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Documento de Trabajo
Serie Unión Europea y Relaciones Internacionales
Número 112 / 2021

A geostrategic rivalry: the Sino-Indian border dispute

Eva María Pérez Vidal



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ISBN: 978-84-18463-83-9

Depósito legal: M-33639-2021

Maquetación: Forletter

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Introduction

About the topic

My choice of the Sino-Indian border dispute as the topic for my master's dissertation responds to different reasons. First of all, I already had investigated in the past about this region through my end-of degree's dissertation, but specifically about the decolonization process, boundary and identity issues, nationality laws of the United Kingdom and the Indian diaspora in this country. I wanted to widen my knowledge about India's reality, as well as China's, due to my interest in Asian studies and the Eurocentric education that I had received during my academic years, that did not focus on these types of topics.

At the same time, the Sino-Indian boundary issue have developed great relevance due to the increasingly competitiveness between China and India that not only covers a regional spectre, but also a global scope, as well as the constant incidents and movements in both sides of the border. Its relevance in the international agenda at the moment makes this topic very interesting to research; but the most attractive aspect from my point of view is that this conflict has been present for seventy years without being resolved and has very deep roots down in history.

Both India and China were the two main regional actors and more relevant territories in Asia during the colonial years, but they were already the two main Asian powers in terms of power and influence for centuries, and even millennia. That is why when they gained independence as states by their own in its modern dimension, they did not see themselves as new countries inside the global or Asian contexts, but more as the representatives of ancient and rich cultures and traditions.

China was the "kingdom or empire of the centre", a territory that stood out culturally, politically, and economically since thousands of years throughout all its empires and dynasties. In the meantime, India, even that it was not as relevant as China in terms of its economy or politics, it certainly has exercised an enormous influence in the Asian panorama, with an "Indianization" and spread of Hinduism or Buddhism to other territories, being the great part of the Asia-Pacific region.

Taking into account all these facts, we have to consider that these civilizations shaped profoundly the rest of the region due to its relevance, and their rivalry came from several centuries ago. In fact, China was not only India's neighbour, but it was the only power that was able to compete with India, and vice versa. This idea will help to perfectly frame the border dispute. Another key element is that in China and India there was a constant struggle between unity and strong minorities or regional identities, both ethnic and religious. This lack of a Chinese or Indian monolithic civilization and identity crisis will finally set off, among other consequences, in the Great partition in the case of India and territorial dispute with China afterwards. With the expansion of their territories and the new delimitation of borders of the 20th century, this conflict between the conception of the state of a monolithic identity and diversity, and the integration of territories with different identities, such as Kashmir for India or Tibet for China, increased enormously the territorial tensions.

Until the 18th or 19th century Europe could not compete against Asia, especially against the Chinese economy. The turning point for this Asian predominance was the First Industrial Revolution, that took place in Europe, and whose centre was the United Kingdom. The technological superiority of the Europeans allowed them to have an economic and military predominance and to be able to take advantage of the resources of the region. This fact, linked to the internal crisis that both civilizations were living at that moment, contributed to the instauration of European colonies in most countries in Asia and the end of their independence.

In the specific case of the British, these used the internal crisis and turned them around with the purpose of gaining control of these territories, starting with India through unequal treaties imposed after revolts, with the final result of the instauration of the British Raj. This same process was used in China, with the repartition of the territory in different areas of influence, although in this case a direct control was not possible. These years of colonial dominance are considered by both civilizations as a very dark and shaming period.

It will not be until India's independence in 1947 and the declaration of the People's Republic of China in 1949 when these countries will gain their autonomy back and therefore the way towards the industrialisation and capitalisation of their economies. This new beginning started to bring their power back and was the turning point for the predominance of Asia in the global context, especially in the case of China, growingly competing with the West's relevance politically and economically. This also means that they will compete against each other for being the major regional power in Asia, and this fight will be exemplified better than anything in the borders dispute.

Therefore, apart from an interest on the region and the current importance of this matter in the international agenda, another reason for the decision of focusing on this topic is the own history and relevance of these two countries, in a global sense. These two giants are the only countries in the Asian context that are able to oppose each other, as well as to position themselves as the leading power in this sphere of influence. The boundary conflict would be the best exemplification of this struggle, as well as a great mirror of the geopolitical strategies and priorities of both countries, hence its importance.

Structure

In order to successfully address this master's dissertation, we will start with a first chapter covering as an introduction the history and causes of the boundary issue, in relation with the decolonization process and creation of new states at the middle of the 20th century, continuing with the Cold War Years and the change of century. The history of the conflict has such relevance because both powers have been justifying for years their actions and movements based on their own history and cultural relations with the territory. This fact initiates a never-ending cycle where both countries feel entitled to carry out actions and seeking their best interests. Also, we have to consider a broader scope where the global context of the moment was very relevant in order to explain the evolution of the conflict. For example, the climate in the region after the colonial occupation and WWII, the game of interests and alliances during the Cold War, or even the change after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the aims of a new beginning that finally were not successful.

At the same time, in a second chapter, we will focus on the specific case of each region in dispute, in relation with how it has directly handled the diverse claims over its territory and confrontations in the past, as well as what is the current situation and prospects of future. This second chapter is necessary, because even though we conceive the boundary issue throughout the master's dissertation as unitary, a single border between India and China, we need to dedicate a space to analyse the situation in every region in conflict with relevant secondary actors involved, and how it has come to this point, to fully understand this topic.

The Kashmir region has suffered an enormous escalation of tensions during the last years, due to several reasons, but specifically to its particularities compared to the other territories in dispute. Kashmir is not only contested by India and China, but also by Pakistan, being a territory with a lot of identity issues. At the same time, the derogation of the Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, and the latest COVID-19 crisis, made the region an authentic hot pot of conflict at the moment.

Bhutan, a frequently ignored but very relevant actor, exemplifies the perfect case of an independent state immerse in the conflict that has tried over the decades to protect its national identity and culture, and not positioning itself favourable to one side or another. The constant claims over some of its territory, its transition to democracy or its management of the pandemic, are making that neutrality to be difficult to maintain, or at least to be questioned.

The territories of Nepal and Tibet are also some of the more important areas in this boundary dispute. While Nepal reached its autonomy, Tibet has been over the years significant due to its visibility and struggle for autonomy.

Finally, in a third chapter, we will make an analysis on the topic proving the hypothesis and sub-hypothesis, covering counter narratives explaining why the conflict has taken place for so long, as well as the nature of the own conflict, alternative forms of involvement and the real interest behind it. For this purpose, we will discuss if the boundary issue is a real war conflict or not, taking into account the sporadic attacks and length

of the conflict. At the same time, it would be discussed if it can become in the future a global outcome, or it will keep relegated to a regional sphere as a bilateral issue between both countries. In the end, the dissertation will be finished with an analysis of the role of natural resources as a motivation for the conflict; as well as the use of the economy, population and the recent COVID-19 crisis as tactics or strategies for reaching more control over the region.

Hypothesis

In this master's dissertation we will present the hypothesis that the Sino-Indian boundary issue is not caused by historical reasons or identity issues that appeared mainly after the end of WWII and the decolonisation process. We want to prove that different national identities and conceptions of the new re-established states in the middle of the 20th century (India and China) came into contradiction and are, the explanation of the border dispute.

We will support that hypothesis on the growing tension in the region for the access to natural resources, due to the enormous population of both countries, as well as the future challenges of climate change. India, which is controlling the headwaters of the main rivers in the western area, in dispute with China and Pakistan, is carrying out a series of public works based on the construction of hydroelectric dams. For its part, China is doing the same in the central-eastern region, not only with hydroelectric projects similar to the ones of its neighbour, but also with largest projects that consist of the deviation of waters from the Himalayas to other parts of the country. This struggle for hydric and electric resources will be translated in the future into more tensions in the border area, in order to dominate the source of all these natural resources, the control of the Himalayas. From this chain grow all main rivers that cross the Asian continent, providing life to millions of people. The need of its control can potentially be translated into a "water war".

As first sub-hypothesis, we have the conception of the conflict as a territorial issue, but not really a war conflict. This is based on the very sporadic attacks and length of the conflict.

The second sub-hypothesis is the potential to the boundary issue of becoming a global conflict, due to its implications and different actors. China, India, and even Pakistan, are nuclear powers; and in relation with the border dispute there is a series of alliances, such as the one of India with the US, that can be very dangerous in case of a major escalation of events.

The last sub-hypothesis will be the use of another strategies in order to gain influence over the areas in dispute, as well as to debilitate the enemy. Examples of these strategies are economic cooperation, with a series of public works and development programmes; the use of population, with purchases of land and the construction of villages in disputed areas; as well as during the last year the fight against the virus.

Methodology

The methodology used to achieve these objectives consisted of a bibliographical analysis based on different sources.

In the one hand, primary sources were barely used, because our analysis is not based on the legal status of the conflict during the years, being as we mentioned before an analysis of the last engagements and moves that justify the hypothesis of the real motivations of the boundary issue, apart from the official ones, as well as the new strategies used. This few primary sources are for example the Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses of 1997 of the United Nations, for explaining the role of water-resources as a cause of the conflict.

Thus, in this master's dissertation we have used mainly secondary sources, separating these in two groups. The first group consists of academic articles of different authors, especially Chinese and Indian scholars. We must emphasise the importance of Cheong in relation to the Sino-Indian war, or Borreguero in relation with the Kashmir region, as well as Christopher with the Brahmaputra project and water resources. The last secondary sources are news from Chinese and Indian digital newspapers, due to the current relevance of this

topic and the latest surge of events during the last years. Some of the newspapers that had more information were China Daily, Xinhuanet, Asia&Pacific, The Hindustan Times, The Hindi, or Outlook.

Difficulties

Some of the difficulties found at this master's dissertation were the lack of academic articles based only on the conflict itself, or even a specific historical event that was explained fully, and not in a broader context of the whole region.

At the same time, at the beginning, it was very difficult for me to contrast the information and start to write about some element of the essay because the Chinese and Indian newspapers contradicted themselves a lot, presenting two versions that were completely the opposite about the same event. This is really clear in relation to certain events, such as the war of 1962 and the occupation of Tibet, or even in the latest cross of fires in the LoC, in the region of Kashmir.

Finally, in relation to the COVID-19 situation, and probably because the events have been very recent, the information about the pandemic does not seem pretty clear or accurate, especially when we analyse the case of China, sometimes without any information in regions such as Tibet. What is true is that this topic has been a challenge since the beginning, having to read a lot of information of different authors and having all the time a critic point of view, without trying to be biased by a country or another. It is not the typical topic; thus, it requires not the common forms of work.

Chapter 1.

Precedents: a historical context

In this first chapter we will focus on the history of the region in order to understand the context and implications that lead us to the present situation. With this purpose in mind, this part of the master's dissertation will emphasize historical periods such as the British Colonial Rule and India's independence, that transformed the area in a "melting pot of conflict"; then we will move to the Cold War years, very relevant in terms of the swift changes of power dynamics; to finally finish very briefly with the 90s and the turn of the century. The main purpose of this introduction is to highlight what are the causes of the conflict and why the situation came to this point.

1. Colonial Rule and Independence

The British Colonial Rule in India dates back as early as the 17th, but the subcontinent already had experienced the presence of other European powers. They were the Portuguese, that were able to get there due to their early expeditions through the West part of Africa, with the aim of reaching India as soon as possible and especially its market of spices, as well as the French and the Dutch, that also had commercial ports in several places of India's coast. The presence of the British takes place so early and has such relevance due to the state of crisis of the Moghul Empire, the hostility in India against the Portuguese, the British naval superiority, and due to the fact that the British were in a first moment willing to abide the Moghul sovereignty.

If we follow history, we will know that this compromise did not last, with the British imposing over the time a series of diktats, with administrative and economic reforms. Taking into consideration the diversity, heterogeneity and ancestry of Indian civilization, the British control caused huge concern and instability among the population, resulting in different revolts. The Indian Rebellion of 1857, caused by the impoverishment of peasants that lost their lands due to the East Indian Company policies, the sinking into poverty of artisans due to the English textiles, and the lack of access of the Indian aristocratic sectors into government with the insults of Indian soldiers of the armies of Bengal, Madras or Bombay; had the consequence of a direct administration of India by the British government. Proclaiming a unitary state and a gradual but limited British-style parliamentary system, the new rulers also protected princes and landed gentry as a feudal safeguard against future unrest. In the decades following, public life gradually emerged all over India, leading eventually to the founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885, and a nationalist movement started to grow.¹

With the World Wars in the 20th century, these nationalist movements gained more power, due to the fact that India's participation in the conflicts made people realise that India was considered a second-class territory inside the British Empire. The tensions against colonial rule and desire of an independent India combined with tensions over religious issues, especially between Hindus and Muslims. These facts were translated into the main voices of the nationalist movement of India and Pakistan, Mahatma Gandhi and Mohammed Ali Jinnah. After World War II, the United Kingdom had no choice but to leave India, a colonial territory that could not afford to maintain, economically and militarily, and that started the whole process of decolonization of the British Empire. The strategy of the independence for the British was to maintain a united India, but this was not possible due to the territorial conflict that was already taking place in the Northern part of the country.

Back in 1846, Great Britain annexed Kashmir, which played a critical role in the British strategy for securing the northern frontiers of India.² To advance its border claims, in 1865, W. H. Johnson, a civil servant with

1 De la Fuente Salido, G.; "La rebelión de los Cipayos (1857-1858)", *Guerra Colonial, nº1*, 2017, p. 48. Consulted on 09-06-2021. Link: <http://www.guerracoloniales.es/medias/files/1.3.-la-rebelion-de-los-cipayos-1857-1858.-ejemplo-de-un-conflicto-colonial.pdf>

2 Zhang, H.; Li, M.; "Sino-Indian Border Disputes", *Analysis No. 181*, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, 2013, p. 3-5. Consulted on 06-03-2021. Link: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301607858_SINO-INDIAN_BORDER_DISPUTES

the Survey of India who was sent to explore the area, proposed the “Johnson Line”, putting Aksai Chin in Kashmir.³ While Aksai Chin is a virtually uninhabited bleak barren plateau it is of high strategic interest as it is a vital passage point between Tibet and Xingjiang,⁴ a fact that didn’t please China, causing great friction between both states.

As both countries could not agree on border delimitation, the Sino-Indian border has never been officially drawn. During the 1913-1914 tripartite conference involving a Tibetan delegate, a representative of the Chinese central government, and Sir Henry McMahon, a foreign secretary of the British Indian government, a secret bilateral agreement was signed with the Tibetan representative on a new border line, later known as the McMahon Line. The Chinese central government finally rejected it, and the Tibetan government later disputed the legality of the McMahon Line.⁵

Furthermore, the McMahon Line was initially rejected by the British-run Indian government as incompatible with the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention. However, the British began using the McMahon Line on the Survey of India maps in 1937, and officially published the Simla Accord in 1938. By the time India gained independence in 1947, the new government of independent India inherited the British territorial policy, including the McMahon Line as the legitimate border.⁶

If we talk about India’s independence, we are talking at the same time about the “Great Partition”, with the result of not only the emergence of India as a state, but also Pakistan in the northeast part of the subcontinent, as well as all these states in the north that are under dispute between India and China until our days. Pakistan’s interest in territories such as Kashmir didn’t help to mitigate the tensions in the border.

“Partition” in the South Asian context acquires a dramatic and sombre connotation like no other; it meant the origin of large-scale migrations carrying along the challenges of loss, violence, displacement, resettlement, renegotiation of identities and elaboration of traumas and legacies.⁷

If we focus a little bit more on the colonial history of the other addressed nation, China, things were as complicated as in India. The Western world promoted an image of China as a nation resistant to change or even ultraconservative, but the reality was more complicated than that. The 18th century China enjoyed a period of pronounced growth and change, especially since the second half of the century. This involved a huge demographic and agricultural growth, and a large expansion of commercial activities. But the internal rigidities of the Chinese system did not allow the country to make the qualitative leap forward that Europe did. In other words, moving from an extensive and manual model to an intensive and mechanized model. This situation put China in a position of disadvantage compared to the colonial powers. In addition to that, the already mentioned internal rigidities would lead to a situation of integral crisis, that included the economy, the political system, and the society itself.

The interference of western powers had the effect of pushing this crisis of the Chinese system to the extreme. The Chinese isolationism that characterised the “empire of the centre” in this moment started to crack very quickly. The pressure from the British after the early domination of India was for China to open its market to trade with them and establish beneficial trade relations. The promotion of the illegal opium trade, whose centre was in Bengal, allowed them to achieve a more favourable balance of trade. This will result in the First Opium War in 1839, that ended with the defeat of the Chinese and the imposition of an unequal treaty, same as happened in India, the Nanjing Treaty of 1842. The other Western powers imposed similar treaties on China over time under the threat of force. These were an attack on Chinese sovereignty, which maintained independence only on a formal level.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*

6 Gupta, K.; “The McMahon Line 1911-45: The British Legacy”, *The China Quarterly*, No. 47, Jul. – Sep. 1971, pp. 521-525. Consulted on 09-10-2021. Link: https://www.jstor.org/stable/652324?seq=2#metadata_info_tab_contents

7 Khan, Y.; *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*, Yale University Press, 2017. Consulted on 08-03-2021. Link: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1bzfp93>

The harsh impositions resulted in popular resistance movements and large-scale uprisings, only with the result of new unequal treaties. At the end of the century, China is living a stage of open spoliation with risk of territorial disintegration. The concession of different areas of “exclusive influence” with the right to exclusively export the most valued or strategic sources of wealth is imposed by the Western powers. A large-scale uprising against foreigners took place, with the Boxer Reform, during 1899-1901. According to M. Cameron, the reform movement in China, lasting from 1898 to 1912, inaugurated by Kuang Hsu, temporarily eclipsed by the “Boxer madness,” and revived and directed by the great Empress Dowager, Tzu Hsi, until her death in 1908, gave way to revolution in 1911. A new defeat against a Western coalition of states meant new compensations, and a situation of absence of power that resulted in the Liberal Nationalistic Revolution of 1911 and the instauration of the Republic of China in the following year.⁸

With the Republic, more than two thousand years of imperial system were ended, and the first Chinese constitution was drafted. Eventually, the republic did not really work, and it was not able to fight the challenges that it had ahead. Its Beijing-based government was internationally recognized but virtually powerless, being the regional lordships the ones who controlled most of the territory. During World War I China supported the Allies with the condition of returning the German concessions in the Shandong Peninsula again to China. Despite this agreement, the peace treaty transferred the concessions in Shandong to Japan instead of returning them to the sovereign authority of China, a fact that was seen as a great humiliation and proved that China was in reality helpless against Japan’s imperialism.

This perception had a follow-up process in the war against Japan between 1937 and 1945, during the years of the II World War. A lot of war crimes took place, not only against the military, but to civil Chinese population as well. These events set off an alliance between the Kuomintang and the Communist forces, that eventually lead to the proclamation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, right after the II World War. It can be considered the first Cold War episode in Asia, even that some argue that it is Korea.

Chiang Kai-check declared the war to Japan, due to the invasion of this new power of the northern and eastern parts of China. The ease with which the Japanese did it highlighted the weakness of the Chinese government at that moment. Thus, the war took place between 1937 and 1945, and can be divided in two periods: one between 1937 and 1938 where Japan conquers the main cities, harbours and industrial areas, and another from 1938 and 1944 where Japan exploits the resources of the controlled areas. The Communist took advantage of the war situation, participating on the guerrilla against the Japanese and gaining the sympathy of the rural population. The tensions between the Communist forces, with a lot of power after the conflict with Japan, and the official government of the Chinese Republic ended in the Civil War that took place between 1945 and 1949, that ended with the instauration of the People’s Republic of China.⁹

As we mentioned before, in 1846 the British annexed Kashmir taking advantage of the critical situation due to the internal crisis that China was suffering at that moment.¹⁰ In the other hand, India was already a territory with foreign presence since centuries backwards, when in the meanwhile China was suffering trying to get rid of the British influence and trying to fix their integral crisis. This move had secured the northern territories for the future British Raj and would allow them to take control of their borders. On top of that, in 1865 it was proposed the so-called “Johnson Line”, and during the Tripartite Conference of 1913-14, the “McMahon Line” was negotiated secretly between the British and Tibetan representatives.

All these acts were rejected by the Chinese central government because they did not take into consideration the Chinese historical borders with India. From the Chinese perspective, even the inexistence of an official border agreement did not change the sovereignty of delimitations that have been there since the 17th century with the last dynasty. In addition to that, the Tibetan government itself later disputed the legality of the

8 Cameron, M.E.; *The Reform Movement in China 1898-1912*, History, Economics and Political Science, Volume 3, Number 1, 1963. Consulted on 09-06-2021. Link: <https://ir.nbu.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/2366/1/25413.pdf>

9 Moreno, J.; *China Contemporánea: 1916-1990*, Istmo, 1992, pp. 37-45. Consulted on 09-06-2021. Link: <https://books.google.es/books?hl=es&lr=&id=SnTuuea1hlcC&oi=fnd&pg=PA15&dq=el+paso+de+la+republica+china+al+comunismo&ots=f27WaWn1Jh&sig=52zhkDHSHiMc-JjbzE0hrZiGPKU#v=onepage&q&f=false>

10 According to Zhang “*When India came under British rule, it began to advance the two countries traditional border to the Chinese side*”. Zhang, H.; Li, M.; *Op. Cit.*, p. 3.

McMahon Line. Afterwards, an independent India established these borders as their official ones, even that there was no negotiation or agreement at all with China.

These meant that both China and India have justified over time their claims in terms of historical connection or control by the Imperial Qing dynasty and the British Raj respectively¹¹, being a constant open wound through the history of both Asian countries. This territorial conflict has proven notoriously difficult to resolve and has been the cause of several military skirmishes and diplomatic standoffs during the time, as we will see in the next subsection.

2. Turning point: The Cold War

In July 1947, the British and the Indian Governments formally informed the Tibetan Government that after the transfer of power, British's obligations and rights under the existing treaties would be enjoyed by India, and the Tibetan Government formally announced its acceptance of the formal relationship with an independent India.¹²

It is in this first stage, with the recent independence of India and China almost transitioning from the republic to the Communist state, relations between both countries were good, even with fluent diplomatic relations and with accredited ambassadors.^{13 14} In 1947 a Tibetan delegation travelled across different countries and met with Nehru and Gandhi in order to obtain support for Tibet's independence. Shakapba, who was the Tibetan representative, and its efforts to establish diplomatic relations abroad failed because India and Britain did not want to unnerve the Kuomintang, and the U.S. had a strategic relationship with Chiang Kai-shek, its main leader. Even so, the Chinese and Tibetan views differed on the nature of the trade delegation and the questions about the visas in Shakapba's passport, a document evidencing Tibet's independence at a time when the Chinese government was unable to exert effective control over the region.¹⁵

The Indian policy towards Tibet clearly started to be more relevant in 1948. By note of October 9th, the Nanking authorities communicated to the governments of India, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom that they denounced, due to the expiration of the term, the Indo-Tibetan Commercial Regulations signed in 1908 between China and the United Kingdom. The British government replied that it had already abandoned the privileges it had acquired in China and agreed that China should negotiate directly with India and the United States. The Pakistani government, for its part, fully agreed with the Chinese government's decision and stated that it wanted to maintain ties of friendship and cooperation.¹⁶

But the Indian response was different; they alleged, as we have mentioned before in the previous section, that from the day of the formation of India the Indian government inherited all the rights and obligations of the agreements signed between British India and Tibet, based on the Simla Treaty of 1914 and its supplementary trade agreements. The situation evolved in July 1949 with the expulsion of the Chinese from Tibet.

On 1950, without any warning or ultimatum troops of the Chinese People's Liberation Army entered Tibet "to liberate the people of Tibet from imperialism".¹⁷ The Chinese stated that Tibet was an integral part of

11 Westcott, S.; "The role of 'prestige' in creating intractable interstate border disputes: the case of the Sino-Indian border dispute", *Australian Political Studies Association*, 2015, pp. 1-2. Consulted on 08-03-2021. Link: https://www.academia.edu/33529239/The_role_of_prestige_in_creating_intractable_interstate_border_disputes_the_case_of_the_Sino-Indian_border_dispute

12 Saurav Talukdar, S.; "Sino-Indian Border Relationship From 1914-1962", *International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies*, Vol. II, Issue II, 2015, pp. 273-274. Consulted on 08-03-2021. Link: <http://oaji.net/articles/2015/11115-1443862576.pdf>

13 Oviedo, E.D.; "Introducción a la historia de las relaciones chino-indias (1947-2005)", *Rep. Hip. UNR. Aprendizaje e Investigación*, Universidad Nacional de Rosario, Argentina, 2006, p. 28. Consulted on 07-03-2021. Link: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/2942643.pdf>

14 The Nanking-based government, pressured by the military actions of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), was unable to control the border line, as was India, at war with Pakistan. For this reason, the borders' issue will be irrelevant to the bilateral agenda for this period. *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*

16 Oviedo, E.D.; *Op. Cit.*, pp. 30-31.

17 Saurav Talukdar, S.; *Op. Cit.*, pp. 273-274.

Chinese territory and that the problem of Tibet is entirely a domestic problem of China on which no foreign interference shall be tolerated. The Chinese military action in Tibet forced the Tibetan government to accept Chinese rule, while India surrendered its special rights in Tibet on the face of a superior military might.¹⁸

The “Seventeen-point Agreement” of 1951 between China and Tibet allowed China to station her troops on Tibetan frontier. The Chinese occupation of Tibet was a diplomatic defeat for India, since for centuries Tibet had served as a buffer state between India and China.¹⁹ In order to eliminate Indian influence in Tibet, China proposed later the “Panchsheel Agreement”. The principles are mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful co-existence. Through the “Panchsheel Agreement” India officially recognized Tibet as a part of China. It marked the withdrawal from Tibet under the Chinese pressure.²⁰

Between 1951-1959 there is a gradual and breaking of the Seventeen Point Agreement which ultimately resulted in open clashes between Tibetans and Chinese. In 1959 there was open revolt against the Chinese forces at Lhasa resulting in a massacre of a large number of Tibetan people. That same year the Dalai Lama fled from Tibet and came to India. The revolt in Tibet marked the end of friendly relations.²¹

At the same time, mutually exclusive and uncompromising territorial claims from either side also emerged when, in 1959, a clash at the area called Aksai Chin on the western border saw the death of nine Indian frontier guards. India urged China to “adopt a reasonable attitude” while China asserted that India had “refused to hold negotiations” on the border issue.²² On 20th October 1962, the Chinese assaulted the Indian positions in the Western and Eastern sectors with heavy artillery. They were in an overwhelming superiority position. The Indians forces were rejected due to poor strategy and lack of efficient communication and transport networks.²³ Then the Indian Government was forced to ask for help and had a very difficult time trying to decide to which country, because they were in the group of non-aligned countries. Finally, they decided for the US, and were able to keep some of the territories, minor ones. The US willingness to provide prompt military assistance to India strengthened India’s position vis-a-vis China. The US sought to tilt India’s non-alignment towards the west through military assistance and, thereby, worked towards establishing order and stability in the sub-continent.²⁴

But according to the Chinese version, previously, on the 12th, Nehru ordered the liberation of the territories on the north-eastern border, and two days later, the Minister of Defense, Krishna Menon, delivered a warmongering speech in which he stated that “*they will fight to the last man and the last gun*”.²⁵ This implies that China was not the only to blame when we speak about this conflict. In fact, the simultaneity of the attack with the Cuban missile crisis, opened the hypothesis of Chinese opportunism to take advantage of the heated conflict between the U.S. and the Soviet Union to force India to cede the territories that they had occupied in Ladakh.²⁶ But China was isolated, blockaded by the U.S. and at odds with the U.S.-Soviet Union, so it will come as no surprise that Khrushchev adopted a pro-Indian position, supporting it economically and warning the Chinese government of its mistake.²⁷

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Ibid.*

22 Cheong, D.; “Rapprochement and the Sino-Indian War of 1962”, *Ezra’s Archives*, 2015, p. 53. Consulted on 05-03-2021. Link: https://ecommons.cornell.edu/bitstream/handle/1813/40253/EzrasArchives2015_Article3.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y

23 Saurav Talukdar, S.; *Op. Cit.*, p. 276.

24 Harshe, R.; “India’s Non-Alignment: An Attempt at Conceptual Reconstruction”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 25, No. 7/8, 1990, p. 401. Consulted on 08-03-2021. Link: <http://ris.org.in/others/NAM-RIS-Web/NAM-Articles/Harshe-India%20Non-Alignment-EPW-1990-min.pdf>

25 Oviedo, E.D.; *Op. Cit.*, p. 40.

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*

The results of this actions were the Chinese demonstrating India's weakened position in the region, and that it was not really a non-aligned state. At the same time, China was displayed as a more powerful country in the Asian context. The conflict exposed the poor system of defence of India, as well as the lack of military preparedness.²⁸ It showed also India's debacle in the war as a failure of a foreign policy whose main defence focus was in the region of Kashmir, leaving the others in a vulnerable position.

India's non-alignment faced another major crisis in the Indo-Pak war which eventually led to the birth of Bangladesh. The birth of Bangladesh can be viewed in perspective by highlighting the changing configuration of powers at the regional and global levels. The 1962 war weakened India's ability to project itself in foreign affairs. Indian foreign policy became devoid of lofty idealism and missionary visions after Nehru's death in 1964. India's inward-looking posture gave its adversaries an opportunity to mobilise forces. After 1962, the subcontinent witnessed a steady growth of Sino- Pakistan friendship.²⁹

Unsolved border disputes between India and its immediate neighbours had brought China and Pakistan closer. In terms of power, the two states got together to undermine India's dominance in the subcontinent. This was also a period that accelerated the Sino-Soviet rift. The two socialist states continued to interpret and clothe a clash of their interests in ideological terms. The Sino-Soviet border war during the late sixties was an obvious manifestation of this rift. Considering the Soviet friendship with India, China found it worthwhile to strengthen its bond of affinity with Pakistan.³⁰

Pakistan finally attacked India in 1965, continuing with the previous vision of India as a vulnerable country. Pakistan already had strengthened its military capabilities with the support of the US, and at that point was ready to attack India to take control of Kashmir. The main goal was to humiliate India, the same as China did before. But Pakistan was defeated, and India was able to maintain the status quo. Pakistan with this move jeopardized its relationship with the US.

India in 1962 with its defeat against China experienced its lowest point. But in 1971 India had a war that ended with the independence of Bangladesh. There was already a very strong Bengali identity very different from the one that existed in Western Pakistan, living as an isolated territory that started to feel that being part of Pakistan was not right. Due to Pakistan's problems between East and West Pakistan, China not only supported the military junta and its role in East Pakistan but also tried discreetly to moderate Yahya Khan's brutal policy towards East Pakistan but without success.³¹ India by that time was led by Indira Gandhi and supported the Bangladeshi nationalist movement, and the territory finally received an international status as an independent nation.

There was a big resentment created in Pakistan that is present until our days due to this episode. They became a weak state against India, that strengthened itself and consolidated its own power in 1974 when it got the nuclear weapon. That means that in barely twelve years the Indians moved from being in their lowest point to indisputably become one of the most powerful territories in Asia, changing all the dynamics of the territory, especially with states such as China or Pakistan.

Serious bilateral border discussions between China and India resumed only in 1981 and eight rounds of dialogue took place between 1981 and 1988, which failed to produce any fundamental breakthrough. In 1987, India and China almost went to war in the North-Eastern frontier region of Sumdorong Chu.³² The breakdown in Sino-Indian border negotiations in 1986 amidst mutual suspicions of troop-concentrations along the border coincided with the break-down of the Sino-Tibetan dialogue that was going on since 1979.³³

28 Harshe, R.; *Op. Cit.*, p. 401.

29 *Ibid.*

30 *Ibid.*

31 Mohd Arif, S.; "A History of Sino-Indian Relations: From Conflict to Cooperation", *International Journal of Political Science and Development*, Vol. 1(4), 2013, p. 132. Consulted on 05-03-2021. Link: <https://www.academicresearchjournals.org/IJPSD/PDF/December/Arif.pdf>

32 Topgyal, T.; "Charting the Tibet Issue in the Sino-Indian Border Dispute", *China Report*, 47, 2, University of Birmingham, 2011, p. 125.

33 *Ibid.*

Second, in 1987 for the first time India allowed the Dalai Lama to visit Western countries for the specific mission of seeking political support for the Tibetan cause and internationalisation of the Tibet issue.³⁴

In 1989, a very significant year, the Dalai Lama received the Peace Nobel Prize, perceived as the indirect support of those repressed in Tibet for asking for economic and political reforms; at the same time, it was a very smart way of visibility and internationalisation of the Tibetan issue. The Chinese ambassador of China at the moment said that: “awarding the peace prize to the Dalai Lama is a blatant interference in the internal affairs of the Chinese people.”³⁵ The 1980s will close also with the incessant persistence of the China–India boundary dispute and the lack of an understanding or agreement between both countries.

3. The 90s and the turn of the century

Following Rajiv Gandhi’s visit to China in 1988, the ongoing border talk between countries was raised to a higher level. With frequent visits from leaders of both countries, bilateral relations improved throughout the early 1990s.³⁶ Despite being questioned for his role in the Tiananmen crackdown, Li Peng visited India in December 1991. During this visit, five documents were signed, being a consular agreement, an agreement for the reestablishment of consulates in India, another for the reestablishment of the consulates in Shanghai and Bombay, a protocol on bilateral trade, a memorandum restoring border trade, and a memorandum of understanding on scientific and technical cooperation for the peaceful use of outer space.³⁷ With this agreements, the parties regain border trade and open the first crossing point at Garbyand, in Uttar Pradesh. Also, other crossing points were opened at Gunji, as same as before it is in Uttar Pradesh, in 1992, and at Shipki La, in Arunachal Pradesh, in 1994.³⁸

Moreover, Prime Minister Narashimba Rao’s visit to China in September 1993, promoted the signing of an agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control in the Border Areas, and three other documents. The agreement considered that the borders question can be resolved through friendly and peaceful consultations, prohibits the use of force or the threat to use force, and required strict respect for and observance of the Line of Actual Control. In addition, when necessary, the parties would jointly check and determine the segments of the Line of Actual Control where they have different views on their alignment.³⁹

This meant that this agreement ensured peace along the LAC, and three years later, in December 1996, a further agreement was signed to establish confidence-building measures in the military field along the LAC.⁴⁰ However, the flourishing bilateral relationship was strained when India named China as its primary strategic enemy in a move to justify nuclear tests.⁴¹

Sino-Indian relations deteriorated substantially following India’s nuclear tests in May 1998. For about a year, India adopted a firm approach towards China not characteristic of Indian governments since perhaps Indira Gandhi, and Beijing retaliated in kind. Tension mounted and bilateral relations deteriorated.⁴²

34 *Ibid.*

35 Moreno, R.; “El Dalai Lama, Nobel de la Paz por su lucha no violenta por la independencia tibetana”, *El País*, 06-10-1989. Consulted on 09-06-21. Link: https://elpais.com/diario/1989/10/06/internacional/623631607_850215.html

36 Zhang, H.; Li, M.; *Op. Cit.*, p. 7.

37 Oviedo, E.D.; *Op. Cit.*, pp. 46-47.

38 *Ibid.*

39 *Ibid.*

40 Zhang, H.; Li, M.; *Op. Cit.*, p. 7.

41 *Ibid.*

42 Garver, J.W.; “The Restoration of Sino-Indian Comity following India’s Nuclear Tests”, *The China Quarterly*, 2001, p. 865. Consulted on 07-03-2021. Link: <https://library.fes.de/libalt/journals/swetsfulltext/12919246.pdf>

Despite this setback, however, bilateral talks on border issues continued. Then Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee visited China in late June 2003. During that visit, the two governments signed an agreement.⁴³ The most significant achievement of this agreement is India's formal acceptance of the Chinese claims on Tibet and the opening of the Nathu-La for trade, as well as the start of meetings between special representatives of China and India on the Boundary Issue. The 15th round of meeting between special representatives of China and India on the Boundary Issue was held on 16 January 2012 in New Delhi⁴⁴.

Until today, Sino-Indian border talks are ongoing, and technically a general consensus has been achieved: both sides agree that border issues should be resolved through peaceful negotiations. However, no breakthrough on border disputes has been made through negotiations yet. The Sino-Indian border dispute is still the biggest obstacle to sustainable, good and stable bilateral relations and also poses a threat to regional and also global peace and stability.⁴⁵

43 Zhang, H.; Li, M.; *Op. Cit.*, p.7.

44 *Ibid.*

45 *Ibid.*

Chapter 2.

The conflict over the time: actors, actions, and present situation

During this second chapter of the master's dissertation, we will focus into the boundary conflict itself, as well as what it is the current situation in the territories in dispute. With this purpose in mind, we will focus in three specific areas, which are the region of Kashmir, the true melting pot at the moment; Bhutan, that is generally conceived as less relevant, but is also in the centre of a tense territorial clash; and finally, the regions of Nepal and Tibet, this last Himalayan territory most well-known for its liberation and human rights struggle since PCR annexation in the 1950s.

We must bear in mind that, as we have noted above, the formation of India as a state created the problem of determining its new boundaries. The main difficulty rested in the fact that the boundaries between both countries were established according to tradition and not under a respected legality by either parts or a consensus. The Chinese government did not recognise the McMahon line established by the British decades prior to India's independence, which was a huge opportunity for India in order to take advantage of the northern territories neighbouring with China. In that moment, the Chinese government, pressured by the military actions of the People's Liberation Army, was completely unable to control the border line, being in a position of disadvantage in the repartition. That's one of the reasons why in the decades after the borders dispute has been placed by China as a priority in their international and security agenda.

The subsequence actions and attempts to establish fluent diplomatic conversations on this matter eventually failed. The reason why this happened is because both countries have felt over the time fully entitled to claim these territories and intervene on them, in a way that even seems personal, and with no room of a middle way or consensus. With highs and lows, the situation could be defined over the years as tirelessly agitated, in occasions calmer, and in others almost on the verge of a war with broader implications.

1. The region of Kashmir

The formation of India and Pakistan as independent states brought with it the dispute over Kashmir. The overlapping sovereignty claims provoked several wars, with no boundary agreement to ensure peace on the border between the two nations.⁴⁶ At the current moment, India has control of about half the area of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, which comprises Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, while Pakistan controls a third of the region, divided into two provinces, Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. Previously parts of the same State, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh are being administered by India as union territories since 5 August 2019, after the revocation of the limited autonomy and bifurcation of the state.^{47 48}

If we go back history, during the independence, the so-called princely states supposed a major problem in terms of belonging to a state or another, referring to India and Pakistan, especially when the religious classification was not the clearest one.⁴⁹ Quickly all but three principalities agreed to join either Pakistan or

46 Oviedo, E.D.; *Op. Cit.*, p. 42.

47 BBC News; "Article 370: What happened with Kashmir and why it matters", 06-08-2019. Consulted on 27-05-2021. Link: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-49234708>

48 Before that, the Article 370 guaranteed to the Muslim-majority state significant autonomy. Essentially, it was a special provision added to the Indian constitution in 1949, that allowed the areas of Jammu and Kashmir, which have been in dispute for seventy years, to have autonomy, with their own constitution, separate flag, an independence over all matters except foreign affairs. Another provision later added under Article 370 - 35A - gave special privileges to permanent residents, including state government jobs and the exclusive right to own property in the state, seen as a way of protecting the character of the only Muslim-majority state in India. BBC News; "Article 370: India strips disputed Kashmir of special status", 05-08-2019. Consulted on 09-06-2021. Link: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-49231619>

49 The princely states were monarchies under a local or regional ruler in a subsidiary alliance with the British India. They were very ancient in history, but since the British occupation they decreased in number, and the remaining ones were used by the British Raj in order to rule indirectly some of the provinces. The Instrument of Accession was the document that mediated the accession of

India, under the guidelines set by Lord Mountbatten, the last viceroy of India. The states made their decisions after considering their geographic locations and religious majorities.⁵⁰ The three principalities that were not immediately decided were: Hyderabad, the most populous princely state, ruled by a Muslim but with a Hindu majority and surrounded by territory that acceded to India; Junagadh, a small state with Muslim rule but a Hindu majority; and the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, with a Hindu ruler and more than the 70% percentage of Muslim population.

Kashmir alone represented a very complex deal because it was composed of three very different regions: central Kashmir, which was Muslim, Jammu, with a Hindu majority, and Ladakh, which had a Buddhist majority. Moreover, the whole state represented a strategic point; its borders conformed the limits with Pakistan, India and China, and the Kashmir valley itself was the passage through the Himalayas to the entire subcontinent. Also, from Kashmir flowed the Indus, Chenab, and Jhelum rivers, on which Pakistan depended for its water supply.⁵¹

Initially, the Maharaja of Jammu & Kashmir, Hari Singh, delayed for several months the decision of which dominion Kashmir would join, hoping to gain independence for the principality; out of that decision would be born the conflict that continues to this day. Pakistan defended the incorporation of Kashmir on the basis of the two-nation theory and geographical contiguity of the region. In contrast, the then first Prime Minister of India, Nehru, an ethnic Kashmiri himself, believed that a majority Muslim state like Kashmir could coexist in a secular, Hindu-majority state. Against both pretenders, the Maharaja of Kashmir sought independence for the territory.⁵²

When the deadline arrived to make a decision, the Maharaja tried to temporarily freeze his incorporation into one or the other state by signing an agreement with both. However, his efforts to gain time were useless, due to the invasion of a contingent of tribal forces from Pakistan in October 1947, to fight against the possibility of becoming part of India. In the face of this situation, the Maharaja Hari Singh was forced to seek India's help to contain the revolt, signing the Instrument of Accession of Kashmir to India in return.⁵³

about 550 princely states into India, the majority of them, and some of them to Pakistan, in 1947. The procedure for a princely state deciding in which country to integrate was autocratic, that is why a ruler could unilaterally decide to join either India or Pakistan, or remain independent, without heeding popular sentiment. Pillai, S.; "Kashmir and the Forgotten History of India's Princely States", *The Diplomat*, 04-08-2020. Consulted on 09-10-2021. Link: <https://thediplomat.com/2020/08/kashmir-and-the-forgotten-history-of-indias-princely-states/>

50 Ossanna, J.; "Cachemira: La frontera más peligrosa del mundo", *Observatorio de Conflictos. Argentina*, 09-09-2004, p.2. Consulted on 29-05-2021. Link: <https://rebelion.org/cachemira-la-frontera-mas-peligrosa-del-mundo/>

51 Ossanna, J.; *Op. Cit.*, pp. 2-3.

52 Dorronsoro, N.; "Cachemira: la obstinación de la identidad", *Papeles nº78*, 2002, p. 75. Consulted on 27-05-2021. Link: <https://www.fuhem.es/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/DORRONSORO-Nicol%C3%A1s-Cachemira-la-obstinaci%C3%B3n-de-la-identidad-Papeles-78.pdf>

53 Gómez Adeva, A.; "Cachemira, la región más codiciada de Asia", Documento de opinión, *Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos (IEEE)*, 2016, p. 785. Consulted on 29-05-2021. Link: http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2016/DIEEEE100-2016_Cachemira_AnaGomezAdeva.pdf

Figure 1. Map of Kashmir



Source: BBC NEWS

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-49231619>

All this critical situation was also called the Indo-Pakistani War of 1947. In 1948, the United Nations Security Council decreed the limitation of Indian forces to a minimal presence in the region, conditioned by the withdrawal of Pakistani troops from the area and the holding of a plebiscite in the State of Jammu and Kashmir.⁵⁴

Over the time, both countries ignored the resolution and their positions hardened; the intervention of the United Nations only made a cease-fire possible in January 1949. Pakistan and India reached an agreement on the composition of the front line five months later, and the United Nations provided observers on both sides of the front line to monitor the cease-fire.⁵⁵ But this outcome did not mean that both countries changed their views on the conflict or felt less entitled to this specific territory, in fact their positions have been the same over the decades, trying to obtain the whole region for themselves as a right with different justifications.⁵⁶

From this point on, Pakistan incorporated the conquered territory under the name of Free Kashmir (or Azad Kashmir) and two-thirds of the region remained in Indian territory as the present-day state of India. In 1962, only a few years after this situation, another war took place, this time with another actor. The well-known and already mentioned disagreement over the boundary demarcation between India and China established by the United Kingdom, the McMahon Line, gave rise to this new confrontation. After a brief standoff, the People's Republic of China would gain control of the Aksai region in the north part of the Kashmir section controlled by India.⁵⁷

The situation in Kashmir became more and more untenable, so in 1965, only after three years of the last armed conflict, we are witnessing the outbreak of a new war in response to the so-called "Operation Gibraltar", a Pakistani operation to infiltrate its troops into Kashmir.⁵⁸ Again, in 1988 there was an outbreak of violence.

54 However, neither Pakistan would withdraw its troops, nor would such a plebiscite be held in Jammu and Kashmir. *Ibid.*

55 Dorronsoro, N.; *Op. Cit.*, p. 75.

56 Even the term of Pakistan makes a reference to the region of Kashmir. It was coined in 1933 by taking the first letters of Punjab, Afghanistan, Kashmir, along with the ending -istan which referred to Sindh and Beluchistan. Pak, in the other hand, means pure or caste in Urdu also. Ishtiaq, A.; *State, nation and ethnicity in contemporary South Asia*, Pinter, London and New York, 1996. Consulted on 26-05-2021. Link: https://books.google.es/books?id=czSm7cmhgA0C&printsec=copyright&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false

57 Gómez Adeva, A.; *Op. Cit.*, p. 786.

58 Once again, the United Nations intervened and called for a cease-fire, and in 1966 the contingents signed the Tashkent Declaration and return to the pre-war positions, with the respect for the principle of non-interference in internal affairs and a commitment to settle the dispute peacefully within the framework of the UN Charter. All these proposals proved to completely fail over time. *Ibid.*

That can be explained because after electoral victories of the Kashmiri nationalist party, the setback in the region's autonomy led to a feeling of great distrust towards Indian democracy.

At the same time, progress in literacy and in the economy accentuated the majority nationalist consciousness in the region, and the Islamic identity of the territory hardened in the face of the gradual intensification of Hindu nationalism, which called for the removal of Article 370 and full incorporation of Kashmir into the Indian Union.⁵⁹ Finally, the own changes in the international system after 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the communist countries alliance also stimulated the aspiration for independence.⁶⁰

In July 1989, bombs exploded at three different places in Srinagar, having as consequence sporadic fighting between pro-Pakistani guerrilla groups and the Indian army and police broke out in the following months. In December, the revolt deepened, the daughter of one minister was abducted in Srinagar and demands were made for the release of 5 imprisoned pro-independence militants.⁶¹ Anti-government and anti-India demonstrations erupted across Jammu and Kashmir, and within weeks the fighting spread throughout the valley.

In a region that previously had little armed violence, the new Pakistan-Afghanistan connection introduced guns, rocket launchers and grenades. The Pakistani government took advantage of the political situation of its neighbour Afghanistan and its war in order to reach US support in its own campaign of an Islamic guerrilla. Great part of the resources that were invested in Pakistan by the United States, such as economic and military ones, were used in Kashmir.⁶² Kashmiri youths started to identify themselves as "mujihadeen" and armed with automatic rifles, and eventually launched a jihad (or holy war) for control of India's only Muslim-majority state.⁶³ In the 1990s, it became clear that a new war over Kashmir was approaching, being the Third Indo-Pakistani War of 1999. But at this moment, India continued to regard the issue as an internal matter, rejecting any attempt of international mediation.⁶⁴

The international community's alarm was raised to an unprecedented level when in 1998, India was conducting its nuclear tests, and Pakistan responded on the same year with the ones of its own. The problem here is that the conflict, that took place over several decades without substantial damages compared to other ones, was being nuclearized, and its implications changed completely. China was also a nuclear power involved, and the international community saw for the first time a real danger and possibility of damage due to a rise of disagreements among these countries.

In February 1999, the Lahore Declaration was signed, with the intention of ceasing hostilities. However, once again, the declarations on paper had nothing to do with the real intentions, as in May 1999 Pakistan would infiltrate new troops into Kashmir, specifically in the Kargil area, leading to a new war. After the two-month-long conflict, India, with the support of international diplomacy would recover the territories that had been occupied by Pakistani forces.⁶⁵ The situation did not change, and instability became the more defining national banner of the Kashmir region.

After that, the next attempt of negotiation after the Lahore one took place in July 2001, during the Agra summit meeting between Pakistani President Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee. In Agra, the

59 The Indian Constitution contained special provisions with respect to Jammu and Kashmir: while Article 1 declared the state an integral part of the Union of India, Article 370 conferred a special status, giving the Indian Parliament of Jammu and Kashmir limited powers with respect to defence, foreign relations, and communications. It also gives the right to have its own Constitution, being the only state in India allowed to that. Ossanna, J.; *Op. Cit.*, p. 4.

60 Dorronsoro, N.; *Op. Cit.*, p. 77.

61 Ossanna, J.; *Op. Cit.*, pp. 4-5.

62 According to Raja Mohan: "In Pakistan, former President Mohammed Zia ul-Haq matched the external weaponization of Islam with the sweeping internal Islamization of Pakistan's polity—through the military's alliance with Islamist groups. The virus of religious zealotry would soon take hold of many Muslim communities across the rest of the subcontinent." Mohan, C.R.; "America, the Afghan Tragedy, and the Subcontinent", *Foreign Policy*, 30-04-2021. Consulted on 09-06-2021. Link: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/04/30/afghanistan-pakistan-india-united-states-biden-withdrawal-war-subcontinent-tragedy/>

63 Ossanna, J.; *Op. Cit.*, pp. 4-5.

64 Gómez Adeva, A.; *Op. Cit.*, p. 787.

65 *Ibid.*

incompatibility of the interests pursued became clear.⁶⁶ The summit failed, and tensions reached a new critical point when in December 2001 an armed group of jihadists stormed the Parliament in New Delhi, showing that Pakistan was keeping its infrastructure for supporting cross-border terrorism intact. It was not until January 2004 that peace talks were taking place again. The place chosen was Islamabad and the occasion was the annual SAARC summit. Out of this meeting came a joint statement by Musharraf and Vajpayee that marked a milestone in the normalization of relations.⁶⁷ Musharraf pledged not to allow any armed group or faction to use territory under Pakistan's control, including the part of Kashmir under Pakistani administration, to support terrorist activities. According to Eva Borreguero: *"the declaration itself was a breakthrough as it implicitly acknowledged what had hitherto been explicitly denied: tactical support to terrorist groups operating in Kashmir"*.⁶⁸

But casualties continued to happen, being one of the conflicts that lasts longer, with seven decades of relentlessly violence. In fact, the death toll from the conflict between 1990 and 2010 is estimated at between 80,000 and 100,000 victims, but there is no clear data.⁶⁹ The crisis of the summer of 2008, as well as several incidents during the last ten years, frame this never-ending dispute with few views of a peaceful agreement.

On the other hand, the evolution of the state of Jammu and Kashmir within the Union of India is, to a large extent, the story of the momentum and subsequent retreat of territorial autonomy⁷⁰. Initially, Indian President Nehru and Jammu and Kashmir Premier Sheikh Abdullah agreed to a status of maximum autonomy for the region, that came into debate over the time, and even led to trigger some of the confrontations or incentive radical national movements in the region. Two years ago, in 2019, the Indian government was revoking almost in totality the Article 370 of the Constitution, that paradoxically was the basis, as we have mentioned, of great part of the hostilities against Indian rule.

In consequence, Kashmir will no longer have a separate constitution but will have to abide by the Indian constitution much like any other state, and all Indian laws will be automatically applicable to Kashmiris, as well as people from outside the state will be able to buy property there. India's government justified itself saying these were measures for bringing development to the region.⁷¹ But through a critical view, it can be considered as a greedy move of India to take complete control of the territory, smashing its former autonomy.

This decision of revoking the autonomy of part of Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh was really controversial because it swiftly changed the independence and dynamic of the territory, and more importantly, with an issue that has been in the air for decades and that constitutes a trigger in terms of sovereignty and national identity for great part of Kashmiris.⁷² Thus, this was not an intelligent move for the Indian government, and an escalation of events was to be expected with no doubt.⁷³

66 India's position at the summit can be summed up in the refusal of going beyond the 1972 Simla agreement, as the winner of the last two wars (1971 and 1999). On the part of the Pakistani delegation the approach was the reverse, aspiring to change the territorial status quo in Jammu and Kashmir by obtaining, at the very least, the independence of the Kashmir Valley. Musharraf felt that Pakistan had engaged in too many wars to get nothing in return. Borreguero, E.; "Cachemira: ¿hacia una reconciliación definitiva?", *Real Instituto Elcano de Estudios Internacionales y estratégicos*, 2005, p.4. Consulted on 29-05-2021. Link: <http://biblioteca.ribei.org/id/eprint/846/1/ARI-118-2005-E.pdf>

67 *Ibid.*

68 *Ibid.*

69 Mato Bouzas, A.; "El significado actual de la cuestión de Cachemira", *Real Instituto Elcano de Estudios Internacionales y Estratégicos*, 2010, p.1. Consulted on 29-05-2021. Link: http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_es/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/asia-pacifico/ari151-2010

70 Dorronsoró, N.; *Op. Cit.*, p. 77.

71 BBC News; *Op. Cit.*

72 Some explain this decision as a direct consequence of the Pulwama attack, at the beginning of 2019. A convoy of Indian security personnel was attacked by a car bomb in Pulwama, in the northwestern Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. The attack killed 46 men from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the attacker himself. The attack was claimed by the Pakistan-based Islamist group Jaish-e-Mohammed, and it was the deadliest one since 1989 against Indian security forces. It is conceived by some as the trigger for the 2019 Indo-Pakistani conflict. BBC News; "Pulwama attack: India will 'completely isolate' Pakistan", 15-02-2019. Consulted on 30-05-2021. Link: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-47249133>

73 The Government of Pakistan has condemned the move through a statement from its Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *"Pakistan will exercise all possible options to counter these illegal measures. No unilateral decision by the Indian government can change the status [of the*

In fact, in the following months several casualties happened. China affirmed that the Indian and Pakistani troops crossed fire and shelled each other several times near the Line of Actual Control in Jammu Kashmir. India also would have sent a large number of additional paramilitary troops to India-controlled Kashmir and intensified security measures.⁷⁴ For the next year, the situation worsened. In 2020, at the same time as the dreadful COVID-19 crisis in the region, several confrontations took place. For example, with militants attacking Indian security forces and at the same time they were defying a strict security lockdown.⁷⁵

Also, in November of the last year, for the first time in over a decade, the party of power in Islamabad has failed to win a clear majority in Gilgit-Baltistan's legislative assembly elections, and hoped of a strong mandate for making the region Pakistan's fifth province have been dashed, just as a national opposition coalition gained momentum.⁷⁶ At the end of the year the two sides regularly stage artillery duels across the de facto border, and invariably blame each other for the clashes.⁷⁷

It is also known the recent intervention of China in the conflict, or collaborating with Pakistan, especially in terms of armament materials, or even through direct attacks along the LoC.⁷⁸ We have seen that the border dispute with China in this particular area is really turbulent, due to the latest constant attacks in both sides of the border, but it is inevitable to speak of Pakistan as a main actor due to its relevance in the dispute. In fact, the border dispute between India and China in the Kashmiri region has two sides.

The first one is territorial, with China alleging at the same time as India that it has sovereignty over the territories in dispute. Through this side of the boundary issue, we put the Sino-Indian War of 1962, the frequent attacks on the border and different movements in order to exert more control in the area, as well as the different statements of the Chinese government against the policies that India has been imposing to Kashmir during the last years, for example the suspension of Article 370.

On the other hand, the importance of Pakistan on this issue is not based only in relation to its own territorial claims, consisting of the fact that this country works as a "proxy state", with strong relations with China. These relations are translated into a political attitude favourable to the Chinese claims over the border, and at the same time used as a strategy for creating tensions that will damage India whenever China need it. In fact, when we speak about the attitude of Pakistan against India in the border, sometimes is a mirror of the Chinese one against India, due to the strong alliance between China and Pakistan. When China works as a sponsor for the Pakistani rebel groups and development projects in the region, it is clear that its interest is going to be sought. At the same time, China does not need to engage directly in order to have a confrontation against India.

It must be also mentioned that in the Kashmiri border there is a "smart fence" over the course of the LoC, that was built between 2003 and 2005, in a moment of escalation of hostilities. It is also called the Anti-Infiltration Obstacle System (AIOS), and it is conformed by a double row fence consisting of concertina wire and it has a

disputed region), as enshrined in UN Security Council resolutions." Martínez, A.; "India revoca la autonomía de Cachemira", *EL PAÍS*, 05-08-2019. Consulted on 30-05-2021. Link: https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/08/05/actualidad/1564991818_983157.html

74 Xinhua; "China calls on India, Pakistan to avoid escalating tensions in Kashmir", *People's Daily Online*, 07-08-2019. Consulted on 30-05-2021. Link: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-08/07/c_138290539.htm

75 South China Morning Post, "India PM breaks ground on Ayodhya temple as militants mark Kashmir anniversary with attack", 05-08-2020. Consulted on 30-05-2021. Link: <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/south-asia/article/3096157/india-pm-breaks-ground-ayodhya-temple-militants-mark-kashmir>

76 Hussain, T.; "Pakistan's plan to annex Kashmir's Gilgit-Baltistan hits snag amid disputed election fallout", *South China Morning Post*, 28-11-2020. Consulted on 30-05-2021. Link: <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3111680/pakistans-plan-annex-kashmirs-gilgit-baltistan-hits-snap-amid>

77 Agence France-Presse; "More than 10 dead after India, Pakistan exchange", *South China Morning Post*, 13-11-2020. Consulted on 30-05-2021. Link: <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/south-asia/article/3109827/more-10-dead-after-india-pakistan-exchange-fire-kashmir>

78 The Line of Control, or LoC, is a military control line between the Indian and Pakistani controlled parts of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, a line which does not constitute a legally recognized international boundary but serves as the de facto border. Originally known as the Cease-fire Line, it was redesignated as the Line of Control following the Simla Agreement, which was signed on 3 July 1972. The part of the former princely state that is under Indian control is divided into the union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, while the Pakistani-controlled part is divided into Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. Deep Singh, K.; "What Is the Line of Control? – The Short Answer", *The Wall Street Journal*, 29-11-1999. Consulted on 30-05-2021. Link: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-263B-8246>

length of 700 kilometres. As we mentioned before, due to the more frequent attacks on the LoC, as well as its high maintenance and rate of degradation due to the snow, the Indian government had justified to improve it and partially rebuild it. At the end of 2020, a new hybrid model was implemented, that consisted of the preservation of the former line with several changes, such as several sensors controlled by the Indian military corps.⁷⁹ Even that the infiltrations have risen as well as the violence, these facts seem like an excuse for the Indian government to maintain greater control on the area, let alone ensuring that Pakistan remains in a disadvantaged position in relation to its claims over Kashmir, and at the same time being on the alert about China's involvement in the conflict.

In 2021, at the beginning of this year in February, both India and Pakistan made a huge steep committing to a ceasefire agreement. The joint statement said: *“Both sides agreed for strict observance of all agreements, understandings and cease firing along the Line of Control and all other sectors with effect from midnight 24/25 Feb 2021.”*⁸⁰ Thus, both countries had agreed to any situation through hotline contact or border flag meetings in order to communicate and engage, avoiding violence. This is relevant because it is the first contact of this type between India and Pakistan.⁸¹ Despite this supposed rapprochement, the situation in the region has not become less agitated. According to Jahnvi Sodhi: *“the Indian government imposed a near-total telecommunications lockdown in the region, detained political leaders and dissidents, and enforced Section 144 of the Indian Penal Code to prevent violent unrest. The conditions on the ground remained the same for over a year, with many political leaders remaining in detention, District Development Council (DDC) elections taking place as mere tokens of normalcy, and 4G internet services being restored only as late as February 2021. Despite the government's actions, India received minimal adverse reaction from the international community.”*⁸²

Following the devastating effects of COVID-19 in the region, the Indian government was able to impose a series of measures that allowed to have a bigger control on population, especially in terms of controlling political dissidents. Due to this fact, on May 5, one of Kashmir's senior separatist leaders, Muhammad Ashraf Sehrai, who was sent to Udhampur jail, died after contracting COVID-19;⁸³ due to the poor conditions in the crowded local prisons and lack of medical treatment.

Regardless of the ceasefire agreement, the tension has remained restless in the Kashmiri territory, not only due to the differences carried during all these decades, but mainly as a direct cause of the 2019 revocation of Article 370 and Kashmir's former autonomy. The pandemic of last year does not help to mitigate the situation; it would be no surprising to see in a few months mutual accusations about breaking the ceasefire agreement and attacks on both parts, as long as both countries didn't seek a solid agreement through diplomacy and consensus, and with the help of the international community.

2. The great forgotten: Bhutan

This tiny state placed in the Himalayan mountain range, has had less prominence than its neighbours, but this does not mean that it has had less relevance in relation to the territorial conflict between China and India, being also a good example of the struggle between both countries. As early as 1773, Bhutan was already a gateway for trade with Tibet, and the British East India Company sent many missions to extend and explore the

79 Peri, D.; A. “Army set to install smart fence along LoC”, *The Hindu*, 30-04-17; B. “Hybrid model of ‘smart’ fence being tested along the LoC”, *The Hindu*, 20-10-2020; Asri, V.; “India launches first ‘smart fence’ project along India-Pakistan border”, *SBS Hindi*, 18-09-18. Consulted on 30-05-2021. Link: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/army-set-to-install-smart-fence-along-loc/article18340498.ece>

80 Bhakto, A.; “India and Pakistan to observe ceasefire along the Line of Control and in all other sectors in Jammu and Kashmir”, *The Hindu*, 25-02-2021. Consulted on 29-05-2021. Link: <https://frontline.thehindu.com/dispatches/india-and-pakistan-to-observe-ceasefire-along-the-line-of-control-and-in-all-other-sectors-in-jammu-and-kashmir/article33933592.ece>

81 Bhalla, A.; “To keep peace on LoC, India and Pakistan to abide by ceasefire agreement”, *India Today*, 25-02-2021. Consulted on 30-05-2021. Link: <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/india-pakistan-abide-ceasefire-agreement-dgmo-loc-1772917-2021-02-25>

82 Sodhi, J.; “The Article 370 Amendments on Jammu and Kashmir: Explaining the Global Silence”, *Observer Research Foundation (ORF)*, ORF Occasional Paper No. 318, 2021. Consulted on 01-06-2021. Link: <https://www.orfonline.org/research/article-370-amendments-on-jammu-and-kashmir/>

83 DW; “Kashmir: COVID looms large among political prisoners”, 27-05-2021. Consulted on 30-05-2021. Link: <https://www.dw.com/en/kashmir-covid-looms-large-among-political-prisoners/a-57692285>

frontiers and trade routes to Central Asia during the British Raj in India.⁸⁴ According to Dorji Penjore, the fact that Bhutan has never been colonised resulted in a Bhutanese society that has been traditionally sensitive to the issues of security and preserving its sovereignty. Maintaining their independence and territorial integrity in the midst of Chinese and Indian presence and influence has historically been a constant challenge.⁸⁵

The reason of this statement is that through the centuries Bhutan has tried to survive in the middle of tensions between two great powers, being in the past the Tibetans and Mongols, or the British India; and fighting in several wars in order to maintain its territorial sovereignty. Unlike its neighbours, Tibet and Sikkim, Bhutan has not been integrated in India or China, the new great powers in the region, but the ties with these states remain strong.

During the 19th century, the British annexation of Assam in 1829, an actual Indian province adjacent with Bhutan, led to the hostility between the Bhutanese and the East Indian Company and later on with the British Empire itself.⁸⁶ The focus on Bhutan changes in the next century from mainly trade interest to securing the control of Central Asia. The British annexation of Assam Duars in 1841 provoked the Duar War in the 1860s, with the final result of the Treaty of Sinchula of 1865. This treaty was the basis for Bhutanese-Indian relations in the future, and restricted the expansion of Bhutan into the south and west, both areas of interest for the British in the region.⁸⁷

The relations between Tibet and Bhutan through the years are important because Chinese claims to Bhutan have been totally dependent of this relation between both territories. From the Chinese perspective, Tibet has always been part of their territory. There are several cultural, social, and religious similarities between Bhutanese and Tibetans, who have had many interactions for a long time. For example, Tibetan influence had been a decisive factor in the evolution of Bhutan's social and political structures.⁸⁸

According to the Indian version of the border issue, the Treaty of Punakha of 1910 was signed in response to geopolitical changes in the north and a strong China's presence in Tibet, due to China's forward policy in Tibet and other Himalayan states. British wanted to stop the Chinese expansion by keeping Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal, and Sikkim as buffer states. The new treaty's provisions guaranteed non-interference in Bhutan's internal affairs in return for the British guidance on its external matters, as an independent country.⁸⁹

It is remarkable that according to the Bhutanese version, recorded in the Journal of Bhutan Studies, it is said that the beginning of the border problems rests in China's desire of punishing Bhutan for being an ally of its other neighbour, India, and not really due to an old territorial issue. According to this version of facts, the 470 kilometres un-demarcated Bhutan and Tibet border did not trouble the peoples of both countries until the Chinese takeover of Tibet.⁹⁰

The Chinese Communist Party before 1949 had been keen to have good relations with Bhutan regardless of the status of Tibet, putting aside the alleged Chinese historical sovereignty over Bhutan and preferred to use diplomacy rather than force. Indeed, Mao Zedong in 1930 openly declared that the correct boundaries of China would include Burma, Bhutan, Nepal, Taiwan, Korea and Ryukyu Island. These remarks were

84 Sherpa, S.; "Bhutan: Between Two Giants", *World Policy Journal*, Winter 2013 / 2014. Consulted on 01-06-2021. Link: <http://worldpolicy.org/2013/12/10/bhutan-between-two-giants/>

85 Penjore, D.; "Security of Bhutan: Walking Between the Giants", *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, Volume 10, Summer 2004, p. 109. Consulted on 01-06-2021. Link: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/26518659_Security_of_Bhutan_Walking_Between_the_Giants

86 We must not mistake the East Indian Company and the British Empire; they are not the same thing. The East Indian Company was a joint-stock company founded at the beginning of the 17th century whose main function was to trade with the East Indies, or the Indian subcontinent, and later on with China. It controlled large parts of the Indian subcontinent and even had an own army.

87 *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

88 Mathou, T.; "Bhutan-China Relations: Towards a New Step in Himalayan Politics" in *The Spider and the Piglet: Proceedings of the First Seminar on Bhutan Studies*, Centre for Bhutan Studies, Thimphu, 2004, pp. 389. Consulted on 03-06-2021. Link: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Bhutan-China-Relations%3A-Towards-a-new-Step-in-Mathou/a422480a36ee739a8b0d-4501f153800997c09735>

89 Penjore, D.; *Op. Cit.*, p. 113.

90 *Ibid.*, p. 116.

contained in the original version of the Chinese Revolution and the Communist Party, but were deleted from the later versions.⁹¹

After India gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1947, Bhutan became one of the first countries to recognize India's independence. Two years after, a treaty similar to that of 1910 took place, in which Britain had gained power over Bhutan's foreign relations, was signed with the newly independent India. That is why the treaty of 1910 was so relevant, serving as a precedent for this new one, therefore for the future close relations between both countries until our days.

The PRC was aware of the Bhutan-Indian treaty of 1949, but even knowing its existence the interest on treating Bhutan as an independent state grew. In 1955, Chinese officers in Lhasa even decided to issue visas directly to Bhutanese citizens, and at the same time Bhutan itself was also interested in having a better relationship with China.⁹² This is caused in part, due to the game that Bhutan has played for centuries as a "sandwich state", trying to maintain its sovereignty and its identity without being involved in conflict with the great powers that has as neighbours.

The outbreak of a revolt against the Chinese in Tibet in 1954-1955 had direct consequences on Sino-Bhutan relations in the general framework of growing tension between China and India. It was in that context that Indian Prime Minister Nehru decided to make a visit to Bhutan in September 1958 in order to convince the Royal Government of Bhutan to end its isolation policy. Despite its own concern over the situation in Tibet, Bhutan was cautious not to be dragged into the emerging big-neighbours confrontation, but in 1959, the PRC occupied eight Bhutanese enclaves in western Tibet, complicating the situation.⁹³

In fact, as we mentioned in the first chapter of this master's dissertation, in 1962 the First Sino-Indian War took place. Without going deeply into it again, we have to put into account that this conflict is relevant in relation with Bhutan because the Chinese's People Liberation Army began working to extend a road from Tibet into the kingdom of Bhutan.⁹⁴ The road building was at the junction of the borders of China, India, and Bhutan and just north of what is called the Siliguri Corridor, or "Chicken's Neck," which is a very narrow piece of Indian territory that links India to its northeast region, including the state of Assam.

In spite of this critical situation, Bhutan tried to keep a low-profile in the conflict, but we have to understand that this Himalayan country already had the best example of how it could lose its sovereignty if it look into the case of its neighbour, the Tibet. That is the reason why, as the author Sherpem Sherpa relates, "*Tibet's fate was a warning to Bhutan that an isolationist policy could place its independence in jeopardy. In the wake of cross-border incursions by Chinese soldiers and China's publication of a map showing altered traditional Sino-Bhutanese borders in their favour, Bhutan restricted cross-border trade in the north and quietly extended its relations with India*".⁹⁵

91 Mathou, T.; *Op. Cit.*, p. 392.

92 *Ibid.*, p. 393.

93 *Ibid.*, p. 393-394.

94 Riedel, B.; "JFK stopped a China-India War. Can Trump? The nuclear stakes are much higher now", *Brookings*, 09-08-2017. Consulted on 02-06-2021. Link: <https://www.thedailybeast.com/jfk-stopped-a-china-india-war-can-trump-the-nuclear-stakes-are-much-higher-now>

95 Sherpa, S.; *Op. Cit.*

Figure 2. Map of Bhutan



Source: University of Texas - http://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/txu-pclmaps-oclc-780922898-bhutan_pol-2012.jpg

Although brief, this war had important consequences in the power balance in the Himalayas. In the years afterwards, Bhutan remained cautious in its relations with China, and in the meanwhile, its relations with India would get closer over the time. A Chinese incursion into Bhutanese territory in 1979 led to a series of bilateral talks between both countries, since 1981; or formal meetings such as the one of 1984 in Beijing.⁹⁶ From the 1970s onwards, the relations with Tibet remained low, especially due to the complications linked to the PRC and the border issue. Maintaining close relations with the Chinese-controlled Tibet meant giving China some kind of justification in order to keep with the incursions or its plan of influence over the Bhutanese territory. Even though cultural, religious and historical links between both Himalayan territories were impossible to break, any different tie was considered a problem for its political implications. That is the reason why at the end of the 1970s the National Assembly of Bhutan decided that Tibetan refugees who had arrived in Bhutan after 1959, had to choose between becoming Bhutanese citizens or leaving the country.⁹⁷

After several years of talks and negotiations between Bhutan and China, between the beginning of the 1980s and the 2000s, the border issue seemed to be left behind. In fact, in December 2001, the Chinese negotiator, Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that the “*boundary issue had, by and large, been resolved*”.⁹⁸ But the reality proved to be different, when in 2002 through additional negotiations over the border territory the Chinese claimed to be owners of a sector of land in the western part of the country, very relevant due to vicinity of India. This situation provoked new rounds of talks and limited relations between both countries.⁹⁹

As far as India is concerned, Bhutan and India are bound together by a special relation that has slowly evolved from a donor-recipient to equal partner relationship. The friendship is deeply rooted in religion, culture,

96 Penjore, D.; *Op. Cit.*, p. 117.

97 Mathou, T.; p. 398.

98 *Ibid.*, p. 402.

99 Bhutan is the only China's neighbour with whom it does not have a diplomatic relation despite sharing a common border. Penjore, D.; *Op. Cit.*, p. 113.

history and economic ties, encompassing a wide range of areas and issues of common interests like security, politics, trade and economy.¹⁰⁰ From India's perspective, at the beginning of the 21st century Bhutan is one of the most vulnerable sectors in the Indian security system, as a frontier of vital strategic importance, which ensures security all over the Himalayan sector.¹⁰¹

What followed was a new Friendship Treaty signed in 2007, replacing the provision that required Bhutan accept India's guidance on foreign policy. Under the new agreement, Bhutan and India are required to "cooperate closely with each other on issues relating to their national interests. Neither Government shall allow the use of its territory for activities harmful to the national security and interest of the other."¹⁰² This was seen to provide greater freedom for Bhutan to manage its sovereignty and external relations. In 2008, welcoming Bhutan's move towards democracy¹⁰³, India also allowed 16 entry and exit points for Bhutanese trade with other countries, excluding China.¹⁰⁴

Since then, Sino-Bhutanese relations have not improved. On the contrary, we are living a moment of great tensions between both states. During June 2017, China was expanding an unpaved road in the strategic plateau called Doklam, located at the triple junction between India, Bhutan, and China. Indian troops stepped in and stopped the work, sparking a standoff between the two sides. New Delhi argued that the road involved security issues.¹⁰⁵ The tense confrontation between Chinese and Indian troops in Doklam raised concerns among many Bhutanese about the possibility of a war breaking out between the Asian giants. Beijing denounced what it described as a "handover of Indian troops". After weeks of diplomacy between leaders of the two countries, the 73-day standoff ended.¹⁰⁶

The Indian version of this last incident is that China is adopting the same strategy with Bhutan as what it did in the South China Sea, saying that "the present Chinese aggressiveness is a reflection of their growing national arrogance after successfully threatening and occupying a large number of islands along its disputed maritime borders with neighbours, ranging from Vietnam to the Philippines. It disregarded a ruling of the International Court of Justice."¹⁰⁷ In its way, India is putting in the same level all Chinese territorial claims, defining them as illegal and greedy moves of power, without questioning its own moves, sometimes not the right ones, and fully supporting Bhutan's sovereignty.¹⁰⁸ This is a sign of the existence of a double-standard, where Chinese actions are criticized but at the same time India is also carrying out a realist policy in other territories, for example Kashmir with the derogation of article 370. At the same time, we can say that China also does the

100 *Ibid.*, pp. 119-121.

101 *Ibid.*

102 Sherpa, S.; *Op. Cit.*

103 The democracy process in Bhutan was really surprising and an example for the region, because it happened in a completely peaceful way, being a project of the elites and supported by the Bhutanese people. Before that, Bhutan was governed by an authoritarian monarchy with successive kings that over the decades started to make concessions towards democracy. After the abdication of the king Jigme Singye Wangchuck in favour of his son, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, a constitutional monarchy was established. This fact created tensions in the regions, with the possibility of Bhutan abandoning its neutrality and allying itself with India, which is also a democracy, and in opposition with the Chinese regime. The more democratic, the less chances of cooperation with China. Gyeltshen, K; Sripokangkul, S.; "Bhutan's Unique Transition to Democracy and its Challenges", *Khon Kaen University*, 2017, pp. 281-287. Consulted on 09-06-2021. Link: https://www.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/journal-peace/article/download/77163/pdf_11

104 Sherpa, S.; *Op. Cit.*

105 Ethirajan, A.; "Bután: el conflicto entre dos superpotencias rivales que amenaza un paraíso 'donde todo es perfecto'", *BBC NEWS MUNDO*, 10-04-2018. Consulted on 04-06-2021. Link: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-43707202>

106 At this moment, social media was the scene of a heated debate over whether it was time for Bhutan to resolve its border dispute with China and pursue an independent foreign policy. Some argued that Bhutan should rid itself of Indian influence. After Tibet was invaded and annexed by China in the 1950s, Bhutan immediately looked southward toward India, in search of friendship and security. Since then, it has been under their sphere of influence. *Ibid.*

107 EurAsian Times Desk; "China Wants Military Advantage Over India & Is 'Replicating' Its SCS Strategy In Bhutan – Analyst", 28-05-2021. Consulted on 04-06-2020. Link: <https://eurasianimes.com/china-wants-military-advantage-over-india-is-replicating-its-scs-strategy-in-bhutan-analyst/>

108 For China, India's military deployment in this region is an attempt to change the status quo, while for India, China's attempts to build roads in disputed territories are in line with its previous moves to unilaterally modify unstable borders in order to expand its territorial scope and enhance its influence in the region. De Castro Pita, J.; "Un incidente fronterizo entre China, India y Bután puede provocar un conflicto militar", *ASIA northeast.com*, 18-08-2017. Consulted on 05-06-2021. Link: <https://asianortheast.com/incidente-fronterizo-china-india-butan-puede-provocar-conflicto-militar/>

same, criticizing India's actions in Kashmir against the autonomy of this area, and at the same time is carrying out a colonialist illegal strategy in Bhutan or expansionist moves in the South China Sea.

In fact, there is evidence that China is founding several villages in the Bhutanese border. It is an unknown form of Chinese land appropriation that it was discovered recently, based mainly on the southern flanks of the Himalayas, just across the border with Bhutan. Under the slogan "prosperous villages by the border", China has built some 200 villages near the southern border in the Himalayas over the past four years, where Tibetans settle to "turn villages into fortresses and homes into watchtowers". New residents are persuaded to settle there with the promise of a new house and subsidies. The process was accelerated in 2015 by spending millions on building housing, roads and hydropower plants across the valley.¹⁰⁹

According to Robert Barnett: *"this new construction is part of a major drive by Chinese President Xi Jinping especially since 2017 to fortify the Tibetan borderlands, a dramatic escalation in China's long-running efforts to outmanoeuvre India and its neighbours along their Himalayan frontiers. In this case, China doesn't need the land it is settling in Bhutan: Its aim is to force the Bhutanese government to cede territory that China wants elsewhere in Bhutan to give Beijing a military advantage in its struggle with New Delhi."*¹¹⁰

Figure 3. Map of the areas in Bhutan where China has been creating settlements



Source: deVolkskrant - <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/territoriumdrift-in-de-himalaya-china-sticht-stiekem-drie-dorpjes-net-over-de-grens-met-bhutan~bd9048b5/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F#:~:text=Hoog%20op%20de%20onherbergzame%20berghellingen,spel%20dan%20een%20paar%20dorpjes.>

Beijing insists there is nothing wrong with building a village because it is China's territory. According to Barnett, the real strategic target of China's land-grabbing is not Bhutan but India. Since 1990, China has offered to return some areas it controls in the Beyul region to Bhutan, exchanging Bhutan's territory around

109 Vlaskamp, M.; "Territoriumdrift in de Himalaya: China sticht stiekem drie dorpjes net over de grens met Bhutan", *de Volkskrant*, 01-06-2021. Consulted on 04-06-2021. Link: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/territoriumdrift-in-de-himalaya-china-sticht-stiekem-drie-dorpjes-net-over-de-grens-met-bhutan~bd9048b5/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F#:~:text=Hoog%20op%20de%20onherbergzame%20berghellingen,spel%20dan%20een%20paar%20dorpjes.>

110 Barnett, R.; "China Is Building Entire Villages in Another Country's Territory", *Foreign Policy*, 07-05-2021. Consulted on 03-06-2021. Link: [https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/05/07/china-bhutan-border-villages-security-forces/#:~:text=In%20October%202015%2C%20China%20announced,Tibet%20Autonomous%20Region%20\(TAR\).&text=Gyalaphug%20is%2C%20however%2C%20different%3A,had%20crossed%20an%20international%20border.](https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/05/07/china-bhutan-border-villages-security-forces/#:~:text=In%20October%202015%2C%20China%20announced,Tibet%20Autonomous%20Region%20(TAR).&text=Gyalaphug%20is%2C%20however%2C%20different%3A,had%20crossed%20an%20international%20border.)

the Doklam Plateau, an area adjacent to India. China believes controlling Doklam will give the People's Liberation Army a significant advantage over the Indian army if China and India go to war.¹¹¹

Different reports stated that building a “whole nation” within the internationally recognised territory of another nation is ‘striking’ even if the region is disputed.¹¹² In fact, there is little that Bhutan can do against this situation. The 1998 agreement to leave the disputed areas was violated, but even in that case, it is very difficult to prove because China is going to defend itself arguing that indeed China has sovereignty over those territories. At the moment, as we mention before, there are debates of how handling the situation, but the most relevant one was the possibility of Bhutan distancing itself politically from India and trying to resolve the conflict bilaterally with China. In fact, this “friendship” with India, due to common interests, was the one in part causing this situation. China is not interested mainly in the territories in dispute with Bhutan, but more in using Bhutan as a weapon for its rivalry towards India. In the other hand, it is true that there are many risks of “abandoning India's umbrella”, and that this tiny Himalayan country has always been protected by this state, being the experiences of isolationism in other neighbours not successful at all. Taking the example of Tibet, it quickly succumbed to China and lost its independence.

3. The heart of the Himalayas: Nepal and Tibet

These landlocked territories in the Himalayan chain have been over the decades very relevant in terms of exemplifying the border dispute between China and India. It is also important to point out that both had had a strong connection between each other, even though they are in a very different political situation at the moment.

Nepal in the one hand, not only occupies part of the Himalayas, but it is also situated in the Indo-Gangetic Plain. In fact, it is formed by a very diverse geography, as well as a wide range of languages, cultures and ethnic groups. One relevant fact is that Buddha was born in this territory, linking Nepal inevitably to the rest of Asia, due to the influence and expansion of Buddhism throughout all the continent.

In terms of territorial dispute, Nepal, unlike Tibet's case, is an independent and sovereign country, surrounded by India through the south, east and west, and to China in its northern part. This international boundary has changed over the years, and if we go back to the 19th hundreds, the war between Nepal and the East India Company finished with the so-called Sugauli Treaty of 1815. Since then, Nepal lost the land from the Mechi to Tista in the east, also, from the Mahakali to Satulej in the west and from Chure range to plain Tarai in the south.¹¹³

This treaty must be mentioned and is so relevant because it specified that the Kali river was the border of Nepal and India. After 1947, the year of India's independence, the treaty was taken as the official border between both countries. But it is curious that not even nowadays the origin of the Mahalaki river was agreed, being the main reason of disputes over the territory.¹¹⁴ At the same time, regarding China, the boundaries have changed dramatically since the Annexation of Tibet in 1949. In this case, Nepal tried to maintain good relations with China in order to not have the same destiny as the Tibetan territory. With this purpose, a treaty between both countries was signed in 1956, the “Agreement on Maintaining Friendly Relations between the People's Republic of China and the Kingdom of Nepal”, and in 1960 the “Sino-Nepalese Treaty of Peace

111 MoneyControl News; “China setting up villages in Bhutan to gain military advantage over India: Report”, 10-05-2021; Raleigh, H.; “In Bhutan, China Takes Disputed Territory Without Firing A Shot”, *The Federalist*, 28-05-2021. Consulted on 04-06-2021. Link: <https://www.moneycontrol.com/news/trends/china-setting-up-villages-in-bhutan-to-gain-military-advantage-over-india-report-6873241.html>

112 Nigam, A.; “China Gradually Invading Bhutan, Builds 'whole Town' Inside Himalayan Neighbour: Study”, *Republicworld.com*, 23-05-2021. Consulted on 03-06-2021. Link: <https://www.republicworld.com/world-news/china/china-gradually-invading-bhutan-builds-whole-town-inside-himalayan-neighbour-study.html>

113 Baral, T.N.; “Border Disputes and Its Impact on Bilateral Relation: A Case of Nepal-India International Border Management”, *Journal of APF Command and Staff College*, 2018, pp. 28-29. Consulted on 04-06-2021. Link: <https://www.nepjol.info/index.php/JAPFCSC/article/download/26710/22113/>

114 Paudyal, G.; “Border Dispute Between Nepal and India”, *Tribhuvan University*, July-December 2013, p. 42. Consulted on 07-06-2021. Link: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/BORDER-DISPUTE-BETWEEN-NEPAL-AND-INDIA-Paudyal/9890f21824b3cded2f21eb0e1b38c808f3ecf2d3>

and Friendship”. They have quite significance because they formally recognised Tibet as a part of China and confirmed the limits of the countries of China and Nepal as they are known today.¹¹⁵

The history of Nepal through the last decades emphasises its tendencies to autocracy and its failed attempts to reach a true democracy. Between 1996 and 2006 the civil war initiated by a Maoist guerrilla caused lots of deaths and a huge polarisation of society. In 2008 monarchy was abolished, and in 2015 the current democratic constitution was approved. For India, this political instability that affects border territories may have adverse effects in the neighbouring Indian federal state of Bihar and has recommended to take into account the demands of Madhesi groups living in the Terai region bordering India. Nepal, for its part, has always considered India’s influence on its domestic politics to be excessive, and a substantial prove of Nepal’s vulnerability in the region.¹¹⁶

As noted by Izquierdo Alberca: “Nepal is well aware that every time one of the big neighbours offers help, the other tries to rebalance its influence with similar actions, and, despite small Nepal’s mistrust of its powerful neighbours, it also benefits from Beijing and Delhi’s competition to win over the Kathmandu government. So, if they have traditional cultural and religious ties with India the overly intrusive behaviour of the Delhi government in Nepal’s domestic politics fuels suspicions that India may be supporting the demands of ethnic groups in the south to gain influence.”¹¹⁷

Figure 4. Situation of Nepal and Tibet in the Sino-Indian border



Source: BBC NEWS - <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-40418777>

On the other hand, considering Nepalese relations with China, many vital border issues have emerged. For example, the northern territory in dispute of Lapchigaun in the Lamabagar area of Dolakha district, as well as claims made by the Survey Department of the Agriculture Ministry of Nepal over the illegal Chinese occupation of Nepalese land spread over seven border districts, which are Dolakha, Gorkha, Darchula, Humla, Sindhupalchowk, Sankhuwasa and Rasuwa. Additionally, we have to mention the displacement of Boundary Pillar Numbers in different districts. Even though previous maps put these areas as a part of

115 It must be mentioned that, as noted by border expert Buddhi Narayan Shrestha, there were also several alterations of the traditional borders over time, owing to geographical remoteness, on the basis of convenience of small settlements, as well as the give-and-take-policy of the two countries. One of the many districts to be reshaped is Humla – specifically the north-western part, which looked like a mount towards the Chinese side but now has been pushed into Nepal. It has been found that Nepal had acquired 2139 sq km of land from China while conceding 1836.25 sq km of its existing territory to China, resulting in a net gain of 302.75 sq km for itself. Nayak, S.; “Nepal: Denying an undeniable border dispute with China”, *Observer Research Foundation (ORF)*, 01-10-2020. Consulted on 08-06-2021. Link: <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/nepal-denying-undeniable-border-dispute-china/>

116 Izquierdo Alberca, M.J.; “Nepal: la difícil transición hacia la democracia”, *IEEE*, 28-10-2015. Consulted on 06-06-2021. Link: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7687252>

117 *Ibid.*

Nepalese territory with the local people paying taxes to the Nepalese Government, they were occupied by China and merged with the Autonomous Region of Tibet in 1951.¹¹⁸

In fact, China is not the only power in the region that is trying to exert its influence inside Nepal's borders. Around half of the Indian government's economic assistance to neighbouring countries in South Asia goes to the infrastructure sector, including roads, railways, ports, and other projects. In the specific case of Nepal, it can be understood as a macro-strategic, political and security move in order to maintain influence over a territory that is really unpredictable and sometimes even hostile with India.¹¹⁹ For carrying out this project related to the modernisation of the former infrastructure in the country, India included the acquisition of land inside Nepal, same as China has been doing during the last years.¹²⁰ These kind of strategies can be understood as a way for China and India of seeking their own interests, using Nepal as a tool for maintaining influence in the region, and at the same time avoiding direct confrontation and implementing a new smart form of soft power.

Framed with the COVID-19 situation during the last year and the political instability of the country, these projects have been delayed and even opposed by the Nepali government. During the last year, the Indian defence minister presented an 80 km road connecting to the border with China, at the Lipulekh pass, and the Nepali government protested immediately. Allegedly, it crosses territory claimed to be of Nepal, and it entails changing the status quo without diplomatic consultations. This last crisis coincided with the exponential growth of China's political influence in Nepal, encouraging to take a bolder stance against India during the current crisis. India, on the other hand, has said to be open to a dialogue on this issue but does not seem to share Nepal's sense of urgency, agreeing to a dialogue but only after the current COVID-19 crisis.¹²¹ In the meantime, Nepal is in the most complicated moment of the whole pandemic, with restrictions being extended.¹²²

For Tibet's part, as we mentioned before, the political situation evolved quite different compared to its neighbour Nepal. Concerning Tibet's history, if we go back to the beginning of the 20th century, specifically in 1904, a British expedition to Tibet took place. The reasons of this expedition were the fear of a Russian expansion in this territory, as a part of the so-called "Great Game", where the British and Russian empires fought each other and seek for an expansion of their influence in the Central Asian region. This expedition turned out to be at the end a military invasion, where the British managed to negotiate a treaty that resulted in the Convention Between Great Britain and China Respecting Tibet. This treaty consisted of the British agreeing in not annexing or interfering in Tibet in return for an indemnity from the Chinese government, while China agreed not to permit any other foreign state to interfere with the territory or internal administration of Tibet. We are speaking about the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1906.

In 1910, the Qing government sent a military expedition to impose the Chinese rule, being successful and the Dalai Lama deposed, having to scape to India. After the Xinhai Revolution, that took place between 1911 and 1912, the new Chinese government apologized for its action and restored the figure of the Dalai Lama. He ruled as an independent leader¹²³; in 1914 a treaty with India was signed, the Simla treaty that we have

118 Nayak, S.; *Op. Cit.*

119 Xavier, C.; Sinha, R.; "When land comes in the way: India's connectivity infrastructure in Nepal", *Brookings*, 12-08-2020. Consulted on 06-06-2021. Link: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/when-land-comes-in-the-way-indias-connectivity-infrastructure-in-nepal/>

120 We can put as an example the *Belt and Road Initiative* of China, of which Nepal is a member and has been the recipient of uncountable benefits. Nayak, S.; *Op. Cit.*

121 Xavier, C.; "Interpreting the India-Nepal border dispute", *Brookings*, 11-06-2020. Consulted on 06-06-2021. Link: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/06/11/interpreting-the-india-nepal-border-dispute/>

122 Fernández, I.; "Nepal cierra los aeropuertos por Covid en plena temporada de expediciones", *Desnivel.com*, 04-05-2021. Consulted on 05-06-2021. Link: <https://www.desnivel.com/expediciones/nepal-cierra-los-aeropuertos-por-covid-en-plena-temporada-de-expediciones/>

123 The Republic of China did not control Tibet and until the People's Liberation Army (PLA) entered Lhasa, Tibet was ruled by the Dalai Lama, with monks and monasteries under a feudal regime where they exercised both political and spiritual power. Ríos Carrillo, V.; "Tíbet y los intereses estratégicos de China, India y EEUU: una aproximación histórica", *Igadi na rede. China e o mundo chinés*, 11-03-2011. Consulted on 08-06-2021. Link: https://www.igadi.gal/china/2011/vr_tibet_y_los_intereses_estrategicos.htm

mentioned before. In this treaty the southern territory of Tibet became part of the British India, causing resentment in the Chinese side.

When in the 1930s and 1940s the regents displayed negligence in affairs, the Kuomintang Government of the Republic of China took advantage of this to expand its reach into the territory. In 1949 the People's Republic of China was proclaimed, integrating Tibet de facto into its territory.¹²⁴ After that, the following year, the Seventeen Point Agreement was negotiated with the newly Dalai Lama's government, affirming the People's Republic of China's sovereignty but granting the area autonomy. Subsequently, on his journey into exile, the Dalai Lama completely repudiated the agreement.

During the 1950s, the initial friendly relation between China and India quickly became one more confrontational. Within the framework of the *Great Leap Forward*, the Chinese decided to impose the Four Settlements to Tibet, and the situation became untenable. The Dalai Lama's conciliatory attempts finally came to an end in March of 1959, and he fled to India due to an uprising by the people of Lhasa.¹²⁵

With the Dalai Lama's government in India, and the Tibetan Rebellion of 1959, linked all that to the Sino-Indian Border Dispute, tensions became to build up. The Chinese did not recognise the McMahon Line as the borders, and the Indians did not recognise the traditional limits established during the Qing's dynasty. Nehru wanted to help the Tibetans, maintain China's friendship, and ensure Indian security; all while trying to prevent Tibet from becoming a Cold War issue and even more of a public issue in India.¹²⁶ Logically, these goals were impossible to reach, and the situation between both powers became unsustainable.

As we have explained in the first chapter of this master's dissertation, it is in 1962 when the First Sino-Indian War took place. It is relevant concerning Tibet because, in short, India lost their claim over the territory in the north of the McMahon Line, being an overwhelming defeat against China. In the other hand, China, ensured its control of the Tibetan region for the next decades.¹²⁷

But Tibet's status continued to be the core of the issue for all parties involved in the conflict for decades. China has been arguing it for at least a century, but only over the last quarter has mobilised an intense array of studies and documents to support its case, basing the sovereignty over Tibet affirming that this territory has been an integral part of China for centuries, mainly since the Yuan Dynasty, or in other words, since the Moghul invasion of the 13th century.¹²⁸ India, on the contrary, defends the borders established during the British colonial period and maintained after India's Independence in 1947. Also, Tibet's autonomy is defended in contrast with the official discourse of Tibet as an essential part of China since centuries forward. In the other hand, the argument presented by Tibetans, especially those in exile, is that Tibet has always been and independent territory for thousands of years, that was lost only since the Communist troops invaded and occupied the country in 1949.¹²⁹

The war of 1962 ultimately demonstrated to both parties the impracticality of a border dispute in relation to other national economic and security concerns, that is the reason why the relations in the 1970s and 1980s became friendly to some extent.¹³⁰ As we already mentioned, at the end of the 1980s Sino-Indian border negotiations were framed around mutual suspicions of troop-concentrations along the border, and coincided

124 *Ibid.*

125 Folch, D.; "50 años de ocupación china de Tíbet", *EL PAÍS*, 20-10-2000. Consulted on 07-06-2021. Link: https://elpais.com/diario/2000/10/22/internacional/972165614_850215.html

126 Madan, T.; "How India-China Relations Changed Due To Border Dispute And Uprising In Tibet", *Huffinton Post*, 03-06-2020. Consulted on 05-06-2021. Link: https://www.huffpost.com/archive/in/entry/india-china-relations-tanvi-madan-fateful-triangle_in_5e60999fc5b62d548c9d4341

127 Cheong, D.; *Op. Cit.*, pp. 53-54.

128 Sperling, E.; "Tibet and China: The Interpretation of History Since 1950", *China Perspectives. The Deadlock in Tibet*, 2009, p. 25. Consulted on 07-06-2021. Link: <https://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/4839>

129 Sperling, E.; "The Tibet-China Conflict: History and Polemics", *Policy Studies* 7, East-West Center, Washington, 2004, p. 21. Consulted on 07-06-2021. Link: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/26098/PS007.pdf>

130 *Ibid.*

with the break-down of the Sino–Tibetan dialogue that was going on since 1979.¹³¹ This fact coincided with the new Xiaoping initiative of resolving the Tibet question through inducing the Dalai Lama to return from exile.¹³²

It was in 1987 when India allowed the Dalai Lama for the first time to visit Western countries in order to raise awareness on the Tibetan struggle for independence over China and to get political support for the Tibetan cause, as well as an internationalisation of the Tibet issue, causing enormous tensions between both parts.¹³³ The Tibet issue in the 1990s reaches its peak again, with the popularisation of the *Free Tibet Movement* around the globe, partly due to the Nobel Peace Prize that the Dalai Lama received in 1989. At the same time as other critical voices in the PRC, such as the Tiananmen Square protests, were brutally repressed by the Chinese government.¹³⁴

During this decade it took place the 8th edition of International Tibet Support Groups conference, or TSG conference, the largest convention about the Tibet's issue, where Lobsang Sangay, the Prime Minister of the Tibetan government in exile said: “*the resistance movement is returning in full power, challenging authoritarian and repressive regimes around the world. The international community and stakeholders must step up activism for human rights and religious freedom in Tibet into the highest gear*”.¹³⁵

During the next years, the situation did not change at all, being really far away of reaching a pacific solution for the Tibet's issue. For this reason, in the year 2000, in response to the need of a pacific solution, the International Tibet Network was created, having the network more than 200 support groups in more than 50 countries, and carrying out global campaigns in order to draw attention of the Tibet's cause.¹³⁶

In this context, the 60-year anniversary gains importance, as a way of pointing out the long struggle of the Tibetan people. Sognam Daggio, the secretary for International Relations of the Tibetan authorities in exile said: “for Tibetans in Tibet, it has been sixty years of peaceful resistance and suffering under Chinese rule”, and that “for those in exile, it has been sixty years of political struggle to regain freedom”.¹³⁷

According to Agustín Morales, with China stronger than ever and the slogan of *Free Tibet* being a victim of historical attrition and perhaps buried in the mud of nostalgia, diplomatic efforts continue, but almost all efforts are focused on strengthening cultural and religious identity, which is expected to transcend the political plane. And that inevitably involves the figure of the Dalai Lama, even if he has distanced himself from politics.¹³⁸ But we must ask ourselves if this enhancement of cultural and religious identity will be enough in the next years to cause a turning point in Tibet's situation, as well as a new compromise regarding China and the occupation of its territory.

In fact, during the last month, the new president of the Tibetan exile government said he was willing to reach out to the Chinese government to resolve their conflict, but both sides have not had a dialogue in more than a

131 *Ibid.*

132 Goldstein, M.C.; “The United States, Tibet, and the Cold War”, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 2006, pp. 154-155. Consulted on 08-06-2021. Link: <https://case.edu/afil/tibet/tibetanSociety/documents/TheUnitedStatesTibetandtheColdWar.pdf>

133 Topgyal, T.; *Op. Cit.*, p. 125.

134 Some of the travellers caught in the violence would later play influential roles in the free Tibet movement, publishing famous photographs of the events when they returned home or working with Tibet support groups which became the basis of the movement. Coleman, O.; “The Free Tibet Movement”, *Shado Magazine*, 2020. Consulted on 05-06-2021. Link: <https://shado-mag.com/act/the-free-tibet-movement/>

135 Staff Reporter; “As the 1990s era of people's resistance returns, Tibet will be at forefront once again: Sikyong at the 8th International TSG conference”, *CENTRAL TIBETAN ADMINISTRATION*, 03-11-2019. Consulted on 07-06-2021. Link: <https://tibet.net/as-the-1990s-era-of-peoples-resistance-returns-tibet-will-be-at-forefront-once-again-sikyong-at-the-8th-international-tsg-conference/>

136 González Cerulli, L.; “60 años a la espera de una solución pacífica para el Tibet”, *CADAL. Derechos Humanos y Sociedad Democrática Internacional*, 10-03-2019. Consulted on 07-06-2021. Link: <https://tibet.net/as-the-1990s-era-of-peoples-resistance-returns-tibet-will-be-at-forefront-once-again-sikyong-at-the-8th-international-tsg-conference/>

137 Morales, A.; “El dalái lama, sesenta años fuera del Tibet”, *The New York Times*, 10-03-2019. Consulted on 05-06-2021. Link: <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2019/03/10/espanol/el-dalai-lama-sesenta-anos-fuera-del-tibet.html>

138 *Ibid.*

decade, and the situation seems difficult to solve.¹³⁹ This action is significant due to the tense military face-off in another territory, as we have mentioned before the Ladakh sector, where the armies of the two Asian giants have been crashing for the last months, in spite of the signature of a ceasefire agreement. For resolving this matter in that second territory, the “Tibet card” was used, having conversations of the Tibet issue and trying to make concessions on that matter. For example, India avoiding all high-level official contacts with the Dalai Lama’s followers and deference to the one-China policy.¹⁴⁰

We could perceive through these actions that the Tibet is not regarded as an essential territory in dispute, or by the importance of its own sovereignty, but similar to a trading card where China and India reflect their own interests in the region and in their position as the two Asian superpowers. We will discuss this later through the importance of natural resources on the boundary issue.

In the meanwhile, the issues addressed in relation with Tibet’s autonomy and its political struggle for freedom seem difficult to achieve, as long as its neighbours, China and India, did not seat and seriously try to make a compromise, focusing on Tibet’s best interests and not in their self-ones, depending on the moment and the global landscape.

139 AP News Wire; “New Tibetan exile president open to reaching out to China”, *The Independent*, 28-05-2021. Consulted on 08-06-2021. Link: <https://apnews.com/article/tibet-china-religion-63339fd59ab8b4afa817ebe3675d9ab6>

140 Guha, S.; “India Signals The Tibet Card As Foreign Ministers Likely To Meet In Moscow”, *Outlook*, 08-09-2020. Consulted on 08-06-2021. Link: <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/world-news-india-signals-the-tibet-card-as-foreign-ministers-likely-to-meet-in-moscow/360005>

Chapter 3.

An analysis of the conflict: India and China, two Asian giants

In this final part of the master's dissertation, we will focus on a proper analysis of the conflict itself in order to have a full view and understanding of the current political situation between China and India, presenting different theories about the reasons occasioning this dispute apart from the historical and traditional ones that were already mentioned through this essay. At the same time, this territorial rivalry is not the only thing to focus on, but also in which way the territories, Kashmir, Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan, have been affected by that, and what are the future prospects for them.

Bearing this on mind, we will start studying if the territorial issue is a real armed or war conflict or not, due to the different opinions concerning this matter. It is important to determine the nature of the conflict in order to evaluate the possible outcomes. In relation to the specific situation of each territory in dispute, we will bring up the involvement of secondary actors in the dispute, and how this played a major role in relation to it, arguing if the Sino-Indian border issue can be considered a global matter. The next hypothesis will be if the conflict itself can be explained by other reasons, moving from a dispute of borders to, in fact, a dispute over natural resources. Finally, the master's dissertation will end with the role of the economy and population of these countries in the conflict itself, and how the dispute affected the management of the recent pandemic and COVID-19 crisis.

1. Is the Sino-Indian border dispute a real war conflict?

There are some debates regarding the Sino-Indian border dispute, to determine if it is a real war conflict or not. Considering all the facts we have narrated in this master's dissertation; we will analyse them in order to determine if the Sino-Indian border dispute is a war conflict or not. This will be useful for understanding the nature of the conflict itself, and therefore the possible outcomes.

In the one hand, we have a record of military actions and use of force in the border over time. In the 19th century, the fight between actors for the control of the territory was already a common aspect. With the independence of India, and the new conception of borders and identities within the region, tensions were created, and they would have been translated into new crashes and skirmishes among the new neighbours, such as India, China or even Pakistan in the Kashmiri region.

The most relevant episodes were, for example, the invasion of Tibet by China in 1950 or the Sino-Indian War of 1962. But apart from these milestones, there have been repetitive tensions over the borders areas, some of them with the result of a direct confrontation between the players. An example of that can be in the Kashmiri region the border violations on the LoC, as well as the violent actions carried out by terrorist groups in the region that have been caused due to the derogation of Article 370 of Constitution, as well as partially due to the COVID-19 situation.

In the other hand, this boundary issue is focused by different strategies others than direct confrontations or the use of force. These strategies are diverse forms of soft power, such as the implantation of projects of public works and transportation in these areas, for example, roads and hydroelectric centres. Other forms of confrontation are the building of villages and purchase of land in the disputed areas to gain influence, as well as the control of their economies.

Looking into the whole picture, we can see that in the boundary issue the use of force is something generalised, but it's not the norm. In fact, during the last years, the direct confrontations have been mostly replaced by these new forms of conceiving the conflict and trying to gain influence and control over the region. In general, we can speak about a conflict that is based on a territorial dispute that has been present for seventy

years in the region, but not about a war conflict as such, because hostilities, even though always at some extent present, have not been a constant through the years.

Therefore, we can determine that the Sino-Indian border dispute is a conflict with peaks and lows in terms of confrontations, as well as periods where this issue becomes more important due to the political situation of the moment between both countries and in the Asian region in general, but not a war conflict.

2. A global clash: allies and neighbour's role

In this section of the master's dissertation, we will analyse the role of the neighbouring states and different allies in the course of the conflict, as well as if the border's issue is really a conflict between India and China or a situation with broader implications, existing the possibility of becoming a "global conflict" in the future. Bearing this purpose on mind, we will start speaking about Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as the role of China as a neighbour in the Kashmiri region. We will finish speaking very briefly about the US and Russia.

Starting with Pakistan, and separating this country from the territorial dispute that is suffered in the Kashmiri region, it is clear that there is a non-official alliance system which links India with the US, and in the other hand China with Pakistan. In fact, this tendency has swiftly accelerated since the derogation of the Article 370 against Kashmir's autonomy, having attacks in the LoC from Pakistan as well as China; but these alliance systems come from the 1962 war, from a very complex process in which Mao invaded China and India was supported by President Kennedy and the US. That is the moment when Pakistan seeks China as an ally against the pressures of India.¹⁴¹

But in fact, Pakistan has been over the time an ally for the US, for example regarding military actions against its neighbour Afghanistan. The US Department of State describes at the moment its relationship with Pakistan as *"a close relationship on a wide array of issues ranging from Afghanistan stabilization efforts, to counterterrorism, to energy, to trade and investment. In terms of counterterrorism and internal security, Pakistan has taken some action against externally-focused militant groups and UN-designated terrorist organizations operating from its territory in accordance with its National Action Plan against terrorism and Prime Minister Imran Khan's public commitments."*¹⁴²

But the true is that these actions against terrorist organisations, such as the Taliban's, are not that efficient. In fact, relations over the years between Afghanistan and Pakistan have got close, and got reinforced by their identity as Muslim states, promoting the existence of shared political radical groups. Some of these groups linked to Afghanistan, and based on terrorist actions, are intervening in the Kashmiri region due to a liberation war of their Muslim brothers that are under the unfaithful domination of India. Also, China is the only country apart from Pakistan to have maintained a continuous and direct relationship with the top leadership of the Taliban.¹⁴³

On the other hand, this implicit alliance with China works as a net of support between both countries. Pakistan recognises sovereignty claims over other territories in other parts of the border in dispute, for example, the Chinese rule over Tibet, as long as their own political claims over the Kashmiri region are supported. Apart from that, meaning the territorial perspective, Pakistan works as a proxy state that is able to divert the situation, and causing tensions with India when China needs it.

At some extent, the role of Pakistan is necessary, because it is a nuclear power in the region that shares borders with India and China, but for its size and resources is not able to compete against these two states yet. It is not irrelevant and insignificant, but at the same time we cannot say that Pakistan is at the same

141 Riedel, B.; "Hardening Alliances: India-America and Pakistan-China", *Brookings*, 11-05-2015. Consulted on 08-06-2021. Link: <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/hardening-alliances-india-america-and-pakistan-china/>

142 US Department of State; "U.S. Relations With Pakistan", *BILATERAL RELATIONS FACT SHEET. BUREAU OF SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIAN AFFAIRS*, 20-01-2021. Consulted on 08-06-2021. Link: <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-pakistan/>

143 Menon, S.; "As China's Pakistan ties deepen, India needs a strategy to mitigate the fallout", *Center for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP)*, 12-07-2016. Consulted on 07-06-2021. Link: <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/as-chinas-pakistan-ties-deepen-india-needs-a-strategy-to-mitigate-the-fallout/>

level as them, and this is a reassurance for both countries in relation with the dispute on the border. It is very convenient, because due to these reasons Pakistan can be used by one side or another as we said before to divert the situation of the border issue, if we understand it as a unit, moving the focus into the Kashmiri region, strategy that was especially used by China, its ally.¹⁴⁴

In the near future we probably will see this alliance between Pakistan and China, and India and the US reinforced, due not only to the escalation of the conflict in the Sino-Indian border, but also due to the increasingly international confrontation between China and the US, that therefore will involve their allies, especially in the Asian region that has developed so much relevance during the last decades.

If we study the role of China in the conflict, but as an external agent, in areas such as Kashmir, the situation changes. As we mentioned, the implicit alliance between China and Pakistan has been taken place since decades ago. This fact does not enter in contradiction with the links between Pakistan and the US that occurred over the time. India was a Non-Aligned country during the Cold War years, even though it seeks help from the US when necessary. The instrumentalization of Pakistan as a proxy country in the border dispute, as well as the connections between both, being the antithesis of India and enemies since the year of independence and the different conceptions over the political system, territory and religion, make this alliance the most natural step to take.

In exchange, China recognises the sovereignty of Pakistan over the territory in dispute with India, participating directly in military actions in the LoC border. In exchange, as we mentioned before, Pakistan not only supports the Chinese claims, but works as a diversion between the fight over territory and influence in the Sino-Indian border. If Pakistan decides to multiply the attacks on Jammu or Ladakh according to China convenience, India will have to move their troops over that territory, leaving other areas in the border more vulnerable.

China with this kind of partnership gains influence over the Kashmiri region itself, not having to carry out a greater number of military expeditions or more attacks. For example, we can justify that by the great number of public works programmes that have been developed in the region, due to the lack of resources of the own Pakistani state. Through these strategies, regarding a huge infrastructural project based on the construction of roads, public transportation and public spaces, the Chinese are exerting a form of soft power in the region without having to use force.

At the same time, if we analyse another actor that has not played such an important role, Russia by its part has had very close and good relations with India over the time. Relations with Russia are a fundamental pillar of India's foreign policy, and Russia has been a time-tested and long-standing partner of India. Since the signing of the "Declaration on India-Russia Strategic Partnership" in October 2000, India-Russia ties have taken on a qualitative new character with improved levels of cooperation in almost all areas of the bilateral relationship, including politics, security, economy, defence, science, technology and culture.

In India, the journalist Prashant Chahal notes: *"there is a common belief about relations with Russia and that is that given the historical ties between the two countries, if India had a dispute with another country, Russia would come to its aid."*¹⁴⁵

It is true that it also has fomented good relations with the PRC, but it is not the same case. Russia and China tightened their relationship only during the last years, despite their differences in order to counter US hegemony. Beijing and Moscow went from warring enemies to taking their relationship "to the highest level" in their history, in the words of Chinese President Xi Jinping last year.¹⁴⁶

144 At the same time, as China seeks to shape the Asia-Pacific region, Pakistan's utility increases. Pakistan would be a central part of China's transition from a regional power to a global one. It is in the heart of the so-called network "One Belt, One Road", China's strategic Marshall Plan. At the same time, Karachi and Gwadar are critical for China's take-off as a naval power, and the ISI is vital to the Chinese on jihadism and initiatives in the Islamic world. Therefore, for China Pakistan is not only a key ally in relation to the Sino-Indian border dispute, but also in its control of all the Asian region, becoming a true world power in the international sphere and controlling the new geopolitics. *Ibid.*

145 BBC News Mundo; "China vs India: qué papel juega Rusia en el conflicto entre ambos países (y con cuál de los dos tiene una relación más cercana)", 29-06-2020. Consulted on 07-06-2021. Link: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-53196327>

146 *Ibid.*

In fact, there was an escalation of competitiveness between these two countries, that are also neighbours, if we analyse their relationship in the regional level and not the international one. It is more beneficial for Russia having India controlling the Himalayan region and the gate to Central Asia. India is not a direct neighbour for Russia, and it is very convenient for this state that the influence of China over this region will be restricted. They already share a lot of borders, and at the same time, the greater Chinese influence in the Silk Road, as well as Central Asian countries such as Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan has become a problem, with the interests of both countries colluding, which are expanding its influence throughout these states.

At the same time, Moscow cannot allow any instability in its borders, due to the already tiring effort of controlling such a vast amount of territory. This fact would make Russia prone to the maintenance of the current borders for not further conflicts in a region that is already really unstable. At the same time, India, due to the relatively good relations not only with them, but also with the Chinese, is seeking for an involvement of Russia on the matter, but not as we would thought in a first moment. Instead of military ways, this cooperation would be as an intermediate actor, where Russia would convince China to keep tensions low in the region of Ladakh.

But this role as an intermediate that has good relations with both countries is not likely. For example, during the last year and all the escalations in the region of Kashmir, Russia dismissed the possibility of a military alliance with China, pointing out to maintain the cooperation on this matter with India. Finally, we must add that Russia and India have concluded important military-technical agreements that include the supply of S-400 anti-aircraft missiles, one of the prides of the Russian arms industry that guarantee the shooting down of aerial targets, from fighters to cruise missiles, at a distance of up to 250 kilometres.¹⁴⁷ The neutral position that Russia wants to maintain has its days counted, and it is very relevant because it shows the possible outcome in an escalation of events, and which are Russia's true allies in the region.

Finally, we must speak about the major influence of the US on this matter. Even though India was part of the Non-Aligned Movement, its neutrality became questioned when in the war of 1962, India asked the US for help. In this context of Cold War, and coinciding with the crisis of Cuba, President Kennedy supported India, but was not able to avoid a defeat for India. This fact would be very relevant because it proved of the future good relation between both states during the years.

In fact, India was always a priority for the US administration, understood since the beginning as a central power in the Asian region, and as the same time the only one that was able to compete with China. China was a natural enemy of the US, especially during the Cold War years. The US feared for the so-called "domino effect" and an expansion of Communism throughout the entire Asian region. On the border issue the US implicitly supported India, but without participating directly in the conflict, only if necessary, being aware of the nuclear potential of both countries and the possibility of a war that would become a global issue for the rest of states.

During the last years, the progress in the diplomatic and security relationship has been proof of the shared US and Indian concerns about China's actions in the region.¹⁴⁸ Also, due to the COVID-19 situation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will seek to consolidate and even expand ties with the United States, a partner he has called "indispensable." Delhi will hope that Washington continues to be helpful to its interests, ensuring that multipolarity prevails in the Indo-Pacific region.¹⁴⁹

The US has also presented a posture defined by the seeking of human rights and end of confrontations between both parties, even that it seems like an impossible task. Bearing this purpose in the international agenda, the US has supported causes such as the independence of the Tibetan region from China and the

147 Agencia EFE; "Rusia descarta una alianza militar con China y reitera su compromiso con la India", Nueva Delhi, 06-04-2021. Consulted on 07-06-2021. Link: <https://www.efe.com/efe/espana/mundo/rusia-descarta-una-alianza-militar-con-china-y-reitera-su-compromiso-la-india/10001-4505222>

148 Madan, T.; "Eisenhower and Trump in India: A tale of two visits, 60 years apart", *Brookings*, 21-02-2020. Consulted on 07-06-2021. Link: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/02/21/eisenhower-and-trump-in-india-a-tale-of-two-visits-60-years-apart/>

149 Madan, T.; "India and the Biden administration. Consolidating and rebalancing ties", *Brookings*, 16-02-2021. Consulted on 07-06-2021. Link: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/02/16/india-and-the-biden-administration/>

sovereignty of the Dalai Lama. At the end of 2020, the US condemned China for its alleged repressive regime in Tibet, urging other countries to pass their own versions of the US law that calls for denying access to the US for Chinese officials known to be involved in restricting visits to the remote Himalayan region.¹⁵⁰ During the last years, this position has been reinforced due to a more direct confrontation between the United States and China, with the purpose of stop its influence over the Central Asian Region.

With so many actors in the picture, some of them very relevant international players, and the status of both India and China as nuclear powers, the current situation can easily evolve into an escalation of events resulting in an armed conflict involving some of the major states in the global landscape. On this matter, the territorial dispute is not the only element in the game, but also the predominance in the region and the control of the Central Asian area. That is why we determine that this is not a mere bilateral conflict, but a broader one with global implications that can easily escalate in a conflict of bigger dimensions, regarding the positioning as the first regional power in the Asian continent.

3. The role of natural resources and technological development

Normally the border's issue is explained simply by the aim of China and India to get back their legitimate territory in the Himalayas since ancient times, worsened by problems occasioned by the lack of an official or formal agreement between both parties and therefore their opposed claims; or even the aims of having a greater sphere of influence in Asia as the main regional powers. Not only involving China or India, even in the 19th there was a confrontation between the British and Russia in the areas of Afghanistan and Kashmir. But why fighting for a region with a very bad access and a really high average altitude? A mere interest on recovering this territory seems odd. We will argue this premise analysing the importance of natural resources in the equation.

In fact, the hypothesis of resource competition is not far-fetched. Transboundary rivers have become one of the major sources of conflict in bilateral and multilateral relations among countries. Freshwater scarcity and the stress of water crisis caused by the rapid population growth, climate change, industrialization, and urbanization, including pollution, have been immense concerns for upstream and downstream river basin countries in many parts of the world.¹⁵¹

This is the case with India and China, worsening the situation by a territorial dispute that has been already going on for centuries. The Himalayan chain of mountains is also called “the tower of water” or the “third pole”. Despite the poles, no other part of the world has so much water resources, with snow, ice and glacier expanses. At the same time, the great part of rivers in Asia have their origin in this particular area, supplying it by a lot of reserves of freshwater. For example, the Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra, Irrawaddy, Salween, Yangtze and Mekong. These rivers flow into Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam.¹⁵²

This hypothesis of “a water war” would be reinforced by the latest actions of China and India. Apart from direct confrontations of force, less frequent in the border dispute but that happened in specific times of history, for example in 1962 or 2019 after the derogation of Article 370 in Kashmir; the conflict has been refocused on different programmes of public works and the development of the region. In addition to roads and communication systems, the main area in which these programmes focus is in hydroelectric projects, mainly based of the construction of dams.

The two areas where these types of projects are taken place are mainly the Kashmir region and the Tibetan region, both the primary areas in dispute and more conflictive ones, taking into consideration that this fact cannot be a mere coincidence.

150 PTI; “US Diplomat Lashes Out At China Over Restricting Access To Tibet”, *Outlook*, 05-12-2020. Consulted on 07-06-2021. Link: <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/world-news-us-diplomat-lashes-out-at-china-over-restricting-access-to-tibet/366279>

151 Basumatary, J.; “Geopolitics of Water and Security Implications: Understanding of India-China Transboundary Water Dispute”, *Central University of Gujarat*, January 2021. Consulted on 06-06-2021. Link: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348237197_Geopolitics_of_Water_and_Security_Implications_Understanding_of_India-China_Transboundary_Water_Dispute

152 Singh, A.P.; “India-China relations and the geopolitics of water”, *The Interpreter*, 23-07-2020. Consulted on 08-06-2021. Link: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/india-china-relations-and-geopolitics-water>

Figure 5. Rivers of the Kahmiri region



Source: B. Chellaney

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/India-Pakistan-tensions-threaten-the-world-s-most-successful-water-pact>

In the one hand, if we analyse the situation through India’s eyes, this country has the 17% of world population but only the 4% of water resources. Its primary sector in economy is agriculture, but at the same time this country is very dependent on the Monsoon winds, with rains that are unstable and not synchronized with harvests. In addition to that, climate change and a largest population constantly growing. These elements make water resources a high priority in India, especially for the future. Without forgetting about the cultural and historical factors, Kashmir became a priority due to the Indus or Sutlej rivers. It is necessary to mention that Pakistan, at the same time, is a territory with poor water resources, and that depends on the supply of water from the rivers shared with its neighbours, India and China.

As a matter of fact, the crash between troops in Aksai Chin, inside the region of Ladakh, both Indian and Chinese, responds to this narrative. This is one of the most disputed areas in all the Sino-Indian Border, and through this valley the Galwan river flows, as well as in its northern part the Shyok river. Pakistan has also made claims over this territory. It is well known that India has promoted a large dam-hydroelectric project in the Kashmiri region, having the advantage of natural resources over Pakistan¹⁵³, but with the shadow of a prompt confrontation with its neighbours, which have a similar interest and needs.

According to Chellaney, Pakistan has already complained over the sharing of the waters of the six-river Indus system, and was seeking to initiate proceedings against its neighbour, all framed in a long and fraught relationship over water resources. Indeed, seeking international intercession is part of Pakistan’s “water war” strategy against India.¹⁵⁴ This proves the relevance of the matter in terms of the territorial dispute between both countries.

At the same time, if we analyse the position of China on this matter, we realise that the Himalayan region is controlled mainly by this power. The control of the region makes China to dominate all the headwaters of the rivers at the same time, which are primordial in terms of nourishing by its flow of waters the rest of the Asian continent. This fact is relevant due to one simple reason; according to the *Convention on the Law of*

153 When Pakistan was carved out of India in 1947 as the first Islamic republic of the postcolonial era, the partition left the Indus headwaters on the Indian side of the border but the river basin’s larger segment in the newly created country. This division armed India with formidable water leverage over Pakistan. Chellaney, B.; “India-Pakistan tensions threaten the world’s most successful water pact”, *Nikkei Asia*, 01-09-2016. Consulted on 07-06-2021. Link: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/India-Pakistan-tensions-threaten-the-world-s-most-successful-water-pact>

154 *Ibid.*

the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourse of 1997, there is a legal preference over the first state using the water, whether we are considering dams or irrigation projects, as well as other engineering works.¹⁵⁵

This fact can explain the constant obsession of controlling the regions where the main rivers are born. There was also by the Indian side a constant fear in relation of how China can really affect the life and economy of India, an agriculturally based country yet, with the adjustment of the headwaters of the wide range of rivers that controls in the Himalayan border. That justifies the big number of efforts and resources carried out in the border dispute for the last decades, and by both countries.

It was mentioned the Indian case in the Ladakh region, having a parallelism in the Tibetan border with the region of Pradesh, controlled by India and claimed by China, and Bhutan. Through this region flows the Brahmaputra, a very important river because it supplies water for at least 600 million of people. China has carried out different hydroelectric projects in the area where this river is born, same situation as India in the Kashmiri area. It is very hypocritical that since the completion of the Zangmu dam by China in late 2014, the largest hydropower dam on the Brahmaputra River, many Indian and international security observers have been warning of coming of 'water wars' between both countries, complicating the border dispute, especially when India is doing the same, taking advantage of the water resources in its territory.¹⁵⁶

In addition to the dams and water supply in the area, there are more projects in relation to the Chinese ambitious programmes for the future, such as the hydrological engineering plan called *South to North Water Diversion*. By 2050, China hopes to move 45 billion cubic meters of water per year through a series of tunnels, aqueducts, and canals. Engineers also seek to link the country's four major waterways: the Huang He, Yangtze, Huai He, and Hai He. The water diversion plan includes three routes: eastern, central, and western. On this matter, water division plans on the Chinese portion of the Brahmaputra are crucial to the western route.¹⁵⁷

In this case, of the Tibetan region, it is China the one placed in an advantaged position due to the control of the headwaters of the rivers. In the Kashmiri area the situation is the opposite, being India the most powerful one in relation to the water sources, and Pakistan and China fighting over the control of the area. But in fact, in we study the entire Himalayan border as a unit, as we have mentioned before, the most advantaged one in terms of water resources is China. There is this fear of an aggressive movement carried out by China, not only with hydraulic programmes, but going way further changing completely the flow of the main rivers in order to nourish its thirsty province, especially the ones in the western areas, and a growing population. On the other side, this will restrict the capacity of producing food, mainly by agriculture, of India.

Reaching this point, we must ask ourselves if a water war is possible, considering all these elements. The building of dams, more than a way of producing energy taking advantage of the flow of the main Asian rivers, it is a way of reinforcing control over a territory on dispute that is going to be very important in the future due to its natural resources, among other things. The exploitation of these headwaters is often justified by both countries based on the affirmation that the countries that only control a part of the flow of the river are not taking advantage and making the most of those water resources. Through this logic, the country that controls the area where the rivers are born would have the "duty" of taking advantage of that lost resources.

Having the justification and the effective control of the territory, we have to add the legal control due to the UN resolutions that we have mentioned before. Taking this fact into consideration, there is no restriction at this moment that can prevent the greater exploitation of water resources in the area, and thus an unequivocal rising of tensions. In terms of the possibilities of China or India to make this issue a priority, we have to consider the need of water of both countries. As we have already mentioned India, in the case of China, this country has the 20% of global population but only 7% of water resources. At the same time, the consumption

155 United Nations Treaty Collection (UNTC); "Status Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses". Consulted on 06-06-2021. Link: https://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/8_3_1997.pdf

156 Zhang, H.; "Sino-Indian water disputes: the coming water wars?", *Nanyang Technological University*, November 2016. Consulted on 08-06-2021. Link: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283975182_Sino-Indian_water_disputes_the_coming_water_wars

157 Christopher, M.; "Water Wars: The Brahmaputra River and Sino-Indian Relations", Case study. *Newport, RI: US Naval War College, Center on Irregular Warfare and Armed Groups*, 2013. Consulted on 07-06-2021. Link: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1007&context=ciwag-case-studies>

of water in the country is pretty low, responding to the lack of water. In addition to that, the threat of climate change hits harder due to the great pollution and bad state of its rivers and waters, not fitted to use for human use, neither agricultural purposes.

As an obstacle for this perspective coming into reality, the own Himalayan mountains work as a huge geographic obstacle for these plans to be carried out. It is pretty difficult to move the water from this region to other parts of China, due to the enormous work in terms of engineering works that has to be done, with several tunnels covering lots of kilometres of the area. It could be done through nuclear actions in order to make the process quickly; that can be one of the reasons of China not signing the treaty about the control of nuclear testing, apart from the obvious defence and military reasons.

But apart from that, all the prospects point out to a future water war between both countries, that is already taking place but framed into a border dispute that has been present since decades ago. The actions carried out by both countries respond to a “realpolitik” where the headwaters of the rivers are in dispute, as a source of water for an enormous population by both sides intimidated by climate change, and as a source of energy in a context where energy resources are more expensive and more limited. As well as these countries are destined to crash in the South China Sea and the Indic Ocean, they will do it in this border context, where tensions have been rising during the last decades. This conflict is in part a way of exemplifying their power in the Asian context as the two main superpowers, only able to compete with each other for being the first regional power in the Asian continent.

It would be very important for China to maintain its control over Tibet. As we mentioned before, a political solution for Tibet was far to be achieved. If we look into the situation through the natural resources vision, this territory is not only unnegotiable for China, but it is also a hydrological weapon against its neighbours, that depend totally on the water supply of its main rivers, having indirectly the future control of all the other countries in the area. At the same time, it is the same situation with Kashmir for India, that is not open to negotiate its sovereignty with China or Pakistan. That can explain for example the derogation of Article 370 of Constitution against a greater autonomy of the area, promoting a major control on a region where hostilities have been present for the last years.

We do not know if in the future the desalinisation technologies or biotechnology, creating more resistant crops, will avoid this situation to took place; but in the meantime, all the prospects and latest actions of both countries point out to a future confrontation due to the exponential need of these resources, both hydric and in terms of other sources of energy, making possible to sustain their own population, the first and second largest in the world, and their own economies.

4. A broader view: economy and population

In this section of the master’s dissertation, we will focus very briefly on the importance of China and India’s economy and population in relation with the border conflict, and if they are used as another weapon in the boundary issue.

Both China and India are very similar states, with the highest rates of population among all the countries in the world, being neighbours with contacts in history since ancient times, and simultaneously, being the two more important cultures in Asia. We cannot forget that these two countries share a lot of differences indeed. Due to all its efforts during the last decades and the phenomenon of Globalisation, China has become the first industrial power in the world. At the same time, India was not able to make the leap forward and turning into an industrial power, although it is committed to achieve this goal in only a few decades and it is starting to compete with China on this matter. But the reality is that India is still enormously tied down to an agricultural economy. In both situations it is very relevant to control the resources of the boundary regions, as we mentioned in the previous section of the chapter; and at the same time, it is crucial to use this control to make these territories dependant both politically and economically, as well as allies within the Asian context, working as “satellite countries or territories”.

Putting the focus on the role of economy and population in the border dispute, they play a major part; the conflict is not only based on the military clashes and the use of force between both powers. For example, India has not limited its fight with China to manage the border dispute, but also extending the conflict to attack Chinese commercial interests. In other words, there are two sides of the conflict between India and China, one military and another economic.¹⁵⁸

Another strategy is for example, in the Kashmiri region, the series of development projects financially sustained by China, in relation with public transportations and roads, as well as investments in the local economy. The same is happening with Bhutan or Nepal. This situation can be seen as possible due to the lack of a modernised and developed economy in these areas, that is why these countries are becoming economically dependent of their neighbours, in this specific case China. This is also visible in the most recent donations of vaccines and oxygen by both countries, China and India, making these territories economically and politically dependent through investments in the region. The more China or India invests in, the more influence and control it will have in the area. There is an implicit pact where these countries receive help from their powerful neighbours but in exchange of something, being understood as a favourable political position, support over their territorial claims, or friendly bilateral relations.

At the same time, the population factor is key, and sometimes used as a weapon in terms of gaining influence over the boundary in dispute. We have already mentioned the Indian “exodus” into the Kashmiri region and the purchase of land in this territory by Indian peoples, very controversial because we are integrating in a territory that has been claimed by different nations, being India, China and Pakistan, a specific ethnic identity that can change the stakes and the possible outcome of the conflict. This strategy has been already used in history, for example, in relation to the occupation of Palestine by Jews that purchased lands, or the movement of other ethnic groups, for example Russians, into other territories of Europe.

We have seen before through this essay that China is doing the same over contested areas in the border with Nepal. This colonisation process has been the ultimate card in the Sino-Indian border dispute, and it is not likely to stop because both countries have a huge inhabitant rate, as well as the need to relocate great part of their nationals from overcrowded areas to others that are way emptier. At the same time, apart from logistical reasons, this process has huge connotations in terms of cultural identity, and in a few decades, it will help to validate the different claims over the territories in dispute, being ethnic majorities completely integrated in the environment and that will be almost impossible to expel, only in the case of conflict.

Thus, through these actions carried out by India and China, we can determine that the hypothesis of a “hybrid conflict” can fit perfectly into this situation. Other methods, apart from the use of force, such as economic restrictions, launch of public works and development cooperation, contributions to the fight against COVID-19, or relocation of groups of people into the border, are used in order to debilitate the enemy systematically and are as important as military actions.

5. New challenges: the COVID-19 crisis

In this last part of the master’s dissertation, we will focus on the recent COVID-19 crisis that started during the last year and how this situation affected not only India and China, but the different territories in dispute around the boundary.

According to the information that we have been receiving during the last year in relation to the global pandemic, that the COVID-19 situation is not the same, and has not been handled in the same way, regarding China and India. Having its origin on this first country mentioned, the pandemic situation was held in secrecy during the first months, and according to Chinese sources, handled perfectly well with the result of China recovering almost to a normal state only a year afterwards. In the other hand, India, got hit especially hard during the last wave of this year, with the so-called “Indian variant” taking lots of lives and without any possible short term solution to the emergency situation.

158 Saran, S.; “Has China bitten off more than it can chew?”, *Hindustan Times*, 10-02-2021. Consulted on 08-06-2021. Link: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/has-china-bitten-off-more-than-it-can-chew-101612878357695.html>

Due to the direct links with India, the region of Jammu and Kashmir has suffered this situation first-hand. Its authorities have declared the “epidemic state” last May, due to the “black fungus” or mucormycosis, a very rare infection linked to COVID-19 cases.¹⁵⁹ It is relevant that in spite of the critical situation, the Indian government allegedly affirmed to have made COVID-19 tests among the India’s Kashmir controlled area, as well as presenting the region as a “green spot” in terms of oxygen availability for hospital use. This amount of oxygen would be responsible of a lower rate of deaths compared to other parts of India, as well as a higher capacity for hospitals due to this matter.¹⁶⁰

This version of events seems to be very implausible, mainly because the state of India cannot handle itself the disastrous situation, let alone helping the Kashmiri controlled area with the effects of the pandemic, being the testing and vaccine capacities limited. At the same time, there were several accusations against the Indian government about how it handled the situation in its own advantage. For example, having hundreds of political prisoners trying to survive in prisons that are enormously overcrowded, and therefore with a high risk of contracting the pandemic.¹⁶¹

Mohammed Ashraf Sehrai, one of Kashmir’s senior separatist leaders who was sent to Udhampur jail, died on May 5 after contracting COVID-19. Sehrai had been the president of Tehreek-e-Hurriyat, a pro-freedom group in Kashmir that has been at the forefront of demanding an end to New Delhi’s rule in Kashmir. The Jammu and Kashmir High Court Bar Association (JKHCBA), a body of lawyers in the region, has described Sehrai’s demise as “custodial death” and demanded the release of all political prisoners amid the pandemic, especially of prisoners in New Delhi’s Tihar jail.¹⁶²

At the same time, health experts say the arrival of tourists and athletes without any COVID testing prompted an abrupt surge in infections. Also, the really restrictive lockdown that the region suffered until February of this year, opens the debate of this measures being really necessary, or on the contrary, being an excuse in order to control more the population and especially political dissidents, and at the same time a major regulation of this area in dispute.

Concerning Bhutan, it works as an example of how to handle COVID-19. With only 1200 cases since the beginning of the pandemic, the Asian country has defeated the virus with social distancing, quarantines and now vaccination, carried out in just two weeks, but not without difficulties due to the geographical distribution of its population.¹⁶³ It must be emphasized that the first dose of the vaccine was a gift from its neighbour, India, being the AstraZeneca vaccine.¹⁶⁴

In fact, it is expected that this small country will be fully vaccinated by the end of June, being one of the first countries in the world to do so. At a news conference earlier this month, Bhutanese Foreign Minister Tandi Dorji said the Indian government had assured Bhutan that it would provide the half million AstraZeneca vaccines, known as *Covishield* in India, required for the second booster dose to achieve full immunization. But there are doubts if Bhutan will be able to reach this goal in such a short amount of time, due to the difficult situation that India is living at the moment.¹⁶⁵

159 MDZ MUNDO; “‘Hongo negro’ en India: Jammu y Cachemira declaran estado de epidemia”, 24-05-2021. Consulted on 09-06-2021. Link: <https://www.mdzol.com/mundo/2021/5/24/hongo-negro-en-india-jammu-cachemira-declaran-estado-de-epidemia-161284.html>

160 The Times of India; “Kashmir a ‘green spot’ India’s map in terms of oxygen availability; 36,000 LPM produced for hospital use”, 25-05-2021; Xinhua, “COVID-19 test underway in summer capital of Indian-controlled Kashmir”, *Xinhuanet*, 28-02-2021. Consulted on 08-06-2021. Link: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/kashmir-a-green-spot-indias-map-in-terms-of-oxygen-availability-36000-lpm-produced-for-hospital-use/articleshow/82950113.cms> and http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-02/28/c_1127150674_3.htm

161 Lateef, S.; “Kashmir: COVID looms large among political prisoners”, *DW*, 27-05-2021. Consulted on 08-06-2021. Link: <https://www.dw.com/en/kashmir-covid-looms-large-among-political-prisoners/a-57692285>

162 *Ibid.*

163 Noticias ONU, “Bután, con un solo muerto por COVID-19 y toda la población vacunada, es un ejemplo de cómo evitar una pandemia”, 16-05-2021. Consulted on 08-06-2021. Link: <https://news.un.org/es/interview/2021/05/1492032>

164 *Ibid.*

165 Gyeltshen, N.; Wangdi, P.; “India’s COVID chaos puts Bhutan’s vaccine success at risk”, *Nikkei Asia*, 21-05-2021. Consulted on 08-06-2021. Link: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Coronavirus/India-s-COVID-chaos-puts-Bhutan-s-vaccine-success-at-risk>

The authorities of the country have pointed out as the secret of its success the responsibility of the Bhutanese population, having a real commitment to social distancing, having meetings with very few people, and whenever there are small outbreaks of transmission, specific areas are blocked off.¹⁶⁶

Apart from this very optimistic view, it is clear that Bhutan is a region isolated in a very difficult area to access through the Himalayan chain, as well as having an economy that could not sustain the cost of vaccines for all its population. It is pretty clear also that Bhutan success has as an answer the implication of India in the fight against the virus, with a bigger economic capacity and a political relevance that allows it to be beneficiary of the battle for the vaccines repartition among the different countries.

Finally, regarding Nepal and Tibet, the situation has been similar to what we already have told. In the specific case of Nepal, same as Bhutan, it has been receiving 800, 000 doses of coronavirus vaccines, but by China, not India.¹⁶⁷ At the same time, China will install a border “demarcation line” at the summit of Everest to avoid any risk of COVID-19 infection by mountaineers from Nepal.¹⁶⁸

In contrast with this hopeful situation in Nepal, the health agency *Public Health England* (PHE), an organization attached to the Department of Health in England, confirmed that it is urgently studying a possible new coronavirus mutation known as the “Nepal variant” or scientifically called K417N.¹⁶⁹ The demarcation line that China is imposing over the country can respond to the knowledge of its existence before the United Kingdom.¹⁷⁰

In relation with Tibet’s situation, there is not much information about the matter. The situation seems stable, in the same line as other regions of China, and in contrast with its close neighbours in the Himalayas. The only aspect mentioned is the demarcation for avoiding transmission of cases from Nepal.

As a conclusion, the COVID-19 has served as an excuse for China and India to exert their control over the territories in dispute, as well as expand their influence through vaccine shipments and cooperation with these regions in order to fight the pandemic. It even evidences the Indian and Chinese colonialism that these territories are suffering, not having a real autonomy, being economically and politically dependent of its neighbours.

166 Notícies TV3; “Bhutan, amb un sol mort per Covid i tota la població vacunada, un exemple segons l'ONU”, 17-05-2021. Consulted on 08-06-2021. Link: <https://www.ccma.cat/324/bhutan-amb-un-sol-mort-per-covid-i-tota-la-poblacio-vacunada-un-exemple-segons-lonu/noticia/3097701/>

167 Business Standard; “Nepal receives 800,000 doses of coronavirus vaccine from China”, 02-06-2021. Consulted on 09-06-2021. Link: https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/nepal-receives-800-000-doses-of-coronavirus-vaccine-from-china-121060200071_1.html#:~:text=Nepal%20on%20Tuesday%20received%20a,Presidents%20of%20the%20two%20nations.&text=China%20on%20May%2026%2C%20announced,COVID%2D19%20vaccines%20for%20Nepal.

168 DW; “China delimitará una frontera con Nepal en la cima del Everest para evitar contagios por COVID-19”, 10-05-2021. Consulted on 09-06-2021. Link: <https://www.dw.com/es/china-delimitar%C3%A1-una-frontera-con-nepal-en-la-cima-del-everest-para-evitar-contagios-por-covid-19/a-57486441#:~:text=El%20Mundo-,China%20delimitar%C3%A1%20una%20frontera%20con%20Nepal%20en%20la%20cima%20del,cumbre%20m%C3%A1s%20alta%20del%20planeta.>

169 Semana; “¿Qué es la variante de Nepal que niega la OMS pero registra casos en el Reino Unido?”, 04-06-2021. Consulted on 09-06-2021. Link: <https://www.semana.com/coronavirus/articulo/coronavirus-que-es-la-variante-de-nepal-que-niega-la-oms-pero-registra-casos-en-el-reino-unido/202151/>

170 To help Nepal fight the latest surge of COVID-19 infections, China has so far shipped 2,000 oxygen cylinders and 10 ventilators to Nepal, in addition to 200 oxygen generators from Chinese companies in the country. Quingqing, C.; Yunyi, B.; “Exclusive: China provides 2,000 oxygen cylinders to Nepal among other medical supplies, says Chinese ambassador”, *Global Times*, 18-05-2021. Consulted on 09-06-2021. Link: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202105/1223836.shtml>

Conclusions

Starting with the historical background, there is an enormous problem in relation with the justification of claims over the territory in dispute by both China and India at their joint borders. The inexistence of a formal agreement, not only at the moment, but in the past, between India and China, made the border delimitation somewhat based on an implicit agreement of both parties, and fully based on tradition, as well as very difficult to identify geographically due to its inaccuracy. The problem rests in the fact of China basing its territorial claims on the Qing's Dynasty period, as well as India basing its own on the British colonial era, actions which completely lack of legal validity, because both countries had the control over a specific area in different moments of history.

This fact makes these claims to be used conveniently according to the interests of the moment of each side, in an endless game that has no basis, but that really works as a way of justifying movements and actions in the territory on dispute. In fact, if there is not a formal conversation framed in a compromise carried out by both countries, as well as the pursuit of consensus, it would be very difficult to end the tensions and confrontation in the border, because this logic of justification of actions based on self-interest can be endless.

In this historical justification of claims, sometimes the cultural and identity dimension is pointed out as a common basis between the area in dispute and China or India. Taking only a few examples, the case of Kashmir and Tibet are pretty relevant, because both India and China emphasise the connections on this matter with these territories. But Kashmir has had a strong identity differing with its neighbours for centuries, as well as a different religion and culture than India. Due to this issue several nationalistic groups have arisen during the years, seeking for independence, making the border conflict worse. The same situation happened with Tibet, having its own specific identity but claimed to be by China an area with a continuous and legitimate Chinese influence since ancient times. It is noteworthy, at the same time, that Bhutan and Nepal, even that they are independent countries, have become extremely dependant on its neighbours, and the preservation of their own culture against them has become a priority on their agenda.

At the same time, going back to Kashmir, the different interests of not only India and China, but Pakistan, in the region have made this area a "melting pot" of conflict during the last years. Not only due to the fact of being a centre of terrorist actions, the derogation of Article 370 has been a clumsy movement for India if it did not want to have reprisals over the matter. Not only it has destroyed all possibility of autonomy for the region and ensured its direct control at least in the short-term, but at the same time it created an insurance of a never-ending turbulent situation and the best fuel for nationalist and terrorist groups in the border.

As we mentioned before, for Nepal and Bhutan the main priority as "sandwiched states" in the middle of the Himalayan chain, is preserving their autonomy, identity and culture. This would be a very difficult task in the future, especially when being in the middle of a growing rivalry between the two main powers in the whole region and the latest actions regarding the disputed areas, as well as having the example of Tibet "next-door". On the other side, Tibet's struggle towards independency seems that is not going to be achieved due to the effective control of the region by China, and at the same time, the little chances of China giving up this strategic enclave of such geostrategic importance.

Taking all these facts into consideration, we have considered different hypothesis responding to the own characteristics and evolution of the Sino-Indian border issue. First of all, we consider the boundary rivalry between India and China a territorial dispute with certain peaks of hostilities over the time, but not a war conflict. Due to its duration, over seventy years, it is impossible that this matter does not have direct confrontation and use of force when an escalation of events happens. Even though, during the last years, new forms of dealing with the conflict have taken place, such as development of projects on the contested regions and other forms of soft power.

Second hypothesis developed is the key implication of more actors in the territorial dispute, such as the US, Afghanistan or Russia, through international alliances, and the status of both India and Pakistan as nuclear powers, makes the situation difficult. Even though the Sino-Indian boundary issue is not a war conflict, it

would become easily one, due to an escalation of events not controlled by the international community. Thus, a dispute over the Himalayan border that has been developing for the last decades without major incidents in the region, can potentially become a global issue and an international conflict.

The third hypothesis that we have determined is that, in contrast with a mere conflict over land in the boundary territories, the Sino-Indian border dispute is not based on historical entitlement, but in the struggle for natural resources in the region. We have pointed out the importance of water as a geostrategic priority and that at some extent explains the long duration of the conflict. The headwaters of the main rivers of the Asian region would be controlled by India in the Ladakh area, and China near the Tibetan one. The control of their flow is essential as an energy source in the future and as a way of survival. Both countries do not have a lot of water resources, in contrast with an immense population and the need of new sources of energy due to climate change and the size of their own economies.

For reaching the control of the disputed areas, in a fourth place, we have discussed the existence of new forms of soft power and exerting influence over those regions apart from the direct confrontation. These new strategies are based on the role of economy and the role of the population in the expansion of influence over disputed areas. We can see as an example the development projects and investments in this region, as well as the new economical war that India is carrying out in order to restrict the power of China in the region. When we speak about the role of population, we are mainly referring to the purchase of land and the “Indian exodus” into the Kashmir region, as well as the constructions of new settlements of villages by China in the border with Nepal.

Finally, we present the hypothesis of the COVID-19 situation as an opportunity of imposing a greater control on these disputed areas. For example, in the region of Kashmir, until February of this year, the restrictions of the lockdown have been very harsh and extended on time, having the Indian government accusations of infringing the rights of political prisoners during the pandemic. This opportunity can be also seen in the different contributions made in terms of vaccines and oxygen for treating COVID-19 cases in the territories in dispute. These actions worked as a form of reinforcing an influence that has been already there, but that with the COVID-19 pandemic has been largely reinforced, working as a way of colonisation of these territories.

As final conclusions and through this master’s dissertation, we determine that the Sino-Indian border dispute has no short-term solution. During the last two years, the increasingly political and economic rivalry between India and China, as well as the own situation of the pandemic, has elevated tensions in a territory characterised in the last seven decades of already being a “melting pot” of conflict. In fact, following the situation in other areas, such as the South China Sea or the Indic Ocean, we observe that the Sino-Indian border dispute is not an isolated case due to historical reasons. Both powers, China and India, are destined to crash sooner or after.

The Sino-Indian border dispute not only perfectly exemplifies this growing rivalry between the two Asian powers, framed in a different identity, conception of the world and regarding security issues, but also shows the global implications of the future Sino-Indian confrontation, and how other relevant states of the international community are going to be involved. To conclude, without a swift and efficient intermediation of the international community, as well as the abandonment of China or India of their own interests and *realpolitik* in the benefit of the whole region, the Sino-Indian border conflict will have in the short-term an escalation of events that will result in increasing tensions with risk of war between the two countries, where other actors will be involved, having potential disastrous consequences for the region.

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Resumen: En este trabajo de fin de máster trataremos la disputa fronteriza Sino-India a través de su historia, causas y contexto en la región, analizando como la situación ha llegado hasta este punto después de setenta años de conflicto. Del mismo modo, estudiaremos la situación de los principales territorios en disputa, siendo la región de Cachemira, Bután, Nepal y el Tíbet. En un último lugar, se tratarán las implicaciones del conflicto en el presente, sobre todo en relación con las necesidades geoestratégicas de ambos países, así como la búsqueda de una predominancia política dentro de la región; todo enmarcado en un trasfondo de hostilidades y creciente rivalidad que no parece que se vaya a suavizar durante los próximos años.

Abstract: In this master's dissertation we will address the Sino-Indian border dispute throughout its history, causes and context in the region, and analysing how the situation has reached the present point after seventy years of conflict. At the same time, we will study the situation on the main territories on dispute, being the Kashmir region, Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet. Finally, the implications of the conflict on the present will be discussed, especially in relation with the current geostrategic needs in both countries, as well as the search of a political predominance within the region; all framed in a background of hostilities and growing rivalry that does not seem that is going to ease during the next years.

Palabras clave: India, China, Paquistán, Himalayas, Bután, Tíbet, Nepal, Cachemira, Ladakh, Jammu, fronteras, disputa fronteriza sino-india, LoC.

Keywords: India, China, Pakistan, Himalayas, Bhutan, Tibet, Nepal, Kashmir, Ladakh, Jammu, borders, Sino-Indian border dispute, LoC.



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