

United Nations Crisis Committee

The question of the Sino-Indian border dispute



Forum	United Nations Crisis Committee
Issue:	The question of the Sino-Indian border dispute
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Introduction

Throughout the history of Asia, there have been several changes to its political borders due to empires forming, colonisation, and many wars occurring. Two of the nations formed because of these changes were the People's Republic of China and the Republic of India. After the Qing Dynasty was overthrown in 1911 because of the Xinhai revolution, the Republic of China was established, the republic was also overthrown in 1949 during the Chinese civil war which led to the formation of the People's Republic of China. On the other hand, India gained independence from Britain in 1947, and a year later adopted its constitution forming the Republic of India.

After the establishment of the People's Republic and India, the Sino Indian border dispute quickly became a point of conflict between the nations. The Sino Indian border dispute, often described to be one of the most enduring and complicated territorial disputes of the modern world, is a territorial dispute between India and the People's Republic of China. The conflict is over the sovereignty of the regions: Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh which are located between China and India in the southeast of Asia and several other smaller regions. Due to this conflict, the Sino-Indian border is not officially internationally recognized to be a "border." Although not recognized as a "border," the boundary between China and India is 2,100 miles long causing the dispute to have major implications on regional stability, bilateral relations, and the geopolitical landscape of Asia. Furthermore, both nations have recently come into discussion for being considered a "superpower," therefore, a conflict between the two nations can not only have implications for Asia but also for the entire world.

In this report the historical context will briefly be explained, as well as the current tensions and challenges, previous and viable solutions to this issue, and useful reading material will be provided in the appendix.



Definition of Key Terms

Sino Indian

“Sino Indian” is a synonym for “Chinese Indian,” the prefix “Sino” comes from the Latin word “Sinae” which means China.

Aksai Chin

Aksai chin is one of the disputed regions within the Sino Indian conflict, the region is claimed by India to be part of the Ladakh union territory, however, is administered by China.

Arunachal Pradesh

Arunachal Pradesh is one of the disputed regions within the Sino Indian conflict, the region is claimed by China to be part of the Tibet autonomous region, however, is administered by India.

Dalai Lama

‘Dalai Lama’ is a title given to the highest leader of the Gelug of Tibetan Buddhism. The current Dalai Lama is s Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama mentioned in this report refers to him as well.

Demarcation

Determining the limits or borders to something, in this case the borders between countries.

The Line of Actual Control (LAC)

The line of actual control is a geopolitical line that separates Indian controlled territory from Chinese controlled territory in the Sino-Indian border dispute. Up to the line each nation has complete control over the territory.



General Overview



A map of the border between India and China, displaying the Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh regions.

Historical Background

Ambiguity regarding the Sino-Indian border has been an ongoing issue since the 19th century, dating as far back as the colonial era. For a long time, British-India and China were content with a not demarcated border due to the natural elements, such as the Himalayas, which created a geographical border between the two countries. However, the arising conflict between the two superpowers, Great Britain and Russia, became an incentive for the British to establish an official border. Since then, many propositions have been made to establish said border.

Proposed border lines



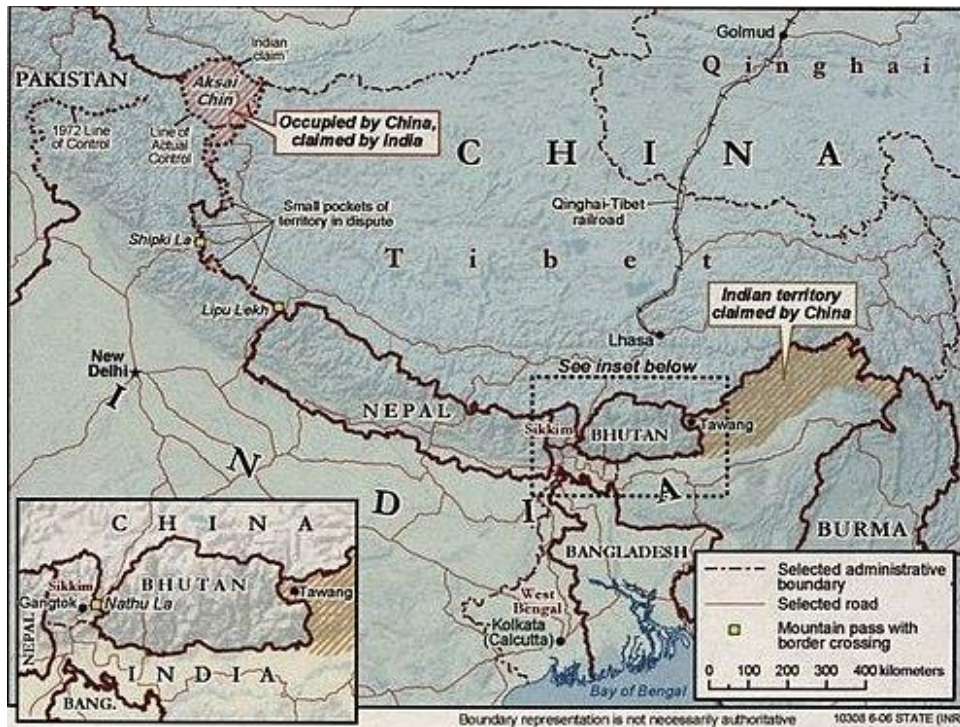
In 1865, W.H. Johnson proposed the Johnson line, which would put the western sector Aksai Chin in Jammu and Kashmir. Due to China experiencing their own struggles because of the Dungan revolt, this line was never proposed to them, and the British grew more restless in fear of Russia's expansion during China's moment of weakness. In 1897, Sir John Ardagh modified the Johnson line, arguing that it would be more strategically advantageous against the Russians. This line was thus named the 'Johnson-Ardagh Line.' The Macartney-Macdonald Line created in 1899, along the Karakoram Mountains, was the only formal line proposition to the Chinese. However, this line has never been acknowledged by them. The border lines kept fluctuating depending on the Russian threat and have never been properly enforced by either party. Despite the British adding these lines to their maps, the lines had yet to be formally acknowledged by all parties involved. Any boundary in Aksai Chin remained yet to be demarcated by the time India gained independence in 1947. In 1913-1914, China, British-India and Tibet attended a conference in Simla (India), which led to the creation of the McMahon Line, by Henry McMahon. This treaty was to be ratified by all parties, however, China refused to sign the final document, while Great Britain and Tibet did. By doing so, the British had violated the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 and Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1906, according to the Chinese. China refused to acknowledge Tibet as a sovereign state and thus also the legitimacy of the Simla Convention and the treaties that were signed by Tibet. The People's Republic of China (PRC), established in 1949, still deems the McMahon line to be invalid.

The Sino-Indian War

The Sino-Indian border dispute had escalated into a war which took place from October to November 1962. Ever since the construction of a road from Xinjiang to Tibet by China in the 1950s and the Tibetan uprising in 1959, there have been a series of skirmishes between the two countries. Efforts from China to resolve these diplomatically have been rejected by India between 1960-1962. During the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis, China decided to abandon diplomacy and launched a military offensive against India, primarily in the disputed regions of Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh, on 20 October 1962. China defeated India with ease and regained control over these regions. However, due to the swift resolution to the Cuban Missile Crisis, the United States of America were able to promptly respond to India's request for help. As a result of this, China declared a ceasefire on November 20 and withdrew from most of the areas they had just invaded. Simultaneously, the Line of Actual Control (LAC) was



established to mostly what was pre-war, which resembles the McMahon line. The LAC first was used only to reference the western border, but by 1990 was used to refer to the entire de facto border. The Sino-Indian war has led to the second Kashmir war between India and Pakistan, and the Nathu La and Cho La clashes, also known as the second Sino-Indian war in 1967, when tensions arose again.



A map highlighting the Line of Actual Control, picture by the CIA

Key border Regions

The Sino-Indian border dispute revolves around two main regions: Aksai Chin in the western sector and Arunachal Pradesh in the eastern sector.

Aksai Chin

The Aksai Chin region is the northeastern portion of the Kashmir region, bordering Tibet, China, and India. Geographically it is a westward extension of the Plateau of Tibet and the Tibet Autonomous Region, south of the Uygur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang in China and



east of the Ladakh union territory in India. China claims the Aksai Chin region to be a part of Uygur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang in China and the Tibet Autonomous Region, suggesting the region is integral to its territory. However, India claims the region to be part of the Ladakh union territory in India based on historical and administrative grounds. The area is a high-altitude desert and incredibly remote, with only few settlements, inhabitants, and resources. Despite this, the area is strategically of importance for the Chinese, as it connects Xinjiang with Western Tibet. During the 1950s, the Chinese thus began the construction of a road from Xinjiang to Tibet through Aksai Chin, which further escalated tensions between the two countries as previously mentioned. The road is currently a part of China National Highway 219. Aksai Chin is currently mostly occupied and in control by China.

Arunachal Pradesh

Arunachal Pradesh is a state in northeastern India that shares a border with China. The state is ethnically and geographically diverse. China claims Arunachal Pradesh to fall under Tibetan territory, and even refers to the region as 'Southern Tibet.' These claims are based on historical grounds by stating the region was historically under Tibetan control. Currently, India exercises de facto control over Arunachal Pradesh and fiercely rejects any attempts by China to rename the region. Furthermore, India claims Arunachal Pradesh to be an integral part of India. The LAC serves as a rough demarcation line, but due to both parties possessing differing opinions on where the LAC exactly lays, border disputes are more likely to occur.

Recent tensions

The Sino-Indian border dispute has been an ongoing issue for 73 years now, with the year 2020 marking the 70th anniversary of this dispute. During these 73 years there have been many cases of violence and conflict regarding the Sino-Indian border. Despite the two countries being able to avoid confrontations like the two wars, more recent conflicts such as the Galwan Valley conflict near Ladakh on 15 June 2020 seem to be on the rise. Tension between the two countries is still high, and military buildup around the border, standoffs and clashes are becoming more frequent and increasingly more difficult and complex to resolve. The duration of some standoffs may be months. With most of the confrontations both parties were able to recognise the potential dangers of the situation and were able to de-escalate accordingly. However, this was not the case in 2020 at the



Galwan Valley, where at least 20 Indian soldiers and 4 Chinese soldiers have been reported to not have survived the conflict. Despite the usage of firearms being prohibited in this area, that was not able to withhold the soldiers from utilising melee weapons and for them to fight in hand-to-hand combat against each other. Despite the high number of attempts at resolving the border dispute diplomatically and to enhance international relations, the gap between the two countries seems to only have widened.

Challenges

Some challenges that come with resolving the Sino-Indian border dispute will be named here. Firstly, due to the area of the disputed regions having rough terrain with varying altitudes it is much more challenging to implement borders and to enforce them. Secondly, the two parties have differing opinions on what the pace of coming to a resolution should be. India is threatened by the current borders and sees the current dispute as a sign of instability, while China does not see the dispute as much of a threat as India does. This leads to a lack of urgency on China's end, as they are willing to wait for an outcome which is more favourable to them. Furthermore, both countries are fiercely nationalistic. Since this dispute has been ongoing for so many years, both parties have suffered defeats they are too prideful to forgive and forget. For both the Chinese and the Indian government it would be a sign of weakness or a lack of respect towards their country to accept any proposition that is not in their favour or what they want. Lastly, a plethora of new concerns have been raised since this dispute first started, such as China's growing influence in Asia and India's increasing international relations with, for example, the USA and Japan.

Major Parties Involved

People's Republic of China (China)

China is one of the two countries involved in the Sino-Indian border dispute, their role in the dispute is significant. Having formed the People's Republic of China on 1 October 1949. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is the principal military force of China and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).



While Tibet is currently still officially part of China, the government did establish the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) in 1965. China's growing influence is a topic of discussion and concern to many.

Republic of India (India)

India is one of the two countries involved in the Sino-Indian border dispute, their role in the dispute is significant. India gained their independence in 1947 from the British. They are currently facing many border disputes besides the Sino-Indian dispute. India is also strengthening bilateral relations with various countries, such as eastern-Asian countries like Japan, but also Western countries such as the USA. This way they are also gaining influence in the region and in the world.

United Kingdom (UK)

The UK colonised India from 1858 to 1947. When the border dispute first arose, the British were still in power in India. The UK sent representatives and negotiated with China and Tibet to come to a resolution and created border propositions while they were still in power, together with the Indians. Even though India is independent from the UK, the actions of the UK when this dispute developed has impacted the process.

The Russian Federation (Russia)

Russia plays quite a significant role in this conflict, albeit more so behind-the-scenes. Russia maintains close bilateral relationships with both India and China and is interested in maintaining the trilateral relationship. Thus, Russia has served as a mediator between the two, with efforts to de-escalate the situation various times. Furthermore, Russia has been an apparent threat to the British, and at some point, the Chinese years ago. Both parties wishing to promptly minimise the threat by changing the borders has been a key factor to multiple escalations and tension.

Pakistan and Nepal

Both Pakistan and Nepal currently have border disputes with India. Pakistan and India have previously fought in wars due to border disputes, such as the first and second Kashmir war. India and Nepal are currently disputed over an estimated 60,000 hectares of border. India has resolved disputes with Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.



Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of event
August 15 th 1947	India gains independence from British rule, causing the establishment of the Republic of India
October 1 st 1949	The People's Republic of China is formed
October 6 th 1950	China invaded Tibet, gaining control over the region, and increasing tensions between China and India
October 24 th 1951	The seventeen-point agreement was ratified
April 29 th 1954	The Panchsheel Agreement was signed by China and India
March 10 th 1959	Tibetan uprising against Chinese rule began and Tenzin Gyasto (Dalai Lama) escaped to India to form the Tibetan government in exile in Dharamshala
1960	Peace talks known as the "Chou En-Lai and Kashrina Menon talks" occur, in the hope to find a peaceful solution to the border dispute
July 1961	China starts patrolling along McMahon Line, entering regions administered by India, increasing tensions between the two powers
December 5 th 1961	Indian Government launched policies to cut off supply to Chinese soldiers that entered regions administered by India
October 20 th 1962	Begin of the Sino-Indian war
November 21 st 1962	End of the Sino- the Indian war
July 2 nd 1972	Simla agreement was signed by Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai
December 23 rd 1988	The establishment of the Joint working group was announced



September 7 th 1993	India and China sign an Agreement on the maintenance of peace and tranquillity along the Line of actual control
April 11 th 2005	China and India signed the Agreement on the Political Parameters and guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India- China Boundary Question
June 16 th 2017	The start of a Chinese and Indian military force standoff over the Chinese construction of a road in Doklam
August 28 th 2017	Both powers announced that they have withdrawn their troops from the site, marking the end of the Doklam standoff
May 5 th 2020	Chinese and Indian troops clash in a fight causing the death of at least 20 Indian soldiers and 4 Chinese soldiers
January 20 th 2021	A face-off between Chinese and Indian troops occurred
December 9 th 2022	Indian army announces there had been a clash between Indian and Chinese forces in Arunachal Pradesh state

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- Seventeen-point agreement, October 24th, 1951
- Panchsheel agreement, April 29th, 1954
- Shimla agreement, July 15th, 1972
- Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity, September 7th, 1993
- Agreement on Confidence building measures, November 29th 1996
- Agreement on political parameters and guiding principles, April 11th, 2005
- Border Defence Cooperation Agreement, October 13th, 2013
- Special representative talks

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue



Previously, there have been several attempts made by both nations to find a solution to the disputed border and to de-escalate military tensions around the line of actual control.

Throughout the history of the political dispute surrounding the Sino-Indian border, there have been several attempts to reach agreements and work toward cooperation between the powers involved. The earliest of these attempts was the “Panchsheel agreement,” this agreement was the first mention of China’s five principles of peaceful coexistence, which were principles addressing their foreign relations. The attempt was remarkably successful in easing tensions between India and China, to the extent that the Indian Prime Minister of the time, Jawaharlal Nehru stated: “If these principles were recognized in the mutual relations of all countries, then indeed there would hardly be any conflict and certainly no war.” Although successful for the time that the agreement was set to last, after 8 years the agreement had elapsed, coupled with the construction of a road in the Aksai Chin region exacerbated relations between China and India. Cementing itself as one of the causes of the Sino-Indian War.

In the years following the Sino-Indian war, several agreements were made to act as confidence-building measures between the two powers, these included the: Border Peace and Tranquillity Agreement (1993), Agreement on Military Confidence Building Measures (1996), Protocol for the Implementation of Military Confidence Building Measures (2005). The three agreements were closely interlinked, with the later agreements furtherly defining and clarifying certain aspects of the agreement reached in 1993. These agreements were adhered to, therefore successfully preventing conflict between the two nations for several years. Although these agreements have been successful in preventing conflict, in recent years this maintenance of peace has failed, such as the clash between the soldiers of the two nations on June 15th, 2020. This altercation can be traced back to the construction of infrastructure and the altering of the ecosystem by the Chinese government at the Galwan River near the line of the actual control (LAC). This was done to increase force deployment in the area and gain more territory in the disputed border. This breached several of the agreements aimed to act as confidence-building measures. It is still unclear which power started the attack, Chinese troops claim that “Indian troops fired shots at their troops,” whereas Indian troops claimed that Chinese troops started firing in the air.

In the early 2000s, there had been several attempts to solve the border dispute between the two powers. The two most impactful agreements were the “special representative mechanism on the India-China boundary question” (2003) also known as the SR mechanism, and the “Agreement on



the political parameters and guiding principles for the settlement of the India-China boundary question” (2005). The SR mechanism has had twenty-two talks between 2003 and 2019, during the fourth round of the SR talks, a three-step plan was created to find a settlement for the Sino-Indian border dispute by defining the border and regions belonging to each nation. The first of these steps was completed in the 2005 agreement mentioned above. Unfortunately, due to the strong conflict of ideas of which areas are claimed and controlled by which country, the second phase has not been declared completed.

Possible Solutions

In recent years, tensions between India and the People’s Republic of China regarding the Sino-Indian border have been increasing drastically. In an age where international collaboration is of utmost importance a long-term solution needs to be found such that political and military stability is promoted and preserved within the region of dispute. To come to such a conclusion, the borders between the countries must be clearly defined and agreements need to be reached to ensure this form of dispute does not occur again. Previous attempts to solve this dispute, such as the agreements reached in 2003 and 2005, have set examples of what a solution to the dispute could look like if the disagreements are overcome.

Viable solutions such as declaring the claimed zones as part of their respectively claimed countries could allow for an end to the dispute. The region of Aksai Chin would be declared to be part of the People’s Republic of China, whereas the region of Arunachal Pradesh would be declared to be part of India. Furthermore, the other smaller disputed territorial regions can be divided between the country of China and India such that the land is divided equally between the nations. The actual line of control can be adjusted to account for the splitting of the smaller disputed regions. If the splitting is deemed unfair by the nations, agreements can be made such that the regions are shared in a “fair” manner as decided by India and the People’s Republic. To ensure the preservation of peace within the disputed area, military agreements need to be made.

Alternatively, by splitting the disputed area among the nations, the disputed regions could gain maximum autonomy becoming a self-governing state. An organisation formed by the United Nations could govern the region. Furthermore, any resources that are gained from the region are to be shared equally between India and the People’s Republic of China. The line of actual control can be



reviewed and if deemed appropriate define the regions that are declared to be autonomous. Furthermore, it must also be ensured that there is military stability within the region, therefore, agreements between nations could be reached or the usage of the UN peacekeepers.

It is imperative that the dispute between both countries come to a peaceful conclusion as soon as possible, as the long-term effects of this ongoing conflict will not only politically and economically damage those directly involved, but also all neighbouring countries in Asia.

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Appendix or Appendices

- I. An incredibly useful site giving an extensive overview of the historical context and current events of the Sino-Indian border dispute: <https://www.e-ir.info/2022/06/26/sino-indian-border-dispute-a-brief-introduction/>



