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## **The Big Question: How should borders be drawn?**

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THE BIG QUESTION

# Setting Boundaries

HOW SHOULD BORDERS BE DRAWN?

FEATURING  
RUAIRI NOLAN  
PETER TAYLOR  
AARTHI RAO  
HOWARD EISSENSTAT  
EUN-JU KIM  
BONNIE GLASER  
TSUNEO AKAHA  
ANSSI PAASI  
HENK VAN HOUTUM  
RICHARD SCHOFIELD

**B**oundaries define nations. Across Europe and Asia, through Africa and Latin America, old frontiers are being challenged. The primacy of the state is under increased scrutiny as the telecommunications revolution erases once impermeable divides. We have asked our panel of global experts how borders should be drawn on land, on sea, and in the blogosphere.

## SOFT BORDERS RUAIRI NOLAN

When South Sudan split from Sudan in 2011, the governments of both countries were praised by the African Union for promising to create a soft border—one that would allow continued trade and interaction between people on both sides of one of Africa's longest boundaries. Sadly, the border now is anything but soft. Although the worst-case predictions of all-out war have not yet occurred, the situation for communities in the border regions is dire. Trade and cross-border travel have been severely curtailed, which is particularly disastrous for the region's nomadic peoples whose traditional livestock migration routes crisscross the new frontier. There have been frequent and bloody border clashes, and the border itself remains disputed in the oil-rich state of Abyei.

The consequences of hard borders highlight how porous borders more effectively minimize divisions between communities. In some situations, not even a combination of good intentions and outside support can prevent conflicts. We need to think about which mechanisms have potential to resolve or manage these conflicts. Many border conflicts are rooted in local issues, such as land or grazing rights, affecting communities on both sides of the border. The withdrawal of international organizations from the border areas leaves only local peace-builders to resolve the numerous conflicts rooted in a host of pre-existing issues. Unfortunately, the Sudan-South Sudan border itself is preventing peace-builders from traveling or even associating with groups across the frontier, leaving those best positioned to resolve conflicts unable to operate effectively.

*Ruairi Nolan is head of Peace Direct's Insight on Conflict project, which profiles 700 peace-building organizations.*

## MOLDING THE CITY PETER TAYLOR

Through control of borders, the homeland is molded in the image of its people to create modern nation-states. Yet, successful cities attract migrants from near and far, making border restrictions anathema to growing cities.

Contemporary globalization was initially heralded by talk of a new "borderless world." This raised the profiles of cities, which, through the work of financial, professional, and creative firms, became the key nodes in this new, global economy. But economic globalization has proven far more complex than the simple notion that borders are disappearing. Businesses simultaneously work with and around borders. This interplay of borders and cities is crucial. It's rarely noticed how structurally similar the rise of a China-dominated East is to the established, American-dominated West. The economies of both regions pivot on a strategic triad of cities consisting of a national capital (Washington, Beijing), a global financial center (New York, Shanghai), and an extra-territorial global platform (London, Hong Kong). This latter pair, beyond the borders of direct economic jurisdiction by each dominant country, provides the necessary maneuverability for global business.

*Peter Taylor, head of the Globalization and World Cities Research Network, is emeritus professor of geography at Loughborough University in Leicestershire, England and author of over 300 publications.*

## FOSTERING CITIZENSHIP AARTHI RAO

Borders must be crafted to foster global citizenship. While borders separate countries, they do not halt the spread of disease or relegate the effects of climate

change to the most environmentally irresponsible countries. Decisions about American imports can directly affect whether farmers in Africa will rise out of poverty. India's intellectual property deliberations reverberate through millions of patients who depend on both lifesaving medicines and the promise of new innovations.

People cross borders every day, legally and illegally, to fulfill such basic needs as health services and economic opportunity. There are rights that belong to each of us that should not be denied based on the short straw of unlucky citizenship. The challenges that define us in the 21st century are global, and they demand collaboration that transcends lines on a map. It doesn't matter whether boundaries are geographic, cultural, or political, borders galvanize populations to celebrate, defend, or dispute them. And though territorial disputes will continue, everyone has a responsibility to think beyond borders. Decisions made by a particular country or even an individual affect the rest of the world.

*Aarathi Rao, a program officer for the Results for Development Institute, is leading a study on biomedical innovation in India.*

### **MESSY SOLUTIONS HOWARD EISSENSTAT**

From the perspective of the world economy, climate change, or terrorist networks, the 19th century obsession with national states and national borders may seem as outmoded as steam engines and telegraph wires. Yet national states and boundaries still constitute the core, not only of the world's basic political structure, but also of most humans' sense of their political universe. Despite global changes in climate, technology, and the economy, we still stubbornly feel national.

The power of this sentiment can be seen in the continued efforts of Kurds, Palestinians, and others to seek national states. From the Basque Country to Xinjiang, most nationalist movements have little hope of success but, nonetheless, remain potent forces. Yet, precisely because national states have been tied so closely to ethnic cleansing, reworking borders to make them more just is unlikely to move us forward. Instead, our goal should be to create transnational structures that allow us to recognize the limitations of national boundaries without altering them. Rather than changing where borderlines are drawn, we should concentrate on making them less clear-cut, through free trade zones, autonomous districts, and other mechanisms aimed at blurring sovereignty.

In a messy world, messy solutions may be best.

*Howard Eissenstat, a history professor at St. Lawrence University focusing on the late Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic, is a Turkey country specialist at Amnesty International.*

### **CROSSING VIRTUAL BORDERS EUN-JU KIM**

With over 90 percent of the world's population within reach of mobile phones, telecommunications already connects people across national borders. Our next challenge is to bring the Internet to the two-thirds of the world's population that remain unconnected. The Asia-Pacific region contains the majority of the world's population and has borders between some 40 countries. But it also has the widest gap in telecommunications development. South Korea is at the top; Papua New Guinea near the bottom, all the way at 142nd out of 155 countries, according to the International Communication Technology Development Index.

The International Telecommunication Regulations treaty helps determine how telecom facilities and services operate across borders. The treaty, recently revised for the first time in 24 years, illustrates the deep divides across both technical and economic-political borders. The treaty separates the world into two camps—those who signed the document and those who did not. The main objective is to facilitate international telecommunications through competitive roaming rates, secure and robust international networks, and harmonized global emergency services. Other objectives include improving energy efficiency, reducing e-waste, combatting spam, and, most importantly, connecting the unconnected. Unfortunately, some countries fear regulating the Internet and have declined to sign the treaty.

All stakeholders in the diverse and dynamic Asia-Pacific region need to work together to build a ubiquitous, borderless, inclusive, and forward-thinking telecommunication society for all, without regard for gender, age, nationality, culture, location, physical ability, or any other circumstance that can serve as a *de facto* border. Through international telecommunications agreements, we can break down borders.

*Eun-Ju Kim is currently the regional director for the International Telecommunications Union in Asia and the Pacific, based in Thailand.*

## **FRAUGHT ASIAN BOUNDARIES BONNIE GLASER**

When the Communist Party came to power in China in 1949, it inherited 23 territorial disputes, most with countries with which it shares land borders. By the late 2000s, most of these disputes had been solved. Contested land borders remain with India, Bhutan,

and North Korea. Of these, only the border disagreement with India remains dangerous. China and India fought a border war in 1962, and sporadic incidents still occur along the Line of Actual Control. A decade of boundary negotiations have made scant progress—deals hampered by domestic politics and lack of political will, primarily among Indian leaders and a parliament that refuses to give up an inch of territory.

At sea, Beijing has disputes over islands and maritime boundaries with Japan and South Korea in the East China Sea, and with Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan in the South China Sea. Deep nationalist passions as well as demand for fish and potential energy resources make settlement of these disputes difficult. Sovereignty over disputed land features should be resolved prior to delimitation of maritime boundaries. If sovereignty cannot be settled through negotiations among claimants, then the dispute should be submitted to international arbitration. However, this requires all claimants' consent, and many refuse. If sovereignty over land features can be resolved, then maritime boundary delimitation can be addressed under the provisions of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. In the South China Sea, an important first step is for China to clarify fully its position on the map it submitted to the UN in 2009. Joint development schemes among disputing parties could help manage disputes and pave the way for negotiated settlements in the future.

*Bonnie Glaser is a senior adviser for Asia at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.*

## **BORDER MANAGEMENT TSUNEO AKAHA**

Borders are conventionally intended to serve as boundaries between persons or communities of people, be they between empires,

regions, nations, states, municipalities, or local communities. Borders have played important roles—political, legal, fiscal, and administrative. Over time, people living in each unit develop a shared identity. This collective identity facilitates the political, economic, and social-cultural integration within each community. However, as borders have been artificially created, so they have been artificially redrawn. In the modern world, the globalizing forces of capital, finance, trade, service, technology, information, and even people have removed and continue to remove the non-legal and non-physical elements of the borders. Many boundaries, however, continue to play an important role in managing intra- and inter-community affairs both within and between contemporary states.

Countries should adopt a set of principles that take into account geographic, historical, political, ecological, and cultural diversities when altering their borders. Frontiers must be sanctioned by the directly affected communities and should refrain from dividing and separating existing communities. Should a border within a community be unavoidable, members should be allowed to engage with each other as they have previously. The management of border areas should facilitate, rather than hamper trade, communication, and other activities that are mutually beneficial to communities on both sides. Cross-border disagreements should be resolved through negotiation, if necessary involving mediation. And finally, states sharing a border should consult each other about any significant changes in border management.

*Tsuneo Akaha is a professor of international policy studies and director of the Center for East Asian Studies at California's Monterey Institute of International Studies.*

## POWERED LANDSCAPES

### ANSSI PAASI

Borders had long been seen merely as lines that separate power containers—or states. Now, borders are often understood as processes, institutions, symbols, or even networks. This wider understanding raises a question of location amid overlapping landscapes. Borders are embedded in emotional landscapes related to state ideologies and national identities. Think how much emotional bordering and us versus them thinking is loaded into national education, independence days, or memorialized landmarks such as military cemeteries.

Borders are part of the landscapes of control where mobility is monitored by increasingly technical devices. New technologies associated with border control are not located solely in border areas but may exist anywhere.

This complexity implies that there is no universal solution on how borders should be drawn. History and context make a difference, and they have to be carefully considered in any exercise of border drawing.

*Anssi Paasi is a professor of geography at the University of Oulu, in Oulu, Finland. He has written extensively on border theory and on the Finnish-Russian border.*

## FREEDOM TO CROSS

### HENK VAN HOUTUM

One of the major border issues is the unjust inequality of the freedom to cross borders. Those born, like me, with a Dutch passport, have more freedom of movement to seek work than a person born in Senegal. This discriminatory border policy determines the lives of millions based merely on where they were born. A striking example of such unjust border politics is the European Union, which has

fallen into the territorial trap of the nation-state. The European Union distinguishes between citizens from countries who must request a visa (135 states) and those who need not (60 states). Among those requiring visas are states with a significantly higher number of Muslims. Individual freedom of movement within the European Union is a matter of being born in a country with the right god.

The difficulty of moving legally for a large portion of the world results in irregular, dangerous, and often deadly attempts to enter into this planet's gated communities, like the European Union. Those who manage to survive the illegal journey will often be locked up as criminals. It is time to stop this global apartheid in border politics. We need border policies that offer equal chances for mobility and discriminate only on the basis of competency, not where one is born.

*Henk van Houtum, head of the Netherlands' Nijmegen Center for Border Research, is co-editor-in-chief of the Journal of Borderlands Studies and a research professor of the geopolitics of borders at the University of Bergamo.*

#### **BOUNDARY POSTURING RICHARD SCHOFIELD**

China's recent, highly visible posturings on the East China Sea remind us of the challenges involved in discussing contemporary boundary and territorial disputes. In the last couple of decades, the social sciences have developed sophisticated critical methods to explore bounding and bordering processes that center around how boundaries are encountered, experienced, and negotiated. Yet states

continue to behave crudely in their disputes. Perhaps, instead of classical modes of operation, maybe we ought to examine how to change our methods.

We need to connect the legal and technical details of dispute more closely with their political drivers. A multidisciplinary approach to the study of international boundary disputes has never really had success—largely because the disciplines haven't talked to each other as effectively as they might. Technical experts will often bemoan academics' imprecision in use of terms and definitions when discussing the evolution of particular boundaries—a complaint that will certainly be echoed by international lawyers. Conversely, historians and social scientists cannot always relate to technical analyses devoid of their human context, even if many of these relate to maritime boundary-drawing. And too often there has been a tendency to view a boundary question resolved under international law as a regional problem that's been solved—clearly a misplaced notion if we look at the recent history of complex disputes.

*Richard Schofield, is a senior lecturer in the department of geography, Kings College London, and author, most recently, of Arabian Boundaries 1966-1971 (Cambridge University Press).*



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