



Pakistan's Gawadar Port: Benefits to Pakistan and China and its economic viability

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Abstract

Pakistan is located at the center of the Indian Ocean, making it a coastal state. It executes 95 percent of its trade through blue, via its ports in Karachi and Gwadar. Gwadar Port is the mega project of ongoing developmental projects in Balochistan which is shaping the economy of the World. The port is creating opportunities and possibilities for promoting regional and international shipping and it will resuscitate trade links between China and CARs being the closest route to warm waters. Gwadar Port has a vast region to influence; stretching up to several breakaway states of the former Soviet Union in the north, to Iran, the Gulf, the Middle East, and East Africa in the west, to India and Sri Lanka in the south. Moreover, this deep port is serving the Gulf and East African ports with fast feeder services. It has a deep-water sea complementary to Karachi and Bin Qasim ports for enhancing cargo shipments and therefore it will be a mother port for Asia in the coming years. It is argued that Gwadar Port has enormous potential to benefit China and Pakistan and also have the potential for uplifting Pakistan's economy.

Keywords: Gwadar Port, trade, economy, China, Pakistan

Introduction

In the changing dynamics of global architecture, sea politics is getting complex with more focus on commercial activities and economic prosperity. And Pakistan is fully enjoying its Strategic importance by having the three big ports the oldest one Qasim, the busiest one Karachi, and the Gawader port. Gwadar port is the most important port after the Karachi and Port Qasim having warm water and the deep seaport of Pakistan (Tauseef, 2017) ^[1].

Gwadar is located on the shores of Balochistan province in Pakistan. It is a coastal city and is also a planned port city. Gwadar lies nearby the mouth of Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. The Strait of Hormuz is one of the most important oil conduits of the world, through which about 35% of the global oil trade takes place. Gwadar is a combination of two Balochi (language) words, which means the "Gate of Air". Gwadar was initially a part of the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman for more than one hundred and fifty years. Even after the independence of Pakistan, Gwadar remained a part of the Omani Empire. It was in September 1958 that Pakistan, after making sure through a survey of the importance of the city, paid the Omani Sultanate £3million to buy back Gwadar. The announcement for the annexation was made by the then Prime Minister Malik Feroz Khan Noon, on 7 September 1958 (Yousif, 2013).

After attaining the Gawader port from Oman for many years there was no construction work occurred in the Port due to financial problem faced by the country and also due to the lack of efficient government and lack of knowledge about the benefit of the deep seaport and off course lack of resources too. But for the first time from 1988 to 1992 small port was constructed. In 2007, General Musharraf inaugurated the port.

From 2007-2012, Gwadar port remained under Port Singapore Authority (PSA) but due to its poor performance, the port was handed over to China Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC) in 2013. Since then the construction work has been done at a rapid pace. Along with the Gwadar port, the building up of Gwadar city, Gwadar power generation plants, and Gwadar International Airport are the proposed projects under development. The port has started shipment, seasonal cargo, and commercial trade but it is still under construction (Port News, 2019).

The port holds great strategic and economic significance for Pakistan. Gwadar can act as an international trade hub for Pakistan. Gwadar Port would connect three regions, i.e. Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. It would open new job opportunities and help in the development of Baluchistan. Pakistan would be able to explore the minerals, hydrocarbons, and oil and gas resources of Central Asian Republics (CARs). The port will attract foreign investment and tourism. It would provide foreign reserves and free trade zones and Special Economic Zones (SEZ) that would help in the economic prosperity of Baluchistan and Pakistan. It would help to increase Pakistan's trade and commercial activities, particularly in the Baluchistan province. Gwadar will increase job opportunities for Pakistani people and help in economic development through transit trade fees and foreign exchange reserves. Gwadar will boost up the cooperation of Pakistan with other countries in oil and energy sector. Tourism, trade, hotel industry, and state revenue will increase which will strengthen the economy of the country. Gwadar is attracting a large number of foreign investors to open new development projects and economic plans. China is an example whose western part is a thousand kilometers away from its Eastern

seaports. Through Pakistan-China Economic Corridor (CPEC), China would benefit from the nearest Gwadar port. The port would provide China access to Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics (CARs) (Port News, 2019).

This study will answer the following questions: What are the worthwhile features of Gwadar port? What will be the economic impact of the Gwadar port on the State and also the essence for other countries, especially for China?

Strategic Location and importance of Gwadar Port

Gwadar is a fishing village on the Arabian Sea coast in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan. Baluchistan shares borders with Afghanistan and Iran to the west – Gwadar is just 72 kilometers from the Iranian border and about 320km from Cape al-Hadd in Oman. More important is Gwadar's proximity to the Persian Gulf. It is situated near the mouth of this strategic body of water, and about 400km from the Strait of Hormuz, through which about 40% of the world's oil tankers pass. Gwadar is located on the Gulf of Oman close to the entrance of the Persian Gulf, about 460 km west of Karachi (Anwar, 2011) [6].

The importance of Gwadar is linked with the trade and energy wealth of its surrounding countries in geopolitical reference. It's 600 KM long. The geography of Pakistan is supporting Gwadar port to act as a hub port. Pakistan is linking Central, West, South, and East Asia and ties the surrounding regions in a web while acting as a hub for trade (Takrim, 2015) [9].

Gwadar is the tail of the silk belt, which will connect Kashgar through different communication networks. Gwadar holds a central place in the project of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor because without making the Gwadar Port fully functional, it would be difficult to see the anticipated corridor as an energy corridor that appears as one of its main objectives behind the construction of the CPEC. Located near the Strait of Hormuz, which channels about one third of the world's oil trade, Gwadar could play a key role in ensuring China's energy security as it provides a much shorter route than the current 12,900km route from the Persian Gulf through the Strait of Malacca to China's eastern seaboard. The port has the potential to serve as a secure outlet as well as a storage and transshipment hub for the Middle East and Central Asia oil and gas suppliers through a well-defined corridor passing through Pakistan (Abid & Ashfaq, 2015) [3].

And the port of Gwadar has an eminent status in the trade of China and Pakistan and throughout the world. In the future, it will be a keystone in the economic development and will provide much more benefit regarding other development not only to the state but also to the people of Baluchistan and the rest of Pakistan. Furthermore, China is also investing in the development of Gwadar port to make it the center of maritime trade of Chinese products (Naz & Asmat, 2018).

Gwadar Port: Plan and Progress:

Gwadar port is labeled as a "jewel in the CPEC crown", the port is expected to play a pivotal role in Pakistan's future trade and cargo activities (Chaturvedy, 2017). According to the Gwadar Port Authority's vision statement, "Gwadar deep sea port is the second great monument of Pakistan-China friendship after the Karakoram Highway linking Pakistan and

China." Besides Gwadar port, CPEC will include transport infrastructure, oil pipelines, power plants, and industrial zones with a capital outlay of nearly \$60 billion. A \$2 billion oil refinery is planned to be set up near Gwadar. The port is being developed by the China Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC), to which it was leased by the Pakistan government for 40 years in April 2017. The final expansion of the port and ancillary systems will be undertaken by the Chinese. Funds for this ambitious project will be provided by China both through the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and by way of direct government-to-government soft loans. To help China to recover its capital investment, COPHC will get a 91 percent share of the revenue from the operations of the port and the terminal and 85 percent of the revenue generated by the free zone. Under this arrangement, though the port is expected to handle 1 million tons of cargo annually, the impression in Pakistan is that benefits will accrue mainly to the Chinese (Kanwal, 2018) [11].

China has been interested in the development of the Gwadar particularly Gwadar port, Gwadar Airport and its infrastructure. The loan of \$230 million for development of Gwadar Airport has been converted into grant. Moreover, \$ 140 Million loan for connectivity of Express Way to coastal Highway of Gwadar, distance of 19Km; this loan was later declared as interest free loan. This type of committed is only development of Gwadar but this generosity never shown by China in other countries and projects. CPEC is long term plan providing the completion of its project. Gwadar will be major player in the trade hub for strengthen the Chinese economic relation with North Africa and Middle East. China has lease agreement for Gwadar for 20 years. Therefore, it is keen interest of China to develop Gwadar and be involved in development of the various projects. The project includes establishment of Gwadar port, Gwadar Airport, oil terminal and petroleum complex, water desalination plant, coal generation plant and infrastructure. Moreover, it includes the Special Economic Zones and commercial ports. Gwadar is depending on Public Private Partnership to allure international investment in various sectors particularly commercial and industrial segments. Pakistan government has announced various tax free zone and investment incentives for Gwadar. It can contribute in better Chinese and Middle East economic relation (Abid, 2021) [2].

The Express Tribune reported that Zhang Baozhong, the chairman of China Overseas Ports Holding Company said that "Despite the corona virus pandemic, the pace of work has not slowed down and many CPEC projects have been completed ahead of time. After the completion of CPEC, Gwadar will become the largest port in the region and an important economic hub in the world, which would benefit various countries. A liquefied natural gas terminal will also be established at the port. Gwadar Development Authority Director General Shahzeb Khan Kakar told The Express Tribune that: Under the 2050 Master Plan, the issues of water and electricity for the "150,000 people" of Gwadar would be resolved by the end of next year (2022). "Work is in full swing on a desalination plant, which will convert five million gallons of seawater into drinking water and a 300 megawatts coal-fired power plant," Kakar said. "Both the

projects will be functional by January 2023” (Khan, 2021).

Significance for Pakistan

Pakistan’s geo-strategic position and geo-political fixation are quite significant and have acquired immense importance in the realm of national security. Gwadar port’s proximity to the Persian Gulf, Central Asia, Eurasia and the world main energy and trade chokepoints all contribute to highlight its unique importance in the region. Its geo-strategic location in the Arabian Sea could facilitate electronic surveillance to monitor naval activities in the entire Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. In fact, Gwadar port lies diametrically within the domain of Mackinder’s Rimland concept which was used during the Great Game. During the time, Gwadar remained military powers’ main focus in the Indian Ocean. In history, warm waters of Gwadar attracted Greeks, Arabs, Portuguese, Persians, Russians and the British. The construction of Gwadar port along with its related projects would benefit Pakistan and also to secure its maritime economic interests in the region (Kalim, 2021).

The joint development of the port under BRI based on mutual consultations and multi-dimensional benefits is in the interests of the region that is also reflecting the common ideals and pursuit of regional development, peace and progress. It is estimated under the Gwadar master plan that the ongoing work on Gwadar Port and Gwadar Free Zone has the capacity to generate more than 40,000 direct jobs in this remote city of Balochistan that has opened its eyes for second life and standing on its feet. Drastic changes have been witnessed since the launch of Gwadar development project as the city has its own vocational training institutes and the university as well with the establishment of model schools for children. The transportation infrastructure under CPEC in the province is reducing traveling barriers, uplifting socio-economic activities for the local population by providing direct access to main markets. In addition, the installed capacity of desalination plant for the provision of drinking water to the local population has been enhanced to 2.5 million gallons, and three more desalination plants will be established in the city to increase this capacity to 5 million gallons. The rise of Gwadar as the country’s commercial, financial and economic center is helping to silence the negative impression created about the area. A coal power plant providing 300 megawatts under the CPEC framework has also been inaugurated that is aimed to provide the continuous electricity facility to the citizens and will advance self-reliance in tackling the energy crisis (Assadi, 2021) [14].

Significance for China

Gwadar is so important to China, because of the significance of the Strait of Hormuz. This is the only access from the Persian Gulf into the open ocean and as such, it is the major transport link for the region’s most important products. We’re chiefly talking about petrol: On an annual basis, 35% of global petroleum that is delivered via sea will pass through the Strait and this goes on to account for 20% of all global stocks. It’s an incredible percentage and arguably this is the most important factor to take into account when considering Gwadar’s potential. China would benefit from the nearest

Gwadar port. Kashgar is 4500 km while Gwadar is 2800 km from the Port of Shanghai. The port would provide China an access to Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics (CARs). The Strait of Malacca can be blocked by India but Gwadar would provide an alternate sea route. Gwadar can act as an alternative route to Indian Ocean or South China Sea routes. The economic security of China’s reckons on Three Es; environmental protection, energy security, and economic growth, out of which energy is the key component. It is generally seen that China’s oil import is The Economic Viability of Gwadar Port: An Hub for Maritime Trade growing rapidly. At the moment, China is consuming twelve percent of the global energy whereas China fulfils its forty percent requirements from oil import. Out of the total supply sixty percent is being supplied from the Middle East and by 2015, the daily import will reach 11.41 mb/d, by 2020 it will be 13.51 mb/d and by 2020, it will be 16.11 mb/d (Bilal, 2016).

Chinese naval presence at this critical choke point of Gulf can not only check the INDO-US domination of Indian Ocean but can also strive to achieve its aim of being a naval power. Apart from the utilization of port an existing land link can be of help to China in improving its ever expanding trade to Central Asia, Middle East and Africa, as it will reduce the sea distance to 2500 kms instead of 10000. Gwadar offers China, a tactical position in the energy rich Caspian Region thus, affording a substitute trade route for the western Xinjiang province, thus utilizing it as a trade route through Gwadar Deep Sea Port. Chinese’s economy is expanding at the rate of about 9% every year with trade volume of U.S \$1.76 trillion and GNP ranging up to 7.3%. China has foreign exchange reserves of U.S \$ 600 billion. China produces 70% of world photo copiers, micro wave ovens, CD players, shoes and toys. Having such a strong and a potent economic growth rate China is expected to be the world leading economy in year 2025. Its growing economic needs are re-defining its fiscal procedures to encompass several countries for a progressive and a pragmatic economic development by enhancing the permanent buyers in international arena for her products. To be a potent member of World Trade Organization (WTO), the foreign and economic policies being followed by the Chinese Government are cogent and well executed. A Chinese effort to lay more emphasis on regional economic developments and foreign realignments highlight’s its focused intent to be an economic power. Since the Russian downfall Chinese government is persuading its pragmatic, focused and determined policies in a passive manner to be a recognized as a world power in times to come (Malik, 2012) [15].

China has the largest population of around 1.371 billion according to 2015 Census report and to fulfill its energy needs, China imports oil from the Middle East. While China has to travel a long distance in order to get that oil, Gwadar on the other hand is surrounded by countries having two third oil reserves. Gwadar can act as shortest trade route to China. The Chinese industries are also facing trouble competing in the global market due to high transportation cost and delivery time. China is using a longest way due to which gives a competitive edge to competitor’s example Japan and The United States. This new route from Gwadar-Pakistan has

solved many problems for China and will save billions of dollars and will reduce time. Now it will enable China to more safely and reliably import oil. The Government of Pakistan has also provided a naval base to China in Gwadar, and it is stated as an Economic Corridor to China. It will enable China to more safely and reliably import oil. Currently, sixty percent of China's oil must be transported ship from the Persian Gulf to the only commercial port in China, (Shanghai) which takes around 2/3 months. Hence time loss and distance will be reduced (Deng, *at al*, 2018) ^[16].

Gwadar is important to Beijing for two reasons. One is establishing direct transport links to the Indian Ocean via the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). In this respect, China does not need its Gwadar investment to create a monetary return, for it is a strategic investment. The second factor is that Gwadar helps anchor or stabilize western China, a region where Beijing feels vulnerable to Islamic agitation (Live mint, April 12, 2021).

Gwadar Port and Economic Development of Pakistan

Maritime Economy which is also known as 'the Blue Economy or Ocean Economy' plays an essential role in the integration of the regions and economic growth as it assists, transforms and globalizes different areas. Pakistan is now becoming the hub of trade and economic activities as the regional players have realized its potentials. Gwadar has surged the scale of investment from \$ 26 billion to \$ 46 Billion. In 2000, Pakistan's annual trade through sea-route was 42 million tons which now has lifted up to about 78 million tons (In 2015). Being the trade hub for the entire region, Gwadar will serve the consumer market of Asia and is equipped with modern cargo handling to meet the challenges of growing global trade. Gwadar port will capitalize on opportunities for trade with landlocked central Asian republics (CARs) and Afghanistan and it will promote trade with Gulf States. Gwadar will generate extraordinary income for Pakistan and it will generate incentives and benefit Pakistan's economy in terms of Foreign Direct Investment, trade enhancement, increase in foreign exchange reserves, transit revenues, new economic and infrastructural developments, employment opportunities, strengthening labor market, emerging new industries and markets and flourishing the existing ones. The province of Baluchistan will be lifted up by implementation of this mega project and its resources would be mobilized in better way. Gwadar is expected to generate 2 million employment opportunities in next 8 to 10 years. Gwadar Port authority stated that foreign investors from Middle East, Europe and China have planned to establish 300 factories in Gwadar which is an evidence of foreign interest in Gwadar (Roshan, 2016).

A one-day seminar titled "Gwadar Development and the Growth of Blue Economy in Pakistan" was held at the Pak-China Business Centre in Gwadar on Monday. The chief guest Sher Ali Arbab during his inaugural address welcomed the participants and highlighted the importance of Gwadar and Balochistan:

Terming Gwadar as a pivot for the concept of CPEC, Arbab stressed that the people of Gwadar need to own this mega project and play their vital role in the progress of CPEC for

the people of Balochistan and Pakistan. "The Gwadar ports and its allied projects will go a long way in changing the lives of people in a good way," he said (The Express Tribune, april, 12, 2021).

Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan, Nong Rong called on Minister for Maritime Affairs, Syed Ali Haider Zaidi in Islamabad and held discussion on bilateral cooperation in the maritime sector.

The two sides expressed commitment to utilize the blue economy concept to further strengthen economic ties under the CPEC (Radio pk, April 03, 2021).

Pakistan has poor infrastructure; energy and power shortages; and an average shortfall of electricity from 4000 to 7000 MW per year. The cost of energy shortages and chronic power cuts reach 7% of the GDP which is a direct drag on economic development, on the improvement of people's livelihood, and even on the development of the national defense. The CPEC will address Pakistan's energy crisis and will fill the fundamental shortage of energy and electricity as 76% of CPEC related projects are in the energy sector. China aims to invest more than \$34bn in the energy sector in Pakistan to ultimately add some 17,000 MW of electricity generation. By the completion of the first projects, it is estimated that CPEC provides up to 10,400 MW energy for Pakistan (Gholizadeh *et al*, 2020).

Gwadar Port would develop agricultural output it donates 20.9% to Gross domestic products and financial records 43.5% of employ. The Pakistan Sea trade improved to 36.3% of the Gross Domestic Product and marine spreads stocks 10% to the nationwide revenue of highest 30 frugalities of world. The amount of ampoules contract in domain's Ports greater than before fast speed of 9%. It is said that the scope of naval trade is the scope of nation's economy. Gwadar port has flow level of asset from \$ 26 billion to \$ 46 Billion (Ali, 2020).

Gwadar Port's importance for the socioeconomic development of Pakistan cannot be ignored. The Pakistani government, until now, depended only on two ports of Karachi with small navy and insufficient resources to improve its maritime strategy. A genuinely active Gwadar Port will have a high weight age in tax collection for the prosperity of the country by producing tax through transit duties from landlocked CARs and generating domestic transport duties. Furthermore, it will also help in making profits from the shipping corporations and facilitating by employing various workers. Operationalization of the Gwadar Port would gradually decrease burden on the Port Qasim and the Port of Karachi which have already reached their maximum cargo handling capacity and will be unable to handle the expected growth and traffic in future. The capacity of the Gwadar Port is planned to be increased upto 400 million tons of cargo per year and expansion of the port to a hundred berths by 2045. On the other hand, the Gwadar Port would expand the economic base as it would help exploit the massive expanse from EEZ. Thus the port will not only provide infrastructural development but also increase socioeconomic development. Gwadar consumes sufficient offshore natural energy. Due to this; investment would also be attracted for capitalizing opportunities of exploration of energy resources. According to the Gwadar Port Authority (GPA), the entire Gwadar district will be declared a free

economic zone to boost industrialization and economic growth (Kaleem & Syed, 2020) ^[13].

It has been viewed that Gwadar seaport will bring about economic and strategic benefits by securing Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) in the Indian Ocean with regard to the International Trade. Economic growth in modern times is dependent on conditions of infrastructure networks for trading and transportation activities. Investments by China in agrobusiness, tele-communicational network, extraction of natural mineral resources i.e. oil, gas, uranium, gold and copper will enhance exports, helping for the boost of Central Asian market economies. China, Pakistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have been agreed for initiation of bus service for enhancement of trade and promotion of people-to-people contact. The transfiguration of Kashgar into commercial and industrial pivot will result into interconnection of inland areas of China to Pakistan and Central Asia. In the due course of time, Kashgar will be capable of becoming platform for promotion of trade and economic collaboration between Pakistan and the Central Asia. With the completion of Gawadar-Kashgar economic corridor is and its further extension to Afghanistan, it will make available incentives to (CARs) by means of diversion of their trade to Gwadar. The economic growth and opportunities through Gawadar-Kashgar interlink will help the people of provinces for joining of mainstream to the national progress. The future planning for establishment of oil and gas pipelines crossing through Baluchistan may enhance strategic importance of Pakistan. Gwadar seaport will attract investment opportunities and bolster progress of country by serving as economic and energy corridor for the Central Asia, West China and South Asia earning revenue in transit fees for Pakistan (Hussain, 2020) ^[23].

Gwadar will bring about extraordinary economic incentives for Pakistan and may place it in the center of the resurgence process for consideration to the leading economies of the region. The opening of east-west trading corridors through Gwadar and its expansion to China will break the isolation of Pakistan. The anticipated collection of revenues through strategic energy-supplies transit route and terrestrial to sea-trading from Pakistan would be estimated at \$1,000,000 per annum. More than 36,000 shipping vessels pass from side to side the area of concern under Pakistan on the annual basis. Pakistan will expectedly generate US\$60 billion a year in transit fees in the next 20 years. The development of Gwadar being an economic hub of the region has resulted in the expansion of strategic infrastructures along with Gwadar to reach out for the energy resources of the (CARs). Chabahar (Iranian port) and DWP of (UAE port) have been having interests in keeping (Gwadar) out-of race because it would oust them due to its strategic location at an entryway to the Strait of Hormuz. It has been expected that Gwadar will generate about (02)-millions of employment prospects for 8-10 coming years in the future (Hussain, 2021) ^[24].

Conclusion

According to the analysis of the study, it is declared that the urgency of the Port is due to its important strategic location, present at the mouth of Persian Gulf near the strait of

Hormuz through which 40 % of world oil tankers pass and connects it with three major regions i.e. Central Asia, South Asia, Middle East.

A Gawader port not only prove beneficial for Pakistan but also for china because china's economy is based on industrial development and vulnerable to oil so its trade is mostly based on oil and Pakistan provides access to China through the Strait of Hormuz and connect it with the Persian Gulf. And China uses Pakistan as a fruitful way for fulfilling its oil need. Pakistan also provides a naval base to China for safe trade. Gawader port reduces the time limitation for China regarding trade and also saves billions of dollars who he extra spent for trade.

The study highlights core reason for the Gawader port development is to facilitate China and Pakistan while nurturing local infrastructure and boosting the economy. The study stipulates that Gwadar Port has the potential to accommodate regional trade including the trans-shipment from CARs, the Middle East, and other important regional countries. In this direction, the Chinese commitment to managing the project is instrumental including its help in technical handling and operability of the project. On the other hand, China is investing over the US \$46 billion in the economic corridor to fulfill its future oil requirements from this project. Overall, China is fully committed to develop and take advantage of its strategic relationship with Pakistan and help the region to develop peacefully. Since the project is very much viable, other nations are also investing in the same tempo. This is an excellent opportunity to keep upgrading our road communication linking with all the important countries to generate revenues for our future economic revival.

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