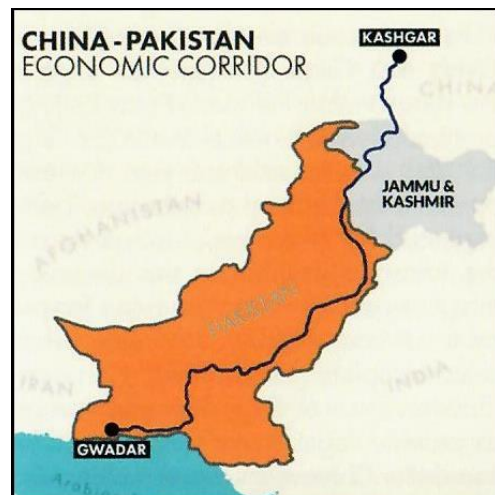

China Pakistan Economic Corridor and Jammu & Kashmir

Introduction

China’s expanding strategic ambitions have many layers and interrelated dimensions. This paper will discuss the implications of China’s presence in Gilgit Baltistan, and thus in the State of Jammu & Kashmir along with the proposed China Pakistan Economic Corridor and try to elaborate its effects on the people of this region and on the future of the wider Kashmir-issue.

Reportedly China’s presence in Gilgit Baltistan is an extension of its ambitions of reconstructing the ancient Silk Road. The construction of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, also abbreviated as CPEC, at a cost of \$54 billion, is an important pawn in this *New Great Game*. The origins of this corridor can be traced back to the Border Agreement of 1963, in which Pakistan ceded more than 5,000 sq miles of illegally occupied Jammu & Kashmir to China.

Part of this 3,000 km long network of roads, railways and pipelines, will pass through Gilgit Baltistan, which does not fall within the jurisdiction of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Since 1947, the region has been treated as a disputed territory. Formerly known as the Northern Areas of Pakistan, it is the northern most administrative territory of Pakistan. Although administered by Pakistan, Gilgit Baltistan is an elemental part of the disputed territory of Jammu & Kashmir. The region, together with Pakistan Administered Jammu & Kashmir, Aksai Chin, Shaksgam Valley under Chinese occupation and Indian Administered Jammu & Kashmir, is an integral part of the Kashmir-issue which is disputed between India, China and Pakistan. Gilgit Baltistan is an area of almost 30,000 sq miles, highly mountainous and the estimated population is around 2 million original inhabitants. The abolishment of the State Subject Rule in 1974 by the Government of Pakistan has, however, resulted in large scale demographic changes in the region.



Legality

While administratively controlled by Pakistan since the First Kashmir War, Gilgit Baltistan has never been formally integrated into the Pakistani State and does not participate in Pakistan's Constitutional political affairs. In 2009, the Gilgit Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order was passed by the Pakistani cabinet and later signed by the then President of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari. The order granted self-rule to the people of Gilgit Baltistan, by creating, among other things, an elected Gilgit Baltistan Legislative Assembly and a Gilgit Baltistan Council. Gilgit Baltistan, thus gained a de facto province-like status without constitutionally becoming part of Pakistan. Officially, Pakistan claims that

it cannot integrate Gilgit Baltistan into Pakistan as that would prejudice its international obligations with regard to the Kashmir conflict.

It has, however, become imperative for China that Gilgit Baltistan has a political status within Pakistan. From Beijing's point of view, a political status for Gilgit Baltistan would address the domestic concerns of the local people from being exploited by Islamabad, and externally the Indian objections. In this backdrop, a high level committee has been formed by the Prime Minister of Pakistan, which is contemplating to elevate the constitutional status of Gilgit Baltistan in a bid to provide legal cover to the multi-billion-dollar Chinese investment plan.

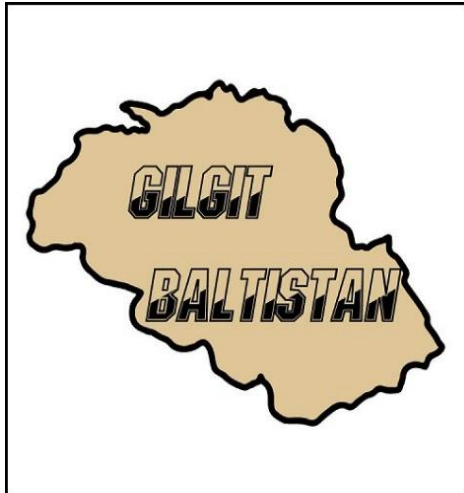
The proposal would see the mountainous region of Gilgit Baltistan, for the first time in the country's constitution, bringing it one step closer to being fully absorbed as an additional province of Pakistan. The move signals a historic shift in the country's position on the future of the wider Kashmir-issue. Internationally, Pakistan has always insisted, yet not practiced, that the parts of Jammu & Kashmir it controls, are semi-autonomous and have therefore not been formally integrated into the country, in line with its claimed position that a referendum should be carried out across the whole of the region. In addition to being named in the constitution, Gilgit Baltistan would also send two lawmakers to sit in the federal parliament - though they would be given observer status only.

Environmental impacts and opposition

The corridor plans have been strongly opposed by people living in Gilgit Baltistan and the rest of Jammu & Kashmir. The much-publicized CPEC may benefit Pakistan and in particular its Punjab province, but it will render more than 10,000 people of Gilgit Baltistan jobless, once the existing dry port is relocated from Sost in Gilgit Baltistan to Havelian in Pakistan. According to the local population and international observers, the region is deprived of all fundamental human and civil rights and it has no representation in the National Assembly of Pakistan or any other national legislative body. Reports suggest that China is digging more than 22 tunnels in Gilgit Baltistan for deployment of missiles, while other areas in Gilgit Baltistan are explored for natural mineral deposits, especially gold resources. The local owners of these lands are barred from going to these areas. The people of Gilgit Baltistan have no say over their natural resources and minerals and all decision-making powers in relation to forest, power, tourism and minerals are under the direct control of the Gilgit Baltistan Council, which is headed by the Prime Minister of Pakistan. All the mining licenses are also directly issued by Islamabad while the Federal Government of Pakistan has not invited Gilgit Baltistan officials to any national level meeting on the construction of this new corridor.

Since the people of Gilgit Baltistan, through whose territory the corridor passes, have had no say in CPEC projects, it means that Pakistan has virtually sold out the territory to China under the rubric of infrastructural development. The region is completely excluded from the high financial profits that a project like the CPEC would bring. Despite the fact that this corridor would cross the region and produce a number of negative environmental and ecological impacts. Gilgit Baltistan is already facing serious environmental problems in relation to climate change because of air and water pollution, inadequate waste disposal, natural resources depletion, deforestation, loss of biodiversity and glacier melting. There is an abundance of water resources, minerals worth billions of dollars and an ocean of

undiscovered tourism potential in this part of Jammu & Kashmir. Gilgit Baltistan has notable reserves of copper, coal, iron, silver, and gold among other metals and minerals. The factories which will emerge during the construction of this corridor will use all the minerals of Gilgit Baltistan as raw material for which the population will not be paid royalty.



The region is also blessed with considerable reserves of uranium. There are at least 5,000 glaciers, including three of the largest in the world outside of the polar regions, in Gilgit Baltistan. It has almost 2,500 glacial lakes. The potential of power is 52,000 MW, while the requirement of the indigenous population is only 150 MW. Researchers have concluded that the current rise of temperature will dry up the glaciers in the Karakorum and Himalayan region within a century. Toxic gasses by heavy traffic flow and construction works related to the establishment of this corridor will only accelerate the melting of the world's largest reservoir of fresh water glaciers. Geologists have noted that erosion and

weathering processes, seismic activity, steep terrain, snow melt, rainfall and irrigation for agriculture, and sediments carried by glacial melt into rivers have been the key triggers of the landslide in 2010, which created the Attabad Lake in Hunza area in Gilgit Baltistan. The landside swept away hundreds of Gilgit Baltistan villages submerging into the Hunza River and leaving over 1,000 people displaced.

Inaction of Pakistan to adequately compensate the victims of these calamities caused massive protests by the local population, led by a political activist, namely Baba Jan. In August 2011, the police used violent means to crush the uprising and ended up killing two unarmed protestors, Afzal Baig and his father, Sher-Ullah Baig. In the aftermath of these brutal murders, Baba Jan organized more protests while demanding impartial investigations into the killings. Baba Jan along with his fellow activists was arrested and subjected to inhuman methods of tortures before being charged with violating Pakistan's Anti-Terrorism Act while according to Pakistan's own constitution and Supreme Court, this act has no jurisdiction in Gilgit Baltistan.

Conclusion

Historical evidence and logically drawn inferences and analyses, support the notion that the construction of the CPEC is illegal and in contravention of international law. The construction of this corridor, complimented by the military benefits for both China and Pakistan and an investment of \$54 billion, has all the ingredients to exacerbate the complexities of the Kashmir-issue, threaten peace and secure China's strategic interests by allowing it, to increase its illegitimate share in Jammu & Kashmir.

Pakistan's move to illegally annex Gilgit Baltistan, change the fundamentals of the actual Kashmir-issue and cement China's stake in this dispute, are in response to concerns raised by Beijing. China finds it internationally indefensible to invest billions of dollars on a road that passes through a disputed territory claimed both by India and Pakistan. The actions of Pakistan totally negate the interests of the people of Jammu & Kashmir and their future. If Pakistan imposes its sovereign writ over Gilgit

Baltistan, India will then have a political and moral right to fully integrate Jammu & Kashmir into India and scrap Article 370 of its Constitution, which gives Jammu & Kashmir a special status. Any kind of solution to the long standing Kashmir-issue will only be jeopardized by these kind of intrusions. China is not investing billions of dollars to simply withdraw if any solution is found to the Kashmir-issue.

China's heavy investment in the disputed region is not speculative: it is a calculated investment to bolster her strategic interest in the region.



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