[The Gilgit game then and now](https://nation.com.pk/24-May-2019/the-gilgit-game-then-and-now" \t "_new)

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It was during the time of Viceroy Lord Northbrook that the Gilgit game was actually started with an eye on Sinkiang as the British were afraid of Russia occupying Sinkiang. This was the time when Afghanistan was claiming Chitral and Badakshan and for British to acknowledge Afghan claim to Chitral would have meant abandoning the Hindukush as British frontiers.

In 1889 a Russian political officer Capt Grombtchevski with a Cossack escort was in Hunza. He concluded an agreement with Mir and Russia was allowed a set up a post in Hunza. Mir also agreed to seek Russia’s help if attacked from Gilgit. The Russian officer advised Mir to stay away from British influence and also assured of military help of 300 rifles and two guns and promised to train people of Hunza as well. The presence of Russian officer in Hunza was taken as the start of Gilgit game. It was also during this time China also claimed Hunza as its territory. Before the arrival of Algernon Durand to Gilgit, Hayward was murdered at Yasin, Biddulph returned after having a tenure in Gilgit and Colonel Lockhart (later Commander in Chief) mission visited Gilgit, Hunza, crossed Hindukush passed through Wakhan and traversed Chitral territory. Colonel Lockhart mission (1885) was to obtain correct knowledge of Hindukush range, population and resources. Also mission was to go to Chitral by way of Gilgit to get full information of the region. Lord Dufferin, Viceroy sent Colonel Algernon Durand as a political agent in 1888 to Gilgit for reopening of Gilgit agency. In March 1889 Gilgit agency was re-established and Durand was appointed as political agent.

Durand’s mission was to stop Mir of Hunza from developing relations with China and Russia and also from carrying out raids on Silk Route to Yarkand, also to enquire the outbreak of hostilities between Hunza/Nagar and Kashmir. In 1889 the conclusion of Durand was that nothing can stop a Russian officer with a thousand Cossacks from reaching Astore in ten days after crossing the passes of Hindukush and from watering their horses in Wular Lake four days later. Roads through Hunza and Nagar were vital for the defence of British Empire against Russia. Apprehensive of Mir of Hunza’s developing contacts with Russia and his refusal to come to the terms, Durand led Hunza/Nagar expedition on the direction of British government. The British were also afraid if not cleared in time Hunza can get help from China and Russia.

The people of Hunza fought very well with bravery against largest and best equipped army of the world. After the tough battle at Nilt finally the British succeeded in entering Hunza on 22 December 1891. In autumn 1894 Lord Curzon visited Gilgit then Hunza to Pamir through Kilk Pass to get first-hand information of the region. He returned to Gilgit by the way of Wakhan, Chitral through Shandur Pass. In 1892 tribal people from Darel, Tangir and Kohistan revolted and attacked Chilas to capture it but did not succeed. Colonel Algernon Durand led the forces from Gilgit to control the rebellion and in 1893 Chilas was occupied and retained because of its shortest route to British India via Babusar top. In 1935 according to a lease agreement all trans Indus (west of Indus) territory was to be administered by British Political Agent to strengthen their hold while Kashmir Administration was confirmed to cis Indus (east of Indus). This agreement remain in force upto July 1947.

Gilgit Baltistan is strategically as important as it used to be in 1885 when Russian troops moved down towards Pamirs to get footing on the southern side of the Hindukush and further advance to British India. Today again, Gilgit Baltistan has become a centre of a new great game played by India, United States, China and Afghanistan with the start of CPEC. The US defence secretary while appearing before Senate and House Armed Service Committee informed them that CPEC passes through disputed territory. The importance of Gilgit Baltistan increased initially with the construction of Karakoram Highway (KKH) and now with the start of CPEC. The CPEC covers almost 500 kilometres in Gilgit Baltistan, therefore the success of CPEC depends on Gilgit, the gateway. The distance from Kashgar to Gwadar is 3000 kilometers and Gwadar port will save at least 11000 kilometres of distance for fuel shipment and transportation. The United States interest in the region is to contain China’s advancement in the region. The US is afraid of China controlling Central Asian, Middle Eastern, Eurasian states and exploring their resources. In the past, India levelled baseless allegations about the presence of Chinese troops in Gilgit. It was a simple attempt to malign Pakistan through baseless propaganda. Ajit Doval, Indian national security advisor is on record who said we also have 106 kilometers long non-contiguous border with Afghanistan (Wakhan Corridor).

India has established a special cell at the cost of 500 million dollars to sabotage CPEC. The federal interior ministry has already warned Gilgit Baltistan’s administration that India has made plans to attack the CPEC installations to sabotage the mega project. Reportedly, in the past RAW has been instrumental into exploiting sectarian issue because of its known history of turbulence and this remains a major threat and odd incident can trigger sectarian clashes. Some dissident groups (sponsored) from abroad are running a campaign to incite local youth of Gilgit Baltistan. There is a small group of sub nationalists who does not enjoy any significant support in the region however, exploiting the issue of constitutional status by instigating the minds of young generations. In 2017, the Gilgit Baltistan police foiled a plan sponsored by RAW to sabotage CPEC. Some 12 persons were arrested in Yasin valley of district Ghizer and also seized a large quantity of weapons during the raid. Police officers confirmed that those arrested received funds from RAW to sabotage CPEC and were also planning to attack a Jamat Khana in Ghizer and other parts to trigger sectarian unrest. India and Afghanistan are using social media to damage the image of Pakistan and to support their narrative hundreds of fake accounts with Gilgit Baltistan surnames have been created. These fake profiles share anti Pakistan material. Indian and western media is also using fake news/videos of Gilgit Baltistan. The Times of India portrayed a video of Gilgit Baltistan as an uprising against Pakistan. The Awami Action Committee who was in video denied allegation by India media that the strike was against new taxes and was not anti-state. The loyalty and sincerity of people of Gilgit Baltistan cannot be doubted as the people of Gilgit Baltistan are completely loyal to Pakistan and all of them willing to lay their life for Pakistan. Gilgit Baltistan was liberated by the people themselves without any outside assistance and decided to join Pakistan unconditionally. The people of Gilgit Baltistan want their identity with Pakistan and Gilgit Baltistan be made a province within the federation of Pakistan yet in accordance with UN resolutions on Kashmir.