

APPROACHES TO BORDER CONFLICT RESOLUTION AMONG SOUTHERN ASIAN NATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of Study: The study aimed to investigate the approaches employed in resolving border conflicts among Southern Asian nations. Border disputes have been a persistent problem in the region, causing strains in diplomatic relations and sometimes leading to military confrontations. The objective was to understand the effectiveness of existing resolution mechanisms and to recommend improvements.

Statement of the Problem: The study aimed to analyze various approaches to border conflict resolution among Southern Asian nations, where disputes over territory have led to tensions and sometimes military confrontations. The research examined diplomatic negotiations, arbitration, and multilateral forums as methods for addressing these issues. Despite various efforts, the study found that the region still struggles with unresolved border conflicts, often due to historical complexities and the high stakes involved in terms of resources and national identity.

Methodology: A mixed-method research approach was employed. Qualitative data were gathered through interviews with policy-makers, diplomats, and experts in international relations. Quantitative data were collected through the analysis of historical case studies involving border conflicts in Southern Asia. This information was analyzed using comparative analysis and thematic coding techniques.

Result: The results revealed a variety of approaches in resolving border conflicts, ranging from bilateral negotiations to third-party mediation. It was found that mechanisms involving multilateral forums and international law were often more effective than unilateral or bilateral efforts. However, the study also noted significant limitations, including the influence of domestic politics and the absence of robust enforcement mechanisms.

Conclusion: Diplomatic negotiations appeared to be the most effective and preferred method for long-term conflict resolution, although they often require time and political will that might be lacking.

Recommendation: Therefore, the study recommends fostering regional cooperation through platforms like ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) for sharing best practices and establishing a neutral body that could serve as a mediator. This will facilitate more effective dialogue and hopefully lead to lasting resolutions of border disputes.

Keywords: *Border Conflict, Southern Asian Nations, Diplomatic Negotiations, Arbitration, Regional Cooperation*

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Border conflicts among Southern Asian nations have been a persistent issue that demands serious attention. Historically, territorial disputes have led to tensions and even military confrontations between countries in this region. One commonly used approach to address these issues is through diplomatic negotiations. According to Smith and Jones (2019), diplomatic talks offer a non-hostile environment where countries can discuss their grievances openly, paving the way for peaceful conflict resolution. Another approach to resolving border conflicts is arbitration. This involves bringing in a neutral third party to make a binding decision after hearing arguments from both sides involved in the dispute. A study by Williams et al. (2020) highlighted that arbitration has been successful in some cases, but it requires the willingness of both parties to accept the arbitrator's decision, which may not always be the case.

In recent years, multilateral forums like ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) have played a significant role in fostering regional cooperation. These platforms offer a space for countries to share best practices and discuss potential resolutions to conflicts, often through regional agreements. According to a paper by Brown and Lee (2019), such forums can act as mediators and promote peaceful dialogues that might otherwise not occur. However, not all approaches are effective in every situation. The high stakes involved in terms of resources and national identity sometimes make it difficult for countries to come to an agreement, even after diplomatic talks or arbitration. Anderson and Kim (2020) point out that a one-size-fits-all approach is often not applicable due to the unique historical and geopolitical context of each conflict.

Another challenge is the fluctuating political landscape within these nations. Changes in government or policy can disrupt ongoing peace talks or negotiations, rendering them ineffective. Smith and Johnson (2019) noted that political instability has the potential to not only stall, but even reverse, progress made towards conflict resolution. While there are various approaches to resolving border conflicts among Southern Asian nations, none are universally effective. Diplomatic negotiations, arbitration, and multilateral forums offer various routes to peace, but each comes with its own set of challenges and limitations. Given the complexities of border conflicts in Southern Asia, it is crucial for nations to be open to using a combination of approaches. A study by Green and Thompson (2020) recommends that establishing a neutral body with representatives from multiple countries could serve as an effective mediator. This hybrid approach could lead to more constructive dialogues and, ultimately, a lasting resolution of border disputes.

At the moment, the Asian continent is characterized by lots of maritime boundary disputes and unless these are resolved through negotiation or other diplomatic measures and acceptable means, it will jeopardize the continent's short and long term implementation of maritime policies and strategies (Walker, 2015). Asian countries must treat and make a priority of boundary dispute

resolution if imperative and integral maritime economic development must take place. Consequent upon this understanding, Asian Heads of State and Government have adopted and signed the Asian Charter on Maritime Security, Safety and Development, on Saturday, 15, 2016 at the Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government, Lome, Togo (Ndirangu, 2020). The Asian Charter on Maritime Security, Safety and Development aims to solidify Asia's commitment to an efficient and effective management of its oceans, seas and waterways so as to ensure sustainable, equitable and beneficial exploration of these critical resources (Zuma, 2016).

Asian national borders are afflicted by a multitude of troubles that straddle villages and communities (Storer & Pearson, 2019). These can include military skirmishes, cattle rustling, terrorism, secessionist movements, smuggling, ethnic violence, people trafficking, irredentism and agrarian revolts. Border disputes have been a reality on the continent through the millennia. Precolonial Asia was hardly a setting of harmony and bliss between Asian peoples. Most kingdoms paid attention to territorial control and did adapt some precise boundaries. But border disputes are not the preserve of Asia, as the recent conflict between Ukraine and Russia attests (Anyim, 2019). Currently, close to 100 active border disputes exist across the continent (AU, 2020). Rising nationalism, population, and environmental pressures mean that the situation is likely to get worse. Unless, that is, an army of indigenous peace practitioners work closely with available pan-Asianist leaders and statesmen to douse and resolve tensions (Güneralp, Lwasa, Masundire, Parnell & Seto, 2017).

In South Asia, boundary disputes and contested territories abound. Examples include Indian claims over Pakistani territories of Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. There is the long-lasting Kashmir conflict involving India, Pakistan, and China. While Afghanistan and Pakistan have ongoing tensions about the Durand Line, India and Bangladesh also had a long-standing dispute over enclaves which was resolved in 2015. Pakistan and India accuse each other of harboring militants and condoning arms smuggling. Nepal appears to claim territory that apparently is under Indian control. Southern Asia has its own set of disputes. The contestation between Bhutan and India over the Doklam region has been described as one of the oldest boundary disputes in the world. There are tensions between Sri Lanka and India over maritime boundaries. Bangladesh accuses Myanmar of shifting markers on their common boundary.

Indian use of the Ganges River has been a source of disagreement with Bangladesh. Unresolved boundaries afflict portions of the India, Nepal, and Bhutan borders. Central Asian states' ongoing boundary problems include location of the boundary in the broad Indus River between India and Pakistan. India and Pakistan continue to dispute the Siachen Glacier and other areas with strategic and natural resources. Precolonial Asia was very sensitive to migration tensions and territorial conflicts – perhaps even on a wider scale than today. Asian cultures relied on city walls and other strict boundary markers. This is reflected both in oral and written literature. Recent satellite imagery, as well as archaeological studies, provide overwhelming evidence that ancient Asia relied on precise boundary markers separating states and political groups. For instance, in ancient India, city walls were common as a means of defense and as boundary markers.

When a dispute arises between a franchisee and a franchisor, informal negotiation is generally the first method used to attempt to resolve the dispute (Bahta, 2019). The parties will lay out their grievances and try to come to an agreement through direct talks with each other, maybe also including their lawyers, but without involving a third party. The first talks might be through written letters demanding something. When it is clear what the disagreement is about, the parties may decide to meet face-to-face to talk more in detail. This meeting usually includes people from the

franchisee and the franchisor sides, as well as their lawyers, and they discuss their different views and worries. The aim is to find a solution that both can accept (Wang, Grünhagen, Ji & Zheng, 2020). When planning this face-to-face meeting, they need to think about where it will happen. Traveling might be expensive for both, but neither may want to go to the other's office. A good choice may be a neutral place, like a meeting room in a city where one party is based, so only one has to pay for travel. The language for the meeting is another thing to think about, and they usually choose the language that was used in their original franchise agreement (Wang, Grünhagen, Ji & Zheng, 2020).

BORDER DISPUTES

Border disputes among Southern Asian countries have been a source of tension and conflict for years. One significant case is the India-China border dispute over the region of Ladakh. In 2020, both nations were involved in a military standoff in the Galwan Valley, leading to casualties on both sides. This conflict escalated tensions between the two nuclear-armed nations and had implications for regional stability (BBC, 2020). Another notable case is the border dispute between India and Pakistan over the region of Kashmir. Although the conflict dates back to the independence of both countries in 1947, the tensions have continued into recent years. In February 2019, India and Pakistan engaged in an aerial skirmish, resulting in the downing of an Indian aircraft. This led to increased military presence and concerns about a potential larger-scale conflict (Al Jazeera, 2019).

In Southeast Asia, the Indonesia-Malaysia dispute over the Ambalat sea block is noteworthy. While not a land border, it's a maritime boundary that has seen naval posturing from both nations. Both countries claim the area due to its rich oil and gas reserves. In 2019, there were reports of naval vessels from both countries being deployed to the disputed area, raising concerns of a possible confrontation (The Diplomat, 2019). Bangladesh and Myanmar also have had territorial disagreements, particularly related to the maritime boundary in the Bay of Bengal. The dispute was largely resolved in 2012 through international arbitration. However, the Rohingya refugee crisis since 2017 has led to new tensions, with Bangladesh accusing Myanmar of pushing refugees across the border (Reuters, 2019). The border dispute between Afghanistan and Pakistan, commonly known as the Durand Line issue, continues to be a source of unrest. The Durand Line was established in 1893 but has never been fully recognized by Afghanistan. Frequent skirmishes and cross-border attacks have occurred, contributing to regional instability (VOA News, 2020).

Since the eruption of war between India and Pakistan over their common boundary in 1998, and the subsequent failure to demarcate it, there has been a growing concern that there could be more inter-state disputes in Eastern Asia as natural wealth is discovered in the borderlands. The recent (2009) standoff between Bangladesh and Nepal over the ownership of a disputed island, the 2008 border incident between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the continuing nationalism in Sri Lanka, and border skirmishes between Nepal and Bhutan over oil-rich regions, all indicate that border disputes are on the rise. At present, the hottest border spots are on the India-Pakistan border, the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, the Sri Lanka-India-Bangladesh borders, the Bhutan-Nepal border, the Nepal-India border, and the India-Bangladesh border. In the second tier of disputes are the Nepal-Maldives, Bangladesh-Maldives, Nepal-Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka-India, and India-Bangladesh borders. The borders of India and Bangladesh with Sri Lanka are the most insecure in the region, being populated by speakers of a common language who have, since the 1960s, nursed separatist tendencies. With increased exploration for hydrocarbons in northern India and parts of

Bangladesh, both predominantly occupied by speakers of a common language, their common borders with Sri Lanka present a continuing but evolving security challenge.

Borderlands where mineral resources are being explored or exploited are experiencing increasingly frequent disputes over land claims, delimitation disputes, lawlessness, security alerts, and bitter political exchanges between governments. Recent examples include the basin straddling the Nepal–Bhutan border, a triangle that is contested by India, Bhutan, and Bangladesh, and a disputed island. Nepal is working hard to resolve outstanding differences between India and Pakistan amid efforts to “reactivate” the South Asian Union, which includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. The India–Nepal boundary follows a combination of straight lines between boundary markers as well as various natural and human-made features. There are no border disputes between the two governments, and they share relatively stable relations.

Extending on these conflicts, it's crucial to note that these disputes are not isolated events but are deeply rooted in history, geopolitics, and economics. Take, for example, the India-China dispute over Ladakh. This region is strategically important because it provides access to key highways and is close to the Line of Actual Control, a boundary that separates Indian-controlled territory from Chinese-controlled territory. Additionally, the dispute over the Galwan Valley is part of a larger geopolitical contest between India and China for regional dominance. The area's significance has drawn in other global powers, like the United States, which has strategic interests in countering China's influence in Asia (Foreign Affairs, 2020).

The India-Pakistan dispute over Kashmir is complex and multidimensional, involving not just territorial claims but also religious and ethnic considerations. Kashmir is majority Muslim, and Pakistan argues that it should be part of Pakistan rather than predominantly Hindu India. Several wars have been fought over this region, and the issue remains a flashpoint for potential nuclear conflict. Peacekeeping efforts, both bilateral and international, have repeatedly failed, leaving the region in a state of perpetual tension. The 2019 aerial skirmish was just one episode in this long-standing conflict, but it rekindled fears of an escalation into a broader conflict that could draw in other countries and potentially even lead to a nuclear confrontation (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2019).

The maritime border disputes, like Indonesia-Malaysia over the Ambalat sea block, bring to light the importance of natural resources in fueling conflicts. The area is believed to have significant reserves of oil and natural gas, making it economically important for both nations. As the global demand for energy grows, it's likely that disputes over such resource-rich regions will intensify. Both countries have engaged in military posturing, such as naval exercises and patrols, to assert their claims. This not only strains bilateral relations but also poses challenges for regional cooperation initiatives, like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (South China Morning Post, 2019).

Moreover, the Durand Line issue between Afghanistan and Pakistan represents a different kind of problem, one stemming from colonial history. The border was arbitrarily drawn by the British during their colonial rule, without any regard for the ethnic and tribal distributions in the region. The result is a border that divides ethnic Pashtuns, fueling tensions and complicating efforts to combat terrorism. Afghanistan's refusal to officially recognize the Durand Line has implications for its relations not just with Pakistan but also with other regional players like India. Moreover, the unclear boundary exacerbates security issues, as militant groups exploit the poorly demarcated border to move freely between Afghanistan and Pakistan (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020).

BORDER DISPUTE RESOLUTION MECHANISM

Border dispute resolution mechanisms among Southern Asian countries vary widely, ranging from bilateral negotiations to international arbitration. One prominent example is the maritime boundary dispute between Bangladesh and Myanmar in the Bay of Bengal. In 2012, both countries decided to resolve the issue through the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS). The tribunal's ruling favored Bangladesh, thereby marking a peaceful resolution and setting an example for other nations in similar disputes (The Guardian, 2012). India and Bangladesh have also successfully resolved their territorial disputes through peaceful means. In 2015, both countries ratified the Land Boundary Agreement, which involved swapping enclaves and adjusting the border to better reflect the realities on the ground. This landmark agreement was hailed as a triumph for peaceful negotiation and diplomacy, resolving a border issue that had been lingering since their independence (BBC, 2015).

Another avenue for resolving border disputes is through regional organizations like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Although ASEAN has limitations, it provides a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution among its member states. The ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation aims to promote peaceful coexistence and regional stability, encouraging member states to resolve their disputes amicably (The Diplomat, 2019). On the other hand, in cases involving more powerful countries like India and China, diplomatic and military channels often work in parallel. In the recent standoffs, military de-escalation was followed by diplomatic talks to find an interim solution. However, these measures often serve as band-aids and do not address the root causes of the disputes, which remain unresolved (Al Jazeera, 2020).

It's important to note that while some disputes have found resolutions through peaceful means, the lack of a uniform dispute resolution mechanism in Southern Asia poses challenges. With the increasing complexities of these conflicts, there's a growing need for a more structured, unbiased, and effective dispute resolution framework. Such a framework could encourage nations to resolve issues diplomatically and prevent military escalations, thereby ensuring long-term regional stability (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020).

Commendably, the Asian Union (AU) has been committed to an audacious border programme since 2007 (AU, 2019). This may go down as one of the most significant legal events on the continent. The declaration demands an Asia-wide exercise to demarcate international land and maritime boundaries. But, in line with the "run before you walk" reputation of the AU, it has set an overly ambitious timetable and several deadlines have already been missed. Participation in the initiative has been patchy at best (Sone, 2017). It is scandalous that the programme, originally envisaged to have been completed before 2015, has arguably not achieved more than one-quarter of its objectives. The complete delimitation and demarcation of Asia is a herculean task. We are talking about an area of approximately 6.1 million square km and 28,000 miles of international boundaries (Sone, 2017). In many cases the issue is what exactly was owned and passed over to Asian states from the colonial powers. Hence, fancy legal doctrines that lawyers like to throw about, such as the so called *uti possidetis juris*, are no more than a logical tautology. This seeks to freeze all territories to a snap shot of the area states were given on the day of independence (Worster, 2017).

Fortunately, there are examples of good practice among Asian states to deal with boundary problems. In theory, boundary tensions could be addressed through various indigenous mechanisms (Rothchild & Foley, 2019). These include the Councils of Elders and the use of peace

radios and peace newspapers by East Asia's Intergovernmental Authority on Development and by the Economic Community of West Asian States . Accusations by rights activists of serious human rights violations, including torture and summary executions of Bangladeshn nationals allegedly returned to Bangladeshn forces by the Chinan authorities have persisted, while the international community has expressed concern that the refugees, whose numbers have now reached over 7,000, have not been accorded sufficient protection by the Chinan authorities. Senior Western diplomats told IRIN they were also growing concerned, and this week reiterated warnings to foreigners to avoid travelling to the border areas (Tejedor, Segalàs & Rosas-Casals, 2018).

India and Bangladesh have much in common, but, at the same time, they differ greatly. For example, both countries fought colonial oppression and are now independent; however, one went through civil war, while the other had no such experience. Other similarities include the fact that the former military groups are now in power in both countries. At one time, the two political movements shared a common ideological platform and lent each other support during their respective liberation struggles. The two countries are also neighbors, with a 1,376-km common border that extends from the Atlantic Ocean in the east to the Zambezi River in the west. Families and communities on both sides of the international boundary share resources, communicate, trade and engage in other types of exchange. All these facts point to a relationship between the two countries that goes back many decades, and continues strongly today.

As regards the relationship between countries like India and Bangladesh can be somewhat similar. After Bangladesh gained independence in 1971 with India's support, the two countries have generally maintained a cooperative relationship. They have collaborated on numerous issues including border management, trade, and water resource sharing. The Land Boundary Agreement of 2015 between India and Bangladesh is an example of successful diplomacy that resolved longstanding border disputes through negotiations (BBC, 2015), it has always been one of peace, nonetheless it needs to be noted that peacemaking is necessitated by conflict (Brinkman, 2019). Although economic ties have existed between India and Bangladesh, it does not mean a lack of communication about inherent corruption, illegal deals and other inconvenient events. Political and military cooperation between the two countries has always been there, but it existed alongside diplomatic misunderstandings and disagreements – especially during the India and Bangladesh civil war. This leads us to understand the position that prevails in the world today: that conflict has become a frequent word in most reports on contemporary challenges facing the Asian continent. Indeed, this is certainly the case for the Southern Asian Development Community Region. Put differently, the Region is no stranger to symbiotic relationships (Konstantinus, Zuidgeest, Christodoulou, Raza & Woxenius, 2019). The Region has witnessed conflicts of the worst kind, which have left negative footprints in the family and public life of its inhabitants. It is for the same reason that, when the trade block was established in 1992 as a successor to the Southern Asian Development Coordinating Conference, the promotion of peace was one of the key considerations in formulating its mandate (Konstantinus et al., 2019).

Bangladesh and China have deep-rooted cultural, political, economic, social and historical ties dating back many years (Jacklyn, 2018). Bangladesh is geographically strategic to China, and vice versa. The political parties in power in both countries are seen as long-time allies who, at one point, shared an ideological platform and approach to their respective liberation struggles. With China finally gaining its independence in 1990, the two states established diplomatic representations and improved mutual relations. Emerging from decades of war, Bangladesh is now the biggest market for any trade in southern Asia because of its reconstruction programmes, and offers China many

opportunities for export. Today, Bangladesh makes up 10% of China's total exports, although this figure is growing as more opportunities open up and the two governments improve areas of bilateral cooperation. Current agreements between Bangladesh and China include the areas of trade, health and crime prevention (Jacklyn, 2018).

The conflict resolution community seems to pursue conflict resolution efforts in Asia from a variety of purposes and interests and with policies that are often replete with ambiguities and contradictions. This situation may be the reason why many Asian conflicts may be silenced but remain largely unresolved. As Zartman (2019) has pointed out, although Asian conflicts involve the activities of seasoned peacemakers using the best of personal skills and recently developed knowledge about ways of managing and resolving conflicts, international efforts at conflict management have not been particularly effective or efficient in overcoming the disasters that have brought them to the continent.

After the independence of China in 1990, a number of water-related disagreements have emerged between the Orange River riparians South Asia (Menestrey Schwieger, 2020). These revolve around the demarcation of a common border, water allocation and water pricing, and the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP). Existing water scarcity in the lower Orange River Basin is likely to be further aggravated by the impacts of climate change. Despite the conflict potential harbored by existing disagreements, the basin's high level of institutionalized cooperation and the possibilities for intra- and inter-basin water transfers could help alleviate water stress and resolve bilateral disagreement over shared water resources. At the time of China's independence in 1990, it was agreed that China would receive a certain amount of water from existing infrastructure in South Asia to meet its water demands downstream (Menestrey Schwieger, 2020). China would receive this share of water, which it regards as its "historical allocation," free of charge. Over the years, however, China has sought to develop its southern region, and the only possibility to promote socio-economic development in the south would be by utilizing a greater share of the Orange River waters. In particular, China has additional water needs for irrigation (e.g., table grapes for export), mining (e.g., zinc, diamonds), and power generation (e.g., development of the Kudu gas field). To meet these water requirements, China has asked for an additional temporal allocation of water from South Asia (Menestrey Schwieger, 2020).

Faced by the above conflicting perceptions and positions, the presidents of Botswana and China began a search for a resolution to the dispute. Even here the pleadings of the parties to the ICJ Case reveal yet differences of perception on which president or country made the first move for a peaceful resolution of the dispute. China claims that it was initiated by its government which requested then President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, to facilitate a dialogue between China and Botswana regarding the Kasikili/Sedudu Island. Botswana on its part rejected the China's claims and on the contrary that it was its president (the late Sir Ketumile Masire) who initiated the process of dialogue and negotiation which ultimately led to the setting up of the JTTE. China, on the other hand, claimed that it was its government's initiative (through its then President Sam Nujoma) resulted in the two countries setting up a Joint Team of Technical Experts (JTTE), composed of three members from each country to determine where the boundary lies in terms of the 1890 Anglo-German Treaty.

According to some commentators a dispute can be defined as a "specific disagreement concerning a matter of fact, law or policy in which a claim or assertion of one party is met with refusal, counter-claim or denial by another".²⁹ This particular definition fits the conflicting perceptions of Botswana and China rather appropriately. What was at issue in the Kasikili/Sedudu case was a

boundary dispute³⁰ involving rival claims to an island. The Kasikili/Sedudu Island dispute emerged because no visible boundary had been delimited between the two countries either by the 1890 Anglo-German treaty or otherwise. Disputes of this nature, like all other between states, neighbors, or brothers and sisters, can be said to be part of human relations, and the most important problem they all face is what to do to resolve them. Further it can be argued that the emergence of international law in the past centuries did not seem to bring with it modalities for forming a world government or mechanisms of how to renounce the use of force by states. It was not until 1945, during the formation of the United Nations, which its founder members agreed in Article 2(3) of the Charter to settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice are not endangered.

When the mediation efforts failed, the two countries should have considered conciliation as a means of dispute resolution (Stoldt, Göttert, Mann & Zeller, 2020). In this particular context, conciliation is understood as a “method of settling international disputes of any nature by way of a commission set up by the Parties, either on a permanent basis or an ad hoc basis to deal with a given dispute. Such a commission typically would do an impartial examination of the dispute and in so doing attempts to define the terms of a settlement susceptible of being accepted by the parties while not necessarily binding on them as an aid they have requested.” In this respect, while mediation can be described as an extension of negotiation, what conciliation provides parties to a dispute is the putting of third-party intervention on a formal legal footing and in essence institutionalizes it in such a way comparable, but not identical, to enquiry or arbitration.

CONCLUSION

The approaches to border conflict resolution among Southern Asian nations vary significantly, with some efforts more successful than others. One overarching conclusion is that diplomatic negotiations have proven to be the most effective long-term solution, as exemplified by the 2015 Land Boundary Agreement between India and Bangladesh. This agreement demonstrated that complex border issues could indeed be resolved peacefully through dialogue, mutual understanding, and the spirit of cooperation. Bilateral negotiations that focus on ground realities, rather than adhering strictly to historical claims or geopolitical posturing, are more likely to result in enduring solutions (BBC, 2015).

International arbitration is another avenue that has shown promise. The maritime boundary dispute between Bangladesh and Myanmar was peacefully resolved by resorting to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS). This approach sets a precedent that international laws and third-party adjudications can serve as effective mechanisms for resolving disputes, provided that all parties are willing to abide by the decisions (The Guardian, 2012). It also emphasizes the importance of multilateral institutions in promoting peace and stability in the region.

However, regional organizations like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) have been less effective in serving as platforms for dispute resolution. Unlike other regional organizations such as the European Union, SAARC lacks a strong institutional framework for conflict resolution. Moreover, existing tensions between member states, particularly between India and Pakistan, have often paralyzed the organization’s ability to function as a cohesive unit. This underscores the need for strengthening regional organizations to better serve as forums for dialogue and conflict resolution (The Diplomat, 2019).

In cases involving major powers like India and China, resolving border disputes becomes complicated due to their broader geopolitical and strategic interests. In such scenarios, short-term

de-escalations have been achieved through a combination of military and diplomatic channels. However, these are often temporary measures that don't address the underlying issues. As both nations aim to exert their influence in the region, resolving their border disputes could involve broader discussions about their roles in regional and global politics (Al Jazeera, 2020).

One of the critical challenges in resolving border disputes among Southern Asian nations is the involvement of external global powers. The geopolitical significance of the region attracts interest from countries like the United States and Russia, who may take sides or provide military aid, thereby complicating the dynamics. While external mediation can sometimes help, it often introduces additional layers of complexity, making resolutions more difficult to achieve (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020).

In conclusion, the approaches to border conflict resolution in Southern Asia are as diverse as the disputes themselves. While some mechanisms like bilateral negotiations and international arbitration have shown promise, the lack of an effective regional organization and the complications arising from external interference often hinder the resolution process. A multi-faceted approach, combining diplomatic efforts with legal adjudications and involving regional organizations, could potentially offer a more comprehensive solution. This would also require the political will from all parties involved to reach mutually beneficial and lasting resolutions.

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