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FIGHTING FOR REPUTATION: CHINA'S DETERRENCE POLICY AND CONCERNS ABOUT CREDIBILITY

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my family for their unwavering love and support.

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FIGHTING FOR REPUTATION:

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ABSTRACT

States under threat may choose to initiate war not only because their interests are hurt, but also because they want to establish or defend their credibility, so that they do not have to fight later wars. This dissertation looks at deterrence situations where the defender of the status quo responds to challenges with force and links its concern with credibility to the decision. When states are expressly worried about the repercussions of backing down, they are more likely to fight. By shining a spotlight on the defender rather than the challenger, this study enriches the discussion on why and how deterrence fails. By linking the decision to fight to a concern about reputation, this study also provides a new framework for analyzing deterrence and foreign policy.

In addition, the dissertation joins the debate on Chinese use of force. All three case studies cast China as the defender that ultimately decided to fight the challenger decisively. In each case, aside from the real and perceived security interests at stake,

China's concern with its reputation for resolve contributed to the decision. The reputation for resolve became a security interest in and of itself, serving to dispel future infringements and well worth fighting for. China was particularly worried about its reputation when it feared a collusion of foreign and domestic enemies and sought to internalize the lesson that fighting now means enjoying peace later.

This study uses in-depth, qualitative case studies with a heavy reliance on textural analysis of first and secondary sources. The three case studies are China's intervention in the Korean War in 1950, China's border war with India in 1962, and Sino-Soviet clashes in 1969. While only three case studies are selected, they are structured along the same questions on deterrence and credibility to focus the reader's attention on the hypothesis. The case studies are selected because they were robust tests; they were all drawn-out deterrence situations in which Chinese leaders pondered explicitly on the role of credibility.

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INTRODUCTION

States under threat may choose to initiate war not only because their interests are hurt, but also because they want to establish or defend their credibility, so that they do not have to fight later wars. This study looks at deterrence situations where the defender responds to challenges to the status quo with force and links its concern with credibility to the decision. When states are expressly concerned about the repercussions of backing down, they are more likely to fight. The study looks at three case studies in depth, all with China as the defender. As such, it contributes both to the literature on deterrence and that on Chinese foreign and military policy.

Literature overview

Deterrence: the theory

Deterrence theory originated as an attempt to use rational choice to simplify and explain a particular type of interstate conflict. Simply put, deterrence is the attempt to dissuade an enemy from undertaking an undesirable action by threatening to retaliate with force. The underlying principle, that force can be used to deter or dissuade, is certainly nothing new, but as many scholars have argued, deterrence as a concept flourished with the burgeoning Cold War and accompanied the invention and use of

nuclear weapons.[1] The reorganization of the world order into a bipolar system led by the United States and the Soviet Union pitted their allies broadly against each other, locked in an active competition for dominance in both core and peripheral regions of the world. Nuclear weapons, on the other hand, made total war unthinkable yet posed new complications for limited wars. Capable of annihilating entire cities in seconds, these weapons enabled states for the first time in the history of warfare to punish enemy states before defeating their troops in the battlefield.[2] Threats, therefore, acquire much graver weight and have to be taken seriously. On the other hand, the awesome power of the weapons made threats less credible as the risk of escalation and retaliation carried unbearable consequences. Together the new pattern of state interaction and the transformative power of the new weapons focused people's minds on how to make deterrence successful so that total wars did not break out.

Deterrence, hardly a novel concept in international politics, took on newfound prominence. In a bipolar world in which main adversaries were seen as bent on challenging each other but also wary of the destruction of nuclear weapons, deterrence was thought to capture the majority of interstate conflicts. Conflicting strategic interests between the two superpowers and their allies meant that challenges were inevitable,

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[1] Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 18-34. For an overview of deterrence theory and various schools, see Christopher H. Achen and Duncan Snidal, "Rational Deterrence Theory and Comparative Case Studies," *World Politics*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (January 1989): 143-169.
[2] Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 21.

likely by taking territory from or casting influence over a country in the opposite camp. But such moves were seen as potentially destabilizing to the whole system and had to be stopped through deterrence. Understanding the dynamics of deterrence was particularly important not only for academic reasons but also for diplomacy, for successful deterrence would entail a de-escalation of conflicts and the avoidance of catastrophic war. Statesmen in major countries during the Cold War were consciously and unconsciously framing their policy decisions in terms of deterrence, and the outcomes of their policies became the fodder for deterrence scholars.

The concept has both a strategic and tactical component, with different implications. On a strategic level, the United States and the Soviet Union were entrenched in general deterrence to prevent each other from upsetting the existing balance of power in a material fashion. As direct war between the two superpowers became unthinkable with the invention of nuclear weapons and the acquisition of second-strike capabilities, general deterrence was seen as largely stable but also of lesser interest. More interesting are incidents of immediate deterrence, in which a state faces a specific challenge from an adversary and needs to deter it. This immediate deterrence makes up the bulk of actual deterrence cases and is the subject of this dissertation. In the Cold War context, immediate deterrence usually takes place within a context of porous general deterrence, and by definition it means that general deterrence can be eroded to the point

of breaking down in isolated places. If general deterrence were completely fail-safe, and the two camps refrained from any challenge to the status quo, immediate deterrence could not have happened.

Within immediate deterrence, extended deterrence also captured particular attention, especially for students of American foreign policy. In extended deterrence, the state defending the status quo had to fend off challenges targeting its protectorate or ally. Because the intent of the two superpowers defending their respective home territories was regarded as beyond doubt, the majority of early deterrence scholars focused on understanding and explaining extended deterrence. In the context of foreign policy issues at the time, this attention was understandable, as the US was keen to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining advantage first in Europe, then in Asia. Most scholars and diplomats assumed that this would be the area where most of the challenges would come from, where defense would be open to question. The task of defending its allies in far-flung areas of the world also posed unique challenges for deterrence scholars.

Unlike other types of war initiation, deterrence seems logical and sequential, and success is seen at least in part as a result of careful design. The defender takes stock of a challenger's actions, threatens to respond by a variety of tools and communication mechanisms, and the challenger either attacks or backs down after weighing the benefits of attacking versus the risks of escalation and punishment. The crucial question quickly

turns to, how could one achieve deterrence success? Given the construction of the deterrence process, it appeared that a clever act of deterring could dissuade enemies effectively, whereas a blunder could lead to deterrence failure.

Early scholars boiled down deterrence policy to three factors: commitment, capabilities, and the communication of commitment.[3] Commitment, or the intent to protect certain interests, was treated as a given. The defender was presumed to be committed to its interests. It is a prerequisite for deterrence to work – without commitment deterrence is unnecessary – but it is also often left in an abstract, unexplained form, especially in extended deterrence. As Thomas C. Schelling points out, it is difficult to put commitment in concrete terms and articulate what an ally is committed to doing for another, and threats are very difficult to establish: "saying so, unfortunately, does not make it true; and if it is true, saying so does not always make it believed."[4] Capabilities are what is used to coerce the challenger. Because of the terrifying destruction of nuclear power, capabilities were also most often regarded as universal and unequivocal, especially for nuclear powers.

Since both commitment and capabilities were assumed to be self-evident, and states were assumed to be rational actors capable of cost-benefit analysis, failures of

[3] For an excellent review and critique of early deterrence theory, see Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 58-83.
[4] Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 35.

actual deterrence incidents therefore could only be blamed on insufficient communication or misunderstanding of that commitment. It is not that commitment was weak; it was simply misunderstood. By implication, if the defender had communicated more effectively, the challenger might have backed down. The emphasis on communication therefore led to a fascination with signaling and efforts to predict the challenger's reaction to certain signals with the aid of game theory. But the use of game theory further simplified deterrence into a highly stylized interaction where both parties base their decisions on the material pay-off of feasible policies, and outcomes are predictable.

However, this "normative-prescriptive" branch of the theory seriously limited its applicability to real-world deterrence situations.[5] The theory was based on either misleading or simplistic assumptions about the nature of the Cold War and the process of decision-making. Actors were portrayed as unitary and rational, capable of weighing difficult options with perfect information and freedom from normative concerns. The actual content of commitment policy was often ignored, substituted with a binary understanding that commitment is either there or not. Although these assumptions may have helped in understanding the intrinsic logic of deterrence, they provided very little guidance to actual applications of deterrence. Strategic and foreign policy goals, the most important context for conflicts, were cast aside.

[5] George and Smoke, 59-60.

Having realized the shortcomings of deductive reasoning based on abstract models, scholars such as Alexander George and Richard Smoke began to conduct large-scale, comparative case studies of immediate deterrence in order to build an inductive and historical theory that takes into account the complexity of conflicts. From these case studies, George and Smoke conclude that the key to deterrence outcomes is the challenger's assessment of the defender's commitment and the calculability of the risks of its policy.[6] Both are necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for deterrence success, but the latter has more predictive power over deterrence outcomes.[7] They argue that the outcome of any deterrence situation depends fundamentally upon the grand strategy and foreign policy of the defender – in this case the US – and cannot replace foreign policy where there is none. Later, Paul K. Huth and Bruce Russett analyze the outcome of more than fifty deterrence cases and argue similarly that it is the defender's level of actual commitment to its ally, demonstrated through foreign aid and alliance relationships, that determines the challenger's decision of whether to launch its offensive. Politics is reintroduced into deterrence theory to provide a richer context for outcomes. However, these scholars still clearly predicate their framework on expected utility or rational choice, the idea that challengers decide on the course of action that incurs lesser costs.[8] They

[6] Ibid., 519-532.
[7] Ibid., ch. 17.
[8] Paul K. Huth and Bruce Russett. "What Makes Deterrence Work?" *World Politics* 36, no. 04 (1984): 496-526.

fine-tune the variables with the aid of comparative case studies but do not overturn the underlying assumptions of the earlier scholars.

In contrast, other scholars question the validity of the rational model itself. Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow, and Janis Gross Stein argue that the mainstream approach to understanding deterrence outcomes, which focuses on the impact of the defender's commitment and actions on the decisions of the challenger, is misconstrued. Instead, leaders in challenger states are often internally motivated, forced by domestic weaknesses to provoke international crises in order to distract the public. These challenger leaders are particularly prone to misperceptions that blind them to even clearly demonstrated commitment and strength of the defender. Deterrence, in this case, is difficult to succeed, and assurance may work better than aggressive tactics in forestalling conflicts.[9] They also disagree with Ruth and Russett on what causes deterrence successes. Rather than credit the deterring nation's efforts in demonstrating and communicating its resolve and strength, one should find out the internally driven reasons for the challenger to withdraw from the confrontation. In many cases, the challenger does not in fact wish to change the status quo to begin with, so the question of whether a state has been successfully deterred is moot. Deterrence success could be created if scholars believed that the Soviet Union and China were actively seeking to upset the balance of power, and their failure to mount

[9] Robert Jervis , Richard Ned Lebow, and Janice Gross Stein. *Psychology and Deterrence*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985, 203-232.

material attacks would then be codified as success.[10] This wholesale challenge on the assumptions of rational deterrence model and Cold War history earned them the name of revisionist scholars.

While Jervis, Lebow and Stein's effort to shift some attention to the domestic dynamics within the challenger state casts a new light on the theory, Huth and Russett vigorously reject the accusation that the rational deterrence theory is based on Cold-War assumptions. They point out that Lebow and Stein's critique of rational deterrence theory is influenced by "a tendency on their part to accept too readily the conclusions of the revisionist literature."[11] Too much emphasis on – and empathy with – the challenger's intentions would result in discounting the threat posed by the challenger and hence the number of deterrence cases.[12] While Huth and Russett are willing to allow for a role by psychological variables, they insist that the rational-choice framework remains robust and rigorous, as long as the case studies are treated consistently and studied systematically.

Elli Lieberman also points out that Lebow and Stein's internal-weakness thesis suffers from a theoretical paradox: even if leaders facing domestic challenges are tempted to initiate conflicts in order to distract or mobilize the domestic audience, they should realize their own vulnerability were their challenges to fail. Only stronger leaders can

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[10] See Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, "Deterrence: The Elusive Dependent Variable," *World Politics* 42, issue 03 (1990): 345-347.
[11] Huth and Russett, "Testing Deterrence Theory: Rigor Makes a Difference," *World Politics* 42, issue 04 (1990): 487.
[12] Ibid., 498-499.

accept the risks inherent in any military adventure; others should logically have valid reasons to seek compromises with the opponent.[13] Lebow and Stein suggest that beleaguered leaders may engage in self-deception through motivated biases to exaggerate the possibility of controlling the risks or, if war were to break out, that of winning the conflict.[14] Lieberman contends that such misperceptions, which Lebow and Stein seek to explain on cognitive and psychological terms, in fact represent the challenger's uncertainty towards either the defender's capabilities or its resolve. Improved rational deterrence theory can successfully account for the so-called gap between deterrence theory and deterrence as a practice of policy identified by Lebow and Stein.

The shift from abstract modeling to comparative case studies has led to a tremendous increase of historical richness, but as Christopher Cohen and Duncan Snidal point out in their critique of case studies, the richness has not resulted in much theory-building. A large number of cross-country, cross-time case studies often introduce a long list of factors or typology that do not lend themselves to parsimonious theories.[15] On the other hand, country specialists also often have doubts on the interpretation of individual case studies, demanding even more historical nuance. The tension between the original stylized theory and the attempt to test it through case studies is not easily resolved.

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[13] Elli Lieberman, "The Rational Deterrence Theory Debate: Is the Dependent Variable Elusive?" *Security Studies* 3, no.3 (1994): 387.
[14] Richard Ned Lebow, "The Deterrence Deadlock: Is There a Way Out?" in Jervis, Lebow and Stein, *Psychology and Deterrence*, 180.
[15] Christopher H. Achen and Duncan Snidal, "Rational Deterrence Theory and Comparative Case Studies," *World Politics* 41, No. 2 (1989):154-158.

Credibility: the underdeveloped variable

Since both commitment and capabilities of the defender need to be perceived and weighed by the challenger in order to have an impact on its decisions, the perceptive lens becomes the most significant but also the most difficult variable. This is where the credibility of the defender, especially when it is making threats, comes in. However, despite the obvious theoretical and substantive development of the field in the last half-century, Paul Huth argues that "as an explanatory variable, reputation is the least developed component of deterrence theory."[16] In the early stages, Schelling argues that it helps to not act completely rational in order to be credible.[17] Though the issue of perception focuses on the challenger's decision-making, credibility is key to perception. Patrick Morgan describes efforts to understand the process of cognition and decision-making on either the individual level, the group or organizational level, or the national actor level.[18] Their explanatory power varies, since certain variables – such as the idiosyncrasies of individual leaders – cannot be simplified into parsimonious variables, but the reputation of the defender logically affects calculations on all three levels. As such the question of reputation, or credibility, becomes the key factor that unifies varied

[16] Paul K. Huth, "Reputations and Deterrence: A Theoretical and Empirical Assessment", *Security Studies* 7, no.1 (1997): 97.
[17] Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 36-43.
[18] Patrick Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1977), ch.3.

channels of cognition.

Is commitment interdependent? In other words, does the challenger infer future behavior of the defender from its past record? What makes a country credible, and where does reputation come from? Some insist that commitment is cumulative, interdependent and that reputation is "one of the few things worth fighting over."[19] Stephen Maxwell, on the other end, asserts that reputation is case-specific and rarely accounts for deterrence outcomes, as commitment is interest-specific and hardly transferable.[20] It is also difficult to determine how reputation plays its role. Scholastic opinion suggests that reputation influences the challenger's assessment of the defender's commitment, yet how and what exactly the challenger observes in crises is hard to pinpoint. For example, even the debacle in the Vietnam War did not seem to have diminished American reputation in the long run, and US success in forcing the Soviet Union to withdraw its missiles from Cuba did not stop the latter from challenging American commitment later on. The simple assumption that a single victory can breed credibility needs to be questioned.

In very specific incidents, credibility may refer to the immediate credit-worthiness of a particular threat, and can be enhanced by clear, trusted communication channels or transparent display of force. Deterrence may be strengthened by careful planning and common sense. But the credibility as the subject of this dissertation and of deterrence

[19] Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 124.
[20] Stephen Maxwell, *Rationality in Deterrence*, Adelphi Papers, No. 50, August 1968: 19.

theory also covers something bigger, the overall reputation of the state and the likelihood that it would carry out its threats.

The apparent lack of agreement on the nature and role of reputation and credibility stems partly from the rational deterrence model that pictures deterrence as a clearly demarcated, objective and logical sequence in which actions convey an unequivocal message and bring about an anticipated impact on the other side. Instead, as Patrick Morgan argues persuasively, deterrence is necessarily a psychological relationship, the secret to its success not in possessing the wherewithal to defeat the opponent but in *convincing* the opponent of such.[21] If we accept that deterrence relies on the act of convincing, then the way the challenger interprets the signals sent by the defender becomes critical. A reputation for resolve can color a challenger's perception, giving more validity to threats. However, the variable is difficult to quantify and observe, and scholars often work backward from the outcome of deterrence: if a threat fails to deter, it must not have been sufficiently credible. This way of theorizing diminishes the role of credibility and leads attention elsewhere.

Defender: the undervalued actor

A bigger flaw in deterrence theory that impedes a fuller understanding of

[21] Morgan, 32.

reputation, however, is the setup of the sequence that stresses the initiatives of the challenger and downplays those of the defender. The theory posits that deterrence works against a challenge to the status quo and that the defender will defend the status quo through the threat of force. Thus, the defender needs only to lay bare its interests and ability to defend, and in turn the challenger needs to make the crucial decision of whether to pursue its initiative and call the defender's bluff. In this view, deterrence breaks down only in one fashion, when the challenger decides to test the defender's threat of retaliation. Of course, the defender's threat plays a significant role, but it is up to the challenger whether deterrence succeeds or fails.

Even though deterrence theory has benefited significantly in recent years from large-scale case studies, the focus remains on the actions of the challenger. George and Smoke argue that the *challenger's perception* of the defender's commitment, as well as its assessment of the controllability of risks, determine deterrence outcomes. Likewise, Huth and Russett's study emphasizes the defender's actual political ties to the protected ally as a decisive factor in influencing the *challenger's perceptions*. Morgan also stresses the effect of the *challenger's* fragmented decision-making on its perceptions.[22] The defender's decision-making structure, in contrast, receives not much treatment.

[22] George and Smoke, 519-532. Huth and Russett. "What Makes Deterrence Work?": 496-526. Morgan, *Deterrence*, 32.

Nothing in the logic of deterrence, however, dictates that only one party can be responsible for escalating pre-conflict confrontations to open conflicts. Deterrence, in the purest sense, is simply the threat of using force to dissuade a challenge. It says nothing about the sequence of events that follow. Some challenges may alter the status quo or change the defender's perception of the acceptability of the status quo to such a degree that the defender changes its assessment of how desirable it is to maintain the status quo. It may decide, in the course of the usually quite lengthy period of trying to interpret the opponent's intentions and influence its actions, to escalate the conflict initiated by the other side, to launch a preemptive attack, or to threaten the other side with such asymmetric force that the latter is forced to respond violently.

In short, the defender could play a much greater role than commonly believed in deciding the outcome of deterrence, especially failures. The theory so far treats the defender's actions as a variable that feeds into the thinking of the challenger. Yet the defender is also in the position to decide outcomes by going to war before the challenger has a chance to. Moreover, the crucial variable of credibility is all the more interesting in the defender's own perception. This dissertation attempts to contribute to the literature on deterrence theory by pointing out this much-overlooked variable and exploring its effect.

Current theorizing on deterrence also suffers from overconcentration on cases within the context of a single episode of general deterrence, namely the nuclear standoff

between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Although this conflict deserves attention, it has led to a preference for highly stylized models because direct conflicts are unthinkable and have to be mapped conceptually. Lessons drawn from studying two superpowers equipped with vast nuclear arsenals are not necessarily applicable to other areas of the world or other bilateral relations, either. This focus on the United States also reinforces the other misperception mentioned above – the tendency to equate the defender in a deterrence situation with the defender of the broader status quo world order. It was largely assumed that the United States had no intention of challenging the Soviet Union's influence or possessions in the absence of provocations, and that its primary goal was to prevent conflicts; the same, however, is not often said about the Soviet Union.

The literature on US deterrence policy, however, is the one exception to the general lack of interest in the defender's concern with credibility. Scholars describe the US as troubled by its reputation, often choosing to fight even when vital interests were not involved for the sake of credibility. However, this literature makes only a limited contribution to deterrence theory because the US was regarded as an exception, and no comparable study was done on the Soviet Union or China. US was deemed different because it had to lead a large alliance from a remote offshore location, and its democratic form of government meant that public support for military conflicts or expensive foreign

policy initiatives cannot always be guaranteed.[23] Add to that the conviction that the Soviet camp harbored deeply hostile and aggressive policies, this strategic disadvantage as a democratic, offshore leader bred fear for being perceived as irresolute by enemies and friends alike.

Skeptics could argue that the US experience may not apply to other powers. The US had the unique advantage of overwhelming strength and an all-encompassing grand strategy, which means that it has more security options than middle-range states and can "afford" to fight for prestige. Smaller and burgeoning powers may not have the luxury of using force against challenges that do not immediately undermine national security. However, the same fear of being seen as irresolute applies to smaller and nondemocratic states as well. Even the US did not always consider itself secure in relative power comparisons with the Soviet Union, so small states with limited resources could also choose to use force to defend their reputation. The exceptionalism of the US may not be as great as it appears.

Deterrence vs. Compellence

Scholars of security policy also draw a distinction between deterrence and compellence, both coercive acts short of war. On the analytical level, the definition for

[23] See Patrick Morgan, "Saving Face for the Sake of Deterrence," in Jervis, Lebow and Stein, *Psychology and Deterrence*, 125-152.

each act seems clean-cut and self-contained. Deterrence presents a definite beginning (an opponent considers an undesirable move), a coercive instrument (the defender threatens to use force or other forms of punishment), and an intention to persuade the challenger to give up its designs. It seems purely defensive, though the threat of violence is evoked for this purpose. In the other type of coercion – compellence, the challenger has already carried out the challenge to the defender and moved the dial. The status quo has become status quo ante. Schelling and other scholars therefore see a clear difference between the two security challenges; the defender seeks to defend the status quo in deterrence, but restore the status quo ante in compellence by coercing its enemy to *reverse* the unfavorable action.[24] The two are viewed as similar yet distinctive types of conflicts, and it is often argued that deterrence is easier to achieve than compellence because it does not require the very public reversal of one's actions, which carries prohibitive political costs. In the debate between Huth and Russett on one side and Jervis and Lebow on the other, much effort is spent on classifying cases correctly. If a deterrence case is in fact compellence, which relies on a different set of factors in order to succeed and is more difficult to begin with, its outcome should not be used to test the validity of deterrence theories.

Just as deterrence is assumed to be purely defensive, compellence is portrayed as

[24] Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 69-71.

clearly offensive. Alexander George derives the concepts of coercive diplomacy and blackmail from compellence and argues that compellence implies heavy reliance on coercion.[25] However, insisting that deterrence and compellence are mutually exclusive would ignore the complexity of deterrence situations. It is often very difficult to determine whether a move is a mere challenge to deterrence or a material encroachment of the status quo that needs to be repelled. Also, a threat of retaliation, if challenges do not stop, may be interpreted by the adversary as an attempt to coerce it to do as it wishes. In the cases in which both sides have an incentive to portray themselves as the defender (which would include most cases), the interpretation of the event rests on what the status quo is and what a challenge is. These questions concern the judgment of state behavior in the Cold War and remain the subjects of important contention among country specialists and Cold War historians.

Empirically, deterrence scenarios, especially those involving two neighbors, are usually not as clear cut as extended deterrence. Challenges to borders, which make up a substantial portion of inter-state conflicts, tend to consist of limited border clashes or advances rather than plans for a large-scale invasion. Such skirmishes may be interpreted as the kind of solid changes to the status quo that call for compellence; yet in the broader context of military conflicts, they may be considered harbingers of the greater challenge

[25] Alexander L. George and William E. Simons, eds., *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy*, 2nd edition (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994): ch.1.

that needs to be deterred. Territorial disputes are almost always predicated on competing historical and legal claims. Legal merit, even if it could be established, does not equal the status quo before a conflict. Territorial disputes therefore highlight the often fluid definition of the status quo on which deterrence theory is based.

Hypothesis of this dissertation

This study examines the defender's concern with its reputation for resolve in deterrence situations and demonstrates that this concern contributes to the decision to fight. It also searches for the causes for such a concern, thus establishing a pattern of behavior that may have implications for similar situations in the future. All the case studies posit China as the defender in immediate deterrence situations.[26]

This study argues that states concerned with their reputations for resolve are more likely to respond to challenges with force, turning a deterrence situation into a violent conflict. In short, states may choose to fight current wars so as not to fight later ones. Deterrence is rarely a one-shot interaction; it often takes place over a period of time, offering both sides time to weigh their options and evaluate the status quo dynamically. Likewise, the challenger rarely gives up its probing and advances immediately after the

[26] As argued above, "defender" in a deterrence situation does not equal defender of the status quo. The distinction between defender and challenger, however, is still helpful in delineating the different roles states play in conflicts. On the difficulty of distinguishing deterrent and compellent aspects of a conflict, see section below.

initial threat of punishment by the defender, especially when it has doubts about whether the defender is willing to bear the costs of escalation. The defender, in this scenario, may become concerned about its own credibility and decide to initiate a conflict in order to establish or maintain a reputation for toughness.

Both the defender and the challenger look beyond the immediate interests involved when mulling their options. One shortcoming of traditional deterrence theory is its singular focus on the values both sides place on the immediate issue, such as the integrity of an ally or the value of a particular disputed area, which renders each deterrence case unique and isolated. Yet not only may both consider the shadow that their actions cast in the future, they are also influenced and restrained by the legacies of past deterrence situations. Although it is imprudent to assert that states infer weakness from defeat in a linear fashion and ignore the circumstances of the issue at hand, it is also unreasonable to assume that past lessons, no matter what they are, have no bearing on current perceptions and decisions. Statesmen, just like scholars, try to understand foreign policy challenges in a historical and comparative context, which shapes the perception and interpretation of challenges and the corresponding responses.

The role of the shadow of the future is particularly pronounced between enduring rivalry relationships, defined by Gary Goertz and Paul F. Diehl as enduring competitiveness between a pair of states over a certain good, involving at least five

militarized disputes in a period of at least ten years.[27] Enduring rivalries are empirically important because twice as many conflicts occur in enduring rivalries as in isolated disputes, and these conflicts have a much higher propensity for flaring into wars. Goertz and Diehl conclude that conflicts are not independent of each other but rather shaped heavily by the context.[28] Their empirical finding is especially relevant to deterrence, since a considerable number of immediate deterrence crises occur between enduring rivalries engaged in long-term general deterrence. In such a context, the defender might have an even stronger incentive to "overreact" to minor infringements from the rival because it sees the danger of irresoluteness as casting a cumulative and negative influence on long-term deterrence. The challenger, on the other hand, is also more likely to presume reactions by the defender from past experiences. Since the good coveted by both sides is unlikely to change drastically, the historical pattern of interaction is more meaningful to decision-makers than it is in non-enduring rivalry relationships. The recognition of such a learning process in turn strengthens the defender's belief that its generalized credibility is at stake even in minor challenges and that it must be defended in order to ward off excessive challenges from its opponent in the future.

Similarly, Elli Lieberman argues that deterrence must be studied longitudinally because deterrence is created through engagement in the long run. "A defender cannot

[27] Gary Goertz and Paul F. Diehl, "The Empirical Importance of Enduring Rivalries," *International Interactions* 18, no. 2 (1992): 151-163.
[28] Ibid., 161.

establish the requirements of deterrence, a credible threat based on a demonstrated capability and will, in any single deterrence episode."[29] Here deterrence success acquires a general meaning. It no longer refers simply to one particular case in which the opponent is dissuaded from attack, but represents the moment when general deterrence succeeds and the opponent accepts the balance of power between the two states. Immediate deterrence thus becomes an organic component of general deterrence and the overall foreign policy of states. In addition, deterrence successes and failures between rivals are intimately connected. Lieberman examines both deterrence successes and failures between the same pair of states, Israel and Egypt, and asserts that "requirements for deterrence stability can only be created through war."[30] Only by defeating the opponent repeatedly and unequivocally can a reputation for resolve be established and deterrence achieved. In other words, meeting challenges with violence may in fact contribute to future stability even though it might disturb peace temporarily. Clearly, if the defender realizes the shadow of the future, it has more reasons to favor the option of force. Moreover, because Lieberman considers deterrence as a longitudinal strategy rather than discrete incidents, he finds that defense and compellence "are elements of a larger strategy of deterrence whose aim is to influence the behavior of the challenger."[31] In

[29] Elli Lieberman, "The Rational Deterrence Theory Debate: Is the Dependent Variable Elusive?" *Security Studies* 3, no.3 (1994): 389.
[30] Ibid., 415.
[31] Ibid., 389.

other words, the distinction between the two types of coercion is not as precise as generally thought.

Actions short of war, such as demonstrations of force, do not come close as effective deterrents, however. Lieberman argues that truly resolute leaders have one way to distinguish themselves from irresolute ones: committing to actions too costly to fake. Wars, which incur immediate costs but uncertain future benefits, are the ultimate barometer of resolve.[32] The outcome of wars most indisputably determines the balance of capabilities each side can bring to bear in conflicts and establishes a reputation at the same time.

Thus, the defender's own assessment of its credibility and reputation is crucial to the outcome of deterrence situations. However, whenever perception is the explanatory factor, there is the inevitable question of whether that perception is correct or mistaken and whether the distinction matters. Generally speaking, there is considerable methodological difficulty in establishing an objective or "correct" perception to be compared with the misperception.[33] In this case, however, the explanatory power of the hypothesis does not rest on the disjuncture between subjective and objective perceptions but rather the subjective assessment of one's credibility and the concern with the lack of it. The purpose of this dissertation is to study the effect of this concern with credibility on

[32] Ibid., 415.
[33] See Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 13-31.

the policy making of the defender.

Besides the question of how the concern with credibility shapes policies, this study also addresses the question of where this concern comes from. What are the factors that breed a strong concern about reputation? Can changes in these factors alleviate such fears? While security interests and the severity of threats still anchor a state's consideration of policy options in any particular incident, the role of credibility may serve to either accelerate or slow escalation. Therefore, if credibility is brought on by either certain structural features or temporal factors, addressing these factors may alleviate an excessive concern about credibility.

This study argues that states that define an enduring rivalry with the challenger in a deterrence situation are more concerned about credibility. States that foresee repeated conflicts with the same opponent might favor the use of force as a preventive measure against excessive challenges. As security threats will be forthcoming regardless of whether the issue at hand is resolved, using force becomes a less costly alternative in this larger context, when benefits will be felt long into the future.

States that consider themselves strategically vulnerable also have a heightened sense of reputation. This sensitivity is the most acute when an external challenge is linked to domestic weaknesses that raise fears of revolt. Some scholars have argued that states experiencing domestic problems might be prone to military action because they are

concerned their opponents might infer vulnerability from domestic troubles. They are also afraid that regime survival is under threat if domestic opposition gains strength when the sovereignty of the state is at risk. Deterrence success rests on the strength of a state's capabilities and resolve. Weak states in particular may be more concerned with its image, its reputation for action, than stronger states. Having learned through repeated deterrence cases that other states do not take their warnings seriously, these weak countries may decide to respond to challenges with force in order to establish such a reputation. What they lack in capabilities they may try to make up in resolve if the challenges are severe enough.

The similarity of these two scenarios is that security threat to the state is compounded by the factors of time and image; credibility is not just an optional good, but a vital security good. In other words, it is not just a luxury for some, but a necessity for most. In these cases, defenders are motivated to fight to be seen as resolute. By extension, states with a revolutionary or ideologically-charged foreign policy are more likely affected by this concern, as they are both more prone to enduing rivalries and fears of domestic revolt. As a newly established regime, the leadership is wary that others may try to take advantage of it. A revolutionary regime that upsets the regional and sometimes international balance of power is also bound to encounter frequent challenges, which force the leadership to link even minor incursions to the fundamental question of what the

appropriate regional or international order is.

In each deterrence interaction, we need to consider the broad foreign policy context facing the leadership, not just the immediate issue at hand. Conflicts do not grow out of nowhere, but stem from either significant disruptions to the international or regional system and bilateral interests that form a history of interactions. First, states are often forced to make sense of complicated and sometimes contradictory external pressures, threats, and assurances beyond the immediate issue of concern. Second, as the leadership presides over a domestic as well as an international audience, it can be motivated by internal concerns and values that nonetheless have a bearing on its foreign policy. Fundamental changes in a state's perception of external threat are often accompanied by important adjustments on the domestic front. Third, as perception is by definition produced by the decision-making process, the factors that affect this process of interpretation can be influential as well. A highly centralized, stable bureaucratic decision-making structure, compared with a period of intensive factional struggle and internal strife, could yield very different decisions even on matters of national security. Finally, a state surprised by a challenger's questioning of its resolve could develop a heightened sensitivity towards its reputation in the future.

These arguments are hardly new to international relations. However, they have often been studied as discrete, competing hypotheses that do not complement each other.

They are used to explain particular conflicts, but the findings do not form a basis for cumulative knowledge because no hypothesis links them together. Too often the distinction between domestic and international factors and the agent-structure debate divide the field of international relations unnecessarily. This study seeks to contribute to the literature by approaching these hypotheses from the singular perspective of deterrence. In particular, it points out that they are in fact complementary hypotheses, all exerting an influence on the concern with credibility. By intensifying or alleviating this concern, these domestic and international factors indirectly shape the outcome of deterrence situations.

Chinese Use of Force: The Substantive Debate

The three case studies in this dissertation span the time period since the establishment of the People's Republic of China to the height of the Cultural Revolution. The choice of China is deliberate, for as a deterrence player, China offers a broad range of explanatory factors, and the conclusions of this study are relevant to more countries' experiences than a study of the nuclear confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union. A middle-range, vulnerable, revolutionary power likely perceives threat and builds its credibility differently than an enormously powerful, entrenched, relatively secure superpower. Given the common assumption that a less powerful country has fewer

options and gets punished more for making mistakes, China's decisions to enter conflicts were all the more intriguing. In the field of Chinese security, this dissertation joins the debate on the pattern of Chinese use of force, a fertile field for scholars helped by a gradual opening of Cold War archives. However, the literature on Chinese use of force, and more broadly, Chinese foreign policy, is rife with both empirical disagreements and competing schools of thought.

The empirical debate: how much force did China use?

First, the field is divided on the starting point of theorizing, which is China's empirical record of using force. Was China a minimally violent, defensive power that shunned conflicts, or a state that preferred force to settle disputes? Early in the Cold War, Western scholars and policy-makers tended to regard China as just another Soviet satellite, acting upon Moscow's decrees or its own radical revolutionary vision and harboring a dangerous propensity to use force. Later events, especially the increasingly public Sino-Soviet split that ultimately erupted into armed clashes, undermined the earlier perception. Since then, many scholars have agreed with the conclusions first forwarded by Allen S. Whiting, who argues that China has used force judiciously and out of its own national security interests. Arthur Huck writes, in the middle of the frenzied Cultural Revolution no less, that beneath the turbulent and ever-more-fanatic ideological rhetoric

lies a realist and shrewd logic of security calculations. China "has maintained an essentially defensive military posture" that has been "obscured to some extent by an aggressive Maoist political stance."[34] Many contemporary Chinese scholars have agreed with that argument and maintain a mostly benign assessment of Mao's foreign policy even though at the same time denouncing his domestic political and economic policies. When it comes to theories on military strategy, a significant portion of the Chinese literature categorizes all Beijing's use of force as "active defense," a term adopted by the People's Liberation Army as the guiding principle of China's post-independence military stance, and thus infers that China used force only to defend its own territory or interests and only as a last resort.[35]

This assessment of Chinese use of force, however, is largely based on an evaluation of several salient cases studies, rather than quantitative evidence. The best known aggregate datasets of military conflicts belie this sanguine image of a China always using force minimally and only as a last resort. Alastair Iain Johnston analyzes the University of Michigan dataset on militarized interstate disputes in the Cold War and concludes that China is among the states with the most frequent and violent record of using force in the post-1945 period. Not only was China second only to the US among

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[34] Arthur Huck, *The Security of China: Chinese Approaches to Problems of War and Strategy* (London: Chatto and Windus for the Institute for Strategic Studies, 1970), 93.
[35] Army Command College Project Group, *Weidade Junshijia Zhou Enlai* (The Great Military Strategist Zhou Enlai) (Beijing: Military Science Press, 1997).

major powers in the frequency of conflicts, but China was the most likely among major powers to escalate conflicts into full-blown wars and more likely to respond to challenges with force. In other words, China did not shy away from using force to resolve disputes and from escalating conflicts. Why? Johnston compares the validity of several theories and concludes that the most probable ones point to territorial security and the higher incidence of conflicts by newly revolutionary states to explain such a record.[36]

To a certain extent this empirical gap between a pattern of violent and frequent resort to force and the portrayal of Chinese military policies as defensive is not as wide as it seems. The change of government in 1949 and the dramatic transformation of the state and society disrupted the regional and international balance of power, and as a result, China had many direct and potential conflicts with its neighbors and with the US to settle. Undefined borders are an obvious source of conflict, but other interests, such as new alliance relations, could also be disruptive for the neighbors of a new regime. Unable and unwilling to reach a compromise on certain issues it deemed vital to its interests, China did not have many policy alternatives at its disposal. Force was simply the choice by default.

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[36] Alastair Iain Johnston, "China's Militarized Interstate Dispute Behavior 1949-1992: A First Cut at the Data," *The China Quarterly* 153 (March 1998): 1-30. Also, see Michael Brecher, Jonathan Wilkenfeld, and Sheila Moser, *Crises in the Twentieth Century Volume II: Handbook of Foreign Policy Crises* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988), 161-162.

The theoretical debate: was China driven by revolution or realpolitik?

However, we cannot simply write off the disparity either. The disagreement over the empirical record reveals a much deeper and more important theoretical division among scholars in the explanation of Chinese history of using force, and much of the disagreements stems from a normative judgment of Chinese security policy. The critical questions are: first, was China a status quo power or revisionist power? In other words, did China have only minimal goals of territorial security or grand designs of altering the existing order either to its advantage or according to the ideal world order of its choice? Consequently, what drives Chinese security policy, Maoist ideology or realpolitik calculations? Third, did the leadership in Beijing approach security policies based on external factors or was it internally driven, manipulating conflicts to realize political goals or misperceiving outside signals because of powerful personal and cultural biases? These questions are interrelated but not completely interchangeable. They target different aspects of foreign policy-making—goals, motivations, and processes. A revisionist power, defined as one that seeks to change the status quo to its desired landscape, may still be sensitive to external threats and calculate its policy rationally. Likewise, a regime largely satisfied with the status quo may still make critical mistakes regarding military conflicts if the leaders became blinded by misperceptions of the enemy.

Those who argue that China's security policy was defensive and status quo draw

on the fact that it used force only on its border, apparently to defend its territorial security. China did not seek to expand its territory even after resoundingly defeating Indian troops in 1962, nor did it station troops in its friendly allies permanently. Allen Whiting, in his monumental study of the Korean War, the Indochina conflict, and the war against India, notes that in each case China attempted to warn the opponent of its intent to intervene and carefully calibrated and paced its verbal signals to the severity of the situation in its eyes. He contends that China was chiefly motivated by a threat against its territorial security. This threat, heightened by a fear of encirclement and exploitation of domestic weaknesses by the enemy, persuaded China to use force even against much stronger opponents.[37]

In stark contrast to the view that China was judicious, status quo, and used force only as a controlled response to severe and objective security threats, other scholars paint a far more violent picture of the Beijing leadership. Mao, they point out, was deeply convinced of the superiority of a Leninist state and a centrally planned economy and sought to keep the revolution alive, even to the detriment of the Communist Party and the society at large.[38] As Mao himself argued, foreign policy is the extension of a state's domestic policy, and it is difficult to imagine that a government with turbulent and radical

[37] Allen S. Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence: India and Indochina* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), 224-248.
[38] Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of Carolina Press, 2001), 10-12.

policy priorities at home would not project the same aspirations abroad. Similarly, Chen Jian, a leading Chinese specialist on Cold War history, identifies three rationales that shaped Beijing's decision-making before its intervention in the Korean War: the Communist Party's revolutionary nationalism, its sense of responsibility towards world revolution, and the need to maintain a domestic revolutionary zeal.[39] China intervened in the Korean War not just out of security concerns, but more importantly because of deep-seated ideological affinity with North Korea and the need to purge the Chinese society of reactionary elements. As evidence, Chen points out that the leadership in Beijing made up its mind to intervene in the Korean War as early as in August of 1950, barely two months after the outbreak of the war and a full month before the Inchon landing that ended North Korea's bid to unify the peninsula.[40] The decision to intervene was a foregone conclusion, decided not by external security threats but more importantly by Mao's Communist world view.

Chen's recent, expanded history of Mao's foreign policy in the Cold War furthers this claim and traces a thread of ideological reasoning in all China's major foreign policy decisions during the Cold War. He asserts that China pursued its foreign policy not as a result of cost-benefit analysis, but as a result of ideological and revolutionary doctrines and predictions. By ideology he does not mean orthodox Marxism, but rather Mao's ever-

[39] Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 213-215.
[40] Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 139-146.

changing ideological preferences, his thinking on the international system, Communist movements, and domestic socialism-building.[41] This depiction of China clearly has practical implications. If Mao's calculation of foreign policy was dominated by ideological doctrines he was deeply convinced of, scholars would have to largely acknowledge in retrospect the wisdom of the containment policy. Such a revolutionary power obviously could not have been peacefully acculturated by the established powers in the international system, and since other states cannot count on normal diplomacy to influence Mao's revolutionary thinking, the only option left with any probability of success would be tough containment and encirclement. In other words, a state leader driven mostly by beliefs and insensitive to external pressures is difficult to deter.

On the other hand, although revolutionary ideals may have shaped foreign China's policy goals, Mao may have also partaken in or even engineered international crises in order to advance his own political agenda. Chen Jian's work on Chinese intervention in the Korean War also remarks on the larger domestic context of the Korean War in Mao's eyes, which was to transform the entire Chinese society and revive its great power status. Once China declared that it has sided with North Korea against the US-led UN forces, the government initiated a massive mobilization and propaganda campaign in a bid to purge the society of all counterrevolutionary elements, eventually resulting in hundreds of

[41] Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, 1-16.

thousands of executions. The war abroad served to garner considerable support for the regime, and by the end of the three-year war China declared that it has finished the initial period of socialist transformation (*gaizao*).[42] In other words, one of the most important reasons for China's intervention and thus escalation of the war may be the fringe benefits the war can bring to China's domestic reform.

Thomas J. Christensen also points out the mobilizing use of international crises not just in China but also in the US, but his explanation is based on the need to fund unpopular and expensive grand strategies. When state leaders choose a grand strategy with a prohibitive price tag or a very high hurdle, they need to mobilize the masses and the political leadership to support their visions and as a result become the victims of their own success. In order to sell their unpopular strategies, in other words, they may have to exaggerate the crises their states are in, which can have the unintended consequence of getting entangled into crises not necessarily in their best interest. President Harry Truman found that in courting Congress for its support on his containment policy and Europe reconstruction plan, which was primarily aimed at saving Greece and Turkey, he had to portray the Communist threat as far more pervasive and urgent than he believed it really was. As a result, the China lobby gained much needed raison d'être, and when the Korean War broke out, Truman had no choice but to pledge American support for South Korea

[42] Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 220-223.

and neutralize the Taiwan Strait. Similarly, Mao faced immense obstacles as he prepared to embark the nation on the Great Leap Forward in 1958, a social and agricultural campaign designed to elevate China to a major economic power practically overnight. He decided to shell the offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu not just to show the US the perils of supporting Taiwan, as Mao himself claimed; he decided to shell the islands to create the right political environment for launching the Great Leap Forward and mobilize the masses to make colossal personal sacrifices in the face of grave external challenges. In this view, security policies do not grow out of an ideology, but are rather dictated by a grand strategy that requires overextension in order to survive.[43]

Finally, there is the question of whether China has correctly perceived and responded to external pressures and signals, or if it has been mired in misperceptions and cultural biases. This debate focuses not so much on the content and intention of the actual policies but the way the Chinese leadership processed information. On one end of the spectrum emphasizing the realist and universal nature of Chinese security policies we can find Avery Goldstein, who shows that China, Britain, and France all pursued similar nuclear policies because they were middle-range powers allied with a superpower.[44] Pressured by the same bipolar world order, which pushes them to seek protection from a

[43] Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 242-261.
[44] Avery Goldstein, *Deterrence and Security in the 21st Century: China, Great Britain, France, and the Enduring Legacy of the Nuclear Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

superpower, and by the fear of abandonment in such an asymmetrical alliance, which forces them to seek self-protection, these countries all chose at different times to develop their own nuclear programs, which means that the fear for abandonment overtook the comfort of alliance.[45] China, among others, correctly perceived the challenges to its own security and made a rational decision that can be explained by realism. These policy choices largely comply with the broad predictions of neorealism and illustrate the power of the systemic structure to make divergent countries behave in a similar manner.

But others contend that China's conflict behavior displays distinct patterns and cannot be explained in such broad strokes. They argue that China's policies reflect cognitive and cultural biases that do not conform to its external environment. Whiting's classic study of Chinese deterrence behavior suggests that while China's response is largely explained by deterrence theory, Chinese use of force was also unique. He observes a greater propensity for Beijing to link internal weaknesses with the severity of external threats and attributes this alarmism to both "classical as well as modern experience" and "a uniquely Chinese contextual framework for deterrence perceptions."[46] At the same time, leaders in Beijing favored belligerent tactics as the best means of deterrence, which raises the risk of triggering a chain reaction that spirals out of control. Whiting does not elaborate on the causes of such distinctive assumptions of the dynamics

[45] Ibid., 15-57.
[46] Whiting, *Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 203.

of deterrence; by calling this pattern "uniquely Chinese," he seems to suggest that we need to resort to cultural interpretations rooted as much in the history of imperial China as in the Communist experiment.

Strategic culture is the focus of Johnston's Cultural Realism, a look at Chinese military doctrines and beliefs formed in the combative history of the oft-divided Chinese state. The PRC's reliance on belligerence is but a modern example of a long tradition that exalted violence. In the dominant paradigm of China's strategic culture, conflicts are seen as constant and zero-sum. The use of violence is preferred and effective. This doctrine would be consistent with China's empirical record of engaging in frequent conflicts at a higher hostility level. This paradigm calls to mind realpolitik traditions in the Western statecraft. Johnston argues that scholars have been mistaken in classifying China's strategic culture as minimally violent and defensive by choice. They have relied too much on Sun Tze's Art of War, which is only one sidelined school in Chinese strategic thinking. This school only gained prominence in the 1980s among Chinese scholars, who accepted the benign judgments at face value. But China's proclivity toward violence, which resembles realpolitik and neorealism, is not a universal or automatic response, rather a result of certain cultural assumptions passed down through centuries of military doctrines and mental framework. By implication, if realism and the proclivity to use force to solve security problems are a learned behavior, then given certain conditions they may be un-

learned. Some liberal democracies have already un-learned this paradigm.[47]

A broader cultural argument is also used by some scholars to explain Chinese military policy. After evaluating both Chinese and American decision-making during several deterrence episodes, Shuguang Zhang evaluates Chinese and American decision-making during several episodes of deterrence and concludes that "culture-bound perceptions of behavior by each country confused important aspects of their strategic thinking."[48] He argues that neither China nor the US actually harbored aggressive intentions towards the other, yet misperceptions, attributable to differences between two cultures and policy-making processes, clouded the vision of the adversaries.[49] Zhang's definition of culture is nevertheless broad. He includes factors such as different geopolitical status and security interests in the confines of culture and asserts that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was obviously influenced by the middle-kingdom, imperial self image and Sun Tzu's doctrine that all wars must be moral.[50] While Americans regard crises as problems that call for solutions, Chinese leaders thrive in crises as they are also opportunities.[51] Americans value human casualties, while the Chinese weigh human costs just as another kind of material costs and thus are much less

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[47] Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 22-27, 249-266.
[48] Shuguang Zhang, *Deterrence and Strategic Culture: Chinese-American Confrontations, 1949-1958* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1992), 271.
[49] Ibid., 268.
[50] Ibid., 273, 278.
[51] Ibid., 279-280.

sensitive to body count.[52] These sweeping characterizations, though on balance favorable toward the Chinese, nevertheless call to mind generalized prejudices once exhibited by American officials. Eisenhower, for example, once said that Chinese leaders were completely indifferent to human losses.[53] It is often difficult to distinguish between this broad cultural typology and untested generalizations.

The debate on Chinese use of force is unnecessarily polarized, partly due to the inevitable carryover of the broader debate in the international relations theory field between neorealism and its critics, especially area specialists. Those in the realist tradition often treat China as just another case study to test the validity of realist explanations; they are satisfied with linking policies to Chinese concern with security threats. They argue that since China feared for an encroachment of its territory and faced real challenges to its security, it would naturally respond with force to protect itself. As China is but a case study of realist theories, they tend to focus more on the generality of Chinese decision-making than the details or sometimes anomalies in its application of deterrence. China specialists, on the other hand, insist on first getting the facts right. Aided by newly declassified documents from the former Soviet Union, the US, China, and European and Asian sources, they are still in the process of vetting these documents

[52] Ibid., 282.
[53] For a discussion of American officials' prejudices during early Cold War, see Gordon H. Chang, *Friends and Enemies: the United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1948-1972* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 170-174.

to verify or disprove past hypotheses about Chinese security policy. Before an authoritative empirical account is established, they tend to resist the attempt by international relations theorists to come up with a generalized theory.

In the end, what the neorealists gain in parsimony they have to sacrifice in explanatory power, and vice versa. Systemic pressures, such as security threats, narrow the range of state responses but do not dictate a particular outcome. No matter how predisposed to conflict the leaders are, the decision to use force does not come easily. It risks international reprimand in an already hostile system and incurs considerable material costs to a poor and at times turbulent society. Even though it may be argued that certain challenges are so severe that all leaders, regardless of their goals and intellectual baggage, would choose to respond with force, in real-life crises, challenges often need to be interpreted and framed by a context before any reaction can be decided. It is imperative that we understand the mindset that narrows down the desirable choices, and this study seeks to use the defender's concern about its credibility as another factor that can lead to conflict. Realist explanations help contextualize and predict the general directions of Chinese military policy, but they could underestimate the range of choices available to statesmen.

Area specialists should also try to join the theoretical debates with their rich findings. China scholars have made admirable inroads in understanding Maoist foreign

policy, filling in holes and debunking misunderstandings and myths, but have largely remained reluctant to place their specific findings into the extensive theoretical literature in political science.[54] Much of their work is limited to a short period or a single policy, and more substantial studies tend to assume the character of a chronology or typology. This focus on events tends to lead to a lack of theoretical rigor. The most important concepts, such as ideology, nationalism, and realpolitik, do not have clear-cut definitions accepted by all or most scholars. The term ideology is especially fuzzy, which has expanded from references to Marxism to any non-realpolitik way of thinking. Without theoretical rigor, efforts to explain and predict events and policies may be ineffective.

Furthermore, the debate over Chinese security policy is torn by a more specific disagreement over the role of Mao and his thinking. Mao, as the founder of the People's Republic, led a powerfully ideological revolution that scholars unanimously agree transformed the society in ways never before imagined. However, as a state leader, he faced the same dilemma as other statesmen, that international anarchy both gave him freedom of action yet at the same time restricted this freedom by raising the stakes of survival. The question that naturally follows is the one that has dominated China Cold War studies: was Mao motivated more by realpolitik considerations or ideological creeds?

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[54] There are a few notable exceptions, one of the most active of which is Niu Jun, whose works include the use of comparative models to study Chinese and American crisis decision-making, for example. See Niu Jun, "Chaoxian Zhanzhengzhong Zhongmei Juece Bijiao Yanjiu (A Comparative Study of Chinese and US Decision-making in the Korean War)," *Dangdai Zhongguoshi Yanjiu* (Contemporary Chinese History Studies), no. 6, 2000: 36-55.

This question drives a host of other, more specific, research questions: was Mao interested in pursuing relations with the US in 1949, or was he set in his tracks to side with the Soviet Union? Did Mao decide to intervene in Korea out of affinity with North Korea or realpolitik security reasons? Was the Sino-Soviet split a result of power struggles or a clash of world views and personalities between Mao and Khrushchev? These questions provide us with a basic structure of policy analysis and carry practical implications for evaluating foreign policies not of China but of other Cold War powers as well.

A close study of Mao and other principal policymakers, however, would be most useful when placed in the analytical framework of international relations or policy-making. Often studies of a single leader become a pursuit in itself, especially for a prolific author like Mao. The release of archival material, moreover, provided the opportunity to cross-check pubic writings with private conversations and fill out chronological developments. But anyone exploring the astounding volume of Mao's thoughts, speeches, and classified communications quickly discovers the ideological complexity as well as pragmatic flexibility in Mao's thinking, and the ease with which Mao cited Marxist canon to justify swift changes in his thinking. The challenge for scholars is to employ a thoughtful textual analysis without turning it into a tautological exercise, as Mao's thinking then explains Mao's actions, and vice versa. Arthur Huck

observes that Mao's increasingly defiant ideological discourse in the 1960s is "incorrigible" and can be used to justify any course of action.[55] Instead, if care is given to explain his thinking and actions in an analytical fashion, with an eye on the international relations discourse, the findings are immensely enriching.

In the end, the dissenting schools and views in the field of Chinese foreign and military policy fit into the two-level game first used by Robert D. Putnam to explain international negotiations. State leaders do not make a clean distinction between international and domestic decisions and constituencies but need to take account of both simultaneously. Decisions on either front send ripples through the other area, and a judicious leader can either manipulate international agreements to bolster a domestic group, a move that would otherwise meet stiff opposition, or turn his domestic weakness into an asset by forcing other leaders to concede to his demands for fear of destroying the deal.[56] Putnam's co-variant theory undoubtedly suffers from a lack of causal certainty, but his insight that leaders need to consider both sets of constituents is thoughtful. The difficulty in disentangling domestic from international concerns in China studies shows that the two are intertwined. For example, the more radicalized Mao was, the more threats China received or perceived internationally, which then encouraged more radicalism.

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[55] Arthur Huck, 30.
[56] Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, No. 3 (1988): 427-460.

This dissertation is more narrowly focused on Chinese deterrence policy and does not purport to address bigger questions in Chinese foreign policy and use of force. However, findings of this study will contribute to the literature. By linking China's perception of its own credibility to the decision to use force, and by tracing credibility to a host of both international and domestic factors, this study identifies one variable that helps bridge the divide. In all case studies, security interests remained the biggest reason for Chinese leaders to go to war. Security threats were grave enough that a forceful response was among the shortlist of policy decisions for leaders, but concerns about credibility helped rule out other, non-violent polices and arrive at a decisive blow that seeks to end the conflict once and for all.

Methodology

This study uses in-depth, qualitative case studies with a heavy reliance on textural analysis of first and secondary sources. While only three case studies are selected, they are structured along the same questions on deterrence and credibility to focus the reader's attention on the hypothesis. In contrast to a large, comparative dataset, a deep analysis of a small number of cases is the best way to test this hypothesis. Because the concern about

credibility and the impact of reputation are difficult to quantify, the best way to trace their role in a deterrence episode is through careful textural analysis.

The three case studies are chosen because they represent the best test cases for the thesis, that the defender can choose to go to war when challenged in deterrence situations when it is concerned about establishing or defending credibility. In all three cases, China decided to respond to challenges with overwhelming force. While scholars have argued before that realpolitik or ideology explained China's belligerence, no efforts have been made to identify the common thread running in all three cases, that China, *as a defender in deterrence*, decided to end provocations through escalation. Comparing the three cases through a set of structured inquiries can help explain this anomaly. As explained earlier, deterrence successes are overdetermined and do not provide the same richness in analysis. Therefore all three cases are deterrence failures at the hands of China.

China has used force frequently after 1949. The three cases are by no means the only instances where China uses force. So why were these three cases chosen? First of all, the number of clear deterrence instances is actually limited. Aside from the three cases mentioned here, there are also a number of deterrence successes, such as deterrence against the US during the Vietnam War and deterrence against Taiwan's counteroffensive in the summer of 1962. Other instances of major conflicts fall more into the compellence or coercive diplomacy category, however. The 1979 war with Vietnam, for example, is

usually seen as compellence to punish Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, which China perceived as Soviet-backed encirclement of China. The 1958 shelling of offshore islands and the 1995-6 military exercises in the Taiwan Strait fall into the category of coercive diplomacy, as force was used not to deter an advance, but to coerce the enemy toward less definitive ends. There are also numerous skirmishes with neighbors due to border disputes, both on land and at sea, but most were too small to qualify for a deliberate use of force as policy. The universe of deterrence cases is actually relatively small.

On a practical level, the three case studies in this dissertation are among the most researched in the literature on Chinese use of force. Whiting's classic analysis of Chinese use of force paved the way for later scholars, who combed over Chinese archives opened after the end of the Cold War. China was more selective in releasing information on the war with India and clashes with the Soviet Union, but generally speaking information available today is vastly more than in the past. Soviet and Eastern European archives greatly supplemented Chinese materials and provided means to test Chinese claims. Chinese scholars in recent years have also made use of provincial and municipal archives and interviews. Better availability of data clearly helps the type of qualitative research this study chooses, but the main reason for the choice of the three case studies is their robustness.

CHINA'S DECISION TO ENTER THE KOREAN WAR

The structure for each case study

To establish the significance of China's concern about credibility, each case study will ask the same set of questions in order to frame what is a complex and interrelated web of decisions: 1) What is at stake in this conflict? 2) How does China think this case could affect its credibility? 3) How does China maintain its credibility? Without these questions, each instance can easily become overwhelmed by its rich historical idiosyncrasies and evolve into an unfocused discussion of foreign and military policy. Instead of examples of China's use of force, case studies should be analyzed as windows of how China understands credibility in deterrence.

The dissertation does not argue that a fear of losing credibility is the sole reason for China to decide to use force when faced with challenges. In many cases, for a new regime facing a hostile security environment, with a constantly shifting threat perception and increasingly volatile domestic politics, the decision to use force can be broadly explained as unsurprising, even necessary, solution to a security threat or the outcome of an increasingly fanatic foreign policy. The first question asked of each case study seeks to explain the main contours of conflicts, in many cases highlighting the security or domestic political reasons for conflicts that drove leaders to force. But explaining these

conflicts solely from the basis of the security environment for China, or the threat perception it faces, fails to recognize the very important subsidiary role played by China's perception of its credibility and the interconnectivity of these conflicts. The second and third questions are therefore specifically focused on China's perception of the relationship between the conflict and its credibility and the measures it undertook to safeguard its reputation. The progression of these case studies will show an increasingly self-conscious definition of credibility and an attempt to both justify past efforts to establish it and apply it to future usage. By asking these same questions in a structured fashion, the case studies then become a history of China's concern about its credibility and reputation, which allows certain trends to be uncovered and analyzed.

The Korean War

As the first instance of deterrence for the young republic, China's attempt to stop United Nations Command (UNC) led by the US from advancing toward the Chinese border, and its decision to intervene in the Korean War, were a defining moment for the Chinese leadership. The lessons learned from the Korean War were not only self-consciously applied in future military conflicts and repeatedly tested against practice, but they also helped establish a near-consensus among Chinese leaders on the utility of deterrence, the importance of credibility and reputation for resolve, and the efficacy of

deploying certain signals and conducting military preparations. While Chinese leaders, especially Mao, saw strong reasons to intervene in the conflict in order to safeguard the security of Chinese territories, which would be severely undermined if a US-led unification of the Korean peninsular drove the North Korean Communist government into China and wage resistance campaigns from the Northeast, they also emphasized the value of establishing a reputation of resolve, especially after their warnings to the US went unheeded. While the Chinese decision to enter the Korean War was rooted in serious concerns about security, the long shadow of the future also weighed heavily in Beijing's decision-making.

The increasing availability of memoirs, academic studies and declassified documents from major parties in the conflict has helped clarify the procession of events prior to and during the Korean War, even though disagreements over specific events persist. Current scholarship sees the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) actively driving the decision by courting Soviet approval, with China preoccupied with its own civil war and misguided by what seemed like low entanglement risks. However, China's decision to enter the war was not merely passed down from Stalin; China made the decision to intervene in close consultation with the Soviets but largely on its own.

Kim Il-sung first appealed to the Soviet Union to strengthen the North Korean

military in March 1949.[57] By early 1950, Stalin was both increasingly reassured that the US may not intervene to stop North Korea from invading and unifying the peninsula and convinced that a unified Korea could help bolster defense of Communist countries in East Asia. In 1949 and 1950, American policymakers were focused on countering Soviet influence in Europe and divided over the best recourse to Asian affairs, with many arguing that the US should accept the impending unification of China under Communist rule.[58] On 12 January 1950, Secretary of State Dean Acheson excluded Taiwan and Korea from the US defense perimeter of peace, instead relying on "the people attacked to resist it and then upon the commitments of the entire world under the Charter of the United Nations."[59] The exclusion was interpreted as a shift in US strategy in Asia to that of distance and neutrality. Kim made plans to reunify the peninsula with an understanding of a neutral US. Stalin largely approved of Kim's proposal after secret meetings in April 1950 but told Kim that he must secure Mao's approval as well.[60] Kim traveled to Beijing on 13 May 1950. According to Chinese accounts, Mao also agreed, albeit reluctantly,

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[57] Chinese Military Museum, ed., *Kangmei Yuanchao Fengyunlu* (History of the War against America and Aiding Korea) (Guangzhou: Huacheng Press, 1999), 13.
[58] For a discussion of the gradual shift in American thinking toward China and Asia, see Gordon H. Chang. *Friends and Enemies*, 5-80.
[59] Dean G. Acheson, "Crisis in Asia," *Department of State Bulletin*, 23 January 1950, 114. Quoted in Allen S. Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1960) 39.
[60] Stalin's telegraph to Mao, published in *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, issue 4 (fall 1994): 61. Also see Qing Shi, "1950nian Jiefang Taiwan Jihua Geqian de Taiqianmuhou (On-stage and Behind-stage Maneuvers in the Shelving of the Decision to Liberate Taiwan in 1950," in Qiu Shi, ed., *Gongheguo Zhongda Shijian he Juece Neimu: Gongheguo Yishi* (An Inside Account of Major Events and Decisions of the Republic: Anecdotes of the Republic) (Beijing: Economics Daily Press, 1997), 56.

after confirming with Stalin that he had given the invasion the green light, but warned of the possibility of US intervention.[61] On 25 June, North Korean forces crossed the 38th parallel and pushed into the south. Caught unaware, the routed South Korean army retreated quickly.

The North's invasion triggered an uproar in the US Congress. The US quickly decided to intervene to prevent South Korea from falling to Communist rule even though Eastern Europe had been the strategic focus for the country. President Harry Truman ordered the deployment of US air and naval forces on 27 June to assist South Korea and dispatched the Seventh Fleet to neutralize the Taiwan Strait. On 30 June, orders to deploy ground forces were also announced.[62] This decision to intervene was not an aberration from earlier preference for disengagement, however. By mid-1950, American policymakers have become completely disillusioned with China. In contrast to previous hopes that a Communist China could carve out an independent policy from the Soviet Union, hostilities between China and the US and the signing of the Sino-Soviet Friendship Treaty in February 1950 proved to even moderates that Communist China was unlikely to respond to US overtures. NSC 68, which captured this hardened view of the Cold War, painted a bleak picture of coordinated threats against the US and warned against any weakening in US's relative military power with the Soviet bloc. The North

[61] Qing Shi, 59.
[62] Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 48.

Korean invasion provided the most opportune reason for the US to reassert itself in Asia.[63] Also, Christensen finds the reason for the swift decision to intervene in Truman's aggressive campaign that aimed to justify massive aid to Turkey and Greece but mobilized a sizeable anti-Communism lobby. To justify US strategy in Europe, Truman could not walk away from Communist advances in Asia.[64]

While the deployment of the Seventh Fleet drew immediate condemnation from China, Whiting observes that China's commentary in the party paper *People's Daily* on US intervention was belated and muted, devoid of direct linkages to Chinese interests.[65] Yet behind the scenes Chinese leaders quickly realized the potential for calamity and began to prepare for what they hoped to be unnecessary – some kind of Chinese involvement. On 2 July, Premier Zhou Enlai told Soviet ambassador to China Nikolai Roshchin that if US forces crossed over to north of the 38th parallel, China could send troops in support of the North Korean army. Therefore, China would move three corps to the northeast.[66] Zhou apparently also used the occasion to complain bitterly that China had warned of the risk of US intervention as early as mid-May. In Zhou's words, "we turned out to be right, but Kim Il-sung did not believe us."[67] On 5 July, Stalin sent a

[63] Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 69-76.
[64] Christensen, *Useful Adversaries*, 32-76.
[65] Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 53-54.
[66] Military Science Academy, Military History Research Department comp. *Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanzhengshi* (A Military History of the War against America and Aiding Korea) (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2000), 65.
[67] Qing Shi, 62.

telegraph to Zhou, calling China's proposed precaution appropriate, namely using the nine divisions amassed in North Korea to operate in North Korea when enemy forces crossed into the north, and pledging to provide Soviet air cover to Chinese combat units.[68] On 7 July, at the expanded meeting of the Central Military Commission (CMC), it was decided that a Northeast Border Defense Army should be established to safeguard the area and to "prepare for crossing the river to aid the DPRK at any moment," depending on developments on the battlefield.[69] Zhou ordered that if Chinese forces were to be deployed, they should don uniforms of a "volunteer army" and fly such flags.[70]

As the war dragged on, sobering notes began to creep into official media commentary on the war. American forces began to arrive in large numbers in early July, and fifteen other states contributed forces to the UNC. The sheer imbalance of forces worried the Chinese leadership. Following the first major battle won by the North Korean army over UN forces on 20 July, a *World Culture* article published on 5 August for the first time termed the conflict a "prolonged war," with the obvious connotations of

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[68] Yu Yan, *Wushinian Guoshi Jiyao: Junshi Juan* (Excerpts of Fifty Years of National Events: The Military Volume) (Changsha: Hunan People's Press, 1999), 89. Telegram, Stalin to Soviet ambassador in Beijing (N. V. Rochshin) with message for Zhou Enlai, 5 July 1950, *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, no.6-7 (winter 1995-1996): 43.

[69] Zhang Xi, "Peng Dehuai Shouming Shuaishi Kangmei Yuanchao de Qianqian Houhou (How Peng Dehuai Followed the Order to Lead the Army in Aid of Korea and against America)," *Zhonggong Dangshi Ziliao* (Chinese Communist Party Historical Material), No. 31(1989): 118.

[70] "Transcript of First Meeting Discussing National Defense," 7 July 1950. Cited by Qi Dexue, *Juren de Jiaoliang: Kangmei Yuanchao Gaoceng Juece he Zhidao* (Rivalry between Giants: High-level Decision-making of the Anti-US and Aid-Korea War) (Beijing: Chinese Communist Central Party Institute Press, 1999), 32.

hardship and possibility of attrition.[71] Around this time the North Korean advance stagnated, as UN forces were able to establish a defensive perimeter around Pusan and hold it against repeated North Korean attacks.

Gathering strength of the UN troops and the dwindling window of opportunity for the North Korean military to use its element of surprise for a swift victory convinced Chinese leaders to step up military preparation. At a 4 August Politburo meeting, Mao said that "if American imperialists won, they would get complacent and pleased and would threaten us. [We] have no choice but to help North Korea."[72] On the next day, Mao telegraphed Gao Gang that "there would likely be no combat operations in August, but Gao should prepare for battle in early September."[73] Soon afterward, UN forces repelled North Korean attacks over several days of intense fighting during 7-11 August and held its ground near Pusan. A *People's Daily* commentary on 13 August acknowledged the new reality, declaring that the conflict "was in a new stage."[74] On 11 August, Xiao Jinguang announced at a meeting for military leaders that the Northeast Border Defense Forces would be tasked with combat in North Korea against the US and that the troops would go as volunteers, without a formal declaration of war against the US.[75] On 13 August, Gao Gang called a meeting of senior cadres above the division commander level,

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[71] *World Culture*, vol.22, no.5 (5 August 1950). Quoted by Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 56.
[72] Qi Dexue, *Juren de Jiaoliang*, 34.
[73] Zhang Xi, 119.
[74] Quoted by Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 71.
[75] *Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanzhengshi*, 91.

relaying the same message and expounding on the need to stop the American master plan of aggression against China.[76] On 15 August, however, Gao reported to Mao that troops were not yet prepared for combat and proposed to defer deployment.[77] Also in mid-August, Acting Chief of Staff Nie Rongzhen pointed out to Mao that a second and third line of defense would be needed within the Shanhai Fort, the entry point from the northeast to the vast North China plateau on which Beijing sits, in case the war escalated.[78] Combat training nevertheless began on 20 August; on 30 August, Mao telegraphed Gao to demand "all preparation work must be complete by 30 September."[79]

As these high-level maneuvering intensified, China's domestic propaganda and diplomatic warnings took on a new alarm, for the first time articulating a Chinese interest in the resolution of the Korean crisis. Part of the reason lay in China's increasing conviction that the tide was about to turn in the war. In August and September, based on military intelligence, Mao and Zhou thought it likely that US troops could attempt an amphibious attack behind North Korean lines. Zhou's military secretary Lei Yingfu reported US troop movements to Zhou on 23 August, suggesting that Inchon may be ideally located for a landing.[80] He put the most likely date at 15 September, and Mao ordered to send a warning to Kim and Stalin immediately as well as telling the 13th Army

[76] Qi Dexue, *Juren de Jiaoliang*, 34.
[77] Zhang Xi, 119.
[78] *Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanzhengshi*, 74.
[79] Zhang Xi, 119.
[80] Li Jing, ed., *Shihua Shishuo Fengzeyuan* (The Real Fengzeyuan) (Beijing: Chinese Youth Press, 2000), 57-58.

Group to be prepared for prompt fighting in August and September.[81] On 26 August, Zhou pointed out at a meeting for military leaders that if enemy forces landed at Inchon, the war would turn into a long-term conflict, and "the burden of annihilating US forces one by one will inevitably fall on our shoulders."[82]

This changing assessment of the balance of forces and the increasing likelihood of Chinese involvement led to first warnings to the US, but at this point diplomatic and public channels were still preferred. On 20 August, Zhou Enlai sent a cable to the UN convention at Lake Success, proclaiming that "the Chinese people cannot but be concerned about the solution of the Korean question," as "Korea is China's neighbor."[83] On 26 August, *World Culture* declared that the "barbarous action of American imperialism and its hangers-on… seriously threatens the security of China in particular." In an ominous message, China announced that "North Korea's friends are our friends. North Korea's enemy is our enemy. North Korea's defense is out defense. North Korea's victory is our victory."[84] At the same time, more belligerent signals were coming from the US: while the *World Culture* statement was published, US Secretary of the Navy Francis Mattews appeared to endorse preemptive attacks in a public speech, saying that the US could be the "first aggressors for peace."[85] In late August, US warplanes strayed into the

[81] Li Jing, 60.
[82] Yu Yan, *Wushinian Guoshi Jiyao*, 91.
[83] Quoted by Whiting: *China Crosses the Yalu*, 79.
[84] Quoted by Whiting: *China Crosses the Yalu*, 84-85.
[85] Quoted by Whiting: *China Crosses the Yalu*, 96.

Chinese border city of Andong (later known as Dandong), bombing and strafing Chinese targets. Given already considerable alarm regarding US intentions and capabilities, this action, which the US later conceded as a mistake, must have further elevated threat perceptions.[86] On 31 August, Zhou chaired a planning meeting on the Northeast Border Defense Forces; it was estimated at the meeting that casualties in the first year would reach 200,000, showing that military planning was advancing into more tactical stages.[87] Amid growing anxiety, Mao explained to a group of non-CCP officials on 5 September that a quick resolution is better than a drawn-out conflict but that China would be prepared for a "long, big" battle and even the atomic bomb, though Mao deemed the prospects of a nuclear attack unlikely.[88]

The successful Inchon landing by UN troops on 15 September bore out the worst fears of Chinese leaders. Within days it was clear that the North Korean hope to unify the peninsula was dashed; when the South Korean army rushed toward the 38th parallel and the North Korean army in disarray, the calculation quickly shifted from whether North Korea would win to whether it would survive. Little doubt remained that South Korean forces would enter North Korea, as South Korean president Rhee Syngman made his intentions clear shortly after the Inchon landing.[89] At this point the leaders may have

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[86] *Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanzhengshi*, 86-89.
[87] Yu Yan, *Wushinian Guoshi Jiyao: Junshi Juan*, 92.
[88] Qi Dexue, *Juren de Jiaoliang*, 36. Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 154.
[89] Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 104.

made extensive arguments in favor of intervention, but preparations on the ground prevented imminent action. On 17 September, Mao wrote to Gao Gang, telling him to get the northeast ready to send forces. According to Zhou's military secretary Lei Yingfu, Mao and Zhou preferred to first warn enemy forces; if they were to propose peace talks when they advanced near the 38th parallel, then China should seize the opportunity. Internally, more careful considerations were needed over the best timing for attack, as "too early and it does not help to fully expose the enemy; too late and it is unfavorable to us militarily."[90] On 30 September, the day South Korean military crossed the 38th parallel and entered the north, Zhou addressed representatives of the China People's Political Consultative Committee, announcing that "the Chinese people absolutely cannot tolerate foreign invasion and cannot ignore imperialism invade [sic] their neighbors with abandon." He pointed out that "US aggressive forces have already encroached on the territory of the People's Republic of China and may expand this invasion at any moment."[91] This may refer to bombings in Andong, but could also be seen as a conviction that encroachment was sure to come. Also on the same evening, Kim visited Chinese embassy in Pyongyang to send a message to the Chinese leadership, asking the Chinese to send the 13th Army Group to Korea. Kim had first appealed for direct Soviet help, but Stalin instructed him to ask for help from the Chinese volunteers. The next day

[90] Li Jing, 61-63.
[91] *Zhou Enlai Waijiao Wenxuan* (A Selection of Zhou Enlai's Writings on Foreign Affairs) (Beijing: Foreign Ministry of the PRC and Document Research Office of the Chinese Communist Party, 1990), 23-24.

Kim sent a formal message to Mao for help.[92]

The prospect of an imminent collapse of the North Korean defense after 15 September intensified Chinese efforts to deter the entry of US forces into North Korea and subsequent takeover of the country. China stepped up direct warnings to the US in late September and early October and sent leaders to the Soviet Union for urgent discussions over Chinese and Soviet responsibilities. These efforts will be examined in greater detail in the section on China's attempts to maintain its credibility. On 1 October, General Douglas MacArthur, commander of the UN forces, issued an ultimatum for Kim's unconditional surrender. On 7 October, US forces crossed into North Korea. After much deliberation and last-minute wavering, Mao made the final decision to commit forces on 18 October. Chinese troops began crossing the Yalu River the next day. Deterrence gave way to war.

What was at stake?

The four months between the onset of the Korean War and the actual commitment of Chinese troops allowed China to gradually define and articulate what was at stake for China. While evidence suggests that the risks and repercussions of US intervention entered the minds of Chinese leaders prior to North Korea's invasion of the South,

[92] Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 171-172.

rapidly evolving conditions on the battlefield as well as continual consultations with the Soviet Union and, to a lesser extent, the DPRK, helped frame the North Korean crisis for top leaders over time. Direct threats by adversaries on the front of Taiwan, China's northeast and Indochina could severely worsen the long-term security outlook for China with indeterminate but prohibitive costs. The loss of a socialist ally would also deal a blow to the camp to which China belonged, a less tangible damage but also significant. The stakes of Chinese inaction were high enough that Mao explicitly considered – and implicitly accepted – scenarios in which China would be engaged in drawn-out battles with the US and suffer heavy losses, especially if the US deployed nuclear weapons. While China clearly hoped for Soviet aid under the best-case scenario and halted its troop deployment when Stalin wavered, it decided to intervene in the end with just an implicit promise of armament aid and extended deterrence for Chinese territory.

For China, the swift decision by the US to intervene in the Korean War against the DPRK and send the Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Strait could not have come at a worse time. Since mid-1949, the CCP has begun focusing on a campaign to crush the Kuomintang (KMT) regime and forces that have fled to Taiwan to set up a government there. On 2 July 1949, Liu Shaoqi led a delegation on a secret visit to the Soviet Union to lay the groundwork for Sino-Soviet relations in face of imminent CCP victory to overturn the KMT regime. During the mission he informed Stalin of the plan to take over Taiwan

in 1950 and asked for military aid in the form of 200 warplanes and pilot training. Stalin approved the idea but rejected requests for Soviet air and naval support in the event of a forceful takeover.[93] At the same time, the frontline commission of the Third Field Army ordered the four corps under the Ninth Army Group to start training for amphibious attacks and subsequently drew up a plan to attack Taiwan with eight corps.[94] Yet the PLA's overwhelming strength on land versus KMT forces did not translate to amphibious warfare. With little experience in landing battles and almost no real naval and air capabilities to speak of, the military failed to take the Quemoy and Dengbu Islands in October and November 1949, which alarmed the military leadership. By end-1949, the Third Field Army has decided to bolster the attack, putting all 500,000 troops in its main forces of 12 corps toward attacking Taiwan.[95]

Stalin also lent more support to the proposal after speeches by Truman and Acheson that suggested non-intervention by the US, especially since the 5 January 1950 statement by Truman explicitly ruled out any US wish to "obtain special rights or privileges or to establish military bases on Formosa" and any "military aid or advice to Chinese forces on Formosa."[96] Seeing that the US has vowed to stay away from the resolution of China's civil war, Stalin subsequently agreed that China should make

[93] Qing Shi, 49.
[94] *Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanzhengshi*, 61.
[95] *Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanzhengshi*, 61.
[96] For Truman's statement, see *New York Times*, 6 January 1950.

necessary preparations for taking Taiwan and agreed that half of the Soviet military aid to China could be put toward purchasing weaponry for a Taiwan campaign.[97] Military planning proceeded; on 17 May 1950, the Third Field Army issued *Several Opinions to Ensure the Success of Attacking Taiwan*, confirming that the army has turned its attention to amphibious attacks. The plan directs different military services to first train separately from July 1950 to March 1951, conduct joint exercises in April-May 1951, and then take Taiwan in a joint attack. In June 1950, during the Third Plenum of the Seventh Central Committee of the CCP, deputy commander of the Third Field Army Su Yu reported detailed battle plans to the central leadership and was appointed by Mao to head the campaign.[98] Even after the dispatch of the Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Strait, Chinese preparation to attack Taiwan did not immediately cease: during July and August 1950, the 24th and 25th Corps as well as three artillery divisions of the East Military Region were still training to take over Quemoy.[99] But the order finally came in July to indefinitely postpone plans to take over Taiwan "in order to aid Korea and counter the US." Su Yu relayed the decision from top party leaders to reconfigure China's defense stance to that of assisting North Korea in a land battle.[100]

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[97] Qing Shi, 51.
[98] *Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanzhengshi*, 61.
[99] Lin Xiaoguang, "Jiangguo Chuqi Woguo Guofang Zhanlue de Zhuanhuan: Chaoxian Zhanzheng yu Dongnan Yanhai Fangwei Zhanlue (Transition in Defense Strategy shortly after the Establishment of the Republic: the Korean War and the Defense Strategy of the Southeast Coast)," *Dangdai Zhongguoshi Yanjiu* (Contemporary Chinese History Studies) 7, no. 6 (2000): 34.
[100] *Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanzhengshi*, 62.

The outbreak of the Korean War and US intervention first dashed the CCP's hope to root out all opposition and fortify its coastal security. The survival of hostile forces in Taiwan, now with the political and military aid of the US, would clearly threaten the mainland for years to come. Zhou Enlai angrily protested the deployment of the Seventh Fleet as "armed aggression against the territory of China" within a day.[101] Soon enough, even the maintenance of the status quo ante seems in doubt, and a much worse potential scenario surfaced, that of an attack on China from its two flanks, the northeast and southeast. Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek proposed to send a 30,000-strong force to North Korea under the UN Command.[102] Following a two-day visit to Taiwan, General Douglas MacArthur and Chiang issued a joint communiqué that the meeting had cemented a foundation of mutually defending Taiwan and military cooperation between the US and Republic of China.[103] While public media reaction was muted, this communiqué undoubtedly left the impression on Chinese leaders that the US and KMT have reached a consensus on a role for the KMT that extended beyond self-defense. On 25 August, General MacAruthur made the iconic statement that Taiwan is an "unsinkable aircraft carrier and submarine tender," part of the "island chain from the Aleutians to the Marianas" from which the US air force can control every Asian port.[104] While he was

[101] Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 58.
[102] Xie Lifu, *Chaoxian Zhanzheng Shilu* (A Realistic Account of the Korean War) (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 1993), 135.
[103] See *Kangmei Yuanchao Fengyunlu*, 29.
[104] *New York Times*, 29 August 1950.

forced to withdraw those remarks on President Truman's intervention, these statements suggested not only the centermost significance of Taiwan to future US defense policy but an implied threat of attacks on China's eastern seaboard.

Not only were Chinese leaders immediately aware of the threat from a US-backed Taiwan, but the point was also driven home by China's allies. Zhou pointed out that "if victory can be achieved on Korea, then it would be easy to resolve our Taiwan issue."[105] In an effort to persuade China to send forces, Stalin also pointed out in his 5 October cable to Mao that if China waited passively that the Taiwan question could no longer be resolved.[106] But the Chinese leadership had to know that the reversal of US security policy to cover Taiwan under its nuclear umbrella meant that the Chinese civil war would remain unfinished for a very long time. A rival regime, with a claim to all of Chinese territory, has survived and would now receive considerable aid from the US. China would have to live with this security threat for the foreseeable future.

When the UNC smashed through the North Korean military after the Inchon landing, the threat of a hostile force pushing up against China's northeastern border replaced Taiwan as the most immediate and urgent menace to Chinese security. In his plea for Chinese aid on 30 September, Kim Il-sung warned the Chinese ambassador to the

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[105] *Zhou Enlai Junshi Wenxuan* (Selected Military Works by Zhou Enlai), vol.4 (Beijing: People's Press, 1997), 43-44.
[106] Quoted in Xu Xiaotian, Li Chunlong, and Xu Zhenze, *Xinzhongguo yu Sulian de Gaoceng Wanglai* (High-level Contacts Between the New China and the Soviet Union) (Changchun: Jilin People's Press, 2001), 190.

DPRK that after North Korea's defeat the Koreas would become a US colony and military base.[107] In a cable to Mao on 16 or 17 September, Stalin also asked if China would help if North Korea needed to establish a government in exile in China's northeast.[108] The cost of providing for and arming the remaining North Korean troops and housing a government-in-exile, which might also recruit actively among the two million ethnic Koreans in China's northeast, would be considerable.

A hostile, US-armed North Korea would also cost China its own security and severely constrain its policy choices for the foreseeable future. Providing a safe haven to the Kim regime, as appeared inevitable, would give the US the perfect excuse to directly harass Chinese forces, as the remnants of Korean forces would still pose a challenge to the US and South Korean authorities from behind the border. It would turn the region into a de facto hostile area to the South Korean and US governments, attracting espionage and covert operations as well as accusations in the international realm. Even if an all-out war could be avoided, thanks in part to the protection of Soviet alliance against a direct attack on China, the resulting standoff would require the active commitment of sizeable Chinese troops to deter US and Korean forces as well as maintaining a credible defense in case of actual war. The sudden loss of hundreds of miles of buffer zone would expose China's industrial and agricultural heartland to enemy forces. Beijing's hope to start demobilizing

[107] Qi Dexue, *Juren de Jiaoliang*, 52-53.
[108] CCP Central Documents Research Office, *Zhou Enlai Nianpu* (Zhou Enlai Chronicles) vol.1 (Beijing: Central Documents Press, 1997), 85.

the PLA and focus on reconstruction after decades of war might have to be postponed forever. A drawn-out standoff that could turn hot at indeterminate times would not only lead to a loss of North Korea but indeed make "our own rebuilding impossible," as Zhou later paraphrased Mao's thinking to Julius Nyerere, the president of Tanzania, in June 1965.[109] For a war-battered country in dire need of repair and consolidation, a perpetual distraction would prove tremendously costly.

Moreover, the loss of a socialist ally in an emerging bipolar world order could also damage the cause with which Chinese leaders have publicly associated themselves. To allow a collapse of the North Korean regime was not just to lose a precious buffer, but also to concede the defeat of the Communist movement and renege on commitments by China and the Soviet Union. While China weighed the tangible costs and benefits of intervention, some of the cost of nonintervention was also less tangible. Zhou said that the Korean issue is not only "a problem for a brotherly nation, not only a problem involving [our] interests because of its adjacency to our northeast, but should be regarded as an important question of international struggles."[110] While the rhetoric was in part meant to justify the decision to intervene in order to convince domestic party officials, it also shows that nonintervention would deal a significant blow to the prestige of China in the Communist movement.

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[109] Cited by Qi Dexue, *Juren de Jiaoliang*, 59.
[110] *Zhou Enlai Junshi Wenxuan*, 61-62.

But most importantly, in the eyes of Chinese leaders, these security threats were not discrete and isolated, but symptoms of a grand strategy by the US to threaten China. In other words, the biggest threat to Chinese leaders was not just the loss of a buffer zone or the danger of an offensive Taiwan, but the overarching threat of a hostile US with both the intention and soon even greater military advantage to challenge China wherever it chose to, which would take forms that China could not yet envision but would nonetheless have to confront. This perception surfaced quickly and consistently, argued with increasing conviction by Mao and Zhou as more tangible security threats mounted. On 28 June, Zhou first pointed out in his protest at the dispatch of the Seventh Fleet that the US wanted to "create excuses for the US invasion of Taiwan, Korea, Vietnam and the Philippines."[111] At the 4 August Politburo meeting, Mao stressed that "Truman has issued orders, demanding that Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam and the Philippines should all do his bidding. We of course would not do their bidding (with the exception of the Philippines). In other words, [we] must contravene his orders. [We] must reclaim Taiwan, while we cannot stand by and ignore Vietnam and Korea."[112] The statement did not yet suggest a definitive intention to intervene, but it spelled out an overbearing concern by the two most important leaders, that of a consistent plan to undermine China's security at will. Disparate threats were linked together in this grand US strategy.

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[111] *People's Daily*, 29 June 1950.
[112] Mao's speech at the Politburo meeting, cited in *Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanzhengshi*, 60.

On 13 August, at a meeting for senior cadres, Gao Gang elaborated on this theme, pointing out that intervening in Korea was a component of US aggressive plans, a launch pad for attacking China. He argued that the US was actively rearming Japan and South Korea in order to leverage their resources.[113] These arguments were likely taken directly from Mao and Zhou's thinking at the time. By 4 October, a matter of days before US forces would cross the 38th parallel into the north, top leaders held some of the most tense meetings to debate whether to send troops. Zhou cited a report by the AFP that the US would hand over North Korea to an international army under the UN Command after it took over the territory. It would draw China's forces to the northeast, freeing up US forces for other areas, including Taiwan and Indochina. "If this is true, we will be forced into a showdown with them in Taiwan and Vietnam."[114] If China faced a three-front assault from the US, "we should choose [to fight in] Korea, with the most favorable geography and transportation… and it would be the most favorable for us to get indirect help from the Soviet Union."[115] Peng Dehuai remembered that during the same deliberations, Mao proclaimed that "if tigers want to eat people, the timing will depend on its stomach. [We] cannot concede to it."[116] In the four months since US intervention, Chinese leaders went from an initially crude conception of US interest in Asia to one that

[113] *Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanzhengshi*, 91.
[114] Xu Yipeng, *Zhihu: Chaoxian Tingzhan Gaoceng Juedou Lu* (Straight Arc: The High-Level Duel over the Korean Armistice Talks) (Nanjing: Jiangsu People's Press, 1998): 257.
[115] Xu Yipeng, 257.
[116] Peng Dehuai, *Peng Dehuai Zishu* (Personal Account of Peng Dehuai) (Beijing: People's Publishers, 1981) 257.

was increasingly more vivid and threatening. The shock of US policy reversal on Taiwan and South Korea led to a profound mistrust of US statements, and the many statements from military and political leaders such as General MacArthur and Secretary Mattews only served to deepen this conviction. What was at stake, in the eyes of Chinese leaders, was never just the failure of North Korea to reunify the peninsula, or the loss of an ally and a buffer zone, but the beginning of an all-new conflict involving the US and China, with China at a clear disadvantage that would only worsen.

How does China think this case could affect its credibility?

This gloomy assessment of the repercussions of the Korean conflict began to raise questions about China's credibility very quickly. It helps explain why leaders began weighing intervention as a yet-undefined possibility as early as July, and why Mao felt compelled to intervene even though at the time Soviet military aid fell far short of what China had hoped for and expected. When Mao was pushed by developments on the battlefield to make a final decision on intervention, the Soviets agreed to provide large amounts of weaponry on lease and air cover for Chinese territory, but did not agree to join China in war efforts in Korea.[117] After the war actually began and engagements between the Chinese and the US military grew quickly, Soviet pilots began shooting

[117] Niu Jun, *Lengzhan yu Xinzhongguo Waijiao de Yuanqi, 1949-1955* (The Cold War and the Origins of New China's Foreign Policy, 1949-1955) (Beijing: Social Science Academic Press, 2013), 296.

down American planes near the Yalu.[118] At the time of deciding, however, Mao had to operate under the assumption that the Soviet Union would not be a material factor in the war efforts.

China quickly perceived the danger of inaction on China's credibility. In fact, the conception of the last – and arguably most important – threat of having to fight the US elsewhere brought China's credibility into sharp relief. Acquiescence of North Korea's collapse would greatly amplify the danger of the last threat, as it would practically invite more severe challenges, while fighting the US in Korea would help reduce the potential damage of the future threat, even considering the cost of going to war. The perception of the threat was so structured as to in effect require that China place its credibility front and center in its considerations.

For top leaders, future conflicts seemed inevitable once the US intervened in Korea and Taiwan, in no small part because Japan had also controlled these areas before finally invading China. For the Communists, who survived and defeated the KMT regime at least partially because the KMT had been severely weakened by years of fighting Japanese forces, the analogy could not have been more alarming. Zhou pointed out that the US "wanted to inherit the ways of Japan."[119] Gao Gang's speech at the 13 August meeting of senior cadres already showed a sense of foreboding. He asked, "is it better for

[118] Christensen, *Useful Adversaries*, 168.
[119] *Zhou Enlai Waijiao Wenxuan*, 31. Cited in *Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanzhengshi*, 59.

us to fight [the US] after letting it take Korea, prepare and become more arrogant and attack China? Or is it better to seize the initiative and help the Korean People's Army to annihilate the enemy and defend ourselves outside our territory? Clearly, defeating the enemy outside our territory is more favorable to us, to our friends and to the cause for peace and democracy by peoples in the world against imperialism."[120] Zhou explicitly called a conflict with the US on Korea "inevitable" at the 4 October meeting.[121] Many civilian and military leaders referred to what Mao said on 13 October to Peng Dehuai, after Stalin clearly indicated that the Soviet air force would not be extending defense for Chinese ground forces. Mao said, "It is okay if we cannot win. [The US] would always owe us something, and we can fight them whenever we want. Otherwise, we would have no excuse if we want to fight [the US] in the future." Peng remembered that this reasoning helped him make up his mind.[122] He told other cadres that "we should not be afraid to smash up [our rebuilding] now. We should be prepared to smash it up and then rebuild; we should prepare for a long war, for smashing up," because the US could threaten China at any point.[123] Mao's remarks were cryptic but striking in its candor. Engaging the US would mean many lives lost. Atrocities would be committed and remembered. Real pain and hurt will leave an indelible mark on the military, the

[120] *Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanzhengshi*, 92.
[121] Xu Yipeng, *Zhihu: Chaoxian Tingzhan Gaoceng Juedou Lu*, 256-257.
[122] Cited by Yu Yan, *Wushinian Guoshi Jiyao: Junshi Juan*, 101.
[123] Wang Yazhi, "Mao Zedong Juexin Chubing Chaoxian Qianhou de Yixie Qingkuang (Some Issues surrounding Mao Zedong's Decision to Send Troops to Korea)," *Dangde Wenxian* (Party Documents) no. 6 (1995): 87.

government and the people, providing the groundwork for future conflicts should China feel the need to confront the US again.

The belief that the US had made the decision to encircle and challenge China in the long term also made it particularly important to defend China's image as a resolute power in the face of the Americans. In the eyes of Chinese leaders, the US was China's enduring rival, locked in a battle for influence in Asia. It both had the capability to sustain a long-term containment policy against China and the intention to do so, demonstrated by the swift decision to not only intervene in the Korean War but also neutralize Taiwan immediately. Backing down in front of the US would bring disastrous consequences, because the US was going to infer weakness from Chinese inaction and become "more arrogant," as Mao and Zhou repeatedly stressed.

Both the sense of the inevitability of conflict and the clear identification of the US as the biggest security threat for China in the foreseeable future convinced leaders that fighting now would be better than fighting in the future. The passage of time favored the US much more than China, despite China's weak position at the time. Military leaders pointed out that delaying the conflict would in fact worsen China's position, despite the many problems China faced at the time. Peng Dehuai explained to commanders and troops that in three or five years, the PLA could not improve its equipment significantly,

but the enemy could arm more troops.[124] Acting Chief of Staff Nie Rongzhen also concluded that allowing the US to take Korea would force China to fight it on another battlefield, when China would be at a bigger disadvantage.[125] When the time value of inaction actually worked against China, fighting now became a more attractive option.

While China most urgently needed to establish credibility in the eyes of the US, its immediate and future challenger, it also perceived a wider audience for its reputation, one that included the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. For Beijing to propose to the Soviet Union some level of involvement by Chinese forces as early as July and then to renege might have also carried costs in the eyes of Chinese leaders. Only a year ago, China had just publicly announced that it was adopting the socialist model propagated by the Soviet Union; while the Soviet Union did not drive the Chinese decision to intervene in Korea, the looming threat of the US could only enhance the strategic importance of the Soviet Union to China. Stalin telegraphed Mao to ask that China send five or six divisions to Korea.[126] After he reneged on the pledge to provide air cover to Chinese troops in Korea on October 14, heading into the war both carried distinctly higher risks but also the corollary benefit of cementing China's image as a committed and resolute ally. Mao hinted at the wider implications of China's credibility when he exclaimed to

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[124] Du Ping, *Zai Zhiyuanjun Zongbu* (At the Headquarters of the Volunteers' Army) (Beijing: People's Liberation Army's Press, 1989), 35.
[125] Nie Rongzhen. *Nie Rongzhen Huiyilu* (Nie Rongzhen's Memoir) (Beijing: People's Liberation Army Press, 1984), 738.
[126] *Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanzhengshi*, 147-148.

Peng, "what kind of a big socialist country are we if we watch North Korea perish and not lending a hand, not show any internationalist spirit?"[127] While these were likely secondary concerns, they also suggest that once credibility becomes a palpable concern for leaders, it tends to reinforce itself as leaders also consider other audiences for its reputation.

The lessons learned from the war clearly illustrate the significance of credibility. From then-leaders and generals to contemporary historians and military strategists, the long-term credibility gained by China as a result of its intervention stands out as one of the most important lessons for Chinese security policy. After the end of the war, Peng listed four benefits of Chinese intervention at a December 1950 conference for senior military cadres: China safeguarded the security of its northeast by reclaiming the 38th parallel, boosted its confidence in struggles with imperialists, mobilized social reforms and construction and deferred the next imperialist invasion.[128] The last one directly credits Chinese intervention for deferring future challenges, while the second one touches on the impact of resolve on China's own morale. Mao pointed out after the armistice treaty that "imperialist invaders should understand that the Chinese people are now

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[127] Yang Fuchang, ed., *Kashijide Zhongguo Waijiao: "Zhongguo Waijiao Huihuang 50nian" Yantaohui Lunwenji* (Chinese Diplomacy Over the Century: A Collection of Theses for the "Fifty Years of Glorious Chinese Diplomacy" Conference) (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 2000), 119.
[128] Deng Lifeng, "Zhongguo Renmin Zhiyuanjun Kanmei Yuanchao Douzheng Gaishu (A Brief Summary of the Struggle by Chinese People's Volunteers' Army in the War against America and Helping Korea)," *Zhonggong Dangshi Ziliao* (Chinese Communist Party Historical Material), No. 36 (Nov. 1990): 159-160.

organized and not to be messed with. If they mess with China, things will be difficult."[129] Former Foreign Minister Qiao Guanhua concluded in a 1998 review of the war that China "created this recognition in the world that statements by the Chinese are not diplomatic antics; they count." He argues that this reputation – that China's words count – carried all the way into the 1970s, when China reestablished diplomatic relations with the US.[130]

Contemporary accounts of the war by military historians and strategists routinely stress lessons about the damage of a reputation of weakness and the rewards of gaining that credibility through intervention. Qi Dexue argues that the US ignored Chinese warnings against sending US troops into North Korea because China was weak, and therefore China concluded that it must not show weakness when faced with imperialist provocations.[131] Renowned scholar Shi Yinhong concludes that "without a direct showdown, the US will find it difficult to understand [the need to] respect the power of the new China."[132] General Xu Genchu of the PLA argues that with intervention, China established "an image of not fearing anything and having the courage to fight any strong enemy to a bloody end… an image of following words with deeds and seeing any action to its end." As a result, imperialists "learned a lesson" and "had to account for the China

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[129] Xu Yipeng, 344.
[130] Qiao Guanhua, "Guanyu Chaoxian Zhanzheng yu Tingzhan Tanpan (On the Korean War and the Armistice Negotiations)," *Zhonggong Dangshi Ziliao* (Chinese Communist Party Historical Material) No. 68 (Dec. 1998): 27.
[131] Qi Dexue, *Juren de Jiaoliang*, 356-357.
[132] Shi Yinhong. *Didui yu Chongtu de Youlai: Meiguo dui Xinzhongguo de Zhengce yu Zhongmei Guanxi: 1949-1950* (The Origins of Confrontation and Conflicts: American Policies towards the New China and Sino-American Relations: 1949-1950) (Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 1995), 240.

factor when considering issues in Asia and the world."[133] In a volume edited by the Vice Chairman of the Central Military Committee Zhang Wannian, it is repeatedly argued that "the foundation of Chinese deterrence thinking is to achieve the result of thwarting the enemy's military without fighting by daring to fight and fighting well."[134] Through these modern cannons the lessons on credibility are learned and passed on.

The lessons drawn from the war by officials and orthodox scholars notably define credibility through action, something that can only be defended by following up threats with action and by, if not winning, then at least incurring enough costs to both the enemy and China itself to demonstrate the seriousness of its commitment. Less mention is made of perfecting the signaling process prior to the use of force. Chinese scholars did not blame miscommunication or ineffective signaling for the breakdown of deterrence; they put the blame squarely on US arrogance borne out of the perception that China was weak and therefore its threats were not credible. While Chinese leaders showed marked awareness of the timing and calibration of threats during subsequent deterrence episodes, suggesting that there was also procedural learning, the biggest lessons from the first and largest armed conflict by the new government portray credibility as a precious good that has to be acquired through costly action. These lessons are likely instilled in generations

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[133] Xu Genchu, "Guanghui de Pianzhang, Buxiu de Fengbei (Illustrious Chapter, Immortal Momument)," *Zhongguo Junshi Kexue* (Chinese Military Science), no. 6 (2000): 15.
[134] Zhang Wannian, ed., *Dangdai Shijie Junshi yu Zhongguo Guofang* (Contemporary World Military and Chinese National Security) (Beijing: Military Science Press, 1999), 182.

of Chinese civilian and military leadership through official education.

How did China maintain its credibility?

The novelty of a deterrence situation and the severity of the stakes likely forced China to both improvise and draw on its past experiences in decades of warfighting. China used a variety of means to communicate its intent, gradually clarifying its objective over time, but at the same time focusing increasingly on the military preparation that would help China attain its goals on the battlefield should verbal signaling fail. The belated use of direct warnings was the result of many factors: the difficulty of defining China's objective, the fact that the relative strength of the two sides changed quickly, advice from generals that it was best to commit Chinese forces north of the 38th parallel, and tense last-minute negotiations with the Soviet Union. While these constraints possibly interfered with the communication of clear objectives and deterrence threats, military preparation, over which Chinese leaders had full control, persisted even though it was not immediately clear whether it would be for large-scale intervention. CCP leaders were incubated in long and often difficult conflicts, with a thorough appreciation for the importance of military preparedness. As China's warnings were ignored, leaders decided that the best way to maintain credibility was to inflict high costs on the enemy and on itself in combat.

As Whiting points out, China did not publicly link the Korean War with Chinese interests until 20 August, when Zhou cabled the UN to demand Chinese participation in any talks on Korea since China was concerned about the resolution of the issue. The 26 August *World Culture* article quoted earlier used far more explicit terms, calling North Korea's enemy China's enemy. The domestic propaganda machine kicked into high gear after US warplanes bombed north of the Yalu, portraying the US as a rabid militant bent on hurting China.[135] But this militancy did not entail "committing the government to any specific action."[136] Broadly speaking, what China initially communicated did not go beyond expressing concern and conveying vague threats, common in proxy wars.

It is not that Chinese leaders did not want to warn the US. If anything, evidence suggests that careful thought went into the selection of venue and the wording of the warnings, which would characterize later deterrence interactions. Lei Yingfu remembers that both Mao and Zhou wanted to warn the enemy first, in hope that it would retreat in the face of the difficulties.[137] Before Zhou sent the clearest warning on 2 October through Indian Ambassador to China K. M. Panikkar that China would intervene if US troops crossed the 38th parallel, he specifically asked his translator how to accurately convey the meaning of the Chinese word *guan*, which had a connotation of "take care of" or "take

[135] Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 99-100.
[136] Ibid., 101.
[137] Li Jing, 63.

over."[138] There was an awareness of sending a clear and accurate message to dissuade the enemy.

But most of China's direct warnings were crowded into the short period between 20 September and 10 October, as increasingly clear indications that they were not being heeded mounted. On 21 September, Zhou told Panikkar that China did not have any obligation to the UN since the US did not recognize China.[139] In hindsight that was an oblique reference to China's freedom from any UN actions or resolutions, but the threat was rather open-ended. On 25 September, Nie Rongzhen told Panikkar that China would not "sit back with folded hands and let the Americans come up to the [Sino-Korean] border."[140] He went on to say that "if imperialists indeed want to wage wars, we have no choice but to rise up and resist."[141] By the time Panikkar delivered a letter by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on 29 September reassuring China that foreign ministers from the US, France and the UK had agreed not to cross the 38th parallel without UN authorization, China has received plenty of signals that suggested otherwise. Zhou reported to Mao on the same day that South Korean and US forces were advancing northward and that the US had openly announced its plans to cross the 38th parallel. The

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[138] Li Yueran, "Wozai Zhou Zongli Shenbian Gongzuo de Pianduan Huiyi (Pieces of Recollection of My Days Working alongside Premier Zhou)," in Ministry of Foreign Affairs Editing Office of Diplomatic History, *Xinzhongguo Waijiao Fengyun* (Diplomatic Winds of the New China) (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 1990), 97.
[139] *Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanzhengshi*, 134.
[140] Quoted by Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 107.
[141] *Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanzhengshi*, 134-135.

situation was dire, as Pyongyang may soon be threatened.[142] The central leadership concluded therefore that US reassurances were simply to "pacify China when crossing the 38th parallel" in order to "mess with" China afterward.[143] On the next day, Zhou issued the clearest warning when addressing the CPPCC that China "absolutely cannot tolerate" US aggression. At the same time, US Ambassador to the UN Warren Austin practically announced that the US was interested not in restoring the status quo ante but to destroy North Korea once and for all: "the aggressor's forces should not be permitted to have refuge behind an imaginary line."[144]

Therefore, an even more direct warning was deemed necessary, when Zhou summoned Panikkar for a meeting on 2 October and specifically told him that if US troops crossed into North Korea, China would intervene in the war.[145] While these warnings were transmitted to the US, they were discounted as inconsequential. Two days after US troops crossed into North Korea, the US Joint Chief of Staff authorized fighting either open or covert Chinese forces in dispatches to General MacArthur on 9 October, as long as there was "a reasonable chance of success," a dramatic departure from orders two weeks ago that authorized action in North Korea only if there was no recorded or threat of entry by Chinese or Soviet forces.[146] China sounded its final alarm on 10 October,

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[142] *Zhou Enlai Junshi Wenxuan*, 58.
[143] Ibid., 74.
[144] Cited in Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 111.
[145] Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 108.
[146] Ibid., 111. For text of 27 September dispatch by the Joint Chief of Staff, see 190-191.

declaring through a Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson that "the Chinese people cannot stand by idly with regard to… the invasion of North Korea and its accomplices and to the dangerous trend toward expanding the war."[147]

While the lack of formal diplomatic channels impaired China's ability to communicate messages quickly and directly, China also hoped to send a message through large-scale troop movement that corresponded with the growing intensity of its verbal warnings. It has been noted by the US press and certainly by the US military that the size of Chinese deployment to the northeast increased from 180,000 in July and August to 320,000 in September.[148] On 22 September, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs also publicly confirmed reports that China had transferred ethnic Korean troops to North Korea prior to the outbreak of the war, adding that China "will always stand on the side of the Korean people."[149] The calculation that troop movements would be detected by the US and the public confirmation of essentially military aid to North Korea were supposed to augment and substantiate verbal warnings. When they prompted only more belligerent US maneuvering and rhetoric, the Chinese leadership concluded that the US had heeded and chose to either discredit or discount the risk of some form of military intervention by China.

Not only did battlefield conditions change too rapidly after the 15 September UN

[147] *Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanzhengshi*, 143.
[148] Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 111.
[149] Ibid., 105.

counteroffensive, but the belated and difficult negotiations with the Soviet Union over aid commitments also complicated signaling efforts during the crucial final days. As a result, by the time China made the final decision to cross the Yalu, the utility of diplomatic warnings had been eclipsed by the demands of the battlefield. Chinese leaders had reached a consensus that the US was unlikely to compromise, that the advantage of fighting far outweighed that of waiting to see if the US would stop short of the Yalu. Chinese and Soviet historians disagree over whether China made the decision to intervene prior or after Stalin cabled Mao to urge China to intervene, and whether Zhou and Lin Biao told Stalin that China would not intervene in their 10 October meeting.[150] But one thing is clear from competing accounts: while Mao and Zhou made up their mind enough to send the order to commit troops to the northeast forces by October 8, the need to secure Soviet pledge of aid created additional problems and forced top leaders to halt their orders and reconsider the decision several times. By the time the final order was given on 18 October, Pyongyang was hours from falling to the UN Command. The hour for diplomacy had passed.

The two-week consultation, both internally and with the Soviet Union, also reveals the difficulty of defending one's credibility both in the eyes of the challenger and its ally while negotiating for explicit or implicit pledge of aid from the ally that could

[150] For the differing accounts on the meeting, see Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War*, 196-200.

boost the chance of a successful defense should deterrence fail. To prove its resolve to the US, Mao needed to convince all top leaders of the need to intervene, when many of them were reportedly ambivalent or critical of intervention.[151] On 1 October, Stalin cabled that China could send five or six divisions.[152] On 2 October, Mao discussed intervention with top leaders including Zhu De, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Gao Gang and Nie Rongzhen, and Gao received confirmation that troops would be ready by 15 October.[153] The meeting was possibly not determinate, but enough to allow Zhou to issue his last warning through Panikkar the same night. On the same day, Mao drafted two cables to Stalin, one pledging Chinese forces, the other stressing two serious consequences of Chinese intervention: one is that a few divisions cannot solve the problem, and the other is that the Soviet Union might be entangled. The first cable was apparently not sent, while the second cable was apparently meant to probe Soviet reaction to its possible involvement.[154] On 4 October, Peng Dehuai was summoned for another emergency Politburo meeting, and Mao again expressed his belief that a war with the US was inevitable since the US was like a hungry tiger.[155] The next day, Peng gave his opinion as a military commander that it would be

[151] According to aides to Yang Shangkun, Yang remembered that a majority of leaders favored not sending troops right away. See Xue Qi, "Gao Gang, Lin Biao Shifou Fandui Chubing Kangmei Yuanchao (Whether Gao Gang and Lin Biao Opposed Sending Troops to Aid Korea and Resist the US)," *Junshi Lishi* (Military History), no. 4 (2000): 77-78.
[152] *Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanzhengshi*, 147-148.
[153] Zhang Xi, 119.
[154] *Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanzhengshi*, 163.
[155] Zhang Xi, 119.

better to fight now than later, to which Mao agreed.[156] Peng was appointed commander of the forces to aid Korea.[157] On the same day, Stalin held a Politburo meeting to discuss Mao's suggestion that there would be difficulties. Afterward he cabled Mao that the US would likely abandon Korea if China intervened and that China and the Soviet Union had a treaty. Together the two allies were stronger than the US and Great Britain. If war was inevitable, then China might as well fight now.[158] The cable likely helped Mao and Zhou convince military leaders at a 6 October meeting to rally behind intervention, though Lin Biao reportedly opposed intervention and open war. Officials at the meeting still stressed the need to clarify Soviet obligations.[159] The 6 October meeting discussed implications of intervention, including the possibility that the US could enter into war with China and potential maneuvers by KMT forces in Taiwan.[160]

On 7 October, Mao replied to Stalin that China would intervene with nine divisions, but not right away.[161] The move was probably meant to prep Soviet leaders for negotiations, as Zhou and Lin departed for Moscow on 8 October. Internally, however, preparation went ahead with full force. By 8-9 October, an order was sent to officially organize the Northeast Border Defense Army into the Chinese People's Volunteers, and Peng and Gao announced to the troops the decision to intervene. The fact that Zhou, Peng

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[156] Ibid., 119.
[157] Qi Dexue, 62.
[158] Xu Xiaotian, Li Chunlong, and Xu Zhenze, *Xinzhongguo yu Sulian de Gaoceng Wanglai*, 190.
[159] Yu Yan, 99.
[160] Wang Yazhi, 86.
[161] *Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanzhengshi*, 165.

and Gao all left Beijing was seen as strongly supporting the argument that the decision to intervene was already final.[162] But when Zhou and Lin arrived in Moscow, they presented a far less definitive decision to Stalin. Shi Zhe's memoir suggested that the two Chinese leaders told Stalin outright that China would not intervene, as the war would be long and costly.[163] Other accounts challenged this version of events. Zhou's confidential secretary Kang Yimin remembered that Zhou and Lin told Stalin that China would send troops.[164]

In a meeting with Kim Il-sung on 10 October 1970, Mao and Zhou recounted the visit to Moscow, and Zhou confirmed that he presented both options to Stalin, making it clear that Chinese intervention would need Soviet air cover.[165] While it may be argued that Mao wanted to claim credit for intervention in front of Kim, when Sino-Soviet relations were at their worst, other details of the conversation were confirmed by separate historical accounts. Presenting a conditional decision to intervene had its distinct advantages; China did not want to be seen as washing its hands of the intervention, when military preparation was already advanced and China had serious security interests to defend, but it also did not want to look so resolute as to expose itself to Soviet

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[162] Xiong Huayuan, "Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanzheng Qianxi Zhou Enlai Mimi Fangsu (Zhou Enlai's Secret Visit to the Soviet Union prior to the Aid-Korea, Resist-US War)," *Dangde Wenxian* (Party Documents), no. 3 (1994): 84.
[163] Shi Zhe, *Zai Lishi Juren Shenbian: Shi Zhe Huiyilu* (By the Side of Historical Giants: A Memoir by Shi Zhe), expanded edition (Beijing: Chinese Communist Central Party School Press, 1998), 443.
[164] Xiong Huayuan, 83.
[165] "Mao Zedong Tan Zhongguo Guanyu Kangmei Yuanchao, Baojia Weiguo de Jueding (Mao Zedong discusses China's Decision to Aid Korea, Resist the US," *Dangde Wenxian* (Party Documents), no. 5, (2000): 14.

abandonment. But Stalin still decided that Soviet involvement would be too risky. Zhou later recounted that Stalin "wavered and said it was okay for China not to send troops" as the Soviet military cannot go into battle.[166] Stalin decided on 11 October that Soviet air force would only support Chinese troops two months after engagement began.[167] The next day, Mao sent an urgent cable to Peng and Gao to halt the dispatch of troops. During another emergency Politburo meeting on 13 October, Mao still argued that China should intervene. Peng remembered that Mao asked him if he thought if it was feasible to fight, if the Soviet Union had "washed its hands."[168] Peng said, "[the Soviets are] half-washing their hands; we can fight." This was when Mao made the comment that even if China were to lose, it was still better to fight first since it would give China an excuse to fight later if it so chose.[169] On 14 October, China sent more questions to the Soviet Union after the Soviets promised loans and specified the size of the air force units to be dispatched. But Stalin decided on 15 October that Soviet air force would only move into the Chinese northeast and would not enter combat in North Korea even after two months.[170] On 17 October, the 42nd Army Corps, which had already crossed into North Korea, received emergency orders to stop advancing to await further instructions, after Mao decided to

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[166] *Kangmei Yuanchao Zhanzhengshi*, 166.
[167] Yang Shengqun and Tian Songnian, eds., *Gongheguo Zhongda Juecede Lailong Qumai (1949-1956)* (The Making of the Important Decisions of the Republic: 1949-1956) (Nanjing: Jiangsu People's Press, 1996), 61.
[168] Yu Yan, 101.
[169] Ibid., 101.
[170] Yang Shengqun and Tian Songnian, eds., 63.

postpone action for another two days.[171] In the final Politburo meeting on 18 October, it was decided that no matter how great the difficulties were, the decision to send the volunteers across the Yalu would not change and the timing could not be delayed further, as enemy forces were already attacking Pyongyang and could press on the Yalu in days.[172]

These intense negotiations both to convince domestic elites and to bargain to the fullest extent with the Soviets very possibly distracted China from making additional warnings through diplomatic channels. Moreover, as it became increasingly clear that the UN Command would not slow its advance in the face of Chinese admonishments, credibility was seen as best gained through not warnings, but a credible, bloody and determined counteroffensive. Nie Rongzhen clearly laid out China's willingness to take costs in his 25 September warning to Panikkar: "[the US] might even drop atomic bombs on us. What then? They may kill a few million people. Without sacrifice a nation's independence cannot be upheld."[173] Mao best summed up the link between absorbing costs and establishing credibility: "we should deal a blow to the US and to deflate its airs. Although there are many concerns, they are all difficulties that can be overcome, or difficulties that *should be endured*, and they are the *costs we have to pay* to strive for this

[171] Ibid., 104.
[172] Ibid., 106.
[173] Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 107.

great victory."[174] Credibility cannot be had without necessary costs that China's leaders decided were preferable to the cost of inaction.

In sum, China's experience in the Korean War helped the Chinese leadership reach certain conclusions about deterrence that would prove seminal in later interactions. China's conception of a long-term, worsening threat posed by the US basically determined the premium it placed on establishing a reputation for resolve in order to deter future attacks. As Chinese warnings were either ignored or heavily discounted, Chinese leaders also concluded that a costly, at least relatively successful counteroffensive was the only way to establish credibility. The conception of credibility as not just a political communication but also a military condition that meant that practical military considerations would figure heavily in Chinese calculations: the need for secrecy, overwhelming force and the element of surprise would increasingly dominate political considerations as challenges intensified. These lessons from the war were to be learned and adopted in future deterrence interactions.

[174] *Zhou Enlai Junshi Wenxuan*, 137-138.

SINO-INDIAN BORDER WAR

While the Korean War in 1950 proved a fertile learning ground for newly anointed Chinese leaders, border disputes with India that erupted into war over two months in 1962 still posed a novel challenge. The long border China shared with over a dozen countries naturally created tensions as the new regime with a revolutionary ideology sought to consolidate its rule, but China's alliance with the Soviet Union and other socialist neighbors dulled many such concerns during much of the 1950s. When India backed territorial claims with actual exertion of border control, Chinese leaders were faced with a dilemma: as the leader of the non-aligned movement, India commanded both international respect and a special place in China's official foreign policy as a friendly state, or at least a state to be won over. On the other hand, Beijing was increasingly wary of India's aggressive rhetoric and tactics, especially in the context of its interests in Tibet. The combination of these factors made it difficult to apply past lessons learned in conflicts with the KMT, militaristic Japan or the US to relations with India; to compound the issue, the border dispute escalated from 1959 to 1962, a period of disastrous domestic experiments and foreign policy reorientation that focused the leaders' attention elsewhere.

In his seminal study on China's deterrence episodes from the Korean War to the

early stages of US intervention in Vietnam, Allen Whiting argues that the 1962 war is largely a rational response to repeated and escalating provocations by New Delhi, despite signs of puzzling tactical inconsistencies that may be a result of a divided leadership on how best to force India to the negotiating table. In attempting to deter and then deciding to fight a war with India, Chinese leaders employed many tactics similar to those used to deter US troops from crossing into North Korea in October 1950.[175] Chinese historians studying the security dimensions of the conflict likewise broadly agree that India's pursuit of its forward policy despite repeated Chinese warnings forced China to respond with a decisive attack.[176] More recently, however, some historians argue that the war has to be understood in the context of Mao's governance challenges – most notably for launching the Great Leap Forward – and his radicalization.[177] As scholars debate over the cause and severity of the Sino-Soviet split and the full extent of Mao's radicalization during this period,[178] studies of the Sino-Indian war must address questions on China's foreign policy and the impact of radicalization on decision-making. Although a number

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[175] Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence: India and Indochina* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), 196-223.

[176] Yu Yan, 431-476. For an authoritative Chinese account of the war from a military perspective, see Editing Committee, *Zhongyin Bianjing Ziwei Fanji Zuozhan Shi* (A Military History of the Sino-Indian Border Self-defense and Counter-offensive) (Beijing: Military Science Press, 1994. Internal circulation version).

[177] Dai Chaowu, "Yindu Waijiao Zhengce, Daguo Guanxi yu 1962nian Zhongyin Bianjie Chongtu (India's Foreign Policy, Big-Power Relations and the 1962 Border Clash with India)," in Niu Dayong and Shen Zhihua, eds., *Lengzhan yu Zhongguode Zhoubian Guanxi* (The Cold War and China's Relations with Its Periphery) (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 2004), 487-556.

[178] See Niu Dayong and Shen Zhihua, eds. Also, see Shen Zhihua, *Lengzhan de Zaizhuanxing: Zhongsu Tongmeng de Neizai Fenqi Jiqi Jieju* (Re-transformation of the Cold War: Divisions in the Sino-Soviet Alliance and the Aftermath) (Beijing: Jiuzhou Press, 2013).

of authoritative accounts of the war have been published in Chinese in recent years, scholars are handicapped by insufficient archival material that records leadership deliberations, especially compared with ample exchanges between Mao and Stalin that chronicle China's intervention in the Korean War.

As this dissertation is focused on analyzing the role of China's concern with its credibility in deterrence instances, it does not seek to offer a novel or all-encompassing explanation of China's decision to use force. While it acknowledges the various contexts for the conflict and engages in certain debates in the field on these subjects, its purpose is to show that in addition to compelling interests in defending China's territorial claims, the need to repel future challenges through the establishment of resolve again played an important, albeit subsidiary, role. This study both notes the similarities between China's conception of credibility in the Korean War and the border clash and identifies key differences.

The historical background of Chinese and Indian claims on the Tibetan-Indian border deserves only minimal mention for this study. Tibetan authorities stepped up efforts to claim independence at the beginning of the 20th century, after an extended period of a weak central Chinese government, but as Whiting notes, "no government ever recognized Tibet as an independent country."[179] Competing regional and central

[179] Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 2.

authorities, however, helped give rise to territorial disputes. The key point of contention in the eastern sector of the Tibetan-Indian border revolved around the McMahon line, between Bhutan and Burma. It was agreed in secrecy between Tibetan and British representative at the 1914 Simla conference between China, Britain and Tibet and pushed the line of control up into Tibetan territory. Because the Chinese representative rejected the proposal at the conference, China denied ever conceding to the demarcation, and the line was kept out of public knowledge for decades. In 1935, the secret accord and the McMahon line were rediscovered accidentally by an official of the Indian government, and the British government quietly adopted the line since it increased India-controlled territory by some 90,000 square kilometers. China consistently protested that the secret deal was illegal, but India largely controlled the area. In addition, China and India also had competing claims over the western sector of the border near Kashmir and Xinjiang, in what is known as Aksai Chin. This area, around 37,000 square kilometers, has not been formally demarcated between India and China, and historical claims on the area are even murkier. China had effective control over the region.

The founding of the new republic in China led to a consolidation of Chinese sovereignty over western borders that tested bilateral relations. Mao ordered troops to press into Tibet and Xinjiang in 1950 in order to establish CCP rule over all Chinese territories and eradicate remaining resistance. In Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal

Nehru's eyes, the CCP takeover threatened traditional Indian interests in Tibet, although he was also wary of hurting bilateral relations if India protested too aggressively.[180] India made several representations to Beijing when the PLA advanced into Tibet and finally asked to preserve India's historical privileges in Tibet on 1 November 1950.[181] The PLA pushed through Tibet territory with relative ease, prompting an agreement between Tibet and Beijing on 23 May 1951 that settled Beijing's political authority over Tibet but promised a significant degree of local autonomy. A separate negotiation with India concluded on 29 April 1954, recognizing certain trade and pilgrimage rights by New Delhi while asserting Chinese sovereignty.[182] Soon afterward, however, Nehru apparently instructed defense and foreign ministry officials to establish border posts in disputed areas.[183] Minor standoffs between the two sides recurred from 1954 to 1958, especially in Wuje (Barahoti) in the central sector.

During this time, both sides were conscious of outstanding territorial claims but did not press for a public resolution. During negotiations over the trade agreement signed in April 1954, Nehru had pondered whether to touch territorial issues but decided against it, hoping to forestall China from turning the negotiation into territorial talks.[184] China was also pursuing better ties with its neighbors at the time and enunciated a set of

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[180] Cable to K. M. Panikkar, 27 October 1950, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, Volume 15, Part II (26 October 1950 – 28 February 1951) (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 332-333.
[181] See *Zhongyin Bianjing Ziwei Fanji Zuozhan Shi*, 58.
[182] Ibid., 59-66.
[183] D. R. Mankekar, *The Guilty Men of 1962* (Bombay: The Tulsi Shah Enterprises, 1968), 138.
[184] B. N. Mullik, *My Years with Nehru: The Chinese Betrayal* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1971), 155.

diplomatic principles on peaceful existence in the trade agreement. However, China was pushing ahead with its consolidation in Tibet, which would eventually have implications on the border issue. Aware that its hold on the far-flung region was tenuous, it built and completed two roads from Sichuan and Qinghai into Tibet in 1954. The third and most strategically important Xinjiang-Tibet road was built from 1956 to 1958, which crossed Aksai Chin in the western sector and prompted India to formally declare its claim on the territory in October 1958.

The relative calm of this period began to dissipate in 1959. The large-scale revolt in Lhasa against Chinese rule in March 1959, as well as Dalai Lama's escape into India, pitted the two countries against each other. To Chinese leaders, India's decision to grant political asylum to the Dalai Lama removed all doubt where India's policy priorities lie. China held India responsible at least in part for instigating the revolt and providing refuge for the Dalai Lama and his followers, which created a long-term base for anti-Beijing operations in the southwest. For a second time, a rebel group was allowed to survive outside China, and China understood that its rule in Tibet would be subject to challenges from outside the border – a double threat to Chinese sovereignty. Tibet, on the other hand, reacted to the violent PLA crackdown in Lhasa and Beijing's dissolution of the Tibetan government. It implemented an embargo on an increasingly large list of exports to China both from India and from its neighboring states, starting with rice and kerosene and

broadening to include car parts and steel products.[185] Hostilities between the two neighbors reached a new level.

Publicly China kept a restrained response to India. Mao instructed propaganda officials to use phrases such as "British imperialists and Indian expansionists collude like wolves to openly intervene in China's internal affairs and take Tibet," but also cautioned them not to directly attack Nehru.[186] In a 6 May meeting with diplomats from 11 countries, Zhou Enlai pointedly argued that the "focal point of disputes between China and India" was India's wish to "keep Tibet backward for the long run so as to act as a buffer state between China and India."[187] While maintaining that the two peoples have been friendly, China must "tell the world… that Indian capitalists are two-faced."[188] The next day, however, Mao halted media coverage and criticism of India's policy toward Tibet, apparently sensitive to the political fallout from the crackdown.[189] Moreover, Chinese troops in pursuit of Tibetan rebels also extended and strengthened their reach along the border, pushing up to the disputed territories in the eastern sector, toward a "physical collision" with Indian border troops that also advanced up to – and sometimes

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[185] For an excellent discussion of India's embargo, see Dai Chaowu, "Yindu dui Xizang Difang de Maoyi Guanzhi he Jinyun yu Zhongguo de Fanying he Zhengce (1950-1962), I (India's Trade Restrictions and Embargo toward Tibet and China's Response (1950-1962) I)," *Zhonggong Dangshi Yanjiu*, No. 6 (2013): 24-37. And II, in *Zhonggong Dangshi Yanjiu*, No. 7 (2013): 57-70.
[186] Zhang Shude, *Miyuede Jieshu: Maozedong yu Heluxiaofu Juelie Qian Hou* (The End of the Honeymoon: The Split of Mao Zedong and Khrushchev) (Beijing: Chinese Youth Press, 1999), 230-231.
[187] *Zhou Enlai Waijiao Wenxuan*, 268-269.
[188] Ibid., 274.
[189] Zhang Shude, 236.

over – the McMahon line.[190] The inevitable hardening of Chinese rule over Tibet and military outreach revived India's fears of national security, the top concern in Nehru's Tibet policy. India began to meet China's heightened security presence in the Tibetan border region with its own patrols.[191]

Against this backdrop of heightened hostilities and suspicions, two armed clashes in August and October 1959 in both eastern and western sectors raised tensions significantly. India border police endured casualties in the October clash, leading to calls of retaliation. The conflicts triggered much more pointed exchanges between Zhou and Nehru, but the tone was still carefully calibrated. Prior to the clashes, Mao personally toned down a Ministry of Foreign Affairs note to India when the latter refuted Beijing's accusation that India had interfered in Tibet. Mao called India China's friend "for over a thousand years in the past and we believe for another thousand or ten thousand years." The statement continues, "China will not be so foolish as to antagonize the United States in the East and again to antagonize India in the West… We cannot have two centers of attention, nor can we mistake friend for foe."[192] Following the first clash, during which China maintained that Indian patrols fired on the Chinese first, Zhou blamed India for

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190 Neville G. Maxwell, *India's China War* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), 106-107.
191 Lorenz M Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 144.
192 *Jianguo Yilai Mao Zedong Wengao* (Manuscripts of Mao Zedong since the Founding of the Nation) (Beijing: Central Documents Press, 1987-90), Internally circulated, vol. 8, 268-272. Maxwell, 106.

causing border tensions but expressed confidence in a peaceful resolution.[193] The long letter, however, appeared to anger Nehru as a "breach of faith," who accused China of trying to bully India.[194] After the second clash that aroused even more nationalistic outbursts in India, Zhou proposed on 7 November that both sides withdraw their patrols by twenty kilometers from the line of actual control, which was rejected by Nehru on 16 November. [195] He had already vowed to use everything within his power to defend India.[196] A fresh round of embargo was enforced, effectively cutting off flows of all tools, grains, petroleum products and autos.[197] Meanwhile, the commander of China's Tibet Military Region Zhang Guohua held a meeting three days after the August clash to stress that China must increase military preparedness, beginning with building more roads.[198]

In early 1960, Nehru agreed to a summit with Zhou in April, but neither gave ground on their positions during the talks. India was not prepared to drop claims on Aksai Chin in the west even if China reciprocated by accepting the McMahon line in the east. By this time, Nehru was convinced that India had a stronger historical claim to Aksai Chin than China and enjoyed actual control of the McMahon line, so he was not willing

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[193] *Zhongyin Bianjing Ziwei Fanji Zuozhan Shi*, 97-100.
[194] For a detailed account of changes in Nehru's thinking and domestic Indian politics, see Maxwell, 111-126.
[195] *Zhongyin Bianjing Ziwei Fanji Zuozhan Shi*, 103-104. See also Yu Yan, 433.
[196] Mullik, *My Years with Nehru*, 243.
[197] Dai Chaowu, "Yindu dui Xizang Difang de Maoyi Guanzhi he Jinyun yu Zhongguo de Fanying he Zhengce (1950-1962), II": 61-62.
[198] Shi Bo, ed., *1962: Zhongyin Dazhan Jishi* (1962: Sino-Indian War) (Beijing: Chinese Earth Press, 1993), 160.

to concede on either.[199] The PLA's General Staff Department passed on Mao's instructions on the southwest border issue, demanding to "quickly stabilize the southwest border region both internally and externally."[200] Operationally this meant no firing within thirty kilometers of the Chinese border no matter what the provocation.[201] This conciliatory stance was quickly implemented. On 29 July, the CMC issued eight policy documents on border defense, reiterating the no-firing policy and withdrawing Chinese troops from Longju, the site of the August 1959 clash with India.[202] But China also sought to strengthen its capabilities in other border areas at the same time. On 1 December, Zhou instructed the Ngari border region along the western sector to modestly increase the number of troops and fortify the outposts more quickly.[203]

India's adoption of a "forward policy" to move outposts into territory controlled by China in 1961, however, put the two militaries in direct contact with each other. The policy was meant to deny Chinese troops room for further advancement but also to establish actual control of the territory in order to back up India's claim on these areas. It was not fully implemented until November 1961. An Indian directive issued on 2 November articulated that the policy was to entail "patrol[ling] as far forward as possible from our present positions towards the international border" while cautioning that "this

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[199] Maxwell, 156-170.
[200] *Zhongyin Bianjing Ziwei Fanji Zuozhan Shi*, 458.
[201] Ibid., 458.
[202] Ibid., 459.
[203] Ibid., 460.

must be done without getting involved in a clash with the Chinese, unless this becomes necessary in self-defense."[204] The vows to avoid clashes, however, would soon prove difficult as the policy directly challenged Chinese military forces. As Indian forces advanced, China kept a tight rein on frontline maneuvers, but also began making necessary provisions for a military response. In a 1 February 1962 notice, the CMC again repeated the no-firing rule and pointed out that the CMC was solely responsible for deciding whether to engage Indian forces.[205] The next day, the Xinjiang Military Region instructed border troops that without orders from above, border patrols must not leave their outposts under any circumstances; they must neither retreat from their position nor engage the enemy. But the same directive also instructed troops to "decisively, thoroughly and cleanly" wipe out Indian forces that have advanced deep into Chinese areas after orders to engage are decided and passed down from the above. To do so would require additional capacity, and border troops were told to prepare for combat by stockpiling supplies and studying battle plans.[206]

The inherent conflict between India's forward policy, which was a fait accompli policy, and China's decision to deny it, led to inevitable military preparations. As the border ran along largely uninhabited, harsh terrain, the need to deploy additional logistics and warfighting capabilities well in advance of any actual engagement was even more

[204] Maxwell, 221-223.
[205] *Zhongyin Bianjing Ziwei Fanji Zuozhan Shi*, 122.
[206] Ibid., 462-463.

acute than in other conflicts. A 12 April Southern Xinjiang Military Region meeting concluded that India has initiated an attempt to resolve border disputes by force, and troops must do all they can to fully prepare for battle.[207] Several days later, the Xinjiang Military Region held another meeting to discuss preparedness and noted that India has stepped up air drops of supplies and increased the number of troops stationed in the area. The meeting concluded that India might be considering a "big engagement" but was yet unprepared, and was confined to a "nibbling strategy" to advance into Chinese-controlled areas in close proximity with Chinese forces. Troops were told to both prepare for smaller-scale provocations and for "big engagements."[208] On 19 April, the General Staff Department issued border patrol protocols approved by top leaders, authorizing the setup of more outposts in areas then sparsely controlled by Chinese positions along the western sector.[209] The last decision clearly made it more likely that advancing Indian troops would meet with defending Chinese forces.

At the same time military tensions flared, political jostling continued between Beijing and New Delhi. After fairly even-keeled communications to India pronouncing that the "door for negotiations is still open,"[210] Beijing sounded more alarmed and began to issue sterner warnings in April, publishing its past diplomatic exchanges with India on

[207] Ibid., 463.
[208] Ibid., 464.
[209] Ibid., 123.
[210] Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 51.

13 April, and on 30 April protested Indian "provocations" by "demand[ing] that the Indian Government immediately withdraw the Indian military posts and intruding Indian troops from Chinese territory." Notably, it proclaimed that in case India failed to heed these demands, "the Chinese frontier guards will be forced to defend themselves."[211] These warning had scarcely any impact, judging from India's response. On 2 May Nehru declared that a war with China "[was] not within India's control." Additional troops were moved into Ladakh and the Chip Chap area at the same time.[212] On 19 May, China lodged a protest against another alleged incursion into its territory in the ominous words Beijing used to deter the US before China's intervention in the Korean War: "the Chinese government will not stand idly by seeing its territory once again unlawfully invaded and occupied."[213]

While Whiting and others observed that this unusual statement was not accompanied by changes in China's military posture,[214] it is now known that it signaled internal efforts to articulate a more comprehensive contingency plan that included for the first time plans for offense. On 6 May, the General Staff Department's order to resume patrols still focused almost exclusively on avoiding bloodshed. Self-defense was authorized if Indian troops surrounded the Chinese post and threatened to inflict major

[211] Ibid., 55.
[212] Ibid., 57.
[213] Ibid., 58.
[214] Ibid., 59.

casualties on Chinese forces, but defense was conceived as a stage process: first fire shots in the air, then fire to stop Indian advances and last capture Indian soldiers.[215] On 22 May, after Beijing issued that stern warning, Zhou instructed that troops must finish all preparation to counter further armed provocations by the end of June. "If the Indian side dares to open fire then, our side either does not fight or must fight for a complete victory and reclaim land invaded by Indian forces."[216] This was the first time Chinese leaders envisioned a military response that went beyond denying Indian advances. Zhou warned at the same time that "we must not be distracted by our enemy, and our main focus should still be offshore,"[217] reflecting China's intense concern that the KMT was planning an attack on China's southeast coast.

On 29 May, the General Staff Department issued the *Substantive Plan on Military Struggles on the Sino-Indian Border* approved by the CMC and Zhou. The notice repeated Zhou's order that all preparation be completed by the end of June. While Indian forces were mostly bent on expanding into Aksai Chin, which was considered China's primary concern, troops along the eastern sector should "mostly prepare for an offensive in order to complement the struggle in the western sector when necessary," with about five thousand troops along three identified fronts.[218] This was to become the blueprint of

[215] *Zhongyin Bianjing Ziwei Fanji Zuozhan Shi*, 127.
[216] Dai Chaowu, "Yindu Waijiao Zhengce, Daguo Guanxi yu 1962nian Zhongyin Bianjie Chongtu": 525.
[217] Ibid., 525.
[218] *Zhongyin Bianjing Ziwei Fanji Zuozhan Shi*, 466.

China's October-November offensive. Such a plan made military and political sense, as the McMahon line has more favorable typography for combat and was drummed up under suspect circumstances, lending more legitimacy to Chinese counterclaims. Beijing began to prepare for a more comprehensive campaign that would definitively resolve escalating disputes. On 5 June, the Tibet Military Region issued a troop training plan, instructing troops to prepare for a large-scale invasion into India.[219]

As the PLA started making military preparations for a clash with India, a slew of other crises briefly took the attention away from the Himalayas. In spring 1962, the KMT regime began making counterattack plans in earnest, with numerous troop movements in Taiwan and offshore islands and raids. Chiang appealed urgently for US support in a large-scale invasion of the mainland. He reasoned that the Chinese people would rise up against the CCP given famines and harsh political conditions.[220] On 10 June, the leadership in Beijing circulated a *Notice on the Preparation to Crush Invasion by KMT Troops on the Southeast Coast* to major municipal and division party committees, publicly mobilizing the country to prepare for combat.[221] Also in early May, US reacted to Communist advances in Laos by promptly dispatching the Seventh Fleet to the Gulf of Siam and deploying thousands more troops to Thailand. On 19 May, a *People's Daily* editorial warned that "the Chinese people… absolutely cannot tolerate the establishment

[219] Ibid., 466.
[220] Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 224-225.
[221] *Zhongyin Bianjing Ziwei Fanji Zuozhan Shi*, 466.

by US imperialism in areas close to China or any new military bridgeheads directed against this country."[222] A long and candid statement to the press by Foreign Minister Chen Yi on 29 May portrayed a China under threat from both domestic economic difficulties and foreign enemies who want to take advantage of Chinese weakness. The US "may support Chiang Kai-shek in starting a 'counter-offensive on the mainland'… or they may be planning to raise trouble on the western border area of China by utilizing the China-India border dispute."[223] He claimed that "the Himalayas are not fit for waging a war."[224] In May, two instances of Chinese refugees fleeing into Hong Kong and the Soviet Union also trained the international spotlight on the plight within China brought by the disastrous Great Leap Forward.[225] With military training and logistics planning still in early stages, the General Staff Department instructed border troops in Tibet on 20 June that "the most practical question now is to use every means possible to stop the nibbling campaign by Indian forces,"[226] with the emphasis still squarely on passive defense. Chinese troops set up more outposts before Indian forces could.

In July, more aggressive Indian maneuvers and the easing of tensions in other areas allowed China's top leaders to return their attention to the Sino-Indian border, but

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[222] Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 66.
[223] Quoted in Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 63
[224] Ibid., 63.
[225] For a brief overview of the two cases, see Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 28-33. For more thorough studies based on Chinese archives, see Li Danhui, "Dui Xinjiang Sulian Qiaomin Wenti de Lishi Kaocha (A Historical Probe into the Issue of Soviet Emigrants in Xinjiang)," in Niu Dayong and Shen Zhihua, eds., 16-66.
[226] *Zhongyin Bianjing Ziwei Fanji Zuozhan Shi*, 136.

Mao decided against using force to repel Indian advances. On 5 July, an Indian platoon set up positions in the Galwan valley in the western sector, threatening to encircle a Chinese outpost there. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs protested on 8 July that "China absolutely cannot capitulate in front of India's ever-increasing military deployment, and China will never give up the right to self-defense when faced with unprovoked attacks."[227] The standoff between the two sides escalated with multiple reinforcements on both sides until 13 July, when Chinese troops were ordered to let Indian patrols move out of the area.[228] During this period, Zhou Enlai asked for updates once every two hours and warned border troops not to make unauthorized moves.[229] During a Politburo meeting on Sino-Indian border issues, Zhou and Liu Shaoqi reported to Mao two military proposals on the Galwan valley incident: one was to drive out Indian troops by force, and the other was to find peaceful ways to force out Indian patrols. After listening, Mao argued for restraint even though "we have every reason to fight," so that "Nehru's true face can be exposed further" and China can win over more countries to China's side. He argued that the problem went far beyond India: "US imperialists and the Soviets are all supporting India. They want to take advantage of our temporary difficulties… but we will not fall for this trap and must not fire the first shot."[230] This

[227] *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Duiwai Guanxi Wenjianji* (Collection of Documents on the External Relations of the People's Republic of China) vol. 9 (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 1964), 61.
[228] Ibid., 138-142.
[229] Ibid., 140-141.
[230] Dai Chaowu, in Niu Dayong and Shen Zhihua, eds., *Lengzhan yu Zhongguode Zhoubian Guanxi* (The

decision was passed on to border troops on the western sector on 14 July; on 20 July, the General Staff Department formally described the "anti-nibbling strategy" as one that "must not cede ground but strive to avoid bloodshed in a long-term armed co-existence."[231] Troops were urged not to make any rash decisions, as Liu and Zhou handled most questions themselves and Mao made the final call on bigger issues.[232]

Leaders also hoped to exploit what appeared to be a brief softening of India's position on border talks. In late July, Chen Yi was pleased with talks with Indian Defense Minister Krishna Menon on the sidelines of the Geneva conference on Laos and proposed issuing a communiqué on holding negotiations, but Menon turned down the proposal.[233] On 26 July, India's response to a Chinese protest dropped the earlier insistence that Chinese troops withdraw from disputed territory before talks could begin, instead proposing discussions "as soon as the current tensions have eased and the appropriate climate is created."[234] China agreed to holding talks on 4 August, but also chided India for causing tensions. "India… should first stop invading Chinese territory and stop all armed provocations… Border situations would immediately relax if India stops advancing into Chinese territory."[235] Chen and Zhou reportedly concluded after Menon rejected Chen's proposal that India had zero real interest in talks; it is possible that they

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Cold War and China's Relations with Its Periphery) (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 2004), 525-526.
[231] *Zhongyin Bianjing Ziwei Fanji Zuozhan Shi*, vol.9, 143.
[232] Ibid., 143.
[233] Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 85, 264.
[234] Quoted in Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 84.
[235] *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Duiwai Guanxi Wenjianji*, 74-75.

therefore decided against more conciliatory language. In any event, Nehru soon applied the pre-condition that Chinese troops withdraw from disputed territory before talks could be inaugurated.[236] This would mean giving up control over the strategically important Aksai Chin. A formal response from India on 22 August clearly stated that China must restore the status quo ante before talks could begin.[237] The fleeting opportunity passed.

China's threats became increasingly explicit in September, issuing effectively an ultimatum on 13 September that talks must resume on 15 October.[238] These final attempts at deterrence will be explored more fully in the later section on how China maintained its credibility. The final decision to retaliate against Indian advances through a large-scale attack was apparently made on 5-6 October. Mao called a meeting with top civilian and military leaders, asserting that "the situation looks like we have no choice but to fight" and asked for his colleagues' opinion on how to fight and what the scale should be.[239] It was decided that the purpose of the attack was to repel Indian troops and force diplomatic negotiations.[240] On 5 October, troops on the western sector had just begun withdrawing from their positions on the mountain top before winter storms hit. In transit on 6 October, they received an emergency order from the General Staff Department to go back to their

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[236] Maxwell, 245.
[237] Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 90.
[238] Ibid., 95-96.
[239] Wang Hongwei. *Ximalayashan Qingjie: Zhongyin Guanxi Yanjiu* (The Himalayan Complex: A Study of Sino-Indian Relations) (Beijing: Chinese Tibetan Studies Press, 1998), 228-230.
[240] Shi Bo, ed., *1962: Zhongyin Dazhan Jishi*, 189-190.

positions in order to coordinate with troops on the eastern sector for a major offensive.[241] The General Staff Department described Mao's order as such: "If Indian troops advance, we should forcefully fight them. Tibet on the eastern front must prepare, but the western sector should also contribute. If they advance, [we] must not only repel them but also hurt them."[242] On 8 October, China informed the Soviet ambassador to China that "if India wages an offensive, we will resolutely defend ourselves."[243] Detailed battle plans were issued on the same day.

After more skirmishes on 10 October and more aggressive maneuvers on both sides, the PLA launched an attack on 20 October on both western and eastern sectors, routing the ill-equipped and largely unprepared Indian troops. The PLA halted the offensive on 27 October, but waged a second attack on 16 November after India amassed more troops and appealed to the Soviet Union and the US for aid instead of agreeing to negotiations on China's terms. PLA troops overran Indian forces and pressed deep into the Northeast Frontier Agency south of the McMahon line, causing widespread panic in India that the PLA might attack central India. However, Zhou announced a unilateral cease-fire starting at midnight, 21 November, and starting on 1 December Chinese troops withdrew to twenty kilometers behind the line of control on 7 November 1959.

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[241] *Zhongyin Bianjing Ziwei Fanji Zuozhan Shi*, 471-472.
[242] Ibid., 179.
[243] "The Truth of Soviet Leaders Allying with India to Oppose China," *People's Daily*, 2 November 1963.

What was at stake?

Whiting comments that territorial security was at stake in every Chinese deterrence case, including its intervention in Korea and deterrence against the US in the early stages of the Vietnam War. It was the same in the war against India, even though the area directly under the threat of India's forward policy was not nearly as strategically critical.[244] However, the area is in fact strategic to Chinese interests in the broader sense. It is true that the Sino-Indian border overall is so far removed from China's heartland and the natural barriers to occupying large areas of Chinese territory in this region so high that India's advances hardly compared to the direct threat a US-occupied North Korea or US-backed attack by the KMT posed to China's physical security. But it was, first of all, a large piece of territory. Mao said in the plainest terms when making the final decision to launch an attack that "we cannot give in; if we did, they would take over an area as big as Fujian."[245]

In addition, the western sector of disputed areas was of high strategic significance because of the vital Xinjiang-Tibet highway, the only route that allowed the movement of troops along the harsh western frontier. The road through Aksai Chin in effect connected Xinjiang with Tibet directly, making it easier for China to move troops and supplies against hostile forces in these two border regions with the highest risks for irredentism.

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[244] Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 199.
[245] Shi Bo, ed., *1962: Zhongyin Dazhan Jishi*, 189.

That is why China essentially hoped that India would concede to Chinese control of the area in exchange for Chinese acceptance of the McMahon line in diplomatic negotiations, even though the eastern sector involves three times as much territory. When India made it clear on 14 May 1962 that the most it would offer on the western sector was to let China use the Xinjiang-Tibet road for civilian purposes provided that China withdraw first from Aksai Chin – a position that would render the road useless to China – China not only found it unacceptable but also offensive. An official statement angrily charged, "How can anyone think that China would give in to such a one-sided condition? Is China a country defeated in war?"[246] To give up Aksai Chin would leave Beijing in a more vulnerable position should unfriendly forces decide to attack.

More importantly than the territory directly under dispute, India's interests and influence in Tibet presented a much bigger problem to Chinese leaders. As soon as the CCP secured Tibet it felt the long arm of India and its significant interests in the region, and China had to negotiate with India to accommodate some of its interests in return for Indian support for Chinese sovereignty. But China knew India could use its influence to the detriment of Chinese interests. After the takeover, the PLA intelligence unit reported that Bhutan was pressured by India to stop rice exports to Tibet, which led to destabilizing inflation. Grain prices doubled soon after.[247] In February 1953, China's

[246] *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Duiwai Guanxi Wenjianji*, vol.9, 60.
[247] Dai Chaowu, "Yindu dui Xizang Difang de Maoyi Guanzhi he Jinyun yu Zhongguo de Fanying he

Ambassador to India Yuan Zhongxian said in a telegram to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that India's policy was to "instigate internal chaos and conflicts in Tibet and obstruct its progress and construction… to continue its ambitions in Tibet. These are the same policies as the US and UK."[248] Throughout the 1950s, Zhou Enlai and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had warned India that militants in exile had congregated in India and actively engaged in espionage and insurgence and asked the Indian government to crack down on these activities. India, however, routinely denied the allegations.[249]

The 1959 revolt showed that the threat of Tibet breaking away from Chinese rule and moving closer to India was all too real. On 17 March 1959, a week after the beginning of the Lhasa uprising, Zhou Enlai pointed out at a Politburo meeting that the revolt was connected to India, which was acting on behalf of the US and Britain.[250] Politburo members decided, however, that China should not name Nehru in its propaganda offensive, to which Mao agreed.[251] After the Dalai Lama crossed over into India, received political asylum and issued a statement criticizing the CCP's Tibet policy on 18 April, however, Mao toughened the rhetoric and personally revised the *People's Daily* editorial on 20 April to accuse "Indian expansionists" for inheriting the British

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Zhengce (1950-1962), I": 27-28.
[248] Ibid., 32-33.
[249] Shen Zhihua, *Lengzhan de Zaizhuanxing: Zhongsu Tongmeng de Neizai Fenqi Jiqi Jieju* (Re-transformation of the Cold War: Divisions in the Sino-Soviet Alliance and the Aftermath) (Beijing: Jiuzhou Press, 2013), 135.
[250] Zhang Shude, *Miyuede Jieshu*, 226.
[251] Ibid., 227.

legacy of cultivating Tibetan rebels.[252] While Mao decided to tone down the vitriol in official statements in early May and the Indian government publicly distanced itself from Dalai Lama's demand for an independent Tibet in June,[253] the tens of thousands of Tibetan rebels who fled to India was a constant reminder of the internal risk posed by sharing a border with a country that held unsettled grudges with China on territorial issues. After Sino-Indian tensions escalated in the early 1960s and the trade agreement was allowed to expire in June 1962, India shut down border trade and cut off a crucial source of food for the Ngari region. The local foreign affairs bureau worried that if grain shortage continued, "the population will experience major turbulence and could flee on a large scale in the fall-winter season."[254] In the eyes of the Chinese leadership, India was bent on exerting its traditional influence in Tibet, to the point of challenging and damaging Chinese sovereignty. If Tibet were to try independence or strike closer ties to India, Beijing would stand to lose a vast territory and strategic depth.

India's fait accompli strategy in challenging Chinese borders also posed larger security questions. While Chinese leaders were not concerned that India had the intention or capability to mount a full-scale invasion, the "forward policy" made it clear that India would not stop unless made to by force. The risk India's encroachment posed was a

[252] Ibid., 229.
[253] Shen Zhihua, *Lengzhan de Zaizhuanxing*, 138-139.
[254] Dai Chaowu, "Yindu dui Xizang Difang de Maoyi Guanzhi he Jinyun yu Zhongguo de Fanying he Zhengce (1950-1962), II": 66.

unique one: unlike a large attack or guerilla warfare, the forward policy was incremental and relentless, with clearly negative implications for diplomatic negotiations over border issues. Unlike larger-scale attacks on China, which had little chance of quickly overpowering the PLA and forcing it to accept unfavorable political arrangements, the forward policy would create a fait accompli that would quickly erode China's claim to line of actual control. China's "anti-nibbling strategy" adopted in spring 1962 could be no more than a stop-gap measure, as it was a strategy of passive control through maintaining a Chinese foothold and denying India's advancements. When Indian patrols pressed on, Chinese guards had no choice but to withdraw in some instances so as to avoid firefights.

India's persistent advances, coupled with increasingly strident rhetoric and appeals for assistance from the US and Soviet Union, also raised fears that India's challenges would only worsen over time, its greater capabilities whetting its appetite for more concessions from China. In 1962, Chinese newspapers noted many instance of bluster in the Indian press. On 24 July 1962, the *PLA Daily* quoted an article in the *Hindustan Standard* that the Chinese would have to go away if India could catch Chinese troops off guard.[255] On 20 August, the *PLA Daily* again reported on a Nehru speech in front of Parliament that trumpeted India's better warfighting and logistics capabilities as a result of weapon purchases from the Soviet Union and the US and domestic

[255] Quoted in *Zhongyin Bianjing Ziwei Fanji Zuozhan Shi*, 135.

production.[256] In September and October, not only did Chinese forces observe more frequent air drops of supplies, but the Chinese press also noted that Lieutenant General B. M. Kaul was appointed commander of a new IV Corps on 4 October, reported as a "special task force to oust Chinese" in an "all-out effort."[257] While the announcement was an almost entirely gratuitous measure to assign a new name to existing troops, the impression of an impending attack was at this point impossible to shake. The Soviet Union and the US also promised more economic and military assistance to India as the border dispute unfolded. In April 1961, India purchased eight Antonov-12 transport planes to be deployed to Ladakh along the western sector. In May 1961, US Congress approved an aid package of 500 million dollars to India. The clash between China and India also deepened chasms between Beijing and Moscow, which in turn made Soviet assistance a menace.

Border disputes with India also coincided with a series of border issues with China's neighbors, which Beijing tried to resolve to varying degrees of success. Failure to stop India's forward policy could have had a demonstration effect and encouraged other countries to use the fait accompli policy rather than negotiations to strike deals favorable to their claims. Despite its insistence on the legality of its historical claims, China was open to border settlements and has recognized borders that it claimed to be illegitimate.

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[256] Ibid., 150.
[257] Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 110.

In early 1960, Chinese leaders were forced to re-evaluate their foreign policy guidelines in light of mounting domestic problems in the aftermath of the catastrophic Great Leap Forward.[258] At a Politburo Standing Committee meeting from 1 to 17 January 1960, top leaders decided on a moderate foreign policy line to reduce external threats to what was already a highly fragile domestic situation.[259] After a comprehensive discussion of China's border issues, it was decided that resolving the Sino-Indian dispute was the top priority, but China should also try to resolve disputes with North Korea, Mongolia, Burma, Nepal and Laos more quickly. The border with the Soviet Union was the longest and most complicated, but China should try to resolve it as well.[260] China subsequently accepted the McMahon demarcation in negotiations with Burma, which would make it impossible for China not to set its border with India along the same line. Through numerous notes to India, China made it increasingly clear that it was willing to accept the McMahon line as the line of actual control and formally demarcated border with India in exchange for India's acceptance of China's control of Aksai Chin. But this willingness to accept arrangements based on political needs did not mean that China would accept a constant erosion of Chinese control. To do so would send the message to China's

[258] For a discussion of this internal debate and review based on available material, see Niu Jun, "1962: Zhongguo Duiwai Zhengce "Zuo"zhuan de Qianye (1962: The Eve of the "Left" Turn in Chinese Foreign Policy)," in Niu Dayong and Shen Zhihua, eds., *Lengzhan yu Zhongguode Zhoubian Guanxi*, 556-594, and Wu Lengxi, *Shinian Lunzhan: Zhongsu Guanxi Huiyilu, 1956-1966* (Ten Years of Polemics: A Memoir of Sino-Soviet Relations, 1956-1966) (Beijing: Central Documents Press, 1999), vol.1.
[259] Niu Jun, "1962: Zhongguo Duiwai Zhengce "Zuo"zhuan de Qianye": 566.
[260] Wu Lengxi, 248.

neighbors, especially as China faced challenges on multiple fronts, that China would back away from the risk of armed clashes and compromise on territorial security.

Lastly, allowing India to nibble Chinese territory would prove to the world that a China weakened by famine and increasingly isolated from its Soviet ally could not defend its interests. The Chinese leadership already suspected and denounced collusion among imperialists, revisionists and counter-revolutionaries at this time. KMT's plan to attack the mainland and subvert the regime was treated with the greatest alarm. In the same spring, more than 60,000 people in Xinjiang fled to the Soviet Union with the latter's tacit encouragement. The leadership was increasingly under siege. To back down now could only invite more challenges.

How did China think that this case could affect its credibility?

As India stepped up its troop deployment and advanced toward China's positions on the border after China warned repeatedly of dire consequences and increased counter-maneuvers of its own, it became clear to Chinese leaders that at the root of India's intransigence was the conviction that China did not have the capabilities and resolve to counter challenges. Chinese leaders asked incredulously in official articles, "how could the Chinese people possibly be so weak-kneed and faint-hearted as to tolerate this?"[261]

[261] *People's Daily*, 14 October 1962, quoted in Whiting, *Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 159.

The thought that India flaunted its military might in front of China – which the commander of the Tibet Military Region compared to average KMT troops crushed by the PLA in the Chinese civil war[262] – was unacceptable. As China's offers to negotiate were not only turned down but also reciprocated by military moves, China could only conclude that India was taking "China's restraint as a sign of weakness."[263] Leaders could not help but draw the conclusion that diplomatic warnings and more active military maneuvers failed precisely because they did not credibly convey that China was willing and able to take risks and incur costs on itself in defense of its territorial security.

If this perception of a weak China holds, the repercussions would be felt much beyond the border issue, even if China faced little existential threat from India. Zhou explained, "if we take a conciliatory approach to Nehru, he would not only be more reactionary because he would think that he is right and we are wrong and whitewash his reactionary side, but he would also gain more advantage. We cannot take this approach."[264] The sense that Nehru would be emboldened and stronger to undertake other undefined challenges to China made it more imperative to convince him of China's might as well as resolve. The official justification for the war as seen by top political and military leaders articulated this element of changing perceptions as well as countering a

[262] *Zhongyin Bianjing Ziwei Fanji Zuozhan Shi*, 159.
[263] *People's Daily*, 14 October 1962, quoted in Whiting, *Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 159.
[264] CCP Central Documents Research Office. *Zhou Enlai Nianpu* (Zhou Enlai Chronicles) (Beijing: Central Documents Press, 1997) vol.2, 279.

tangible threat: "Central [leaders of the] CCP has decided to wage a counteroffensive to *deal a blow to the arrogant airs of Indian reactionaries*, safeguard the motherland's borders and create conditions for Sino-Indian negotiations."[265]

The concern about credibility did not manifest as a distinct concern until India adopted the forward policy to change the status quo with the use of force. Until then, Chinese leaders had focused on persuading India to negotiate. Military preparations were already under way in summer 1962, evidenced by explicit orders by the General Staff Department on 29 May to prepare for a large counteroffensive, but apart from logistics preparation, troops were told to passively resist the forward policy and even began to move out of the theater on 5 October ahead of winter. The reason for the constraint was multifold: for one, Chinese leaders did not think Indian troops were in the position to launch a meaningful attack on the border in the summer,[266] and attention must be given to thwarting a KMT attack on the southeast coast that appeared imminent in May-June 1962 and would pose a much more critical threat to China's physical security. After the threat of an attack from Taiwan passed, India's seemingly modest 26 July 1962 note also held out some hope of diplomatic resolution.

Moreover, Chinese leaders were preoccupied in August and September by a series

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[265] Qiu Shi, ed., *Gongheguo Zhongda Shijian he Juece Neimu: Gongheguo Yishi* (An Inside Account of Major Events and Decisions of the Republic: Anecdotes of the Republic) (Beijing: Economics Daily Press, 1997), 518.
[266] Dai Chaowu, "Yindu Waijiao Zhengce, Daguo Guanxi yu 1962nian Zhongyin Bianjie Chongtu": 525.

of party meetings that marked Mao's return to radical policies, two years after he was forced to acquiesce to the disasters of the Great Leap Forward and endorse moderate domestic retrenchment and conciliatory foreign policies.[267] At the 6 August work conference in Beidaihe, Mao deviated from the agenda; instead of discussing economic work, Mao wanted to debate the issue of class struggle for socialist countries and attacked criticisms of the Great Leap Forward, which have become mainstream opinions among top leaders at that point.[268] At the Tenth Plenum of the Eighth Party Congress in September, Mao would argue forcefully that "now [we] can be sure that classes exist in socialist countries, and so do class struggles."[269] He concluded that criticism of the Great Leap Forward was a reflection of class struggles, and domestic critics could collude with foreign revisionists in subverting the state, as clashes with the Soviet Union turned increasingly acrid.[270] This belief that class enemies were alive and well and would constantly threaten the survival of the socialist regime would later balloon into a full-scale purge in the Cultural Revolution. It is within reason that such an important and

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[267] For a discussion of Mao's reorientation, see Niu Jun, "1962: Zhongguo Duiwai Zhengce "Zuo"zhuan de Qianye", 556-594, and Yang Kuisong, "Zouxiang Polie (1960-1963): Zhonggong Zhongyang Ruhe Miandui Zhongsu Guanxi Weiji [Path to Breakup (1960-1963): How Central CCP Leaders Handled Crisis in Sino-Soviet Relations]," *Dangdai Zhongguoshi Yanjiu* (Contemporary Chinese History Studies), no.25 (1998): 87-99.

[268] Niu Jun, 589-591.

[269] "Mao Zedong's Speech at the Tenth Plenum of the Eighth Party Congress," 24 September 1962. Quoted in Yang Kuisong, "Zouxiang Polie (1960-1963): Zhonggong Zhongyang Ruhe Miandui Zhongsu Guanxi Weiji": 97.

[270] "Dui 'Waishi Jianbao' Di137qi de Piyu (Comments on the 137th Issue of 'Foreign Policy Briefings," 29 September 1962. *Jianguo Yilai Mao Zedong Wengao* (Manuscripts of Mao Zedong since the Founding of the Nation), vol.10 (Beijing: Central Documents Press, 1996), 199.

largely unexpected turn toward radicalism would preoccupy top leaders as well.

Once Chinese leaders became convinced that India did not *believe* that China was powerful or resolute enough, however, they expressed concerns about China's credibility that was both broadly conceived and specifically directed toward India. During the early October discussions chaired by Mao that made the final decision to fight India, Mao said, "we have fought Chiang [forces], we have fought the Japanese, and we have fought the Americans. *We have never had any fear, and we defeated them all*. Now the Indians want to fight us, *and we of course do not have any fear*. We cannot give in; if we did, they would take over an area as big as Fujian."[271] Leaders decided that China must make sure to win the war; otherwise "rebels will cause trouble again, the West and the Soviet Union will gloat in our loss, China's diplomatic prestige will fall precipitously, and all [Chinese] people will be deeply pained. *A loss would be more than the loss of one battle, and victory will be more than the victory of one battle*."[272] Zhou pointed out that after four years of skirmishes since the first armed conflicts in 1959, China was in a position where "there was no backing down anymore," and that if China did not retaliate, "it really became a show of weakness and [India] would think that China could be bullied."[273] These statements demonstrate that Chinese leaders see the shadow of the past and future in each conflict, and at this point a series of conflicts in which the PLA engaged much

[271] Shi Bo, ed., 189.
[272] Ibid., 192-193.
[273] *Zhou Enlai Junshi Wenxuan*, 471-473.

stronger enemy forces and at least fought them to a standstill have imbued them with confidence, but the deepening siege mentality also made leaders hope all the more for a victory that shows not only to India but also to other countries that China was not to be challenged.

Yet the leadership also exhibited a particular conception of India as a weak power that had no business challenging China. In 1962, Liu Shaoqi told visiting North Vietnamese officials that China would never tolerate it if India acquired the attitude of a major power or if Indians thought they were superior to the Chinese.[274] The 27 October *People's Daily* editorial entitled "More on Nehru's Philosophy in Light of the Sino-Indian Boundary question" vilifies Nehru not only for the capitalist interests he purportedly supported, but also for "dreaming of a great Indian empire."[275] The indignation is palpable: for a country like India to challenge China would not only embolden other adversaries to follow suit, it was simply unacceptable. Deep down Chinese leaders did not consider India on a par with the level of prestige China commanded or should command among other countries, and the realization that India did not think Chinese threats credible made establishing that credibility more critical. After the second offensive concluded the border war, a statement by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign

[274] Shri Ram Sharma, *India-China Relations, 1947-1971: Friendship Goes with Powers* (New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 1999), 17. Quoted in Dai Chaowu, "Yindu Waijiao Zhengce, Daguo Guanxi yu 1962nian Zhongyin Bianjie Chongtu": 546.
[275] *Peking Review*, no. 44, 2 November 1962. Quoted in Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 127.

Affairs again hinted at the injustice of India's position. It implores,

The basic starting point of the Indian government's approach to the Sino-Indian border is such: *India thinks that it has the right to achieve its territorial demands, and China can only capitulate and cannot retaliate in self-defense...* Regarding India's invasive, haughty expansionist attitude, China duly advises the Indian government not to blindly believe in the power of force.[276]

China's concern about its reputation in this episode of deterrence failure both resembled the concern prior to its intervention in the Korean War and displayed subtle differences. Much like the Korean War, China was facing domestic troubles as well as what appeared to be a deteriorating security environment. In 1950, the CCP had just begun economic reconstruction but faced constant harassment from the remnants of KMT forces and had to commit troops to Tibet and Xinjiang to consolidate its control. The outbreak of the Korean War not only meant that Taiwan would remain off limits to the CCP and serve as a launch pad for future tensions, but also brought the US close to its northeast and southwest. In 1962, China was just beginning to recover from the disastrous Great Leap Forward, which has weakened Mao's position within the party, but also had to prepare for attacks from Taiwan and a deepening Sino-Soviet split that could have security implications, as shown by the flight of 60,000 Chinese citizens with close ties to the Soviet Union in summer 1962. As Whiting argues, China has shown a

[276] Quoted in Wang Xianjin, *Rexue Bingshan* (Hot Blood on the Glaciers) (Beijing: Chinese Communist Central Party School Press, 1993), 125.

particular wariness of the possibility that domestic weakness would encourage more attacks on China.[277] Accordingly, China conceived of credibility in broad terms that cast the reputation for resolve as transferable from one instance to the next, and likewise, the cost of failing to establish this resolve would also be felt across a variety of situations.

But unlike the US, which China convinced would be its enduring rival capable of threatening the survival of the regime or at least cause significant hardship, India was perceived as engaging in persistent and escalating challenges, but in a very confined setting of a border conflict. While the issue of territorial security was clearly vital, deep down Chinese leaders did not believe that India was interested in taking vast swaths of Chinese territory or that India could pose a lasting existential threat to China. Likewise, the counter-attack on India was both carefully scaled and also promptly deescalated after it sent the message home. Even as Mao adopted an increasingly radical framework for domestic and foreign policy in this period and began to cast the conflict in class terms after the Tenth Plenum of the Eighth Party Congress, China did not veer far from its professed goal of forcing India to stop challenging China's border claims militarily. Once it was observed that Nehru ordered the army to comply with China's unilateral truce and sent a private message to China that it would not cross over the McMahon line, China ignored continued public bluster in India.[278]

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[277] Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 202-203.
[278] Shi Bo, ed., 338, and Li Xiangqian, "Cong Lingtu Zhuquan Zhizhong Kan 1962nian Zhongyin Bianjie

How did China maintain its credibility?

By the time China and India went to war, Chinese leaders had clearly learned from its first failed deterrence against the US. It both drew on the precedent established in the previous conflict – using the same words and phrases to signal rising threat levels and the possibility of intervention – and also benefited from greater autonomy, since the limited scope of the conflict and strained Sino-Soviet relations meant that China did not need to coordinate its policy with the Soviet Union. As diplomatic channels proved futile, China both visibly amassed troops to the area (another lesson from the Korean War) and devised the "anti-nibbling" strategy to force India to challenge Chinese troops, in the hope that the threat of higher risks would make China's diplomatic warnings credible. When that strategy failed, China again explicitly referred to the lesson learned in the Korean War, that the only way to establish credibility is through a decisive battle inflicting real costs. Having the benefit of hindsight helped Chinese leaders plan the counteroffensive more thoroughly. Finally, when the first one-week offensive fell short of compelling India to concede defeat, a second offensive became necessary to suggest the full extent of potential costs to India if it continued to challenge China.

Warnings both featured escalating language to convey the seriousness of Chinese

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Fanji Zuozhan Juece (A Look at the Decisionmaking in the 1962 Sino-Indian Border Retaliation from the Perspective of Territorial Sovereignty)," *Zhonggong Dangshi Yanjiu*, No. 5 (2012): 77-84.

intent and explicitly evoked the same phrasing used prior to Chinese intervention in North Korea. On 5 September Beijing warned India that "whoever plays with fire will burn himself"; on 13 September the warning was stepped up, as "he who plays with fire will eventually be consumed by fire"; and another eight days later China warned that the "flames of war may break out" over the McMahon line.[279] The ominous phrase used to deter the UNC from crossing the 38th parallel during the Korean War – that China would never "sit idly by" – also surfaced in a deliberate pattern. On 19 May, it was first announced that China "will not stand idly by seeing its territory once again unlawfully invaded and occupied";[280] on 22 July, Beijing again warned that China "can by no means sit idle while its frontier guards are being encircled and annihilated by aggressors.[281] This phrase was later replaced by the most explicit warning on 3 October, that "whenever India attacks, China is sure to strike back."[282]

China also supplemented these official statements with an attempt to reach India through more private channels for more sensitive messages. When author Elizabeth Comber visited Zhou in summer 1962, Zhou told her, "we know that the Indian military has drawn up plans, but we ourselves have also drawn up plans. Please tell your Indian friends that we are not afraid… We do not want war, but we are not afraid of

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[279] Quoted by Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 92. For an excellent and comprehensive review of China's apparent care in phrasing and pacing the verbal signals, see ch.7 in Whiting, 196-223.
[280] Quoted in Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 43.
[281] Ibid., 77.
[282] Quoted in Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 108.

intimidation."[283] It is not clear if Comber relayed the message, but Zhou clearly hoped to warn India of the military preparation that China had under way as public channels would not be suitable for this type of a message. While he did not reveal the extent to which China was prepared, such as planning to wage a counteroffensive if all else failed, the message was a very specific warning. As this came during the same period when diplomatic statements were becoming harsher, Chinese leaders likely hoped that the combination of public, vague and private, more specific threats would work.

Just like the summer and fall before China's intervention in the Korean War, China also did not conceal the amassment of troops in the months prior to the large-scale offensive. China moved its better-equipped infantry divisions to replace the light-infantry border defense units to prepare for the conflict, even though the official press consistently referred to the troops as border patrols or border defense units.[284] Indian commanders observed the systematic buildup of supplies across the frontlines and the deployment of fresh divisions and artillery units.[285] To prepare for battle on the McMahon line, engineering troops built many roads and infrastructure for radio communication.[286] China had reasons to believe that these moves would not have gone unnoticed by the Indian

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[283] Wang Hongwei, 159.
[284] Cheng Feng and Larry M. Wortzel, "PLA Operational Principles and Limited War: The Sino-Soviet War of 1962," in Mark A. Ryan, David M. Finkelstein, and Michael A. McDevitt, eds., *Chinese Warfighting: The PLA Experience since 1949* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003, 173-197), 177-178.
[285] Brig. J. P. Dalvi, *Himalayan Blunder* (Bombay: Thacker and Co., 1969), 153-154. Quoted in Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 97.
[286] *Zhongyin Bianjing Ziwei Fanji Zuozhan Shi*, 188.

military. When the latter responded by accelerating air drops of its own and restating its goal to drive Chinese forces out of disputed areas, Chinese leaders could only conclude that they did not believe China had the will or the capabilities to fight.

The last measure China used to signal resolve short of an all-out offensive was to choose the anti-nibbling strategy that effectively upped the ante from April to September 1962, forcing Indian troops to either back down or deliberately move into areas with heavy Chinese presence. Instead of populating uninhabited and unpatrolled areas, Indian forces would have to consider the costs of moving up to Chinese patrols either already there or would soon be deployed to the area. Instead of mere diplomatic warnings or troop deployment, this strategy would materially raise the odds of skirmishes and casualties, which would in turn raise the domestic political cost of inaction for the CCP regime. China hoped that India would back down or slow its forward policy when made aware of the higher risks that China was willing to take and was forcing India to take.

The difficulty of executing this strategy as a signal as well as operational defense, however, made larger-scale conflict even more likely in the end. Instead of backing down, Indian patrols more often pressed close to newly established or reinforced Chinese positions, either cutting off their supply routes or encircling the positions at close range. India was likely also aware of the high political costs of backing down in front of Chinese border controls. Because China was not ready to launch an offensive yet but simply

wanted to send a more costly signal, it also had to instruct troops to passively resist India's forward policy and not fire the first shot. This defensive posture in turn led to several casualties in September according to Chinese accounts.[287] Paradoxically, this strategy meant that China was the party that had to back down repeatedly, which likely reinforced the Indian perception that China was too weak to fight, and this misperception then convinced China that India would not find any Chinese threat credible.

Moreover, the anti-nibbling strategy also likely spurred widespread outrage among the rank-and-file and pressure on the leadership to react forcefully. The official PLA account of the war is littered with references to soldiers who asked to fight. While the PLA has the incentive to portray itself as the party exercising self-discipline, higher-level military officers detailed the amount of consultation they had to do in order to talk down soldiers. The pressure was likely genuinely felt, especially as the military was also increasingly indoctrinated with radical views. For example, Vice Director of the Intelligence Division of the General Staff Department Chai Chengwen repeatedly cautioned troops on the western sector to exercise restraint when they asked to punish Indian patrols. Chai arranged mock interactions to better implement the CMC's rules of engagements under the anti-nibbling strategy. Other commanders also reportedly visited each outpost to explain the CMC instructions.[288] Chinese officers remember that this

[287] *Zhongyin Bianjing Ziwei Fanji Zuozhan Shi*, 161.
[288] Ibid., 153-154.

sentiment dates back to 1959, after the first bloody clashes, a natural response to the deadly incidents. Zhou proposed a twenty-kilometer withdrawal of forces at that time partly because Chinese leaders thought a disengagement of forces was necessary to avoid open conflicts.[289]

When the riskier but still defensive anti-nibbling strategy failed to deter Indian troops from pursuing the forward policy, China resorted to the final lesson that it learned during the Korean War, that the best and sometimes only way to establish credibility is through a decisive battle that proves to the opponent China's will and strength to defend its interests. The final order for battle emphasized the need to not only defeat the enemy but also demonstrate China's overwhelming capability. The 6 October order from the central leadership specifically demanded troops to "not only repel the [enemy], but also hurt it in a forceful blow."[290] On 10 October, Chief of Staff Luo Ruiqing instructed the Tibet and Xinjiang military regions that "this battle must be fought well, not poorly. This issue has implications for the national and military prestige and major international developments. [We] either do not move at all, or we must resolutely hurt the enemy."[291] Commanders paid special attention to defeating the newly formed IV Corps, for it represented the crown jewel of India's military.[292] By going beyond the immediate

[289] Lei Yingfu and Chen Xianyi, *Tongshuaibu Canmou de Zhuihuai* (Remembrance by Staff Officers in the Command Headquarters) (Nanjing: Jiangsu Literature and Arts Press, 1994), 218-219.
[290] *Zhongyin Bianjing Ziwei Fanji Zuozhan Shi*, 179.
[291] Ibid., 472-473.
[292] Yuan Zhengling, "Lun Xinzhongguo Jianlihou Changgui Weishe Sixiang yu Shijian (On Conventional

territory and disputes in question, China hoped to make it plainly obvious that the costs of challenging China would be prohibitive. The supplementary need to establish credibility explains the order to "hurt" the enemy.

A successful deterrence of Chiang's counteroffensive shortly before the Sino-India conflict flared up likely proved the dividends of fighting the US during the Korean War. Chiang Kai-shek lobbied for an offensive against the mainland in the spring of 1962, seen in the significant buildup of forces across from the Fujian coast and ramp-up in reconnaissance flights. China responded with both threats of retaliation and a corresponding buildup of troops, including a 10 June mobilization order that went to all party committees on the prefecture and division level.[293] The US then reined in Taiwan and sought to reassure China through both public and private channels, with President Kennedy stating plainly that the US would not support Taiwan in an invasion.[294] Finding US reassurances credible, China later ended the preparation for battle. Security interests aside, the fact that the US found Chinese threats credible likely demonstrated to the Chinese leadership the rewards of intervening when the US ignored Chinese threats during the Korean War. Without inflicting heavy costs on the enemy – and bearing the same costs itself – it would be very difficult to establish credibility decisively. Since India

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Deterrence Thinking and Practice after the Founding of the New China)," *Junshi Lishi* (Military History), no. 1 (2002): 24.

[293] *Zhongyin Bianjing Ziwei Fanji Zuozhan Shi*, 466.

[294] Whiting, *Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 68-69.

did not pose the same level of threat as the US, Mao's final deliberations prior to the war focused not so much on the immediate material costs but rather diplomatic repercussions; he pointed out that once China and India went to war, many countries would likely side with India, and China might become isolated.[295] But he then pointed out the long-term payoff that justifies the short-term costs: "as long as we fight a good battle, we will enjoy the initiative… we either do not fight or must fight to impress. *We must secure at least thirty years of peace*."[296]

Finally, when India responded to the first offensive with defiance and appealed to the US and Soviet Union for aid, China followed up with a second offensive meant to drive the point home. Beijing issued a statement on 24 October, repeating its earlier proposals that both sides withdraw troops twenty kilometers from the line of actual control and that the two premiers meet for talks.[297] The appeal and the moderate tone may have been an effort to contain the fallout of the attack.[298] The Chinese offensive hardened India's public opinion even further, however, and all were clamoring for war. New Delhi rejected China's proposals on the same day, demanding that China withdraw instead to the line prior to 8 September 1962. Beijing has found the position unacceptable because it would restore the Dhola post north of the McMahon line. There was certainly no sign of

[295] Wang Hongwei, 230.
[296] Ibid., 230. Italics added.
[297] *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Duiwai Guanxi Wenjianji*, vol. 9, 109-111.
[298] Whiting, *Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 125.

India softening its diplomatic position publicly; militarily, India appeared to be gearing up for war with China. India announced a state of emergency on 26 October, and the US State Department said on 31 October that the US would begin supplying India with infantry arms and communications equipment.[299] China could only conclude that it had to hurt India even more.

The CMC instructed troops on 24 October that if India rejected negotiations again, the PLA should "deal a more resolute blow to Indian reactionaries to force them to sit down and negotiate."[300] On 12 November, the CMC defined the objective of the second offensive as annihilating three to four Indian brigades. The PLA ended the three-week lull on 16 November with a forceful attack on both the east and west and in three days forced Indian troops into a hasty retreat, driving all Indian military out of its Northeast Frontier Agency in four days. Refugees filled the streets and officials burned money and documents. It was feared that Chinese troops could press into the Assam plateau on the heels of its victory, and on 20 November there was widespread panic in New Delhi.[301] The second offensive clearly went beyond the first attack and left a lasting impression on the Indian leadership.

China's concern about credibility again contributed to its decision to counter

[299] *Zhongyin Bianjing Ziwei Fanji Zuozhan Shi*, 265.
[300] Ibid., 477.
[301] Whiting, *Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 146-147.

challenges with a concentrated use of force. While China's strategic interest in defending its territory and deterring challenges on its territorial claims argues decisively in favor of a limited war, leaders also found it necessary to establish credibility in the eyes of India, which would help consistently strengthen Chinese deterrence for years to come. India was not regarded as an enduring rival like the US. However, credibility vis-a-vis India was still important as the Chinese neighbor had unique influence over Tibet. Just as in the Korean War, China concluded that the best means to establish a reputation for resolve was actual military engagement in not just one but two battles, as the first one fell short of putting an end to Indian strategy. Again, leaders looked to past conflicts for lessons and projected the rewards of their decisions into the future.

1969 SINO-SOVIET BORDER CLASHES

The string of deadly border clashes between China and the Soviet Union in spring and summer 1969 laid bare for the first time the deep schisms between the two biggest Communist powers in the world and led to threats of nuclear war among the two former allies. The emergence of more archival material has shed light on some key points in the decision-making timeline and led to more scholarly consensus on certain factual questions, but much remains unknown and locked up in archives. Moreover, studies of this conflict are often grounded in the large and contentious discussion on China's revolutionary foreign policy, so that the historical interpretations are further complicated by a lack of clarity in the framework of analysis. In contrast, this dissertation hopes to focus primarily on the issue of whether and how the concern with credibility contributed to China's decision to use force in March 1969.

Unlike previous case studies, in which China used well-defined and decisive force to protect specific strategic interests, executed by a largely effective and centralized bureaucracy, the March 1969 border clashes occurred against a backdrop of radicalized values, the fervor of Mao Zedong's personality cult and a tattered if not fully destroyed bureaucracy. This dramatically different context raises legitimate doubts about the applicability of previous lessons and frameworks. Moreover, unlike previous incidents of

deterrence, China's decision to use force in March 1969 triggered an extended period of tension and Soviet reprisals that nonetheless did not erupt in war. In the absence of a clean-cut end to a deterrence episode, there may be questions that the case does not fit. This dissertation will also address these concerns and acknowledge the limits of the current endeavor.

The clash in spring 1969 was more than ten years in the making, the culmination of increasingly public and deep-seated conflicts between the Soviet Union and China. When fractures first appeared, however, the two countries were engaged in unprecedented political and military cooperation. The death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 and the subsequent resolution of Korean War armistice talks brought the end to collaboration necessitated by war operations, but Sino-Soviet relations did not suffer at the hands of Nikita Khrushchev. In fact, the new Soviet leader authorized the largest-scale military technology transfer between the two allies, including the still new nuclear technology.

On 3 October 1954, during Khrushchev's first visit to Beijing, Mao asked for the first time that the Soviet Union assist China's attempt to develop a nuclear weapons program.[302] In case that the Soviets were not willing to "share" atomic weapons with China, Mao proposed that they provide "technology for the manufacturing of the atomic

[302] Dai Chaowu, "Zhongguo Hewuqi de Fazhan yu Zhongsuguanxi de Polie (1954-1962), I (Development of Chinese Nuclear Weapons and the Sino-Soviet Split (1954-1962), I)," *Dangdai Zhongguoshi Yanjiu* (Contemporary Chinese History Studies) 8, no. 3 (2001): 80.

bomb." Khrushchev turned down the request tactfully, advising China against developing its own nuclear technology due to its lack of industrial and financial means. China could instead rely on Soviet nuclear protection.[303] Far from giving up on the program, China decided to keep up the pressure on the Soviet Union and pressed for comprehensive assistance in missile technology in a Central Committee telegraph in August 1956. The Soviet response that it would train Chinese cadres in missile manufacturing fell far short of Chinese hopes, however.[304] Soviet attitude turned considerably warmer in fall 1957, after repeated communication by the Chinese leadership that they would seek nuclear capabilities with or without Soviet involvement. Khrushchev also needed Chinese support during another episode of Politburo power struggle. During September 1957 talks, Soviet officials suggested that the Soviet Union could provide technological manuals and a model atomic bomb. The proposal was followed by a comprehensive technology transfer agreement signed in October, including surface-to-surface missiles, a nuclear reactor, SLBMs and rockets in the next twelve months.[305]

Robust military ties masked a widening divergence in ideology and strategic priorities, however. The Soviet 20th Party Plenum in February 1956 recalibrated the

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[303] Niu Jun, "Mao Zedong yu Zhongsu Tongmeng Polie de Yuanqi (1957-1959) (Mao Zedong and the Beginning of Sino-Soviet Split ((1957-1959))." *Guoji Zhengzhi Yanjiu* (International Politics Studies) 2, no. 80 (2001): 55.
[304] Dai, "Zhongguo Hewuqi de Fazhan yu Zhongsuguanxi de Polie (1954-1962), II": 81.
[305] Dai Chaowu, "Zhongguo Hewuqi de Fazhan yu Zhongsuguanxi de Polie (1954-1962), II": 62-63. Also see Shen Zhihua, *Lengzhan Zhongde Mengyou: Shehuizhuyi Zhenying Neibu de Guojia Guanxi* (Allies in the Cold War: State Relations in the Socialist Camp) (Beijing: Jiuzhou Press, 2012), 168-171.

country's economic and foreign policy, for the first time asserting that the socialist camp and capitalist camp could engage in peaceful coexistence, peaceful competition and peaceful transition[306]. More shocking was Khrushchev's "secret speech" that revealed Stalin's role in ruthless purges and struck down the personality cult around him, a speech that sent reverberations throughout the socialist camp. For Mao, who had long struggled to preserve some degree of autonomy and maximize interests for CCP as the Soviet Union's junior partner, the criticisms struck a chord. The CCP leadership circulated the secret speech transcripts among party members without much effort at controlling its reach.[307] Mao could have held the information closely, but he might have wanted to gauge the impact of de-Stalinization. In a private meeting with the Soviet Ambassador Pavel Yudin on 11 March, Mao detailed all the misguided orders by Stalin that caused damage to the CCP in the pre-independence years and accused the late Soviet leader of chauvinism.[308]

However, as the first-generation leader of a newly consolidated republic, Mao inevitably identified more with Stalin than Khrushchev and was alarmed by the prospects of having his legacy tarnished by a seemingly loyal successor. In closed-door meetings on

[306] For an overview of Chinese reaction to the 20th plenum, see Shen Zhihua, *Chuzai Shizi Lukou de Xuanze: 1956-1957nian de Zhongguo* (Choice at the Crossroads: China in 1956-1957) (Guangzhou: Guangdong People's Press, 2013), 50-104.
[307] See Shen Zhihua, *Chuzai Shizi Lukou de Xuanze: 1956-1957nian de Zhongguo*, 94-95.
[308] Ibid., 98.

19 March, Mao said that Stalin was 70% correct and 30% incorrect.[309] The editorial in People's Daily published on 5 April 1956 was distinctly more hedged on Stalin's legacy, weighing his mistakes against his achievements and calling him an "extraordinary" statesman.[310] Mao told an enlarged Politburo on 25 April that "the same people who once flattered and held Stalin to ten-thousand feet in the sky are now striking him down to nine-thousand feet under ground. Some people in our country are following suit."[311] The attack, sharp and bare, was a shot across the bow for any similar attempts to challenge his leadership. Unrest in Poland and Hungary that triggered Soviet crackdown months later further deepened his worries. In his eyes the Soviet leadership mishandled de-Stalinization, but the Soviet Union was no more reluctant to display force against dissenters in the alliance.

But the secret speech more than sowed the seeds of mistrust in Mao's mind. Mao also started to openly challenge the authority of Soviet ideology and contending for leadership in the international Communist movement. In the follow-up editorial published in the People's Daily on 29 December 1956, a much more grandiose effort was made to evaluate the entire Communist movement and establish a set of "universal" and

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[309] Shen Zhihua, "Heluxiaofu Mimi Baogao de Chutai ji Zhongguode Fanying (The Production of Khrushchev's Secret Speech and China's Reaction)," *Bainianchao* (Hundred Years' Tide), no. 8 (2009). See http://jds.cass.cn/Item/22264.aspx, last accessed 25 May 2012.
[310] "Guanyu Wuchanjieji Zhuanzheng de Lishijingyan (Historical Lessons of Proletariat Dictatorship)," *People's Daily*, 5 April 1956.
[311] "Lun Shidaguanxi (On the Ten Major Relationships)," *Mao Zedong Wenji* (Collected Works of Mao Zedong) (Beijing: People's Press, 1999), 42.

orthodox Communist beliefs that transcended time and space.[312] On hooks such as dogmatism and revisionism hung China's criticism of the current Soviet leadership, which was trying to maintain indisputable control of Eastern European allies while pursuing a more conciliatory foreign policy toward the West. This editorial would set the tone for repeated and bitter polemics in the future carried out in party papers.

While Mao spent considerable time navigating what seemed like obscure and nuanced ideological minefields, his analysis of the uprisings in Poland and Hungary revealed more of what he was striving for at the time: a more prominent status in the international Communist hierarchy and greater freedom from Soviet influence. He told the Second Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee held from 10 to 15 October 1956 that the main reason for unrest in Eastern Europe was that the class struggles there were not harsh and thorough enough and not enough enemies were killed.[313] In other words, the unrest was instigated by enemies such as capitalists and western powers and must be suppressed. On the other hand, he criticized the Soviet Union for using force against its allies. Just days after the speech he told the Soviet ambassador Yudin that "if you dispatch troops we will support Poland and oppose you and openly condemn your armed intervention in Poland."[314] He was just as guarded against Communist dissenters as

[312] "Zailun Guanyu Wuchanjieji Zhuanzheng de Lishijingyan (Continued Discussion on the Historical Lessons of Proletariat Dictatorship)," *People's Daily*, 29 December 1956.
[313] Xu Xiaotian, Li Chunlong, and Xu Zhenze, *Xinzhongguo yu Sulian de Gaoceng Wanglai*, 424.
[314] Ibid., 424.

resentful of Soviet intervention.

Moreover, Mao actively voiced his disagreement with Soviet ideology at bilateral and international settings. Mao's mission for Zhou Enlai, on the latter's visit to Moscow in January 1957, was to criticize Khrushchev and the Soviet central party leadership "face to face" on their conduct in the Eastern European unrest and ask them to openly admit mistakes and wrongdoing.[315] This daring mission would have been unthinkable during Stalin's reign. Khrushchev's efforts to de-Stalinize, while reminding Mao of the risk of betrayal, also encouraged him to challenge the Soviet leadership and question Stalin's legacy. With Stalin's death and Khrushchev's courtship of Chinese support came the yearning for equality. In a telegram sent after completing the visit, Zhou acknowledged that finally "China and the Soviet Union can sit down together on an equal footing to discuss issues" and that "relations are certainly different from the days of Stalin."[316]

But more than anything else the Chinese leadership concluded that the shift in the relationship traced back to a shift in the balance of power between the two countries and compelling circumstances. In the same telegram, Zhou concluded that warming relations was primarily due to "the threat of major enemies" which compelled "solidarity and mutual assistance between China and the Soviet Union."[317] As a result he also called the

[315] Ibid., 420.
[316] Li Lianqing. *Lengnuan Suiyue: Yibo Sanzhe de Zhongsu Guanxi* (Cold and Hot years: The Ups and Downs of Sino-Soviet Relations) (Beijing: World knowledge Press, 1999), 265-266.
[317] Ibid., 265-266.

Soviet leadership opportunistic and questioned its sincerity. On 27 January 1957, Mao relayed to provincial party chiefs that "circumstances are more powerful than people, even some important officials. Pressed by circumstances, those stubborn Soviets who wanted to pursue big-power chauvinism found that they could not." Mao called them "blinded by the lust for gain." The gains, or rather the material grounds for the Soviet foreign policy, were summed up as "fifty million tons of steel, four hundred tons of coal and eighty million tons of oil," the pillars of Soviet industrial production in Mao's eyes. But this is "really nothing extraordinary!" Mao bitterly concluded that "[we can] seek similarities and tolerate differences for the time being… But if they insist on continuing with this, [disagreements] will be aired out eventually."[318]

In these ominous words one clearly sees the beginnings of the Great Leap Forward launched one year later, a disastrous, misguided attempt to leapfrog China's industrial capacity ahead of rivals and peers in record time. If the key to reshaping Sino-Soviet relations lay in a stronger China, the logical conclusion can only be one: that China must get stronger at all costs. And the converse is true: as Mao initially believed that the Great Leap Forward was delivering the desired results and propelling China into the club of great industrial powers, he felt that China could assert its views and interests more forcefully in front of its allies. The junior partner's search for autonomy in an

[318] *Mao Zedong Wenji* (Collections of Mao Zedong's Essays), vol. 7 (Beijing: People's Press, 1999), 191.

alliance relationship is bound to be difficult, and even more so when ideology is used to lend legitimacy to competition.

Yet on the surface relations were still warm and disputes nascent in 1957. Later in the year the two sides were to sign the treaty on national defense that started large-scale nuclear technology transfers. Mao, while contemptuous of Soviet "opportunism," deemed the relationship advantageous to China and largely satisfactory. By 1958, however, relations suffered a number of serious blows that triggered mistrust and slowed the pace of cooperation. The two sides started perceiving threat from the other side.

By May 1958, China set its course on overtaking Great Britain in seven years and doubling its steel production in one year. A month later, Mao thought that it would take "two to three years, possibly two" instead of seven years.[319] The country also firmly believed that it would be able to produce nuclear weapons in several years, with or without Soviet assistance. The course it was charting was different from and superior to the Soviet path, exemplar of the entire Communist movement. This year Mao boasted that "Communism may arrive sooner for us than the Soviet Union," clearly introducing an element of competition.[320] In November 1958, Mao said that in the imminent future

[319] Yang Kuisong, "Mao Zedong yu Liangci Taihai Weiji (Mao Zedong and the Two Taiwan Straits Crisis)," in Niu Dayong and Shen Zhihua, eds., *Lengzhan yu Zhongguode Zhoubian Guanxi* (The Cold War and China's Relations with Its Periphery) (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 2004), 367.
[320] Shen Zhihua, "Zhongsu Tongmeng Polie de Yuanyin he Jieguo (Reasons and Results of the Sino-Soviet Split)," *Zhonggong Dangshi Yanjiu* (Chinese Communist Party Studies), no. 2 (2007): 32.

China would be waiting for the Soviet Union at the doorstep of Communist society.[321] A ministry-level meeting held at the same time to discuss the merit of the Soviet economic model concluded that the Soviet model was too balanced, too bound to plan, and not sufficiently invested in economic growth.[322]

This confidence in China's burgeoning great power status and singularity were expressed fully in alliance relations. No longer the junior partner – at least not for long – China would no longer tolerate compromises and challenges to its autonomy. The incident of the joint fleet, cited for decades by the official press as an example of Soviet haughtiness and imperialism,[323] in reality did not differ much from common military arrangements between allies. In April 1957 PLA Navy Commander Xiao Jinguang visited the Soviet Union. Impressed with its missile submarines, he proposed to the Chinese leadership that China should try to get technology assistance from the Soviet Union. In June Zhou Enlai telegraphed Khrushchev, expressing an interest in nuclear submarine technology.[324] But it was very difficult to justify sharing this advanced technology with China. The Soviet defense minister proposed that China set up a long-wave radio station in Hainan that the Soviet submarine fleet could access and a program under which Soviet vessels could dock and undergo repairs at Chinese ports. With this level of cooperation

[321] Ibid., 32.
[322] Li Danhui, "Wushiniandai Zhonghuoqi Zhongsu Guanxide Yanbian (Evolution of Sino-Soviet Relations in Mid- to Late-1950s)," *Dangshi Yanjiu Ziliao* (Party History Studies Material), no. 12 (1995): 13.
[323] Tang Jiaxuan, ed., *Zhongguo Waijiao Cidian* (China Diplomacy Almanac) (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 2000), 727-728.
[324] Dai Chaowu, "Zhongguo Hewuqi de Fazhan yu Zhongsuguanxi de Polie (1954-1962), II": 65.

technology transfers could be justified.[325] Mao agreed to the setup of the radio facility but rejected Moscow's offer to fund the bulk of it.[326] Despite China's obvious reluctance, Soviet ambassador Yudin again relayed the leadership's offer to cooperate on the radio facility and fleet to Mao on 21 July 1958. Mao blasted Yudin and asked if the Soviets would withhold assistance unless China agreed to some form of a "cooperative." He summoned Yudin the next day for a rambling tirade in front of the entire Politburo. Mao announced that he would stop asking for Soviet assistance, as the Soviets were clearly looking down upon China as "inferior people." Grievances about Soviet espionage and interferences also came tumbling out.[327] He was so outraged that Khrushchev arranged to visit China in late July to placate Mao. Yet China had tolerated much more serious compromises at the hands of the Soviets during the Civil War and the early 1950s. What was different this time was that China no longer saw such compromises as necessary for securing its interests.[328]

China's hope to acquire nuclear weapons, likely a reflection of its mistrust of the Soviet nuclear umbrella, also complicated Soviet efforts to reduce the risks of catastrophic war and reach an arms control agreement with the US. At the very time when

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[325] Ibid., 66.
[326] Shen Zhihua, "Heluxiaofu, Mao Zedong yu Zhongsu Weishixian de Junshi Hezuo (Khrushchev, Mao Zedong and the Unrealized Military Cooperation between China and the Soviet Union)," in Niu Dayong and Shen Zhihua, eds., *Lengzhan yu Zhongguode Zhoubian Guanxi*, 250.
[327] Shen Zhihua, "Heluxiaofu, Mao Zedong yu Zhongsu Weishixian de Junshi Hezuo": 252-253.
[328] Shen Zhihua raises the hypothesis that Mao lashed out to get Khrushchev to sign a memorandum of understanding with China ahead of the Quemoy shelling, so that the US would think that the Soviets supported China's campaign. See Shen Zhihua, *Lengzhan de Zaizhuanxing*, 81-86.

Mao was berating the Soviets for belittling China, Moscow and Washington were in talks over devising a system that could monitor secret nuclear tests, which would enable a future test ban. Any arms control agreement, however, would not allow proliferation, and the Soviets likely found their options increasingly constrained. Chinese officials, by the same token, could not but suspect that the test ban was aimed at denying China the right to own nuclear weapons.[329]

But it was China's decision to shell the offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu without advance notice that sparked the fear of entanglement for Soviet leaders. After months of pondering the best course of action against the Nationalist regime in Taiwan during the summer of 1958, Mao decided on shelling the two offshore islands controlled by the KMT.[330] Though Mao sought to carefully control the risk of US intervention, the move could not help but disrupt regional and global relations, especially as the intention of the shelling was not made clear. The thousands of shells that started raining on the islands on 23 August came as total surprise to Khrushchev, who had just visited China but did not hear a word from Mao, and was at about to accept Eisenhower's invitation to meet and start negotiating a nuclear test ban and arms control regime.

Moreover, Chinese leaders were effectively touting the risk of entangling the Soviet Union as the crisis widened. On 18 September, at the peak of the crisis, Zhou

[329] Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 191-192.
[330] Yang Kuisong, "Mao Zedong yu Liangci Taihai Weiji": 368-373.

Enlai told the Soviet attaché in Beijing that if war broke out and the US deployed atomic bombs against China, China would suffer damages but the Soviet Union would retaliate on China's behalf. He also said that China planned to develop modern weapons with Soviet assistance.[331] While Khrushchev publicly vowed to uphold alliance responsibility and said that the Soviet Union would side with its Chinese comrades,[332] what he regarded as Chinese adventurism and total disregard for Soviet foreign policy interests greatly upset his confidence in the alliance. Afterwards Khrushchev decided not to provide an atomic bomb model to China and sought to slow down, scale back and eventually scrap advanced technology transfers to China in 1959.[333] With Chinese interests seemingly diverging, the risk of arming China with nuclear weapons was too great to bear.

Similarly, Soviet criticism of Chinese policies during the first significant clash on the Sino-Indian border also spawned mistrust and anger. Months after the Dalai Lama fled Tibet in March 1959, which eroded CCP's control over the strategically important region, Indian border troops clashed with Chinese guards on 25 August in disputed areas. China's western border, which had not been a strategic focus for the new republic, began to come under pressure. Khrushchev later recalled that he believed Mao was to blame for provoking the conflict, and he was angered by another failure of the Chinese to do what

[331] Dai Chaowu, "Zhongguo Hewuqi de Fazhan yu Zhongsuguanxi de Polie (1954-1962), II": 66.
[332] Shen Zhihua, *Lengzhan de Zaizhuanxing*, 86-87.
[333] Dai Chaowu, "Zhongguo Hewuqi de Fazhan yu Zhongsuguanxi de Polie (1954-1962), II": 66.

was obligated in the Sino-Soviet treaty and consult its ally over an armed conflict.[334] Despite repeated pleas delivered by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to side with Chinese claims, TASS carried a statement on Soviet neutrality on the conflict on 9 September,[335] tantamount to a public rejection of Chinese grounds in the eyes of Chinese leaders. In a candid and unpleasant exchange between Khrushchev and top Chinese leaders on 2 October, the Soviet leader complained of Chinese adventurism while the Chinese protested that the Soviet Union gave in to India.[336] Shocked that the Soviets would so publicly disclose policy differences with China, Mao concluded that the Soviet Union sacrificed China in order to please the US, the same reason the Soviets suspended technology transfers to China in June 1959.[337] When Khrushchev visited the US in September 1959, the first by a Soviet leader, Mao must have grown increasingly wary of what he saw as Soviet capitulation or even collusion.[338]

The most serious breach of trust, however, lay in the Soviet questioning of the Great Leap Forward that coincided with dissent within the CCP. The Soviet Union initially had very little information on the Great Leap Forward. In summer 1959, Khrushchev recounted to a congregation in Poland mistakes made in the 1920s when the

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[334] Li Hua, "1959 nian Zhongyin Bianjie Chongtu Qiyin ji Sulian Fanying Tanxi (The Origin of the 1959 Sino-Indian Border Clash and A Study of Soviet Reactions)." *Dangde Wenxian* (Party Documents) 2, no. 86 (2002): 60. Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*: 145.
[335] Wu Lengxi, *Shinian Lunzhan: Zhongsu Guanxi Huiyilu, 1956-1966* (Ten Years of Polemics: A Memoir of Sino-Soviet Relations, 1956-1966) (Beijing: Central Documents Press, 1999), 213.
[336] Li Hua, 64.
[337] Niu Jun, "Mao Zedong yu Zhongsu Tongmeng Polie de Yuanqi (1957-1959)": 57.
[338] Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 209-210.

Soviet Union attempted to establish communes, an oblique criticism of rural communes that were the centerpiece of the Great Leap Forward.[339] The speech was promptly noted in an internal news digest for top leaders and on 28 July was sent to Lushan, Jiangxi, where the fateful enlarged meeting of the Politburo was being held.[340] By this time the meeting had been radicalized; Mao was incensed by the letter Defense Minister Peng Dehuai penned on 14 July criticizing the Great Leap Forward and his leadership. He circulated the Soviet speech among delegates the next day and commented that he was willing to "fight the world," presumably including Khrushchev, as well as "a large number of opponents and skeptics in the party."[341] The Lushan meeting led to the radical Eighth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee, in which Peng Dehuai and other senior leaders were purged for anti-party crimes. Soviet criticism came at a time when Mao was extremely sensitive to domestic dissent and worried about the security of his rule. While the two allies would later attempt to paint over their differences, Mao was likely suspicious that nay-sayers within the leadership would lean on Soviet criticism to erode Mao's supremacy. In the 1920s and 1930s, the young CCP had been rocked by violent internal upheavals; officials backed by the Soviet Union often clashed with and purged locally educated counterparts, and Mao was one of the latter. Soviet interference in intra-

[339] Shen Zhihua, "Zhongsu Tongmeng Polie de Yuanyin he Jieguo (Reasons and Results of the Sino-Soviet Split)," *Zhonggong Dangshi Yanjiu* (Chinese Communist Party Studies), no. 2 (2007): 33.
[340] Ibid., 33.
[341] Ibid., 33.

party rivalry was a particularly sensitive subject for Mao.

Yet these burgeoning tensions, disagreements and mistrust have not yet morphed into serious security threats. The two allies have cooled from the honeymoon period after Stalin's death, no doubt, but disillusioned allies did not make enemies. Relations waxed and waned in the early 1960s as Mao took the back stage temporarily in the wake of the famines, and both countries used the plethora of international conferences and meetings as battlegrounds for legitimacy as well as occasions for reconciliation. China's boycott of an agreement on disarmament at the February 1960 Warsaw Pact conference enraged Khrushchev, who then censured China for adopting a reckless foreign policy in India. The CCP then published three lengthy articles on Leninism in April, a thinly disguised attack on Soviet policies. The two continued to spar at the June 1960 meeting of the Romanian Communist Party, and in July the Soviet Union notified China that it was withdrawing all Soviet experts in China. Yet even at this stage Mao still insisted that the differences were minor and could be overcome.[342] In November 1960, China and the Soviet Union found enough common ground at the conference of 81 Communist and workers' parties to produce a communiqué.

But as China's security environment took a turn for the worse in 1962, unresolved

[342] See Yang Kuisong, "Zouxiang Polie (1960-1963): Zhonggong Zhongyang Ruhe Miandui Zhongsu Guanxi Weiji [Path to Breakup (1960-1963): How Central CCP Leaders Handled Crisis in Sino-Soviet Relations]," *Dangdai Zhongguoshi Yanjiu* (Contemporary Chinese History Studies), no.25: 87-92. Also, Xu Xiaotian, Li Chunlong, and Xu Zhenze, 573-660.

territorial issues with the Soviet Union provided fertile ground for more material clashes. China claimed that imperial Russia had taken territory from China through unequal treaties and armed conquest in Xinjiang and the northeast, and the two also had conflicting historical claims on other pieces of land. The People's Republic neither recognized nor denounced these treaties with Russia, but demonstrated in its negotiations with Burma that it was willing to recognize the line of actual control. But unresolved disputes also meant that clashes were inevitable. The first sign of tension appeared in August 1960, when Soviet border troops drove back herdsmen who crossed over in Xinjiang and triggered a statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the territory in question was Chinese. In 1962, China first faced the possibility of an armed KMT invasion of the eastern seaboard in the summer, then fought a short but decisive war with India in the west in October and November after months of escalating clashes.

Compared with these familiar adversaries, however, the Soviets were a less expected provocateur. In April-May 1962, more than 60,000 Chinese in Xinjiang, either of Russian descent or Uyghurs and Kazakhs with close ties to Russia, crossed over into Soviet territory en masse. A significant number were local officials. [343] Chinese officials observed that they received encouragements and assistance from the Soviets, who offered them legal papers and instructions. The stunning show of defiance and the weakness of

[343] Li Jian, ed., *Xinzhongguo Liuci Fanqinlue Zhanzheng Shilu* (A Realistic Account of New China's Six Wars against Invasions) (Beijing: Chinese Broadcast and Television Press, 1992), 885.

Chinese control in this large and unstable region left much room for the Soviets to exert influence. But the assistance provided by Soviet officials suggested an even bigger nightmare: borders would become irrelevant if the population were more attached to the unfriendly neighbor.

While Chinese officials tried to downplay the embarrassing episode of mass exodus, they could not help but appreciate the increasing security threat from the Soviets. The US-Soviet rapprochement was the most serious, structural threat to Chinese interests, raising the possibility of Soviet abandonment. As China slowly recovered from the Great Leap Forward, Mao reclaimed dominance in domestic politics and showed no appetite for a meaningful shift toward moderate policies. He purged the pro-reconciliation officials led by Wang Jiaxiang and pushed for a return to revolutionary foreign policy. But at the same time, the Kennedy administration, alarmed by the prospect of a nuclear-armed and volatile China, chose to take advantage of Sino-Soviet divisions and approach the Soviet Union for a Limited Test Ban Treaty. The Soviets also found Chinese adventurism threatening and welcomed the idea. The treaty was eventually signed in 1963, which proved to the Chinese leadership beyond all reasonable doubt that the Soviets have abandoned China and wanted to deny China nuclear weapons know-how. Although it is not clear if Chinese officials knew at the time, the US also probed the Soviets if it would agree to either a unilateral or joint US-Soviet attack on Chinese nuclear facilities. China

most likely knew of the plan from an October 1964 New York Times article referring to US-Soviet cooperation in preventing China from acquiring nuclear weapons.[344]

By this time China ramped up the virility of attacks on Soviet ideology, publishing a series of abusive editorials in People's Daily from December 1962 through July 1964 and publicizing cleavages with its ally. The attacks convinced the Soviet Union that China was becoming too volatile and difficult to control and alarmed China's other neighbors, such as Mongolia. In 1963, the Soviet Union reached an agreement with Mongolia to station Soviet troops along the Sino-Mongolian border, putting the entire length of China's northern border within reach of the Soviet military. Mongolia moved to join the Warsaw Pact in July and asked explicitly for Soviet defense aid in 1964-65.[345] In September 1963, Shenyang Military Region officials said that China had to be on the lookout militarily, as "the revisionist could do every bad thing imaginable."[346]

At this point China began to raise the border issue as a prominent point of discussion with the Soviets. It should be noted that as a revolutionary party, the CCP must settle disputes with its neighbors anew after its founding in order to have secure borders. But how it chose to conduct these negotiations depended on its security interests, guiding

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[344] Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 228-252. Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, 246-259.
[345] Sergey Radchenko, "New Documents on Mongolia and the Cold War," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issue 16 (fall 2007/winter 2008): 360-365.
[346] Li Danhui, "Zhengzhi Doushi yu Dishou: 1960niandai Zhongsu Bianjie Guanxi – Dui Zhongsu Bianjie Wenti de Lishi Kaocha Zhier (Political Warriors and Adversaries: Sino-Soviet Border Relations in the 1960s – Historical Review of Sino-Soviet Border Issues, II)," *Shehui Kexue* (Social Sciences), no. 2 (2007): 149.

foreign policy principles and ideological needs. In March 1963, China for the first time raised the issue of "unequal treaties" in a People's Daily editorial, hinting at a much tougher stance than previously stated.[347] As unequal treaties are legally dubious, making such a claim upped the ante before the two sides held any talks. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs used the same language in a formal notice in September. In February 1964, the two sides held negotiations to settle border disputes. Mao instructed that while China could accept an agreement based on the status quo, the Chinese delegation must secure Soviet concession that the current border was settled in a series of "unequal treaties" between imperial China and Russia.[348] Such a premise, however, could not help but arouse suspicions in the Soviet Union that China would challenge the legality of an agreement in the future, and talks stalled.

A brief window of reaching a deal, however, was closed by a brash comment. By early July it appeared that the two sides might be able to deliver an agreement on the eastern sector, and the delegates took a break.[349] Therefore, it came as a shock to the Soviets when Mao seemed to reverse course and up the ante on the talks. He told Japanese visitors in July 1964 that China could have revisited the claim on vast areas in the Far East, all the way to Vladivostok, and that China would support Japan's claim on

[347] Ibid., 149.
[348] Ibid., 150.
[349] Ibid: 153.

disputed territory with the Soviet Union.[350] The Chinese delegation, inspired by the new, tough guidance from Beijing, raised more claims in August and warned that "if you stubbornly insist on the wrong stance… [we] cannot exclude the possibility that we would consider alternative solutions to the issue."[351] In early September, the Pravda commented that China was bent on expansionism.[352] Later Mao would explain that he was not interested in reclaiming the more than 1.5 million square kilometers of territory ceded in imperial treaties, but simply wanted to "make empty claims" to make Khrushchev nervous so as to push the latter to sign an agreement.[353] But it backfired. Talks broke down in August 1964 without reaching any consensus.

China briefly reached out to the Soviet Union following a worsening of its security environment in the south and a changing of the guard in the Soviet leadership in the second half of 1964. The US started bombing North Vietnam after the 2 August 1964 Tonkin Gulf incident, when the North Vietnamese navy allegedly engaged US destroyers. In China's eyes, the escalation of military actions hinted at a Korean War redux, where US intervention in a neighbor's civil war threatened to implicate China. Mao already made it clear that China would "do all it could" to support North Vietnam in a 27 July statement, pointing out that China must be prepared for war as well.[354] A week later, the

[350] Xu Xiaotian, Li Chunlong, and Xu Zhenze, 769.
[351] Li Danhui, "Zhengzhi Doushi yu Dishou": 154.
[352] Xu Xiaotian, Li Chunlong, and Xu Zhenze, 769.
[353] Ibid., 771.
[354] Niu Jun, "Lun Liushi Niandaimo Zhongguo Duimei Zhengce Zhuanbian de Lishi Beijing (On the

General Staff Department of the PLA ordered military preparations across all forces.[355] While China's diplomatic maneuverings and US willingness to accept military limits to its operations would eventually prevent war between the two, the escalation of US involvement in Southeast Asia could not help but force China to consider the possibility of war.

It was in this context that Khrushchev was ousted in October 1964. China was encouraged enough by the potential impact on Sino-Soviet relations that Zhou Enlai reached out almost immediately, asking to establish channels of communications and send a delegation to attend celebrations of the October Revolution in Moscow.[356] In a telegram to the Soviet leadership signed by the collective Chinese leadership, China vowed to "unite closely with the Soviet Communist Party and the Soviet Union to oppose our common enemy and promote our common mission."[357] The Soviet leadership, for its part, agreed to the visit and stopped anti-China propaganda briefly. The limited goodwill generated in these initial contacts, however, was completely dissipated when a very drunk Defense Minister Rodion Malinovsky told Zhou Enlai in Moscow on 7 November that

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Historical Background of the Shift in China's US Policy in the Late 1960s)" in Yang Fuchang, ed., *Kuashijide Zhongguo Waijiao: "Zhongguo Waijiao Huihuang 50nian" Yantaohui Lunwenji* (Chinese Diplomacy Over the Century: A Collection of Theses for the "Fifty Years of Glorious Chinese Diplomacy" Conference) (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 2000), 131.

[355] Ibid., 131.

[356] Cao Guangjin, "Bolie Riniefu Zhizheng Chuqi Zhongsu Hejie de Changshi yu Shibai Tanxi (Trials and Errors of Sino-Soviet Rapprochement in Early Brezhnev Years)," *Zhonggong Dangshi Yanjiu* (Chinese Communist Party Studies), no. 1 (2012): 68.

[357] Ibid., 68.

"you Chinese should get rid of Mao, [just like how] we Russians got rid of Khrushchev."[358] At an emergency CCP Politburo meeting held on the next day to discuss the event, it was decided that a serious protest was called for. Zhou told Brezhnev and others that far from a random act, this outburst "reflected the fact that some in the Soviet leadership continued to follow Khrushchev's behavior, which is to subvert the Chinese regime."[359] Subsequent talks revealed that the new Soviet leadership had no intention to chart a new course on foreign policy or to denounce Khrushchev's China policies, and Zhou concluded that "things were even worse than we thought."[360] The brief probe ended quickly, with China resuming attacks on the new leadership.

By 1965, China's official foreign policy principles had become as radicalized as its domestic policy. People's Daily announced on 14 June 1965 that "anti-imperialism must be accompanied with anti-revisionism,"[361] formally designating the Soviet Union the same enemy status as the US, China's longest running enemy and ideological foe. Lin Biao, by then the most likely heir to Mao's throne, elevated China to "the revolutionary base of the world" in a 3 September article in the party paper, in effect declaring China as the leader of world revolution. If China were to be the revolutionary base for the world, the implication was that China would spread the seed of Communist revolution to the rest

[358] Ibid., 71-72.
[359] Ibid., 72.
[360] Ibid.,74.
[361] Chen Shaoming, "Yijiu Liujiunian 'Guojixingshi Zuotanhui' jiqi Lishi Gongxian (The 1969 'International Situation Seminars' and Its Historical Contribution)," *Zhonggong Dangshi Yanjiu* (Chinese Communist Party Studies), no. 1 (2008): 75.

of the world, much like how the CCP first established revolutionary bases across China before engaging the ruling KMT in an all-out civil war.

This radical turn of Chinese foreign policy both fed into and was exacerbated by the Sino-Soviet competition and clashes over their Vietnam policies. In February 1965, Soviet Premier Aleksei Kosygin told Zhou Enlai after visiting Vietnam that the Soviet Union was prepared to offer any assistance necessary to North Vietnam.[362] Kosygin stepped up material assistance by the Soviet Union and asked for Chinese permission to help transport Soviet troops on Chinese rails to North Vietnam and grant access to Soviet planes through Chinese airspace.[363] On the diplomatic front, he called for convening a new international conference on Indochina.[364] These moves to take the lead in negotiations and military actions on the Vietnam issue irked China, which had a special interest in the negotiations in the 1950s and helped broker the first armistice in 1954. China first opposed Soviet intervention on the technical front, arguing that such obvious military maneuvers risked premature escalation. It accused the Soviet Union of both courting Vietnam and curbing Chinese influence.[365] China also objected to holding talks with the US.[366] As Thomas Christensen argues, the split between China and the Soviet Union led to a competition for greater influence in Vietnam and hurt their relations

[362] Li Lianqing. *Lengnuan Suiyue: Yibo Sanzhe de Zhongsu Guanxi* (Cold and Hot years: The Ups and Downs of Sino-Soviet Relations) (Beijing: World knowledge Press, 1999), 336.
[363] Ibid., 337-8.
[364] Ibid., 337.
[365] Ibid., 338.
[366] Ibid., 342.

further.[367] The disputes also meant that it was more difficult to reach a compromise on the Vietnam issue. In other words, Vietnam served as additional fodder for China and the Soviet Union to clash over, and disagreements bled back into the ongoing ideological debate and heightened security concerns.

When the Soviet Union and Mongolia formally signed the friendship treaty in January 1966, Mao was preparing for what he saw as his greatest accomplishment to date, the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution. Mao hoped that by encouraging a mass revolution to overthrow and cleanse the existing establishment, he could rid the party and government of dissenting voices, especially those who sought more practical policies. He could centralize all authority and channel it into the next handpicked, orthodox leader of China. This radical revolution turned out to be very difficult to tame, however. All spheres of political, economic and foreign policies became imbued with ideological fervor, and great energy was spent between factions vying for newly vacant party and government power.

Relations with the Soviet Union turned steadily worse against this backdrop. In February 1966, the Soviet leadership invited Chinese leaders to attend the 23rd Party Plenum. In its reply a week later, the Chinese leadership declined, declaring that "you are colluding with the US and conducting a series of dirty deals in the United Nations and

[367] Thomas J. Christensen, "Worse Than a Monolith: Disorganization and Rivalry within Asian Communist Alliances and U.S. Containment Challenges, 1949–69," *Asian Security* 1, Issue 1 (2005): 80-127.

elsewhere. You are actively facilitating the counterrevolutionary 'global strategy' of the US imperialists and attempting to organize a siege of socialist China."[368] The venom of mutual attacks was such that fights broke out at massive demonstrations in both capitals after the onset of the Cultural Revolution. Pravda asserted in an October 1966 article that the Chinese movement targeted pro-Soviet cadres in China. By December 1966, the Soviet central leadership passed a resolution denouncing Mao and his followers.[369] Another serious fight broke out in January 1967 between Soviet police and Chinese students in Moscow defending Maoism. China issued a most outraged diplomatic protest and the students were received in China by tens of thousands. Afterward the Soviet embassy in Beijing saw heated protests, and Soviet diplomats were blockaded and harassed in February.[370] Soviet newspapers pinned the blame squarely on Mao, suggesting that he was trying to divert the attention of the Chinese people by attacking the Soviets. In reality, the revolution has become self-reinforcing.[371]

It was also during this time when the border issue began to flare up. Through the early and mid-1960s, China has been asserting its territorial claims gradually, by sending small numbers of troops to disputed territory, especially on the eastern front. In 1963,

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[368] Xu Xiaotian, Li Chunlong, and Xu Zhenze, 746.
[369] Wang Qi, ed., *Erzhanhou Zhongsu (ZhongE) Guanxi de Yanbian yu Fazhan* [The Evolution and Development of Post-Second World War Sino-Soviet (Sino-Russian) Relations] (Beijing: Qinghua University Press, 2000), 120.
[370] Sergey Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962-1967* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009), 191-192.
[371] Wang Qi, 125-127.

China stationed personnel for weeks on end on islands on the Amur River claimed by the Soviets.[372] But the moves were limited in scale, and the personnel were always instructed to avoid conflicts. This changed in late 1966. By then the policy has transformed into allowing soldiers and civilians to fight if necessary when Soviet border guards blocked "normal patrol routes."[373] Such a change in policy explains the many incidents of fights and tussles between Soviet border guards and Chinese troops and fishermen in 1966 and 1967, triggering formal protests as well as popular outrage.

Years of relentless propaganda campaign depicting the Soviet Union as the new revisionist imperialist power bent on hurting China have turned China's former ally into a public enemy in the minds of the Chinese population. According to a May 1969 People's Daily article, the Soviet Union provoked 4,189 clashes on the Sino-Soviet border from October 1964 to March 1969.[374] While this figure was likely vastly inflated in a self-serving attempt to justify the March clashes on the Zhenbao (Damanskii) island that is the subject of this chapter, there had been numerous clashes between the two sides after relations turned sour, evidenced by the large number of Soviet diplomatic protests. Soviet ground troops on the Chinese border doubled from 1966 to 1969 to "full strength," and

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[372] Arthur A. Cohen, "The Sino-Soviet Border Crisis of 1969," in Alexander L. George, *Avoiding War: Problems of Crisis Management* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 272.
[373] Arthur A. Cohen, 274.
[374] Zhang Anfu, "Xinjiang Junqu Shengchan Jianshe Bingtuan yu Ershi Shiji Liushi Niandai Zhongsu Bianjing Chongtu (Production and Construction Corps of the Xinjiang Military Region and Sino-Soviet Border Conflicts in the 1960s)," *Dangdai Zhongguoshi Yanjiu* (Contemporary Chinese History Studies) 18, No. 4 (July 2011): 100-105.

Soviet firepower density on China's northeast border was "comparable with that opposite NATO."[375]

The earliest record of a proactive military strategy on the border issue dated to 24 January 1968. The CMC telegraphed the Shenyang and Beijing Military Regions to increase preparedness of the border troops and set out specific guidelines on "border struggles." In short, Chinese border guards were authorized to shoot in self-defense if "two warnings by our side were ineffective and the other side has killed or injured our personnel."[376] Border troops were instructed that they "either did not fight or fight to win."[377] Yet while this strategy significantly upped the risk level on the border and made armed clashes a virtual given, the sites of patrols seemed to have been chosen with care. Guards were put on islands on the Chinese side of the main channel, a good distance away from Soviet cities and military bases.[378] This choice likely resulted from practical reasoning on several levels: the distance from Soviet cities and troops meant that any clash was unlikely to put significant strategic interests of the Soviet Union under risk; moreover, it also meant that risks were more easily controlled on the Chinese front, as Soviet reinforcements would not be much of a concern. Such a controlled clash was also bent in China's favor, as it was easier for the Chinese side to concentrate forces and

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[375] "Letter from Allen S. Whiting to Henry Kissinger, 16 August 1969, enclosing report, "Sino-Soviet Hostilities and Implications for U.S. Policy," National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, box 839, China. Accessed at http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB49/ on 25 June 2012.
[376] Yu Yan, *Wushinian Guoshi Jiyao: Junshi Juan*, 535.
[377] Yu Yan, 535.
[378] Arthur A. Cohen, 274-5.

engage where Soviet defense was weak. In other words, while it appeared that China set the PLA on a collision course with Soviet guards, the government or military still hoped to control the scale of potential conflicts by selecting targets carefully.

Chinese scholars credit the 5 January 1968 clash on the Qiliqin (Kirkinskii) island for directly triggering this change of policy. According to Chinese sources, Soviet guards used armored personnel vehicles to repel groups of Chinese fishermen on this small island to the north of Zhenbao (Damanskii), which led to bloodshed, and the incident was seen as squarely provoked by the Soviet side.[379] The decision from the top military body was made several weeks later, in response to the conflict. A frontline command headed by the deputy commander of the Shenyang Military Region was set up[380]; it appeared that the local military commanders were treating the conflict seriously, with an expectation that additional conflicts might occur. However, this expectation did not yet turn into a decision to start a conflict.

Another pivotal moment in this steadily building tension on the border would occur far away from China. In August 1968, thousands of tanks and troops from five Warsaw countries led by the Soviet Union rolled into Czechoslovakia to crack down on the reformist government of the Czech Communist party. The occupation was swift and thorough, and the government was left no choice but to accept Soviet occupation and

[379] Qing Shi, "Yijiu Liujiunian Juece Zhimi? (Secrets from the 1969 Decision?)," *Kexue Juece* (Scientific Decisionmaking), No.1 (1999): 12.
[380] Xu Xiaotian, Li Chunlong, and Xu Zhenze, 772.

forced negotiations. The sheer speed and efficacy with which the Soviet Union brought its vast power to bear on an ally undoubtedly shook Mao. More significantly, the Soviet leadership justified the invasion by imposing limits on allies' sovereignty in what was dubbed the Brezhnev Doctrine: "the sovereignty of individual socialist countries cannot be set against the interests of world socialism… The weakening of any of the links in the world system of socialism directly affects all the socialist countries, and they cannot look indifferently upon this."[381] The doctrine in effect reduced all socialist countries to Soviet satellites in one broad brushstroke and envisioned a collective defense system against its own allies. While Mao could not have endorsed the Czech government's decision to political liberalization, he must have felt the threat of regime survival in the wake of the doctrine.

Of course it would be much more difficult to occupy China's vast territories, but the key is that the Soviet Union both had indisputable power to hurt China and the willingness to apply that power on its allies. The new Soviet grand strategy had removed all pretense of non-intervention and would legitimize an attack on China, a risk that Chinese leaders immediately realized. In a protest over alleged Soviet incursions into Chinese airspace, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted gravely that such incursions "were absolutely not coincidental" just weeks after Warsaw armies crushed the Prague

[381] Mark Kramer, "Beyond the Brezhnev Doctrine: A New Era in Soviet-East European Relations?" *International Security* 14, No. 3 (winter 1989/90): 25.

Spring.[382] Zhou also linked Soviet military threat to China, such as border clashes and Soviet troops stationed on Chinese borders, to the Brezhnev doctrine.[383]

Chinese leaders began to draw up battle plans shortly after. Another noteworthy confrontation between the two sides occurred on 23 January 1969 on the Zhenbao (Damanskii) island. Soviet border patrols beat and injured Chinese soldiers.[384] Two days later, the Heilongjiang Provincial Military Region proposed a "blueprint of anti-intervention struggle" on the island, which was in effect a plan of "retaliatory self-defense" or proactive strike.[385] The plan was approved first by the higher-level Shenyang Military Region. Another clash, in which shots were fired, occurred on 6 February. By 7 February the General Staff Department and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs passed the plan and gave detailed instructions. The central leadership instructed that if Soviet troops "invaded" again and "provoked militarily," Chinese troops can retaliate in self-defense after warnings went unheeded. However, troops should also take care to make sure that it was in the right and that actions were controlled.[386] While this notice does not sound much different from the one issued in early 1968, the mention of "retaliation" was clearly significant. It authorized a careful act of retaliation in the name of self-defense.

The military authority picked the site of the coming conflict judiciously. Zhenbao

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[382] *People's Daily*, 17 September 1968: 5.
[383] M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, Princeton (NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 208.
[384] Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation*, 208.
[385] Yu Yan, 537. Qing Shi, "Yijiu Liujiunian Juece Zhimi?": 12.
[386] Li Lianqing, *Lengnuan Suiyue*, 348.

(Damanskii) island was remote from Soviet reinforcements, and it promised tactical advantages to the Chinese due to its terrain.[387] The island has already seen several small-scale clashes in January and February 1969, resulting in some minor injuries among Soviet guards and Chinese patrol forces. China warned the Soviets against future incursions following each incident, which did not prevent future conflicts from occurring.[388] In other words, this island both offered tactical advantage and legitimacy; the Chinese side could claim that it was simply responding to repeated challenges from the Soviet side.

On 2 March 1969, the Chinese guards struck after days of careful preparation. More than 200 guards lay in ambush and annihilated the small group of Soviet guards, according to Soviet briefing to East German leaders.[389] A total of 31 Soviet guards were killed. China issued a strongly worded diplomatic protest the day after, claiming that the Soviet guards intercepted Chinese guards and opened fire first, which forced the Chinese side to defend themselves. The Soviet Union was caught completely off guard. Moscow protested vehemently, calling it a premeditated attack, and ordered border units to counter attack.[390] Massive demonstrations broke out in cities across China and the Soviet Union, and saber-rattling reached an intense pitch. On 13 March, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

[387] Arthur A. Cohen, "The Sino-Soviet Border Crisis of 1969": 277.
[388] Ibid., 277.
[389] Christian F. Ostermann, "East German Documents on the Border Conflict, 1969," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 6-7 (Winter 1995/1996): 189.
[390] Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, 340-341.

demanded that the Soviet Union "stop all acts of intrusion and provocation" and warned that "if you insist on this path, the Soviet government must bear all responsibility for all the grave consequences."[391]

On 14 March, the party journal Red Flag proclaimed that if the Soviet forces wanted war, China would "wipe them out completely." The journal, insisting that the Soviet side provoked this conflict, attributed it to the principle of "limited sovereignty" that "helped the Soviet military advance into other countries," a direct reference to the occupation of Czechoslovakia.[392]

The second, more violent clash occurred on 15 March. This time the Soviet side used artillery, tanks and ground troops in the attack, and both sides significantly increased involvement, sending at least one regiment (up to 2,000 troops) on each side into battle.[393] But the Soviets did not use air power, and Soviet guards also refrained from coming to the island following the incident.[394] While the Chinese suffered more casualties this time, the Soviet troops were not able to retake their positions on the island. Efforts to contain the conflict showed distaste for large-scale war and a hope to limit the amount of damage to each side to the immediate confines. Mao seemed to share a similar unwillingness to escalate. While he was "overjoyed" by the clashes because they helped

[391] Li Lianqing, *Lengnuan Suiyue: Yibo Sanzhe de Zhongsu Guanxi*, 353.
[392] Wang Qi, ed., *Erzhanhou Zhongsu (ZhongE) Guanxi de Yanbian yu Fazhan*, 139.
[393] Arthur A. Cohen, 279
[394] Ibid., 280.

to "motivate in the face of serious enemies," he also pointed out that "there should not be additional fighting."[395] Chinese troops also moved off the island following the attack.

The period between the March conflicts and the August large-scale retaliation in Xinjiang by Soviet forces saw China responding half-heartedly to Soviet diplomatic proposals while becoming increasingly alarmed at the prospect of war with the large Soviet military. On 21 March, Premier Kosygin called the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and asked for Zhou Enlai. The next day the Soviet attaché was called and read a memorandum, in which China simply asked the government to raise any matters through formal diplomatic channels. On the 29th, the Soviet Union issued a mildly worded statement asking for negotiations, while the Chinese side continued to warn the Soviets against "playing with fire."[396] While Mao and Zhou appeared pleased that the Soviet Union was reaching out diplomatically, they were not keen on resolving the issue this way in the immediate aftermath of the March fighting. On 24 May, China responded that it had always tried to resolve border issues diplomatically but also threatened that China can "fight to the end if we have no choice but to fight."[397] It was not until after the August clash that China agreed to negotiate.

On 13 August, Soviet army struck forcefully in Tiebielieke of Yumin County, Xinjiang, the western segment of the long Sino-Soviet border, far out of China's comfort

[395] Qing Shi, "Yijiu Liujiunian Juece Zhimi?": 13.
[396] Li Lianqing, *Lengnuan Suiyue*, 355-358.
[397] Ibid., 363.

zone. The site was six miles east of a small settlement, Zhalanashkol, in Simipalantinsk Oblast, Kazakhstan.[398] Dozens of Chinese guards were killed in the clash, in which the Soviet army deployed helicopters and armored vehicles.[399] The attack, while not completely unexpected, caught the Chinese leadership by surprise, and the threat of a Soviet incursion into Chinese territory, especially in areas where Chinese reinforcements were weak, suddenly became real.

More serious still was the threat of nuclear war. While the Brezhnev regime had repeatedly but quietly warned of nuclear attack, the communication of such warnings had only began to filter through third parties in August, catching China's attention. During the summer, reports that Russian diplomats had inquired about the reaction of Eastern European countries in the case of a nuclear attack on China's nuclear facilities surfaced. Mass rallies were held in China to condemn a Soviet nuclear war. More startlingly, on 18 August, Second Secretary of the Soviet embassy in Washington D.C. Boris N. Davydov asked US Special Assistant for North Vietnam William L. Stearman "what the US would do if the Soviet Union attacked and destroyed China's nuclear installations." Such an attack could help to eliminate the nuclear threat from China and weaken the Mao leadership, possibly allowing dissenters to take control. He assured the US that it would

[398] Arthur A. Cohen, 285.
[399] Zhang Anfu, "Xinjiang Junqu Shengchan Jianshe Bingtuan yu Ershi Shiji Liushi Niandai Zhongsu Bianjing Chongtu": 101.

have no impact on the US.[400] The Washington Post published an article on 28 August 1969 on a potential attack by the Soviet Union on China. The source was likely the CIA director. Appearing with the article was a map of known Chinese atomic bomb sites.[401] A report in the US media on Soviet signaling would undoubtedly carry enormous credibility in the minds of Chinese leaders, who had been wary of US-Soviet collusion to attack China for years.

These threats explained the rapid escalation of tensions and military preparedness in China in the following month. On 27 August, hearing of Soviet hints of attack from the East Europeans, the Central Committee and the CMC issued emergency notices to set up a public air-defense group headed by Zhou Enlai. The mission of the group was to help organize evacuations of the urban population and relocate factories. On the next day, the Central Committed asked revolutionary committees and military forces in border areas to prepare for a "massive attack by the Soviet Union at any moment." At the same time, forces in the northeast, north and northwest military regions went on alert.[402]

Conditions relaxed momentarily following a last-minute meeting between Kosygin and Zhou Enlai on 11 September. Kosygin promised not to initiate a nuclear attack on China, and the two parties agreed to de-escalate first by resisting from military

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[400] US State Department Memo of Conversation, "US Reaction to Soviet Destruction of CPR Nuclear Capability," 18 August 1969. Accessed at http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB49/sino.sov.10.pdf on 30 June 2012.
[401] Arthur A. Cohen, 287.
[402] Qing Shi, "Yijiu Liujiunian Juece Zhimi?": 15.

clashes.[403] But Kosygin failed to exchange documentation of the informal talk after he returned to Moscow, prompting speculation that either he deceived China or that there were disagreements within the Soviet regime. The Chinese leadership did not take chances as the stakes of a misreading were prohibitive. On 16 September, there was another leak that an air raid on Chinese nuclear sites was imminent.[404] In the period between 16 and 22 September, the Politburo held at least three meetings to discuss war prospects. A number of leaders believed that Kosygin's visit might be a decoy meant to disarm China before a decisive attack, much like the visit by a Japan envoy to the US ahead of the Pearl Harbor attacks.[405] Leaders decided that the Soviets could time the attack during the upcoming National Day celebrations. Zhou spoke at a military preparedness meeting on 22 September that "we have to be prepared for war… as a new strategic plan."[406] Three days later, the CMC called together military region commanders to discuss tactical planning. On 23 September and 29 September China held an unannounced underground nuclear test and a hydrogen bomb test respectively, presumably as a deterrence signal to the Soviet Union.[407] The day after the hydrogen bomb test Beijing airports were evacuated in anticipation of a surprise attack by the

[403] Yu Yan, *Wushinian Guoshi Jiyao: Junshi Juan*: 548.
[404] Luthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*: 343.
[405] Qing Shi, "Yijiu Liujiunian Juece Zhimi?": 16. Also, Xu Xiaotian, Li Chunlong, and Xu Zhenze, 793-795.
[406] Qing Shi, "Yijiu Liujiunian Juece Zhimi?": 16.
[407] Li Jian, ed., *Xinzhongguo Liuci Fanqinlue Zhanzheng Shilu* (A Realistic Account of New China's Six Wars against Invasions) (Beijing: Chinese Broadcast and Television Press, 1992), 931.

Soviets.

This highly charged atmosphere lasted until border negotiations began on 20 October. While the talks did not yield material results in the years to follow, the fact that the Soviet Union did not attack China and was willing to negotiate toned down palpable tension. During this period, Mao also began to initiate a rapprochement with the US, a significant policy reversal that served to improve China's security environment in the years to come. The episode of armed conflicts between China and the Soviet Union, both nuclear powers, passed without breaking into an all-out war.

Why is this a relevant case for credibility?

The Sino-Soviet clash differs from the previous two cases in several notable ways on the surface. First, the conflict never escalated into a full-scale war as in the previous cases. The scope and duration of the clashes were very limited in comparison, with casualties in the hundreds and combat over in a day. Neither side waged a joint military campaign or targeted military or civilian facilities beyond the specific point of encounter. Second, the period of tension consisted of a series of defined clashes of similar scale, with China initiating the first and the Soviet side initiating the latter two. While the number of personnel committed varied, the clashes did not trigger a more powerful response that morphed into a lengthier military campaign. While the reason for this

restraint is outside the scope of this paper, those in the school of nuclear deterrence would argue that nuclear powers inevitably avoided all-out wars with one another. Moreover, the fact that there were a number of episodes made it more difficult to define the beginning and end of tensions.

These superficial differences also bring up more material questions about the validity of this case. One objection may be that the state-centric model of deterrence interactions does not apply to this interaction, which was tinged heavily with factionalism. Students of Chinese foreign policy have long been split over the importance of ideology and personality versus realist calculations in policy-making in Mao's China, but no matter which school one is in, it would be impossible, if not completely misguided, to ignore the overwhelming presence of ideological fervor fueled by Mao's personality cult in this period. If one recalls the argument by Robert Jervis et al, it would seem that the rational-actor premise of a unified China with a coherent foreign policy could not be further from the truth. It could be argued that a group of ideologically driven leaders looking to seize power in the near-anarchy of the late 1960s orchestrated the conflict.

Very little is known of the late 1960s, a critical juncture in Chinese foreign policy. Publicly available material paints the broad contours of the conflict, and declassified Soviet archives help fill in the gaps in diplomatic exchanges and top-level meetings. But almost nothing is known on the elite politics level: how big a role did radical military

leaders such as Lin Biao play? How much did Mao want to use Soviet policies to criticize and destroy dissenters in the party? How much of the Soviet nuclear threat was perceived in China, and was it played up by certain leaders? On the Soviet side, how committed were leaders to the idea of preemptive strike on Chinese nuclear facilities? These questions may not be known for a long time.

Some evidence already hints at the role of factional politics. According to one important account, the Xinjiang Military Region commander Long Shujin met with Lin Biao at the Ninth Party Plenum in April 1969, during which Lin was publicly designated as the heir apparent to Mao. Lin regarded the risk of a large war as "very small" between China and the Soviet Union, since the main contention was over the leadership role in the international Communist movement and did not justify a major war. However, "a bit of border conflicts" would add to the clout of the military and allow the several military region commanders pull more weight in the central leadership.[408] Long therefore downplayed border skirmishes in the months to follow, gearing for a more significant clash that could add to the military's clout. In April, the CMC sent a telegram to Long with Mao's warnings to watch for incidents in the northwest. Long did not pass it down the ranks and instead told subordinates that they did not need to report small diplomatic incidents.[409] On 10 and 11 August, shortly before the Xinjiang clash, Long did not react

[408] Li Jian, *Gongheguo Zhizhan* (Wars of the Republic) (Beijing: Chinese Society Press, 1996), 920.
[409] Ibid., 920.

to reports of Soviet army maneuvers, allowing Soviet guards to use the element of surprise to kill all Chinese guards on patrol on 13 August.[410] It is difficult to determine whether these allegations were made to denigrate Lin following his fall from grace in September 1971, but they at least suggest the possibility of factionalism playing an important role in what is usually highly centralized military policy.

Those subscribing to factionalist explanations may argue that unlike a classic instance of deterrence, in which the defender calculates what is at stake and takes a series of measured steps to warn the adversary, the Sino-Soviet border clash was born from domestic forces that sought to exploit tensions and conflicts. There was no deterrence because no one was looking to deter. If the account of Lin Biao's instructions is credible, it may seem that instead of deterring, the military was almost hoping for conflicts.

The turn to radicalism did powerfully influence China's foreign policy and domestic politics, but to argue that infighting and radical thinking invalidate this case misses the point. The state-centric assumptions of deterrence do not require a single, rational decision-maker. As long as a process exists to produce a decision that in turn drives the interactions between states, what goes into that process can vary a great deal depending on idiosyncratic factors such as political institutions, the ideology of the ruling party and the personality of the state leader. Certain combination of factors, such as a

[410] Ibid., 921.

conservative ideology and risk-averse leader, may be more conducive deterrence management. Others, such as radical thinking and contentious domestic politics, may contribute to aggressive posturing and conflicting signals. But none of these conditions would invalidate a deterrence process, which is an exchange between the defender and the challenger on the best course of action. The simplification does not seek to reduce states to one voice or one policy. In the case of the Sino-Soviet clash, while it was clearly inevitable that radical ideology entered all realms of Chinese politics, the interaction between China and the Soviet Union, though marred by some fits and starts, fit the theoretical model like other episodes of deterrence. China – though in this case a more fragmented entity – was still capable of perceiving threat and implementing deterrence. Lin may have wanted conflicts to enhance his power, but the threats posed by the Soviet Union and the interactions between the two states were likely independent of his wishes.

What was at stake?

Compared to previous cases in this study, whereby territorial security was unmistakably under threat and dominated China's calculations, the provocations that led to China's attack at Zhenbao (Damanskii) seem less severe at first glance. In the Korean War case, the UN Command was rapidly advancing across the 38th parallel and racing toward the Chinese border, upsetting the status quo ante and threatening to permanently

destabilize the northeast region of China. Twelve years later, India embarked on a military strategy of active encroachment that would push into hitherto unoccupied or Chinese-controlled territory. In both cases the challenger has upset the immediate status quo, with an unclear end goal that posed an uncertain threat to China's security. Yet the Soviet Union has not aggressively pushed into Chinese-controlled territory. The two sides shared a lengthy border with disputed areas largely controlled by the Soviet Union. So why did China feel the need to deter?

Despite the lack of an immediate provocation, however, the threat to Chinese security was both specific and structural. The chapter has presented a chronology of tensions and mistrust that turned the former allies into enemies. Unlike the traditional enemy of the United States, which was powerful but distant and had already tasted the results of a drawn-out war with China, the equally powerful Soviet Union physically enveloped vast portions of China, had long-standing interests in the northeast and northwest and was capable of striking China's capital with the bulk of its forces in days, even if it chose not to deploy its large nuclear arsenal. As the leader of the Warsaw Pact and international Communist movement, it could also isolate China and undermine China's legitimacy, at least among its own allies. It was truly an enemy with awesome power that could put China's physical and political survival at risk.

And while the threat posed by the Soviet Union was more generalized than

immediate, it was extended over vast and strategically important territories in the northwest and northeast. China was long displeased about Soviet attitude in the Sino-Indian border disputes. When Soviet press carried a neutral statement on 9 September 1959 despite China's pleas to support the Chinese claim or stay quiet on the subject, Chinese leaders felt betrayed. Chen Yi accused Khrushchev during the latter's visit to China in October 1959 of siding with India. Khrushchev's answer did not help. He asked, "Do you not understand that India considers it critical to have an independent neighbor? … A Tibet as part of China is certain to pose a threat to India."[411] This candid assessment that an independent Tibet would be more conducive to border settlement and perhaps even better relations with China was unsettling to say the least, so soon after Dalai Lama fled Lhasa and set up an exile government in India. This sense that the Soviet Union did not support Chinese territorial claims, which called into question the credibility of extended deterrence, was further deepened when the Soviet Union extended loans of 1.5 billion rubles in 1959 and sold fighter jets to India in 1962.[412] A People's Daily article in November 1963 called the Soviets more ardent supporters of Indian counterrevolutionaries than even the Americans.[413]

Unlike the southwest region of Tibet, where Soviet risks were indirect, the northwest region of Xinjiang felt Soviet presence much more keenly. The Chinese

[411] Quoted in Li Hua, "1959 nian Zhongyin Bianjie Chongtu Qiyin ji Sulian Fanying Tanxi": 64.
[412] Shi Bo, ed., *1962: Zhongyin Dazhan Jishi*, 230.
[413] Zhang Shude, *Miyuede Jieshu*, 252-253.

Communist Party was able to reclaim Xinjiang after it won the civil war precisely with Soviet help. It was Soviet transportation that allowed China to take over the region sooner than expected. After decades of Soviet influence in Xinjiang, about 200,000 residents in the Yili-Tacheng area held Soviet passports, and the Soviet consulate actively encouraged even those with tangential ties to the Soviet Union to acquire Soviet papers.[414] In the shocking Yita incident in April-May 1962, more than 60,000 Uyghurs and Kazakhs, including local party cadres, fled to Soviet territory with Moscow's encouragement. Soviet forces were well established in the area surrounding China, with army stations just six miles away from the point of contact in the 13 August conflict and a railroad crossing within a mile. China was in no position to fight a "people's war" in Xinjiang, the tried-and-true strategy proudly upheld by Mao and his followers. The loyalty of the people was in question.

An attack by the Soviet Union was also seen as increasingly likely in the 1960s, peaking when Moscow adopted the Brezhnev Doctrine against its own allies and the Soviet Union sent out feelers for preemptive attacks. Mao became openly concerned about the possibility of a Soviet attack on China starting in 1963-64, repeatedly asking foreign guests including Kim Il-Sung if Khrushchev could attack. He even pondered the route of an invasion; "[they could] send armies to occupy Xinjiang, Heilongjiang and

[414] Li Danhui, "Dui Xinjiang Sulian Qiaomin Wenti de Lishi Kaocha (A Historical Probe into the Issue of Soviet Emigrants in Xinjiang)," in Niu Dayong and Shen Zhihua, eds., 18-22.

then advance inland. Inner Mongolia could be under threat, too." He mused, "we must be prepared."[415] This threat to China's rule was further extended to the Sino-Mongolian border after the Soviet Union signed the friendship pact with Mongolia in 1966 and stationed more than a dozen divisions on the border. At this point all of China's vast northern flank was completely in the shadow of Soviet forces. Chinese leaders felt this military pressure. In a 16 March 1966 meeting, Zhou told northern China officials that "if anything happens, north China may be the main front of attack by the enemy."[416] Japan struck this political and industrial heartland of China in 1937 when World War II escalated. The historical lesson of northern China falling into the hands of a powerful enemy was still fresh in the minds of these revolutionary leaders.

And the thousands of skirmishes in disputed areas put pressure on the leadership to respond. Possible exaggeration aside, the fact that it was the Heilongjiang provincial military region that first proposed retaliation in 1968 corroborates that there had been significant grievances among the rank and file. Although the clashes in this case did not follow the previous examples of invasion or continuous encroachment, they were also frequent and difficult to stop. Chinese forces faced the choice of either avoiding conflicts altogether by staying out of the way of Soviet border guards or incurring costs and

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[415] Xiao Donglian et al. *Wushinian Guoshi Jiyao: Waijiaojuan* (Excerpts of Fifty Years of National Events: The Foreign Relations Volume) (Changsha: Hunan People's Press, 1999), 297.
[416] CCP Central Documents Research Office. *Zhou Enlai Nianpu xia* (Zhou Enlai Chronicles II) (Beijing: Central Documents Press, 1997), 21.

damages if they tried to enforce Chinese claims.

Increasing radicalism certainly helped aggravate these threat perceptions. As China's domestic and international policies were dominated by talks to oppose "revisionists" who dared venture away from Mao's thinking, leaders who had more moderate views of China's security environment have long been cleansed from the top ranks. The dovish Wang Jiaxiang, who advocated pragmatic foreign policies that upheld China's basic security interests, was purged in 1962. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was under serious attack from radical leaders from 1966 to 1967, which was only rectified when Mao became worried enough to reinstate Zhou Enlai and let him handle day-to-day affairs at the ministry. Mao's Soviet policy was so central to his turn to the left that no one was allowed to question it in any way. In this frenzied atmosphere, threats were amplified, and it was very likely that both the rank and file and senior officials yearned for retaliation.

In Mao's eyes, what made the Soviet Union particularly menacing was the threat it posed to regime survival. The threat came both in the form of breeding dissent within China and the possibility of a forced takeover in the example of Czechoslovakia. From the days of Khrushchev's secret speech Mao has regarded the problem of regime succession with grave concern. And he had reasons to be wary: after the Soviet attack on the personality cult around Stalin, people naturally compared that to the personality cult

around Mao. According to classified internal reports submitted to the central leadership after the secret speech, cadres around the country questioned slogans such as "long live Chairman Mao" and "Mao saved the people." Cadres in Chongqing observed that every time a Communist leader died, attacks were leveled on them, and that the succession in Communist countries was just like dynastic succession.[417] This cannot but raise the most alarming prospects for Mao, barely a decade into his rule over the country.

To have his legacy thrown out and his name tarnished was unthinkable. This is why Mao stridently defended Stalin despite his long-standing grievances. Were there people just like Khrushchev lurking in the ranks of Communist officials? Worse, could his heir apparent turn out to be Khrushchev? Such thinking played a big role in his decision to wage successive attacks on "rightists" and revisionists in the party, both a need to purge dissent but also paranoia that no amount of loyalty was enough. By the mid-1960s Mao was convinced that there were already Khrushchev-like elements, if not his lackeys, within the party. They were simply waiting for the right time to bring back the ancien régime. Revisionists were in the highest echelons of the party.[418] The unfortunate suggestion by a drunk Rodion Malinovsky that China should rid itself of Mao in November 1964 served as evidence that the Soviet Union was bent on overthrowing

[417] Shen Zhihua, *Chuzai Shizi Lukou de Xuanze: 1956-1957nian de Zhongguo*, 101-103.
[418] Li Danhui, "1969nian Zhongsu Bianjie Chongtu: Yuanqi he Jieguo (1969 Sino-Soviet Border Clash: Beginnings and Results)," *Dangdai Zhongguoshi Yanjiu* (Contemporary Chinese History Studies), no. 3 (1996): 45.

the regime.

In short, at stake in this conflict were extensive security interests along China's north border as well as regime survival, in the eyes of China. The Soviet Union was both one of the most powerful countries in the world and one that could bring the most forces to bear on China. It could at once threaten large sections of Chinese territory. Moreover, it had a special influence on China and Chinese leaders as the first Communist country and held the most convincing claim to legitimacy. In Mao's eyes, the Soviet regime was also actively courting his adversaries in the party and waiting to denigrate his legacy. If the Soviet Union were allowed to conduct its policies undeterred, it would become an all-out threat, a time bomb for the regime.

How did China think that this case could affect its credibility?

As argued above, this conflict is distinctly more drawn out than previous cases of deterrence. The lack of a clear crisis and a dearth of historical records in the politically sensitive era of the Cultural Revolution mean that it is more difficult to verify China's thinking with archival materials. However, what has been made available points to the same preoccupation with being taken advantage of by an adversary with long-term intentions to hurt China. We have seen in previous case that such a line of thinking necessarily entails sensitivity toward China's credibility and reputation for resolve.

It took more than ten years for China to shift from regarding the Soviet Union as its closest ally and "big brother" to an archenemy, more evil and feared than the US. Similar to the US, the Soviet Union also cast a long shadow in most of Mao's reign over the new republic. China's understanding of the security threat posed by the Soviet Union transitioned from small and isolated to serious and omnipresent. As late as 1960, following a minor border incident in Xinjiang in which Soviet guards chased away Chinese herdsmen, Zhou Enlai told officials that "border provocations are possible, but [I] cannot imagine a military clash."[419] But with escalating tensions China turned wary. Zhou said in 1962 that China had to be prepared militarily as there was no evil that revisionists would not do.[420]

By the mid-1960s Mao was convinced that a large-scale war with the Soviets was inevitable. Mao became obsessed with the Soviet nuclear threat in 1963-1964, calling the Soviets a bigger nuclear menace than the US. After the initial Zhenbao (Damanskii) clash, Mao exclaimed that China must be prepared for war "no matter which year it is" and "whether [the Soviet Union] comes or not."[421] On 28 April 1969, Mao said at the First Plenum of the Ninth Party Congress that while he would not be provoked and would not "go out and fight… even if you invite me," he would "deal with it if you want to attack

[419] Li Danhui, "Zhengzhi Doushi yu Dishou: 1960niandai Zhongsu Bianjie Guanxi – Dui Zhongsu Bianjie Wenti de Lishi Kaocha Zhier (Political Warrriors and Adversaries: Sino-Soviet Border Relations in the 1960s – Historical Review of Sino-Soviet Border Issues, II)," *Shehui Kexue* (Social Sciences), no. 2 (2007): 148.
[420] Ibid., 149.
[421] Qing Shi, "Yijiu Liujiunian Juece Zhimi?": 13.

me."[422] The huge undertaking to build the Third Front accelerated in 1969, speaking to Mao's conviction of an almost certain Soviet attack. The crippling costs of relocating manufacturing capacity and technological know-how to remote, mountainous areas were only justified if Soviet attack was considered imminent. [423]

With this powerful enemy looming on the horizon and so much at stake, Mao repeatedly expressed concerns that the Soviet Union might bully China, either by itself or in collusion with the US, a concern that grew with US-Soviet rapprochement during Khrushchev's years. On several occasions in 1964, Mao told foreign visitors that "while we do not have nuclear weapons yet, it is unacceptable for others to try to scare us. We have never ever accepted threats by great powers, and it has always been the case no matter how weak we once were."[424] Elsewhere he has warned of a Soviet-US collusion to divide up the world and undermine China in the process. Reports of Soviet probes in 1968 to wage a preemptive attack on Chinese nuclear facilities seemed to confirm this worst fear.

Mao also viewed territorial disputes as one long string of offences by different perpetrators that must be put to a decisive stop. Following the bitter spat over the joint fleet in 1958, Mao told Khrushchev that "for many years the British and other foreigners

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[422] Chen Shaoming, "Yijiu Liujiunian 'Guojixingshi Zuotanhui' jiqi Lishi Gongxian (The 1969 'International Situation Seminars' and Its Historical Contribution)," *Zhonggong Dangshi Yanjiu* (Chinese Communist Party Studies), no. 1 (2008): 76-77.
[423] See Barry Naughton, "The Third Front: Defence Industrialization in the Chinese Interior," *The China Quarterly*, no. 115 (Sepember 1988): 351-386.
[424] Xiao Donglian et al., *Wushinian Guoshi Jiyao: Waijiaojuan*, 281.

have taken our land. We must not allow anyone to use our territory to achieve their end."[425] In other words, no territorial dispute exists in a vacuum. Any undermining of Chinese sovereignty would call to mind previous offences, even if by other countries. As a flip side to uninterrupted historical outlook, if China were to sit back and allow others to take advantage of its weakness or fears, it would only lead to similar affronts in the future.

In the case of the Zhenbao (Damanskii) conflict, when the CMC agreed to a plan to retaliate and set an example, it also evoked the traditional military principle oft mentioned in previous cases of deterrence, that "if others do not violate us, we do not violate them; if they do violate us, we must violate them." This tit-for-tat principle was at first glance a shrewd and measured foreign policy. Yet the emphasis on the absolute must of a countermeasure, a retaliation, reveals a preoccupation with its own credibility. If China did not respond to offences with like force, this theory suggested, it would be an open invitation for attacks in the future.

In all, while there is not as much available archival material detailing China's thinking on how the case affected its credibility, the similarity in other basic lines of reasoning, especially the establishment of the Soviet Union as a possible enduring rival, suggests that China was also concerned about how it would be perceived by the

[425] Tan Yiqing, "Shilun Xinzhongguo de Guojiaanquan Zhanlue (On the National Security Strategy of the New Republic," *Zhongguo Junshi Kexue* (Chinese Military Science), no. 4 (1999): 23.

challenger, a country with a history of domineering Chinese politics and the means to threaten its survival. China's multi-pronged efforts to uphold its credibility also suggest that this concern had remained in the forefront of its thinking.

How did China maintain its credibility?

As China was concerned about its credibility in the eyes of a possible enduring rival with the singular ability to destabilize the Chinese regime and threaten its physical survival, it resorted to similar means to maintain its credibility as seen in previous incidents of deterrence, displaying both the ability to learn from previous interactions but also the consistency of thinking within the same leadership. On the other hand, rapidly deteriorating relations with the Soviet Union posed challenges to crisis management, and the takeover of radical thinking among top leadership also made some tools seen in previous conflicts unfeasible. The pattern emerging from China's management of its credibility in the eyes of the Soviet Union broadly follows the one from previous cases of deterrence; China decided when threats failed that the best course of action to strengthen its credibility was to initiate a decisive conflict that it was certain to win.

Since the more generalized state of tension between China and the Soviet Union started years before border conflicts became the flash point, China had the time to identify the long-term solution to the issue of credibility – the need to build real political,

economic and military power as well as nuclear deterrence. Mao was obsessed with the fact that Soviet leaders never took China as an equal, despite China's size and strategic importance and the CCP's track record of successfully overthrowing the KMT regime and fighting the US army to a standstill in North Korea. As Mao argued in January 1957, it was the fifty million tons of steel, four hundred tons of coal and eighty million tons of oil that allowed Soviet leaders to look down upon and take advantage of China, and some people in China were also blinded by Soviet prowess.[426] As a logical conclusion, he decided to set China upon an accelerated path to becoming a great power. China must first acquire the ultimate weapon, the atomic bomb, since the reason imperialist powers "looked down upon us was because we do not have atomic bombs, only hand grenades."[427] China must also acquire the hallmarks of economic power strength. Aside from grain production, which ensures the self-sufficiency of a country, Mao settled on steel production because it was the essential building block of both civil and defense manufacturing. The Great Leap Forward in his mind would deliver China to the doorstep of great wealth and power; all it took was enough mobilization to unleash the limitless potential among the people. Great changes can happen suddenly, just like the victory of the CCP and the jump in grain and steel production.[428]

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[426] *Mao Zedong Wenji* (Collections of Mao Zedong's Essays), vol. 7 (Beijing: People's Press, 1999), 191.
[427] Tracy B. Strong and Helene Keyssar, "Anna Louise Strong: Three Interviews with Chairman Mao Zedong," *The China Quarterly*, 103 (September 1985): 503.
[428] Niu Jun, "Mao Zedong yu Zhongsu Tongmeng Polie de Yuanqi (1957-1959)": 59.

While China did acquire nuclear weapon capabilities within the expected time frame, the disaster of the Great Leap Forward and political turmoil prevented China from establishing itself as an industrial heavyweight during Mao's time. With this ultimate solution to maintain credibility beyond reach, China made use of verbal and non-verbal threats when it was challenged to establish and defend credibility, as in previous cases. Following a period of vehement public attacks on each other in winter 1966, China asserted on 11 December 1966 that the Soviet Union was planning to join forces with the US and attack China, but China was "not afraid of a Soviet-US attack" because "we have the atomic bomb and rockets."[429] This reference to nuclear retaliation was meant to deter a more generalized threat posed by the Soviet Union. Regarding the specific border issue, after the initial Zhenbao (Damanskii) clash, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs warned the Soviet Union to "stop all acts of invasion and provocation… If you insist on this course of action, the Soviet government must bear all responsibility for all the grave consequences as a result."[430] On 7 October, after weeks of intense calculation that the Soviet Union might attack China's nuclear facilities, China declared that "China is not going to be scared by the threat of war, including nuclear war. If a small number of warmongers dare to go against the trend and attack China's strategic strongholds, then that means war and invasion. Seven hundred millions of Chinese people will rise up and

[429] Wang Qi, ed., *Erzhanhou Zhongsu (ZhongE) Guanxi de Yanbian yu Fazhan*, 120.
[430] Li Lianqing, *Lengnuan Suiyue*, 353.

resist, taking out an invasive war with revolutionary war."[431] These threats were a necessary way to communicate China's resolve in the face of threats and establish credibility, especially difficult when threatened with nuclear war.

The verbal communication was supplemented by non-verbal signals including a perceptible change of engagement principles and finally a threat of nuclear attack. As was the case in the Sino-Indian border conflict, after repeated warnings on the frontlines did not work, the central authorities instructed local troops to engage enemy forces in "self-defense" if the other side did not back down in future encounters. The principle, first authorized in January 1968, again put Chinese guards in the line of fire and increased the risk of casualties, as it did in the border war with India. The willingness to incur additional political and military costs was a non-verbal signal that China would defend its interests. However, the view in the Soviet Union that Chinese policies have disintegrated into a state of disarray and radicalism probably affected the effectiveness of signaling.

When the threat of a Soviet attack peaked in late September and invasion was believed to be imminent, China selected the most unequivocal signal: it detonated an atomic bomb and a hydrogen bomb in two separate tests late in the month. Soviet intelligence most likely was aware of the detonations, despite a lack of archival confirmation. Beijing was seeking to use the ultimate threat available to itself and

[431] Ibid., 377.

significantly upped the ante in the standoff. If the Soviets dared attack China's nuclear facilities, any surviving capacity would be deployed on the Soviet Union. It appears that the threat of nuclear retaliation finally brought the Soviet Union back to the negotiating table.

Unlike previous cases, however, China's signaling did not follow a distinct sequence, and exchanges were few and far between in comparison. Part of the reason has to be found in the lengthy and generalized nature of Sino-Soviet tensions. The border disputes were in themselves significant but far from the entirety of Chinese grievances. The perceived encirclement and subversion of China were more serious challenges. In this light, the lack of a sudden crisis made it less likely that China would issue a series of signals in a clear sequence. The only exception was the September period, when China entered a period of intense preparation for war and signaling intensified. On the other hand, the almost complete breakdown on all levels of communication probably contributed to the difficulty of signaling. Li Lianqing, who worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the time, recalled that the operator at the ministry hung up on Kosygin when he called the Sino-Soviet hotline because it was inconceivable to speak to the arch-revisionist. It was only after Zhou criticized the operator that Kosygin was able to call again and set up a meeting for the Soviet attaché.[432] With the propaganda of Soviet

[432] Ibid., 354-355.

revisionism so ingrained on all levels of the government and military and the repercussions so dire for those seen as Soviet sympathizers, the proper workings of diplomacy had all but broken down.

In the end, China decided to employ the most effective and decisive method to establish credibility in the eyes of the Soviet Union, combining a decisive conflict with a threat of nuclear retaliation. Just as in the past, a carefully planned battle was the best way to demonstrate China's resolve and power. The threat of nuclear annihilation, however, prevented either side from escalating the clash to a sizeable war, and China found that deterrence was difficult when the conflict had to be localized. China isolated its conventional attack to one small island on the lengthy Sino-Soviet border, and the Soviet Union responded with an attack in Xinjiang. Unlike the Korean War, the Soviet Union and China did not fight in a proxy state that naturally served as the boundary of conflict. Unlike the Sino-Indian conflict, China had to face the risk of complete destruction at the hands of the Soviet Union. Given these constraints, China decided on a limited clash where Chinese forces could wipe out a small group of Soviet guards. As the CMC instructed, "either do not fight or fight to win."[433] But when the limited clash failed to deter the Soviet Union from continued challenges, including threats of a nuclear war, China used the nuclear tests to bring the Soviet Union back to negotiations.

[433] Qing Shi, "Yijiu Liujiunian Juece Zhimi?": 12.

The Sino-Soviet border clash was the culmination of more than a decade of growing tensions, real and perceived strategic conflicts and radical politics in China. As a result it was a more complex and less typical case of deterrence failure. However, just as in earlier cases, China displayed a concern with its own reputation and credulity in the eyes of this powerful adversary and came to the same conclusion that the best solution was to fight resolutely and win. Even in the face of potential nuclear disaster, it decided that credibility was worth fighting for.

CONCLUSION

China has chosen to initiate military conflicts with perceived challengers in some deterrence situations. This dissertation makes the argument that aside from the real and perceived security interests at stake, China's concern with its reputation for resolve contributed to the decision to fight. In the case studies covered in this dissertation, Chinese leaders were worried that they were not resolute enough in the eyes of adversaries. The reputation for resolve became a security interest in and of itself, serving to dispel future infringements and well worth fighting for. In the end, deterrence breaks down not only because the defender fails to convince the challenger to back down, but also because the defender believes that fighting enhances credibility the most.

Case studies: deterrence failures

The case studies are three episodes in recent Chinese history in which China used force actively to respond to repeated challenges from another country in a deterrence situation. The similarity in these cases lies in the fact that it was China that used decisive force first after an escalation of tensions that was started by the challenger. Otherwise the cases are different in the counterparties and the specific types of security challenges China faced. Another similarity is the broader time period and context, both within China

and internationally. All three cases occurred during the first twenty years of the People's Republic, with Mao Zedong at the helm. They also took place in the first half of the Cold War, prior to the China-US rapprochement.

On the other hand, while they occurred during this largely uninterrupted continuum, the domestic and international contexts for each conflict were different. In 1950, the People's Republic was barely born and its survival seemed perilous. In 1962, Mao was certainly more established in his rule but faced growing fissures with China's biggest ally, the Soviet Union; moreover, there was the need to rebuild the country in the aftermath of the disastrous Great Leap Forward. In 1969, Mao had demonstrated his personal hold on power but the bureaucracy was tattered. China also began to see the Soviet Union as arguably a bigger threat than the United States. These vacillating circumstances may have faded into the same Cold War backdrop in hindsight, but leaders were faced with what seemed to be vastly different situations and perceptions.

All three fit into deterrence situations even though it is not always easy to define challenger and defender in clinically precise terms. China's intervention into the Korean War was the most clear-cut of the three, as China was involved in extended deterrence and was not in a position to change the status quo ante at the beginning of the intervention. Even in this case, however, the rapidly changing military developments blurred the distinction between deterrence and compellence. When China finally sent

troops across the border into North Korea, Mao's telegrams showed that China's task had changed from deterring the rapidly advancing UN forces to fighting a decisive war that defeated the US once and for all.[434] It was only when that goal became unattainable in combat that China began negotiating for an armistice that cemented the division of the peninsula. In the border conflict with India, China was deterring further advances into territory previously controlled by the Chinese. But diverging territorial claims meant that China could be seen as the fait accompli offender if one takes the other side of the claim, especially as China adopted more aggressive patrolling tactics in response to the forward policy. Similar territorial disputes also existed between China and the Soviet Union, making it difficult to classify and distinguish actions and sometimes players. Chinese radicalism in the 1960s also made Beijing the more discontented party in the international system. This difficulty in applying theoretical definitions of deterrence and compellence to real-life situations highlights the complexity and rapid evolution of events. Concepts such as security and the integrity of borders are not merely descriptions of reality or the status quo at any given point in time; they are also shaped by history and perceptions and can be fluid.

However, while sterile definitions may not do justice to the complexity of real events, the concept of deterrence is still a useful construct to describe the broad contours

[434] Niu Jun, "Chaoxian Zhanzhengzhong Zhongmei Juece Bijiao Yanjiu (A Comparative Study of Chinese and US Decision-making in the Korean War)," *Dangdai Zhongguoshi Yanjiu* (Contemporary Chinese History Studies), no. 6 (2000): 36-55.

of players and their interactions in a given time frame. In all three case studies, regardless of the legitimacy of claims by each side, China did not actively seek to change the status quo when it attempted to deter, but rather had to deal with an opponent interested in changing the status quo. In the case of the Korean War, the rapidly advancing UN forces changed the balance of power on the Korean Peninsula and threatened to bring adversarial forces to the border of China, a clear change of the status quo. In the case of the war against India, the forward strategy of India moved forward the actual line of control by Indian forces in both the west and east sectors of the border. Lastly, aggressive tactics by the Soviet Union along disputed borders led to concerns of Soviet advances across the border. This case was the most mired in ideological posturing, and the efficacy of the Chinese leadership was the most in doubt. Yet in the most basic sense of border conflicts, China was dealing with a string of border-related offenses, including the 1962 mass exodus of border populations in Xinjiang and repeated skirmishes in the northeast. Therefore in a broad sense, China was put in the position of defender and its strategic calculations showed this self-classification as well.

The decision to only evaluate deterrence failures rather than successes is deliberate. First of all, the hypothesis of this dissertation is squarely focused on the defender's concern with resolve. When the concern is strong, it can help push the defender to initiate military conflicts to end the provocation. In the case of deterrence

failures, both the outcome (military conflict) and concerns about resolve are observable, and policymakers often clearly couch the decision to use force in the terms of establishing or defending its reputation for resolve. In certain deterrence successes, such as the tacit agreement between the US and China not to directly engage each other in the former's deepening involvement in Vietnam, one may argue that one reason for the success was China's confidence in its reputation for resolve. As the US chose to acknowledge Chinese concerns actively and frequently and observed self-inflicted limits on its military campaigns, China was reassured that it did not have to use force to demonstrate its resolve. In this sense there are certain deterrence successes that could help strengthen the hypothesis.

However, deterrence successes are over-determined. In reassuring China, the US also by necessity reduced its threat to Chinese security. China did not have to fight because the US already took away the reason to fight. The analysis of such episodes would not add much more to the discussion because the lack of security concerns would be considered compelling enough. In addition, the less complicated interaction between the two parties, as well as a shorter time frame, also meant that there was less discussion in official discourse on the reason for peace.

In contrast, while deterrence failures can also be over-determined and explained by infringements on Chinese security interests, the much richer leadership discourse for

analysis as well as the possibility to compare cases would better showcase the role played by the concern with resolve. The fact that security interests were present in all deterrence cases does not make them equal. There was often as good a reason to fight as there is to seek a compromise. In the first case, US-led campaigns to unify the Korean Peninsula, seen by most scholars as the most compelling case for China to go to war, did not necessarily compel a war. Some have argued that China overestimated US threats to China and could have avoided a costly conflict.[435] In the context of Cold War politics, it was not necessarily the most egregious offense. Dozens of countries were going through the process of becoming independent and shifting allegiance, which changed the security context of countries around them. Violent crackdowns in Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union did not prompt neighboring countries to go to war with the Soviets. The fact that the US was so powerful and could easily hurt the new People's Republic, if not destroy it, meant that intervention also carried enormous security risks. In the last case, when China chose to actively engage Soviet forces on the border, security interests were clearly present and arguably transcended just the border issue, but they did not point automatically to military conflict. Instead, China could have chosen to accept a compromise or lived with the reality of minor incursions. Deterrence does not break down in just one fashion, nor does it have to break down. Comparing the varied inputs

[435] Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu,* 169.

into deterrence failures allows us to evaluate the constant factor, that of the defender's concern with resolve.

Summary of findings

The case studies were organized in a similar structure. In each case the historical context for the conflict was laid out to help set the stage. The stream of events and discourse were analyzed through the same three questions: first, what was at stake? Second, how did China think that this case could affect its credibility? And third, how did China maintain its credibility? These questions are designed to lend structure to the textural analysis. Any instance of China using force could be approached from a myriad of angles, relevant to security studies, nuclear deterrence, military strategy, bureaucratic politics, personalities and domestic politics. Given the constant challenge of finding material on China's policymaking during the Cold War, it is easy to dwell on the attraction of historical details. By addressing these questions after setting up the historical context, this dissertation hopes to frame the discussion through the lens of the hypothesis, that while China considered itself the defender in deterrence situations, it nonetheless decided to use force in part to establish and defend its reputation for resolve. It also makes it possible to treat the cases not merely as distinct instances of deterrence, but as a continuation of China's attempts to strengthen its reputation over time, which it believed

would improve its security.

What was at stake?

The threats in each case were certainly grave, though they differed in severity and type. When the UN forces advanced past the 38th parallel toward China's border with North Korea, China was suddenly faced with the specter of having enemy forces directly on its border, something that China thought it had avoided by winning the civil war. The sudden change in the balance of power on the Korean Peninsula was unprecedented even at this stage in the Cold War; while the extension of Soviet interest after the end of the Second World War meant regime changes in many countries, the shift was rarely the result of a spectacular military defeat in a short period of time. In the case of the Korean War, the change in the status quo was a sudden and deeply uncertain development. There was no guarantee that the UN forces would stop at the border with China, and even if they did, it was not obvious if they would leave. The implications of a unified Korea under the auspices of the US were difficult to predict but likely disastrous, as the North Korean government-in-exile would set up in China and attract hostile forces for the foreseeable future. The threat of constantly preparing for war with US, or US-allied forces across from the border would cost thousands of troops and millions of dollars, a luxury that China could not afford. Though China's own territorial integrity was not yet

compromised, the likelihood that it would be had gone up significantly.

India's forward strategy, on the other hand, threatened China's territorial security in the most conventional sense. By pushing forward the effective line of control, India reduced the strategic depth of the Chinese southwest and threatened to cut off China's logistics supply lines in the west. The area is considered of higher importance due to ethnic tensions in the region and the leadership's more tenuous hold on loyalty. Directly affected were territorial interests as well as a loss of military advantage in potential conflicts in the future. India's influence in Tibet following the 1959 Lhasa revolt was also a worrisome backdrop to the conflict.

The Soviet Union was an unlikely foe. China's biggest ally and ideological flag bearer just a short few years ago quickly become a threat to China after a shift in the balance of power between the two bred tensions and competition. Territorial disputes and small-scale conflicts in this case were simply pieces in a bigger fight for control. By themselves, the territory in dispute and type of military strategy did not pose as direct and significant a threat to China as the case of India. It was the strategic significance of losing out to the Soviets that mattered in this scenario. In another sense, however, the difficult coexistence with a power adversary in the north was the most familiar and traditional security problem for the Chinese. For hundreds of years the biggest threats had come from nomads in the north, and on two occasions they succeeded in conquering the Han

Chinese entirely and setting up the Yuan and Qing dynasties. The Communist takeover of power was part of the grand search for a modern nation-state after the collapse of the Qing dynasty, and the Communists were steeped in the anti-imperial, anti-Qing causes. The difficulty of living with an enemy in the north, where borders lacked natural defenses and loyalty was suspect, was well understood by any leader, even if the most Communist.

Beyond the most direct security threats that were often different, all three cases presented big stakes to the leadership. The conflicts took on much greater importance in the shadow of the future and in front of domestic audiences. In the case of the Korean War, China was keenly aware of the possibility of engaging the US again in future conflicts and the likelihood of being taken lightly by the powerful opponent. It was only shortly before the outbreak of the Korean War when the leadership specified its wholesale alliance with the Soviet Union in the "leaning to one side" announcement. While China had not abandoned hopes to adopt a realist, working relationship with the west, it was certainly understood that China was joining the Soviet Union in an active standoff between the two camps. When the territorial dispute between China and India escalated in 1962, the context of a much weakened China due to the Great Leap Forward likely clouded the security calculations as well. The fear that a weaker China would be taken advantage of, much as it was during previous dynasties, made a decisive response and advantageous outcome all the more valuable to the leadership. Finally, in the deterrence

case against the Soviet Union, China already regarded the Soviets as a more serious threat to Chinese security than the US at that point, and the leadership expressed concerns that the powerful Soviet military with massive nuclear capabilities right on China's border could strike China much more easily and directly than enemies across the sea. In all of these cases a larger security concern was at play.

All three episodes also took place when the Mao-led Communist leadership had reason to worry about its survival, and over time Mao also became fixated on the survival of his legacy. By the time the Korean War broke out, less than a year after the official founding of the People's Republic, Chinese Communists largely had control over vast land masses but their rival, the KMT, had survived in Taiwan and remained the most viable threat to the regime. Battles over maritime control were still being fought, as were final campaigns to settle western territories. Without the benefit of hindsight, it was far from clear that the Communist takeover was final. Internally, few would doubt the supremacy of Mao's reign at this time, but the sheer challenges of governing over a vast population were likely perilous.

More than a decade later, when China had to decide what to do with India, the Chinese government had become much more institutionalized and experienced, but the regime was also badly tattered by its own doing. The Great Leap Forward, instead of propelling China into the league of great nations, had led to a large-scale famine and the

destruction of nascent industrial capabilities. While Mao had more than enough authority to purge the party of skeptics such as Peng Dehuai, he was forced to take a conciliatory position in 1962 when it became plainly obvious that the policy had failed and a loosening of his grip was necessary. Even though he enjoyed so much concentration of power that no legitimate challenge from within the party could exist, he was aware of the doubt that must have arisen as he single-handedly steered the country down the wrong path. At the same time, security challenges were also surfacing from the ousted KMT in Taiwan. Though no alternative existed, the legitimacy of Mao's rule was under threat. By this time the search for a successor was also well under way. Mao was concerned about safeguarding his own legacy as well as upholding the ideological stature of the party as he had defined it, and he had shown a distaste for moderates such as Wang Jiaxiang. While the fallout with Liu Shaoqi would not come until later, the suspicions that his colleagues have betrayed the revolution were always present.

The search for a successor was all the more urgent by the late 1960s with Mao well into his twilight years. His last cause, the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution, unleashed and harnessed tremendous violence and proved his effective grip on the party and society, but also ruined the functioning bureaucracy in all political structures. Mao's fear that a Chinese Khrushchev would emerge after his death never disappeared, and the political institutions, or what remained of them, were extremely radicalized. Although

Mao managed to restore a minimum level of efficacy by letting the military take over the political apparatus, normal political processes were still disrupted beyond recognition. Even though Mao likely had faith in the new world order that were to emerge from the ruins, his deep insecurity never died. With the competition for legacy and status in the international Communist movement reaching a feverish pitch, the need to prove himself was probably never greater.

How did China think that this case could affect its credibility?

While the three cases differed in their specific security contexts, they all prompted concerns by the leadership about the damage that submission would do to China's credibility. In all three cases, immediate security challenges became increasingly intertwined with future security challenges, and it became difficult to clearly define the boundaries of the damage. As the leadership became more convinced that giving ground now would lead to questions about China's credibility in the future, it also became increasingly interested in responding to challenges once and for all through a decisive military victory.

In the case of China's intervention following the Korean War, Mao quickly began to see parallels between the past and present and made projections from the present to the future. Mao, and other senior leaders, decided that just like past episodes when China's

security was encroached upon gradually as it fell into disarray in the late 1800s, the US and its allies were daring enough to threaten Chinese security at the moment for exactly the same reasons. The century of humiliation saw China forced to face up to foreign challenges repeatedly, only to demonstrate its weakness in the most humiliating way possible and give up fragments of sovereignty in an endless string of unequal treaties. These challenges finally culminated in an outright invasion of China by Japan, its much smaller but more powerful neighbor. As Mao often said that the Japanese invasion was the reason why the Chinese Communists could seize power from the inept and distracted Kuomintang, he was more apt than anyone else to connect security threats with demonstrated weakness. After repeated warnings failed to stop the advancing UN forces, the leadership came to the conclusion that the UN forces must be ignoring China's warnings because it was believed to be too weak. If China were to stand down, the perception would prove true and loom in all future conflicts. And by this time China was certain that the US would feature in future conflicts with China. By blocking the Taiwan Straits with its mighty aircraft carrier groups, the US has effectively denied China the chance to destroy its enemies, who would survive to challenge China in the foreseeable future.

Likewise, when China faced repeated challenges from India, the leadership largely reached for very similar explanations for these threats. For them the security

challenges from a traditionally friendly, or at least neutral, Nehru regime was puzzling. To be sure, by this time Sino-Indian relations had cooled considerably, as India's attitude toward the exiled Dalai Lama was considered an act of hostility, harboring grander territorial ambitions. And the party had convenient ideological labels for India to explain its divergent interests from those of China's. In the end, however, the leadership was hard pressed to understand why a mid-sized power, shortly after independence, would ignore the many warnings from China. The most obvious conclusion, again, was that India thought China was too weak and did not believe that China had the capability to withstand another military conflict. Given China's weakened state after the Great Leap Forward, it was perhaps not completely unfounded. But the weakness also heightened leadership fears. If a mid-sized power like India could advance into China-controlled territory and not heed Chinese warnings, all of a sudden the ranks of potential Chinese adversaries would swell. If China did not defend its credibility, the implications for other countries were clear, in the eyes of the leadership. Any country with unfriendly relations could have the nerve to challenge China in the future.

Almost a decade later, the threats from the Soviet Union were interpreted in much the same way, but with even deeper fears. First, China's troubled alliance history with the Soviet Union, formal and informal, dated to the genesis of the Communist party. Over close to half a century, China saw Soviet support wax and wane, often based on how

China fit into the larger security picture for the Soviets. When the KMT seemed on the verge of rooting out Communist forces, or when good relations with the US were considered more important, the Soviets were often seen as reevaluating their options and withholding support for the CCP. The long history of close interactions bred suspicion and resentment, and provided many reasons for observing that the alliance was constantly threatened by shifting self-interests. Second, Mao in particular believed that the Soviets were only able to flaunt their might because China was weak. China could not drive alliance dynamics and decisions because it did not produce fifty million tons of steel. If China did, no amount of Stalin's personality cult or Soviet ideological pedigree could stop China from assuming a bigger role in the alliance. As such China was particularly sensitive to the status of inferiority vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. Finally, by the time China's conflicts with the Soviet Union reached their peak, the two countries were openly confrontational and the Chinese leadership was completely convinced that the Soviets would remain China's adversary for the foreseeable future. Just like the US, the Soviet Union's superpower status would remain unchallenged for the time being, and its ability to completely destroy China was even more assured. Losing credibility in the eyes of such a menacing and certain opponent would almost become an open invite for aggression.

In all three cases, in other words, the conflict and the way it was evolving were

seen to affect not only Chinese security at the present, as demonstrated by answering the first question "what was at stake," but also China's credibility. The key was that China had warned against further challenges, often repeatedly, with very little effect. The immediate issue at question then took on additional risk angle: if China was already not taken seriously at the present, what would acquiescence do to China's security in the future? The concept of credibility acted as the link, contextualizing the immediate conflict in a larger arena, where conflicts will take place in the future. If China can demonstrate its credibility, the current, minor conflict would not necessarily translate into repeated aggressions or challenges by the same opponent, or others, in the future. If China cannot demonstrate its credibility, the ground China yields today will open the door to much graver, often unquantifiable damage in the future.

How did China maintain its credibility?

In all three cases China tried a variety of tools to communicate its threats and maintain its credibility, but in the end decided upon the only option so costly that its intention could not be mistaken – military conflict. As Allen Whiting points out in his seminal works, the Chinese way of communication during deterrence episodes tends to employ particular lingo and follow a familiar pace of communication. While the degree of duplication may have been more pronounced in the 1950s and early 1960s, before

effective bureaucracy broke down during the Cultural Revolution, the deliberate choice of words to convey varying levels of threat was likely a direct aftermath of learning through deterrence episodes. The biggest lesson learned from past episodes, however, is the utility of force and the need to defend one's credibility in order to prevent future conflicts.

In the case of the Korean War, China picked an array of press and informal diplomatic channels to warn the UN forces not to threaten Chinese interests, especially territorial interest. Public warnings first appeared in late August, in the form of a statement linking North Korea's interest to Chinese interest. Due to the dramatic reversal of fortunes between the North Korean military and UN forces, however, the window for China to make warnings was narrow. China issued increasingly alarmed threats to UN forces as the latter charged toward China's border with North Korea between 20 September and 10 October.

Moreover, the limited channels of communication made it difficult to discuss or negotiate directly with the stakeholders. China had to pass warnings through the Indian ambassador and wait to either hear back from him or to observe the events on the ground. When a government spokesperson delivered the clearest and most urgent warning on 10 October, China was seeing its security position become rapidly jeopardized. Thus China also made use of troop movements and public acknowledgements of military support to

the North Korean regime to demonstrate its huge stakes in the conflict. Compared with verbal threats, these were clearly more serious modes of communication, one that carried higher costs to China and implied greater risks to the challenger. However, the US-led UN forces decided that the risks were under control and discounted the possibility of a full-scale war with China. China had largely exhausted its conventional arsenal of threats.

While the sequence of warnings proved futile in warding off US challenges in the Korean War, China re-deployed them when tension was building with India on its western border. The much slower burn of this conflict, compared to a more favorable balance of power against the adversary, likely explained the multitude of warnings and more varied diplomatic efforts. The careful choice of words may be a result of either explicit or implicit learning from within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; China may have observed the impact these words have on the audience as well as expert commentators. Also, given the very tightly controlled diplomatic process and the politicized nature of discourse, the repertoire of sanctioned diplomatic phrases was probably very limited to begin with. When warnings failed to stop India from ordering troops to advance, China again moved troops openly, tapping another Korean War-era tactic. The case against India provides a marked contrast to the Korean War case in how much more room and time China had to maneuver, but China largely attempted to demonstrate its credibility in the same way as during the Korean War. Yet it failed again.

The final case against the Soviet Union was an even slower grind, featuring escalating tensions, heightened distrust and hostility broken by periods of attempted reconciliation. In the first years the two allies had more than adequate venues to communicate their grievances, such as private exchange, summit meetings and international conferences, but more channels did not make for a consensus. As interests began to diverge, China's government also began to lose effectiveness in the process of radicalization. In the months before the outbreak of conflict, private communication between the two parties had been all but shut down, leaving China to use the same public warning system it has used in previous conflicts. Only the previous pattern of warnings was used in a less precise and elaborate fashion in this episode. The frequent expression of vitriol against the Soviets by the early years of the Cultural Revolution, combined with a breakdown of diplomatic channels, likely made communication much less effective. Tactically, China might have also hoped that a more aggressive engagement principle for frontline border guards could signal an escalation of Chinese response. But again, it was lost in the noise of repeated clashes, and did not lead to a change in Soviet behavior.

When all else failed, China decided to demonstrate credibility through initiating a fight, the only way to put an end to the perception that it was bluffing. And in each case, the military response was not a token warning, a brief engagement followed by retreat, but a decisive, prepared blow with the intention to win the conflict at hand. In the Korean

War, the Chinese moved hundreds of thousands of troops and decimated thousands of the UN forces in the first battles. In the border war with India, China also committed large troops to meaningfully push back the Indian line of control. China's military response was more measured against the Soviets, likely a result of nuclear deterrence between the two, but still the border engagement was aimed at wiping out the Soviet border guards to send a message that could not be mistaken. When threats escalated in August 1969, and warnings of nuclear attack began to emerge from the Soviets, China combined nuclear tests with a big evacuation, sending the strongest signal short of an actual nuclear attack that China was prepared for one. In all cases, China finally decided on the most costly warning that could not be faked.

Defender's concern with credibility and deterrence theory

Deterrence theory, both in its classic version and later modifications, focuses more on the challenger than defendant. The challenger has the unique power of deciding whether a particular episode of deterrence ends in success or failure, simply by deciding to continue and step up the challenge or to step down. The defender plays an important role, no doubt, by trying to influence the decision-making process of the challenger. It usually chooses between a show of force to deter or diplomatic channels to reassure. In the case of extended deterrence, which is more difficult than homeland deterrence, the

defender can also employ a variety of tools to strengthen its commitment to the protégé in the eyes of the challenger. When all is said and done, however, it is the challenger that sits at the forefront of deterrence theory. If it is convinced of the defender's ability and resolve to counter a provocation, it may not proceed. If not, it will.

This deterrence study seeks to put the defender in the limelight, as it faces an uncertain challenge from an opponent. How may it determine the outcome of deterrence? Is it possible for a defender to preemptively strike out against an adversary, before its territory or other indisputably vital interests have been violated? In the case of China during Mao's rule, at least three conflicts saw China strike out before a material invasion by the opponent. Though it was on the receiving end of provocations, it decided to wage a decisive military attack on the challenger even before the latter had had the chance to carry out its ultimate objective. The defender, in other words, can determine the outcome of a deterrence episode simply by terminating the encroachments forcefully. The traditional arguments for deterrence underestimate the importance of the defender, by implicitly assuming that defending the status quo makes one risk-averse.

In the three cases in this study, China started with wanting to defend the status quo and avoid conflicts, much as classical theory implies. It tried to use diplomatic channels to communicate with the other side, though the channels were not always adequate and direct. Against bigger adversaries that did not have effective

communication with China, it also used verbal and tactical warnings such as troop maneuvering, painting a picture of dire consequences were challenges to continue.

Yet deterrence is by definition a series of provocations *until they stop*. Unless a warning is so intense or the challenger so weak that it retreats after just one warning, a deterrence episode is dotted with failures by the defender to convince the challenger to stop. As provocations continue, two consequences are likely: first, the status quo shifts in favor of the challenger; second, the defender becomes concerned about its credibility since the challenger has ignored one warning after another. Scholars have considered the shift in status quo that can happen during a deterrence episode: when the status quo is changed materially, the interaction becomes one of compellence rather than deterrence, as the defender tries to restore the status quo ante. However, even classic cases of deterrence, such as China's border war against India in 1962, followed a gradual moving forward of the actual control line in favor of Indian border patrol. From China's perspective, the status quo was certainly being eroded and transformed. As we indicated before, the line between compellence and deterrence can be rather blurred. As the status quo changes in the favor of the challenger, the defender will both feel more threatened and find it more difficult to convince the challenger to give up its gains.

The second consequence, defender's concern about its credibility, is the focus of this study. In search for why its warnings are unheeded, defenders may identify reasons

such as an unfavorable balance of power or miscommunication, as many have argued. These are all valid reasons, but the defender may also arrive at another lesson: that the challenger does not retreat simply because it does not believe the defender. No amount of communication or size of arsenal can convince the other side if one is not considered credible.

The stakes are particularly high if the defender finds itself in an entrenched strategic position and cannot easily change the adversarial relationship with the opponent. Conflicts are bound to happen among neighbors who disagree and enemies who will remain enemies in the foreseeable future. Challenges in such a context take on an understandable significance: they are feared to be the opening salvo to a long war, with uncertain end goals. Does the enemy want total annihilation of the Chinese territory? Unlikely. But does the enemy want to weaken Chinese defense by reducing China's strategic buffer or the reach of Chinese military on porous borders? Possibly. When it is not clear what the enemy wants in the end, strategic and tactical calculations become trickier. How many resources should be expended on the current conflict, when one compromise may invite future conflicts where stakes are higher? Credibility concerns are therefore more pronounced if the defender has reasons to believe that it may find itself fighting the same conflict in the future.

The three case studies find that China decided to use decisive force to end the

provocations once and for all. Reasoning among the leadership suggests that while strategic interests were at stake and needed to be redressed, the need to establish credibility in the most unequivocal fashion was also a contributing factor. Deterrence ended because the defender wanted it to end, so that it could both remedy the grievances at hand and prevent future challenges. Certainly, concerns about credibility would not have existed if strategic interests were not at stake, but this does not diminish the importance of the concern. It was the logic that was needed to justify the commitment of force and the ensuing reputational risk.

The fact that China responded with decisive force in all three cases despite varied strategic interests and relative balance of power suggests that the concern with credibility is difficult to address. Although in each case significant strategic interests were under threat, they were not always the same and did not threaten China to the same extent. The threat posed by the US-led UN forces was certainly ominous, but unlikely to result in a compromise of Chinese territory. Indian troops advanced into Chinese-controlled land, but India was a much less of an adversary than either the US or Soviet Union. Lastly, the Soviet Union at its peak was perhaps the most thoroughly threatening, but China's nuclear deterrence capabilities should have provided some security. Yet in all cases China expressed concerns about credibility: it was concerned that adversaries big and small could take its might and willpower for granted; it was concerned about real and potential

threats to its territory and buffer states. The presence of this concern in different cases suggests that a drawn-out deterrence process, where the defender has the time to make repeated warnings or reassurances only to be ignored multiple times, could exacerbate the concern about resolve.

The concern about credibility plays a unique role in deterrence calculations. Whereas in classic international relations theories, balance of power is considered an international-level game and separate from domestic-level games such as bureaucratic politics, the concern about credibility reflects complex reasoning that ties in concerns based on both levels. Insecurity, whether stemming from a relatively weak economy and military, or from worries about domestic strife and succession uncertainty, fed the concern about credibility. In the mind of the defender, the adversary does not believe we could fight back because it thinks we are too weak to fight; or the adversary does not believe we could fight back because it thinks we are too divided to fight. Either way, once this concern is present and encouraged by deterrence challenges, the insecurities that lie behind the cause can easily reinforce each other.

This study suggests that given the impact of deterrence interactions on the concern about credibility, the longer the interaction period, the more likely the defender would be concerned about credibility. Once the pattern of being thwarted or ignored is established, the defender is likely to look for reasons for its concern, and would find it

either in international weakness or domestic weakness. Both of these insecurities are difficult to remedy in a short order: the relative balance of power is usually fixed for a considerable period of time, and domestic rivals will likely remain a concern for some time as well. In the absence of a sure way to redress the underlying weaknesses, the defender could consider the use of force to settle the dispute at hand.

The concern about credibility and China's security policy

This dissertation also addresses themes from another area of international relations, that of Chinese security policy. The choice of the three case studies is deliberate: by focusing on China's deterrence episodes, this dissertation hopes to add to the discussion on Chinese foreign policy in addition to that on deterrence theory. The findings can also enrich the understanding about how and why China uses force.

As Alastair Iain Johnston argues, China has been involved in frequent militarized conflicts since ancient times. This turbulent history may reflect an often adverse strategic environment, as past regimes could not always defend its vast and unstable periphery. But it may also show a long history of learning and socializing violent lessons from foreign policy, as Johnston argues. The central role played by the military in political thinking, as well as a realist, amoral approach to victory and defeat, may have led China to believe in resolving conflicts violently.

The fact is that most deterrence cases China faced occurred during Mao Zedong's rule, in the first thirty years of the new republic, were understandable from a purely realist perspective. The new regime came to rule China after a drawn-out, brutal civil war, following a harrowing and divisive war against Japanese invasion. Such upheavals would take time to settle, especially since the rival KMT regime managed to survive just a hundred miles off the mainland coast and enjoyed US protection. Not only that, but the Mao regime was also established under the context of the burgeoning Cold War, siding with the Soviet Union against the western bloc as the two sides were actively vying for greater control and pushing the boundaries of each other's policies. As a new revolutionary power that refused to acknowledge old treaties, China naturally had to reconfigure its ties with neighbors, redefine friends and foes and learn the rules of engagement. In other words, it is reasonable to project that the early history of a revolutionary power would be similarly turbulent. As countries came to accept the new strategic setup and the Cold War also transitioned from active confrontation to management of co-existence, violence would logically give way to more predictable policymaking.

On the other hand, the field of Chinese foreign and military policy has often found this broad analysis unsatisfactory and pointed out that the strategic environment did not necessarily predetermine China's foreign policy. China had a violent first thirty

years because China, or its paramount leader, sought conflicts. It may have sought conflicts to secure Mao's rule; to propagate a violent and revolutionary ideology or culture; or to sell grand strategies to the Chinese population that was reluctant for war. Whatever the cause, China and Mao wanted conflicts to serve a bureaucratic or personal purpose, and its broadly hostile relations with the outside world simply provided a stage for such conflicts.

The divide between the two schools has become increasingly smaller, thanks to a rich body of new archival evidence and scholarly research. A more nuanced understanding of Cold War history and Chinese politics points to a middle ground, that China's complex bureaucratic politics and Mao's personality provided the spontaneity within the confines of international politics. The number of policy choices for any given leader is not fixed, but depends on the forgiveness of the international environment and the room for maneuver offered by domestic politics. Leaders could miscalculate and overshoot, just like politicians in hope for electoral victory. Like politicians, they also enjoy some freedom of choice until grave mistakes are punished, in the case of state leaders, by threats to regime survival.

China's deterrence cases demonstrate that domestic political concerns filter into security policymaking during crises via the concern about credibility. When leaders are less secure domestically, they are more likely to be concerned about credibility, as the

need to demonstrate resolve is meaningful as a deterrent toward enemies both foreign and domestic. They are also worried that foes would read into domestic weakness and conclude that leaders would not risk a war when its power was contested. This variable, the concern about credibility, was the way in which insecurities were expressed, and the source of insecurity could lie in both the international and domestic level.

In all three episodes Mao experienced serious political crises even prior to the outbreak of the conflicts. In the case of Korea, Mao was pressed for time to pacify the remainder of KMT forces as well as settle the restless western borders. When the border war with India broke out, China's territory was more secure, but Mao had to re-establish his tarnished reputation in the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward disaster and rebuild China's industry and economy. Seven years later, when China chose to face off the Soviet Union, Mao's last and boldest social experiment, the Cultural Revolution, had all but annihilated the existing political landscape and left Mao with great uncertainty as his health declined rapidly. While it would be overly simplistic to equate Mao's personal struggles with the extent of Chinese domestic politics, they were often the most important element given his status as the indisputable leader who concentrated power in his own hands and failed to establish a credible alternative or succession mechanism.

China also learned to value credibility through its conflict-prone history, and especially during Mao's rule. Mao was keenly aware of the likelihood of repeated wars

with China's enemies. In spite of a considerable amount of grandstanding, Mao was likely sincere in his conviction that international politics, just like domestic politics, would feature an unending string of struggles. He constantly prepared for war, no doubt the side effect of fighting almost constantly for thirty years before coming to power. While Mao and his cohorts were also capable statesmen who sought to strengthen their hold on power through diplomatic means, they had traced all the major achievements in nation-building to hard-won military victories. Without scoring decisive, indisputable and total victories, the CCP regime may have had to settle at best for a divided rule. The Soviet Union would have also wanted China to remain divided, Mao believed, and it was only when the CCP leadership demonstrated its power that the Soviets reaffirmed their support. The quintessential Maoist expression, that power comes from the barrel of the gun, sums up Mao's belief about politics and violence.

Chinese leaders both learned from each deterrence case and institutionalized the lessons through repetition, indoctrination and scholarly affirmation. One of the most explicit lessons learned from deterrence interactions is that credibility is established through a decisive military engagement. The Korean War was touted as an example of employing carefully prepared forces in substantial numbers to overpower the better-equipped UN forces. Though China eventually had to settle for a divided peninsula, the fact that the UN Command was rolled back and the status quo ante restored and

maintained over three years of on-and-off combat established China as a force to be reckoned with. Even strong powers such as the US dared not mess with China following this victory, the lesson goes.

The second lesson was that military preparation and diplomatic efforts should be concurrent. While scholars have often regarded the advance preparation for war as evidence that China had wanted to fight from the start of the conflict, it was regarded only as prudent policymaking for the Chinese generals-cum-leaders. War efforts cannot be rushed, especially when the aim is to overwhelm enemy forces in a final blow if diplomacy fails. Diplomacy and war are not mutually exclusive. These lessons are written into official military accounts and political chronology; dozens of books by orthodox authors tout the importance of a decisive military victory and that of credibility in avoiding future conflicts. In the case of successful deterrence, such as China's deterrence against the US during the Vietnam War, the lesson is seen as proved from the other side: because China has established its credibility in the eyes of the US through the Korean War and used many of the same communication tools, it avoided a second conflict with the superpower. The penchant for meeting challenges with force, at least once, is confirmed and reinforced by each incident.

The concern with credibility and modern foreign policy

These findings reveal the difficulty of achieving successful deterrence. With the challenger bent on testing the tolerance of the defender through a series of probes, it is almost inevitable that the defender would begin to question its own credibility in the eyes of the challenger. Once these doubts are established, the defender is more likely to consider the use of the force not only to reset its security environment but also to affirm its reputation for resolve. The two become mutually reinforcing, especially if the deterrence process is drawn out and the defender has multiple occasions to be rebuffed. Deterrence therefore could more easily fail, both because the challenger may feel that the relative balance of power has tilted more to its favor, and because the defender may feel the need to put an end to the challenges once and for all. Deterrence success in this instance becomes very difficult.

The concern about credibility is also exceedingly difficult to assuage. These worries surfaced in all three cases, despite differences in the degrees of threat to Chinese security and the variation in relative strength. When challenged, countries are apt to fear that credibility was not strong enough (or otherwise there would not have been challenges), setting itself up for a tautology. China did not take its credibility for granted after a successful campaign in Korea, the next time it faced threats from India; in fact, being confronted by a more equal adversary probably confounded Chinese leaders and led to an even stronger desire to establish credibility.

In the case of Chinese security policy, China's better security environment, as a result of its abandonment of revolutionary ideology and the end of the Cold War, has reduced the threat level to China, which is the premise of deterrence. Yet another source of insecurity that used to translate into a heightened concern about credibility, that of political vulnerability, has also been reduced through the gradual establishment of certain rules about succession and collective leadership. Political leaders do not enjoy concentrated power to the extent Mao did during his reign, but likewise also do not face the worst-case scenario of total anarchy and unpredictability in the case of death of the supreme leader. In the post-Mao era, the greatest source of domestic insecurity would likely stem from popular unrest and economic troubles, rather than over-concentrated power. As long as the leadership finds its hold on the population more or less secure, it is unlikely to experience severe insecurity that convinces them to opt for a forceful response to external challenges.

Yet the historical precedents still have value in post-Mao Chinese foreign policy. The challenges China faces today, or conceives of, stem from unresolved disputes that have been revived. As recently as 2008, the possibility that Taiwan could elect a pro-independence president was considered threatening enough to warrant a stern military warning, or even an attack. Territorial disputes with Japan over the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands flared up into angry protests and military maneuvering as recently as 2012 and

2013. And frequent skirmishes with Southeast Asian neighbors over the Spratly Islands, especially Vietnam and the Philippines, often threatened to escalate into controlled conflicts. As China's land borders became more settled, helped by the normalization of Chinese foreign policy and the precedent of fighting decisive wars, the remaining disputes are overwhelmingly naval. Despite several naval engagements with Vietnam in the 1970s and 1980s and skirmishes in the 2000s between China and the Philippines, no significant, premeditated conflicts have been fought. There are fewer precedents on the handling of naval deterrence, especially since China has more catching up to do in its naval forces. In the case of Taiwan, the explicit warning from the East China Sea military exercises of 1995-96 demonstrated China's resolve but left ambiguities. Unilateral military exercises, after all, are vastly different from direct military conflicts, and China could not firmly establish its credibility in the absence of an engagement, something that is difficult to envision given US involvement in cross-Strait affairs.

The unresolved conflicts therefore could still create the premise of proper deterrence episodes, in which case China's concern with its own credibility would be an important factor to watch. Though balance of power is decidedly in China's favor now, the new battleground on the sea means that Chinese prowess is not as tested, leaving room for probing and insecurity. The regime's use of diplomatic disputes to fan up popular support could also backfire and create pressure to respond forcefully. In such

deterrence cases, the government's public statements that emphasize the importance of credibility must be closely watched, a sign that preemptive engagement is more likely.

The defender's concern about credibility, a factor overlooked by classic deterrence theory, plays an important role in the decision of the defender to initiate conflicts. This dissertation examines the role of credibility in three cases of deterrence failures in recent Chinese history and concludes that it contributed to the decision for China to go to war. While some of the causes for China's heightened concern have eased in the post-Mao era, this factor remains alive and important in potential challenges in the future in unresolved disputes. These findings aim to make both a theoretical and practical contribution to the body of literature on security policies.

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