

## **SINO-INDIAN BORDER DISPUTE**

### **Abstract**

The Sino-Indian border dispute stands as one of the most pressing issues of the 21st century, with a path to a peaceful resolution still unclear. The conflict involves a vast territory, with each side claiming different areas. According to China, the length of the disputed border measures 2,000 km, while India asserts that it encompasses 3,488 km. Tensions surrounding the border have escalated since World War II. Following India's liberation from British colonial rule and the establishment of a communist government in China, the two nations struggled to delineate their borders. This disagreement ultimately culminated in the Sino-Indian War on October 20, 1962, during which India suffered a significant defeat. Since then, tensions have resulted in periodic clashes between the two sides.

Both China and India have made efforts to establish various peace mechanisms in hopes of resolving the border issue through negotiations, but they have yet to achieve meaningful progress. Compounding the challenges, each country has been increasing military personnel and constructing infrastructure near the border, hindering peaceful coexistence between these two nuclear-armed giants and complicating the resolution of the longstanding dispute.

**keywords:** *Sino-India, Aksai Chin, Arunachal Pradesh*

The Sino-India border dispute is considered one of the most urgent problems of the 21st century, but solutions are still not visible. The two giants of the world are unable to reach an agreement. The so-called "Line of Actual Control", also known as LAC, is the longest disputed border in the world. Due to this problem, the situation between the neighboring countries periodically becomes extremely tense.

The opposing sides have different arguments to support their positions. New Delhi believes that the total length of the disputed Sino-Indian border is 3,488 kilometers. The LAC is divided into conditional 3 sectors: Western sector: - 1,597 km. length, Middle sector: - 545 km. and Eastern sector: - 1,346 km. India also accuses China of occupying an area of about 38,000 km<sup>2</sup> in the Kashmir region. That is why it considers Aksai Chin to be an integral part of the Ladakh region under Indian control.

Beijing claims that the length of the disputed India-China border does not exceed 2,000 km. The western sector includes the Karakoram Mountains and is about 600 km. long, and the dubious area is 33,000 km<sup>2</sup>, which is currently controlled by China. Beijing

claims that the middle sector is about 450 km long, of which the disputed area is 2,000 km<sup>2</sup>. The eastern sector is 650 km long, and the dubious area is 90,000 km<sup>2</sup>, which they believe is currently illegally occupied by India. According to the Chinese perspective, the eastern sector of the border presents the greatest challenges to resolution. This is largely because the "McMahon Line" is viewed as illegitimate. Consequently, China asserts its claim over the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, specifically targeting the Buddhist city of Tawang, which it considers to be part of the southern region of Tibet.

## **Historical background**

The territorial dispute between China and India dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is related to the strategic competition between the British and Russian empires in Central/South Asia. In 1865-1897, the British colonial rulers of India developed various versions of the northern and northeastern border of Kashmir. The conditional border fluctuated depending on the analysis of the expected threats from Russia. It is noteworthy that China never agreed to any of the proposed border proposals. The so-called "MacArthur-MacDonald" line of 1899 was the only one officially proposed to Beijing, although the rulers of the Qing dynasty did not accept this offer and were not subsequently able to persuade them. The Xinhai Revolution in China in 1911 eased the Chinese problem for the British. However, the new government emerged from the revolution also firmly defended its claims to Tibet.

Tibet, more than the Chinese Empire, was under the influence of Britain and Russia. In order to reduce Russian influence in Tibet, Britain decided to recognize Chinese sovereignty over part of Tibet. Purposely, the British government held a tripartite conference in Simla, India, in October 1913. Henry McMahon, who represented British interests at the conference, divided Tibet into two zones: "Inner Tibet", which would be under full administrative autonomy of China, and "Outer Tibet" would be subject to the Tibetan government and Britain-India (with a largely autonomous status). The Chinese, in addition to objecting to the equal representation of Tibet at the conference, opposed the proposed terms and borders. That's why they didn't agree to the British plan.

Negotiations continued in 1914. However, this time the issues were mainly discussed between Tibet and Britain. As a result of the negotiations, a new border between India and Tibet was established 20 km north of Tawang. The Chinese representative Chen reluctantly agreed to the line drawn on the map by McMahon. The agreement was concluded on April 27, 1914. Although Chen initialed the agreement, but he did not sign the draft, and two days later the Chinese government officially rejected the agreement.

The Simla Conference failed to establish the demarcation of the Indo-Tibetan border because the Chinese government did not ratify the so-called "McMahon Line". Although the territories of Dirang and Tawang fell south of the McMahon Line, they remained under Tibetan control.

After the Russian Revolution of 1917, the British were no longer concerned about Russian expansion towards the Indian Ocean. Therefore, the border issue was never discussed again. When the British left India in 1947, they left no clear definition of where the Indian border actually lay. They left a similar ambiguity regarding the eastern sector.

The border dispute between India and China intensified in the 1950s, when the People's Republic of China established control over Tibet. The then Indian political elite, concerned about Tibet's encroachment on China's borders, urged the Nehru government to strengthen military and administrative control over the regions along the border with China. Despite their calls, Prime Minister Nehru and the Indian ambassador in China, Panikkar, were wary of a possible escalation of relations with China. In order to avoid conflict, they decided that India would not actively pursue the settlement of the border issue. However, at the same time, they declared that the so-called "McMahon Line" was the border between India and China. India officially recognized Chinese sovereignty over Tibet in 1952, but this did not resolve the problem.

It should be noted that China was not interested in escalating the border issue with India. The newly-elected communist regime was mainly concerned with consolidating its power and resolving internal problems. It was also concerned about the fear of an invasion by the United States and the threat of the return of the Nationalist government of the Republic of China, which had evacuated in Taiwan. Therefore, it postponed the resolution of the border issue with India for the future.

### **Indo-China War – 1962**

In 1954, the Panchsheel Agreement was signed between China and India, which regulated India's relations with Tibet. New Delhi recognized Tibet as an integral part of China and lost the rights inherited from Britain. The Panchsheel Agreement eased tensions between the two countries to some extent, but both sides still had great distrust of each other. An additional rift in relations was created by maps published in India after the Panchsheel Agreement, which depicted the borders of Tibet. Beijing was angered by the fact that the map included Aksai Chin, located in the Ladakh region, which the Chinese considered their own territory.

In 1959, an anti-Chinese rebellion in Tibet demanding independence broke out, further deepening the grounds for mutual distrust and suspicion between China and India. Immediately after the uprising began, China accused India of inciting violence. Although the People's Liberation Army (PLA) quickly suppressed the Tibetan uprising. The flight of the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama to India and the granting of political asylum to him angered Beijing. The Chinese communist regime suspected that India was also involved in the Tibetan uprising. Beijing sharply criticized Nehru, accusing him of continuing imperial policies in Tibet.

Political tensions escalated into military conflict. In August 1959, the sides opened fire for the first time at Longju. The military escalation had a significant impact on relations. In September, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru unsuccessfully attempted to resolve the problem through negotiations. In 1960, Zhou Enlai visited India for dialogues. Nehru rejected the Chinese premier's offer of a kind of territorial exchange. The western sector (which was already under de facto Chinese control) would remain with China, thus resolving the dispute over Aksai Chin. Beijing would recognize New Delhi's sovereignty over the eastern sector and no longer claim Arunachal Pradesh.

After the failed negotiations, the Indian government decided to send troops into the eastern sector. It deployed troops on the south of McMahon and forced the Chinese soldiers there to retreat to the north. The Chinese suspected that India was also planning to take Aksai Chin by force in the western sector.

On October 20, 1962, the SGA attacked Indian positions along the entire disputed border from Aksai Chin to the Arunachal Pradesh region, starting the Sino-Indian War. The rapid attack of the Chinese army was successful and ended in a crushing defeat of the Indian army in about a month. On November 21, the Chinese authorities considered that their goal had been achieved and unilaterally declared a ceasefire. The SGA was disposed to the north of the McMahon Line and created a 20-km buffer zone. At the same time, New Delhi was warned not to think about attacking, as the Chinese response would be much harsher. The Indian side reluctantly agreed to the ultimatum.

As expected, the war failed to provide a final solution to the border dispute. Since then, political negotiations on the border issue have been ongoing, periodically accompanied by crises and clashes of varying complexity.

In 1987, the third Sino-Indian crisis broke out in the Sumdorong Chu River valley (Chinese: Wangdung) in the Tawang district, which lasted for 8 months. Both countries deployed troops facing each other, and the threat of war increased. On December 19-24, 1988, the prime minister of India, Gandhi, held talks with the Chinese. His goal was to resolve the conflict and restore the status quo that existed before the conflict. First of all, he again recognized Tibet as an integral part of China. He also stated that disputed issues should be resolved through negotiations. As a result, both sides withdrew a large part of their troops from the valley, and tensions decreased. It should be noted that his efforts laid the foundation for the creation of mechanisms for peaceful resolution of the conflict in the future.

On September 8, 1993, during the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao to Beijing, the country's leaders signed the "Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement." According to the agreement, the parties refused to use force and recognized and respected the reality of the LAC. Disagreements on the disputed border sections were to be resolved only through negotiations.

On November 29, 1996, a 12-point agreement on confidence-building measures in the military sphere along the LAC was signed. The main spirit of the agreement was to avoid military conflict. For example, the use of firearms, explosive materials, dangerous chemicals, etc. was prohibited. It is important that in the context of the China-India border talks, both countries finally recognized the existence of certain problems in the border regions and considered it necessary to create institutional mechanisms to manage these problems.

On June 23, 2003, China and India adopted the Declaration on the Principles of China-India Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation. The parties agreed to appoint special representatives to explore ways to resolve the border dispute. In 2012, the India-China Working Group for Consultation and Coordination on Border Issues was specifically tasked with resolving and managing issues arising from tensions in the border regions.

Although relations between India and China have improved since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of disputes have emerged, the China-India border remains a hotbed of tension. For example, in 2005, Beijing allegedly hinted to New Delhi that it might no longer have claims to Arunachal Pradesh and Tawang. However, the situation changed since 2007, when Chinese media began referring the above-mentioned regions as Southern Tibet.

### **Nowadays Situation**

Since Xi Jinping took over as head of the People's Republic of China, relations have become even more tense, periodically escalating into conflict. For example, if in 2014 there were 334 incidents, in 2019 there were 606 such cases. In 2017, the Doklam incident occurred, which escalated into a heavy military clash and lasted for 70 days. On June 15, 2020, a clash occurred in the Galwan Valley near Ladakh. The opposing sides, armed with ketas, engaged in hand-to-hand combat, resulting in the deaths of 20 Indian soldiers and 4 Chinese soldiers. After the incident, additional troops were deployed to face each other, which almost turned into a war. Further escalation was prevented by the timely intervention of political and military officials. The opposing sides withdrew their military units from Galwan Valley.

In 2021, China's legislature passed a law on land border protection, which states that it "promotes coordination between border defense and social and economic development in border areas." In line with this mandate, China has built significant civilian and military infrastructure near the disputed border with India. It has dug tunnels in the Arunachal Pradesh region to facilitate transportation if necessary. In response, India deployed 50,000 troops along the disputed border in 2021 and deployed air forces in its vicinity. It has also launched a campaign to increase the number of Indian residents in the disputed areas and has actively begun building villages.

### **Conclusion**

There is no easy way to resolve the border dispute between the countries with two nuclear powers and a huge economy. Although China has shown in the past that it can make some concessions, this approach is no longer observed in modern China. On the contrary, it is trying its best not to leave the disputed territories unattended and is setting conditions for their return. The disputed territories with India, especially the western sector, are a strategically important corridor for China, so a compromise in this area can be considered practically impossible.

It is unacceptable for India to retreat on disputed issues. Its positions are strengthened by its historical past and the borders established during its time as a British colony. The impression remains that the eastern sector is more important for it, although due to its strategic proximity to Kashmir, a disputed territory with Pakistan, the surrender of Aksai Chin seems unthinkable. In addition, a rapidly growing India is striving for leadership in the

region and in the Indian Ocean basin, so it is very annoyed by the growth of Chinese influence in such a close neighborhood as Sri Lanka.

In view of the above-mentioned actions, we can assume that in the near future, the opposing parties are not aimed at resolving the conflict peacefully, but at further strengthening their own positions.