

# Geopolitical Significance of Balochistan: Interplay of Foreign Actors

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## Abstract

*The geographical location of Balochistan makes it an important region. The province, being the best possible and the shortest route to the Arabian Sea, has attracted the key international and regional players, including China, India, the US, Iran, the Central Asian Republics (CARs) and Afghanistan. Each player wanted to utilise this region to pursue its geopolitical and geostrategic interests. The building of Gwadar port and the development of Balochistan under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is going to be a game changer for Pakistan's socio-economic development. A fully operational Gwadar port will enhance Pakistan's commercial activities and its connectivity with oil-rich Gulf states, the CARs, Afghanistan, China and with the rest of the world. Therefore, CPEC, under the Chinese One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, has enhanced the significance of the Balochistan province. However, it has also added to the concern of the adversaries of Pakistan and China, particularly India and the US. To counter the viability of Gwadar, India has started to invest considerably in the development of the Iranian Chabahar port. Since China's rivalry with the US and India's with Pakistan has been a recurring theme in the global and regional politics respectively. It is Iran's strategic partnership with India, which has been stirring doubts in Pakistan. The episode of arrest of the Indian spy, Kulbhushan Jhadav, has confirmed the involvement of India's intelligence agency — Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) — and endorsed all other reports on the foreign involvement in supporting the insurgency in Balochistan. In this milieu, this study is an effort to factor in the foreign elements in the current instability in the province.*

**Keywords:** Balochistan, Gwadar Port, India, US, Central Asian Republics (CARs), CPEC.

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## Introduction

The area, which now comprises the province of Balochistan, has long attracted the regional players, especially Iran and Afghanistan, as Pakistan shares borders with these two countries. Similarly, the location of the Gwadar port also holds the key to the development and export of energy from the Central Asia since it offers access to the Indian Ocean as the shortest route. Therefore, it is not unfair to claim that Balochistan stands as a host to other geopolitical imperatives for the West and members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) countries.”<sup>1</sup> This region has been considered as the heart of Asia since the ancient times. Currently, Balochistan is also attracting an ideal place for the global powers, to replay their “great game of the 18th century.”<sup>2</sup>

The province’s natural resources including marble, chromite, fluorite, barite, asbestos, garnet, vermiculite, gold, copper and iron are globally known and considered as its valuable assets. Balochistan is also known to have an estimated 19 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves and six trillion barrels of oil reserves. The Map No. 1 shows the global strategic importance of the Gwadar deep seaport.

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Draitser, “Balochistan: Crossroads of Another US Proxy War?,” *Global Research, Centre for Research on Globalisation*, July 01, 2012, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/balochistan-crossroads-of-another-us-proxy-war/31703>

<sup>2</sup> Umbreen Javaid and Javeria Jahangir, “Balochistan: A Key Factor in Global Politics,” *South Asian Studies*, vol. 30, no. 2 (July- December 2015): 94.

## Map No. 1 Strategic Significance of Balochistan and Gwadar



*Source: Hassan Yar Malik, "Strategic Carnage of Balochistan, Balochi Linguist," A Balochistan blog for academic research studies, December 13, 2015, <https://balochlinguist.wordpress.com/2015/12/13/strategic-carnage-of-balochistan-2/>*

The map clearly exhibits manifold destinations that converge on Gwadar, emphasising its vital geostrategic position vis-à-vis its connectivity with the regional states situated on its west, north and eastern directions. Gwadar, as a warm water port, stands to serve as a huge opening to the landlocked countries of the Central Asia. It shows that how much potential Gwadar has to promote trade and commerce for the regional countries peacefully and it is expected to bring harmony among the nations to contribute to the global economic order.

### US Involvement in Balochistan

The abundance of natural resources in Balochistan and in the surrounding regions attracts the US as much as its immediate neighbours, Iran and Afghanistan, which makes it a convenient spot to keep an eye on China, Russia and the CARs. For these states, Balochistan provides an opening to the Arabian Sea, as a shortest available route for the transportation of their

oil and gas.<sup>3</sup> The US is also very uneasy as Gwadar gives China an entry to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. According to the reports emanating from Pakistan, the Chinese Navy's ships will be positioned at Gwadar along with the Pakistan Navy's warships to guard the port and keep the sea lanes safe and secure. Pakistan and China also wanted to contain the growing influence of the Indian Navy (IN) and the US naval base at Diego Garcia, which is located in the south of Gwadar. The Chinese Navy will now have its presence in the Indian Ocean.'<sup>4</sup>

The US fears that China may also establish a military base in Gwadar, although there are, at present, no such plans. Secondly, Balochistan shares a long border with Iran, which is inhabited by a large faction of the Sunni Baloch population. Iran fears that the US involvement in the current insurgency in Balochistan has the potential to instigate the Iranian Balochs against the state. In the last few years, there have been some serious incidents on Pakistan-Iran border (Iran's Sistan and Pakistan's Balochistan province), resulted in the death of the Iranian border guards. In a recent incident, on April 26, 2017, 10 Iranian border guards were killed by the Sunni militants, later on, the responsibility for the attack was claimed by *Jaish-al-Adl*.<sup>5</sup>

The US Congressman, Dana Rohrabacher, who is a Baloch nationalist supporter, organised and chaired the Congressional hearing on Balochistan, assured the Americans that "the Balochs are natural US allies, and would like to share the Gwadar port with the US, they would not allow the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline through their lands and would fight the Taliban as well."<sup>6</sup> Hence, "the US has made no secret of its desire to play a 'part' in Balochistan because it would not like to be left behind in the New Great

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<sup>3</sup> Jehanzeb Ahmad, Iftikhar Ahmad and Sohail Shehzad, "Regional & International Interest In Oil & Gas Pipelines to Gwadar," *Dialogue*, vol. II, no. II (2014).

<sup>4</sup> M G Singh, "Chinese Navy Warships at Gwadar Port in Pakistan Cause for Alarm for USA," *Blasting News*, November 27, 2016, <http://us.blastingnews.com/opinion/2016/11/chinese-navy-warships-at-gwadar-port-in-pakistan-cause-for-alarm-for-usa-001289817.html>

<sup>5</sup> "Militants Kill Iranian Border Guards in Attack on Frontier with Pakistan," *Guardian*, April 26, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> "Balochistan and US Elections," *Dawn*, November 6, 2012, <https://www.dawn.com/news/761991>

Game. The US is not a fool and it will not sit idle.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, in order to counter Iran, Balochistan remains crucial. The American hegemonic mindset would never like to be restricted by the Chinese or the Iranian presence in Balochistan. The US knows that if it does not maintain its economic hegemony in the Indian Ocean or in the region, the vacuum will be filled by China. The US is already perturbed by the increasing Chinese influence through the Gwadar port and coastal line of Balochistan “to maintain its dominant maritime power, the maritime capability and capacity, vital to the flexible projection of the US power and influence around the globe must surely be preserved.”<sup>8</sup> In accordance with the shift in the global power, the US will seek a sustained forward presence in the Indian Ocean. “Through a combination of trade, aid, resource extraction and infrastructure development, arms sales and bases, Beijing is seeking to extend its strategic perimeter in the Southern Asian and the Indian Ocean region.”<sup>9</sup> The Gwadar project attracted the US interests in Balochistan because it has the capacity to convert the province into the main corridor for energy transportation from Central Asia and Iran to other parts of the region in minimum time.<sup>10</sup> The Gwadar port features prominently in CPEC plan and is considered to be a crucial link between the ambitious OBOR initiative and Maritime Silk Road Projects. A state-run Chinese company will handle the operations of Pakistan’s strategic Gwadar port for a period of 40 years. Pakistan’s Minister for Ports and Shipping, Mir Hasil Khan Buzenjo, announced in the Senate that the China Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC) would carry out all the development work on the port in the Arabian Sea. The COPHC has 91 per cent share of revenue collection from gross revenue of terminal and marine operations and 85 per cent share of gross revenue of free zone operations.<sup>11</sup>

The US has found a ready listening ear in India, who shares its concern about the growing Chinese clout in the region and the Chinese control of Gwadar is indeed very worrisome to both. This has resulted in the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi’s, more forward-leaning in working with

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<sup>7</sup> Jumma Khan Marri, “An analysis of Balochistan’s Facts, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow,” *Balochistan Crises*, November 10, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Chunhao Lou, “US–India–China Relations in the Indian Ocean: A Chinese Perspective,” *Strategic Analysis*, Routledge, June 26, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Mohan Malik, “Balancing Act: The China-India-US Triangle,” *World Affairs* (Spring, 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Javaid and Jahangir, “Balochistan,” 95.

<sup>11</sup> “Pakistan’s Gawadar Port Leased to China for 40 Years,” *News*, April 20, 2017.

Washington, particularly on maritime matters, as a means to hedge against China's commercial and military influence. The signing of the Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean in January 2015, was a landmark agreement in strengthening the US and India to cooperate outside of South Asia. It specifically mentioned, "ensuring freedom of navigation and over flight in the South China Sea, confirming their mutual commitment to maritime security and to curbing China's maritime and territorial ambitions."<sup>12</sup>

Presence of the Taliban groups and the ethnopolitical turmoil in Balochistan are equally upsetting for the American strategic paradigm in the region. After 9/11, the US was given access to an airbase in Balochistan because strategically Balochistan was much more convenient for the US forces for carrying out the aerial bombing in Kabul and other regions to destroy the Taliban strongholds and their network in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the killing of Nawab Akbar Bugti, the chief of the famous Bugti tribe of Balochistan, added more fuel to the fire and turned a mild Baloch resistance into a full-fledged insurgency and in the process, attracted more attention of the US towards Balochistan. Though it is true that Bugti's killing marked a turning point, the insurgency had long begun before his death that nevertheless, increased the pace and gave birth to the fifth phase of the insurgency."<sup>13</sup>

Balochistan's long border with Afghanistan and the volatile nature of the frontier was not lost on the US, which has stationed substantial troops in Afghanistan in the post 9/11 period. In 2012, Balochistan attracted significant attention in Washington. Expression of concern by the US Congress and the State Department over the situation in Balochistan has worried Islamabad.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the US factor in Balochistan could also possibly be on account of the development of Gwadar seaport. Since the commencement of Gwadar port, the US has been concerned about the Chinese engagement with the port. It fears that the world's second largest

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<sup>12</sup> Lisa Curtis, "China's South Asia Strategy," Testimony before The US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, March 10, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Shah Meer, "Balochistan and the Killing of Akbar Bugti: 10 Years Later," *Diplomat*, August 26, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> "Balochistan and the US Elections."

economy, China, would use the port to carve up spheres of influence in the Middle East and Africa while threatening the American regional goals.<sup>15</sup>

Arrival of the Chinese Navy in the Arabian Sea has put the US to discomfort in the region. It poses a threat to its decades long hegemony in the Gulf region and in the Indian Ocean. The US seeks hegemonic maritime power worldwide, not only limited to the Atlantic or Pacific oceans but also encompassing the Indian Ocean.<sup>16</sup> It will surely strengthen China economically by banking on the resources of Balochistan, the Middle East and Africa via the Gwadar port, the signature project of the CPEC. It is not surprising that the US, being the sole super power, also wants to play a crucial and essential role in the New Great Game. The underlying motives of the US are to present North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to the world as an active military organisation by taking control of Afghanistan and keeping a check on Iran, China and Russia. Afghanistan is a gateway to oil-rich CARs; therefore, the US can get secure access to oil and mineral resources by taking control of Afghanistan.<sup>17</sup> The future development of the region in general and Balochistan, in particular, is of prime concern for the US because many international actors are already in competition to get their due strategic share in the New Great Game. Competition between the US, the UK and other NATO countries against Russia, China and other members of the SCO for influence, power, hegemony and profits in Central Asia and the Transcaucasia persists.<sup>18</sup> For that reason, the US has to encounter the potential Chinese threat, which will upset the internal situation of Pakistan. Pakistan's strategic location as a gateway to the oil and gas resources of Central Asia means that it will remain a battleground for competing interests for the foreseeable future. The Great Game continues well into the 21st century.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ayaz Ahmed, "Gwadar Port and Strategic Regional Interests," *Frontier Post*, August 25, 2015, <http://www.thefrontierpost.com/article/330218/gwadar-port-and-strategic-regional-interests/>

<sup>16</sup> Lou, "US-India-China Relations in the Indian Ocean."

<sup>17</sup> Iram Khalid, "The New Great Game in Afghanistan: Role of India (A Pakistani Perspective)," *South Asian Studies*, vol. 26, no. 2 (July-December 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Martin W Lewis, "Balochistan and a New 'Great Game' in Central Asia?," *Geo Currents*, May 20, 2011, <http://www.geocurrents.info/geopolitics/balochistan-and-a-new-great-game-in-central-asia>

<sup>19</sup> Rina Saeed Khan, "Gwadar: Pakistan's new Great Game," *Guardian*, April 8, 2011.

While talking to the *Asian News International (ANI)*, ex-ISI official, Brigadier (Retd.) Mohammad Aslam Ghuman, allegedly said that Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), RAW and Mossad (*Ha Mossad le Modi*) are behind the Baloch insurgency. He further added that “yes, the CIA in connivance with RAW and Blackwater, is operating in Balochistan and other parts of the country, they cannot digest the reality of any Muslim country becoming an atomic power. They wish to have a complete control over the Gwadar port, and seize the nuclear assets of Pakistan,”<sup>20</sup> while involvement of RAW and Mossad may lend credence to the past allegations, however, Blackwater’s presence in Balochistan may be a bit far-fetched because the US company was blacklisted in Pakistan after the Raymond Davis case. However, there are still growing interests of the US in Balochistan. As the insurgency in Balochistan continues, despite government of Pakistan’s efforts to reach out to the dissidents and offer of financial package to the Baloch youth, the US is also suspected of providing financial support to the insurgents to incite them on subversive activities.

On February 8, 2012, a subcommittee on oversight and investigation of the foreign affairs committee under the Chairmanship of Congressman Rohrabacher, held a hearing on Balochistan. On February 17, he introduced a bill in Congress recognising Balochistan’s right to self-determination. Essentially, Rohrabacher was calling for a breakup of Pakistan. This caused an uproar in Pakistan at an extremely precarious time in the US-Pak relationship. One of the experts invited to testify the hearing was Dr Christine Fair, Assistant Professor at George Town University. Prior to the hearing, she called the entire affair a political stunt. She further said that “I don’t believe it’s motivated by the concern for Baloch; rather, Rohrabacher is wanting to irk General Headquarters (GHQ).”<sup>21</sup>

Later on, Rohrabacher wrote in an article that “there has been quite a stir since I introduced a resolution this year calling for recognition of the

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<sup>20</sup> “Ex-ISI official Alleges CIA, RAW, Mossad behind Baloch Insurgency,” *Asian News International*, March, 14, 2014, <http://www.sify.com/news/ex-isi-official-alleges-cia-raw-mossad-behind-baloch-insurgency-news-international-ldop4djdciasi.html>

<sup>21</sup> “Does the US Want to Break-up Pakistan?,” Truth Serum, unabashed political commentary, video uploaded on *YouTube*, February 23, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l0s7u0rihv0>



right to self-determination by the people of Balochistan. I drafted the measure after a February 8, hearing, by the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on oversight and investigations that exposed horrific violations of human rights by Pakistan security forces in Balochistan.”<sup>22</sup> The Pakistan Army always denied such outright allegations and worked diligently against all the malicious designs of the foreign powers. Time and again, it maintained that the US, Israel and India are responsible for the killings in Balochistan.<sup>23</sup> Most recently, Louie Gohmert making an outrageous speech in the US House of Representatives said that “since most of the supplies to NATO forces stationed in Afghanistan pass from Balochistan, therefore the US should support a free Baloch state.”<sup>24</sup> Gohmert came up with this new demand after meeting with the exiled Baloch leaders, Hairbayer Marri, and Suleman Dawood, the Khan of Kalat, in London.

### **China’s Strategic Involvement in Balochistan**

The construction of the seaport in the southwest of Pakistan is part of China’s major move to secure its energy needs. Beijing will direct its energies toward South and Southeast Asia, “where supplies of oil, natural gas and other commodities critical to China’s economic development must pass. There China will encounter an equally powerful naval power, India, that enjoys the distinguished geostrategic advantages.”<sup>25</sup>

The Gwadar port, which China has built, will operate in the province of Balochistan, is situated near the Strait of Hormuz, a major oil-shipping lane that can serve as an energy corridor from the western China through Pakistan to the Persian Gulf.<sup>26</sup> China initiated the project with the help of Pakistan Government in 2008. It was in 2013, during the visit of the Chinese Premier, China proposed a railroad and an oil pipeline to link Gwadar to the Kashi port in Xinjiang to give access to the shortest route to the Middle East and in exchange Pakistan will receive a substantial amount

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<sup>22</sup>Dana Rohrabacher, “Why I Support Balochistan,” *Washington Post*, April 6, 2012.

<sup>23</sup>Richard Leiby, “US Delegation to Pakistan Walks into Uproar over Congressman’s Resolution,” *Washington Post*, February 24, 2012.

<sup>24</sup>Malik Siraj Akbar, “America and Balochistan,” *World Post*, February, 2014.

<sup>25</sup>James R Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, “China’s Naval Ambitions in the Indian Ocean,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 31, no. 3 (2001): 367-394.

<sup>26</sup>Syed Fazl-e-Haider, “A Strategic Seaport, is Pakistan Key to China’s Energy Supremacy?,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 5, 2015.

of investment. Keeping its strategic interest in view, the Chinese government is spending US\$62.0 billion to construct an “Economic Corridor.” The CPEC is an opportunity for Pakistan to realise its true strategic and economic potential and it is, rightly, regarded as a “Game Changer” for Pakistan and the region. The benefits of the project will materialise gradually and require determination from national leaders in the times to come. This economic corridor will comprise highways, railways, and natural gas and oil pipelines connecting China to the Middle East. “China hopes that the CPEC will enable oil and gas from the Persian Gulf to be piped through Balochistan instead of shipping it through the Malacca Strait, which is under control of the US Navy.”<sup>27</sup>

The Chinese factor in Gwadar will definitely challenge the Indo-US domination of the Indian Ocean. Thus, considering that the US wants to maintain its maritime dominance, an India-US potential power struggle in the Indian Ocean is more likely to characterise the Indian Ocean region than the ‘China threat.’<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the port, by design or by default, also provides China with a strategic foothold in the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, which alarms India and perturbs the US sitting opposite to the Strait of Hurmoz.<sup>29</sup> The construction of Gwadar port has long term economic implications for China. Hasan Yaser Malik writes in his article that “Gwadar offers China, a tactical position in the energy rich Caspian Region, affording a substitute trade route for the western Xinjiang province, thus utilising it as a trade route through Gwadar deep seaport.”<sup>30</sup> Naturally, it will tangibly decrease the sea distance to China. Apart from the utilisation of port, an existing land link can be of help to China in improving its ever expanding trade to Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa, as it will reduce the sea distance to 2,500 km instead of 10,000.<sup>31</sup> There is no denying that the

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<sup>27</sup> “Dark Corridor, Conflict in Balochistan must be Resolved for a Trade-corridor between Pakistan and China to bring Rewards,” *Economist*, June 6, 2015, <http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21653657-conflict-balochistan-must-be-resolved-trade-corridor-between-pakistan-and-china-bring>

<sup>28</sup> D S Rajan, “Indian Ocean: China-India-US Jostling for Power; Cases of Sri Lanka and Maldives,” *South Asian Analysis Group*, February 23, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Tarique Niazi, “Gwadar: China’s Naval Outpost on the Indian Ocean,” *Jamestown Foundation*, February, 14, 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Hasan Yaser Malik, “Strategic Carnage of Balochistan,” *Journal Of Humanities and Social Science*, vol. 8, no. 4 (March-April 2013):71.

<sup>31</sup> Muhammad Mumtaz, *History of Karakoram Highway*, Volume II (Rawalpindi: Hamza Pervez Printers, 2009), 8.

security situation in Balochistan is far from satisfactory, but even then China is determined to move forward to provide all technical and financial assistance to Pakistan for the development and progress of any economic project. Map No. 2 shows that how China can help improve its economy by reducing transportation time of goods and energy through the CPEC.

### Map No. 2 Reduction in Transportation Time for China due to CPEC



**Source:** “China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: A Timeline,” February 15, 2015, <https://walizahid.com/2015/02/china-pakistan-economic-corridor-a-timeline/>

The control of the Gwadar port by China benefits it immensely. It will visibly improve the demand for China’s products in the African and Gulf market and also accelerates entrepreneurship in the most underdeveloped regions of Pakistan from where the CPEC route passes due to the reduction in transportation time. Map No. 3 shows the proposed route for the CPEC.

### Map No. 3 CPEC Routes



*Source: Authentic map of CPEC route within Pakistan, Defence Pakistan, May 1, 2015, also see, “A China-Financed Economic Corridor brings Promise and Discord to Pakistan,” Global Voices, January 14, 2016, <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2016/01/14/a-china-financed-economic-corridor-brings-promise-and-discord-to-pakistan/>*

### Russian Strategic Involvement in Balochistan

For centuries, Russia geographically hedged between the European and the Asian continents. Surrounded by the cold waters mostly, it always looked out for a connection to the warm Indian Ocean. Peter the Great, in the late 17th century, said whoever controls the shipping lanes in the Indian oceans will rule the world.<sup>32</sup> However, there is no concrete evidence that the Soviet Union had embarked upon a policy to reach the warm waters of any ocean. It was alleged by the so called “Soviet Experts,” that the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan by the then Soviet Union was an attempt to reach the warm waters of the Indian Ocean was falsely concluded. “Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 was not meant to reach the warm waters of the Indian

<sup>32</sup> “The Russian Quest for Warm Water Port,” *Global Security*, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/russia/warm-water-port.htm>

Ocean as is widely believed; it was actually an attempt to pre-empt a possible US intervention in some of the CARs and Afghanistan.”<sup>33</sup>

While pursuing its economic agenda, Russia is determined to increase its activities through the SCO to form an alliance with the CARs and South East Asian countries. In the recent past, there has been a marked improvement in Pakistan-Russia relations and convergence of interest. It was reflected in Russia’s willingness to work in tandem with China and Pakistan while hosting the meetings to resolve the Afghan conflict. Improvement in the bilateral ties has also brought about a better understanding in Russia of Sino-Pakistan relations, especially in the context of the CPEC. Russia says it ‘strongly’ supports the CPEC as it is crucial for Pakistan’s economy and regional connectivity. The CPEC is a component of China’s Silk Road and his country was also working on the similar Eurasian Union; China and Russia are holding discussions to merge the two projects.<sup>34</sup> This plan has the potential to undermine the US interest in the region.

### **Iranian and Indian Involvement in Balochistan**

The construction of the Gwadar port has never been in the interest of India or Iran, rather both considered it to be a great threat to their strategic interests in the region. In response to this threat, they are jointly working on Chabahar port. India’s interest in Chabahar port increased when Pakistan handed over the control of Gwadar port to China on the lease, which New Delhi perceives as a continuation of China’s policy of the “String of Pearls.”<sup>35</sup> India heavily invested in the construction of Chabahar port. Moreover, the port is going to be another important hub of economic activities in the region. Interestingly, despite the fact that Chabahar and Gwadar ports are separated by a distance of less than 110 miles both the Iranian and Pakistani governments are leaving no stone unturned to compete with each other to exploit the Central Asian resources.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Sardar M Asif, “Soviet Invasion wasn’t meant to reach Indian Warm Waters,” *Daily Nation*, December 18, 2015.

<sup>34</sup> “Russia Supports China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Project: Envoy,” *Dawn*, December 17, 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Anirban Bhaumik, “Iran offers India Control of Strategic Chabahar Port,” *Deccan Herald*, August 15, 2015.

<sup>36</sup> Ahmed, “Gwadar Port and Strategic Regional Interests.”

India is obsessed with the idea of importing oil and gas at reasonable prices from the Central Asian region. It also wants to export its products like cars, computer related items to Central Asia and Afghanistan. In this way, India intends to utilise the resources of Afghanistan and restrict China's access to Afghanistan resources. Within India, there is an air of confidence that it can take a lead in facilitating the trade and commercial opportunities for Afghanistan and the region.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, India and Iran are seriously concerned about the strategic importance of the Gwadar port.

India's intelligence agencies are found to be involved in encouraging the extremist elements, which are involved in the subversive activities against Pakistan. India's main agenda is to incite insurgencies in Federally Administrated Tribal Area (FATA) and Balochistan. However, it is an unavoidable reality that India is involved in committing a crime of undermining democratically government in Pakistan's Balochistan province by using the soil of Afghanistan, while it is also true that the Indian Consulates in Afghanistan covertly assist, train and finance the terrorists against Pakistan by projecting them as freedom fighters.<sup>38</sup> The Indian involvement in the Balochistan unrest is an open secret now. In fact, China's strategic interests in the Gwadar port have undermined the Indian designs of maintaining hegemony in the region, especially in the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. A fully-developed and functional Gwadar port near the Strait of Hormuz enables China to frustrate India's dream of dominating the regional waterways. New Delhi feels that the Gwadar port would have serious strategic implications for India.<sup>39</sup>

It seems relevant that Balochistan's troubles owe much to the geopolitics of the energy resources. The players of the global energy game, in general, and India, in particular, are trying to hold their stakes in Balochistan at any cost, which is considered as a strategic part of the trans-national pipeline corridors. The trans-national gas pipeline projects and the construction of a seaport, an oil refinery, and an oil city in Gwadar can turn Balochistan into an important energy hub in the region. The separatist groups like the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) in geostrategically

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<sup>37</sup>Deepak Pandey, "Why does India invest a lot of money in Afghanistan?," *Quora*, <https://www.quora.com/Why-does-India-invest-a-lot-of-money-in-Afghanistan>

<sup>38</sup>Saima Afzal, "Indian Involvement in Balochistan Unrest," *Foreign Policy News*, May 15, 2015.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

important ‘energy nodes’ would be the key players in a New Great Game.<sup>40</sup> Pakistani authorities have shared concrete evidence with the international community, particularly with the US and other major powers, of the Indian involvement to internally destabilise Pakistan, especially in Balochistan. During the last visit of Pakistani Prime Minister to the US, this issue was once again brought to the notice of US, which the Indian authorities, as usual, denied having any such involvement. Pakistan is crying loudly about the alleged Indian involvement in the Baloch insurgency in a careful, calculated manner,<sup>41</sup> but of not much avail.

While on the other hand, Pakistan has a long history in developing the relations with Iran in economic and socio-cultural sectors. However, Balochistan seems to be an important factor, which directly influences Pak-Iran relations, both negatively and positively. Iran’s current involvement in Balochistan has three main dimensions, the proposed gas pipeline, Jundallah organisation and increasing competition between Gwadar and Chabahar. The Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline project also known as, The Peace Pipeline, was aimed at constructing a 1,620 mile (2700 km) long pipeline from Iran’s South Pars fields in the Persian Gulf to Pakistan’s major cities of Karachi and Multan and then further to Delhi, India. The significance of this pipeline lies in the fact that Iran is the most geographically convenient supplier of gas to both countries and that it is also offering to cover 60 per cent of the construction costs of the pipeline. The total length of 2700 km project would run 1100 km in Iran and 1000 km in Pakistan and in case of agreement with India it will continue 600 km in the Indian territory. This project is expected to greatly benefit India and Pakistan.<sup>42</sup> A land-based pipeline would be the four times cheaper than any other option, even after taking into account transit fee payments to Pakistan. Pakistan could earn about US\$200-\$500 million annually in transit fees from the pipeline which would enable it to pay the price of natural gas from the pipeline it consumed.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Syed Fazl-e-Haider, “Is India Fuelling Unrest in Balochistan?,” *Express Tribune*, May 5, 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Hamid Mir, “India and the Baloch Insurgency,” *Hindu*, July 28, 2009.

<sup>42</sup> “Project Focus: Iran-Pakistan-India Gas Pipeline,” *Gulf Oil and Gas*, February 5, 2017, <http://www.gulfoilandgas.com/webpro1/projects/3dreport.asp?id=100730>

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

The proposed gas pipeline could provide Iran with an opportunity to export its natural gas through Balochistan as it will enter this province before it moves to the next province. Despite this fact that Iran has the world's second largest reserves of natural gas, it could never utilise its potential as a major exporter of natural gas. Nick Cunningham expounds in his article that "there is one major pipeline project that has been on the drawing board for years that may now move forward given Iran's re-entry into the international community. Iran has been eager to build a natural gas pipeline to Pakistan and India, a project that would benefit all three countries. This would allow Iran to tap into a hungry market for its gas, and Pakistan and India could access much-needed energy for electricity."<sup>44</sup>

Unfortunately, the project has witnessed severe opposition from the US whose crippling sanctions, in fact, did isolate Iran and prevented it for decades from its desire of attaining regional hegemonic status. The IP gas pipeline can only benefit Iran and Pakistan if peaceful law and order situation prevails in Baluchistan. The major portion of pipeline's length will be passing through Balochistan and thereby, if built, will face major security peril, particularly when the insurgency in the province has intensified unabated.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, Iran's prime concern in Balochistan should be in the context of security, because it would not only benefit Iran but the South Asian region as well. It will provide a foundation for the future economic growth, peace and prosperity of the region. Significant direct and indirect economic benefits during the construction and over the life of the project will be generated through employment, transit fees, and availability of clean fuel, economic and industrial growth.<sup>46</sup>

The new emerging trend of the growing competition between Gwadar and the Iranian Port of Chabahar is another great factor which shows Iran's

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<sup>44</sup> Nick Cunningham, "Iran-Pakistan Pipeline Receives Boost from Nuclear Deal," July 20, 2015, <http://oilprice.com/Energy/Energy-General/Iran-Pakistan-Pipeline-Receives-Boost-from-Nuclear-Deal.html>

<sup>45</sup> Muhammad Munir, Muhammad Ahsan and Saman Zulfqar, "Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline: Cost-Benefit Analysis," *Special Focus, Institute of Policy and Research Institute (IPRI)*, April 4, 2014, <http://www.ipripak.org/iran-pakistan-gas-pipeline-cost-benefit-analysis/#sthash.zPS7Yfeb.dpbs>

<sup>46</sup> Amanullah Khan Jadoon, "Iran-Pakistan-India Gas Pipeline For Regional Prosperity," *International Energy Forum (IEF)*, <https://www.ief.org/news/iran-pakistan-india-gas-pipeline-for-regional-prosperity>



reservations regarding Balochistan. Chabahar is the new Indian financed port. It is part of the Indian plan to develop transportation infrastructure in the eastern Iran in order to reduce the growing influence of Pakistani Port of Gwadar. India's ultimate desire is to connect Chabahar with the Central Asian countries through roads and a network of the railway system to bypass Pakistan.<sup>47</sup> In fact, Iran wants to give access to the Central Asian States through its Chabahar port, whereas Gwadar can be a much more practical and less expensive trade route, the strategic location of the port makes it an important regional shipping hub, providing the landlocked CARs, Afghanistan, and the Chinese Xingjian region an access to the Arabian Sea and third it will reduce the distances of 500 km between Pakistan and Central Asia.<sup>48</sup>

No doubt, Iran with the technical assistance of India constructed Chabahar with an intention to counter the potential threat from Gwadar seaport. India and Iran concluded a long-awaited port agreement plan lending a big boost to efforts for promoting regional trade. The Chabahar port near the Iranian border with Balochistan reflects Prime Minister Modi's keen interest in forging robust trade links with Central Asia, including landlocked Afghanistan.<sup>49</sup> In this scenario, India's desire to become a sole hegemonic regional power in the Indian Ocean looks confusing because this yearning also has adverse strategic implications for India in the long-term. The growing relations between Iran and India can have a diverse effect on Pak-Iran relations because the Pakistani Gwadar port and Iranian-India dual objective is first to encircle Pakistan by maintaining cordial relations with Iran and Afghanistan, secondly to counterweight it.<sup>50</sup>

The Gwadar port with its important geostrategic location will benefit both Pakistan and China which will automatically undermine Chabahar. Gwadar does not seem to be a mere seaport, but it would empower Pakistan to control strategically important energy sea-lanes in the Persian Gulf. While Iran and India, as allies, are determined to operationalise Chabahar

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<sup>47</sup> Zahid Ali Khan, "Balochistan Factor in Pak-Iran Relations: Opportunities and Constraints," *Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1 (January-June 2012): 135.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Syed Mudassir Ali Shah, "Chabahar vs Gwadar," *Dawn*, May 10, 2015.

<sup>50</sup> Afzal, "Gwadar Port versus Chabhar Port."

with transportation corridors running northward which indicates New Delhi's economic rivalry with Beijing. "At the same time, they pledged to develop the infrastructure that in due course will make the port readily functional. This denotes a fierce rivalry with the Pak-China economic alliance. With China pouring in billions of dollars investment in a series of infrastructure projects, including the port in Gwadar and the proposed economic corridor through Pakistan the Indo-Iran partnership will certainly have a cause of concern. The Indo-Iranian "joint venture" has raised apprehension in Pakistan and in the other western countries.

## Conclusion

For the past many decades, Balochistan has remained in the global news for the wrong reasons. The conflicting interests of the government and certain factions of the people in the province have kept it restive and impeded the efforts to bring the desired stability and progress. The scenario, not surprisingly, allowed Pakistan's adversaries to take advantage and exploit the situation in the province. The development of the Gwadar port has further aggravated the situation, bringing even a friendly neighbour Iran in the picture, who found its own Chabahar port economically threatened by the Gwadar port. The US believes that the Chinese control of the Gwadar port would add to Beijing's growing economic power. And, even at some stage, it buttresses its naval power is at odds with the US interest. American concerns about Gwadar emerges from the convergence of the Indian and the US strategic interests in the South Asian region vis-à-vis China and Pakistan.

Thus, the Indo-US strategic partnership in the Indian Ocean, the Indo-Iranian cooperation through Chabahar and their involvement in the affairs of Afghanistan, Balochistan are the factors of the recent instability in Pakistan. Balochistan has been exploited as the meeting ground for the great powers to advance their ideologies and establish supremacy in the region and beyond.<sup>51</sup> These conflicting interests and the complex dynamics of the New Great Game discussed in this study darken the prospects of an economically thriving Balochistan. Pakistan's civil and military establishment perceives the international interference on this issue as an indirect support to the militants. On the other hand, the Pakistani establishment has been striving

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<sup>51</sup> Syed Iqbal Ahmad, *Balochistan, its Importance* (Royal Book Company, 1992), 248.

hard to bring peace to the region with peaceful means through moderate political forces. A remarkable policy of appeasement and general amnesty by the government, for the entire home-grown insurgents and the self-exiled Baloch leaders, have shown flexibility and have hinted that they might even forego their demand for independence.<sup>52</sup> However, Pakistan still has to go a long way to restore peace and defuse the elements of unrest.

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<sup>52</sup> “Balochistan a Security Checkpoint,” *Daily Pakistan Global*, October 14, 2015.