

China Pakistan Economic Corridor and Jammu & Kashmir

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The impact of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor on the region is a very broad subject with many layers and interrelated dimensions. As a State Subject of the State of Jammu & Kashmir, I will mainly concentrate on the implications of this corridor on the State of Jammu & Kashmir and try to elaborate its effects on the people of this region and on the future of the wider Kashmir-Issue.

The people of Gilgit Baltistan are equal stakeholders in the Kashmir-Issue and are as much Kashmiri as the Kashmiris living in other parts of J&K. Unfortunately, for all of their history they have been forgotten, neglected, insulted and exploited.

Throughout history, Pakistan has attempted to change the demographics of Gilgit Baltistan. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor can be best classified as deliberate attempt to carry this tradition forward and even aim to change the demographics of the actual Kashmir-Issue.

In 1949 the area of Gilgit Baltistan was named 'The Northern Areas of Pakistan' and put under the direct control of the Federal Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas Affairs, which de facto is run by Islamabad. Afterwards, it was Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who abrogated the State Subject rule in this part of J&K. The next Pakistani ruler, Zia-ul-Haq, unleashed anti-Shia forces in the region during his term, which caused extreme socio-political polarisation in especially Skardu. After that, 'Tribal Lashkars' started the institutionalized abduction of women and massacred thousands of Shias in 1988.

Pakistan's stance on Gilgit Baltistan in particular and on Jammu & Kashmir in general has been full of paradoxicalities. In 2009, the Pakistani government passed the Gilgit Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance order. The order turned Gilgit Baltistan into a province while Gilgit Baltistan has never been constitutionally a part of Pakistan. It has even no mention in the Constitution of Pakistan.

To make matters more complicated and perhaps even incomprehensible, the Pakistani Supreme Court in 1994 observed that these areas 'are part of Jammu & Kashmir State, but are not part of Azad Kashmir'.

Utterly contradictory to its actions, Pakistan has officially been rejecting the full integration of Gilgit Baltistan by propagating that such an action would be unjust considering its international obligations with respect to the Kashmir-Issue.

A few months ago, Pakistan again raised the Kashmir-Issue in the United Nations and propagated an independent and impartial plebiscite under UN supervision, which would enable the Kashmiris to claim their inalienable right to self-determination.

As a nationalist Kashmiri who believes in the ideology of an Independent, united and secular Jammu & Kashmir, the UN Security Council resolutions hold no relevance for me, but perhaps some other Kashmiris who have been victims of propaganda need to understand the duplicity of Pakistan's role in the UN vis-à-vis the Kashmir Issue.

The right of the Kashmiri people to self-determination was abrogated by Pakistan itself in the UN Security Council. It was the Pakistani Foreign Office which in a letter to the Security Council signed by Zafrullah Khan -the then Foreign Minister of Pakistan- enquired if the words 'future status' as stated in the resolution of 13 August 1948 could mean an Independent Kashmir. An affirmative reply from the Security Council, caused the Pakistani government to suggest an amendment to this resolution.

In a letter to General McNaughton, President of the Security Council, dated 28th of December 1948, Pakistan wrote to propose a change to this clause. It requested to substitute the words "the future status of State of Jammu and Kashmir" by the following: "The question of the accession of the state of Jammu and Kashmir to India and Pakistan". India did not object to this amendment and subsequently, on the initiative of the Pakistani Government, the question of the future of Jammu & Kashmir and its inhabitants was transformed into a territorial dispute between India and Pakistan.

As a result, the resolution of 5 January 1949, changed into: 'The question of the accession of the State of Jammu and Kashmir to India and Pakistan will be decided through the democratic method of a free and impartial plebiscite'.

Even Pakistan's call for a plebiscite is mere lip-service, as it is Pakistan which will have to act first if such a plebiscite has to take place. Part II of the Truce agreement puts all liabilities on Pakistan. Three important clauses of this agreement are: 1) As the presence of troops of Pakistan in the territory of the State of Jammu and Kashmir constitutes a material change in the situation since it was represented by the Government of Pakistan before the Security Council; the Government of Pakistan agrees to withdraw its troops from that State. 2) The Government of Pakistan will use its best endeavour to secure the withdrawal from the State of Jammu and Kashmir of tribesmen and Pakistani nationals not normally resident therein who have entered the State for the purpose of fighting. 3) Pending a final solution, the territory evacuated by the Pakistani troops will be administered by the local authorities under the surveillance of the commission.

Coming back to the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, I would like to emphasize that I am not averse to economic development, solutions to Pakistan's growing economic crisis or the eradication of poverty. I welcome that and wholeheartedly wish that the friendship of China and Pakistan will flourish into eternity. However, as a Kashmiri, I have my strongest reservations regarding this new economic corridor, the origins of which can be traced back to the Border Agreement of 1963 in which Pakistan ceded more than 5000sq miles of Jammu & Kashmir to China.

The people of Gilgit Baltistan have no constitutional guarantees of their political liberties. They have no say over their natural resources and minerals. 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.

The economic potential of Gilgit Baltistan is such, that had the people been masters of their own destiny and not treated as a colony by Pakistan, Gilgit Baltistan could finance the complete construction of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor. 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.

There are at least 5000 glaciers, including three of the largest in the world outside of the polar regions in Gilgit Baltistan. It has almost 2500 glacial lakes. The potential of Power is 52.000MW, while the requirement of the indigenous population is just 150MW.

Gilgit Baltistan and its ecological habitat will also be effected negatively. Researchers have concluded that the current rise of temperature will dry up the glaciers in the Karakorum and Himalayan region

within a century. The toxic gasses and heavy traffic flow related to the construction of this corridor will only enhance the melting of the world's largest reservoir of fresh water glaciers.

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 any royalty. The proposed shifting of the Sost Dry port from Gilgit Baltistan to Havelian will also result in devastating loss of whatever little business the inhabitants have.

Based on facts, one is compelled to conclude that not the people of Gilgit Baltistan, but the Pakistani Army and Navy will be the actual economic and strategic beneficiaries of this corridor. One of the arrangements of this deal is that Pakistan will purchase eight attack submarines and six patrol vessels from China. This arrangement will elevate China as Pakistan's primal arms provider, a contract to the tune of 5 billion dollars, while it will seriously disturb the equilibrium in the Indian Ocean and thereby threaten the already fragile peace in the region.

I firmly believe that the construction of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor is illegal. Gilgit Baltistan is part of Jammu & Kashmir State, the future status of which still needs to be decided according to the wishes of the people living in Jammu, Ladakh, the Kashmir Valley, Pakistan Administered Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan.

The construction of this corridor, complimented by the military benefits for both China and Pakistan and an investment of 46 billion dollars, has all the ingredients to exacerbate the complexities of the Kashmir-Issue, threaten peace and cement China's stake in Jammu & Kashmir.

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. Its investment guarantees their strategic interests in the region.

The people in Gilgit Baltistan are not in need of economic corridors of exploitation. They are longing for basic human rights and their political liberties. Admittedly, we Kashmiris have also been culpable of neglecting Gilgit Baltistan as we were too pre-occupied trying to liberate just one part of Kashmir on the behest of intelligence agencies, working in their national interests, while they used us Kashmiris as cannon fodder.

We Kashmiris must comprehend that Kashmir is more than the Valley only and protest against the China Pakistan Economic corridor as it is an attempt to further destabilize the region in general and the Kashmir-Issue in particular. No country, not even our so-called elder brother and benefactor, has the liberty to impose economic corridors on us by force.

There is a need to unite and contemplate on what we need to change in order to defeat this new 'Game-Changer'.

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