

# Gwadar Port Attack: China's Core Interests in Pakistan Under Threat

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**Cover Map Attribute: Gwadar Port Authority Colony Attack, March 20, 2024 / Source: Google Earth/Airbus/YouTube screengrab**

A resurgence of security concerns has swept through the southwestern Pakistani region of Gwadar following a militant attack that targeted the Gwadar Port Authority complex, situated near the crucial port. The assault, which occurred just 7 kilometers from the port itself, has once again thrust into the spotlight the intricate security challenges facing Chinese interests, particularly those intertwined with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Pakistan.

As per the official reports, on Wednesday (March 20) eight gunmen of the Majeed Brigade of the separatist group Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) executed their assault by ramming a

vehicle laden with explosives into the gates of the Gwadar Port Authority colony, which resulted in a clash with security forces, leaving casualties on both sides. Pakistan claimed all eight militants, along with two security personnel, were killed. Conversely, the BLA has asserted responsibility for the deaths of 25 security personnel including five officers.

The Majeed Brigade's targeting strategy centers on striking the interests and facilities of the more conventionally powerful opponent in places where traditional guerrilla tactics lack effectiveness, notably in urban centers. Targets are chosen based on their political, military, economic, and symbolic importance, as well as their potential to garner attention for the group on the global stage.

According to this targeting approach, the Gwadar Port emerges as a key target. Developed with significant Chinese investment and operational support from China Overseas Ports Holding, stands as a linchpin in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project under the broader BRI framework. As such, any disruption or threat to operations in Gwadar sends ripples through the local and national security apparatus and across international corridors, impacting China's strategic and economic interests in the region.

The incident has cast a shadow over assurances provided by Pakistani authorities regarding the safeguarding of Chinese investments and personnel in the region. Islamabad's commitment to ensuring the security and stability of projects linked to the BRI has come under renewed scrutiny, with stakeholders questioning the efficacy of existing security measures in the face of persistent threats from militant groups operating in the region.

In response to the attack, Pakistani security forces have intensified their presence in Gwadar and its surrounding areas, conducting sweeping operations to root out any remaining threats and bolstering security protocols at key installations. Additionally, authorities have launched investigations to ascertain the perpetrators behind the assault, underscoring the gravity with which the Pakistani government views such incidents and its determination to hold accountable those responsible for jeopardizing national and international interests.

For China, this attack raises concerns regarding the vulnerability of its expansive infrastructure projects in Pakistan, which serve as vital arteries for its ambitious BRI objectives. The assault underscores the complex security landscape in which Chinese investments operate, characterized by a delicate balance between economic development aspirations and the persistent threat of militant violence.

Despite the setback, China has reaffirmed its commitment to investing in Pakistan, viewing the incident as an isolated challenge rather than a systemic flaw in its broader strategic vision. Chinese officials have called for enhanced cooperation between Beijing and Islamabad in addressing security concerns, emphasizing the need for collaborative efforts to mitigate risks and ensure the uninterrupted progress of BRI projects in the region.

The attack comes at a pivotal moment for Pakistan, as the newly elected government grapples with the formidable task of navigating domestic political dynamics while simultaneously managing complex international relationships. The incident serves as a stark reminder of the multifaceted challenges confronting Pakistan's security landscape and the delicate balancing act required to accommodate diverse interests, including those of its key ally, China.

In light of this incident, stakeholders within Pakistan and abroad closely monitor developments, assessing the implications for regional stability and the future trajectory of China-Pakistan cooperation. The incident underscores the interconnectedness of security dynamics in the region and the imperative of concerted action to address underlying grievances and vulnerabilities that fuel extremist violence.

### **About Majeed Brigade**

The Majeed Brigade derives its name from two siblings, Majeed Langove Senior, and Majeed Langove Junior, who carried out suicide missions in August 1974 and March 2010, respectively. Majeed Senior attempted to assassinate then Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto during his official visit to Quetta, motivated by the dismissal of the National Awami Party's government in Baluchistan. However, Majeed Senior lost his life during the operation. Majeed Junior sacrificed himself to protect his comrades when Pakistani security forces raided the residence where they were located in Quetta's Wahdat Colony, delaying the raid to allow his associates time to flee.

After Majeed Junior's death, Aslam Achu, the now-deceased leader of the BLA, formed the group's suicide unit, naming it the Majeed Brigade. The Brigade executed its inaugural vehicle-borne suicide attack in December 2011, targeting Shafeeq Mengal, the son of former Pakistani federal minister Naseer Mengal, on Quetta's Arbab Road. Although Shafeeq, who had led a squad targeting Baluch insurgents in various parts of the province, survived unscathed, 13 others perished in the assault.

Subsequently, due to financial constraints and recruitment challenges, the Majeed Brigade went dormant, only resurfacing seven years later to carry out its second suicide attack in August 2018, targeting a bus transporting Chinese engineers in Dalbadin. Rehan Aslam Baloch, the 22-year-old son of Aslam, executed the attack. Additionally, in the past, Majeed Brigade suicide bombers targeted the Chinese Consulate in Karachi in November 2018, Gwadar's Pearl Continental Hotel in May 2019, the Pakistan Stock Exchange in June 2020, the University of Karachi's Confucius Institute in April 2022

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