

The Geopolitics of South Central Asia and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

By [Brig. Imran Malik](#)

Global Research, January 09, 2017

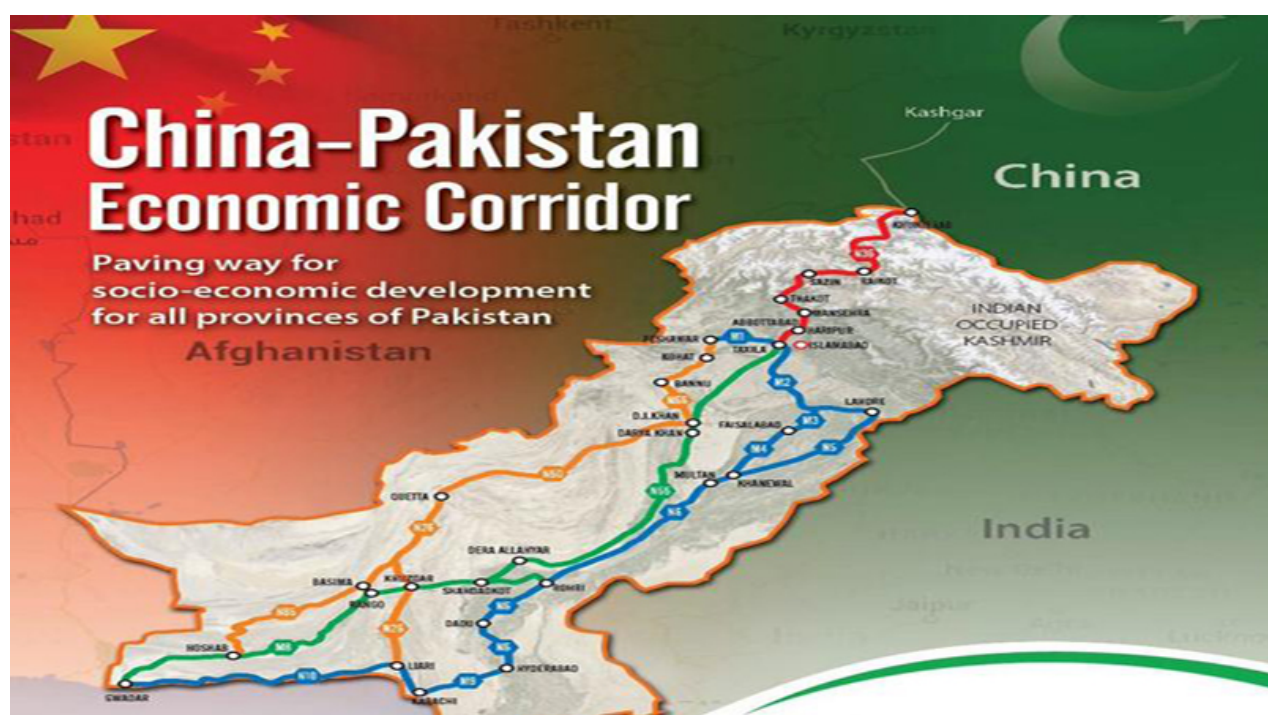
Region: [Asia, Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [Military](#) and [WMD](#)

Geopolitically speaking, the South Central Asian Region (SCAR) is all set to become one of the most happening places in the world in the very near future. It is already the focus of the major powers of the world, albeit for entirely different reasons.

The US has aligned India to itself in pursuit of its “pivot” to the Asia Pacific and its compulsive drive to manage the rise of China. Its ingress into India is direct, emphatic and in line with its stated policy objectives in the region. This portends deep economic, political and strategic connotations for the region. India has readily mustered to the US call and has ventured into the South China Sea imbroglio too, ostensibly to prove its credentials as a “strategic partner” of the US. The US “pivot” to the Asia Pacific and India’s role in it is however now subject to President-elect Trump’s review of it. The possible fate of the Trans Pacific Partnership may be an indicator of things to come!

China and Pakistan’s multidimensional interests continue to converge and the CPEC now epitomizes the continuously growing strength of their alliance. The Russians have started engaging Pakistan at the economic, political and strategic levels. Its historical interest in the perennial warm waters of the Arabian Sea is getting revived by the success of the CPEC. The CARs, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and even the EU amongst others have shown interest in getting involved with the CPEC.



The geo political, geostrategic and geo-economic dimensions of the Mekran Coast and the CPEC are thus acquiring truly gigantic and ominous proportions. The interplay of conflicting and competing interests of many countries around the CPEC makes for a fascinating new Great Game. The emergence of a multi polar regime with all its dynamics and consequences is all but certain.

There appear to be two time-based groupings that may emerge as a consequence of US policies in the region. Eventually, one might morph into the other to form an even larger, more potent entity to challenge it.

First, a possible alliance of China, Russia, Iran and Pakistan (CRIP) could evolve as a competing pole to the US-India combine in the region. The CRIP would make for a very potent regional grouping with a massive strategic, economic and political clout and an evolving sphere of influence.

Foraying forth from the Mekran Coast it would potentially dominate the oil and gas rich Greater Middle East Region (and the CARs by default) and also have an oversight on all Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) to and from the Hormuz Straits/Persian Gulf. It's strategic reach and oversight will cover the global East-West trade that transcends the Indian Ocean, Red Sea, Suez Canal and Mediterranean Sea and beyond. With the CPEC crystallizing China has literally outmaneuvered the US in the Asia Pacific. It also outflanks the menacing Malacca Straits with all its devastating implications. In one stroke it has literally become a two-ocean nation. Coupled with a potential draw down on the "pivot" to Asia Pacific by the Trump Administration it may even force groupings like ASEAN and its members to rethink their priorities at the regional and extra regional levels.



The other option is for the SCO (logo right) to emerge from its self induced slumber, become proactive and present itself as an alternative to the US at the global level. Till date it has had a political dimension only. It is now time for it to acquire an economic and military one too. It incorporates the CARs and the weight of the geo political grouping in itself will force Afghanistan to fall in line. The US presence in Afghanistan may yet turn out to be the spoiler in the game with India playing the side kick. Regardless, the SCO must move positively to bring the areas including the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea and the Greater Middle East Region into its sphere of influence.

The CRIP could ensure the trouble free grounding of the CPEC, stabilize the region and then

become the core around which an expanded, reinvigorated and multi dimensional SCO could evolve and grow. It has the potential of becoming the major competing pole to the US and its allies and creating some balance of power at the global level.

India's role however will have to be carefully examined. Will it be willing to get off the US band wagon? Or will it want to milk both cows simultaneously, as has been its wont? How will its relations with Russia and the US effect the formation of CRIP and its evolution into a stronger SCO? Or are we in for a *battle royale* in the SCAR or even Eurasia, with the major powers and their surrogates involved in a geopolitical game of gigantic proportions and ramifications? Russia and China could actually use the CPEC and the emerging groupings to wean India away from the US. This could become a reality if President-elect Trump follows an isolationist policy, withdraws west of the Atlantic and decides to concentrate on "Making America Great Again" – starting with continental US!

The CPEC is bound to become the massive centre of gravity around which the regional and even extra regional economies will thrive in the near future. It's very pronounced economic dimensions will have a direct bearing on the political and strategic relationships within and outside the region. Interstate relations will be cast anew. Inter and intra regional connectivity will evolve to ensure effective utilization of the many East-West and North-South trade corridors that will crisscross Pakistan. New alignments, new realities and new partnerships will emerge. Old ones will be recalibrated. Old festering issues will need to be resolved post haste. Increasing economic stakes in the CPEC will force belligerents to seek and maintain regional peace. Outstanding issues will have to be resolved justly and according to international covenants. It applies directly to India-Pakistan and Pakistan-Afghanistan issues. India is likely to be left out of this economic bonanza if it does not rethink its approach towards Pakistan and towards conflict resolution with it.

The author is a retired Brigadier and is currently on the faculty of NUST(NIPCONS).

E Mail: im.k846@gmail.com

Twitter: @imk846m

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