

The “New” Silk Road

10 Dec 2015

216-2015-23

Most of us have heard of the “Silk Road”. It was a network of trade routes, formally established during the Han Dynasty of China, which linked the regions of the ancient world in commerce. These routes were used regularly from 130 BC, when the Han officially opened trade with the west, to 1453 AD, when the Ottoman Empire boycotted trade with the west and closed the routes.



Silk Road Routes

It was called the Silk Road because silk was traded along it. At the time, silk was only made in China, and it was a valuable material. The Silk Road not only earned China a lot of money, but all along the route cities prospered and markets flourished. Cities like Samarkand and Bukhara were built largely on the trade from the silk route. Trade on the Silk Road played a big part in the growth of the ancient cultures of China, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia, India, and Rome, and helped to make the beginning of today's world.

Of course, many other things were also traded, even ideas. Because the traders came from many places, different ideas were brought to China, and China's ideas were taken to other places. Some of the other things traded were porcelain and other types of pottery, food, wine, and spices. Chess pieces from northern India were brought to China and Persia. Paper arrived in the west from China. Metals and jewels were transported and traded along with slaves. Probably no trader went the whole way along the road which extended 6,400 miles (10,000 kilometers). Goods would be traded on at every stopping-point. Plus there were a lot of deals made to get past difficult and dangerous places.

The greatest value of the Silk Road, however, was the exchange of culture, art, religion, philosophy, technology, language, science, architecture, and every other element of civilization. This along with the commercial goods were carried from country to country. Along the network of routes, disease traveled also, as evidenced in the spread of the bubonic plague of 542 AD which is thought to have arrived in Constantinople by way of the Silk Road and which decimated the Byzantine Empire. The closing of the Silk Road forced merchants to take to the sea to ply their trade, thus initiating the Age of Discovery (1453-1660 AD) which led to world-wide interaction and the beginnings of a global community.

That was a brief description of the “Ancient Silk Road”. But, have you heard about the “New” Silk Road? Well, I had not heard about it until a few weeks ago when I was sitting at the bar talking to an acquaintance of mine who I have seen at the bar several times but only talked to a couple of times. I could tell from his appearance that he was from a Mideast country. As it turns out, he is from Dubai or Qatar (I can’t remember for sure) and he is here working in Hawaii as a contractor. He found out that I do a little writing and asked me what I write about. I told him I write about everything and asked him if there was anything he wanted me to research and write an article about. He asked me to write about, “The Chinese Presence in the Province of Balochistan, Pakistan.”

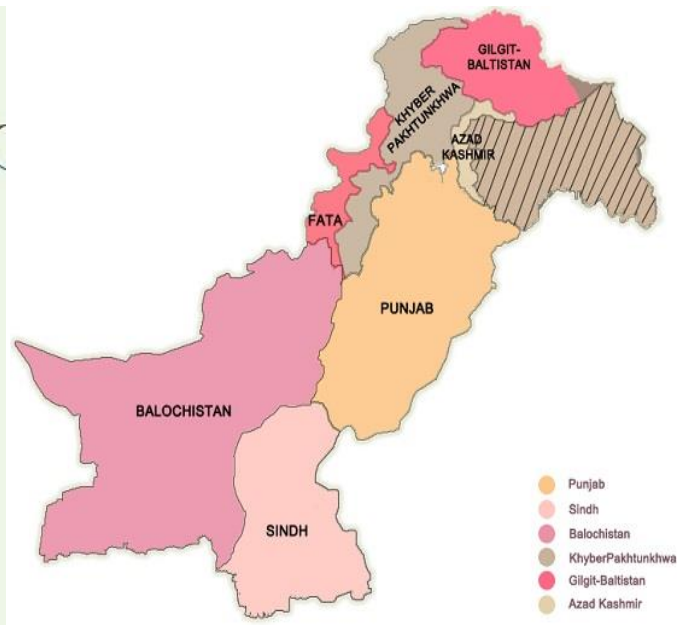
It didn't take much research to discover that my Mid-eastern acquaintance was really asking me to write about The "New" Silk Chinese-Pakistan Road Project. To really understand the significance of this project, we need to learn some background information on Pakistan and the Province of Balochistan.



Okay, I know for sure that I have never heard of Balochistan but I do know a few things about Pakistan. I know that the Islamic Republic of Pakistan is the only Muslim country in the World with the nuclear bomb and that it was in Pakistan where we (the United States) finally found and killed Osama bin Laden. That's about it. Let's take a look at a couple of maps of Pakistan to see if we can find Balochistan.



Islamic Republic of Pakistan



Pakistan Provinces

Yes, I see it – on the right map - the big purple colored province in South Western Pakistan. We will discuss Balochistan in a minute but first let's learn a little bit more about Pakistan - here are a few facts and some basic information:



PAKISTAN

Pakistan was formed on August 14, 1947, when India gained independence from Great Britain. It was created as a homeland for India's Muslim population, the nation was originally divided into East Pakistan and West Pakistan.

Pakistan and India Conflicts

Pakistan and India fought their first war over the disputed territory of Kashmir in 1948, a second in 1965, and a third in 1971 when India intervened in a civil war over East Pakistan's attempt to secede from the nation. The secession was ultimately successful, and East Pakistan formed what is now Bangladesh.

Geography, Population, and Demographics

Present-day Pakistan is 321,576 square miles (803,940 sq. km), about twice the size of California. Its population is about 200 million -- more than five times that of California. Pakistan's capital is Islamabad (Population is a little over 2 million people). The two cities with the most people are Karachi in the Province of Sindh with about 23 million and Lahore in the Province of Punjab with about 7.5 million people. Ninety-seven percent of Pakistanis are Muslim; 77 percent are Sunni Muslim, and 20 percent are Shiite Muslim.

The official language of Pakistan is Urdu, though only 8 percent of the population speak it. The most widely spoken language in Pakistan is Punjabi, spoken by 48 percent of the people.

The life expectancy is a little over 62 years. The average annual income is approximately US \$1200 and 35 percent of the population lives below the international poverty line. Pakistan's literacy rate is about 46 percent.

Economy

Pakistan's primary industries are textiles, apparel, food processing, beverages, construction materials, paper products, fertilizer and shrimp. Its unemployment rate, not including substantial underemployment, is about 8 percent. Forty-four percent of Pakistan's labor force works in the agricultural sector, which produces cotton, wheat, rice, sugarcane, fruit, vegetables, milk, beef, mutton and eggs. Pakistan exports textiles, rice, leather, sports goods, carpets and rugs to the United States, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, Germany and Hong Kong.

Nuclear Bomb

In 1974, three years after the third India-Pakistan war, India held its first atomic test, prompting Pakistan's then-prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, to vow to develop a nuclear program in Pakistan.

Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan, a Pakistani scientist then working in the Netherlands at a European nuclear facility, allegedly stole the designs he had access to and returned to Pakistan in 1976, where he used these to help develop Pakistan's nuclear arms program. Khan is highly regarded within Pakistan for having put the nation on the international map as a nuclear power. In 1998, both Pakistan and India conducted nuclear tests, which renewed tension between the two countries.

Terrorism in Pakistan

Terrorism in Pakistan has become a major and highly destructive force in recent years. The annual death toll from terrorist attacks has risen from 164 in 2003 to about 4,000 in 2014, with a total of more than 40,000 Pakistanis killed.

Terrorism in Pakistan originated with it supporting the Soviet war in Afghanistan, and the subsequent civil war that continued for at least a decade. The conflict brought numerous fighters from all over the world to South Asia in the name of jihad. The Taliban and al Qaeda control areas in northwest Pakistan and they are doing everything they can to destabilize the country. They have been responsible for a wave of suicide bombings and other terrorist attacks in recent months.

Pakistan is rated as the fourth most dangerous country in the World after Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan.



The Province of Balochistan

Balochistan is one of the four provinces of Pakistan, located in the southwestern part of the country. Its provincial capital and largest city is Quetta (Population 1.25 million). The total population is a little more than 13 million people. Balochistan is by far the largest province with a total area of 134,050 square miles (347,190 sq. km) which equates to 44% of Pakistan's total land mass. It shares borders with Punjab and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas to the northeast, Sindh to the southeast, the Arabian Sea to the south, Iran to the west, and Afghanistan to the north.

Most of the province's inhabitants are Balochs, Pashtuns and Brahuis though there are smaller communities of Iranians, Hazaras, Sindhis, Punjabis, and other settlers such as the Uzbeks, and Turkmens. The name Balochistan means "the land of the Baloch" in many regional languages.

Balochistan is noted for its unique culture, extremely dry desert climate, and the Sulaiman Mountains. Quetta is located in a densely populated portion of the Sulaiman Mountains in the northeast part of the province. It is situated in a river valley near the Bolan Pass, which has been used as the route of choice from the coast to Central Asia, entering through Afghanistan's Kandahar region. The British and other historic empires have crossed the region to invade Afghanistan by this route.

The economy of Balochistan is largely based upon the production of natural gas, coal, fisheries, mining, and manufacturing industries.

Balochistan has been called the "neglected province" where a majority of population lacks amenities. Since the mid-1970s, the province's share of Pakistan's GDP has dropped from 4.9 to 3.7%, and it has the highest poverty rate and infant and maternal mortality rate, and the lowest literacy rate in the

country. All of these factors have contributed to the insurgency problem.

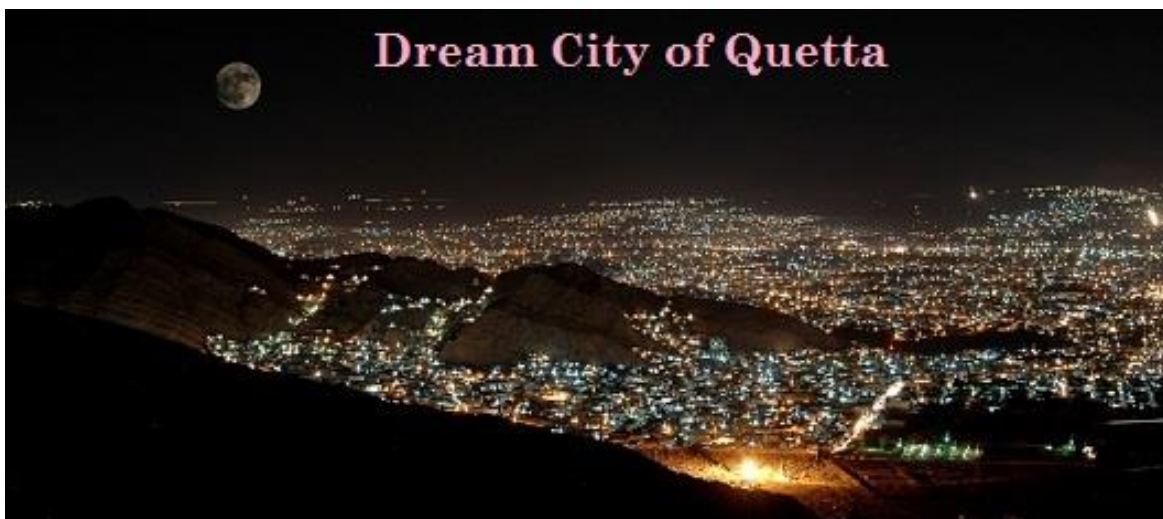
Though the province remains largely underdeveloped, several major development projects, including the construction of a new deep sea port at the strategically important town of Gwadar are in progress in Balochistan. The port is projected to be the hub of an energy and trade corridor to and from China and the Central Asian republics. The Mirani Dam on the Dasht River, 31 miles (50 kilometers) west of Turbat in the Makran Division, is being built to provide water to expand agricultural land use by 14,000 square miles (35,000 square kilometers) where it would otherwise be unsustainable.



Bolan Pass



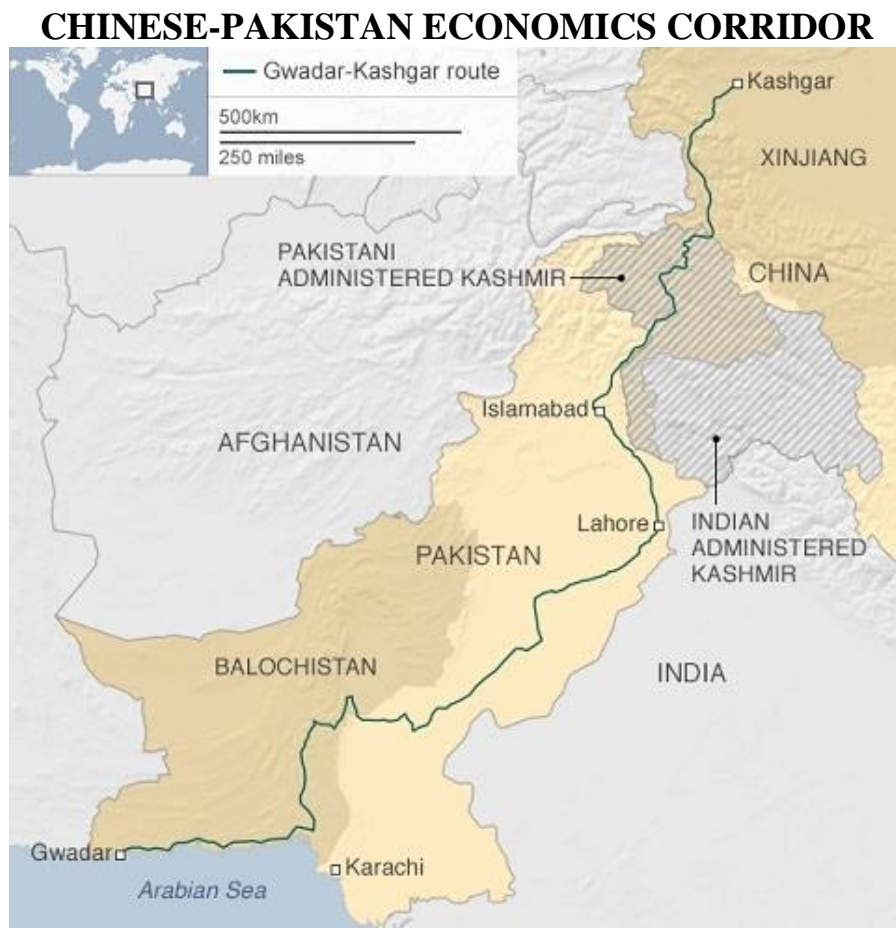
Gwadar Port



Finally, we are ready to address the real topic of this article, “The Chinese Presence in the Province of Balochistan, Pakistan.”

After nearly six centuries, China has set its eyes to returning to the warm waters of the Arabian Sea for energy security and naval domination. China has committed \$45.6 billion dollars for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The project has become the “flagship project” of China’s “New” Silk Road Economic Belt. Although it was proposed in May 2013, all 51 agreements didn’t get signed until August of this year (2015). This is a megaproject which aims to connect Gwadar Port in southwestern Pakistan to China’s northwestern mostly Muslim region of Xinjiang and the city of Kashgar, via a network of highways, railways and pipelines to transport oil and gas. The economic corridor is considered central to China–Pakistan relations and will run about 1864 miles (3,000 km). They expect that most of the projects will be done in 3 years or less and the entire project is expected to be completed in 10-15 years.

Pakistan Premier Nawaz Sharif, during his last visit to China, described Pakistan-China relations as "higher than the Himalayas and deeper than the deepest sea in the world, and sweeter than honey."





Pakistani Prime Minister, Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and Chinese President, Xi Jinping in Islamabad after signing the deal for the “New” Silk Road

The money China is planning to pour into Pakistan is more than twice the amount of all foreign direct investment (FDI) Pakistan has received since 2008, and considerably more than the entire assistance from the United States, Pakistan's largest donor until now.

This economic corridor will provide Pakistan with telecommunications and energy infrastructure. The project also aims to improve intelligence sharing between the countries. China and Pakistan hope the massive investment plan will transform Pakistan into a regional economic hub as well as further boost the growing ties between Pakistan and China. The Pakistani media and government called the investments a "game and fate changer" for the region. According to The Guardian, "The Chinese are not just offering to build much-needed infrastructure but also make Pakistan a key partner in its grand economic and strategic ambitions." The project will also open trade routes for Western China and provide China direct access to the resource-rich Middle East region via the Arabian Sea, bypassing longer logistical routes.

The Corridor is an extension of China's proposed 21st century Silk Road initiative. It also links the new maritime silk road with the existing and planned “string of pearls,” China's network of maritime facilities in the

Pacific and Indian Oceans. The “String of Pearls” is the term used to describe Chinese intentions in the Indian Ocean region. It refers to the network of Chinese military and commercial facilities and relationships along its sea lines of communication, which extend from the Chinese mainland to Port Sudan. The sea lines run through several major maritime choke points such as the Strait of Mandeb, the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Hormuz and the Lombok Strait, as well as other strategic maritime centers in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Maldives and Somalia. It’s clear that China has another name for these ports — the “New” Maritime Silk Road.”



Chinese Navy Carrier Ship

Many experts think that rebuilding and gaining use of Gwadar Port is the primary reason China is spending all this money. It could even become a Chinese Navy Base. The presence of China in Pakistan's deep sea strategic port has disturbed the United States. Washington fears that the port might be used as a listening post to monitor US military activities in the Persian Gulf. India leaders have a different kind of fear - they fear that the Gwadar port project which is also linked to the Karakoram highway expansion project linking Western China with the Arabian Sea could make Pakistan economically stronger. This could lead to increased conflicts between the two countries.

This entire China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project is being built with Chinese engineers and laborers. Yes, more than 15,000 Chinese workers including laborers (8,000+) and professionals (7,000+) have flooded into the

Province of Balochistan. This is in addition to the estimated 10,000 Chinese residents who already live in Pakistan. These Chinese workers have started working 24 hours a day 7 days a week on dozens of CPEC projects.

China has a great strategic interest in the Gwadar Port. That is the primary reason they decided to start this project at the Gwadar Port in the Province of Balochistan. China is heavily dependent upon the oil from the Persian Gulf; at present this oil passes via a very long route through the Strait of Malacca, which is under US influence. After this oil has reached Shanghai or the Chinese East Coast, it has to be transported thousands of miles inland to the West of China. By using Gwadar port and then the Karakoram Highway (KKH), the oil follows a much safer, cheaper and shorter route to western China.

But there has been many problems to overcome and there will be more trouble – kidnappings, suicide bombers, and other terrorist attacks. Taliban militants present a dangerous insurgency in Balochistan. Beijing has expressed great concern with the safety of its workers. Pakistan’s military has assembled a 12,000-strong special security force (not including support staff) to protect the Chinese workers. In addition to this force, an undetermined number of Chinese military personnel are in Balochistan. There is almost one policeman or military member per Chinese worker.



Taliban Militants (Terrorists)

Baloch Liberation Army

Regardless of all this security, there is more trouble ahead for The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. Baloch nationalist and Islamist/sectarian militant groups oppose the establishment of the corridor. Baloch nationalist groups such as the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), that largely operate in central and southern Balochistan, have previously kidnapped or killed foreigners, especially Chinese, to undermine the

government's development objectives in Balochistan. These groups have often resorted to attacking the existing gas pipelines running from Sui and Dera Bugti to disrupt natural gas distribution to the rest of the country. Similarly, Islamist groups, including various splinter factions of the Pakistani Taliban, who are more active in northern Balochistan districts are likely to target infrastructure projects related to the CPEC as well. Islamic militants perceive that these attacks will highlight the government's inability to provide security for such projects.

In addition to the nationalist and sectarian violence in the province, the security scenario in Balochistan is further complicated by the presence of organized crime networks smuggling weapons and drugs from Afghanistan and diesel fuel from Iran. On top of this, the Afghan government has long claimed that the leadership of the Afghan Taliban has been operating from Balochistan for years, while the Pakistani military establishment has alleged that violence in Balochistan has been propagated by India. Some Pakistan officials claim there is evidence to prove Indian involvement in Balochistan and accuse India of using its consulate offices in Afghanistan and Iran as meeting places for Baloch separatists and operation centers for their terror operations. Let's face it, Pakistan and India just don't get along with each other.

Most Balochistan (Baloch) citizens want independence and to break away from Pakistan but the CPEC project will make this very difficult. China will do what they can to keep this from happening - they have got too much money invested in this project and they want access to Gwadar port. Baloch nationalism is a movement that claims the Baloch people, an ethno-linguistic group mainly found in Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan should be a distinct nation.

So, why does the Pakistan government in Islamabad treat the Province of Balochistan like an unwanted stepchild? They take the many resources like natural gas from the region and give back little in return. Why do the Baloch people want to form their own distinct nation? Well, it is Great Britain's fault! I will explain in the next paragraph.

Have you heard of the British Raj? From 1858 to 1947, The Britain Empire ruled over the Indian subcontinent. The word "Raj" means "rule" in Hindi. So anyway, in 1947 when the British Rulers and Surveyors divided (setup the new country's boundaries) up the land, they didn't give the Baloch people

their own country. Instead, 13 million Balochs ended up in the Province of Balochistan, Pakistan, approximately 2 million in Iran, 500,000 in Oman, 400,000 in Afghanistan, and 150,000 in the United Arab Emirates. There are a lot of unhappy Baloch People in Pakistan and the surrounding area.

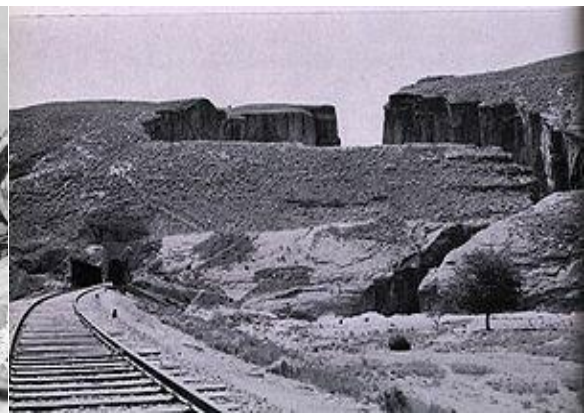


British Raj - The Britain Empire ruled the Indian subcontinent (in red)

Mother Nature has not been very kind to Pakistan either. It is situated at the north western side of the Indian subcontinent and overlaps both with the Indian and the Eurasian tectonic plates. Its Sindh and Punjab provinces lie on the northwestern corner of the Indian plate while Balochistan and most of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa lie within the Eurasian plate which mainly comprises the Iranian plateau, some parts of the Middle East and Central Asia. Therefore, Pakistan has a history of violent and deadly earthquakes. I will list four major earthquakes that happened in the Province of Balochistan:



The 1935 Quetta Earthquake leveled the city and killed about 60,000 people



The earthquake opened up huge gorges in the mountains

1. The 1935 Quetta earthquake occurred on 31 May in the city of Quetta, Balochistan, British India (now part of Pakistan). The earthquake had a magnitude of 7.7 and an estimated 60,000 people died from the impact. This ranked as the deadliest earthquake to hit South Asia until the 2005 Kashmir earthquake.

2. The 1945 Balochistan earthquake occurred in British India on 28 November with a moment magnitude of 8.1 and a maximum perceived intensity of X (Extreme) on the Modified Mercalli Intensity Scale. The earthquake's epicenter was about 60 miles (97.6 kilometers) south-southwest of Pasni in Balochistan and a tsunami caused damage along the Makran coastal region. Deaths from the event were reported to be at least 4,000 people.

3. The 2008 Balochistan earthquake hit on October 29 with a moment magnitude of 6.4. The US Geological Survey reported that the quake occurred 37 miles (60 km) north of Quetta and 115 miles (185 km) southeast of the Afghanistan city of Kandahar. More than 200 people died and more than 200 were injured and 120,000 became homeless.

4. The 2013 Balochistan earthquakes took place in late September in southwestern Pakistan. The main shock had a moment magnitude of 7.7 and a maximum Mercalli intensity of VII (Very Strong). At least 825 people were killed and hundreds more were injured. On 28 September, a magnitude 6.8 aftershock occurred killing at least 22 more people.

The Province of Balochistan does have many beautiful and interesting tourist sights. Just in case you are very brave and are planning a vacation there, here are some places of interest:



Makran Coastal Highway



Hanna Lake

- Mehrgarh Archaeology Site
- Gwadar Beach
- Bolan Pass
- Ziarat Mountain District

- Quetta City
- Charon Falls
- Zhob valley
- Astola Island



Hingol Nation Park



Hunza Valley

No trip to the Mideast, Northern Africa, or South Asia is complete without going on a camel ride. While I was in the U.S. Navy stationed at Kenitra, Morocco, taking a guided tour camel ride out into the Sahara Desert was a highlight of my stay in Morocco.



Hopefully, this article helped us learn a little about Pakistan and the Province of Balochistan. We found out that China is building a “New” Silk Road and an important part of this is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project that starts at Gwadar Port and runs across the entire country of Pakistan and ends at Kashgar, China. We learned that more than 15,000 Chinese workers are responsible for completing this project. We also learned about the problems the country of Pakistan and the Province of Balochistan have with terrorism.

The last time I saw my Mid-Eastern acquaintance at the bar, I told him that I had started working on the article he requested. A little later he bought me a beer and the conversation at the time was about our pets and our favorite animals. Of course, I showed everybody sitting at the bar pictures of Monty and Patti (our two Rottweilers) and said my favorite animal was the “dog”. I turned to my new friend and ask him what his favorite animal was? He had a wry smile on his face as he announced that his favorite animal was the “Camel”.

bigdrifter44@gmail.com