

The Importance of Pakistan's Geo-Strategic Location

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It sounds quite paradoxical that the very existence and survival of the state of Pakistan is dependent on its geo-strategic role, which it has got to play under the dictation and obligation of its geography. The matter needs to be highlighted and explained in the light of present day situational phenomena of the region in general and Pakistan in particular.

Pakistan occupies a strategic position at the nexus of the Middle East, South Asia and Central Asia. Located in the North West part of the South Asian Subcontinent, it became an independent state as a result of the partition of British India on 14 August 1947. Geographically it is linked with India on the East, Iran on the West, Afghanistan on the North West, China on the North East and is in close proximity of Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf on the South. There is a 596 kilometers boarder between Xinjiang province of China and the Northern Areas of Pakistan, while Wakhan corridor of Afghanistan, varying in width from 11 to 50 kilometers, divides the Tajikistan state from Pakistan along 302 kilometers. Though on the one hand Pakistan joins extensive peaceful boarders with Iran while on the other hand the boundary with Afghanistan along the Durand Line has often been turbulent. Located at the head of Arabian Sea, Pakistan flanks the entrance to the oil-rich Gulf and is strategically placed in relation to the sea-lanes between Europe, and the Indian Ocean.

Pakistan due to its unique geographical location and huge logistic potentials may serve as a trade as well as energy corridor in Asia and most of the regional and global economic actors may take advantage of the opportunities. It is perhaps the only country, which can qualify for being a part of an energy triangle that connects

East Asia with both Middle East and Central Asia. Pakistan can play a vital role in advancing cooperation in the region keeping in view that regional cooperation a necessary ingredient for economic development and can ultimately lead this region (South Asia) into an economic powerhouse. It can emerge as a commercial hub for landlocked Central Asia due to its well geographical position. Gwadar is strategically located on the western end of Balochistan coast, on the opposite end of the Gulf of Oman and the Straits of Hormuz and on the mouth of the Gulf. It lies just 624 nautical kilometers to the east of Straits of Hormuz which is an important route for oil tankers bound for Japan and Western countries out of Gulf. It is 460 kilometers away from Karachi in the East and 120 kilometers away from Iranian border in the West. When the deep-sea port at Gwadar becomes functional, various plans for important cross-national oil pipelines passing through the province Balochistan would further enhance the region's strategic value. Chinese financial assistance and technical expertise would be instrumental throughout the course of development of Gwadar port. The \$200 million package for this port is the biggest ever offered to any country by China. It is important for China from both economic and security point of view. It will be linking its western province of Xinjiang with Pakistan. It is expected to become a gateway port for Central Asia and Xinjiang. Pakistan is equally suitable for "Asia Gas Grid". This Grid would connect gas-rich nations in the Gulf and Siberia to consumption centers in India, China and Japan. Energy producing countries would be connected through a series of pipelines to energy consuming countries. Pakistan would be a hub of this activity and would

be used as trans-shipment point that will provide huge amount of transit fees to Pakistan economy and East Asian countries would get gas access at cheaper rates compared to transport through ships. The IPI gas pipeline through Pakistan would cost India four times less than the proposed deep-sea pipeline. This energy trade provides a favourable situation to all the participants. Besides it, the Gulf and Caspian basin regions have huge energy resource potentials, which are to be shared by the global community in the foreseeable future, and the traditional geopolitical approach of overpowering, if allowed to prevail, may lead to new conflicts. A new approach of ensuring due share through healthy economic competition, multinational investments and technical cooperation can only enhance the global energy security. But it would remain a design until security issues persisting for a long period of time are addressed seriously. However, Pakistan along with other potential regional beneficiaries need to sincerely work for creating an environment conducive for capturing the emerging economic cooperation and healthy market based competition among the states of the region is necessary for individual and collective gains.

Pakistan could easily become the hinge that connects China and India and could provide transit facilities to the rapidly growing trade between them. It could also become the energy hub for the flow of natural gas to these energy deficit countries. But these, and several others, are opportunities that will not be realized without the help of public policy that incorporates both economic and foreign affairs. Pakistan keeping in view all these changes must alter not only its economic strategy but also its foreign policy to reflect these global changes.

To be continued