Political geographers have long been concerned with international disputes resulting from ineffectively established boundaries. Some of these conflicts have led to the severing of diplomatic relations between states but have escaped general public notice. Others, more extreme in nature, have produced newspaper headlines, particularly if they resulted in armed clashes between the competing claimants.

In modern terms most international boundaries are finite lines delimited by treaty, located on accompanying large scale maps and demarcated on the ground. Along these boundaries the effective sovereignty of one state is separated from that of another state. Times are long past, in most parts of the world at least, where the sovereignty of one state is separated from that of another by a wide frontier in which its authority gradually diminishes as the state gives up its rights and obligations over the territory. However, the tidal swamplands of the Rann of Kutch separating part of Pakistan and India was until 1969 just such a border zone—unsettled, and for the most part unused, into which Pakistanis and Indians intruded from time to time but over which neither state exercised exclusive control.
From June to November summer monsoon rains combined with flood tides from the Arabian Sea produce a vast saline swamp within the economically unproductive Rann. Isolated rocky hills called bets, scattered throughout the approximately 8,000 square miles of territory, assume the characteristic of islands at this time. As the summer monsoon abates, the water level drops rapidly; and salt flat conditions become dominant.2

**Background of the Dispute**

The Rann separates Gujerat state in India from Pakistan. The northern part of Gujerat state abutting upon the Rann is the district of Kutch and was formerly one of the states of Western India States Agency. It became a part of Gujerat in 1960 following the formation of this state. The southern segment of Pakistan, abutting upon the Rann, is the province of Sind (see Map).

A partial demarcation of the western boundary in the Rann of Kutch occurred in 1923-24 growing out of a 1913 dispute over the southern limits of Sind. The boundary had been determined as extending from the mouth of Sir Creek to its headwaters, along the center of the navigable channel; then due east to \(23^\circ 58'\) N, \(68^\circ 48'\) E; and finally due north to the northern edge of the Rann.3 Demarcation pillars had been positioned along this route. With independence, Pakistan, in July 1948, raised the issue of the Sind-Kutch frontier delimitation east of the earlier demarcated boundary. The problem arose periodically thereafter.

Opportunities for friction were produced by herders from Sind and from Kutch moving their animals across the Rann during the winter dry season in search of pasturage. Skirmishing occurred on several occasions. Finally during the winter of 1964-65, when feelings between the two states were high, clashes occurred along the northern perimeter of the Rann resulting in intervention by Indian and Pakistani troops; and bitter fighting ensued.

One may regard this warfare as symptomatic of conflicting national passions generally between the two countries rather than specifically in relation to the economically unproductive Rann. It may be assumed the Rann or Kutch conflict, in part, grew out of the disagreement between India and Pakistan over the status of Kashmir, a territorial dispute which had not been resolved at the time the two became independent sovereign states. Shortly after partition, the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan was established in an attempt to mediate the conflict which quickly arose over Kashmir. This resulted in the establishment of a Military Observer Group in 1949 designed to oversee the ceasefire line that had been agreed upon by the two states. Other efforts by the United Nations to mediate a reasonably stable arrangement in Kashmir were unsuccessful.

Border incidents again flared briefly in Kashmir in 1954. Yet by 1960, India and Pakistan were able to conclude treaties concerning the Indus River water supply and segments of the unresolved boundary between the two states. Despite these token agreements, Pakistan remained frustrated over its failure to obtain a plebiscite in Kashmir and over the reticence of the United States in support of her claims.

Pakistan concluded an agreement with China in 1963 in which her right to control certain areas in Kashmir was recognized. Yet it was prudent that she did not capitalize on India’s border conflict with China in 1962 to make gains in Kashmir. Although conversations between India and Pakistan again
materialized in October 1964, they accomplished little.

Border incidents increased between the two states as Pakistan attempted to bring the problem of Kashmir to world attention. Yet, Pakistan needed a more dramatic means of opposing India's activities. Thus it may be assumed on the one hand that the outbreak of hostilities in the Rann of Kutch in the spring of 1965 was provoked by Pakistan to forestall the gradual loss of Kashmir that India’s policies threatened to produce. On the other hand, it may well have been a provocation on the part of India as a warning to Pakistan over the Kashmir issue. Possibly, it was a testing device to determine the military strength of the opposing forces. Then, too, the rumored existence of petroleum and natural gas in the Rann marshlands cannot be overlooked completely as a factor in the thinking of these power-deficient states. Both India and Pakistan claimed that the other had made the initial provocation by invading past established positions along the border.

British Mediation and United Nations' Arbitration

Following several weeks of fighting, British intercessions between the two states were able to produce an informal break in hostilities. During the pause, Britain attempted to mediate a formal cease-fire as well as an agreement to negotiate the Rann incident. Neither the Indians nor the Pakistanis met directly with each other during these efforts, but rather the British High Commissioners representing the two states acted as their chief intermediaries. Both claimants agreed upon the desirability of a cease-fire and of further negotiations to establish a final settlement.

It is impossible to overestimate the mediation efforts of Prime Minister Wilson between Shastri and Ayub Khan at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Conference in June 1965 in the final resolution of the Rann incident. The agreement signed on June 30 as a result of Britain's mediation included provision for a formal cease-fire, procedures for troop withdrawals, for a meeting of ministers to negotiate a settlement of the border, and for the creation of an arbitration tribunal empowered with the task of rendering a decision if the ministers were unable to reach a settlement.4

Since neither India nor Pakistan could themselves arrive at a settlement to the problem, the Indo-Pakistan Western Boundary Case Tribunal was established as agreed, with the Secretary General of the United Nations appointing Gunnar K. A. Lagergren, a noted Swedish jurist, as chairman. Its two other members were Pakistan's nominee, Nasollah Entezam, an Iranian diplomat, and India's nominee, Ales Bebler, a Yugoslav lawyer. Both parties committed themselves in advance to abide unquestionably by the verdict of this International Tribunal.

These representatives met in Geneva, Switzerland, from February 15, 1966, until July 14, 1967. Oral hearings were held during this time, but the final award of the Tribunal is dated February 19, 1968. The bases for the claims of both states were part of the Award but not the great bulk of data, which included about 350 maps and 10,000 typewritten pages.5 Both states furnished documentation of occupation and administration of specific territories and produced maps confirming their claims.

Indian and Pakistani Claims

Pakistan submitted evidence to establish that the northern half of the
Rann had been under the effective control and administration of Sind both subsequent to and during the British period. She further claimed that the Rann was a marine feature; and, as such, the delimited boundary should be governed by the principles of the median line. Furthermore, Pakistan asserted that the isolated bets within the Rann should be allocated on the basis of nearness to shore. Finally, since the Rann of Kutch was a boundary with width, it needed to be reduced to a widthless line. Thus, Pakistan claimed a line roughly equal to the latitude of 24° N. 6

India’s challenge to the Pakistani claim was based partly on the assertion of the Rao of Kutch that the Rann lay within his territory, an assertion that had not been contradicted by the British authorities for a period of approximately seventy-five years prior to independence. In addition, India contended that extending over an equal period of time Great Britain was the chief power in the subcontinent and had taken official action by which it acknowledged the Rann to be Kutch territory. Finally, from about the beginning of the twentieth century until partition, the British government in India began showing on their official maps a conterminous boundary between Sind and Kutch or between Sind and the States of Western India. Based upon this evidence, India thus claimed a historical boundary that extended close to the northern edge of the Rann. 7

Accepting these and other acts of British authority to be acknowledgments of Kutch sovereignty over the Rann and consequently of India’s sovereignty as successor to Kutch, the Chairman of the Tribunal, with whom the Iranian delegate agreed, said: 8

I conclude as follows. In respect of those sectors of the Rann in relation to which no specific evidence in the way of display of Sind authority, or merely trivial or isolated evidence of such a character, supports Pakistan’s claim, I pronounce in favour of India. These sectors comprise about ninety percent of the disputed territory. However, in respect of sectors where a continuous and, for the region, intensive Sind activity, meeting with no effective opposition from the Kutch side, is established, I am of the opinion that Pakistan has made out a better and superior title.

It becomes evident that the Tribunal based its award primarily upon Indian historical rights to Rann territory. 9 Yet in certain instances it considered Indian presence along the northern edge of the Rann, close to certain cities of Pakistan, as destabilizing and even provocative. Therefore, political considerations were significant in certain areas in positioning the award line.

To implement the Award, an “Agreement of the Rule of Procedure for the Demarcation of the Boundary to be Determined by the Tribunal” was negotiated. This Rule of Procedure involved the nomination of a representative from each government to oversee the demarcation work. These delegates met in New Delhi to reach a decision on a variety of matters including: 10 the number of personnel in each team; the kind, number, and spacing of the boundary pillars; and the detailed instructions for the guidance of the field staff. In addition, control points were to be ascertained; pillar positions established; and a final Theodolite Traverse was to be made to provide coordinates of all the boundary pillars. With the help of these coordinates, a plane table survey was to be carried out and strip maps produced. Field work was to be accom-
plished by March 31, 1968; and the strip maps completed for authentica-
tion by the Plenepotentiaries of the two countries by May 31, 1969.11

Boundary Demarcation

Following these and other guidelines set forth by the Rule of Procedure, the boundary was surveyed by the demar-
cation team with Indian and Pakistani officials meeting periodically to review the progress. Due to the imprecise nature of the topographical features in the Rann, the boundary is most often represented by straight lines drawn through certain basic points.

Field work involved the construction of 59 control pillars and an additional 847 cement boundary pillars along the 255-mile boundary, one at each change in direction with not less than three pillars every mile.12 Designated as WT on the accompanying map (Fig. 1), the Western Terminus of the new international boundary is located at 23° 58' N, 68° 48' E. From the Western Terminus (WT), Judge Lagergren ruled that the boundary "shall lie along the vertical line as demarcated on the ground."13 This statement refers to the 1923-24 demarcation as noted earlier. Eastward to its intersection with the Rajastan state of India, the boundary was surveyed in a jagged pattern with straight lines drawn through the previously established control points. The Eastern Terminus is designated as ET on the map.

No attempt has been made in this paper to examine each segment of the boundary in detail. However, the boundary as delimited by the chairman of the Tribunal and fixed on the Survey of India map has been located on the map as accurately as possible.14

With demarcation accomplished, important hills and grazing land in the northern part of the disputed Rann as well as Chhad Bet, a strategic post and the scene of bitter fighting in April 1965, became part of Pakistan. In addition, several water inlets were incorporated within the same state. Most significant of these were the two inlets on either side of Nagar Parkar, near the eastern terminus of the award line. Judge Lagergren ruled that "it would be inequitable to recognize these inlets as foreign territory" and in fact it would be conducive to "friction and conflict" between the two countries.15 Pakistan gained approximately 350 square miles of territory from the award of the Tribunal and India 3200 square miles. The greater part of the area awarded to India is saline swamp and marshland or dry salt flats, depending upon the season of the year.

To serve as part of the demarcation document fifteen sets of strip maps were prepared and authenticated with the signatures of government representatives from both states. Mr. Kewal Singh, Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, signed for India; and Mr. S. M. Yusuf, Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, signed on behalf of Pakistan.17 Upon completion of the signing, which occurred in a formal ceremony in Islamabad, the maps were sent to the International Tribunal. In turn, the Tribunal notified the Secretary General of the United Nations. The Kutch award has been deposited with the United Nations and now is preserved in its archives in New York City. Following one final meeting in Stockholm, Sweden the Indo-Pakistan Western Boundary Case Tribunal was dissolved. This action successfully completed the process of boundary delimitation and demarcation within the Rann of Kutch.
Conclusion

International action pursued in the Rann of Kutch boundary dispute accomplished two distinct goals. Mediation efforts achieved a ceasefire and provided the immediate first aid to stop the hostilities, yet final resolution of the problem was arbitrated under the auspices of the United Nations.

In a period of history when force and violence tend to be the most commonly used means of settling international boundary disputes, the fact that arbitration was found acceptable is a tribute to the wisdom of the leaders of both states.

At the writing of this paper the Rann still has not been proven to possess any significant intrinsic value. Neither the existence of the rumored petroleum nor natural gas has been discovered. However, since boundaries are expressed as vertical planes rather than surface lines alone, the limit of the two states' sovereignty and thus their mining operations are firmly established in the event of future mineral discoveries and exploitation.

Unfortunately the basic territorial dispute concerning Kashmir which helped precipitate the Rann crisis has not been entirely resolved and the situation still remains potentially explosive.