

The history of the territorial disputes history essay



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Throughout history, the Indian subcontinent's strategically convenient geographic location and its wealth of natural resources have predictably made it a breeding ground for a vast variety of territorial disputes. In the modern era, a significant portion of these disputes are remnants of unsolved tensions from the subcontinent's partitioning in 1947.[1]The sheer volatility of the region in tandem with these disputes has led to the eruption of war in more than a handful of cases, the most famous of which being the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir. However, given India's conflicts with Pakistan and China, it is as of yet unclear what sacrifices, if any, India will have to make in achieving geographical stability.

Disputes with Pakistan

Jammu and Kashmir

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Map : Current territorial boundaries[2]

http://media.economist.com/sites/default/files/interactive-map/map_image1.png

Map : Pakistan's claims[3]

http://media.economist.com/sites/default/files/interactive-map/map_image3.png

Map : India's claims[4]

As can be seen in maps II and III, India and Pakistan have both laid claim to most of the region of Jammu and Kashmir. This is largely due to the region's strategically advantageous geographic location; it is laden with "hilly and mountainous terrain,"[5] and it borders Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China; it was also close to the USSR's Central Asian territories during its existence. There are multiple ethnic and religious groups at play within Jammu and Kashmir itself; the region of Jammu is predominantly Sikh and Hindu, the region of Ladakh is mostly Shia Muslims and Buddhists, and the Vale of Kashmir is almost entirely populated by Sunni Muslims.[6]

The conflict dates back to 1819[7] when Ranjit Singh's Sikh army defeated the local Afghans. As a result, Sikh governors were appointed to administer the newly conquered region, predominantly filled with Muslims, and eventually, the region was put in the hands of Gulab Singh under hereditary rule. In 1846[8], following the Anglo-Sikh war, it was decided that Jammu and Kashmir should be ceded to the British; Gulab Singh was given the opportunity to re-acquire the territory on the condition that he pay Rs. 75,000,000[9] and ally his (and his heirs') army with British forces. The British alliance and Singh family rule over a predominantly Muslim territory remained the state of affairs at the time of India's partition in 1947, which was a significant factor in the emergence of the dispute which pervades through the present day.

In 1938[10], Sheikh Abdullah created and headed the All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference, which held its first conference in October, 1939[11].

Over time, the National Conference eschewed the policies of the Muslim League headed by M. A. Jinnah and sided with the Indian National Congress

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in the partition conflict. The modern Kashmir dispute was set into motion when India was finally partitioned in 1947 and the question of whether Jammu and Kashmir should join India or Pakistan sprang up. Abdullah's viewpoint, supported by Indian leaders, was that the Pakistani-backed Maharaja should be removed from power before Kashmiris were to decide their accession. At this point, the Kashmiri masses seemed to side with India, as " in a democratic and secular society which the Congress leaders were striving to build in India, their aspirations [for freedom] would have a greater chance for fulfillment;"[12] conversely, " if Kashmir became a part of Pakistan where vested interests were strongly entrenched," they would continue to deal with the Maharaja. Kashmiri discontent with the Maharaja; this clash of interests led to a 1947[13] invasion by Pakistan, directly leading to the National Conference convincing the Maharaja to request India's acceptance of Kashmir's accession and to provide assistance, to which India agreed. Since then, India and Pakistan have had two more direct military conflicts in 1965 and 1971.[14]

Arguably, progress has been made since the beginning of the 21st century. At the beginning of 2004[15], Indian and Pakistani officials came to a consensus that " the Kashmir conflict should be handled peacefully."[16] However, despite this apparent move towards peace, the Pakistani angle on the Kashmir dispute remains one of annexation, while India seeks to maintain the status quo.

Siachen Glacier

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Map : Location of the Siachen Glacier[17]

The subject of a more minor dispute, the Siachen Glacier lies directly on the Indian/Pakistani border, between the Karkoram and Saltora mountain ranges; India claims the region as a part of Jammu and Kashmir, and Indian troops occupied the region in 1984[18]. India's peace proposals, outlined in a sixth round of talks in 1998, called for a ceasefire in the general Saltora region, without singling out Siachen as a particular point of conflict; as a result, the Pakistanis refused, since the glacier borders territory in Kashmir that is currently administered by the Pakistani government.[19]India, meanwhile, values the territory as it provides a barrier between it and Pakistan and China.[20]The two sides eventually agreed to a cease-fire in 2003[21], but true ownership of the region remains a point of contention.

Sir Creek

Sir Creek Map

Map : Sir Creek boundaries[22]

Sir Creek lies on the border of India's Gujarat province and Pakistan's Sindh province[23]; the region, rich in gas and oil, is highly desirable by both nations, and the marshlands surrounding the region have led to ambiguity in the maritime borders of the creek, which were originally demarcated in the early 20th century[24]. While it was the site of some fighting during the 1965

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war with Pakistan[25], it has no political significance other than its natural resources (which are not to be overlooked,) and it is mostly believed that a resolution to this dispute will open diplomatic doors to resolving the dispute surrounding Siachen.[26]

Disputes with China

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Map : China's territorial claims[27]

Kashmir region

Although China has never laid any direct claim to governance of Jammu and Kashmir, it does have disputed borders with India over land it claims belongs to Tibet. Up until the late 1980s, China had supported Pakistan's viewpoint on the Kashmir conflict; in a 1963[28]agreement between China and Pakistan, 3360km[29]of Pakistani-occupied land in Jammu and Kashmir were given to China. If India were to come out the victor of the Kashmir conflict, this territory would need to be renegotiated, effectively removing any shared border between Pakistan and China, severely complicating commerce and oil routing between the two[30].

Contested lands in this region include the Trans-Karakoram Tract (shown in Map IV,) which was ceded to China in the 1963 agreement with Pakistan but is still claimed by India. The Depsang Plains and Aksai Chin (shown in Map VII,) are in a similar situation; however, there is an agreed upon impassable 'Line of Actual Control' between the two nations as a result of their 1962

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border war; however, China has crossed this line 500 times between 2010 and 2012[31].

The area of Aksai Chin occupied by China

Map : Aksai Chin and lines of control[32]

Eastern dispute

India's northeastern border is contested in the state of Arunachal Pradesh; as seen in Maps III and VI, China claims much of this Indian state as part of Tibet. In 1914, the McMahon Line (shown in Map VIII) was agreed upon as the border between British India and Tibet at the Simla Conference; Chinese representatives refused to accept the line, and have not as of yet formally recognized it.[33] A border war erupted between the two countries along the line in 1962, largely sparked by tensions surrounding both the eastern and western borders, which resulted in China declaring victory and withdrawing back behind the line. Another scare in 1987 resulted in a total of 400,000 Chinese and Indian troops along the border, but this did not result in actual conflict.[34] Since then, the McMahon line has remained relatively quiet; despite this and repeated talks between the two countries, India and China have yet to actually resolve this border.

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Map : Arunachal Pradesh and McMahon Line[35]

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