

Sharing Ideas at The Elliot School of International Affairs of The George Washington University, Washington D.C.

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Development and Displacement in Pakistan controlled Gilgit-Baltistan

Location; area, population; demography, ethnic and linguistic groups

76, 000 square kilometers almost equal to South Carolina

Around two million people call it their home

Tajiks, Dardic, Burushu and Tibetans

Farming, tourism, gem trading are main sources of income



Development in context of Gilgit-Baltistan:

Micro-level development: Bottom up approach mostly led by NGOs like Aga Khan Foundation, decision making at grassroots level, aimed at capacity building to sustain livelihoods at the local level

Women village organization meeting – knowledge sharing and skill building



Macro-level Development: Top down approach; Governments and corporations leading the development projects with marginal or no role for the locals in decision making – benefits in the larger context often come at the long term and area specific sacrifices by the natives

How Do Chinese and other foreign corporations engage in Gilgit-Baltistan

China's interests mainly pertain to large scale strategic and economic projects. Locals have no role in planning, policy formulation, execution and benefit distributionthe sectors that the Chinese engage in are:

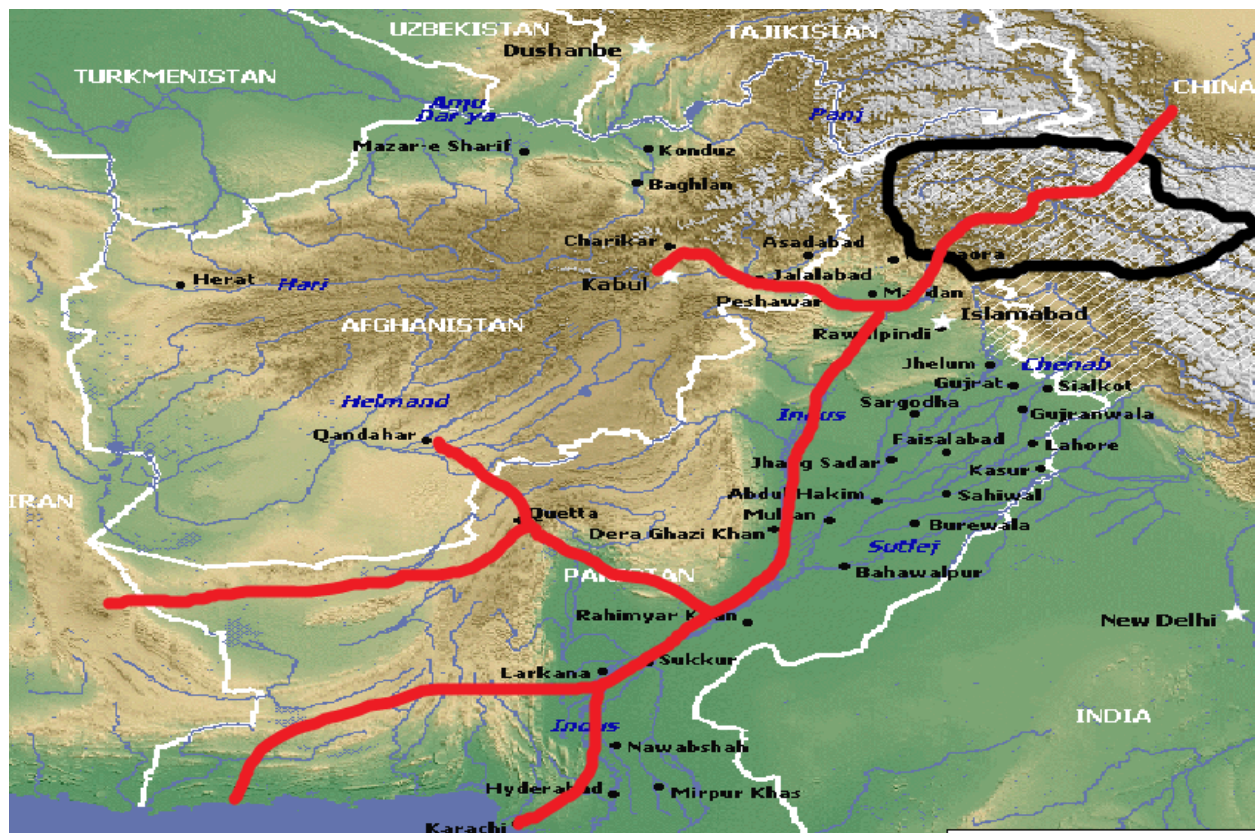
Building trade and transit routes and tunnels

Dams / Energy sector

Mining – Uranium, gold, copper and other elements

Future plans: Rail track, gas and oil pipeline

Transit and trade routes enabling China to access Pakistani ports, Africa, Iran and Afghanistan



Dams: Why Gilgit-Baltistan?

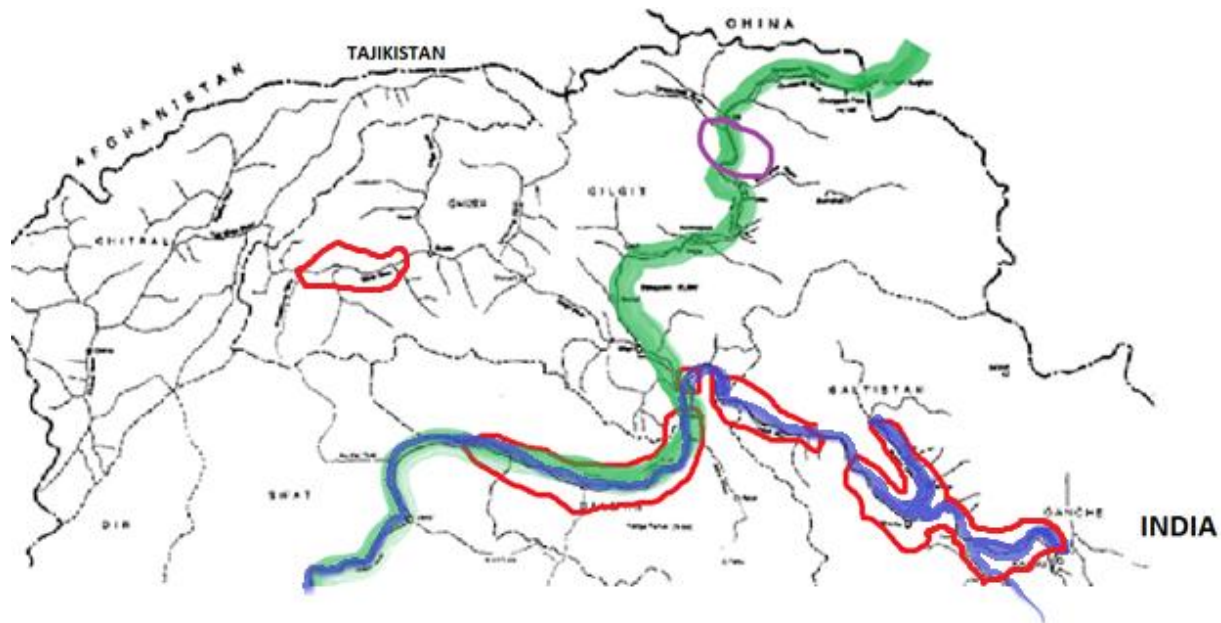
Gilgit-Baltistan, almost same size that of South Carolina, is called the water tank of Pakistan: More than 106 mountains over 7,000 meters (21,000 feet), and the longest glaciers outside the polar regions found here....three famous mountain ranges; Himalayas, Karakoram and Hindukush converge near where three mega dams are being built

Indus, a primary source of water for Pakistan, flows through Gilgit-Baltistan

Rivers of Gilgit-Baltistan have the potential to generate more than 30,000 MW of electricity

Dams under construction and consideration will inundate densely populated valleys

Diamer Dam, highest at this elevation anywhere in the world, 100 mile long, constructed in a highly volatile seismic zone



Sadpara Dam; overlooking Skardo town with over 100,000 population. Local journalists and activists continue protest against the faulty design and material use, which could lead to a burst affecting the inhabitants of Skardo valley

Chinese are aggressively acquiring mining sites – Gilgit-Baltistan is rich in uranium, gold, copper, gems and other metals and minerals



Local Resistance:

Despite local protest, Chinese continue mineral extraction although claim to harvest sand

Locals fear losing control over their resources and other means of livelihood; no role in decision making and lease grant takes place in Islamabad

While Chinese and other foreign companies receive instant access to mineral sites, native mining companies await for similar considerations since 2000

GBGMMA led protests in different valleys of Gilgit-Baltistan in 2011

All political parties united to protest Mohsin Industries in Shigar valley

PYF – Babajan Hunzai – resisted such excesses in Hunza and surrounding areas

Balawaristan National Front led protests in different valleys of Gilgit-Baltistan especially Ghizer as well as in Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi

People of Diamer district resisting construction of the dam – complain about land compensation, royalty and resettlement policies

Three people killed and 41 injured this spring in Chilas when Pakistani security forces shot at the protestors who oppose construction of dam in their valley

People in Ghizer ousted the Chinese miners. One person killed in 2008 during the clashes with security forces

People blame the foreign companies for extracting uranium and smuggling with no monetary benefits to natives

Politicians in Darel Tangir like Haji Gulbar oppose licensing process, where foreign companies have been awarded mining sites without consent from natives

Gilgit-Baltistan Graduate Association protested discriminatory hiring policy by foreign companies including the Chinese Mohsin Industries

GBGMMA protested against discriminatory licensing policy of Islamabad where more than 200 local companies continue to wait for licenses which are now awarded to foreign companies

Foreign companies also given tax break

Local political parties oppose such excesses but Islamabad continues with its apartheid policy

All members of Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly passed resolution opposing discriminatory mining policy but licensing process continues with support of federal government



Locals in Shigar protest presence of Chinese companies



What else do the locals fear?

In addition to loss of control over resources, they fear that displacement will lead to death of culture, loss of language base and national identity

Some of the most archaic forms of modern languages spoken in Gilgit-Baltistan, guarded and preserved by the tall mountains for centuries, now under immediate threat due to demographic change and destructive government cultural policies

Petroglyphs – more than 50,000 such specimens will submerge in the Diamer dam lake





Given that most of the natives are poor, illiterate, lacking modern skills and facing language barrier, they will find it hard to compete with others for jobs in their new adopted settlements

Ethnic and religious conflicts could emerge due to short sighted resettlement policies

Type of displacements that can occur due to mega projects

Immediate displacement:

Dams

Farmland, pastures, irrigation network lost to miners who use explosives harming the glacial base

Farmland lost to road infrastructure, which cannot be replaced, leads to loss of farm based livelihood

Long term displacement:

Glaciers in Hunza, Nagar and Shigar prone to rapid melting as rail, expressway, oil and gas pipelines and tunnels will continue to emerge over time in these mountain ranges. Area covering Karakoram mountain range needs special attention as being declared the youngest and most fragile ecosystem in Asia

Dams help increase humidity level causing more rain and glacial melt, which then causes GLOFs to burst leading to landslides and avalanches – lack of forest cover in Gilgit-Baltistan makes it even worse

Ataabad Lake case: Eight villages destroyed, 22 dead, livestock perished, thousands became IDPs in 2010

Government has failed to compensate and resettle the IDPs





Land and soil erosion due to floods owing to increased ice melting; which hurt habitats as well as farmland

Flashflood in Gilgit-Baltistan 2010 – causing both short and long term displacement



Water pollution and associated health risks forcing people to migrate

Seismic activity: Dams built in areas like Bonji, Haramosh, Raikot and Diamer where three mountain ranges converge...continued rock shift, sliding and tremors

In 2005, people of Astore had to live in makeshift tents even during the winters as periodic tremors and aftershocks continued for several months

Perpetual unnatural glacial loss would lead to loss of irrigation resource hurting farming sector which will eventually force farmers to either take daily wage labor and other un-skilled temporary jobs or migrate to urban parts of Pakistan – permanent demographic change

Wildlife displaced – Chinese working in and around Khunjerab National Park – habitat loss and direct threats to wildlife

Extension of Sadpara dam diverting water from Shiv-thung River will hurt wildlife and its habitat in Deosai national park

Migration to Gilgit-Baltistan:

New job opportunities associated with dam building, trans-national trade, urbanization and industrial development will encourage skilled and resourceful outsiders including Chinese and Pakistanis to immigrate to Gilgit-Baltistan.

Pakistan abrogated State Subject Rule in 1974 to help enhance systematic but illegal settlements in Gilgit-Baltistan

Demographic change occurring at twice the rate; involving both displacement of natives out of Gilgit-Baltistan and arrival of skilled and resourceful Pakistanis to Gilgit-Baltistan

Gilgit-Baltistan moving towards a model of development which will convert natives into a minority in their own homeland and denies control over their political, judicial and economic institutions