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## FOREIGN ASSISTANCE UNWELCOME IN CHINA-INDIA BOUNDARY CONFLICT

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The collision between China and India for the control of certain regions of their shared border seems to be an unrelenting conflict and a source of unending headlines. On January 9th, New Delhi denounced Chinese military units for realising an incursion in the Indian region of Ladakh. One day later, the Indian army recognised it as a misunderstanding, stating that there was no Chinese intrusion in Ladakh. Also last month, there was another misunderstanding when India abruptly discovered that Map World, a Chinese online service similar to Google Earth and backed by the government, included two territories that India considers part of its sovereignty as part of China.

Since the Sino-Indian war in 1962, China occupies two areas claimed by India as part of its Jammu and Kashmir State: the Askai Chin high-altitude deserts and the Karakorum pass, transferred to China from Pakistan in their 1963 bilateral boundary Agreement. Apart from the disputed areas in Kashmir, the Sino-Indian war left the most serious territorial conflict in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh: In just one month, from October to November 1962, The People's Liberation Army (PLA) occupied Arunachal Pradesh – a territory of 83,500 square Km., roughly the size of Austria. Shortly after, Beijing announced a unilateral ceasefire and moved its troops out of Arunachal Pradesh. The PLA reached the geographical limits that the Chinese Communist Party recognizes as the legitimate border between the two countries. China wants India to redefine the present boundary between Arunachal Pradesh and the Tibetan Autonomous Region. This border is integrated in the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the boundary internationally accepted as the limit between both countries. Although China assumes this line as a temporary solution, Beijing refuses its present border with the Arunachal Pradesh frontier because it was settled a century ago by the Governments of India, Great Britain and by the Tibetan religious leadership. Back then, Tibet acted as a sovereign state. The Communist Party claims that the Tibetan leaders were neither the legal representatives of China nor the representatives of an independent country.

For the last fifty years China and India have joined efforts to find a peaceful solution with no substantial agreements. From time to time both sides get involved in both diplomatic and military skirmishes. China, for instance, last year blocked a flood prevention program sponsored by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for Arunachal Pradesh because this financial institution recognizes the region as part of India.

Both sides have rejected any kind of international assistance despite a 2005 Joint Statement signed in New Delhi by prime ministers Wen Jiabao and Manmohan Singh, stating that China and India established a Strategic and Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity that “reflects the consensus that bilateral relations transcend the bilateral issues and have acquired a global and strategic perspective”, according to a briefing posted online by the Indian Embassy in Beijing.

On February 2010, Jabin T. Jacob, a researcher at the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS) in New Delhi, published a report under the title *The EU, China and India. The promise of trilateral engagement*. In this paper, Jacob defends that due to its “diplomatic wisdom” and a less hated international image, Europe is the ideal player to assist China and India in settling their differences. The US strategy on the boundary conflict is seen with suspicion in China. In an academic paper published in 2009 about India-US links, Zhang Li, professor at the South Asia Research Center, Sichuan University, highlighted that the support of Washington “led to a hardening of India’s position in its border disputed with China in Aksai Chan, Sikkhim and Arunachal Pradesh.” Jacob briefed his position: “in the case of Sino-Indian dialogue, neither China nor India would welcome or expect such [international] mediation. What I am suggesting is Europe either encouraging or initiating trilateral dialogue on issues such as anti-piracy, climate change, green technology and other forms of technology development so as to increase the positive linkages that will ensure that the boundary dispute by itself does not dominate the Sino-Indian ties.”

In 2007 the European Commission (EC) launched the “Instrument for Stability (IFS), a new peace-keeping resource that the European Union has been using to finance “crisis response” projects all around the world. The aim of this instrument is to establish partnerships “to strengthen civilian expertise for peace building activities”. The EC assures that one of “the major challenges facing Europe” is Asia’s “global significance”. According to the EC, the dialogue with China, India and Japan is of top priority to improve regional security. The EU approved for the period 2007-2013 an investment of more than €5 billion –US\$ 6.7 billion- to address problems in Asia related to climate change, security and stability. There are qualified voices demanding this kind of foreign assistance for one of the most threatening conflicts in Asia: the boundary disputes between China and India.

The fact is that officially neither China nor India wants assistance from third parties. A spokesperson of the Delegation of the European Union to China admits that the EC “can’t imagine either countries inviting international mediation in a dispute about sovereignty. The EU would not contemplate offering mediation unless invited by both parties.” Rosemary Opacic, representative of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the

European Parliament, also confirms that the EP “can play no role in mediating and would in any case need to be invited to play such a role by the parties involved, which is not the case.”

In 2007, the European Parliament approved a resolution on the situation of Kashmir that recognized India, Pakistan and China as “important EU partners”. The document stressed that the “EU may have something to offer based on past experience of successful conflict resolution in a multi-ethnic, multinational, multi-faith context; therefore offers the present resolution and any meetings that may come out of it as part of a shared experience from which the EU can also learn.” Neither the Indian Embassy in Beijing nor the Chinese Foreign Ministry replied to a request to give their point of view on this matter.

There are only a few cases of European organizations serving as advisers between China and India. Prof. Jacob underscores the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS)

as the most significant example. The KAS belongs to the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the German conservative party, currently in power. The KAS, like the IPCS, has been organizing trilateral meetings with scholars, business executives and officers from the EU, China and India to cope with all kind of issues, from economy to environment or security policy. Wolfgang Meyer, director of the KAS office in Beijing, confirms that such meetings have encouraged dialogue on the boundary issue “with Chinese, Indian and German policy advisors.” Meyer says that these meetings “are kept internal and confidential”. According to Prof. Jacob, there are significant handicaps in these gatherings “because this is a Track-II [non official diplomacy] process involving retired military and government officials on both sides and after a point neither side really can go beyond stated government positions”.

Jonathan Holslag, a research coordinator at the Brussels Institute of Contemporary China Studies and one of the most qualified experts on the subject, warns about a negative trend on the boundary conflict: “Contrary to Pakistan, India and China have always tried to avoid interference of third powers in the border. I don’t think this is going to change. Moreover, the issue is getting more sensitive.” Holslag gives some examples of why conditions are worsening: “On Arunachal Pradesh, both sides seem to be back in the trenches. The Chinese have stepped up pressure by publically referring to Arunachal as Southern Tibet, establishing a special visa regime for locals and blocking ADB aid for the impoverished areas. The same is true for Aksai Chin. The Indians are getting very nervous about the growing economic ties between Aksai Chin and the Pakistan part of Kashmir. China and India seem to be becoming more sensitive to alleged provocations. Because of domestic economic and political uncertainty, leaders in both countries cannot afford to give the impression of being weak.”