

The Geo-Strategic importance of Gilgit-Baltistan in the context of One Belt One Road (OBOR)



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Abstract: *The Geo-Strategic importance of Gilgit-Baltistan has gained prominence in recent international politics. It is situated in the northern part of Pakistan and consists of 14 districts that share a border with Pakistan, China, and India and indirectly share its border with Russia and Afghanistan. The territory of Gilgit-Baltistan has been disputable between two nuclear powers, India and Pakistan, since their inception from the British Raj. Both India and Pakistan claim the territory as their integral parts. However, the region is now under the jurisdiction of Pakistan's constitution. The region has historical and geographical importance, which is traced back to the ancient silk route, and the region was used by colonial powers for their socioeconomic purposes. The importance of the region has been further increased by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is the Project One Belt, One Road (OBOR), it connects the Chinese economic market with other regions. China, with its economic ambitions to connect Chinese economic firms with other regions of the world, has invested in Gilgit-Baltistan. The region has its importance in international politics because it is considered a gateway to Asia and the world*

Keywords: Geo-Politics, Socio-Economics, Geo-strategic, Regional powers, OBOR, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan, China, India.

Introduction

Geo-strategy is the field of study related to geopolitics, and it is also considered a branch of foreign policy that revolves around the geographical location of a state's foreign policy. Geographical factors play a crucial role in how states establish their foreign relations. Countries derive their significance in geo-strategy from one another, as it serves as a tool for nations to shape their foreign relations, exchange cultural values and norms, and achieve various diplomatic goals. Geo-strategy enables countries to pursue their socio-economic and political

objectives by utilizing their strategic geographical positions. It is often said that the intersection of strategy and geography is a hallmark of powerful nations, hence the phrase "geography is the mother of nations." Gilgit-Baltistan is renowned for its geo-strategic significance and abundant natural resources, including minerals, rivers, stunning mountains, towering peaks, colossal glaciers, strategic borders, trade routes, extensive forests, pristine environments, tourist attractions, mountain passes, and picturesque locations. Notably, three nuclear powers in Asia (China, Pakistan, and India), along with other major global players like

the USA and Russia, maintain a keen interest in the socio-economic and political developments in Gilgit-Baltistan. Located in South Asia, Gilgit-Baltistan is a disputed territory sandwiched between India and Pakistan. It shares its borders with three Asian nuclear powers—China, India, and Pakistan—and indirectly connects with Russia and Afghanistan. Covering an area of 72,971 square kilometers (28,174 square miles), with a population of 2.5 million, Gilgit-Baltistan is smaller than China, India, and Pakistan, yet larger than Kashmir. Remarkably, it is the only disputed region of Pakistan that provides a trade route and trade relations with China, thereby serving as a crucial link in China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative. The collaboration between China and Pakistan in this region significantly advances their socio-economic and political interests (hussain, 2017).

Gilgit-Baltistan is a pivotal region for both Pakistan and China, and global connectivity would be incomplete without this strategic piece of land. The significance of Gilgit-Baltistan's geo-strategic location becomes evident when we consider historical events like the Sino-Indian War of 1962 and the Pak-Sino border adjustment of 1963. Today, the OBOR initiative plays a central role in enhancing economic prosperity in Central Asia. It is essentially a revival and modernization of the ancient Silk Route, connecting numerous Asian states (Hunzai I. , 2013)

Historically, the region now known as Gilgit-Baltistan has undergone several name changes, reflecting its evolving significance during different periods and in various contexts. Prior to being known as Gilgit-Baltistan, it was referred to as the "Northern areas." At various times in history, it was known as Grigrit and Dardistan. Each name change reflects the region's socio-economic and political dynamics and its role in significant geopolitical events, such as the Great Game, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and OBOR. The name "Balawaristan" denotes the historical influence of the Balawar people in the region (Naji, 2001)

During the colonial period, Gilgit-Baltistan held strategic importance for the British due to its proximity to the Russian Empire. The British maintained control over the territory in order to safeguard their interests. The 1935 lease of Gilgit-Baltistan from Maharaja Hari Singh of Jammu and Kashmir for 60 years served as a strategic move to dominate the region. This historical context reveals the intertwined relationship between Gilgit-Baltistan's geo-strategic importance and the Kashmir issue. The issue of Gilgit-Baltistan's status has remained unresolved for seven decades. India asserts that the entire region is part of India, while Pakistan claims the same for its territory. Pakistan, however, cannot grant autonomous status to the region or make Gilgit-Baltistan its fifth province. The prevailing view is that any political change in the region would violate international law and United Nations resolutions. Maharaja Hari Singh favored India during the accession agreement in 1947, which included Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. Legally, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan are part of India, although this is primarily a symbolic stance. The region remains disputed, and the United Nations resolutions regarding Azad Jammu and Kashmir represent the final solution (Ali M. , 2019)

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the geo-strategic importance of Gilgit-Baltistan in the context of the One Belt One Road (OBOR) by addressing the following questions:

How does the geo-strategic importance of Gilgit-Baltistan contribute to the socio-economic and political prosperity of South Asia within the framework of OBOR?

What is the historical background of Gilgit-Baltistan and its geo-strategic significance on the global stage?

Why do China, Pakistan, India, and other nations maintain an interest in Gilgit-Baltistan?

How can the clash of interests between the three regional nuclear powers—India, Pakistan, and China—be accommodated in the region?

Is the geo-strategic importance of Gilgit-Baltistan in international politics more significant than other parts of Jammu and Kashmir?

The Historical Significance of Gilgit-Baltistan:

To establish the geo-strategic importance of Gilgit-Baltistan at regional and international levels, it is essential to delve into the region's early history. Major Brown, in his book "Where Three Empires Meet," documents the discovery of pyramids, fossil fuels, and rock carvings in various regions of Gilgit-Baltistan, including Hunza, Passu Valley, Tibetan areas, and other strategic locations. The presence of rock carvings, such as the Manthal Buddha in Skardu city, suggests human habitation in the region since 2000 BC. By 2000 BC, the entire region had been settled by Tibetans, and this historical influence remains evident in the cultural practices of the people of Ladakh and Baltistan. These cultural connections with Tibet are reflected in customs and practices, such as Buddhism, which have been followed in the region (Brown, 1896)

(O'Neil, 1998) In his book "Sheribadat the Cannibal King" critically examines the last local king of Gilgit-Baltistan, Sheribadat. He explores the strategic and economic significance of the region by connecting the rule of Sheribadat with other geo-strategic and political factors. Mock challenges the characterization of Sheribadat as a cannibal king, suggesting that this was a conspiracy orchestrated by a foreign ruler named Azar Jamshid, who used Sheribadat's daughter (Miyokhay) in a plot to achieve certain political and strategic goals. The conspiracy revolved around creating rumors that discredited Sheribadat's kingship. Azar Jamshid ultimately seized power in the region and ruled in place of Sheribadat. (Whitfield, 2018) In his book "Life along the Silk Road," emphasizes the peaceful nature of Buddhism and the friendly, human nature of Buddhist people. Azar Jamshid purportedly used this rumor to undermine Sheribadat's kingship. As a result, Azar Jamshid gained control over the region, emphasizing the strategic use of rumors and misinformation for political purposes.

Throughout its history, the region has seen periods of sovereign rule as well as foreign influence and division. The presence of the Silk Road reflects the significant geo-strategic interests of foreign traders and travelers in the region. The region's multi-lingual culture and multi-ethnic groups are indicative of early foreign interactions and their geo-strategic and economic interests (Ali, 2019).

At one point, the region was under the control of the Chinese Han dynasty, which is evidenced by place names like Hunza Valley, Hanuchial Valley, and Haramosh Gilgit, all with connections to the Hun dynasty. The Silk Road, which passed through Hunza Valley, underscores the region's historical importance in trade and connectivity. The people in the entire Hunza region share cultural values and language, and this area was significant for travelers and traders during ancient times. The presence of the Chinese and their proximity to Tibet and the Baltistan region played a crucial role in shaping the region's history, including civil wars between Tibetans and Chinese during the 600-700 period (Najii, 1997)

The historical accounts also reveal early influence from various other cultures, including Turk, Persian, Arab, and Korean influences, which have collectively contributed to the region's diverse heritage. The predominant Muslim population in the region today reflects the influence of Arab, Turk, and Persian empires and traders. It is noteworthy that the saying attributed to Hazrat Muhammad, "Seek knowledge even if you have to go to China," can be interpreted in the context of Gilgit-Baltistan's geo-strategic importance. The region, situated at the crossroads of the Silk Road and the Chinese civilization, has been historically ruled by different empires, dynasties, and nations. The strategic importance of the region is evident from the fact that without its geo-strategic location, it could not have been subject to foreign rule (Israr Hussain, Iqtidar Hussain, Iqar Hussain Qambari, 2020)

(Bodla, 2014) In his book "Making a Nation in High Mountains," discusses how Sufi Muslims from Persia introduced Islamic culture to the Baltistan region during the 14th century, while

Turkic rulers played a role in bringing Islam to the Gilgit region. Today, the people of Baltistan predominantly follow Shia Islam, while the Gilgit region has followers of both Shia and Sunni Islam. The region has seen the rule of various local dynasties and rulers, with prominent ones including the Mapoon dynasty, Raja of Hunza, and Sher Khan Anchan. During Sher Khan Anchan's rule, he united Gilgit-Baltistan with Chitral and Ladakh, marking an enlightening period in the history of the region. This period saw the introduction of art, architecture, sports, and polo games that continue to be celebrated in their original form today. The last local Buddhist king in the Gilgit region was Sheribadat, and the last ruler of the Baltistan region was Raja Ahmed. According to local accounts, Sheribadat was characterized as a tyrant and cannibal king, which led the people of the region to reject his rule under the influence of foreign Persian ruler Azar Jamshid.

The Constitutional Status of Gilgit-Baltistan from the British Raj to the Present:

Following the rule of local leaders, the Dogra of Jammu established control over the region in 1840. In 1970, the entire region came under British rule during the Great Game, a strategic rivalry between the British and Russian empires. The British administration in the region had various motives, one of which was to contain Russian expansion through this area. In 1935, the British created the Gilgit agency, and the region was leased to them for 60 years by Maharaja Hari Singh of Jammu. However, in 1947, the entire scenario of the region changed when the Indian subcontinent was divided into two independent states, India and Pakistan. This led to 562 princely states and feudatory states having the choice to decide whether to join India, Pakistan, or become independent under the Act of 1947. After partition, these princely states remained separate. However, when Maharaja Hari Singh of Jammu attempted to integrate all the princely states into India through the Instrument of Accession, the people of Gilgit-Baltistan gained independence from the Dogra rule and opted to join Pakistan. Nevertheless, due to the Kashmir issue, Gilgit-Baltistan remains disputed and without a

constitutional status. Both India and Pakistan have different views on the region's status. According to India, Gilgit-Baltistan is integral (Atutang) to India, while Pakistan considers it a vital part of Pakistan. The region has remained disputed and in a constitutional limbo for 70 years. A portion of the region, Ladakh, is occupied by India, and another part is under Pakistan. According to United Nations resolutions, the entire region has the right to a plebiscite to choose between India, Pakistan, or independent. However, due to the intransigence of both sides and the anarchic international system, the UN resolution has not been implemented (Ali, 2019).

The constitutional status of Gilgit-Baltistan has undergone various changes and challenges over the past seven decades. The Bhutto era was a significant period of political transformation, with many reforms introduced to the region. While Bhutto extended political and economic rights to the people, his tenure is also associated with violations of the State Subject Rule (SSR) in Gilgit-Baltistan. The SSR, which stipulated that outsiders had no authority to rule the region, was altered to introduce deputy commissioners and bureaucrats as district heads, replacing the raja system. Hunza and Nagar states were abolished (Hunzai I. , 2013)

(Sökefeld, 2014) In her book “Anthropology of Gilgit-Baltistan” says the people of Gilgit Baltistan are suspicious in analyzing the political and constitutional status of Gilgit Baltistan. People have no right to become a member of the National Assembly of Pakistan. Both judiciary and provincial governments illegally working in the region. According to state subject rule (SSR) one outsider of the region have no authority to rule and bring Socio-Economics and political changes but local have fewer rights to rule in the region as compared to Pakistani, Indian or other rulers.

Geographical importance of Gilgit Baltistan

Under the umbrella of geographical location. Gilgit Baltistan shares its border with three big regional nuclear powers of Asia China, Pakistan, and India as well as Afghanistan. Historically the region was a route of early traders, travelers,

and invaders. One Belt One Road passes through this route which is basically rebuilding of early Silk Route. The region was the gateway for Central Asian invaders, traders, and travelers and today this region continuously repeat its geo-strategic importance in the form of One Belt One Road (OBOR). Historians can easily investigate the Geo-strategic and Socio-Economics importance of Pak-Sino relations under the importance of the ancient Silk Route and One Belt One Road (OBOR). After the Sino-Indian war, both Pakistan and China signed the Pak-Sino border agreements. That was fundamentally an agreement of Geo-strategic revival of ancient silk route and it kept importance in regional and international arenas. Today china Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and One Belt One Road (OBOR) are in their matured form. China earns millions of dollars from this route. China openly doing her trades with South Asia and world states. This route connects China with regional and as well as world states. Therefore, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is considered a game changer. Gilgit Baltistan plays a vital role as a gateway for Socio-Economics and political developments. Both China and Pakistan enjoy their Socio-Economics interest through this region. On the other hand, India wants to be an owner of Gilgit Baltistan. As we know India doesn't want to see any kind of Socio-Economics and political development in the region. Siachen conflict of 1984 and the Kargil war of 1999 among these two states are two great examples to understand the stance of India and their interest in the region. The Ladakh region is already under the control of India because India sees the Gilgit Baltistan issue from the perspective of the instrument of accession. Indian national assembly also has two seats for the people of Gilgit Baltistan. Hence India's claim is that Gilgit Baltistan is part of India. In Pakistan, there is no any seat in the national assembly for the people of Gilgit Baltistan. Pakistan's stance regarding the issue is any constitutional and political change in the region is a violation of international law (Khawaja Zahid Aziz, Anees ur Rasheed Hashmi, Noreen Iqbal Swati).

Gilgit Baltistan is situated in the northern part of Pakistan therefore its called the northern area of Pakistan. It is located between three regional and nuclear powers India, Pakistan, and China. Gilgit Baltistan also shares its borders indirectly with some other states of South Asia. Such states include Kashmir, Tajikistan, Russia and Afghanistan. It has an area of 72,971 km² (28,174 mi) with a population of 2.5 million people (Kulkarni, 2020).

Gilgit Baltistan is known for its Geo-strategic location and its natural resources, minerals, rivers, beautiful mountains, peaks, trade routes, forests, fresh environment, passes, tourism points, springs water, and charming places. Three nuclear regional powers of Asia (China, Pakistan, and India) and some other big powers like the United States of America, Russia, and Britain keep their Geo-strategic interest in the region. The physical structure of the land is mountainous with a fresh climate where three mountain ranges Karakorum, Hindukush, and Himalaya meet. Gilgit Baltistan is also known for its cosmic and military importance in the world. In early it has been a world corridor many times to maintain Geo-strategic orders. Gilgit Baltistan is the land of the world's largest glaciers these glaciers are the Siachen Glacier, Baltoro Glacier, Baska Glacier, and Kutwal Glacier, etc. These glaciers have the capacity to produce 50 thousand MW of electricity. The region is one of the big markets in the lenses of world researchers because the region is full of strategic locations and natural resources. Its natural resources consist of copper, tin, Mica, Coal, Lead, Cobalt, Bismuth, spring water, and Quartz etc. (John, 1979).

Gilgit Baltistan consists of 14 districts and 22 Tehsils. Gilgit city is the capital city of the whole region. The Silk Route is the historical route of Gilgit Baltistan which connects China with Pakistan and other regional and world states. In 2016 Pakistan and China signed China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) agreement to rebuild the Socio-Economics and political importance of the ancient Silk Route. Because this route is the only path that connects China and Pakistan with other parts of the world. Languages of Gilgit Baltistan also determine the

historical importance of the region, The people of Gilgit Baltistan speak seven languages, these languages are Shina, Balti, Khawar, Brushki, etc. Shina is the largest language of Gilgit Baltistan. Each language represents different ethnic groups and the historical interests of different nations. Gilgit Baltistan consist of 20 passes. These passes are Mintaka pass, Kilik pass, Shandor pass, Babosar pass, Burzil pass, Darkot pass, Baraghil pass, and Karambar pass. All passes have their importance but the most important pass is the Mintaka pass which divides the Chinese province from Gilgit Baltistan. Gilgit Baltistan is also known for its charm and beautiful valleys and tourism points in Pakistan. At present time all tourism points are called national parks of Pakistan (Wolf, 2016). Pakistan earns millions of dollars from these tourist points and beautiful valleys of Gilgit Baltistan. These are Shandur valley, Astore valley, Dowsai, Skardu valley, Shangrilla, Kutwal valley, Naltur valley and Gojal valley. All valleys also have beautiful natural lakes like Kutwal Lake, Naltur Lake, Shangrilla Lake, SadPara Lake, etc. (Kapoot, 2022)

Geo-economics importance of Gilgit Baltistan

The study looked at China-Pakistan ties after the CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) increased the relevance of the GB on a regional and global scale. Furthermore, following the CPEC agreement between China and Pakistan in 2013, India expressed reservations, while the US raised concerns about the project. Both India and the United States have been inconvenienced, which has changed the geopolitical dynamics of the world community. Residents, on the other hand, express reservations because they believe they are not represented and are being left out of the CPEC's socioeconomic benefits. Furthermore, the CPEC is a critical gateway for China's worldwide progress, and she has essay and chip sets ranging from excess to South Asia, Europe, and the rest of the world are all covered. (AMAN, Nazim, 2021).

(Zain, Umar Farooq, 2010) investigated Gilgit Baltistan's sociopolitical situation. According to the research, the socio-political and economic dynamic is extremely sensitive, and it is a source of tension between India and Pakistan.

Furthermore, India and Pakistan have fought four wars and there is a constant state of war along the border. On the other hand, China's interest is being heard, as this is the safest, cheapest, and easiest link to the international market from a strategic standpoint. This is also an empirical study of China's influence and how the new strategic and defiance relationship between India and the United States has influenced Chinese expansion and worldwide and regional geopolitical dynamics in the twenty-first century. The Karakorum Highway was recently expanded, and a new contract for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a multi-billion dollar project. In this undertaking Pakistan and China share ownership. The project is critical for China's strategic excess in the warm water, the United Arab Emirates, the European Union, and other parts of the world. The One Belt and One Road Initiative is another name for CPEC (hussain, 2017).

Silk route and One Belt One road

Interaction between people is as old as human history. Aristotle said in his Greek philosophy & quote; that men without social interaction a social animals; which Means without interaction men cannot achieve their Socio-Economics and political goals. Hence men should interact with each other to achieve their purposes. Men use trading, traveling, and sharing of ideas as a tool to achieve their Socio-Economics and political purposes. E.g. exchange of goods with their neighboring countries in human history is an example for countries to make their foreign relations. The ancient Silk Route was a path for regional and other big powers to make Socio-Economics and political interactions with each other. Today this ancient silk route is in its practical form in the form of one belt one road (OBOR). One Belt One Road is a rebuilding of the ancient Silk Route. Which also represents early trade and trade routes since the 200-year-old Han dynasty. This ancient silk route connects the whole of South Asia and other states of the world. (Summar Iqbal Babar, 2022)

According to many researchers, China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) connects more than 70 countries around the world. India which is rising as the second-largest economy in this

region and 7th largest economy in the world wants to become part of One Belt One Road (OBOR). But India failed because of its hostile relations with China and Pakistan. This route shows the historical and practical importance of Gilgit Baltistan under the geographical importance of Karakorum and Himalayan mountain and their passes. The Karakorum and Himalayan mountain passes tell us about the interactions of Chinese civilization with Indian civilization and Buddhist civilization. In the 15th this route was declined but in 1960 Pakistan and China decided to rebuild this route. Finally, both states started to construct the Karakorum highway. Today we can see it in terms of one belt one road OBOR (Swain, 2009).

One Belt One Road is also called the modern Silk Route and a new period of globalization. One Belt one road binds China with Asia, Africa, and Europe. Both Pakistan and China combine work in one Belt and one Road to boost their economy. Both states have the opportunity to connect world states through roads, railways, highways, airports, and corridors. One of the big purposes of One Belt One Road is to make the interaction of China, Asia, Africa, and European states. One Belt One Road OBOR is not only purpose to make highways, roads, and ports but it consists of many plans/projects including routes, ports, highways, oil and gas lines, railways, hospitals, educational developments, economic coordination, and collaboration as well. Because of One Belt One Road United States of America considers China as an economic threat to the USA. China strategically expands its economic dominancy through this route (hussain, 2017)

Gilgit Baltistan: Geo- political, and strategic interest of different actors

Gilgit Baltistan is now a day a fatherland between rising powers. This region is also known as a primitive trading region. The Silk Route is the best example of the earliest trading. Today this region plays a great role in the context of one belt one road (OBOR). Pakistan and India see this region with Geo-strategic and economic lenses. Pakistan said that Gilgit Baltistan is the jugular vein (shah-rag) of Pakistan and on the other hand, India said that

Gilgit Baltistan is integral (Atutong) of India. Historically Gilgit Baltistan is gate way and chock point of South Asia. It means that Gilgit Baltistan keeps Geo-strategic and socio-economic and political interests for both regional and world emerging powers. However, the region has been disputed since 1947 and is undefined. Because of it, s nonautonomous status regional powers and their interests clash. Its non-autonomous status is also a question mark for China-Pakistan economic corridor (CPEC) and political relations between these two states, since conflict exists between India and Pakistan over the region. As we know the nature of conflict creates differences among states at regional and international levels. Therefore, this conflict should be resolved through peaceful co-existence, through negotiation for regional collaboration and coordination (Hussain A. , 2019).

China Interest:

Chinese interest in Gilgit Baltistan is as old as other regional and world power interests that have been ruled in the region including Russia and Britain. We have an example of an ancient silk route to understand the interest of China in the region. China nowadays invests its economy in Gilgit Baltistan for long-term policies. China wants to adopt economic-friendly policies in Gilgit Baltistan. China is bringing social and economic developments to Gilgit Baltistan. In particular, China is working on developing the infrastructure of the region for economic growth. Because one belt one road passes through this region. Economically One Belt One Road is very beneficial for both China and Pakistan. China keeps all kinds of social and economic interests in Gilgit Baltistan. And nature of the Chinese economic model is to expand the economy around the world. China is continuously working in one Belt one Road (OBOR) through railways, airports, highways, and corridors. Therefore, china also wants to see the constitutional status of Gilgit Baltistan (Ali, 2019).

Pakistan interest:

As we know Gilgit Baltistan has been a disputed and unconstitutional territory of Pakistan for 70

years. According to experts of international law Pakistan cant bring political changes in Gilgit-Baltistan. Because this issue is linked to the Kashmir issue. Its final solution is plebiscites under the United Nations resolution. Therefore, Pakistan does not make Gilgit Baltistan a fifth province of Pakistan. Pakistan has one final option to give autonomous status to the region but Pakistan doesnt want to give autonomous status to the region (Bhattacharya, 2020).

(Ali, 2019) In her book *Delusional State* argue that Pakistan delusionally rule in the region. Its said that Gilgit Baltistan is the Shah Rag of Pakistan and Atutong of India. They both states have the authority to give autonomous setup to the region (Kashmir-based setup). They do not give such a setup to the region and both states only enjoy their interest in the region. Region is strategically and economically important for both states. She again said Pakistan earns millions of dollars from the region of Gilgit Baltistan. This is the only region that provides natural resources and strategic locations e.g. tourism, the Silk Route, and water (Indus water and springs water). Today Pakistan is working on making dimer Bhasha dam. Pakistan can generate 50 thousand MW of electricity and in the future Pakistan can earn millions of dollars by water and electricity. (Aman Ullah, 2021) Pakistan can improve its economy through China Pakistan Economic Corridor CPEC and One Belt One Road OBOR. Because CPEC and OBOR provide a lot of economic and job opportunities to Pakistani people.

Indian Interest:

India claims on this region on the basis of the Kashmir conflict and instrument of accession. Today India and its Allies fought proxies in the region. As we know there are two big regional powers in the region. One power is China which is the existing/superpower of the region and another power is India which is the rising power of the region. India wants to contain Chinese dominance in the region and international level. India works with the USA to counter Chinese dominance in the region. We can analyze this by some Chinese-centric policies of India. But China wants to make India a part of CPEC. The Kashmir conflict is an old conflict between India

and Pakistan. They both states have fought two wars in the region to achieve their political purposes. Therefore, china wants to resolve this conflict and wants a provincial setup for the reason that China needs peace in the region. Chinas stance regarding the issue is that if this issue will not be resolved through peaceful co-existence among conflict states then distances will create at the regional level. Pakistan and China get economic benefits from the geography of Gilgit Baltistan. Why India is not doing so? It should be clear that India also gets economic benefits from the Gilgit Baltistan (Ladakh) region. According to some researchers, India cannot easily enjoy the economic opportunities of CPEC and OBOR. As both China and India have had a big territorial dispute since the Sino-Indian War of 1962. Pak-Sino relations are another issue for India hence suspiciously keeping their interest in the region, especially in terms of one belt and one road OBOR (Summar Iqbal Babar, 2022).

USA and their Allies Concern:

The United States of America has a big economic interest in Asia especially in the context of countering Chinese expansion. America sees China as the fastest economic growth in this region, perhaps the economic and strategic developments as a threat to American dominancy. The USA has signed many agreements with its allies to contain China in the Indian Pacific and South China Sea. During the Obama period, the US and its allies were busy with economic and military strategies to counter Chinese economic expansion in the region, especially in the South China Sea and the Indian Pacific. According to US defense and US policymakers, One Belt One Road is an illegal development. Moreover, the USA said Gilgit Baltistan is a disputed territory between India and Pakistan and the USA also supports India against this issue. The US is worried about Chinese developments (OBOR) in Gilgit Baltistan. E.g. China invests her economy in the Hydro project, KKH, and Dimer Bhasha Dam in the region. America has only some regions of Asia to counter China in Gilgit Baltistan, in the South China Sea, and in the Indian Pacific. Today its one of the big debates for international

relations students to analyze US-China relations in the term of Thucydides Trap. Through, China can displace America from global dominancy through One Belt and One Road. China shares 12 borders with different states and China has hostile relations with most states e.g. Japan, India, Taiwan, etc. China has only a region and strategy route to connect its trade with regional and world states through the Silk Route. Therefore, China is making peaceful policies for its rising economic growth. (Dad, 2017).

Kashmir interest:

It is said that the whole of Jammu, Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan keeps Geo-strategic importance not of the Geo-strategic location of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh but its Geo-strategic importance is because of the geographical location of Gilgit Baltistan. Furthermore this region is the gateway of the ancient silk route and one belt one road for regional and world trade. Major Brown in his book *Where Three Empires Meet* argues, that Kashmir is called Northern Guard and Gilgit Baltistan should be called her father/check post. (Brown 1905). These are some reasons that's why Kashmir keeps its interest in Gilgit Baltistan. Kashmir doesn't want to see Gilgit Baltistan the 5th province of Pakistan. When Pakistan wanted to make Gilgit Baltistan a fifth province of Pakistan, Kashmiri came on the road for protest with the slogan of "Gilgit soba nahi banay ga" (Gilgit won't become a province). According to many people, Kashmiri wants to become a separate nation by combining Gilgit Baltistan and Indian-occupied Kashmir. The Ladakh region is also historically a part of Kashmir, both territories combine make a separate nation under UN resolution and cultural values. In addition to, Gilgit Baltistan is historically a different nation with different languages. It is a part of the Kashmir issue but it could not be a part of Kashmir nation. Here it's necessary to understand Kashmir's stance and UN resolution regarding the issue. Kashmiris don't want to see Gilgit Baltistan as a fifth province of Pakistan, India, or a separate nation. They openly say that Gilgit Baltistan is part of Kashmir. According to UN resolution and state-subject rule, one state or any ruling body does not have the right to rule in

the region of Gilgit Baltistan and only local peoples of the region have the right to rule in Gilgit Baltistan. After the plebiscite under the UN resolution people of the region will decide sovereignty of the region (Ali, 2019).

RECOMMENDATION

1. As we know the Kashmir issue is a very big issue for both India and Pakistan, it should be resolved through dialogues. People of the region are suffering for 70 years. Both states are nuclear states and the issue can create a big war between these two nuclear states. If both countries resolve this issue it would be best for both states to focus on Socio-economic development and socio-economic importance is necessary as compared to other factors.
2. Gilgit Baltistan is the gateway to South Asia, Chinese ancient silk route to South Asian states shows the historical importance of Gilgit Baltistan, and thus three big regional nuclear powers and states keep their interest in the region to achieve their socio-economic and political goals. This region is one of the playgrounds for regional and international states. Hence States should give a UAE-like setup to the region for collective good.
3. Tourism is one of the big segments in the economy of the local people especially people who get money from tourism Points, but because of the underdevelopment condition, the people of the region are suffering. State and world community should focus on basic facilities to the region.
4. Gilgit Baltistan is considered as a mountainous region in the world and neighbor with Kashmir, Ladakh, China, Tibet, Afghanistan, Russia, India and Tajikistan. Karakorum Highway (KKH) connects the region with Pakistan only. For regional prosperity states should make roads with other neighboring regions.
5. Gilgit Baltistan is only a region of Pakistan where three regional and

nuclear states meet with clash of their interest. As we know that the sum result of the clash is zero in the context of game theory. Therefore, regional states should accommodate this conflict for South Asian socio-economic prosperity.

Conclusion

Geo-strategy is the study of geopolitics, also considered a branch of foreign policy rooted in geographical factors. Therefore, Geo-strategy maintains a significant relationship with geography. Some scholars have pointed out that many geographers are also Geo-strategists, and many strategists have a background in geography. It is widely recognized that geography plays a fundamental role in shaping a country's foreign relations, as it influences the strategic choices nations make. The geographical and strategic location of Gilgit Baltistan bestows upon it immense Geo-strategic importance on both regional and international scales. Situated as a disputed territory of Pakistan, it lies between India, Pakistan, and China, covering an area of 72,971 square kilometers (28,174 square miles) and housing a population of over two million people. Gilgit Baltistan serves as a crucial gateway to South Asia, connecting the Chinese economy with regional and international states, as it shares strategic borders with Pakistan, India, China, and Kashmir.

Gilgit Baltistan is considered a Geo-Strategic ally due to its vital strategic passes, including Barbour Pass, Bichar Pass, Burji Pass, and Barzil Pass. Moreover, this region of Pakistan is rich in natural resources, often considered one of the world's largest markets for such resources. These natural assets encompass water resources, minerals, mountains, peaks, tourist destinations, and forests. Notably, Gilgit Baltistan is home to the world's largest glaciers, with the Siachen glaciers ranking as the second largest globally. It is estimated that these glaciers have the potential to generate up to fifty thousand megawatts of electricity for the region. Gilgit Baltistan holds significant Geo-strategic importance globally, primarily due to its historical association with the Silk Route and its modern identity as the One Belt One Road

(OBOR). These routes facilitate connectivity between China and Pakistan, making Gilgit Baltistan a crucial junction. The region's uniqueness lies in the convergence of three major mountain ranges, namely the Karakorum, Himalaya, and Hindukush, making it historically and geographically significant.

The historical roots of Gilgit Baltistan can be traced through rock carvings and the ancient Silk Route. These historical remnants reveal a rich two-thousand-year-old history, which has attracted numerous traders and invaders, each pursuing their socio-economic and political objectives. Over the centuries, the region has been under the control of various empires, including Indian, Chinese, and Central Asian. Local rulers held sway during the 17th and 18th centuries, while the British took control during the colonial period. The British leased the region for sixty years to curb Russian expansion. The events of 1947 ushered in significant changes in the entire subcontinent, as India and Pakistan gained independence from the British Empire, giving princely states the choice to join either side or become independent. Consequently, the entire Jammu and Kashmir region, including Gilgit Baltistan, remained disputed. In 1963, Pakistan and China signed a border agreement to enhance their socio-economic and political relations, eventually leading to the reconstruction of the ancient Silk Route under the One Belt One Road Initiative. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a vital component of OBOR, strengthens economic connectivity between China and Pakistan through the Karakoram Highway (KKH), encompassing highways, ports, trains, railways, and corridors.

Given its Geo-Strategic location, Gilgit Baltistan serves as the gateway to South Asia, facilitating socio-economic and strategic connectivity between South Asian nations and the rest of the world. This strategic importance has drawn the attention of three nuclear-armed nations and other global powers. India and the USA seek to protect their interests in the region, working to garner international support in containing Chinese dominance. In contrast, China employs various Geo-strategic and political tools to bolster its economy through the

One Belt One Road initiative. Consequently, the international community has recognized this region as a global marketplace.

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