

OFFICE OF THE GEOGRAPHER AND GLOBAL ISSUES  
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GUIDANCE BULLETIN

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**GUIDANCE ON THE DEPICTION OF THE  
BHUTAN-CHINA BOUNDARY**

**Background:** For decades, Bhutan and China have depicted sections of their mountainous boundary on maps differently. These discrepancies on current Bhutanese and Chinese maps are as much as twenty-five kilometers wide and add up to 1475 square kilometers in area. Unlike most international boundaries, no historic treaties or delimitation agreements define the alignment of the boundary.

Public statements by Bhutanese and Chinese government officials note progress in reconciling their boundary during their 23-year-long negotiations. Still it remains unclear from current maps and reporting where and what changes have been agreed upon. Until such changes are published by the parties, this Office recommends that dual indefinite lines be shown as boundaries in discrepant areas where scale and context permit on U.S. Government maps. Discrepant areas between the two lines should be labeled “Unresolved Sovereignty” in a typeface that reflects neither political administration nor topography.

**Boundary Alignment:** Press articles on the boundary negotiations refer to four discrepant areas, three of which have been reportedly resolved. Details on which sections and to what extent they were resolved have not been made available. The two largest areas which stand out when the boundaries of both states overlay one another are shown in the sketch map below and labeled A and B:

Area A corresponds to a section of northwest Bhutan from 28°14'26"N 089°49'09"E eastward to 28°03'45"N 090°26'36"E. Bhutanese maps show the boundary aligned originally along on the notional watershed first sketched on British Survey of India maps; Chinese maps show the boundary following the actual watershed. This results in a 1325 square kilometer discrepancy.

Area B corresponds to a section of western Bhutan just north of the tripoint with India from 27°29'40"N 088°59'32"E northeastward to 27°37'14"N 089°07'30"E: The 150-square-kilometer discrepancy derives from which country claims sovereignty over the western slopes of the Masang Kyungdu range in the southern Himalayas. China again draws its line to hug the watershed; Bhutan has its line further west in the valley.

The other remaining discrepant sections have not been confirmed from available medium-scale map sources.

**Boundary Symbolology:** Both the Bhutanese and Chinese depicted lines should be represented with an undifferentiated indefinite international boundary symbol, indicating that the U.S. Government is cognizant of but does not take a position on the conflicting alignments. If no symbol differentiation is made between definite and indefinite international boundaries, the discrepant sector boundaries may be labeled “indefinite” if space and scale permits. All other non-discrepant sections of the Bhutan-China boundary should be depicted with a standard full international boundary symbol and no label.

**Color or shading:** Between the dual lines in the discrepant areas, the color tint or shading, if any, should be either a neutral white or gray or alternating stripes of the same color as used for Bhutan and China.

**Area Label:** If scale and space permits, the label “Unresolved Sovereignty” should identify the interior of the discrepant areas within either the body of the map or the legend.

**Notes and Disclaimers:** None are required except the standard disclaimer: “Boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative.”

