

Doklam Dispute: A Threat to South Asian Security

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Abstract: Today Doklam dispute has been acknowledged as a major controversy between India and China. In June 2017 it became a critical issue between the armed forces and China. When China made an attempt to make a road from Yadong further Southward on the Doklam Plateau, India opposed it and Bhutan also supported India's step. Unlike China and Bhutan, India does not have a claim on Docklam; however, India supports Bhutan on friendly grounds. On 18th June 2017 Indian troops apparently crossed into the territory in dispute between China and Bhutan in an attempt to prevent the road construction. It raised critical situation for China and it opposed India's effort to stop her constructing road infrastructure in the Docklam region. Nevertheless, we can't ignore the fact that India is right and it is very essential for her security and peace in South Asian region. However, very recently both the countries have reached on a solution and both of them have decided to retreat their troops from the disputed region. The present research paper highlights some security imperatives for India regarding the Docklam region.

Keywords: Chumbi Valley, Docklam Plateau, Siliguri Corridor, Border Dispute.

Introduction: When the Kingdom of Sikkim was founded in 1642, it included all the areas surrounding the Docklam Plateau. During the

18th century Sikkim faced repeated raids from Bhutan and these areas often change hand. Therefore, after a Bhutanese attack in 1780 a settlement was reached which resulted in the transfer of the Haa valley and the Kalimpong area to

Bhutan. The Dooklam Plateau sandwiched between these regions was likely to be part of the both territories. After the Sino-Nepalese war of 1792 China helped Tibet and it proved to be a decisive entry of China into the Himalayan region. The victorious Chinese general ordered a land survey in which Chumbi valley was declare as a part of Tibet. Then in the following years Sikkim established its relations with the British East India Company. However, Sikkim retained loyalties to Tibet and in 1890 they sought to exclude the Tibetan from the Sikkim by establishing a treaty with the China. In 1904 the British Government signed another treaty with Tibet and the boundary was established between Sikkim and Tibet in the treaty still remains same. In this way Bhutan became a protected state in 1910 and it continued by Independent India in 1949. However, Bhutan retained its independence in all internal matters

and its borders were not demarcated until 1961. It is also said that the China cites maps from before 1912 to stake its claim over Doklam. But India has always supported Bhutanese sovereignty and very recently this support has resulted a controversial issue between China and India.

The fact is that from very beginning of 1958 China started to show Dooklam as the part of her territory which created critical situation in South Asian region. Furthermore, in 1960, China issued a statement claiming that Bhutan, Sikkim and Ladakh were part of a unified family in Tibet and had always been subject to the Great Mother Land of China that is why Bhutan closed off all trade and diplomatic relations with China and it established a formal defence agreement with India. From August 1965 India and China traded accusations regarding intrusions

into Docklam. Now China alleged that Indian troops crossing into Docklam and were carrying out reconnaissance and intimidating Chinese herders. However, India paid no attention to Chinese complaint and after all several round of exchanges on 30th Sept. 1966 were forwarded as a protest from the Bhutanese Government which stated that Tibetan grazers were entering the pasture near the Docklam Plateau accompanied by the Chinese petrol. It was also said that Docklam area was to the south of the traditional boundary between Bhutan and Tibet in the Southern Chumbi area. Now on 3rd October 1966 the Govt. of Bhutan issued a press statement that Docklam belongs to Bhutan on traditional basis including its natural feature. In response China also stated that Bhutan was a sovereign country and India has no need to interfere in its matter. China also asserted that this area has always

been under Chinese jurisdiction. Bhutan requested India to raise the matter with China; but China rejected India's efforts regarding the Docklam region. However, in later days China withdrew her troops from the Docklam area and Bhutan came very closer to India, after this India appointed 3400 Indian defence personnel in Bhutan for training the Bhutanese Army.

Furthermore, border negotiations between Bhutan and China began in 1972 with India playing a supportive role. However, China sought the exclusion of India and Bhutan declared that it was her right to negotiate with China. Regarding the fact in view Bhutan reduced 1128 km of disputed border area to 269 sq. km. by the end of 1999 with China. Bhutan apparently ceded the Kula Kangri mountain peak to China and the China offered a package deal to Bhutan in 1996 offering to give up

claims on 495 sq. km. in the Central region in exchange for 269 sq. km. in the north-west including Docklam, Sinchulumpa Dramana, and Shakhatoe, all adjoining the Chumbi valley – areas that would offer a strategic death to Chinese defensive and excess to the strategic Siliguri corridor of India. Now having turned down China's package deal in 2000, Bhutanese government put forward its real claim line of 1989 and there was no progress afterward. Further the government of Bhutan reported that China has started constructing road in Border areas in 2004 which is against the peace and tranquility agreement between the two. However, most of the area belongs to Docklam region and China claimed that it was no issue of dispute as she was constructing road in Sinchela pass region. In 2007, there were reports of the Chinese having destroyed

unmanned Indian forward costs in the Docklam region.

The dispute of Docklam became more critical when China claimed the Docklam region based on the Anglo-Chinese convention of 1890, negotiated between the British Empire in India and the Chinese royal mission. According to the treaty the representatives of Sikkim and Tibet were part of these negotiations; but records show that they were not present during the negotiations in Calcutta. Moreover, the boundary of Sikkim and Tibet shall have to remain as the crest of the mountain range separating the waters flowing in to the Sikkim Teesta and its affluent from the water flowing in to the Tibetan Mochu and northwards into other rivers of Tibet. The Diplomat has commented that the continuous mountain crest mentioned in the treaty begins from very near to Batang La on the Northern ridge of

the Docklam Plateau and it suggests a contradiction between the first and second sentence of the first article of the treaty because Batang La is depicted and claimed as the tri-junction point by Bhutan and India.

Moreover, Bhutan and China have held 24 rounds of boundary task since 1984 and the Government of Bhutan states that the present road construction in the Docklam area accounts to unilateral change to a disputed boundary by China in violation to the 1988 and 1998 agreements between Bhutan and China. This agreement prohibits any use of force and bounds both the countries to follow the path of peaceful means. The agreement also states that both the countries shall refrain from taking unilateral actions and any change to the status quo of the boundary shall not remain into action.

In June 2017 Docklam became a war fare site between the

armed forces of India and China following an attempt by China to construct a road from Yodang further Southward on the Docklam Plateau, however, India does not have a claim on the region, nevertheless, it supports Bhutan's sovereignty. According to the Govt of Bhutan, China has attempted to extend a road that previously terminated at Doka La towards the Bhutan army camp at Zopelri near the Jampheri ridge two km to the south; that ridge may be viewed as the disputed area including China's interference in India's highly strategic Siliguri Corridor project. On 18th June Indian troops cross into the territory in dispute between Bhutan and China to prevent the road construction on the strategic point of view. India charged that China has violated the peace treaty between Bhutan and China by constructing roads in Docklam. She also criticized China's effort to cross the border illegally,

while china has also criticized India on the same ground.

Further on 29 June 2017, Bhutan opposed China's effort in disputed territory of Docketlam as tri-junction area. The Government of Bhutan put its army on high alert and border security was reviewed by deploying more troops by India and Bhutan in the region which resulted the growing tension in the region. On the contrary China released a map showing Docketlam as a part of China and its claim was supported by the 1890 British - China treaty. Then on 3rd July 2017, China stated that former Indian Prime Minister Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru had also accepted this treaty and China showed a letter to her claim. On 5th July 2017 it had for the past 24 month a basic consensus with Bhutan that Docketlam belong to China, and there was no dispute between the two countries. In a

press statement released on 1st August 2017, China excused India of using Bhutan as a pretext to interfere and impede the boundary talks between China and Bhutan. The report also stated that India has trespassed into Docketlam region and it is a violation of the territorial sovereignty of China but Bhutanese government denied China's statement about Bhutan relinquishing its claim to Docketlam.

However, Chinese government maintains that from the historical point of view Docketlam has always been the traditional pasture for the border inhabitants living in Yadong, a country in its autonomous region of Tibetan and China has executed good administrative practices over the area. It also says that before the 1960 the inhabitants of Bhutan also wanted to herd in Docketlam and they needed the consent of China as they had to pay the grass step to the

China. But some scholars accept that it was a disputed text and China had no right to take it. Further on August 28, 2017 both the countries have reached on a consensus and they had agreed to withdraw their troops from the disputed region.

Conclusion: To conclude we can say that the desire for height in Sikkim as Dooklam Plateau has become a bone of contention between China and India. From the Indian security point of view and on the strategic grounds China wants to take control of Dooklam in its hand. But the Indian defence forces in Sikkim are protecting India's security and strategic imperatives. The China overlooks the strategic Siliguri Corridor to the South and a claim to the mount Gipmochi and the Zompelri ridge would bring the Chinese to the very edge of the Himalayas from where the slopes descend into the southern foothills

of Bhutan and India. Moreover the China would be able to monitor the Indian troops movements in the playing and it would be helpful to launch an attack on the vital Siliguri Corridor in the event of a war. That is why; Dooklam has become strategically very important for India as well as for China. After the controversy of 72 days, both the countries have reached to conclude that the controversy is no more beneficial for both the countries as the protection of bilateral relations. That is why; on August 28, 2017 both the countries have mutually agreed to a speedy disengagement of their troops on the Dooklam plateau. Now it is hoped that this step would bring peace and stability in Dooklam region including Indo-China relations.

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