

China's Five Finger Policy

The Five Fingers Policy of China is a foreign policy envisioned by its erstwhile leader Mao Zedong.

He believed that while Tibet was the right hand of China, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Ladakh were its 'five fingers' of its periphery and that it was China's duty to 'liberate' these areas.

Although it was never discussed in official statements made by successive Chinese governments, its existence was confirmed in a provisional mouthpiece magazine of the Chinese Communist Party following the Doklam standoff in 2017.

This article will further elaborate upon the Chinese Five Finger Policy within the context of the IAS Exam.

Origins of the Five Finger Policy

Before Communist China laid claims over Bhutan, Nepal and Sikkim, its imperial predecessor had done the same as well in the early 1900s, citing that these territories were an extension of Tibet. The Chinese Imperial Resident in Tibet also wrote to the rulers of these territories 'that they must work together as brothers' in the face of British Imperialism

During the Chinese Civil War, Mao Zedong termed Nepal and Bhutan as tributaries of China. He made further public statements throughout the 1940s about the inclusion of the 'five fingers' into greater China.

In 1954, Chinese officers in Tibet were making statements, claiming that they would liberate Sikkim, Ladakh, Nepal, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh (Then known as the North East Frontier Agency - NEFA) from 'wrongful occupation'.

The claims over the "five fingers" were asserted frequently from 1958 to 1961 over radio systems in Beijing and Lhasa. At one point in July 1959, Chinese lieutenant General Zhang Guohua said that the "Bhutanese, Sikkimese and Ladakhis must form a united Tibet, subject to the great motherland of China". Indian diplomats and scholars of the time such as Triloki Nath Kaul and B. S. K. Grover had noted this was a serious reflection of Beijing's 'expansionist mindset' and not mere 'chest-thumping and empty rhetoric'.

Five Fingers Policy in the 21st Century

Officially, the Chinese Government has never discussed the five finger policy and it is dormant now. China claims Arunachal Pradesh and Ladakh which it considers as part of Aksai Chin which in turn is administered as part of Hotan Prefecture, Xinjiang.

But there are fears that this policy might be revived following the Doklam clash in 2017. Qunzhong, a mouthpiece magazine of the Chinese Communist Party in the Jiangsu province made statements about 'invoking' the five policy along with making allegations of India's covert support for the Tibetan independence movement and that as China's investments, trade, and economic relations with these regions increase, the Chinese influence in these regions will overtake that of India and will eliminate it to a "great extent".

As per geopolitical experts, the 'five fingers policy' is due the historical geography of the Himalayas that allows for bi-territorial claims. This has always been a cause of the long standing border dispute between India and China.

Options for India's stand regarding Five Finger Policy

India's has the following options to counter any border aggression that may arise due to the five finger policy:

- Detailed protocols are in place for troops to handle face-off incidents. The countries need to stick to the 2005 protocol and the 2013 Border Defence Cooperation Agreement.
- On 1st April, 2020, India and China completed their 70 years of diplomatic relations. It is imperative that both sides recognise that an armed conflict is not in anyone's interest and that confidence-building mechanism must be improved
- For India, the first priority has to be to restore the status quo ante at the border as it existed in before. This will mean that India must flex its military might at the border by countering Chinese aggression and by making it abundantly clear that any form of incursions will not be taken lightly.
- Bi-lateral agreements like the Panchsheel Agreement must be followed to the letter.

Through Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, India can try to replace Chinese products with domestic products in certain sectors and make alliances with other countries in economic matters.