



CPEC & Indian Claims about Gilgit–Baltistan

CommandEleven
Briefing Paper
February 2017

© 2017, CommandEleven. All rights reserved.

For more information about receiving this, or other CommandEleven analysis documents, please visit <http://www.commandeleven.com/>.

REPORT AUTHOR

“CPEC & Indian Claims about Gilgit–Baltistan” was researched, compiled and written by Sabena Siddiqui, a lawyer and a journalist, writing on geopolitics and International law-related topics. She provides analysis on geopolitics and human rights issues related to the War on Terror, both domestic and international.

ABOUT COMMANDELEVEN

CommandEleven is a research organization focused on Pakistan’s national security aspects and enhancing global understanding and collaboration opportunities for the nation.

Founded in 2015, CommandEleven provides situational awareness to facilitate a better understanding of the key dynamics that effect Pakistan from a national security perspective, especially in relation to terrorism, insurgencies and extremism.

CommandEleven seeks to inform and guide public policy and decision makers in government, business and military through a rigorous program of publications, conferences, digital medias, policy briefings and recommendations.

Visit <http://commandeleven.com> for more information or contact info@commandeleven.com.

PREFACE

India never paid much attention to Gilgit–Baltistan or even claimed it along with Kashmir, so much so that the world did not even know that the ‘Kashmir dispute’ included the region of Gilgit–Baltistan, it was thought to be just the Kashmir valley which was claimed by both countries. Indian claim on Gilgit–Baltistan is a relatively recent development because it feels threatened by increasing Chinese influence and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor CPEC.

Gilgit–Baltistan is the sole route connecting Pakistan with China and the Central Asian states as the 1300 km Karakoram Highway runs through this sleepy, mountainous region, it is being widely discussed by Indian media these days in relation with the China–Pakistan mega–project CPEC nowadays, [India likes to stake its claims on](#) Gilgit–Baltistan as a disputed region with the intent to subvert CPEC, massive propaganda circulates regarding the Pakistani region of GB, even fake news campaigns about ‘rebellions’ are aired.

India woke up to the existence of Gilgit–Baltistan circa 2009 and 2010, especially after it received reports that Chinese soldiers and workers had a presence in Gilgit–Baltistan. Soon after, this is how it responded, *“India believes that Pakistan has been in illegal occupation of parts of the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir since 1947. The Chinese side is fully aware of India’s position and our concerns about Chinese activities in Pakistan–occupied Kashmir”*, the Indian ministry of external affairs ([MEA](#)) [claimed in 2009](#).

In 2015, Indian National Security [Adviser Ajit Doval](#) followed suit and surprised most Indians, when he reminded an audience of Border Security Forces (BSF) officers that “we also have a 106–km–long non–contiguous border with Afghanistan (Wakhan corridor) that we need to factor in,” this was a reference to Gilgit–Baltistan’s Afghan frontier.

The next was Vikas Swarup, MEA spokesman, who also remarked in similar vein “India’s position is well known. The entire state of Jammu and Kashmir, which includes the regions of Gilgit and Baltistan, is an integral part of India. The election, which is scheduled for June 8, is as an attempt by Islamabad to camouflage its forcible and illegal occupation of the regions.” So after many decades, India wants to claim Gilgit–Baltistan, notwithstanding the fact that when [the Dixon proposals came up in 1950](#), India had accepted the proposal for allotment to Pakistan of those areas, where there was no apparent doubt about the wishes of the people aligned with Pakistan, and Gilgit–Baltistan was one of those areas.

Let’s go back in time; GB was part of Kashmir up till 1947 as it was previously merged with the princely state in 1846 by the Hindu Dogra rulers of Kashmir after many bloody wars. The region was named ‘Gilgit Agency’ by the British and constituted mainly of the princely states of Hunza and Nagar, with various smaller regions of Chilas, Koh Ghizr, Ishkoman, Yasin and Punial, and the Gilgit Wazarat. Only the ‘Gilgit Wazarat’ was administered by the Dogra royal family of Jammu and Kashmir, the British leased it to them in 1935 for a period of 60 years while the rest of the regions remained British administrated.

At the time of the partition of India, the Hindu Prince preferred to accede to India instead of Pakistan, overlooking the fact that the huge majority of his subjects were Muslims and wanted to be with Pakistan. Maharaja Hari Singh Dogra never signed a full accession, Jammu & Kashmir was annexed to India under the temporary law Article 370 which was only effective until a plebiscite was held, not only that, a special commissioner was appointed for this purpose. As we know, India refused to hold the plebiscite and has been refusing to this very day.

The Gilgit Wazarat also wanted to escape getting handed over to India, in an immensely popular move, a local Gilgiti commander Colonel Mirza Hassan Khan overthrew the Dogra-appointed Governor with the help of Major Brown, commandant of the Gilgit Scouts on 1st November, 1947. The news of the alleged accession of Kashmir to India had upset the Gilgitis tremendously, the [entire local population was pro-Pakistan](#) and they had no wish to stay with Kashmir state or be part of India. Major Brown of the British Army is a hero to this day in the region of Gilgit–Baltistan, shortly after, some locals announced the Republic of Gilgit with Shah Saeed Khan as President, this arrangement only survived 16 days.

Finally, the Gilgitis approached Mohammad Ali Jinnah and requested his permission to join the Pakistan federation unconditionally, he accepted the offer and sent his nominee Sardar Alam Khan to manage the administration and the Frontier Crimes Regulation became the law for Gilgit 's various princely states. Ostensibly, since the founder and ruler of Pakistan accepted the people of Gilgit Baltistan as Pakistani, Gilgit–Baltistan became a sovereign region of Pakistan on that very same day.

In 1948, the Kashmir issue reached its boiling point and India took the matter to the United Nations, a plebiscite was ordained in a UN resolution. The Pakistani authorities felt that including Gilgit–Baltistan with Azad Kashmir would swell up the numbers in the prospective plebiscite in favor of Pakistan as the Gilgitis had already thrown in their lot with Pakistan. This is how the region of Gilgit Baltistan found itself back to the pavilion with Kashmir even after having joined the Pakistan federation.

“China is using Indian land area illegally occupied by Pakistan,” said Seshadri Chari, a national executive member of the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party. Nowadays, this is the usual refrain, it is time to retrieve records of the date from which India started laying claim to Pakistani region of Gilgit–Baltistan. At the time of the Dixon proposals of 1950, India was not bothered to claim GB, plus the merger of Gilgit–Baltistan with the federation of Pakistan is not [“stabbing Kashmir in the back”](#) as Pakistan has never stopped supporting the Kashmir issue.

The Dixon proposals amount to India refusing to stake a claim on Gilgit–Baltistan, so the matter was closed decades ago. The [Stockholm International Peace Research](#) Institute, a Swedish-based think-tank, has assessed that, “India’s opposition to CPEC reflects a concern over the internationalization of the Kashmir dispute and the growing influence of China in the Indian Ocean, there is considerable concern within India that China, which has been neutral on Kashmir since 1963, can no longer be so now that its economic and security interests in these territories are growing.”

So, India’s real concern remains Kashmir and the fact that CPEC is too close for comfort is pinching, what is the future of Indian Occupied Kashmir even 20 years from now? The Indian hold on Jammu and Kashmir may not be easy to continue as the region has great strategic value for the troika of China, Russia and Pakistan. Suchitra Vijayan, a New York based lawyer working on Kashmir, says, “India doesn’t want to internationalize the Kashmir issue, but with Pakistan, China, and CPEC coming in, it happens.” This is the real issue; India is irked by China’s presence next door.

Meanwhile, as far as Pakistan is concerned, it is grossly unfair to make Gilgit–Baltistan wait for its constitutional status and make it dependent on the resolution of Kashmir. It wants to be declared a proper province and looks forward to having its representatives in Pakistani Parliament. The region of Gilgit–Baltistan was declared the safest place in Asia in 2016, most Gilgitis prefer to join the Pakistan army and have no issues with the CPEC project. Pakistan government has been mulling over whether it should stay as a semi-autonomous region or be declared a full province. Azad Kashmir wants Gilgit–Baltistan to stay attached with it due to historical reasons; this endless debate has deepened the cracks between [Gilgit–Baltistan and Azad Kashmir](#).

The Pakistan government has tried to assimilate Gilgit–Baltistan into the mainstream by making state employment available for its educated youth since a couple of decades, local entrepreneurs have also been facilitated and provided access to big investors, both locally and abroad. Recognizing Gilgit–Baltistan as a province might be viewed as a major shift vis a vis Pakistan’s stance on Kashmir, but the multi-billion dollar [Chinese investment merits legal cover](#) immediately for the greater long-term interests of this entire geopolitical region. A high level committee formed by Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif is [working on the proposal](#) to mention Gilgit Baltistan formally in the Pakistan constitution and two of its representatives would sit in the National Assembly.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sabena Siddiqui, a lawyer and a journalist, writing on geopolitics and International law-related topics. She provides analysis on geopolitics and human rights issues related to the War on Terror, both domestic and international.

ABOUT COMMANDELEVEN

CommandEleven is a research organization focused on Pakistan's national security aspects and enhancing global understanding and collaboration opportunities for the nation.

Founded in 2015, CommandEleven provides situational awareness to facilitate a better understanding of the key dynamics that effect Pakistan from a national security perspective, especially in relation to terrorism, insurgencies and extremism.

CommandEleven seeks to inform and guide public policy and decision makers in government, business and military through a rigorous program of publications, conferences, digital medias, policy briefings and recommendations.

Visit <http://commandeleven.com> for more information or contact info@commandeleven.com.