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## BEIJING-BACKED PAKISTAN PORT OPENS AS HUB FOR AFGHANISTAN TRADE

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By Adnan Aamir

Gwadar challenges Indian interests in region, but China's ROI remains unclear

Gwadar port in southern Pakistan recently began handling cargo bound for Afghanistan. While undoubtedly a positive development for the \$50 billion dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, experts say the economic sustainability of the Chinese-managed port remains far from certain.

The CPEC comprises a number of Pakistani infrastructure projects and is a major part of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

On Jan. 14, the cargo ship Diyala, part of the Cosco Shipping Lines fleet, unloaded two containers covered by the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement. The cargo of chemical fertilizer was then transported by truck from Gwadar to Afghanistan via the Chaman border crossing through northern Balochistan.

The APTTA allows both countries to use each other's transportation infrastructure to transport goods through designated corridors -- vital to landlocked Afghanistan.

In October 2019, Pakistan's Ministry of Commerce officially declared Gwadar port ready to handle bulk cargo to and from Afghanistan.

The announcement was touted as a major landmark in Pakistani media, while the Chinese embassy in Islamabad tweeted that the development reflected the success of the CPEC and Belt and Road in solidifying regional economic ties. Zhang Baozhong, chairman of China Overseas Port Holding Company, which is operating Gwadar port, told media the APTTA will allow Gwadar to take full advantage of its geographical location.

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