
The US and Indian Response towards the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Gwadar Port: Intensifying Geopolitical Competition in the Gwadar region and the Indo-Pacific Region

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Abstract

The development of the Gwadar Port, often described as the "jewel in the crown" of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), has emerged as a focal point of intensifying global power dynamics within the broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This article explores the strategic and geopolitical rationales underlying the Gwadar project and its implications for regional stability in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific. The primary aim of this research is to investigate how China's maritime aspirations and the establishment of a potential naval presence in Gwadar have triggered reactive strategies from the United States and India. The study also pursues the objective of analyzing the socio-political consequences of these megaprojects, particularly focusing on the worsening human rights conditions and the marginalization of indigenous communities in Balochistan. Findings suggest that the CPEC has catalyzed a shift in the regional balance of power, leading to heightened military strategies and diplomatic rivalries that diminish regional stability. Ultimately, the purpose of this research is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the US and Indian responses as they seek to counterbalance Beijing's expanding footprint, highlighting the complex intersection between high-stakes geopolitics and local socio-cultural rights.

Key Words: Geopolitics, CPEC, BRI, Indo-Pacific Region, Regional Stability

Introduction:

The strategic landscape of the Indo-Pacific is currently undergoing its most significant transformation since the end of the Cold War, with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) serving as the primary catalyst for this shift. At the heart of this competition lies Gwadar, a once-quiet fishing village in Balochistan that has been reimagined as the "jewel" of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). For Beijing, Gwadar is the ultimate solution to the "Malacca Dilemma", a way to bypass vulnerable maritime chokepoints and secure a direct energy artery from the Arabian Sea to the Chinese heartland (Zafar, 2025; Araújo, 2025). However, what China frames as a project for regional

connectivity, the United States and India view as a "strategic strongpoint" designed to facilitate a permanent Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean, fundamentally threatening the existing maritime order (Atlas Institute, 2025; Social Science Review Archives, 2025).

The Gwadar Port development is not just a civil engineering work, but a physical realization of the changing world order. The high-paced growth of Gwadar has caused tide of concerns in other neighbouring capitals, especially that of New Delhi. The port has also become an element of a so-called strategic encirclement viewed as a threat to the traditional Indian Ocean maritime supremacy as perceived by India (Dutta, 2020; ORF, 2025).

This competition has sparked a tit-for-tat infrastructure race. While China consolidates its diplomatic and economic ties with Iran through massive long-term investment agreements, India has doubled down on the Chabahar Port in Iran—located just 170 kilometres from Gwadar—to maintain its own influence and bypass Pakistani territory to reach Central Asia (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025). This escalation of presence has turned the region into a theatre of a 'gravity-zone' competition, where every new pier or pipeline is viewed through the lens of military potential.

Ultimately, it is a project that represents China's aspiration to become a dominant Indo-Pacific power and its desire to secure a "Malacca-bypass" for its energy needs (Araújo, 2025). Yet, as the rivalry between the U.S., India, and China intensifies, the human and sociocultural consequences for the people of Balochistan remain the most volatile—and often overlooked—element of the CPEC narrative.

Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative, multi-methodological approach to analyze the evolving geopolitical competition surrounding the Gwadar Port and the Indo-Pacific region. Given the complexity of international relations and the security-centric nature of the subject, the study utilizes the following frameworks:

1. Neo-Realist Analytical Framework

The study is grounded in the "Neo-Realist" school of International Relations, which emphasizes the role of power dynamics, state interests, and the pursuit of hegemony in a multipolar world. This framework is used to interpret the strategic competition between China, the United States, and India as they navigate the "security dilemma" created by the development of maritime megaprojects.

2. Case Study and Comparative Analysis

A focused case study method is applied to the Gwadar Port and the CPEC. This involves the 'Strategic Mapping' which Analyzes the geographical and maritime significance of Gwadar in relation to the Strait of Hormuz and the Indo-Pacific trade routes. Secondly, the Comparative Strategy Review is used to Evaluate the distinct yet complementary responses of the US (via Indo-Pacific strategies) and India (via regional maritime initiatives) to counterbalance Chinese influence.

3. Data Collection and Scrutiny

The research relies on a synthesis of primary and secondary data. The Primary Sources are the Official policy documents, white papers from the US Department of Defense, Indian Ministry of External Affairs statements, and bilateral agreements between China and Pakistan. Similarly, the secondary Sources use a comprehensive review of scholarly articles, geopolitical reports and journalistic accounts regarding human rights conditions and military escalations in the region.

Chinese BRI and the Chinese influence in the South Asian and the Indo-Pacific Region:

China's deeper involvement in global power dynamics and its pursuit of regional hegemony have fundamentally reshaped the political landscape of South Asia, ushering in an era of heightened complexity and diminished stability. As Beijing seeks to overhaul the maritime and territorial architecture of the Indo-Pacific, the region has become a crowded theatre for major powers with conflicting geopolitical interests. Most notably, the intervention of the United States and India has transformed traditional regional cooperation into a zero-sum competition, where every strategic gain by one actor is perceived as a direct loss by its rivals (Kaplan, 2011).

The launch of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has acted as a catalyst for these new regional dynamics, providing Beijing with a powerful tool to project influence far beyond its borders. By anchoring its investments in Gwadar, China has effectively positioned Pakistan as a "pivot state" within its broader strategic calculus. This alignment is a central pillar of the "String of Pearls" strategy, a network of commercial and military hubs designed to secure vital sea lanes and establish a persistent Chinese presence across the Indian Ocean (Pehrson, 2006). The expansion of China's BRI into South Asia has transformed the region from a quiet corner of global trade into the primary arena for 21st-century power politics. What began as a series of infrastructure loans has evolved into a sophisticated tool of geopolitical statecraft, aimed at redefining the maritime and territorial architecture of the Indo-Pacific.

1. Hegemonic Ambitions and Regional Instability

China's participation in global power dynamics is increasingly viewed through the lens of a new hegemony', where Beijing seeks to establish a Sinocentric regional order. This pursuit has had a destabilizing effect on the political landscape of South Asia, introducing a level of intricacy that small nations often struggle to navigate. By leveraging its economic "debt-book diplomacy," China has secured long-term strategic concessions that often bypass traditional international norms of transparency and sustainability (Chellaney, 2017; World Bank, 2024).

This shift has effectively transformed regional cooperation into a zero-sum game of influence. As Kaplan (2011) famously argued, the Indian Ocean is where the global struggle for power will be decided. Consequently, the involvement of the United States and India has created a "triangular rivalry," where any gain for Beijing is perceived as a strategic loss for Washington and New Delhi, leading to a fragmented regional environment where security and development are inextricably linked (International Crisis Group, 2025).

2. CPEC and the 'Pivot State' Calculus

The introduction of the CPEC has been the most significant catalyst for these new regional dynamics. By investing over \$65 billion into Pakistani infrastructure, energy sector and other sectors, Beijing has effectively elevated Pakistan to the status of a pivot state" within its broader grand strategy. For China, Pakistan provides the only viable terrestrial bypass to the "Malacca Dilemma"—the fear that its energy supplies could be choked off at the narrow Strait of Malacca by the U.S. Navy (Araújo, 2025; Atlas Institute, 2025).

CPEC is not merely an economic project; it is the physical anchor of the "String of Pearls" strategy (Pehrson, 2006). By securing a 40-year lease on the Gwadar Port, China has gained a strategic "pearl" that sits at the mouth of the Persian Gulf. This allows the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) to monitor the world's most vital energy chokepoints, directly challenging India's traditional maritime supremacy in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the United States' ability to protect global sea lanes (Zafar, 2025; Social Science Review Archives, 2025). China's deep economic and military integration into South Asia, particularly through the CPEC, is fundamentally redrawing the regional balance of power.

The development of Gwadar Port serves a dual purpose: it provides Beijing with a critical "energy bypass" to mitigate the vulnerabilities of the 'Malacca Trap' while simultaneously contesting the naval hierarchy that has long dominated the Indian Ocean (Brewster, 2014). From the perspective of offensive realism, these massive infrastructure projects are viewed as much more than commercial ventures; they are calculated moves to acquire strategic depth and secure future military access. The expansion of the BRI into the Indo-Pacific has inevitably triggered a classic 'security dilemma' among neighbouring states. India, perceiving the CPEC-led encirclement as a direct challenge to its sovereignty and maritime security, has accelerated its own strategic countermeasures, most notably the "Security and Growth for All in the Region" (SAGAR) policy (Mohan, 2015).

Similarly, the United States has re-centered its regional strategy around a "Free and Open Indo-

Pacific" framework, aiming to defend the existing rules-based order against China's revisionist ambitions. As a result, the Gwadar region has transitioned from a localized infrastructure project into a primary theatre of global geopolitical rivalry. In this high-stakes environment, economic investments are no longer taken at face value but are increasingly scrutinized for their potential as "dual-use" military assets.

The US and the Indian Response to the Chinese presence in the Region:

The burgeoning influence of China across the Indo-Pacific is increasingly perceived by global and regional powers as a transformative shift with deep strategic consequences. The United States and India have responded to Beijing's expanding footprint with significant concern, prompting the development of individual yet reinforcing strategies designed to check Chinese hegemony (Kuo, 2020; Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).

Central to this anxiety is the BRI, with a specific focus on the deep-water infrastructure at Gwadar, Pakistan. Policymakers in Washington and New Delhi fear that such maritime hubs provide the PLAN with the essential logistical framework to project military force well beyond China's traditional coastal spheres and into the vital energy corridors of the Indian Ocean (Zafar, 2025; U.S. Department of Defense, 2025).

The US Response:

By entering into important defence agreements and fortifying current military ties with regional allies including Australia, Japan, and India, the United States has refocused its strategic attention on the Indo-Pacific (Kuo, 2020). In order to maintain freedom of navigation, the IOR has seen a rise in combined maritime exercises and military deployments as a result of this realignment. In addition, as a direct counter-narrative to China's BRI, the United States has supported alternative infrastructure projects like the Blue Dot Network, which are intended to encourage high-standard, market-driven, and transparent infrastructure development. (U.S. Department of State, 2024; Runde, 2024).

Strengthening Military Alliances and Defense Pacts

Key to this re-alignment is the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) with India, which has evolved into a cornerstone of the bilateral relationship. In 2024 and 2025, this partnership expanded into co-production of jet engines (GE-F414) and the establishment of a strategic semiconductor fabrication plant in India to support national security platforms (White House, 2024; Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).

With Japan, the U.S. has undertaken the most significant upgrade to its command-and-control structure in 60 years. Following the 2024 "2+2" ministerial meetings, the U.S. began transitioning U.S. Forces Japan (USFJ) into a joint force headquarters to synchronize operations with Japan's newly established Joint Operations Command (JJOC) in March 2025 (Ministry of Defense Japan, 2025; Stimson Center, 2025). Simultaneously, the AUKUS pact with Australia and the UK has moved into "Pillar II" implementation, focusing on advanced undersea capabilities, AI, and hypersonic weapons to bolster regional deterrence (Congress.gov, 2025).

Maritime Security and Naval Deployments

The re-alignment has catalyzed a heightened frequency of joint maritime exercises and persistent naval presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The Exercise Malabar 2025 and the 29th iteration which was held in Guam, saw the full participation of the "Quad" navies (U.S., India, Japan, and Australia), focusing on high-end anti-submarine and surface warfare (U.S. Navy, 2025). Similarly, the Talisman Sabre 2025, is considered as a milestone for regional integration, India participated for the first time in this traditionally U.S.-Australian exercise, which involved over 40,000 personnel from 19 nations (Indo-Pacific Defense Forum, 2025).

Moreover, the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness has been expanded to help regional partners track "dark vessels" and counter illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, which the U.S. views as a "gray-zone" security threat (CSIS, 2024).

Alternative Infrastructure and the Blue Dot Network

To offer a credible alternative to China's BRI, the U.S. has championed high-standard, transparent infrastructure development. Blue Dot Network (BDN) which was formally launched at the OECD in April 2024, the BDN provides a "seal of approval" for quality infrastructure projects. In April 2025, the network held its first certification ceremony, recognizing projects that meet rigorous standards for environmental and social sustainability (U.S. Department of State, 2024; Blue Dot Network, 2025).

Moreover, the PGII as the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, a G7-led initiative, has set a target of mobilizing \$600 billion by 2027 to fund digital, energy, and health infrastructure across the Indo-Pacific, directly challenging the state-led financing model of the BRI (G7 Apulia Summit, 2024; Runde, 2024).

Indian Response:

The strategic landscape of the Indo-Pacific has undergone a profound transformation, moving from a region of cooperation to one of intense systemic competition. While the United States and India have historically maintained a degree of strategic distance, the shared challenge of China's assertive rise has fused their interests into what is now frequently termed a "Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership" (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).

1. India's Assertive Shift: From "Act East" to "MAHASAGAR"

India's response is no longer merely reactive but increasingly proactive. Under the Modi 3.0 administration (2024–2025), India has transitioned from its 2014 "Act East" policy toward a more ambitious maritime doctrine known as MAHASAGAR (December 2025), which aims to position India as the "preferred security partner" and "first responder" across the Indian Ocean (Arab News, 2025).

First, in the late 2024 and early 2025, India significantly ramped up its military diplomacy. This included the inaugural CINBAX (India-Cambodia) army exercise in December 2024 and the first India-Philippines Maritime Dialogue, which focused on countering "gray-zone" threats in the South China Sea (ORF, 2025).

Second, India has significantly played the role of a multilateral leadership. The adoption of the BIMSTEC Bangkok Vision 2030 in April 2025 highlights India's efforts to integrate the Bay of Bengal into a secure economic zone, bypassing the traditional hurdles of the SAARC framework and providing an alternative to China-led regional connectivity (BIMSTEC Secretariat, 2025).

2. Port Infrastructure: Countering the "String of Pearls"

To counter China's logistical foothold at Gwadar, India has accelerated its "Necklace of Diamonds" strategy, a series of strategic access agreements at key chokepoints.

Strategic Asset	Partner Country	Current Status (2025)
Chabahar Port	Iran	Received a critical U.S. sanctions waiver until April 2026; serves as the linchpin for the INSTC (Drishti IAS, 2025).
Agalega Islands	Mauritius	Fully operationalized as a maritime surveillance hub to monitor Chinese PLAN movements in the Western IOR (FPRI, 2024).
Duqm Port	Oman	Expanded through a 2025 MOU with Japanese and Omani firms, reinforcing India's access to the Arabian Sea (NYK Line, 2025).

Strategic Asset	Partner Country	Current Status (2025)
Sabang Port	Indonesia	Joint development ongoing to monitor the entrance of the Malacca Strait (ORF, 2025).

3. The U.S.-India Latticework: A New Defense Paradigm

The U.S. has replaced its old ‘hub-and-spoke’ alliance system with a latticework of overlapping security architectures. The most significant development in 2025 was the signing of the 10-year Defense Framework Agreement in October, which seeks to synchronize U.S. and Indian military industrial bases (Vivekananda International Foundation, 2025).

The Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) has moved into high-gear, with the Bharat Semi-US Space Force fabrication plant (February 2025) establishing a trusted supply chain for defense-grade semiconductors, reducing regional reliance on East Asian hubs vulnerable to Chinese coercion (SAIS Review, 2025). Similarly, the The Quad’s Evolution played a significant role in countering the BRI narrative in the region. At the July 2025 Quad Foreign Ministers’ meeting in Washington, the group launched the Indo-Pacific Logistics Network, a mechanism for shared airlift and maritime logistics that practically integrates the navies of the four democracies (White House, 2025).

4. Multi-Alignment as a Superpower Tool

Scholars now argue that India has successfully replaced "Non-Alignment" with "Multi-Alignment" (or Omni-alignment). This strategy allows New Delhi to engage with the U.S. on defense and technology while maintaining strategic autonomy through partnerships with Russia and the Global South (Tharoor, 2025; CIDOB, 2025). This pragmatism is designed to ensure a multipolar regional order, preventing any single power—specifically China—from achieving hegemony in the Indo-Pacific.

"India's strength lies in its strategic nimbleness. Rather than being bound by rigid alliances, it is guided by interests—engaging the U.S. on tech, Russia on energy, and Europe on trade." — Shashi Tharoor, 2025.

India’s geopolitical strategy has transitioned into a more assertive phase, underpinned by the dual pillars of the "Act East" and "Neighbourhood First" policies. By identifying a burgeoning "strategic encirclement" through Chinese-led infrastructure, New Delhi has moved away from historical non-alignment toward a pragmatic "multi-alignment" (Zafar, 2022). This shift is characterized by deepened security ties with Washington through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and the development of regional maritime hubs, such as Chabahar Port in Iran. These initiatives allow India to leverage Western partnerships while cementing its role as the primary security provider in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), creating a coordinated front against a unipolar, Beijing-centric order.

China’s foothold in Gwadar is a critical disruption to this balance, offering Beijing control over essential maritime chokepoints and upending established maritime conventions. This presence directly threatens the core strategic interests of both India and the U.S., forcing a recalibration of regional tactics to contain China’s military and economic expansionism (Zafar, 2022).

Following the military withdrawal from Afghanistan, the United States has accelerated its strategic pivot to the Indo-Pacific. This realignment is visible in the modernization of defence alliances with Japan, Australia, South Korea, and India (Anwar, 2020). These partnerships are designed to form a cohesive network of democratic states dedicated to maritime security and the protection of global sea lanes. Recent high-level forums, including the Quad and G7 summits, emphasize a unified response to China’s regional ascendancy, with India emerging as the indispensable linchpin for security in the IOR (Rasheed, 2022; Anwar, 2020).

Central to this effort is the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) doctrine, which has facilitated a significant increase in U.S. naval deployments—including aircraft carriers and submarines—to monitor Chinese activity (Anwar, 2020; Vashisht, 2023). Beyond conventional military posturing, the U.S. has utilized its economic statecraft to encourage investment in nations surrounding Gwadar, particularly India, to offer a viable alternative to Chinese financial influence.

A critical new front in this competition is the digital and technological landscape. Citing concerns over state-sponsored surveillance and cybersecurity, Washington has led a global campaign to restrict the presence of Chinese firms like Huawei and the Beidou satellite system within the sensitive communication networks of its allies (Berman et al., 2023; Sanger et al., 2019). By urging Quad partners to exclude Chinese hardware from their 5G infrastructure, the U.S. aims to safeguard the integrity of regional communications and limit Beijing's intelligence-gathering capabilities (Berman et al., 2023). This technological containment is an essential component of a broader strategy to maintain a competitive advantage and prevent the consolidation of Chinese power across the Indian Ocean (Berman et al., 2023).

The CPEC and the Evolving Geopolitical Competition Around the Gwadar Region:

The rise of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has transformed the sleepy fishing town of Gwadar into a high-stakes epicenter of 21st-century power politics (Zafar, 2025). At its heart, Gwadar is more than just a deep-water port; it is the physical manifestation of China's "Malacca Dilemma" solution, offering a direct bypass for energy imports from the Arabian Sea to the Xinjiang province (Atlas Institute, 2025; Araújo, 2025). However, this maritime "shortcut" has triggered a profound ripple effect across the Indo-Pacific. For the United States and India, Gwadar represents a "strategic strongpoint" that could eventually facilitate the permanent presence of the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) near the world's most vital energy chokepoints (Social Science Review Archives, 2025). This has catalyzed a complex game of maritime chess, where India's "Necklace of Diamonds" strategy—a term first coined by former Foreign Secretary Lalit Mansingh to describe the encirclement of Chinese interests—and the U.S.-led "Integrated Deterrence" framework now converge to counterbalance what they perceive as a shift toward a Beijing-centric regional order (Air University, 2025; Dolan, 2025). As 2025 progresses, the competition has become so intense that reports indicate Pakistan has begun floating exploratory proposals for alternative facilities, such as the Pasni port, in a tactical attempt to regain strategic agency and maintain diplomatic leverage between Washington and Beijing (Anees, 2025; Maritime Gateway, 2025).

This research highlights that the United States has systematically deployed its substantial economic leverage to dissuade developing nations from fully integrating into Beijing's expansive BRI and the CPEC. In the specific context of Pakistan, Washington has sought to maintain its traditional influence and prevent Chinese economic hegemony by leveraging the structural mechanisms of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) during periods of fiscal crisis (Ali, 2020). By intervening as Islamabad approached the precipice of a sovereign default, the U.S. skillfully utilized IMF assistance to impose fiscal reforms that mandate transparency and structural shifts, thereby reducing Pakistan's absolute economic reliance on Beijing (Lawder & Singh, 2023).

This strategic maneuver served a dual purpose: it acted as a safeguard against the perceived risks of China's "debt-trap diplomacy" while simultaneously aligning Pakistan's economic trajectory with Western financial standards (Ali, 2020). By facilitating IMF financing, the U.S. ensured that Pakistan would not default on its obligations, which might have otherwise forced Islamabad into deeper concessions to China. Furthermore, this calculated intervention served as a powerful signal to the broader international community, illustrating the systemic limitations and potential sovereignty risks associated with an over-dependence on Chinese capital (Lawder & Singh, 2023; Ali, 2020).

Parallel to these American economic maneuvers, India has adopted an increasingly sophisticated, multi-pronged approach to counter what it perceives as the existential threat posed by the development of Gwadar Port. Recognizing that Gwadar provides China with a critical gateway to the

Arabian Sea, New Delhi has significantly accelerated its naval expansion and modernization efforts (Pant & Mehta, 2018). Central to this response is the development of the Chabahar Port in Iran, which is strategically designed to bypass Pakistan and provide India with a vital gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asian markets (Pant & Saha, 2021). By fostering deep security and commercial ties with other Indian Ocean Region (IOR) states, India aims to reassert its role as a central pillar of regional stability and a primary security provider.

To preserve its strategic autonomy, India has intentionally pivoted away from Chinese-led investment models, prioritizing deeper economic integration with the United States and other democratic partners. This diversification serves as a critical shield against potential fiscal vulnerabilities, ensuring that New Delhi's economic sovereignty remains uncompromised despite Beijing's aggressive regional expansion (Anwar, 2020). However, the persistent presence of Chinese assets in the Arabian Sea continues to cause significant alarm in Indian strategic circles, particularly regarding the long-term potential for regional destabilization and the erosion of India's traditional maritime influence.

To effectively check China's growing footprint, India has modernized its maritime surveillance and domain awareness capabilities through the acquisition of advanced sonar and satellite-based tracking systems. This posture is bolstered by regular participation in high-stakes joint naval exercises, most notably with the United States and Japan, which serve to operationalize the security cooperation of the Quad framework (Bose & Chaudhury, 2024; Pant, 2022).

Beyond traditional defense, New Delhi is actively constructing a counter-narrative to the BRI through massive connectivity projects like the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor, aimed at ensuring that Gwadar does not evolve into an unchallenged military outpost (Wani, 2023; Panda, 2023; Johnny, 2023).

This assertive paradigm is codified in the "India Doctrine," a strategic framework that evolved from its initial emergence in 2004 to its formal integration into maritime security strategy in 2007 (Indian Naval Strategic Publication, 2009). This doctrine establishes India as the primary security provider in the IOR, emphasizing the protection of Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) and the preservation of territorial integrity against revisionist powers (Baruah, 2020).

The rise of Gwadar, however, presents a direct geographic challenge to this doctrine. By granting China a "backdoor" to the Persian Gulf, the port threatens to disrupt India's traditional maritime dominance and complete a ring of Chinese-controlled hubs—frequently identified as the "String of Pearls" (Butt & Siddiqui, 2021). In response, India has evolved its "Look East" policy into a more vigorous "Act East" policy, significantly expanding its diplomatic and military engagement with Southeast and East Asian nations to mitigate Beijing's encircling maneuvers (Bajpae, 2017; Rajendram, 2014; Mehrotra, 2012).

Ultimately, these conflicting grand strategies have birthed a cycle of reciprocal escalation. Beijing interprets Indian naval modernization and Western alliances as provocative threats to its own maritime ambitions, prompting further militarization and fortification of Gwadar. This resulting atmosphere of deep-seated distrust and the ensuing maritime arms race have effectively transformed the Indian Ocean into the primary theater of 21st-century geopolitical competition, where every infrastructure project is viewed through the prism of zero-sum influence.

Navigating the Geopolitical Landscape Surrounding Gwadar Region: A Critical Evaluation of Key Findings:

The analysis of this research reveals several key findings concerning the geopolitical, strategic, and military motivations underlying the CPEC and the Gwadar port for both Pakistan and China:

Firstly, it is evident that the CPEC has profoundly fortified the strategic alliance between China and Pakistan, particularly as a unified counterbalance to Indian influence. While this partnership is framed by both nations as being built on mutual trust, it has simultaneously fostered a notable economic and

infrastructural dependence on China within Pakistan. This reliance has prompted experts to voice concerns over the potential for Beijing to exert disproportionate influence over Pakistan's domestic and foreign policy (Ijaz, 2018). Consequently, this deepening tie is viewed with apprehension by neighbouring India and the United States, both of whom see it as a strategic manoeuvre to expand Chinese authority and challenge established regional interests.

Secondly, the military dimension of this relationship has evolved alongside economic aid, allowing Pakistan to modernize its armed forces and enhance its maritime deterrence. This cooperation has facilitated greater interoperability through joint training and exercises, yet it simultaneously raises the spectre of regional militarization and an accelerating arms race. The strategic necessity of Gwadar is underscored by Pakistan's historical vulnerability to naval blockades, particularly the experiences of the 1971 war. However, by establishing a foothold near the Strait of Hormuz—a vital chokepoint for the global oil trade—the port has become a focal point for geopolitical friction and competition over the Indian Ocean's primary maritime routes.

Thirdly, China's "String of Pearls" strategy utilizes Gwadar as a central node, offering the potential for a permanent naval station that could safeguard Beijing's maritime communication routes. This expanding presence is perceived as a direct challenge by the United States and India, who fear that Chinese dominance over these passages could eventually disrupt global trade. In response, these nations are actively pursuing counter-strategies—ranging from the strengthening of regional alliances to the alleged use of proxies—to impede China's developmental initiatives and secure their own commercial pathways.

Lastly, the local populace has suffered greatly because of the growing rivalry for regional supremacy. Scholars like Sabatini and others have examined how the region's securitisation has put international law and human rights at grave risk. This has shown up as systematic marginalisation, restricted mobility, and forced relocation for the indigenous communities in Gwadar. Although the BRI was promoted to address Balochistan's long-standing neglect and high rates of poverty, the anticipated economic revolution has mainly failed to materialise among the local population (Malik, 2018). Rather, the advantages of development have stayed concentrated in the port areas, mostly benefiting Chinese citizens and foreign labourers (Ijaz, 2018; Notezai, 2024).

Conclusion:

The strategic transformation of the Indo-Pacific has reached a critical juncture where grand maritime ambitions and local human realities collide. As this analysis has demonstrated, the expansion of China's footprint, anchored by the CPEC and the pivotal Gwadar Port, has fundamentally altered the equilibrium of the IOR. This concludes that the region is no longer merely a conduit for global trade, but a volatile theatre of 'integrated deterrence' and systemic rivalry, where the pursuit of maritime hegemony by one power inevitably triggers a multifaceted defensive response from others.

The clear enunciation of China's strategic goals through the BRI has acted as a catalyst for a new, 'lattice-work' security architecture. The United States and India, viewing Gwadar as the potential vanguard of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), have moved beyond cautious observation to active counterbalancing. This security dilemma has birthed a self-perpetuating cycle of rivalry: as China increases its logistical footprint to secure energy sea lanes, the U.S. and India respond with heightened naval presence and the formalization of alliances like the Quad. As the IOR becomes more crowded with naval assets and competing infrastructure projects, such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), regional power dynamics have become increasingly brittle, raising the risk of miscalculation and diminishing the prospects for traditional multilateral cooperation.

Furthermore, the most reprehensible finding of this study is the widening gap between the "billion-dollar rhetoric" of the CPEC and the deteriorating well-being of the indigenous Baloch population. The strategic centrality of Gwadar has effectively turned the region into a high-security garrison, where the fundamental rights of the local people are sacrificed at the altar of state-led development.

The collaborative efforts of China and Pakistan have established a disturbing pattern of human rights abuses, characterized by the forced displacement of Baloch communities from their ancestral lands. This is not merely an economic transition but a direct assault on the right to live in peace, as the "securitization of daily life" imposes rigid restrictions on freedom of movement and the subjective vulnerable populations to pervasive, technology-driven surveillance.

Pakistan's domestic policies further compound this crisis, as an iron-fisted approach toward dissent exacerbates the plight of the Baloch people. By framing local grievances as existential threats to national security or foreign-funded sabotage, Islamabad has created a stifling environment that leaves no room for local communities to exercise their basic rights or voice concerns over environmental degradation and resource depletion. This unfortunate reality underscores the unacceptable human cost exacted by the geopolitical manoeuvring centered around Gwadar, where the "success" of a port is measured in cargo tonnage rather than the prosperity of the people living in its shadow.

Finally, the counter-balancing powers, i.e., the United States and India with their opposition to CPEC is rooted in legitimate strategic concerns regarding a unipolar, Beijing-dominated order. This pressure inadvertently fuels Pakistan's security anxieties. The regional friction unwittingly places the Baloch people in a perilous position, caught in a "pincer movement" between a repressive domestic security apparatus and a global "Great Game" that prioritizes chokepoints over civil liberties. For a truly 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' to exist, the regional powers must acknowledge that any security architecture built on the marginalization of local populations is inherently unstable. Until development in Gwadar prioritizes human dignity over naval logistics, the region will remain a theatre of enduring conflict rather than a beacon of shared prosperity.

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