



**SINO-INDIAN GEOSTRATEGIC COMPETITION FOR CONTROLLING THE
BLUE ECONOMY OF IRANIAN PORTS AND ITS IMPACTS ON PAKISTAN**

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Abstract

In the modern world, trade is one of the key tools used to strengthen the economy and lay the foundation for a country to achieve regional or global hegemony. It is widely acknowledged that maritime security has surfaced as a bone of contention between India and China, competing with one another in the region to seek safe and cheap routes to meet their energy needs. India is leveraging its strategically important location as well as the support of the US to balance China's influence, while China is adopting its "string of pearls" strategy to connect the important choke points of the world. Therefore, this article analyzes the interests of China and India in Iranian ports, particularly in Chabahar Port, and their efforts to secure access to the region's resources and markets. It also evaluates that the Sino-Indian competition for controlling Iran's ports could have significant implications for Pakistan, including economic opportunities and challenges, geopolitical risks, and strategic choices. Moreover, this paper intends to unfold the competition through the lens of a realist approach and unwind the ground realities by using a spectrum of qualitative research methodology.

Keywords: Sino-Indian, maritime security, Pakistan, Iranian Ports, Chabahar,

1. Introduction

The world is in a deep sense of geostrategic confusion. The rise of China, the emergence of India, and the declining geostrategic power of the US are making not only Sino-Indian relations more competitive, but challenging at both the regional and global levels (Menon, 2020). Competition between the two rival neighboring countries of Asia; India and China is no longer limited to the overland linkages and trade corridors, but the inclusion of the blue

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economy as well. Both states are investing huge amounts in the modernization of the navy to protect the Sea Lens of Communion (SLC) and secure more and better positions at the seas, especially in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the Gulf Region.

Both the powers are trying to maximize their respective geostrategic positions even at the expense of the other. Generally, states enhance their power either for survival or political, strategic, or economic supremacy or to gain ambitious hegemonic designs. In the case of Sino-Indian competition, it is inspired by all the prerequisites of real politick. One possible scenario is the competition to gain leverage over the Iranian blue economy by securing access to Iranian ports. This isn't just a geostrategic competition for Iranian ports between China and India, but much more than that. For instance, the Iranian port of Chabahar has gained global attention as a potential trading hub as well as an arena of geopolitical competition between the two emerging powers of Asia.

The competition is not only limited to the blue economy, but it is strategic in nature. China wants to have safe and secure access to Iran's rich energy sources, including mineral resource reserves. Furthermore, China is seeking to gain access to Eurasian trade routes through Iran (Aliasgary & Ekstrom, 2021). Also, the existence of the Malaccan dilemma is compelling the Chinese to gain more and more secure access to its ever-growing energy needs by building new maritime pathways and overland belts.

On the other hand, India sees the strategic port of Chabahar as an access way to Afghanistan and ultimately to the Central Asian Republics (CARs) due to the CARs tapped and untapped energy resources. India considers the maritime and overland route through Iran as the best possible option to avoid the use of its arch-rival neighbor Pakistan's land route. Pakistan's land route connects India with Afghanistan and finally to Central Asia (Zaheer, 2023). However, using Pakistan's route for connectivity isn't going to be materialized soon due to the tense relationship between the two neighboring countries of South Asia. At the same time close Indo-Iranian ties can work as a balancing act for a close Sino-Pakistan strategic alliance.

China's rapid engagements with Iran have raised suspicion in India. The \$400 billion deal with Iran for developing Iran's strategic ports, banking system, telecommunication, railways, and various other projects is a clear dispatch of China's growing fascination for Iran (Sruthi, 2020). Recently the Chinese government has also signed 20 documents and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Iran on February 14, 2023, during Iran President

Ebrahim Raisi's visit to Beijing. The agreements include cooperation in diverse fields (Bayramli, 2023).

Observing the Sino-Indian strategic competition for Iranian ports and sea lanes the case of Pakistan cannot be neglected. China and Pakistan both are enjoying an all-weather friendship, while China and India, both see each other as rival competitors. China is investing \$62 billion in Pakistan through China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Afzal, 2020). The most important project of CPEC is the Gwadar deep sea water port. However, the new strategic game for gaining influence on Iran's ports, especially Chabahar, the BRI flagship project backbone of the Gwadar is losing its importance. Chinese competition for Chabahar and assuring safe access to oil will have serious implications for Pakistan's port of Gwadar.

1.2 Research Methodology

Qualitative research methodology has been used in this study to explore the complex interactions in the Sino-Indian geo-economic competition for controlling the blue economy of Iranian ports and its impact on Pakistan. The type of qualitative methodology that has been used in this study is a case study of Chabahar. The case study approach is appropriate for investigating complex social phenomena within their real-life context and allows for the in-depth exploration of multiple sources of evidence. In this case, the study has focused on the Sino-Indian competition for controlling the blue economy of Iranian ports and its impact on Pakistan, which is a complex geopolitical and economic phenomenon that requires a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of the different actors involved, their interests, and their strategies. Moreover, Data is collected through secondary sources. Such as books, articles, research documents, reports, and media sources.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The research article has been analyzed through the lens of Realism which discusses power politics and the pursuit of national interests. According to realism, the quest for power and security is what motivates states, which are the main actors in international affairs. In this regard, the conflict between China and India for control of Iranian ports can be seen as a power struggle between two rising powers in Asia. The objectives of both nations in the region are to strengthen their positions of power and defend their economic and strategic interests. Realists contend that the motivation for this competition is the desire to seize control of resources and protect oneself.

In this situation, the Sino-Indian rivalry over Iranian ports may have an impact on regional security as both nations aim to strengthen their navies and take control of vital shipping lanes. A regional weapons race and heightened tensions between China and India could result from this, which could have larger repercussions on the balance of power in Asia in general and Pakistan in particular. As a developing country, Pakistan is heavily dependent on foreign aid and trade, and it must navigate the complex web of international relations to secure its own economic and security interests. Realists would argue that Pakistan's response to the Sino-Indian competition for Iranian ports is likely to be based on its own calculations of power and self-interest. Overall, the Realist theory provides a useful framework for understanding the Sino-Indian competition for controlling the blue economy of Iran.

2 Geo-strategic Importance of Iranian ports

The Iranian ports play a vital role in Iran's economic development because it contributes to approximately 95 percent of its commercial activities. In this regard, the most significant are the southern ports on the Arabian Gulf and the northern Caspian Sea ports that export oil and non-oil goods to all parts of the world. Some of them are affiliated with regional bodies, and local governments, while others are with the Iranian Navigation Authority. Iran wants to develop these ports to advance its goals, especially given that Iran and the rest of the world rely heavily on these seaports for trade. Iran has therefore worked to expand its ports in recent years in an effort to boost its blue economy, spread its population along its coast, and stop internal migration to Tehran (Leila & Abdullah, 2021).

Iran imports the majority of its needs through the southern ports on the Arabian Gulf, like the port of ShahidRajai, as they are open access points to the world's seas. In addition, Iran exports its most vital goods, including oil, petrochemicals, and minerals, from the ports of Imam Khomeini, Bahonar, and Khorramshahr. Transport of products between Iran and the nations in the Arabian Gulf occurs through the port of Bushehr. Fishing, tourism, and passenger transportation between Iran and the Gulf states all take place in the port of Abadan. The port of Chabahar serves as a route for foreign commerce to reach the markets of Central Asia and Afghanistan. Iran is strategically located in the heart of the earth, where many of these Iranian ports are involved in competitor initiatives like Chabahar Port, where China's Belt and Road Initiative and India's INSTC projects intersected. The reason is that Chabahar Port has the capability of an international commerce hub as well as an arena of geopolitical conflict (Rahim & Ali, 2018).

This port is located in the southeast Iranian regions of Sistan and Balochistan. The Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea connect Iran to the Indian Ocean. This huge port has two terminals: Al-ShahidBeheshti and Al-ShahidKalantari. There are five slots in every terminal. Iran has taken significant measures to improve this seaport in recent years. In addition, its capacity was expanded from 2.5 million tons to 8.5 million tons. Furthermore, in 2018, a 1,800-square-metre port was built (Gul et al., 2020). Moreover, Chabahar is one of the few areas in Iran that is not subjected to US sanctions, greatly facilitating commerce with other nations. As a result of its geographical closeness to international commerce in South and Central Asia, it can become one of the world's most significant commercial ports (Zaheer, 2023).

However, despite the several ports in Iran having a hefty economic impact and being crucial from both an economic and a strategic standpoint, it desperately needs to engage with strong economies of the world to develop new diplomatic and economic partnerships. Most international affairs experts believe, that Iran's status as a giant economic house is primarily restricted by its hostile relations with other nations, most notably the United States and Saudi Arabia, as well as by economic sanctions that severely limit its ability to smoothly conduct international trade (Aliasgary & Ekstrom, 2021). Therefore, Iran has sought to build closer connections with both India and China which have less antagonistic relations with it to get around these restrictions. Meanwhile, India and China have separate ambitions to control the Chabahar Port to dominate the blue economy of Iran.

2.1 Indian Interests in Iranian Ports (Chabahar Port)

Since the 1990s, India has shown a keen interest in the development of Chabahar Port in south-east Iran, and after several years of planning, an agreement was finally signed on May 24, 2016. This agreement between India and Iran aims to transform Chabahar, into a comprehensive deep seaport. The development of Chabahar Port has generated great enthusiasm and interest due to its potential to benefit not only Iran and India but also Afghanistan. The tripartite agreement aims to establish major road and rail connectivity between the three countries, which will connect them to the seaport and create new possibilities for Central Asian countries and beyond. This enhanced accessibility to the Chabahar Port is a significant landmark for India as it provides alternative access to the resource-rich central Asian states, which was previously limited to Pakistan's only land route (Salem, 2016).

The continued availability of energy supplies is vital to India's economic progress. The reason is that nowadays, India imports over three-quarters of its oil from other countries, the majority of which originates from the West Asian area. With India's growing dependency on foreign energy, minimizing reliance on West Asian supplies and nurturing alternate energy sources has become an urgent priority. Hence, Central Asia is a significant source of India's energy demands. All of these states are mineral-rich and have substantial hydropower resources (Rowden, 2020).

India's lunch policy to connect Central Asia which was implemented in 2012 is a wide-ranging structure including political, financial, safety, and cultural ties. After the launch of the Connect Asia strategy in 2012, the Indian Prime Minister visited all five nations practically in 2015. Throughout Modi's Central Asian journey in 2015, India and Kazakhstan inked five major treaties, including a defense deal to strengthen defense relations and a deal for uranium supplies. Moreover, India employs enormous soft power in the form of music, Bollywood cinema, literature, and so on to enhance its influence in the region (Kaura, 2017).

Yet, the problem arises that India does not share a common border with any of these Central Asian states. While Pakistan prohibits direct access to Afghanistan or Central Asia that's why New Delhi sees Chabahar as a way to avoid Pakistan's land boundary and get access to Afghan and Central Asian markets. Chabahar Port is a step towards Connectivity between India and Afghanistan. Also, the port will boost links across India and Iran, perhaps offsetting growing Sino-Pakistani collaboration. India and Iran have strong historical and civilization links, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MEA), "our diplomatic ties are defined by strong connectivity. Apart from access to land-locked and resource-rich countries, Chabahar Port is being built largely to compete with the Gwadar Port project and to link it to Russia's International North-South Transport Route (INSTC) (Chauhan, 2022).

The INSTC, which includes train system, road, and shipments transport from Mumbai in India to Astrakhan in Russia and Baku in Azerbaijan via Bandar Abbas in Iran, would be an import and export corridor with enormous potential for assisting India in developing its financial and military significance in Eurasia and Central Asia regions. If finished, the corridor is intended to give a remarkable possibility for massive quantities of products to be carried as well as between Central Asia and India, but also among Europe, giving a substitute to the extremely challenging and piracy-infested Suez Canal maritime routes

(Levina, 2022). Apart from these benefits analysts considered INSTC might also provide a geopolitical counterbalance to China's growing regional aspirations throughout its One Belt, One Road Program.

Moreover, the INSTC gateway pathway is shorter than Suez and the Mediterranean Sea. As rivalry for resources with China heats up, this region is expected to become more important. As Indian strategists know the other elephant in the room is China whose increased presence in the Indian Ocean has posed an even larger geo-strategic danger (Chauhan, 2022). Therefore, the construction of Chabahar and control of the blue economy of Iran are essential for India, to contain China's growing influence in the region.

2.3 China Interests in Iranian Ports (Chabahar Port)

Iran and China, two of the world's ancient states and empires have a millennia-long background of their engagements. However, in the twenty-first century, the two states have come closer than before due to the Chinese massive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Their bilateral commerce has grown dramatically with time, reaching 15 billion in 2020 (Diez, 2023). Chinese companies are busy in building ports, jetties, airports, and infrastructures such as highways and metros in Iranian cities. In this regard, to expand its influence and investment in the Iranian ports, China opened its first consulate in the port city of Bandar Abbas in 2022 (Boltuc, 2022). Moreover, China has also accessed Chabahar to deepen its ties with Iran in order to safeguard Iran's oil and mineral assets and get access to beneficial Eurasian trade routes, so it is not just India that has a stake in Chabahar Port. The fulfillment of these goals is crucial for Chinese access to Chabahar Port since China could link the facility to its own enormous sea Lines of Communication.

The other important objective of implementing this strategy and expanding the BRI, China will also lessen its reliance on the Strait of Malacca. Where China asserts control and ownership over the majority of the region, is one of China's main issues. The reason is that China's neighbors oppose these claims, while Western powers support them. Furthermore, the heightened military presence and drills of Indo-US militaries exacerbated the situation and the trap of Indian naval bases and bilateral cantonments in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands at the neck of the Malacca Strait accelerated the process. As a result of these tensions, which pose a threat to China's marine trade, China is developing alternative routes through the BRI to benefit from additional trade routes (Mamaghani & Asadikhomami, 2021). In this respect,

Gawadar and Chabahar would be two of the BRI's hubs to bypass Malacca and build a short route through Western and Central Asia.

For the practical implementation of the BRI, President Xi Jinping visited Tehran in 2016 and emphasized that China and Iran were ideal allies in the implementation of the BRI. He additionally encouraged greater infrastructure, interconnection, manufacturing capacity, and energy collaboration between the two sides in the BRI scenario. In response, Ali Khamenei declared that Iran will push bilateral practical cooperation to new heights. Iran is an important state in the China trade relations among Central Asia and Europe. One of the major markets for Chinese exports via Kazakhstan is Europe. Freight traffic between China and Europe via Kazakhstan more than doubled between 2012 and 2014, lately surpassing 91,500 tonnes. Iran has contributed significantly to the execution of Chinese energy projects in Central Asia and the creation of transportation corridors. Iran, for instance, may play a vital role in the development of routes between Turkey and China, along with other nations in the region. Iran is developing its railway network, according to Abbas Akhod, the country's minister of transportation, in order to better support China's Central Asian infrastructure and logistics strategy. Two Chinese economic priorities—the first being the expansion of commerce with Turkey, and the second being the influx of Chinese goods into Iranian ports along the Strait of Hormuz involve Iran significantly (Çelik, 2022).

China used its 25-year contract capacity to infiltrate Chabahar and control Iran's blue economy, according to recent 400 billion agreements between them; the Chinese will build Iran ports and its maritime trade network. China's involvement could significantly help the port's development, according to Behrouz Aghaei, the director-general of Sistan-Baluchestan Province's Ports and Maritime Department, who made this claim in an interview with Tehran Times. Further, he mentioned that shipping companies are essential to the development of ports, and China's involvement could raise Chabahar's standing internationally (Shipping News, 2021). On the other side, building this port is important because it provides Beijing control over one of the world's seven major maritime chokepoints. With a foothold in Chabahar Ports, China would be able to monitor the US Navy's activities and, when combined with a presence in Gwadar and Djibouti ports, would also increase its influence in the Indian Ocean region. In addition, the purpose of all of this prevents India from using the leverage that its close links to the US give it against China (Iqbal & Haider, 2020).

2.4 The Noose Seems to Be Tightening Around India

Beijing has reportedly recreated the Silk Route by establishing trade and development relations with India's neighbors. China intends to suffocate India from Nepal in the Southeast to Myanmar, Bangladesh to Sri Lanka in the South, and Pakistan in the West. China is diplomatically encircling India by launching large-scale infrastructure projects, energy initiatives, financial donations, and the construction of corridors in South Asia and the Middle East, establishing ports across maritime communication lines in nations like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, the Maldives, Pakistan, and Iran, especially (Kharl et al., 2020). Furthermore, Iran advances its relationship day by day with the east economic powerhouse widening the gaps between India and Iran, as already the two mega projects were canceled in 2020; one was the Chabahar- Zahedan railway project, and the other was related to the Farzad-B gas field project (Haidar, 2020). Moreover, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's recent three-day visit reflected his excitement for Iran's expanding trade and cultural ties with China. Several bilateral cooperation agreements were signed between Tehran and Beijing in the areas of agriculture, commerce, tourism, environmental protection, health, disaster relief, culture, and sports. The papers include agreements for various joint projects, such as the high-speed rail connection between Tehran and Mashhad and investment in the Imam Khomeini Airport City, in the fields of transportation and industry, worth \$12 billion and \$3.5 billion, respectively (Diez, 2023).

Apart from all these, the more important one is the first direct shipping route between China and Iran's southeastern seaport was established this year when the first container ship leaving China berthed at Chabahar, this development has advantages for China; according to the official, the direct shipping line between China and Chabahar has reduced the cost of loading and unloading by \$400 per container and has resulted in cargoes arriving ten days early. While at a geostrategic level, this engagement could cloud India's plans in Chabahar (TehranTimes, 2023). These geopolitical transformations that have seen a strengthening of China-Iran ties have pushed India into a difficult strategic position as well as endanger India's Chabahar Port deal as the development of the Chabahar Port was halted twice already, first in November 2018 and then in May 2019 (S, 2020). Therefore, India is falling short concerning geopolitical competition with China in the region as claimed by India's own analyst M.K. Bhadrakumar that India's grip on Chabahar Port loosens as Iran's growing engagement with China is frustrated, and sure China races ahead. Additionally, the effectiveness of the Chabahar Port will also be impacted by the peace and stability in

Afghanistan. Trilateral efforts between India, Iran, and Afghanistan to run the Chabahar Port facility could be jeopardized by the unstable security situation in Afghanistan. And finally, if Afghanistan is not stable, Chabahar's port will be of little use. Therefore, the ongoing geopolitical changes in the region are deeply affecting Indian interest in the Chabahar Port.

3. Competition among Sino-India and its Implications for Pakistan

The strategic and economic importance of the region is causing security concerns and compelling both states to indulge in counterbalancing acts. China, for instance, is deepening its relations with Pakistan in terms of the development of the Gwadar port for its energy security as well as to ensure its presence in the Chabahar. These ports also provide China with an alternative to avoid the strategic headache of the Malacca dilemma (Rahim & Ali, 2018). This possible arrangement in the shape of the development of Gwadar as well as Chabahar will help China to divert and fulfill its growing energy needs in the future. However, the strategic rival partner, India tried to counter the Chinese move by developing the Chabahar Port of Iran and further linking it with Afghanistan to reach its final destination of Central Asian Republics, the resource-rich countries of Asia (Khan, 2012). These strategic counterbalancing acts will intensify relations between the close neighboring states of the region, especially between Iran-Pakistan, Pakistan-Afghanistan and Pakistan-India. Any case study where India is involved particularly in South Asia will have positive or otherwise ramifications for Pakistan.

However, Iran and Pakistan enjoy cordial and healthy relations. Pakistan's and Iran's government's view Chabahar and Gwadar as "the sister ports", having no element of competition but of cooperation (Haider, 2016). While on the flip side, India invested in Iran's port of Chabahar to counterbalance Pakistan's deepwater port of Gwadar. Furthermore, China after a deep analysis of the Indian developments in Iran jumped into the strategic competition for having a say in the Iranian ports (Bureau, 2022). China invested billions of dollars in Iran to counter Indian influence and its access to Central Asia through Afghanistan.

Watching the situation closely, one can assume that the policy paradigm emerging from the factors focused in detail that balance is tilted more towards competition rather than cooperation soon. Keeping in view the above-detailed discussion one can assume several implications for Pakistan, instead of the fact that cooperation can be the priority of Pakistan and Iran in the context of Chabahar and Gwadar.

3.1 Indian Factor

Strategic competition for controlling the blue water and securing SLOs and energy supply chains led India to show strong reservations about the Chinese-led project CPEC in Pakistan. India tried to securitize the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and to derail it India supported the Baloch separatist elements in Baluchistan to sabotage the environment for the completion of Gwadar and CPEC (The Indian Express, 2017). Furthermore, both the Afghanistan and Iran border are linked with Baluchistan, the core of CPEC anything bad in the province of Baluchistan has a direct impact on the development of Gwadar port.

Furthermore, the development of Chabahar paved the way for India to bypass Pakistan not only for energy projects like the Iran-Pakistan-India Pipeline but also for the transportation of goods. After the signing of Chabahar with Iran in 2016, India 2017 delivered wheat cargo via Chabahar to Afghanistan. The Indian newspapers claimed it is an alternative, reliable, and robust connectivity for Afghanistan (Vashisht, 2017). This will help India reach Afghanistan through Iran, a friendly state rather than Pakistan. Not using Pakistan's land for cross-border trade will further increase the vacuum between Pakistan-India as well as Pakistan-Iran.

3.2 Chinese Factor

China is forging close relations with Iran. Although the relationship isn't at the cost of Pakistan, for certain it will have implications for Pakistan due to China's huge investments in Iran and its quest for close cooperation with Iran to develop ports and secure its energy lifeline. According to the draft agreement, China could be spending a sum of 400 billion dollars over 27 years (Dawn, 2020). Comparing this amount with the Chinese flagship project of BRI the CPEC with 62 billion dollars indicates the Chinese more enthusiastic role in Iran.

China is also working in close cooperation with Iranians to develop Iran's port of Chabahar and make it successful for both the state's cargos. Apart from the developments in Chabahar, which many see as a sister port to Gwadar port, China is also developing several other ports in Iran. The construction of the Bandar-e-Jask port of Iran is strategically important as it is located outside the Gulf of Hormuz, through which most of the world's oil transits. Keeping in view the recent developments in Iran and the strategic competition between China and India will have severe implications for Pakistan. The development of ports in Iran under the BRI project will hurt Pakistan's Gwadar and will lose its importance as a Chinese BRI flagship project.

3.3 Afghanistan Factor

The landlocked country of Afghanistan was dependent on Pakistan for trading with the rest of the world having no other secure and economically beneficial alternative. Now the world is more connected than ever through corridors and transportation links. The development of Chabahar and India's deliverance of cargo via Chabahar to Afghanistan marks it as an alternative for more safe, secure, reliable, and robust connectivity for landlocked Afghanistan (Vashisht, 2017).

Afghanistan trade thought Chabahar would have negative impacts on Pakistan. First, it will lose a major junk of customer service income, and secondly, Pakistan is losing its edge of having a say in Afghan affairs as it was mostly dependent on Pakistan for providing transit routes (ISW, 2020). This will enable Afghanistan to independently formulate a strategy and diplomatic relations with India without considering Pakistan's interests.

3.4 Internal Challenges

There are several internal factors in addition to the external ones causing concerns for Pakistan. First of all, Pakistan is facing a security situation in Baluchistan where the mega project of CPEC lies. Apart from separatists and causing disturbances other regional powers are also involved in sabotaging peace efforts in Baluchistan. A recent example of such an act of supporting the militants and causing damage to Gwadar is the episode of Indian spy Kulbhushan Yadav being arrested by Pakistani law enforcement agencies (Khetran, 2017).

Secondly, unlike Iran with a GDP (PPP) of \$1.596 trillion in 2022, Pakistan is trapped in debt (Tehran Times, 2023). Iran can run and administer Chabahar while Pakistan isn't in the position to take control of Gwadar. Also, the economic factor is very much crucial for running and administering ports. The construction of rail and road networks as well as linking them to the economic hubs of the country is crucial for the success of any port. Pakistan lacks the economic capacity and administrative capability to make Gwadar the success story. Currently Pakistan Gwadar port is on 40 years lease to a Chinese company (The Economic Times, 2017).

Last but not least Pakistan is facing political instability. Pakistan's political instability has added to the already fragile institutions. The lack of institutional capacity and political instability is the major hurdle in implementing CPEC-related projects in time. This factor has indirectly affected the flow of foreign direct investment into the country. On one hand, it is

melting the already-in-progress projects of CPEC while on the other hand; it is reducing Chinese confidence in Pakistan.

4. Conclusion

The Sino-Indian rivalry, which arose as a result of their territorial conflicts, is now evolving into more intense competition on land and at sea in terms of geopolitics and geo-economics. The growth of ports in the region reflects India and China's quest for dominance in the region. India's interest in the region must be secured by its participation in the Chabahar Port. However, the growing engagements of China in the Iranian blue economy particularly in the Chabahar Port jeopardized Indian interests in the region.

Being China's strategic adversary, India views China's economic and political dynamics as a danger to its regional economic and political plans. Sino-Indian geostrategic and geo-economics objectives are pushing regional states to split apart while at the same time intensifying the adversarial strategic and economic struggle between the neighboring states. However, Strategic, economic, political, and diplomatic consequences are being felt by Pakistan as a result of the Sino-Indian geostrategic and geo-economics rivalry over the ports of Iran. The reason is that Beijing intends to build additional ports in Iran. The most significant port is Bandar-e-Jask, and Chabahar, where the majority of the world's oil travels. Consequently, Gwadar might eventually lose its unique position as the primary port of the BRI's flagship corridor. Therefore, Pakistan should address its internal problems and prioritize the development of its ports and infrastructure to enhance its competitiveness in the region.

5. Policy Recommendations

Keeping in view the complex nature of the relationships of the involved actors requires a multilateral dialogue involving China, India, Iran, and Pakistan. It will not only promote diplomacy for peace and long-lasting cooperation but also will help to address concerns related to competition over the blue economy. Multilateral dialogue will benefit all the stakeholders encouraging the development of mutually beneficial economic partnerships that enhance trade and cooperation in the region.

Secondly, all four involved states adopt geostrategic competition as compared to other regional neighbors, and this competition and maximization of own state interest in a realist manner can only be minimized with interdependency and connectivity. The ports of

Chabahar and Ghawadar provide the opportunity for joint economic ventures which will compel India and Pakistan, and India and China to collaborate in joint economic projects. This could include investments in infrastructure, trade routes, maritime security, and energy projects.

Thirdly, to reduce the possible implications for Pakistan, due to geo-strategic competition between India's and China's investments in Chabahar port. Pakistan police makers should give top priority to developing its own ports and infrastructure. This involves making investments in the modernization of current ports and paving the way for the completion of important geo-strategic projects like CPEC. However, despite the recent unpleasant events between Iran and Pakistan regarding air strikes, both states should follow conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms and methods to avoid any unpleasant situation.

Last but not least, to reduce instability in the region, all states should work collectively on maritime security to ensure the safety of shipping lanes and the protection of economic interests. This could involve joint patrols, intelligence sharing, and capacity building to counter any potential security threats.

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