



CENTRE FOR  
JOINT WARFARE  
STUDIES

GL/5/25

**HISTORICAL INVALIDITY OF CHINESE CLAIMS ON  
LADAKH  
BY  
MAJ GEN (DR) GAJINDER SINGH, AVSM (RETD)**

**ORGANISED BY CENJOWS  
23 JANUARY 2025**

**HISTORICAL INVALIDITY OF CHINESE CLAIMS ON LADAKH**  
**BY MAJ GEN (DR) GAJINDER SINGH, AVSM (RETD)**  
**ORGANISED BY CENJOWS ON 23 JANUARY 2025**

Ladakh, a high-altitude desert, has gained national significance due to recent border tensions. However, public perception is often shaped by media narratives rather than historical facts. This lecture aimed to debunk China's claims on Ladakh by tracing its historical and geopolitical evolution.

### **The Ladakh Dispute**

The core of the India-China conflict in Ladakh is the disagreement over the Ladakh-Xinjiang and Ladakh-Tibet borders. China occupies approximately 38,000 sq. km, including Aksai Chin. The dispute persists due to the undefined Line of Actual Control (LAC), leading to constant incursions and military face-offs. China's "salami-slicing" tactics further complicate the situation, making Ladakh a potential flashpoint for future conflicts.

### **Strategic Importance of Ladakh**

Ladakh serves as a crucial link between Xinjiang (formerly East Turkestan) and Tibet. Historically, it has been a contested corridor for Mongols, Tibetans, Mughals, and Dogras. The G219 highway, running through Aksai Chin, is vital for China's control over Tibet and Xinjiang.

### **Tibet and Xinjiang: No Basis for Chinese Claims**

China's claims on Ladakh are based on the premise that Tibet is historically Chinese territory, which is false. Tibet was an independent kingdom with its own governance. Tibetan forces even occupied the Tang Dynasty capital in 763 AD. Tibet came under limited Chinese influence only in 1720 when China placed administrators in Lhasa. Similarly, East Turkestan (Xinjiang) was occupied much later, further undermining China's territorial assertions.

## **Ladakh's Historical Sovereignty**

From the 7th to 10th centuries, Ladakh was part of the power struggle between the Tibetan and Chinese empires. In 900 AD, an exiled Tibetan prince established a kingdom that included Ladakh, Western Tibet, Zaskar, Spiti, and Lahaul. The division of his kingdom between his three sons defined the traditional boundary between Ladakh and Tibet which aligns with India's claim from Lanka La to Imis La.

During the Namgyal reign (1555-1675), Ladakh expanded into western Tibet. However, a Mongol-backed Tibetan force invaded Ladakh in 1681. With Mughal assistance, Ladakh repelled the invasion, leading to the Treaty of Tingmos-gang in 1684, which fixed the Ladakh-Tibet border at the Lhari stream near Demchok. India maintains that this treaty solidifies Ladakh's historical independence.

## **The Dogras and Ladakh**

In 1834, Dogra General Zorawar Singh annexed Ladakh, later conquering Baltistan and Western Tibet. The subsequent 1842 treaty reaffirmed Ladakh's traditional borders and Dogra sovereignty. China dismisses this treaty, arguing Tibet acted independently. However, this contradicts China's claim that Tibet was historically Chinese.

## **British Influence and the 'Great Game'**

After the Anglo-Sikh War (1846), the British demarcated the Ladakh-Tibet border. In 1865, British surveyor William Johnson mapped Aksai Chin as part of Kashmir, a claim tacitly accepted by China for decades. Later, the 1893 Macartney-MacDonald proposal suggested ceding Aksai Chin to China, but China never officially responded, leaving it unratified.

## **Conclusion**

China's claims over Ladakh are historically invalid. The region has a well-documented history of independence, with treaties and historical accounts contradicting China's

narrative. Understanding this historical context is essential in countering China's territorial assertions and reinforcing India's legitimate claims over Ladakh.