

## **Development of Gwadar Port as one of the key projects of CEPEC and its impacts on Pakistan-Afghanistan relations**

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### **Abstract:**

This research article attempts to assess the development of Gwadar Port as an energy and trade corridor, one of the major projects of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, and its positive impacts on Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. Deep-sea Gwadar Port located 180 nautical miles from the Strait of Hormuz is not only a gateway to the Middle Eastern and the African Energy reserves but also provides a world trade transit route to Afghanistan and other landlocked countries of Central Asian states. Pakistan and Afghanistan are not only sharing territorial boundaries but also have the same culture, history, and religion. The relationships between Pakistan-Afghanistan in the context of the development of Gwadar Port as a major part of CPEC are analytically examined in this article through the lenses of liberalism theoretical frameworks within the domain of International Relations.

**Keywords:** CPEC, Gwadar Port, Pak-Afghan Relations, Liberalism.

### **Introduction:**

The China Pakistan Economic Corridor projects, consisting of the development of Gwadar Port, Energy sector, Transport Infrastructure, and Industrial Cooperation, are expected to bring economic prosperity to Pakistan. The CPEC starts from the Chinese North-Western region of Xinjiang and ends at Gwadar Port, Pakistan. Gwadar Port will give China a route to the Middle East through the Arabian Sea. The trade activities that previously took long days i.e. 45 days would be reduced to approximately 10 days for China, thereby saving time and a lot of other resources (Solangi, 2019). The port will play a significant role in CPEC projects. Afghanistan being a landlocked country is en route in CPEC and may be benefited from the project.

Pakistan and China have a strong relationship and that is why both countries decided to construct the huge project CPEC with the collaboration of Chinese investment. CPEC is one of those projects that China has initiated under its largest plan of One Belt One Road. CPEC has projects like Gwadar Port, Industrial Parks, Roads, Railways, Generation Plants, etc. It is expected that CPEC would be a game-changer for Pakistan and would bring drastic changes to the economy of Pakistan. CPEC is also facing some internal and external opposition and problems and countries like India and the USA are not accepting it. Despite all opposition, CPEC would be fully operated by 2030. It would bring peace, prosperity, development, and resultantly better living standards for the common people of Pakistan and Afghanistan (Solangi, 2019).

### **Theoretical Framework:**

The study was conducted through the lenses of Liberalism theory because the development of Gwadar Port will promote economic and commercial activities that will provide opportunities

to develop bilateral relations, cooperation, and well-being in the region. Scott Burchill argued that commerce and free trade activities would control and reduce the artificial obstacles that are causing a hindrance between the individuals being united into a community. He also advocated that trade would provide platforms of mutual dependence and understanding that would minimize conflict among the people. He further gave an example that regional economic integration as in Europe, conflict among states would likely be minimized due to sharing a common interest in economy and trade in the shared geographical region (Burchill, 2005). Liberalism advocates cooperation, liberty, common development, and equality as a basic right of every nation-state and even every individual. The liberalism perspective believes in shared goals and common cooperation through mutual development. Liberalism does not advocate dominating others or power politics as Realism propagates (Aftab, 2020).

Liberalism regards a common basis for international cooperation and interaction. Economic and social goals motivate international actors to use different means to achieve their goals. Economic, technological, and cultural aspects may give policymakers reasons to cooperate with other states. Liberalism advocates that the anarchic international system is lessened by norms and rules of international law and trade. Liberals do not like the interference of the government in economic processes (Khan et al., 2019). Invitation to enjoy the facilities of Gwadar Port is open for all regional countries, especially, for Afghanistan to connect her with this fine project to increase the living standard of her people (Solangi, 2019).

### **China Pakistan Economic Corridor:**

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is about to link Gwadar Port, Pakistan to Kashgar in Xinjiang, China. The main projects of CPEC are the construction and development of Gwadar Port, the building of Communication and Energy infrastructures, and the setting up of Industrial Zones. A network of Roads, Railways, Pipelines, and Fiber optical cables will be developed to connect the corridor (Solangi, 2019). CPEC will help Pakistan to balance the geo-economic and geopolitical aspects. It will further improve the infrastructure, economic growth, energy requirements, and labor development of Pakistan. CPEC is not only a game-changer for Pakistan and China; it is for the entire region because economic development and regional integration will emerge through communication and collaboration (Cheema, 2015).

CPEC has significant value for both Pakistan and China and also has high worth for the countries in the region. Both countries have decided to complete the project by 2030. CPEC will not only provide benefits to Pakistan and China, but it will also give great advantages to nearby countries, especially Afghanistan (Sansa, 2020).

### **Assessing Development of Gwadar Port:**

Economics and commercial activities play a key role in the country's development as these activities lead nations towards urbanization and modernization. Gwadar Port as the main project of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor will convert Pakistan into an energetic economic hub in the region (Shafeeq, 2016). Gwadar Port is situated only 180 nautical miles away from the Strait of Hormuz which is the way towards the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea. Gwadar Port is the third largest deep seaport in the world. It is located at the world's largest route from where the world's 40 % of oil passes via the Strait of Hormuz. Gwadar Port has taken prominence between Pakistan and Afghanistan because of the trade route through Quetta city to Chaman towards Afghanistan and even then, Central Asia (Mazhar et al., 2012 ).

The economic corridor is planned to link Gwadar Port with Kashghar located in northwest China through road, rail, and energy pipelines. The oil pipeline maybe later on connected to Iran also and this would further enhance trade between southwest Asia and the Gulf Cooperation Council. (Fazl-e-Haider, 2013). Robert D. Kaplan quoted that ports situated on the coast of the Indian Ocean will play key roles as “Evacuation points” for the energy resources in the Caspian Sea and Central Asian states. He further defined that Central Asian energy politics would be dependent on these ports that would influence states even 12,000 miles away from these ports (Kaplan, 2009).

Two ports in the Indian Ocean became prominent on the International stage, one is Pakistani Gwadar Port and the other is Iranian Chabahar port. Indian companies, primarily, financed the Chabahar port which is 110 miles away from Gwadar. Chabahar port is also almost closely located near the Strait of Hormuz and is considered a competitor of Gwadar port to access the same market i.e. Afghanistan and then Central Asia (Haider, 2005). China and Pakistan are focused to develop a large deep-sea Gwadar Port. The development, initially, includes three multi-purpose berths and a service berth as well. A berth can handle a large ship carrying 30,000 tons of goods. During the second phase, ten more deep-sea berths and three container terminals will be constructed. In the next phase, cargo handling capacity will be enhanced at par with Karachi Port which carried 90 percent of Pakistan’s seaborne trade. Gwadar Port would also be extended to fully operated petroleum loading and unloading facilities (Garver, 2006).

When Gwadar Port will be fully developed, it will be the origin to sufficiently operate an inland transportation system, transfer, and transportation of cargo, port-to-port connectivity for liner vessels, and trading of international cargo through sea routes. The economic benefits of Gwadar Port will decrease the cost of trade and will increase value and attraction to almost all economic areas in Pakistan, China, Central Asia, and South Asia. Moreover, when the efficiency of Gwadar Port will be increased, bilateral trade between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman ports will also be further generated (Shafeeq, 2016).

### **A Brief History of Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations:**

Although, early relations between the two countries failed to take a happy start as in September 1947 Afghanistan’s representative refused to recognize Pakistan and he was the only man in the UN who did not cast the vote in favor of Pakistan (Ahmed, 2020). Once again, in 1948 Kabul Envoy Sardar Najibullah visited Governor-General Muhammad Ali Jinnah respectfully but could not agree to begin a good relationship. Upon returning to Kabul, propaganda was made against Pakistan. Fortunately, Marshal Shah Wali Khan, a graduate of Aligarh University, was appointed as the first ambassador to Pakistan and since then positive relations started (Ahmed, 2020).

In 1958, Ayub Khan's government struggled to improve relations with Afghanistan as he invited foreign minister Naim Khan and convinced him of mutually positive and beneficial relations for both countries (Naz, 2019). During the visit of King Zahir Shah to Moscow, he adopted the Pro-Indian Policy at the time of the 1965 war between India-Pakistan but later on Afghan government followed a neutral policy (Khan et al., 2019). In 1971, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto as president of Pakistan visited Kabul and in 1972 begum Nasrat Bhutto visited Kabul for three days to build good relations between the two countries. In July 1973, the former Afghan Prime Minister ousted his brother-in-law (King Zahir Shah) from the throne and declared Afghanistan a Republic State.

Daud Khan again started an aggressive policy towards Pakistan on he raised the issue of Pushtunistan with him and his envoy at Algiers in September 1973. President Daud visited Moscow in 1974 and in 1975, President Podgorny visited Kabul. To build positive relations, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto again visited Afghanistan and both countries signed the Five Principles of nonviolent policies, in return, President Daud visited Pakistan and was welcomed historically by the government of Pakistan (Naz, 2019; Ahmed, 2020).

In 1977, General Zia ul Haq as President of Pakistan visited Afghanistan and in return, Daud Khan also visited Pakistan for the second time. Both presidents assured mutual, positive, and beneficial relations. In April 1978, the PDPA (People Democratic Party of Afghanistan) threw the Daud Khan regime, and Daud Khan along with his brother and family were killed in Kabul.

The Soviet Expansionist policy towards south Asia reached aggressively and was unacceptable to religious people inside Afghanistan, however, the US, Pakistan and religious groups in Afghanistan focused to contain the USSR (Borders, 1978; Ahmed, 2020). Post-1979, Pak-Afghan relations emerged as a complex one because of hosting millions of refugees and at that time USSR blamed Pakistan that Islamabad along with China and Iran was interfering with Kabul's internal affairs. But all countries rejected Moscow's accusation. At the same time, the Havana summit brought Islamabad closer to Kabul. After Tarakai's government's downfall, Hafizullah Amin established friendly cooperation with Pakistan but the Afghan government also blamed it for supporting guerilla fighters (Mujahedeen) against the Afghan government (Ahmed, 2020).

Due to inter-regional and great powers' competition as the conflict in Afghanistan was beneficial for them, Pak-Afghan relations remained unstable in the region (Hoodbhoy, 2005; Ali & Saeed, 2019). In 1986, Dr. Najibullah took over Kabul and in the same year Benazir Bhutto returned to Pakistan and General Zia wanted to make a clear policy toward Afghanistan. Eventually, the Afghan Mujahedeen leaders decided that they will remain pro-US government if Moscow will support the PDPA (Ali & Saeed, 2019). In 1992, Mujahedeen took over Afghanistan.

It was a unique change in Afghanistan that Burhan Uddin became the President of the country being a non-Pashtun leader and established good relations with Pakistan as the Afghan President Rabbani had good Political relations with Pakistan since 1979. After about two years of Rabbani government, Afghanistan fell into the hands of warlords and there was no central government and no foreign relations with neighboring countries at the state level. In 1996, the Taliban took over the charge of Qandahar, Kunduz, Taloqan, and other provinces of Afghanistan until 2001 (Ali & Saeed, 2019; Hoodbhoy, 2005; Khafizovich, 2020).

After the 9/11 incident, the US started operations in Afghanistan with the support of General Dostum, Ata Muhammad Noor, and other local Commanders. In 2002, Pak-Afghan relations opened a new chapter for bilateral cooperation on Security and anti-terrorism issues (Hoodbhoy, 2005). Pakistan at its best level played a key role to establish good relations with Afghanistan for bilateral trade, the peace process, prosperity, and reconciliation as Pakistan and Afghanistan are not only sharing territorial boundaries but also have the same culture, history, and religion.

## **Conclusion:**

Pakistan and Afghanistan are brother Islamic countries and share common cultural and geographic roots. The relationship between both the countries did not remain cordial during the early times since the inception of Pakistan but over time both countries developed very pleasant relations. The development of Gwadar Port offers opportunities to build new bonds of peaceful

development and solve regional security issues between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It will give firm assurance and support to each other on the issues related to sovereignty, stability, and security through mutual participation in trade and commercial activities generated through Gwadar Port. It will help to reduce the chances of mistrust and eradicate the exploitation of negative elements that are destabilizing the two countries. Mutual development of infrastructure and adequate communication will stabilize the security situation between the two countries. Most of the terrorism issues are because of low levels of income and lack of development in infrastructures.

The development of Gwadar Port will bring enormous opportunities to accelerate trade and commercial activities in the region and resultantly the people of Afghanistan will come up from the vicious cycle of poverty and terrorism. Pakistan and Afghanistan will promote education, knowledge, science, technology, and mutual exchange programs for the benefit of their people and finally, the people of Afghanistan will get rid of poverty and will enjoy peace, prosperity, employment opportunities, and stability. The development of Gwadar Port will provide opportunities for Afghanistan to enjoy the benefits of a community of collective values, prosperity, and equally beneficial interests through win-win cooperation and peaceful co-existence.

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