

Gwadar: Balance in Transition

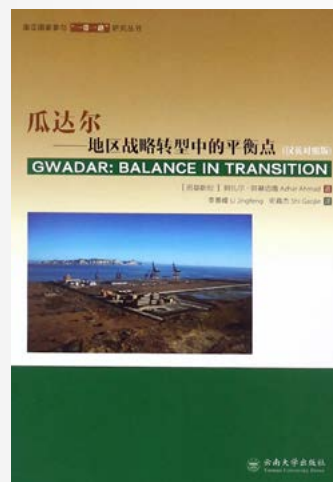
By Asad Ali

The book titled 'Gwadar: Balance in Transition' authored by Dr. Azhar Ahmad is available in both English and Chinese language which focuses on issues related to Maritime Security and Gwadar. The writer also reflected on important areas such as elements of national power, maritime security issues and strategic importance of Gwadar and its potential and challenges it faces.

The author discussed four significant elements of Maritime Power and these elements were: Ports and Harbours, Merchant Marine, Ocean Economic Resources and Combatant Naval Force. At present, 90% of all world trade takes place by sea. In present era, maritime influence is essential for the survival of a nation.

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The author has given account of history of Gwadar and Makran



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taking help from the de-classified documents of British India, which at places differs from the publicly available narrative. The geographical location of Gwadar makes it more important for regional and extra-regional actors. At the time of partition, Pakistan inherited only one commercial port in Karachi. In 1991, it was decided to establish Gwadar as a full fledged deep water commercial port. Gwadar has potential to connect five very important regions with each other, such as; Arabia, Persia, Central Asia, South Asia and China.

Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914) a prominent naval historian stated the importance of Indian Ocean and said 'whoever controls the Indian Ocean, dominates Asia. This Ocean is the key to the seven seas. In the twenty first century the destiny of the world will be decided in these waters'.

Almost all the major regional and extra regional powers have their presence in Indian Ocean. United

States of America arrived in this region during the World War II and currently they maintain 12 bases in Indian Ocean. The Persian Gulf is an important trade route in the strategic Indian Ocean. All Gulf States are oil producing countries and their direct access to world is through Strait of Hormuz and the North Arabian Sea. India regards the Indian Ocean as an 'Indian Lake' and 97% of India's total trade is through sea. China's 90% trade is through South China Sea. The distance from the Strait of Hormuz to China's eastern seaboard is 10,000 km and in addition to over 4500 km further inland. China is apprehensive of its long SLOCs across the Malacca Straits. This route remains vulnerable to hostile intervention and even piracy. It is impossible to escort lengthy SLOCs all along. The best option available for China is the ports of Pakistan, especially Gwadar Port.

Pakistan's Gwadar port has the potential, if driven with wisdom and foresight, to put Pakistan on the right path

The author states that Pakistan is blessed with abundance of natural resources and shares maritime boundaries with Iran, Oman and India. Pakistan has a long coastline, which is about 990 km. Pakistan despite all-natural resources was not able to benefit from tremendous resources due to lack of maritime vision of successive governments. A sound maritime strategy is required

to exploit maritime resources and that is the way Pakistan could become a true maritime nation.

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Pakistan's Gwadar port has the potential, if driven with wisdom and foresight, to put Pakistan on the right path. The country's record in offshore oil and gas exploration has been equally disappointing. Due to lack of expertise and inconsistent policies of the past governments very little has been done in this area. The book elaborates the history of Gwadar and provides information and data about the natural resources and potential of Pakistan. It is a well-researched and authentic account on Gwadar and its maritime potentials. The book is written in easy to understand language and attracts readers from all walks of life. Overall it is a good read ■



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