



China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: The Rising Geopolitical Competition in

Balochistan and Its Impacts on Local Population

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by

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the frequently neglected individuals and communities residing in a resourceful land, who have been marginalised by the rapid pace of development. They have been ignored throughout their lives.

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Abstract

This PhD thesis undertakes a thorough investigation of the complex relationship between increasing geopolitical competition and its resulting impact on human rights, with a particular emphasis on the unique setting of Balochistan. The purpose of this academic pursuit is to clarify the mechanisms that contribute to the escalation of human rights abuses in conjunction with the deepening of geopolitical competition. It is crucial to emphasise that this complex relationship, at the micro-level, has been noticeably absent in the existing scholarly discussion.

This thesis posits that the escalation of geopolitical competition has had a detrimental impact on international law and human rights, resulting in significant concessions in the domain of human rights. The analytical framework that Sabatini and other well-known academics developed serves as the foundation for the argument. The consequences of China's increasing involvement through its multi-billion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its flagship China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in the Indian Ocean Region have had a significant impact on the local population of Balochistan. The research findings highlight the socio-economic and political implications faced by the people living in the Gwadar region, shedding light on the complex dynamics of geopolitical rivalry in this area. The findings revealed that the local population in Balochistan, particularly in the Gwadar region, is experiencing forced eviction, limited access to the sea for fishing, more securitization and surveillance, and a loss of control over their own resources. These consequences have led to heightened tensions and unrest among the local population, as they feel marginalised and disempowered in their own land. Additionally, the influx of Chinese workers and businesses has also resulted in cultural clashes and a sense of cultural erosion among the Baloch people. Within the confines of this

analytical framework, the thesis explores the particular implications of the growing geopolitical rivalry at a micro-level in the vicinity of the Gwadar port. The results effectively highlight the significant adverse effects on the community, wherein individuals have observed the deterioration of their fundamental rights, personal freedoms, socioeconomic entitlements, and commercial concerns.

This study examines the intricate dynamics resulting from the interaction between geopolitics and human rights breaches at a local level, within a region known for its past power struggles and regional wars. The research is characterised by its creative and insightful approach. This work serves as a testament to the significance of amplifying the voices and experiences of individuals who have been deeply impacted, therefore making a considerable contribution to the growing fields of international relations and human rights research.

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Abbreviation

ADB: Asian Development Bank

AIIB: Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

BAP: Balochistan Awami Party

BLA: Baloch Liberation Army

BNP-M: Balochistan National Party- Mengal

BRI: Belt and Road Initiative

CARs: Central Asian Republics

CCP: Chinese Communist Party

CFR: Council on Foreign Relations

COPHC: China Overseas Port and Harbours Company

CPEC: China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

DSR: Digital Silk Road

ETIM: East Turkistan Islamic Movement

EU: European Union

FDI: Foreign Direct Investment

GDA: Gwadar Development Authority

GPA: Gwadar Port Authority

GPS: Global Positioning System

IMF: International Monetary Fund

IOR: India Ocean Region

IORA: Indian Ocean Rim Association

KPK: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

KSNP: Kalat State National Party

LTP: Long Term Projects

M.E.: Middle East

MOU: Memorandum of Understanding

MSRI: Maritime Silk Road Initiative

NAP: National Awami Party

NP: National Party

OBOR: One Belt One Road

PLA: People's Liberation Army

PLAN: People's Liberation Army Navy

PML-N: Pakistan Muslim League- Nawaz

PPP: Pakistan People’s Party

PRC: People’s Republic of China

PSA: Port of Singapore Authority

PTI: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf

QUAD: Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

RASTA: Research for Social Transformation and Advancement

SCO: Shanghai Cooperation Organization

SEZ: Special Economic Zone

SLOC: Sea Lines of Communication

SREB: Silk Road Economic Belt

TTP: Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan

UDHR: Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UNO: United Nations Organization

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 The Context:

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), formerly known as "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR), is a massive economic and strategic project initiated by China's President Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It aims to enhance connectivity, trade facilitation, and economic development through the establishment of infrastructure networks such as roads, railways, ports, and digital connectivity. China's BRI is an immensely ambitious and far-reaching economic and strategic project that holds the potential to significantly reshape the international political and economic landscape (Chatzky & McBride, 2020). It has sparked a new wave of political and foreign policies across the world, especially in Asia and Africa. According to a World Bank report, the BRI is anticipated to build new economic corridors, improve infrastructure connectivity, and foster economic growth in participating nations (World Bank, 2018). The report also suggests that the BRI has the potential to stimulate economic growth, establish additional economic routes, and improve infrastructure connectivity among participating countries.

The growing number of Asian and African countries joining the project is proof that this initiative has attracted enormous interest and attention from a wide range of nations (Chatzky & McBride, 2020; McBride, Berman & Chatzk, 2023). According to the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) of the United States, a total of 139 countries have joined the BRI, with a considerable number of additional states expressing interest in participating in this expansive endeavour (Sacks, 2021).

The allure of the BRI lies in its promise of enhanced connectivity, trade facilitation, and economic development through the establishment of infrastructure networks such as roads, railways, ports, and digital connectivity. By promoting regional cooperation and integration, the BRI seeks to create a more interconnected world, fostering economic growth and prosperity (Wiktor, 2023).

China is currently engaged in a significant expansion of the BRI project with the aim of augmenting its sphere of influence. It extended an invitation to its primary regional competitor, India, to partake in the BRI as a means of reducing potential opposition. However, after the border clashes that occurred in July 2020, India terminated several trade agreements with China (Cohen A. , 2020).

The BRI faced resistance from regional as well as international powers due to the strategic and geopolitical involvement of China. India and the western world powers are mostly sceptical about the reach and outcome of the great BRI project and its impact on their regional as well as international interests. India and the US have openly criticised the BRI, expressing concerns about China's regional influence and its impact on their own interests. India sees the rise of China in the Indian Ocean as an encirclement and is wary of further Chinese infiltration in the region (Sutton, 2020). The US also has reservations about the transparency of the BRI and its flagship projects (Ali S. M., 2020).

Asia is transforming due to the BRI. Many scholars have called it the "New Great Game" which is reshaping the Asian geopolitical landscape (Sood, 2017). As Roy said, "The rise of China both economically and militarily; the rise of India; the power game between countries to increase commercial influence throughout Eurasia and beyond; and the continued presence of the US to address this power dynamic are all signs that show that Asia is fast

becoming a “flashpoint” in the global platform” (Roy, 2019). In this setting, the Asian continent has become the focus of China's Asian Dream. The dream centres around the projection of multiple seaports in different littoral states on the Indian and Pacific Oceans and the development of infrastructure and energy projects.

To materialise the Asian dream, China has signed multi-billion-dollar projects with South and East Asian states. One such initiative is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which was introduced in September-October 2013 as a long-term infrastructural development, production, and economic integration vision aimed primarily at the Eurasian landmass (Shah, 2017). The project was officially launched on April 20, 2015, when Chinese President Xi Jinping and Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif signed 51 agreements and MOUs (Memorandum of Understanding) (Iqbal, 2015).

CPEC is composed of four major components, including energy, infrastructure, economic zones, and the construction and operationalization of Gwadar Port (Pascal, 2023). Gwadar is in the province of Balochistan in Pakistan and holds strategic importance due to its geographical and geostrategic location. Strategically, Gwadar is crucial for realising China's vision of becoming a dominant player in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), as it connects China to the busiest trade and energy routes. Gwadar is located approximately 400 kilometres from the highly trafficked trade and energy route known as the Strait of Hormuz (Javaid & Jahangir, 2015). In addition to facilitating China's access to the Indian Ocean, the mentioned route also serves as the most direct pathway for China to reach its Xinjiang province. China perceives Gwadar as an asset in the pursuit of its wider Asian ambitions, while Pakistan reaps substantial advantages from China's involvement in Gwadar (Gady, 2016).

However, Gwadar Port's strategic importance as part of the BRI and CPEC projects also intensifies geopolitical rivalries in the region. The US and India have expressed their reservations and opposition to China's hidden agendas in Gwadar Port. Local power politics and geopolitical rivalry have adversely affected the Indigenous population around the Gwadar Port (Khan, 2022). The signing of CPEC between Pakistan and China means that both states are pursuing their regional and national interests and are dependent on each other for the attainment of their goals. Conversely, the US, India, and other influential actors in the regional context endeavour to limit China's position, thereby exacerbating geopolitical rivalry.

The BRI, specifically through projects like the CPEC, have led to increased tensions between India and China, as well as between Pakistan and India. The local communities around Gwadar Port have been marginalised and displaced because of large-scale infrastructure development and land acquisition. The traditional way of life for the indigenous population, dependent on fishing and agriculture, has been disrupted and their livelihood threatened. This has led to social unrest and a sense of alienation among the people, who feel neglected and forgotten in the pursuit of economic development. The long-term impacts of the BRI projects on the region's geopolitical dynamics and the well-being of the local communities remain uncertain and require further attention and analysis. Furthermore, there are concerns about the loss of livelihood for fishermen due to the expansion of port activities in the Indian Ocean. There have been reports of human rights violations and the neglect of local populations in politically volatile regions like Balochistan (Burgess, Simm, & Cooper, 2019). Exploring these impacts and their connection to the growing geopolitical competition would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges associated with the BRI. As a result, this thesis examines and investigates the link between rising geopolitical competition

in and around Gwadar and its direct impacts on the human rights of the Baloch community in Balochistan.

1.2 Statement of the problem:

Balochistan, under the spotlight of China's BRI initiative, is witnessing billions of dollars pouring in through the CPEC project. This ambitious endeavour, weaving a web of transportation, railways, and energy lines, seeks to bridge China's Xinjiang to the Indian Ocean, serving not just economic ambitions but also strategic goals in the IOR. Gwadar, a crown jewel of CPEC, has seen China inject millions into its Deep-Sea Port. This port promises a twofold advantage: securing reliable Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) for China, bypassing the Malacca Strait's chokepoint, and potentially establishing a naval base to keep an eye on Indian activities in the region (Kaplan, 2009). China's heft in Balochistan's economy, while fostering development, also raises concerns about its growing geopolitical footprint and potential naval expansion near a key rival (Kaplan, 2009).

For Pakistan, China's projects have helped in some way to address the country's immediate economic woes although their long-term consequences remain unclear. Pakistan has faced significant challenges, including a poor law and order situation, corruption, and military and economic sanctions from the US (The Times, 2011). Additionally, its energy and infrastructure sectors are not as developed as those of other countries in the region. Hence, Pakistan sees the CPEC project as a significant opportunity to rebuild its economy and address the various challenges it has been facing. With Chinese investment, Pakistan aims to develop its energy and infrastructure sectors. Additionally, the CPEC provides Pakistan with economic and military support, particularly in its rivalry with India. The provision of submarines and naval security provided by China ensures that Pakistan can effectively defend its coastline and

deter any potential Indian hostile acts (Sen, 2023). By aligning with China, Pakistan strengthens its position against India and aims to establish itself as a significant player in the region.

However, while the CPEC project has its advantages, it is not without concerns and criticisms. The primary concern of the CPEC is the growing geopolitical competition in the region, particularly between global powers like China and the US as well as between the regional competitors i.e., India and Pakistan. The growing competition in and around the IOR and Indo-Pacific region is likely to escalate tensions and increase the risk of conflict. This is because the CPEC project has the potential to alter the strategic balance in the region, with China gaining a significant foothold in Pakistan. China is expanding its presence in Balochistan's Gwadar region, which is strategically located at the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz. This has raised concerns among neighbouring countries, especially India, as it gives China greater control over the vital sea lanes of communication in the Indian Ocean. Additionally, the CPEC has created a sense of unease in the US, as it sees China's increasing influence in Pakistan as a challenge to its own strategic interests in the region. Therefore, the CPEC project has not only become a catalyst for geopolitical competition but also a potential flashpoint for future conflicts, posing serious impacts on the local communities, in Balochistan.

The more the Chinese presence in Balochistan grows, the more it affects the local population. Under this condition, the projects for which the Baloch should be given priority, are compromised. Since the people of other provinces are more advanced and developed than the Baloch community in Balochistan, they have an advantage in job and project competitions. This inequality has further strained relations between the central government and the province, fuelling distrust among the Baloch people towards the state. This growing

sense of mistrust further perpetuates the cycle of underdevelopment in Balochistan. The lack of opportunities and unequal distribution of resources only widen the gap between the province and other region. The Baloch community in Balochistan is downtrodden, poor, and unable to compete with the Chinese and other ethnic groups in their areas. Because of the ignorance and lack of attention shown to the people of Balochistan, the Baloch community remained underdeveloped. The most populous and developed provinces in Pakistan, Punjab, and Sindh, receive the lion's share of CPEC projects and jobs. This clearly illustrates the unequal distribution of developmental projects, which has only served to widen the already existing divide between the province and the centre.

The concerns expressed by the local Baloch people regarding the CPEC can be categorised into three primary areas. First, there is apprehension about the potential demographic shift and its impact on their businesses, human rights, and livelihood. This could lead to a loss of opportunities and resources for the local Baloch population, as well as a dilution of their cultural identity. Additionally, the Baloch nationalists are concerned about the human rights violations that may occur during the construction of CPEC projects, such as forced displacement, land grabbing, and environmental degradation. These violations can further marginalise the Baloch community and undermine their autonomy and rights (Wani, 2021). The fear of a potential demographic shift stems from the influx of workers from other provinces, particularly Punjab, who may settle in Balochistan permanently.

Second, opposition to the CPEC is also fuelled by Baloch nationalists and opposition political parties in Balochistan, who perceive the project as a means of subjugating the Baloch community in Pakistan. That is because the Baloch as a community and as a province have a long history of mistrust towards the federal government, and the CPEC could place the Baloch

community on the verge of being a minority in their own province. Due to the lack of quality education and skills, the Baloch community would not be able to compete with other regions.

Third, the growing geopolitical competition has further exacerbated the situation, constituting a reason for the local Baloch people's scepticism towards the CPEC. As geopolitical tensions escalate, various nations and entities become more invested in gaining influence and control over strategic regions like Gwadar (Hillman & McCalpin, 2020; Khan, 2022). This competition between global powers, such as China and the US, has intensified the concerns of the Baloch community regarding their autonomy and control over their resources. They fear that the CPEC may further marginalise their already marginalised community, as they believe that the economic benefits will primarily benefit outsiders and not the local Baloch people. This deep-rooted scepticism is fuelled by historical grievances and a sense of being left behind in the development process, making it difficult for the Baloch community to trust the intentions of the Chinese and Pakistani governments (Burgess, Simm, & Cooper, 2019).

Against the backdrop of a mounting geopolitical rivalry surrounding projects linked to the CPEC, this research endeavours to delve into the experiences of the Baloch community, situated at the heart of this escalating competition. This research aims to shed light on the challenges faced by the Baloch people as they navigate the complexities of the CPEC projects and the power dynamics between competing nations. This study aims to explore the extent to which larger political and economic interests have overshadowed the rights of the Baloch community by examining their experiences. Ultimately, it is crucial to understand how this competition impacts the Baloch people to develop strategies that prioritise their well-being and ensure their inclusion in decision-making processes. These issues need careful

examination from a scholarly perspective. Through an examination of these dynamics, the study seeks to provide significant contributions to our understanding of the complex ramifications of the CPEC on the Baloch community.

1.3 Research Questions and Aims and Objectives:

The study focuses on the BRI, its flagship project – the CPEC and their consequences on the local Baloch population. It brings forth the perspectives, concerns, and experiences of locals and their views on CPEC. The study will address the following key analytical question:

- i. To what extent does geopolitical competition between major powers, manifested through megaprojects like the Gwadar Port and CPEC in Balochistan, influence and exacerbate human rights violations, restrictions on businesses, freedoms of movement, expression, and assembly?

The escalating geopolitical competition surrounding the Gwadar Port and CPEC project, driven by strategic interests of major powers, exacerbates human rights violations in Balochistan. The pursuit of economic and strategic advantages by states often overshadows concerns for human rights, leading to human rights violations, displacement, marginalization, and suppression of local communities, particularly the Baloch people.

Gwadar Port, a critical node in the CPEC, is a focal point of geopolitical rivalry. Its strategic location and economic potential have drawn the attention of multiple global powers, intensifying competition in the region. However, this geopolitical competition is not without consequences, as local communities, especially the Baloch people, experience a surge in human rights abuses.

The development of Gwadar Port and associated CPEC projects has led to forced displacement of Baloch communities, loss of livelihoods, and environmental degradation. Additionally, the increased security presence and surveillance measures aimed at protecting strategic assets have further curtailed civil liberties and political freedoms in the region.

Beyond addressing the central research question, this study delves into a series of interconnected inquiries that have emerged from ongoing discussions within the field. These inquiries, while subsidiary to the main focus, offer valuable insights into the nuances and complexities of the subject matter. By exploring these related questions, the research aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic and its implications.

- I. In the Indian Ocean region, what are the key dynamics and factors driving the emerging geopolitical competition surrounding Gwadar Port, and how do these dynamics differentially impact the strategic interests of the major powers involved?
- II. How has CPEC affected the social, economic, and political well-being of the Baloch people? What role do the geopolitical interests of China and Pakistan play in the project's implementation and the local population's reactions?
- III. How has CPEC affected the social, economic, and political well-being of the Baloch people? What role do the geopolitical interests of China and Pakistan play in the project's implementation and the local population's reactions?

To address the fundamental questions ignored by most scholars, the study aims to uncover how large-scale projects with geopolitical consideration like CPEC impact human rights in the region. The study will examine the effects of these megaprojects on the local

Baloch community, focusing on their human rights and livelihood. It will investigate the extent to which the development activities associated with CPEC have led to displacement, marginalisation, and violations of the rights of the Baloch people. Additionally, the study will explore the role of the emerging geopolitical competition around Gwadar port in exacerbating these issues. By shedding light on these overlooked aspects, the research will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of large-scale projects on human rights at a local level. The study will not only focus on the given statement but will open vistas for more academic inquiry in the context of geopolitical competition, the geopolitics of megaprojects, and human rights.

Thus, the primary objective of this research is to analyse the relationship between geopolitical competition and human rights violations. Specifically, this research aims to investigate the growing geopolitical competition surrounding Gwadar Port and its implications for human rights violations in Balochistan. Since Balochistan has always experienced human rights violations and military operations from 1948 until today, the current geopolitical competition between the major powers has exacerbated the situation. This objective is to be achieved by analysing the various dimensions (economic, strategic, and geopolitical) of the BRI and the CPEC with reference to the Gwadar region. By gaining a deeper understanding of these geopolitical rivalries, this research aims to generate new knowledge regarding their effects on the local population, particularly in projects with significant geopolitical and geostrategic elements.

To achieve these objectives, the research relies on a comprehensive range of data sources, including interviews and the opinions of different stakeholders from the Gwadar and Balochistan regions. These stakeholders include the local authorities, civil society

organisations, and members of the indigenous population. By incorporating their perspectives and practical experiences, this research will present a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the consequences of the geopolitical dynamics. This approach will provide a more comprehensive and credible understanding of how megaprojects impact indigenous communities at a micro-level. By incorporating these qualitative insights, this research aims to fill a crucial gap in existing scholarship, generating a robust body of knowledge that captures the complexities and intricacies of the geopolitical dynamics and their ramifications for the indigenous population in Balochistan.

1.4 Central Argument:

In the context of this research project, my central argument is that there is a profound link between geopolitics of megaprojects and human rights violations. As geopolitical rivalries intensify, human rights violations increase. This is because countries tend to prioritise their strategic interests over human rights in a competitive global environment. As nations strive to gain an edge over their rivals, they may overlook or even actively disregard the rights and well-being of their own citizens or those of other nations. Thus, the proposition of this research is that the BRI and the CPEC projects are significant factors that influence and shape the geopolitical dynamics in South Asia and the IOR.

The strategic imperatives of China and Pakistan for economic growth, energy security, and regional connectivity are what drive their geopolitical interests in the CPEC project, but they also carry risks of geopolitical competition, regional conflict, and domestic instability. The CPEC has the potential to transform the economic landscape of Balochistan. It can create new opportunities for infrastructure development, trade, and investment. However, it also poses significant challenges to the local communities. These challenges include land acquisition,

displacement, economic disparity, the influx of millions into a province, loss of economic, social, and political rights, and environmental degradation. The Baloch people's historical experiences of marginalisation, discrimination, and conflict with the state, as well as their aspirations for autonomy, self-determination, and social justice, all have an impact on how they react to the CPEC.

1.5 The Rationale for the Study:

This thesis delves into the unexplored connection between rising geopolitical competition and the human rights implications for local communities entangled in megaprojects like CPEC. Despite the significant influence of geopolitics on such endeavours, its consequences for indigenous populations, particularly in Balochistan, remain largely unexamined. By investigating the complex interplay between competing geopolitical interests (China, Pakistan, India, US) and their impact on the fundamental rights of people of Balochistan, this research sheds light on the intricate power dynamics at play and underscores the urgent need for human rights safeguards within the context of megaprojects and geopolitical manoeuvring. This research rationale highlights the significance and necessity of this study, considering the following key points:

1.5.1 Knowledge Gap:

The existing scholarship on the BRI and the CPEC, has primarily focused on their economic and strategic implications. However, there is a critical gap in the literature regarding the direct impacts of these megaprojects on the local population, particularly the indigenous communities in Balochistan. By addressing this gap, the proposed research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the geopolitical dynamics of megaprojects and their effects on human rights.

1.5.2 Human Rights Implications:

The expansion of Chinese influence and investments through the BRI and CPEC raises concerns about the potential human rights violations experienced by the indigenous population in Balochistan. These communities often face challenges such as demographic challenges, displacement, migration, cultural erosion, and economic and political marginalisation. Understanding and documenting these human rights implications is crucial for advocating for the protection of the rights and well-being of the affected individuals.

1.5.3 Geopolitical Dynamics:

The geopolitical competition surrounding the Gwadar Port involves various actors, including China, Pakistan, India, and the United States, each pursuing their own strategic, geopolitical, and economic interests. This research seeks to analyse how these geopolitical dynamics influence the human rights situation in Balochistan. By unravelling the complexities of these interactions, the research can shed light on the power dynamics at play and their consequences for the local population.

1.5.4 Indigenous Perspectives:

The research rationale emphasises the importance of including the voices and perspectives of the indigenous population in the study. By engaging with local stakeholders and conducting interviews with community leaders, educators, scholars, and the residents of Gwadar, the research aims to amplify the voices of those directly affected by the growing geopolitical competition. This approach ensures that the research captures the nuanced experiences, challenges, and aspirations of the indigenous communities, thus enhancing the

validity and relevance of the findings. It is a study of the connections between geopolitical rivalry and human rights violations at the micro-level.

Henceforth, the rationale of this research is to broaden the understanding of Chinese investment in a region where there are differences of opinion and reactions related to the CPEC. The Government of Pakistan refers to CPEC as a win-win game, while locals refer to it as a new form of internal colonisation and exploitation of the Baloch people's resources. Despite the longstanding state of insurgency and deprivation in Balochistan, the province never received its due share in the CPEC and its related projects.

1.6 The Contextual terminologies:

In this study, it is imperative to establish the contextual framework and clarify the terminology employed to ensure a lucid and precise comprehension of the concepts under examination. For instance, the term "human rights" is prominently featured throughout this study, necessitating a clear definition of its meaning and the specific context in which it is being considered. Human rights encompass the fundamental entitlements and freedoms inherent to every individual, irrespective of their race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or any other distinguishing characteristics. These rights encompass the rights to life, liberty, and personal security, as well as freedoms such as expression, religion, and assembly, among others. Within the specific context of this study, human rights are explored in relation to the ramifications of great power politics and geopolitical competition on the rights of local communities. A precise delineation of this concept is crucial to comprehend how violations of human rights can occur within this framework. The violation of human rights materialises when a state, in pursuit of its strategic and economic objectives, seeks to assert its dominance over local communities, often at the expense of the human rights of the people residing within those

nations. This can entail the curtailment of political and economic rights, along with the use of force, coercion, and other suppressive measures to stifle dissent and maintain control. By meticulously defining these terms and concepts, the present study endeavours to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of geopolitical competition on human rights, specifically within the context of local communities.

1.6.1 Human Rights:

Since the start of the CPEC and China's direct involvement in and around Gwadar, the common people of Balochistan have experienced severe human rights violations perpetrated by both the military and insurgent forces. This is due to the ongoing insurgency in the region and China's investment in Balochistan, which has been openly opposed by rebel groups. The conflict between these two parties now centres on the common people. For an exceptionally long time, the Pakistan military has enforced its draconian and repressive policies under the pretence of protecting Chinese interests and workers. As a result, the rights of the general populace have been suppressed and subjugated. Human rights are defined differently and include an overly broad spectrum. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the United Nations (UN),

“Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination” (UNO, 2023).

The progress of human rights can be attributed in large part to the work that was done on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The United Nations General Assembly in Paris on December 10, 1948, approved the Declaration, which had been drafted by delegates hailing from all corners of the globe and possessing a wide variety of cultural and legal traditions (UNO, 2023). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and their respective optional protocols are the elements that make up the International Bill of Human Rights (UNO, 2023). Human rights refer to a variety of rights, including the right to life, the freedom from torture and other cruel or inhumane treatment, the freedom from slavery and forced labour, the right to liberty and security, the right to a fair trial, the prohibition of all illegal forms of punishment, and the right to education and health care, among others. Because human rights encompass a wide range of rights, I want to focus on the significant human rights violations that have gotten worse since the CPEC's inception in this study.

1.6.1.1 Economic, social, and political rights:

The 'International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights' which defines the economic, social and cultural rights in international law, came into force in 1976 (United Nations Human Rights, 2024). The human rights that the Covenant seeks to promote and protect include:

- a. The right to work in just and favourable conditions.
- b. The right to social protection, to an adequate standard of living and to the highest attainable standards of physical and mental well-being.

- c. The right to education and the enjoyment of benefits of cultural freedom and scientific progress.

Economic, social, and political rights are fundamental human rights that ensure the well-being and dignity of individuals. Economic rights refer to the right to work, fair wages, and safe working conditions, while social rights refer to the right to education, healthcare, and adequate housing (United Nations Human Rights, 2024). Political rights encompass the right to free speech, association, and participation in the democratic process. However, these rights are being curbed due to growing geopolitical rivalry, which has created an environment of instability and conflict in many regions of the world.

The economic rights of individuals are being curbed due to growing geopolitical rivalry as countries engage in trade wars and impose economic sanctions on each other (Wolff, 2023). These actions harm the livelihood of individuals who depend on trade for their income, and they also disrupt global supply chains, leading to increased prices and shortages of goods. For example, the ongoing trade war between the US and China has led to significant economic losses for both countries and has also affected global markets, causing a decline in economic growth.

Furthermore, escalating geopolitical rivalry are causing a reduction in social rights. Nations employ propaganda and disinformation efforts to advance their own objectives and undermine their adversaries. This strategy exacerbates the dissemination of false information about crucial societal matters such as healthcare and education, ultimately instigating scepticism and bewilderment among the general public. An exemplary instance is the COVID-19 pandemic, wherein disinformation regarding the virus's origins and transmission impeded public health endeavours.

Political rights are also being restricted due to growing geopolitical rivalries as countries engage in cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns to undermine each other's democratic processes. These attacks can result in the suppression of free speech and the manipulation of public opinion, leading to the erosion of democratic values. For example, during the 2016 US presidential election, Russian hackers engaged in a disinformation campaign to influence the outcome of the election, which raised concerns about the integrity of the democratic process (Rodriguez, 2020). In addition to curbing individual rights, growing geopolitical rivalry can also lead to conflict and instability, which can have devastating consequences for individuals and communities. For example, the ongoing conflict in Syria has led to the displacement of millions of people and has created a humanitarian crisis in the region (Ferris & Kirisci, 2016; Center for Preventive Action, 2024). Similarly, the conflict in Yemen has led to widespread famine and disease, which has put the lives of millions of people at risk.

1.6.1.2 Civil and Cultural rights

Civil and cultural rights refer to the basic human rights that are necessary for individuals to live with dignity and freedom in a society (United Nations Human Rights, 2024). Civil rights are defined as legal and political rights that provide individuals with protection from discrimination and unfair treatment, while cultural rights refer to the right to participate in cultural life and the preservation of one's cultural heritage. Both civil and cultural rights are fundamental to the protection and promotion of human rights (Mowforth, 2014).

However, in the current era of economic expansionism and geopolitical power competition, civil and cultural rights are often threatened by a range of factors. Government policies, discriminatory practices, and the pursuit of economic growth at the cost of these rights are some of the factors that can lead to violations of civil and cultural rights (Sabatini,

2022; Watch, 2022). In many cases, the pursuit of economic development may take priority over human rights, leading to the marginalization and oppression of vulnerable population.

Furthermore, the pursuit of economic growth and geopolitical power can also lead to the exploitation of natural resources, which can have devastating consequences for indigenous communities (Mowforth, 2014; United Nations, 2021). For instance, in Latin America, the extraction of natural resources such as oil and minerals has often led to the displacement of indigenous communities and environmental degradation, leading to violations of their cultural and civil rights (Mowforth, 2014). To protect and promote civil and cultural rights in the face of economic expansionism and geopolitical power competition, it is crucial to ensure that economic development is sustainable and does not come at the cost of human rights (United Nations, 2021). Governments and other stakeholders must prioritise human rights and work to ensure that economic growth and development are inclusive and equitable, benefiting all members of society. This requires a commitment to upholding and protecting civil and cultural rights, as well as ensuring that indigenous communities and other vulnerable populations are not marginalised or exploited in the pursuit of economic gain.

This study uses terminology related to human rights in relation to various circumstances. The local populace is experiencing serious human rights violations because of the escalating geopolitical rivalry between the regional powers and their proxies. Because of security concerns, the right to live in peace, the right to work under favourable conditions, and the people's civic and political rights are all severely curtailed. In conversations with local populations, they reported that their actions are continually observed, that they are only allowed to fish along specific routes, and that they must present identification when entering and leaving their community every time.

1.6.2 Geopolitics:

Geopolitics is another term that appears frequently in this study. Geopolitics is the study of how geography, resources, and power relationships among nations shape political behaviour and international relations. It examines how the physical features of a region, such as land, water, and natural resources, influence the strategic interests and actions of states. Geography has always been one of the most key factors to consider while dealing with the major strategic locations in the world. Geographical knowledge has been used by the European nations to govern the most important regions of the world for ages. Two renowned explorers and navigators, Vasco da Gama, and Christopher Columbus, used their cartography and maritime expertise to open new trade routes and markets for the European powers (Mitchell, 2023). Rudolf Kjellen, a Swedish political scientist, coined a new term in 1899 to refer to the state's exploitation of geographical locations and research to further its political objectives (Flint, 2006). Kjellen was a pupil of Friedrich Ratzel, a well-known German geographer of the time who developed the Darwinism idea of "*Survival of the Fittest*" in the geographical space of the states in his first work, "Political Geography" (Sharpe, 2014). Ratzel contends that states with strong economies and robust populations will be able to survive and will require an increasing amount of land to meet their demands and those of the populace. Conversely, states that are lagging in their development will lose their territory and be unable to survive (Sharpe, 2014).

The evolution of regional strategic objectives and the shifting geopolitical landscape have undergone transformations throughout history. The academic community witnessed a growing interest in the concept of "geopolitics" during the First World War. Due to the progression of time, the notion of geopolitics has become intricately interconnected with

global politics, encompassing numerous contemporary global powers. During the initial years of the Cold War, Western Europe and Europe at large assumed a prominent role as the geopolitical hub. Following the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001, the regions of the Middle East and Central Asia assumed heightened strategic and political importance. These areas witnessed the emergence of distinct interests and rivalries among major global powers, namely the US, Russia, and China (Tsunekawa, 2007). Furthermore, the initial ten years of the twenty-first century witnessed the rise of central Asia as a novel global power hub owing to its copious reserves of natural resources and gas. China has demonstrated a keen interest in the Central Asia region, with a particular focus on establishing connections between this region and the Indian and Arabian seas.

1.6.2.1 Definition of the Geopolitics:

To understand and evaluate the different dimensions of geopolitics, it is essential to define the term broadly. Several authors traced the history of geopolitics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The definitions of "geopolitics" from various sources are listed below. Jason Dittmer and Johann Sharp define geopolitics in their edited work, *Geopolitics: An Introductory Reader*, in the following words:

“Geopolitics refers to the theory and practice at the global level, with specific emphasis on the geography of the world, which both shapes and results from that politics. In other words, it is more than the study of the global politics, it is the study of how the geography is implicated in that politics” (Sharpe, 2014).

To provide a more in-depth explanation of this phrase, geopolitics can be defined as the convergence of political dynamics and geographical factors, wherein the significance of a particular geographic location is shaped by political considerations and ideological

perspectives. Furthermore, the geographic location is influenced by the availability of natural resources and the countries that share borders with them. This multidimensional approach to geopolitics recognises the interplay between political power, geographical features, and strategic interests, highlighting how the geopolitical context of a region is shaped by a complex web of factors.

1.6.2.2 Key Determinants of Geopolitics: Understanding the Factors at Play:

- a. **Strategic Location:** Geopolitics emphasises the importance of a country's geographic position and its impact on its security, influence, and access to resources. States that possess advantageous locations, such as those with control over key trade routes or proximity to valuable resources, often have greater geopolitical significance.
- b. **Power and Influence:** Geopolitics focuses on the distribution of power among nations and the ways in which states seek to expand their influence and maintain their security (Dodds, Klaus, 2009; Woon & Yuan, 2010). It examines military capabilities, economic strength, and diplomatic alliances as means of asserting power and advancing national interests.
- c. **Resource Competition:** Geopolitical analysis considers the role of natural resources in shaping international relations (Dodds, 2009). Access to resources such as oil, minerals, water, and arable land can drive conflicts, alliances, and economic strategies as states seek to secure vital resources for their development and security (IRENA, 2019).
- d. **Geopolitical Rivalries:** Geopolitics recognises the existence of rivalries and competitions among nations for control and influence over strategic regions or resources (Markowitz & Fariss, 2018). These rivalries can manifest in territorial disputes, geopolitical alignments, military posturing, and economic competition.

- e. Great Power Politics: Geopolitics emphasises the role of major powers in shaping global politics (Agnew, 2010). Great powers exert major influence on international affairs through their economic strength, military capabilities, and diplomatic influence. The actions and policies of these powers have far-reaching geopolitical implications.

The role of contemporary geopolitics in shaping the state of globalisation and its significant impact on international politics cannot be overstated. An area worthy of investigation pertains to the growing significance of geopolitics in shaping global interactions. According to Colin Flint, "contemporary geopolitics identifies the sources, practices, and representations that allow for the control of territory and the extraction of resources" (Flint, 2006). The presence of geographical advantages, such as convenient access to crucial resources or strategic locations, can exert a major influence on a nation's economic development and national security (Owens, 2015). Moreover, the field of geopolitics serves to exacerbate rivalries among nations through the amplification of competition for valuable resources and strategically advantageous locations (Lippert & Perthes, 2020). An illustration of the impact of geopolitics on global interactions can be observed in the persistent rivalry for dominance over oil resources in the Middle East and other Gulf regions between the US, China, and Russia (Lons, Fulton, Sun, & Al-Tamimi, 2019). The presence of substantial oil reserves in the region has positioned it as a pivotal participant in worldwide energy markets, thereby granting countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran substantial leverage in global political and economic affairs. A similar phenomenon has emerged in Asia following China's announcement of its large-scale projects in the South Asian region, which has intensified the geopolitical and strategic rivalry among China, India, and the US.

Thus, given the context, the field of geopolitics has become an essential aspect of international politics, providing a comprehensive framework that aids in understanding the complex dynamics between nation-states and the several factors that influence their actions and decision-making. The intricate interplay and competitive dynamics among nations, propelled by their strategic imperatives, bear profound implications for the global landscape, power configurations, and the wellbeing of indigenous communities. The occurrence of human rights violations frequently arises from geopolitical competition, wherein the prioritisation of strategic advantage supersedes the safeguarding of individual rights. The subsequent chapter will thoroughly examine the profound influence of geopolitics on the deterioration of human rights and international law and will be extensively explored, providing a comprehensive understanding of this intricate relationship.

1.7 Structure of the Study:

This study is organised into eight chapters. The first chapter (the present chapter) is the introduction to the thesis. This chapter presents a detailed overview of the subject undertaken, the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the research questions, the aims and objectives, the rationale of the study, the methodology, the organisation and structure of the study, and the limitations of the study. In this chapter, I have introduced the general topic, that is, the BRI. After discussing different dimensions of BRI, the intentions of China are discussed. Furthermore, the CPEC, as the pilot project, is undertaken and discussed in detail with economic and geopolitical components, finally narrowing it down to the specific topic of the impacts of emerging geopolitics in the IOR, particularly in the Gwadar region, on the local Baloch population.

The second (II) chapter is devoted to a comprehensive literature review, establishes the analytical framework for the thesis and surveys relevant literature pertaining to the study's theme of emerging geopolitical competition and its local impact. In addition to this, the thesis also discusses the literature related to Balochistan, the BRI and its pilot project, the CPEC, the geopolitics of the megaprojects, and the impacts on the local population. The literature review is one of the essential parts of the study. The chapter is divided into three main sections. In the first section, a brief introduction is given to the literature review and the main objectives of the review. The second section of the literature review deals with the analytical framework based on the analysis of Christopher Sabatini and other scholars who argue that international norms and human rights norms have seen a downward trajectory in the last two decades due to the growing geopolitical rivalries around the globe. Similarly, it focuses on the rights of the individuals who are at the centre of the growing geopolitical rivalries. In the next section, it discusses the scholarship related to the subject undertaken. In this section, I examine and investigate four significant types of scholarship to provide background information. The discussion includes:

- i. the Analytical Framework and the literature related to it.
- ii. the literature related to Balochistan, its history, politics, and the geopolitical importance,
- iii. the literature related to BRI, and the geopolitics of BRI,
- iv. the literature on CPEC as a pilot project of BRI, and its geopolitical, strategical, and economic components as well as the impacts on the regional power politics, and finally,

- v. the literature related to the geopolitics of megaprojects and the effects on the local population.

The last section is the critical evaluation of the literature and locating the missing links and gaps. In this section, I have discussed how mainstream scholarship has overlooked the crucial issue of the emerging geopolitical competition and its impacts on the local population. I also discuss the uniqueness of this study, which ultimately discloses the missing link and fills the literary gaps in academia.

The third chapter of this thesis focuses on the research methodology. The chapter begins by introducing the methodology and exploring several types of research methodologies employed in the social sciences. The first section delves into the fundamental concepts and frameworks associated with conducting research, establishing a solid foundation for the subsequent sections. The second section specifically addresses the research methodology adopted for this study, which is qualitative research. Within this section, the emphasis is placed on the sources of data collection, highlighting the primary method of conducting interviews. The chapter elaborates on the process of interviewing participants, including techniques for structuring, and formulating questions as well as the nuances of building rapport. Furthermore, it discusses the essential steps involved in analysing the interview data, with a particular focus on thematic analysis. The chapter delves into the methods used for transcribing and analysing the interview material, shedding light on the systematic approach employed to derive meaningful insights from the gathered data.

The fourth (IV) chapter is about Balochistan, which investigates the national, historical, and geopolitical background of Balochistan. The primary purpose of this chapter is to critically examine and thoroughly understand the historical and geopolitical environment of

Balochistan. It is divided into three parts. Firstly, it covers the historical background of Balochistan before merger with Pakistan. The focus of this section is on the Kalat State and its relationship with the British Empire. Secondly, it also discusses Balochistan after the merger with Pakistan, i.e., from 1947 up to date. The focus of this section is on the relationship between the federation and Balochistan. It also discusses the factors behind the tension between the centre and Balochistan. The next section deals with the current phase of the crisis in Balochistan after the CPEC deal was signed and its impact on local politics. Finally, the geopolitical importance of Balochistan is also discussed in detail in this section vis-à-vis the BRI and CPEC, particularly the geopolitical importance of Gwadar port and the emerging geopolitical competition after China strengthened its foothold in Balochistan.

The fifth (V) chapter deals with the Chinese Belt and Road initiative and increased Chinese strategic and economic presence in Pakistan and in the region. This chapter has two broad parts. Firstly, this chapter illustrates the BRI in general and the Chinese economic, political, and strategic motives behind it. The three major components of BRI, i.e., the maritime silk road, the road and railroad through mainland China to other parts of the world, and the digital silk road, are discussed in this section. Moreover, it discusses the increasing Chinese role in the region, particularly in the littoral states of the IOR through BRI and its flagship corridors. Secondly, this chapter also highlights and analyses the growing geopolitical competition in the IOR region. The US, India, and other states' reactions to the Chinese BRI project are also crucial in this regard. Furthermore, this chapter also scrutinises the inimical rivalries between different actors in the regional context. This chapter also covers CPEC as a flagship project of BRI and its origin and evolution, encompassing its economic, political, and geopolitical significance for both China and Pakistan.

The sixth (VI) chapter examines the geopolitical dynamics and strategic significance of Gwadar Port in the context of the CPEC and regional power competition. It analyses the geopolitical and strategic motivations of China and Pakistan behind CPEC and Gwadar Port at a broader level. Additionally, it discusses China's growing role in the region generally and in Pakistan specifically, which is driven by geopolitical gains and economic expansionism. The chapter presents Gwadar as a catalyst for geopolitical competition among the regional powers, and examines the geopolitical, economic, and strategic games related to CPEC in detail. In this section, I have noted that CPEC does not only provide China with the shortest route to the Indian Ocean for its energy transportation; it also provides an important strategic location on the Indian Ocean. China controls the strategic Gwadar port, which is just four hundred kilometres from the strategic Strait of Hormuz. It gives China leverage to play a more dominant role in the IOR. It also provides China with an opportunity to keep an eye on the activities of India and the US in the region. I have also discussed that the recent actions of China in the Indian Ocean, that is, the closeness with Iran and signing a multi-billion-dollar agreement, are crucial for China to contain India's dominance in the region. The last section of the chapter deals with the US and Indian responses to the growing Chinese footholds around Gwadar port and discusses how Balochistan and particularly the Gwadar region is being used for the geopolitical agendas of the great powers.

Chapter seven (VII) examines the profound social, economic, and political impacts of the escalating geopolitical games orchestrated by China and other actors in the region through initiatives like the CPEC. It explores the multifaceted consequences of these power struggles, which extend beyond economic considerations. The chapter delves into the intricate dynamics and complexities that emerge within the context of these initiatives, shedding light

on how they affect the local population of Balochistan. By examining the various dimensions of this influence, the chapter provides insights into the challenges faced by the people of Balochistan amidst the ongoing geopolitical shifts and power dynamics. Additionally, the chapter sheds light on the intricate power struggles taking place and their implications for the local population of Balochistan. Drawing upon the findings of interviews conducted with the residents of Gwadar and other stakeholders, this chapter offers valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of the local community.

Chapter eight (VIII) is the conclusion of the study. This chapter comprises the results, findings, and some policy recommendations. The chapter summarises the fundamental research and provides a detailed evaluation with some suggestions. This chapter suggests that although the megaprojects bring prosperity and an economic boom, create thousands of jobs, and open new vistas for investment, this prosperity is not for everyone. It also has conflicting and adverse impacts on the local population, whose land is essential for the megaproject. It also suggests that without dialogue with the local community and giving their due share in megaprojects such as CPEC, they would barely be fruitful and successful.

1.8 Limitation of the Study:

Like any research project, this thesis is not free from limitations. The first limitation pertains to the geographical focus of the study. The research focuses on a region that is politically sensitive and has been experiencing unrest. This aspect of the study makes it challenging to access the local population and conduct interviews with them. Additionally, the volatile nature of the region poses potential security risks for the researchers. Moreover, the limited access to reliable and up-to-date data in the area further hampers the comprehensive analysis of the research. Despite these limitations, the study strives to provide

valuable insights and contribute to the existing literature on the subject, acknowledging the need for further research in more stable and accessible regions. Moreover, given the security situation in the region, some officials and particularly the local population were hesitant to provide information that could be perceived as sensitive or controversial. However, with the help of the local community, I was able to gather as much information and data as was needed.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented disruptions to academic activities worldwide. With the imposition of lockdowns and travel restrictions, researchers face significant challenges accessing physical resources such as libraries and archives. Fortunately, the advancement of technology has allowed for virtual access to many resources, enabling researchers to continue their work remotely. Online databases, digital archives, and virtual libraries have become invaluable tools for collecting necessary information. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the determination of researchers and the support of the academic community have allowed for the continuation of important research endeavours.

Despite these limitations, the researcher has made every effort to mitigate these constraints and produced a robust and insightful analysis of the impacts of the BRI and CPEC projects on the local Baloch population. I have used virtual platforms to conduct interviews, reaching out to participants who were unable to meet in person. Despite the setbacks, my adaptability and resilience have allowed me to provide valuable insights into the social, economic, and political ramifications of these large-scale infrastructure projects.

Chapter 2 Literature Review: Building an Analytical Framework

2.1 Introduction:

The primary objective of this chapter is to offer a balanced and comprehensive examination of existing literature concerning the geopolitics of megaprojects, power struggles among nations, and their impact on local population. Scholars such as Christopher Sabatini, Rodriguez-Garavito, Beth A. Simmons, and Christian Wagner contribute pivotal arguments to the discourse on the decline of international law and human rights amid emerging geopolitical competition. Before delving into their perspectives, understanding the context is crucial. These scholars posit that powerful countries often prioritise their interests over international law and human rights, leading to a decline in enforcement and effectiveness. As geopolitical competition intensifies, adherence to international law becomes increasingly selective, undermining its universal application and eroding global human rights protection. Sabatini, among these scholars, has laid the foundation for understanding how international law and human rights have declined in recent years due to growing geopolitical rivalries and the resurgence of authoritarian states, such as China and Russia, in the global political landscape (Sabatini, 2022).

The geopolitical competition in strategically significant regions holds immense significance in understanding global power dynamics. Regions with valuable resources, strategic military positions, or vital trade routes attract major powers for their geopolitical or strategic objectives (Savoy & Staguhn, 2022). The competition for control over these regions can have substantial implications for international relations, economic stability and regional security. For instance, the Indian Ocean Region is strategically important due to its position as a major trade route and its abundance of natural resources (Davis & Balls, 2022). The

competition for influence in this region, particularly in and around the Indian Ocean, has led to power struggles and tensions among global powers such as China, India, and the US.

Owing to power politics, international organisations and institutions have failed to protect fundamental rights, and geopolitical rivalries between major nations have grown. Despite the successes and long-term support for human rights by global bodies, organisations, and the public at large, recent years have seen a decline in the networks of laws, practices, and efforts to implement human rights in international institutions, domestic legislation, and governance (Sabatini, 2022).

Understanding the impacts of this geopolitical competition on the local population is crucial for comprehending the broader implications for human rights and international law. The focus of this research will be on these setbacks in recent years at a micro-level, particularly in and around the Gwadar port region, and how Sabatini's and other scholars' ideas build on and go beyond what has already been written about rising geopolitical competition and the weakening of international laws and international human rights norms.

Three interlinked objectives underlie the essence of this chapter. The primary aim of this study is to analyse the existing scholarly works pertaining to the geopolitical competition in strategically significant regions and the escalating rivalries within these areas. The research will specifically focus on the impact of these dynamics on the local population of these areas and the ensuing power struggles. In this regard, an analytical framework is outlined to draw attention to the impacts of growing geopolitical competition on the human rights of the local community. Second, it explores the existing literature on the BRI and its flagship project, the CPEC, in a geopolitical and strategic context. Third, it aims to understand where we stand in terms of academic scholarship related to the subject. By examining the effects of geopolitical

competition in the IOR, with a specific focus on the Gwadar region, we can gain insights into the intricate dynamics at play.

2.2 Analytical Framework:

The rise of globalization, combined with a growing emphasis on national interests over international law and human rights, has fuelled intensifying geopolitical competition and a worrying decline in the global human rights situation. This analysis suggests that these three trends are interconnected: globalization creates opportunities for competition, prioritizing national interests weakens international law and human rights frameworks, and a decline in these frameworks weakens global human rights protections. Examining the challenges faced by international human rights norms in the context of evolving geopolitical dynamics and the rise of influential states, scholars such as Christopher Sabatini, César Rodríguez-Garavito, Salvador Santino F. Regilme Jr., John J. Mearsheimer, and Beth A. Simmons emphasise how geopolitical considerations often take precedence over human rights within international organisations, resulting in a decline in the enforcement of international law and human rights standards (Simmons, 2009; Sabatini, 2022).

The erosion of human rights due to geopolitical competition is a recurring historical phenomenon. Throughout history, the pursuit of state interests has consistently superseded considerations for human rights (Weber, 2024). During the Cold War, both the United States and the Soviet Union frequently overlooked human rights abuses committed by their allies in the pursuit of geopolitical advantage (Keys & Burke, 2013). For instance, the US supported authoritarian regimes in Latin America and Southeast Asia, while the Soviet Union suppressed dissent in Eastern Europe. In the aftermath of the Cold War, while there was a brief period of optimism for a "new world order" based on human rights and international law, this hope

quickly faded as powerful states continued to prioritise their own interests (Cohen, 2013). The 9/11 attacks and the subsequent "War on Terror" further eroded human rights protections, as governments around the world implemented measures that curtailed civil liberties and justified torture and extrajudicial killings in the name of national security (Freeman, 2006).

In today's world, internationalism and global politics have peaked in importance, gaining significant prominence. Geopolitics, as a pivotal element in international politics, has gained prominence due to intensified rivalries among major nations (Ratner, 2001). International organisations and advocates for human rights have strived to uphold international legal norms. The 20th century witnessed a global transformation in human rights, marked by the acknowledgment that a government's invocation of sovereignty to justify severe human rights violations is socially unacceptable. Institutions like the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights emphasise the universality of human rights and governments' responsibility to protect them (Ratner, 2001).

Furthermore, a wider and more confident agreement emerged, confirming the rights of states and multilateral organisations to voice their views and oversee human rights matters after the Cold War (Vento, 2024). These organisations were engaged in the promotion and enforcement of international law, with the aim of compelling states to adhere to the legal obligations and treaties they had previously ratified (Sabatini, 2022).

However, despite achievements, challenges emerged, such as conflicting perspectives on human rights between Western and Eastern countries. The conflicting perspectives on human rights between the eastern and western worlds is one specific difficulty that international human rights norms face (Ahdanisa & Rothman, 2020). Western countries

prioritise individual rights and democratic principles, while Eastern countries argue for a more culturally sensitive approach that emphasises collective rights and social harmony. Consequently, several states, including the US and Western nations, have positioned themselves as proponents of democratic principles and the promotion of democratisation (Powers, 2021).

The increasing competition between major powers, particularly in key areas like the Indian Ocean around Gwadar Port, is visibly undermining international human rights norms, resulting in a rise in human rights violations against local communities. This phenomenon reflects a troubling trend where geopolitical considerations frequently take precedence over human rights concerns, as scholars like Christopher Sabatini and César Rodríguez-Garavito have highlighted (Sabatini, 2022; Rodríguez-Garavito, 2021). This prioritisation of national interests and power dynamics has led to a decline in the enforcement of international law and human rights standards, leaving vulnerable populations at risk.

The decline of human rights due to geopolitical competition aligns closely with realist views in international relations, showing how power dynamics frequently take precedence over human rights concerns. In his seminal work, "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics," John J. Mearsheimer argues that the international system is inherently anarchic, lacking a central authority to enforce rules and norms (Mearsheimer, 2001). In this anarchic system, states are compelled by an unwavering pursuit of power to guarantee their survival and security. This pursuit of power frequently results in competition, conflict, and, ultimately, a disregard for human rights.

Mearsheimer's offensive realism posits that states are not merely interested in maintaining the status quo but actively seek to maximise their power relative to other states

(Mearsheimer, 2001). This inherent drive for dominance creates a security dilemma, where one state's efforts to enhance its security inevitably threaten the security of others, leading to a perpetual cycle of rivalry and conflict. In this zero-sum game, human rights considerations often become secondary to the pursuit of power and strategic advantage.

Hans Morgenthau, another influential realist thinker, echoed this sentiment, stating that "the main signpost that helps political realism find its way through the landscape of international politics is the concept of interest defined in terms of power" (Morgenthau, 1948). Morgenthau emphasised that states are primarily motivated by self-interest, and their actions are guided by considerations of power and security. In this context, human rights are frequently perceived as a privilege that states can only indulge in when their survival is not jeopardised.

Kenneth Waltz, a key figure in neorealism, further developed the concept of anarchy in the international system, arguing that the absence of a central authority leads states to rely on self-help mechanisms to ensure their security (Waltz, 1979). This self-help system, in turn, fosters competition and conflict as states seek to balance power and prevent any single state from becoming too dominant. In this situation, the necessity of preserving the balance of power can easily overshadow human rights concerns.

Sabatini's observation aligns with the realist perspective, as it highlights how states, in their pursuit of power and strategic advantage, often disregard human rights concerns. Sabatini's argument about the decline of international human rights norms due to escalating geopolitical competition and the rise of authoritarian states finds strong resonance within this historical context. Realism, with its emphasis on state power and national interest, explains how states like China prioritise their geopolitical and economic interests in regions (Zalta,

Nodelman, Allen, & Anderson, 2010). Sabatini believes that “the threats to the international rights framework are emerging from three new directions: increased geopolitical competition with new powers whose views of state sovereignty are at odds with human rights obligations, the rise of xenophobic and populist domestic movements, and the spread of surveillance technologies” (Sabatini, 2022). The escalating geopolitical rivalries among major powers pose a significant risk to the integrity of human rights laws and norms. This is due to the tendency of global powers to prioritise their geopolitical and strategic objectives over adherence to international law and human rights standards. The economic interdependence among major powers is one reason there is a lack of will to implement international laws or human rights (Sabatini, 2022).

Sabatini's argument also exposes the limitations of liberalism in the face of geopolitical rivalry. While international institutions and norms exist to protect human rights, they often prove ineffective when powerful states choose to ignore them. The Gwadar Port case demonstrates how the liberal international order struggles to safeguard human rights in the context of intense geopolitical competition.

The human rights community is confronted with a significant challenge stemming from the emergence of influential states and the intensification of geopolitical rivalries (Sabatini, 2022). Perhaps the rise of geopolitical competition is one of the most serious and critical challenges to human rights and individual rights. The pursuit of power and dominance by these influential states, such as China and the US, often takes precedence over upholding human rights standards (Sabatini, 2022). This has led to a dangerous erosion of international norms and the prioritisation of national interests over the well-being of individuals. Furthermore, the intensification of geopolitical rivalries has created an environment where

human rights abuses are more likely to go unchecked, as states may ignore violations committed by their allies to maintain strategic alliances. As a result, the human rights community must navigate a complex landscape where political considerations often outweigh the protection of basic human rights. These emerging powers often have different priorities and values, which can lead to clashes with established human rights norms.

César Rodríguez-Garavito's analysis of the shifting geopolitical landscape further illuminates the challenges faced by human rights advocates. He argues that the decline of the Euro-American world order and the rise of multipolarity have created a more fragmented and unpredictable international legal and political order (Rodríguez-Garavito, 2021). In this context, there are fewer reliable champions of human rights causes, leaving vulnerable populations like those in Balochistan more exposed to abuses (Rodríguez-Garavito, 2021).

“Five drivers of change pose particularly serious challenges to human rights. The first one is the geopolitical challenge. The Euro-American world order inherited from the Second World War, which provided the geopolitical backbone for the globalisation of human rights in the second half of the twentieth century, is no more. The initial death knell was sounded by the rise of the BRICS countries in the 2000s, which heralded a new era of multipolarity. As it turns out, all that remains of that acronym in terms of realistic aspirations for global geopolitical power is the “C” for China. The result is a more fragmented and unpredictable international legal and political order, with no obvious reliable government champions of human rights causes” (Rodríguez-Garavito, 2021).

These emerging powers often have different priorities and values, which can lead to clashes with established human rights norms (Posner, 2014). Additionally, the rising

geopolitical competition and the increasing race for resources and influence are resulting in a disregard for human rights to achieve strategic goals. For example, in the case of China, its rapid economic growth and desire for global influence have often overshadowed concerns about human rights violations within its own borders (Human Rights Watch, 2023). This has led to clashes with established human rights norms, particularly in areas such as freedom of speech and assembly.

Unfortunately, the resurgence of influential nations has reduced the efficacy of international law to a mere facade, hindering its adequate enforcement and exposing a dearth of will among powerful nations to uphold it (Jordaan, 2016; Zhao S., 2018). Rajeev Dhavan (2003) rightfully observed the rise of big powers and the status of international law and human rights norms in the following words:

“There is nothing so bad or so good that you will not find an Englishman doing it; but you will never find an Englishman in the wrong... America is no different. It claims to act in terms of international law but feels free to subvert international norms whenever it wants. It supports the authority of the United Nations but turns its back on the U.N. to suit its convenience. It globalises trade in the name of fairness and most unfairly usurps the major trade benefits to its advantage. It launches a war to secure the largest oil reserves in the world but pretends to fight for peace. It claims to act in the name of democracy but leaves behind battered states wherever it goes. It fights a war for peace but makes huge profits from the sale of arms that follows. Its peacekeeping results in war. Its war brings no peace. No sooner are its interests maintained, it leaves behind a debris of enfeebled states. It is never at a loss for an effective moral attitude” (Dhavan, 2003).

The recent resurgence of geopolitical competition, particularly with the rise of China and the intensification of rivalry with the United States, has exacerbated this trend. Velina Tchakarova analyses the evolving global landscape and emphasises the disruptive impact of rising powers like China and a resurgent Russia on the established international order (Tchakarova, 2022). The fragmentation of the world order, which is characterised by competing spheres of influence and shifting alliances, makes it difficult to uphold human rights. As states vie for power and resources, human rights concerns are often relegated to secondary importance (Tchakarova, 2022). China strategically seized opportunities to expand its spheres of influence and address geopolitical vacuums, emerging as a significant global power (Zhao M., 2019). Recognising China's prominent rise within the Asia-Pacific region, the US began shifting its strategic attention towards countering China. Consequently, this region has evolved into a geopolitical flashpoint between the two nations. The rise of China as a global power and the resurgent Russia challenge the current international order and intensify geopolitical rivalries (Tchakarova, 2022). China's increasing global role through its BRI and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 need to be analysed within the context of an ongoing global transformation process (Tchakarova, 2022).

The world has witnessed a sharp rise in geopolitical rivalries since 9/11, particularly with China's ascent. Asia and Eurasia have become the primary battlegrounds as the global landscape shifts towards a multipolar order (Zhao, 2019). Traditional 'hard power' tactics face increasing competition from 'soft power' strategies (Barsha, 2022). Economic hubs and transportation routes vital for trade and energy security are key targets in this new contest, with the US and China locked in a struggle for influence (Barsha, 2022). This dynamic leaves many South Asian nations caught in the middle, navigating the complex interplay of blocs,

international institutions, and human rights concerns, a challenge echoed across the globe (Collins, 2010; Barsha, 2022).

The rise of new powers like China and Russia disrupts the established global order. This fragmentation weakens the international system's ability to champion human rights, as powerful states prioritise strategic interests over legal obligations. Moreover, a new round of US-China rivalry unfolds in Asia, with China aiming for regional dominance by controlling key chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz and the Indian Ocean. However, the US counters with its network of regional alliances like India, Japan, and Australia, further fuelling the competition (Mearsheimer, 2010; Wagner, 2017; Doshi, 2021).

Major power rivalries, embodied by the US-China competition, reshape international politics, focusing on economic hubs, trade routes, and energy security. This shift brings human rights concerns to the forefront, especially in the Indian Ocean region, where the convergence of China, the US, Pakistan, and India around strategic locations like Gwadar Port amplifies the urgency of addressing human rights violations. Gwadar Port's development under the CPEC exemplifies how geopolitical competition can negatively impact human rights.

This context and real-world examples elucidate the intricate connection between international law (including human rights) and international politics, especially in the realm of geopolitics. The pursuit of geopolitical goals often directly infringes on international law and individual rights. The intensification of geopolitical competition in strategic areas directly correlates with an increase in human rights violations against local populations. The stark absence of a central authority to uphold and enforce international laws and treaties safeguarding civilian populations becomes strikingly evident. The greater the geopolitical implications, the higher the risk of human rights abuses.

Geopolitical rivalry in the Indo-Pacific Ocean, particularly around Gwadar Port, is set to intensify in the coming years. This heightened competition in Balochistan fuels forced evictions, like the recent displacement of dozens of families from their ancestral fishing village to make way for port expansion. Disappearances remain shrouded in mystery, leaving families grappling with grief and fear. The influx of foreign workers exacerbates economic inequality, pushing local fishermen out of their traditional livelihoods and increasing competition for scarce jobs. Environmental degradation from project construction threatens marine life and is the very source of sustenance for coastal communities. These consequences, often borne by poor fishing communities and marginalised groups, risk leaving lasting scars on Balochistan's social fabric and hindering any potential long-term benefits from development.

A longitudinal analysis of human rights violations in the context of geopolitical rivalries reveals a troubling pattern: as competition between states intensifies over time, respect for human rights often diminishes. This trend is not new; as historical instances demonstrate how state interests have consistently overshadowed human rights concerns during periods of heightened geopolitical tension. The Cold War, the post-9/11 era, and the ongoing rivalry between China and the United States all exemplify this phenomenon.

In the case of Gwadar Port, a longitudinal perspective reveals the contingent nature of human rights outcomes. Initially, the project was framed as a catalyst for economic development in Balochistan (Nazir, 2021). However, as the project progressed and geopolitical interests deepened, the negative consequences for human rights became more noticeable. This exemplifies the contingent nature of events because the outcome of geopolitical competition is dependent on a complex interplay of factors, such as the actions

and reactions of various actors, changes in power dynamics, and unforeseen events (Gill, 2019).

The initial optimism surrounding the Gwadar Port development gradually gave way to disillusionment as the local Baloch population experienced forced evictions, disappearances, economic marginalisation, and environmental degradation (Bezanjo, 2023). This shift underscores the dynamic nature of geopolitical competition and its impact on human rights. The promises of economic prosperity and development, often used to justify such projects, can quickly fade as geopolitical calculations take centre stage (Barsha, 2022; Bezanjo, 2023).

The contingency of events in Gwadar Port also highlights the limitations of traditional IR theories, such as realism and liberalism, in predicting and explaining outcomes. While realism may explain the prioritisation of national interests over human rights, it struggles to account for the specific ways in which these violations manifest and evolve over time (Zalta, Nodelman, Allen, & Anderson, 2010). Similarly, liberalism's emphasis on international norms and institutions falls short in explaining why these mechanisms fail to protect human rights in the face of geopolitical pressures.

While global scholars like Christopher Sabatini have shed light on the intricate link between geopolitical rivalries and human rights abuses, this thesis delves deeper into a micro level analysis. It ventures beyond generalised observations to pinpoint the lived experiences of Balochistan's people caught in the crosshairs of this volatile interplay. This thesis distinguishes itself by concentrating on the individual ramifications of geopolitical competition, especially for ordinary individuals in Balochistan. It goes beyond theoretical frameworks to capture the vivid stories of families displaced, livelihoods threatened, and

fundamental rights eroded, all collateral damage in the great game of geopolitical competition and global power dynamics.

2.3 Review of the Existing literature on the BRI, CPEC and the Geopolitical Importance of Balochistan:

The review is organised thematically and proceeds in the following manner: Four fundamental issues are significant in the research project, which will be the key focus of this review. First, it will explore the relevant literature on the history and culture of the Baloch people and their relationship with the central government of Pakistan. The scholarship in the field is thoroughly investigated in this section. This investigation helps us to have a broader picture of Balochistan and its background. Secondly, the scholarship related to the BRI project is investigated. The existing scholarly works vary in concept and substance. Hence, the focus of the survey will be on those books and articles that portray neutral and unbiased opinions regarding BRI and CPEC. Furthermore, the literature analyses China's geopolitical objectives in pursuing the BRI. These include several books and articles. Sequentially, the analysis and review of the materials, including the surveys conducted by different governments, think tanks, and policymakers, will also be scrutinised. Thirdly, the research materials on the CPEC as a pilot project of the BRI and the geopolitical power play connected to it are surveyed. Considering the importance of the CPEC for China and Pakistan, a detailed investigation into their historical relationship is crucial. Hence, materials related to Sino-Pakistan relations are surveyed. And finally, the study surveys the literature on the impacts of the megaprojects on the indigenous community in Balochistan. It is pertinent to note here that there is a dearth of scholarly work on this issue. Local communities in geopolitically important regions are always the victims of megaprojects. There are some examples of local minority communities that

have suffered a lot because of how close they are to other political areas. Therefore, the materials on some other cases of human rights violations due to the geopolitics of megaprojects, such as in Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Bangladesh, Uganda, and Kenya, are scrutinised. Hence, such examples help us understand the missing links between the geopolitics of megaprojects and their impacts on local communities.

2.3.1 The literature on Historical Background and the Geopolitical Importance of Balochistan:

The exploration of the geopolitical importance of Balochistan is imperative within the context of analysing the global expansion of geopolitics and the escalating competitions throughout the Asian region. This area is witnessing the emergence of a contemporary power struggle, commonly referred to as the "new great game," involving two opposing forces: China in collaboration with Pakistan, potentially accompanied by Russia, and the United States in alliance with India, Japan, Australia, and select Western European partners (Ali, 2020; Buzan, 2012). On one side, China has initiated the BRI project, where CPEC is a flagship project to enhance the infrastructure of Asian developing and underdeveloped countries; on the other hand, the US has introduced different infrastructure megaprojects through the QUAD and G-7 to counter the Chinese BRI and its influence in the Indian and Pacific Ocean regions, the European Union, and Latin America (Reuters, 2021; Shabbir, 2022; Garin, 2021). Although BRI is a global ambition of China at this stage, China's major focus is concentrated on the Indian Ocean, where China is seeking influence and establishing seaports in Pakistani Balochistan, i.e., the Port of Gwadar, and Iranian Balochistan, i.e., the port of Bandar Abbas (Aliasgari & Ekstrom, 2021; Jie & Wallace, 2021).

However, Balochistan and particularly Gwadar have become the centres of geopolitical rivalries between China and Pakistan against the US and India. Balochistan holds a strategic location on the shores of IOR, where China is building a mega port and a possible naval base, which has alarmed the US and India. This section reviews the literature related to the historical background of Balochistan through the lenses of geopolitics and geostrategic. Some of the most notable books in this regard are not only from Baloch writers but also from international authors. Among them, Selig S. Harrison's 1981 book *'In Afghanistan's Shadow: Baluch Nationalism and Soviet Temptations'* is noteworthy, which analyses the geopolitical importance of Balochistan during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (Harrison, 1980). Similarly, Albert William Hughes's book, *'The Country of Balochistan: Its Geography, Topography, Ethnology, and History'* (Hughes, 2022), Nina Swidler's book, *'Remotely Colonial: History and Politics in Balochistan'* (Swindler, 2014), T.A. Heathcote's book, Balochistan, *'The British, and the Great Game: Struggle for the Bolan Pass, Gateway to India'* (Heathcote T. A., 2016), Tilak Devasher's book – *'Pakistan: the Balochistan Conundrum'* (Devasher, 2019), William Max's book – *'Balochistan At a Crossroad'* (Marx, 2014), Alok Bansal's *'Balochistan in Turmoil: Pakistan at Crossroads'* (Bansal, 2009), Syed Ramsay's *Balochistan: in Quest of Freedom* (Ramsey, 2017) and Jason R. Murtha's book – *'The Strategic Importance of Balochistan'* (Murtha, 2011) are significant which are reviewed for a better understanding of the importance of Balochistan as a geopolitically important region.

Some books that best investigate the history of Balochistan and its troubled relations with the state of Pakistan after the merger are by Baloch writers and show a Baloch perspective. These books include Naseer Dashti's *'The Baloch and Balochistan: A Historical Account From the Beginning to the Fall of the Baloch State'* (Dashti, 2012), Siddiq Baluch

'Political Economy of Balochistan' (Baluch, 2018), and another book *'Balochistan: Its Politics and Economics'* (Baluch, 2013), Inayat Ullah Baloch *'The Problem of Greater Baluchistan'* (Baloch I. , 1987), Taj Mohammad Breseeg – *'Baloch Nationalism: Its Origin and Development'* (Breseeg, 2001), Mansoor Akbar Kundi (1994)- *'Balochistan: A Socio-Cultural and Political Analysis'*, Fida Hussain Malik *'Balochistan: A Conflict of Narratives'* (Malik, 2020), Habib Jalib Baloch book- *'Balochistan: Statehood and Nationalism'* (Baloch, 2006) and Mir Khuda Bakhsh Marri book- *'Searchlights on Baloches and Balochistan'* (Baloch, 1974) are among the books that are thoroughly reviewed for better background information and understanding of Balochistan through the lens of history. The writers not only provided extensive background knowledge on Balochistan as a crucial land, but they also linked the current Baloch insurgency and militancy with geopolitics.

Some of the books that present Balochistan as a key component in the geopolitical games in the region are comprehensively investigated. Selig S. Harrison's work *'In Afghanistan's Shadow: Baluch Nationalism and Soviet Temptation'* presents a compelling analysis of the struggle of the Baloch people against the Pakistani state (Harrison, 1980). The military operations during the Ayyub and Bhutto eras are also discussed in the work. During the 1970s insurgency, the author visited the Baloch guerrilla camps and interviewed the Baloch tribal leaders who were leading the rebellion. In his work, he mentioned the geopolitical importance of Balochistan, which would rise in the years to come. He predicted that Balochistan would be the centre of future global politics. According to him, "A glance at the map quickly explains why strategically located Balochistan and the five million Baloch tribesmen who live there could easily become the focal point of superpower conflict" (Harrison, 1980).

According to Harrison, Balochistan was important for the USSR as it might have given it access to the Indian Ocean's warm waters. Taj Mohamad Breseeg's *Baloch Nationalism, its Origin and Development* (Breseeg, 2001) analysis is enlightening in terms of Balochistan's political evolution by providing a breakdown of Baloch nationalism. By offering a comprehensive argument on the geopolitical importance of Balochistan during the great game between Russia and Britain, the book covers the history of the Baloch people from the beginning until the Zia era, but his interpretation is primarily based on the Baloch perspective. Martin Axmann's book "Back to The Future: The Khanate of Kalat and the Genesis of Baloch Nationalism 1915-1955" (Axmann, 2008) covers a limited period, yet it is significant to understand the region and its people. The author explains how Balochistan was merged with Pakistan and how it became a part of the One-Unit to illustrate the political dynamics of the area using primary source documents (West Pakistan).

The geographic location, wealth of natural resources, extensive coastline on the Indian Ocean, and borders with Afghanistan and Iran make Balochistan attractive to the Chinese. The literature review also explores how Balochistan has continued to be a target for powerful nations throughout history, from the great wars to the contemporary age. A single glance at the map demonstrates, according to Harrison, "why strategically positioned Balochistan and the five million Baloch tribesmen who dwell there may easily become the focal point of a superpower confrontation" (Harrison, 1980). As a result, Sabatini's viewpoint considers that escalating geopolitical rivalry diminishes the rights of the average person and that proxies and increased militarization in the critical region will eventually have an impact on their lives. The analytical framework, in addition to the reading and critical analysis of the literature, demonstrated how Islamabad and Beijing are using resource rich Balochistan and its coast

across the IOR as a geopolitical and strategic ploy. The nationalist Baloch population has long protested this exploitation and waged a guerrilla war against Islamabad, which further deteriorated the situation (Muzaffar et.al., 2015). The forces and military operations used by the central government to quell the insurgency have also had a negative influence on the general populace and their notions about Islamabad. Since 2004, there have been serious abuses of human rights, but with the geopolitical conflict between the powers brought on by China's presence in the region, this suppression will intensify. Baloch will suffer in the coming decades because of political rivalries between major nations.

2.3.2 The Literature on BRI and its Geopolitics:

The rise of new authoritarian states in the current order of the international system, such as China, has serious repercussions for the laws and organisations that govern international relations on a global scale. Due to the rise of China as a major world power, the previous unipolar international order, which was led by the United States, has been replaced by a multipolar order (Schindler et. al., 2021). In a geopolitical-economic struggle to incorporate regions into value chains backed by home-grown leading companies, the USA and China are competing with one another. Transnational infrastructure, including transportation networks, regional energy grids, critical seaports, and other megaprojects, is being funded and developed as part of this competition. Smaller states are placed in potentially hazardous situations while still having the opportunity to express and comprehend spatial concepts through this competition (Schindler et. al., 2021). The conflict between the USA and China has become more heated since the announcement of the BRI, which consists of a network of land-based and marine corridors that connect the borders of natural resources with important markets and value chains that are grounded in Chinese-led businesses (Wolf, 2019;

Lin and Sidaway, 2019; Schindler et. al., 2021; Schindler & Kanai, 2021). The following section discusses the existing literature on the BRI, and its geopolitical, economic, and militaristic objectives.

The BRI is a relatively new project that was undertaken only in 2013. Since its launch, the BRI has attracted the attention of academic circles and scholarships. One of the first publications on the BRI is the book - "China's One Belt One Road Initiative" (2016)- edited by Tai Wei Lim, Chan Henry, Katherine Tsung, and Wen Xin Lim (Wei Lim, Chan, Hui-Yi Tseng & Lim, 2016). The focus of this book revolves around the formation of the OBOR (later changed into BRI) initiative and gives a detailed insight into the Chinese economic and diplomatic ambitions through the project. According to the authors, OBOR is the only major foreign policy initiative of Chinese President Xi Jinping's administration (Wei Lim, Chan, Hui-Yi Tseng & Lim, 2016). They note that the vision consists of two essential components. Firstly, it connects China to the Indian Ocean and other continents through overland connectivity. This connectivity is composed of railway tracks across the continents and crosses many nations' borders. Secondly, the maritime silk road is composed of the construction of seaports across the Indian Ocean, the Middle East, and the African continent.

Moreover, the BRI has been described by many Chinese and international scholars as China's new geopolitical strategy. This phenomenon of dominant geopolitics has always been one of the critical foreign policy agendas of the Chinese leadership. Before the commencement of the BRI, China and India were planning to compete in the Asian geopolitical and maritime spaces. With the former Soviet Union's withdrawal from Central Asia and the USA's withdrawal from Afghanistan, China planned for a dominant role in the region. Zhixin Zhang argues that the BRI is China's geopolitical strategy, positing that a

primary consideration behind the BRI project is to enhance trust with neighbouring countries to ensure a more prosperous and peaceful atmosphere for China's development (Zhang, 2018). The dream of China for a dominant role in the region, particularly in Central Asia, the littoral states of the Indian Ocean, and the Middle East, can only be realised by ensuring the energy security of the developing countries as well as providing capital for infrastructure building. China has signed agreements with over one hundred countries and international organisations five years after its announcement (Zhang, 2018). By signing deals with other countries, China not only uses its surplus capital but also gives employment to its surplus skilled workers and commodity goods. It reflects two achievements for China. First, it reduces the unemployment of growing Chinese skilled labourers, and second, it brings the invested money back to China through its workers and engineers and by forcing the recipient country to use its industrial materials.

Additionally, the BRI is the fundamental geopolitical remapping of China in the 21st century. Its focus is more on changing the current status quo, which is predominantly under the control of the USA and the western world. According to Jiwoon Baik (Jiwoon, 2019) in his article "One Belt One Road and the Geopolitics of the Empire" the world of the West has championed modern geopolitical games; to cope with the threats emanating from such geopolitical games, BRI initiates a new shift on the relationship between land and sea, replacing the Pacific Ocean with Eurasia as a focus of world's geopolitical competition (Jiwoon, 2019). The principal aim of the BRI is to revive the ancient Chinese civilization and connect it with Chinese socialism to overcome capitalism. It is worth mentioning here that the geopolitical objective of the BRI includes a dominant position in the IOR. With this aim, China

needs financing and enough capital to enhance its trust among the targeted areas where Chinese geostrategic and geopolitical objectives are connected.

Interestingly, in this article, the writer gives some very historical references regarding the development of Western societies and civilizations. While discussing the BRI projects and their geopolitical implications, the writer connected them with Great Britain in the 17th to 19th centuries, showing how the small country emerged as an empire while only focusing its attention on the sea and locations of geopolitical importance. According to the author:

“Over the past decade or so, several conceptualisations ranging from the “Beijing Consensus” to the more recent Empire Discourses have explicitly pegged the hope for a postmodern civilisation on China’s emergence. Similarly, the ‘China Dream’ of the Xi Jinping era, whose roadmap may be found in the BRI, has challenged wholesale the geopolitics of modernity that was built upon Western maritime existence. As England had once transformed itself into a sea power and emerged as a global empire, China is preparing to turn itself into a land power by moving westward from the Pacific coast. A new spatial horizon called “Eurasia” is about to open before our eyes” (Jiwoon, 2019).

Remarkably, China has jumped into the capitalist orbit to revive its paths to the development of the ancient Silk Road and maritime Silk Road. Although China faces serious opposition from within, particularly from some Chinese experts and pro-Communists, it has not deviated from its goal. According to the researcher, BRI is China’s geopolitical countermeasure against the West in general and the US in particular (Jiwoon, 2019). Furthermore, it is also a kind of challenge to the Bretton Woods system in the West. This initiative by China and the positive response from other countries that are either part of BRI or wish to become part of it is at the same time a challenge to the US dollar's dominance. The

author situates his position on the geopolitical aspects of the BRI project by directing his attention to the theories of Adam Smith and Giovanni Arrighi's *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origin of Our Times*. He claims that China is following the same path as the Western capitalist countries.

Correspondingly, another article with the same discourse of the BRI as a geopolitically driven project by Shirly Yu (Yu, 2019), "The Belt and Road Initiative: Modernity, Geopolitics, and the Developing Global Order" is worth mentioning here. The scholar argues that China is using the same grand strategy as the US after the Second World War. After the Second World War, the USA established international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). It helped the USA create a unilateral world and use these institutions to dominate the world through its economic and military power (Yu, 2019). According to Yu, like the US, China is also using financial institutions such as the "China Development Bank," "EXIM Bank," "China's Policy Bank," and the "Silk Road Bank" to provide a new direction to China's multilateral, regional framework (Yu, 2019). The BRI is considered a new Marshal Plan from China's standpoint to have a dominant role in developing or underdeveloped countries. It is a grand strategy for the "One Hundred Year Plan" of President Xi Jinping and ultimately to assert a new Chinese version of global order by 2050. It clearly shows that the BRI is not just an economic plan; rather, it is a grand regional and geopolitical strategy of China. The author asserts that the "BRI is about economics, but not simply about economics" (Yu, 2019). Chinese President Xi's grand strategy of BRI has two versions, i.e., the economic or modernisation version and the political or strategic version. Yu argues that "the success of the BRI is contingent upon the cohesion and integrity of the achievement of both visions in their entirety" (Yu, 2019).

Moreover, she also analyses the technological and modernisation vision of the BRI project. She states that this initiative does not only provide a new alternative economic order, but it also tends to challenge the US-led Western technological advancement through the Digital Silk Road component of the BRI (Yu, 2019). The recent and sophisticated infrastructural development and rapid expansion of Huawei and ZTE are clear examples of China's technological intentions for the project. Yu's article critically reviews different visions of the BRI project in various aspects.

Raj Mohan's book (Mohan, 2012), *Samundra Manthan: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific* focuses on the enduring element of the Sino-Indian relationship since the middle of the 20th century. The scholar develops its position by arguing that BRI is a significant geopolitical development whose consequences are not limited to the bilateral relationship between the two states. Nonetheless, it has a much wider range across continents. The competitive dynamics of the two countries in the Indian and Pacific Oceans have consequential impacts on the littoral states that are locked into the geopolitical expansionist orbits of these two states. The writer used a thematic framework to organise the discussion and portray the rise of the two dominant powers in the Indo-Pacific region. Within a brief period, both countries enormously increased their economic and military presence in the area. The study argues that despite the improving relationship between India and China, they are using competitive dynamics against each other in a variety of spheres to set the stage for their politico-economic and military involvement (Mohan, 2012). According to the author, China and India are not the only dominant powers in the Indo-Pacific region; ideally, the US has a significant economic and geopolitical agenda in this region. The US may consider India's rise a good omen, but the economic and military growth of China may not be in its favour.

The book also analyses the dependence of China and India on imported natural resources, mainly from oil-producing countries, especially in the Middle East and on the African continent. Besides their reliance on imported natural resources, they are also in search of external markets for their manufactured goods and commodities. The research claims that this desire has changed their naval mission and provided them with a much higher opportunity for blue-water purposes. The more they participate in other territories, the more they need to build their naval power. The greater their naval power, the greater their ability to operate outside of their home territories. Similarly, more exertion of power creates more threats to their security and strategic agendas. The power politics in the region ultimately result in an intense rivalry. Furthermore, the book also covers the nuclearization of the sea due to the growing rivalry between India and China. Although the book is an investigative piece of writing and covers a broad spectrum of the Sino-India rivalry and power politics in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, it covers the whole area, from the political to the economic and military-strategic regions as well.

Similarly, about the 'Chinese Dream', Rumi Aoyama also describes the BRI as President Xi's vision of the Chinese dream and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation as the goal of the BRI projects in her well-structured and investigative, analytical article titled as "One Belt, One Road: China's New Global Strategy" (Aoyama, 2016). The author also calls the BRI a "grand global strategy" for the attainment of the Chinese dream (Aoyama, 2016). Rumi critically discusses how China as a nation is unified under Xi and how he has focused his attention and efforts on achieving this dream. Xi's administration set forth a mega "Hundred-Year Dream" and coincided it with the 100th anniversary of the Communist Party of China (CCP), which came into being in 1922 (Aoyama, 2016). The great Chinese dream is only

possible if China can secure its energy routes and maximise its areas of influence. The CPEC projects are among the many examples of increasing Chinese involvement in different countries. In this regard, one cannot overlook the potential impacts of the initiative on global politics, as China is not alone in this region. But this foreign policy focus of the Xi administration is difficult to maintain due to the dominant economic and military presence of the USA. On the borders of China, the USA has its strongholds, such as in Afghanistan, where the US has an army base. According to the writer, the surrounding environment in China has worsened dramatically. It was imperative for China to launch such an appealing initiative that would attract not only neighbouring and strategically important states but also European and Latin American countries. The BRI has significantly increased China's area of influence at the expense of other powers. Besides, it has attracted nations in Central Asia, Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Latin America to be involved in the BRI initiative.

The article covers almost all the aspects of the BRI and the possible outcomes of the project. She critically encompasses all areas of the project, from Asia to Africa and from Latin America to Europe. She also evaluates the internal affairs of those countries that are members of the initiative, particularly Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Russia, and many more. The possible threats to BRI and its weaknesses are also critically evaluated. Furthermore, she suggests how the Chinese administration can cover the risks and vulnerabilities of the BRI. Although the article covers wide-ranging issues pertaining to the BRI, one thing that is ignored is the strategic and geopolitical games that are played out on a larger scale and how the regional rivalry is taking a new turn. The growing American economic and military interests in India and the nuclear and defence deals between the two countries indicate the intensity of

the situation. The US and India are not happy with China for its broader regional and international vision, or "Chinese dream."

Some other research works are also noteworthy for highlighting the implications of the BRI and its geopolitical and global reach. In this regard, the work of C. Flint and C. Zhu, "The Geopolitics of Connectivity, Cooperation, and Hegemonic Competition: The Belt and Road Initiative" (Flint & Zhu, 2019); M.H. Gao's "Globalization 5.0 Led by China: Powered by Positive Frames for BRI (Gao, 2018)"; S. Lin, J.D. Sidway and CY. Woon, "Reordering China, Respecting the World: Belt and Road Initiative as an emergent Geopolitical Culture" (Lin & Sidway, 2019); Enrico Cau "Geopolitical Implications of the Belt and Road Initiative: The Backbone for the New World Order? (Cau, 2018)", G. Hongliu (2018), "The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): A China Specific Approach for Global Governance" are noteworthy.

In this section, the material related to the BRI and the geopolitics of the BRI are thoroughly investigated. The focus of these scholarships is mainly on the concept of BRI, the Chinese motive behind BRI, the geopolitical, economic, and strategic aspects of BRI, and its effects on the region. It has also been demonstrated that the USA, Europe, and India consider the project a threat to their broader interests in the region and their dominant position. Moreover, the literature also critically analysed the vision of President Xi in anticipation of the development of the Chinese dream. In the following section, the literature related to CPEC as a flagship project of BRI and the China-Pakistan relationship, as well as the motives behind CPEC, is reviewed.

2.3.3 Literature on the China-Pakistan Relationship, the CPEC and Geopolitics:

To understand the BRI's flagship CPEC project, it is crucial to illustrate the dynamics of the relationship between Pakistan and China with geopolitical consideration. It is due to the cordial and brotherly relationship between the two countries that China has undertaken such a massive and costly project in Pakistan. Although the political, economic, and security situation in Pakistan at the time of the signing of the CPEC project was not favourable for China, it overlooked every concern and signed the CPEC project that could facilitate its geopolitical motivations. Any other country would have been cautious before signing a megaproject worth forty-six billion dollars, but it was China that trusted in its relationship with Pakistan.

In this connection some of the literature, such as, Brij Lal Sharma (Sharma, 1968) China Pakistan Axis, B.N. Goswami, Pakistan and China: A Study of Their Relations (Goswami, 1971), Ghulam Ali, China-Pakistan Relations: A Historical Analysis (Ali, 2017), Dr Suresh Chandar (2016) China-Pakistan Relations: Implications for India (Chandra, 2016), Andrew Small, China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics (Small, 2015), K. Arif, China-Pakistan Relations: 1947-1980 (Arif, 1984) and Gurnam Singh, Sino-Pakistan Relations: The Ayyub Era (Singh, 1987) are outstanding works which have been written on the relationship between the two countries. These literatures build excellent background knowledge to understand and gauge the intensity of their relationship. Some of the following literature is surveyed in more details in the said subject.

Andrew Small's book, The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics, covers the geopolitical aspects of the CPEC. This book is an analysis of Sino-Pakistani relations through an era of difficulties. He describes how Beijing and Washington had a secretive relationship

during the troubled times of the Cold War and how both nations came forward to form a formal but cordial political and then economic relationship. It is due to their friendly and brotherly relationship that they have the best opportunity to sign the CPEC deal as the BRI's pilot project. The formal involvement of China and Pakistan started with a gift of a box of mangoes during the time of Mao Zedong in August 1968 (Small, 2015). According to the author,

“For decades, Beijing's secretive ties with Islamabad have run closer than most formal alliances. Founded on a shared enmity with India, China's backing to Pakistan has gone so deep that it was willing to offer the ultimate gift from one state to another: the materials that Pakistan's nuclear scientists needed to build the bomb” (Small, 2015).

Andrew Small argues that China and Pakistan both enjoyed a good relationship throughout history because of two goals that connected them. The first is the enmity with India, and the other is the geopolitical location of Pakistan. For China, Pakistan is a golden egg. It lies at the heart of Beijing's broader plan for a more significant role in the affairs of the Indian Ocean. Pakistan lies at the heart of the Indian Ocean, where China can have access to a network of ports, pipelines, roads, and railways connecting the oil and gas fields of the Middle East and the major cities of the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. Its coastline is becoming a crucial staging post for China's take-off as a naval power, extending its reach from the Indian Ocean to the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea. For China, the coastal belt of Balochistan, particularly the Gwadar Port, which lies at a strategic location in the Indian Ocean, is significant for its Indian Ocean dream. The Indian Ocean's dominance is an essential aspect of a Chinese strategy to realise the Chinese dream in the 21st century. Similarly, for Pakistan, China is critical to getting out of instability and economic weakness. This is even

more important given US economic and military sanctions on Pakistan and the growing financial gap. These sanctions include the legislative sanctions that President Trump imposed in 2017-18 based on the Foreign Assistance Act of 1960 (Pandey, 2018). These sanctions, among others, prohibited Pakistan's military and economic assistance by adding seven Pakistani companies allegedly engaging in nuclear trade to a list of foreign entities that could pose a risk to the national security and strategic interests of the US. Before this strict sanction, the Trump administration also suspended military training for Pakistan's army. The US has withheld some \$500 million in military and defence assistance from Pakistan (Pandey, 2018). In such a circumstance, China remains the only trusted ally that can help Pakistan. Hence, it appears that Pakistan has replaced the US with China as its external patron, both strategically and economically.

The Sino-Pakistani relationship encompasses some of the most sensitive areas of the two sides' national security policies. Officials in China and Pakistan are naturally cautious when discussing them. And this is not just true for foreign researchers, even the limited number of Chinese and Pakistani analysts who study the relationship face challenges (Small, 2015). Due to the opaqueness of the deal, researchers and the media do not have access to it. Even the opposition political parties in the Pakistan National Assembly are not privy to the terms and conditions of the contract. The opaque nature of the deal between Pakistan and China has raised questions about the CPEC agreement and the Gwadar port agreement. There are questions as well about the CPEC projects because leaders in Balochistan and KP perceive that Punjab is the only beneficiary of the CPEC projects at their expense. Some blame should also be attributed to China for this. Small's book covers wide-ranging issues of Sino-Pakistan relations. It evaluates China's economic gains from the CPEC. The book also covers how China

tried to build a working relationship with the Taliban when they were in power in Afghanistan to stop the activities of the East Turkistan Movement (ETM) group in the Xinjiang region. This book is an excellent source for building good background knowledge on the China-Pakistan relationship and their secretive designs for regional geopolitics.

Similarly, Siegfried O. Wolf has published a well-researched and analytical book about the CPEC. The title of the book is China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Context, Concept and Assessment (Wolf,2019). Wolf begins by discussing the China-Pakistan relationship that ultimately led to the flagship project of BRI, the CPEC. According to Wolf, CPEC is the project that can realise the Chinese dream of becoming a dominant player in the region. The Chinese dream is proposed and announced by President Xi, and it presents the Chinese vision in a detailed manner. After an in-depth discussion on the China-Pakistan relationship, the author diverts his attention towards the modernization aspect of the CPEC. According to the scholar,

“Both the BRI and CPEC initiatives are key instruments of Xi’s ‘Chinese Dream’ and consequent international and global aspirations. To realise the ‘Chinese Dream,’ Xi indicates that all citizens must ‘walk down the Chinese road, develop the Chinese spirit, and jointly harness China’s strengths.’ He also points at the so-called threefold self-confidence— in the path, theory, and institutions of socialism with Chinese characteristics—as a prerequisite for attaining the ‘Chinese Dream” (Wolf,2019).

The modernization of China through the Chinese Dream has four distinct aspects. Firstly, a reliable China: economically, politically, diplomatically, scientifically, and militarily (Wolf,2019). Secondly, civilised China achieved equity and fairness, a vibrant culture, and high morale. Thirdly, China became harmonious through amity among the social classes. And finally, beautiful China with a healthy environment and a lower population It is the only book

that mentions the digital part of the BRI project as the "digital silk road." The author discusses the Chinese and Pakistani motives regarding the BRI in general and the CPEC. He also addresses the security risks of implementing CPEC-related projects. Although Wolf has covered almost all aspects of CPEC and BRI, the impacts of BRI and CPEC on the local population have hardly been discussed. The author discusses some security-related threats to the CPEC in Balochistan.

‘China’s Asian Dream’ has been the focus of many scholars around the world. The BRI and its flagship CPEC project are the brainchild of President Xi’s vision for a developed China. Tom Miller, in his book- *China’s Asian Dream: Empire Building Along the New Silk Road* (Miller, 2017), also analyses the motives of China in connection with its ‘Asian Dream’. The author discusses in detail the intentions of China, not only for Pakistan or Gwadar Port but also for the rest of Asia (from East Asia to West Asia, from Central Asia to the Middle East), Africa, and Latin America. Although the focus of the book is China’s vision, it also provides analysis on the Gwadar port and China’s increased geopolitical games in Pakistan. According to Miller, the biggest gain for China from the three thousand kilometres of economic corridor is to open an alternative route for energy transportation from the Middle East. The project provides China with the gateway to continue trade through the Gwadar port during the crisis with the US or with India (Miller, 2017). The author also shows how poor security and extremism threaten China’s strategic ambitions in Pakistan, where China wants the Gwadar port to be a strategic value-point for its PLA Navy. It can be said that the possible Chinese naval base in Gwadar not only benefits China in the Indian Ocean but also serves Pakistan’s strategic interests. The Indian Navy blockaded Pakistan’s only port city, Karachi, during the war of 1971. So, when

Pakistan is at war with its rival India, the Gwadar port is used as a backup port. As a result, New Delhi considers China's presence in Gwadar Port to be more geopolitical than economic.

Abdul Rehman Shah (Shah, 2018), while focusing on the CPEC related security threats, he argues that China and Pakistan face numerous challenges in the process of implementing the project. Interestingly, the author argues that Pakistan's domestic issues have adversely affected the intentions of China in Pakistan. Firstly, the discourse on CPEC has become extremely sensitive and securitized. Local opposition or dissent is always labelled as a conspiracy against the CPEC (Shah, 2018). Second, CPEC has revived divisions between the provinces across ethnic lines due to the unfair distribution of the projects and the route controversy. Historically, three significant ethnicities after Punjabis of Pakistan, that is, Pashtuns, Sindhis, and Baloch, have harboured strong resentments that Punjabis (or Punjab province) have usurped the national resources and power to their advantage. Although the scholar has thoroughly described these issues and observations at the same time, he snubbed the academic and empirical insights on the reservations of the native people. It should be kept in mind that the CPEC not only changes the demography of Balochistan, but it may also become one of the reasons for the internal displacement of the Baloch community from their ancestral territories.

Similarly, another relevant article, "Impact of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor on Nation-Building in Pakistan" (Ahmed, 2019), covers the impacts of CPEC on nation-building in Pakistan. CPEC and the unfair and unjust distribution of CPEC-related projects among the provinces widened the already existing gaps between the centre and the provinces. The analysis has focused on the ethnographic differences of Pakistan as a nation-state. It argues that although CPEC and Chinese investment in Pakistan are considered game changers for

Pakistan's economy, they have already widened the ethnographic gaps due to the unfair distribution of resources and CPEC projects (Ahmed, 2019). It is pertinent to note here that Pakistan's four major ethnic groups are divided into four different provinces, i.e., the Panjabis are in Panjab, which is the dominant ethnic group, and Panjab is the biggest province in terms of its population. The province of Punjab alone constitutes 52 percent of the total population of Pakistan. Other ethnic groups, such as Sindhis, Pashtuns, and Balochs, are smaller ethnic groups residing in Sindh, Khaybar Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), and Balochistan provinces, respectively. The least developed provinces of Pakistan, i.e., Balochistan and KPK, have always been neglected when it comes to sharing the resources of the state. The same strategies have also been applied to the CPEC projects, where the central government has ignored the two underdeveloped provinces of Pakistan. This divide has been the focal point because of the lion's share of the Punjab province and the Punjabi dominance in the federal government. It has also overlooked the already impoverished provinces of Balochistan and KPK. The PML-N government prioritised Punjab over other areas. Furthermore, a significant share has been allotted to central Punjab due to their vote bank.

Nalanda Roy, in her article, "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor – Is It the Road to the Future?" (Roy, 2019) highlights how the South Asian region's geopolitics are changing. According to her, the security, and economic ramifications of BRI-related projects—paying particular emphasis to CPEC—have put the neighbouring states in a highly precarious and polarized position. While it mentions the worries of Pakistan's smaller provinces, it falls short of offering a thorough examination of how the CPEC projects will affect the local Baloch community.

Jeremy Garlick, in his article “Deconstructing the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor: Pipe Dreams Versus Geopolitical Realities,” (Garlick, 2018) has disputed the Chinese claim regarding the usefulness of the CPEC and the Gwadar port. In his article, he evaluates the CPEC's advantages and disadvantages and makes a connection between them and China's objectives. According to him,

“[T]he overland connection is beset with difficulties because of geographical, economic and security problems, and that China's long-term motivations for maintaining a presence in Pakistan are likely to be chiefly geopolitical rather than geo-economic. China's primary aims with CPEC and other investments is to hedge against India by establishing a physical presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). This strategy is herein referred to as geo-positional balancing” (Garlick, 2018).

The article mentioned is based on empirically balanced opinion. The author breaks down the CPEC into sections and examines all aspects of the Pakistani and Chinese reasons for the project. He investigates the CPEC as a land corridor for the use of the Gwadar Port, as well as China's security concerns over the CPEC projects. His analysis demonstrates that the CPEC is a substantially bigger plan for China than official papers indicate. It is more than just a business venture or a win-win situation for China and Pakistan.

Manish Prashant Kaushik, in his article “CPEC, Afghanistan and India's Concerns” (Manish & Kaushik, 2019) takes a broader view of the CPEC. His analysis covers the impact of the project on India and Afghanistan. He believes that, while China's focus is mostly on Pakistan, it also seeks a calm environment in neighbouring Afghanistan and India. (Manish & Kaushik, 2019). Both China and Pakistan are concerned about India's expanding influence in Afghan

politics. A peaceful Afghanistan is in China's best interests for the overall development of the BRI and CPEC.

Zahid Hussain, in his article “China Pakistan Economic Corridor: Economic Rationale and Key Challenges” (Khan, 2019) focuses on economic as well as security concerns and threats to the CPEC. Three core and essential questions are discussed in this article. First, how will CPEC change the socioeconomic structure of Pakistan? Second, what are the domestic and transnational challenges in the way of CPEC’s further progress? And finally, what should be done by the Chinese and Pakistani governments to alleviate the fundamental concerns regarding CPEC? Although the article tries to cover all the threats, concerns, and grievances about the CPEC, it overlooks the human rights violations caused by the geopolitics of the BRI generally and the CPEC. Moreover, together with other concerns, the writer discusses and negates the allegation of the "debt trap" policy. He sides with the narrative in Islamabad that China does not intend any debt trap policy for Pakistan. He bases his analysis on western and Indian media propaganda to create distrust and misinformation about the CPEC as a countering strategy (Khan, 2019). Finally, like many other articles, this article also discusses the regional concerns about the CPEC, particularly the Indian ones. It terms it as a threat to the CPEC project as it runs through the disputed territories of Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan region which India considers as its parts. Furthermore, India also views China in Gwadar as a threat to its dominant role in the IOR and against its regional interests.

The CPEC has sparked considerable debate and raised important questions regarding its potential impact on regional stability. To shed light on this topic, Shehryar Khan and Guijian Liu have offered their perspectives on the issue in their article, “The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): Challenges and Prospects” (2019). The authors acknowledge the potential of

CPEC to transform the region's economic landscape but also highlight its potential to pose challenges to regional peace. The disputed territories through which CPEC passes have been a major source of concern for India, and the authors suggest that such concerns may have contributed to escalating tensions between India and Pakistan. Additionally, the authors argue that Indian apprehensions over the Chinese role in the development of Gwadar port could further exacerbate the situation. Khan and Liu also raise concerns over the possible demographic changes that could occur in Balochistan, particularly in the context of the indigenous inhabitants of Gwadar, who may not be adequately prepared to cope with the magnitude of the project. Specifically, the authors assert that the lack of education among the inhabitants of Gwadar could potentially exacerbate existing socioeconomic and political challenges. This raises important questions about how the CPEC can be implemented in a way that ensures it is both economically transformative and socially responsible. Considering the geopolitical considerations surrounding the CPEC, it is important to carefully manage the project's implementation to mitigate any potential negative impacts on regional stability. Khan and Liu's article thus underscores the need for policymakers and stakeholders to recognise and address the complex social, economic, and political dynamics that underpin the CPEC to ensure that its implementation is equitable, sustainable, and supports regional peace.

The same concerns regarding the CPEC are also discussed in the article, "The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): Challenges and Prospects", (Khan & Liu, 2019). In this article, the authors mention that although CPEC can be a notable change for the region, it also poses serious threats to regional peace. According to them, the Indian concerns regarding CPEC, which is crossing through the disputed territories may be one of the reasons for the escalation of tension between the two nations. Similarly, the Indian concerns related to the

Chinese active role in Gwadar further intensifies the situation. Interestingly, the paper also mentions the possible demographic changes in Balochistan, particularly in Gwadar. They argue that the indigenous inhabitants of Gwadar are not educated. Therefore, they are not ready to cope with such megaprojects (Khan & Liu, 2019).

The article, “China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: A Perspective from Pakistan” (Salik, 2018), is a detailed discussion of the CPEC and its possible outcomes for the region. One factor that has dominated the article is the factor of regional insecurities and hostility between the major players, which has not only derailed regional prosperity but also allowed extra-regional powers to play a dominant role. On the other hand, the writer also provides insight into Pakistan’s resolve towards domestic and regional developments amidst the Chinese presence in Pakistan through CPEC. It also considers the strengthening of Sino-Pak relations as the mainstay of materialising the CPEC goal of development for all. The writer notes the significant insecurities and threats to the CPEC project and the regional threats to the BRI in general.

Robert D. Kaplan’s scholarly works focus on the Indian Ocean and the powerplays in the IOR and the rivalry between regional and extra-regional powers. Among them, his (2010) book- *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the battle for supremacy in the 21st century* (Kaplan, 2010), the (2011) book- *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American power* (Kaplan, 2011), and his article “Center Stage for Twenty-First Century: Power Plays in the Indian Ocean” (Kaplan, 2009) are the scholarships in which the writer predicted the intentions of China in the IOR particularly in Pakistan. Although the article was first published in 2009, at that time, the Gwadar Port was under the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA), and China did not have any hold on any projects in Pakistan. In the article, for the first time, Kaplan claimed

that China intends to build a massive naval base in two small fishing cities of Balochistan, i.e., Gwadar and Pasni (Kaplan, 2009). These naval bases will ultimately be used against any Indian or US aggression in the Indian Ocean. The writer also analysed the possible Indian opposition against China. The power plays in South Asia are concentrated on the politics of the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, especially in Gwadar Port, Chabahar and the resource-rich Central Asian Republics.

Filippo Boni agrees with Kaplan on regional power politics in his article “Civil-Military Relations in Pakistan: A Case Study of Sino- Pakistani Relations and the Port of Gwadar” (Boni, 2016). According to the author, Pakistan has rightly sensed the geopolitical and strategic importance of its coastal areas such as Gwadar. By doing so, China has shown greater interest in Gwadar Port for its westward dreams of becoming a dominant player in the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. According to the author, China signed CPEC to connect its western province of Xinjiang to the IOR, as well as a shorter road stretching from Karakorum to Gwadar city.

The article analyses the geopolitical importance of the Gwadar Port for China. The writer discusses in detail the prevailing gap between Pakistan’s military and civilian governments, which resulted in a delay in signing the agreement. Boni and other writers of the same genre claim that China has always shown an interest in working with the military instead of the civilian government. But since the signing of the CPEC agreement, Pakistan’s military has already assured China of full protection of its routes and workers. Furthermore, Nawaz Sharif’s civilian government supported China’s design in Balochistan, particularly in Gwadar. China portrays Gwadar Port as its nearest point for imports and exports. As Boni claims:

“The city of Gwadar (in Urdu the ‘Gate of Air’) lies at the intersection between the oil-rich Arabian Peninsula, Central Asia, and South Asia, representing an ideal gateway for energy supplies to Pakistan, the Central Asian Republics and, most importantly, China. In this context, Gwadar has the potential of becoming an important regional hub due to the port’s geographical proximity to the Strait of Hormuz, which represents one of the most important chokepoints in the world by volume of oil transit” (Boni, 2016).

John W. Garver has provided a similar analysis in his article, “Development of China’s Overland Transportation Links with Central, South-West and South Asia” (Garver, 2006). He claims that China has long desired to have a dominant position in the South and Central Asian regions. This Chinese dream not only provides the shortest routes for energy and manufactured goods transportation, but it also assists China in finding a massive market for its skilled workers. The dream was realised when China announced the BRI project and signed agreements with dozens of states in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Though the article was written before the CPEC agreement, the report predicted that China had a deal with Pakistan on the Gwadar port. But the writer also mentioned the importance of Gwadar port for Chinese economic development, the aim of China to have a dominant role in the Indian Ocean, and direct access to warm water.

Umbreen Javid and Javaria Jahangir, in their article, “Balochistan: A Key Factor in Global Politics” (Javid & Jahangir, 2015), note the importance of Balochistan in terms of its geostrategic importance with vast mineral, copper, and gold reserves and an extensive, massive coastline. The focus of the article is on the broader geopolitical aspects of Gwadar port and Balochistan as a whole. Furthermore, the writers argue that the road and sea link with China helps Pakistan rebuild its torn infrastructure and fulfil its energy desires. However,

the article takes an optimistic approach and does not mention the security risks of Gwadar Port and CPEC (Javaid & Jahangir, 2015).

The scholarships on CPEC and the importance of Balochistan, particularly the Gwadar port, for CPEC are pinned down by Rorry Daniels' "Strategic Competition in South Asia: Gwadar, Chabahar, and the Risks of Infrastructure Development" (Daniels, 2013) and Mohammad Abrar's article "Snooping into the Belt & Road Initiative: A Comparative Study of Gwadar with Chabahar Port" (Ahmad, 2017) also emphasises the importance of Gwadar for China's economic and military interests. The authors compare the essential ports in South Asia, such as Gwadar Port and Chahbahar. He discusses that infrastructure development in South Asia is driven by competition for geographic control, i.e., to secure resources and markets, and by fear of strategic encirclement (Daniels, 2013; Ahmad, 2017). They compare Pakistan's Gwadar Port to Iran's Chahbahar and predict that it will be the epicentre of geopolitical games in the region in the coming years. The two recently established ports, Gwadar in Pakistan, and Chabahar in Iran have especially solidified the strategic alliances between China and Pakistan and between India and Iran. According to the writers, the strategic location of Balochistan gives it a distinctive feature. Gwadar serves as a component of "China's strategy of pearls", as the writer claims (Ahmad, 2017). The strategic string of pearls of China enables China to envision strategic ports along the Pacific Ocean, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean.

It means that China is not only enhancing its influence in the Indian Ocean for economic gains but also for strategic and geopolitical motives. The hidden geopolitical purposes will become evident over time. Still, the competition with India in the Persian Gulf is one of the most important reasons why China has gambled such a considerable amount in Balochistan, where the insurgency is underway. China's commitment to building the Gwadar Port is the

reason that many scholars are raising questions about China's plans in Pakistan, particularly in Balochistan. Consequently, the domination of China in the Persian Gulf has raised serious concerns for not only India but also the USA. The USA and India's concerns about China and its growing presence in the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf further intensify the growing geopolitical games in the region, affecting the minority nations across the borders.

The sources that I have looked at for the preceding section explore the general tendencies in China-Pakistan ties as well as CPEC while taking crucial geopolitical considerations into account. Pakistan has emerged as one of the most trustworthy friends of the Chinese-led bloc because of the rising regional connectivity and geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China. It has become a security corridor for China, giving it the ability to overwhelm the United States on the Asian continent and play a more dominant role. During the inquiry, it became clear that China is dedicated to aiding Pakistan both economically and militarily, which has the potential to play a significant role in their conflict with India. A substantial number of authors have concentrated their attention on aspects of the relationship, such as its economic, political, military, and strategic facets. It has been demonstrated, through an in-depth analysis of the relevant published material, that the academic research on the topic focuses solely on CPEC's broader context. The research that was looked through examines the shifting geopolitics of the region as well as its consequences for the power structures and alliance networks of the region.

2.3.4 The Growing geopolitical rivalries through BRI and CPEC and the Local Community:

The Analysis of Sabatini and other scholars' asserts that the escalating geopolitical rivalry is a prominent factor that contributes to the declining condition of human rights and international law in regions of geopolitical significance. The increasing geopolitical rivalry in

Balochistan, particularly in the Mekran region, where China is developing a significant mega port and assuming control over its activities along the Indian Ocean coastline, is anticipated to have detrimental consequences, leading to suffering and the infringement of fundamental rights among the local population. So far, there has been a lack of comprehensive analysis conducted to ascertain the consequences of the increasing geopolitical conflicts in this region. The academic community has largely overlooked this crucial aspect of this issue, as it has been neglected in most studies conducted thus far. During the period of drafting this thesis, there was a limited availability of academic inquiries related impacts of the geopolitical impacts of CPEC on the local community. Nevertheless, certain scholarly endeavours have sought to analyse and juxtapose the grievances expressed by the community in relation to the increasing insurgency and counterinsurgency operations taking place in Balochistan. The objective of the scholarships was to depict the populace as encountering hardship due to the insurgency and separatist ideology.

A quantitative study on the response of the Baloch community in general and the impact of the insurgency on CPEC is conducted by Sabahat Jaleel and Nazia Bibi in their article “Baloch Insurgency and its Impact on CPEC” (Jaleel & Bibi , 2017). In this research paper, the writers empirically analysed the response of the Baloch community, and the results indicate that CPEC would face opposition from the people of Balochistan, which harms CPEC. The scholars explain the grave impacts of these megaprojects on the local population. In many cases, the pieces of evidence show that the native community was either forced to leave the nearby territories or migrated to other areas due to the increasing battles between the security forces and insurgents. Although the writers link CPEC with insurgency, in any case, the local population always bears the consequences during times of tension.

Filippo Boni and Katherine Adeney's recent article "The Impacts of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor on Pakistan's Federal System: The Politics of the CPEC" (Boni & Adeney, 2020) present an empirical insight into the growing concerns of the provinces and local population regarding the distribution of the resources of CPEC. In the article, the authors claim that Pakistan's federal system and interprovincial relations have further deteriorated due to the unfair delivery of CPEC-related projects. Furthermore, the writers interviewed prominent politicians regarding the impacts of the megaproject on the local population. For instance, he interviewed former Chief Minister of Balochistan, Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch, and MP Sana Ullah Baloch regarding the concerns of Balochistan over CPEC.

The above section is the critical area where the focus of the study is centred. This is the area where most of the scholarship has been ignored. As can be seen, there is scant scholarly work on this crucial issue. No comprehensive, thorough, and systematic research has been conducted to uncover the link between the geopolitics of the megaproject, i.e., CPEC in this context, and the sufferings of the local minority community (Baloch) in Balochistan. The ongoing research will focus on this critical and essential issue and ultimately answer all those questions related to the geopolitics of megaprojects and the suffering of the common masses.

2.4 Critical Evaluation:

After conducting thorough research and reading relevant materials, the undertaken research establishes its position in the field and aids in the discovery of unanswered questions. The goal of the preceding literature review was to provide context and justification for the proposed research. It directs the study and helps in building detailed background knowledge. It helps us gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject under study. The researcher

grasped the survey by locating, reading, and evaluating reports of research as well as descriptions of casual observations and opinions that are related to the planned project.

Thus, the above literature review is based on Sabatini's argument about the impacts of growing geopolitical rivalries on individual human rights. Sabatini and others emphasise the deterioration of international law and human rights. Through the literature review, it has been made clear that the geopolitical rivalry between the USA and China and their allies will be more extensive, and the power struggle between these two blocs will surely increase, which will further deteriorate human rights and norms. Sabatini's argument is worthy of study and discussion when the geopolitical rivalry between the US and China is under consideration. The question of whether Sabatini's and others' arguments apply to Chinese involvement through the BRI and CPEC in Balochistan and their impacts on the local population is a key question that will be considered in this thesis based on the study.

The critical reading of all the scholarship revealed that these are the specific questions that are not addressed in any text. The position of this study remained unique, as it would uncover those questions and provide the answers to them. This literature review justifies that the investigated scholarships are an essential source of background knowledge, but it does not discover the missing link. It further rationalises my position regarding the geopolitics of megaprojects and their impacts on local communities. An inquiry into the existing materials helps in finding the unanswered questions related to the impacts of the geopolitical rivalry between the US and China and its impacts on the local community. The literature reviewed in the above sections does analyse various aspects of the BRI and its key pilot project, the CPEC. While they are significant, the missing dimension in their analyses cannot be missed, which is the impact of the brewing geopolitical rivalry around the BRI and the CPEC and its

devastating effect on the local Baloch population. Also, it is essential to note here that the reviewed pieces cover only one aspect of the problem; none provide a comprehensive analysis of the politics of the BRI and CPEC.

Existing scholarship on CPEC's economic and social effects lacks the nuance to grasp its full impact on the local Baloch community, particularly in the context of its geopolitical underpinnings. The reviewed literature in general have not systematically investigated the connection between the emerging geopolitical competition and the impacts on human rights and the suffering of the local population. While there is some scholarship on the BRI and CPEC, the literature review reveals a gap in understanding the specific impacts of the growing geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China on the local Baloch population. Previous studies have focused primarily on the economic and geopolitical aspects of these megaprojects, neglecting the human rights implications, and suffering of the native population. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by investigating the link between geopolitics and its consequences for the local minority population in Balochistan.

As can be seen from the study of the literature, the focus of mainstream scholarly work is on the growing geopolitical and economic aspects of the BRI and the CPEC. Arguably, the megaprojects have massively affected the local population, mostly in a negative sense, and have failed to gain the attention of the literature, as mentioned above. The people in this geopolitically and strategically important region are poor and oppressed and cannot stand up against the powerful elite. The mass migration and political and military attacks on the indigenous populace, particularly the people of Mekran Division, are the results of the megaproject. With more Chinese pouring into Gwadar, the army has tightened its grip over the entrance route in these areas, and even the residents are unable to go to their homes.

More military deployments have occurred in the name of security in the region to safeguard Chinese engineers and CPEC activities. This missing dimension is the focus of this study, which aims to investigate CPEC-related geopolitics and their impact on the local minority population.

The study focuses on the globalization of geopolitics and the declining state of international law and human rights in recent years. According to Sabatini, the intensification of geopolitical rivalries is one of the key factors contributing to the deterioration of international law and the state of the human rights situation. As a result of China's rise to prominence as an economic and military power, the previously unipolar world has transformed into a multipolar one, and geopolitics has assumed the role of being the most vital component of the international order. Through the BRI, China is exerting economic and military influence over several Asian countries. Militarization is on the rise in these countries because China is making significant financial investments in the construction of new ports and other types of infrastructure that are geopolitically significant. With the assistance of India and Japan, the United States is working to rein in the growing power of China, which has contributed to the escalation of the competition. Because of the weapons race and the increasing militarization of countries across Asia, the rights of an increasing number of people are being disregarded or exploited in some way. The failure of international organisations to defend the rights of individuals and the public is largely attributable to the lack of binding authority that comes with membership in international organisations, as well as the disregard shown by sovereign states for violations of international law and human rights.

As mentioned in the objectives of the research, the main objective of this thesis is to examine how the geopolitical rivalries between major powers in Balochistan affect the local population, including human rights violations and demographic changes. The BRI, CPEC, and

all those megaprojects that have a significant geopolitical component always have significant impacts on the economic, political, social, cultural, and human rights of the masses whose geography is at their centre. In the case of CPEC, the centre of the geopolitical competition is in the Gwadar district of the Mekran region, where China is building the port and free economic zones. The strength of the thesis is twofold. The first step is to carefully look at the BRI and its flagship project, the CPEC, from a geopolitical perspective. Most research in this field is carefully examined to get a clear picture of what is already known. Second, it is analysed and presented to show the impacts of emerging geopolitical competition around the Gwadar port on the local population, where the initiative is focused. Gwadar is the crown jewel of the BRI and the CPEC, and China is building and using a deep seaport in Gwadar to make political and economic gains.

Understanding the impacts of geopolitical rivalries on the local Baloch community is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it sheds light on the human rights violations and sufferings experienced by the native population in the face of megaprojects such as the BRI and CPEC. Secondly, it contributes to the broader discussions on the decline of international law and human rights in the context of growing geopolitical tensions. Lastly, it provides valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders to make informed decisions regarding the development and implementation of megaprojects in the region. In the next chapters, this research will attempt to gain valuable insights through primary data collection while also establishing its position. Furthermore, the most recent data will serve as a foundation for future studies on geopolitics and how it affects local people in every state. The current investigation emphasises the importance of contributing to the existing body of knowledge

on the topic and of providing a nuanced, data-driven analysis that can inform future policy decisions.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction:

This chapter explains the data gathering strategies used in this thesis and how the data have been used in this work. In the context of scholarly investigation, the methodological approach is extremely important since it serves as a foundation for producing reliable research findings. It requires a thorough study of all the steps taken during the research project, with a primary emphasis on themes like data collection, analysis techniques, and the technical approaches used to gather and process data. Thinking back on the procedures and outlining the successive actions that make up the research endeavour are essential components. Choosing a methodology and strategy in line with the study objectives is a common methodological decision. Thus, taking these objectives into account, a qualitative research methodology that incorporates both descriptive and analytical techniques was carefully selected. Interviews will be the primary method of primary data collection; qualitative content and text analysis approaches will be used for secondary data collection.

Given the specific research objectives concerning the scrutiny of the expanding geopolitical rivalry and its implications for the Baloch population, the adoption of a qualitative research method became paramount. This method was deemed suitable for a comprehensive exploration of these pivotal variables. Secondary data will be sourced through qualitative content and text analysis, drawing from an array of diverse and reputable sources. Interviews emerged as the most viable primary data collection method due to the impracticality and potential risks associated with survey-based approaches in the volatile Balochistan region. Consequently, the researcher employed semi-structured methods in interviewing the Baloch community. These interviews were conducted either face-to-face or through various digital

platforms, such as Skype, Zoom, Emails and WhatsApp, ensuring flexibility in interview styles and locations to prioritise participant safety and convenience. Primary data encompassed a wide spectrum, including government documents, archives, policy statements, statistics, and bilateral agreements between Pakistan and Chinese entities.

Navigating the complex security landscape of Balochistan prompted the selection of interviews over surveys, a decision that was thoroughly deliberated with pertinent stakeholders. Employing semi-structured methods, the researcher specifically targeted the Baloch community situated in strategically significant areas with underlying scepticism towards CPEC initiatives. These interviews, conducted in person or via digital platforms, were chosen to accommodate safety considerations and participants' comfort. The primary data amassed comprised a comprehensive array of governmental documents, archives, policy statements, statistics, and formal agreements between Pakistan and China. Upon acquiring the primary data, transcription into textual form was primarily conducted in English, with the provision of Balochi language where necessary. With proficiency in English, Urdu, and Balochi, participants were offered the flexibility to engage in their preferred language, negating the necessity for a translator. Moreover, being a fluent native language speaker has benefited me in a much better way because I could communicate and understand the nuances of the documents more effectively. This allowed for a more accurate analysis and interpretation of the information gathered. Additionally, my language skills enabled me to establish a rapport with participants, making them feel more comfortable and willing to share their insights and perspectives.

To ensure data protection compliance, a secure protocol was implemented, safeguarding the data against theft and loss through adherence to relevant legal procedures. The project

also incorporates an investigation and analysis of diverse secondary sources of data, including research articles, books, academic writings, seminar papers, and Chinese and Pakistani policy papers. Secondary sources hold paramount importance in research endeavours, as they serve as fundamental resources for comprehending and analysing the chosen subject matter. A comprehensive analysis of the available literature is a fundamental undertaking in research, providing foundational knowledge and contextual information. This process aids in identifying existing knowledge and gaps within the current body of literature.

This project draws upon a diverse array of sources, ranging from online books, scholarly articles, reputable newspapers, esteemed magazines, and authoritative policy papers. The unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent imposition of lockdown measures have compelled individuals to resort to remote and online resources for information retrieval. The closure of libraries has further constrained physical access to these sources, prompting researchers to adapt their methodologies to the virtual realm. Despite these limitations, the utilisation of a wide range of reputable and authoritative sources ensures a comprehensive and robust foundation for the study at hand.

Thus, the methods applied in this research endeavour to explore the intricate interplay between the escalating geopolitical rivalry and its far-reaching ramifications on the local population in the South Asian region, with a particular focus on Balochistan. Specifically, the study explores into the ways in which the geopolitics surrounding megaprojects have exacerbated human rights violations, impeding the locals' rights to conduct business, and leading to the subjugation of other social and economic rights. Moreover, the research extensively investigates the perceptions of the indigenous population of Balochistan towards

the influx of Chinese presence in their regions and the subsequent impact on their demographics and age-old traditions.

3.2 Research Design- The Qualitative Research Method:

Qualitative research is the most practised method in social science disciplines. According to Sarah J. Tracy (2019), “qualitative researchers purposefully examine and make sense of the context and build larger knowledge claims about the bigger picture” (Tracy, 2019). Qualitative research allows the researcher to collect, analyse, and evaluate non-numerical data to form an opinion, concept, or experience on a larger scale. It also helps the researcher gain comprehensive insight into the problem under consideration and generate new opinions and ideas. Qualitative researchers argue that the empirical and theoretical resources needed to understand a specific concept or predict its future path are linked to and contextualised by the social settings in which it is made.

According to Sarah (2019), qualitative methods are essentially an umbrella notion that encompasses group or one-on-one interviews, participatory observation, and textual analysis (Tracy, 2019). Qualitative research as a strategy for understanding how individuals interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attach to their experiences. As a result, this research project is planned to employ qualitative methodologies to understand, analyse, and add a new idea in the field of academia by combining primary and secondary data sources. In-depth communication, such as interviews, can best explain the outcomes and discover the sufferings and human rights violations of those who are at the epicentre of the growing geopolitical competition, committed in the name of security and development. As a result of their stories, scholars could have different ideas about how geopolitical competition poses serious threats to the lives of the public.

Qualitative research methods were chosen for this study because they allow for a comprehensive exploration and analysis of the complex issues surrounding the growing geopolitical rivalry and its impact on the Baloch community. Unlike quantitative methods, which focus on numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative methods such as interviews and content analysis provide in-depth insights and rich data that can capture the experiences, perspectives, and voices of the local population. This approach is well suited for understanding the nuanced dynamics and complexities of the subject matter and can help generate innovative ideas and insights in the field of academia.

3.1.1. Primary Data collection and Sampling:

This study aimed to collect primary data and achieve its objectives through the implementation of interviews in the Balochistan region. The region had garnered significant attention due to China's substantial investment as part of the BRI. The primary geographical area chosen for engaging with respondents was the Mekran Division, encompassing the Gwadar and Kech Districts. The research aimed to understand the social and economic impacts of China's investment in the Mekran region by collecting primary insights and perspectives from individuals directly affected by the investments. This was achieved through conducting interviews in this strategically significant area. The interviews yielded substantial data for analysing the ramifications of China's engagement in the region and offered valuable insights into the perspectives and experiences of the indigenous populace concerning the BRI projects and their effects.

3.1.2. Conducting Interviews:

A research interview is a specific form of conversation that leads to the goal of attaining authentic and raw information for the research (Kvale, 1996). The main goal of the

qualitative interview is to understand the interviewees' first-hand experiences and how they interpret the facts related to the research topic. Moreover, qualitative interviews are a method of gathering data through conversations that allow for the exploration and construction of knowledge (Kvale, 1996). It is a specific form of human interaction with knowledge that evolves through dialogue. Even though the structure of a research interview is like that of an everyday discussion, it is conducted in a professional setting and requires a specific method and technique for asking questions. Michael Q. Patton (2014) describes the main purpose of choosing qualitative interviews as: "The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter the other person's perspective" (Patton, 2014). Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful and knowable and can be made explicit. According to Patton, "We interview to find out what is on someone else's mind and gather their stories" (Patton, 2014).

In the context of this research, qualitative research interviews were employed as a methodological approach to gathering data. These interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, adhering to an interview guide designed to explore specific themes that align with the research objectives. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allows for flexibility and adaptability during the conversation, enabling the researcher to delve deeper into relevant topics and probe for valuable insights. It is conducted in accordance with an interview guide that focuses on specific themes leading to the goals of the research and may include suggested questions for the participants (Kvale, 1996). While the interviews had a predetermined focus, the participants had the freedom to express their thoughts and experiences, contributing to a rich and subtle understanding of the subject matter. The interview questionnaires served as a framework, providing suggested questions that aim to

elicit comprehensive responses and ensure the research goals are met effectively (Kvale, 1996).

Moreover, in this sort of interview, the sequence of the questions is not set, and the researcher can ask alternative questions based on the direction the interview takes. A well-conducted interview may elicit a wealth of information about people's perspectives, attitudes, and the meanings that underlie their lives and behaviour (Kvale, 1996). It is not as easy as it looks because of the constraints and the situation during the interview. It takes days or weeks to contact and get a suitable time and a suitable setting from the potential interviewees. In many cases, the participant agreed to conduct interviews but cancelled them due to sudden and unintended emergencies, which posed delays in conducting interviews.

The study included participants from various backgrounds, including local fishing community, small businessmen, middle-class residents, university students, members of the legislative assembly, specialists, political economists, academic scholars, and tribal notables. The participants were selected based on their direct connection to the projects launched in their areas or their ability in the subject matter. Providing more information about the demographics and backgrounds of the participants will enhance the understanding of the study's findings.

The researcher divided the potential interviewees based on their availability and relevance to the subject under consideration. For this reason, the researcher divided the targeted audience for the interview into two clusters based on their perspectives, i.e., the elitist perspective and the common perspective, which is discussed in the following section. Moreover, for interviewing, "purposeful sampling" is used to divide the clusters. Most qualitative researchers use purposeful sampling to identify and select respondents. The use

of purposeful sampling is not intended to achieve representativeness in statistical terms. Instead, it is employed due to the inherent richness of individual cases in providing pertinent information related to the research question and its associated concepts (Draper & Swift, 2011). Purposive sampling, as its name suggests, involves the deliberate selection of individuals with a specific objective in mind. The primary aim is to address the research goal by targeting individuals who possess a wealth of relevant data (Draper & Swift, 2011).

3.1.2.1. The Common/Public Perceptions:

This study is significant as it aims to investigate the impacts of political and economic factors related to large-scale development projects on the lives of ordinary people in and around the Gwadar and Mekran regions. By conducting interviews with various groups, including local inhabitants, university students, representatives from public sector institutions, and elites, the study provides a comprehensive perspective on the subject matter. The findings of this study can contribute to a better understanding of the local perspective and inform policy decisions regarding these development projects.

In addition to the local population, it was equally significant to include representatives from public sector institutions, particularly universities within Balochistan, to maintain a comprehensive perspective. Many universities have established CPEC Study Centres, organising seminars and conferences to portray a positive image of the CPEC and its potential benefits to the region. Hence, faculties and students from Balochistan's universities were also interviewed to gather insights from academia. In total, at least fifteen (15) participants were interviewed to gain a diverse and comprehensive perspective. Subsequently, their interviews were transcribed and coded to facilitate systematic analysis, which will be elaborated upon in the forthcoming sections.

3.1.2.2. The Elite perception:

Elite perception is another important group in this research. The reason for taking this group is to make a balanced analysis and get an unbiased perception from both sides. Elites are those groups that mostly belong to government agencies, work on behalf of the government, or have their own academic as well as scholarly opinions regarding the issue. According to JS. Malay (2016), the elitist perspective posits that the optimal approach to addressing and comprehending a community's challenges lies in the hands of a select few individuals who possess authority and wield the ability to establish rules (Maloy, 2016).

The researcher endeavoured to establish communication with various stakeholders, including members of the legislative assembly, specialists, political economists, academic scholars, and tribal notables, among others, to gather their perspectives. Specifically, the researcher chose to conduct interviews with assembly members who held positions within the government and cabinet, forming a focused cluster of participants. Nevertheless, due to practical constraints, it was not feasible to interview all parliamentarians holding government positions. Consequently, the researcher made a deliberate decision to interview those legislators who were directly or indirectly associated with the study's subject matter, i.e., the BRI and CPEC. However, despite many attempts and promises they made to give interviews, many members of the legislative bodies chose not to respond to the interviews.

For this cluster, I interviewed fourteen (14) participants. A major portion of the participants were from academia and researchers who had vast knowledge and information related to the subject matter. Their focus was on Balochistan, and the geopolitics involved in the region. These participants were instrumental in providing in-depth insights and perspectives regarding the impact of the BRI and the CPEC projects on the province. Their

wealth of knowledge and expertise enabled the researcher to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the historical and political dynamics of the region and the possible implications of these projects for the local population. The information and insights gained from these participants proved to be critical in shaping the overall findings of the study.

3.1.2.3. Participant Observation:

The researcher aimed to assess and monitor the interviews conducted, considering the specific circumstances in which they were performed. The researchers noted instances where interviewees encountered difficulties in providing comprehensive explanations or elaborations on specific terminology and elements. These challenges arose from a range of factors, including security considerations in the region and the presence of politically and sociologically sensitive problems. Uwe Flick (2014) highlighted that a variety of observation techniques are utilised in qualitative research, with participant observation being the most common approach (Flick, 2014). By employing participant observation, researchers can gain valuable insights into the definitions of terms used by participants during interviews. Furthermore, it allows for the observation of events or situations that informants may be hesitant or unwilling to share openly during interviews due to politeness or sensitivity. This approach also enables researchers to observe situations that informants have previously described in interviews, providing an opportunity to identify any distortions or inaccuracies in their accounts (Flick, 2014). For researchers conducting qualitative research, participant observation proves particularly beneficial as it enhances their understanding and observation skills, which, in turn, contribute to conducting more insightful and effective interviews. As David E. Grey puts it.

“Careful observation helps to detect information on how the interview is progressing. Observation of the respondent’s body language, for example, is important to detect important clues on the respondent’s concentration level, motivation to continue with the interview, and whether she or he is at ease. If negative signs are detected, it may mean changing the sequencing of questions, bringing easier or less controversial ones up the order” (Gray, 2021).

For a variety of reasons, participant observation is critical in the current investigation. For the past two decades, Balochistan has been undergoing an insurgency. The military has used force and operations against nationalists and separatists to maintain peace and order in numerous places. However, the situation in many localities, notably the Mekran region, has yet to be fully resolved. The researcher travelled to the Gwadar region, which is only 169 kilometres from my birthplace, District Kech, and is one of the locations where law and order are a problem. The researcher also tries to evaluate and observe the interviews based on the circumstances in which they are conducted. A significant limitation associated with the interviewing process pertains to the existence of a trust deficit between the interviewee and the interviewer. The phenomenon of interviewees experiencing a sense of insecurity when responding to questions has been noted in regions characterised by security concerns and ongoing insurgencies between two factions. Given the prevailing circumstances and the contextual backdrop of security concerns within the region, a considerable proportion of the participants held the belief that the interviewer's affiliations were aligned with a particular party, thereby potentially jeopardising their own well-being by displaying bias towards any one faction. In interviews such as CPEC and Chinese roles, the respondents were sceptical about the interviewee and may feel uncomfortable or think otherwise.

3.1.3. Linguistic Approach:

The linguistic approach in this thesis is fundamentally shaped by the rich cultural and linguistic diversity of the Balochistan region. Recognizing the importance of effective communication in qualitative research, especially with local communities, a deliberate choice was made to prioritize linguistic sensitivity. Interviews with the common masses were primarily conducted in Balochi, their native language. This decision arose from the understanding that many lacked fluencies in Urdu or English, or struggled with the nuances of questions posed in those languages.

The researcher's trilingual proficiency in Balochi, Urdu, and English proved invaluable. This allowed smooth communication with interviewees, fostering trust and encouraging open dialogue. Participants felt comfortable expressing themselves, leading to more comprehensive data. Conducting interviews in Balochi also captured cultural intricacies and nuances that could have been lost in translation, providing a more authentic representation of their perspectives. This linguistic advantage extended beyond mere verbal exchange; it fostered cultural resonance and trust, enabling candid conversations and a nuanced appreciation of the cultural contexts shaping participants' perspectives.

The multi-lingual proficiency went beyond the interview stage. The researcher transcribed the recorded conversations from Balochi to English, making the data accessible for broader analysis. This further enriched the research by preserving intricate details and cultural references that might have been lost in translation, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the data and a richer representation of Balochi culture for a wider audience.

Thus, the researcher's trilingual proficiency significantly enhanced the quality and validity of the research findings. It underscored the adaptability necessary in qualitative research,

highlighting the researcher's attunement to the linguistic diversity of the study population and its profound impact on the research process and interpretative outcomes. This linguistically sensitive approach not only ensured effective communication but also paved the way for a seamless transition of rich, culturally embedded narratives into a broader academic discourse.

3.3 Data Analysis: Transcribing and coding using Thematic Analysis:

Transcribing the interviews from the audio or video materials into texts for the purpose of investigation is called "transcription for a closer analysis" (Kvale, 1996). The data used in the interviews includes visual data such as audio and interview recordings using digital and online sources. Transcribing the data involves sheer or close observation of the data through repeated, careful listening or watching. Close observation is one of the most important aspects of data analysis. Transcribing is an arduous process that usually takes hours or days when the recordings are lengthy. It usually takes at least 3 hours per hour of talk in an interview and up to ten hours per hour with a satisfactory level of detail, including visual detail (Bailey, 2008).

After the process of transcription, the focus then goes to the coding and thematising of the data. For transcribing, coding and generating themes, different approaches are used. According to Saldana (2011), "coding is just one way of analysing qualitative data and it is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute to a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldana, 2021). The coding can be applied to a wide range of literature and field work, such as interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, notebooks, papers, open-ended survey

responses, drawings, artefacts, pictures, video, Internet sites, e-mail contact, academic and fictional literature, and so on (Saldana, 2021).

The primary data collected through interviews, surveys and government documents was analysed using thematic analysis. This approach involves identifying patterns, themes, and categories within the data to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of CPEC on the Baloch community. The secondary data, including research articles, books, and policy papers, were analysed through content analysis to extract relevant information and insights related to the research topic. This method is used to identify, analyse, organise, describe, and report the themes found within a data set. According to Lorelle et al. (2017), “thematic analysis provides a very flexible technique that can be changed to match the objectives of numerous investigations, offering a rich and thorough description of data due to its theoretical flexibility” (Nowell, et.al., 2017). It is also a helpful method for analysing the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences. It is also a helpful method for analysing the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences.

Furthermore, the thematic analysis also allows for a comprehensive exploration of the experiences and perspectives of the Baloch community in relation to the CPEC. By identifying patterns and themes within the primary data, this research aims to shed light on the social, economic, and cultural implications of CPEC for the Baloch people. Additionally, the content analysis of secondary data provided a broader context and theoretical framework to support the findings derived from the primary data analysis. Together, these methods contributed to a comprehensive and delicate understanding of the impact of CPEC on the Baloch community.

The process of transcribing is a difficult and time-consuming task. The interviews for this study were conducted in a variety of languages, including English, Balochi, and Urdu. Converting spoken and native languages into written languages follows a set of established procedures. Because the participants came from a variety of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, the researcher devised a variety of interview language possibilities.

3.3.1 Application of Thematic Analysis in the Study:

Thematic analysis is employed in this study as a means of organising and interpreting the interview data. It goes beyond simple sorting and labelling techniques by identifying and exploring the underlying themes that emerge from the data. Thematic analysis is a helpful analytic method for qualitative researchers to learn because its analytical procedures have been clearly outlined (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012, and 2021) suggest that the decision to employ thematic analysis, like any other research or analytical approach, should be founded on the research's aims rather than a desire to adopt a simple method of analysis. When seeking to analyse a chain of events, ideas, or attitudes across a data set, thematic analysis is a relevant and strong tool to use (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Finally, the steps of thematic analysis are comparable to those of grounded theory, ethnography, and other qualitative approaches that involve coding and exploring data sets for themes (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003).

Based on the researchers' personal judgement and expertise, the original coding structure and themes are produced in accordance with each study's theoretical and conceptual frameworks. As a result, validating themes is crucial for reducing bias and producing more robust work. Respondent validation and researcher validation are the two

ways of determining validity in thematic analysis. To obtain satisfactory results, the analysis should contain the following key options:

- (a) adhere to established methodological criteria,
- (b) include all statistics and data, and
- (c) be thorough and meticulous.

As a researcher, it was my responsibility to look for evidence that contradicts or differs from the major conclusions, since this information could help improve the overall results of the investigation. Finally, to assist readers in making critical judgments about the study, I have chosen to provide a detailed account of how the data were gathered and evaluated in the thesis.

Following the semi-structured interviews, the researcher continues to examine the data by categorising it into distinct themes. These themes are identified based on recurring patterns, topics, and concepts that emerge from the interviews. The researcher carefully reviews the audio recordings, word files, and other forms of data to identify relevant excerpts that pertain to each theme. This process involves transcribing the interviews, reading and re-reading the transcripts, and coding the data according to the predetermined categories. By organising the data into themes, the researcher gains a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences. To avoid any misleading or incorrectness within the transcript, the following important points are adopted carefully:

- a. To make sure the transcripts of the interviews are valid and reliable. Before going on to the next step of the research, all transcripts were double-checked for correctness.
- b. To make sure that any comments and information which are taking during the first and the second readings of the transcripts were carefully incorporated into codes.
- c. And finally completing all the transcription with the help of the codebooks already generated during the reading process.

The process of transcribing interviews is a crucial step in ensuring the accuracy and credibility of the research findings. Each point made by the interviewees are adopted carefully, without any misinterpretation or distortion. This meticulous approach is necessary to maintain the validity and reliability of the transcripts. Before proceeding to the next phase of the research, I double-checked all the transcripts for correctness and coherence. Any comments or additional information obtained during the initial and subsequent readings of the transcripts were methodically incorporated into the coding process. This ensures that no valuable insights or data are overlooked. Finally, the transcription process plays a crucial role in ensuring the accuracy of the findings and conclusions drawn from the research. It serves as a foundation for analysis and interpretation, allowing researchers to delve deeper into the data and extract meaningful insights.

As part of the study design, all interview records and materials were translated from languages such as Urdu and Balochi to English. This step ensures that the findings are accessible to a wider audience and allows for consistent analysis across different languages. By translating the data, the researcher eliminates any potential language barriers and ensures that the nuances and meanings of the original responses are accurately captured. This

enhances the validity and reliability of the findings and enables a comprehensive analysis of the data.

3.3.2 Validity and Reliability of the data:

Validity and reliability are concepts that are used to evaluate the quality of research and indicate how well a method, technique, or result are formulated. It is vital in any research to verify the results and answers to the questions as valid, acceptable, and reliable. Verification of knowledge is commonly discussed in social science in relation to the concepts of validity, reliability, and generalizability (Kvale, 1996). Validity is about accuracy and refers to the truthfulness and correctness of a statement, whereas reliability is about the consistency of the research (Kvale, 1996). Careful data generation and moving back and forth between data sets during the investigation are important for ensuring that the data is true. Using creative synthesis to check for meaning, accuracy, and validity in portraying the essence of the phenomenon under investigation. Moreover, the process of validation requires more engagement by moving outward with the experiences of others who have shared their experiences of the phenomenon under inquiry and can provide additional feedback and understanding. According to Patton, validity and reliability are two factors that any qualitative research should consider when designing, analysing the results, and evaluating the study's quality (Patton, 2014). Validity and reliability can be evaluated by a careful examination of the trustworthiness of the data. Validity and trustworthiness can lead to more credible and defensible results. Reliability is measured by observing the consistency with which the same method of data collection produces the results (Mason, 2017).

It is important to note that validity refers to the extent to which visual observations accurately record the behaviour of the participants. To strengthen the validity of a study, the

researcher has used participant observation. Participant observation enabled me to make sure that what the participants are saying is accurate based on what the situation was showing during the visual observation. This helped me gain a better understanding of the context and phenomenon under investigation. As a researcher, I observed several people during the interviews to ensure that the situation matched the views of the participants. Participants were observed in the interviews in the region of Gwadar and other areas of Balochistan, for instance. As a researcher, I noticed that, aside from the port areas of Gwadar, the entire city was exhibiting signs of underdevelopment and destruction. As a result, the locals frequently demonstrated against the authorities over issues such as a lack of access to clean drinking water, the provision of electricity and gas, and the destruction of the city's roads and sewerage system (Baloch, 2021). In addition to observation, other methods like interviewing and document analysis are used to make the results more reliable. Subsequently, generalisation is also one of the most important criteria after validation and reliability of the data. As Mason (2002) argued, "it is important to think very carefully, critically, and sensitively about how to generalise and about the wider resonance of your research." (Mason, 2017). There are two basic types of generalization: theoretical and empirical (Mason, 2017). In my case, I have gone with empirical generalization. This type of generalisation enabled me to make generalisations from an analysis of one empirical population, i.e., the experiments of the Baloch community in Pakistan regarding megaprojects and geopolitics. Therefore, a more genuine, reliable, and diverse construction of reality resulted from the use of a variety of methodologies, such as interviews with participants and participant observation, as well as recordings to demonstrate the empirical generalization. Recordings and interviews with people who took part in the study, as well as participant observation, helped me build a more accurate and reliable picture of reality (Patton, 2014).

Validity, reliability, and generalisation focus on the consistency, trustworthiness, and verification of empirically driven results from the qualitative data, i.e., the primary and secondary data. The results that have been interpreted from the data, provides the reader with information about real-world experiences and allow for a detailed discussion of the shared experiences. For example, information about BRI, CPEC, and its geopolitics is given in the literature review chapter, served as a background knowledge for the reader. This information provided a comprehensive background on how the BRI and CPEC projects are being implemented, considering the geopolitical aspects of the region.

3.3.3 Ethical Issues and their solution during the Primary data collection:

There are several ethical concerns that must be addressed, particularly in relation to the researcher's chosen research approach. Research ethics is concerned with the propriety of a researcher's conduct in relation to their subject matter and the others impacted by it. Ethical difficulties can develop during the design, implementation, and reporting stages of research when it involves human engagement and the things that affect them (Kvale, 1996). Ethical challenges emerge even during the earliest step of gaining access, when a determined researcher may unintentionally or intentionally put influence on others to participate. The primary ethical concern emerges when research incorporates individuals in the role of subjects. The participants, in their capacity as subjects, fall within the purview of the researcher, who regards safeguarding their privacy, secrecy, and anonymity as crucial obligations.

The key to ethical involvement is acquiring informed consent, not merely consent. All the participants in the research are informed in a clearly written form that demonstrates the aim and objective of the research, why the question is being asked, for what purpose, etc.

Informed consent entails informing the research subject about the overall purpose of the investigation and the key features of the design, as well as any possible risks and benefits from participation in the research projects (Kvale, 1996). It also entails getting the subject's voluntary involvement, as well as his or her right to withdraw from the study at any moment, to avoid undue influence and coercion. The informed consent form should also inform the participant about the time the interview takes and their right to respond to or withdraw from the interview, etc., at any time during or after the research.

David Gray listed several ethical issues before conducting the research or planning the fieldwork (Gray, 2021). According to him, the privacy of the participant, whether he wants to participate or not, should be of the utmost concern to the researcher. Secondly, there should be a risk assessment before conducting the fieldwork. Thirdly, the confidentiality of the participants should be respected in practice. The participant should have faith in the words of the researcher about his anonymity and confidentiality. Fourth, the participant should be informed through a consent form that presents a clear picture of the aims and objectives of the research. Fifth, who will have access to the data and who owns it should also be clearly mentioned. And finally, how the researcher will be affected by the research and how to cope with that are among the ethical issues that need deliberate discussion.

Throughout the research process, utmost care has been taken to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants involved in this research. The ethical considerations of copyright, confidentiality, and anonymity have been given high importance, and to further safeguard the data and information, the research has obtained the approval of the ethics committee at the University of Hull. In addition, prior to undertaking any fieldwork, the researcher completed the necessary online health and safety training to ensure

compliance with all applicable laws and regulations. A Self-Assessment Report (SAR) was also completed to conduct a thorough risk assessment and identify any potential hazards that could arise during the research process. All potential hazards were listed, and mitigation strategies were put in place to ensure the safety of all involved parties. This approach to ethics and safety reflects the researcher's commitment to conducting thorough and ethical research while ensuring the protection and confidentiality of all participants and data.

The undertaking of this research required the careful consideration of numerous ethical issues. In addition to this, complex issues surrounding knowledge generation, ownership, and exploitation also had to be considered. As a researcher, I recognised the responsibility to secure the permission and interests of all those involved in the study. It was essential that I did not misuse any of the information obtained, and I maintained a moral obligation to the participants. It was my duty to safeguard the rights, privacy, and sensitivities of the individuals involved in the study. To ensure that the confidentiality of those who could be at risk was preserved, I obtained permission from all stakeholders. This correspondence elucidated the methodology and rationale behind my research, as well as the precautionary measures implemented to safeguard the privacy and well-being of the participants. Through careful consideration and examination of ethical concerns, I was able to undertake a research project that adhered to the principles of responsibility and respect.

The invasion of privacy of potential respondents can be regarded as a dual concern, encompassing both moral wrongdoing and the exposure of individuals to potential impact due to the deprivation of privacy's protective benefits. Individuals provide information with the understanding that it could be used for the specified objectives of a research endeavour. Researchers bear the responsibility of safeguarding the information in a confidential and

anonymous manner unless an explicit agreement to the contrary has been reached. The provision of confidential information to a researcher is a possibility. Consequently, the field notes, phone recordings, and questionnaires were diligently stored in a secure location. Furthermore, the data used in this study was limited to the objectives for which the participants had provided their consent. Except for the supervisors, the data or information was not accessible to any other individuals.

3.4 Conclusion:

Research methodology is a crucial component of academic investigation, as it involves the selection and application of appropriate and trustworthy techniques for conducting research. These techniques can be used for analysing secondary data or for tasks such as transcribing, coding, and generalising primary data. Adherence to a methodological approach is of utmost importance in the development of dissertations and theses, as it establishes the necessary framework for conducting thorough and systematic investigation.

The present study employs a qualitative research approach, incorporating the use of primary and secondary sources of data. Qualitative research methods are extensively employed in the fields of social sciences and humanities, facilitating the understanding of dynamic social transformations from novel viewpoints. The use of this methodology facilitates the exploration of both inductive and deductive approaches. This includes the formulation of research inquiries and hypotheses that are grounded in theoretical frameworks, subsequently subjecting them to empirical scrutiny through interviews and fieldwork.

The main objective of this research, as a social science researcher, is to investigate the inquiries presented in the thesis. This is accomplished by using raw data obtained from

multiple stakeholders and individual perspectives. The data is obtained through conducting interviews and subsequent analysis using qualitative content analysis of secondary sources. Thematic analysis is used as a method to transcribe and code the collected data, facilitating a careful and thorough examination to ensure validation.

To achieve these objectives, a combination of primary and secondary data sources is employed. Qualitative content analysis is systematically employed to assess the instances in literature, including books, research articles, journals, and other pertinent sources, as a means of analysing secondary data. The primary method employed for data collection in this study is fieldwork, which has been conducted in various regions of Balochistan. The study involves conducting interviews with two distinct groups of participants: local inhabitants who represent the general population and individuals who hold an elitist perspective. Semi-structured interviews are generally preferred due to their capacity to promote candid and comprehensive responses, thereby cultivating an amicable and reliable atmosphere.

Participants are informed about the objectives of the interviews and their consents are taken beforehand. The ethical considerations are rigorously followed, thereby guaranteeing the preservation of confidentiality and anonymity for both the interviewees and the data, in accordance with the guidelines set forth by the University of Hull. In a region characterised by a protracted insurgency, significant measures are implemented to ensure the safety and protection of both the researcher and the participants involved in the study.

In conclusion, this academic inquiry has employed a rigorous research methodology that has encompassed critical reflection at every stage of the research process. The selection of the topic and the design of the research were conducted with careful consideration, ensuring that they were aligned with the research objectives. Furthermore, appropriate

techniques and strategies were chosen for data collection and analysis, further enhancing the alignment with the research objectives. The utilisation of the selected qualitative methodology was found to be essential in the examination and verification of the data gathered throughout multiple phases, thereby guaranteeing the generation of research of superior quality.

Chapter 4 The Historical and Geopolitical Background of Balochistan

“A glance at the map, quickly explains why strategically located Balochistan and the five million Baloch tribesmen who live there could easily become the focal point of superpower conflict” (Harrison, 1980).

4.1 Introduction:

This chapter aims to comprehensively examine the intricate political, economic, and geographical history of Balochistan. The study endeavours to provide a profound understanding of the challenges faced by the Baloch people, encompassing violations of their fundamental human rights, deprivation, and ongoing marginalization. The indigenous population of Balochistan has endured relentless human rights violations, security measures, forced displacement, and persistent marginalization, forming a backdrop against which the geopolitical power dynamics in the region have played a pivotal role.

Balochistan, Pakistan's least populous province, has been embroiled in a prolonged insurgency since its integration in 1948. Since then, Balochistan has grappled with an insurgency fuelled by frustration and a yearning for self-determination. Human rights violations, securitization measures, and forced displacement have become grim realities for the Baloch people, casting a long shadow over their lives. Despite this, the province remains a land of immense potential, its strategic location at the crossroads of Asia attracting the attention of regional and international powers. Trade routes, energy resources, and the dream of a deep-sea port have drawn superpowers like the United States, Russia, and China, and also the regional players like India, Iran and Saudi Arabia, into a geopolitical rivalry. This

constant battle for influence, however, has often come at the expense of the Baloch people, their land becoming a pawn in a high-stakes game.

Balochistan's strategic location has attracted the attention of regional and international powers, including Iran, Saudi Arabia, the USA, and China, all seeking to secure their political and economic interests. The region's vast natural resources, including oil, gas, and minerals, have further intensified the geopolitical competition, contributing to instability and conflict. Despite its strategic importance, the indigenous population of Balochistan has been consistently overlooked as the principal stakeholders in their own territory.

Understanding Balochistan requires a journey through time, a meticulous examination of its history that stretches from pre-colonial origins to the complexities of the present. Examining the British era and the fraught legacy of integration into Pakistan is crucial, as is shedding light on the intricate relationship between the federal government and the province. The chapter examines the integration of Balochistan into Pakistan, elucidates the complex relationship between the federal government and the province, and explores the historical context of human rights abuses. The geopolitical and strategic importance of Balochistan is underscored, emphasizing its pivotal role in the escalating geopolitical competition.

4.2 The Geography of Balochistan: A brief overview:

Balochistan, the largest of the four provinces of Pakistan, spreads over an area of 347,190 sq. km, forming 43.6 percent of the total area of Pakistan (Government of Balochistan, 2023). However, it is the smallest province in Pakistan in terms of population. According to the census of 2023, the population of Balochistan was 14.89 million, which constitutes approximately 6 percent of the total population of Pakistan (Islamabad Post, 2023).

Geographically, Balochistan is an extensive plateau of rough terrain divided into basins by ranges of high mountains and ruggedness. It has massive amounts of natural resources and minerals. Broadly, the area of Balochistan can be divided into four distinct zones: upper highlands, lower highlands, plains, and deserts. Balochistan is bordered by the Indian Ocean in the south, Iran in the west, Afghanistan in the north, and, in the east, other provinces of Pakistan, i.e., Sindh, Punjab, and KPK.

Balochistan was incorporated into the federation of Pakistan in March 1948 following a controversial agreement between the Khan of Kalat and the governor general of Pakistan (Dashti, 2012). However, it did not acquire official status until 1955, when it became a participant in the One Unit Scheme (Breseeg, 2001). The 'One Unit Scheme'¹ was implemented in 1955, resulting in the consolidation of the western region of Pakistan, comprising Punjab, Sindh, NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), and Balochistan, into a single administrative entity known as the west province. Simultaneously, the eastern region, which is presently recognised as Bangladesh, became the east province of Pakistan. Following the abolition of One Unit in 1969, the province of Balochistan was officially recognised in 1970 (Breseeg, 2001).

Balochistan's contemporary landscape can be split into three parts: eastern Balochistan, western Balochistan, and southern Balochistan (Javaid & Jahangir, 2015). With a vast coastline of 750 kilometres and the strategically significant Gwadar Port linking

¹ The One Unit Scheme in Pakistan was imposed to unite all the four provinces of west Pakistan (modern-day Pakistan) into one provincial status to counterbalance the Bengali majority population of east Pakistan (modern-day Bangladesh). Mohammed Ali Bogra, then Prime Minister of Pakistan, on 22nd of November 1954, launched the plan, which was imposed in 1955.

Balochistan to the province of Sindh, Western Balochistan connects Pakistan with Iran via the Goldsmith Line, Eastern Balochistan with Afghanistan via the Durand Line, and Southern Balochistan with the Indian Ocean (Javaid & Jahangir, 2015). It borders Afghanistan by 1,000 kilometres and Iran by 900 kilometres (Javaid & Jahangir, 2015).

The region is primarily characterised by mountains, deserts, and experiences extreme weather conditions. In the western and southern areas, such as Mekran, Naseer Abad, and Dera Murad Jamali, temperatures can soar as high as 100–130°F or 48–53°C, while in the northern and interior highlands, including Quetta, Kalat, Mastung Surab, Ziarat, Kila Saifullah, Chaman, and others, temperatures often drop to 40–10°F or -10 to -15°C (Breseeg, 2001). Balochistan's arid climate and limited rainfall make its land unsuitable for agriculture. Nevertheless, the barren region of Balochistan is abundant in valuable natural resources, such as coal, natural gas, copper, gold, and various minerals. These resources have been a major source of revenue for Pakistan, as they are extensively mined and exported. Additionally, the discovery of oil reserves in Balochistan has further boosted its economic potential. Despite its challenges in agriculture, the region's rich natural resources have played a crucial role in its development and economic growth.

Balochistan has a vast coastline around the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. The coastline starts nearly four hundred kilometres from the Strait of Hormuz, encompassing Jiwani, Gwadar, Pasni, Ormara, Gaddani, Hub, and Karachi city. Balochistan's coastline is composed of approximately 750 kilometres of beautiful sandy beaches, rocky cliffs, and mangrove forests (Jalil, Khan, & Mansoor, 2022). The ecosystem of the sea is very suitable for marine life, with numerous species of fish, dolphins, and turtles thriving in its waters. The coastline also serves as a major trade route, with Gwadar Port being a key hub for

international shipping and trade. Additionally, the coastal region offers breath-taking sunsets and opportunities for water sports, making it a popular tourist destination. The coastal region of Balochistan is not only geographically significant but also holds immense economic potential. The strategic location of these coastal areas has attracted international attention, leading to significant investments in port infrastructure and development projects. Gwadar has emerged as a major deep-sea port, connecting Balochistan to global trade routes and offering immense opportunities for trade and commerce.

While Balochistan is the richest province in Pakistan in terms of natural resources and a strategically significant, vast coastline, it unfortunately has the highest poverty rate and is below the poverty line (Wolf, 2019). The sparse population of the area makes it challenging to connect the villages and small towns to urban centres. This lack of infrastructure and connectivity has hindered the region's ability to fully use and benefit from its natural resources. Additionally, the ongoing insurgency has created an atmosphere of instability, discouraging investment and economic growth. These factors combined have resulted in a vicious cycle of poverty and underdevelopment, preventing Balochistan from fully capitalising on its abundant natural resources and improving the lives of its residents. The following sections will explain why Balochistan, a region with abundant natural resources, has not developed and is impoverished.

4.3 Historical Background of Balochistan During and after the British Colonial Rule:

The term "Balochistan" has its origins in the ethnic group called the Baloch, who have inhabited the border regions of the Indian subcontinent, Iran, Afghanistan, and the coastal areas of the Indian Ocean for an extensive period (Bakht, 2008). The nomenclature of Balochistan has been a topic of varying interpretations among different authors. According to

St. John, the designation "Balochistan" was bestowed by Nadir Shah, the Persian emperor, subsequent to his triumph over Afghan invaders, wherein he declared himself the ruler of the area and denoted it as Balochistan, symbolising the territory inhabited by the Baloch community (Bakht, 2008). Nevertheless, there are writers who express scepticism regarding this narrative, as they highlight that Balochistan had already been referenced by previous emperors, such as Zaheer Uddin Baber, before the invasion by Nadir Shah (Bakht, 2008). According to Bakht (2008), there are assertions made by Gul Khan Naseer and other Baloch writers that suggest the existence of the name predating Nadir Shah's reign in Iran (Bakht, 2008).

Currently, the Baloch people are dispersed across various regions and lack their own autonomous nation-state. Instead, they reside within the territorial confines of three distinct sovereign states, namely Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. Historically, Balochistan emerged as an autonomous entity after the waning influence of two dominant empires, specifically the Persian Safavids of Iran and the Moghul Empire based in Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent, during the 18th century (Dashti, 2012). The decline of these two empires facilitated European powers' access to the Iranian plateau and the Indian subcontinent (Dashti, 2012). Consequently, this development further bolstered the rationale for various dispersed tribes in the region to unite. During this period, the Merwadi tribe assumed the role of the inaugural monarchy in the Baloch nation-state, encompassing the adjacent territories of Kharan, Mekran, and Lasbela, with its capital situated in the Kalat region (Dashti, 2012).

Balochistan, characterized by tribal rule and norms, has consistently been influenced by tribal rivalries and conflicts. The modern phase of Baloch history witnessed ongoing civil wars among different clans and tribes after the consolidation and expansion of the Khanate

of Kalat² into various Baloch-dominated areas. Prominent among the warring tribes were the Khan of Kalat, Mir Mehmud Khan, and his successor, Mir Mehrab Khan II³, along with other Baloch tribes of Sarawan and Jhalawan. These conflicts provided an opportunity for British imperialists in the subcontinent to intervene in the affairs of Balochistan (Dashti, 2012).

The history of modern Balochistan can be divided into two phases: the period of British colonial rule and the era following its merger with Pakistan. The modern history of Balochistan begins with the partial occupation of the Kalat state by British forces and the killing of its ruler, Mir Mehrab Khan II, in 1839 ((Dashti, 2012; Breseeg, 2001). This event marked a direct attack on the Kalat state, with its capital under siege. From this point onward, the internal and external affairs of Balochistan came under the control of foreign powers in the Indian subcontinent.

The apprehension regarding the expansionist ambitions of the Tsarist Empire in the Central Asian and Afghan regions, driven by the objective of gaining control over the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, gave rise to a significant power struggle known as the "New Great Game"⁴ (Dashti, 2012). This geopolitical contest had far-reaching consequences for the

² The Khanate of Kalat, encompassing present-day Pakistani Balochistan and parts of Iranian Balochistan, was governed by a Khan who enjoyed independent rule. The Khanate consisted of four principalities: Kalat, Kharan, Las Bela, and Mekran. However, in 1839, the British colonizers occupied the region, marking the end of the Kalat state's full independence, which it has not regained since that time.

³ Mir Mehrab Khan II succeeded Mir Mehmood Khan as the ruler of the Baloch State. Following Mir Mehrab Khan's death, the state was engulfed in a severe civil war. The most formidable rebel faction opposing Mir Mehrab Khan was the Ahmedzai tribe, led by Mir Ahmed Yar and Mir Mehtab Ahmedzia. Further details can be found in Naseer Dashti's book "Baloch and Balochistan: A Historical Account from the Beginning to the Fall of the Baloch State," specifically on pages 199-203.

⁴ The name "Great Game" was coined to describe the competition that developed between Britain and Russia as their areas of influence in Mughal India, Turkestan, and Persia (Iran) drew them closer together in South-Central Asia. The Great Game between England and Russia started in 1830 and lasted until the end of the nineteenth century. The Russian advances in Central Asia alarmed the British. To safeguard all access to British India from a Russian invasion, England used Afghanistan as a buffer state. For more see; Cynthia Smith, "The Great Game and Afghanistan", *Library of Congress*,

already vulnerable Baloch state, which was internally ravaged by various challenges, such as internal tribal wars within the Khanate and the opposition from other tribal chiefs in recognizing the Khanate. As the British expansion progressed towards the north-western region of India, Balochistan emerged as a strategically significant location for the British military. Concurrently, Russian officials started showing a keen interest in Balochistan during the 1830s due to Russia's growing influence in Central Asia. Consequently, the British authorities made considerable efforts in Balochistan to ensure unfettered travel between Afghanistan and Iran. Given that Iran could be approached by the British from the side of the Persian Gulf, it held crucial importance for both the British's global naval strategy and their strategic control over Balochistan's territory.

The primary objective of the British Raj was to exert control over all strategic positions in the region, including Balochistan, to sustain its power. The prevalence of intra-tribal conflicts in Balochistan facilitated the British governance without significant resistance. The strategic significance of Balochistan and Sindh, combined with the advancing Russian influence in Afghanistan, further reinforced the British imperative to occupy Balochistan (Dashti, 2012). The British colonial rulers sought a secure and suitable seaport and a convenient land route to facilitate their control over India and Afghanistan. To fulfil this requirement, they entered into an agreement with the Khan of Kalat for the utilization of Jiwani port, which was formally signed in March 1839 (Dashti, 2012). The treaty stipulated the provision of secure coordination and the use of Jiwani port by the British. In return, the

URL: <https://www.loc.gov/ghe/cascade/index.html?appid=a0930b1f4e424987ba68c28880f088ea> (accessed date: 03-03-2022).

British government pledged to safeguard the sovereignty of the Khan of Kalat and assist him in consolidating his rule in the region. However, this agreement of 1839, concluded between the Khan and the representative of the British viceroy, lapsed following the demise of Mir Mehrab Khan (Dashti, 2012; Breseeg, 2001).

Furthermore, certain Baloch chieftains expressed discontentment with the accord, leading to an insurrection by a faction of the tribe. Intermittent uprisings against British dominion in Balochistan had been observed since the region fell under British governance. However, the tribal structure of the area rendered these rebellions largely futile. The Baloch insurgents engaged in a fierce struggle to invalidate the accord by launching assaults on the British military during their return from Afghanistan. The assault launched against the British forces within the Baloch regions has effectively rendered the treaty of 1839 void (Dashti, 2012; Breseeg, 2001). Mir Mehrab Khan II, the son of the former Khan, was held responsible by the British Raj for the attack and, as a result, the Kalat state was besieged.

The protracted struggle for dominance over the capital city of Kalat persisted for several days, Killing the Khan and ultimately culminating in the Khan's downfall and the subsequent establishment of British hegemony over the Kalat state. Notwithstanding the British government's efforts, it proved to be incapable of expanding its authority over other self-governing entities in Kalat, such as Kharan and Mekran. In the aftermath of Mir Mehrab Khan II demise, the British authorities appointed Mir Shahnawaz Khan to the position of regent, with the explicit objective of strengthening their grip on Balochistan (Breseeg, 2001; Dashti, 2012). In the aftermath, a coalition of Baloch tribal leaders, spearheaded by Mir Naseer Khan II, the progeny of the deceased Khan, coalesced their military might and

launched a campaign against the British administration with the aim of avenging the death of Mir Mehrab Khan II (Sayeed, 1980; Dashti, 2012).

In the beginning, Mir Naseer Khan undertook strategic manoeuvres and effectively secured the independence of Kalat from the British dominion, thereby preserving its sovereignty over the Kalat state (Dashti, 2012). Mir Shahnawaz Khan fled to the neighbouring country of Afghanistan. Moreover, the newly appointed Khan of Kalat, Mir Naseer Khan, harboured aspirations of liberating additional territories from the British control. However, the overwhelming advantage of the British in armaments and munitions, coupled with the participation of some tribal chieftains from neighbouring territories, resulted in the Khan's inability to advance, ultimately leading to his ousting by the British on the 3rd of November, 1840 (Breseeg, 2001; Dashti, 2012). Upon assessment by British authorities, it was determined that Mir Naseer Khan II was preparing to make another attempt at seizing control of the Khanate. Consequently, the pursuit of a political resolution was undertaken. Colonel Stacy, the British political agent of Kalat, entered a treaty of coexistence with Mir Naseer Khan (Dashti, 2012). The agreement facilitated the ascent of Mir Naseer Khan II to the esteemed position of the Khan of Kalat; however, it also necessitated the Khan's recognition of the pre-eminence of British governance within the area.

In this chronological period, the remaining principalities of Balochistan, namely Kharan, Las Bela, and Mekran, were governed autonomously by Baloch tribes. After the initial establishment of British dominion, the British government entered a renewed treaty in 1876 with the Khan of Kalat, Mir Khudadad Khan, thereby consolidating their hold over the region. This agreement facilitated the inclusion of the remaining four princely states of Balochistan into the British suzerainty which were ruled by the later indirectly (Aslam & Kazmi, 2015;

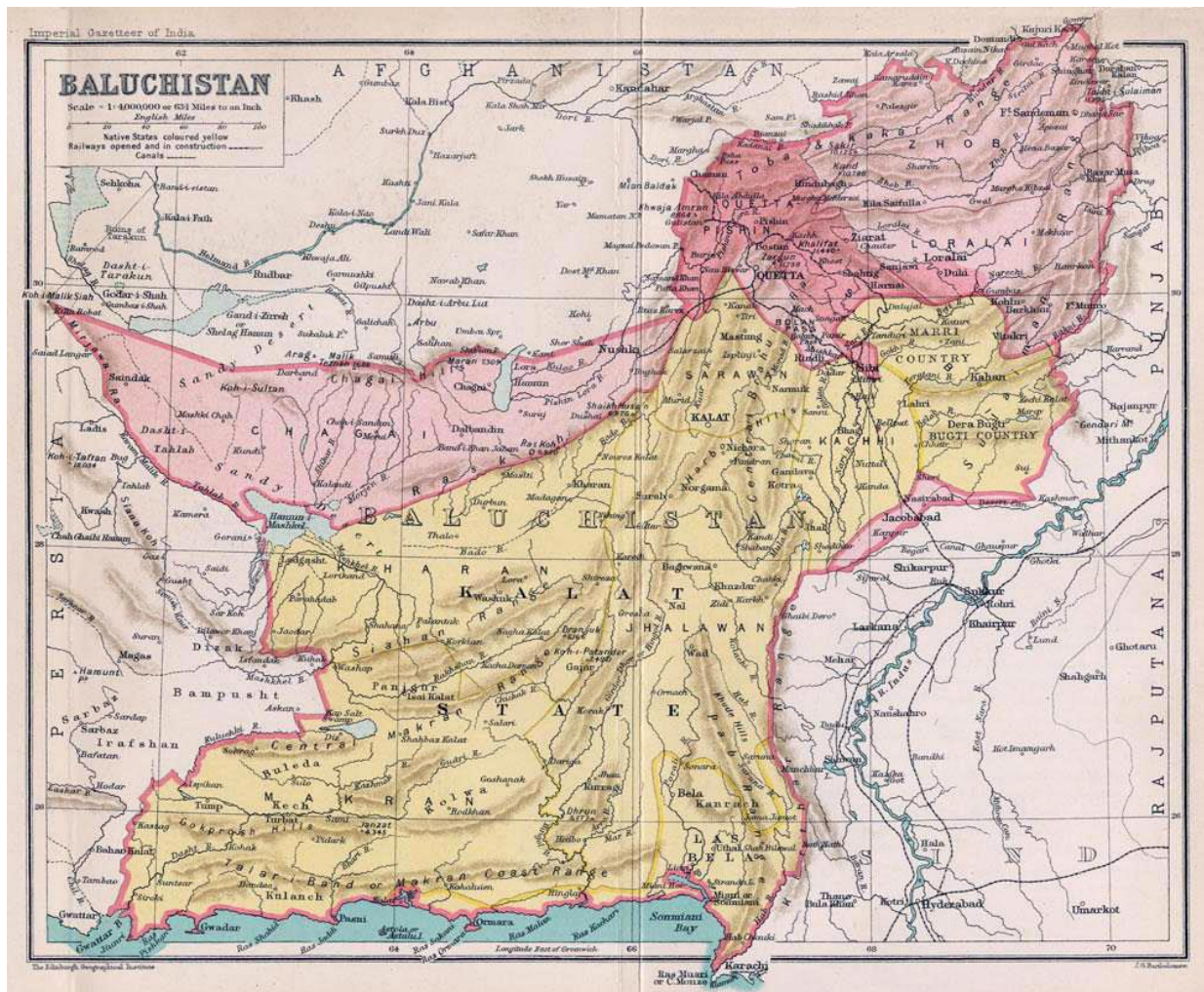
Sayeed, 1980; Dashti, 2012). During this time, the region encompassing Quetta, presently the provincial capital of Balochistan, along with adjacent areas of Afghanistan, were entirely governed by the British Empire, and were commonly referred to as British Balochistan. The region of British Balochistan was primarily characterised by a populace predominantly comprised of Pashtun or Pukhtoon ethnicities. The Kalat state was subject to the influence of the British in matters pertaining to policy making and foreign affairs. However, this intervention was not direct in nature, as it was executed through the agreement of 1876 ((Dashti, 2012; Dashti J., 2020).

In this period, the British government designated Sir Robert Sandeman⁵ as the Agent of the Governor General (AGG) of the Indian Subcontinent. He altered the 1876 agreement with his direct engagement strategy without involving the leaders of the Baloch people. To exert strong control over the Khanate, he applied a variety of pressures to the Khan of Kalat, Mir Khudadad Khan (Breseeg, 2001). The introduction of modern Sardari or Tribal System also known as Sandeman System where he empowered the local tribal leaders with money and power to stand against the Khan and built their respective armies, is among these tactics. Following the death of Sandeman in 1892, the position of AGG was conferred upon General Brown (Dashti, 2012). Mir Khudadad Khan harboured a fervent desire to alter the British government's intervention, a stance that was met with disapproval by the latter. This discord

⁵ The appointment of Sir Robert Grove Sandeman (1835-1892) as the Agent of the Governor General (AGG) is a significant event in the political history of Balochistan. His notable contribution to the region is the Sandemann system, also known as the Sardari Nizam. In 1876, he implemented a system aimed at diminishing the authority of the Khan of Kalat by endowing the tribal chiefs, also known as Sardars, with significant power. The implementation of this system resulted in a reduction of the Khan's authority within the region, particularly in the Quetta, Sibi, and Mari Bughti areas, where the Sardars retained a significant degree of influence. The provision of financial allowances to the Sardars was undertaken with the aim of enhancing their strength. The *Sardari* system persists in numerous regions of Balochistan up to the present day.

escalated to such an extent that the British authorities deposed him from his position of power, apprehended him, and appointed his son, Mir Mehmud Khan, as the new successor to the throne of Khan of Kalat (Axmann, 2008; Dashti, 2012).

Simultaneously, the British government made a crucial decision to assert its strong authority over Balochistan by using divide and rule tactics. The decision entailed the division of the expansive territories into distinct nations. During this period, the demarcation committees were established with the purpose of delineating the boundary lines separating the territories of Iran and the Indian state, as well as Afghanistan. The demarcation committees were responsible for dividing the territories under the Khanate state, resulting in the merging of certain parts of the state with Iran and Afghanistan. Thus, Balochistan experienced notable transformations in its geopolitical landscape because of two remarkable events, 'the Durand boundary commission of 1896' and 'the Goldsmith boundary commission of 1873' (Axmann, 2008). The Durand boundary commission, led by Sir Mortimer Durand, established the border between British India and Afghanistan, cutting through Balochistan and separating the Baloch people into different political entities. Similarly, the Goldsmith boundary commission aimed to define the border between Iran and the Khanate state, leading to the inclusion of some Baloch regions within Iran. These events not only altered the territorial integrity of Balochistan but also had long-lasting implications for its people, who found themselves divided by artificial borders (Axmann, 2008). These boundary commissions played a crucial role in reshaping the political and cultural dynamics of Balochistan. After the Treaty of 1876, the territories of Kalat state are shown in Map I.



Map I. The image representation of the Kalat state/Balochistan in the year 1897 exhibits a conspicuous demarcation of the regions encompassing Kalat, Mekran, Kharan, and Las Bela. The red colour denotes the geographical regions encompassing British Balochistan and the leased tribal areas. Source: AGG Balochistan Archives. Retrieved from: <http://balochistanarchives.gob.pk/AGG-Balochistan-Records>

The end of the nineteenth century was marked by a gloomy atmosphere in the region of Balochistan. Balochistan's independence was short-lived due to the persistent suppression of global political dynamics. The policies implemented by the British government pertaining to the administration and intervention in the domestic matters of Balochistan endured until the 20th century (Dashti J., 2020; Baloch, 1987).

However, during the initial quarter of the twentieth century, a group of politically motivated young individuals from Balochistan expressed their discontent towards Khan's resolution of the Khanate issue and tribalism. As a means of actively involving themselves in the Khanate's affairs, they organised and took part in political gatherings held in different areas of the Kalat state. The commencement of this initiative signifies the mobilisation of Baloch youth within the political realm, with the objective of opposing the subjugation and exploitation of Balochistan by external entities (Dashti N. , 2012; Axmann, 2008). Among these young bureaucrats-turned-political-activists were Mohammad Hussain Unqa, Abdul Aziz Kurd, and Mir Yusuf Aziz Mugsi, among other well-known individuals. As a result of their political activism and dissemination of awareness campaigns via various media outlets and pamphlet distribution, they were incarcerated and subjected to close surveillance by both the British government in Quetta and the Khanate government in Kalat (Dashti, 2012).

Following World War, I (1914-1918), Balochistan, like British India, went through a period of transition during which nationalism made significant gains. An example of this is the establishment of '*Anjuman-e-Ithihad-e- Baloch wa Balochistan*' (Committee of the Union of Baloch and Balochistan) political party, in the 1920s, which remained mostly clandestine until the formal start of its activities in 1932 (Breseeg, 2001; Dashti, 2012). In February 1937, the party was taken over by the Kalat State National Party (KSNP). The secular, anti-imperialist, and populist features of this party dominated its politics. The views of Gandhi and Abdul Kalam Azad had an impact on the organization's leaders, including Ghaus Baksh Bizenjo, Gul Khan Naseer, and Abdul Aziz Kurd, among others (Yaqubi & Ahmed , 2020). In addition, the youth exerted pressure upon the British government with regards to specific matters. These included advocating for non-interference in the internal affairs of Kalat state, promoting the

establishment of Kalat as an independent state similar to Afghanistan and Iran, and opposing the implementation of the 'Sardari system' or Sandeman system (Breseeg, 2001; Dashti, 2012).

During the Second World War, the British colonial administration in India was gradually approaching a state of collapse, and the eventual partition of the region into the separate states of Pakistan and India was expected. Mohammad Ali Jinnah was appointed by the Khan of Kalat to serve as the legal expert tasked with presenting the case for Balochistan before the British government (Kutty, 2009). Prior to this event, the Khan sent two memoranda to the British government, requesting the surrender of all authority to the Khan and compliance with the provisions specified in the treaty of 1876. Nevertheless, the British government opted not to acknowledge the memorandums (Dashti, 2012).

The expected withdrawal of the British government from India had significant implications for the future of Balochistan's independence movement, with the KSNP emerging as a crucial player in subsequent years. Taj Breseeg (2001) highlights the prominence of Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, Mir Gul Khan Naseer, and Mir Abdul Aziz Kurd among their contemporaries (Breseeg, 2001). The leaders who championed the cause of Balochistan's independence persevered through a myriad of challenges, including imprisonment, exile, and political coercion (Breseeg, 2001; Dashti, 2012). Despite these obstacles, they remained steadfast in their unwavering commitment to the Baloch movement. The KSNP, despite being banned by both, the British government, and the Khanate of Kalat, persisted in its activities even after its offices and newspapers were seized and its leaders were exiled (Dashti, 2012).

As the British Empire planned to withdraw from the Indian subcontinent, the Kalat state similarly prepared itself for the independence of Balochistan (Centre, 2006). The

Cabinet Mission of 1946 witnessed the dispatch of a delegation by the British government to engage in discussions and present a proposal for the transfer of power to the proposed states of India and Pakistan. On June 3, 1947, the partition plan of India was announced by the Viceroy of India, Lord Mountbatten. The plan explicitly outlined the inclusion of the princely states, including Balochistan, which had been incorporated into British India through the All-India Act of 1935 (Dashti, 2012). The princely states were presented with the opportunity to exercise their autonomy in determining the desires of their populace. Either join India and Pakistan or declare independence were the two choices. Preceding the partition plan, Khan engaged in a sequence of meetings and negotiations with the viceroy of India and prominent figures, namely M.A. Jinnah as the potential governor general and Liaqat Ali Khan as prime minister, affiliated with the Pakistan Independent Movement. On August 4, 1947, a memorandum was reached by leaders from all sides, culminating in an agreement that agreed upon the independence of Balochistan on the 5th of August 1947. The conference was convened in the city of Delhi, with Lord Mountbatten, the representative of the British Indian government, presiding over the proceedings as chairperson. Accompanying him was Lord Ismay, the legal advisor to the Viceroy, who provided invaluable counsel throughout the meeting (Kutty, 2009; Dashti, 2012). On the other hand, the Khan of Kalat, Mir Ahmed Yar Khan, and Prime Minister Barrister Sultan Ahmed Khan were representing Balochistan (Kutty, 2009). According to Mir Ghous Bakhsh Bizenjo, the meeting ended up with a three-point agreement (Kutty, 2009), which are as follows:

1. Government of Pakistan recognizes the independent and sovereign status of the State of Kalat, which has treaty relations with the British Government and whose status and position is different from other princely states of India.
2. Legal opinion will be obtained to decide whether Pakistan can be the successor to those treaties and to the ones on leased areas.
3. Following the receipt of the legal opinion, the representatives of Pakistan and Kalat will engage in further discussions. In the interim, a standstill agreement will be in place between Pakistan and Kalat regarding the territories leased to the British government.

Following the departure of the British government from the Indian subcontinent, a diplomatic and political struggle ensued between India and Pakistan as they vied for dominance, posing a threat to the sovereignty of numerous princely states (Kutty, 2009). Following the enactment, Balochistan continued to exist as a princely state, a status that the Khan of Kalat opposed. However, when the British departed, the Khan of Kalat declared the independence of Kalat on March 11, 1947 (Kutty, 2009). The Indian occupation of Kashmir in March 1948 heightened concerns in Pakistan. To pre-empt potential Indian interference, M.A. Jinnah sought to secure the accession of Balochistan and merge it with the state of Pakistan in March 1948 (Breseeg, 2001).

Primarily, there exist two opposing viewpoints with regards to the integration of Balochistan into Pakistan. A perspective commonly advocated by Baloch nationalists is that the amalgamation of Pakistan was a forced integration that lacked the widespread approval of the Baloch population (Breseeg, 2001). As per the accounts documented by Baloch authors and Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, a representative of the Khanate of Kalat, claimed that the

Pakistani government pressured the Khan of Kalat into merging Balochistan with Pakistan. Some historian noted that Jinnah had approached Khan to merge with Balochistan, while Khan insisted on to discuss the matter with other law maker of Balochistan during the parliamentary proceedings. However, when the parliamentary proceedings were going on in Balochistan, the Pakistani military conducted a forceful occupation of the Kalat state (Dashti, 2012). The Khan's decision was not made unilaterally, as he acknowledged the need for discussion with the appropriate legislative bodies. Consequently, the matter was brought before the Parliament of Balochistan, which was comprised of two distinct houses: The *Darul Awam*, or lower house, whose members are elected from the non-tribal populace, and the *Darul Umara*, or upper house, which represents the tribal constituency of the parliament. The proposal of accession with Pakistan was declined by both houses (Kutty, 2009). Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, clearly revealed that “the Indian government act of 1935 was nothing but a planned and constructed strategy to control the region through divide and rule, therefore, they (the British government) changed the status of Balochistan as a princely state, but Balochistan was never a princely state, rather, it was an independent state, had a treaty relation with the British Indian government” (Dashti, 2012).

The contrasting viewpoint, predominantly supported by Pakistani scholars and policymakers, argues that Khan of Kalat did indeed endorse a merger agreement with the Governor General of Pakistan, Mr. Jinnah. It is of significance to mention that the three remaining princely republics in the region of Balochistan, specifically Mekran, Kharan, and Las Bela, had previously undertaken the process of integration with the nation of Pakistan (Breseeg, 2001; Dashti, 2012). According to A.B. Awan (1985), after the partition of India and Pakistan, the leaders of the three provinces of Balochistan expressed their desire to

amalgamate their territories with Pakistan (Awan, 1985). He further elaborated that after the acceptance of the annexation request from the princely states, the Pakistani government dispatched a contingent of military personnel to the regions of Pasni and Jiwani, situated along the coastal expanse of Balochistan, where important military and defence installations were located. His book claims:

“At Pasni and Jiwani the government of Pakistan had valuable installations, such as airstrip and postal and radio installations. That is why on the 26th, the prime minister called up the three service chiefs and it was decided to send one platoon of troops, by air to Jiwani for the protection of the airport, another platoon to Turbat and a company, by sea to Pasni to take over the port and radio stations. The Agent of the Governor General at Quetta and the Khan were both informed” (Awan, 1985).

The amalgamation of the three strategic regions within Balochistan exerted additional strain on the Khan of Kalat. Khan vehemently contested the matter with the Pakistani authorities, contending that the regions lacked autonomy and were devoid of the capacity to independently make decisions. The mounting pressure on Kalat was a direct result of the strategic and geopolitical significance of the regions, particularly Mekran. Despite the opposition of both parliamentary chambers, the Khan of Kalat requested that Mr. Jinnah expedite the signing of the merger agreement within a three-month timeframe. In the words of Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, then the Leader of the House of Commons (*Dar ul Awam*):

“Despite both houses giving their categorical verdict against Kalat’s accession to Pakistan, Khan Sahab informed the government of Pakistan to finalise the merger of Kalat within three months. Instead of accepting this offer, the Pakistan government decided to annex Kharan and Lasbela – the two subordinate states of Kalat – and

enforce their 'merger' with Pakistan directly. Similarly, Mekran which had been a district of Kalat for the last 300 years, was made 'independent' of Kalat state on March 17, 1948, and one of its three sardars, Bay Khan Gichki was made its ruler" (Kutty, 2009).

The author proceeds to articulate his apprehensions regarding the annexation and unilateral determination, which were executed without due notification to both chambers of the legislative body:

"Eventually succumbing to incessant pressure from Pakistan Government and due to his own state of indecision, the Khan of Kalat affixed his signature to the Agreement of Accession on 27th March 1948. In taking such a step-in gross violation of the will of the people of Kalat-Baluchistan as expressed unanimously by the members of both Houses of Parliament, the Khan rendered himself guilty of an act of great injustice to them. I wonder if history will ever forgive him" (Kutty, 2009).

From a strategic standpoint, the annexation of Balochistan, a region with a vast coastline, abundant resources, and mineral-rich mountains, resulted in a significant expansion of Pakistan's territorial expanse, nearly doubling its size. Referencing Map II, the depiction showcases the region of Balochistan after its integration with Pakistan. The discord among Baloch leaders who opposed the annexation of Balochistan into Pakistan, particularly the tribal chieftains, exacerbated the already fragile situation in the province. The prevailing situation led to an extended period of conflict and insurgency, which involved the Pakistani army in opposition to tribal chieftains and Baloch nationalists.



Map II: The map of Pakistani Balochistan after March 1948. Source: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Retrieved from:

<http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/04/11/balochistan-state-versus-nation-pub-51488>

4.4 The Problematic Relations Between the Federation of Pakistan and Balochistan:

Balochistan, a rugged and arid terrain, has long been endowed with abundant natural resources, and has consistently demonstrated a constant struggle against external forces throughout the course of history. As Harrison Akins argued.

“On the periphery of the Subcontinent’s historic empires and highly resistant to outside invaders, Balochistan is a land of extremes—burning deserts, towering peaks, freezing winters, and fierce tribes. It has been described as a veritable moonscape, one in which Alexander the Great famously got lost during his return march from India” (Akins, 2017).

After the merger in March 1948, a state of ambiguity persisted between the federation of Pakistan and the province of Balochistan, leading to sporadic armed conflicts. The level of insurgency exhibited periodic fluctuations, shifting between periods of heightened intensity and periods of diminished strength (Cohen, 2006). The present insurgency phase can be traced back to its antecedent phases, which were initiated after the assassination of Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti on August 26th, 2006 (Jain, 2018). The insurgency's rapid expansion from the tribal regions to non-tribal areas was propelled by the emergence of geopolitics as a novel driving force. Following the initiation of the CPEC agreement and the subsequent rise of Gwadar as a prominent component of the initiative, the insurgency in the region experienced a notable escalation.

The Baloch ethnic conflict can be attributed to its origins in the colonial era and the subsequent annexation of the Kalat State and its principalities by Pakistan. However, a plethora of intricate and interrelated political, economic, and geopolitical factors that have

persisted since the creation of Pakistan have further perpetuated and intensified the conflict. The conflict between the central government and Balochistan has had severe consequences for the general population, leading to significant suffering. The use of state force against the local Baloch community has resulted in an egregious infringement of human rights. The security forces employed lethal military measures against educated youths with ideological leanings, as well as social and political activists, insurgents, and individuals who aligned themselves with the separatist ideology (Mendez, 2020).

The genesis of insurgency and conflict in Balochistan can be traced back to the period immediately following its annexation by Pakistan. It was during this time that Prince Abdul Karim, the brother of the Khan of Kalat, began the formation of a military force with the intention of waging war against Pakistan (Ali, 2005; Akhtar, 2007). Subsequently, he undertook a brief sojourn to Afghanistan with the aim of gathering the tribal Lashkar troops and orchestrating an assault on the Pakistani military in Balochistan (Center of Foreign Policy, 2006; Akhtar, 2007). Despite inadequate backing from the Afghan government or tribal chieftains, he played a pivotal role in the inception of the Baloch uprising. The insurgency was inherently destined for failure due to the inadequacy of ammunition and support, both domestically and internationally, that were required to maintain its momentum. His arrest with his Lashkar on the 12th of July 1948, upon his return from Afghanistan resulted in charges of treason being brought against him and his Lashkar (Kutty, 2009).

Following Prince Abdul Karim's resistance, a period of reconciliation ensued. However, the emergence of One Unit in 1955 provided a pathway for further resistance as Balochistan became integrated into West Pakistan (Center of Foreign Policy, 2006). During this time, the elderly Baloch tribal chief, Nawab Norouz Khan, started an armed struggle in response to the

arrest and imprisonment of the Khan of Kalat, Mir Ahmed Yar Khan, on charges of treason. This resistance also proved to be short-lived. Norouz Khan was subsequently apprehended and subjected to a military trial. Ultimately, he received a life imprisonment sentence, while his son and five relatives were handed death sentences, executed, and passed away in prison in 1964 (Center of Foreign Policy, 2006).

Despite the brief nature of past insurgencies and their inability to compete with the powerful Pakistani military, sentiments of separatism and regional autonomy continue to permeate the consciousness of some Baloch tribal leaders. During the period of General Ayoub's imposition of martial law, a resurgence of the Baloch insurgency occurred, marking the onset of the third wave (Ali, 2005). The third insurgency in Balochistan, commencing in 1962, was notably protracted in comparison to its antecedents and persisted until 1968, resulting in substantial financial and material detriments (Cohen, 2006; Centre, 2006). The insurgency that took place in 1973 was initiated after the dismissal of the elected and constitutional government of the Sardar Atta Ullah Mengal as the Chief Minister of Balochistan from the National Awami Party (NAP) (Cohen, 2006). After the Mengal was overthrown as CM by Bhutto, a far more dangerous and fatal insurgency started against the state of Pakistan. As Stephen P. Cohan (2004) puts it:

“[T]he peaks of Baluchi separatism during the insurrection of 1973–75, sparked by Bhutto’s dismissal of local administrators. After an alliance of an Islamist party (the JUI) and the NAP came to power in Baluchistan and the NWFP in 1972, two powerful and respected Baluch leaders, Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo and Sardar Ataullah Khan Mengal, became governor and chief minister, respectively. This arrangement ended after ten months, when Bhutto dismissed the NAP-JUI governors ... army and

paramilitary forces numbered about 80,000 troops, reinforced by helicopter gunships, armoured vehicles, and mortars from Iran. This was the first occasion on which Pakistan's elite Special Security Group (SSG) commandos saw battle. On their part, the Baluch could only field some 10,000 guerrillas, armed with ancient rifles. Their forces suffered about 3,300 casualties, and some 7,000 families took refuge in Afghanistan" (Cohen, 2006).

Eventually, when Bhutto's government was overthrown by the military dictator Ziaul Huq⁶, there was a resolve to amicably solve the Baloch uprising by altering some of the state policies for Balochistan. Zia order to stop the military operations in Balochistan, released the political detainees previously held by Bhutto, and commenced negotiations with prominent Baloch political figures. The initiative undertaken by Zia effectively mitigated the volatile situation in Balochistan for a period of approximately two decades. The political climate was peaceful and there was greater peace during the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s.

In 1999, General Pervez Musharraf⁷ assumed power and ousted the government led by Nawaz Sharif. This marked a transition to military rule in Pakistan, accompanied by the implementation of strict legislation. The peaceful atmosphere of Balochistan was adversely

⁶ Zia Ul Huq, a military leader, assumed control of Pakistan through the imposition of martial law on July 5th, 1977, thereby displacing the Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. He initiated legal proceedings against Bhutto, who was subsequently convicted by the Supreme Court of Pakistan on charges of murder and received a capital punishment sentence. Bhutto was executed by means of hanging. For a period of nearly eleven years, Zia governed Pakistan in the capacity of a military dictator and president. On the 17th of August 1988, he died in a plane crash.

⁷ On the 15th of October 1999, General Pervez Musharraf ascended to the position of military dictator by means of toppling the elected government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. He maintained a position of military dictator and then became the president of Pakistan for a period of nine uninterrupted years. He relinquishes the role of presidency in the year 2008 and retired from military services. He died on 5th of February 2023 while living in Dubai in self-exile.

impacted due to the implementation of stringent policies by General Musharraf. Balochistan again experienced a renewed series of rigorous military operations. This insurgency has been characterised as one of the most futile, protracted, and destructive conflicts to date, having garnered significant support from the general populace. However, the insurgency in Balochistan persists as armed resistance against the state undergoes a new transformation and gains backing from various non-state actors active within Pakistan.

Upon assuming power through a military takeover, General Musharraf made a contentious statement concerning the Baloch nationalists and tribal leaders who expressed discontent with the policies implemented by the Islamabad government. The individual made a contentious remark in which he expressed, His controversial statement where he said, “Do not push us ... It is not the ‘70s. We will not climb mountains behind them, we will hit them, and they will not even know what and from where something has come and hit them” (Wirsing, 2008). Musharraf's actions ultimately resulted in the transformation of the Baloch nationalistic movement into a separatist movement, which was propelled by the masses. This was an important change from previous movements, which were primarily led by tribal chiefs. The persistent insurgent activity that is currently underway can be attributed to the 2002 election, wherein the Baloch nationalists deemed it to be a grossly manipulated electoral process that favoured the federal government's agenda (Wirsing, 2008). The allegation made by the nationalists was that the elections had been manipulated to marginalise their political influence within the government. This purportedly served the purpose of consolidating Musharraf's authority over the resources of Balochistan, facilitated by the installation of a provincial government that was handpicked to support his agenda (International Crisis Group, 2006; Wani, 2021). The electoral proceedings were conducted during the tenure of the

military regime of General Pervez Musharraf. The election was subject to scrutiny by various observers, including those hailing from Europe and the Commonwealth (Zaidi, 2002). The electoral proceedings were conducted during the tenure of the military regime of General Pervez Musharraf. The consensus among these observers was that the election had been premeditated and that instances of pre-poll rigging had taken place. Thus, a chosen administration was instituted in Balochistan with the aim of attaining the intended objectives in the strife-torn region.

Musharraf launched many economic and social measures shortly after the 2002 elections, with a focus on Baloch areas, including the construction of the Gwadar Port and the Mirani Dam in the Turbat area (Centre, 2006; Wani, 2021). Consequently, multiple military garrisons were established in remote regions of Balochistan. The establishment of military garrisons instilled a heightened sense of apprehension among the Baloch people, who began to experience a sense of uncertainty regarding the advancements. Similar, the construction of Gwadar Port has become a concern for nationalists, who view it as a form of “ethnic swamping” (Wani, 2021). Conversely, the Baloch community has expressed apprehension over the possibility of an influx of non-Baloch individuals from other provinces, which could potentially alter the demographic makeup of the Gwadar region.

Another significant incident that fuelled the insurgency during Musharraf’s military rule was the rape of Dr. Shazia Khalid in Dera Bugti by Captain Hammad, a serving military officer. In this sense, Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti⁸, an influential and ageing Baloch chieftain

⁸ Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti, a prominent tribal leader of the Baloch community, exerted a considerable impact on the political landscape of Balochistan. He served as the Chief Minister of Balochistan during the decade of the 1970s, and subsequently served as Governor of Balochistan in the 1990s. At the outset, he espoused a pro-

resisted and urged the Musharraf administration to punish the army commander, but General Musharraf refused. "Dismissing the notion that any officer could have been responsible, Musharraf went on to suggest that the doctor had invited the rape to become eligible as a political refugee in a western country" (Hoodbhoy, 2006). instead, Musharraf blamed Bugti alleging that he sought to negotiate higher royalties for the extraction of Sui gas from his region, while simultaneously impeding the progress of development in Balochistan. He asserts that the Sardars residing in Balochistan exhibit a lack of interest in the progress and advancement of the region, actively opposing the interests of the state of Pakistan (Butt & Ashraf, 2021). However, the primary concerns revolved around the acquisition rights of Gwadar port and the construction of new cantonments in Balochistan. Baloch tribal leaders and political parties were concerned over the construction of Gwadar port and the increasing numbers of military cantonments in various parts of Balochistan (Butt & Ashraf, 2021). Thus, the Baloch tribal Lashkar rebelled in response to the policies of Musharraf. The central government initiated a military operation against the Baloch rebels and hundreds of people were killed in conflicts between the two sides (Hoodbhoy, 2006). The rape of a lady doctor in the Bugti region was one of the primary occurrences that led to Nawab Bugti's armed struggle against the Pakistani state.

Pakistan stance and expressed opposition towards the principles of Baloch Spiritism. His perspective underwent a transformation subsequent to General Pervez Musharraf's ascension to power in Pakistan in 1999, wherein he resolved to initiate a military campaign against the Baloch insurgents and Ferraris. The decision was met with opposition from Nawab Bugti, who displayed unwavering resolve in his dissent. The armed resistance of Nawab Bugti against the Pakistani state was precipitated by a significant event, namely the rape case of a female physician within his Bugti region. According to reports, the individual responsible for the act held the rank of captain within the Pakistan Army and received backing and safeguarding from Pervez Musharraf. In response to Musharraf's intervention in the investigation of the accused major, Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti opted to engage in a struggle against the state.

The Baloch insurgents started attacking the infrastructure and other government installations, such as petroleum and gas pipelines. Musharraf alleged that the attacks on the army and government facilities were the work of the tribal chiefs, particularly Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti (Grare, 2013). On August 26, 2006, the Pakistan Army executed a substantial military campaign with the objective of apprehending or eliminating Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti. During the operation, Bugti engaged in combat against the Pakistani army in the mountainous regions of Kohlu and Dera Bugti, ultimately resulting in his demise (Grare, 2013). The assassination of Nawab Bugti during the operation provoked demonstrations and unrest across the province of Balochistan. The assassination of Nawab Bugti was met with widespread disapproval from political parties in Pakistan as well as human rights organisations and Baloch nationalists (Wirsing, 2008; Grare, 2013). The act contributed not only to the sense of unfairness and oppression that the Baloch people already had, but it also fuelled the separatist movement in the Baloch region. Another incident that further exacerbated the prevailing tension was the killing of Mir Balach Marri on November 19, 2007 (Wirsing, 2008). Furthermore, in 2009, three senior Baloch political activists affiliated with the Balochistan National Movement (BNM) were reported missing. Subsequently, their bodies were found in a state of brutal murder on the outskirts of Turbat city (Grare, 2013). These incidents exacerbated the situation in Balochistan, specifically in the Mekran region, which had previously experienced relative tranquilly amidst past instances of insurgency. The military continued the brutal policies of eliminating those activists who were criticising the state policies and military operations in Balochistan (Grare, 2013).

After these military operations and the purported governmental "Kill and Dump" policy towards political activists, the situation in Balochistan remained volatile. Musharraf

rule ended in 2008, following the electoral victory of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in 2008 (Grare, 2013). PPP government issued an apology for the hardships and military actions in Balochistan and unveiled the 'Balochistan Package' (Grare, 2013). The government also announced a reconciliation process with the nationalist and anti-state leadership to heal the wounds of Balochistan (Grare, 2013; Wirsing, 2008). Through the constitutional amendment known as the 18th amendment, more provincial authority was granted. In addition to the aspects pertaining to negotiations and apologies, it can be posited that the military's approach towards Balochistan remained largely unaltered. Thus far, the Pakistani government has been unsuccessful in eradicating the insurgency and its underlying roots.

Following the signing of multi-billion-dollar projects for the Gwadar Port and the CPEC in 2015, the Balochistan situation has once again garnered the attention of academic and government circles. Considering the protracted grievances and policies of deprivation, the focus has shifted towards novel megaprojects and the potential allocation of resources to Balochistan. The successful implementation of the CPEC hinges on the resolution of the Balochistan issue through political and economic means. The absence of such a resolution would pose a significant challenge for Islamabad and Beijing in realising the full potential of this ambitious project.

The CPEC and Chinese investment have the potential to be game changers not just for Pakistan's economy but also for the fate of Balochistan if the local people are given their due rights and are treated as true stakeholders in all projects. However, following the declaration of the handover of the Gwadar Port to China and the launch of the CPEC, a considerable number of Baloch nationalists and leaders have expressed apprehension regarding the potential for significant demographic transformation in Balochistan. By employing more

aggressive power in the name of the security of the projects against political activists and nationalist political parties, it can be said that the megaprojects in Balochistan are a burden on the lives of the local inhabitants. After years of utilising brutal force against dissenting voices, Islamabad should have learned its lesson from the past, which has never turned out in its favour.

Balochistan as the largest unit of Pakistan has a chequered political history since the inception, posing earnest threat to the centre. Perceived as secessionist movement and conspiracy, against the ideological and geographical frontiers of Pakistan not less than five times i.e., 1948, 1950, 1963, 1973 and since 2004 the Baloch insurgency erupted paving the way for military operations. The arms rebellion, which was started by tribal sardars and chiefs, gradually spread into Balochistan's common masses and non-tribal areas. As the resistance became more evident in non-tribal areas, young political and social activists joined the movement, which grew more severe and turbulent.

4.5 Geopolitics as a new driver for Insurgency and human rights violation in Balochistan:

The evolving geopolitical and geo-economic scenario has generated considerable attention from various regional nations towards Balochistan, thereby instigating a fresh geopolitical competition in the area. To comprehensively understand the recent surge in violence, human rights violations, and economic destitution in Balochistan, it is imperative to investigate the fundamental interests of the international actors that are involved. The present study posits that the causes of the increased violence in Balochistan cannot be exclusively attributed to internal factors such as economic deprivation, political marginalisation, and inadequate development but are also significantly influenced by external factors such as geopolitical competition by the major powers. The local community has

encountered increasingly difficult challenges, which have been further exacerbated by internal issues (Peerzada, 2019; Iqbal, 2012). However, the primary factor contributing to the present insurgency is the influence of geopolitics and foreign interference in Balochistan's internal affairs, as exemplified by China's involvement in the region through the CPEC (Council, 2017).

The significance of geography in shaping the growth and prosperity of a particular area cannot be overstated. The presence of abundant natural resources and a favourable coastal location can have a substantial impact on the economic prosperity of a state. The widely recognised acknowledgement of the potential of natural resources, such as gold, oil, gas, and minerals, to serve as catalysts for economic growth and development is evident. The emerging economies are currently witnessing a rapid increase in demand for natural resources (Dogan, et.al., 2021). The province of Balochistan exhibits a diverse array of geographical factors that are considered crucial for facilitating economic growth and prosperity. However, it is important to note that the province continues to exhibit significant underdevelopment in comparison to other provinces within Pakistan. The poverty and underdevelopment can be attributed to the historical marginalisation, lack of awareness, deprivation, and unequal distribution of resources between the federal government and the province of Balochistan.

Balochistan's geographical location at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East gives it a distinct and great advantage for intra-regional travel and trade, which increases its global attraction (Safdar Sial & Basit, 2010). Over the past decade, Balochistan's geopolitical relevance has expanded due to the construction of a deep-water port at Gwadar, abundance of natural resources and various pipeline projects to deliver

energy to Islamabad's expanding need. CPEC, which was founded recently, has placed Balochistan at the centre of regional geopolitical competition.

The geographic features of Balochistan have had a significant impact on its geopolitical significance, which is primarily due to three crucial factors. The ancient rivalry referred to as the 'great game' between Tsarist Russia and the United Kingdom, which focused on the competition for control over the Indian Ocean, an area that had a significant coastline with Balochistan during the Khanate era, was revived in a new shape between the US, China, and India (Dashti, 2012). Second, Balochistan is endowed with a diverse range of natural resources, encompassing valuable minerals such as gold, copper, chromite, and various other minerals of considerable worth (Dashti, 2012). And third, Balochistan boasts a substantial coastline that stretches along the temperate seas of the Indian Ocean. As previously mentioned, the British authorities started negotiations with the Khan of Kalat to establish Jiwani as a strategic sea gateway. This endeavour was undertaken with the objective of asserting British supremacy over Afghanistan and hindering the territorial expansion of Russia. In recent times, the province of Balochistan has gained significant strategic and geographical importance within the framework of the CPEC. The Gwadar port, which is at the core of the CPEC projects, plays a crucial role in connecting China with other locations, such as the Indian Ocean, Central Asia, and the Persian Gulf, namely the Gulf of Hormuz.

Despite the abundance of natural resources in Balochistan, successive governments in Islamabad and the Pakistani military have typically viewed the province through the prism of security and law enforcement, motivated by both domestic and geopolitical concerns. It has been subjected to more ignorance and deprived of its right to possess its own natural resources. Balochistan has always been subject to an unfair distribution of shares by the

central government. That has also been accepted by successive federal governments: Balochistan has experienced exploitation but has not been given the rights to hold its own natural resources. It is beleaguered by a failing health and education system, drought, and a lack of basic infrastructure, all against a backdrop of neglect and underdevelopment (Kakar, 2020). According to a recent published work by Dr. Kaiser Bengali, the province's historical lack of investment in basic economic and social infrastructure, with the exception of natural gas extraction for use in other provinces, has resulted in a low level of economic activity, implying a narrow tax base and limited fiscal resources to invest in development (Dorsey, 2019; Bengali, 2015).

In addition, the copper and gold reserves in Saindak and Reko Diq in district Chagai Balochistan have the potential to develop the entire province, but China is extracting the metal without giving Balochistan any advantages (Finings, 2019). According to a report, it has been observed that China and Islamabad have reached an agreement pertaining to two significant natural resource domains without seeking consultation from the provincial administration (Finings, 2019). Based on the terms of the deal, the Chinese corporation has consented to augment the proportion of shares allocated to the central government. Nevertheless, the province stands to derive minimal benefits from this arrangement. Conversely, the Chinese enterprises that were granted the contract have intensified their mining operations, resulting in a rapid depletion of copper reserves attributable to excessive mining practises. There exists a considerable number of individuals who express apprehension regarding the excessive mining activities conducted by the company, asserting that such practises might be characterised as “exploitation of Balochistan's resources” (Jha, 2022).

Balochistan also holds significant strategic value for the United States in the pursuit of its regional objectives. The establishment of the deep-sea port in Gwadar has exacerbated the issue, thereby involving Iran, a neighbouring country, as the Gwadar port poses a threat to its own Chabahar port. The US expresses concerns about the potential implications of Chinese ownership of the Gwadar port, as it may contribute to the further strengthening of Beijing's growing economic influence (Shah, 2017). Furthermore, it reinforces its naval capabilities at a certain juncture, a stance that is incongruous with the interests of the United States. The concerns regarding Gwadar in the United States stem from the alignment of strategic objectives between India and the US, particularly in relation to China and Pakistan within the South Asian region.

Since 2002, the US has used various air bases located in Balochistan for the purpose of conducting security operations in Afghanistan during the 'war on terror' (Masood, 2011). Balochistan has functioned as a strategic conduit for the transportation of fuel and other essential provisions to support the operations of NATO forces in Afghanistan (Shah, 2017). However, the circumstances underwent a transformation in which the United States began considering the utilisation of Balochistan after China's endorsement of the CPEC agreement. The CPEC has emerged as a significant factor limiting the extent of the US' influence in Pakistan as well as in other neighbouring regions. The US expresses apprehension regarding the Chinese presence in Balochistan, perceiving it as a potential challenge to its Asian foreign policy objectives. Considering China's penetration into Pakistan, the United States established a formal agreement with India and other nations in the Indo-Pacific area with the aim of countering China's regional aspirations. The emergence of Chinese influence in Balochistan

and the United States, coupled with India's efforts to counter China, has sparked a fresh geopolitical rivalry in the region, with specific attention on Balochistan.

Therefore, the rise of China and the US, along with their respective allies, would inevitably increase geopolitical competition in and around the Indian Ocean, particularly in the Balochistan region. Geopolitical rivalry is intensifying as China gets more involved in the region of Balochistan (Conrad, 2017). Against this background and examples, the geopolitical rivalries in areas that are strategically significant make the local population the victims of atrocities. As countries like China and India vie for control and influence in Balochistan, the local population often becomes collateral damage in this geopolitical power struggle. History has shown that when major powers clash in strategically significant regions, the consequences for the local population can be dire. In the case of Balochistan, the construction of the Gwadar seaport and other infrastructure projects may bring economic benefits, but they also risk displacing and marginalising the indigenous people, leading to human rights abuses and atrocities. Sadly, the local population becomes the unfortunate casualty of these geopolitical rivalries. The local government either fails to protect the populations or does not have the will to do so, as they receive huge sums of money in the name of development and mega projects. The states do not protect people's rights because of the rise of internationalism, one of its components being geopolitics (Sabatini, 2022). The lives of the common people are seriously imperilled when they are at the centre of geopolitical conflicts between the major powers, as argued by human rights defenders and civil activists. The present state of the international order faces potential jeopardy because of the resurgence of China and Russia, which aspire to assume more prominent global positions. The increasing

prevalence of authoritarianism and the intensification of geopolitical rivalries are leading to a diminishing of the rights enjoyed by the local population.

Similarly, because geopolitics has become a new motivating factor, the current insurgency in Balochistan is significantly more violent and lethal than previous insurgencies in the area. Due to the speed with which it has grown, the current insurgency emerged in a setting of resource exploitation and socioeconomic distress, both of which the Musharraf administration's militaristic strategies served to exacerbate. In addition to the insurgency, the struggle for control over Balochistan has attracted the attention of major powers seeking to advance their own geopolitical interests. The involvement of external factors, such as China and Russia, further complicates the situation and exacerbates the violence (Wani, 2021). The local population, caught in the crossfire of these geopolitical rivalries, suffers from a loss of rights and freedoms as their lives are overshadowed by the global power play. The new variables, such as the presence of China, the construction of Gwadar Port, and the CPEC, have increased the Baloch's fears of marginalisation, expropriation of the province's resources, and human rights violations.

4.6 Conclusion:

Balochistan has had a tumultuous past, starting with its birth as an independent state in the 17th century, becoming a British protectorate in the 18th and 19th centuries, and finally becoming a part of Pakistan in the 20th century. Historically, Balochistan has been a centre of attraction for great powers due to its strategic location. Its proximity to the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea has made it a crucial region for trade and military purposes. Additionally, Balochistan is rich in natural resources, including oil, gas, and minerals, making it an important economic hub. However, this has also led to conflicts and exploitation by various powers

throughout history as they sought to control and benefit from the region's resources. As evidenced by earlier events, the British kept their borders open to Balochistan due to its location. The Jiwani port in the Gwadar district was under British control for the transportation of arms and ammunition during the British colonisation of the Asian subcontinent. During the great game between Tsarist Russia and Great Britain, the politics of warm waters played out in Balochistan. This destabilised the region politically and made it easier for the British government to fill in the power gap in the years to come. Similarly, China recognised the geostrategic and geopolitical importance of Balochistan and signed the CPEC deal to gain strategic depth along the Indian Ocean's coastlines. For both economic and strategic reasons, China has acquired the operational rights to the Gwadar port and the Gwadar Exclusive Economic Zones. The Chinese have several goals in Gwadar, including putting their foreign policy ambitions into action. Gwadar serves certain vital foreign policy agendas for China due to its location, and China is running a well-coordinated campaign in the IOR to reduce US economic and military hegemony and restore the balance of power.

The CPEC has been a catalyst for substantial investments in the region, culminating in the development of numerous mega-projects, including infrastructure and special economic zones. China's interest in Gwadar also stems from its desire to secure its energy supply routes and diversify its trade routes. By establishing a strong presence in the Indian Ocean, China aims to safeguard its energy imports from the Middle East and Africa, reducing its dependence on vulnerable maritime chokepoints. Additionally, Gwadar's strategic location allows China to expand its influence in the region and counterbalance the United States' dominant position in the Indian Ocean.

However, China's interest in Balochistan and Gwadar has widened an already-existing fault line in Asia, which has heightened geopolitical rivalry. This competition is primarily between China, the US, and India, as all countries seek to assert their influence in the region. The growing tension between these countries has led to an increased military presence and strategic manoeuvring in the Indian Ocean, creating a potential flashpoint for conflict. In between these rising geopolitical competitions, the local population finds itself marginalised in the decision-making process, leading to mounting frustration and resentment among the Baloch people. They perceive their land and resources as being exploited without commensurate benefits reaching them. Since the initiation of the CPEC, the security situation in Balochistan has significantly deteriorated. Chinese businessmen and workers have fallen prey to a series of attacks, prompting an increased military presence in the area. The establishment of additional military garrisons to safeguard Chinese interests has only heightened tensions, with the local population viewing such measures as a form of occupation.

International human rights organisations have consistently emphasised the appalling human rights situation in Balochistan. Reports of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and torture have become alarmingly common in the region. The lack of accountability for these abuses has further fuelled resentment among the local population and contributed to the growing unrest in Balochistan. The advent of the CPEC has exacerbated the situation, manifesting in accounts of forced displacement, land usurpation, subjugation of political and economic rights, and environmental degradation. Economic deprivation prevails among the local population, as the purported benefits of the CPEC remain elusive to them. The escalating insurgency is not only a consequence of internal colonisation and economic marginalisation but also a manifestation of geopolitics and the machinations of major powers.

Similarly, conflicting interests among the government, military establishment, and some sections of the Baloch population, particularly some sardars, have plagued the province and prevented it from actively fostering a peaceful environment. This predicament has impeded endeavours aimed at attaining much-needed stability and progress. Balochistan has borne significant costs owing to the intricate interplay of competing interests and geopolitical dynamics. The intensification of geopolitical rivalries among major powers, such as the US, Europe, Japan, India, China, Russia, and Pakistan, has detrimentally impacted international law and human rights.

Despite being rich in natural resources and having a vast coastline on the world's busiest sea route, the rulers of Balochistan have failed to develop the province. Since the merger with Pakistan in 1948, Balochistan has experienced several small and large insurgencies. The current insurgency, which started in 2002, is the longest and bloodiest. The situation in Balochistan is complex and multi-layered, with multiple factors contributing to the region's instability. The CPEC has brought investment and development to the region, which are discussed in the next chapters, but it has also exacerbated existing problems and created new ones for the local population. The local population is being left out of the decision-making process, and their concerns are being ignored. The current security situation is characterised by its precarious nature, while the human rights situation is marked by its dire circumstances. The forthcoming chapters will examine the influence of the geopolitical, economic, and strategic aspects of the BRI and CPEC on regional geopolitical competition. Additionally, the chapters will explore how the geopolitical and strategic motivations of major powers have contributed to the challenges experienced by the local population.

Chapter 5 The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its flagship project, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): Regional Geopolitical Dynamics

5.1 Introduction:

The primary objective of this chapter is to examine the motivations and impacts of the BRI and the CPEC megaprojects, analyse the geopolitical dynamics shaping the BRI, and discuss the interests of rival powers. Through a comprehensive evaluation of these factors, this chapter seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of the complex geopolitical dynamics shaping the BRI and highlight the impacts on the South Asian region, particularly Balochistan. By reviewing the fundamental aspects of the project, the chapter highlights the geopolitical dynamics of the CPEC. It also illustrates the core concerns of the rival powers in pursuit of a comprehensive mechanism for sustainable partnership in the regional affairs of the weaker nations, thus leading to the degradation of international law and human rights, as has been discussed in the analytical framework. The impacts of geopolitical rivalry on the South Asian region, particularly around the Gwadar region in Balochistan, have been profound and far-reaching. The BRI and CPEC have brought economic opportunities and triggered geopolitical dynamics. The analysis of the project in this chapter reveals the complexities involved and sheds light on the concerns of rival powers. It becomes evident that the pursuit of a comprehensive mechanism for sustainable partnership in regional affairs has led to the neglect of international law and human rights.

The geopolitical competition in and around the IOR is intensifying due to the Chinese military and economic presence in the region. China sees the BRI as an opportunity to strengthen its economic and diplomatic standing, reigniting its past dignity, financing neighbouring nations' infrastructure projects, and revitalising its stagnant economy (Rana &

Ji, 2020). The BRI is made up of three main components: The Silk Road, the Maritime Silk Road, and the Digital Silk Road. According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Asia needs to invest approximately 26 trillion dollars by 2030 to meet its infrastructure shortfall (Asian Development Bank, 2017). By providing funding for projects such as roads, railways, and ports, the BRI can stimulate economic growth and development in the region (Rana & Ji, 2020; Asian Development Bank, 2017). In this context, China's focus on Asia, especially through the BRI, could fill this gap and provide new opportunities for the region's development and economic stability (Chatsky & McBride, 2017; Brakman, et.al., 2019).

While many Western countries believe that the BRI has a military and geopolitical component that challenges the current status quo, China maintains that the BRI is primarily an economic project aimed at promoting win-win cooperation. However, it is important to acknowledge that there are valid concerns about the potential for unequal power dynamics between China and participating countries. Critics argue that China could exert influence and control over the economic and political affairs of these nations, potentially undermining their sovereignty and independence (Rana & Ji, 2020). The US and western countries are sceptical that the BRI could lead to debt sustainability issues for participating countries, as they may struggle to repay the loans taken from China for infrastructure projects (Hillman, 2018). Thus, other regional stakeholders such as the US and India are concerned regarding China's entry into the IOR, and they claim that BRI aims to change the political and economic order of the world by influencing the participant states and their economic and political decisions (OECD, 2018). The status quo, which is under the US supervision, is being transformed to a bilateral economic order, where China would be another actor in the economic atmosphere of the world (Chatsky & McBride, 2017).

China's increasing influence in Asia is seen as a threat to the US's economic and strategic interests, and as a result, the US has increased both its military and commercial ties to the region. This has caused tensions between China and the US, as both countries accuse each other of causing regional instability. Concerns about the effects of Chinese and US military and strategic investments in the region on local communities' livelihood and the environment have also been raised. For instance, according to reports by Shahid Mahmood, Moazzam Sabir and Ghaffar Ali (2020), Chinese projects and initiatives in the region have resulted in forced land acquisition, the eviction of residents, and environmental degradation. These actions have heightened regional anti-China sentiments (Mahmood, Sabir, & Ali, 2020).

This chapter is divided into two core sections. The first section will discuss the BRI and its three major components: the land-based Silk Road, the maritime Silk Road, and the digital Silk Road initiatives. It will examine the economic, geopolitical, and strategic motives behind the BRI and the increasing Chinese role in the region. The second section will focus specifically on the CPEC as the flagship project of the BRI. It will explore the origin and evolution of the CPEC and delve into the economic, security, strategic, and geopolitical motivations of China and Pakistan behind this massive project.

5.2 China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): An Introduction

The BRI is a grand vision for infrastructure development that spans from East Asia to Europe and is aimed to boost China's economic, political, and military influence. President Xi Jinping first announced these investments and development plans in 2013. China's BRI has been considered one of the most ambitious infrastructure projects proposed at global levels which can transform the landscape of the whole global economy. For instance, the BRI has led to construction of ports, railway tracks, and highways in countries such as Sri Lanka,

Pakistan, and Kenya, which have improved their connectivity and trade opportunities. In Sri Lanka, the development of the Hambantota Port, which China funded as part of the BRI, has made the area into a significant shipping hub, and connected it with other ports (Kannangara, 2019). Similarly, in Pakistan, the CPEC, the mega project of the BRI, has led to the development of infrastructure, including power plants, it has encouraged economic growth and energy production. According to Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, as of 2020, there were over 1,590 projects valued at around 1.9 trillion USD under the BRI, with Chinese participation accounting for most of the investments. Since its inception, the initiative has garnered a significant amount of attention on a global scale from intellectual circles. BRI is thought to be the single most funded project in the world after the Marshal Plan for economic and infrastructural development (Shen & Chan, 2018).

The present iteration of the BRI, alternatively referred to as the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI) and the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), can be comprehended as a comprehensive endeavour aimed at establishing connectivity between Asia, Africa, and Europe through the utilisation of both terrestrial and maritime networks spanning six specific corridors. The overarching objective of this initiative is to enhance regional integration, foster trade expansion, and catalyse economic growth (Liu & Dunford, 2016; Loh, 2019).

Prior to the commencement of the project, Chinese foreign policy was guided by two strategic approaches: the first being the intention to avoid drawing excessive attention, and the second being the desire to maintain a low profile, with the ultimate goal of fostering a more favourable and harmonious trajectory of development (Wolf, 2020). Hence, the project, which centres around its unique strategies of "Going Out" and "Opening Up", has garnered attention from numerous countries and international organisations across various continents,

notably Asia, Europe, and Africa (Bhattacharya et al., 2019). According to the official announcement of the Chinese government about BRI's main goal is "To ease the connectivity of Asian, European, and African continents and their adjacent seas, establish and strengthen partnerships among countries along the Belt and Road, set up all-diminished multi-tiered and composite connectivity networks, and realise diversified independent, balanced, and sustainable development in these countries" (BRI Official Website, 2022). It further reads, "It is a systematic project that would be jointly built through consultation to meet the interests of all, and efforts should be made to integrate the developmental strategies of the countries along with the BRI" (State Council of People's Republic of China, 2015). The report on the BRI defines it as "Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road to promote the implementation of the Initiative, in still vigour and vitality into the ancient Silk Road, connect Asian, European, and African countries more closely, and promote mutually beneficial cooperation to a new high and in new forms" (State Council of People's Republic of China, 2015). The BRI initially covered six economic corridors, which are as follows:

1. The New Eurasian Land Bridge Economic Corridor (NELBEC)
2. China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor (CMREC)
3. China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor (CCWAEC)
4. China-Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor (CICPEC)
5. Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIMEC), (however, this corridor was dropped from the list of the BRI-funded projects later in 2019)
6. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

BRI reflects Chinese ascendancy in the global arena, geopolitically, economically, and strategically (Yu, 2017). The comprehensive nature, extensive coverage, and extended

timeframe of the initiative indicate that it is regarded as China's significant undertaking for achieving the longstanding aspiration of the "Chinese Dream" in the nation's development. The objective is to convert China into a highly developed socialist nation that is affluent, robust, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and aesthetically pleasing by the year 2050, coinciding with the centenary celebration of the People's Republic of China (Manish, 2019). The initiative, with the help of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), not only centralises the Chinese position in the region, but it also replaces the domination of the West, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank (Dollar, 2015). It also enables China to play a more governing role and ultimately challenge the US in the region. The BRI and the AIIB can change the financial and political landscape of Asia, the Middle East, and Africa (Dollar, 2015).

Due to conflicting figures reported by various media sources, the precise amount of loans and investments made for projects connected with the BRI is currently unknown. According to the available data, it has been observed that the value of BRI initiatives exceeded 4 trillion USD during the initial quarter of 2020, which can be considered a significant achievement in a relatively short period of time (Briefings, 2021). This massive injection of funds has the potential to drive economic growth and development in these regions, creating new opportunities for businesses and improving infrastructure. However, critics argue that the BRI's lack of transparency and its potential for debt-trap diplomacy raise concerns about the long-term sustainability of these projects. Nonetheless, the BRI and the AIIB's influence cannot be ignored as they continue to reshape the global economic order and challenge the traditional dominance of Western institutions such as the World Bank and IMF.

5.2.1 The Silk Road Economic Belt and its revival through BRI:

The ancient Silk Road played a crucial role in facilitating China's ascension to the position of the world's most dominant economic power during that era. The term "Silk Roads" refers to the ancient land-based trade networks that linked Asia with the Middle East, North Africa, the Mediterranean, and Europe. The Silk Road was established during the Han Dynasty in China, around 130 BCE, and remained in operation for over a thousand years (Rana & Ji, 2020; Brakman, et.al., 2019). It connected major civilizations and empires such as China, Persia, India, and Rome, facilitating the exchange of goods, ideas, and culture between East and West. Historically, the primary mode of transportation for goods was camel caravans. To reach their destination, the caravans had to cross arid and barren deserts. These deserts were characterised by gusty winds and parched sand. The caravans also had to navigate through rugged and steep terrain. Samarkand, Bukhara, and Tehran were major urban centres along the Silk Road in central Eurasia (Rana & Ji, 2020). Luxury goods such as Chinese silk, lacquerware, porcelain, medicinal herbs, European glassware, coal, Persian dates, cotton, saffron, pistachio nuts, spices, almonds, sandalwood, Indian paper, Central Asian musical instruments, jade, indigo, and frankincense were transported through this land-based trade route (Rana & Ji, 2020).

Historically, there were two Silk Roads. The Northern Silk Road began in China, in the present-day city of Xi'an. It split into two routes in Dunhuang, which converged in Kashgar (bordering Pakistan and now at the epicentre of the CPEC, which is in the province of Xinjiang) before continuing to the Mediterranean and Europe (Rana & Chia, 2017). There was also a lesser-known Southern Silk Road that started in China's Yunnan region. According to Rana and Chia (2017),

The Southern Silk Road (SSR) consisted of four sections. The first section was the Sichuan-Yunnan-Burma-India Road, which started in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan, and continued to Kunming and Dali in Yunnan province before entering Burma and India. The second section was the Yunnan-Vietnam Road. The third section was the Yunnan-Laos-Thailand-Cambodia Road. And the fourth section was the Yunnan-Tibet Road, which connected South Asia and Central Asia with southern China and modern-day ASEAN. It started in Yunnan and looped back to Yunnan via Myanmar, India, Nepal, and Tibet” (Rana & Chia, 2017).

The Silk Road brought immense wealth to the participating civilizations and empires, with Chinese silk and spices from the East being highly sought after in the West. The trade along the Silk Road also led to the development of new industries, such as silk production and glassware manufacturing, and the establishment of trade routes and infrastructure, such as caravanserais and market towns.

However, once one of the world's busiest trade routes, the Silk Road began to decline abruptly due to varied reasons. First, the Silk Road declined due to the invasion of the Mongol Empire, which disrupted economic activities and made traders reluctant to engage in trade along the route (Chatsky & McBride, 2017). Secondly, when steam engines were invented, the importance of the Silk Road declined. Steam engines were faster than camels and horses. The transporters and the investors preferred steam engines for trading purposes. Thirdly, Europe and the West have taken Asia's place as the world's industrial and economic centres. The industries were built across the European continents, and the routes for trade were shifted from the Silk Road to the European landscapes, mainly in Western Europe. It also resulted in an increase in European maritime trade with Asia along the Southern Ocean

Corridor (Rana & Chia, 2017; Chatsky & McBride, 2017). This corridor began in the Mediterranean and continued to South Asia, through the Straits of Malacca, and up the East Asian coast to Korea and Japan. And the final blow to the decline of trade through this route started after the 14th century due to the fall of the Mongol Empire. It began because of the empire's conflicts, and China's isolationist policies worsened the issue. The isolationist foreign policies of China's Ming and later Qing dynasties did not help. Ultimately, the old silk road became history, and it began to diminish in the eyes of the world.

As mentioned before, the BRI has been executed with the objective of rejuvenating the historical Silk Road and reinstating its previous significance within the region. President Xi and his aides have undertaken the development of a new foreign strategy with the objective of revitalising and increasing China's influence in maritime domains (Chubb, 2019). The SREB was introduced by President Xi during his official visit to Central Asian nations and initiated a series of energy and transport infrastructure projects that have been developed through collaborative efforts with neighbouring nations (Rana & Chia, 2017, 2017). President Xi's plan entails the establishment of an extensive transport infrastructure network comprising railways, energy pipelines, motorways, and efficient border crossings. This is supposed to span across the mountainous former Soviet Republics of Central Asia towards the west and extend southward to Pakistan, India, and Southeast Asia (Chatsky & McBride, 2017). With the help of the Silk Road Economic Belt, China intends to build up to fifty special economic zones across the Asian and African continents, following the successful models of the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) on the Chinese mainland.

The revitalization of the historical Silk Road through the implementation of the Silk Road Economic Belt poses a complex challenge that encompasses various dimensions. However,

the revival of the SREB during President Xi's tenure can be attributed to two primary motivations that have emerged as fundamental reasons. The first motivation is China's growing need for energy resources and markets to fuel its rapidly expanding economy (Rana & Ji, 2020). China has become the world's largest energy consumer. As a result, new transportation routes for importing energy supplies and exporting commodities to markets in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa are critical for China's economic expansion. The second is the shifting geopolitical landscape, which is characterised by the ascent of the USA as a global superpower and Europe's relative decrease in economic influence. China's BRI aims to position China as a dominant regional force by extending its strategic influence beyond its boundaries. This urge to challenge the existing world order and restructure global economic and political systems fuels this ambition. As such, the BRI is an essential component of China's broad strategy to cement its standing as a superpower and construct a new international order more conducive to its interests.

Similarly, the renewal of the Silk Road has been the driving force behind the dramatic shift in China's foreign policy that has taken place during the Xi administration. This shift became clear when the country shifted from adhering to a covert and peaceful model of growth and maintaining a low profile in international affairs to adopting a 'Go West' foreign policy and modelling its developmental approach after that of the US (Rana & Chia, 2017). This developmental model became a successful strategy and made China one of the fastest-growing countries in the world. China believes in the model of peaceful co-existence with its neighbours, through which China could import its model of development to the neighbouring countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014). Through this connectivity model, China also aims to connect itself with the flow of energy resources across these countries. For example, China

has also been building east-west pipelines such as the Kazakhstan-China and Central Asia-China pipelines to reduce its exposure to security threats and potential disruptions in its oil and resource supply from its eastern coastal regions and beyond. These policies aim to enhance economic growth and connectivity among neighbouring countries, leading to a rise in Chinese influence within these regions (Rana & Chia, 2017).

Thus, based on the above investigation, it is evident that the revival of the ancient SREB by China aims at strengthening its geopolitical position and expanding its economic influence in Eurasia. By investing in infrastructure projects and establishing trade routes, China seeks to secure access to vital resources and markets while also promoting regional stability and cooperation. This ambitious initiative demonstrates China's determination to reshape the global economic order and establish itself as a dominant player in the region.

5.2.2 The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road through BRI:

Chinese President Xi presented the proposal for the Maritime Silk Road, also known as the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, during his participation at an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum economic leaders' summit in Indonesia in October 2013 (Szechenyi et.al., 2018). The proposal aimed to revive the ancient maritime trade routes that connected China to other countries in Asia, Africa, and Europe. President Xi emphasized the need for increased cooperation and connectivity among nations through maritime trade, infrastructure development, and cultural exchanges. This ambitious initiative received widespread support and had since become a cornerstone of China's foreign policy, fostering economic growth and diplomatic relations with countries along the Maritime Silk Road (Szechenyi et.al., 2018). According to Jean-Marc F. Blanchard and Colin Flint, "China's contemporary MSRI relates, at least in the imagination, to the ancient maritime Silk Road that

began in Fuzhou (a city in Fujian, China) and then went to Southeast Asia through the South China Sea and then, via the Malacca Strait, the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean, and Europe” (Blanchard & Flint, 2017,). The need for substantial economic activity spanning three continents necessitates a huge amount of financing. To fulfil this objective, the Chinese government has established a Silk Road fund using its various institutions and banks, including EXIM Bank and AIIB (Blanchard, 2020).

The main objective of the Chinese MSRI is to connect Chinese cities and provinces to countries across the IOR and increase reliance on seaborne trade and the export of Chinese commodities (Blanchard & Flint, 2017). This initiative is crucial for Chinese foreign policy agendas because it connects 28 littoral states spanning three continents and contributes to 17.5% of the global landscape. It fosters economic growth and diplomatic relations with countries along the maritime Silk Road (Kannangara, Collins & Waidyatilake, 2018). As of 2017, IOR consisted of approximately 2.6 billion individuals, representing approximately 35% of the global population. This figure is indicative of a notable and ongoing increase in membership within the organisation. The Indian Ocean is home to a considerable proportion of the world's proven petroleum reserves, with 16.8% of the world's proven oil reserves and 27.9% of the world's proven natural gas reserves located there. The countries situated in the region were responsible for the production of 35.5 percent and 17.8 percent of the world's iron and gold, respectively. Additionally, the fishing industry in the region constitutes 28% of the total global fish capture, with China, Indonesia, India, and Vietnam being among the foremost global fish producers (Kannangara, Collins & Waidyatilake, 2018). This phenomenon has provided a robust basis for the export industries in numerous countries. China, Indonesia, India, and Vietnam are among the foremost global fish producers (Sofia, 2020). Among other factors,

this region's richness in natural resources has aided its trade-led growth. Moreover, more than half of the world's seaborne oil is transported over these vital sea channels, which also house 23 of the top 100 container ports in the world and assist maritime trade in the IOR (Kannangara, Collins & Waidyatilake, 2018).



Map III: The Chinese 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.

Source: Jean-Marc F. Blanchard and Colin Flint (2017), "The Geopolitics of Maritime Silk Road", *Geopolitics*.

The MSRI initiative aims to build ports and exclusive economic zones in the port cities across the littoral states of the IOR. It includes ports in Kyaukpyo in Myanmar, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, and Gwadar in Pakistan (Szechenyi et.al., 2018). China also reached an agreement with the Sri Lankan government over the construction of the port city of Colombo. China has hugely invested in the Asiatic region and is now tightening its grip over the economic activities of these countries, which were once under complete US economic dependence (DeVota,

2016). Several Eastern African nations, including Djibouti, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Tanzania, will also get support from the MSRI. Indeed, according to Brian Eyler, “the focus of the Maritime Silk Road is to support and facilitate booming trade growth between Asia and Africa” (Blanchard & Flint, 2017). The amount of connectivity infrastructure through the sea was also attractive to several African countries. The construction of various ports across the African continent, particularly in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Somalia, and other littoral states of Africa (Blanchard, 2020).

However, many thinkers believe that the MSRI has a much bigger agenda and that its ultimate destination is not limited to Asia, the Asia Pacific, or Africa. The primary end destination of the MSRI is Europe, and it aims to reach Europe via the Suez Canal and Mediterranean. This would allow China to establish a strong presence in Europe and Asia and gain access to important markets and resources. Additionally, the MSRI's focus on building infrastructure in countries along the IOR would also provide China with strategic military advantages, allowing them to project power and influence in the region.

Therefore, the MSRI's goal of reaching the energy-rich continents highlights China's ambition to become a global superpower and reshape the geopolitical landscape. By expanding its economic and political influence through the MSRI, China could potentially challenge the dominance of other global powers, such as the United States. Moreover, the initiative's emphasis on connectivity and trade could foster stronger diplomatic ties between China and participating countries, further solidifying its position as a key player in international affairs.

5.2.3 The Digital Silk Road (DSR):

The current era is characterised by the proliferation of information and the advancement of aerospace technology. The attainment of a leading global position and the ability to effectively compete with the US in various domains are contingent upon China's development in networking, information technology, and control of the internet battleground (Hillman, 2021). China recognises the importance of establishing a strong presence in the digital realm, which has led to the emergence of the Digital Silk Road (DSR). DSR is an initiative launched by China to connect countries through the development of digital infrastructure and promote technological cooperation. It aims to facilitate the flow of information and expand China's influence in networking and information technology. The DSR was established in recognition of the importance of the digital realm in global competition and the battle for control over the internet (Hillman, 2021). The main goals of the DRS include promoting the development of the global digital economy, deepening digital connectivity, and reducing reliance on US-based satellites and systems. Additionally, the DSR aims to introduce the Chinese model for digitalization to the world, particularly in Asia and Africa. It also seeks to establish and construct modern technologies for social, military, and strategic use (Hillman, 2021).

As Xu Qilang, the former Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission of China, explained, "If you control the sky, you control the ground, the ocean, and the electromagnetic domain, thus seizing the strategic initiative, and both the US and China agree: space is the ultimate high ground" (Hillman, 2021). The DRS is a power game that is not limited to borders; it has expanded into space. The countries that advance in internet technology are leading the world in economy and space. Depending on the world through the internet is one of the

newest techniques of war, which is called "internet warfare". According to Jonathan Hillman 2021, "As the cold war was ending, the battle for information territory was just beginning" (Hillman, 2021).

The international community has widely acknowledged and supported the DSR for its beneficial role in promoting the expansion of the global digital economy and enhancing digital connectivity (Minghao, 2020). Its primary objective is to enhance China's influence beyond the economic realm, specifically in the domains of cybersecurity and global digital connectivity. Additionally, this sector aims to reduce or eliminate China's dependence on satellites based in the United States and the Global Positioning System (GPS). It deals with the introduction of the Chinese model for the digitalization of the world, particularly the Asian and African continents. The major aim of the DRS varies from satellite diplomacy to the establishment and construction of modern technologies for social, military, and strategic use. Since China has installed its own satellites in space through Baidu's DSR, many Asian and African countries are using China-based global positioning and submarine cables for the internet and other technological uses.

The four layers of China's digital infrastructure consist of wireless networks, internet-connected devices, the internet backbone, and satellites. These layers serve as catalysts for the development of strategic technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data applications. They also enable China to obtain economic and strategic benefits by positioning itself in various layers and expanding its global presence (Hillman, 2021). Although not comprehensive in scope, the domains serve as catalysts for the development of artificial intelligence (AI), big data applications, and other strategic technologies in China (Hillman2021; Greene &Triolo, 2020). China is currently experiencing global gains and positioning itself in

various layers to obtain both economic and strategic benefits. The prominent trio of Chinese state-owned enterprises, commonly referred to as “the Big Three,” i.e., Telecom, China Unicom, and China Mobile, are actively involved in the DSR (Hillman, 2021). These companies, along with Huawei, are rapidly expanding markets in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. China has gone from relying on foreign businesses for subsea cables to becoming the world's fourth-largest provider. This expansion enables China to transport, store, and mine more global data while keeping its own networks hidden (Hillman, 2021).

For the last three decades, China's progress has been eclipsed by its worldwide ambitions. President Xi has stated that his country will be the global leader in advanced technology production by 2035 and a global superpower by 2050 (Wilson, 2020). If China can combine its actions within and across these layers, it will benefit enormously. Through the DRS, China is advancing towards the centre of global information networks at a time when information is more important than it has ever been. China is expanding its network to those areas where the future population of the world is concentrated, such as Africa, which is expected to have more than half of the world's population by 2050, and where Chinese firm Huawei has built 70 percent of the 4G networks in Africa (Hillman, 2021). Chinese subsea cables are connecting Pakistan and Djibouti, creating the shortest internet link between Africa and Asia. This is significant as these regions have experienced rapid growth in international bandwidth (Hillman, 2021; Robert Greene & Triolo, 2020). This is evident from the fact that, as China is developing its technology, it is also growing and expanding its future markets in these regions, not only for its networking trade but also for other commodities. Chinese technological firms such as Huawei, Alibaba, Tencent, Baidu, Didi, and other Chinese enterprises in Southeast Asia have provided high-quality products and services at a low cost

with the help of Chinese government financing as compared to the more expensive western technological brands (Minghao, 2020). For example, in Pakistan, Chinese mobiles and internet devices have completely occupied the technological market. Phone brands such as Vivo, Oppo, and Xiaomi are the major brands that are easily available in Pakistan at very reasonable prices (Hillman, 2021). Similarly, Huawei and ZTE have built smart city technologies across Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Huawei constructed smart cities in over 200 cities across forty nations, and ZTE constructed smart cities in over 170 cities across sixty countries (Hemmings & Cha, 2020).

5.2.4 The Geopolitics and Strategic components of BRI:

China is investing in the region in a 'China-centric' manner that reflects national policy goals such as the Western Development Strategy and promotes and enables the activity of firms, but with an overarching strategy of national interest. The actions and statements of the Chinese government are readily interpreted as a combination of strategies in which economic and geopolitical goals are entwined. Economic production, trade, investments, and infrastructure are fused in China's vision for the practises and outcomes of the BRI. The BRI is meant to be truly transformative for the economic and political geography of all of Asia.

Many scholars, along with the Chinese government, assert that BRI can be called an economic project of China. By creating economic dependencies on China, especially through loans and investments, it gives Beijing leverage to exert its political influence and shape the global order in its favour. By providing loans and investments to countries participating in the BRI, China can establish itself as a dominant economic force in these regions. This economic influence allows Beijing to shape the policies and decision-making processes of these countries, ultimately advancing its own political agenda.

Through the BRI, China aims to create a network of interconnected economies that can contribute to its own economic growth. By providing loans on concessional terms, China can ensure that these countries have the necessary resources to develop their infrastructure and improve their economic conditions. Additionally, by tapping into the large population within these areas, China can market its own productions and benefit from the availability of skilled labour. With the support of the BRI, Chinese enterprises can attract foreign direct investment, boosting their profits and strengthening their global presence. By building infrastructure such as railways, ports, and SEZs, China provides good economic opportunities to its manpower and to its industries by selling Chinese materials for these projects.

Thus, the initiative is started to maximise its economic activity within its borders and make global connections that take full advantage of the benefits of global economic flows in these areas. More economic involvement means more people following the path of the Chinese model and less terrorist activity in the region. While Beijing takes the position that BRI is an infrastructure development initiative that is equally advantageous for all parties taking part, there is a clear strategic motivation that contradicts the Chinese illustration.

Nevertheless, although there are proponents who contend that China's objectives for the BRI are solely driven by economic factors, it is crucial to examine the substantiating evidence that underscores the strategic and geopolitical aspirations of this endeavour (Clark, 2017). First, China claims that the BRI is entirely an economic and infrastructural development project with the goal of assisting developing nations in the process of building their economies. However, many analysts argue that the BRI has significant geopolitical and strategic implications. The vast infrastructure projects funded by China allow it to expand its influence and gain access to strategic locations across the globe (Zhao, 2021). China's establishment of

a military base in Djibouti as part of the BRI allows it to project power in the region and secure its strategic interests in the Red Sea (Saxena, Singh, & Uri, 2021). This base gives China a significant presence at a key maritime chokepoint, allowing it to monitor and control the flow of goods and resources through the Red Sea. Similarly, China's investments in the Gwadar Port in Pakistan provide it with a strategic sea route that bypasses potential blockades and reduces dependence on the Malacca Strait (Saxena, Singh, & Uri, 2021). This alternative sea route provides a more direct and efficient pathway for energy transportation, saving valuable time and resources. Additionally, China's investments in African countries rich in natural resources, such as Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, can be seen to gain access to these resources and ensure their long-term economic growth and stability.

Second, in addition to the military base in Djibouti, China's investments in ports and infrastructure projects in countries such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar allow it to gain access to strategic locations and enhance its influence in the region (Wang, 2023). By building infrastructure such as railways, ports, and SEZs, China provides good economic opportunities to its manpower and to its industries by selling Chinese materials for these projects. Furthermore, China's involvement in the construction of railways and pipelines in Central Asia and Europe creates new transportation routes that bypass traditional power centres and potentially shift the balance of geopolitical power. These examples provide concrete evidence of China's strategic intentions and the geopolitical implications of the BRI (Flint & Zhu, 2019).

Third, the BRI aims to remap the geopolitical landscape of the world, which the Western world has promoted since the end of the Cold War (Baik, 2019). It aims to reshape the interaction between land and sea by replacing the Pacific Ocean in the centre with Eurasia. The US and the European powers currently hold a lot of power, which BRI is now challenging

(Baik, 2019). By doing so, it also enhances its areas of influence in a new geopolitical setting by creating new geographies and new geopolitical settings (Wolf S. O., 2019). Pouring billions of dollars and attracting more than hundreds of countries on the three continents is a clear picture of such geographical creation. By investing such a huge amount of money into the regions that are economically struggling, it could transform the lagging economies of the Eurasian region, placing it in the enviable position of being Asia's true pivot, or the Chinese Eurasian Pivot (Dossani, 2017; Xiaotong, 2014; Lain, 2017)

“China is investing in the region in a “China-centric” manner that reflects national policy goals such as the Western Development Strategy and promotes and enables the activity of firms, but with an overarching strategy of national interest. The actions and statements of the Chinese government are readily interpreted as a combination of strategies in which economic and geopolitical goals are entwined. Economic production, trade, investments, and infrastructure are fused in China’s vision for the practises and outcomes of the Belt and Road Initiative. The BRI is meant to be truly transformative for the economic and political geography of all of Asia” (Flint & Zhu, 2019).

Fourth, a key aspect of China's geopolitical agenda, particularly in relation to the BRI, is the establishment of a sphere of Chinese influence encompassing at least South, Southeast, and Central Asia (Schulhof, Vuuren & Kirchherr, 2022). It is evident that the BRI has a strong geopolitical dimension, given the state's active involvement in the economy and its aim to attain regional political power. While economic interconnectedness inherently carries geopolitical implications to some extent, the BRI is distinctly reliant on and contributes to

China's geopolitical strength to effectively operate as an economic network involving diverse economic actors and projects (Chang, 2019).

Fifth, the IOR, which is also one of the busiest regions for the transportation of energy and petroleum, is functional throughout the year due to its warm waters. By establishing a different sea route through the construction of Gwadar Port, which has decreased the time and travel for its energy transportation, the US and India are no longer a threat to block it (Paszak, 2021). With the establishment of Gwadar Port, China has effectively mitigated the risks associated with the Malacca Strait and the South China Sea issues (Paszak, 2021). Similarly, the control of the strategic strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf also plays a significant role in fulfilling Chinese energy needs (Funaiole, Hart, & McElwee, 2023). By establishing a strong presence in this region, China not only secures its energy supply but also expands its influence in the Indian Ocean (Funaiole, Hart, & McElwee, 2023).

Finally, the BRI has an interlinked agenda for its geopolitical goals and digital and cyber security goals (Baik, 2019). China's push for digital connectivity and cyber security is not only aimed at protecting its own interests but also serves to exert control and influence over other countries (Hillman, 2021). By establishing digital infrastructure and offering technical assistance to partner nations, China can gain access to sensitive information and potentially manipulate it to its advantage. This interconnected agenda of the BRI highlights China's comprehensive approach to expanding its influence and securing its strategic interests in both the physical and virtual realms. China's focus on digital infrastructure within the BRI is a clear indication of its intention to not only expand its economic presence but also strengthen its control over information flows through the establishment of telecommunications networks,

data centres, and e-commerce platforms. China is creating a web of connectivity that enables it to monitor and potentially manipulate information on a global scale (Mozur, 2019).

In conclusion, the Belt and Road Initiative is not simply an economic development project, but also has significant geopolitical and strategic implications. China's efforts to expand its influence, secure strategic locations, and shape the global order are evident in its investments in infrastructure projects across Asia, Europe, and Africa. While the BRI presents economic benefits and opportunities, it is important to carefully consider potential criticisms and concerns to ensure that it is implemented in a sustainable and mutually beneficial manner. Upon careful analysis of the geopolitical motivations and economic advantages associated with the BRI, it becomes evident that China's efforts to enhance connectivity play a crucial role in its overarching strategy to establish its influence and mould the global order in a manner that aligns with its interests.

5.2.5 BRI and the Challenges for the US, the EU and India:

The BRI has garnered significant attention and raised concerns among major global players such as the US, EU, and India (OECD, 2018). The increased Chinese military and economic presence in the region has reshaped existing rivalries and power dynamics, resulting in intensified alliances and evolving military and economic ties among these powers (Randev, 2022). The US, the EU, and India have all faced new challenges because of China's rapid worldwide emergence. Beijing offers a viable alternative to the West and has prepared answers for developing countries (Brattberg & Feigenbaum, 2021). However, Washington and Delhi have concerns about the initiative due to their strategic and geopolitical interests in the region, which they perceive as being directly jeopardised by the project. They view the BRI as detrimental to their strategic interests globally, with a particular focus on the Indo-Pacific

region. In this section, the challenges, and implications of the BRI for these countries are discussed, particularly in terms of strategic interests, geopolitical dynamics, and regional alliances. By examining the concerns raised by the US, EU, and India, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complex power dynamics and competition that have emerged because of China's mega-project.

The US has raised concerns about the lack of transparency and accountability in the funding of BRI projects, as well as the potential for recipient countries to face problems with the sustainability of their debt. The US has also criticised the BRI for potentially destabilising the international system based on regulations, particularly regarding labour and environmental standards. Similarly, the Chinese expansion into the Asian continent has raised significant concerns for the US and its allies. The US assumes a crucial role in the power dynamics of South Asia, particularly in the facilitation of regional power equilibrium among the various states.

Tensions have emerged between the US and China with respect to the South China Sea and other adjacent waterways in the Pacific region. In response to the growing influence of China, the US has engaged in negotiations with various regional powers, including India, Japan, Australia, and South Korea (Action, 2022). Through these negotiations, the US has established the QUAD and other organisations to counterbalance Chinese influence. Many critics contend that the American mission in the IOR goes beyond managing the balance of power and includes containing Chinese dominance and expansionist aspirations through assistance to significant players in the Indo-Pacific region, namely India and Japan (Randev, 2022). For the first time, the US laid out an Indo-Pacific strategy to counter China's growing power and influence in the Indo-Pacific oceans.

Similarly, the BRI is perceived by the US as a strategic manoeuvre by China to diminish American influence in the Asian region. This perception arises from the observation that countries such as Pakistan and several others are increasingly gravitating towards Chinese investments. During the period commonly referred to as the 'War on Terror', Pakistan emerged as a significant ally of the US, wielding considerable influence. Pakistan played a crucial role by granting military and air bases to the US, enabling them to effectively combat terrorism and counter the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan. In contrast to this approach, the US has pursued a strategy of enhancing its relations with India, a country that has historically been considered a rival of Pakistan. This approach aims to establish a regional equilibrium and counteract China's expansionist policies (Hu & Meng, 2020). Consequently, BRI contributed to security and political alliance formation in the region, i.e., US-India and China-Pakistan. Though these alliances were not new, BRI undoubtedly intensified and strengthened the strategic bloc formations in the South Asian region.

The Biden administration has launched a low- and middle-income country infrastructure financing mechanism to compete with China's Belt and Road Initiative, which they have termed "Build Back a Better World" (Widakuswara, 2021). At this stage, given the current geopolitical scenario of the region, particularly at a time when Russia and Ukraine are at war, the US foreign policy for the Eurasian region has dramatically changed. The US is intensifying efforts to strengthen its alliances and partnerships to counterbalance China's influence. In Asia, India and Japan have emerged as key allies for the US as they share concerns about China's assertiveness in the region. In Europe, the US is relying on its historical partnerships with Germany and France to resist China's growing influence and ensure a united front against any potential threats (Widakuswara, 2021).

Chinese involvement in eastern European countries, particularly Georgia, Greece, Hungary, and Romania, has alarmed the EU. The EU has serious concerns over the growing Chinese influence in many central and eastern European countries. Similarly, the EU has expressed concerns over the growing Chinese influence in many central and eastern European countries, such as through the implementation of the 16+1 cooperation mechanism (Hallgreen & Ghiasy, 2017). The EU has been working to counterbalance China's influence by promoting stronger ties with these countries through initiatives like the Three Seas Initiative. Additionally, countries like Poland and Hungary have also expressed concerns over China's economic expansion in the region, particularly through investments in critical infrastructure. By addressing these concerns and working together, the EU aims to maintain its own influence and prevent any undue influence from external powers like China (Hallgreen & Ghiasy, 2017).

One way the EU has sought to address these concerns is by implementing stricter regulations and oversight on foreign investments, particularly in sectors deemed critical to national security. The EU has acknowledged the need to safeguard its own economic interests and make sure that crucial sectors like telecommunications and energy are not subject to external control or potential vulnerabilities. By tightening regulations and scrutinising foreign investments, the EU hopes to safeguard its own infrastructure and maintain control over strategic sectors (Brattberg & Feigenbaum, 2021).

India expresses apprehension regarding the potential establishment of China's military presence in the IOR. China's presence in the IOR is acknowledged; however, India perceives itself as the sole dominant force that is adequately represented in the region (Sharma, 2019). With China's growing geopolitical and economic footprint, India's long-standing dominance in the area is changing. India sees the BRI and Chinese investment in

Pakistan, Iran, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Myanmar as establishing a strategic encirclement that has the potential to significantly impact regional geopolitics (Sharma, 2019). As a result, India has initiated its own initiatives and fostered global partnerships with countries like Japan to jointly establish the Trincomalee Port in northern Sri Lanka as a means of countering the influence of China-backed Hambantota.

Additionally, India has undertaken efforts to enhance the development of Iran's Chabahar port to compete with the Gwadar port as a response to the geopolitical and strategic implications of the BRI (Sharma, 2019). India's rapid industrial development and ambitious energy requirements are like those of China. It is concerned about the energy routes coming from the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean at a time when China is heavily present in the Gwadar region, which is only four hundred kilometres from the Hormuz Strait. India's rapid industrialization and ambitious energy demands bear resemblance to those observed in China. China is currently engaged in the construction of the Gwadar port to mitigate the potential challenges associated with the "Malacca Dilemma." However, it is important to note that China's establishment of a significant presence in Pakistan through this port may eventually give rise to what can be referred to as the "Hormuz Dilemma" for India (Malik, 2016).

Interestingly, India is also a part of the Quad among the US, Japan, and Australia, which by nature is anti-China and aims to contain the rise of China in the Indo-Pacific region (Buchan & Rimland, 2020). The Quad was officially created in 2007, and it has since worked as the opposite of the Chinese presence in the above-mentioned region. India, along with the US and Australia, have signed a series of multilateral naval agreements to strengthen their relationship against a common naval competitor. At the same time, India is also part of Brazil,

Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) organisation, which shows that India is playing on both sides (Dar, 2021).

Thus, the BRI has raised significant concerns and challenges for the US, EU, and India. These countries have expressed worries about the lack of transparency, potential debt sustainability issues, and the strategic implications of China's expanding influence. As a result, they have sought to establish alliances and counterbalance Chinese power in the region. The power dynamics and competition resulting from the BRI have led to the formation of new alliance systems and intensified geopolitical competition. It is crucial to understand the impacts of these developments on the local populations and the broader implications for regional stability and security.

5.3 The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Its Origin and Evolution:

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a significant infrastructure project that aims to connect Gwadar Port in southwestern Pakistan to China's north-western region of Xinjiang through a network of highways, railways, and pipelines. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang first proposed the project during his visit to Pakistan in May 2013 as a part of China's ambitious BRI (Manish, 2019). Since then, CPEC has evolved into a multi-billion-dollar venture that encompasses various sectors, including energy, telecommunications, and agriculture. It has the potential to greatly enhance trade and connectivity between China and Pakistan, as well as with other countries in the region. Moreover, CPEC is expected to create numerous job opportunities, boost economic growth, and improve the overall infrastructure of Pakistan.

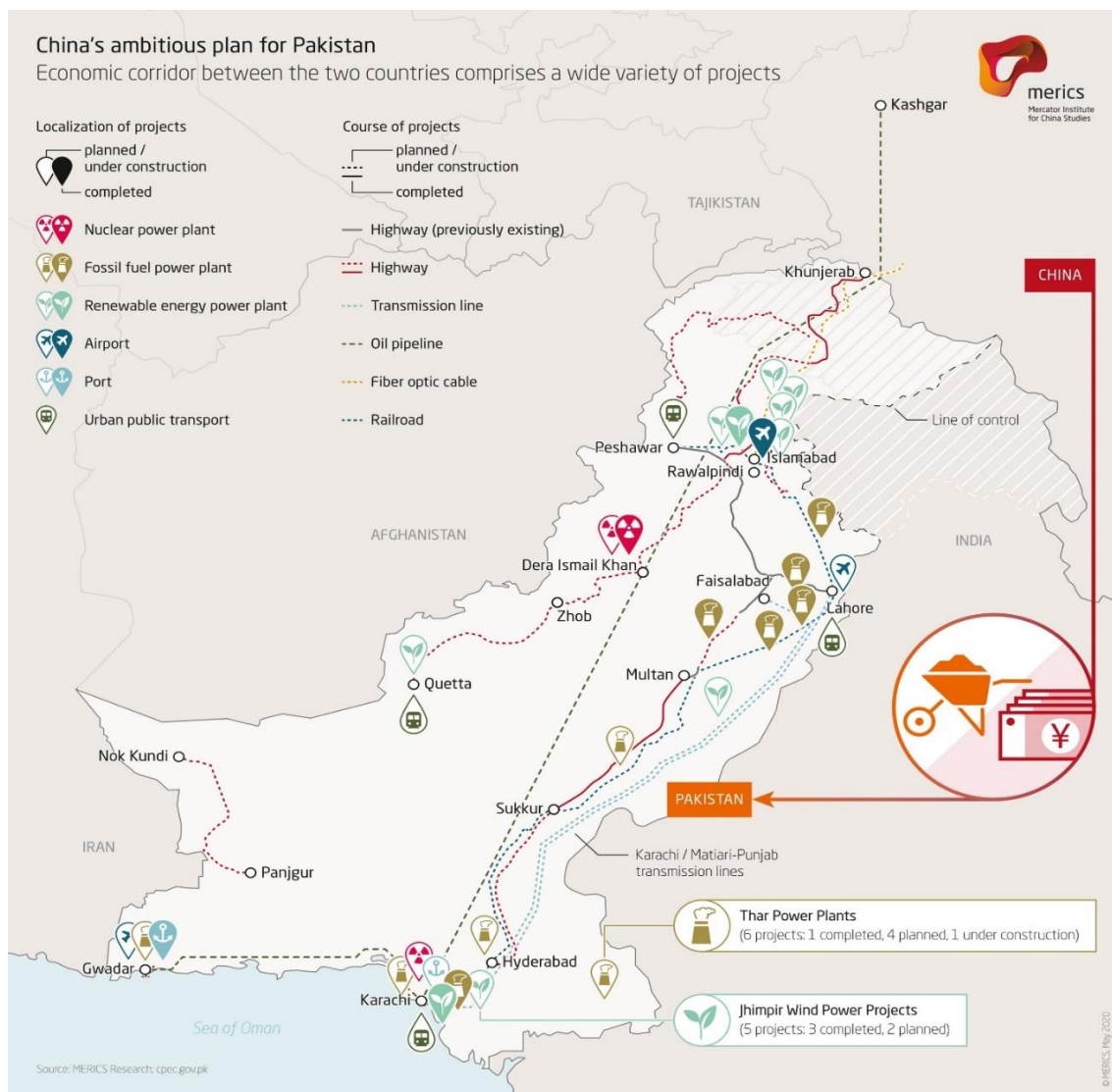
The corridor is expected to not only enhance trade between the two countries but also bring much-needed foreign direct investment (FDI) to Pakistan and China, constituting a

crucial component of the BRI. China and Pakistan established the "1+4 cooperation model," which has the CPEC as its focal point and rests on four important pillars: Gwadar, energy resources, transportation infrastructure, and industrial cooperation (Khan, Changgang, Ahmad & Wenhao, 2018; Shulin, 2015). The primary objective of this model is to enhance trade and investment between the two countries while also facilitating the establishment of special economic zones, industrial parks, and commercial centres (Shulin, 2015). On April 20, 2015, a total of 51 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) were executed in conjunction with the CPEC initiative (Rizvi, 2015; Shulin, 2015). The execution of the projects was strategically organised into three distinct phases: short-term, medium-term, and long-term. The subsequent section will provide a comprehensive analysis of these phases.

The arrival of Chinese finance has been observed to have a positive impact on the economic recovery of Pakistan. The CPEC has played a significant role in strengthening the bilateral relationship between Pakistan and China. Between 2015 and 2018, the CPEC was executed with ease due to the concerted efforts of both nations towards the project's advancement. However, after Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf (PTI) came to power in July 2018, the pace of the CPEC's implementation slowed down (Ali, 2018). During his time in opposition, Imran Khan voiced concerns regarding the CPEC. Following his ascent to power, Imran Khan administration endeavoured to revise some projects under CPEC initiatives that had been previously agreed upon by the preceding government (Report, 2018). This revision led to a temporary delay in the execution of certain projects as the new government aimed to ensure transparency and address any potential issues.

Despite these challenges, both China and Pakistan have reaffirmed their commitment to the successful completion of CPEC and continue to work together towards its advancement.

Imran Khan's position was altered because of external and internal influences, specifically pressure from the Chinese government and the Pakistani military, as well as public concerns regarding the transparency and economic viability of the CPEC projects (Notezai, 2021). The Chinese government and Pakistani military exerted pressure on Imran Khan to address these concerns and make the necessary changes to ensure the success of CPEC (Notezai, 2021). The change in his instance was manifested through his recurrent trips to Beijing after his initial reluctance towards the CPEC.



Map IV: China's Ambition plan for Pakistan: the projects under CPEC. Source: *MERICs: Mercator Institute of China Studies*. URL: <https://merics.org/en/analysis/bri-pakistan-chinas-flagship-economic-corridor>

However, Shahbaz Sharif, the brother of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the man who founded the CPEC project in Pakistan, replaced Imran Khan and has vowed to quicken the project's progress (Sheng & Keyue, 2022). Shahbaz Sharif's commitment to accelerating the CPEC project reflects his deep understanding of its significance for Pakistan's economic growth and development. His previous experience successfully implementing infrastructure projects further strengthens his confidence in his ability to deliver tangible results in a timely manner. The CPEC has encountered a multitude of obstacles, yet the most disconcerting predicament pertains to the recent assault on Chinese educators in Karachi, Pakistan. The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), an outlawed organisation, executed this attack on April 26, 2022 (Ali & Ahmed, 2022). Furthermore, the financial limitations have raised significant concerns regarding the timely completion of the projects. Despite these challenges, the Shahbaz Sharif's government has shown remarkable resilience and determination in ensuring the successful implementation of the CPEC.

In addition to project delays and security issues brought on by the insurgency in Balochistan and militancy in parts of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province, CPEC also had to deal with opposition to the recommended trade routes. The CPEC has been hailed as a game-changer in the region, promising to bring economic prosperity to both countries. It aims to connect Gwadar Port in south-western Pakistan to China's north-western region of Xinjiang through a network of highways and pipelines. Nevertheless, despite its potential advantages, the project has also been the subject of debates and worries, particularly regarding the

corridor's chosen route. Critics argue that the current route of the CPEC disproportionately benefits certain regions of Pakistan, such as Punjab, while neglecting others (Bengali, 2015). They argue that a more inclusive and equitable route would ensure that all provinces and regions of Pakistan benefit from the economic opportunities brought by the project (Bengali, 2015)

The proposed routes initially traversed regions of Balochistan and KPK that have historically been overlooked by the federal government in previous large-scale endeavours. However, when the CPEC projects unfolded, it became evident that the government was trying to change the proposed western route and replace it with the eastern route, which passes through the province of Punjab and the ruling elite classes. This shift in the proposed route has raised concerns among the people of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, who fear that the development and economic benefits of the CPEC projects will not reach their regions. They argue that this decision further reinforces the centralization of power and resources in the hands of the ruling elite in Punjab, exacerbating the existing socio-economic disparities between different provinces. The government's decision to alter the route also undermines its promise of equitable development and raises questions about the transparency and fairness of the decision-making process surrounding the CPEC projects.

5.3.1 CPEC: Pakistan's motivations:

Pakistan's motivations for the CPEC extend beyond economic development. The project aims to strengthen bilateral ties with China and enhance regional connectivity, fostering greater cooperation and stability in the region. Additionally, CPEC is seen as a strategic opportunity for Pakistan to reduce its energy deficit and address infrastructure gaps, ultimately improving the quality of life for its citizens. In a situation when the economy was

failing, and Pakistan's previous allies had abandoned the country, Chinese financing, and investment in the form of the CPEC have been seen as a boon to the country's economy (Younus, 2023; Hussai, 2018). Furthermore, the CPEC has the potential to enhance Pakistan's geopolitical significance by strengthening its ties with China and increasing its influence in the region. This collaboration not only provides economic benefits but also opens avenues for greater diplomatic cooperation and regional stability. Consequently, Pakistan's decision to embrace Chinese investments is driven by both economic and strategic considerations.

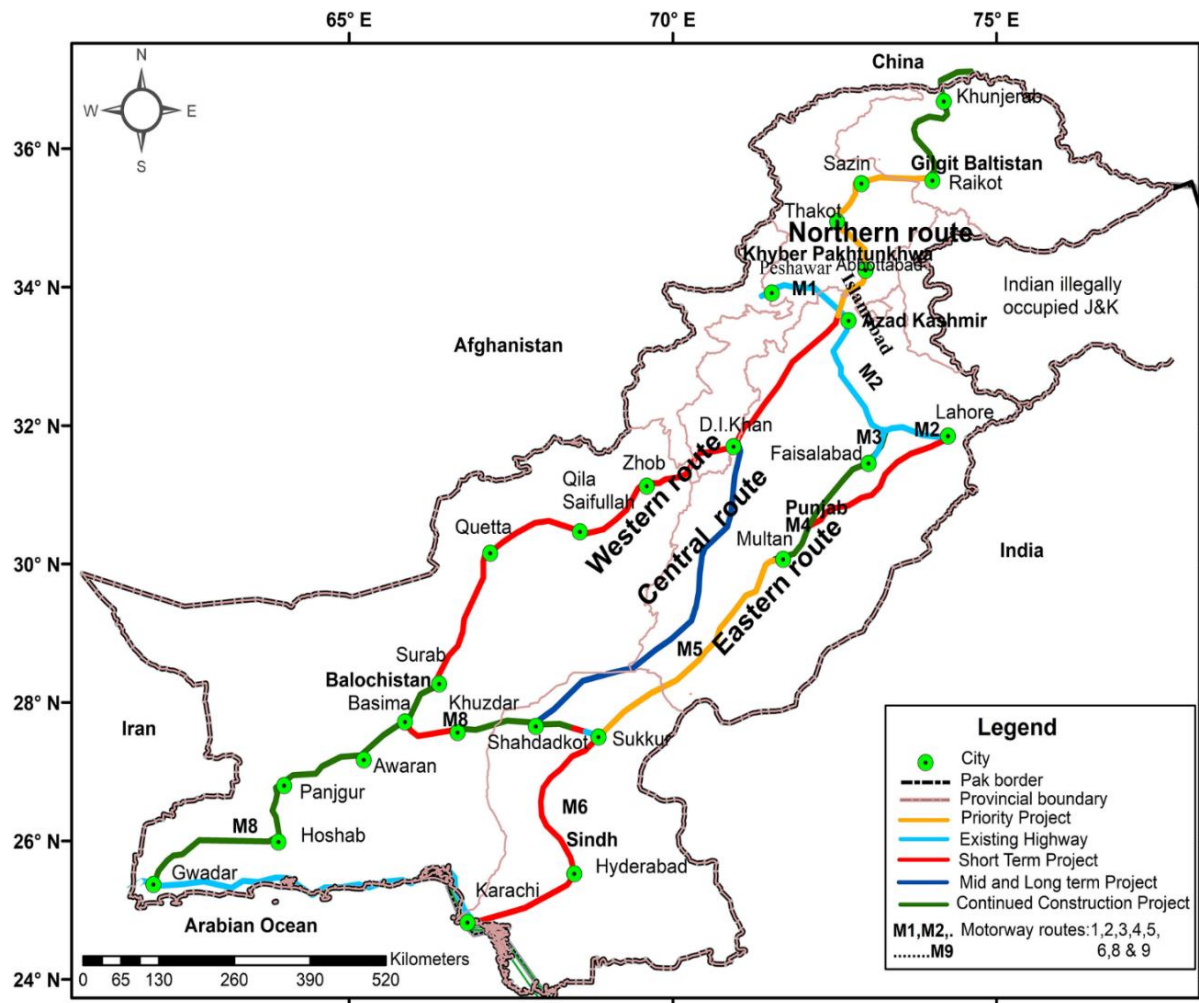
5.3.1.1 Economic motivations:

The primary objective of the CPEC is to enhance the economic growth of Pakistan and generate a substantial number of employment opportunities. This is envisaged through the implementation of four key components of the project. The primary and most extensive constituent of the CPEC is Pakistan's energy sector. This sector has garnered a total investment of \$33 billion, which accounts for approximately 72% of the designated amount (Arif, 2018). The investments have been allocated towards the establishment of hydropower plants, coal power plants, solar power plants, and wind energy power plants (Ali M. , 2020). Insufficient energy production in the industrial sector has been attributed to a shortage of gas and petroleum resources. This has resulted in an inability to meet the energy demands of factories and industries. The industrial and developmental sectors faced a significant disparity between energy demand and supply, which presented further obstacles to the advancement of economic growth. The World Bank has identified that the insufficiency of energy presents a noteworthy obstacle to productivity, particularly for manufacturers who are reliant on electricity as a crucial component in their technical processes and have a high energy consumption rate (Wolf, 2020; Haider, 2018).

Considering the energy scarcity, Pakistan has directed its attention towards enhancing the number of energy initiatives incorporated within the CPEC. The investment in Pakistan's energy sector under the CPEC aims to address the country's chronic energy crisis and improve its power generation capacity. This will not only boost industrial productivity but also improve the living conditions of millions of Pakistanis who currently suffer from frequent power outages. Additionally, the investment in the energy sector is expected to attract further foreign investment and stimulate economic growth in other sectors of Pakistan's economy (Mirza, Fatima, & Ullah, 2019). Moreover, through the CPEC, Pakistan aims to diversify its energy fuel mix and reduce costs in the current situation by relying more on solar, wind, and other sources of renewable energy (Unwin, 2019). The substantial allocation of resources towards energy infrastructure within the CPEC may be regarded as a key motivation for the Pakistan government. The extent to which the numerous energy projects under the CPEC are incorporated into a comprehensive energy policy that effectively caters to Pakistan's demand for dependable energy provision is yet to be determined (Wolf, 2020). Most of the energy projects began in 2015, termed as "Early Harvest" (EH), has been either competed or near competition, which have prompted more than 10,000 megawatts energy in Pakistan's national grid and energy distribution sector.

With a total investment of \$12 billion, infrastructure developments are the second-largest part of CPEC. These infrastructure developments aim to improve connectivity within Pakistan and between Pakistan and China. This includes the construction of roads, railways, ports, and airports, which will not only facilitate trade between the two countries but also boost economic growth and development in Pakistan (Ali, 2020). This entails the creation of the eastern route, the western route, and the central route (shown in map V), which aim to

connect China to the Indian Ocean via the port of Gwadar and enhance inter-provincial connectivity throughout Pakistan since they pass through various Pakistani towns and provinces (Rehman et al., 2023). Vision 2025 is one of Pakistan's seven primary pillars of “modernising transport infrastructure and regional connectivity” (Ali, 2020). Through Vision 2025, Pakistan aims to not only strengthen its ties with China and improve connectivity between the two countries but also promote regional integration and trade. This initiative will facilitate the movement of goods and people, attract foreign investment, and create employment opportunities, ultimately contributing to Pakistan's overall economic growth and development. Additionally, by modernizing its transport infrastructure, Pakistan can enhance its competitiveness in the global market and position itself as a key player in the region. The policy statement of Pakistan’s government states that 10% of the GDP and around 6% of all jobs in Pakistan are related to transportation. The nation's economy nevertheless loses up to 6% of its GDP annually because of ineffective communication and transportation systems (Ali, 2020).



Map V: Map of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) routes project in Pakistan, from its initiation in 2013 to its projected completion in 2030 (source www.cpec.gov.pk). The CPEC routes connect China's western region of Xinjiang to Pakistan's south-western port of Gwadar, passing through various regions and cities of Pakistan.

Another crucial element of the CPEC is the construction of special economic zones (SEZs) and their implementation. These SEZs aim to attract foreign direct investment and promote industrialization in Pakistan. By providing a favourable business environment, these zones can help boost economic growth, create employment opportunities, and facilitate technology transfer. Additionally, the development of SEZs can also lead to increased exports and the diversification of the country's industrial base. There have been nine SEZ proposals

under the CPEC umbrella (Hussain & Rao, 2020). The four SEZs that are now being constructed are Rashakai in KPK, Dhabeji in Sindh, Allama Iqbal Industrial City in Punjab, and Bostan in Balochistan (Authority, 2022). In Pakistan's key financial capitals and strategically significant locations, SEZs will be constructed to support industrial expansion and improve regional connections. These industrial and economic zones would enable Pakistan to quicken the process of high-level industrialization (Pakistan Economic Survey 2020-21). Pakistan also thinks Chinese investment will be attracted to the envisaged industrial parks and SEZs along the CPEC route, increasing industrial output. Pakistan also thinks Chinese investment will be attracted to the envisaged industrial parks and SEZs along the CPEC route, increasing industrial output. According to strategy documents, establishing industrial and economic zones in key potential locations would enable the nation to produce goods that are more competitive on the global market, improve its reputation as an engineering powerhouse, and tip the trade balance in its favour (Khan & Khan, 2019).

In addition to projects in infrastructure, energy, and SEZs, Pakistan also aimed to start projects in other areas to strengthen its economy. For this, feasibility studies in a variety of economic sectors, such as agriculture and dam construction, were conducted. These programmes aimed to transform the CPEC into a meaningful change for Pakistan's economy. By linking Gwadar Port to the Middle East and Central Asia, two regions that are abundant in natural resources, it will enable Pakistan to meet its economic needs. If China and Pakistan continue to place a high priority on CPEC, it might provide Pakistan with long-term economic benefits in addition to the immediate development of energy, infrastructure, and the construction of the Gwadar Port. By 2030, the GDP growth rate of Pakistan is projected to reach 7.5% with the completion of the CPEC projects (Mehmood, Fatima & Ullah, 2019)

The CPEC projects have the potential to create up to two million jobs, according to various estimations projected by the Government of Pakistan. This holds significant relevance for a considerable proportion of the youthful demographic in Pakistan, who are actively seeking employment opportunities and avenues for economic advancement (Bijian, 2022). The creation of employment opportunities resulting from the implementation of various projects, businesses, industrial zones, transportation, and other industries associated with the CPEC is expected to enable the active engagement of Pakistani youth in these activities (Bijian, 2022). Additionally, a deal between China and Pakistan to promote collaboration in the transfer of information and technology has been reached, giving educated Pakistani nationals the chance to start new firms and industrial endeavours (Hussain, & Furqan, 2020). A substantial number of Pakistani students are currently pursuing their higher education in various disciplines at Chinese universities through people-to-people contact programmes and cultural connectivity under the CPEC. China has also opened its doors to Pakistani students, particularly in the fields of engineering and technology (APP, 2021).

5.3.1.1.1 Phases of CPEC:

Following the signing of the CPEC agreement, the project has been segmented into three distinct phases. The projects were classified according to their significance, with short-term projects scheduled to be completed by 2020, medium-term projects to be completed by 2025, and long-term projects (LTP) to be completed by 2030 (Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform, 2017). The subsequent section pertains to the phases of the CPEC, which are further classified into three distinct phases.

In the first phase of the CPEC, there was a prioritisation of short-term projects for the first five years (Syed, 2019). The initiative known as the 'Early Harvest Project' (EHP) has been

implemented with the aim of expediting the growth of Pakistan's economy and resolving the energy crisis plaguing the nation. These projects include the construction of energy infrastructure, such as power plants and transmission lines, as well as the development of transportation networks, such as roads and railways (International, 2020). The focus of these early harvest projects is to quickly improve Pakistan's infrastructure and stimulate economic growth, laying the foundation for long-term sustainable development in the country. The projects were comprised of initiatives pertaining to energy and infrastructure (Khan, 2021). Furthermore, the projects have yielded a noteworthy improvement in energy production, facilitated the development of the county's infrastructure, and generated employment opportunities for a substantial number of individuals and has made a notable contribution of one percent to the GDP of Pakistan. Following are the projects which were placed on the EH OR FAST track projects, as enumerated on the official website of the CPEC-Authority.

Serial No.	Name of the Project	Source of energy	Capacity	Estimated Cost (USD in Million)	Status of the project
1	Sahiwal Coal-fired Power Plant	Imported Coal	1320MW	1912.2	Completed in Oct. 2017
2	Coal-fired Power Plant at Port Qasim Karachi	Imported Coal	1320MW	1912.2	Completed in April 2018

3	China Hub Coal Power Project, Hub Balochistan	Imported Coal	1320MW	1912.2	Completed in Aug. 2019
4	Engro Thar Coal Power Project	Domestic Coal	660MW	995.4	Completed in July. 2019
5	Quaid-e-Azam Solar Park (Bahawalpur)	Solar Panels	1000MW	1302.0	Completed in Aug. 2016
6	Hydro China Dawood Wind Farm, Ghara, Thatta	Wind Turbines	50MW	112.65	Completed in April. 2017
7	UEP Wind Farm, Jhimpir, Thatta	Wind Turbines	100MW	250.0	Completed in Jun. 2018
8	Sachal Wind Farm, Jhimpir, Thatta	Wind Turbines	50MW	134.0	Completed in Apr. 2017
9	Three Gorges Second and Third Wind Power Project	Wind Turbines	100MW	150.0	Completed in Jul. 2018
10	Matiari to Lahore ±660 KV HVDC	Transmission Line	4000 MW + 660KV	1658.0	Completed in Spt. 2021

	Transmission Line Project		Transmission Line		
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Table 1. List of CPEC Projects placed in 'Fast Track or Early Harvest'. Source: Data gathered from the official website of CPEC. URL: <http://cpec.gov.pk/energy> (Date Accessed: 28-04-2022).

Similarly, under the fast-track projects, five infrastructural projects have also been completed which advanced the weak infrastructures of the country. These projects were.

Serial No.	Name of the Project	Length in KM	Estimated Cost (USD in Million)	Status of the project
1	KKH Phase II (Havelian - Thakot Section)	120	1315	Completed in July 2020
2	Peshawar-Karachi Motorway (Multan-Sukkur Section)	392	2889	Completed in Nov 2019
3	Orange Line Metro Train – Lahore	27	1626	Completed in Oct. 2020
4	Cross Border Optical Fibber Cable	820	44	Completed in July 2018

5	Hakla - D.I Khan Motorway	298	122.18	Completed in Jan 2022
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Table 2. List of completed CPEC projects. Source: Data gathered from the official website of CPEC. URL: <http://cpec.gov.pk/infrastructure> (Date Accessed: 28-04-2022).

The second phase of the CPEC projects, known as CPEC 2.0 or medium-term projects, has garnered significant attention following the completion of the first phase to be completed by 2025. CPEC 2.0 aims to further enhance the energy infrastructure and expand into other sectors such as agriculture, industrial cooperation, and tourism (Subohi, 2020). With the successful completion of the first phase, CPEC 2.0 is expected to attract even more international investments and foster stronger bilateral relations. The expansion into other sectors do not only create job opportunities but also promote economic growth and diversification. This phase encompasses megaprojects in various sectors, with a particular emphasis on industrial cooperation, agriculture, education, science and technology, oil and gas refineries, tourism, and socio-economic livelihood projects (Khalid, 2021).

The third phase of the CPEC focuses on the long-term and master plan of the project. This phase aims to ensure the sustainability and success of CPEC by integrating various sectors and projects into a comprehensive framework which is projected to culminate by the year 2030. It involves strategic planning, coordination, and implementation of infrastructure development, energy projects, industrial cooperation, and socioeconomic initiatives. Additionally, this phase emphasizes collaboration between China and Pakistan to address any challenges or obstacles that may arise during the implementation process. The third phase of the CPEC is also geared towards strengthening and the promotion of industrial capacity cooperation across various sectors, including chemical and pharmaceuticals, engineering

goods, agriculture, iron and steel, light manufacturing, home appliances, and construction materials. (Development and Reform, 2017).

The long-term projects of CPEC also aim at development in the agricultural, poverty alleviation, and tourism sectors in Pakistan. The agricultural cooperation under the CPEC encompasses a range of activities, such as providing training to agricultural workers, facilitating technical exchange and cooperation between both countries, undertaking biological breeding, processing, storage, and transportation of agricultural products, implementing measures for disease prevention and control, promoting the efficient use and conservation of water resources, and facilitating land development to promote the systematic, large-scale, standardised, and intensified building of infrastructure. This collaboration aims to augment the establishment of contemporary agricultural zones that promote water conservation as well as improve the development and reclamation of land that has medium to low yields, thereby ensuring optimal resource utilisation.

Tourism is linked to the enhanced development of infrastructure in Pakistan. The development of infrastructure would have a favourable impact on Pakistan's tourism sector (Siddique, 2021). The development of the coastal tourism industry has been prioritised in the CPEC Master Plan 2017 (Husain, 2017). The coastal leisure sector encompasses a diverse range of amenities, including yacht wharfs, cruise homeports, nightlife venues, city parks, public squares, theatres, golf courses, spas, hot spring hotels, and water sports facilities. This sector is set to span from Ketī Bander to Jiwani, which represents the last settlement prior to the Iranian border (Husain, 2017). Furthermore, certain regions of Pakistan, including Swat, Kalam, and the northern areas, possess abundant natural landscapes that have the potential

to entice global tourists. Pakistan has a favourable climate and natural beauty for the promotion of tourism; however, that is linked with the law-and-order situation.

5.3.1.2 CPEC and the Gwadar Port:

The Gwadar Port, located on the shores of the Indian Ocean, has emerged as the centrepiece of the CPEC and the BRI. The CPEC constitutes a crucial component of the "string of pearls" strategy, with the primary objective of establishing a connection between Pakistan's Gwadar port and China's north-western region of Xinjiang. Due to its location as the closest point to the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf, Gwadar possesses significant strategic value for China.

The development of the Gwadar Port forms an integral component of China's comprehensive strategy aimed at safeguarding its maritime trade routes while establishing alternative land-based corridors to the Middle East, Europe, and Africa (Kardon, 2020; Rahman, Ishaq & Naeem, 2023). The location of Gwadar within the Mekran division of Balochistan, Pakistan, further amplifies its significance as it grants China direct entry to the resource-rich areas of Central Asia and the Middle East. Consequently, the development of the Gwadar port, along with its integration with China through CPEC, assumes paramount importance in China's long-term strategic blueprint, enabling the expansion of its economic, political, and military influence within the region (Jetly, 2021; Gholizadeh, Madani & Saneinia, 2020). It enjoys a very significant geostrategic position near very important maritime routes from Africa, Europe via the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf to east Asia, choke points in the Middle East, and the opening of the Pacific Ocean (Gholizadeh, Madani & Saneinia, 2020).

Gwadar, a small fishing village located on the shores of the Arabian Sea, has a long and complex history of geopolitical upheaval. The village was under the control of the Omani leader for over two centuries starting from 18th century, when a war within the Busaidi family led the ruler, Ahmad bin Said al-Busaidi, to seek refuge in Balochistan (Jamali, 2014; Ahmad, 2016). Due to his good relationship with the overthrown Sultan, Khan of Kalat, as ruler of Balochistan, bestowed Gwadar city on the Sultan. The Sultan used Gwadar as a base of operations and gathered much of his army from Mekran's Turbat, Panjgur, and Gwadar, along with some parts of Iran such as Bandar Abbas and surrounding territories. When Oman's Sultan reclaimed power, he refused to return Gwadar to the Khan of Kalat and increased his areas of influence in the surrounding areas (Jamali, 2014).

Different countries have ruled Gwadar over the centuries, including the British, who used the port as a transit hub for their goods, and Pakistan, which took over Gwadar in 1958. Gwadar was not in the national and international media until China showed interest in the construction and operation of a deep-sea port at Gwadar in 2001. Despite being under Pakistani control, Gwadar remained underdeveloped until the announcement of the CPEC, which has brought renewed attention to the strategic location of Gwadar as a crucial part of China's BRI. China has contributed more than 80% (estimated at 248 million USD) of the initial development costs for the port (Shira, 2013; Pakistan, 2018). When the first phase of the construction of the Gwadar port was completed in 2007, the port was supposed to be handed over to Chinese firms for its operational rights. However, after the attacks on Chinese nationals that killed four engineers in Gwadar in 2004 and other parts of Balochistan, China was reluctant to take the risk of operating the port. Therefore, the port was handed over to the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA) for 40 years of lease for its operationalization in 2007

(Adeney & Boni, 2021). PSA controlled the operational rights of the port for more than six years, but due to two major reasons, the Port of Singapore could not manage the operationalization of the port and withdrew from the operational rights of the port in 2013 (AFP, 2013). Later, in the same year, the port was handed over to the Chinese Overseas Ports and Holding Company of China (COPHC) for a 40-year operational right lease of Gwadar on a concession agreement with the government of Pakistan (Rakisits, 2015).

The development of Gwadar Port has been a significant focus for China, as it is regarded as the most crucial project of the CPEC. China sees Gwadar Port as a strategic location that will provide them with a direct trade route to the Arabian Sea and the Middle East, bypassing the Strait of Malacca. This will greatly reduce China's dependence on the longer and more vulnerable route through the Strait. The development of Gwadar Port is expected to bring economic benefits to both China and Pakistan, with the potential to transform Gwadar into a major economic hub and create job opportunities for the local population. The anticipated outcomes of this initiative include the attraction of investments, the enhancement of trade flows, and the establishment of a regional hub for commercial transportation. These outcomes have the potential to stimulate the geopolitical environment in the region. The strategic location of the Gwadar seaport at the intersection of three economically significant regions, namely west Asia, central Asia, and south Asia, presents a promising opportunity for Pakistan to generate substantial revenue through transit levies, provided that the port is effectively operationalized. As per the official statements from Islamabad, the beginning of regional and global commerce via the Gwadar port facilitates the transmission of substantial power resources from Central Asia to the burgeoning markets of the world.

5.3.1.3 Unveiling the Veil: Transparency Concerns Surrounding CPEC and the Gwadar Port

Agreement:

The CPEC and its flagship project, the Gwadar Port, have attracted significant attention and investment due to their potential to reshape regional trade dynamics. However, the lack of transparency surrounding these initiatives has raised concerns among stakeholders and observers about the true intentions and long-term implications of the agreements. The absence of clear information regarding the terms, conditions, and financial aspects of the projects has fuelled suspicions about hidden agendas and unequal benefits for participating countries. Additionally, the limited involvement of local communities and their exclusion from decision-making processes have further exacerbated transparency concerns surrounding CPEC and the Gwadar Port Agreement.

The smaller provinces in terms of population were very sceptical regarding the CPEC deal, but the people of Balochistan, particularly the people of Gwadar, were very curious regarding the agreements of the Gwadar Port (Baloch, 2016). They were hopeful that the development projects under CPEC would bring economic opportunities and improve their standard of living. However, as the implementation progressed, concerns arose about the lack of transparency and local participation in decision-making, raising doubts about whether the benefits would truly reach the local communities (Baloch, 2016). Questions have been raised about the terms of the agreement between China and Pakistan, including the lease duration, revenue-sharing arrangements, and the extent of Chinese control over the port and its operations. In April 2015, Dr. Malik Baloch, the Chief Minister of Balochistan at the time, revealed that he was not informed when the Gwadar Port Agreement with China was signed (Shah, 2015). This lack of transparency surrounding the Gwadar agreement further fuelled

speculation that the CPEC was a clandestine geopolitical endeavour between Pakistan and China, giving China unrestricted access to use the Gwadar port for its own purposes. In 2016, when the Chairman of the Senate of Pakistan requested the federal Minister of Planning and Development to present the CPEC agreement in the house to dispel rumours and misinformation, the minister deemed the CPEC deal sensitive and not suitable for making it public (Khan, 2016). So far, the CPEC deals and agreements are proposals, and only some of the energy and infrastructure projects have been shared with the public. According to one former officer of the Gwadar Port Authority,

“So far, most things in CPEC are only on paper; no one exactly knows what China’s long-term plans for CPEC are; therefore, saying something or predicting something from that paperwork would not disclose a lot, but what are the hypes and media revelations? They do not show the real intention of China and its government. The true nature of China’s intentions with CPEC can only be understood through careful observation of their actions and the outcomes of their investments. While the media may speculate and create sensational stories, it is essential to analyse the actual projects and their impact on the ground to gain a clearer understanding of China’s long-term objectives. Only time will tell whether CPEC will be a mutually beneficial partnership or if there are hidden motives behind China’s involvement.”⁹

Despite the lack of clarity surrounding the specifics of the plan, such as the terms of investments and loans, the scale of projects, and the conditions for the Gwadar Port and

⁹ Interview B 5 (26/01/ 2022)

Gwadar Free Zone, both the Chinese and Pakistani governments have made concerted efforts to shape and influence the discourse surrounding the CPEC (Afzal, 2020). However, the Gwadar Port deal is seen as opaque due to security concerns and the involvement of geopolitical, strategic, and military motivations.

In 2017, a master plan of CPEC was released by the federal minister for planning and development, where different Chinese intentions and plans were disclosed to the public for the first time since its start in 2015 (Husain, 2017). However, that too did not completely disclose the overall CPEC agreement, particularly the terms and conditions of the Gwadar port operationalization and Chinese long-term objectives. It was only disclosed that Gwadar port is being leased out to China for a period of 40 years with tax exemption, where 91% of the revenue from the port and 85% of the revenue from Gwadar free zone directly go to the “China Overseas Port Holding Company” (Report, 2017).

The lack of transparency in the CPEC and Gwadar Port deal creates a sense of unease among the local population and raises questions about the intentions and benefits of the project. The allocation of such a large amount of land to China further intensifies these concerns, as it leaves the local inhabitants uncertain about their future and the potential consequences for their livelihood. The limited access to information fuels speculation and rumours, making it difficult for the local population to fully understand the long-term implications of the CPEC and Gwadar Port deal. This lack of clarity undermines trust and increases scepticism towards the project, highlighting the need for greater transparency and communication from the authorities involved.

5.3.1.4 Geopolitical, Strategic and Security Motivations of CPEC for Pakistan:

Pakistan's strategic location renders it a consequential actor in the geopolitical landscape of South Asia and beyond. The extensive coastline of Pakistan along the Indian Ocean has amplified the importance of the CPEC across a broader spectrum. The IOR represents a pivotal and consequential body of ocean that interlinks three continents and twenty-eight nations. The IOR's warm waters are conducive to year-round commercial activities (Baruah, 2021). The geopolitical landscape of the IOR experienced a notable transformation after the conclusion of the Cold War (Foster, 2006). This transformation led to an increased focus on maritime security and the emergence of regional cooperation initiatives such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). This transformation brought about an increased focus on economic and trade partnerships, with countries recognizing the potential of the IOR as a major trade route.

The development of the BRI and the CPEC has further enhanced the region's significance, as it provides Pakistan with a direct link to the IOR and enables it to play a crucial role in regional trade and connectivity. The CPEC has not only strengthened Pakistan's ties with China but has also resulted in a heightened geopolitical interest in the region from other major global powers such as the United States, Russia, and India. The strategic location of the IOR, coupled with the economic opportunities presented by the CPEC, has sparked a race for influence and control in the region. As a result, the IOR has become a key arena for geopolitical competition, with countries vying for economic dominance and military presence to safeguard their interests in this critical trade route.

In the present scenario, India holds the dominant position in terms of economic and military power in the region as compared to Pakistan. India has a considerably more powerful and advanced naval force with sophisticated weapon systems provided by Russia, which can

outperform Pakistan (Lalwani, et.al., 2021). Pakistan's economy was not able to spend more money on its military, as the US has already indicated that it is withholding vital military support from Pakistan. Against such a backdrop, Islamabad moved ahead with the CPEC, which could be useful not only for its military but also for its economy. Pakistan therefore anticipated that embracing China would alter the regional balance of power in Islamabad's favour. Hence, Pakistan's geopolitical motivations can be observed in pursuing the CPEC.

CPEC has become one of the most important projects for Pakistan to boost its security and economic stability. By partnering with China, Pakistan hopes to strengthen its position in the region and counterbalance the influence of its traditional rival, India. The most important security and strategic hurdles for Pakistan are from its neighbouring country, India, and the security considerations towards Afghanistan and Iran (Lalwani & Haegeland, 2018). Particularly, India has been wary of the growing influence of China in the region and sees the CPEC as a potential threat to its own security interests. Additionally, Pakistan's concerns towards Afghanistan and Iran stem from the volatile security situation in these countries, which could have spill over effects on Pakistan's stability and territorial integrity. However, Pakistan's relationships with Iran and Afghanistan were always circumstantial. During the American invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan provided security bases to the US forces and allowed the US air force to use its airbases against the Taliban. In reaction to this, the Taliban conducted many suicide attacks in many cities in Pakistan (Mir, 2022). Similarly, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) also conducted hundreds of attacks on Pakistan, particularly in the KPK and Balochistan provinces (Mir, 2022). Pakistan alleges that Afghan soil is being used for these attacks and repeatedly protested to the Afghan Taliban government. These attacks highlighted the volatile nature of Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan, as the Taliban and TTP were able to freely operate and launch attacks from across the border.

The diplomatic ties between Pakistan and Iran have exhibited a degree of inconsistency and uncertainty (Kfir, 2011). Interpersonal dynamics among both countries exhibited a degree of variability, with instances of peace being placed alongside instances of mutual criticism regarding the provision of support to respective proxies in opposition to one another. The significance of Pakistan's robust and intimate ties with Saudi Arabia cannot be overstated, particularly considering Iran's reservations regarding this alliance (Kfir, 2011). Extremist factions launched a series of attacks after 2010 in various Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan regions with the intention of hitting the Shia minority (Rafiq, 2014; Asia Report, 2022). Iran has attributed responsibility for the attacks to the government of Pakistan, while also positing the potential involvement of Saudi Arabia in said attacks. Iran has attributed responsibility to Pakistan for providing support to the Sunni Baloch groups in opposition to the Iranian state as well as perpetrating assaults against security personnel. Pakistan has linked the support of Baloch insurgent groups within Iranian territory to Iran (Rehman, 2014). In this connection, the arrest of an Indian Raw agent in 2016 near the Pakistan-Iran border has further exacerbated the situation (Karim, 2022). The bilateral relations between Pakistan and Iran have not witnessed a direct military confrontation akin to that of India. However, it is noteworthy that the level of cordiality and strength in the relationship between the two nations is not on par with that of China. Considering the aforementioned factors and circumstances, as well as to fortify its territorial boundaries, Pakistan has significantly allocated resources towards bolstering its military capabilities to effectively address the prevailing situation. The execution of the CPEC accord presents an opportunity to address security concerns emanating from the region through robust security measures.

China and Pakistan have entered a robust military and strategic alliance with the aim of mitigating potential obstacles to the successful execution of the CPEC in Pakistan.

Consequently, the CPEC initiative incorporates several military and defence accords that have the potential to augment Pakistan's military and naval capabilities (Rajagopalan, 2021). China is rapidly becoming the largest conventional arms supplier to Pakistan, outpacing the USA (Malik & Ishtiaq, 2018). China and Pakistan signed a deal to support and finance the military. Thus, the Pakistani Air Force and Chinese officials were putting the final touches on a proposal to boost Pakistan's production of Chinese military jets, missiles, and other hardware after the Trump administration froze military aid to the country (Abi-Habib, 2018). The initiative further strengthened the China-Pakistan relationship, and space collaboration and sea-based security were later included in the agreement. From rifles to aircraft, and from tanks to warships, all kinds of conventional small and big arms are being supplied to Pakistan. Between 2017 and 2021, Beijing met 72% of Islamabad's demand for large armaments, while Pakistan received 47% of all Chinese big arms exports during that time (Patranobis, 2022). The continuous supply of the JF-17 combat aircraft is one of the top arms transactions between the two nations, with deliveries of the significantly enhanced Block-3 variant beginning in 2021 and being shown off on Pakistan Day on March 23, 2022 (Patranobis, 2022). Moreover, both nations have agreed on a joint venture to produce many parts of conventional and non-conventional arms in Pakistan. Currently, many jets and other military hardware are being assembled in Pakistan with the support of Chinese engineers.

Furthermore, CPEC also helped Pakistan strengthen its naval power and enhance its naval capabilities in the blue waters (Gill, 2019). The naval power of Pakistan has historically paled in comparison to that of India. During the war that took place in 1971, the Indian naval forces executed a military operation targeting the port of Karachi and imposed a maritime blockade (Gill, 2019). The acquisition of eight submarines by Pakistan from China through the CPEC has bolstered the country's naval capabilities, enabling it to potential competition with

the more advanced Indian naval force (Kardon, 2020). The Pakistan naval forces, having undergone notable expansion and modernization in recent years, have been furnished with fresh military equipment from both China and Turkey (Times, 2021). A naval task force called Task Force-88 (TF-88) was constituted in this context to ensure the seaward security of Gwadar Port and the protection of associated SLOCs from both traditional and non-traditional threats (Observer, 2021). It consists of four hundred marines who specialise in the protection of marine assets and projects on land and at sea against subterranean, surface, and airborne threats. China and Pakistan, along with Turkey, also conducted naval exercises for the second advanced warship in Shanghai (Ians, 2021). The main purpose of this naval exercise of warships was to prepare the Pakistan Navy for future warfare and make it aware of the dangers of the sea. The warship induction would ultimately enhance the capability of maritime defence and deterrence in the future (Ians, 2021).

Similarly, Gwadar Port has been the centre of Chinese attention for a long time, even before the signing of CPEC. Pakistan claims that Gwadar port can become an international port city and future hub of economic activity and attract the investment of different states (Khan, 2018; Khetrar, 2014). Pakistan can significantly benefit from the construction and development of the Gwadar port in both security and economic terms. According to many media sources, China has allegedly started building a naval base in Gwadar to protect its PLAN and SLOCs (Nigam, 2022; Sutton, 2020; Report, 2020). The bolstering of naval capabilities in Gwadar, conversely, affords Pakistan the opportunity to assume a more prominent position in the various pivotal chokepoints that are of paramount importance to both commercial and strategic concerns in the surrounding areas.

Due to increasing geopolitical competition in the Arabian Sea, Pakistan can link Gwadar with four vital regions: South Asia, the Middle East (ME), Central Asia, and Iran (Khetran, 2014). Islamabad has repeatedly requested the Gulf countries, i.e., Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, and Iran, to invest in Gwadar. Saudi Arabia has agreed to set up a \$10 billion oil refinery in Gwadar and help Pakistan with its fiscal crisis (Yousafzai, 2019). Similarly, Iran also agrees to join the CPEC and invest in Gwadar, as China has already signed a multi-million-dollar agreement with Iran (Shahzad, 2018; CPEC, 2021). The participation of Iran and other Gulf countries in the CPEC and the Gwadar Port would provide Pakistan with an additional layer of geopolitical and strategic depth in the Indian Ocean.

Thus, beside the economic and geopolitical significance of CPEC for Pakistan, it also brought with it a range of strategic and security measures for Pakistan. The regional balance of power has been changing since the US has withdrawn its forces from Afghanistan, which has resulted in a power vacuum. China is thriving to fill the vacuum and is playing its dominant role in the South Asia and Asia-Pacific region, where Pakistan can become a significant player with the support of China. If CPEC performs according to the intentions and plans of China and Pakistan, it can abruptly and radically change the regional balance of power. More rigorous and brutal policies would be applied to increase their areas of influence in the current geopolitical settings, which ultimately impact the indigenous population of the region. However, the most alarming effect of the geopolitical and strategic competition is on the local population of the Balochistan region, where the insurgency and brutal policies of Islamabad have already deteriorated their lives. Such an abrupt change in the current geopolitical competition further worsens the human rights situation in the region.

5.3.2 CPEC: China's Motivations:

5.3.2.1 Economic Motivation :

The CPEC exerts considerable influence over various dimensions of the Chinese state and society, encompassing both domestic and foreign policy objectives as well as regional geopolitics. It not only aims to enhance economic cooperation between China and Pakistan but also serves as a strategic move to expand China's influence in the region (Wolf, 2020). The Chinese motivation behind the CPEC extends beyond mere economic benefits and the development of its western province of Xinjiang. Rather, there exist additional dimensions of Chinese motivations, involving geopolitical, strategic, military, and energy and resource security considerations (Wolf, 2020).

The primary objective of the CPEC is to establish connectivity between China's western region and the Indian Ocean, Middle East, and Africa. China's main source of energy is derived from the import of oil from the Persian Gulf, with its energy supply routes traversing through the Malacca Straits. This transportation route poses significant risks and is also a lengthy process to reach mainland China (Ali, 2020). China has recognised the susceptibility of vessels traversing the Malacca Strait and has identified Gwadar as a viable alternative, thereby mitigating the "Malacca conundrum" to a significant extent (Ali, 2020). Furthermore, the pathway that incorporates the use of Gwadar Port and the Karakoram Highway is comparatively more cost-effective. Through the CPEC, considerable time savings can be achieved by China in comparison to using the Malacca Strait. The Gwadar Port and the CPEC effectively reduce the geographical span by approximately six thousand miles (Rakisits, 2015).

Gwadar, as the jewel in the crown of the CPEC, functions as a transportation hub

connecting China to the Arabian Sea and beyond. With its strategic location, Gwadar offers a shorter and more efficient route for Chinese goods to reach international markets (Ali, 2020). Additionally, the development of Gwadar Port has attracted significant investments, making it a key driver of economic growth in the region. Pakistan has allocated a total of 2280 acres to facilitate the development of the Gwadar Port Free Zone, 3000 acres for the GIEDA Industrial Zone, and an additional 1000 acres for the EFZA export processing zone (Husain, 2020). China is establishing residential structures for its workforce and restoring the livelihood of approximately 500,000 Chinese experts in Gwadar (Shah, 2017).

Furthermore, China aims to address the historical neglect and underdevelopment of its western region through the implementation of the CPEC. The surge in radicalization and terrorist activities among the minority Muslim Uighurs in the region can be attributed to their marginalisation and deprivation. This route is significant as it serves Xinjiang, which is considered China's most backward and terrorism-plagued province. The Muslim Uighurs and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) are engaged in a struggle for the region's independence (Cho & Turner, 2020). Xinjiang is a province that is geographically isolated from the coastal regions of China, rendering the eastern Chinese ports inaccessible for trade purposes due to their considerable distance. The strategic significance of the Gwadar Port lies in its potential to facilitate the progress of China's relatively underdeveloped western region (Alam, et al., 2023). The CPEC is expected to enhance the security of China's volatile Xinjiang province, as the Chinese government has urged Pakistan to implement stringent and forceful actions against extremist factions and militant organisations, including the Uighurs and the ETIM (Sehgal, 2016; Javaid, 2016).

In addition to the development of its western region, China also provides a diverse

range of resources to Pakistan and subsequently benefits economically from the establishment of SEZs in Pakistan as part of the CPEC initiative. With a population of nearly 220 million individuals, Pakistan represents a substantial market for Chinese merchandise. In accordance with the March 2017 agreement, exclusive authorization was granted to Chinese enterprises to establish industries within the SEZs, and the employment of Chinese workers and engineers was stipulated (Husain, 2017). Furthermore, the employment of Chinese workers and engineers can help improve the efficiency and productivity of industries within the SEZs, leading to potential economic growth for both countries.

Moreover, the CPEC and the development of the Gwadar Port have facilitated China's establishment of additional ports and improved seaborne trade in the states located along the IOR. This has the potential to enhance the security of China's SLOC and maritime trade. China has acquired ownership of the Gwadar Port, situated in the IOR, thereby expanding its commercial presence in the Middle East and Africa. Additionally, China is augmenting its economic and naval sway in the region. Furthermore, the increasing involvement of China in Africa and other regions has facilitated its expansion in Latin America, which aligns with China's strategic initiative of the 21st-century maritime silk route.

In short, the Chinese economic motivation behind the initiation of the CPEC and the Gwadar Port projects is rooted in its long-term strategic interests. By establishing a direct land-based route through Pakistan to the Arabian Sea via Gwadar Port, China aims to secure its energy supplies, expand its trade networks, and diversify its trade routes. The development of Gwadar Port provides China with an alternative to the Strait of Malacca, a critical chokepoint that currently manages a sizeable portion of China's energy imports. By investing in infrastructure developments, industrial zones, and connectivity projects, China seeks to

strengthen economic cooperation with Pakistan and create a corridor that can facilitate bilateral trade and regional connectivity.

5.3.2.2 Geopolitical and strategic motives of CPEC for China:

The geopolitical and strategic motivations behind China's engagement in CPEC and the Gwadar Port projects reflect its aspirations for regional influence and economic dominance. In the following section, the geopolitical significance of CPEC for China is discussed in detail.

As per Schwemlein's (2019) analysis, there exist three prominent narratives that help in understanding China's strategic and geopolitical aspirations in the region with respect to the CPEC. First, Chinese foreign policy continues to uphold the 'Model Friendship' framework, which aims to portray Pakistan as an exemplary friend based on their amicable and fraternal relationship (Schwemlein, 2019). China aims to present Pakistan as an exemplary ally owing to their longstanding and amicable association. China aims to showcase Pakistan as a novel paradigm of inter-state relations to the global community, highlighting its unwavering dedication to supporting its allies in their economic and infrastructural progress. Recognizing the strategic and geopolitical significance of Pakistan's geographical position, the strong bond between China and Pakistan effectively supports China's ambitious development objectives. Schwemlein (2019) asserts that the CPEC functions to prompt a transformation in Pakistan's behaviour, aligning it with China's goal of elevating the country from a vulnerable and weak state to a modern and moderate Muslim nation. This transformation aims to position Pakistan as a capable and deserving partner, rather than a potential obstacle, in China's broader strategic endeavours (Schwemlein, 2019). This strategy entails dual objectives for China, namely, to help Pakistan, a nation that is vulnerable and unstable, and to showcase this metamorphosis as an emblem of China's commitment to its global allies.

Secondly, the most common narrative about China is the “Exporting of the Chinese developmental model” (Schwemlein, 2019; Ferchen, 2020). This model, which emphasises state-led development, infrastructure investment, and strategic partnerships, has attracted the attention of many developing countries seeking to emulate China's economic success. It underscores China's aspiration to showcase the applicability of its development model beyond its borders and its superior efficacy compared to alternative models, specifically the Western development model. This proposition represents a level beyond friendly ties and signifies the Chinese government's enhanced assurance in the potency and appeal of its economic structure. Recognising Pakistan's vulnerability to instability and extremist activities, as well as potential security risks from neighbouring countries, notably India, China aims to establish the CPEC as a paradigmatic model wherein China can safeguard its partner from external menaces. The concept that China's trade, investment, and loan prospects are mutually advantageous for both China and its developing-country counterparts is actively advocated by Beijing (Ferchen, 2020). China holds the belief that the foundation of its social and geopolitical stability relies upon its economic expansion. The model exhibits the successful applicability of the Chinese developmental model in any context, including those that are fragile and insecure. The efficacy of the model is contingent upon the triumph of the CPEC, a formidable undertaking for Chinese financiers and banking institutions (Schwemlein, 2019).

Thirdly, the model and potential rationale for the CPEC, along with the broader BRI, can be attributed to Beijing's strategic intent of utilising Pakistan to engage in strategic competition with the US and India (Schwemlein, 2019). China's increasing economic and military involvement in numerous Asian states, coupled with its implementation of the BRI

and CPEC indicate that these megaprojects serve as strategic tools for China to engage in regional competition. The establishment of financial institutions, namely the EXIM Bank, Silk Road Fund, and AIIB, has been seen in this regard to finance more and more money to be able to influence the regional geopolitical settings (Schwemlein, 2019). This scenario leads to a stalemate between the Indian and Chinese naval forces in the IOR during uncertain and unforeseen events. The presence of People's Liberation Army (PLA) and People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) forces in the Indian Ocean has raised concerns about India's naval dominance in the region. The strategic location of Gwadar port allows China to extend its influence and maintain a strong presence in the IOR, thereby challenging India's traditional dominance (White, 2020). As a result, any unforeseen events or conflicts in the region could potentially lead to a military stalemate between the two countries, further escalating tensions in the already complex geopolitical landscape of the Indian Ocean.

In addition to the Schwemlein's model, another strategic and geopolitical reason China wants to include Pakistan in its economic and strategic sphere of influence is energy security. As previously noted, China has heavily relied on the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea to meet its increasing energy demands. These bodies of water intersect at the Strait of Malacca, a region where India and the United States hold significant power (Umbach, 2019). The fact that China's economy is built on oil has made it evident that oil may be used against it as a weapon to limit its growth. As a result, China prefers not to rely on uncontrolled foreign markets for its energy supply, and controlling critical oil supply routes has become a top priority for the Chinese government. Therefore, the CPEC and the Gwadar port provide China with an alternative route for the shipment and stocking of oil. Moreover, the Gwadar region is also being used for vigilance on the activities of the Indian and US navies in the blue waters

of the IOR (Kalim, 2017). China's main goals in developing the Gwadar port and the CPEC are to enhance its relationship with Pakistan by collaborating on large-scale economic development projects to secure oil supply channels and diversify oil imports from the CPEC and Gwadar port, which is strategically placed at the Persian Gulf's entrance. China is not only limited to Gwadar port; rather, through the port, China is extending its areas of influence throughout the regions of strategic importance (Kalim, 2017). For that reason, China's strategy revolves around establishing military or geopolitical footholds in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf littoral states by funding huge sea-lane security projects.

Thus, the geopolitical and strategic motivations driving China's participation in the CPEC, and the development of Gwadar Port are multifaceted and far-reaching. These initiatives serve as integral components of China's broader strategic vision, aiming to secure its maritime trade routes, diversify its energy sources, and expand its geopolitical influence. By establishing alternative land-based trade routes and gaining access to resource-rich regions, China mitigates the risks associated with traditional maritime chokepoints while solidifying its economic and political presence in key strategic areas. Moreover, the alignment of CPEC and Gwadar Port with China's BRI further strengthens its regional connectivity and enhances China's global economic integration. Through these projects, China asserts itself as a dominant player in shaping the geopolitical landscape, emphasising its long-term commitment to fostering regional development and cooperation.

Given the significant geopolitical and strategic implications, it can be observed that both the BRI and the CPEC entail substantial complexities. The CPEC's strategic significance, particularly with regards to its connectivity routes, has garnered the interest of significant global powers such as India, Japan, and the US, resulting in heightened geopolitical rivalry in

the area. The intensification and strengthening of rivalries among competitors are expected as the power-play continues among these nations for securing their regional and strategic goals. The project in Balochistan has resulted in noteworthy outcomes for the indigenous populace, such as the infringement of human rights and the curtailment of social and economic rights, along with an increase in massive migrations and demographic changes. The intensifying geopolitical competition is posing challenges for the inhabitants of Balochistan, given China's efforts to expand its sway and establish dominance in the IOR. The increasing presence of global powers in the region has also raised concerns about potential conflicts and security threats. Additionally, the local population in Balochistan is apprehensive about the potential exploitation of their resources and displacement due to the large-scale infrastructure projects associated with the BRI and CPEC.

5.4 Conclusion:

This chapter provided an in-depth analysis of the origin and evolution of the BRI and its flagship project, the CPEC. The analysis explored the economic and geopolitical motivations behind the BRI and the CPEC and how they have become significant drivers of China's global influence. Additionally, it highlighted the challenges and criticisms faced by the BRI, including concerns over debt sustainability and geopolitical tensions with other countries. It also highlighted that various narratives have been associated with the BRI, such as "Go West," "Good Neighbourhood Policy," "Chinese Soft Power," "Applicability of the Chinese Developmental Model," and "Realising the Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation." President Xi introduced the "Realising Chinese Dream" narrative in September 2012, which has paramount importance as a guiding principle for China's growing role in the world. Overall,

this chapter has shed light on the complex nature of the BRI and its implications for regional and global dynamics.

Two significant directives, which aimed to maintain a low profile and stay out of the spotlight of international politics, served as the foundation for Chinese foreign policy prior to President Xi taking office. However, with the implementation of new reforms, such as the realisation of the Chinese dream, the previous foreign policy strategies have subsided. With the help of these reforms and the opening of its borders to the rest of the world, China has greatly improved its overall national strategy and made it easier for it to become the most powerful country in the world. Additionally, President Xi undertook the transformation of the economy from a Socialist-Leninist economy to a mixed economic model with socialist and Chinese characters to make it more appealing and acceptable for other nations to follow in China's footsteps and adopt a similar economic model.

The BRI exhibits an array of Chinese motivations. It ranges from economic to political and from strategic to geopolitical. One of the key economic motivations behind the BRI initiatives is to address China's overcapacity in industries such as steel and construction. By investing in infrastructure projects in countries along the Belt and Road, China can export its excess production and stimulate its economy. Additionally, the BRI allows China to expand its political influence and strengthen its position as a global leader. From a strategic perspective, the initiatives help secure vital trade routes and access to resources while also promoting regional integration and stability. Lastly, the geopolitical implications of the BRI cannot be overlooked, as it allows China to project its power and potentially reshape the global order in its favour. The BRI not only presents economic benefits for China but also holds significant geopolitical implications. By investing in infrastructure projects across Asia, Europe, and Africa,

China can not only export its excess production but also establish itself as a dominant player in global trade. This expansion of economic influence allows China to strengthen its position as a global leader and exert greater political influence on the international stage.

Moreover, the strategic importance of the BRI cannot be underestimated. By securing vital trade routes and ensuring access to key resources, China safeguards its economic interests and reduces its dependence on other countries. This ensures that China can maintain stability and control over its own economic development, avoiding vulnerability to external factors or disruptions. Additionally, the BRI facilitates the integration of China's less developed regions into the global economy, promoting regional development and reducing regional disparities within the country. Overall, the Belt and Road Initiative has far-reaching implications for China's economic growth, geopolitical influence, and domestic stability, solidifying its role as a major global player in the 21st century.

However, many Western and Asian countries are sceptical about China's growing influence in different regions, with particular focus on Asia, Africa, and Europe. The US, the EU, India, Japan, and Australia are among the countries that have shown strong reservations over Chinese influence and regional integration in these regions. These countries are concerned about the potential for China to assert its dominance and exploit resources in these regions, leading to a loss of sovereignty for smaller nations. Additionally, there are worries about China's human rights record and its use of economic leverage to exert political influence. As a result, they have begun forming strategic alliances and partnerships to counterbalance China's power and protect their own interests. This has the potential to create tensions and conflicts, both economically and politically, as China continues to assert its global influence.

With the formation of alliances, geopolitical competition has seen a surge in the IOR. The US, India, Japan, and Australia have joined forces to establish the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad) to counter China's growing influence in the region. This alliance aims to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific, promoting security, stability, and economic prosperity. However, China perceives this as a containment strategy and has responded with increased military presence and assertiveness in the disputed South China Sea and Indian Ocean, further escalating tensions in the region. The geopolitical competition in the Indian Ocean is likely to intensify as these alliances and partnerships continue to evolve.

In addition to the BRI, this chapter also thoroughly investigated the origin and evaluation of the CPEC as the single most funded project of the BRI. The CPEC aims to connect the Gwadar Port in south-western Pakistan to China's north-western region of Xinjiang. It has received significant funding and investment from China, making it a crucial component of the BRI's infrastructure development plans. The chapter delved into the historical background and assessed the potential economic and strategic implications of the CPEC for both China and Pakistan. In addition to its economic significance, the CPEC also holds strategic importance for China and Pakistan. The corridor provides China with a shorter and more secure route for its energy imports from the Middle East, bypassing the Strait of Malacca. It also strengthens Pakistan's position as a regional trade hub, enhancing its geopolitical influence in South Asia. Moreover, the CPEC has the potential to address the development disparities between Pakistan's less developed provinces and accelerate their economic growth. Overall, the chapter concluded that the CPEC has the potential to transform the economic landscape of both China and Pakistan while also reshaping the regional power dynamics in South Asia.

The BRI and CPEC projects could serve as a test case for China's ability to implement such a megaproject successfully. The success of the BRI is relatively dependent on the success of CPEC, as it is one of the flagship projects under the BRI. If China can effectively address the challenges and ensure the smooth implementation of CPEC, it will demonstrate its capability to replicate this success in other BRI projects globally. However, any major setbacks or failures in CPEC could raise doubts about China's ability to execute such ambitious infrastructure projects on a large scale. China and Pakistan have high stakes in the CPEC project; therefore, both countries are committed to making the CPEC project successful. However, such measures would undermine the human and individual rights of the common masses where various projects are located. Additionally, the focus on national interests may overshadow concerns for human rights, potentially causing further discontent among the common masses affected by the project. The growing geopolitical rivalries and the power competition in and around the Gwadar region and the IOR in general will be discussed in detail in the next chapters.

Chapter 6 Geopolitical Dynamics and Strategic Significance of Gwadar Port in the Context of CPEC and Regional Power Competition

6.1 Introduction:

The geopolitical dynamics and strategic significance of Gwadar Port in the context of the CPEC and regional power competition cannot be understated. The Gwadar Port, which is 'jewel in the crown of CPEC' located in south-western Pakistan, serves as a critical juncture in China's Belt and Road Initiative, providing a gateway for trade and connectivity between the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and China. Additionally, Gwadar Port's proximity to the Arabian Sea gives it strategic importance in the maritime domain, allowing for a potential military and naval presence in the region. Thus, understanding the implications of Gwadar Port's development is crucial to comprehending the evolving power dynamics in the region. The development of Gwadar Port has sparked concerns among neighbouring countries, particularly India, who view it as a potential threat to their own maritime interests. This has led to increased tensions and competition for influence in the region, further highlighting the significance of Gwadar Port's development in shaping geopolitical dynamics.

This chapter explores the geopolitical and strategic rationales underlying the CPEC and Gwadar port initiatives within the context of the BRI. Additionally, it analyses the linkages between these projects and the worsening human rights conditions in the Gwadar region of Balochistan. The chapter also examines the issues and consequences pertaining to human and sociocultural rights experienced by the general population in the Gwadar region of Balochistan, as emphasised by Sabatini and other scholars. The geopolitical and strategic aspects of the CPEC and Gwadar port initiatives can be seen in China's aspirations in the Indo-Pacific Ocean and its desire to establish a dominant position in the region. For example,

China's consolidation of diplomatic relations with Iran and the establishment of substantial agreements can be seen as strategic measures aimed at mitigating the influence exerted by India within the region. Additionally, the increased Chinese presence at Gwadar Port has resulted in an escalation of strategic and geopolitical rivalries, further aggravating existing regional divisions.

China's participation in global power dynamics and its pursuit of hegemony have had a significant impact on the political landscape of South Asia, leading to heightened intricacy and diminished stability. The involvement of numerous powers with vested geopolitical interests has further complicated the situation. The introduction of CPEC has revitalised China's efforts to establish novel geopolitical and regional dynamics. The regional balance of power in South Asia is impacted by the CPEC and China's extensive economic and military engagement.

Amidst this escalating geopolitical rivalry, there have been growing apprehensions regarding infringements upon human and sociocultural rights, as well as the implementation of more forceful military strategies that adversely affect the well-being of indigenous communities. The geopolitical significance of Gwadar has resulted in complex socio-political dynamics that require a careful analysis of their consequences for the public.

The geopolitics of megaprojects, which have contributed to an increase in the level of strategic competition between the various geopolitical powers, is the principal focus of this chapter. Discussion of this chapter will proceed in the following manner. First, it explains the rationale and characteristics of 'mega project', which refers to CPEC as a model project for geopolitical consideration, and the motivations behind its application in the context of infrastructure development initiatives. The rationale for the megaprojects, as well as the viewpoints of the general population, are investigated. In the second half of this chapter, the

researcher investigates Pakistan's geopolitical and strategic objectives regarding the Gwadar port. In the third section of the chapter, a comprehensive investigation into China's geopolitical and military objectives regarding the development of the Gwadar port and the CPEC project will be conducted. The last section of this chapter deals with the rising geopolitical competition and the US and Indian responses to the Chinese's growing presence in and around Gwadar.

6.2 Exploring the Motivations and Implications of Megaprojects: A Comprehensive Analysis:

This section aims to delve into the significance and impact of megaprojects in shaping geopolitical influence in various regions and their potential to drive economic growth and development. By examining the motivations behind these large-scale projects, we can gain insights into the strategic objectives of countries and the implications they have on global power dynamics. Megaprojects, characterised by their vast scale, complexity, and elevated levels of investment, have become instrumental tools for countries seeking to expand their geopolitical reach and exert influence on a global scale. The USA and China serve as prime examples of nations that have pursued their vested geopolitical interests through the development of megaprojects in different parts of the world (Ali, 2022; Kimari & Lesutis, 2022). These projects not only contribute to economic growth and infrastructure development but also serve as platforms for projecting power, securing resources, and enhancing geopolitical leverage. By analysing the motivations and implications of these megaprojects, this section seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how they have become crucial instruments for achieving geopolitical objectives in diverse regions.

Megaprojects are an established device to speed up development and crystallise the prestige of the local elite (Rizzo, 2019). A typical megaproject is largely a government-funded urban development or even a rural development, characterised by a specific theme that demonstrates a specific developmental model and a dominant function. Many countries deploy mega urban projects for economic and political engineering to compete for foreign direct investment (FDI), skilled labour, and international tourists (Rizzo, 2019). Megaprojects can be of various forms and span a variety of industries, including energy, infrastructure, communication networks, cyber security, weapon systems, and port and special economic zone construction (Kundu, James & Rigby, 2021). They are generally well received by the public in various regions of the world and seen as an important aspect of economic progress and social development. Public opinion, on the other hand, can be hostile to megaprojects, particularly when they are strategic or geopolitical in nature and entail resource extraction (Kundu, James & Rigby, 2021). Megaprojects frequently have the intention of fabricating resource extraction in the name of development projects, which has a detrimental effect on the lives of the common people and is also opposed by the public. Megaproject supporters, however, also attempt to affect public opinion by making the project's concept sound positive and inflating the benefits to the community while concealing the project's actual difficulties and unfavourable effects (Kundu, James & Rigby, 2021). According to Kundu et al. (2021), “this is attributed to the transformational nature of megaprojects, i.e., their potential for impacting millions of people. The involvement of several stakeholders makes megaprojects prone to conflict as it makes the project landscape institutionally complex, bringing different institutional logics together and catalysing institutional differences (Kundu, James & Rigby, 2021).

Megaprojects encompass a diverse array of drivers and motivations, spanning from the pursuit of economic transformation to the facilitation of social change (Akhtar, et.al., 2021). Megaprojects have the capacity to exert a substantial impact on the economic terrain of a country, consequently resulting in a subsequent metamorphosis and enhancement of the social fabric. This implies that the implementation of megaprojects, in conjunction with economic transformations, has the potential to bring about societal shifts away from poverty and deprivation. One compelling illustration that supports this assertion is the megaprojects undertaken in Dubai and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which have undergone a remarkable transformation from a modest fishing town to emerge as a prominent cosmopolitan metropolis and a global hub for tourism and commerce (Kubat, et.al., 2009). Dubai has undergone a major transformation into a globally recognised economic centre through the implementation of large-scale projects, which has garnered favourable public sentiment towards the city. The government's assurance of economic and societal transformation in the city was predicated on the preservation of the local population's fundamental rights and the maintenance of the city's demographic composition. Individuals from any part of the globe possess the opportunity to engage in investment activities within the city of Dubai, albeit without the entitlement to obtain citizenship rights. In the current setting, the megaproject has effectively transformed the economic landscape of both the city and the nation, encountering minimal resistance from the general populace due to its provision of assured fundamental rights and prospects for economic advancement.

In the Asian context, the emergence of megaprojects became evident as developers recognised the significant potential of creating integrated megaprojects. These projects were designed to incorporate various functions that mutually support and enhance each other,

thereby resulting in increased market profitability (Rizzo, 2019). China's recognition of a significant infrastructure deficit in Asia prompted the initiation of substantial financial investments in large-scale projects, including the BRI and its prominent endeavours across multiple countries (DiCarlo & Schindler, 2022). Multiple media organisations and sources depicted these projects as potential avenues for impoverished nations to enhance their economic growth and mitigate deficiencies in infrastructure. China's official media and other stakeholders have initiated efforts to promote the project by employing quantitative measures to highlight its advantages and presenting it as a mutually beneficial arrangement. The BR has been subject to diverse interpretations by different stakeholders. However, the prevailing perspective, widely recognised and supported, posits the BRI as a mutually beneficial endeavour, offering equal opportunities for development to all participating nations (Jiang, 2022; DiCarlo & Schindler, 2022).

Consequently, a considerable number of states that are in search of financial resources and loans are inclined to participate in the BRI megaproject (Turcsanyi & Kachlikova, 2020). The Chinese media, along with state media in collaborating countries, played a significant role in shaping a positive public perception and attitude among the broader populace. The portrayal of the BRI by China in media outlets, particularly in Europe and Asia, has garnered attention. This portrayal has contributed to the establishment of Chinese soft power, as it aligns with Chinese narratives emphasising economic opportunities while disregarding geopolitical and security concerns (Turcsanyi & Kachlikova, 2020).

The CPEC has been officially designated as a megaproject by both the governments of Pakistan and China, generating considerable enthusiasm and fervour. The project has been hailed as a game-changer for the economies of both countries, with the potential to create

thousands of jobs and boost trade and investment. Nevertheless, as the project has advanced, apprehensions have begun to arise pertaining to its ecological ramifications and the potential financial obligations it might impose on Pakistan. Critics contend that the project exhibits a pronounced bias towards China, thereby offering limited advantages to the local communities. Furthermore, the CPEC agreement initially suffered from a lack of transparency, with insufficient dissemination of pertinent information. Nevertheless, the smaller provinces experienced a sense of marginalisation and deprivation of their fair allocation of projects because of the federal government's decision to modify the routes and relocate most of the initiatives to Punjab and Sindh (Afzal, 2020). The megaproject received substantial initial backing in Pakistan, except for Baloch nationalists, who expressed concerns regarding its potential repercussions (Baloch, 2016). The local population has exhibited an increasing level of scepticism towards the CPEC, prompting substantial criticism directed at the federal government of Pakistan for its failure to disclose pertinent information regarding the specifics of the CPEC agreement.

Currently, there is a lack of discernible economic or social transformation in the adjacent areas. While smaller provinces are experiencing the exploitation of their resources, it is noteworthy that most development projects are predominantly concentrated in other provinces. In summary, the exploration of the motivations and implications of megaprojects has shed light on their integral role in shaping geopolitical dynamics around the world. Particularly in the context of Asia, the geopolitics of infrastructure development have intensified the rivalry between the United States and China. With the launch of China's BRI and President Biden's announcement of countering it with their own megaproject initiatives, the competition for influence and control has escalated (DiCarlo & Schindler, 2022; Liptak,

2022). Furthermore, the prevailing security conditions in the region, particularly in Balochistan, have engendered an escalating apprehension regarding the possibility of human rights transgressions. As megaprojects continue to shape the geopolitical landscape, they have presented severe challenges for local communities, as the interests of major powers often take precedence over the rights and well-being of the common masses.

6.3 The Rise of the Indo-Pacific: A New Geopolitical Arena for Great Power rivalry:

The rise of the Indo-Pacific as a new strategic framework and a focal point for major power competition reflects significant changes in the geopolitical landscape of the twenty-first century. This concept highlights the Indian and Pacific Oceans as a unified geopolitical region, gaining increased prominence in contemporary times due to its strategic importance for major powers and economic dynamics (Jochheim & Lobo, 2023).

Throughout history, the IOR has been a meeting point for civilisations like the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, and Persians, acting as a crucial maritime route linking Asia, Africa, and Europe (UNESCO & Chittick, 1974). Ancient empires and colonial powers recognised the strategic significance of the IOR, competing for dominance over its sea routes and resources (Baruah, Labh, & Greely, 2023). The IOR's centrality in global trade and its abundant energy resources have made it a perennial arena for geopolitical competition.

The contemporary concept of the Indo-Pacific expands on this historical basis, underscoring the connection between the Indian and Pacific Oceans in the present era and emphasising their importance for regional interactions (Smith, 2019). This interconnectedness has become increasingly vital as countries in the region seek to strengthen alliances and navigate complex geopolitical challenges. The Indo-Pacific region has

emerged as a key player in global trade and investment, with major powers like China, India, and Japan vying for influence (Baruah, 2020). Furthermore, the Indo-Pacific region is also a hotbed for strategic competition, with countries like the United States and Australia increasing their presence to counterbalance China's growing dominance. As tensions continue to rise in the region, the need for cooperation and collaboration among nations becomes more critical than ever (Baruah, 2020). The Indo-Pacific has become a dynamic and evolving geopolitical landscape, shaping the future of international relations in the 21st century.

China's rapid economic growth and expanding military capabilities have strategically positioned it as a major player in the Indo-Pacific region. For example, China's economic investments in infrastructure projects and its military presence in disputed areas like the South China Sea have significantly influenced regional economic dynamics and military strategies (Wang, 2021). The BRI has further strengthened China's connectivity with the region, raising concerns about Beijing's strategic intentions (Kardon, 2020; Li, 2021). The BRI, a vast network of infrastructure projects and economic corridors, has strengthened China's connectivity with the region, raising concerns among other powers about Beijing's strategic intentions (Kardon, 2020).

Furthermore, the relative decline of US hegemony and the rise of other powers, particularly India, have contributed to a more multipolar regional order, reshaping the balance of power and strategic alliances in the Indo-Pacific (Baruah, 2020). This diffusion of power has created a more complex and dynamic environment in the Indo-Pacific, with various actors vying for influence. India's growing economic and military strength, coupled with its

longstanding historical ties to the IOR, have strategically positioned it as a significant player in shaping the developing Indo-Pacific environment.

However, the Indo-Pacific is home to numerous flashpoints and potential conflict zones, including the South China Sea, the Taiwan Strait, and the Korean Peninsula, which have heightened tensions and raised the stakes for regional security (Kaplan, 2009). The historical importance of the IOR as a maritime chokepoint for global trade has amplified these security concerns as major powers seek to secure their interests and maintain freedom of navigation in the region (Gupta, 2018).

The rise of the Indo-Pacific as a strategic concept has led to a realignment of strategic partnerships and alliances with regional security and cooperation (Lee, 2020). Specifically, the US has aimed to enhance its connections with regional partners such as India, Japan, and Australia, establishing new alliances like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) to offset China's increasing impact (Pant, 2022). This has escalated great power competition in the region, resulting in increased tensions as each participant strives to protect its interests, dominate strategic resources, and maintain a favourable power balance, shaping the strategic landscape of the Indo-Pacific and potentially heightening conflict risks.

The rise of the Indo-Pacific as a strategic concept continues the historical significance of the IOR as a key arena for geopolitical competition. The IOR's strategic importance, coupled with the evolving global power dynamics and the rise of China, has made the Indo-Pacific the epicentre of great power rivalry in the 21st century (Singh, 2017). To fully grasp the intricate challenges and opportunities in the region and their impact on the global order, it is crucial to delve into the specific historical events and factors driving the rivalry in the Indo-Pacific.

The confluence of these factors has stimulated the emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical concept and intensified great power rivalry within the region, particularly focusing on crucial maritime sites. Out of these, Gwadar Port in Pakistan has become a focal point, representing the intricate interaction of economic interests, strategic ambitions, and security concerns that define the current Indo-Pacific region. China's increasing participation in the building of Gwadar, although seemingly motivated by economic factors, has caused concerns among other regional countries, who perceive it as a demonstration of Beijing's wider strategic aspirations in the Indian Ocean.

6.4 Chinese Presence in Gwadar Port and the Evolving Strategic and Geopolitical Competition in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR):

China uses Gwadar Port for a variety of goals, including strategic and military ones. The strategic importance of Gwadar Port for China lies in its potential to serve as a key maritime gateway, connecting China to the Arabian Sea and providing an alternative route for its energy imports (Conrad, 2017). Additionally, militarily, the port allows China to enhance its naval presence in the region, ensuring the protection of its maritime interests and contributing to its overall geopolitical influence. China's presence in the Gwadar port provides it with a strategic foothold in the Arabian Sea and the IOR. With the ability to bypass the heavily congested Strait of Malacca, China can ensure the more secure and efficient transportation of goods and resources. This not only reduces its dependence on the vulnerable chokepoint but also strengthens its economic and trade ties with countries along the route. Furthermore, the establishment of a naval base in Gwadar allows China to project its power beyond its immediate vicinity and assert its influence in the Indian Ocean, challenging the dominance of traditional naval powers in the region. China has long been searching for a location on the

shores of the Indian Ocean to counter the growing influence of the US and the Indian Navy and to maintain the balance of power in the region. Even before the CPEC deal was signed, the Gwadar port was handed over to China, which indicates that the exploitation of Gwadar Port by China is basically to limit Indian naval action. Due to its reliance on imports going through the strait, which is near Pakistan's Mekran coast, India, too, faces a "Hormuz Dilemma" (Kaplan, 2009).

"The Chinese government has already adopted a "string of pearls" strategy for the Indian Ocean, which consists of setting up a series of ports in friendly countries along the ocean's northern seaboard. It is constructing a sizable naval base and listening post in Gwadar, Pakistan (from where it may already be keeping an eye on ship traffic through the Strait of Hormuz); a port in Pasni, Pakistan, 75 miles east of Gwadar, which will connect to the Gwadar facility by a new highway" (Kaplan, 2009).

Furthermore, to safeguard its vital shipping lanes and counter potential threats from rivals like the US and India, as well as piracy, China seeks to establish a military base in the Indian Ocean. A naval presence in Gwadar would not only offer a shorter, more secure trade route but also prevent China from being strategically encircled in the Strait of Malacca, a critical chokepoint vulnerable to disruption. For a long time, PLAN has conducted anti-piracy missions in the Gulf of Mexico and in the Indo-Pacific Ocean to avoid Chinese ships being robbed, but the lack of a military base or naval outpost made it difficult to gain any effective results (Kardon, 2020). Pakistan offers the most crucial point in this regard in the form of the Gwadar port for China. Gwadar not only serves as a delivery and storage point for Chinese commodities being imported and exported, but it also uses the port as China's naval outpost in the Indian Ocean (Kardon, 2020).

Moreover, a strong and equipped naval base in Gwadar has been considered since the CPEC deal was signed. China is slowly strengthening its military foothold in the IOR region through Pakistan's Gwadar region (Lalwani, 2023; Caliskan, 2022). This strengthens China's position in the IOR, allowing it to control other key ports, such as Salalah Port in Oman and the Dubai Port Authority, all the way to the African continent. In the case of a hostile threat, China has already armed Pakistan with conventional weapons and submarines to safeguard Gwadar Port. Similarly, China has deployed its PLAN to protect the Gwadar Port's entrances (Kardon, 2020).

In addition to securing the SLOCs for effective anti-piracy operations, China is building a blue-water navy in the IOR. The Blue Water Navy requires easily accessible outposts for fuelling and other security-related measures (Report, 2022). Having access to Gwadar will help China build its blue-water fleet in the Indo-Pacific. Because of China's large population and desire for energy and markets for economic development, this requirement has arisen. As a result, Gwadar is the most convenient and accessible Chinese strategic entry port in the region for China's blue-water navy growth.

Thus, China's pursuit of access to Gwadar Port extends beyond purely economic considerations, potentially encompassing strategic objectives for its military and naval forces. Gwadar's strategic location would allow China to expand its influence in the Indian Ocean region and counterbalance the naval power of other countries in the area, such as India and the United States. The port would serve as a crucial naval base for China, enabling it to project its military presence in the region and safeguard its maritime interests. Additionally, Gwadar's proximity to conflict-ridden regions like Afghanistan provides China with a strategic

advantage in terms of regional security and stability. Overall, the development of Gwadar Port under CPEC holds immense strategic significance for China beyond its economic benefits.

6.5 US and Indian Response to Chinese Presence in and Around Gwadar: Intensifying Geopolitical Competition in the Indo-Pacific Region:

China's increasing presence in the Indo-Pacific region has been viewed by other major regional and international powers as having strategic implications. The United States and India, in particular, view China's expanding footprint in the region with apprehension, leading them to adopt distinct yet complementary strategies to counterbalance Beijing's influence.

The US has re-oriented its strategic focus towards the Indo-Pacific by signing defence agreements with regional partners like India, Japan, and Australia, enhancing its naval presence in the IOR through joint exercises, and endorsing alternative infrastructure projects like the Blue Dot Network to counter China's BRI (U.S. Department of State, 2024; Kuo, 2020; Runde, 2024). This has involved strengthening military alliances with regional partners like India, Japan, and Australia, as well as increasing naval deployments in the IOR (Kuo, 2020).

China's establishment of a strategic stronghold in Gwadar not only amplifies its geographical advantage but also bestows control over vital economic and strategic maritime choke points. This reality poses a significant challenge to the prevailing order in the IOR, disrupting established maritime norms and affecting the strategic interests of both India and the US in the region. The significance of these maritime passages to their respective interests' underscores China's disruptive role and the ensuing challenge it poses. The strategic disruption has accentuated the complexity of power dynamics in the IOR and catalysed further discussions about recalibrating strategies to address this evolving geopolitical

landscape. Both India and the US are actively manoeuvring to constrain China's economic, military, and strategic expansion, aligning with their longstanding strategic interests (Zafar, 2022).

After the withdrawal of its forces from Afghanistan, the US has strategically pivoted towards the Indo-Pacific realm, a recalibration underscored by the reinforcement of its military partnerships and defence collaborations with key regional players like India, Japan, Australia, and South Korea (Anwar, 2020). These strategic alliances are meticulously designed to ensure unimpeded freedom of navigation and bolster maritime security. These partnerships are purposefully structured to form a cohesive network of like-minded nations, collectively equipped to counterbalance China's mounting assertiveness. Recent events such as the QUAD and G-7 meetings underscore the shared agenda of mounting a comprehensive economic and geopolitical response to China's ascendancy, with India's pivotal role emphasised within the Indian Ocean Region and Japan and Australia poised to engage within the broader Indo-Pacific theatre (Rasheed, 2022; Anwar, 2020).

Moreover, the idea of a "free and open Indo-Pacific" has helped the US strengthen its naval presence (Anwar, 2020; Vashisht, 2023). To keep an eye on Chinese activity and preserve a balance of power, this policy entails expanded deployments of warships, submarines, and aircraft carriers in the IOR. The US Navy conducts routine freedom of navigation operations to oppose extravagant maritime claims made by China in the South China Sea and possibly the Arabian Sea. Additionally, the US has tried to use its economic strength to counter China's increasing regional economic dominance. To challenge China's economic influence, the US has also promoted investment in the nations near Gwadar, particularly India.

In addition to the formation of alliances, the US has also taken steps to restrict the presence of Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei in its networks and those of its allies in the IOR region due to the threat of surveillance and cyber security ((Berman, Maizland & Chatzky, 2023; Sanger, Barnes, Zhong & Santora, 2019). The US government has raised concerns about Beidou and Huawei's alleged relations with the Chinese government and their potential for surveillance and cyberattacks. In response, the US has encouraged its allies, particularly India and other QUAD countries, to ban Huawei's involvement in the development of their 5G networks (Berman, Maizland & Chatzky, 2023).

This initiative aims to ensure the security and integrity of critical communication infrastructure, particularly in sensitive areas such as the IOR. By leading efforts to exclude Huawei, the US aims to limit China's ability to gather intelligence and exert control over communications infrastructure in the Indian Ocean region. This technological response is part of a broader strategy to counter China's growing influence and maintain a strategic advantage in the region. It is inevitable that the US has chosen to counter and curtail the Chinese economic and military presence in these regions, which intensifies the already existing geopolitical power competition with China. Pakistan's strategic location as a gateway to Central Asia's oil and gas resources means that it will be a battleground for competing interests for a long time.

Furthermore, the US has strategically used its economic influence to impede the involvement of other countries in China's ambitious projects, such as the CPEC and BRI. In the case of Pakistan, by impeding the involvement of other countries in China's projects, the US aimed to maintain its influence and prevent China from gaining too much control over the global economic landscape (Ali, 2020). This strategic manoeuvring by the US reflects the

intense competition and power struggle between the two countries in their quest for dominance in the world economy. Therefore, the US very deftly pressed Pakistan through IMF loans and reduced its economic reliance on China, as it was poised to become a defaulting nation. This strategic move allowed the US to regain some control over Pakistan's economic policies and limit China's influence in the region. By offering IMF loans, the US ensured that Pakistan would not default on its debts and fall into China's debt trap diplomacy. Additionally, the US used this opportunity to leverage its economic influence and encourage Pakistan to align its policies with its own interests. Through the IMF loans, the US was able to establish conditions and implement reforms that Pakistan had to implement, thereby shaping its economic trajectory (Lawder & Singh, 2023; Ali, 2020). This strategic move not only strengthened the US-Pakistan relationship but also acted as a warning to other countries contemplating China's debt-trap diplomacy, showcasing the repercussions and constraints of excessive reliance on China for economic aid.

Similarly, India views Gwadar Port as a direct challenge to its regional security interests and has responded with a multi-pronged approach. This includes enhancing its naval capabilities through modernization and expansion, forging strategic partnerships with other powers like the US and Japan, and developing its own port projects, such as the Chabahar Port in Iran, to counterbalance Gwadar's influence (Pant & Mehta, 2018; Pant & Saha, 2021). India has also sought to deepen its economic and security ties with other countries in the IOR, positioning itself as a key player in regional affairs (Pant & Saha, 2021).

Instead of relying heavily on Chinese investments, India has focused on diversifying its economic partnerships with various countries, including the US. This approach has allowed India to maintain its economic independence and avoid falling into a potential debt trap.

Additionally, India's strategic alliances with other regional powers have helped create a counterbalance to China's expanding influence in the region. On the other hand, India has expressed significant apprehension regarding the Chinese presence in Gwadar and its potential consequences for regional stability (Anwar, 2020).

India has responded by focusing on several key areas. To strengthen its position in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), India is upgrading its naval forces, expanding its maritime presence, investing in advanced surveillance technology, conducting joint naval exercises with partners like the US and Japan, and bolstering defence cooperation through agreements and joint projects (Bose & Chaudhury, 2024). Furthermore, India has taken an active and initiative-taking stance in initiatives aimed at countering the influence exerted by China. The emergence of the Quad, a collaborative platform involving Australia, Japan, the United States, and India, has been observed in the Indo-Pacific region (Pant, 2022).

Moreover, to counterbalance China's growing economic influence, India has actively pursued efforts to enhance its economic presence in the IOR. Several initiatives have been undertaken to enhance connectivity, such as the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor, the Chabahar Port in Iran, and the International North-South Transport Corridor (Wani, 2023; Panda, 2023; Johnny, 2023). India's response has been aimed to strengthen its trade and security ties with countries in the IOR particularly and in the Indo-Pacific Ocean region in general, while also serving as a counterweight to China's BRI. By strategically investing in infrastructure projects and forming partnerships with key regional players, India hopes to maintain its influence and prevent the Gwadar Port from becoming a Chinese military stronghold (Anwar, 2020).

China's economic and strategic influence in the IOR has posed a significant challenge to India's security and maritime doctrine. The development of the Gwadar port has made the

problem worse by adding a new dimension to the predicament and increasing the complexity of the situation. The development of Gwadar port poses threats to India's longstanding regional dominance, necessitating a reassessment of its security and marine plans. The maritime and security doctrine, also known as the 'India Doctrine,' initially surfaced in 2004, and subsequently, India's maritime security plan was formulated in 2007 (Indian Naval Strategic Publication, 2009). The doctrine encapsulates the nation's strategic approach to safeguarding its interests and maintaining regional stability, particularly within the IOR (Indian Naval Strategic Publication, 2009). This doctrine underscores India's commitment to maintaining a secure and stable maritime environment that fosters economic growth, safeguards territorial integrity, and facilitates cooperative endeavours with other regional and global actors.

At the core of India's maritime policy lies a significant emphasis on the Indian Ocean as a crucial area of strategic importance. India considers itself a significant player in the IOR due to its deep-rooted historical, cultural, and economic connections with the region, underpinning its influence and strategic importance. (Baruah, 2020). The doctrine places significant emphasis on the protection of the SLOCs that span the Indian Ocean, with the objective of ensuring uninterrupted trade and energy transportation (Baruah, 2020).

India's traditional maritime approach has centred on maintaining a strong presence along major sea lines, primarily focusing on the naval dominance of the Indian Navy. However, Gwadar's rise as a potential hub for maritime connectivity has introduced a new dimension to the security dynamics of the region. The port's proximity to the Arabian Sea and its potential to provide China with a shorter maritime route to the Persian Gulf pose strategic challenges to India's traditional maritime hegemony.

The Chinese notion, known as the 'String of Pearls' holds significant relevance within the context of India's sense of being strategically encircled by China's increasing network of naval sites and commercial ports in the Indo-Pacific (Butt & Siddiqui, 2021). Moreover, China's maritime activities in the vicinity of Gwadar, including naval deployments and enhanced maritime infrastructure, necessitate India's vigilance. The 'Look East' policy, that was later replaced by 'Act East', which emphasises enhanced engagement with countries to the east of India, particularly in South-East Asia, East Asia, and the Asia-Pacific region, is a key component of India's maritime strategy (Bajpaee, 2017; Rajendram, 2014; Mehrotra, 2012). However, while these actions are intended to counterbalance China's growing influence, they have also contributed to a broader escalation of geopolitical tensions in the region.

India's efforts to enhance its naval capabilities and establish strategic partnerships are seen by China as provocative and threatening to its own ambitions in the Indian Ocean. This has led to a cycle of reciprocal actions, with China further strengthening its presence in Gwadar and expanding its maritime activities, thereby fuelling India's anxieties and prompting further countermeasures. The resulting arms race and strategic manoeuvring have created a climate of mistrust and heightened competition, with each side vying for dominance in the region.

This escalation of tensions has far-reaching consequences, not only for India and China but also for the broader Indo-Pacific region. The risk of conflict, whether through direct confrontation or proxy wars, has increased significantly, posing a threat to regional peace and stability. The local populations in areas like Balochistan are particularly vulnerable, as they are caught in the crossfire of competing geopolitical interests.

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

The establishment of Gwadar port in Balochistan province as a crucial deep-sea port, strategically located near key maritime routes, has brought about substantial changes in the geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific, altering trade patterns and power dynamics in the region. With China's increasing involvement in the development and operation of Gwadar, the US and India have responded assertively to counter the growing Chinese influence (Lindley, 2022). This section examines the responses of the US and India to the Chinese presence in and around Gwadar, analysing how these actions have further intensified the geopolitical competition in the IOR.

The motivations behind China and Pakistan's massive projects, the CPEC and the development of the Gwadar port, have been thoroughly explored in this chapter. Both countries are making progress towards achieving their geopolitical goals in relation to the Gwadar port and CPEC, despite facing regional and international challenges. The CPEC and Gwadar agreements between China and Pakistan have led to a significant shift in the region's geopolitical landscape. China's desire for a strategic foothold in the Arabian Sea, which would give it access to essential energy resources and trade routes, is the driving force behind its investment in the CPEC and the Gwadar port. Pakistan, on the other hand, sees these projects as an opportunity to boost its economy and strengthen its ties with China while also addressing its own energy and infrastructure needs. Despite concerns raised by neighbouring countries and international observers about the potential implications of these projects, both China and Pakistan remain committed.

The analysis of this chapter reveals several key findings concerning the geopolitical, strategic, and military motivations underlying the CPEC and the Gwadar port for both Pakistan and China: Firstly, the CPEC has notably contributed to bolstering the strategic partnership between China and Pakistan, particularly in their shared stance against India.

Second, while the CPEC has strengthened their ties, it also establishes Pakistan's notable dependence on China for economic development and infrastructure projects. This reliance on China has raised concerns among some experts, who worry about the potential for China to exert undue influence over Pakistan's domestic and foreign policies. However, both countries have emphasised that their partnership is based on mutual trust and respect, with Pakistan viewing the CPEC as a catalyst for its own economic growth and development. Furthermore, the increasing reliance on China through the CPEC has raised concerns among neighbouring countries such as India, which see it as a strategic move by China to expand its influence in the region. This could potentially strain Pakistan's relationships with these countries and create geopolitical tensions. The United States also closely observes these developments, as it seeks to maintain its influence in the region and may view Pakistan's deepening ties with China as a challenge to its own interests.

Third, the military cooperation has complemented the economic aid associated with the CPEC, enabling Pakistan to strengthen its armed forces, which include the army and navy. This has allowed Pakistan to enhance its defence capabilities and potentially increase its deterrence against external threats. Additionally, the military cooperation between Pakistan and China has also facilitated joint military exercises and training programmes, fostering greater interoperability between the two countries' armed forces. This augmentation,

although enhancing Pakistan's defensive capabilities, simultaneously introduces concerns regarding regional militarization and the potential emergence of an arms race.

Fourth, the strategic significance of the Gwadar port development becomes evident when addressing Pakistan's vulnerability to potential Indian blockades, as seen in the war of 1971. However, this development simultaneously intensifies the competition for control over vital maritime routes within the Indian Ocean. The port's proximity to the Strait of Hormuz, a critical conduit for global oil trade, escalates its importance, rendering it a prospective focal point for geopolitical tensions.

China's utilisation of the CPEC and the Gwadar port as platforms to showcase the accomplishments of its BRI emerges as a substantial opportunity. However, the expanding economic and military presence of China in the region has spurred apprehensions among rival powers, particularly India and the US. Amid the economic benefits, the CPEC strategically prioritises geopolitical interests, particularly China's aspiration to establish control over the Indian Ocean. This underscores the potential for heightened geopolitical tensions in the region, prompting further exploration into potential clashes between China's strategic objectives and the interests of other significant stakeholders within the Indian Ocean.

Moreover, China's strategic approach, known as the "String of Pearls," prioritises the inclusion of Gwadar as a principal component, enabling enhanced communication across various regions and presenting China with the opportunity to establish a naval station. The establishment of this strategic network allows China to enhance its influence and safeguard its maritime communication routes. However, it also elicits concerns among competing nations about the possibility of encirclement and containment.

Fifth, China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean is perceived as a potential challenge to the strategic interests of other major countries, such as India and the United States. There is concern among certain parties that the establishment of China's naval station in Gwadar may potentially grant it the ability to exercise dominance over vital maritime passages and maybe disrupt established trade routes. Consequently, these nations are actively pursuing strategies to mitigate China's regional influence and safeguard their own security. The utilisation of proxies to impede China's developmental initiatives and disrupt operations in Balochistan serves as a notable illustration of the proactive measures undertaken by various nations to counteract China's influence within the region. These nations recognise the significance of exerting authority over the Indian Ocean and safeguarding their commercial pathways.

Finally, the escalating geopolitical competition poses serious concerns for the local population. As has been evident from the analysis of scholars such as Sabatini and others, the growing geopolitical competition poses a serious threat to human rights and international law. The measures undertaken by various nations to counteract China's influence in the region include strengthening alliances and partnerships, increasing military presence, conducting joint exercises, and investing in infrastructure projects to enhance connectivity and trade. These nations are also actively engaging in diplomacy to promote dialogue and cooperation among regional players. However, the escalating geopolitical competition raises serious concerns for the local population as it can exacerbate tensions, lead to proxy conflicts, and potentially undermine human rights and international law.

The communities residing in the Gwadar region face numerous challenges linked to the escalation of geopolitical competition and the implementation of security measures. These groups are subject to human rights violations, forced displacement, and limited freedom of

movement, consequently posing difficulties that require attention, as elaborated upon in the subsequent chapter.

The CPEC has promised to transform Balochistan, especially in terms of infrastructure development and economic activity. Before the implementation of the CPEC, Balochistan faced significant neglect and underdevelopment, especially in Gwadar. Poverty rates were alarmingly high, with scarce employment opportunities available (Malik, 2018).

The BRI, with the Gwadar Port as its centrepiece, aimed to address these internal challenges by injecting substantial investment into projects such as the construction of a modern deep-sea port, upgraded road networks, and the establishment of special economic zones. However, the anticipated development progress has not fully materialised for the broader region (Ijaz, 2018; Notezai, 2024). While the port zone itself has experienced significant development, mainly benefiting Chinese residents and individuals from other provinces, the lack of similar progress in the surrounding areas can be attributed to factors such as uneven investment distribution and challenges in infrastructure development (Ijaz, 2018; Notezai, 2024). The heightened security measures in the region, intended to safeguard Chinese investments, have increased tensions and marginalised the local population further.

Despite the influx of investment and the potential for economic growth, the BRI's impact on Balochistan is complicated and contentious due to governance issues, cultural differences, and geopolitical factors. The disparity between development promises and on-ground realities has increased discontent among the Baloch people, underscoring the necessity for a more inclusive and equitable development approach in the region.

Nevertheless, the BRI has posed challenges in Balochistan, such as security concerns, environmental issues, and questions about the equitable distribution of benefits, adding complexity to the region's development. The region's long-standing security concerns, stemming from insurgency and terrorism, have not been resolved. In fact, the increased presence of Chinese workers and assets in the region has, in some cases, exacerbated these issues, making them a target for insurgent groups. This highlights the continuity of security challenges despite the economic progress brought about by the BRI.

Furthermore, concerns about Pakistan's increasing debt to China, the environmental repercussions of infrastructure projects, and the fair distribution of benefits have introduced additional layers of complexity to Balochistan's development trajectory. This has escalated tensions and deepened suspicions in the region, further complicating the journey towards stability and prosperity.

Thus, while the BRI has undoubtedly brought about visible changes in Gwadar's infrastructure and attracted foreign investment, it has also intensified existing security concerns and failed to address the deep-seated socioeconomic issues that have long plagued the region. This underscores the importance of considering both the positive and negative consequences of large-scale development projects like the BRI, and the need for more inclusive and sustainable approaches that prioritize the well-being of local communities.

6.7 Conclusion:

China's expanding influence in the region, particularly through the CPEC and Gwadar port, has triggered reactions from rival powers, the US and India. The US and India have expressed concerns over China's clear enunciation of its geopolitical and strategic goals pertaining to the

CPEC, which has the potential to undermine their interests in the region. Consequently, the current state of the regional power dynamics is confronted with increased vulnerabilities because of the intensifying geopolitical rivalry within the IOR. Geopolitical competition in the IOR has intensified, raising concerns about the regional balance of power and stability. The increased military presence, formation of alliances, and technological responses have led to heightened rivalry.

The reprehensible human rights violations against the Baloch people are exacerbated by the collaborative efforts of China and Pakistan, whose activities in the region serve to undermine the fundamental rights and well-being of this vulnerable population. The strategic centrality of Gwadar, a focal point in the escalating geopolitical competition, intensifies the repercussions for the local communities, who find themselves caught in the crossfire of power struggles. China's extensive involvement in the region, particularly through CPEC, has contributed to a disturbing pattern of human rights abuses. The Baloch people, residing in the vicinity of Gwadar, have borne the brunt of forced displacement from their ancestral lands, experiencing a direct assault on their right to live in peace. The collusion between China and Pakistan has led to heightened security dynamics, imposing restrictions on the freedom of movement for these vulnerable populations and subjecting them to increased surveillance, fostering a pervasive sense of vulnerability.

Pakistan's policies further compound the issue, as its iron-fisted approach towards dissent in response to perceived threats only exacerbates the plight of the Baloch people. The stifling environment created by Pakistan's securitization measures leaves little room for the Baloch to voice their concerns or exercise their basic rights. This unfortunate reality underscores the unacceptable human cost exacted by the geopolitical manoeuvring centered around Gwadar.

While China and Pakistan bear primary responsibility for these violations, it is crucial to recognize the unintentional complicity of the United States and India. Their strategic opposition to CPEC projects has inadvertently fuelled Pakistan's anxieties, leading to a more repressive stance. The regional rivalry between the United States and India unwittingly places the Baloch people in a perilous position, exposed to the harsh consequences of this geopolitical game.

In the next chapter, a thorough investigation will delve into the effects of these megaprojects and geopolitical competition on the lives of ordinary people in the region surrounding the Gwadar port. The rise in strategic competition, driven by China's economic and military involvement, directly impacts the daily lives of these communities. By examining these effects, we can gain a better understanding of the consequences of this power struggle on the ordinary masses in the region.

Chapter 7 The Rising Geopolitical Competition Around Gwadar in Balochistan: Implications for the Local Baloch Population

7.1 Introduction:

This chapter examines the impact of escalating geopolitical tensions on the local Baloch population in Balochistan, focusing on their human rights, socio-economic well-being, and cultural practices. The main argument is that the convergence of China's geopolitical ambitions and strategic interests in Balochistan has intensified the challenges faced by the local Baloch population, leading to compromised human rights, socio-economic disparities, and stifled voices. This analysis reveals that the local Baloch population in Balochistan faces compromised human rights, including a disregard for human rights, freedom of movement, business and civil liberties, freedom of expression, and the rule of law due to geopolitical considerations and the Chinese presence. Furthermore, the influx of Chinese investments and infrastructure projects in Balochistan has exacerbated socio-economic disparities within the region. While these projects promise economic development, they often prioritise the interests of Chinese companies and workers over those of the local population, resulting in limited job opportunities and an unequal distribution of wealth. Socio-economic disparities are evident, with limited access to clean water, healthcare, and education, which hampers human development. Thus, the chapter will examine the historical context of Balochistan and the factors that have contributed to the escalation of geopolitical tensions in the region, as well as the role of external factors, such as China, in exacerbating these challenges for the local Baloch population.

Before delving into the analysis, it is important to mention the existing literature on the impact of geopolitical competition on human rights. Previous studies, such as Sabatini and

other scholars' insights, have highlighted the adverse consequences of escalating geopolitical competition, particularly in terms of human rights, socio-economic well-being, and cultural practises (Sabatini, 2022; Simmons, 2009; Rodriguez-Garavito, 2021; Rizzo, 2019). For instance, Sabatini's research revealed that nations engaged in intense geopolitical competition tend to prioritise their own national interests over human rights obligations (Sabatini, 2022). This often leads to a disregard for civil liberties, freedom of expression, and the rule of law. Additionally, socio-economic well-being is negatively affected as resources are diverted towards military expenditures, leaving less for social welfare programmes. Moreover, cultural practises and diversity can suffer as geopolitical competition fuels xenophobia and ethnocentrism, undermining the rights of minority groups (Sabatini, 2022). Therefore, understanding the existing literature helps shed light on the potential consequences of intensified geopolitical competition on human rights. By building upon the framework of these existing studies, this analysis aims to scrutinise the situation in Balochistan at a micro level. Within this context, the Balochistan population contends with formidable trials stemming from the presence of both China and the US in the region.

In the ongoing struggle for global dominance, Balochistan, a resource-rich region within Pakistan, has become a key battleground. The CPEC, a massive infrastructure project aimed at bolstering Pakistan's economy and connectivity, has intensified this competition. China's strategic investments, particularly those linking Gwadar port to Xinjiang, have further fuelled the rivalry between China, the US, and India. This geopolitical struggle has had devastating consequences for the people of Balochistan, particularly those living near Gwadar, leading to human rights abuses and limited social and economic opportunities.

This chapter explores the complex effects of these geopolitical rivalries on the local level, examining their impact on the human rights, political, socio-economic, and mobility rights of the Baloch people. Subsequent sections will delve into each of these rights in detail, providing a comprehensive analysis of the challenges faced by the Baloch community in each domain.

7.2 CPEC: The Rising Geopolitical Competition and the Socio-economic and Human Rights

Impacts on the Local Baloch Population:

In the context of this thesis, the term "impact" pertains to the prospective benefits and drawbacks foreseen by the local community in relation to the diverse components of the CPEC. When considering the potential effects of these endeavours on local communities, economies, and the environment, it is crucial to recognise that the positive consequences of these initiatives are largely overshadowed by the negative consequences. Therefore, a comprehensive investigation focused on communities residing near the megaprojects is necessary to thoroughly assess the negative effects of the projects.

Additionally, residents' prior experiences with large-scale projects, exposure to foreign investments and resource exploitation, treatment by the central authorities, and understanding of and fears regarding the project's effects all influence their attitudes towards these initiatives. This aspect holds particular importance within the context of the CPEC and Balochistan due to two key factors. Firstly, Balochistan has a long history of feeling marginalised and neglected by the central government, which has exacerbated opposition towards megaprojects. The residents fear that the CPEC only exacerbates their troubles by further exploiting their resources without providing any substantial benefits to the province (Azam, 2022). Secondly, the Baloch people have witnessed the negative impact of previous megaprojects in terms of exploitation, displacement of local communities, forced evictions,

and environmental degradation. For example, when Sui gas was discovered in Balochistan, the local population was not given its due share of the profits generated from the gas industry (Wani S. A., 2021). Additionally, the extraction of natural resources for megaprojects like mining and gas pipelines has bypassed Balochistan itself, ignoring its own territories and being transported to other provinces such as Punjab and Sindh (Wani, 2021; Wani, 2021). As a result, the people of Balochistan felt marginalised and neglected by the government. This led to widespread protests and demands for a fair distribution of gas revenue (Wani, 2021). Similarly, the Reko diq and Saindak gold and copper mines have resulted in displacement, forced evictions, and the loss of livelihood for many local communities. According to studies by Abbas (2019), the lack of compensation and failure to address concerns have been cited as factors contributing to the sense of injustice and resentment among the affected population (Abbas, 2019). The lack of transparency and accountability in the management of these resources has only fuelled the perception of exploitation and unfair treatment (Abbas, 2019). This has created a deep-seated mistrust towards such initiatives and has led to a strong inclination to resist the CPEC as well. Hence, the assumptions and apprehensions of the local community bear significant weight, especially given the involvement of China and the geopolitical rivalry entailed.

This section explores the multifaceted impacts arising from the growing geopolitical competition in and around Gwadar port. These impacts include infringements upon individual rights, curtailment of freedom of movement, speech, and business, as well as disruptions to the economic and social rights of the local population.

7.2.1 Impacts on Human Rights:

The intensifying geopolitical competition in the Gwadar region has significant and wide-ranging implications, especially in terms of the infringement of human rights. This study examines several manifestations of human rights breaches resulting from this rivalry, the lack of international institutions to enforce responsibility on important actors, and the particular obstacles encountered by the local community in the Gwadar region as a result of China's engagement. Through the analysis of these effects, we can get a more profound comprehension of the intricacies and consequences of geopolitical competitions on individual human rights.

As elucidated within the analytical framework, a significant consequence stemming from the escalating geopolitical rivalry is the violation of human rights perpetrated by the key actors involved in the rivalry (Sabatini, 2022; Rodríguez-Garavito, 2021). In the context of this thesis, human rights refer to a variety of rights, including the right to life, the freedom from torture and other cruel or inhumane treatment, the freedom from slavery and forced labour, the right to liberty and security, the right to a fair trial, the prohibition of all illegal forms of punishment, and the right to education and health care, among others. Furthermore, the violations of these rights manifest in various forms, such as forced evictions, arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, and restrictions on freedom of business, employment, movement, expression, and assembly. The continuous competition for power and dominance often leads to the prioritisation of national security over individual rights, resulting in a disregard for basic human rights standards (Commission, 2020). This does not only undermine the principles of democracy and the rule of law but also leaves individuals vulnerable and marginalised in the face of state repression. This transgression is primarily

attributed to the absence of robust international institutions (Sabatini, 2022). The absence of international institutions enables these influential actors to act without facing consequences or accountability for their actions. Consequently, the individuals and communities ensnared in this rivalry frequently experience infringements of their fundamental human rights. For example, the construction of the Gwadar Port in Balochistan under the CPEC initiative has resulted in the displacement of fishing communities and the destruction of marine ecosystems, leading to a loss of livelihood for many locals.

The Gwadar and Mekran regions are currently experiencing a severe violation of human rights, primarily manifested through the forced eviction of individuals from their ancestral lands (Abbas, 2019). According to the United Nations Special Report on Forced Eviction, “forced evictions constitute gross violations of a range of internationally recognised human rights, including the human rights to adequate housing, food, water, health, education, work, security of the person, freedom from cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment, and freedom of movement” (United Nations Human Rights, 2023).

The forced evictions not only violate the fundamental right to property but also disrupt the social fabric of these communities (United Nations Human Rights, 2023). For example, in Gwadar, local fishing communities have been forcefully displaced from their coastal villages to make way for large-scale development projects, such as the construction of a deep-sea port.¹⁰ The fishing pier (Jetty), where the local fishermen unload and store their catch, has been taken over by security forces due to the ongoing expansion of the Gwadar port and its associated road infrastructure. According to a Gwadar resident, as reported in an

¹⁰ Interview A 3 (28-03-2022).

interview with the researcher, this has started happening since the Chinese arrival and the construction of a port.

“The issue of land acquisition and limited access to specific areas has garnered considerable attention following the inception of the CPEC and China's engagement in the region. The security forces have conducted forcible evictions in the adjacent areas of Port, defending their actions based on security considerations as the primary justification. The security forces now have control over the old jetty, making it impossible for the fishing community to dock their ships there. This has been a long-term policy of China and Pakistan to create unfavourable conditions for the local population with the aim of encouraging migration and prompting individuals to abandon their current habitats.”¹¹

These communities, which have relied on fishing as their livelihood for generations, are now left without a source of income and are being denied access to their traditional fishing grounds, resulting in a devastating impact on their economic and social well-being. This has resulted in the displacement of thousands of families who have been living in these areas for generations. Many of the communities around the Gwadar region have experienced forced evictions. According to another resident of Gwadar,

“Numerous communities situated along the route of the CPEC were faced with the possibility of involuntary evacuation. The villages and areas dwelling along the

¹¹ Interview A 3 (28-03-2022).

CPEC route and port areas in Gwadar either engaged in migration to adjacent countries, such as Iran, or experienced Internal displacement. ¹²

Similarly, reports on the fishing community of Gwadar have indicated that individuals residing in the vicinity of the port areas are disproportionately affected by forced eviction and displacement. The report presented a compelling argument that “A Chinese company working on the development of East Bay (*Demi-Zer*) expressly asked people to vacate the area. Most of the fishermen of Gwadar access the sea through this coast, and this is the place where their boats are docked. The livelihood of thousands of fishermen is at risk. This eviction will further worsen the situation of the daily lives of fishermen, which are already affected by CPEC related developments in Gwadar” (Abbas, 2019). The evacuation of local people from areas of significant financial and strategic importance has become apparent since the Gwadar port construction has been started. Moreover, the lack of proper compensation and resettlement plans further exacerbates the plight of these affected individuals, leaving them vulnerable and marginalised in their own country.

In addition to the forced eviction, there have been reports of forced disappearances targeting the local population, who express concerns regarding development and forced eviction (Mendez, 2020). The forced disappearances of people started in Balochistan during the former military dictator Musharraf's tenure. It got worse during the PPP's tenure and after the announcement of the CPEC. Many Baloch went missing across the province who held dissenting voices against the state's policy towards Balochistan (Baloch, 2021; Report, 2023). After the arrival of Chinese engineers and workers in Gwadar, the Baloch insurgents started

¹² Interview A 5 (03/10/2022).

targeting the Chinese nationals. The series of attacks on Chinese workers and the high-profile hotel in Gwadar further intensified the already dire situation in Balochistan. Hundreds went missing, and many others fled the region due to the fear of being disappeared (Baloch, 2022).

The increasing number of enforced disappearances only served to deepen the rift between the government and the Baloch nationalist groups, exacerbating the already widespread protests and unrest in the area (Baloch, 2021). Authorities have also used brutal force against protestors demonstrating for their loved ones (Baloch, 2021). The local population is also concerned about the region's militarization, which violates individual rights. As an interviewee has noted:

“Things have drastically changed in the region. The people have fundamental questions about their security, rights, and political freedom. Thousands have died because of the conflict, and thousands more are missing since the arrival of China.”¹³

The escalating geopolitical rivalry in the Gwadar region has not only resulted in human rights violations and disappearances, it has also left a significant impact on the security and stability of the region. The presence of foreign powers and the competition for strategic and economic advantage have contributed to a sense of disenfranchisement and resentment among the local population. This has led to protests, unrest, and even violence, further exacerbating the already precarious state of law and order in the region. According to one report, “local people have long been frustrated that despite the disruption caused by the construction—a heavy military presence, checkpoints, and frequent security-related

¹³ Interview A 13 (22/11/2022).

shutdowns of internet and cell services; they have not seen any improvement in their circumstances” (Shackle, 2021). Local political activists and advocates of human rights have blamed the securitization of the region for the increased number of individual rights abuses. According to one resident of Gwadar,

“For my area and me, CPEC is posing a lot of difficulties. Militants are targeting CPEC projects, and security forces are responding by attacking them. This is one of the worst circumstances in the region because once rebels attack security personnel, they typically block off the entire area for hours and target people in general during search operations.”¹⁴

According to interviews A 4 and A 5,

“It directly affected our areas located near Gwadar. Balochistan is a conflict-ridden region, and insurgents are operating in various parts of the country, including Gwadar. Security forces are also actively operating in Balochistan to counter the insurgents for the security of the Chinese. The daily routine of the common people is disturbed because of the securitization of the entire region”.¹⁵

“The most severe changes I have observed since the inception of CPEC include strict security measures and restrictions on common people doing their daily businesses. The excessive presence of law enforcement agencies (LEAs) creates a sense of insecurity and threats to local people, which was a calm and peaceful town over the years”.¹⁶

¹⁴ Interview A 5 (03/10/2022).

¹⁵ Interview A 5 (03/10/2022) and Interview A 4 (08/07/2022).

¹⁶ Interview A 5 (03/10/2022).

The importance of Gwadar port in terms of geo-strategic significance serves as a vital aspect in providing strategic depth to the Navy for surveillance actions to assure maritime defence and the secure flow of oil from the Persian Gulf to China through the CPEC.¹⁷ Because of these, the security forces are providing more and more security to the Chinese officials and workers to avoid any danger to their lives, but the local people are the primary victims of this measure. According to Maulana Hidayat ur Rehman, the president of Gwadar Huq Do Tehreek (Movement for the Rights of Gwadar),

“We do not have water, power, or education, but Lahore gets the Orange Line, and we get army officials and check posts. The army is always deployed there to keep a hold on it; there are check posts at every step; we are asked for identification in our hometowns, while those asking us, belong to other provinces” (Rizwan, 2022).

In this scenario, the fishing communities are the hardest hit, as they are prohibited from fishing at certain times or in certain locations. This restriction has severely affected their livelihood, as fishing is their main source of income. The fishing communities are now facing financial hardships and struggling to meet their basic needs due to the limitations imposed on their fishing activities. Interview B 5 believes that CPEC would bring more securitization of the sea and increase the hurdles for the fishing communities.

“One of the biggest impacts of CPEC on the local population is that it is increasing militarization in the region. On one side, the Pakistan army, in the name of enhanced security, is militarising the areas, and there would be restrictions on movement for the

¹⁷ Interview B 6 (14/05/2022).

local communities due to this militarization and security. On the other hand, the attacks from the insurgents have also increased. And in this scenario, the militarization will increase, and the victims will be the local people of the region, and they are the ones who are going to lose out. The fishermen's access to the sea is also affected, and they are not allowed to go fishing as they used to in the past".¹⁸

The former Gwadar Deputy Commissioner stressed the importance of regional securitization due to China-India-US geopolitical tensions.¹⁹ The presence of Chinese engineers and workers is under attack by insurgents and militants, which has further intensified the security measures around Gwadar. Pakistan blames India and neighbouring countries for supporting the militants who conduct attacks on Chinese nationals to sabotage the CPEC projects (Aamir, 2018). The intense securitization of the area poses a potential threat, thereby bringing the Baloch population into focus. Due to the increased securitization, the local population of Gwadar is often seen protesting for their rights and for the protection of their small businesses. These protests have gained international attention, shedding light on the plight of the Baloch people and their struggle for autonomy in the face of growing militarization. The securitization measures, although aimed at protecting strategic assets, have marginalized the local population, exacerbating existing socio-economic disparities.

In 2021, Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rehman, a prominent figure of a politico-religious party in Gwadar, has organised a protest that lasted for over a month. The protest aimed to address the issue of local fishermen being consistently denied access to the sea due to VIP movements

¹⁸ Interview B 5 (26/01/2022).

¹⁹ Interview B 6 (14/05/2022).

and Chinese security concerns (Abbas, 2021; Siddiq, 2021; Baloch, 2021). The local populace has voiced their dissatisfaction and objection towards specific policies, namely the heightened securitization of the region, restrictions on freedom of movement, and the prohibition of local fishing activities in certain areas. These concerns have arisen due to the escalating presence of Chinese and international fishing trawlers in the sea surrounding the Gwadar region (Aamir, 2022). The locals felt that their voices were being ignored and their concerns were not being addressed, leading to a surge in anger and frustration. Despite facing opposition, the protesters remained resilient, demanding transparency, inclusivity, and the protection of their rights in the development plans. The protesters demanded greater representation in decision-making processes and voiced concerns over the lack of infrastructure development in their city. The escalation of anti-CPEC protests in Gwadar has elicited concern from China (Das, 2021). The protests and opposition to certain measures have raised apprehensions among Chinese authorities about the stability and progress of their investments in the region (Aamir, 2022). This has prompted China to engage in dialogue with local stakeholders and work towards addressing their grievances to ensure a smooth implementation of CPEC projects in Gwadar.

Additionally, Intensified security measures in Balochistan, spurred by a long-standing insurgency and fears of foreign interference, have created a climate of pervasive surveillance and control. This "grid-style social management" (Finley, 2019) employs a network of checkpoints and sophisticated data analysis to closely monitor the movements and activities of the local population. The level of securitization and militarization increased due to three major reasons. First, there has been a strong insurgency going on in Balochistan for the last two decades, and the insurgency has been turned into a separatist movement. Second, the

insurgents' recent targets have been primarily Chinese interests and workers (Fazl-e-Haider, 2022). And third, Pakistan blames the involvement of foreign and neighbouring powers, i.e., India, Iran, and Afghanistan, behind the insurgency who want to sabotage the CPEC by supporting and training the insurgents. Thus, every individual is seen as a threat, they are being closely watched, and their every movement is under severe surveillance.²⁰

*"We, as the local people, are under surveillance, and vigilance. We are being watched for every movement, and they say it is especially important for Chinese security."*²¹

According to the residents, quoted in one report, published by Mishele Ijaz in 2018.

"In my own country, and on my very own land, I am being welcomed as an outsider by someone who is the outsider. They smiled warmly, shook our hands, and asked us how they can help us since we were their guests! How would you feel, tell me?" (Ijaz, 2018)

The above highlights that Chinese and Pakistani activities in Gwadar have compromised human rights, amplified socio-economic disparities, and stifled the voices of the Baloch community. Furthermore, the escalating geopolitical tensions have resulted in a surge of violence and armed conflicts in Balochistan, further worsening the already compromised human rights situation. The Baloch population has been subjected to forced eviction, enforced disappearances, and victimization by both state and non-state actors. Socio-economic disparities have also widened, with limited access to education, healthcare, and basic infrastructure, leading to a cycle of poverty and marginalization. Additionally, the

²⁰ Interview A 1 (28-03-2022) and Interview A 2 (28-03-2022).

²¹ Interview A 3 (28-03-2022).

stifled voices of the Baloch community are evident through strict media censorship and restrictions on freedom of expression, making it difficult for their grievances to be heard on a global platform (U.S. Department of State, 2023). This systematic oppression has led to a sense of hopelessness and despair among the Baloch people, as they struggle to find avenues for justice and change. The lack of accountability for human rights violations further perpetuates a culture of impunity, where perpetrators can act with impunity and continue to violate the rights of the Baloch community.

7.2.2 Economic Impact of CPEC:

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a cornerstone of China's Belt and Road Initiative, has been touted as a transformative project for Pakistan's economy, particularly for the strategically located port city of Gwadar. The influx of investments in infrastructure, energy, and industrial projects under CPEC has fuelled expectations of significant economic growth and development in the region. However, the actual economic impact of CPEC on the local population in Gwadar remains a complex and contested issue.

7.2.2.1 Impacts on Economic Rights:

The CPEC has the potential to transform economic conditions and uplift the backward and smaller provinces in terms of development if the impartial distribution of resources is assured. Most respondents believe that CPEC can help Balochistan become Pakistan's economic hub because of its minerals, natural resources, and huge coast on the world's busiest ocean. However, given the trust deficit between the centre and the province and the history of troubled relations, people are not optimistic that it will change enough for the local population. There is a deep-rooted scepticism among the locals that the CPEC will primarily benefit the central government and foreign investors rather than the people of Balochistan.

The province has long suffered from neglect and marginalisation, with its natural resources being exploited by others without any significant benefit to the locals. Without a genuine commitment from the authorities to address the historical grievances and ensure fair resource allocation, it is unlikely that CPEC alone will be able to bring about the transformative change that Balochistan desperately needs. According to one activist from Gwadar,

“Balochistan is where CPEC begins. The port is the powerhouse and economic hub of CPEC, and since it is in Balochistan, given the scenario where the province benefits from the revenue more than the federal economy, Balochistan can benefit a lot. But again, only in the best-case scenario.”²²

Similarly, the economic activity in those areas grows where CPEC economic zones and CPEC routes are passing, and those areas are also where Special Economic Zones are being established. According to interview B1,

“CPEC is also a way to impact some positive developments in some of the backward areas of both countries, such as Xinjiang in China and Balochistan in Pakistan, and the way it has been framed, it will develop those regions in Pakistan and China economically. And if we interpret it in multiple ways, whether this would be good for both countries are debatable, but yes, the economic corridor is one such venture where economies grow.”²³

Undoubtedly, CPEC has a lot of economic potential for the local communities if they have been prepared for this change and its economic outcomes and if the widening gap and

²² Interview B 15 (05/12/2022).

²³ Interview B 01 (21/09/2021).

trust deficit problems were solved beforehand. However, as we have seen in Chapter 4, Balochistan is the most backward and poverty-ridden province, and most of the population lacks basic facilities such as water, electricity, gas, health, and education. How can they become part of this megaproject when they lack the basic educational qualities? Since the announcement of the CPEC projects, except for some roads and infrastructure, Balochistan has remained ignored in many CPEC-related projects, such as energy projects. The prioritisation of the construction of the western routes of the CPEC was determined upon its announcement in 2015, with consideration given to the fact that these routes traverse the most socioeconomically disadvantaged areas within the nation (Abb, 2022). Nevertheless, it is evident that China does not exhibit a keen interest in the development of this route, while the central government appears to be inclined towards the eastern route, which traverses the provinces of Sindh and Punjab (Abb, 2022).

At the outset, the local community in Balochistan, namely the inhabitants of Gwadar, exhibited a high degree of optimism, predominantly characterising it as a venture poised to bring about economic success and social well-being. However, the current circumstances do not align with the assertions made by authorities and the information presented in the media. All interview participants, regardless of their social status, expressed that the present course of events did not show indications of economic stability.²⁴

The creation of roads and infrastructure does not guarantee economic stability; rather, it is contingent upon the welfare of the community and the establishment of SEZs, which allow residents to actively participate and benefit from the economic advancements.

²⁴ Interview with B 1,2, B5, B13 and B15.

However, according to Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch, there has been zero funding for the general welfare of the population except for some roads (Baloch, 2022). At the time of the signing of the CPEC agreement, Mr. Baloch held the position of Chief Minister of Balochistan. Subsequently, he publicly disclosed that he had not been consulted or apprised of the terms and conditions pertaining to the CPEC deal and Gwadar Port (Baloch, 2016).

“What we have been told is completely different from what we see on the ground. We are told that China would make educational institutions, health facilities, and energy projects in Gwadar, but except for one or two small projects, no big energy projects have been initiated in Gwadar or Mekran; rather, most of the energy projects are initiated and completed in other provinces such as Sindh and Punjab, but not in Balochistan.”²⁵

Furthermore, successive administrations in Islamabad have shown a limited capacity to undertake measures aimed at fostering social and educational advancement among the indigenous Baloch population. Consequently, the local Baloch community has endured a lack of access to education and skills training, resulting in their marginalisation and a significant developmental disparity. When compared to the other federating units, the Baloch population exhibits lower levels of education and possesses fewer skill. According to one interviewee,

“The residents of Mekran, Lasbela, and the wider province exhibit a lack of sufficient skills and qualifications for the employment opportunities that will arise because of the

²⁵ Interview with B2 (07/09/2021).

CPEC. Consequently, individuals from other provinces are inevitably migrating into these regions, as it is impractical to impede their movement within one state. It is unreasonable to expect individuals from Karachi or any other province to possess the requisite qualifications for these positions. The presence of a skilled labour shortage will likely attract individuals, leading to a subsequent alteration in the demographic composition of the region.”²⁶

The lack of government intervention hindered the local community's ability to sufficiently prepare for this significant undertaking and deprived them of access to the better employment opportunities which require specific qualification and skills. It was imperative that the local population should have been prepared with adequate education and training, equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively capitalise on employment prospects. Despite the promises made by the central as well as the provincial governments regarding the potential benefits of the CPEC project, the local population is unlikely to witness any discernible improvements in employment opportunities resulting from the initiative. This can be attributed to the government's limited efforts in facilitating capacity building or fostering human development.

One former Gwadar Port Authority employee, during the interview, made the following arguments about the economic benefits of the port and CPEC for the local population:

²⁶ Interview with B2 (07/09/2021).

“There is no doubt that the CPEC and Gwadar Port Projects are huge projects, and they would create many jobs. But those jobs would not be for the local population, as they have no skills, no professional qualifications, and are not educated enough. Successive governments never tried to give quality education to the local communities so that they could compete with the skilled workers of other provinces. If I answer this question in this manner, then it will not be wrong to say that the local population is unable to fill the gap in skilled labour. The local inhabitants of Gwadar are extremely poor and uneducated; how can they be fit for the jobs that are created?”²⁷

He further said that the government has primarily focused on infrastructure development rather than investing in skill development and job creation programmes. As a result, the local population lacks the necessary qualifications and training to benefit from the employment opportunities that may arise from the CPEC project.

“Our focus should have been to give jobs to the locals, but when they could not fulfil the required skills and qualifications, how could they be hired? Ultimately, those who have skills, and the required qualifications would be hired, and they may not be from Balochistan or the Baloch. So, this is the reason the Baloch community cannot have ownership of the projects because they have already accepted that this project is not for them.”²⁸

Furthermore, the local community has raised concerns about the perceived lack of transparency in the recruiting procedures, potentially resulting in favouritism and the

²⁷ Interview B 12. (15/08/2021).

²⁸ Interview B 12. (15/08/2021).

potential exclusion of local citizens from employment prospects. The community members have expressed their discontent with the perceived absence of equitable employment opportunities. The contention posits that those residing in the local area, with the necessary qualifications and displaying enthusiasm for employment, should be given precedence over external candidates. However, the situation is the opposite. External candidates are often selected over local citizens, leaving the community feeling marginalised and overlooked. The lack of transparency in the recruiting procedures only exacerbates these concerns and further fuels the perception of favouritism.

This can be evident from the recent employment opportunities, announced for the Gwadar International Airport. The airport authority has recently made public announcements regarding multiple employment opportunities available at the newly established Gwadar International Airport. A considerable proportion of individuals residing in the local area submitted applications for the employment positions. However, with the release of the results, it was observed that out of the 37 vacant positions ranging from Grade 1 to Grade 17, a mere two individuals from Balochistan were selected, while the remainder of the appointments were granted to those hailing from provinces other than Balochistan. This observation suggests that the allocation of jobs or the recruitment process by the authorities was characterised by unfairness, resulting in discontent and animosity among the local populace. The present circumstances not only erode the faith and confidence of the community in the CPEC projects but also impede the potential economic advantages that may have arisen from the provision of employment possibilities to local citizens.

In addition to the employment opportunities, Balochistan has also been ignored from the energy and other developmental projects which could benefit the local surroundings. According to interviewee B 2,

*What Balochistan got out of the projects from the CPEC are some roads and two coal based energy power plants, which does not seem to be liable and are environmentally destructive.*²⁹

Moreover, during the interview with the local inhabitants of Gwadar, one participant argued that:

*“The government does not want to invest on economic wellbeing and societal development in our area because we, as resident of Gwadar, are not important for them, rather they care more about the land and the Balochistan as a whole.”*³⁰

Similarly, when discussing how CPEC may be a game changer for the people of Balochistan with one of the former Chief Ministers of Balochistan, he emphasised that under CPEC, very few or extremely limited projects were announced for the social welfare of the Baloch community. The ordinary population is not the focus of economic transformation.³¹

The CPEC does not only impact the creation of the jobs, employment opportunities for the local community and share in the energy projects, but it has also severely impacted the already existing small businesses i.e., the fishing industry, and the livelihood of the

²⁹ Interview B 02. (07/09/2021).

³⁰ Interview A 1, 2, and 3.

³¹ Interview B 13. (25/09/2022).

common masses. For example, the people of Gwadar district which includes all the coastal belt areas i.e., Pasni, Gwadar, Jiwani, Pishukan, Ganz, and Ormara, solely rely on the fishing industry and earn their livelihood from fishing (Anees, 2022). However, with the arrival of Chinese in and around Gwadar, their small businesses are severely impacted. All the interviewees from Gwadar even from other areas agree that with the arrival of the Chinese, the local inhabitants have been negatively impacted.

There are two main reasons why the fishing industry and small businesses are in danger after the arrival of the Chinese in the Gwadar region. First, the security concerns for the Chinese workers and the potential threat posed by insurgents coming from the coast, which have led to numerous restrictions by the security forces on fishing access to the sea. This has greatly impacted the livelihood of local fishermen and the overall fishing industry in the area. According to a journalist in Gwadar when interviewed about the fishing industry:

“The fishermen have experienced a significant reduction in the availability of fishing locations that were previously accessible to them. The economic sources have seen negative consequences. This occurrence is frequent due to the stringent security protocols implemented by the security forces.”³²

Enhanced security measures have been implemented by the Pakistan Coast Guard and Frontier Corps along the coastal regions. The local communities have been assigned a designated schedule for engaging in fishing activities at sea, with the expectation that they adhere to the allocated time limit and return before its expiration. But at times adherence to

³² Interview B 15 (05/12/2022).

the time limit proved difficult due to the nature of the work. Fishing necessitates the virtues of patience and time, as there are instances where one must endure extended periods of waiting before achieving a successful catch. However, it is currently imperative for fishing community to adhere to the directives issued by the military and authoritative figures, ensuring their timely return home, regardless of whether they have procured fish or returned empty-handed. While security forces' instructions aimed to adjust the local fishing community's schedule, these rules clash with the inherent limitations of fishing itself. Fish do not follow timetables, and restrictions on specific times or periods severely limit the community's catch, causing significant hardship. The authorities had implemented these timetables and policies without consulting the local fishing community (Notezai, 2021). According to Haji Khudadad Waju, quoted in one report, “his community (fishing community) is left out of the conversation on development entirely. Despite being the oldest dwellers in Gwadar, we have no say in the process” (Notezai, 2021). Like him, there are other fishermen who are now fearful that they would starve if this continues.

“Prior to the arrival of the Chinese, the indigenous fishermen enjoyed unrestricted autonomy to embark on fishing expeditions at their own discretion. They had the liberty to venture to any desired distance and select the most suitable time for engaging in fishing activities, thus enjoying unrestricted freedom of movement. Currently, robust security protocols have been implemented. Fishing vessels are distributed tokens and licences to access waters, which are accompanied by a prescribed time for engaging in fishing activities. For instance, if an individual engages in fishing activities on a given day, it is expected that their next fishing excursion will come approximately after three to four days. The availability of fishing hours in the sea

became constrained, leading to a corresponding limitation in the number of fishing vessels. The cessation of their former unrestricted ability to engage in both labour and fishing activities has resulted in a current state where they are prohibited from openly engaging in fishing activities without obtaining prior authorization from the governing authorities.”³³

Another fisherman shares the same concerns regarding the fishing and the restriction to sea in the following words.

“It is noteworthy that the primary economic activity in Gwadar is centred around the fishing industry, which currently serves as the sole established industry for the local population. A considerable proportion, ranging from 70 to 80 percent of the region's inhabitants are reliant on this industry for their livelihood. However, it is important to acknowledge that the freedom of individuals to engage in fishing activities at sea has been curtailed compared to previous circumstances. The provision of a predetermined timeline for fishing is of limited utility to fishermen, as the act of fishing is contingent upon certain temporal conditions. It would be more prudent to await the opportune moment as dictated by the fisherman's expertise and knowledge.”³⁴

Second, in addition to the security concerns, the presence of the Chinese trawlers and robust fishing techniques have posed serious challenges to the local fishing community, which solely relies on the traditional way of fishing with small boats. This has led to increased competition for resources as Chinese fishing vessels have begun encroaching on traditional

³³ Interview A 1 (28/03/2022) and Interview A 3 (28/03/2022).

³⁴ Interview A 2 (28/03/2022).

fishing grounds (Notezai A. , 2021). This has further strained the already struggling small businesses, as they are now forced to compete with larger, more technologically advanced operations. The report, which the Pakistan Institute of Development Economy and Research for Social Transformation and Advancement (RASTA) Islamabad jointly published in 2022, depicts the concerns of the fishing communities (Haque & Khan, 2022). Though, most fears are related to the excessive presence of the security forces, they see Chinese trawlers engulfing the centuries-old primitive fishing industry. A resident of Gwadar fears the extinction of the local fishing industry in the following words:

*“Subsequent to China's presence in Gwadar, a considerable number of Chinese trawlers have been observed engaging in extensive fishing activities within our maritime domain. While our fleet consists of tiny boats, the Chinese possess large trawling vessels that are significantly impacting the geographic distribution of fish species. Everyone knows who is responsible for granting permission to these trawlers, and the underlying motivations behind their approval are widely recognised.”*³⁵

The experiences that the Gwadar residents have shared are in line with the findings of Kinfu Adisu et al.'s (2010) research. The authors argue that Chinese trawlers and economic competition with local small businesses pose serious threats to local businesses (Adisu, et al., 2010). According to the findings of Kinfu Adisu et al. (2010), the influx of Chinese investment into Africa initially resulted in economic growth. However, over time, it became evident that

³⁵ Interview A 3 (28/03/2022).

local businesses were adversely affected by these investments, while Chinese businesses experienced significant prosperity (Adisu, et al., 2010).

The local Gwadar community is dealing with the same situation. The Chinese investment in Gwadar has brought initial economic growth to the region. However, as time goes on, local businesses in Gwadar are facing challenges due to the competition posed by Chinese businesses.

‘When discussing the adverse consequences of the CPEC and the advanced Chinese fishing tactics and technology, it becomes evident that the local population lacks the capacity to effectively contend with the Chinese trawlers and their fishing technologies. The local fishing practises predominantly rely on traditional techniques; however, the presence of Chinese trawlers has resulted in their overtaking of the local fishing industry.’³⁶

Similarly, besides Chinese trawlers, Chinese overfishing and overproduction are significantly threatening the livelihood of the local communities. A report published in 2018 highlights that Chinese vessels and trawlers in the Indian Ocean pose serious threats to Asia’s most fertile fishing grounds, which support the domestic fishing industry (Campbell, 2018). These activities not only deplete the fish populations but also create an imbalance in the ecosystem, affecting other marine species and their habitats. Moreover, excessive fishing and overproduction by Chinese vessels can lead to economic losses for local fishermen, who struggle to compete with advanced Chinese trawlers and ships (Campbell, 2018).

³⁶ Interview B 8 (10/11/2021).

Moreover, the Gwadar region is famous for its unique fish breeds, which are in severe danger not only from the Chinese trawlers but also from the trawlers of other provinces, i.e., Sindh. Furthermore, the indiscriminate trawling techniques used by Chinese and other trawlers pose a threat not only to the fish populations in the Gwadar region but also to the delicate marine habitats that support these unique fish breeds. The destruction of these habitats can have long-lasting and irreparable consequences for the local ecosystem. It survived earlier because of the region's ancient and traditional fishing methods; the environmental effects were incredibly limited. According to interview B 7, whose argument reflects the report of Campbell C. (2018):

“If the US, Japan, as well as other developed countries are unable to effectively compete with China in this particular domain, what strategies can be employed by the historically underdeveloped local Baloch community, which traditionally relies on fishing as their primary livelihood?”³⁷

“China has made significant advancements in the development of its blue economy, hence overtaking other Asian countries such as Japan and India. The presence of China and its trawlers poses a significant challenge to the sustainability of the indigenous fishing sector in the Gwadar region.”³⁸

“It is not only about fishing; it is also about the blue economy. The blue economy is such a vast and huge area, but when we talk about the trawling, especially Chinese trawling in these regions, they are doing genocide of the fish species with their wire

³⁷ Interview B 7 (09/11/2021).

³⁸ Interview B 7 (09/11/2021).

nets, which is illegal in Pakistani law, but they are still doing it because no one can stop them. The local fisheries department is unable to act against this because of the reach and political connection of the Chinese with the military establishment of Pakistan.”³⁹

During the interview, one expert provided a thorough analysis of how CPEC and China's presence in the area have affected local small businesses and their daily livelihood.

“The primary concerns of the indigenous businesses, as far as I know, are the fisher communities. Undoubtedly, when larger cooperation comes with better technology, greater manpower, and the skills to basically fish in the seas, the local businesses are affected daily. Therefore, this is also one of the larger concerns of the local population when it comes to the larger CPEC, particularly when they think that the Chinese will flood the markets in terms of businesses and that the local industry will become less competitive.”⁴⁰

“And yes, this indigenous business will be impacted by the Chinese efficient trawlers. And I think it has already started, and many people have already been rehabilitated, and their livelihood have been impacted due to security concerns of the Chinese and local military establishment.”⁴¹

As a result, it has become clear from the research and experiences of the local community and experts that the locals' small businesses, which are already underdeveloped and in poor conditions, would suffer. These small businesses often lack the resources and

³⁹ Interview B 7 (09/11/2021).

⁴⁰ Interview B 1 (21/09/2021).

⁴¹ Interview B 1 (21/09/2021).

infrastructure to compete with technologically advanced businesses, leading to a further decline in their economic prospects. Additionally, the influx of Chinese businesses may also result in a loss of cultural identity and traditional practises of the local community. Additionally, due to security restrictions, the local fishing industry is already under pressure, and the local people are afraid of their livelihood. Furthermore, the Chinese businesses may exacerbate the existing challenges faced by the local fishing industry. With security restrictions already in place, the arrival of Chinese businesses could potentially lead to increased competition for fishing resources, further threatening the livelihood of the local fishermen. This not only adds to the economic strain on the community but also instils fear and uncertainty among the people who rely on fishing for their basic needs. The combination of economic decline and cultural erosion poses a significant threat to the overall well-being and sustainability of the local community.

7.2.3 Non-Economic Impact of CPEC:

The CPEC has been heralded as a catalyst for development in Pakistan, with the promise of transforming the nation's infrastructure and economy. Gwadar, a strategically located port city at the heart of CPEC, has received significant investments in various sectors, particularly deep-sea port construction, establishment of SEZs, Gwadar Free Zone but very limited investment on education and healthcare.

7.2.3.1 Impact of CPEC on Education and Health:

The development of Gwadar Port and the subsequent implementation of the CPEC have had a profoundly negative impact on the already precarious state of education and healthcare in Balochistan. While these projects were touted as catalysts for economic growth and development, their realization has been accompanied by a systematic neglect of the

province's social sectors (Ijaz, 2018). The diversion of substantial resources towards infrastructure and energy projects has resulted in a disproportionate allocation of funds, strategic and intentional negligence, leaving education and healthcare severely underfunded and overlooked. Furthermore, the influx of foreign workers and the displacement of local communities due to these mega-projects have strained existing resources and exacerbated inequalities in access to essential services.

Historically, the federal government has exhibited a consistent disregard for the development of education and healthcare in Balochistan (Achakzai, 2024). Despite the launch of CPEC, a project heralded as a game-changer for Pakistan's economy, the province continues to languish in terms of human development indicators. The education and health sectors remained more ignored after the announcement of Gwadar port construction.

The neglect is not accidental but rather a strategic choice. An educated and healthy populace is more likely to question the distribution of resources and demand accountability from its leaders (Achakzai, 2024). By maintaining a population with limited access to quality education and healthcare, the status quo can be more easily preserved. Moreover, a skilled and educated local workforce could challenge the importation of foreign labour, undermining the core economic model underpinning these mega-projects. Finally, an informed citizenry is better equipped to scrutinize the costs and benefits of large-scale development initiatives, making it more difficult to justify projects that primarily serve elite interests.

It is evident that the underdevelopment of education and healthcare in Balochistan is not merely a consequence of resource constraints but a deliberate strategy to maintain control and suppress dissent (Editorial, 2024). The Gwadar Port and CPEC have exacerbated existing inequalities and deepened the crisis in these vital sectors.

While comprehensive and directly comparable data on education and health in Gwadar before and after CPEC is limited, various sources provide insights into the changes brought about by CPEC initiatives. In the education sector, Gwadar faces significant challenges such as a lack of quality educational institutions, a shortage of trained teachers, and insufficient resources for educational infrastructure.

Although there is a shortage of complete data, Zeenat Erum's research in 2022 offers valuable insights using secondary data from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) and the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM). These sources provide a concise overview of education and literacy rates, as well as more comprehensive socioeconomic situations.

The analysis presents a clear and striking depiction of the educational infrastructure and availability in Gwadar. The district possesses a restricted quantity of educational institutions, exhibiting notable discrepancies in amenities among elementary, intermediate, and secondary schools (Erum, 2022). A significant number of educational institutions lack fundamental facilities such as access to electricity, clean water, and proper sanitation. The rates of enrolment, especially for girls, are significantly low, and there is a total lack of a specialised women's college (Erum, 2022). These findings highlight the difficulties that the community encounters while trying to obtain high-quality education.

In district Gwadar, there are a total of 203 primary schools, 24 secondary schools, 21 high schools, 12 community schools, 3 private schools, and 5 intermediate colleges. Electricity is accessible in a mere 27% of elementary schools, 33% of middle schools, and 58% of high schools. Only 41% of primary schools have a perimeter wall, while 51% of primary schools lack access to safe drinking water and 46% of schools do not have washrooms (Erum, 2022). The

physical infrastructure in middle and high school buildings, including electricity, drinking water, toilets, and boundary walls, is better to that of primary schools. An analysis of primary and secondary education is conducted based on the gross and net enrolment rates of students aged 5-9 years. 71.26% of students are registered in public schools (Erum, 2022). Only 3% of students enrolled in private schools are within the age group of 10-14 years. According to Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (2015), 71.68% of students are enrolled in public schools, while 1.62% are enrolled in private schools (Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, 2015). There was no dedicated college for female students in the entire district of Gwadar, rather they attend classes in the boys' college in the evening. The building for the girls' degree college was built recently.

Another reason that has hampered development in the education and health sectors in Gwadar since the CPEC is the securitization and surveillance by the security forces and law enforcement agencies. This heightened presence of security forces has created a sense of fear and unease among the local population, leading to a reluctance to invest in these sectors. Additionally, the constant monitoring and restrictions imposed on movement have made it difficult for teachers and healthcare professionals to carry out their duties effectively, further hindering progress in education and health services in Gwadar. As a result, the strict security measures in place have limited the potential benefits of CPEC in improving these crucial sectors. According to Akbar Notezai (2024), this increased security not only hinders social cohesion but also restricts the broader societal benefits, such as economic growth, development in educational sectors and community engagement, that could have resulted from these initiatives (Notezai, 2024). This sense of exclusion has led to increased tension and mistrust between the local population and project developers.

Nevertheless, the local community has not reaped the expected benefits due to strict security measures and surveillance on academic and administrative sections of the mega city. The heavy presence of security forces has created a sense of unease and restrictions on mobility, creating a significant accessibility issue to schools, colleges and hospitals.

The disparity in development has created a stark contrast in the quality of education and healthcare facilities available to different communities. Schools and health facilities in the port and free zone areas are often better equipped and staffed compared to those in other parts of Gwadar, leading to unequal access to quality education and healthcare services for the majority of residents. For instance, schools in the port area may have access to modern facilities, qualified teachers, and a wider range of educational resources, while those in other areas might lack basic amenities like clean water, electricity, and adequate teaching materials. According to one interviewee;

“Despite the lauded infrastructural advancements brought about by the CPEC, its impact on Gwadar's local population has been largely detrimental, with the exception of some improvements in roads and infrastructure. The swift and extensive nature of these developments has overwhelmed the local community, who lack the necessary skills, numbers, and education to effectively participate and benefit from this massive undertaking. The government's failure to adequately prepare the local population for the influx of new industries and opportunities has exacerbated this issue. The lack of investment in education and skill development programs has left the residents ill-

*equipped to compete in the new job market, further marginalizing them within their own community”.*⁴²

Similarly, another resident of Gwadar pointed out that since the inception of CPEC and even before CPEC, the education and health sectors in Gwadar have not improved. Despite promises of development and infrastructure projects, essential services like education and healthcare continue to be neglected in Gwadar. The lack of investment in these sectors has left residents feeling disillusioned and forgotten by the government. As the city grows and changes rapidly due to the influx of CPEC-related activities, addressing these fundamental issues must become a priority to ensure the well-being and prosperity of Gwadar's residents. According to the interviewee;

*“Notwithstanding the promises of development and improved infrastructure under CPEC, the reality on the ground in Gwadar reveals a stark contrast, especially in the healthcare sector. While there have been investments in road infrastructure, essential medical facilities remain severely lacking. The absence of qualified doctors and basic diagnostic tools like CT scans and MRI machines in a city touted as a hub for development raises serious concerns about the prioritization of healthcare needs. Even minor injuries cannot be adequately treated locally, forcing residents to travel long distances for basic medical care”.*⁴³

“Development encompasses more than just infrastructure; it necessitates ensuring access to essential services such as healthcare and education, which have historically

⁴² Interview with B 4 (07/09/2021).

⁴³ Interview with A 7 (01/09/2022).

*been lacking in Gwadar. The minimal progress made in these fundamental areas, even after ten years of CPEC, raises concerns about the project's effectiveness in truly benefiting the local Baloch community”.*⁴⁴

The uneven distribution of development initiatives within Gwadar has significantly hampered the progress of the education and healthcare sectors in the region. For instance, one of the main demands of the Gwadar Huq Do Tehreek was on this disparity and unequal distribution of resources and militarization. These movements expressed their dissatisfaction with the unequal treatment of the residents of Gwadar, despite its central role in the CPEC (Ahmed, 2023). They demanded that the provincial government ensure that the people of Gwadar have access to electricity and education, remove the check posts and take action against the Chinese trawler mafia (Ahmed, 2023).

The fishing communities of Gwadar have faced severe challenges, including disrupted traditional fishing grounds, restricted coastal access, and environmental pollution, due to mega-projects like CPEC and the construction of Gwadar Port. As a result, the primary source of income for many fishing families has been severely impacted (Anwar, Raheem, & Hashmi, 2022; Ahmed & et. al., 2024). This has directly resulted in reduced access to basic necessities, healthcare, and education. It has thereby exacerbated poverty and lowered living standards. For example, a study conducted in 2023 found that the average income of fishing families in Gwadar had decreased tremendously compared to pre-CPEC levels (Anwar, Raheem, &

⁴⁴ Interview with A 3 (29/03/2022).

Hashmi, 2022; Ahmed & et. al., 2024). Additionally, many families have been forced to sell their assets, including boats and fishing equipment, to meet their basic needs.

Similarly, the decline in income has also significantly affected the education of children. The forced eviction, displacement, and dislocation of the fishing community in Gwadar due to the megaproject CPEC and construction of Gwadar Port have had a devastating impact on the education of their children (Talpur, Ahmed, & Katahor, 2023). Many families who have been displaced to remote areas, often far from schools and colleges, have struggled to afford the necessary expenses for their children's education. Many children have been forced to drop out of school, disrupting their academic progress and limiting their future opportunities. The lack of access to quality education has perpetuated a cycle of poverty within the community, making it even more difficult for families to break free from their current circumstances. This has resulted in a significant decline in literacy rates among the displaced population.

The disruption of their lives and the loss of their traditional livelihoods have made it difficult for families to prioritise education, leading to a cycle of poverty and educational deprivation. This has long-term consequences for both individuals and the community, as education not only empowers individuals to secure better opportunities but also plays a vital role in driving economic growth and fostering social progress.

Moreover, the feelings of marginalization and exclusion among the local population, especially the youth after the construction of Gwadar port, have cultivated disillusionment and resentment towards the government. These sentiments are directed solely at its infrastructural development policies. For example, many young people in Gwadar feel that their voices and concerns are ignored by policymakers, who prioritize the interests of external

stakeholders. They resent the influx of outsiders who seem to benefit from the development projects while they are left behind.

Anecdotes abound of young people who feel that their higher education and career prospects have been limited by the lack of opportunities in Gwadar. They may have aspirations to pursue higher education or find employment in fields like engineering or technology, but they are hindered by the lack of educational institutions, vocational training programs, and job opportunities in Gwadar. This sense of frustration and hopelessness can lead to disillusionment with the political system and a desire for change. For instance, the significant involvement of young students in recent protests has increased frustration and the likelihood of more unrest in the community (Akhtar, 2024). The protests led by Dr. Mahrangh Baloch and Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC), which saw significant participation from young students, are indicative of this growing frustration and the potential for further unrest (Hussain A., 2024). The youth, feeling alienated and disenfranchised, are increasingly engaging in various forms of activism. This includes organizing protests, awareness campaigns, and community initiatives to voice their grievances and advocate for change (Hussain A., 2024).

The apprehension experienced by local individuals stems from the inherent difficulty faced by most Baloch individuals in effectively competing with educated professionals and skilled labourers from other provinces, primarily due to their limited access to education and skills training. The Pakistani government has been criticised for its perceived lack of effort in facilitating the development of the Baloch community in technical, vocational, and professional education, thereby hindering their ability to effectively compete with individuals from other provinces.

The first engineering university in Balochistan was established in 2002 coinciding with the commencement of infrastructure development for the Gwadar port. However, the university, located in the capital city Quetta, which is 1000 KM away from the Gwadar port city, has encountered challenges in generating enough competent and proficient labourers to effectively compete with other provinces. Despite its proximity to the port, the people of far flung areas has faced limitations in terms of accessibility and affordability. With limited seats available and high expenses, the university has been unable to cater to the needs of the broader population, particularly those from marginalized communities. This has hindered its ability to produce a sufficient number of skilled engineers to meet the demands of the growing Gwadar port and related industries. The same issue echoes in one of the experts' assertion:

*“Taking Balochistan as a case study, it can be observed that the central government is actively seeking investments and advocating for the inclusion of the Baloch community in the development of Gwadar. However, upon implementation, it becomes evident that the Baloch population lacks the necessary skills and expertise due to poor educational system. This deficiency can be attributed to the state's failure to foster the development of these competencies over the past 74 years. The federal government has never focused its attention in the education sector”.*⁴⁵

Hindering the overall development of Gwadar, as a significant portion of the population remains underserved in terms of education and healthcare (Ali & Sanauddin, 2022; Nihad, 2021; Notezai, 2024). This unequal distribution of resources not only exacerbates

⁴⁵ Interview B 1 (21/09/2021).

existing social inequalities but also fosters resentment and a sense of injustice among the local population (Nihad, 2021; Ali & Sanauddin, 2022). It reinforces the perception that CPEC primarily benefits the strategic interests of China, serves the economic benefits of outsiders and the elite, while neglecting the needs and aspirations of the local community.

In summary, while there are claims of infrastructural advancements in Gwadar's education and health sectors under the CPEC umbrella, the reality is that these benefits have primarily favoured external stakeholders over the local community. Local residents persistently struggle to access quality education and healthcare services, as numerous facilities lack essential resources and trained staff. The gap between the promised improvements and the actual outcomes has caused increasing frustration and disillusionment among the people of Gwadar. Many residents feel that development projects in Gwadar have favoured the interests of outside investors over the needs of the local population. Consequently, the prioritization of outside investors has led to a sense of neglect and marginalization among those who were supposed to benefit from these initiatives. Moreover, the strict security measures and the feeling of being disconnected from decision-making have greatly hindered the positive effects of these developments. The main aim appears to have been to present a false image of progress to draw foreign investment and attention, instead of genuinely improving the lives of Gwadar's residents. This underscores serious concerns about the equitable and long-term viability of CPEC projects and stresses the urgent need for development initiatives that are centred on the needs and aspirations of local communities.

7.2.3.2 Impacts on Political Rights:

Political exclusion from the mainstream of Pakistani politics has always been a problem in Balochistan. The Balochistan local politics of distrust and regionalism collide with

the political and economic effects of the CPEC (Shafqat, 2017). Many Baloch academics view this political marginalisation as justification for tightening control over the province's resources. They argue that the central government's neglect of Balochistan's development and exploitation of its resources has perpetuated economic disparities and hindered the province's progress. The Baloch view of CPEC is a manifestation of the history of political exclusion and resource exploitation by the elite Punjab-based rulers at the centre and the military-bureaucracy nexus (Azam, 2022). Balochistan's political exclusion occurred due to two main reasons: first, there has always been an anti-centre or anti-state tendency, which dates to 1948. Although some of the tribal elders sided with Pakistan for the merger of Balochistan with Pakistan, there was unprecedented opposition from most of the political and tribal leaders (Bangash, 2011). Added with that, the natural resources coming out from Balochistan were never used for the province which has intensified the situation. As discussed earlier, it was among the top three reasons that Baloch community in Pakistan always experienced deceived and excluded from economic development. Since then, there is a mistrust and lack of will from the Baloch leaders to be included in the mainstream politics.

The province has always been administered by the centre, or at least by the party that plays a role in the centre, which is the second and most significant factor in the political isolation of Baloch people in Pakistan (Shafqat, 2017). This centralised control has often led to a sense of marginalisation and discontent among the Baloch people, fuelling demands for greater provincial autonomy and self-governance. Despite occasional periods of relative political autonomy, the Balochistan region has struggled to assert its own identity and interests within the larger framework of Pakistani politics. The lack of political representation and the heavy-handed tactics used by the authorities have only fuelled the Baloch nationalist

movement, which seeks greater autonomy and control over their own resources (Azam, 2022). A common perception that the province has been kept underdeveloped to enable resource exploitation underpins Baloch nationalism. Even development initiatives are viewed as tools to conduct the central government's extractive agenda due to the political narratives' pervasive use of this mistrust. Although the province is the country's biggest producer of natural gas, Balochistan only receives a very modest portion of 12.4 percent in gas royalties, demonstrating the state- and military-led resource exploitation of the area. The CPEC's terminal, Gwadar port, is currently subject to the same feelings of exploitation by the local community (Gattani, 2021). Chinese businesses and the Pakistani government, according to Baloch nationalists, are seizing a larger portion of the lands in and around Gwadar port and related projects.⁴⁶

In addition to the already tensed situation between the Baloch nationalist parties and Islamabad, the arrival of the Chinese has further exacerbated the political situation in the province. The local political parties are under threat from the military establishment as well as from Baloch militants. The military establishment is putting pressure on the local nationalist parties due to the scepticism about Chinese projects among the local Baloch population (Grare, 2022). This has led to a growing sense of frustration and anger among the Baloch nationalist parties, who feel that their voices are being silenced and their concerns ignored (Gattani, 2021). Moreover, to stop the nationalist parties from coming to power through elections, the military establishment has always supported those political parties in power that have kept silent over the use of force, rights violations, and exploitation of

⁴⁶ Interview A 3 (28/03/2022), and Interview B 5 (26/01/ 2022).

resources. The military establishment has been accused of political engineering in Balochistan and making and breaking frequent political parties to maintain control over the region. The military's involvement in politics has also hindered the development and stability of Balochistan, as it often prioritises its own interests over the welfare of the local population.

Most of the nationalist parties in Balochistan, such as the National Party, Balochistan National Party, and other small political parties, are extremely cautious and do not raise their voices due to security threats. According to Malik Siraj Akbar, those political parties that are formed under establishment patronage are selected in the voting process (Akbar, 2018). He goes on to say that “weary of what they described as Balochistan’s endless exploitation by the two mainstream national parties and persistent manipulation of the province’s natural resources and political vulnerabilities, this group of traditionally pro-establishment politicians formed the Balochistan Awami Party (BAP). All national and regional parties viewed the BAP as the establishment’s outpost in Quetta” (Akbar, 2018).

The example of BAP is relevant to portraying the political atmosphere in Balochistan, which was established overnight due to the allegedly political engineering of the military establishment. The BAP political party surfaced just before the 2018 election, and members of the BAP are among those pro-establishment politicians who were with other political parties in the 2013 elections and were members of the government (Hashmi, 2018; ANI, 2023). Most of them were from the Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). The two most popular nationalist parties in Balochistan are BNP-M and NP, but in the 2018 election, BAP became the majority party and constituted the Balochistan provincial government (Hashmi, 2018). Interestingly, the BAP party also won the most National Assembly seats from Balochistan. This has all happened because the party has

sympathisers in the military establishment and has close relations with them (Hashmi, 2018). Even the former Chief Ministers of Balochistan Aslam Raisani and Dr Abdul Malik Baloch alleged that the electoral process and government formation is basically the result of political engineering by the establishment and the voters and politicians are threatened to change their loyalty (Hashmi, 2018).

Similarly, the Baloch militants and insurgents are also attacking the local political parties that are trying to take part in the political process, further exacerbating the political instability in Balochistan (Grare, 2013). These attacks not only create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation but also discourage individuals from actively participating in the democratic process. The insurgents see it as further exploitation of the local Balochs natural resources and do not want them to participate in any military-run political process (Grare, 2013). These insurgents believe that the military establishment is exploiting Balochistan's natural resources for their own benefit, and therefore, they view any involvement of local Baloch in the political process as a betrayal of their cause (Ansari, 2012).

In the province of Balochistan, there exists a notable degree of scepticism among a sizeable portion of the political landscape regarding the CPEC (Ahmed, 2018). This scepticism stems from the belief that CPEC may merely serve as a transient presence in the province, lacking any substantial economic benefits. Furthermore, there is concern among stakeholders regarding the potential negative political consequences that may arise because of the Chinese presence in Gwadar (Ahmed, 2018). The concerns of Balochistan can be traced back to a history of inequitable distribution of resources and development, as well as a perceived lack of transparency from the federal government regarding the CPEC.

The political activists across the Balochistan have faced multifaceted problems. Many of the activists who were vocal against Chinese exploitations have been either killed or disappeared. The political leaders do not only face threats and attacks from the law enforcement agencies, many of them have also been targeted by the insurgents based on their affiliation and supporting pro-Pakistan instances.

Thus, the youth of Balochistan have lost faith in the electoral process. Because the state singled out genuine parties for their pro-Baloch stance as 'wrong policy', the approach of addressing the Balochistan issue by force has increased enmity in people's hearts (Baloch, 2022). This lack of democratic representation has further marginalised the Balochistan population, leading to a sense of exclusion and disillusionment among the youth (Baloch, 2022). As can be seen, political activists are always under the radar of the military establishment. The student wings of the nationalists' political parties are mostly under severe restrictions or banned from operating in educational institutions, limiting their ability to mobilise and organise. This suppression has only fuelled a sense of defiance and resistance among the Balochistan youth, who see these actions as an infringement of their rights to freedom of expression and association. As a result, they are more inclined towards alternative means of seeking justice and advocating for their rights, such as protests and activism.

7.2.3.3 Impacts on Indigenous Culture, Language, and Local Demography:

Since the announcement of BRI and its flagship project, the CPEC, many academicians and scholars have termed the tendency to spread Chinese cultures and values alongside strategic objectives. Through BRI, China has established many Confucius institutions across the participating countries to spread Chinese culture and the Chinese language. The first Confucius institution in Pakistan was established at the National University of Modern

Languages (NUML) in 2005 (Jamshed, Jahangir & Khawaja, 2021). After the signing of CPEC, NUML also established its branch in Gwadar to teach the local Baloch community the Chinese language (Jamshed, Jahangir & Khawaja, 2021).

Similarly, according to one scholar, “CPEC will be a Chinese cultural intrusion on Pakistan” (Sanaullah, 2019). Through the Confucius centres, it means that the local population has been prepared to learn Chinese language so that they can interact with Chinese nationals. One resident of Gwadar said,

"There are a lot of impacts on the local population from the arrival of Chinese. For example, before Chinese arrival, Pakistan was sided with the US, and we were asked to learn and speak the English language. English language centres were established across the country. Now it is China, and we are asked to learn and speak the Chinese language. It means they want us to change our culture, language, and customs for outsiders and ultimately our Balochi language would disappear. And I am sure that is coming soon that we will be asked to speak either Chinese or another language but not our language".⁴⁷

Considering the above interviewee's claim, another resident argued,

"It (the CPEC) can also distort the local culture through large exogenous influxes from other parts of the country and China. It has a severe negative impact on the cultural, social, and political aspects of the indigenous population."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Interview A 1 (28/03/2022).

⁴⁸ Interview A 5 (03/10/2022).

Additionally, the presence of many Chinese nationals in Gwadar has sparked concerns about the preservation of local traditions and cultural identity. The increasing number of Chinese nationals and people from other provinces of Pakistan in Gwadar raises questions about the potential erosion of local traditions and cultural identity. The influx can lead to the dilution of indigenous practises and values as well as a shift in social dynamics within the community. According to one resident,

“The impact of cultural changes on local communities is a matter of significant concern. The Baloch and Chinese populations exhibit distinct cultural characteristics. The coexistence of two distinct cultures in a permanent manner is untenable; it necessitates a trajectory of transformative development whereby the presence of settlers from external communities exerts a substantial adverse influence on the lives of the indigenous population.”⁴⁹

The local community's experiences are similar to those of the elite's perception of the situation. Understanding the demographic shift occurring in this region due to the influx of individuals coming from other nations and even from other provinces of Pakistan is crucial, as it is one of the main concerns of the local community. During the interview conducted with a subject expert, the focus was on exploring the cultural impacts associated with the CPEC. The expert put forth an argument regarding these impacts in the following manner,

“When considering the comprehensive literature on post-colonialism, it becomes evident that the local population has frequently experienced marginalisation upon the

⁴⁹ Interview A 11 (22/11/2022).

arrival of colonial powers and their territorial conquests. This marginalisation has not only entailed the erosion of their social customs and tribal structures but has also resulted in a profound transformation of their identities. Instances such as those observed in Africa and the Durand Line dispute between Afghanistan and Pakistan underscore the way the influence of great power politics has reverberated across local communities, significantly affecting their cultural fabric. Consequently, the implications of CPEC and its geopolitical implications foreshadow an impact on the local community and their indigenous cultures.”⁵⁰

The impacts of developmental projects extend beyond cultural changes. They often bring about changes in the economic and social structures of the local communities, leading to a shift in their way of life. The construction of infrastructure and industries associated with CPEC, for instance, may lead to the displacement of indigenous populations and the loss of their traditional livelihood. Additionally, the influx of outsiders and the integration of global markets may result in the erosion of local customs and traditions, further homogenising cultures and diluting their uniqueness. Instead, it would present significant challenges to their culture and language. In the perspective of Interview B 2,

“There is a strong likelihood that individuals from various regions and nations will take advantage of a particular chance in Gwadar. In the absence of constitutional and legal protections for the preservation of local culture and language, the migration of individuals from diverse regions will inevitably result in the introduction and perpetuation of their own cultural, political, and customary practises. The current

⁵⁰ Interview B1 (21/09/2021).

surge of varied influences is exerting a considerable influence on the indigenous community, resulting in a dramatic transformation of their cultural practises and lifestyle. The level of integration with local communities and alignment of political affinities with the local people remains a major concern.”⁵¹

One of the main concerns, in addition to the cultural and linguistic issues raised by the local community, is the fear of potentially becoming a minority in their own province. Both the common respondents and the elite respondents expressed their belief that the fear of becoming a minority is a significant concern for the local community in Gwadar. This fear stems from their position at the heart of a rapidly evolving city, which serves as a major seaport and offers numerous employment opportunities.⁵² The past experiences of the Baloch community in Pakistan have not been good regarding megaprojects and the development of the local community.

The experience of the local Baloch community may be effectively illustrated through the case of the Baloch residing in Karachi. Historically, the Baloch population in Karachi was predominant; however, as Karachi underwent rapid development, their numerical representation gradually diminished, resulting in their minority status. According to the research conducted by Suhail and Lutfi (2016), Karachi was initially characterised by a significant Baloch ethnic majority, and the city was historically governed by Baloch leaders (Suhail & Lutfi, 2016). However, after the urbanisation and establishment of ports and railways, Karachi witnessed an influx of individuals migrating from various rural regions.

⁵¹ Interview B 2 (07/09/2021).

⁵² Interview B 1 (21/09/2021), and Interview B 2 (07/09/2021).

Moreover, with the influx of migrants from India during the 1947 independence movement and from Afghanistan following the Soviet invasion in 1979, the demographic composition of the Baloch community underwent a significant transformation. Consequently, the Baloch community, which was once in the majority, became a minority group. The absence of legislative measures by the central government to safeguard the local population of Karachi has been observed. However, it is worth noting that the residents, who constitute a minority, face socio-economic challenges, and are relatively disadvantaged (Suhail & Lutfi, 2016).

The designation of Gwadar port as the focal point of the CPEC has significantly amplified the apprehension among the indigenous community of Gwadar regarding the escalating influx of individuals from other provinces as well as from foreigners (Grare, 2022). In a similar vein, another scholar specialising in the study of ethno-nationalism and the politics of ethnicity holds the viewpoint that,

“The presence of demographic transition poses an undeniable risk. Furthermore, the occurrence of this phenomenon might be attributed to the comparatively lower level of competence and professionalism exhibited by the local population in contrast to individuals migrating from other provinces. Assuming that another ethnic group possesses a greater number of talented individuals and entrepreneurs, it is plausible to assert that marginalisation will persist. However, it is important to acknowledge that it is not feasible to restrict the freedom of movement of individuals migrating from

*one province to another within one country. So, people would go to Gwadar for better economic opportunity.”*⁵³

When questioned about the increasing number of individuals, including Chinese nationals, migrating to Gwadar, a student and resident of Gwadar expressed similar apprehensions.

*“I express my concern on the change of the demographic composition in Balochistan, namely in Gwadar, which has resulted in the local population being transformed into minority. The inhabitants of Gwadar may perhaps be compelled to relocate from their ancestral territories in the pursuit of enhanced security measures. Upon transitioning into a minority group inside the region, they are anticipated to encounter numerous challenges, notwithstanding their current predicaments encompassing limited access to essential resources such as water, power, and gas.”*⁵⁴

The influx of affluent individuals from various provinces into Gwadar for entrepreneurial endeavours has resulted in the acquisition of numerous properties within the region. These investors possess the necessary financial resources to acquire land from the poor local community in Gwadar, which may lack awareness of the true market value of the land they are selling (Hamza et.al., 2016). As a result, the local community in Gwadar often ends up selling their lands for a fraction of their actual value, further exacerbating their impoverished condition. This economic disparity between the rich outsiders and the disadvantaged locals not only widens the wealth gap but also raises concerns about the

⁵³ Interview B 1 (21/09/2021).

⁵⁴ Interview A 5 (03/10/2022).

exploitation of the local population. For example, a wealthy developer from a major city swoop in and offers to buy a large plot of land from a struggling family in Gwadar at a significantly low price. The family, desperate for money, accepts the offer without realising the true potential value of their land in the rapidly developing market. The developer then goes on to sell the same piece of land to an international investor for ten times the amount they paid, leaving the local family unaware of their loss and trapped in poverty. According to Hafeez Jamali (2014),

“Soon (after the announcement of the construction of Gwadar port) the army of bureaucrats, private entrepreneurs, industrialists, hoteliers, real estate agents, marketers, and builders - many of them Musharraf’s cronies descended on Gwadar. Aided by local middlemen and corrupt revenue officials, they poured in billions of rupees to buy land from local people and turn it into commercial and residential real estate...It was touted as a place where dust turns into gold (Jahan Mitti Sona Ban Jaye) and where one could enjoy a forty-year tax holiday, that is, not have to pay taxes on goods and services until 2040” (Jamali, 2014).

The experience of marginalisation, coupled with ignorance and apprehension towards demographic shifts, leads to a transformation in ideology and subsequently prompts individuals to engage in detrimental behaviours. The research conducted by psychologists Richeson and Maureen Craig found that experiencing a sense of minority status within one's own country or region can contribute to the development of negative ideologies and animosity towards others (Resnick, 2017). The experience of marginalisation and being in the minority frequently prompts individuals to pursue retribution or assert dominance as a means of re-establishing a perceived sense of authority. According to the findings of the study,

individuals tend to embrace radical ideologies as a form of self-preservation when they perceive a decline in their power or influence. This phenomenon underscores the significance of fostering inclusiveness and guaranteeing equitable representation within society as a means of mitigating the conditions conducive to the proliferation of extremism and animosity.

7.2.3.4 Impacts on the Censorship and the Freedom of Movement:

The region of Balochistan has consistently experienced unrest, characterised by limited freedom of movement and political rights. The securitization of the region experienced significant growth with the advent of the CPEC and the involvement of Chinese engineers and workers. An increasing number of security checkpoints have been established along the western route and the coastal highway. The unrestricted movement of individuals has been impeded by law enforcement agencies, specifically within the vicinity of Gwadar Port and the surrounding districts. During the interview, a participant expressed the viewpoint that the presence of Chinese individuals has resulted in a restriction of freedom of movement. He posited that Chinese and VVIP movements have restricted the mobility of local people. He goes on to say that,

“Presently, there is a prevailing sense of being subjected to constant surveillance in our daily lives. The seashores of East Bay (Demi Zer) have been enclosed by fences, and security personnel have been deployed to ensure the safety and protection of the coastal area. After 10 p.m. on West Bay, individuals are prohibited from engaging in pedestrian activities or engaging in any form of joyful gathering. Over the past decade, there has been a noticeable increase in the presence of security checkpoints within and

in the vicinity of urban areas. The presence of security personnel instils fear and a sense of menace among the local population.”⁵⁵

Another inhabitant of Gwadar raises apprehensions pertaining to the prospective displacement and confiscation of their lands. The attitudes articulated by the general populace are not new, nor have they arisen only after the ratification of the CPEC accord. Nevertheless, the influx of Chinese has further aggravated the problem, resulting in a state of helplessness within the local community.

“Since the beginning of this project, I have encountered strangers in my area who come from all over the country. They are buying land and taking over businesses in the local market. This is building a sense of insecurity inside me. Moreover, because of CPEC, our local boats have trouble fishing. The security forces have limited our access to the sea which is creating a fiscal crisis for the locals.”⁵⁶

The security risks within the entirety of the region exhibit a consistent pattern across all geographical areas. There have been occurrences in which terrorists and militants have conducted many attacks specifically aimed at Chinese engineers and workers, as well as displayed acts of violence towards infrastructure projects and places related to CPEC. The situation in the region of Mekran, particularly in Gwadar, exhibits a higher degree of severity in comparison to other localities within the province. Undoubtedly, the Baloch community is often subject to scrutiny and mistrust when analysed through the lens of security.

⁵⁵ Interview A 8 (01/09/2022).

⁵⁶ Interview A 8 (01/09/2022).

“Ever since the announcement of the CPEC, there has been an observable increase in the level of suspicion towards the residents of Balochistan. The scope of our lives has become limited in this context. Despite the current state of relative normalcy, pedestrians were prohibited from crossing roads and required to refrain from waiting for the passage of VIPs. The experience of undergoing continuous checks at check points was a source of embarrassment for us.”⁵⁷

Similarly, people in Gwadar district have taken to the streets for their freedom of movement, misbehaviour from the security forces, and illegal fishing. They categorically demanded the rights of freedom, fishing, and livelihood against the misbehaviour of the security forces, as well as removing all unnecessary check posts that were creating troubles for the local population (Wolf, 2021). However, due to the lack of implementation of their demands, the local people again staged a protest in Gwadar and warned to block the roads leading to Gwadar Port, which is controlled by the Chinese.

Thus, it is evident from the findings and analysis that CPEC and the construction of Gwadar port have severely restricted the free movement of the local Baloch community in Gwadar and surrounding areas. The Baloch community in Gwadar has been continuously protesting for their rights and demanding greater share in the development projects. However, the government's failure to fully implement their demands has only further fuelled their anger and frustration. The control of the Gwadar Port by the Chinese has also raised concerns among the Baloch people, who fear that their land and resources are being exploited by foreign powers. Overall, the implementation of CPEC and the presence of the Chinese in

⁵⁷ Interview A 7 (01/09/2022).

Gwadar have had significant negative implications for the local Baloch community, limiting their freedom and hindering their progress.

7.3 Conclusion:

The primary purpose of this chapter was to investigate and analyse the impacts of the emerging geopolitical rivalries in and around Gwadar port and their impacts on the local Baloch community in Pakistan. In addition to examining the geopolitical rivalries, the chapter also aimed to shed light on the socio-economic consequences faced by the Baloch community because of these rivalries. The chapter aimed to provide a thorough understanding of how these emerging geopolitical tensions affect the local population by examining the complex dynamics at play. Balochistan, and particularly the Gwadar region in Mekran, is at the centre of the growing geopolitical rivalry between China and Pakistan against India and the US. The strategic importance of Gwadar port, which is a crucial part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, and Pakistan's desire to improve its maritime capabilities are the main factors driving this rivalry.

The conclusions reached in this thesis are consistent with studies done by Sabatini and other researchers, who have also highlighted the negative effects of geopolitical rivalries on local communities. These scholars argued that rising geopolitical competition has always negatively impacted the rights of the common masses. This has been evident in various conflicts around the world, where everyday citizens become the unfortunate casualties of power struggles between countries. When the emerging geopolitical competition and its impacts on the human rights of the common population are investigated at the micro-level, it becomes evident that great power rivalry and geopolitical competition have significantly impacted the lives of the local Baloch population in Balochistan. These power struggles not

only hinder the development and progress of the Baloch people but also perpetuate a cycle of violence and instability in the region. The Baloch people in Balochistan have long been caught in the crossfire of geopolitical competition, as their region is rich in natural resources and strategically located. This has led to increased militarization, human rights abuses, and the displacement of the local population. Furthermore, the power struggles between nations have hindered the Baloch people's ability to exercise their basic rights and have perpetuated a cycle of violence and instability in the region.

In this chapter, based on the findings driven by the primary data collection, it is evident that the local community in Gwadar has experienced significant changes and disruptions because of the geopolitical competition. These changes have not only impacted their economic livelihood but have also raised concerns about the preservation of their cultural heritage and identity. The fear of the local community stems from their past experiences regarding the megaprojects and their history of neglect and marginalisation. The impacts of the geopolitical competition and the presence of Chinese in Balochistan have varied in form and shape.

First, the CPEC and the development of Gwadar port have had severe impacts on the human rights of the local population. The construction of infrastructure for the CPEC and the development of Gwadar port have led to the forced displacement of local communities. This has resulted in the loss of livelihood and inadequate compensation for their land. The forced eviction has also disrupted social structures and traditional ways of life for the Baloch people.

Second, the presence of Chinese engineers and workers has also resulted in beefing up security, and the Gwadar region is a militarised zone. Furthermore, the increased militarization has raised concerns about the violation of human rights and the potential for

further conflicts in the region. The more militarization occurs, the more human rights and individual rights are violated. Additionally, the militarization has led to an increase in surveillance and control over the local population. The Baloch people now face constant monitoring and restrictions on their movements, which further suppress their basic freedoms and autonomy.

Third, because of the militarization of the Gwadar region, the fishing community is significantly facing challenges. The increased presence of military forces has disrupted the traditional fishing practices of the Baloch community. They now have limited access to fishing grounds due to security concerns and are often subjected to strict regulations and inspections. This has severely impacted their livelihood and economic stability, pushing many fishermen into poverty, and further exacerbating social tensions in the region. The militarization of Gwadar has not only undermined human rights but has also disrupted the delicate balance of the ecosystem, posing long-term environmental threats to marine life and coastal areas.

Fourth, the local community is unprepared for the jobs and employment opportunities that CPEC and Gwadar Port would create due to a lack of basic education and skills. This results in a disparity between the available workforce and the requirements of the new industries, leading to unemployment and frustration among the local population. Additionally, the influx of workers from other regions and countries may further marginalise the local community as they struggle to compete for limited job opportunities. Moreover, the influx of outsiders seeking employment can also strain the limited resources and infrastructure of the region, further widening the gap between the local community and the newcomers. As a result, the economic benefits promised by CPEC and Gwadar Port may not reach the intended beneficiaries, deepening the social and economic divide in the region.

Similarly, the inflow of foreign investors and workers has created a surge in demand for resources and land, leading to the displacement of residents and the destruction of their traditional way of life. Furthermore, the lack of proper regulations and oversight has allowed foreign investors to exploit the local workforce, paying them meagre wages and subjecting them to harsh working conditions. This not only exacerbates poverty and inequality in the region but also fosters a sense of resentment and disillusionment among the local population.

Additionally, the entry of people from different ethnic groups or other nationalities is posing serious challenges to the local culture and customs. This cultural clash can lead to social tensions and conflicts, as the local population may feel their traditions and way of life are being threatened. In addition to having impacts on local culture, the influx is also posing a challenge to the local Balochi language. The increasing number of people from different ethnic backgrounds and nationalities has resulted in a decline in the usage and preservation of the local Balochi language. As more people speak languages other than Balochi, there is a growing concern that the younger generation may not prioritise learning or speaking their native language. This loss of language not only affects communication within the community but also contributes to a further erosion of cultural identity and a sense of disconnection among the local population.

Fifth, the Baloch political parties and leaders have never been included in the decision-making process in Balochistan. With Chinese involvement, the local leaders are ignored and overlooked while agreements are signed between Pakistan and China for the Gwadar port development and other projects in the region. Additionally, the local population as well as the Baloch political leaders have been excluded from significant decisions regarding the Gwadar

Port, Saindak, and Reko Diq projects, as well as from the socio-economic development projects of the province. This further marginalises the Baloch people and fuels their grievances, leading to increased unrest and calls for autonomy or independence. The lack of representation and consultation has deepened the divide between the local population and the government, hindering any prospects for peaceful resolution or sustainable development in Balochistan.

And finally, the presence of China in Gwadar port also intensifies the already existing insurgency in Balochistan. The involvement of India, Iran, and the US is posing a serious surge in the current law and order situation. The belief that foreign powers, especially China, are exploiting local resources contributes to the insurgency in Balochistan. The presence of China in Gwadar port has heightened tensions and created a breeding ground for insurgency groups. Pakistan alleges India's and other regional actors' involvement in the insurgency in Balochistan, which has further strained relations between the two countries. The allegations of external interference have led to a deep sense of mistrust and suspicion, making it even more challenging to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Balochistan. The combination of these factors creates a volatile environment that hinders economic development and exacerbates the already existing law and order challenges in Balochistan.

Megaprojects can also have negative effects, including a noticeable reduction in the quality of life for the population, if they neglect to consider the complexity of the surroundings, such as the layout of historic metropolitan centres. Baloch communities claim that CPEC will change the entire socio-cultural foundation of the region due to the growing number of people. Megaprojects are linked to physical, environmental, sociocultural, and

economic issues, such as a sharp reduction in the standard of living for the local population and the rupturing of the social order.

As the CPEC project progresses, there is an increasing sense of apprehension throughout the local community. The growth of this phenomenon can be attributed to its historical context, characterised by systemic injustice and widespread ignorance. The indigenous Baloch assert that the CPEC has the potential to transform them into a minority within their native region, using economic expansion and prosperity as justification. The indigenous population of Gwadar and the wider region of Balochistan is currently experiencing a lack of attention and consideration in terms of employment prospects and other available options. The community is experiencing a widespread sentiment of injustice and disappointment, which has led to an increased sense of deprivation.

Thus, the government of Pakistan must address the issues and grievances of the local Baloch population, which guarantees the success of this megaproject. Failure to address these concerns could potentially lead to social unrest and hinder the development of Gwadar as a key economic hub. It is crucial for the government to actively involve the local population in decision-making processes and ensure that their voices are heard. By providing equal employment opportunities, investing in education and healthcare, and promoting cultural preservation, the government can build trust and create a sense of ownership among the indigenous people, ultimately leading to the sustainable growth and prosperity of the region.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

This research is a comprehensive examination of the escalating geopolitical rivalry surrounding the Gwadar port region, with a particular emphasis on the impact of China's economic and military presence through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The evolving geopolitical dynamics in this region have triggered heightened tensions between global actors, including China, India, and the United States. As a result, the local Baloch community has been caught in the middle of these power struggles. This conclusion seeks to distil the key findings, theoretical underpinnings, and empirical contributions of the research, shedding light on the intricate interplay between rising geopolitical competition and its consequences for human rights at the micro-level. This thesis has investigated the experiences of the local masses in the region to understand the social, economic, political, and cultural implications of China's involvement in the Gwadar port region. This study aimed to shed light on how the influx of Chinese workers, businesses, and investments affected community members' daily lives by conducting interviews and personal observations. Additionally, it sought to examine challenges that had arisen as a result of this collaboration between the growing geopolitical competition and its impacts on human rights at the micro-level in the Gwadar region.

The main goal of this thesis is to carefully examine how geopolitical competition affects human rights at the individual level within the local population. It has attempted to identify the difficulties or opportunities that arose as a result of CPEC and the development of Gwadar port, particularly in relation to human rights, by examining the suffering that the local Baloch community experienced. By thoroughly examining the intricate interplay between geopolitics and human rights at the micro-level, this

research has provided a comprehensive understanding of the social implications of this collaboration for the local community. The growing geopolitical competition resulted in human rights violations, cultural and demographic challenges, forced evictions, and an unequal distribution of resources among neglected and backward Baloch ethnic groups within Pakistan.

This research was guided by three main questions. The central question explored the connection between the political dynamics surrounding large-scale development projects (megaprojects) and how these projects impact human rights violations. Two additional, more specific questions complemented this central inquiry. The second inquiry aimed to provide further insight and analysis into the developing geopolitical rivalry resulting from the BRI and the CPEC centred around Gwadar port. This examination specifically focused on the strategic implications for major global actors, including China and the United States. The objective of the third inquiry was to examine the cultural, demographic, socio-economic, and security impacts of rising geopolitical competition on individuals. In addition, the study sought to examine the underlying factors contributing to coerced displacements and the subsequent impacts on the impacted populations within the Gwadar region.

In the context of the aims, objectives, and research questions, the overarching argument of this research is anchored in the notion that as geopolitical rivalries escalate, there is a corresponding rise in human rights violations. This phenomenon is attributed to the prioritisation of strategic interests over the promotion and protection of human rights in the competitive global landscape. The empirical findings from the Gwadar region affirm this argument, showcasing instances of forced evictions, cultural erosion, economic disparities, and demographic shifts as direct consequences of growing

geopolitical competition. In the pursuit of competitive advantage, authorities neglect or intentionally violate the rights and welfare of their own inhabitants or those of other countries. The research suggests that the BRI and the CPEC projects significantly influence the geopolitical dynamics in South Asia. Hence, through an analysis of the geopolitical context surrounding the BRI in South Asia, the objective of this study is to provide insights into the prevailing power dynamics and vested interests within the region and the human rights violations of local communities in Balochistan.

To provide a theoretical lens for understanding the complex interplay between rising geopolitical competition and human rights violations, this research built on a theoretical framework anchored in the works of scholars like Christopher Sabatini, César Rodríguez-Garavito, Salvador Santino F. Regilme Jr., and Beth A. Simons. The framework encompasses theories on power struggles among global actors, the role of strategic interests in shaping geopolitical dynamics, and the implications of such competition for vulnerable population. The framework highlights that the growing geopolitical competition has a detrimental impact on the lives and human rights of the local population. These scholars argue that international norms and human rights have been on a steady decline over the past few decades due to growing geopolitical competition and the rise of authoritarian states. This decline can be attributed, at least in part, to the geopolitical struggle that exists between world powers, particularly between the US, China, and Russia. The growth of authoritarian regimes such as China, along with the decline of multilateralism, has led to a gradual but steady deterioration of principles pertaining to human rights. When the level of geopolitical competition is at its highest, international institutions and domestic governments are incapable of protecting the lives of the common masses.

In addition to Sabatini's (2022) argument, other scholars and experts have also highlighted the exacerbating effects of rising geopolitical competition on the impacts faced by the local population. They emphasise that as major powers engage in intensified geopolitical rivalries; the interests of local communities can often be overlooked or marginalised. The competition for strategic influence and control over resources can lead to a disregard for the rights and well-being of the common masses in the affected regions. This includes the potential for human rights violations, displacement, economic disparities, and environmental degradation. Therefore, a closer examination of the consequences faced by the indigenous population becomes crucial in order to understand the full extent of the impacts of geopolitical competition and their impacts.

The thesis presents key findings that show the relationship between geopolitical competition and the experiences of the local Baloch people in the Gwadar port region. According to the research findings, there have been more human rights abuses as a result of the geopolitical competition that has grown around the Gwadar area in particular, and in Mekran and Balochistan in general due to projects like the BRI and the CPEC. Chapter 7 of this thesis seek to uncover a multifaceted narrative surrounding the intricate interplay between rising geopolitical competition and the human rights violations in and around the Gwadar port. The research findings have shed light on the specific impacts of Chinese involvement in the region through the CPEC and the BRI, elucidating the challenges for the local Baloch community. As we delve deeper into the connection between geopolitical dynamics and human rights, it becomes imperative to explore the broader implications and draw a comprehensive understanding that transcends the immediate context of Gwadar. The findings call for a re-examination of

global priorities, urging policymakers to adopt an ethical framework that ensures the protection of human rights amid the turbulence of geopolitical competition.

The suffering that the indigenous Baloch community experienced is not merely a by-product of development; rather, it is a result of geopolitical decisions that place strategic interests above human rights. The security concerns of major global actors have led to the marginalisation of the local population, raising critical questions about the ethical dimensions of geopolitical manoeuvring. Examples of human rights violations in the Gwadar port region include forced evictions, political marginalisation, and economic disempowerment.

The findings of this thesis indicate that there exists a complex correlation between the escalation of geopolitical competition and the occurrence of human rights violations, namely in the Gwadar port zone. The thesis, grounded in the theoretical framework, has revealed a complex tapestry of consequences stemming from the intersection of global power dynamics and the lives of the local Baloch community at the micro-level, which has not been carried out before in any academic investigation.

One of the significant findings of this research is the exacerbation of human rights violations at the hands of geopolitical competition. The local population in Gwadar, and by extension, in Balochistan, has faced forced evictions, political marginalisation, and economic disempowerment since the advent of Chinese involvement. This has not only resulted in a decline in socio-economic conditions but has also contributed to the demographic transformation of the region. The influx of Chinese nationals and other foreign entities has altered the demographic composition, pushing the indigenous Baloch community towards a minority status. This demographic shift is not merely a

statistical change; it has profound implications for the preservation of cultural identity, socio-political representation, and economic participation among the Baloch people.

Furthermore, the impact on the fishing community in Gwadar due to security measures imposed by the security forces and restrictions on local fishermen's access to the sea is emblematic of how geopolitical interests can directly impinge upon the economic livelihood of the local population. The fishing in Gwadar has historically been a major source of income for the local population, providing employment opportunities and sustaining their livelihood. This not only hampers their economic prospects but also highlights the complex interplay between geopolitical interests and the well-being of local communities.

Similarly, the local population has very limited resources other than the fishing profession. Since the local population is not well-educated and technically trained, there are very few chances that they are preferred for employment opportunities. Rather, the preferential treatment of non-locals in employment opportunities has further marginalised the local population, which further demonstrates the unequal distribution of resources and adds yet another layer to the socioeconomic difficulties the Baloch community faces. This has led to a growing sense of frustration and resentment among the locals, as they feel overlooked and left behind in their own communities. Additionally, the influx of non-locals has also put a strain on already limited resources, exacerbating issues such as housing shortages and increased competition for basic amenities. The intertwined nature of geopolitical competition and its direct repercussions on the human rights of a specific community underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of global dynamics and their localised impacts.

In addition to the fishing industry and employment opportunities, the findings also shed light on the coercive displacements faced by the local population. These displacements further contribute to the tension on already limited resources, exacerbating issues such as land grab, forced eviction, and increased competition for basic amenities. The competition for strategic influence and control over resources leads to the forced eviction of vulnerable populations, disrupting their lives, and perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalisation. The interviews conducted with individuals offer a first-hand account of the upheaval caused by geopolitical manoeuvring, emphasising the human cost of power struggles.

The demographic change in the Baloch population that has happened since China got involved is not just a random statistical change. This change has profound implications for cultural identity, social cohesion, and political representation. The interviews conducted with members of the local Baloch community provide a poignant narrative of the struggles they face in preserving their cultural heritage and socio-political voice amidst the deluge of external influences. Delving into the cultural, demographic, socio-economic, and environmental consequences, the research has illuminated the multifaceted impact of geopolitical competition on the lives of individuals in the Gwadar region. The cultural identity of the Baloch community is under threat as demographic shifts and forced displacements has altered the social fabric.

Similarly, as illustrated in Chapter 7, due to the growing security concerns of CPEC and Chinese workers, Balochistan has become a militarised zone, and increased security checkpoints have been established across the province. With more militarization comes more human rights violations and less freedom of movement and freedom to work. The securitization has led to enforced disappearances and forced

evictions of the local population in Gwadar. Many families have been forcefully displaced from their homes to make way for infrastructure projects related to port development. Additionally, the locals of Gwadar have reported that security forces are detaining citizens without following the law, which raises concerns about their safety and wellbeing. The securitization has also accelerated fighting between Baloch nationalists and security forces, leading to an increase in violence and human rights abuses in the region. The ongoing conflict has further marginalised the local population and hindered any potential for peaceful resolution or development in Gwadar. Furthermore, the securitization has led to an influx of outsiders and a rise in illegal fishing activities, further threatening the sustainability of the local fishing industry.

Similarly, the militarization of the region has also resulted in the curtailment of the freedom of speech of the local Baloch community. The local Baloch community has faced severe restrictions on their ability to express their opinions and concerns about the situation. This suppression of freedom of speech has hindered their ability to advocate for their rights and address the issues they face due to militarization. Additionally, it has created an atmosphere of fear and intimidation, further marginalising the voices of the local Baloch community.

These findings have been drawn directly from the extensive fieldwork and primary data collection that were carried out in parts of Balochistan, particularly in and around the Gwadar port region. The fieldwork and data collection involved interviews with local residents, government officials, and industry experts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the human rights, socio-economic, cultural, and demographic impacts of the Gwadar port development. These interviews provided valuable insights into the experiences of the local community and the impacts of geopolitical competition. The

data collected was analysed to identify key themes and patterns related to human rights violations and the socio-economic effects of Chinese involvement in the Gwadar port region. The interviews conducted with the local population, academics, politicians, and local authorities have provided insights into the intricate power dynamics at play.

The empirical dimension of this research has been crucial in unravelling the multifaceted impacts of growing geopolitical competition on the lives of the local Baloch community. Through interviews and on-the-ground observations, this study meticulously examined the daily experiences of individuals, shedding light on the social, economic, political, and cultural implications of China's involvement in the Gwadar port region. From the influx of Chinese workers, businesses, and investments to the resulting challenges faced by the indigenous Baloch community, the research delved into the micro-level manifestations of the broader geopolitical contest.

The theoretical underpinnings, rooted in the conceptual framework, illuminated the overarching trend of declining international norms and human rights in the face of growing geopolitical competition. The erosion of principles related to human rights is not merely a consequence of this competition but also reflective of broader global trends where authoritarian regimes gain prominence and multilateralism wanes.

In addition to analysing the geopolitical implications of BRI and CPEC, this research project also makes a substantial contribution to the existing body of literature in several key dimensions. Firstly, the analytical contribution of this research lies in its in-depth examination of the geopolitical implications of the BRI and CPEC in the Gwadar port region. The empirical findings provide a granular understanding of the impact on the local Baloch community, elucidating the interconnectedness between geopolitical decisions and human rights violations. By scrutinising the socio-economic, political, and

cultural dimensions, the research adds analytical depth to the discourse on the repercussions of major power competition on vulnerable communities.

Secondly, the empirical contribution of this research is significant, grounded in the first-hand accounts and narratives of the local population. The interviews with diverse stakeholders, including those directly affected by the BRI and CPEC projects, offer a rich tapestry of experiences, challenging prevailing narratives and shedding light on the realities of individuals caught in the crossfire of geopolitical rivalries. This empirical depth contributes a unique perspective to the literature, emphasising the importance of considering local voices in understanding the true impact of global initiatives.

And thirdly, the theoretical contribution of this research lies in its application of a theoretical framework to contextualise and interpret the empirical findings. The integration of Sabatini's framework and other scholars' insights into the analysis provides a theoretical lens for understanding the broader implications of geopolitical competition for human rights. This research extends the theoretical discourse by demonstrating how the theoretical underpinnings align with and elucidate the empirical realities at the micro-level in Balochistan.

This research stands out for its uniqueness in its comprehensive examination of the Gwadar port region's geopolitical dynamics and the resultant impacts on the local Baloch community. The originality lies in its approach to bridge theoretical perspectives with empirical evidence, offering a holistic understanding of the micro-level consequences of major power competition. The study uniquely applies the theoretical framework to the grassroots level, shedding light on the experiences of individuals in the face of global power struggles. The original contribution of this research is evident

in its nuanced exploration of the multifaceted challenges faced by the Baloch community. The focus on cultural, demographic, socio-economic, and security aspects provides a comprehensive view of the consequences of geopolitical competition, distinguishing this study from existing literature. By bringing forth the voices of the marginalised Baloch community, the research adds new insights to the discourse on how geopolitical decisions directly impact human lives.

Additionally, the significance of this research extends beyond its academic contributions, resonating with broader implications for policymakers, international organisations, and those concerned with human rights and global development. The findings underscore the need for a re-evaluation of global priorities, emphasising ethical considerations alongside economic development in major global initiatives at a practical level. The research also highlights the importance of incorporating local perspectives into policymaking processes. By amplifying the voices of the Baloch community, the study advocates for a more inclusive approach that considers the human cost of geopolitical decisions. Policymakers are urged to adopt an ethical framework that safeguards fundamental rights amid the turbulence of geopolitical competition, recognising the interconnectedness of global power dynamics and local livelihood. Additionally, the research calls for a closer examination of the role of international institutions and domestic governments in protecting the rights of individuals during heightened geopolitical competition. The limitations of existing institutional frameworks in addressing the challenges posed by power struggles among major global actors are highlighted, prompting a re-evaluation of the mechanisms in place to safeguard human rights in such contexts.

Thus, this thesis tried to fill the significant gap which has been identified in the current body of knowledge and academic discourse that mainstream scholarship has largely ignored. Most existing research focuses on the economic benefits of CPEC for Pakistan, overlooking how the project's geopolitical nature might negatively impact people's human rights. This includes rights to conduct business, participate in politics, and freely move and express themselves. This research challenges the prevailing narrative that overlooks the geopolitical considerations driving China's involvement in the region. Notably, it highlights the neglect within Pakistani academia regarding the intensified competition between China, the US, and India stemming from CPEC, particularly in Gwadar and Balochistan. By focusing on the micro-level impact of geopolitical competition on human rights, this study contributes valuable insights. It sheds light on previously unexplored consequences, specifically for local populations residing near strategically significant projects.

And lastly, the research addresses a critical gap in existing literature, paving the way for further, it is important to acknowledge that this area further needs in-depth analysis and informed discussions on the subject. Firstly, this study focused primarily on the experiences of the local Baloch community and may not capture the perspectives of other affected groups. Future research could expand the scope to include a broader range of stakeholders and employ more quantitative methods for data collection and analysis. Moreover, this research serves as a compelling reminder of the pressing need for further inquiry into additional facets of the discourse surrounding geopolitical competition and human rights. Examining how international organisations and human rights advocates protect and advance individual's rights amid the escalating power struggle between global powers is an area that is ripe for further exploration.

Furthermore, gaining a deeper understanding of the enduring consequences of geopolitical rivalries on local populations and their rights, as well as identifying effective strategies to mitigate these negative impacts, holds significant importance for future research endeavours. By delving more deeply into these realms, scholars can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate interplay between geopolitics and human rights, ultimately guiding the development of informed policies and initiatives to protect the rights and well-being of communities affected by geopolitical competition. Ultimately, the aim should be to foster a global environment where geopolitical competition coexists with a commitment to upholding human rights, ensuring that the pursuit of strategic advantage does not come at the cost of the dignity and well-being of vulnerable populations.

In conclusion, this research project has not only expanded the scholarly understanding of the intricate interplay between rising geopolitical competition and human rights violations but also offered practical insights for policymakers and advocates. The originality of its approach, grounded in empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks, sets it apart as a significant contribution to the existing body of literature. As major global actors continue to navigate complex geopolitical rivalries, the lessons drawn from the Gwadar port region serve as a crucial reminder of the imperative to prioritise basic human rights in the pursuit of strategic interests.

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Appendix 1 Interview Questionnaire for the Common Masses (English and Urdu).

انٹرویو کا سوالنامہ

The interview will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes, depending on the length of the interview. The interview is a semi-structured interview, which means that the researcher may ask other questions after the answers and the directions it takes. The interviewee is completely independent and does not have to answer any questions. They can withdraw from the interview process at any time during or after the interview until the interview is in the coding process.

The following are some of the primary questions. The rest of the questions would follow based on the direction of the interview, as it is a semi-structured interview.

انٹرویو میں تقریباً 30 سے 45 منٹ لگیں گے یہ انٹرویو مکمل طور پر تحقیقی مقاصد کے لیے لیا گیا ہے اور کسی تیسرے فریق کے ساتھ شیئر نہیں کیا جائے گا۔ چونکہ یہ ایک نیم ساختہ انٹرویو ہوگا، محقق پہلے سے طے شدہ سوال نامے کو مکمل کرنے کے بعد اضافی سوالات پوچھ سکتا ہے۔ انٹرویو دینے والے کو انٹرویو ختم ہونے سے پہلے یا بعد میں کسی بھی سوال کو مسترد کرنے اور گفتگو کو چھوڑنے کا حق ہے۔ انٹرویو دینے والے کی رازداری کو مکمل طور پر یقینی بنایا جاتا ہے، اور اگر وہ ایسا انتخاب کرتے ہیں، تو وہاں نام استعمال نہیں کیا جائے گا

چند بنیادی سوالات درج ذیل ہیں۔ باقی سوالات انٹرویو کی سمت کی بنیاد پر ہوں گے، کیونکہ یہ ایک نیم ساختہ انٹرویو ہے۔

1. What is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)? How did you hear about it?

چین پاکستان اقتصادی راہداری کیا ہے؟ اور آپ اس کے بارے میں کیا جانتے ہیں؟

2. What do you think is the reason China is interested in Pakistan's coastal belt, particularly in Gwadar Balochistan?

آپ کے خیال میں چین کی پاکستان کی ساحلی پٹی بالخصوص گوادر بلوچستان میں دلچسپی کی کیا وجہ ہے؟

3. How do you see CPEC contributing to the development of Balochistan? Can it be called a game-changer for Balochistan, like other provinces of Pakistan?

آپ چین پاکستان اقتصادی راہداری کو بلوچستان کی ترقی میں کس طرح سے کردار ادا کرتے ہوئے دیکھتے ہیں؟
کیا اسے پاکستان کے دیگر صوبوں کی طرح بلوچستان کے لیے گیم چینجر کہا جا سکتا ہے؟

4. Does the presence of the CPEC and Gwadar Project in your area cause any change in your security and daily life routine?

کیا آپ کے علاقے میں چین پاکستان اقتصادی راہداری اور گوادر پراجیکٹ کی موجودگی آپ کی سیکورٹی اور روزمرہ کے معمولات میں کسی تبدیلی کا سبب بنتی ہے؟

5. Do you find CPEC and Chinese investment in Gwadar in your favour?

کیا آپ چین پاکستان اقتصادی راہداری اور گوادر میں چینی سرمایہ کاری کو اپنے حق میں سمجھتے ہیں؟

6. What effects does Chinese presence have on the lives of ordinary people in your area?

چینی موجودگی آپ کے علاقے میں عام لوگوں کی زندگیوں پر کیا اثرات مرتب کرتی ہے؟

7. What positive changes have you discerned in your life since the start of the CPEC Project? Does it pose any changes in your daily life routine around you? And does it deprive the indigenous masses of their political and social and human rights?

چین پاکستان اقتصادی راہداری منصوبے کے آغاز کے بعد سے آپ نے اپنی زندگی میں کیا مثبت تبدیلیاں دیکھی ہیں؟ کیا یہ آپ کے ارد گرد آپ کے روزمرہ کی زندگی کے معمولات میں کوئی تبدیلی لاتا ہے؟ اور کیا یہ مقامی عوام کو ان کے سیاسی، سماجی اور انسانی حقوق سے محروم کر دیتا ہے؟

8. What adverse changes have you observed in your life since the beginning of this project?

اس منصوبے کے آغاز سے لے کر اب تک آپ نے اپنی زندگی میں کن منفی تبدیلیوں کا مشاہدہ کیا ہے؟

9. Do you think the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Chinese investment in Gwadar and Mekran will be beneficial to you in the long run, or it will create more economic, political and social issues for you?

کیا آپ کو لگتا ہے کہ چین پاکستان اقتصادی راہداری اور گوادر اور مکران میں چینی سرمایہ کاری طویل مدت میں آپ کے لیے فائدہ مند ہوگی یا اس سے آپ کے لیے مزید معاشی، سیاسی، انسانی حقوق اور سماجی مسائل پیدا ہوں گے؟

10. How are your local businesses, such as fishing, being affected after the handing over of Gwadar Port to China and the formation of the Gwadar Free Zone?

گوادر پورٹ کو چین کے حوالے کرنے اور گوادر فری زون کی تشکیل کے بعد آپ کے مقامی کاروبار، جیسے ماہی گیری، کس طرح متاثر ہو رہے ہیں؟

11. What is your opinion about the influx of people from other areas and other nations into Gwadar? What changes will it bring to your area and the demography of the district?

گواہدر میں دوسرے علاقوں اور دیگر اقوام کے لوگوں کی آمد کے بارے میں آپ کی کیا رائے ہے؟ یہ آپ کے علاقے اور ضلع کی آبادی میں کیا تبدیلیاں لائے گا؟

12. How do you see the future of the CPEC for you and for your region?

آپ اپنے اور اپنے خطے کے لیے چین پاکستان اقتصادی راہداری کے مستقبل کو کیسے دیکھتے ہیں؟

Appendix 2 Interview Questionnaire for Elite (English and Urdu)

This interview is solely conducted for research purposes and will not be shared with any third party. As it will be a semi-structured interview, the researcher may ask additional questions after completing the predetermined questionnaire. The interviewee has the right to decline any question and leave the conversation at any point before or after the interview is over. The interviewee's privacy and confidentiality are totally assured, and if they so choose, anonymity will be used.

یہ انٹرویو مکمل طور پر تحقیقی مقاصد کے لیے لیا گیا ہے اور کسی تیسرے فریق کے ساتھ شیئر نہیں کیا جائے گا۔ چونکہ یہ ایک نیم ساختہ انٹرویو ہوگا، محقق پہلے سے طے شدہ سوال نامے کو مکمل کرنے کے بعد اضافی سوالات پوچھ سکتا ہے۔ انٹرویو لینے والے کو انٹرویو ختم ہونے سے پہلے یا بعد میں کسی بھی سوال کو مسترد کرنے اور گفتگو کو چھوڑنے کا حق ہے۔ انٹرویو لینے والے کی رازداری اور رازداری کو مکمل طور پر یقینی بنایا جاتا ہے، اور اگر وہ ایسا انتخاب کرتے ہیں، تو وہاں نام استعمال نہیں کیا جائے گا۔

1. What is China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)? Do you believe CPEC may be described as more than just an economic and infrastructure project, such as geopolitical or strategic? And what drives China to undertake the project—is it economic, strategic, or something else?

چین پاکستان اقتصادی راہداری کیا ہے؟ کیا آپ کو یقین ہے کہ اس منصوبے کو صرف اقتصادی اور بنیادی ڈھانچے کے منصوبے کے طور پر بیان کیا گیا ہے؟ اور چین نے یہ منصوبہ کیوں شروع کیا؟ کیا ہم اسے سٹریٹجک، جیو پولیٹیکل یا کچھ اور بھی کہہ سکتے ہیں؟

2. What drives Pakistan to pursue this project? Do you believe Pakistan has started such a large project based on expected economic results?

پاکستان کو اس پراجیکٹ کو آگے بڑھانے کے لیے کس چیز نے مجبور کیا؟ کیا آپ کو یقین ہے کہ پاکستان نے متوقع معاشی نتائج کی بنیاد پر اتنا بڑا منصوبہ شروع کیا ہے؟

3. What aspects of CPEC are geopolitical? What do you think about their potential effects on the local populace, especially the Baloch community?

چین پاکستان اقتصادی راہداری کے جیو پولیٹیکل پہلو کیا ہیں؟ مقامی آبادی بالخصوص بلوچ کمیونٹی پر ان کے ممکنہ اثرات کے بارے میں آپ کا کیا خیال ہے؟

4. What effect will the multibillion-dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) have on Balochistan's indigenous businesses?

اڑیوں ڈالر کے منصوبے چین پاکستان اقتصادی راہداری کا بلوچستان کے مقامی کاروبار پر کیا اثر پڑے گا؟

5. What impact will the multibillion-dollar projects have on the local economy of Balochistan?

اڑیوں ڈالر کے منصوبے بلوچستان کی مقامی معیشت پر کیا اثرات مرتب کریں گے؟

6. What potential effects can the large-scale projects have on the lives of the locals, fishermen, and residents in the Mekran region, notably in Gwadar and Balochistan overall.?

بڑے پیمانے پر منصوبے مکران کے علاقے خصوصاً گوادر اور بلوچستان میں مجموعی طور پر مقامی لوگوں، ماہی گیروں اور رہائشیوں کی زندگیوں پر کیا ممکنہ اثرات مرتب کر سکتے ہیں۔؟

7. What are the positive changes you think CPEC could bring to the people of Balochistan?

آپ کے خیال میں سی پیک بلوچستان کے لوگوں میں کیا مثبت تبدیلیاں لا سکتا ہے؟

8. What are the negative changes you think CPEC could bring to the people of Balochistan?

آپ کے خیال میں سی پیک بلوچستان کے لوگوں میں کون سی منفی تبدیلیاں لا سکتا ہے؟

9. China is hugely involved in Gwadar and the region. What are the impacts of Chinese presence on the lives of the common masses? How do you see the future of Chinese involvement in and around Gwadar?

چین گوادر اور خطے میں بہت زیادہ ملوث ہے۔ چینی موجودگی کے عام لوگوں کی زندگیوں پر کیا اثرات ہیں؟ آپ گوادر اور اس کے اطراف میں چینی مداخلت کے مستقبل کو کیسے دیکھتے ہیں؟

10. Since the announcement of the CPEC project, China's interests are mainly centred in Balochistan, but still Balochistan's current and previous governments expressed their grievances against the disparity in the distribution of projects. What is your opinion on this?

سی پیک منصوبے کے اعلان کے بعد سے، چین کے مفادات بنیادی طور پر بلوچستان میں مرکوز ہیں، لیکن پھر بھی بلوچستان کی موجودہ اور سابقہ حکومتوں نے منصوبوں کی تقسیم میں تفاوت کے خلاف اپنی شکایات کا اظہار کیا۔ اس پر آپ کی کیا رائے ہے؟

11. Will the influx of millions of people in Balochistan deprive the indigenous masses of their political and social rights or human rights?

کیا گوادر میں لاکھوں لوگوں کی آمد مقامی لوگوں کو ان کے سیاسی اور سماجی حقوق یا انسانی حقوق سے محروم کر دے گی؟

12. Do you think there should be legislation to protect the local population and its interests? Are you aware of any legislation which has been adopted to safeguard the rights of the indigenous population after the influx of the millions of foreigners or people from other provinces of Pakistan?

کیا آپ کے خیال میں مقامی آبادی اور اس کے مفادات کے تحفظ کے لیے قانون سازی ہونی چاہیے؟ کیا آپ کسی ایسی قانون سازی سے واقف ہیں جو لاکھوں غیر ملکیوں یا پاکستان کے

دوسرے صوبوں سے لوگوں کی آمد کے بعد مقامی آبادی کے حقوق کے تحفظ کے لیے اپنایا گیا ہو؟

13. How much you are hopeful about CPEC and to what extent it can change the fate of Balochistan? What is your expert opinion?

آپ سی پیک سے کتنے پر امید ہیں اور یہ بلوچستان کی تقدیر کس حد تک بدل سکتا ہے؟ آپ کی ماہرانہ رائے کیا ہے؟

14. What will be your suggestions for the government to provide more and more benefits to the local population and the impacts of megaprojects become less harmful to them, particularly the people of Mekran?

مقامی آبادی کو زیادہ سے زیادہ فوائد فراہم کرنے اور میگا پراجیکٹس کے اثرات خاص طور پر مکران کے لوگوں کے لیے کم نقصان دہ ہونے کے لیے حکومت کے لیے آپ کی کیا تجاویز ہوں گی؟

15. How do you see the future of CPEC for Balochistan particularly for the indigenous population of Mekran?

آپ بلوچستان خصوصاً مکران کی مقامی آبادی کے لیے سی پیک کے مستقبل کو کیسے دیکھتے ہیں؟

You can add more important points about CPEC, and BRI based on your expert opinion.

Due to ethical concerns, if you request anonymity during the interview, your identity will be kept a secret, and the research will make use of a pseudonym.

آپ اپنی ماہرانہ رائے کی بنیاد پر، سی پیک اور بی آر آئی کے بارے میں مزید اہم نکات شامل کر سکتے ہیں۔

اخلاقی خدشات کی وجہ سے، اگر آپ انٹرویو کے دوران اپنا نام ظاہر نہ کرنے کی درخواست کرتے ہیں، تو آپ کی شناخت کو خفیہ رکھا جائے گا، اور تحقیق میں تخلص کا استعمال کیا جائے گا۔

Appendix 3 Invitation form

(to be completed by researcher and signed by participants)

Invitation Form

We would like you to consider participating in the study being conducted solely for research and publication purposes. This invitation sheet provides further information about this project and your involvement in the research.

The title of the project is *“China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: The Rising Geopolitical Competition in Balochistan and Its Impact on the Local Population.”*

The aims and objectives of the research are ‘to analyse and investigate the impacts of the growing geopolitics competition and its impacts on the local population of Balochistan, i.e., the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), on the local Baloch population of Balochistan, Pakistan’.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview or questionnaire of approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour in length, to take place at any place of your convenience.

The procedures involve:

You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you wish to. Furthermore, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time before the coding process is completed without any negative consequences by advising the researcher(s). Once the coding procedure is completed, it will be completely anonymous, and no identity or

personal information can be known. Therefore, it is informed to you beforehand that you can withdraw from the research at any time before the coding process is completed.

With your permission, the interview will be audio or video recorded to facilitate the collection of information and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish.

All the information you provide is considered strictly confidential. Your name and any organisation you belong to will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study; however, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used.

Data collected during this study will be retained for 5 years in a locked office at the University of Hull and my personal clouding software. Only researchers associated with this project will have access.

There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

Should you [the participant] have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact the researcher personally by dropping an email or through any other contacting sources. The contact details are given at the end of this form.

I hope that the results of our study will be of benefit to the stakeholders directly involved in the study as well as to the broader research community.

I very much look forward to speaking with you, and I thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Yours Sincerely,

Name of Researcher: Muzaffir Hussain

Email of Researcher: M.Hussain-2019@hull.ac.uk

Name of Supervisor: Dr Bhumitra Chakma

Email of Supervisor: B.Chakma@hull.ac.uk

Appendix 4 Informed Consent Form:

I, Name of participant: _____ of Company/ University/
Institution _____

Hereby agree to participate in this study to be undertaken

By Researcher: **Muzaffir Hussain**

and I understand the aims and purpose of the research titled “China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: The Rising Geopolitical Competition in Balochistan and Its Impact on the Local Population.”

The aims and objectives of the research are ‘to analyse and investigate the impacts of the growing geopolitics competition and its impacts on the local population of Balochistan, i.e., the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), on the local Baloch population of Balochistan, Pakistan’.

By signing this consent form, you are agreeing to your participation in this research process and to the collection of the material. Participants have the right to withdraw from participation in the research process at any point, and materials collected from them up to that point will be removed.

I understand that.

Upon receipt, my questionnaire will be coded, and my name and address will be kept separately from it.

Any information that I provide will not be made public in any form that could reveal my identity to an outside party, i.e., I will remain fully anonymous.

Aggregated results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals (including online publications).

Individual results will not be released to any person except at my request and with my authorization.

I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the study, in which event my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from me will not be used.

Participant's Signature:

Date:

The email contact details of the Researcher are:

m.hussain-2019@hull.ac.uk

Muzaffir.hussain@uot.edu.pk

muzaffirbaloch@gmail.com

The email contact detail of the Supervisor is:

B.Chakma@hull.ac.uk

