

CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



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GAWADAR FENCING



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1. The news of fencing of Gawadar, purportedly for the security of the establishments in the City saw large number of people coming out in opposition. In the wake of the controversy created, a case was filed in the Balochistan High Court which has stayed the construction of the fence for the time being. This case, however brings forth certain key issues which need to be looked into to understand the background which has resulted in this precarious problem, the relevance of this port, its importance to CPEC and the current imbroglio.

2. Gawadar came into the limelight ever since China showed its interest in the port to Pakistan in 2001 and completed the initial development in 2006. Subsequently the announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by President Xi Jinping during his visit to Singapore and Kazakhstan in 2013, heralded a much closer look at this port. The China Pak Economic Corridor (CPEC), connecting Kashgar (Xinjiang) with Gawadar, is a key part of the BRI. Gawadar will give alternative route of sea connectivity to mainland China, avoiding the Malacca Straits. This is critical for China as it shortens the sea travel and allows another route for Chinese trade in case of possible

conflicts and closure of Sea on the Eastern/ SE Seaboard of China which is fraught with serious problems. Apart from shortening the transit time and reduce cost of trade, China also plans to use this for protecting its interest in the IOR. With an outpost at Djibouti and another at Gawadar, China will have maritime access and logistic sustainability in this area which will be critical in securing their expanding maritime interests. Consequent to UN resolutions of 2008 on piracy, China has established a strong naval presence in the Indian Ocean with the deployment of the PLA Navy's Anti-Piracy Task Force. China's assistance to Pakistan in the construction of a Very Low Frequency (VLF) facility at Turbat (north of Gwadar) for strategic communications, probably with Submarines, confirms the assumption that Gawadar will have both commercial and strategic significance for China. Pakistan leased the deep water port to Chinas Overseas Port Holding Company in 2015 for a period of 45 years and the development of the port is planned in three phases till 2045 along with the other projects envisioned in CPEC.

3. The CPEC aims to develop infrastructure in terms of Roads, Railways and Sea ports along with hydroelectric projects for electricity generation, SEZs and other projects which will ensure investment of over 60 billion USD in Pakistan. The road and rail connectivity will allow movement of goods from West China to Gawadar port and onwards along the global trade routes by sea. Thus, Gawadar will connect both the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Route, which together comprise the BRI. In 2016 a Gawadar Special Economic Zone was sanctioned for development at a cost of USD 1.62 Billion and the aim is to develop this area as a manufacturing, logistic and economic hub with jobs for over 40,000 people

4. The CPEC has been showcased as a life changer by the politico-military elite of Pakistan with many stating that this would generate employment for the people and boost growth. However, CPEC has come into a lot of criticism lately which is increasing by the day and this is due to a number of factors; first being the Chinese model of Business which creates a debt trap for the host country as has been seen in other countries which have take assistance from the Chinese, the second is the attitude, behaviour and

functional ethos of the Chinese companies who are doing all the work in the CPEC as they look down on the locals and are wary of assimilation, the third issue is the fear that Pakistan will eventually become a vassal state of China and be dependent completely on China economically and for security and the last but not the least is the security situation in Pakistan especially in Balochistan, where Gwadar is situated, which threatens the viability of CPEC.

5. Gwadar has witnessed a number of attacks by Baloch nationalists in the recent past and this is likely to increase as the present unrest in Balochistan is not showing any signs of abating. These targeted attacks on Chinese nationals and security forces have come from Baloch nationalist insurgents, who during the last three years have carried out at least five major terror strikes in the area. The Baloch movement traces its roots to the fact that Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan covering approx 45% of the area with only 5% of the population, it is rich in minerals and has great potential for trade along the sea but very little development has been seen in this province and the people feel that the riches of the state are benefitting the others, mainly Punjabis, who control the majority of the businesses in the country. The state has seen five periods of unrest in 1948, 1958, 1962, 1973, and the last in 2004 which continues even today. The Islamisation of this region during Zia's regime and rehabilitation of the Afghan refugees in this area by successive governments has heightened the fears of the Balochis that they will be converted into a minority in their province. The vexed question of autonomy or freedom for Balochistan continues to reverberate with the locals which is aggravated by the continued oppression by the Pakistan Military, Frontier Force and Intelligence agencies. There have been untold deaths, disappearances and targeted killings both within and outside Pakistan of the Baloch Nationalists. The signing of the CPEC declaration in 2015 was initially seen as a boon for developing this region, however the economic development does not seem likely in the current situation of mistrust and continued operations by the forces against the locals. The situation has been further aggravated with very limited participation of the locals in the development plans as most of the work has been taken over by the Chinese companies. There is also the

fear of misuse of the resources by the Chinese as Balochistan is rich in mineral reserves. One example is the contract for extraction of gold and copper from the Saindak mine given to China Metallurgical Group Corporation which has been resented by the locals.

6. The proposal to create a fence in order to allay the fears of the Chinese working in Gawadar will involve fencing a large portion of the town with limited entry and exits and associated checks and restriction on movements. This has been strongly opposed by the locals as it will impact their livelihood. The need of creating security zones well inside the country for the purpose of protecting interests of foreign nationals while adversely impacting the local populace also feeds into the narrative of discrimination against the Balochs for the benefit of others. The strong opposition to this move and the court decision to stay the construction of the fence have stalled the problem for the time being, however the greater issue is how the Balochistan unrest is resolved as it seems to be taking a turn towards the worse. There is also the related issue of security of CPEC and Gawadar in the troubled region. A fence is certainly not going to resolve these major issues which will require deep engagement of the state and the province, withdrawal of military, creation of job opportunities, infrastructure, improvement of local economy and above all a great deal of local governance and trust, all of which, at present, seems an illusion.

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