



RESEARCH PAPER

External Forces and their Role in Baluchistan: A Geo-Political and Geo-Strategic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan's geography has always remained significant in its relations regional and global states. The Baluchistan province increases the strategic and economic importance of Pakistan. Particularly Baluchistan's coast-756 kilometer of coastline- provides a special economic zone spreading about 180,000 sq. km area, making Baluchistan strategically very important. So, the geographical and geopolitical importance of Baluchistan province cannot be ignored and will play a significant role to strengthen Pakistan's economy. The main objective of the research paper is to investigate the interests of regional and global forces in Baluchistan who are trying to control the transit route of oil transportation through Pakistan. The study has examined how the divergent interests of external factors have affected the security and stability of Pakistan. This is descriptive and analytical research. Data is collected through secondary source i.e. Books and journal. The study concludes that Pakistan is strengthening its ties with China and Russia to achieve long term peace and stability in the region.

KEYWORDS Baluchistan, Geo-Political Interests, Global Actors, Regional Actors

Introduction

Geo-political region describes the unity of its geographical features and provides a structure for shared political and economic action. Whereas location and assets are predominantly distinguished features of a geopolitical region and the emergence of numerous powers within a geostrategic region is based on geopolitical regions.

A geo-strategic region must possess certain characteristics that influence the world or international politics. It explains how a significant portion of the world is connected in terms of geography, human migration, trade, direction, and cultural and ideological ties. The unity of the geo-strategic area depends on control of key maritime and land routes. The oil drill in 1844 in Baku (Azerbaijan) and the involvement of oil in World War I have made the Central Asian states a significant geo-political, geo-strategic, and geo-economic region. After the independence of these states in 1991, the geo-economic and geo-strategic weight of this region was exposed to the world. These landlocked states need some route, through land or sea, for the transportation of their natural resources to the world market. Pakistan provides a transit route to these Central Asian States and its geographical significance has made it a vital geo-economic and geo-strategic region of the world.

Geo defines the earth and strategic means policy, preparation, and tactics. Geo-strategy as a term was first used by Frederick L. Schuman in his article, "Let us Learn our Geopolitics", in 1942. It was the translation of "Wehre geo-politik", a German term used by Karl Haushofer who was a German geostrategic. Political, economic, cultural,

military, and strategic geography is the sub-fields of geography. Geo-strategic describes the significance of a state or region because of its geographical location and geo-political means, geographic and political aspects to determine the importance of a region or state and the effect of its topography on policymaking, regionally or globally (Muzaffar, et. al. 2018; Cohen, 1973). Geo-politics is the politics-domestic and globally-of a country as determined by its geographical features. Strategic implies the planning and application of measures to achieve certain goals of foreign policy or important assets of military significance and geo-strategic combines strategic deliberation with geopolitical. Geography, demography, economics, and strategic possibilities have a vital role in shaping a country's foreign policy and establishing its relations with other states. The geographical factors of Pakistan have always remained significant in its relations with the world (Rizvi, 1993). Its Geography has provided a base for the interrelationship between Pakistan and other regional and global states in trade, orientation, and cultural and ideological bonds. This study investigates how numerous external pressures have influenced Baluchistan, concentrating on both geopolitical and geostrategic dimensions. It focuses on key factors and the interests of major countries, and the ramifications of these actions for the region's stability and growth.

Literature Review

The existing literature on the study helps to understand and analyze the significance of Baluchistan issue in detail. The literature also highlights characteristics that have gone ignored and need to be explored. (Jahangir, 2015) discusses the significance of Baluchistan in global perspective. She analyzed that foreign states' goals are to gain economic power and worldwide hegemony by controlling a large percentage of the world's energy resources. So it is the most important demand of time to spread their influence over world energy resources, energy transit corridors, significant land and sea commerce links, and for this goal, Baluchistan has notably been the target of global geopolitical exploitation. (Abbas, 2024) Analyzed that the geostrategic location of Pakistan stands dominant on the map of Asia. It has significant geopolitical implications for the region, particularly in South Asia. Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, China, and Iran all share the Wakhan Belt's borders. Because of its geographical location, Pakistan is frequently contacted by foreign powers seeking assistance in accomplishing their economic and strategic aims in South Asia. China and the United States continue to view Pakistan as significant. Nations such as the United States, China, Russia, and others place a high value on Pakistan's security. China and its strategically oriented political economic goals in the Asia-Pacific region are the key motivators for US interest. Without a doubt, the United States of America will continue to use additional techniques in order to fulfill its political and economic aims in the area. China wants to strengthen its regional economic cooperation, even though its military presence in Afghanistan has produced embarrassing outcomes. China is getting closer to its regional economic objectives with the help of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the One Belt, One Road initiative.

Ahmed, (2022) States that Pakistan has strong cultural, economic, and security ties with Gulf States, and has worked with the US on several security-related initiatives, most recently the 'war on terror'. As China seeks more influence through BRI and continues to challenge the US dominance in the existing world order, there is an open trade war between China and the US. It provides a greater knowledge of various geopolitical shifts, allowing us to determine how well-positioned Pakistan is for opportunities and difficulties. He concludes that Pakistan will continue to maintain balanced relations with China and the US, despite its continuous proximity to Beijing. (Baloch, 2021; Muzaffar, et. al., 2021)) Examine the issues that fifth-generation warfare poses in Baluchistan. It is Pakistan's largest province, comprising around 45% of its

territory. It is a key geostrategic and economic site. Since 1947, when Baluchistan became part of Pakistan, world countries have interfered. Throughout history, the province has seen externally supported insurgencies followed by suicide assaults, bomb blasts, and unrest. Baluchistan is now at war, with foreign hostile forces.

Material and Methods

The Research paper involves qualitative research techniques to investigate the geo-political and geo-strategic significance of Baluchistan province. The study is descriptive and analytical to understand and explain the role of external forces in Baluchistan from both a geopolitical and geo-strategic perspective. Data has been collected through secondary sources i.e. books, academic journals, news articles and media reports. The study contributes valuable insights to the academics and policy communities.

Discussion and Results

Pakistan's Geo-Strategic and Geo-Political Importance

Geographically, Pakistan share border with Iran in the west, with Afghanistan in the northwest, China in the northeast, India in the east, and have Arabian Sea in the South. The Persian Gulf has geographical importance due to its wealth of oil and Pakistan has cordial relations with Middle East states and is a significant connection in the sequence of Muslim countries. Pakistan is the only Muslim nuclear state. It also links China to the Middle East and reduces Indian domination in the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics are landlocked countries and are very far away from coastal areas. To have an access to the sea, these countries have to pass through the land of Pakistan. Khyber Pass connects Pakistan and Afghanistan and Khunjrab Pass links Pakistan and China. Iran and Pakistan share a border at Koh-i-Taftan. The Central Asian States have large oil and gas fields and are famous for the high production of agriculture. Thus Pakistan is very important for the economic development and future growth of Central Asia. Landlocked Afghanistan also finds its way through Pakistan for future development. Pakistan and China share a border of 523 km long, Chinese territory of Sinkiang and Tibet share a border with Kashmir. The Pakistan-India border is 2,912 km long whereas Pakistan shares a border of 2,430 km with Afghanistan and 909 km with Iran. The coastline of Pakistan is 1,046 km. Pakistan provides the shortest road of 2600 km to the Central Asian region in comparison to Iran at a distance of 4500 km or Turkey at a 5000 km distance. It provides a link between South Asia, West Asia, and Central Asia, a path from energy-rich to energy-deficient regions. The globe is experiencing energy catastrophes, and Pakistan offers a conduit for the shipping of commodities rich in energy. While history has not been kind to Pakistan, its location has been its greatest asset, as Stephen Cohn well noted. It has locations with abundant resources in the northwest and wealthy people in the northeast (Muzaffar, et. al., 2021a; Yaseen, et. al., 2023)

Geo-Economic significance of Baluchistan

The Baluchistan province increases the strategic and economic significance of Pakistan. It shares border with Iran and Afghanistan. Baluchistan makes up a significant amount of Pakistan's mineral and energy resources, producing 36% of the country's total gas output. It is a crucial transportation hub for pipelines carrying fossil fuel from Iran and Turkmenistan to India and contains significant resources of coal, gold, copper, silver, platinum, aluminum, and, most importantly, uranium (Aslam, 2011). Particularly 756

kilometer of coast line- provides a special commercial zone rich in hydrocarbons and minerals spreading about 180,000 sq. km area, making Baluchistan strategically very important (Baloch, 2011). Two out of three of Pakistan's naval basis-Omara and Gwadar are located here. Gwadar is situated near the Strait of Hurmuz, at the opening of the Persian Gulf, and can provide a seaport, industrial facilities and ware houses for more than 20 countries, including states in the Gulf, the Red Sea and Central Asia and east Africa along with Iran, India and parts of north-west China. The Port is competent of unloading freighters with a capability of 30,000 tons and containers, and vessels up to 25,000 tons. After its construction, the Gwadar port would receive oil tankers with a capacity of 200,000 tons (Ahmed, 2017). A distinct industrial growth and free trade zone have also been declared. Gwadar port would make Pakistan the focus of all commercial activities in South Asia and a linkage of highways and rail to link it with Afghanistan and Central Asia are under construction. This network would provide the land-locked areas an exit to the sea.

Gwadar port is a deep sea port, located to the west of Karachi and strengthened Pakistan's naval defense by offering a substitute to the Karachi port which once blocked by the Indian fleet. A threat of another blockade appeared in the Kargil war and Karachi's vulnerability was confirmed. The Gwadar development is an essential measure of naval policy to provide Pakistan with another harbor facility and making of the Omara base is also a part of same policy.

Baluchistan is rich in Copper, gold, chromite, Coal and natural gas. The geographical and geo economic importance of Baluchistan was increased in 1993 due to the discovery of Recodic site located in Chagi. Recodic contains many high-quality precious minerals like gold and copper. The estimated mineral resources at Recodic are 509 billion tons with an average of 41% copper and 0022-gram ton gold and an estimated annual production of 200,000 ounces of gold shall be achieved by processing 600,000 tons of concentrate annually. The presence of iron ore in Baluchistan can't be ignored. From these iron ore rocks and minerals, about Meta 11pc iron can be extracted economically. Most importantly, this raw material iron ore can be used to extract pig iron which in turn is used to make steel (Saleem, 2016). So, the geographical and geopolitical importance of Baluchistan cannot be ignored which is rich in minerals and will play a significant role to strengthen Pakistan's economy. Due to these precious minerals, Pakistan and Baluchistan province have become center of attraction for regional and global forces.

The South Asia and South-West region of Asia have come into forefront during the contemporary global politics, particularly from the period of Soviet invasion in Afghanistan and after its withdrawal from the opening of US-Afghan war. In other words, as a result of altered geopolitical situations that also affected Pakistan, the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st have seen the emergence of complicated political conditions in the area.

Before World War I, the wars among great powers were fought to achieve the imperialistic motives. The great powers were involved in a race to increase the number of their colonies which provide raw material for their industries and also act as a market for them. Until World War I, oil did not act as a motivating force in the war. Though prior to World War I, oil had been discovered in 1844 in the modern city of Baku in Azerbaijan but its strategic and logistic importance was not exposed to the world. Till World War I, the armies were moved either by trains or on horsebacks. Though combustion engine was discovered but mechanized vehicles were not part of military planning. It was only one month after World War I began and Germany was near to occupying Paris. At that moment the taxicabs were used for the first time to transport the French troops to the

front to stop German advance. Thus, at that moment oil entered in the war and the strategic and logistic importance of oil revealed to the world and great powers started search for oil. The World War I and II proved the strategic importance of oil and all the developed and industrialized nations became more interested in what lay below the surface i.e., oil. Till 1990s Middle East became a chess game in quest for oil among global actors and each tried to influence and get control of the region. In 1991, the disintegration of Soviet Union exposed Central Asia with its untapped energy reservoirs to the world.

Central Asia is the succeeding largest energy reservoir of hydrocarbons after Persian Gulf and is the core region of Asian continent whereas Pakistan is located at convergence of South Asia, Central Asia and West Asia and offers the straight access to warm water for all land locked these states. Pakistan also acts as a junction of multiple corridors of economic cooperation between these three regions in the field of energy, employment, shipping and tourism. Pakistan will become an economic hub and spur inter-regional economic activity due to the communication and commerce routes that connect South Asia, Central Asia, and West Asia.

The global actors have foreseen the growing importance of Pakistan providing an outlet for landlocked economies (Central Asian states), as a southern transit route. Pakistan has a preference over other transit routes because along the Arabian Sea, it has three major sea ports i.e. Karachi port, Qasim port, and Gwadar port. The road along with railways development will transform Pakistan into an economic heart of inter-regional commercial movement. In this regard, Baluchistan is also very rich in natural resources and predictable assets are 29 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 6 billion barrels of oil. Towards the east, Pakistan share a border of 1650-kilometer with Punjab-Rajasthan and in the west, Pakistan shares a border of 2240 kilometer with Afghanistan divided by Durand Line via Baluchistan province. In the south of Pakistan, it has a belt of 700 km connecting Baluchistan with sea water of Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea. Connectivity of Baluchistan with Tajikistan, Central Asian states, is separated through a thin strip of Afghanistan area, Waha Khan. Afghanistan, which is also a land locked state, depends upon Pakistan for its trade with the rest of the world.

Geo-political interests of Regional and Global Powers

Due to Pakistan's geo-political and geo-strategic importance, the regional global powers are pursuing their national interests and securing their economic benefits. From the early nineteenth century with the beginning of the era of industrialization and the growing needs of the world for energy, there is a competition among the states to explore, exploit and control the hydro-carbon resources where these exist. The huge oil and gas reserves were even known in the Caucasus and the Central Asian region before 1991 which influenced the geo-politics of South Asia and Central Asian region. The independence of CARs in 1991, has attracted various international states, regional state and non-state actors to get a share in the abundant oil and gas resources in the region (Shafqat, 2007). The 9/11 event has brought a major change in the traditional geo-political background of the South Asia and Central Asian region.

Pakistan has become important for all regional and international actors after US-imposed war on terrorism. CARs have large reserves of untapped natural resources (oil and gas) and hydro-carbons (diamonds), but lack of technology and weak economy have incapacitated them to utilize their resources. This short coming has made the regional and world powers- Russia, China, USA and Iran to interfere in the Central Asia. Central Asia cannot ignore Pakistan as it offers the direct route to export oil and gas from Central Asia and to the markets in Europe, Far-East Asia and Pacific Asia (Ahmed L. , 1992). A

race has started between regional and global powers to control the route from CARs to Pakistan and onward to Arabian Sea. The main cause of instability in Pakistan (Baluchistan and Karachi) is because these areas provide the main transit route for natural reserves of CARs. The external forces are trying to control the transit route (through transportation of oil and gas by their own companies) which has affected the stability of the region. The instability of the region is because of the presence of NATO in Eastern Europe. A competition has emerged among the international actors (USA) and regional actors (Russia, China and Iran). Their conflicting interests have a significant negative influence on Pakistan's security.

China's Interests in Baluchistan

In the northern mountains, the Silk route connects Pakistan and China. These countries have friendship relations and China has assisted Pakistan in the development of defense and economic projects such as Gwadar in Baluchistan. China has fastest economy growth rate of 8.1% GDP in 2021 according to NBS (National Bureau of Statistics) (Zhou, 2022) and is interested in Gwadar Port because China is at a distance of only 2500km from Gwadar and 45km away from Sinkiang. Gwadar Port is a deep-sea water port and has attraction for trade with China, CARs, and South-East Asian countries. China needs Pakistan for trade towards Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea. Due to China's rapidly growing economy, it needs an access to the world states for trade expansion. A transit trade route is provided by Pakistan to China for transportation to its western region, which also acts as an energy passage to import Gulf oil and oil transportation is protected providing naval services along the Arabian Sea coast.

The proximity of Pakistan with China has amplified the importance of Baluchistan. It shares a border connectivity with China which is an emerging economic power in the future and it is estimated that China would replace USA on economic forum by 2025. China shares a border of 400 km with Kashmir state in Pakistan and is located in the northern part of Baluchistan. Baluchistan has a magnetism for China to enter in world trade through shortest sea route and also for the development of its Sinkiang province. The distance of port trade form Sinkiang to Shanghai, China, is 4500km whereas towards Pakistan- Gwadar's port the distance has become reduced to 2500 km only. The distance of port trade with Iran is 4500 km and Turkey is 5000 km away so Baluchistan Gwadar is a convenient and economical trade route for China (Axxmann, 2008). It would help not only China's economic growth but also boost up Pakistan's economy.

The Gwadar port in Baluchistan is built mainly with Chinese capital and labor and China's involvement further enhances Gwadar's importance. It is considered as Chinese naval outpost on the Indian Ocean in the south west of Pakistan, to protect Beijing's oil supply lines from the Middle East and to counter the growing US presence in Central Asia. The Chinese government has financed the project in exchange for land facilities in Gwadar and Omara port, and to set up a listening post on the Makran coast to interrupt the communication of US military forces in the Gulf. Beijing also runs the copper and gold mines in Saindak, near the border of Afghanistan and Iran which is not very far from the Ras Koh, the mountains where Pakistan's nuclear tests are conducted.

By 1993, China had become an oil importer as the domestic production of China fulfills only 70% of domestic consumption. China's developing economy needs more and more oil and it will become even more dependent on oil. Thus, China has adopted a new energy strategy to maintain its economy. Currently the country's energy's sphere depends on the Middle East oil as 62% oil is imported from Middle East. Iraq war on 20th

March 2003 has badly injured the China's foreign trade and investment and slowed down its economic growth. After Iraq war, China paid attention to South Asia, Central Asia, Russia, the Caspian, another region to avoid any such economic crises in the future.

In the intra-regional trade relations, an important area is the western China particularly its Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous region. To supply energy from the Gwadar port, China is upgrading and building the 616 km Karakorum highway to link Pakistan with China. A highway is also planned to build from Urumachi (Capital of Xinjiang) to Kashgar, in Xinjiang near the border with Pakistan. Kashgar is an important trading city of China. At this juncture, with high cargo rates and traffic jams at Chinese ports, trade between the Asia-Pacific area and Europe costs more than \$300 million annually. China has been forced to explore other overland trade routes as a result. Trade via the sea routes through Asia and Europe can cost up to \$167 per ton sent, and the transit time is 45 days. In contrast, the second Eurasian land bridge would cost just \$110 per ton and cut the shipping time in half and this bridge cuts the distance to Europe from 26,000 km to 6,379 km, saving time and money on shipping. China's southern coastline regions have been developed. It is now concentrating on the improvement of Xinjiang, its western region, and West Pakistan routes with Gwadar can play an important role (Rizvi, 2015).

This CPEC project, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor will carry one million barrel per day of oil from Middle East to China via Baluchistan, Gwadar. The import need of China currently is 8 million barrels per day and out of which 6 million barrels per day are imported via sea (Maqsood, 2017). Through the Gwadar port trade, China will be the most beneficiary to access worldwide trade from its Xinjiang border to the Central Asian Republics. Oil may also be delivered to Xinjiang from the Persian Bay via Pakistan's rail system. The extension of the East-West Railway from Kashi to Peshawar city, China would be able to receive the shipment from Gwadar along the straight road, Karachi to Peshawar.

Afghanistan Interests in Baluchistan

The Durand Line, which separates Pakistan and Afghanistan, was established in 1897 by Sir Mortimer Durand. The Durand Line spans 2,640 kilometers (1,640 miles). Pakistan moved to the front lines of the Durand Line's mandated worldwide battle against Al-Qaida and its allies after the 9/11 attacks. Pakistan made a significant contribution to the war by allowing the NATO to use its supply channels to reach Afghanistan. The two land routes from Karachi and Qasim ports went directly to Chaman and Torkham, which are situated on the Durand Line on the Pakistani side. Chaman, the second largest city after Quetta in Baluchistan province, plays an important role in CPEC. It is near to Kandahar and Torkham and is very close to Jalalabad which is the capital of Nangrahar province of Afghanistan. Afghanistan is also a land locked country and the nearest sea to Afghanistan is Arabian Sea. Afghanistan can get access to Arabian Sea only through Gwadar port in Baluchistan. Gwadar is a deep sea warm water access as compared to Northern Distribution Work which is not warm water route and is more difficult and expensive.

To benefit from the energy resources of the Central Asian region, Pakistan has to use the Wakhan Corridor which is 45 km in Afghanistan. The land route links Chaman, Baluchistan, with Kushka in Turkmenistan with a distance of 1170km. Asian Development Bank has a road development project to construct 52 proposed road routes that would go via Afghanistan would link Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, to five seaports in Pakistan and Iran. These road links will leave Afghanistan at Torkham, in Nangrahar province and enters Pakistan's Chaman, Baluchistan province, leading to

Karachi port Qasim and Gwadar. The total distance of the combined road corridor is 13,586 km and it has fourteen routes to connect Tajikistan and Pakistan via Afghanistan, Kabul to exit point at Torkham.

In the energy sector, an agreement was signed between Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan and India, construction started in December 2018 for a gas pipeline, TAPI, from Turkmenistan via Afghanistan to Pakistan and India. The TAPI pipeline is 1600km and estimated cost of the project is US \$10 billion. The main contributor to the project is Turkmenistan, the State Company of Turkmenistan, which is financing \$8.5 billion out of \$10 billion cost. The TAPI pipeline project is also supported for financial and technical assistance by the Asian Development Bank feasibility study to construct a natural gas transmission pipeline and was expected to be completed by 2021. This pipeline is will transport 33 billion cubic meters of gas per year from the Duletabad gas field in Turkmenistan to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. The pipeline would be constructed along the Kandhar-Heart highway (in western Afghanistan) from Duletabad to Afghanistan's cities of Herat and Khandahar and then via Quetta to Pakistan and India. Afghanistan will earn about an estimated \$400 to \$1 billion million per year as transit fees from Turkmen, which will help to strengthen Afghanistan's economy (Parwani, 2021).

As part of its support for the Afghan peace process, Russian President Vladimir Putin has stated that Russia will assist Afghanistan through international initiatives like TAPI. In addition to bringing energy from Central Asia to the market, the TAPI pipeline would reduce the world's dependency on Middle Eastern oil. The TAPI pipeline has had American backing for the past three decades, although the country is not actively involved in its development, making no financial contributions, and is not a signatory to the agreement. The U.S. government does, however, have a stake in the project's success since it will decrease the power of China and Russia in the region. Due to the nations' heavy or exclusive reliance on China as the sole importer of their resource, several energy-rich countries that are supported by China's Belt and Road Initiative are now in debt. However, as NATO and American soldiers have withdrawn from Afghanistan, Central Asian nations will need to turn to Russia and China for funding for large-scale projects as they are more than happy to "advance their prestige and influence in the area." The viability of TAPI, however, will hinge on the project's ability to pass through Afghanistan as that country serves as the pipeline's primary transit point. The Taliban has often said that they will support and support the TAPI pipeline project. But it's still unclear if the Taliban's position will have a significant influence on the project's security and the geopolitical situation in Central Asia. While the TAPI pipeline is viewed as a strategic asset since it connects Central and South Asian energy cooperation, many governments are waiting to see if the Taliban will keep their promise to assist the nation's economic development.

Indian interests in Baluchistan are linked with Central Asia

India also has historical, social, and cultural links with Central Asian States but its impacts are not as strong as in Pakistan because India sees Central Asia as a land of invaders in their homelands. India has no religious links with Central Asian states and it lacks a direct geographical links with Afghanistan and Central Asia. To get access to the region, it has to pass through Pakistan territory. After the independence in 1947, India established close ties with Soviet Republics. The fall of Soviet Union has triggered India to establish its relations with Muslims Central Asian States as a security imperative against Pakistan and to contain Pakistan's hegemony in the Central Asian Region. Especially in the post-9/11 event, India supported the Karzai government in

Afghanistan, expanded its role in the war-torn Afghanistan and has established its consulates in Kandahar, Mezar-i-Sharif, Herat, and Jalalabad and also in Avni in Tajikistan.

After 9/11, India and Central Asia became engaged in a shared perception of threat from Islamic fundamentalists and developed cooperation to contain cross-border terrorism, fundamentalism, and drug trafficking. India thought that any success by the Islamist militants in the secular regime in the Central Asian region's borders with Afghanistan, could stimulate similar fundamentals in Indian-administered Kashmir. Though India has planned an energy pipeline from Russia across Central Asia and China, TAPI pipeline is more significant for Indian interest to connect it to Turkmenistan through Afghanistan and Pakistan. India also wants to access the energy resources in Central Asia and is interested in Afghanistan's security situation and has established a military base at Farkhor in Tajikistan which reflects the strategic cooperation between India and Central Asia. This base is operating since May 2002 and is near the border with Afghanistan. Pakistan has charged that India is creating unrest in Pakistan's western border in Baluchistan and is exploiting the situation in Afghanistan to protect its strategic and economic interests in Central Asia. India's rapidly growing economy needs more markets for its goods and energy resources for its industries and both are provided by Central Asian Republics which are rich in energy resources and provide markets for Indian products. So, Indian entrepreneurs are forcing the need for greater involvement in Central Asia but the shortcoming for India is that it has no direct link with the Central Asian region.

This CPEC has a strategic significance for South Asia and India has started a military conflict over it with China. As more countries of major regional powers are siding with this project, so the need is to avoid the escalation of the issue and transformation of it into a regional war. Russia has also joined this project and the China-Pakistan-Russia triangle will strengthen regional stability and trade.

India is worried about Pakistan's expanding influence and the CPEC's rapid development, particularly in Baluchistan. Since it is perceived as a danger to the Indian Sea Line of Communication (SLOC) and regional hegemony, neither CPEC nor China's presence in Gwadar makes India happy. By upsetting the calm in Baluchistan and blocking the development of the Gwadar port to protect her SLOC, India seeks to harm Pakistan's economy. Additionally, India encourages a separatist movement among Baloch dissidents overseas while utilizing the land of Afghanistan to finance terrorism in Pakistan, notably in Baluchistan.

US interest in Baluchistan

The geo-strategic importance of Pakistan and its geo-graphic proximity with China has made Pakistan important for the US. The 1973–1974 oil crisis and two subsequent increases in oil prices – one in 1973 and the second at the end of the 1970s – forced the West and the USA to explore for alternate energy sources. In 1973 the estimated world oil consumption was 57 million barrels a day which was increased to 68 million barrels. In the world oil consumption, USA leads the countries and 50% of its imported oil comes from Middle East. The dependence on oil import is expected to rise in the 21st century. It has threatened the US national security and its interests so America has changed oil policy with regard to import. To avoid dependence on single supplier (OPEC), USA hunt for diversification of oil supply to protect its national security and interests. The energy reservoirs of Central Asia have attracted the US interests and this framework explains US curiosity in the restructuring and development of oil industries

and oil fields in the Central Asian region. The proximity of Pakistan with Central Asian region has captured the attention of USA in pursuing its interests in Central Asia.

The 9/11 event had brought the CARs and US closer to each other. The CARs were a front-line state in the US war in Afghanistan due to their shared border with Afghanistan. The US was permitted to utilize the airbases of four Central Asian nations, including Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, during the country's enforced war on terrorism. Despite formally declaring itself a neutral state, Turkmenistan gave the US Air Force the use of its bases and air corridor for logistical assistance and rescue missions. As in the case of the Manas airfield in Kyrgyzstan, these sites were to be utilized to launch assaults against Afghanistan in an emergency (Shelala, Kasting, & Gordsman, 2012). The CARs also have geographical proximity with Iran, Russia, China and Tibet region. The presence of American forces in the Central Asian bases had placed the US closed to China's western border, side by side US bases located in the proximity of China's eastern and southern region- US based in South Korea and Indian Ocean. Thus, the US had militarily encircled China. US bases in Central Asia also positioned the US forces close to Russian southern border and it also provided the US military with an outrage to Iran, which Bush had singled out as part of the 'axis of evil' in his State of the Union address in January 2002 (Nichol, *Central Asia: Regional Development and Implications for U.S Interests*, 2014). Under the ICBM regime, the US has advanced missile and surveillance systems that can target important locations in Iran, Russia and China and deployment of NATO troops in Central Asia is an indication of US strategy of world dominance.

Billions of dollars' worth of gas pipes will pass across Baluchistan. The endpoint for gas pipelines coming from Qatar, South Pars gas deposits in Iran, or Turkmenistan will be Gwadar. Additionally, this gas would be sent to the global market from Gwadar. The position of Gwadar also gives China an alternative to the Malaka Straits, where American soldiers maintain a base and via which China receives 80% of its oil supplies. Therefore, America can quickly cut off China's access to oil in the event of hostility. The US is interfering in Baluchistan politics and fomenting trouble there in order to poison China and further its interests. (Bansol, 2006).

Because of CARs strategic location and rich fuel resources, the United States has taken Central Asia as an inalienable part of its global strategy. The disintegration of Soviet Union has opened the political, military and economic doors to the US. America is turning Central Asia into a base of its strategic resources and a center from where it can keep an eye on Russia, Iran and China (Lian, 2010). The aim of the US geo-political strategy in Eurasia is to maintain U.S presence in Central Asia and to protect the US economic interest. America's motive in Central Asia is in three directions. Firstly, United State is forcing them to adopt Western values and democratic ideology and to make them a part of a western system. Secondly, U.S with NATO forces, is maintaining its military presence in Central Asia to ensure the region security. It wants to help the states to liberate themselves from their security dependence on Russia. Thirdly, the U.S is providing financial aid and direct investment in Central Asia to get control over their key industries especially, in the sphere of mining and transportation of natural resources. After 9/11, U.S and NATO forces have entered Central Asia and have made it the main fronts of the so called global war on terrorism. In order to penetrate the region, the U.S has successfully raised the slogan of anti-terrorist struggle and today it is getting control over its hydro-carbon resources and Caspian oil.

Russian interest CPEC and in Central Asia

Russia has a century old dream to get access to warm waters for all weather trade activity and for that purpose Russia had entered its forces in Afghanistan in 1979 (Harrison, 1981). Russia is still interested in expanding its trade connectivity from North to South across Eurasia between Arctic ocean and Afro-Asian (Indian) ocean as expressed by Putin as “one more perspective route, Arctic-Siberia-Asia” (Putin, 2019). The aim is to connect the ports of North Sea Route to Ports along the Pacific and Indian Ocean via road links in East Siberia and central Eurasia. This connectivity is achieved through expansion of CPEC (Pakistan- China initiative) towards North which involve Afghanistan, Central Asia and Russia itself. Another expansion of CPEC to serve Russian interests is to expand it towards West involving Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Russia. It has moved from a policy of foe to friendly relations with Pakistan.

To get access to CPEC’s terminal port of Gwadar, INSTC (International North-South Transport Corridor) is under development with Turkish and Chinese assistance. It is a 7,200-km long multi-mode route consisting of ship, rail and road path for movement of goods between Europe, Central Asia, Russia, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Iran, and India. This corridor is to increase trade connectivity between South Asia, Central Asia and Europe, and also protects China’s interests along a New South Eurasian Silk Road through Central Asia, the Caspian and the Caucasus. The CPEC is a massive network of highways, railroads, and pipelines that enables international trade between Kashgar and the Gwadar port. Since the economy is what drives interstate relations, Russia is investing in a variety of industries in Pakistan (Chia & Haiqi, 2021). This pan-Eurasian connection would be advantageous from a strategic, economic, and political standpoint for all project participants, including Russia, and it would improve regional stability and economic integration.

Pakistan and Russia were never on same page and have no history of friendly relations between them especially during cold war era. In the last two years, after 2018, the bilateral relations between them have immensely transformed and joint military exercises (Express, 2021) is an indication of the dawn of friendly relations between the two nuclear powers of South Asia. Russia is also aware that it would not be liked by India and the USA which is an open opponent of CPEC. However, Russia’s friendly gestures towards Pakistan and China are a matter of concern for India and USA.

Russia and Pakistan, both shares geo-strategic interests as Russia is also worried about Afghanistan situation and fears that terrorism from Afghanistan might spill over in its backyard, Central Asia that might threaten the stability in Russia itself. In this respect, Russia is quite aware of the significant role of Pakistan in solving Afghanistan issue and in withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan on 30th August, 2021. The presence of US forces in Central Asia has caused Russia to establish friendly ties with a nuclear state, Pakistan, to strengthen its position vis a vis to US especially after the signing of LEMOA (Logistic Exchange Memorandum of Agreement) between India and US (Philip, 2020). Pakistan is also incorporating Russia in CPEC and giving access to deep-sea port of Gwadar which would not be likened by both, India and US. So, there is a convergence of conflict of interests among regional and global powers in South Asia. Pakistan also wants to counter balance India’s influence in the region and is moving towards Russia.

Russia cannot end its association with Central Asian states and is quite conscious about the regional stability and security. In fact, Russia itself fears that regional instability and insecurity due to religious extremism, illegal drugs and weapons trade and international terrorism, it might spill over into its own territory if left unchecked. So, Russia has also recognized to establish friendly relation with Pakistan to achieve its own

security objectives in the region (Nichol, CRS Reports for Congress-DTIC, 2014). Russia is intended to play a vital role in the region after withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan. To minimize the role of outside powers in solving any future political, economic and security problems in the region, Russia desire to solve all the regional problems by involving regional states, Pakistan and China.

China is also keen for Russia to join China- Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project as China foresee that Russia use of Gwadar port through joining this project would boost Sino-Russian cooperation. The covert motive of China's keenness for Russian participation in CPEC is to pacify India as this project passes through Pakistani regions that are claimed by India and the trouble is that Pakistan and India continue to fight to get control of this crucial part of CPEC.

Iran and Baluchistan

Iran shares a border of 900 km with Baluchistan province whose western part is called Sistan Baluchistan in Iran and Eastern part is Pakistani Baluchistan in Pakistan. It also borders with Helmand province of Afghanistan in the North- west. Baluchistan geographically is connected with two strategically significant states, Iran and Afghanistan and have majority of Baluch residents on Iranian and Afghan areas. Any insurgency and violence in Pakistan Baluchistan may affect the neighbors and cause instability in their regions. The Baluch insurgency has a demand for greater Baluchistan that includes the Baluch areas on Iran and Afghanistan. Baluch insurgency has affected the friendly relations between Iran and Pakistan as the former suspects that Jundullah Organization in Baluchistan is also creating violence and instability in Iranian Baluchistan with the full support of USA. Baluchistan based Jundullah Organization is a group of Baluch militant nationalist demanding for Greater Baluchistan (Khan, 2012). The construction of Gwadar port has come into competition with Chabahar port of Iran and it has further disturbed the economic and political relations between Iran and Pakistan. The situation has been aggravated due to the enmity among Pakistan, China and India as these states are trying to influence the CARs through these ports.

Chabahar port is Indian financed project and is situated in Iran, outside the Strait of Hormuz, at a distance of only 70km away from Pakistani Gwadar. Chabahar port provides a light sea traffic route than heavy sea traffic of ships in the Persian Gulf. A network of rail and roads is under construction to connect to CARs through Herat province in Afghanistan. India is seriously involved in its development as it wants to sidestep Pakistan's road (Iran, Afghanistan, and the Central Asian States) for trade with the Central Asian States (Hussain, 2014). Besides it, India also wants to counter the growing economic influence of Gwadar in the regional trade that will benefit most probably Pakistan and China, and is seriously interested in the development of the Iranian port. It intends to diminish the dependence of landlocked Central Asian States for trade to the Pakistani seaport Gwadar and has a plan of communication and transportation with CARs through eastern Iran.

Through Chhabra, India can get an access to Afghanistan through Indian Ocean and an agreement about tariff with special preferences to Indian goods has been signed between India, Iran and Afghanistan. Gwadar would be a threat to Indian commercial activity through Indian Ocean and Pakistan would get control of energy route through sea. China would be able to keep an eye on Indian commercial and naval activity in Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf. Iran also has fears that Baluchistan Gwadar port would be used by USA to monitor Iran activities (Khan, 2013). So Iran is more interested in the construction of Chabahar port to facilitate Indian trade to CARs and vice versa.

The involvement of China and India in Baluchistan Gwadar and Sistan Baluchistan, respectively, has not only increased the economic competition but also caused the strategic rivalry among China, India, Pakistan and Iran in Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea. Friendly relations between India and USA, and signing of an India-US civilian nuclear agreement has become a matter of thoughtful apprehension for China. India is developing its relations with Iran and Afghanistan to counter Pakistan and China as the latter can suppress Indian hegemony and domination in the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean, and the Persian Gulf.

Conclusion

Instability in the province of Baluchistan is a result of regional and international powers' interests. They want to transit route via Pakistan and Afghanistan. China will benefit more than the USA from Gwadar port. China can transport products more quickly to its eastern border and ultimately to the province of Xinjiang by using the Gwadar port. To get to its eastern coastal regions, it wouldn't need to cross the entire Pacific Ocean. Due to Gwadar port, Baluchistan has become a focus of international power's energy politics. These nations aim to have control over Baluchistan's natural gas pipelines along with the Central Asian region's petroleum and natural gas deposits. Pakistan's importance is based on the province of Baluchistan due to its geostrategic position. Regarding international energy politics, the United States has prioritized Pakistan in its future strategic plans and may utilize the territory of Baluchistan province to monitor Iran, Afghanistan, and China using cutting-edge technologies. Russia, China, the USA, India, and Iran are the main rivals in world energy politics at the moment. All of these nations are vying for more authority in the area and sway over the region's oil and gas deposits.

With the completion of the China-Pakistan project in Baluchistan and the withdrawal of NATO and US forces from Afghanistan, the competition among regional and international players for the future flow of natural resources from the Central Asian States to the global market is now approaching its final and crucial stage. The winners will gain billions of dollars yearly in transit fees along with ownership of pipelines, which will play a vital role in Pakistan's geopolitical power in South Asia in the twenty-first century. Though challenging, the job is not insurmountable. In order to balance India's influence, Pakistan is strengthening its ties with China and Russia. However, this should not come at the expense of Pakistan's relations with the United States.

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