STUDY NOTES · BASIC CONCEPT

What is the Shaksgam valley issue between India and China-Pakistan?

International Relations

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The Shaksgam Valley (also known as the Trans-Karakoram Tract) is a high-altitude, strategically sensitive region of approximately 5,180–5,200 sq km in the eastern Karakoram range. It is currently administered by China as part of its Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region but is a long-standing territorial dispute involving India, Pakistan, and China.

Location and Geography

- Lies north of the Karakoram watershed.
- Borders China's Xinjiang to the north, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK/Gilgit-Baltistan) to the south and west, and the Siachen Glacier region (under Indian control) to the east.
- Extremely remote, rugged, sparsely populated, and harsh climate — making it difficult for habitation but valuable for military/logistics due to proximity to key passes and glaciers.

Core of the Dispute

- India's Position: The valley is an integral part of Indian territory (part of Jammu & Kashmir/Ladakh). India has never recognized any transfer or cession of the area.
- Pakistan's Role: After the 1947–48 India-Pakistan war, Pakistan occupied parts of J&K, including this tract. In March 1963, Pakistan signed the Sino-Pakistan Boundary Agreement with China, ceding the Shaksgam Valley (and related areas like parts of the Yarkand River) to Beijing to settle their border and gain favor amid post-1962 India-China war tensions.India views this as illegal and invalid — Pakistan had no sovereign right to cede territory that legally belongs to India (per J&K's 1947 accession).
- The 1963 agreement includes a clause (Article 6) stating that after Kashmir's resolution between India and Pakistan, the "sovereign authority" would renegotiate with China for a formal treaty — implying the cession was provisional.
- China's Position: Beijing claims the valley as its sovereign territory based on the 1963 agreement and "historical"/actual control. It defends infrastructure projects (e.g., roads under CPEC) as legitimate on its land.

Why It Matters Strategically?

- Proximity to Siachen Glacier (world's highest battlefield, Indian control) allows potential monitoring/encroachment on Indian positions.
- Part of broader India-China border tensions (e.g., LAC disputes post-2020 Galwan).
- Enables China-Pakistan "sandwiching" of Indian territory via CPEC routes (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor), raising encirclement concerns.
- Valuable for military logistics, rare earths/minerals, and emerging Arctic-like shipping routes due to climate change.

India (MEA on Jan 9, Army Chief Gen Upendra Dwivedi on Jan 13, Ladakh LG Kavinder Gupta) strongly reiterated: The 1963 pact is illegal; Shaksgam is Indian territory; any activity (e.g., ~75 km all-weather road construction under CPEC) is disapproved; India reserves the right to take "necessary measures."
China (Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning on Jan 12): Reaffirmed the area as Chinese territory; infrastructure is "beyond reproach" and justified for development; CPEC/1963 agreement doesn't affect its Kashmir stance (which it calls bilateral between India-Pakistan).
This exchange highlights ongoing friction despite partial LAC disengagement progress elsewhere. India consistently protests alterations to the status quo and views CPEC through disputed territory as a violation of sovereignty.

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