

CPEC for Balochistan

Amna Razzak
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Balochistan is an integral part of Pakistan. It has the history of supporting Resolution of Pakistan-1940, which envisaged creation of a separate homeland for Muslim majority areas of Indian sub-continent. Unfortunately, there were certain dissident elements who tried to poison the minds of innocent Baloch youth by distorting the history of Balochistan's accession to Pakistan. Balochistan, the resource-rich province of Pakistan, is very much in rivaling eyes, and some regional powers as well as imperialistic powers intend to expand their influence in the region to gain control of minerals and other economic resources. There is no denying that Balochistan was neglected during the British Raj and also by various governments of Pakistan since 1947, with the result that Balochistan lacks technological prowess and economic resources to exploit its minerals and untapped resources. In this context, Pakistan had sought China's help in developing Gwadar into an international port with a future plan to link it with Kashgar (China).

The 46 billion dollar Pakistan-China Economic Corridor promises progress in the long run that Balochistan, Pakistan's southwestern province, has always struggled for which would connect the Gwadar Port in southwestern Pakistan to Xinjiang in northwestern China through a network of highways, railways and pipelines to transport oil and gas. According to media reports, a total of 51 agreements were signed in different fields during Xi's visit to Pakistan, including infrastructure projects, energy generation, agriculture, education, telecommunications and research. Of the 51, 30 agreements were linked to the strategic corridor, regarded as the biggest connectivity project between the two countries after the Karakoram Highway built in 1979.

The proposed corridor will shorten the route for China's energy imports from the Middle East by about 12,000 kilometers. The CPEC will link China's underdeveloped far-western region to Pakistan's Gwadar deep-sea port on the Arabian Sea, based in Balochistan. The province that has long been demanding control over its resources has seen plans related to development of the Gwadar Port as a possible conspiracy on part of the center to take over

the strategic port. Moreover Special Economic Zones (SEZ) proposed under the CPEC would be extremely useful in increasing economic activity in Pakistan and also in reducing employment. The districts where these SEZs are established would also experience a massive increase in standards of living. Rationality dictates that the impoverished provinces of Pakistan should be prioritized for establishment of these SEZs. Notwithstanding the fact that major reservations of Balochistan and KP about CPEC remain intact, political opposition to this project has ended for the time being.

This is a welcome development given the economic plight of Pakistan and the need for an urgent stimulus to the economy. However, Balochistan and KP had some reservations on this Pak-China corridor had faced strong opposition from its neighbor India that objects to the proposed corridor as it will pass through Pakistan occupied Kashmir, a region with disputed status that is a baseless allegation as India would not be threatened by the construction of Gwadar port. Hence it is very clear that many other countries and India in particular is not happy with CPEC, which has the potential to transform Pakistan into an important country of the region. Because India wants to be the only regional hegemony in South Asia so she leaves no

opportunity to destabilize the region. However, despite this shameless propaganda on CPEC, it is going on with full zeal and it would bring fruitful results for the regional uplifting. No doubt, Gwadar deep sea port has great potential to boost Pakistan's economy, and mineral resources of Balochistan could bring prosperity not only to the people of Balochistan but also people of other provinces.

Of course, people of Balochistan stand to gain more, as they will have the first right in business and employment opportunities. All Chinese investment, be it for expansion of Gwadar port or roads and other assets will remain the property of Balochistan, as these assets cannot be shifted elsewhere. Coming back to development of Balochistan, it is imperative to have peace. True enough, the CPEC project is part of Beijing's "Belt and Road" plan to expand its trade and transport footprint across the Central and South Asia. It is also true that it will give China easier access to the Middle Eastern oil via the deepwater port of Gwadar. However, the completion of Gwadar and implementation of CPEC would make Balochistan an economic hub and people of Balochistan in particular and Pakistan in general would benefit.

Hence Governments of Pakistan, probably on the wishes of its Chinese counterparts, have to clear whole Balochistan particularly southern area from where China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has to pass. Therefore a peaceful Balochistan is mandatory for port operations and uninterrupted pace of construction of corridors routes. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which involves the construction of highways, railways and energy pipelines connecting western China with Pakistan and the Persian Gulf, may prove a 'game changer' for ambitious China if things go as they have been planned. China sees Insurgency-hit Balochistan, the Pakistan's southwestern province, as its strategic hinterland to achieve its goals associated with long-term energy security.

I would like to argue that Gwadar like a 'Mega Magnet' with all its attractions is likely to allure the people from other three provinces and abroad for availing job opportunities and settling their businesses in Balochistan. This will cause a massive influx of outsiders into the sparsely populated province.

Source: <http://dailythepatriot.com/cpec-for-balochistan/>