

GEOPOLITICAL AND STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF BALOCHISTAN'S COASTAL BELT

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Abstract

The coastal belt of Baluchistan holds high importance. This study attempts to explain the surrounding circumstances and the strategic viability of Balochistan's coastline. The location of various port towns and areas adjacent to the Gulf of Oman and Strait of Hormuz promises important advantages for Pakistan in Indian Ocean region. The geographical layout of Gwadar, Jiwani, Ormara and Pasni at the juncture of Middle East, South Asia and Central Asia act as an instrument of sea power for Pakistan as well as for China under the umbrella of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. The presence of military and naval bases alongside the roads and airports has enhanced regional and maritime security of Pakistan. Gwadar deep seaport has the capability to connect land locked Central Asia, the resourceful Middle East and populous South Asia. Gwadar port has enlarged the strategic depth of Pakistan. Makran Coastal Highway has linked all the important coastal places with the rest of Pakistan. The future dynamics of geopolitical interests in Indian Ocean will further promote the role of Balochistan coastline for Pakistan. This paper is an account of geopolitical and strategic aspects of different areas on Balochistan coastal belt. The paper is a qualitative study mainly based on literature review method and data is collected from newspapers, research articles, books and theses. Primary data is collected from relevant experts in the form of interviews.

Key Words: Geo-strategic, Geo-political, Balochistan, Coastline, Arabian Sea, Gwadar Port, CPEC

Introduction

Coastline is an important geographical feature in southern part of Pakistan. The location of coastal belt in the regional perspective has enhanced the geostrategic and geopolitical role of Pakistan. The coast

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has naturally been connected to the provinces of Balochistan and Sindh and there are many areas and towns from Jiwani to Rann of Kutch on the lengthy coast of Pakistan. (Faisal & Raheela.2015) The coast's east-west layout has impacted the effectiveness of Pakistan in Indian Ocean. The entire coast's unevenness and irregular geomorphology on the Arabian Sea has influenced various locations for the establishment of seaports and naval bases (Khan, 2017). The total length of Pakistan's coast is 1046 kilometers along the Arabian Sea. The UN commission on limits of continental shelf has expanded water surface area of Pakistan from 2,40000sq km to 2, 90000sq km and continental shelf limits from 200 nautical miles to 350 nautical miles. The strategic position of Arabian Sea offers advantages to Balochistan and Sindh coastal belts in terms of natural resources, naval base formation, economic activities, military operations and generation of wind energy. Various governments of Pakistan have constructed roads, ports, airports, naval bases, tourist resorts, industrial zones on significant locations of the entire coast belt. India is situated on the eastern side while Pakistan and Iran are located on the north of Arabian Sea. Yemen, Somalia, Oman, and Arabian Peninsula lie in the western region of Arabian Sea. The most significant water routes for transportation and strategic purposes are connected with Arabian Sea. (Ahmad, 2016) The main coastal towns and areas of Balochistan are Jiwani, Gwadar, Pasni, Ormara, Gadani, Ras Malan, Sonmiani and Hub. All the places and locations have specific geostrategic and political dimensions for Pakistan.

Literature Review

Many scholars and writers have highlighted the geostrategic and geopolitical importance of these individual towns, ports and places as well as the whole of coastal belt. Faisal and Raheela, (2015) have discussed the importance of sea trade and ports in local and regional development. They also mentioned the economic activities, coastal infrastructure and geostrategic potential of Sindh and Balochistan coastal areas.

Dales and Lipo in their book, "Exploration of Makran Coast, Pakistan, a search for paradise", (1992) have described a general and

archaeological profile of the main areas on Makran coast. They had conducted a survey from Karachi to Jiwani and explored the specific importance of Ormara, Ras Malan, Gadani, Gwadar, Pasni and Jiwani. They have highlighted many aspects of Makran coast.

The construction of Makran Coastal Highway has changed the traditional pattern of social and economic life of coastal areas. Far flung coastal towns are now accessible from the city of Karachi. Makran Coastal Highway has also promoted tourism along the coast of Pakistan. There are many beautiful beaches and islands on the coastal region of Pakistan. These places have attracted tourists from all over Pakistan and abroad. People are regularly visiting these areas. (Shah,2015)

Barendse (2002) has provided information about the coastal countries connected with Arabian Sea. He has mentioned the geographical locations of many states on the Sea including coastline of Pakistan and its significance in the region. Hali, (2015) has written about the marine resources in Pakistan's exclusive economic zone. He has examined the maritime security of Pakistan and the role of navy in the ongoing geopolitico and strategic environment of the whole region. There are socio-economic impacts of Arabian Sea as a source of monsoon winds on the coastal region of Pakistan. Variations in the pattern of monsoon winds due to global warming and climate change have indirectly affected geo-economic and geostrategic activities on the coastal areas of Pakistan. (Mahmood, 2009)

Pakistan's strategic significance in the maritime sector has been at the center of debate, particularly with the development of deep sea Port at Gwadar. How Gwadar will emerge as a new economic architecture in the crucial area. However, a wider significance is relevant with the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road initiative by China that includes Gwadar port as a part of China Pakistan Economic Corridor. The project of CPEC along with port of Gwadar will enhance the process of collective maritime security in Arabian Sea. (Iftikhar.2016)

With the construction of sea ports at Gwadar, Ormara, Keti Bandar and expansion of facilities at Karachi and Qasim ports, Pakistan is on the threshold of emerging as a major way for trade and commerce

as well as oil outlets for Central Asia. Pakistan's own 90 percent of trade with the world is sea borne. In addition, the country is blessed, in the Arabian Sea, with a vast Exclusive Economic Zone, which is also known as the resourceful province of Pakistan. Strategic international sea route of communications, out of the Persian Gulf, pass very close to Pakistan. Our country has important interests in the Gulf States. There is Pakistani expatriate community in the Middle East and we need a strong link with them. (Tiwana, 2002)

Gwadar port and CPEC project will have positive impacts on the strategic status of Jiwani. The construction of Chabahar port in Iran with Indian support has accelerated the defensive and monitoring aspects of Jiwani's location. Makran Coastal Highway integrated Jiwani with Gwadar port and other parts of Baluchistan. Jiwani will get logistic support through Makran Coastal Highway during emergency and will serve as most strategic asset of Pakistan. (Khan, 2016)

Toor (2016) has evaluated the potential of Pasni regarding development of strong naval base and the utilization of Astola Island for defense purposes. Due to its significant location on Arabian Sea, the USA requested for air base and naval vessels landing facilities against Taliban government in Afghanistan.

Research Methodology

This research paper is based on qualitative literature review methodology. Primary data is collected from the relevant experts in the form of semi- structured interviews. Descriptive method is also used as a supplement to clearly explain particular aspects of the topic. Each and every prominent coastal locations and towns on Balochistan belt have been examined in the framework of previous literature to achieve maximum accuracy.

Geopolitical and Strategic Significance of Balochistan's Coastal areas and port towns

Jiwani

Jiwani is a port town on the western most side of Pakistan's coast. It is situated in district Gwadar of Balochistan province. Jiwani town has a total population of 25000 residents and most of them largely

depend on fishing. Jiwani is located near the Iranian border about 60 km west of Gwadar port and 115 km east of Chabahar port. It holds geo strategic importance due to its proximity with the international shipping sea routes to and from the Persian Gulf. There is a small naval base and an airport at Jiwani which have significant aspects with regard to future planning and development. (Baluch, 2002) Axmann (2008) has analyzed the British strategy to establish an aero-naval base in Jiwani. Gertz (2018) wrote in The Washington Times regarding the construction of Chinese military naval and air bases at Jiwani. He has further evaluated the geo strategic location of Jiwani and the policies of Chinese Government in Indian Ocean.

Sehgal (2007) has discussed the geopolitical interests of India, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, China and Afghanistan in the region. He stressed on the government of Pakistan to utilize locations of Jiwani, Gwadar and Ormara for preservation and promotion of the national interests. Jiwani's location is very suitable to counter Indian influence, because India is investing huge amount in development of Chabahar port in Iran. (Hassan, 2017)

China's intention to establish a military base in Jiwani at the mouth of important sea route, the Persian Gulf, has prompted strong reaction from India, USA and Afghanistan. The presence of Chinese military power in an important location of Pakistan can change regional geo political environment of South Asia, Central Asia and Middle East to a great extent. (Sallin, 2018)

Jiwani is the main area which can strengthen geopolitical and strategic role of Pakistan. Jiwani's location is very suitable for countering Indian influence, because India has invested huge amount in development of Chabahar port in Iran. Suitable location of Jiwani has provided a counter strategy to Pakistan against geo political interests of India in Afghanistan and Iran. China's intention to establish a military base in Jiwani at the mouth of Persian Gulf has prompted strong reaction from India, USA. The presence of Chinese military power in an important location of Pakistan can change regional geostrategic and political environment of South Asia, Central Asia and Middle East to a greater extent.



Physical Map of Pakistan Source: <https://www.worldometers.info/about/google.com>

Gwadar

Gwadar is a port city on the coast of Baluchistan province located near the Iranian border and the Persian Gulf. It was under the control of Oman from 1783 to 1958. (Marium, 2010) Sultan (2012) has unveiled the economic and military opportunities of the Gwadar port for Pakistan and considered Gwadar as a significant strategic depth of Pakistan. Gwadar's capability to be a deep warm water sea port was first identified in 1954. During that period Gwadar town was under the control of Omani Government. Plans for the development of the deep sea port were not materialized until 2007, when the port was inaugurated by the president of Pakistan. In 2015, it was accepted that the port town would be further developed under China Pakistan Economic Corridor. CPEC will link northern areas of Pakistan and western autonomous area of China to Gwadar seaport. The port was leased to China by the government of Pakistan. (Personal Interview, 2018)

Gwadar as a city and a natural deep sea port strategically located between the three important regions, South Asia, Middle East and Central Asia. It is very close to Strait of Hormuz, a significant

route of oil transportation. The security arrangements of Gwadar port and the economic and industrial zones under CPEC project will strengthen defense of Pakistan. Moreover, the expected presence of Chinese forces in the Arabian Sea has enhanced the geostrategic dimensions of Gwadar in the entire region. PNS Akram naval base and the development of modern airport at Gwadar are very effective for security purposes. (Ahmad, 2017)

Arabian Sea is now open to friendly Central Asian States through the capability of Gwadar port for which Soviet Union had been desired for years. China has announced plans to establish railway line from Tashkent, Uzbekistan, towards Kyrgyzstan with further linking to China and Pakistan's Gwadar port. The heads of Central Asian republics have shown their interest in CPEC. They have desired to link their physical infrastructure networks to the port of Gwadar via Chinese territory. (Personal Interview, 2018)

The construction of Chabahar port in Iran with the assistance of India, intended to provide Indian goods to Iran and then through a link road towards Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics. This is a geo-political decision of India to counter Gwadar and CPEC in the region. The development of Chabahar port has accelerated the significance of Gwadar deep sea port for Pakistan in this whole region. The location of Chabahar port has provided limited functions to Iran, Afghanistan and India in terms of its geo-economic and geostrategic value as compared to Gwadar's location on the Arabian Sea. The Iranian administration has admitted the importance of Gwadar and desired to join CPEC project via Gwadar port. (Personal Interview, 2017)

Malik (2016) has analyzed the possible military presence of China on Makran Coast. Pakistan and China will neutralize the US and Indian strategic partnership in this area. He explained the significance of Gwadar as the main soul of CPEC and has provided a reasonable mechanism to minimize Indian influence in the ongoing situations. He has also discussed the possible participation of landlocked Afghanistan, Iran and Russia in the project of CPEC. The location of Gwadar and CPEC has paved the way for the strong regional connectivity of Central Asia, Middle East and South Asia in the coming years. Pakistan's

position is strategically important for the One Belt One Road planned endeavor of Chinese leadership (Ilyas, 2018)

Pakistan has now constructed a port at the town of Gwadar on the mouth of energy rich Persian Gulf. Gwadar offers an economical link to the flow of Central Asia's natural oil and gas resources to the international market. (Ali, 2016) The port will contribute in the revival of geopolitical and economic status of Pakistan. The surrounding region of Gwadar is home to about two thirds of the world's proven gas and oil reserves. Gwadar is the nearest warm-water deep seaport to the landlocked, but natural resourceful Central Asian States and Afghanistan. (Hussain, 2015)

The Gwadar Port project will also influence China's Western Development planning about the progress of Xinjiang, Tibet and Qinghai areas of China. In addition to its role to minimize Chinese dependence on the South China Sea and Malacca Strait, the port of Gwadar will present China a shorter route for oil imports from the Middle East, thereby causing in reduction of the shipping costs and duration of time. (Salem, 2017)

Ashraf (2016) in his Article titled, "Regional Connectivity" describes very logically the importance of CPEC in terms of internal and external connectivity approach. He has evaluated the geo strategic and geo political dimensions of CPEC in the region. CPEC has enhanced the role of Pakistan coastal areas in many respects. It will promote the process of integration in the provinces of Pakistan. He has examined the geo political environment linked with the China's connectivity plan in the region. He has also given information about the possible strategic alignment of states in the Indian Ocean Region.

Dani (1996) in his book, Central Asia today, wrote that warm waters of Arabian Sea are now open to friendly Central Asian states through the capability of Gwadar port for which Soviet Union had been desired for years. In his book, "Expansion of Karakoram Corridor: Implications and Prospects", Sering, has recognized the strategic alliance of China and Pakistan against the regional interests of India. He explained the possible geo economic interaction of Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran, China, Middle East and Pakistan under the

expansion of Karakoram corridor to vital areas of Pakistan coastline. (Sering,2012)

Pasni

Molesworth (1902) had discussed the significance of Pasni. The British reached Pasni in 1905 and fully analyzed its geostrategic position for promoting her interests in Indian Ocean. It is situated near Gwadar on the Makran Coast about 450 Kilometers from Karachi. (Bugti, 1979) Toor (2016) has evaluated the potential of Pasni regarding development of strong naval base and the utilization of Astola Island for defense purposes. Due to its significant location on Arabian Sea, the USA requested for air base and naval vessels landing facilities against Taliban government in Aghanistan. Pakistan provided air base and ships landing facilities to US forces at Pasni and thus it got worldwide recognition as an important strategic asset on the coast of Pakistan. US policy makers also wished to get the same facilities against Iran in order to monitor regional activities of Iran. Pakistan did not provide support to USA against Iran. (Khokhar, 2018)

The completion of Makran Coastal Highway from Karachi to Jivani has enhanced the significant of Pasni's location on the coast with respect to military operations, monitoring and logistic support. The presence of Pakistan naval station and military airport at Pasni has strengthened maritime security of our coastline. Gwadar port and CPEC project will have positive impacts on the strategic status of Pasni. The location of Pasni acts as the most advantageous component of the Pakistan naval network on the coastal belt. (Jan, 2016) Zaki (2010) has described the geo-economic dimensions of maritime trade of fishes on the coast of Pasni and mentioned Japan's 800 million grants for the rehabilitation of Pasni Fish Harbour to continue economic activities at Pasni.

Ormara

Ormara is located about 235 kilometers east of Gwadar and 362 kilometers west of Karachi on Makran Coast. It is a seaport town on the Arabian Sea and its physical position on the coast is very effective in terms of maritime security. (Baluch, 1999) Jinnah Naval Base has been set up at Ormara. It is strategically very important for

safeguarding coastline of Pakistan. It is providing berthing facilities to four submarines and eight war ships at a time. The government of Pakistan wants to shift all the primary operations and naval assets along with diesel –electrical submarines from Karachi to Ormara. Jinnah Naval Base has been linked with CPEC project and the Gwadar port. (Hashmi, 2018) The military installations, Ormara Cadet College, modern functional airport and Makran coastal highway have promoted geo strategic aspects of Ormara. (Arbab, 2016) Ormara is also a natural fish harbor on the Arabian Sea and a suitable site for wind power generations. Ormara’s position on the Makran Coast is very significant because it can serve as an effective site of strategic support for Karachi and Gwadar during emergency. It is expected that the development of Gwadar port and CPEC will push geo-economic activities at Ormara. Makran Coastal Highway has accelerated transportation of fishes from Ormara to Karachi There are various geographical factors at Ormara which are very helpful in the development of coastal economy of the area.

Gadani

Gadani is a small coastal village of southern Balochistan located close to the province of Sindh. It has geo strategically very important dimensions between the two provinces. Gadani is accessible through Makran Coastal Highway and the Sea from Karachi (Haroon, 2004) Worst law and order situations in the province of Balochistan were created by a network of Indian spies. Kulbhushan Jadhav was the head and financier of this network who has worked at Gadani as scrap dealer. He controlled the network from Gadani which caused unrest in Balochistan as well as in Karachi. Karachi is located about 50 kilometers from Gadani so he got advantage of this proximity and carried out his secret mission against Pakistan. The RAW wanted to destabilize CPEC project and promote insurgency in Balochistan. Due to its location, the government has proposed to a military base along with oil refinery in Gadani. (Kiani, 2018) Gadani is the third largest old ship breaking industry in the world. Gadani Fish Harbour is also providing trade and job opportunities to local people. There are some power projects proposed under CPEC at Gadani which will further accelerate the geo-economic conditions of the area. (Nazir, 2017)

Ras Malan, Sonmiani and Hub

The location of Ras Malan is suitable on the coast of Pakistan for launching polar satellites as decided by the SUPARCO, a space agency of Pakistan. Large portion of land has been acquired at Ras Malan which acts as a geostrategic asset for Pakistan. (Abbas, 2011) Sonmiani is a small coastal town located in the south of Balochistan province about 80 kilometers away from Karachi. Due to its location on the coast, the government of Pakistan established space Center/spaceport at Sonmiani which is fulfilling the geo strategic needs of Pakistan.(Toor,2018) For tracking the correct trajectory of missiles and aircraft, Pakistan Air Force has established an instrumental weapons test range at Sonmiani. (Dominguez, 2018)

Hub is a coastal commercial town located in southern Balochistan. Due to its proximity to Karachi, Hub has got multiple advantages on the coast. Makran Coastal Highway connects all the important coastal towns which plays an important role in the promotion of local economies through efficient transportation system. Hub is one of the largest industrial towns on the coast of Balochistan Province. (Malik, 2018) Coal-Fired Power Plant (1,320MW) at Hub has been formed under CPEC project and Khalifa Coastal Refinery will be established at Hub. The Locations and facilities at Hub are a source of incentive for the establishment of new industries. (Jamil.2017)

Ras Malan, Sonmiani and Hub have multiple geopolitical and strategic aspects. They have strengthened maritime policy of Pakistan. The location and physical topography of Ras Malan have provided a good place on the coast for launching satellites. The monitoring and strategic functions of satellites have supported maritime security policy of Pakistan. Sonmiani is a coastal town situated in the southern Balochistan about 80 kilometers away from Karachi city. Due to its geographical position on the coastline, government of Pakistan has formed space center/spaceport at Sonmiani to counter geopolitical interests of India in the region. (Siddique, 2012)

Conclusion

Naturally, Pakistan is not a landlocked country and the location of lengthy coastal belt on the Arabian Sea has promoted the role of Pakistan in the region. It is a fact that the province of Balochistan has

offered more geostrategic and geopolitical advantages to Pakistan than the coast of Sindh province. The locations of Gwadar, Jiwani, Ormara, Pasni and CPEC project have acted as an instrument of state power for Pakistan. Unevenness nature of the Balochistan coast from east to west has facilitated the development of naval ports, commercial ports and airports at effective positions. The natural and human induced features at the coast of Balochistan have enlarged Pakistan's sphere of influence at mouth of Gulf of Oman and Persian Gulf. The entire CPEC project has been motivated by the nature and dimension of Balochistan coastal belt, particularly the deep sea port of Gwadar.

The research has explored many small and big towns, ports and areas on Balochistan's coastline and their respective significance. The location of Jiwani and Gwadar has contributed more than those of Gadani and Hub with reference to geopolitical and geostrategic functions. The location of Jiwani on the west side is more suitable to advance specific interests of Pakistan than the locations of Ketu Bander and Gadani. The development of Pasni and Ormara as military bases has strengthened the defense of the central portion of our lengthy coastal region. Gwadar as an integral part of CPEC is playing its role in the process of national integration as compare to Bin Qasim, Pasni and Karachi Ports. The locations of Jiwani and Ormara are more conducive to wind generation than the locations of Ketu Bander, Manora and Hub. Gadani and Hub are more suitable places for industrial development than Ormara.

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