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The Impact of CPEC on the people of Balochistan

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Voice of Baloch Missing Persons and The Unrepresented Peoples and Nations Organisation

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Executive Summary

China and other world powers have long coveted the strategic location of Gwadar Port in Pakistan, as it provides them with an unobstructed route to the Indian Ocean. This has allowed China to potentially establish naval bases along the coasts of Balochistan, which would offer access to secure refueling, replenishing, and crucial ship repairs. Moreover, the development of Gwadar would enable China to compete directly against India's Chabahar port in Iran. However, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which aims to establish a network of transportation and energy infrastructure, has faced criticism for failing to involve local communities, particularly the indigenous Baloch people, in the democratic-making process. This has resulted in neglect and state-sponsored oppression of the Baloch community.

Despite promises of social, economic, and educational development, the Baloch people find themselves restricted in movement and lacking basic facilities, while relocated residents remain unpaid for the acquisition of their lands and damages to their homes caused by the construction of the CPEC project under the direct supervision of Pakistan military forces. The government of Pakistan has also decorated the coastline of Balochistan with security checkpoints and fenced-off beaches, directly impacting the livelihoods of local fishermen. Additionally, the Baloch people have raised concerns about healthcare, electricity, clean drinking water, and unequal treatment.

In response to protests and demonstrations, the government of Pakistan has adopted a draconian law, Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, which permits banning rallies and protests of all kinds, resulting in the detainment of over 100 supporters of the movement. This has worsened the human rights conditions of the Baloch people, as the blanket ban on all public gatherings has a chilling effect on freedom of expression and assembly, and protestors continue to be met with brutal force by Pakistan authorities. Furthermore, Gwadar remains cut off from the outside world, as information is blocked, including internet service, mobile phone networks, and landlines in Makran cities. UNPO members and those on the ground have provided information on these critical issues, which will be highlighted in this report.

Introduction

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a multi-billion-dollar infrastructure and development project that aims to connect Gwadar port in southwestern Pakistan to China's northwestern region of Xinjiang, through a network of highways, railways, and pipelines. The project is hailed as a game-changer for Pakistan's economy, as it is expected to improve the country's transportation infrastructure, create jobs, and boost economic growth. The project is also seen as a crucial component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which seeks to

expand China's influence globally by investing in infrastructure and development projects in partner countries.

However, the CPEC project has also been met with strong opposition from the Baloch people, who view it as a tool for exploitation and repression. The Baloch people are the indigenous inhabitants of Balochistan, which is the largest province in Pakistan in terms of land area, spanning over 44% of the country's total landmass. Despite being rich in natural resources, including minerals, oil, and gas, Balochistan remains the poorest province in Pakistan, with high levels of poverty and unemployment.

The Baloch people have long-standing grievances against the Pakistani state over the denial of their basic human rights, including political and economic marginalization, discrimination, and state-sponsored violence. The CPEC project has only intensified these grievances and has resulted in numerous human rights violations against the Baloch people, including forced evictions, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and repression of freedom of speech and assembly. The project has also led to environmental degradation, loss of livelihoods, and changes in the demographic composition of the region, which has further fuelled resentment among the Baloch people.

As of May 2023, Baluchistan has witnessed the deployment of army forces by the federal government, with approval from the Federal cabinet.[1] This deployment is expected to assist the civil administration in conducting targeted operations against dissenting voices in the Baloch community. However, there are concerns that this military presence may indicate the initiation of a large-scale operation in cooperation with China for the advancement of the controversial CPEC project.

This report seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project, including its impact on the Baloch people and the local economy. It will examine various issues associated with the project, such as land grabbing, displacement of local communities, militarization of land, environmental issues, and major human rights violations like enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and brutal crackdowns on civil dissent by the Baloch people. The report will also present how the CPEC project has influenced Pakistan's domestic and foreign policy, economy, and debt trap issues. Furthermore, the report will emphasize the critical issue of the lack of consultation and participation from local Baloch communities in the development of the CPEC project.

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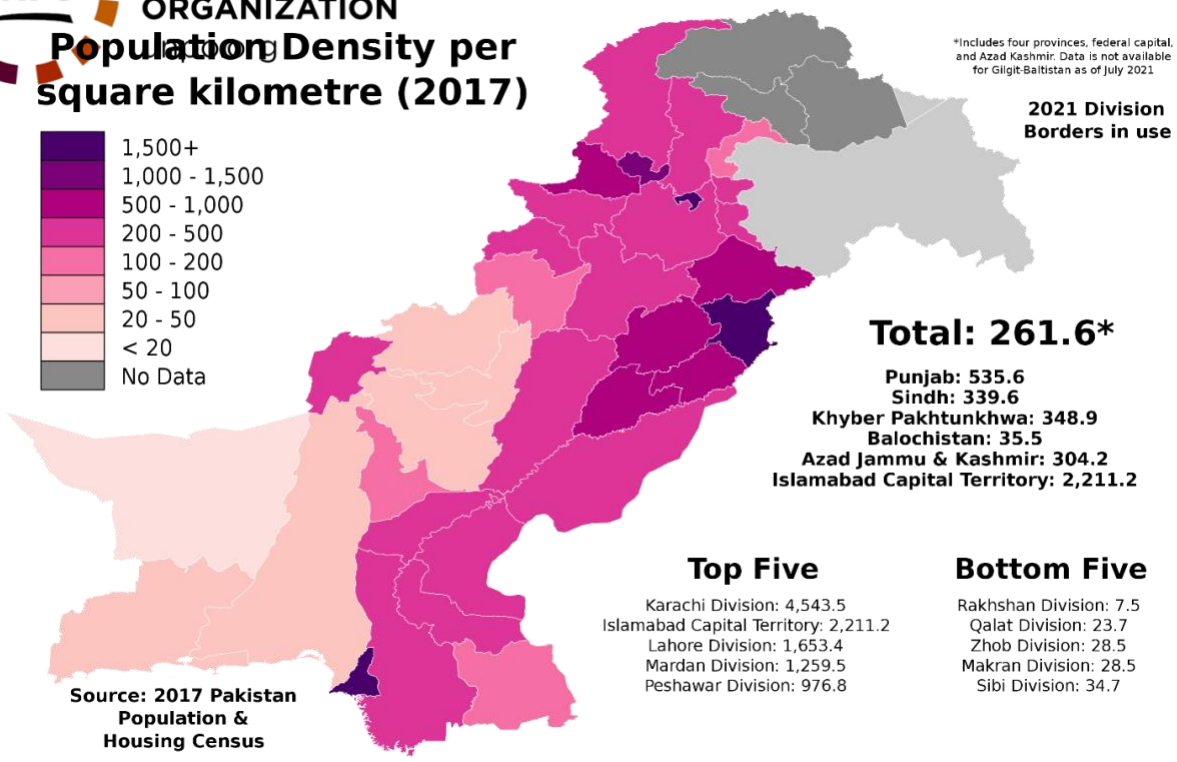
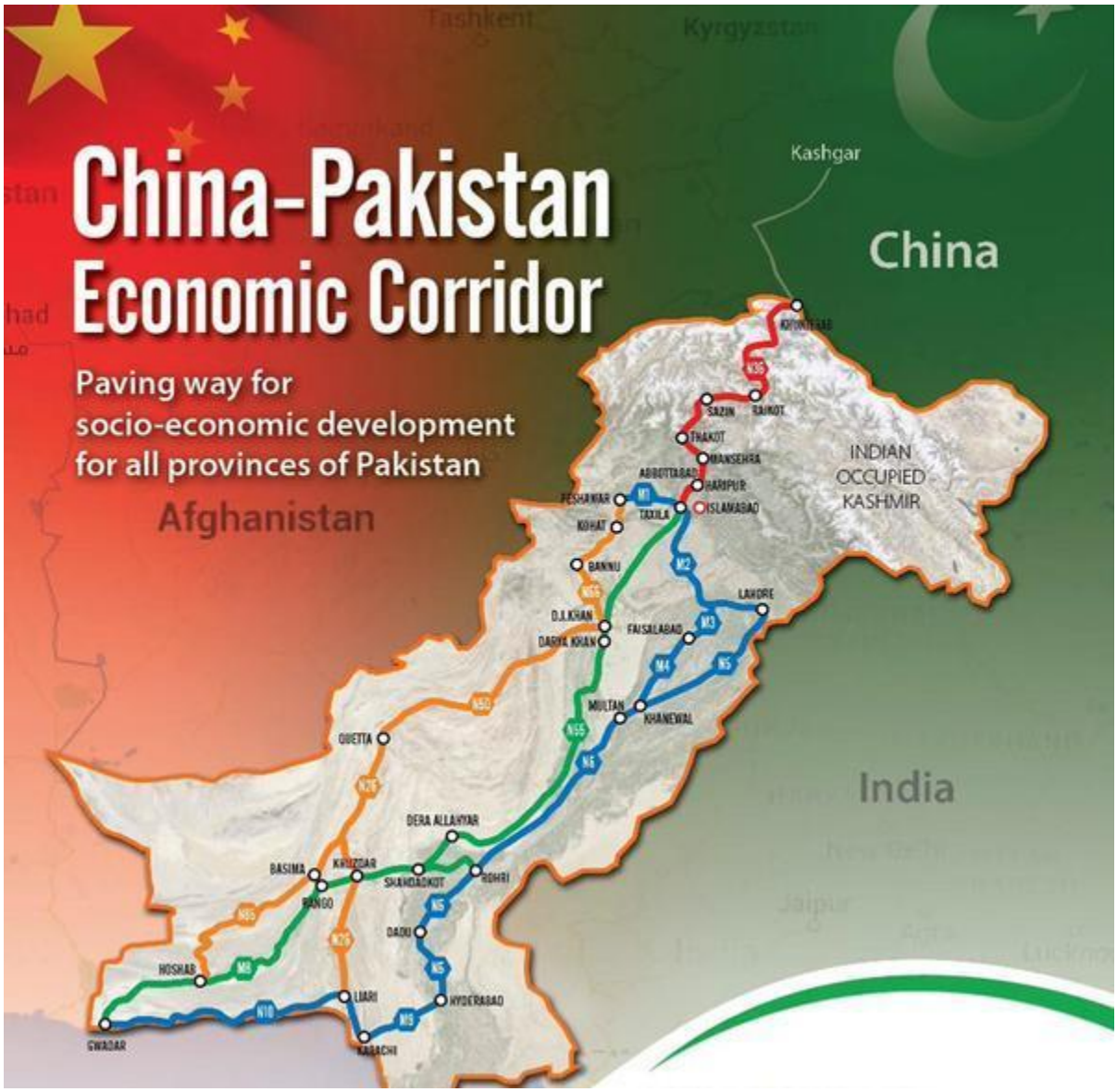
Population Density per square kilometre (2017)



1. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor



The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a major infrastructure project that aims to connect China's western Xinjiang region with the Pakistani port of Gwadar through a network of transportation and energy infrastructure. The project is part of China's larger Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to create an overland "belt" and a maritime "road" connecting China with the rest of Asia, Europe, and Africa.

The CPEC includes plans for the construction of power stations, ports, dams, transmission lines, roads, and fibre optic cables, as well as the establishment of special economic zones along the entire length of the corridor. The project is expected to provide China with access to the Indian Ocean through the port of Gwadar, which is strategically located near the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman.

Importantly, the project violates international law as its route cuts through the UN-declared disputed territory of Gilgit-Baltistan.

CPEC has been described as a "game-changer" for Pakistan's economy, as it promises to create thousands of jobs, boost trade, and attract foreign investment.[2] The project is valued at $62 billion, and in terms of funding , it is estimated “80% of Chinese spending is in the form of loans at or near commercial rates. Only 12% of the money China is giving Pakistan is in grants that do not need to be repaid.”[3]

The project has faced criticism, however, for a number of reasons, especially regarding China's impact on Pakistan's economic future, its foreign and domestic policies, the geopolitical implications, and the community's negative consequences for indigenous people whose lands intersect with the CPEC projects.

Restricting Pakistan’s Economy

However despite promises of economic improvement for Pakistan, since its announcement in 2013, there has been no observed economic boost.[4] Additionally, there are concerns that the CPEC may limit Pakistan's economic flexibility and harm its domestic industries. The CPEC involves the establishment of special economic zones where Chinese companies will receive tax incentives, land at subsidized rates, and other benefits. This could lead to Chinese companies competing with local industries and potentially displacing them. Furthermore, the establishment of these special economic zones may create a situation where Pakistan becomes overly reliant on Chinese investment and exports, which could harm its domestic industries in the long run.

Moreover, the CPEC is largely focused on infrastructure development, such as the construction of power stations, ports, and highways. While this may create short-term jobs and stimulate economic activity in certain regions, it may not necessarily lead to the development of sustainable industries or the growth of the domestic manufacturing sector.[5]

Moreover, there are risks of restricting Pakistan’s ability to respond to external events. For example, Pakistan was unable to respond in the way it needed to during the Covid-19 pandemic because of its CPEC commitments.[6]

Debt Trap Problem

The BRI has been gaining increasing attention in recent years for the manner in which China’s debt financing has led to a “debt trap" for client states.[7] Through CPEC, it is observed that China utilises its financial muscle to gain political and economic leverage over Pakistan and other countries in the region, by providing them with loans for infrastructure projects that they are unlikely to be able to repay, thereby increasing their dependence on China.

According to the International Monetary Fund, Pakistan's external debt increased by around $18 billion from mid-2016 to mid-2020, with a large portion of this increase attributed to CPEC-related borrowing from China.[8] The report notes that "CPEC-related outflows are expected to rise sharply in the coming years" and warns of the potential for "debt distress" in Pakistan if the country is unable to repay these loans.

The Center for Global Policy (CGP) also points out that the terms of the loans provided by China for CPEC projects are often unfavourable to Pakistan – "most of the loans to Pakistan

under CPEC are at interest rates much higher than the rates on international loans, and the repayment period is much shorter."[9] This, in turn, raises concerns about Pakistan's ability to repay these loans. Furthermore, there are also concerns about the lack of transparency, particularly in relation to the terms of the loans and the costs of the projects. The CGP report notes that "the lack of transparency in CPEC projects makes it difficult to assess their true costs and benefits."[10]

Influence on Domestic and Foreign Policy

BRI-related contracts have also been found to create the conditions through which China is capable of controlling "debtors' domestic and foreign policies"[11] and to effectively "politically subjugate states."[12] One manifestation of this political subjugation can be seen in Pakistan's recent actions in Gilgit-Baltistan (Pakistan-controlled Kashmir). The route of the corridor passes through several areas that are internationally recognized as being part of the disputed region. This has led to concerns that the CPEC could exacerbate tensions between India and Pakistan, and could potentially escalate the long-standing territorial dispute.

Indeed, despite the fact that Pakistan has been instructed to withdraw from the region pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 47, China has pushed Pakistan to make Gilgit-Baltistan its fifth province in order to settle Chinese apprehension of implementing and investing through the disputed territory.[13] Thus, in 2019, the Supreme Court of Pakistan extended its jurisdiction to Gilgit-Baltistan, and in November 2020, the Prime Minister of Pakistan promised to grant provisional provincial status to the region.[14]

Lack of Consultation and Participation from Local Communities

The CPEC has also resulted in a shift in decision-making power away from local communities, , particularly the Baloch, leaving them unable to participate in the decision-making process or provide their consent to infrastructure projects.

The CPEC project is also criticised for failing to involve the local community, particularly the Baloch, in the democratic decision-making process. The Baloch have repeatedly expressed concerns about the project and lack of benefit to their region. The lack of consultation and participation from local communities has led to protests and violence in the region and highly disproportionately violent responses from the authorities (see below freedom of assembly section).

This has led to adverse consequences for indigenous communities living in areas where CPEC projects are being carried out, and the "debt trap" associated with the BRI has prevented democratic accountability and effective responses to these negative impacts.

Further manifestations of this political subjugation related to the diminution of respect for minority and indigenous rights in Pakistan are set out in further detail the following sections.

2. The Gwadar Port Developments

Gwadar Port which is in Makran division (District kech) of the Southwestern Pakistan province of Balochistan, is the largest deep seaport in the world. Located on the southwestern Arabian Sea along the coastline of Balochistan, It features majorly in the CPEC. Gwadar has 620 Kilometres of coastline along the Arabian Sea. The most significant feature of the Gwadar District is Gwadar Port, a deep-sea warm water port. It is located on the eastern bay of a natural hammerhead protrusion of land from the coast, distended into the apex of the Arabian Sea. The port has a unique geographic location as it is located at the crossroads of international sea shipping lanes that pass through the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, and the Suez Canal. Gwadar has a population of 297,000, according to the census 2017,

The Baloch people, a historically oppressed minority in the Southern-western province of Pakistan who have long suffered from gross human rights violations by Pakistani security forces, find the expansion of the Gwadar Port within the CPEC development particularly unsettling. CPEC's presence in this already volatile context places an additional burden on the region, further marginalizing the Baloch people from the decision-making process about the fate of their homeland and depriving them of institutional mechanisms to address their grievances.

The Baloch people's current concerns about CPEC's plans for the Gwadar port are rooted in the region's troubled history with the Pakistani state. Back in August 1947, the Khan of Kalat declared Balochistan's independence from Pakistan one day after the country's formation. However, the Pakistani leadership rejected the declaration and incorporated the region nine months later. Since then, the prevailing sentiment in Balochistan is that their province was coerced by the British and forcibly merged with Pakistan. This has resulted in persistent insurgencies against the central government, leading to significant conflicts in 1948, 1958, and 1962.

Prior to CPEC, the Baloch people felt a strong sense of deprivation due to other Chinese-run projects like Saindak, which have been implemented despite reservations from the Baloch Nation. The Saindak copper and gold project, which started in 2001, was leased to China in 2002 for ten years and has since been renewed twice, in 2012 and 2017. Recently, Pakistani authorities have extended the lease for an additional 15 years, hoping it will bring in a $45 million investment to the country. The mine holds an estimated 412 million tons of copper and gold reserves, and the Pakistani government claims to have earned $2 billion through the project between 2002 and 2017. Despite this, Chaghi, the district where the project is centered, remains one of the poorest districts in Balochistan, which is already the most underdeveloped province in Pakistan. China receives 60% of the revenue, the federal government gets 38%, and only 2% is returned to Balochistan, further exacerbating the sense of deprivation felt by the Baloch people.

These same sentiments of exploitation now apply to Gwadar Port, the terminus of CPEC. Baloch nationalists contend that Chinese companies and the Pakistani central government are taking a more significant share of Gwadar port and associated projects. The Baloch claim that the contracts have been given to non-Baloch firms and that most of the labour employed on these projects is non-Baloch. Once again, there is a strong sense that a natural advantage given to Balochistan is being usurped and exploited by outsiders, whether Punjabis or Chinese. The Project is implemented through land acquisitions under the direct supervision of the Pakistan Army.

Saindak in the era of so-called development

Saindak copper-gold project

Development of the Gwadar Port

In the late 1950s, the government of Pakistan first identified the need for a deep-sea port on the country's southwestern coast to facilitate trade with the Middle East and Africa. The site for the port was initially identified at the nearby town of Jiwani, but this plan was abandoned due to geological and logistical challenges. In the 1970s, the government of Pakistan renewed its efforts to develop a deep-sea port on the southwestern coast, and Gwadar was identified as the new site for the port. However, political instability and a lack of funding prevented any significant progress from being made.

In 2001, the government of Pakistan signed a memorandum of understanding with China to develop Gwadar port. Under this agreement, China was to provide technical and financial assistance for the construction and operation of the port, with the goal of creating a new trade route to the Middle East and Europe. In 2002, the Gwadar Port Authority was established to oversee the development of the port.

Phase 1 of the port reportedly cost US$240 million – with only 50 million of this being supplied by Pakistan and the rest, by China – and was completed in December 2005. It has given the port capacity to handle bulk carriers of up to 50,000 DWT (dead weight tonnes) and container ships of up to 25,000. Phase 2 envisaged the construction of several additional berths of 300 metres and two piers

In 2007, the port was handed over to the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA) on a 40-year lease. PSA was responsible for the operation and maintenance of the port, as well as marketing the port to potential customers. . However, the company failed to develop the port as agreed, losing control over the operations. In February 2013, an MoU transferring the rights to the Chinese state-run company China Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC) was signed, granting China 40 year of control over the port.[15]

Since then, COPHC has invested heavily in the development of Gwadar port and the associated free trade zone. In 2019, it announced plans to invest an additional $500 million in the port and its infrastructure over the next five years.

The scope of Beijing's influence on the development of Gwadar extends beyond the port's commercial operations and includes plans for the surrounding areas. This approach follows the "Port-Park-City" model often used in Chinese overseas development initiatives.[16] The "Port-Park-City" development model is a common approach used by China in its overseas development projects, and it suggests that the construction of a port will be followed by the establishment of a Chinese industrial park, which will then lead to the creation of a Chinese-style city in a foreign state. In Gwadar, CPIC has received approval for several construction projects to develop a "Dubai-esque" international Port City that includes a financial district, an airport, a $265 million luxury golf resort, and a $150 million gated community for 500,000 Chinese professionals. It is even predicted that by 2048, the Chinese population in Gwadar will surpass that of the Baloch people.[17]

Recent Developments and Current Status

In March 2021, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan inaugurated the Gwadar Free Zone, which is part of the larger China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. The free zone spans over 2300 acres and is expected to attract foreign investment and create job opportunities in the region. Additionally, in August 2021, the Balochistan government announced a plan to establish a tourism zone in Gwadar, which will include the development of luxury resorts and facilities. The project is aimed at promoting tourism in the region and creating job opportunities for the local population.

In December 2021, Pakistan and China signed an agreement to establish a joint working group on the Gwadar Port. The group will be responsible for coordinating the development and operations of the port and ensuring that it remains a key hub for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).[18]

In January 2022, the Pakistan Navy assumed control of the Gwadar Port from the Gwadar Port Authority. The move was aimed at enhancing security at the port and ensuring its smooth operation.[19]

In April 2022, it was announced that the Chinese government had approved a loan of $1.2 billion for the construction of a new international airport in Gwadar. The airport is expected to boost economic activity in the region and facilitate tourism.[20]

These development projects in Gwadar and the wider CPEC project raise major concerns over their impact on the Balochi people, particularly regarding land grabbing, displacement of local communities, the environment, and militarisation of land.

GWADAR PROJECTS

#	Project Name	Cost In USD Million	COD/STATUS
1.	Gwadar EastBay Expressway (Interest Free Loan) (17Km)	160	• October, 2020
2.	New Gwadar International Airport (Grant)	230	• Groundbreaking done by PM on March 29, 2019
3.	Technical and Vocational Institute at Gwadar (Grant)	10	• Implementation minutes signed on March 29, 2019 • Level of effort (LOE) between Economic Affairs Division (EAD) and Chinese Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) signed in April 2018
4.	Pak China Friendship Hospital (Grant)	100	• Implementation minutes signed on March 29, 2019 • LOE between EAD and MOFCOM signed in April 2018.
5.	Gwadar Smart Port City Master Plan (Grant)	4	• June 2019
6.	Development of Free Zone (Grant)	32	• First phase completed and inaugurated in January 2018
7.	Provision of Fresh Water (Grant)	114	• PC-I for 5 MGD RO plant for Gwadar cleared by CDWP • Phase-1, laying of pipelines from Swad Dam to Gwadar, is near completion • Desalination plant establishment on BOT is floated • 200,000 gallons being provisioned to the city through port desalination plant • 50,000 gallon project will be done through socio-economic grant
8.	Construction of Breakwaters		• Draft business plan has been received from Chinese (COPHCL), under review by MoP&S and GPA
9.	Dredging of Berthing Areas and Channels		• Draft business plan received from Chinese (COPHCL), under review by Ministry of Ports and Shipping and Gwadar Port Authority • Draft MoU for joint technical and commercial feasibility has also been prepared and being vetted by concerned ministries

3. The Gwadar Port's Impacts on the Balochi People

Crucially, the Baloch people view the CPEC initiative not as a chance for economic and social development, but as a means of increased neglect and oppression. The Pakistani military, instead of addressing the Baloch's long-standing grievances, has chosen to enforce state control through force. CPEC has come to exacerbate frustrations among the local population, who already perceive exploitation by the central government and have experienced authorities' suppression of dissent, fuelling the ongoing insurgency and worsening an already fragile political environment.

The complaints of the Balochi people towards the Pakistani state are very much justified due to the mismanagement of infrastructure and unequal allocation of federal resources by authorities in Islamabad. Balochistan, which comprises 40% of the country's landmass, has the lowest population density of 12 million inhabitants. Despite being rich in energy and mineral resources, the province is the least industrialized and has the lowest literacy rates and highest levels of multidimensional poverty.

Illegal Land Grabbing from Pakistan Government

These acquisitions have been without proper compensation and sometimes even without the consent of their rightful owners. The usurped land is rented out further with 'land rights' to the Chinese enterprises. The government officials and their associates had taken away most of Gwadarites' lands by different tactics. Such as covert transfer of possession to unknown and irrelevant people, showing inaccurate area-wise details of lands in the government's record. Many such properties have been expropriated from the locals by the port authorities regulated under the federal and provincial governments and security agencies like Pakistan

navy, Coast Guards, and Rangers. Along with a handful of State Collaborators, they have occupied large tracts of coastal lands, lagoons, and foreshore. At the same time, the entire coastal belt of Balochistan (700km) is decorated with security checkpoints and fenced beaches. It violates the land and sea rights of the fisherfolk of Balochistan.

A cabinet committee on Pakistan's CPEC project has surrendered 20 acres of prime land in the port city of Gwadar in favor of its Navy after they refused to vacate the land citing "security reasons". Besides this, the CPEC committee again told Pakistan Navy to vacate another 52 acres of land on 12 February 2022.[21]

According to the defense ministry, the Balochistan government has agreed to allocate 1,407 acres to the federal government for the establishment of a cantonment by the army in Gwadar. “In compliance with the directive of the president and prime minister of Pakistan, a proposal to establish a new cantonment in the coastal area of Balochistan (Gwadar) is under process.”, the government of Balochistan was requested to transfer provincial government land measuring 1,407 acres, three rods and 24 poles to the federal government for use by Pakistan Army. The provincial government of Balochistan has agreed, in principle, to transfer the said land to the federal government.

The land-grabbing policy of Military establishment started in 2003, and still, it continues the land of indigenous people is turning soon to a Military Cantonment. On 2003 May 26, Pakistan Navy had been illegally occupying 1,834 acres in Gwadar, impeding work on extension projects, Ex-Minister for Ports, and Shipping Babar Khan Gauri.

For this reason, the army land grabs have been brought to the international community's notice by the judiciary of Pakistan itself. In April 2021, the Lahore High Court Chief Justice Mohammad Qassim Khan went on record to say that “the Army seems to have become the biggest land grabber in the country and. the uniform of the Army is for service and not to rule as a king.”[22]

Furthermore, the Military establishment engaged in fencing Gwadar in the name of Security to Gwadar or Gwadar Safe city in the month of December 2020, which gauges the sentiments of Baloch. On December 27, 2020, the people of Gwadar city and those from the surrounding areas, including Ormara, Jiwani, and Pishukan, gathered in Gwadar city to protest the fencing of Gwadar.

Displacement of local people

Directly related to this is the issue of the mass displacement of the local population in Gwadar, as a large number of foreign individuals, mostly Chinese, are expected to settle in the area.[23] While the "special economic zones" are incentivizing Chinese citizens to move to Gwadar with tax breaks, the Baloch people are being forced out of the region. Many of the residents who have been displaced are still waiting for compensation for the acquisition of their lands and damages to their homes caused by the construction of the CPEC project. The sudden demographic change is causing concerns among the Baloch people, as they fear becoming a minority in their own province, which could further diminish their already limited political power.

Militarization of Land

TO enforce the abovementioned issues of land grabbing and displacement, the government of Pakistan has deployed military forces to secure the area, leading to major concerns around increasing militarisation of the Gwadar Port. The increased military presence at the port has raised alarm among the Baloch people, who believe that the Pakistani military is using CPEC and the port as an excuse to exert more control over the province. Moreover, the Pakistani government has installed security checkpoints and fenced off beaches along the Balochistan coastline, directly affecting the livelihoods of local fishermen. The intensification of military presence in Balochistan creates a dangerous and violent cycle.

Local Economy and Employment Opportunities

While the project promised to bring significant investment and infrastructure development to the region, which could potentially create new jobs and boost economic growth, as seen above, the reality is far to the contrary. There are major concerns that the benefits of these investments may not reach the local population, and that the influx of foreign workers and businesses could actually harm the local economy in the long run. For example, many of the jobs created by the CPEC project may require specialized skills that are not available locally, which could mean that the majority of jobs go to Chinese workers or workers from other regions of Pakistan. This would exacerbate the existing unemployment problem in Balochistan and further marginalize the local population.

Additionally, the development of Gwadar as a major hub for trade and commerce could also negatively impact traditional industries in the region, such as agriculture and fishing, which are already struggling due to a lack of infrastructure and investment. The displacement of local populations from their land could also have significant economic consequences, particularly for those who rely on their land for their livelihoods.

Chinese Fishing Trawlers and Local Fishermen in Balochistan

Indeed, Parliamentary Committee on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), under the Chairmanship of Mr. Sher Ali Arbab, MNA, paid an on-site visit to the projects at Gwadar on 21st March 2021. The Committee was given a detailed on-site briefing regarding various ongoing projects at Gwadar under the CPEC framework. The Committee heard the issues of local people, analyzed ground realities, and gave assurances to local people to resolve all their outstanding issues as early as possible. Locals were of the view that Gwadar used to be a fishing village, and fishing had been a potential source of income for the fishermen's community. However, they are facing the issue of scarcity of boats and resources to meet both ends.

Protests against CPEC in Gwadar have recently focused on the exploitation of fish resources by Chinese trawlers. Many local fishermen left their fishing spots when the Gwadar port was built, hoping for better prospects. However, the federal government granted fishing

permission to Chinese fishermen, causing widespread unrest. A 28-day sit-in was held in 2021, with many men, women, and children participating. The participants accused the government of working with Chinese authorities, claiming that people in Gwadar were losing jobs due to CPEC. They protested against the hegemonic designs of the center, claiming that Chinese fishermen were exploiting fish resources at the expense of locals. Although the protest was initially against the government's permission for Chinese trawlers to fish, other concerns, including the lack of basic facilities, were also raised. The fisherfolk of Balochistan, known locally as Med, are indigenous to the Makran region, with 70% of their population residing near the coastline of Gwadar district. The sub-nationalist Baloch leaders demand total control over land and marine resources in the region. The government's granting of licenses to Chinese fishing trawlers, combined with Chinese illegal and unregulated fishing in the Arabian Sea, is likely to result in unemployment and poverty, driving people towards drugs and human trafficking.




Sanitisation

The lack of proper sewerage lines in Gwadar has created unsanitary conditions that pose a health hazard for the local community. The dismantling of existing sewerage lines has further exacerbated the problem. The Chairman of the Gwadar Development Authority has acknowledged the issue and informed a committee that the sewerage line is in the process of being tendered. In the meantime, the committee has recommended that anti-mosquito spray be conducted in affected areas and that steps be taken to ensure proper draining of dirty water. The committee has also directed the chairman of the GDA to submit a proposal for the construction of sewerage lines, and for all stakeholders, including the Gwadar Port Authority and district administration, to work together to resolve the issue and other challenges faced by

the local community and fishermen as soon as possible. Residents of the port city also complain about being deprived of basic facilities, from healthcare to electricity to clean drinking water

Environment

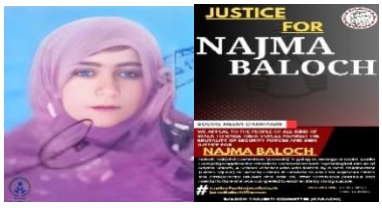
Finally, the construction and operation of the Gwadar Port and CPEC have had significant environmental impacts in the region.

The increased shipping traffic in the area has resulted in higher levels of marine pollution, with the discharge of waste from ships and oil spills polluting the sea and affecting the marine ecosystem and the livelihoods of local fishermen. Additionally, the development of CPEC infrastructure projects has led to the clearing of vast areas of forested land, resulting in deforestation and loss of habitat for wildlife. Furthermore, the construction of dams and water diversion projects along the CPEC route has led to reduced water flow in downstream areas, causing water scarcity for local communities and impacting agricultural activities. Finally, the construction and operation of the port and CPEC projects have led to increased vehicular traffic and industrial emissions, resulting in higher levels of air pollution in the region. These environmental impacts are a cause for concern and require urgent attention to mitigate their effects on the region's ecosystem and the livelihoods of local communities.

Increasing Suicide Rates

The suicide rate in Balochistan, particularly among women, is increasing at an alarming rate. According to the non-governmental organization Paank, 56 suicide cases, mostly women, have been reported in the past three months in Balochistan, with 80 cases reported last year. However, the actual numbers are believed to be higher due to underreporting in rural areas influenced by social and tribal taboos.[24] These suicides are often a result of social injustices, which for the oppressed Baloch nation, translate into national injustices.

In some cases, Baloch women have been targeted by security forces, coercing them to work as informants under the threat of severe consequences. Najma, a Baloch teacher, tragically took her own life due to threats from state-sponsored death squad members who forced her into collaboration. Baloch human rights activists have took to social media platforms to bring attention to these cases, demanding justice for Najma Baloch and advocating for the protection of Baloch women under the hashtags #JusticeForNajmabaloch and #SaveBalochWomen.[25]



4. Human Rights Violations in Baluchistan

Aside from the abovementioned concerns, then development of the Gwadar report has triggered major human violations to be committed by the Pakistani government against the Baluch.

Enforced Disappearances

The Pakistani government's Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances has reported over 5,000 cases of enforced disappearances since 2014, with the majority of cases remaining unresolved. However, both local and international human rights organizations claim the actual number to be much higher. According to these sources, more than 20,000 individuals have been abducted from Balochistan, with over 2,500 found dead and bearing signs of severe torture.[26]

Moreover, prior to assuming the position of Prime Minister, Imran Khan publicly acknowledged in several interviews that Pakistan's intelligence agencies were involved in enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. He pledged to step down if he was unable to put an end to this practice and ensure that those responsible were held accountable.

Another tactic used by the Pakistan army to ensure the multi-billion-dollar project successful in burning down houses and kidnapping the residents. On 15 April, personnel of the Frontier Corps burnt down the houses of 80 years old Razai in Bidrang Kolwah, whisking him away along with two daughters and grandchildren, including a 9-month-old baby girl. No one has heard of them since then. On 18 April, the FC burnt down the houses of Ganj Bakhsh Balach, Dilpul Balach, Lewar Balach, Naguman Doli, Somaar Jan Mohammad, Kacho Zabro, Assa Basham, Khan Mohammad Zabro and Zadbag Basham in Balor area of Kolwah, whisking away Abdul Razzaq Ali Bakhsh, Sudheer Ali Bakhsh and Rasheed Murad, a teacher. On 16 April, the FC took away Dil Murad Qadir Bakhsh, Mahmood Dad Mohammad, Shah Dost, and Dad Bakhsh from Kasht Kolwah, Dr. Noroz Aram, Pervaiz Aram, Sajjad Mustafa, Kursheed Mustafa, Nasir Qadir Bakhsh, Aslam Qadir Baksh and Sipahan Fazal from Choten Keelkor. Pervaiz Aram, Kursheed Mustafa, and Sipahan were tortured and released the next day. Other whereabouts are still unknown.

Despite the Pakistani government's claims of fighting terrorism, those who have been subjected to enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings are typically educated Baloch individuals, including political activists, teachers, students, and lawyers who have peacefully opposed CPEC. The families of these victims are frequently subjected to threats, harassment,

and intimidation, particularly those who have been vocal in their protests and have actively campaigned for justice for their missing loved ones.[27]

Extrajudicial Killings

Human rights organizations have accused the Pakistani authorities of using extrajudicial killings as a means of suppressing dissent and opposition to the CPEC project. Amnesty International, in its report published in 2018, documented several cases of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings in Balochistan.[28] The report noted that many of the victims were political activists, journalists, and students who had criticized the government's policies towards the CPEC.

The issue of extrajudicial killings in Balochistan has also gained international attention, with several countries and organizations expressing concern over the human rights situation in the region. In 2021, the United Nations Human Rights Council called on Pakistan to investigate cases of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings in Balochistan.[29] Human rights groups continued to express scepticism that the government was committed to ending enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and torture, and called for independent investigations into the allegations.[30]

Freedom of Assembly and Movement

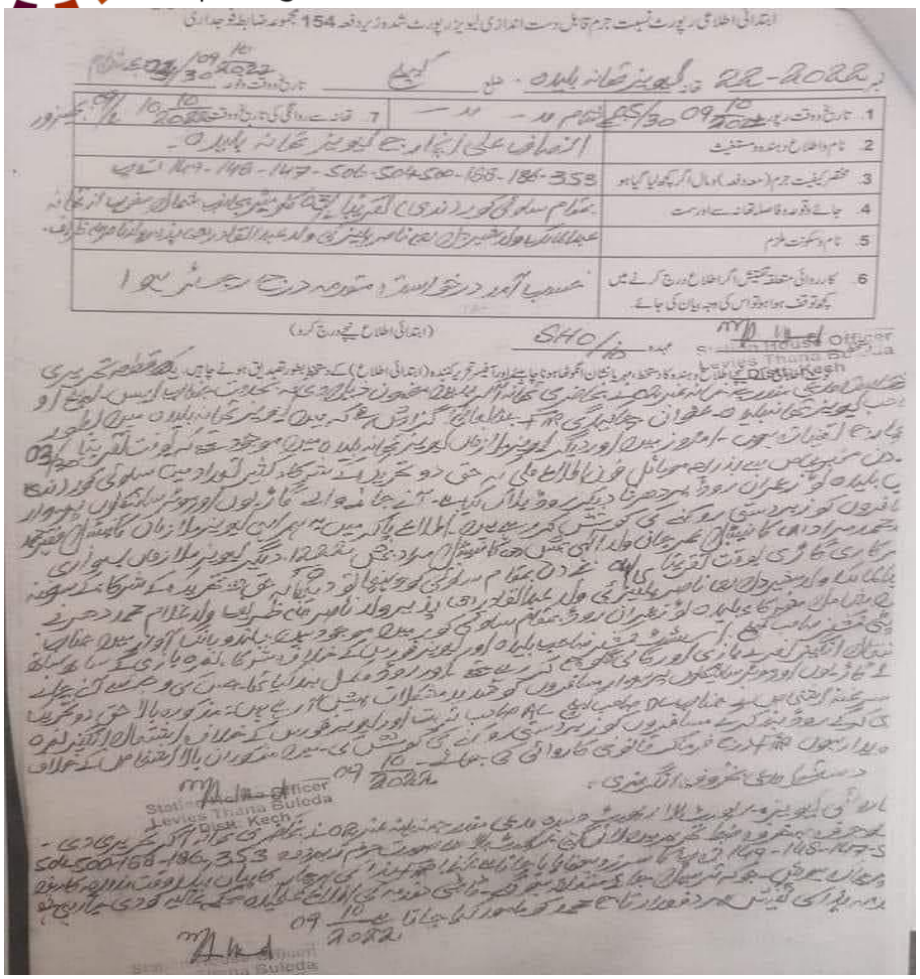
The discontent of Balochis with the development of Gwadar port has resulted in numerous protests, which have been met with a brutal crackdown by the Pakistani authorities. These protests are an expression of civil dissent and an exercise of fundamental rights of assembly. However, instead of addressing their grievances, the authorities have responded with violence and repression. This has only served to deepen the sense of injustice and frustration among the Balochi people, leading to further unrest and instability in the region.

A de facto curfew has been imposed in Gwadar, a port town in Pakistan, following a crackdown on a local rights movement. This has cast a shadow over China's Belt and Road infrastructure investment in the area, which is a crucial destination. The government of Balochistan has imposed Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, an outdated colonial-era law that prohibits rallies and protests of any kind. Over 100 supporters of the movement

have reportedly been arrested by the police. In addition, on January 3, 2023, the police in Gwadar registered an FIR against Haq Do Tehreek leader Maulana Hidaya tur Rehman on charges of murder, attempt to murder, provocation of violence, and other charges.

Led by Maulana Hidayat ur Rehman Baloch, the leader of Haq Do Tehreek and the general secretary of Jamaat-e-Islami in Balochistan, the demonstrators blocked the main airport road and the road leading to the port. Rehman also called for Chinese nationals to leave the airport and is critical of the heightened security and pointless check posts in the port city. While the sit-in was peaceful at first, matters turned ugly when Rehman and his followers closed the main entry road to Gwadar port and threatened armed resistance if their demands were not met.

The Gwadar Rights Movement was established in August 2021 to voice the concerns of the local population. Hidayat ur Rehman led a similar protest that lasted for 32 days in 2021, and although some progress was made, many issues continued to worsen. On October 27, 2022, Rehman and his followers started another sit-in, condemning the government for reneging on its promises. When the sit-in reached its 25th day, tens of thousands of protesters, including women and children, blocked an expressway leading to the Gwadar port as the government failed to meet the deadline to implement their demands.



However, matters turned violent on December 26, 2022, following a strike call, as police and protesters faced off. Law enforcement personnel used tear gas on the demonstrators, resulting in several arrests. While critics claim that Hidayat ur Rehman has political aspirations, he has struck a chord with the people of Makran, who feel that establishment-backed politicians and nationalists have failed to deliver. Gwadar has also been cut off from the rest of the country as the authorities have suspended internet service, mobile phone networks, and landlines in all four port cities of the Makran division, including Gwadar, Jevani, Pasni, and Ormara.

Amnesty International, expressed alarm over the reports of mass arrests and the imposition of emergency law in Gwadar. The organization stated that "putting a blanket ban on all forms of public gatherings amounts to repression of the right to protest and sends a chilling message that there is no room for dissent." Significantly, the Balochistan High Court expressed its displeasure over the police crackdown in Gwadar and has asked the deputy commissioners of Gwadar and Kech, as well as their police officials, to submit written explanations by January 15, 2023, while hearing a petition filed by senior lawyers Amanullah Kunrani and Rahib Buledi.

On January 5, 2023, the Quetta Corps Commander Balochistan General Asif Ghafoor visited Gwadar following the crackdown and arrest of the Haq do Tehreek sit-in in the coastal city. During his visit, he met with local dignitaries and the administration. According to Gwadar senior local leader Sulaiman Baloch, the corps commander warned that if the roads were closed again, he would put everyone in jail. Sulaiman emphasized that protesting is a democratic right, and they will continue to do so for their rights. He also posted a video on Twitter (@SamBaloch0), expressing concern that the military establishment is running government affairs and seeking to rule by hook or crook.

Balochistan National Party protesting the fencing of Gwadar

Conclusion

CPEC, often dubbed as the "corridor of death and destruction" is an exploitation project that will benefit Pakistan and China, but not the people of Balochistan. The Baloch people were forced out of their lands in the name of development. CPEC would enable Pakistan's government to gradually alter the demographic composition of Balochistan. The Baloch are not against development, but they are opposed to the exploitation of their resources by Pakistan or other global powers.

The Makran region, where Gwadar is situated, is heavily militarized, resulting in severe human rights violations. Enforced disappearances are carried out by labeling individuals as anti-

CPEC. CPEC is not just an economic project; its purpose is to enhance Pakistan-China's military dominance in the region, which we believe will destabilize the area.

The Baloch people should be stakeholders and shareholders in all the developments happening in Balochistan. Telling them that they will benefit from the CPEC-related development, even though they are not stakeholders and shareholders, will not appease them. There is a long history of mistrust in the federal government, which contributes to people's insecurity.

Human rights organizations remain sceptical about the government's commitment to addressing the issue of extrajudicial killings, and they have called for an independent investigation into these allegations. The international community has also expressed concern about the human rights situation in Balochistan, and the United Nations Human Rights Council has urged Pakistan to investigate cases of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings in the region.

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