

Chabahar Port: A New Game for India and Golden lane to Afghanistan and Central Asia

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Abstract: The chabahar port is the only Iranian port with the direct access to the Indian Ocean. It is strategically very important for India of being close to Afghanistan, central Asian countries and also to the gulf countries. In this paper, I will briefly discuss the history and background of the agreements that had been signed between India, Afghanistan and Iran, and also discuss the strategic importance of port chabahar. Chabahar port is also seen as an important route for India, Afghanistan and also for Iran to bypass obstacles created by Pakistan for trade in the direct routes. I had also discussed the root causes and the strategy of India in the development of the port in Iran and why the construction of chabahar port becomes a matter for concern for Pakistan and china. After much deliberation, Indian contractors decided that Iran's southernmost coastal city, chabahar, would be the optimal place to build a seaport. However, due to lack of funding from the Iranian government, the project was halted. I will also discuss the consequences of the construction and the problem that had been faced by these countries in the constructions of the total infrastructure. This paper will also do the brief coverage of the Indians political and strategic interest in the chabahar port.

KEYWORDS: Infrastructure, bilateral and trilateral, transport and transit, agreement and pact, harbor and port, Central Asia, gulf countries.

Introduction

Chabahar is seaport located in the border of Iran Afghanistan with direct access to Indian Ocean. Chabahar is developed by India with the help cooperation of Iran and Afghanistan. It is the only oceanic port of Afghanistan and Iran. Chabahar port is divided into two sector as it is consist of two separate port named Shahid kalantari and Shahid Beheshti, each of which have five berths constructed between 1982-1983. Chabahar port is located south eastern Iran, on the Makran coast 700 km(430miles) away from Zahedan , the capital of the sistan and Baluchistan province, 950km(590miles) from Milak, the closest city to the afghan border, neat to the gulf of Oman and the mouth of strait of Hormuz and 1,827km (1.135miles) away from Sarakhs and the Turkmer border. Chabahar is the only Iranian oceanic port which has direct access to the Indian Ocean the chabahar port has been considered as a bridge to get in central Asia and golden opportunities for the trade by India, Afghanistan Iran and also central Asian countries.

The development of chabahar port was accelerated after the signature of Tahran nuclear pact formally known as joint comprehensive plan of action, in between the Washington five other major powers 2015 to put curbs on its disputed nuclear program in exchange for relief from punishing economic sanction.

It is also respond as a golden opportunity for the trade in between Iran, Pakistan and India being close to Afghanistan it will also help in trade with central Asian countries mainly with the land locked countries as Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan etc. Because there land locked countries has no sea ports and the trade was among there countries were in the wake of Pakistan denying transit access to New Delhi. Hence is has termed as the "golden gate" to these land lock countries.

India access to predominately see the chabahar port is as a counter-balance to the port of Gwadar on the southern western coast of Pakistan s restive. Baluchistan and it was run interlay by china on the terms of the china-Pakistan term of the china-Pakistan economic corridor [CPEC]. The first phase of construction of port was inaugurated by the Iranian president Hassan Rouhani, on 3rd December 2017, after several construction and developments the port is going to reach new extend which will increase its capacity from 2.5 million tons to 8 million tons of cargo in one year.

History

The development of a port in Iran has been firstly proposed by last shah of Iran in 1973. But the program of the development was delayed by the Iranian revolution 1979. After that the first phase of the port was opened in 1983 during the Iran-Iraq war through Iran started shifting. Seaborne trade and transit toward east through the land routs as they started doing trade by increasing use the Pakistan border in order to decrees dependency on ports in the Persian Gulf which were vulnerable to attack by the Iraq air forces. After 20 years of India and Iran has first agreed to plan and contrive further development of Shahid Betieshti port in 2003, because they are not able to do so on account of the sanctions against Iran by p5+1 countries (USA, UK, Russia, France, China+ Germany)

The bilateral agreement signed between India and Iran in 2015. According to this agreement India was allowed to operator for 10 year by Indian port global. It also gives right to India to develop. Two berths other Chabahar port. This is the joint venture between Jawahar Lal Nehru, Port trust and Kandla port trust and in Partnership with area Bahader port of Iran. After this an agreement trilateral transit agreement has been signed by India, Afghanistan and Pakistan which allow Indian goods and workers to get in to Afghanistan through Iran. It helps to link the Chabahar port to afghan border this linkage is cover by both the means of transport road and rail.

The transportation is done in between the ports of western coast of Indian to the Chabahar port; it's a direct link for the transportation between both the country .As per the agreement signed in may 2016 these twelve memoranda of understanding. In which India commitments to Iranian infrastructure are total worth 635 million dollar. As per deal India was allow building Chabahar port and will also develop various other industries, including aluminum and urea production plants in between the economic zone of Chabahar which is attached to the port.

Under the agreement signed in 2016, Indian port global will develop the berths at a cost of 85 million dollar over a course of 18 months. Under this program India port global will reconstruct and refurbish two long container handling facilities at the port. First is the 600 meters (1,970 feet) long container handling facility and second is 600 meters (1,970 feet) long container handling facility .Indian port global also reconstruct and modernize four rail mounted gentry cranes which is an cillary infrastructure . Another consignment to chabahar port is six rubber tire gantry cranes, six mobile harbor cranes, two reach stackers and two empty cranes. By the upgrading of these several works the chabahar port capacity has increases to 8 million tons from the 2.5 million tones capacity (according to the agreement).

In May 2016 India and Iran has signed another memorandum of understanding for financing the chabahar-Zehedan railway section which is 900km railway line, link chabahar port to Iran it has been built by the corporation between mineral- rich Hajigak regions of Afghanistan, of chabahar-Indian railways public sector anit ircon international as part of the north-south transport corridor. Indian is also engaged in developing supporting infrastructure project of worth 2 million dollar. India has also promoted Hajigak Iran and steel mining project in central Afghanistan of 11 billion dollar. In 2011, 7 Indian companies had acquired rights to mine in the central Afghanistan Hajigak region. This region contains largest deposit of Iran ore in Asia. India and Iran also had a signed a deal of entailing 8 billion dollar for the construction of 240km road which will connect chabahar port with Afghanistan and develop industries and infrastructure in chabahar special economic zone.

In March 2017, India has started running training in Nagpur for the Afghanistan's customs officials who were posted at custom posts built by India at Iran-Afghanistan border. A road also had been constructed by India in a conference. After India-Afghanistan ambassador announces that India shipments to Afghanistan via chabahar will be started soon. India had invited expression of interest from private parties to manage the chabahar port for 10 years in march 2017. india announced that the required equipments port were taken by the Indian privet companies and India had also announced the name of several companies Adani groups and Ruia family's Essar group are interested in the contraction work in chabahar port.

In august 2017 another important announcement on chabahar port at an event in Iran by the Indian union minister of ports, Nitin Gadkari, he denotes that the civil work at chabahar port, which was developing by the Indian authority for a long period of time has been completed. He also announced that government of India has ordered to give held of worth INR 400 cores (USD 63 million) required mechanical equipment and cranes. Mr. Gadkari also announced that the port will become operational in 2018 to export Indian wheat to Afghanistan. After this announcement, in December 2017, 1st shipment of wheat was send to Afghanistan from India via chabahar port. The trilateral agreement becomes successful when trade and merchandise has Implemented.

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The geopolitical implications of the port chabahar expansion had becomes a matter of concern for Pakistan, because chabahar port is seems to be a competition and rival to the Gwadar port. The port Gwadar has been built with the help of Chinies labor and money. China had invested 54 billion dollar in the construction of Gwadar port. For china it is strategy to get in the central Asia via Pakistan or it also said that it server as Beijing's gate way to global market via the India ocean. The Chinies investment in this infrastructural project it is also known as the "china-Pakistan economic corridor "under the Chinies strategic dream project "one belt, one road" (OBOR) initiative. Pakistan main concern is the competition of Indian goods and services in central Asia after this Afghanistan may make Pakistan products less expensive and that make the rush out item from the market, which had increased after the construction of chabahar port.

According to an expert Dr. Abdul Sattar Dushauki centre for Baluchistan studies in London," Pakistan is concerned about indo-Iran economic ties, even if Iran insist that its growing directed against Pakistan and china".

Another concern of Pakistan is that India is increasing its influence in Afghanistan and also India may lead to destabilize and Pakistan from, Afghanistan .According to Michael kugelman a diplomat an senior program associate for south Asia at the Woodrow Wilson international center for scholars in Washington DC his main specially is Pakistan, India, Afghanistan and U.S relation with each of them. Said that," Pakistan sees India as an existential threat and the idea of India being in any way present on Pakistan's western flank in Afghanistan will always raise alarm bells in Islamabad".

However for Iran the development of chabahar port with international assistance is a game changing move and is also a highly emblematic more to let the US and European union know that Iran is no longer isolated and it will come into the game as further.

The construction of chabahar has been launched by Iran as one of its major post nuclear deal projects the chabahar port has been punching further for the engagement with the global community which will pull out of the land mark international accord. The construction of chabahar port started after the signature of joint comprehensive plan in 2015 in Tehran in-between Iran and five other major nuclear powers it has allowed Iran to enter into negotiation with India, china and Europe on investment and supply of raw material and equipments.

Shanghai Zhenhua Heavy Industries co.ltd (ZPMC) agree to supply four gritty cranes for the accommodation of large container ships in the first 8.5 million tones jetty, once two third of the total capacity, once two- third of the total capacity will realized, five other jetties will constructed to increase the capacity of the port to 82-85 million tones. Another important construction which has been planned under this program is- built multipurpose terminal and a 610km north-south railway to Afghanistan and central Asia, which is connected from the port. This railway will turn the port into a strategic asset or route to India is the grimace of its rivalry and competition with china and Pakistan

One of the main benefits for Iran is the fact that it will diversify its economic and trade partners. Under the economic sentence in Iran, china and Russia both had strengthened their foothold in Iran by becoming Iran's chief trade partners. However, now that sanctions had been lifted, Iran did not want china and Russia to hold a monopoly on Iran's main sectors as- crude oil natural gasses and petrochemical products. However, the offset these technical constraints helping Iran to recover its economy to its pre-sanction levels and develop its economic further.

The chabahar port project has allowed Iran to strengthen its ties with India, and also promote and develop new ties with several other countries. Before the construction of the chabahar port, Iran uses its only port Bandar Abbas port to export goods. However the Bandar port can only receive 100,000 ton cargo ships. But in the Iran's ties with Pakistan has been historically mired in suspicion and Iran don't want Pakistan to overtly shifted to middle eastern countries, through Tehran has assured Islamabad that it would not allowed Delhi any other country to use chabahar against Pakistan.

The main challenge today will be to sustain the momentum in the after wake of the trump administrations opposition to the nuclear deal. Geopolitical and strategically tensions between soudi Arabia and Iran has risen with the Tehran pact being accused of the expanding of its influence in yaman, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon through its proxies.

Rasx tillerson- us secretary of state had said that "Washington does not want to interfere with legitimate business done with Iran, whether they can be from Europe, India or other agreements that are placed or promote economic development and activity to the benefit of our friends and allies.

Iran's national shipping company- Islamic republic of Iran shipping lines (IRISL) – off a vessel that had just get in or arrived from India carrying to heat shipments, which will by hacked to Afghanistan. In this operation, Swiss made cranes. I had been installed in this first operational jetty uploading contains which were bearing the trade make of (IRISL) were used. In the wheat shipments which will be trunked to Afghanistan. It was the third consignment arriving to port this year. The port has been contracted for transit of 101 ports to the land locked neighboring country via chabahar port.

In December on the official inauguration of the first phase of the strategic chabahar port in Iran's sister and Baluchistan province by the Iranian president Hassan Rouhani in the presence and fanfare of officials from 17 countries who were attending the ceremony and had marked the opening of a next extension of the strategic trade corridor. India is in the centre of this port project as it was remaining keen on the opening of a trade route to Afghanistan and larger central Asia, by passing Pakistan.

Conclusion

It has open several new opportunities for trade and transit for India-Iran- Afghanistan and also it has enhanced the trade and commerce between these three countries and also for the whole central Asia and Middle East Asia. The opening of the chabahar port two things has manly indicated: this is a firm committed by the port of India to extended support for Afghanistan and also the fact that the opening of the chabahar port had put into greater use owing to Pakistan refusal to allow over land rights. However the chabahar port has got an altogether several lease of life's of Indias discourse with compared to the Iranian. The probability of these build-up weights heavy on Indian strategists mind and Chabahar is offending to see as a deal balancing option. Indies access to predominately see chabahar port as a counter-balance to the port of Gwadar.

For the land lock countries of central Asia, chabahar has now become the shortest rout of transport. And India has to tie up with central Asia also through bilateral or multilaral agreement mechanisms of connectivity project with the help of the transit via chabahar port. Hence in the backdrop of the several development projects, India has now needed to look at the strategic role of chabahar port by involving both INSTC and proposed transit corridor to central Asia from chabahar as an integrated transportation network.

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