to Strait of Malacca. This research work is qualitative by nature. Both primary and secondary data are utilized and the non-probability purposive sampling technique is used for data collection.

Key Word: Pakistan, China, Central Asia. United States, BRI, CPEC, Strait

INTRODUCTION

Belt Road Initiative (BRI) project was coined by President of People Republic of China Xi Jinping during his visit to Kazakhstan in September 2013 for one day stay there because Kazakhstan was very important among the Central Asia States while another purpose was to promote the diplomatic relations which was considered a step for regional integration through both land routes and Maritime Trade Routes. This project will connect more than 60 countries in Asia, Europe and Africa (Rana, 2017). This research work will analyze Pakistan's role in BRI and its link with China's Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Moreover, this research will try to investigate the causes of the inclusion of India in the BRI project by China. The effects of the AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, and the United States) agreement on the OBOR/BRI project will be the focal point of discussion in this research.

The BRI project is supposed to be comprised of seven Economic Corridors namely, China, Mongolia and Russia Corridor (CMRC), Eurasian Land Bridge Economic Corridor (ELBEC), China, Central Asia and West Asia Corridor (CCAWAC), China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar Corridor (BCIMC) and Maritime Silk Road (MSR). The Maritime Silk Route corridor is connecting China with Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Kenya, Athens and Venice, all these countries will be integrated through sea routes. (Shafei Moiz Hali, 2014) Despite this, 60 countries will be brought under the BRI umbrella. Pakistan is the opening player and main actor in this project because, China is facing threats in its South China Sea due to the existence of Indian and US submarines in the Strait of Malacca which is threatening its sea trade, moreover Japan, Indonesia, Vietnam and Philippines are considering the South China Sea as their right. This is the reason that Gwadar and Karachi ports have importance for China as they will not face any difficulty in sea trade and all trade materials will be reached China through Silk Road. (Arrfat, 2018)

BACKGROUND

The Han emperor Wu establish Silk Road around 130's B.C.E, for trading with Central Asia and Europe. In ancient times it not only connected China with Central Asia but also with Europe, Iran and Turkey for trade purposes. The name Silk Road was coined by German Geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1877. The name Silk Road was given because Silk was the largest export item of China to other countries. (Britannica, 2019).

Soon after the independence of Pakistan Gwadar was part of Sultanate Oman. The then Prime Minister of Pakistan Malik Feroz Khan Noon bought Gwadar for 10 million Dollars on 7th September 1958 (Iftikhar, 2019). The President of Pakistan General Parvez Musharraf made a great effort with the assistance of China to initiate the development plan for Gwadar and they approved it while the project ceremony took place performed by General Parvez Musharraf and Vice-Premier of China Wo Wang Guo in March 2005. Later in February 2007, an accord was signed by Pakistan Government and Singapore and responsibility for its development was given to the Port of Singapore Authority, but they were not ready and hesitant to invest money in it. Then in 2013, Gwadar port was taken over by China. (Erfurt, 2013).

On 22-23 May 2013, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang during his visit to Islamabad decided to develop Gwadar port and connect it with Kashghar Province of the Uyghur Autonomous Region, and signed a 46 billion dollar project with Pakistan for the construction of its main four-pillar requirements such as energy project, infrastructure development, workforce development and economic progress, this project is a big investment of China in Pakistan for next 15 to 30 years. Under this CPEC, China also began its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) flagship project. This CPEC project will shift the world economy from Europe to Asia and will be a game-changer not only for China but for the whole Asian region. Its distance from Kashghar is 3400 Kilometer. (Hussain, 2017).

LITERATURE REVIEW

A bulk of the literature has been produced on the current topic and a few glimpses have been given below.

Hilali considers the CPEC project as a game-changer in his research article *China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Dynamics of Regional Connectivity: Prospects and Challenges*. According to the author, this project will be a paradigm shift from the Western to the Asian region in economic prosperity. He further elaborates that it will open the doors to regional connectivity through Afghanistan with Central Asia and Russia, through Iran with Turkey and Siberia and ultimately will connect Asia with Europe. He describes that the BRI project is linked with regional connectivity, the CPEC is part of BRI therefore it will play a significant role in economic prosperity and regional integration (Hilali, 2019).

Khan is of the view that BRI consists of multiple economic corridors, railways projects, pipelines and multiple projects are linked with BRI. Moreover, Pakistan being its part of paving the way for China's regional connectivity policy by providing the shortest route to enter the Central Asian region either by Afghanistan but consistent peace is the only condition for it or Tajikistan. Furthermore, he elaborates that China importing oil and other resources from the Middle East and Iran through Malacca Straits but the trade shipping of China is under threat on account of the American Navy's presence there; therefore CPEC can provide China an opportunity to overcome the American threat on Malacca Strait. (Khan, 2019).

Khan, Ahmad & Xing have discussed in their research paper that CPEC is being one of the corridors of the BRI project because, with the help of Gwadar port, Chinese economic potential will be increased from Pakistan to Turkey through Iran on one way and to Europe and Central Asia through Afghanistan on the other way. Furthermore, they discuss that Pakistan is a strategically important country that must be its part because of the only country which can merge Central Asia, Europe and Eurasia with South Asia, East Asia and Far East Asia through China. They further illustrated that with the help of CPEC and BRI, China will become dominant not only in the Indian Ocean but also in the Persian Gulf. (Khan, 2018).

Khurshid has analyzed in his research paper about Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Kazakhstan in September 2013 and announced BRI project but did not get any attention from International media and the world as was expected, this project came into the limelight in October 2013 when Xi Jinping visited Indonesia where he not only talked about BRI but also

pointed out the necessity to initiate the new Maritime Silk Route of 21st Century. Moreover, this project also has the aim to dominate the world under their domestic and regional economic development and to use their power on the world like US and Russia. (Khurshid, 2017)

Although, a bulk of the literature has been produced on BRI both ways nationally and internationally but very little has been written on BRI about regional integration.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem states that China and India have a border clash on one hand and china has economic competition with the US as well. Moreover, India also creating hurdles for China's CPEC project but China is going to include India in the BRI project.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research paper will be an attempt to show the future development in the Asian region, as well as point out the significance of the Central Asian region in the regional integration of Asia with Europe. Furthermore, it will try to suggest some steps for halting American influence in Central Asia and will recommend taking some measures for the forces halting the BRI project.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What causes China to include India in the BRI project?
- What consequences does the AUKUS agreement bring out for China's BRI project??

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To examine the reasons for India's inclusion in the BRI project.
- To find out the consequences of the AUKUS agreement on China's BRI project

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is qualitative. The recent historical background, geostrategic, geo-economics and geopolitical importance of the region for all major powers has been covered in the descriptive portion. The primary and secondary sources are used for the collection of data. In analyzing the government reports, official statements and assembly debates through primary sources while books, research journals, articles, thesis, newspapers, web sources and issue briefs through secondary sources.

BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE A STEP TO REGIONAL INTEGRATION

In May 2013, President Xi Jinping provided an idea of the Belt and Road Initiative in a speech in Kazakhstan under two layers, Silk Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Trade Route. This initiation has the purpose of enhancement of relations with regional and neighboring countries, adopting policy west just to take Western Countries in domination through trade. China with the help of the Belt and Road Initiative has the replacement of American influence in the world with China. The Chinese established Banks and organizations

will be the replacement of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and United Nations (UN), and the Dollar currency of the United States with the currency of China called Renminbi in the global market shortly. In spite that the China Belt and Road Initiative has the objectives of regional infrastructure improvement, economic policy cooperation to be increased, hurdles in the way of trade to be eliminated, and cultural relations among regional countries to be enhanced for broader projects. (Zimmerman, 2015).

ECONOMIC CORRIDORS OF BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

China's Belt and Road Initiative consists of six land-to-land corridors which are discussed below one by one.

1. CHINA PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR

China Pakistan Economic Corridor is the main project of the BRI project without this Regional Integration between Asia and Central Asia through Gwadar Port is not possible. China needs a Gwadar port because of the vigilance of the US Navy in Malacca Strait, if America blocked it, it will paralyze Chinese trade from the South Asian Sea (Fatima, 2019).

2. CHINA-MONGOLIA- RUSSIA ECONOMIC CORRIDOR

In 2014, at the meeting of SCO, the heads of China-Mongolia-Russia met each other while agreements were also signed between China and Mongolia, Russia and China, Mongolia and Russia for the initiation of this corridor by the tripartite cooperation (Khalid, 2018).

3. NEW EURASIA LAND BRIDGE

This economic corridor has the objective of providing railway facilitation to the Chinese goods to the Western European Countries, by constructing a railway line from China to connect Lianyungang, Chongqing, Lanzhou, Xian, Wuhan, and Urumqi with Western Countries of Europe through train which will be 4350 miles long, with which Chinese goods will be reached to Europe within two days. This railway line project will have the cost 230 billion dollars. (Jaleel, 2019).

4. BANGLADESH-CHINA-INDIA-MYANMAR ECONOMIC CORRIDOR

This Corridor was initiated in February 2013 by Kolkata to Kunming car rally for ensuring transportability from Kolkata to Kunming. This economic corridor will have a distance of 2800 kilometers as Myanmar is its corridor. This corridor has the purpose of connecting the South Western Region of China with South Asia through BCIM corridor (Karim, 2018).

5. CHINA-CENTRAL ASIA-WEST ASIA CORRIDOR

The China-Central West Asia corridor, Xinjiang is their starting point which will integrate Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan including Iran and Turkey. This economic corridor is under construction while some of them are being constructed by the participant countries. This economic corridor will connect Central Asia via Alashankou on the China-Kazakhstan border (Initiative, 2017).

6. CHINA-INDOCHINA PENINSULA ECONOMIC CORRIDOR

China will provide connections to Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore will integrate them under BRI projects with land to the land route. China being a host of BRI projects enhances the relations with Indo-China Peninsular Countries. These countries also have mutual cultural and trade relations with each other. This corridor will start in Nanning city of China and will end in Kuala Lumpur city of Malaysia (Luft, 2016).

7. MARI-TIME SILK ROUTE This route starts from South China Sea and Indian Ocean to Europe and Africa through Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea. For establishing China would have to invest in Shanghai, Tianjin and Zhoushan ports of China (Jaleel, 2019).

CENTRAL ASIA AND BELT ROAD INITIATIVE

The Central Asian Republics (CARs) has the foremost significance for China's BRI project because of two reasons, first, these are the border states between Russia, Europe and Caucasus regions and secondly these states have an abundance of oil, mines and other resources. These countries are landlocked countries therefore trade for them is difficult. The China investing money in CARs for constructing pipelines, railways and highways for trade and will also enable CARs to trade through Gwadar port and they will be brought to an international arena of trade and also be dominant in that region and will replace American and Russian influence. China in the present day has been economically dominated by the Central Asian Republics and most oil consumer countries (Javaid, 2018).

The Central Asian Republics have been converted from Landlocked Countries to Land linked Countries under the BRI project of China and EAEU of Russia. This EAEU has been provided flexibility not only to the BRI project of China but also to the Central Asian Republics to trade with each other and with Russia as well in a flexible attitude (Saud, 2021)

Despite that fact, China will also face hurdles in Central Asia because of two reasons, firstly the Islamist groups in CARs will be against China because of their irresponsible and cruel attitude towards Uyghur Muslims in China and secondly America will use these groups against China to create hurdles in China's BRI project (Umbrasas, 2019).

AUSTRALIA-UNITED KINGDOM-UNITED STATES ALLIANCE (AUKUS) AND BELT ROAD INITIATIVE

China is now being the strong military in Asia. America and Western Countries have been suspicious of China's BRI project because this project is against US interest and almost reduces the US domination not only in Asia but also in Europe and South America. China's BRI project will also dominate the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific region, to counter this policy of China, United States signed an AUKUS agreement with United Kingdom and Australia to give nuclear submarines to Australia which will keep an eye on China's increasing influence and dominance in Asia and Indo-Pacific region and in case of any policy which could further harm American interest, America along with two AUKUS countries could pressurize China of its policy. (Korybko, 2021). There is no ability in the AUKUS agreement to influence or make threaten the BRI project of China because in alternative to the Maritime Silk Route the land routes are to be used for the economic purposes emerging under the BRI project with China. (Aamir, 2021)

INDIA'S INCLUSION IN BCIM ECONOMIC CORRIDOR AND INDIA'S RESPONSE TOWARD BRI

The Pakistan territory would be used for the transportation of goods between Pakistan and China, India is criticizing such move and accusing China of violation of disputed territory which is claimed by Pakistan. The Chinese interest behind the inclusion of India in the BCIM corridor is that China can easily get access to the Bay of Bengal; moreover, China also puts the influence on the Eastern States and Provinces of India. Furthermore, China claiming of Arunachal Pradesh States as part of the Southern Tibet region of China can also be economically dominated by China. Under BCIM economic corridor, China will sideline the border dispute with India. (sajjanhar, 2016)

The Indian Government is against the BRI project on the grounds of being the CPEC violating the territorial integrity and its sovereignty by using Gilgit Baltistan territory which India considers its right. Indian Government has a firm view about the BRI project, that it will be a debt trap, bring political instability and several problems to the region. The Indian interests, dominance and influence due to American involvement with the help of Indians will be decreased because of the growing popularity of BRI projects and the Indian neighborhood is also its part. India is the only ally of America in South Asia to reduce the dominance and heft of the Chinese growing BRI project. China has also increased its naval presence in the Indian Ocean for the protection of the BRI project, it also took over the Hambantota port of Sri Lanka and India is observing such a situation and feeling itself threatened (Chakma, 2019)

REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND BELT ROAD INITIATIVE

Regional integration is the facilitation of Free Trade Agreement among the member states of the project. CPEC being a vital project of the BRI therefore it will enhance the regional integration by trade through Gwadar by using its ports. The countries using this port will probably be China itself, Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia Republics, etc. These countries will be integrated under the BRI project having facilitative trade with China through Gwadar Port (Khan, 2016).

Pakistan is located in that position where it occupies strategic significant importance because of hot water Arabian Sea and Deep Sea Port-like Gwadar, China and India in North East and East respectively. Therefore Pakistan being a member of the BRI project playing a significant role in regional integration through Gwadar Port in which South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries and Association for Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) countries, Central Asian and other countries of Far East Asian will start trade through Gwadar Port and it will be an opportunity for Pakistan to host trade of several countries under regional integration with collaboration China. China also wanted India to be a part of CPEC and BRI and if it happens it will become a trilateral trade between Pakistan-India-China. Moreover, Central Asian states will get a waterway for their trade and be less dependent on Russia. For trade facilities, Afghanistan and Tajikistan signed a transit trade agreement also just to provide a roadway to Tajikistan for reaching the resources to Gwadar for trade (Li Zhi, 2020).

The CARs are the landlocked countries and port required for them. Pakistan being neighbor of CARs is the most suitable for them to use its port. In 2007, Pakistan provided them a gateway for trade through Karachi and Bin Qasim ports but these became overloaded and therefore Pakistan stopped them for trade through these ports. In 2013, BRI and CPEC launched therefore, certain developments occurred in shape of economic cooperation. China is looking for natural resources and they have found CARs because they are rich of natural resources. They intended they CARs Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan will provide electricity to Pakistan through Afghanistan (Sugd-Dushanbe-Kabul-Peshawar) and the electricity capacity will be 1000 Mega Watt (MW) while Turkmenistan will provide gas to Pakistan. The Central Asia-South Asia 1000 (CASA-1000) was also signed with Pakistan on 12th May 2016 and it is a project of 1.16 billion dollars while under Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) agreement gas be exported to Pakistan with 1000 bcm (Rauf, 2018).

Afghanistan also being one of the ways for achieving cause regional integration but on the condition of developing the WaKhan border which will enhance Pakistan for trading between Central Asia and Europe, it will be one of the shortest routes for China to trade with Central Asia and Pakistan will also be its beneficiary. Afghanistan because of its position is connecting South Asia with Central Asia and ultimately with Europe. China also reckoned and apply a strategy because there are some anti-Taliban forces in Badakhshan Province and if any kind of clash happened, Chinese policy will ultimately affect it (Akhtar, 2019).

CONCLUSION

The Belt Road Initiative project, an idea of President Xi Jinping has the aim of integrating Europe, Asia and Africa under this project with pipelines, electricity transmission, economic roads, railway tracks and other infrastructure developments. The countries under the BRI project such as China, Pakistan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, South Korea, Russia, CARs, Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, Serbia, Hungary, Netherland, Malaysia, Indonesia, Kenya, Djibouti etc are part of it. China also established ports under its supervision by providing loans to the countries such as Pakistan and Sri Lanka. America considering it and the debt trap while Pakistan and other countries are considering it as the best economic and development opportunity under China hosted program BRI. There are seven economic corridors for achieving such tasks while the revival of Silk Road is one of its tasks. China also signed certain Memorandum of Understandings, agreements etc with member countries of BRI. For achieving such purpose, Pakistan is its pinpoint, while integrating Central Asia with South Asia under CASA-1000 and TAPI agreements in which Pakistan is its pivotal country. China wants to reach to the resources rich countries of Asia which are ultimately CAR's then through this a gate will be provided for integration between Asia and Europe through Central Asia while with Africa through Maritime Silk Route which will be through Sea. AUKUS agreement is threat to BRI project of China while China divergence to Gwadar port is because of American Navy presence in Malacca Strait and China worries if America blocked it, it will ultimately paralyze China trade.

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