

Geopolitical Value of Gwader for the Region (Mainly for Pakistan, China and the Region)

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Abstract

In the present geo-economics situation, the significance of the sea ports cannot be ignored; Because of the important sea ports, Dubai is now the nucleus of the world's economy, especially of the Gulf. But as things are, the Middle Eastern part has been engulfed, a lot lately, in serious political conflicts because of which large disturbances are being predicted in the next few years. In order to deal with this situation, an alternative, near to Dubai, needs to be positioned very soon so that uninterrupted and a constant supply of oil is ensured from Gulf region throughout the world, even in case of a worst political scenario. The port in Karachi could have been a better option but the load on that port is to such an extent that it cannot bear much more. The port of Gwader is not only in the vital interest of Pakistan and China but also in the paramount interest of the region's development. Thus the vital importance of Gwader cannot be ignored for the region especially for China and Central Asia.

Key words: sea ports, Gwader, significance, region, vital

Introduction



Source: Wikipedia

About 70% of the earth's surface is occupied by water which plays a significant role in the development of human society on a geographical and the environmental level. Oceans and seas play a vital role in transportation; hence in the system of trade. In other words, oceans can be a link and can provide access to the core of not only the common men, but also of

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the governments. The importance of sea routes geopolitics cannot be overlooked, especially in this age of globalization and modernism.

God has gifted Pakistan with a sea frontage of 960 Kms, stretching to the west and south-east axis. Along the coast line, Karachi and Port Qasim have been developed whereas 'Ormara is currently being developed as a second naval base. (Kashif.2006, 521) The other ports existent as well which have potential are Ketu Bandar, Sonmiani Hingol, Bandar, Sonmiani, Hingol, Khor, Kalamat, Pasni and Jiwani)The 21st century saw a revolution in the sense that sea trade has become a major source of globalization. A positive and sensible step was taken up by the Pakistani Government in the form of this mega project regarding Gwader. Since then, the waters in the territory are being made use of and good statistics are showing up. It has been a source of strengthening the country's long broken economy; not only this, but it will also serve as a geopolitical interest of the country by providing her a standing within the continent.

Geographical Location of Gwader Port

Gwader, a warm water deep sea port is situated about 460 km west of Karachi at the 'apex of Arabian sea,(2013,The News &The Financial Daily & http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/gwader_port) at least 380 km northeast of the nearest point in 'Oman, and about 75 km east of Pakistan's border with Iran at the mouth of 'Persian Gulf. Surprising factor is that how just an ignored fishing village Gwader is now being turned into a great sea port. (Hassan.2005,June,5) Its strategic significance lies in the fact that it is situated near the 'Strait of Hurmuz which is an active trading and oil shipping lanes.

Keeping in view the significance of the ports, Pakistan recognized Gwader as a 'port site in 1954, when USGS (Recorder,2013,22Feb&thepakistanationalist.blogspot.com/2013/01/gwaders-accession-to-pakistan_6696.html) identified it as suitable site for seaport. Gwader was under the Omani control until September 1958 as it was located right on the Gulf of Oman. In return for a payment of 3 million pounds sterling, Sultan Said bin Taimur allowed it to be integrated into the Pakistani territory when Pakistani Prime Minister Feroz Khan Noon decided to purchase that piece of land owing to its ideal geographical conditions.

The question of Gwader occupation was highlighted by Haji Muhammad Iqbal Baloch in 1947 after independence and the then Prime Minister, Khan Liaquat Ali Khan asked for annexation of Gwader to Pakistan. Haji Mohd Iqbal Baloch urged the government that Gwader must become port of Pakistan. In September 1957, (www.wikipedia.org) Gwader was repurchased from the Sultan of Oman on the insistence of Haji Baloch that Gwader should be converted into a sea port. For these services and a significant role played by Haji Baloch, the government of Pakistan bestowed him with Tamgha-e-Khidmat. The Government of Pakistan purchased it from 'Oman on 8th September 1958, after four years of negotiations for \$3 million. Although Pakistan declared Gwader a port site in 1964 but due to lack of funding the work could not be continued. At this hour of need, China came forward to the rescue along with the required sources for the building up of that port.

During the period 1988-1992, a small port was constructed at Gwader yet its construction was awarded to Chinese company in 2002 which completed its 1st phase in

2006 and it was inaugurated by the then Pakistani military ruler, General Pervez Musharraf along with Minister of Chinese communication, Li Shenglin, in the spring of 2007. It was originally built by the Chinese and currently undergoing further expansions. Chinese aid, both technical and financial, is being used to extend it into a naval base. The first shipping that touched the port was in 2008, marking its first operational trade. The ship was from Canada carrying 52000 tons of wheat. The honor of this official inauguration was done by the Minister of Sports and Shipping, Sardar Nabil Ahmed Khan Gabol on 21st of December in the year 2008. (Dawn.2008, Dec 22)

Keeping in mind the extreme worth of the port, Government has declared it as a Free Economic Zone and Duty Free Port. The government of Pakistan has delegated the port vicinity as a "sensitive defense zone.(Master plan) The project is a clear indication of the fact that it will prove to be beneficial for the people of not only this country, but the whole region in coming years. (Nuri.2002, The News, June 28) Our economy can be boosted again only if the plans related to this project are devised wisely and properly (Economic Survey, 2003-04). Billions of dollars are expected to be made according to the economists and millions of employment opportunities also be generated just because of the Gwader Project.(Daily Times, 2007) When this project is fully equipped, Baluchistan will also be affected in a positive manner as it will be a pathway for all the by-road transportation connecting Central Asia through Afghanistan. No doubt, this makes Gwader 'the energy hub of Asia'. (Gauhar.2005, May, 29) Gwader will become the centre for all economic activities in case of meeting all the required present expenses of the port. (Dawn, Amir, 2005, Apr.30)

The chief of the Navy went as far as calling the port as third naval base for the country after Karachi and Ormara strengthening the nation's defense. (Daily Times, 2004, Apr.19) In order to serve as a strategic location in case of alternative, Gwader was chosen as the most suitable site amongst eight potential locations of Keti Bandar, Sonmiani Hingol, Bandar, Sonmiani, Hingol, Ormara, Khor, Kalamat, Pasni and Jiwani. Apart from Gwader, port Karachi and port Qasim were also brought under consideration. But they were not the sources of attraction for major shipping agencies because of three main concerns:

- distance from main shipping routes
- limitations of draft
- longer turnaround time as compared to Gwader. Because Gwader fulfilled all these requirements, it was chosen as the third locale for the economic sea port of the country.

The construction of this third port has increased chances for the development of the Makran Coast. In a very positive manner, the development of the coast will further lead to a positive change in the form of a long term and long lasting transformational changes in the province of Baluchistan. The province can thus be converted into a modern society depicting the 21st century rather than the age old tribal primitiveness that has always been associated with the land.

Gwader now serves not only as an economic reward for the country but in future, it will also provide an opportunity to boost the benefits or maximize the advantages from its strategic location on the SLOCs (Sea Line Of Control) of Indian Ocean and the Strait of Hormuz. (Kashif.2006, 523) The construction of the Gwader Port was much needed and it is a sensible step taken by the Pakistani Government. Having the benefit of a perfect locale,

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the Gwadar port is a place of great strategic value, providing immense raise to Pakistan's importance in the whole region. It allows Pakistan to expand its weight age from the Persian Gulf through the Indian Ocean to Southeast Asia. The port is bounded nautically by the Persian Gulf in the west and the Gulf of Oman in the southwest.

A focal point, in this case being a port, collects plentiful trades at a single accumulated point. Experimental study shows a positive relationship between trade and growth; the results of course show the directly proportional link between the two. As the economy gets bigger, chances of greater generation are increased. Thus, Pakistan with a GNP of over \$60 billion ([http:// www.pakistan.gov.pk/ divisions/ environment-divisions/media/wssd-chp1.pdf](http://www.pakistan.gov.pk/divisions/environment-divisions/media/wssd-chp1.pdf)) and trade volume forecast of 78 million has gone on board upon a naval endeavor of building a port at Gwader. Because of the port, Pakistan now has access to the great natural resources of Central Asian Republics. It has also been proved beneficial as a route to the large punter market of Asia with 1/3 of world population. Gwader will surely put our country in the limelight of world affairs. It can very easily be prophesized that in the near future, oil and gas will be carried through this port to be transported via road to Western Chinese region. (Master plan).Gwader, once well operational, will create further opportunities for new investment, strengthen the country's strategic defensives, and will serve as an energy pathway for Central Asia, South Asia and western China, earning Islamabad significant profits in shipment charges. The pursuit for energy sanctuary and geostrategic vital issue has also attracted the attention of China, India, the USA and Russia, all part of the "new great game" focused around Gwader. (Fazal-e-Haider.2009)

Chinese interests in Gwader

Among the first few countries which extended a hand of recognition and established ties with China was also Pakistan. The case of China's admission in the United Nations was first pushed forward by Pakistan. Traditional relationships are formed between the two countries and they are very close neighbors. Reciprocally, China also came to Pakistan's aid very openly and criticized India for its violence against Pakistan in war of 1965 and provided services during and after the war. (Khalid, 2001) Pakistan and China have sustained amiable relations for the last sixty –five years. Both Pakistan and China are located in the area that has great geographical significance. It is a fact that three of the seven declared nuclear states of the world are located here, and another Russia has its own interests in the region because of Central Asian states. Despite strong strategic and diplomatic ties, Pakistan provides the 'secure, shortest possible route from Gwader through the KKH to the western region of China which is experiencing a huge economic shift, will be helpful to boost up economic cooperation between the two countries.

China is materializing its name in the world as a strong economic country, not through a gradual but a swift procedure. Although, it has a vast piece of land, but lacks any port with hot waters to give it any advantage regarding sea trade 16,000km of distance comprising of 2-3 months of additional travelling is what is required for the approach of Chinese industrial region to the Shanghai port. On the other hand, Gwader port for them is only on a distance of 2500km proving to be a great benefit for them as trade continues to take place throughout the year because of the hot waters. That is a major reason of

Chinese interest in the Gwader project. (Khan.2006, 1) The Gwader port is a symbol of Pak-China relations. (Haider, 2005, 96)



Source: Wikipedia

According to China, Gwader is playing a similar role as did the Karakoram Highway; i.e. strengthening the close knit ties between the two countries. China has shown interest in laying a pipeline from Gwader to Xinjiang for the purpose of transforming it into an energy-transport center. Through this pipeline, oil will directly be carried from the Gulf States. It can also prove to be a major defense tactic in case a major war breaks open. In order to provide a link between parts of China with that of Pakistani Ports and Middle East, former President, General Musharraf ordered the construction of a dry port in Sino-Pakistani border town of Sust which is 200km away from Gilgit. This dry port was constructed in the year 2004. (Dawn.2006,Mar,29) Former President Musharraf announced that the state of the art facility would be linked to Gwadar via KKH. He said that this dry port will provide parts of China with the shortest access to Pakistani deep sea ports, and the Middle East.(Dawn, 2006,Jul.5) The Gwader port is an open and an apparent symbol of the long term friendship that exists between the two countries. It was an effort to encourage projects in Pakistan built on modern infrastructures. This port will prove to be a strategic hub for the economical activity for the whole region. Mutual ties between Pakistan and Gwader will turn Gwader into world class port that will serve as a regional hub not only for Pakistan, China but also for Iran, the Gulf States and if technically planned with the construction of transport infrastructure, will be useful for Central Asian republics.

Chinese economic potentials and strategic opportunities in Gwader

Gwader's location at the juncture of South & Central Asia and Middle East has made it 'the western -most link in China's 'string of pearls strategy. (Ali at <http://www.eastasiaf>) Gwader is close to the entrance to the Persian Gulf and the Middle East, China's biggest source of crude, and a pipeline to western China would greatly reduce the time and distance required to transport the fuel, while cutting out the congested seaways around Singapore. Some economic and strategic opportunities are,

- At present, China is not in a condition to interfere effectively in the Indian Ocean, yet owing to her growing navy, it can exercise considerable influence in the region. China

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wants to take the role of a major participant in the establishment of a new type of world order. This cannot be achieved with having the Indian Ocean out of her influence. China also resents the hegemonic design of India towards the Indian Ocean. China suspects India's supporting to super power presence in the Indian Ocean as means of countering China.(Kpur,2003) Through this port, Beijing can aspire to exercise considerable influence in the region, and also monitor US naval activity in the Persian Gulf, Indian activity in the Arabian Sea, and future US-India maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean.

- China has transparent interests in monitoring the supply routes for its rapidly increasing energy shipments from the Persian Gulf and in opening an alternative route via Pakistan for trade serving China's vast, restive, and rapidly developing Xinjiang Region. Gwadar has become China's most favorable choice for oil trade, as the present choke point of oil trade at Hormel is becoming congested. About 80 per cent of China's oil imports flow through the narrow Strait of Malacca, which is considered as unsafe route and is notorious for piracy. Gwader's location opposite to the Straits of Hormez provides China an alternative to the Strait of Malacca. Gwader port provides China a transit terminal for crude-oil imports from Iran and Africa to China's Xinjiang region.
- It is widely claimed that there is Chinese interest in reaching the blue waters of Arabian Sea which reflects China's strategic move in Gwader. It is said that China is trying to develop its Western regions at par with its Eastern regions to reduce the economic gap within China and to stop the internal migration of people from West to East. It is famously called their 'Go West' policy. To market products produced in Western China, ports of Shanghai or other eastern ports are almost 3000 km away from the western production centers where as Gwadar provides access to a port at just 1500 km.(Amir,2005,Dawn,Apr.30).Xinjiang lies 4,500km from China's east coast but just 2,500km from Gwader.(Siddiqui,2002,Dawn,Jan.28) This process will also stimulate the economic development of China's backward Xinjiang region.(Hassan,2002)

China will have access to the network of rail and road links connecting Pakistan with CARs and Afghanistan that is envisaged as part of Gwader project and this access would serve as an opening door for China into CARs markets and energy sources. Gwader port will be a project of diverse prospects for various regional and extra regional powers. (The Nation,2002,Apr.15) The strongest relations between any two countries in the Indian Ocean region have been the relations between Pakistan and China. Former President Mussaraf reiterated the historical bond by saying that China has been our most consistent ally over the past thirty years. (Solomon, 2004,Oct,20)

Naval outpost is considered a strategic dimension for the Chinese to this project. It has been called part of 'String of Pearls' strategy of Chinese where they've got hold of strategic port in Gwadar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and South China Sea etc. On a world map, these ports form of string (of pearls) which may form as Chinese line of defense to control oil movement. 80% of oil used in China goes through shipping lines of Malacca Straits. This strategy of a series of ports along the oil shipment routes gives China

a forward footing. It is said that China is also wary that US may cut off its oil supplies through Malacca straits in case of any increase of hostilities on Taiwan issue. The port will also enable China to diversify its crude oil import routes and extend its presence in the Indian Ocean. The port is strategically located to serve as a key shipping point in the region. Thus, Gwader port can provide China a strategic foothold in the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean as it will enable China to monitor its energy shipments from the Persian Gulf.

Gwader port can provide the Chinese a forward base to monitor US naval activity in the Persian Gulf region as well as Indian naval activity in the Arabian Sea. Similar conditions prevail in the Bay of Bengal where China has established facilities at Coka Island in Myanmar to monitor Indian maritime activity and missile testing in Orissa. (<http://www.ipcs.org/issues700730cr-sakhuj.html>) A Washington based newspaper had insinuated that the Chinese interest in developing the port of Gwader means to give Beijing a potential staging ground in exert influence along the shipping lanes of the Gulf. (Khalid,2001) While laying the foundation stones of Gwader port, President Mussarraf termed it an historic event in Pak-China relations. He said.

"Pak-China friendship journey from Karakoram to Gwader depicts very truly the relationship that Pakistan and China enjoy which has led from Karakoram in the north of Pakistan as the symbol of this relationship and has reached all the way through Pakistan on to the coastline at Gwader". (Mussarraf,2002)



No doubt, Gwader port would open new opportunities for Chinese investment in Pakistan, yet it would be an important symbol of Pak-China relations. (Dawn, 2002, Mar.23) After decades of evolving relations, Beijing and Pakistan have cemented their strategic links. Their cooperation now covers almost all facts of economy, energy, industry and infrastructure. (Sichuan,5) Gwader’s location at the mouth of the Gulf and at the opposite end of the strategic choke points of Straits of Hormez and the Gulf of Oman enhances its strategic importance. Its development could favorably influence the geo-strategic environment of the region and have an overall beneficial impact on Pakistan. Beijing also intends to take advantage of Gwader’s accessible international trade routes to Central Asian republics and Xinjiang. The plan envisages extending China’s east-west railway from the border city of Kashi to Peshawar. The incoming and outgoing cargo from Gwadar can then be delivered to China through the shortest route from Karachi to Peshawar. The same road

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and rail network can also be used for the supply of oil from the Gulf to the western provinces of China. When a reliable network of road and rail links is established, it could benefit both Pakistan and China commercially as well as strategically. Once a small fishing town along the Makran Coast, Gwader is poised to become a mega seaport, it will fulfill the requirement of four geographically important regions: South Asia, West China, Central Asia and Afghanistan.

Geographical Significance of Gwader for the region

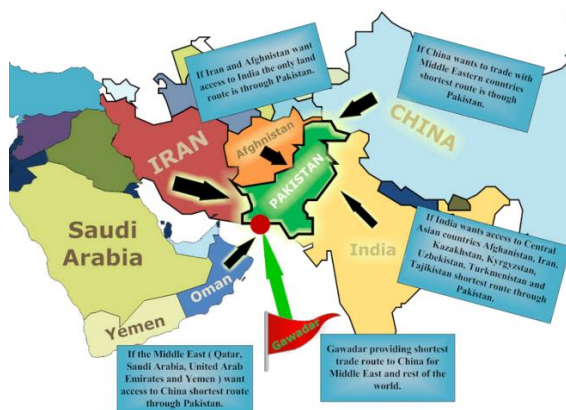
“Gwadar will soon be a hub of trade and commerce in the region and it holds key to bring together the countries of Central Asia and lending a new impetus to Pak- the China relations. Gwadar project had very significant and strategic importance for China adding that nearly 60% of China’s crude oil was imported from the Gulf countries which would increase in the next decade.” (Khan, 2013) Asif Ali Zardari)

Gwader is strategically located between three increasingly important regions of the world: the oil-rich Middle East, heavily populated South Asia and the economically emerging and resources-rich Central Asian Republics. Enjoying the status of a third Deep Sea Port, the port has particular significance with allusion to trade link with CARs, UAE, Persian Gulf, East Africa and North West India. By the high merit of its site, the port will soon turn into a city which will be analogous with cities like Singapore, Hong Kong and Dubai. Located at the doorway of Persian Gulf on Arabian Sea, the port has immense geopolitical significance on many versions. In light of the persistent shakiness in the Gulf region, the Gwader port will provide a firm and adjacent point of access to the Gulf ports, just 250 miles from the Straits of Hormuz, through which nearly 40 percent of the world’s oil supplies flows. Certainly, this makes Gwader the energy center of Asia. (Dawn, 2006,Mar,29) The port is strategically located to serve as a solution shipping point in the section. The port will not only augment Pakistan's strategic importance in Southwest and Central Asian region but it will steer in a new era of socio-economic development in Baluchistan. (2002)Pakistan has very little strategic profundity from east to west which will be increased by Gwader (Kashif,2006,524).The port emerges as a place of great strategic assessment, giving tremendous boost to Pakistan’s importance in the whole region, lengthening from the Persian Gulf through the Indian Ocean to the Southeast Asia and the Far East.(The Nation, 2002,Apr.15)

It is an estimate that the facilities offered by the port will not only be sufficient for the country but will also provide services to the neighboring countries.(Bakhsh,1995,189) In order to avoid being blockaded in times of difficulty, this port can also serve as the third naval base for the Pakistani Navy apart from Karachi and Ormara. There had always been a threat of a naval blockade as all the ships were located collectively at the Karachi port. Another major positive fact is that Port Gwader is further 450 km away from the Indian border as compared to the Karachi Port.(Kashif,2006,524) It would be easier for the Navy to spread out its branches with their bases both at Ormara and then now at Gwader. ‘Sensitive Defense Zone’ proves to be a correct designation designated by the Government of Pakistan.

The area which was always ignored and neglected will be brought into the limelight in terms of wealth, trade, infrastructure and progress once this port is fully functional. It will be cause of producing ‘1288 direct and 11,000 indirect opportunities’ for employment. (Dawn, 2003,Mar.3) An official source cites the fact that around 75% employees were enlisted from Baluchistan.(The Frontier Post,2003,Aug. 7) As a result of the development, Pakistan will become a nautical center connecting Middle East, European and Anglo-American markets with Central Asian states. This port will provide route not only to the large natural resources of the Central Asia, but also the immense purchase business market of Asia with almost one third of the world’s population. It will surely put the port forward as a popular sector in the international market.

A fully developed Gwader Port will open vistas of trade through the Arabian Sea for all those Asian countries which are landlocked. China will also be provided with a much shorter route to the Arabian Sea. Owing to the functions which it is going to play as being a link between the landlocked nations and the rest of the world through the Arabian Sea, it can rightly be called as ‘A gateway to Asia.’ The income that is required by the country can be accommodated through the trade that will flourish because of the development of this port. Becoming a nucleus in trade, link with the other areas and its connections with Afghanistan and the rest of Asia are the important positive after effects of this construction.



A road that is considered to be the shortest path between Central Asia and the sea is under construction; the road being between Gwader and Saindak. It is going to provide Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics with access to the sea as they are surrounded with lands all around. Transportation of goods, oil and gas reserves to the international markets through this port will be made easier.

Apart from being the largest province in terms of the land, Baluchistan is also the most under developed areas of the country. Because of the poor leaderships and lack of planning, the infinite natural resources found in the province remain unexplored. Aid will be provided in the exploration of these sources after the development of the Gwader Port. Undoubtedly, as a result, Gwader will emerge as the center of all economic activities of the country. After the port becomes fully functional, there will start an ongoing and a continued hectic activity because of the immense transportation as it will become a passage for the long line of trucks and other forms of container vehicles. The newly constructed highway will be connecting

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Central Asia through Afghanistan in the north to Gwader in the South of the region. (Gauhar, 2005, May 29)

An economic uplift for the dwellers of the province of Baluchistan will take place soon after the port starts to function properly. A change will be seen in the living standards of the people living in the backward area. The Government is encouraging the people of Baluchistan to come forward and be a part of the travelers that is going on to the road of this progress and development. This will help in the process of nation building. As the port is being set up, the dreams of progress witnessed over the years are materializing and the clouds of desperation are now clearing over giving a bright ray of hope. A brightly lit future in the form of Gwader port is awaiting the people of Baluchistan.

Conclusion

In the present geo-economic scenario, the significance of the sea ports cannot be ignored; especially after the US occupation of the Iraq and Kuwait which has immensely influenced Saudi Arab and has also resulted in the neutralizing of Bandar Abbas and Chah Bahar-the sea ports from Iran. The European demands are now met with by the ports from Dubai and Salalah. As these demands are quite heavy, the port in Dubai has become overloaded; being the axle of economic progress, it direly needs relaxation in order to keep going. Because of the important sea ports, Dubai is now the nucleus of the world's economy, especially of the Gulf. But as things are, the Middle Eastern part has been engulfed, a lot lately, in serious political conflicts because of which large disturbances are being predicted in the next few years. In order to deal with this situation, an alternative, which is near to Dubai, needs to be positioned very soon so that uninterrupted and a constant supply of oil is ensured from Gulf region throughout the world, even in case of a worst political scenario. The port in Karachi could have been a better option but the load on that port is to such an extent that it cannot bear much more. (Asma.2006, 1) Apart from that, it is situated on a distance from the nucleus and as a result, the demands of the international transshipment cannot be fully achieved. The first demand requires it to be that the distance from the port of Dubai is minimum; so that oil supply keeps on without any obstacle, for which Gwader can be a perfect location (Narbaev.2004) Secondly, Gwader is a 'natural deep sea port (Master Plan) which makes it more compatible. Lastly, being nearer to the Gulf, this natural alternative can be quite cost-effective. The port of Gwader is not only in the best interest of Pakistan and China but also in the best interest of the region's development. Thus the vital importance of Gwader cannot be ignored for the region especially for China and Central Asia.

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