

CHAPTER IV

BHUTAN'S STRATEGY IN ACTIVATING CONFLICTS OF BORDER BETWEEN CHINA AND INDIA THROUGH COERCIVE DIPLOMACY

Inter-state conflicts always bring adverse effects, including the loss of lives, damage to infrastructure to long-term impacts including economic depreciation and so on. For this reason, various international regimes try to prevent conflicts from occurring, where defensive efforts often involve the surrounding countries. This proposition also applies to Bhutan in following up on the conflict between China and India.

In following up on the conflicts between China and India, the Bhutanese government carried out a framework of coercive diplomacy by expressing the harsh criticism voiced by the country's stakeholders, including the prime minister to the commander of the Bhutanese army. Then further coercive diplomacy was embodied in the framework of the Tacit Ultimatum, namely the official stance of the Bhutanese government which was stated directly to the Chinese government and SAAARC. Then another form of coercive diplomacy is the gradual turning of the screw, namely Bhutan's effort to keep the conflict from happening again, including by alerting troops in the border region, to building more effective cooperation with China and India. The description of the three implementations of coercive diplomacy will be described in chapter IV as follows.

A. Implementation of Coercive Diplomacy through the Ultimatum Framework

Ultimatum is part of the framework in coercive diplomacy which shows that the state (regime) does not like the phenomenon or foreign policy of other countries. For this reason, the country that is opposed to the phenomenon or foreign policy is trying to build up the issue of controversy in the hope that the subjects/actors can change or stop their actions⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Alexander George and William Simon, *The Limit of Coercive Diplomacy*, Westview Press, Boulder-Colorado, 1994, p.39-40.

The ultimatum is the beginning of a series of coercive diplomacy. Generally, at this level issues that are of high political nature, including conflicts between countries, annexation or regional boundary disputes cannot be resolved. This is because at the ultimatum level the result is the formation of an issue, not an approach that can pressure the parties involved. Nevertheless, the ultimatum becomes essential because the phenomena/conflicts that occur can then be the spotlight of the regional or international community.

Bhutan is a country that is not influential enough in regional political constellations in the South Asian region or internationally. Nevertheless, Bhutan strives to participate in regional relations in a comprehensive manner, including through SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Corporations). Bhutan also collaborates abroad with 38 world countries, including Indonesia, Thailand, Slovenia, Russia, Brazil, Canada and various other world countries, and is a member of the United Nations (UN), to the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and various other international organizations.⁴⁹

The existence of Bhutan as a small country politically, economically and geographically turned out to not make this situation weak in the regional political constellation. The ability to establish effective and non-national cooperation in one of the superpower blocs made Bhutan quite respected in the international political constellation. This also applies to cases of border conflict between India and China, where Bhutan can build this issue as a national and international issue to form a normative force that can pressure the two countries to end the conflict.⁵⁰

Since June 16, 2017, the Bhutanese government has expressed an attitude of refusal and regretted the incident. This is important when China is a large country that seeks to oppose the use of violence. History of China that developed in Bhutan since

⁴⁹ Kent Schroeder, "Political and Global Happiness: Government and Development in Bhutan", *The Journal of Politic of Punjab*, Springer Publishing, New York, 2017, p.39.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

the Tang Dynasty (VI century) China has abandoned ways of conflict to control others. Since this dynasty, China has also sought to develop a trade mission to Europe, almost all of Asia and parts of Africa. A few centuries later when the era had developed towards the modern, China also tried to develop its influence in various countries of the world, but still maintained the mission of trade, diplomacy, and peace. This is what makes the 2017 incident a very unusual problem. This is following the statement of Bhutan's Prime Minister Tshering Pgbay on June 28, 2017, stating that:

*"...the India and China border conflict is unfortunate because it occurred in an area that is very close to our region. This increasingly dangerous conflict when two countries involved are large. for that, as the parties that are not involved directly, we condemn the incident."*⁵¹

Then the next ultimatum form from Bhutan can be seen from some things from the development of 2017 and China dispute issues from the emergence of news in print and electronic media to the reactions of young people and students who managed to run several demonstrations sporadically. This case shows that the India-China border dispute has become an essential political security issue in Bhutan. This can be explained as follows:

1. News on the main page in several Bhutanese national newspapers, including the Bhutan Observer, Bhutan Times of News and The Journalist, which reported that China carried out forced policies in the development of the trajectory on June 19, 2017. Then two days later namely 29 and 30 June 2017 media the print positioned the China and India border dispute as headlines.

⁵¹ "Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Visit Bhutan in first High-Level Interaction Since 2017 Doklam Standoff", in <https://thediplomat.com/2018/07/chinese-vice-foreign-minister-visits-bhutan-in-first-high-level-interaction-since-the-2017-doklam-standoff/>, accessed on February 19, 2019.

The role of the print media (newspaper) for the Bhutan community is indeed quite valuable as a means of disseminating information in foreign countries, South Asia regional to international. Print media in Bhutan in 2017 is also still popular as a media in disseminating government programs. In the ultimatum case, the print media reported this case continuously which led to the emergence of a public attitude to opposing the incident. In every day around 16,000 to 20,000 copies of the newspaper are spread in various regions of Bhutan so that this becomes important to build the issue of rejection of the border disputes between the two countries.

2. Continuing coverage of television media is also essential in building issues in the dispute between India and China in 2017. Some television media that intensively report on this issue, including BBS (Bhutan Broadcasting Service) and NYAB radio (National Youth Association of Bhutan). This media since the first conflict between India and China continues to report, especially on national news events and certain hours in the afternoon, evening to night. This is what helped contribute to building the issue of the India-China dispute in 2019 which then formed an issue that developed in the community.⁵²
3. The development of demonstrations in several regions took place shortly after the breakup of the China and India border disputes in 2017. Some cities including the capital of the Thimp-Bhutan and New Delhi-India. Some massive actions took place in early July 2017 held by Bhutanese youth and students in India who pressed the Indian side to withdraw their troops from the Doklam region immediately.⁵³

The coverage of print and electronic media, as well as the presence of protests and demonstrations then made the

⁵² "Why is The India-China Escalating," at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-40653053>, accessed on February 18, 2019.

⁵³ "What Behind of India-China Border Standoff," at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-40478813>, accessed on February 18, 2019.

issue of 2017 and India's border dispute in the government's attention. The pressure from the bottom made the Bhutan government have to be able to transform the aspirations of the people and then carry out more concrete actions and policies. Moreover, until the end of July 2017, there were no signs from China and India to end the conflict.

B. Implementation of Coercive Diplomacy Through the Tacit Ultimatum Framework

Tacit ultimatum is part of the framework of coercive diplomacy as a follow-up to the ultimatum crowd. At this level, the various phenomena of conflict that have occurred have been responded legitimately by the government of a country by involving existing political and security instruments so that they become legitimate and legitimate forms of foreign policy, including also getting support or at least a positive response from the opposition of the country concerned.⁵⁴

A tacit ultimatum can also be called an act of disagreement over the phenomenon of conflict that occurs, where the attitude of a country in uncovering the conflict as a form of protest (note of protest). The problem that arises is related to the formed constellation, where if the country has strong economic and military capacity, then the parties to the dispute can adhere to it, but if the country is in a weak position when the issue of the conflict that occurs will be brought to a higher by seeking political support collectively.

The development of the downstream pressure from community groups encouraged the Bhutanese government to establish an effective policy as a form of a tacit ultimatum. This effort is carried out so that the conflict does not increase and can be immediately ended because if the conflict heats up and enlarges, the Bhutanese will become victims and will experience many losses.

The initial response from the Bhutan government in tacit ultimatum was first followed up by 27 June 2017. This policy

⁵⁴ Alexander George and William Simon, *op. cit.*

was implemented through the sending of a protest note to the Chinese government signed by Prime Minister Lotauy Tshering and commander of the armed forces Bhutan Bota Thsering. In the protest note, the Bhutanese government expressed a firm stance that the Chinese side must immediately leave the territory of Doklam as soon as possible starting June 29, 2017.⁵⁵ The manifestation of the Bhutan protest note to China can be seen as follows:

Given the many queries raised recently in the media regarding the Bhutan – China boundary in the Doklam area the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would like to convey the following:

On 16th June 2017, the Chinese Army started constructing a motorable road from Dokola in the Doklam area towards the Bhutan Army camp at Zompelri. Boundary talks are ongoing between Bhutan and China, and we have written agreements of 1988 and 1998 stating that the two sides agree to maintain peace and tranquility in their border areas pending a final settlement on the boundary question and to maintain status quo on the boundary as before March 1959. The agreements also state that the two sides will refrain from taking unilateral action, or use of force, to change the status quo of the boundary.

Bhutan has conveyed to the Chinese side, both on the ground and through the diplomatic channel, that the construction of the road inside Bhutanese territory is a direct violation of the agreements and affects the process of demarcating the boundary between our two countries. Bhutan hopes that the status quo in the Doklam area will be maintained as before 16 June 2017.

**Figure 4. 1 Note on Bhutan Protest Against China in
Dispute India-China Border**

Source: Processed from the "Press Release: Ministry of Foreign Affairs," in <http://www.mfa.gov.bt/press-releases/press-release-272.html>, accessed on February 19, 2019.

Through a protest note, the Bhutanese government also stated that the claims and construction of the trans highway in the Doklam region by China unilaterally had made it vulnerable

⁵⁵ "Press Release: Ministry of Foreign Affairs," in <http://www.mfa.gov.bt/press-releases/press-release-272.htm>, accessed on February 19, 2019.

to friction on the ground by the military and security forces of the two countries. This was because the road was adjacent to the Bhutan military unit, namely the Bhutan Zompelri army camp about 2 kilometers from the project under construction. Then the Bhutanese government also expressed strong reaction to the construction of the trans road in the Doklam region because it was also close to the Siliguri Corridor as the center of Indian military power in the northern region.

Bhutan's policy of uncovering the 2017 and India border disputes on the tacit ultimatum aspect was also carried out by rejecting the Calcutta 1890 Convention. The Bhutanese considered that this agreement was long enough and no longer valid because tripartite between China, Bhutan and India agreed on 2012 that the boundaries of the three countries must refrain from developing development policies permanently and will then become the object of joint security supervision and coordination involving Chinese and Bhutanese and Indian military and security personnel.⁵⁶

On July 5, 2017, the Bhutanese government again declared its position as a form of Tacit Ultimatum that it and India were ready to bring the issue of border disputes to the negotiating forum. The Bhutanese side also stated that the displaced people of Doklam had returned and they were legitimate Bhutanese people. The accusation that the community is closer to China is an erroneous object, where the Bhutanese prime minister Lotay Thering stated that these groups were nomadic farmers from Tibet.⁵⁷

A few moments after the application of ultimatum tacit by the Bhutanese government, the Chinese then carried out various political and security discourses. On July 19, 2017, in the end, the Chinese government, through its foreign spokesman, Geng Xuang stated that the Chinese government would withdraw all its troops and stop the trans-road construction project, including

⁵⁶ "Recent Development on Doklam Area," at https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/28572/Recent_Developments_in_Doklam_Area, accessed on February 19, 2019

⁵⁷ Ibid

heavy equipment, construction staff, and other workers and others. This is then the basis of the success of Bhutan in building ultimatum tacit as a form of reconciliation of conflict between China and India.⁵⁸

C. Implementation of Coercive Diplomacy through the Gradual Turning of Screw Framework

The gradual turning of the screw is part of the post-Tacit ultimatum coercive diplomacy. This framework is an initiative of a country to anticipate that problems (conflicts) do not occur again. Generally, this effort is carried out by improving communication, building infrastructure policies, building more effective foreign cooperation and several other efforts.⁵⁹

The success of the gradual turning of screw relates to the issue of the conflict itself. If the problem develops due to a reactive incident, the gradual turning of the screw will be easier to solve, but if the conflict has become a potential problem and is the target of foreign intervention, the issue of conflict will be increasingly difficult to resolve.

Bhutan's strategy in developing the gradual turning of the screw is an initiative from this country to keep the conflict between India and China from happening again. The first step in Bhutan's strategy was the request of Lotna Thsering's Prime Minister to the Chinese government to file reports and current conditions on China's borders and goodwill. This effort was later approved by the Chinese side, where the country on July 24, 2017, through its Prime Minister Wang Yi stated that the Chinese government for the common good would withdraw. Read more Wang Yi stated that:

"... that it is obvious who is right and who is wrong in the standoff in Doklam, and that senior Indian event has publicly said that Chinese have not intruded into Indian territory. In

⁵⁸ "China Hold Life Fire Drills on Disputes Himalayan Territory," in <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1131641/world>, accessed on February 19, 2019.

⁵⁹ Alexander George and William Simon, *op. cit.*

other words, India admitted that it had entered Chinese territory. The solution to this issue is simple, which is that they behave themselves and withdraw."⁶⁰

The Bhutan government also invited China to bring relations back to India. Moreover, since the escalation of the conflict has decreased, there has been an incident in the form of an attack by Indian forces by China, even this case had caused racial sentiment when Chinese forces mocked Indian personnel and vice versa. This condition triggered a meeting of field commanders in both countries, where the Indian government was represented by Bipin Rawat, while the Chinese were represented by Wang Ching Lun who managed to reach an agreement to establish joint coordination, provide services to civil society, medical evacuations and others.

In supporting balancing relations with China and India, Bhutan has also developed a useful cooperative framework since 2017. This is marked by the increase in investment and development cooperation contracts in the country of Bhutan, whose value continues to increase. This can be seen in community visits between countries and the value of cooperation that can be seen in table 4.1. As follows:

⁶⁰ "Focus Today," at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8KT9IX_xM14, accessed on February 18, 2019.

Table 4. 1 Development of Bhutan and China Bilateral Relations 2017-2018

No	Information	2017	2018
1.	Value of cooperation	139 juta US\$	181 juta US\$
2.	Community traffic	1.889	2.370
3.	Trade cooperation	18	35
4.	Exploration of natural resources	3	7

Source: processed from "Bhutan Relations With China and India," <https://jamestown.org/program/bhutans-relations-china-india/>, accessed on February 18, 2019, and "Is Bhutan Drawing Closer to China," in <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defense/article/2108804/bhutan-drawing-closer-china-and-what-can-india-do-about>, accessed on February 18, 2019.

From the table above it can be understood that China and Bhutan maintain good relations. Bhutan also tried not to leave India as its close ally. The 2017 India and China border dispute has provided an understanding that conflict can be prevented through coercive diplomacy without having to resort to military action. Coercive diplomacy will also be a milestone for relations between Bhutan and China in a conducive manner as partners in the cooperation of countries in strategic regions.