



Management of Indian Border Disputes - A Complex Task

Force is all conquering, but its victories are short lived.

— Abraham Lincoln

Border disputes have been a longstanding challenge for nations worldwide, often fueling tensions and conflicts. In the case of India, managing border disputes presents a multifaceted challenge due to its **diverse geography, complex history, and intricate relationships** with neighboring countries.

Understanding the historical context of Indian border disputes is crucial for comprehending their complexities. Many of these disputes stem from **colonial legacies, arbitrary border demarcations, and unresolved territorial claims**. For instance, the **India-China border dispute** traces back to the **McMahon Line** drawn by the British in **1914**, which China has never recognized. Similarly, the **India-Pakistan border disputes**, notably over **Kashmir**, have roots in the **partition of British India** in **1947** and subsequent wars between the two nations.

The geopolitical landscape significantly influences Indian border disputes, with regional powers vying for strategic advantages and territorial control. China's assertive territorial claims in the strategically significant Indian states/UTs pose a significant challenge to its security and territorial integrity. The **Doklam standoff** in **2017** exemplifies the **geopolitical tensions** between India and China, with both sides engaging in a standoff over territory claimed by **Bhutan**. Similarly, Pakistan's support for insurgent groups in Kashmir adds another layer of complexity to the India-Pakistan border dispute, exacerbating tensions and hindering peaceful resolution efforts.

International law and established legal frameworks play a crucial role in managing border disputes. India has sought to rely on legal mechanisms such as **arbitration, mediation, and international tribunals** to resolve disputes with its neighbors. For instance, **India and Bangladesh** successfully resolved their **maritime boundary dispute over territorial waters** in **Bay of Bengal** through arbitration by the **Permanent Court of Arbitration** in 2014. However, legal mechanisms are often limited by the willingness of parties to abide by their rulings and the complexities of enforcing decisions on the ground.

Diplomacy serves as a primary tool for managing Indian border disputes, requiring tact, patience, and strategic engagement with neighboring countries. India has pursued various diplomatic strategies, including **bilateral negotiations, track-two dialogues, and confidence-building measures**, to address border issues. The signing of agreements such as the **Indo-China Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement** in **1993** and the **Line of Actual Control (LAC) Confidence-Building Measures** in **2005** reflects India's commitment to diplomatic engagement with China. Similarly, the **Simla Agreement of 1972** and **Lahore Declaration of 1999** signify India's diplomatic efforts to manage border disputes with Pakistan.

Despite diplomatic efforts and legal mechanisms, managing Indian border disputes faces several challenges and obstacles. Historical animosities, nationalist sentiments, domestic politics, and military posturing often impede progress towards peaceful resolutions. Moreover, the asymmetry of power between India and its neighbors, particularly **China** and **Pakistan**, complicates efforts to find mutually acceptable solutions. The **lack of trust, transparency, and communication** exacerbates tensions and increases the risk of escalation, as evidenced by periodic border skirmishes and standoffs.

Examining specific case studies provides insights into the complexities of managing Indian border disputes. The **Siachen Glacier conflict** between India and Pakistan exemplifies the human and environmental costs of unresolved territorial disputes. Similarly, the **India-China border** standoff in **Ladakh in 2020** underscored the fragility of peace along the **LAC** and the roadblocks in de-escalating tensions amidst competing territorial claims.

Border management of India requires sustained dialogue, **confidence-building measures**, and adherence to existing agreements. Prioritize diplomacy over military posturing to reduce the risk of escalation. **People-to-people exchanges** and **cultural diplomacy** can foster mutual understanding. Enhance transparency and communication channels to build trust and prevent misunderstandings. Engage in multilateral forums to address regional security concerns and promote cooperation. Pursue innovative solutions, such as joint development projects, to transform border regions into zones of peace and prosperity.

India shares a long border with **Myanmar**, much of which is **mountainous and densely forested**, making border demarcation challenging. Disputes have arisen over issues such as **boundary pillars, illegal crossings, and insurgent activities** along the border. Myanmar serves as a land bridge connecting **South Asia to Southeast Asia**. The proximity of Myanmar to India's northeastern states establishes a strategic link and facilitates regional connectivity.

The **Free Movement Regime (FMR) agreement** between **India and Myanmar** indeed has security concerns, particularly in addressing issues related to **cross-border movement of insurgents, illegal immigrants, and criminals**. The FMR is a mutually agreed arrangement between the two countries that allows tribes living along the border on either side to travel up to **16 km** inside the other country without a visa. It was implemented in **2018** as part of the Indian government's **Act East policy**. It can raise concerns about **territorial integrity**.

India and Bhutan have a unique relationship, with India providing significant **economic and military assistance to Bhutan**. While the border between the two countries is largely settled, some minor disputes exist over **boundary demarcations and riverine territories**. The **Doklam standoff in 2017** involved a disputed area claimed by **Bhutan**, where **Indian and Chinese** troops were engaged in a tense standoff. India and Bhutan share a **699 km** long border, which has been largely peaceful.

Tensions between India and Nepal escalated when Nepal unveiled a new **political map in 2020**, laying claim to territories including **Kalapani, Limpiadhura, and Lipulekh** in Uttarakhand, as well as **Susta** in the **West Champaran** district of **Bihar**. India objected to the map, stating that Nepal's claims were not grounded in historical evidence and amounted to an artificial expansion of its territory. This move reignited border disputes, particularly concerning the **Kalapani-Limpiadhura-Lipulekh trijunction** shared by India, Nepal, and China, as well as the Susta area.

Kalapani is a valley that is administered by India as a part of the **Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand**. It is situated on the **Kailash Mansarovar** route. Kalapani is advantageously located at a height of over **20,000 ft** and serves as an observation post for that area. The **Kali River** in the Kalapani region demarcates the border between India and Nepal. The **Treaty of Sugauli** signed by the **Kingdom of Nepal and British India** (after Anglo-Nepalese War, 1814-16) in **1816** located the **Kali River** as Nepal's western boundary with India. The discrepancy in locating the source of the Kali river led to boundary disputes between India and Nepal, with each country producing maps supporting their own claims. Despite the open border between both countries and the people to people contact, the levels of distrust in Nepal about India have only increased.

Managing Indian border disputes is a complex and multifaceted task that requires a combination of **historical understanding, geopolitical awareness, legal frameworks, and diplomatic strategies**. Despite the challenges and obstacles, India has demonstrated a commitment to **peaceful resolution** through **dialogue, negotiation, and engagement** with its neighbors. However, sustained efforts are needed to address the root causes of these disputes and build trust and confidence for lasting peace and stability in the region. Only through constructive engagement and cooperation can India navigate the complexities of its border disputes and secure its territorial integrity and national interests.

When Diplomacy Ends, War Begins.

— Adolf Hitler

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