

# China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: A security analysis

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## Introduction

China and Pakistan have developed strong bilateral trade and economic ties and cooperation over the years. China has gradually emerged as Pakistan's major trading partner both in terms of exports and imports. Bilateral trade and commercial links between the two countries were established in January 1963 when they signed the first bilateral long-term trade agreement (Ministry of Finance, 2014:126). Under the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the two countries, which was signed on November 24, 2006 and implemented from July 1, 2007, Pakistan secured market access on several products of immediate export interest.<sup>1</sup> Later both countries signed the FTA on Trade in Services on February 21, 2009 that became operational from October 10 that year (Ibid).

According to statistics provided in Pakistan Economic Survey 2013-2014, the volume of trade between Pakistan and China has increased from US\$ 4.1 billion in the year 2006-07 to US\$ 9.2 billion in 2012-13 representing an increase of 124 percent. While China's exports to Pakistan increased by one percent during this period, Pakistan's exports increased by 400 percent from around \$600 million in 2006-07 to \$2.6 billion in 2012-13. As a result, China's share in Pakistan's total exports has gradually picked

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<sup>1</sup> These include cotton fabrics, blended fabrics, synthetic yarn and fabrics, knit fabrics, home textiles like bed-linen etc, minerals, sports goods, cutlery, surgical goods, kinnow, mangoes, industrial alcohol, etc.

up from four percent in 2008-09 to 10 percent during the fiscal year 2013-14.<sup>2</sup>

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is expected to further strengthen trade and economic cooperation between the two countries. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang emphasized the construction of the CPEC during his May 2013 visit to Pakistan (Tiezzi, 2014). The incumbent Pakistani government has also shown much enthusiasm for the project since then. The corridor will connect the Gwadar Port in Balochistan province of Pakistan to Kashghar in northwestern China, which will make Gwadar not only fully operational but also a significant deep sea port in the region. Opened for operations in 2007, the control of the Gwadar Port was transferred to China's state-owned China Overseas Ports Holding in February 2013. Since then, Gwadar is undergoing a major expansion to turn it into a full-fledged, deep-water commercial port (*South China Morning Post*, 2014). When the corridor is constructed,<sup>3</sup> it will serve as a primary gateway for trade between China and the Middle East and Africa. The corridor is expected to cut the 12,000-kilometre route that Middle East oil supplies must now take to reach Chinese ports (Ibid). Besides meeting China's needs in energy and developing its far west region and upgrading Pakistan's economy, the CPEC is expected to benefit people of countries in South Asia and make profound contribution in maintaining regional stability as well as economic integration (*China Daily*, 2013).

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<sup>2</sup> For details see chapter 8 of Pakistan Economic Survey 2013-2014 available at <[http://finance.gov.pk/survey/chapters\\_14/08\\_Trade\\_and\\_Payments.pdf](http://finance.gov.pk/survey/chapters_14/08_Trade_and_Payments.pdf)>

<sup>3</sup> The full project is expected to be completed by 2030 whereas related short-term projects including motorways and energy projects are to be completed by 2017-2018.

As cited earlier, the CPEC is a comprehensive development program that entails the linking of Gwadar Port to China's northwestern region of Xinjiang through highways, railways, oil and gas pipelines, and optical fiber link. Major physical infrastructure to be built includes 2,700-kilometre highway stretching from Kashghar to Gwadar through Khunjrab, railways links for freight trains between Gwadar and Khunjrab having regional connectivity with China, Afghanistan and India, and Karachi-Lahore motorway. The project will also undertake revival and extension of Karakorum Highway that links Xinjiang with Pakistan's northern region Gilgit-Baltistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.<sup>4</sup> Besides physical links connecting Pakistan and China, the project also envisages establishing several economic zones along the corridor. Also, an Energy Planning Working Group of the CPEC has been established that will undertake fast-track implementation of power projects related to the CPEC. About projects of 21,690 MW power production would be undertaken with the assistance of China under the CPEC plan (*Pakistan Today*, 2014).

This report assesses potential threats and risks that could affect the implementation of the CPEC project in terms of insecurity and violence that pervade Pakistan, internal political and economic constraints, and also global and regional geostrategic impediments. The purpose is to understand and evaluate Pakistan's security, political and economic environment and regional geostrategic dynamics in medium to long terms to explore feasibility prospects for the corridor and also to manage the potential threats, if any, that could hamper the project implementation. Most importantly, the report discusses the security aspect in detail in

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<sup>4</sup> The highway was started in 1959 and completed in 1979.

which the probability of threats vis-à-vis extremist militancy, nationalist insurgency and criminal violence are analyzed with the main focus on the areas across Pakistan which will be traversed by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

### **1. Political and economic constraints**

Although Pakistan regards China an “all-weather friend” and bilateral relations between the two countries have never been uneasy over the course of history, yet it is important to evaluate the variables that can affect Pakistan’s political and economic capacity and response to implement the elements of the larger CPEC project over longer period of time. Important among these variables are: 1) Pakistan’s political stability and policy consistency; and 2) The present situation and future scenarios of Pakistan’s economy.

With regard to the first variable, a positive aspect is that there is almost consensus among Pakistan’s political parties on maintaining friendly relations with China which suggests that in principle there should be no major political impediment in the way of the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. With an exception of minor segments among nationalist parties in Balochistan,<sup>5</sup> Pakistan’s regional parties also have positive views about China. Similarly Pakistan’s military establishment, which is also a key stakeholder in policymaking processes in Pakistan, considers China a trusted and valuable partner in bilateral military, economic and strategic areas of engagement and cooperation. Every

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<sup>5</sup> Some Baloch nationalists believe that mega projects in Balochistan such as Gwadar Port are not providing due share or benefit to the Baloch people. In that context, too, it is not specifically anti-China sentiment but anti-Mega project narrative that makes these nationalists aggrieved of Chinese involvement in Balochistan’s development projects.

political party that comes into power in Pakistan holds frequent high-level meetings with the Chinese government to discuss the political and strategic prospects that are helpful in strengthening bilateral relations and cooperation. Nor have been high level bilateral exchanges of military officials between the two countries less frequent.

Also, Pakistani and Chinese geostrategic concerns have historically remained largely converged around many common areas of strategic and bilateral interests. The relationship between the two countries mainly hinges on four main shared areas of interest that include 'economic cooperation, energy security concerns of both countries, shared internal security concerns, and largely converging geostrategic interests' (Mezzera, 2011).

All these factors indicate that a change of government in Pakistan is less likely to reverse or halt the CPEC project as successive future governments are expected to maintain consistency in Pakistan's foreign policy towards China and also policy on bilateral trade and economic engagement. One example is that the incumbent Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government in Pakistan has started the country's political and economic engagement with China from the point where the outgoing Pakistan People's Party (PPP)-led government had left it.

At the same time, as the revised alignment of the corridor, or eastern alignment which will be discussed at length later in the report, will not run through most parts of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) as initially planned, some analysts are of the view that it would be difficult for federal government to get political ownership of the CPEC project by

all provinces.<sup>6</sup> As the new CPEC route will largely pass through Punjab, political leaderships of Balochistan and KP may think their people are being deprived of the development and employment opportunities the CPEC will bring with it. However the government claims it has not abandoned the original western route, which will be constructed later, and that the decision to first construct eastern alignment was based on financial and security reasons.

Apart from that, long-term political stability will be required in Pakistan to smoothly implement the projects like CPEC. In the past Pakistan has faced many phases of political instability and turmoil that weakened the country's development roadmap and also affected policy consistency. It was very promising development for the country's political stability that a democratically elected government completed its five year term and peaceful transition of power happened after the 2013 elections. But the current government now faces a political crisis after just 14 months of coming into power. This crisis unfolded itself after two political parties – Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) led by Imran Khan, and Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) led by a religious scholar Tahirul Qadri – started their protests and sit-ins in Islamabad on August 14. Apart from some other demands, both parties demanded resignation of the prime minister. While the former is a political stakeholder having representation in National Assembly and also heads the coalition government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the latter had not contested the 2013 election and does not have considerable electoral strength. The PTI alleges the ruling PML-N of rigging in elections and demands fresh elections under a 'neutral'

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<sup>6</sup> Fazlur Rehman, executive director, Pakistan Council on China. Interview by author. Islamabad. October 2014.

interim set-up. Nonetheless, the PAT advocates a new political system that ensures 'true and participatory' democracy.

The ongoing political instability has already caused huge losses to economy besides distracting political leadership from other matters of vital importance related to governance, and policymaking and implementation. Some important visits to Pakistan of heads and officials of different countries and also international organizations including International Monetary Fund (IMF) had been either deferred or shifted to locations outside Pakistan.

As far as the second variable is concerned, economic growth and development are linked to political stability to a greater extent. At present, Pakistan's economic outlook, although not very bright, seems positive and improving. The IMF on August 18th this year raised its growth forecast for Pakistan to 4.3 percent for the current fiscal year, up from 4 percent (*Daily Times*, 2014). In absence of some major political crisis and policy breakdowns, it would be safe to say that the country's economy is right on the track and will improve gradually.

Put it other way, Pakistan can provide the required funds and facilities for the CPEC project over a longer period of time if there is no major political conflict and economic meltdown. The incumbent government has already allocated over Rs73 billion budget for Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) to execute development projects under the CPEC during the current fiscal year. Most of it will be spent on construction of Karachi-Lahore motorway and connecting roads and for land acquisition and relocation of utilities (Zafar, 2014). But in case a prolonged political crisis and economic meltdown grip the country, such yearly and periodic

allocations for the project could be disturbed causing a delay to the project outcomes beyond the set targets.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project needs about \$32 billion of investment. Loans for the project are expected to come mainly from the Chinese banks and corporations. For that purpose, Federal Minister of Planning, Development and Reform Ahsan Iqbal and Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif held several meetings on their three-day visit to China in July this year with the Chinese National Development and Reform Commission, National Energy Administration, China Development Bank, Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, Exim Bank, and heads of Chinese corporate sector (Ibid).

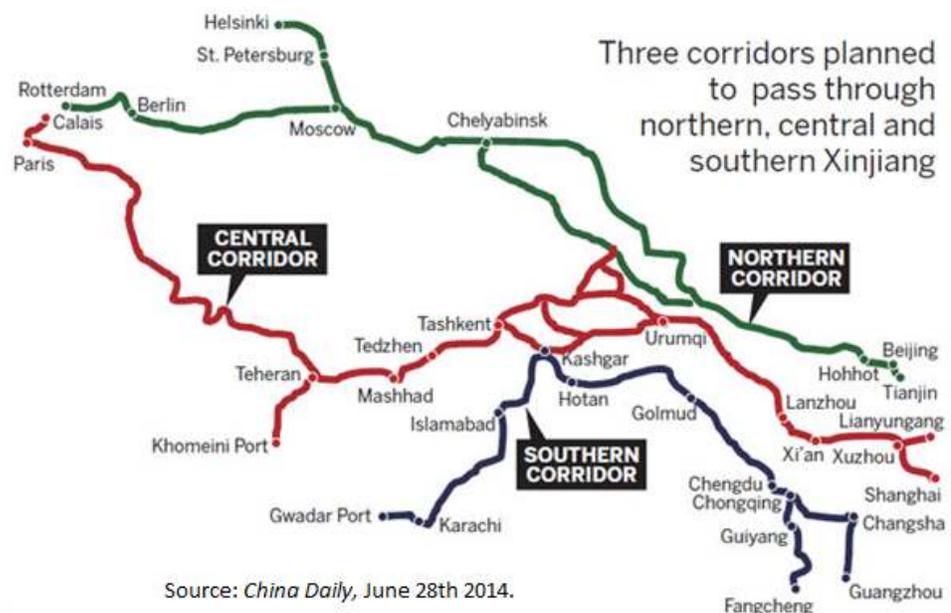
Secondly, the corridor will be largely built on BOT (build-operate-transfer) basis. As a result of Chinese financing loans, the project will be completed by Chinese companies, especially state-owned enterprises in China. It is expected that the project will be financially viable for these companies because the revenues generated by the project through BOT-related facilities would cover its cost and provide sufficient return on investment. Under BOT arrangements, Chinese companies will also receive concessions from the government to finance, design, construct, and operate the designed projects as agreed in the concession contract, or BOT. The government may also provide support for the project in form of provision of the land.

## **2. Geostrategic dynamics**

The CPEC is part of China' efforts that are meant to strengthen its trade and commerce connectivity with different regions of world. In September 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping emphasized reviving the ancient trade

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routes connecting China, Central Asia and Europe through developing three main corridors through southern, central and northern Xinjiang, which connect China with Russia, Europe and Pakistan (Jia, 2014). Also, Chinese have recently increased focus on Bangladesh-China-India Myanmar corridor that would provide China's landlocked Yunnan province access to the Bay of Bengal (Chowdhury, 2013).



While China's prime focus in constructing these corridors seems to strengthen its trade and economic connectivity with the countries in the region and beyond primarily to fulfill its energy needs and enhance exports, it is expected that Pakistan could emerge as a hub of commerce and trade in the region with the construction of the CPEC that would entail establishing several economic and industrial zones and physical road and railway links connecting Pakistan and China. As the corridor also anticipates having regional connectivity with India and Afghanistan—

although it is still too early to comment whether regional element of the CPEC will become operational or not—it could also enhance regional economic and trade cooperation that in turn would contribute towards regional peace and stability.

Gwadar holds central place in the utility of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor because without making the Gwadar Port fully functional, it would be difficult for China to see the anticipated corridor as an energy corridor that appears one of the main Chinese objectives behind the construction of the CPEC. Located near the Strait of Hormuz, which channels about one third of the world's oil trade, Gwadar could play key role in ensuring China's energy security as it provides much shorter route than the current 12,900km route from the Persian Gulf through the Strait of Malacca to China's eastern seaboard (Chowdhury, 2014).

Some however believe that the construction of the CPEC will 'place Gwadar on the matrix of intense geo-strategic competition' (CPGS, 2014). They think Gwadar will also put China and Pakistan in a strategically advantageous position in Arabian Sea compounding already existing Indian concerns that stem from 'China's involvement in nearby ports such as Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Sittwe in Myanmar and Chittagong in Bangladesh' (Chowdhury, 2014). On the other hand as India is too energy hungry, it looks forwards to develop Iran's Chabahar Port. In October this year, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cabinet decided to develop Chabahar Port, which many believe is central for India to open up a route to landlocked Afghanistan, where it has developed close security ties and economic interests (*Dawn*, 2014a), and to have access to energy-rich Central Asian States.

While Gwadar is located in Pakistan's Balochistan province, where a nationalist insurgency is going on, Chabahar is located in Iranian province Sistan-Baluchistan where too some unrest prevails mainly due to some violent Sunni sectarian-nationalist groups operating there. If peace and stability are not achieved in Afghanistan after the pullout of the international assistance forces, and countries in the region, mainly India, Pakistan and Iran, engage in proxy war there, it could have some implications for internal security mainly of Pakistan and Afghanistan and also Iran that could impact development projects. Pakistan has blamed India in the past for supporting Baloch insurgents from Afghan soil. Similarly, Iran has concerns on Jundulla's—a sectarian insurgent group based and operating in Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan province, free cross-border movement into and from Pakistan. But analysts argue that while Pakistan has struggled to achieve security in Balochistan, Iran has the capacity to enforce its writ in Sistan-Baluchistan that suggests Chabahar could become functional earlier than Gwadar if pursued by India and Iran fervently.

Nonetheless, China has devised a pro-active foreign policy vis-à-vis the Middle Eastern countries by using platform of the United Nations in order to negate the ongoing war in the region (CPGS, 2014). As far as Iran is concerned, China wishes to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue through peaceful political settlement. Moreover, regarding disturbed relations between Pakistan and India, China kept on playing its part to avoid the conflict between both the countries (Ibid). At the same time, for China, Pakistan's geo-strategic position is very crucial as it serves as a window into the Middle East. Meanwhile it has already expanded its trade, infrastructure and energy links with most of the Central Asian Republics

(Pakistan-China Institute, 2014). But insecurity and instability in Afghanistan are a major source of concern not only for China but also other neighboring countries including Pakistan, India and Iran. China is already the biggest economic investor in Afghanistan with about \$7.5 billion investment there (Ibid). China has recently become active on enhancing bilateral and trilateral efforts aimed at strengthening regional cooperation and coordination. It hosted the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process Beijing on October 31st 2014 with a view to promote the security and stability of the Afghanistan, in cooperation with its neighbors (Arif, 2014). China has also pushed the matter of Afghanistan's future after withdrawal of international assistance forces to the top of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's agenda (Pakistan-China Institute, 2014).

While cooperation among all countries in the region, at least in terms of trade and economy, would be an ideal scenario in the changing regional dynamics, there is strong likelihood that persisting bilateral conflicts and an environment of mistrust would keep them polarized and part of alliances where Pakistan would certainly remain close to China, with emerging regional dynamics having little impact on the construction of the CPEC and functioning of the Gwadar Port. But it still remains to be seen whether or not the CPEC and Gwadar could become instrumental in forging and enhancing regional coordination and cooperation, although they are designed to have regional connectivity with India and Afghanistan.

### 3. Security threats to the CPEC in Pakistan

There are certainly some security-related threats linked to China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. While most of these threats might originate in Pakistan, the Xinjiang province in western China is also facing security threats from Uighur militants and East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). Uighur and ETIM militants have long been sheltered in Pakistan's tribal areas along with the local militants. However, Pakistan's security forces have tightened grip over foreign militants in North Waziristan Agency including ETIM and Uighurs in recent months with the commencement of military operation *Zarb-e-Azb* greatly weakening the operational capacity of ETIM, which is the greatest threat for China (Khan, 2014). Furthermore, the US drone strikes in various areas of FATA have also dented the group by eliminating a number of its leaders.

The security of the corridor is of crucial importance for Pakistan as well as China in order to further strengthen the trade- and development-related ties. It is highly certain that the militant and criminal elements will try to engage themselves in violent activities with the commencement of projects designed for the corridor. It will thus be a challenge for both the countries to manage such activities along and across the borders. China also expects assistance from Pakistan in this regard. The presence of local and foreign militants in Pakistani tribal areas usually generates pressure on the Pakistani government because they realize that such phenomenon may cause disturbance in the region therefore effecting the bilateral relations (Rana, 2014).

On the whole the militant groups in Pakistan are relatively less hostile to China as compared to America and the West but at the same time we

have seen the militants targeting Chinese citizens, workers and engineers in Pakistan. As mentioned earlier, the Uighur militants' links with the Taliban in FATA pose a major threat to Chinese interests in Pakistan. An Uzbek-speaking militant leader Mufti Abu Zar al-Burmi recently released a video message directing all Taliban groups to carry out attacks on Chinese embassies and companies and kidnap or kill Chinese nationals (Rehman, 2014). Second source of threat could be the Baloch insurgent groups who are against the mega development projects in Balochistan including Gwadar Port currently being developed by Chinese companies. Thirdly, the militant-criminal nexus in certain areas also poses a threat to Chinese engineers, workers and citizens in form of kidnapping and robberies. In the past, there have been many incidents of kidnapping and killing of Chinese in Pakistan.

This part of the report discusses the nature and level of potential security threats to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which can appear in different parts of Pakistan in form of protracted violence, terrorist attacks, kidnapping and criminal acts such as road robbery etc. The threat assessment for different regions—through which the CPEC will pass—is based on frequency of terrorist attacks reported from there over the past few years, and also presence of militant, insurgent and criminal groups in those regions.

### **3.1 Geography of the CPEC**

The CPEC is a huge project that undertakes construction of highway and railway links that will run through almost entire Pakistan starting from Gwadar in Balochistan to culminate in Kashgar in western China, while passing through parts of Balochistan, Sindh, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

provinces and Gilgit-Baltistan in northern Pakistan to reach Khunjrab Pass and beyond to China.

***Eastern alignment:*** Pakistan and China have decided to initially construct eastern alignment of the corridor mainly due to two reasons: first, Chinese companies are willing to undertake the construction of eastern alignment on BOT (build-operate-transfer) basis, and secondly it is more secure compared to western alignment planned earlier. Eastern alignment traverses only a few areas of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces where security situation is more volatile compared to other parts of the country. This change in original plan even earned some criticism from parliamentarians from these two provinces who thought the new alignment will deprive people of their respective provinces of development and employment opportunities the CPEC will bring with it (*The News*, 2014).

Senators hailing from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan during a meeting of Senate Standing Committee on Finance held in June this year said that the new corridor alignment [eastern] excluded many areas of their provinces and the new route largely passed through Punjab (Ibid). The Federal Minister for Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal however told the senators that no investors were willing to construct western route on BOT basis. He said the government has only decided to first construct relatively more secure eastern route with Chinese assistance and that it had not abandoned the original western route, which will be constructed later (Ibid).

Eastern alignment of the corridor originates from Gwadar, travels parallel to Makran Coastal Highway towards east (towards Karachi), and then

after passing through parts of interior Sindh, and southern, central and northern regions of Punjab it reaches Islamabad. From Islamabad it extends to Haripur, Abbotabad, and Mansehra districts of relatively peaceful Hazara Division in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa—this part of the corridor will also run through Muzaffarabad, the capital of Azad Jammu and Kashmir—and reaches Khunjrab after passing through Diamer and Gilgit areas in northern Pakistan. The corridor will also run through the Pamir Plateau and Karakoram Mountains. A link from Taxila through Peshawar and Torkhum will connect the eastern alignment of the corridor to Jalalabad in Afghanistan. Regional connectivity with India through eastern alignment is designed to be provided through Hyderabad-Mirpurkhas-Khokhrapar-Zero Point link and Wagha border, Lahore.

***Western alignment:*** This was the original alignment which the government says it has deferred until the eastern alignment of the corridor is completed. According to western alignment plan, economic corridor (highway and railway) starts from Gwadar and runs through some southern and eastern districts of Balochistan (Khuzdar and Dera Bugti, respectively), and some districts in South Punjab to reach D.I. Khan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. From D.I. Khan it further extends to Islamabad and Abbotabad and from there onward the route is the same as in the eastern alignment. Western alignment will have an additional regional connectivity link to Afghanistan through Chaman and will connect to Iran through Quetta-Kho-e-Taftan link.

***Karachi-Lahore Motorway:*** It will run from Karachi to Lahore through traversing interior Sindh (mainly Hyderabad, Dadu and Sukkur), and parts of south Punjab including Raheem Yar Khan and Multan.

### 3.2 Potential security threats to CPEC in each geographical region of Pakistan

Pakistan faces diverse challenges to its security and stability, for instance, the Taliban militancy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and tribal areas, a nationalist insurgency in Balochistan, ethno-political violence in Karachi, growing religious extremism and radicalism, and deteriorating law and order amid acts of terrorism and violence being reported from across the country almost on daily basis.

This prevailing environment of insecurity, militancy and violence in Pakistan can pose serious threat to the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. As the level and nature of this threat is not uniform across Pakistan, it is a positive aspect that the finalized eastern alignment of the corridor runs through parts of the country which are relative more secure with few exceptions.

As China and Pakistan have decided to initially construct the CPEC along eastern alignment, this section of the report assesses the security, law order situation and militant landscape of the regions through which the Gwadar-Kashgar Highway and railways will run, also including areas to be traversed by Karachi-Lahore Motorway.

#### ***Gwadar and Makran Coastal Highway***<sup>7</sup>

***Summary:*** *Baloch insurgents pose the key threat in Gwadar and coastal belt; the Taliban and sectarian militants have minimum presence in this*

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<sup>7</sup> All data and statistics used in this section are taken from Pak Institute for Peace Studies' (PIPS) database on conflict and security (<http://san-pips.com/index.php?action=db&id=1>), unless described otherwise.

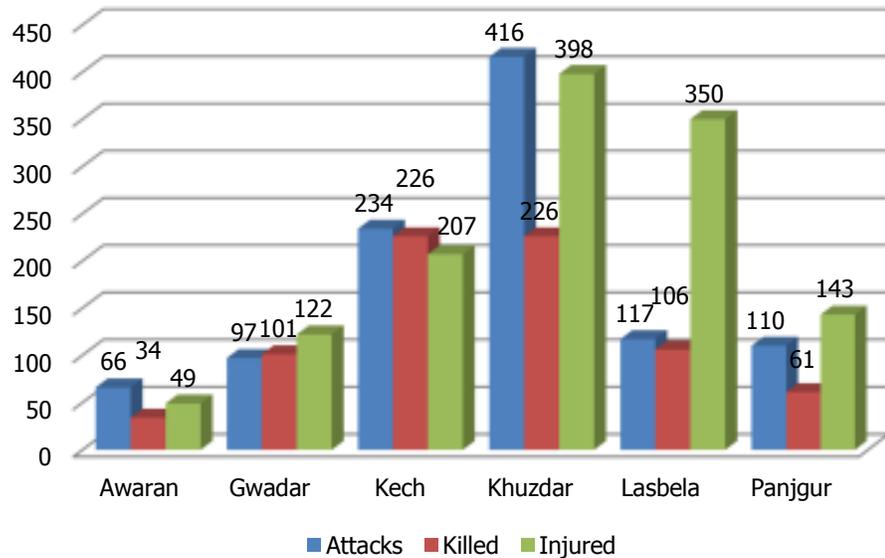
*region. Baloch insurgents can carry out low intensity attacks targeting the CPEC-linked installations and infrastructure and workers besides attempts at kidnappings. The level of threat is medium, and needs stringent security measures.*

As many as 653 km-long Makran Coastal Highway extends towards east to link Gwadar with Karachi. The Balochistan part of the CPEC will originate from Gwadar and run similarly towards Karachi. Security threats to the construction of the CPEC and workers can also appear from neighboring northern districts of Gwadar and Makran Coastal Belt, e.g. Kech, Awaran and Lasbela. As the militant landscape of these districts is largely linked to that of Panjgur and Khuzdar, too, it is pertinent to assess security situation of this entire region spread over these 6 districts.

A review of reported terrorist attacks between 2007 and July 2014 suggests that Kech and Khuzdar are most volatile districts in this region. *(See Chart 1)* Worrisome factor is that Gwadar shares boundaries with Kech, a district where activities and influence of Baloch insurgents have increased over the past few years. On the whole 1,040 terrorist attacks took place in these six districts between 2007 and July 2014, representing 23 percent of total attacks reported from Balochistan during that period. In other words, 23 percent of total terrorist attacks reported from Balochistan between 2007 and July 2014 concentrated in six districts of Gwadar, Kech, Awaran, Panjgur, Lasbela and Khuzdar.

Targets hit in most of these attacks included security forces, civilians, political leaders, non-Baloch settlers and workers, gas pipelines and power pylons, railways tracks, and government installations and property etc.

**Chart 1: Terrorist attacks in Gwadar and neighboring districts (January 1, 2007-July 31, 2014)**



- Violent religious/sectarian and militant groups such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) or its Balochistan chapter Tehreek-e-Taliban Balochistan (TTB) have very little presence and operational activities in Gwadar, Kech, Awaran and Lasbela, four districts that will have immediate proximity with the CPEC alignment. But religious extremist and violent sectarian groups have enhanced their presence and activities in Khuzdar that lies towards north of Lasbela and Awaran districts.
- That means the immediate threat to the CPEC in Balochistan is less likely to come from the Taliban or associated groups and sectarian groups such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi due to their little presence in

Gwadar and its immediate neighborhood. Another reason for least probability of such a threat is the fact that such development projects have not been prime targets of the religious extremist and sectarian groups.

- However most of the insecurity in terms of terrorist attacks and threat of kidnapping in Gwadar, Makran Coastal Belt and neighboring districts emanates from Baloch insurgent groups mainly Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) and Lashkar-e-Balochistan (LB) while Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Baloch Republican Army (BRA) are also occasionally found involved in insurgent attacks reported from these four districts.
- The BLF, led by Dr. Allah Nazar Baloch, is predominantly focused in the southern coastal Makran belt although it operates across Balochistan. The group represents disgruntled middle-class and lower middle-class Baloch youths. The LB led by Javed Mengal is concentrated in southwestern districts of Balochistan (Panjgur, Gwadar, Kech, particularly Turbat) and also Khuzdar. It is suspected that the group was involved in terrorist attacks on the Chinese Consulate in Karachi and a blast at the Lahore Railway Station in August 2012 (PIPS, 2013). The BLA and BRA are also active in parts of Gwadar and its neighboring districts particularly Panjgur and Kech.
- As far as security situation of Gwadar district and Gwadar coastline is concerned, BLF, the frequency of terrorist attacks in these areas is quite low compared to other regions of Balochistan. From 2011 onward, Baloch insurgents have hit different targets in Gwadar at an average of nine (9) attacks per year or less than one attack a month. These targets range from security forces including Gwadar coast

guards, non-Baloch settlers, state installations, public and private property, and political leaders and workers etc.

- The drug peddlers, human traffickers, and criminal groups are also present in Turbat, headquarters of Makran Division, and parts of Gwadar. Also, the growing nexus of Baloch insurgents with the Taliban-like groups and also criminals has the potential to increase the overall security threat for Gwadar and its neighborhood. To curtail such a threat it is necessary to counter the Taliban, sectarian groups and criminals from across Balochistan so that they are not able to expand their outreach to Gwadar region.

### **Karachi and Interior Sindh<sup>8</sup>**

**Summary:** *The level of threat is medium in Karachi and very low in interior parts of Sindh. With presence of large numbers of the militants, sectarian extremists and criminal elements in Karachi, there is a probability of attacks on engineers and workers of the CPEC-related projects and also security personnel deployed to provide security to the project sites and workers. Incidents of kidnapping too cannot be ruled out.*

A security analysis of major areas of Sindh along eastern alignment through which Gwadar-Kashgar highway and railways and Karachi-Lahore motorway will run reveals that major threat can emerge from Karachi whereas the level of threat in interior of Sindh is quite low.

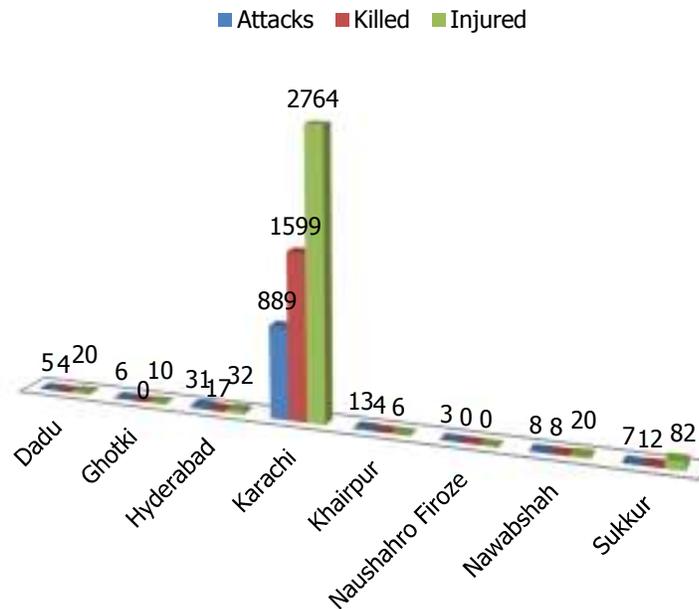
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<sup>8</sup> All data and statistics used in this section are taken from Pak Institute for Peace Studies' (PIPS) database on conflict and security (<http://san-pips.com/index.php?action=db&id=1>), unless described otherwise.

Between 2007 and July 2014, as many as 962 terrorist attacks took place in areas of Sindh through which the CPEC and Karachi-Lahore Motorway will run. Most of these attacks, 889, occurred in Karachi alone. Among 31 attacks reported from Hyderabad, most were low intensity attacks carried out by Sindhi nationalists and others.

Most of these attacks targeted security forces and law enforcement agencies, civilians, Shia and Sunni religious communities, and political leaders and workers. A few attacks also targeted NATO supply vehicles. A considerable number of low intensity attacks also hit railway tracks and trains, mainly in interior parts of Sindh,

**Chart 2: Terrorist attacks in parts of Sindh where CPEC-linked projects will run (January 1, 2007-July 31, 2014)**



- ❑ Karachi has become hub of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and associated groups and sectarian militants such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Sipah-e-Muhammad. While sectarian groups are largely engaged in sectarian violence—with an exception of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi that is also engaged in terrorist attacks on security forces and other targets being a key ally of TTP—most of the terrorist attacks including high profile are carried out by the TTP and associated groups.
- ❑ The ongoing security operation in Karachi has failed to break the network of militants in the city. Reports also suggest that criminals were mainly targeted in security forces' surgical strikes going on in the city for several months now. There is dire need to launch a comprehensive operation against militants in Karachi because the TTP and its allies including foreign militants are well entrenched in the city, more than what is usually thought, mainly in areas of Gadap, Sultanabad, Gulshan-e-Buner, Manghopir, Sohrab Goth, Mauripur, Musharraf Colony, Usmanabad, Steel Town, Sultanabad, and Orangi Town. The brazen attack on cargo terminal of Karachi airport in June this year provides enough evidence to suggest how militants have established their network and strengthened their operational capabilities in Karachi. It also highlights lapses in the state's security and intelligence infrastructure.
- ❑ Also, Karachi can become more vulnerable after the military operation has been launched in North Waziristan. Taliban militants based in Karachi along with Sunni sectarian groups will be more than happy to welcome their fellow Taliban militants fleeing from North Waziristan.
- ❑ As far as parts of interior Sindh are concerned, in recent years religious extremism has been reported to be gradually rising there.

The increasing incidents of persecution of religious minorities there suggest that interior Sindh, which historically and traditionally has been a land of peace and pluralism, is not safe anymore from the onslaught of religious extremism and radicalism. Although the frequency of terrorist attacks has been quite low in interior parts of Sindh, yet few high profile attacks were reported from there in recent past including a lethal suicide-and-gun attack by a group of five militants on the regional headquarters of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in Sukkur in July 2013.

- While the presence and activities of militant groups have been quite low in parts of interior Sindh, through which the CPEC will run, threat to security of these areas has been gradually rising from Sindhi nationalist groups mainly Sindhu Desh Liberation Army. Sindhi nationalists have carried out some low intensity cracker attacks in recent months and years targeting state infrastructure such as railway tracks but their operational capacity and organizational strength are too weak to cause some heavy damage. Hence the threat from nationalists to security of interior parts of Sindh also remains low that can be easily managed with stringent security measures.

### **Punjab and Rawalpindi-Islamabad<sup>9</sup>**

**Summary:** *The overall threat level is low in those parts of Punjab and Islamabad from where the CPEC corridor will pass. However sporadic incidents of violence including against the project-related targets such as sites, engineers, workers and security personnel cannot be ruled out*

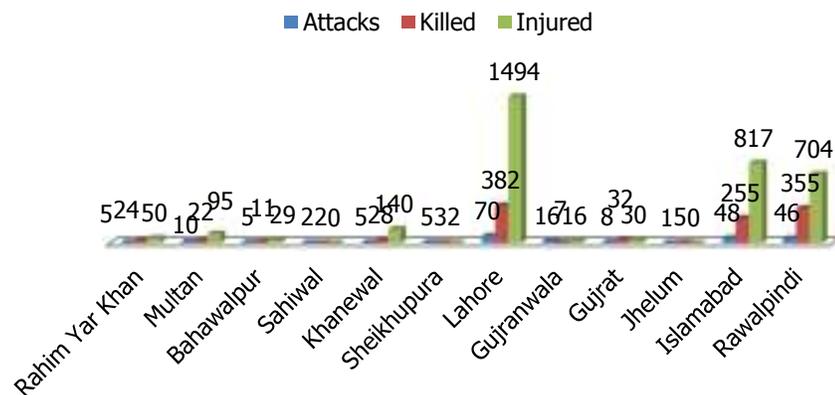
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<sup>9</sup> All data and statistics used in this section are taken from Pak Institute for Peace Studies' (PIPS) database on conflict and security (<http://san-pips.com/index.php?action=db&id=1>), unless described otherwise.

*completely. It is imperative to eliminate TTP's support structures in Punjab to prevent high value and high intensity attacks in future.*

Over the past about eight years, starting from 2007, Lahore and Islamabad-Rawalpindi have faced maximum terrorist attacks and casualties compared to other regions of Punjab through which the CPEC-linked roads and railway links will pass. However sporadic attacks have also been reported from other areas as illustrated in Chart 3. Targets of most of these attacks were security forces, civilians, and Shia and Sunni communities. Some attacks also hit political leaders and workers, private property and NATO supply vehicles. A spree of terrorist attacks including lethal suicide attacks gripped Lahore and Islamabad-Rawalpindi after the 2007 Red Mosque siege and that continued for 2-3 years. Even after that some high intensity attacks have rocked these and few other cities of Punjab.

**Chart 3: Terrorist attacks in parts of Punjab and Islamabad where CPEC-linked projects will run (January 1, 2007-July 31, 2014)**



- ❑ The TTP has support structures in parts of Punjab in form of groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and also some Deobandi madrassas. These support structures have helped the TTP in past to carry out some lethal attacks in heart of Punjab, Lahore, and also Rawalpindi and Islamabad. But strong vigilance and surveillance of security and law enforcement agencies in Punjab have denied the TTP militants permanent operating bases or safe heavens there. That fact keeps the security threat to the CPEC-linked projects and personnel in Punjab low.
- ❑ Secondly, the eastern alignment of the CPEC will run through those parts of Punjab which are relatively safer and tactically difficult for militants' free movement and entrenchment. For instance, the CPEC alignment in southern Punjab (Raheem Yar Khan, Bahawalpur and Multan regions) will be located towards east of the Indus River and will be least vulnerable to security threats that could emerge from western side of Indus River. To west of Indus River not only lay some areas which are hub of extremist groups and criminals gangs (D.G. Khan and Rajanpur, respectively) but also for militants in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, the simplest entry-point into Punjab is D.G. Khan through Indus Highway and link roads. Also, in the west of Indus River there is presence of criminal elements, mainly in Kacha area of Rajanpur, an area that lies between Indus River and Indus Highway. These criminals reportedly have also nexus with Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and have been found involved in kidnapping and road robberies.
- ❑ Areas in central and northern Punjab parts of the CPEC alignment are even relatively safer than south Punjab. Although the Chart 3 displays a large number of terrorist attacks reported from Lahore and

Islamabad-Rawalpindi between 2007 and July 2014, but as mentioned earlier these cities were specifically targeted in the aftermath of Red Mosque operation of 2007. Also, most of these attacks were orchestrated from outside and terrorist infrastructures have minimal presence in these cities, although operational support exists. One more factor to be noted is that development projects and infrastructure schemes have hardly remained target of militants in these and other cities of Punjab.

- Although it appears that the security threats to the CPEC project in Punjab will be low and minimal but it is also important that militants have the capacity to orchestrate high value and high intensity attacks in those areas of Punjab from where the CPEC road and railway links will pass. It is imperative to ensure that the tribal militants' support structures in Punjab are eliminated and also strong surveillance and vigilance is maintained to prevent any major terrorist attacks. Police and intelligence agencies have major role to play regarding that.

#### **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and AJK<sup>10</sup>**

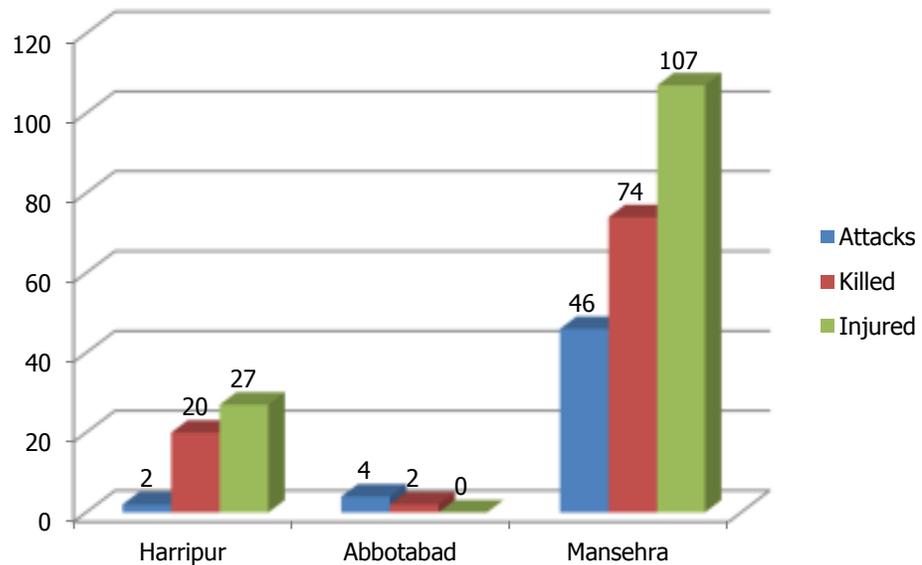
***Summary:*** *The threat level for CPEC alignment in this part is also low because Hazara Division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is relatively much secure and safe from militancy than other parts of the province. However, local Taliban militants in Mansehra, some of them linked with the TTP, can pose some security threat to workers and engineers of the CPEC.*

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<sup>10</sup> All data and statistics used in this section are taken from Pak Institute for Peace Studies' (PIPS) database on conflict and security (<http://san-pips.com/index.php?action=db&id=1>), unless described otherwise.

The parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through which the CPEC will run (Haripur, Abbotabad, and Mansehra) have traditionally been least violent as compared to other regions of the province. Presence of militant groups is also little in these areas with an exception of Mansehra where some local Taliban groups exist but they too do not have the capacity to carry out some major attacks without the help and support from some outsider terrorist group. Between 2007 and July 2014, as many as 4,732 terrorist attacks took place in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and only 52 of these attacks, or 1 percent, occurred in these three districts of Haripur, Abbotabad and Mansehra. Also most of these 52 attacks were concentrated in Mansehra alone, and only 4 and 2 attacks took place in Abbotabad and Haripur, respectively. (See Chart 4)

**Chart 4: Terrorist attacks in parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where CPEC-linked projects will run (January 1, 2007-July 31, 2014)**



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- ❑ As mentioned earlier local Taliban militants in Mansehra, some of them linked with the TTP, can pose some security threat to workers and engineers of the CPEC, but probability and intensity of such a threat is low.
- ❑ Abbotabad and Haripur have remained largely isolated from the Taliban militancy in the province. However the Taliban in the past have tried to make inroads into these areas. For instance, in September 2007 an attack on army's mess building in Haripur had killed 20 soldiers. Since then however no major terrorist attack has been reported from these two districts.
- ❑ Strict security measures however are required to keep the TTP and other militants away from this region, and also to counter any threats that might be posed by the local Taliban and extremist groups.
- ❑ This part of the CPEC will also be linked to Muzaffarabad, capital of Azad Kashmir. Security situation of Muzaffarabad has also remained peaceful over the years with the exception of few attacks in the past; only three terrorist attacks occurred in the city between 2007 and July 2014, all in 2009. One of these attacks was sectarian-related suicide attack that claimed 10 lives and injured 81 others. Another suicide attack had targeted army barracks killing two soldiers, while the third attack was a low intensity cracker blast that killed one person. 2009 was the year when reports started to appear in media that the TTP is trying to make inroads into Muzaffarabad but since then no such attacks has been reported; nor any reports describing the TTP's presence in the region have emerged.

### **Diامر and Gilgit<sup>11</sup>**

**Summary:** *The region has seen plenty of sectarian violence in past. Some high intensity attacks in recent years on security forces and foreigners also revealed TTP and other militants' outreach to these areas. However absence of militants' bases and support structures in Gilgit and Baltistan suggests the threat level to the CPEC in this region will be low. However sporadic attacks on the CPEC-linked sites and personnel cannot be ruled out.*

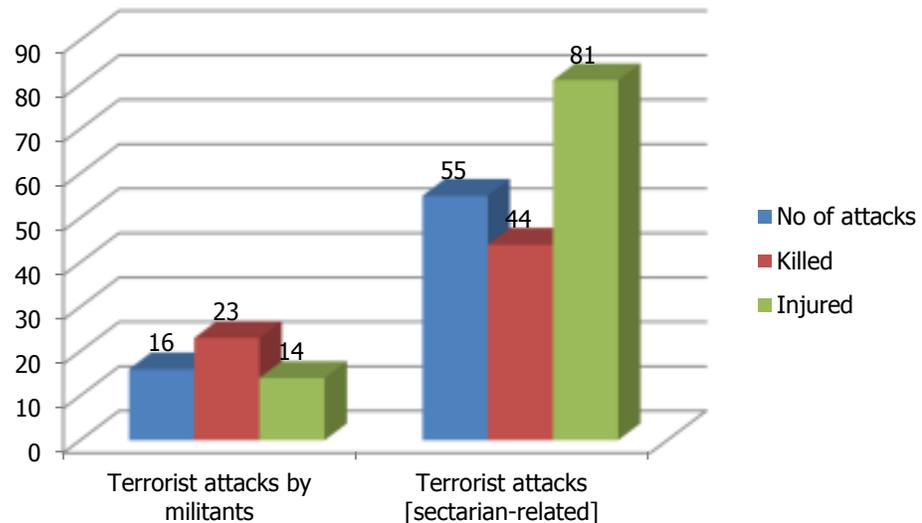
After passing through parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Azad Kashmir as described earlier, the CPEC will run through Diامر and Gilgit districts of Gilgit-Baltistan. Some terrorist attacks from the region in recent years, which hit high value targets, attracted the world attention and also raised concerns that the Pakistani militants, mainly the TTP, in collaborations with ETIM and Chinese Uighur militants could try to entrench themselves in this region. Other than that most of the violent incidents reported from this region have been sectarian-related.

A total of 74 terrorist attacks were reported from Gilgit-Baltistan between 2007 and July 2014 – 71 from Diامر and Gilgit alone – out of which 55 were sectarian-related and only 16 were carried out by the TTP and associated militants and other groups. (See Chart 5)

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<sup>11</sup> All data and statistics used in this section are taken from Pak Institute for Peace Studies' (PIPS) database on conflict and security (<http://san-pips.com/index.php?action=db&id=1>), unless described otherwise.

**Chart 5: Terrorist attacks in parts of Gilgit-Baltistan where CPEC-linked projects will run (January 1, 2007-July 31, 2014)**



- On June 23, 2013, militants killed 11 people including nine foreign tourists and two Pakistanis at Nanga Parbat tourists' Base camp near Bunar Nullah. TTP spokesperson Ehsanullah Ehsan told some media representatives through telephonic calls that the group's faction named Junud-e-Hafsa had carried out the brutal attack. He further said the killing was revenge against the US drone attacks and killing of TTP chief Waliur Rehman Mehsud (Khan, 2013). The Diامر attack on tourists also revealed the threat that the nexus of TTP, Al-Qaeda and East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) could pose to Pakistan's internal security and also that of China's Xinjiang province.
- Later on August 6, 2013, three security forces officials including an army colonel, a captain and SSP Diامر were shot dead in Chilas City

(district headquarters of Diamer) by the TTP militants. The officials were investigating the Nanga Parbat incident in which foreign tourists were killed by the militants (*The News*, 2013).

- On July 4, 2014, over three dozen militants wearing Pakistan Army uniforms stormed a police station in Diamer district. They took away 10 guns, three pistols, thousands of rounds, wireless telephone sets, police uniforms and other belongings of the police personnel (*Dawn*, 2014b). Inhabitants of Diamer suspected these attackers belonged to Taliban militants.

### **3.3 State's capacity and responses to maintain security and law and order**

Pakistan has the required capacity and security infrastructure to deal with the potential threats to the CPEC project. The country has huge security and law enforcement infrastructure comprising military, paramilitary including Rangers and FC, police and locally raised police forces such as Khasadar force in FATA and Levies force in Balochistan. Apart from that it has strong professional intelligence agencies. Also Pakistan has sufficient sources and equipments for its security, law enforcement and intelligence agencies. But as the threat of terrorism is quite non-conventional and asymmetrical, Pakistan needs more stringent efforts to deal with this threat.

One major source of terrorism in Pakistan has been the tribal militants against whom Pakistan has launched several military operations in the past. The latest military operation, *Zarb-e-Azb*, was launched on June 15 this year in North Waziristan that still continues. Initial reports following the launch of the military operation in North Waziristan suggested that

foreign militants mainly those hailing from Central Asia and China were prime target of military strikes. Several militants of East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)—both groups along with the TTP have close links with Chinese Uyghur militants—have been killed in the military operation so far. As the government and army have vowed to clear North Waziristan from all kinds of militants including local and foreigner, there is hope that these foreign militants hailing from Central Asia and China will no more find sanctuaries and shelter in North Waziristan. Some reports suggest many of them have already relocated to either Afghanistan and elsewhere or other parts of FATA and Pakistan. However one thing is certain that many of their 'hideouts' in Waziristan have been destroyed and remaining will be destroyed and they will be followed in other parts of FATA and country as well. This will certainly reduce the security threats for the country and also the CPEC project emanating from FATA.

As far as Balochistan is concerned, the province is already under strict security scrutiny in the presence of FC, police and Levies. In recent months attacks by nationalist insurgents and militants have reduced in the province. State's security apparatus in Balochistan, if utilized effectively, is quite capable to deter any threat to the CPEC-linked projects and activities.

However there is an immediate need to address security problems in Karachi, which is a huge city where militants find many weak spots and spaces to hide and operate. Rangers and police are currently busy in security operation in the city, but there is need to expand scope of this operation to eliminate all sorts of militants.

Law enforcement agencies, mainly police can handle the security of the CPEC alignment in Punjab, Islamabad, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and also Gilgit Baltistan with the help of intelligence agencies. Coordination among different security, law enforcement and intelligence agencies will be vital to secure the route, construction and workers of the CPEC project.

Provincial police departments can take pre-emptive steps to ensure security of Chinese engineers and others working on the CPEC-related projects. Some good precedents were set in recent past regarding that. For instance, Lahore City Police established eight special security desks around the city in June this year for Chinese citizens employed in the government, semi-government and private sector (*Express Tribune*, 2014).

#### **4. Conclusion**

Long-term political stability in Pakistan is vital to smoothly implement the projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. In the past Pakistan has faced many phases of political instability and turmoil that weakened the country's development roadmap and also affected policy consistency. Similarly if now or later, some prolonged political crisis and economic meltdown grip the country, yearly and periodic budget allocations for the CPEC project could be disturbed causing a delay to the project outcomes beyond the set targets.

Prevailing environment of insecurity, militancy and violence in Pakistan can pose serious threat to the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. But the level and nature of this threat is not uniform across Pakistan. It is encouraging that the areas through which the

finalized eastern alignment of the corridor will run are relative more secure than the areas of earlier planned western alignment, though with few exceptions. The level of threat to the security of the CPEC project, including sites and personnel, is low along most areas of eastern alignment with the exceptions of Gwadar, Makran Coastal Belt and Karachi, where threat level is assessed to be medium.

At the same time it is imperative to ensure stringent security measures along the entire CPEC alignment.

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