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Rivalry Between Gwadar Port and Chabahar Port: An Outlet for Central Asian States

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ABSTRACT

In the era of rapidly changing state policies and power politics sea trade is gaining valuable attention. In this connection Pakistan's Gwadar seaport and Iranian Chabahar seaport have gained geopolitical and geostrategic significance. Both economic seaports are found at the Strait of Hormuz area which keeps 2/3 of the global oil assets and where approximately seventeen billion dollars drums of raw oil goes every day. Apparently, once these seaports are completely functional, they will be opponents for control of the local seaborne business. The financial and geostrategic significance of these harbors is deliberately clear from the fact that these sea economic trade hubs are found at the combination junction of worldwide sea delivery and oil business tracks while linking three regions: South Asia, Middle East and Central Asia. Furthermore, both are geostrategic ally and financially important chokepoints which given endless entrance to the Indian Sea where about one lakh ships navigate in a year and seventy percent of the global oil sea trade goes. It is also home to sixty percent of the global raw material. The paper presents that how Chabahar and Gwadar port would provide an outlet for the landlocked central Asian countries to access to warm water and to reduce the dependency over the Russia for its trade route. Moreover, it highlights the rivalry between Gwadar and Chabahar port and the strategic situation in the region and it concludes with how Gwadar trumps the Chabahar port?

Keywords: Central Asia, Afghanistan, Chabahar, Gwadar, trade and transit, CPEC, geo-strategy.

INTRODUCTION

South Asia and Central Asian States covering Caspian Area, Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asian Republics and the energy-rich 'lake' known as the Caspian Sea, is an important region because of its enormous financial potential and geographically important position, which has established the area as a heart region in the worldwide power politics. The natural resources wealthy Caspian region has become a chance among the local and foreign important player to 'Treasure Hunt'. Currently each state is trying to get highest possible out of the economic power. In the existing situation, the Central Asian Republics (CAR'S) are trying to have a modern foreign policy and economic system and on the other hand the local and foreign vital players are seeking to discuss as much as possible from the growing Central Asian financial systems(Rehman, 2015). Central Asian Region need to resolve historic boundaries of Caspian Sea as it continues to be an item of ongoing discussion for and against Iran, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. The Central Asian Regions (CARs), besides their complete disinclination are still reliant on Russian federation. In order to avoid the consequence of Russian impact and to enhance their economic system by dispatching their numerous natural sources these states need a store.

There are two tracks , one moving through Pakistan (Gwadar) and on other side Iran (Chabahar).Chabahar will also serve as the Indian Ocean outlet for Central Asia, and the proposed 7200 km International North South Corridor (INSTC) running northward through Iran and Afghanistan, hence it will enable the central Asian republics to access the world market for exportation of natural resources (oil and gas). The emergence of Gwadar Port with a distance of 2334km to central Asian republic will serve as an exciting local financial center is responsible for the local and foreign regional authorities to create geostrategic and infra structural growth with Gwadar seaport to range the natural resources wealthy Central Asian republics (CAR). Gwadar port has the possibility to get the position of a heart as a checkpoint to Strait of Hormuz; it can contend with the United Arab Emirates seaports by helping them getting out of links to Caspian Area, and thus offering a better business for path to landlocked Central Asian Region. Gwadar has the ability to be established into a full-fledged local economic center and a trans-shipment seaport in the future.The operationalization of Chabahar will also boost India's efforts to connect with resource-rich Central Asia and Russia(Jetly, 2009).

From India's perspective, the Chabahar Port would improve New Delhi's access to Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics (CARs). India has, in fact, already used the Chabahar Port for facilitating trade with Afghanistan. In March 2012, first time the Indian government has used the seaport to carriage one lakh metric tons of wheat to northern areas of Afghanistan as part of its charitable aid. Iranian seaport Chabahar, unlike Bandar Abbas, is situated beyond the Strait of Hormuz increase its importance.

Interestingly, China and India with markedly divergent regional interests are engaged in the construction and financing of these ports. The Chinese Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC) took over the Gwadar Port in 2013 for 40 years to make

it fully operational. In this context, Beijing signed energy and infrastructure deals with Pakistan worth \$46 billion, including the one on the development of the Gwadar Port. The port opens up a three thousands kilo meter-long trade economic corridor that will attach Gwadar port to Kashgar via railways, roads, and pipelines to transport gas and oil(Shahid, 2002).

On the other side, India has been immersed in financing and constructing the Chabahar Port since 2003. On May 6, 2015, it concluded a long-awaited memorandum of understanding with Iran to complete the development of the port. The Chabahar and Gwadar seaports are at a distance of around seventy two kilo meter from each other. Both states have been trying to weaken each other in the Asian region and strengthen themselves in the power politics of the world arena through the growth of the two seaports which is bound to add to the animosity. The fact is that Gwadar has an edge over Chabahar in terms of its geographic location. Chabahar is a part of the Gulf of Oman and not a part of the Indian Ocean, where India has dominance.

Map showing Chabahar and Gwadar port along with regional players



Gwadar port an outlet for CAR's

When Pakistan offered sea access to Central Asia in the early 1990s, at that

time, there were only Karachi and Bin Qassim ports and they were over loaded. Pakistan decided to build Gwadar Port and China finally helped of US\$ 248 million to construct the port in 2001. The port was quickly completed by 2007 and the Singapore Port Authority (PSA) was given its management rights but it could not manage the port effectively for one or the other reason and the rights were then transferred to the China Port Holding Company (CPHC) in February 2013, which quickly built the required allied infrastructure of the port. The port became operational since November 2016. Pakistani Gwadar seaport could become a center harbor for the (CARs). These states could conduct their South Asian and the Gulf transit trade through Pakistan. It is considered that Gwadar Seaport and its related road infrastructure is a Suez Canal for Central Asia and China. There is a serious requirement to promote the effectiveness of Gwadar Port for (CARs) on print and electronic media of (CARs) featuring the advantages of economic activities and connection(Khalil, 2017).

President of Pakistan Mamnoon Hussain said that China Pakistan Gwadar port under the CPEC project would enhance contacts of Central Asian States with many countries of the world while through this project shortest sea route would be available from Gwadar Port to Kyrgyzstan. Nearly all policy makers see the Gwadar Port as an effective economical instruments, as it would significantly increase the financial systems of the south Asian region and make it more powerful region in the power politics of the world arena(Jetly, 2009). Central Asian States as a landlocked but rich in natural resources area, have always seemed to be accessible local market, such as China, India, Pakistan and west Asian states. In this respect, Gwadar seaport could be an ideal geopolitical and geostrategic prospect for Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, to handle their products and sell them more reasonably to local and world economic market. Pakistan also wants to accessibility the resources rich states of Central Asia through Afghanistan to fulfill its power needs, as well as transportation of products to Central Asia.

In this perspective, numerous Central Asian states have accepted the execution of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) venture. The state president of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov discuss the effectiveness of CPEC with Pakistan's ex-prime minister Nawaz Sharif in March 2016, focusing the part of the venture in enhancing the economic prosperity. President of Turkmenistan have passion should not come as unexpected, as his state is permitted to use the CPEC, the recently upgraded Gwadar deep-sea port in Pakistan, which provide the entrance of Turkmenistan to the warm water of Indian Sea. Tajikistan is also seeking entrance to Gwadar deep-sea port, as it would be a cross junction to link the landlocked CARs with the other globe. Though, there is presently an absence of important relations, whether railways and roads between Islamabad and Dushanbe(Bandeira, 2013).

Eventually, Pakistan may getting the road link with the Central Asian Countries through the Tajikistan province of Murgab province. But that will need the development of a new roads, owing to the latter's hilly position. In 2015,

Tajikistan Chief executive Emomali Rahmon and ex-prime minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif accepted three new roads project connecting their states and attached to the wider CPEC structure. Deputy Prime Minister of Uzbekistan Ulugbek Rozukulov indicated a in the same way helpful position during his formal political tour to Islamabad in December 2016. The contribution of rich natural resources Uzbekistan in the CPEC venture has the possibility to dual Pakistan's power outcome for the next 6 years, guaranteeing the state with long lasting accessibility to power. Kazakhstan is also apparently desperate to start combined venture under CPEC In 2015, then-Prime Minister Karim Massimov outlined the significance of the CPEC venture for Kazakhstan and the CARs.

The information minister of central government Arbab Alamgir Khan has given the statement that federal government is working on extensive plan to connect with Gwadar seaport with International Roadways specifically with China, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and other CARs, Arbab Alamgir Khan also said federal government is wanted to complete all inner link highways and roads to Gwadar as this road system will enhance economic activities with neighbor states. He wishes that neighbor states would be taken advantage from the Gwadar seaport. He said federal government has already permitted Afghanistan to use this harbor for their economic activities. Central Asian Region would also be used this Gwadar seaport for their trade and economic actions for which Pakistan will completely accomplish.

Although, CPEC guarantees bundle of profits for engaged states' future financial development, the local security problems continues to be a major issue for CARs and China. The huge hurdle in deepening multilateral interaction between Pakistan, China, and CARs is the difficult situation in Afghanistan. The exchange of products and natural resources from Central Asian Region to Pakistan is extremely reliant on the normalization procedure in Afghanistan, since the small path for CARs to link with Gwadar seaport in Pakistan would need traversing Afghan ground. Moreover, the fact that most of the facilities investment of CPEC is scheduled to run through Pakistan's most vulnerable and politically filled regions Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where Gwadar port is situated provides more prospective failures to associates from CARs.

Chabahar port an outlet for CAR's

Chabahar will also serve as the Indian Ocean outlet for Central Asia, and the proposed 7200 km International North South Corridor (INSTC) running northward through Afghanistan and Iran, will also give India dynamicentrance tothe markets of five Central Asian Republics (CARs), Russia and, ultimately, Europe. Trade between India and Central Asia has long been constrained by the absence of viable overland transit routes, denied by Pakistan and China who share boundaries with India. With Chabahar port becoming operational, India may be able to begin to compete with China. India's contribution to the development of Chabahar Port has relieved Iran of its stress to get CARs ready for transit of their trade goods only through Chabahar. Iran is constructing railway track and metaled roads for its trade with CARs via

Turkmenistan to the neglect of roads and railways track in Afghanistan due to bloodshed and violence(Ashwarya, 2017).

Following his visit to Iran in early August 2017, Nitin Gadkari, Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Shipping and Water Resources, had said, “Talks are on for building railways and roads through Chabahar till Afghanistan and then we have access to Russia. Once Chabahar is operationalized, which we are hopeful will be in 12 to 18 months, it will prove to be a gateway to golden opportunities to boost trade and business would be a ‘win-win’ situation for India, Iran and Afghanistan as it would serve as a “growth engine and gateway to golden opportunities, we are working on a fast track.” Also, the first Indian leader Narendra Modi as Prime Minister in May 2016, became the first Indian Prime Minister in fifteen years to political visit in Iran(Rehman, 2015). Throughout his tour, he pledged up to \$500 million to develop and operate Iran’s Chabahar port, as part of a trilateral engagement between India, Iran and Afghanistan.

The Chabahar Agreement will facilitate India’s entrance to the gas and oil reserves rich Persian Gulf and Central Asia. Developing an economic harbor in neighbor state of Iran will deliver another entrance route via Iran to Afghanistan. Iran will also use it to increase trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia. Apart from developing the port, India is planning to lay a pipeline to transport oil and gas resources from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan into Iran and from there to Gujarat. This way, India will bypass Pakistan, although it provides a much shorter route under the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) project for transporting oil resources to India.

According to the scientist of Ahmad Bilal Khalil writing in The Diplomat on January 31, 2017, which published at the Centre for Strategic and Regional Studies, Kabul, Iran also wants to connect CPEC (and Gwadar) and Chabahar(Bandeira, 2013). Given that both Afghanistan and Iran have embraced OBOR, it seems unlikely that Chabahar will be in direct competition with the Chinese project. Gwadar cannot compare with Chabahar, which is in well-developed Iran, whereas Gwadar is in Baluchistan, a ravaged, undeveloped and exploited province of Pakistan. Hence there is a possibility that the Iranian Chabahar harbor will reduce the significance of Gwadar port (the end-point of CPEC) as an economic transportation center and route for rich natural resources states like Afghanistan and Central Asian countries. The reactions of the Pakistani media, particularly the Urdu media, have been uneasy. Some retired army generals and former defense secretaries have even referred to the Chabahar agreement as a “security threat” to Pakistan.

Geo-Strategic situation in the region

Primary it is thought the Afghan nuisance should be settled. Though, in situation of problem and governmental uncertainty within Afghanistan, stressed Pak-Afghan connections, instead of connecting through Kabul or Wakhan area, CPEC path gives a different to connect Tajikistan, Kirgizstan, and Kazakhstan which straight boundary China, as well as Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, to the CPEC path. This is even possible during the civil war period in Afghanistan. The CPEC path

gives a reliable substitute option. Afghanistan requires Waghah transit trade through Pakistan to trade with India. It is a pre-condition as lately mentioned by Chief executive Ashraf Ghani in case Afghanistan looks for to participate in CPEC. Pakistan resolve the objections. Terrorist is present there since 9/11 incident. India desires to destroy China Pakistan Economic Corridor (Bhat, 2017).

Fundamentalist activities often function within Afghanistan soil against Pakistan. In situation of this problems, China Pakistan Economic Corridor path provides tremendous possibilities to CARs to increase economic activities with Pakistan and also experience China and increase their trading activities and business. The president of China Xinjiang cherish hundreds of years old social customs, traditions and trading connection with CARs. The historical China Silk Road first joins with CARs than world. Central Asia is thus central to Silk Road.

“If we realize this entire area, it is like a channel. The top of the channel is this extensive region of Central Asia and also west part of China. And this channel gets simplified on through Afghanistan and Pakistan and the end of this channel is Gwadar port. So, this channel, futuristically, is the financial channel of this whole region” (Former Chief executive of Pakistan Pervez Musharraf, 2002).

Putin’s interest in South North Corridor linking India with Russia through Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia is natural as this route is operational. During his recent visit to Tehran, Putin told reporters that Russia would invest resources into South North Corridor because this route is “viable”. India recently sent 1.1 MT tons of wheat to Afghanistan through South North Corridor via Chabahar Port of Iran. India will use same route to send cargo loads to Europe via Iran, Azerbaijan and Turkey at one direction while to Afghanistan, Central Asia and Russia from another direction. India and Iran are already busy in completing a new economic path that will go in Northern areas of Afghanistan in the immediacy of Central Asian region. New route will run from Herat to Laman, Bala, Murghab, Cormach, Maymaneh, Andkhoy, Karamkal, Shaberghan, and Aqchach and to Mazar-e- Sharif while Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Turkmenistan (TAT) Railway track will connect this route at Andkhoy. It may be mentioned that every country of Central Asia is already connected with Mazar-e- Sharif either through railway track or by all-weather roads (Khalil, 2017).

Development observers believe that success of South North Corridor has mitigated demand of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Gwadar Port to Central Asian states as chances of linking CPEC with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are remote due to Afghan civil war and also due to refusal of Afghanistan to allow Pakistan to use Afghan land for CPEC to reach Central Asian states. It is pertinent to mention that Afghanistan has conditioned CPEC link to Central Asia with direct trade of Afghanistan to and from India via Pakistan. Islamabad regretted such direct trade of Afghanistan with India. Central Asian states have already expressed their concerns over success of CPEC running through west areas of Afghan state where guerrilla war is continue since the last 35 years and where the terrorist organizations like Daish and Taliban are powerfully existing.

It may be mentioned that CPEC route (if allowed by Afghan government) will enter to Afghanistan from Pakistani Baluchistan and can link to Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan with Gwadar Port. China is already linked with Uzbekistan by railway track. South North Corridor through new road networking will enable Chabahar Port to connect with other central Asia states while bypassing old Soviet route that links Iran with Uzbekistan through Turkmenistan. New road network will link Iran with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan through Afghanistan, diminishing route and transit price for Central Asian states of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to reach Chabahar harbor for economic transit and cargo trade. Existing route that connects India via Chabahar Port with Central Asia starts from Kandla port of India to Chabahar port of Iran via sea and then moves on towards Central Asia through Iran, Zahedan and Mashhad. From Mashhad, it enters to Turkmenistan and crosses Chardzhov and then enters Uzbekistan at Bokhara. It runs from Bokhara to Tashkent and enters Kyrgyzstan via Dzhambul (Ashwarya, 2017).

This route ends at Almaty city of Kazakhstan. This route does not touch Tajikistan directly. India had invested \$960,000 for the construction of Delaram–Zaranj Highway inside Afghanistan. The length of this route is over 200km. It connects Delaram (border city of Afghanistan) to Zaranj (Capital of Nimruz province of Afghanistan). Nimruz is already linked with Sistan Province of Iran. Construction of this project started in 2005 and road was opened for trade in year 2009. Meanwhile, Iran built a highway from Chabahar to Afghan border city of Delaram, Nimruz. Now India is linked with Afghanistan through South North Corridor via Iran which is linked with entire Central Asia through two different routes. Landlocked Afghanistan has direct access to seawaters at Chabahar Port through city of Delaram.

Five Reasons Gwadar Port Trumps Chabahar

In New Delhi's latest bid to flex its economic muscles, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Iran last month and signed an agreement to develop the \$500 million Chabahar port. The seaport, if materialized, would be an entrance for Indian products into Central Asia Countries. It is certainly an extraordinary economic contract but every strategic move faces strategic impediments, and Chabahar is no exception. Only 72 kilometers away lies Pakistan's Gwadar port, which itself holds greater significance and poses tangible economic, commercial, and strategic challenges to Chabahar. Here are five ways Gwadar outflanks Chabahar (Bhat, 2017).

Experience

This is the first time India has plunged into a foreign port development venture with such vigor. Chabahar seaport is a geographical boundary close for Indian state New Delhi, meanwhile it is not in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) where Indian government not only has numerous operational seaports like (Goa, Kolkata and Mumbai) but has the Indian Navy shield also. In Chabahar India would be a guest state, whose borders and territorial waters are at a much greater distance. Moreover, the vessels transporting goods to Chabahar would also be subject to the active monitoring of the Pakistani Navy, which would keep a hawk-eyed watch on

the high seas and adjacent international waters. On the contrary, Gwadar is not only developed by China which has a wealth of experience in overseas infrastructure projects but the government of Pakistan has handed over the control of port to China. Tehran won't do the same, at least judging by the existing agreement with India.

Security

After Chabahar in Iran, the next stop for Indian goods will be Afghanistan, and then subsequently to the Central Asian states. Although India has enjoyed cordial terms with the successive post-2001 governments of Afghanistan together with its \$2 billion investment there, the security situation is inadequate in major areas. Besides, the Taliban, the major insurgent group in Afghanistan has no love for India, since the latter historically supported the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance. Gwadar too is witnessing security issues, since Baluchistan province is subject to low-scale belligerency. Still, the scope and extent of separatist brawls in the area have decreased in recent years while many militant groups have voluntarily surrendered to security agencies (Rehman, 2015).

The Iranian Question

One year after the Iran has comprehensively signed the joint plan of action with the P5+1 states, the deal has not lived up to expectations. Iran recently launched a nuclear-capable missile, violating a UN Security Council resolution (which prohibits any Iranian nuclear launch or test). Further, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has vowed that Iran "will not cooperate with America over the regional crisis, their aims in the region are 180 degrees opposed to Iran's." Given this scenario, the prospect of lifting of all sanctions on Iran is again in doubt. The uncertainty regarding sanctions could undeniably have negative consequences for the India-Iran Chabahar deal. Gwadar has no such problems (Shahid, 2002). There are no restrictions on China's investment anywhere nor is Pakistan subject to any kind of UN sanctions. Furthermore, China holds veto power on the UN Security Council thus even in the case of a proposed resolution that could impact Gwadar, China could veto the move and continue its economic ventures with Pakistan.

The Afghanistan Pressure Point

The influence and role of Pakistan in Afghanistan has not emaciated and on the other side Indiaboosted their economic, diplomatic, and political relations toward Afghanistan to fulfil their national interest and create the threat for the Pakistan security. Although the federal authorities of Afghanistan government supports more toward Indian interest, Pakistan has built their relations with several ethnic and militant groups who signify a major part of Afghanistan society. Additionally, Pakistan and China are vigorously working together on the \$46 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which culminates in Gwadar. China would not want such a huge investment going to waste (Bhat, 2017). Thus, there is every possibility that Beijing and Islamabad join hands to obstruct the political and economic maze of Afghanistan, so as to obstruct India's dreams of

reaching Central Asia. Pakistan could also see an India-Iran covert partnership to cause dysfunction in Gwadar, but Tehran would likely refrain as it is trying to pacify relations with its neighbors and the international community in the wake of 2015 agreement. Any entanglement with Pakistan would also endanger the eastern border of Iran.

Partnerships and Rivalries

There is no economic competition between Pakistan and China. Chinese investment in Pakistan is also aimed at boosting trade with the rest of Asia, and Pakistan won't become a hurdle in China's quest to reach the Middle East and Persian Gulf. That's because Pakistan is currently on the receiving end of a huge Chinese investment, which will revamp Pakistan's feeble economic structure. The infrastructural development at Gwadar at the CPEC in general will help Pakistan to enhance trade with both China and the Middle East, but this doesn't necessarily mean it would interrupt the flow of Chinese trade and goods to the same destination. However, the Iran-India dynamic is different. After the July 2015 agreement, Iran government is trying to economically prominent into the international power politics through accelerating trade in order to put its jammed economic wheel back on track. Tehran will not permit to fulfil the dream of Central Asian and Indian governments at the price of national interest of Iran (Ashwarya, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Although both states of India and Pakistan are fervidly announcing the Gwadar and Chabahar port contracts and economically and politically damage the stability of each other, the fact remains that the Gwadar port holds an economic superiority over the Iranian Chabahar port for its efficacy, geographical position to control the maritime warm waters and its immediacy with the economic power China owing to the road connection. Iranian Chabahar port is not situated in the IOR where Indian government has other operational seaports like; Goa Mumbai and Kolkata are situated having the safeguard of the Navy force to guarantee their naval operations. Although Afghanistan is a partner in the Indian trade agreement of Chabahar, the signatory is the Afghan government which does not exercise its command and control over a large portion of Afghanistan, especially the Afghan Mujahedeen controlled Southern Afghanistan region. The Mujahedeen do not have any commonality of interest with India, whereas Pakistan has connections with major tribal groups in Afghanistan and has some influence on them. Indian convoys could therefore be subjected to their attacks, creating a big question on the security of the Indian mercantile traffic passing through Afghanistan. All of this would also be in the backdrop of Pakistan's role to undermine the project when it enters Afghanistan as against the Indian clandestine operations to sabotage CPEC, of which the recent arrest of Indian Navy Commander Kulbushan Jadhav from Baluchistan, who was planted by Indian RAW for the purpose, is prime evidence. Whether Gwadar or Chabahar, the developments of both ports can assist millions of people. Gwadar may well hold a slight edge because of its importance and utility, but it can

produce best results only when there are no major regional threats. The same goes for Chabahar. Economic cooperation and integration is what's needed in South Asia and even beyond.

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