

Geopolitical Significance of Gilgit Baltistan of J & K State

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ABSTRACT: *Gilgit-Baltistan, previously known as the Northern Areas, is part of a disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir, which has been divided between India and Pakistan since their independence in 1947. The Kashmir dispute has remained a major catalyst of militarization, open and protracted wars, extremism, and underdevelopment in South Asia. Situated in the mountains of northern Pakistan, Gilgit-Baltistan has a strategic importance because of its geopolitical dimensions. Geopolitically, Gilgit-Baltistan is located at the junction of China, Central -South Asia, and the ancient silk route, famous for trade in Central Asia crossed through this region. Its geography also makes it vulnerable to spread out conflicts from active militant movements in surrounding areas. Keeping in view these dimensions, this paper will illustrate the geo-political dimensions of Northern Areas of State of Jammu and Kashmir. The region here signifies the undivided Jammu and Kashmir before partition i.e. 1947A.D. and the surrounding areas encompassing India, Pakistan, Tibet and China. Therefore, the main focus of this paper is to explain the strategic significance of NA, also called Gilgit-Baltistan for India, Pakistan and China. This region also effects peace and security in South Asia. The geo-political significance of Northern Areas for India is because of the reason that NA is an integral part of Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir. NA is significant for Pakistan due to the reason that it is the only region which has borders with Afghanistan, China, POK (Pakistan Occupied Kashmir) and India. This region is also strategically important for Pakistan's water security. Also, the (KKH) Karakoram highway runs through the Northern Areas which are of immense significance to both Pakistan and China. The geo-political significance of NA for China reflects in her building railway line, gas pipeline and road links on this highway.*

Keywords: *Geopolitics, Northern Areas, Kashmir, Communal Violence, Freedom Movements.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the emergence of state system, geopolitics has always played an important role in international relations. It has formed the identity, character and history of nation-states and has played an important role in their relations. The Gilgit-Baltistan, previously known as the Northern Areas, is part of a disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir, which has been divided between India and Pakistan since their independence in 1947. The Kashmir dispute has remained a major catalyst of militarization, open and protracted wars, extremism, and underdevelopment in South Asia. Situated in the mountains of northern Pakistan and at the junction of China, Central and South Asia, Gilgit-Baltistan has a strategic importance because of its geopolitical dimensions. Gilgit-Baltistan covers an area of 72,971 square kilometres. Its estimated population of 1.2 million includes four denominations of Islam—Shiite (39 percent), Sunni (27 percent), Ismaili (18 percent), and Noorbakshi (16 percent)—and at least twenty-four ethnic and linguistic groups.¹

The geo-politics of NA, formally part of Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir, and now under Pakistan's control, has gained much popularity in the present. It was first due to the reason that NA was initially part of Jammu and Kashmir State, which acceded to India and became an integral part of India and secondly, due to the reason that the region still does not have the constitutional status and no fundamental rights under Pakistan's control. The status of NA is still undefined as according to the UN Resolution of 1948, the fate of this area will be decided by the plebiscite to be held in future. For this reason, Pakistan has kept the region under its direct control and treats it as a colony, with absolute autocracy and no fundamental, civil or political rights provided to them in a modern world of democratic politics. No accession deal was ever signed by the people of NA with Pakistan Government. Infact, Pakistan in its "Karachi Pact" of April 28, 1951, admitted that NA is part of Jammu and Kashmir.²

No doubt, the people of NA strongly resisted their absorption into Pakistan, or they preferred to join AJK which is not the sole successor of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. The legal developments that took place in Pakistan also suggested that the NA could not be incorporated into Pakistan's constitution, nor the so called AJK Interim

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Constitution of 1974 and defined these areas as under its direct administration. Pakistan made several attempts for absorption of NA into it but even after 65 years, it cannot even support the independence of Jammu and Kashmir for the sake of losing the NA. The roots of this may exist in the partition dilemma because the genesis of problem is necessary to understand the whole problem and the dispute between India and Pakistan over the contested territory is the crux of the problem. There are strong evidences that the partition of Indian subcontinent was accepted peacefully everywhere by India and Pakistan except Jammu and Kashmir. It is the need of hour to find the reason for the conflict of Jammu and Kashmir partition. The solution may lie in the events of pre-partition or post-partition affairs of J&K and India. It may also be possible that the British Government intentionally played such role in demarcating boundaries which can arise a conflict. These issues need to be understood for proper solution. The opening of Kargil-Skardu road will give India an opportunity to understand what is actually happening inside NA. It is assumed that Pakistan sees the NA as a strategic and security issue due to Karakoram Highway and water security. As a result, any demand for increased local participation in administration or better governance will not be seen as a natural but as a threat to the military's control and hence, a security threat. The military power may likely suppress these demands brutally as Pakistan sees the area not through a political but through a security point of view. It may suppress the NA likewise Baluchistan, by brutal force, bombs or by using sectarian violence, which they did many a times. The sectarian card can help them divide and rule NA so that there is no unified voice of administrative reforms and the like.³

Recent reports prove that China has deployed troops in Gilgit-Baltistan.⁴ While the Chinese Government attributes to the economic and infrastructure development in the region, this interfering presence is a cause of concern for India. Both Gilgit-Baltistan and AJK has been evidently absent in the media as well as in the scholarly literature.⁵ This region has been conspiracy of silence and outside the range of dispute and is ruthless in diverting attention to the issue of human rights abuses in Jammu and Kashmir on Indian side. Pakistan has been using the territory, resources and people of the region to further its national objectives. Militarily, this territory has served as a launching pad for all ventures of the Pakistan army to create unrest in Jammu and Kashmir including offering a permanent place for radical extremist and terrorist organisations that threaten regional security.⁶ Although the presence of Chinese troops in these areas has been denied by both Pakistan and China, Indian concerns are genuine and need attention.⁷ In recent years, China has been able to change the geopolitical and geostrategic equations in this region that borders China, India, Pakistan, and Tajikistan. China's improvement of the Karakoram Highway, its development of road and rail access as well as other constructions including dams and tunnels, enable it to extend its strategic reach to the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf through Pakistan. As far as China is concerned, the Karakoram Highway is integral to keep Pakistan's military sustained against India. Hence, the presence of Chinese troops in the contested region constitutes Beijing's direct involvement in the Kashmir dispute. No doubt, the roads and bridges being constructed with Chinese support to make easy Pakistan's army operations against India in the region. This involvement further alarms that "Pakistan is a frontline state of China's Grand Strategy" to strengthen the Chinese presence in South Asia.⁸ Recently, Chinese troops have intruded 19 kms. inside the Indian Territory in Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir.⁹ Such type of activities is a matter of deep concern for India's security. This clearly indicates that China's geo-strategic ambitions are taking the shape of grand strategy of regional dominance, which has serious security implications for India.



Map ; <https://www.google.co.in/search?q=j+and+k+map&source>

II. BACKGROUND OF NORTHERN AREAS

Situated between the Hindu Kush and Karakoram Range of mountains in the north and western Himalayas in the south, the geo-strategic placement of Gilgit-Baltistan makes it even more significant for Pakistan. The region borders Pakistan's Dir, Swat, Kohistan and Kaghan districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the west, the Wakhan Corridor of Afghanistan in its northwest, Xinjiang Province of China to its east and northeast, Azad Jammu and Kashmir under control of Pakistan to the southwest, and a 480 km-long Line of Control (LOC) running alongside India in the southeast. Covering a total area of 74,600 sq km, the Gilgit-Baltistan region is administratively divided in two divisions of Gilgit and Baltistan respectively. The Gilgit division, in turn has further been divided into five districts, namely, Gilgit, Ghizer, Diamer, Astore, and Hunza Nager; and the Baltistan division holds two districts of Skardu and Ghanchi under it. The people of this area not only share the mountainous terrain with their neighbors to the North and West, but also ethnicity, history, religion, culture and languages. Its geo-political importance was evident during the British era when the Gilgit Agency was a vital arena in the Great Game politics between Britain and Russia. Today, it is still an important strategic link between Pakistan and China and the Muslim countries of Central Asia. Following map clearly shows the divisions of NA.



[http://www.google.co.in/imgres.](http://www.google.co.in/imgres)

The Jammu and Kashmir State has always remained strategically an important area. During the British rule, besides using Afghanistan as a buffer state, the Britishers also established an observation post in Gilgit by taking it on lease in 1935, for surveillance in this vital region.¹⁰ The Gilgit agency remained in their occupation till 1947, after which they handed it over to the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir State. To understand the Gilgit issue, it is necessary to study pre-independence political relationships between the Indian States and British India in the light of Government of India Act, 1935 that provided federal status to Indian States and leading to merger, accession and subsequent integration of Indian states with the Indian Union before the British withdrawal on August 15, 1947. The Indian Independence Act of 1947, passed at the British Parliament was designed to create the two dominions – India and Pakistan and in accordance with it, the British provinces were territorialised along the geography of the religious pattern. The Muslim majority territories of Punjab and Bengal went to Pakistan, besides the provinces of Sind, Baluchistan and North West Frontier Province, while the remaining British Provinces stayed with India. With regard to the Indian States, there were the provisions of the Instrument of Accession and the Standstill Agreement in the Indian Independence Act, 1947, and it was left upon the Indian states to merge or accede with either of the dominion: India and Pakistan. There was no third option for them. There were altogether 562 Indian States, spread across the subcontinent, with varying geographical size, and majority of them were landlocked.

But Maharaja Hari Singh of Jammu and Kashmir State was unwilling to join either of the two and perhaps under geopolitical compulsion from within on account of the majority Muslim population, preferred to remain independent of both India and Pakistan, given the political and legal condition arising out of the lapse of Paramountcy.¹¹ Geographically, Jammu & Kashmir was inclined towards West Pakistan because its contact with the outside world used to be carried forward through Karachi port across the Punjab and the Sind provinces of the erstwhile British India. Now, since these provinces made up the constituent units of the new dominion, Pakistan after the partition, there was no option for the Maharaja but to sign the Standstill Agreement with Pakistan (it was signed on August 16, 1947) for commercial and other economic functions, besides access to the outside world. The Maharaja had known that he could not antagonize Pakistan for access to outside world for his people, trade and commerce which, in no way, were possible through India as there was no proper link with India. In the prevailing political situation, the Maharaja was right in signing the Standstill Agreement with Pakistan.¹² Nevertheless, the Maharaja had also urged the Government of India to sign the Standstill Agreement which the later refused to oblige.

Indecisiveness on the part of the Maharaja with regard to accession angered both India and Pakistan. But, Pakistan became desperate and restless also, given the uncertain stand of the Maharaja on the accession issue. Pakistan conspired with the Pathan-armed tribes of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and the Posthus of Gilgit-Baltistan region against the Maharaja, and organized a massive armed infiltration into the State. It was on October 22, 1947, the tribal invaders backed by Pakistan infiltrated into Kashmir. Maharaja urged the Indian Government to support him militarily, which the latter agreed to pay on the condition of signing Instrument of Accession with India. So, when Maharaja signed the Instrument of Accession on 26 October, 1947, the Indian troops were airlifted to Srinagar to expel the raiders.¹³ As the invaders were being pushed back to the contemporary LOC (Line of Control), then referred to as CFL (Cease-fire Line) by the Indian army, the Indian Government approached the United Nations Security Council in December, 1947. Till then, Pakistan had occupied a large part of Jammu and Kashmir including present AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan.

The United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) was set up on August 13, 1948 to mark the ceasefire line.¹⁴ The UN Security Council passed a resolution that a plebiscite should be held to legitimate the accession to India, subject to the withdrawal of all troops in the province. Hostilities between India and Pakistan over the occupied areas of Jammu and Kashmir continued throughout 1948. They only formally ceased on 1st January, 1949. The military representatives of both the countries signed an agreement in Karachi on 29 July, 1949 for defining the ceasefire line in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.¹⁵ The CFL marked the de facto division of State between India and Pakistan; it was to be divided permanently. However, the Pakistani raiders forcefully occupied the area of two-third of Jammu and Kashmir including Muzaffarabad area (POK) and the Northern Areas. Pakistan occupied 86,023 sq. km. of the territory of Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir. Later, Pakistan divided this area into two distinct entities i.e. Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Northern Areas (NA). AJK is having an area of 13,528 sq. km. and NA includes 72,495 sq. km. Out of the total area of Jammu and Kashmir which is 222,236 sq km, the area under Pakistan's occupation at present is 78,114 sq. km. In 1963, Pakistan illegally ceded an area of 5,180 sq. km. which includes the Shaksgam Valley to China by the Sino-Pak Border Treaty, 1963.¹⁶ Therefore, China has also become a party to the dispute, owing to Sino-Pak Agreement of 1963 by which China got Karakoram range and in return, recognised Pakistan's control over NA.

III. STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE NA

The region of NA, which includes the Karakoram Pass, highly strategic route (Silk Route) in the history, is yet neither an official part of Pakistan, nor a part of AJK, nor having status worthy of recognition. The area is important to India because of the reason that Pakistan intruded and occupied it in 1947 and never vacated it, despite U N Resolutions requiring it to do so.¹⁷ There are real strategic reasons for India to make an issue out of this illegal occupation by Pakistan. For Pakistan, the rivers that flow through this area irrigate the west Punjab of Pakistan.¹⁸ Moreover, the Karakoram Highway is a vital strategic route into China and has been used for supply of nuclear material, missiles and missile components from China and North Korea. In addition, Pakistan has located a part of its jihadi infrastructure in these remote areas and used them against India.¹⁹ Therefore, the control of this area provides Pakistan with the advantage point against India in times of war or proxy war. Not only India and Pakistan, but China also became a party to this strategic region and border dispute. The Karakoram Highway and the strategic Gwadar port, close to the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf provide China vital access to the sea lanes in the area. It also enables continued supply of material to Pakistan against India.²⁰ The interest of China in Gilgit-Baltistan is a matter of serious concern and threat to the Northern Area which is an unsettled issue.²¹ China has already started construction of railways and gas pipe lines along the frontier region of Northern Areas.

IV. PRESENT STATUS

Since its occupation by Pakistan, for over 65 years, the region of Northern Areas is left in a state of confusion, in order to annex the area to its own territory. Pakistan, through various laws, deliberately left the area unmarked. On the one hand, the region was separated from AJK, to be ruled directly by Pakistan; and on the other hand, it linked the accession of the region with the plebiscite to be held in Kashmir in future, according to the UN Resolution. Therefore, NA remained in political incognito- its status still being undefined. As a result, the people of this area still wait for someone to own them. NA is neither an official part of Pakistan, nor a part of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, nor having status worthy of recognition. There is no representation of people in the National Assembly. They have no constitutional status. They do not constitute a province of Pakistan, nor a province of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and do not having any political rights. Its status is uncertain. Pakistan has vaguely maintained that this region is a part of disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir but not the part of Azad Jammu and Kashmir.²²

The people of NA need an exit permit for moving out of the area.²³ Economically, the region is most neglected, backward and poorest area. It does not have the basic amenities like education, roads, health care, power supply, sanitation etc. It has no University, no professional College, no post-graduate facilities, no radio,

and no Television station.²⁴ There is no Service Commission or Service Tribunal or service rules or structure. There is no independent judiciary. There is no appeal against the judgement of Judicial Commissioner. They do not have freedom of press. People of NA continued to be deprived of all rights - fundamental, legal, political and civil. The unwillingness of Pakistan government to provide basic political and civil rights to the people of NA strengthened the nationalist movement striving for independence. Sectarian violence has been used by Islamabad to suppress the movement in a region where Shias, Sunnis and Ismailis have peacefully co-existed since times immemorial.

V. NA UNDER PAKISTAN'S ADMINISTRATION

NA has remained under the Pakistan Military control for over six decades. Under the Karachi Agreement, 1949, the matters such as defence, foreign affairs and administration of the NA were left with the Pakistan Government. The entire region is administered by repressive Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR), along the code of laws operated in the Federally Administered Tribal Laws (FATA) making it mandatory for residents to report their movements. In 1950, Gilgit agency was separated from North West Frontier Province, to be a part of Ministry of Kashmir Affairs.²⁵ Under this arrangement, the Political Resident for Gilgit and Baltistan looked after the administration. In 1967, a separate post of Resident was created with its headquarters at Gilgit. In 1972, Zulfikar Ali Butto converted Gilgit Agency into Gilgit and Baltistan districts to be administered by Deputy Commissioners. Soon, Gilgit was divided into two districts to make Diamer district that included the subdivisions of Astor, Chilas and Darel / Tangir. By 1974, Bhutto forcefully abolished the Hunza state. One more district Ghanche was created out of Baltistan district and another district Ghizr was added to Gilgit region.²⁶ The federal Government of Pakistan has all the rights against the people of NA such as the right to collect taxes, the right to enforce law and order, the right to deploy the army in the territory, the right to make recruitment to the Armed Forces from the territory, the right to prescribe the school curriculum, the right to change the demographic composition etc.²⁷ The people of NA have no rights against the state of Pakistan - such as the right to vote in the federal elections and to be represented in the federal parliament, the right to control their budget through their elected representatives, the right to self determination etc. The Frontier Crimes Regulations make it obligatory to take prior permission of the authority before travelling from their place of residence to another place. Those violating laws are liable to punishments such as fine, penalty of property, cancellation of gun licence etc. Such are the conditions prevailing in the region under the Pakistan administration.

COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN NA

Gilgit-Baltistan, unlike the rest of Pakistan, has a Shia majority. The Pakistani administration for over 65 years has supported an anti-Shia programme in this region. The result has been frequent sectarian clashes among the Shia natives and the Sunni outsiders who have settled in this region. Sectarian violence has become a routine. Whenever Shia-Sunni riots takes place anywhere in Pakistan, their affects are felt in these areas.²⁸ Since 1980's, the NA have witnessed sectarian violence that has claimed a number of lives. A local rebellion broke out in Gilgit in May 1988 and in order to suppress the rebellion, the Special Services Group of the Pakistani army based in Khapalu was dispatched. Sunni tribal irregulars were used by the army to execute a brutal programme against the locals.²⁹ After eight days of unending violence, the army interfered to restore peace. In 1989, entire villages around Gilgit were razed to the ground, leading to the death of hundreds of innocent people. Since then, Shia-Sunni sectarian violence has become the normal routine, despite the deployment of para-military force and army personnel in these regions. There has been irregular violence in which clerics turned politicians on both sides have been horrifically killed. However, the impact of these has been invariably borne by the Shia populace.³⁰ In 1992, again sectarian violence broke out in Gilgit when a Sunni leader Gayasuddin was assassinated on 30th of May. These clashes took over 16 lives. After this incident, conciliatory talks ended in failure which led to the killing of Shia leader, Latif Hussain on August 4, 1993, again starting bloody war loosing almost 20 lives. In 2003, Pakistan Ministry of Education has issued Islami textbooks as part of the curriculum in the schools of the NA. According to Shia community leaders, the textbooks promote Sunni thought and values and are an attempt to promote sectarian hatred between the two sects.³¹ As a result, hundreds of primary and secondary schools boycotted classes and stage protest rallies daily in the Gilgit region. Again, in January 2005 murder of prominent Shia community leader, Agha Ziauddin led to widespread Violence claiming the lives of 15 people and the violence is still going on in the recent times.

NA's REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

In recent years, the resentment among the people against the Pakistani authorities has risen. Till 1990's, the political demands in Gilgit-Baltistan were largely focussed on demanding civil rights, right to vote and constitutional status at par with POK (Pakistan Occupied Kashmir) but now the demand is growing for 'self rule' and complete independence from Pakistan, as granted to them under the UN Resolution passed on August 13, 1948. Large number of organisations sprung up in the region like KSO (Karakoram Students Organisation),

BSF (Balwaristan Students Federation), GBNA (Gilgit-Baltistan National Alliance) etc. These political organisations initiated a movement in the region to oust the outsiders of Pakistan from getting administrative jobs in the region.³² The movement further led to the formation of (BNF) Balwaristan National Front, which proclaimed that Gilgit and Baltistan were a subjugated nation whose proper name was Balwaristan i.e. 'land of heights'. A complete nationalist ideology is evolving around the concept of Balwaristan, a nation firmly grounded in a common history, geography and culture which stretches from Chitral in the west to Ladakh in the east. Many BNF and other POK leaders blame India for not realising its claim over the area with action. According to them, India having accepted the accession, should have taken the responsibility of liberating the Gilgit and Baltistan from the Pakistan clutches. The political parties are currently divided between those who are demanding independence of the entire State of Jammu and Kashmir and those who are calling for independence of Balwaristan.³³ Thus, a movement for the grant of right of self-determination for the people of NA has been steadily growing. The first appearance of the movement was seen in 1994 and since then, it is getting momentum. The movement was fuelled by the anger of Shias over the suppression of their rights and of the people as a whole as they are considered as second class citizens. In 1999, Pakistan's incursion into Kargil, the troops died was mostly from Northern Light Infantry based in Skardu.³⁴ The anger of local population against the failure of Pakistan Military leadership to compensate their families, who were killed during Kargil conflict of 1999, has aggravated the feelings of alienation. So, these organisations took up their cause with UN Human Rights Commission and other UN organisations in the International Community and bringing incidents of human rights violations in NA to the notice of all.³⁵

INDIA'S POLITICAL STAND

India looks upon POK & NA as an integral part of India .When India became independent on 15 August, 1947 and it was decided by the British Government that all the princely states were to join either of the two dominions- India or Pakistan, J&K state decided to join India and signed Instrument of Accession with India in October, 1947. As Pakistan's hope of J&K joining their dominion was shattered, it started tribal attacks in the valley and occupied the area called POK i.e. AJK & NA. War between Indian armies and Pak raiders continued for days and with the help of UN Security Council, ceasefire took place. The Kashmir dispute was referred by India to the UN in the hope of fair and legitimate solution but except cease-fire, nothing could be achieved. Therefore, India went ahead of its policy of ascertaining the will of the people of J&K through democratic means.³⁶ In September, 1951, the people of J&K elected a constituent assembly which went to approve the accession of state to India on February 15, 1954. Finally J&K assembly drafted a constitution for the state which was adopted on November 17, 1956 and came into force on 26 January, 1957. Contrary to the adverse position taken by UN Security Council that only plebiscite would decide the future of people of this region, India held free, fair and democratic elections in her part of J&K and declared it legitimate. India has continued to maintain that POK is an integral part of the Indian Union.

The Chinese presence in NA is a violation of India's sovereignty claims. Although, China links her presence in NA with infrastructure development, India's concern is genuine, related to security and needs proper attention and solution. After 62 years of occupation, Pakistan has approved the Gilgit Baltistan Empowerment and Self- Governance Order, 2009 changing the official name of region from NA to Gilgit Baltistan. Against this order, India has formally lodged a protest, though belatedly: two weeks after Pakistan announced the autonomous package. This shows the extent of India's concern for an issue of geopolitical importance. On the Indian maps up to the present day, the whole of Gilgit Baltistan - the former Gilgit agency including the then principalities of Hunza, Nager and the governorship of Puniyal, Yasin, Kuh, Ghizer and Ishkoman, the Chilas and Baltistan districts- are marked as part of Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir, and hence to the Indian Union. Presently, China intruded about 19 kms. inside the DBO sector of Ladakh region across the LAC on 15 April, 2013. India has not given up the region, rather solved the issue by way of Flag meetings with the Chinese representatives. Though the resolution took 21 days, yet the issue of incursion has been successfully resolved. It is a lesson for India that it should not bend before the others and take a firm stand for her belongings. There are real strategic reasons for India to make an issue out of this illegal occupation by Pakistan and ascertain a proper solution for it.

CHINESE INVOLVEMENT

China's presence in the Karakoram region in Gilgit Baltistan, where she is developing infrastructure for highway, rail and road projects and gas pipeline and inducted Chinese protection troops to protect the construction team with the acceptance of Government of Pakistan, assures Beijing's direct involvement in the dispute. It is a matter of security concern for India. It is to remember that Pakistan has illegally occupied this region of J&K in 1947 and UN has declared it a disputed territory and suggested plebiscite to be held in future to solve the problem Hence, Pakistan has no legal rights over it, though it has illegally ceded an area of 5180 sq.

km. of NA to China for construction works. With the construction of highways, railways and ports, it is very clear that China's objective behind is to gain direct access to the Gulf. She has also been undertaking many development projects in POK like small and medium sized dams etc. Pak has ignored the resentment of the people of POK against increasing Chinese saturation into their area. The people of POK had registered their protest when Pakistan ceded the Trans Karakoram Tract to China in 1963. They were in fear that China may completely take over Gilgit Baltistan by 2020.³⁷ Presently, the Chinese are seeking to prevent Indian activism against Chinese presence and interests in Gilgit Baltistan area by intruding new territory in Eastern Ladakh, Daulat Beg Oldie to the extent of 19 kms. on 15 April, 2013 and keeping the Indian army away from the environs of Karakoram area. From such activities, it is assumed that Chinese have the intention to pressurise India for legitimizing their presence in the NA same as they did in the case of Tibet- pressurised India to accept in writing that Tibet is an integral part of China. On the whole, enhanced Chinese involvement in Gilgit Baltistan has security implications for India. Therefore, it is the need of hour to ascertain international public opinion about Chinese forays in NA.

INTERNATIONAL OPINION ON NA

Till the earthquake in 2005, Pakistan kept the POK (including Azad Jammu and Kashmir or AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan or NA) away from the eyes of International Community. For the first time, Human Rights Watch (HRW) prepared a report titled "*With Friends like These-----Human Rights Violation in Azad Kashmir*" exposed Pakistan's claims about autonomy and democratic freedom of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir.³⁸ After this, International Crisis Group (ICG), a think-tank in Brussels, in its publication 'Asia Report-April 2007' titled "*Discord in Pakistan's Northern Areas*" highlighted the miserable condition of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan. The report mentions that with the denial of political space and basic rights there arouse discontentment among the people and the political vacuum was exploited by extremist groups to promote their sectarian goals.³⁹ Another report of the European Parliament prepared by Barroness Emma Nicholson, a member of European Parliament of the Liberal Democratic Party, highlighted lack of democracy and plight of local people in POK. On 24th May, 2007, Nicholson's amended "*Report on Kashmir: Present Situation and Future Prospects*" was passed by majority in the European Parliament in Strasbourg. The report while appreciating India's efforts of ensuring democracy and providing democratic space to the people of Jammu and Kashmir criticised Pakistan for lack of democracy and human rights violations in POK.⁴⁰ Nicholson writes that Gilgit and Baltistan region "are not and were never part of Jammu and Kashmir" as it was a part of British dominion, later attached to J&K then forcefully occupied by Pakistan. The report discredits Pakistan's claims to Siachen glacier as well as NA. It has also ruled out plebiscite for Jammu and Kashmir, though Pakistan is hopeful of plebiscite and is also claiming Siachen as part of NA. Nicholson has blamed Pakistan for failing to fulfil its obligations to introduce 'meaningful democratic structure' on its side of Kashmir. She also quoted the leased agreement of 1935, according to which Gilgit and Baltistan were in the domain of Maharaja of J&K. It also formed part of Instrument of Accession, signed by Maharaja Hari Singh on October 26, 1947. The Human Rights organisations in Pakistan itself have been raising voices against the inhuman treatment meted out to the people of this region by the Pakistani administration.

VI. CONCLUSION

On the whole, it is assumed that the strategic significance of the region of Gilgit-Baltistan has made it an issue of international importance. NA was formally a part of undivided Jammu and Kashmir in 1947. Therefore, India has the genuine reason to claim the reoccupation of this region. But Pakistan had occupied it and is not willing to vacate it, though the Government has not included NA into Pakistan constitution and kept it as a colony till the plebiscite is done. Under the Pakistan Government, NA is not recognised as a part of Pakistan constitution or part of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, nor any political status given to them. China also became the third party to the disputed region by the Sino-Pak Treaty, 1963 and wanted to occupy the region for highway links to Oman. As the NA and POK are an unsettled issue, and UNCIP and other organisations of International Community have an eye on the affairs of this region. Till now, plebiscite cannot be happened as Pakistan violates the ceasefire line times and again and is unwilling to vacate the occupied area. So, this unfinished and unsettled dispute on Jammu and Kashmir between India and Pakistan seeks international attention. The geopolitical interventions in mountain areas always affect the livelihoods of people who have not been involved in the decision-making process in particular and the South Asia in general.

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