



THE EVOLUTION OF GWADAR PORT: SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS AND STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS WITHIN THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

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Abstract

This study examines the strategic development and geopolitical significance of Gwadar Port in Pakistan, analyzing historical and contemporary efforts by the United States, Singapore, and China. Gwadar Port, located on Pakistan's southwestern coast, has transformed from a small fishing village into a major deep-sea port with substantial economic and strategic value. The research objectives include evaluating the socio-economic impact of the port on the local population, assessing its strategic significance, and identifying challenges while recommending future development strategies. Methodologies employed include surveys among Gwadar residents, document analysis, archival research, and case studies of American, Singaporean, and Chinese involvement. The findings reveal that while the port's development has created employment opportunities and improved infrastructure, significant challenges remain, including regional instability and major power rivalries.

The study highlights the port's crucial role in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), emphasizing its potential to enhance regional trade and economic integration. However, it also underscores the need for enhanced China-Pakistan strategic trust, multilateral cooperation, and strategic communication with major powers to ensure sustainable development. The author hopes this study will offer insights for policymakers to maximize benefits and address challenges, while acknowledging limitations related to data accuracy and geopolitical dynamics.

Keywords: Gwadar Port, Pakistan, CPEC, regional geopolitics, strategic development,

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I. Introduction

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is situated in the southern region of the Asian continent. It covers a total land area of 803, 940 square kilometers, which is approximately equivalent to the combined land areas of France and the United Kingdom. Pakistan's eastern border is shared with India, extending for a length of 2, 912 kilometers. To the west, Pakistan is flanked by Iran, with a shared border spanning 909 kilometers. In the northwest, Pakistan's neighbor is Afghanistan, with whom it shares a 2, 430-kilometer border. Towards the northeast, China shares a 523 kilometer border with Pakistan. The nation's southern edge is bounded by the Arabian Sea, offering 1, 046 kilometers of coastline (Pakistan Paedia, 2024). Along the coastline, there are two major military ports: Karachi Port on the eastern coast and Gwadar Port on the western coast. Karachi Port is situated near the Indian border, while Gwadar Port lies close to the Iranian border. Originally an inconspicuous fishing village in the Makran region of Balochistan province, Gwadar has transformed into a strategic deep-sea port (Alamgir, 2011). Located in Gwadar city, Balochistan, southwestern Pakistan, the port is about 460 kilometers from Karachi and approximately 120 kilometers from the Pakistan-Iran border. It lies near the Arabian Sea and is positioned at the entrance of the Strait of Hormuz (Figure 1).



Figure 1, Location of Gwadar (source:Google map)

Gwadar Port has attracted substantial scholarly attention due to its strategic location and its integration into the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the broader Belt and

Road Initiative (BRI). Existing studies generally emphasize Gwadar's geostrategic value, particularly its proximity to the Strait of Hormuz and its potential to diversify regional trade routes (Rahman, 2024; Portia, 2017). Scholars also highlight Pakistan's aspiration to transform Gwadar from a peripheral fishing town into a regional logistics hub (Alamgir, 2011). Much of this literature adopts a descriptive or state-centric perspective, focusing primarily on geopolitical narratives while offering limited empirical assessment of local socio-economic transformations. Research on the port's development trajectory tends to concentrate on the United States, Singapore, and China, etc, yet often treats these phases separately. For example, studies of American and Singaporean involvement generally discuss political failures and contractual limitations (Humaira, 2021; Ali & Khan, 2019), whereas analyses of Chinese engagement under CPEC frequently highlight infrastructure investment but seldom examine how these efforts compare with or diverge from earlier development attempts (Ziad, 2018). This fragmented approach leaves unresolved questions about how successive foreign interventions have collectively shaped Gwadar's institutional, economic, and social evolution.

Sveral studies acknowledge Gwadar's potential to stimulate growth in Balochistan, but they often rely on macro-level projections rather than micro-level empirical evidence. Limited scholarly work investigates the lived experiences of local communities or systematically evaluates changes in employment, infrastructure, and living standards. The gap between projected benefits and documented on-ground realities remains insufficiently explored, particularly in terms of how local perceptions align—or conflict—with national development narratives. Furthermore, although the strategic importance of Gwadar within the BRI is widely noted, the existing literature insufficiently integrates geopolitical analysis with socio-economic outcomes. This creates a theoretical gap between security-driven assessments of the port's strategic utility and development-oriented analyses of its economic implications. A more holistic, interdisciplinary approach is needed to understand how geopolitics, development planning, and community-level impacts interact within the evolving Gwadar landscape.

In response to these gaps, the present study combines survey data, historical document

analysis, and case-study methodology to provide an integrated assessment of Gwadar Port's evolution, the primary objectives of this study are:

- To analyze the socio-economic impact of Gwadar Port on the local population: This involves understanding how the port's development has influenced employment opportunities, infrastructure development, and the standard of living in Gwadar.
- To examine the historical and current developmental efforts at Gwadar Port: This includes evaluating the contributions and impacts of American, Singaporean, and Chinese efforts in the port's evolution.
- To assess the strategic significance of Gwadar Port: This includes its geographical, economic, and political advantages, particularly in relation to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- To identify and analyze challenges and recommend strategies for the future development of Gwadar Port: This involves addressing intrinsic challenges, the impact of major power rivalries, and regional obstructions.

This study provides strategic insights into Gwadar Port's role in regional geopolitics and international trade dynamics. After analysis on historical development efforts and identifying challenges alongside proposing strategies, the author offers comprehensive economic impact assessment that aids policymakers in making informed decisions to maximize benefits and address challenges. However, the study's limitations include potential biases in secondary sources, the dynamic nature of geopolitical contexts that may render some findings time-sensitive, and the challenge of capturing the full socio-economic impact on the local population due to variability in data accuracy and availability.

II. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Geopolitics Theory

Geopolitics Theory provides a foundational lens for analyzing Gwadar Port's strategic relevance within regional and global power dynamics. Mahan (1890) and Mackinder (1904) argue that control over maritime chokepoints and strategic territories enhances a state's ability to project influence and secure national interests. Gwadar's proximity to the Strait of Hormuz aligns closely with Mahanian maritime doctrine, which emphasizes the significance

of naval power and access to critical sea lanes. Contemporary scholars similarly highlight Gwadar's role in enabling China and Pakistan to diversify trade routes and mitigate vulnerabilities associated with the Strait of Malacca (Rahman, 2024; Portia, 2017). Critical geopolitics further emphasizes how states construct narratives to justify strategic projects (Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992). In this context, China positions Gwadar as part of the BRI, framing it as a node of "win-win cooperation," whereas Western analyses often interpret the port as a component of China's expanding regional influence. Pakistan, meanwhile, promotes Gwadar as a "gateway to Eurasia," reinforcing its geopolitical relevance.

2.2. Strategic Depth Theory

Originally formulated within Pakistan's military doctrine, strategic depth refers to the ability of a state to secure geographical and political space to withstand external pressure—initially directed toward countering India's military advantage (Khan, 2012). Gwadar expands Pakistan's strategic depth by reducing dependence on Karachi, which is geographically vulnerable due to its proximity to the Indian border, and by enhancing naval mobility and force dispersal along the Makran coast.

Furthermore, scholars argue that strategic depth extends beyond military considerations to include economic and logistical resilience (Rizvi, 2018). Gwadar fits into this expanded conceptualization by serving as a platform for trade diversification, energy security, and regional economic integration. Its integration into CPEC also deepens Pakistan–China security cooperation, indirectly strengthening Pakistan's strategic posture.

Geopolitics Theory and Strategic Depth Theory provide this study with a multi-level analytical approach to understanding the evolution of Gwadar Port, where the former illuminates external strategic drivers such as China's pursuit of secure maritime access, U.S. interests in Central Asia, and broader competition in the Indian Ocean, while the latter clarifies internal motivations related to Pakistan's security vulnerabilities, regional disparities, and the need to strengthen state presence in Balochistan. Combined, these theories offer a coherent framework for examining Pakistan's pursuit of Gwadar as both a strategic and economic asset, interpreting foreign involvement across the American, Singaporean, and Chinese development phases, and assessing the port's role within an emerging regional

security architecture.

II. Methodology

2.1 Surveys

To assess the socio-economic impact of Gwadar Port's development on the local population, surveys were conducted among Gwadar residents. The surveys were designed to collect qualitative and quantitative data on various aspects of the port's influence, including:

- **Employment Opportunities:** Questions focused on whether the development of Gwadar Port created new job opportunities for the locals, changes in employment rates, and the types of jobs generated.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Respondents were asked about improvements in infrastructure, such as roads, public transportation, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions, and how these changes impacted their daily lives.
- **Standard of Living:** The survey assessed changes in the standard of living, including income levels, access to basic amenities, and overall quality of life before and after the port's development.

The survey data was then analyzed using statistical methods to identify trends, correlations, and the overall socio-economic impact of Gwadar Port on the local community.

2.2 Secondary Sources

Document Analysis

A document analysis was conducted to gain insights from existing literature. This involved reviewing government reports, academic articles, and policy papers relevant to Gwadar Port, the CPEC, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Key documents analyzed included:

- Reports by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and World Bank
- Publications by Chinese and Pakistani governments on CPEC and BRI
- Policy papers and academic studies on the geopolitical and economic implications of Gwadar Port

Archival Research

Historical records and archival materials were reviewed to trace the development trajectory of Gwadar Port. This includes agreements and contracts between Pakistan and international entities like Unocal Corporation, Singapore Port Authority, and China Overseas Port Holding

Company (COPHC), and historical documents detailing the initial plans, negotiations, and milestones in the port's development

Statistical Data

Quantitative data on port traffic, economic indicators, and regional trade flows were collected from various sources, including:

- Pakistan Bureau of Statistics
- Gwadar Port Authority
- International trade databases

2.3 Case Study Approach

A case study approach was adopted to provide an in-depth examination of specific aspects of Gwadar Port's development. The study analyzed three key phases: American Development Efforts, focusing on Unocal Corporation's proposed pipeline project; Singaporean Operations, assessing the operational management by the Singapore Port Authority (PSA) and its impact on infrastructure and efficiency; and Chinese Development, examining China's financial and technical involvement, infrastructural enhancements, and strategic motivations within the frameworks of the CPEC and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

III. Development History of Gwadar Port

3.1 American Development Efforts

The development of Gwadar Port has its roots in the late 1990s when the American company, Unocal Corporation, proposed an ambitious oil and gas pipeline project. The plan involved constructing a pipeline starting from the Dauletabad oil fields in Turkmenistan, passing through Afghanistan, and reaching Pakistan's Mardan, eventually terminating at Gwadar Port. The proposed pipeline would span approximately 1,950 kilometers with an estimated investment of \$1.7 billion. Designed to transport 1.5 to 2 billion cubic feet of oil and gas daily, the pipeline aimed to deliver Central Asian oil and gas resources to Japan, South Korea, and other Far Eastern countries via the Indian Ocean, promising substantial economic benefits. However, the project faced significant challenges due to the ongoing Afghan civil war, which threatened its progress. Additionally, Russia, concerned about expanding American influence in Central Asia, quickly secured 80% of Turkmenistan's oil and gas extraction rights.

Consequently, of Turkmenistan's annual production of 82 billion cubic feet of oil and gas, 62 billion cubic feet were sold to Russia, with the remainder distributed among Iran and other countries. This development undermined Pakistan's pipeline project, leading to the eventual abandonment of the American plan. Compounded by other political factors, Unocal Corporation withdrew from the bidding process (Humaira, 2021).

In 1998, Pakistani government signed a memorandum of understanding with the American Forbes Corporation for the development of Gwadar Port, bypassing international bidding procedures. Edward Forbes, an American businessman, through the Chairman of the Pakistan Investment Federation, Ektat, reached a \$460 million development agreement with the local government of Gwadar Port. The agreement granted Forbes Corporation almost sovereign-like powers, including infrastructure development, policing, and security measures. The company was authorized to construct walls, lighting systems, and an independent electronic communication network, including satellite ground stations and microwave transmission towers, and even planned an exclusive airport and runway. This arrangement raised severe sovereignty concerns for Gwadar Port (Ali & Khan, 2019).

The media reported the plan, sparking opposition from the Pakistani public and military. Under intense domestic pressure, the local parliament of Gwadar Port passed a resolution against the agreement with the American company, ultimately causing the American plan to fail.

3.2 Singaporean Operations

In 2005, Pakistan publicly tendered the operational rights for Gwadar Port for the first time. Four companies emerged as contenders: the Singapore Port Authority (PSA), Saudi Global Maritime Services Company, Pak-French International Container Terminal Joint Investment Company, and Malaysia's Western Port Company. Singapore won the bid with the highest offer, securing a 40-year operating lease for Gwadar Port. By 2007, initial port construction was completed, and Singapore assumed operational control of Gwadar Port from then-President Pervez Musharraf.

Despite securing operational rights, Singapore's efforts were marred by insufficient development investments, leading to deteriorating port facilities and suboptimal operations. Additionally, Singapore failed to fulfill its contractual obligation to invest \$525 million in

expanding the port's terminals, resulting in significant dissatisfaction from the Pakistani government (Ziad, 2018).

Due to Singapore's inadequate performance and failure to meet investment commitments, the Pakistani government decided to reclaim the port's operational rights. In 2012, Pakistan formally transferred Gwadar Port's operational management to China. On February 18, 2013, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari announced that Pakistan would transfer operational control of Gwadar Port to China Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC).

3.3 Chinese Development

Following the rise to power of Pervez Musharraf in 1999, Pakistan decided to advance the construction of Gwadar Deep Sea Port and sought assistance from China. Musharraf's visit to China in July 2000 strengthened the friendly relations between the two countries, resulting in agreements on several key issues. Subsequently, in August 2001, China decided to participate in the project, signing a financing agreement with the Pakistani government for the first phase of Gwadar Port's development.

On February 18, 2013, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari announced the formal transfer of control over Gwadar Port from the Singapore Port Authority (PSA) to China Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC). Under this agreement, China assumed full responsibility for all development projects at the port and was entitled to 91% of the port's maritime revenue. On November 11, 2015, China officially took over 9.23 square kilometers of land at Gwadar Port for a period of 43 years, which included the management of Gwadar International Airport and the associated economic zone.

Since the transfer of control, Gwadar Port has become a crucial maritime outlet for the CPEC. Chinese investments and construction activities have accelerated, continuously optimizing the port's functionalities. By 2016, the port was fully operational, marking the comprehensive launch of CPEC's flagship project (Ziad, 2018). (Figure 2)

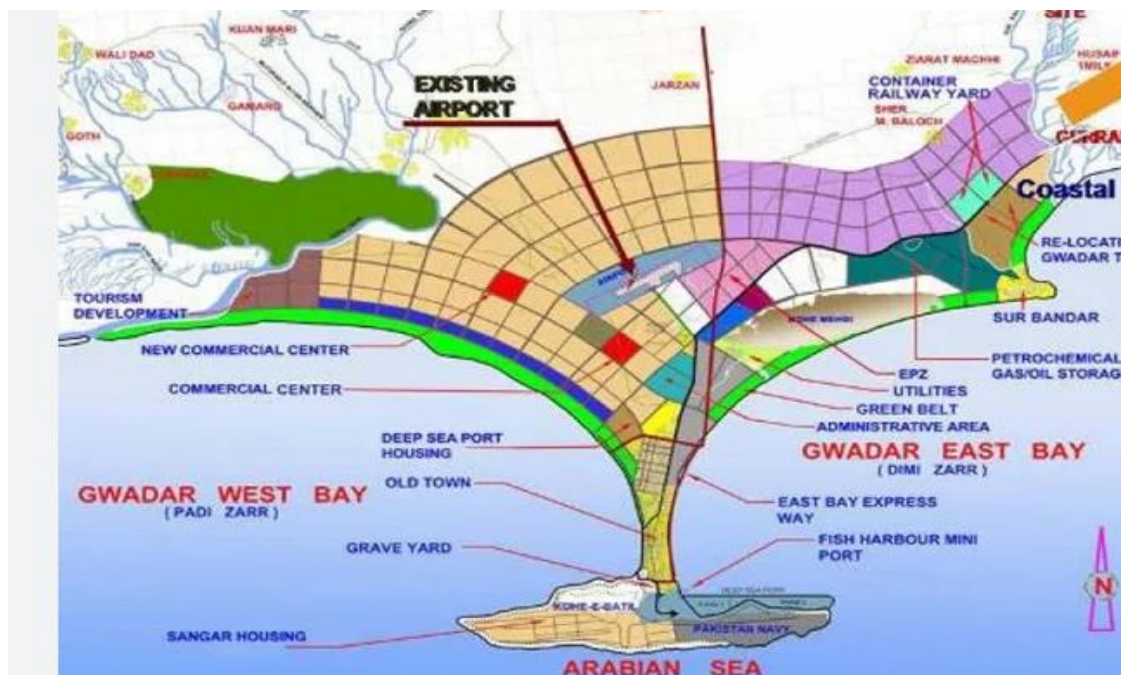


Figure 2, Magnetic port of Gwadar and CPEC(Source: Pakistan & Gulf Economist)

In November 2022, a joint statement by China and Pakistan highlighted that: "Both sides recognize Gwadar Port as a leading project of CPEC and a significant node in regional connectivity. Both parties expressed satisfaction with the completion of key projects and agreed to expedite the development of Gwadar Port and other projects within the Free Zone" (China-Pakistan Joint Statement, 2022).

In October 2023, another joint statement reiterated: "Both sides acknowledge Gwadar Port as a crucial node in regional connectivity and agree to accelerate the construction of supporting facilities at Gwadar Port. They expressed satisfaction with the progress of key projects such as the Gwadar Desalination Plant, the new Gwadar International Airport, and the China-Pakistan Friendship Hospital, reaffirming their commitment to developing Gwadar Port into a high-quality port, regional trade center, and connectivity hub" (China-Pakistan Joint News Statement, 2023).

These statements clearly indicate Pakistan's vision for Gwadar Port as a high-quality port, regional trade center, and connectivity hub.

3.4 Construction Progress

The development of Gwadar Deep Sea Port, Pakistan's third major port, holds significant economic importance for the western and northern regions of the country. The Phase 1 project

of Gwadar Port, initiated as part of the Gwadar Deep Water Port Project, included the construction of three berths designed to serve multiple purposes, including roll-on/roll-off cargo. The port was designed with a handling capacity of 100, 000 TEUs per year and 720, 000 tons of bulk cargo annually. The berths were constructed to accommodate ships up to 50, 000 DWT, with a total length of 702 meters, utilizing high-pile prestressed beam slab structures.

The Phase 1 construction included dredging the port basin and approach channel for vessels up to 30, 000 DWT, with considerations for 25, 000 DWT container ships. The approach channel extended 4.35 kilometers. Additional infrastructure included civil works, power supply, water supply, firefighting systems, environmental protection measures, communication, navigation, loading and unloading facilities, and computer-aided management and control systems. The total project cost was \$248 million, with China providing \$198 million through grants, interest-free loans, concessional loans, and buyer's credit, while Pakistan contributed \$50 million in matching funds. The project, managed by China Harbour Engineering Company, commenced on March 22, 2002, with a contractual period of 37 months but was completed in 33 months. The project received high praise for its quality and was celebrated as a milestone in Sino-Pakistani friendship (Hasan, 2021).

The development of Gwadar Port was planned in two phases. Phase 1, costing \$248 million, primarily focused on port infrastructure, including three multifunctional berths and a 4.35-kilometer approach channel. China's financial support covered most of these costs, while Pakistan's funds were allocated for taxes, port authority office buildings, and other ancillary projects.

Phase 2, scheduled for 2016-2029 with an estimated investment of \$1.62 billion, involves extensive port expansion. This phase includes the construction of port facilities along a 3.2-kilometer coastline, comprising one grain terminal, one roll-on/roll-off terminal, one bulk cargo terminal for ships up to 100, 000 DWT, two oil terminals for tankers up to 200, 000 DWT, and three container terminals, totaling 75 berths. Additional infrastructure includes the six-lane East Bay Expressway, Gwadar International Airport, a desalination plant, a 300 MW coal-fired power plant, a floating LNG terminal with a daily processing capacity of 14

million cubic meters, and a 14.5-meter-deep approach channel (Ali & Khan, 2019).

The Pakistani government allocated 519 million rupees for Phase 2 development, listing it in the 2010-2011 Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP). The PSDP budget earmarked 69.96 million rupees for constructing Gwadar Port’s infrastructure center, with a total project cost of about 200 million rupees. Additionally, the government planned the construction of the East Bay Expressway to integrate Gwadar Port into the national highway network, with an estimated cost of 6.274 billion rupees. (Figure 3)

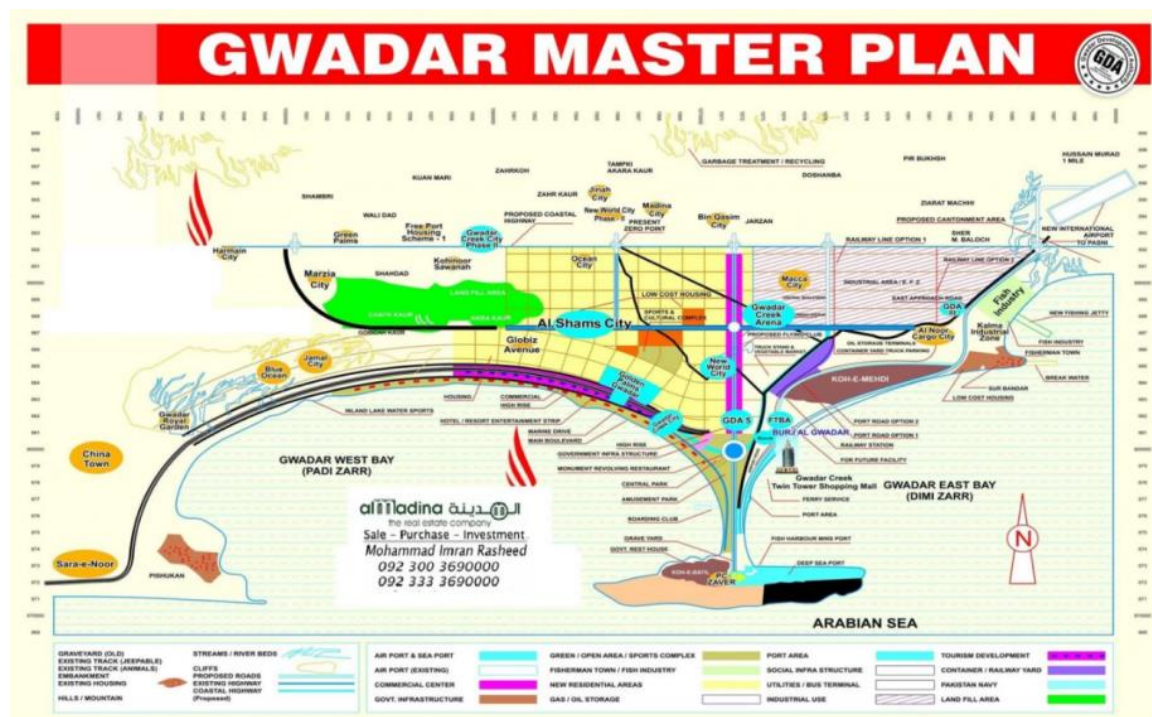


Figure 3, Gwadar Master Plan (Source: zckuo.jshcanada.org)

Concurrently, the government aimed to enhance port postal services through projects like establishing an automated postal sorting system, developing mail/cash/goods delivery services, and constructing postal buildings, with respective allocations of 27.618 million rupees, 14.693 million rupees, and 38.773 million rupees, totaling around 1.16 billion rupees. By 2010-2011, 81 million rupees had already been allocated (Ziad, 2018).

Currently, Gwadar Deep Sea Port features a multifunctional terminal with three berths for ships up to 50, 000 DWT and a 140, 000 square meter back storage yard. The port is fully operational, capable of handling bulk cargo, containers, roll-on/roll-off cargo, and liquefied petroleum gas.

In the Gwadar Free Zone, the first phase of construction has been completed, including

facilities for fisheries processing, grain and oil processing, fertilizer production, animal vaccine production, lubricating oil production, electric vehicle assembly, metal materials manufacturing, overseas warehouses, and service industries (hotels, banks, insurance, and financial leasing), with an investment exceeding 3 billion yuan.

After years of effort, Gwadar Port has finally achieved its goal of connecting with major ports worldwide, enhancing its position in South Asia's maritime landscape and resolving longstanding commercial operation issues. The port's development is expected to spur economic growth in Balochistan province and throughout Pakistan, providing the nearest seaport for landlocked Central Asian countries like Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. This strategic positioning enables Gwadar Port to serve as a maritime transshipment hub for these nations, facilitating trade with Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Oman, UAE, Iran, Iraq, and even China's western provinces like Xinjiang. According to a representative from China Overseas Port Holding Company, Gwadar Port's construction not only saves time for Chinese exports and imports but also benefits Pakistan and its neighboring countries through increased trade. Gwadar Port is envisioned as a modern coastal city with an airport connecting it to international destinations, becoming a new emblematic city for Pakistan (China-Pakistan Joint News Statement, 2023).

IV. Strategic Advantages of Gwadar Port

4.1 Geographical Location

Gwadar Port, located in the southern province of Balochistan, Pakistan, has evolved into the country's third major deep-sea port after years of development. Its strategic position near the Strait of Hormuz and the Arabian Sea provides significant control over the entrance to the Persian Gulf, making it a crucial transit hub for routes leading north into the Gulf, south to Africa, and west into the Red Sea. This location offers Gwadar Port a strategic advantage as it lies near major shipping lanes of the Persian Gulf and is a natural ice-free port.

The port's connectivity via railways, highways, and air links extends to Central Asia and South Asia, potentially creating a major transportation artery from China's Xinjiang region to the Indian Ocean. Situated at the intersection of the North-South Silk Road, Gwadar is a vital transportation hub along the BRI, connecting West Asia, the Middle East, South Asia, Africa,

and Europe. This positioning makes it an undeveloped but strategically significant area for economic development (Sial, 2020).

4.2 Economic Development Potential

Gwadar Port is located within Pakistan's exclusive economic zone and the resource-rich province of Balochistan, known for its abundant fish and seafood, as well as significant mineral and hydrocarbon resources. The extensive development over the years has transformed Gwadar into one of Pakistan's most resource-rich and technically advanced regions, making it a prime area for economic growth.

The presence of a combined military and civilian airport near the port supports the development of air transport. Additionally, the nearby Shadi Kaur Dam can facilitate the construction of power plants to provide continuous electricity to the port. Gwadar's development is not only integral to the broader BRI framework but also carries the aspirations of local populations for improved living standards. As the BRI and CPEC initiatives progress, Gwadar's economic prospects appear promising, with potential to become a major economic hub in the region (Ali & Javed, 2019).

4.3 Unique Political Status

Gwadar Port's strategic location offers several political advantages. Situated far from India and close to the Iranian border (only 72 kilometers away), Gwadar is also near Afghanistan. Pakistan shares deep historical, geographical, religious, cultural, and ethnic ties with Afghanistan, traditionally holding significant influence there. Developing Gwadar Port at this tri-junction could strengthen Pakistan's relationships with its neighbors, Iran and Afghanistan, fostering traditional bonds and cooperation.

Compared to Karachi, Pakistan's primary port, Gwadar's location is more advantageous for regional dynamics. As a Muslim-majority country, Pakistan's Gwadar Port serves as a crucial maritime gateway connecting to the Islamic nations of the Arabian Peninsula. Leveraging shared religious beliefs, mutual interests in petroleum resources, and a cooperative framework aimed at win-win outcomes, Gwadar is poised to become a regional economic and trade center. This development is likely to enhance economic integration and deepen trade cooperation among regional players, including China, thereby promoting regional economic stability and growth (Ahmad & Mi, 2017).

V. Gwadar Port and China

5.1 Key Node in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

The CPEC has intertwined the economic futures of China and Pakistan. Starting in Kashgar, Xinjiang, and ending at Gwadar Port, this corridor spans east to west, reaching the Indian Ocean. CPEC is envisioned as a catalyst for economic resurgence and national rejuvenation, a "golden opportunity" for Pakistan. As the western terminus of CPEC, Gwadar links to six major economic corridors within the BRI, including the China-Pakistan, New Eurasian Land Bridge, China-Mongolia-Russia, China-Central Asia-West Asia, China-Indochina Peninsula, and Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar corridors. This connectivity underscores Gwadar's immense strategic and developmental potential, making it a flagship project for cross-regional economic cooperation, energy infrastructure integration, and capacity investment (Wolf, 2019).

Given China's current economic landscape characterized by excess capacity and slower growth, Gwadar's development and operation provide an outlet for Chinese capital and industrial output. The port's development not only bolsters Pakistan's economy but also supports China's westward economic expansion. In November 2014, Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif signed a \$45.6 billion investment agreement with China to develop CPEC, focusing on infrastructure and energy projects over the next six years. The 4,000-kilometer road network connecting Gwadar to Kashgar is set to enhance land transport between the two countries, facilitating trade and personnel exchanges. The Chairman of the Gwadar Port Authority, Jamaldini, emphasized Gwadar's pivotal role in CPEC's success. Chinese coastal cities like Fuzhou, Xiamen, and Zhanjiang actively participate in Gwadar's investment projects, with Zhuhai promoting the development of a China Southern Products Exhibition and Trading Center in Gwadar's free trade zone (Ali, 2019).

The development and operation of Gwadar Port are expected to attract substantial Chinese investment and technology, propelling CPEC's construction, aligning with the BRI strategy, and fostering development in China's western regions, especially Xinjiang. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), established at the end of 2015, further enhances the prospects for Gwadar's development and subsequent operations by providing crucial financial

support (Small, 2015).

5.2 Expanding China's Geostrategic Space

For a major power like China, having strategic depth and regional influence is crucial. While China possesses significant strategic depth in its western and northwestern regions, its eastern and southeastern activities have been constrained, conflicting with its status as a leading global economic and political power. This has impeded the realization of the "Chinese Dream." In the East and South China Seas, countries like Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam, supported by the United States, have created a series of island chains to encircle China. In South Asia, India, which perceives China as a rival, occupies 65,000 square kilometers of Chinese territory in Southern Tibet. Resolving the Sino-Indian border dispute requires both governments' wisdom and resolve. Since 2010, the U.S. has refocused its strategy on the Asia-Pacific, fostering conflicts in the East and South China Seas to contain China's rise.

Amid these challenges, turning to Gwadar Port allows China to sidestep direct conflicts with the U.S. and establish Gwadar as a bridgehead in South Asia under the BRI. Coupled with ports in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and Chittagong, Bangladesh, Gwadar forms a U-shaped strategic chain exerting pressure on India. This expansion into South Asia and the Indian Ocean strengthens China's presence, reinforces its image as a major power, and enhances its influence in South Asia and Central Asia (Blanchard, 2017).

5.3 Creating a New Energy Corridor

According to BP's Annual Energy Review, China surpassed the U.S. as the world's largest energy consumer in 2010 based on total primary energy consumption. Over the next two decades, China's energy demand is expected to continue growing robustly, driving global liquid energy demand. However, as a major energy consumer, China faces significant energy security challenges. Rapidly increasing demand and rising dependency on foreign energy sources make China's energy situation increasingly precarious. Currently, 70% of China's imported crude oil passes through the vulnerable Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca, exposing these routes to threats from piracy and geopolitical conflicts.

Gwadar Port, located near the Persian Gulf at a key strategic chokepoint, offers a solution. Building an oil pipeline from Gwadar to Xinjiang could reduce the transportation distance by up to 85%, cutting shipping time and costs while mitigating the "Malacca Dilemma." This

new route would diversify China's energy supply corridors, enhancing energy security. The China-Pakistan oil pipeline project, part of the CPEC framework, is actively being planned. Ashley Tellis, an expert from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, noted that such a pipeline would provide China with a steady oil supply from the Gulf in the future (Tellis, 2013).

5.4 Future Overseas Strategic Support Point

Oceans serve as major conduits for global trade, significantly impacting national economies and politics. Alfred Thayer Mahan, a prominent sea power theorist, argued that maintaining and strengthening overseas power is essential for a nation's prosperity. A nation's power hinges on its mobility, especially its ability to project power over long distances. This capability enables a nation to exert influence globally.

As China transitions from a regional power to a global one, developing long-range power projection capabilities, including a blue-water navy, is essential. Since joining anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden in 2008, the Chinese Navy has not only safeguarded maritime security but also fulfilled its responsibilities as a major power and developed naval talent. Located on the Arabian Sea near the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz, Gwadar Port's strategic location and proximity to China make it a key support point in the Western Indian Ocean. It can serve as a bridgehead for protecting and expanding China's overseas interests and is vital for China's westward strategy (Mahan, 2010).

VI. Challenges and Recommendations

6.1 Challenges

Gwadar Port is situated in the Balochistan province, the poorest and most underdeveloped region of Pakistan, characterized by the highest maternal and infant mortality rates and the lowest literacy rates in the country. The region is marred by complex ethnic and religious issues, compounded by the intervention of major powers, resulting in prolonged instability. Three main factors contribute to this instability: ethnic tensions between the Baloch and Punjabi populations, sectarian conflicts between Sunni and Shia Muslims, and disputes over natural resource extraction between the Balochistan provincial government and Pakistan's central government. These tensions have led to protests and even terrorist attacks against

Gwadar Port projects involving Chinese enterprises. Resolving these ethnic and sectarian conflicts, and addressing resource disputes between central and provincial governments, is crucial for regional stability and the successful development of Gwadar Port, which is integral to China's BRI.

In terms of infrastructure, the proposed China-Pakistan oil pipeline connecting Gwadar Port to Xinjiang must traverse regions with complex ethnic and religious dynamics and frequent conflicts. The route also includes challenging terrains such as mountains and permafrost areas, necessitating solutions to both engineering challenges and sensitive ethnic relations. Currently, the only land route between China and Pakistan, the Karakoram Highway, remains closed for most of the autumn and winter seasons due to climatic conditions. Additionally, political instability in Pakistan poses significant challenges to the project's development and sustainability (Zhao, 2018).

6.1.1 Impact of Major Power Rivalries

Gwadar Port's strategic location at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, West Asia, and East Africa, near the Strait of Hormuz, a vital global energy route, inevitably involves it in major power rivalries. The United States, aiming to maintain its global hegemony and counter China's rise, is unlikely to ignore China's expanding strategic depth and influence in this region. With military bases across the Asia-Pacific, South Asia, and Central Asia, the U.S. is poised to intervene in China's BRI efforts to various extents, reflecting concerns articulated by former National Intelligence Council Chairman Thomas Fingar, who identified China as a key challenge in the 21st century. Gwadar's proximity to the Strait of Hormuz, approximately 400 kilometers away, makes it a strategic point for the U.S. to monitor and potentially control Middle Eastern and Persian Gulf energy supplies, posing a dual maritime and territorial threat to China with its deep-sea fleet and Afghan military presence (Kaplan, 2013).

India harbors significant reservations about the China-Pakistan cooperation on Gwadar Port and the CPEC, viewing them as strategic moves to counter India's regional dominance and hinder its rise. Concerns about Gwadar Port's potential militarization and its integration with other Chinese-influenced ports like Colombo and Hambantota, which could encircle India, exacerbate these suspicions. Although China has no intentions of militarizing Gwadar Port, alleviating India's concerns remains challenging. Thus, China needs to consider major power

interference factors from a broader strategic perspective to effectively counter these challenges and ensure the smooth progress of its BRI strategy (Pant, 2012).

6.1.2 Regional Obstruction

The development of Gwadar Port and the establishment of an oil pipeline to Xinjiang could reduce China's dependence on Middle Eastern oil, potentially affecting the economic interests of some Middle Eastern countries. India perceives China's development of Gwadar Port as a challenge to its traditional sphere of influence in South Asia, worrying that China will strengthen its influence in the region and constrain India's strategic development. Furthermore, Iran plans to upgrade Chabahar Port, located near Gwadar, to serve as a bridge for India's access to Afghanistan and Central Asia. For Iran, China's full-scale development of Gwadar Port could divert cargo and passenger traffic from Chabahar, jeopardizing Iran's significant trade partnership with India. As a crucial neighbor, Iran's stance significantly impacts China's BRI strategy (Small, 2015).

6.2 Recommendations for Gwadar Port Development

6.2.1 Enhancing China-Pakistan Strategic Trust and Facilitating Bilateral Cooperation

China and Pakistan have been long-standing all-weather strategic partners, characterized by strong political trust and close economic collaboration. China regards Pakistan as a crucial ally in its westward strategy. As President Xi Jinping stated, "China and Pakistan are good friends, good neighbors, and good partners, enduring and steadfast." The development and operation of Gwadar Port symbolize the friendship between China and Pakistan and represent an integral part of their win-win strategy.

To further enhance bilateral cooperation, China should leverage the CPEC to deepen political trust and promote economic collaboration. This involves assisting the Pakistani government in strengthening the management of Gwadar Port, establishing effective security mechanisms to prevent terrorist attacks and sabotage, and ensuring the port's safe and stable operations. Additionally, China should foster collaboration in infrastructure development, energy exploitation, and trade logistics, thereby promoting Pakistan's economic development and improving local livelihoods to address the root causes of instability in the Gwadar region (Rafiq, 2017).

6.2.2 Deepening Multilateral Cooperation to Promote Regional Peace and Development

China should actively advocate for multilateral cooperation in the development of Gwadar Port to promote regional peace and development. By establishing a "Gwadar Port Economic Development Alliance" with Pakistan and other relevant countries, China can facilitate cooperation in infrastructure development, energy exploitation, and trade logistics, ensuring mutual benefits. Additionally, China should seek to cooperate with neighboring countries such as Iran, Afghanistan, and India, promoting regional peace, stability, and economic development. Through such collaborations, China can help resolve regional conflicts, reduce external interference, and create a favorable environment for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Garlick, 2018).

6.2.3 Strengthening Strategic Communication with Major Powers to Garner More Support

China should enhance strategic communication with major powers to gain broader support for the BRI. Despite strategic competition, China and the United States share common interests in regions such as the Asia-Pacific, South Asia, and Central Asia, particularly in counter terrorism, energy security, and regional stability. Strengthening strategic dialogue with the U.S. can improve mutual trust, reduce strategic miscalculations, and minimize friction. Additionally, China should leverage multilateral platforms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) to enhance cooperation with Russia, India, and Japan, promoting regional peace and development.

Moreover, China should actively participate in global governance, advocating for international fairness and justice to gain broader international support for the BRI. Enhancing strategic communication with major powers will help mitigate geopolitical risks and ensure the smooth implementation of the Gwadar Port project (Swaine, 2015).

6.2.4 Enhancing National Strength and Strategic Responsiveness

To effectively advance the BRI, China must continuously enhance its national strength and improve its strategic responsiveness. Accelerating economic restructuring and promoting economic transformation and upgrading will improve the quality and efficiency of economic development. Strengthening technological innovation will enhance China's technological capabilities and competitiveness. Moreover, bolstering military strength and modernizing

national defense will enhance China's defense capabilities and deterrence power. Actively participating in international affairs and increasing China's discourse power and influence on the global stage will provide robust support for the BRI.

Conclusion

Gwadar Port's strategic location and development hold significant implications for Pakistan's economy and regional geopolitics. The port's evolution, influenced by American, Singaporean, and Chinese efforts, underscores its potential as a critical hub for international trade and a linchpin in the CPEC and BRI. The study reveals that while Gwadar has made substantial progress, challenges such as regional instability and power rivalries persist. To harness Gwadar's full potential, it is crucial to enhance China-Pakistan strategic trust, foster multilateral cooperation, and strengthen strategic communication with major powers. Addressing these challenges and leveraging strategic opportunities can position Gwadar as a pivotal maritime and economic center in South Asia and beyond.

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