

Gwadar: A Historical Kaleidoscope

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Abstract

[Until recently, Gwadar was a small fishing village little known to the outside world. However, the development of a deep-sea-port with the help of China and the prospects of linking China and Central Asia through Pakistan to North Arabian Sea has brought this small, obscure village to international limelight. This is not the first time that Gwadar has become a focus of attention. Study of history reveals that due to its distinctive geographical location, Gwadar has been an important port since ancient period. During the British times, Gwadar was considered an important outpost in the overall imperial strategy. In the 18th century Gwadar changed hands from the Khan of Kalat to the Sultan of Muscat and remained under the Sultan's rule until 1958 when Pakistan reclaimed the area through an agreement with the British. This papers brings to light some facts from the history of Gwadar which have never been published, and therefore, remain unknown. Gwadar has become an important node in the "Belt and Road" initiative proposed by the Chinese president. It will link South Asia, China, Central Asia, Middle East, Europe and Africa through a network of land and sea routes. And, contribute significantly towards the progress and prosperity of Pakistan, China and the entire region. – *Author.*]

Introduction

Gwadar is a picturesque port city on Pakistan's western seaboard Makran coast. It is an important city of Balochistan province and is located about 635 km via the Makran Coastal Highway or 475 km (257 nautical miles) via sea, west of Karachi, the main seaport of Pakistan¹. Despite its strategic location and historical importance, Gwadar has remained generally obscured from the limelight in the recent history. It attracted international attention in the early nineties when finally Pakistan decided to pursue its longtime desire of constructing an international port at Gwadar. Later on, China's involvement in building the port and developing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) galvanized the politics of the region. The significance of Gwadar as a future trade hub and an important geo-strategic location has generated a lot of discussion domestically as well as internationally. All regional and extra-regional players have since shown great interest in the port (and in fact, the entire Corridor) for a mix of reasons – the most paramount among those being economic and security. Experts of international relations and geopolitics have elucidated on the port's

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¹ Admiralty Chart BA 38 "Karachi to Ra's al Had", 2001 ed.

potential as a gateway of trade and prosperity, not only for Pakistan but for the connecting regions as well. It is prophesized to open up vistas of opportunity for the Central Asian Republics, China and even Russia, connecting these regions to the rest of the world and allowing easy flow of energy, raw materials, goods and services across the area. There are, also a few who feel threatened from the envisaged competition that the port may generate, and there are still others who are worried for security reasons, particularly the access of China to such a vital strategic area. Although, both China and Pakistan have repeatedly clarified that the port is being built for entirely economic/commercial reasons, Gwadar continues to be a subject of speculation and intrigue for few. Due to relative obscurity and backwardness of the area, there is also a dearth of knowledge about the port in particular and the area in general which has allowed some misrepresentations in the available literature on the subject. This paper presents the true history of the port and the adjoining region in an attempt to demystify the truth and rediscover the significance of this location.

History of Makran

Gwadar is an ancient town which has always held an important place in the history of Makran. A brief look at the history of Makran is therefore, essential to understand the background of the region in general and that of Gwadar in particular. Owing to its position athwart the main line of communication between the Middle East and India, no part of Balochistan has figured so largely in ancient annals as Makran, an area full of legendary lore, going back to the most ancient times. Historians have traced the history of Makran to the time of Prophet Dawood AS (David), when people entombed themselves in the small cairns to escape from the constantly recurring famines. Traces of these cairns (known locally as *dambi*) could still be found in Makran.² Persia's famous poet Firdousi has mentioned this area, in *Shahnama*, as the battleground between the Iranian and Turanian Kings. Makran, according to recorded history, formed part of the possessions of Iran during the reign of a Persian king Kai Kaus, who is said to have travelled across Makran from where he took a boat to other parts of his dominion. The area remained under the reign of a Turanian King Afrasiab for some time before it was regained by Kai Khusrau the successor of Kai Kaus. Kai Khusrau is said to have stayed in Makran for about a year. He is credited with considerable improvement in agriculture of the area by importing expert cultivators from all over the

² Planning & Development Department, Government of Balochistan, *Gwadar: A District Profile*, (Quetta: Quetta Printing Press, July 1997).

world, to layout fruit gardens and attend to pasture grounds for his horses and hunting grounds. On leaving, he appointed one Ashkash as governor, and it may have been the latter who named the two *karez* in Turbat, still known as the Kausi and Khusrawi, after his royal patrons.³

According to *Shahnama* Makran paid allegiance to Kai Kaus, Kai Khusrau, Lehrasp, Gushtasp, Bahman, Huma and Darab. The long history of Persian rule was apparently interrupted in 325 BC with the invasion of Alexander.⁴ The journey of Alexander's army and his fleet along the coast, as narrated by Arrian,⁵ is perhaps the oldest well documented account of this area. At that time the whole area was known as *Gadrosia*.⁶ Arrian described the coastline as the country of *Ichthyophagoi* i.e. fish eaters. The present name *Makran* seems to be derived from a Persian word "*Mahi Khoran*" having the same meaning i.e. fish eaters. According to the annals of his expedition, while Alexander with his army travelled through Makran, keeping as close to the coast as possible, his fleet under Admiral Nearchus was sailing parallel along the coast and mention of the names of Kalamat, Gwadar, Pishukan and Chahbahar are also there:⁷

Sir Thomas Holdich has traced Alexander's route as following the coast to the north of the Hingol river, when he turned northward and passed through the mountains at the back of the Taloi ridge of the Makran Coast Range, emerging on the shore between Kalamat and Pasni, along which he continued to Gwattar (Gwadar).⁸

Arrian explains that after subduing the Oreitei and the Gadrosoi, Alexander did not mistreat them and appointed Apollophanes as his satrap and instructed him to remain in the area till the fleet sailed past its shores, to settle a colony in the city, and establish order among the Oreitai, so that they might be readier to pay respect and obedience to the satrap.⁹ Alexander himself marched through the Gadrosia, by a difficult route, on which it was scarcely possible to procure the necessities of life, and which often failed to yield water for the army. They were, besides, compelled to march most of the way by night and

³ *The Gazetteer of Balochistan (Makran)*, (Quetta: *Gosha-e-Adab*, 1906), 34.

⁴ Tahir Mehdi et al., South Asia Partnership-Pakistan, *Profile of District Gwadar with Focus on Livelihood*, (Lahore: Visionaries Division, December 2009).

⁵ Arrian is a Greek historian, his treatise *Anabasis of Alexander* is considered the best account on the campaigns of Alexander.

⁶ Lord Curzon, 1892 quoted in *The Gazetteer of Balochistan (Makran)*, Preface.

⁷ Tahir Mehdi et al., *Profile of District Gwadar*.

⁸ *The Gazetteer of Balochistan (Makran)*, 40.

⁹ According to Vincent Smith, *The Early History of India* (New Delhi: Atlantic, 1999) Oreitai may be the predecessors of present day Lumri tribes of Las Bela, who claim Rajput descent. While a sub clan of Lumri called the Gadurs may represent Gedrosioi.

at great distance from the sea. Most of the Alexander's historians admit that all the hardships which his army suffered in Asia are less in comparison with their sufferings on this route. However, according to Nearchus, Alexander intentionally chose this route after learning that no one had traversed it with an army except Semiramis, when she fled from India with only twenty men, and Cyrus who escaped with only seven men. Cyrus had come to this region with a considerable army for the purpose of invading India but lost a greater part of the army due to difficulties which beset his march through the desert. Another reason for staying close to the coast, besides outdoing Semiramis and Cyrus, was an operational necessity to keep his fleet supplied with provisions. Nevertheless, the blazing heat and scarcity of water destroyed a great part of his army.¹⁰

The accounts of Alexander's expedition highlight the extreme inhospitability of the terrain, which remains a factor retarding the development of this region even in today's technologically advanced age. And it is for this reason that none of the invaders or conquerors

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wished to stay in this country for long. Therefore, while the region did come under the rule of great kingdoms on different occasions, no permanent rule could be established and hence remained less developed. For most of its history the Makran coastal belt seems to have remained under the control of local *sardars* and chieftains holding influence over small pockets of areas. According to Vincent Smith, after the death of Alexander, two of his generals

emerged as competitors for supreme power in Asia, Antigonos and Seleukos Nikator. In 312 BC Nikator gained control of Babylon, and within a period of six years became the lord of Central and Western Asia.¹¹ The eastern provinces of his realm extended to the borders of India, and Makran was included in his possessions. He is presumed to have marched through Makran across the Indus where he was defeated by Chandragupta (the Raja of Magadha) in 305 BC, and forced to cede Makran along with several other provinces.¹²

¹⁰ A detailed account of the Alexander's passage through Makran is given in *the Gazetteer of Balochistan (Makran)* pp 34-41.

¹¹ Babylon was an ancient city in present day Iraq.

¹² Vincent Smith, in *The Early History of India* has given a detailed account of Alexander's expedition and the defeat of Seleukus Nikator.

For the next eight centuries, or so, history seems to be silent on Makran. In the fifth century AD, Shermah, Malik of Hind married his daughter and gave the territory of Makran in dowry. For the next two centuries the territory thus remained in the hands of the Sassanians until the rise of the Brahman dynasty in Sindh. According to *Chachnama*, Rai Chach marched through Makran towards Kirman in 635-6 AD, subduing the local chieftains, and marking the boundary between Kirman and Makran.

Immediately after the death of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), the Arabs showed interest in Makran and India. However, they did not feel powerful enough to venture against Sind until after the conquest of Persia. In the last years of Caliph Umar (634-643 AD) the Arab Muslims attacked India and after stiff resistance from the ruler of Makran (Malik Saad), Makran fell into the hands of the Arabs. The message sent by his general Abdullah Bin Abdullah to the Caliph after this victory is as follows¹³:

Commander of the faithful, it is a country of which the mountains are mountains indeed, and the plains of which are real mountains; it is a country with so little water that its dates are the worst of dates, and the inhabitants are the most warlike of men. If thou hadst a less numerous army there, it would be annihilated and could do nothing; and if thy army is considerable, it will perish of hunger, because there are no victuals. The country beyond is still worse.

On receipt of this message, the Caliph reportedly dropped the idea of conquering Sindh. However, Makran was made a base for the officer-in-charge of the Indian frontier, and remained under the Arab rule, notwithstanding a few setbacks in between, through to Umayyid ruler Abdul Malik (684-705). During this time, Makran came under the jurisdiction of Hajjaj Bin Yousuf, who was appointed the governor of Iraq. It is said that in the early Eight Century AD Muhammad Bin Qasim was assigned to rescue Muslim prisoners from the governor of Deebal, Partaab Raye and also to check piracy along the Makran and Sind coasts. After the conquest of Sindh by Muhammad Bin Qasim, Makran was administratively amalgamated with Sindh. Arab settlements probably studded the coast of Makran for many years after the seventh

¹³ Ibid., 43. The popular belief in Pakistan is that Islam was introduced to the sub-continent after the expedition of Muhammad Bin Qasim. From these accounts it is confirmed that Islam was introduced in Makran much earlier during the time of Caliph Umar.

century and Arab blood has undoubtedly left its mark on the present population of the area. Not much is written about the area for the subsequent periods. However, from the accounts of Ibn-ul-Haikal it appears that the Arab rule lasted till at least the 10th century. Frequent references to Makran are also made by other Arab geographers of the period namely Ibn-e-Khurdadba, Al-Istakhri and Al-Idrisi, all of whom agree in describing the country as "for the most part desert."¹⁴

For the next seven centuries Makran came under attack by various foreigners and changed hands frequently. The foreign dynasties that exercised temporary suzerainty over the region included the Deilamis, the Seljuks, the Ghaznivids, the Ghorids and the Mongols. However, since no invader stayed in this country for long, the local rulers continued to enjoy internal authority, most of whom had by now converted to Islam.¹⁵ The local rulers ascended to power in the following order: Hots, Rinds, Maliks, Buledais and Gichkis. Makran is also mentioned in the memoirs of Marco Polo in the following words:¹⁶

Kesmacoran is a kingdom having a king of its own and a peculiar language. [Some of] the people are idolaters, [but the most part are Saracens]. They live by merchandize and industry, for they are professed traders, and carry on much traffic by sea and land in all directions. Their food is rice [and corn], flesh and milk, of which they have great store. There is no more to be said about them.

It may be noted that this part of the region was often quoted by historians as Kech (Kij) Makran to distinguish it from Persian Makran. The term Kech Makran has also been mentioned in the accounts of other great travelers: Ibne- Batuta and Turkish Admiral Sidi Ali, and in the local folklore '*Sassi Punnu*'.

Turkish Admiral Sidi Ali Reis remembers his visit to Gwadar in the following words:¹⁷

...escorted by the said captain we entered the harbour of Guador (Gwadar). The people there were Beluchistanis

¹⁴ Ibid., 61.

¹⁵ Tahir Mehdi et al., *Profile of District Gwadar*.

¹⁶ Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo.2*, available at <http://www.hotfreebooks.com/book/The-Travels-of-Marco-Polo-Volume-2-Marco-Polo-and-Rustichello-of-Pisa--20.html>, accessed on October 3, 2012.

¹⁷ Sidi Ali Reis, *Miratul Mumalik* (The Mirror of Countries), *Medieval Sourcebook*, available at <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/16CSidi1.asp> accessed on June 28, 2016.

and their chief was Malik Djelaleddin, the son of Malik Dinar. The Governor of Guador came onboard our ship and assured us of his unalterable devotion to our glorious *Padishah*.

In the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese arrived and captured several places along the Makran coast. A well-known Portuguese writer Manual De Souza has written the details of the Portuguese attack on India in his book *The history of Portuguese days in East*.¹⁸ The Kalmatis fought bravely, but the Portuguese ultimately prevailed and burnt the cities of Gwadar and Pasni in 1581.¹⁹

The great Baloch migration eastwards took place in the fifteenth century attributed to the tyrannical rule of one Malik Muzaffar Shah. In the middle of the 18th century (circa 1758) Khan of Kalat Mir Naseer Khan took over this area from the Gichkies and added it to the Khanate of Kalat but reinstated the local Gichki chief, Umer as a governor. Later both, the Gichki chief and Mir Naseer, realized that neither could keep the area without the other's support and therefore, entered into an agreement which allowed the Gichkis to maintain administrative control of the area, in return for furnishing half the collected revenues to Kalat.²⁰

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History of Gwadar

In 1783 Saiad Said bin Ahmad succeeded to the throne of Muscat. His brother Prince Saiad Sultan bin Ahmad, fled to Makran and met Mir Naseer Khan for help. Naseer Khan declined to offer military assistance but handed over Gwadar, as part of his share of revenues, to Saiad Sultan, for the latter's maintenance. Saiad Sultan became the ruler of

¹⁸ "Gwadar Historical Background," <http://www.skyscrapercity.com/archive/index.php/t-360436.html>, accessed on June 27, 2013; and Tahir Mehdi, *Profile of District Gwadar*.

¹⁹ Tahir Mehdi et al., *Profile of District Gwadar; Gwadar profile 1997; The Gazetteer of Balochistan (Makran)*, 46. Most of the documents agree on this date, however, *A Gazetteer of Balochistan*, (Haryana: Vipin Jain for Vintage Books, 1989) originally published by the Superintendent of Government Printing Calcutta (1908) gives the year to be 1651.

²⁰ Tahir Mehdi et al., *Profile of District Gwadar; Also see The Gazetteer of Balochistan (Makran)*, 50.

Muscat in 1797 but failed to return Gwadar.²¹ The ensuing struggle for the possession of Gwadar between the heirs of the Sultan and those of Mir Naseer, allowed the British to intervene, who brokered an agreement declaring Gwadar as part of Muscat.²² At that time the term Gwadar was applied not only to the town and port of Gwadar but the entire area under the suzerainty of Muscat. According to the *Gazetteer* this area covered about 307 sq miles at that time.²³

British attention was first drawn to Makran at the time of the outbreak of the first Afghan war, when Major Leech deputed Haji Abdun Nabi to visit the area from Kalat in 1838-9.²⁴ Gwadar achieved strategic importance when the British decided to lay the first Indo-Europe telegraph. Major Goldsmith was appointed by the British government in 1861-2, to ascertain the extent of coastal areas under control of local chiefs and an Assistant Political Agent was appointed in Gwadar in 1863. The first ever telegraphic link to these areas was made in 1863 when Gwadar was linked to Karachi. Telegraph offices were opened both at Gwadar and Pasni and Gwadar became a port of call for the steamers of British India Steam Navigation Company. Post office was opened in Gwadar in 1894.²⁵ The British also used Gwadar as a Flying Boat base until 1938, when the operations were shifted to Jiwani.²⁶

According to the *Gazetteer of Balochistan (Makran)* the population density of the area was less than three persons per square mile (1903), a result which indicates the sparsely populated character of the area. It further states that the inhabitants have a general tendency to avoid living together in large communities and the only place which possesses any pretensions to be called a town is 'Gwadar'. There has been from time immemorial a great deal of traffic between Gwadar and the other coastal ports of Makran and Muscat, and the names of some of the species of dates are probably Arabic in a more or less corrupted form.²⁷

²¹ Muscat claimed that the city was transferred to them permanently by the Khans of Kalat, a claim supported by Lord Curzon who asserts that the place was made over by the Khans of Kalat as a free gift to the Sultans but denounced by the natives of Gwadar and the Khans themselves. See *The Gazetteer of Balochistan (Makran)* and *Gwadar District Profile 1997*. The declassified documents of British India also indicate that the area was not permanently gifted to the Sultan.

²² Mir Naseer Khan expired in 1794 while Saiad Sultan was killed a few years later in 1804.

²³ *The Gazetteer of Balochistan (Makran)*, 280.

²⁴ Major C. B. Leech was the British Political Agent in Ghilzai region of Afghanistan.

²⁵ *Gwadar District Profile 1997*.

²⁶ His Majesty's Government India Office Declassified Records, National Data Centre, Cabinet Division, Islamabad, accessed during October/November, 2012.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 167.

The fact that numerous traces of irrigation works still exist throughout the area, even in tracts which are now dry crop areas, and the circumstance mentioned by Al-Idrisi that sugar was grown in the country and silk was produced in exportable quantities, indicates that Makran enjoyed in the past a high degree of agricultural and commercial civilization.²⁸ It appears from different historic accounts that Gwadar was the chief port on the entire Makran coast which handled all the trade of this area. The trade was mostly in the hands of *Hindus* and *Khojas* (locally known as *Lotias*). In 1903 Gwadar's trade was estimated at Rs. 550,000 of exports and Rs. 200,000 of imports. The contract for customs (levied at 5% *ad valorem*), octroi and tithes on fish, was leased for Rs. 40,000²⁹. However, after 1903, when the British India steamers also starting calling on Pasni, a significant share of the trade was diverted to Pasni.³⁰ Both Gwadar and Pasni became the link to the inland cities. Lord Curzon landed at Pasni at the end of 1903, the first Viceregal visit ever paid to Makran.³¹

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Some uncertainty has been created about the nature of transfer of the area to Muscat. Lord Curzon incorrectly asserts that the place was given to the Sultans as a free gift. However, the local accounts strongly contradict this assertion. An extract made from the diary in possession of one Mir Mazar Mirwari of Malar in Kolwa is relevant in this regard. It is addressed to the writer's son and runs as follows:

If somebody asks you whether Gwadar belongs to Kech and how it fell into the hands of the Bu-Saiads of Maskat, tell him in reply that Saiad Sultan was their ancestor and fled from the country of Maskat at the hands of his own relations and came to Zik. Dad Karim Mirwari accompanied him and went to Kharan and induced Mir Jahangir Nausherwani, to join them and they took refuge with Shah Naseer Khan (of Kalat). In the end, the Brahui army did not go to Maskat to help Saiad Sultan, but at length Mir Naseer Khan lent him Gwadar on trust. Mir Naseer Khan said, 'as soon as Maskat is recovered make over Gwadar to me (Mir Naseer Khan).' He has not given it back up to this time.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 137.

²⁹ *A Gazetteer of Balochistan*, 187.

³⁰ *The Gazetteer of Balochistan (Makran)*, 226-8

³¹ Lord Curzon was the British Viceroy of India from 1898 to 1905.

This local assertion is also supported by the Gichki's claim that they continued to receive their share of the revenue long after this incidence, which would have been stopped if the country was handed over permanently to the Sultan. Even Haji Abdun Nabi's report confirms this when he writes in 1839 that,³²

The two ports (i.e., of Gwadar and Chahbahar) formerly belonged half to the Gichkees and half to the Brahoees. The Brahoees' half was given in grant by Mir Naseer Khan to the present Imam's father, Saiad Sultan, who took refuge at Kalat during some convulsion in his own state.

From 1863 to 1879 Gwadar was the headquarters of an Assistant Political Agent.³³ In 1880 Major Henry Green, who had been the Political Agent at Kalat, published a book titled "Gwadur". Green not only supported the claim of the Khan of Kalat to Gwadar but also suggested that "the British government should purchase the town of Gwadar and present it to the Khan of Kalat."³⁴

The Khans of Kalat continued to reiterate their claim on the 'Gwadar enclave', however, since the area was under British suzerainty it did not materialize. The documents of the period declassified by the British government indicate that before independence, the 'Wazir-e-Azam' of Kalat again raised the issue of Gwadar. The political agents of the time Colonel Poulton and his predecessor Sir Geoffrey Prior supported the Khans claim and proposed that Gwadar be transferred to Kalat. In the words of Poulton, the political agent at Gwadar in 1947³⁵:

The Sultan (of Muscat) is an interloper there and his retention of an enclave in non-Arab territory will tend to become more and more of an anachronism.

The documents further reveal that the Jain community in India also offered to purchase Gwadar. The Jain community, according to one official account "numbered 1,500,000, possessed great wealth and could offer good price". However, the British government decided that it is in their strategic interest if Gwadar stayed with Muscat. A number of reasons may be found by sifting through the declassified files of that era. Firstly, the fact rarely mentioned, the British had hoped to find oil in Balochistan including parts of Gwadar. For the purpose of oil

³² Ibid., 284

³³ *The Gazetteer of Balochistan (Makran)*, op. cit., 285.

³⁴ Henry Green, *Gwadur*, (Calcutta: Superintendent Printing Press, 1880), 1-5.

³⁵ Declassified Records.

exploration 'Concession Rights' were awarded to a British-American company called Indian Oil Concessions Limited, in 1939. However, before the company could start its work, World War II broke out and a moratorium was imposed on oil exploration until after the war.³⁶ Secondly, both Admiralty and Air Ministry opposed transfer of Gwadar to Kalat because they thought it is important for both, imperial strategy and Air communications, to retain a "*pied a terre*" on mainland in case India becomes unfriendly.³⁷ Thirdly, Nehru had already asserted that Kalat should form part of the Indian territory. The British had doubts that independent India will not remain part of the Common Wealth and it was considered unwise to handover strategically important Gwadar to an "unfriendly India."³⁸ Furthermore, Gwadar was an important outpost in Britain's 'Forward Policy' to contain Russia from warm waters.

Reclaiming Gwadar from Oman

At the time of partition of the sub-continent into India and Pakistan, Gwadar, comprising Peshukan, Sur Bander, Phuleri and Nigore, was under the political control of Sultan of Oman.³⁹ Pakistani authorities, realizing that geographically and historically Gwadar is a part of Pakistan, requested the British government, immediately after partition, to allow/induce the Sultan for return of Gwadar. However, due to their continuing strategic interests the British declined to help. In this regard, the instructions from the British Foreign Office to their Political Resident in the Persian Gulf are relevant, extract of which is reproduced below:⁴⁰

We understand, however, that the hinterland possessed oil bearing properties, and that there is, therefore a long term possibility that Gwadar may become an important port. This long term possibility should be borne in mind in any negotiations concerning the future of Gwadar.

³⁶ The war lasted from 1939 to 1945 during which the British lost its primacy as the world's super power. After the war the British realized that the cost of maintaining colonial rule is too high and agreed to grant independence to the sub-continent. Thus the oil exploration could not materialize.

³⁷ M. W. Low of British Air Ministry at London to P. A. K. Harrison, India Office, London, March 4, 1947, in Declassified Records.

³⁸ It may be noted that the partition of the sub-continent into Pakistan and India was announced on June 3, 1947 hence these documents still refer to united India and not Pakistan.

³⁹ Tahir Wasim et al., *Gwadar- 20 Years from Now*, Group Research Paper, (Islamabad: National Defence University, 2007), 1.

⁴⁰ B. A. B. Burrows of British Foreign Office to Lt. Col. A. C. Galloway, Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, Bahrain, August 26, 1948 in Declassified Records.

The reason why Pakistan had to request the British instead of talking directly with Muscat government was that the British had concluded an agreement with the Sultan on March 20, 1891 in which the latter

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pledged "never to cede, sell, mortgage or otherwise give in occupation any of his dominions or dependencies save to the British government."⁴¹ However, the Pakistan government continued to raise the issue with the British. In 1958, after learning that the

Indians are also trying to purchase Gwadar, the government of Pakistan intensified its efforts and succeeded in concluding an agreement with the British government on August 1, 1958.⁴² At this time the British government was already under pressure due to a motion tabled in the UNSC to consider "armed aggression by the UK against the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Imamate of Oman," and the Sultan of Muscat was also in dire need of funds to continue his campaign against the Imam. According to the agreement the Pakistani government had to pay an amount of £3 million (\$10m) along with some concessions to the Muscat government.⁴³ Hence on September 8, 1958 Gwadar was transferred to Pakistan, through the British representative. On behalf of the Sultan of Muscat, the *Wali* handed over Gwadar to the representative of the British Counsel General in Muscat, who in turn, handed over possession to Pakistan. Pakistan side was represented by Mr. Agha Abdul Hamid, who was the Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister and Secretary Cabinet Division.⁴⁴ It was made a *tehsil* of district Makran in the Balochistan province till July 1, 1977 when it was given the status of a district.

⁴¹ Harrison to Low, February 19, 1947, in Declassified Records.

⁴² Akram Zaki, former Secretary General Foreign Affairs, in discussion with the author, Islamabad, April 25, 2013.

⁴³ Declassified Records, and "Gwadar Historical Background."

⁴⁴ For details see Usman M. Khan, "Tribal Politics in Balochistan 1947-90," PhD Dissert. (Karachi: University of Karachi, 1997) and Pakistan Navy Operations Order No. DN/1100, September 5, 1958.

Gwadar Port Project

In 1882, Sir Charles Metcalfe MacGregor visited Gwadar and travelled along the coast. He reported that Gwadar was a suitable place for a modern port but this proposal was not approved because of lack of resources and market feasibility.⁴⁵ After the Pak-India war of 1971, a proposal was put up to the government for an additional port along the Makran coast (Gwadar being a preferred option).⁴⁶ According to T. M. Khattak, Pakistan's President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, in 1974 offered the US to build a port at Gwadar and use it as a naval base.⁴⁷ However, the US declined because they had access to Chahbahar under friendly Shah of Iran's regime. For decades, the coastal town of Gwadar had been a victim of sheer neglect at the hands of the government, and

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hardly any development work was seen there. In 1988 a Belgium firm was awarded a contract to build a small "fish harbour cum mini port" at Gwadar which completed in December 1992. In 1991 the concept of deep water port at Gwadar was formally conceived by the Government of Pakistan. The project was approved by the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) in June 1994.⁴⁸ In December 1995 the government of Pakistan instructed Karachi Port Trust to finance the development of Gwadar to the extent of Rs.1 billion. In February 1996 the government released Rs. 2 billion for the construction of a deep sea port in Gwadar. In Dec 1996, 43 major companies submitted Expression of Interest (EOI) for construction of Phase I of the Gwadar project.⁴⁹ In March 2002 Sino-Pak Agreement was signed under which China Harbour Engineering Company was to build Phase-I of the Port at a cost of US \$ 248 million. Out of the \$248 million, Pakistan's contribution was only \$ 50 million, whereas, the rest

⁴⁵ Jason R. Murtha, *The Strategic Importance of Balochistan*, Master's Thesis (Monterey: Naval Post-Graduate School, 2011), 8. Major-General Sir Charles Metcalfe MacGregor(1840- 1887) was an Anglo-Indian explorer, geographer and officer of the Royal British Indian Army.

⁴⁶ U.S. Department of State memorandum s/s-7323703 6722 dated December 20, 1973 quoted in Ammad Hussain, *Pakistan's Gwadar Port- Prospects of Economic Revival*, Master's thesis (Monterey: Naval Post Graduate School, 2004), 3.

⁴⁷ *The News* (Islamabad), April 3, 2013. Khattak is a retired Vice Admiral and former Vice Chief of the Naval Staff.

⁴⁸ Abdul Raziq Durrani, DG Operations, Gwadar Port Authority, e-mail message to the author, February 4, 2013.

⁴⁹ Reema Kazmi, "Port Gwadar: Turning Dreams into Reality", *IBEX*, (January, 2009), 12-17.

was to be paid by the Chinese government. Gwadar Development Authority (GDA) was established in October 2003.⁵⁰ In 2004 the scope of work was enhanced to include designing and additional dredging of the navigation channel and cost an extra US \$ 39.8 million (Pakistan \$ 17.54 million, China \$ 22.26 million).⁵¹ In December 2005 Phase-I of the project was completed with a total cost of US \$ 287.8 million (Rs 17.268 billion), which consists of:

- 3 berths of total length 602m
- 4.5 km long approach channel
- Outer harbour dredged to 15.5m, inner harbour 12.5m.
- Turning basin 450m diameter
- 1x 100m service berth
- Related port infrastructure and port handling equipment, Pilot tugs, tugs, survey vessels etc.

China has also invested another US \$ 200 million for building the Makran Coastal Highway connecting Gwadar port with Karachi. After the completion of Phase I the port can handle Bulk Carriers of up to 50,000 DWT (Dead Weight Tonnage) and Container ships of up to 25000 DWT.

Phase-II envisaged the construction of seven additional berths of 300 meters and two oil piers. It will provide facilities to accommodate oil tankers up to 200,000 tons DWT, Bulk Carriers up to 100,000 tons, General Cargo Vessels up to 100,000 tons and fourth generation Container Ships of 15.6 to 20 meters draft. Phase-II was estimated at US \$ 932 million and proposed to be built on a BOT/BOO basis⁵². The objective was to have a port capable of handling latest shipping in business.

In 2006 the government of Pakistan invited offers from experienced port operators for the management of the Port of Gwadar. Six companies submitted bids including the Dubai World Ports, Hutchinson of Hong Kong, PSA International, two Saudi companies and one Pakistani company. An interested Chinese company opted out of the formal bidding. The contract was finally awarded to PSA International. The agreement was signed on February 5, 2007 between Gwadar Port Authority (GPA) and PSA Gwadar Pvt. Ltd. (a subsidiary of

⁵⁰ Yasmeen Gul, "Converting the Dream into Reality", *The Gwadar News*, (July-August, 2007), 27.

⁵¹ Durrani, e-mail message. Also Chairman GPA presentation to Maritime Industry Task Force, February 20, 2009.

⁵² Data received from GPA December 2012. Also see Raffat Zaheer, "The Dream of a \$1bn Boom Town", *The Gwadar News*, (July-August, 2007), 32.

PSA International).⁵³ However, the company failed to develop the port as envisaged and it was decided to handover the operations to a Chinese company. On February 18, 2013, an MOU was signed for transferring the concessional rights to a Chinese state-run company, China Overseas Port Holding Company which has subsequently taken over responsibility of the port.⁵⁴

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang visited Pakistan on May 22-23, 2013. During the visit the two sides decided to enhance the scope of the project. The new concept was named "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Pakistan's Ministry of Planning, Development & Reforms and China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) were tasked to spearhead the project and devise a long term plan and strategy to implement the idea.⁵⁵ A comprehensive package was conceived under CPEC which includes development and expansion of Gwadar port, energy projects throughout Pakistan; road and rail infrastructure and communication projects to connect Gwadar with the hinterland, industrial development and upgrading of airport besides other facilities and infrastructure in and around Gwadar city. This project has added another dimension to the already very strong relations between the two countries. During the landmark visit of the Chinese President Xi Jinping to Islamabad on April 20-21, 2015, CPEC was formally launched with a signing of 51 MOUs related to diverse aspects of bilateral relations including the CPEC⁵⁶. So far a number of projects worth US \$ 45.649 billion have been identified to be completed by 2030. These projects include energy generation of more than 16500 MW; road and rail infrastructure projects to link Gwadar with the hinterland and with China through the Karakorum Highway; infrastructure projects related to the port and Gwadar city including an international airport; cross-border optical fiber cable; establishing of industrial/economic zones etc. Ultimately, the port will also link with the Central Asian States through road and rail network and contribute to the overall progress and

CPEC will generate enormous opportunities for development of the people of Pakistan and China.

⁵³ Raffat Zaheer, "Development and Operations of the Gwadar Port", *The Gwadar News*, (July-August, 2007), 18.

⁵⁴ *News International*, February 19, 2013.

⁵⁵ Minutes of the 1st Joint Cooperation Committee Meeting held in Islamabad (August 27, 2013).

⁵⁶ Mateen Haider, Economic Corridor in Focus as Pakistan, China sign 51 MOUs, *Dawn* April 20, 2015.

prosperity of the entire region.⁵⁷ CPEC has assumed the significance as a flagship project in the overall “One Belt One Road” initiative introduced by President Xi Jinping which aims to connect the countries of Eurasia and Africa through land and sea trade routes. CPEC will generate enormous opportunities for development of the people of Pakistan and China and will contribute to further strengthening of our relations with each other and with other regional countries.

Conclusion

Gwadar has a remarkable history, and a strategic geography, which makes it an ideal location for a deep sea port. The port has the potential to become a regional hub, which would be able to meet not only the growing domestic requirements but also handle cargo for the entire region. Gwadar port is strategically located at the cross roads of natural resources of the Middle East and Central Asia, a huge consumer market of Asia with over one-third of world population, and at the shortest route to the western provinces of China. It is being equipped with modern cargo handling facilities to meet the challenges of growing world trade, which over 70% is conducted through containers. Economically booming China and India, increasingly stable Pakistan, and gradually opening consumer markets of Central Asia, coupled with exponential population growth in the region, will generate a substantial portion of world trade in near future. CPEC does not only contribute towards trade and connectivity, but to a wide array of development needs of Pakistan. Gwadar port under the overall umbrella of the CPEC will act as a stimulus of growth and prosperity not only for Pakistan but for the entire region.

⁵⁷ Michael Bucher, “The US \$46 billion Silk Handshake”, Country Report *Shanghai Business Review*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (March 2016). 26-29.

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