



STRENGTHENING MARITIME SECURITY TO UNLOCK GWADAR'S POTENTIAL

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Once a quiet coastal town, Gwadar is now a focal point of regional geopolitics, emerging as a gateway with the power to reshape trade & security in South and Central Asia. It is located just 400 kilometers from the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most important maritime chokepoints, through which nearly 20% of global oil commerce flows. Gwadar's deep-water port, built under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), puts it as a potential center connecting China's western provinces to the Arabian Sea, providing an alternate commercial route that avoids longer & riskier routes. Beyond business, Gwadar's position confers enormous geopolitical & strategic importance, giving it a focal point for regional maritime strategy and international attention.

Along with its tremendous trade potential strengthening Gwadar's maritime security is the foundation of its success. Data shows that more than 80% of trade commodities are transported by sea worldwide, therefore uninterrupted and secure sea routes are critical for stable trade & investor trust. Shipping lines, insurers, & investors are unlikely to commit to new routes or long-term infrastructure investments if they lack confidence in marine security. Robust security thus supports not only the physical flow of products, but also the political and economic stability that attracts capital and produces jobs.

However, Gwadar's security situation cannot be separated from the broader realities of Balochistan. Long-standing economic marginalization, local discontent, and the presence of separatist militant groups such as the Balochistan Liberation Army collectively undermine the port's security & stability. These elements elevate security risks beyond normal port operations & complicate the establishment of a secure maritime environment. Incidents such as the 2024 militant attack on the Gwadar Port Authority Complex highlight how these threats can quickly translate into direct disruptions to port functionality & local confidence.

Therefore, it is essential to have effective maritime security frameworks, such as naval patrols, coastal surveillance systems, & increased law enforcement capability. To address the underlying causes of instability, studies suggest integrated security strategies that combine better coordination between military, naval, & civilian agencies with funding for local community development.



In Gwadar, the intense focus on security, through heavy militarization & checkpoints, has paradoxically hindered civilian economic activity & alienated local communities by restricting access to traditional livelihoods like fishing.

Although the port is facing challenges but things are improving in positive direction with the help of China's cooperation. Its involvement in Pakistan through CPEC has resulted in significant investments in a region which was historically neglected. While security issues exist, China has stressed development as the cornerstone of long-term peace. Infrastructure developments, port expansions, and energy investments are intended to benefit not only international trade but also local communities by creating jobs and long-term economic possibilities. Prioritizing development over coercion, China emphasizes stability through inclusive growth, stronger economic links, and empowerment of local communities. This approach combines infrastructure, investment, and skills-building & reflects China's proven model of fostering long-term growth and sustainable peace.

At the international level, China's presence in Gwadar has encouraged Pakistan to strengthen its economic diplomacy & regional connectivity. While external powers may perceive the port as a source of strategic competition, China has frequently expressed a willingness to engage in multilateral cooperation, inclusive commerce, & regional engagement in the Indian Ocean. China's involvement in Gwadar, which prioritizes development over military & partnership over confrontation, provides a constructive road to regional stability based on shared progress, mutual benefit, & long-term peace.

Moreover, Under the CPEC, large-scale investments have been directed toward highways, energy infrastructure, airports, & special economic zones, with estimating total commitments in the tens of billions of dollars. Projects such as the new Gwadar International Airport, financed primarily by China, & the Eastbay Expressway connecting the port to Pakistan's national road network reflect a strategic effort to position Gwadar as a regional connectivity hub.

If Gwadar has to play a significant role in regional stability, it must serve not only as an economic hub but also as a source of tangible benefits to the local residents. Projects like the Pak-China Friendship Hospital, financed by China, demonstrate this potential.



The facility, which spans 68 acres, the hospital provides modern healthcare services free of cost & has treated hundreds of thousands of patients, significantly improving access in a region that was long undeserved. Such initiatives show how strategic cooperation may immediately improve quality of life and public trust in development programs.

Beyond healthcare, local participation must encompass economic prospects. Job creation, skill training, and equitable revenue sharing are important to ensuring that the Baloch community benefits directly from Gwadar's expansion. When communities see genuine opportunity rather than exclusion, security benefits become more lasting, and Gwadar's potential as a stabilizing economic corridor will be strengthened. China's active contributions to healthcare & livelihoods set a constructive example, demonstrating that infrastructure development, when combined with inclusive policies, can promote both prosperity & regional stability.

Gwadar's development is closely linked to larger geopolitical factors, but China's engagement in this process represents a long-term vision focused on connectivity, economic growth, & regional stability. Rather than seeing Gwadar as a zero-sum strategic asset, China has always positioned the port as part of a broader framework of cooperation under the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI), which seeks to connect regions through trade, infrastructure, & shared prosperity.

At the regional level, Gwadar is frequently compared to other ports, such as Iran's Chabahar, but China's approach has focused less on rivalry & more on improving structural weaknesses in global trade. China seeks to strengthen supply-chain resilience & assure the smooth flow of commerce across Asia, the Middle East, and beyond by promoting alternate maritime & land-based routes. This policy, particularly China's efforts to minimize its reliance on the Malacca Strait, promotes overall maritime stability & supports regional economies that rely on uninterrupted trade.

Gwadar's emergence as a strategic maritime hub highlights the transformative potential of China's Belt and Road Initiative, demonstrating that economic growth, security, and regional stability can advance hand in hand when guided by inclusive planning.



China's sustained investment in port infrastructure, energy projects, and local development reflects a long-term commitment to creating opportunities for both trade and community empowerment. True stability in the region will not come from militarization or competition alone, but from policies that integrate local populations, ensure transparent governance, and foster multilateral cooperation across the Indian Ocean.

By prioritizing development alongside security, China has set a model for how strategic infrastructure can deliver tangible benefits while reducing friction among regional stakeholders. Looking forward, continued Chinese engagement, coupled with broader regional collaboration, can turn Gwadar into a lasting engine of prosperity, a symbol of shared growth, and a cornerstone for sustainable peace in South Asia.