

Question and Answer:

The Border Clashes between China and India

(Translated)

Question:

Reuters [reported](#) on 10/06/2020, “Hundreds of soldiers have been ranged against each other in the remote snow desert of Ladakh since April in the most serious border flare-ups for years after Chinese patrols advanced into what India deems its side of the de facto border, Indian officials say. China claims the territory to be its own and has objected to the Indian construction of roads in the area.” The border region between China and India has witnessed skirmishes between the border guards of the two countries, since the first week of May. Is the motive local or is America behind it, to harass and pressurize China? What is the impact of this conflict on the Muslims in Occupied Kashmir and Pakistan?

Answer:

Border skirmishes broke out on 5th May 2020, in the Galwan River Valley of the high-altitude region of Ladakh in northern India and then, three days later, at the Nathu La mountain pass, in the Himalayas, connecting the Indian state of Sikkim to China’s Tibet Autonomous Region. These skirmishes led to a military and diplomatic impasse between the two countries. The history of tensions between China and India is longstanding. It recurs frequently in the form of conflict over the borders that the British drew up with China, in the Sikkim-Tibet Convention of 1890, when the British dominated the region, having colonized the Islamic Indian Subcontinent. When the British left, they divided the Indian Subcontinent into India and Pakistan, leaving Kashmir as an area of conflagration between them. They did the same with India and China, sparking conflicts over many border regions. To explain what happened recently, we review the following:

First: The recent border skirmishes between India and China are not the first of their kind. The armies of the two countries were on the brink of war to varying degrees in the years 2013, 2014, 2017, within the last decade alone. The two countries fought a fierce cross-border war in 1962, in which India was defeated and China occupied Aksai Chin, in northern Kashmir. The dispute between the two countries on the eastern borders is the result of British colonialism. British colonialism ensured the annexation of the state of Arunachal Pradesh to India, with the non-demarcation of the borders with China, throughout the period of the British colonization of India. As for the dispute over the western borders, it is due to the greed of the two countries for Islamic Kashmir, especially after 1947. Due to the border disputes, both countries publish widely differing data, even about the length of the border between them, up to a discrepancy of nearly four thousand kilometers.

As for the skirmishes on 5th May 2020, they occurred when the forces clashed, injuring dozens of soldiers on both sides, upon the banks of the Pangong Tso glacial lake, situated at an altitude of around fourteen thousand feet on the Tibetan Plateau. Since then, reinforcement of forces continued, amidst ongoing confrontations. China sent about 5,000 soldiers and armored vehicles to the disputed border area in Ladakh. It was reported that “The Business Standard Newspaper [reported](#) that, ‘over 5,000 Chinese soldiers have intruded at five points in Ladakh — four along the Galwan River, and one near the Pangong Lake.’” (www.defense-arabic.co 24/5/2020).

Second: Tensions between the two countries flared after India separated the Ladakh region from Jammu and Kashmir. China understood that Ladakh’s separation from Jammu and Kashmir was for strategic reasons, in order to maintain the intense Indian confrontation against China, since Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in the year of 2014, as the head of government formed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said in response to Amit Shah’s announcement on 5/8/2019 of India’s intention to separate Ladakh, “India’s unilateral amendment of its domestic law is harmful to China and violates regional sovereignty, and this is unacceptable.” The border disputes that flare up recurrently between the two countries are centered over two focal points: The first is on the eastern border, where China demands the annexation of a major part of the 83,000 square kilometer state of Arunachal Pradesh, which China calls South Tibet, but India rejects.

The second focal point is over the Indian demand for the return of lands seized by China in the 1962 war on the western borders, in the Islamic Kashmir region, which is the Aksai Chin area of around 37,000 square kilometers, a semi-desert climate region with a small population. This Indian demand is rejected by China. Instead, China is demanding even more sovereignty in the Kashmir region. So, the Chinese demands are concentrated today on the western borders on a part of the Ladakh region of Kashmir, bordering the Aksai Chin region, which was part of the ancient trade route of China, the Silk Road.

Third: The Ladakh region, in which the recent Indo-Chinese skirmishes occurred, is an Islamic region and an integral part of Kashmir. It was ruled by Islam for centuries and it was within the state of Jammu and Kashmir until it was separated on 31/10/2019 by law! It is a region with low population density but high strategic value. It is the highest plateau in India and includes the valley of the upper Indus River. It is located between the Chinese Line of Actual Control (LAC) to the east and the Pakistani Line of Control (LoC) to the west. The Karakorum Pass is located to the north. Also, the last Indian settlement before the Karakorum Pass is Daulat Beg Oldi and for information, this literally means in the Turkic “the spot where the great and rich man died.” It is said that it refers to Sultan Said Khan, the ruler of the Yarkand Khanate, who came in a campaign of conquests in 938 AH, the autumn of 1531 CE, in order to open Ladakh and Kashmir to Islam. Upon making his return to Yarkand, at the end of 939 AH, he became seriously ill and it is said that he died in this place. So, it is an Islamic Land and now India controls it, within the areas of its control in the Kashmir region. The region has multiple wounds. Just as India controls Jammu, Kashmir Valley, and Ladakh, China controls Aksai Chin and Trans-Karakoram Tract, all of which are Islamic regions in the Kashmir region. This is whilst Pakistan only controls the Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan region, which is perhaps less than a third of the region’s area. Azad Kashmir borders the regions under Indian occupation, while Gilgit-Baltistan is adjacent to other regions, under the control of both China and India. In light of the current state of vulnerability of Islamic countries, particularly Pakistan, India claims right over the disputed areas of Ladakh as part of the Jammu and Kashmir region, while China responds and claims right over those areas as part of the Xinjiang region, which is East Turkestan. Thus, the two countries contest rights over these Islamic regions, whilst Pakistan is continuing its subordination to America and the rest of the rulers of Muslims are silent!!

Fourth, China views the Ladakh region, which is under the control of India, in a special way. In addition to the presence of Buddhists in this region, it contains two ancient trade routes that reach Central Asia. This reality is of great importance to the new strategy of China, the Silk Road Economic Belt. Although there are other routes for China to reach Central Asia, the route through Ladakh is shorter, in reaching the heavily populated centers and markets of Central Asia. What further increases this consideration, is that these ancient trade routes would bring closer many destinations to deliver Chinese goods from the industrial centers in eastern China, through northern Pakistan, on the way to Gwadar Port. This project is an important economic corridor (CPEC), in which China has invested tens of billions of dollars in recent years. Therefore, this conflict is not free from this dimension in the Chinese mentality. If China were to open the other border dispute with India, on the eastern border over the state of Arunachal Pradesh, China would not realize the benefits of the “economic corridors” that it seeks, within the framework of the Silk Road Economic Belt strategy, avoiding passage through the areas controlled by the US Navy, particularly the Strait of Malacca. What increases Chinese suspicions that India is engaging in the US policy to curb the rise of China, are the following:

1- After the Coronavirus disease pandemic crisis, America found a new premise for striking China, under various pretexts. Washington talks incessantly about the need for Beijing to bear responsibility for the spread of the virus. It is dragging along other countries, including India, in the direction of demanding an inquiry, particularly over the Wuhan Institute of Virology. On the other hand, the interruption of some supplies from China, when the virus first struck, adversely effected production in many European and international factories, as a result of the disruption of the supply chain of parts from China. This provoked demands to abandon supply chains that pass through China. This trend added to the efforts of the US President to bring back American companies operating in China, rather get them out of China, making Beijing feel today, more than ever before, that its economy is under actual threat and pressure.

2- What also indicates India’s involvement in US policy, is its attempt to weaken the Chinese economy. Anadolu Agency [reported](#) that, “Globally, China is losing its leverage as it is believed to have caused the pandemic. Industries are looking to move out of China. This is causing China to divert

attention from the COVID-19 situation,' Lt. Gen. Vinod Bhatia, India's former Director-General of Military Operations (DGMO), told Anadolu Agency. He said the post-COVID world will be a big opportunity for India, as the fulcrum of power will shift from West to East." (Anadolu Agency of Turkey, 31/5/2020). It seems that the opportunity that the Indians are talking about is the transfer of foreign companies, especially the American ones, from China to India. China is witnessing that the United States is behind the development of Indian capabilities to enable confrontation with China. The US supported India's nuclear program until India became a nuclear power. The US gave India a distinguished status and priority in trade and economic relations. The US also forced Pakistan to reduce tensions with India, allowing India to move large military contingents that were stationed for decades on the borders with Pakistan, redeploying them on the border with China. This policy of the United States towards India is not new, but has been so for many years. Today, the United States adds to the involvement of India, by getting large foreign companies out of China, with India as an alternative, thus involving India in striking the Chinese economy.

3- It is worth noting that from the military perspective, China has been able to develop its army significantly. It has become the second ranked country globally in terms of military spending, after the United States, with a military budget of 261 billion dollars for the year 2019. Moreover, China spends more than Russia, Britain and France combined. Although in the year 2019, India became the third ranked country globally in terms of military spending, after China, with a budget of \$72 billion, the largest in its history, the capabilities of India's army are still small compared to the military capabilities of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA). The fact of the respective military capabilities of the two armies, makes India cautious of waging extensive battles with China today, which is unlike how it was in 1962. All of this is despite the fact that India has a significant advantage in conventional weapons within the recent conflict zone in Ladakh, especially since many contingents of its army are stationed on the borders with Pakistan, close to the conflict zone. This is unlike China, whose armies are not yet stationed in that region. This reality, in terms of the conventional military capabilities of both countries in the conflict area, has been confirmed in a study prepared by the US's Harvard University (Arabic Post 31/5/2020). However, it is noteworthy that after these skirmishes, that China has been mobilizing additional forces in the region and is increasing its military capabilities against India on the western borders.

4- The Indian conflict in 2017, over the eastern border, was defused, with a meeting of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2018. "The two leaders held their first informal summit in Wuhan in April 2018 and during this meeting Xi accepted Modi's invitation to visit India for a second meeting." (Euro Arab News, 9/12/2019). However, the current conflict coincides with redoubled American efforts to undermine China, which creates additional complications that make defusing the conflict more difficult. The new complications that the Trump administration is creating around China are fully understood in Beijing. Thus, "Chinese President Xi Jinping said today, Tuesday (26/5/2020), 'Beijing will intensify its preparations for armed combat and improve its capabilities to carry out military missions, under the great impact of Coronavirus pandemic on national security.'" (Sputnik, Russia, 26/5/2020)].

Although it is not directed against India specifically, this statement reveals that Beijing senses great threats surrounding it, after observing American intentions to hold it responsible for the spread of the Coronavirus. So perhaps China is thinking and planning to show its military capabilities in order to deter any US military plan against it that involves the allies of the US in the region, including India. It is as if China is sending a message to proximal enemies not to cooperate with America, otherwise the Chinese army is capable of inflicting great harm on them. Perhaps the intelligence report issued by the Ministry of State Security in China at the beginning of April 2020 that asked Beijing to prepare for a military confrontation, reveals the seriousness of the US plans against China. The leaps in the Indian military spending, reaching up to 72 billion dollars for the first time in Indian history in 2019, as well as the huge arms deals concluded by the Indian army, all pose a direct threat to China. China has the conviction that India represents the head of America's spear against it. The infrastructure projects undertaken by India in the disputed border areas with China, coupled with the acceleration in its armament, increase the concerns in China about the future of its relations with India.

Fifth: As for the American position on the recent conflict between India and China, it was certainly supportive of India. US diplomat Alice Wells, the outgoing Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, criticized the Chinese actions in Ladakh and linked them to Beijing's provocations in the South China Sea. (NEWS 18, 21/5/2020). Representative Eliot L. Engel, Chairman

of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, issued a [statement](#) saying, “I am extremely concerned by the ongoing Chinese aggression along the Line of Actual Control on the India-China border. China is demonstrating once again that it is willing to bully its neighbors rather than resolve conflicts according to international law... I strongly urge China to respect norms and use diplomacy and existing mechanisms to resolve its border questions with India.” (US House of Representatives’ Committee on Foreign Affairs, 1/6/2020).

This is in addition to the fact that the US is trying to exploit these border disputes, using them as a trump card against China to pressure China regarding its policy towards it, to limit the penetration of its influence in the region, keeping it busy in these skirmishes, as well as blackmailing it in a trade war and interfering in China’s affairs. That is why the US President, Trump, offered to mediate between India and China, after the outbreak of the recent conflict between them, in order to control the resolutions between the two parties to his advantage. Trump tweeted via his Twitter account on 27 May 2020, “We have informed both India and China that the United States is ready, willing and able to mediate or arbitrate their now raging border dispute.” (Al-Hurra, 27/5/2020). US mediation was rejected by China, “as Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lijian Zhao said that the two countries do not want a third party to “intervene” to solve their differences.” (Anadolu Agency, Turkey, 9/6/2020)].

Sixth: Despite that, America did not stand down, continuing its activity in the region that it considers to be one of the most important regions in the world. The US persisted in its actions to confront China, from scaling it down to containing it, as well as attempting to confront it directly and indirectly in the South China Sea. However, America can no longer carry out wars everywhere and preserve its extended influence in many regions of the world, except by relying on regional and local powers that it gains to work for it. Then came the Coronavirus crisis that exposed America as a state that cannot manage crisis that it faces successfully. Indeed, the crisis has exposed the US as a failure, helpless before a mere virus! And this exposure increased after the issue of racial discrimination erupted within it, after a white American policeman suffocated an African-American citizen, which exposed it internationally. All of this is at a time when China is a major regional power. Therefore, America has become more dependent on other countries than before, to achieve its interests and maintain its influence...

America sought to bring its agents in India to power, so that India would be under its command. It brought them to power so that America could guarantee that results would always be in its favor and that the agents would follow it. It worked with all its might to bring the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to power. So this pro-American party reached authority for the first time under Vajpayee’s leadership, to rule in India in 1998 until 2004. When elections took place in that year, the BJP lost to the Congress Party. The BJP returned to power after winning in 2014 and remains in power. The US began exploiting India against China. In order to allow India to play this role, America neutralized Pakistan and made it move away from conflict with India, so that India would devote itself to the current conflict with China. This is why the rulers of Pakistan abandoned Kashmir to the farthest extent, when India announced last year on 5/8/2019 that Occupied Kashmir has become part of India. And we mentioned in the “Question and Answer” dated 18/8/2019, “America saw that tensions over Kashmir between India and Pakistan affect the weakening of the confrontation of the Indian Subcontinent against China... To overcome these tensions, the United States began the process of normalization between India and Pakistan. The goal of normalization was to neutralize the Indian and Pakistani forces from fighting each other because of Kashmir, and to direct efforts toward cooperation with the United States, eventually to restrict the rise of China. America believed that the annexation of Kashmir to India and America’s pressure on the regime in Pakistan to prevent it from acting militarily, shifting the subject to dialogue will kill the issue and prevent military conflict between them, just as Abbas’s authority in Palestine and the Arab countries around them are not taking military action against the Jewish entity that is occupying and claiming what it wants of Palestine!”

The rulers of Pakistan committed themselves to this, and they declared, as stated by Prime Minister Imran Khan, when he said, “His government will respond appropriately to the government of India, if it launches an attack on Pakistan.” (Anadolu Agency, 30/8/2019). That is, not for the liberation of Kashmir! After about a month, he said that, “The army chief Bajwa assured him that Pakistan Army is ready to confront India, in case it launches an attack on Azad Kashmir...” (Pakistani Geo News Channel 26/12/2019). That, is Azad Kashmir alone and not to liberate Jammu and Kashmir from India’s control!

