



RESEARCH PAPER

Gwadar-Chahbahar Connectivity Politics: Pakistan's Emerging Grand Strategy in the Middle East and Central Asia

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ABSTRACT

The study explores Pakistan's emerging role in contemporary connectivity politics at the regional and global level. At the crossroads of South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia, Pakistan's Gwadar seaport and Iran's Chahbahar seaport forged a new great game, attributed to economic opportunities, strategic advantages, and political maneuverings. With 300 million tons of cargo capacity, the Gwadar sea port is more viable than Iran's Chahbahar, which has a limited proposed capacity of 10-12 million tons. Despite these differences, Pakistan's view on Chahbahar is proactive, reflecting that Islamabad is pursuing a new version of regional connectivity to increase its political and strategic influence in the Middle East, Afghanistan, and Russia via CARs. Strategically, both of these seaports are potential chokepoints. Within the framework of complex interdependence theory, the study uses qualitative research methodology with secondary data sources. The analysis reveals that Pakistan is pursuing a new version of regional and global connectivity to increase its economic and strategic importance at the regional and international levels. This connectivity approach is a logical extension of China's 'string of pearls'. Moreover, the Gwadar-Chahbahar rivalry is India's strategic move to decode Pakistan's grand economic and strategic connectivity strategy, which Islamabad needs policy-level decisions to counter.

KEYWORDS Central Asia, Chahbahar, Gwadar, Connectivity Politics, CPEC, New Great Game

Introduction

The politics of connectivity is seemingly shaping the future of the world order, where sea routes and blue economies will play a significant role in achieving sustainable security. South Asia, Afghanistan, Iran, and CARs are predominantly chained into a geographic bond and thus have limited choices to enhance economic and political growth. The energy-rich 'lake' known as the Caspian Sea is the region's most important source of blue economy because of its geography and minerals. This region has become a 'heartland' in the worldwide power politics (Rahim, et. al., 2018; Sattar et al., 2023, p. 24). The Russian political dominance, however, has valuable implications for the rest of the stakeholders, particularly the CARs. At the same time, the CARs have developed a new sense of identity in which they tend to modernize their foreign policy and economic systems. On the other hand, the interest of regional and international players is growing in Central Asian financial systems (Rehman, 2015).

There is another complex issue of geographic claims on the Caspian Sea, as it continues to be an ongoing discussion among Iran, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan. This unresolved problem has the potential to generate inter-state conflicts and needs CARs' immediate attention. Due to these issues, there are limited options for extending the pipeline project, affecting all parties' financial interests. As a matter of fact, the Russian Federation is a beneficiary of this unresolved dilemma. The CARs heavily depend on Russian oil and gas supplies due to their limited energy extraction capabilities

and Moscow's political influence. These political and strategic compulsions dictate that CARs consider alternative options to enhance their economic, political, and strategic reliance (Malik, 2012, p. 57).

In due course, the geographic feasibility allows CARs to initiate "Look Gwadar and Chahbahar" option. Gwadar and Chahbahar could serve as new trade and investment routes for CARs. Chahbahar is an Indian Ocean outlet for Central Asia with 7200 km International North-South Corridor (INSTC) through Iran and Afghanistan (Hannan Hussain, 2024, p. 2). The proposed scheme will enable CARs to access the global market to expand their energy resources. Meanwhile, the Gwadar Port is 2334km away and will allow CARs to access the Strait of Hormuz and the Arabian Sea (Hannan Hussain, 2024, p. 3). This opportunity will increase trade and investment activities across the region and can change the future of all partners (Khetran, 2014, p. 70). The Gwadar seaport is expected to be fully functional within the next few years, subject to regional peace and stability. The functionality of this route will be a landmark in CAR's economic and strategic strength (Khetran, 2014, p. 70). In fact it will become a backbone for China and Pakistan's economy (Rahman et al., 2024, p. 1). Gwadar port has the potential to become a key checkpoint for the Strait of Hormuz; it can compete with the UAE seaports by facilitating access to the Caspian Sea, and thus offering a more favourable route for the landlocked Central Asian Region. Gwadar can develop into a full-fledged local economic center and a transshipment seaport. The operationalisation of Chahbahar will also boost India's efforts to connect with resource-rich Central Asia and Russia.

From the Indian perspective, Chahbahar is strategically important. India has been using the Chahbahar Port to increase its trade with Iran, Uzbekistan and landlocked Afghanistan (Dadparvar & Kaleji, 2025, p. 283). In post-US exit from Afghanistan, India's interest in Chahbahar has increased. Initially, India used this opportunity to carry food items including wheat and other edible in 2012. There is a joint investment of around US500 Million \$ in Chahbahar and India continues the investment to increase the trade volume (Dadparvar & Kaleji, 2025; Shah, et. al., 2020). Around 1.0 million metric tons of Indian wheat were supplied by this route to Afghanistan. This aid was part of India's strategic posture towards Afghanistan once the US forces exit from the region. The primary purpose of this initiative was to increase New Delhi's influence on Kabul. Contrarily, Bandar Abbas is perceived as a threat for Chahbahar. Tehran always tried to increase trade and business activities at Chahbahar to compete with Bandar Abbas.

Literature Review

The comparative study of Gwadar and Chahbahar reveals that the Gwadar port of Pakistan is the baseline for the resurgence of its connectivity dream. (Tanoli, 2016, p. 5) concludes that Gwadar can be called a 'golden bird for Pakistan' (Tanoli, 2016). This research report was published by the Center for Strategic and Contemporary Research (CSCR) in 2016, briefly comparing Gwadar and Chahbahar ports. Zafar Iqbal Rawana endorsed this comparative advantage of Gwadar, considering it Pakistan's dream in his scholarly contribution to Pivot Magazine in July 2023, considering it as a pivot to secure future east-west trade (Rawana, 2023, p. 11).

The existing literature on Gwadar and Chahbahar expands discussions on traditional India-Pakistan rivalry, giving a reductionist viewpoint on the subject area. Although India and Pakistan have been engaged in economic and strategic competition due to their historical tug of war, Pakistan's increasing regional and global importance denotes a valuable gap. The US Naval Institute has published a report in 2017 exploring the strategic importance of Gwadar. (Khan, 2017) argues that China's interest in investing in Gwadar has implications both in the economic and military domains. However, there is no clarity on Pakistan's grand strategy concerning connectivity politics at the regional or global level.

(Rahman et al., 2024, p. 1) Discloses the financial dimensions of regional and global interest in the CARs. Most of the literature that gives an insight into CARs connectivity to the CPEC or Indian Ocean Region (IOR) revolves around the economic future of the connecting states. However, the changing strategic and military interests of the emerging regional and global players have been viewed through a traditional prism of either Indian dominance assumptions or China's dream through its strategy of one belt one road (OBOR). A greater role of Pakistan is a neglected area in contemporary studies on regional connectivity politics. During the last decade, Pakistan regained its strategic and political worth not only in South Asia but around the globe. (Mashal, 2025, p. 3) in his viewpoint believes that the major powers are now endorsing Pakistan's military capabilities particularly after 2025 four-day war against India. This war compelled them to review their own defence capabilities and war strategies.

Karim and Khan, (2018) Specifically, it discusses Pakistan's strategic relations with Tajikistan. It gives a detailed description of Pakistan's bilateral relations with CARs. (Hussain, 2020, p. 79) continues with the perspective of China's dream to explore the importance of Gwadar. (Abbasi, 2025) his report published by Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) briefly supports Gwadar importances and highlights the importance of electricity and water issues as a baseline for CPEC connectivity to the Gwadar port.

There is also an interesting portion of official delays in functioning of CPEC and Gwadar projects in Pakistan which is related to the administrative part. (Rana, 2025) discussed similar administrative issues in his article in the Tribune. This article provide valuable information about concession issues and delays from China Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC) in the execution of projects in Pakistan.

India-Pakistan rivalry over Gwadar and Chahbar is also an important aspect of the available literature on South Asian connectivity dilemma. (Basit, 2024) disclosed the increasing involvement of India's RAW in Pakistan. The Balochistan region of Pakistan is an example of this intervention through India's sponsored guerrilla warfare (Basit, 2024, p. 2). There is no particular study on how Chahbahar can advance Pakistan's version of connectivity.

Kalim, (2016) However, the strategic advantage of Gwadar for CARs. He argues that Gwadar can be a better outlet for CARs and Russia than the Chahbahar due to its location and route to the Strait of Hormuz (Kalim, 2016, p. 207). Kalim precisely explores the geostrategic aspect of the emerging political landscape of geoeconomic and geostrategic rivalries of seaports at the crossroads of Asia and the Europe. (Muzaffar, et. al., 2018; Sattar et. al., 2023) in their scholarly contribution, Gwadar port's geostrategic significance: a gateway to regional prosperity and integration, pinned this port as 'heartland' for the global powers.

Keohane and Nye, (2012) theory of complex interdependence is a unique framework to understand economics and security in 'one bag'. The neo liberal challenge to understand international politics through developing an order in issue areas is distinct which Robert B. Keohane and Joseph Nye explained in their exceptional work 'Power and Independence. The study is strongly supported through this theoretical literature. Broadly, the literature on Gwadar and Chahbahar or the scholarly discussion on CARs connectivity, is a mixed bag with a limited portion of Pakistan's central role. The current study expands this debate by incorporating Pakistan's new approach and role in regional and global connectivity.

Theoretical Framework

The study is framed within the parameters of complex interdependence theory. This theoretical conception provided an opportunity to understand complex relationship between the geo-economics and geo-politics as it accommodates the strategic calculations

within its parameters. The 'complex interdependence theory absorbs realist's concerns of security and thus this theoretical conception gave a strong foundation to neo-liberal philosophers to challenge traditional and neo-realists. Nye accepts that military independence always exists and power is still important in the contemporary world (Keohane & Nye, 2012, p. 3). The three main pillars of this framework give a way forward to expand discussion on Pakistan's emerging connectivity politics. These include multiple channels, no clear hierarchy in issues and the military forces at minimal (Keohane & Nye, 2012, p. 21). The complex interdependence allows a narrow interaction of realists and liberals to accommodate security and interdependence in one room.

The neoliberal framework provides a suitable application for understanding Pakistan's current connectivity politics. Interestingly, Pakistan used an unusual route to achieve a regional and global role in the world's political arena. With a weak economy, Pakistan established its state-of-the-art military power, nuclear stature and strategic dominance in the region. In post-2025 India-Pakistan war, Pakistan has seemingly changed its posture by increasing multiple channels and shuffling economic interests by shuffling its security concerns. Although security remained a vital part of the agenda, the grand connectivity strategy reflects that Islamabad has restructured the prioritization of issues.

Material and Methods

The current study uses a qualitative approach with secondary data sources. The evolutionary process and changing regional political dimensions do not allow for statistically calculating states' behavior and strategies. Understanding the issue in depth is rational for adopting a qualitative approach. The analysis uses valid secondary data sources on connectivity politics, mainly research articles from different research journals, reports from relevant magazines, and a few media sources, including authentic newspapers and websites, which are part of the discussion to support the arguments. The data was divided into three main categories: the traditional portion with CPEC and China-focused scholarly literature. Second, the data is based on the Indian narrative of Chahbahar, and third, the data is related to Pakistan's regional and global connectivity options.

Results and Discussion

Pakistan's Grand Strategy of Connectivity

The Chahbahar is currently enjoying higher economic activity; however, it does not give a complete picture of the trade potential of both ports. The Gwadar port is strategically and politically more viable than the Chahbahar port (Hussain, 2020, p. 146). The traditional conception of rivalry between Gwadar and Chahbahar is based upon trade and economic activity. However, during the last few years, Pakistan has changed its strategic demeanor and emerged as an important regional strategic player. In 2025, the Indo-Pakistan war exposed India's military weakness, resulting in implications for its supposed dominance in South Asia. Indian operation Sindoor badly failed, whereas Pakistan successfully responded with heavy strikes on major cities of India during its reactive Operation Bunyan-ul-Marsoos. This war completely changed the existing perceptions of South Asian power structure. (Muzaffar & Khan, 2021). Soon after Pakistan's win against India, US attacks on Iran, and Israel's attacks on Qatar threatened the Middle Eastern countries. At the same time, the failure of Western and Russian technologies in the India-Pakistan war proved China's tech superiority. Consequently, the US and the European states faced a review of their arms technology to compete with China (Mashal, 2025). The Saudi and other Arab nations immediately decided to conclude a security pact with Pakistan, which is now shaping Pakistan's global role in power contestation.



Fig. 1 Pakistan's Connectivity Advantage Source: <https://geology.com/world/asia-satellite-image.shtml>

Logical Extension of String of Pearls

China's investment in Gwadar is a logical extension of the 'String of Pearls'. Interestingly, Pakistan's strategic approach to align with the great powers is meaningfully influencing Afghanistan, Iran, CARs, and Russia to join CPEC via Gwadar (Gurmeet, 2018, p. 1). However, the US and India perceive this as a policy of China. The geographic proximity of Pakistan brought the country to the center of a new great game, where it is developing its own idea to increase the reliability of major powers on it, which is an essential part of its new grand strategy. Pakistan's strong defence capabilities inspired the Middle Eastern economic powers to use its strategic umbrella. Reciprocally, it gives a way forward to Pakistan to establish its strategic dominance across Arabian sea and the Strait of Hormuz. The Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's recent visit to Afghanistan is another important event where Pakistan's importance to improve North-Western connectivity (Ejaz Rafi, 2025). The US strategists have also considered Pakistan's naval ports as pivotal, forging new role of connectivity politics in its foreign policy approach (Khan, 2017).

New Strategic Outlet for CARs and the Middle East

In recent years, Pakistan has rapidly improved its ties with the external world, particularly with the US, China, and the Middle Eastern states. Pakistan is actively playing its role in the current geostrategic competition in the Middle East. The Israel-Iran war, US bombing on Iran's nuclear sites, and Israel's attacks on Qatar were very recent events that will shape traditional policy approaches in Tehran, Riyadh, and Doha. These oil-rich states need a political umbrella, which Pakistan has the potential to establish in the region due to its military and strategic strength. At the same time, the US President Donald Trump declared that the US should regain its control over Afghanistan's Bagram airbase (Madhani, n.d.). This indicates that US-Afghan ties need a revival. Pakistan as a strategic partner to the US, cannot be neglected by the US to achieve these objectives. This evolutionary process will increase the importance of ports in the region. Comparatively, the Gwadar port has a strategic advantage over the Chahbahar port due to its geographic viability and deep-sea characteristics. Another vital aspect of Gwadar is Pakistan's absolute sovereignty, which India lacks over the Chahbahar port. Chahbahar is legally a part of the Gulf of Oman and not

a part of the Indian Ocean, and thus India has limited scope to claim and control its strategic canvas.

Traditional Trade Route for CARs

Historically, the CARs used Pakistan's sea routes through Bin Qasim port. The plan to build a new port in Gwadar emerged as a new game on the political chessboard of connectivity politics of Asia and Europe's crossroads. As a part of the Chinese grand strategy of regional and global connectivity, an investment of US\$248 million paved new paths for the rapid construction of the Gwadar port. The Singapore Port Authority (PSA) initially won its bid after its partial completion in 2007. However, this control was transferred to the China Port Holding Company (CPHC) in February 2013. The CPHC rescheduled the remaining work, improved its infrastructure, and fully operationalized the port by November 2016. The operationalization of the Pakistani Gwadar seaport stimulated CARs to review their economic and trade policies as the region got a new trade route to access the Strait of Hormuz, which controls two-thirds of the global energy supplies. It also sensitized Russia and the Western powers due to their historical tug of war over the Russian near abroad, which Russia claims to be securitized. These states could conduct their South Asian and Gulf transit trade through Pakistan. It is considered that Gwadar Seaport and its related road infrastructure is a Suez Canal for Central Asia and China (Abbasi, 2025).

Aligned with China's Grand Strategy

The political leadership in Pakistan projected Gwadar port within China's CPEC policy (Samad, 2025, p. 1). It shows deep strategic ties between Pakistan and China. Due to its active transit status, it opened new horizons for the CARs. In contrast, this project would offer the shortest sea route from Gwadar Port to Kyrgyzstan. Nearly all policymakers view the Gwadar Port as an effective economic instrument, as it would significantly enhance the growth of the South Asian region in general and Pakistan in particular, and make it a more powerful state in the regional and global power politics arena. Central Asian states, as landlocked but rich in natural resources, have always seemed to lack accessibility to local markets, such as China, India, Pakistan, and West Asian states. In this respect, the Gwadar seaport could be an ideal geo-political and geostrategic prospect for Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, enabling them to handle their products and sell them more competitively to both local and global economic markets (Karim Haider Syed & Imran Khan, 2018, p. 336). Although Wakhan strip gives a passage to CARs (Karim Haider Syed & Imran Khan, 2018, p. 333), Pakistan also seeks to access the resource-rich states of Central Asia through Afghanistan to fulfil its strategic needs and transport products to Central Asia.

This emerging scenario convinced all CARs to take an interest in implementing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. For example, Turkmenistan acknowledged the importance of CPEC and its cordial ties with Pakistan concerning trade routes. The leadership in Pakistan also endorsed CARs increasing interest in the Gwadar port. Similarly, Tajikistan showed a keen interest in joining the CPEC (Karim Haider Syed & Imran Khan, 2018, p. 333), following Turkmenistan's statements. CPEC, the recently upgraded Gwadar deep-sea port in Pakistan, provides Turkmenistan's entrance to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. However, the lack of other relevant infrastructure to increase mobility, such as railways and roads, is still a big question for materializing CARs' connectivity with South Asia.

Pakistan is also interested in establishing economic and strategic ties with all regional stakeholders as part of its new connectivity posture (Pakistan, 2025). The government of Pakistan recently made several policy-level decisions to promote its relations with the region. In 2015, Tajikistan's Chief Executive, Emomali Rahmon, and Pakistan's former Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, accepted a new road project connecting

their states and attached to the wider CPEC structure (Rana, 2016). Deputy Prime Minister of Uzbekistan Ulugbek Rozukulov took a similarly helpful position during his formal political tour to Islamabad in December 2016 (Rana, 2016). The contribution of Uzbekistan's rich natural resources to the CPEC venture has the potential to double Pakistan's power output over the next six years, ensuring the country with long-term access to energy. Kazakhstan is also apparently eager to initiate a combined venture under CPEC. In 2015, then-Prime Minister Karim Massimov outlined the significance of the CPEC venture for Kazakhstan and the CARs, reflecting Kazak pivot to connectivity with Pakistan.

Reversing the Indian politics of IOR

India sees Chahbahar as a strategic point that could serve as an outlet for the Indian Ocean region (IOR). The proposed 7200 km International North South Corridor (INSTC) running northward through Afghanistan and Iran will also give India a dynamic entrance to the markets of five CARs, Russia, and Europe. Connecting IOR with the CARs is impossible without the Chahbahar port functionality. However, there are serious political issues in pursuing this dream due to changing global political preferences. However, the trade between India and Central Asia has long been constrained by the absence of viable overland transit routes, which have been denied by Pakistan and China, who share boundaries with India. One of the motives behind Indian investments in Chahbahar is to counter China's CPEC extension in the region and the Gwadar project. Pakistan is rapidly establishing its ties with CARs, Russia and the Afghan clusters to implement its connectivity plans. This created a vulnerability for Chahbar plan and the Indian politics of IOR. The recent external military interventions in the Middle East have also slowed down Indian ambitions. Contrarily, the US strategic maneuverings massively influenced the Iranian economic activities. There is also a complex issue of terrorism resulting in a law and order situation in Afghanistan, particularly after the US exit from Afghanistan. These hurdles are part of the obstacles to CARs' absolute dependency on the Chahbahar proposal. As an independent proposal, the Chahbahar cannot be considered as the sole outlet for CARs to access warm waters and the Strait of Hormuz.

Russia, on the other hand, has a keen interest in Chahbahar. The senior officials of the Russian government paid several visits and engaged in talks with the Indian and Iranian authorities to build new infrastructure. Indian strategic moves and close collaborations with Tehran to fully operationalize the Chahbahar port were visible as the Prime Minister Modi initiated intense political engagements with Tehran. India pledged approximately \$500 million to develop and operate Iran's Chahbahar port, as part of a trilateral engagement between India, Iran, and Afghanistan.

The CPEC can also connect Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. As a part of the CPEC strategy, the Gwadar sea route is a better outlet for CARs and Afghanistan (Kalim, 2016). This plausible advantage of Pakistan's Gwadar port persuaded Indian policy makers to destabilize the security environment in the region.

The Indian agencies also used the Afghan soil to pursue such activities. In the post-US exit from Afghanistan, the terror activities funded by the Indian Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) have increased manifold (Basit, 2024). The activities to destabilize CPEC, particularly the Gwadar project, were adopted as a part of India's non-traditional war agenda against Pakistan. The Baluch Liberation Army (BLA), which is a terrorist group declared by the US and the Government of Pakistan, was funded by India to continue the agenda (Basit, 2024). In recent years, several incidents took place in the Gwadar region in particular and Baluchistan in general, which were proven to be externally funded terrorist activities. Pakistan realizes that the chain of this connectivity will serve to promote greater regional and global trade activities. Consequently, it became a matter of securitization for Pakistan to protect this financial channel.

The Russian politics of connectivity is centered on the idea of its 'sphere of influence'. Putin's interest in the South North Corridor (SNC) does not facilitate Western economic interests. Still, connecting India with Russia through Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia is a logical extension of 'near abroad politics'. Historically, there was a general perception that Russia was seeking access to the warm water through Afghanistan and Pakistan, which became a reason for the Cold War episode. Whatever the historical reasons, the current tendency of Moscow's regional connectivity is an extended version of its political influence in the region. Russia has been enjoying cordial relations with India since 1947. Moscow is aware of the Indian market needs and thus supports its Chahbahar project. This means India facilitates Russian power projection to continue its influence in CARs. Reciprocally, Moscow advises India to connect with Europe via Iran, Azerbaijan and Turkey.

In comparison, the first route for India would be Afghanistan, Central Asia and Russia. The route that will serve as part of increasing Russian influence in the region in collaboration with India run from Herat to Laman, Bala, Murghab, Cormach, Maymaneh, Andkhoy, Karamkal, Shaberghan, and Aqchach and to Mazar-e-Sharif, while the Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Turkmenistan (TAT) Railway track will connect this route at Andkhoy. Landlocked Afghanistan will enjoy a central connectivity point through a railway track or all-weather roads.

India continued its engagements with Taliban even during US war against terror in Afghanistan. In post-US exit, the Modi government extended its regional agenda and invested in Afghanistan's reconstruction and infrastructural development projects. There were two major objectives for this increased economic and political support. First to abolish Islamabad's historical influence on different Afghan political groups. And the second to block CEPEC plan that may increase Pakistan's regional and global importance. The Afghan government can play a vital role in this regard. The success of CEPEC depends upon safe passage linking Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan via Gwadar Port.

China's strategy is more complex and rooted in strategic dominance through economic engagements with the rest of the world. Strategically, China does not see Chahbahar as a threat to its global ambitions. The Chahbahar Port route to Central Asia starts from Kandla Indian Kandla port to Chahbahar port of Iran, followed by Shar, Zahedan, and Mashhad. The land route starting from Mashhad, connects it to Turkmenistan and crosses Chardzhor. Chardzhor is a small area and has the potential to become a center point as it connects this route to Uzbekistan's main city, Bokhara. The CARs' connectivity ultimately provides passage land connectivity to Bokhara and Tashkent, which ultimately covers Kyrgyzstan via Dzhambul.

Connectivity, Politics, and China Factor

The China factor is also a critical debate while discussing the prospects of Gwadar and Chahbahar connectivity. The regional tug of war between China and India will slow down Chahbahar (Kalim, 2016, p. 210). On the other hand, China is investing millions of dollars in the Gwadar port project, which shows the future expansion of Chinese investments in the region. During the same period, India focused on Chahbahar, the Government of Pakistan started trade activities at Gwadar port in collaboration with the Chinese Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC) (Rana, 2025). The agreement was based on commercial terms and conditions for four decades. This step was part of the great CPEC project worth \$ 46 B USD. It will go through Gwadar port to Kashgar via railways, roads, and pipelines for gas and oil.

Strait of Hormuz & CARs priority

In the first decade of the 21st century, India pursued parallel efforts to develop a grand economic port through Chahbahar. In 2015, India and Iran reached a consensus on the ToRs of the Chahbahar project; however, regional political and strategic developments have slowed down the desired ambitions. The parallel conflicts in the Middle East and South Asia gave new learnings to Iran, India, and other players to review their trade and strategic alignments. Iran, for example, lost its ambition to become part of the Indian politics of Gwadar-Chahbar rival, both Chahbahar and Gwadar seaports are a short distance of around 72 kms and thus allow Pakistan to implement its grand strategy connectivity plan. Due to India and Pakistan's divergent political and strategic motivations, both states failed to manage a shared route and an outlet for CARs to access the Strait of Hormuz through Gwadar port Pakistan has also learned strategic lessons from its brotherly and deep relations with China.

On the other hand, a long experience of ties with US also enhances Pakistan's expertise on global strategic nerves. Many states' substantial financial and administrative investments in this connectivity process make it a collective asset for all. However, India's hegemonic approach will be the last hurdle to establishing Pakistan's version of the string of pearls from Gwadar to CARs, which Pakistan has successfully addressed.

Conclusion

Pakistan has revised its policy options concerning its regional and global engagements and adopted a grand connectivity strategy. A revised US policy to continue its presence in Afghanistan provides evidence of its distrust of India to compete with China, particularly after the India-Pakistan war of 2025. This event has completely changed the conception of all major players of international politics about India's misperceived global role. The American offer was reversed, and the US president reclaimed Bagram airbase to ensure the presence of US forces in the region. On the other hand, Pakistan has adopted an extended version of China's string of pearls as a guide for its new grand connectivity strategy. The idea to connect its ports with Iran, Afghanistan, CARs, and Russia on one hand and with the oil-rich Middle East on the other is currently based on the use of multiple channels and shuffling of its economic and military interest. This version of Pakistan's grand strategy has defused India's Chahbahar bid. In comparison, Pakistan is rapidly gaining its influence in Tehran, Riyadh, and Moscow, enabling Islamabad to incorporate Iran's Chahbahar port connectivity as part of its new strategic approach. This scenario also reflects Pakistan's emerging role in South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East politics.

Recommendations

Pakistan's ability to develop its grand strategy embedded in geostrategic and geoeconomic connectivity needs long-term policy measures. Pakistan's political instability has historically been the most crucial reason for its political and economic downward spiral. However, a rapid recovery in the last decade shows a prompt domestic and external recovery. Pakistan also needs to initiate legislation on a project of broader national interest. These actions will increase the trust of investors, global institutions, and foreign governments in investing in long-term financial assets. There is also a dire need to enhance a strong political bond with Iran, Russia and the CARs to bridge the West and the Eurasian power clusters. Finally, Pakistan's grand connectivity strategy needs a clear direction independent of external influence.

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