

## Gwadar Port: Historical, Geographical and Strategic Perspectives

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### ABSTRACT

The relationship between Iran and Pakistan has always been vital for both countries as well as for the regional stability. During last seven decades, the two sides have majorly enjoyed cordial ties at cultural, diplomatic, and economic fronts. However, the establishment and development of Gwadar Port in Pakistan and Chabahar Port in Iran has raised some serious questions for both sides. On one hand, China is investing heavily in construction of Gwadar Port, while India is the major investor in Iranian Port. Utilizing the theoretical perspective of geostrategic, this research has also looked into different economic, security, military, trade and regional integration aspects of these two ports. Furthermore, the thesis has focused on the implications of these ports on the bilateral ties of both the states. The matter of congeniality has also been discussed in this research whether these ports are competitors or potential tool for cooperation between Pakistan and Iran. The research work has analyzed the policies of both countries as well as India and China to understand their major motives behind the development of these projects. Furthermore, the issue of regional integration through these facilities has also been discussed in detail.

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### Introduction:

Located in Pakistan's Baluchistan province, Gwadar Port is one of the deepest sea ports in the world. The port is a vital aspect of ongoing mega-project China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and considered the main link between Maritime Silk Road Projects and Belt and Road Initiative under the CPEC. Geographically, the port is 170 kilometers in east to Iran's Chabahar Port in Sistan and Baluchistan province and 120 kilometers in southwest of Pakistani Baluchistan's Turbat city. The strategic importance and location of Gwadar port was first noticed in 1954, when the region was still under the rule of Omani rule. Pakistan expressed her interest in the area after conducting a survey of its coastline with the assistance of United States Geological Survey (USGS). After the survey, USGS declared the region suitable for a sea port, hence Islamabad started negotiations with Oman (Gwadar Info, 2019; Saran, 2015).

After four-year-long dialogue, Pakistan purchased the Gwadar enclave at a cost of 3 million dollars from Oman in 1958. The port officially became part of Pakistan on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1958



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after remaining a part of Oman for around 200 years. In 1992, a small part of Gwadar was developed and formal proposal for development of the whole port was presented in 1993 (Dawn, April 14, 2008). The federal government approved the development and construction of this deep-sea port but project remained incomplete mainly due to shortage of funds. In 1997, a task-force appointed by the federal government declared Gwadar port as one of the focus areas for development, but the proposal and the project once again could not become a reality due to international economic sanctions on Pakistan after 1998 nuclear tests. The construction of first phase of the port started in 2002, after former military ruler General Pervaiz Musharraf signed the construction agreement during 2001 visit of Chinese Premier Zhi Rohnij. After the completion of the phase-I in 2007, the first commercial cargo vessel docked at the deep-sea port of Gwadar. The 'Pos Glory' reached the port with 70,000 Metric ton of wheat in 2008. (Dawn, April 14, 2008).

After launch of CPEC, it was announced in 2015 that the port will be further developed under the mega project with the cost of 1.62 billion dollars. The major purpose of development of the port was to link western China and northern Pakistan with Indian Ocean through this deep-sea port. It was also announced that Gwadar will also be the site of a floating liquefied natural gas facility which will be constructed under the larger plan of Gwadar-Nawab shah plan of Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline. The project was set to be complete at a cost of \$2.5 billion. Furthermore, the construction of Special Economic Zone (SEZ) of the port was started in 2016 on a 2200-acre land right next to the Gwadar port. In 2015, Government of Pakistan officially leased the port to China till 2059 (Walsh, 2013; China Daily, December 11, 2014).

On November 14, 2016, the deep-sea port became officially operational when former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif inaugurated it. The first convoy was observed by former military chief General Raheel Sharif. In 2020, to help the neighbouring country under COVID-19 pandemic, Pakistan used the port for Afghan transit trade to send food, health and basic essentials to the land-locked country (The Express Tribune, April 20, 2020).

### **Geography and Location:**

The deep-sea port is located at the helm of Gwadar city on the shores of Arabian Sea, in Pakistan's Baluchistan province. The city is situated 533 kilometers away from country's economic hub Karachi and is around 120 kilometers away from the border of Iran. Furthermore, the port is very near to vital oil trade routes and lanes in Persian Gulf and 380 kilometers away from state of Oman. The surrounding regions of the port are home of almost two-third of proven oil-reserves in the world. Gwadar is also a door and nearest warm-water port to the land-locked but natural resources-rich Afghanistan and more importantly Central Asian States (IUCN Pakistan, 2007; Baluch, 2011).

The deep-sea port is situated on a rocky landscape of the Arabian Sea which shapes a natural hammerhead-shaped peninsula extended from the coastline of Pakistan. This peninsula, also known as Gwadar promontory is a rocky area with altitude of 560 feet and 2.5 miles width. This area is linked to shores of Pakistan with a 12-kilometer long sandy and narrow neck of land. This isthmus separates Eastern Demi Zirr harbor from Padi Zirr Bay in the West (Yousaf 2012, Sherazi, 2006).

### **Operational Control of Gwadar Port:**

The port is currently operated by government-owned Gwadar Port Authority with collaboration of Chinese-government-run company, China Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC). Before the current administration, the port was handled by Singapore Port Authority (Ahmed, 2013; Asia Times, September 5, 2012).

After completion of Phase-I, Pakistan government signed a 40-year long agreement with Port of Singapore Authority for construction and development of the port. The SPA was also contracted to complete the development of 584-acre area, adjacent to the port, for Special Economic Zone. During the bidding, SPA emerged as highest bidder after its main rival, an International logistic company, DP World extracted its bid from the auction. Under the contract with Islamabad,

Singapore Authority was given wide-range of exemptions from taxes, including corporate tax for two decades (Walsh, 2016). The authority was also provided concessions on duty-free imports, acquisition of land of Economic Zone, duty-free shipping and bunker oil for next four decades and import of material for construction of the port. Furthermore, the SPA was also exempted from Baluchistan's provincial and district levy taxes. Under the agreement, Pakistan was scheduled to get a set 9 percent share of the revenue generated from maritime and cargo service, along with the 15 percent of revenue earned from SEZ.

In a report in 2011, American-based magazine Wall Street Journal reported that the deep-sea port of Gwadar is being underused as compared to its commercial potential and Islamabad has asked Beijing to take over the charge of operations at the port. Meanwhile, SPA also offered to withdraw from the contract and sell its share to Chinese firm after Pakistan Navy failed to provide land for planned Free Trade Zone. Moreover, SPA also failed to invest promised \$550 million into the development of the port, reportedly due to unstable security situation in Pakistan and especially in Baluchistan between years of 2007 and 2013. Islamabad also could not invest in required work for infrastructure development. Under a public petition, the Supreme Court of Pakistan also issued a stay against the allotment of land by the government to Singapore Port Authority (Wright, Page, 2011).

After these developments, Government of Pakistan awarded the contract to China Overseas Port Holding Company on February 18, 2013. Under the new contract, the port would be a part of Pakistan, but COPHC will run the operations of the facility. The ceremony of signing of the contract was held in Islamabad attended by then President of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari and Chinese envoy to Islamabad, Liu Jian along with government officials and several members of parliament. The ceremony also marked the handing over of the tax concessions to Chinese firm. Under the deal, 9% of the revenue from the port will be given to Pakistan while rest of the 91% will go to COPHC. Furthermore, the company was given similar exemptions as given to SPA (Khan, 2017; BBC, April 22, 2015).

### **CPEC and Expansion of Gwadar Port:**

Under the mega project, COPHC is handling the whole operations of the port and it will also expand the functions of the facility. The company is contracted to build 9 new multipurpose berths on the seafront expanded to 3.2 kilometers towards east to current functional berths. The company will also construct huge cargo station on 12KM of land in northwest and north of the port along with Demi Zirr Bay's shoreline. Under the agreement, Chinese company has been awarded port-expansion contracts worth 1.02 billion dollars. In addition to development of cargo terminals and nine berths, several other development plans are in pipeline which will be financed by Chinese state-owned banks (Ramachandaran, 2015; Stevens, 2015).

The dredging project of Gwadar port will further increase and enhance the approach channels to depths from 11 meters to 14 meters. This development will let larger ships with deadweight of up to 70,000 tons to dock at the port as current capacity allows ships only with maximum 20,000-ton deadweight on them. Under future plans the dredging will take to 20 meters so that larger vessels can dock at the port directly. Under the contract, the Chinese firm will also develop the infrastructure of the port at a cost of 130 million dollars (Chowdhary, 2015; Alam, 2015)

Furthermore, the contract stated that new ancillary infrastructure and development projects will be done under the CPEC project. Under these news developments, 114 million dollar-worth desalination plant is set to be built to provide clean water to the local population, meanwhile Islamabad will provide 35 million dollars for construction of Special Economic Zones inside the port. It was also decided that a 19-kilometer-long road also known as East Bay Expressway will also be constructed to connect the deep-sea port with Makran Coastal Highway, along with an airport for the Gwadar city. Furthermore, Pakistan government has also established a Pak-China Technical and Vocational Institute at the port city to give training to locals and help them find jobs and operate machinery at the port (Lintner, 2019)

The two countries also decided that until 2017, the port will have the capability to handle over 1 million tons of cargo from the docked ships. Most of this material was consisted of construction goods to be used in other projects under CPEC. The agreement said, capacity of Gwadar port will eventually be extended to 400 million tons of cargo each year. Until 2045, the deep-sea port is set to have 100 operational berths. According to a report submitted in Pakistan's Senate in 2018, 99 cargo ships from seven different countries have been docked at Gwadar, with estimated weight of 1,439 million tones (Shrivastava, 2013; Faizan, March 20, 2019).

### **Construction Phases of Gwadar Port:**

The deep-sea port has been constructed and developed under two phases, in which berths and terminals were constructed for its operations.

#### **Phase-I**

The first phase of the development of Gwadar port was from 2002 to 2006, and inaugurated in 2007 by the then President General Pervaiz Musharraf. Under this phase, three multipurpose berths with length of 602 meters were completed. Furthermore, 4.5 kilometers long approach channel was constructed along with 12.5-meter deep dredged with the channel capacity of 30,000 deadweight tones and container vessels of 25,000 deadweight tons were finished. Furthermore, a turning basin with 450 meters in diameter, a service berth with 100 meters of operations and linked infrastructure of the port and handling equipment filled with tugs, survey vessels and pilot boats were also completed. The first phase cost 248 million dollars to both Pakistan and Singapore Port Authority (Gwadar Port Authority, 2016; Tanoli, 2015).

#### **Phase-II**

The second phase of Gwadar port construction was finalized under CPEC and it is still underway including improvements in ancillary projects in the region. This second phase is expected to cost 1.02 billion dollars, mainly to China. Currently, an approach tunnel which will be dredged to 14.5 meters in depth with max draft channel is underway, along with six lane East Bay Expressway linking the port and Makran Coastal Highway is under construction. Furthermore, a new international airport will also be constructed for the Chinese engineers and cargo from other countries. The other planned projects at the port include a four-container berth at the shoreline of the port, 1 bulk cargo terminal, 1 Ro-Ro terminal (to carry wheeled cargo), 1 Grain Terminal and 2 Oil terminals. Moreover, a floating liquefied natural gas terminal will also be built at the vicinity linked with 2,292-acre special economic zone at the port (Xin, 2015)

### **Special Economic Zone of Gwadar Port:**

The special economic zone is 2,283-acre land located in the vicinity of Gwadar port and it is modelled on the economic zone of China. In 2015, Pakistan handed over the piece of land to Chinese Overseas Port Authority for 43 years on lease, as the construction of the zone started in June 2016. This SEZ is expected to give livelihood and jobs to over 40,000 people at a time with plan of expansion in future (Li, 2015; Business Recorder, November 12, 2015).

Under this SEZ, there will be logistic hubs, display centers, manufacturing zones and warehouses. All the businesses established in this special zone will be exempted from income, federal, excise, and sales taxes for next 23 years making it a lucrative investment opportunity for the international investors and businessmen. Meanwhile, contractors and sub-contractors from COPH will be given exemption from all above-mentioned taxes for next 20 years as imports of machinery, plants, appliances, equipment and accessories will be given same facility for next forty years but these all goods must be used in development and construction of the deep-sea port (Express Tribune, June 20, 2016; APP June 19, 2016; Rana, May 24, 2016).

This SEZ will be completed in three zones with first part be completed by 2025. Both the countries have envisioned that by that time processing and manufacturing systems will be developed, while further expansion of the facility will be completed by 2030. While talking to Washington Post in 2016, the chairman of China Overseas Port Holding Company, Zhang Baozhong said the company has planned to spend 4.5 billion dollars on different projects

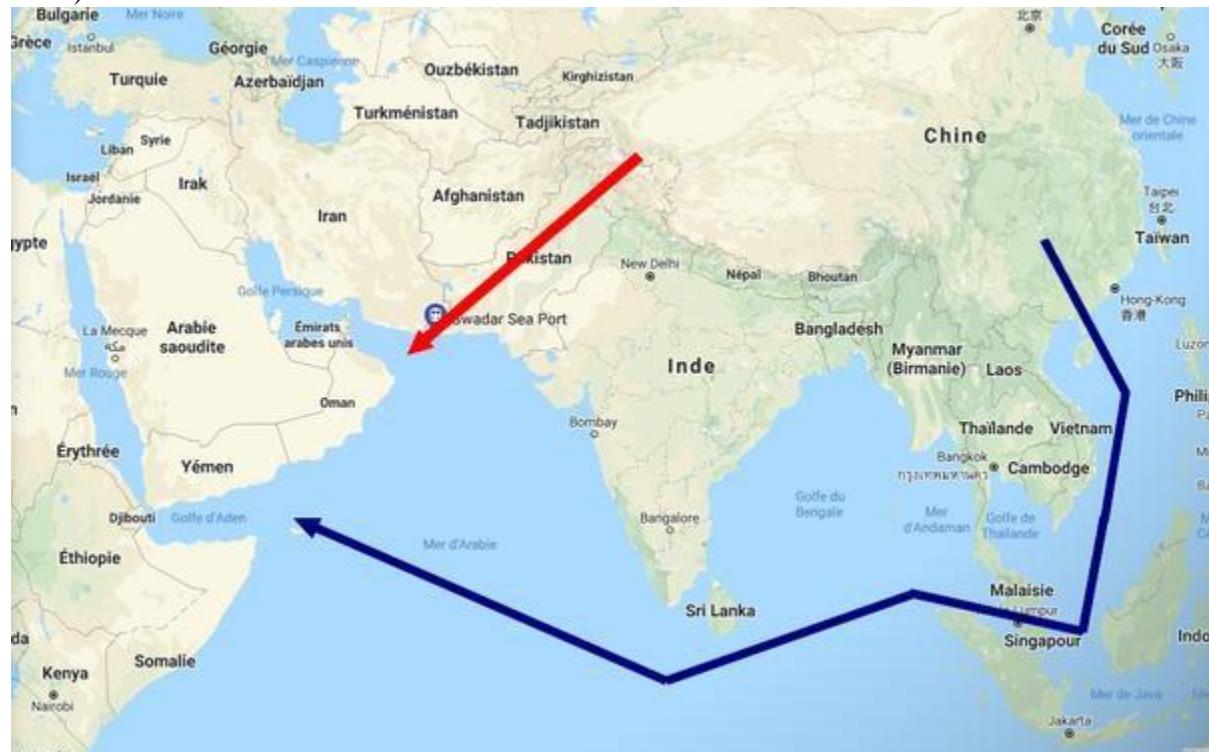
including power houses, hotels, roads and other infrastructures within SEZ, which will also be opened for companies outside China. (APP June 19, 2016; Rana, May 24, 2016).

### **Geostrategic and Geopolitical Significance of the Deep-Sea Port:**

Gwadar Port holds immense geostrategic and geopolitical importance mainly because of its location, geography, alliance of Pakistan and China and nexus of U-S and India in the region. The port not only has huge economic benefits, but also holds a major position in military and security aspects. Since 9-11, South Asian Region has become focus of international relations making this port more important and vital for regional stability, economy and peace. Furthermore, it is located at the hub of world oil sea-trade and because this is a deep-sea port, it has immense business and economic benefits for all involving parties, especially the countries which heavily rely on oil and energy trade.

### **Gwadar Port: Alternate Route to Strait of Malacca:**

The Strait of Malacca is the main trade route for China as it provided the Peoples Republic the shortest route to Europe, Middle East and Africa. Eighty percent of Beijing's oil trade also passes through this strait making it a jugular vein for the business, energy and trade sectors of the country. As the biggest oil importer in the world, the security of Strait of Malacca is a huge concern for China as the waters along this strait is often patrolled by navy of United States of America, and ties between the two countries have been hostile for past several decades. The sea-route for China through Malacca is almost 12,000 kilometers; while on the other hand, distance from Gwadar Port to Chinese region of Xinjiang is only 3,000 kilometers, with additional 3,000 kilometers from Xinjiang to country's eastern coast (BBC, January 30, 2016; Ramachandaran, 2015).



Source: <https://es.quora.com/Qu%C3%A9-potencial-ha-visto-China-en-Pakist%C3%A1n-que-el-resto-del-mundo-no-ha-visto-que-impulsa-a-China-a-invertir-continuamente-en-miles-de-millones>

In case of facing hostility and enmity in Strait of Malacca region by state or non-state actors, the energy imports/exports of China can come to a halt, which can lead to a total paralysis of major economic activities in the country. This possibility has been named as 'Malacca Dilemma' by policymakers in Beijing. Adding to the uncertainty in Strait of Malacca, Chinese oil and energy trade also heavily rely on the South China Seas routes, passing near the disputed Paracel Islands and Spratly Islands. These areas are currently centre of hostility among China, United States, the

Philippines, Vietnam and Taiwan. The completion of CPEC and Gwadar port will allow Beijing to avoid these turmoil regions and have safe passage for transportation of its energy sources. To avoid the Malacca Dilemma, China is also building another project named Sino-Myanmar Pipelines (Singh, 2019; Ali, 2017).

In maritime security and trade, China is facing two major challenges, first is hostile ties with the United States and the second is India. On one hand, Beijing faces potential weakness against U-S Navy while on other hand further decline in its relationship with New Delhi will also create further issues for the country. In recent times, India has increased its maritime presence and security in Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean from its naval base on Great Nicobar Island, creating new alarms for China. New Delhi has repeatedly expressed its concerns over China's 'String of Pearls' policy in the Indian Ocean Region, under which the country is establishing sea ports in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Gwadar Port is the most vital among these ports. India believes that China is implementing this policy to encircle it and it can lead to a conflict and Indian Navy can target Chinese imports from the straits of Hormuz (Tunningley, 2017; NBD, February 13, 2017).

The enhanced Indian surveillance in the Andaman Sea has essentially increased China's interest in Gwadar Port because it is close, reliable and their country enjoys close ties with Pakistan. To counter, Indian threat, China is also building Kyaukpyu sea port in Myanmar, which will give it another alternative route for economic and maritime oil trade. This port will also help China in countering Indian Navy and its presence in Strait of Malacca. Furthermore, the proposed Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Corridor (BCIM) will also assist Beijing in countering Indian advances as both countries will be economically dependent on each other, paving the way for security in the region. The current situation, however, has made CPEC more realistic for China and its interests in the region (Lintner, 2018, Maritime Executive, January 27, 2016; Shrivastave, 2013).

### **Gwadar Port: Improved Access to West of China**

The investment in Gwadar Port under mega project of CPEC, will provide China an easy and improved connectivity to the restive Xinjiang region. Linking the port with CPEC will boost investment and business in the region. Keeping this in mind, Beijing has invested heavily in this project under its 13<sup>th</sup> 5-year development plan. The completion of Gwadar Port will also complement country's Western Development Plan, which not only includes Xinjiang but also Qinghai and Tibet. By adding these regions into its trade and economic activities, China wants to include them in the central circle of politics (Fazl, 2015; APP, November 23, 2015).

Moreover, in addition to providing China with an alternative route from South China Sea and Strait of Malacca, Gwadar Port will also give Beijing a shorter and safer energy route to Middle East, reducing the shipping costs and transit times at the ports. After completion and full operational capability of Gwadar Port, Chinese imports will have to travel roughly 7,000 kilometers instead of current 12,000 kilometers through the sea. The new port will open new doors for China and its imports and exports for Europe, Africa and Middle East (Malhotra, 2015; Pantucci, 2016).

### **New Transit Trade Door for Central Asian Region:**

A completely functional and operational Gwadar Port will not only be beneficial for Pakistan and China but also be a huge economic blessing for Central Asian States. The port will reduce the transit time between China, Pakistan and Kashghar immensely. The functional port and CPEC, will also decrease the transit time for oil-gas rich Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan through land routes. Following its policy of regional connectivity, China has already upgraded the road linking Osh, Kyrgyzstan to Kashghar thought Erkeshtam, a Kyrgyz town. Furthermore, a railway track between Almaty, China and Urumqi in Kazakhstan has also been completed by China under its One Belt One Road venture, several road and land crossings are already operational between China and Kazakhstan. Additionally, Beijing has announced to construct a

railway track which will connect Tashkent, Uzbekistan towards Kyrgyzstan with further link to Pakistan's coast and China (Aamir, 2020; Pantucci, 2016).

The heads of states of several Central Asian States have already expressed interest and desire to join Pakistan and China's CPEC project. The leaders have called it a great trade gateway for landlocked region. During his 2015 visit to Kazakhstan, Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his Kazakh counterpart Karim Massimov, discussed the Gwadar Port and CPEC. During the meeting, Massimov conveyed his country's desire to join the CPEC project, which will give a direct approach and access to the deep-sea port (The News, August, 26, 2015).

Additionally, during his 2015 visit to Pakistan, Tajikistan's President Emomali Rahmon also expressed his country's willingness to join Quadrilateral Agreement on Traffic in Transit to take benefit from CPEC and utilize its immense economic potential. Rahmon said that his country wanted to use Gwadar Port for its imports and exports as an alternative route from Afghanistan. The request received political backing in Pakistan. The Central Asian Pamir Highway is already providing a direct access to Tajikistan through the Kulma Pass. These links and crossings complement CPEC and route to Central Asian Region as direct access to Gwadar Port and other sea ports of Pakistan. Through this route, Central Asian states can totally avoid Afghanistan, the country which has been ravaged by the war and conflict for past four decades (Bhutta, 2016).

Landlocked countries current and projected imports and exports tons equaling volumes 2005-2015

Country	Imports 2005	Imports 2015	Exports 2005	Exports 2015
Kazakhstan	14,200	76,3000	25,000	13,8000
Uzbekistan	38,000	12,6000	30,000	10,2000
Turkmenistan	26,000	85,000	17,000	52,000
Kyrgyzstan	8,000	32,000	1,000	2,000
Afghanistan	4,000	9,000	1,000	2,000

Source: [https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/6343/1/S0900132\\_en.pdf](https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/6343/1/S0900132_en.pdf)

#### Gwadar Port: Geo-strategic significance for Pakistan:

Gwadar Port can be a game changer for Pakistan in increasing its maritime trade and security to a very large extent. The government data shows, 36,000 trade vessels and ships transit through maritime territory of Pakistan consisting of around 38 million tons annually through this route. The coastline and region have immense strategic and economic benefits for the country as government has to focus more on maritime strategic policy to completely utilize the resources. In case of rise in maritime activities at the coastal areas of Pakistan, the trade can increase up to 91 million tons annually.

On security front, Gwadar Port and CPEC, will give a huge boost to Pakistan against threat of Indian naval hegemony. As discussed earlier, Indian Navy has increased its surveillance and security in Indian Ocean to counter Sino-Pakistan influence. Since the independence in 1947, both countries have been at loggerheads for most part of the history and a fully functional Gwadar Port will definitely go in the favor of Pakistan.

The major issue over the years is that Pakistan has been facing lack of strategic depth. Due to its small size as compared to rival India, the country has been in a sensitive position with regard to maritime security. Its coastal cities like Karachi have faced threat of strike by Indian navy multiple times. The Gwadar Port, however, can change the game for Pakistan as it will provide a strategic depth to the country. The deep-sea port will be a hard target for Indian Navy as compared to Karachi port (Malik, 2012). The move by Pakistan is similar to that of shifting its capital from Metropolis of Karachi to newly-built Islamabad because the old city was within the reach of Indian Navy for an attack.

As Gwadar Port is located further 460 kilometers away from India, it will become easy for Pakistan to respond. The deep-sea port will enable Pakistan to adopt assured nuclear retaliation policy also known as minimum deterrence against India. This type of strike will ensure small but secure nuclear stance guarantying a retaliatory attack on India in case of an offence (Robinson, 2011). This new strategic depth will help navy of Pakistan to set its base near the port for effective deployment and for quick attack on the enemy during any confrontation. (Haider, 2013).

In his article, Zia Haider suggests that Karachi Port has always faced serious threat from Indian Navy because its blockade will result in serious economic issues for Pakistan. He, however, pointed out that Gwadar Port is further away from India in the west of Karachi port, giving it crucial strategic depth. The distance of the port from enemy's navy gives it a strategic and safe position to handle the potential air strikes by Indian forces. Pakistan military's media Wing Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) has said that Naval Strategic Force Command at Gwadar port will prove to be a vital point to country's second-strike capability from a safe location. (ISPR, 2012).

Moreover, Gwadar Port will transform Pakistan navy into a stronger competitor to its Indian rival. The port will provide a strong military point to China in Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea, which will ultimately assist Pakistan in countering an Indian aggression. Through the Gwadar Port, both Pakistan and China will successfully tackle Indian-US nexus in the region. On one hand, Pakistan has been threatened by India while U-S has been following its expansionist policy in the region to counter Chinese influence (Storey, 2008). This port will prove to be a huge strategic, security and military advantage for Pakistan as it can successfully create a strong deterrence against India and its policy of becoming a regional dominant force in South Asia ((Blazevic, 2009).

Another major significance of Gwadar port is the protection of Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) through maritime presence. The SLOCs, are the communication systems connecting the world. These means play a vital role in shipping trade routes during peace and during wars they connect the war zones. (Good, 2002). The developed powers of the global community are heavily dependent on SLOCs for their every growing energy demands to ensure industrial development, trade and even security of these SLOCs itself, along with international chokepoints in the maritime trade (Robinson, 2011; (Surendran, 2013).



Source: (India and China Face-Off, 2013, p. A1).

Due to its vital geopolitical location, Pakistan holds a vital role in SLOCs. The geography of the country, its nuclear power and unresolved territorial conflicts with India, makes it a very important country in South Asian Region. A war between the two neighbouring countries can lead to shutdown of SLOCs in Indian Ocean which will lead to total closure of working energy corridors. A military confrontation between Pakistan and India will not only affect bilateral ties but will have a deep impact on regional and global politics. This also explain a constant presence of U-S and China in the Indian Ocean to keep a smooth oil supply to their industrial zones.

The energy politics in Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea has made geostrategic location of Gwadar port all the more important. In last few decades, the Asian countries have rapidly increased energy demand for their industries. (Basrur, 2011). The major gap between demand and supply of oil and energy material have increased the geostrategic and geopolitical competition among states which have been peaked by China. To keep their industries running, the countries are ready to go to any extent as it is their livelihood, financial stability and prosperity of their citizens.

This race of energy has increased the importance of Indian Ocean because major oil supply passes through it. Robert (2003) writes that out of every three barrels of oil, one is either occupied by Iraq or Saudi Arabia. These two countries hold oil reserves of 112 billion and 259 billion barrels respectively, making them leading exporters of oil in the world. Studies have shown that global demand of energy has jumped over 95 percent in last three decades. It has also been mentioned that next 15 years will saw a further thirty percent jump in demand, while another forty percent increase is estimated to be observed in next four decades. (Ahmad, 2009). The region of Persian Gulf, Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea will become more and more centre of global trade in coming times. Keeping in mind these statistics, Pakistan can take advantage of this trade and demand and after development of Gwadar Port, it will be easier for the country. The energy demand is future of this globalized world and this deep sea port has the capability to be a front runner in this whole race of maritime trade.

### **Economic Benefits of Gwadar Port:**

The biggest goal for Pakistan to develop and construct Gwadar Port is the economic benefits. The port can be a real game changer for country in trade, economy and international investment. A cursory look at other ports will show the economic benefit they provide to their countries. The government data showed, in 2002 that total GDP of Hong Kong was 151.5 billion dollars and Hong Kong port was providing twenty percent of it. Meanwhile, Salala Port, which was inaugurated in 1992, is currently earning over 58 billion dollars and have broken the record of container handling per hour, twice (Salala, 2015). The analysts have predicted that Pakistan's annual economy will reach up to 60 billion dollars if Gwadar's infrastructure and functions are operationalized properly. (Khan, 2013).

Projected revenue from Gwadar over next 40 years

Name of party/sector	Expected revenue US \$ (billion)
Concession holding company	17 to 30
Container and other	10 to 18
Free zone	3 to 6
Multipurpose terminals and others	4 to 8
Estimated income for Gwadar port Authority	
The container holding and other	0.9 to 1.6
Free zone (15 percent CHC revenue)	0.45 to 0.9
(9 percent CHC revenue)	0.36 to 0.72

Source [www.if sama.org](http://www.if sama.org)

According to Gwadar Development Authority, the facility will act as central part for the development of industry in the country. The development plan includes establishment of Special Economic Zone, which can bring huge foreign investment into the country. In this SEZ, China and Pakistan are planning to establish industrial state spreading over 4,000 hectares, 3,000 acres of land and 74 hectares of another land (World Bank, 2008).

Different surveys have shown that Gwadar port can generate revenue in different sectors including hotel services, real estate, shipyard and repairing services, travel industry, warehousing distributions, agricultural business and fisheries. It has shown that the business prospects in Gwadar are enormous as investors have expressed happiness for the benefits they have acquired. The survey also shows that in some areas of business, some investors have gain success while many have gain double in return to their expenditures. (Ullah, Berma and Shahdan, 2013). The port is only lacking in foreign investment currently. The reason behind this issue is law and order situation in Baluchistan and hostility between Pakistan and India. As soon as, these issues are solved, government is expecting huge surge in foreign direct investment in near future. The government and armed forces are fighting against non-state actors in the region to end turmoil in the region so that the country can progress in right direction. Since 2013, the forces have gained immense success against insurgents and militants making the country safer and secure for both domestic and international businesses.

### **Seaborne Trade and Pakistan's Economy:**

Since its independence in 1947, the country has been facing crisis one after another, mainly due to instable security and political situation of the country. These circumstances have directly affected the economic policies and activities of the country, making it an underdeveloped nation. To meet its economic needs, Pakistan has heavily relied on loans from international and regional monetary organizations and developed states. This foreign aid and loans have further destroyed overall outlook of Pakistan's economy. After becoming a frontline ally of United States in the War against terrorism, the country has faced loss of approximately 67 billion dollars, making its condition worse. Due to security threats and political uncertainty, the external loans have jumped to 33 percent of country's GDP (Khan, Rehman, 2014)

The changing regional and international trade trends, however, can be very helpful to the country. With its 960-kilometers extended coastline which is stretched to 200 nautical miles, it can take full advantage. Pakistan's 100 % oil import and 95% trade activities rely on sea trade and it has been observed that sea trade is almost twice of country's GDP (Jabri, 2017; Alam, 2019).

Frankel (1987) has argued that sea trade and shipping can contribute immensely into economy of a country. He said the health of shipping industry and its growth have always left a substantial impact on a country's GDP. In his book, Lovett wrote in 1996, that for sustainable economic growth and development, all countries across the world have to focus on maritime trade projects to get the best spot in global trade. Since World War II, the international shipping industry has completely changed as global economy has become more vibrant than ever before. A close link has been established between competitive markets and shipping industry making it one of the most successful business in the world. (Stopford, 1997). In 1776, Adam Smith argued that no country can reach the goal of successful industrialization without cheap sea trade and transport. The shipping industry and maritime trade have immense advantages for developing countries like Pakistan because it is cheap, easily connect it to the rest of the world and easily available shipping services. (Martin, 1997).

The government data has shown that Pakistan spends from 1.5 billion to 1.7 billion dollars in services for trade freights annually. For countries like Pakistan, it is a huge amount, hence development of opportunities like Gwadar Port will not only be beneficial but also cost effective to a very large extent. Currently, Pakistan national merchant vessel holds less than five percent of the country's whole foreign trade volume which is even far less than that of allowed by UNCTAD under its convention. (UNCTAD, 1984). The country holds immense potential to develop its shipping industry but non-focus and least attention by the governments have made this industry stale.

Due to its geo-strategic location, Pakistan can take advantage by promoting institutional infrastructure for merchant marine. The government can train the labor and staff and be part of international competitive market of shipping and maritime trade, and development of Gwadar Port may be the biggest chance for the country. The investment in shipping industry will surely reduce the balance of payment and account deficit issues. By developing this deep sea port and shipping industry, Pakistan can achieve two major objectives. Firstly, the step will enhance its transit trade starting from Central Asia, Afghanistan and Western China all the way to warm waters of Gwadar. This trade will be hugely beneficial, business wise, for both Gwadar and Karachi ports.

Secondly, being a dynamic hub port, the shipping industry will assist Gwadar port in establishing its place as a main transit point in global trade. Furthermore, the infrastructural development of shipping industry will also generate feeder shipping services for Gwadar port which can help the secondary regional ports including Chabahar and Dubai ports. (Nawaz, 2004). In the long run, this deep-sea port has the capability to be emerged as leading port in the region and dominate the whole market.

### **Regional Integration and Gwadar Port:**

The deep-sea port can be a regional integration tool bringing the South Asian and Central Asian states close to one another for progress of these regions. The concept of regionalism has seen success in several parts of the world and the European Union may be the most successful model in this context. Despite fighting two World Wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the European countries ended their differences and formed a block. These states took this step mainly for economic and trade benefits which ultimately proved to be successful. The model of EU has shown the world that regionalism is practical and holds benefits for all members. Following this example, Pakistan, China, India, Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asian States can form a block for the economic development and Gwadar Port can be a central part of this plan.

As mentioned earlier, Indian Ocean has become the hub of international oil, raw material and energy sources trade, especially after 9-11. Under this new World Order, the security has become the top priority along with the economy. The region's importance has also enhanced due to unprecedented infrastructure development projects. The constructions of new mega roads, railway tracks, airports, and sea ports are underway across Asia from East to West. These projects are connecting Indian Ocean to Eurasia which will lead to commercial traffic and

geostrategic competition among the world actors. The development of Gwadar Port may be the most important aspect of this whole scenario. Dubai port has remained the hub of global economic activities but uncertain situation in Middle East and potential threat of attack on the port can result in halt of global trade circle. In this situation, Karachi port can be used as an alternative but this port has not been designed to hold major load capacity, hence, Gwadar port will be the eventual choice.

The current maritime traffic of almost 300 M TEUs would be doubled in 2018-19 and Pakistan's deep-sea port can be linking element for boost in China and Indian economy, steady opening for Central Asian natural resource market to the world and will lead sustainability in Pakistan. The facility can become the future of world trade and this whole region would generate a sizeable share of the global economy. Gwadar port provides the shortest accessible route to Afghanistan and land-locked Central Asia, making the port a conjunction point for South, Central Asia and Middle East, all three are highly active economic regions. To gain a key role in the port, China, USA and India are trying hard.

Medi (2009) write that from a small distant fishing town, Gwadar will soon become the mega trade center like Mumbai, Dubai and Singapore. Islamabad is very keen to use the facility to establish it as transportation point of oil, energy and raw material to China, Afghanistan and Central Asia. A quadrilateral agreement between Pakistan China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan can be used to promote regional integrity and dependence leading to trade cooperation. Main import items of Central Asia consist of electric items, consumer goods, garments and exports are listed as gas, machinery, metal ores, cotton and oil.

Economic Significance of Gwadar Port Report (2010) has estimated the transit of gas and oil and land to sea trade through Pakistan about 10 billion dollars annually. Under the initial plan of Gwadar port, it has been decided that it will serve Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan through Afghanistan's route mainly due to geographical closeness but with the expansion of the port, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan will also be served. Due to its strategic closeness to trade hub on Indian Ocean, major shipping points and Straits of Hormoz, Gwadar port holds the potential of remaining at the centre of all of these trade activities (Business Standard, 2004).

Under the master plan of Gwadar port, it has been planned that it will capture around 25 percent of import and export of regional market by 2020, while 15 percent of Central Asian transit trade will be conducted through this, along with 12 percent of Xinxiang's and 40 percent of Afghanistan's (Gorst, 2006). The activity through this port will cause interlinking in the region and through this interdependence the states will have direct stake in prosperity and stability of the region.

The first step to be a major part of this regionalism for Pakistan was taken by former President General Pervaiz Musharraf. During his visit to China in 2006, Musharraf expressed his desire to enter in Shanghai Cooperation Organization to boost country's economic scope. In the same year, Pakistan got the full membership of the organization as one Indian analyst wrote that Islamabad wants to create balance of power in South Asia that is why it is also eager to include China in SAARC (Sridhar, 2006). Taking Russia into the picture, China has planned to build a 90-kilometer-long road connecting China's side of Karakorum Highway to Russian road networks, which is already linked to Central Asian region. This network of roads and highways will ultimately end at Gwadar Port, linking the whole region through land (Chaturvedy, 2006; Argus, 2008).).

The development and construction of this deep sea port is also part of Pakistan's 'Look East' and Chinese 'Go West' policy. By merging their policies, both countries are looking to form a regional bloc. Islamabad's policy, if implemented, will be most suitable for its political, diplomatic, security and most importantly economic goals. Through this plan, Pakistan can form a natural bond with its neighbouring and regional states including Russia and can distance itself from United States of America. This regional bloc is an organic alliance for Islamabad and

gradual policy shift will end the differences between Pakistan, Central Asia and Russia, forming a strong group (Argus, 2008).

The enormous natural resources of Central Asia may be the best trade point for Pakistan and Gwadar port. The flow of these resources through the port will mark the significance of facilities in world trade market. Asian Development Bank (2005) said the estimated trade volume of this region is 20 billion dollars including 12 million dollars export of domestic items. The report also said the volume can reach up to 80 million dollars in terms of weight and capacity of those goods. Energy-rich Kushka city of Turkmenistan has a distance of only 1200 kilometers from Gwadar by road, while in comparison the area is 3400 kilometers away from Odessa Port in Ukraine which has remained its main point of export. A road linking Gwadar to Kushka will pass through Afghanistan's provinces of Herat and Pakistan's areas of Chaghi, Panjgur and Rabat, making it the best choice available for Turkmenistan. This land route will be the easiest, shortest and cheapest export route for the Central Asian state. This route is also cost and time worthy as compared to road from South Asia to Suez, to Mediterranean, to Atlantic all the way to Baltic ports in North Sea. The Russian exports will save delivery cost by 400-500 dollars by container and time by 20 days (Mehdi, 2009)

Furthermore, Central Asian Region is expected to provide 80 percent of American oil by 2050 and Gwadar port is the shortest route for its export. Turkmenistan can also utilize the deep-sea port to export its gas to the world through TAPI gas pipeline. Moreover, Caspian region's estimated oil reserves are 17-49 billion barrels with gas reserves around 232 trillion cubic feet. After the completion of road networks, this port will be the most accessible and reliable source of import and export for the whole region.

Meanwhile, China has signed several agreements with Central Asian Republics for export of oil and gas through pipelines. The length of main pipeline is 1000 km to 3000 km, in addition to 4200 kilometers from Shanghai to Xinjiang. But its reliance of Middle East for oil remain vital and that is why it is converting Gwadar Port into a transit terminal. This port can serve Beijing in oil imports and transport to the rest of the world. (Aftab, April 1, 2002).

Along with Central Asia and China, Afghanistan is another country which can take massive benefits from Gwadar Port. The land-locked country has Pakistan and its ports as the best available option for import and export with the world. The route from Afghanistan to Gwadar Port is shorter hence cheaper for Kabul. The 85 percent of bilateral trade is covered under current Pak-Afghan trade agreement but it has generated only 0.6 percent port traffic. To take full advantage from this facility, stability and peace is essential in Afghanistan. Once Kabul administration achieved this, it will definitely seek more economic and trade opportunities in global market through Pakistan. Recently, under bilateral trade agreement, Pakistan has launched Afghan-transit trade from Gwadar port. Islamabad allowed food and health items to be imported from Gwadar port to Afghanistan as the country fight against COVID-19 pandemic. The government of Pakistan has taken this step as a friendly gesture to pave the way for better economic and trade relation with Afghanistan. This development is expected to pave the way for future trade with a boost in relationship in near future.

The deep-sea port of Gwadar is located in Pakistan's north-western province of Baluchistan. The country bought the area from Oman in 1958. This small fishing town remained deserted for almost three decades when in 1992, the government allotted a task force to estimate its value. During 1990s, two such teams worked on this project but the proposals could not be utilized mainly due to economic constraints and international sanctions after nuclear tests in 1998. At the dawn of 21<sup>st</sup> century, Pakistan decided to take benefit from the geo-strategically vital port. In 2002, the then President General Pervaiz Musharraf singed a deal with Singapore Port Authority to construct and develop the facility. This first phase was completed in 2007 but SPA could not meet its contract and offered to sell its shares to the government.

Pakistan signed the second contract with Chinese Overseas Port Authority to further develop and expand operations of the port. The Chinese authority took over the port from SPA, and started

Phase-II. The significance of the port peaked after Islamabad and Beijing singed Pakistan China Economic Corridor (CPEC) and in 2013 the port became the center of this mega project. Under CPEC, China is contracted to build new births, pledging its depth to 20 meters, construct Special Economic Zone and link the port with highways and road networks.

The port holds a vital geostrategic and geopolitical position in the world oil trade. The port is situated at the helm of Indian Ocean which is a pathway for international oil and energy trade. Furthermore, it is a deep-sea port making it cheaper, easy and reliable choice for the world powers. The port also provides an alternative way to restive Straits of Malacca and Straits of Hormuz. These two straits have handled the maritime trade but the insecurity and conflict in Middle East and Persian Gulf has made them a hard choice, hence, world and regional states have a better option in shape of Gwadar port.

For Pakistan and China, Gwadar port holds vital geostrategic importance. The port will provide a strong security post to both countries against a nexus of India and United States. New Delhi, who has been trying to dominate Indian Ocean is in alliance with Washington and have increased its presence and surveillance in Indian Ocean Region. Gwadar port will give Islamabad and Beijing a point where they can keep a close eye on movement of India and the US. Furthermore, this port will give Pakistan Navy a secure post to tackle any offense by Indian Navy, making it both a military and economic base.

Moreover, the deep-sea port is a trade gateway for land-locked countries of Afghanistan and Central Asian Region. These two areas have no direct way to conduct maritime trade, hence, Pakistan and Gwadar port is a best option for them to access warm waters. The energy and oil rich Central Asia can conduct imports and exports through this port which will be cheaper and easy to access as compared to its route to Ukraine. The Central Asian States can export their oil to the international market through Pakistan and avoid instable Afghanistan through road networks of China's One Belt One Road project. Furthermore, Afghanistan can also take advantage from this port and a stable Kabul administration can seek new trade opportunities through Gwadar port.

The port has full capability to increase regional integration in South Asia and Central Asian Region. Through economic interdependence and mutual trade, Pakistan, China, Afghanistan, India, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Iran and Russia can form their own regional bloc. This regional model has all the potentials like European Union. Gwadar port will be the gateway for all energy, oil, domestic goods and items import and export for this bloc. Through this port, regional states can takeover major share in the global trade. The bloc will pave the way for regional prosperity and stability because economic interlinking will increase trust and cordial ties among states. Gwadar port is not only beneficial for Pakistan but the facility also has the capability of changing the future of whole region.

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