



China's Foreign Policy towards Bangladesh and Pakistan: In the Context of Geo-strategic Issues (Early 21st Century)

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Abstract

Geo-strategy is a geopolitical branch of foreign policy that is largely influenced by geographical variables in terms of warning, limiting, or influencing political and military preparation. The term geo-economics has been used in recent years to describe the perceived superiority of economics in interstate affairs over politics. The key purpose of this research is to concentrate on the geostrategic and economic value of the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean, and the Persian Gulf, where there is a great interest in China. In addition, the study found that the Bay of Bengal, southeast Bangladesh-Pakistan, the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf and Port of Gwadar are of considerable significance to China for trade and investment purposes, as well as for exports and imports. The study attempted to examine the ongoing development of China-Bangladesh-Pakistan relations in the diplomatic, military, and economic spheres. These trends have had a significant effect on South Asia in general and on the relations between China and Bangladesh and Pakistan in particular. China-Bangladesh-Pakistan relations have developed in the diplomatic, military, and economic realms in the early 21st century. This analysis was carried out on the basis of secondary sources. The study argues that the Bay of Bengal is an important region for China because of its easy access to the Indian Ocean, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. Pakistan is situated at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, lying astride China, South Asia, Central Asia, and West Asia, and has the potential to become a crossroads for trade, transportation, and oil.

Keywords: China, Foreign Policy, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bay of Bengal, Geostrategic, Indian Ocean, Geo-economic, Port of Gwadar, Persian Gulf

Introduction

China has traditionally maintained good ties with Bangladesh and Pakistan. A variety of factors have determined the slow progress of relations between the regions, such as their historical and cultural history, their geographical positions, and each country's socio-economic and political system. China and South Asian nations, as growing world forces, have dedicated themselves to fostering peace, security, and prosperity in the new international context. Their partnership, perceived to have significant consequences around the globe, has become a subject of global concern and public interest (Weidenbaum & Hughes, 1996).

Currently, China has developed bilateral cooperative relations with several countries in South Asia. South Asia has also been the subject of world interest since the Cold War, along with the greater Asia Pacific region. Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and the Maldives are some of the countries involved. Since the 1990s, friction and unease have been brewing between the two forces as India gradually got closer to the US and the US shifted away from Pakistan. This made China wary of the designs of India and the US and made China and Bangladesh and Pakistan ever closer. The quad took on a simple and concrete anti-Chinese form that led to the establishment of the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

The aim of this analysis is to examine China's Geo-strategic foreign policy towards Bangladesh and Pakistan in the early 21st century. Most notably, the study has examined the Geo-strategic relations with China-Bangladesh and China-Pakistan. Also, the study described Geostrategic and Military Relations between China-



Bangladesh and China–Pakistan, China’s geostrategic interests in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean, China–Pakistan geostrategic interests in the Persian Gulf, and the port of Gwadar and its importance to China and Pakistan. Also, the study has examined the Geo–Strategic and Geo–Economic Relations of China–Bangladesh.

Literature Review

Restricted literature was available, however, covering emerging relationship trends between Bangladesh, Pakistan, and China in the context of developments in the early 21st century. China’s foreign policy towards Bangladesh and Pakistan was not sufficiently covered in the current literature: geostrategic consequences (Early 21st Century). For example,

Syed (1974) discussed from 1949 to 1972 on relations between Pakistan and China. It included important events such as the early misunderstandings in Pakistan–China relations, Pakistan’s signing of SEATO and CENTO, the Bandung Conference in 1955, Ayub Khan’s era and Pakistan–China alliance, the 1965 Indo–Pak conflict, and China’s post–Tashkent military and economic assistance. The rapprochement and cooperation between Pakistan and China that began in the 1950s and 1960s was explained, as was an account of the shaping of relations between the two countries.

Singh (2007) examined a number of issues that Pakistan and China have faced since their emergence and described areas of cooperation between the two countries, especially China’s continued supply of conventional arms and political support for Pakistan. It was an important book on Pakistan’s developing ties with China. It included the viewpoint of numerous Indian scholars on the relations between Pakistan and China, in which they highlighted the importance of the two countries’ economic and security links.

Bhola (1986) discussed in his book *Pakistan–China Relations, Quest for Politico Strategic Partnership*. It was a big work on why, considering the fact that both countries were politically opposed to each other right from the beginning of their developing links, Pakistan and China formed friendly relations. He also covered in depth the determinants and goals of the pattern of action of each other and examined the economic and cultural relations of both countries at length.

Malik (2001) analyzed an appreciation of the features and attitudes of Chinese foreign policy in its relations with all the countries of South Asia. China maintained frequent communication with South Asian countries to ensure that the increase in cooperation between China and India was not at their expense. China’s improved ties with Pakistan and other South Asian countries have also raised questions about changes in India and New Delhi. India’s policy of protecting its security interests remains critical, despite Beijing’s insistence on a peaceful settlement of conflicts. According to the report, South Asia will continue to be a significant area for China, and the rivalry between China and India in South Asia will remain a key geopolitical feature of the region.

Sarker (2014) explained a bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and China at the dawn of the 21st century. He discusses this bilateral relationship’s historical development; goes through its different dimensions; describes major problems and proposes a bunch of policy imperatives that facilitate this friendship. The authors also address the context of the Bangladesh–China relationship (before 1971, 1971–1975, 1975–1982, 1982–1990, 1990–1996, 1996–2001, 2001–2006, 2006–2008, 2008–2013), the Bangladesh–China relationship aspects, the political dimension, the economic dimension, the security and military dimension, the science and technology dimension, the educational and cultural dimension, the bilateral relationship’s main problems, the large trade deficit, and the Indian element.



Although the above-mentioned literature addressed the regional and global implications of this relationship, there was no comprehensive study of the regional and global consequences of this vital relationship. This study aim was to fill a void in the existing literature by examining China's geostrategic implications for Bangladesh and Pakistan (Early 21st Century). Therefore, the purpose of the study was to fill the void in the current literature and add to knowledge in the critical field of science and research.

Methodology of the Research

The present article is descriptive of form, exploratory and empirical. The research was carried out using secondary sources. Primary references contained records on foreign policy, such as speeches and declarations by decision-makers, formal interviews with them, joint communiques, de-classified official agreements, and the viewpoints of the respondents chosen. Books, magazines, newspapers, journals, websites, and blogs were included in the secondary sources. The study used books that discussed the essence of China-Bangladesh-Pakistan relations from a variety of various disciplines, such as Foreign Relations Chinese Studies, Bangladesh Studies and Pakistan Studies. Often included were articles from various publications such as Global Relations, Foreign Policy, and World Politics. Articles such as Regional Studies, Strategic Studies, Pakistan Horizon, and the Center for Asian Studies (University of Chittagong, Bangladesh) from Pakistani and Bangladeshi journals were also included.

In the Context of Geo-strategic Issues

Geopolitical relations between China, Bangladesh, and Pakistan are important for both China and Bangladesh and Pakistan. China's exports and imports will be facilitated by deep seaports, which will save time and billions of dollars in foreign currency. The economic relationship and strategic collaboration between China and the coastal countries are better than the engagement and strategic relations between India and the coastal countries.

1. Geo-strategic Relations with China-Bangladesh and China-Pakistan

1.1 In the Perspective of China-Bangladesh

Bangladesh may be of less interest from the economic and political point of view of China. But Bangladesh's Bay of Bengal should not be overlooked as its economic and commercial passageway. China has suggested the development of a deep seaport on Sonadia Island in the Bay of Bengal, taking into account the geostrategic importance of Bangladesh. But, because of India's objections, the project has not yet come into force. Japan has now come forward with a new plan for the development of a deep seaport in Matarbari, Cox's Bazar Bazar sub-district of Mahesh Khali. The contract for consulting services for the Matarbari Port construction project was awarded to Japan International Cooperation Agency in September 2020. The Roads and Highways Department (RHD) signed a contract with Oriental Consultants Global Company Ltd, and the Chittagong Port Authority signed a contract with Nippon Koei. At the moment, China is focusing on bombing the deep-sea blocks of Myanmar's seabed oil and gas. China is the biggest trading partner of Bangladesh and their co-operation towards the nation is in many spheres including, economic, infrastructure, technical and technological as well as military areas. So, if China instead of Japan is given opportunity and priority to develop in the field, the mutual understanding and co-operation between the countries will be stronger which will be



spreader to other areas in future, the long-term benefit of Bangladesh would be greater. The goal of China is to conquer the region, taking these two distinct points into account:

1.1.1 The term “string of pearls” refers to the geopolitical and economic importance of marine routes such as the Malacca Strait, the Lombok Strait, and the Hormuz Strait, as well as countries like the Maldives, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

1.1.2 The 21st Century Maritime Silk Path, which ties the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Silk Road Economic Belt with a shared aim of linking the Indian Ocean to the landlocked southern provinces of China. China may have easy access to the Bay of Bengal by building the string of pearls, which will be used for submarine navigation and military exercises. This might eventually counter the dominating maritime point of view at Coco Island in the northern Indian Ocean, which could constrain Indian navy operations geographically. The Maritime Silk Route might provide significant economic and commercial potential under China’s Belt and Road Initiative (Noor, 2019).

In the multimodal transport expansion, the China-Myanmar-Bangladesh tri-national highway stretches from Cox’s Bazar via the Balukhali-Gundhum border route to Kunming, the capital city of Yunnan in China. Economic activities within these countries can be encouraged by the Asian Highway and Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar (BCIM). China’s creation, unwittingly, paved the way for the US military presence in the area. NSA; India has suggested the establishment of a Maritime Security Partnership in the Bay, Bangladesh, as one of the two considered allies to tackle this non-regional armed presence. However, many academics claim that Bangladesh does not comply with India’s military alliance bid against China. For the socio-economic and infrastructural growth of Bangladesh, China is a significant region (Ahamed & Rahman, 2020).

1.2 In the Perspective of China-Pakistan

Pakistan and China established strategic ties after signing the 1963 Border Agreement, which was intended to counterbalance Indian and regional US influence. As a result, the Pakistan-China relationship is crucial because it allows China to restrict India’s aspirations to become a regional force, counterbalance the emerging US-India relationship, and strengthen its position against India. The United States wants to maintain its role as a regional leader, as shown by President Bush’s signing of the US-India Civilian Nuclear Deal in 2006. As a result, the United States is determined to keep its military presence in the area, especially in Afghanistan. She is enthralled by the possibility of establishing a “strategic” alliance with India in order to boost her regional supremacy and keep an eye on China’s entrance into the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea through Pakistan. In order to pursue her own time-honored antagonistic policy toward Pakistan, India received a comfortable umbrella. Despite their partnership in the war on terror, the US is exerting pressure on Pakistan to maintain its strategic policy, both openly and covertly. Furthermore, India’s Pakistan mania, hegemonic plans, and territorial tensions strengthened ties between Pakistan and China, order to check on India’s anti-Pakistan aspirations (Javaid & Javaid, 2016). The fall of the Soviet Union coincided with China’s opening up, providing chances for China to expand its economic reach in Central Asia, while the newly liberated Central Asian Republics (CARs) were worried about their own economic progress (Javaid & Javaid, 2016).

The strategic cooperation between China and Pakistan, which was formed to counteract Indian and regional US dominance, has opened up new economic and infrastructure development opportunities in the area. China’s point of view, regional strategy entailed building a synergy of cooperation with the CARs and neighboring states in order to promote joint development in trade and energy matters. In these circumstances,



Pakistan serves as a regional pillar for China and Central Asia, which can benefit from increasing trade, transportation, and energy links while also contributing to domestic growth in the region. This cooperation would also be of benefit to the region as a whole and to the small states, especially the energy-rich CARs. Pakistan has always endorsed its development policies and stopped the unrest of Uyghur-related militancy in Xinjiang province in order to meet China's strategic needs (Javaid & Javaid, 2016).

2. Geostrategic and Military Relations between China-Bangladesh and China-Pakistan

2.1 In the View of China-Bangladesh

Bangladesh is the second-largest importer of Chinese arms after Pakistan. Bangladeshi-Chinese links are advantageous to China. In the year 2019, Bangladesh's bilateral trade imbalance with China had increased by 1,600 percent in the previous 20 years, even as 25 percent of the overall imports from Bangladesh came from China. In addition, China offered Bangladesh financial support as well as loans at a cheaper interest rate than India. Furthermore, in order to satisfy Bangladesh's electrical needs, China has advocated developing the country's nuclear power facilities, which are vital to the country. China has waived charges for 97 percent of products manufactured in Bangladesh from 1 July 2020 onwards (Katoch, 2020).

The Bangladesh Awami League government, led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, has taken harsh action against terrorism and religious dogmatism and has actively engaged with India on the matter. When India asked, the Awami League government turned over a large number of suspected radicals. On the other hand, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government held anti-India extremist camps in Bangladeshi territory under the leadership of Khalida Zia, when the Bangladesh Armed Forces were practicing their own kind of 'cold start' into Indian terrain, which was to be continued for the first few days in the minor land strip linking India's Northeast India by insurgent-cum-radical organizations. There were Al Qaeda, (LeT) Lashkar-e-Taiba, and (ISI) Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence trainers in these terrorist camps (Ahamed & Rahman, 2020).

In terms of Bangladesh's strategic and military relationships with both India and China, several analysts agree that establishing a strategic and military alliance with China is far more powerful than forming one with India. There are no clear land boundaries or territorial disputes between China and Bangladesh. But with India, Bangladesh has geographical and maritime border disputes. Hence, relative to India, Bangladesh's military alliance with China is safer. That is, for Bangladesh, a strong ally for territorial disputes with India is more important. As the biggest and powerful neighbor country of Bangladesh, India's influence over it is in all spheres including economic, trade, geopolitics, border, security as well as military co-operation.

2.2 In the View of China-Pakistan

Ties between Pakistan and China do not share the novelty of the late 60s and 70s, but Pakistan retains significance as a credible foreign ally for China and a security consideration for China's southern and western periphery. The Chinese leadership has consistently informed Pakistan of the precise existence of Pak-China ties and that the growth of China's relations with India will not affect them. Li Zhaoxing, a former Chinese foreign minister, told his Pakistani counterpart, "Pakistan is the only country that can define our friendship as all-weather". Since both China and Pakistan have territorial disputes with their common counterpart India with which both the countries fought several times over territories, China and Pakistan have become closet allies against India and created economic, trade, technological and technical as well as military co-operation. It can be predicted that as far as their common interest is existence, their relation and co-operation will not be faded. In addition to its presence and support for a number of big defense, heavy, energy, nuclear,



and infrastructure projects, China remains Pakistan's nearest friendly nation and the most reliable provider of military hardware and technology. Pakistan's stability and territorial integrity have a definite interest to China. In the increasingly changing global power alignments and changes, this mutuality of interests gains vital significance (Mahmood, 2011).

Premier Wen Jiabao said, "China and Pakistan have always been, and will always be, good supports, good neighbors, good allies, and good associates". The illustrious past of Pak-China ties proves without a shadow of a doubt that this relationship is special, friction-free, time-tested, not only can it survive, but it has the capacity to grow stronger and broader, rooted in profound reciprocal confidence and trust, provided that, while maintaining a strong strategic relationship in the political and security fields, extended trade and investment, mutually beneficial economic cooperation, and increased citizen interaction. The focus would turn to international integration and an alliance for progress and development. And in this manner should we guarantee that this strong bond is carried on to the generations that follow.

Premier Wen Jiabao's latest highly successful visit to Pakistan offers a firm foundation for the path forward. The best metric to determine the progress of the Pakistan-China Friendship Year will be the way and pace at which the latest 275 agreements will be achieved! MOUs signed between the two nations are being adopted (Mahmood, 2011). There is no reason to suspect that the Friendship Year will be highly satisfying, bringing their bilateral relations to new heights, given the dedicated symbiotic strategic relationship between Pakistan and China that exists.

3. The Bay of Bengal and China's Geostrategic Interests

The Bay of Bengal is currently regarded as one of the geopolitical epicenters in the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean areas. Today, it is a major economic route as well as a strategic and military location. As the host of the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh is in the best position to take advantage of the squabbling and maneuvering for economic and political benefit. If Dhaka is interested in taking advantage of this, it would love it quickly (Ahamed & Rahman, 2020).

4. China-Pakistan Geostrategic Interests in the Persian Gulf

The importance of Pakistan's strategic geographical location has increased as China's demand for safe energy sources and commercial outlets for its Western areas, which are now the focus of its rapid growth drive, has risen. Indeed, Pakistan is located at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, and the other hand of China borders Central Asia, West Asia, and South Asia, which has the potential to become a major commercial, transportation, and energy crossroads. China's participation in the development of the port of Gwadar, situated 180 nautical miles from the Hormuz Strait, which transports 40% of the world's traded crude, as well as the upgrading of KKH, shows China's appreciation of the importance of Pakistan's relationship.



Figure 1 The Persian Gulf.

Source: <https://gulf2000.columbia.edu/gulfregion.html>

As one considers that the distance between China’s Xinjiang area and Karachi or Gwadar is just about 2,500 kilometers compared to China’s eastern seaboard’s distance of 4,500 kilometers, the potential viability of this gateway becomes clear. Pakistan and China have been increasingly aware that the scope of their bilateral economic and commercial relations, as well as people-to-people interaction, does not correspond to their close strategic political and security ties (Mahmood, 2011).

5. Naval Activity in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean by China

Some analysts raised concerns about China’s naval presence in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. They believe China’s naval strength would leverage the construction of a deep seaport for defensive and political objectives against India’s presence in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. Despite India’s insistence, Bangladesh is now attempting to entice global investors to develop a deep seaport in Cox’s Bazar rather than China (Brewster, 2014).



Figure 2 The Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean.

Source: <http://southasiajournal.net/the-global-pivot-significance-and-contestation-over-the-indian-ocean-region/>

Sri Lanka, however, is now seen by China as a possible strategic ally, and Chinese firms have made major investments. In attracting Chinese investment, Colombo is very involved in the country's socio-economic and infrastructural growth. Sri Lanka is one of the main partners of the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) project in China.

Sri Lanka provides China with strategic ties to the region as well. The Chinese government was invited to take over control of the current and expanded Phase II construction of the port of Hambantota in October 2014, and the port should be entirely used exclusively by the Chinese government.

Sri Lanka's government has also proposed training and the development of a military camp in northern Sri Lanka to help the country's military and air force. The visits of Chinese submarines to a new port in Colombo, built by China, in September and October 2014, according to several Indian scholars and commentators, have boosted the Chinese armed presence in Sri Lanka. "At first, the Sri Lankan government was reluctant to reveal China's military presence in the Indian Ocean, but it now intends to use China's military presence in the Indian Ocean to develop strategic relations with China" (Brewster, 2014). It's also true that India's imperialist foreign policy toward South Asian countries and the Bay of Bengal is substantially to blame for China's military presence in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean.

A large military presence in the area will have a significant impact on the defense dynamics of the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean. The geostrategic location of Sri Lanka is in the central Indian Ocean. The expanding security connections between China and Sri Lanka raise serious doubts about China's claim that the Maritime Silk Road (MSR) is just a commercial venture (Brewster, 2014). As a result, China has two

tactics in the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean: military and commercial. Furthermore, the nations of the Bay of Bengal will be able to enhance their economies by assisting and promoting China’s massive economy of US\$ 30 trillion, which is the world’s largest economy by Purchasing Power Parity (PPP). India lags far behind China in terms of economic potential and foreign currency reserves. Small nations in South Asia and the Bay of Bengal should strengthen their connections with China in order to benefit from Chinese foreign investment and development cooperation (Ahamed & Rahman, 2020).

6. The Port of Gwadar and Its Importance to China and Pakistan

Gwadar’s port will serve as the terminus of the New Silk Route, connecting Kashgar in China to a number of communication networks (Abid & Ashfaq, 2015). It plays a key role in the CPEC project along the Hormuz Strait, which accounts for about 40% of global oil production. “As a key shipping point, Gwadar has the potential to play a key role in ensuring China’s energy stability, as it offers a much shorter path from the Persian Gulf to China’s eastern seaboard via the Malacca Strait than the existing 12,900-kilometer route” (Chowdhury, 2013).

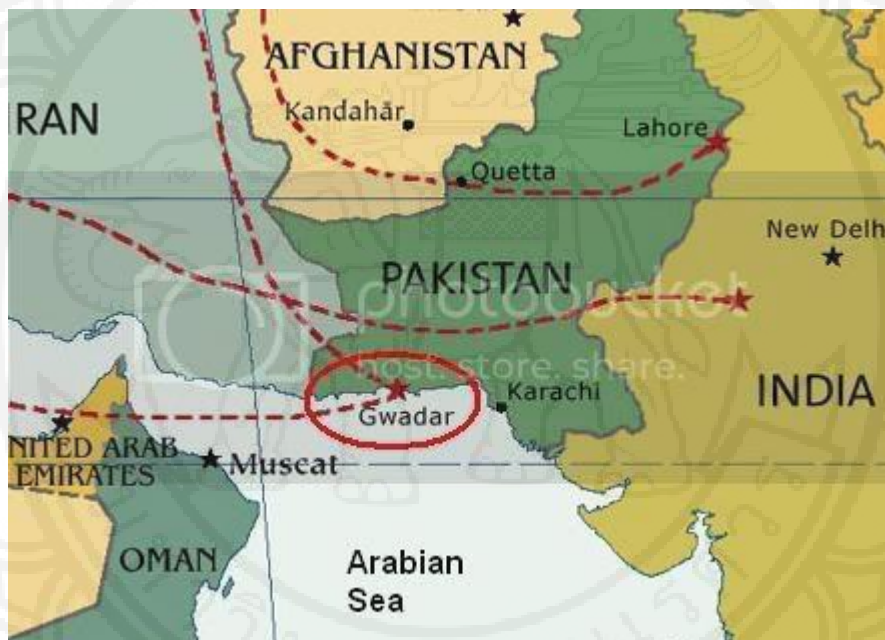


Figure 3 The Port of Gwadar.

Source: <https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2009/5/9/729750/>

The port will help Pakistan become a hub for “economic operation between the energy-rich states of the Gulf and Central Asia, Afghanistan, and China, as well as give the strategic scope of the Pakistan Navy as a naval base off its coast” (Zee News, 2013). Gwadar will also encourage China to broaden its influence in the Indian Ocean by extending its crude oil import routes.

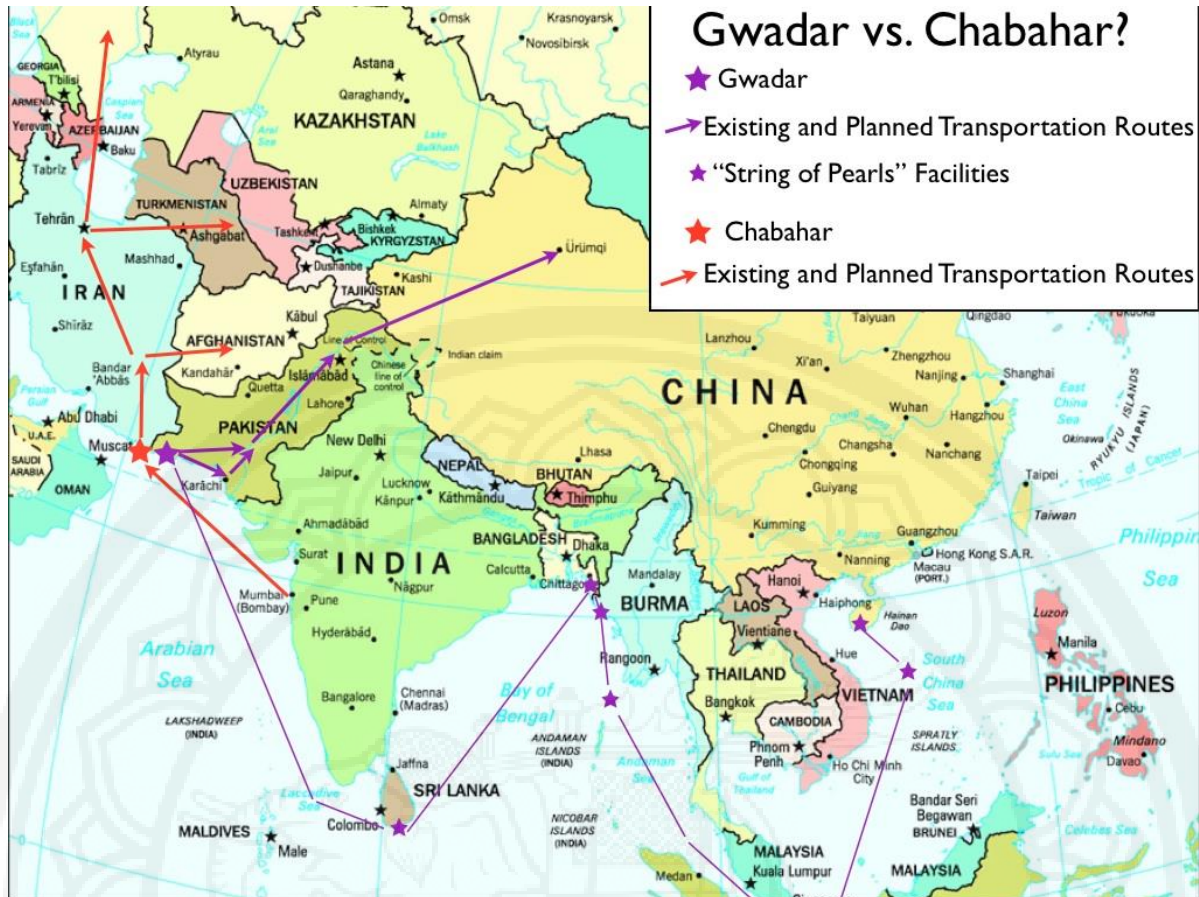


Figure 4 The Port of Gwadar vs the Port of Chabahar.

Source: <https://www.geocurrents.info/2011/05#gallery/13/>

As China makes imports of oil from a much shorter path, the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will serve as an energy corridor for the country. The CPEC also has a great deal of geostrategic importance and would place China and Pakistan in a strategic and profitable role in the Sea of Arabian, further exacerbating Indian worries.

India is investing in Iran's Chabahar port in order to challenge Gwadar. The port of Chabahar would allow India to reach the Arabian Sea from a new direction, as well as assist Afghanistan, which has developed strong and close ties with India (Javaid & Javaid, 2016).

7. Geo-strategic and Geo-economic Relations of China-Bangladesh

Most notably, in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Malaysia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Indonesia, there are already Chinese industrial parks in the Bay area. Overland and marine connectivity projects, as well as collaboration with the Bay's coastline nations, will strive to erase China's historic weakness in the Bay of Bengal region in response to the evolving geopolitical scenario, which the US has dubbed as a rebalancing to Asia. Beijing will be able to ensure its protection in the region as a result of this. Economic corridors and the maritime Silk Road will help these countries shape a growth triangle and support China's Western Development Policy in terms of reciprocal cooperation and development. The region's communication system and infrastructure have been weak for a long time, and the economy has grown slowly because the region is landlocked and far from China's center of development (Fan, 2011). Energy and products can be transported conveniently, on schedule, and at a cheap cost to and from China's southwestern area. These will strengthen the link between the Bay of Bengal and the



Chinese economy. Furthermore, Beijing has played a key role in the development of Myanmar's infrastructure, notably the recently completed oil and gas pipelines connecting Myanmar's new deep seaport of Kyaukpyu with China's Yunnan region. On 28 July 2013, a natural gas pipeline project began exporting gas to China. The 2,806-kilometer gas pipeline connects Ruili and Kunming, traversing through Guizhou and Guangxi provinces in the southwest (Liu, 2015).

The \$20 billion Kyaukpyu plan was also included in the project's 1,200 km rail and highway network (Ahamed & Rahman, 2020). Kyaukpyu's latest Sino-Myanmar pipeline, railway and highway ventures will decrease China's dependence on the Malacca Strait and diversify China's supply of oil and gas. New Delhi is concerned that Beijing's connectivity measures would put India's regional interests to the test, and that the projected BCIM Economic Corridor could undermine the country's national cohesiveness by integrating India's alienated northeastern states into the Chinese economy. It will mitigate uncertainties and enhance China's ability to contend with an evolving and volatile foreign climate (Uberoi, 2016).

India, on the other hand, is supporting the Trilateral Highway Project to construct road links from Delhi connects with Thailand via Bangladesh, India's north-eastern provinces, as well as Myanmar. The three countries officially agreed on the establishment of a trilateral India-Myanmar and Thailand highway in April 2012 at a meeting in Naypyidaw between their presidents. The goal of the project is to link the three countries by building a highway from Moreh, Manipur, to Mae Sot, Thailand, via Mandalay and Yangon, Myanmar. Although the project was launched at the end of 2013, new reports suggest that it will be finished by 2016. But several newspapers claimed in the summer of 2014 that 2017 could be a more optimistic timetable for completion (Ahamed & Rahman, 2020).

The progress towards the development of the trilateral highway project between the three nations, however, was uncertain. Due to the poor state of its eastern neighbors, ethnic insurgencies, and diplomatic disagreements over transportation rights, New Delhi's overland link project with Southeast Asia through the Bay of Bengal area is difficult to develop. However, in order to safeguard India's regional strategic position, it will place a greater focus on aligning its interests. India is also funding the renewal of maritime routes via the Bay of Bengal. Calcutta was the center of a busy intra-regional maritime network that linked India and the Bay's surrounding regions, as well as linking rivers like the Brahmaputra, Irrawaddy, and Brahmaputra, which are being linked together to allow direct access to more rural areas, until the 1940s.

In the decades after India, Pakistan, and Myanmar's freedom from colonial control, these relations withered away. Challenges have remained since the demarcation of these sovereign states' borders and the lack of engagement with them on the shipping road. India, on the other hand, is reviving traditional oceanic and river transport routes, which are far more convenient and cost-effective for intra-regional commerce. In October 2014, a trial service between Indian and Bangladeshi ports was launched by the Indian government-owned shipping company, which restored direct service between Rangoon, Chennai, and Colombo. For a long time, India has been exporting products and resources into its northeastern region via Bangladesh's river systems. Kaladan's Myanmar multimodal transportation projects were also completed. A maritime road will connect the ports of Kolkata, India, and Sittwe, Myanmar, as well as a train link between Sittwe and Lashio, which lies farther up the Kaladan River (Ahamed & Rahman, 2020).

Lashio would then be connected to India's Mizoram province by a road. In 2008, the two countries signed an agreement to carry out the initiative (Htun, Lwin, Naing, & Tun, 2011). The major goal was to



improve the connection between mainland India and the northeastern states by providing an alternative to the current sole route, the Siliguri corridor. India also wants its enterprises to engage in a proposed new port project near Chittagong, Bangladesh, which would help connect India's northeastern state of Tripura to the city by road and enable it to carry commodities to the city at a reasonable cost and in a timely manner (Islam, 2013). However, this corridor's efficiency is currently hindered by asymmetrical trade and transit networks, as well as disparities in legislation, procedures, and public engagement. The promise of developing integrated infrastructure for cross-border trade and people movement in the form of Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) on the Indian side of the Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan borders, for example, has not yet been fully realized. The lack of good coordination between the Union and the West Bengal State government is a major cause of this delay. The Initiative for Indian Connectivity Project will connect Southeast Asia and the larger Mekong region while at the same time reducing China's presence in the region.

Policy Recommendations for China, Bangladesh and Pakistan

Some steps have been taken to foster China-Bangladesh-Pakistan geostrategic and economic links, as well as to increase trade volume with the aim of improving socioeconomic and political ties. The following steps will substantially increase the level of trade while also raising the momentum of geo-strategic and economic relations:

In view of the above discussions, it is appropriate to take the following actions from China-Bangladesh's side:

1. Bangladesh wants its diplomatic relationship with China to be strengthened. Bangladesh should also look into a political framework for collaboration with China to overcome security issues that could endanger Bangladesh's interests. It also requires Bangladesh to follow the role of China in giving Asia political stability.
2. To ensure that China invests in the deep seaport of the world, Bangladesh could be persuaded. With Chinese collaboration, Bangladesh may also seek to boost the capability of the ports of Mongla and Chittagong.
3. China should take steps to ensure the stability of Bangladesh through the provision of military and technical assistance, so that regional peace in South Asia will ensure mutual benefits for both China and Bangladesh.

On the other hand, in view of the above discussions, it is appropriate to take the following actions from China-Pakistan's side:

1. Three criteria depend on the potential course of trade between Pakistan and China: Gwadar Port, CPEC and Central Asian Connectivity, with or without Afghanistan. Under a new economic system, the CPEC got the trade ball rolling, as China gave Pakistan US\$ 46 billion in packages and inked up to 51 mega projects. Much of this budget (\$ 36 billion) has been invested on the energy market and the rest on infrastructure development. Since the Gwadar Port and the CPEC are connected, they have built a contact connection in Pakistan.

2. A judgment based on the efficiency advantages and detrimental consequences of multipliers must be taken by the government. Prioritization of roads needs to be calculated on the basis of demographic growth (directly linked to population migration), roadside fertile ground, and lack of progress.

3. It must pay due attention to its geopolitical importance and its short- and long-term effects on Pakistan. As a result, the proposed land-to-sea trading route would make possible trade between the two countries smoother.

4. In order for income to function properly and be shared equally, accountability must be upheld. To resolve all CPEC-related disputes, the government must use the existing structures (Council for Shared Interest). The most important argument is that, since China is a project partner, all partners need to have a good view of Chinese needs.



Pakistan's economy will begin to stabilize as a powerful trading partner as China's economy continues to expand rapidly. The next trade deal between the two countries will be one-of-a-kind and thrilling. As a result, Pakistan will soon reap the rewards of these tight trade links.

Conclusion

The strategic direction of China's foreign policy agenda is to play an appropriate role, aligned with its own national interests, in global and regional affairs. Preventing and controlling regional disputes in a timely manner through improving regional cooperation are the goals of recent Chinese foreign policy. The Bay of Bengal is an important region, with easy access to the Indian Ocean, Myanmar, and Bangladesh, according to the report. China wants to develop Asian highways and deep seaports in Sonadia, Cox's Bazar, to provide a direct link between China and Bangladesh. Because of its geostrategic significance, the Bay of Bengal is equally important for China and India. Pakistan situated at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, lying astride China, South Asia, Central Asia, and West Asia, has the potential to become a crossroads for trade, transportation, and oil. Gwadar's port will serve as the terminus of the New Silk Route, connecting China's Kashgar to a number of communication networks. China's participation in the development of the port of Gwadar, 180 nautical miles from the Hormuz Strait, through which 40 percent of the world's traded oil moves, and the upgrading of KKH speak volumes about China's appreciation of Pakistan's significance. Pakistan and China are increasingly aware that the depth of their bilateral economic and commercial relations does not correlate to their strong strategic political and security ties. China wants to deter any ambitious regional or global force from establishing control over the Bay's coastal countries, where India, as a regional hegemon, poses a geopolitical challenge to many South Asian countries, including Bangladesh and Pakistan. The key policy of China is to strengthen relations with the Bay's coastal countries. China seeks to resolve its geostrategic and security weakness due to its geographic location and lack of physical connection with the Bay, while India seeks to preserve its dominant role in the region. As a result, in the sense of geostrategic perspective, Bangladesh and Pakistan are highly significant for China.

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