

### **CHAPTER III**

## **DYNAMICS OF THE CHINA AND INDIA BORDER CONFLICT**

The conflict between India and China is part of the crisis in the border between the two countries whose various solutions have been deadlocked. This conflict occurred within two months, and there were no fatalities. However, this conflict was able to cause a great fear of the Asian regional community because it could trigger an open war.

The existence of Bhutan as a country that borders directly with China and India then tried to show a reaction to the conflicts between the two countries through the leader of Dangso Wangcuk. In the end, the India and China conflict ended in August 2017. In chapter III this will be explained further about the background of the conflict, developments, various impacts caused, and Bhutan's response to the conflicts between the two countries.

#### **A. Background of China and India Border Conflict**

The conflict between India and China is a security crisis that can be categorized as a border conflict. This conflict originated from China's initiative to build a highway in the border region called Doklam. This policy turned out to be China's strategy in developing the grand agenda known as the new silk road.

New silk road is an idea or aspiration of Chinese stakeholders to develop influence (hegemony) in achieving the national interest of this country. The new silk road concept was introduced by Hu Jintao implicitly through the ELB (Eurasian Land Bridge) program in November 2007 in Kazakhstan. In a meeting together with relevant officials, including representatives from Russia at the meeting Hu Jintao stated that ELB was a new silk road which would later be able to bring together progress in the countries that were passed.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Holslag, *The New Silk Road Trap, How China Trade Ambition Challenge Europe*, Wiley Publishing, London and New York, 2019, p.117.

The Chinese Ministry of Commerce Minister Shing Zhan stated that:

*"... China is very serious about the border region which is useful to open up isolated areas. Then the construction of the will areas connecting China with other countries until the most from Asia, Africa or Europe. This is not a manifestation of neo-imperialism, but the initiative for China to build good relations with the countries of the world, though often misinterpreted. "*<sup>2</sup>

The statement above shows that the Chinese government has predicted that there will be friction with neighboring countries that have passed the trans road construction project. Even so, the Chinese side also tried to avoid conflict and try to solve problems through a peaceful road map because by allowing conflict to occur, it would harm the Chinese themselves in the future.

The idea of the new silk road was again transformed by the next Chinese regime, Xi Jinping. In its leadership, the new silk road was realized through the idea of developing a one belt one road initiative in October 2013 through the opening of cross-country transportation routes. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, the agenda for the new silk road was strengthened by increasing distance, strengthening foreign cooperation to land transportation, which was not only fixed on the railroad tracks but also roads which were built through opening paths to steep hills and ice mountains.<sup>3</sup>

The economic progress achieved by China in the era of Hu Jintao's leadership to Xi Jinping became the foundation for the implementation of the new silk road policy. This achievement then encouraged the Chinese government along with other stakeholders to realize the Chinese empire (China Zhongguo) through the new silk road. China is not playing games in its ambition to rebuild the silk route to facilitate the distribution of goods to many countries. For this ambition, China said it was

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> "Xi Jinping Call for Regional Cooperation's New Silk Road," in <https://astanatimes.com/2013/09/xi-jinping-calls-for-regional-cooperation-via-new-silk-road/>, accessed on February 8, 2019.

prepared to budget up to billions of US dollars. In a statement at the New Maritime Belt and Road Belt Summit for International Cooperation (Belt and Road Forum) in Beijing, Chinese President Xi Jinping claimed to have prepared a budget of up to 124 billion US dollars or more than Rp. 1,650 trillion. This massive amount of funds will be used to build land and sea infrastructure that connects Africa, Europe and Asia, including India, Afghanistan and several other countries.<sup>4</sup>

The development of the new silk road agenda as part of the development of China's ambitions as a superpower then collided with India's interests, where China's policy on the construction of the highway adjacent to Bhutan would be a threat. In addition, the direction of combat troops to the border areas of India and Bhutan is also considered as a form of provocation and infiltration to occupy the area, where the modernization of China's defense and military since the early 2000s has become a trigger for arms race and heated constellation regional security, including with India as a fellow country that has a large area / geographical area, and has military resources that are also very large in terms of personnel or defense equipment.<sup>5</sup>

## **B. Conflict of India and China Development**

The border conflict between China and India occurred on June 16, 2017, to August 28, 2017, in a region that is geographically or geo-politically prone to friction for several reasons, including Chinese historical factors which emphasize this region as part of China's sovereignty and regional topography. Which is difficult to determine the boundary line because it is a fairly steep area, including canyons, meadow valleys, and others. This conflict occurred in the Doklam region which is the border between China and Bhutan. This region is included in the territory of Bhutan which is a plateau and a part of the valley that lies between the Chumbi Valley which is

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Sanjay Badri Maharaj, "Current Condition of India-China Relations," Journal of Defense Policy, Institute of Defense Policy Analysis Vol I, Singapore, 2019, p.2.

included in North Tibetan sovereignty and the Han Valley included in Bhutan's sovereignty, and the Sikkim Valley which is included in Indian Sovereignty. Grasslands dominate this region and since 1961 has been a dispute over state toga, including Bhutan, China, and India.<sup>6</sup>

For China, Doklam is part of its sovereignty territory, including in the Southern Tibet region which is directly adjacent to the Sikkim region. As for India, the area is included in the Gangtok area which is included in Sikkim. Bhutan's existence was indeed not very aggressive in this issue because it did get support from the Indian side.<sup>7</sup>

An overview of the strategic position of the Doklam region as an area of the India-China border conflict, see map 3.1. As follows:



**Figure 3. 1 The territory of the area of the border conflict between India and China**

Source: processed from the "China Release Map to Prove Doklam Claim," in <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/china-releases-map-to-prove-doklam-claim/430466.html>,

<sup>6</sup> "What is Doklam, Dispute Area of China and India," at <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-Doklam-dispute-between-India-and-China>, accessed on; February 7, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

From the map above, it can be understood that Doklam is an area that is indeed a border area in both countries. Its position in the valleys and highlands makes it difficult for the three countries to develop boundaries. The outbreak of the border conflict between China and India began with the initiative of the Chinese government to support development in the Tibetan region as a form of regional equality and support the grand agenda on the new silk road.

Several phases from the beginning to the outbreak of the India-China border conflict are as follows:

- a. On June 16, 2017, a team of construction and field staff came to the Doklam area carrying heavy equipment and equipment to work on the trans road expansion project that connects the Doklam region with Yatung (Southern Tibet). The team is headed by the deputy for rural China's development, Zi Yang which has around 38 staff and implementing workers. This team did not ask for permission from Bhutanese authorities or Indians and then did mapping and then continued with pegging on several sides around the Doklam area.
- b. On June 18, 2017, two days after the arrival of the road construction team, the Indian government then sent troops of the military and dictated the security of the border to the Doklam region to stop the project. The Indian government considered the arrival of the planning and development team from China in the Doklam region as an act of infiltration.
- c. On June 30, 2017, the Indian government through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the Chinese side had committed severe violations by building road infrastructure without the approval of India and Bhutan. The Indian government also stated that the Chinese government unilaterally violated a 2012 agreement on the border region known as the Siliguri Corridor Agreement.
- d. On June 30, 2017, the Chinese government through a spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the instructor development policy in the Doklam area was legal because so far the Chinese government had obtained tax from the pasture and the determination of the status of

Doklam was decided through customary deliberations involving local communities.

- e. On July 5, 2017, the Chinese government stated that for two years since 2015 the Chinese government had exercised control that Doklam was a Chinese territory by making it a security monitoring area in the form of border patrols and so far there were no disputes between Bhutan and China.
- f. On July 19, 2017, the Government of China declared a strong reaction to the Indian side to withdraw its military forces from the Doklam region.
- g. On August 15, the Chinese government sent its military forces to the Doklam region by infiltrating the Ladakh region. This is where physical contact takes place in the form of sporadic attacks and exchanging gunfire between Indians and Chinese.
- h. On August 16, 2017, there were physical clashes between plainclothes militia (without military uniforms) between India and China in the border region.
- i. On August 15, 2017, the border conflict between China and India was marked by stable security conditions, and the absence of military forces and combat equipment in the region, both from China and India.

### **C. Impact of India and China's Conflict**

The impact of the border conflict between India and China is indeed not like the other conflicts that take place over a long period and involve various groups, including civil society. During June 16 to August 28, 2017, there were only a few injured victims from the military personnel of the two countries, both China and India. Nonetheless, this sentence was able to cause various reactions, including coming from Amjad Hussein Sial who was the Secretary-General of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation's) that:

*"... this conflict is miserable because South Asia has had a prolonged conflict and it is feared this will be the same thing. We*

*appreciate the various parties involved to withdraw so there will be no greater and prolonged conflict.* "<sup>8</sup>

Amjad Hussein Sial's statement proves that the India-China conflict is quite worrying for the South Asian regional community. This is because China and India are two large countries with enormous military power which is feared by the international community to trigger a security crisis on a broader scale. Then various other effects resulting from this conflict are<sup>9</sup>

1. There is a periodic flow of refugees from people living around Doklam, totaling dozens of people, especially women and children, to the Batang and Chokala areas for several days.

This case occurred as a result of several incidents at night in the Doklam region and residents living in this area were concerned that conflicts would occur on a larger scale by involving more personnel and defense equipment, so that these groups of people were temporarily displaced, especially in at night.

2. There are obstacles to the delivery of food and energy materials to the Doklam region which causes threats to food security and the cessation of social activities and economic activities of the people in this region.

These problems occur due to transportation from and to the Doklam region stalled and hampered due to examination in the border region because it is feared that it can be interrupted by the opposing party. Also, the stockpiling of crude material is also an obstacle for transportation to Doklam.

3. The cessation of infrastructure development activities in the form of developing highways in the Doklam region which could open access from the Doklam region to the Southern Tibet region.

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<sup>8</sup> "SAARC Himbau China dan India Untuk Menahan Diri," Kompas, August 20, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

This problem was halted due to a series of Indian and Chinese conflicts, where this project could provide benefits to the people of Doklam, but due to the feud in maintaining regional sovereignty, the infrastructure was stopped until the end of 2018.

#### **D. Bhutan's Response to India and China's Conflict**

The Bhutan government responds to the border conflict between China and India, where on June 29, 2017, the Bhutanese government declared the development of the Doklam area a provocative action because several kilometers from the area there was a Bhutanese army camp located in the Zhongli region. The Bhutanese government also stated that actions without an agreement with his party would make security stability prone to physical contact on both sides.<sup>10</sup>

The Bhutan government through the Bhutanese Royal Military Chief, Baatno Schering stated that:

*"... We become entities that are very harmonized by the two countries involved. Indeed, the strength of our military is not large enough compared with China or India, but we remain optimistic because peace is more important. This will take consideration for China and India to go back to withdrawing troops, peaceful and harmonious returns as before."*<sup>11</sup>

People living in the Doklam region also stated that China had violated the line that had been occupied by Bhutanese people. While the allegations of the people who support China's existence over Doklam are overseas citizens from Tibet. Most of the people of Doklam and surrounding areas are worried that if China's efforts are kept silent, then this will be like in the case of Tibet, even more than that, the Bhutanese government stated that

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<sup>10</sup> "What is the Bhutanese Thinking About Doklam," <https://thediplomat.com/2017/08/what-do-the-bhutanese-people-think-about-doklam/>, accessed on February 8, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> "Bhutanese Chinese-Indian Standoff" Why Bhutan is the Wildcard," <https://thediplomat.com/2017/07/why-bhutan-is-the-wildcard-in-the-ongoing-india-china-standoff-at-doklam/>, accessed on February 8, 2019.



the conflict was feared to damage relations between Bhutan and China and Bhutan and Tibet.<sup>12</sup>

Through the above description, it can be understood about the conflict between China and India as a border conflict while the trigger is the construction of infrastructure (highway) which was claimed unilaterally by China and then opposed by the Indian side. In its development, in a relatively short period, this conflict could stop on August 28, 2017. This achievement was not separated from Bhutan's strategy to run coercive diplomacy. An overview of this will be described in the discussion of the next chapter (chapter IV).

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid