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**Chinese Acquisition, Indian Concerns and Its Future
Prospects**

Author: Farooq Yousaf (Erfurt)

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APSA

Im Neuenheimer Feld 330

D-69120 Heidelberg

contact@apsa.info

www.apsa.info

Gwadar Port: Chinese Acquisition, Indian Concerns and Its Future Prospects

Pakistan, on 18th February, 2013, handed over the all-important Gwadar port to the Chinese owned Chinese Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC) I believe there is no need for reference here, bcz this is in public domain (AFP 2013). The port is located in the province of Balochistan, area wise the largest province of in Pakistan. It is projected as an important future hub for the world oil trade and thus maintains a great strategic significance . Also, Gwadar has been deemed as one of the largest, project in the history of Pakistan due to its cost and projected future outcomes (Joshua 2013). The port would be providing opportunities for promotion of global shipping in the region. Not only to China, but the port can provide the shortest access to warm waters to many land locked Central Asian states (Haider 2013). General Pervez Musharraf, the former President of Pakistan, on ground breaking ceremony of Gwadar, in March 2002, summed up the importance of the port by saying:

"If we see this whole region, it is like a funnel. The top of the funnel is this wide area of Central Asia and also China's western region. And this funnel gets narrowed on through Afghanistan and Pakistan and the end of this funnel is Gwadar port. So this funnel, futuristically, is the economic funnel of this whole region. All the top of this funnel, the broad top of the funnel, anything going into it or out of it, Pakistan and Gwadar port provides the real input, the inlet and the outlet into it. It will also facilitate the development of shipyards and export of mineral resources of Balochistan" (Gul 2013).

With the ground breaking ceremony, it was obvious that Pakistan was looking towards China as the main operator of the port in future. Furthermore, China's potential ownership increased with the fact that it had provided eighty percent of the total funding for the development of first phase of the project.. But against many expectations, the operating rights for the Port were handed over to the Singapore based Port of Singapore Authority (PSA), on February 6, 2006, once the development work on the first phase completed (News 2007). The recent takeover of Gwadar port has raised concerns on regional as well as international level. India, neighboring both China and Pakistan, has expressed deep concern over the Pak-China deal and see's the deal with suspicion. According the Indian Defence Minister A. K. Antony the deal is a "matter of serious concern for India"(PTI 2013).

The following sections would explain the background of the Gwadar port, along with an in-depth analysis of Chinese takeover, Indian concerns and future of the port.

Historical Background of Gwadar City and Port:

Gwadar is located on the shores of Balochistan province in Pakistan. It is a coastal city, and is also a planned port city. Gwadar lies in the close proximity of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. The Strait of Hormuz is one of the most important oil conduits of the world, through which about 35% of global oil trade takes place (Hamdan 2012). Gwadar is a combination of two Balochi (language) words, which means the "Gate of Air". Gwadar was initially a part of the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman for more than one hundred and fifty years (Anwar 2010). Even after the independence of Pakistan, Gwadar remained a part of the Omani Empire. It was in September 1958 that Pakistan, after making sure through a survey the importance of the city, paid the Omani Sultanate £3 million to buy back Gwadar (Haider 2009). The announcement for the annexation was made by the then Prime Minister Malik Feroze Khan Noon, on 7 September 1958. Soon after his announcement, celebrations broke out in Gwadar, Balochistan and the rest of Pakistan. Below is the opening statement of his address: "The Government of Pakistan has issued a communiqué stating that the administration of the Port of Gwadar and its hinterland, which had been in the possession of His Highness the Sultan of Muscat and Oman since 1784, was today taken over by Pakistan with full sovereign rights" (Azam 2013).

The city, since the inception of Pakistan, was getting its due attention for having the potential of serving an important international port. The pursuit for acquisition sped up after survey recommendation of Worth Condrick, who was appointed by the United States to survey Gwadar in 1954. Until the of the Port handover to China on February 18 2013, according to Rizvi (2008), the following major events took place at Gwadar.

From a time period between 1988-1992, a mini port was built at Gwadar from Pakistani and Bengali funding equivalent to approx. Pakistan Rupees (Rs.) 2300 million, yet no ship worth the name was ever called at the port. In 1992, the Karachi Port Trust (KPT), with a cost of \$200 million, where the KPT was supposed to provide 60% of the total funding and the project was supposed to be completed in two years. In 1993, a British firm, Gifford & Partners & Technecon, in association with Techno-consult conducted a survey study for future development of Gwadar port. In the same year, Pakistan's eighth five year development plan included Gwadar as an important element for the economy of the

country and thus put an emphasis on further development of the port. In 1994, a policy package was floated to attract foreign investors for development of the port but the response was poor. In 1995, the Pakistani government finally decided to approve the construction of the port project but was unable to initiate any sort of development work on the site due to the shortage of resources. In 1997, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mian Nawaz Sharif, appointed a task force for ports and shipping issues in the country. The task force made development of the port as one of the top priorities but there was again no progress on the port due to Pakistan's nuclear test related sanctions. Year 1999 was supposed to be an important year for Gwadar when China offered financial and technical support to initiate construction work on the port, yet due to unknown reasons, the offer couldn't materialize. In May 2001, President General Pervez Musharraf made an effort to personally request China for helping in the project during his visit to China. China accepted the request and agreed to help in implementation of the project. Later in the same year, Chinese engineers prepared a work plan for the project and its ground breaking ceremony. The ceremony, though, was delayed due to US war on terror in Afghanistan. On March 22, 2002, the groundbreaking ceremony of the project was formally performed by President Pervez Musharraf and Chinese Vice-Prime Minister Wu Gang Guo. The estimated completion date for the project was March 2005 (Rizvi 2008).

From these events onwards, the Gwadar project witnessed an up and down journey where a lot of completion dates were given for the completion, and the first phase of the project took more time than the expected date. The initial completion date, given by Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz and Gwadar Development Authority, for the completion of the first phase was March 2005. . Moreover officials were, at one stage, hopeful to complete the project even before 2005, which was a miscalculation. When things didn't go according to plan, the completion date was revised to June 2006, whereas the costs revised from \$248 million to \$298 million. It was also planned that following the completion of the first phase, the port would also require an operator to manage the operations and thus an advertisement was published in newspaper for invitations of Expressions of Interest (EoI's) and Requests for Proposals (RFP's) on June 12 and 13 in 2005. The process was long and there were several delays during the whole application process which was adding up to the long delays the project was already facing.

First Lease of Operations:

Even though the advertisement for tenders was given in 2005, it took more than one and a half year to complete the transfer process. On February 6, 2007, Pakistani government finally signed an accord with the Singaporean state owned PSA (Port of Singapore Authority) International to hand it over the operations of the Gwadar Port. In terms of handing over the operations to PSA, two conflicting theories came forward at the time of the deal. Both were common, yet none of the two has been proven till date. The first theory regarding the transfer was President Musharraf's intent against displeasing the United States. As, at that time, Pakistan was a strong ally of the United States in Global War on Terror, Musharraf decided to give the operating rights to a Singaporean firm rather than the Chinese. The second theory that was mostly presented by the Indian media was that China, knowing the unstable situation of Balochistan, didn't want to fully commit to Gwadar, and was thus fine with Pakistan handing over the operations to PSA. PSA's deal came with certain milestones to be achieved. Some of these milestones included construction of four Container Berths, one Bulk Cargo Terminal, one Grain terminal, two oil Terminals, and one Approach Channel.

In order to make the project successful, the project's lease was rented out with a number of concessions and rebates. The PSA got a corporate tax exemption for twenty years, duty free imports for construction equipments, along with getting a duty waiver for shipping and bunker oil for forty years. But even with all these concessions, the development work on the project was slow against expectations. The PSA was hesitant to invest money that it had promised to invest on Gwadar because of various reasons, among which, security concerns, were the primary ones. According to various media reports in August 2012, it was stated that the PSA wanted to scrap the lease deal it had made to operate the port for 40 years. Two primary reasons given for PSA's backing out were security concerns in Balochistan and the Supreme Court stay order. Balochistan witnessed a renewed insurgency soon after the death of nationalist leader Nawab Akbar Bugti, on August 26, 2006, on orders of the then President Prevez Musharraf (Baker 2006). The second reason was Pakistani Supreme Court's stay order against the allotment of the land allocated for ports in Gwadar to any foreign company. This stay order was given after petitions were filed by a few local Baloch citizens, including the governor of Balochistan.

One of the final reasons, which hindered the progress of the whole process was government's failure to provide 550 acres of land to the PSA for site development at

Gwadar. A major chunk of this land was to be vacated by the Pakistan Navy, which was unwilling to do so, and thus PSA had no option but to back out of the project once the government of Pakistan provided them with a No Objection Certificate (NOC) (Report, PSA, partners allowed to sell shareholding 2012). Pakistan Navy's basic argument in denial of land vacation was related to security concerns. It was of the view that due to its important strategic location the land cannot be handed over to a foreign firm as it could compromise the site's security. These reasons were brushed off by analysts on grounds that once Gwadar would develop as a fully operational port, the whole site and the region would become a vital point and site. Finally in the beginning of September 2012, it was reported that succumbing to all the roadblocks and hurdles faced by the PSA, and lack of fulfillment of commitment made by the Pakistani authorities, the PSA and its local shareholders decided to sell off their stake in the project and leave the site with immediate effect (Editorial 2012).

China's Takeover

It is also clear from past events that the decision made by China may have come after some hiccups or hesitation. In May, 2004, a remote controlled bomb killed three Chinese engineers near the port site, along with injuring many others (Khan 2004). The incident was a huge blow to the developing and ever- growing Pak-China ties, along with the future prospects of the project (Z. Haider 2005). Soon after the attack, the then President Pervez Musharraf was quick enough to offer condolences to the Chinese government, and also promised to track and arrest the culprits. . Soon after the event, the military forces were deployed on the site along with providing strict security to the Chinese personnel on site. The incident led to a long suspension of work on the project. Once the security of the site improved, the Chinese personnel restarted their work on the site. It was till 2012 that Chinese authorities didn't have full operating rights of the Port, but in September 2012, reports suggesting PSA's lack of interest in the project lead to a renewed interest of China to take over the port, which it did in February 2013 in an agreement signing ceremony held at the President House Islamabad (Yousaf 2013).

The Gwadar Port offers both economic as well as military gains. China can use a fully operational Gwadar port as an oil conduit that can shorten its oil supply route. In order to improve the prospects of the project, Pakistan has also offered China to build a pipeline more than 1500 km in length from Gwadar to Xinjiang - that lies in Western China. China

may also restart Gwadar Oil refinery project that was put on hold in 2009 amid fears of Baloch separatist attacks which had kidnapped Chinese engineers in the same year as well (Sakhuja 2013). Apart from all these factors, China can effectively use this port to improve its trade with Central Asia, Middle East and Africa, as Gwadar would provide an effective focal point for that purpose. With Gwadar, China would like to develop the Xinjiang province, which is China's biggest and area wise largest province. Xinjiang province shares the border with Pakistan, Central Asia and Afghanistan. The major ethnic group living in the province is the Uighurs, which are Turks by descent, and have for long called for their right of self-determination. China aims to connect Kashgar in the Xinjiang province with Islamabad through the project which would help both the countries in terms of economic development. Such is the importance of this connection that the newly elected Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, recently announced of planning to build Kashgar Gwadar railroads and linkages in order to provide the project with necessary transit corridors (Durrani 2013). Nawaz called the Kashgar-Gwadar connection project as a "game changer" for the whole region, asserting the importance his government gives to the project on the whole (APP 2013).

With all these considerations in mind, it seems that the Chinese policy makers look set to use Gwadar as an integral part of their Go-West policy (Malik 2012). Furthermore, with its proximity to the Strait of Hormuz, Gwadar would serve as a shorter oil conduit for China. Additionally, the port also boasts to provide economic opportunities to landlocked Central Asian states, which would find Gwadar and its warm waters access a good opportunity to enhance their trade (Haider 2005). These states would be able to export their energy resources and export products to the rest of the world through the Gwadar port which would indirectly benefit China, and Pakistan, being the operator of the port. Furthermore, keeping future threats of piracy or geo-strategic politics in perspective, China may consider Gwadar as an alternate to Strait of Malacca, a sea route used excessively by China for its sea trade (Haider 2005). From a military perspective, Gwadar's acquisition can be seen not only as an attempt to contain the US and Indian influence in the Indian Ocean but also an opportunity to stake its claim as one of the major global naval powers. If Gwadar in future acts as a Chinese Naval Base, or even a Pak-China cooperative base, it would be enough for China to check India's progress in the Indian Ocean (Malik 2012). Although various regional and international concerns have been voiced against possible Chinese ambitions of naval base in Gwadar, many geo strategic analysts, such as James Holmes, believe that such ambitions would only be realised in future as China may not only be

looking to weigh its options in order to check India in the region (Holmes 2013). But considering the location of Gwadar and recent expansion of the Chinese Naval in terms of its vessels and aircraft carriers, a possibility of future Naval Base under Chinese control in Gwadar cannot be ruled out.

Indian Concerns

Gwadar has always remained a bone of contention for India. Since its development plans came to the fore, India had shown its reservations on the project. The prime reason for Indian concerns was the Chinese involvement in the project. From the very beginning, India felt that Gwadar port would give Pakistan an edge over India in Central Asia and Central Asia's access to the world market. Furthermore, the Indian side was also of the view that Chinese funding in the project would also mean that China would seek the enhance its influence in the Arabian Sea (MacDonald 2003). The Indian concerns were visible from the Indian media reports and the way the Gwadar port deal was portrayed in and outside of the country. A famous news outlet reported the Sino-Pak Gwadar deal with the headline as "Chinese Hand Reaches Persian Gulf Mouth" (Gupta 2002). In an interview in 2003, the Indian Navy chief voiced his concerns over China's close cooperation with Indian neighbors, along with its possible activities in Gwadar, which could harm Indian maritime interests (Haider 2005). Judging the extent of concern towards Gwadar from India, in 2004, the Pakistan police claimed to have arrested an Indian agent who provided information to India's spy agency, including a map of Gwadar port (Haider 2005).

Many of the Indian concerns or allegations of China encircling it come at the back of various Chinese developments happening in and around the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea. Near the Tibetan border in Nepal, China is building a dry port that would cost \$14 million. Furthermore, in the same region, China would also be spending on development of five other ports, which would be targeting the Indian market. Coming to Bangladesh, another neighbor of India, China is interested in building a port at the Sonadia Island in the Bay of Bengal. The Hambantota port opened in Sri Lanka inaugurated in June 2012 was also built with the help of Chinese loans, though China has no equity claim on the port (Dawn 2013). Such developments, dubbed as the "String of Pearls", are thus proving to be a major concern for India (Diwakar 2013). With the recent handover of Gwadar port to China, Indian government officials were more vocal in expressing their displeasure over the agreement. The Indian Defence Minister A.K. Antony, responding to the deal, called the

Chinese presence at Gwadar a matter of serious for India (PTI 2013). India also feels that Chinese Navy can use the Gwadar port to park its ships in order to watch over its trading ships and help them in situations of security risks. One of the reasons China may consider Gwadar as a worthy naval outpost because Karachi Port, Pakistan's major sea port, was exposed during the Indo-Pak war in 1971(Sakhuja 2013).

In order to counter the impact of Gwadar, India has been working alongside Iran to develop Chabahar sea port in Iran (Niazi 2005). India has also promised to invest a further \$100 million for the expansion of the port. The Chabahar port is unique in nature as it can be connected through rail and road networks to the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), a mega project that involves Russia, Iran and India. Furthermore, the port can also serve as trans-shipment hub for Zahedan, Afghanistan, through a 600 kilometer connecting road, which can also further be used as a transit point for the Central Asian states (Sakhuja 2013). With possible Chinese naval interests in Gwadar, India could also think of Chabahar as an alternate naval outpost, which could be subject to Iran's approval. This interest and development of Chabahar port may create foreign policy issues for India as United States, one of India's largest trade partners, considers Iran as a rouge state because of its nuclear programme and threat to Israel (Jorisch 2013). For that purpose, Indian policy makers would face the task of balancing its geo strategic interests and relations with the United States. Along with these complications, India would also have to consider the fragile situation in Afghanistan in perspective as any prolonged stability could harm India economically in the long run if it invests in huge sums.

The Future of Gwadar Port?

With Gwadar's operations going to China, the debate of future of Gwadar and its stability also started to surface. Among many warring factions in the region, two of the major groups posing major threat to provinces' stability and military forces are the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) (Grare 2013). Although Gwadar port is considered to be one of the biggest projects in Pakistan's history, the future prospects of the project still have a few question marks. There are many hurdles that need to be crossed in order to successfully complete the second phase of the project. One of those hurdles is the long going Baloch insurgency in the Balochistan province. This insurgency, whose traces could be found back in 1947 after Pakistan's independence, is a major cause of instability in the province. Soon after the partition of the Indian Sub-continent, the Khan

of Kalat (a major princely state in Balochistan), Muhammad Yar Khan, refused accession to Pakistan, in favor of independence (Heeg n.d.). The Pakistani government at that time resorted to force and thus Balochistan was annexed to Pakistan under Army's influence and force. Balochistan had a long history of being ruled by the local tribal leaders and not the State authorities, and thus its accession to Pakistan was always a problem. These insurgencies have also forced the Pakistani authorities to deploy close to 50,000 Frontier Constabulary, (FC; a paramilitary force under the Interior Ministry) personnel all of Balochistan (Desk 2012). Although until 2006, the insurgency was somewhat checked by the FC, the assassination of Nawab Akbar Bugti, a Baloch Nationalist leader and an ex-Chief Minister of the province, reignited the insurgency and thus the movement gained momentum (BBC 2006). The Baloch insurgents have called for independence of Balochistan as a primary condition for laying down arms. According to them, their grievances have never been considered by the State along with being deprived of their rights and resources. In that context, these insurgents consider Gwadar as a Baloch asset, and its handing over to China as illegitimate. These insurgents also claimed the responsibility for an attack on Chinese engineers near Gwadar in 2004 (Khan 2004). This insurgency, if not checked, holds a major threat to the progress of the Gwadar port. Along with insurgency, the province is also hit by sectarian violence. The minority Hazaras of the Shia sect are frequently being targeted by radical organizations such as the Lashkar e Jhangvi (Walsh 2013). This spate of sectarian violence is another source of major concern and instability in the province.

Another hurdle in Gwadar port's completion is an important piece of land owned by the Pakistan Navy, which it refuses to handover for the port's development. Pakistan navy feels that surrendering this land would compromise the security of the region. The Pakistan Navy possesses this land since 1980, and has constantly refused government's requests to vacate it (Kakakhel 2013). Amid various deadlocks, it was reported in June this year that negotiations were underway with the Pakistan Navy for vacation of the land, and signs were positive that the Navy would vacate the 500 acres of land (Report 2013). Although initially the Pakistan Navy agreed to take an alternate piece of land in return of vacating their possessed land for Gwadar, it was reported in August this year that an extra 84 acres of land was proving to be a major hurdles in brokering a deal with the Navy. The government of Balochistan had allocated 500 acres to the Navy, but the Navy was asking for a further 84 acres of land (Tribune 2013). Further, in terms of bilateral agreements and development plans, a deadlock was recently reported on Gwadar Port concerning an oil

refinery to be built by Iran. The oil refinery, costing \$4 billion and Pakistan's largest, supposed to be built at Gwadar is facing uncertainties as the Pakistani government has refused to promise the same incentives as it promised to the previous investors of the project - Abu Dhabi based Parco (Bhutta 2013).

With all these hurdles in perspective, it still seems a long road ahead for successful completion of Gwadar port as the project would have to overcome all these impediments in order to become a major business hub. In order to make this project successful, Pakistani authorities would need to take all stakeholders on board, including the Baloch representatives, and assure them that the project has something for all, in it.

Conclusion:

At a time when Gwadar Port was starting to be considered as a white elephant, the Chinese owned COPHC came to rescue and took over the project. Although the project still has a long way to go, only time will tell if the project can deliver the success the investors are expecting from it. Even though when PSA backed out and Chinese officials were denying any interest in taking over the Port, yet the sudden agreement on terms with the Pakistani authorities from Beijing showed the importance the latter gave to the project. In terms of geo-strategic importance, if China succeeds in converting the project into a fully operational trade hub, it could save huge sums in oil transit costs. But even with all its promises and projected benefits, the security situation in Balochistan would be a major deciding factor in Gwadar Port's future. The security forces would face a tricky situation in protecting the Chinese personnel and investors from the Baloch separatist fighters. Additionally, India, one of the major actor affected by the deal, should be taken on board by both Pakistan and China in order to reach a consensus on the way forward for the project. Such a consensus portrays the project's benefits not only for China and Pakistan, but also for India and other neighbors. Finally, the most important stakeholders in the project are the Baloch people. As Gwadar Port is in Balochistan, and the province has mostly been neglected by Islamabad, it would be important not to send a message of exploitation of Baloch resources. Furthermore, the investors as well as Pakistani authorities must also make sure that the project benefits the locals in terms of revenues, development and jobs. With all these considerations and steps, Gwadar can become a project that can fulfill its true potential without harming strategic interests of any of the stakeholders.

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