



## CPEC's Extension to Afghanistan

**For Prelims:** [CPEC Extension to Afghanistan](#), [Gwadar Port](#), [BRI](#), [Indian Ocean](#), [Central Asia](#), [Iran's Chabahar port](#).

**For Mains:** CPEC's Extension to Afghanistan and its Implications for India.

### Why in News?

Recently, China and Pakistan have held the 4<sup>th</sup> round of the **Foreign Minister-level Pakistan-China Strategic Dialogue** Islamabad, Pakistan, where they agreed to extend the [China-Pakistan Economic Corridor \(CPEC\)](#) into Afghanistan.

- Alongside, the 5<sup>th</sup> **China-Pakistan-Afghanistan Trilateral Foreign Ministers Dialogue** was also held where they agreed to combat terrorism and enhance cooperation in different economic fields.
- In 2021, China proposed construction of the **Peshawar-Kabul motorway** as an extension of CPEC in Afghanistan.

### What is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor?

- CPEC is a **3,000-km long route of infrastructure projects connecting China's northwest Xinjiang Uygur** Autonomous Region and the [Gwadar Port](#) in the western province of Balochistan in Pakistan.
- It is a bilateral project between Pakistan and China, intended to **promote connectivity across Pakistan with a network of highways, railways, and pipelines** accompanied by energy, industrial, and other infrastructure development projects.
- It will pave the way for **China to access the Middle East and Africa from Gwadar Port**, enabling China to access the [Indian Ocean](#) and in return China will support development projects in Pakistan to overcome the latter's energy crises and stabilizing its faltering economy.
- CPEC is a part of the [Belt and Road Initiative](#).
  - The BRI, launched in 2013, aims to link **Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Gulf region, Africa and Europe** with a network of land and sea routes.

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## Why does Afghanistan seem Significant for Both Pakistan and China?

- **Access to Rare Minerals:** Afghanistan has a **large amount of Rare Earth Minerals (1.4 million tonnes)** that are important for **making electronics and military equipment**. However, since the Taliban took over, the country has been **facing economic difficulties because foreign aid** has been withdrawn.
- **Energy and Other Resources:** Afghan participation in CPEC will allow **Islamabad and Beijing to harness energy and other resources**, as well as gain access to Afghanistan's **vast wealth of untapped natural resources**, ranging from copper, gold, uranium, and lithium, which are critical components for a variety of advanced electronic technologies and high-tech missile guidance systems.

## What can be the Implications for India on CPEC's Extension to Afghanistan?

- **Reduces India's Scope in Central Asia:**
  - Afghanistan's involvement in CPEC can reduce the scope of **India's investment in Iran's Chabahar port**. India intends to project the port as a **gateway to lucrative prospects for commerce between India, Iran, and Afghanistan** with Central Asian countries.
  - Pakistan is also hoping to undermine India's influence in Central Asia and CPEC might provide the perfect platform for this.
- **China can take Lead from India in Development Aid:**
  - In terms of development aid, **India has been the largest regional lender to Afghanistan**, investing more than USD 3 Billion for projects such as
    - Road construction, power plant construction, dam construction, parliament building, rural development, education, infrastructure, and much more.
  - With the extension of CPEC, China is projected to **displace India and take the lead in Afghanistan's development sphere**.
- **Security Concerns:**
  - China may control Afghanistan's **Bagram air force base**.
  - The Bagram airport is the biggest airport and technically well-equipped as the Americans kept it for their use till the end, instead of the Kabul airport.
- **Undermining India's Sovereignty:**
  - The CPEC passes through PoK, which **undermines India's sovereignty**. India has repeatedly raised concerns over this issue as a violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity.
  - By extending the CPEC to Afghanistan, China and Pakistan are further consolidating their economic and strategic ties, which India sees as a **threat to its security and regional interests**.

▪ **Terrorism and Strategic Concerns:**

- If Afghanistan becomes a part of the CPEC, it will boost economic development but **may also give Pakistan a strategic advantage in the region**, which could be a threat to India's interests.
- It may lead to an **increase in terrorism from Pakistan against India**, as it seeks to gain the upper hand in the region.

▪ **Exploitation of Rare Earth Minerals:**

- With the extension of CPEC, China is also looking to exploit Afghanistan's rich minerals and **highly lucrative rare-earth mines**.
- Rare-earth metals, which are key components for a host of advanced electronic technologies and hi-tech missile guidance systems.

## Way Forward

- CPEC has the potential to **alter the power balance in the region in China's favour**, much to India's displeasure. If not dealt with properly, this might **change the strategic dynamics of the region and the credibility of India's claim** over PoK in the long run.
- India should strengthen **its economic and trade ties with Afghanistan** by investing in the country's infrastructure and development. This will not only improve the economic situation in Afghanistan but also help **India in countering the influence of CPEC**.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

### Prelims

**Q. Belt and Road Initiative' is sometimes mentioned in the news in the context of the affairs of (2016)**

- (a) African Union
- (b) Brazil
- (c) European Union
- (d) China

**Ans: (d)**

**Exp:**

- Proposed in 2013, the 'Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)' is an ambitious programme of China for connecting Asia with Africa and Europe via land and maritime networks.
- The BRI comprises a Silk Road Economic Belt – **a trans-continental passage that links China with Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Russia and Europe by land - and a 21st century Maritime Silk Road**, a sea route connecting China's coastal regions with Southeast and South Asia, South Pacific, Middle East and Eastern Africa, all the way to Europe. **Therefore, option (d) is the correct answer.**

### Mains

**Q1.** The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is viewed as a cardinal subset of China's larger 'One Belt One Road' initiative. Give a brief description of CPEC and enumerate the reasons why India has distanced itself from the same. **(2018)**

**Q2.** China and Pakistan have entered into an agreement for the development of an economic corridor. What threat does this pose for India's security? Critically examine. **(2014)**

**Q3.** "China is using its economic relations and positive trade surplus as tools to develop potential military power status in Asia". In the light of this statement, discuss its impact on India as her neighbour. **(2017)**

**Source: IE**

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