

## Regional Connectivity and Gwadar Port

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Pakistan's Gwadar Port is a flagship project of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and has great potential in connecting highly populated South Asia to resource-rich Central Asia. The capacity of Pakistan's maritime trade could also be dramatically increased through Gwadar Port while reducing its dependence on the current largest Karachi Port.

In the era of globalization and the fourth wave of industrialization, regional connectivity and mutual integration are important aspects to bring economic prosperity and socio-political stability to the regions. In this wake, South Asia and Central Asia are two significant regions with potential economic interdependence regions packed with beneficial potential for each other. Central Asia is full of natural resources that include oil and gas while South Asia is lacking in energy resources. The development of infrastructure linkages and increase in the trade sector will be mutually beneficial for both regions.

In a recent speech, Chinese President Xi Jinping said that they are standing with developing countries. President Xi Jinping proposed Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013 since then 140 countries have joined Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In the past 8 years of the Belt and Road (BRI), it has greatly contributed to the global economy and development. Trade between China and BRI partners has reached 9.2 trillion U.S dollars.

This social and economic model of China is taking it towards more cooperation with other regional countries. As part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the development of Gwadar port is a result of China's setting up a path of global connectivity and prosperity in the region.

It is understood that globalization begins from the sea trade and the development of Gwadar port is uplifting high standards not only for Pakistan but to a complete regional level.

The economic advantages of Gwadar port are that it provides a direct and short route to China, Central Asia, and Afghanistan and more secure from India as compared to Karachi Port or Port Qasim. It will help Pakistan to rise economically as Gwadar port is located in the vicinity of the Persian Gulf which is used for the transportation of oil to the rest of the world. In the coming future, Gwadar port could be used for oil trade to the international sea routes.

The broader aspect of regional connectivity through Gwadar port seems to be trending in a positive way which will contribute to South Asian stability. Pakistan is playing a vital role to boost trade movements through Gwadar and in return hoping to overcome its insufficient energy resources.

The impact of Gwadar port is very simple and straight, it is not only confined to China and Pakistan but has great potential and affects regional economic development and connectivity with various countries. The transportation infrastructure is proving short and more convenient routes, uplifting the socio-economic development in the region and direct access to the main markets.

Previously, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi expressed his views that "the core element of Pakistan's foreign policy is Economic Diplomacy". Highlighting the country's potential, he said that our vision of an economically secure Pakistan with a shift emphasizing geo-economics. In South Asia, Pakistan holds a very pivot geo-economic location and the Gwadar Port project under the Belt and Road Initiative is "central" to Pakistan's economic vision. It promotes regional connectivity, a big consumer market, and a major multilateral investor in strengthening the connectivity.

It is wrong to say that China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is only focusing on Pakistan rather it is inviting other regional countries like Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. Gwadar port enhances Sri Lanka's

connectivity to Central Asian states. A robust economic and commercial linkage between Pakistan and Sri Lanka will potentially increase the two-way trade with a total of more than 2 billion U.S dollars. For Afghanistan, Gwadar port under China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is now accessible for transit trade and easy access to the Indian Ocean, highly beneficial for its import and export and lastly, Afghanistan can also enjoy various business activities and uplift its economic growth and energy growth. Moreover, in this regard, Pakistan is giving Afghanistan a guarantee of reliable access to Central Asia through Gwadar Port.

Gwadar Port has a great potential in regional connectivity as well as trade including the trans-shipment from Central Asian states, the Middle East, and other regional countries. In this direction, the Chinese commitment to make Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) a global project and bring more and more countries into it is going towards multipolarity. Overall, China is fully engaged in regional connectivity and enhancing the strategic relationships with Pakistan and other regional countries and help the region to develop peacefully. Gwadar port is an excellent opportunity in upgrading our sea and road linkages with all the important countries to generate viable revenues for our economic revival.