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SPECIAL REPORT

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Conflict Dynamics in Gilgit-Baltistan

Summary

- Gilgit-Baltistan, a historically distinct political entity near the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir, is located at the junction of China, Central and South Asia, and Afghanistan.
- Ideally situated for trade and commerce, its geography also makes it vulnerable to spillover of conflicts from active militant movements in surrounding areas.
- Pakistan is home to the largest concentration of Shia Muslims outside Iran, and Gilgit-Baltistan is the only Shia-majority region in the Sunni-majority country.
- Tensions between Shia and Sunni communities have increased since the 1980s, especially after the construction of the Karakoram Highway, which connects this previously isolated region with China and mainland Pakistan.
- The first serious sectarian violence in Gilgit broke out in 1983. In 1988, a rumor alleging a Sunni massacre at the hands of Shias resulted in an attack by thousands of armed tribesmen from the south, the killing of nearly four hundred Shias, and the burning of several Shia villages.
- In 2012, sectarian violence surged again, triggered by a quick succession of well-organized killings targeting Shia travelers on the two routes that connect Gilgit-Baltistan with Islamabad but including others. As many as sixty have been killed. The ensuing retaliatory killings in Gilgit town and suburbs, by armed militants on both sides, have added to the carnage and fear.
- A peaceful Gilgit-Baltistan is essential for regional stability and development.
- One possible way forward to reduce the conflict and counter growing militancy in the wider region is to strengthen governance systems and processes to establish inclusive policies for equitable development and redress long-held grievances.

Introduction

Gilgit-Baltistan, previously known as the Northern Areas, is part of a larger conflict-ridden region of Jammu and Kashmir, which has been disputed between India and Pakistan since

About the Report

This report explores sectarian conflict in the remote, mountainous Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan, which until recently was a relatively peaceful enclave in an otherwise volatile part of the world. It was commissioned by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), as part of its mandate to understand global conflicts in specific contexts.

About the Author

Izhar Hunzai, a native of Gilgit-Baltistan, has a background in community development in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Tajikistan, and Indonesia. Awarded a United States Agency for International Development scholarship, Hunzai received a master's degree in international development from Cornell University in 1990. Until recently, Hunzai was CEO of Aga Khan Rural Support Program, operating in Gilgit-Baltistan and the Chitral district of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province.

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their independence in 1947.[1] 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 covers 72,971 square kilometers. Its estimated population of 1.2 million includes four denominations of Islam—Shiite (39 percent),[2] Sunni (27 percent), Ismaili (18 percent), and Noorbakshi (16 percent)—and at least twenty-four ethnic and linguistic groups (see figure 1).[3]

On February 28, 2012, eighteen Shia pilgrims were openly killed on the Karakoram Highway in Kohistan district while returning from Iran.[4] Another attack killed twenty people at Chilas on April 3.[5] Yet another—again targeting Shia but also four Sunni who protested—killed twenty-two near Babusar Pass on August 16.[6] These events have jolted the communities in Gilgit-Baltistan, which have collectively condemned such killings and demanded decisive action from the government.

The brutality and impunity with which these crimes were committed have triggered wider sectarian tensions and hardened attitudes in Gilgit-Baltistan. The situation is tense, especially in Gilgit town, the main city in the province, where the violence and mutual insecurity has deepened sectarian fault lines. Gilgit town is now literally divided into "no-go" areas for the main Shia and Sunni communities, forcing people to use separate transportation, schools, and hospitals. Land travel between Gilgit-Baltistan and Islamabad has become extremely insecure for local travelers, traders, and tourists alike. It is estimated that the government has had to spend over 100 million Pakistani rupee (PKR) on the deployment of security forces alone over the last few months. The magnitude of losses accruing to socioeconomic spheres of life is huge. Trade of high-value horticultural crops, such as seed potatoes, cherries, and apricots (a mainstay of local economy), has been badly disrupted.[7]

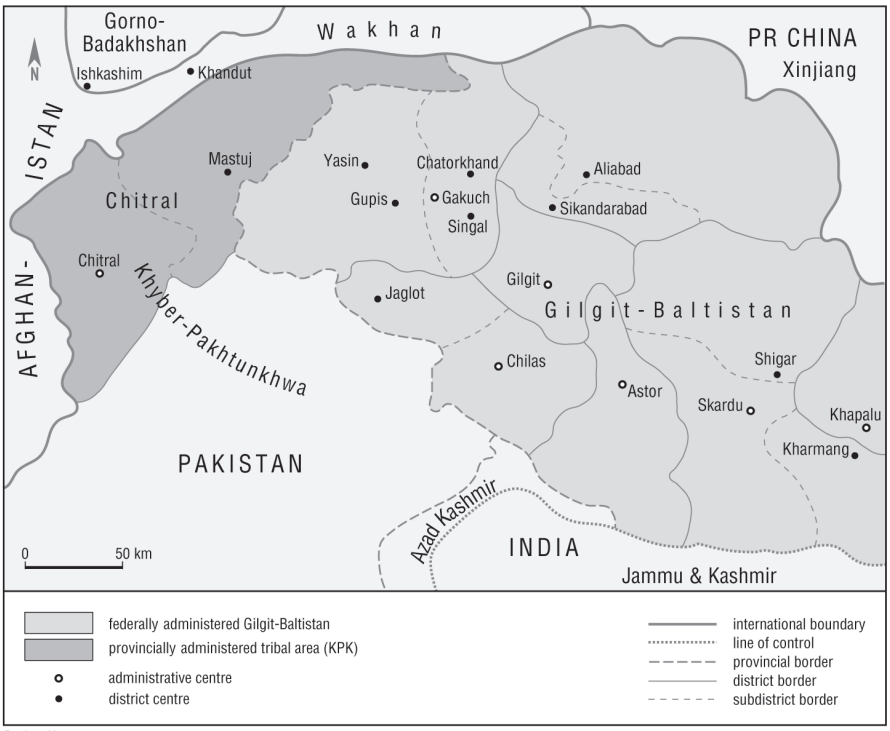
Religiously motivated violence is a recent phenomenon in Gilgit-Baltistan. It has its roots in demographic changes, limited space for political organization, and exposure to rising religious extremism in mainland Pakistan. The Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, the policy of lslamization under Pakistani military ruler General Zia-ul-Haq, and the Afghan jihad during the 1980s did not leave Gilgit-Baltistan untouched. The cumulative effect has been the introduction of an ideologically motivated outlook, now manifesting itself through sectarian turmoil.[8] The dynamics of the region are changing again—from the planned withdrawal of the American forces in Afghanistan, the nuclear stand-off in Iran, and the breakdown of the status quo in the Arab world—and the reverberations are being felt in Pakistan and, by extension, in Gilgit-Baltistan. When not fighting external proxy wars or being squeezed from outside, the rival militant organizations in Pakistan have tended to direct their wrath at each other, thus intensifying sectarian wars.[9] Given the sizeable Shia population in Gilgit-Baltistan, the province is perceived as a Shia fortress by the extremist Sunni organizations, making it a battleground for deadly sectarian attacks. The recent back-to-back sectarian killings appear to be the start of a new phase in the conflict.

This report attempts to understand the context and underlying causes of sectarian violence in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Background

The historical differences between the Sunni and Shia Muslims, who make up about 87 percent and 13 percent respectively of global Islam, can be traced back to the contested legitimacy of succession after the death of Prophet Mohammad, some fourteen hundred years ago. Since then, the schism has been reinforced by continuing rivalry and shifting political power between Sunni and Shia dynasties. Over the centuries, the Shia political power weakened considerably, forcing Shia Muslims to adapt to a subordinated position under Sunni-led empires.

Figure 1. Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral



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After the demise of the Ottoman Empire and subsequent decolonization, Shia communities became significant minorities in the newly created Arab states but remained numeric majorities in a few countries —such as Iraq, Kuwait, and Bahrain—where they continued to be ruled by minority Sunni rulers. Shia Islam endured in Safavid Iran, however, and bounced back after the Iranian revolution of 1979.

The gradual rise in sectarian tensions, which began in the early 1970s and escalated after the Iranian revolution and the Soviet-Afghan war, had to do with politics and competition for influence and power, notably between Iran and the Arab countries, led by Saudi Arabia. This competition contributed to a sharp rise in sectarian tensions in Pakistan and Afghanistan as both sides tried to use religion as an instrument of policy. Baathist Iraq's invasion of Iran and the ensuing war throughout the 1980s also played a role in this respect.[10]

Sunni-Shia Conflict in Pakistan

Before partition of the Indian subcontinent, the Sunni-Shia conflict remained mostly under the surface, limited to localized disputes during annual Muharram processions. All Muslim groups living in British India felt compelled to unite against the real or perceived excesses of the Hindu majority. After the creation of Pakistan, and with no Hindus or British rulers around to blame for the internal governance problems, Pakistani Muslims began to find fault with one another. The Ahmadiyya community was the first and easy target.[11] Its members were persecuted as heretics and officially declared non-Muslims in 1974 by Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, who did so to appease religious parties opposed to his government. Bhutto was subsequently deposed and hanged by the military dictator Zia-ul-Haq.

The growing intolerance for minority groups in Pakistan, which had begun in the 1970s, received full state support under General Zia-ul-Haq, who pushed Wahhabi-oriented Islamization[12] in the country. Islamization under General Zia-ul-Haq affected the judicial system, the penal code, economic activity, and educational policy. Two decisions, in particular, that

contributed to the rise of sectarianism were the imposition of religious taxes—*zakat* and *ushr*[13]—and the expansion and radicalization of orthodox-Sunni religious seminaries—the *madrassas*.[14]

To legitimize his rule, Zia imported strict sharia laws from Saudi Arabia, financed *madrassas*, and fronted for the American-sponsored jihad in Afghanistan against the Soviet occupation. His ideological successors in Pakistan replicated this model of holy war in Indian-controlled Kashmir in the 1990s, injecting jihad into a largely secular self-determination movement against Indian rule. Zia-ul-Haq is also blamed for throwing state support behind extremist groups in Pakistan, such as the anti-Shia Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP). In response to these policies, the pro-Shia Tehreek-e-Nafaz-e-Fiqah-e-Jafaria (TNFJ) came into existence. Another Shia militant group, the Sipah-e-Mohammed Pakistan (SMP), was formed in the early 1990s. On the other side of the aisle, in 1996, the SSP created an armed wing, the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), which was to become the most lethal anti-Shia outfit in Pakistan.[15]

Most of these groups were subsequently outlawed, but they have conveniently branched into stealth groups, making it more difficult to control them. Because of their active participation in state-sponsored proxy wars in Afghanistan and Kashmir, they have developed roots in religious political parties as well as in official organs of the state. Sectarian violence in Pakistan has intensified over the past three decades. Each group, led by its most extreme elements, is pursuing a policy of the other's annihilation; Sunni and Shia sectarian militant outfits now openly declare each other non-Muslim.[16]

In urban Pakistan, sectarian violence has mostly become a contest for body counts among rival sectarian death squads, which have claimed thousands of innocent lives over the years. Initially, the violence was restricted to targeted killings of sectarian leaders and activists. By the mid-1990s, however, worshippers in mosques and mourners in cemeteries were also added to the list of soft targets of sectarian gunmen, along with bureaucrats and businessmen, Iranian diplomats, engineers, and military cadets in major urban towns such as Rawalpindi, Lahore, Karachi, and Multan. By the start of the new millennium, doctors were also added—the militants believed that "a doctor presented a strategic target because of the publicity his killing generated."[17] These killings are in addition to the ongoing Taliban attacks on Hazara tribes in federally administered tribal areas (FATA) and roadside massacres of Shia pilgrims and passengers in Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan.

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The sectarianism nurtured by Zia-ul-Haq, and supported in part by funding from the United States and Saudi Arabia, now threatens Pakistan's existence. The sufferings brought about by radicalization of religion have taken a high toll on Pakistani society. The overwhelming majority of Pakistanis, weary of internal and external wars, are against all forms of violence. Sectarianism is no exception in that it lacks grassroots support, but the majority seems to have been silenced by both the absence of the state to back them and the power of the gun that threatens to take down all opposition.[18]

Nonetheless, sectarian violence cannot be wished away without addressing the underlying causes and contexts giving rise to it.[19] A long-term solution of Pakistan's sectarian and other religiously inspired violence within the country and beyond is cooperation among all stakeholders to resolve local and regional disputes. Policies of global coexistence must replace politics of power and intrigue.

Roots of Sectarian Conflict

Historically, the diverse communities of Gilgit-Baltistan have lived together in relative harmony.[20] Ethnic and tribal identities and social ties developed over centuries were valued more than sectarian affiliations. Local rulers generally followed secular policies in dealing

with their subjects[21] and built alliances with other royals and powerful families in the area through marriages and cultivating foster-family[22] relationships, regardless of their religious affiliations.

Religious tolerance was, and still is, characteristic of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan, given that the bulk of the population lives in rural areas where family ties, cooperation, and interdependence for managing common resources take precedence over religious identities. Moreover, Islam came to this area through Sufi saints, who preached tolerance and universality of human values. Even in the southern district of Diamer, which borders on the more conservative Kohistan district of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, music and dance were common, even among *madrassa* students, which remained benign until they were infiltrated by sectarian forces from outside the region.[23]

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Sectarian tension was limited to Gilgit town, with religious clerics shouting insults at each other from the opposite sect's mosques, and adrenaline-induced fights among the Shia and Sunni youth, especially during Muharram processions, which would be quickly brought under control by local elders. The first case of sectarian violence resulting in the loss of human life occurred in 1975, when the Shia Muharrum procession in Gilgit town was fired at from the Sunni mosque. The subsequent arrest of the Sunni *qazi* (religious leader) caused riots in the Sunni areas of the Indus valley, south of Gilgit, and its side valleys of Gor, Darel, and Tangir. Sunnis from these regions threatened to attack Gilgit.[24]

The next major clash took place in 1983, triggered by a dispute over the sighting of the moon—the timing to end the month-long fasting of Ramadan and start Eid festivities. Based on the declaration of moon sighting by their religious leaders, the Shia community ended fasting and started celebrations while the Sunni community was still fasting. The disagreement was significant because Muslims are forbidden to fast on the day of Eid. Tensions rose quickly and resulted in violent clashes in Gilgit town, killing two people and injuring several others.[25]

Since then, many internal and external factors have contributed to providing a fertile breeding ground for the rise of sectarian conflicts in Gilgit-Baltistan. Some of the internal factors include erosion of traditional culture, especially music and dance, the growing social and economic disparities, and unemployment among the youth. Internal rural to urban migration has also changed the demographic composition of Gilgit and other towns. The disputed status of Gilgit-Baltistan and prolonged direct rule from Islamabad has not only resulted in limited space for political participation and blunted institutional development, but also prevented development of local resources, such as hydropower and minerals. A bulging population and lack of employment opportunities also appear to be contributing to sectarian violence and crime. Among the external factors are an increased exposure to intolerant attitudes from the mainland Pakistan, as well as spillover effects of extremism and sectarian violence.[26]

In the early 1980s the completion of Karakoram Highway, the highest paved road in the world, which connects China's Xinjiang province with Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan, coincided with the rise of religious militancy in Pakistan. While unlocking Gilgit-Baltistan from its physical isolation and ushering in economic opportunity, the highway has also increased Gilgit-Baltistan's vulnerability to new threats, such as the influx of illegal weapons, drugs, and intolerant attitudes from the south, and it has changed the demographics of Gilgit and other towns.

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In 1988, toward the tail-end of Zia-ul-Haq's rule, a mujahedeen *lashkar* (religious militia), more than eighty thousand according to some estimates, invaded Gilgit, massacring more than four hundred Shia community members and burning down entire Shia villages.[27] This attack was triggered by a rumor alleging a Sunni massacre in Gilgit by Shias, which some say was deliberately spread to provide an excuse for Sunni militants to conduct the attacks.

This massacre marked the beginning of a new and more lethal phase of the conflict, one that involved well-equipped militant organizations, often supported by external sponsors, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, which provided money and training. Unlike the previous sectarian clashes, which were usually limited, the post-1988 conflict has become more violent, unpredictable, and severe.[28]

After the massacre, the Shia community in Gilgit-Baltistan realized its vulnerability to well-organized Sunni militant groups and decided to upgrade its capability for a long war with Sunni extremism. It naturally looked to Iran for material support and strategic guidance.[29] The Shia perception was that as long as the Sunni militant organizations remained unchecked, much of the violence against them was engineered by the state. Thus an arms race of a sort ensued in which local Sunni and Shia militant groups have been accumulating light and heavy weapons illegally[30] and recruiting unemployed youth to their cause. The overall rise in sectarian tensions and killings in Pakistan more generally have also contributed directly to the violence in Gilgit-Baltistan. Significantly, the recent period has witnessed the emergence of a vicious cycle: violence in Pakistan directly inflaming that in Gilgit-Baltistan and vice versa.[31] This violence is triggered by both emotional reactions to instant media reporting of attacks on sectarian kin elsewhere and the growing nexus between local militants and their national networks.

The overall rise in sectarian tensions and killings in Pakistan more generally have also contributed directly to the violence in Gilgit-Baltistan.

According to a recent analysis in Gilgit-Baltistan, 117 sectarian-related murder cases were registered between 1988 and 2010, which does not include an estimated 170 attempted murders. In 2011 alone, another forty-four cases of sectarian killings were registered.[32] This does not include killings of nearly one hundred people in 2012, mostly Shia, travelling between Islamabad and Gilgit, and the retaliatory killings of Sunnis in Gilgit town that followed. The impact of the deteriorating security situation since the 1990s on the collective psyche and economic life of people living in Gilgit-Baltistan has been severe. Tourism, one of the key industries, has been hit particularly hard, especially since 9/11. Hermann Kreutzmann, a scholar who has studied this region for more than three decades, reports about the effect on the tourist industry:

> Different crises—either home-made in Pakistan or outside the country with effect on the country—occurred since the mid-1990s with intervals becoming shorter. But nothing had an effect like 9/11[,] when from one day to the other the best tourism season for seven years collapsed to next to nothing. . . . Since then the lowest international tourism flow for more than two decades was observed. Tourism operators had to close offices, tourist guides were laid off, demand for services and local products became non-existent, loans were defaulted and bankruptcy of tourism entrepreneurs is on the brink. People who had extracted a substantial income from tourism so far went back to their roots and practiced mountain agriculture again, basically the only insurance they possess if not drawing a pension from a previous engagement in government jobs.[33]

The changing environment around Gilgit-Baltistan has certainly helped bring heightened sectarian conflict to the area. Today, it is no exaggeration that a nexus has developed between local sectarian militants and national and global jihadists.[34] The recent attacks on commuters on the Karakoram Highway and Babusar Pass appear to be efforts by non-Gilgit-Baltistan Islamists to inflame sectarian conflicts once again in order to make in-roads into this geostrategically important enclave. After all, Gilgit-Baltistan and the adjoining district of Chitral in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province are surrounded by active Islamist militant movements from all directions—from Afghanistan and the Southern Gorno-Badhakshan region of Tajikistan in the west and north, to Xinjiang province of China and Indian-controlled Kashmir in the east, and the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and FATA regions of Pakistan in the south.

The strategic relevance of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral has increased significantly because of their proximity to . . . where Taliban and al-Qaeda have established strongholds.

Jurgen Creutzman argues that the strategic relevance of Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral has increased significantly because of their proximity to the parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan where Taliban and al-Qaeda have established strongholds.[35] There are even reports that Taliban are increasing their influence in Gilgit-Baltistan, thus increasing Gilgit-Baltistan's

vulnerability of falling into the hands of extremist elements.[36] As it is, its countless passes—to Afghanistan, China, and India on the one hand, and to Pakistani Kashmir, Swat, and other remote valleys of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa[37] on the other—increase Gilgit-Baltistan's geographical vulnerability. These passes, which average a height of approximately sixteen thousand feet and are located in remote and desolate areas, are extremely difficult to guard.

Perspectives from Gilgit-Baltistan

The developments over the past three decades have left underlying sectarian tensions in Gilgit-Baltistan to simmer and grow. People increasingly think in sectarian terms and perceive the so-called other as problematic. Because local voices are often crowded out in the public discourse on the conflict, this report attempts to capture perceptions and perspectives from various stakeholders on sectarian clashes, contributing factors, and implications.[38] These perspectives—compiled from personal interviews—do not fully or even adequately represent all the diverse views but do provide a sense of the most common local sentiments. None of these views necessarily represent the stances of Gilgit-Baltistan-based formal organizations representing various communities, whether religious or political.

Shia

The Shia community is highly aggrieved by the treatment it has received from the majority Sunni Pakistan, especially in the 1980s during the rule of Zia-ul-Haq, who not only showed total disregard for numeric minorities, both non-Muslims and non-Sunni Muslims, but also used state institutions to persecute Shia in their own country.

These grievances range from what Shia see as anti-Shia laws and educational syllabi to targeted killing of their religious and political leaders, prominent citizens, and professionals. Blame is also ascribed to Zia-ul-Haq and his successors for supporting anti-Shia terrorist organizations that have pursued a relentless anti-Shia campaign, painting them as heretics and non-Muslims and declaring them as liable to be killed. The larger Shia community also feels that it has been at the receiving end of unprovoked sectarian mass killings in Pakistan and Gilgit-Baltistan, which are well documented by human rights and other groups.

The Shia believe that they played a key role in gaining independence for Gilgit-Baltistan in 1947 and actively defended the motherland during all aggressions from India. Yet they feel they are treated as second-class citizens and persecuted and killed in the country they helped create. Shias also complain that their numerical majority in Gilgit-Baltistan has been continuously diluted by the influx of Sunni ethnic Pathans and Kashmiris from the south. Some even retain a lingering sense that their existence is threatened and that, because the state has failed to protect them, they have every right to defend their community, faith, and way of life any way that they can.

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Finally, the Shia community believes that it has a right to its own practices of Islam, which include teaching its children the history and core beliefs of Shia Islam through the public school system in Pakistan.

Sunni

The Sunni community in Gilgit-Baltistan condemns violence from all sides, claiming that its members are themselves victims of sectarian violence. They argue that Gilgit-Baltistan is as much their home as it is that of the Shia and other communities and that they have nothing to do with Sunni militant organizations.

They complain that they are unfairly targeted by Shia militant organizations taking revenge for killings that happen in both Gilgit-Baltistan and elsewhere in the country. The Sunnis point out that because the Gilgit-Baltistan government has remained in the hands of

the Shia community because of their numerical majority, it is the government's responsibility to protect all citizens, including the Sunni community.

The Sunni community also feels that it is politically and economically marginalized by the Shia-majority government in Gilgit-Baltistan. The Sunni complain that they have little or no representation in the provincial government, which now enjoys wide-ranging powers and greater resources than before. They argue that much of the development funds are channeled to Shia-majority valleys and that Sunnis are excluded from key positions and employment opportunities, both in government and in the private sector.[39]

The Sunni community argues that the main responsibility for creating a conducive environment for peaceful existence in Gilgit-Baltistan rests with the majority Shia community, which must live up to its obligations as the community that runs the government, makes policy, and controls law enforcement agencies. Instead, they say, the Shia community lives in a perpetual state of belligerence with its neighbors. Moreover, the Sunni community feels that the Shia community needs to respect the rights and protect the interests of its sister communities if it expects to be respected and protected by the majority Sunni community in Pakistan.

Ismaili

The Ismaili community in Gilgit-Baltistan holds a neutral but conciliatory position toward its Shia and Sunni counterparts, calling them sister communities. Ismailis are the third largest community after the Shia and Sunni Muslims in Gilgit-Baltistan.[40] Acting in individual capacities, members of the Ismaili community have, on occasion, also protected and given shelter to vulnerable individuals from angry mobs from both sides, even at considerable risks to their lives.

The Ismaili community remains pro-development, focusing on education for girls and economic opportunity for both men and women.

The Ismaili community remains pro-development, focusing on education for girls and economic opportunity for both men and women. Because of its liberal outlook, the Ismaili community is often an easy target for hard-liners, who accuse Ismailis of being complicit with the West, taking donor money, and quietly promoting their interests while the rest of Gilgit-Baltistan is burning.

Ismailis say that their policy of peaceful coexistence and development is misunderstood and assert a track record in sharing the fruits of development with other communities, and they say that they have always acted in the interest of Gilgit-Baltistan and the larger country. They cite the leading role Ismaili notables played in the creation of the economic and social development of Pakistan through investments in industries and in health and education facilities.

The contribution of members of the Ismaili community in the liberation, defense,[41] community development, and educational development of the area is well recognized and appreciated by most people in all communities. Given their neutral position as far as the Shia-Sunni sectarian divide is concerned, Ismailis can potentially assume a more proactive role in promoting peace and reconciliation in the area. However, the Ismaili community follows a highly centralized and hierarchical system, most of its decision making being located in Karachi, and members are accountable to their spiritual leader, the Aga Khan, who is based in France. This vertical organization allows fewer horizontal links with other Gilgit-Baltistan communities, making the Ismailis passive political participants and absentee stakeholders in their own land. This situation also explains why they are often accused of being self-consumed and opportunistic.

Noorbakhshi

The Noorbakhshi community is divided into two factions, one leaning toward the Shia and the other toward the Sunni. The Noorbakhshi community is perhaps the most marginalized in Gilgit-Baltistan, mostly concentrated in the remote and underdeveloped valleys of Baltis-

tan. The community traces its origins to a Sufi-saint preacher who came from Kashmir and promoted interfaith harmony. Because of their peaceful outlook and roots in both Sunni and Shia communities, the Noorbakhshi community exerts a moderating influence on the religious and temporal politics of Gilgit-Baltistan, particularly in Baltistan. Overall, however, their influence is fairly marginal.

Peace and Reconciliation Initiatives

A number of peace and reconciliation efforts have been launched since 1988, involving *ulema* (religious leaders) and civic leaders from both the Shia and the Sunni communities. The main objective of these initiatives has been to remove irritants and controversial issues from the Shia and Sunni narratives and to evolve a code of conduct for religious clerics from both sides. The greatest difficulty in building a foundation for peace is the deep-rooted contempt and distrust that religious leaders and organizations have for one another, often even refusing to sit together.

After many attempts and coaxing, Sunni and Shia organizations signed a six-point peace agreement drafted by the then Northern Areas Legislative Council (NALC) members in February 2005. According to this agreement, the Tanzim Ahle Sunnah wal Jama'at, known by its short name, Tanzim (unity), representing the Sunni community, and the Central Anjuman-e-Imamia, known as Anjuman (community), representing the Shia community, agreed to immediately stop issuing religious fatwas (edicts) and counter-fatwas against each other and to foster sectarian harmony by resolving other outstanding issues. Each agreed to ensure law and order during Muharram processions and to be held responsible for protecting members from other communities living in their localities and neighborhoods.

As recently as May 2012, after scores of Shia travelers were killed by unknown assailants in Kohistan, a Grand Jirga (council) constituted by the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly (GBLA) issued an appeal to minimize friction and mitigate causes of conflict. This appeal was followed by a law unanimously enacted by the GBLA aiming to curb sectarian clashes.[42] Referred to as the Code of Conduct (CoC), the law forbids prayer leaders from issuing religious edicts against each other's sect, especially during Friday and Eid sermons. It further states that the clerics will not demand their respective sect's share in jobs and will not seek influence in other government matters.

Community leaders, scholars, poets, writers, and professionals from both sides have also used civil society platforms to further their efforts at peace. For instance, they have recently started a series of peace initiatives, holding rallies and forums in sensitive parts of Gilgit town.

The unfortunate reality is that all attempts to reconcile sectarian differences have met with only limited success. Sectarian disasters have remained unmitigated and perpetrators of sectarian crimes have usually gone unpunished. Perhaps forcing religious leaders to respect each other's sentiments is simply not enough without parallel efforts to curb external influences and address underlying causes and long-standing grievances. Long-standing grievances, such as the pro-Sunni curriculum in schools, are accumulating and taking on more complex dimensions. More significantly, because the main handlers and sponsors of sectarian violence are both external to the area and well-organized, local attempts to calm the situation can go only so far.[43] An essential starting point may be to investigate past incidents and to punish those who are found guilty.

Because the main handlers and sponsors of sectarian violence are both external to the area and well-organized, local attempts to calm the situation can go only so far.

Policy Recommendations

Despite the complexity of the sectarian issue in Gilgit-Baltistan, its roots in Pakistan's fractious religious politics, and the power games of external forces, a long-term approach to

building peace is still possible. However, this will need a multidimensional and multigenerational effort. The long-term solution has to include education, political development, and equity in access to economic and social opportunities. The process of peace and reconciliation needs to begin now and in earnest, however, centered on certain strategies.

Law Enforcement

It is critical to restore the writ of the state in enforcing existing laws. The criminal laws in Pakistan are further reinforced by additional laws that give the government wide-ranging authority to prosecute violent crimes, such as acts of terrorism, and impose the harshest punishments on those convicted. But law enforcement is quite weak in terms of both the investigative and legal process. One major problem is lack of clarity in the respective roles and poor coordination among the myriad security and intelligence agencies functioning in the area. As a result, for decades hardly anyone has been prosecuted successfully for the sectarian killings in Gilgit-Baltistan. Better law enforcement will help stem religiously motivated violence by arresting, prosecuting, and punishing perpetrators and inciters of religious extremism and communal violence, as well as by cutting funding sources.

Hardly anyone has been prosecuted successfully for the sectarian killings in Gilgit-Baltistan.

One way to quickly improve law enforcement is to appoint an empowered and impartial police chief in Gilgit town, which is the epicenter of religiously motivated violence in Gilgit-Baltistan. This appointment should be followed by much-needed police reforms, especially cleansing of the police force, which is not only poorly trained and suffers from low morale, but is also infested with sympathizers of warring groups.

Gilgit-Baltistan, and particularly Gilgit town, is brimming with illegal weapons for many reasons, including mutual insecurity and deterrence, especially given that the state is unable to protect the citizens. Professional gun runners, who are also present, are simply after money. Serious and persistent efforts to cleanse the city of illegal weapons and to cut off their supply lines are vital to building public confidence. Gun trafficking can be checked through better monitoring of the only two access roads, the Karakoram Highway and the Gilgit-Chitral Road.

A robust and smart security plan is also needed, in which mutual roles and responsibilities of various security forces and agencies are better defined and more political control is exercised over security-related decisions. In essence, bringing the full weight of the state to curb sectarian and other violence will be an important pillar of a long-term strategy to return peace to Gilgit-Baltistan.

Accommodation

This element of the peace road map should focus on grievance mitigation and management. As noted earlier, the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly has already passed a new law and created a peace council made up of representatives nominated by both Shia and Sunni communities. This effort should be further strengthened by creating a permanent Gilgit-Baltistan Peace Commission (GBPC), equipped with a secretariat, empowered and well-resourced to engage professional expertise to develop a long-term program of actions. The GBPC should be able to conduct its own independent research, propose draft legislation for Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly to promote communal harmony, and engage with civil society in improving communal relations.

The ideological differences in defining "proper" Islam between the two communities are significant and cannot be resolved easily. A determined start, however, can be made in which at least a dialogue framework can be created, focusing on commonalities and a broad spectrum from both sides of voices and stakeholders beyond the religious clerics. A key demand of the Shia community, for instance, is to include their understanding and practices of Islam in the school syllabi—a contentious point that has led to communal clashes in the past. To resolve this matter, political leaders, professionals, scholars, and third-party

mediators must be involved to present possible solutions that may be mutually acceptable. Such an approach is certain to galvanize public support of the silent, peace-loving majority of Gilgit-Baltistan.

The accommodation strategy will also need to address deeply held grievances from unmitigated disasters, particularly the emotional and economic sufferings of families who have lost family members to violence but cannot bring closure to their grief because the killers remain unpunished. It is reported that the killings on the Karakoram Highway were triggered by a boy whose father had been randomly killed in revenge for an earlier incident and who went to a *madrassa* in Chilas for help after exhausting all other avenues to justice. Lack of justice compounds the grief, which compels aggrieved families to nurture their enmity and contributes to blood feuds and further lawlessness. One starting step would be to document all cases of grievances since 1988, address them through a judicial commission, and devise at least a humanitarian support package for the families of the victims so that widows and orphans can rebuild their lives.

Political accommodation is the ultimate remedy. However, under the current winner-take-all electoral system, the majority community sweeps local elections and is able to control key government institutions, thus creating a sense of deprivation and marginalization among numerically minority communities. Several Sunni community members interviewed for this report expressed this grievance. The Sunni community points out that in the current arrangement they do not have any meaningful share in state institutions: the top positions of governor, chief minister, and speaker of Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly are all occupied by other communities. Those who are in power say that they have been elected legitimately and that apportioning government positions by religious affiliation would set a bad precedent.

A case is to be made for a larger tent approach to governance in Gilgit-Baltistan, because it would give political processes an incentive to replace sectarian strife. Nurturing a political process that is inclusive and accommodates the legitimate interests of minority groups, and is free from domination and persecution, would be fundamental in achieving durable peace and communal harmony.

Prevention

The sectarian violence in Gilgit-Baltistan is often triggered by random events such as an inflammatory speech by a visiting cleric, a malicious mobile text message, or a homicide unrelated to sectarianism. Much of this violence can be prevented by better intelligence, public awareness and communication campaigns, and efficient investigations.

At present, the government has no preventive measures or protocols in place either to counter the disinformation techniques extremists use to create mayhem or to inform citizens about the causes of a random event before it flares up and takes a sectarian dimension. Avoiding potential situations and events that can lead to communal violence is the responsibility not only of the government, but also of citizens—especially those in leadership positions in their communities.

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The *khateeb* of a mosque, who delivers a sermon on Friday prayers, carries a huge responsibility in building or destroying delicate communal relations. A number of Muslim-majority countries—including Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran—follow a careful screening process, including proper certification of their education and background in appointing mosque khateebs, who are required to deliver a pre-approved Friday sermon. In Pakistan and especially Gilgit-Baltistan, this model is worth considering.

For coexistence, developing a culture of compromise is critical. In the context of Gilgit-Baltistan, the Shia community holds a numerical majority, which naturally results in a greater share of political power. However, the Shia politicians need to be mindful that their

community lives in a Sunni-majority country. This reality calls for a careful understanding and internalization of the mutual need for compromise and obligations on the part of the majority communities in both Gilgit-Baltistan and the nation.

Numerically minority communities also have certain obligations, in both local and national contexts, to respect and remain sensitive to the sentiments and rights of their majority sister communities.

Collaboration

Collaboration is a proactive strategy for building common stakes and offers a long-term solution for peaceful coexistence and development. It is the art of finding win-win solutions. Examples of and opportunities for promoting collaboration among different communities in the context of Gilgit-Baltistan are numerous. Peace forums, sporting and cultural events, youth initiatives (especially using social media), cultural and intellectual initiatives, and community building projects are all powerful tools for bringing communities closer.

Culture, especially poetry, music, and dance are universal forces that draw people together everywhere, and Gilgit-Baltistan is no exception. At the center of Gilgit town, the main fortress-like Shia and Sunni mosques are located near one another, facing each other and symbolizing strong sectarian identities. Between the two lies the main polo field, called the Aga Khan Shahi Polo Grounds, named for the spiritual leader of the Ismaili Muslims. When tension is high, members of the Sunni and Shia communities avoid each other and converge in their respective mosques. However, at the first beat of the drums during a polo match, they join at the polo ground and cheer their favored teams and dance together as if the sectarian conflict did not exist.

Culture can play a pivotal role in promoting communal harmony. . . . Local festivals provided important opportunities for people to mingle.

Culture can play a pivotal role in promoting communal harmony. In the past, local rulers and colonial administrators patronized local festivals (music and dance) and polo matches, binding people of different persuasions of Islam in a common cultural web, creating empathy and tolerance for each other. Local festivals such as sowing, harvest, and traditional new year (*nawroz*) celebrations provided important opportunities for people to mingle. Tourism played a supportive role in reviving local culture through dance and music events, sponsored by tour operators. The Silk Route Festival celebrated as an annual event in Gilgit before 1999 and attracted thousands. All this, however, has lost traction. The annual Shandur Festival, at which polo teams from Gilgit and Chitral play at Shadur Pass every July, is the only festival that has survived, but only barely, and solely because it is backed by the royal family of Chitral. Going to Shandur and camping there for several days is not an easy option for ordinary people, however. Still, thousands from both sides flock to the event, as do many national and international tourists.

Local culture is now facing a slow but certain death, and traditional festivals are being replaced by religious festivals, such as Eid and other notable days in the Islamic calendar, and Aga Khan's birthday (celebrated by Ismailis only), which are exclusive and closed occasions among separate communities, and where music and dance are being discouraged as satanic practices under the growing influence of clerics. A peace activist from Diamer, the Sunni majority conservative district in Gilgit-Baltistan, commented on the growing sectarian divide:

> In the recent past, it was a common practice to celebrate wedding ceremonies with music and dance parties open to everyone in a village. It created opportunities for social integration of people belonging to different communities. Nowadays, music and dance is discouraged, and people have become inward-looking.[44]

Conclusion

Gilgit-Baltistan is still a relatively peaceful and pro-development enclave in a troubled part of the world. It and the neighboring district of Chitral share many cultural and linguistic

affinities and have largely remained immune to religious extremism and hard-core militancy that have affected other parts of Pakistan. That they have is mainly attributable to a culture of coexistence that has evolved from an interdependence natural in a closed mountainous environment, supplemented by investments in education and social development.

Despite the intermittent violence and recent carnage, Gilgit-Baltistan's development outcomes are impressive, built on the time-tempered resilience of the people and facilitated by high social capital. The province has also benefited both from the attention of a national government motivated in no small measure by geopolitical considerations and from investments made by development organizations in education, health, and community building.[45]

The signs of economic and social change are unmistakable. People have moved to cities, connected to markets, adopted new technologies, enrolled in universities, and adopted other trappings of modern life. In some aspects of education, health, and water and sanitation, the people of the region enjoy equal or even better status than is prevalent in the rest of Pakistan.[46]

In its first economic report on Gilgit-Baltistan, the World Bank asks, "Where to go from here?"[47] Gilgit-Baltistan's strategic location—linking China and Central, South, and West Asia—provides real opportunities for trade and commerce among neighboring countries. The province has a young and increasingly literate and mobile population, not to mention the highest levels (57 percent) of women's education in Pakistan.

The development potential of Gilgit-Baltistan is huge in terms of its water resources for irrigation and hydropower, mineral wealth, tourism, high-value horticulture, and opportunities for trade and transit. If developed, this potential could usher in prosperity for everyone along the ancient Silk Route. Plans have been drawn up to build two mega-hydropower projects in the area, and widening and upgrading the Karakoram Highway is under way. Long-term plans have also been floated for a rail link with China and even a pipeline for transporting energy to China from Iran and the Middle East. If the current educational trends continue, the majority of Gilgit-Baltistan's population will become a literate and skilled workforce in due course, providing a huge demographic dividend for Gilgit-Baltistan and for Pakistan. With a literate population, a solid start in development, huge resource potential, a responsive local government, a responsible civil society, and, hopefully, stable democracy in the country, the dream of turning this area into a stable, peaceful, and prosperous border economy will be closer than ever, benefiting everyone in the region.[48]

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However, the people of Gilgit-Baltistan are increasingly nervous. They have much to lose from the growing menace of extreme political ideologies and religiously motivated violence, given their hard-won transformation from a feudal past and their recent development gains. Their future trajectory is at stake. Indeed, if the current conflicts and uncertainties continue in the region, and if the area becomes a pawn in the hands of larger forces, development potential in Gilgit-Baltistan will be ruined. It was recently reported that the Asian Development Bank (ADB), under pressure from India, is pulling out of an earlier understanding to lead a consortium of investors in the Diamer-Basha Dam project.[49] The World Bank has already indicated that it will not be able to play any significant role in the financing of this project, for similar reasons. Reportedly, financing is also not available for the Bunji Hydropower Project, which was to be an even bigger reservoir. Together, these two projects have the potential to generate more than 10,000 megawatts of clean and low-cost hydropower, which would become a source of prosperity for the whole of Pakistan. Pakistan is also under pressure to scrap its planned Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline, which originally included an extension to India and China that would flow through Gilgit-Baltistan.[50] Many people interviewed for this report expressed a concern that the recent attacks on Karakoram Highway are part of a larger plan to thwart these and other developments in the region.[51] This perception is

supported by false and unfounded reports in the international media about Chinese designs to annex Gilgit-Baltistan and a presence of Chinese troops in Gilgit.[52]

In Gilgit-Baltistan, as well as in mainland Pakistan, sectarian differences have always existed and have sometimes erupted into violent conflicts. However, until recently, they were locally manageable conflicts. The old sectarianism was part of a social dialogue, an ongoing bargain for peaceful coexistence and equilibrium. Its capacity to destabilize established communal relations was limited. The new sectarianism, however, has the potential to destroy the basis for a social dialogue through the application of terror. Politically mobilized religion perpetuated by the state and sustained by global power-politics has changed the dynamics of sectarian conflict.

Gilgit-Baltistan is at a crossroads. Its development potential and geography can make it an ideal place for trade, commerce, and transit for the entire region. However, the same geography, unresolved subnational and regional conflicts, and global politics can also pull it in the opposite direction, making it even more of a complex conflict zone and a source of discord and destabilization. The current upsurge in sectarian violence has added a new dynamic and increased the odds for an uncertain future. The choices people of this strategic area will make, and how global events will influence these choices, will determine the direction and destiny of Gilgit-Baltistan, even Pakistan.

Notes

1. The people of Gilgit-Baltistan contest their disputed status, having revolted against the *Maharaja* of Kashmir and joined Pakistan on Nov. 1, 1947, two months after the Maharaja had opted to join India against the wishes of his Muslim majority population.
2. The term refers to Twelver Shias, not other groups under the broader category of Shia Muslims.
3. Hermann Kreutzmann, "The Karakoram Landscape and the Recent History of the Northern Areas," in *Karakoram: Hidden Treasures in the Northern Areas of Pakistan,* ed. Stefano Bianca (Turin: Allemandi, 2007).
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5. AFP, "At Least 20 Shias Pulled off Bus, Shot Dead in Northern Pakistan," *Dawn.com,* August 16, 2012, www.dawn.com/2012/08/16/several-forced-off-buses-killed-in-northern-pakistan.
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7. Zafar Iqbal, "Gilgit Baltistan: Paradise on Fire," *Viewpoint,* no. 129, November 30, 2012, www.viewpointonline.net/gilgit-baltistan-paradise-on-fire.html.
8. Seema Shekhawat, "Sectarianism in Gilgit-Baltistan," *Faultlines* vol. 20, article 4, January 18, 2011.
9. "Terrorism in Pakistan," *Wikipedia,* November 15, 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terrorism_in_Pakistan
10. Shireen Hunter, "Sunni-Shia Tensions Are More About Politics, Power and Privilege than Theology," Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, February 5, 2007, http://acmcu.georgetown.edu/135390.html.
11. Also known as Qadiyanis, the Ahmadiyya community believes that their leader Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was the promised messiah. They consider themselves Muslims; some other Muslims consider them apostates.
12. The Wahhabi school is most predominant in Saudi Arabia.
13. These are religious taxes over whose specifics there is no consensus by the various Muslim schools of thought.
14. *The Economist,* 28 January 28, 1996, p. 37.
15. ICG, "Pakistan: Madrassas, Extremism and the Military," Asia ICG report no. 36 (Islamabad/Brussels: International Crisis Group), July 29, 2002.
16. Huma Yusuf, "Sectarian Violence: Pakistan's Greatest Security Threat?" (Oslo: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, July 2012), www.peacebuilding.no/var/ezflow_site/storage/original/application/949e7f9b2db9f947c95656e5b54e389e.pdf.
17. Suroosh Irfani, "Pakistan's Sectarian Violence: Between the 'Arabist Shift' and Indo-Persian Culture," in *Religious Radicalism and Security in South Asia,* eds. Satu Limaye, Robert Wirsing, and Mohan Malik (Honolulu: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2004), www.apcss.org/Publications/Edited%20Volumes/ReligiousRadicalism/PagesfromReligiousRadicalismandSecurityinSouthAsiach7.pdf.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Myra Imran, "True Culture of Gilgit-Balistan," *The News,* June 10, 2011, www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-6-51720-True-culture-of-Gilgit-Baltistan.
21. An exception was the attempt by the Mehtar of Chitral in the first quarter of the twentieth century to forcefully convert Ismailis from Upper Chitral to the Sunni faith. These events led to substantial outmigration of Ismailis from Chitral to the Gilgit Agency that was under British administration (Hermann Kreutzmann, "Kashmir and the Northern Areas of Pakistan: Boundary-making along contested frontiers," *Geography* vol. 62, no. 3: 215).
22. The foster-family relationship is similar to the godparent relationship practiced in many parts of the world. Children born into royal families were adopted by commoners at birth, primarily for nursing and child-care purposes because the concept of paid nannies did not exist. The relationship entailed benefits for both parties: political backing and unpaid soldiers for the ruler from the foster family's extended tribe, and economic gain and social standing for foster families.
23. Ghulam Nabi, in a discussion with the author on the causes of growing sectarianism, Gilgit, October 12, 2012.
24. Magnus Marsden, "Selves and Others: Representing Multiplicities of Difference in Gilgit and the Northern Areas of Pakistan" in *Islam and Society in Pakistan: Anthropological Perspectives,* ed. Magnus Marsden and Ali Khan (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 240. See also Muhammad Feyyaz, "Sectarian Conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan" (background paper, Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency, Lahore, May 2011), p. 14, www.pildat.org/publications/publication/Conflict_Management/GB-SectarianConflit-BackgroundPaperEng-May2011.pdf.
25. Kreutzmann, "Kashmir," 216.
26. Abdul Malik and Izhar Ali Hunzai, "The Promise and Challenge of Pluralism for Sustainable Development in Mountain Areas" (paper presented at the international workshop "Strategies for Development and Food Security in Mountainous Areas of Central Asia," Dushanbe, Tajikistan, June 6–10, 2005), www.akdn.org/publications/2005_akf_mountains_paper11_english.pdf.
27. Ismail Salami, "Target Killing, Mass Murder of Shia Minority in Pakistan," *Global Research,* September 5, 2012, www.globalresearch.ca/target-killing-mass-murder-of-shia-minority-in-pakistan/5303348.
28. Malik and Hunzai, "Promise and Challenge."
29. Feyyaz, "Sectarian Conflict."
30. Ibid.
31. ICG, "The State of Sectarianism in Pakistan," Asia ICG report no. 95 (Islamabad/Brussels: International Crisis Group), April 18, 2005.
32. Gulmina Bilal Ahmad, "The Cannibal King and the Awaited Hero," *Daily Times,* May 18, 2012, www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2012%5C05%5C18%5Cstory_18-5-2012_pg3_6.

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33. Hermann Kreutzmann, "The Karakoram Highway as a prime corridor exchange between Pakistan and China," in *Integrated Tourism Concepts to Contribute to Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions,* eds. Hermann Kreutzmann, Amin Beg, Lu Zhaozhi, and J. Richter (Bonn, 2008), pp. 30–31.
34. Aziz Ali Dad, "Anatomy of Sectarian Violence," *Pamire Times,* September 25, 2012, www.pamirtimes.net/2012/09/25/anatomy-of-sectarian-violence.
35. Jurgen Creutzman, "Gilgit-Baltistan: A Land Seldom Traveled, " *Gilgit-Baltistan Tribune,* August 23, 2012, http://gbtribune.wordpress.com/2012/08/23/gilgit-baltistan-a-land-seldom-traveled.
36. Ibid.
37. These are Chulung la, Gyang la, Marpola, Burzil Pass, Zoji la, Kamri la, Chorbat la, Gasherbrum la, Skyang la, Sovoia la, Muztagh la, Sarpolago la, Khunjerab Pass, Mintika Pass, Killik Pass, Hapuchan Pass, Irshad Uween, Khora Bhurt, Qalandar Uween, Karumbar An, Bashkaro An, Dadarilli An, Kheli Gali, Shrilli Gali, Jumagh Gali, Kuba Gali, Babusar Pass, Shonthar Pass, and Fulway Pass.
38. These perspectives were collected through informal interviews with individual community leaders, professionals, intelligentsia, and university students.
39. These perceptions are difficult to verify. However, they stem from the current political reality that under the Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Local Governance Ordinance (2009), local government is more autonomous, and as politicians all over the world, a Shia majority government would be more keen to serve its electoral constituencies. In the past, federal authorities checked potential imbalances, resulting from the winner-take-all electoral system.
40. Ismailis branched out from the main Shia community in the seventh century and are regarded as a distinct community. Their current *imam* (spiritual guide), believed by Ismailis to be the direct descendant of imam Aly, the first imam of Shia Muslims, lives in France.
41. Ismailis are among the highest martyrs and decorated soldiers in military service in Pakistan on a per capita basis. Lalik Jan, a soldier from the Gilgit-Baltistan Ismaili community, is among only ten recipients of Nishan-e-Haider, the highest military award in Pakistan, given posthumously.
42. Shabbir Mir, "Pakistan's First: GBLA Passes Law to Curb Sectarianism," *Express Tribune,* May 29, 2012, www.tribune.com.pk/story/385520/pakistans-first-gbla-passes-law-to-curb-sectarianism.
43. These outsiders are often taken away by federal intelligence agencies after they are apprehended by local police, never to be seen again.
44. Nabi, discussion with the author.
45. On a per capita basis, GB receives more development funds and subsidies from the federal government than other peer regions of Pakistan. It is also a tax-free zone. GB's per capita income, however, is only one-third of the national average.
46. "Gilgit-Baltistan Economic Report: Broadening the Transformation" Report no. 55998-PK (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2010).
47. Ibid.
48. Mahpara Hunzai, "Development as Transformational Politics: A Case of the Northern Areas" (master's thesis, University of London, 2009), summary reprinted in *Kakakoram Knowledge Highways* vol. 1, no. 2 (April-June 2009), article 6.
49. Mushtaq Ghumman, "Diamer-Bhasa Dam Project: Centre Blames ADB for $2bn Loss," *Business Recorder,* October 18, 2012, www.brecorder.com/top-news/1-front-top-news/86704-diamer-bhasha-dam-project-centre-blames-adb-for-2bn-loss-.html
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52. China, as a rising economic power, is certainly interested in the mineral resources and transit facilities in Pakistan but, given its own problems in the Xinjiang Region, is extremely careful not to embroil itself in a larger and more complex conflict with the Islamist militants in Pakistan.

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