

Book Review

Book Author: Shahzad, S. Mehmood **Book Title:** Impact of Pakistan Maritime Affairs on Blue Economy in Backdrop of CPEC **Year of Publication:** 2020 **Publisher:** MQI Printers **Book Pages:** 236 **ISBN:** 9781913553067 **Price:** PKR 3000

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Blue Economy and Pakistan's Maritime Potential

Pakistan has a very interesting geostrategic location. It can be easily considered as the base camp for all access routes in South Asia. These access routes work like 'spatial-wormholes-on-land' for a journey in all directions. Access to the Far East from Pakistan is as easy as moving to the Far West. What makes Pakistan a potential 'trade rout', is its location at the apex of the Arabian Peninsula. Three fully functional sea-ports look after the affairs of sea routes to and from Pakistan, which gives this country a kind of unopposed control over the traffic passes through Persian Gulf into the vastness of the Indian Ocean. It is essential to note that Pakistan may not become an attractive market for global businesses as it has not much to offer considering the growing gap between upper and middle economic and social classes and an ever-increasing lower middle class. Also, it borders states like India and China which are more progressive, modern, capable, and gigantic economies and have too much to offer for the global businesses and enterprises. Such scenarios require more creative approach from Pakistan's economic elite and the think tanks. In this case, there are four potential areas that not only offer a more attractive playground for transnational businesses but also can give a boost to the country's economy.

1. Pakistan has world's highest peaks, glaciers and green lands that are perfect for tourism. The focus in this regard would be on the development and marketing of the best suited areas for attracting foreign tourists, and on enhancing internal security.
2. Pakistan is an agricultural country and significant progress can be made regarding food and clothing considering growing demands of related products globally. To make it possible, Pakistan must focus on developing agricultural industry and modernizing production facilities of food and related products rather than exporting the raw materials.
3. The usefulness of being a 'trade rout' may be the best ready-made feature that Pakistan's economy can naturally utilize. It gives Pakistan extreme maneuverability even to manipulate regional trade policies and exploit trade tendencies for significant economic gains. It will, however, require a strong and trusted infrastructure of internal and external security.
4. Pakistan is blessed with extremely attractive port facilities like Gwadar and Karachi which give the country not only a wider ground to enhance its maritime economy but also to develop systematically to turn into a blue economy. Pakistan has the propensity for extremely high sea food production by exploiting untapped resources which are in abundance in the Arabian sea. As the country also has the leverage of utilizing 150 NM of its continental shelf apart from exploiting its EEZ, Pakistan only requires a quick, coherent, and creative approach to secure economic benefits from its maritime activities.

Shahzad discusses all concerns related to maritime affairs of Pakistan and no issue is left untouched. From living and non-living resources of Pakistan's EEZ to the development of 'coastal tourism', everything is grabbed like a resourceful researcher and a crafty opinion maker. Pakistan's Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Syed Ali Haider Zaidi, has recommended this book for the national curriculum for MA and M. Phil programs.

Shahzad's book is inviting Pakistan's economic elite, planners, think tanks and researchers to come forth and invest their intellectual and material share to make Pakistan a blue economy. "Nothing particular about Pakistan's EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) is ever discussed before" and "this document (book) may prove to be an instrumental tool for future researchers looking forward to conduct research in this field" (p. 82). Contents of the book are conceptually coherent; meaningfully structured for the readers to understand the futuristic ideas floated through maritime expression to create a specific economic impression related to a relatively modern concept of 'blue economy', especially for a developing country like Pakistan. Shahzad (2020) writes in the introduction of his book, "we are a maritime nation but unfortunately we don't know what benefits we can accrue from it" (p. 29). What a way to introduce the reader to the contents of his book and what a crafty line to begin with. This single sentence alone is defining the book's subject, Pakistan's maritime potential, inadequacy of planning and incapability of Pakistan's economic think tanks.

Pakistan as Blue Economy

The canvas of Shahzad's arguments, in support of his hypothesis, is vast. He discusses Pakistan's maritime potential and current economic capabilities; its trade routes, options, and strategies; and its economic volatility and poor planning. He draws his opinion, of Pakistan's failure in becoming a maritime nation, on conventionalism of the governance; roots of which can be found in the 'Mughal era' and beyond, when the concept of 'maritime affairs and border management' was seldom found. Owing to the scientific advancement in maritime affairs, development of modern naval and strategic forces, categorical improvement in maritime tourism, growth and expansion in maritime trade, increased shipping and freight forwarding safety, and extensive progress in Oceanography and ocean education, now oceans and seas may be more threatening or beneficial than they were in the past.

Ocean security and proper exploitation of maritime resources are the main themes of Shahzad (2020). Modern nations are now looking towards new economic and strategic horizons, such as global oceans and space. Pakistan has the potential to exploit its oceanic resources to become blue economy and this transformation, from conventional economy to blue economy, is the need of today. Countries bordering maritime zones, even modern market economies, are seeking to cross the economic threshold and become effective and modern blue economies. Pakistan's maritime sector can be divided in two main categories:

1. Pakistan's regular maritime trade and tourism
2. Pakistan's CPEC oriented maritime trade and tourism

Pakistan's economic policy has seen a shift after China introduced CPEC as part of the BRI project. The whole world is now concentrating on maritime transport, tourism, and trade. "Chinese industries are facing problems to compete in global market due to high transportation costs and delivery time. CPEC will decrease travel distance and cost significantly from China to the Gulf" (p. 157).

The CPEC addresses and exploits all the four features of Pakistan's economy discussed above, i.e., tourism, agriculture, trade-routes, and the maritime economy. Pakistan is seeking to use CPEC as a tool to mend breaches in its economic system and strengthen economic integrity, and to reshape its trade, commerce, logistics, and transportation infrastructure. Pakistan has been a target of regional illicit and violent

non-state actors and hit severely by terrorism for over two decades and now, the country requires a coherent and proactive security restructuring and rehabilitation, which CPEC deems to provide. CPEC will also connect Pakistan's industrial, economic, agricultural, and educational hubs through a roads network and serves as a base camp for the country's famous tourist attractions. The primary purpose of the CPEC which both countries, i.e., Pakistan and China, seek to fulfil is Pakistan's utilization as a trade-route. So, Pakistan, as a wormhole, will cut short the distances, give easy access in all directions, and consequently increase economic profitability. Also, this is a part of Chinese effort to upgrade Pakistan's economic and security infrastructures to use it effectively against the growing Indian threat. So, development of the CPEC is multifaceted, i.e., it increases economic integrity, political maneuverability and enhances collective security.

While Pakistan's Gwadar port is being developed at a rapid pace by China as part of the CPEC project, Chinese economic reliance on the South-China Sea will be minimized. This is only a glimpse of the benefits that China intends to take from the CPEC, and Pakistan would be the second only beneficiary to collect the monetary benefits. Consequently, the economy is expected to grow rapidly. However, transparency and proper planning are keys to success for this under-construction 'roads network' which connects Gwadar to China and all Pakistan's business, industrial and agricultural hubs together. As the element of CPEC is an add-on for Pakistan's economy, the only requirement, in this regard, would be to harness this advantage properly. If not played right, big projects, deemed for great advantages, also have the potential to become big burdens.

Conclusion

Pakistan requires academic and policy professionals and institutional growth specifically for maritime studies and practices. The transformation from conventional to blue economy is a process of economic evolution that would take place with better maritime understanding and planning, application of practical and academic ideas according to the need of time, and transparent mechanisms for financial matters. There is much to be done in all aspects of economy and a coherent and harmonized framework should be formed. I consider that Shahzad's book is one small step that has potential to become a giant leap for Pakistan's economy.

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