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## CHINA'S PERSPECTIVE ON TERRORISM: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH ASIA

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### ABSTRACT:

*The geopolitics in Asia is taking new direction with Belt and Road initiative led by China. As a rising global power China can play a positive responsible role in the region to bring peace and stability in South Asia. With expanding OBOR projects the vulnerability to terrorist attacks has increased in China. This makes it more essential for the dragon to douse the fire of extremism and terrorism which engulfs the region as the most pertinent security threat. The research paper would look into the policies of China on terrorism and what implications it has for South Asia region.*



**KEYWORDS:** geopolitics , global power China , the fire of extremism and terrorism.

### OBJECTIVE

The research paper analyses the magnitude and nature of threat that terrorism poses to China. The paper critically studies China's policies on terrorism in domestic and regional context. The paper would also analyse China's perspective on regional issues like Kashmir and Afghanistan besides Xinjiang for holistic understanding of its policies and action plan with regard to terrorism. During the process, the role of CPEC project under the Belt and road initiative by China has closely been studied. CPEC is important from the view point of connecting the two hotbeds of terrorism in South Asia, viz. Kashmir and Xinjiang.

While studying various facets in relation to terrorism the aim of the paper is to analyse China's perspective on terrorism and subsequent policies in relation to the same with implications for the South Asian region.

### HYPOTHESIS

- China's over-broad definition of terrorism which includes separatism and extremism determines its policy on Xinjiang.
- The security situation in South Asian countries of Afghanistan and Pakistan which borders Xinjiang region influences the domestic as well as national security of China.
- Post-OBOR initiative there has been increase in vulnerability to the terrorist attacks in China.

- CPEC can play an important role in bringing peace and stability in the region.

### METHODOLOGY

The proposed study is descriptive, exploratory and explanatory in nature. The research will include historical and analytical methods. The study proposes to refer both primary and secondary sources of information and data by using deductive method.

The primary sources will include various reports of the multilateral agencies. In China, due to the state-controlled media there is absence of independent sources of information and insufficient information released by the Chinese government. Also, most of the primary sources like government policies, reports,

statements, official visits and other related information are in Chinese language. So majority of primary sources material for this study used will be the ones released by western archives or translated ones. For exposure to Chinese perspective, I interviewed Professor Zhang Li who teaches in the Institute for South Asian Studies, Sichuan Studies and specializes on security issues. Other primary sources include newspaper clippings, speeches by important dignitaries, and information and data collected through the think tank analysis of the worldwide organizations. The proposed research proposal would largely base upon the secondary sources. The secondary sources of data include books, journal articles, newspapers, internet materials, unpublished research documents and other relevant materials published in media from time to time, which will be used in the proposed study.

## INTRODUCTION

China is facing dual security threat on both its fronts, maritime tensions in South China Sea on the east and tensions in Xinjiang region on the west. With its expanding overseas interests the threat of terrorism is also increasing in China. Though the terrorist attacks are not so sporadic in nature in China but the threat is serious.<sup>1</sup>

China being a rising power and influential global player can play an important leading role in tackling the problem of terrorism especially in the South Asian region. President Xi Jinping's speech at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Astana, capital of Kazakhstan on June 9, 2017 highlighted China's firm stance on fighting the terrorism and safeguarding regional peace. He highlighted the importance of security as "without security,

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<sup>1</sup> Interview of Professor Zhang Li, Institute of South Asian Studies, Sichuan University. (June 21, 2017).

there would be no development to speak off".<sup>2</sup> The combined efforts of the member countries including China led to signing of SCO Convention on "Combating Terrorism" at the summit. President Xi in his speech at SCO talked about the fight against the "three forces", namely terrorism, separatism and extremism.<sup>3</sup>

China's laws define terrorism in overly broad manner. China treats separatism, extremism and terrorism as interrelated problems. It calls it "the three evils". China sees all the three as posing significant potential threat to China's national security. The reason for grouping the three into one category is the common ideology they share.<sup>4</sup> Article 3 of the Counterterrorism Law includes in the definition of "terrorism", "advocacy" or "behavior". Article 4 of the Counterterrorism Law defines "extremism" as the "ideological basis of terrorism".<sup>5</sup> This has led to Chinese government to deal with separatist and extremists forces in the country at par with the terrorist elements and heavy handed approach to the separatist movements.

The terror attacks have recently increased in China with the launch of Belt and Road plan and the initiation of CPEC project which connects the Gwadar port in Pakistan to Kashgar in Xinjiang region of China. There are critics who point out on this scheme of project which would exploit the vast natural resources of Xinjiang to develop further the east China. Also, this project has attracted Han Chinese to capture the job opportunities inviting the contempt from the local ethnic groups especially the Uyghurs.

Post 9/11 terrorists attacks marked a watershed point in the history of terrorism and had brought out the global nature that terrorism had acquired in twentieth century. Thus, re-coursing the counter-terrorism strategies of countries world over. China strongly condemned the 9/11 attacks and announced fighting terrorism on basis of the UN Charter and international law. China voted

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<sup>2</sup> Xi Jinping Attends 17<sup>th</sup> Meeting of SCO Council of Heads of State and Delivers Important Speech. (2017). Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. Retrieved from [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1469850.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1469850.shtml)

<sup>3</sup> Baijie A. (2017). Xi advocates common security. Retrieved from [https://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-06/12/content\\_29707285.htm](https://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-06/12/content_29707285.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Interview of Professor Zhang Li, Institute of South Asian Studies, Sichuan University. (June 21, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> China: Disclose Details of Terrorism Convictions (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/16/china-disclose-details-terrorism-convictions>

for Resolution 1368 by UN Security council post-attacks.<sup>6</sup> This is the first time that China had voted in favour of international use of force. At regional level, China took constructive approach to terrorism in South and Central Asia by cooperating with Afghanistan and Pakistan to fight terrorism waged by Taliban and al-Qaeda. China also undertook measures to improve its domestic security and counter-terrorism laws. This included heavy clamp down on the Uyghur separatist groups working in Xinjiang along with various soft domestic policies to develop the west region and satiate the un-restive multi-ethnic groups. China has concerns relating to Islamists extremists that operate in and around the Xinjiang Autonomous Region who receive training and equipments from al-Qaeda and the Taliban operating in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries of South and Central Asia.

### XINJIANG CONFLICT

In order to understand the problem of terrorism in China it is important to understand the region of Xinjiang and China's policy towards it. China faces the problem of ethnic-religious extremism and cross-border terrorism in its largest and mineral resource rich Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous region. It borders eight countries out of which five are Central Asian countries. Terrorism in Central Asia is ethnic-religious in nature and largely a cross-border phenomenon. This imperils the western region of China and threatens the stability and security of the Xinjiang region.

Besides the regional factors, the domestic factors have also been responsible for the turbulence in the Xinjiang region. On September 13, 1955 the Standing Committee of the First National People's Congress passed a resolution to establish the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region to replace the former Xinjiang Province.<sup>7</sup> The establishment of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region meant implementation of the system of ethnic regional autonomy in Xinjiang. But the region has been home to ethnic tensions due to various cultural and economic factors. Xinjiang which has more than a dozen major ethnic groups with Uyghur Muslims being the largest group identify themselves culturally to Central Asian nations. Most Uyghurs are Muslims and their language is Turkish. In 1949, they enjoyed a brief period of autonomy under the name of East

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<sup>6</sup> United States Department of State, Coordinator for Counterterrorism. (2002). Patterns of Global Terrorism, 2001. Retrieved from <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/10319.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> White Paper. (2015). Historical Witness to Ethnic Equality, Unity and Development in Xinjiang Information Office of the State Council, China. Retrieved from [https://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-09/24/c\\_134655252.htm](https://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-09/24/c_134655252.htm)

Turkmenistan but soon to be brought under the PRC.<sup>8</sup> Since then the region has been simmering with separatist movement. Also, Xinjiang has largest reserves of natural gas yet it remains to be least developed region of China which adds to the grievances of the people.

In 1990's, the open support for separatist groups increased after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the independent Muslim states in Central Asia.<sup>9</sup> This called for stringent measures from the Chinese government to suppress the increasing separatist tendencies which caused widespread unrest in the region. Chinese government launched "Strike hard" campaigns in 1996 in

order to round up the suspected separatists.<sup>10</sup> This included restrictions on the religious activities to prevent propagation of Islam. China's government attempts to restrict the religious practices of the people in Xinjiang in order to reduce the influence of extremist religious thought. The government in 2015 issued a notice for restaurants to remain open during the holy month of Ramadan thereby discouraging the people from fasting.<sup>11</sup> The World Report 2017 by HRW also reported the same that the local authorities instructed the restaurants in Xinjiang region to not to close down during the Muslim holiday of Ramadan.<sup>12</sup> Very recent, a report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that China banned Islamic names for babies in Muslim-majority Xinjiang region. The children with banned names like Saddam will not be able to get a residence permit called "hukou" which is required to access medical and educational services.<sup>13</sup>

However, the Information office of the State Council of China, in September 2015 issued a white paper titled "Historical witness to Ethnic Equality, Unity and Development in Xinjiang" which has something else to say. It gives useful insight into the Chinese government policies regarding

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<sup>8</sup> Why is there tension between China and Uighurs?. (2014). Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-26414014>

<sup>9</sup> Why is there tension between China and Uighurs?. (2014). Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-26414014>

<sup>10</sup> Mackerras, Colin and Clarke, Michael. (Eds.). (2009). China, Xinjiang, and Central Asia: History, Transition and Crossborder Interaction into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Taylor and Francis Routledge Publications.

<sup>11</sup> China bans Muslims from fasting Ramadan in Xinjiang. (2015). Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/06/china-bans-ramadan-fasting-muslim-region-150618070016245.html>

<sup>12</sup> World Report 2017. Human Rights Watch. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/china-and-tibet>

<sup>13</sup> China bans Muslim names for babies in Xinjiang. (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/china-bans-muslim-names-for-babies-in-xinjiang/article18209483.ece>

the Xinjiang region.<sup>14</sup> In 1984, the state promulgated and put into effect the Law of the People's Republic of China on Ethnic Regional Autonomy, establishing ethnic regional autonomy as a basic political system of the state, thereby providing a powerful legal basis for all ethnic peoples in Xinjiang to fully exercise their right of autonomy based on the principle of safeguarding national unification. The Chinese government also extends various benefits to the Uyghurs. The non-Han Chinese people in Xinjiang were allowed to ignore the one-child policy. The taxes on land are available at low cost to the farmers. The students are given extra-points on the university entrance exams.

Xinjiang faces the conflict of separatist movements led by the ethnically Uyghur Muslim against the Chinese government most notable being the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) whose objective is to establish an independent state called East Turkestan. For the terrorist activities in the country, China blames the Islamists militants led by the ETIM. China alleges it to have ties with the al-Qaeda. Though many in western media have their doubts about China's allegation on the ETIM due to inadequate evidences provided by China.

Post 9/11 attack saw a proactive change in the policy of Chinese government to tackle the Xinjiang conflict. The 9/11 attacks brought Islamic terrorism into highlight with increasing attempts by

Chinese government to link the Uyghur Muslims separatism with international jihadist groups. With increased interest of US in the region and China joining the “war on terror” campaign, post 9/11 period saw implementation of harsh security measures and heavy crack down on separatist forces in Xinjiang. China with the support of US and UN successfully placed ETIM group on the terrorist organizations list. The Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi while speaking in Turkey on the sidelines of the G20 summit (held in November 2015) called on the international community to form a “united front to combat terrorism” and that “cracking down on ETIM should become an important part of the international fight against terrorism.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> White Paper. (2015). Historical Witness to Ethnic Equality, Unity and Development in Xinjiang Information Office of the State Council, China. Retrieved from [https://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-09/24/c\\_134655252.htm](https://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-09/24/c_134655252.htm)

<sup>15</sup> After Paris, China seeks World’s Support in Xinjiang. (2015). Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/after-paris-china-seeks-worls-support-in-xinjiang/article7883787.ece>

Besides gathering the international support to resolve the terrorism issue which is intrinsically linked by the Chinese government to the Xinjiang ethnic conflict, the government has adopted various domestic soft-policies. In 2000 Chinese government launched its “Go West” strategy to boost economic development in its 12 provincial-level regions in the west (including Xinjiang). Despite this Xinjiang remains least developed region in China. Critics say that the strategy has facilitated in development of the east by exploiting the natural resources of the west. In order to counterbalance the demographic dominance of Uyghurs ethnic group, in-migration policy for ethnic Han Chinese in Xinjiang has been adopted by the Chinese government. Xinjiang is a multi-ethnic region with largest ethnic population of Uyghur Muslims comprising of almost 45% of the local population. Chinese government is trying to pursue unity through assimilation but the critics oppose to the policy which endangers the local ethnic groups in Xinjiang.

In recent past, especially after the OBOR initiative there has been again increase in use of hard and strict approach to deal with the conflict in Xinjiang particular after a surge in terrorist attacks in 2013 and 2014 in the country. President Xi Jinping made visit to Urumqi in Xinjiang in April 2014 sending a strong message of stability with emphasis on the need to “resolutely contain and attack hostile forces at home and abroad who are exploiting ethnic problems to engage in separatism, infiltration and sabotage”.<sup>16</sup>

### CHINA'S KASHMIR POLICY AND ROLE IN REGIONAL STABILITY

China’s position on Kashmir conflict between the two major powers in the region, viz. India and Pakistan is essential for the regional stability in South Asia. The security of the region has been imperiled on many occasions due to the dispute over Kashmir between the two South Asian nuclear powers. The prolonged conflict over Kashmir has deeply inflicted the region with terrorism which affects China as much as Pakistan and India. Also with the coming of China- Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) the importance in role of China in the Kashmir issue has become more relevant. CPEC has not altered China’s formal position on Kashmir but has increased its interest in the regional stability. The policy of China on Kashmir has been a difficult balancing act for China due to the sensitivity of the issue between Pakistan and India. We can see that the policy of China on

<sup>16</sup> In Xinjiang, Xi pushes vision of Uyghur Integration. (2014). Retrieved from <https://nytimes.com/blogs/sinosphere/2014/04/29/in-xinjiang-xi-pushes-vision-of-uyghur-integration/?referer=>



Kashmir has not been constant. It has changed from time to time depending on its relationship status with India on one hand and with Pakistan on the other. China was neutral to the Kashmir issue until 1962 Indo-Sino conflict. After the 1962 Indo-Sino border conflict, we see a marked shift in the policy towards Kashmir with China's increased proximity with Pakistan. Pakistan supported China in its claim for UN permanent seat while China changed its position on Kashmir. In 1964, China's Prime Minister Zhou Enlai visited Pakistan and declared support for the resolution of Kashmir dispute "in accordance with the wishes of people of Kashmir as pledged to them by India and Pakistan"<sup>17</sup>. But this stance changed in the early 1980s, with the coming of Deng Xiaoping. In the effort to normalize its relationship with India we see shift in China's policy to neutrality towards Kashmir. While in the post-cold war period, China maintained that Kashmir is a bilateral issue and should be resolved peacefully.<sup>18</sup> Even post 9/11 attacks, China maintained its policy of neutrality towards Kashmir. After 2001 Indian Parliament attack incident, Indo-Pak relationship dipped and China's Foreign Affairs declared its official position on the issue: "We have always maintained that the Kashmir issue is one between India and Pakistan left over by history."<sup>19</sup>

China's policy calls for "settlement through bilateral negotiations" but some incidents seem to suggest China's tilt to Pakistan over Kashmir issue. In 2009, China adopted separate visa policy for Indian administrated Kashmir but no policy was made regarding Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK). The same year China invited Mirwaiz Umer Farooq, the leader and president of All- Parties Hurriyat Conference. He was first time invited for official visit to China. Also, the CPEC passing through disputed area of POK indirectly suggests accepting Pakistan's sovereignty over Kashmir.<sup>20</sup>

Despite, we can say that China has given priority to the regional stability. During various crisis following 1999 Kargil conflict, 2001 Indian parliament attack, 2008 Mumbai terror attacks and 2016 Uri attacks China has played an important role as the third-party to deescalate tensions<sup>17</sup> Arif, K. (Ed.). (1980). *China-Pakistan Relations: 1947-1980*. Lahore: P.K.Vanguard Book Ltd. p. 47.

<sup>18</sup> Jain, R. (Ed.). (1989). *China-South Asian Relations 1949-88*. (Vol. 1). New Delhi, IN.: Radiant Publishers. p. 544.

<sup>19</sup> Foreign Ministry Spokesman's Press Conference. (2002). Retrieved from <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/30672.htm>

<sup>20</sup> Iqbal, Z. (2010). *Indo-China Diplomatic War over Kashmir*. Retrieved from <http://www.countercurrents.org/iqbal070110.htm> Access on 4-2-2014

between its nuclear-armed neighbours, viz. India and Pakistan. China has the potential to play greater role in stabilizing the region. This becomes more quintessential when ethno-religious unrest and secessionist outburst in neighbouring areas can have direct implications for China's region of Xinjiang and Tibet.<sup>21</sup> Beyond security issue, Kashmir conflict overlaps with other issues like ethnic conflict, cross border terrorism and human rights violations. China as emerging global power and its deep friendship with Pakistan can play an important role in mitigating the Kashmir conflict which has been the main bone of contention between India and Pakistan for over sixty years now, aptly termed by Stephen Cohen as "shooting over a century".<sup>22</sup>

## AFGHANISTAN AND CHINA

Afghanistan was one of the first countries to recognise the new People's Republic of China in 1950. The warm relationship between the two ensued in settlement of territorial dispute over Afghan-controlled Wakhan on the border between Badakhshan Province in Afghanistan and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in China. In November 1963 China and Afghanistan signed the Border

Agreement under which Wakhan corridor was recognized by the two sides as the border separating the territories of the two countries.

The Wakhan corridor has served as vital transit route between China and Afghanistan throughout the history. The corridor served as an important transit point for trade between China and Afghanistan in the Ancient Silk Road. Wakhan corridor has once again become important by navigating a new silk road under the OBOR initiative. The corridor connects China to the Central Asian region via Afghanistan. Besides the trade, Afghanistan has been of strategic interest for countries seeking influence in the Central Asian region. The nineteenth century "Great Game" of political confrontation between Britain and Russia over Afghanistan and neighbouring territories in Central Asia describes this well.<sup>23</sup>

In the twenty-first century, this AfPak-Central Asia corridor has become transit route for the separatists and terrorists especially in the Xinjiang region to join the ISIS and other groups in

<sup>21</sup> Li, Zhang. (2009). To Manage Conflict in South Asia: China's Stakes, Perceptions and Inputs. Institute for Security and Development Policy. Sweden.

<sup>22</sup> Cohen, Stephen Philip. (2016). Shooting for a Century: Finding answers to India-Pakistan Conundrum. India:Harper Collins Publishers.

<sup>23</sup> Urban, Mark. (1988). War in Afghanistan. London: Macmillan Press.

West Asia.<sup>24</sup> Post-9/11 attacks saw increase in regular army units by China near the borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>25</sup> This directly concerns China due to the direct connectivity of the corridor with its Xinjiang region. During the Taliban rule in Afghan, Al Qaeda set up training camps and supplied arms equipment to the terrorist and separatist groups from the Xinjiang. Chinese officials believe that the border areas between Pakistan and Afghanistan serve as the hideout for the members of ETIM.<sup>26</sup> The concern of the spill-over effect from Pakistan and Afghanistan bordering Xinjiang is cited by Zhang Li, a Chinese scholar on security issues.<sup>27</sup> Also the crisis in Middle-East is having serious implications for China by providing platform for training and experience to the terrorist and separatist elements in the region.

China has organized multilateral dialogues involving Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, India, United States and Russia under Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) to work on finding a solution to the Afghan crisis and achieve greater stability. On August 3, 2016 the top military commanders from China, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan met in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China to form "Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism in Counter Terrorism".<sup>28</sup>

China's policy towards Afghanistan can also be seen to be driven by the US's diminishing role in the region. "The killing of Osama bin Laden (in 2014) was a benchmark" in China's policy towards Afghanistan according to Hu Shisheng, the Director of the Institute of South and Southeast Asian and Oceania Studies at the China Institutes of Contemporary International relations. With change in US's policy to scale down American problem in Afghanistan, China is giving increasing importance to its bilateral ties with Afghanistan.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Shisheng, Hu. (2016). China now a major player in the AfPak-Central Asia Theater. Retrieved from <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/China-now-a-major-player-in-the-AfPak-Central-Asia-theatre-Chinese-scholar-Hu-Shisheng/article14593147.ece>

<sup>25</sup> Interview of Professor Zhang Li, Institute of South Asian Studies, Sichuan University. (June 21, 2017).

<sup>26</sup> Krishnan, Ananth. (2014). Call for China to be proactive in Afghanistan. Retrieved from

<http://www.hindu.com/todays-paper/tp-international/call-for-china-to-be-proactive-in-afghanistan/article5995078.ece>

<sup>27</sup> Interview of Professor Zhang Li, Institute of South Asian Studies, Sichuan University. (June 21, 2017).

<sup>28</sup> QCG was formed by US, China, Afghanistan and Pakistan with the aim to create an enabling environment for peace process between the Afghan government and the Afghan Taliban in order to restore the regional stability and prosperity.

<sup>29</sup> Shisheng, Hu. (2016). China now a major player in the AfPak-Central Asia Theater. Retrieved from <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/China-now-a-major-player-in-the-AfPak-Central-Asia-theatre-Chinese-scholar-Hu-Shisheng/article14593147.ece>

Thus, post-2014 period with NATO's withdrawal and increased attacks in its homeland has increased China's interest to play a broader role in Afghanistan beyond investing in projects. Zhao Minghao of Peking University, Centre for the International and Strategic Studies warns that "Afghanistan in the post-2014 era is posing another challenge for China's neighbourhood policy."<sup>30</sup> He suggests that in order to safeguard the stability in border areas and economic interests in Afghanistan, China should continue to play role on relevant issues.

### CHINA-PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR (CPEC)

China's president, Xi Jinping credited One Belt One Road (OBOR) project to bring "golden age" of globalization. No doubt OBOR initiative by China is the most ambitious project in the modern history. It will restructure and rebalance the economic and geo-political dynamics in the region with some scholars comparing it to the Marshall plan.<sup>31</sup> Similarly CPEC, a flagship project under OBOR can be seen as a vital project with far reaching implications for the South Asian region in the coming future. CPEC will play an important role in reshaping the geo-politics in the region. This project has for the first time given the window for China to actively participate in the South Asia region which it has been trying against India's will. With CPEC, China has become active participant of South Asia's political economy.<sup>32</sup>

When the project "Trans Pakistan road and rail corridor China" popularly called CPEC, was announced in the April 2015, it raised many eye-brows in India. India expressed its disapproval by remaining absent from the Belt and Road Forum hosted recently by China in Beijing (May 8- 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017). India claims that a part of the corridor runs through the disputed region of Kashmir, violating India's sovereignty. China has repeatedly tried to allay India's fears by emphasizing that CPEC has "no direct link" with the Kashmir issue. At a press conference in April 2017, Chinese Foreign Minister Wangyi said the CPEC is economic corridor with "no direct link with

<sup>30</sup> Ananth Krishnan. (2014). Call for China to be proactive in Afghanistan. Retrieved from <http://www.hindu.com/todays-paper/tp-international/call-for-china-to-be-proactive-in-afghanistan/article5995078.ece>

<sup>31</sup> Shen, Simon. (2016). How China's Belt and Road Compares to the Marshall Plan. Retrieved from <http://the diplomat.com/2016/02/how-chinas-belt-and-road-compares-to-the-marshall-plan/>

<sup>32</sup> Lama's comment. (2017, 06 June). Seminar on "Changing Geopolitics in South Asia" by Krishna Prasad Oli . Organized by Institute of South Asian Studies, Sichuan University, China.

political or border disputes."<sup>33</sup> India's another concern is about China's entry into South Asian region through this deep-economic penetration which challenges India's position in the region. Thirdly, China's access to Gwadar port increases its influence in the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean by adding another



pearl to its "string of pearls".<sup>34</sup> Amidst the controversies and criticisms, both the partners in the project viz., China and Pakistan hail it as win-win situation. For Pakistan it is a God sent blessing and popularly termed the "game-changer".<sup>35</sup> Pakistan couldn't have been more thrilled especially at the juncture of time when the country's economy was in a slump and the Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif needed to consolidate his newly acquired political power post-2013 elections.<sup>36</sup>

From China's perspective these initiatives will bring stability and prosperity for both the countries and the region as a whole. For China, the cooperation in security and economic areas are interdependent. It believes that the economic development will bring more internal stability in Pakistan. A stabilized and secure Pakistan would in turn ensure stability in the western region of China especially Xinjiang which is inflicted by terrorist activities.<sup>37</sup>

Implementation of CPEC doesn't come without challenges, the biggest being the security threat posed by terrorism. Since the launch of the project, efforts have been made by the separatist and terror groups to disrupt the plan by attacking the Chinese working in Pakistan. This is evident from the incidences like abduction of a Chinese tourist near Balochistan border in May 2014, burning of five fuel tankers for a Chinese company in March 2015, targeting a Chinese engineer

<sup>33</sup> Aneja, Atul. (2017). CPEC unrelated to Kashmir issue: China. Retrieved from <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/cpec-unrelated-to-kashmir-issue-china/article18113773.ece>

<sup>34</sup> "String of pearls" is a prominent popular geopolitical theory propounded by Booz Allen in 2005 in his "Energy Futures in Asia" published by US Consultancy Booz Allen Hamilton. It is regarding expansion of China's naval presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) by building maritime civilian infrastructure in friendly states in the region.

<sup>35</sup> Zaidi, S. Akbar. (2017). The New Game Changer in Pakistan. Retrieved from <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/chinapakistan-economic-corridor-the-new-game-changer-in-pakistan/article8656498.ece>

<sup>36</sup> PM performs groundbreaking of Sukkur-Multan motorway. (2016). Retrieved from <http://tribune.com.pk/story/1098275/pm-performs-groundbreaking-of-sukkur-multan-motorway/>

<sup>37</sup> Zhipin, Shi. (2016). The Benefits and Risks of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Carnegie-Tsinghua Centre for Global Policy.

near Karachi in May 2016 and similar other incidents.<sup>38</sup> CPEC, the 3000 kilometers economic corridor extends from the deepwater Gwadar port in Pakistan to Kashgar in China. Gwadar is located on the coast of Balochistan, a province of Pakistan wrecked by separatist insurgency while Kashgar is located in China's only Muslim majority, Turki-speaking Xinjiang region which has been affected by a separatist movement. CPEC is connecting corridor of the two hotbeds of separatist insurgency and terrorism in Asian region. This can be seen as a challenge to CPEC but on the flip side CPEC can be the challenge to the problem of separatism and terrorism faced by both China and Pakistan.

## CONCLUSION

"We should intensify counterterrorism efforts, address both the symptoms and root causes, and strive to eradicate poverty, backwardness and social injustice," were the words of President Xi Jinping in his speech at the opening ceremony of Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing in May, 2017.<sup>39</sup> With the Belt and Road initiative China has become more vulnerable to the threat of terrorism. As the threat of terrorism has increased in China post- OBOR initiative so has its effort to fight and counter terrorism at different levels, viz. domestic, regional and international.

China's efforts to counter-terrorism at domestic level can be seen from the National Security Law of People's Republic of China, 2015. It codifies a comprehensive set of national security policies of the government, many of which are related to fighting terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism. Under Article 28 "the State opposes all forms of terrorism and extremism".<sup>40</sup> Zheng Shuna with the Legislative Affairs Commission of the NPC Standing Committee talked about the importance of the law in the presence of the "ever-growing security challenges".<sup>41</sup> In August 2015, Ninth Amendment to the Criminal Law of the PRC was passed

<sup>38</sup> Ali, Imtiaz. (2016). Chinese Citizens Targeted in Karachi Blast. Retrieved from <http://www.dawn.com/news/1261600>

<sup>39</sup> Xi Jinping Attends 17<sup>th</sup> Meeting of SCO Council of Heads of State and Delivers Important Speech. (2017).

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<sup>40</sup> National Security Law. (2015). Retrieved from

<https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/2015nsl/?language=en><sup>41</sup> China adopts National Security Law. (2015). Retrieved from [https://m.chinadaily.com.cn/en/2015-07/01/content\\_21150783.htm](https://m.chinadaily.com.cn/en/2015-07/01/content_21150783.htm)

by the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee which got implemented on November 01, 2015. It is in part to accompany the Counterterrorism Law and sets legal definitions and punishments for many terrorism related offenses.

China in recent years has acted as a responsible power in maintaining global peace and made contributions in improving global governance to fight terrorism. China, contributes more troops to the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions than any other permanent member of the UN Security Council.<sup>42</sup> China also uses multilateral platforms such as Quadrilateral Coordination Group and the Shangri-la Dialogue to discuss security and defense cooperation with Asia-Pacific members and others. President Xi Jinping in his keynote speech at the UN Geneva headquarters in January this year (2017) pointed out that terrorism and refugee crises are closely linked to geopolitical conflicts thereby announcing 200 million RMB (\$29.42 million) of humanitarian assistance by Chinese government to help refugees in the Syrian crisis.<sup>43</sup>

China's stance on various other regional and global stability issues reflects its commitment towards global peace and prosperity. China advocated talks between the countries to address the maritime disputes in the South China Sea. It pushed for an early resumption of the stalled six-party talks to end the Korean Peninsula nuclear conundrum recently. China was also part of the historic Iranian nuclear deal framework reached in 2015 between Iran and permanent members of United Nations Security Council.

In context of South Asia, China has played a positive and balancing role in bringing stability and peace in the region. China is largest trading partner of many Asian countries and with OBOR initiatives like CPEC and BCIM, China is becoming integrated into the region. South Asia can look at it as an opportunity to move towards cooperation with China.

<sup>42</sup> Fung, Courtney J. (2016). China's Troop Contributions to U.N. Peacekeeping. Retrieved from <https://www.usip.org/publications/2016/07/chinas-troop-contributions-un-peacekeeping>

<sup>43</sup> Backgrounder: 10 key quotes from Xi's speech at UN Office at Geneva. (2017). Retrieved from [https://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-01/19/c\\_135994782.htm](https://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-01/19/c_135994782.htm)

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