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## Geo-Strategic Importance of Gwadar and Power Politics between China and America

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### Abstract

Gwadar, the Deep-sea port city of Balochistan, is the most important international energy and trade route between the West and East. Untapped natural resources of the landlocked central Asian Countries have increased the importance of Gwadar for international, power games, especially for the U.S.A and China. It has a special influence on regional and global politics owing to its geostrategic position. Gwadar has exponentially enhanced the lust of power for China and U.S.A because the sea politics wields great significance in terms of commercial and defence activities. The deep sea port of Gwadar covers vast sea areas with warm waters and sea lanes that have driven the US and China's attention in power politics. Apart from this, China and the United States economically and militarily are major powers that have been stepping up their advancement to get hold of this strategically important region. This research paper explores the geo-strategic significance of Gwadar and the power struggle between China and the United States and their containment design towards each other. This study is qualitative in nature and secondary data were collected from different sources such as books, journal articles, and other published materials from various websites. Furthermore, the researcher has selected the most relevant materials for the research purpose. Different themes were developed and collected data were analyzed accordingly. It is concluded that China has implemented different projects, especially CPEC to influence power politics. On the other hand, the USA is also influencing Pakistan's economic and political policies in the context of Gwadar's development. So, the strategic importance of Gwadar increased the power struggle between China and America.

#### Keywords:

Geo-Strategic, Gwadar, Power Politics, China, America

## Introduction

Gwadar possesses geo-strategically a very important location. It lies on the Arabian Sea and it is close to Strait of Hormuz, which is a dynamic trading and oil shipping route. Gwadar, situated at the crossroad of the international energy trade routes, plays a crucial role in the regional geo-political arena. It is a strategic hub for the economic and commercial activities of the entire region. In addition, it is also close to the Chabahar port, which is located in Iran. Gwadar's geographical location has increased the interests of the two major powers: China and the USA, which greatly influence the regional power politics. Both China and the US are struggling to establish their hegemony in this region in order to influence each other militarily and economically. Therefore, Gwadar can serve best in this regard. The US and China's tug-of-war has also triggered trade war, thus, resulting in serious ramifications for world's economy.

Now there is an indicative of a strategic shift on the Russian side in the region that the Russia has been providing military hardware, technology and equipment to China, this is a real shift that both countries see each other as important partners. The growing economic and military relationship between the two countries is a clear message to the United States that they would thwart American dominance in the region with the help of Iran. But the US absolutely does not want to experience the greatest constraints on its power, therefore, it wants to enjoy greater hegemony and confronts its most formidable rival and challenger, China in the region, where China is the only country challenging its supremacy, while the U.S aspires to be merely a great power to establish sufficient dominance in the region.

Power politics of two major traditional and arch rivals coupled with the

great military and economic powers of China and the United States will further greatly aggravate the deteriorating situation of the region which can cause dire implications for the stability and prosperity of the region. China's long-term policy objective in the region is that it aspires to be the regional hegemonic power. However, the US is an Asian-Pacific power and its political, economic and security interests in the region are deep rooted. In fact, China feels uneasy with the US policy as a superior and sometimes wants to get involved in managing regional affairs.

China's One Belt One Road initiative and China Pakistan Economic corridor is significant to China's energy security. The OBOR is part of China's grand strategy of its rise as a great power on the globe through financial activities. The CPEC is part of One Belt One Road initiative. Thus, China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been termed as a game changer. This project is known as fate changer which includes a network of roads, railway tracks, construction and development of ports, airports, economic zones, fiber optic for communication, oil and gas pipelines to connect the western areas of China to the Gwadar deep sea port. This project has strengthened Pakistan China's ties to a great extent.

China is suspicious that the US may block off its oil supplies chain through Malacca Strait in any unfavorable situation of intensifying animosities. Around 80 per cent of China's oil is import via this route and it is believed to be a vulnerable passage. A warm water deep sea port of Gwadar will be an alternative route for China to transport its crude oil and also ensure its presence in the Indian Ocean to monitor its energy shipments from the Persian Gulf. India is too keen to get a position of global power for itself. For US interests a powerful India is all-important as a counterbalances

tool to contain China. In addition, China is looking for a safe entry into Middle East in order to have the hold of oil and become a super power (Sadiq, 2016).

### Literature Review

Naseem (2014) explains that Gwadar's location at the mouth of the Gulf is the strategic choke points of the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman increase its strategic significance. Its development will influence the geo-strategic climate of the region and have a profitable impact on Pakistan and China. China aspires to get benefit from Gwadar's reachable international marketing routes to Central Asian Republics and Xinjiang.

Khalid (2001) argued that a Washington based newspaper had indicated that the Chinese interests in building the port of Gwadar means to confer China a potential operational position in expanding its clout across the shipping lanes of Gulf.

Kapur (2003) was of the view that China perceives India's backing to the US presence in the Indian Ocean as a means of countering China. This dominion sketch of India in this Ocean is being disliked by China.

Hassan (2018) says the US growing interests in this region and specially in Balochistan is apparent that U.S is trying to destabilize Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan to establish its foothold in Central Asian Region, and also to curtail Chinese interests in African and Middle East and to create obstacle for the development of Gwadar port. Therefore, the American establishment has started supporting the movement for independent Balochistan. As a result of convergence of interests, India and America are working on this design to pressurize Pakistan to capitulate U.S. demands.

### Methodology

The study was conducted to explore the importance of Gwadar in power game between US and China. Both countries are playing power game in the region for their

influences. This study was qualitative in nature and qualitative data have been collected from different sources. Pragmatic and systematic investigation is the crucial step for collecting data, which can carefully evaluate all facts and figures in a scientific and extensive manner. Similarly, the data were collected from secondary sources such as books, journals, research thesis and other published materials regarding the topic. The researcher has downloaded extensive literature from different sources of internet and followed different steps for inclusion and exclusion process. Researcher used different research string such as CPEC, Importance of Gwadar, Pakistan and US Relation, US China Relation, Pakistan and China Relation, Political game between China and US in Pakistan, Gwadar Deep Sea Port, and power struggle between Pakistan, China, India and US etc. After downloading these all articles and materials, researcher has tried to view the title and very irrelevant literature was segregated. After that researcher has selected the most important and relevant literature on the topic through purposive sampling technique. Then researcher has the selected articles thoroughly and developed different themes on the topic accordingly.

### Gwadar Deep-Sea Port

Gwadar is a district of Balochistan situated in the coastal areas and located at the west of Pakistan and Gwadar port is known as the gateway to Asia, which is 75 miles away from the eastern border of Pakistan (Hassan, 2005). And it is very close to the Iranian Chabahar port. Gwadar port and Chabahar port are at the distance of 125 miles (2019). The Gwadar Port, that is going to be the third largest port of the world, is constructed at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, which is 180 nautical miles from the Strait of Hormuz through which 40% of world's Oil passes and it is also the largest

trade passage of the world (Mazhar, Javaid, & Goraya, 2012).

Gwadar's geo-strategic location has increased its geo political importance in the region. It provides access to the mineral rich Middle East, European countries and to the offshore of Africa. Its vital geographical location for access to the South Asian and landlocked Central Asian countries has caught the attention of China and America, because it's the main entrance to the energy rich Central Asia. It is also one of the best supply chains for energy resources and geo-economic development in the region. That's why the global powers are keeping an eye on it. Moreover, Gwadar port is very important in terms of strategic and defense position.

More than 90 percent of the global trade is transported over sea (Nawaz, 2004). In this regard Gwadar has a very long coastal line which can serve for this purpose very well. In addition, the Asian Development Bank has titled the strategic Gwadar port as an alternative of Dubai port, which facilitates commerce to more than two dozen countries of the Persian Gulf the East Africa, Afghanistan, Iran, central Asia, Pakistan and China (Khan, 2013). Gwadar port is only 450 km away from the Indian border (Kashif, 2006).

In 1784, an opponent to the government of Oman Sayed Sultan came to Balochistan for meeting Naseer Khan to request him for help. Naseer Khan undertook to support him to establish himself in Oman, but for the time being as a substance allowance Naseer Khan handed over Gwadar to him. With the passage of time Oman claimed that it was a gift given by Naseer Khan, but Naseer Khan negated the Sultan's claims. When Sultan became ruler of Oman in 1792, he occupied Gwadar and made it an outpost of Oman and built a fort (Gichki, 2015).

Due to its strategic importance the British had desired to build a aero naval base and approached the Sultan to get Gwadar port on lease, but following the Sultan's refusal the British requested Mir Ahmed Yar Khan to lease the Jawani's territory but the Baloch nationalist did not agree to lease Jawani to the British, they influenced Khan's decision. However, Khan knowing to use the opportunity and take avenges from Sultan and supported the British to set up the military base of Jawani instead of regaining control of Gwadar (Axamann, 2008).

Historically, the occupation of Gwadar by Sultan of Oman was a big loss for Kalat State the Baloch people struggled continuously to restore Gwadar's autonomous position from the Sultan. In 1947, Haji Iqbal raised the question of Gwadar's occupation, which got importance and Gwadar was repurchased from Oman by the efforts of Haji Iqbal (Naseem, 2014).

### **CPEC is an Eye Sore to the US**

It is China's longstanding desire to contain the US hegemonic designs which has initiated the multi-billion-dollar projects, that is known as China Pakistan Economic Corridor. China's rising power is an eye sore to the US. It resents China's emerging power and considers it a major threat to its interests in this volatile region. China for advancement of its hegemonic design is setting up the Gwadar deep sea port, which could facilitate China to strengthening its foothold in Indian Ocean.

Chinese president visited Pakistan and signed fifty-one (51) agreements having worth of \$46 billion (Rouf, 2019). Including multiple development projects such as Gwadar port, a pipeline from Gwadar to Xinjiang the western province of china, which carries crude oil, a network of road link from Pakistan to China under China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is being built with the assistance of China to facilitate trade and meet Pakistan and China's

economic energy needs. China is also willing to build a naval base in Gwadar to jockey influence in the region and to contain American threats and to control the international trades and business in Strait of Hormuz; where 45 per cent world oil supply flow through it (Khan, 2013).

China fulfills its 60 percent energy needs from the Persian Gulf while Chinese vessels will have to cruise about 10,000 km, but through Gwadar the distance will be reduced to just about 2500 km. Chinese presence at Gwadar will help it to keep track of oil transportation in Persian Gulf (Malik, 2012). Hence, China is greatly interested to expedite the building of China Pakistan Economic Corridor to ensure its economic growth and widely have its influence in the region. This project will open the door for development and prosperity, not only in Pakistan but also in the entire region. Gwadar will become a special economic zone and energy transit corridor for regional and global trade and economic cooperation activities to increase the growth of economy and provides help to alleviate the energy crises speedily.

### **The US-China Tug-of-War**

Power politics of the US and China has changed the regional and global economic situation. The changing situation could affect Pak-China friendly relations and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor. Pakistan has many times faced American resentment over tilting towards China's alignment. It is critical juncture for Pakistan how it maintains its friendly relations with these two major powers, because the US and China's tug-of-war affects Pakistan economically, politically and militarily.

The prominent American Think-Tank Selig Harrison addresses a seminar under the United State Institute for Peace (USIP) held in Washington DC on April 15, 2011. He said that the United States of America was active to recognize Balochistan as an independent

state because it serves American interests. Similarly, the former ambassador Munter in his visit to Quetta expressed that the US has special interests in Balochistan. He also reiterated request to open a consulate in Quetta but Pakistan rejected his request. It is clear from the above fact the American war against religious extremism Al Qaeda and the Taliban are basically a pretext for moves by the US in a Great Game with China.

Engdhal defines three reasons for The US presence in Afghanistan. The first reason is to retain control over the opium trade to benefit the bankrupt and corrupt Wall Street financial mafia. The second reason is that the US is establishing a wide-ranging military installation throughout Afghanistan to challenge the interests of Russia and China and to be capable of combating at those countries if inevitable in the future and the third is the conflict for domination of the Caspian Sea region oil (Collins, 2019).

### **Exploitation of Natural Resources**

China's One Built One Road initiative (OBOR) leads to colonization, subjugation, extraction of minerals and natural resources in the region, particularly in Balochistan and Central Asian countries. Building up Gwadar deep sea port and other projects under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor has increased the apprehensions of indigenous in Balochistan. The Baloch political nationalists are of the view that China may exploit the mineral resources of Balochistan, as it is exploiting the Saindak and ReqDiq projects. They also have feared of allotting land to the Chinese companies at Gwadar that might trigger mass influx into Gwadar and turn the natives into minority.

China and India are engaged in a global energy game. The aim of China is expansion. On the other hand, India is trying to keep away Chinese encirclement which is developing Gwadar port. India fears that Chinese String Pearl and presence in Gwadar

is a major threat to its political and economic interests in the Indian Ocean.

The US has interests in Balochistan for various reasons. Balochistan is the only accessible passage for carrying of oil and gas from Central Asia and Caspian Sea. It possesses an estimated 19 trillion cubic feet of the natural gas reserves and six trillion barrels of oil, copper, gold and other minerals, which make it attractive for exploration. American and Indians do not like the Chinese breathing down their neck in Gwadar as it is close to the oil passage of the Strait of Hormuz and the US bases in the Indian Ocean (Defence, 2012).

### **Regional Politics and Peace**

China's rapidly growing trade and economic activities in the globe seem to be the beginning process of China replacing the United States of America as the dominant power in Asia and the globe as well. The US department of Defense in 2002 published a study report that China was promptly modernizing its military with the aims of countering American power in the Pacific and compelling Taiwan to welcome integration on China's conditions. The report also claimed that China's military modernization would pose a threat to Japan and the Philippines as well as Taiwan (Dao, 2002).

On the other hand, America is utilizing its full-fledged energy to obtain the immediate assistance from Japan and Philippines to counter China's growing influence in the region. In fact, Japan and Philippines already have been at loggerheads with China regarding the disputed South China Sea, where China is building man-made islands with the objectives of militarizing the islands. The US Congress passed the Taiwan Act in 1979, which compelled the US government to defend Taiwan. It created trouble for China to attain merger with Taiwan as 2A (5) of the act declares that it is the responsibility of the

United States of America to supply Taiwan a defensive weapons system (Malik, 2008).

Regarding Power politics of China and America in the region, Gwadar due to its geo-strategic location will play the central role as China has shown keen interests by developing the deep sea port of Gwadar, because it will facilitate it to linking regional countries and the port could be described best as a choke point.

Therefore, China has turned its attention to Central Asia and the Middle East in 2003 as it inked the China-Kazakhstan pipeline agreement estimated at \$ 3.5 billion and at the same time it has signed a mega-gas pact with Iran worth of \$ 100 billion. The pact entails the annual export of million tons of Iranian liquefied natural gas for a period of twenty-five years. In 1993 for a 2,760 km pipeline with more than 700 km traversing Pakistan territory the Iran and China agreement could create a real peace line (Maik, 2008).

The US extensive influence in Afghanistan, longstanding military presence and presenting India as a global player, whose influence has already been felt in this conflict zone, actually is part of the American South Asian containment policy towards China and Russia. Similarly, China is very active to challenge the U.S. power and presence in this war-torn region, because it perceives the United States as expansionist emporium. By a combative countervailing power between the two major powers China and the United States this region may experience a drastic ups and downs situation by the power struggle of these major powers. It may also leave behind an everlasting impact on this region, which had never witnessed.

To somehow the US, India and Japan have common interests. Japan is helpful of India's case for its permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council. To Japan freedom of shipping and security in



the Indian Ocean are of vital significance. Since Japan relies on the Gulf countries for 90 per cent of its crude imports. Japan claimed in 2004 that once the Japanese watercrafts cross the Malacca Strait and circumnavigate west, it needs to build defense cooperation especially navy to navy collaboration (Enoki, 2004).

### Conclusion

Power politics of China and U.S.A have vast impact on regional peace and stability, because this region has already been targeted by myriad militant groups, who are fighting for different purposes. It deteriorated the regional peace and stability, however, US is being much close to India to counter its arch rival China's regional influences as well as anti-U.S forces, while China, Iran and Russia are creating an alignment to counterweight the United States to protect their common interests. China's investment in Gwadar further will create obstacles for the US and shatter its prospect of hegemonic influence. And China is willing to go to at any extent to protect its investments in the region. China is deepening its relationship with Pakistan and bringing abundant of projects and investment in Gwadar which are a big challenge for US influences in the region, who considers China as its biggest rivalry in the international politics.

The US desires to use the region as a bulwark against Chinese influence and closes all the possibilities for China to build its proposed naval base in Gwadar and to strengthen the American military activities in Persian Gulf that is very close from the Gwadar port as well as Strait of Hormuz. For the U.S China's rising power in the region is a big challenge to its imperialistic ambitions. Hence, America has been striving to establish its foothold in the region to counterweight Chinese emerging influence in Baluchistan and to counter the influence of those countries which have been creating

hurdles for the U.S interests whether that is Iran, Russia or Islamic religious extremists. America considers Balochistan geo-politically an important region that will be helpful to maintain its status quo.

On the other hand, America has been keeping an eye on land-locked central Asian countries and Balochistan to extract their untapped resources. For this purpose, America needs a direct and safe route. According to U.S, Balochistan can be the safest route and nearest direct route for exploiting these resources and transporting them to western countries. Moreover, the U.S has been expanding its clout in the Strait of Hormuz to establish its hold on this major transit trade route to monopolies international trade and commerce activities and to undermine its rivalries sway in the region. Besides this, America also desires to sabotage Iran, Pakistan and India (IPI) gas pipeline project and Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India (TAPI) gas pipeline project as well, both run through Baluchistan that planned in the future. It is certain that the US tries its best to persuade India to pull out of these gas pipelines projects.

The US has been destabilizing Iran as it pulled itself out of the Iran nuclear deal and slapped economic sanctions on it. America has been conspiring to destabilize the CPEC projects it considers that China in the future deploys its naval troops in Gwadar mega city. In the wake of US and China's increasing influences in this volatile region Baluchistan and Afghanistan conflicts, absence of peace and stability, incessant violence and chronic human rights abuses cannot be overlooked for gaining their aims and objectives.

It is a fact the U.S. and India will never ever accept Chinese troops presence in Gwadar, that aims to monitor U.S. military activities in the Persian Gulf and to counter Indian naval activities in the Indian ocean,

China's other ambitions are to get access to strait of Hormuz and in the Arabian sea to export and import goods from the African countries and Middle East to China and to strengthen its clout over these region. It is anticipated that the US will start to create hurdles to use its influences to prevent Chinese vast ambitions in the region, which will cause challenges for Chinese hegemonic desires, in the same way China will create obstacles for the U.S interests. However, their power politics will affect the regional states politics and stability.

Power politics between the U.S.A and China in the region will have grave implications for the set of relationships in the region ahead. Probably Iran, India and Russia get involved in power politics in the regional political arena for protecting their vested interests. However, their full-flagged involvement in power politics in this volatile region will further aggravate the prevailing situation of the region.

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