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## HARNESSING REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY POTENTIAL THROUGH BRI: A CASE STUDY ON CHINA, PAKISTAN AND TURKIYE CONNECTIVITY

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### ABSTRACT

*Connectivity and integration at the regional level are the transformative realities of the twenty-first century. Post Covid-19 pandemic world is grappling with economic crises compounded by conflicts. During these challenging times, the conventional wisdom continues to adjust to national priorities that are shaping against globalism with global firms becoming locally territorialized with multidimensional domino effects. The wave of globalization triggered the tendency of states towards regionalism. The governments are exploring solutions to avoid long-term damage to the economy and facilitate the recovery that can address challenges to livelihoods, food and energy crisis, poverty alleviation, provision of global public goods employment creation, and the global order. As a region in transition, confronted by a number of economic, political and social challenges we need to find solutions to these issues and a path of stability for the region. Regional economic integration is based on the foundation of connectivity. The countries of Asia and the Pacific Rim are giving special importance to this. This situation can change with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and CPEC which are beacons of hope for a prosperous region and beyond. Since its inception, Pakistan, China and Turkiye are key partners in the BRI and enjoy exceptionally fraternal ties. However, the connectivity aspects still need to be enhanced. The strategic locations of Pakistan and Turkiye, economic and demographic potential, geopolitical evolutions around the key regions of Asia and geo-economic transformation offer distinctive opportunities for a multilateral underpinning for three countries.*

**Keywords:** Pakistan-Turkiye Relations, Leadership, Regional Economic Integration, China Pakistan Economic Corridor project (CPEC), Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Free Trade Agreement (FTA), Cross-border Trade

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### INTRODUCTION

In the changing times and transforming world Asia remains at the epicenter. In these interesting but challenging times, new regional links and hubs are being established, however, China remains the center point and reason for relevance, according to Henry Kissinger (Kissinger, 2011). Based on the vision of connectivity BRI, introduced in 2013, is the largest initiative in history to enhance collaboration among the partner countries in Asia, Africa and Europe. The concept of BRI is based on the Silk Road Economic Belt, which is trans-continental land routes while the Maritime Silk Road comprises of sea

routes. BRI is the largest coordinated infrastructure plan in human history. BRI reduces the travel time by 12% resultantly also reduced travel costs. This project has increased global trade by 3 to 8% due to connectivity policies. This resultant improved integration could increase global real income between 0.7 and 2.9% and real income for BRI economies between 1.2 and 3.4% (World Bank, 2019). The first BRI summit in 2017 in Beijing steered a process of joint and collaborative process initiating an Asian-led system, representing two-thirds of the global population and half of its GDP. Parag Khanna illustrates this project the as most significant diplomatic project of the twentieth century encompassing an entire part of the planet (Khanna, 2019, pp. 1-2). The five pillars of BRI include policy coordination, People to people coordination, facility connectivity, financial integration, and unimpeded trade.

South Asian countries have realized the importance of connectivity thus embarking upon a number of regional and inter-regional connectivity initiatives, such as the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal Motor Vehicles Agreement (BBINMVA) and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) to boost trade integration. However, regional conflicts and bitter politics have traditionally impeded economic cooperation for the region which remains one of the least integrated and cooperative regions in the world with minimal movement of goods, individuals, and investments across countries. Since South Asia is the least integrated yet one of the largest growing regions of the world, a myriad of challenges requires robust and dynamic solutions to the challenges of this region. In BRI, this region holds fundamental significance because of China Pakistan Economic Corridor, being the flagship project connecting the Maritime Silk Road and the Belt; network of roads, railways and air connectivity in the continental landmass of Eurasia.

Turkiye is undoubtedly the gateway of Eurasia. From 2013 to 2020, Turkiye received 1.31% of total Chinese investment. Turkiye joined BRI in 2015 (Gurel & Kozluca, 2022, p. 2). China-Turkiye economic integration opens up diverse sub regional approaches for BRI in Middle East and North Africa and Central and Eastern Europe. In 2019, trade volume between China and Turkiye stood at USD 22 billion with USD 20 billion trade deficit on Turkish side (Gurel and Kozulca, 2022, p. 5). Turkiye's trade volume with EU was USD 143 billion during the same period while with BRIC nations it stood at USD 43 billion. These figures show a huge potential of regional economic integration. In the case of Pakistan, as a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has brought much-needed development in meeting infrastructure and energy requirements and has created the rural-urban synergy and regional integration through which Pakistan is today in a position to become regional transshipment and logistics hub. This paper identifies the mechanism through which the Belt-One Road initiative/ CPEC can evolve from a Trade Corridor to an Economic Corridor and transform eventually from this to a Knowledge Corridor. This study is aimed at analyzing the economic integration potential of Pakistan with Turkiye and China through BRI.

### **Challenges to globalization leading to regional economic integration**

The dawn of the twenty-first century is marked by the forces and tendencies of an international system towards regionalism and economic integration within the regions to extract and exchange system capabilities and mutual efficacies. The economic system of the world drove towards being more globally centric with trade liberalization tendencies after World War II. Since the bipolar structure of the Cold War was based on conflicting

ideologies of democratic capitalist structure and centralized communist economy, the dialectic economic structure created two economic cores surrounded by the respective beneficiary peripheries. However, the neoliberalist ideas of trade liberalization, and institutionalization to facilitate international trade dominated the international economy since 1970s and expedited economic integration. Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye's concept of complex interdependence had a significant impact to integrate the global economy. Their recognition of and trust in international financial institutions and non-state actors; primarily the MNCs (Multinational Companies) in case of global economic interdependence (Keohane & Nye, 1989, pp. 25-26) played a vital role in the development and propagation of democratic capitalist core and periphery. The demise of the Soviet Union gave enhanced impetus to the capitalist market economy augmenting the dependence on the capitalist core to an unprecedented level (Flint & Taylor, 2018, pp. 35-36). This is the point in history where globalization emerged as a developed and dominating phenomenon though the process have been initiated long ago.

Wallerstein's concept of the World System's Analysis critically analyzes the era of globalization where a single core based on the liberalized market economy is surrounded by developing semi-periphery and least developed large periphery. The system is based on highly complex economic interdependence facilitated by international financial institutions originated in the Bretton wood System and later harbored by the Washington Consensus. The units/states of peripheries extract the resources and benefits from this structure according to their system capabilities thus keeping most in periphery though highly dependent on core yet unable to extract needful from the structure. The global economic integration was highly facilitated by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) limiting the role of protectionist measures of states to territorialize trade. The evolution of GATT into the World Trade Organization in 1994 culminated in Globalization. The last decade of the twentieth century was marked by the economic phenomenon of globalization disseminating the impacts on the political, social and cultural fabric of nations (Flint & Taylor, 1989, pp. 17-18).

However, the financial crisis of 1997 initiating in Thailand augmented the tendencies of regional integration. The neo-functional theory describes the phenomenon of regional integration through various factors and believes that economic integration eventually leads to political integration. This tendency is invoked by the preeminence of economic and other related issues over the traditional national security considerations (Gilpin, 2001, p. 352). The slow outcomes of the GATT had encouraged Western Europe to rely on regional potential substantiated by geographical proximity and political and social convergences. The process had vehemently increased by the 1980s. This also triggered the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) right inside the core of globalization. By the start of the twenty-first century the transformation of the European Community into the European Union, based on joint politico-economic structure, joint currency, and institutionalized regional integration was the manifestation of receding dependence on the single global economic core. The next successful manifestation of regional integration can be described in ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations), which is the most enhanced level of the economic integration of Asian Pacific nations and a great example. The phenomenon of G20 and BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India and China) and SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) increasingly challenged the capacity of the single core during the first decade of this century to facilitate global economic structure augmenting the drive towards regional solutions. The emerging economic powers like Brazil, India, Russia, and

China, emboldened the semi-periphery of the structure thus creating various small cores though very less efficacious yet winning more confidence of regional states. The emergence of N11 economies provides more alternative solutions within the region (Gilpin, 2001: pp 3-24). The approach of liberal inter-governmental considers the economic factors as the leading forces of economic integration at regional level (Gilpin, 2001, p. 354).

Goldmann Satche's concepts of BRIC nations in 2003 and N11 in 2005 magnify the increasing significance of semi periphery. The BRIC economies (Brazil, India, Russia and China) were characterized on basis of growth rate, economic potential and population growth having the potential to surpass the US economy by 2050. The next group of 11 countries (Bangladesh, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Korea, Turkiye, Vietnam, Egypt, Indonesia, Mexico and Philippines) exhibit plausible potential of being major investment destinations (Al Onaizi & Gadhoom, 2017, p. 47).

### the BRICs, N-11 and the World



Source: [https://apiar.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/5\\_APJABSS\\_v3i2\\_Bus-44-53.pdf](https://apiar.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/5_APJABSS_v3i2_Bus-44-53.pdf)

Ronald Robertson's concept of glocalization is simultaneous amalgamation of *globalization* and *localization*. This concept recognizes the parallel tendencies of homogeneity and centralization and heterogeneity and decentralization. The concept shuns the strict polarization of the global and local levels rather it signifies the confluence of both. The local is fundamentally shaped by the global but the opposite is also true (Blatter, Britannica: Robertson, 1994, pp. 191-193). MNCs have been and are practicing glocalization in order to improvise to local markets. The globalization though decreased the space and time phenomenon to a remarkable extent yet the cultural, social and local

demands of markets require the global considerations to evolve and transform the trade commodities according to the target population.

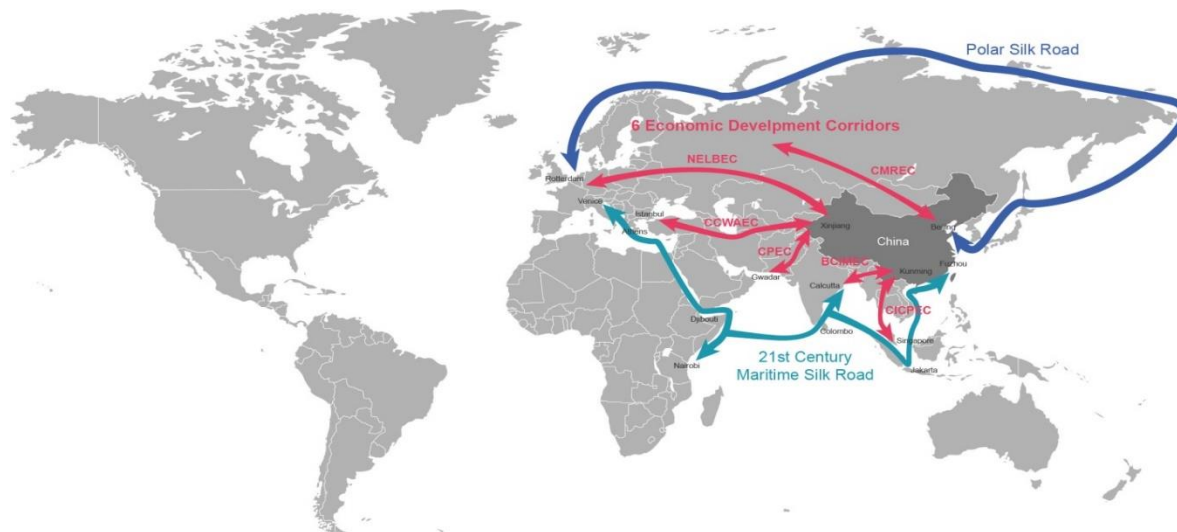
The economic, political, and social dynamics of Pakistan, China and Turkiye have broadly distinctive features but the transformation of the global economic trajectory unleashes a huge potential of collaboration among these countries. Geo-economics is the defining feature of the twenty-first century unequivocally. This determinant conjectures a multilateral collaborative roadmap which is also substantiated by geopolitics. Globalization has knitted the entire world in an unprecedented bond of economic, political, cultural, and informational relationships. But with the increasing impact of globalization the local communities, markets and national identities yearned for the preservation and dissemination of their uniqueness too.

The combination of 'global' and 'local' is aimed at the conservation of cultural heritage. The old Silk Road in history has successfully manifested the economic, social, political, cultural and knowledge exchange among primitive civilizations. BRI is actually the revival of the project based on the same vision. Pakistan and Turkiye have also enjoyed immense economic proximity under RCD (Regional Cooperation for Development later ECO, Economic Cooperation Organization of Pakistan, Iran and Turkiye) along with having deep-rooted religious and cultural affinity. The geo-economic reality of today's world has total potential to augment the tendency of cultural, strategic, and political convergences of these three nations.

### **Belt and Road Initiative: A New Global Reality**

Global trade is a millennia-old phenomenon, which has introduced the distinctive parts of the world to each other in ancient history. The Old Silk Road being a glaring example rejuvenates in the vision of China's Belt and Road Initiative. President Xi's vision of New Asian Security introduced the concept of reimagining Asia in which the order, stakes, security and structure are orchestrated by and beneficial to Asians. This is the concept of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security in Asia, comprising 67% of the global population and one-third of the global economy. China propagates this as a win-win solution to the problems of Asia with shared prosperity and development (Jinping, 2014). This concept and vision of security is the foundation rock of the vision of the BRI.

In March 2017, the BRI project was validated by the Resolution 2344 of the United Nations Security Council endorsing the concept of regional development and cooperation. The BRI comprises of the network of roads and railways and the Maritime Silk Road, which circumnavigates and crosses through entire Eurasia. The BRI project, which was named the most important coordinated infrastructural development project of the 21st century aims at expanding China's economic and political sphere around the world. By the end of 2020, this project has covered almost 168 members in which 138 are member states 30 are



international organizations. These countries encompass 69% of the global population and 51% of the GDP (McKenzie, 2017, p. 7).

Source: <https://www.beltroad-initiative.com/belt-and-road/>

The BRI is focused on five areas of cooperation: (1) increasing trade and investment among BRI countries (2) along the Silk Road a free trade zone (3) expanding infrastructure with improved financial cooperation (4) enhancing availability and access to natural resources (5) refurbishing transport infrastructure among BRI countries (Vision, 2015; Yilmaz, 2022, p. 1). Since 2010 to 2019 BRI program had been introduced 244 new projects every year on average of worth USD 2 billion. Since then until the end of 2021, a total of 3,224 projects of worth USD 3.94 trillion had been spawned. In 2019, the highest number of projects was introduced i-e, 433 but the Covid-19 pandemic slowed down the progress as the volume of projects in 2021 shrank to USD 13.6 billion. By the end of the year 2021, 144 countries and 32 international organizations had joined the seamless project of roads and railways. It is forecasted that this project will increase global GDP by USD 7.1 trillion per annum until 2040 thus increasing the volume of GDP by 4.2%. In the case of sectoral analysis, it is not surprising that logistics is at the top as China is developing continent-wide roads, railways, sea and air transport and logistics, which is, valued USD 819.52 billion with 97 projects (Refinitiv, 2022, p. 4). According to the estimates of the Asian Development Bank, the Asian infrastructure needs USD 26 trillion by 2020. However, China has pledged to achieve net zero emissions status by 2060 and it endeavors to transform its projects to be compatible with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Paris Agreement (Refinitiv, 2019). Under the main objective to improve connectivity between Europe and Asia, the BRI foster trade relations and interconnection between partner nation through a range of infrastructure projects connecting transport networks and markets and promoting the movement of goods, capital, energy, raw materials, and people (Barbora Družbacká, 2021).

### **China Pakistan Economic Corridor**

CPEC and BRI have similar history and future from their inception in 2013. In March 2015, the Chinese government published the “Vision and Action plan on jointly building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st century Maritime Silk Road”. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) was launched in 2013 as the flagship and leading project of the initiative. Since then. CPEC was given priority and precedence among the 6 other corridors of the

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) because of the strategic geographic location of Pakistan and its Gwadar Port (the latter is the converging point of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road) (CPEC Long term Plan, 2017, p. 5). China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), has brought much-needed development in meeting infrastructure and energy requirements and has created the rural-urban synergy and regional integration through which Pakistan is today in a position to become regional transshipment and logistics. It is helping Pakistan leverage its natural endowment and through industrial cooperation, Pakistan is venturing in new avenues to become an export-led economy. The Government of Pakistan considers the BRI and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as an opportunity for long-term development projects. It has the potential to serve as a multilateral corridor with various doors connecting China with Central Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe. The scope of CPEC has been expanded by the government so it becomes a “Gateway of Prosperity”, not only linking Pakistan and China, creating new job opportunities, poverty reduction, and development, and sustainable industrial growth through road and rail integration. Through this integration the three countries can export goods, raw material and locally manufactured goods to large consumer markets in Eurasia and much beyond towards a stable economy (CPEC Authority). CPEC was actually envisioned as a corridor with multiple connections spanning a long-term plan until 2030. The infusion of connectivity projects, energy and infrastructure projects, port, railways, and people-to-people contacts can transform it into a regional hub.

There are 22 projects of worth USD 28 billion US which are underway transforming the future of Pakistan. This is helping in developing, “a model of collaboration, partnership, connectivity, and shared prosperity and entering a new and distinct phase along the path of economic growth through Industrial and agriculture cooperation” (CPEC Authority, 2021). The Belt and Road Initiative mainly focuses on the connectivity of policies for unimpeded trade resultantly increasing trade up to 3 to 8 percent. Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are considered to be the engines of growth as they have a key role in social uplift through the strategies of boosting trade, expanding the base of exports, expediting urbanization and other social privileges. Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are a model around the world to enhance Foreign Direct Investment, employment, and economic reforms through trade policies. With no special economic zones (SEZs) operational in Pakistan, it remains to be seen if the government's plan of setting up prioritized SEZs with both Greenfield and Brownfield investment will also turn into another “land grabbing real estate venture.” There are nine SEZs in the framework of CPEC for the economic upgradation

### **Pakistan-China-Trade potential and actual trade:**

Pakistan China established overland trade ties in 1979 after the completion of the Karakoram Highway. But a very small portion of Pakistan’s trade with China is through this route. Pakistan has been looking at China from the perspective of security as a counter to the US and strategic support in rivalry with India. Pakistan China’s economic relations have increased immensely during the last decade after Free Trade Agreement signed in 2006 as China is the largest import partner of Pakistan and second largest export partner. After calculating the export value of Pakistan and the import value of China of the same goods which Pakistan exported to the world, we can surmise the potential of Pakistan’s exports in China. This identification delineates the ability of Pakistan to initiate the export of those specified goods to China.

Pakistan's trade ties with China enhanced manifold when both countries signed the first bilateral Free Trade Agreement in 2005. Both countries are members of the World Trade Organization. Currently, China is the biggest import partner of Pakistan and the second largest export destination in 2020 with USD 1.8 billion after the US which was USD 4.14 billion. The imports from China increased from USD 3 billion in 2006 to USD 12.4 billion (Uroos, 2021, p. 8). However, in the total exports of Pakistan, only 12% are to China. Phase II of this FTA operationalized in 2020 immediately eliminating 313 tariff lines of Pakistan's export interests giving it status at par with ASEAN. These eliminated tariff lines cover almost USD 8.7 billion of Pakistan's global exports USD 64 billion of Chinese global imports. In terms of the complete offer by China overall USD 19 billion of Pakistan's global exports will be covered and overall China's USD 1.6 trillion of global exports will be covered (Uroos, 2021, p. 6).

**BRI and Turkiye** China and Turkiye signed the MoU for joining the BRI during the G-20 summit in Antalya-Turkiye in November 2015. Turkiye and Pakistan are among the initial partners of the BRI and also attended both BRI forums in 2017 and 2019. Turkiye's land connection with the BRI consists of two parts: firstly, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars Corridor (BTK) is part of the Middle Corridor Project connecting Europe and Asia. The second part of the Middle Corridor was to be built from the eastern border (Georgia) to the western border (Bulgaria), connecting Kars and Edirne through a high-speed railway (Yilmaz, 2022, p. 6). The main aim of the agreement with China was to expand markets and create investment opportunities, as well as to provide a significant contribution to Turkiye's economic development. Turkey's participation in BRI expands cooperation between the two countries in many areas of infrastructure and funding projects, and deepens cooperation dialogues. Turkiye is one of the most strategically significant countries on the route.

Its distinctively geographic position elevates it to the status of a bridge and energy corridor between Asia and Europe. The cooperation between Turkiye and China is expected to make BRI's penetration into Europe rapid and smooth and make Turkiye the center of freight transport between Asia and Europe in terms of trade routes, and transportation. The most significant recent milestone of the trade relations was Turkey's freight train arriving Xi'an in December 2020 (Belt & Road News, 2021). Both countries have already developed economic and military relations which are mutually crucial. China intends at reviving the ancient "Silk Road" countries through cooperation with Turkiye. This cooperation also encompasses energy linkages increasing their trade and investment potential. This cooperation has the potential to shape their economic growth by improving infrastructure and investment connectivity.





**Source:** [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey\\_s-multilateral-transportation-policy.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-multilateral-transportation-policy.en.mfa)

In 2008, the idea of reviving “Silk Road” had surfaced with the agenda of developing and enhancing trade relations between China, Turkiye, Azerbaijan, Iran, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The negotiations continued until 2012 when Turkish Prime Minister visited China where both Prime Minister Erdogan and President Xi Jinping emphasized bilateral Sino-Turkish relations based on equality and mutual benefits. Through BRI Turkiye–China and Turkiye–Central Asia relations are developing fast, Turkiye aims to build more bilateral and multilateral relations with these countries. For China, Turkiye is gateway to the connectivity of Asia and Europe. With the joint vision both states have achieved important inroads into each others’ markets as more Turkish products are entering into China and more Chinese investment is coming in Turkiye.

### **Pakistan-Turkiye Relations Economic Potential**



Source: Generated on basis of data from International Trade Center, 2020



These graphs show the trade of top 50 and least 50 products of Pakistan with world and with Turkiye and in some products we can see that Turkiye's total import of that particular product is high in value than that of Pakistan's total Export and Export Potential in that product. So, here we assume that we can enhance our Export with Turkiye but make favorable policies.

The Turkiye-Pakistan Free Trade Agreement (also known as Pakistan-Turkiye FTA) is an under-negotiation free trade agreement between Pakistan and Turkiye. Pakistan has proposed a tariff reduction plan under the Turkiye-Pakistan Free Trade Agreement that calls about the immediate elimination of customs duties on 35% of tariff lines amid steady progress in talks for the early finalization of the deal. The plan has been shared with the Turkish authorities during the third round of FTA talks, held late last month in Ankara, according to officials of the Ministry of Commerce. It is a flexible plan that is subject to

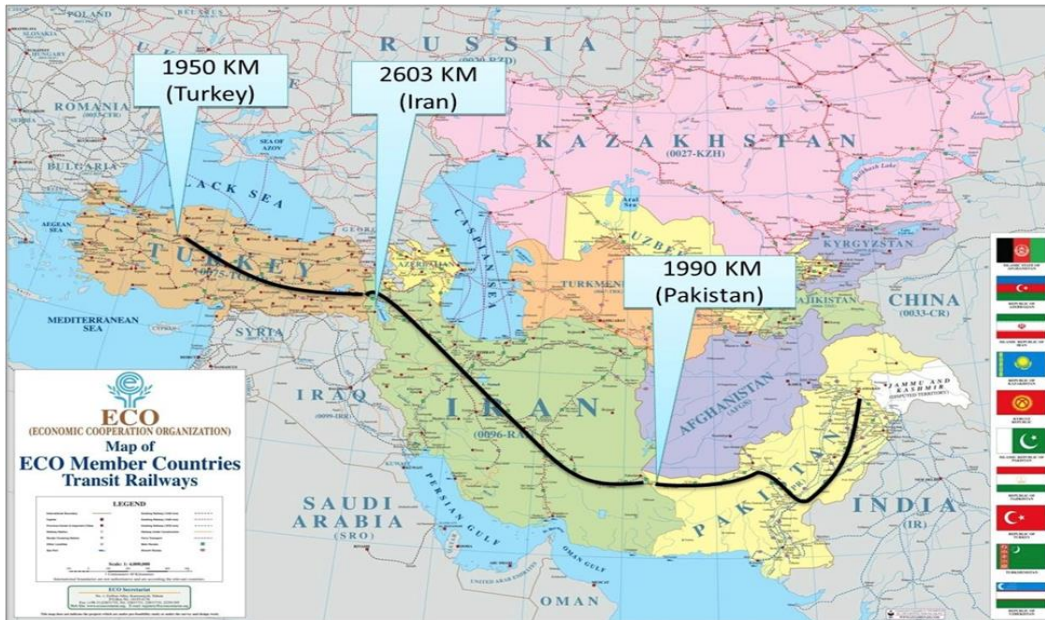
further negotiations that will take place by the end of August 2022 in Islamabad. The plan talks about 85% liberalization of trade. The current trade between the two countries stands at USD 600 million, but after signing the agreement, it has the potential to touch USD 2 billion mark.

### **Pakistan-Turkiye Connectivity:**

Pakistan is located at 73.06 degrees longitude and 33.72 degrees latitude. Turkiye is located at 32.85 degrees longitude and 39.93 degrees latitude. Pakistan and Turkiye are separated by 3614 kilometers and 692.95 meters in a straight line. The distance between Pakistan and Turkiye in miles is 2246.1 miles. Because this is a straight-line journey, the actual travel distance between Pakistan and Turkiye may differ depending on the curvature of the road. A direct land link via the Istanbul-Tehran-Islamabad (ITI) road corridor will soon be opened, which will be a significant step forward for bilateral trade between Pakistan and Turkiye. The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) expressed gratitude to the National Logistics Cell (NLC) for receiving TIR clearance to ship goods from Pakistan to Turkiye via the new ITI road corridor.

According to recent reports, the Chairman of the FPCCI's Pakistan-Turkish Joint Business Council praised the land's openness. He said that not only would this speed up delivery, but it would also save money on freight because shipping companies were charging five times as much. Furthermore, all joint meetings and other relevant forums have been told that this joint venture has been pending for a long period (Naveed, Ali, Iqbal & Sohail, 2020). It is expected that if this route proves successful, trade between Central Asian countries and Europe will become more accessible.

NLC will also revitalize the Istanbul-Tehran-Islamabad line in order to carry out the first high-value goods shipment from Pakistan to Turkiye. The NLC has already begun delivering important goods from Islamabad to Istanbul through Taftan, Zahidan, and Tehran on three trailers. Electronics, textile-related equipment, raw material, plastic, computers, household items, home appliances, dry fruit, non-perishable food items, furniture, and carpets were among the items delivered. The reopening of the ITI road corridor will enhance and strengthen Pakistan's regional connectivity with Iran and Turkiye. It is stated that, in comparison to a delivery time of roughly one month, a consignment from Pakistan to Turkiye or vice versa might be delivered in ten days via the land route. As a result, this service would benefit both exporters and importers.



**Probable Road Connectivity between Pakistan, China and Turkiye:**

HIGHWAYS	COUNTRIES	MAJOR CITIES	ROAD CONNECTED
ASIAN HIGHWAY 01	CHINA	Dandon-Beijing Beijing-Guangzhou Guangzhou-HH	G11 G1 G11-G72 G80-G15
	PAKISTAN	Lahore-Islamabad Islamabad-Peshawar Peshawar-Torkham	M2 M1 N5
ASIAN HIGHWAY 02	PAKISTAN	Lahore-Quetta Quetta-Taftan	N5 N65 N40
	IRAN	Taftan-Zahidan Zahedan-Hannada	84 71 56 48
ASIAN HIGHWAY 04	RUSSIA	Norosibirsk to Mangolia near Tashanta	P2-56
	CHINA	Takeshkan-Fuyun-Toksun- Kashgar-Tashkurgan	S320-G3-G314
	PAKISTAN	Khussab Pass-Hassan Absal-Islamabad-Lahore- Karachi	N35-M1-M2-N5
ASIAN HIGHWAY 07	RUSSIA	Yekaterinburg-Chelyabinsk	M5-A310
	KAZAKISTAN	Kostani-Burubaytal-Shu- Merke-Chal dover	M36,A3-58,P29,M39
	KYRGYZTAN	Chal dover-Kara-Balta-Osh	3M-01,3M-02,3M-11
	UZBEKISTAN	Osh-Tashkent-Khavast	A3-73,M34,A3-76
	TAJKISTAN	Khavast-Dushanbe-Panji- Poyon	P6-13,P6-01,P6-11
PAKISTAN	Chaman-Quetta-Karachi	N-25	

Source: Generated by the author based on the data from Asian Highway Database

**Strategic Communication between Pakistan, China and Turkiye:**

Strategic communication is “the concept of coordinated actions, messages, images, and other forms of signaling and involvement aimed at informing, influencing and convincing a selected audience to support national goals”. This concept creates a fundamental link

between national goals and systematic application of processes, strategies and communication to achieve the defined objectives and bring about positive change. Politically it implies to affect the communication strategy to achieve common goal with a perspective and conduct. Strategic communication is not media specific campaign rather it encompasses comprehensive political, diplomatic, economic and military engagement with the selected and targeted audience. In international relations it incorporates the communication of precise, prudent and pertinent information with the targeted sectors, factions of governments or entire executive structure of the state with which strategic engagement is to be carried out (Naveed, Farah & Hasni, 2021). The concept of strategic communication succeeds public diplomacy and replaces the negative connotation of propaganda. Diplomacy is a dynamic process and concept simultaneously that must be creative, innovative and inventive. It is worst when mere bargaining. The nature of diplomacy requires it to be inclusive negotiation. The internal political stability of a state is integral to fruitful diplomacy. Trade and economic relations have always been the most important part of foreign relations. Meaningful economic engagement smoothen the achievement of foreign policy objectives by dismantling various obstacles. In the twenty-first century, the exchange of knowledge and technology are essential to flourish economic diplomacy which in turn develops the entire diplomacy archetype of a state (Naveed & Batool, 2020). Economic security is the core issue to attain complete and comprehensive security of which operational execution depends on the devious achievements of its ends through a varied range of state and non-state resources. Economic diplomacy is different from trade diplomacy as the latter just deals with commercial activities. The former's foundation is a long-term procedure committed to negotiating an unbroken communication channel. It involves a wide range of stakeholders' management and engages a multitude of levels of cooperation. In the execution of this, the principal or end is 'economic security' and agent or mean is economic diplomacy.

The current geo-economic challenges put up novel opportunities for economic integration which Pakistan, China and Turkiye can capitalize upon. The economic linkages and integration require enhanced people-to-people communication and direct business-to-business linkages. In order to cater to this requirement, a trilateral strategic communication management platform is integral which should not only create rather propagate a joint narrative based on converged interests. Strategic communication management augments the potential of effective business-to-business dealing enabling the overall environment to facilitate the purpose of integration.

### **BRI-A long-term digital opportunity for Pakistan and Turkiye**

The concept of BRI is embedded in the historical development of trade and connectivity between the Orient and Occident. The connectivity was not confined to the traditional trade and exchange of commodities rather it encompassed the dissemination of ideas, inventions, new technology and cultures. Old Silk Road's rejuvenation through BRI is humungous owing to the globalized world though it can usher into globalization 2.0. The middle-income countries, developing nations and potential markets of Asia have a huge interest and multilateral stake in the project which is much more than the trade of commodities. Rather these states are eyeing technological advancement, infrastructure upgradation and digitization at a rapid pace enabling them to compete for the global threshold of scientific and technological development implicating economies and security at an unprecedented scale.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is today the lynchpin of economic development and integration. Affordable fiber optic cable networks are an integral part of all corridors of BRI. The important cable systems for Pakistan under BRI are SEA-ME-WE 5 and Silk Road Gateway system 1. Pakistan also upgraded Transworld submarine Cable (TW1). (UNESCAP, 2017: pp. 25-26).

China is already leading in 5G, artificial intelligence, block chain, quantum technology publications and patents (Zawya, 2017). China is expected to reach 6G by 2030 which will be 1000 times speedier than 5G. China has launched the biggest block chain ecosystem of the world connected to over 100 city nodes in the world. It is also the first country to launch widespread pilots of the digital fiat currency-Digital Currency Electronic Payment. Also China has world-leading fiber optic industry (Zawya, 2017). These digital breakthroughs enable China to bond strongly with BRI countries. The Asian developing nations are enormously in need of digital development in a world where there is increasing cyber insecurity with digital sophistication. China should enhance its digital connectivity and technological sharing with BRI countries. Pakistan and Turkiye provide ample potential ecosystem for the absorption of technological advancement and digital economies.

### **Conclusion**

Realizing the benefits from BRI will require complementary actions on the parts of all participants in the BRI including Pakistan, China and Turkiye are the most active members of the initiative. It will also require managing the potential threats including false narratives, which will entail, multilateral cooperation and ease of doing trade, cross-border infrastructure development and improved transparency. This will require a robust development strategy duly institutionalized with a pragmatic approach to studying the project's intended and unintended consequences and long-term impact on the environment and economy. The governments will be required to tailor policies in support of developing the "*Knowledge Economy*" that can support sustainable long-term economic growth through connectivity under the umbrella of BRI. In this regards several initiatives have been undertaken to leverage the existing endowment for the creation, diffusion, and utilization of knowledge through an enabling environment and a policy framework that provides incentives that encourage the use and allocation of existing and new knowledge efficiently will help to foster policy change. This has to be backed up with a well-conceived, fact-based, and sustained strategic communication campaign, to appraise the stakeholders of the benefits of this great initiative with a win-win outcome. Now connectivity requires new forms of Information and Communication Technology to enhance trade collaboration and economic integration. Similarly, the enduring problem that regional integration projects face today is their structures, which remain rigid amid change. The recommended integration also emphasizes the human element, enabling people to work well together through People to people contact. There is also a requirement to understand the crucial role of cultural and work style diversity and encourage a mindset of collaboration and accountability. Following recommendations are proffered in this regard.

### **Recommendation:**

**In order to accrue desired trade and connectivity outcomes from BRI, the following recommendations are proffered:**

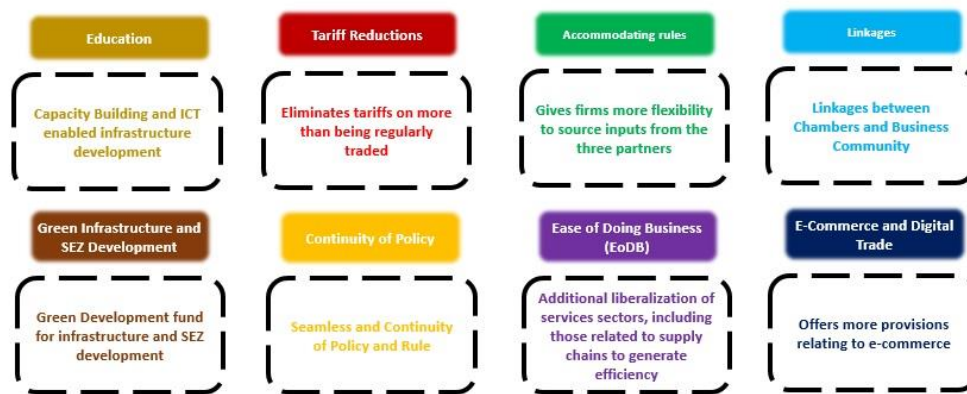
- a. Effective implementation of BRI must depend on cooperation, policy coordination, and information sharing through uniform services sharing among endpoints. Cross-sectoral coordination is immensely required among partner countries to develop synergies.
- b. Custom cooperation is essential for trade facilitation encompassing the concept of a “Single Window” allowing international traders to complete all processes at a single location. Moreover, new modes of trade and e-commerce should be sought after.
- c. Facilitation measures be introduced to eliminate investment barriers according to openness and mutual benefit principles.
- d. A joint "Green Fund" should be established to encourage trade and business activities related to Green infrastructure and clean and green energy as well as create opportunities for developed counterparts to invest in green and circular economy in the regional developing nations. This shall also cater for poverty alleviation, job creation while moving strides towards green, sustainable development in the region.
- e. The regional countries enjoy natural endowments. However, fall behind in terms of capacity building in order to leverage from their natural endowments. For this purpose, a series of joint capacity-building exercises shall be conducted with focus on the cross-borders training and learning from each others’ experiences.
- f. The regional countries not only need hardscape regional connectivity but a people-to-people connectivity. For this purpose, a cultural exchange program shall be established via which students, young professionals and academia shall join hands from each country. This way exchange of cultures, knowledge and people across borders would also help in better understanding of the masses towards their counterparts across the borders. This would also help to fight extremism and terrorism which is a real menace for the real prosperity of the region.
- g. The regional countries enjoy natural endowments with high-standing peaks, glaciers, grazing pastures to clean lakes, rivers and oceans. This provides immense opportunities for regional countries to open their borders for Eco-Tourism. This can create a domino effect on the model of the European Union boosting other activities along the way like trade, cultural exchanges and knowledge. These countries also share a mutual yet unique history and this can also pave way for religious Tourism.
- h. This era is an age of modernization and Digitization and with the evolution of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), physical borders are no longer necessary. 4IR can be used to have a common Regional strategy and build a narrative to promote regional peace and prosperity. This can also help in ease of Doing Business across borders and promote regional trade and exchange of people, skills and knowledge.

i. A hierarchical model is recommended to facilitate efficient connectivity under BRI among Pakistan, China and Turkiye and other partners, rather than a flat model. Thus, core nodes must be carefully selected first before the topological design stage.

j. Seamless network integration is highly recommended for open and standardized Information and Communication and Technology. Broadband and High-speed connectivity among all BRI countries should be developed through Broadband Internet Connectivity.

## Pakistan-China-Turkey Comprehensive Partnership

### Key Development Features



k. High-level coordination among relevant stakeholders in priority sectors especially seamless trade and connectivity should be regularly organized.

l. Removal of communication barriers and no restrictions on R& D and knowledge sharing to facilitate people, organizations and countries to freely access information.

m. Ports and other facilities along the corridors should be converged to increase trade and investments.

n. Friendship SEZs may be developed in bordering areas to promote joint trade and exports



- o. Joint Working Groups and monitoring mechanisms be developed with meetings, seminars and conferences held bi-annually.
- p. Lastly, future research should focus on a larger framework to include Afghanistan, CARs and Russia, etc. This may help bring a comprehensive picture of the change in the functioning of international trade across all partner countries.

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