

PAKISTAN SIGNS GWADAR PORT OVER TO CHINA DESPITE ROHRBACHER'S MEDDLING



Detail of CIA Pakistan transportation map showing region around Gwadar. Click on map for a larger image.

Even though he was unsure of its pronunciation, Representative Dana Rohrabacher mounted what was initially a one-man campaign that he claimed was for a free and independent Balochistan. He did eventually enlist top-notch intellectual luminaries Louie Gohmert and Steve King in his effort, but the lingering question I had regarding his efforts on this front boiled down to:

Does Rohrabacher want to help the Baloch, or does he merely want US control of the port of Gwadar and an end to the planned gas pipeline from Iran to Pakistan through Balochistan?

We now have the opportunity to answer that question, as Rohrabacher's attempts to arrange US control of Gwadar and to prevent the gas pipeline have failed. Pakistan officially transferred control of the port of Gwadar to China today from the Port of Singapore

Authority. The final agreement relating to construction of the gas pipeline through Pakistan (Iran claims to have completed 900 kilometers of the pipeline within its borders already) was expected to be signed last Friday, but it appears a last-minute disagreement of gas pricing has delayed those signatures for a week. Here is Dawn on the transfer of Gwadar:

China took control of Pakistan's Gwadar port on Monday as part of its drive to secure energy and maritime routes that also gives it a potential Arabian Sea naval base, sparking Indian concern. "The contract of operation of Gwadar port is formally given to China. Today, the agreement is transferred from the Port of Singapore Authority to China Overseas Ports Holding Company Limited," President Asif Ali Zardari announced. "The award of this contract opens new opportunities for our people... It gives new impetus to Pakistan-China relations," added Zardari in a speech broadcast live on television.

As the article notes, China had funded the bulk of the construction of the port, so it should come as no surprise that they would eventually gain control:

China paid about 75 per cent of the initial \$250 million used to build the port but in 2007 PSA International won a 40-year operating lease. Then-ruler Pervez Musharraf was reportedly unwilling to upset Washington by giving control of the port to the Chinese.

I have to wonder whether Rohrabacher's outright hostility shown to Pakistan over the Balochistan freedom movement and the issue of Dr. Shakeel Afridi played into their willingness to go against US wishes in signing Gwadar over to the Chinese. Perhaps Representative Rohrabacher can enlist a new ally in his battles with Pakistan

since he is such an adherent to “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” approach. It appears that Iran is finding it necessary to build their own naval base very close to Gwadar so that they can keep an eye on what transpires there:

Iran’s Navy Commander Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari says the country is establishing a new base in the Sea of Oman near Pakistan’s border to boost the Islamic Republic’s defense capabilities. “The naval base, which is under construction, is situated in the Gwatr Gulf on our country’s farthest eastern shores bordering Pakistan,” Sayyari said on Sunday.

“The Iranian navy has so far had no military presence in the area, but now, we will be present in the region to defend the interests and maritime resources of our country and exercise a tighter control over the traffic in the region,” Sayyari noted.

Just as he took up arms to fight alongside Osama bin Laden’s Mujahideen movement against his arch-enemies from the Soviet Union, maybe Rohrabacher will decide to team up with Iran’s navy near Gwadar in an attempt to punish Pakistan for daring to thwart his wishes.