

# **India-Bhutan Security Cooperation: A Study on ‘Operation All Clear’ and Doklam Crisis**

A Thesis Submitted

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**Sikkim University**



In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for the  
**Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**By**

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March 2023

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### **DECLARATION**

I, **Sanshrama Basumatary**, hereby declare that, the research work assimilated in the dissertation titled "**India-Bhutan Security Cooperation: A Study on 'Operation All Clear' and Dokhlam Crisis**" submitted to Sikkim University for the award degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**, is my original work. This thesis has not been submitted for any other degree of this or any other University.

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### CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the Thesis Titled “**India-Bhutan Security Cooperation: A Study on ‘Operation All Clear’ and Doklam Crisis**” submitted to Sikkim University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** in the Department of International Relations, embodies the results of bonafide research work carried out by Ms. Sanshrima Basumatary under my guidance and supervision. No part of the thesis has been submitted for any other degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship.

All the assistance and help received during the course of the investigation have been duly acknowledged by her.

We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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Sanshrama Basumatary

## Abbreviations

<b>AASU</b>	-	All Assam Student Union
<b>ABSU</b>	-	All Bodo Students Union
<b>AFSPA</b>	-	Armed Forces Special Powers Act
<b>BBIN (MVA)</b>	-	Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (Motor Vehicles Agreement)
<b>BIFA</b>	-	Bhutan-India Friendship Association
<b>BIMSTEC</b>	-	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
<b>BRI</b>	-	Belt and Road Initiative
<b>BTAD</b>	-	Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts
<b>CIA</b>	-	Central Intelligence Agency
<b>DGFI</b>	-	Directorate-General of Field Intelligence
<b>GNH</b>	-	Gross National Happiness
<b>ICRC</b>	-	International Committee of the Red Cross
<b>IMA</b>	-	Indian Military Academy
<b>IMTRAT</b>	-	Indian Military Training Team
<b>ISRO</b>	-	Indian Space Research Organisation
<b>JIBA</b>	-	Joint India-Bhutan Army
<b>KLO</b>	-	Kamatapur Liberation Organization
<b>MPLF</b>	-	Manipur People's Liberation Front
<b>NAM</b>	-	Non-Alignment Movement
<b>NDA</b>	-	National Democratic Alliance
<b>NDA</b>	-	National Defence Academy
<b>NDFB</b>	-	National Democratic Front of Bodoland

<b>NESO</b>	-	Northeast Student Organization
<b>NIA</b>	-	National Investigation Agency
<b>NSCN (I-M)</b>	-	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isaac-Muivah)
<b>NSCN (K)</b>	-	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang)
<b>PLA</b>	-	People's Liberation Army
<b>PREPAK</b>	-	People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak
<b>RAW</b>	-	Research and Analysis Wing
<b>RBA</b>	-	Royal Bhutan Army
<b>RPF</b>	-	Revolutionary People's Front
<b>SAARC</b>	-	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
<b>SATCOM</b>	-	Communications (SATCOM) Products and Services
<b>SFF</b>	-	Special Frontier Force
<b>SSB</b>	-	Sashastra Seema Bal
<b>ULFA</b>	-	United Liberation Front of Assam
<b>UNCTAD</b>	-	United Nations Conference for Trade and Development
<b>UNLF</b>	-	United National Liberation Front

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## **CHAPTER-1**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

# CHAPTER-1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

The security cooperation between India and Bhutan is mainly conducted through the joint-military training camps, joint initiatives on security issues, particularly the military operations conducted by both the countries. India and Bhutan have always maintained a trouble-free relationship compared to other South Asian countries. In the many areas of cooperation between India and Bhutan, the most important is security cooperation which is the focus of this study. The security cooperation between India and Bhutan is based on the mutual understanding and the treaties signed between the countries. This study attempts to understand the security cooperation between India and Bhutan by analysing two major developments, the 'Operation All Clear' (2003-2004) and Doklam Crisis (2017), where both the countries have closely cooperated.

The Republic of India and the Kingdom of Bhutan are the two neighbouring South Asian countries. India is a Federal, Parliamentary, Constitutional, and Socialist Republic whereas Bhutan is a Unitary, Parliamentary, and Constitutional Monarchy. While India is the seventh largest country by area and the second most populous country in the world, the tiny Bhutan is the second least populous country in the region. India is bounded by the Arabian Sea on the south-west, Bay of Bengal on the south-east and the Indian Ocean on the south. It shares land borders with Pakistan in the west, China, Nepal and Bhutan in the north-east and Myanmar and Bangladesh in the east. India and Bhutan shares 605 kilometres long land border (Saha, 2015). Bhutan is located in the Eastern Himalayas and is bordered by Tibet Autonomous Region of China in the north, the Sikkim state of India and the Chumbi Valley of Tibet in the West, Arunachal Pradesh of India in the east, and the states of Assam and West-Bengal in the south (Dogra, 2015: 111).

In terms of security, India benefits from Bhutan which provides a natural barrier in protecting the Himalayan frontier of India and serves as its ally and prevents China from entering into India (Karat, 2005). Bhutan is mostly dependent on India for trade, transit and contact with the outside world as it is a landlocked country. Bhutan, being an economically and militarily weak country, cannot defend its boundaries on its own.

Bhutan has to look for other friendly neighbours like India, as China claims around three hundred square miles of Bhutanese territories in the Chumbi Valley, the Torsa Nala, and some grazing areas in northern and western Bhutan (Chakraborti & Mukherjee, 2014: 8). China had already made plans to build railway networks around the region which is a threat to India and Bhutan. India has been keeping genuine friendly ties with Bhutan and thereby successfully prevents any external influence on the Bhutanese territories, which in turn supports India's strategic interests in the region (Chakraborti & Mukherjee, 2014: 8). Bhutan was termed as the 'lost territory' by China in 1954 which brought serious problems to the sovereignty of the former during the time of Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1952 and the Tibetan revolt in 1959 (Roy, 2010). All these were the factors which led Bhutan to have closer relations with India.

This study attempts to understand the security cooperation between India and Bhutan by analysing 'Operation All Clear', which was conducted from December 2003 to January 2004 and Doklam Crisis of 2017, the two major events in which both the countries have cooperated. The importance of this study is that it gives a critical analysis of Operation All Clear and Doklam Crisis, two crucial developments in India-Bhutan security cooperation. The main area of cooperation is traditional security issues, which is central, point in this study. Although Operation All Clear falls under the category of sub-conventional or non-conventional warfare and Doklam Crisis falls under territorial dispute, both the incidents have brought India and Bhutan together and deepened security cooperation (Dixit, 2010: 121). Good neighbourhood policy, conflict resolution perspective and the Chinese presence in the area, which play an important role in terms of security and border issues between India and Bhutan, are also some of the problems in this study. The Chinese presence in the Doklam region, a tri-junction in the India-China-Bhutan border, is one of the most important factors which have further intensified the security cooperation between both India and Bhutan.

The security cooperation between India and Bhutan can be mainly seen through Operation All Clear and Doklam Crisis which have been highlighted in this study. The Governments of India and Bhutan have cooperated in terms of both the events to eliminate the obstacles that have been hampering the relationship between the two countries. The friendship treaties signed between India and Bhutan are the main

foundations for the cooperation between both the countries. This study highlights the treaties signed between India and Bhutan for further examination of Operation All Clear and Doklam Crisis which became the foundation of friendship between both the countries. The two incidents have been the major pinnacles in India-Bhutan security cooperation.

### **1.1.a Historical Perspectives of India-Bhutan Security Cooperation**

Since 1947, India and Bhutan have maintained friendly relations. Bhutan is a strategic buffer state between India and China. Bhutan provides a natural barrier to protect the Indian Himalayan frontier from China. Bhutan's first contact with the British East India Company was made when Bhutan raided Cooch Behar in 1772 and the King of Cooch Behar was forced to seek the help of East India Company (Kharat, 2005). Bhutan came under British sovereignty in 1865 after a clash with the colonial power. The reason behind which the King of Bhutan and the British signed the treaties was to protect Bhutan from the Chinese expansionist policies, to establish separate political entity with the help of the British and to modernise Bhutan and bring radical changes into the economic system of the country with British India's assistance (Kharat, 2005).

Bhutan became a protectorate of British India after signing the treaty of Punakha in 1910, and allowing the British to guide its foreign affairs and defence (Kharat, 2005). Bhutan was one of the first countries to recognise India's independence in 1947 and both nations fostered close relations. The bilateral relations further improved after the annexation of Tibet in 1950 by the People's Republic of China and China's border disputes with both Bhutan and India (Sherpa, 2014: 42). Because of its geo-strategic significance in British India's strategic security system, Bhutan had developed security arrangements with Britain and then the independent India. After India got its independence, in April 1948 Bhutan urged the Government of India to revise the treaty of 1865. Consequently, India and Bhutan signed a new treaty - the 'Treaty of Peace and Friendship' on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1949 at Darjeeling (Sherpa, 2014: 42).

The treaty of 1949 marked a continuation of the Anglo-Bhutanese treaty of 1910. It maintained the British legacy of treating the Himalayas as the sentinel of India's security. According to Article II of the India-Bhutan treaty of 1949, Bhutan's foreign policy should be guided by the Government of India. Second part of the article says,

‘the Government of Bhutan agrees to be guided by the advice of the Government of India in its external relations’ (Kharat, 2005). To contain the Chinese Communist influence in the Indian subcontinent, India is said to have concluded the treaty of 1949 with Bhutan, as India was facing the consequences of accession of Jammu and Kashmir in 1948. The treaty of 1949 strengthened the position of Bhutan at home and abroad (Kharat, 2005).

The age-old ties between India and Bhutan had been conditioned by bonds of shared history, geography, religion, culture and tradition. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru of India and King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck of Bhutan gave a new thrust to this relationship (Letho & Karma, 1994: 53). For much of its history, Bhutan has preserved its isolation from the outside world, staying out of international organisations and maintaining few bilateral relations. During the 1950’s and 1960’s, two important events compelled Bhutan to move closer towards India and they were, the depiction of Bhutan’s territory as part of China in the Chinese map of 1958 and the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1959. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru declared in 1958 that, acts of aggression against Bhutan would be taken as aggression against India. In January-February 1961, the Bhutanese Government asked the Indian Government to help in any situation of possible Chinese attacks, also to talk about economic and security needs and to maintain friendly relations (Kharat, 2005). During the 1962 war between China and India, the Bhutanese government showed sympathy towards the latter by providing them with medical care and hospitality. In 1973, both India and Bhutan signed an agreement in order to settle the boundary line and the India-Bhutan border was properly demarcated in between 1975-1984 (Saikia, 2014).

The defence of Bhutan is the joint responsibility of the Indian military establishment and the Government of Bhutan. The Bhutanese Army uses Indian equipment exclusively and is the largest beneficiary of latter’s foreign aid (Belfiglio, 1972: 684). The Indian Military Training Team (IMTRAT) was introduced in Bhutan to help in training the Bhutanese army in order to guard its borders against possible Chinese threats. The headquarters of the Indian Military Training Team in Bhutan is located in the Ha district adjacent to Tibet’s Chumbi Valley (Trivedi, 2008). The majority of the army officers of Bhutan and non-commissioned officers were trained by the Indian Military Training Team, which was commanded by an Indian Army Brigadier at the Wangchuck Lo Dzong Military Training School established in Ha district in 1961.



The Indian Military Training Team also offered a one to two month pre-course for officers and enlisted personnel selected for advanced training in India (Kumar, 2013: 78). The Eastern Army Command and the Eastern Air Command of India have integrated protection of Bhutan into their role. The Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) and the Royal Bodyguards (RBG) officers are sent for training at the National Defence Academy (NDA) in Pune and Indian Military Academy (IMA) in Dehradun. The Army Welfare Committee was established in 1978 to oversee the army welfare project (Bandyopadhyay, 2009).

Both the countries have conducted joint military operations from December 2003 to January 2004 to eliminate the three insurgent groups from India's Northeast region who were residing in the jungles of South Bhutan illegally. The Doklam issue of 2017 is also one of the major issues of security cooperation between India and Bhutan because, although it was a border dispute between China and Bhutan, India got involved as per the treaty signed between both the countries in 2007. Through the principle of bilateralism, India insisted that the problems in the region must be resolved bilaterally and that external powers should have no role in the region. This principle came through the form of 'Indira Doctrine' which was initiated during the rule of late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi (Mohan, 2003). Bhutan has also been given much importance through the 'Neighbourhood First Policy' of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The decision to promote the 'Neighbourhood First Policy' was based on the twin objective of projecting India as a global power and as a supportive benefactor of its neighbouring states (Bose, 2020).

India negotiated a treaty with Bhutan in 2007, whereby the provision requiring Thimphu to seek India's guidance in foreign policy was replaced with broader sovereignty and would not require Bhutan to get India's approval over importing arms (Dogra, 2015: 115). The security cooperation between India and Bhutan is overseen mainly by India. Under the 2007 India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty, both the countries have agreed to cooperate closely with each other on issues relating to their national interest and neither government shall allow the use of its territories for activities harmful to the national security and interest of the other (Sherpa, 2014: 43). The Friendship Treaty signed between India and Bhutan is said to be the source of impact which led to the Doklam Crisis between India and China in terms of protecting the Bhutanese part of the land. The issue relating to the national interest came into effect

when India stepped forward in order to defend the Doklam region on behalf of Bhutan in accordance with the agreement made through the treaty of 2007 between both the countries.

### **1.1.b. ‘Operation All Clear’**

‘Operation All Clear’ is a counter-insurgency operation which was initiated by the Royal Government of Bhutan, with the blessings of India in 2003-2004, against the Indian insurgents who were residing illegally inside the territories of Bhutan. The counter-insurgency operations conducted by Bhutan in 2003 and 2004 were against the separatist groups from the Indian state of Assam and West Bengal. This operation was code-named originally as ‘Operation Flush-Out’ and it later came to be known as ‘Operation All Clear’. By 2003 there were about 30 insurgent camps inside Bhutan, with the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA)<sup>1</sup> controlling 13, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)<sup>2</sup> controlling 12 and the Kamatapur Liberation Organization (KLO)<sup>3</sup> having 5 (Banerjee & Laishram, 2004). Scattered across the dense jungles of Southern Bhutan, adjacent to Assam and West Bengal, these camps were estimated to lodge about 3500 militants. The Indian Army put a lower estimate of about 1500 (Banerjee & Laishram, 2004).

Due to the geographical proximity, the separatist insurgents from Assam and West Bengal have established their camps in the Southern jungles of Bhutan. These separatist insurgent groups started settling in the territories of Bhutan after ‘Operation Bajrang’ and ‘Operation Rhino’, conducted by the Indian Army in the state of Assam during the 1990-1991 against the ULFA (Saikia, 2014). The Indian Government and

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<sup>1</sup>The United Liberation Front of Assam is a separatist outfit operating in Assam, North East India for the Indigenous Assamese people. It seeks to establish a sovereign Assam with an armed struggle in the Assam conflict. The government of India banned the organisation in 1990 citing it as a terrorist organisation, while the United States Department of State lists it under other groups of concern.

<sup>2</sup>The National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) was an armed separatist outfit which used to demand a sovereign Bodoland for the Bodo people. But after it split into NDFB (Progressive) and NDFB (Songbijit), it changed its objective for Bodoland statehood.

<sup>3</sup>The Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (abbreviated KLO) is a militant organisation based in Northeast India whose objective is to carve out a separate Kamtapur nation from India. The proposed state is to comprise six districts in West Bengal and four contiguous districts of Assam which are Cooch Behar, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, North and South Dinajpur and Malda, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Dhubri and Goalpara, Kishanganj districts in Bihar and Jhapa District in Nepal. The KLO was formed to address problems of the Koch Rajbongshi people such as large-scale unemployment, land alienation, perceived neglect of Kamtapuri language, identity, and grievances of economic deprivation.

the Government of Assam persuaded the Government of Bhutan to initiate a Joint India-Bhutan Army (JIBA) operation to drive out these insurgents from Bhutan (Trivedi, 2008). At first, Bhutan denied that insurgent base camps existed on its soil, but by mid-1995, Bhutan accepted the presence of insurgents on its soil, as it felt the pain emanating from the continued existence of these groups. As early as 1996, India sought active intervention from the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGB). In 1997, four Bhutanese policemen were killed in a terrorist attack on a police station in Naganglam and in 1999, a senior army officer and his convey were ambushed in Pathsala, across the Assam border (Choudhary, 2005: 223).

Giving priority to the friendship with India and keeping its foreign policy as the cornerstone, His Majesty the King of Bhutan accepted the seriousness of the situation and he was clear that action should be taken. But the King feared that any direct intervention by the Indian Army in Bhutan could be considered as an act of aggression. The King also said that his Government would prefer to address this issue peacefully through dialogue and persuasion (Banerjee & Laishram, 2004). Therefore, the Royal Government of Bhutan had a round of talks with the insurgent groups in accordance with its National Assembly and advised them to leave the territories of Bhutan peacefully. Five rounds of talks were held with the United Liberation Front of Assam and three with the National Democratic Front of Bodoland since 1998. The Kamatapur Liberation Organization didn't respond to the call for talks and other insurgent groups did not take the talks seriously as most of the talks were represented by the low level cadres. Though the United Liberation Front of Assam decided to close down four camps in 2001, they did not put it into action. On 14<sup>th</sup> of July 2003, military actions were approved by the National Assembly of Bhutan and the Operation All Clear was launched on 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2003 (Banerjee & Laishram, 2004).

During Operation All Clear, the Indian Army did not take part in the fight directly but supported the Bhutanese forces logistically and with medical services. Since the operation was done within the borders of Bhutan, the Bhutanese government did not want the Indian Army to cross its borders and conduct an operation due to certain foreign policy related issues. The Indian Army deployed 12 battalions along the Bhutan border to prevent rebels from entering the Indian Territory and also provided

helicopters to assist the Royal Bhutan Army troops to evacuate the injured soldiers during the operation (Ghosh, 2015).

### **1.1.c Doklam Crisis**

Territorial disputes are traditionally regarded as the most common sources of war (Forsberg, 1996: 433). Bhutan, being a landlocked Himalayan Kingdom sandwiched between India and China, has long faced challenges to its frontiers from incursions and border disputes. When we discuss India-Bhutan security cooperation, the territorial disputes between China and Bhutan are also of great importance along with the security cooperation between India and Bhutan in tackling traditional security threats. Bhutan came into existence in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, the immigrating Tibetans had subjugated the local tribes and established their supremacy. It took four centuries for the migrant Tibetans to demarcate the geographical boundaries of the country and set-up a politico-religious system of governance (Choudhary, 2005: 214). Bhutan continued to maintain its tributary relationship with Tibet until China annexed the latter in 1950. Doklam Crisis is a territorial dispute which had emerged between People's Republic of China and the Kingdom of Bhutan, where Indian soldiers moved in, claiming to have acted on behalf of Bhutan, as both have agreed to cooperate in such situations based on the principles of the India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty of 2007.

Doklam is an area which lies between Tibet's Chumbi Valley to the north, Bhutan's Haa Valley to the east, and India's Sikkim state to the west. It is an area consisting of a plateau and a valley. Doklam is known as Zhoglam in Tibetan language and Donglang in Chinese language. Bhutan shares a 470-km-long border with China and according to some reports, over 25 percent of this border remained disputed for decades (Stobdan, 2017). Since 1961, it has been shown as a part of Bhutan in its maps but is also claimed by China. Doklam is a border issue between the Kingdom of Bhutan and the People's Republic of China. This border issue between both the countries started from 1959 onwards when the PLA (People's Liberation Army) invaded Tibet and Bhutan closed its border on the northern side. This led Bhutan closer to India. After the People's Republic of China invaded Tibet, it refused to recognise the traditional watershed principle that had decided the boundaries between Bhutan and Tibet (Lamsang, 2017).

During the 1950's and 1960's, China started publishing maps that claimed portions of Bhutanese territories with no clear basis. The Chinese are asserting legal claims to it on the basis of tax receipts issued to graziers who were paying a herder's tax to the government in Lhasa till 1960. After the war between China and India in 1962, it was reported that the Chinese troops and the Tibetan grazers encroached the areas of Bhutanese territory which is adjacent to the southern part of the Chumbi Valley (Kharat, 2005). In 1972, the Government of India helped Bhutan to establish its own survey department and survey Bhutan's border with the Tibetan region of China. Bhutan's boundary issues were handled in consultation with New Delhi. But from 1984 onwards, Bhutan had direct talks with China and it was the first boundary talks between both the countries. In 1988, some guiding principles of the talks about maintaining peace and not using force to change the status quo were agreed upon (Kharat, 2005).

This was further elaborated and defined in a more detailed manner in the agreement signed in 1998. But Bhutan and China had agreed to put the dispute in cold storage by signing a standstill agreement on border disputes in 2002. There had been 24 rounds of boundary talks between 1984 and 2016. The 24<sup>th</sup> boundary meeting held in Beijing endorsed the report of the Joint Technical Field Survey of the disputed areas in the western sector carried out by the expert groups of both sides (Lamsang, 2017). In June 2017, a military stand-off occurred between China and India as the former attempted to extend a road on the Doklam plateau southwards near the Doka La Pass (Lamsang, 2017). The Indian troops moved in to prevent the Chinese. India claimed to have acted on behalf of Bhutan as they both signed the Friendship Treaty in 2007. Bhutan had formally objected to the road construction in the disputed area. The India-China confrontation at Doklam in 2017 was the most serious military stand-off between the two countries after the 'Sumdorong Chu Episode'<sup>4</sup> of 1986-1987. On 28<sup>th</sup> of August 2017, India and China had mutually agreed to a speedy disengagement on the Doklam plateau bringing an end to the military stand-off which lasted almost for three months (Bajpai, 2018: 245). Therefore, the two incidents, 'Operation All Clear' and Doklam Crisis, in spite of their fundamental differences, reflected the strong security cooperation between India and Bhutan.

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<sup>4</sup>The 1987 Sino-Indian skirmish was the third military conflict between the Chinese People's Liberation Army Ground Force and Indian Army that occurred at the Sumdorong Chu Valley, with the previous one taking place almost a quarter of a century earlier.

## **1.2 Review of Literature**

In order to understand the security cooperation between India and Bhutan along with the two events 'Operation All Clear' (2003-2004) and Doklam Crisis (2017), the study has mainly referred secondary sources. Various articles, books, newspaper reports, treaties, agreements, etc. have been reviewed to identify the knowledge gap for this study. The literature reviewed has been divided into four parts; the first part covers the overall India-Bhutan security cooperation, the second part covers the Operation All Clear 2003, third part covers the Doklam Crisis and the fourth part is an overall analysis of Operation All Clear and Doklam Crisis.

### ***On India-Bhutan Security Cooperation***

Amitav Acharya (2014), in his article, "*Human Security*", Christian Wagner (2014), in his article "*Security Cooperation in South Asia Overview, Reasons, Prospects*", Arvind Dutta (2009), in the book, "*Role of India's Defence Cooperation Initiatives in Meeting the Foreign Policy Goals*", Tilottama Mukherjee and Tridib Chakraborti (2014), in their article, "*India and Bhutan Under the New NDA Government: The First Footprints of Narendra Modi's South Asia Policy*", Lopamudra Bandyopadhyay (2009), in his article, "*Indo-Bhutanese Relations: A Historical Perspectives*", N. Jayapalan (2000), in his book, "*India and Her Neighbours*", Shubham Ghosh (2014), in the article, "*Understanding India Bhutan Relations*", Ramesh Trivedi (2008), in his book, "*India's Relations with Her Neighbours*", Hiranya Saikia (2014), in his article, "*India- Bhutan Relations - Politics and Prospects*", Medha Bisht (2012), in her article, "*Bhutan: India-Bhutan Relations in the Next Two Decades*", Rajesh S. Kharat (2005), in his book, "*Foreign Policy of Bhutan*", Sherpem Sherpa (2013), in his article, "*Bhutan: Between Two Giants*", have mentioned that, traditionally, security meant the protection of sovereignty and territorial integrity of states from external military threats. It is the essence of the concept of national security which dominated the security analysis and policy-making during the cold war period. They have also mentioned that South Asia continues to be one of the most important crisis regions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and is characterized by an interlocking web of old and new security risks. There are unresolved territorial disputes and India has also developed an extensive military collaboration with Bhutan. They also mentioned that the Friendship Treaty of August 1949 gave India substantial influence in handling the foreign policy and international affairs of Bhutan and with the treaty, India also intended to protect

its security interest vis-à-vis China in the Himalayan region. According to them, defence cooperation is an ideal tool to advance the national foreign policy objectives by building bridges of friendship, preventing conflicts, building mutual trust and capacities on a global basis. According to them, India-Bhutan relations are a product of history and it cannot be reversed by any government from both sides, no matter what maybe it's viewpoints or principles. Because of the topography, geo-politics, security and the progress of the Kingdom, it has to have good relations with India and that bilateral friendly cooperation between India and Bhutan has been developing in a very satisfactory and healthy manner. They talked about the contentment of Bhutan and the peaceful coexistence between India and Bhutan. With the border tensions between India and China escalating into military conflict in 1962, India could not afford Bhutan to be a weak buffer state. They also mentioned about India's assistance towards Bhutan's security and defence arrangements, specifically in training and equipping the Royal Bhutan Army, which was prompted by several factors such as Bhutan's geo-strategic location, the Chinese occupation of Tibet, the 1962 border war between India and China, and perception of an increasing Chinese threat to the subcontinent. They have also written that the relations between India and Bhutan did not evolve after 1947 when the former achieved its independence from British rule. According to the authors, during the early period of India's independence, the Bhutanese had forged an alliance with Tibet and Sikkim to form a balance with India because they were apprehensive about the latter's dominance. But the then Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru assured Bhutan about its distinct identity and autonomy. The authors also mentioned that, the real friendship between these two countries developed only after both the countries signed the treaty of 1949 on 8<sup>th</sup> August, which is, the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between India and Bhutan. They said that a stable and independent Bhutan is important for India to be an effective buffer state and the latter does not have any imperial agenda in dealing with the former. In the past, Bhutan had fears that it would be affected along with the incorporation of Sikkim into India, but was assured by the latter that its territorial integrity would be respected. In spite of close relations between India and Bhutan, the Bhutanese affairs were maintained by India's Political Officer based in Sikkim until 1968 till formal diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan were made with the establishment of India's residential embassy in Thimphu. The India-Bhutan Treaty of 1949 was seen as India's control over Bhutan's foreign affairs and defence. Bhutan

tried to assert itself as a sovereign nation and India's repeated declarations of military support to it in case of any external aggression were rejected by the former. Bhutan maintained that the country was not a protectorate of India and was apprehensive of the latter's hegemony and doubted its military strength to defend against possible Chinese aggression. It has also been mentioned that the Indian military trains the Bhutanese army and their headquarters are located in the Haa district inside Bhutan. Due to its location, there has been discontentment among the public of North-west Bhutan and the representatives of the National Assembly of Bhutan as the Indian Military Training Team (IMTRAT) has occupied the forts. It has been mentioned that defence cooperation can also sometimes hurt the cultural sentiments of small countries. The relations between India and Bhutan got strained in 1960 as there was some misunderstanding about the map which was published by the Government of India as it did not show the India-Bhutan boundary as an international boundary. Later it was solved after signing an agreement in 1973 when the Government of India agreed to show Bhutan in different colours on its maps. It has also been mentioned that, many critics have seen the events in which India cut off its subsidy on cooking gas and kerosene in which the Bhutanese are highly dependent on during the 2013 national elections in Bhutan as part of India's continued efforts to expand its influence over Bhutan's foreign policy, trade and security. Many people like hoteliers, shopkeepers, civil servants, journalists argued that India's warm embrace of Bhutan is turning increasingly into a complete control. Thus the security cooperation between India and Bhutan has been discussed in terms of mutual benefits by the authors.

### ***On 'Operation All Clear'***

David J. Kilcullen (2007), in his article, "*Counterinsurgency in Iraq: Theory and Practice, 2007*", Praveen Kumar (2004), in his article, "*External Linkages and Internal Security: Assessing Bhutan's Operation All Clear*", Dipankar Banerjee and Bidhan S. Laishram (2004), in their article, "*Bhutan's 'Operation All Clear' Implications for Insurgency and Security Cooperation*", Sushil Kumar Sharma in his article, "*Operation All Out against Bodo Militants: What Next?*", Arijit Mazumdar (2005), in his article, "*Bhutan's Military Action against Indian Insurgents*", Ramesh Trivedi (2008), in his book, "*India's Relations with Her Neighbour*", Bhashyam Kasturi (2004), in the article, "*Bhutanese Army Action Against Militants*", Sushil Kumar Sharma (2014), in his article, "*Insurgency in North-East India: External*



*Dynamics*”, Balaji Chandramohan (2009), in his article, “*Indo-Bhutan Joint Action against Insurgents*”, have all talked about insurgency and counter-insurgency in their books and articles. They have mentioned that insurgency is an organized movement which is aimed at overthrowing the constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict. According to them, in counter-insurgency and insurgency, political power is the main issue and counter-insurgency is the military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological and civic action taken by the government to defeat the insurgent groups. They have also mentioned that, in a developing liberal democracy like India, communicating issues relating to regional development and fulfilment of aspirations of various constituent communities takes time. In this context, a cooperation against groups preaching the ‘culture of violence’ to exploit the vulnerability of the general people arising out of a sense of economic deprivation and cultural discrimination is necessary. This can be related to Bhutan’s Operation All Clear. They discussed about the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan’s decision to conduct its first operation against the Indian insurgent groups who have been residing in its territorial jungles. The authors talked about the Indian Government’s insistence on Bhutan to flush out these insurgent groups from its soil. Although these insurgent groups were from India, the Bhutanese Government was not willing to let the Indian army enter into its territory in fighting the insurgent groups due to some political and domestic reasons. As a result, the Bhutanese Government decided to conduct the operation on its own while the Indian army helped them on the other side of the Indian border. It has been mentioned that, there is a need for continuous joint surveillance by the security forces of both sides along the India-Bhutan borders. This can act as a restraint to the insurgents operating close to the border. According to the authors, the Government of Bhutan did not pay much attention to these insurgent groups as long as the Bhutanese people were not threatened. They were not interested in the idea of allowing the Indian troops to enter Bhutan despite India’s repeated requests for joint-operations. The authors also have mentioned that some sections of the Indian press, particularly the local press in Assam, were suspicious that Bhutan was proffering itself as safe haven for these insurgents, as the Royal Government repeatedly refused during 1997 to 2000, to take action against these insurgents. They have also mentioned that the Royal Government decided to enter into a dialogue with the United Liberation Front of Assam and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland leaders due to pressure from India and

increasing disturbances in the Southern Bhutan border. They mentioned that, in the wake of military operation on 21<sup>st</sup> of December 2003, the United Liberation Front of Assam called for suspension of trade ties between Bhutan saying that the Bhutanese were the enemy of the Assamese, Bodos and the Kamatapuris. According to the authors, the militants of Northeast India have been taking unauthorised shelters in the territories of Bhutan since a decade. They mentioned that the Government of Bhutan under the Indian pressure launched Operation All Clear to flush out these insurgents on 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2003. According to them there is some evidence to show that Bhutan accepted the influx of the militant groups in order to keep away the Nepalese refugees, who were forced to leave in the 1990s. This led the Bhutanese government to get stuck in a long process of peaceful negotiations over a long period of time with the insurgents. In their articles, they have mentioned that, whatever the reason might be behind the Bhutanese military action, ‘Operation All Clear’ was an important event which set an example of cooperation to tackle insurgency in the region. But, some of the inaccessible forested areas along the Assam-Bhutan border are still serving as temporary bases and safe havens for the insurgent groups. According to them, ‘Operation All Clear’ on 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2003 can be termed as the dawn of the new India-Bhutan strategic partnership.

### ***On Doklam Crisis***

Brian Taylor Sumner (2004), in his article, “*Territorial Disputes at The International Court of Justice*”, Anand Kumar (2013), in his article, “*The Royal Bhutan Army*”, Kanti Bajpai (2018), in his article, “*Modi’s China Policy and the Road to Confrontation*”, L.K. Choudhary (2005), in his article, “*Indo-Bhutan Relationship: A Unique Example of Bilateral Friendship in South Asia*”, Tenzing Lamsang (2017), in his article, “*Understanding the Doklam Border Issue*”, Medha Bisht (2012), in her article, “*Bhutan: India-Bhutan Relations in the Next Two Decades*”, Commodore Katherine Richards (2015), “*China- India: An Analysis of the Himalayan Territorial Dispute*”, Ram Rahul (1971), in his book, “*Modern Bhutan*”, Anil Kamboj (2015), in his article, “*India’s Neighbourhood: A Challenge*”, P Stobdan (2017), in his article, “*In the Tri-Junction Entanglement, What Does Bhutan Want?*”, said that, in International Law and International Relations, ownership of territory is significant because sovereignty over land defines what constitutes a state and natural borders creates a clear dividing line between two states, and offers a buffer of security. One of

the authors have specifically said that, the strategic location of Bhutan allows it to act as buffer zone between China and India in some parts of the Himalayas, and since 1953, India and Bhutan are engaged in defence and security cooperation. They have mentioned that, Eastern Bhutan adjoins the Indian Army defences in Arunachal Pradesh, which is still claimed by China and the Royal Bhutan Army was organised as a regular military force in the 1950's with the encouragement of India and in response to the Chinese takeover of Tibet. They have mentioned that the Doklam Stand-off resulted from a process of mutual irritation between India and China. According to them, Bhutan took all the precautions to keep its special relationship with India intact in order to keep away China from having legitimate security concerns in its territories and any deal with China should not be at the cost of its relationship with India. The Chinese side have also built a major road till the Yadong town in the Chumbi Valley. According to the authors, the attempt by the Chinese is to take as many roads as it can from there to the Indian and Bhutanese borders in the vicinity. However, especially for India, any roads moving south towards the Chicken Neck are seen as being particularly harmful for its security. They have also mentioned about the border disputes between China and Bhutan and the struggle of the latter to survive between its giant neighbours China and India. They said that Bhutan's border dispute is one of its biggest challenges which are set to define its future as a nation state. According to them, beyond the dynamics of Sino-Indian great power rivalry and the problems bestowed by geography for strategically-important buffer states like Bhutan, the Sino-Bhutan border dispute also points to a far more complex aspect of Himalayan geo-strategic politics, namely the role of Tibet. Bhutan and Tibet have a long and complex history and continue to share common cultural and religious bonds based on Tibetan Buddhist ideology. For China, the Tibetan link with Bhutan is a powerful force in the dispute, as settlement of the border and the cross-border movement of people could help to legitimize China's rule in Tibet and vindicate its Tibetan policies. According to them, in the past, China's claims have made Bhutan insecure along with India and this has benefitted Bhutan both economically and politically, especially from the latter. Bhutan, like the other Himalayan border countries had been dependent on Tibet and China historically, and so it is due to this reason China refuses to recognize India's rights on Bhutan and Sikkim and insists on

conducting bilateral negotiations with both the countries. They have also mentioned that, the Chinese threat to Bhutan is very real despite the belief of Druk Gyalpo<sup>5</sup> Jigme Dorji. They have mentioned that, Bhutan may use China as a balancer against India and it may continue to strengthen its relations with the latter and have a ‘Look South Policy’, thereby establishing deeper linkages with India, Bangladesh and Southeast Asian countries. The people in Bhutan think that India has for too long prevented their country from normalising diplomatic ties and negotiating a border settlement with China, so India, on its part, fears that any boundary deal will not only impact Indian security, but also impinge on its own negotiating position with China on the boundary issue. They have also mentioned that, from Bhutan’s perspective, India’s position is adversely impacting its ties with China. This is the main issue that is leading to complexities and confusion, including the stand-off at Doklam.

### **1.3 Knowledge Gap**

There are many articles and books accessible on India and Bhutan’s security cooperation. There are also articles and books on both the counter-insurgency operation by Bhutan (Operation All Clear) on Indian insurgents and Doklam Crisis. But the incidents, Operation All Clear and Doklam Crisis have not been incorporated by any studies in terms of security relations between India and Bhutan. An overall study has not been made on both the incidents in relations to India Bhutan security cooperation.

### **1.4 Rationale and Scope of the Study**

The study is about India and Bhutan’s security cooperation in general and the counter-insurgency operation conducted by Bhutan on the Indian insurgents and also the cooperation between India and Bhutan in the Doklam Crisis in particular. The main focus of this study is to incorporate them with the India-Bhutan security cooperation and find out the positive and negative effects in the cooperation. Although the relation between India and Bhutan are by and large good in nature, there are many ups and downs in their relationship. Therefore, this study can bring many new issues and dimensions of the security cooperation between India and Bhutan.

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<sup>5</sup>Kings of Bhutan are known as Druk Gyalpo. Dragon King or the King of Bhutan is the head of state of the Kingdom of Bhutan. Bhutan is known as Drukyul which translates as “The Land of Dragons”. So, Kings of Bhutan are known as Druk Gyalpo (Dragon King).

Unlike other neighbouring countries who share borders with each other, India and Bhutan do not have many issues in terms of foreign policy and border related matters. Most importantly, both the countries have been cooperating for a long time and have been giving assistance to each other in terms of defence and security matters. The security cooperation between India and Bhutan is particularly in terms of good neighbourhood policy, conflict resolution perspective and the Chinese presence in the area, which plays an important role in terms of security and border issues. This study also attempts to understand whether Bhutan is facing any problems in the process of security cooperation with its bigger partner.

Being a small country sandwiched between two giant countries, Bhutan has chosen India to be its protector and ally. Interestingly Bhutan chose India instead of China, despite the latter being a bigger and more powerful country than the former. India's assistance to Bhutan in terms of military training is also a good example compared to the other neighbouring countries of the world. The respect of the treaties between both the countries since its existence, have led the two countries in cooperating with each other in terms of security. 'Operation All Clear' and Doklam Crisis are the two incidents where both India and Bhutan have shown their cooperation and have respect for the treaties signed between both the countries.

The treaties signed between India and Bhutan is the background of friendship between both the countries. In terms of 'Operation All Clear', Bhutan has used Article VIII of the Indo-Bhutan Treaty of Perpetual Peace and Friendship 1949. According to Article VIII the extradition of persons wanted by either state for crimes and for unlawful activities affecting their security shall be keeping with the extradition agreements between the two countries. In case of Doklam Crisis, Article II of the India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty of 2007 has been followed, which says that, in keeping with the abiding ties of close friendship and cooperation between Bhutan and India, the Government of the Kingdom of Bhutan and the Government of the Republic of India shall 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 each other.

The scope of this study is to understand the friendship and cooperation between India and Bhutan which is good in nature compared to most of the neighbouring countries

and also between a small and a big country. This study also examines whether the friendship between India and Bhutan, especially in terms of security can be set as a good example for neighbouring countries in future to cooperate with each other. It examines Bhutan's importance for India in terms of security vice-versa, in relations to China especially in terms of their boundaries and also in terms of their foreign policy related matters which is complicated in nature. The thesis limits itself only to the security cooperation i.e., traditional security cooperation of India and Bhutan in order to study about both the country's cooperation especially in the two cases; 'Operation All Clear' and Doklam Crisis.

### **1.5 Framework of Analysis**

According to Neo-realists, if states are to be secure in an anarchic world, they need to pay heed to the structural constraints under which they operate and powerful states can and indeed should or must do more than less powerful states and the most powerful states shouldn't get too excited about the power-projection opportunities that arise simply from having great capabilities (Jakobsen, 2013). In case of India and Bhutan, neither of them can take the other for granted and both the countries have a major stake in the security, stability and prosperity of the other. In 1954, China said that Bhutan was wrongfully held by imperialist India, but India in 1946, recognized Bhutan as an independent state. India stated that it could not be equated to the princely states of the Indian Territory (Roy, 2010). Bhutan being a small Kingdom sandwiched between two giant countries has to keep a low profile in dealing with its larger and more powerful neighbours in order to avoid conflicts.

Defence cooperation is said to be an ideal tool which can advance the national foreign policy objectives by building bridges of friendship, preventing conflicts, building mutual trust and capacities on a global basis. Defence forces work together to achieve mutual aims and objectives and at sharing of operational and doctrinal expertise, training and capability enhancement of one's own military, strengthening of ties with other countries and sales of weapons and military technologies (Dutta, 2009: 31). Security in military terms is the capacity of one state to prevent an armed invasion by the other. The security studies have been dominated by the realist and neo-realist paradigm for a very long time (Chhibber, 2004). In international relations, security has always been considered as the main objective of any country's foreign policy. In

this context, such capabilities are acquired by the states themselves or through cooperation with other powers.

Bhutan being an economically and militarily weak country, cannot defend its boundaries in situation of conflicts, so Bhutan has to look for other friendly neighbours like India as it has border problems with China. Bhutan is more concerned about Chinese aggression, so it is increasing its international contacts indirectly trying to get sympathetic support for its independence and at the same time restrict India from interfering much in its domestic politics (Kharat, 2005). Bhutan's location is also an advantage for the Indian strategic defence system as Bhutan acts as a buffer country between China and India. Defence cooperation is an important tool of bilateral relations for building bridges of friendship, mutual trust, preventing conflicts, and build-up capacities in this world (Dutta, 2009). Such cooperation not only builds trust and confidence among nations, but also facilitates cooperation at strategic, political and economic levels (Bishoyi, 2011).

Since 1953, India and Bhutan have had extensive cooperation and have developed ties in various fields. Both the countries have also engaged in defence and security cooperation and in May 1961, the government of India had sent a team of military officers and men on a reconnaissance mission to Bhutan (Kumar, 2013: 76). Defence cooperation is also reflected through exchange visits of dignitaries, individual and joint training, joint military exercises, and equipment procurements, transfer of military technology and development of common doctrines. Such cooperation also promotes global and regional peace and stability through dialogue and reciprocal exchange of ideas (Bishoyi, 2011). It is more useful when forces have inter-operable systems and equipment, which facilitate functional cooperation. This can be helpful for the new innovations in a rapidly changing operational environment through production and joint development of military equipment (Bishoyi, 2011). The relationship between India and Bhutan has been sustained by the tradition of regular visits and high-level dialogues between both the countries. The training and equipping of the Royal Bhutan Army and the training and courses for army personnel conducted by the Indian Military Training Team (IMTRAT) is also an example of defence cooperation.

Counter-insurgency is the military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government in order to defeat the insurgent groups. The most important phase of any counter-insurgency act is recognizing that the threat exists. The counter-insurgency is to fight militarily and politically in order to destroy the insurgency from the roots (Millson, 2011). The counter-insurgency operation, conducted by Bhutan, was to flush out the insurgents who had taken unauthorised shelter in its territories. The problem for counter-insurgency is distinguishing between lawful or unlawful forms of discontent. Restricting guaranteed rights and freedoms every time a bomb is detonated will undermine the credibility and intentions of the government. At the same time, waiting too long to uphold the rule of law, however, will give the insurgents or terrorists the necessary time to be robust (Kiras, 2007: 198).

The Royal Government of Bhutan was not eager to act against the insurgents because they thought that in retaliation, the insurgents might hamper the movement of personnel and goods of the main trade routes to India across Bhutan. But by 2003, the Royal Government began to see the insurgents as a direct threat to the security of the Bhutanese nation and its people (Mazumdar, 2005: 573). Insurgency is not conventional war or terrorism; instead it is the use of force to achieve a political end. In an insurgency, the opponents are asymmetric and a sub-state group attempting to bring about political change by administering and fighting more effectively than its state-based enemy through the use of guerrilla tactics. These tactics are characterized by hit-and-run raids and ambushes against local security forces. Insurgency, unlike terrorism, is characterized by the support and mobilization of a significant proportion of the population. Individual insurgencies differ widely in terms of character (social, cultural, and economic aspects) and type (revolutionary, partisan, guerrilla, liberation, or civil war) but obtaining power and political control is the desired outcome (Kiras, 2007: 188).

The anti-Indian activities of the Indian insurgents from the Bhutanese soil were detrimental to the interests of both the countries, as the latter felt the pain emanating from their continued existence on its soil. Bhutan being sensitive to its demographic composition felt greatly disturbed by the Nepalese migrants and the insurgents, especially when five Bhutanese were killed by the insurgents on the Assam highway in August 2002 (Choudhary, 2005: 223). Not everyone was pleased by the actions of



the Royal Government of Bhutan. Some groups like Northeast Student Organization (NESO), the Ahom Sabha (Assam Assembly), and the All Assam Student Union (AASU), urged the Indian government to talk with the insurgent groups in order to find a permanent peaceful solution to the problems of the Northeast India (Mazumdar, 2005: 578).

Territorial disputes occur when official representatives of one country make an explicit statement claiming sovereignty over a specific territory that is claimed or administered by another country (Mitchell, 2016). Bhutan being a landlocked Himalayan Kingdom sandwiched between two political and economic powers, India and China, has long faced challenges to its frontiers from incursions and border disputes. Doklam Crisis is a border issue between the Kingdom of Bhutan and the People's Republic of China. Territorial disputes lead to militarized conflict more frequently than other types of diplomatic disputes involving maritime, river, identity, economic, cultural, or other issues. A majority of interstate wars have been fought between countries embroiled in one or more territorial disputes. Countries who share borders are more likely to fight wars with each other than other states, especially if they have disagreements over specific pieces of territory. This can be said in terms of India, China and Bhutan. There is a conflict between India and China also China and Bhutan in terms of their borders. Doklam Crisis of 2017 is one of the territorial disputes between China and Bhutan (Mitchell, 2016).

The reason behind the defence cooperation of India and Bhutan is the territorial disputes between China-India and China-Bhutan. Since both India and Bhutan have a common threat i.e., from China, they have decided to cooperate closely in terms of any attack from the latter. The 1962 war between China and India was also due to territorial dispute. Even India and Bhutan had misunderstandings in 1960 about the map published by the government of India in which the India-Bhutan boundary was not shown as an international boundary. But later on, this misunderstanding was solved when in 1973, both the countries signed a border agreement and the government of India agreed to show Bhutan in different colours in the map (Kharat, 2005).

The roots of boundary disputes between China and Bhutan lie in the overall approach of Imperial China towards its close neighbours since 1907. Mao Zedong's regime

considered Bhutan and other countries lying on its periphery as the ‘lost territories’ of China. China’s military might have always threatened Bhutan’s territorial integrity, peace and tranquillity from 1958 to 1962 (Kharat, 2005). The 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, which ended the ‘Thirty Years War’, established the norm that rulers would respect one another’s territorial sovereignty. The willingness of states to settle territorial disputes by law rather than by force or use of arms is a remarkable achievement and the basic mission of international law remains the facilitation of peaceful dispute resolution within the existing border (Chesterman, 2011: 1).

### **1.6 Objectives of the Study**

- To examine the security outlook of India-Bhutan friendship for cooperation.
- To analyze the nature of security cooperation existed in ‘Operation All Clear’ and Doklam Crisis.
- To critically examine the significance of ‘Operation All Clear’ and Doklam Crisis in India-Bhutan security cooperation.

### **1.7 Research Questions**

- What are the security perspectives of India-Bhutan friendship cooperation?
- What is the essence of cooperation existing in ‘Operation All Clear’ and Doklam Crisis?
- What are the impediments on the security cooperation of India-Bhutan in terms of ‘Operation All Clear’ and Doklam Crisis?

### **1.8 Methodology**

The method used in this study is descriptive, which analyses the two major events, where both India and Bhutan have engaged in traditional security cooperation. To understand the security cooperation between India and Bhutan, the study focuses on two major events- ‘Operation All Clear’ and Doklam Crisis. The primary sources used in this study include government and other official publications, documents, papers and treaties. The secondary sources are news-papers, published books, magazines, journals, maps, book manuscripts, policy briefs, internet sources and research reports. The tools and techniques like in-depth and unstructured interviews

with the resource persons, citizens of both India and Bhutan, important stakeholders, in terms of Operation All Clear and Doklam Crisis are utilized broadly for this study.

The location and area of the interviews in terms of Operation All Clear was based on the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) of the state of Assam in India and through emails on the Bhutanese side. The interviews were conducted with the civilians of border areas of both India and Bhutan and the participants, i.e., the insurgent groups of India who have currently surrendered. For Doklam Crisis, interviews were based overall through emails on both side of India and Bhutan and the respondents were civilians and some government officials. Due to some confidentiality, Government participants could not respond to the interviews.

The study is divided into five chapters, where, in the first chapter, historical books, journals and treaties, etc., have been utilized. In the second chapter books, articles, government publications have been referred, along with newspaper articles, etc. In the third chapter, maps, newspaper articles, etc., interviews have been conducted. The fourth chapter also includes interviews and newspaper articles, journals, maps, etc. In the fifth chapter overall analysis has been done critically on both 'Operation All Clear' and Doklam Crisis. Some of the response of the interviews from both the previous chapters have also been utilized and analysed in this chapter.

## **1.9 Chapterization**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter presents an overview of security cooperation between India and Bhutan. It also has the structure of the thesis which includes- background, review of literature, knowledge gap, rationale and scope of the study, framework of analysis, objectives of the study, research questions, methodology and chapterization.

### **Chapter 2: Security Perspectives of India and Bhutan: Historical Settings**

This chapter looks at conceptual aspects of security cooperation in terms of traditional security. The chapter has a historical overview of India-Bhutan security cooperation and the important reasons as to why there is cooperation between both the countries. It also discusses the beginning of the security cooperation between India and Bhutan, the signing of treaties and also a brief introduction about the foreign policies of India and Bhutan. This chapter focuses on the security outlooks of both the countries.

### **Chapter 3: India-Bhutan Cooperation in Counter-Insurgency Operation: The Case of ‘Operation All Clear’**

In this chapter, it discusses ‘Operation All Clear’, the first counter-insurgency operation by Bhutan against foreign insurgents. It also discusses the challenges faced by Bhutan in this operation and the factors which led Bhutan to conduct the counter-insurgency operation. This chapter is a descriptive study on the nature of cooperation between India and Bhutan and the significance of this cooperation.

### **Chapter 4: Doklam Crisis and the Changing Dynamics of India-Bhutan Security Cooperation**

This chapter is about the tri-lateral Doklam Crisis, which involved both India and Bhutan along with China. It studies the reasons for cooperation and the involvement of India in the Doklam Crisis which was meant to be an issue between China and Bhutan. This chapter also brings some of the age-old boundary disputes between China and Bhutan and tries to find out the reasons as to why there have been disputes.

### **Chapter 5: A Critical Analysis of ‘Operation All Clear’ and Doklam Crisis in India-Bhutan Security Cooperation**

In this chapter, the focus is on the impacts of ‘Operation All Clear’ and the Doklam Crisis in India and Bhutan’s security cooperation. It analyses the significance of both the incidents in India and Bhutan’s security cooperation. This chapter also discusses critically the nature of cooperation between India and Bhutan during both the incidents. A brief discussion is also done in this chapter about the impacts upon the civilians in the process of security cooperation between India and Bhutan.

### **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

This chapter gives the concluding remarks of the study through a short overview on India-Bhutan Security Cooperation and on ‘Operation All Clear’ and Doklam Crisis. The key findings of the study have been elaborated in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER- 2**

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### **SECURITY PERSPECTIVES OF INDIA AND BHUTAN: HISTORICAL SETTINGS**

## CHAPTER- 2

### SECURITY PERSPECTIVES OF INDIA AND BHUTAN: HISTORICAL SETTINGS

#### 2.1 Introduction

The chapter focuses on the security perspectives of both India and Bhutan. The chapter also examines the historical aspects of India-Bhutan security cooperation and the important reasons as to why there is cooperation between both the countries. The chapter starts from the period when the British East India Company had direct contact with the Kingdom of Bhutan. It also gives a brief introduction about the foreign policies of India and Bhutan and the beginning of the security cooperation between both the countries. The Chinese factor also plays an important role in the relations between India and Bhutan. And therefore, a brief source of history about the China factor is also included in this chapter.

Bhutan is having an important place in India's strategic and economic concerns. The country is an important player in India's 'Neighbourhood First Policy'<sup>6</sup> and 'Act-East Policy'<sup>7</sup> (Borah, 2019: 1). Situated in the Himalayan ranges, Bhutan's welfare and economic development are naturally linked with its big neighbour to the south, particularly with the Indian states of Assam and West Bengal. Broadly, Bhutan's relation with India is shaped by its national interests and geopolitical compulsions (Economic and Political Weekly 1971). Bhutan considers India its most trusted ally. The two countries have a history of close cooperation for more than seven decades. Bhutan's Prime Minister, Tshering Tobgay observed that, the relations between Bhutan and India have really stood the test of time and that both the countries have worked together and both the countries' good relation was founded by their former leaders (Sherpa, 2014: 42).

The relevance of Bhutan to China is due to its strong cultural linkages with the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China. China shares a very lengthy border with India which is 2,167 miles, and many of its stretches are disputed. China has boundary disputes with Bhutan as well. China also has very strong cultural linkages with

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<sup>6</sup><https://www.newdelhitimes.com/indias-neighbourhood-first-policy-well-serves-the-region/>.

<sup>7</sup><https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/blogs/et-commentary/act-east-north-east-unlocking-the-potentials/>.

Bhutan and has been involved in developing infrastructure and providing economic aid to Bhutan. India, with its treaties and agreements, guarantees security to Bhutan (Meena, 2019: 1). The strategic importance of Bhutan to India is the central focus for the defence of India's North-eastern frontier. If China invaded Bhutan, then the Chinese-dominated Bhutan would surround India's position in upper Assam and strategically place the Chinese south of the Himalayas (Belfiglio, 1972:680).

## **2.2 Concepts of Security**

Ensuring security is an important responsibility of any country. National security is defined as the ability of any nation to protect itself from external threats (Roy, 2010: 4). The word security is derived from the Latin word 'Securitas', meaning 'freedom from care'. In the traditional sense, the concept of security is not free from politics or interests associated to it (Pettiford, 1996: 303). Traditionalists, particularly the advocates of the realist school of thought, have defined security as freedom from any objective military threat to the state survival in a predominant anarchic international system (Sulovic, 2010:1-3). Since its beginning, the security study represents the core of International Relations which deals with the issues of war and peace. After the Second World War, security studies have become a synonym for Strategic Studies with a distinct focus on the military sector. In the 1950s and 1960s, the concept of security referred mainly to military threats, national territory and it is considered as the narrow concept of security (Daase, 2010: 26-27). But with the rise of economic and environmental challenges, emergence of new security challenges, risks and threats, emergence of new international actors, the traditional concept of security became narrow (Daase, 2010: 26-27).

In the recent era, an extended concept of security also captures the individual risk of global human rights violations. The proponents of Copenhagen School of Security Studies argues that security dynamics are no longer to be reduced to military political relations of the super powers no matter how important they might be (Sulovic, 2010: 1-3). The concept of security has a much longer history in European thought and can be related to the diverging spheres of internal public safety and external state security in the process of European nation building. The 1950s is a starting point of the concept of security since they represent a time in which the meaning of security narrowed to the greatest possible degree, focusing on the national survival of states

and communities in the face of existential threats such as world wars and nuclear annihilation. External security became the key concept of international politics throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and remained separated from social notions of security. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the meanings of internal and external, national and human, military and economic, territorial and global security have merged into an extended concept of security (Daase, 2010: 26-27).

Security cooperation can be an effective means of maintaining sub-regional and regional peace and stability. It includes programs that train and equip foreign partners, provide professional military education, conduct military exercises, and exchange information. Security cooperation or peacetime military engagement is not a new concept, and it has evolved significantly over the last decade (Dyekman, 2007: 1). Security cooperation approaches attempt to shape state policy-makers' attitudes about security and offer alternatives to realistic balance of power strategies. In this sense, cooperative security approaches attempt to identify and shape motives for state behaviour (Snyder, 1997: 12). Cooperative security is not the same as collective security because the former is designed to ensure that organized aggression does not start and the latter, collective security, is an arrangement for deterring aggression through military preparation (Singh, 2004: 347).

With the end of the cold war between the United States of America and the former Soviet Union, there developed a new kind of security environment in which nation states are inclined to enlarge their conception of security in a world becoming increasingly interdependent in a larger framework (Prasad, 1992: 1). In this discourse, international security has mostly been discussed within the realist school of thought. According to the realist, since there is no sovereign body above the state in the international political system, states must rely on their own military resources to achieve their ends through security cooperation. Whereas, liberals see national interest in just more than military terms and they stress the importance of economic, environmental and technological issues. So according to the liberals, interdependence between states is a critically important feature of world politics (Dunne, et al., 2014: 93-105). States are still ego-centric about their security and they are concerned primarily with absolute gains rather than relative gains. According to the Hobbesian



state of nature, cooperation for joint gain is extremely difficult, since trust is lacking, time horizons are short, and relative power concerns are high (Wendt, 1992: 400).

Another form of security is negative security. Negative security can be understood as ‘security from’, i.e., from a threat and positive security as ‘security to’, i.e., enabling (Gjorv, 2012: 836-837). Negative security is often associated with traditional security, which is rooted in assumptions about a universally defined state and security issues, addressed by a universally agreed upon tool of security, i.e., the military. Negative security is also often associated with the dominant perceptions of security, prevalent within realism in the field of International Relations, often called ‘traditional security’ and it employs an epistemology of fear, focused on the identification of threats and the use of violence, which in turn informs the understanding and practice of security (Gjorv, 2012: 836-37).

### **2.2.a Security cooperation between India and Bhutan**

India and Bhutan have always shared a unique and organic relationship which is often termed as a ‘sacred bond’, largely sustained by regular high level visits and dialogues between the leaders of the two neighbours. Both the countries have mutual interests in diverse areas of cooperation like- security, border management, trade, hydro-power and many more. India’s assistance to Bhutan is more about making it militarily, politically as well as economically self-sufficient (Mahajan, 2018: 1). Security is focused on the state that has been responsible for the safeguard of its community interests and there is a close link between national security, unity and territorial integrity, and it must be safeguarded, almost exclusively, through military capacity (Sánchez, 2017: 232). It was not until Second World War, that the term ‘national security’ acquired its place in the strategic dictionary amidst the traditional terms, such as military affairs, external and military policy, etc., and the term ‘national security’ is even at the present level of social development linked with a sovereign nation state in the sense of protection of its physical integrity (Grizold, 1994: 40).

Due to the normative shift in the concept of security<sup>8</sup>, there is a new security threat which is more subtle, dangerous and difficult to contain as new forces working across borders are beyond the control of their other counterparts while the old military threat still looms largely and it complicates the security situation further especially for the

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<sup>8</sup>Normative shift refers to the changes in the view of a dominant group about something.

smaller states like Bhutan. So, there are both opportunities and challenges arising from both the realist and idealist world orders and the process of globalization. Small states have often been summed up by vulnerability. They have been the objects of conquest by the big powers in order to scramble for dominion during the colonial and cold war periods (Penjore, 2004: 108). Bhutan had never been colonized by a foreign power and so the Bhutanese society has traditionally been sensitive to the issues of security, and preserving its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity has historically been a constant challenge. However, it was the Tibetans and the Mongols from the north and British India from the south, which is today replaced by China and India respectively in terms of its geo-strategic foreign policy. Bhutan fought seven wars in the north and three in the south to protect its territorial sovereignty from 1634 to 1865 (Penjore, 2004: 109).

The protection of sovereignty and territorial integrity of a state from external threats is the focus of traditional security (Acharya, 2014: 492). The assistance given by India towards Bhutan's security and defence arrangements, specifically in training and equipping the Royal Bhutan Army, was prompted by several factors i.e., Bhutan's location in India's strategic defence system, the Chinese occupation of Tibet, the 1962 border war between India and China and the perception of increasing Chinese threat (Choden, 2004: 119). The Bhutanese Government had to end its isolationist policy to accept Indian economic and military assistance because India considered Bhutan as the most vulnerable sector in its strategic defence system. When Bhutan accepted the Indian offer, the Indian Army became responsible for the training and equipping of the Royal Bhutan Army. Due to the Chinese take-over of Tibet and subsequent People's Liberation Army actions there, the Royal Bhutan Army was formed in the 1950s to safeguard the borders of Bhutan from Chinese threat with intense pressure by India. By 1990, the Royal Bhutan Army was a force of 6,000 soldiers (Bhushan, 2010: 1).

### **2.2.b China as a Determinant in India-Bhutan Security Cooperation**

India has come to be a mutual security ally of Bhutan, albeit tacitly and informally, while the Chinese seem to think about the latter as an Indian protectorate (Rej, 2017:1). China having cornered Bhutan in the absence of India, will invariably seek to change territorial facts, and so the balance of forces in the India-Bhutan-China tri-junction will turn in favour of China further jeopardizing the strategically-sensitive

Siliguri Corridor<sup>9</sup>. Also, if India abandons its responsibility toward Bhutan, it will affect the former's other neighbours as India is considered an aspiring hegemony among its neighbours and so, India should not abandon its allies (Rej, 2017:1). Historically, Bhutan has been a peaceful country and its security concerns have been handled in large part by India. China on the other hand, with its economic growth and financial power has been wooing every South Asian country, effectively challenging India's dominance in the region. So, India has to build on the already existing friendship with Bhutan to avoid such a situation with the Himalayan Kingdom (Meena, 2019: 1).

The public opinion of India is to safeguard the weak Himalayan countries from the ambitious Chinese designs in the Himalayas (Saraf, 1968: 287). The concern of India is motivated by the security of the Himalayan countries and to keep away the Chinese influence on them. Thus, China and India entered into rivalry due to the rugged Himalayan borderlands. Due to the high Himalayas which stand to be north of them and slope downward into sub-Himalayan foothills or the Indian plains, the geopolitics of Bhutan is easier for the military mobility from north to south than vice-versa, which gives an added advantage to forces based in Tibet (Singh, 2010: 1285-87). Tibet is not only well connected with China by a network of roads, but also through newly constructed oil pipelines to overcome the problems of logistic supplies and maintenance. If the Tibetan plateau has modernized roads and railway lines, then it will be vulnerable for Bhutan as the Chinese can easily have access on the latter through Tibet in times of war (Singh, 2010: 1285-87).

The concept of Security gets competitive, when it involves the maintenance of people's homeland, their territories beyond the sea, earning the world's respect for them and the maintenance of their economies. It involves asserting one state's will over others, showing a high degree of leadership if not dominance, and displaying a prickly demeanour. This behaviour will almost clash with that of others who define their security in the same way and the problems will not be solved if statesmen believe that their security requires the threatening or attacking of others (Jervis, 1978: 185). The rival states may deploy other kinds of threats against each other's territorial

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<sup>9</sup>The Siliguri Corridor is also known as the Chicken's Neck. It is a narrow stretch of land of about 22 kilometres, located in the Indian state of West Bengal that connects India's north-eastern states to the rest of India, with the countries of Nepal and Bangladesh lying on either side of the corridor.

integrity and domestic political order. These may include environmental, economic and cultural threats (Singh, 2004: 346-47). The Third King of Bhutan Jigme Dorji Wangchuck felt that it was not secure for Bhutan being a small Kingdom between two big and powerful countries because a huge track of northern Bhutan have already been occupied by the Chinese and by Chinese-sent Tibetans (Economic and Political Weekly 1968). Realising that the best way of defending his country is by bringing its people together and making them feel responsible for the defence of their country, the King decided to entrust greater powers to the National Assembly (Economic and Political Weekly 1968).

In a cooperative security system, states identify positively with each other as the responsibility of all (Wendt, 1992: 400). Cooperative security is designed to ensure peace and that, aggression does not happen but it envisions a political climate in which there is little danger of war, and that, can allow policy establishments to give their undivided attention to non-military threats and others (Lhamo & Tshomo, 2018: 1). The main purpose of Bhutanese policy was to obtain an understanding from India that Bhutan's sovereignty should never be left in doubt after India's independence. In fact this was the basis on which Bhutan sought to readjust its relations with India and therefore, assumed that under the Indo-Bhutanese Treaty of 1949, Bhutan had the right to establish diplomatic relations with other nations<sup>10</sup> (Poulose, 1971: 204).

### **2.3 British India's Influence on the Kingdom of Bhutan**

Bhutan shares a border with India on all other sides, while on the northern part, Bhutan shares borders with China. Bhutan is a country which is a frontier of Tibetan and Indian cultures. As mentioned above, Bhutan has had much history to share with India since ancient times. Bhutan, after emerging as a nation state, remained isolated for centuries and the Bhutanese concern for political stability and separate identity was the most compelling reason for their policy of isolationism. This, however, was broken by the advent of British rule in India (Naidu, 1986: 533-34). The British ruled India from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The British dictated the policy to defend India by dominating imperial relations with Russia, Eastern

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<sup>10</sup>According to Ambassador V. Namgyel of Bhutan to India, the former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi accompanied her father Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to Bhutan in 1958. He said that this close tie between the leaders had proved beneficial for Bhutan in long terms because when Bhutan wanted to join the United Nations, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi extended full support.

Mediterranean, and precipitated the invasion of Egypt, as well as subsequent conquests in Eastern Africa (Green, et al., 1985: 15).

Bhutan came into existence under Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal<sup>11</sup> in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as a political unit. The Kingdom of Bhutan is also called as ‘Druk-yul’ which means ‘Land of the Thunder Dragon’ by the Bhutanese. Prior to British rule, India has been a land of small kingdoms ruled by different dynasties. India’s relations with Bhutan go as far back as the 8<sup>th</sup> century of the Christian era when the ancient Kingdom of Kamrup<sup>12</sup> was said to embrace the whole of the present-day Bhutan. In 746 AD the Indian Buddhist monk Guru Padmasambhava who was later known as the Rimpoche went to Bhutan and established the Mahayana Buddhism<sup>13</sup>. Later it became a separate Hindu Kingdom when the Tibetans conquered Bhutan in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The new rulers destroyed all traces of Hindu rule, the people of the country and all that they had left behind in terms of their memorials and more specifically their places of worship (Mehra, 1960: 193-95). The Tibetan Lamas who came later to Bhutan were primarily responsible for the large-scale conversion of Bhutanese into Buddhism and by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Tibetan Lamas established a complete influence over Bhutan and ultimately the Bhutanese have come to look upon Lhasa as their spiritual headquarters (Naidu, 1986: 534).

Bhutan is always known as the land sandwiched between the two Asian giants i.e., China and India (Phuntsho, 2013: 15). Bhutan has been known with different names by its neighbours and the modern name Bhutan is a British legacy (Phuntsho, 2013: 11). Ralph Fitch was perhaps the first Englishman who visited India in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, to have knowledge of the Bhutanese and the trade of their region. He mentioned a country called “Bottan”, but Fitch did not travel to Bhutan although he

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<sup>11</sup>Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651) was a Tibetan lama who unified Bhutan and is believed to have been reborn successively, and each of his successors is known as the Shabdrung. He was also the claimant to the position of Gyalwang Drukpa, the traditional leader of the Drukpa Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism.

<sup>12</sup>Assam was known as Pragjyotisha and later on as Kamarupa in the ancient days. Book-“Origin and Antiquity of Pragjyotisha or Kamarupa”, S.L Baruah (2009), New Delhi, MunshiramManoharlal Publishers.

<sup>13</sup>Mahayana Buddhism spread from India to various other South, East and Southeast Asian countries before being replaced by Theravada Buddhism, Islam, or other religions. Mahayana Buddhism is one of two main existing branches of Buddhism, the other one being Theravada Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism refers to the path of the Bodhisattva seeking complete enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, also called “Bodhisattva Yana”, or the “Bodhisattva Vehicle”.

may have the opportunity of meeting traders from Bhutan in “Couche” (Cooch Behar) (Field, 1962: 340). Bhutan was an extensive territory at the time when the British East India Company took over Bengal in 1757. Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri which are the current districts of the state of West Bengal (India) were part of Bhutan during those times. Bhutanese used to raid the plains of India through Assam (one of the states in India) and Bengal Duars<sup>14</sup>.

In 1772, Bhutan invaded Cooch-Behar which is also at present one of the districts of West Bengal state under India. The Bhutanese kidnapped the Raja of Cooch-Behar and the latter was forced to seek help from the British East India Company (Naidu, 1986: 534). At that time, Warren Hastings was the Governor General of India. Even prior to the invitation from Cooch Behar, the East India Company had the idea of expansionist policy across India and northwards towards Bhutan as the Bhutanese invaders and gangs of Sannyasins<sup>15</sup> ravaged territories under British control (Phuntsho, 2013: 348). The British were interested in establishing trade routes to Tibet through Bhutan and a more distant aspiration was to explore the possibilities of establishing communications via Tibet with China so they interfered on behalf of the Raja of Cooch Behar, while Warren Hastings the Governor General of Bengal readily sent military troops. The establishment of the trade route towards Tibet through Bhutan by the British was considered a threat for China, as the latter had been in competition with the former in the Himalayan region (Phuntsho, 2013: 348).

Bhutan, like Tibet, closed its borders to Europeans after the visit of George Bogle and Hamilton who were bound for Tibet in 1774-1775 and Captain Turner’s commercial mission dispatched by the British to Bhutan also failed along with Saunders in 1783. The frontiers were closed in 1792 (McKay, 2007: 173). Warren Hastings had the opportunity to extend Bengal’s frontier from the north of Cooch Behar up to the Bhutan hills. He valued the friendship of Bhutan more than a natural frontier to the north as he saw Bhutan as a new horizon opening to British trade beyond the snowy peaks. Therefore, when Bhutan asked for an additional fifteen square miles within the Pargana Baikunthapur, he did not mind giving it to Bhutan (Majumdar, 1969: 334).

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<sup>14</sup>Duars or Dooars means doors in Assamese, Maithili, Bengali, Bhojpuri and Magahi. The 18 passages or gateways between the hills in Bhutan and the plains in India are known as Duars.

<sup>15</sup>Religious ascetics, who have renounced the world by performing his own funeral and abandoning all claims to social standing.

British East India Company occupied Assam in 1826 after the first war with Burma. Soon after, the British discovered that the Bhutanese had occupied the Duars in the Darang district of Assam. In order to open Bhutan, Warren Hastings send his envoy Captain Robert Boileau Pemberton (Mehra, 1960: 196). The Company using civil disturbances, like raids and kidnappings as excuses, tried to acquire the Assamese Duars which were under the control of Bhutan. In 1839, Captain Pemberton accompanied by Dr. Griffith and Ensign Blake were sent on a mission to Bhutan with the purpose of making the Bhutanese sign over the Assam Duars to the Company. The Bhutanese refused the Company's request because the Duars, which were the principal means of access for the Bhutanese to the plains for trade were under the control of the Penlop (Governor) of Trongsa, one of the most powerful person in Bhutan at that time (Ahmad, 2013: 71). Also, for Assam, the trade with Tibet and Bhutan were more profitable since the ancient times (Baruah, 2009: 441). After crushing the revolt of 1857, which was known as the Sepoy Mutiny, the British Government took over the responsibility of India from the East India Company. The British Government of India turned its attention more towards Bhutan then on (Labh, 2016: 24).

The British policy towards Bhutan constituted part of the general frontier policy and was governed by its general principles like repression and concession in order to bring the frontier areas into the British sphere of influence and the British imperial system in India and imperialism in their political, commercial and cultural aspects. Like all the other frontier regions, Bhutan was also a scarce and inhospitable region and the Bhutias (the Bhutanese subjects) used to raid the adjoining British territories which obliged the British to follow the disciplinary policy. This policy of Bhutan was criticised both at home and in India because all this culminated during Sir John Lawrence's Viceroyalty into the Bhutan Expedition of 1864-1865 which resulted in partial annexation of Bhutan and subsidising it to bring it effectively into the British sphere of influence (Murty, 1970: 329). Kazi Ugyen Dorji was the Bhutanese Agent in Darjeeling from 1889 to 1916 and he played an important role in shaping British India's frontier relations. He also set the course of Anglo-Bhutanese relations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and he served both his country and the British, he was gifted in diplomatic skills and he helped the British in promoting their imperialistic plans in the Himalayan borderlands. Due to his efforts, the relations between the British and

Bhutan grew from hostile to cordial. This relation has become the source of India-Bhutan Friendship even after the former left the region (Majumdar, 1996: 823).

The principal objective of the Himalayan policy of the British was to strengthen the Indian traditional borders on the north as the British assumed that the main threat came from Russia due to which the Anglo-Afghan war took place during the 1800s. The British Government had suspected that the Tsarist Russia was expanding its influence into Tibet at the invitation of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatsho and through the Buryat monk Dorjiev (Phuntsho, 2012: 122). It was the British strategy to send the Younghusband Mission to Lhasa in 1903-1904 which made China conscious about British designs on Tibet. The aim of the expedition in 1904 to Tibet led by Colonel Francis Younghusband and Jean Claude White (the British Political Officer in Sikkim) was to settle the Tibet-Sikkim border. The British movement into Tibet was bound to invite Chinese displeasure because at that time, China claimed Tibet as its protectorate. The British Government had to go ahead with its Tibetan policy due to the fear of Russia's interest in Tibet since early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Russian interest was secretly backed by China, as China considered Russia a friendly neighbour in comparison to the imperialist Britain. The British Indian Government took the Russian presence in Tibet as a threat to peace in Northern India and so it decided to send a Mission to Tibet under Younghusband instead of a direct action. But China took action on some other front against the Mission (Nayak, 2007: 554).

Lhasa had followed a strong isolationist policy from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century towards the outside world in general and British India in particular. In spite of this, the Younghusband expedition was launched as a full scale invasion of Tibet and it turned out to be disastrous because Tibet and the British were caught in war instead (Phuntsho, 2012: 122). The Younghusband expedition was set at the time of Viceroyalty of Lord Curzon and Bhutan was dragged in between British India and Tibet. But due to the Trongsa Penlop Ugyen Wangchuck's persuasions, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's court officials agreed to take part in negotiation and signed an agreement with the British (Ahmad, 2013:100-02). Having won the favour of the British and also the Tibetans in dealing with the Younghusband expedition, Ugyen Wangchuck's fortunes rose. The British sent Jean Claude White, the Political Officer in Sikkim to honour Ugyen Wangchuck with the titles of Knight Commander of the Indian Empire (Phuntsho, 2013: 508).



In 1905, after his brief visit to the Maharaja of Bhutan, Jean Claude White, the then Political Officer to Sikkim, advised the British Indian Government to get a new treaty on Bhutan's external relations. The British policy towards Bhutan was also based on the Chinese threat to India's North-eastern borders (Poulose, 1971: 196-97). Under the British pressure, and by the elected vote from the Council of Lamas, Abbots, Councillors and the Governors of Bhutan, the Trongsa Penlop Ugyen Wangchuck was enthroned as the first hereditary monarch of Bhutan in 1907. Until 1907, Bhutan was a theocratic political system evolved by the Shabdrung with endless civil wars ravaging the country (Mathew, 2006: 1311-12). Bhutan suffered from internal wars since the beginning because each of the four original provinces was ruled over by Penlops, competing with each other for an extension of power and influence. Whoever proved the strongest became the temporal ruler (Levi, 1959: 493). The new monarchy has brought an era of peace and stability in Bhutan (Labh, 2016: 13).

Later the Russian thrust was neutralised by the Anglo-Russian Convention of St. Petersburg in 1907, which abstained both the powers from intervention in the internal administration of Tibet as it was the concern of the Himalayan region. Although the Russian threat from the north disappeared, the more constantly recurring threat to India's North and North-eastern Frontiers was from China, as it always held the view that the Himalayan region was within her natural sphere. But Great Britain could not do anything against the Chinese attempt to take Tibet into her grip because Chang Yin Tang, the Chinese High Commissioner at Lhasa, made it specific that the Himalayan region was under China's natural sphere (Poulose, 1971: 195).

Geopolitics of the region made it inevitable for Bhutan to make British India as the primary focus by following the principle of optimal isolation. The British policy towards Bhutan was based on the Chinese threat to India's North-eastern border. Sir Charles Bell, who succeeded Jean Claude White, negotiated the 1910 Treaty with Bhutan. British Indian Government wrote to the Secretary of State of India for permission to secure the control of Bhutan's external relations by a treaty. The India Office in its communication to the Foreign Office was also equally concerned about China establishing suzerainty over Bhutan because it would have its effect on the neighbouring areas (Poulose, 1971: 196-97). Except for a brief period in the 1910-1912, when Chinese Army occupied Tibet and moved towards south of the

Himalayan frontier<sup>16</sup>, China was in no position to exert any influence in this region (Rose, 1974: 192).

As a counter to Chinese moves, the British decided to revise the Treaty of Sinchu La and place the relations between Bhutan and India on a firm footing. As a result, the Treaty of Punakha was signed on 8<sup>th</sup> of January agreeing not to interfere in the internal affairs of Bhutan as long as the Bhutanese accepted British advice on its external relations. As per the Treaty of 1910, the British Government agreed to increase the annual subsidy granted to Bhutan under the Treaty of Sinchu La of 1865 in terms of the ceded territories from 50,000 rupees to 100,000 from the 10<sup>th</sup> of January and undertook not to interfere in the internal administration of Bhutan. The Bhutanese Government agreed to be guided by the advice of the British Government in regard to its external relations. The Treaty of Punakha regulated Bhutanese foreign relations and stopped the growth of Chinese influence in Bhutan and brought it into closer cooperative relations with the Government of India (Naidu, 1986: 535).

King Ugyen Wangchuck made friendship with the British as his first order of business and the response to that was encouraging as the terms proposed by the British were interpreted by the Bhutanese Government as the best possible under the circumstances. The British recognized Bhutan's internal sovereignty and did not insist upon the establishment of a residency in Bhutan as they had in Nepal and Sikkim. The British Political Officer in Gangtok (Sikkim) who was allowed occasionally to visit Bhutan was accredited to Bhutan formally only under carefully circumscribed conditions that denied him the opportunity to exert an undue influence in internal Bhutanese politics which was a unilateral act on New Delhi's part, never recognized by the Bhutanese authorities (Rose, 1974:192). King Ugyen Wangchuck took his relations with British India to a new level in Bhutan's southerly relations (Phuntsho, 2013: 525).

In 1911, King Ugyen Wangchuck travelled to Delhi along with thirteen officials from his court to attend the durbar organised for King George V. Prior to that, King Ugyen Wangchuck had already met King George V at Calcutta when he was the Prince of Wales. By this time, the relations between British India and Bhutan were already strong. King Ugyen Wangchuck was adorned with the Grand Cross of the Indian

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<sup>16</sup>In 1910, the Chinese Governor of Sechwan occupied Lhasa and laid claims to Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan.

Empire in 1922 (Phuntsho, 2013: 527). Bhutan was not a native state under British rule like the other princely states. But King Ugyen Wangchuck was treated like one of the native princes during the Delhi durbar in 1911. In order to be called as a native state under British suzerainty, Bhutan received neither financial nor military benefits from the government of India which the other princely states enjoyed. And yet, Bhutan was not looked upon as a fully sovereign state by the British and even the King was fully referred to as the Maharaja, a title specifically used for the Indian princes. Also the King's relationship with the British was not one on an equal standing. So, the British had no responsibility to be concerned about Bhutan's situation after their withdrawal from India. The existent status and approaching Indian independence gave rise to many questions about Bhutan's future (Phuntsho, 2013: 559-60).

Bhutan was described from 1924 as a state under British suzerainty, but not an Indian state like the other princely states of India. Bhutan's future was a matter of natural concern and interest, for both the countries (Tobgye, 2019: 1). King Ugyen Wangchuck died in 1926 after ruling for nearly twenty years and he was succeeded by his son Jigmi Wangchuck in March 1927 (Ahmad, 2013: 106). Bhutan continued to follow its isolationist policy and did not open its borders to the outside world nor appoint any representatives of foreign governments in its country (Labh, 2016: 29). Bhutan was kept out of the Council of States of Federal Legislature which came into existence as per the Government of India Act of 1935. Because of the status of Bhutan in its relations with the British Indian Government, the Government of India Act of 1935 did not make any changes in the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of Bhutan. The British also maintained the policy of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of Bhutan till they left the subcontinent in 1947 (Dogra, 2015: 113).

In 1946, the Bhutanese presented a Memorandum of Understanding to the British Cabinet Mission to confirm its separate identity from other princely states in India (Bose, 2003: 71). But Bhutan's request for a meeting with the Cabinet Mission was turned down. The Cabinet mission assured that Bhutan's position would be given careful consideration before the transfer of power in Indian subcontinent. Since the people of Bhutan have no affinities with the people of India and that they have developed only economic relations with India as well as with Sikkim and Tibet, the Bhutanese do not wish to join the Indian Union. Nehru also recognized that Bhutan

was not like other Indian states but was independent under the protection of India. So, he reassured that Bhutan's future position in relation to India would be determined through mutual consultation, and there was no question of compulsion in the matter. The British Government could only offer help to Bhutan in negotiating fresh treaty with India (Chawla, 2019).

#### **2.4 Independent India's Security Relations with the Kingdom of Bhutan**

Foreign policy is the system of activities evolved by communities for changing the behaviour of other states and for adjusting their own activities to the international environment (Modelski, 1962; Khanna, 2007:1). The size of the country is also one of the determinants of foreign policy along with geography, history and traditions, raw materials and natural resources, national morale, political traditions and organisations, military strength, and international milieu (Labh, 2016:31; Modelski, 2007: 7-10). The foreign policy of a state means its behaviour with reference to the environment outside its territory. It differs from international relations in that it classifies from the point of view of the single state rather than from that of the world. It results from the continuous effort of the community to modify the external environment in order to fit its own interests and also to modify its interests in order to fit in the changing world environment (Wright, 1930: 910).

Bhutan's foreign policy and external relations were shaped by the basic principles surrounding the Younghusband expedition into Tibet by the British Government in 1903-1904 and the treaty between Bhutan and British India signed in 1910. After British left the Indian subcontinent, the Bhutanese had little scope to initiate foreign policy matters due to the political situation in the Himalayan region (Rose, 1974: 192). India, on the other hand, has its foreign policy formulated through the development of history as the victim of British colonialism and imperialism and her non-violent movement under the leadership of the nationalist leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Maulana Azad, etc., along with the legacy of the ancient civilization and culture. India also formulated its foreign policy through the teachings of Kautilya, the realist and from the Buddhist traditions of Emperor Ashoka the Great, who advocated peace, freedom and equality (Khanna, 2007: 18).

Bhutan's major determinants in its foreign policy are Chinese Occupation of Tibet, China-India border disputes, policy of accommodation and conciliation towards China and India's friendliness and Bhutan's domestic milieu (Labh, 2016: 31-51). The determinants of India's foreign policy can be summed up as; geography, history and tradition, economic and military factors, ideological factor, charisma of Jawaharlal Nehru, and the international situation (Khanna, 2007: 17). Bhutan's geopolitical position has an important influence in its foreign policies. Bhutan is landlocked between China and India and is fully dependent to India for its economic survival. All these create obstacles in establishing independent foreign policy for Bhutan (Sharma & Sharma, 2016: 366). Bhutan is a landlocked country and therefore has access to the sea or other third country only through China or India. The important factor why China is interested in Bhutan is because the latter has under its control a number of Himalayan passes which are overland routes to both China and India. Bhutan also acts as a strategic buffer for the Siliguri Corridor which is a narrow strip of land around 20 kilometres long and 60 kilometres wide and it connects the North-eastern part of India with the rest of the Indian mainland (Richards, 2015: 5).

After 1945 a traumatic shock awaited the Bhutanese when it finally became clear that the British Raj was coming to an end in the Indian subcontinent and that the Royal Government of Bhutan would have to seek an accommodation with an independent India. As Bhutan had remained aloof from political developments in the south, the Royal Government of Bhutan was not sure what they could expect from the newly independent India (Rose, 1974: 193). Eventually, Bhutan sent its delegation in 1946 to New Delhi for consultations about its future status in the context of transfer of power and submitted a note to the Foreign Secretary of the Government of India. Eventually, the matter was referred to Sir B. N. Rau, the Constitutional Adviser to the Government of India who gave the opinion in favour of the continuation of the status quo (Poulose, 1971: 119). The British left the Indian subcontinent in 1947, dividing the country into two parts, i.e., India and Pakistan. India inherited from British the strategic doctrine which is based on three pillars: safeguarding the northwest frontier of India through which successive invading armies had made inroads into Indian territory, preventing the areas that are within India's strategic policy from falling under the control of foreign powers and ensuring the command of the Indian Ocean and its environs (Ahsan & Chakma, 1993: 1044).

The philosophy of extended frontiers has been followed by India ever-since the period of British. This extended frontiers means that a threat was to be met as far from the Indian borders as possible and so India being in a defensive position vis-a-vis China on the Himalayan frontier, is always sensitive about keeping an exclusive influence on the Himalayan states south of Tibet (Ahsan & Chakma, 1993: 1044). India's main intention after its independence in 1947 was to proclaim a policy of peace, friendliness and goodwill to all nations and particularly to China, its biggest neighbour (Poulose, 1971: 119). There was never any question in the minds of Indian leaders after independence about Bhutan whether it would have to remain under India's control. The question was only in what form, because legally, Bhutan was neither under British nor a princely state, but was independent (Levi, 1959: 493). According to Swati Chawla, on 15<sup>th</sup> of May 1946, Arthur J. Hopkinson, the last British Political Officer in Sikkim, advised the Indian leaders about Bhutan's strategic importance because he was watchful of the developments beyond the Tibetan Plateau. He said that India needs a friendly and contented Bhutan for its interest within the Indian rather than the Chinese orbit and its negligence would soon drive Bhutan and much else besides into the open arms of China, and bring a foreign power, like Russia, to India's doors (Chawla, 2019: 1).

The Government of India assumed the role of a successor to the British from August 1947, and it was with New Delhi that the Himalayan states had to reach an agreement. Nepal, Sikkim and Tibet signed the "standstill agreements"<sup>17</sup> which was on a temporary basis under which relations with India were continued on the same basis as before until new treaties could be negotiated. Bhutan and India did not sign a "standstill agreement" as such but both governments operated as before and the Bhutanese Agent in India continued to function in his previous activities and the Indian Political Officer in Gangtok was still accredited to Bhutan as well (Rose, 1974: 193). In a big turning point, in 1947, at the invitation of the Indian Prime Minister

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<sup>17</sup>A standstill agreement was a bilateral agreement signed between the newly independent countries of India and Pakistan and the princely states of the British Indian Empire prior to their integration in the new dominions. The draft of the standstill agreement was formulated on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1947 by the Political department of the British Indian government and it provided that all the administrative arrangements which existed between the British Crown and the state would continue unaltered between the signatory dominion (India or Pakistan) and the princely state, until new arrangements were made.

Jawaharlal Nehru, Bhutan had sent its delegation to participate at the Asian Regional Conference (Malik & Sheikh, 2016: 44-45).

After the British departure, the intentions of the Bhutanese Government were the restoration of sovereign status, and to negotiate for a renewed treaty with India in this regard. The negotiation for the new treaty began in the summer of 1949, and its objectives were simple: recognition of its independence and restoration of the Dewangiri hill strip on the frontier with India (Ahsan & Chakma, 1993: 1043). The Indian Government was willing to sign an agreement that incorporated the essential provisions of the 1910 Treaty and also to give favourable consideration to Bhutan's territorial claims. The Bhutanese delegation accepted the Indian proposal with little debate and a treaty was signed on 8<sup>th</sup> of August 1949. The treaty recognized Bhutan's independence but also included the clause of the 1910 Treaty under which the Royal Government agreed to accept Indian guidance on foreign policy and the Dewangiri strip was restored to Bhutan, also the annual Indian subsidy to the Royal Government was increased to 500,000 rupees (Rose, 1974: 193).

The objective of India for signing the Treaty of 1949 was to protect her strategic interests due to the growing communist movement in China. The Treaty of 1949 was also called the 'Treaty of Perpetual Peace and Friendship' (Malik & Sheikh, 2016: 45-46). In April 1949, when delegation-level talks at Delhi were going on for the India-Bhutan Treaty of Perpetual Peace and Friendship, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru offered to make Bhutan either part of the Indian Union but remain an autonomous state; or to have an alliance with India, making it responsible for Bhutan's defence, external affairs and communications. But the Bhutanese strongly resisted saying that they were not a protectorate. In the end, communications and defence were left out from the draft treaty, which was finalised on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1949 at Darjeeling. Article II of the treaty says that, there will be no interference in the internal administration of Bhutan, and it agreed to be guided by the advice of the Indian government in its external relations. It also mentioned that both nations would consult each other closely in foreign and defence affairs. It is also recorded that in 1958 Nehru stated in the Indian Parliament that any attack on Bhutan will be considered as an attack on India, to which the Bhutanese Prime Minister objected (Mehta, 2018).

Bhutan was determined to stay isolated from the other countries. However, it was compelled to come out of its isolationist policy because of the geo-strategic developments particularly when the Chinese troops annexed Tibet and created threats to its borders. Due to this, Bhutan had to build relations with India and the relations between India and Bhutan have evolved over the decades with mutual loyalty and trust (Bhutia, 2021). From January 1968 to 2018, it has been fifty years since diplomatic relations between Bhutan and India were established. So, in 2018, the Golden Jubilee of the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the two countries was celebrated (Royal Bhutan Embassy, New Delhi, 2021).

The India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty of 1949 formalized relations between India and Bhutan for the post British Raj. According to Article II of this treaty, ‘the Government of Bhutan agreed to be guided by the advice of the Government of India in regard to its external relations’, thus stipulating that Bhutan was to surrender its freedom of conducting foreign relations with the neighbouring states to India, accepting the latter’s special commitment in the region (Naidu, 1986: 535). This was partly in keeping with the spirit of Bhutan’s relations with British India enshrined in the Treaty of Sinchu La in 1865 and renewed in the Treaty of 1910. But its main aim was to keep Bhutan free from the regional power politics, especially China’s policy to absorb Tibet. Bhutan opted for India’s guidance and protection rather than choosing the Nepali model due to its political aims and the need to preserve its cultural and institutional identity (Choudhury, 1981: 476). The Treaty of 1949 was also intended to be replacing the imperial relationship that existed between British India and Bhutan (Naidu, 1986: 535).

Bhutan did not follow the Nepal model. Nepal wanted to keep both China and India at arm’s length either by wooing them or by other means of political opportunism. Instead, Bhutan opted for India’s guidance and protection although a pressure group at Thimphu had worked persistently to impose the Nepal model on Bhutan too. The Third King of Bhutan Jigme Dorji Wangchuk (1952-1972), and his Prime Minister, Jigme Dorji, successfully withstood that pressure, because the reality was different at that time (Choudhury, 1981: 476) The Third King of Bhutan, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, who ascended the Throne in 1952, and Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, were the main architects of India and Bhutan’s cooperation which has been



continued till today. King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck also made a state visit to India as the Chief Guest of India's Republic Day celebrations (Tobgye, 2019: 1).

The Article II, which mentioned about the non-interference of the Government of India in the internal matters of Bhutan and on its part, was a mutual understanding between both the countries. It can also be assumed that both the countries agreed upon this article for their own benefits as Bhutan agreed to be guided by the Government of India in its external affairs. (Mohanty, 2017: 1). This decision was taken accordingly through the Article II of the 1949 Indo-Bhutan Treaty which specified that Thimphu would be guided by India in its conduct of external relations. The guidance of the external relations of Bhutan by India led to the security arrangements between both the countries. Thimphu sought help from India in times of need (Mukherjee, 2014: 1).

When the new Friendship Treaty was signed on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2007, India and Bhutan re-negotiated the 1949 Treaty of Friendship months before the first democratic elections were held at Bhutan in December 2007-March 2008. A new Article II mentioned cooperating closely on issues relating to national security, including neither country would allow the use of its territory for activities harmful to national security and interest of the other. The clause on Bhutan agreeing to be guided in external relations by India was removed, but India being responsible for the defence of Bhutan and Indian Army's operational plans included defence of Bhutan. India being responsible for the defence of Bhutan was not backed by any Memorandum of Understanding. India has been aiding Bhutan as a protector, either for its security benefits or out of certain normative principles (Mehta, 2018: 5).

#### **2.4.a China Factor in India-Bhutan Relations**

China had always held the view that the Himalayan region was within her natural sphere of influence and even considered Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan as Union of China by blending of the five colours and compared the position of these countries to that of the molar teeth side by side in a man's mouth (Poulose, 1971: 195-96). The Chinese Government refused to recognize the boundary line drawn by the British previously and claimed that the latter had unilaterally imposed it on the Chinese authorities (Mohanty, 2017: 1). China followed the active policy whenever she was powerful enough realising the importance of obtaining a footing in these countries. China claimed a shadowy suzerainty over Bhutan, without any support or evidence

because both the Bhutanese and the British never recognised the Chinese suzerainty. The Chinese Premier, Zhou En-Lai also gave a statement that China was willing to live together in friendship with Sikkim and Bhutan without committing aggression against each other and that China had always respected the proper relations between these small Himalayan Kingdoms and India (Poulose, 1971: 195-96).

The Communist China has also propagated the idea that the high plateau of Tibet is like the palm of the hand along with Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and North-East Frontier Agency as the five fingers (Saraf, 1968: 287). China has the palm under its control after its conquest of Tibet and now it wants the strategic five fingers without which the palm is not very useful. It is also said that along with the conquest of Tibet, the liberation of Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan will be followed by the creation of a federation of Himalayan States which are often described as the four teeth of the Chinese dragon to grind its way to the southern seas (Saraf, 1968: 287). The objective behind the Chinese campaign was to expand its influence across the mountain passes of Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan so that it might gain access to the fertile Himalayan valleys, the Gangetic plains and even right up to the Indian Ocean (Gupta, 1968: 261). The Chinese Communist Government regarded all the adjacent areas as an important part of their security due to which Mao Zedong, in 1930's gave a statement that the imperialist powers had taken away many Chinese dependent states and part of its territories, also Bhutan was mentioned in it. Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru accused Peking of aggression, and declared that the Chinese are motivated by the pride and arrogance of power. He also confirmed India's determination to defend Bhutan and Sikkim (Gupta, 1968: 261).

According to its treaties with Sikkim and Bhutan, India was responsible for the protection of the borders of Sikkim and Bhutan and of the territorial integrity of these two States. India declared that any aggression against Bhutan and Sikkim will be considered as an aggression against India (Poulose, 1971: 201). Bhutan had been closed to the outside world till the late 1950s. Bhutan was forced to strengthen its ties with its neighbour to the south i.e., India due to the political disturbances in the neighbouring Tibet (Shah, 1989: 818). Bhutan followed a policy of isolation to preserve its independence and distinct identity and its geography, and to protect it and allow it to apply this policy successfully during the colonial years. But the strategic

developments in the Himalayan region when China occupied Tibet in 1950 and the way it suppressed the Tibetan revolt in 1959 disturbed Bhutan greatly. This led Bhutan to re-think about its age-old policy of isolation. The security interests of China and India are the main factors in determining foreign policy options for Bhutan. The shifts in the power equation between China and India will always have a negative effect on Bhutan's foreign policy considerations and at the same time that it consolidates and preserves its own national independence. Bhutan has used its foreign policy options very successfully in moving from a semi-protectorate to a modern nation-state (Ahsan & Chakma, 1993: 1045).

In 1954, when Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru visited King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck the Third King of Bhutan, he conveyed the message to the latter that India was friendly with China and there was no reason to think that there would be any conflict between India and China. Nehru also pointed out that the foreign affairs of Bhutan were a vital matter for India and as Bhutan is now a fully independent nation, whatever happens in Bhutan remains vital to India (Arpi, 2018: 1). The territorial dispute between China and India first became known in 1954, but was originally minimized and concealed by both sides (Pringsheim, 1963: 474). On 29<sup>th</sup> April 1954, both China and India signed an agreement related to trade between the Tibetan region of China and India. According to this treaty, India surrendered its extra-territorial rights in Tibet and accepted China's full sovereignty over Tibet, gave up the right to station Indian army units in Yatung, Gyantse, rationalised arrangement for border trade and pilgrimage and also surrendered its control over post and telegraph administration in Tibet. This treaty also included the five principles or the 'Panchsheel' along with the visits of Chinese Premier Zhou En Lai to India in June 1954 and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to China in October 1954. In the 'Panchsheel' agreement, both the leaders have agreed that Tibet is part of the People's Republic of China (Khanna, 2007:115).

The official Chinese statements often gave the impression that the Chinese regarded the three Himalayan Kingdoms of Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal as parts of China which had been lost to British imperialism. In the book titled "Short History of Modern China", published in 1954 by the Foreign Languages Bureau in Peking, the Himalayan Kingdoms of Sikkim, Nepal and Bhutan were presented as part of China.

The Chinese followed up all this by starting to build roads along the Bhutanese border. Prime Minister Nehru paid a hurried visit to Bhutan on the back of a mule since there was no direct road from the south during those times, passing through Sikkim and the beautiful Chumbi Valley in Tibet. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru advised the young Bhutanese King, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, who was then hardly 28 years old, to introduce modern reforms in the country (Economic and Political Weekly, 1971).

Again in 1958, the magazine, "China Pictorial", printed a map showing a part of Bhutan within China's borders. The Tshogdu (National Assembly) of Bhutan objected and asked India to take up the matter with China on behalf of the Bhutanese Government. This revealed the extent to which Bhutan traditionally had depended on India for the conduct of its external affairs on the basis of Article II of the Indo-Bhutanese Treaty of 1949 (Ahsan & Chakma, 1993: 1043). Along with Bhutan, some of the Indian territories were also shown as part of China in the maps published in the "China Pictorial". The area of about 36,000 square miles in the North-eastern region of India and about 12,000 square miles in the North-western part of India were shown as part of China (Khanna, 2007: 115). Later when India complained about it, Peking told New Delhi that these maps were the reproduction of the old maps of the Kuomintang Government and that the present Chinese Government had no time to undertake the survey of the Chinese borders and so the survey was pending as the present Chinese Government was not interested in making any changes in the boundary. This led to the beginning of the border dispute between China and India (Khanna, 2007: 115).

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru declared at Paro in September 1958 that any attack on Bhutan would be treated as an aggression against India. Although this statement was not formalized in any agreement or treaty, it was made in the context of the strategic vulnerability of West Bengal and Assam, India's eastern provinces, and Bhutan's common frontier with Tibet and its proximity to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) have been the main considerations (Choudhury, 1981: 476-77). Again, in 1958, at Paro, Prime Minister Nehru in his speech declared that 'some may think that since India is a great and powerful country and Bhutan a small one, India might wish to exert pressure on Bhutan. It is therefore necessary to make it clear that the wish of the

Indian Government is for Bhutan to remain an independent country, choosing their own way of life, and taking the path of progress according to their will. At the same time both India and Bhutan should live with mutual goodwill' (Letho, 1994: 54). He also said that, both India and Bhutan are members of the same Himalayan family and should live as friendly neighbours helping each other. Freedom of both Bhutan and India should be safeguarded so that none from outside can harm it (Letho, 1994: 54).

At the Time of Tibet's occupation, the Chinese also occupied eight Bhutanese enclaves- Khangri, Tarchen, Tsekhori, Diraphu, Dzong Tuphu, Jangche, Chakip and Kocha (Saikia, 2014: 1). These enclaves have been under Bhutanese administration for the last three hundred years. In 1959 the Bhutanese Assembly pointed out to the Government of India that in some of its latest maps, territories of north and east Bhutan were shown by China as part of Tibet. Bhutan wanted to negotiate directly with China for resolving the China-Bhutan border dispute, but India objected such a move from Bhutanese side (Saikia, 2014: 1).

Shakya also mentions that in the 1950s, China had negotiated and settled most of its land borders, but could not complete its discussions with Bhutan as India wanted to negotiate on behalf of Bhutan. But the Chinese refused to negotiate through India as China wanted to have direct negotiations with Bhutan (Shakya, 2017: 1). The Government of India, in its notes of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> August 1959, requested the Chinese Government to restore the rightful authority of the Bhutanese Government over the eight enclaves and also protested against the publication and circulation of the invalid map (Economic and Political Weekly, 1971). In March 1959, when India granted asylum to the Dalai Lama who fled from Tibet, China considered this an 'enemy-like' act. China also charged India of being expansionist although India advised the Dalai Lama not to organise any anti-China resistance on the Indian soil. As it already recognised Tibet as part of China, India did not interfere in the developments of Tibet and in their aspirations for autonomy although it sympathised with the Tibetan cause. The China-India rivalry was formalised with the granting of asylum to the Dalai Lama though India claimed that its action was on humanitarian ground (Khanna, 2007: 116-17).

India and Bhutan both had strong impacts of the Chinese occupation of Tibet. The assembling of the Chinese troops near Bhutan's northern border alarmed the

Bhutanese authorities and so the latter withdrew their representatives from Lhasa and sealed off their border with Tibet (Labh, 2016: 41). King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck wanted to be part of the 1960-62 negotiations between China and India over the border dispute, but Nehru had turned down his request. But the Chinese continued to make unofficial encroachments to Bhutan. In 1961, the King of Bhutan declared that Bhutan had no desire to enter into direct negotiations with China and that Bhutan did not want to be either friends or enemies of China. The King also added that Bhutan being a sovereign independent Kingdom has the right to establish direct diplomatic relations with any country (Belfiglio, 1972: 683).

A misunderstanding arose between India and Bhutan in May 1960, over a map which was released by the Indian side. According to Bhutan, the map had not shown its border with India as an international one. So, the boundary strip maps between the two countries were signed. After this incident, the Bhutanese National Assembly (Tshogdu) argued that it was time for Bhutan to have direct diplomatic relations with other countries against the Article II of the 1949 treaty (Shubham, 2014: 1). During the Sino-Indian war of 1962, the People's Liberation Army of China intervened in Bhutanese territory. These incidents further increased Bhutan's fears and resulted in threats being posed to Bhutan's territorial integrity, internal stability and its political independence (Kharat, 2014: 88).

Bhutan remained neutral during the Sino-Indian war as it followed a cautious policy towards China, and wanted to avoid Chinese hostility (Labh, 2016: 41). Again during the 1962 Sino-Indian war, some of the Indian troops had crossed into the Bhutanese territory, to which Bhutan complained to the Indian Government that Bhutan is a sovereign state and so the King refused to offer base to the Indian troops for defence purposes. Bhutan took a position that the 1949 Treaty was not a defence pact (Shubham, 2014: 1). Although Bhutan had remained neutral during the Sino-Indian war in 1962, Bhutan made its south-eastern part a safe retreat for the Indian army after they were annihilated by the People's Liberation Army of China (Mukherjee, 2014: 1). After the defeat of India in the 1962 war, Bhutan started to doubt the ability of India as its protector against China (Stobdan, 2014: 7).

During the Sino-Indian war of 1962, China launched a surprise attack on India in the North-East Frontier Agency and Ladakh and cut across Bhutanese territory to attack

the rear of the Indian army in the Kameng district of North-East Frontier Agency. At that time, Bhutan had no defence structure to stop the advancing Chinese troops. So the Chinese trespassing had remained as a strong impact in the Bhutanese mind due to which the final signal for military cooperation with India was made-up. In early 1962, India sent a military mission to Bhutan in order to train a small traditional Bhutanese Army at the request of the Government of Bhutan. With Lungtenphu as its headquarters, the Bhutanese Army was formed and trained in guerrilla warfare with a militia of about 10,000 equipped with light infantry weapons and modern arms. There was hardly any heavy artillery. The Royal Bhutanese Army was expected to offer resistance to the invading Chinese army while waiting for other friendly countries who will be intervening on its behalf (Economic and Political Weekly, 1971). Bhutan had more fear of China and had less confidence in India's ability to defend it but at the same time, expanded its relations with India (Arpi, 2014: 1).

When Bhutan decided to come out of isolationism, India helped it by financing the first two five-year plans of Bhutan. India emerged as the largest single donor ever since Bhutan launched its first five-year plan in 1961. The Indian government is also involved in many projects with Bhutan, like hydropower plants, cement plants, roads, setting up of petroleum storage at Deothang in Bhutan, etc. India also aided in Project Dantak<sup>18</sup> launched in 1961, which made a major contribution to Bhutan's socio-economic development and also the Paro airfield, microwave links with the outside world, broadcasting station, equipments of the Chukha project, and facilities in education and health. Bhutan has 16 entry and exit points for trade with other countries except with the Peoples' Republic of China (Padma, 2017: 159-60).

India got involved in Bhutan since 1962 due to its own strategic requirements as Bhutan is a buffer between the former and China. India also supported Bhutan to have an independent identity in the international forum and helped in building its bilateral relationship with other parts of the world along with its entry as a member of the Colombo Plan in 1962, which gave Bhutan an international status for the first time (Padma, 2017: 159). During the 1965 war between India and Pakistan, Bhutan gave full support to India and was the only neighbouring country of the latter to assure every possible help (Roy, 2010: 103).

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<sup>18</sup>Project Dantak is one of the oldest projects of border road organization raised in 1961 for the construction of roads in Bhutan and also helped in other works throughout Bhutan.

In 1966, China occupied the Doklam area in Bhutan and the People's Liberation Army again conducted a cross border incursion into the Bhutanese territories along with the Tibetan herders (Arpi, 2014: 1). In July 1966, the King of Bhutan and India's External Affairs Minister Dinesh Singh discussed the entry of Bhutan into the United Nations. The King believed that Bhutan met the requirements to be a member of the United Nations (Belfiglio, 1972: 683). In 1968, when the Bhutanese King visited India, the then President of India, Zakir Hussain told the King that the Government of India would like the Bhutanese people to consider India as a 'second home away from home'. This sentence gave some encouragement to the friendship between India and Bhutan; while the King also assured that there was no misunderstanding, dispute or argument between both India and Bhutan. The factor which led to such a strong bond between India and Bhutan was the apprehensions about its giant neighbour China. Bhutan moved more closely towards India due to the fear of being annexed by China (Roy, 2010: 103).

#### **2.4.b Bhutan in International Forums**

According to Bhutan, the guiding principles of its state policies are to promote goodwill and promote cooperation with other nations, to respect the international laws, treaties and obligations, and to encourage the settlement of disputes by peaceful means in order to promote international peace and security (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Royal Government of Bhutan, 2019). In 1968, Bhutan attended the United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) session in New Delhi and barred unauthorized foreigners, including Indians, from entering into its territory. In 1969, Bhutan introduced its own currency and in 1970 established its own Foreign Affairs Department (Shubham, 2014: 1). With the help of India, Bhutan also became a member of the Universal Postal Union in 1969. On 8<sup>th</sup> of January 1968, India's residential embassy was established in Thimphu and formal diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan began with the appointment of a Special Officer of India to Bhutan and the resident representatives were exchanged on 17<sup>th</sup> of May 1971 (Tobgye, 2019: 1).

India exempted Bhutan from opening diplomatic offices at Bonn, London, New York and Paris in order to issue visas to encourage tourism in the country, and allowed Bhutan to resume trade with Tibet. This was done by India since Bhutan was to be guided by India in its external affairs according to the Article II of the 1949



Friendship Treaty (Roy, 2010: 106). After Bhutan established diplomatic relations with Nepal in June 1983 and in 1985, it formed formal relations with Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, Netherlands, etc. Through this, both India and Bhutan made it clear on taking liberal actions on the basis of the Article II of the 1949 treaty (Roy, 2010: 107).

In 1970, the King asked Indian Government to sponsor Bhutan for membership in the United Nations and the former agreed to the King's request in 1971. The King told the newsmen in April 1971 at New Delhi that he was satisfied with the 1949 treaty with India and that India would continue to look after the external relations of Bhutan even though the latter was now a member of the United Nations. The King also said that it was not compulsory for Bhutan to vote with India but sometimes they could vote due to the similarities of their policies. Bhutan planned to have only two missions abroad, at the United Nations headquarters and at New Delhi. Bhutan also allowed an Indian Foreign Mission in Thimphu, the only one in the country at that time (Belfiglio, 1972: 683).

Bhutan began to gradually operate at the global level in an effort to expand its range of foreign policy operations after joining the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985. At the regional level, SAARC was useful for Bhutan because through it Bhutan could expand its foreign relations with South Asian neighbours without causing offence to India as per the treaty of 1949, Article II. SAARC became the safeguard for Bhutan to increase its international contacts against the possibilities of external interference especially in its internal affairs. This is because SAARC unanimously recommends the principles of non-interference in domestic and international affairs of other nations, no matter how small or weak a country may be (Kharat, 2014: 88-92). Bhutan always favoured these principles as it is the foreign policy strategy in the United Nations or the Non-Alignment Movement. So, Bhutan has decided to use SAARC as a platform to intensify and diversify its foreign policy options without affecting its relations with India, as the latter is the security provider for Bhutan. However, Bhutan has to make cautious decisions, while dealing with its foreign policies (Kharat, 2014: 88).

#### **2.4.c Bhutan's Foreign Policy objectives towards India**

The developments that lead to the integration of Sikkim to Indian union on 16<sup>th</sup> May, 1975 had created a sense of insecurity for Bhutan on the Indian interests (Stobdan, 2017: 1). When Sikkim merged with India, Bhutan was against it because Bhutan felt it was a loss of cultural identity of Sikkim, a close neighbouring Himalayan Kingdom. Bhutan also became insecure about its position even though it was not a protectorate like Sikkim. Eventually, Bhutan invited 150 countries to attend the coronation of the Fourth King Jigme Sinye Wangchuck in June 1974. This was the first time Bhutan opened itself to the outside world and the representatives from the United States of America, Britain, France, China, the former Soviet Union, Canada, Switzerland, Australia and New Zealand also attended the ceremony (Roy, 2010: 105-06). By this act, Bhutan wanted to tell the world that it had always been a sovereign and independent nation with a separate national identity of its own (Roy, 2010: 106).

After the Janata Government came to power in India in March 1977, certain positive changes occurred in India-Bhutan relations. The King paid a visit to New Delhi in April 1977, and the Minister for External Affairs of the Government of India returned the visit in November 1977. During these visits, it was announced that past irritants had been removed and that the 'P' Form<sup>19</sup> requirement for Bhutanese travelling overseas was stopped (Padma, 2017: 160). In March 1978, the King again visited India, and for the first time, India announced that it would allow Bhutan to diversify its trade and the status of Bhutan's representative in New Delhi was officially recognized as that of an Ambassador (Padma, 2017: 160). Eventually, Bhutan changed the name of its diplomatic office in New Delhi from the Royal Bhutan Mission to Royal Bhutanese Embassy on 8<sup>th</sup> of August 1978 (Tobgye, 2019: 1). In 1979, King Jigme Singye Wangchuk stated that Bhutan was not obliged to obey India's advice on foreign relations (Mahajan, 2018: 1).

At the United Nations, Bhutan did not follow India's opinion on the status of landlocked countries. It sided with China and other countries on the issue of Cambodia's Khmer Rouge at the Non-Alignment Summit at Havana in 1979. Bhutan supported the Pol Pot regime of Cambodia while India was against it (Stobdan, 2017: 1). Again in 1979, Bhutan and India both protested against regular intrusions by

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<sup>19</sup>P form was the permission given by Reserve Bank of India for travelling abroad. It was withdrawn by the Indian Government on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1978.

Tibetan herders into Bhutan. But the Chinese ignored the Indian protest, responding only to the Bhutanese complaint (Arpi, 2014: 1). China finally got the opportunity to conduct formal border talks with Bhutan in 1984 and a peace agreement was signed in the 1990s, which was named the “Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity in the Bhutan-China Border Areas”. Through this agreement, Bhutan has been officially recognised by China as a sovereign Kingdom (Theys, 2018: 1).

The policies of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi further strengthened the India-Bhutan relations. The ‘Indira Doctrine’ insisted that the problems in the region must be resolved bilaterally and that external powers should not have any role in the region. This principle has been a matter of faith for Indian foreign policy makers since then (Mohan, 2003). Later, this bond of friendship was strengthened by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who cultivated a personal relationship with King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck visited India in 1985 and 1988 and reaffirmed India’s commitment to Bhutan’s economic development. The King also played a very important role in strengthening India-Bhutan friendship (Labh, 2016: 117).

In 1996, Bhutan abstained from accepting the package deal offered by China to settle the border dispute. Under this deal, China is said to have reportedly been willing to give up claims on Jakurlung and Pasamlung Valleys in North-western Bhutan in exchange for Bhutan to give up control over Doklam. If Bhutan accepted this deal from China, then they would be able to settle the border disputes, but in consideration of India’s security concerns, Thimphu has not accepted this deal as yet (Ramachandran, et al., 2018: 3). Finally in 1998, China signed a peace agreement with Bhutan in order to maintain peace and tranquillity on the China-Bhutan border areas and through this Beijing admitted that China fully respects the territorial integrity and independence of Bhutan (Arpi, 2014: 1). There have been 24 rounds of talks between China and Bhutan on border, which is three times than that of India and China<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup><https://eurasianimes.com/how-chinese-attempts-to-undo-india-bhutan-relations-failed-miserably/>.

#### **2.4.d Indian Military Training Team's (IMTRAT) Role as a Defence Pedagogue for Bhutan's Military**

Bhutan being economically and militarily weak with an army of only 10,000, it cannot defend its boundaries in conflict situations and also during operations against insurgency. Under such circumstances, it has to look towards other friendly neighbours, such as India, and also to other regional and international organisations such as South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the United Nations Organizations (UNO) (Kharat, 2014: 87). In 1965, the Indian Military Training Team was set up in order to train the Royal Bhutanese Army after the Joint Defence Agreement has been signed between both India and Bhutan. The Indian Military Training Team containing both the armies of India and Bhutan performs joint patrolling operations along the border (Roy, 2010: 101).

The Indian assistance to Bhutan's security and defence were all due to the Chinese occupation of Tibet and the India-China border war of 1962. The Indian Military Training Team trained the army personnel in the past and at present. The Bhutanese army cadets are sent to the National Defence Academy (NDA) at Pune and the Indian Military Academy (IMA) at Dehradun in India. The armies of both India and Bhutan also perform joint patrolling operations along the border areas of both the countries. The IMTRAT also has the Friendship Hospital which is locally known as the IMTRAT Hospital and the local Bhutanese patients are also allowed to use its services (Trivedi, 2008: 134). The Bhutanese pilots are also trained by the Indian Army along with the Bhutanese armed force as part of the security cooperation between both India and Bhutan<sup>21</sup>.

#### **2.5 India as a Security Provider for Bhutan**

In India's neighbourhood policy, Bhutan is considered as an important country and the India-Bhutan relations are placed under the direct supervision of India's Foreign Secretary along with the foreign office, which is in close contact with the Royal Government of Bhutan (Bisht & Rahut, 2013: 16). Even after Bhutan acquired sovereign status after its entry into the United Nations on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1971, its foreign policy was still guided by New Delhi (Economic and Political Weekly 1974).

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<sup>21</sup><https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/indian-bhutanese-pilots-killed-as-army-helicopter-crashes-in-eastern-bhutan/1628985>.

India's policy towards the neighbouring South Asian countries during 1947-1996 contradicted India's global and regional policies. India rejected the ideas of balance of power at the international level and followed Non-Alignment Policy (NAM). It strongly opposed the intervention by major powers in the internal affairs of the weaker ones and was all for multilateralism at the global level. While at the regional level, India wanted to have her complete influence among the neighbours by performing as the security provider to smaller nations and their regimes within the subcontinent and also insisted for bilateralism in the neighbourhood (Chattopadhyay, 2010: 1252).

On 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2003, the Royal Government of Bhutan conducted a military action known as Operation Flush Out (Operation All Clear) against the Indian insurgents and infiltrators who were residing in the jungles located in southern part of Bhutan and conducting illegal activities from there. The insurgent groups who resided in Bhutan were the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), and the Kamatapur Liberation Organization (Trivedi, 2008: 124). Though the Government of India proposed to conduct a Joint India-Bhutan Army (JIBA) operation to drive out these insurgents from Bhutan, the Royal Government of Bhutan decided to take action on its own.

A sovereign independent state has the right of legation and the right to conclude treaties and be recognized as sovereign by other states. But in the case of Bhutan, it is not a fully sovereign state as long as India is responsible for its external relations. Bhutan is not known to have shown any of the quality of external sovereignty except through India (Poulose, 1971: 204). In July 2006, Fourth King of Bhutan King Jigme Singye Wangchuck proposed to the Government of India about the updating of the Treaty of 8<sup>th</sup> August 1949. As per Article II of the treaty, Bhutan had agreed to be guided by the advice of the Government of India in terms of its external relations that was limiting Bhutan's sovereignty and independence. Consequently, both India and Bhutan decided to update the treaty of 1949 and a new 'Friendship Treaty' was signed at New Delhi on 8<sup>th</sup> of February 2007, after Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh and Bhutan's 27-year-old King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk, held talks on a wide array of bilateral and global issues (Labh, 2016: 54).

In the Friendship Treaty of 2007, except for Articles II and VI of the 1949 Treaty, the rest of the articles are similar. Articles II and VI were rewritten and it gave more freedom to Thimphu for pursuing its foreign policy and also to purchase non-lethal military equipment as long as it does not damage India's vital strategic interests<sup>22</sup>. However, the Article II of 2007 India-Bhutan Treaty have also replaced the old Article II of 1949 Treaty in which, the term guidance by India in Bhutan's external relations was replaced with the cooperation of both India and Bhutan closely on issues relating to national interest and that, neither country will be allowing its territories for the use of activities harmful to national security and interests of the other<sup>23</sup>. The Friendship Treaty of 2007 between India and Bhutan, strengthened the relations of both the countries and the then Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh visited Bhutan on 16<sup>th</sup> of May 2008, where he declared that, India stands ready to join hands with the people and the Government of Bhutan in order to strengthen the relationship of both India and Bhutan and that, India will do its role for the development of Bhutan (Labh, 2016: 118).

According to the previous treaty, India was to guide Bhutan on foreign and defence policies and the 2007 Treaty is meant to respect the sensitivities of Bhutan regarding its sovereignty. The Indian military is also effectively responsible for protecting Bhutan from the kind of external threat that the Chinese military poses. Due to this reason, India acts in a responsible manner to defend Bhutan's border from China<sup>24</sup>. When Bhutan decided to move towards democracy, the then Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh visited Bhutan and expressed strong support for Bhutan's move towards democracy in 2008. After his coronation in November 2008, the Fifth King Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuk visited India on 21<sup>st</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> December 2009 as a gesture of goodwill. This visit pointed out the willingness of Bhutan's relationship with India along with the high-level meetings and talks on a wide-range of issues starting from internal security matters to economics and foreign policy issues (Padma, 2017: 161).

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<sup>22</sup><https://www.hindustantimes.com/world/india-bhutan-sign-friendship-treaty/story-03O9hJv3DkYDq80J3VseXJ.html>.

<sup>23</sup><https://eurasianimes.com/how-chinese-attempts-to-undo-india-bhutan-relations-failed-miserably/>.

<sup>24</sup><https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/china-side-steps-issue-of-road-construction-in-doklam/article19581244.ece>.

Bhutan had been trying to blend with China under the previous Prime Minister Jigme Thinley, raising serious concerns with regard to the security and foreign policy establishment of India. This all started with the meeting of Bhutan's Prime Minister with the Chinese Premier during the Rio+20 Conference in 2012 (Phuntsho, 2013: 576). During the 2013 election in Bhutan, New Delhi even discontinued the subsidy on LPG and kerosene that it supplied to Bhutan. This action taken by New Delhi was seen by many as a token demonstration of New Delhi's displeasure about Bhutan reaching out to China. The decision was reversed soon after Tshering Tobgay's People's Democratic Party was voted to power in the second parliamentary elections held on 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2013. After coming to office, Tobgay said that good relations with India are the cornerstone of Bhutan's foreign policy. On 15<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup> June 2014, India's newly elected Prime Minister; Narendra Modi visited Bhutan in order to strengthen the existing friendly relations between the two neighbours. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said before his visit that Bhutan is the first destination of his visit abroad and is a natural choice and relations with Bhutan will be the primary concern of the foreign policy of his government. This visit by Prime Minister Modi to Bhutan is assumed to be against the backdrop of China's growing efforts to support the small nation and create full diplomatic ties (Bhattacharjee, 2014: 1).

There had been a border stand-off between India and China on 16<sup>th</sup> of June 2017, which remained for over two months and was resolved on 20<sup>th</sup> of August 2017 (Jacob, 2018: 1). On the night of 8<sup>th</sup> June, China initiated a series of activities in Doklam that triggered a chain of events leading to the most dangerous stand-off between India and China in 2017. The Doklam plateau is a tri-junction which is of immense strategic significance to three countries, i.e., India, Bhutan and China (Chengappa, 2017). A platoon of People's Liberation Army of China (PLA) is said to have moved cautiously into the Doklam plateau and completely destroyed the stone bunkers that the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) had constructed years ago and manned occasionally. China seemed to have made a deliberate move to alter the status quo that prevailed for decades in that sensitive region. On 16<sup>th</sup> of June, a PLA road construction corps entered Doklam with road rollers, bulldozers and excavators. The Chinese troops and construction crew were promptly faced with resistance from the Royal Bhutan Army. The Royal Bhutan Army reminded about the bilateral commitments, especially the most recent of which was signed in 1998, to not alter the status quo in disputed areas.

But the PLA troops stood their ground, encouraging Bhutan to seek India's help. The Indian Army intervened after two days and stopped the PLA, leading to a major stand-off (Chengappa, 2017).

The strength of People's Liberation Army in the Tibetan Autonomous Region has increased in the post-Doklam period. The Chinese President Xi Jinping had told the visiting US Defence Secretary James Mattis in June 2018 that, China is not ready to give up an inch of its territories which they have claimed and that, these territories were handed down by their ancestors (Sawhney, 2019). A year after the two month long border stand-off at Doklam on the India-Bhutan-China tri-junction between the Indian Army and the China's People's Liberation Army, an agreement was signed by Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh and China's State Councillor and Minister of Public Security Zhao Kezhi. It was the first agreement on security cooperation which meant to strengthen and combine assistance in counter-terrorism, organised crimes, drug control, human trafficking and exchange of information which will mark a new beginning between India and China<sup>25</sup>.

In August 2019, Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi paid his second visit to Bhutan after his re-election and signed 10 Memorandum of Understandings with Bhutan in the field of space research, aviation, IT, power and education<sup>26</sup>. In his visit, the Prime Minister inaugurated the 740 MW Mangdechhu hydroelectric power plants and also launched the stamps to commemorate five decades of India-Bhutan hydropower cooperation. Prime Minister Modi also launched RuPay card in Bhutan to enhance digital payments, trade and tourism and also increased the currency swap limit for Bhutan under SAARC currency swap framework by giving USD 100 million to Bhutan under a standby swap arrangement to meet the foreign exchange requirements. Both Prime Minister Modi and his Bhutanese counterpart Prime Minister Lotay Tshering also unveiled e-plaque of the interconnection between India's National Knowledge Network and Bhutan's Druk Research and Education Network<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup><https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-china-sign-first-security-cooperation-agreement/story-TvHK1dqJGi4Kz2JS8CdScJ.html>.

<sup>26</sup><https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/keeping-bhutan-on-our-side-755579.html>.

<sup>27</sup><https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/keeping-bhutan-on-our-side-755579.html>.



Prime Minister Modi also said that it is a privilege for India to be a major partner in the development of Bhutan and India's cooperation in Bhutan's five-year plans will also continue and that India is committed to accelerate the development of Bhutan using space technology. The two Prime Ministers jointly inaugurated the Ground Earth Station and SATCOM network which have been developed with assistance from ISRO for utilization of South Asia Satellite in Bhutan<sup>28</sup>. The Ground Earth Station and the SATCOM network will help Bhutan to be with the South Asia satellite and boost its capacity for broadcast services, telemedicine, distance education, resource mapping, weather forecast and disaster management. All these may have been the idea on India's side in order to put in place many initiatives in Bhutan as there have been reports about Bhutan's growing interest in establishing official diplomatic and economic ties with China<sup>29</sup>.

In the words of Shelly Mahajan, Bhutan can become economically competitive, militarily advanced and self-reliant in the matters of national security and also India can guide Bhutan in developing necessary democratic infrastructure and a political establishment that can sustain the demands of a democratic society. India can lead to a partnership based on this foundation which will ensure future success of Bhutan and secure the long-standing relations shared between the two countries (Mahajan, 2018). In the words of Karma Phuntsho, Bhutan is like a shy daughter influenced by her mother i.e., India, who wants to keep Bhutan away from an unworthy suitor, i.e., China, because the latter is too keen on diplomatic overtures (Phuntsho, 2013: 576). India has insecurities about the larger strategic and military question of the PLA gaining access to several important Himalayan passes. Due to this, the China factor is important for both India and Bhutan as the latter shares considerably long borders with its northern neighbour (Malik & Sheikh, 2016: 50). The issues of national security emerged largely because of the unpredictable borders drawn by the British Colonial Masters (Dahia & Behuria, 2012).

According to the annual report from the Ministry of Defence of the Indian Government, India's foreign policy and defence strategy seeks to ensure a peaceful and enabling environment for achieving trans-formative national growth and

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<sup>28</sup><https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/india-bhutan-sign-10-mous-on-first-day-of-modi-visit/1678292/>.

<sup>29</sup><https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/keeping-bhutan-on-our-side-755579.html>.

development. A complex and increasingly unpredictable interplay of regional and global developments, ranging from West Asia to the Indo-Pacific, shapes India's security environment. Guided by the principles of strategic autonomy and self-reliance, it continued to address a wide spectrum of conventional and non-conventional security challenges by pursuing constructive bilateral engagement with partner countries, as well as in regional and global frameworks to peace and stability (Ministry of defence, Government of India, Annual Report, 2017-2018).

Along with some of the major cooperation, India and Bhutan also share communications and transport linkages, which are a reflection of their international relations. The roads built between India and Bhutan also demonstrate the bilateral relationship. The laying of the trunk roads of Bhutan in the 1960s and 70s, the Dantak project are the broader objectives of the bilateral relationship which were done in order to develop, modernise and consolidate the sovereignty and security of Bhutan. Due to the tension between India and China, the road linkages started in the 1960s. Along with the road projects, other projects like airfields, helipads, the telecommunications network, a microwave link, a broadcasting station, 34 hydel substations, river works, schools and colleges have also been built (Ura, 2014). India provides landlocked Bhutan with shorter, all-weather routes to the sea, due to which Bhutan's trade with India and through it to third countries is therefore more economical than potential routes through China. The physical terrain to the north of Bhutan is treacherous as several mountains rise to a height of 7,000 metres and mountain passes are usually ice-bound throughout the year. While, the terrain to the south of Bhutan, i.e., towards India, slopes down, which makes travel and trade to and through India easier than to and through Tibet and China. (Ramachandran, et al., 2018: 5).

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The relation between India and Bhutan can be traced back to the British Colonial period. Although the relations between both the countries started in ancient times, the security perspective of India and Bhutan in this chapter has been highlighted from the British Colonial period. The relations between India and Bhutan do not highlight much of serious conflicts except for the Duar wars during the 1800s in the British period. The concept of British India in bringing Bhutan under its influence can be

highlighted as to preserve its rule in the Himalayas and to avoid the Russian and the Chinese influence towards its northern borders in the Himalayas. We can say that the British had been successful in keeping Bhutan under its influence through different policies and avoiding the dangers from the Russian empire until its departure from the Indian sub-continent.

The independent Indian Government continued the same policy of its Colonial master, i.e., the British. With the signing of the Friendship Treaties, both the countries have managed to establish a good relationship with strong foreign policies. In terms of its security policies, the common border threat for both India and Bhutan comes from China everafter the British had left the Indian sub-continent. In fact, due to the Chinese factor, Bhutan has come closer to India. China can be considered as the main factor which has influenced the friendship between India and Bhutan. Bhutan preferred to accept India as its ally rather than China, which has made the latter more hostile towards the former. The friendship between India and Bhutan has produced a genuine outlook in terms of its security cooperation, especially against the possible threats from China.

In terms of security, India has provided enough help for Bhutan to guard its northern frontiers from the Chinese threats, especially after the annexation of Tibet by China. The trainings of the Bhutan Army by the Indian Army are also another example of India as being a security provider for Bhutan. It not only helped in the security perspective against China, but also against the Indian insurgents who had been a threat for both the countries. India guiding the external matters of Bhutan in Article II of the 1949 treaty is also a strong foundation in terms of security cooperation between both the countries. While in 2007, the same Article II of 1949 treaty was replaced with the cooperation of both India and Bhutan closely on issues relating to national interest. This made the friendship stronger between India and Bhutan and led to the events of the Doklam Crisis.

## **CHAPTER- 3**

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### **INDIA-BHUTAN COOPERATION IN COUNTER-INSURGENCY OPERATION: THE CASE OF 'OPERATION ALL CLEAR'**

## CHAPTER- 3

### INDIA-BHUTAN COOPERATION IN COUNTER-INSURGENCY OPERATION: THE CASE OF ‘OPERATION ALL CLEAR’

#### 3.1 Introduction

Insurgency is a form of revolutionary war against the government which is an internal conflict within a state or a country in which the insurgent groups aim to seize power or split the country or the state for their political ideology (Galula, 1964: 1). The insurgents and the guerrillas use violence as a means and utilized weaknesses of state or a country to increase their political demands and change the shape of international discourse (Young & Gray, 2011: 65). South Asia is one of the prominent conflict zones especially in terms of terrorism and insurgency. India has been facing the problems of insurgency since its independence. The insurgent groups formed in the North-eastern region of India are based on ethnicity and they have been demanding separate states (Chakrabarti, 2010: 71).

The term counter-insurgency was first coined by the politicians and the military of the United States in 1962. They used this term in order to describe the ongoing wars against ‘national liberation movements’ (or guerrillas) across the world during the Cold War period (Dixon, 2009: 356). Counter-insurgency can also be described as an attack against organized revolutions (Ahmad, 1971:16). In terms of tackling the insurgents, most of the South Asian countries do not have enough resources and capabilities. But India managed to tackle the insurgency situation somewhat better than its regional neighbours (Chakrabarti, 2010: 71).

‘Operation All Clear’, which is originally known as ‘Operation Flush Out’ is a counter-insurgency operation conducted by Bhutan against the Indian separatist insurgents who had resided in its southern jungles since the 1990s. This counter-insurgency operation was conducted with the Indian assistance particularly against the three militant groups from India, i.e. the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and the Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO). Since the North-eastern states of India are just 20 kilometres away from the borders of Bhutan, many insurgent groups from Northeast India had taken shelter in the southern jungles of Bhutan. Bhutan, under the pressure from the Indian Government, decided to flush out these insurgent groups from its soil as they

were conducting illegal activities from Bhutan against India. Operation All Clear was launched on 15<sup>th</sup> of December 2003, and the Royal Bhutanese Army was aided by the Indian Army. The operation ended on 15<sup>th</sup> of January 2004 (Trivedi, 2008: 124). In Bhutan, Operation All Clear is also known as the ‘Second Duar War<sup>30</sup>’ (Nagasawa, 2016: 38).

This chapter discusses the cooperation between the Bhutanese Army and the Indian Army in countering the insurgent groups by not defying the internal sentiments and the foreign policy of Bhutan by India. This chapter also discusses about the Operation All Clear where there was an understanding between India and Bhutan in foreign policy relations. It is evident that the former respected the sovereignty of the latter in its decision making process. This chapter also discusses about Article VIII of the India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty of 1949, where both the countries had agreed about extraditions of criminals who have taken shelter in their territories after committing crimes in their respective countries.

### **3.2 Insurgent Groups in the Northeast Region of India**

Safe havens are usually used by the insurgents for protection from the government forces. Whether it is inside or outside the country, safe havens are used by the insurgents to operate across international borders or within the country by using guerrilla tactics against the government forces or against any forces whom they target. Safe havens protect the insurgent group leaders and the members by providing them the place to rest and plan for future operations, to train the new recruits, etc. (Sharma, 2014: 112). Thus, Bhutan having been covered with 60 percent of forests had been used as a safe haven by the insurgent groups from the North-eastern parts of India, mainly from the state of Assam. India and Bhutan share a 669 kilometres long boundary and it is demarcated except along the tri-junction with China. The process of demarcation of the India-Bhutan border started in 1961 and was completed in 2006 and India’s boundary with Bhutan is an open boundary. The border between India and Bhutan had been peaceful for a long period of time since the independence of the

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<sup>30</sup>The first war was the Duar war with British India in 1864. Duar Wars have been mentioned in the second chapter of the history part of this thesis.

former in 1947, until the Indian insurgent groups established their camps in the southern districts of Bhutan<sup>31</sup>.

Northeast region of India comprises the states of Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, and Sikkim. Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and Cooch Behar Districts of West Bengal is situated between Assam and Sikkim while a narrow corridor in Darjeeling district which is also known as the 'Chicken Neck Corridor', connects the Northeast region with the rest of Indian mainland (Lacina, 2009: 1000). The Northeast region of India has suffered prolonged violent struggle more than any parts of India or of South Asia (Bhattacharya, 2010: 233). After India's independence, the partition of the country split hill tribes living on the new border with East Pakistan in the further east. The separation of Burma (Myanmar) from British India had already divided hill communities a decade earlier. The princely states of Tripura and Manipur were acceded to India as centrally administered territories, while the Khasi states (Meghalaya) and Cooch Behar were dissolved into Assam and West Bengal as well. Nepal remained sovereign, Bhutan and Sikkim became monarchical protectorates and the latter was merged to India in 1975 (Lacina, 2009: 1001).

India's Northeast region comprises of various ethnicities, cultures and religions who have demanded for separate states within or outside of the Indian Union. There have been mass movements for autonomy and has been the hub of ethnic conflict since India got its independence from the British in 1947. Due to these ethnic conflicts, there have been disturbances of peace and tranquillity along with the violation of human rights of innocent people by both the insurgent groups and the Indian armed forces (Kalita, 2011: 1354). The demands for separate states arose among the indigenous population due to the reason that they were losing their cultural identity, political power and being deprived of its share of the region's resources. These feelings were also fuelled by subsequent Indian governments that sought to suppress indigenous cultures through assimilation into the majority Hindu culture and carried out discriminatory economic and political policies (Kalita, 2011: 1358).

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<sup>31</sup><https://www.insightsonindia.com/2015/01/13/security-challenges-and-their-management-in-border-areas/>.

The influx of Bangladeshi immigrants has also been one of the major causes for the emergence of insurgency in Assam. The reasons for insurgency also differ from state to state. The physiographic constraints, the geographical isolation of the region and the wide communication gap are the primary geopolitical factors responsible for the spread of insurgent groups and their prolonged struggle against the Indian government (Chauhan, 2021). The reasons for insurgency in the Northeast region of India goes back prior to the independence of India. The British tribal policy, Christian missionary education, setting up of reserved forests, etc., led to the loss of tribal control over natural resources and the migration of people from the plains started posing economic, cultural and political threat to the tribes along with the lack of good governance and transparency towards the tribes. There was economic deprivation, inappropriate development, and large scale unemployment among different tribal groups. This made the tribes anti-establishment. Money for development never reached the target as the funds were diverted to the insurgents by politicians to buy security. There were no shortages of recruitment into the insurgent groups as unemployed educated youth were available to join them (Thapliyal, 2016).

Due to the grievances and discontent among the people of the region, there have been many militant groups emerging in the Northeast region of India (Ahmad, 2013: 196). The counter-insurgency operations conducted by Indian military have killed thousands of them. The groups in the Northeast region of India had been arguing that their region was never a part of India before the British unified it. According to these groups, the inclusion of the Northeast region to the independent India was illegal. So, the defeat of India by the Chinese in the 1962 war further encouraged these groups in the Northeast region of India (Nath, 2004: 638-39). The safe haven for the insurgents of the Northeast region had been its neighbouring countries like Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal. But during the 1960's and 1970's, the Chinese also played some role as a helping hand towards the Naga insurgents<sup>32</sup> (Sharma, 2014: 112).

Through both central and state administrations, the Indian Government tried certain measures in order to bring a ceasefire. The Indian Government deployed hundreds and thousands of military and paramilitary troops who operated through laws which led to massive human rights abuses in the Northeast region (Ahmad, 2013: 196). The

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<sup>32</sup>They are the insurgent groups from the Indian state of Nagaland, who have been demanding separation from Indian autonomy.



insurgent groups of the Northeast region of India who had been the main targets of the ‘Operation All Clear’ in Bhutan were the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and the Kamatapur Liberation Organization (KLO). The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) had been fighting to liberate Assam from India since 1979, and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) was formed for an independent Bodoland since 1986 and was formerly known as the Bodo Security Force (BdSF). The Kamatapur Liberation Organization (KLO) had been fighting to form Kamatapur nation<sup>33</sup> and to carve it out from India. In the meantime, these organizations set up their base camps inside the thick jungles of Bhutan and continued to operate through guerrilla tactics against the Indian Security forces (General Secretary, NDFB (P), 2018:1).

There had been trade exchanges between Bhutan and the plains of Assam, Cooch Behar and Bengal through the Duars or the passes since the ancient period (Saikia, 2014). After 1947, when India got independence from the British, both Bhutan and independent India maintained friendly relations as mentioned in the previous chapters. The 1949 India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty facilitated free trade and commerce between the two countries (Saikia, 2014). Bhutan shares 70 percent of its borders with the state of Assam and there existed massive trade prospects between the two since ancient times. But due to the insurgency and frequent general strikes called by different organisations, the trade got greatly disrupted and Assam could capture only 30 percent of Bhutan’s trade with India. Bhutan has good ties with Assam then and now and many Bhutanese come to lower Assam to procure commodities. Also the Bodo<sup>34</sup> women of the bordering areas weave 25 to 30 percent of traditional Bhutanese dresses<sup>35</sup>. Many ethnic groups who reside in the international borders have more in common with the people living across the border than with their own countrymen. There is a sense of support both materially and non-materially among them due to their age-old ties (Sharma, 2014: 113). Due to all these factors, it was easy for the Insurgent groups to cross the border and settle in the jungles of Bhutan.

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<sup>33</sup>The Kamatapur Nation is a proposed state in which, the North and South Dinajpur and Malda from West Bengal state, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Dhubri and Goalpara from Assam, Kishanganj districts in Bihar and Jhapa District in Nepal will be included.

<sup>34</sup>Bodos are one of the indigenous tribes of the state of Assam in India. The majority of the Bodos reside mainly in the India-Bhutan border areas on the Indian side.

<sup>35</sup><https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/north-east/bhutan-for-more-trade-with-assam/cid/453350>.

### **3.2.a The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA)**

In 1971, when the civil war broke out in East Pakistan, it led to the formation of Bangladesh. Bangladesh created a dramatic implication for the security of India's Northeast region as huge number of refugees came into India from Bangladesh along with subsequent economic migration of Bengali-speaking Muslims. This refugee crisis aggravated resource competition in the region. The anti-immigrant movement started in Assam during 1979 and generated several waves of severe violence and disorder. In 1985, a student-led coalition of anti-immigrant activists came into power in Assam. The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) was formed through these settlements and the ULFA also began sponsoring insurgents from other communities such as the Bodos in the Northwest Assam and the Rajbanshis on the Assam-West Bengal border (Lacina, 2009: 1003).

The goal of the ULFA was to be independent from the Indian Union. The ULFA started with armed actions and sought weapons and military training from officials and other secret sources located in Bangladesh, Myanmar and China. By 1980's the ULFA began attacking the Indian security forces in Assam. This led the Government of India to send its army in order to tackle the ULFA insurgents (Mazumdar, 2005: 567). The violence committed by the ULFA reached its peak in the 1990s, almost paralyzing the law and order machinery in the state. On 27<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> November 1990, the entire state of Assam was declared as 'Disturbed Area' and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act<sup>36</sup> (AFSPA) was summoned for restoring peace (Assam Police, Government of Assam, 2022). The President's rule was imposed on Assam and the Indian Army was brought in to tackle the insurgents through counter-insurgency operation code-named 'Operation Bajrang' on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1990. The then Chief Minister of Assam Hiteswar Saikia had declared that ULFA was going to be finished within few hours<sup>37</sup>.

The Indian Armed Forces operated mainly under the Assam Disturbed Areas Act 1955 and Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) 1958. The Indian Armed Forces were supposed to aid the state government, but instead, took over the power of

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<sup>36</sup>The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) is an act by the Parliament of India introduced in 1958. This act grants special powers to the Indian Armed Forces. They have the power to maintain public order in "disturbed areas".

<sup>37</sup><https://www.timesofassam.com/articles/thy-name-heerak-jyoti-mahanta-failure-conspiracy/>.

the civil administration. It led to mass arrests, torture, extrajudicial killings, and fake encounters, disappearances of arrested persons, molestations and rapes of Assamese women. According to Saikia, “the Indian Army which is trained in guarding the international borders against external aggressions was terrorising its own citizens internally” (Saikia, 2013). When elections were held in the state of Assam in June 1991, the Indian National Congress won 66 out of 126 seats in the Legislative Assembly and the Asom Gana Parishad won 19 seats in the Legislative Assembly. The Presidential rule ended in the state of Assam on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1992<sup>38</sup>.

There started the second Phase of counter-insurgency operation code-named ‘Operation Rhino’ in Assam on 15<sup>th</sup> of September 1991. Government troops killed Heerak Jyoti Mahanta, ULFA Deputy Commander, on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1991. The then Prime Minister of India Narasimha Rao and ULFA leaders held negotiations beginning on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1992, and the government suspended Operation Rhino on 13<sup>th</sup> January 1992<sup>39</sup>. Due to the Operations Rhino and Bajrang, half of the ULFA cadres escaped to the southern jungles of Bhutan and settled their camps and continued the operations until Operation All clear in 2003-2004 (Mazumdar, 2005: 568-69).

### **3.2.b The National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)**

The National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) is an insurgent group of Bodo ethnic tribes who have been the indigenous inhabitants of Northeast India and has its majority settlements in the North-eastern state of Assam in India. The demand for tribal identity and political autonomy for the Bodos started way back during the Colonial era when the first memorandum was submitted by the Bodo leaders in 1929. After independence of India, it started with the Bodo Sahitya Sabha<sup>40</sup>, which raised the issue of language and script in relation to consolidation of the Bodo identity. During the Assam movement many of the Bodo youths worked along with the All

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<sup>38</sup>India/Assam (1967-present), <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/asiapacific-region/indiaassam-1967-present/>.

<sup>39</sup>India/Assam (1967-present), <https://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/asiapacific-region/indiaassam-1967-present/>.

<sup>40</sup>The Bodo Sahitya Sabha was founded in 1952 under the presidency of in order to promote the Bodo language and Bodo literature. It was founded under the presidency and leadership of Joy Bhadra Hagier, at Basugaon, Kokrajhar district, Assam on 16<sup>th</sup> of November 1952. It consisted of representatives of Assam, West Bengal, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura and Nepal abroad.

Assam Students Union (AASU). But in the post Assam Accord<sup>41</sup>, the tribal communities began to face the same treatment from the new government just like the previous one. A feeling of disappointment spread among the Bodo youths and the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) took over the leadership (Das, 2014: 1-2).

The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) was formed in 1967 to represent the Bodo cause. In the 1970s, the ABSU emerged as an influential force under the leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma and led an agitation for the recognition of Bodo as an official language of Assam (Sharma 2016). The ABSU launched the Bodo Movement<sup>42</sup> in the late 1980s for the creation of a separate Bodo state- 'Bodoland'. In March 1987, ABSU started a movement for a separate state of Bodoland on the North Bank of the Brahmaputra which spread over 25,478 sq. km, with the slogan of 'Divide Assam fifty-fifty'. Along with it, there had been the rise of a number of Bodo militant outfits like the 'National Democratic front of Bodoland' (NDFB), 'Bodo Liberation Tiger Force' (BLTF), etc., (Das, 2014: 1-2). Ranjan Daimary had raised a militant outfit, known as the Bodo Security Force (BdSF) in 1986. The name of the group was later changed into National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). The NDFB had been one of the first insurgent groups to settle in the southern jungles of Bhutan (Sharma, 2016).

The ULFA and the NDFB viewed the migration of people into Assam as a threat to the survival of the indigenous population. The ULFA and NDFB insurgents were forced to flee Assam during the 'Operation Bajrang' and 'Operation Rhino' launched by the Indian Army in November 1990. Some of the remaining insurgents started to settle in the Assam-Bhutan borders and the number of the insurgents increased as Bhutan was like a safe haven for them (Mazumdar, 2005: 568-69). Bhutan shares a 605 kilometers border with Assam in India's Northeast region. This 605 kilometers long border is an unfenced border which gives easy access for anyone to cross over to

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<sup>41</sup>The Assam Accord was a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement in the presence of the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi at New Delhi on 15th of August 1985. Later, the Citizenship Act was amended for the first time the following year, in 1986.

<sup>42</sup>'Bodo Movement and Situating Identity Assertions in Assam', Bitasta Das. [https://www.academia.edu/11647759/Bodo\\_Movement\\_and\\_Situating\\_Identity\\_Assertions\\_in\\_Assam](https://www.academia.edu/11647759/Bodo_Movement_and_Situating_Identity_Assertions_in_Assam).

Bhutan illegally. Due to this reason the insurgent groups from Assam and other North-eastern states had crossed over the border into Bhutan in search of safe haven<sup>43</sup>.

### **3.2.c The Kamtapur Liberation Organization (KLO)**

The Kamtapur Liberation Organization (KLO) which entered Bhutan later than the NDFB and the ULFA was formed on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1995, by the students from the indigenous Rajbongshi community. They launched an armed struggle to form a Kamtapur State comprising districts from the states of North Bengal and Assam. The outfit was banned by the Indian Government in 1997 (Amitava, 2017). The KLO insurgent groups have originated from the tribe of Koch Rajbongshi. The Koch Rajbongshi is the ancient tribe originally from the ancient Koch Kingdom<sup>44</sup>. The Rajbongshi tribe is referred to as Koch Rajbongshi, or Rajbanshi, or Rajvanshi. The word 'Rajbongshi' literally means 'Royal Community'. They have a rich cultural heritage, their own language and resided earlier in the states of West Bengal, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and various North-eastern parts of India. The Great Kamtapur Kingdom was divided into Bangladesh, West Bengal, Assam, Nepal, Meghalaya, Tripura, Bihar and Bhutan during the British rule. After the independence of India, a large number of Rajbongshi people now live in North Bengal, West Assam, Meghalaya, Bangladesh and Nepal<sup>45</sup>.

The KLO is said to be the armed underground wing of Kamtapur People's Party (KPP) and that it maintained close linkages with the ULFA. Soon after its formation, the KLO members were said to have been trained by the ULFA during 1996-1997 in Samdrup Jongkhar, Gelengphu and Kalaikhola districts of Bhutan. The KLO's headquarter was situated near that of ULFA's headquarter at Samdrup Jongkhar. Samdrup Jhongkhar district of Bhutan had been the major hotspot during the Operation All Clear<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup><https://www.ndtv.com/guwahati-news/no-indian-militant-camps-in-bhutan-says-pm-thinley-442598>.

<sup>44</sup>The Koch Kingdom, which lasted from 1515 to 1949, ruled parts of eastern Indian subcontinent in present-day Assam and Bengal.

<sup>45</sup>[wbnorthbengaldev.gov.in/HtmlPage/Rajbongshi.aspx](http://wbnorthbengaldev.gov.in/HtmlPage/Rajbongshi.aspx).

<sup>46</sup>[https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/assam/terrorist\\_outfits/Klo.htm](https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/assam/terrorist_outfits/Klo.htm).

### **3.3 Early Phase of the Entry of Indian Insurgents in Bhutan**

Bhutan is geographically landlocked and it is isolated from the rest of the world. The country maintains its relations and contacts with the rest of the world through Indian Territory based on the treaties signed between both the countries. Bhutan has thick forests, high mountain ranges, severe winter and heavy rainfall which make it inaccessible from the east, west, and also from the north (Kharat, 2010). Bhutan had been busy guarding the northern frontiers of its borders with its limited security forces due to the fear of Chinese aggression. In its southern border, Bhutan didn't pay much attention due to its good relations with India. But it happened to be that, Bhutan's threats came mostly from the south due to the insurgent groups from the Indian state of Assam and West Bengal (Penjore, 2004: 122-23). Since the beginning of history, there has been a sharing of trade and culture across the southern parts of Bhutan with Indian citizens. Due to this, there was not much reason to worry before the insurgents entered the Bhutanese soil.

The NDFB who had earlier been known as the Bodo Security Force were the first to set up their camps in the Kingdom of Bhutan across Udalguri district of Assam in 1989. As already mentioned, there have been trade relations between the Bodos and the Bhutanese since the ancient times; it was much easier for the NDFBs to enter Bhutan. Later, the ULFA followed after two years and by mid-1990s there were around ten camps belonging to these groups along with the KLO who have been active in North Bengal (Bhattacharyya, 2018). The entry of the Indian insurgents in Bhutan hills and forests began during the period of the Lhotshampa<sup>47</sup> issue in Bhutan. The Royal Government of Bhutan was accused of using the insurgent groups as a bargaining chip in order to discourage India from supporting the pro-democracy movement in Bhutan. Even the Royal Government of Bhutan's representatives accepted the fact that rebels were helped on different occasions in Bhutan directly or indirectly by the state functionaries (Sinha, 2009).

It is said that many ULFA militants were supported by the Bhutanese Government through economic and military aid. The Royal Government of Bhutan had denied all these reports while stating that the officials had acted on an individual level and their actions had nothing to do with the Royal Government of Bhutan (Kharat, 2004:

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<sup>47</sup>Lhotshampas are a heterogeneous Bhutanese people of Nepalese descent who resided in the southern borderlands of Bhutan.

1662). But again, in the words of a senior official in Thimphu, the counter-insurgency operation, which Bhutan launched, was meant to trace the militants who were trying to melt into the immigrant pockets of the Himalayan Kingdom<sup>48</sup>. Although there might be less security in the southern borders, the Government of Bhutan could have done occasional checks on the southern parts at the slightest hint if the insurgents were unwelcomed. According to a source from the Bhutanese newspaper ‘Kuensel’, from 1995 to 2003, the Indian militants who had resided in Bhutan, had set up 30 camps at the foothills of Bhutan. From 1997 to 2003, the Bhutanese Government tried to resolve the situation peacefully through negotiations (Tashi, 2010).

According to another source, there were about 50 training camps runned by the ULFA, NDFB and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isaac-Muivah) NSCN (I-M)<sup>49</sup>. According to the intelligence report, these banned outfits have set up an ‘umbrella organisation’ to consolidate their position and to strengthen themselves against attacks from Bhutanese and Indian security forces, while obtaining arms and ammunition from Bangladesh and Myanmar (Chaudhuri, 2003). But according to an ex-insurgent who had been residing in Southern Bhutan during the Operation, the NSCN (I-M) groups had not set up their camps permanently in the southern jungles of Bhutan. They were on a visit for a few weeks. The Kamatapur Liberation Organization (KLO) had set up their camp along with the ULFA and the NDFB although much later<sup>50</sup>.

As per the statement given by the Foreign Minister of Bhutan, the three armed separatist groups from India, i.e., the ULFA, NDFB and the KLO have entered and established their camps in the dense forests of Southern Bhutan. These three groups

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<sup>48</sup><https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/bhutan-plans-militant-mop-up-operation/cid/780756>.

<sup>49</sup>The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) which was formed on January 31, 1980 by Isak ChisiSwu, Thuingaleng Muivah and S.S. Khaplang was later split into two factions, namely the NSCN-K led by SS Khaplang and the NSCN-IM led by Isak ChisiSwu and Thuingaleng Muivah on April 30, 1988. Their main objective was to oppose the ‘Shillong Accord’ (The Shillong Accord of 1975 was an agreement signed between the Government of India and Nagaland’s underground government to accept the supremacy of Constitution of India without condition, surrender their arms and renounce their demand for the secession of Nagaland from India) signed by the then NNC (Naga National Council) with the Indian government. The NSCN aims to establish a ‘Greater Nagaland’ (‘Nagalim’ or the People’s Republic of Nagaland) based on Mao Tse Tung’s ideology. Their platform is based on the principle of Socialism for economic development and a spiritual outlook – ‘Nagaland for Christ’.

<sup>50</sup>Interview with the then General Secretary of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (Progressive) Gobindo Basumatari in January 2018.

were scattered across Southern Bhutan bordering Arunachal Pradesh in the east, to Sikkim in the west, thereby covering the entire stretch of Bhutan's southern boundary with India. Bhutan has always been particularly sensitive to India's security concerns in the region. The ULFA had 13 camps, the NDFB runned 12 camps and the KLO runned 5 camps. The camps were used to train their cadres in the dense forest and store their weapons to launch surprise attacks in India<sup>51</sup>.

According to the then Prime minister of Bhutan, Lyonpo Jigmi Thinley, the insurgent camps were spread across the country's southern region. The camps were spread from Diafam in the east to Samtse in the west. The central command headquarters of the ULFA was located at Phukaptong in Samdrup Jongkhar. This was the main camp of the ULFA which served as their central headquarters. He also said that the Royal Government of Bhutan had exercised extreme patience and tolerance for a peaceful solution and it was regrettable that the three groups refused to leave peacefully<sup>52</sup>. The Royal Government of Bhutan did not pay much attention to these groups as long as they were not threatening the Bhutanese people. The ULFA and the NDFB conducted their hit-and-run attacks in Assam ambushing small detachments of Indian security forces. The insurgents would escape back to their camps before reinforcements from the Indian side arrived on the scene. The Indian Army was not able to cross the international borders to pursue the insurgents inside Bhutan (Mazumdar, 2005: 569).

Due to the presence of these groups, the development and economic activities in Bhutan were seriously affected. Works in large industries like the Dungsam Cement Project had been suspended, educational institutions in vulnerable areas had to be closed down. Trade, agriculture production and other commercial activities in several districts of the country were disrupted. Even in Assam, West Bengal and Bhutan, innocent people had been victims of threats, coercion and extortion. It became unsafe for the Bhutanese to travel and transport goods from India through the traditional and more convenient routes<sup>53</sup>. The Indian Government on the other hand, asked the Bhutanese Government to act under the Article VIII of the 1949 Treaty<sup>54</sup>, in which

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<sup>51</sup>[https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bhutan/document/papers/stat\\_15dec03.htm](https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bhutan/document/papers/stat_15dec03.htm).

<sup>52</sup>[https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bhutan/document/papers/stat\\_15dec03.htm](https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bhutan/document/papers/stat_15dec03.htm).

<sup>53</sup>[https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bhutan/document/papers/stat\\_15dec03.htm](https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bhutan/document/papers/stat_15dec03.htm).

<sup>54</sup>The 1949 Treaty of Perpetual Peace and Friendship is a treaty between the Government of India and the Government of Bhutan in which according to the second part of article VIII, the Government Bhutan has to surrender any Indian subjects who are accused of any crimes specified in the first schedule of act XV of 1903, who may have taken refuge in the territory under the jurisdiction of Government of Bhutan back to the Government of India.



Bhutan had to surrender the insurgent groups in the hands of the Indian Army. India also wanted to offer its own troops in order to fight the insurgents. But the Government of Bhutan was not willing to accept this offer, as it would create an issue of internal security in Bhutan (Ahmad, 2013: 197).

Bhutan had a good reason not to allow the Indian Army inside its territory as it might create chaos just like the issues which happened in Sri-Lanka during the Civil War (1987-1990) when India's peacekeeping forces intervened (Scudieri, 1994: 43). In 1996, Thimphu and New Delhi started negotiating on mutual extradition agreement in dealing with cross-border terrorism and organized crimes (Ghosh, 2014). Despite repeated requests by the Government of India, the Royal Bhutanese Government did not take firm action against the insurgents and on the other hand, India did not want to forcibly send its security forces inside Bhutan to flush out these groups (Chaudhuri, 2003). The Indian Government had complained for over a decade that the insurgent groups who were residing in Southern Bhutan were disturbing and dangerous to the Assam sector along the 260 kilometres long border areas of India and Bhutan. Since Bhutan is a sensitive region in terms of its demographic composition, it felt greatly concerned especially about the Nepalese migrants along with the Indian insurgents (Choudhary, 2005: 223).

The Royal Government was also in fear of the Lhotshampas being an ally of the ULFA and the NDFB, as some of the Lhotshampas resided near the insurgent camps. The Bhutanese Government wanted to prevent the insurgents from supplying arms to the Lhotshampas as it could cause a full-scale ethnic insurgency movement in the southern parts of Bhutan (Mazumdar, 2005: 572). Since 1998, the Bhutanese Government has had five rounds of talks with the ULFA and three with the NDFB (Mazumdar, 2005: 572). The Bhutanese Government held the first round of talks with the insurgents in 1998 and a second round of talk in 1999. The third round of talk could not be held in 2000 before the session of the National Assembly due to security concerns from the ULFA leaders. The discussions with the NDFB also came to have similar problems, but contacts were made locally by the Royal Government with the NDFB. It is said that the intention of Bhutan's involvement with the insurgents were meant to be part of an effort to find a solution to the current problem rather than interfere in Indian affairs (Mathou, 2001: 133).

The efforts to negotiate with the insurgent groups for six years by the Bhutanese Government failed. The Government of India constantly pressured the Government of Bhutan to take final actions against these insurgents. But the King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuk, was not ready to obey the Indian command as he had several reasons, for example, he feared that such action might lead to terrorism against his own people. The King preferred to persuade the militants to leave peacefully rather than to shed blood (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2003). The King's fears came true by the late 1990's when these insurgent groups started committing terrorist activities against the police personnel, army officers and also the civilians on both sides of the border areas (Choudhary, 2005: 223).

By 2003, there were serious consequences due to the presence of the insurgents in Southern Bhutan. The security of the Bhutanese citizens was under threat and the nation itself was threatened due to their presence. Developmental projects like the Dungsam Cement Project were closed down and the 900 megawatt Mangdechhu Hydropower Project which was to be built with the Indian assistance was hampered due to the security threats from the insurgents. There were incidents of attacks on policemen, and extortion of Bhutanese citizens along the trade routes between India and Bhutan by the insurgent groups (Mazumdar, 2005: 573). The Foreign Minister of Bhutan also declared that the militants who entered and established their camps in Bhutan 12 years ago had become a direct threat to Bhutan's sovereignty and national security<sup>55</sup>.

The long-term presence of the insurgents had affected the peace, stability and socio-economic development enjoyed by the Bhutanese people. Their presence had also affected the excellent bilateral relations with India which is of the highest importance to the Royal Government and the Bhutanese people. The issue had also been regularly discussed in the National Assembly of Bhutan due to the magnitude of the security threat posed by the armed insurgents and this had also been one of the central issues raised in the regular meeting of the local bodies in Bhutan<sup>56</sup>. Also, it had been mentioned that in 2001, at a meeting between the Bhutanese Government and the ULFA leaders, the Bhutanese King had offered 200 crore rupees to the outfit and promised assistance in transferring all the cadres to Myanmar (Bhattacharyya &

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<sup>55</sup>[https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bhutan/document/papers/stat\\_15dec03.htm](https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bhutan/document/papers/stat_15dec03.htm).

<sup>56</sup>[https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bhutan/document/papers/stat\\_15dec03.htm](https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bhutan/document/papers/stat_15dec03.htm).

Baruah, 2014). According to R.N. Ravi, an expert on Northeast insurgency and former special director, Intelligence Bureau, “this action had to be taken by the Bhutanese Government because Bhutan did not have much choice but to cooperate with the insurgents” (Baruah, 2014).

After several rounds of talks with the insurgent groups, the Government of Bhutan somehow managed to persuade them to close the camps. But later, the Government of Bhutan found out that, instead of closing down their camps, they have relocated (Arikara, 2018). While the Bhutanese Government was suspected of providing safe haven for the insurgents by those in India, on the other hand, the representatives of the National Assembly of Bhutan, led to their own beliefs that the Indian Government was not doing enough to solve the problem. A resolution calling for military action was decided after a prolonged debate with an overwhelming majority in the 78<sup>th</sup> session of Bhutan’s National Assembly held in June 2000 (Mathou, 2001: 134). It started with the decision to stop the supplies of their rations, and implementation of the National Security Act against persons helping the insurgents and that the armed forces would be used if the peaceful negotiations fail. The presence of the Bhutanese Army along the Bhutan-Assam border was reinforced through the resolution of the Bhutanese Parliament (Mathou, 2001: 134).

The resolutions taken in the National Assembly of Bhutan were not maintained by some officials, as those government officials were secretly involved in supporting the ULFA militants through directly supplying or indirectly facilitating them with economic and military aid (Kharat, 2010). Again in 2003, at the 81<sup>st</sup> session of the Bhutanese National Assembly which was held from 28<sup>th</sup> of June to 18<sup>th</sup> of August, a new resolution was passed in which the Royal Government was authorised to make one last effort to persuade the insurgent groups to leave the Bhutanese territories peacefully (Mazumdar, 2005: 574). The repeated negotiations conducted by the Bhutanese Government with the Indian insurgents to exit them from the Bhutanese soil peacefully, ultimately failed (Choudhary, 2005: 224).

There was a plea from the ULFA leader Arabinda Rajkhowa to the Bhutanese Government about their human rights issues in which he stated that, the ULFA is not going to occupy Bhutan permanently, nor did they have any plan to include Bhutan in a sovereign Assam and that, their camps in Bhutan are not for such purposes. He also

said that due to the Indo-Assam conflict, the freedom fighters of Assam had to establish their camps in Bhutan in order to save themselves and that it is their basic human right to be able to go to a place when one's life is in danger. He said that, the ULFA appealed to the Government of Bhutan and the Bhutanese people that, the cadres of ULFA must be given the universal right and to maintain the centuries old Assam-Bhutan<sup>57</sup> cordial relationship intact (Kharat, 2010).

During the talks conducted by the Royal Government of Bhutan headed by the then Prime Minister Jigme Thinley in the months of October-November 2003, the insurgent groups were told that their presence in the Bhutanese territory was illegal and unacceptable and that if they didn't vacate the place, the Bhutanese Government would be forced to launch the counter-insurgency operation. The Bhutanese Government even advised the insurgents to enter into talks with the Government of India. Only the ULFA and the NDFB agreed to be present during the talks between the Bhutanese Government and the insurgents, but they sent their mid-level representatives instead of their leaders. Meanwhile, the KLO did not respond to the call of the Bhutanese Government for the talk. The Bhutanese Government also warned the insurgents that they would not take responsibility for any loss of life during the counter-insurgency operation and the insurgents will be solely responsible for it (Mazumdar, 2005: 574).

Bhutan was placed in a situation where it could not decide instantly whether to conduct a military operation due to lack of human and material resources to finance military operation. Moreover, the joint operation with India would violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Bhutan. Also, the local Assamese population would be against the Bhutanese population if the Bhutanese Government conduct military operations as Bhutan use Indian highways to travel from west to east vice-versa. This would put the Bhutanese travellers at risk. Meanwhile the insurgents were immovable from Bhutanese soil until they get independence from India which led to their long term presence (Penjore, 2004:123-24). The Royal Government of Bhutan had been under pressure from both the Indian Government to drive out the insurgents and also from the local Assamese population against it (Chaudhuri, 2003). Thus, the

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<sup>57</sup>Ancient Trade Partners: Bhutan, Cooch Bihar and Assam (17th - 19th Centuries) Françoise Pommaret, [http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/jbs/pdf/JBS02\\_01\\_02.pdf](http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/jbs/pdf/JBS02_01_02.pdf).

Bhutanese Government was in a tough position to decide the fate of the insurgents in terms of the operation.

### **3.4 Main Course of the Operation**

Bhutan created a large militia or reserve force to defend national borders for the first time due to the threats posed by the insurgent groups. Bhutan had never militarized itself before although it had been a buffer Kingdom between the two giant nations, i.e., India and China. Students who completed universities or high schools were trained in order to guard the borders permanently. Bhutan's standing army consisted of a couple of thousands who used to guard the northern frontier. While the security to its southern border strengthened only after being threatened by the Indian insurgents (Penjore, 2004: 124). Bhutan gathered 6,000 soldiers which included the Royal Bhutan Army and the Royal Bodyguards in order to conduct the counter-insurgency operation. To support the Bhutan Army, 627 personnel volunteered as militia (Kasturi, 2004: 81; Tashi, 2010). The Royal Bhutan Army was trained by the Indian Army prior to the counter-insurgency operation (Bhattacharyya, 2018).

The Royal Government of Bhutan agreed to launch the military operation after the meeting of the then Prime Minister of India Atal Behari Vajpayee and the Bhutanese King Jigme Singye Wangchuck in September 2003. The King of Bhutan had the power to make the ultimate decision in terms of security and the sovereignty of the Kingdom since he was the head of the state and ruler of the Kingdom despite the political reforms made in 2002. So, the Royal Government of Bhutan started raising a counter-insurgency force in May 2003, which was composed of civilian volunteers (Mazumdar, 2005: 574). Before the launching of the operation, on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2003, the Bhutanese King Jigmye Singye Wangchuck called the then Prime Minister of India Atal Behari Vajpayee on the telephone and informed him about the decisions which the Royal Government of Bhutan had taken in order to conduct the counter-insurgency operation. The Indian security establishments were also alerted on the same day (Kasturi, 2004: 82). The Royal Government of Bhutan also issued a 48-hour ultimatum on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2003 to the insurgent groups before launching the operation (Bhushan, 2010).

Although Bhutan had not conducted any military operations for the last 138 years in dealing with outside forces, it launched a military operation on 15<sup>th</sup> of December

2003, in order to flush out the three insurgent groups from its soil (Choudhury, 2005: 225). The Royal Bhutan Army was stationed to conduct the operation mainly in the area north of Samdrup Jongkhar where the majority of the ultra-camps were located (Kasturi, 2004: 81). The Indian Army actively helped the Royal Bhutan Army during the counter-insurgency operation (Baruah, 2012).

**Map 1: Map of the location of insurgent camps during the Operation All Clear 2003**



Source: <https://www.tribuneindia.com/2003/20031217/main3.htm>.

The Government of India had also initiated a Joint Indo-Bhutan Army Operation (JIBA) to drive out the insurgents from Bhutan (Kharat, 2004: 1662). It is said that the Indian Army offered to go to the camps inside Bhutan with a large number of soldiers. But the King declined as Bhutan did not want any foreign troops conducting any operations on its soil which would create an issue on the country's sovereignty. Bhutan wanted to take its own action against the insurgents as they posed a major danger to its security<sup>58</sup>. According to Rajesh Kharat, the reasons for the Royal Government of Bhutan not to bring in the Indian Army inside its territories can be stated as such that the Royal Government of Bhutan was not ready to be exposed of its involvement in supporting the insurgents. The Royal Government of Bhutan might also have thought that it might lead to the Chinese apprehensions and hamper the

<sup>58</sup><https://thebhutanese.bt/indian-media-should-do-their-homework-on-bhutans-2003-operation-all-clear/>.

smooth functioning of the Sino-Bhutanese relations due to the military assistance from Government of India and it might provoke the Chinese to send their observers not only to monitor and protect their border with Bhutan but also to assist the Royal Bhutanese Guards to prevent illegal entry of Tibetan herdsman into Bhutanese territory. In the end, it would be very difficult for Bhutan to refuse the Chinese if it allowed the Indian military into Bhutan to deal with the insurgents (Kharat, 2004: 1662).

Bhutan being a Buddhist Kingdom has been following the principles of Buddha, and Buddhism is its state religion. So, on the day of the operation, all the Bhutanese soldiers were assembled just before the hostilities began and Thukse Rinpoche one of the Dorje Lupon<sup>59</sup> at that time addressed the Bhutanese soldiers, emphasizing the equality of all human beings. He told the soldiers that the Assamese, as well as the Bhutanese, had families dear to them who desired a happy life, and that the act of killing is a negative action in any circumstances. Early in the morning of 15<sup>th</sup> December 2003, the Royal Bhutan Army opened fire on the bases of Assamese separatist forces operating in the forests of South Bhutan near the Indian border. (Nagasawa, 2016: 38).

According to one of the interviews done by 'The Telegraph' an online newspaper, the source had narrated the incident of the 15<sup>th</sup> of December morning. According to the respondent, the King used to visit the ULFA camps on a couple of occasions, while the army officials exchanged pleasantries and handed over some gifts, like a huge box of fresh oranges and a silver bottle of US-made vitamin pills. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of December, the King was supposed to come for another visit in the camps. So the women from the camps were preparing Assamese Pithas which are a special class of rice preparation generally made only on special occasions like Bihu which is an important non-religious festival in the Indian state of Assam. While the men tidied up the camps and lined up along the three approach roads to accord a ceremonial welcome to the King, around 8.30 am, the first gunshots were heard<sup>60</sup>.

The Bhutanese King, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuk was leading his troops from the front during the operation. It is said that the King was risking his life in order

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<sup>59</sup>The Lupon is mainly responsible for the tantric rituals.

<sup>60</sup><https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/bhutan-attack-was-betrayal-says-ulfa-leader-7-years-to-the-day-mama-relives-operation-all-clear/cid/449853>.

to protect the sovereignty and security of the Himalayan Kingdom by leading his troops into the hostile jungles to flush out the anti-India insurgents. The army action had spread from Dhangtar in Samdrup Jongkhar district, where offensives were concentrated to Nganglam area in Southern Bhutan, Sarpang district in West Bhutan and beyond Samtse<sup>61</sup>. The Royal Bhutan Army and Royal Bodyguards force of 6000, attacked an estimated 3000 militants spread across 30 militant camps (Bhushan, 2010). The role of the Indian Army was to guard its own side of the border and airlift the injured Royal Bhutan Army soldiers<sup>62</sup>.

But according to the Indian civilians of the Indo-Bhutan border, the Indian Army's role was not only that of airlifting the injured soldiers. On the day of the operation, there was a sudden attack with heavy artillery from the Indian Army<sup>63</sup>. The Bhutanese Army assaulted on positions which by official accounts, were heavily defended and protected by minefields of the insurgent groups. It would have been impossible for the Bhutanese Army without any major Indian military backing. According to the officials, the Royal Bhutan Army killed around 120 insurgents, sustaining just seven fatalities in return. This shows the numerical and technological superiority of the Bhutanese Army which it simply does not possess (Swami, 2004).

On 17<sup>th</sup> of December 2003, the Royal Bhutan Army managed to capture three top insurgent leaders although its army overran several important bases of the insurgents in Bhutan. The Indian Army's Eastern Command in Kolkata said that around 120 militants were killed in the anti-insurgent operations, while reports from Assam said over 35 Royal Bhutan Army personnel were killed in the counter-insurgency operation<sup>64</sup>. The ULFA leader Arabinda Rajkhowa made an appeal to the Chinese Government on 25<sup>th</sup> of December 2003 through fax message. In his appeal he asked the Chinese Government to grant them temporary shelter in China because of the attacks from the Indo-Bhutan joint forces and that their combatants were being forced to retreat towards the Sino-Bhutan border. But the Chinese Government turned down their request while making the frontier forces more vigilant against the insurgents in

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<sup>61</sup><https://www.raonline.ch/pages/bt/btbodo12c2.html>.

<sup>62</sup><https://thebhutanese.bt/indian-media-should-do-their-homework-on-bhutans-2003-operation-all-clear/>.

<sup>63</sup>Interview taken with the civilians on the Indian side of the Indo-Bhutan border, on July 2019, in the state of Assam, India.

<sup>64</sup><https://www.raonline.ch/pages/bt/btbodo12c2.html>.



order to stop them from entering China. The decision made by the then Chinese Government had been an unexpected event unlike its normal attitude towards India and Bhutan in terms of its policies (Sharma, 2014: 115).

On 1<sup>st</sup> January 2004, during the 12<sup>th</sup> Summit forum of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) which was held at Islamabad to call upon nations in the region to actively clamp down on terror, the then Indian Foreign Minister, Yashwant Sinha, had urged the SAARC countries to emulate Bhutan in flushing out insurgents from their soil. The Bhutanese Prime Minister Jigme Thinley also strongly pleaded for the adoption and effective implementation of the protocol on terrorism during the Summit. In the first week of January 2004, the then Prime Minister of India Atal Behari Vajpayee, addressed in the Summit by saying that he would like to draw attention to the courageous action taken by His Majesty the King of Bhutan and his government against the insurgent groups who were trying to use Bhutanese territory to launch terrorist activities in India. He also mentioned that it is an outstanding example of sensitivity to the security concerns of a neighbour which is at the same time in the direct long-term security interest of Bhutan itself (Hussain, 2001).

The main operation lasted only for a few days, and the Assamese guerrilla camps were completely destroyed. The Bhutanese military campaign which they called the 'Second Duar War' had proved to be successful. The war was distinguished by the humane treatment of the captive Assamese insurgents (Nagasawa, 2016: 38). According to the estimated number, there were around 3,000 insurgents in those 30 camps of the three groups. Some of them who were non-combatants were on the run. Those who chose to fight were either killed or captured or were forced to flee while scattering themselves into the difficult terrain of East and Southern Bhutan (Prabhakara, 2004). The ULFA camps were dismantled along with that of the NDFB and the KLO, while 26 personnel from the ULFA and three central committee members and eight officers were missing after being handed over to the Indian Army by the Bhutanese Army (Saikia, 2014). It has also been mentioned that, while the ULFA and the NDFB were ready to fight, the KLO cadres preferred to surrender rather than fight the Royal Bhutan Army (Sharma, 2003).

### **3.5 Significance of the ‘Operation All Clear’**

There are different opinions in terms of Operation All Clear, especially among the civilians residing on the Indian side of the India-Bhutan border. According to one of the civilians residing in the border areas from the Indian side, the Royal Government of Bhutan’s main target in conducting ‘Operation All Clear’ was KLO and ULFA. One of them has mentioned that the counter-insurgency operation was necessary because the civilians from the border areas were in constant danger from both the insurgents and the patrolling Indian Army. And according to the other civilian the Indian Army emptied the homes of the civilians and relocated the villagers to the local public schools in order to search for the insurgents as they were suspected of hiding in the civilian homes after being chased out by the Bhutanese Army. The Indian civilians were arrested without any reason for questioning and for suspicion of sheltering the insurgents. He also added that, although there was insecurity between the Indian Army and the civilians, it was lesser compared to 1980’s Bodo Movement<sup>65</sup>. The Indian Army gave tight security to Bhutan in dealing with the insurgents, while according to another civilian; the Indian Army did not disturb the public<sup>66</sup>.

According to the civilians from the other side of the border i.e. from the Bhutanese civilians, there was no hostile situation from the government during the ‘Operation All Clear’ in 2003. Also, there had been no noticeable impact on the politics or foreign policy between India and Bhutan due to Operation All Clear, although it emboldened and re-emphasized the independence of Bhutan’s foreign policy stand and India’s respect to the decision of Bhutan in dealing with its internal security problems concerning the Indian origin insurgents. There were changes in the India-Bhutan relations after Operation All Clear, as it reaffirmed India’s respect to the independence and sovereign status of Bhutan and also Operation All Clear was necessary. It was also a success on the side of the Bhutanese civilians because it was aimed to evict the Indian origin insurgents out of Bhutan<sup>67</sup>.

According to the Bhutanese Government, the ‘Operation All Clear’ was an all-Bhutan affair, with King Jigme Singye Wangchuk himself leading his troops from the front

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<sup>65</sup>The Bodo Movement have been mentioned in 3.2 portion of this chapter.

<sup>66</sup>Interview with the civilian residing in one of the villages of the Indo-Bhutan border on the Indian side, July 2019, Assam, India.

<sup>67</sup>Interview with the Bhutanese subject through email on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2019.

and that the Indian armed forces were providing only logistical support sealing the international border ferrying the injured to hospitals in India, capturing those militants who tried to break into Indian territory and killing those who offered fight. Barring the handing over to the Indian Army authorities of 37 women and 27 children, many militants, and some leaders were captured. But according to the ULFA leaders, the Indian armed forces were actively taking part in the fighting on the ground. There had been at least one newspaper report of the arrival of a coffin wrapped in the Indian tricolour at 11 Garhwal Helipad at Darranga, which is situated on the Indian side of the border south of Samdrup Jongkhar, one of the districts where the dismantled camps were situated (Prabhakara, 2004).

According to some of the main participants (insurgents) of the Operation All Clear, there was no such disturbance for the civilians either by the Indian Army or the insurgent groups, nor did the counter-insurgency operation disrupt the relation between India and Bhutan. While some have mentioned that, there were little changes in the economic aid towards Bhutan from India as a reward for conducting the Operation All Clear. The economic aid as well as the socio-economic development programs such as building of roads, communications, constructions of dams, etc., increased after the operation<sup>68</sup>. But on the other side of the border, i.e., in Northeast India, there were bandhs called by various insurgent outfits in solidarity with the ULFA, NDFB, and KLO. Press releases by these organizations all called for termination of military operations in Bhutan. The NSCN (K), the MPLF (a joint front of the RPF, the UNLF and the PREPAK) condemned the operation and appealed to the people of the region to display solidarity with ULFA, NDFB and KLO. But there was a lack of popular support to these movements (Banerjee & Laishram, 2004: 3).

According to one of the ex-insurgent leaders, ‘Operation All Clear’ was not necessary because it failed and the insurgent outfits are still residing in the jungles of Southern Bhutan, as most of the top insurgent leaders were not arrested or killed except for a few. Those who managed to escape had settled down at new camps in Myanmar and some of the factions were in the process of discussion and ceasefire with the Indian Government. According to them, no force can be crushed down by force, although it

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<sup>68</sup>Interview with the civilian residing in one of the villages of the Indo-Bhutan border on the Indian side, July 2019, Assam, India.

can be weakened for a short period of time, as the scattered elements can regroup and become strong. All the three insurgent groups, i.e., the ULFA, KLO, and the NDFB were still active. Also they feel that, India being a big democratic country, should have taken steps to solve the problem through peaceful means, like having dialogue with the insurgent groups. Had the Government of India resolved the problem through dialogue, then the insurgent groups would have ended their quest for good. They feel that this act in reality makes India a violent country<sup>69</sup>.

In the words of an official of the Royal Government of Bhutan, “there is a possibility of the militants returning to the Southern Bhutanese jungles. And so, the Bhutanese Government will maintain constant vigil on the border to ensure that they do not face the same problem in future”<sup>70</sup>. The escaping insurgents settled down in Myanmar<sup>71</sup> and also in Bangladesh. Also, a large number of them remained back in Bhutan itself, while some have moved north into the mountainous region of Bhutan and as already mentioned above, the ULFA sought permission from China to allow them to pass through Tibet into Myanmar along with hospitality due to the cold weather as its members had no foods and clothing (Kasturi, 2004: 83). After being flushed out from Bhutan, the insurgent groups’ next refuge was in Bangladesh under the patronage of the Khaleda Zia Government. But the pro-India Sheikh Hasina Government arrested most top ULFA leaders and handed them over to Indian authorities in 2008 (Baruah, 2012).

The countries sharing borders with the North-eastern states of India have all been affected by these insurgent activities. Bhutan successfully cooperated with India in removing the insurgent groups although some traces of these groups remain in the southern jungles of Bhutan. Bhutan might have given some assistance to the insurgents at the beginning, but later, it abided the friendship with India and has acted against the insurgent groups in the end (Kumar, 2018). The subjects of Bhutan rejoiced after the success of the operation as they were shaken by anxiety over the safety of their King, while the ministers prepared for massive celebrations to honour their triumphant hero. But His Majesty the King cancelled the celebrations. The King

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<sup>69</sup>Interview with the participants of the ‘Operation All Clear’ 2003, Assam, India, July 2019.

<sup>70</sup><https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/bhutan-plans-militant-mop-up-operation/cid/780756>.

<sup>71</sup>As mentioned by one of the participants in the interview taken on July 2019, Assam, India.

reminded everyone about the 32 Bhutanese and many insurgents who had died and ordered butter lamps to be lit for their souls. Bhutan went into mourning and two years later, the eldest queen ordered the building of 108 Chortens (stupas) at Dochula Pass which is an important tourist spot, as atonement for the loss of lives (Sappani, GNH)<sup>72</sup>.

In the later years in 2010 when Prime Minister of Bhutan Jigmi Y Thinley while visiting Assam in order to attend a programme at the foothills of India-Bhutan border area and on his way back to Paro, said that, “there are no Indian militant camps or bases in Bhutan and that the Government of Bhutan will ensure that no militants are able to enter Bhutan”<sup>73</sup>. He also said that, “after ‘Operation All Clear’ 2003, there is no militant base in Bhutan and that the Government of Bhutan has handed over all the prisoners to the Indian authorities, so there are no prisoners left in Bhutan”<sup>74</sup>. He also said that “evil of terrorism needs to be fought effectively with the help of Bhutan’s friendly neighbour India”<sup>75</sup>. There have been regular meetings on security issues and border management between India and Bhutan along with coordination of entry exit points of the Indo-Bhutan border. The Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) of India escorts the Bhutanese people and vehicles (Sarkar, 2012: 348). The Operation All Clear also had a significant effect on the neighbouring countries of India like Bangladesh and Myanmar. Because of the pressure that the Operation All Clear applied on Bangladesh and Myanmar, both the countries expressed their willingness to take action against militant camps within its territories (Banerjee & Laishram, 2004: 3).

### **3.6 India-Bhutan Correlations after ‘Operation All Clear’**

In the aftermath of the Operation All Clear, the Bhutanese territories were again being used by the militants of the Northeast India as the Bangladesh Government headed by Sheikh Hasina ceased to act as safe haven for these militant groups<sup>76</sup>. Two years after Operation All Clear was conducted, the ULFA cadres of 709 Battalion under the

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<sup>72</sup><https://sites.google.com/site/wellbeingmeditationdirectory/bhutan-gnh>.

<sup>73</sup><https://www.dnaindia.com/world/report-no-indian-insurgent-camp-in-my-country-says-prime-minister-of-bhutan-1483772>.

<sup>74</sup><https://www.dnaindia.com/world/report-no-indian-insurgent-camp-in-my-country-says-prime-minister-of-bhutan-1483772>.

<sup>75</sup><https://www.dnaindia.com/world/report-no-indian-insurgent-camp-in-my-country-says-prime-minister-of-bhutan-1483772>.

<sup>76</sup><https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/NDFB-militants-strike-in-Bhutan/articleshow/7535965.cms>.

leadership of Hira Sarania managed to set up camps at locations across Darrang for almost six months but later they were abandoned (Bhattacharyya, 2018). After that, there had been proof of the existence of other militant group in the territories of Bhutan. It came to light when four Bhutanese security personnel were attacked inside its territory in February 2011 by the suspected NDFB militants between Sarpang and Gelephu road in Bhutan's Sarpang district bordering Kokrajhar district of Assam. While previous year, a Bhutanese army man was shot dead by the NDFB anti talk faction at Gabrukanda west of Manas River inside Bhutan<sup>77</sup>.

The militant group which started settling in Bhutan in the aftermath of Operation All Clear was the group known as NDFB (Songbijit). The NDFB (Songbijit) had temporary camps along the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts (BTAD) which borders with Bhutan. The NDFB (S) had about 20 small groups operating along the area straddling Chirang and Baksa districts of the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts (BTAD) in Assam and Bhutan's forested foothills. The Songbijit faction had been wreaking havoc in the Bodo areas and had been held responsible for killings and extortion<sup>78</sup>. When the NDFB (S) massacred the people of the Adivasi village in Assam on December 2014, the then Home Minister of India, Rajnath Singh requested the then External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj to seek help from Bhutan to tackle the militant group<sup>79</sup>. After assuming the office, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Thimphu for two days as his first foreign trip, he expressed satisfaction with the cooperation between India and Bhutan related to their mutual security. Both the countries agreed to continue with their close coordination and cooperation with each other on issues relating to their national interests, and not allow each other's territory to be used for interests harmful to the other<sup>80</sup>.

Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi on 17<sup>th</sup> of June 2014 gave a message to Bhutan in which he said, "Terrorism divides, Tourism unites". This was said in

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<sup>77</sup><https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/NDFB-militants-strike-in-Bhutan/articleshow/7535965.cms>.

<sup>78</sup><https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/modi-prods-bhutan-to-curb-ndfb/cid/172357>.

<sup>79</sup><https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/government-wants-bhutans-help-to-tackle-ndfb/articleshow/45637636.cms>.

<sup>80</sup><https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-bhutan-assure-each-other-on-mutual-security/articleshow/36677703.cms>.

reference to Bhutan's closeness with the North-eastern states of India. Bhutan being close to the North-eastern states of India, its security became a natural component of New Delhi's dialogue with Thimphu. India again sought Bhutan's cooperation in fighting Indian insurgent groups who had been looking for shelter in the border areas of Bhutan<sup>81</sup>. The Royal Government of Bhutan promised the Government of India that its territories will not be used against India. Also, during the visit of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Bhutan, the Government of Bhutan and the Government of India agreed not to allow each other's territories to be used for interests which might be harmful to the other (Miglani, 2014).

The Indian Border Road Organisation (BRO) constructed all the accessible roads from the twenty districts of Bhutan as part of India's responsibility for the security of Bhutan. The Indian Border Security Force (BSF) shares the responsibility with the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) in protecting the India-Bhutan border and since the Operation All Clear of 2003, the border has been somewhat quieter than prior to the operation (Sarkar 2012: 348 & Kanwal, 2007: 3).

One of the disruptions caused by the insurgent groups before and during the Operation All Clear was on the 'Indo-Bhutan Friendship Fair', which used to be organized in order to boost bilateral relations between India and Bhutan. This fair was co-conducted as a part of confidence building measures at Subankhata along the India-Bhutan border in Assam's Baksa district and the name of this fair is also known as 'Magw Fair'<sup>82</sup>. The 'Maghw Fair' committee and members of Bhutan-India Friendship Association (BIFA) met to revive this old tradition as the citizens of greater Subankhata area have been organising the fair since six decades, where citizens from both India and Bhutan filled the fair every year in order to enjoy the peace and unity among societies in the region. The Bhutanese merchants from Pemagatshel and Samdrup Jongkhar would go down to the border in order to trade mandarin, ginger, soybean, and potatoes, etc., and camped at Subankhata for months and witnessed the fair and recount the fun and wonders they saw to their friends and family back home. That tradition of Bhutanese going down to Subankhata continued well until the 1990s. But due to the security issues along the border, the fair was

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<sup>81</sup><https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/modi-prods-bhutan-to-curb-ndfb/cid/172357>.

<sup>82</sup>Maghw is a harvest festival celebrated in Assam, Northeast India, which marks the end of harvesting season in the month of Magh (January–February).

discontinued until it was reopened in January 2020. Unfortunately, the fair is on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which led Bhutan to seal its border with India from March 2020, until 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2022. (Kokrajhar Bureau, 2020).

On 11<sup>th</sup> January 2020, the three NDFB factions<sup>83</sup> came together and signed a ceasefire agreement and a total of 1615 cadres of the three factions of National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) militants laid down their arms and ammunition as part of the arms laying down ceremony as per the agreement between these militant outfits and the Government of India. This agreement led to Third Bodo Accord which is said to have brought peace formally on the three decades long militancy in Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD)<sup>84</sup>. Thus, among the three participants of the Operation All Clear 2003, the Government of India manages to dissolve the NDFB for greater peace. The absence of the NDFB insurgent groups is also a lesser threat for the security of Bhutan in its southern borders.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

The Operation All Clear of 2003 had been the first counter-insurgency operation of the Royal Government of Bhutan against foreign insurgents. Being a small Kingdom, Bhutan has done its duty to help its neighbour India although they had limited arms and army personnel. Bhutan might have given shelter to the ULFA, NDFB and the KLO, in the earlier phase due to some reasons but in the coming years the Royal Government realised the dangers and threats which existed due to their mistakes in harbouring these insurgent groups. As per the treaties signed between the Indian Government and the Bhutanese Government the latter had maintained the treaty and helped the Indian Government in arresting the insurgents. The Bhutanese government also maintained some protocols by not allowing the Indian army to enter inside Bhutan and conduct the operation due to foreign policy issues and not to hamper its subjects who might get hurt if the Indian Army enters inside Bhutan. Due to the

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<sup>83</sup>After the Operation All Clear of 2003, the NDFB split into two factions. The majority group remained under the leadership of Dhiren Boro who signed a unilateral ceasefire with the Indian Government and the Assam Government on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2005. This group was known as the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (Progressive) (NDFB (P)). While the other half who had been opposed to the peace talks remained under the leadership of Ranjan Daimary and was renamed as NDFB (R). In 2012, after the arrest of Ranjan Daimary, NDFB-R split, leading to the formation of another faction, led by a non-Bodo IK Songbijit (NDFB-S).

<sup>84</sup>[theshillongtimes.com/2020/01/30/1615-cadres-of-4-ndfb-factions-lay-down-arms-in-guwahati/](https://theshillongtimes.com/2020/01/30/1615-cadres-of-4-ndfb-factions-lay-down-arms-in-guwahati/).



sincerity and the bravery of their King, the Bhutanese Army and their volunteers managed to fight the insurgents courageously.

China, being a competitor of India and also having border issues with both India and Bhutan, has responded positively during the Operation All Clear of 2003 by not sheltering or allowing safe passage to the insurgents through their territories. Although in the beginning, the Chinese Government helped the Northeast insurgents in buying arms and training them, in the latter years their policies changed towards these groups. The result was shown when the Government of China denied safe passage to the ULFA leader for the injured members through China towards Myanmar. Also, Bhutan being a peaceful Kingdom, the Royal Government showed respect to both the Bhutanese soldiers and the insurgents who were wounded or deceased during the operation. The Bhutanese Government has also done their duty well by handing over the captured insurgents and their families to the Indian Army.

Therefore, India having a neighbour like Bhutan is a blessing in terms of foreign policy and security, as the Indian Government managed to persuade the Bhutanese Government in handling the insurgent groups who have been a problem and a threat to the latter. The relations between India and Bhutan have come back to normalcy after the counter-insurgency operation. Although there are different opinions from among the civilians and insurgents about the operation, the Operation All Clear is a good example of collaboration in terms of security between the two neighbouring countries that have faced challenges. In terms of security, Operation All Clear was a success for both India and Bhutan although it might not be the same for the rebel group.

## **CHAPTER- 4**

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# **DOKLAM CRISIS AND THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF INDIA-BHUTAN SECURITY COOPERATION**

## CHAPTER- 4

### DOKLAM CRISIS AND THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF INDIA-BHUTAN SECURITY COOPERATION

#### 4.1 Introduction

The Doklam Crisis of 2017 is one of the major challenges in the India-Bhutan security cooperation. Doklam is about 15 kilometres towards the southeast from Nathu La pass, an area that divides China and India at the Sikkim border. The Dok La pass which connects the Indian state of Sikkim with Tibet and Western Bhutan is on the western perimeter of Doklam plateau. The tri-junction area where there was a border stand-off between India-China-Bhutan is a point 2000 metres away from Mount Gipmochi, marking the terminus of the Indian border, which New Delhi regards as a strategic red line (Beena, 2019: 61). The Doklam Crisis which is also known as the ‘Doklam Stand-off’ had occurred when China constructed a road in the disputed territory at the Doklam plateau in June 2017.

The Doklam area consists of a plateau and also a valley, which lies between China’s Chumbi Valley at the north, Bhutan’s Haa Valley in the east and India’s state of Sikkim in the west. The name Doklam is derived from standard Bhutanese language, while the Tibetans call it Zhoglam and the Chinese call it Donglang. Doklam has been portrayed as part of Bhutan in the Bhutanese maps since 1961, but it is also claimed by China<sup>85</sup>. When the crisis occurred, India intervened on behalf of Bhutan, supporting the latter’s stand and demanded China to halt its construction work in the disputed territory<sup>86</sup>. Doklam is mostly a rocky path, especially on the southern side of Torsa Nala and the meaning of Doklam also signifies a ‘rocky path’. Doklam is a part of Haa district, which was transferred by Sikkim to Bhutan in 1780 following the attack by Bhutan (Haran, 2017).

Doklam does not have permanent residents, except for few visitors between late April and early September, mostly from the Bhutanese side. Their graziers visit mainly Southern Doklam, between Jampheri ridge, the highest ridge to the south of Chumbi

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<sup>85</sup><https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/behind-the-ongoing-stand-off-in-doklam-century-old-manoevres-of-geostrategy-4735805/>.

<sup>86</sup><https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/behind-the-ongoing-stand-off-in-doklam-century-old-manoevres-of-geostrategy-4735805/>.

valley and Torsa Nala, and goes to the northern side of the Nala occasionally. Doklam is deserted for the rest of the year since the terrain and weather are harsh (Haran, 2017). It is situated between the two Silk Road entry points from China to India near the India-Bhutan border in Sikkim; Nathu La and Jelep La. It is located in the Chumbi Valley and consists of grasslands which are visited often by wild yaks and cattle herders from Tibet and Bhutan (Soumik, 2017).

The Chumbi Valley, which is situated in the Eastern Himalayas, has been a gateway of interaction between India, Tibet and the Himalayan states of Bhutan and Sikkim for migration and commercial exchanges for a very long period of time. But it has changed over the years and now it has become a part of China. It is now the meeting point of defence and security interests of both India and China. Due to this reason, the area has naturally become of unique geo-strategic importance. Chumbi Valley had also been the corridor through which migration had taken place from the region of Tibet to the south and vice-versa, carrying with it the socio-cultural influences of one country to the other. It has also been the stage where some great powers have interacted with each other to establish control over the trade and politics of the region (Datta, 2015: 206-207).

According to China Today<sup>87</sup>, the Doklam area which is known as the Dong Lang area in China is located in Yadong County of the Tibet Autonomous Region of China, which borders India's Sikkim state on the west and the Kingdom of Bhutan on the south. It is claimed by China as their territory even after the 1890 convention between Great Britain and the former, which was signed relating to Sikkim and Tibet<sup>88</sup>. The Chinese border troops have been patrolling the area and Chinese herdsman graze their livestock there. Even at present, the boundary between the Dong Lang area and Sikkim is a part of the China-India boundary in the Sikkim Sector<sup>89</sup>. According to the Chinese Government, from the time of the Qing dynasty (1644 to 1912), Tibetans owned the Doklam grasslands and the Bhutanese shepherds paid grass tax to access the region. But according to the Governments of India and Bhutan, the treaty was concluded before Bhutan became a British protectorate in 1910 (Dey, 2017: 7).

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<sup>87</sup>China Today is a monthly magazine founded in 1952.

<sup>88</sup>[www.chinatoday.com.cn/english/news/2017-08/04/content\\_744549.htm](http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/english/news/2017-08/04/content_744549.htm).

<sup>89</sup>[www.chinatoday.com.cn/english/news/2017-08/04/content\\_744549.htm](http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/english/news/2017-08/04/content_744549.htm).

The Doklam plateau is also considered by the Tibetan historian Tsering Shakya as Droglam (the nomads' path). He described it as China's 'One Belt One Road' project, the militarization of the plateau and its massive infrastructure building in Tibet and that it is all part of China re-starting the Great Game: expanding Chinese influence across the Himalayas and Central Asia, all the way to Europe. The Doklam Stand-off between China on the one side and Bhutan-India on the other, along with the border dispute between China and India, has their origins in the British invasion of Tibet in 1904<sup>90</sup>. In the present scenario, China and Bhutan share a 470 kilometres long boundary which is not yet demarcated and over 25 percent of this border has been disputed for decades. In the northern sectors, the disputed regions are the 495 sq. kilometres of the Jakurlung and Pasamlung valley in the Wangdue Phodrang district while the other disputed regions are, the 269 sq. kilometres of Doklam, Sinchulung, Dramana and Shakhatoe in the Samste, Haa and Paro districts of the north-western part of Bhutan (Chakraborty, 2020). These claims made by China have been totally dependent on Tibet's claim. That is why, it is important to understand the historical relations between Tibet and Bhutan in order to understand the present border dispute between China and Bhutan (Chakraborty, 2020).

India and Bhutan have a typical relation since the beginning, due to which, both the countries have signed treaties as mentioned in the second chapter. The security cooperation in the time of Doklam Crisis can be said to relate with the treaties signed between the two countries in terms of security. The border dispute in the Doklam region is not a new one. There had been border disputes between China and Bhutan since the beginning as mentioned in the history. The Doklam Crisis of 2017 is another episode of the border dispute between China and Bhutan.

#### **4.1.a Historical Background**

The Bhutan-Tibet relationship must be addressed first in order to understand the boundary dispute between China and Bhutan. According to World Atlas, for about 1800 years, from around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, the historical Chinese maps showed Bhutan and Sikkim as parts of Tibet. Later, when Tibet got annexed by the People's Republic of China, from 1958 onwards, the maps started showing that large parts of Bhutan were part of China's territory. Two years later, China claimed that Bhutan,

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<sup>90</sup><https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/up-front/story/20170724-china-great-game-doklam-tibet-manchu-china-1024299-2017-07-14>.

Ladakh, and Sikkim have always been a part of it, which alarmed Bhutan. So, Bhutan closed its border with China and stopped all its diplomatic contacts with the latter, while it has signed a Friendship Treaty with India (World Atlas, 2021).

The boundary between Bhutan and Tibet is a natural, traditional and customary one, which follows the crest of the Himalayan range that forms the main watershed between the Amo Chu and the waters flowing into Ram Tso, Yu Tso, Nyang Chu and Kuru Chu in Tibet and the Paro Chu, Punakha, Thimphu Tongsa and Bumthang rivers in Bhutan. Since there has been no evidence of any direct Chinese treaty relations with Bhutan, the Chinese statements of past authority over Bhutan are the beliefs of inheritance. Bhutan is with Tibet through the Dalai Lama due to a tributary relationship since the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Current Background 1939; Gupta, 1968: 263).

In the past years, Bhutan had never been conquered due to its geographical landscapes and in the northern borders Bhutan had to deal only with the Tibetans, not the Chinese (Andelman, 2010: 106). Bhutan's contact with China was only through the occasional and informal meeting of the Bhutanese representative in Lhasa with the Chinese officials, as the former never sent tributary missions to the latter (Jha, 2013: 2). Being militarily stronger during the early 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Tibetan armies invaded Bhutan (Mathou, 2004: 389). There had been seven wars during 1616 to 1679 between Tibet and Bhutan (Ardussi, 2013: 65).

The central Tibetan Government launched war against Bhutan, first under the banner of the Gtsang Dynasty Kings and after 1642, under that of the Dge-lugs-pa establishment. But in every war, the Tibetans were defeated. As the new Tibetan and Bhutanese political organization grew in strength, the struggle developed from its purely separatist origin into a series of conflicts over territory and national prestige along their common Himalayan border and beyond. This can be considered as the starting point of the boundary disputes which have later continued with the changing times, especially after the Convention of 1890 signed between Great Britain and the Qing Empire (China) over the boundary of Sikkim and Tibet. This Convention was signed without consulting the Tibetans. Tibet and China had fluctuating relations since they first came in contact during the 700 A.D. (Ardussi, 2013: 65). It was in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century that Ngawang Namgyal, a refugee forced out by Tibetan rulers, unified Bhutan (Mathou, 2004: 389).

Due to the rivalry between the Penlops (Governors) of Paro and Tongsa, the Tibetan intervention was often invited to Bhutan. In 1730-1731, after the intervention of Tibet in the civil war of Bhutan, an agreement was signed by which Bhutan was obliged to send a representative with a tribute to the Tibetan Government (Kuzmin, 2010: 52). In 1730, the Bhutanese were compelled to station a representative at Lhasa after one of the Tibetan interventions and this practice was continued till 1951, which led to the Tibetan and later, Chinese claim of suzerainty over Bhutan (Sharma, 1994: 27). Bhutan had trade relations with Tibet and India since the beginning, but the trade route was cut down after the annexation of Tibet by China. So, Bhutan started trading more with India (Sherpa, 2014: 42).

Tibet and Bhutan had a smooth relationship in the past although the former was a threat for the latter. Bhutan's relations with China started after the establishment of the Chinese Ambans (residents) at Lhasa in the 18<sup>th</sup> century under the Qing dynasty. Although the Bhutanese representative who had been posted in Lhasa met the Tibetan officials regularly and the Chinese officials occasionally, there were no Bhutanese missions to Beijing. The Bhutanese missions went only to the Dalai Lama, and no letters or gifts were forwarded to the Emperor in Beijing, but they usually called on the Chinese Ambans in Lhasa. Even the courtesy gifts to the Dalai Lama, or even the Amban had no political significance (Mathou, 2004: 391-392).

Tibet was a forbidden country for all the people of non-Buddhist origin by the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The British or any person of western or non-Buddhist origin were not given any formal permission to carry out official trade or to open any trading mart inside Tibet. Only informal trades were carried out along the border and so, trans-border trade began to develop in a more systematic manner after the handover of Darjeeling to the British in 1835 by the King of Sikkim (Datta, 2015: 212). According to Ratna Sarkar and Indrajit Ray, a 16<sup>th</sup> century merchant Ralph Fitch noted in his travelogue about the movement of Chinese caravans in the Bhutan-Bengal trade route. Also, according to a foreign traveller in 1626, Chinese merchandise such as silk, gold and porcelain came through Tibet via Bhutan to Bengal. The trade continued during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which consisted largely of transit character as several export commodities like salt, gold, tea, pearls and corals, were not of Bhutanese origin (Das, 1902: 85; Kawaguchi, 1979: 450; Sarkar & Ray, 2006: 56).

For centuries, salt, yak tails and silk were transported over the mountains, taxed by mountain warlords operating in an inner-Himalayan world which was under the dominant power of the Dalai Lama's court at Lhasa, loosely linked to China since the time of the Yuan dynasty. This shows that the tri-junction point in the Chumbi Valley has been considered as an important point since the beginning. This makes the Doklam plateau a high ground for China to have access over the tri-junction between India-China-Bhutan (Swami, 2017). When the Treaty of Sinchula was signed in 1865 between the British Indian Government and Bhutan, China made several efforts to claim the latter as their historical rights (Jha, 2013: 2).

The Calcutta Convention of 1890 was signed as a tripartite agreement between China-India-Sikkim. This agreement was signed after British won the war against the Chinese and forced them to open trade and commerce to the British Empire (Saluja, 2017). In this Convention relating to Sikkim and Tibet, signed at Calcutta in 1890, the Qing Government accepted the British protectorate over Sikkim. The Tibet-Sikkim border was established and the British scheduled their talks with the Tibetans in this Convention about trade relations. The Convention of 1890 was signed by the Viceroy of India on the British side and by one of Lhasa's Ambans on the side for the Qing. But the Tibetans did not acknowledge this Convention and demolished the poles installed at the border (Waddell, 1996; Shakabpa, 1988 & Kuzmin, 2010: 65, 66).

In 1893, the Qing and the British representatives signed the Regulations Regarding Trade, Communication, and Pasturage. Again, the Tibetans refused to acknowledge these regulations, as both agreements were signed without its participation. The Tibetan authorities also banned Tibetans from settling in Yatung, the place where the planned trade with the British was meant to take place, at Pari. While in the words of J.C. White, the British representative in Sikkim, the Chinese had no power over Tibet and that China was only a symbolic suzerain of Tibet (Waddell, 1996; Shakabpa, 1988 & Kuzmin, 2010: 65, 66).

The Chinese always aimed for the trade relations in the tri-junction point of the Sikkim-Tibet-India border. The Chinese could not fulfil these ambitions during the British Colonial period, and it has been trying ever since to have an access over the region to fulfil its economic policies in the contemporary era. During the Convention of 1890, the British attempted to communicate with the Tibetans through China as the



former were not aware of the fact that the latter no longer exercised any real authority at Lhasa. Meanwhile, the Chinese were also anxious to prevent the British from negotiating directly with the Tibetans. So, the Chinese agreed to talk with the British Indian Government at Calcutta. These resulted in the 1890 Anglo-Chinese Convention and were attached with the 1893 Trade Regulations (Mckay, 2012: 7).

The 1890 treaty was signed between the British Viceroy of India, Lord Lansdowne and China's Imperial Associate Resident in Tibet (Beena, 2019: 62). The treaty included the border arrangements of Bhutan and Sikkim with China and is mentioned in the Article I of the Convention of 1890. As per Article I of Convention of 1890, it was agreed that the boundary of Sikkim and Tibet shall be the crest of the mountain range separating the waters flowing into the Sikkim Teesta and its affluent, from the waters flowing into the Tibetan Mochu and northwards into other rivers of Tibet. The line commences at Mount Gipmochi, on the Bhutan frontier, and follows the above-mentioned water-parting to the point where it meets the territory of Nepal (Saluja, 2017).

The Convention of 1890 was also attached with a Trade Regulations of 1893, which allowed the opening of a Trade mart at Yatung, in the Chumbi Valley. But the Tibetans played no part in these negotiations (McKay, 2003: 70). The Convention of 1890 which was signed during the Qing Dynasty set the Gipmochi Snow Mountains as a crossing point of China, Bhutan and India, also the Bhutanese herders of the border areas were supposed to get the approval of the Chinese if they wanted their cattle to graze in that area. The Bhutanese authorities were not a party to this treaty and it was only after 1910 that its foreign relations were guided by the British (Chinese Foreign Ministry, Dasgupta, 2017). The Convention between Great Britain and China relating to Sikkim and Tibet was signed at Calcutta on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1890 and ratified at London on 27<sup>th</sup> August 1890<sup>91</sup> (Tibet Justice Centre, 2021).

The Bhutanese, Ugyen Dorji was chosen as an agent of the British in the Anglo-Tibet relations with the consent of the Darbar of Bhutan to prevent suspicion by the Tibetans as he was a frequent visitor in Tibet. Bhutan also had traditional and commercial relations with Tibet along with having religious and ethnic affinity (Majumdar, 1996: 826). As the British invaders reached Lhasa on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1904,

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<sup>91</sup><https://www.tibetjustice.org/materials/treaties/treaties9.html>.

both the British and the Tibetans signed the ten point agreement on 7<sup>th</sup> September at the Potala Palace. Amban Yutai, Gorkha Representative Captain Jita Bahadur and Bhutanese Representative Trongsa Penlop Ugyen Wangchuk were the witnesses. On 11<sup>th</sup> November 1904, this convention was ratified by the Viceroy and Governor General of India and as per the declaration included in the Convention, the indemnity Tibet owed to the British would be reduced from 7,500,000 rupees to 2,500,000 (The Department of Information and International Relations (DIIR), 2001). It also said that the British occupation of Chumbi Valley would cease on the payment of this assurance provided, however, that the Tibetans co-operated in establishing British trade marts in Tibet (DIIR, 2001).

When Bhutan supported the British's Younghusband Expedition in 1904, its relations with Tibet were severely worn out (Jha, 2013: 2). The British invaded Tibet in 1904 in order to impose trade upon the Tibetan government and to prevent Tibet's coming under the protection of Russia (Tibet House US, 2022). A treaty was signed at Lhasa between Great Britain and Tibet in 1904, as the latter refused to recognize the validity of the Convention of 1890. This treaty was also known as a Convention between Great Britain and Tibet. As per the Convention, Tibet agreed to respect the Convention of 1890 and to recognize the frontier between Sikkim and Tibet, as defined in Article I of the said Convention. Also under the terms of the 1904 Treaty, the British were given political and economic access to Tibet and the right to station representatives of the Government of India inside Tibetan territory (Alexandrowicz, 1953: 496). The Tibetans were also forced to pay a war indemnity of Rupees 75 lakhs and until this amount was paid up, Chumbi Valley was to remain with India. Also the Rupees 75 lakhs was to be paid in an instalment of Rupees 1 lakh a year, ensuring thereby that even if the Tibetans paid up, Chumbi Valley would remain with India for at least 75 years (Phanjoubam, 2017).

This made the Manchus<sup>92</sup> embarrassed as Tibet had signed a Convention with the British without them having any say in it. Therefore, the Manchus tried all means to sign a Convention of their own with the British. In 1906 a 6-point Anglo-Manchu Convention was signed at Peking (DIIR, 2001). On 27<sup>th</sup> April 1906, another treaty was signed between Great Britain and China at Peking, which confirmed the

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<sup>92</sup>The Qing dynasty was first established in 1636 by the Manchus to designate their regime in Manchuria (now the Northeast region of China).

Convention of 1904 between Great Britain and Tibet (Saluja, 2017). Although direct relations were established between the British and Tibet, the former recognized Chinese suzerainty over the latter in 1906 (Alexandrowicz, 1953: 496).

In 1907, when China invaded Tibet, the Chinese Governor Lian-yu of Tibet wrote that, Nepal and Druk Yul, the Land of the Thunder Dragon i.e., Bhutan are side by side like the molar teeth in a man's mouth, and the subjects of all three are those of one Kingdom. This idea of the molar teeth is the 'five finger policy' of Mao Zedong (Swami, 2017). The Chinese Government has the ideological view-point towards its old policies along with the modern economic policies, due to which, it has been in the process of recreating its past glorious trade routes, along the Chumbi Valley and the Himalayan passes in the form of Belt and Road Initiative. Also, the access over the Chumbi Valley and its control over the Doklam plateau can make China the economic super-power in the region (Swami, 2017).

After the annexation of Tibet in 1907, a five-point Convention on Tibet was signed between Russia and Great Britain. According to Article I and II of the Convention, "Great Britain and Russia engage to respect the territorial integrity of Tibet and to abstain from all interference in the internal administration. In terms of the suzerainty of China over Tibet, Great Britain and Russia agreed not to enter into negotiations with Tibet except through the intermediary of the Chinese Government" (DIIR, 2001). The 15-point agreement signed at Calcutta in 1908 between Great Britain and China laid down the boundary of the British trade marts in Gyangtse and the protocol for the conduct of trade and protection of the trade marts. The agreement was signed by the Manchu and British plenipotentiaries. The Manchus, without any request from the Tibetan government, paid Rs. 2,500,000 to the British as war indemnity, which the Lhasa Convention of 1904 had demanded (DIIR, 2001). The tri-junction point of the Chumbi Valley had always been treated as an important point for trade by the neighbouring rulers. The original owner of the region never had a say in the treaties conducted between the Russians, Chinese and the British rulers. This has ultimately led to the unsettled boundary disputes for the present context and has created a misunderstanding over Doklam plateau between China and Bhutan (DIIR, 2001).

On 25<sup>th</sup> February 1910, the Emperor of China issued a proclamation stating that the Dalai Lama was deposed. In protest, the Tibetans sent letters to the Manchu officials.

Letters of protest were also posted on the walls in different parts of Tibet, particularly in Kham and also refused to provide horse transportation and other actions. The Tibetans in Kham made things very difficult for the Manchus. So in order to satisfy the Tibetans, the Manchus invited the Panchen Lama, Lobsang Thubten Choekyi Nyima, to rule in place of the Dalai Lama to which the latter refused the offer. So the Manchus found themselves in a very difficult position. The emperor appointed Lo Tita'i, a Chinese official, as the governor of Tibet and ordered him to travel to India and invite the Dalai Lama back to Lhasa (DIIR, 2001).

The Treaty of Punakha was signed between the British Indian Government and Bhutan when China invaded Tibet in 1910 and made claims on Bhutan. After the Treaty of Punakha in 1910, the Manchu empire of China made an effort to revive the old Chinese claim of suzerainty over the Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim along with Tibet. These three Kingdoms were described by the Chinese as the “molar teeth lying side by side in a man’s mouth”<sup>93</sup>.

With the signing of the Treaty of Punakha in 1910, Bhutan became a British protectorate, which made the former as a buffer between the British Indian Government and China (Alexandrowicz, 1953: 496). The British were very much concerned about Bhutan because, at that time, the former had signed only the 1865 Treaty with the latter. The 1865 Sinchula Treaty was an agreement for the Bhutias not to raid the Duar plains and for this, the British would pay compensation and this Treaty however would not have been able to protect Bhutan if the Chinese decided to enter it (Phanjoubam, 2017). So the British, at the request of Charles Bell, the then British Political Officer in Sikkim, visited the King of Bhutan in 1910, and convinced the latter to sign a new treaty. The treaty added one more clause to the 1865 Sinchula Treaty which stated that Bhutan would pursue its foreign affairs in consultation with India. But after the collapse of the Qing Dynasty, the Chinese threat did not last and soon afterwards in 1913, the British called the Simla Conference in an effort to secure India’s boundary in this sector (Phanjoubam, 2017).

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British Indian policy makers tried to take advantage of the friendly attitude of Bhutan for geo-political and geo-strategic reasons

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<sup>93</sup><https://www.epw.in/journal/1971/1-26/our-correspondent-columns/bhutan-only-mountains-are-serene.html>.

and the influence of China, Russia or any major powers towards Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim was considered a major problem for the British held territories (Kohli, 1986: 142). Even after the treaty of Punakha in 1910, China continued to make land claims on Bhutan during the years just before the Chinese Revolution of 1911 in order to secure its south-eastern border against increasing foreign aggression. But after the Revolution, the new Republic of China did not pay much attention in claiming Bhutan (Jha, 2013: 2). Later, when the Manchu Dynasty surrendered to the Chinese Revolution, the Tibetans seized the opportunity and expelled the Manchu troops from Tibet. The provisional President of China, Yuan Shikai, sent a telegram to the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama and restored his earlier titles (Tibet House US, 2022).

The Tibetan Government reached out to Great Britain as the Dalai Lama's government was facing problems after their independence. In 1913-1914, an understanding known as the Simla Accord was signed between the delegates of British India, Tibet and China. The Simla Agreement established the Mac-Mahon line and also divided Tibet into inner and outer regions. The terms gave China's influence over Inner Tibet and the Tibetan Government could administer Outer Tibet. But in Article 7 (a), it mentioned, "The Tibet Trade Regulations of 1893 and 1908 are hereby cancelled". Meanwhile, along with the Imperialist and the Nationalist Governments, the Communists in China also considered parts or all of Sikkim and Bhutan as their feudatories (Levi, 1959: 492). Bhutan, along with Sikkim, Nepal and Tibet, has served as buffer states for decades between India and China and it became more significant with the establishment of the Communist authority in Tibet (Levi, 1959: 492). China established direct contacts with Bhutan under the Kuomintang regime in China (Ranjan & Ravindran, 2018:6).

#### **4.2 Security Relations between People's Republic of China and Bhutan**

Lord Curzon had visualized the Himalayan region of Ladakh, Sikkim, Bhutan and Northeast frontier as an inner defence line for India protected by a Tibetan buffer region in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Warikoo & Datta, 2015: 1). China became direct neighbours of Bhutan only after the Chinese annexation of Tibet in 1951 when the People's Republic of China came to power. China officially maintained a territorial claim on parts of Bhutan although the latter's border with Tibet had never been officially recognized, or demarcated. With the increase in soldiers on the Chinese side

of the Sino-Bhutanese border after the 17-point agreement between the Tibetan government and China, Bhutan withdrew its representative from Lhasa (Chopra, 2020). During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, China claimed Bhutan in order to counter growing British influence there. But as the People's Republic of China came into power, it showed parts of Bhutanese territory as their own. Also, during its annexation of Tibet, China briefly occupied eight enclaves in western Bhutan (Ramachandran, 2020).

The Communist Government of China also tried to maintain good relations with Bhutan by sending gifts to the Bhutanese King and by inviting the Bhutanese subjects to China, which made the Bhutanese more cautious about the Chinese motives (Ranjan & Ravindran, 2018:6). Mao Zedong also followed the claim made by the Manchu Government, by considering Tibet to be China's right-hand palm, with five fingers- Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim and the two Indian territories of Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh. According to Mao, China was also meant to liberate these five fingers along with Tibet, the palm (Chellany, 2020). When the 1959 Tibetan uprising took place, the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama escaped and took asylum in India. Since then, the security of Bhutan's border with China became a necessity for the former. Around 6,000 Tibetans fled to Bhutan due to which, the latter eventually closed its borders fearing more refugees and a possible Chinese ire. The Tibetan refugees were welcomed into Bhutan in the 1950s and given land by the King (Denyer, 2008).

According to a report, the villages known as Khangri, Tarchen, Tsekhor, Diraphu, Dzung Tuphu, Jangehe, Chakip and Kocha which were administered by Bhutan for more than 300 years were stripped illegally in western Tibet although these villages did not belong to the latter; they were integral parts of Bhutan's territory. Bhutan had appointed the officers who governed these villages, collected taxes from them and administered justice for centuries. Even the Tibetan authorities consistently recognized that these villages belonged to Bhutan as they were not subject to Tibetan officers and laws; nor did they pay any Tibetan taxes. On 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> August 1959, at the request of Bhutan, the Government of India sent official notes to Beijing, in which the Chinese Government was requested to restore the rightful authority of the Bhutan Government over their enclaves. According to John Bray from the International Association of Ladakh Studies, Bhutan governed small enclaves of

territory in Western Tibet, Darchen Labrang and several smaller monasteries and villages near Mount Kailash (Arpi, 2017).

After the flight of the Dalai Lama to India, Bhutan closed its borders and trade routes northwards in 1960 and withdrew its representatives and officers from Lhasa in Tibet. Bhutan turned south towards India and the first road connecting Western Bhutan with India was built through the aid given by India in 1961. These made China resolve border issues through bilateral discussions with Bhutan without India's involvement and also offered to give unconditional economic assistance to Bhutan, while on the other hand, continuing to make claims on the territories of Bhutan (Mathou, 2004: 170).

The Government of Bhutan has requested the Government of India to bring the following to the notice of the Chinese authorities with a request for immediate action as the latter is responsible for the external affairs of the former as per the 1949 Treaty signed between both the countries. The local Chinese authorities have also seized all arms, ammunition and ponies belonging to the Bhutanese officers who were in charge of these enclaves at the village of Tarchen without any official reason. These actions were considered by the Government of Bhutan as part of the local Chinese authorities who have violated the traditional Bhutanese rights and authority. The Government of Bhutan as per their request, wanted the Government of India to urge the Chinese Government to give immediate instruction to be issued for the return of the articles and the animals and for ensuring respect in the future by the local authorities for Bhutan's jurisdiction over these villages (Note given to the Foreign Office of China, 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1959).

The infiltration of the Chinese authorities in the borders of Bhutan is not a new one in terms of the Doklam Crisis as seen in the history of the region. Ever since Bhutan signed a treaty with British India, the former had always requested help from the latter in terms of external disputes with its northern neighbour China. This routine continued even after British left the Indian Subcontinent. In 1960, when the Prime Ministers of India and China agreed to participate in a conference with officials of the two sides to sort out the boundary issue, the latter refused to discuss the Tibet-Sikkim and the Tibet-Bhutan borders (Arpi, 2017). China took over Tibet, and occupied eight western Tibetan enclaves under Bhutan's administration, along with it in a 1961 map,

the Chinese Government claimed the territories in Nepal, Bhutan and the Kingdom of Sikkim (now part of India) (Amaresh, 2020).

In 1965, China accused Indian troops of crossing into Doklam and threatening their herders. This triggered a dispute between China and Bhutan. Each country claimed that Doklam was under its sovereignty (World Atlas, 2021). China began its official contact with Bhutan in the 1970s after which in 1971, Bhutan voted in favour of China's membership to the United Nations. The negotiations to resolve the border dispute between China and Bhutan started in 1972. In 1974, China was invited along with few other countries for the coronation of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck in which, the Chinese delegation was led by Ma Muming, the Chargé d' Affaires of the Chinese Embassy at New Delhi (Ranjan & Ravindran, 2018:6).

Since 1974, China has been aiming for bilateral trade and closer diplomatic relations with Bhutan (Chandrasekharan, 2010). The Chinese intrusions of 1979 into the Bhutanese territory led to direct negotiations about the boundaries between the two countries. The Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian and the Bhutanese Foreign Minister Dawa Tsering met and held consultations in order to discuss about the boundary dispute and to develop bilateral relations in 1983 at New York and the first round of boundary talks were held at Beijing in April 1984 (Ranjan & Ravindran, 2018:6-7, Mathou, 2004: 400). The incursions by Tibetan herdsman and Chinese soldiers create tensions often in Bhutan. As per official reports by the King of Bhutan to the National Assembly, there are four disputed areas between China and Bhutan. The real problems started in 1988 for Bhutan when China sent PLA troops to erect roads and began occupying Bhutanese territory which did not get much attention from the international community (Amaresh, 2020).

Bhutan brought out a map in 1989 after conducting its own surveys and checking tax records. It was approved by the 68<sup>th</sup> National Assembly. Bhutan did not have an official map of the country till 1961. In fact, the first map of Bhutan was prepared with the help of India in 1961 and afterwards, a Bhutanese agency mapped the country in the early 1980s, which was prior to the engagement of China-India border talks. In the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the National Assembly, the King had outlined the border which he said should go from Batangla to Merugla and Sinchela and then down to the Amo Chu River. According to the records, during the 14<sup>th</sup> round of border talks with



China in 2000, the Bhutanese delegation had further extended the claim line in three areas in Doklam, Sinchulumba and Dramana as per the decision of the Council of Ministers (Joshi, 2017). Since the 1990s, the Chinese ambitions was to claim more of the western sectors of Bhutan as the former wanted to get as much space as possible in the western sector that is close to the tri-junction of India, Bhutan and China (Chandrasekharan, 2010).

The Chinese Government put forward a package proposal in 1996, by offering to recognize Bhutanese sovereignty over the Pasamlung and Jakarlung valleys in return for Bhutan recognizing Chinese sovereignty over Doklam, Sinchulung, Dramana, and Shakhatoe in the western sector. This proposal referred only to the disputed territories in central and western Bhutan (Ramachandran, 2020). This package deal would bring China closer to India's vulnerable Chicken's Neck or the Siliguri Corridor (Patranobis & Laskar, 2020). Both China and Bhutan agreed to maintain the status quo on the border areas under the Clause 3 of the 1998 Treaty, which was signed in order to maintain Peace and Tranquillity (Ramachandran, 2020). The agreement was groundbreaking because China acknowledged Bhutan as a sovereign country and the agreement further stated that China fully respects the territorial integrity and independence of Bhutan (Vasudeva, 2021).

In 2006, Bhutan's National Assembly was told of six roads being constructed near the Bhutan border, while three of the roads crossed the border itself (Joshi, 2017). The attempt made by China in terms of its territorial claims on Doklam region has always made Bhutan insecure, especially after the former's annexation of Tibet. Due to this annexation, Bhutan has looked towards India which has created a strong friendship between both the countries. Doklam Stand-off is one of the events which have led to security cooperation between India and Bhutan. China is not willing to give up its claim easily as it has been repeating the border incursions then and again.

#### **4.2.a Doklam Stand-off 2017**

Doklam had a very little significance in the past because the trade between India and Tibet flourished mostly along the Siliguri Corridor and Chumbi Valley. Even the British did not give much importance to Doklam as a trade post (Joseph, 2018). The Doklam plateau had been a quiet grazing area for Bhutanese herdsmen for centuries. The British and the Chinese did not show much interest in it prior to India's

independence when they negotiated various border settlements between themselves. The problem started only after the 1962 border war between India and China (Chengappa, 2017). The Chinese had been claiming their authority on the basis of tax receipts given to graziers who paid a herders tax to the government in Lhasa until 1960. China and Bhutan agreed to suspend the dispute in 2002 when both the countries signed a standstill accord on border disagreements (Beena, 2019: 62).

But according to Aadil Brar from the Diplomat, Doklam had a rich history of trade, as Doklam is in the Dromo region and sits at the heart of Chumbi Valley and historically had three trading agencies: Yatung, Gyantse, and Gartok, set up by the British in Southern Tibet. Yatung Trading Centre is the closest to the Doklam region and was a nodal point for the caravan traders travelling between Lhasa and Kalimpong before the occupation of Tibet by the People’s Republic of China. The Indian government owned a building at this location, with a substantial staff of Tibetan and Indian heritage who were expelled from the building after the occupation (Brar, 2017). According to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, its claim on Doklam first started from Qing dynasty-era taxation of Bhutanese herders in the area prior to the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1890 (Panda, 2017).

**Map 2: Map of the Qing Empire**

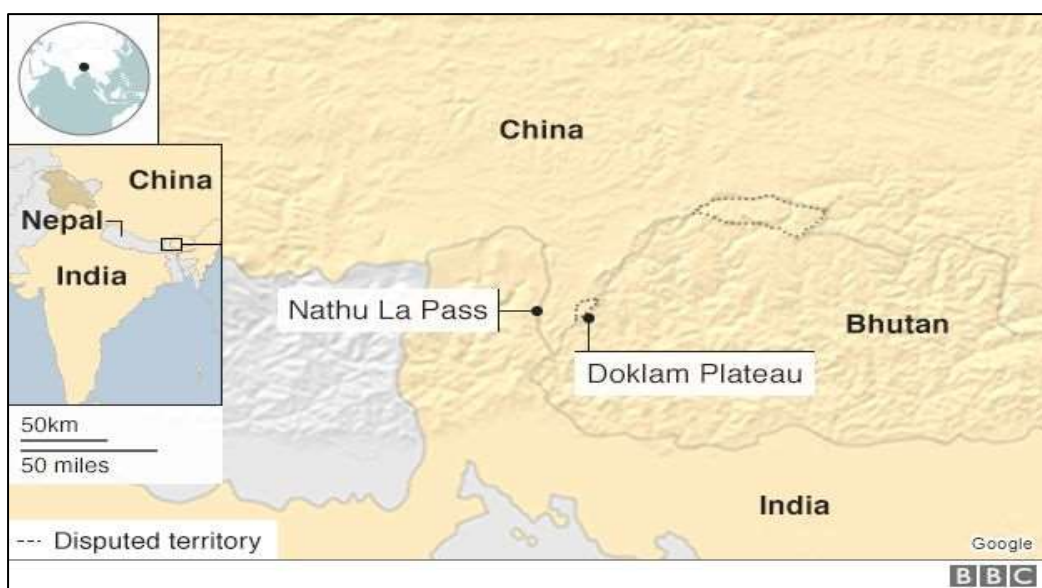


Source: <https://theqingdynasty.com/qing-dynasty-geography.html>.

The problem at the Doklam plateau started with the Treaty of 1890, where the boundary of Sikkim and Tibet wasn't clearly mentioned. China claimed the borderline which began at Mount Gipmochi and the border included the entire Doklam area within the Chumbi Valley ending at the Jampheri ridge on the south and the joining point of the Doklam River on the east. According to modern cartographic studies, the actual crest of the mountain range is Merung La (15,266 ft.), which makes Batung La as the tri-junction and the border of Bhutan runs along the northern ridge of Doklam and hold the critical Jampheri ridge (Chakraborty, 2020). The disputed area is recognized as Bhutanese territory by India and Bhutan, but some of it is claimed by China as part of its ancient frontier (Malik, 2017).

For India, Doklam plateau is an undisputed part of Bhutanese territory, but according to the Chinese Government, it is a stow land which is an extension of the Chumbi Valley that lies between Sikkim and Bhutan (Philip, 2019). According to the Chinese claim, if Tibet is an integral part of China, then all the territories ever controlled or claimed by Tibet are also integral parts of China. So, in terms of China, the incident on the Doklam plateau which is inhabited only by seasonal Tibetan and Bhutanese yak-herders may have been implied to send India an indirect message (Blank, 2017). While India and Bhutan consider the Doklam plateau as an integral part of the latter, China views it as an extension of its Chumbi Valley (Chaudhury, 2021).

### **Map 3: Map of the location of Doklam Plateau**



Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41070767>.

According to the *India Today*, the area of Doklam carries huge military advantage and if it falls into the hands of China, it will not only compromise the security of Bhutan but also of India. If China comes in control of the Doklam plateau, it will get the high ground which would enable it to completely crush Bhutan in case of a war. Also, if a war breaks out between India and China, the latter will have an upper hand at conquering the Chicken's Neck of India as well as the whole of the North-eastern region of the country<sup>94</sup>.

In 2002, according to the Bhutanese Government, the disputes were in four significant areas, and according to the Indian point of view, the most important was the 89 sq. kilometres Doklam area, which is adjacent to Sikkim (Pillalamarri & Subanthore, 2017). After the talks, the extent of the disputed area was reduced from 1,128 sq. kilometres to 269 sq. kilometres; this included the Doklam area, as well as two other points in north-western Bhutan. Although Bhutan voluntarily gave up the northern claims, it made no difference as the Chinese Government wants most of the Doklam area adjacent to Sikkim because of its strategic significance. In 2005, Bhutan considered surrendering territory in the Doklam region to China in order to regain land in northern Bhutan which is at least twice the size of the Doklam Plateau. However, Bhutan demonstrated the power of the bilateral relationship and accepted India's wish to cancel the deal (Pillalamarri & Subanthore, 2017).

Bhutan and China formally demarcated their 699 kilometres border only in 2006 (Joshi, 2017: 11). In 2012, the Governments of India and China had reached a common understanding between their special representatives that, the tri-junction boundary points between both the countries and third countries will be finalized in consultation with the concerned countries. Any attempt, therefore, to unilaterally determine tri-junction points is in violation of this understanding (Sixteenth Lok Sabha, 2018: 15).

According to the Indian spokesperson, the 2012 understanding was merely to reconfirm their mutual agreement on the basis of alignment. Further discussions were to take place to actually finalize the boundary and in order to resolve this; it suggested that, while the two sides had agreed that the watershed is the boundary, there is need

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<sup>94</sup><https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/gk-current-affairs/story/where-doklam-why-important-india-china-bhutan-1198730-2018-03-27>.

for more work to actually finalize it. But the Chinese spokesman on 3<sup>rd</sup> July complained against the statement issued by India's Ministry of External Affairs on 30<sup>th</sup> June. The Chinese spokesman said that this statement completely left out the Convention between Great Britain and China relating to Sikkim and Tibet Convention of 1890, which defined the China-India boundary alignment in areas where the incident happened (Joshi, 2017).

Throughout the years, China captured small pieces of the territories in Doklam and has started building roads. Finally in 2017, it started constructing a road headed to the strategically important Jampheri ridge-line (Philip, 2019). On 8<sup>th</sup> June 2017, a unit of Chinese border guards moved into Doklam. They destroyed stone bunkers which were used occasionally by the Royal Bhutan Army and shortly afterwards, a Chinese road construction crew arrived with excavators, bulldozers, and a larger military escort (Blank, 2017). On 16<sup>th</sup> June, the Chinese troops accompanied the construction crew and marched south on the plateau to a clearing known as a 'Turning Point' in the locality, which is proximate to the Indian post of Doko La on the border of India (Sikkim) and Bhutan and also close to Chicken's Neck or the Siliguri Corridor. The Bhutanese soldiers confronted the Chinese troops and asked them to return to their normal positions but the Chinese pushed back the Bhutanese troops (Malik, 2017).

Yun Sun, the co-director of East Asia Program of Stimson Centre located at Washington DC said that, during the Doklam Stand-off in 2017, China was surprised as it was not expecting India to challenge its stand and cause the 73-day long stand-off over a piece of barren land near Bhutan<sup>95</sup>. Also, according to Beijing, it was the Indian troops who had crossed the border on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2017 into Chinese territory and obstructed its road construction. China has repeatedly accused the Indian soldiers of trespassing and preventing Chinese soldiers from building a road in the region, which is under Chinese control but claimed by Bhutan (Patranobis, 2017). Beijing has repeatedly claimed that Doklam belongs to China<sup>96</sup>. On the other hand, both the Houses of the Bhutanese Parliament dismissed China's claim on Doklam (Chaudhury, 2018). According to the Bhutanese Foreign Ministry, the attempt made by the PLA to

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<sup>95</sup><https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/china-was-surprised-in-doklam-never-thought-india-would-challenge-it-china-scholar-yun-sun-1695672-2020-06-30>.

<sup>96</sup><https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2018/mar/26/india-should-have-learnt-lessons-from-doklam-stand-off-says-china-1792717.html>.

construct the motor-able road from Dokola in the Doklam area towards the Bhutan Army camp at Zompelri or Jampheri, was a unilateral action that needed to be stopped immediately pending settlement of the boundary issue<sup>97</sup>.

In response, the Indian troops were engaged with the Chinese military troops after consulting with the Bhutanese Government in a 73-day stand-off at Doklam tri-junction in 2017, which caused fears of a conflict between the two nuclear-armed neighbours. But the tensions got reduced after several rounds of talks<sup>98</sup>. The military stand-off between Indian border guards which consists of the Indian Army and ITBP (Indo-Tibetan Border Police) and China's PLA forces at Doklam, was said to be initiated by China's People's Liberation Army forces. The People's Liberation Army forces attempted to construct a class 5 motor-able roads, which is supposed to connect Doka La (Doklam plateau) and Jampheri or Zompelri ridge in Bhutan. The building of this road would facilitate smooth transit for China's military logistics and could be able to overlook India's topographic strategic advantage in Doklam (Senthilkumar, 2019: 1253). According to Joel Wuthnow, Satu Limaye, and Nilanthi Samaranyake (Wuthnow, et al., 2018), China, building roads through Doklam plateau may serve two major strategic purposes, which is, the road network would support a more entrenched Chinese presence in the region and a new infrastructure would allow Chinese troops to access a key ridge overlooking the Siliguri Corridor. The Chinese forces could also use their positions on higher grounds to collect intelligence on Indian military positions and, in a conflict, even threaten Indian supply routes (Wuthnow, et al., 2018).

According to a report by *The Times of India*<sup>99</sup>, the infrastructure developments done by Beijing in recent times, maybe said to have aimed directly at strengthening its ability to extend its air power along the entire Indian border which is being done at the same time when India is rebuilding its air power<sup>100</sup>. Indian and Bhutanese maps have put the tri-junction, 200 metres south-east of Batang La, which the Chinese say that it

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<sup>97</sup>[https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/border-row-bhutan-rejects-beijing-s-claim-that-doklam-belongs-to-china-117081000418\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/border-row-bhutan-rejects-beijing-s-claim-that-doklam-belongs-to-china-117081000418_1.html).

<sup>98</sup><https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/china-doubles-air-bases-air-defence-positions-and-heliports-near-lac-after-2017-doklam-standoff-stratfor/articleshow/78257851.cms>.

<sup>99</sup><https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/china-doubles-air-bases-air-defence-positions-and-heliports-near-lac-after-2017-doklam-standoff-stratfor/articleshow/78257851.cms>.

<sup>100</sup><https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/china-doubles-air-bases-air-defence-positions-and-heliports-near-lac-after-2017-doklam-standoff-stratfor/articleshow/78257851.cms>.

is at a place called Gipmochi also confused for Gyemochen (or Gamochen). On 2<sup>nd</sup> of August 2017, the Chinese said that the name of the mountain is Ji Mu Ma Zhen and that India has no claim on the territory south of Batang La which is believed to be Bhutan's. China had built a road in the area in 2005 that terminated at a point below the Indian posts at Doka La. Chinese vehicles would come to this point and thereafter, their personnel would go on foot and patrol the region south of this till the Jampheri or Zompelri ridge, where the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) post is located (Joshi, 2017).

There has been an intrusion by the Chinese patrols and the Tibetan graziers in the areas which Bhutan claims as its own, especially at the Doklam region. During the 2017 stand-off, China constructed a motor-able road from Doka La, very close to the Indian post there and to the Royal Bhutanese Army camp at Zompelri. Bhutan pointed out that this construction is in direct violation of agreements of 1988 and 1998, which require China to maintain the status quo (Singh, 2017). China denied the accusation by claiming that Doklam is a part of Chinese territory (Griffiths, 2017). Since the Bhutanese troops could not stop the Chinese construction, the Indian troops intervened as per the 2007 agreement between India and Bhutan, which provided mutual assistance in the event of threats to each other's security (European Foundation for South Asian Studies, 2020). China's official media wrote that India should not intervene in the China-Bhutan border dispute. According to the Chinese, India is a third party and has no right to make territorial claims on behalf of Bhutan and that; China has all along respected Bhutan's sovereignty and independence<sup>101</sup>.

On 18<sup>th</sup> June 2017, several companies of the Indian Army who were posted at the Doka La Post in the Sikkim-China border intervened. They crossed into the Doklam area of Bhutan as part of the operation and formed a human wall to prevent a team of Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) from constructing a road that would have given the Chinese access to Indian Territory. The Indian troops physically blocked the movement of the Chinese soldiers and human chains were formed by both sides. No shots were fired and the face-off did not degenerate into anything more serious than the occasional pushing and shoving. Both sides held onto their positions for 73-days. This operation was known as 'Operation Juniper'<sup>102</sup> (Philip, 2019). As mentioned by

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<sup>101</sup><https://eurasianimes.com/how-chinese-attempts-to-undo-india-bhutan-relations-failed-miserably/>.

<sup>102</sup>Junipers are trees found in Eastern Tibet.

the Indian Government in a parliamentary panel, it intervened during China's road-building exercise in Southern Doklam due to the danger of the tri-junction being pushed further south and directly threatening the Siliguri Corridor. The Indian Government also mentioned that, if the Chinese had build up in the upper reaches of the plateau then, it would be a matter to deal with between Thimphu and Beijing (Mitra, 2018).

Bhutan officially lodged a protest against the road-construction activity with China on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2017 through its diplomatic mission in New Delhi. China responded through coordinated statements of its foreign and defence ministries on 26<sup>th</sup> June, in which it accused Indian troops of crossing into Chinese territory to stop the road construction. China claimed that the Sikkim section of the Sino-Indian boundary had been defined by the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1890 that had repeatedly been confirmed by India (European Foundation for South Asian Studies, 2020). The Chinese Government accused India for further escalating the dispute, by sending troops into Bhutan. Since then, both countries have increased their military presence in the region. China engaged in live fire drills near the border, and a war of words erupted, culminating in a racist video published by China's official Xinhua news agency in which a Chinese actor wearing a turban and fake beard mocked Delhi for "shooting itself in the foot" (Griffiths, 2017). Despite the Chinese provocation, the Indian Government stood firm and declared its stand with Bhutan in terms of crisis and, in the process, strengthened its partnership with Asian countries, particularly in South and Southeast Asia (Chaudhuri, 2018).

The Chinese Government said that the Doklam plateau is their territory and claimed that Indian forces had crossed a mutually recognized border to block their road construction. The action taken by the Chinese Government may be to shift the India-China-Bhutan tri-junction even further south of Gamochen and so it is being done through a road construction in Bhutan. India has a clear reason to interfere as it can have a direct impact on its security (Joshi, 2017). In the words of Ashwin Sanghi, India knew that the construction of a road through Doklam would give China the ability to enter Indian Territory. Due to this reason, stopping the Chinese was not an option for India (Sanghi, 2020).



On 5<sup>th</sup> July 2017, Bhutan took an initiative by asking Beijing to restore the status quo in the Doklam where Chinese soldiers tried to unilaterally build a road towards its Army camp in Zompelri area. On 10<sup>th</sup> of August 2017, the then External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj met her Bhutanese counterpart Damcho Dorji. Bhutan hoped that the Doklam Stand-off should be solved peacefully. India has been sending more troops along the entire stretch of its border with China located in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh<sup>103</sup>.

The then Chinese Foreign Minister accused that, through the process of tackling their Chinese counterparts, India had breached the 1890 Treaty between British India and Imperial China (Beena, 2019: 65). But India replied that it had not broken the 1890 Treaty because the Indian Army did not travel through Chinese territory in order to reach Doklam. According to Indian maps, the state of Sikkim is adjacent to Bhutan and therefore the Indian army did not travel through Chinese territory to arrive at Doklam. India also asserts that, due to the participation of Bhutan, the latest happening with China is considerably different from earlier boundary stand-offs and India only desired to give an assurance to Bhutan and not activate aggressive moves in the region (Beena, 2019: 65).

The Chinese Foreign Office and Ministry of National Defence along with the state-owned English language Chinese media, issued several harsh messages to India and Bhutan (European Foundation for South Asian Studies, 2020). The Chinese Defence Minister advised India to learn the historical lessons from the 1962 war between both the countries. The Chinese Foreign Minister also insisted that it is essential for the Indian troops to completely pull back from Doklam and that India had violated the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and trampled on international law and the norms governing international relations. The Chinese Government also accused India's action as illegal and shameless, which demonstrated its irresponsibility and recklessness and its disregard for both China's sovereignty and the United Nations Charter (European Foundation for South Asian Studies, 2020). The hostile situation at Doklam region ended on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2017 after 73-days, and both the countries agreed to withdraw their soldiers to pre-crisis positions (Sajjanhar, 2017).

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<sup>103</sup><https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/blow-by-blow-a-timeline-of-india-china-face-off-over-doklam/story-qBIEwZI7kUcXxNmCfHzHCP.html>.

After the stand-off, in December 2017, as mentioned by Indian media, China had continued to deploy roughly 1600 troops, about the size of an army regiment, and in January 2018, India's Army Chief General Bipin Rawat also confirmed that the People's Liberation Army had remained over the winter and carried out some infrastructure development. Also in March 2018, Indian Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman noted that People's Liberation Army forces had built sentry posts, trenches, and helipads designed to facilitate year-round deployments (Wuthnow, et al., 2018).

According to the Bhutanese Government, the road which China has been building would run from the town of Dokola to the Bhutanese army camp at Zompelri<sup>104</sup>. According to Indian stand, the tri-junction is at Batang La and that it's neighbour at the Jampheri Ridge is Bhutan. But for China, the tri-junction is at Gymochen, making China as the neighbour of India at the Jampheri Ridge. The Jampheri Ridge is the only major geographical obstacle to China which has a direct vantage point to the Siliguri Corridor and it has a permanent force of the Royal Bhutanese Army deployed on it (Menon & Kanisetti, 2018: 6-12).

According to Professor Wang Dong from Peking University, the Doklam region belongs to the Chinese territory. He mentioned that, on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2017, Indian border troops crossed the demarcated and mutually recognized Sikkim section of the border into Chinese territory illegally in an attempt to interrupt China's normal road construction, which triggered the stand-off (Saran & Dong, 2017). As mentioned in the 15-page document<sup>105</sup> issued by China on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2017, on Doklam Stand-off, around 270 Indian troops crossed the boundary and advanced 100 metres and blocked the Chinese activity which is in the territory disputed between Bhutan and China (Joshi, 2017).

One of the non-official witnesses, Shri Nalin Surie, a former senior diplomat while deposing before the Committee, submitted on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2018, mentioned about Article 2 of the 2007 India-Bhutan Treaty in which it is written, "The Government of the Kingdom of Bhutan and the Government of India shall cooperate closely with

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<sup>104</sup><https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/why-bhutan-is-special-to-india/article19195034.ece>.

<sup>105</sup>The Facts and China's Position Concerning the Indian Border Troops' Crossing of the China-India Boundary in the Sikkim Sector into the Chinese Territory.

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”. So according to him, the important thing to bear in mind is that, in Doklam, Bhutan and India was on the same page. Bhutan will obviously not take a frontal position as it is a small country, and does not want to get buffeted on both sides. But Bhutan has been more than mindful of Indian interests and has gone along with what the latter’s interests required and this is a relationship which should not be allowed even by hint, to be affected adversely (Sixteenth Lok Sabha, 2018: 24).

The Foreign Secretary also submitted a report during the briefing on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2018 saying, “in terms of a boundary solution, that is a decision which the Bhutanese Government would make, as it is their sovereign decision. However, successive Governments in Bhutan and in India have always expressed confidence that, when either country makes an important decision that has a bearing on the interest of the other, given again the very close and unique nature of their relationship, such decisions are made after due consideration and consultation” (Sixteenth Lok Sabha, 2018: 24).

According to the Chinese Government, Doklam has been part of China since ancient times and that; this claim will not go away. On 28<sup>th</sup> August 2017, the PLA troops withdrew mostly because China was hosting the BRICS summit in early September 2017 and had the fear of being boycotted by India. Because, if the then Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi had not taken part in the Xiamen meeting, the international image of Xi Jinping would have been badly affected, something he could hardly afford a few weeks before the meeting of the Communist Party of China where he is supposed to be re-elected for a second term (Jaffrelot, 2017). According to a satellite image from October, the Chinese construction workers have extended the length of a tunnel on the stretch to 500 metres and since the 2017 stand-off, the Chinese side have tarred and reinforced its existing track in Doklam to make it an all-weather road. Doklam region comes through four key passes, Doka La, Batang La, Merug La and Sinche La (Central Tibetan Administration, 2020).

According to the respondent of the interview done by Hindustan Times, “the Chinese troops did not enter the tri-junction usually, but they had developed a road infrastructure near the area which was possibly advantageous for the mobilization of

army personnel”<sup>106</sup>. Since the Indian Army was forced to move to the tri-junction through a single road in the absence of an alternative, it delayed the deployment of troops in Doklam during the stand-off. So, India’s Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has built an alternative road after the 2017 stand-off, through which its troops can enter the Doklam valley. The alternative road will enable access to the area through two points, easing the logistic difficulties, reducing time and making the process of deployment smoother (Sen, 2019).

According to A.K. Bardalai (Bardalai, 2018: 8), the external geopolitical compulsions of China and Xi Jinping’s consolidation of power domestically may be the reason for the People’s Liberation Army to make such moves in the Doklam region. As Chumbi Valley is a narrow strip of land only few kilometres at its narrowest point, it is like an ‘Achilles heel’ for China. The Chinese Government might be willing to enlarge the size of the Chumbi Valley by annexing a large portion of Bhutanese territory because of the fear of being cut off by the Indian Army from the west as well as from the east (Bardalai, 2018: 8). Also the Chumbi Valley is commercially important because it is the only point on the Sino-Indian frontier where overland trade between the two countries is sometimes permitted. The Chumbi Valley corridor is also an old route over the Himalayas that China wants to keep firmly in its control in case of a conflict with India. So, the Doklam area is of strategic importance to the Chinese Government and its inclusion would widen the corridor which China controls between western Bhutan and the Indian state of Sikkim. Since the Doklam region is also connected with the Chumbi Valley, it is of strategic importance for China (Lintner, 2020).

China wanted to maintain good relations with Bhutan just like how the latter maintains with India. Just before the May 2017 Belt and Road conference in Beijing, a Chinese diplomat from New Delhi visited Thimphu and tried to persuade the ministers, lawmakers, civil society and business leaders to push Thimphu to have balanced relations with its neighbours, China and India (Bhaumik, 2017). The Belt and Road conference was boycotted by both India and Bhutan. According to the Bhutanese officials, the Chinese are ready to settle the disputed boundary in all other sectors except in Doklam, as it is of strategic importance to the Chinese for defensive

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<sup>106</sup><https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/doklam-effect-more-troops-at-india-china-myanmar-tri-junction-near-tibet-say-army-sources/story-WkkCbHqFRAjQ52MvqXmLWK.html>.

and offensive reasons. The Chinese aim at building roads in the Bhutanese territory might not be just for gaining local terrain and tactical advantage. It might be that the Chinese wanted to provoke by aiming a diplomatic offensive to bring Bhutan out from the Indian ambit of influence (Bhaumik, 2017).

According to Ajai Shukla (2018), mentioned in the South China Morning Post, India has been discouraging Bhutan from opening diplomatic relations with other countries, particularly China, encouraging it instead to conduct diplomatic relations through its embassy in New Delhi. Due to which, the Bhutanese old elites and new, populist politicians, worry about befriending India as China has been outpacing the former economically and militarily and showing its power through incidents like Doklam. Bhutanese elites and the public are eager to settle their border with China, rather than to get attached in a settlement with India's more complex dispute (Shukla, 2018). According to Kartik Bommakanti, the Doklam Crisis has put India in an authentic difficult situation because, New Delhi can neither forsake defending the territorial claims Bhutan has over the Doklam, nor can India ignore Chinese moves to shrink its operational military space (Bommakanti, 2017).

According to the Chinese Foreign Minister, all Indian individuals and facilities had withdrawn to the Indian side of the border and that the Chinese side would be reducing troop numbers in response to the Indian redeployment (Denyer & Gowen, 2017). The Chinese Government said it would continue to patrol and garrison the area and exercise its sovereign rights while the Indian Ministry of External Affairs said that the two countries had maintained diplomatic communication about the dispute (Denyer & Gowen, 2017). The Chinese Government also suggested reducing the number of their troops in response to the Indian redeployment and that the Chinese frontier defence force will continue to patrol and garrison in the Doklam area. According to the Chinese spokeswoman Hua Chunying, the situation at the spot had changed, and China will adjust and deploy according to the current situation and that China will exercise its sovereign rights according to the historical treaty of 1890, and guard its territorial sovereignty (Denyer & Gowen, 2017).

According to the annual report by the Ministry of Defence, Government of India, the entire period of Doklam Stand-off could be divided into three distinct phases based on the status of activities of both sides- "a quiet stand-off up-to 25<sup>th</sup> June 2017, build-up

of forces by both sides complemented by hostile Chinese media from 26<sup>th</sup> June to 14<sup>th</sup> August 2017 and a subsequent relaxed environment, leading to disengagement from 15<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> August 2017” (Ministry of Defence, Government of India, Annual report, 2017-2018). Disengagement at Face-off Point between the Indian troops and the PLA took place on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2017. The mutual disengagement was a result of intense diplomatic communications between both the sides, complemented by the firm resolve and determination shown by the Indian Army on ground. In the post disengagement, the relaxation of the troops between both sides is yet to take place (Ministry of Defence, Government of India, Annual report, 2017-2018). The Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Wu Qian said in a statement that, the Chinese Government have reminded India to learn the lessons from this incident, to abide by the historical treaties and the basic principles of international law, and to meet China halfway, jointly guard the peace and tranquillity of the border areas, and promote a healthy development of bilateral military relations (Denyer & Gowen, 2017).

#### **4.2.b Post Doklam Stand-off**

In June 2020, the Chinese Government attempted to get the Global Environment Facility (GEF) of the UNDP to stop funding activities in Bhutan’s Sakteng Sanctuary in eastern Bhutan on grounds that it was a disputed territory. Even after days of protest by Bhutan, the Chinese Government doubled down on its claim and made an official declaration through a statement by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the boundary between China and Bhutan has never been delimited and there have been disputes over eastern, central and western sectors for a long time (Joshi, 2020). But the Bhutanese Government rejected Beijing’s claim and also clarified that the area is not a disputed one (Ramachandran, 2020). The claim on Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary can get India involved as it has a common boundary with Arunachal Pradesh, which is an Indian state that China also claims as its territory (Chang, 2020).

The claim on Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary by the Chinese Government is being seen in the context of the wider stand-off along with the Doklam Stand-off (Ethirajan, 2020). China is willing to give back the part of Beyul Khenpajong it has occupied to Bhutan in exchange for another 269 sq. kilometres of disputed areas of Doklam, Charithang, Sinchulungpa, Dramana, and Shakhatoe in Western Bhutan (Vasudeva, 2021). Those areas are far away from Beyul Khenpajong, but close to the China-Bhutan-India

border and it would offer Beijing a decisive military advantage to threaten India. In Tibetan Buddhism, Beyuls are the hidden valleys that the Second Buddha 'Padmasambhava' chose in the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE as spiritual refuge (Vasudeva, 2021). The Chinese Government is trying hard in the Chumbi Valley which is a tri-junction of Bhutan, Sikkim and Tibet, for the Yadong railway. The Yadong railway which will be reaching Kathmandu via Gyirong (Tibet) is also being planned by the Chinese to build the railway line through Bhutan, West Bengal and Bangladesh (Bhattacharyya, 2017).

The Qinghai-Tibet railway has reached Shigatse, not far from the border with Nepal. From there, the Chinese plan to extend the railway to Yadong, which is inside the Chumbi Valley. Yadong is the base for reaching Nathu La, the pass which connects Tibet with Sikkim and it is only 31 kilometres away along a winding road up a mountain. The road network between Tibet's capital, Lhasa, and Yadong, is around 500 kilometres. This pass is in Tibet's Shannan prefecture, also known for its turquoise blue Yam Dro Yum Tso Lake, an emblematic point of reference in Buddhist religious calendar. Further ahead lies the Tibet-Bhutan junction before the road descends steeply towards Yadong, located at a height of around 9,000 feet (2,700 m). According to the Chinese military perspective, there is one major problem with this road to Yadong, i.e., it is too narrow for major military manoeuvres. Greater tactical space can be acquired if a new road is constructed through the Chumbi Valley via the disputed tri-junction area, with Doka La as the access point to India (Aneja, 2017).

Since the project of extending their road from below Doka La to the Zompelri ridge had been blocked by the Indian soldiers, almost immediately, the Chinese began a systematic build up in Doklam that has consolidated their position on the plateau claimed by Bhutan. In 2017 itself, military installations and helipads had come up in the area from Sinche La, over which the road from Chumbi Valley runs down to Doka La. According to Colonel Vinayak Bhatt, a retired Army satellite imagery analyst, the Chinese have occupied all of Northern Doklam since December 2017. The People's Liberation Army had fortified its position in Northern Doklam by creating shelters, seven helipads, munitions storage sites, missile dumps, a radar station, stationed armoured vehicles and has laid fibre optic cables for communications. The Chinese

side also constructed a village in Bhutanese territory in Doklam along with a road down the Mochu River (Joshi, 2020).

Since the Doklam region has become inconvenient to have access, China is laying claim to another 11 percent of Bhutan's territory, which can be accessed only through Arunachal Pradesh. These territories have already been shown as part of China in their maps (Chellaney, 2020). In 2020, the Chinese media claimed that a new border village known as Pangda, built by China near Bhutan was on Chinese territory, which turned out to be located 2 kilometres inside Bhutanese territory disputed by the two countries. According to Chinese maps, the village is within China's territory, but China's border extends further south beyond where India and Bhutan say the border runs. The area is east of the India-Bhutan-China tri-junction on the Doklam plateau (Krishnan, 2020). These boundary disputes are based on Tibet's claim in the past (Chakraborty, 2020).

Gyalaphug which is an area of extraordinary religious significance for the people of Bhutan is one of three villages on which China has made fresh claims. Also the construction of roads, settlements and buildings within Bhutan's territory by the Chinese Government goes against the 1998 peace agreement signed by the two countries. According to the agreement, both Chinese and Bhutanese Governments promised to maintain peace and tranquillity on the Bhutan-China border areas (Vasudeva, 2021). According to an article written by Wang Qi in Global Times, it is mentioned that some Indian media tried to drive a wedge between China and Bhutan, by accusing China of constructing a village in Bhutan, 9 kilometres from the spot of the Doklam Stand-off (Qi, 2021). According to a report by global security consultancy Stratfor, China constructed around 13 entirely new military positions including three air bases, five permanent air defence positions and five heliports near the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the aftermath of the Doklam Stand-off of 2017<sup>107</sup>. The Indian air force has also increased the deployment of Su-30MKI warplanes to these air bases after the Doklam Crisis of 2017 (Marcus, 2018).

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<sup>107</sup><https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/china-doubles-air-bases-air-defence-positions-and-heliports-near-lac-after-2017-doklam-standoff-stratfor/articleshow/78257962.cms>.



According to Nazia Hussain, India's hosting of the Dalai Lama, the securitization of shared river water, and China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)- have only added layers to the already-complex border issue (Hussain, 2018). In June 2020, Hua Chunying, spokesperson at China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said at a routine press conference that the military of both China and India had conducted army commander-level talks on a resolution of the recent border situation and on maintaining peace and tranquillity in the border regions. And according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry and experts, the on-going border dispute between China and India will not escalate into a conflict or another Doklam Stand-off as the military commanders from both sides held talks which resulted in positive agreements on peacefully resolving the situation. As noted by an analyst, the military stand-off could continue for a little longer due to the complexity of the situation (Xuanzun, 2020).

Bhutan rejected the Chinese offer in dealing the un-demarcated boundary between them which goes long back to the 1990s. Bhutan did not accept the offer in deference to Indian sensitivities (Malhotra, 2020). Due to the fears that Beijing is doing a South China Sea policy in Bhutan, by gradually taking over land, India is pushing the latter to settle its border dispute in the tri-junction area of Doklam (Basu, 2020). According to China, re-opening trade with Bhutan is part of an overall strategy in the Himalayas, which has been built in the global setting of the development of China's western dependencies and the re-opening of Trans-Himalayan trade is a key component of that strategy (Amaresh, 2020). Meanwhile, by challenging China in Doklam, the Indian Army was protecting vital Indian interests more than protecting its neighbour Bhutan (Shukla, 2018). Bhutan has remained firm on its position on territorial sovereignty by balancing between India and China and withstanding diplomatic, political and military pressure from Beijing (Chaudhury, 2018).

#### **4.3 Conclusion**

With the coming of the British to the Indian subcontinent, the dream of China in creating a great empire beyond the Himalayas has failed. Also, after the British handed over its power to the Indian Government in 1947, China could not get back its claimed territories due to the changing scenario in the politics of the region. India being neighbour of China, is trying to protect its territories from the Chinese through different methods, especially with making Bhutan as its buffer region. The security cooperation between India and Bhutan has made the Chinese ambitions more

unfeasible. The Doklam Stand-off is one such example which has created an impediment for China in its territorial claims, while strengthening the security cooperation between India and Bhutan. The intrusion by Chinese on the Bhutanese soil has been an ongoing process which has been repeated throughout history. Infact it is difficult for Bhutan to negotiate with China in terms of its territories without hampering India's security concerns.

Bhutan being a small Kingdom and a buffer between both its giant neighbours is in a difficult position while conducting its foreign policies. Since Bhutan is already in conflict with China due to territorial disputes, it has to seek for protection from its other neighbour, India. Due to its friendship treaties with India, Bhutan has been under the safe guidance of India as of now. In terms of the Doklam Stand-off, the Friendship Treaty between India and Bhutan has played an important role in which the former have also gained advantage in protecting its territories from China through the treaty. Hence, the Doklam Stand-off is not only a mere territorial dispute, but a fight for supremacy over the Himalayan region. The Doklam Stand-off is also a factor that has created a major significance for both Bhutan and India in their security cooperation. The security cooperation between India and Bhutan have been a successful one but it has consequences to deal with.

## **CHAPTER- 5**

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### **A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ‘OPERATION ALL CLEAR’ AND DOKLAM CRISIS IN INDIA-BHUTAN SECURITY COOPERATION**

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### **A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ‘OPERATION ALL CLEAR’ AND DOKLAM CRISIS IN INDIA-BHUTAN SECURITY COOPERATION**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The security cooperation between India and Bhutan is the basis of the ‘Operation All Clear’ and ‘Doklam Crisis’. India is considered as Bhutan’s net security provider, both militarily and economically (Gambhir, 2021). In fact, the basis of both the incidents goes back to the treaties, which India and Bhutan have signed in 1910, 1949 and 2007, in which the latter came under the protection of the British and afterwards under India since 1947. After 1947, the basic framework of India-Bhutan bilateral relations started with the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation of 1949, signed between the two countries. This treaty was updated and signed during the visit to India, by His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck in February 2007. The India-Bhutan relationship in the South Asian region has a unique character, where Bhutan on its part has appreciated India for its economic assistance, while the latter has been sensitive to the former’s developmental needs. The relationship has also helped Bhutan to shape a unique developmental trajectory based on Gross National Happiness (GNH), development cooperation like the hydro-power, technology, intelligence sharing, disaster risk management, education, and the counter insurgency operation in 2003 conducted by both the country’s military along with the Doklam Stand-off of 2017 (Sarkar, 2012: 348-49).

The India-Bhutan relations have the tradition of regular exchange of high-level visits, in which, His Majesty the King has undertaken several visits to India. Bhutan also receives, at regular intervals, visits from the levels of Head of State and Head of Government from India (Royal Bhutanese Embassy, 2021). Since the ancient times, people from Bhutan and India interacted regularly in different ways. These interactions were governed by leaders of distinct and autonomous political units from India’s northern frontiers such as Ahom Kingdom, Sikkim, Ladakh and Cooch Behar. With the coming of the British and after the Indian independence, the high-level

political interaction of Bhutan with its neighbouring nations evolved into formal diplomacy, especially with New Delhi directly. When India got independence, it viewed Bhutan more in terms of strategic competition with China (Kaul & Rabgyal, 2021). India's role as a security provider for its South Asian neighbours focuses mostly on the rivalry with China. This situation has often failed to notice the fact that India has raised its security cooperation with many neighbours in order to fight terrorism and cross-border militancy. Due to this, India is slowly establishing regional security in order to strengthen its role as a security provider in South Asia (Wagner, 2020:5).

According to the 'Indira Doctrine', which was named after the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, any conflict in the neighbouring states should be settled only with the help of India and without the intervention of other superpowers (Daimari, 2018: 946). This ideology was framed by India towards its South Asian neighbours. This security priority given by Indira Gandhi in her foreign policy towards the neighbouring states of India was later replaced by the 'Good Neighbourhood Policy' (1996) rendered by Inder Kumar Gujral, the Minister of External Affairs in H. D. Deve Gowda Government. Later, Inder Kumar Gujral became the Prime Minister of the United Front Government of India. Inder Kumar Gujral emphasized more on economic issues and his policies were known as the 'Gujral Doctrine' (Daimari, 2018: 946). The relationship between India and Bhutan have greatly benefited from India's neighbourhood policy. India has supported Bhutan in its aspiration to become a self-sufficient, sovereign, and developed country especially by being the latter's largest trade and transit partner. In return, Bhutan has remained committed to India's security concerns (Nayak, 2018). Bhutan falls within the strategic perimeter of India's Himalayan security zone. So, by mutual agreement, India helps Bhutan in times of trouble in order to safeguard its own security in the areas that borders China (Rao, 2017).

## **5.2 Repercussions of India-Bhutan Security cooperation in 'Operation All Clear' and Doklam Crisis**

The relation between India and Bhutan had been close up to the point that the option of border fencing was not available, as more than 50 percent of the Bhutanese population live in the eastern and south-eastern region. The Bhutanese also have to travel to Assam, India, regularly for the purchase of their commodities (Routray,

2001). The states of Northeast India need to be considered while making policy related to Bhutan, especially in terms of security, because Bhutan is strategically important for the peace, stability and security of the Northeast states of India (Sarki, 2019: 144). Bhutan, being a geopolitical barrier to the Chinese expansions south of the Tibetan plateau and also as a small country, has to depend on India for economic and political security. Due to this relationship, Bhutan had to satisfy India as was seen in December 2003, during Operation All Clear (Barbora, 2006: 3807).

India has an arrangement with the Royal Government of Bhutan through regular exchange of high-level visits and Secretary-level Border Management and Security Meeting, and Border District Coordination Meetings (Chaudhury, 2019). There have been free movements in the India-Bhutan border for the Indian and Bhutanese nationals as Bhutan is adjacent to the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, West Bengal and Sikkim. The openness of this border had been exploited by the Indian insurgent groups particularly United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and Kamatapur Liberation Organization (KLO), for indulging in anti-national activities. The Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), had been deployed as the Border Guarding Force (BGF), in the India-Bhutan border in order to counter the challenges from these insurgent groups, and to improve the security environment along the border (Annual Report 2004-2005, Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs).

Operation All Clear can be termed as the dawn of a new India-Bhutan strategic partnership (Chandramohan, 2009). On 24<sup>th</sup> December 2003, India, Bhutan and Myanmar joined hands to launch the biggest ever concerted offensive against the Northeast militants, who have camped illegally in the neighbouring countries of Bhutan and Myanmar (Talukdar, 2003). The actions taken by India and the neighbouring countries have not been successful, as the same insurgents search for alternate bases in other neighbouring countries like Bangladesh or Nepal soon after the operations. Counter-insurgency measures have been unsuccessful due to these reasons and as a result, the problems do not end in terms of terminating the insurgents especially in the Northeast region of India (Hussain, 2022).

A judgement delivered in 2019, by a special court of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) against a functionary of the proscribed United Liberation Front of

Assam (ULFA), said that, the Special Frontier Force (SFF) assisted the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) during Operation All Clear, which was launched in December 2003. Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), India's external spy agency, exercises control over SFF, which consists mainly of Tibetan and Gorkha paratroopers trained in mountain warfare. The SFF came into existence in 1962 when the first batch of Tibetan volunteers in India were trained by the U.S Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and India's Intelligence Bureau. SFF's role in Bhutan was unknown, although the involvement of the Indian Army was widely suspected by sections of the media, former rebels and the Assam police. While Indian government officials refused to comment on the mention of SFF in the judgement, former ULFA functionaries based at the camps in Bhutan before they were dismantled were certain about the secret force's involvement in the operation, which lasted for close to two weeks (Bhattacharyya, 2020).

According to a former rebel functionary, a large chunk of SFF, consisting of Tibetans, were engaged in Operation All Clear dressed in the uniform of the Royal Bhutan Army. According to him, the strongest evidence came from the shelling that destroyed the central and general headquarters of ULFA in Samdrup Jongkhar, which could not have been done by an inexperienced force like the Royal Bhutan Army (Bhattacharyya, 2020). Since SFF consists mainly of Tibetan and Gorkha paratroopers trained in mountain warfare, there is a possibility of it getting involved in the Operation All clear of 2003. It would be difficult for the small number of Bhutan's Army to fight against 3000 insurgent groups, due to which there might be a possibility of SFF being sent by the Indian Government to help<sup>108</sup>.

During Operation All Clear, the Indian Army crossed borders once in a while to attack rebel bases in Bhutan<sup>109</sup>. On the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the operation, the Indian Army sealed the Indo-Bhutan border and concentrated on the Indo-Bangladesh boundary as the fleeing militants were likely to move. Whereas, Myanmar's Foreign Minister, U Win Aung declared that Myanmar had also decided to join hands to flush out the anti-Indian rebels. The then Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi said, that the Assam Government would welcome the militants and help them rehabilitate if they gave up

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<sup>108</sup><https://defenceupdate.in/was-indias-special-frontier-force-engaged-in-bhutans-operation-all-clear-to-flush-out-militants/>.

<sup>109</sup><https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-33074776>.

arms and joined the mainstream (Talukdar, 2003). According to the official sources, rather than indulging in firing, the Royal Bhutan Army was engaged in shutting off specific areas to track out the rebels who were trying to hide in the difficult terrain of the hilly Kingdom. Also, according to the sources in Bhutan, special care was being taken to evacuate the non-combatant women and children of the militant camps by providing shelter and food till they were identified for sending back to India<sup>110</sup>.

Prior to the Operation All Clear, the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and Kamtapur Liberation Organization (KLO) was said to have increased cooperation with the Bhutan Tiger Force, the Bhutan Maoist Party and the Communist Party of Bhutan. There was also the fear in Bhutan that the Communist Party of Bhutan, with active cooperation from Northeast Indian insurgent groups, might acquire advanced weapons and attempt to overturn the newly elected democratic government headed by Prime Minister Jigmi Y Thinley (Chandramohan, 2009). According to the reports received by the Government of India, during Operation All Clear, the surrounding United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) commanders were in constant touch with the Directorate-General of Field Intelligence (DGFI) of the Bangladesh army (Sharma, 2003).

As a friendly neighbour of India, Bhutan has the responsibility to prevent the presence of anti-India militants inside its territory (Haokip, 2003). There has been an on-going threat of insurgency in the South Asian region. It is crucial for the countries of the South Asian region to aspire for mutual cooperation (Kharat, 2006). There was a diplomatic pressure by India on Bhutan as the former claimed that these insurgent groups posed a threat to the India-Bhutan relationship. Also, their strong historical relationship, as well as the significance of India to Bhutan's economy made the latter to cooperate. India's pressure on Bhutan to act against the insurgents is the evidence of successful persuasion in the context of a strong, cooperative regime (Prasad, 2019). The then Bhutanese Prime Minister Lyonpo Jigmi Thinley said that Bhutan also had suffered enough due to the presence of the insurgent groups, as there were obstructions in trade which brought about the closure of several large industries as well as educational institutions in the affected areas and prevented general socio-

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<sup>110</sup>[https://zeenews.india.com/news/nation/royal-bhutan-army-continue-with-its-operation-all-clear-for-ninth-day\\_138161.html](https://zeenews.india.com/news/nation/royal-bhutan-army-continue-with-its-operation-all-clear-for-ninth-day_138161.html).



economic developments in the southern region of the Himalayan kingdom<sup>111</sup>. He also said that, they were trying to create misunderstandings and affect the relations between India and Bhutan<sup>112</sup>.

The India-Bhutan counter-insurgency cooperation along its border has been considered as a remarkable event in bilateral relations (Chand, 2014). At one point of time, the Bhutanese Legislators suggested that their country should take Chinese help to evict the insurgents although Bhutan and China do not have diplomatic ties. But the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had some discussions about it with the King of Bhutan, Jigme Singhye Wangchuk during his visit to the Himalayan Kingdom (Bagchi, 2003). King Jigme Singye Wangchuck had gained the trust of the Indian leaders in 2003, when he led the offensive by the Royal Bhutan Army to cleanse anti-India insurgents from the Bhutanese soil through Operation All Clear. Since trust is the major importance in the strategic sphere, the former King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck managed to convince its friendly neighbour India. There is also the risk of Indian insurgent groups reusing Bhutanese territory against the Indian Government. Due to this reason, there are several policy options for Bhutan to continue strengthening its relationship with India. It may also use China in order to balance against India (Dahia & Behuria, 2012).

Due to open borders between India and Bhutan, activities of insurgent groups could increase and make the region highly conflict prone. The threat would be high if militant groups which are anti-India and anti-Bhutan manage to consolidate their bases in the border areas (Bisht, 2012: 48). After the construction of new roadways between Northeast India and Bhutan, it has become easier to install new security forces, which has been helping in combating insurgency (Sen, 2022). After the operation, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Indo-Bhutan meeting on security and border management was held at Thimphu from 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> September 2004. Security related issues between the two countries and border management issues were discussed at the meeting (Annual Report 2004-2005, Government of India, and Ministry of Home Affairs). At the time of Operation All Clear, Bangladesh reacted by saying that it had sealed its borders with India to prevent Indian insurgents fleeing Bhutan or Myanmar from entering its

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<sup>111</sup><https://www.financialexpress.com/archive/impedes-growth-bhutan/97110/>.

<sup>112</sup><https://www.hindustantimes.com/india/implement-terror-protocol-urgently-asserts-bhutan/story-nD7ZiZiX44hW67B4zYIE5N.html>.

territory. But most of the insurgents who have fled from Bhutan during the operation were caught after few years in Bangladesh<sup>113</sup>.

Other than the India-Bhutan counter-insurgency cooperation, India has also conducted joint operations with its other two neighbours, Myanmar and Bangladesh. In the earlier period, Bangladesh was unwilling to address India's security concerns, which were mainly based on the presence of many insurgent groups from North-eastern region of the latter, who had been enjoying a safe haven in the former's territories and had been carrying out their activities across the border (Bhattacharjee, 2018). According to India's belief, the militant organizations having roots in, or links with Pakistan were using Bangladesh as a transit point. So India repeatedly urged the Government of Bangladesh to take action against such groups. But the Bangladeshi Government had been denying their existence. When Sheikh Hasina became the Prime Minister of Bangladesh in 2009, measures were taken to cooperate with India. The Bangladeshi Government helped in the arrests of top insurgent leaders, including the Chairman of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), Arabinda Rajkhowa and Ranjan Daimary of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) (Bhattacharjee, 2018).

'Operation Golden Bird', has often been represented as a joint operation between the armed forces of India and Myanmar. But unlike Operation All Clear, this operation was planned and executed by the Indian Army alone, with troops ex 57 Mtn Div and those under operational control of Headquarters Inspector General, Assam Rifles (North) or HQ IGAR(N). The involvement of the Myanmar Army in the operation was not by design on any side. Operation Golden Bird was conducted along the India-Myanmar border in the North-eastern state of Mizoram in April-May 1995 (Dahiya, 2016: 5). Therefore, Operation All Clear can be observed as a distinctive cooperation in terms of counter-insurgency operation.

Prior to Operation All Clear, the Government of Bhutan even offered to pay the ULFA a sum of Rupees 200 crore if they vacated their camps from its soil and assist the government in the transfer of the members of its cadre to Myanmar. But the ULFA refused the offer, due to which, the Bhutanese Government had no choice but to forcibly remove the insurgents through the operation in 2003 (Bhattacharya, 2015).

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<sup>113</sup><https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume17/wasbir.htm>.

There had been a deal between India and Bhutan during 2003-2004, in which, the latter had helped the former by flushing out militants from its soil, in return, India agreed to keep silent over the expulsion of Bhutanese citizens, Lhothampas, from the south and by facilitating their entry into Nepal (Bidwai, 2007).

Some of the remaining insurgents after the Operation All Clear had taken shelter in the neighbouring states of Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar. Due to which, the numbers of these insurgent groups have increased in the coming years (Hussain, 2002). ‘Operation Sunrise’ had to be carried out between the Indian and the Myanmar Government. The first phase of Operation Sunrise was conducted in 2019, along the India-Myanmar border, in which a number of camps of Northeast-based militant groups were shattered. Also, during the first phase of Operation Sunrise, the Indian Army targeted members of the Arakan Army, an insurgent group in Myanmar, who were opposed to the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit transport project, which is viewed as India’s gateway to Southeast Asia. In the second half of the Operation Sunrise, the armies of both the countries coordinated with each other to destroy the camps of militant outfits, including the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO), the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang) (NSCN-K), the United Liberation Front of Assam (I) (ULFA-I) and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)<sup>114</sup>.

According to the interview on some Bhutanese citizens, the relationship between India and Bhutan was firm before the Operation All Clear, with no direct interference and influence on the decisions of the Royal Government of Bhutan regarding the border security. After Operation All Clear, the relationship between the two countries grew even stronger. The Bhutanese citizens were not affected much by the Indian side of the military operation. The operation did not have any noticeable impact on the politics of either of the country, but it definitely shaped and re-emphasised the independence of Bhutan’s foreign policy stand and India’s respect to the decision of Bhutan to deal its internal security problems concerning the Indian origin insurgents. According to them the Operation All Clear was necessary and successful as it was aimed at evicting the Indian origin insurgents out of Bhutan. India respected Bhutan’s

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<sup>114</sup><https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-myanmar-conduct-joint-operation-to-destroy-militant-camps-in-northeast/article27956142.ece>.

independence, and the two nations have shown its prosperity in the area of security cooperation<sup>115</sup>.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2003, after the operation, Bhutan refused a request from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to let its team visit the Kingdom to help evacuate non-combatant women and children from areas where the Royal Bhutan Army was conducting the operations (Timeline Bhutan Year 2013). Some of the ULFA leaders who had been denied shelter by the Chinese Government during the Operation All Clear have in recent years, taken shelter in Yunnan (China), which can be traced through different sources in the last couple of years. This includes statements by surrendered ULFA functionaries and inputs received by Indian intelligence agencies. The presence of ULFA Chief of Staff, Paresh Baruah since 2011, in Yunnan, would not have been possible without the knowledge of the higher authorities (Sharma 2014 & Bhattacharyya, 2020).

Bhutan must have felt pressured by India's repeated request to clear the insurgent groups from its soil because the former had to worry about the consequences of military confrontation with the insurgents on its people, especially the impact on their social and economic life. The people of Southern Bhutan would have to be evacuated if military operations were launched as there would be human casualties. The Royal Bhutan Army was also no match for the militant organizations because the Royal Bhutan Army had vintage World War II rifles and the militant groups were armed with AK-47s. It ultimately led the Government of Bhutan in a very agonizing situation (Kumar, 2002).

On the other side, there has been another interesting accusation by the ULFA group during its stay in the southern jungles of Bhutan against India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). When the NDFB group was accused of attacking a Bhutanese police post at Nanglam in Southern Bhutan, there was a question as to why would the NDFB rebel groups, who have used Bhutan as their main safe haven attack Bhutanese policemen and invite doom for themselves. It is possible for them to attack the Indian forces as their fight is with the Indian Government, but it cannot be same with the Bhutanese Government. The then ULFA chief of military wing Paresh Barua in defence of their fellow insurgent group NDFB, who had been hiding together in Bhutan claimed that the

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<sup>115</sup>Interview with Bhutanese citizens on 20/09/2019.

Indian secret agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), was behind the attack. According to him, the RAW might have ordered the other Bodo militant outfit that had recently come into negotiation with the Government of India to carry out the attacks against the Bhutanese police. But the other Bodo militant outfit which had been identified as the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) had denied the charges (Bhaumik, 1997).

Steps should also be taken to hamper the business interests of some of the insurgent groups in neighbouring countries so that the motivation that keeps these groups alive is lost. The concept of smart borders is also very much applicable in the Indian context. India has taken a step further towards achieving a biometric database in the form of the Aadhaar Card<sup>116</sup>. Any citizens of India entering Bhutan should have Aadhaar Card to keep records of the entry and exit. Similar exercises may be facilitated in neighbouring countries to maintain citizen records (Sharma, 2014: 123). The borders of Bhutan, Myanmar and Nepal cut across houses and villages, thus dividing several tribes and forcing them to reside as citizens of different countries. Due to which, these tribes continue to maintain strong linkages with their kith and kin across the border. This ultimately leads the insurgents to cross over into the other side of the border and receive training in arms, establish safe havens, and re-enter India to carry out subversive attacks (Sharma, 2014: 125-26). In India's Northeast region, the rebel groups have often succeeded in reversing the events by entering into deals with other insurgent groups, and these alliances act as force multipliers<sup>117</sup>.

The security cooperation between India and Bhutan can be discussed through another event, i.e., the Doklam Stand-off. The relations between the borders of India and Bhutan have been a peaceful one. India and Bhutan's main conflicts have been over conservation and both the countries have jointly run counter-insurgency operations in wildlife preserves. The Indian Government has made statements defending both their borders. The China-India border is neighbour to the Bhutan-China border, and this naturally creates battle lines between the countries. China and India's border problems have extended towards Bhutan. India is close to Bhutan, and the two have an alliance, but the latter does not have the same relations with China (Grizzell, 2021). China have

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<sup>116</sup>Aadhaar is a 12 digit individual identification number issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India which serves as a proof of identity and address, anywhere in India.

<sup>117</sup> <https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume17/wasbir.htm>.

been taking over small pieces of lands from Bhutan and this actions of the former are not as visible physically (Bisht, 2014). The stand-off in Doklam, situated in the India-Bhutan-Tibet (China) tri-junction is the rise of a pre-existing condition (Rao, 2017).

When the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, it rejected all prior foreign agreements as unequal treaties, imposed upon it during the previous centuries, which the Chinese considered it as a period of humiliation. So China demanded for a re-negotiation of all its borders. According to Chinese belief, the Doklam dispute is confined in the 'Tibet-Sikkim Convention' of 1890 which settled the border issue. So to say, the Chinese have been selective in their reorganisation of the British treaties. But at that time, Bhutan was not a party to the 1890 Convention (Rossow, et al., 2022). China's road construction at Doklam is considered as a deliberate move to trigger a response from Bhutan and India, through which it seeks to impose its own definition of the tri-junction point of the boundary between Bhutan, China and India. This move has serious security outcomes for both Bhutan and India's defence interests (Mitra, 2017).

There is some insecurity from Bhutan's side in terms of Doklam crisis towards India. India might be eager to help Bhutan defend its borders but the latter is not willing to lose its autonomy over its foreign and defence affairs although it remains largely within India's strategic orbit, and has sought greater autonomy over its foreign and defence affairs. Much of the civilians in Bhutan prefer to reach a territorial settlement to maintain cordial ties with China through talks (Wuthnow, et al., 2018). The Doklam Stand-off have showed an outstanding result about the relations between India and Bhutan and the dilemma of the latter between its two giant neighbours. Although the Doklam Stand-off have adjourned for now, there is a possibility of re-emerging of the event in future (Panda, 2017).

The Doklam Stand-off was an opportunity for India to prove its emerging role as a country that can stand up against the Chinese expansionism in the region. India has been trying to influence the South Asian countries against the Chinese expansionist policies, which have proved to be in vain except for Bhutan. Bhutan is an exceptional among the South Asian countries due to its special relation with India (Rossow, et al., 2020). The maintenance of Diplomatic communications between India and China after the stand-off has been hegemonic towards Bhutan. Bhutan being the proprietor

of Doklam plateau has been treated as a henchman by India and China during the negotiations (European Foundation for South Asian Studies, 2020). Doklam Stand-off is another example of the past history where the British and the Chinese fought over territories in the Himalayan region and it has been repeating in the present scenario except for the former has been replaced by India (Senthilkumar, 2019: 1261).

The people on both sides of the borders of India and Bhutan have had close contacts for several centuries and have economic and cultural exchanges on a daily basis due to the open border. India decided to accept Bhutan's proposal to open a consulate (Haran, 2017). A Bhutanese consulate was opened at Guwahati, India in 2018 after the military stand-off at Doklam. Also, after the Doklam Stand-off, Assistant Foreign Minister of China, Kong Xuanyou, visited Bhutan from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> July 2018. He was also accompanied by Luo Zhaohui, the Chinese Ambassador to India. The Assistant Foreign Minister met the Fifth King, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, the Fourth King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, and the Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2018 & Ranjan, 2019: 93).

After becoming the Prime Minister, Tshering Tobgay paid a visit to India from 27<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> December 2018. During his visit, the two Prime Ministers expressed their satisfaction about the bilateral ties of friendship and cooperation between the two countries, which is based upon trust, mutual understanding, goodwill, respect for each other's interests, and people to people linkages and close economic and development partnership (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India 2018 & Ranjan, 2019: 94). In a telephonic conversation between Chief of Army Staff Gen M. M. Naravane of India and Royal Bhutan Army Chief Operations Officer, Lt. Gen Batoo Tshering, issues regarding bilateral defence cooperation were discussed in May 2021, due to the increase in aggressive behaviour from the Chinese side. This may be because of the reason that the Chinese Government had issued a white paper on Tibet, in which the former have been gaining up efforts to develop infrastructure in remote villages along Tibet's border with India, Bhutan and Nepal<sup>118</sup>.

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<sup>118</sup><https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/army-chief-speaks-to-royal-bhutan-army-officer-discusses-bilateral-defence-cooperation/articleshow/82917664.cms>.

According to some Bhutanese citizens, the Doklam Crisis was a military stand-off between India and China at the border of Bhutan and China, where China has exhibited its expansion towards Bhutan through construction of roads and display of military presence. According to the Bhutanese citizens, China has portrayed its hunger to expand its territory across the border of a relatively smallest nation it could dominate through both economic and military might. They say that the Bhutanese Government has agreed to be guided by India concerning external security and foreign policy. India has its military outpost located in various regions of Bhutan. For them, the India-Bhutan security cooperation is based on mutual understanding and that India's involvement is driven by its own security and strategic concerns rather than being hegemonic towards Bhutan. It will never be safe for Bhutan being a buffer state between two giant nuclear states, nor will it be, for any nation expanding itself into another nation with the nuclear weapon at hand<sup>119</sup>.

The Bhutanese citizens have also mentioned that, with the presence of military personnel, arms and ammunition at the tri-junction and without a clear understanding between the three nations involved, it is safe to say that the Doklam Crisis is yet to be resolved. It was the right thing to do on the Indian side to get involved in the Doklam Crisis, and that, the Doklam Crisis would not be resolved any sooner. Also, the Doklam Crisis could not resolve the relations between India and Bhutan any further. The crisis could be resolved only if the two giants agree to retract themselves along with their arms and ammunition in the order of; first India to retract followed by China and leaving the border without any sort of military presence<sup>120</sup>.

Some younger citizens of Bhutan, those who are not much aware of the treaties signed between India and Bhutan, disapproved of New Delhi's interference in their internal affairs and even resented Bhutan's over-dependence on India (Mehta, 2018). But the Bhutanese Government cannot give away Doklam to China because the former knows very well about the latter's unending territorial appetite and the difficulty involved in satisfying it (Pattnaik & Panda, 2021). The primary trend of the China-Bhutan talks was to build bridges of friendship and cooperation (Bisht, 2014).

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<sup>119</sup>Interview with Bhutanese citizens on 20/09/2019.

<sup>120</sup>Interview with Bhutanese citizens on 20/09/2019.



According to some Bhutanese citizens, it is important as it depicts the unnecessary and unlawful territorial expansion of China towards a relatively smaller nation, Bhutan, in such an era, where the whole world knows about the sovereign and independent status of the Kingdom of Bhutan. Moreover, Bhutan having acted as buffer state between the two large nations for so long, and the encroachment of China into Bhutanese border, has drawn the security and military attention of India into the crisis. While India has also agreed to guide Bhutan through its foreign policy, it was imperative to involve and intervene in the matter. The nuclear state status of both the giant nations involved in this crisis also makes it more important for the nations involved and for the whole world to understand it as an important crisis<sup>121</sup>.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Neighbourhood First' policy has lent some energy to the India-Bhutan relations. The 'Neighbourhood First' policy is a policy focused on cooperation, based on the needs and requirements of neighbouring countries. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has followed up on his state visits to Bhutan since 2014 (Bhonsale, 202). After the Doklam Stand-off in 2017, the strategic dialogue between India and China continued under the circumstances of a developmental partnership, which also helped in peaceful disengagement of border personnel of India and China at the face-off site in the Doklam region. Both sides recognized that ensuring peace and tranquillity in the India-China border areas is an essential for the development of bilateral relations. They agreed that, progress in bilateral relations should be guided by the consensus reached between their leaders that, at a time of global uncertainty, India-China relations are a factor of stability and both the countries in their relationship, must not allow differences to become disputes (Ministry of Defence, Government of India, Annual Report, 2017-2018).

Senior diplomatic officials of China and Bhutan signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on a three-step road-map for expediting the Bhutan-China boundary negotiations during a video conference on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2021. The problem in terms of border talks with Bhutan by China lies in India, which has served as a complicated factor. The demand to negotiate the border issue with China on behalf of Bhutan by India had failed due to which, it has tried to exercise influence on every

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<sup>121</sup>Interview with Bhutanese citizens on 20/09/2019.

detail of the China-Bhutan negotiations<sup>122</sup>. On 1<sup>st</sup> August 2017, during the Doklam Crisis, Bhutan's Ambassador to India, Gen Vetsup Namgyel, attended the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the People's Liberation Army at the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi. This may be seen as an indirect signal of Bhutanese goodwill towards China (Mehta, 2018).

According to the Indian defence sources<sup>123</sup>, China's construction of settlement-building along its disputed border with Bhutan, with more than 200 structures, including two-storey buildings, under construction in six locations, shown to satellite image analysis, suggests that China is determined to resolve its border claims<sup>124</sup>. The construction of villages would also offer China some strategic value. The settlements would allow China to control and monitor extensive areas, and potentially use them to establish security-focused installations. But according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, the construction is entirely for the improvement of the working and living conditions of the local people and that it is within China's sovereignty to carry out normal construction activities on its own territory<sup>125</sup>. According to the Bhutanese Foreign Ministry, Bhutan and China had agreed to speed up the process of resolving their differences during the latest round of boundary negotiations in April 2021<sup>126</sup>.

Through the signing of MoU on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2021, China and Bhutan are willing to expedite the progress on the boundary talks. China claims around 89 sq. kilometres in the area which will help it to have more territory in a narrow area extending towards the Siliguri Corridor (Singh, 2021). China wants to test India in order to find out whether the latter would come to the rescue of its closest neighbour Bhutan when its tiny neighbour is put under pressure through border intrusions (Chaudhury, 2017). India needs to closely consult with Bhutan in order to understand how the latter feels about the situation in Doklam should be handled (Rao, 2017). From the Bhutanese point of view, in terms of geography, Doklam is neither strategically important nor does it hold any economic value, as the stand-off area is frozen for most of the year and nothing can grow there. But it has become more important for India due to its

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<sup>122</sup><https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202110/1236431.shtml>.

<sup>123</sup><https://www.reuters.com/article/israel-bhutan-idUSKBN28M0NK>.

<sup>124</sup><https://www.reuters.com/article/israel-bhutan-idUSKBN28M0NK>.

<sup>125</sup><https://www.reuters.com/article/israel-bhutan-idUSKBN28M0NK>.

<sup>126</sup><https://www.reuters.com/article/israel-bhutan-idUSKBN28M0NK>.

own strategic security. The Doklam Stand-off was an opportunity for Bhutan to abandon the whole issue, but Bhutan stood on India's side (Lamsang, 2017).

China completed construction of a new village where the Chinese region of Tibet meets the Kingdom of Bhutan in which a hundred Chinese people moved into two dozen new homes beside the Torsa River. The new village is near the Doklam plateau, where the borders of China, India and Bhutan intersect. But China did not hide the fact that it had constructed a village, as evidenced by several state media reports on the village. This can be proved as the Chinese conducted an inauguration ceremony on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2020, which was attended by senior officials from Shanghai, including Yu Shaoliang, Deputy Secretary of the city's Communist Party Committee (Myers 2020). But according to the Bhutanese ambassador to India, there is no Chinese village inside Bhutan as the new constructions might be military installations (Menon & Kanisetti, 2021:11).

After negotiating with China, if Bhutan abandons its claims over Doklam, the situation will not be good for neither India nor the latter. India might stop trusting Bhutan, as it can harm the Indian security because of Doklam's strategic location. Even if Bhutan grants its territory to China in order to appease it, the latter will not stop its expansion (Nagao, 2019). Since wars create total disruptions on all sides, people no longer want any kind of conflicts. So India wanted to end the Doklam Crisis through negotiations. It was a wise decision made by India in order to promote peace (Lama, 2019). The issue in terms of Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary<sup>127</sup> in Bhutan would provide China the military advantage of being able to outwit the Indian defences at Tawang in a conflict. The announcement made in June 2020 by China claiming Sakteng may be seen in the context of India's proposal to construct a road from Guwahati to Tawang via Trashigang district where the sanctuary is located. This road would provide an alternate route to Tawang and reduce the distance by about 150 kilometres from the existing one which is via Bomdila and Se-la, speeding up mobilisation of Indian troops in case of a conflict with China (Gurung, 2020).

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<sup>127</sup>Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary is a wildlife sanctuary in Bhutan and is on the tentative list for inclusion in UNESCO. It is located at Merak and Sakteng Gewogs of Trashigang District and just across the border into Samdrup Jongkhar District.

In October 2021, Beijing issued a new boundary law, through which the Chinese citizens can help defend China's borders. This boundary law also authorises patrol officers to use force if necessary. The law also prohibits the construction of permanent facilities near China's borders by its neighbouring countries without permission from Beijing and it also encourages Chinese citizens to settle in disputed regions. The boundary law issued by China is hegemonic in character as it is egocentric in nature (Grossman, 2022). The decisions taken by the Chinese are intimidating in nature and are not cosy enough to lure Bhutan towards it. On the other hand, India is conducting itself as being homely towards Bhutan. This ultimately has made Bhutan feel more comfortable with India.

### **5.3 Cooperative Security Analysis between India and Bhutan**

Cooperative security puts importance to dialogues, confidence building measures, interdependence and cooperation both at intra- and inter-regional levels. The first step towards forming a comprehensive security framework is cooperation between countries, which can de-securitize the insecurities between the states within a region and help them work in a united manner to meet common challenges (Nayak, 2013). The Doklam Stand-off was a distinctive opportunity for India to prove its emerging role as a fortress against Chinese expansionism westward (Rossow, et al., 2020). Cooperative security implies that countries seek to merge in relation to threat perceptions, challenges and opportunities with a view that it is advantageous to their security, stability and prosperity (Chinoy, 2019). India and Bhutan have been cooperating on mutual security concerns and this cooperation has been progressing satisfactorily in the interest of both the countries. While the law enforcement agencies on both sides of the border have also escalated in sharing the intelligence to keep an eye on terrorists and other anti-social activities along the border (Haran, 2017).

India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy is a demonstration of its leadership position in South Asia. The competition between India and China in South Asia on the military, economic and diplomatic dimension is equal. This rivalry between India and China at one point of time, turned into a military conflict in 2017 at Doklam, where the Indian forces entered the disputed territory at the request of Bhutan to prevent Chinese forces from building a road there. The Doklam Crisis demonstrates New Delhi's foreign policy change with Beijing, signalling that India is determined to act stronger to

combat Chinese influence and activities in South Asia (Nga & Thuong, 2021: 2, 16 & 17).

The claims made by Foreign Minister spokesperson, Lu Kang on Doklam region based on the 1890 Convention could not prove that Doklam falls on the Chinese side of the water-parting. Because, as per mentioned by Jawaharlal Nehru, since Sikkim, Tibet and Bhutan were not involved, the 1890 Treaty was unequal. So according to Zheping Huang, since the Chinese always use the term ‘unequal treaty’ in it’s history with western powers, the 1890 Convention should also be considered as unequal as it did not involve the three main Kingdoms i.e., Sikkim, Tibet and Bhutan. Also, the Convention of 1890 refers to the boundary of Sikkim and Tibet and not the tri-junction area where the dispute had occurred at Doklam (Huang, 2017).

The Friendship agreement between India and Bhutan was a strategic arrangement, in which Bhutan gained a security insurance for its sovereignty and territoriality vis-à-vis China. This led to a lack of an autonomous foreign policy for Bhutan, but it is considered as a small price to pay for this strategic gain. For India, the cooperation with Bhutan ensured the creation of a Himalayan buffer zone between India and China that would slow down a potential attack by China due to the geography of the Himalayas. Bhutan also relies on the Indian border to gain access towards the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean (European Foundation for South Asian Studies, 2020). Bhutan is caught between the traditional influence of India and the rising new influence of China. The Bhutanese also worry about an India-China conflict on their land (Nagao, 2019).

Although China and Bhutan have no formal relations yet, there has been a rise in the high-level visit of Chinese officials to Bhutan. China’s former Ambassador to India, Le Yucheng visited Bhutan in 2015, followed by a three-day visit by China’s Vice-Foreign Minister, Kong Xuanyou in 2018. During his visit, he invited Bhutan to join the Belt and Road Initiative project and reap the benefits of ‘China’s Developmental Dividend’. The Chinese Ambassador to India, Luo Zhahui also visited Bhutan in January 2019 and met the Bhutanese King, Prime Minister Lotay Tshering and the Foreign Minister Tandi Dorji and discussed strengthening pragmatic cooperation in different fields and push for a new development of their bilateral relations (Ranjan, 2019).

The peripheral policy is the core of China's external strategy. China has always been eager to maintain good relations with its Asian neighbours, i.e., the periphery countries. Bhutan being considered as one of the 'five fingers' of China's policy is an important periphery of the latter. China might have wanted Doklam plateau to be part and parcel of its policies. Since the plan of constructing roads in the Doklam region have failed, now China is willing to create ties with Bhutan through the Belt and Road Initiative and different developmental projects (Singh, 2012).

India's relations with China must be balanced with care based on the principle of mutual understanding, and border disputes must be resolved through political will based on negotiations which have taken place between the two countries until now (India's National Security Strategy, 2019: 8). In South Asia, China sees Bhutan as its last frontier, although it does not have an embassy yet. As soon as India and China negotiated disengagement at the end of August 2017 after the Doklam Stand-off, Beijing redoubled moves to establish itself in the Doklam plateau and altered its route to the ridge and began a massive military build-up for troops and helipads. China has also been building a model village on the Mochu River and a road winding south towards India in the Bhutanese territory. China might not be willing to give up on its preferential territories in Bhutan easily. Due to this reason, China is trying its best to increase the military bases on its border areas with Bhutan (Joshi, 2021).

Some of the critics in Bhutan are against their country's dependency on India and are willing to change the situation (Sarki, 2019: 148). According to the experts on border studies, some people in Bhutan feel that India's clutch on their country is becoming suffocating and controlling, as Bhutan's national defence, energy and economy are tightly under India's grip. India's control of Bhutan is extensive, especially in national defence. The Bhutanese Army has many members from India and the border patrol forces are also sometimes Indian troops<sup>128</sup>. There is also a strong opinion amongst the people that India's hold on Bhutan is becoming a millstone, hampering Bhutan's initiative to cultivate relations with other nations. They suggest that Bhutan needs to build an independent foreign policy, settle the border dispute and normalise relations with China (Mishra, 2019). Even the Bhutanese youth are dissatisfied with the presence of the Indian troops on their soil especially after the Indian intervention at

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<sup>128</sup><https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202110/1236991.shtml>.

Doklam (Mehta, 2022). But the fact is that, the Indian Government got involved in the Doklam Stand-off at the request of the Government of Bhutan (Joseph, 2018).

Bhutan fears China, and finds itself caught up in a cautious but critical diplomatic battle being waged between India and China (Benedictus, 2014). According to Long Xingchun, Director of Centre of India Studies, China West Normal University, Bhutan could become a key player in ending the face-off in Doklam, as part of a two-step formula of finding a solution. According to him, Bhutan could have requested India for a swap between Indian and Bhutanese troops at the location of the Doklam Stand-off. Indian troops could have moved out of the disputed area and enter Bhutan, and be replaced by Bhutanese troops and once the Indian troops were out of the line of sight, it would be much easier for China to deal with Bhutan bilaterally in the absence of Indian forces. China has always considered India as an obstacle in its path towards befriending Bhutan. According to China, India is like an intimidator of Bhutan and its small neighbours. Therefore, China wants to negotiate with Bhutan privately without India's involvement (Aneja, 2017). China is also trying to persuade Bhutan through business and academic opportunities offered to young people from Bhutan. This shows the uphill battle of China in disrupting the friendship between India and Bhutan (Shasiharan, 2020).

Medha Bisht, replied to a question asked by Shivam Yadav that, there is no need for an update in the Friendship Treaty between India and Bhutan because, the 2007 Treaty, includes all the areas like cultural, economic and development aspects, which are essential for further strengthening bilateral ties along with security (IDSA, 2018). But there have been discussions on social media as to whether it was time for Bhutan to settle its border dispute with China and follow an independent foreign policy or whether Bhutan should come out of India's influence. On the other hand, many Bhutanese are thankful to India for its assistance over the decades (Ethirajan, 2018).

After the Doklam Stand-off, both China and India had each learned their lessons. India realised that its intervention in Doklam had no long-term effect on Chinese road construction and that it should therefore combine its hold on the disputed lands under its control quickly through road constructions, troop placements and other means. As for China, it learned that the difference in military capacity between the two countries

allows it to take actions, such as taking Indian controlled territory in Ladakh, which India cannot take (Dossani, 2021).

China may have been trying to come in between India and Bhutan by focusing on the latter. China wanted to know whether India would defend its own territories or go to war against a much stronger rival in order to defend someone else's territories. China may have thought that India would back down and compromise in some way by permitting Bhutan to trade its claim on Doklam for China's package deal (Blank, 2017). Bhutan is struggling to maintain its territory as well as keep both its giant neighbours happy. Bhutan is cautious of doing anything that could cause it to get caught in the middle of a conflict between India and China. According to Lieutenant General Manoj Pande, who heads the Indian Army's eastern sector, the Siliguri Corridor is critical and sensitive for India, especially during the on-going border tensions. According to another source, India's goal is to push Bhutan to demarcate clear borders with China without giving up the strategic area in Doklam (Sen & Chaudhary, 2021). The signing of MoU between China and Bhutan in 2021 would also indicate India's loss of hold on Bhutan and also deterioration of relations with the latter and ultimately, can affect India's National Security (Mukherjee, 2021).

Due to Bhutan's strategic importance, India cannot ignore it and has to be sensitive to its relations to create a long-term relationship. This could be seen even during the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020, when India dispatched 500 vehicles carrying essential goods to Bhutan, many vehicles entering the country on a daily basis, and have sent three medical consignments to the country which included Hydroxychloroquine tablets. India also made necessary logistical arrangements for around 1,700 stranded Bhutanese citizens in eight Indian cities to go back to Bhutan safely via special Druk Air flights (Alam & Sebastian, 2020). This might be the policy of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Bharat to Bhutan' vision where India wanted to show that both the countries are always on each other's side based on the relationship enshrined in the treaty of 1949. India is willing to bring Bhutan closer towards its orbit and help each other against China, who has been trying to take over their territories especially in Doklam which certainly can challenge the security of the Siliguri Corridor (Bhonsale, 2020).



Due to the mutual trust set in India-Bhutan bilateral relation, Bhutan has abstained from playing the China card. If the boundary dispute is settled, China and Bhutan may establish formal diplomatic relations. China's influence on Bhutan's north-western constituencies with a settled boundary would make India's Siliguri corridor strategically vulnerable. But if China and Bhutan do not settle their boundaries, the former can adopt claiming tactics on Bhutan's territory (Bisht, 2012: 48). Both India and Bhutan would benefit if they sustain their cooperation, except, the former should be watchful, given Bhutan's strategic location and proximity to sensitive conflict-prone border areas (Bisht, 2010: 353).

India's relationship with its neighbours is civilizational and unique which cannot be replaced (Prakash, 2022). Traditionally, India has viewed its neighbours with a security-centric lens and has treated South Asia and the Indian Ocean as its sphere of influence and the first line of defence. Except for Bhutan and Afghanistan, the rest of the South Asian countries treat India with animosity, lack of trust, and scepticism (Shivamurthy, 2022). Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka are said to be moving closer to China on the economic and political front. The Chinese provocation at the Doklam tri-junction in 2017 can also be considered as an indirect way of telling Bhutan where to draw the line in its dependence on India (Moorthy, 2020). Bhutan's relations with China are not only because of the Indian factor. As mentioned always, the Chinese threat and intentions were responsible for Bhutan getting closer to India. Since both India and Bhutan enjoy a special relationship and respect the 2007 Treaty, it might be impossible to believe that Bhutan would establish diplomatic ties with China without informing or discussing with India (Pant & Shivamurthy, 2021).

China's relations with other South Asian Countries are based on the principles of amity, sincerity, mutual benefits, and inclusiveness. Beijing has formulated a geostrategic approach to the region in order to secure its own national interests. China's longstanding dispute with India is based on territories and the question of sheltering His Holiness, the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama of Tibet. With Pakistan, China has partnership in terms of developing the rest of the world through Belt and Road Initiative. China also treats Pakistan as a useful partner in order to achieve security for the benefit of economic development in Afghanistan (Grossman, 2020). As for Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, China is focused on the need for

economic development through Belt and Road Initiative (Grossman, 2020). As for China and Bhutan, the issue comes mainly from border disputes. The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2021 is of historic significance and is the result of years of joint efforts and sincere cooperation between China and Bhutan. The MoU also includes the discussions of the Doklam region (Siqi, et al., 2021).

Besides India and China, Bhutan's relations with other South Asian neighbours is primarily of mutual benefits in terms of trade, cultural cooperation, people-to-people contacts, human resource development, agriculture, healthcare, standard and civil aviation, tourism, multilateral fora, institutions like South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), etc.<sup>129</sup>. During the Doklam Stand-off, Nepal was more concerned because Bhutan is closer to the Nepalese territory from its eastern part. Only the Indian state of Sikkim lies between Nepal and Bhutan. Due to which, the stand-off between the Indian and Chinese troops in Doklam areas could have directly affected Nepal (Jha, 2017).

India has been treating Bhutan with a new outlook after the revision of the Friendship Treaty in 2007. Bhutan is free to make foreign policy decisions independently in most cases without Indian objections, like in case of the Arms Trade Treaty<sup>130</sup> (Sibal, 2013). Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Neighbourhood First' policy has been significant to the successful Bhutanese response to the Corona-virus pandemic. This relationship between India and Bhutan is questionable enough to face major challenges in the coming years unless Bhutan senses a threat of expansionism from its southern neighbour (Shasiharan, 2020). The opening of the new consulate in Guwahati, Assam (India) indicates deepening mutual trust and understanding between both the countries. Bhutan has also been a major beneficiary of India's 'Act East Policy'. The stand-off at Doklam in 2017 might have led Bhutan to have a more cautious policy in building a deeper partnership with India and other countries, through economic routes by having bolder role in BBIN (Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal) Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA)), and BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative

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<sup>129</sup><https://www.mfa.gov.bt/bilateral-relations-2/>.

<sup>130</sup>The Arms Trade Treaty was adopted in April 2013 and signed by 130 countries before it entered into force on 24 December 2014, in order to address the issue of illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand (Nayak, 2018).

Although Bhutan is free to make its own foreign policy, in December 2020, a signing ceremony was held between the Israeli and Bhutanese ambassadors to India at the Israeli embassy in New Delhi. This clearly shows that Bhutan is still under the influence of India (Ayyub, 2020). Prior to the Doklam Stand-off, the Chinese side has been arguing that China and Bhutan are unable to resolve their boundary dispute because of India and have not managed to have normal bilateral ties. On the other hand, since the disputed areas of the tri-junction in the Chumbi Valley can directly affect India's Northeast region, India's involvement will be likely if Bhutan and China want to settle their border dispute (Singh, 2018). China has a strategy which is sometimes referred to as 'hardening the hard and softening the soft'. As Bhutan is a security zone of India, any move of China in Bhutan specifies Indian traditional influence zone. But Bhutan has become a zone of preferences for China in terms of economy and diplomatic influence. The move of China has been strictly watched by India as Bhutan is very close to India based on bilateral, military, and diplomatic relations (Bhattarai, 2021).

China has the view that India does not want the former to resolve boundary issues with Bhutan although the latter would have more advantages. According to the Chinese, India does not respect sovereignty and independence of the neighbouring countries (Sharma, 2021). According to People's Daily, India's military has been present in Bhutan for half a century, exercising its power and influence in every corner even in the remote and strategic areas of Northern Bhutan, the Indian soldiers exercise their authority and control the movement of local Bhutanese<sup>131</sup>.

In an interview with the newspaper 'The Hindu' in 2019, Bhutan's Prime Minister Lotay Tshering said that no side should do anything near the tri-junction point between India, China and Bhutan without consulting each other and as long as the status quo is maintained there will be peace and tranquillity in the region<sup>132</sup>. Bhutan basically is trying to maintain the peace between its neighbours, which, if not

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<sup>131</sup> <http://en.people.cn/n3/2017/0712/c90000-9240652.html>.

<sup>132</sup> <https://www.livemint.com/politics/news/bhutan-wants-india-china-to-maintain-status-quo-in-doklam-1560741592906.html>.

preserved might lead to a huge predicament on its territories. Bhutan might be the worst victim if any kind of war breaks out between India and China. Neither can China lure Bhutan away from India through negotiations as the latter is not willing to come towards the former and Bhutan have been maintaining equidistance between both India and China while considering India as its closest neighbour and security guarantor<sup>133</sup>.

India and Bhutan need to cooperate with each other in order to prevent a deeper Chinese intrusion southward in the Chumbi Valley as it is strategically sensitive for India's defence (Sibal, 2013). India considered the Chinese intrusion as a threat to its security and its regional influence (Mastro & Tarapore, 2017). India should be vigilant in terms of its friendship with Bhutan due to the new regional and international context which has become unpredictable and is changing fast (Hang Nga, et al., 2019: 451). Some of the bilateral issues which India and Bhutan needs to have serious concerns are- Bhutan's access to Xinjiang Province, China's continuous claim of Chumbi Valley and Doklam plateau, illegal training camps of militant outfits in the jungles of South-east Bhutan (Langeh, 2021). China, through its aggressive attitude, is in a process of objecting to the right of India to have a security agreement with Bhutan and is trying to estimate that the India-Bhutan relation is hegemonic (Chaudhury, 2018).

The relation between India and Bhutan makes the latter as a protected state and not a protectorate, of India (Dema, 2021). Bhutan is making cautious efforts to distance itself from India, as it is being known as the latter's protectorate (Adhikari, 2017). Bhutan's efforts to come out from the hegemonic attitude of India were quite visible especially in 2003, during the 'Operation All Clear'. When the Indian Army, at the beginning of the operation, made an offer to attack the insurgents directly, His Majesty the Fourth King declined as Bhutan did not want any foreign troops conducting operations on its soil. This was because Bhutan's sovereignty would be at stake if another country's military entered its soil<sup>134</sup>. Yet, Bhutan is influenced by India in its foreign policy, defence and commerce. The two main pillars of India-

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<sup>133</sup><https://www.livemint.com/politics/news/bhutan-wants-india-china-to-maintain-status-quo-in-doklam-1560741592906.html>.

<sup>134</sup><https://thebhutanese.bt/indian-media-should-do-their-homework-on-bhutans-2003-operation-all-clear/>.

Bhutan relations are defence and economy. Indian Military Training Team (IMTRAT) consolidated the defence of Bhutan and has always been a source of strength for Bhutan especially during Operation All Clear in 2003 and during the Doklam Stand-off (Atray, 2018).

The Treaty of 2007 was meant to protect the vulnerabilities of Bhutan's sovereignty. The Indian military is practically responsible for protecting Bhutan against external threats, especially from the Chinese military. Therefore, Bhutan believes that it is getting dragged amidst the India-China tensions<sup>135</sup>. Bhutan does not want to be a part of a big power rivalry in Asia. During the Doklam Stand-off, the Government of Bhutan officially remained silent and made no comments while India took a stand, the Indian army was said to be protecting Bhutanese territory (Guha, 2021). Bhutan has still not joined China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) even though the latter is constantly trying to persuade the former to become part of its ambitious plan. If Bhutan joins the Belt and Road Initiative and falls into a debt trap, China may try to grab strategically important areas from Bhutan (Verma, 2019). Among all the South Asian countries, Bhutan was the only country that did not attend China's Belt and Road Initiative forum in May 2017 (Acharya, 2018). Bhutan offers India a strategic benefit as a buffer along the northern border and the former has saved the latter billions of rupees in defence spending (Acharya, 2018).

India should try to reach out more to the people of Bhutan in order to counter the critics especially those who have been attacking India on social media (Malhotra, 2017). India-Bhutan cooperation has been continuing rapidly in the times of Covid-19 and the gestures made by India have been admired by His Majesty the King of Bhutan as well as the Prime Minister of Bhutan, Dr. Lotay Tshering. India's efforts have also been admired by the Bhutanese people, in particular due to the support given by the Indian Government in safeguarding essential supplies to Bhutan during the lockdown, through the handing over of medical supplies. The 'Duars' of North Bengal signifying the doorways, is the gateway to Bhutan. The India-Bhutan border crossing at Jaigaon/Phuentsholing is the key entry point for not only both Indian and foreign tourists but for important goods and commodities. Since Bhutan is a land-locked country, most of its important goods and commodities such as food, fuel and

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<sup>135</sup><https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/why-bhutan-is-special-to-india/article62060197.ece>.

medicines flow from India even in normal times. In-fact, it is quite difficult for Bhutan to move away from the Indian influence because of the benefits reaped by it from India through the Friendship Treaty (Purohit, 2020).

The North-eastern states of India need to be considered while making policy related to Bhutan in terms of security. The insurgency problems in the North-eastern states of Assam can affect Bhutan and can create another situation like the Operation All Clear, also the region is important as it is the gateway towards Southeast Asian countries. Having good relations with the North-eastern region of India can benefit Bhutan in making contacts with countries like Myanmar and Bangladesh through land. Bhutan is also strategically important for the peace, stability and security of the North-eastern region of India (Sarki, 2019: 144). Bhutan's desire to have access to seaport will continue to determine its choice which is more feasible through India rather than China. Thus, a switch over towards China will not be easy for Bhutan because India is developing economically and has been its largest foreign aid provider (Malik & Sheikh, 2016: 51).

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

The security cooperation between India and Bhutan has one major source of impediment, i.e., China. Since the inception, it has been the Chinese that had become the major threat for India-Bhutan relations. The source for the creation of the boundaries in the Himalayan region bordering the British Empire itself had been the Chinese Empire. Due to this historical rivalry between the British and the Chinese, the border conflict has continued and has been on-going. In-fact, the relations between India and Bhutan has its origin due to the mutual rivalry towards China in terms of the border arrangements. The source of security cooperation between India and Bhutan lies in the Friendship Agreements signed between both the countries, and the recent security related issues have been mainly based on the latest Friendship Agreement of 2007.

The Operation All Clear and Doklam Crisis have set up a major focus on the security cooperation between India and Bhutan. Unlike other countries, India and Bhutan always cooperated in times of trouble although at some point there occurs disagreements on certain issues. The third parties like the insurgent groups and the Chinese have been like a discomfort in the relations of India and Bhutan. The

problems created by the third parties have been solved through skilful diplomacy of both India and Bhutan, due to which both the countries have managed to remain in cooperation to this day although not perfect in terms of its public opinion. Although it might not be the third party that has brought India and Bhutan closer to each other, it might be some invisible traits created by either India or Bhutan in order to bring its neighbour closer by playing the blame game on the third parties. Overall, Operation All Clear and Doklam Crisis is an eccentric example of security cooperation between India and Bhutan although the later is in excruciating situation thrust between two giant neighbours unable to progress separately.

Bhutan is not in a position where it cannot afford to lose India as its partner due to the threat from its northern borders, nor can it join hands with China in fear of losing its benefits gained through friendship with India. Bhutan cannot displease India, by shifting towards China, nor can it act independently as it might lead to another blockage by India on Bhutan. Bhutan is in a dilemma in terms of its foreign policy and security dimensions. India needs to concentrate on how it is handling its foreign policy on Bhutan, to protect its neighbour from the other neighbour, i.e., China. The relations between India and Bhutan are complicated although it seems unique.

## **CHAPTER- 6**

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## **CONCLUSION**



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The study has undertaken some of the concepts like security cooperation, friendship agreement, counter-insurgency cooperation and border disputes. After the independence of India from British Colonialism, both the countries had established a fresh relationship through the Friendship Treaty of 1949. And later on, the relations between India and Bhutan have been preserved through the strong foundations laid by the first Prime Minister of India Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and the Third King of Bhutan Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, in 1952. The relations between India and Bhutan have been highlighted mainly of peace and tranquillity, along with economic aids given by India to Bhutan in different areas and also India have been helping Bhutan in coming out of its isolationist policy and have helped Bhutan to enter into the international world forum.

The security cooperation between India and Bhutan can be seen mainly through the Friendship Treaties of 1949 and 2007. The treaties which have been signed between India and Bhutan are also the foundation of trust between both the countries. The formation of the Indian Military Training Team (IMTRAT) is also another example of security cooperation between India and Bhutan. The counter-insurgency operation, which was conducted by Bhutan against the Indian insurgents in 2003, is also another example of security cooperation between India and Bhutan in which the latter had taken actions against the Indian insurgents. The problems which India and Bhutan face are similar since the British period. But in the present context, it was not Russia that was the main threat; instead, it came from the Communist China in the north and the insurgents from India in the south, who has always considered Bhutan as their safe haven because of its dense forests and mountains.

The main factor which has led to the close relations between India and Bhutan is mainly because of China. Bhutan being a buffer Kingdom between India and China has to either remain close with India or with China. Even though Bhutan tries to remain neutral, both the countries are trying to influence Bhutan through different means. Bhutan is strategically important for both India and China. Bhutan has to safeguard its territories and its people, which is why, the foreign policy decisions

should be made in such a way, which would benefit the country in every aspect. The Bhutanese Government is in a dilemma as it cannot take independent decisions in terms of its foreign policy, because its decisions had been affected especially during 2013 elections in Bhutan. Also, since the threat comes mainly from the northern side of Bhutan's border i.e., from China, the former is in fear of the latter. While Bhutan does not get affected much on its southern borders i.e., on the Indian side, Bhutan is able to handle its affairs with India compared to China.

Bhutan has also sometimes had disagreements with India in the United Nations on certain matters. Through SAARC, BIMSTEC and BBIN, Bhutan managed to expand its foreign relations with other neighbouring countries without offending India. Although Bhutan sometimes wishes to come out of India's influence, it becomes difficult because of the 2007 Friendship Treaty. The treaty has bonded both the countries, where Bhutan cannot take an independent stand, especially in a situation like Doklam Crisis. In terms of economic and hydropower projects, Bhutan has relied on India since the beginning. The economic cooperation has improved with time and it has advanced with the signing of 10 MoUs with Bhutan in the field of space research, aviation, IT, power and education. India is always selective of Bhutan's relations with other countries. As mentioned in chapter II, India wants to keep Bhutan away from China, because the latter is too keen on maintaining diplomatic relations with the former.

The relation between India and Bhutan is based on cooperative security. China can be said as the major factor in terms of the cooperative security between India and Bhutan. Another major element in the relation between India and Bhutan is the trust which had been rooted at the beginning between Jawaharlal Nehru and the Third King of Bhutan, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. The Article I of both the treaty of 1949 and 2007 itself says that, "there shall be perpetual peace and friendship between India and Bhutan". There might be a misunderstanding in terms of the friendship between India and Bhutan by other third parties. But Nehru himself had clarified about it in 1958, at Paro in his speech that India did not want to exercise its power on Bhutan, and wanted the latter to remain independent. India wants Bhutan to have independent foreign policy, while at the same time; both the countries should live with mutual goodwill.

There had been times where Bhutan had often thought of breaking out of India's influence. Bhutan has the chance of breaking free from the Indian influence and accepting the offer given by China. But Bhutan knows that accepting the Chinese offer may have consequences. While on the other hand friendship with India benefits Bhutan although sometimes its foreign policy gets hampered. For Bhutan, it has to choose between China and India in order to survive.

In terms of Bhutan's counter-insurgency operation, the Northeast region of India must be given priority. Foreign policy is conducted between the Ministers who reside in the country's capital, but the issues regarding border security and other insurgency problems take place in the peripheral areas of the country. So the Ministers who reside at the capital of their respective countries cannot understand the aspirations and grievances of those residing in the border or the peripheral areas. Without looking into the problems and prospects of the Northeast region of India, one cannot solve the problems of insurgents settling in Bhutan. The problems might be stable after the counter-insurgency operations, but it is likely to re-emerge one way or the other if they are not solved properly in the mother country of the insurgents. Due to which, India needs to do careful analysis in its domestic policies as to stop the insurgency problems in its Northeast region in order to stop the latter from re-entering Bhutan and setting up camps, which may lead to another counter-insurgency operation.

Counter-insurgency operations in the present context may not be much favourable for Bhutan, especially while China is at its doorstep ready to take advantage of the situation. In the beginning, Bhutan might have been flexible with the entry of the insurgent groups for its own reasons as mentioned in chapter 3. But with time, the Government of Bhutan was unable to control the insurgents as the latter became unmanageable. It was at this point that Bhutan decided to cooperate with the Indian Government in countering the insurgent groups. Bhutan also had a lack of military power and weapons, due to which, it was not completely possible for Bhutan to conduct the operation without India's help. In-fact, it can be said that Bhutan has often tried to come out of India's influence, but have failed on several occasions, especially in the areas relating to security. This shows that Bhutan is dependent on India because of its vulnerable nature and it does not want to lose India, as the latter is the largest economic aid provider to the former.

The border between India and Bhutan may have been under strict surveillance, but not strict enough to check on the bribes being taken by the border security forces or the illegal activities like smuggling of goods, through which, the insurgents may have easy access to enter Bhutan. Operation All Clear was successful in terms of India-Bhutan security cooperation, but a failure in terms of removing the insurgents completely from Bhutan's soil. As mentioned in chapter 3, Operation All Clear was a failure because the insurgents went back into Bhutan and had been residing there, although few in number compared to the past. Those who have taken asylum in the Chinese province of Yunan are likely to work for China in future against Bhutan or India. The Operation All Clear has also benefited Bhutan in many ways, like the construction of border roads by Indian Border Road Organization and other developmental projects in order to have quick access while checking for illegal border crossings. Bhutan has also gained trust of India by conducting the Operation All Clear of 2003.

The consequences of the Operation All Clear have both positive and negative effects. The positive consequences are the development of relations between India and Bhutan along with clearing of the insurgent camps. Bhutan also earned India's trust and showed the independent stand of its foreign policy by not allowing the Indian Army to enter inside its territory. It also brought security and peace in the border areas of both sides for the civilians as well as for the cultural and economic activities. While, the negative consequences were, during and after the operation, the insurgents escaped to other neighbouring countries, especially Myanmar and Bangladesh. Ending their camps in Bhutan led them to start another in Myanmar and Bangladesh. It ultimately became a new problem for both Myanmar and Bangladesh. India had to look for other options to start new negotiations in order to conduct other counter-insurgency operations in those countries. India's domestic problems should not hamper its neighbouring countries.

Bhutan's insecurities in the southern border came mostly from the insurgent groups of the state of Assam's Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts (BTAD) area, which is a part of India's Northeast region. But, since January 2020, the major insurgent groups of the BTAD area have surrendered and disbanded. So, with the peace process in the BTAD area, Bhutan can also lighten up in terms of its southern borders

regarding the insurgency problems, although there might be some chances of other minor groups entering illegally. Bhutan's securities are based on its neighbouring countries. If something goes wrong in India's Northeast region, it is likely to affect Bhutan because the latter does its trade, transit and transportation through the BTAD area which is now known as the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). Peace in the BTR area is a must for Bhutan.

The Government of India has the responsibility of solving its internal problems, especially the insurgent problems, in order to give Bhutan proper security, as mentioned in articles of the 2007 Friendship Treaty. Any mistakes made by the Government of India can escalate into an uncontrollable issue in the Northeast region, which might trigger large-scale disruptions, affecting the international relations between India and Bhutan or between India and its other neighbouring countries, because the Northeast region is a very sensitive region for India. It can also cause disruptions for India's 'Act East Policy', as the Northeast region is very important, acting as a gateway towards Southeast Asia. Overall, it is based on India's actions which can mould the India-Bhutan security cooperation.

The Doklam Crisis of 2017 may have different reasons for China and Bhutan. In the beginning, when China emerged as a new independent county under Mao Zedong, there was no concept about Belt and Road initiative or the OBOR project. The annexation plan of Bhutan into China was based on the 'five finger policy' of Mao Zedong. Since 2013, OBOR and then the BRI, under Xi Jinping came up which have threatened Bhutan. It has also been added in chapter 4, as per mentioned by the Tibetan historian Tsering Shakya, that, Doklam is China's One Belt One Road project and the militarization of the plateau and its massive infrastructure building in Tibet is all part of China re-starting the Great Game: expanding Chinese influence across the Himalayas and Central Asia, all the way to Europe.

On its northern borders, Bhutan must remain vigilant at all times, driving it towards India. Although China and Bhutan may end up cooperating, it can lead Bhutan into an uncomfortable situation in future. Bhutan had already undergone two major border issues in the Doklam region with China, once in the 1960s and the second one in 2017. There have been small border issues between Bhutan and China in the past years due to which Bhutan is not able to be as friendly with China as it has been with

India. With regards to the Friendship Treaty of 2007 Article II, it states that, “the Government of the Kingdom of Bhutan and the Government of the Republic of India will cooperate closely with each other on issues relating to their national interests in terms of close friendship and cooperation between both the countries. Both the Government will not allow the use of their territories for activities harmful to the national security and interest of the other”. Due to which, Bhutan cannot allow China to have the Doklam plateau as it will be vulnerable for India if the Chinese gets access towards the Siliguri Corridor.

The Convention of 1890 is a controversial one, which could not be accepted by either China or Bhutan. In-fact we can say that most of the territorial disputes in former colonial countries have been the consequences of the Western Colonialism and Imperialism. Reclaiming of its lost territories by China has led to the result of the Doklam Crisis. Bhutan has the opportunity to surrender Doklam to China and make peace with it. But it will affect the relations with its southern neighbour, India, who have provided Bhutan, economic aids, security and friendship. Bhutan is in tight situation as a buffer nation, especially between the two giant countries who have a complicated nature of rivalry with each other. It is not easy for Bhutan to make simple decisions because; India and China are different in nature to other neighbouring countries, as India provides Bhutan with economic aids as well as security protection, while china occasionally claims its territories. Both the neighbours of Bhutan have opposite characteristics, which leads Bhutan to move closer towards India against the possible threats from China.

Bhutan is doing its best to maintain the friendship with India; while on the other hand, the latter is also acting as the protector of the former. This, in-fact, has led China to conquer more of Bhutan’s territories in order to have access through the Chumbi Valley so that it can have a strict surveillance upon India, or to cut off through the Chicken Neck Corridor towards the Bay of Bengal. One way or the other, China is keen on taking over some parts of Bhutan’s territories. So it is up to Bhutan and India, to solve the issue related to China. The friendship between India and Bhutan has gone through ups and downs in the past. At present, both the countries need to have a stronger focus on their relations with each other in order to deal with the present situation. After the Operation All Clear, India and Bhutan got closer, but after the

Doklam Crisis, the relations between both the countries have not been same as before especially in terms of public opinion.

Doklam Crisis is one of the events that have brought India and Bhutan together. There are bigger challenges within their country that both need to deal with, as some of the citizens from both the countries have problems regarding India and Bhutan's relations. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is difficult for both the governments to make foreign policies based on goodwill and mutual understanding like the past, where Nehru and the Third King of Bhutan had. The younger generations are likely to understand foreign policies in terms of economic benefits, not of security trust. So in the present scenario, India has been treated as a hegemonic neighbour of Bhutan, instead of a good neighbour. India might have sacrificed its military and weapons for Bhutan's territory through Operation Juniper in the Doklam Crisis, but what others see, especially the Chinese, is an act of interference in others affairs.

Despite the fact that it has been clearly mentioned in Article II of the India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty 2007, about cooperation and protection of each other's territories, it has been difficult for the third parties to understand the relationship between India and Bhutan. Even then, India and Bhutan have maintained the treaty and cooperated during the stand-off in 2017. As per requested by Bhutan, India came to defend the former in times of its crisis. India's actions might have been for its own benefit, but it has not threatened Bhutan like how China did in terms of security. It has been mentioned in chapter 5 that, Operation All Clear and Doklam Crisis is the basis of India-Bhutan's security cooperation. China may be the factor for the close relationship between India and Bhutan, but the fact leads to another source, i.e., both the countries shared trade, culture, politics, etc., relations since the ancient times. In fact, there had always been a clear foundation of friendship between India and Bhutan. Operation All Clear and Doklam Crisis were a part of security cooperation because both the countries have the responsibility of maintaining the treaties. So it all depends on the treaties signed between India and Bhutan. Despite the fact that there had been many requests by the Bhutanese citizens to have balanced relations with both India and China; the Bhutanese Government is unable to decide due to its insecurities towards China and also of not offending India.

In the present era where almost every country is ready to show off its nuclear weapons capabilities, it is better for any country to choose peaceful negotiations rather than create a direct confrontation. If China wants to have good bilateral relations with Bhutan, it needs to stop claiming the latter's territories on its northern borders. India, on the other hand had never laid any claims on Bhutanese territories nor did it threaten the small neighbour, due to which, Bhutan has trusted India rather than China. The India-Bhutan security cooperation is distinctive in nature with uncertainties at times, which have been managed by both the countries skilfully.

The significance of Operation All Clear and Doklam Crisis in India-Bhutan security cooperation is the maintenance of the treaties by both the countries, respecting Bhutan's independence by India and providing military assistance in times of need without violating the demands of the former. As mentioned in chapter 4, at one point of time, Bhutan wanted to surrender the Doklam plateau to China in exchange for other lands in its northern borders. But due to its sincerity towards India, as the Doklam plateau is strategically vulnerable for India, Bhutan changed its mind. Bhutan's decision in terms of its acceptance of the package deal offered by China is like an evaluation for the friendship between India and Bhutan. Both India and Bhutan can have standard economic relations with China but it will be difficult to have good relations when it comes to security concerns as both India and Bhutan have border disputes with China. If China is willing to have balanced relations with India and Bhutan, it has to abandon its territorial claims.

To conclude, the perspectives of India-Bhutan security cooperation are the age-old friendship with respect to mutual trust, defence of their border areas and the tackling of their common threat, i.e., China. India and Bhutan have to respect the treaty and each other's sovereignty in order to continue its unique relation. India needs to treat Bhutan as its equal partner without being hegemonic, while Bhutan needs to gain India's trust as it had been doing in times like Operation All Clear and Doklam Crisis. The existing trust is important for India and Bhutan to be vigilant about their border problems with China. In times of external threats and foreign policy related affairs, Bhutan has been consulting India, which is a great attribute in the relations between both the countries. But, it is also important to note that, unlike the past, Bhutan has been pursuing independent foreign policies where ever possible in recent times.



The essence of cooperation existing in Operation All Clear and Doklam Crisis is through the maintenance of the treaties between India and Bhutan. The Treaties of 1949 and 2007 have been comfortable since the beginning. Both the treaties covered all the sectors relevant to India and Bhutan's cooperation. The Friendship Treaty of 1949 and 2007 is unique in nature upto the point that, it was enforced in times of the two incidents, i.e., Operation All Clear and Doklam Crisis. Both the countries are conscious about their security concerns and the advantages of the nature of the cooperation. This has led to the successful cooperation between India and Bhutan during Operation All Clear and Doklam Crisis.

The impediments on the security cooperation of India and Bhutan in terms of Operation All Clear and Doklam Crisis are the external threats i.e., the presence of insurgent groups in the Northeast region of India and the border disputes raised by China occasionally. India's insurgent groups from the North-eastern states have always been an irritant element for the neighbouring countries. India's internal politics, if not dealt properly, can continue to hamper its South Asian neighbours including Bhutan; this ultimately, will be an impediment in terms of security for both the countries. The threat from China in terms of security can also affect the relations between India and Bhutan in the long run, unless both the countries come to an agreement with China. Doklam Crisis was not meant to be, if India did not interfere on behalf of Bhutan. In-fact Doklam Crisis occurred due to the interference of India on behalf of Bhutan against the Friendship Agreement between both the countries. Doklam Crisis is one of the many disputes caused by China and it is upto India and Bhutan to decide how they go about with cooperation in future. Anyhow, both the incidents, Doklam Crisis and Operation All Clear can be summed up as the instances of successful security cooperation between India and Bhutan.

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## **APPENDICES**

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## APPENDIX- I

### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE STUDY

This questionnaire is prepared to collect the data for the study on “India-Bhutan Security Cooperation: A Study On ‘Operation All Clear’ and Doklam Crisis”. These particular questions will be generally based on ‘Operation All Clear’ and its implication on India-Bhutan Security Cooperation.

#### To be filled by the Respondents

##### Part- A

- 1 .Name (Optional):
2. Gender:
3. Age:
4. Qualification:
5. Nationality:
6. Occupation:

##### Part- B

(To be answered in brief)

1. What do you know about Operation All Clear which was conducted in 2003?
2. What was the relation between India and Bhutan before Operation All Clear 2003?
3. What do you know about Security Cooperation between India and Bhutan?
4. Was there any hostile situation from the government of the other side of the border during the Operation All Clear of 2003?
5. If yes, can you describe in brief?
6. Do you think that Operation All Clear of 2003 had impact on the politics or the foreign policy of India and Bhutan?
7. Were there any changes in the India-Bhutan relations after Operation All Clear 2003?
8. If yes, describe the nature in brief.
9. Do you think Operation All Clear of 2003 was necessary?
10. If no, why?
11. Do you think Operation All Clear was successful?
12. Why do you think Operation All Clear was successful/not successful?
13. Do you think the India and Bhutan’s security cooperation will prosper/decline in future? Describe in brief.

This questionnaire is prepared to collect the data for the study on “India-Bhutan Security Cooperation: A Study On ‘Operation All Clear’ and Doklam Crisis”. These particular questions will be generally based on ‘Doklam Crisis’ and its implication on India-Bhutan Security Cooperation.

To be filled by the Respondents

Part- A

1. Name (Optional):
2. Gender:
3. Age:
4. Qualification:
5. Nationality:
6. Occupation:

Part- B

1. What is your view on the Doklam Crisis?
2. Why is Doklam Crisis important?
3. What do you know about India-Bhutan security cooperation?
4. Do you think it is necessary for India to involve itself in the Doklam crisis?
5. Do you think that India’s involvement is driven by India’s own security/strategic concerns or is it about India being hegemonic towards Bhutan?
6. Do you think that the Doklam crisis had any impact on India-Bhutan relations?
7. Do you think that India-Bhutan relations have improved because of the Doklam Crisis?
8. If yes, how?
9. Do you think it is safe for Bhutan in future being a buffer Kingdom between China and India? Describe in your own words.
10. Do you think the Doklam Issue have been solved and has no chances of coming up again as a border issue between Bhutan and China in future?
11. If no, explain in brief about the reasons as to why it has not been solved.
12. How can India-Bhutan-China solve the Doklam Crisis?

## **APPENDIX- II**

### **Treaty of Sinchula-1865**

On the 11<sup>th</sup> day of November, 1865

Treaty between His Excellency the Right Honourable Sir John Lawrence, G.C.B., K.S.I., Viceroy and Governor-General of Her Britannic Majesty's possessions in the East Indies, and the one part by Lieutenant Colonel Herbart Bruce, CB, by virtue of full powers to that effect vested in him by the Viceroy and Governor – General, and on the other part by Samdojey Deb Jimpey and Themseyrensey Donai according to full powers conferred on them by the Dhum and Deb Rajahs, 1865.

#### **ARTICLE I**

There shall henceforth be perpetual peace and friendship between the British Government and the Government of Bhootan.

#### **ARTICLE II**

Whereas in consequence of repeated aggressions of the Bhootan Government and of the refusal of that Government to afford satisfaction for those aggressions, and for their insulting treatment of the officers sent by His Excellency the Governor-General in Council for the purpose of procuring an amicable adjustment of differences existing between the two states, the British Government has been compelled to seize by an armed force the whole of the Doars and certain Hill Posts protecting the passes into Bhootan, and whereas the Bhootan Government has now expressed its regret for past misconduct and a desire for the establishment of friendly relations with the British Government, it is hereby agreed that the whole of the tract known as the Eighteen Doars, bordering on the districts of Rungpoor, Cooch Behar, and Assam, together with the Taloo of Ambaree Fallcottah and the Hill territory on the left bank of the Teesta up to such points as may be laid down by the British Commissioner appointed for the purpose is ceded by the Bhootan Government to the British Government forever.

### **ARTICLE III**

The Bhootan Government hereby agree to surrender all British subjects, as well as subjects of the Chief of Sikkim and Cooch Behar who are now detained in Bhootan against their will, and to place no impediment in the way of the return of all or any of such persons into British territory.

### **ARTICLE IV**

In consideration of the session by the Bhootan Government of the territories specified in Article II of this Treaty, and of the said Government having expressed its regret for past misconduct, and having hereby engaged for the future to restrain all evil disposed persons from committing crimes with in British territory or the territories of the Rajahs of Sikkim and Cooch Behar and to give prompt and full redress for all such crimes which may be committed in defiance of their commands, the British Government agree to make an annual allowance to the Government of Bhootan of a sum not exceeding fifty thousand rupees (Rupees 50,000) to be paid to officers not below the rank of Jungpen, who shall be deputed by the Government of Bhootan to receive the same. And it is further hereby agreed that the payments shall be made as specified below:

On the fulfillment by the Bhootan Government of the conditions of this Treaty Twenty Five Thousand Rupees (Rupees 25,000).

On the 10th January following the 1st payment, thirty five thousand rupees (Rupees 35,000).

On the 10th January following, forty-five thousand rupees (Rupees 45,000).

On every succeeding 10th January, fifty thousand rupees (Rupees 50,000).

## APPENDIX-III

### The Treaty of Punakha, 1910

Whereas it is desirable to amend Article IV and VIII of the Treaty concluded at Sinchula on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of November, 1865, corresponding with the Bhpptea year Shing Lang, 24<sup>th</sup> day of the 9<sup>th</sup> month, between the British Government and the Government of Bhutan, the under mentioned amendments are agreed to on the one part of Mr. C.A. Bell, Political Officer in Sikkim, in virtue of full powers to that effect vested in him by the Right Honourable Sir Gilbert John Elloit-Murray, Kynynmound, P.C., G.M.S.I., G.C.M.G., Earl of Minto Viceroy and Governor-General of India-in-Council and the other part by His Highness Sir Ugyen Wangchuk, K.C.I.E., Maharaja of Bhutan.

The following addition has been made to Article IV of the Sinchula Treaty of 1865:

“The British Government has increased the annual allowance to the Government of Bhutan from fifty thousand rupees (Rs.50, 000) to one hundred thousand rupees (Rs.1,00,000) with effect from the 10th January 1910”.

Article VIII of the Sinchula Treaty of 1865 has been revised and the revised article runs as follows:

“The British Government undertaken to exercise nointerference in the internal administration of Bhutan. On its part, the Bhutanese Government agrees to be guided by the advice of the British Government in regards to its external relations. In the event of disputes with or causes of complaint against the Maharaja of Sikkim and Cooch Behar, such matters will be referred for arbitration to the British Government which will settle them in such manner as justice may require and insist upon the observance of its decision by the Maharajas named”. Done in quadruplicate at Punakha, Bhutan, this eighth day of January in the year of our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and Ten, corresponding with the Bhutia date, the 27th day of the 11th month of the Earth Bird (Sa-ja) year”.

C.A.Bell

Seal of Political Officer

Seal of Dharma Raja

Political Officer in  
Sikkim 8<sup>th</sup> January,  
1910

Seal of His Highness the  
Maharaja of Bhutan

Seal of tatsang Lamas

Seal of Tongsa Penlop

Seal of Paro Penlop

Seal of Zhung Dronyer

Seal of Timbu Jongpen

Seal of Punakha Jongpen

Seal of wangdu Potang Jongpen

Seal of Taka Penlop

Seal of Deb Zimpon

Minto

Viceroy and Governor-General of India

This Treaty was ratified by the Viceroy and governor-General of India in-Council at Fort William on the twenty fourth day of March, A.D. one thousand nine hundred and ten.

S.H. Butler

Secretary to the Government of India  
Foreign Department



## **APPENDIX- IV**

### **TREATY OF FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN INDIA AND BHUTAN, 8<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 1949**

The treaty of 1949 was intended to replace the imperial relationship that existed between British India and Bhutan (National Legislative Bodies 8<sup>th</sup> August, 1949);

#### **ARTICLE 1**

There shall be perpetual peace and friendship between the Government of India and the Government of Bhutan.

#### **ARTICLE 2**

The Government of India undertakes to exercise no interference in the internal administration of Bhutan. On its part the Government of Bhutan agrees to be guided by the advice of the Government of India in regard to its external relations.

#### **ARTICLE 3**

In place of the compensation granted to the Government of Bhutan under Article 4 of the treaty of Sinchula and enhanced by the Treaty of the 8th day of January 1910 and the temporary subsidy of Rupees one lakh per annum granted in 1942, the Government of India agrees to make an annual payment of Rupees five lakhs to the Government of Bhutan. And it is further hereby agreed that the said annual payment shall be made on the day of January every year, the first payment being made on the 10th day of January, 1950. This payment shall continue to long as this treaty remains in force and its terms arc duly observed.

#### **ARTICLE 4**

Further to mark the friendship existing and continuing between the said Governments, the Government of India shall. within one year from the date of signature of this treaty, return to the Government of Bhutan about 32 square miles of territory in the area known as Dewangiri. The Government of India shall appoint a competent officer or officers to mark out the area so returned to the Government of Bhutan.

## **ARTICLE 5**

There shall, as heretofore, be free trade and commerce between the territories of the Government of India and of the Government of Bhutan; and the Government of India agrees to grant the Government of Bhutan every facility for the carriage, by land and water, of its produce throughout the territory of the Government of India, including the right to use such forest roads as may be specified by mutual agreement from time to time.

## **ARTICLE 6**

The Government of India agrees that the Government of Bhutan shall be free to import with the assistance and approval of the Government of India, from or through India into Bhutan, whatever arms, ammunition, machinery, warlike material or stores may be required or desired for the strength and welfare of Bhutan, and that this arrangement shall hold good for all time as long as the Government of India is satisfied that the intentions of the Government of Bhutan are friendly and that there is no danger to India from such importations. The Government of Bhutan. On the other hand, agrees that there shall be no export of such arms, ammunition etc., across the frontier of Bhutan either by the Government of Bhutan or by private individuals.

## **ARTICLE 7**

The Government of India and the Government of Bhutan agree that Bhutanese subjects residing in Indian territories shall have equal justice with Indian subjects, and that Indian subjects residing in Bhutan shall have equal justice with the subjects of the Government of Bhutan.

## **ARTICLE 8**

(1)The Government of India shall, on demand being duly made in writing by the Government of Bhutan, take proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Indian Extradition Act, 1903 (of which a copy shall be furnished to the Government of Bhutan), for the surrender of all Bhutanese subjects accused of any of the crimes specified in the first schedule of the said Act who may take refuge in Indian territory.

(2)The Government of Bhutan shall, on requisition being duly made by the Government of India, or by any officer authorised by the Government of India in this behalf, surrender any Indian subjects, or subjects of a foreign power, whose

extradition may be required in pursuance of any agreement or arrangements made by the Government of India with the said power, accused of any of the crimes, specified in the first schedule of Act XV of 1903. who may take refuge in the territory under the jurisdiction of the Government of Bhutan. and also any Bhutanese subjects who, after committing any of the crimes referred to in Indian territory shall flee into Bhutan. on such evidence of their guilt being produced an shall satisfy the local court of the district in which the offence may have been committed.

#### **ARTICLE 9**

Arty differences avid disputes arising in the application or interpretation of this treaty shall in the first instance be settled by negotiation. If within three months of the start of negotiations no settlement in arrived at, then the matter shall be referred to the arbitration of three arbitrators, who shall be nationals of either India or Bhutan, chosen in the following manner:-

(1)One Person nominated by the Government of India

(2)One person nominated by the Government of Bhutan;

(3)A Judge of the Federal Court, or of a High court in India. to be chosen by the Government of Bhutan, who shall be chairman.

The judgment of this tribunal shall be final and executed without delay by either party.

**ARTICLE 10**

This treaty shall continue in force in perpetuity unless terminated or modified by mutual consent.

Done in Duplicate at Darjeeling this 8th day of August, 1949, corresponding with the Bhutanese date the 15th day of the 6th month of the Earth-Bull year.

**For the Government of India:**

HARISHWAR DAYAL

Political Officer in Sikkim.

**For the Government of H. H. the  
Maharaja of Bhutan:**

DEB ZIMPON SONAM

TOBGVE DORJI

YANG-LOP SONAM

CHHO-ZIM THONDUP

RIN-ZIM TANDIN

HA DRUNG JIGMIE PALDEN DORJI.

## **APPENDIX- V**

### **INDIA-BHUTAN FRIENDSHIP TREATY, 8<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2007**

The Indian-Bhutan Friendship Treaty, which was signed in New Delhi on February 8, 2007, came into force following the exchange of Instruments of Ratification between the two governments in Thimphu on March 2, 2007.

#### **INDIA-BHUTAN FRIENDSHIP TREATY**

The Government of the Republic of India and the Government of the Kingdom of Bhutan:

Reaffirming their respect for each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity;

Recalling the historical relations that have existed between our two countries;

Recognizing with deep satisfaction the manner in which these relations have evolved and matured over the years into a model of good neighbourly relations;

Being fully committed to further strengthening this enduring and mutually beneficial relationship based on genuine goodwill and friendship, shared interests, and close understanding and cooperation;

Desiring to clearly reflect this exemplary relationship as it stands today;

And having decided, through mutual consent, to update the 1949 Treaty relating to the promotion of, and fostering the relations of friendship and neighbourliness between India and Bhutan;

Have agreed as follows:

#### **Article 1**

There shall be perpetual peace and friendship between India and Bhutan.

**Article 2**

In keeping with the abiding ties of close friendship and cooperation between Bhutan and India, the Government of the Kingdom of Bhutan and the Government of the Republic of India shall 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.

**Article 3**

There shall, as heretofore, be free trade and commerce between the territories of the Government of Bhutan and the Government of India. Both the Governments shall provide full cooperation and assistance to each other in the matter of trade and commerce.

**Article 4**

The Government of India agrees that the Government of Bhutan shall be free to import, from or through India into Bhutan, whatever arms, ammunition, machinery, warlike material or stores as may be required or desired for the strength and welfare of Bhutan, and that this arrangement shall hold good for all time as long as the Government of India is satisfied that the intentions of the Government of Bhutan are friendly and that there is no danger to India from such importations. The Government of Bhutan agrees that there shall be no export of such arms, ammunition and materials outside Bhutan either by the Government of Bhutan or by private individuals.

**Article 5**

The Government of Bhutan and the Government of India agree that Bhutanese subjects residing in Indian territories shall have equal justice with Indian subjects, and that Indian subjects residing in Bhutan shall have equal justice with the subjects of the Government of Bhutan.

**Article 6**

The extradition of persons wanted by either state for crimes and for unlawful activities affecting their security shall be in keeping with the extradition agreements between the two countries.

### **Article 7**

The Government of Bhutan and the Government of India agree to promote cultural exchanges and cooperation between the two countries. These shall be extended to such areas as education, health, sports, science and technology.

### **Article 8**

The Government of Bhutan and the Government of India agree to continue to consolidate and expand their economic cooperation for mutual and longterm benefit.

### **Article 9**

Any differences and disputes arising in the interpretation and application of this Treaty shall be settled bilaterally by negotiations in a spirit of trust and understanding in consonance with the historically close ties of friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation that form the bedrock of Bhutan-India relations.

### **Article 10**

This Treaty shall come into force upon the exchange of Instruments of Ratification by the two Governments which shall take place in Thimphu within one month of the signing of this Treaty. The Treaty shall continue in force in perpetuity unless terminated or modified by mutual consent. In witness whereof, the undersigned being duly authorized thereto by their respective Governments, have signed this Treaty.

Done at New Delhi on the Eighth Day of February Two Thousand and Seven, in two originals each in Hindi, Dzongkha and English languages, each text being equally authentic. However, in case of difference, the English text shall prevail.

**For the Government of**

**The Republic of India**

**Sd/-**

(Pranab Mukherjee)

Minister of External Affairs

**For the Government of**

**the Kingdom of Bhutan**

**Sd/-**

(H.R.H.Trongsa Penlop

Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck)

The Crown Prince of Bhutan