

Theoretical Analysis of the Geopolitical Significance of Balochistan: The Interface of Mackinder's Heartland and Spykman's Rimland

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Abstract

This analysis is a theoretical examination of the geopolitical importance of the Balochistan province which presents the province as a significant geographic location at which Halford Mackinder's Heartland Theory and the Rimland Theory by Nicholas Spykman collide. Traditionally, the Balochistan region is considered in the localized perspective, but according to this study, it is regarded as a shatter-belt, which connects the land force of Eurasia to the sea-power of the Indian Ocean. The analysis of the strategic topography of the area reveals that Balochistan is a key energy and trade route, namely the construction of the Gwadar Port. The study utilizes the use of the focus on the Pivot Area brought forward by Mackinder to explain how the dominance of this transit zone can enable landlocked Central Asian states to avoid the traditional bottlenecks. At the same time, the paper relies on Spykman Rimland paradigm to emphasize the position of Balochistan in the inner crescent in which its accessibility to the sea poses a threat to the containment policies by world superpowers. The results indicate that the convergence of the two classical theories changes Balochistan into a peripheral region to a central Great Power competition region. This paper arrives at the conclusion that the area is no longer a border but a decisive contact point where the search after the continental depth is connected to the need of the naval accessibility which has a considerable impact on the 21st century geopolitics of South and Central Asia.

Key Words: Balochistan, Geopolitics, Heartland Theory, Rimland Theory, Gwadar

Introduction

The unstable sands of global power relations often have made the obscurity of geographic locations the focal point of international security discourse. Balochistan, the largest but least populous province of Pakistan, is one of the best examples of a "geographic pivot" among these. Where it is frequently mentioned as a measure of internal insurgency or regional underdevelopment, the real burden of the region is situated in between two paradigms of geopolitics Halford Mackinder Heartland Theory and Nicholas Spykman Rimland Theory. Balochistan has turned into the theatre of the battle between the old conflict between the continent and the maritime forces, as the physical location situated between the resource-rich Eurasian landmass and the warm waters of the Arabian Sea has become the point of renegotiating the balance between the old and the new millennium. In order to appreciate the importance of Balochistan, it is necessary to examine the rivalry of world hegemony that was formed in the early 20 th century. Sir Halford Mackinder assumed that the Heartland the big, central inland area of Eurasia was the key to world empire since it was not reachable via the sea (Mackinder, 1904). Nicholas Spykman on the other hand held the view that the more important prize was the Rimland which were the fringes of the coasts which surrounded Eurasia because it controlled access to the seas and also served as a shield between land and sea powers (Spykman, 1944).

Balochistan cannot be divided into one classification. It is nothing more than a kind of a Shatterbelt--the area of these two strategic zones that overlap. It also offers to the north, the natural outlet of the landlocked states of the Heartland (including Afghanistan and Central Asia), the fulfillment of what Mackinder had envisioned of a continental power yearning an escape to the sea. Its 750 mile Makran coast on the south is an important part of the Rimland, which is able to project maritime influence up to the Strait of Hormuz and the Indian Ocean.

This theoretical conflict is most evident in the creation of the Deep Sea Port of Gwadar. Being the jewel in the crown of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Gwadar is not just a business project, but it is a geopolitical masterstroke. To China, a new power with continental and maritime ambitions, Balochistan is one of the potential solutions to the Malacca Dilemma of its energy imports being vulnerable to a naval blockade in the Southeast Asian straits (Kaplan, 2010).

Being able to gain a presence in Balochistan, Beijing is basically putting into practice Spykman's Rimland concept of defending its sea lines of communication, and, at the same time, fulfilling the

potential of the Heartland which Mackinder envisioned; by creating a direct route on land between Western China and the Arabian Sea. The United States and India, who consider militarization of the Baloch coast as a threat of interruption in the status quo of the maritime equilibrium in the Indo-Pacific, have attracted their attention to this utility with dual use (Khurana, 2007).

Although the concept of the Balochistan Interface is strategic, it has its internal complexities that pose a threat to its stability. The history of the province is characterized by the feeling of peripheral alienation as all the time the local population feels a spectator in a game of global chess. This conflict between the need within the central government to develop at a macro-level and the local need to develop socio-politically causes an explosive situation.

Moreover, the non-state actors, along with the spectre of Great Power Competition, have transformed the province into an intelligence warfare epicenter and proxy warfare. According to Kaplan (2010), the Indian Ocean becomes the stage in the 21st century and the balcony, where one sees the play and can possibly manage it, is Balochistan.

This discussion aims to have a transcendence of the conventional security-focused perception of Balochistan. Rather, it tries to put the province into pieces as a theoretical laboratory where the soundness of Mackinder and Spykman could be put into trial in the contemporary world. This paper is a qualitative study of how the convergence of land and sea power in this particular geography is transforming the security architecture of South and Central Asia.

Review of Literature

Kaplan, R. D. (2010). *The monsoon: The Indian and the future of American power*. Random House. Kaplan has given a modern interpretation of the Rimland where he refers to the Indian Ocean as the focal point of conflict in the 21st century. He suggests that the coast of Balochistan is the critical connection point where the instability of the Middle East collides with the population of South Asians. This study will be necessary in the work of Kaplan because he shares the same ideology of Spykman that whoever holds the inner crescent (the Rimland) controls the fate of Eurasia. In particular, he points to Gwadar, as the possible pivot, which can enable a continental power such as China to finally project power into the maritime arena, potentially combining the interior power of Mackinder with the coastal influence of Spykman.

Khurana, G. S. (2007). The Indian Ocean and the String of Pearls in China and their implications to India. *Strategic Analysis*, 31(1), 1-39. The analysis by Khurana is based on the String of Pearls concept that is a modern implementation of Rimland strategy proposed by Spykman. He assumes that with the geographic location, a two-purpose marine infrastructure could be developed that would not only ensure the safety of energy streams but also prevent local competitors. Literature indicates that the Makran coast development is a direct effort to avoid the weaknesses of landlocked position of the Heartland. Through the encircling strategy of India, Khurana offers a critical approach towards how Balochistan is the buffer, as well as acting as a bridge, in the greater Indo-Pacific security structure.

Brewster, D. (2014). *The Ocean: The Indian bid to gain regional leadership*. Routledge. Brewster also examines the Indian point of view about the Rimland in that Balochistan is a major choke point to Indian naval ambitions. He proposes that once a Heartland power obtains a long-term presence in Balochistan they will cancel out the traditional maritime superiority of the Rimland states. The source is essential in knowledge of the Shatterbelt dynamics on the region where the Balochistan is not only a province of Pakistan but a battleground of the naval strategy of New Delhi and alliances of Islamabad on the ground. It confirms the fact that it is the geography of the province that determines the naval posture of the whole South Asian subcontinent.

Fazl-e-Haider, S. (2007). *Balochistan economic development*. Oxford University Press. Although he concentrates on economics, Fazl-e-Haider offers an adequate grounded approach to the way in which physical geography (the advantage of the Heartland) determines political stability. He claims that Balochistan was a very rugged land that is literally a fortress of the land power since it is a huge area just as Mackinder used to describe the Eurasian interior. He however points out that this land power will not be stagnant unless it is integrated on a maritime basis. This article fills that gap by demonstrating that the hypothetical "significance" of the region lies in the ability to change its status of a pivot into a working economic zone that would allow linking the deep interiors of Asia to the international trade networks.

Yoshihara, T., & Holmes, J. R. (2010). *Red star over the Pacific: the rise of China and the threat to the U.S. maritime strategy*. Naval Institute Press. The theories of Alfred Thayer Mahan and Spykman are also used in this source to examine the application of Balochistan to the New Great Game. The authors posit that the Baloch coast interest of China can be deemed as a strategic break out of the Heartland into the Rimland. They give a technical explanation of how geography of Arabian Sea enables a power stationed in Balochistan to spy on Strait of Hormuz. It is a very important element of the literature in that it views Balochistan as the geographical location where

the depth of continents is exchanged with the maritime maneuverability which forms one of the fundamental principles of contemporary geopolitical contests.

Sempa, F. P. (2002). *Geopolitics: Cold War to the 21 st century*. Transaction Publishers. Sempa gives the historical-theoretical context that will enable one to connect Mackinder and Spykman. He says that the stability of the Rimland was the only way to contain the Heartland. Balochistan has been referred to as a key focal point in the Eurasian security belt in Balochistan analysis. The failure or change of alignment of this hinge toward the Heartland (e.g. by means of partnership with Russia or China) would threaten the whole Western policy of maritime domination. The source assists in framing the thesis of the study, by situating the Balochistan within the long-term history of the global power struggles.

Pant, H. V. (2012). *The emergence of China: Consequences to the Asia-Pacific*. State University of New York Press. Pant develops the idea of a land-power idea, Strategic Depth, and how it is being extended out to the maritime geography of Balochistan. He insists that Pakistan sees Balochistan as its Heartland- a large territory capable of offering defense in depth and external powers see it as the ultimate Rimland prize. The source is especially valuable to examine the inter-state aspect of the topic, which states how the domestic security of the Balochistan has an impact on the foreign geopolitical policies of the United States, China, and India. It emphasizes that the province is currently an intersection of geopolitical interests in which land and maritime interests are now indivisible.

Methodology

The given research assumes a qualitative and secondarily motivated design with the usage of a comparative theoretical framework, which assesses the contemporary geographic reality of Balochistan. The research overlaying the principles of Halford Mackinder Heartland Theory and Nicholas Spykwoff Rimland Theory on the current data, such as the policy demands of CPEC, reports of maritime security, and the maps of the energy transit in the region, the research evaluates the modern data through the prism of classical geopolitical realism. The research is based on an intensive archival examination of early 20th-century geopolitical literature and a survey of the contemporary spatial mapping to identify how the rocky landscape of the Makran coast and the Bolan Pass is determining the flow of “Land Power” as opposed to the flow of “Sea Power.” It is a deductive method of viewing Balochistan as a central case study, in which its physical and political changes are viewed not as domestic phenomena, but as calculated actions in a wider “Shatterbelt” where the depth of Eurasian terrestrial nature is paralleled by the supremacy of the Indian Ocean.

Findings

Analysis shows that Balochistan serves as a special Geopolitical Interface with the traditional borders between the Heartland and the Rimland practically disappearing. One of the first findings is that there is a phenomenon known as the Gwadar Paradox that proves that, although the Gwadar port is geographically located in the inner crescent of the Rimland, its main role is to become an exit point of a Heartland-oriented power (China) and thus to neutralize the sea-containment strategies initially suggested by Spykman. Moreover, the paper defines the province as contemporary Shatterbelt, discovering that its inner socio-political uncertainty cannot be discussed without its outer worth as a warm-water passageway of landlocked states in Central Asia. The research concludes that the intersection of these two theories in Balochistan turns the province into a decisive point of the game of the New Great Game in which the desire to acquire maritime accessibility via the Arabian Sea makes the goal of attaining continental strategic depth completely reliant on it.

Geopolitical Theories and Balochistan's Strategic Role in Global Power Dynamics

Exploring Classic Geopolitical Ideas: Mackinder's Heartland and Spykman's Rimland in Today's World

When we consider the great ideas that have informed global politics, there are few ideas that have endured as long as Halford Mackinder's Heartland Theory, or the Geographical Pivot of History. A leading figure in geopolitics of the early parts of the XX century, Mackinder put forward this concept in 1904 and was inspired by such thinkers as Alfred Thayer Mahan. In his conception of the world he saw a closed loop in which the ambitions of nations intersecting with the major struggle being among those who controlled the seas and those who controlled the land (Mackinder, 1904). Central to his argument was Europe's heartland (which he called the "Pivot Area," and later the Heartland). From his Eurocentric point of view, this vast inland area was the site of endless invasions and jostling for power from which the coastal areas with greater links to ocean trade were drawn.

For centuries the sea powers like Britain had the advantage, they were able to move around the world with their fleets. Mackinder saw the game changer in the development of railways and better land transport which meant that land-based empires could transport their troops as effectively as

their naval fortresses, and the balance of power moved away from the domination of the seas. He advised British leaders that whoever had the Heartland (the hard-to-reach interiors of Eurasia) could command the world. This premise gave him his famous lines, "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island commands the World." (Mackinder, 1919). Geography, he argued, was not the background, but the script for power plays.

Mackinder viewed the hotspots of Eurasia, including Eastern Europe and Central Asia, as it would be in the center of global competition (see Figure 1 for a visual breakdown). Throughout the twentieth century regions like Eastern Europe, Central Asia, South Asia and parts of Africa became arenas for geopolitical tug of war. He became concerned that Germany would invade The Heartland and in this context he recommended that a transatlantic alliance between Britain and the United States be set up to check such ambitions. It was his thinking that helped American creation of a barrier against Soviet expansion (NATO) (Sloan, 1999).

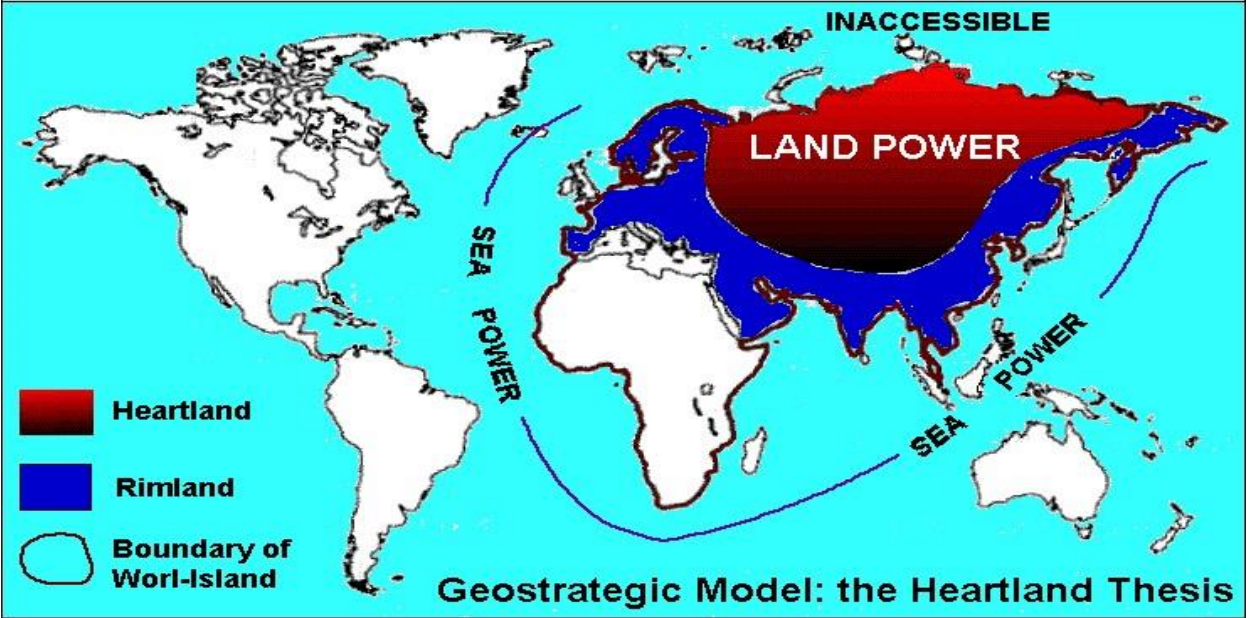


Figure 1: Mackinder's Heartland model, highlighting the Pivot Area, Rimland, and World-Island boundaries. Adapted from Sloan (1999).

Shifting gears to another heavyweight, Nicholas Spykman stood on the foundation of Mackinder but in significant ways shifted the focus. As a Dutch-American geopolitical thinker and the student of Mackinder, Spykman added the emphasis of Mahan on sea power and its role in opening the world markets and strategic edges (Mahan, 1890). In a 1944 book entitled, "The Geography of the Peace" (published posthumously), Spykman re-divided the world, drawing attention to the "Rimland" (the coastal fringes of Eurasia's heart). Unlike Mackinder who emphasised land dominance, Spykman believed that naval strength was the true advantage in trade and warfare.

Spykman viewed the Eurasian landmass as ultimate prize but he felt that significant action was played out along the Rimland rather than in the inland Heartland. He refined Mackinder's zones: the Heartland was still center (Russia, Central Asia), but the Rimland was a dynamic buffer zone of coastal states in Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, and more. He also saw other layers of naval intrigue such as marginal seas like the Mediterranean or South China Sea. For Spykman, the Rimland was where cultures did clash and civilisations has evolved, very different from what Mackinder focused on, which was the barren steppes (Gray, 2015). He dismissed the Heartland as isolated and harsh, and how Russia, with its frozen ports and rough terrain, depended heavily on Rimland access for growth and influence. Spykman's pungent dictum: "Who controls the Rimland controls Eurasia; who controls Eurasia controls the world" (Spykman, 1944). This put emphasis on sea-facing powers and amphibious states such as the U.S., China or Britain, which could project power across oceans. He singled out Asia's monsoon belt - from South Asia to the Indian Ocean - as a prime Rimland hotspot with its potential for people, resources and industrial development (Holmila, 2020). Dominating this area involved controlling the Indian Ocean, with its warm-water ports and important trade routes.

Jumping to the present the vision of Spykman seems to be accurate in terms of the competition in the Indian Ocean and further. The power brokers come to play in the region: China has moved to the South China Sea and the Gwadar port of Pakistan to the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf; India to the Bay of Bengal and the Chabahar port of Iran; the U.S. towards chokepoints like the Malacca Strait (Bakare, 2019). It is a combination of all economic muscle and military strength - consider China Belt and Road initiative (BRI) which extends all the way across Central Asia (the Pivot by Mackinder) and into Rimland countries.

The actions of China demonstrate a Rimland policy: to capture the Central Asian countries to the energy and access, and the further expansion to the South Asia, Middle East, and Africa through the BRI. As a result, Gwadar turns out to be a node and, therefore, Beijing can afford to invest in infrastructure and have strategic footholds. This is not merely trade but it is a battle to control the Heartland and the Rimland to remain controlled in the long run (Cannon, 2025). In the meantime, India, Russia and U.S react with their own plans and the region turns out a Great Game of the modern era. Eventually Mackinder as well as Spykman hit the nail on the head of eternal magnetism of Eurasia. Their theories contribute to the explanation of reasons why superpowers pay much attention to Central Asia, South Asia, the Indian Ocean and the Middle East - geography meets ambition and the stakes are high.

Balochistan's Strategic Edge: Linking Heartland, Rimland, and Modern Power Plays

During the British colonial times, Balochistan was the most strategic place to control the Indian subcontinent. Balochistan played a significant role in protecting the supply routes and preserving Afghanistan as a buffer against the North during the Great Game when the tense competition between the British and Russia was the leading force in power (Heathcote, 2015). The barbaric province consisting of deserts and mountains was not a backwater, but an entry point that allowed the British to keep their empire safe against possible invasions (Khan, 2018).

Balochistan is geographically a land of crossroads of eastern, western and central Asia, as well as the Indian Ocean - a sea that has been among the objects of the struggle of superpowers to control valuable trade and energy routes since ancient times (Kardon, 2020). The borders that it shares with Afghanistan and Iran put it in direct touch with Central Asia and oil rich Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. It is a global chokepoint because that strait is the only one that transports millions of barrels of oil daily (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2025a). Balochistan is a long coastline bordering the warm waters of the Arabian Sea and it is perfect in the trade routes between ports like Jiwan to the north of Afghanistan and to the eastern part of Central Asia as well. Gwadar Port, which is approximately 400 km to the Strait of Hormuz will experience approximately 17 million barrels of oil transit per day (Zero Carbon Analytics, 2026). The location of Gwadar that lies at the crossroads between oil wealth in Middle Earth and the emerging market of Central Asia contributes to the geopolitical significance of Balochistan even more (Sindhu, 2021).



Figure 2: Map highlighting Balochistan's position, borders with Afghanistan and Iran, and its Arabian Sea coastline. [alamy.com](https://www.alamy.com)

Placed on the systems of either the Heartland Theory of Mackinder or the Rimland Theory of Spykman, Balochistan is placed squarely in the Rimland - the key coastal perimeter where the interior of Eurasia can be persuaded to and reach (Mirza, 2022). The province serves as a major transit point to several landlocked neighbours, such as the Central Asian Republics (CARs), Afghanistan and some of western China. Particularly in the CARs that geographically have no direct access to the sea, the participation in the global trading circles has traditionally been minimal (Zafar, 2025). The whole idea of Beijing on how to channel the resources of these interiors to the Indian Ocean through Gwadar would solely depend on going through the territory of Balochistan. Although China already has a bilateral economic agreement with Tajikistan and other states in the

region, the transformation of these agreements into large-scale trade operations will demand a strong overland network that can easily transport goods to warm-water ports (Mirza, 2022).

Lately, the CARs took a keen interest in becoming part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and see that Gwadar is their straight shot to the sea for exports and imports (Khan, 2018). These countries have captured the world headlines, thanks to their untapped natural resources, with eyes from all sides. India, for example, is interested in the area, and joined Iran in the construction of Chabahar Port in the vicinity (Sindhu, 2021). Iran has its own plans for the CARs, and Russia is not far behind, hoping to regain some of its old sway in the neighbourhood.

This scramble has seen tension in the region with every major player fighting to extend their influence for economic and strategic benefit (Kardon, 2020). It is Balochistan and particularly Gwadar that is at the forefront of assisting China to cross the CARs to the Indian Ocean to provide Beijing with a faster, more stable route to and from its western provinces (Zafar, 2025). An increased Chinese presence in Gwadar through its military could allow the People's Liberation Army Navy to more closely monitor the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and protect sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2025a). From there China could expand, building more of the ports and bases across the Rimland and into Africa and Latin America, areas Mackinder flagged as resource goldmines. Control of them would provide China with massive military and economic influence (Cannon, 2025). All in all, Balochistan's position on the map keeps it smack in the middle of these high-stakes manoeuvres, combining old school geopolitics with today's economic hustles.

Why Balochistan Plays a Key Role in China's Global Ambitions

Once the Cold War had ended in 1991, the Central Asian Republics (CARs) had broken through and devastated what was once considered Eurasia's one "heartland" into pieces. This change paved the way for new approaches and in 2013 China announced its revival of the Silk Road, known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), originally referred to as One Belt, One Road (OBOR). The aim was to harness the region's vast energy wealth and nestle closer economically. China's thrust became even clearer with the BRI with the aim to connect those CARs directly to the Indian Ocean and beyond to its humongous Xinjiang province. Often referred to as China's "21st Century Maritime Silk Road," this plan beamed in a speech delivered in 2013 by then President Xi Jinping at the Nazarbayev University in Astana, in which he proposed constructing an "economic belt" along the ancient Silk Road that would increase connections and growth between Euro-Asian nations-as he noted would benefit all those who crossed its path (Zhang, 2021).

Both Pakistan and China have soaring energy demands, which has brought Balochistan into high-profile as a key intersection for a series of projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline and even a proposed pipeline that runs from Tajikistan through Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Middle-East, China and India (Hassan, 2020). Balochistan isn't just a pass through, but it's chock full of untapped riches like natural gas, copper, coal, gold and other minerals waiting to be dug up. But flimsy security has made exploration difficult for Pakistani officials. Take the gas fields discovered back in 1952 - the gas fields have fuelled much of the country but left Baloch areas languishing with little benefit and therefore are key targets for local insurgents that have been frustrated with uneven benefits (Wolf, 2020).

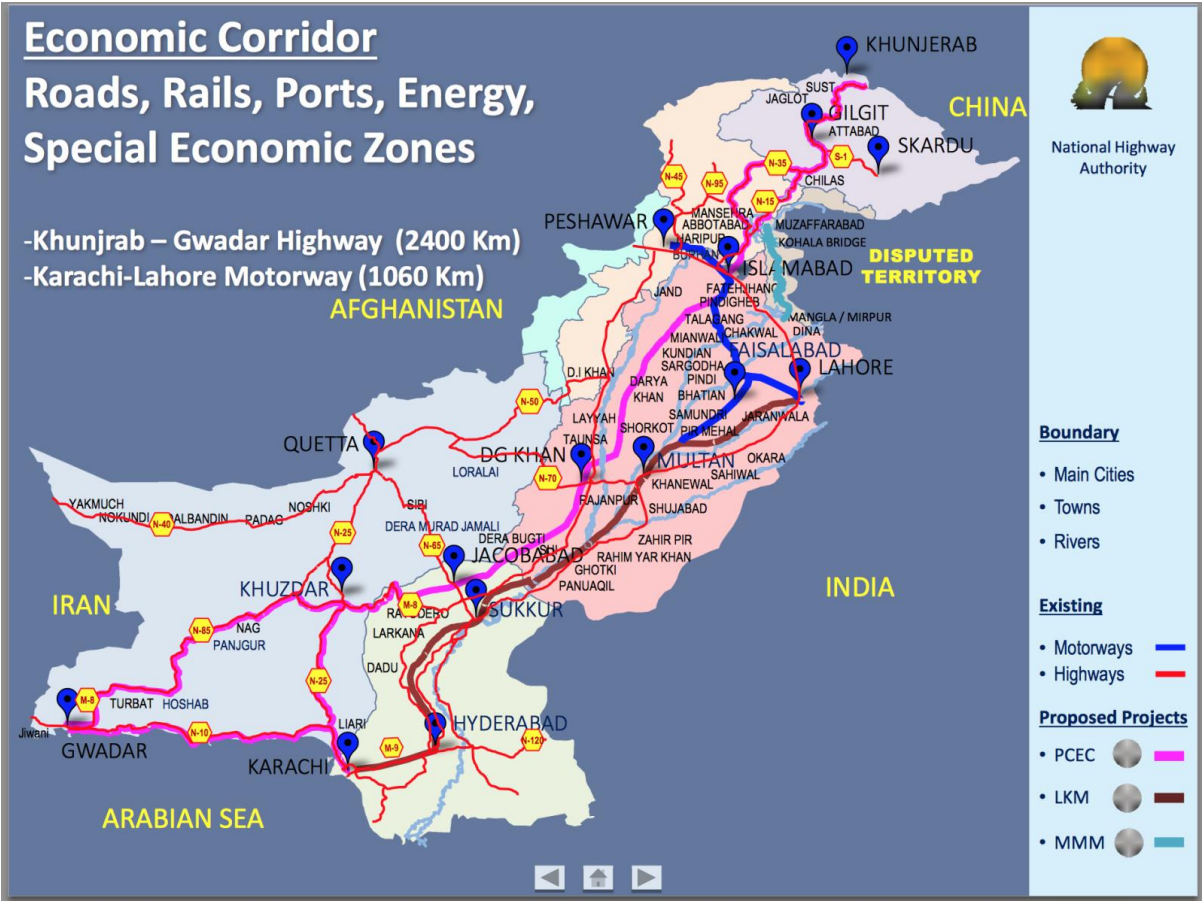


Figure 3: A map outlining key energy and transport corridors in Balochistan, including CPEC links and pipeline paths. Adapted from recent geopolitical analyses.

In order to lock in this pathway, China signed a deal in April 2015 to pump more than \$50 billion into Pakistan, concentrating on the strategically important Gwadar port and rolling out CPEC (Small, 2015). This setup allows China to hitch the CARs to the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea to draw their economies and resources into its orbit. But pulling this off means threading roads and rails through Balochistan's sprawling terrain, tying the oil heavy Middle East and Strait of Hormuz right to the western edges of China.

With the opening of Gwadar, China has broken open a new export route from its hub in Xinjiang in Kashgar by snaking through Pakistan's rail and road networks-all through Balochistan. In return, China receives a stable flow of oil and resources from Central Asia and the Middle East through Gwadar and links through the corridor (Beeson & Crawford, 2023). Gwadar is also oriented towards trade exclusively for Central Asia with the railways and roads to China, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. And let's not forget the military angle: Gwadar fits into China's "String of Pearls" approach, a network of ports across the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean for their trade and possible naval reach (Bhuiyan, 2024). When Pakistan handed Gwadar operations to China in 2015, it essentially gave Beijing a stake in areas that the U.S. used during the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, adding another level to the region's power plays (Akhtar, 2023).

Looking ahead, Balochistan's place in all of this isn't fading-it's revving up with the CPEC's expansions and the BRI's wider push. But challenges such as local unrest and uneven development continue to test the waters, reminding all that big plans need local buy-in if they are to stick (Naz & Parveen, 2022).

Balochistan's Pull on Global Players: Resources, Rivalries, and Risks

Beyond its transit role, Balochistan is situated on massive untapped reserves of coal, copper, and gold that have the potential to transform the region's economy - if security permits. Take the Reko Diq area in Chagai District: It's home to what is often called the 'Hillock of Gold,' an in-situ deposit of copper and gold that is considered one of the world's largest undeveloped copper-gold ore deposits. Recent studies put it at approximately 5.9 billion tonnes of ore with average grades of 0.41 per cent copper and 0.22 grams per tonne of gold, which translates to the following: about 15 million tonnes of copper and 26 million ounces of gold (Barrick Gold Corporation, 2025). That's enough to make it one of the best sites in the world, with projections for the annual output of 200,000 t of copper and 250,000 oz of gold once mining ramps up (Khan, 2025).

These riches also attract external powers such as the U.S. and India, who view Balochistan as a means of competing with Chinese expansion by investing in and building land routes from Gwadar to Kashgar. Pakistan has long been pointing fingers at India for fueling Baloch separatists calling for independence. In 2004, Baloch rebels bombed a car carrying Chinese engineers building Gwadar Port killing three (Bansal, 2018). In 2006, three more Chinese workers were shot dead in

Hub District by gunmen (International Crisis Group, 2024). Both hits were claimed by the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), who railed against the port as an outsider's grab (Javaid, 2010). Pakistan blamed these groups for receiving support from neighbors to poison Sino-Pak relations. Baloch communities spill across borders into Iran and Afghanistan, creating cross-border twists. In Iran, where the majority of Baloch are Sunni, Tehran blames the U.S. and Saudi Arabia for fomenting unrest against its Shia-led government (Grare, 2006). This shared ethnic tie means insurgency in one spot, can ripple into others, messing with regional politics.

Hammered by rivalry with both Pakistan and China, India has frosty relations with Islamabad, resulting from four wars (1948, 1965, 1971, 1999) and the 1971 split that birthed Bangladesh. As the world's sixth biggest energy guzzler, India does not feel comfortable about China's stranglehold over Gwadar, considering that it is a chokehold on the sea route through the Strait of Malacca where India has huge stakes in trade (Pant, 2021). This all becomes part of a "New Great Game" in South Asia, where India, China, the U.S. and Iran labour to find the fastest routes to Central Asia's energy, the Middle East's oil, and South Asian markets (Afridi, 2019).

Over half of the world's container ships and a third of all sea traffic zips through the Indian Ocean, often by way of Malacca into the South China Sea (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2025b). India is concerned China's push into the Indian Ocean restricts its influence, particularly as Beijing's economy is dwarfing the region. A Swedish think-tank report identifies India's perception of Gwadar as a cunning security move to spy on the Indian naval moves (Akhtar, 2021). So New Delhi fights back by pouring cash into Iran's Chabahar Port, just down the coast - to avoid Pakistan and instead connect with Central Asia (Pant, 2021). The U.S. has similar jitters of China's rise, expressing concerns to Pakistan (Siddiqi, 2020).

Meanwhile, the Baloch insurrection throws a wrench into China's and Pakistan's energy quests. This latest wave differs from the previous ones, fueled more by geopolitics and resource grabs. As analyst Robert personaggi Wirsing noted: Balochistan's energy wealth sparks grievances over exploitation without fair shares; it's a pipeline crossroads from Iran or Turkmenistan; and Gwadar's the hub for ports and power (Wirsing, 2008).

Russia has its eye on a piece too, renewing old Tsarist dreams of warm-water access. The 1979 Soviet Afghan invasion was in part a mission to reach the Indian Ocean (Fair, 2022). For that, Balochistan has always been on the radar of Moscow. From the 1990s Russia: Balance Europe Asia trade: China's South Asia push: a win win through BRI. Murphy, 2013 Moscow keeps low low for now, it lacks funds to meet China's investments, but it has shown an interest in CPEC. Pakistan greenlighted Russian exports through Gwadar in 2016, making the port a larger regional trade spot (Yusuf, 2012). In the mix, Balochistan is a mix of powder keg-in the sense that resources combine with rivalries-a place of promise -- but potential bust -- if the tensions boil over.



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place where the theories in the past can be compared with the realities of the future and that geography is the most persistent in the fate of nations.

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