STUDY NOTES · BASIC CONCEPT

China claims Shaksgam Valley. What is Shaksgam valley? What does this claim mean to India?

International Relations

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On January 12, 2026, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning asserted that the Shaksgam Valley (also known as Trans-Karakoram Tract) in Jammu and Kashmir "belongs to China," defending ongoing infrastructure construction there as "fully justified" on its own territory. This came in response to India's repeated protests against Chinese activities under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which passes through the region.

Background on Shaksgam Valley

This 5,180 sq km high-altitude area (part of the larger Gilgit-Baltistan/PoK region) borders China's Xinjiang to the north.
In 1963, Pakistan ceded it to China via a boundary agreement, which India has never recognized as "illegal and invalid" — arguing Pakistan had no authority to transfer land it illegally occupies. India views the entire Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh as integral parts of India.

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Recent Developments

1. China is building/expanding roads and other infrastructure in Shaksgam Valley as part of CPEC (a flagship Belt and Road Initiative project linking Xinjiang to Pakistan's Gwadar port via highways, energy projects, etc.).
2. India (via MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal on January 9, 2026) reiterated non-recognition of CPEC (as it traverses illegally occupied Indian territory) and reserved the right to safeguard its interests.
3. China countered that the 1963 agreement and CPEC are sovereign matters between Beijing and Islamabad, focused on economic development and livelihoods — and do not alter its unchanged stance on the Kashmir issue (to be resolved bilaterally by India and Pakistan per UN resolutions).

Implications for CPEC and Kashmir:

1. Strengthens China's foothold — Infrastructure solidifies de facto control, enhances connectivity for trade/energy, and provides strategic depth (military/logistical advantages near Siachen and Ladakh borders).
2. Complicates Kashmir dispute — China's growing presence in PoK (via CPEC) adds a third party to the India-Pakistan conflict, potentially altering ground realities and making resolution harder. It also ties economic stakes to geopolitical leverage.

3. Escalates India-China tensions — Reinforces border frictions (post-2020 Galwan clashes), challenges India's sovereignty claims, and fuels opposition to BRI/CPEC globally.
4. Pakistan's role — Benefits from investment but faces criticism for "ceding" territory and sovereignty concerns in Gilgit-Baltistan.
5. China insists CPEC is purely economic and its Kashmir position unchanged, while India maintains protests and non-recognition. This exchange highlights persistent territorial friction amid the broader India-China-Pakistan triangle.

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