

08 CORRIDORS, CULTURE & CONNECTIVITY

December, 2018

**Geopolitical Strategy, Economic
Integration and Cultural Connectivity:
The New Era of Regional
Cooperation between China,
Pakistan and Afghanistan**



**Shaharyar Ahmed
Mustafa Hyder**



Pakistan-China Institute

Corridors, Culture & Connectivity

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4th China-Pakistan-Afghanistan Trilateral Dialogue

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Abstract

Strategic cooperation between China, Pakistan and Afghanistan is pertinent, as the three countries share mutual interests in the region. Moving forth with the progress of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), it is important to understand policy decisions on the potential of expanding cooperation with Afghanistan under the BRI. Therefore, this report attempts to cover the topics of economics, geopolitics and cultural connectivity through CPEC with the inclusion of Afghanistan. The scope of this report is defined by key findings from the recently concluded China-Pakistan-Afghanistan 4th Trilateral Dialogue, held in Islamabad on November the 12th, 2018. The report wishes to establish a consensus on the importance of inclusion of Afghanistan in CPEC and the greater BRI, and its role in providing access to other states such as Iran, the Central Asian Republics and even Europe, which can be linked through this mega-corridor. The report also wishes to understand the role of cultural connectivity, as with the launch of the BRI, the focus is not just on energy and infrastructure projects, but also people-to-people ties between all of the BRI countries. Finally, it is imperative to explore how the three countries can be resilient and overcome the issue of terrorism and extremism in the region, where a 40 year war has been taking place, and how regional economic integration can serve to be a contributor to stability, rather than stability being a contributor to regional economic integration. This report will consolidate and give a way forward through the key policy statements given by speakers at the dialogue.

Foreword

In its endeavor to promote dialogue and conflict-resolution, the Fourth Pakistan-China-Afghanistan Trilateral Conference, provided continuity to the original initiative taken by PCI half a decade ago.

This Trilateral Conference held a particular significance in the backdrop of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), enhancing and pronouncing the need for regional connectivity and regional cooperation in the fields of trade, infrastructure and people to people contact.

We shall continue to work towards fostering regional dialogues and engage with all stakeholders to ensure that discourse and constructive debate remains a key priority albeit difference of perspectives.

Mustafa Hyder Sayed

Executive Director, Pakistan-China Institute

1. Introduction

The agreement to commence work on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) was signed on April 20th, 2015, during President Xi Jinping's historic state visit to Pakistan. At the time of signing, the project was worth USD 46 billion, with USD 35 billion invested in energy projects and USD 11 billion invested to expand the infrastructure portfolio of the country. Since then, the scope of these investments has been increasing, which currently stand at USD 62 billion, accounting for nearly 20 percent of Pakistan's total GDP, as per 2017. With the magnitude of investments coming in from China, it is important to discuss not only the economic aspect but also the strategic and cultural aspects of such investments in the region, and a major regional stakeholder of the mega-project is Afghanistan.

Afghanistan can help benefit countries in the region, such as China, Pakistan and the Gulf countries, by offering them access to the landlocked Central Asian States, provided the various problems of economy and security the country is facing are resolved. Afghanistan provides a natural access for the transportation of goods not just to China and Central Asia, but can create a broader access to the European Market.

In light of the above mentioned areas, a conference was conducted in Islamabad by the Pakistan-China Institute (PCI), in collaboration with Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), to discuss the broader implications and opportunities in CPEC and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with the inclusion of Afghanistan as a third partner in CPEC. Expert opinions were given by all three sides, and a consensus was formed on the inclusion of Afghanistan in CPEC.

2. The Strategic Perspective

A high powered and intellectual group of speakers represented Pakistan at the trilateral dialogue. Senator Mushahid Hussain, Chairman of the Pakistan-China Institute (PCI), who also heads the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Senate, talked about the recent shift in global power from the West to East, terming the 21st Century as the '*Asian Century*'. He also talked about the

emerging 'Greater South Asia,' with the inclusion of Afghanistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian States, which can be linked together through the emergence of the BRI. This is evidenced by the revival of the traditional Silk Road, the ancient land route for trade which is more than 2000 years old. The Silk Road comprised of trade with multiple countries, in spices, livestock, precious stones, glass, bronze, silk and various other goods. President Xi Jinping, with his announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, has sought to revive this ancient silk route, providing a platform of regional connectivity through infrastructure projects, oil and gas pipelines, energy projects, ports and platforms for cultural connectivity among all the countries. The revival of the ancient silk route is further enhanced by the establishment of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road that seeks to connect different ports of Asia and provides a connection to Europe, making BRI a truly global initiative.



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Senator Mushahid Hussain, Chairman PCI, addressing the 4th Trilateral Dialogue | Source: www.pakistan-china.com

2.1. Afghanistan as a natural partner in CPEC

Afghanistan is a natural partner when it comes to CPEC and the BRI. Senator Mushahid Hussain highlighted the importance of including Afghanistan, during his time as the Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on CPEC, when he proposed the idea of including Torkham in Afghanistan to the existing Karachi-Peshawar Main-Line (ML-1), which is undergoing development work under CPEC. The route can be extended onwards towards Central Asia. According to Senator Hussain, there is a global rise of connectivity taking place, especially for Pakistan, with projects such as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline and the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline. Also, with the inclusion of Pakistan in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Pakistan's regional importance has increased, which can be leveraged to include Afghanistan in the mega project of CPEC.

However, in order for CPEC to become a regional project, it's important to have a conducive global environment for peace. Providing emphasis to this, Senator Hussain said that a series of peace talks have now started to emerge across the globe, starting from the talks in Korean peninsula, which is the second oldest armistice ceasefire after the Kashmir ceasefire line in Asia, and a recent meeting in Moscow on November 9th 2018 between the Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Afghan Taliban. He said that such talks provide a glimmer of hope, that countries across the globe have started to realize that for progress, economy is key and such is the primary focus of President Xi Jinping under the BRI.

2.2. Consensus for a political solution in Afghanistan

The Ambassador of China to Pakistan, H.E. Yao Jing, expressed the need for consensus among the three countries to devise a political solution in Afghanistan. For China, peace and stability in Afghanistan is important, not just for the success of the BRI, but also on a broader scale of how regional countries can manage their own issues. In order to promote greater understanding between the three countries, an annual Trilateral Foreign Ministers meeting, the first of its kind, was held in Beijing in December 2017 and the second round took place in Kabul in December 2018. During the second meeting, Pakistan, China and Afghanistan signed an anti-

terrorism cooperation Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), the purpose of which was to form an alliance to eradicate terrorism in the region.¹ Such initiatives provide avenues of cooperation and enhance capabilities of all three countries in dealing with security challenges that plague the region. China also hopes to act as a facilitator and supporter of the bilateral relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and CPEC provides that opportunity to China.



Ambassador of China, H.E. Yao Jing addressing the 4th Trilateral Dialogue | Source: www.pakistan-china.com

Moreover, Mr Mohammad Iqbal Azizi, Former Governor of Lughman and Lugar provinces in Afghanistan, brought forth some essential hurdles that need to be crossed, in order to make this trilateral partnership successful. For Afghanistan to become a platform for regional

¹ 'Tripartite talks: "Pakistan, China, Afghanistan ink MoU for cooperation against terrorism.'" The News International, December 16, 2018.

cooperation and global connectivity, he said it is important to build trust and enhance communication between the three countries. Security in Afghanistan is extremely important, especially to China, as the success of China's globalization largely depends on the political climate of Afghanistan. He said that the 'stereotypes' relating to Afghanistan need to be dispelled, as they become reasons for closure of borders, which negatively impact lateral trade and transit. He also stated that in order to achieve political trust, it is important to remove antagonistic and confrontation-oriented politics, and rather focus on an inclusive economic policy that would promote collaboration and trade ties between the two countries. According to Mr Mirwais Yasini, a member of parliament in Afghanistan, Afghanistan has lost more than 170,000 people in the past 17 years and Pakistan has lost more than 70,000 people in the war against terrorism. Therefore, he said that it is imperative that under the umbrella of CPEC, China plays the role of a facilitator to support the peace process in Afghanistan, because it is also in the interest of China, being the second largest economy in the world, to bring peace and stability in the region based on the principle of Peaceful Coexistence as per China's foreign policy.

2.3. Gwadar as an opportunity for the region

According to Mr Mirwais Yasini, the Gwadar port is an important opportunity for Afghanistan and the Central Asian Region. Through CPEC, Afghanistan can be connected to two regions: one from Rashakai in Pakistan to Tajikistan via Afghanistan and across Central Asia, and the other from Gwadar towards Helmand Valley in Afghanistan and eventually towards Turkmenistan. He said that Gwadar can also serve as a trade route for Afghanistan's large reserves of minerals such as copper and iron, which can then be exported around the world. This will open routes for Afghanistan to expand trade relationships with other countries in South Asia, Central Asia, North Africa, Gulf countries and even Europe. The issue of security and stability in the region remains outstanding, as Mr. Yasini pointed out that Pakistan and Afghanistan need to focus on joint Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) and agreements to counter terrorism, extremism and separatism and then shift policy towards the revival of bilateral economic relations.

2.4. A new beginning for Afghanistan

In its long-standing history, Afghanistan has borne the brunt of several wars including serving as the battle grounds for the Soviets, and later the United States. Over time this created a domestic power vacuum and upon the exit of the Americans, an internal strife and conflict originated in the otherwise beautiful country. Moreover, Pakistan's established alliance with the West in 2001 and Afghanistan's non-alignment led to further dispersion between the two countries, leading to instability and the exacerbation of terrorist activity. Now with the emergence of China and CPEC, Pakistan and Afghanistan can focus on improving their economic exchanges, trade ties, and people to people contacts, which will open a new chapter in the relationship between the two countries. China's role be that of a facilitator in establishing policies that would help this evolution.

3. The Chinese Belt and Road: The Potential for Cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan

Afghanistan, being the focus of discussion at the trilateral dialogue, has a major role to play in uplifting the economy and improving GDP growths of the region. The Ambassador of Afghanistan, H.E. Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal discussed the importance of connecting South Asia to Central Asia. He said that Central Asia is an energy and resource rich region, whereas South Asia is a technology and manufacturing focused region, and connectivity between the two regions can provide South Asia a platform to boost its manufacturing capabilities through larger exports, while Central Asia can provide sufficient resources necessary to increase exports across the globe. Adding to that, he said that For Pakistan, through Afghanistan's inclusion in CPEC and the BRI, there would be free access to Central Asia, which will help in fulfillment of its energy needs and in turn will supply its manufactured products to the Central Asian Republics (CARs). This way, Pakistan's GDP growth, which currently stands at 5.7 percent,² can more than double with increased linkages with Central Asia. However, the countries in this region are least connected in

² Zakhilwal, Omar. Presentation, China-Pakistan-Afghanistan 4th Trilateral Dialogue, Islamabad, November 12, 2018

the world, with less than 5 percent global trade, as compared to 70 percent in Europe and 50 percent in Asia as a whole.³ He also said that the bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan fell from USD 2.5 billion in 2008 to less than half in the year 2018.⁴ Therefore, it's important to have numerous platforms and fora to promote this regional cooperation.

3.1. Putting economic policy at the forefront

National policies play a vital role in shaping macroeconomic outcomes for any country. According to the Ambassador of Afghanistan, H.E. Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal, the foreign policies of both Pakistan and Afghanistan with one another have been security centric, rather than being economic centric. He said that politicians in both countries are not elected based on their proposed economic policies, therefore their political service does not focus on resolving core economic issues that hinder growth. He further pointed out that the major flaw in the policies of the governments is positioning political stability as a prerequisite for regional economic integration, rather than using regional economic integration as a contributor to political stability. He stated that in the past, political stability has been viewed as something that could only be achieved through exhibiting and using military might, however, stability can be achieved by peaceful diplomacy, which is promoted through soft power and economic means. Hence, he said that that economists need to be at the forefront of policy decisions and play a role in the economic uplift of the region, by devising mechanisms of shared regional prosperity through economic cooperation.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.



Ambassador of Afghanistan to Pakistan, H.E. Dr. Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal addressing the 4th Trilateral Dialogue | Source: www.pakistan-china.com

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Mr. Hazrat Omar Zakilwal was at the frontline in promoting CPEC in Pakistan and in the region. According to him, CPEC should expand to Afghanistan and through Afghanistan towards Central Asia. The economic viability of CPEC will tremendously enhance and increase if it expands, and will have a direct, quick and significant impact on the peace and stability of Afghanistan. Talking about the strategic importance of Afghanistan's location, he said that the country can play a key role in providing a connection between the two major corridors of the Belt and Road, The China-West Asia-Central Asia Corridor and CPEC, provided that peace and stability are maintained as the core motivations of this increased connectivity. Additionally, he said that with the establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Pakistan under CPEC, investment and commercial engagement will be welcomed from Afghanistan, which will make it an indirect stakeholder of CPEC.

3.2. Afghanistan and its economic future

According to Dr. Chen Wenling, Chief Economist at the China Centre of International Economic Exchanges (CCIEE), Pakistan's economic development has grown steadily under CPEC, with an average GDP growth rate of 4.77 percent in 5 years,⁵ and total Foreign Direct Investment in Pakistan has increased from USD 650 million in 2012 to USD 2.2 billion in 2018, of which China's direct investment has reached USD 1.4 billion, as of 2018. This has increased the average annual income of the Pakistani people from USD 1334 in 2013 to USD 1641 in 2018.⁶ Talking about Afghanistan, the country has a meager GDP of USD 20.815 billion and a GDP growth rate of 2.6 percent as of 2017.⁷ If Afghanistan becomes a strategic part of the BRI through CPEC, it can too, see similar trajectories as Pakistan did in the last 5 years.

Furthermore, one of the major contributions of the projects under the Belt and Road program are the Special Economic Zones (SEZs). 9 SEZs are scheduled to become a part of CPEC, which serve the primary purpose of the relocation of the Chinese industry in Pakistan, through public-private partnerships and joint ventures. With the establishment of these SEZs, the majority of Pakistan's youth, if equipped with appropriate skills, will drive domestic growth as the influx of Chinese investments and technology continues.⁸ This will have a direct impact on the current Human Development Index (HDI) of Pakistan, which is currently 0.562 as of 2018,⁹ evidencing a significant gap in development between rural and the urban areas. CPEC will connect local districts to the markets in the burgeoning industrial zones. Afghanistan faces a similar situation with an HDI of 0.498.¹⁰ However, with improved road networks and connectivity projects under CPEC, it will give the population of Afghanistan a chance to tap into the benefits of industrial

⁵ Wenling, Chen. Presentation, China-Pakistan-Afghanistan 4th Trilateral Dialogue, Islamabad, November 12, 2018

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The World Bank. *GDP growth (annual %)*. (2017).

⁸ "Ignacio Artaza," Inclusive growth and Human Development, The Express Tribune, Accessed December 29, 2018.

⁹ "Human Development Reports." Human Development Data (1990-2015) | Human Development Reports. Accessed January 18, 2019.

¹⁰ "Human Development Reports." Human Development Data (1990-2015) | Human Development Reports. Accessed January 18, 2019.

development as part of these mega-projects that are expected to facilitate growth, improve manufacturing and employment prospects of participating countries.

Furthermore, it will also give Afghanistan's labor a chance to learn new Chinese technological skills. Learning from China's own success, in the famous Shenzhen Economic Zone of China, under the then Communist Party leader Deng Xiaoping, special tax benefits and preferential treatment were given to foreign investors, and as a result, there was a surprising 24,569 percent increase in the GDP per capita of Shenzhen from 1978 to 2016.¹¹ There is much to be learnt from China in this regard and the policies that made SEZs a success in China need to be studied closely.

According to Mr. Mohammad Iqbal Azizi, Afghanistan's natural alignment in CPEC stems from the six projects that are in the pipeline to be constructed, which include the Peshawar-Kabul Motorway, the Landi Kotal-Jalalabad Railway, the Chaman-Spin Boldak Railway, the hydropower dam at Kunar river, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan Electricity transmission line and the Trans Afghan Highway to Central Asia. According to Mr. Azizi, in order for these projects and others to be completed successfully, it is imperative that joint working groups are created for infrastructure projects between Afghanistan and the Chinese, that will not only enhance communication but will act as a platform for China and Pakistan to offer assistance to Afghanistan in completing these projects in line with the country's economic and strategic priorities.

Moreover, the Long Term Plan of CPEC lays great emphasis on agriculture, and thus agricultural cooperation will be at the forefront of investments under CPEC. Afghanistan, also being an agrarian economy like Pakistan, can leverage benefits from China by including agriculture in the projects destined under the BRI, which would help the country enable socio-economic uplift for its people.

Pakistan was previously known as one of the most dangerous countries of the world, with foreign investment and tourism shrinking every year. With the trust and the advent of Chinese

¹¹ Holmes, Frank. "China's New Special Economic Zone Brings Back Memories of Shenzhen." Business Insider. April 20, 2017.

investments in Pakistan, the country has quickly risen to the status of becoming an emerging market for investors. Bilateral trade between Pakistan and China has increased from USD 6.89 billion in 2007 to almost USD 20.85 billion in ten years.¹² If doors are open to the Chinese in Afghanistan, such changes as Pakistan experienced should also be expected for a previously stigmatized Afghanistan, which can be expected to embark upon the road to recovery and a prosperous future with participation in CPEC.

3.3. China's regional priorities

For China, regional integration is extremely important, in light of the American trade war and military encirclement by the US and other partner countries against China. While China prioritizes its foreign policy and economic relations with its immediate neighbors, particularly making CPEC and the northern corridors of the BRI its top priority, it is also rising globally. According to Dr. Chen Wenling, China has 14 neighboring countries by land and 6 neighboring countries by sea and is the largest trade partner for 16 Asian countries, including Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and Malaysia. In early 2012, she said that the total volume of trade between China and its neighboring countries surpassed the total volume of its trade with the United States and Europe. Additionally, CPEC gives China an alternative to the Strait of Malacca and South China sea route, reducing maritime distance to Europe, Africa, and the Middle East considerably, while giving West China a chance to integrate with the developed countries of the world. Afghanistan, due to its strategic location, provides that platform for China to access Central Asia and Europe through infrastructure projects in railways, roads, pipelines and telecommunication.

¹² Ibid, 12.

4. Regional Connectivity Through a Cultural Corridor

4.1. Realizing the vision of Allama Iqbal

Cultural connectivity, or soft power, is one of the primary components of the BRI. Senator Mushahid Hussain discussed the role of Allama Muhammad Iqbal in enhancing cultural connectivity between the three countries. In his works Allama Iqbal talked about the significance of peace in Afghanistan as a prerequisite to peace in Asia. He had also predicted the rise of the Chinese nation many years ago, as the following phrase from his poetry suggests:

گراں خواب چینی سنبھانے لگے
ہمالہ کے چشمے ابلنے لگے
گیا دور سرمایہ داری گیا
تماشا دکھا کر مداری گیا

Springs of hope are emerging from the Himalayas as the Chinese are awakening from their slumber.

Allama Iqbal being a revolutionary poet, made this prediction before the Chinese Revolution in 1949. Allama Iqbal's poetry has many dimensions, but one of the most significant aspects is that of regional solidarity and integrity. He envisaged the decline of Western Colonialism, supported by the following phrase from his poetry:

ہر کمالے را زوالے، وہ افق کے پار دیکھ
ٹوہنے والا ہے خورشید استعمار دیکھ

Beyond the horizon, every rise has a fall, and the sun of colonialism is setting in the West.

Allama Iqbal was a revolutionary poet, not just for India but for the entire region. His poetry composed of both Urdu and Persian languages. He regarded north of India as the base of Muslim civilization for a long time, and had the highest regard for Turkish, Irani, Baloch and Afghan people. According to Former Senator Afrasiab Khattak, Iqbal was one of the most

outstanding 'Afghanologists'. According to him, Iqbal's hero was Amanullah Khan, who became king of Afghanistan in 1926, and Iqbal attributed his book, 'Bang-e-Dara' to Amanullah Khan. Talking about Afghanistan, Iqbal said that if Asia is a body of water and clay, then Afghanistan is the heart inside this body. Afghanistan's openness and prosperity will open ways of prosperity for Asia, and turmoil and destruction in Afghanistan will lead to a destruction of Asia. Addressing the Afghans directly, Iqbal said:

رومی بدلے، شامی بدلے، بدلا ہندوستان
 تو بھی اے فرزند کوہستان اپنی خودی پہچان
 اے غافل افغان

Iqbal summoned Afghans to wake up as the rest of the world was changing. It was based on these ideas that we see how much focus the poet laid on the revival of the Afghans, and not just the people of the Indian subcontinent. Based on the teachings of Iqbal, Afghanistan should realize its centrality to Asia and both Pakistan and Afghanistan should learn from the proficiency of the Chinese civilization. Integrating Iqbal's concepts of tradition and modernity through the deepening of a trilateral relationship between Pakistan, China and Afghanistan, will make this triad the epicenter of Asian prosperity. Therefore, through the emergence and extension of CPEC, these three countries have a solid foundation for cultural collaboration.



Panelists of the 4th Trilateral Dialogue, From Left: Senior Journalist Mr Murtaza Solangi, Ex-DG ISI Lt Gen ® Asad Durrani, Member Parliament Afghanistan Mr Mirwais Yasini, Former Governor of Lughman and Lugar provinces Afghanistan Mr Mohammad Iqbal Azizi and Scholar Tsinghua University Beijing Professor Li Xiguang. | Source: www.pakistan-china.com

4.2. History of Afghanistan-Pakistan cultural ties

According to Mr Mirwais Yasini, a member of the Afghan parliament, it was during the time of Late King Zahir Shah of Afghanistan, who ruled the country for 40 years before he was deposed in 1973, that Kabul and Lahore were very close. Famous classic and folk singers of Pakistan including Late Madam Noor Jehan, Mehdi Hassan and Fareeda Khanum performed in Kabul, and Afghan singers would come to Lahore to do the same. Therefore, the rich cultural history between the two countries beckons for more such events which would go a long way in putting the security of both countries into order.

4.3. History of Afghanistan-China cultural ties

Professor Li Xiguang of the Tsinghua University in Beijing, talked about the rich cultural history of Afghanistan and China. Zhang Qian, the first Chinese envoy, came to Afghanistan through the Wakhan Corridor in second century BC. He described the Afghanis as being tolerant and trustworthy, and was impressed by how peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan was during that time. On behalf of the Chinese emperor, Ambassador Zhang Qian proposed to depute a military alliance with Afghanistan and since then, Afghanistan and the Wakhan Corridor have been serving as a gateway to China, giving rise to the Silk Road and bringing Buddhism and Islam to China, integrating China, Central Asia and South Asia, both economically and culturally.

However, this crossroad of the Silk Road was first disrupted by the European invasion of Afghanistan and China. In 1840, Great Britain launched the first opium war against China, and later against Afghanistan which was again invaded and occupied by Western Troops. It is despite this history that China has managed to reform and open up to the outside world, after 70 years of a difficult struggle. Through President Xi Jinping's BRI, China can strengthen its inter-civilization dialogue with South Asian countries, including Afghanistan, to jointly promote the rich wisdom of the Eastern and Asian values. The rise of China and the realization of the Chinese dream needs to spread both in the Eastern Wing and the Western wing.

With the establishment of the BRI, President Xi Jinping has labeled cultural connectivity as one of the major components of the BRI. He delivered a speech in the Pakistani parliament on April 21st 2015, titled "Building a China-Pakistan Community of Shared Destiny to Pursue Closer Win-Win Cooperation for the Promotion of Asian Values,"¹³ wherein he posited that both China and the South Asian countries have a time honored history, which needs to be valued through inclusiveness, mutual learning, harmony and co-existence. He said that China is ready to strengthen inter-civilization dialogue with the South Asian countries, in order to promote the wisdom of Asian values. Thus, it is important to understand that no civilization should try to

¹³ Dawn.com. "Pakistan Was with Us When China Stood Isolated: Xi Jinping." DAWN.COM. April 21, 2015. Accessed December 29, 2018.

'civilize' other civilizations, and as mentioned by Senator Mushahid Hussain, Asians should take the fate of their continent into their own hands. The call for unity between China and the Islamic world does not mean that China will give up its non-alliance policy (a policy that entails China's non alignment with the power blocs of the world), but China's relationship with the Islamic world is much deeper, built on a mutual understanding of peaceful coexistence and cultural harmony.



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President of China, Xi Jinping addressing the Pakistani parliament on April 21st, 2015 | Source: www.xinhuanet.com

5. Pakistan, China and Afghanistan: Removing Misperceptions in the Media

Media is arguably the single most powerful tool that can influence the way people think in a society. This is primarily why significant investments are made by countries to promote a positive national narrative on various media. The Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship is subject to media propaganda. Today, there is predominantly an Anti-Pakistan sentiment in Afghanistan, which is seen in public discourse through the media. According to Mr. Murtaza Solangi, a senior journalist in Pakistan, there is a feeling of betrayal on both sides. He said that in Afghanistan, the major blame falls on Pakistan's security establishment and in Pakistan, Afghanistan is blamed for

domestic crime rates and the *Kalashnikov* culture. Mr. Solangi pointed out that these perceptions exacerbate altercations, which later result in closure of Chaman and Torkham borders, hurting business of traders and businessmen.

Mr. Solangi further explained that the closure of Afghan cable in Pakistan deprives the Pakistani audience from engaging with the Afghan culture. Denying the masses the right to information, gives foreign propagandist media an opportunity to take advantage of the information gap.



Senior Journalist, Mr Murtaza Solangi talking about the misperceptions in the media on Pakistan and Afghanistan at the 4th Trilateral Dialogue. | Source: www.pakistan-china.com

Another major reason for the strained relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, according to Mr. Solangi, is Pakistan's media representation in Afghanistan. He said that in the past, Pakistan has enjoyed close diplomatic relations with Afghanistan, and most of Pakistan's successful ambassadors were those who spoke the *Pashto* and *Farsi* languages. However, as of late, there is no criterion for sending diplomatic missions to Afghanistan, resulting in less

coverage of Pakistan in Afghanistan. Therefore, both countries should focus on enhancing diplomatic ties through understanding better the culture of the two countries.

Furthermore, with the inclusion of Afghanistan in CPEC and BRI, China can take the opportunity in promoting media collaboration between the three countries. The BRI is not just a conglomeration of projects relating to development of roads, railways, pipelines and energy; it is also about soft power. Pakistan and China have already collaborated to promote media understandings between the two countries, with films and television dramas being broadcasted both in Urdu and Chinese languages. For instance, the “CPEC Media Forum 2018,” which was held on November 16th, 2018, was a collaboration between the Pakistan-China Institute (PCI) and the China Economic Net (CEN), serving to promote media understandings between the two countries and counter false and negative perceptions on CPEC in both China and Pakistan. A similar collaboration can be formed with the inclusion of Afghanistan that would promote people-to-people ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan, with China acting as a facilitator.

5.1. Language as a medium to promote cultural connectivity

22 A significant area that the three countries can focus on is language exchange. In order to convey meaningful messages through print, electronic and social media, it is important that the news is disseminated in local languages. After the launch of CPEC in Pakistan, there has been a significant rise in the Chinese language speakers in Pakistan, with approximately 25,000 Pakistani students currently learning Chinese and the establishment of China study centers in Pakistani universities and vice versa.¹⁴ In order to make Afghanistan a key beneficiary of CPEC and BRI, it is important for both Pakistan and China to spread positive messages among the Afghan masses in local languages of the country. This will also foster people-to-people ties among all individuals from disparate cultures.

¹⁴ Correspondent, Our. "Learning Chinese Will Open Jobs Highway for Many Pakistanis." World | Thenews.com.pk |. April 21, 2018. Accessed December 29, 2018.

6. Conclusion

Concluding remarks at the Trilateral Dialogue were given by Mr. Mustafa Hyder Sayed, Executive Director of the Pakistan-China Institute, who talked about the overall consensus that was reached amongst the speakers at the event. He emphasized that Gwadar, which is the converging point of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, is an important opportunity for Afghanistan, which has yet to be included in any previous discourse on CPEC. Gwadar will be the pivotal point of trade and connectivity for not just Pakistan, but also Afghanistan and Central Asian countries. Therefore, he said that it is imperative to “...go beyond the prism of geo-politics, the prism of proxies and the prism of zero-sum games into a new form of regional cooperation.”¹⁵ This can only be done if both countries, focus on their economic revival keeping in mind China as a possible and ready facilitator.

The 4th Trilateral dialogue between China, Pakistan and Afghanistan came at a crucial time, when CPEC has entered its Second Phase and the positive effects of the Early Phase are now rippling. Moving forward, the three countries need to focus on establishing specific policies that attuned to the three key areas of regional cooperation: strategic, economic and cultural connectivity.

As discussed in this report, regional cooperation includes strategically establishing a consensus for a political solution in Afghanistan, and seeing Gwadar, as not only the center point of the CPEC and the BRI but an opportunity for Afghanistan to partake in the existing China-Pakistan partnership as it is a natural partner in CPEC. Furthermore, sound economic policy will be essential for realizing a prosperous future for both Afghanistan and Pakistan and any economic cooperation with a rising China and further entry into competitive international trade markets. Finally, keeping in mind the rich history that Afghanistan and Pakistan have enjoyed with China, cultural ties need to be further promoted. Media is an effective way to strengthen positive images among Pakistanis, Chinese and Afghani people of each other, and disseminating

¹⁵ Hyder, Mustafa. Presentation, China-Pakistan-Afghanistan 4th Trilateral Dialogue, Islamabad, November 12, 2018

information in local languages will especially help to remove misperceptions and deepen people to people relationships and understanding. In the effort to bolster regional cooperation in these three key areas, several policy suggestions arise, as detailed in the section below.

7. Policy Prescriptions

The 4th trilateral dialogue served as a platform of future policy decisions, which would aid the governments and policy makers of the three countries in devising a future course of action. Based on the knowledge disseminated by the expert speakers during the dialogue, the following recommendations have been formulated:

1. A consensus needs to be formally developed among all the three countries, for a political solution in Afghanistan, in order to foster regional connectivity and promote people to people ties among the three countries.
2. Media should be used as a platform that serves to build trust and enhance communication between the three countries. Joint strategies need to be developed by all three countries to promote soft power and enhance cultural connectivity. Media should also play a crucial role in clarifying misconceptions among all the three countries that have strained regional integration in the past.
3. In the promotion of soft culture, media's information dissemination among all three countries should be in local languages, for better understanding of the precise information that is being provided. For this, practical initiatives should be taken to break the language barriers that come in way of a deepened relationship between the three countries.
4. China is in an ideal position to be above-board player in Afghanistan to improve economic and strategic ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Through China's help, Pakistan and Afghanistan should focus on their economic revival, which includes joint Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) and agreements to counter terrorism, extremism and separatism.

5. It is vital that joint working groups are created in various fields between all three countries to enhance communication and a platform for directing assistance to Afghanistan in line with the country's economic and strategic priorities.
6. Afghanistan should devise ways to become a key partner in CPEC as it enjoys an ideal strategic location, which provides China a platform to access Central Asia and Europe through infrastructure projects in railways, roads, pipelines and telecommunication.
7. Pakistan should support the Afghan-led and Afghan owned peace and reconciliation, including undertaking effective actions against fugitives who pose a threat to the two countries, with China acting as a key facilitator.
8. A Silk Road Forum needs to be established between the countries that will help pool public and private corporate resources for the extension and development of projects under the BRI framework in all three countries.
9. Think-tanks in Pakistan, China and Afghanistan, should help to institutionalize trilateral dialogues as a regular occurrence in all the three countries.

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