

# US Strategic Policies Towards China and Their Impact on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor in Balochistan

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## ABSTRACT

This research paper aims to examine the strategic policies of President Donald Trump, Joe Biden, and Trump 2.0 in relation to China. It seeks to highlight how the United States has shifted its foreign policy from engagement to strategic competition. Both administrations believe that China is their primary strategic competitor, challenging US hegemony economically, politically, and ideologically. Furthermore, the thesis will examine the Indo-Pacific Strategy, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), and the Build Back Better World (B3W) initiatives as countermeasures to China's Belt and Road Initiative. The research will also examine the impact of the rivalry between the US and China on Pakistan, particularly in Balochistan, where the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is situated. Balochistan has been geopolitically significant since the nineteenth century, and Gwadar has captured the interest of major powers. Both China and the US have vested interests in Gwadar due to its strategic location for import and export and warm-water access. The research paper will argue how the US-China rivalry impacts CPEC and Gwadar, where a long-standing insurgency has been ongoing since Pakistan's independence.

## Author Biography

My name is Danish Ali, and I have completed my MPhil degree from Quaid-e-Azam University in the Department of Area Study Center of Africa, North and South America. My area of research is US policies towards China, Indo-Pacific Strategies, and I have also written a Seminar paper on Insurgency in Balochistan.

Keywords: China, U.S., Indo-Pacific Strategy, CPEC, Strategic competition, Gwadar.

## INTRODUCTION

In this new era of strategic competition, the United States has changed its policy towards China. China has become an economically and militarily dominant country by initiating mega projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and increasing its military presence around the world. To counter China's projects, the US has also shifted its policy towards China by initiating projects like the Build Better World (B3W) and Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), supporting those countries that have disputes with China by giving them economic and military aid. However, the US is also increasing its influence in Asia to counter Chinese projects and support countries in the Indo-Pacific region. The US has announced its free and open Indo-Pacific strategy as a strategic alternative to BRI and is supporting Taiwan in that region.<sup>1</sup>

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a significant project under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China, with its hub located in Gwadar. China has invested over \$45 million in this project, which aims to connect South Asian countries with China. The initiative promotes the development of interdependency among BRI states through various routes. Pakistan is in support of the One Belt and One Road project and the CPEC of the Chinese government. Pakistan believes that the completion of this mega project would bring economic prosperity to South Asia.<sup>2</sup>

The 21st century has brought about significant changes in the world, and the United States views China as a threat to its strategic interests. As a result, the US is countering Chinese influence in Pakistan and other regions of the world. In this context, the fate of the CPEC and Gwadar Port in Balochistan is of utmost importance, as the federal government of Pakistan is currently facing an insurgency movement in the region. During the fifth phase of the conflict, Baloch insurgents have demonstrated their proficiency in guerrilla warfare tactics by targeting strategic locations and Chinese engineers working on the CPEC project.<sup>3</sup>

Pakistan is facing pressure as the US has labelled the CPEC as a debt trap. While Pakistan welcomes investments, the new initiative called Build Back Better World (B3W) may create obstacles to Pakistan's participation. The US is urging its allies to refrain from allowing Chinese investments, as it considers them a threat that could lead to a new Cold War.

Therefore, the US may ask Pakistan to choose between siding with the US and China.<sup>4</sup>

China, with its economic and military power, has been increasing its influence in Asia and other regions. However, the US has initiated a trade and technological war against China and at the time of the Trump administration. However, to contain China Trump administration has announced its national security strategy to increase its influence in Indo-Pacific and other regions and to build alliances with developing countries. When Biden came into power, the administration also continued the policies of Trump against China and called China a strategic competitor. The trade and ideological war between China and the US will also affect Asia and other developing countries.<sup>5</sup>

## Research Questions

What are the strategic policies of the US towards China, and how would they potentially impact the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor in Balochistan?

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Structural realism is the theory of international Relations which was given by Kenneth Waltz after World War II in his famous book "Theory of International Politics" (1979). The objective was to build a theory in IR that can discuss and explain how international politics functions. Waltz, in his book, built a theoretical argument on how the actors and structures function in international politics. However, many international security-related politics are discussed from the perspective of structural realist theory.<sup>6</sup>

From the perspective of neorealists, the international system in world politics consists of two elements: the structure of the international system and the states that act in that system. However, neorealism is based on the assumption that the state is the most relevant actor in international politics. Consequently, the interest of states plays a driving force in their behavior, as neorealists assume that states want universal domination within the international system. Moreover, for that reason, states want to maximize their military strength and economic capability and to build alliances with other countries.

Waltz, in his book, does not deny the role of non-state actors and transnational groups in international politics; they also play an important role in international politics. However, for neorealists, the international system is anarchic in nature, and for that reason, states want to increase their economic and military power. However, in the international system, the unit of capabilities and power defines the role of a state in international politics. Moreover, the changes in the international system came in the variations in the distribution of capabilities across the state. Waltz defines that structural realist theory explains why wars start and what the conditions are that make war, but it will not predict the outbreak of wars. However, according to structural realist, because anarchical systems in international politics which state are encouraged to seek security for their survival, that's the reason arms race, military buildup, economic and technological innovations, competitions, and building alliances to maintain their balance of power.<sup>7</sup>

Structural realism is divided into two groups: defensive and offensive realism, which define the nature of state behavior in international politics. Defensive realism describes that in the international system, it provides incentives for expansion only under certain conditions.

However, defensive realist predicts that in the international system, there are many driven expansions and states must increase their security for their survival.<sup>8</sup>

However, on the other hand, offensive realism, which theory given by John Mearsheimer, believes that the international system is anarchic in nature and states must increase in power and expansion because in the international system, only a powerful state can guarantee its survival.<sup>9</sup>

The world order in international relations has changed now after the emergence of China in the superpower competition. However, China is increasing its influence in Asia and other regions by giving aid to developing countries. Moreover, China is also increasing its military strength and technology, which is a threat to the US. Furthermore, the US believes that China is challenging the hegemony of the US in economic, military, and value-based systems, and now the US has started economic and security competition against China.<sup>10</sup>

According to Waltz, non-state actors also play a role in international politics. However, when the US withdrew from Afghanistan, the US had left many weapons in Afghanistan, which are now used by Balochistan insurgents and Pakistani Taliban. Moreover, the insurgency in Balochistan has become more brutal by targeting Chinese people and interests, and the armed forces. Many analysts of security issues believe that to counter CPEC projects US and India are giving military and logistical support to the freedom fighters and the Taliban.<sup>11</sup>

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In Minghao Zhao's article "The Belt and Road Initiative and China-US Strategic Competition," it is mentioned that the US has exerted pressure on countries like Pakistan, Israel, and others, urging them not to participate in Chinese projects such as the BRI. The US intelligence director and others have stated in the committee on worldwide threat assessment that the BRI aims for global geographical influence, posing a threat to the US democratic order. The Trump administration took various steps to counter the BRI, including the Indo-Pacific strategy and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue known as the Quad, which is aimed at countering China in maritime security and digital technology. Under the Biden administration, it has been made clear that the long-term goal is to counter China in strategic competition. The Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative, initiated by Biden with the help of G7 countries, aims to counter China's influence globally. The initiative involves developed countries assisting democratic developing countries, with \$40 trillion earmarked for the B3W project.<sup>12</sup>

The U.S. ambassador, Donald Blome, visited Gwadar in Balochistan in September to demonstrate ongoing concerns about the issues in Balochistan. During the visit, Blome expressed interest in collaborating on development and trade sectors with Pakistan and emphasized the historical collaboration between the U.S. and Balochistan. He mentioned U.S. assistance during natural disasters such as floods and support for the development of health and education sectors. Blome also met with political leaders and assured them of U.S. support for Balochistan.<sup>13</sup>

In the "National Security Strategy" published in October 2022, the U.S. declared China as its sole challenger to reshape the international order using economic, military, diplomatic, and technological power. China has expanded its influence in the Indo-Pacific region to control trade routes through the sea and has become a leading global power. Additionally, China has increased its technological and economic influence, making other countries dependent on its economy and products. China is also investing in modernizing its military capabilities worldwide.<sup>14</sup>

In his PhD thesis titled "A Harbor in the Tempest: Megaprojects, Identity, and the Politics of Place in Gwadar, Pakistan," Hafeez Ahmad Jamali highlights the Pakistani government's attempts to initiate development projects in Balochistan. The thesis also addresses the social and political issues faced by fishermen in Gwadar due to development projects and the security concerns affecting the people of Gwadar. The writer argues that the

Pakistani forces' control in the region has led to fear and social problems, especially for fishermen whose livelihood depends on fishing in the sea. The writer also discusses identity politics in Balochistan and the concerns of the local population about potentially becoming a minority in Gwadar and the city falling into the hands of Chinese and Punjabi elites.<sup>15</sup>

In the research paper "Returning to the Shadows: China, Pakistan, and the Fate of CPEC," Andrew Small describes CPEC as the most profitable investment of the BRI between China and Pakistan. The project has faced challenges in its initial phases due to corruption and political instability in Balochistan. Many local people have expressed concerns about CPEC. The second phase of CPEC has commenced, but there are still several issues to be resolved. The rivalry between the US and China has further complicated matters; during the Trump administration, the US labeled BRI as a debt trap and warned Pakistan and other countries against participation. Despite Pakistan's historical alliance with the US, the competition between China and the US has strained relations, as the US prefers Pakistan to take its side in the new phase of the Cold War. However, due to the political instability stemming from its alliances during the Cold War, Pakistan seeks a neutral foreign policy based on trade partnerships with both countries. The global stance on BRI does not easily affect CPEC due to its significance, and both Pakistan and China are working to address issues preventing the completion of the CPEC project, particularly corruption and political instability in Pakistan, specifically in Balochistan.<sup>16</sup>

### From the Trump Administration

When Donald Trump came into office, the foreign policy of the US changed towards China; the policy of strategic partners shifted to strategic competitors. The Trump administration increased its strategic competition with China to contain China's influence in world politics. The free and open Indo-Pacific strategy was announced by the Trump administration to contain China in the Indian and Pacific Oceans and build allies in the Indo-Pacific. The Trump administration imposed sanctions on exports of many Chinese products in multiple countries. Trump's administration criticized Pakistan many times because of its partnership with China, and changed its policy towards Pakistan by placing blame on the country.<sup>17</sup>

During his time in office, Trump made many allies and foes in international politics. However, Trump and his policy makers believed in the "America First" policy and took hard steps to fulfill US national interests. Trump called the BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) a debt-trapping project and proposed a strategic alternative project to BRI, which was the free and open Indo-Pacific strategy aimed at containing China in those regions. Concerns arose between India and the US regarding the CPEC project, an economic initiative between Pakistan and China. The trade war during Trump's tenure affected the World Trade Organization, resulting in a deficit of \$376 billion.<sup>18</sup>

In South Asia, Trump's efforts were directed towards strengthening India as a counterweight to China, attempting to counter the Belt and Road Initiative and its flagship project of CPEC. His pronounced tilt towards India encouraged Prime Minister Modi to revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, after which Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh became part of the Union of India, which is a violation of the UNSC resolution. This action has turned the region into escalating tensions between the three nuclear states.<sup>19</sup>

The change in US policy came in the administration of Trump when he declared China as its sole competitor, challenging US hegemony in the world in its national security strategy. Trump and his advisors started promoting the policy of "toughing it out" with China, encouraging policymakers to enact policies against China by containing it economically and technologically.<sup>20</sup>

The NSS comprises 55 pages of content and outlines vital issues that Trump, and by extension, his National Security Council, consider of paramount concern for the United States. Broadly, the president aims to:

1. Protect the homeland
2. Promote US prosperity
3. Leverage strength to preserve peace

#### 4. Advance US influence in the world.<sup>21</sup>

##### From the Joe Biden Administration

The Biden administration has established a committee to assess the strategic competition between the US and China. The committee's report concludes that the US must prepare for potential threats and conflicts from China. The national security policy of 2022 continues the previous administration's approach, recognizing both China and Russia as strategic competitors.

The NSS of Biden 2022 focuses on three key areas:

1. Economic and innovation
2. Alliances
3. American values

The US aims to strengthen its economic and technological capabilities to compete with China, continuing the trade war initiated during the Trump administration and imposing sanctions on China in the defense and technology sectors. Additionally, the Biden administration has sustained the "free and open Indo-Pacific" project as a strategic alternative to the BRI Initiative and introduced the "Build Back Better World" (B3W) project, in collaboration with G7 countries, as an alternative approach to BRI.

Under the B3W initiative, the US and G7 allies aim to work on various projects, positioning this effort as an alternative to China's BRI. The Biden administration is also prioritizing the building of alliances to counter China's influence in the Indo-Pacific and other regions. The focus is on supporting developing countries to contain Chinese influence, with the Indo-Pacific region being a top priority.

Furthermore, the Biden administration is advocating for Taiwan, providing military and economic assistance to the country to counter China's influence. During the 2021 Munich Security Conference, President Biden highlighted the need for the United States, Europe, and Asia to work together to prepare for a long-term strategic competition with China. The US is strengthening its alliances with countries in the Indo-Pacific region, such as Japan, South Korea, and Australia. It is also increasing defense cooperation with India and Southeast Asian countries to counter Chinese influence. The US aims to deter and deny Chinese aggression by supporting Taiwan's defenses and partnering with like-minded democracies.<sup>22</sup>

##### From Trump 2.0

U.S. administrator for nearly a decade, believes that China is an economic, social, and technological rival. However, on the other hand, to contain the influence of China, the Trump and Biden administrations have their National Security Strategy (NSS) documents. In addition, in the second Trump administration, the policies towards China have the same goal to contain the influence of China in the economic, military, and technological sectors. During his campaign, Trump had policies to impose 60% tariffs on Chinese imports in the US.<sup>23</sup>

Trump 2.0 policies are strongly focusing on advanced technology of artificial intelligence (AI) and semiconductors. However, Congress of US Congress also supports the policies of Trump to maintain restrictions on semiconductor technologies to prevent Chinese companies from misusing technology-related things such as AI. Moreover, Trump polices focus on that US investments and resources must be used to protect the national interests of the US.<sup>24</sup>

Trump was elected the president of the US in the 2024 elections, and in his second tenure, Trump is the president of the US. The Trump 2.0 campaign was on economic issues, and its primary targets were US-China relations. Trump has imposed high tariffs on goods imported from China. However, Trump 2.0 has also taken an aggressive approach towards China and started a trade war. Moreover, by imposing high tariffs on China, Trump's aim is to contain the economic influence of China by investing in US companies.<sup>25</sup>

While taking office, President Trump applied new tariffs of 10% on Chinese import products, while many products are subject to 125% high tariffs. However, in retaliation, China applies 125% tariffs on American exports. Moreover, Trump's shift from liberalism towards a nationalist approach has started a new escalation between the US and China. In addition, Trump is using his tariff strategy and announcing his tariff strategy on many other countries.<sup>26</sup>

### Pakistan: Implications for CPEC

In the era of globalization in the 21st century, a power shift has been observed in international politics. China is emerging as a global power, challenging the hegemony of the US economically, politically, and on a value basis. Russia has also emerged as a powerful country in geopolitics. Additionally, India, as the fifth most powerful economy in the world, holds strategic importance due to its location near the Indian Ocean. As a result, the US is no longer the sole superpower in the world.

There are indications of a changing global landscape, such as the rise of the East, increasing Indian dominance in the Indian Ocean, changes in warfare due to the digital revolution, expansion of geo-economics in diplomacy, and the revival of a new cold war, which has brought the US and China into opposition. These changes put significant pressure on the foreign policy options of weaker states, particularly those that are economically vulnerable, politically destabilized, and socially fragile. Pakistan is not an exception to these challenges.

The world has now been divided into two blocs - China and the US. China is increasing its hegemony in Asia and other regions for trade and political influence. Pakistan is also part of China's BRI, which was announced in 2007, and many Asian and Eastern countries have joined these projects. China has invested more than \$60 million in its CPEC projects in Pakistan. On the other hand, the US has referred to the BRI projects as debt-trap diplomacy, expressing concerns that China's investments are aimed at gaining control of the coastal and other resources of developing countries.

The BRI is an economic initiative by China that involves investing money to develop projects and build roads for its imports and exports. The project is estimated to cost 2.1 trillion dollars, and more than 65 countries have joined the initiative, including 40 countries in Asia. The BRI comprises two main parts: the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), which is a land route through central Asia, and the Maritime Silk Road (MSR), which consists of a network of sea lanes through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean.

The projects included in the BRI encompass the construction of airports, gas and oil pipelines, railway networks, and seaports, among others. However, many critics argue that China's involvement in developing and underdeveloped countries is primarily for its own capitalistic gain. According to David Harvey's Spatial Fix Theory, when there is a crisis of over-accumulation in capitalism, the system finds ventures such as spending money on infrastructure as a way to prolong investment opportunities and consume surplus by investing in social and physical infrastructure.

Furthermore, other critics accuse China of using an imperialist approach towards underdeveloped countries by providing them with loans, and when they are unable to complete the project, China seizes their resources and strategic locations. This approach has been labeled as "debt trap diplomacy." Critics frequently cite the example of the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, where China compelled the Sri Lankan government to invest in an ambitious project that failed to generate expected outputs. Consequently, the Sri Lankan government offered the lease of the port to China for 99 years in order to escape from the debt burden. It has also been argued that China will use these acquired natural assets for strategic purposes.

The CPEC was signed in 2013, started in 2015, and completed its first phase in 2020. The second phase is underway and is expected to be completed in 2025, while the third and final phase is scheduled to be completed in 2030. However, local people in Gwadar are facing significant issues related to development and security as a result of the CPEC. Baloch leaders have expressed concerns about the confidential agreements of the CPEC, and residents have also raised their concerns.

Furthermore, there is a fear among the residents of Gwadar that China and Pakistan's development activities under the CPEC will bring about demographic changes in their area. Baloch leaders have also articulated these concerns in their writings and speeches. The arrival of large ships for fishing in Gwadar has led to the destruction of the ecosystem of the Gwadar Sea. In response to this, the Haq Do Tehreek, led by Maulana Hidayat ul Rehman, was founded in 2021 to protest against illegal fishing in Gwadar. The movement focuses on four main issues:

1. Iran-Pakistan border issues, including checkpoints and border trade.
2. Security issues, particularly military involvement in Balochistan.
3. Illegal fishing in Balochistan's ports, mainly in Gwadar.
4. Human rights for the Baloch people in Gwadar and throughout Pakistan.

The ongoing war in Balochistan, which began after the annexation of Balochistan with Pakistan, remains a significant challenge for the state of Pakistan. Failed policies by Pakistani elites and the military have contributed to the continuation of the conflict. Separatist groups have started targeting Chinese investments and people in Balochistan, posing threats with heavy weapons and suicide bombers, which has further destabilized the region.

There are suspicions that these groups have received support from the US and India to destabilize CPEC projects in Balochistan, while others believe that the weapons left by the US in Afghanistan may have been accessed by Baloch fighters. These attacks have also impacted CPEC projects, leading to a decrease in investment in Gwadar due to the threats posed by Baloch separatists.

The growing strategic competition between the two countries is also causing challenges for Pakistan at a strategic level. This competition puts pressure on Pakistan to choose between the two countries, with Pakistan leaning more towards China due to hostile relations with India. The common threat posed by India has established Pakistan and China as natural allies, yet closer relations with China may provoke the wrath of the United States against Pakistan. Given this context, the implications for the CPEC are significant.

### **Economic Implications**

The economic relationship between Pakistan and China has improved with the agreement of the CPEC. In this agreement, China will help develop Pakistan's infrastructure, build roads and railways, and work on the energy sectors. However, some economists believe that Pakistan isn't benefiting from improved imports and exports in the CPEC and that most materials for CPEC are coming from China.

Statistics suggest that imports from China doubled in the five-year average of FY11-15 due to CPEC, with Chinese machinery and equipment being imported for the project. However, exports from Pakistan have not shown significant growth since 2014. Additionally, Pakistani exports mainly consist of raw materials, such as cotton and rice, while Chinese exports are predominantly manufactured products. Many believe that Pakistan's imports and exports will improve if small and large industries are established under CPEC. It is hoped that after the completion of CPEC projects, Pakistan will become economically stable.

There are differing opinions regarding the benefits of CPEC. Some argue that Pakistan could serve as a bridge between East Asia and South Asia, potentially becoming a central point for regional integration, while others criticize the lack of visible benefits from CPEC projects.

It should be noted that the trade deficit decreased by \$3 billion in FY 2018-19, reaching \$10.8 billion, but this reduction wasn't directly attributed to progress in CPEC projects. Rather, it was due to the renegotiation of tariff liberalization in the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) phase II. To improve its economic conditions regarding CPEC, Pakistan should consider taking the following steps:

1. Bringing political stability
2. Involving local people of Gwadar in policymaking
3. Establishing industries in Balochistan
4. Improving imports and exports with other countries

## 5. Connecting other countries with CPEC

### CPEC and Employment Opportunities for Local People

The CPEC has been in progress for some time, but the people of Gwadar have not yet reaped many benefits from the project. They are concerned that CPEC will bring demographic changes to their areas, as the investors are predominantly foreigners, and jobs are being given to outsiders. Former chief ministers Dr. Malik and Jam Kamal have criticized Islamabad for not considering them in CPEC policies. Additionally, they believe that without the involvement of local people, CPEC will face more issues in the near future.

Significant protests have erupted in Gwadar under the banner of Haq Do Tehreek, led by Maulana Hidayat Ul Rehman. These protests do not focus solely on employment opportunities but also on the issue of illegal fishing, allegedly conducted under the orders of political elites. The protesters are worried that large ships from outside are affecting the sea through the use of large fishing nets. They also allege that, in the name of security, they have been prevented from fishing in the sea. The protests have gained support from thousands of men and women demanding action on their genuine concerns.

While official papers suggest that CPEC has the potential to create 1.2 million direct jobs, as reported by the Center of Excellence, other sources such as the International Labour Organization, the Applied Economic Research Centre, and the Planning Commission provide varying estimates. However, despite these potential opportunities, local and Pakistani people have not yet secured jobs under CPEC.

The benefits of CPEC to the economy of Pakistan have been widely discussed in the media and academic literature. However, there is much less information available about how CPEC will impact the local people in Gwadar, which is the epicenter of CPEC. While debates around the importance and development of CPEC have been ongoing at the national level, it seems that the local people have been neglected in these discussions.

Residents have expressed their frustration about CPEC. For instance, a fisherman vented his anger by saying, “Whether CPEC has certainly damaged their livelihood; we can’t do fishing in the sea in which my father and grandfather used to fish.” Similarly, a female participant in the protest mentioned, “One day, almost ten years ago, my husband told me that the Chinese are coming to Gwadar to develop the port and build other projects. He said that we will get all the necessities of life—gas, electricity, water, and employment opportunities and live a happy life. I got very happy at that time... but most of these things didn’t come true.”

To address the concerns of the local population, the following policies should be implemented regarding CPEC:

1. Employment opportunities for local people should be a top priority.
2. The rights of fishermen must be protected in these projects.
3. Chinese and other trawlers coming from outside should be regulated or stopped.
4. Incidents of security measures disrespecting local people must be halted.

### Debt Trap: Concerns of Balochistan

The main concern raised by critics of the CPEC is whether Pakistan will be able to repay the loans or if it will fall into another cycle of debt. The most frequently cited example is the Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, where the government was unable to repay loans because the project did not generate expected profits. As a result, China took control of the port on a 99-year lease. Many Indian and Western writers have labelled projects under the BRI as debt traps, pointing to the example of Sri Lanka.

The loans obtained for CPEC projects are considered economically unviable, and Pakistan is now struggling to meet its repayment obligations. Economic experts have warned that once Chinese investors start repatriating profits, and when repayments are expected to rise in 2021, Pakistan's debt burden in debt from Chinese bank loans which they have expected from China. Some Pakistani writers argue that these concerns are propaganda by the US and India and that China only seeks cooperation with Pakistan for economic development. Ishtat Husain, for instance, denies the possibility of a debt cycle and argues that the \$15 billion for infrastructure is

based on government-to-government loans with a 2% interest to be repaid over 20 to 25 years, resulting in an outflow of \$2.5 to 3 billion annually. To address the potential debt trap, the following steps must be taken:

1. Hold corrupt political elites accountable.
2. Focus on developing industries in Gwadar.
3. Ensure political stability for economic stability.
4. Take bold actions to convince local people that CPEC is for economic gain.
5. Connect other countries with CPEC.

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