

## **Strategic Importance of Gwadar Port**

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### **Abstract**

The pragmatic facets like geography and history have always imprinted the demographical mosaic and development of a civilisation. The civilisations have always developed along the waters. The waters have been used as trade route since long and the modern trade has further enhanced the need of trade through waters. Pakistan being a gateway to the strategically important 'Strait Of Hurmoz' in the Indian Ocean, blessed with hidden treasures and bordering two Islamic Republics, Afghanistan and Iran, has always been a centre piece for Regional Politics. The emergence of Gwadar Port as a vibrant regional economic hub has caused the regional and extra regional powers to develop strategic and infra structural development with Gwadar Port to reach the energy rich Central Asian Republics (CARs). Iran and Dubai Port World (UAE) have interests to keep Gwadar Port out of competition as it serves as a gateway to Strait of Hurmoz. Pakistan needs to be addressing all the concerns to make Gwadar as a regional energy corridor.

**Key Words:** Strategic, Gwadar, Sea lines of communications, Caspian region, Indian ocean

### **Geo Strategic Importance**

"If we see this whole region, it is like a funnel. The top of the funnel is this wide area of Central Asia and also China's western region. And this funnel gets narrowed on through Afghanistan and Pakistan and the end of this funnel is Gwadar port. So this funnel, futuristically, is the economic funnel of this whole region" (Former President of Pakistan Pervaz Musharraf, 2002: 22<sup>nd</sup> March).

Geographical environment is considered as one of the important factors influencing the development of human society. The most critical element of the environment is the sea, which occupies almost three-quarters of the surface of earth.

Pakistan is blessed with a sea frontage of 1100 kms, stretching to West and Southeast axis. About 36,000 ships transit through Pakistan's area of interest each year. Pakistan's total annual trade is about 38 million tons out of which

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95% takes place through sea. Karachi port is handling 68% whereas Port Qasim takes care of 32% of the sea borne trade. The projected rise in total trade by the year 2015 is 91 million tons. This will increase shipping activity phenomenally at the existing ports. Sea ports provide a vital link to a country with the outside world. These ports can become a main hub of commercial activity and can give a substantial rise to the economy of the country.

Pakistan has very little strategic depth from east to west; Gwadar will increase this strategic depth considerably, as a strategic port being further away from India. The additional distance of 460 Kms away from India will decrease the vulnerability of Pakistan. Gwadar will help Pakistan to monitor the Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) originating from the Persian Gulf and bottle neck at Strait of Hormuz. Strategically, considering the establishment of Naval Bases at Gwadar and Ormara by Pakistan, presence of Chinese Naval assets, domination of Arabian Sea at Persian Gulf by U.S 5th Naval Fleet and Indian aspiration to emerge as a Blue Water Navy will be checked. This will also establish Pak-China naval nexus to deny manoeuvre space to Indian Navy in Indian Ocean.

With a population of 227,984 having 12,637 sq kms area, Gwadar Port yields of its vitality for regional and extra regional key players. Gwadar has the potential to acquire the status of a center piece as a gate to Strait of Hurmoz; it can compete with the UAE ports by improving the exiting links to Caspian Region, and thus providing a better trade for route to land locked Caspian Region. Gwadar has the potential to be developed into a full-fledged regional hub and a trans-shipment port in the future. However, this unique opportunity when viewed in today's changed global environment can also be seen as a junction of conflicting interests. United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Iran may have conflicting interests in Gwadar. CARs and China have most significant economic interests whereas Chinese and United States (US) interests may be divergent in natures, so Gwadar will be a project of diverse prospects for various regional and extra regional powers. Gwadar will help Pakistan to monitor the Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) originating from the Persian Gulf and bottle neck at Strait of Hormuz. Strategically, considering the establishment of Naval Bases at Gwadar and Ormara by Pakistan, presence of Chinese Naval assets, domination of Arabian Sea at Persian Gulf by U.S 5<sup>th</sup> Naval Fleet and Indian aspiration to emerge as a Blue Water Navy will be checked. This will also establish Pak-China naval nexus to deny manoeuvre space to Indian Navy and will make maritime communications safer for commercial shipping in Indian Ocean (Chaliand, 1994:835).

In case Malacca Strait is blocked by U.S Gwadar can serve as an alternate route for Chinese trade in the Indian Ocean and to West Asia. In military and strategic terms, Gwadar can help China to monitor the sea-lanes from the Persian Gulf as about 60% of Chinese energy requirements come from the Persian Gulf and transit along this sea-lane. The port of Gwadar Port can provide China a Listening Post to Observe the Indian naval activities around the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Adan.

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Gulf States, especially UAE and Iran consider Gwadar as an emerging rival port in the region. They fear that Gwadar Port will share the economic and trade activities which other wise they can exclusively enjoy. So the interest of these countries is divergent in nature with regards to the development of Gwadar Port. The U.S interest in the energy resources of Middle East and CARs may cause strong Chinese presence near the Gulf and Strait of Hormuz and may definitely project Gwadar's strategic importance for the US. In the same contest former President of Pakistan said, "We all are witness to the making of history today".

The globalisation has brought trivial changes in the world economy and has led the civilization to a 'Borderless Civilization. This phenomenon has considerably increased the sea trade from, 2.37 billion tons of cargo to 5.88 billion tons of cargo moving through the sea. (Stopford, 2009:3). After years of painstaking deliberations by Government of Pakistan, Gwadar was chosen as the most suitable alternate port apart from Karachi and Bin Qasim Ports amongst eight potential locations of Keti Bandar, Sonmiani, Hingol, Ormara, Khor Kalmat, Pasni, Gwadar, and Jiwani. The port finally become functional after first commercial vessel 'Pos Glory' called on the port on March 15, 2008 (Shahid, 2008, December 22<sup>nd</sup>). The port has numerous potentials, a few of them are:-

- a) Its location is close to the international SLOCs and is suitable for trans-shipment facilities.
- b) It is farthest from Pakistan's eastern neighbour and thus provides more warning time against air and naval threat.
- c) It offers natural protection against weather.
- d) It is more suitable for capitalizing trade opportunities with energy rich Afghanistan and Caspian Region.
- e) To give access for the development potential of heartland (Chaliand, 1994:967) and Rimland (Chaliand, 1994:969).
- f) Gwadar Port being a gateway to the Persian Gulf at the Hurmoz Strait will offer various harbour services like show casing and storage of sea resources, shipment, trans-shipment, and manufacturing conveniences for regional, extra regional key players, UAE and European nations.

With the development of Gwadar port, all trade to and from CARs is definite to adopt the shortest available route via Gwadar and the trade benefits of Pakistan are expected to multiply. The proven reserves and production will have following implications on Gwadar Port:-

- a) Estimated production of dry cargo is more than liquid cargo, which means larger ships and deep sea port will prove better.
- b) Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan will produce more dry cargo than other CARs and Gwadar will prove to be the shortest access to warm waters.

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- c) Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan having more liquid cargo can export it through pipelines and can have an alternate routes to Mediterranean Sea through Caspian Region which is about 1800 kms long route whereas through Gwadar it will be only 1400 kms long.
- d) Route to Mediterranean Sea passes through Russia which is a point of concern for Europe, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.
- e) European nations are striving to reach this mineral rich region through Caspian Region earlier than other key players through Gwadar and Afghanistan.

### **Project Development Plan**

Master Development Plan of Gwadar Deep Sea Port includes development of an area over 18,600 hectares of land for various project schemes and structures including:-

- a) Expansion of port over an area of 400 hectares.
- b) Export Processing Zone of 47000 acres located on land adjacent to the port in East Bay.
- c) Special Industrial Zone of about 4,000 hectares lying to the north of the town.
- d) Oil refinery of 1,000 hectares located to the north east of the town.
- e) Residential area of 400 hectares stretching north of the existing town along Western Bay.

### **Economic Update of Project**

China's Harbour Engineering Company undertook this joint venture at an initial cost worth U.S \$ 300 million. Pakistan had to pay an amount worth U.S \$ 50 million and the remaining amount has been paid by China. The project has been leased to Port Singapore Authority. U.S. companies were competitive in providing the port with cranes and crane components, forklifts, tractor and trailer units, unloading system, conveyor system, security and environmental equipment. As per memorandum of understanding China, Pakistan and Central Asian Republics have already planned an extensive development of communication infrastructure from Caspian Sea in west to Xinjiang in the east, converging at the Gwadar Port in the south.

- a) The Pakistan Government will not be able to provide all the means required to implement the project alone. Private sector will have to participate actively for undertaking various developmental activities
- b) Involvement of foreign investors will certainly be required as Pakistan will not be able to provide all the economic resources required for this giant project. China is involved in the port development. Similarly for development of road from Gwadar

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- to Afghanistan and onwards to CARs, Islamic Development Bank has provided U.S \$ 100 million.
- c) The Asian Development Bank basing on an exhaustive study has reflected Gwadar Deep Sea Port as an alternate to Dubai Port World (UAE) as it is out of the choke point (Strait of Hurmoz) and can handle larger cargo 'S' class ships and oil tankers.

### **Interests of Key Players**

Strategically Gwadar holds a dominant position in the Gulf Region as part of the 'Great Game (Bhonsle, 2006:123). It has enormous potentials to emerge as a regional hub and a future trans-shipment port. However the changed environments have a few concerns for the global key players to exploit its potentials to the fullest.

### **Chinese Interests**

Chinese naval presence at this critical choke point of Gulf can not only check the INDO-US domination of Indian Ocean (Nixon, 1992:63) but can also strive to achieve its aim of being a naval power (Yeuh, 1972:40). 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 ( Khalid, 2009:8). 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 Organisation (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 recognised as a world power in times to come.

China has provided an all-out assistance for the development of Gwadar Deep Sea Port to Pakistan thus, strengthening the vital geo-strategic ties with each other in an expanding global village. As it is rightly said that "the Pak-China friendship cannot be seen in the context of dollars and pounds" , and it

would not be fair to suspect the Chinese interest in the Gwadar project but on the other hand China is likely to benefit from the Gwadar project. Numerous strategic and economic aspects of Chinese interest in this project are explained below: -

- a) Xinjiang is China's largest and yet most sparsely populated province. Xinjiang shares borders with Pakistan, Eastern Central Asian Republics and Afghanistan. The Uighurs the ethnic Turks in the western Muslim dominated Xinjiang province basing on, religious, cultural and language differences from the Han majority have called for right of self-determination. Considering the facets like its neighbourhood to the Muslim Central Asian Republics, the presence of a nuclear test site of Lop Nur, Its access to warm waters through silk route and the presence of oil, Chinese government has adopted the policy of 'Go west' for the economic development of Xinjiang province. The Gwadar port is very prudent for the Chinese economy especially for the economic development of its south western Xinjiang Province. It provides China with an option to utilize the shortest approach to the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Aden, only by traversing 2500 kms on an existing Silk Route. This approach will also be taken as an economic opportunity for the struggling Uighurs, which in turn can improve the relations of neighbouring Muslims from two countries.
- b) The Gwadar Port can provide the Chinese with a listening post to observe the naval activities of USA in the Persian Gulf 460 km further west of Karachi and away from Indian Naval Bases of Gujrat and Mumbai.

In military and strategic terms, Gwadar Port can help China to monitor the SLOCs from the Persian Gulf as about 60% of Chinese energy requirements come from the Persian Gulf and transit along this approach. Chinese naval presence is likely to improve Pakistan's coastal defence. Rolling out ceremony of JF-17 air craft built indigenously with help of reliable and trusted friend China on November 23, 2009 is an evidence of deep rooted trust between Pakistan and China.

The Indian activities in the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Aden have always been an eye sour for the Chinese's. Zhao Nanqi, director of the General Staff Logistics Department of the Chinese Navy issued a top-secret memorandum explaining the People Liberation Army's strategic plans to enhance control over Pacific and the Indian Ocean in accordance with the "high-sea defence" policy by pursuing its 'string of pearl strategy'. Zhao stated that "We can no longer accept the Indian Ocean as only an ocean of the Indians". A naval base at the mouth of the Indian Ocean will help China in checking the Indian hegemonic designs in the region. The prudent Gwadar Deep Sea Port has emerged as a most appropriate and direct approach to markets of the Gulf Region and Africa. Through the existing route passing through South China

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Sea, Pacific Rim, Strait of Malacca and Sri Lanka, Chinese vessels will have to cruise about 10,000 kms and through Gwadar the distance will be reduced to just about 2500 kms. Presence at Gwadar would help China to keep track of oil transportation in Persian Gulf. Gwadar Port is an alternate for China if the route through Malacca strait is denied to her for access to Asia, Europe and Africa.

### **Interests of CARs**

Central Asia and South Asia, encompassing Caspian Region, Central Asian Republics, Afghanistan and Iran and the energy-rich 'lake' called the Caspian Sea, is a significant region because of its huge monetary prospective and geographically vital positioning, which has formed the region as a centre piece in the international arena. The energy rich Caspian region has become an opportunity among the regional and extra regional key players to 'Treasure Hunt'. Presently every country is trying to get maximum out of the treasure. In the present scenario basing on the resources the Central Asian Republics are making an effort have a progressive economy and foreign policy and on the other hand the regional and extra regional key players are endeavouring to share as much as possible from the emerging Central Asian economies. CARs needs to settle maritime borders of Caspian Sea as it remains an object of continuing debate between Turkmenistan, Iran and Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan (Blank, Stephen J, 2009:1).

The CARs need economically feasible pipeline itineraries. The CARs, besides their utter unwillingness are still dependant on Russia (Blank, Stephen J, 2009:2). In order to shun away the effect of Russian influence and to strengthen their economy by exporting their abundant mineral and oil resources these countries need an outlet. There are two routes available to them, one passing through Iran (Chabahar) and the other leading through Pakistan (Gwadar). Due to prevalent international environment, western countries are not in favour of the trade route through Iran; hence Gwadar emerges as a more viable alternate port.

Pakistan was quick to realise the potentials of the CARs and establish diplomatic and trade relations, and has been eager to show a higher profile in this region. It also revived the old Regional Corporation for Development (RCD), extending its membership to CARs and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in an effort to build a framework for closer economic links. Pakistan has always been eager to help these states and provide them an opening into the Arabian Sea, which obviously is the desire of all these states. Few facets due to which Gwadar emerges significantly for the CARs are:-

- a) The Caspian Region is in need of a suitable route for pipeline approaches and Gwadar as a gateway to Strait of Hurmoz is the most suitably option.

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- b) In order to bridge the geographical gap Turkey proposed to establish a railway link between Central and South Asia (India), the proposal failed because of the terrestrial limitations. In the present global circumstances and availability of Silk Route Pakistan appears to be the best option.
- c) The CARs are still dependant on Russia, mainly because of the old Moscow based communication grids which control international mail, telephone, telegraph links and other communication infrastructure. Russia was and is still alarmed by the possibility of cheap Central Asian gas for European market because it would compete with Russian gas giant Gazprom (Ghaleb, 2009:65). In order to get rid of Russian influence and to strengthen their own economy by exporting their abundant mineral and oil wealth, besides the Caspian Sea there are two routes available to these countries, one passing through Iranian Chabahar Port and the other leading through Pakistan. The western oil exploring companies are not in favour of the trade route through Iran; hence Gwadar emerges as most viable port.

With the development of Gwadar port, all trade to and from CARs is definite to adopt the shortest available route via Gwadar and the trade benefits of Pakistan are expected to multiply. The proven CARS reserves and production will have following implications on Gwadar Port:-

- a) Estimated production of dry cargo is more than liquid cargo, which entails requirement of larger ships and thus deep sea port will prove better.
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- c) Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan having more liquid cargo can export it through pipelines and can have an alternate routes to Mediterranean Sea through Caspian Region which is about 1800 kms long route whereas through Gwadar it will be only 1400 kms long.
- d) Route to Mediterranean Sea passes through Russia which is a point of concern for Europe, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.
- e) Western route for liquid cargo pipeline to Pacific Ocean through South China Sea Port is 1400 kms long.
- f) European nations are striving to reach this mineral rich region through Caspian Region earlier than other key players through Gwadar and Afghanistan.
- g) The investment for liquid cargo passage through pipeline via Gwadar, Caspian Region and China will be 2 to 2.5 billion U.S \$, 3.3 billion U.S \$ and 35 billion U.S \$ respectively.
- h) The investment and distances for gas pipelines are more or less same as of oil pipelines.



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The facts proving the above mentioned implications are appended as under: -

- a) Russia is interested to establish gas and oil pipelines in Northern region passing through Caspian Sea, port of Novorossiysk and Baltic Sea to Europe to avoid possible U.S and Islamic pressure.
- b) Kazakhstan in order to make timely use of its natural oil & gas resources coupled with limited investment would like to link up to the existing pipeline network of Gazprom in the North.
- c) Azerbaijan being member of common wealth of Independent States (CIS) would prefer the western route passing through port of Baku, Black Sea and Ceyhan port to Europe.
- d) Turkey and Georgia are also in favour of western routes. Turkish western pipeline from Baku to Turkish Mediterranean through Ceyhan port at the cost of U.S \$ 3 billion is a point in case.
- e) Another suitable route to the warm waters of Indian Ocean is through the Iranian Chabahar Port, which due to the recent sanctioned imposed by the USA seems to be a far cry.
- f) China has adopted an approach to combine western and southern access to warm waters by establishing oil and gas pipeline from CARs to Silk Route (via Pakistan) through Xing Yang province. Trans Asian Gas pipeline and China – Kazakhstan oil pipe line are points in case.
- g) The U.S oil giant ‘Unocal’ proposed construction of an oil pipeline called as Turkmenistan- Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI), which further highlights the strategic value of Gwadar Deep Sea Port.

### **Interests of Afghanistan**

Afghanistan has been gifted with a number of natural resources. These resources are not fully exploited and the process is unlikely in the near future too. On the other hand Afghanistan currently has few exports i.e. steel, agriculture, textiles, etc. It is most likely that the country will be dependent on the imports and the aid from the donor nations, for which it had to depend on a transit agreement with Pakistan (Matinuddin, 1991:308). Whatever the likely imports or the exports, Pakistan can benefit from them by providing a safe transit route through Gwadar. A few facets which will influence the significance of the Gwadar port for Afghanistan are as follows:-

- a) Gwadar provides the shortest possible access for Afghanistan to the Indian Ocean and is most cost effective.
- b) The local Pashtuns have religious, cultural and economic linkages with Pakistan.

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- c) For a developing and a landlocked country like Afghanistan, which is in need of immediate access to warm waters Gwadar appears to be a most suitable opportunity.
- d) The U.S would like that the Afghan trade should be routed through Pakistan and not through Iran.
- e) Afghanistan will get all the port related amenities, warehousing services, transit conveniences and import opportunities.

Since the end of World War-II U.S occupied a place of importance in the Afghanistan's economic and social development. Afghanistan believed that good and active relations with U.S were not only important for the economic and social development but also for the maintenance of their policy balance (Ghaus, 152).

The success of Gwadar port depends upon its usage by Central Asia, South Asia and China in this respect, cooperation with Afghanistan is perilous. Gwadar Port has the potentials for harmonising cultural and economic ties among the people. Although presently a war ravaged country, it has every potential, both in terms of human and natural resources to improve its economy through this port. Trade from CARs is also dependent upon peace in Afghanistan. According to an estimate, CARs contain up to 250 billion barrels of petroleum and largest gas reserves. Caspian Region has plenty of Other mineral. As the fossil fuel reserves elsewhere are rapidly depleting the fuel hungry world is focusing on this region. A number of dream pipeline projects are already at various stages of development, including the one that would pass through Afghanistan and Pakistan to reach the warm waters through Gwadar.

### **Persian Gulf**

Persian Gulf countries are the pivot of the world's oil trade. They share two third of international oil trade. Besides the exports in the oil sector, the Gulf region has very few exports and is largely dependent on the imports from around the world. Other than these imports the region is now developing in the re-exports with Iran and India. Considering the above mentioned facts the Gwadar port, due to its location, will be significant to the Gulf region because of the following reasons:-

- a) Oman, the next door neighbour, is likely to profit most from this project by capitalising on the trade from China and the CARs. Therefore, Oman's Government is taking a lot of interest in the project.
- b) Millions of dollars grant to take up various development schemes are in the pipe line. An electric power house is being constructed with an amount worth Rs 50 million (equivalent to U.S \$ 0.80 million).
- c) The Gwadar Port complex will be able to provide the services of showcasing, Storage, trans-shipment, transportation, and

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coastal employment, saleable market and manufacturing openings for worldwide export-import opportunities.

Although the Western nations are not part of the region, but this port is strategically important for them as well due to the following reasons:-

- a) The energy reliance of the European monetary alliance led by the U.S necessitates Caspian Region to be interconnected and combined to the worldwide marketplaces via a dependable and harmless trade way that evades its passageway through Iranian or Russian land. Politically required and parsimoniously desirable course. The European monetary alliance also points at the Arabian Sea, passing through Afghanistan, on the coastlines of Pakistan.
- b) Afghanistan has the option of using the trade route through Iran, which is contrary to the U.S interest; hence route through Gwadar would be a more viable option.
- c) To counter the growing Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean.

### **Asian Interests**

Iran is having real concerns over the development of Gwadar port for its close proximity to Iranian ports of Chahbahar and Bandar Abbas. Gwadar port can generate a commercial rivalry, which can be exploited by India. Besides her concerns Iran has taken the initiative by establishing an oil refinery at Gwadar in order to share the trade, transit and strategic potentials. The SAARC agreement of financial growth and collaboration accentuates fast-tracked economic development, upgrading the quality of life, wellbeing, education, human resource improvement and poverty mitigation. The region includes one of the prime marketplaces in the global village. Pakistan with its contemporary transportation amenities and sea ports will also supplement development efforts of the SAARC countries. The Gwadar port will enable Pakistan Navy to uninterruptedly observe the expanse of Arabian Sea for suitable retort to any hostile activity. The current involvement discloses that during the tautness epoch, India had endeavoured to lurk Pakistani imports originating from Southeast. Implementing a similar approach by intimidating Indian SLOCs for quid-pro-quo reaction is equally vital (Latif, 2007:47). "Due to its strategic location the Gwadar port will become a major port of the region" and will be able to provide the trans-shipment and ware housing facilities to the South East Asian Countries.

### **Conclusion**

Both military and economic power now depends upon oil (Nixon, 1980:71). In military and strategic terms, Gwadar will help Pakistan to monitor the SLOCs from the Persian Gulf. Gwadar is of strategic importance, lying across the SLOCs emanating out of the strategic choke point of Hormuz, from where 13 million barrels of oil is transported daily (Dawn, 2008). Globally, from the

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waters of Gwadar one can regulator the whole Indian Ocean with trade courses of far eastern countries, Pacific Rim and Persian Gulf Region. Pakistan will be able to prevent any 'bottling' of its navy as was witnessed during the Indo–Pakistan conflict in 1971 and also during the Kargil crisis, by developing Gwadar. The port will afford strategic depth to Pakistan's marine assets, both commercial and military. Gwadar Sea Port is not only providing strategic depth to Pakistan but will surely bring in prosperity for entire region.

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### **End Notes**

Former President of Pakistan Musharraf, Pervaz, during ground breaking ceremony of Gwadar Deep Sea Port, (Gwadar), March 22, 2002.

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