

## **POK: Geo-Political and Strategic Importance for the bordering Countries**

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### **Abstract:**

China and Pakistan are continuously coming closer in various sectors of mutual co-operation and have entered into Geo- strategic and military coalition too. This all development becoming possible because of Pak- Occupied Kashmir- a landmass connecting Pakistan with China's territory directly. Recently a new coin has been added to this series of increasing mutual co-operation when in November 2016, Kakoram Highway, a part of China Pakistan economic corridor, made operational. This project connects Gwadar port of Pakistan with China's town Kashgarh. Though this 3000 Km long network of Rail, Road and Pipelines is apparently an economic project but substantially it has number of other implications including much concerns for India, which the following article articulates.

### **Research Methodology**

Article is an informative as well as intrinsic in nature, thus it includes descriptive and analytical approach of study. Various facts and incidents analyzed and different possibilities have been enquired and synthesized into the article.

### **Purpose of the Study**

1. To enable reader understand the importance of an underestimated landmass of Pak- Occupied Kashmir.
2. To understand actual nature of China- Pak economic corridor and its resulting concerns for India.

China in November 2016 has partially operationalized a road corridor in the Karakoram Range of Pak- Occupied Kashmir named Karakoram Highway – a part of broader Rail-Road project of China in the region- the China - Pakistan Economic Corridor connecting China's Kashgar town of Xinjiang province with Gwadar port of Pakistan in Arabian Sea. A 15 year project of US\$ 54 billion the China –Pakistan Economic Corridor is in turn regarded a part of China's ambitious One Belt One Road Initiative which China propagates as the revival of ancient Silk Rout. The 3000 KM long China Pakistan Economic Corridor consisting of highways, railways and pipelines is the project which aims at rapidly expanding and upgrading Pakistan's infrastructure and strengthening the economic ties between China and Pakistan is turning the latest cause of concern and irritation for India in the region.<sup>[1]</sup>Increasing co-operation and partnership between China and Pakistan in recent years and development of railroad and pipeline network in the region of Pak Occupied Kashmir has attracted lot of attention worldwide also outlined its geo-political and strategic importance in the region.

Kashmir was a princely state in the British colonial India before 1947 when India and Pakistan got independence from the British rule but princely states were given choice by the British government to either accede to India or to Pakistan or remain separate and independent of both. Raja Hari Singh the then ruler of Kashmir decided to be independent and establish a separate nation out of Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan did not accept its independent position and to capture the land sent its armed troops in the form of Tribal militant who speedily forwarded and seized one third of the land unless the ruler approached to India for security and acceded to India. The invasion of Kashmir by Pathan Tribesmen and Pakistani troops and persuasion of its popular leader, Seikh Abdollah, the state of Jammu and Kashmir acceded to India.<sup>[2]</sup> Indian troops in a quick response checked and started pushing back the advancement of Pakistani troops but political interference and International pressure did not let the army settle the issue permanently and actual ground position turned

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into the fate of the region and divided part could never be united since, leaving Pakistani control intact over the one third region of J&K now frequently known as Pak-Occupied Kashmir. Subsequently, POK is a part of state of Jammu & Kashmir that is India but illegally occupied and controlled by Pakistan since 1947.

Today, India on ground, controls only 60% of the area of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir- Jammu, Kashmir valley and Laddakh; Pakistan controls 30% of the region- Gilgit, Baltistan and Azad Kashmir and China occupies 10% of the state- Aksai Chin and Trans Karakoram Tract. Actually, The Karakoram range or Trans Karakoram Tract wherein the four lane roads being developed by China fall in Pak-Occupied Kashmir- legally an Indian territory captured by Pakistan in 1947 and apparently ceded to China after an agreement in 1963.<sup>[3]</sup> Whole region of POK comprises of Azad Kashmir which is 13297 KM<sup>2</sup>, Gilgit- Baltistan region of 73000 KM<sup>2</sup> and Karakoram range which extends 9900 KM<sup>2</sup>, thus has total area of 96197 Km<sup>2</sup> approximately.<sup>[4]</sup> The hilly landmass mostly of lower Himalayan region is of immense strategic value for India also attracts a much Geo-political and security implications due to recent aforesaid development in the region, the region shares its border with Indian administered Kashmir to east, Khaiber-Pakhtunkhwa pass and Afghanistan to west, China's eastern Uighur (Xinjiang province) to north and Punjab province of Pakistan to its south which makes the region strategically much crucial and important for not only India but equally for Pakistan and China even Afghanistan and Central Asian countries in many ways-

The region being occupied and controlled by Pak has grave and deep negative implications for India which affect India's strategic interests may make them vulnerable anytime in future. Despite being an Indian territory the region is under Pakistani control since its illegal capture in 1947. The region bears lower Himalayan hills which make it not only beautiful by the aesthetic point of view and imbued big possibility of tourism, but by the military point of view it is much difficult to pass through from the east that from Indian side and provides easy access from west thus help Pakistani militant and terrorists to intrude and enter into Indian land. Hills and valleys one side help militants to hide themselves, escape security watchdog and enter into India secretly and on the second side, tough terrain and harsh climatic conditions hampers security surveillance and search operation against these intruders. POK by being an Indian territory would provide India a huge geo-strategic advantage in the sector as the region opens in the plain to the west- Pakistani Punjab.

POK shares its a little boundary with Afghanistan which would facilitate India to connect Afghanistan directly via road and help India to play a more decisive role in Afghanistan and its issues which India is deprived of. Simultaneously, the region is very close to central Asian countries - Tajikistan and others rich in natural gas and fissile material. Also, close geographical relations would help India in balancing China's growing influence in the region.

China Pakistan Economic Corridor project took reality because of the region of Pak-Occupied Kashmir that starts at Kashgar in China spans Pakistan and connects Gwadar port town of Pakistan situated at the coast of Arabian Sea. Under the project number of roads, railways and pipelines to be constructed running from Gwadar to Kashgarh, providing massive investment opportunities in Pakistan for several years to come. Besides the potential for growth, power and jobs, Pakistan also expects the CPEC to bind it in an even tighter embrace with close friend China, giving it greater strategic leverage with India,<sup>[5]</sup> all credit goes to POK. POK is the only land piece that connects China and Pakistan with each other thus facilitating Rail-road connection between both. Pakistani control over the region has opened a channel gate for Pakistan as well as China to connect in between and share their borders on the ground and make a nexus against India supposed to pose a grave security concern for India in days to come, along with China's direct access to Arabian sea and an alternative route to reach Indian ocean and oil rich Arab countries. China by possessing Gwadar port now, would be able to keep an close eyes on Indian Navy and its activity in Arabian sea, may pose serious security concerns for India too as it had deployed some nuclear submarines near the port at Gwadar recently. Gwadar lies close to the Strait of Hormuz, a key oil shipping lane. It could open up an energy and trade corridor from the gulf across Pakistan to western China that could also be used by the Chinese Navy. The CPEC will give

China land access to the Indian Ocean, cutting the nearly 13000 KM sea voyage from Tianjin to the Persian Gulf through the strait of Malacca and around India, to a mere 2000 KM road journey from Kashgarh to Gwather.<sup>[6]</sup>

Pak- China nexus, weak strategic position in Afghanistan and hard access to central countries are the side-effects of Indian inertia in taking POK back during the war in the past otherwise China and Pakistan would remain separate geographically and it won't be feasible for China to have direct access to Arabian sea nor for Pakistan to find easy shelter of emerging super power like China. POK has been proved to be a bridge for both the countries of different region- central and East Asia and south-Asia gradually to come together and establish a deep relation. Growing economic, diplomatic, strategic and defense partnership which may turn against the common rival of both-India, is of great concern for India as both China and Pakistan have always shown extremely hostile approach towards India. This makes Indian borders unsafe from north as well as west together.

Though CPEC is an economic project of bilateral cooperation but it engulfs deep strategic and geo-political possibilities as China by investing a lot will become obliged to guarantee the security of the construction under the project means territorial security of Pakistan behind the curtain thus encouraging Pakistan for further mischiefs.

Controlling Pak-Occupied Kashmir, China can keep India on back foot on one way and can easily exploit possibilities of energy resource transportation from oil rich Gulf-region. Thirdly it can tackle down Uighur Islamic separatist movement in the eastern part of Xinjiang province as China can keep check on any economic and military assistance or any encouragement to Uighur Islamist possibly provided by Afghan Taliban or Pakistani Islamic terrorists. POK is proving a land of great possibilities for China in the Geo-political equations of the region wherefrom it can have nearby access India, Pakistan and Afghanistan- all at the feet. Pakistan has already ceded the northern part of POK to China where it has developed a military base watching Indian military and its activity in Siachin and Dras sector. POK, on the other side, is equally valuable for Pakistan too as it allows Pakistan to bear better position as compared to India at the Line of Control in J&K. Most importantly the region has opened the door of hopes and possibilities for both China and Pakistan for mutual economic, strategic and defense cooperation leaving India into the mist of uncertainty, pressure and danger.

One Historical mistake and low political will and esteem to correct this as early as possible in the past left India now in trouble. Though, presently there is little space that India can do about the development in the POK, as reality in the present can't be denied and any attempt to gain control over POK may harm India even beyond the expectation. Still, India's non-endorsement and indifference toward the region will be appeared as a short-sighted thinking.

#### **References:-**

1. Insightsonindia- February 02, 2017
2. Chandra Bipin, India Since Independence: pg 416
3. Googleweblight.com
4. Ibid.
5. Insightsonindia- February 02, 2017
6. Ibid.