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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Pakistan Navy, CPEC, Gawadar Port, Economic Crises, Maritime Trade	The significant access to the maritime domain not only helps the state to prosper economically, but it also provides the ultimate strong defense and protection if used fully. But in the case of Pakistan, despite being blessed with almost 960 km of coastline, one of the most potential possessions, it has not been exploited to its fullest degree. Almost 90% of Pakistan's trade is carried by sea, and still the importance of maritime trade is quite underrated. The economic agreement between China and Pakistan and the operationalization of Gwadar Port under CPEC show that Pakistan is focusing on its sea resources to be a part of the developed world, or at least to get out of the worst economic crisis. However, everything comes in a package, with pros and cons, the same in the case of CPEC. Although it is said that it has numerous socio-economic benefits, it also brings several security threats and challenges. Hence, the following paper will highlight the significance of maritime security for Pakistan in general and the security compulsions on CPEC particularly. Furthermore, the role of Pakistan's Navy and its potential assistance in CPEC will be the core aspect to be discussed and examined in this research paper. Thus, the examined role of the Navy in CPEC will help in concluding that if Pakistan effectively overcomes such hurdles and manages to eliminate these threats, then the construction of CPEC will reap the reward.
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Introduction

The Indian Ocean is encircled on the south by Antarctica, on the north by Asia, on the west by Africa, and on the east by Australia, as described by the well-known geographer Robert D. Kaplan. The Indian Ocean is surrounded by about thirty passages and straits, the most important of which are the Strait of Malacca that combines Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. The Strait of Hormuz, on

the other hand connects Iran and Oman while the Bab el-Mandeb connects southern Yemen and Djibouti. The Mozambique Channel integrates southeastern Africa with Madagascar in the east, and the Suez route connects the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea through the Isthmus of Suez. It is strategically essential to trading networks since the maritime sector is responsible for 90% of global trade and provides services to 90% of the world's population (Bouchard, 2011).

The state can only achieve national supremacy if it has a strong sea power and its tactical use in war (Mahan, 2012). Further, emphasized enhancing sea power by highlighting the six elements that have the potential to increase not only the geographical importance of the state but also maritime supremacy. The valuable sedimentary location, effectively purposeful maritime coastlines, geo-strategic position, the state's efficiency to defend its borders, strong administration, and social order to control the sea are the factors mentioned by A. T. Mahan to elaborate the influence of marine power (Mahan, 2004). Every state in the region is politically and militarily striving to protect its marine interests, resulting in a collision of premeditated settlement and to achieve the influential supremacy among extra-regional powers, regional powers, and minor indigenous nations. Pakistan, as a coastal country, receives 20 million tons of oil by sea. Oil is essential for 32% of its energy consumption and 38% of power production. As a result, maintaining and modernizing Pakistan's marine security is like the backbone of the human body in this context (Ali, 2021). The Indian Ocean region contains almost thirty-six states along its coastal zone; besides that, eleven neighboring countries, even though they are landlocked, in some way or directly rely on it. Major developed states like the US and Japan, along with regional states like India and China, have been very much captivated by the IOR due to its economic and strategic importance (Yoshihara and Holmes, 2026; Yoshimatsu, 2026; Aryal and Nair, 2025). As a massive tonnage of international trade is dependent on it, in the form of world oil at sixty-five percent while the gas trade is at almost 35 percent, respectively. Pakistan, being one of these thirty-six littoral states and having about 990km of coastline to protect with inadequate infrastructure, finds it is very challenging for the state to protect and patrol throughout the coastal zone. Consequently, this brings ultimate security threats and challenges for Pakistan, specifically in the maritime zone, as the challenges are both traditional and non-traditional in nature in modern times, where the lethal technology is becoming more and more advanced and complex (Azad, 2016).

Problem Statement:

In the following research, the problem statement is basically twofold; firstly, it refers to the role of Pakistan's Navy while dealing with the security challenges. These are quite intense in nature, specifically after the signing of the multi-billion-dollar project CPEC under the Belt and Road Initiative. This paper will also examine maritime security with special reference to Pakistan and how CPEC has increased Pakistan's security compulsions.

Theoretical Framework:

Maritime power is one of the strongest assets any country can possess, which gives multiple benefits. However, there are several advantages as well as disadvantages alongside it and the existence of

strong and efficient maritime security to protect Pakistan's sovereignty is very crucial. Even though Pakistan possesses one of the strongest forces in the world, it is undeniable that the naval power of the country lags, as compared to Indian and Chinese naval forces in the Indian Ocean. Therefore, under the realistic approach, the lens of defensive realism will be used as the theoretical framework in the proposal, because of the self-help nature of the system; states have to develop a system in which they can protect themselves in any situation of danger. Therefore, they try to increase their capabilities relative to one another through either internal efforts of self-strengthening or external efforts of alignment with other states (Waltz, 1979).

So, in the case of Pakistan, due to the geostrategic location of Pakistan, the country has always opted for a defensive strategy to protect itself (Abbas et al., 2024; Kousar and Behan, 2025). The following theory is preventive in nature, and the state adopts defensive policies to create fear among other states to protect itself (Raza, 2024). The defensive strategies and policies might involve gaining power by making alliances or by enhancing military power for survival in the international arena (Idrees et al., 2026). The theory assumes that the state should acquire an appropriate amount of power necessary for it to survive.

Research Methodology

In qualitative research, documentary analysis requires data that can be interpreted in order to evoke meaning and to gain a better understanding of the issue that has been highlighted in the following document. In qualitative research methodology, there are many approaches to conduct the research, but in this specific research paper, Documentary analysis will be used for the research purposes as it is a very systematic approach for evaluating documents available both in printed and soft form. Documentary Research is defined as the research conducted through the use of official or personal documents as a source of information (Umar et al., 2023). This form of research methodology is quite similar to qualitative content analysis as it includes the study or the review of the already existing data in the form of texts or media projections (Bowen, 2009).

The four-step approach to control the content in documentary analysis to curb the chances of bias includes: authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning (Bahmae et al., 2023). The first approach provides a very crucial aspect for the research, which is historical perspective; besides that, it also provides an authentic source to acquire additional data. The second factor includes the best means of triangulation due to its reliability and validity of the data for research purposes, the third aspect refers to the representativeness, as the documents are the main subject of systematic research in their own manner. The fourth aspect, meaning, is one of the most important factors, as all the research work depends on the interpretation of the content in the right context (Scott 1990).

Importance of Maritime Security for Pakistan

Due to extensive changes within the Indian Ocean Region over the last few decades, each country within the region has to adopt a more strategic policy to cope with the drastic changes. On the one hand, numerous opportunities are available due to advanced technology and development, many

hurdles and challenges are also there, which the states have to face for the sake of their survival. The hyper-activation within the Indian Ocean since the last decade has a lot to offer as the already existing and newly emerging superpowers like the US, China are trying to utilize the ocean's geostrategic location and the possession of its immense natural resources to its fullest extent to achieve their strategic goals and long term aims (Bueger 2017). In the region, all major fleets, especially Washington, Moscow, and Beijing, now have an intentional presence. Foreign militaries played a critical role in combating piracy within the ocean, and they are more likely to play an indispensable part in aiding the area in dealing with coastal safety concerns (Shahzad and Gillani, 2022). However, there is a possible downside to this: international fleets also have their own strategic aims to pursue, and that may or may not coincide with regional goals. The naval presence does, in fact, imply a major militarization of the region (Van der Putten et al., 2014).

Pakistan is the state that holds a crucial position in the marine defense composition of the region, as the country has made a lot of efforts, from fighting against terrorism to getting involved in various mutual maritime maneuvers, to protect its national sovereignty. The navy not only gained significant operational experience during these missions, but it also created new bilateral and international alliances with regional actors. For the native area, it is critical that Islamabad not only proceeds to engage in certain cooperation, but also takes a constructive role in regional coastal power and political debates. Pakistan may assume regional leadership responsibilities since it has one of the few operationally experienced fleets in the area. Pakistan must continue to expand its horizons outside its own waterways (Humayun 2014).

Despite its importance and enormous potential, Pakistan still has slow economic growth as a result of officials' negligence. The Gwadar Port, holding a crucial geo-strategic maritime location and an epicenter of the multibillion-dollar China Pakistan Economic Corridor, provides a genuine incentive to correct Pakistan's fiscal position. However, due to the strategic setting of the harbor right at the starting point of the Gulf and blocking points in the opposite direction of the Hormuz Strait and Gulf of Oman. It has been perceived that the port is envisaged to turn into a regional trading hub by providing short travelling routes for the inward and outward trading movement of the Gulf countries and the Middle East. However, while highlighting the importance of Gwadar Port, the administration has acknowledged Gwadar as a Duty Free Economic Zone and Free Port (Memon and Shah 2016).

Significance of Naval power for state survival:

Pakistan's troops on the ground are adequately robust, with tactical defense systems, and the country is paying enough attention to air defense development. The recent military operations' success and overturning of the enemy's intentions, namely in North/South Waziristan, Swat, insurgency-affected parts of Baluchistan, and metropolitan Karachi, have demonstrated the capability of efficient intelligence services and military assets. The sole domain in which Pakistan must focus its efforts is the building of a naval force. As any country's position and grandeur are reflected in its maritime power, Pakistan cannot hope to take its due place in the world without a powerful navy. Pakistan's naval issues are huge in scope, because the Pakistan Navy has been

mostly neglected for decades, as well as lacking defined duties. Pakistan inherited an arch-rival India, which is very aggressive in demonstrating its hegemony in South Asia and beyond, as well as greatly boosting its naval force. Pakistan is constructing a massive network of road and power infrastructure with the assistance of China under the OBOR vision, and a dependable and robust navy is required to maintain uninterrupted commercial activity (Hafeez, 2018).

Despite the fact that Pakistan is still in the process, the country is already facing different challenges in the political, social, economic, and security realm. But due to the complex strategic shifts in the modern era, the nature of the challenges is also becoming complex and hard to tackle, as is the case with maritime security. To protect Pakistan's dominion in the Arabian Sea, which is an integral part of the Indian Ocean, Islamabad has been armed with one of the largest navies in the South Asia region (Mustafa, 2005). The drastic transformation has been viewed in the role of the Pakistan Navy, particularly after the signing of a multi-billion-dollar project to tackle the new dimension of terrorist activities to sabotage CPEC. Primarily, the foremost aim behind the development of a strong navy was to be prepared to protect the state's integrity within international waters. Now, with the new strategic developments, the responsibilities of the PN have increased to meet the complex challenges. Pakistan has not been able to adequately utilize the opportunity to exploit the possession of raw materials within the ocean as a maritime nation. Years of mismanagement have impeded the marine sector's growth, which has harmed both the country's economic growth and national security. The local maritime and construction sectors are in disarray, despite the fact that seaborne trade is the backbone of Pakistan's economy. Marine natural resource utilization is limited to coastal fisheries. Despite its hostility towards India, Pakistan has relied on two collaborative ports at Karachi until recently, which would be a potential target in any conflict. Previously, the growth of the Pakistan Navy as an effective element of the military strategy has been hampered by policymakers' central standpoint (Nawaz 2004).

But due to the fact that it has the capacity of more than 90% of maritime trade, Pakistan's geo-strategic location of Pakistan right at the initial point of the Arabian Sea connects the trade routes and provides short routes (Khan and Rizwan , 2022). The country aimed to achieve its goals of becoming a trade channel for Central Asia and China through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, urging it to play an increasingly active and noteworthy role in ensuring regional maritime security. As a member of the American-led Combined Maritime Forces, notably Combined Task Force 150 and anti-piracy Combined Task Force 151, the Pakistan Navy has long contributed to international security missions. Pakistan has also established its own Maritime Security Patrol in the region. Since October 2017, the service has been directed by Adm. Zafar Mahmood Abbasi, who has expanded the service's patrol capabilities to protect the country's exclusive economic zone and interests at sea. In addition, it is undergoing considerable recapitalization to preserve deterrent credibility in the face of India's naval modernization (Abbasi, 2020).

Hybrid Warfare to Sabotage CPEC:

Because of its central position in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which the US perceives as a tool for China's global economic and political dominance, Pakistan is destined to become the

world's top hybrid warfare battlefield. The establishment of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the opening of the Gwadar harbor baffles its opponents. The project's huge potential has enraged India's ruling elite and the Trump administration; Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India, is also very eager to dismantle the project. Neither India nor the United States could disrupt the CPEC project with conventional forces. Considering conventional war as a tool of legislation has become less relevant than ever before; amongst atomic power competitors, the likelihood of full-fledged conventional warfare, particularly between nuclear-capable strategic adversaries, is steadily fading as a means of resolving disputes. Premier Modi, with the help of the Trump regime in recent history due to its own reservations on CPEC, is more inclined towards using a hybrid warfare strategy to sabotage CPEC after exhausting all political and diplomatic options (Korybko 2017).

To undermine the project, India has deployed a hybrid of conventional small arms, irregular tactics, terrorism, and criminal conduct at the same time and in different ways. Simultaneously, the US is using financial pressure to obstruct CPEC construction, while native factions have been hiring misinformation or diversionary discourse digitally to wreck the project at the request of external forces. It has also been viewed that RAW, the Indian intelligence agency is actively funding and backing up extremists and radicalized Sunni militants and the separatist groups in Baluchistan province specifically to amplify sectarianism and hamper the CPEC projects. It has intentionally built a sectarian division in Quetta to sabotage societal and religious unity among the people of the area, as well as terrify investors considering investing in Baluchistan as a result of the building of Gwadar's port and international airport. Tehreek-e-Taliban and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi mostly targeted Hazaras (a Shia sect) in Quetta as both are extremist Sunni militant organizations (Jaspal 2020). However, to deal with such a hybrid nature of challenges, Pakistan forces specifically, the navy is continuously evolving and getting engaged in various joint military exercises and navy drills with China, US, Russia to promote peace and regional stability. Besides that, the main aim of these drills is to prove to its rivals that Pakistan's naval capabilities are more than enough to resist any attack on the flagship project CPEC of China's grand initiative BRI. Keeping in view that, due to the country's geo-strategic location, it would bring various implications if the state becomes offensive in its policymaking, to achieve its aims in the long run and for the protection of the state's territorial integrity. Pakistan is more inclined towards defensive realism and opts for defensive mechanisms to make sure the protection of the state from all external and internal harmful elements. Another concern, which needs to be addressed, is the increased weaponization in the region due to the US-China tussle, specifically after the initiation of BRI and its flagship project CPEC in the South Asian Region.

India has been backed up by the United States, as the superpower is providing New Delhi with unconventional and latest weaponry and technologies, which ultimately have a direct and long-term impact on Pakistan. The verge of using nuclear weapons in a conventional war has been intensified due to India's military development, as it is infuriating the arms-mobilization imbalance with Pakistan, which is promoting Indian aggression. Furthermore, the US is also supporting India while portraying the justifiable Kashmiri freedom struggle as 'Islamist Terrorism' by accusing Pakistan of backing up those militants; such challenges are keeping Pakistan a target of a hybrid war. To keep it detached from the arms mobilization buildup, ceasefire violations across the Line of

Control, and hostility to Kashmiri independence, India is openly supporting the ethnic rifts in ex-FATA, as well as TTP and BLA terrorism. Such elements are also very actively involved in the negative portrayal of Pakistan's image by anti-Pakistan Western elements. The US adapted FATF threats to put Pakistan on its blacklist and oppose CPEC and has also kept the IMF package for Pakistan on hold, due to concerns about repayment of Chinese relief funds (Akram 2019).

The role of Navy in protecting CPEC:

Due to the persistent attacks on Chinese workers by different militant organizations, which have become a threat to Chinese interests, the higher authorities in Pakistan initiated a particular program to develop a force whose primary task is to protect Chinese citizens and infrastructure, with the help of PSCs. According to an estimate, around thirty-two thousand security staff from various law enforcement agencies and the Pakistan Armed Forces have been deployed to provide security to more than fourteen thousand Chinese expatriates and corridor groundwork. With almost six civil sectors and nine army battalions, the army is forming a 13,700-strong special security Division committed to CPEC, costing \$220 million. This specialist Division will work under the supervision of a major general. More than 500 Chinese security workers are required to work on improving the capacity of the special force and local security agencies. The idea is to beef up sanctuary in Balochistan, where 1000 levies, 3000 police workers, 5700 Frontier Corps Guards, Pakistan marines, and border security troops will supposedly patrol all routes leading to the port to ensure the protection (Basit 2018). The expansion of the Pakistan Navy has been considered a necessity to provide CPEC with security and to ensure safe maritime trade routes. The main aim behind the formulation of the special maritime forces is to safeguard Gwadar Port along the connected channels, which consists of various gunboats, frigates, fast attack craft, drones, and other electronic surveillance systems. The Pakistan Navy's Task Force 88 has also been activated and fully functional since 2017 (Ahmed, 2017).

The Pakistan Navy (PN) is undergoing the most extensive upgrading project in its history. The renovation is aimed not just at filling functional holes, but also at making it a more dominant force. It is outfitted with a variety of anti-ship weapons to keep Indian ships at a distance, as well as powerful air-defense systems to limit the Indian Navy's freedom of operation in its command zone. It is achieving these goals thanks to the introduction of new types of ships from China and Turkey. The addition of additional ships will not only boost PN's capabilities, but will also adopt new technologies and responsibilities. The Pakistan Navy is a smaller fleet than its competitor, the Indian Navy (IN), which is more modernized and hence has a broader operational reach. PN, on the other hand, is organized as a defensive specialist tasked with safeguarding the state's marine assets and deterring invasion at and from the sea. As a result, Pakistan Navy plans are targeted at limiting the Indian Navy's potential to operate near Pakistan's coastline and keeping it away from sensitive shipping routes in order to safeguard its shoreline territories, marine lines of transportation, and trade. The Pakistan Navy plans to deny the Indian Navy convenient access to waterways and restrict its capabilities (Site, 2021).

Anti- Access and Area Denial Strategy:

The Anti-Access or Anti-Denial is a comparatively recent term for a long-standing method of warfare. Despite the fact that the terminology is synonymous with Chinese and Russian war strategy, neither country uses it formally. Anti-access is defined as an "action, activity, or capability, usually long-range, designed to prevent an advancing enemy force from entering an operational area," while area-denial is defined as an "action, activity, or capability, usually short-range, designed to limit an enemy force's freedom of action within an operational area," according to the DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms. To put it another way, A2/AD is aimed at creating a no-go zone for the opponent (DOD, 2021).

The plan is to put into action the anti-access/area-denial plan into practice. The opponent is prohibited from power projection under this approach, and its actions are limited to a specific region. In Pakistan's scenario, A2/AD might be an effective tactic for countering the danger posed by the Indian Navy's expanding reach in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea. The A2/AD plan is basically a defensive strategy aimed at keeping foreign invaders out of one's defense zones. Pakistan's position to adopt this strategy is also very clear, as it fights a superior Indian Navy, whose might, aspirations, and aims in the Indian Ocean are expanding to become the ocean's ruling force. The Indian Navy's growing capability and ambitions pose a direct danger to Pakistan's sovereignty and maritime interests. As a result, the A2/AD is a good fit for Pakistan's goals of restricting India's military development in its sphere of influence while also protecting its own objectives (Ali, 2021).

Indian naval power and China-Pakistan Collaboration:

To compete with its rival in the Indian Ocean and become a regional hegemon, India pursued the process of modernization of its naval power; on the other hand, Pakistan, under its defensive mechanism, has an inventory of five submarines and nine frigates. As compared to India, which has far more advanced technology, including sixty-seven fighting vessels, destroyers, frigates, submarines, corvettes, and two aircraft carriers. India has already achieved the target of having a nuclear-powered submarine, while Pakistan has developed such submarines that can launch nuclear warheads. India is already the fifth-largest navy in the world, and further wants to enhance its capabilities by having the possession of 160 technologically advanced ships in a decade. However, such inventories also involve various patrol boats that would allow New Delhi to be more effectively able to patrol in the Indian Ocean; such steps also boost its chance to adopt an anti-access/area-denial strategy (Shahzad, 2019).

The rapidly extending Indian naval muscle is aimed at opposing the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLA-N, the Chinese Navy) in the Indian Ocean, besides Pakistan. The likelihood of a future war between New Delhi and Beijing in the Indian Ocean is considered high. China's signing of many commercial agreements and building projects, notably port expansions in Islamabad, Dhaka, Colombo, and Naypyidaw, have been widely seen in India as indicating expansionist intentions. The blame game between Pakistan and India has reached a pinnacle with the interchange of remarks blaming one another for maritime terrorism. While Indian officials claimed to have

expressed to Chinese officials what they viewed as security threats resulting from probable extremism in the Arabian Sea, China seemed to be convinced to engage with Pakistan in counter-terrorist efforts aggressively. Terrorism is still very much a threat to Gwadar and the economic corridor, and China acknowledges that its foes may take advantage of the situation. In addition, Chinese authorities have offered increased financial aid for Pakistan's counter-terrorism operations, bearing in mind the need (Attig-ur-Rehman, 2018).

Pakistan's Navy Increased Capabilities to resist the threat:

Since the Gwadar Port became a key cornerstone of the CPEC project, the PN's role has grown. China and Pakistan have increased their military-to-military cooperation in order to defend the energy and economic corridor from future dangers. The two nations signed a series of agreements and memorandums of understanding (MOUs) related to the BRI project in 2015, and they also committed to upgrading their partnership to an "All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership. Even before CPEC, since 2003, the Chinese and Pakistani navies have conducted combined naval drills frequently. When Islamabad opted to acquire Beijing weaponry to upgrade its outdated naval force, the navy-to-navy cooperation began to increase. Pakistan's navy signed a 750-million-dollar contract with China in 2005 for four F-22P frigates and six Z-9c helicopters. China has taken part in the drill on a regular basis.

PN ships also visit Chinese ports on a frequent basis and take part in cooperative naval drills. With the involvement of over nations, Exercise Aman – 2017 was Pakistan's largest maritime exercise ever, demonstrating the country's naval aspirations. The activity, which began as a search-and-rescue exercise in 2003, has grown to include a wide range of coastal and naval operations involving ships, helicopters, maritime patrol aircraft, joint boarding operations through air defense exercises, Special Forces, and communication drills, among other things (Hasan, 2016). Pakistan remained a significant purchaser of Chinese military equipment, according to the SIPRI – 2016 Yearbook. The 2016 submarine contract between China and Pakistan is one of the biggest in bilateral ties, which would improve Pakistan's undersea capacity in the Indo-Pacific region. The

\$6 billion agreement also provided Pakistan's navy with access to China's Beidou-II (BDS) satellite navigation system (M. Ahmed 2016). According to Pakistani academics Massarrat Abid and Ayesha Ashfaq, the CPEC would increase Pakistan's GDP by more than 15%. Pakistan is expected to have consistent and sustained growth as a result of the economic element combined with energy development. The growing Sino-Pakistan axis helps bridge the gap with India in the economic, military, and nuclear areas, which has been expanding. This obviously suggests that the burgeoning China-Pakistan naval axis might limit the Indian Navy's access to the Indian Ocean maneuvering area (Panneerselvam, 2017).

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) can be viewed as a foundation for China to expand its naval presence in the Indian Ocean region. Simultaneously, the huge project would strengthen Pakistan's naval influence in the area. Consequently, both countries are likely to strengthen their marine collaboration in order to protect the CPEC's progress while also increasing their geopolitical

interests in the Indian Ocean region. Gwadar will be able to provide a route for trade that saves almost 400 kilometers compared to the Karachi transit line, right after the completion of the mega project. Piracy in Indian Ocean routes, on the other hand, has a significant impact on the legitimate performance of trade. The Chinese navy is already one of the naval forces in the Indian Ocean, particularly in Somalia's seas. Despite the fact that navy warships may port in Yemen and other nations for replenishment, they still have flaws. The construction of Gwadar port is mostly a commercial operation at present time, but after a period of time, it may be able to give some material assistance to the Chinese navy, allowing it to increase its competence (Rahman et al., 2021).

As part of its fleet modernization and growth ambitions, the Pakistan Navy (PN) has partnered with the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and its related partners. PN has received three Azmat-class Fast Attack Craft since 2013 (Missile Boats). These patrol boats were built under a technology transfer model. Meanwhile, Pakistan signed a deal in April 2015 to purchase eight Yuan-class diesel-electric submarines, four of which would be manufactured in China and the remaining four in Karachi. Pakistan's capacity to install a nuclear triad and naval force projection capabilities will be enhanced by the purchase of these submarines. Following that, in 2017 and 2018, Pakistan signed building contracts. A wide range of anti-surface and anti-air tasks can be carried out by these facilitated warships. As Pakistan aspires to secure maritime safety, defend commercial vessels, and project its naval strength in the Arabian Sea while conducting nuclear missions, such acquisitions would greatly improve Pakistan's naval capabilities (Faisal, 2020).

To protect the Gwadar Port and to provide safety to the associated sea lanes against both traditional and non-conventional threats, a special organization has been developed, mainly known as the Task Force (Chawla and Jacob, 2024). The task force-88 includes almost four hundred Marines, which has been designed for defending sea resources both seaward and offshore, against threats arising from aerial, surface, and subsurface (Haq, 2026). It has been armed with appropriate technology, weapons, aircraft, drones, gunboats, frigates, Fast Attack Craft, as well as other electronic surveillance resources. The two-way defensive system includes a marine-based harbor defense system, shore-based anti-air artillery, rapid patrol vessels, and a surveillance system that includes radars, drones, and aerial surveillance devices. Both traditional and non-traditional hostile forces can be dealt with by the coastal defense (Hali 2020).

With evolving threat patterns and increased maritime security needs, the introduction of contemporary and capable surface systems such as offshore patrol vessels, frigates, and patrol boats has become more urgent, and Type 054A/P frigates are being purchased from China in this respect. The Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Niazi, enlightened the general masses about the increased capabilities of Pakistan naval power while, in an interview to the Global Times, saying, "These will be one of the most technologically advanced platforms of the Pakistan Navy Surface Fleet, equipped with modern surface, subsurface and anti-air weapons, sensors and combat management system. These ships will boost the potency of our fleet and significantly contribute to maintaining peace and security in the region. Besides these, other major programs include enhancing our long-range anti-submarine warfare and anti-surface warfare capability through induction of long-range maritime patrol jets, unmanned combat aerial vehicles, and modernizing

our existing fleet with state-of-the-art weapons and surveillance systems.

The CPEC and the development of the Gwadar port are expected to reshape geopolitical and geostrategic equations not just in South Asia, but even beyond it. Other countries in other areas are also rethinking their multilateral and bilateral relationships with global and regional powers. Gwadar and CPEC's potential to connect numerous locations, not just of Asian origin but also other regions, to a single focal point, Pakistan, would drive Beijing and Islamabad to deeper collaboration and joint military capability in the regional and global arenas. CPEC, a flagship project of BRI that carries various opportunities yet numerous challenges, which are very complex in nature, and Pakistan being the central stakeholder of this project is in a very difficult spot to tackle all the challenges to ensure the success of the project. It will provide the country a golden chance to enhance its trade with other nations and several chances to develop better infrastructure, and it also gives an immense boost to the state's economy. Entirely, CPEC has been considered as a game-changer for Pakistan, but the continuous efforts to hinder the project by both national and international factors make the completion of the project very difficult. The continuous threat by India, specifically in the Indian Ocean, helps to intensify the role of Pakistan's Navy, which somehow was not at the center of attraction in the past compared to other forces within the country and other forces in the neighborhood; for instance, China's and India's Naval power is way ahead of Pakistan's Navy. Nevertheless, since the initiation of the multi-billion project, the Pakistan Navy is playing a central role in protecting the state's sovereignty and integrity within international waters.

Conclusion and Policy Implications:

The study emphasizes that the maritime security has gained significant importance in the success of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in Pakistan as Gwadar Port and the Gwadar Sea Lanes are vulnerable to the traditional and non-traditional elements and challenges in the maritime security. Meanwhile, the Indian Ocean is experiencing increased security threats due to strategic rivalry, naval modernization by India, pirated activities and threats of terrorism and hybrid security challenges for Pakistan, which continues to exert its efforts to protect Gwadar, commercial shipping and Pakistan's broader maritime interests. The formulation of a comprehensive maritime strategy in Pakistan would help enhance the security of the CPEC by making it more comprehensive, combining naval preparedness along with economic, technological, diplomatic and institutional measures. The first step in further modernization of the Pakistan Navy should be to focus on surveillance, intelligence, coastal defense, unmanned systems, anti-submarine warfare and protecting sea lanes of communication. Second, Task Force-88 needs to be further strengthened with better inter-agency coordination between the Navy, Maritime Security Agency, intelligence agencies, port authorities and provincial law enforcement agencies. Third, Pakistan needs to improve maritime domain awareness and equip with coastal radar networks, drones and satellite monitoring and information sharing systems. Fourth, broadened maritime diplomacy should be encouraged in the region and active involvement in multilateral security efforts should be expanded to help defuse tensions in the Indian Ocean, as well as sustained naval cooperation with China. Last, there needs to be more investment in the maritime economy and port development, coastal communities and jobs in Pakistan in order to ensure that CPEC security is also driven by

economic inclusion and long-term political stability.

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