

The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Is the Perfect Opportunity for Pakistan to Pivot to Africa

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All Great Powers, including most recently even Russia and India, are increasingly expanding their influence in Africa as they seek to take part in the continent's expected growth across this century, and CPEC provides the perfect opportunity for Pakistan to pivot there too so long as the country's decision makers are aware of its many opportunities and successfully craft a comprehensive strategy for building mutually beneficial partnerships with those states.

Conceptual Basis

African countries don't normally come to mind when discussing Pakistan's future partners, but they should because CPEC is providing it with the opportunity to finally build mutually beneficial partnerships there. The flagship project of China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) global vision of New Silk Road connectivity will eventually serve to facilitate Chinese-African trade across Pakistani territory, which has in turn made Pakistan and China's African partners interested in expanding relations with one another. Islamabad already took the step to commence Regional Maritime Security Patrols throughout the Red Sea-Gulf of Aden region across which CPEC-transiting African-Chinese trade will traverse, so the next step is to leverage the military relationships that Pakistan's building in this strategic maritime space to create economic opportunities for its businesses.

Most Likely Partners

In the Horn of Africa, Pakistan should follow what Russia's doing in Eritrea by building a logistics centre in that country, Sudan, Djibouti, or Somalia as a stepping stone for eventually linking up with regional giant Ethiopia, which is the continent's second-most-populous state and its fastest-growing economy. Moreover, the fast-moving political changes there under its new Prime Minister make it a promising country for any Great Power to deepen its engagement with, which might even be slightly easier for Pakistan than others because of Addis Ababa's very close working relations with their mutual partners in Beijing. Moving southward, other potential countries that Pakistan should endeavour to form strategic partnerships with are Kenya and South Africa, which are the best-performing ones in their given regions and also on excellent terms with China.

Economic Opportunities

Signing deals and announcing partnerships are only symbolic actions unless they're backed up by substance, which is why Pakistan should promote its domestic agricultural (including fertilizer) and textile products, among others, as suitable for the growing African

marketplaces. The whole point of pivoting to Africa through CPEC isn't just for the sake of Great Power prestige, but to deliver something tangible to Pakistanis at home by showing them that CPEC is more than just a "highway" across their country for China's international trade with West Asian, European, and African countries. The rapidly growing economies in Africa provide limitless opportunities for commercial engagement with Pakistan so long as decision makers, entrepreneurs, and thought leaders are motivated to pursue them, which is why a change in thinking is urgently needed.

Military Dimensions

Expanding upon the concept of CPEC facilitating Pakistan's "Pivot to Africa", the military component of its partnership "scouting" via the Regional Maritime Security Patrols could also spread to the realm of bilateral training deals such as the sort that Russia and Pakistan recently reached with one another, albeit with Pakistan providing the training to its African partners under this arrangement. The Pakistani Armed Forces have proven their world-class capabilities in defeating terrorism, and sharing their experiences with African colleagues could be very useful to many of them as they try to thwart the threat that terrorists in their own countries pose. In addition, Pakistanis have decades of experience participating in African peacekeeping missions, which can help them create custom security solutions for the African partners that they train.

Cross-Continental Engagement

These possible partnerships don't have to be limited to the coastal states of the Afro-Bengal Ocean (referred to as the "Indian Ocean" in conventional parlance) most immediately connected to CPEC's Sea Lines Of Communication (SLOC), but should also include states along Africa's Atlantic coast such as its most populous country of Nigeria. Even with the Silk Roads not yet linking them together, Pakistan could pioneer partnerships with Nigeria and the other Muslim-majority countries of the West Africa region by approaching them first and foremost from the security perspective and then eventually developing those incipient ties into an economic relationship. In other words, Pakistan's strategy towards West Africa is the reverse of what it should attempt in East Africa, where economic relations are prioritized, and military ones follow.

Integrational Trends

Pakistan should also bear in mind that Africa is increasingly integrating its economic and security potential, the first-mentioned through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCTFA) and the latter via the African Union's peacekeeping missions, but that some individual countries will still fulfill leading functions in each of these two categories. That's why Islamabad needs to plan its strategy in advance as opposed to "winging it" in order to make the best of its efforts. As a suggestion, the economic-military model that was previously described could be applied to several pairs of regional leaders and their neighbors in order to lay the basis for a comprehensive continental policy that eventually encompasses most of Africa and opens up a multitude of opportunities.

The Paired Approach

In any given order and in the framework of the regional leaders that should be focused on followed by their most attractive neighbours for Pakistan, these African countries are:

Ethiopia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Sudan

Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Somalia

South Africa, Mozambique, Madagascar, Botswana, Zimbabwe

Angola

Nigeria

Algeria

Egypt, Libya

As can be seen from the above, Pakistan's "Pivot to Africa" truly has the potential build a multitude of partnerships all across the continent, each of which could be facilitated in their own way by CPEC.

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