

THE GILGIT-BALTISTAN GAME PLAN

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Pakistan

Reports indicate that the Pakistan government is on the [verge of declaring Gilgit-Baltistan a province of Pakistan](#). The most authoritative declaration came last month from Pakistan's Minister of Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan who stated that Prime Minister Imran Khan would soon make an announcement to this effect.

Technically speaking Gilgit-Baltistan was a part of the State of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) at the time of Partition although Dogra rule sat very lightly on this region. Much of it, particularly Gilgit, because of its strategic importance in the context of the Great Game in Central Asia, had been leased to the British by the Maharaja and was under the direct control of the British government until the lapse of suzerainty. Gilgit had its own British-officered local army, the Gilgit Scouts, which switched allegiance to Pakistan within a week of the Maharaja's [accession to India](#).

Gilgit-Baltistan | [The land of peaks, streams and disputes](#)

From the beginning Gilgit-Baltistan was governed as a separate entity by Pakistan and not as a part of Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK). Islamabad had hesitated to declare it a province of Pakistan because of its claim that J&K is disputed territory and its future must be decided by a plebiscite among all its inhabitants.

There are several reasons why Islamabad has now decided to formally integrate Gilgit-Baltistan into Pakistan. First, the [revocation of Article 370 by India and the bifurcation of the State into two Union Territories](#) have sent a clear message that the Kashmir dispute is not only dead but also buried as far as New Delhi is concerned. Pakistan's imminent move, transforming Gilgit-Baltistan's de facto status into a de jure one, is a clear riposte to the Indian decision.

Second, public opinion in Gilgit-Baltistan has long been in favour of full integration into Pakistan as a province as the predominantly Shia and ethnically distinct population of the region has very little in common with PoK. Islamabad feels that by declaring it a province will assuage domestic dissatisfaction on this score.

Third, China has been encouraging Islamabad to turn Gilgit-Baltistan into a province. The [China-Pakistan Economic Corridor \(CPEC\)](#) runs through Gilgit-Baltistan and China has invested heavily in the region. In view of India's continuing claim to the area, Beijing is interested in delinking Gilgit-Baltistan formally from Kashmir so that its investment does not remain hostage to the possibility of another round of India-Pakistan hostilities over Kashmir.

Also read | [Gilgit-Baltistan polls have no legal basis, says India](#)

China also wants to repay India in its own coin following New Delhi's decision to separate Ladakh from J&K. Beijing views the Indian move as the first step towards India attempting to enforce its claim on Aksai Chin, currently under Chinese occupation.

In addition to CPEC, China considers Gilgit-Baltistan very important because of its strategic location. It is contiguous to Ladakh as well as Xinjiang and could act as a staging post against India if a major conflict erupts in Ladakh. Beijing possibly presumes that Pakistan will agree to a Chinese military presence in Gilgit-Baltistan because Islamabad would like to see India embroiled simultaneously in a two-front war — in Ladakh and Gilgit — with China.

There is already substantial Chinese civilian presence in Gilgit-Baltistan related to CPEC projects. China is interested in stationing military personnel as well. Delinking the region from the Kashmir dispute would make it easier for the international community to accept Chinese presence in Gilgit-Baltistan. It would also serve Pakistan's purpose of getting back at India for abrogating Article 370 as well as complicating India's strategic environment by the implicit threat of turning it into a Chinese staging ground.

India must calibrate its response carefully because merely by turning up the rhetorical heat, it may play into Chinese and Pakistani hands and escalate the situation. Rhetoric must always be determined by a meticulous assessment of capability.

Mohammed Ayoob is University Distinguished Professor Emeritus of International Relations, Michigan State University

This article is available only to our subscribers.

Already have an account ? [Sign in](#)

Start your 14 days free trial. [Sign Up](#)

Dear reader,

We have been keeping you up-to-date with information on the developments in India and the world that have a bearing on our health and wellbeing, our lives and livelihoods, during these difficult times. To enable wide dissemination of news that is in public interest, we have increased the number of articles that can be read free, and extended free trial periods. However, we have a request for those who can afford to subscribe: please do. As we fight disinformation and misinformation, and keep apace with the happenings, we need to commit greater resources to news gathering operations. We promise to deliver quality journalism that stays away from vested interest and political propaganda.

Dear subscriber,

Thank you!

Your support for our journalism is invaluable. It's a support for truth and fairness in journalism. It has helped us keep apace with events and happenings.

The Hindu has always stood for journalism that is in the public interest. At this difficult time, it becomes even more important that we have access to information that has a bearing on our health and well-being, our lives, and livelihoods. As a subscriber, you are not only a beneficiary of our work but also its enabler.

We also reiterate here the promise that our team of reporters, copy editors, fact-checkers, designers, and photographers will deliver quality journalism that stays away from vested interest and political propaganda.

Suresh Nambath

Please enter a valid email address.

To reassure Indian Muslims, the PM needs to state that the govt. will not conduct an exercise like NRC

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

crackIAS.com