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DETERRENCE AND CLARITY:

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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCP</td>
<td>Chinese Communist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency (U.S.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CINC</td>
<td>Commander in Chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CINCFE</td>
<td>Commander in Chief, Far East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CINCPAC</td>
<td>Commander in Chief, Pacific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CINCUN</td>
<td>Commander in Chief, United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CJCS</td>
<td>Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNO</td>
<td>Chief of Naval Operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COS</td>
<td>Chief of Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPV</td>
<td>Chinese People’s Volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOD</td>
<td>Department of Defense (U.S.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOS</td>
<td>Department of State (U.S.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPRK</td>
<td>Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRV</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSB</td>
<td>Department of State Bulletin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEC</td>
<td>Far East Command</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRUS</td>
<td>Foreign Relations of the United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>JCS</td>
<td>Joint Chiefs of Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>JUSMAG</td>
<td>Joint U.S. Military Assistance Groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>KMT</td>
<td>Kuomintang</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAAG</td>
<td>Military Assistance Advisory Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDA</td>
<td>Mutual Defense Assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDAP</td>
<td>Mutual Defense Assistance Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSA</td>
<td>Mutual Security Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSC</td>
<td>National Security Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OIC</td>
<td>Officer in Charge</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLA</td>
<td>People’s Liberation Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLAAF</td>
<td>People’s Liberation Army Air Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRC</td>
<td>People’s Republic of China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROC</td>
<td>Republic of China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROK</td>
<td>Republic of Korea (South Korea)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SACEUR</td>
<td>Supreme Allied Commander, Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECDEF</td>
<td>Secretary of Defense</td>
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<tr>
<td>SECSTATE</td>
<td>Secretary of State</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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ABSTRACT

I argue that most previous work in the field of rational deterrence ignores or understates the importance of declaratory policy. In keeping with the traditional literature, I hold that the success of deterrence is a function of the credibility of the deterrent threat; however, I advance a somewhat different formulation of credibility by explaining it as a combination of the balance of capabilities and interests between the challenger and defender, conditioned by contextual risk propensity. I assert that risk propensity is most important when information on the balance of capabilities and interests is either unavailable or reveals relative equality between challenger and defender. In either of these cases, uncertainty is increased. By looking to the declaratory policy of a defender, uncertainty can be reduced. By including rather than ignoring the impact of declaratory policy, I provide what I argue is a more accurate understanding of deterrence that has important prescriptive implications for policy-makers. After explaining the theory in some detail, I provide a summary of how I seek to measure risk propensity by using a psychologically based approach rather than the expected utility approach more common to political science models. Based on the motivated and unmotivated biases identified by Jervis (1976) and on prospect theory as developed by Kahneman and Tversky (1979; 1982; 1984; 1992) and applied by McDermott (1998), I employ a contextual, individually based determination of risk propensity.

I test this theory against a series of crises in the Asian Pacific from 1950 through 1970 in which the United States attempted to deter behavior by different autocratic states. Each crisis is discussed in depth with assessments provided of the significant factors suggested by the theory. The final chapter analyzes these assessments to determine whether there is empirical support for the theory presented.
Deterrence refers to an attempt to prevent undesirable action by another actor. It is distinguishable from an attempt to force another actor into taking some desired positive action—an idea represented by the term compellence. This distinction is necessary given the greater difficulty of initiating movement as compared to maintaining the status quo. Within the category of deterrence, there are numerous variants based on the target of the deterrence, the method used to deter, the interest being defended, the timing of the attempt to deter, and the geographic location of the interest at stake. Table 1.1 provides a summary of these variations. While I assert that the theory advanced in this study should be applicable to all types of deterrence, I am unable to empirically test this assertion. Simply put, we cannot know when general deterrence has been successful. Was there no attack due to the successful design of the deterrence strategy, or was there no attack due to some other reason exogenous to the attempted deterrence? For example, did the Soviets refrain from attacking the United States during the Cold War due to U.S. efforts at deterrence, did the Soviets determine that they lacked the capabilities to successfully engage in such an operation regardless of threatened U.S. retaliation, or did the Soviets never intend to attack the United States absent the perception of an immediate military

---

1 Robert Powell rejects this distinction for his theory of nuclear deterrence. This rejection is emblematic of the major criticism I offer of much of the existing work on deterrence in its explicit rejection of the psychological difference between prevention and compulsion. Recognition of this difference is a fundamental component of prospect theory - a tool I use herein to help develop a contextually based theory of deterrence. See Robert Powell, Nuclear Deterrence Theory: The Search for Credibility (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
threat therefrom? Because of this difficulty in identifying cases of successful general deterrence, the subject of this study is limited to cases of immediate deterrence.

Table 1-1: Types of Deterrence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Interest</th>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td>Retaliatory</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>Type I / Homeland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Deterring attacks by any and all states against a particular interest</td>
<td>Deterrence that is continuous and ongoing; proactive rather than reactive</td>
<td>Deterring attacks on the homeland of the deterring state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific</td>
<td>Defensive</td>
<td>Specific</td>
<td>Immediate (Crisis)</td>
<td>Type II / Extended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Deterring attacks by a specific state against a particular interest</td>
<td>Deterrence employed in response to a specific current threat</td>
<td>Deterring attacks on the territory of friends or allies of the deterring state</td>
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The fundamental research question motivating this study is as follows: Does clarity in a state’s declaratory deterrent policy affect the success of deterrence? Before turning to the impact of clarity, it is necessary to explain how I expect deterrence to work. In contrast to the academic

1 The Type I / Type II distinction was introduced by Herman Kahn, On Thermonuclear War, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 126-43.
paradigm of rational deterrence theory (RDT), I offer a variation of deterrence that self-consciously rejects the rationality assumption. The theory offered takes into account both the contextual dynamics and psychological variables that cause deviations from rationality. By so doing, I construct a theory that encompasses factors at the individual, domestic, and systemic levels of analysis. While I argue that this theory presents a more accurate explanation of deterrence, I expressly concede that such is purchased at the price of operational, although not theoretical, parsimony.

I argue that rational choice is not so much wrong as it is irrelevant. That is, most decision-makers would likely abide by the logical pattern outlined in the rational choice model only they lack the information necessary to follow the formal rational decision-making procedures. Secondly, RDT places decision-makers in a contextual vacuum. Each decision is evaluated independently with all the alternatives weighed fairly. Biases and predispositions are eliminated, personal experiences are ignored, and willful blindness is left unconsidered. These human and historical factors that color decision-making are simply unaccounted for. Thus, although framed as a description of decision-making, it may be that rational choice is more of an ideal than an accurate description.

RDT is a specific application of the rational choice school of thought. Rational choice is founded on the assumptions that decision-makers either establish, or act as if they establish, a prioritized list of goals, evaluate a comprehensive set of alternative policy choices in terms of meeting these goals, and then choose a policy best able to meet the prioritized goals. In its simplest mathematical form, RDT assumes the assignation of a value to potential gains and a value to potential losses for each policy choice along with probabilities of each occurrence, resulting in a statement such as the following:

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2 Because I implicitly adopt the unitary actor assumption, using explanatory variables from different levels of analysis should not present aggregation problems. See e.g. Levy noting that combining variables from different levels is only a problem “if the levels of analysis are conceptualized in terms of the dependent variable.” Jack Levy, “The Causes of War and the Conditions of Peace,” Annual Review of Political Science 1 (1998): 144.

In an attempt to include subjective valuation in this mechanical process, the concept of utility as distinct from value is introduced. Utility is defined as an individual decision-maker’s “intensity of preferences.” Thus, a decision-maker may have a different utility for different sections of the range of values. In other words, we might represent value as a simple linear function unaffected by whether the value is high or low, positive or negative. In contrast, utility could be a non-linear function such that it varies dependent on whether the absolute value is either high or low. Unfortunately, the theory provides no guidance as to assessing when utility differs from value. Preference identification, ordering, and intensity (utility) all must be provided from exogenous data sources and fed into the model. Thus, in essence if we tell the model what goals are preferred, in what order, and whether and how much a particular goal is valued relative to other goals, the model will tell us what policy choice will be made. I argue that this is an unremarkable feat.

In practice, RDT models often fail to distinguish between utility and value in that utilities are identical across actors and constant across contexts. Moreover, value is routinely measured and prioritized by western standards. For example, a prioritized list of goals typically looks as follows: victory > status quo > loss. This reflects the consensus western ideal that regime survival is considered the first and foremost goal of a regime. Yet in some cases, it may be that the cultural values of the regime actually dictate a preference ordering of victory > loss > status quo. Imagine a conservative fundamentalist theocracy facing the prospect of its younger generations becoming increasingly westernized, turning away from cherished religious

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4 Ibid., 630.

traditions. In such a case, inaction would lead to such a perceived shameful result that complete destruction might be preferred to doing nothing to try to reverse the westernization. Thus, an entirely rational prioritization based on subjective utility can be left unconsidered.

A second problem lies in the fact that irrational action can be seen as a desirable behavior if a decision-maker believes the other side wishes to avoid war. By proceeding despite inferior capabilities and a questionable balance of interests, a leader may hope to establish a reputation for resolve that will permit him to undertake future actions without challenge. Herman Kahn describes this as the strategy of tossing the steering wheel out of the window while playing “chicken.” By its failure to account for contextual differences, RDT forces the value associated with irrationality into the exogenously derived expected utility of the actor.

My theory attempts to provide some mechanism for determining the goals, priorities, and utilities of actors that can account for change across both individuals and time and that does not promote the common default to western formulations of expected value as a fall-back. In the search for grand theory, some deterrence theorists have sought a single all-encompassing deterrent that should work in all crises across all times. I argue that such a deterrent does not and cannot exist. Unlike RDT which provides little with respect to acknowledging context, my theory specifically includes context as a major explanatory factor.

I argue that successful deterrence depends partly on credibility, which is a function of the balance of capabilities, the balance of interests and the risk propensity of the defender. In addition, the success of deterrence depends on the risk propensity of the challenger; however,

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7 See e.g. Robert Powell criticizing existing deterrence theory as weak because of the different policies and strategies that have occurred across time. Powell, 14. This reflects an inability to accept that deterrence must be matched to the context.

8 Few seem to reject the idea that context matters (see e.g. Huth and Russett, “What Makes Deterrence Work,” 498, noting that compellence “is more demanding than deterrence”), yet RDT generally fails to account for many contextual factors. Indeed, by the logic of rational choice, there is no reason to distinguish compellence and deterrence as there is no theoretical acknowledgment of the status quo bias encountered in the real world.
this is an exogenous characteristic rather than a constituent element of credibility. Essentially, I assert that we must look at the relative balance between the deterring state (the defender) and the would-be attacker (the challenger) in both capabilities and interests as well as the individual risk propensities of both actors.

The balance of capabilities can be measured fairly easily through an objective accounting of military and economic assets. Where a defender holds a decisive advantage in capabilities, the credibility of the deterrent is enhanced. Conversely, where the challenger holds a decisive advantage in capabilities, the credibility of the deterrent is lessened. However, the balance of capabilities is not the sole determinant of credibility. Using capabilities accrues costs. Thus, to bear these costs, states must determine the importance of the interest at stake and how willing they are to act in pursuit of that interest.

The balance of interests is less easily measured. Some interests remain constant across time and space (e.g. ability to control and defend territory), while others remain constant over time for particular places (e.g. British or Japanese interest in secure sea lines of communication; Russian interest in defending the southern frontier; U.S. interest in ensuring security in the Gulf of Mexico). However, given regimes may place unequal weights on other interests. For example, the current U.S. government may place great value on advocating democratic government and market based economic principles. The current Saudi Arabian government may place greater value on adhering to its interpretation of Islamic governance than on applying a particular economic system. The current Philippine government may place great value on economic development, regardless of political system. The values assigned to these interests may change within states as different regimes come to power. Where a defender’s vital interests are at stake or where the defender’s interest is greater than that of the challenger, the credibility of the deterrent is enhanced. Where a challenger places greater value on an interest at issue than does the defender, the deterrent is lessened. If the interests are equal, but less than vital, the deterrent is uncertain.

The final element of deterrence credibility is an assessment of the risk propensity of the defender. Risk propensity refers to the willingness of a state to act under uncertainty. Where objectively clear vital interests are at stake, a greater willingness to act can be inferred.
Likewise, where it is objectively clear that only minimal interests are at stake, reluctance to act can be inferred.\(^9\) Where the value of interests at stake is unclear, willingness to act will likely be unclear as well. In addition, where both the level of capabilities and the level of interest are relatively equal, willingness to act may be unclear. From these assessments, the credibility of the deterrent is ascertained; however, the success or failure of the deterrence is also conditioned by the risk propensity of the challenger. That is, even where a credible deterrent is in place, a highly risk acceptant actor might still pursue action.

Generally, an overwhelming imbalance of capabilities should prevent a challenge/defense from materializing, unless the balance of interests is highly uneven in the reverse direction. Where the balances are relatively equal, we find the greatest uncertainty. By “uncertainty,” I mean simply an inability to determine with any degree of confidence what another actor will do. Uncertainty can be created in two different ways. First, there may be incomplete information as to the balances of capabilities and interests. Decision-makers may lack knowledge as to the military capabilities their putative opponents could deploy in the relevant theater. For example, Mao may have underestimated or misunderstood the power of nuclear weaponry. More likely, however, is a lack of information as to the level of interests. The subjective nature of certain interests makes it more difficult to ascertain accurate assessments. An example of this would be the questions surrounding the U.S. will to defend South Korea prior to June 1950. Where information is incomplete, it is impossible to generate probabilities of action with the precision necessary for confident predictions. An estimate may be limited to identifying a wide range of probabilities; for example, incomplete information may result in an estimate identifying a forty to sixty percent chance of action. Such an estimate is clearly of limited value. Second, there may be relatively complete information as to the balances of capabilities and interests, yet, in probabilistic terms, that information may produce a fully-informed and precise estimate that there is an equal chance of action as well as inaction. Indicators may be present, but they do not permit a confident estimate of much use. Uncertainty, by the definition put forth, permits risk

\(^9\) For deterrence to even be attempted, we can assume that there is some interest at stake. Accordingly, we can consider some unspecified minimum level of interest a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for successful deterrence.
acceptant states their greatest opportunity to act. Therefore, it is in this realm of uncertainty that we are likely to find the greatest number of failed attempts at deterrence.

I argue that clear declaratory policy can help eliminate some of this uncertainty. By having and abiding by a clear declaratory policy, a defender can signal challengers as to the defender’s willingness to act. Establishing a declaratory policy that includes definitive statements regarding all objectively clear vital interests automatically establishes a foundation of credibility. By including in this declaratory policy those vital interests that are not objectively clear, a defender provides information as to how it values the interests at stake in these otherwise unclear issues. Of course, this also demands that the defender follow through with declared intentions in order to establish a reputation for credibility. Providing this information should reduce uncertainty and thus minimize the impact of risk propensity.

If this theory is correct, it has important implications not simply for the academic study of deterrence, but for policy-making as well. Expected utility models of deterrence have been found lacking, particularly with respect to descriptive attributes of how decisions are actually made. Some have found the challenge to empirical testing of deterrence to be a downfall.

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sufficient to question whether rational deterrence theory is a worthwhile research program. In one of the more provocative challenges to rational deterrence theory, Jonathan Mercer argues that most deterrence situations are characterized by a situational assessment rather than by dispositional attribution. Most states evidence an egocentric bias that attributes undesired behavior by another to the character (disposition) of the other, while attributing desired behavior to be a reaction to one’s own policies (situational). Moreover, predisposition to confirmatory attribution - seeing what we expect to see - makes it unlikely that states will change their assessments of other states as information contrary to expectations is summarily disregarded. Mercer claims that reputation for resolve is thus largely irrelevant as crises are usually viewed independently of past actions by decision-makers. In other words, if an adversary back down in a crisis, it is not because he lacks resolve; rather, it is because the situation left him with no alternative. Accordingly, what matters is the concentration of capabilities and the strength of interest that can be demonstrated to the challenger.


11 See e.g. Lebow, “Conclusions,” 203, noting “There is a consensus among the authors [of this volume] that deterrence is inadequate as an explanatory theory of international relations. . . .”; Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, “Rational Deterrence Theory: I Think Therefore I Deter,” World Politics 41, no. 2 (January 1989): 208, “To develop theories with predictive capability and policy relevance, scholars must go beyond deterrence and rational choice to other theories of international behavior;” and, generally, Keith B. Payne, The Fallacies of Cold War Deterrence and a New Direction (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2001).


13 Ibid., 62-63; See also Ken Booth, Strategy and Ethnocentrism (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 34-35.

14 Mercer, 56-57; Booth, 25.

15 Mercer, 57.
In contrast to Mercer, the theory of deterrence presented here argues that dispositional characteristics must still be analyzed to determine the categorization of friends and adversaries. Moreover, I argue that this categorization can change more easily than Mercer’s explanation seems to allow, precisely because of the importance of context. In addition, I discount Mercer’s rejection of the importance of reputation, as even with a situational explanation of prior crises, establishing a reputation for following through with declarations can help prevent new crisis situations from arising. However, Mercer’s emphasis on situational factors (context) is echoed herein. Indeed, in focusing on clarity and the need to minimize uncertainty, I emphasize the same capabilities and interests as Mercer.

In addition to scholarly questions regarding the usefulness of RDT, the end of the Cold War and the reduction in the threat of strategic nuclear exchange with the Soviet Union have caused interest in deterrence as a whole to recede. However, rather than marking the end of deterrence, the end of the bipolar era and the opening of a new era of proliferation of weapons with tremendous destructive potential has made deterrence as important as ever. While the test I propose of the theory described herein is limited in scope, the theoretical implications are far less restricted. Although my empirical tests focus on immediate deterrence due to the difficulty in identifying cases of successful general deterrence, the theory presented should be applicable to both immediate and general deterrence.

**Dissertation Overview**

Chapter Two explains in detail my theory of how a clear declaratory policy affects deterrence. I outline how I perceive deterrence operates, explaining how capabilities, interests, and risk propensity combine to establish the credibility of the deterrent threat. I also put forth my argument as to the significance of risk propensity in determining the likelihood of successful deterrence in a given context. While laying out my theory, I contrast it with the basic rational deterrence theory premises that serve as the existing deterrence paradigm in the academic literature.

Chapter Three provides a comprehensive explanation of the research design I use to test this theory of deterrence. First, I discuss the ideal qualities for a set of cases to test this theory;
then I clarify why the nine cases selected offer a useful test. I then detail how the dependent and independent variable are measured, providing a tabular summary at the chapter’s end.

Chapter Four offers a risk propensity assessment for the leaders of the challenging states, utilizing the combination of psychological factors and contextual factors per my argument. I look at both unmotivated and motivated biases by examining individual backgrounds to see what predispositions figures such as Mao, Stalin, Ho Chi Minh and Khrushchev might have had that colored their perceptions. However the chapter is structured in terms of crises rather than leaders in order to properly take into account the context of the immediate crisis. Thus, the first time a leader is discussed, a more detailed individual analysis is presented than in subsequent crises involving the same leader. To account for context, I make use of prospect theory’s ideas of domain perception and framing, with the psychological factors helping to provide a foundation for establishing the relevant baselines.

Chapter Five provides an analysis of the salient elements of each crisis, including goals, capabilities, interests, defender’s risk propensity and declaratory policy. Each crisis is developed in depth, with historical evidence presented to support the assessments offered of the relevant factors.

Chapter Six analyzes these assessments to determine whether empirical evidence supports the theory presented. Concluding observations are drawn from these analyses and areas of future exploration are suggested.
Deterrence depends on credibility: it is only successful if the deterring entity - the defender - is able to convince the intended audience of resolve to act in a particular fashion. Absent credibility, attempts at deterrence constitute nothing more than empty bluffs.  

Credibility results from three basic factors: capability, interest, and risk propensity. Capability is essentially an objective measure of the physical force an actor is able to bring to bear on a particular challenger. Interest refers to the level of importance an actor assigns to particular issues. Because some interests remain relatively constant for actors occupying specific territory (i.e. geopolitical determinants) while other interests change with regimes, interest can be seen as lying in the middle range of the objective-subjective spectrum. Risk propensity is defined in this study as willingness to act under uncertainty. The level of objectivity is significant in that states can more accurately measure objective characteristics of their adversaries. Thus, a potential challenger should be relatively certain of the balance of capabilities between it and a potential defender, less certain as to understanding what interests are considered most important to the potential defender, and less certain still as to assessing the potential defender’s risk propensity.

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1 Lebow, “Conclusions,” 209, argues that because credibility must be judged through the eyes of the challenger, it is too difficult to objectively assess it and thus, “credibility cannot be used as a means of either proving or disproving the efficacy of deterrence.” While in full agreement with the idea that things must be viewed from the challenger’s viewpoint and value system, I reject the idea that assessment is impossible, instead offering a method of dealing with this assessment problem.

2 A fuller explanation and justification of this definition can be found infra beginning at p. 21.
I argue that many previous studies of deterrence have failed to adequately consider risk propensity because of its subjective quality. Empirical tests of deterrence have generally attempted to capture the concept of willingness to act by searching for possible objective indicators. This has usually resulted in looking to past behavior of the state, either with respect to how it responded in a recent crisis or how it responded in a prior crisis with the same actor.\(^3\)

The limitations of this type of measure are readily apparent. Changes in domestic political leadership may dramatically alter state behavior on a given issue over a very short time, learning may occur from one crisis to the next, relative power positions may change due to economic development, alliances may be formed or abandoned, states may become involved in other conflicts that deplete the resources necessary to engage in war or, quite likely, there may be qualitative differences in issues.\(^4\) In short, prior behavior may offer some clues to risk propensity, but prior behavior alone is an inadequate indicator of current willingness to act.

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\(^3\) Huth and Russett, “What Makes Deterrence Work,”; Huth, Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War; and Huth, Gelpi and Bennett, “The Escalation of Great Power Militarized Disputes.”

\(^4\) To properly address context, accounting for individual leaders is imperative. “The subjective obstacles to communication cannot be wholly eliminated, for they are rooted in the beliefs and environment of men who decide policy.” Allen S. Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu: Decision to Enter the Korean War (New York: MacMillan Company, 1960), 172.
I suggest that a state’s declaratory policy should be considered a prime indicator of a defender’s willingness to act as it relates to deterrence. States employ deterrence as a preventive measure, designed to avoid war. Signaling a challenger as to intent to defend can be difficult due to the prevalence of misunderstandings and misperceptions. What may appear to be a subtle yet unmistakable message to the sender may not be so interpreted by the intended recipient. By clearly articulating interests and specifying actions considered unacceptable, the defender can diminish the likelihood of misperception. The simplicity of this idea precludes any claim of novelty. Indeed, John Foster Dulles noted nearly fifty years ago, “The chances for peace are usually bettered by letting a potential aggressor know in advance where his aggression will lead him.” I attempt to provide a theoretical rationale to support this apothegm, explaining why it should be so, and suggest an emphasis on, and method for studying, variables that have to date been under-appreciated in many systematic studies of deterrence.

Theoretically, the clarity of a policy could be privately established between leaders, assuming the existence of some open channel of communication, so as to provide a challenger with the means of saving face. However, by publicly declaring a policy, the defender can enhance its credibility by incurring signaling costs. Adopting a clear and public policy results in placing the state’s reputation at stake, thereby diminishing its flexibility and “locking in” a commitment. This self-imposed constraint is intended to signal credibility to potential

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5 To be precise, the declaratory policy signals a greater value placed on interests, thereby minimizing uncertainty so that the risk propensity of both actors becomes less important in determining the success of the deterrence.


challengers. Additionally, it places the burden of avoiding escalation squarely on the shoulders of the challenger, shifting the liability attached to a “last clear chance” of avoidance away from the defender.  

Some have argued that clarity unnecessarily limits the extent of the area under the deterrent umbrella, based on the logic of *inclusio unius est exclusio alterius*. Indeed, this logic of capitalizing on a tendency toward risk aversion in the face of the unknown underlies Schelling’s famous “threat that leaves something to chance.” When Secretary of State Dean Acheson articulated the American forward defense perimeter in the Asian Pacific as running from the Aleutians to Japan down through the Ryukyus to the Philippines, the omitted Republic of Korea was quickly subjected to North Korean attack. To avoid this type of “invitation” to attack, these analysts advocate adopting intentionally imprecise umbrella “boundaries” to permit the fullest extension of the deterrent. This logic was seen in American attempted deterrence of Iraqi use of chemical and biological weapons in the 1991 Gulf War under the title “calculated ambiguity.” American policy-makers suggested that the United States deliberately left unclear whether the United States would provide a nuclear response to Iraqi chemical or biological attacks.

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8 Fearon, “Signaling Versus the Balance of Power,” notes that such signals work on the domestic audience as well - a fact particularly relevant to democratic regimes, as backing down from a public commitment entails grave political costs.


13 Pursuant to negative security assurances provided in the context of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation regime, the United States had publicly committed not to use nuclear weapons
If this is true, then the question persists: why shouldn’t states maximize their deterrent forces by extending the bluff? In other words, why not try to place as much as possible under this “umbrella” subject only to the limitations of capabilities?

To answer these questions, I argue that we must first differentiate levels of interests. Specifically, vital national interests must be distinguished from non-vital interests.\textsuperscript{14} Vital national interests can be thought of in broad terms as encompassing two basic issues: 1) ensuring the physical security of a state, and 2) ensuring the population’s ability to maintain their way of life. These two basic interests are the foundational responsibilities of national government. Accordingly, a defender’s credibility is greatest with respect to vital national interests.\textsuperscript{15} It is far more credible that the United States will defend and retaliate against an attack threatening American oil supplies than it is that the United States will defend and retaliate against an attack threatening to institute totalitarian rule in Nepal. Maintaining access to oil is a vital national interest. While ensuring democratic governance in Nepal is undoubtedly of interest to the United

 against non-nuclear states, except in the case of attack by a non-nuclear state allied with a nuclear power. As Iraq was a signatory state of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and was not proven to have a fully developed nuclear weapons program, this “security assurance” was presumably in effect. Nonetheless, having abandoned offensive chemical and biological warfare programs, the only unconventional deterrent remaining in the active U.S. arsenal was nuclear. Thus, it was unclear what the U.S. response would be to Iraqi chemical or biological weapons attacks.

\textsuperscript{14} Of course, in practice it is difficult to obtain consensus on whether a specific issue is properly categorized as vital or non-vital. Thus, a more practical way of looking at interests is to adopt a continuum rather than a dichotomous distinction; however, for clarity of explanation, I retain the dichotomy herein.

\textsuperscript{15} Lebow, “Conclusions,” 211, argues that “the most common cause of aggression [is] the perceived need of leaders to respond to severe strategic or domestic threats.” Therefore, the degree of clarity should have little effect as the leader has no option but to respond. In fact, according to Lebow, the most likely effect of clarity would be to stimulate war by virtue of increasing the incentive for pre-emptive strikes. While this logic follows from a worldview shaped by neo-liberal or perhaps even defensive realist principles, it is patently incongruous with offensive realism. To be explicit, this study rejects the idea that most conflict is accidental or the result of misperception. Rather, I attribute a substantial portion of conflict as deriving from opportunistic offensive behavior. For the clearest explication of this “offensive realism” worldview, see John J. Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2001).
States for moral, humanitarian, and perhaps, economic reasons, Nepalese totalitarianism is not a threat to the physical security of the United States or to the continuance of the American way of life. An extended deterrent policy aimed at protecting Nepal lacks credibility in the face of a serious challenge.

The second reason arguing against an indefinite extension of the deterrent umbrella is that individual governments have differing levels of risk propensity in different circumstances. Before initiating hostilities we can assume that challengers evaluate the probabilities of succeeding. However, given uncertainty surrounding the defender’s willingness to act in defense of the subject interests, the challenger may only be able to gauge a range of probability of success. That is, because the intent of the defender is unknown and the interests are only partially known, the challenger cannot calculate with precision his chances of success. All that can be said with confidence is that based on the information regarding capabilities and the estimates of the defender’s vital national interests there is some range of probability of success.

The effect of uncertainty is not uniform across states. States with a greater risk-taking character (risk acceptant states) will be more willing to take action in the face of uncertainty. Conversely, risk averse states will shy away from action until uncertainty is reduced. Accordingly, by introducing uncertainty through an intentionally ambiguous declaratory deterrent policy, we invite risk-acceptant states to challenge our interests.

These two concepts, level of interest and risk propensity, provide the foundation for establishing a theory of deterrence based on clarity. Essentially, I argue that a policy of clarity shifts the locus of potential attacks from a mixture of both vital and non-vital national interests to a set composed almost entirely of non-vital interests. Although such a shift may be accompanied by a minor increase in the total number of attacks, the security obtained from diminished attacks on vital interests should more than offset the security lost from increased attacks on non-vital interests.

As noted earlier, regimes have differing degrees of risk propensity. If we think of a continuum ranging from the most conservative on one end (never apt to attack) to most risk

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16 When I use the term “defender” in this discussion, I am implicitly including the potential deterring allies of the defender.
acceptant on the other (undeterrible), I expect that the overwhelming majority of states will be on the more conservative side of the continuum in most situations due to the effects of loss-aversion.\footnote{Loss-aversion, an element of prospect theory, is discussed more thoroughly infra at 27. In short, actors typically place greater utility on losses than identically valued gains. See Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, “Loss-Aversion in Riskless Choice: A Reference Dependent Model,” \textit{The Quarterly Journal of Economics} 106, no. 4 (1991): 1039-61. Neoliberals or defensive realists would likely expect a similar distribution of risk propensity, based on the idea of shared interests in avoiding violent conflict or a lack of aggressive intent.} (See Figure 2.2) Thus under either an ambiguous or a clear policy, these states are unlikely to attack the interests of another state absent a clear guarantee of victory.\footnote{Moreover, in most cases, even where a clear superiority is evident, the stronger state may prefer to engage in cooperative relations with the weaker state. This can be so due to an imbalance of interests, including concerns over reputation, precedent, maintenance of stability, economic efficiency or other values. In other words, I do not accept the proposition that \textit{all} states are necessarily active imperialists.} That is, those states to the left of neutral require overwhelming certainty in order to prosecute military operations against another power. Accordingly, I theorize that the degree of ambiguity or clarity in deterrence policies is largely without effect on these states. However, the minority of states on the acceptant side of neutral will react to a change in clarity of policy.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig2.png}
\caption{Hypothetical Distribution of Risk Propensity Among States}
\end{figure}
As indicated in Figure 2.3, as policy shifts from ambiguity to clarity, states with lower risk acceptance (but still greater than neutral) may have reservations of attacking removed by explicit declaratory policy of what absolutely will be defended. In Panel A, the shaded region indicates the hypothetical set of states that would consider attacking under a policy of ambiguity. The defender has attempted to extend its deterrent to as large a population as possible; thus, the challenger is less able to distinguish vital from non-vital interests.

![Figure 2.3 Panel A: Region of Attackers Under Ambiguity (Vital and Non-Vital Interests)](image)

Figure 2.3 Panels B and C display the hypothetical sets of attackers under a policy of clarity. In this case, the defender has explicitly stated its intentions, allowing the attacker to more accurately assess both the intentions and interests of the target. Accordingly, with respect to non-vital interests, Panel B provides for a larger set of potential challengers as the degree of uncertainty has been lowered so as to increase the probability of success (the deterrent removed). Additional states now meet their threshold of risk acceptance for taking action.
However, in Panel C, we see that a smaller number of states are now willing to attack vital interests. Again uncertainty has been removed; but for vital interests the effect is to lessen the probability of success. Thus, only a hard core set of undeterrable states remains willing to attack the vital interests.
It is important to note that clarity in deterrence policy need not mean that the defender will *never* defend non-vital interests. In fact, the defender may be willing to commit force to defend non-vital interests in certain contexts (humanitarian relief, ethnic cleansing, geographic importance for some ongoing mission, etc.). The certainty established by clarity in declaratory deterrent policy will undoubtedly operate both to decrease the assessment of the probability of success of attacks on vital interests and to increase the assessment of the probability of success in attacks against non-vital interests. However, the stronger effect should be with respect to the former. There should be no doubt that the defender will *always* use force to defend the subject of the deterrent (vital interests). As noted before, this leaves clarity open to the interpretation of that which is not expressly included is excluded; however, nothing central to clarity prohibits a state from *at times* using force to defend non-vital interests. Thus, although admittedly diminished, some value from uncertainty should remain with respect to non-vital interests.

Secondly, if deterrence is successful with respect to vital interests, resources will be more available for contingency operations in non-vital areas. This should be qualified by noting that it is premised upon the inviolable maintenance of credible deterrent capabilities – in other words, these forces cannot be relied upon “twice.”

A second graphical representation of the above concept can be offered in the form of a two-by-two matrix, as in Table 2.1. If we confine the matrix solely to those states on the risk acceptant side of neutral (assuming that risk averse states are not going to attack under any type of attempted deterrent policy - either ambiguous or clear) we should see that with a policy of ambiguity there is a certain total of attacks, divided equally between vital and non-vital interests. Under a policy of clarity, we may see an increase in the number of attacks; however, most of

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19 To illustrate, the United States maintains a contingent of troops in South Korea partly in order to deter an attack on South Korea by North Korea. For almost fifty years, North Korea has refrained from launching a major military attack on South Korea. While we cannot know whether the absence of attack is due to the presence of U.S. troops or not, it suggests that perhaps the deployment is an example of successful deterrence. Yet, although we have avoided further war with North Korea, these troops are not freely mobile to deal with other contingencies that may arise in the Pacific theater. To rely on these troops as deployable for an emergency that might arise in Indonesia would be to “count the troops twice” – once in fulfillment of the deterrent mission and once for contingencies. By making the forces available for contingencies, the deterrent mission would be undermined.
these are now on non-vital interests, with only the most risk acceptant (the undeterrable) still willing to risk attacks on the now-defined vital interests. Note that very risk acceptant does not equate with risk-blind. High levels of risk acceptance can still be outweighed by a highly unfavorable correlation of forces. Thus, only the far extreme of the risk-acceptant states would be of concern in situations involving extreme capability disparity. Short of the undeterrable, even risk-acceptant regimes are theorized to have a significant interest in maintaining power and avoiding suicidal actions.

Table 2.1: Theoretical Distribution of Attacks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AMBIGUITY</th>
<th>CLARITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VITAL INTERESTS</td>
<td>0 Risk Acceptant</td>
<td>0 Risk Acceptant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 Very Risk Acceptant</td>
<td>5 Very Risk Acceptant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NON-VITAL INTERESTS</td>
<td>0 Risk Acceptant</td>
<td>10 Risk Acceptant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 Very Risk Acceptant</td>
<td>25 Very Risk Acceptant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>30 Attacks</td>
<td>40 Attacks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Numbers used in this table are for illustrative purposes only

Interests are, of course, subject to change over time. Indeed, I expect that there is a threshold level at which the quantity of attacks on non-vital interests constitutes a threat to security sufficient to be labeled a vital interest. At some point, cumulative non-vital losses can sum to be a vital loss. That threshold point will vary according to context. For example, during the Cold War, U.S. policy in Southeast Asia reflected a low threshold. American policy makers concerned over the possible “domino effect” of allowing a single state to fall to communist imperialism attempted to counter Soviet advances in every state in the region. Thus, although individually of limited interest, activities by the communists in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam
were denominated “vital interests” of the United States. Accordingly, levels of interest are not necessarily static but can change as context changes over time.20

**Risk Propensity**

Much of the work testing rational deterrence theory either omits risk propensity or uses a measure of risk based on expected utility.21 In this paper, I examine risk propensity using a psychological approach, as advocated by deterrence analysts such as Robert Jervis and Richard Ned Lebow, Keith Payne, and Alexander George and Richard Smoke,22 combined with a contextual accounting based in prospect theory. By combining these two approaches, I obtain analysis based on what Mercer describes as both dispositional and situational attributes.23 Because my definition of risk propensity and the manner in which I determine risk propensity are novel, I provide a detailed discussion explaining my ideas relating to risk below.

Uncertainty is important as different actors behave differently under such conditions. Some states will be more willing to gamble despite a great amount of uncertainty whereas others will refrain from action absent more complete information. I define this quality as the “risk propensity” of states. It is important to recognize that this is somewhat different from the conceptualization of risk propensity adopted by the rational choice school of thought. This school attempts to explain and measure risk propensity primarily in reference to probability of

20 Absent such dynamism, an aggressor would attempt to present a series of challenges in which the risks of defending would seem “disproportionate to the objectives in dispute.” DSB V. 41, 203 (1959). While this might be addressed by adopting a broader view of interests over time, in order to maintain theoretical consistency, it can also be addressed by noting the change in a specific objective due to context.


22 Jervis, Lebow and Stein, Psychology and Deterrence; Payne, The Fallacies of Cold War Deterrence; and George and Smoke, Deterrence in American Foreign Policy.

23 Mercer, 6-7.
success. In the Kendall’s Tau-b associational measure created by Bueno de Mesquita, risk propensity is determined by comparing the alliance portfolios of states.\textsuperscript{24} “Risk-averse leaders adopt policies (reflected by patterns of alliances) that minimize their vulnerability, presumably at the expense of some of their autonomous objectives.”\textsuperscript{25} Thus, risk propensity is determined by the capabilities a state amasses through allying. Capabilities are important in that the balance between two antagonists (and their alliance partners) is assessed in order to establish a probability of military success. States with stronger or more allies that are able to amass greater capabilities and are presumed to have a greater probability of victory are thus deemed risk averse. States with fewer or weaker allies that are less able to amass capabilities and are presumed to have a lesser probability of victory are thus deemed risk acceptant. Accordingly, the central component of this conceptualization of risk is probability of success. Uncertainty plays only a secondary role, in as much as statements of probability reflect uncertainty.

I argue that defining risk propensity in terms of probability of success is flawed in two ways. First, it is unable to deal with situations marked by uncertainty. To be of use, it requires point estimates of the probability of success. However, we are often unable to generate accurate point estimates of the probability of success due to the uncertainty in the environment. Many times information is unavailable, unclear or unhelpful. Where we cannot generate probabilities of success with a significant degree of precision, an expected utility model is inapplicable.

This point is demonstrated with a pair of simple two-by-two matrices in Figure 2.4. In Figure 2.4 Panel A, where uncertainty is low, the expected utility calculations of rational choice are likely to be the driving force behind decision-making; however, where uncertainty is high, we will be unable to calculate expected utilities and, thus, unable to use an expected utility definition of risk propensity. The first matrix identifies a situation where there is a potential positive outcome. Thus, the lesser the uncertainty surrounding this outcome (the greater the probability of a positive outcome), the more we should be guided by rational choice’s expected


\textsuperscript{25} Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and David Lalman, \textit{War and Reason} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 293.
utility calculations. An actor faced with a situation of low uncertainty (high probability) of a positive outcome who is unwilling to act can be considered irrational. The low amount of uncertainty indicates we have the ability to accurately assess probabilities and thus can compute the positive expected utility of acting. Likewise, an actor in the same situation who is willing to act and take advantage of the positive expected utility can be considered rational. Note that the rational and irrational labels switch places in the second matrix describing a potential negative outcome. When we face situations of high uncertainty, rational choice’s expected utility equations are less useful as, by definition, we lack the certainty to accurately assess the probabilities necessary to generate expected utility values. Accordingly, under conditions of high uncertainty, we should look to something else to determine how decisions are made. This study attempts to provide that “something else” in the form of risk propensity as derived from the psychological and contextual environment surrounding the decision. As shown in Figure 2.4 Panel B, where uncertainty is low, we might still make use of the expected utility models, but where uncertainty is high, we have a tool to use to predict the likelihood of action.

Figure 2.4 Panel A: Rationality and Risk Propensity: EU Approach
The second problem is that the standard definition of risk propensity is essentially a continuation of the concept of rationality. If we have a point estimate of probability of success, then we need only identify the expected costs of defeat and the benefits of victory in order to calculate the expected utility of the action:  
\[ EU = P(gain) + 1-P(loss) + \text{opportunity costs} \]
Rational actor models are based on this cost-benefit analysis, in that if a proposed course of action leads to an expected loss, rational decision-makers are expected to reject the proposal. Likewise, if a proposed course of action leads to expected benefits, a rational decision-maker is expected to accept the proposal. Accepting a course of action with expected losses or rejecting a course of action with expected benefits is considered irrational. If we have point estimates of the probability of success, we can generate the cut-point for rational actions. Presumably, if a proposed course of action costing one hundred and ten units involved a potential gain of fifteen hundred units and a potential loss of five hundred units with a seventy percent chance of losing, the decision-maker choosing to act, assuming non-action results in no change, would be identified as irrational rather than risk acceptant. Thus, there is no theoretical or operational mechanism to filter out the component part of irrationality identified as risk propensity.

\[ EU = .30(1500) + .70(-500) + 1(-110) = -10 \] 

Expected utility advocates argue that they can account for subjective valuation through the mechanism of “expected utility.” However, few expected utility models delve into how subjective valuation differs across cases. Rather, an objective measure of value is assumed in the
model with the utility function mirroring the probability estimates. The subjectivity included in the model is nothing more than shifting the utility of the outcome to one side or the other of zero depending on if we consider the actor risk averse or risk acceptant. This tells us little about risk propensity. For example, an actor is labeled risk averse if he consistently rejects choices that provide some small expected gains. To illustrate, in Figure 2.5, the area labeled C (inclusive of A and B) shows the set of rejected outcomes based on expected value by a risk averse actor. The area labeled B (inclusive of A) shows the risk-neutral rejected set and the area labeled A shows the risk-acceptant rejected set. Why does the risk averse actor reject the outcome between 0 and +12? Because he is risk-averse. Why is he risk-averse? Because he rejects these expected gains. In other words, the model provides no explanation or understanding of risk propensity. Nor does the model permit any change in risk propensity according to context. Moreover, this model remains dependent on identifying probabilities of success, so that we are again left with a simple expected utility equation. Simply put, in this conception of risk, there is no theoretical explanation distinguishing irrationality from risk-acceptance. I argue that risk propensity is not identical to irrationality, but is a concept that can be evaluated independently.

Interestingly, Bueno de Mesquita acknowledges that risk propensity is “a psychological trait best evaluated through an in depth examination of the decision maker’s personality and environment,” but concludes that such is not viable in constructing a general theory and so
proceeds to construct his structurally based quantitative measure based on state alliances.\textsuperscript{26} I argue that the difficulty of gathering and assessing data is not justification for acceptance of an inadequate measure of a central theoretical component.

Secondly, as my particular interest is in deterrence as practiced by American policy makers, the general data problems advanced by Bueno de Mesquita may be more easily overcome. Given the arguments advanced by Bueno de Mesquita among others as to the dyadic democratic peace, it will often be the case that non-democratic regimes represent a large percentage of the set of challengers when democratic regimes are attempting deterrence. These regimes are more likely to be dominated or heavily influenced by either a single individual or a small handful of individuals, making psychologically based variables less problematic (from a U.S. based research program) than Bueno de Mesquita undoubtedly correctly anticipates for many other regimes.

Huth, Bennett and Gelpi provide another common definition of risk propensity, defining a risk acceptant actor as one who will choose a high-payoff, low-probability course of action, and a risk averse actor as one who will choose a low-payoff, high-probability course of action.\textsuperscript{27} This potentially avoids the problem of conflating rationality with risk propensity, as the two actions may be mathematically equal. For example, when faced with a choice between a twenty percent probability of gaining one hundred dollars and an eighty percent probability of gaining twenty-five dollars, a risk acceptant actor would choose the former and a risk averse the latter, although the expected value for either equation (assuming no transaction costs) is identical.

\[(2) \quad (.20) 100 = (.80) 25\]

While this distinction is important, it still depends on the ability to calculate point estimates of the probability of success. Accordingly, this definition still disregards the central role of uncertainty. Of note, however, this conception stems from the idea that how issues are framed affects how individuals make decisions – a concept central to prospect theory.

\textsuperscript{26} Bueno de Mesquita, \textit{The War Trap}, 123.

\textsuperscript{27} Huth, Gelpi and Bennett, 610.
Prospect theory moves away from the expected utility calculations into the situational analysis of risk. In brief, prospect theory suggests that individuals evaluate potential actions differently dependent on whether they see the contemplated action as one that will introduce new gains or as one that will mitigate or prevent losses. Rather than focusing on the states of outcomes, prospect theory emphasizes relative changes in outcomes. People are believed to “overvalue losses relative to comparable gains” such that they are willing to bear greater risks to avoid losses while they are more risk averse if operating in the domain of gains. Accordingly, identifying a leader’s “reference point” becomes essential. In identifying this reference point, studies suggest that reorientation around past events occurs at different rates. Winners are seen to adjust their frame of reference to incorporate gains quickly, applying loss-avoidance (risk acceptant) behavior to attempts to overturn the newly acquired gain; however, losers tend to keep the reference point as the status quo ante such that they will engage in more risk acceptant behavior to recover the recent losses. Identifying the frame of reference is difficult in that analysis must also bear in mind the perceived costs of inaction. A leader may be in the situation that he feels his relative position is slipping so that inaction is loss. Such is important in the


study of deterrence, as attempted deterrence should be more successful against states seeking perceived gains and less effective against states seeking to avoid losses.\(^{31}\) In addition, prospect theory suggests a status quo bias, as individuals tend to over-value certain outcomes relative to probabilistic outcomes. For example, a person might not be willing to sell a bottle of wine for twice its market value of $100, yet, he might refuse to pay even $150 to replace it if lost. Prospect theory thus comports well with the political and military penchant for presenting the adversary with a *fait accompli*’ over minor or tangential issues as the opponent will then be faced with the burden of overturning the status quo.\(^{32}\)

While prospect theory provides a contextual framework for assessing risk, it is silent as to what causes the initial baseline to be set or why an event is framed in a particular manner. I use Jervis’s tools for assessing individual biases as a heuristic to determine the establishment of baselines and framing of decisions. For example, an individual motivated strongly by nationalist resentment of foreign powers may set a baseline that excludes the interference of other states, even if it requires the assertion of a baseline from a century past. Likewise, how events are framed is affected by biases. An individual unfazed by the use of large scale violence may find reputation a more salient issue than potential loss of life. Hence, when framing alternatives, the individual may focus on the loss attending to a reputation for irresolution more than the costs of wholesale casualties. Importantly, prospect theory is sensitive to changes across time. While the basic psychological assessments I use to help inform the constituents parts of prospect theory are in part static, prospects theory’s situational outlook is inherently dynamic. Unlike rational choice, actors are not locked into a mechanical computation of expected value maximization unable to change across time.\(^{33}\)


\(^{32}\) Of course, the difference in re-adjusting perceptions of the status quo makes this a more dangerous tactic for major issues where both sides will be operating from a loss-avoidance framework and will be more risk acceptant. Note also how this construct provides a theoretical explanation for the distinction between deterrence and compellence referenced earlier.

\(^{33}\) See e.g. McDermott, 176.
Rational choice theorists recognize some of the basic ideas contained in prospect theory, but understate our inability under conditions of uncertainty to assess the probabilities necessary to generate expected utility values. For example, both Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman and Kim and Morrow explain risk as the relationship between outcome and utility, such that a risk acceptant actor is willing to act in situations with a lower probability of success than would a risk neutral or risk averse actor. In other words, the risk propensity affects the utility placed on a particular outcome, so that an identical probability can result in different expected utilities. This is demonstrated in Figure 2.6 where the steeper curvature of the line in the realm of victories shows that risk acceptant actors place greater utility on victories than on losses.

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34 Based on Kim and Morrow, 901 “Figure 2: Three Utility Function With Different Risk Attitudes.”

35 Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman; Kim and Morrow.

36 This curvature is a recognition that the principle of linearity is wrong, yet in most EU models, the mirroring of probability and utility accompanying the neglect of subjective valuation results in adoption of a linear utility function.
The substantive import of Figure 2.6 is quite similar to a graph often used in prospect theory to demonstrate risk propensity. There, the figure is presented in terms of a single actor whose risk propensity changes from averse to acceptant dependent on context. When in the domain of gains, the actor is said to be risk acceptant such that he places a greater value on avoiding losses than obtaining gains, while if in the domain of losses, the actor values gains more than incurring absolutely equal losses. Essentially, the prospect theory graph simply joins the two lines from Kim and Morrow into a single S-shaped curve as shown in Figure 2.7, along with providing an explanation of when risk propensity might change. The line in the gains domain is similar to the risk averse actor of Kim and Morrow and the line in the losses domain is similar to the risk acceptant actor of Kim and Morrow, although the figure is not a precise mirror-image simply re-located. Per prospect theory’s loss aversion hypothesis, the steepness of the curvature in the domain of losses is greater than the steepness in the domain of gains. In other words, the effect of declining marginal utility is greater in the domain of gains than in the domain of losses.

Note, however, that while the Y axis in both figures is essentially the same concept (utility and value), the X axis in Figure 2.7 refers to “domain” rather than outcome, reflecting the

\[37\] Drawn from Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, “Choices, Values, and Frames,” in Choices, Values and Frames, ed. Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3, “Figure 1.1 A hypothetical value function.”
idea of change-driven evaluation rather than states-driven evaluation. To complete the synthesis of these two figures, I use the same utility and outcome categories as used on the axes of Figure 2.6, but include the more complete positive/negative distinction expressed in Figure 2.7, to create a new Figure 2.8. In this figure, two lines are again necessary to demonstrate the different risk functions for decision-makers acting in the realm of gains and those acting in the realm of losses. Line Q-Q2 indicates the risk propensity of a decision-maker acting in the realm of losses by showing that the perceived costs involved with a defeat are far less than the perceived benefits accrued by a victory. Hence, this actor would be risk acceptant. Conversely, line Z-Z2 indicates the risk propensity of a decision-maker acting in the realm of gains by showing the flatter, more limited perceived benefits placed on a victorious outcome compared to the larger perceived costs associated with a defeat. As with Figure 2.7, the steepness of the drop for Z-Z2 is greater than the corresponding rise for Q-Q2, as indicated by the scale used on the y-axis.38

Figure 2.8: Synthesis of Kim and Morrow with Kahneman and Tversky

Summing up prospect theory, it is important to determine what is the baseline from which the decision-maker is operating, how is the issue framed both for and by the decision-maker, and

38 Note that the values placed on the y-scale are entirely arbitrary and are meant simply to convey the greater steepness associated with risk-aversion.
does the decision-maker perceive the action, as compared to inaction, on the whole in the realm of gains or losses.

I describe risk propensity as directly involving the question of uncertainty. When capabilities are relatively even and the objective indicators of level of interest provide no grounds for distinguishing probability of victory, we are left with only the subjective components of interest - a situation likely to be marked by uncertainty. Thus, the definition of risk acceptance offered here is directly concerned with how a regime will act when we are unable through objective measures to confidently predict a likely victor in conflict. A risk averse actor will refrain from acting under conditions of uncertainty whereas a risk acceptant actor is more willing to take significant action under conditions of uncertainty. To ascertain risk propensity, I argue that we must look to the contextual indicators as asserted by prospect theory as well as the individual psychological biases of the key decision-makers as suggested by Robert Jervis’ classic work, *Perception and Misperception in International Relations*, and the 1985 synthesis of some of these ideas.\(^{39}\)

Given this definition of risk propensity, it is key to recognize that risk propensity is most significant when the relative capabilities of the competitors are either unknown or are known but equal. In other words, a regime may be risk acceptant, but may still recognize a disparity in capabilities sufficient to prevent it from engaging in militarized conflict. Indeed the following should be noted as an explicit assumption: regimes generally prefer to maintain power and avoid suicidal actions. Military conflict carries with it a certain probability of defeat that often entails removal of the defeated regime from power.\(^{40}\) Where the balance of capabilities is decidedly adverse, even a risk acceptant regime is unlikely to engage in military conflict. Likewise, the definition of risk acceptance is limited by the assumption that regimes do not necessarily engage militarily simply because they have an overwhelming balance of capabilities. In other words,


risk propensity becomes relevant only in the context of uncertainty – a context that definitionally excludes situations involving large disparities among capabilities. In other words, where rational choice calculations are possible and provide clear-cut determinations, they are likely to outweigh the risk propensity considerations. Thus, risk propensity is most important for the subset of cases residing in the area of uncertainty, as described below in Figure 2.9.

![Figure 2.9: Risk Propensity: Zone of Uncertainty](image)

Given this theoretical formulation, I attempt to test whether there is empirical support to validate the propositions suggested. To assess the theory, I identify three basic hypotheses that bear upon the fundamental theoretical premises.

\[ H1: A \text{ state employing an ambiguous deterrent policy will have a greater likelihood of experiencing attacks on vital interests than will a state employing a clear deterrent policy.} \]

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This is not to say that capabilities are the sole determinants of uncertainty. Rather, it is to accept that when one side or another holds a dominant edge in capabilities, it is often, although not always, sufficient to establish the certainty necessary for avoidance of conflict.
H2: A state employing an ambiguous deterrent policy will experience fewer total attacks (vital and non-vital interests combined) than will a state employing a clear deterrent policy.

H3: A state with a more risk-acceptant leader will be less likely to be deterred from acting in the face of ambiguous declaratory policy.
Evaluating the success of general deterrence policies is particularly difficult as it is impossible to be certain if deterrence has worked. We can observe instances of no war, but we cannot be certain that the lack of war is a product of deterrence. It is difficult to attribute non-events to any particular policy. Myriad other factors may be responsible for the lack of war between two states. Indeed, general deterrence is specifically intended to prevent the would-be challenger from even considering the path of conflict, thereby averting the instance of crisis. Although similar problems persist with the study of immediate deterrence (crisis deterrence) as to having confidence that war was successfully avoided due to the particular impact of deterrence, with immediate deterrence we are at least able to identify a specific threat. Deterrence failures are far more obvious. Regardless of the triggering event, the failure of deterrence is a readily observable fact. Accordingly, many analysts have focused on these easily identified cases, notwithstanding the problem of ignoring the silent set of successes.¹ For the very reasons these scholars have noted, this study is limited to a sample of cases of immediate deterrence. Because the study is so limited, I cannot test the hypothesis regarding the amount of attacks one will suffer generally due to greater clarity.

**Case Selection**

Figure 3.1 below provides a diagrammatic representation of the limits of the cases at issue in this project. The entire circle represents the set of all foreign policy crises bearing on

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U.S. security interests. This includes instances where immediate deterrence may or may not be at issue. For example, a surprise attack may occur with little or no warning, such that there is no opportunity to attempt immediate deterrence. Instead, the defender is left with attempting compellence should it desire a return to the status quo. This *fait accompli* scenario is classically illustrated by the North Korean invasion of South Korea in June 1950. These cases are beyond the scope of this study. Within this general set of crises is another subset of cases where immediate deterrence is possible. Yet, the possibility of attempting immediate deterrence does not necessarily equate with actually making such an attempt. A defender may choose not to try deterrence. For example, if a challenger threatens to take some hostile action, the defender may forego attempting immediate deterrence and instead resort to the immediate use of force to resolve the crisis. However, due to the high political and economic costs of resort to force, instances of foregoing attempted immediate deterrence where it is a possibility should be extremely scarce. Such cases, if any exist, are not addressed in this study. This leaves cases where immediate deterrence is both possible and actually attempted. Within this set of cases, declaratory policy can be either clear or ambiguous. This set of cases is the set of interest to this research project.

*Figure 3.1: Sets of Possible Deterrence Cases*
Because of the complexity and contextual importance of identifying the component parts of risk propensity, the set of vital national interests, and the character of declaratory policy, I am skeptical of the ability to accurately assess and standardize data to run large-n quantitative tests. Accordingly, the research design employed herein is based on focused case studies. Case studies permit the in-depth examination necessary to accurately assess such difficult to measure concepts. The drawback of this design is the loss of ability to generalize the project’s findings to deterrence efforts at large. I concede Achen and Snidal’s point that all case studies can provide are “contingent empirical generalizations.” However, while noting this disadvantage, I assert that conclusions regarding deterrence are inherently difficult, if not impossible, to generalize as deterrence is an exercise in matching the deterrent to the particular value structure of the intended recipient. In other words, there is no paradigmatic deterrence case.

Partly because information is more readily available for the United States than for many states, and partly because my interest lies in U.S. security policy, I opt to test the above hypotheses based on a set of case studies involving U.S. attempts at immediate deterrence. From the U.S. perspective, the most probable deterrence scenario involves a challenge by an authoritarian or totalitarian regime in which power is heavily concentrated in the leader of the government. Support for this proposition is found theoretically in the abundance of work on the democratic peace and empirically in an historical review of U.S. deterrence efforts of the past

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2 In this respect, Mao’s warning is appropriate, “If one rides a horse to view the flowers … one [would not] understand a problem profoundly even after a lifetime of effort.” Philip Short, *Mao: A Life* (New York: Holt, 1999), 304.

3 Achen and Snidal.

4 Payne, *The Fallacies of Cold War Deterrence*, stresses this point quite strongly.

5 Some authoritarian regimes have power distributed across an institution (i.e. a military junta, or a theocracy with a religious council) or across a small elite group. In theory, these states should have a greater number of items of “value” subject to a deterrent threat than would a single leader, permitting easier deterrence.
fifty years. Thus, while case studies are concededly problematic with respect to generalizing, selecting cases representative of the most likely scenarios does allow for the possibility of drawing relevant policy implications.

In choosing a set of cases to test this theory, the first step is to identify events in which declaratory deterrent policy was ambiguous and events in which declaratory deterrent policy was clear. Ideally, these events should involve identical surrounding circumstances so that we are able to isolate the effect of the clarity of declaratory policy. As I cannot reproduce these ideal experimental conditions in the real world, I seek instead to choose cases wherein the variance among other variables is minimized. To do so, I need cases involving the same set of state actors in roughly the same time frame. One means of accomplishing this is through a longitudinal study focusing on a single state. Unfortunately, such a design risks minimal variance in the dependent variable. Accordingly, I opt to broaden the focus from a single state to several states within a certain geographic region. In this manner, I can obtain at least some of the benefits of both longitudinal and cross-sectional designs. Thus, my design in terms of case selection, follows that employed by J.H. Kalicki, identified therein as a “comparative and cumulative case study.” As I focus on U.S. immediate deterrence efforts, the sample of cases best fitting the criteria of regional homogeneity, temporal similarity, authoritarian nature, variance in the character of declaratory policy, and variance in deterrence success is the set of attempted immediate deterrence efforts in the Asian-Pacific from 1950-1970. During this time span, the United States engaged in repeated efforts to deter hostile actions by autocratic states including the People’s Republic of China, North Vietnam, North Korea and the Soviet Union. The region and time frame permit sufficient variance on both the key independent variable (clarity of declaratory policy) and the dependent variable (success/failure of deterrence) that I should be

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able to test the theory constructed above. Table 3.1 below provides a list of U.S. attempted immediate deterrence in this region.

**Table 3.1: U.S. Immediate Deterrence Efforts in the Asian-Pacific, 1950-75**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEARS</th>
<th>THREAT</th>
<th>DETERRENCE OBJECT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>China Attack on Taiwan</td>
<td>Chinese attack on Taiwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Korean War</td>
<td>Chinese intervention in Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-53</td>
<td>Korean War</td>
<td>Expansion into a General War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950-54</td>
<td>1st Indochina War</td>
<td>Chinese intervention in Indochina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950-54</td>
<td>1st Indochina War</td>
<td>North Vietnamese expansion into Laos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954-55</td>
<td>1st Taiwan Straits Crisis</td>
<td>Chinese invasion of Taiwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>2nd Taiwan Straits Crisis</td>
<td>Chinese invasion of Taiwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959-64</td>
<td>North Vietnamese Attacks</td>
<td>North Vietnamese expansion into Laos and Attack on South Vietnam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A potential selection bias may be said to exist in the research design in that it looks only at cases where immediate deterrence was applied. By excluding cases where immediate deterrence was available, the design may be overlooking a potential correlation between such cases and cases of either ambiguity or clarity. In other words, the research design may permit false conclusions to be drawn by omitting the possibility of an alternative theory of success/failure. However, given that this design is focused on U.S. policy, and given the relative reluctance of the United States to engage in military action, there will be very few, if any, cases where immediate deterrence was an option yet the United States chose not to make any attempt at immediate deterrence.\(^8\) Indeed, Nitze’s 1950 NSC-68 revision of Kennan’s original

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\(^8\) The North Korean invasion was a failure of general deterrence rather than immediate deterrence as the attack was a surprise attack that was not preceded by diplomatic maneuvering. One arguable possibility is the failure of the United States to engage in any attempt at deterring the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950. Although the United States did provide limited military aid, it was insignificant in stopping the Chinese, nor was it publicized in an attempt to deter the Chinese. Again, it should be noted that this speaks only to immediate deterrence, not general deterrence. One can easily identify actions that took place against U.S. interest to which the U.S.
containment idea and Eisenhower’s 1953 “New Look” policy as outlined in NSC-162 provided the foundation for deterrence occupying center stage in U.S. defense policy throughout the Cold War. To return to Figure 3.1, I thus argue that in this period there are basically just three events: fait accompli, ambiguous deterrence, and clear deterrence.

Along similar lines, a potential objection could be made with respect to whether there are unidentified factors correlated with the success/failure of deterrence other than the clarity of declaratory policy. If the clarity of declaratory policy was systematically enunciated based on some other factors (i.e. level of interest at stake and context of the threat), then looking only toward declaratory policy as the explanation may provide erroneous findings. While I expect that level of interest and context did in fact drive the clarity of the declaratory policy, I assert that the declaratory policy was vital as a means of providing information to the challenger. As the theory advanced explains, level of interest has both objective and subjective components. The challenger can look to geography to ascertain certain interests (i.e. U.S. interest in securing the Caribbean Sea), but it is less able to determine the subjective values of a state that contribute to level of interest. It is through the declaratory policy that a challenger can gather information as to these subjective values. Thus, it is insufficient to simply look at interests and context. For example, Kim Il-Sung was likely quite surprised to discover that the United States considered the freedom of South Korea an interest worth fighting for. He might have readily observed the U.S. interest in keeping Japan out of communist hands, but based on the lack of U.S. support for the nationalist regime in the Chinese Civil War, the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Korean peninsula in 1949, and the ill-advised omission of Korea from the declared U.S. forward defense perimeter in 1950, he likely did not believe the U.S. would resist his invasion. Had Kim faced a situation with identical interests and context, only this time with a clear U.S. declaratory policy that it would defend South Korea against communist aggression, it is doubtful whether Kim would have taken the same action.¹ Thus, it is precisely declaratory policy, undoubtedly

¹ Had the United States made clear its intention to defend South Korea, it is unlikely that either Mao or Stalin would have given Kim the go-ahead to proceed with the invasion in 1950, given

acquiesced; however, such actions were largely failures of general deterrence requiring compellence rather than immediate deterrence.
reflecting interests and context, that is able to minimize uncertainty and is therefore necessarily the variable of interest to this theory of deterrence.

**Measurement of Variables**

Following I explain the rationale and methods behind the measurement of the dependent variable, deterrence success, and the independent variables: clarity, risk propensity, interests, and capabilities.

**Dependent Variable**

*Deterrence success*: The dependent variable in this study is the effectiveness of deterrence. As noted earlier, it is impossible to state with confidence instances of successful deterrence. However, for simplicity’s sake, I define deterrence in a trichotomous manner: failure, mixed, and successful. Following Harvey, I define failed deterrence as a case in which the attacker either substantially achieves its policy goals or initiates or continues large-scale military conflict.\(^{10}\) The mixed category covers cases in which the challenger achieves some of his policy goals or engages in lesser intensity conflict. I define successful deterrence as events wherein the challenger failed to substantially accomplish his policy goals or refrained or discontinued large-scale military conflict. To determine instances in which the United States attempted immediate deterrence, I look to official policy pronouncements from the United States government as reflected in the Department of State Bulletins and Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) series. To determine whether deterrence has been successful, I look to general historical sources.\(^{11}\)

\(^{10}\) Frank P. Harvey, *The Future’s Back: Nuclear Rivalry, Deterrence Theory and Crisis Stability After the Cold War* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997). As noted above, in the special case of intra-war deterrence, this definition should be modified to replace initiation of military conflict with escalation of military conflict. “Large-scale conflict” is also a relative term that depends on the capabilities of the relevant parties. For example, North Vietnam’s lack of atomic weaponry does not preclude it from engaging in large-scale conflict.

\(^{11}\) DOS Bulletins are improper here as official policy statements have a natural bias to place things in the best light possible for U.S. policy and are thus less likely to admit instances of ineffective policy.
In evaluating U.S. policy, it is necessary to view the policy in the context of the specific ongoing “crisis” that has generated the need for immediate deterrence; however, as deterrence is a dynamic process, it is also useful to evaluate policy across time. In other words, while I look at each crisis as a whole, I assess the effectiveness of the policy on a continuing basis. For example, if we consider the U.S. attempt to deter North Vietnam from launching a direct invasion of South Vietnam, undeniably the policy failed. North Vietnam did invade and defeat the South Vietnamese army, eliminating South Vietnam as an existing state. Yet, on a continuing basis, we might claim that the policy was effective in the initial years. While this may or may not have been due to the U.S. deterrent threat, the event did not occur. Thus, we might label the first few years of the crisis as effective deterrence, followed by a subsequent year of failure. However, a case need not end with the first year of failed deterrence. Because the United States might have sought to deter conflict escalation, immediate intra-war deterrence should be noted as well. Thus, subsequent years within a conflict may constitute instances of failed or successful deterrence. Obviously, because of the intra-war character, success or failure cannot be measured by the initiation of hostilities; thus, intra-war deterrence should be measured by the specific object sought to be deterred. For example, the continuation of hostilities or the escalation of hostilities (depending on the specific context) may be indicators of unsuccessful deterrence.

**Independent Variables**

*Clarity:* Operationalizing “clarity” of declaratory deterrent policy as it applies to a given issue is problematic. Establishing a static measure of clarity is unsatisfactory as policies change over time, particularly within the course of crisis. Likewise, clarity can differ across issues within the same time period. For example, the United States may have had a clear declaratory policy with respect to providing a deterrent threat protecting the Philippines, while having an ambiguous policy with respect to defense of Taiwan during the same time period. Accordingly, I will attempt to measure clarity by an event specific measure.

Given the case study nature of this project, it is possible to distinguish the level of clarity based partially on the public speeches, statements, and publications of official policy-makers. Rather than approach this analysis solely through a review of historical treatments that risks the
contamination of hindsight, I rely primarily on contemporaneous source documents, including transcripts of speeches, official press releases, news conferences, and congressional testimony. The Department of State Bulletin Series and FRUS series provide the most complete collection of relevant foreign policy declarations for this purpose.

In addition, I look to available objective measures of clarity including size of the active duty U.S. military, regional troop deployments, regional basing agreements, U.S. defense spending, military aid programs to particular states, materiel transfers, military training programs, provision of military advisors, economic aid programs to particular states, and the existence of security treaty relationships between the U.S. and the protected state as well as other states in the region. Many of these objective measures of clarity are in fact the same factors as those reviewed with respect to capabilities. However, when looking at these factors from a clarity standpoint, I look not at relative measures as is necessary when assessing capabilities, but rather, at how the activity signals intentions. Thus, the objective measure is more of an absolute measure. One might also note that these objective factors seem to be tied to the concept of resolve as much as to clarity. In fact, both resolve and clarity are attempts to measure the importance of an issue to a defender, so it is unsurprising that similar factors are reviewed. However, the central idea of the theory is that verbal policy can enhance the information provided by these objective indicators and should be reviewed in conjunction therewith. Accordingly, clarity looks at the combination of verbal declaratory policy and objective declaratory policy to provide a more comprehensive assessment of a state’s expressed will to defend.

Risk Propensity: To measure risk propensity, I employ Jervis’s ideas of motivated and unmotivated biases and Kahneman and Tversky’s ideas of prospect theory to determine risk propensity of specific state leaders in context. That is, I look at differences over issues as well as over time from both a contextual and individual standpoint. In the face of uncertainty, leaders will search for some means to help them analyze the situation and predict behavior. Two elements that seem likely to play a significant role in leaders’ attempts to lessen uncertainty are

12 While prospect theory alone does not involve looking at individual psychological traits, it does not reject the idea. As noted by McDermott, 27, “More substantive knowledge about a particular decision-maker’s history or goals might help to predict frames more accurately.”
the predispositions leaders have of others based on past experience, and the predispositions
leaders have that are influenced by their own policy preferences. Robert Jervis offers a
framework capturing these two elements that might be used to help structure the identification of
state leaders’ risk propensities. Applying a psychologically based approach, Jervis breaks down
perceptions of state leaders in terms of unmotivated bias and motivated bias. These biases
might also be labeled cognitive (unmotivated) and affective (motivated); however, I use Jervis’
labels because of their descriptive utility.

Unmotivated bias refers to a predisposition to see things in a particular light based on
personal experience; that is, people see what they expect to see. Thus, if a leader perceives
another state as having behaved in an untrustworthy fashion in the past, actions taken by that
state will normally be viewed through a lens of hostility, coloring potentially innocuous acts.
The predispositions are weighted by the recency, gravity and personal involvement of the leader
in the prior experiences. For instance, the history of Japanese-Korean relations engenders great
distrust on the Korean peninsula for any activity increasing the strength of the Japanese Self-
Defense Forces. Despite the last half-century of peaceful relations between the states, the
dramatic events prior thereto still greatly influence Korean perceptions. Jervis also notes that
these unmotivated biases will reflect the greater “availability” of one’s own thought processes
and motivations as measures by which to gauge another’s intentions. For example, a soldier is

13 Jervis, Perception and Misperception.
14 Jervis, Psychology and Deterrence.
15 Jervis, Perception and Misperception, 143-54.
16 Jervis, Psychology and Deterrence, 18-19.
17 Jervis, Perception and Misperception; Psychology and Deterrence.
18 Jervis, Psychology and Deterrence, 22-23. This point reflects the identical idea of mirror-
imaging, which as noted by Payne, The Fallacies of Cold War Deterrence, is particularly
problematic in the area of deterrence, since the application of one’s own value system onto the
thought processes of an opponent operating by a different value system will lead to false
assumptions about what constitutes “rational” behavior. See also Booth, Strategy and
Ethnocentrism.
more apt to see a military solution, whereas a diplomat may be more apt to see a diplomatic solution. If a leader perceives another state in a bad light, his mind-set is likely to be somewhat hostile, resulting in the greater “availability” of a hostile interpretation of the other state’s actions. Jervis also notes the tendency to seize on certain information as truly “representative” of another state’s intentions, despite such information being outweighed by evidence pointing to another conclusion. Thus, unmotivated biases reflect a readiness to believe the worst (or best) about another actor and to deny the significance of evidence to the contrary.

A motivated bias reflects a subconscious preference to see things in a particular way; to perceive things in a manner consistent with the policy the leader has already implemented. Thus, if a leader has committed to a budget minimizing naval expenditures, his perception of subsequent maritime threats may be influenced causing him to dismiss ambiguous evidence thereof. If, on the other hand, a state has invested heavily in naval power, the same evidence may generate an entirely different reaction, causing the leader to grimly confirm the propriety of his previously implemented policy.

Coloring these biases are the generic psychological trends to over-estimate the centralized, calculated nature of events, and to over-estimate one’s own importance as an explanatory factor in analyzing another’s behavior. In other words, people are generally too willing to attribute a carefully implemented plan as the cause of sequences of events, when in actuality the events may be the product of Clausewitzian fog or even random chance. Secondly, people often place themselves at the center of the explanation for another’s conduct, taking credit for influencing another’s behavior when he takes desired actions and assuming another is actively targeting them when he takes undesired actions.

In language reminiscent of Simon’s satisficing theory of policy-making, Jervis describes these biases partly as the product of a limited ability to synthesize the full array of available

19 Jervis, Perception and Misperception, 143; Psychology and Deterrence, 23-24.

20 Jervis, Psychology and Deterrence, 24.

21 Jervis, Perception and Misperception, 319; 343.

22 Ibid., 343.
Accordingly, decision-makers determine policy on the basis of the one or two factors of most personal salience, and then use this as a baseline affecting their perceptions of new events.\textsuperscript{24}

The prospect theory component of risk assessment likewise requires an in-depth review of the circumstances surrounding the event. First, a baseline must be determined against which potential choices of conduct, including inactivity, are compared. Second, the way the issue is framed by the decision-makers must be analyzed. What aspects of the issue are deemed most salient to the decision-maker? Depending on the context, different dimensions of policy may have different priorities for the same decision-maker across time. Third, based on how the issue is framed and evaluated against the baseline, the decision-maker will determine whether, on balance, he is operating in the domain of gains or losses.

Herein, I use this idea of bias driven perceptions as a framework through which I can systematically evaluate the psychological influences on risk propensity. By coupling historical accounts of context and assessing the likely biases of state leaders, I can then insert these assessments into the prospect theory framework to determine the likely baseline, manner of framing, and evaluation of domain for particular events. The ultimate measure of risk propensity is drawn from both the contextual environment and the psychological biases of the decision-maker.

\textit{Vital National Interests:} Providing an independent definition of what constitutes a "vital national interest" is troublesome. Portions of this set change dependent on values and ideology. However, a sizeable component of vital national interests is determined by geopolitical factors. Geography is relatively stable, producing basic requirements for states regardless of ideology.\textsuperscript{25} For example, Britain has a vital national interest in seeing that continental Europe is not consolidated under a hostile power (or, perhaps any power). Likewise, Britain cannot allow the

\textsuperscript{23} Herbert A. Simon, \textit{Administrative Behavior} (New York: Macmillan, 1947).

\textsuperscript{24} Jervis, \textit{Psychology and Deterrence}, 31.

\textsuperscript{25} Nicholas J. Spykman, “Geography and Foreign Policy,” \textit{American Political Science Review} 32, no. 1 (February 1938): 28-50.
development of a superior sea power in the North Atlantic. The United States has a vital national interest in projecting her sea-power across both the Atlantic and the Pacific in order to ensure economic stability (and in a more fundamental sense, to ensure that the next major ground war is not fought on U.S. soil). Gaddis suggests geographic position, demographic potential, and traditions of political and social organization shape the set of vital national interests. In the Most and Starr framework, these may be seen as the “opportunity” or environmental determinants of interest, with the particular regimes able to provide the “willingness” or choice determinants.

For purposes of this paper, I identify vital U.S. national interests in the Asian-Pacific by location. During the time period studied, U.S. officials repeatedly made reference to the strategic importance that the Pacific island chain running from the Aleutians to the Philippines served in terms of providing a forward defense perimeter for the United States. This chain includes the Aleutians, Japan, the Ryukyus, Formosa, and the Philippines, omits the Indonesian islands, and concludes in the south with Australia and New Zealand. Based on the consistent attention paid this line, I include each of these territories as vital national interests. Although Formosa was not routinely included in the list of states comprising the island chain defense perimeter prior to the conclusion of the U.S. - Republic of China Mutual Defense Treaty in 1954, I include it as part of the U.S. vital national interests for the entire period of the study. In addition, I include Laos and South Vietnam as vital interests during the period of this study as for two decades U.S. policymakers from both political parties labored under the assumption that the loss of one or the other would set in motion a domino effect whereby all of Southeast Asia would be lost to the

26 John Lewis Gaddis, We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

27 Benjamin A. Most and Harvey Starr, Inquiry, Logic and International Politics (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989).


29 This has no bearing on the crises-years analysis provided herein, as no major crisis involving Formosa begin until 1954. For references including Formosa as a part of the perimeter, see DOS V. 35, 277 (Aug. 13, 1956); DOS V. 40, 475 (April 6, 1959)
communists, thus threatening the defense perimeter as well as India to the west. However, because of the freedom the case study methods provides in terms of providing more nuanced and qualified descriptions of variables, in Chapter Four I am able to describe interests in terms of degree rather than through strict dichotomy.

Capabilities: To measure the balance of capabilities, it is helpful to look at both the complete picture of a state’s total military and economic health, as well as the more restricted local military capabilities. The size of the military in terms of troops, divisions, numbers of aircraft, and budget, as well as the quality of the military in terms of technology, modernity, and training are relevant to ascertaining over-all military capabilities. Force in the region or capable of rapid transport to the region are relevant to local capability. Government publications, military histories, and secondary sources are all useful in identifying objectives measures of military capability. The measurement and operationalization of the key variables in the study are summarized in Table 3.2.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Operationalization</th>
<th>Measurement</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case selection</td>
<td>U.S. extended immediate deterrence in the Asian-Pacific, 1948-75</td>
<td>USSR; PRC; DPRK; Indochina</td>
<td>Foreign Policy Histories: Dept. of State Bulletins, Foreign Relations of the US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent Variable</td>
<td>Success of deterrence</td>
<td>Failure - challenger achieves policy goal or initiates hostilities; Mixed - partial success Success - challenger fails to achieve goals or initiate/continue conflict</td>
<td>General History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Variables</td>
<td>Declaratory policy</td>
<td>Specificity in official US govt. releases and contemporary executive dept. speeches</td>
<td>Dept. of State Bulletins; Spending levels, troop deployments, foreign aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Capabilities</td>
<td>Size of armed forces; number of active troops; types of weaponry; military spending; availability of forces in the region</td>
<td>Military Histories; DOD Annual Reports; Reports on Soviet Military; SIPRI database; COW database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level of interest</td>
<td>Geographic position, demographic potential, economic potential, regime survival</td>
<td>Diplomatic History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Risk propensity</td>
<td>Prospect theory (domain); Motivated and unmotivated biases (psychological)</td>
<td>Biographies, Diplomatic histories, Context data (GNP, length of crisis, domestic competition, intl. prestige, other conflict)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 4
ESTABLISHING RISK PROPENSITY

In accordance with prospect theory, risk propensity is in large part dependent upon context. However, the individual psychology of a decision-maker is also likely to influence acceptance of risk. Through its requirement of an existing reference point, prospect theory is limited to explaining change, and is thus dependent upon some other explanation as to how an “original” reference point is determined. To explain the original reference point, we can look to the framework advanced by Robert Jervis making use of individual predilections referred to as motivated and unmotivated biases. I construct a risk propensity foundation for the primary leaders of the challenger states by looking to their personal histories and examining evidence creating and reflecting such bias. From these foundations, I then attempt to integrate the contextual effects of the individual crisis events to complete the assessment of risk propensity.

In the first part of this chapter, I identify the individual state leaders relevant to the cases explored in this study, justifying both the selections and the notable exclusions. Thereafter, I construct a qualitative assessment of the risk propensity of the given states based on a combination of psychological and contextual factors. As contextual factors are inherently dynamic, it is necessary to organize the chapter in terms of cases rather than individual leaders. However, to avoid redundancy, I provide the general psychological influences such as family background, education, and experience only in the initial discussion of each leader. When assessing the impact of motivated and unmotivated biases thereafter, I add only case-specific evidence.

**The Relevant Leaders**

Mao Tse-Tung dominated Chinese foreign policy decisions from the founding of the communist Chinese state via his control over the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) until his death
in 1976. Mao first laid claim to the undisputed top spot in the CCP during the Long March at the meeting at Zunyi in 1935.\(^1\) There is little disagreement that Mao was the single most dominant force within the CCP by the late 1940’s, and that his dictatorial power only grew thereafter.\(^2\) By 1943, Mao was given the power of “making the final judgments for important decisions” by the CCP Politburo, and by 1945, “Mao Zedong thought” was recognized as the party’s “guiding ideology.”\(^3\) Goncharov, Lewis, and Litai question whether Mao dictated foreign policy but admit that Mao’s vote counted “more than all the others combined.”\(^4\) By 1950, Michael Hunt asserts that Mao was the “indispensable and unchallengeable leader” whose decisions were no longer subject to question.\(^5\) Michael Oksenberg describes Mao’s rule as “shaped by the desire of the people to see the Chinese ruler as a detached, all-knowing emperor,” while describing other Chinese leaders as mere sycophants.\(^6\) Chen Jian notes that Mao was “always the central figure.”\(^7\) Qiang Zhai describes Mao as having “absolute” power and that “once the Great Leader spoke, the party obeyed.”\(^8\) By the middle 1960s the cult of personality surrounding Mao and the

\(^1\) Short, 321.

\(^2\) As noted by Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis and Zue Litai, Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao and the Korean War (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 21, in the case of both Mao and Stalin, the degree of power concentration makes “organizational and bureaucratic theories” unavailing.


\(^4\) Goncharov, Lewis, and Litai, 19.


\(^7\) Chen Jian, Mao’s China and the Cold War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 10.

groveling of other officials became embarrassingly clear. Party orthodoxy declared “Mao Zedong thought is the source of our life….Whoever dares to oppose him shall be hunted down and obliterated.”

Zhou En-lai held important posts as Premier and Minister of Foreign Affairs during long stretches; however, Zhou was largely unable to exercise independent influence on Chinese policy. Zhou’s power declined during both the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, although he successfully returned to positions of nominal power following both of these periods. With diplomatic skills in short supply among PRC leaders, Zhou retained value to Mao and was never purged or eliminated from the leadership. Zhou never challenged Mao’s policies or confronted Mao with evidence of failures; thus, the important policies that were undertaken have little to do with Zhou’s own predilections.

Chu-Teh exercised influence early in the development of the Communist Party, but did not develop an independent power base after the creation of the communist state and consequently had only limited authority. Liu Shaoqui served as the number two to Mao in the party rankings for much of the 1950s and early 1960s; however, he deferred to Mao on most questions during this time. Following Mao’s retirement as Head of State in 1959 and Liu’s assumption of these duties, and particularly in the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward, Liu Shaoqui was perceived as presenting a challenge to Mao’s dominance, but he had little effect on Chinese foreign relations before being removed by Mao and Lin Biao. Lin Biao obtained power in the middle 1960s through his positions as Defense Minister as well as Vice-Chairman of the CCP. Indeed, Mao relied on Lin Biao and the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to regain control of the fanatical Red Guards he had unleashed in the Cultural Revolution, resulting in Lin’s designation as Mao’s heir; however the appointment was short-lived as Mao soon began to

9 Short, 536.


11 Ibid., 315-16.
doubt Lin’s loyalty.\textsuperscript{12} In 1971, Lin was killed in a plane crash while fleeing the state after it became clear that Mao was soon going to have him arrested. Both Lui Shaoqui and Lin Biao were prominent figures during the period in question; however, in practice both remained subservient to Mao and confined themselves largely to supporting and implementing Mao’s domestic directives. Deng Xiaoping held posts just on the fringe of true power throughout this period, but was shorn of power in the removal of Peng Dehau in the late 1950s and, following his rehabilitation, was again vilified during the Cultural Revolution. Although Mao rehabilitated Deng in the early 1970s, it was not until Mao’s death and the subsequent imprisonment of the Gang of Four that Deng rose to the head of the party. Thus, it is fair to focus on Mao as the dominant personality shaping China’s risk propensity for the two decades of this study.

In North Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh was able to establish his rule with a more subtle hand than Mao in China. Ho preferred the appearance of rule by consensus, seeking to downplay the notion of himself as a dictator; however, Ho’s dominance of North Vietnamese affair is unquestioned through the late 1950s. While Ho sought to portray himself as a Confucian-style nationalist, his allegiance to the communist party was evident based on a long history of obedience to Communist Internationale (Comintern) directives.\textsuperscript{13} As head of the regional communist party in its various iterations, Ho’s control over North Vietnamese foreign affairs was limited only by the influence of his Soviet and Chinese benefactors. Not until the 1960s did Ho’s power begin to decline while Le Duan took a more active and important role.\textsuperscript{14} Also during this period, Vo Nguyen Giap was recognized as a major military leader whose opinions were accorded substantial weight; however, the rise of Giap and Le Duan was largely after the crises

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 321-59.

\textsuperscript{13} William J. Duiker, \textit{Ho Chi Minh} (New York: Hyperion, 2000), 500.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 537.
addressed in this study. Given the long-term dominance of Ho, it is proper to focus on him as the major influence on North Vietnam’s risk propensity.

Kim Il-Sung ruled North Korea from its creation in 1948 until Kim’s death in 1994. By the early 1950s, Kim’s authority in North Korea was complete, as he was able to eliminate the factions within the North Korean Communist Party. Having been placed in power by the Soviets following the de facto division of the Korean state, Kim was essentially a Soviet puppet for the first few years of his rule. Given that would-be challengers to his authority had gravitated toward Seoul following the end of the Second World War under the belief that the split on the peninsula would be temporary and power over the united nation would be based in Seoul, there was only limited competition for power in North Korea. Moreover, Kim’s power base comprised the military and security apparatus allowing Kim to consolidate control quickly and completely. Throughout his reign, Kim tightened his grip on power to a degree even greater than that exercised by his role model Stalin. Perhaps nowhere in the twentieth century have the words “L’etat c’est moi” been more true.

Finally, in the Soviet Union, three major personalities dominated Soviet foreign affairs during the period 1950-70: Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev. Each held the top post in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Stalin’s domination of the state from the late 1920s through his death in 1953 was legendary. Following Stalin’s death a short period ensued where Khrushchev, Georgy Malenkov, and Vyacheslav Molotov shared power, but by 1955, Khrushchev was successful in consolidating his own power and assuming the mantle of

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leadership. While Khrushchev never obtained the power of Stalin and was constrained to some degree by the Politburo, he was able nevertheless to use his position as head of the CPSU to take an active and assertive role in foreign affairs. Following Khrushchev’s ouster in 1964, Leonid Brezhnev emerged as the new chief power in the party. Brezhnev initially shared power with Alexei Kosygin and Nikolai Podgorny, but through the role of First Secretary of the Party Brezhnev established himself as the most influential individual in the state. Brezhnev attempted to rule by consensus in the Politburo rather than through dictatorial power or intimidation; however, as First Secretary, Brezhnev’s opinions received deference. While the argument can be made that with the ascent of Brezhnev, the Soviet Union was removed from the era of a single dominant individual with Brezhnev simply primus inter pares, Brezhnev provides a prime representative of the type of individuals in the Soviet Politburo at this time (older apparatchiki increasingly absorbed in the bureaucracy of party/government and removed from either the theoretician or the working man). Thus, I contend that Brezhnev’s predispositions would have been shared by nearly all of his fellow Politburo members. Accordingly, focusing on Brezhnev should provide an accurate depiction of Soviet risk propensity.

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18 Sergei N. Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev and the Creation of a Superpower*, Translated by Shirley Benson (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University, 2000), 62-63. Khrushchev was successful in operating jointly with Malenkov and Bulgarian to rid himself of the head of the Secret Police, Lavrenti Beria, via execution; however, with Beria disposed of, Khrushchev was able to push the other two out of power and in 1957 to have Malenkov expelled from the CPSU.

19 Discussing the Cuban Missile Crisis, S. Khrushchev notes, “During that period the Presidium generally relied on [Khrushchev]. His word was final. It wasn’t even a matter of personality. Everything was determined by the structure of centralized power . . . .” Ibid., 487.


21 See Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy*, 353, holding that “when Khrushchev was deposed, the nomenklatura as a collective entity became the new supreme chief of the system...[with] Brezhnev stand[ing] as an appropriate symbol for his whole Stalin-bred generation.”
Establishing the Challenger’s Risk Propensity

To establish risk propensity, I employ a combination of psychological and contextual analyses. Jervis’s idea of unmotivated and motivated biases provide a framework for reviewing the psychological influences on risk propensity, while prospect theory’s concepts of determining a baseline, framing the relevant activity, and judging a domain serve as tools for assessing contextual influences on risk propensity.

China’s Intervention in Korea, 1950

Mao hailed from a middle peasant family in a rural area of Hunan and, atypically for a peasant, received both Confucian and western instruction in his early education.22 Experiencing troubled family life, Mao developed a set belief regarding confrontation that foreshadowed his rule decades later: “I learned that when I defended my rights by open rebellion my father relented, but when I remained weak and submissive, he only beat me more.”23 Despite these rows, Mao’s father financed his education through graduation from a teacher’s college in 1918.24

Adopting Marxism in his early twenties, one of Mao’s early assignments was to lead a peasant uprising in Hunan in 1927; however, the event was a dismal failure resulting in Mao’s removal from both the provincial party committee and his post as an alternate member to the “national” Politburo.25 Although Mao ultimately regained power, his thinking process was undoubtedly shaped by the rebuke, as he thereafter displayed a willingness to deviate from party instructions and follow his own ideas when placed in difficult situations.26 Throughout his rise to power, Mao consistently made use of tactical alliances, whether with the Kuomintang, local warlords, or other communist party members, that he would ignore or betray when the balance of

22 Franz Michael, Mao and the Perpetual Revolution (Woodbury, NY: Barron’s, 1977), 2-3; Short, 36. Indeed, Mao’s father was sufficiently wealthy to own land, employ two workers, hold other peasants’ mortgages and even dabble as a grain merchant. Short, 20-26.

23 Short, 29.

24 Ibid., 30-57.


26 Ibid., 46.
power turned in his favor.\footnote{Ibid., 76.} When faced with what he saw as a challenge to his leadership in the CCP by a Moscow sponsored rival backed by the CCP’s 4\textsuperscript{th} Army, Mao permitted the 4\textsuperscript{th} Army to be isolated against the Kuomintang (KMT) so as to “blamelessly” eliminate his rival and then rebuild the force with his own supporters.\footnote{Hunt, 141; Michael, 63-64. This fear of a potential competitor arising out of the military was consistent through Mao’s rule. In the 1950’s he re-organized the military command structure to prevent any of the five armies from dominating an entire region and thereby establishing a base of power. Michael, 89. Later, Mao began to rotate the commanders of the various armies so as to reduce the possibility of a single individual creating a personality clique. In 1965, Mao even abolished official title and insignia of rank in the PLA so as to diminish the “emerging professional officer class” as a source of possible opposition. Michael, 145. Finally, it was likely Lin Biao’s power as the Defense Minister that caused Mao to begin to doubt his right-hand, and ultimately led to the split and removal of Lin.} Upon reaching the pinnacle of power in the CCP, Mao engaged in Stalin-like purges to eliminate potential rivals and staff positions of authority with personal followers.\footnote{Michael, 71-89. Between 1950-1953, it is estimated that between ten to twenty million Chinese were killed as a result of agrarian reform calling for the execution of rich peasants, urban intellectuals, and any one opposed to Mao on virtually any grounds. Michael, 93-94.} By the time the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was officially established, Mao tolerated no dissent, personally controlling all important decisions.\footnote{Nikita Khrushchev describes Mao as “suffering from the same Megalomania Stalin had all his life.” Nikita S. Khrushchev, Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament, Ed. and trans. Strobe Talbott (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974), 252.}

Mao’s relations with the Soviet Union were originally quite good, as Mao followed the Comintern line in cooperating with the KMT in the mid-1920s, despite his personal misgivings.\footnote{Short, 136-47, 161-63. John Lewis Gaddis suggests that Mao was compliant with Comintern orders as late as the 1940s. Gaddis, We Now Know, 59.} However, Mao chafed under the foreign control, suspecting the Soviets of harboring territorial intentions with respect to Manchuria and becoming bitter over Soviet reluctance to fully support the CCP in its battle with the Kuomintang.\footnote{Malia, The Soviet Tragedy, 308; Michael, 55-58, 82-83; Stuart Schram, “Mao Tse Tung and Liu Shao Ch’i, 1939-1969,” Asian Survey 12, no. 4 (April 1972): 275-78. Although it should be}
refused to extend substantial aid to the CCP, claiming the CCP was not involved in a true socialist revolution due to the feudalist conditions still prevalent in China.\textsuperscript{33} Moscow questioned the Marxist credentials of Mao, particularly with Mao’s advocacy of basing the revolution on the power of the peasantry - a radical extension of Lenin’s original modification of Marxism that permitted the peasants to play a supporting role under the leadership of the urban proletariat.\textsuperscript{34} Stalin did not offer support for Mao as the leader of the CCP until July 1938.\textsuperscript{35} For his part, Mao questioned the dogmatism of the Soviet Comintern advisors, holding that revolutionary practices should be adapted to the specific conditions of the area, yet with the CCP dependent on Comintern financial support, Mao had no choice but to accept Soviet authority.\textsuperscript{36}

During this period, Mao rightly perceived that Stalin was more concerned with defending the Soviet Union than with expanding the international socialist revolution, as made clear by his diplomacy with the KMT aimed at restraining the Japanese. In 1936 when Chiang Kai-Shek was kidnapped by a subordinate friendly to the CCP, Stalin intervened to pressure for Chiang’s

\begin{quote}
noted that Stalin did transfer captured (surrendered) Japanese arms to the CCP to aid the communist victory over the Kuomintang. Regarding Mao’s perception of Stalin’s territorial designs, the following exchange between Mao and Khrushchev in a 1958 meeting is illustrative: Khrushchev: “Now do you really consider us as red imperialists?” Mao: “It is not a matter of red or white imperialists. There was a man by the name of Stalin, who took Port Arthur and turned Xinjiang and Manchuria into semi-colonies, and he also created four joint companies. These were all his good deeds.” Vladislav M. Zubok, “The Mao-Khrushchev Conversations. 31 July - 3 August 1958 and 2 October 1959,” Cold War International History Project Bulletin 12/13 (Fall/Winter 2001): 254 (translating conversation of Khrushchev and Mao at Hall of Huaizhentian (Beijing) 31 July 1958).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{33} Hunt, 98.


\textsuperscript{35} Short, 366.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 338. Mao first introduced the idea of “Sinified Marxism” as early as 1938. Schram, “Mao Zedong a Hundred Years On,” 130.
release and to push for a reunification of the CCP with the KMT to fight the Japanese and protect the southwestern Soviet flank.\textsuperscript{37} In 1941 and 1943, Stalin again called for the CCP to deploy troops against the Japanese to prevent a possible Japanese offensive on the Soviet southeastern flank; however, Mao refused due to his belief that engaging in conventional warfare at the time would be disastrous.\textsuperscript{38} Later, following the Japanese surrender, with Mao expecting Soviet support in his battle against the KMT, Stalin’s signing of the August 15, 1945 Soviet-KMT alliance left Mao feeling betrayed and bitter towards the Soviet Union again.\textsuperscript{39} Finally, in 1948, with the CCP clearly winning the battle against the KMT, Stalin advised the communists not to cross the Yangtze to fight for the south, but to be satisfied with controlling just the northern region of China.\textsuperscript{40} Recognizing that Stalin’s advice was motivated by the Russian national interest in a split China rather than by fraternal socialist concern over CCP overextension, Mao took the advice as confirmation of Soviet duplicity and ignored it. Accordingly, the seeds of distrust between Mao and Moscow were sown long before the public split of the late 1950’s. Although the post-Stalin reasons for the split, including the increasing ideological divide between Mao and Khrushchev, Russia’s advocacy of peaceful coexistence with the west, and Mao’s supporting a military struggle against the capitalists as the only proper course, were important, the genesis of the quarrel antedated the passing of Stalin.\textsuperscript{41}

One can also identify a consistent theme of action in the life of Mao. Rather than merely articulating a theory, Mao attempted to bring his theories to practice. Such can be seen in his commitment to the idea of peasant-led rebellion in the face of Comintern opposition, his

\textsuperscript{37} Hunt, 144; Short, 349-61.

\textsuperscript{38} Goncharov, Lewis, and Litai, 8.

\textsuperscript{39} Jian, \textit{Mao’s China and the Cold War}, 28; Short, 401.

\textsuperscript{40} Short, 421.

\textsuperscript{41} Malia, \textit{The Soviet Tragedy}, 309. Indeed, while Khrushchev sought ways to coexist, Mao was suggesting that China could accept “losing three hundred million of his people in a nuclear conflict, because China could still build socialism with the three hundred million that would remain.” Ibid., 343.
unwillingness to submit to others in the Long March, the immediate institution of major agrarian reform and land redistribution upon coming to power, the attempt to bypass the Marxist imperative of socialist development by “fast-tracking” communist policies in the Great Leap Forward, the shelling of Quemoy and Matsu, and the intentional destruction and reformation of the entire CCP during the Cultural Revolution. Despite the colossal failures that resulted, Mao was never daunted from implementing his ideas. Indeed, Mao is often associated with the idea of “perpetual revolution” as a part of his concept of eternal dialectic struggle.  

Mao came to value the importance of force early on. Although this has been traced to the KMT’s preponderance of weapons that permitted it to overwhelm the CCP in the 1927 split of the KMT-CCP alliance, Mao’s appreciation of violence is evident in his reaction to and support for the peasant uprising in China prior to this. “All the [peasant’s] excessive actions were extremely necessary ….To put it bluntly, it is necessary to bring about a brief reign of terror in every rural area….To right a wrong, it is necessary to exceed the proper limits. The wrong cannot be righted without doing so.” As noted by Yang Kuisong, citing the Selected Works of Mao Zedong,

From the Yanan period to the creation of the PRC, Mao had always adhered to the view that "the central task and the highest form of revolution is to seize power through armed struggle and to solve problems through war. This is a

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43 The May 21, 1927 “horse-day incident” in which a KMT commander oversaw the elimination of thousands of CCP, permitting the rural elite to exact revenge on the peasantry now lacking their organized protectors, marks the end of this period of KMT-CCP alliance. Following this, the CCP recognized the need for more than simply organizational and front work. Short, 187-95. The phrase “political power grows from the barrel of a gun” has been traced to the aftermath of this event. Schram, “Mao Zedong a Hundred Year On,” 128.

44 Short, 172-73. Zhisui, 122-25, describes Mao as having great admiration for the use of ruthlessness and cruelty, and being more than willing to sacrifice large numbers of lives in order to restore China to its proper grandeur. Schram, “Mao Zedong a Hundred Years On,” 140, charges Mao with being “addicted to the arbitrary use of terror and violence for political ends.”
Mao’s use of violence was reflected in the numerous party purges and internal “rectification” movements suffered in the CPP, beginning with a series of purges in 1930-31 aimed at eliminating “reactionary infiltrators,” continuing with the Yanan Rectification Campaign of 1941-44, the counter-revolutionary purges of 1950-51, the purge of the “Hundred Flowers” dissidents in 1957, removal of critics of the Great Leap Forward in 1959, and culminating with the Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s. Mao held that a leader should never appear to be soft; that all opponents should be thoroughly destroyed to prevent their mounting a challenge later.

By 1950, Mao had vast experience as a military leader of a guerrilla fighting force and as a political leader of a revolutionary party; however, he had minimal experience in the arena of foreign affairs. His first and only trip outside of China was a visit to the Soviet Union from December 1949 through February 1950. As a revolutionary, his experience in foreign relations came in dealing with the Comintern and with fellow revolutionaries in North Korea and Indochina. In each of these cases, relations were structured in a hierarchic fashion rather than as peers. To the Soviet-run Comintern, Mao was a subordinate, obligated to defer or at least provide the appearance of deferral to Soviet direction. Conversely, Mao considered the neighboring


48 Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 29. Cf: Robert R. Simmons, The Strained Alliance: Peking, Pyongyang, Moscow and the Politics of the Korean Civil War (New York: Free Press, 1975), 49-50, arguing the PLA was ready and able to engage in normal diplomacy in 1949 and sought good relations with the United States. I discount this contention based on Chinese political behavior at the time including seizure of American property, detention of American citizens, repudiation of and refusal to abide by international obligations, and the derogatory public statements issued in the name of the PLA regarding the United States.
Asian revolutionaries inferior to the Chinese culturally, militarily and ideologically.\textsuperscript{49} Thus, Mao had no practical experience in normal relations with sovereign states in the international arena from which to draw comparisons.

This lack of experience influenced Mao’s perceptions and fears. For example, Thomas Christensen asserts that Mao was relatively confident that the United States would not intervene in Korea, although he feared that the United States might send Japanese troops to resist the communist advance.\textsuperscript{50} Clearly, such a course of action would have been politically impossible given the nature of the Japanese domination and occupation of Korea over the prior forty years. Not only would the South Koreans have vigorously rejected such a move, but a U.S. sponsored return of Japanese military might would have alienated all of Southeast Asia by coloring the Americans as imperialists, thus destroying all U.S. credibility. Deployment of Japanese soldiers would have simply delivered all of Asia to the communists on a silver platter. That Mao feared such an event is evidence of his lack of understanding of foreign affairs.\textsuperscript{51}

Another facet of this restricted background was the limited experience Mao had with a conventional state army. Mao’s military background was as a guerrilla strategist exploiting popular discontent and geographic depth. In this, he recognized the differences and difficulties involved in mounting conventional large-unit operations. Indeed, Mao had balked at the premature launch of conventional military offensives favored by the Comintern representatives the early 1930s, and was proven right when communist units were obliterated by superior KMT

\textsuperscript{49} Reflecting his classical education, Mao held on to the idea of China as the Middle Kingdom, center of the civilized world. Mao saw the Chinese revolution as an example of how other Asian states should adapt Marxism to the specific conditions present in the region. Indeed, Mao’s nationalist tendencies have been well discussed and are self-evident in his efforts to gain control of such areas as Tibet, Formosa, and islands in the South China Sea. Yet, Mao was also an internationalist in terms of spreading the socialist revolution abroad and pursuing the ultimate goal of global communism. That he could advocate both nationalism and internationalism without concerns of inconsistency illustrates the principle of unity of the opposites - the dialectic style of thought useful in maintaining ambiguity. See, e.g. Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 6-7.


\textsuperscript{51} In addition it highlights the narrow ideological view of the world held by Mao.
firepower. This series of defeats was the precursor to the destruction of the CCP’s Jiangxi Soviet base area and the famed Long March of 1934-35. Following World War II, when the Chinese Civil War blazed anew, Mao again retreated to the familiar tactics of guerrilla warfare - tactics marked by caution, quick retreat, and avoiding risk. In fact, the ultimate CCP victory resulted more directly from the corruption and incompetence within the KMT leading to its rapid disintegration than from the Communist military operations.

A second obstacle limiting Mao’s ability to properly analyze the conduct of western states was the limited information he had about them. Having never traveled abroad, monolingual, and lacking access to an independent press for most of his life, Mao had a history of restricted information on the United States. His early education was colored by nationalist resentment of western imperial powers imposing injustices on China. Indeed, Mao held the Japanese in high regard for their demonstrating that an Asian country could defeat a European state during the Russo-Japanese War, indicating his deep-rooted anger against western powers even above the more proximate threat of imperial Japan. His primary source of contemporary

52 Short, 295-314.
53 Ibid., 409.
55 Di, 148; Jian, Mao’s China and the Cold War, 42-47; John G. Stoessinger, Nations in Darkness: China, Russia and America, 3rd ed. (New York: Random House, 1978), 49-50; William Stueck, The Korean War: An International History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 45; Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 4-5. This nationalist resentment was even directed towards the Soviet Union as Mao perceived the Soviets as pursuing European imperialist policies towards China when Stalin sought certain concessions in the December 1949 meetings. N. Khrushchev, 241. See also Zubok, 246.
56 Short, 37-38. Of course, Mao feared the possibility of a U.S.- Japanese alliance directed against China as well. Whiting suggests this as one of the primary motivations behind Mao’s intervention in Korea. China Crosses the Yalu, 34.
information on the United States, prior to the formation of the PRC, was official Soviet press. Exposed to a steady diet of Soviet propaganda, Mao was undoubtedly predisposed to see the United States as the primary antagonist. Even after Mao obtained direct access to western media sources, his lack of understanding of an independent media contributed to misperception, as Mao equated published editorials or articles quoting sensationalist Congressional rhetoric as reflective of official government positions.

When Mao did meet U.S. representatives, including the Hurley mission in 1944, he engaged in surface level flattery to try to avoid direct U.S. aid to the KMT, but held out little hope for genuinely good relations. When Chiang Kai Shek rejected the proposal for shared power presented by Major General Hurley, Mao seized on it as evidence of U.S. deception and immediately launched a campaign of criticism against the United States. Both prior to and during General George Marshall’s mission to China to attempt to mediate between the CCP and KMT, rather than engaging in direct talks himself, Mao relied on Zhou En-Lai to negotiate. For Mao, the October 1945 landing of 50,000 U.S. Marines in northeast China colored the subsequent Marshall mission, leading Mao to surmise that the talks were merely a ploy by the

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57 Kalicki, 72; Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 9-10. See also Hong Xuezhi, “The Chinese Peoples Volunteer Forces’ Combat and Logistics,” in Mao’s Generals Remember Korea, eds. Xiaobing Li, et al. (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 115, explaining that PLA generals knew very little about the U.S. military, having only general information about operations in Europe in World War II and some campaigns against the Japanese.

58 Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 169; Shu Guang Zhang, Deterrence and Strategic Culture: Chinese- American Confrontations, 1949-1958 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 44. However, at least by the mid-1950s, Mao was aware of the impact of and paid attention to U.S. national elections. See Zubok, 261-62 (translating conversation of Khrushchev and Mao at Hall of Qinjendiang, 3 August 1958), in which Khrushchev and Mao discuss the coming elections.

59 Cf. Di, 146, who claims Mao genuinely sought good relations with the United States and welcomed the Marshall mission and the attempt to prevent a civil war. This argument is unconvincing in that it repudiates Mao’s nationalist resentment and ideological understanding of the United States. Moreover, Mao’s fanatic and violent brand of Marxism welcomed Civil War.

60 Jian, Mao’s China and the Cold War, 23-24.
Americans to permit the KMT time to consolidate its position. Given this lack of contact and familiarity with the United States, Mao was hampered in his ability to distinguish propaganda from factual information and hence to develop normal relations with the West.

Mao applied his own nationalist sense of the importance of China to the motivations of the United States. That is, the Middle Kingdom represented the most central strategic point on the globe. Given that Mao saw Chiang Kai-Shek as a tool of the west, it could only be expected that the United States would move to restore Chiang or at a minimum to dislodge the CCP. Likewise, Gaddis suggests that Mao perceived the U.S. government as operating under similar devices as his own, such that rule by fiat was the norm. Accordingly, Mao would have drawn on his own experiences of proceeding to action and focusing on the military route and thus would likely have expected the same from the U.S. leadership. Hence, despite the attempts of the United States to avoid direct involvement in the Chinese Civil War, the refusal to aid Chiang Kai-Shek more energetically, and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Korean peninsula prior to the Korean War, Mao would have readily seized upon the continued, if uninspired, support of the United States for Chiang on Formosa as representative of the true intentions of America to eventually eliminate the CCP. This is not to say that Mao expected imminent American involvement in 1950 prior to the Korean War; rather, it is to note Mao’s understanding of the long-term strategic context.

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61 Hunt, 168-69; Jian, Mao’s China and the Cold War, 34; Short, 402-04.


63 Gaddis, We Now Know, 64.

64 Ibid., 64-65. Hence, Mao would not have distinguished between the military authority granted MacArthur in Japan and the ability of MacArthur to make and conduct U.S. foreign policy outside this particular theater. See also, Tsou and Halperin, 99.

65 See Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 11.
Third, despite, or perhaps in furtherance of, some of Mao’s modifications of Marxism-Leninism, his denunciation of dogmatism, and his cultivation of a cult of personality, Mao believed in the principles of communism. In fact, Mao was a fanatical ideologue, driven to implement his unique version of Marxist thought globally. While Mao was more flexible tactically with respect to the existing conditions confronting a revolutionary movement, his core fanaticism cannot be overstated. Mao’s thought evolved over time, yet the principles of dictatorial communism were unchanged. With this, Mao saw the United States as the leader of the capitalist world, the principal opponent to the socialist revolution. Thus, when the United States did intervene in Korea, Mao could have readily conceived of the action as an opening salvo in an imperial attempt at conquest. Moreover, given that the Japanese had entered China through a Korean beachhead twice in the past sixty years, the American presence would naturally be cause for concern.


See Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 23, re Mao’s desire to spread the revolution globally.

For example, Mao originally called for revolution in all countries not supporting the USSR, rejecting the concept of neutrality and adopting a strict dichotomous world order. Petrov, 13; Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 31. Yet, later the idea of a “third way” became a central component of Mao’s thought. A simple explanation would attribute this to the Sino-Soviet split; however, if this were the only reason, Mao could have more easily and more consistently maintained the “either-or” picture by tagging the Soviet leaders as reactionary traitors and categorizing them as part of the imperialist camp (a tactic Mao did increasingly embrace throughout the 1960s). The third way reflects an attempt at a deeper development of Mao’s thought aimed at both creating a separate Maoist school of thought equal or superior to Leninism and thus promoting Chinese ascendancy.

Kalicki, 60; BinYu, “What China Learned from the “Forgotten War” in Korea,” in Mao’s General Remember Korea, eds. Xiaoibing Li, et al. (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 11-13. S. Zhang, 18, asserts that Mao saw a three stage pattern of imperialist intervention; first, provision of materiel aid to reactionary forces, second, imposition of diplomatic isolation, and third, armed attack.
The irreconcilability of Marxism with a nationalist belief in the superiority of Chinese civilization appeared not to bother Mao. Whereas Lenin had opened the door to a tactical alliance of socialist revolutionaries and nationalists, to Lenin this was a short-term expedient. Nationalism was to be used as a tool to mobilize the masses against western influence, but was to be shunted aside once the revolutionary party gained sufficient strength. In other words, nationalism and communism were compatible provided a two-stage framework was observed: first, there should be national unification to evict the imperialists; and second, once independent, the state should work to transform into a socialist state so as to prepare to merge into the union of world brotherhood. Mao, never one to be overly concerned with consistency, effectively dismissed this staged process and promoted Marxist revolution based on the Chinese model.

Adopting the role of a modern Emperor, he made little pretense of democracy or equality, domestically, or post-Stalin, in the second world. For Mao, the global revolution was dependent on Chinese national security and leadership since Maoism represented the only true Marxist thought.

While Mao has occasionally been labeled a pragmatist with respect to foreign policy, primarily based on the Sino-American rapprochement arising in the early 1970s, there is little evidence to suggest Chinese Communist pragmatism prior thereto. The series of crises generated by the Chinese during the 1950s, the Sino-Soviet split beginning in the late 1950s and early 1960s and the foreign policy chaos attendant with the Cultural Revolution in the latter 1960s all point toward ideological extremism far more than pragmatism. Additionally, while the Sino-American relaxation of tensions can be explained in terms of pragmatic balance of power

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70 Indeed, Lenin’s rejection of Marx’s global revolution and adoption of the more practical revolution within a single state, made such an alliance most useful.

71 See e.g. Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History*, 37.

72 See e.g. Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 204, noting Mao’s belief in the cultural and moral superiority of the Chinese way.

73 For an argument that Mao was a pragmatist, see Christensen, 139. Also see S. Zhang, 268, who explains Chinese aid to Indochina and Korea as “purely geopolitical” and separate from ideological motivations.
politics, it can likewise be explained in basic Leninist terms. A fundamental tenet of Leninist thought is the directive to engage in tactical alliances with non-revolutionary actors when helpful to the furtherance of the long term revolutionary goals.\textsuperscript{74} That such an alliance could be aimed at another self-proclaimed Marxist state is hardly evidence of the triumph of real-politik over ideology. By the time of Nixon and Mao’s meeting, Marxists had a long tradition of internecine conflict. Mao’s belief that the Soviets had taken the reactionary path after the death of Stalin and that China was the leader of the true communist revolution provided ideological justification for the foreign policy adjustment towards the United States. Given the pattern of prior behavior, an ideological explanation provides a more convincing rationale, particularly on the heels of the ideological excesses of the Cultural Revolution, than does a sudden attribution of realism.\textsuperscript{75}

Although this evidence is drawn from events subsequent to 1950, so too is the evidence suggesting Mao as a pragmatist. At the time of the intervention in Korea, by most appearances, Mao was a committed ideologue.

Mao was convinced of the accuracy and infallibility of basic Marxist principles, if not the practical application thereof by the Soviets. When faced with internal problems and challenges, Mao typically arrived at the conclusion that someone was improperly or incompletely indoctrinated with revolutionary principles. Further “socialist education” was an elixir capable of remediaying both the largest and smallest of problems. As the corollary to these beliefs, Mao viewed the capitalists as weaker and less resolute than himself and his fellow communists. Once the party made clear to the masses that they were on the correct path, the will of the masses would overcome any advantages the capitalists might have. Accordingly, with a properly indoctrinated army, military victory should be a near certainty.\textsuperscript{76}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{75} Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 83, expressly note Mao’s tendency to conclude temporary alliances with the stronger force in order to build strength.
\item \textsuperscript{76} This serves as a prime example of where rational deterrence theory fails. By analyzing only the objective balance of capabilities and failing to distinguish cultural differences in “reasonable” analysis of capabilities, traditional rational deterrence would measure “rationality” by progress by a measure significantly different than the measure employed by the decision-maker. If we
\end{itemize}

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the Japanese, and of the CCP over the technologically superior KMT had reinforced Mao’s convictions in this regard. Only adventurism or timidity, both the result of faulty education, could sidetrack communist success. Thus, Mao was both engaging in propaganda to spur the masses and asserting his own confidence when he issued declarations describing the United States as a “paper tiger.”

Although Mao considered conflict with the United States inevitable in the long term, like Kim Il-Sung and Stalin, he was surprised at the fervor of the U.S. military reaction to the North Korean invasion, given U.S. policies over the preceding three years. In addition to the withdrawal of troops from mainland Asia and the refusal to become involved in the Chinese Civil War, U.S. officials had made explicit the idea of an island-chain forward defense perimeter in the Pacific. Mao ignored Soviet warnings in 1949 that crossing the Yangtze would invite American intervention, and when U.S. forces failed to intervene, Mao concluded that the United States had written off any possibility of engaging in a mainland war. American bases in Japan, Okinawa, the Philippines, and Guam matched the declarations of U.S. officials who publicly described this security perimeter. Together, these actions and statements evinced a pattern of

understand that Mao placed great emphasis on the difficult to measure concept of indoctrination, we might adjust how we measure rationality.

77 Hunt, 184; Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 16; Kathryn Weathersby, “New Russian Documents on the Korean War,” Cold War International History Project Bulletin 6-7 (Winter 1995/1996): 39 (Document 13: Telegram from Shtykov to Vishinsky, May 12, 1950, citing Mao as telling Kim Il-Sung that “there is no need to be afraid of [the Americans]” as they “will not enter a third world war for such a small country [as Korea].”)


79 Christensen, 142.

80 Interview with General MacArthur, March 1, 1949; “Crisis in Asia - An Examination of U.S. Policy,” Remarks of Secretary of State Dean Acheson before the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., January 12, 1950. DSB V. 22, 116 (January 23, 1950). Both Mao and the Soviets were well aware of this speech and discussed it at a January 17 meeting in Moscow.
behavior indicating U.S. reluctance to become involved militarily in the near future on mainland Asia. Moreover, as late as January 1950, the U.S. House of Representatives rejected legislation providing additional economic assistance to South Korea, indicating a specific disinclination toward American involvement on the peninsula.

Thus, while taken aback at the U.S. intervention, Mao continued to believe that the United States did not have a firm commitment to Korea. By presenting the Americans with a large number of casualties, Mao thought the U.S. forces could be quickly driven off the Korean peninsula. While Mao was not blind to the U.S. superiority in military technology, he continually emphasized the Chinese advantage in manpower. In Mao’s eyes, this advantage was not simply quantitative, but was also qualitative. The fighting spirit and revolutionary fervor of the properly propagandized communist soldier coupled with steadfast leadership made for an unbeatable army. Indeed, this belief in the power of human will as being able to overcome all hardships was central to Maoist thought in not only military affairs, but in economic and political affairs as well. While this is in part an unmotivated bias as discussed infra, it is also in part a

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81 Mao foresaw eventual military conflict involving the United States, but believed the Americans would attempt to rehabilitate Japan first in order to make use of Japanese military potential. Thus, Mao did not expect U.S. intervention until the Japanese military might was at least partially restored. S. Zhang, 20.


83 Du Ping, “Political Mobilization and Control,” in Mao’s Generals Remember Korea, eds. Xiaobing Li, et al. (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 63. For example, an internal Chinese publication in late October 1950 asserted that the reason the allies had been successful in World War II was Russian manpower, not American technology. Stueck, The Korean War: An International History, 112-13. Mao’s inordinate emphasis on numbers was also noted by Nikita Khrushchev, 260-61. In a discussion in the mid-1950s regarding future conflict, Mao reportedly told Khrushchev to compare the number of divisions the United States and its western allies could raise against the number the Soviets and Chinese could field. Khrushchev, professing his own astonishment that Mao could be so simple-minded in disregarding the impact of technology, found Mao’s faith in sheer numerical advantage alarming.

84 Short, 412-14; Tsou and Halperin, 81.
motivated bias in that Mao had constructed his army on a foundation of will rather than tangible capabilities. Having thus built his military, he could not have easily admitted that it was incapable of confronting its major ideological adversary.

Mao’s inexperience in foreign affairs, lack of information, nationalist resentment and ideological extremism all influenced his attitude towards the United States.\textsuperscript{85} Coupled with his motivated biases that shaped his assessment of the United States as a weak and corrupt government susceptible to defeat by a properly educated force, a picture emerges of a distrusting, hostile, single-minded leader, unburdened by unfriendly facts and confident in the superiority of his purpose.

The communists established the People’s Republic of China on October 1, 1949. However, rather than looking to the territory then under PRC control or even the territory that had been under KMT control, Mao considered the territory that had been under Chinese imperial control in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century as his baseline. As evidence, Mao spoke not of acquiring adjacent regions to the west, but instead of restoring control over Tibet, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia.\textsuperscript{86} Despite the fact that Formosa had been under Japanese control since the 1890s, Mao spoke of reunification of Formosa with proper Chinese authority. Consistent with prospect theory’s teaching concerning the failure of people to assimilate losses into their baselines, Mao was operating from a status quo circa 1850 rather than 1950.\textsuperscript{87}

This baseline probably did not include a restoration of Chinese suzerainty over its neighbors, including the Korean peninsula, but it likely did include a dominant relationship. Accordingly, Mao would be loathe to accept foreign troops on the peninsula, although in the

\textsuperscript{85} Paralleling this assessment, Whiting notes the three primary influences on Chinese policy as nationalism, ideology, and the experience of the Chinese Civil War. \textit{China Crosses the Yalu}, 1-2.

\textsuperscript{86} Hunt, 224.

event he was more or less stuck with the Soviet presence. In addition to the direct security threat from foreign troops in Korea, Mao had to be concerned with neighboring states’ perceptions of China if it wished to regain status as a regional hegemon. If China were to permit foreign troops to occupy a neighboring state unopposed, China would suffer a loss of face in the region and would be regarded as impotent in the face of western challenges. Thus, China was concerned not simply with its security at the Korean border, but with establishing a reputation.

To Mao, the mere entry of United Nations (UN) troops in South Korea was a significant problem. The further north these troops pushed, the greater the degree of imminence the threat to Chinese security; however, of more importance than any particular geographic threshold on the peninsula was the simple fact of introduction onto the peninsula. Many prior analyses of this event focus on the decision of MacArthur to send U.S. troops across the 38th parallel, yet, as cogently argued by Chen Jian, Mao was prepared to send Chinese troops into Korea regardless of whether U.S. troops crossed the 38th parallel. Supporting this interpretation is the fact that on August 5, at a time when the North Korean forces were still in good order, Mao ordered his forces in the northeast to be ready for combat by early September. The timing of the Chinese

88 In this vein, the Korean situation served as a latent source of friction for the Sino-Soviet relationship, as the Korean communists in the North were split into factions based upon their prior associations with either the Chinese or the Soviets. See Lankov, 78.

89 Stoessinger, 46, suggests that Mao saw China as the leader of all of Asia, charged with the responsibility of redressing the inequities visited upon Asians by the westerners over the past 150 years.

90 Stephen Walt identifies uncertainty surrounding new regimes as one of the major reasons why involvement in international war often follows domestic revolution. “Revolution and War,” World Politics 44 (1992): 321-68.

91 Short, 427, citing Mao as fearing that success in Korea might “whet the U.S. appetite” and increase the risk of direct attack on the PRC.

92 Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War. See also Christensen, 149, 165-67.

93 Ping, 62. On August 18, the deadline was extended to September 30. Ping, 64.
decision may have been affected, but the problem existed just as surely from U.S. troops in Pusan as in Pyongyang. Had he not intervened, China would face the prospect of fortifying and manning a thousand kilometer border along the Yalu - an expensive proposition and a far less effective means of maintaining the popular mobilization necessary for Mao’s extreme economic reforms.  

Along with the deployment of troops along the eastern seaboard to defend against KMT harassment, creating such a border would result in two long-term commitments of Chinese troops, reducing the ability of Mao to respond to other avenues of approach for the enemies.

In February 1950, the Chinese concluded a security pact with the Soviet Union that had significant influence on Mao’s perception of the strategic context. While intervention in Korea risked U.S. attacks on China, the Sino-Soviet pact was thought to provide a deterrent to U.S. escalation. Although Mao surely did not trust Stalin, he likely did believe that the Americans considered the Sino-Soviet bond tight enough that direct U.S. attacks on China would result in Soviet intervention. When Stalin broached the subject of Chinese intervention in July 1950 and later explicitly requested it in early October 1950, Mao could hardly have voiced a concern regarding Soviet reliability.

Furthermore, as the United States had deployed the Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Straits and pledged financial and materiel aid to the French in Indochina in conjunction with the

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94 S. Zhang, 96-97; Marshal Nie Rongzhzen also cites this indefinite commitment of border fortification as a primary reason for intervention. Nie Rongzhzen, “Beijing’s Decision to Intervene,” in Mao’s Generals Remember Korea, eds. Xiaobing Li, et al. (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 43.

95 Christensen, 156; S. Zhang, 96-97.

96 Signed on Feb. 14, 1950, the pact was ratified and entered into force April 11, 1950.

97 See Weathersby, “‘New Russian Documents on the Korean War,” 43 (Document 18: translation of telegram from Stalin to Zhou En-Lai, dated July 5, 1950, stating in part “We consider it correct to concentrate immediately 9 Chinese divisions on the Chinese-Korean border for volunteer actions in North Korea in case the enemy crosses the 38th parallel. We will try to provide air cover for these units”). Regarding Stalin’s requesting Mao’s intervention in October 1950, see Xiaobing Li, Allen R. Millett and Bin Yu, eds. Mao’s Generals Remember Korea (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 3.
military response to the North Korean assault, Mao perceived the beginning of a strategic encirclement of communist China. Moreover, the growing likelihood that the United States would establish a permanent presence in Japan signaled an enhanced need for some type of buffer. Whiting identifies American policy toward Japan, including a shift from “restriction to rehabilitation of Japanese industry,” a shift from “encouragement to restriction on Japanese labor activity,” and the likely conclusion of a peace treaty with Japan excluding the Soviet Union, as major concerns in China. Noting Mao’s misunderstanding of American command hierarchy, Mao feared MacArthur. The General’s successful reconstruction of Japan, his well-publicized anti-communism, and his proven military track record in the Pacific provided ample cause for concern. Particularly galling to Mao would have been MacArthur’s unequivocal support for the KMT and his public advocacy of ensuring a free Taiwan. With MacArthur now at the helm of a force on mainland Asia, Mao anticipated military action against China. Thus, to Mao, the question was whether to intervene in Korea in hopes of a quick and decisive victory or to cede the initiative to the enemy and risk popular support by turning China into a battleground once again. Permitting the entry of troops into Korea without acting to prevent it surely would have been perceived as a significant loss.

The impact of the congressional elections in the United States on the timing and scope of the Chinese intervention is unclear. Mao sent troops into Korea in October, engaging UN forces in late October and early November; however, he broke contact prior to the November 7th elections, withdrawing to the north. Mao might have been trying to influence the elections by

98 Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 128; Kalicki, 32; S. Zhang, 90; FRUS 1958-1960, Vol. XIX: 309 (Telegram from Embassy Poland to DOS, Sep. 30, 1958, reporting Chinese Ambassador Wang as claiming American purpose in 1950 was to strangle the PRC from three fronts).

99 Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 35-36.

100 Ping, 65. Melvin Gurtov and Byong-Hoo Hwang, China Under Threat: The Politics of Strategy and Diplomacy (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 47, go so far as to explain the Chinese intervention as a pre-emptive attack against the UN force.

101 Shulsky, 9.
presenting the United States with the threat of war. As Mao’s history of relations with the Democratic administrations of Roosevelt and Truman was stormy, he may have been hoping to swing American public opinion away from the Democrats. At the time, a major part of the Republican party was noted for its rejection of internationalist policies; hence, Mao may have believed that a Republican congress would be less apt to maintain a presence in mainland Asia. Arguing against this explanation is Mao’s unfamiliarity with the U.S. political system and party platforms. In the event, the Republicans made gains in both houses but did not wrest control of the Senate from the Democrats. Thus, when Truman, unconstrained by Congressional objections, permitted the offensive to continue in the aftermath of the elections, Mao resumed military intervention on a grand scale.

Nonetheless, Mao faced countervailing pressures working against intervention in Korea. Prior to Kim’s assault, Mao had been preparing to launch a major offensive aimed at taking Formosa and dealing a final death-blow to Chiang Kai-Shek. While he had been advised of Kim’s invasion plans and had not objected thereto in light of Stalin’s support, he did not take part in the military planning and was not advised of the specific timing. Thus, PRC forces had been most recently shaped and trained with amphibious operations against the KMT in mind, a far cry from training for sustained ground warfare against a technologically superior opponent. In addition, Mao still sought to establish control over Tibet and to eliminate KMT remnants in the west. Deploying Chinese troops to the Korean peninsula could conceivably retard his

102 Jian, Mao’s China and the Cold War, 54; Short, 426.

103 Hunt, 181; Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 134; Short, 426. Mao was not aware of the timing, but hoped it would come after his attempt at capturing Taiwan. Jian, Mao’s China and the Cold War, 54. Prior to the 1990s release of documents from Soviet archives proving otherwise, some analysts asserted that Mao was not consulted at all regarding Kim’s attack on the South. See e.g. Gurtov and Hwang, 47.

104 Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 182, also notes the logistical difficulties brought about by not only engaging in conventional warfare for the first time, but doing so abroad.

105 Substantial KMT activity continued in 1950 in Xinjiang and Gansu in the northwest and Sichuan and Yunnan in the southwest. Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 20. Gurtov and Hwang, 31, suggest that some 400,000 KMT remnants were dispersed across China in 1950.
ability to consolidate the gains of the CCP and neutralize the KMT threat. Finally, China was in dire economic straits given the long civil war and eager to engage in domestic reconstruction.\footnote{Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 14-15. Gurtov and Hwang, 25, describe China’s situation in 1950 as “on the verge of total collapse.”} Between 1936, the year prior to the Japanese invasion, and 1949 China’s industrial production dropped by fifty percent, with heavy industry reduced by seventy percent.\footnote{Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 11.} Inflation had pushed the exchange rate of currency in Shanghai from 1,600 to the U.S. dollar to over 35,000 to the U.S. dollar.\footnote{FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 356 (Memo from Bureau of Far Easter Affairs noting remarks of Consul General in Shanghai, June 2, 1956).} In his December 1949 pilgrimage to Moscow, Mao received minimal economic help from Stalin, securing only $300 million from the Soviets in the form of a loan with interest.\footnote{Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 29. Per a report from the U.S. Consul General in Shanghai, Mao was seeking financial aid in the neighborhood of $5 billion in addition to heavy industrial equipment and military materiel for an invasion of Taiwan. FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 291 (Telegram from Consul General in Shanghai to Secretary of State, Jan. 21, 1950). Moreover, less than a month after this loan agreement, the Soviets announced a devaluation of the ruble, effectively further reducing the value of the loan by nearly one-fourth. American Foreign Policy 1950-1955: Basic Documents, Vol. II: 2466 (Secretary of State Speech, Mar. 15, 1950). Cf. Stueck, The Korean War: An International History, 39, who asserts Mao chose this small amount so as to avoid saddling the PRC with high foreign debt. That Mao would choose such an amount seems questionable since $300 million over five years would hardly affect the Chinese economy. If foreign debt was perceived as this important to avoid, then Mao would not have likely made the significant concessions to the Soviet Union in conjunction with the loan that he did. Note the loan agreements came well before agreement on the Sino-Soviet treaty.} Food shortages throughout China left millions dead due to starvation and millions more living in near starvation conditions.\footnote{FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 304 (Telegram from Consul General in Shanghai to Secretary of State, Feb. 1, 1950); 318-19 (Telegram from Consul General in Shanghai to Secretary of State, Mar. 16, 1950).} Financing a military action in Korea would severely undermine the civil economy. Accordingly, Mao had substantial independent reasons to avoid conflict with the United States so early in the life of the state.\footnote{FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 318-19 (Telegram from Consul General in Shanghai to Secretary of State, Mar. 16, 1950).}
While such considerations might seem to point toward refraining from intervention in a foreign conflict, Mao may have seen the domestic troubles as all the more reason to engage in foreign adventure. By rallying the masses against the “imperialist invaders,” Mao could mobilize the population to accept continued deprivations and could justify further purges and crackdowns aimed at consolidating CCP rule and instituting revolutionary ideals in the name of repelling the Americans. Indeed, such a scheme would be in consonance with the Marxist concept of creating a “new man” by eliminating the reactionaries and establishing a communist utopia. Thus, driven by his ideological fanaticism, but cognizant of his still tenuous hold on power, Mao could have welcomed the opportunity to intervene. Carefully played, it would provide a basis for adopting totalitarian measures while simultaneously ingratiating the CCP to the masses for defending the homeland against the western threat. Although such a maneuver risked inciting a general war with the United States, Mao was confident that should fighting

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111 I place no significance on Mao’s calling the Chinese intervention force the “Chinese People’s Volunteer (CPV)” force. This was simply a propaganda tool for domestic consumption rather than a serious attempt at disguising the fact that the CPV comprised PLA units. Cf. Allen S. Whiting, “China’s Use of Force, 1950-96, and Taiwan,” International Security 26, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 107-08, who cites this as an indication of Mao’s attempt to minimize risk of U.S. retaliation.

112 Jian, Mao’s China and the Cold War, 11-14; Short, 436; Watman and Wilkening, 37; Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 159. See Christensen for a book-length explication of this argument.

113 George Kennan had attributed this very type of thinking to the Soviet leadership in his famous “Mr. X” article: “[S]ince capitalism no longer existed in Russia and since it could not be admitted that there could be serious or widespread opposition to the Kremlin springing spontaneously from the liberated masses under its authority, it became necessary to justify the retention of the dictatorship by stressing the menace of capitalism abroad.” “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” Foreign Affairs 25 (July 1947): 566-82. Between April and September 1950 the PRC successfully “inactivated” 60,000 alleged KMT “bandits;” in October 1950 PLA troops invaded Tibet. Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 82-83; 145.

114 Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 129; Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 15. Such would be in stark contrast to the perception of the KMT as having permitted the Japanese invasion due to KMT focus on the CCP.
occur in China, the defense in depth guerrilla principles he had employed in the past, as well as
the deterrent power of the Soviet atomic bomb would permit him to prevail.\textsuperscript{115}

With a baseline of imperial Chinese power rather than modern Chinese power, and with
the option of doing nothing clearly located in the domain of losses, the practical arguments
against intervention would likely have been overcome by the perceived dangers of inactivity.
Having only recently come to power, Mao was less susceptible to the status quo bias that
dampens risk propensity. Moreover, the Chinese notion of crisis as a synthesis of danger and
opportunity would not have scared away the ideologically driven leadership of China,
particularly one bent on “perpetual revolution” and thus in need of consistent popular
mobilization. Accordingly, when looking at both psychological and contextual indicators prior
to October 1950, the Chinese leadership would be assessed as particularly risk acceptant.

\textbf{Chinese Attack on Taiwan, 1950}

Having fought the KMT for nearly twenty years, Mao was determined to finish off
Chiang Kai Shek with a final assault against the KMT stronghold in Taiwan. Mao believed
based on the American policies since the end of World War II that the United States would not
intercede to save Chiang.\textsuperscript{116} Moreover, Mao held that the U.S. call in the Cairo Declaration for
Japan to return Formosa to the then in office government of China was proof that his incumbent
government of China had legal title to the island of Formosa.\textsuperscript{117} As the PRC had succeeded the
KMT as the de facto government of China, Mao argued that it thus had successor rights over
Taiwan as well. Therefore, believing that international law was on his side, and mindful of the
Truman administration’s pledges not to become involved in the Chinese Civil War, Mao saw the

\textsuperscript{115} This topic will be addressed more fully in the section on escalation of the Korean War into a
general war, infra.

\textsuperscript{116} Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 98, describe Mao’s perception of the January 1950 statements
from the White House as a “green light” to go forward with operations against Taiwan.

\textsuperscript{117} This was pursuant to the Cairo Declaration released December 1, 1943. Of course these
arguments based on past circumstances and policies conveniently omit the fact that in 1936 with
the KMT in power in China, Mao expressly supported Formosa’s independence from China.
attack on Taiwan as a domestic matter that might provoke protests from the United States, but not action.\textsuperscript{118}

To Mao, the invasion of Taiwan would be the final chapter to conclude the Chinese Civil War. Firm in his belief in the superiority of the communist soldier, Mao focused on the numeric advantage enjoyed by the PRC over the KMT. An amphibious attack against Quemoy in October 1949 had been soundly defeated; however, in April 1950, the CCP had launched a successful amphibious invasion of the KMT-held island of Hainan, inflicting approximately 33,000 KMT deaths and capturing the entire breadth of the island in only two weeks.\textsuperscript{119} Hainan Island, located off the southeastern coast, represented an operational trial for the techniques to be used in the planned invasion of Taiwan. Roughly the same size as Taiwan in terms of total area, although far less populous, less well defended, and nearer to the Chinese mainland, the Hainan operation gave the CCP a chance to evaluate their amphibious capabilities.\textsuperscript{120} Buoyed by the success of the invasion, Mao envisioned an attack on Taiwan in summer 1950, notwithstanding the PRC’s dearth of air power and landing craft.\textsuperscript{121}

Stalin had originally counseled against pursuing an armed attack against Taiwan, expressly advising Liu Shaoqui in his summer 1949 trip to Moscow to avoid such an operation; however, following the January 1950 statements from Washington, Stalin reversed course and

\textsuperscript{118} On January 5, 1950, President Truman announced that the “United States Government will not pursue a course which will lead to involvement in the civil conflict in China. Similarly, the United States Government will not provide military aid or advice to Chinese forces on Formosa.” \textit{DSB} V. 22, 79 (Jan. 16, 1950).

\textsuperscript{119} Whiting, \textit{China Crosses the Yalu}, 21; S. Zhang, 72. In May, the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Field Army successfully took the Chusan Islands off the coast of Shanghai, further adding to Mao’s confidence. However, the defeat in Quemoy did serve to clarify for Mao the need for Soviet naval and air assistance for the coming assault on Taiwan. Stueck, \textit{The Korean War: An International History}, 38.

\textsuperscript{120} Both Hainan and Taiwan comprise approximately 13,250 square miles.

\textsuperscript{121} Kalicki, 44; Whiting, \textit{China Crosses the Yalu}, 22. Jian, \textit{China’s Road to the Korean War}, 98-101, holds that Mao placed greater emphasis on the Quemoy defeat and had delayed the final assault on Taiwan until 1951.
agreed to sell China aircraft necessary for such an invasion.\textsuperscript{122} Stalin’s policy switch could have been due to a desire to demonstrate good will to the Chinese in the face of the American attempt at driving a wedge between China and the Soviet Union, or a straight-forward desire to expand the communist holdings in the Pacific.\textsuperscript{123} In either event, the Soviet materiel backing only furthered Mao’s belief that Taiwan was ripe for the taking.

Truman’s deployment of the Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Straits in reaction to the Korean invasion enraged Mao.\textsuperscript{124} Indeed, in the first weeks following the invasion, official Chinese statements focused much more heavily on the American actions in the Taiwan Straits than on the deployment of U.S. troops to Korea. Mao considered the American action to be an about-face from the President’s statements in January and emphasized the perceived treachery of the Americans in mobilizing anti-American sentiment domestically. Clearly, the introduction of the Americans into the Taiwan Strait was perceived as a major loss.

Mao’s baseline included Taiwan as part of China proper. Permitting the KMT to survive, and permitting it to occupy what Mao perceived as the sovereign territory of China both were seen as unacceptable. As long as the KMT survived, dissatisfied elements on the mainland would have a source of inspiration as well as materiel support. As long as Taiwan remained outside the grasp of Beijing, China would continue to be subject to the depredations imposed by imperial powers and would be prevented from regaining its rightful regional hegemony.

In addition, should he leave an enemy occupied Taiwan only 115 miles across the Taiwan Strait, Mao feared that the island could be used militarily in the eventual inevitable conflict with the United States. Shu Guang Zhang argues that Mao was concerned over immediate joint U.S.-KMT action launched from Taiwan;\textsuperscript{125} however, while probably true to some degree, I discount

\textsuperscript{122} Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 79; 98-100.

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 100, assert the former claiming Stalin’s distrust of Mao caused him to become concerned over the possibility of normalization of PRC-U.S. relations. However, the reversal came only after Mao’s “leaning to one side” statement and while Mao was already in Moscow.

\textsuperscript{124} Christensen, 161-62.

\textsuperscript{125} S. Zhang, 66-67.
the significance of this concern based on the evidence available to Mao at the time. First, had the United States strongly desired to perpetuate Chiang’s rule, it could have intervened during the Chinese Civil War from 1945-49, during a time when the U.S. was still mobilized for war, when 50,000 U.S. troops were in China, and when the balance of forces favored the KMT. Yet the United States refrained from intervening. Second, the initial diplomatic salvos of the Cold War had already been fired: the Truman Doctrine was promulgated in March 1947; the Marshall Plan had been developed in summer 1947; the Berlin blockade occurred in 1948; NATO was founded in April 1949. Yet, despite these extraordinary developments clearly delineating the significance of the international split, America had not opted to become militarily involved in China. Third, the United States had removed its troops from Korea in 1949, indicating its reluctance to overextend limited U.S. military resources at a time when America still embraced a Europe-first policy. Fourth, the Soviet Union had detonated a nuclear bomb in August 1949, providing all the more incentive for the United States not to intervene in China. In sum, even with his limited information about and understanding of the United States and with his perceptions distorted by ideological blinders, Mao would not have been overly concerned of significant U.S. activity emanating from Taiwan in early 1950. Given this apparent U.S. reticence, Mao would not have expected U.S. forces to engage the CCP during the PLA invasion. However, each day that the KMT remained on the island permitted them to become more entrenched and to fortify the island’s defenses against attack.

Prior to the onset of the Korean War, China unquestionably perceived the continued KMT presence on Taiwan as residing within the realm of losses. Accordingly, even though an amphibious operation was a risky and complex task, pushed by his belief in complete annihilation of the enemy, his inclination towards action, and his inordinate belief in the communist soldier, Mao would have opted for a quick attack in spite of the operational difficulties. Coupled with the domestic importance of destroying the KMT, China would have been particularly risk-acceptant in acting against Taiwan.

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126 Chinese leadership took note of the Europe-first policies of the United States. Ping, 63.
Expansion of the Korean War into General War, 1950-1953

China: After China’s initial successes in Korea in November and December 1950, the Chinese offensive bogged down. By February 1951, it was becoming apparent that the Chinese would not enjoy a quick victory as originally hoped for by Mao. Accordingly, Mao, Stalin, and Kim Il-Sung had to decide whether they were willing to escalate the situation into a general war with the west.

Following their first contacts with American forces in late October and early November 1950, the Chinese produced a publication “Primary Conclusions of Battle Experiences at Unsan” articulating the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the American forces. Significantly, the Chinese focused on what they considered the poor quality of the individual American soldiers, describing them as quick to retreat, afraid to advance, and completely dependent on the technological capabilities of their weaponry. In addition, the Chinese believed that the Americans were fighting an unjust war in Korea, thereby lessening U.S. soldiers’ motivation to fight. How much of this assessment was propaganda designed to enhance morale is unclear; however, the themes echo Mao’s mantra regarding the superiority of the properly indoctrinated soldier. If the writing was not directed by Mao, it would have reinforced Mao’s prior beliefs and strengthened his determination to continue. Supporting the idea that Mao believed he was winning a great victory in Korea was a report from the Dutch Charge in Beijing relating the celebratory mood there and describing Chinese officials as “carried away with their success.”

Mao considered the presence of American troops on mainland Asia to be a change in the status quo that threatened the vital interests of the PRC. However, when it became apparent that the United States would not cross the Yalu River into Chinese territory with air power much less ground troops, this threat lessened in intensity. Mao undoubtedly still foresaw an eventual total


129 FRUS 1951, Vol. VII: 50 (Telegram Ambassador in Netherlands to Secretary of State).
conflict with the United States, but was likely surprised by the willingness of the U.S. leadership to acquiesce in the conduct of limited war in Korea. Whether Mao attributed this to an American reluctance to get dragged into an even larger ground war with its increased casualty figures, to the restraining pressure placed on the United States by its allies, or to the deterrent power of the Soviet nuclear threat is unclear. However, Mao’s ability to escalate was dependent on his Soviet sponsors acquiescence, which had not and ultimately would not be forthcoming. Lacking indigenous air power, sufficient mechanized infantry, and logistical capability, Mao’s forces could do no better than hold the original line.

Accordingly, Mao was confronted with a familiar type of engagement - a long-term battle of attrition dependent on will more than technology. Mao fully expected the Americans to lose heart after a short time, counting on American public opinion to do what Chinese military forces could not - expel the American armed forces from Korea. Given his ideological fanaticism, his penchant for action, and his comfort with sacrificing lives, Mao would not have shied away from, at a minimum, continuing the war in Korea. Moreover, a sustained limited war permitted Mao to maintain the mobilization effort at home helpful in implementing the drastic economic and political policies of the communists, while escaping the threat of regime change should the war effort fail. Between October 1950 and May 1951, nearly 2.5 million dissidents were arrested in China and approximately 700,000 executed. However, by 1953, with Eisenhower now in charge in Washington, Mao began to worry that the U.S. acceptance of a limited war was fading and that the Americans might seek to escalate matters in Korea.

Working against Chinese initiated expansion, China’s economic condition was barely capable of supporting the war effort in Korea. In 1950, defense expenditures amounted to some 38% of the national budget, while in 1951 Mao was faced with the situation where defense consumed 46% of the PRC national budget. On the heels of the long civil war, and having

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130 Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 194 (citing an internal Chinese document from 1954).

131 Stueck, Rethinking the Korean War, 172.

132 Hunt, 192. Bin Yu, 25, provides Chinese government estimates of defense spending at 41.4% (1950), 43% (1951), 32.9% (1952), and 34.2% (1953) of total annual government expenditures for the PRC. Yang Kuisong places 1950 defense expenditures at 52% of the budget, although he
alienated most of the countries able to provide the necessary capital for reconstruction, committing the resources to a long-term struggle in Korea threatened to overwhelm the PRC economically. Moreover, escalation of the war would only exacerbate things by inviting attacks on the vital industrial centers in Manchuria that U.S. policy in the limited war had to date spared.\footnote{Whiting, \textit{China Crosses the Yalu}, 50.} These economic troubles involved dual risks. First, continued economic devastation could rejuvenate support for the KMT, and second, China would be drawn into even greater dependency on the Soviet Union.\footnote{As it was, simply maintaining the war effort in Korea greatly increased Chinese dependence on Soviet military materiel assistance. Stueck, \textit{The Korean War: An International History}, 218-19.}

With a history of perceived Soviet duplicity, most recently exhibited in Stalin’s eve of battle notification that Soviet air power would not be forthcoming until 8-10 weeks into the war, Mao could not have been comfortable with the idea of having to rely on Soviet defenses.\footnote{Jian, \textit{Mao’s China and the Cold War}, 58. In the event, Soviet air cover was present in China from the beginning of the Chinese intervention. Of note, one scholar suggests that the alleged Soviet backsliding on the pledge of airpower was invented by Zhou En-lai in an attempt to persuade Mao to adopt Zhou’s supposed favored policy of not intervening in Korea. By this account, Stalin consistently followed his promise to provide air cover. See Alexandre Y. Mansourov, “Stalin, Mao, Kim, and China’s Decision to Enter the Korean War, September 16 - October 15, 1950: New Evidence from the Russian Archives,” \textit{Cold War International History Project Bulletin} 6-7 (Winter 1995/1996): 103.} While Stalin would clearly have expended great resources to defend northern China, including the important industrial region in the northeast and the areas abutting Soviet republics in the northwest, it is less certain that Stalin would have gone to great lengths to defend south of the
Yangtze. In fact, Mao might have already questioned Stalin’s motives in placing China in charge of the eastern revolution. While Stalin would not have welcomed American forces in southern China, he may well have believed that should U.S. forces take southern China in an escalated war, they would remain there only temporarily and would withdraw upon the installation of a pro-western government. Should this have occurred, Mao would have been in a far less amenable position to exert influence in the rest of Asia, diminishing his potential as a threat to the USSR.

A second reason suggesting reluctance due to Sino-Soviet relations was the fact that the Soviets provided materiel to the Chinese in terms of loans rather than grants. Mao resented the Soviet demand of payment when China was bearing the brunt of fighting in costs of lives.\(^\text{136}\) Expansion of the war would only have created greater Chinese debt while simultaneously inflicting greater damage on their ability to repay.

In terms of a baseline, China had originally operated from a position wherein South Korea was free of western troops. The 1949 withdrawal of American troops had been assimilated into the Chinese reference point. As the war progressed into 1951 and the fourth offensive failed, Mao was forced to revise his thinking. At this point, he probably realized that the Chinese lacked the capability to conquer the entire peninsula and were dependent on the degree of Soviet assistance they would receive. Accordingly, Mao’s reference point likely changed to incorporate an American presence in the south, while maintaining Kim’s regime in the north, as it was apparent that the Americans were unwilling to expend the effort necessary to conquer the entire peninsula either.\(^\text{137}\) Acceptance of a cease-fire and return to the status quo ante in terms of territorial demarcation would likely mean the continued long-term presence of American troops in mainland Asia; however, the simple fact that an Asian country had been able to stand up to the westerners and fight to a draw would gain China great respect in the region. While China might prefer the expulsion of all western troops, the PRC had been in existence for


\(^{137}\) Hunt, 192, identifies Mao’s switch in goals as occurring around June 1951, while Christensen, 173, places the change as taking place four to five months earlier.
little more than a year and could not realistically hope to leap from a civil war combatant to international superpower in such a short time period. Thus, China could frame the events in terms of intangible gains rather than in stark territorial or physical terms. By so doing, Mao could have seen maintenance of the limited war as a positive. Given the reduced American threat attendant with acceptance of limited war, and the even balance of factors pushing toward and against escalation, expansion of the war into a general war would have led to a relatively risk neutral posture.

Soviet Union: The Soviet Union and the United States held the key votes with respect to escalation of the Korean War. Without Soviet approval and assistance, Mao was limited in his ability to raise the stakes. This is not to say that Mao had no influence on the situation, but simply to recognize that Stalin would make the final determination.

Stalin was born to a peasant family in Georgia, but was provided with an education beyond his means, studying for the priesthood as a teen. While at seminary, Stalin became acquainted with and adopted Marxism. Although reasonably successful academically, Stalin’s power was obtained via his strong will more than through intellectual accomplishment. Of note, Stalin’s character was likely shaped by a series of events all pointing to the emergence of a distant, insecure personality that may have resulted in a “descent into madness” in his latter


\[139\] Ibid., 25.
years. A substantial component of Stalin’s success was his ability to overcome setbacks and his connection with the more earthy Russian commoners.

Stalin’s modus operandi was more of a plodder than a sprinter. Although quite willing to embark on a course of blood-letting to accomplish a goal, Stalin was often slow to act in times of crisis and was given to long-term attrition strategies rather than innovative brilliance. Such would of course indicate a reluctance to act in the face of uncertainty and suggest a certain risk-averse character. Not beholden to short-term ideological consistency, Stalin’s main goal appeared to be the acquisition and consolidation of personal power. Thus, characteristic of Stalin’s caution was the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact that sought to shift the burden of containing Hitler to the western powers while the Soviet Union stood pat.

140 These events include his experience under a drunken abusive father who passed away when Stalin was only ten years old; his attendance at better schools where he was among the poorest of any of the students; his somewhat diminutive physical stature (he was only 5’4); the death of his first wife after only two years of marriage when Stalin was only 28; his status as a Georgian in a party and state dominated by Russians; and the suicide of his second wife after an argument. See Conquest, 2-44; Martin Malia, Russia Under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 303.

141 Stalin survived multiple arrests and deportation to Siberia to return to power with the Bolsheviks. This ability to rebound plays well with the Slavic notion of the long-suffering Russian soul, destined to failure and defeat, but noble through perseverance. Stalin might thus be seen as epitomizing the traditional Russian “inferiority complex” longing for western acceptance. See FRUS 1946, Vol. VI (reprinting George F. Kennan’s Long Telegram).

142 Conquest, 69. For example, to obtain cooperation from his own people with forced agricultural collectivization, Stalin permitted millions to perish from starvation. Party sponsored trial and executions of rich peasants or kulaks made clear the immediate consequence of resistance, while the cheaper policy of deliberate indifference to the peasants’ suffering took time, but accomplished the goal. Conquest, 164-65. In another instance, when the Soviets obtained a downed U.S. B-29 in 1945, allowing the renowned Soviet aircraft engineer Andrei Tupolev a chance to study the design, Tupolev was summoned to Moscow to present his findings to Stalin. While Tupolev argued for learning from the American plane but moving forward with new designs as the B-29 would be obsolete by the time Soviet production facilities could come on-line, Stalin ordered the Soviet engineer to produce an exact replica. As noted by Sergei Khrushchev, “Stalin tried to avoid even the lightest risk. The [plane was to] be exactly the same as the American one. That would guarantee success.” S. Khrushchev, 45.
In foreign affairs, Stalin’s basic policy appeared to be to push as far as possible but to retreat when met with real opposition.\textsuperscript{143} Parroting the party line, Stalin held the west to be the enemy of the people.\textsuperscript{144} Vilification of the United States also served a significant domestic purpose: by holding America out as a great threat, Stalin established justification for the continued imposition of a police state internally.\textsuperscript{145} In addition, Stalin must have recalled the western powers’ deployment of troops to Russia during the Russian Civil War to attempt to assist in the defeat of the Bolsheviks. However, while Stalin made use of anti-western rhetoric, his primary concern was safeguarding his position of power domestically. This is not to deny his desire to expand the Soviet empire, but suggests that he would likely be less risk acceptant than some of the junior Asian communist leaders.\textsuperscript{146}

Stalin’s paranoia was legendary. The purges from the CPSU and the armed forces contributed greatly to restraining the power Stalin was able to extract via his otherwise effective,

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{143} Conquest, 280; Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, 198-99.

\textsuperscript{144} Henry Kissinger, Diplomacy (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 448 (observing “Stalin regarded the Western capitalist powers as irrevocably hostile”).

\textsuperscript{145} Of course, this totalitarian state was also deemed necessary due to the “traitors to socialism.” Such failures were seen as the failure of Party cadres to properly motivate and educate the citizenry rather than the failure of the theoretical (or implemented) system.

\textsuperscript{146} Kissinger, Diplomacy, 333, notes Stalin’s “incredible patience,” describing him as the ultrarealist who firmly believed in the Marxist-Leninist idea of history moving inexorably toward a communist triumph. Thus, Stalin’s role was simply to move the process along where possible, but to adopt Lenin’ tactical alliance strategy regardless of ideology in protection of the gains already amassed. William Tow, Encountering the Dominant Player: U.S. Extended Deterrence Strategy in the Asia-Pacific (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 151, describes Stalin as “desperately fearing” a superpower clash. John Lewis Gaddis, The Long Peace: Inquiries Into the History of the Cold War (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 44, describes Stalin as “motivated by insecurity and characterized by caution.” Petrov, 10, 24, assesses Stalin as “a pragmatic politician with no taste for gambling” but as believing World War III was “inevitable.” American officials considered Stalin as “very cautious,” and unlikely to launch a war “unless the odds were overwhelmingly in his favor.” FRUS 1950, Vol. VII: 523 (Meeting of American, British and French Representatives, Aug. 3, 1950).
\end{footnotesize}
albeit ruthless, totalitarian style of rule.\textsuperscript{147} This mistrust extended to the realm of foreign relations.\textsuperscript{148} Stalin always maintained the basic Marxist imperative that capitalism contained the seeds of its own destruction in that economic competition inevitably would lead to conflict among the capitalist states, into which the Soviet Union would eventually be drawn.\textsuperscript{149} Still, Stalin was in no hurry to rush headlong into conflict and instead attempted to strengthen the Soviet Union militarily so that when the war did arise, the Soviets would be in position to more easily obtain their destined triumph.\textsuperscript{150}

Stalin’s rise to the top was built not on risk-taking but on a deliberate, brutal consolidation of power. Soviet military operations in World War II followed the same pattern of workman-like perseverance. Bludgeoning its way to success on the eastern front, Soviet leadership showed little flair for innovation or initiative. Thus, when Mao adopted unorthodox methods in leading the CCP to victory, Stalin was skeptical.\textsuperscript{151} Rather than welcoming Mao to the socialist bloc, Stalin saw a potential great power competitor to be monitored closely. Yet, Stalin’s shrewd nature also saw an opportunity to make use of this new wellspring of ideological

\textsuperscript{147} See e.g. A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, \textit{The War Ledger} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 74-103 (noting the enhanced extractive power of an authoritarian style of government compared to a democratic government).

\textsuperscript{148} Kissinger, \textit{Diplomacy}, 296, 336-37, describes Stalin’s position as one of “congenital distrust of the Western democracies,” and “paranoia about a capitalist anti-Soviet cabal.”

\textsuperscript{149} Gaddis, \textit{We Now Know}, 195; Goncharov, Lewis, and Litai, 2; Petrov, 24.

\textsuperscript{150} Stalin is quoted as telling the Yugoslavs in April 1945, “The was will soon be over. We shall recover in 15 or 20 years, and then we will have another go at it.” Conquest, 280. Gaddis, \textit{We Now Know}, 160, describes Mao as believing that Stalin was “intimidated by the prospect of war.”

\textsuperscript{151} As late as December 1949, Molotov is reported to have advised Stalin that Mao was “far from being a Marxist.” Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 88.
zealotry by creating new obstacles for the west, while maintaining a cautious distance from the
front.\textsuperscript{152}

In meetings with Mao’s emissary, Liu Shaoqui, in the summer of 1949, Stalin had
expressed the desire that although the Soviet Union should remain the leader of the international
socialist movement, China should take responsibility for promoting the revolution in the east.\textsuperscript{153}
While intended to flatter the Chinese, Stalin also saw an opportunity to constrain Chinese power.
By charging the CCP with aiding the revolution in the east, Stalin might direct Chinese power
away from the Sino-Soviet border while also preventing a U.S.-Sino alliance against the Soviet
Union.\textsuperscript{154} Moreover, should the Chinese come into conflict with the west, Stalin stood to see
both Chinese and western power diminished - both to his long-term benefit.

It is clear that both Mao and Stalin were true believers in Marxism-Leninism as well as
having nationalist concerns. The contrast lies in the reconciliation of these competing
motivations. Mao meshed Chinese nationalism with the Marxist principles to form a new
Chinese Marxist school of thought founded on constant frenzied revolutionary activity both
domestically and abroad. Conversely Stalin took a far more cautious approach wherein he
simply placed nationalist security concerns above ideology, rationalizing that the revolution had
not yet reached the stage that socialist ideals could be freely exported without threatening the
progress to date. Thus, Stalin’s manner was far more risk-averse in general.

In 1950, Stalin was still facing the economic reconstruction of the Soviet Union
following the devastation wreaked by the Nazis. In addition, Stalin was facing stiff resistance to
Soviet advances in Europe. Having opened new political fronts in the east, Stalin originally
discounted the idea of American intervention; however, once it had occurred and Stalin was able
to assess its limited nature, Stalin sought to extend U.S. commitments beyond their breaking

\textsuperscript{152} When U.S. officials approached Stalin about discussions of ending the war, Stalin held that
the United States needed to talk to China, claiming he had only limited influence over the
Chinese. Foot, 228.

\textsuperscript{153} Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 74; Id, Mao’s China and the Cold War, 3.

\textsuperscript{154} Duiker, 422.
point.\textsuperscript{155} America’s demobilization and commitment to a Europe-first policy would have provided Stalin with confidence that the United States would not engage in China on a magnitude sufficient to threaten Soviet security.

Whether Stalin was the precipitating force behind Kim’s invasion or acquiesced to Kim’s determined lobbying is less important than the fact that Stalin made sure to maintain a cautious distance permitting flexibility of policy.\textsuperscript{156} Keeping with character, Stalin used the North Korean invasion as a tool to test both the United States and China.\textsuperscript{157} When the United States failed to use air power against the Soviet lines of communication or even to destroy the bridges crossing the Yalu following Chinese intervention, Stalin became more emboldened, permitting Soviet air power, anti-aircraft artillery, and even some mines to be used in North Korea.\textsuperscript{158} Still, Stalin refused to deploy Soviet infantry, armor, naval units or bombers in North Korea.

\textsuperscript{155} As to Stalin’s surprise at American intervention, see Kathryn Weathersby, “New Findings on the Korean War,” Cold War International History Project Bulletin 3 (Fall 1993): 14; Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 76-77, suggest Stalin may have feared a preemptive American attack following the Soviet detonation of an atomic weapon in August 1949. However, with Truman’s announcement in early 1950 that the United States was going to pursue a thermonuclear weapon, fear of a preemptive American military attack should have largely dissipated.

\textsuperscript{156} \textit{FRUS} 1950, Vol. VII: 483 (Telegram Ambassador in USSR to Secretary of State, Jul. 27, 1950).


\textsuperscript{158} Foot, 137, citing George Marshall. Following the Inchon landing, Stalin retreated to his normal cautious approach, refusing to provide Soviet air cover for Mao until he saw what the U.S. response would be to Chinese intervention.
When the limited range of Chinese forces became apparent in early 1951, Stalin faced the choice of increasing Soviet participation in an attempt at victory, maintaining the same participation in an attempt to keep U.S. troops occupied in a peripheral theater, or withdrawing assistance and accepting American victory. The first option appears out of character for the Soviet leader and contrary to the existing economic and military conditions of the time. Kim had sold Stalin on the invasion under the idea that once North Korean troops “liberated” Seoul, the masses in the south would rise up against Syngman Rhee and complete the communist quest. When the uprising failed to materialize by early July, Stalin likely recognized that North Korean forces would be unable to accomplish the objective without assistance. Unwilling to risk direct military confrontation with the United States, Stalin would have rejected escalation. The latter option would permit the first defeat of a Soviet installed communist government. As the Soviet empire in central and eastern Europe was still in its formative stages, Stalin would have feared the signal that communist defeat would have sent.\(^{159}\) The entry of American forces was less a concern to Stalin than Mao as this would serve to tie down both U.S. and Chinese forces indefinitely along the Yalu, creating greater freedom of action for the Soviets.\(^{160}\) Thus, the middle option would appear the most favorable to Stalin. Supporting this assessment is the Pravda interview with Stalin published internationally in February 1951 in which Stalin adopted an uncompromising tone in vitriolic rhetoric aimed at NATO and the United States in particular.\(^{161}\) In June 1951, Stalin advised Mao to increase his force deployment in Korea.\(^{162}\) In

\(^{159}\) North Korea was one of the first Soviet satellites to undergo Moscow’s rehabilitation plan of 1) merging all political parties into a single “united front” under communist domination, 2) implementing major land reform, 3) nationalizing industry, and 4) imposing a centralized economic plan. Lankov, 32-33. Thus, permitting North Korea to fall would have been especially damaging to Soviet prestige.

\(^{160}\) Kathryn Weathersby, “Deceiving the Deceivers: Moscow, Beijing, Pyongyang and the Allegation of Bacteriological Weapons Use in Korea,” Cold War International History Project Bulletin 11 (Winter 1998): 179, reaches the same conclusion regarding Stalin’s desire to perpetuate the Korean War.

\(^{161}\) Stueck, The Korean War: An International History, 160-61, describes this interview as Stalin’s “first major statement on international affairs since January 1949.” That the statement
November 1951, Stalin again counseled Mao to remain firm in negotiations with the United States, arguing that the Americans were in greater need of an armistice.\footnote{Stueck, \textit{Rethinking the Korean War}, 138.} Stalin’s role in perpetuating the conflict in Korea is supported by the sequence of events following his death. Less than one month after Stalin passed away in March 1953, Zhou En-lai issued an announcement expressing a new willingness to trade prisoners with the UN command.\footnote{Stueck, \textit{The Korean War: An International History}, 247; Id, \textit{Rethinking the Korean War}, 157.} Four months later, the armistice was reached.

Stalin operated from a baseline marked by Russian weakness. Although Georgian by birth, Stalin readily adopted the same insecurities as his Russian predecessors.\footnote{Foot, 215.} Likewise, he sought security by expanding the Soviet empire to foreclose the possibility of foreign invasion. World War Two’s aftermath brought the Soviet Union to new heights as it rapidly expanded imperial domination into eastern and central Europe. Prior to the war, Stalin had invested little in the east, but with the vacuum created by the collapse of the Japanese empire, new opportunities in the east arose. Still, Stalin was far more concerned with events in the west than in Asia, perceiving the east as a secondary theater and turning to it only after the United States evinced a willingness to meet the Soviet threat in Europe.\footnote{Gaddis, \textit{The Long Peace}, 39.} Accordingly, new acquisitions in Asia would be seen as gains. As such, prospect theory holds that Stalin would be risk-averse in this theater.

\textit{North Korea:} Kim Il-Sung was born to a peasant family, but unlike Mao, Zhou, and Ho, Kim’s formal education was quite limited.\footnote{With respect to Korea particularly, see Lankov, 4.} When he was still a boy, Kim’s family moved came on the heels of the failed third campaign of the Chinese and as UN forces neared Seoul is an unlikely coincidence.
north to Manchuria, where he became proficient in Chinese.\textsuperscript{168} In his early teens in Manchuria, Kim joined in the anti-Japanese guerrilla resistance movement where he first came into contact with communism.\textsuperscript{169} By the mid 1930s, Kim had established a reputation as a prominent guerrilla leader working with both the Chinese and the Soviet controlled Comintern resistance.\textsuperscript{170} As the Japanese force grew stronger in Manchukuo, Kim fled north to the Soviet Union where he spent the remainder of the war wearing the Soviet uniform.\textsuperscript{171} With the surrender of the Japanese on the Korean peninsula north of the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel to Soviet troops, and the resulting division of the peninsula into two separately governed entities, Kim was placed in power in the north by the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{172} Until this time, Kim had no evident reason to obtain a predisposition to the United States that was anything different from the standard Comintern party line that the United States represented the bastion of the class enemy.

During Kim’s guerrilla days, he employed terror tactics typical of the genre, including kidnapping civilians in order to acquire supplies, torturing individuals for intelligence, and executing fellow guerrillas or civilians in order to spread fear.\textsuperscript{173} Once installed in power by the Soviets, Kim faithfully followed Moscow’s instructions while systematically eliminating would-be Challengers to his authority, including local communist resistance leaders, communist party

\textsuperscript{168} Lankov, 50-51.

\textsuperscript{169} Suh, 4-5. Lankov, 52, suggests Kim joined a Marxist group in high school, was arrested, and upon his release embarked on a guerrilla career.

\textsuperscript{170} According to Lankov, 53, Kim even joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1932.

\textsuperscript{171} Lankov, 53-56; Suh, 4-51.

\textsuperscript{172} Simmons, 23; Suh, 65. Lankov, 2; 59, asserts that from 1945-48, the real power in North Korea was a Soviet officer, Colonel-General Terenti Shtykov, who simply used Kim as a tool to implement Soviet directives. See also Weathersby, “Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945-1950: New Evidence From Russian Archives,” noting Shtykov “exercised extremely close supervision over political events in North Korea” during the late 1940s. In fact, Lankov, 44, asserts the North Korean constitution was drafted in Moscow and edited by Stalin himself.

\textsuperscript{173} Suh, 38.
officials from the South, and Chinese-based guerrilla fighters.\textsuperscript{174} Not a particularly skilled Marxist theoretician, Kim was more likely to turn to violence than ideas in promoting his agenda.\textsuperscript{175} Having come of age in the era of Stalin, Kim apparently took to heart Stalinist methods, as his own reign would produce a cult of personality far more insidious than that which Khrushchev railed against in 1956. In short, the overwhelming shaping forces for Kim were the ideological direction received from Soviet officials and the constant military struggle against the occupying Japanese. As Kim had been trained in an authoritarian military manner, this was undoubtedly the most available frame of reference for him when confronted with uncertainty.

Finally, lacking any direct meetings with Americans as he had never traveled beyond the mainland far east and having had no contact with U.S. troops in the areas in which he fought, Kim was likely to perceive American behavior in light of Comintern and direct Soviet teachings. Thus, Kim would have seen the U.S. troops in South Korea as an attempt to establish an imperial foothold in mainland Asia and would have seen the withdrawal of U.S. troops in 1949 as a sign of weakness compounding the U.S. failure to provide military support to the nationalist Chinese in the preceding three years.\textsuperscript{176}

Kim had lobbied for Soviet support for an attack against South Korea from as early as 1947, as the traditional centers of power on the peninsula were located below the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel.\textsuperscript{177} In fact, Kim repeatedly emphasized that strong communist sentiment existed in the south, such

\textsuperscript{174} Simmons, 23-25; Suh 130-54. Indeed, while it is readily apparent that Kim could not have launched his assault on South Korea without Stalin’s military backing (in the event such aid was provided by the Chinese at Stalin’s direction), Kim’s deference to Stalin is illuminating. Gaddis, citing Soviet Ambassador T.F. Shtykov, reports Kim as having said “that he himself cannot begin an attack, because he is a communist, a disciplined person, and for him the order of Comrade Stalin is law.” Gaddis, \textit{We Now Know}, 73.

\textsuperscript{175} Lankov, 26. Again, Kim was all in likelihood simply following directives from his Russian handlers during the late 1940s.

\textsuperscript{176} See Gaddis, \textit{We Now Know}, 74 (citing Kim as assuring Stalin that “the Americans would never participate in the [Korean] war. . . . America was losing the giant, China, but still had not intervened.”)

\textsuperscript{177} Lankov, 41.
that if the North Korean military could quickly capture Seoul, the masses in the south would rise up in support of Kim and remove the Syngman Rhee government without the need for further large scale military efforts. Yet, from 1947-50, Stalin repeatedly refused to approve a military effort at unification. Only with the withdrawal of American troops in 1949 followed by Acheson’s January 1950 statement did Stalin relent and acquiesce to Kim’s request; yet, Stalin required Kim to go to China and obtain Mao’s approval pursuant to the division of labor agreed to in 1949. Mao had agreed to Kim’s plan when informed that Stalin had accepted it, but was apparently not deeply involved in the operational planning, although he had returned thousands of Korean-born PLA soldiers with arms to North Korea and did redeploy some of his own military units to the northeast region prior to the invasion. Given Mao’s own plans for Taiwan, he had reason to oppose Kim’s action due to the risk it brought of inflaming world tensions by suggesting militant communist expansionism as well as by creating a rival for Soviet assistance; however, Mao could hardly justify such reasons under the banner of an internationalist communist government.

With the introduction of Chinese troops into the Korean War, Kim lost operational control. From November forward, Kim was essentially a political figurehead, utterly

178 Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 130.
179 Lankov, 41.
180 Petrov, 21; Stueck, Rethinking the Korean War, 73; Weathersby, “New Findings on the Korean War,” 14-15.
181 Kalicki, 29; Petrov, 21; Rongzhen, 47-48; Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 44. The returnees comprised the PLA’s 164th Division, consisting of approximately 12,000 - 14,000 troops returning in summer 1949 and an additional 23,000 from the 166th Division in January 1950, according to Jian, Mao’s China and the Cold War, 55, 75, 88, 110. Appleman, 184-85, numbers total returnees as approximately 30,000; Hunt asserts that Korean born soldiers returned from the PRC numbered between fifty and seventy thousand; and Stueck, The Korean War: An International History, 31, 373 n.3, puts the number at 60,000 prior to June 1950 and between 80,000 and 100,000 during the course of the war.
182 See Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 140-46.
183 Lankov, 61.
dependent on Chinese “largesse” for his survival. Ironically, Kim’s power was wholly a creation of the Soviet Union, as Kim had to overcome factionalism within the party, including a distinct Chinese faction that Kim sought to minimize.\textsuperscript{184} Still, Mao could not simply ignore Kim or install a puppet government of his own as Kim was Stalin’s chosen power in North Korea. Thus, while the Chinese military commanders, in close contact with the Soviets, ran the war, Mao had to give Kim some face-saving role and at least take into account Kim’s opinions.

For Kim, the baseline was a unified Korea. Even though he had risen from a junior grade officer to head of state in a tremendous stroke of luck, reverting back to the status quo ante would be considered a loss. His state was entirely dependent on foreign economic aid and training from the Soviets, and now on foreign military aid from the Chinese. Moreover, PRC intervention had strengthened the Chinese faction’s hand in the North Korean Communist Party.\textsuperscript{185} A return to the previous division of the peninsula would leave Kim looking foolish. Thus, for Kim, the consistent call was for increased tempo of operations, more and larger offensives, and continued fighting. The risks associated with escalation were mainly borne by the Chinese and Soviets. Therefore, Kim would have placed anything less than escalation in the domain of losses, making him extremely risk-acceptant with respect to expansion.

\textsuperscript{184} Cf. Foot, 56, who argues that Kim was “at least as close to Peking as he was to Moscow.” While there is a paucity of reliable sources covering Kim Il-Sung and North Korean domestic politics in general, the remaining available sources are unanimous in their conclusion that Kim was, at this time, much closer to the Soviets than to the Chinese. Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 131; Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, passim; Kalicki, 25-31; Lankov, 25-28; Petrov, 23; Stueck, Rethinking the Korean War, 71; Suh, passim; Kathryn Weathersby, “Korea, 1949-50: To Attack or Not to Attack? Stalin, Kim II-Sung and the Prelude to War,” Cold War International History Project Bulletin 5 (Spring 1998); Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu. Chen Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 161-63, recounts the possibility that the original direct request for Chinese aid following the Inchon landing was made by North Korean juniors from the Yenan faction who sought indications as to whether Mao might be willing to depose Kim and install a pro-Chinese government in Pyongyang. Mao is said to have directly rejected any such discussions and steadfastly refrained from criticizing Kim in remembrance of the Korean willingness to assist the CCP in the Chinese Civil War. Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 153, note that in the buildup for the war, Kim arranged to have Soviet arms shipments arrive by sea rather than rail in order to prevent informing Chinese authorities of the level of Soviet assistance.

\textsuperscript{185} Lankov, 91.
Chinese Intervention in Indochina, 1950-1954

Although the Viet Minh had been fighting a war for independence against the French since 1946, organized Chinese communist intervention was not a realistic possibility until 1950. However, no sooner had China won its own civil war than Ho made a formal request for Chinese assistance. In November 1949, Liu Shaoqui announced in a speech to an “international trade union congress” that China would provide “active assistance” to nationalist movements in Asia, specifically mentioning Indochina. In February 1950, Mao met with Ho Chi Minh and promised to provide assistance to the Viet Minh leader to the best of China’s ability. That spring, Mao provided PLA military advisors to Ho, as well as military materiel and financial aid. This assistance likely originated from Mao’s confirmation of China’s role as leading the revolution in the east during Mao’s meetings with Stalin in Moscow from December 1949 through February 1950. Stalin distrusted Ho’s Marxist credentials as he did Mao, and was thus disinclined to provide Soviet aid directly. Moreover, Stalin was concerned over the proposed rearmament of West Germany, a concern shared by France, causing Stalin to avoid provoking France though blatant support of the communists in Indochina. Not until late

186 PLA units may have offered some aid to Viet Minh forces in the border area as early as 1948 (Duiker, 415-16) but through late 1949 the Chinese were still too busy with the KMT to begin exporting significant military aid abroad. Jian, Mao’s China and the Cold War, 119-20.

187 Duiker, 417.

188 Ibid., 418.

189 Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 104; Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 16.

190 Duiker, 427; Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 105; Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 18-20; S. Zhang, 176; Short, 433, identifies the advisors as coming in fall 1950.

191 Stalin had rejected a request for direct assistance from Ho in January, directing him to look toward China. S. Zhang, 172.

1954 and early 1955 would the Soviet Union begin to play a larger direct role in Vietnamese affairs.\footnote{Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 73-75.}

The period of 1950-54 saw four distinct phases with respect to possible Chinese intervention. Prior to the Korean invasion, Mao would be less likely to provide PLA troops to Indochina, in fear of provoking a U.S. response. However, once the Korean War began, Mao had less to lose in terms of provocation, although he also had far less in terms of disposable military resources with which to aid the Viet Minh. Moreover, with the initial successes in the Korean War, Mao might have been particularly apt to capitalize on the surprise of the west by expanding the front in Indochina.\footnote{Ibid., 24.} Once the Korean War settled into a relatively stable routine from summer 1951 through 1953, Mao would have greater opportunity to provide assistance. Finally, with the signing of the armistice in Korea in July 1953, Mao on one hand would be able to intervene in Indochina due to freed up resources, yet on the other hand constrained due to the damage inflicted during the Korea War.\footnote{Kalicki, 88-89; Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 50-53.}

Looking at Mao’s psychological biases with respect to this situation, the same general tendencies appear. Mao sought to actively further the international socialist revolution and believed the Chinese example of revolution from the countryside was particularly applicable throughout Asia.\footnote{Jian, Mao’s China and the Cold War, 120-22.} Aiding the Viet Minh would have five particular advantages. First, defeating the French imperial government would eliminate a western power from mainland Asia. Second, assisting the Viet Minh would restore traditional Chinese influence in what had historically been a tributary state and in an area Mao surely saw as China’s rightful “sphere of influence.”\footnote{FRUS 1952-54, Vol. XIV: 405 (Background Paper from DOS for Geneva Delegation, Apr. 4, 1954).} Third, China would garner the respect of the nationalist movements across Asia by taking an active anti-imperial role, thus facilitating the introduction of socialist revolutionary
movements in the region. Fourth, China would secure the southeastern flank as well as enhancing the eastern maritime border security. Fifth, Indochina’s relative agricultural wealth would be denied to the non-socialist states, particularly Japan.

Mao understood that he had little to fear from the French as far as an attack on his southern border. The French regime had been proven weak during the Second World War and was a decaying world power. Accordingly, Mao would have seen significant prospects for the indigenous movement to succeed without direct Chinese intervention. Since there was minimal threat to China, he could permit the existence of the French for a longer period than he would have the United States in Korea. Moreover, the Chinese centers of power were much more distant from Indochina than from Korea. Nonetheless, Mao was intent on seeing the western powers eliminated from Asia.

Mao and Ho Chi Minh enjoyed good relations during this period as evidenced by the fact that the PRC was the first state to diplomatically recognize the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) days after its establishment in January 1950. By assisting the Viet Minh, Mao could garner influence in Indochina and demonstrate to the moderate elements in China that the communists were restoring a leading role for China. Indeed, if Ho was successful in his goal of promoting a Vietnamese led revolution in all of Indochina, Mao would have expanded the Chinese sphere of influence beyond that of the 19th century Qing dynasty.

With Stalin having directed China to take the lead in assisting revolutionary movements in Asia, Mao was more than ready to accept the responsibility. By assisting in the Viet Minh battle against the French, Mao could frame Chinese activism as anti-colonial rather than ideologically inspired. Of course, once the colonial power was removed, it would demonstrate the supremacy of the peasant-centered revolution, and would provide Mao with increased stature across Asia. Mao thus foresaw exporting his movement through Indochina into all of Southeast

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198 Duiker, 419; Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 15; S. Zhang, 171-72. In contrast, Soviet-Vietnamese relations at the time were relatively poor for fellow socialist states, as Stalin doubted Ho’s revolutionary credentials and treated the Vietnamese leader “with contempt.” Duiker, 421; Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 25.

199 Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 24.
Asia and eventually west into India. In Qiang Zhai’s words, such activity “would help establish China’s identity in the world.”

Providing assistance to Vietnam would help allay fears about potential vulnerability along China’s southern border. As discussed infra, Mao did not expect imminent U.S. deployment of troops to mainland Asia prior to the Korean invasion, but was nonetheless confident of an eventual military conflict with America. After Kim’s invasion and the U.S. response, concern over potential U.S. activity in Indochina increased exponentially. Still, Mao was well aware of the opposition of America’s major European allies to deploying troops to Indochina. To a lesser degree, Mao was cognizant, if not fully understanding, of the domestic opposition to what would appear to be Americans fighting to maintain another state’s colonial empire. Thus, by the summer of 1951 with the Korean situation evolving into a stalemate and no U.S. deployment to Indochina, these fears would likely have subsided to some degree.

A second reason for concern over border security came from the continuing harassment of KMT holdouts pushed into the mountains of Vietnam, Laos and Burma. Introducing a friendly government in Indochina would greatly assist Beijing in suppressing these hit and run attacks and permit the communist government to devote its energies to economic rehabilitation.

Finally, helping the Viet Minh to succeed in Vietnam would serve as an important economic victory for the socialists as Indochina was well known as the “rice-bowl” of the Asian Pacific. Controlling the export of agricultural products from Indochina to, among others, Japan, would offer an additional important lever of power for the socialists.

Working against intervention were the same economic concerns addressed with respect to Korea. In addition, after June 1950, Mao was faced with prospect of fighting a multi-front war.

200 Ibid., 22.
201 Duiker, 423.
202 S. Zhang, 179.
203 Ibid.
204 Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 20-21.
in Korea in the north, against Taiwan to the east, and in Indochina in the south. 

While Mao had confidence in the PLA, his confidence was built in part on amassing an overwhelming number of troops relative to his adversary and willingness to accept high casualty rates associated with human wave assaults. If faced with a multi-front war, Mao recognized he lacked the logistical support system or the mobility to rapidly redeploy forces where needed. While some authors suggest Mao was also wary of alienating the French government which at the time might still have been considering diplomatic recognition of China, I discount this as a serious motivation.

After the Korean armistice, the Chinese immediately began to implement a five year plan geared toward restoring the economic health of the state. This plan depended on reorienting the manpower currently engaged in military activity toward public works projects, including development of major lines of communication throughout China. Commitment to such a plan would have necessarily militated against Chinese intervention in Indochina.

To Mao, the baseline would have probably been a French occupied Indochina. Although the French occupation of Tonkin occurred at roughly the same time as the Japanese occupation of Taiwan, the salience of the Indochina situation was less than that of Taiwan. While China had exercised imperial influence in Tonkin, it did not exercise direct governmental authority there. Moreover, it had even less influence in Annam, Cochin-China, Laos or Cambodia. In contrast, the Chinese government claimed direct rule over Taiwan. Because of this, Mao would not have had the same incapacity to assimilate the French control into his outlook as he did with respect to Taiwan.

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205 S. Zhang, 177.

206 Duiker, 420. Mao had already made clear in his lean to one side speech in 1949 and his treatment of western diplomats remaining in China that establishing the conditions for normal relations was out of the question.

207 Kalicki, 94.

208 Tonkin was occupied by the French in the 1884 Sino-Franco War. Tonkin is essentially the northern third of modern Vietnam, with Annam making up the central area and Cochin China the south.
Mao likely differentiated intervention in Indochina from intervention in Korea based on the type of conflict. In Korea, the war had been a conventional engagement of massed armies in pitched battle across a dynamic front. Thus, when the UN forces obtained the upper hand, introduction of a large Chinese force was able to reverse the tide. In Indochina, the war was largely a guerrilla conflict with small units engaging in hostility across the country such that no clear “front” existed. Chinese intervention would work to transform the conflict from a guerrilla war to a conventional war, moving from a style of combat in which the United States was ill-prepared to one in which it was far more comfortable. Secondly, Chinese intervention would exacerbate the vulnerabilities that lines of communication present to guerrillas. Intervening with Chinese guerrilla units rather than conventional forces would be extremely difficult due to the inability of the Chinese to blend in to the Vietnamese citizenry.

With the fall of Dien Bien Phu and the obvious inability of the French to maintain control in Indochina, the question must be raised: Why bother negotiating in Geneva rather than pressing the military advantage on the battlefield? The most compelling answer lies in the likelihood that Mao, and to a lesser extent perhaps Ho, feared that a complete military victory resulting in the defeat of the French would precipitate U.S. involvement. If the French were being forced out, the United States might be able to more easily justify intervention in Indochina to its allies. Conversely, if the French left pursuant to a negotiated settlement, the Americans would have less opportunity to intervene. Thus, through negotiation - on the heels of battlefield success so as to ensure maximum possible concessions - Mao sought to minimize the possibility of U.S. forces deploying to his south.

On balance, Mao saw limited assistance to the Vietnamese as a positive. As long as he could provide assistance without provoking the deployment of U.S. troops that would require a reorientation of Chinese assets, Mao was disposed to help Ho. Once American forces came to mainland Asia in June 1950, Mao would have seen inaction as leading to significant losses, including the loss of face internationally and the rekindling of opposition forces domestically. With the armistice, Mao would have had the opportunity to shift forces to aid Ho, but at the same time he would likely have been influenced by the need for economic reconstruction. Given his

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209 Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 54-55.
biases however, Mao would be more disposed to opt for action, for immediacy, and for continued pressure to hide his weakness. Thus, from June 1950 through the Geneva Conference of 1954 Mao would likely have been risk acceptant in considering an intervention in Indochina.

**North Vietnamese Intervention in Laos, 1950-1954**

Ho Chi Minh was the son of a Confucian scholar and was educated in the Confucian tradition.\(^{210}\) He adopted anti-French nationalist sentiments, following other members of his family. After getting into trouble by participating in anti-French activity, Ho traveled to Europe and the United States, eventually settling in France where he became active in the French communist party.\(^{211}\) Ho spent time in both the Soviet Union and China in the 1920’s followed by his organization in 1930 of the competing communist parties in French Indochina into a single Vietnamese Communist Party.\(^{212}\) Throughout the 1930’s and 40’s Ho traveled between Indochina, China, and Russia, spending some time in detention under British authorities in Hong Kong and under nationalist Chinese authorities in southern China.\(^{213}\) Similar to Zhou, Ho operated more as a pragmatist than a doctrinaire communist.

Ho originally had positive relations with the United States, working with U.S. military officials to gather intelligence against imperial Japanese forces in Indochina in 1944-45.\(^{214}\) Although Ho sought to portray himself as only a nationalist and thereby to avail himself of the anti-colonial sentiment of the United States, American policy-makers were well aware of Ho’s communist ideology.\(^{215}\) As American officials became increasingly concerned with the CCP

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\(^{210}\) Duiker, 8. Born with the name Nguyen Sinh Cung, and given the name of Nguyen Tat Thanh upon reaching adolescence, Ho originally came to fame under the name Nguyen Ai Quoc (Nguyen the Patriot), using numerous pseudonyms before adopting the name Ho Chi Minh.

\(^{211}\) Ibid., 130.

\(^{212}\) Ibid., 179.

\(^{213}\) Ibid., 180-255; Jian, Mao’s China and the Cold War, 118.

\(^{214}\) Duiker, 294; Gaddis, We Now Know, 156; Kalicki, 92.

\(^{215}\) Duiker, 404. Stoessinger, 65, describes Ho as both a nationalist and communist, apparently rejecting the idea that the two are intellectually incompatible.
successes in China, support for France and for the French puppet government of Bo Dai increased. 216 While Ho undoubtedly had nationalist sentiments, he was foremost a communist and would almost surely have implemented socialist policies in Vietnam regardless of whether he had received U.S. aid early in his conflict with the French.

When Ho did come to power in the Tonkin territory, he played the role of consensus builder within the Politburo, although his reputation provided him with unequalled status. 217 He preferred to operate with the appearance of a benign elder statesman (hence, “Uncle Ho”) although he was astute at manipulating the levers of power behind the scenes so as to ensure his preferred policies were implemented. 218

With over a quarter-century of service in the Comintern by the end of World War II, Ho was undoubtedly influenced by the Soviet attitude toward the United States. Given Stalin’s mistrust, and given the fact that the United States was supportive of France, Ho would have been predisposed to see U.S. actions in a negative light. Moreover, considering Ho’s penchant for subtle intrigue, he would have seen overtures from the United States as tactical maneuvers designed to block stronger international communist ties. 219 However, his familiarity with western governments and his patient approach to foreign relations stand in contrast to the drive toward action of a leader such as Mao. Once the first French Indochina war had begun and the U.S. began to provide funding and military supplies to the French, Ho’s perceptions of U.S. conduct would have been set in stone.


217 Ibid., 5.

218 Ibid., 439. Ho was quite successful at public relations not only in the west, but with his deferential performances before the Chinese that enabled Vietnam to obtain, by one estimate, over $20 billion in Chinese economic and military aid between 1960-78. Suyin, 277.

219 Ho was far from above duplicity, as evidenced by his promise to Nehru in 1954 that Vietnam would maintain “correct relations” with the royal governments in Cambodia and Laos, at the very time that Vietnamese assistance was going to the Pathet Lao who had occupied two provinces in northern Laos - in direct violation of the Geneva Accords. See DSB Vol. 41, 278 (Aug. 24, 1959); Kissinger, Diplomacy, 646.
Ho was intent on “liberating” not only Vietnam, but all of Indochina.\textsuperscript{220} While part of this was due to Ho’s belief in the world socialist revolution, a more practical side involved the use of the eastern mountainous region of Laos as a covert supply-line for sending both troops and materiel from North Vietnam to South Vietnam. This route, immortalized as the “Ho Chi Minh Trail,” kept the guerrilla movement in South Vietnam well supplied both during and between the Indochina Wars. By creating a revolutionary movement in Laos, Ho could keep the Royal Lao government and their French backers occupied and facilitate ease of movement along the trail.

Indigenous Lao communist revolutionaries by and large did not exist.\textsuperscript{221} While there was some nationalist resentment of French rule, as typified in the Lao Issara movement following World War II, it was not terribly strong and was quickly defeated by the returning free French forces.\textsuperscript{222} Such would be expected since, as characterized by Bernard Fall, “Laos is neither a geographical, nor an ethnic or social entity, but merely a political convenience.”\textsuperscript{223} The Pathet Lao, essentially a creation of the Viet Minh tied to the popular Lao Issara figure Prince Souphanouvong, did not reach prominence until 1950.\textsuperscript{224} As the Vietnamese had traditionally exercised great influence of the peoples of eastern Laos, the formation and administration of the Pathet Lao by the Viet Minh was not unusual.\textsuperscript{225} While the Viet Minh provided some aid to the


\textsuperscript{222} Langer and Zasloff, 18-20, attribute the lack of a strong nationalist movement to the relatively benign French occupation of Laos. Seeing little of value in Laos, the French were content to administer the country in a minimalist style, permitting the Lao to continue their way of life unimpeded.


\textsuperscript{224} Langer and Zasloff, 171; Langland, 631.

\textsuperscript{225} Langer and Zasloff, 16.
Pathet Lao prior to 1950, it was only with the introduction of significant Chinese aid to the Viet Minh that they could in turn provide increased aid to the Pathet Lao.\textsuperscript{226}

For Ho, aid to the Pathet Lao was a no-lose situation. The cost of the assistance was being offset by the Chinese assistance he was receiving. French forces were already engaged in Vietnam with his own. The threat of U.S. interference appeared small given their commitments in Europe and Korea, their public anti-colonial stance, and their initial reluctance to increase military spending. Within days of the March 1953 breakthrough in the Korean armistice negotiations, Viet Minh forces invaded Laos. Whether this was approved by the Chinese is unknown, but Ho might have seen this as an opportunity for increased Chinese aid and thus, an increased tempo of operations against the French.

Ho’s baseline was that of French rule in Indochina. Since defeat would result in nothing more than occupation of the region by a foreign power, a situation that already existed, Ho essentially had nothing to lose. Lacking a formal seat of power, Ho would hardly have been affected by prospect theory’s status quo bias. Even if Viet Minh success brought American intervention in Indochina, this development would affect China and the Soviet Union far more than Vietnam. Still, Ho was concerned about the potential effects of American involvement, as suggested by his willingness to cede to Chinese pressure to conclude a settlement in summer 1954, prior to the election of a new congress in the United States that might be more favorably inclined toward intervention than the sitting legislature.\textsuperscript{227}

Failure to act would have been seen as unacceptable for several reasons. First, Ho would have risked his standing as the head of both the Viet Minh and as the figurehead of the Vietnamese nationalist movement. Ho’s dominance of the Indochinese communists did not match Mao’s authority in China, so Ho was bound to look out for challenges to his authority. Second, failing to act in Laos would risk ceding the initiative to the CCP. As Ho was intent on establishing authority over all of Indochina, not just Vietnam, permitting the Chinese to take the

\textsuperscript{226} Ibid., 35-38, 49.

\textsuperscript{227} Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 60, regarding Ho’s concern about the possibilities with a new congress.
leading role in Laos would restrict his role. Third, Thai concern over communist expansion coupled with the weakness of the Royal Lao government would have made Laos a target for a pro-Thai coup that would create difficulties for the Viet Minh. Fourth, control over eastern Laos was necessary for continued operations in South Vietnam. Thus, framing the activity in terms of action versus inaction, and operating from the French-occupation baseline, Ho would have perceived events as lying within the domain of losses and would have assumed an extremely risk acceptant posture.

**First Taiwan Straits Crisis, 1954-1955**

The same biases attributed to Mao in the prior decision to attack Taiwan remained in effect in 1954, only this time he had even more reason to believe in his particular brand of Marxism, given the relative success he enjoyed in pushing back the Americans in Korea and given the diplomatic success enjoyed at the Geneva Conference on Indochina in July 1954. Mao would have perceived these as success gained through action and through revolutionary displays of force.

The Korean War had ended in an armistice locking in a divided Korean peninsula at the 38th parallel. While Mao had not achieved his aim of ridding the peninsula of all western troops, he had been successful in pushing the UN forces back to the 38th. Likewise, in Vietnam, Chinese aid to Ho Chi Minh had permitted him to drive the French out at Dien Bien Phu and later Geneva. Republic of China (ROC) guerrilla operations from the offshore islands had receded since 1950 to the point where nearly no operations had been launched since fall 1953. Having successfully aided revolutionary efforts in these areas, and with the towering figure of Stalin no longer overshadowing the socialist movement, Mao might well have been basking in his own glory internationally. Moreover, with the ultra-cautious Stalin removed, Mao might have expected greater support from the Soviet Union in his attempt to claim Taiwan. Furthering

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this hope was the fact that the Soviet had exploded their first hydrogen bomb in August 1953, beginning a rapid increase in the Soviet nuclear stockpile.\textsuperscript{230}

Offsetting these positive international developments was the recognition that the United States was unhappy with the Geneva Accords, had refused to sign them, and was pursuing a regional collective defense pact.\textsuperscript{231} In addition, a new Republican administration was in office as of 1953, although whether the difference between the Truman administration and Eisenhower administration policies appeared to Mao from the outset is uncertain.

Domestically, Mao still faced serious troubles. In summer 1954, flooding along the Yangtze reduced the agricultural yield, producing food shortages that erupted into occurrences of domestic unrest.\textsuperscript{232} American intelligence described the floods as the worst in one hundred years, and noted that that the PRC began buying rice from Burma in preparation for the expected famine.\textsuperscript{233} Given these internal problems, Mao might well have chosen to focus attention back on the KMT to ensure continued public vigilance in performing their socialist duties. However, undermining the idea that this crisis was a reaction to these developments is the fact that Mao had begun planning for the attacks on the offshore islands in January 1954.\textsuperscript{234} Of course, this does not disprove the thesis that the crisis was manufactured for domestic reasons as part of Mao’s long-term mobilization of the masses pursuant to his idea of perpetual revolution.

Mao continued to operate from a baseline in which Taiwan was part of China. Since 1950, he had solidified his control over China while simultaneously exporting revolution abroad


\textsuperscript{232} Short, 445.


\textsuperscript{234} S. Zhang, 197.
in a successful manner. Thus, Mao had more to lose in 1954 than in 1950; however, he also had even greater reason to believe that confrontation was a winning policy. The United States had not attacked China directly during the Korean War, it had not intervened in Indochina to save the French, and as of August 1953, both the Soviets and the Americans had developed thermonuclear weapons. While Mao may still have held nuclear arms less important with respect to his own country he could not have been oblivious to the ramifications such destructive weapons had on deterring full scale superpower confrontations.\textsuperscript{235} On balance, Mao still was inclined toward risk-acceptance.

**Second Taiwan Straits Crisis, 1958**

*China:* Drawing on the classical education he received, and evidencing his nationalist pride, Mao often referred to the works of the Chinese strategist Sun-Tzu.\textsuperscript{236} Thus, deception played a key role in Mao’s military thought. Although this would not have been as immediately apparent in the prior crises given the fact that Mao had little track record with respect to a conventional military, by the second Taiwan Straits crisis Mao’s pattern of thought should have been more readily discernible. Having heard the Chinese bluster and experienced the seemingly irrational Chinese decisions to attack despite technological inferiority, the tenet of feigning strength when weak and appearing weak when strong might have been recognized. In Shu Guang Zhang’s description, Mao was practicing an “active defense” designed to use short term belligerence in order to forestall more general war.\textsuperscript{237}

The first Taiwan Straits crisis achieved mixed results for Mao. The PLA did take the Tachen Islands north of Matsu, but made no headway with respect to Quemoy or Matsu. Moreover, the crisis failed to prevent the Manila Pact and provided the direct impetus for the

\textsuperscript{235} Di, 150, asserts that Mao grew confident from the PLA’s ability to fight the Americans to a draw in Korea, but also learned a greater appreciation of the technological capabilities possessed by the Americans, reducing his “recklessness” in the Taiwan Straits crises and in Vietnam.

\textsuperscript{236} Whether Sun-Tzu represents a single author or an amalgamation of Chinese strategic teachings is irrelevant for the purposes herein. For simplicity’s sake, I simply refer to Sun-Tzu as a single individual.

\textsuperscript{237} S. Zhang, 234.
conclusion of the U.S.-ROC Mutual Defense Treaty in December 1954. Finally, the continued pursuit of the shelling prodded the U.S. Congress into passing the Formosa Resolution in January 1955, effectively giving the U.S. President carte blanche to commit U.S. forces at his discretion in the Taiwan Straits. The original ambiguity of the U.S. response had taken on sharper definition as the months of shelling dragged on. Whether the United States would respond in 1958 as it was beginning to in spring 1955 was questionable to Mao.

In 1956, Nikita Khrushchev gave his famous speech denouncing Stalinism. Chinese reaction to this was originally muted, but with Stalin gone, Mao was less inclined to defer to the Soviets as the leaders of the socialist revolution.\(^{238}\) While part of Mao’s discontent with the Soviets was ideological, including the Soviet use of force in Hungary and Poland, reconciliation with Tito, the failure to take a stronger stand in the Suez Crisis of 1955, and the entire concept of peaceful co-existence, undoubtedly another large part was the Soviet criticism of the cult of personality and the single dominant leader.\(^{239}\) Mao was no longer willing to accept a junior role internationally and was particularly sensitive to Soviet conduct perceived as condescending.\(^{240}\)

While he had acquiesced to Stalin’s position as the socialist international leader, Mao was clearly not willing to provide similar respect to Stalin’s successors. Mao saw himself as the father of Chinese communism and thus on par with Lenin as not simply a practitioner, but a theorist who was able to translate his beliefs into practice. Nonetheless, publicly Mao continued to praise the Soviet Union as China continued to rely on Soviet advisors, technology, and loans.\(^{241}\)

In October 1957, the Soviets successfully launched a satellite into space, confirming Mao’s belief that socialist technology could compete with and prevail over western scientific

\(^{238}\) Short, 450.

\(^{239}\) Gurtov and Hwang, 72. Although Mao supported the use of force in Hungary, Mao still blamed the Soviets’ “big power chauvinism” for creating the conditions in which reactionary elements could challenge the socialist leadership. Jian, Mao’s China and the Cold War, 152-59.

\(^{240}\) Zubok, 257 (translating conversation of Khrushchev and Mao at Hall of Huaizhentian (Beijing) 31 July 1958), noting Mao’s complaint of being treated by Mikoyan in a manner of a father “lecturing” a son.

\(^{241}\) Jian, Mao’s China and the Cold War, 71; S. Zhang, 229.
advancements.\textsuperscript{242} This Soviet success probably influenced Mao in two major ways. First, the military implications of mating intercontinental missiles with atomic weapons made clear that the United States could no longer intervene at will across the world while maintaining an invulnerable home front.\textsuperscript{243} Thus, the socialist camp might be able to adopt a more aggressive international posture in furthering the global proletariat revolution. Indeed, the shift in American strategic discussion from a strategic nuclear response to aggression to ideas of limited nuclear war seemed to support such thinking.\textsuperscript{244} Despite the rapidly deteriorating Sino-Soviet relationship, Mao likely believed the Soviets could not permit the United States to engage the Chinese directly without intervening. In addition, Mao made a visit to Moscow just a month after the Sputnik launch where he sought and reached preliminary agreement with the Soviets to provide technical assistance in developing a Chinese nuclear weapons program.\textsuperscript{245}

Second, the Soviet achievement inspired Mao to accelerate the progress of Chinese advancement toward communism, ultimately manifested in the Great Leap Forward (GLF). Moreover, relative success in the first Chinese five-year economic plan probably spurred Mao to believe he could will continued success via intensifying the socialist changes.\textsuperscript{246} Beginning in

\textsuperscript{242} Kalicki, 167.

\textsuperscript{243} Zubok, 260 (translating conversation of Khrushchev and Mao at Hall of Huaizhentian (Beijing) 31 July 1958). The following exchange occurred at the end of the meeting: Khrushchev: “It is good that we develop the Soviet economy, and our scientists helped us build missiles.” Mao: “We all live because of your missiles.” Khrushchev: “Yes, to a certain extent this is so, one can say without false modesty. This deters the enemy.”


\textsuperscript{245} S. Zhang, 232; Zubok, 244. Soviet technicians arrived in Beijing in June 1958 to begin this process.

\textsuperscript{246} The average rate of annual industrial output growth in China during the first five-year plan was nearly sixteen percent. \textit{FRUS 1958-1960}, Vol. XIX: 24 (NIE 13-58, May 13, 1958). While
spring 1958, Mao, relying once again on the superiority of the properly indoctrinated human will, introduced a series of reforms aimed at skipping the developmental stages of socialism and hastening the arrival of communism. Drastic social and economic changes were emplaced, including the introduction of agricultural communes on a large scale, construction of massive reservoir, irrigation, and dam projects, bizarre back-yard steel furnaces, and elimination of the family home in favor of communistic living quarters. To aid in the administration, Mao made use of People’s Militia organizations founded on military structures, but emplaced primarily for non-military reasons. Thus, once again, evidence suggests Mao may have found it useful to conjure up a foreign policy crisis in order to mobilize the population to accept sweeping domestic reforms. Indeed, Mao is quoted from November 1957 as holding, “Let there be tension in the world, tension is good for us. It keeps our country united.” Originally, Mao focused on Japan by cutting commercial contacts, seizing Japanese fishing vessels and detaining Japanese nationals in April 1958, prior to the Japanese elections. Thereafter, Mao returned to his favorite nemesis, the United States.

\[\text{impressive, caution must be used in interpreting this figure given the minimal baseline from which the growth rate was measured.}\]

\[247\] Short, 480-81; Zhisui, 246-64.

\[248\] Kalicki, 174; Zubok 246, noting “The Chinese peasants toiled in the fields, while their rifles were stacked nearby. The war preparations also helped explain why they had to eat less and work harder.”

\[249\] Zhisui, 225. Likewise, on September 5, 1958, Mao gave a speech in which he noted, “A tense situation is not necessarily harmful for us in every circumstance; it has an advantageous side. Why do I think this way? It is because besides its disadvantageous side, a tense situation can mobilize the population, can particularly mobilize the backward people, can mobilize the people in the middle, and can therefore promote the Great Leap Forward in economic construction.” Li Xiaobing, Chen Jian and David L. Wilson, “Mao Zedong’s Handling of the Taiwan Straits Crisis of 1958: Chinese Recollections and Documents,” Cold War International History Project Bulletin 6/7 (Winter 1995/1996): 216 (Document No. 5, September 5, 1958 Speech by Mao at the Supreme State Council).

\[250\] DSB V. 40, 376 (Mar. 16, 159) (Testimony of Secretary of State FE Affairs before Senate Subcommittee on Disarmament, Feb. 23, 1959).
Prior to Mao’s August 1958 attacks, Sino-Soviet relations suffered another setback when Mao rejected the idea of a Soviet long range communications facility in China and a plan for cooperation in building a submarine fleet to be based in China’s harbors.\textsuperscript{251} Khrushchev made an impromptu visit to China in late July 1958 to try to repair relations, but made no headway. Although unclear at the time, subsequent research indicates that these talks did not include notification or an explanation of the planned shelling of the offshore islands.

As before, Mao still clung to the baseline of a Beijing governed Taiwan. The continued existence of the KMT and the occasional American deployment of military power thereto was a constant thorn in Mao’s side. While there was no longer any real chance of Chiang’s returning to power on mainland China via some sort of KMT offensive, Chiang’s mere presence was an annoyance. By 1958, Mao had considerably more to lose than he did in 1950, thus moderating his otherwise risk-acceptant nature. Accordingly, at the time of this crisis, Mao was likely still risk-acceptant, but less so than before.

\textit{Soviet Union:} Nikita Khrushchev was of poor working-class background, rising to power through the communist party bureaucracy under the protection of Stalin’s minion, Lazar Kaganovich.\textsuperscript{252} During his ascendancy, Khrushchev employed the tactics of terror introduced by Stalin, blaming “deviationists” for party failures and expelling or banishing those who challenged his authority as Party representative.\textsuperscript{253} In 1938, Khrushchev was appointed party secretary in Ukraine where he actively liquidated the existing party leadership in order to consolidate his own control.\textsuperscript{254} During the Russian Civil War, Khrushchev was still a junior party of little importance, while during the Second World War he was primarily a party representative in the Soviet army. Most of Khrushchev’s experience came as a party apparatchik, working with the peasants at practical implementation of policies rather than

\textsuperscript{251} N. Khrushchev, 259-60; S. Zhang, 238.

\textsuperscript{252} Malia, The Soviet Tragedy, 169.

\textsuperscript{253} Ibid., 223

forming grand theories.\textsuperscript{255} Thus, unlike his predecessor or his Asian contemporaries, Khrushchev was less intimately acquainted with constant military struggle. Still, Khrushchev exhibited characteristics consistent with the idea of the Russian inferiority complex.\textsuperscript{256}

Khrushchev was a strong believer in Marxism-Leninism. While he eventually disavowed Stalinist methods and attributed great errors to Stalin’s practices, he nonetheless was committed to the accuracy of Marxism and the supremacy of the communist system. Khrushchev, like his intellectual successor Gorbachev, believed that certain reforms were necessary to hasten the victory of the Soviet state over the western powers. However, Khrushchev did not foresee the inevitability of military conflict with the west. Rather, he believed that the communist system would produce the technological and economic advances necessary for the Soviet state to obtain its objectives. In this way, Khrushchev was less concerned with ensuring a strong Soviet military capable of fighting a major war, but was more intent on providing a strong deterrent force that would enable the Soviets to invest resources in economic concerns.\textsuperscript{257} This is not to say that Khrushchev had abandoned the idea of extending the Soviet empire; rather, he sought to increase it through the promotion of indigenous revolts receiving Soviet advice and materiel assistance instead of through Soviet military manpower. Thus, Khrushchev set about constructing his foreign policy using “missile diplomacy” to threaten, coerce, and intimidate in a high-risk, high-reward tradeoff aimed at freeing resources for domestic use at the cost of the west

\textsuperscript{255} Malia, \textit{The Soviet Tragedy}, 319-20.

\textsuperscript{256} Khrushchev worried whether Soviet diplomatic delegations were receiving the proper respect due at international conferences, fearing the western powers might be looking down on the Soviets. Such issues as whether or not to wear tailcoats, the size of the hotel rooms assigned, and the seating arrangements were of direct interest to Khrushchev rather than being handled by the protocol officer as one might expect. Khrushchev reveled in flying a new model Soviet aircraft simply to deliver the mail while he attended a conference in Britain, simply to “show off” the Soviet achievement. S. Khrushchev, 116-122. Similar considerations attended his visit to the United States in 1959. S. Khrushchev, 326-29 (noting Khrushchev’s pleasure at discovering the Washington, D.C. airport runways were too small to accommodate the new giant Soviet aircraft). See also Paul Michael Kozar, \textit{The Politics of Deterrence: American and Soviet Defense Policies Compared, 1960-1964} (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1987), 12.

\textsuperscript{257} Tow, 153.
potentially calling his bluff. As seen in Figure 4.1, estimated Soviet defense spending as a percentage of gross national product decreased by nearly one quarter over the first five years of Khrushchev’s tenure.

![Figure 4.1: Estimated Soviet Defense Spending](Source: Based on CIA Estimates, Firth and Noren, 1998: 129-30.)

As a result of his deep belief in Marxist ideology, Khrushchev would likely have adopted the stereotypical Cold-War belief system, seeing things in clear bipolar terms. To ensure the Americans maintained their fear of the Soviets in the face of Soviet military reductions, Khrushchev adopted policies based more on bluffing and rhetoric than had Stalin. Examples of Khrushchev’s conduct of foreign policy by crisis include the invasion of Hungary in 1956,

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258 S. Khrushchev, 125; 154-55 (Khrushchev’s concern that the United States would discover how weak the Soviet Union was and launch a pre-emptive strike); 208-10 (Khrushchev’s threat to use missiles in the Suez Crisis which he believed directly resulted in British and French withdrawals); 247 (Khrushchev’s threat to Turkey not to act against Syria); 289-93 (Khrushchev’s threat to the west not to use force in Iraq); 392 (Khrushchev’s threat to use missiles against the bases from which the U-2 intelligence flights originated) and most famously, 604-42 (Khrushchev’s threatening the United States in the Cuban Missile Crisis).

259 See Gaddis, We Now Know, 243; S. Khrushchev, 107.
“fomenting” troubles in the Middle East resulting in the Suez Crisis of 1956, encouraging wars of national liberation in southeast Asia and Africa, the deployment of Soviet troops to the Turkish border in 1958 to coerce Turkey not to act against Syria and later to coerce the United States and Britain not to use force in Iraq, the Berlin Crisis that pinnacled in 1961-62, and the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. In sum, Khrushchev was more willing to assume risks than was Stalin.

In the context of the 1958 Chinese shelling, Khrushchev was in the midst of rapidly deteriorating Sino-Soviet relations. Khrushchev considered Mao to be a dangerous and unreasonable ally who cloaked himself in a traditional Chinese imperial manner of aloofness and infallibility. The Soviet leader considered the GLF a ridiculous idea and complained that the Chinese ignored “scientific laws of economics,” instead operating on “nothing but slogans.” While Khrushchev sought to maintain the unity of the socialist world publicly, communication and consultation between China and the Soviet Union were already breaking down. Most likely, despite traveling to China for talks from July 31 - August 3, 1958, Khrushchev was not advised of the impending offshore island shelling. Accordingly, Khrushchev and the Soviets probably had little influence in the 1958 decision to shell Quemoy and Matsu.

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261 Stoessinger, 172, describes Khrushchev as volatile, and “capable of dangerous, even reckless action.” Even the Soviet Ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin describes Khrushchev as a gambler. Dobrynin, 68.

262 N. Khrushchev, 272.

263 Ibid., 277.

264 N. Khrushchev, 262, asserts that the Soviets favored Chinese attacks on Quemoy and Matsu in order to deny their use to Chiang Kai Shek, but maintains that once the situation favored Mao, the Chinese failed to follow through so that “the whole operation came to nothing.” This demonstrates the divide between Chinese and Soviet thinking on the matter, as the Chinese apparently failed to inform their northern ally of their true intent in the shelling.

265 Xiaobing, Jian and Wilson, 210 (translating Memoir of Wu Lengxi, claiming that Khrushchev was completely unaware of Chinese intentions and dispatched Andrei Gromyko to Beijing on
North Vietnamese Expansion into Laos and South Vietnam, 1960-1964

Ho’s position since 1954 had been tested in North Vietnam, as some factions of the party bitterly protested the Geneva agreement, asserting Ho gave up far too much considering the military victory at Dien Bien Phu. When the Diem regime in the South refused to participate in national elections, these charges against Ho were magnified.\(^{266}\) Ho continuously faced an element domestically that sought to increase military pressure throughout Indochina from 1954 forward. Adding to Ho’s problems, following the Geneva Accords, a tremendous flow of refugees, including most of the professional educated class streamed out of the north to the south.\(^ {267}\) Moreover, in the mid-1950s Ho had implemented Chinese style land reforms that were a clear failure.\(^ {268}\) With these domestic pressures building, by the late 1950s Ho faced a serious situation internally.

Given these domestic problems, the North Vietnamese had maintained a relatively low profile in Laos, still training Pathet Lao officers, but refraining from large unit infiltrations directed at engaging the Royal Lao government. Under these conditions, the Pathet Lao had reached agreement on a coalition government with the Royalists in 1956, but the agreement quickly fell through within less than two years.\(^ {269}\) By 1959, a new Laotian government with Phoui Sananikone as Prime Minister and the noted anti-communist General Phoumi Nosavan in the Cabinet, announced that the Geneva Agreements of 1954 were now complete and no longer binding on the Lao government.\(^ {270}\) Thereafter, the Pathet Lao came under increasing military

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\(^{266}\) Diem’s refusal to participate was partially in response to the numerous violations of the Viet Minh in abiding by the terms of the agreement, including denial of access to the north in order to campaign prior to the elections. Stoessinger, 72.

\(^{267}\) Langer and Zasloff, 60, place the number of refugees at approximately 750,000.

\(^{268}\) Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 76.

\(^{269}\) Ibid., 93; Langer and Zasloff, 65-67.

\(^{270}\) Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 93-94.
attacks from the Royalists as the Pathet Lao refused to implement an agreement to unite Pathet Lao forces into the governmental military structure.

It is possible that Ho enjoyed greater freedom of action during this period as the Chinese domestic troubles may have spurred Mao to return to instigating foreign policy crises to distract from internal problems. After the Geneva Conference of 1954, both China and the Soviets counseled Ho to avoid expanding military operations for fear of provoking American intervention.\textsuperscript{271} However, Mao’s GLF policies, combined with a significant drought in 1960 had produced economic disaster in China. The initial failure of the GLF in 1958-59 and resultant criticism of Mao only caused Mao to push the policies with more vigor, purging all dissenters, including Peng Dehaui.\textsuperscript{272} With the drought exacerbating food shortages, a reported twenty million Chinese peasants starved to death in 1960, followed by another five million in 1961.\textsuperscript{273} PLA forces were deployed to Tibet and to multiple western provinces to deal with peasant rebellion stemming from the food crisis.\textsuperscript{274} Border skirmishes with India first began in 1959.\textsuperscript{275} Thus Mao may have returned to his tried and true tactic of resorting to foreign crises to refocus the country away from the internal problems.\textsuperscript{276}

\textsuperscript{271} Zubok, 249.

\textsuperscript{272} It is important to note that Mao’s relinquishment of office as head of state was not a punitive measure for the GLF policies, but was a pre-planned event intended to free Mao from administrative tasks. Schram, “Mao Tse Tung and Liu Shao Ch’I,” 288; Zhisui, 281.

\textsuperscript{273} Short, 504-05. Zubok, 247, suggests a figure of between twenty and thirty million famine casualties. American estimates were that the Great Leap Forward caused industrial production in China to fall by almost fifty percent between 1959 and 1962, while agricultural production also declined such that 1957 production levels were not matched until 1963. \textbf{DSB} \textbf{V. 50}, 12 (Jan. 4, 1964) (Address Assistant Secretary for FE Affairs, Dec. 13, 1963).

\textsuperscript{274} Short, 506; Zubok, 247.

\textsuperscript{275} Zubok, 247.

\textsuperscript{276} Sino-Indian border clashes occurred in 1961, as did a new round of raised tensions with respect to the offshore islands, although no significant military activities occurred toward Taiwan.
During conversations with Khrushchev in October 1959, Mao told the Soviet leader that China was “against an escalation of fire in Laos” in accord with the Soviet position.\(^{277}\) Liu Shaoqui chimed in to claim that Ho was also against escalation, but that the North Vietnamese Minister of Defense wanted to increase operations in Laos.\(^{278}\) However, given the collapsing Sino-Soviet relations, it is unlikely that Mao would have freely admitted plans to back North Vietnam in ratcheting up tension in Laos. Such would have permitted Khrushchev to take moves aimed at increasing Soviet influence in the region and defeating the Chinese intent.

Encouraging Ho to become more aggressive with respect to Laos, would not only be in keeping with Mao’s previous behavior patterns, but would accord with his desire to replace the Soviet Union as the leader of the international socialist movement.\(^{279}\) Even if the Vietnamese movement was a failure, China would still reap the benefits of being perceived as a committed supporter of revolutionary socialist movements in the third world, in contrast to the perception of the Soviet Union as a more staid government that was being coopted into the existing world power structure.\(^{280}\) Mao was intent on preventing “peaceful coexistence” from infiltrating China and corrupting the perpetual revolution he had created.\(^{281}\)

\(^{277}\) Zubok, 270 (translating conversation of Khrushchev and Mao at Beijing, 3 October 1959).

\(^{278}\) Ibid.

\(^{279}\) Although still strongly supportive of international revolutionary movements, in the throes of the Great Leap Forward disaster the PRC was wary of providing the United States with an excuse to deploy troops to its borders. Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 97-98. Prior to January 1959, the PRC expressly advised Ho not to attack in the south. Jian, Mao’s China and the Cold War, 206, agrees that the decision to escalate matters in Vietnam was Hanoi’s own, not directed by Beijing.

\(^{280}\) Still Mao considered the Vietnam issue a secondary matter until the escalation of 1964. Jie, 293-94.

Thus, sparked by increasing governmental resistance in Laos, domestic troubles, and Chinese domestic distractions pushing Mao to assume more aggressive international posture, Ho ramped up his military machine once again in 1959 to intervene in Laos. Ho was able to obtain increased assistance from China, allowing an exponential increase in the Vietnamese sponsored Pathet Lao.282

Ho’s relations with China were under some strain during this period on account of Ho’s silence regarding the Sino-Indian border conflict. Due to India’s position as Chair of the International Control Commission created at the Geneva negotiations to monitor events in Laos, Ho sought to avoid irritating India. Accordingly, the Soviets may have attempted to take advantage of this conflict to increase their own stature with the Vietnamese communists relative to the Chinese. As the Sino-Soviet conflict intensified, Ho quickly recognized that Vietnam might be a windfall beneficiary as each of the two communist giants sought to bolster their standing as a leader of the international socialist movement. With both powers seeking to establish a reputation, Ho might have felt more inclined to risk military adventure under the belief that he would be well-supplied and supported by the communist giants.

Ho was now operating from a baseline wherein he at least held control over part of Vietnam, comparing favorably to the situation in 1950 when France occupied all of Indochina. Thus, invading Laos risked losing these newly won gains. Yet, given his decaying position within North Vietnam and the risks to be incurred should the Royal Lao government eliminate the Pathet Lao and place additional pressure on Ho’s western flank, along with the economic ruin incurred by adopting Maoist land reform, inactivity was clearly perceived as lying within the realm of losses. Upping the military ante in Laos risked provoking American intervention and potential escalation into a World War, but as before, these risks fell mainly on China and the Soviet Union, as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) was already fighting for survival. On balance, Ho would be operating in the domain of losses, and would thus be risk acceptant.

With respect to initiating military action against the South, both Ho and Mao were likely to be more conservative. Guerrilla operations had been ongoing with different levels of intensity

282 From roughly 1,500 troops in 1959, the Pathet Lao expanded to over 16,000 troops by 1961. Langer and Zasloff, 80-81.

**Chinese and Soviet Intervention in Vietnam, 1964-1969**

**China:** In 1964, Mao was concerned over the CCP drift towards bureaucratism, fearing that revolutionary zeal was dying. Moreover, embittered by the failure of the GLF, Mao was convinced that the fault lie not with the policies, but with the lack of proper indoctrination. Accordingly, Mao sought to revive revolutionary spirit and to remove those leaders who had fallen victim to “sugar-coated bullets.”\footnote{Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 115.} Thus sowing the seeds of the Cultural Revolution, Mao was still focused domestically when the war in Vietnam escalated to new heights with the infusion of American combat troops in 1965. As in the past, Mao sought to mobilize popular support for his extremist domestic policies by directing attention toward foreign ventures. Of course, the same nationalist, internationalist, security, and ideological motivations as existed in the first Indochina War existed in the 1960s as well.

By 1964, the Sino-Soviet conflict had turned publicly bitter. Mao’s ideological fanaticism placed China on a far different path than that of the Soviet Union. Mao saw the Cuban Missile Crisis as further evidence of the Soviet abandonment of revolutionary ideals. Although Khrushchev’s risky policies and increasingly domineering leadership style had alienated the Soviet Politburo leading to his removal, the concept of peaceful coexistence was retained. To Mao, this looked like a Soviet-American condominium in which the international socialist revolution was shunted aside and in which the Chinese were permanently consigned to a secondary role. Replacing Khrushchev with his protégé Brezhnev, a lifelong apparatchik, only cemented Mao’s opinion of the Soviets as a stagnant, bureaucratized state that had lost its
revolutionary bearings. Mao thus saw the situation in Vietnam as an opportunity to establish China as the true international leader of the socialist movement taking an aggressive militant path in support of Ho Chi Minh.\textsuperscript{285} Chinese aid of Sukarno in Indonesia spurring the confrontasi with Malaysia at precisely the same time leaves little doubt as to China’s intentions in Southeast Asia.\textsuperscript{286}

It is important to note that Mao’s two main reasons for providing assistance to the Vietnamese had little to do with Vietnam. First, Mao wanted to mobilize the masses within China in order to carry out the policies of the Cultural Revolution. Second, Mao used Vietnam to pursue his objectives stemming from the Sino-Soviet conflict.

The CCP was no longer a revolutionary band seeking a claim on power, but was in charge of an established state celebrating its fifteenth anniversary. China no longer feared for its survival, but sought to advance its interests. As a major player on the international stage, the PRC had far more to lose in 1964 than in 1950. Even though Mao was preparing his own personal “coup” against the CCP, he too shared the benefits attendant to a decade of rule and was clearly averse to a return to nothing.

In October 1964, the PRC detonated its first nuclear device. While it lacked the means to deliver such a device to the United States, it nonetheless marked a significant qualitative advance in PLA capabilities.\textsuperscript{287} Mere possession of such a weapon could reasonably be considered to have a strong deterrent effect on the prospects for escalation. Moreover, the American administration in charge was no longer that of Eisenhower and Dulles seeking to capitalize on the potential utility of nuclear weaponry, but instead was that of Johnson and McNamara seeking to further the concepts of flexible response and limited war while beginning to see nuclear weapons as unusable. Accordingly, the Chinese were likely far less concerned over the


\textsuperscript{287} \textit{Cf. } Tsou and Halperin, 80, claiming the explosion of the atomic device did not change China’s “military situation vis-à-vis the west.”

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possibility of American troops crossing the Chinese border than they had been in 1950. With its first test of an air-dropped nuclear bomb in May 1965 and a nuclear armed missile test in November 1966, China’s nuclear deterrent was further strengthened.\footnote{288}{Tao, 430. The Chinese lacked intercontinental range missiles, but could have hit American military bases located in Asia. Tao, 430-31. Indeed, Zhou Enlai is quoted from a May 21, 1965 speech as saying “When the atomic bomb is shot over their heads toward us, the Japanese will suffer more damage than we will. Japan has a population on one hundred million concentrated on several large islands. It has many industries.” Qiang Zhai, “Zhou Enlai Explains China’s Decision to Explode the Second Atomic Bomb,” \textit{Cold War International History Project Bulletin} 10 (March 1998): 228. While Zhou was offering rhetoric claiming Japan actually favored China’s possession of nuclear weapons, the threatening tenor of the statements is unmistakable.} On the other hand, possession of nuclear capability removed some of the constraints that Mao had counted on to stay the U.S. nuclear hand in Korea. Chinese nuclear weapons facilities provided a suitable target for U.S. nuclear weapons. Moreover, world opinion would likely be less outraged at the use of nuclear weapons against another nuclear state than against a non-nuclear state. Accordingly, Mao might have been more secure that he would not be attacked; however, should he initiate attack, he may have felt far less secure that the United States would abstain from using nuclear weapons.

While membership in the nuclear club freed China’s hands to take a more active role in Vietnam secure in the knowledge that they had greater control over escalation, the Sino-Soviet conflict worked in the opposite direction. Withdrawal of Soviet advisors, technical specialists, financial and materiel assistance to the PRC in 1960 left China standing alone against the military might of the United States.\footnote{289}{Jian, \textit{Mao’s China and the Cold War}, 82. William Taubman, “Khrushchev vs. Mao: A Preliminary Sketch of the Role of Personality in the Sino-Soviet Split,” \textit{Cold War International History Project Bulletin} 8/9 (Winter 1996): 246, cites Chinese sources indicating Khrushchev withdrew nearly 1,400 Soviet technical advisors, canceled nearly 350 contracts, and ended over 250 joint projects in science and technology.} Thus, while the chances of escalation were less than in Korea, the potential consequences of escalation were greater. Should the Chinese escalate the war in Indochina provoking an American response, the February 1950 Sino-Soviet alliance was hardly a steadfast guarantee of Soviet aid.\footnote{290}{Jie, 292, asserts that the Chinese begin to doubt this treaty as early as 1959.} In marked contrast, Chinese involvement in

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\textit{Cold War International History Project Bulletin}
Indochina would have to take into account the requirements of deterring hostile actions emanating from the north.\textsuperscript{291}

A second major damper on Chinese escalation resulted from the fact that in 1964, the PRC was just beginning to climb out of the hole created by the disastrous GLF policies. Figure 4.2 shows the beginning of the upward trend in terms of China’s estimated gross domestic product from 1952-1965. Unlike Korea in 1950, the Chinese would not enjoy Soviet assistance in terms of grants or loans.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure42.png}
\caption{PRC Estimated GDP, 1952-1965}
\label{fig:figure42}
\end{figure}

Source: Alan Heston, Robert Summers and Bettina Aten, Penn World Table Version 6.1, Center for International Comparisons, University of Pennsylvania (2002)

Third, the Chinese perceived less need to escalate matters in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{292} The incompetence and corruption of the South Vietnamese regime had made the elimination of popular support for the Viet Minh particularly difficult. Guerrilla tactics in the south had been effective, leading the Chinese to counsel Ho to continue to avoid conventional conflict and

\textsuperscript{291} In the event, significant Sino-Soviet border clashes did not occur until 1969. Short, 584.

\textsuperscript{292} Schulzinger, 248.
instead concentrate on guerrilla warfare. To Mao, U.S. deployment of troops would not have a large effect on a guerrilla war. As long as the Vietnamese did not pursue concentrated conventional operations, they would withstand U.S. assistance to the south. Moreover, Mao was only too happy to see the United States expend resources in a long-term campaign that Mao perceived as inevitably favoring the communists.293

Gurtov and Hwang suggest a further reason militating against Chinese involvement was division among the CCP elites following the GLF.294 I wholly discount this idea of a pluralist China where competing interest groups vied for resources through negotiations and political maneuvers. Far from an example of Allison’s bureaucratic politics model, China was a totalitarian dictatorship under Mao.295 All power was concentrated in a single individual. The very fact that Mao was able to create the Cultural Revolution is testament to the fact that Mao’s power was absolute. Likewise, Mao’s ability to dismiss such prominent figures as Liu Shaoqui, Zhou Enlai, and Deng Xiaoping undercuts the pluralist thesis.296 Accordingly, an explanation based on competing interest groups within the Chinese politburo simply fails to accord with the evidence.

By the late 1960s Mao’s perception of the international environment had changed. The Chinese ambassador was recalled from Moscow and the Soviet ambassador returned from Beijing in 1966.297 The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and the announcement of the Brezhnev Doctrine in 1968 in which the Soviets essentially reserved the right to intervene in the matters of any socialist country that appeared to be casting aside socialist bonds fueled Chinese

293 Duiker, 546.

294 Gurtov and Hwang, 157-77.

295 Zhai, “Beijing and the Vietnam Conflict,” 238, suggests that Mao’s dominance of affairs “casts doubts on the utility of the faction model in explaining Chinese foreign policy-making.”

296 Even the Politburo required Mao’s approval before announcing a decision. X. Li, 324.

fears of Russian imperialism.\textsuperscript{298} Nixon’s policy of Vietnamization suggested an American retreat to Mao, permitting the Soviet Union to become the dominant force in the Asian Pacific. By 1969, the Sino-Soviet conflict passed from bitter rhetoric to actual military clashes along the Ussuri River, resulting in deployment of “hundreds of thousands of troops” along the border by each side.\textsuperscript{299} These events led Mao to accept overtures made by Nixon to improve Sino-American relations in a classic example of balance of power politics.\textsuperscript{300}

This change in primary adversaries directly influenced the events in Vietnam as in the late 1960s as the Viet Minh were becoming increasingly agitated over the Chinese refusal to cooperate with the Soviets in the delivery of Soviet aid. Moreover, with the Viet Minh pursuing larger unit offensive operations, the heavier weaponry available from the USSR become more necessary, causing the DRV to grow closer to the Soviets.\textsuperscript{301} This in turn caused the Chinese to fear a Soviet dominated Vietnam, resulting in the PRC’s looking to tighten relations with both the Pathet Lao in Laos and the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia so as to provide a counter-weight to Vietnam, which only furthered the Sino-Vietnamese split since the Viet Minh saw Chinese actions as impinging on Vietnam’s sphere of influence.\textsuperscript{302}


\textsuperscript{300} In \textit{Mao’s China and the Cold War}, Chen Jian asserts that this was not simply power politics, but included an ideological element as well, arguing that Mao had identified the Soviets as capitalist-imperialists and thus the bigger threat. I find this argument unconvincing and unnecessary. Marxist thought has long held nominally socialist governments to be more dangerous than capitalist governments. Socialist governments address some of the symptoms of the “capitalist disease” permitting the unequal conditions of exploitation to continue indefinitely, whereas capitalist governments are so exploitative that the proletariat will be highly motivated to overturn the system. Socialism in this sense may inoculate the system against revolution, providing just enough relief to dissuade the revolution from getting off the ground. In this way, Mao need not have stretched credulity by labeling the Soviets as capitalists, but could have maintained mainstream Marxist thought by depicting the Soviets as a stagnant socialist bureaucracy looking to infect the healthy Chinese revolution, thus presenting the greatest threat.

\textsuperscript{301} Zhai, \textit{China and the Vietnam Wars}, 179.

\textsuperscript{302} Ibid., 180-91; Suyin, 394.
Initially, the Chinese framed the decision to escalate matters in Vietnam against the domestic backdrop. Consumed by his vision of a continuous revolution, Mao looked to Vietnam as a tool to be used for domestic purposes. Buoyed by an indigenous nuclear deterrent and fairly confident over U.S. intentions, the Chinese saw no need to expand its role in Vietnam. As the Sino-Soviet split furthered, Beijing faced competing pressures. On one hand it could expand its activities in Vietnam in order to undercut Soviet influence. Such a course of action entailed significant risks due to the Chinese economic picture and the pressures on multiple geographic fronts: India, Soviet Union, Taiwan, and Vietnam. On the other hand, China could scale back its involvement in Vietnam in order to improve Sino-American relations while simultaneously damaging Soviet-American relations. With the domestic turmoil unleashed in the Cultural Revolution and mounting international hostility, the risks involved in expanding Chinese presence in Vietnam were perceived as substantial. Accordingly, while Mao originally saw things in the domain of losses due to the stagnation of his domestic revolution, by the end of the 1960s he had reversed course and now evaluated his position as in the domain of gains. Thus, at the beginning of the period, Mao may have been somewhat risk acceptant, but by the end of the decade, he was moving into the risk averse realm.\(^{303}\)

**Soviet Union:** Leonid Brezhnev was born to steelworker parents in 1906, rendering him too young to participate meaningfully in the Russian Civil War. He joined the *Komsomol* (Communist Youth League) as a teen and was trained as a land administrator for the party.\(^{304}\) This position amounted to a tax collector and provided Brezhnev with the authority to employ

\(^{303}\) This conclusion highlights the need to assess gains and losses based on the unique cultural characteristics of the decision-maker. What to most western analysts looked like a clear disaster for China in the Cultural Revolution was perceived by Mao as on balance a marked success. He eliminated stagnant leaders across the country, shook up the CCP, imbued an entire new generation with revolutionary zeal, and set an example of extremism that he hoped to see followed after his death. From a western perspective these “gains” would hardly have outweighed the millions of human lives that were lost, the material destruction suffered, and the complete removal of China as a model for third world revolutionary movements.

\(^{304}\) Murphy, 21.
severe physical threats to ensure his quotas were met.\textsuperscript{305} As he began to rise in party ranks, he made use of terror to ensure collectivization goals were met.\textsuperscript{306} Brezhnev’s methods were hardly unique; however, as Stalin’s purges cleared the way for fast promotions, Brezhnev caught the attention of Khrushchev and became the latter’s political protégé.\textsuperscript{307} Later as Moldavian party chief, Brezhnev successfully pacified the area by executing under-producing collective farm leaders.\textsuperscript{308} Upon Stalin’s death, Khrushchev appointed Brezhnev to a high-ranking position with the Soviet military, placing him in charge of the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile program.\textsuperscript{309}

Brezhnev’s military service record during the Second World War was solid, although he was a essentially a propagandist rather than a line officer. However, his career is notable for the fact that he was the first lifelong bureaucrat to achieve the top position in the CPSU. Brezhnev was inclined to see things through the thick veil of the communist totalitarian structure. His position with the military caused him to promote military matters in a reversal of Khrushchev’s policies - a fact that enabled the military to garner power as an independent constituency to a far greater degree. Given these positions, it would be only expected that he would have had a Cold-War mentality of viewing the United States as an aggressive, hostile state.

Brezhnev’s primary interests in Vietnam were those attending Sino-Soviet relations. Prior to 1964, the Soviet Union took only a limited interest in the Vietnamese war; however, beginning with the ascent of Brezhnev in 1964, the Soviets markedly increased their efforts to assist the Viet Minh.\textsuperscript{310} By offering aid to Hanoi, the Soviets sought first to counter the Chinese bid for international socialist leadership and re-establish their own primacy, and second to keep the Americans bogged down in a resource draining commitment with little possibility of what

\textsuperscript{305} Ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{306} Ibid., 32.
\textsuperscript{307} Ibid., 48.
\textsuperscript{308} Ibid., 113.
\textsuperscript{309} Ibid., 159.
\textsuperscript{310} Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 122.
could be publicly termed success. By keeping a steady logistical flow to the North Vietnamese, but stopping short of substantial troop commitments, the Soviets hoped to keep the threat of escalation alive in order to keep the Americans tied down.  

As the war continued and the Sino-Soviet split progressed, it became important for the Soviets to maintain a strong hand in Vietnam in order to contain Chinese influence. Considering Mao to be entirely unpredictable, the Soviets sought to establish geographic advantage should the conflict erupt into open warfare. Secondly, maintenance of a position in Vietnam offered the Soviets new opportunities with respect to expansion in the Asian Pacific. Establishing a Soviet naval base at Cam Ranh Bay directly across the South China Sea from the U.S. base at Subic Bay in the Philippines provided an excellent opportunity to monitor American seapower. Nonetheless, the Soviets did not wish to become directly involved in a war with the United States, particularly in light of the growing threat emanating from China.

The Soviet baseline in 1964 was a split Vietnam with preponderant Chinese influence. Failure to act to support the Viet Minh would effectively cede the region to the Chinese. Escalation of the war would serve only to stop the bleeding of American resources that might be accomplished in a drawn out guerrilla war. Moreover, the Soviets might gain influence in the region via successful escalation, but only at the risk of direct attacks on the Soviet Union. In short, the Soviets were operating within the domain of gains. Hence, the Soviets would have adopted a risk averse posture.

Summary

With these risk assessments in place, we can now turn to the application of the theory as to the actual deterrence efforts in the cases discussed and to testing the significance of clarity in successful deterrence polices. Using these estimates of challenger risk propensity, we can review the credibility of defenders’ threats to see in which cases declaratory policy might have played a large role, and, if so, how the actual declaratory policy performed in influencing actors with varying risk propensity. Table 4.1 provides a bottom-line summary of the risk assessments.

311 Malia, The Soviet Tragedy, 374.
Table 4.1: Summary of Risk Assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crisis</th>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China’s Intervention in Korea, 1950</td>
<td>Mao</td>
<td>Very risk acceptant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China’s Attack on Taiwan, 1950</td>
<td>Mao</td>
<td>Very risk acceptant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expansion of Korean War, 1951-53</td>
<td>Mao</td>
<td>Risk neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stalin</td>
<td>Risk averse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>Very risk acceptant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China’s Intervention in Indochina, 1950-54</td>
<td>Mao</td>
<td>Risk acceptant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Vietnam’s Intervention in Laos, 1950-54</td>
<td>Ho Chi Minh</td>
<td>Very risk acceptant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Taiwan Straits Crisis, 1954-55</td>
<td>Mao</td>
<td>Risk acceptant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Taiwan Straits Crisis, 1958</td>
<td>Mao</td>
<td>Marginally risk acceptant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Khrushchev</td>
<td>Not influential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Vietnam’s Intervention in Laos and Attack on South Vietnam, 1959-64</td>
<td>Ho Chi Minh</td>
<td>Risk acceptant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escalation of Vietnam War</td>
<td>Mao</td>
<td>Risk acceptant moving towards risk averse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brezhnev</td>
<td>Risk averse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 5
APPLYING THE THEORY

In this chapter I apply the theory set forth to each of the nine test cases. For each case I provide a brief synopsis of the crisis, followed by an assessment of the goals, capabilities, and interests at stake for each of the parties. I then review the defender’s risk propensity and declaratory policies, before offering an analysis of the deterrence episode.

**Chinese Intervention in Korea, 1950**

Between the end of the Second World War and the June 25, 1950 assault by North Korean troops across the 38th parallel, the United States established little in the way of a consistent coherent policy aimed at protecting U.S. interests in continental Asia. Focused primarily on Europe, the United States placed General Douglas MacArthur in charge of the Japanese islands, grudgingly provided independence to the Philippines while retaining a major military presence therein, and pushed along the Dutch grant of independence to Indonesia. Bounded by the American position in the Aleutian Islands to the north and friendly governments in Australia and New Zealand to the south, an offshore defensive perimeter began to take shape for the United States in the western Pacific. Meanwhile, U.S. policy toward the Asian mainland was marked by passivity. In China, stuck with an ineffective ally in Chiang Kai-Shek, the United States drifted between urging settlement with the Maoists and qualified support of the KMT. The Soviets, having already occupied Outer Mongolia and seeking to extend their Asian influence, watched cautiously for an indication of the degree of U.S. support to the KMT. On the Korean peninsula, the presumably temporary division arising from the respective responsibilities of the Soviet and U.S. armies for accepting Japanese surrender hardened into an armed partition with little likelihood of peaceful unification. In Southeast Asia, reflecting the
continued Europe-first orientation of the American government, the United States accepted prolonged European imperialism in both Indochina and Malaya, helping to undermine the pro-American sentiment that liberation from the Japanese had purchased.

On June 25, 1950, Kim Il-Sung launched an invasion of the Republic of Korea (ROK) with the blessings of both Stalin and Mao. When the United States took advantage of the Soviet boycott of the UN Security Council meetings to push through a resolution providing for the use of military force to repel the North Korean invasion, both the Soviets and the Chinese were surprised. Mao immediately began to reorient his military forces, preparing to assist Kim. The North Koreans enjoyed early success, managing to push the South Koreans and the initial contingent of UN forces to the southern tip of the Korean Peninsula where a defensive position centered around Pusan had been established. When the North Koreans failed to break through the perimeter, Mao stepped up preparations, ordering his border area commander to be ready to begin operations by October 1. Thus, well prior to the dramatic Inchon landing of September 15, in which UN forces cut the North Korean lines of communication, decimating the over-extended North Korean forces, Mao was ready to act. Plans for Chinese intervention long preceded the early October UN push to and past the 38th parallel.

1 While many contemporaneous analyses suggested that the Korean invasion was wholly a product of Moscow, modern analyses suggest Moscow provided more of a supporting role. See Chapter Four, n. 157.

2 Stalin had ordered the Soviet Ambassador to the UN, Jacob Malik, to boycott Security Council meetings beginning in January 1950 to protest the seating of a KMT representative rather than a PRC representative. While often portrayed as a major Soviet error, another line of thought suggests Stalin may have purposely absented the Soviets from the Security Council precisely to channel any western reaction to Kim’s invasion into the UN rather than risk unilateral action by the United States. Had the Americans acted outside the UN and China intervened, Stalin risked having the Sino-Soviet defense pact invoked by Mao; however, with the action taken by the UN, the operative provisions of the treaty would not be implicated. Undermining this theory are the facts that Stalin did not give his final approval for the invasion until April, that the treaty was concluded in February, and that Stalin was sold on the invasion with the promise that the operation would provide a fait accompli.
In mid-October 1950, PLA forces began crossing the Yalu River on the China - North Korea border.\(^3\) While this clearly indicated the failure of U.S. deterrent efforts, American intelligence may have perceived this as “limited intervention” designed solely to secure a “buffer zone” between China and UN occupied North Korea.\(^4\) Accordingly, American deterrence efforts continued until the scope of the Chinese intervention became apparent in late November, at which time a reassessment of American aims and capabilities was undertaken.

**Goals**

*China:* China’s fundamental goal for the intervention in Korea was nothing less than the complete defeat of the U.S. led UN forces and their removal from the peninsula.\(^5\) Returning to the status quo of a split Korea and accepting the deployment of U.S. troops in South Korea was unacceptable to Mao on ideological, security, and status grounds.\(^6\) Instructions to subordinates made clear that any inquiries into a negotiated settlement on behalf of the UN were dependent upon the UN first agreeing to a complete and immediate withdrawal of its forces from the Korean peninsula.\(^7\) To accomplish this, Mao sought to capitalize on the post World War II demobilization in America that had left the military undermanned and underequipped. Mao hoped to rapidly defeat the Americans before they had the opportunity to adjust to Chinese intervention and bring in additional troops and materiel.\(^8\) Secondary goals included a cessation

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\(^3\) Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 116, places the precise date as October 14, 1950.

\(^4\) S. Zhang, 102.

\(^5\) Christensen, 166. Note that Christensen argues that while this was the Chinese goal, the Chinese only put it into effect once U.S. troops crossed the 38\(^{th}\) parallel.

\(^6\) Hunt, 189-91, suggests that Mao had no clear original goal, but was forced to intervene in a hastily planned operation simply to stop the UN rout. Hunt argues that the early battlefield successes caused Mao to adopt the more ambitious goal of eliminating U.S. forces from Korea.

\(^7\) Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War*, 119.

\(^8\) S. Zhang, 80-84.
of American aid to Chiang Kai-Shek and conclusion of a peace treaty with Japan on terms acceptable to the communist world. 9

Whiting argues that the Chinese goal was merely the establishment and maintenance of a buffer zone between UN forces and Chinese borders. 10 Supporting this argument is the suggestion that Mao was heavily dependent on the Yalu River power plants for generating electricity necessary in the Manchurian industrial region. However, the evidence tends to undermine this thesis. The Commander in Chief of UN Forces (CINCUNF) General Douglas MacArthur reported that at least some of the power stations along the Yalu were not running or manned when the first UN scout forces approached the area in November. 11 Secondly, the size of the Chinese intervention, coupled with the logistical effort to supply the Chinese second offensive in late November made clear that the plan to move forward was in place long before UN troops crossed the 38th parallel or even landed at Inchon.

United States: America’s goal in Korea was unclear. Initially, Truman sought to repel the North Korean invasion in order to demonstrate American resolve to fight communist aggression while also establishing the UN as a major factor in guaranteeing collective security. Pursuant to the newly approved NSC-68, U.S. containment policy was to become more aggressive and assertive in meeting communist advances wherever they might take place. Given the success of the North Korean assault and the logistical difficulties of mobilizing and deploying forces across the Pacific Ocean, U.S. forces were strictly defensively oriented in the early weeks of the war. The UN Security Council Resolution of June 25, 1950 called merely for the withdrawal of North Korean forces to the 38th parallel. 12 Once the situation stabilized and


10 Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 155.

11 FRUS 1950, Vol. VII: 1232. Additionally, when the order finally was given to attack these plants in June 1952, field commanders noted that the plants had not been attacked earlier as machinery had been removed from these plants for a long time: only recently had the machinery been returned and the plants been operating. FRUS 1952-1954, Vol. XV: 356 (Memo DOS-JCS Meeting, Jun. 25, 1952).

additional forces could be brought into the theater, U.S. policy-makers began to emphasize the notion of unifying the peninsula under southern control.\textsuperscript{13} Since the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel had never been intended as a permanent border, lacked inherent significance, and was geographically unsuited to serving as a defensible demarcation, it made little sense to continue to set policy around this arbitrarily chosen parallel. Indeed, no legal justification existed for the division of Korea. Only the de facto general observation of the line by Kim Il-Sung and Syngman Rhee, along with their respective international backers, provided meaning to the 38\textsuperscript{th}. Thus, Kim’s June gamble effectively erased the only legitimacy the division had. Accordingly, rather than simply repelling the North Korean forces, U.S. policymakers began to favor giving MacArthur authority to proceed beyond the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel, provided he kept a safe distance from the Russian frontier.\textsuperscript{14}

The State Department’s Policy Planning Staff limited its support to a restoration of the status quo while the State Department’s Bureau of Northeast Asian Affairs was less opposed to operations beyond the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel.\textsuperscript{15} While recognizing the political need to respond to communist aggression in Korea, the influential George Kennan advocated searching for some negotiated settlement, after which the United States could withdraw from Korea entirely, asserting that it was “beyond U.S. capabilities to keep Korea permanently out of the Soviet orbit.”\textsuperscript{16} By the end of August, the State Department accepted that operations past the 38\textsuperscript{th} were acceptable, provided there was no major Soviet or Chinese intervention.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{13} Stueck, The Korean War: An International History, 63; Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 70; DSB V. 23, 409 (Sep. 11, 1950)(President Truman Radio Address, Sep. 1, 1950).


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 453 (Draft Memo, DOS Policy Planning Staff, Jul. 22, 1950); Ibid., 458-61 (Memo from Director Office of Northeast Asian Affairs to Director DOS Policy Planning Staff, Jul. 24, 1950).

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 625 (Memo from Kennan to Secretary of State, Aug. 21, 1950).

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 653 (DOS Memo, Aug. 28, 1950).
Military leaders were less fractured, agreeing that the proper goal was unification. In July, in the midst of the delaying action, MacArthur argued for an objective of destruction of North Korean forces rather than mere return to the prior borders. In August the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) agreed that the objective in Korea should be the destruction of the North Korean military forces, a position approved by the Secretary of Defense in early September and passed on to President Truman. On September 11, the President approved NSC 81/1 which called for U.S. forces to seek unification of the peninsula provided there was no entry of Soviet or Chinese forces into North Korea. With the success of the Inchon operation, MacArthur was given a formal order on September 27 approving the crossing of the 38th, as well as direct authority from the new Secretary of Defense George Marshall to do so. As victory appeared certain, on October 7 the UN General Assembly passed a resolution calling for the unification of the peninsula. Thus, prior to the Chinese intervention, the goal of the United States had shifted from expulsion of the North Korean attackers to unification of the peninsula.

Capabilities

Communist forces: In the summer of 1950, the PLA consisted of approximately five million active duty troops organized into five field armies. While it had eliminated nearly one million troops in the spring of 1950, these reductions were likely aimed at eliminating the KMT

22 Ibid., 793 (Secretary of Defense to President, Sep. 27, 1950); Ibid., 826 (Secretary of Defense to CINCFE, Sep. 29, 1950).
23 Ibid., 302 (Telegram from Consul General at Shanghai to Secretary of State, Feb. 1, 1950); Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 20. The 3rd and 4th Field Armies were the primary offensive forces, each containing approximately forty-five divisions - nearly double the size of the remaining armies. James C. Mulveron and Andrew N.D. Yang, eds. The People’s Liberation Army as Organization (Santa Monica: Rand, 2002), 16-17.
troops that had defected to the communist side during the Civil War.\textsuperscript{24} Permitting these troops to join the PLA had served both military and propaganda purposes during the Civil War, but with the flight of the KMT to Taiwan, ideological considerations dictated that such troops be removed in order to prevent their undermining the PLA’s fanaticism. Moreover, as Mao was now in charge of \textit{state} security, he needed to reshape his forces to cope with external threats; thus, a switch from troop-intensive basic infantry to technology-dependent naval and air power was unavoidable to some extent, despite Mao’s belief in the superiority of the properly indoctrinated communist soldier.\textsuperscript{25}

The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) army numbered between 100,000-135,000 prior to the June invasion and had 150 Soviet supplied T-34 tanks and 180 Soviet supplied aircraft, as well as howitzers, mortars and anti-tank guns to provide artillery support.\textsuperscript{26} Between one-third and one-half of this army comprised Korean born soldiers who had fought

\textsuperscript{24} In a January 1, 1950 conversation with the Soviet Ambassador to China, N.V. Roshchin, Mao claimed 400,000 KMT troops had been taken prisoner and defected to the PLA in just the provinces of Szechuan and Xinjiang. Westad, 227 (translating Roschchin’s Memorandum of conversation between Mao and Roshchin). See Jian, \textit{China’s Road to the Korean War}, 95, and Whiting, \textit{China Crosses the Yalu}, 18, concerning downsizing.

\textsuperscript{25} Jian, \textit{China’s Road to the Korean War}, 95 (characterizing the reduction as a restructuring rather than a demobilization).

with the CCP and been returned by Mao, with arms, over the previous year.\textsuperscript{27} Nearly all of the top level DRPK military leaders were trained in the Soviet Union while many of the other officers received training in either China or the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{28} Reports suggested Soviet advisors may have even accompanied attacking North Korean forces.\textsuperscript{29} Given this level of experience and equipment, the DPRK military was far superior to its ROK counterpart at the outset.\textsuperscript{30} However, the human wave tactics employed by the North Koreans over the summer, capped by the devastation inflicted by UN forces following the Inchon landing left the North Korean military in tatters by the end of September, requiring nearly three months to regroup in order to field combat effective units, although small groups of DPRK troops were able to function as guerrillas behind enemy lines.\textsuperscript{31}


\textsuperscript{28} Lankov, 37.

\textsuperscript{29} FRUS 1950, Vol. VII: 309-10 (Telegram from Secretary of State to Diplomatic and Consular Offices, Jul. 6, 1950). Tsouras, 70-71, asserts the presence of approximately 3,000 Soviet officers with DPRK troops.

\textsuperscript{30} Montross and Canzona, U.S. Marine Operations in Korea. Volume I: The Pusan Perimeter, 22, go so far as to describe the DRPK military as “second only to the Russians” as the “best armed force of its size in the Far East.”

\textsuperscript{31} Appleman, 609. Even prior to Inchon, the DRPK army sustained heavy casualties, numbered at approximately 58,000 by early August. Appleman, 262. Stueck, The Korean War: An International History, 48, 86, 111, puts DPRK casualties at 50,000 within just the first month of the war, while claiming only 25,000 DPRK troops even made it back across the 38\textsuperscript{th} following the Inchon landing. In mid-October MacArthur estimated approximately 15,000 DPRK troops remained south of the 38\textsuperscript{th} while perhaps 100,000 troops of varying quality were left north of the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel. FRUS 1950, Vol. VII: 949 (Memo of Wake Island Conference between MacArthur and Truman, Oct. 15, 1950).
Prior to the invasion, Mao’s forces had been gathering near the Fujian coast directly across from Quemoy in training for an operation against Taiwan, although in May and June 1950, Mao had repositioned sixty thousand troops from the south to the northeast region. Once Kim’s forces invaded, causing the U.S. deployment of the Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Straits, Mao scotched the Taiwan plans and began to amass forces in China’s northeast. By July 1950, Mao had moved some 180,000 troops, including elements of both the 3rd and 4th Field Armies, to Manchuria and begun training designating the United States as the enemy force. In early August Mao combined several units, including the 38th, 39th, 40th and 42nd Field Armies to form the 13th Army Group consisting of 260,000 troops for the initial intervention in Korea. Anti-aircraft artillery units were deployed to the Yalu River in August. By October, Mao brought the total to over 320,000 troops positioned “within striking distance” of Korea, with plans to send an additional 400,000 to northeast China as a reserve force. After the first skirmishes in

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32 Approximately 150,000 PLA troops were concentrated across the Straits from Taiwan with another 300,000 in reserve. Roger Dingman, “Atomic Diplomacy During the Korean War,” International Security 13, no. 3 (Winter 1988/1989): 61; S. Zhang, 58. For the May-June deployment to the northeast, see Kalicki, 27.

33 Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 53; 68; S. Zhang, 74.

34 American intelligence reported nearly 200,000 PLA troops on the Korean border as of early July. FRUS 1950, Vol. VII: 309-10 (Telegram from Secretary of State to Diplomatic and Consular Offices, Jul. 6, 1950).

35 X. Li, et al., 3; Ping, 62; S. Zhang, 102. Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 136-37, places the movement in late July. Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 162, note the training for the United States.

36 Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 137. See also DSB V. 23, 858 (Nov. 27, 1950) (Special Report of UN Command Operation in Korea, noting anti-aircraft fire from Manchurian side of the Yalu in late August).

37 Kalicki, 56; Richard Ned Lebow, “Deterrence Failure Revisited,” International Security 12, no. 1 (Summer 1987): 201. American intelligence in early November estimated there were forty-four divisions available in Manchuria. FRUS 1950, Vol. VII: 1039 (Memo Director Office of Chinese Affairs to Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern Affairs, Nov. 4, 1950). Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 23, suggests that some of these troop movements to the northeast began
late October and early November, the PLA brought another 80,000 troops, including the 50th and 66th Armies, across the Yalu, resulting in a Chinese force of roughly 340,000 troops in Korea in mid-November, with close to 500,000 positioned in Manchuria.\(^{38}\) Seeking to capitalize on the huge manpower advantage he enjoyed, Mao planned to bring another twenty-four divisions into the fray the following spring and summer.\(^{39}\)

China lacked a significant air force or navy at the time, although it was in the process of acquiring Soviet made MiG-15 jet fighters as well as Soviet light bombers.\(^{40}\) As a result of negotiations undertaken during Liu Shaoqui’s visit to Moscow in July 1949, the Soviets established six aviation schools for Chinese military pilots, sent nearly nine hundred Soviet air technicians to work in China and sold Mao 434 aircraft.\(^{41}\) During Mao’s meetings with Stalin in Moscow that winter, Mao purchased an additional 280 fighters, 198 bombers and 108 Soviet transport and trainer aircraft.\(^{42}\) Before leaving in February, Mao began negotiations to obtain another 600 Soviet planes.\(^{43}\) Moreover, to entice Mao to deploy his troops to the Korean border, Stalin advised as early as July 13, 1950 that the Soviets would provide approximately 124 fighter aircraft to provide air support should Mao send Chinese divisions to the Korean border.\(^{44}\) Later,

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\(^{38}\) Appleman, 768; Kalicki, 61; Tsouras, 67; Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 122.


\(^{40}\) Christensen, 169; X. Li, et al., 4.

\(^{41}\) Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 75-77.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 84.

\(^{43}\) Ibid.

with Mao expecting Soviet air support during the invasion, Stalin claimed he could not provide such air support in Korea until ten to twelve weeks into the campaign. Mao estimated the developing Chinese air force would not be ready for major operations until February 1951. Still, Soviet aircraft were present in China and patrolled Shanghai even prior to Kim’s invasion in order to deter KMT air attacks. Soviet air defense units were sent to Shanghai, Nanjing and Xuzhou as early as February 1950. While not originally venturing into Korean airspace, Soviet piloted MiGs were spotted near the Yalu in November in areas where Manchurian based aircraft engaged UN aircraft. MacArthur estimated that the Soviets had approximately one thousand planes available in the region from the Siberian Air force, including some jets and some medium range bombers, and could supplement this force with another two to three hundred aircraft from the Soviet fleet, should the Soviets decide to provide air support for the Chinese. However, the military anticipated minimal, if any, coordination between Soviet air and Chinese ground forces.

45 This was most likely a test of Mao’s reliability, as in the event, Soviet aircraft appeared much sooner. See Weathersby, “New Russian Documents on the Korean War,” 49 (Document 38: telegram from Mao to Stalin dated Nov. 15, 1950, expressing gratitude to Soviet pilots for reportedly shooting down 23 invading American planes over the previous twelve days).

46 Zhihua, 238 (quoting Chinese version of Mao’s Oct. 2, 1950 telegram to Stalin). Mao’s telegram references only 300 planes, a substantially smaller figure than that cited by Jian.

47 S. Zhang, 77.

48 Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 84.

49 Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 135. Appleman, 715, reports the first MiG-15 combat action in Korea as occurring October 31, 1950. Reports of Manchurian based aircraft attacking UN planes are noted in a speech made by Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Dean Rusk on November 15, 1950. DSB V. 23, 890 (Dec. 4, 1950). Unconfirmed intelligence reports noted the presence of a Soviet officer in command of a North Korean air base during the initial June attack. FRUS 1950, Vol. VII: 252 (Teletype from Tokyo to Washington, June 30, 1950).

The PLA was primarily equipped with Japanese arms turned over to the CCP by the Soviets after World War II, and with captured KMT arms produced in America.\footnote{Whiting, \textit{China Crosses the Yalu}, 20.} Accordingly, the Chinese forces suffered from a lack of standardization and an inability of Chinese industry to readily supply ammunition for the varied weaponry.\footnote{Weathersby, “New Russian Documents on the Korean War,” 48 (Document 36: telegram from Mao to Stalin dated Nov. 8, 1950, noting lack of standardized weaponry and scarce ammunition, while requesting large numbers of small arms and ammunition); Yu, 13.} In addition, the PLA was lacking heavy equipment and entirely dependent on Soviet provision of conventional weapons. Mao estimated that each of his Field Armies was outgunned in terms of artillery pieces by a ratio of 1,500 to 36 by the U.S. Armies.\footnote{Zhihua, 238 (quoting the Chinese version of Mao’s October 2, 1950 telegram to Stalin).} Despite these materiel deficiencies, the Chinese perceived five advantages over American troops: superior morale, combat experience, mobility and flexibility, will to bear hardship, and shorter lines of communication.\footnote{Xuehi, 116-20.}

Mao believed that the United States could send at most 500,000 troops to Korea, due to security commitments in others areas.\footnote{Jian, \textit{China’s Road to the Korean War}, 144.} PRC estimates were that the UN had ten divisions in Korea totaling 400,000 troops in October 1950, of which about one third were believed to be combat troops.\footnote{Ibid., 195. Actual UN force levels in October were much closer to 220,000 including the 100,000 ROK troops.} In contrast, Mao had nearly the entire complement of four million PLA soldiers at his disposal given the lack of external Chinese obligations and the weakness of the KMT. In addition, Mao had access to millions of potential conscripts. On the other hand, the limited transportation and supply capabilities in China made it impossible for Mao to fully tap his military manpower.

Located adjacent to the Korean peninsula, the vast Chinese countryside provided a secure rear for Chinese forces. Logistical problems were thus far less complex than for the American
forces. Supply lines were set up and materiel shipped to the Korean border area beginning in August 1950.\(^{57}\) The first UN encounters with Chinese troops in November 1950, suggested a well-fed, well-equipped force.\(^{58}\) Nonetheless, the critical shortage of mechanized transportation for troops, food, and ammunition made the eventual extension of Chinese lines of communication risky. Not only were the Chinese reliant on the Soviet Union for any motor transport they could find, they were reliant on Soviet provision of petroleum products to keep their mechanized equipment operational.\(^{59}\) Chinese field commanders were particularly fearful of the security of the Yalu River bridges following initial contact because of these logistical concerns.\(^{60}\)

Mao considered the American nuclear capability to be largely irrelevant to this operation. Soviet nuclear weapons would provide some deterrent effect, while allied pressure and negative world opinion as to the use of nuclear weapons would enhance the retaliatory deterrent.\(^{61}\) Moreover, Chinese industry was still in its infancy and the Chinese population was widely dispersed, leaving few suitable targets even if the Americans chose to attack inside China.\(^{62}\) Mao believed nuclear weapons to be of little military use in Korea given his assessment that operations would not follow distinct battle lines so as to permit the use of nuclear arms due to the indiscriminant effects of early nuclear weapons.

China enjoyed good relations with the Soviets providing them with a secure northern frontier. The newly independent government in India to the west was involved with its own

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 138-39.  
\(^{58}\) Appleman, 719.  
\(^{60}\) Rongzhen, 48-51.  
\(^{61}\) Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 182; Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 144; Rongzhen, 63; Appu K. Soman, Double-Edged Sword: Nuclear Diplomacy in Unequal Conflicts: The United States and China, 1950-1958 (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 68-69.  
\(^{62}\) Hunt, 190; Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 192-93.
problems with Pakistan, while the Himalayas made sizeable military operations all but
impossible in any event. To the south, the Viet Minh were engaged with the French in a struggle
for control of Indochina. While the KMT remained poised to strike from the east, Truman’s
dispatch of the Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Strait immediately upon Kim’s invasion was made
with the purpose not of defending the KMT, but instead with the purpose of preventing fighting
in the area. Thus, the primary extant security threat that might have hindered Chinese flexibility
was temporarily pacified by American forces. 63

UN forces: Immediately after World War II, the United States engaged in a massive
demobilization of military forces that resulted in a drastic cut in defense spending, a reduced
number of troops, and a desire to avoid foreign entanglements. 64 Only after it became apparent
that the Soviet Union would press every advantage in an attempt to expand its sphere of
influence did the United States recognize that disengagement was not an option. Yet the main
thrust of U.S. efforts to counter the Soviet threat was in Europe, with only minimal attention
placed on Asia. Indeed, from 1945-50, ninety percent of U.S. economic and military aid went to
Europe. 65 With respect to Korea, the United States, although complaining about Soviet
malfeasance in North Korea, withdrew its military forces from the peninsula in early 1949. 66

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63 Chinese involvement in Tibet, manifested in the October 1950 invasion force of forty thousand
PLA troops, was within the control of Chinese leaders rather than a security threat forced upon
Beijing.

64 The number of active duty U.S. military personnel was reduced by nearly 75 percent in one
year (12,056,000 in 1945 to 3,025,000 in 1946) and then again by nearly 50 percent the
following year (3,025,000 in 1946 to 1,582,000 in 1947). U.S. Department of Defense, Office of
the Undersecretary of Defense (Comptroller), National Defense Budget Estimates for FY2002
not so completely demobilized our military power between 1945 and 1950, Korea might never
have occurred.” Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, DSB V. 28, 416 (Mar. 5, 1953).

65 DSB V. 25, 973 (Dec. 17, 1951)(Speech of Ambassador John Foster Dulles).

66 DSB V. 20, 781 (Jun. 19, 1949) (Press Release). Less than 500 U.S troops remained after June,
At the time of the Korean invasion, the United States had a total active duty force of approximately 1.5 million troops. Following the invasion, the United States began a rapid mobilization attempt designed to double the active duty force and sharply increase military industrial capacity. On August 3, 1950 Congress removed the two million man cap on the size of the active force. Thereafter conscription was resumed, a practice that had been in recess since February 1949. Prior to the outbreak of the Korean War, the Joint Chiefs of Staff designed a force based on ten active army divisions and a like number of regimental combat teams, 281 combat ships, two Marine divisions, and 48 air wings; however, following the Korean assault, this plan changed first to a posture of eighteen divisions, 354 combat vessels, and 78 air wings, and within the year to even larger increases. Mao obviously was aware that only a limited portion of this buildup could realistically be deployed against China due to U.S. global responsibilities; accordingly, Mao did not to account for the majority of this increase in considering intervention and later escalation in Korea.

South Korean forces numbered approximately 95,000 in June 1950 of which approximately 65,000 were trained for combat. When U.S. troops withdrew from Korea in 1949, nearly $56 million of U.S. military equipment was turned over to the South Korean military, including 100,000 small arms, 50 million rounds of small arms ammunition, 2,000 rocket launchers with 40,000 rockets, anti-tank guns, 105mm howitzers, 60mm and 81mm mortars with over 700,000 shells, 4,900 vehicles, and 79 naval vessels including minesweepers, landing craft and patrol boats. In addition, the United States provided approximately twenty


68 Ibid.


70 Foot, 41; Weigley, 382; Semiannual Report of the Secretary of Defense, January 1 to June 30, 1951: 198.

71 Appleman, 45; Schnabel 40.

aircraft, however, these were merely trainers and a handful of F-51 Mustangs. Another $253,000 worth of equipment was provided to the ROK military pursuant to the Mutual Defense Act of 1949.

Despite this assistance, ROK forces were routed in the first week of fighting as they had no tanks in their inventory and artillery of inferior range compared to the North Korean artillery. Led by the Soviet T-34 tanks, the North Korean army crushed the defenders, reducing the ROK force to less than 30,000 effective troops in just a few days. Nonetheless, with the aid of American forces delaying the North Korean drive southward, ROK forces were able to regroup within a month and quickly reconstitute decimated units thereafter. As was the case with North Korean forces and Chinese officers, command authority passed from the ROK officers to U.S. officers once the U.S. forces were in place.

American forces in theater consisted of units involved in the occupation of Japan, as well as troops stationed in Okinawa and the Philippines, totaling approximately 147,000. These included the Seventh Fleet, with homeports in both the Philippines and Okinawa, and the small task force of naval vessels directly under U.S. Naval Forces Far East in Japan; the Eighth Army

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73 Appleman, 17.


75 DPRK artillery included 112 mm howitzers with a maximum range over five thousand yards farther than the maximum range of ROK 105 mm howitzers. Schnabel, 36.

76 Appleman, 45; Montross and Canzona, U.S. Marine Operations in Korea, Volume I: The Pusan Perimeter, 17; 45. ROK units continued to experience tremendous casualty rates as new and poorly trained conscripts were systematically fed into combat units. By early August, ROK units had already suffered approximately 70,000 casualties. Appleman, 263.

77 By July 26, 1950, ROK combat effectives were reported at 85,871. Appleman, 191.

78 On July 14, 1950, Syngman Rhee verbally placed the ROK under the command of the UN Commander in Chief, MacArthur. Appleman, 112.

79 Schnabel, 43. Just three years earlier, Far East Command included over 300,000 troops. Schnabel, 52.
comprising the 7th division occupying Hokkaido and the northern third of Honshu, the 24th Infantry Division (ID) in Kyushu, the 25th ID located in the southern third of Honshu, and the 1st Cavalry division occupying central Honshu as well as the 29th Regiment in Okinawa and seven separate anti-aircraft artillery battalions; and the U.S. Far East Air Forces, made up of the 5th, 13th, and 20th Air Forces comprising nine air wings totaling 350 combat ready aircraft spread among Japan, Okinawa, the Philippines and Guam. 80 Both existing Marine divisions were stateside. A handful of British naval vessels and a squadron of Australian fighters, both based in Japan, were immediately made available to the UN Commander as well. 81

To respond to the Korean invasion in a timely manner, the 24th ID, 25th ID, and 1st Cavalry had been drawn immediately from Japan despite their less than normal strength and their lack of anything heavier than light tanks. 82 With additional units from Hawaii not arriving until mid-July, U.S. ground forces in Korea numbered roughly only 35,000 troops. 83 Over the next two months, additional units were deployed from the United States while the in-country units fought a delaying defensive action. Stateside response to immediate combat needs was

80 Each of these infantry units was at two-thirds fighting strength. Appleman, 49; Montross and Carzona, U.S. Marine Operations in Korea. Volume I: The Pusan Perimeter, 43; Weigley, 383. Only two of the fighter air wings were in range for operations in Korea. Appleman, 49.

81 Appleman, 48. Despite the UN resolution of June 29 asking member states to contribute assistance to South Korea, the only immediate offer of assistance in the form of ground troops came from Taiwan, although a month later, Thailand offered some four thousand ground troops and the Philippines offered twenty-six thousand Scouts. FRUS 1950, Vol. VII: 470 (Memo Deputy Undersecretary of State to Special Assistant to Secretary of Defense for Foreign Military Affairs, Jul. 25, 1950).

82 Appleman, 49-50. The 24th ID arrived in Korea the week of July 2, the 25th ID arrived the week of July 10, and the 1st Cavalry came into country the week of July 18. Each division could deliver only slightly more than sixty percent of assigned infantry firepower and less than fifteen percent of assigned tank fire. Tsouras, 17.

83 Appleman, 197 n.31; Mark A. Ryan, Chinese Attitudes Toward Nuclear Weapons: China and the United States During the Korean War (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1989), 24; Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 55.
inordinately slow. By the end of July, U.S. Far East Air Forces totaled 890 planes, including 525 available for combat. By mid-August, the 29th Regiment from Okinawa and the 2nd ID, 5th Regimental Combat Team, and 1st Provisional Marine Brigade arrived from Hawaii and California to supplement the combat power held by MacArthur and bring total U.S. forces in country to approximately 60,000. Shortly thereafter, the U.S. forces scored their first major combat victory at Taegu. By mid-September, U.S. ground forces in Korea numbered over 80,000, while air support and naval support provided another 33,000 and 36,000 respectively. 

After finally securing the Pusan perimeter and transporting additional forces and supplies into the theater, MacArthur engineered the risky but brilliantly successful landing at Inchon in mid-September, using the now present 1st Marine Division to storm ashore and cut the communist lines of communication. Followed by the 7th ID, the U.S. forces destroyed the North Koreans by attacking from the north and west while the remainder of the Eighth Army pushed up from the south resulting in a communist collapse and a swift UN drive to and past the 38th parallel. At the beginning of October, total U.S. ground forces in Korea numbered over 113,000 and combined with the ROK military to provide a ground combat force of nearly

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84 See e.g. FRUS 1950, Vol. VII: 547 (Telegram Ambassador ROC to Secretary of State, Aug. 9, 1950, complaining of failure of United States to deliver small arms in a timely fashion for use by ROK units in desperate need).

85 Appleman, 257.


87 Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 71.

88 Appleman, 382.

89 Both the 1st Marine division and the 7th ID were brought up from less than half strength by the addition of reservists, new recruits and Korean auxiliaries. Montross and Canzona, U.S. Marine Operations in Korea. Volume II: The Inchon-Seoul Operation, 22.
200,000.\textsuperscript{90} Far East Air Forces was staffed by nearly 37,000 airmen while the U.S. Naval Forces, Far East had risen to almost 60,000 sailors.\textsuperscript{91}

With the rout of the North Koreans obvious and the UN forces moving northward quickly, other UN members became more willing to send their own ground units to Korea, as demonstrated by the October arrivals of a Thai Battalion, a Turkish Brigade, a Dutch Battalion, a Canadian Battalion, and an additional British Brigade.\textsuperscript{92}

To the extent the Chinese relied on the Soviet nuclear deterrent to provide protection against American use of atomic weaponry, it is significant to note the disparity in Soviet and American capabilities. At the outset of the Korean War, the United States had some 300 atomic weapons in being and approximately 260 aircraft capable of delivering them on Soviet targets.\textsuperscript{93} In contrast, the Soviets had far fewer weapons and a single delivery system of non-returnable bombers.\textsuperscript{94} In July 1950, the United States sent ten B-29 nuclear-capable bombers to Guam; however, these aircraft were returned to the United States by the end of the year.\textsuperscript{95} In practice, Truman made little effort to capitalize on the U.S. nuclear advantage.

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\textsuperscript{90} Appleman, 605. Approximately 1,700 British and 1,400 Filipino ground troops were present at this time as well.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 606.

\textsuperscript{92} Appleman, 668. Prior to this, the only UN ground troops in Korea were American and small contingents from Great Britain and the Philippines. Chiang Kai Shek had offered to send a force of thirty thousand KMT soldiers in late June, but the United States fearing allied reaction, suggested they might be better utilized defending Formosa. \textit{FRUS} 1950. Vol. VII: 239 (Memo Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern to Secretary of State, Jun. 29, 1950).

\textsuperscript{93} Dingman, 52.

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid..

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 60-64; Soman, 62 (citing September as the return date).
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Interests

**China:** Allen Whiting presents a realist argument for China’s intervention, stressing the geopolitical dimension of Mao’s fearing American entry into China and desiring a buffer zone. Nie Rhongzen and Shen Zhihua echo the idea of fearing American action directed at China, claiming that it was a choice between actively confronting American troops in Korea where China could seize the initiative or waiting passively for the Americans to take the offensive in Manchuria. Chen Jian notes a second geopolitical interest behind Mao’s decision may have been the opportunity for Mao to gain a foothold in Korea by increasing the influence of the Yenan faction in the North Korean leadership. Shu Guang Zhang focuses on a cultural and ideological interpretation of the intervention, arguing that Mao acted to demonstrate China’s ideological commitment to communist internationalism as well as to further Chinese regional ambitions. Michael Hunt asserts that Chinese intervention was dually motivated by an internationalist duty to aid fellow socialist revolutionaries and by a geopolitical imperative to prevent a hostile border. Thomas Christensen emphasizes the domestic reasons motivating Mao to maintain a militarized state. At the time, American officials believed the crisis may

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96 Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*.

97 Rongzhen, 43; Zhihua, 237. If this were true, then the question persists why Mao would abandon his defense in depth strategy of inviting a superior enemy into territory controlled by Mao in favor of an unfamiliar and risky strategy of pursuing a large scale conventional offensive.

98 Jian, *China’s Road to the Korean War*, 130.

99 S. Zhang, *Deterrence and Strategic Culture*. Bin Yu criticizes Zhang’s focus on cultural factors, arguing that, contrary to Zhang’s assertion, the CCP leadership did not simply follow what Mao decreed as the modern emperor. Ironically, Yu undermines his own criticism of “culturalism” by turning to a cultural explanation as evidence allegedly contradicting Zhang. Yu asserts that Mao did not lead by imperial edict and that the CCP leadership did oppose intervention in Korea. He then argues that the nominal assent to intervention provided by Chinese leaders was less important than the further bargaining that occurred during implementation of the intervention. Yu, 248 n. 28.

100 Hunt, 188-89.

101 Christensen, *Useful Adversaries*. 

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have been contrived as a tool to use in obtaining PRC admission to the UN. Most likely, each of these played some part in driving Mao’s decision, making reductionist attempts at identifying a single motivation unavailing.

Geographically, the North Korean border abuts Manchuria, among the most important economic regions in China in 1950. Not only was the majority of China’s heavy industry located in this area, but the region was a major producer of grain.\textsuperscript{102} Thus, China would have practical reasons for ensuring a friendly regime in Korea.

Given the multiplicity of Mao’s motivating interests, arguments asserting the war might have been avoided had the United States refrained from crossing the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel or approaching the Yalu are dubious.\textsuperscript{103} The shift of forces to the border region in June and July, the training focused on an American enemy, and the August 5 order to commanders to be prepared to fight by the first week of September all suggest Mao was gearing up for intervention well before the threat to the 38\textsuperscript{th} emerged.\textsuperscript{104} Chinese warnings identifying the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel as a significant threshold were merely a delaying ploy designed to permit Chinese forces additional time to improve aerial capabilities, build-up materiel in the northeast, and stress American lines of communication, while attempting to bargain for greater Soviet military aid.\textsuperscript{105} Because Mao’s interests were not limited solely to ensuring Chinese security, reassurances and buffer zones were of lesser importance to Mao. Stueck argues that had U.S. forces provided a buffer some

\textsuperscript{102} Petrov, 7 (asserting that over three-quarters of China’s industrial capacity was found in Manchuria); Whiting, \textit{China Crosses the Yalu}, 19; 50.

\textsuperscript{103} Examples of such arguments are found in Foot, \textit{The Wrong War}; Gurtov and Hwang, \textit{China Under Threat}; Stueck, \textit{The Korean War: An International History}; and Whiting, \textit{China Crosses the Yalu}.

\textsuperscript{104} See Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 271, reprinting and translating the August 5 order contained in a telegram from Mao to Gao Gang. On August 18, Mao extended the preparatory period, permitting the commanders until the end of September. Ibid., 171.

\textsuperscript{105} See Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 195-96 (noting Mao’s plan of attack was to first simply demonstrate force then withdraw in hopes of causing the UN forces to halt their offensive while the PLA forces improved their materiel capabilities); Jian, \textit{China’s Road to the Korean War}, 180-81.
distance from the Yalu, Mao would have built up his forces, but the Americans could have likewise built up forces and thus deterred Chinese intervention. This argument relies on a western understanding of the importance of the balance of capabilities and on the assumption of a single security based Chinese interest in intervention. Since Mao clearly did not view the balance of capabilities as did western strategists, it is unconvincing that Mao would have been any more deterred in March 1951 then he was in October 1950 by a display of American capabilities. Mao’s cable to Stalin of October 2 holding that Mao would only intervene if the enemy pushed north of the 38th should be seen in this same light. In essence, Mao was attempting to bargain for greater materiel aid from the Soviets by conditioning his commitment and emphasizing the disparity in capabilities. Moreover, publicly identifying this line provided a foundation for the communists to influence world political opinion. By making


107 Even if the Americans were willing to continue a military build-up in Korea, after halting operations short of the Yalu, it is inconceivable that the number of troops sent to Korea between October 1950 and spring 1951 would have been more than one to two additional divisions at most. More likely, American policy would have been to reduce the number of troops in Korea once combat operations ceased. In either event, the huge numerical advantage of troops in theater possessed by Mao would hardly have been affected. Given Mao’s belief in the superiority of man over technology, the potential introduction of additional armor, artillery, and air assets would likely not have been effective deterrents either.

108 There is some dispute surrounding the October 2, 1950 cable sent by Mao to Stalin following the CCP Politburo meeting at which the decision to send Chinese troops to Korea was formally passed. Different versions of the cable have surfaced in Chinese and Soviet archives, with the Chinese version providing a definitive statement that troops will be deployed but noting the material disparities while the Soviet version suggests a non-committal response by the Chinese and a desire to negotiate. See Zhihua, “The Discrepancy Between the Russian and Chinese Versions of Mao’s Message 2 October 1950 Message to Stalin on Chinese Entry into the Korean War: A Chinese Scholar’s Reply.” Under either version, the intent of Mao to obtain additional Soviet materiel assistance is clear. In the event, the ploy failed as the cagey Stalin simply replied that if the Chinese opted not to commit force than they should discuss preparations on receiving the dethroned Kim government and the communist refugees that would soon be arriving. Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 189-90.

109 Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 152.
such threats publicly, Chinese leaders effectively foreclosed the option of halting American forces to Truman, lest the administration appear to be giving in to communist pressure. In sum, Mao would have been particularly difficult to deter at this time precisely because of the multiplicity of significant interests at stake.

**United States:** In 1948 President Truman approved a policy effectively abdicating American responsibility for the defense of Korea. Although General Bradley sought to revisit the issue in 1949 as the American withdrawal of troops neared completion, American interests in Korea were held to be of too little importance to provide an American defense.¹¹⁰ In January 1950, the House of Representatives rejected a Korean aid bill, further diminishing apparent U.S. interest in Korea.¹¹¹ Even after the invasion, some American officials privately noted that Korea was not inherently vital to American security.¹¹²

America’s primary interests in Korea were reputational. As early as June 1949, President Truman had articulated the basis of the importance, however small, he ascribed Korea politically:

Korea has become a testing ground in which the validity and practical value of the ideals and principles of democracy which the Republic is putting into practice are being matched against the practices of communism which have been imposed upon the peoples of North Korea. The survival and progress of the Republic toward a self-supporting, stable economy will have an immense impact and far-reaching influence on the people of Asia. Such progress by the young Republic will encourage the people of southern and southeastern Asia and the islands of the Pacific to resist and reject the Communist propaganda with which they are besieged. Moreover, the Korean Republic, by demonstrating the success and tenacity of democracy in resisting communism, will stand as a beacon to the people of northern Asia in resisting the control of communist forces which have overrun them.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Schnabel, 50.


¹¹³ *DSB* V. 20, 783 (Jun. 19, 1949, Message of the President to the Congress, Jun. 7, 1949).
Permitting the communists to take South Korea and depose the American installed President, Syngman Rhee, would leave other American allies questioning U.S. resolve in Asia. If Asian leaders perceived the United States as unwilling to come to their aid when threatened by the communists, they would have little choice but to seek accommodations with the communist governments in Moscow and Beijing.

Secondly, communist control of the entire Korean peninsula would present a threat to American interests in Japan. Militarily, control of the southern half of the peninsula would provide a major staging point for armed actions against the Japanese islands; economically, elimination of the pro-western government in South Korea would deprive Japan of a sorely needed market. Politically, American failure to defend the Koreans would call into question the American will to defend Japan, undermining America’s plan to make the Japanese islands the Asian bulwark against communism. Japanese government officials supported the U.S. response in Korea due to the indication of American resolve as well as because of the base of personal support MacArthur had built during his rule in Japan.

Third, the challenge in Korea was seen as a direct test of the United Nations. On the heels of the League of Nations failure, skepticism as to the efficacy of the UN was widespread. Acheson’s January 1950 speech had made clear that the United States would look to the UN for implementation of collective security ideals. If the UN failed to respond to the assault by North Korea, collective security could be disregarded and an overt return to traditional balance of power principles would result. However, if the UN demonstrated that it could and would act to meet aggression, its prestige would be greatly enhanced. Likewise, if the UN succeeded in destroying the North Korean forces, it would constitute the first instance of rolling back communist domination, potentially inspiring greater resistance globally.

116 Ibid., 542 (Memo of Special Assistant to the President Averill Harriman, Aug. 20, 1950).
117 Foot, 59.
Fourth, the Korean peninsula sits at the conversion of the three traditional powers in Asia: China, Russia, and Japan. Control of the peninsula provides a strategic threat to the Japanese islands as well as the historic Chinese economic center of Manchuria. For Russia, control is less necessary defensively, but in addition to constituting a threat to the other two Asian powers, it serves as a potential entry to the Pacific unguarded by the Kurile Islands. Permitting Soviet domination of this point would markedly enhance Soviet power potential in the region. Still, military leaders placed limited significance on Korea’s geographic location as bearing on American interests directly.  

With these interests in mind, a strategy of simply returning to the 38th parallel and stopping would appear weak. Such a policy would set a precedent of cost-free challenges. Akin to catching a burglar, escorting him to the front door, and then releasing him, failing to impose some punishment for breaking international law would only invite future incidents.

**Risk Propensity**

President Truman sought to avoid world war, but by Spring 1950 was in a position where he believed that the United States must confront communist advances wherever they might take place. Placing primary importance on Europe, Truman nonetheless was prepared to engage communist aggression in Asia. Truman had witnessed the failures of the League of Nations, the European attempt at appeasement in Munich, and the American attempts at remaining neutral early in the Second World War. In agreement with Churchill, Truman had come to believe that the communists could only be checked by the threat or use of force. Truman’s state of mind is best evidenced by his approval of NSC-68, a document highlighting the threat posed by the Soviet-led communist world and asserting the need for immediate American action to reconstitute its defense capabilities and engage in a more militarized version of containment.

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120 Acheson shared this assessment as well. Foot, 33-34.
Thus, reflecting the idea of availability with respect to cognitive bias, Truman was predisposed
to see his policy choices during international crises in stark terms of appeasement or standing
firm, with little room in between.

The timing of the Chinese intervention was coincident with domestic Congressional
elections in the United States. The Republican opposition had made a major campaign issue out
of the communist success in China by pointing to the record of the State Department in China
under Truman and raising questions about pro-communist sympathies.\(^{121}\) Likewise, questions
were raised regarding the speed with which the Soviets had developed nuclear capability.
Creating a catch-22 situation for Truman, Republicans also sought to limit American
deployments globally. Thus, Truman was on the defensive regarding his China policy and may
have been looking for an opportunity to demonstrate his resolve against Chinese communism,
although he would be open to political attack regardless of his decision. Accordingly, prior to
the elections of November 7, 1950, Truman may have been more willing to adopt a strong stance
in Korea, including proceeding with a goal of reunification. Indeed, when first contact with
Chinese troops was made in late October, Truman continued with the same policies, refusing to
halt the planned final offensive.\(^{122}\) Only with the full scale Chinese offensive of late November
did Truman retreat from the aim of unification of the peninsula.

Again reflecting the cognitive bias associated with availability, U.S. officials applied
western thinking when considering the likely response of Mao to actions in Korea. Assuming
that Mao would recognize the vast disparity in capabilities as well as the “benign intent” of the
United States, American officials underestimated Mao’s fanaticism and paid no regard to Mao’s
domestic motivations.\(^{123}\) In fact, American attention was primarily on Stalin, under the
assumption that decisions as to any intervention would come from Moscow, although

\(^{121}\) Foot, 96; Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History*, 42; 53.

\(^{122}\) Major Chinese attacks were first reported around October 26-28, 1950. Stoessinger, 43; S.
Zhang, 102.

\(^{123}\) See generally Stoessinger, 51-55.
intelligence suggested Stalin was not interested in initiating world war as of June. However, American diplomats abroad warned Washington that it was likely Stalin would attempt to get America involved in fighting with Chinese communist troops. Had the Soviets intervened, American general war plans called for a withdrawal from Korea in order to concentrate on the European theater. When no intervention occurred in July or August, the time when intervention would have been least costly and most apt to succeed, and when the Soviet Ambassador returned to chair the Security Council in August, the Americans began to doubt the probability of intervention.

Even if Stalin had not originally planned to intervene in North Korea under the assumption that the United States would not react, American officials had to consider whether the instigation of the rearmament program in the west spurred by the Korean action might cause Stalin to react. As the Soviets held a conventional advantage, Stalin might conclude that immediate initiation of a global war would be superior to permitting the west to reap the benefits of mobilization. In this case, the United States would have to rely heavily on its atomic edge to buy time; however, whether European allies who would find their own countries host to the battlefields would stand firm or would pursue accommodations with the Soviets was unclear.

124 FRUS 1950, Vol. VII: 258 (Memo citing U.S. Ambassador to USSR, Jun. 30, 1950); American policymakers assumed the North Korean action was a deliberate Soviet act, asserting Pyongyang was “completely under the Kremlin’s control.” FRUS 1950, Vol. VII: 148-54 (Preliminary Intelligence Estimate, Jun. 25, 1950). This sentiment was echoed elsewhere. Ibid., 199 (Telegram Ambassador in USSR to Secretary of State, Jun. 27, 1950); Ibid., 318 (Telegram Secretary of State to U.S. Embassy in Britain, Jul. 10, 1950). In contrast, British intelligence did not consider the DRPK or PRC to be mere tools of the Soviets, but ascribed Chinese intervention in Korea to Chinese interests. John Baylis, Ambiguity and Deterrence: British Nuclear Strategy 1945-1964 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 116.


126 Ibid., 346 (Memo JCS to Secretary of Defense, Jul. 10, 1950).

127 Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 167-71.
Thus, American officials had to be careful in propagating rhetoric holding the Soviets directly responsible for North Korea.

Prior to Inchon, NSC 81/1 noted that it was possible Chinese communist forces could be used, but this would “depend on whether [they] were ready to engage in general war at this time.”\textsuperscript{128} This suggests that American officials believed they had already provided a clear threat that Chinese intervention would result in general war. Yet, given the lack of authoritative statements from Washington and the emphasis on reassurance as opposed to deterrence, the foundation of this belief is unclear. Most likely, this suggests how motivated bias influenced policymakers, as Americans simply assumed Mao would understand the American policy and assumed American actions were obvious. Moreover, this same document asserted that the “United States should not permit itself to become engaged in general war with communist China,”\textsuperscript{129} suggesting a mindset that would hardly be prone to mistakenly issue clear deterrent threats. In fact, forerunning Truman’s policy after Chinese intervention, Secretary of State Acheson argued that “present policy of the U.S., both military and political, is directed toward a localization of the conflict in Korea and the avoidance of any unnecessary extension of hostilities or the outbreak of general war.”\textsuperscript{130} Strikingly absent from this statement was any reference to victory.

American officials were aware that China was supplying North Korea with substantial military aid as General MacArthur had noted such in his reports, and as a Chinese official expressly admitted it on September 22, 1950, yet the possibility of direct Chinese intervention was still largely dismissed.\textsuperscript{131} The dramatic success of the Inchon operation renewed concerns of

\textsuperscript{128} FRUS 1950, Vol. VII: 714 (NSC 81/1, Sep. 9, 1950). This attitude is reflected in early October as well. Ibid., 864 (Memo Director of Office of Chinese Affairs to Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern Affairs, Oct. 4, 1950).

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 717 (NSC 81/1, Sep. 9, 1950).

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 721 (Memo Secretary of State to President, Sep.11, 1950).


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potential intervention. In late September, PLA Chief of Staff Nie Rhongzen (Nieh Jung-chen) warned the Indian Ambassador in Beijing, Panikkar, that crossing the 38th parallel would bring about Chinese intervention. On October 3, the government of India alerted the United States to a warning received from Zhou En-Lai threatening that if UN forces crossed the 38th parallel, the Chinese would intervene. These warnings were not credited by U.S. policy-makers due to the methods the Chinese used in delivering them. By delivering the warnings privately, American policymakers assessed the threats as empty bluff since the Chinese were leaving the door open to deny issuance of the threats and were decidedly not incurring what Fearon would term “audience costs.” Moreover, employment of the Indian Ambassador as the messenger further diluted credibility, since the same individual had earlier warned of an imminent attack on Taiwan, which did not come to pass, and was perceived as pro-Chinese in Washington. With American troops having crossed the 38th on October 7, Zhou on October 10 warned once again that U.S. troops should not cross the 38th parallel. Yet, on October 12, 1950, the CIA provided dissent to this position was found in a CIA Memorandum in mid-August that was pessimistic about unifying Korea, predicting that the Soviets would not relinquish North Korea without a major fight. Ibid., 601-02 (CIA Memorandum, Aug. 18, 1950).

132 Ryan, 28; Stanley Weintraub, MacArthur’s War: Korea and the Undoing of an American Hero (New York: Touchstone, 2000), 176; Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 93; 1975: 214; S. Zhang, 94-95; For the sake of clarity and consistency, I use the name “Beijing” in place of the more accurate contemporaneous names “Peiping,” or “Peking.”

133 FRUS 1950, Vol. VII: 839 (Telegram, Charge in UK to Secretary of State, Oct. 3, 1950); Ibid., 850 (Telegram Ambassador India to Secretary of State, Oct. 3, 1950).

134 FRUS 1950, Vol. VII: 850 (Telegram Ambassador USSR to Secretary of State, Oct. 3, 1950); Ibid., 868 (Memo Conversation between U.S. and British Delegates to UN, Oct. 4, 1950); Ibid., 913 (Telegram Consul General in Hong Kong to Secretary of State, Oct. 7, 1950).

135 See Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” and “Signaling Versus the Balance of Power and Interests: An Empirical Test of a Crisis Bargaining Model.”

136 Stueck, Rethinking the Korean War, 101.

137 Stoessinger, 50; Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 94.
an assessment to President Truman characterizing a major Chinese intervention in Korea as improbable during 1950.\footnote{FRUS, 1950 Vol. VII: 933-34 (CIA Memo, Oct. 12, 1950, noting there were “no convincing indications of a actual Chinese communist intention to resort to full scale intervention in Korea”).} At the Wake Island conference of October 15, 1950, General MacArthur asserted that there was no longer much chance of Chinese intervention in Korea, significantly underestimating the number of PLA troops in the area and their ability to cross the Yalu.\footnote{Ibid., 953-54 (Notes of Wake Island Conference, Oct. 15, 1950). In October U.S. Far East intelligence estimated there were nine Chinese armies, consisting of thirty-eight divisions in Manchuria. Appleman, 759.} Even after the first contacts with Chinese troops in late October, MacArthur rejected the idea that significant Chinese intervention might occur. In a communiqué to the UN issued November 6\textsuperscript{th}, MacArthur asserted that the “Korean war was brought to a practical end with the closing of the trap on enemy elements north of Pyongyang and seizure of the east coastal area” in which enemy losses and prisoners combined with prior casualties to reach a sum equal with assessments of total DPRK force strength.\footnote{DSB V. 23, 763 (Nov. 13, 1950).}

By early October, there appeared to be little reason to stop at the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel. Militarily, halting operations presented a seriously flawed option. The adversary had just been dealt a crushing blow and was fleeing in disarray. Stopping at the 38\textsuperscript{th} would have denied prime military targets at their most vulnerable and permitted enemy forces to regroup. In addition, the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel was simply an arbitrary demarcation on a map rather than a geographically based boundary. Arranging a defense based on a cartographic feature instead of a terrain feature presented major problems.\footnote{MacArthur noted the inadequacy of the terrain surrounding the 38\textsuperscript{th} for “positional warfare.” Stueck, \textit{The Korean War: An International History}, 174. As described by Schnabel, 11, “the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel cut more than 75 streams and 12 rivers, intersected many high ridges at variant angles, severed 181 small cart roads, 104 country roads, 15 provincial all-weather roads, 8 better class highways, and 6 north-south rail lines.”} Instituting negotiations for what appeared to be easily attainable via “sweeping up” operations likewise appeared illogical from a battlefield standpoint. Given
the PRC’s goal of expelling all American troops from the peninsula, stopping at the 38th would only have provided additional time for the PLA to train and equip units to fight the Americans. At most, a halt would have delayed the war until the following spring, when American forces might have been less prepared for combat.

A major restraining factor on Truman was the attitudes of America’s western allies. While most members of the UN generally favored the American response, only a very limited number of members actually contributed troops. More common were offers to deploy forces, provided the United States either agreed to some type of security treaty or agreed to foot the bill and provide armaments for the allied forces. A major restraining factor on Truman was the attitudes of America’s western allies. While most members of the UN generally favored the American response, only a very limited number of members actually contributed troops. More common were offers to deploy forces, provided the United States either agreed to some type of security treaty or agreed to foot the bill and provide armaments for the allied forces. NATO partners were also pleased to see American will to stand up for overseas allies, but soon began to grow wary over how the U.S. commitment of forces to Korea would affect Europe’s American-provided security. Already facing American pressure to increase the amount of resources devoted to their own defense, NATO allies feared the deployment in Korea would overtax U.S. capabilities and further reduce the European burden America was willing to bear. Britain in particular urged Truman to keep from pressing toward the Yalu in hopes of preventing China from being driven into a closer relationship with the Soviet Union. Despite the fact that the Chinese had already declared a policy of “leaning to one side,” concluded a defense pact with the Soviet Union, and adopted a harsh anti-western policy, and in utter misunderstanding of the true Chinese motivations, the British counseled limited American operations. Partially motivating British restraint were her majesty’s interests in maintaining profitable enterprises in Hong Kong and mitigating uprisings in Malaya. Other allies joined with Britain in urging the United States to refrain from

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143 Ibid., 54.
144 Foot, 92. The limited degree of British military support and the extensive delay in deployment strained relations between Washington and London. FRUS 1950, Vol. VII: 559-60 (Telegram from Secretary of State to Embassy in UK, Aug. 11, 1950).
provoking China. With a Euro-centric Secretary of State, the Truman Administration paid serious attention to this advice. Contrasting this line of reasoning, some in the American government saw the potential for a Sino-Soviet split and sought to force the Chinese into greater dependence on the Soviets, arguing that the Soviet economy could not support a client state as large as China. By closing off alternatives to the Chinese, it was hoped that Chinese and Soviet national interests would clash and undermine socialist internationalism.

Once the Congressional elections were over and the Democrats had retained majorities of 49-47 in the Senate and 234-199 in the House, Truman had less inclination to adopt the same strident tone. Even though, or perhaps because, many analysts in the United States considered the Chinese intervention as proof that the Korean War was a considered plan directed from Moscow, and despite General MacArthur’s request for authorization to aerially engage targets in China, Truman sought to maintain a limited war.

**Declaratory Policy**

U.S. declaratory policy from June through November 1950 varied considerably. Two days after the attack, President Truman ordered American air and naval forces to support the South Koreans “against all targets south of the 38th parallel,” ordered the Seventh Fleet to neutralize the Taiwan Strait, strengthened American forces in the Philippines while increasing aid to the Philippine government, and increased aid to Indochina. The same day, the UN Security Council passed a resolution asking all UN members to furnish assistance to South Korea to repel the invasion. Within the week, Truman committed to providing U.S. ground forces in Korea to ensure friendly control of the Pusan port area, as well as expanding the approved area

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146 In response to an American inquiry as to providing UN pilots with authority to cross into Manchuria if in hot pursuit of attacking aircraft, most allies responded negatively. FRUS 1950, Vol. VII: 1151 (Telegram Ambassador in Netherlands to Secretary of State, Nov. 14, 1950); Ibid., 1160 (Telegram Ambassador in Canada to Secretary of State, Nov. 15, 1950); Ibid., 1172 (British Embassy to DOS, Nov. 17, 1950).

147 DSB V. 23, 5 (Jul. 3, 1950)( Statement by President Truman, June 27, 1950); Quote about targets south of the 38th is from Appleman, 38.
of naval and air operations to include targets in North Korea as well.\textsuperscript{148} On June 30, Truman issued orders granting MacArthur’s request for two divisions to conduct countering operations and creating a naval task force to blockade North Korea.\textsuperscript{149} Further demonstrating American resolve, the draft was re-instituted while Congress authorized the President to activate the National Guard and reserve military units.\textsuperscript{150}

The publicly announced goal of the United States was to restore the situation in Korea to the status prior to Kim’s invasion.\textsuperscript{151} With respect to China, U.S. policy initially focused on attempts to assure Mao that America had no design on interfering in China rather than issuing an explicit deterrent threat for China to stay out of Korea.\textsuperscript{152}

On August 10, 1950, Woody Austin, the American Ambassador to the UN, made a speech that publicly focused on a goal of unifying the Korean peninsula.\textsuperscript{153} On August 17, the American delegate to the United Nations described the objective of UN forces as “total victory” over North Korea and “unification of the entire peninsula under UN auspices.”\textsuperscript{154} In his radio address of September 1, President Truman reiterated the idea of unification by asserting, “We believe the Koreans have a right to be free, independent, and united - as they want to be. Under the direction and guidance of the United Nations, we with others, will do our part to help them

\textsuperscript{148} Appleman, 46; Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 142; FRUS 1950, Vol. VII: 202-03 (White House Statement, Jun. 27, 1950).

\textsuperscript{149} Appleman, 47.


\textsuperscript{152} Stoessinger, 44-45; Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 171.

\textsuperscript{153} DSB V. 23, 331 (Aug. 28, 1950)

\textsuperscript{154} Stueck, The Korean War: An International History, 63; Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 70.
enjoy that right.”¹⁵⁵ Three weeks after this endorsement of a unified Korea, Truman backtracked from the unification goal when asked by a reporter at a news conference what the US troops would do upon reaching the 38th parallel. Truman responded that this was a matter for the UN to decide and that the United States would abide by the UN decision.¹⁵⁶

In late August the United States issued its first deterrent threat to the Chinese when the American Ambassador to India, Loy Henderson, asked the Indian government to relay an American message to the PRC that Chinese intervention in Korea would result in an American bombing of Chinese “bases of power” in Manchuria.¹⁵⁷ However, on Truman’s September 1 address, he returned to ambiguity and inference in attempting to deter China from intervening:

> We do not want the fighting in Korea to spread into a general war; it will not spread unless Communist imperialism draws other armies and governments into the fight of the aggressors against the United Nations. We hope in particular that the people of China will not be misled or forced into fighting against the United Nations and against the American people who have always been and still are their friends.¹⁵⁸

Following the Inchon landing, the Americans again attempted to deter Chinese intervention by asking the Indian government to convey the message that, “it is of utmost importance [that the Chinese communists] avoid intervention in Korean hostilities,” and that the UN “would view with grave concern [Chinese communist] intervention.”¹⁵⁹ However, this request was accompanied by a request that the Indian government present this as their own view rather than as a message from the United States.¹⁶⁰ Thus, any deterrent effect this might have had was deliberately weakened.

¹⁵⁵ _DSB_ V. 23, 409 (Sep. 11, 1950) (President Truman Radio Address, Sep. 1, 1950).


¹⁵⁷ Christensen, 165.

¹⁵⁸ _DSB_ V. 23, 409 (Sep. 11, 1950) (President Truman Radio Address, Sep. 1, 1950); Whiting, _China Crosses the Yalu_, 97-98.


¹⁶⁰ Ibid.
American initiatives on the global stage in the months following the Korean invasion indicated a new willingness in the west to act militarily. European allies were pressured to upgrade defensive capabilities, rearming West Germany and establishing a national police force in Japan that might serve as the foundation for a reconstituted military received new emphasis, and NATO was expanded to include Greece, Turkey and Spain. On September 6, 1950, Congress passed the original defense bill calling for $13.3 billion for fiscal year 1951. However, on September 27, Congress passed a supplemental providing an additional $11.7 billion in defense funding.

On October 1, UN forces crossed the 38th parallel while pursuing the fleeing DPRK army. With victory apparently in sight, on October 7 the UN General Assembly approved by a count of 47 to 5, a resolution calling for the unification of Korea and establishing the Commission on Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea. Following the Chinese warnings of October 3, the Secretary of State attempted to have India broker a meeting between the American and Chinese Ambassadors in order to pass along a direct warning to China not to intervene, but the Chinese rejected any meeting.

J.L. Stuart, a China specialist in the State Department, argued as late as November 3, 1950 that if the United States would make it “crystal clear” that the UN had no intention of proceeding against China, the Chinese would have been deterred from making a major attack. Indeed, the United States repeatedly indicated to the PRC that it had no intentions of beginning a war with China; yet, relying on reassurance rather than clear deterrence failed miserably. Given that Mao was less concerned with an imminent American invasion than with establishing reputations domestically, regionally, and globally - reputations that required the defeat of the

163 FRUS 1950, Vol. VII: 875-76 (Acting Secretary of State to Embassy India, Oct. 4, 1950); Ibid., 921 (Telegram Ambassador India to Secretary of State, Oct. 10, 1950, noting Chinese rejection of meeting).
164 Ibid., 1029.
American forces - reassurance was doomed to failure. Both the Chief of Naval Operations and the Air Force Chief of Staff advocated expressly advising the Chinese to withdraw immediately or face attacks in Manchuria should the MacArthur offensive fail, yet Truman ultimately refused.\textsuperscript{165} The failure of the United States to immediately cut off the Chinese bridges at the Yalu in early November following the first major engagements with the Chinese could only have been interpreted as American fear, giving Mao all the more encouragement to proceed.\textsuperscript{166}

**Deterrence Outcome**

Based on the objective of deterring any Chinese intervention in the Korean War, the U.S. deterrence effort was an unqualified failure. Hundreds of thousands of Chinese troops poured into China, reversing the course of the war and forcing the United States into a costly long-term deployment of forces.

The balance of capabilities clearly favored the United States in the long term. Not only the military potential resulting from bringing the American economy to a war footing, but also the military power in being was far superior to that of the Chinese. Atomic weapons gave the United States a devastating weapon should it choose to employ it. Local capabilities were much less favorable, but still provided the Americans with an advantage. While the Chinese could mass large numbers of soldiers, they had nothing to offset the qualitative advantage of U.S. weapons. If need be, the Americans could evacuate the peninsula and employ air and naval

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 1207 (Memorandum of Conversation on Situation in Korea, Meeting at Pentagon, Nov. 21, 1950).

\textsuperscript{166} Originally, the JCS directly reversed MacArthur’s order to take out the Yalu River bridge at Antung, prohibiting any bombing within five miles of the border. Thereafter, MacArthur did receive permission to bomb the bridges on the Korean side, but was strictly prohibited from hitting the Chinese side. Given the limited accuracy associated with aerial bombing at that time and the prohibition against going into Chinese airspace to eliminate the MiG bases and anti-aircraft artillery embankments, such orders effectively prevented meaningful bombing of the bridges. Foot, 90; Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History*, 111-13; Weigley, 389; Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 138-39. Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 132-33, suggests that rather than being a tactic designed to invite UN forces north into a trap, the Chinese retreat after the initial engagements may have been designed to see how the United States would react. If this is correct, than the limited American reaction served to undermine the credibility of the already weak deterrence in place.
power while building up ground troop strength in Japan. Stalin had made clear to Mao his unwillingness to fully commit Soviet resources in Korea; thus, the Soviet offset in terms of aerial and atomic power can be discounted.\textsuperscript{167} However, Mao’s perception of the balance was far less one-sided. He disregarded atomic weaponry and underestimated the advantages of technology, instead focusing on the value of political indoctrination of the foot soldier. He also thought the length of the American logistical train and the limited port facilities available in Korea would make sustained operations impossible. Although Mao recognized the superiority of U.S. capabilities, he likely did not see the advantage as overwhelming. Moreover, his value structure appears to have placed far less emphasis on avoiding loss of life. Mao understood his advantage in this respect and was willing to sacrifice extraordinary numbers of lives to demonstrate political will. Thus the Chinese perception of the balance of capabilities was such as to note American superiority, but not to the degree that American policymakers expected.

The balance of interests favored Mao in this instance. State security, political security, ideology, and imperialist aspirations all motivated Mao to intervene. Having only occupied the position as head of state for approximately one year, Mao had little to lose even should he fail. Conversely, by succeeding, Mao could eliminate a western, ideological opponent from his southern flank, he could bring legitimacy to his regime domestically by trumpeting nationalist rhetoric of restored Chinese power, he could acquire a voice in the political affairs of the Korean peninsula, and he could influence other neighboring states by demonstrating greater will than the

\textsuperscript{167} Arguments insisting that the United States had to abstain from bombing operations in Manchuria in order to prevent Soviet bombing operations in South Korea or Japan (e.g. John Edward Wiltz, “The MacArthur Hearings of 1951: The Secret Testimony,” \textit{Military Affairs} (December 1975)) ignore the superiority of American air defense capabilities compared to Chinese capabilities, as well as the escalation dominance of the United States at the time. It was extremely unlikely that Stalin would have ventured beyond the bounds of his well-recognized caution to risk attacks on Pusan or Japan in retaliation for American operations in Manchuria. The American ability to use atomic weapons on targets in Russia was immeasurably greater than the corresponding Soviet ability to bring atomic weapons to the American homeland. For a risk-averse actor such as Stalin, there is no question but that he would not risk Moscow for Pusan, Pyongyang, or even Beijing. Moreover, even had Stalin decided to take this wildly out of character risk, the American air defense capability would have taken a serious toll on Soviet air power forcing Stalin to redeploy assets from the more significant European theater. Conversely, Chinese targets did not have the same defense capability.
Americans. For the United States, interests in Korea were mainly reputational. Loss of the peninsula would have little immediate effect on American security. Had the original North Korean invasion occurred a year earlier, the United States may well have taken a different approach; however, with Communist advances threatening across the world, with the philosophical change in containment outlined in NSC-68, and with the loss of China a major issue in the imminent Congressional elections, the Truman administration was intent on drawing the line and demonstrating newfound resolve. Nonetheless, it was also intent on avoiding a war with the Soviet Union. In sum, control over Korea specifically was not absolutely necessary to the United States, while the multiplicity of interests motivating Mao and the proximity of Korea to Manchuria made intervention seem the only choice for China.

The risk propensity of the United States in this crisis was low to moderate. In global terms, Truman would have seen war with Communists in China as a step towards avoiding a loss that inaction might bring about; however, in local terms, the withdrawal of U.S. troops in 1949 and the occupation of North Korea by the communists coupled with the lack of traditional U.S. interest in Korea would have placed a war for unification within the realm of gains. Accordingly, per prospect theory, the United States would have been more risk acceptant in defending South Korea than in pursuing unification. At the time, Truman had become sensitive to communist aggression, yet his focus was on Europe rather than Asia. While intent on demonstrating resolve to meet the communists wherever they might initiate aggression, for both a domestic audience and for the Kremlin, Truman failed to adequately consider Chinese intentions. Given the balance of capabilities, the Americans believed that Mao would not intervene; thus, little planning for the eventuality of a Chinese intervention was undertaken. When the Chinese failed to commit troops during the summer, U.S. officials felt confident that whatever chance of Chinese intervention there was had passed, allowing for a change in goals from expulsion of the North Koreans to reunification of the peninsula, although this was conditioned upon the absence of Chinese or Soviet intervention. Chinese perceptions of U.S. risk propensity would have been mixed, given the failure of the United States to directly assist the KMT and the American withdrawal from Korea in 1949, followed by the American commitment to South Korea following Kim’s invasion.
Combining the balance of capabilities, balance of interests and risk propensity of the defender, it would appear that a deterrent threat offered by the United States should have been reasonably credible. Although interests favored the Chinese and the risk propensity of the United States might have been low, the disparity in balance of capabilities should have provided significant credibility for the deterrent. Yet, had American policymakers considered Mao’s background as well as the immediate context from Mao’s point of view, they might have recognized a high likelihood for risk acceptant behavior. Given the risk assessment of Mao provided in Chapter Four for this case and the strong interests in intervening, a successful deterrent would have had to leave Mao absolutely no room for doubt that an American response would be certain and would be devastating. Yet the deterrent efforts put forth by the United States were the exact opposite. As summarized by Allen Whiting, “Inadequate communication, or the failure to convey accurately to an opponent one’s intentions and one’s probable responses, played a pivotal role between August and October 1950 in precipitating war between the CPV and UN forces.”

The United States offered few public statements aimed at deterring the Chinese, with the exception of the August 10 statement threatening retaliatory action in Manchuria. In general, the United States was ambiguous in explaining exactly what it would do in the event of Chinese intervention and took few definitive actions aimed at demonstrating resolve to follow through with the major deterrent threat made. Even after the first Chinese engagements in late October, the United States failed to offer any signals that would make clear American intentions to exact a penalty for Chinese interference. Thus, despite characteristics that would lend credibility, the ambiguity of the U.S. deterrent effort led the Chinese to challenge the United States.

**Chinese Attack on Taiwan, 1950**

Prior to Kim’s invasion of June 1950, China was proceeding on pace to launch an invasion of Taiwan within the year. The KMT had been forced from the mainland to Formosa in December 1949. During the flight to Taiwan, Chiang made an effort to fortify nationalist

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168 Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 168.
positions on many of the coastal islands adjacent to the mainland. American officials expected an attack on Taiwan during 1950, and, following the successful communist seizure of Hainan in April 1950, predicted communist victory. \(^{169}\) During the first half of 1950, the threat of attack on Taiwan was perceived by most U.S. policymakers as much more serious than the threat facing South Korea. \(^{170}\) There is little doubt that Mao did in fact intend to mount an operation against Taiwan during 1950, however the deployment of the Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Straits in June 1950 completely disrupted Mao’s plans. Originally, the operation was merely pushed back, but as the war in Korea dragged on, Mao was forced to abandon the plans indefinitely.

**Goals**

The conquest and subjugation of Taiwan would have fulfilled three of Mao’s goals simultaneously. First, he would eliminate the “old order” of the KMT, thereby ensuring his military security. Second, he would enhance his stature domestically by acquiring territory lost in the 1890s, signifying the resurgence of China and the end of the era of western and imperial exploitation. Third, he would acquire a key location for expanding Chinese influence throughout the region via control over the northern entrance to the South China Sea as well as acquiring a base from which to threaten U.S. bases in the Philippines.

The United States sought to keep the communists from taking control of the island of Taiwan, primarily to secure the southern flank of UN forces deployed in Korea. However, the United States also sought to satisfy international concerns that it was not embarking on a new imperialist course; thus, under Truman, it attempted to distance itself from the KMT. Accordingly, U.S. officials emphasized that the Seventh Fleet was a neutralizing force in the Taiwan Straits, rather than a supporting force for the Chiang Kai-Shek regime.

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\(^{169}\) Christensen, 130.

\(^{170}\) Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War*, 79. Both the proximity of U.S. troops in Japan and the fact of UN recognition of the South Korean government were believed to make Korea a less likely target than Taiwan. Skirmishes at the 38\(^{th}\) parallel increased in intensity from January 1950, such that the onset of full-scale war was not completely without warning.
Capabilities\footnote{171}

\textit{China}: In December 1949, citing the poor state of Chinese naval and aviation forces, Mao personally requested assistance from Stalin in the form of Soviet pilots or “secret military detachments to speed up the conquest of Formosa.”\footnote{172} Stalin implicitly refused by noting that assistance had not been ruled out, but it was important to avoid giving “America a pretext to intervene.”\footnote{173} He then suggested fomenting rebellion on Formosa via political agitation rather than pursuing direct military conquest, effectively ending the discussion of the matter and leaving Mao empty handed with respect to the power projection forces he had sought.\footnote{174}

In June 1950, Mao’s forces directly across from Taiwan numbered 156,000.\footnote{175} Over the prior few weeks, Mao had concentrated six armies in Fujian province to conduct training for an amphibious assault on the Zhoushan Islands and Quemoy as the first two steps to the planned Taiwan campaign.\footnote{176} In May, part of the invasion force began assembling in Shandung to attack the Zhoushan targets while the remainder stayed in Fujian preparing to assault Quemoy.\footnote{177}

By late July, American intelligence reports suggested that a “sufficient build-up of troops and water lift now exist on the China coast for launching an invasion of Taiwan.”\footnote{178}

\footnote{171} For a review of the Chinese and U.S. military capabilities at this time generally, see the prior section.

\footnote{172} “Stalin’s Conversations with Chinese Leaders,” 6 (providing translation of official Soviet record of conversation between Stalin and Mao in Moscow, December 16, 1949).

\footnote{173} Ibid.

\footnote{174} Ibid.

\footnote{175} Kalicki, 44.

\footnote{176} Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 148; Jian, \textit{China’s Road to the Korean War}, 132.

\footnote{177} Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 149. The Zhoushan are located nearly three hundred miles north of Taiwan, near the Chinese port City of Wenzhou. They play no inherent role in the defense of Formosa.

Specifically, the JCS estimated that the communists could transport approximately 200,000 troops to Formosa, using as many as four thousand naval vessels. However, this intelligence was countered by reports from MacArthur’s aerial reconnaissance in early August that showed no major concentrations of naval vessels along the Chinese coast. Part of the problem in obtaining intelligence as to amphibious capability was due to the nature of the Chinese communist navy. As the fleet was composed of civilian junks rather than commissioned naval transport vessels, American reconnaissance was unable to distinguish ordinary concentrations of fishing vessels from concentrations of military significance.

After deploying troops en masse to Korea, Mao once again sought to acquire naval assets from Stalin, including an urgent request for “high-speed torpedo boats, floating mines, armored ships, small patrol boats, minesweeping equipment, coastal fortress artillery and torpedo bomber planes.” Again, this request apparently went unfilled.

ROC - U.S.: In January 1950, attempting to justify distancing the United States from the defense of Taiwan, Secretary of State Acheson described the ROC military as a million-man army, buffeted by an air force of one hundred thousand and a navy of thirty thousand. More realistic assessments of ROC military strength in June 1950 placed the numbers at less than 600,000 troops, with roughly 400,000 ground troops, 60,000 airmen, 30,000 sailors, 18,000

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179 Ibid., 401 (Memo from Secretary of Defense to Secretary of State, Jul. 29, 1950). Cf. the G-2 Periodic Intelligence Report on Soviet Intentions and Activities No. 4, dated July 27, 1950, holding “there is no reliable information that an attack on Taiwan is imminent.” Referenced in FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 403 (Memo from Secretary of State to Secretary of Defense, Jul. 31, 1950.)

180 FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 432 (Telegram from Secretary of State to Embassy in UK, Aug. 12, 1950).


182 Ibid., 261 (Memo of Secretary of State Acheson meeting with Senators Knowland and Smith, Jan. 5, 1950).
Marines and 55,000 “combined service” troops.\(^{183}\) As the threat of invasion declined, Chiang’s forces were reduced to approximately 350,000 active troops by early 1952.\(^{184}\)

At the beginning of 1950, the United States “did not intend to become engaged in the defense of Formosa,” and thus rejected sales of heavy tanks or bombers to the KMT.\(^{185}\) While endeavoring in his January 1950 speech to cut off future sales of American military equipment to the KMT, Truman did permit in-progress sales to be completed, including the export of 25 M-4 Sherman tanks and 25 F-80 jet fighters.\(^{186}\) By and large, the ROC infantry was well armed, having acquired large amounts of materiel from both the United States and the surrendering Japanese in World War II, although the military as a whole lacked significant numbers of modern jet aircraft, combat naval vessels, and heavy tanks.\(^{187}\)

Despite the size of these forces and the equipment provided, U.S. confidence in the KMT military was minimal. Quoting George Kennan, “The Nationalist forces on the island must, in view of their national temperament, their past experiences and their unfortunate leadership, be regarded as wholly unreliable.”\(^{188}\) The returned American Charge’ from Taipei, Robert Strong,

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\(^{183}\) Ibid., 359 (Telegram from Charge in China (Taiwan) to Secretary of State, Jun. 7, 1950); FRUS 1952-54, Vol. XIV: 379 (Telegram Ambassador in ROC to DOS, Mar. 8, 1954).


\(^{186}\) Ibid., 316 (Letter from Secretary of State Acheson to Secretary of Defense Johnson, Mar. 7, 1950); Ibid., 325-26 (Letter from Acheson to Johnson, Apr. 14, 1950).

\(^{187}\) The Army claimed to have no more than 450 operable tanks and even fewer trucks. Ibid., 418 (Telegram from Charge in China (Taiwan) to Secretary of State, Aug. 4 1950, citing ROC Foreign Minister). The ROC Navy had received 131 U.S. vessels since 1947, including a large number of various types of landing craft, twelve mine sweepers, six destroyer escorts, and several smaller patrol boats. American Foreign Policy 1950-1955: Basic Documents, Vol. II: 2461 (Text of Reply by DOS to Questions of House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Feb. 9, 1950).

\(^{188}\) FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 380-81 (Memo from George Kennan to Secretary of State, Jul. 17, 1950).
authored a memo in September 1950 that was critical of the armed forces, citing political favoritism, formation of cliques, unclear lines of command, incompetent commanders, lack of coherent planning, and lack of confidence in Chiang as major problems effecting the military.\textsuperscript{189} A January 1951 National Intelligence Estimate echoed these concerns, noting “there is considerable doubt, however, as to the reliability and effectiveness of the Nationalist troops under present Nationalist leadership.”\textsuperscript{190} The Far East Command Survey Group charged with conducting a comprehensive review of the ROC military was also highly critical of the navy and somewhat critical of the air force, noting poor training and lack of coherent doctrine.\textsuperscript{191}

Truman’s ordering the Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Straits on June 27\textsuperscript{th} reversed the balance of capabilities in regard to an assault on Taiwan. Prior to the deployment, Mao was already facing a difficult operation due to KMT air power and the lack of PRC naval power. An amphibious landing in Taiwan would have been casualty intensive even without American intervention. Introduction of the American warships into the vicinity made it nearly impossible to successfully execute an amphibious assault on Taiwan.\textsuperscript{192} In fact, the American military buildup in August and September staged in Japan in preparation for a counter-offensive in Korea added tremendous local defensive capability for Taiwan. U.S. air power based in Okinawa and the Philippines further weighted the scales against an amphibious invasion. To provide nuclear

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 487 (Memo from Robert Strong to Director, Office of Chinese Affairs, Sep. 6, 1950).


\textsuperscript{191} \textit{FRUS} 1950, Vol. VI: 591-95 (Highlights of FEC Survey Group dated Sep. 11, 1950).

\textsuperscript{192} In actuality, a large part of the Seventh Fleet was engaged in the waters off Korea rather than in the Taiwan Straits. Ibid., 536 (Memo of conversation of Secretary of State and John Foster Dulles regarding Formosa, Oct. 23, 1950). Ironically, this placed the fleet at a greater distance from Taiwan than if it remained at its homeport in Cavite (Manila Bay). Presumably for this reason, Robert Simmons, 143-45, argues that the Seventh Fleet could not have stopped a Chinese invasion of Taiwan in 1950. However, this would demand the Chinese fleet of junks traverse the Straits to Taiwan, survive Nationalist air assaults during the voyage, and land a force with supplies prior to the arrival of U.S. vessels or naval air support. The primitive Chinese fleet had minimal chance of succeeding in such an endeavor in 1950.
capability, Truman ordered the deployment of nuclear capable B-29 bombers to Guam in early July 1950.193

Finally, American materiel assistance to Taiwan was increased under the Mutual Defense Act. MacArthur’s visit to Formosa at the end of July was made specifically to assess the island’s defense capabilities in order to determine what materiel assistance from the United States was most urgently needed. The decision to prohibit sales of heavy tanks and jet fighters, beyond previously agreed to transactions, was reversed.194 In November 1950, Taiwan received significant shipments of American made artillery and small arms ammunition,195 as preliminary American assessments determined that the ROC was relatively well equipped and needed spare parts, ammunition and maintenance services more than anything else.196 In December, the sale of fifty F-47D aircraft was approved.197

Still, Truman sought to avoid long-term commitments to Taiwan or the basing of U.S. forces on the island.198 Indicative of the Truman administration’s attitude toward Chiang was the deliberate pace of supply. Appropriations for U.S. military assistance to Taiwan totaled nearly $300 million for fiscal years 1951 and 1952 combined, yet nineteen months into this period, the Truman administration had only delivered $25 million of military equipment to Formosa.199

193 Stueck, The Korean War: An International History, 67. These were recalled prior to the end of the year.
195 Secretary of Defense Semiannual Report, January 1 to June 30, 1951: 68.
197 Ibid., 604 (Letter Secretary of State to Chinese (ROC) Ambassador, Dec. 19, 1950).
198 See e.g. Ibid., 439 (Telegram JCS to CINFE, Aug. 14, 1950, instructing MacArthur not to base U.S. aircraft in Taiwan, even in the event of a communist attack).
Interests

China: PRC interests in obtaining possession of Taiwan were clear. To complete its victory in the Chinese Civil War, the CCP needed to eliminate the last vestiges of KMT resistance. As long as Chiang survived, he represented a threat to the CCP and a hindrance to its acceptance globally as the official government of China. In his escape to Taiwan, Chiang had avoided a climactic battle with the communists, permitting him to bring a large quantity of nationalist troops and equipment with him. Moreover, Chiang retained the support, albeit qualified, of the west, as represented by the refusal to seat the PRC in the UN. Even though Chiang might not have the capacity at present to provide a serious military threat of returning to the mainland, when the communists faced anticipated domestic discontent in the future due to the severe economic and social policies associated with Soviet-style socialization of the government, Chiang could potentially harness that to create problems for the CCP. Thus, eliminating Chiang while he remained relatively weak was considered necessary.

Secondly, Mao’s personal animus toward Chiang made the elimination of the KMT particularly important. Mao considered Chiang as a traitor who had sold out to the west. Having worked with Chiang in the KMT-CCP alliance in the early 1920s, only to have Chiang engage in an extended attempt to destroy the CCP, Mao was intent on preventing Chiang from enjoying recognition.

Third, if Mao could acquire Taiwan, he could score points domestically by appealing to Chinese nationalism. Although Taiwan had long been associated with the mainland government in varying degrees of subservience, the Japanese had successfully taken Taiwan in the 1890s. Reinstating Chinese rule over the island would suggest Mao might be able to restore the once great imperial China to its former glory, while at the same time providing an early warning site for future Japanese or American maritime invasions. In addition, Mao was intent on avoiding a precedent of abandoning Chinese territorial claims. With an eye toward Chinese expansion in Southeast Asia, troops already being positioned to take Tibet, and hopes of reaching accommodation with the Soviets in regard to Mongolia and Manchurian ports of interest, Mao was determined to avoid what he saw as territorial loss.
United States: Until two months prior to the Korean invasion, the United States adopted a minimalist approach to assisting the nationalist Chinese government in their civil war with the Maoists.\textsuperscript{200} Despite labeling China as a “vital interest” to the United States, support for the nationalist government of Chiang Kai-Shek was minimal, as the Truman administration harbored resentment over the incompetence demonstrated by the nationalists during and since the end of the Second World War.\textsuperscript{201} As late as January 1950, the administration categorically ruled out military aid to Chiang’s forces after they had withdrawn to Formosa.\textsuperscript{202} Following the communist victory in 1949, Secretary Acheson explained the nationalist defeat by noting, “Added to the grossest incompetence ever experienced by any military command was the total lack of support both in the armies and in the country, and so the whole matter just simply disintegrated.”\textsuperscript{203} George Kennan considered the KMT so corrupt that it would be preferable to see the CCP win rather than having the United States attach its credibility to such a despised regime.\textsuperscript{204} Secretary Acheson emphasized that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had characterized Formosa as not of vital interest to the defense of the United States.\textsuperscript{205}

American policy began to change following the conclusion of the Sino-Soviet Defense pact of February 1950. The Truman administration was in the midst of a shift from a passive

\textsuperscript{200} As of March 31, 1948, less than 6,000 U.S. military personnel remained in all of China. \textit{DSB} V. 18, 705.

\textsuperscript{201} As stated by Secretary of State Dean Acheson, “Only the Chinese Government itself can undertake the vital measures necessary to provide the framework within which efforts … may be effective.” \textit{DSB} V. 18, 269 (Feb. 29, 1948). When asked by a Congressman why the United States was not doing more to aid Chiang, Secretary Acheson noted that further economic aid to China was impractical and would be ineffective.

\textsuperscript{202} “The United States will not provide military aid or advice to Chinese forces on Formosa.” \textit{DSB} V. 22, 79 (Jan. 5, 1950)(Statement by President Truman).

\textsuperscript{203} \textit{DSB} V. 20, 781 (Jun. 19, 1949)(Press Release).

\textsuperscript{204} Christensen, 60-61.

\textsuperscript{205} \textit{FRUS} 1950, Vol. VI: 260 (Memo of conversation by Secretary State Acheson with Senators Knowland and Smith, Jan. 5, 1950.)
brand of containment as advocated by Kennan, to the more active containment policy spelled out in NSC-68. Already drawing a sharper line in Europe, as reflected by the Truman Doctrine and the creation of NATO, the conclusion of a mutual defense agreement by the two great communist powers forced the United States into a reassessment of policy in Asia. Accordingly, NSC-68’s advocacy of switching from a strongpoint defense to a forward defense accorded new value to Taiwan, as well as Korea and Indochina. Military leadership, including Secretary of Defense Johnson, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Omar Bradley, and the Commander in Chief of Far East Command Douglas MacArthur, argued for American assistance in defending Taiwan. On June 14, 1950, MacArthur sent a memorandum on Formosa to the Secretary of Defense asserting that “the strategic interests of the United States will be in serious jeopardy if Formosa is allowed to be dominated by a power hostile to the United States” due to the offshore forward defense centered around Japan, Okinawa and the Philippines. Describing the island as an “unsinkable aircraft carrier and submarine tender,” MacArthur attributed decisive importance to the possession of Taiwan. By adopting an island-based defense perimeter, control over the trans-Pacific and local sea lines of communication became imperative. Ceding Taiwan to the communists would threaten such control at each of the American strongpoints.

The attack on Korea caused the Truman Administration to complete the course reversal by immediately deploying the Seventh Fleet to defend Taiwan. The Joint Chiefs of Staff specifically reaffirmed the strategic importance of Formosa to the United States in their memo of July 27, 1950 recommending the immediate adoption of a policy to provide materiel assistance to the ROC military. Debate continued for some time thereafter, as evidenced by the October

206 Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 118.


1950 public statement of the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations denigrating the importance of Formosa to U.S. security, however, with the Korean invasion, the American policy of ensuring the defense of Taiwan was set. By 1951, no less than George Marshall was asserting that Taiwan could never be allowed to fall into the hands of the communists.

Defending Formosa was also important from a psychological standpoint. Having concluded defense pacts for the protection of Western Europe (NATO) and for the Americas (Rio Pact), it may have appeared that the United States was ceding the rest of the world to the communists. By defending Formosa, the United States could signal Asia and the Middle East that it would not retreat to fortress America. Under this line of reasoning, whether Formosa had independent geo-strategic value was irrelevant, as the loss of Formosa would conceivably cause other Asian states to reorient policy toward China. Thus, the United States could choose to take a stand at Formosa, or it could wait some years and be forced to take a stand nearer to American territory after most of Asia and the Middle East had already fallen into the communist camp.

Thomas Christensen argues that many American policymakers would have preferred to cut all ties with the KMT and pursue a strategy of attempting to divide the Chinese and Soviets; however, the political tactics chosen by Truman forced the United States to defend the KMT.

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211 “The great and overriding problem in dealing with Formosa, and with the Red regime in China, is that under no circumstances should we allow ourselves to be tricked into a shooting war on the Chinese mainland. While Formosa is important to our security, it is certainly not that important.” Senator Tom Connally, DSB V. 23, 565 (Oct. 9, 1950).

212 Foot, 139. Marshall’s support for defending Taiwan is notable given the fact that Chiang held Marshall in contempt following Marshall’s failed mission to China aimed at reconciling the Communists and Nationalists in 1946-47.

213 See e.g. FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 604-05 (Telegram Consul General at Hong Kong to Secretary of State, Dec. 20, 1950).

214 Ibid., 349-51 (Draft memo from Assistant Secretary of State Rusk to Secretary of State Acheson, May 30, 1950).

215 Christensen, 78-79.
Christensen asserts that selling the American public on a rearmament campaign based on hard core realist principles was too difficult, so the Truman administration simplified things by presenting a picture based on ideology, neatly dividing the world into two competing camps of good and evil. Through the Truman Doctrine, the President was able to increase domestic support for such things as establishing NATO, keeping U.S. servicemen stationed abroad, financing the Marshall Plan, and funding the Military Assistance Program that provided aid to friends and allies. Yet Truman and Acheson were focusing on Europe with this plan. Neither intended to apply the same policies to Asia in the either-or format the Cold War approach mandated. However, when the communists took China and pressured Taiwan, Truman was caught in his own rhetoric and was forced to defend the KMT in order to satisfy China’s supporters in Congress and to maintain consistency with his own ideological arguments. Accordingly, Christensen holds that the major interest in defending Taiwan was not strategic location or even ensuring reputation, but was ensuring consistency with the chosen strategy aimed primarily at ensuring European security.

In the event, the defense of Taiwan was accorded high priority in the early months of the Korean War. Government officials placed greater immediate importance on the situation in Formosa than on the ongoing conflict in Indochina, as explicitly asserted in discussions of military assistance. While this was obviously influenced by the U.S. belief that France could handle things in Indochina, it nonetheless reflects the increased stature given Chiang’s government under the new version of containment.

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216 Ibid., 50-51.

217 Ibid., 93-95.

218 Ibid., 60-65.

219 FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 508 (Memo MDA DOS to Office of Military Assistance DOD, Sep. 18, 1950 (stating “The Department of State is prepared to accept the supply priority recommended by the Department of Defense for this initial list of items to be furnished to the Chinese Nationalist Government, such priority being immediately above that of grant military assistance to Indochina.”))
Risk Propensity

The conclusion of the Sino-Soviet alliance on February 14, 1950 binding the Soviets to come to the defense of the Chinese in the event the PRC was attacked “by Japan or states allied with it,” was aimed directly at the United States.\textsuperscript{220} Thus, Truman had to consider the possibility that conflict with China would escalate to global war with the Soviet Union at a time when the Soviets held conventional military superiority and positional advantage in Europe.

In March 1950, the CIA provided an intelligence estimate that the PRC was capable of and likely to engage in operations designed to seize Taiwan before the end of the calendar year.\textsuperscript{221} In April 1950, prior to the PRC attack on Hainan, U.S. military attaches in Hong Kong and Taipei noted increasing PRC pressure on ROC forces and recommended immediate U.S. financial and materiel assistance to help hold Formosa, or at a minimum, buy time to build up Southeast Asian forces, noting the inevitability of Chinese attack there if and when Formosa fell.\textsuperscript{222} By May, with Hainan having fallen, the American Charge in China expressed his view that the “fate of Taiwan was sealed,” with a communist attack on Formosa likely between June 15 and the end of July.\textsuperscript{223} He expressly recommended evacuation of most personnel and sensitive material as well as transferring various operations from Taipei to Hong Kong, thereby provoking the State Department to issue a warning to American citizens on Formosa to leave and to authorize reducing diplomatic personnel on the island.\textsuperscript{224} In June, PRC media sources were calling on citizens in Formosa to “arise against their ‘oppressors’ as the eleventh hour leading to

\textsuperscript{220} For the public text of the Sino-Soviet Treaty, see American Foreign Policy 1950-1955: Basic Documents, Vol. II: 2463-2465.

\textsuperscript{221} FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 330 (Memo from Asst. Secretary of State Rusk to Secretary of State Acheson noting March CIA analysis and April 10 reappraisal reaffirming prior analysis, April 17, 1950).

\textsuperscript{222} FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 333-34 (Memo from Asst. Secretary of State Rusk to Secretary of State Acheson, Apr. 26, 1950).

\textsuperscript{223} Ibid., 340-41 (Telegram from Charge in China to Secretary of State, May 17, 1950).

\textsuperscript{224} Ibid., 342-43 (Telegram from Acting Secretary of State to Embassy in China, May 19, 1950.); Ibid., 344-45 (Telegram from Acting Secretary of State to Embassy in China, May 26, 1950).
their liberation was approaching.” Accordingly, an imminent attack on Taiwan was not merely a possibility, but considered a foregone conclusion in Washington prior to the Korean invasion.

Immediately after the North Korean invasion occurred, attention focused on Taiwan as the likely next object of communist aggression. Following the American deployment of the Seventh Fleet, China issued condemnations of the American action. In early July, the Indian Ambassador to China stressed that he believed China “was preparing for [an] attack on Formosa in [the] immediate future” and that it was likely to invoke the Sino-Soviet defense treaty in conjunction therewith. At the same time, PRC forces engaged in shelling of the offshore islands held by the KMT, eventually resulting in the KMT launching an aerial strike against concentrated Chinese forces on the mainland, in contrast to American wishes. In late July, the JCS informed MacArthur that the PRC would likely succeed in taking Formosa, asserting that they had recommended ROC units be authorized to attack PRC concentrations on the mainland.

By early August, the perceived imminence of a Chinese action against Formosa was abating, although Chinese actions against the offshore islands continued. General MacArthur reportedly noted that the American forces in the area made an attempt on Formosa unlikely and neither his intelligence nor reconnaissance indicated massing of an invasion force. American officials accepted the deterrence of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan as fact. A CIA

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225 Ibid., 369 (Telegram from Ambassador in UK to Secretary of State, Jul. 6, 1950).
227 FRUS 1950: Vol. VI: 372 (Telegram Ambassador in India to Secretary of State, Jul. 9, 1950).
228 Schnabel, 368.
229 FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 429 (Extracts from Memo of Conversation between General MacArthur and Special Assistant to the President Averill Harriman in Tokyo, Aug. 6 and Aug. 8, 1950).
230 See e.g. FRUS 1950, Vol. VII: 780 (Telegram from Ambassador USSR to Secretary of State, Sep. 26, 1950, noting the U.S. presence had “stymied Red plans to seize [Formosa]”).
memorandum prepared in October held that the PRC could launch an invasion of Formosa with approximately 200,000 troops and “moderate” air cover, but that intelligence did not indicate an intent to attempt such an invasion in the immediate future.\textsuperscript{231} The report concluded that absent Soviet instigation of world war, an invasion would not be attempted for the remainder of the year.\textsuperscript{232}

In defending Taiwan, the United States was largely bereft of allied support. While the action in Korea was undertaken pursuant to UN authority, the deployment of the Seventh Fleet was strictly a unilateral affair. Chiang Kai-Shek’s authoritarian methods garnered little good will in liberal democracies. Moreover, European states that were seeing their own empires dismembered while American global influence increased were not inclined to offer assistance on geostrategic grounds regardless of the benefits that might accrue. Even such a pro-American Asian ally as the Philippines responded to a preliminary inquiry by the United States regarding provision of asylum for Chiang Kai-Shek by refusing to welcome him and noting should he flee there in the event of attack on Formosa, he would be given twenty-four hours to leave.\textsuperscript{233}

Having seen China and North Korea fall to the communists and with an attack on South Korea and active insurgencies underway in most of Southeast Asia, Truman saw the potential loss of Formosa as yet another incremental step forward for Moscow. Accordingly, communist possession of Formosa would reside within the realm of losses, suggesting the United States would be more risk acceptant in attempting to prevent such an occurrence.

**Declaratory Policy**

On January 5, 1950, President Truman made a speech in which he asserted the United States would adopt a policy of non-involvement in the Chinese Civil War, denying U.S. “military aid or advice to Chinese forces on Formosa,” and thus effectively rejecting the defense


\textsuperscript{232} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{233} FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 346 (Editor’s n.2).
Secretary of State Acheson followed these remarks by asserting “We are not going to get involved militarily in any way on the island of Formosa. So far as I know, no responsible person in the Government, no military man has ever believed that we should involve our forces in the island.”

On January 12, 1950, Secretary of State Acheson made his ill-fated remarks regarding the U.S. security perimeter in which Korea and Formosa were omitted from the defined areas of interest. In the course of the same speech, the U.S. commitment to defend Japan and the Philippines was expressly emphasized. Acheson went on to state “[s]o far as the military security of other areas in the Pacific is concerned, it must be clear that no person can guarantee these areas against military attack.” Thus, although official policy statements recognized the insurgencies taking place in Burma, Malaya, Indochina, and Thailand as of “deep interest” to the United States, and the hostilities occurring at the Korean border as vitally important, declaratory policy was decidedly unclear with respect to what the United States would do to help protect against communist advances. To Mao these statements clearly signaled that the United States would not object should the PRC assault Chiang’s stronghold on Taiwan.

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234 DSB V. 22, 79 (White House Press Statement, Jan. 5, 1950); Christensen, 109.


236 DSB V. 22, 111 (Remarks by Secretary Acheson, Jan. 23, 1950).

237 “[I] can assure you that there is no intention of any sort of abandoning or weakening the defenses of Japan and that whatever arrangements are to be made either through permanent settlement or otherwise, that defense must and shall be maintained….It is hardly necessary for me to say an attack on the Philippines could not and would not be tolerated by the United States.” Press Release, DSB V. 20, 781 (Jun. 19, 1949). Similar remarks by Ambassador Loy W. Henderson are found in DSB V. 22, 564 (Apr. 10, 1950).

238 DSB V. 20, 781 (Jun. 19, 1949).

239 See, DSB V. 22, 564 (Apr. 10, 1950); DSB V. 22, 627-30 (Apr. 24, 1950); DSB V. 22, 1049 (Jun. 26, 1950).

240 Kalicki, 34.
Following the North Korean invasion, the reversal in declaratory policy toward Formosa was striking. The President’s official statement of June 27, 1950 concerning Formosa was as follows:

In these circumstances, the occupation of Formosa by Communist forces would be a direct threat to the security of the Pacific area and to United States forces performing their lawful and necessary functions in that area. Accordingly, I have ordered the Seventh Fleet to prevent any attack on Formosa. As a corollary of this action, I am calling upon the Chinese Government of Formosa to cease all air and sea operations against the mainland. The Seventh Fleet will see that this is done. The determination of the future status of Formosa must await the restoration of security in the Pacific, a peace settlement with Japan, or consideration by the United Nations.\textsuperscript{241}

The next major public statement on Formosa from the President occurred in an address to Congress on July 19, 1950, during which the President asserted the following:

In order that there may be no doubt in any quarter about our intentions regarding Formosa, I wish to state that the United States has no territorial ambitions whatever concerning that island, nor do we seek for ourselves any special position or privilege on Formosa. The present military neutralization of Formosa is without prejudice to political questions affecting that island. Our desire is that Formosa not become embroiled in hostilities disturbing to the peace of the Pacific and that all questions affecting Formosa be settled by peaceful means as envisaged in the Charter of the United Nations.\textsuperscript{242}

Pursuant to American request, the Government of India provided the text of this address to the Chinese communist government directly, via its Ambassador in Beijing.

Thereafter, not only did the public criticism of Chiang stop, but Formosa became the recipient of substantial U.S. military and economic assistance, with official policy holding that “there is a wide range of agreement that the island of Formosa should not be allowed to fall into hostile hands for exploitation against the peace of the Pacific.”\textsuperscript{243}

\textsuperscript{241} DSBJ V. 23, 5 (Jun. 27, 1950).


\textsuperscript{243} DSBJ V. 25, 822 (Nov. 19, 1951); See also DSBJ V. 27, 102 (Jul. 21, 1952).
MacArthur personally visited Taiwan in a highly publicized move that pushed Truman to increase American commitment to Taiwan while enhancing Mao’s concerns over strategic encirclement.\(^{244}\) MacArthur’s visit also produced a decided upsurge in KMT morale, calmed ROC sensitivities over American rejection of Chiang’s offer of KMT troops for use in Korea, and enhanced KMT prestige on the island.\(^{245}\) Around the same time, Secretary of State Acheson leaked to the press the U.S. deployment of B-29s to Guam, suggesting a potential nuclear response could be forthcoming should escalation occur.\(^{246}\)

Officially, Truman stuck to his policy of neutralizing the Straits; however, MacArthur’s letter to the Veterans of Foreign Wars released on August 25, 1950 strongly advocating American defense of Taiwan was in contrast to Truman’s understated policy.\(^{247}\) Despite Truman’s order that MacArthur rescind his statements and Truman’s statement that Formosa was a matter for the UN to handle, the perceptions in Communist China may have been significantly influenced.\(^{248}\)

On August 31, the President noted during a news conference that the Seventh Fleet would only remain in the Taiwan Straits so long as the Korean War was ongoing, and that its mission was designed only to provide “flank protection” for the UN forces.\(^{249}\) These sentiments were repeated the next day in a nationally televised report from the President on Korea. Thus, U.S.

\(^{244}\) Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 142-43; Stueck, The Korean War: An International History, 66-67.

\(^{245}\) FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 411 (Telegram Charge in China (Taiwan) to Secretary of State, Aug. 3, 1950).


\(^{247}\) FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 451-52 (Telegram Secretary of State to Certain Diplomatic Offices, Aug. 26, 1950, reprinting parts of MacArthur’s letter). MacArthur later asserted that he had assumed his letter was in keeping with the articulated policy and that he would not have sent the letter had he believed otherwise. Ibid., 534 (Memo of conversation between Harriman and MacArthur, Oct. 14, 1950).

\(^{248}\) Kalicki, 49; Stueck, The Korean War: An International History, 68-69.

declaratory deterrent policy was clear with respect to the short term, but decidedly less so as to a long-term policy toward Taiwan. Further, as Truman had called on the ROC to suspend offensive operations at this time, the announcement that the Seventh Fleet would withdraw following hostilities in Korea caused the KMT to balk. Suspension of KMT operations permitted the PRC to freely build up supplies imported from the Soviets for launching an attack on Taiwan, increasing Taiwan’s vulnerability once the Seventh Fleet departed relative to its introduction.\textsuperscript{250} Accordingly, ROC officials repeatedly voiced their concerns to the American government over this latest declaration.\textsuperscript{251}

With the Chinese intervention en masse in Korea in 1950, the tenor of the American commitment to Taiwan changed again. By December, it became apparent that the action in Korea could be far lengthier than originally presumed. Accordingly, pursuant to the Mutual Defense Act of 1949, the Truman Administration concluded a Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement with Taiwan entering into force in early February 1951, thereby signaling the Chinese that the United States was prepared for a long-term commitment to the KMT.

In order to forestall any possible new Chinese activity toward Taiwan following Truman’s dismissal of MacArthur in April 1951, the Pentagon released a statement on April 24 announcing that Taiwan “ranked equally to Western Europe in priority for weapons and ammunition shipments.”\textsuperscript{252} In addition, the United States created a new military advisory group to deploy to Taiwan, as well as increasing the level of military materiel assistance.\textsuperscript{253}

Under Eisenhower, U.S. declaratory policy regarding Taiwan became increasingly clear. Eisenhower publicly “unleashed” Chiang to attack the mainland as he saw fit, reversing

\textsuperscript{250} Ibid., 482 (Telegram Charge in China (Taiwan) to Secretary of State, Sep. 2, 1950).

\textsuperscript{251} See e.g. FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 511 (Memo of conversation Director of Office of Chinese Affairs, Deputy Secretary of State Far East and ROC Ambassador, Sep. 19, 1950).

\textsuperscript{252} Stueck, The Korean War: An International History, 185.

\textsuperscript{253} DSB V. 24, 747 (May 7, 1951); Stueck, The Korean War: An International History, 193.
Truman’s orders to the Seventh Fleet to neutralize the Taiwan Straits. In early February the head of the Military Advisory Group in Taiwan declared that the ROC military had “doubled its fighting efficiency” in the course of the past year.

Deterrence Outcome

The deployment of the Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Straits in June 1950 resulted in the immediate postponement of Chinese plans to attack Taiwan. Publicly committing American military forces to neutralize the Straits resulted in a certain U.S. guarantee of Taiwan at least for the short term. Even had hostilities ensued and the Soviets participated, America could not have backed down given the publicity of the move. China still held out hope of merely delaying the planned attack until the following summer; however, as the Korean War dragged on and the American presence became fixed, hopes for the Taiwan operation faded. In August 1950, the plans for a 1951 attack were officially canceled.

The balance of capabilities overwhelmingly favored the United States in this crisis. The Chinese manpower advantage was far less important for an amphibious operation than for the ground operations in Korea. As the Chinese communists had minimal naval capabilities, the introduction of the Seventh Fleet nullified any real chance for communist amphibious success. Soviet naval capabilities were likewise extremely limited compared to the U.S. Navy, particularly in the Pacific. Soviet and Soviet-provided Chinese airpower could still threaten bombing operations against Formosa, but such attacks would risk American reprisals against the


256 Central Committee orders postponing plans were issued in late June. Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 131; Gong Li, “Tension Across the Taiwan Strait in the 1950s: Chinese Strategy and Tactics,” in Re-examining the Cold War: U.S.-China Diplomacy, 1954-1973, eds. Robert S. Ross and Jiang Changbin (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), 144. Note that Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 152, assert the operation was delayed until 1951 in early June. If this is so, the obvious implication would be that Mao was consulted as to the general timing of the Korean action and recognized he could not seize Taiwan before Kim moved south.

257 Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 158.
Chinese mainland and would have minimal chance of accomplishing the Chinese goal of capturing the island. Moreover, American provided air defense would probably result in a disastrous attrition rate for communist bombers, rendering air assault an unlikely option.

In fact, with such an imbalance in naval and air assets, the American adoption of a neutralization strategy in the Taiwan Straits made little military sense. The American interest was in preventing communist control of Formosa. With this interest effectively achieved for the short term simply by locating the Seventh Fleet in the Straits, permitting the KMT to engage in offensive operations against the mainland would have forced the Chinese to reorient resources from Korea to the southeast coast. The American fleet need not assist the KMT in these actions if political fallout was of major concern; although it is difficult to see how allied discontent over America’s Taiwan policy would have had significant effect on other policies given the free world dependence on U.S. defense. Even had the Chinese made use of their Soviet allies to strike Taiwan, as long as the island did not fall into communist hands, the primary U.S. interest would still be met. By encouraging, or at the least permitting, KMT operations against the mainland, scarce PRC resources might be drained allowing U.S. forces in Korea some respite from the initial Chinese onslaught, and thereafter, providing additional bargaining leverage for U.S. negotiators.

The balance of interests overwhelmingly favored the Communists. As in Korea, America was concerned primarily with reputation and with instituting a global strategy, whereas to the PRC, accepting KMT survival on Taiwan meant a continuous threat to the communist regime’s survival. Even if the KMT could not mount a military assault to displace the CCP, the presence of a Chinese opposition provided a rallying point for opponents of the communist regime. Elimination of the KMT would solidify the CCP’s control, while acquiring Formosa would provide nationalist propaganda value by recovering territory taken by the Japanese in the 1890s. The United States was primarily concerned with Formosa as a symbol of American resistance, rather than as inherently valuable territory. Over time, policymakers begin to attribute significance to Formosa due to the Pacific defense line and due to the potential rival it constituted to the communist government of China; however, in 1950, only a minority in Washington advanced these reasons.
American risk propensity in this crisis was probably moderate to high. Having already lost China and North Korea to communism, and with much of Southeast Asia threatened, Washington began to recognize the need to take a stand. Moreover, domestic criticism of the Truman administration was particularly focused on a supposed lack of attention to Asian policy. Thus, Truman was determined not to accept any more uncontested losses in Asia. Seeing communist acquisition of Formosa as a loss, prospect theory would expect greater risk acceptance by the United States.

U.S. declaratory policy as to Taiwan ran the gamut in 1950 from basically inviting the PRC to take Taiwan unimpeded in January to the deployment of extremely powerful warships to prevent any Chinese action aimed at Formosa in the latter half of the year. The antipathy Truman and Acheson had for Chiang kept them from issuing strong statements in support of the KMT, leaving them to adopt an attitude that the disposition of Formosa should be a matter for the UN. However, the entry of the Seventh Fleet under orders to prevent attacks in the area made American intentions clear. Renewed military assistance, a personal visit from General MacArthur, and U.S. commitment to a long-term security relationship with Taiwan in December clarified the newfound American resolve. Even in the face of Mao’s extraordinarily risk acceptant posture and intense desire to remove Chiang, the disparity in capabilities and the clarity of American declaratory policy kept Mao from acting. Absent such a show of force and statements of resolve, Mao would have surely initiated a campaign to eliminate his long time rival.

Expansion of the Korean War into General War, 1951-53

The insertion of Chinese troops into Korea dramatically turned the tide in November 1950. Following initial contact with UN forces, Chinese forces withdrew into the cover and concealment provided by the mountainous Korean landscape. This withdrawal has been interpreted as China’s attempt to signal its limited aims to the UN in hopes that the American troops would recognize the Chinese need for a buffer zone and cease efforts to push north of Pyongyang. See e.g. Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu. Alternatively, this withdrawal has been interpreted as a tactical maneuver by Peng Dehuai aimed at drawing the UN troops into unfamiliar terrain so as to stretch their lines and draw them into a PRC trap,
Truman’s refusal to permit the engagement of Chinese targets beyond the Yalu, MacArthur requested and received permission to go forward with a final offensive in November aimed at securing victory before Christmas.\(^{259}\) Intelligence underestimated the size of the Chinese force in Korea, the UN assault was repelled, and a counter-offensive quickly followed the withdrawal of UN troops, leading to a further UN withdrawal from Pyongyang on December 5 and a retreat south of the 38\(^{th}\) parallel on December 15.\(^{260}\) By this point, the United States recognized that the Chinese intervention was not simply to secure a buffer zone south of the Yalu, but was aimed at complete military victory. Having already placed American prestige on the line, America could hardly abandon South Korea at this juncture, yet Truman and the Joint Chiefs were anxious to avoid U.S. engagement in an Asian ground war. On one hand Truman wanted to prevent the

similar to CCP tactics against the KMT in the Civil War. Bin Yu supports the “luring into a trap” explanation, but also admits that the withdrawal was due to the discovery of inadequate firepower in combat, an inability to pursue retreating troops because of a lack of motor vehicles, and an inability to supply longer lines of communication. Yu, 15. Given that Mao needed the American troops completely removed from the peninsula, the explanation offered by Bin Yu is far more credible than the signaling hypothesis advanced by Whiting.

\(^{259}\) MacArthur has been blamed in prior analyses for arraying his forces to produce a gap between the Eight Army in the west and the Tenth Corps in the east, thus permitting the Chinese to pour through. However, even a cursory review of the conditions and the Chinese operations renders such an analysis facile. In late November, the forward battle area was in northern North Korea where the center portion of the country is particularly mountainous. Establishing a single coast-to-coast line of operations was not only impractical on such terrain, but impossible given the limited personnel and equipment at MacArthur’s disposal. MacArthur had repeatedly requested that if no additional forces could be made available, Washington might at least bring the deployed units to full strength in a more expeditious manner, yet Washington failed to flesh these two-thirds strength units out, until after the Chinese mass intervention. Secondly, the Chinese did not punch through the gap, but conducted a standard flanking movement aimed at exploiting the weak point of the adversary; in this case, the ROK units manning the eastern flank of the Eighth Army. Even had a solid line connecting the Eighth Army and Tenth Corps been in place, the dispersal of troops necessary to create such would have enabled the Chinese operation to take place regardless. Last, the success of the Chinese counter-offensive was largely the result of a political decision in Washington to withdraw U.S. troops rather than militarily necessitated flight. See e.g. Appleman, discussing the Chinese operation at 746-47; Schnabel, 300-304. Had political will existed to carry the war into China, the UN positions in North Korea might have been held.

\(^{260}\) Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 210-212; Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 164-65.
expansion of communism on the mainland in conjunction with the newly revised containment strategy; maintain American credibility as an ally by ensuring the security of Japan, Okinawa and the Philippines as the anchor points of the American forward defense in the Pacific; and present Congress with incontrovertible justification for a military buildup to confront communist aggression across the globe. On the other hand Truman sought to maintain forces in place necessary to ensure European security, to circumvent directly attacking China and triggering Soviet intervention via the Sino-Soviet Treaty of February 1950, particularly since the Soviets now possessed nuclear weapons, and to avoid becoming bogged down in an indefinite and costly war of attrition over a marginal piece of territory. Faced with the fact of Chinese intervention, deterrence policy shifted to attempts to deter Soviet intervention as well the type of Chinese escalation that would require answering attacks on Chinese soil so as to invoke the Sino-Soviet treaty.

The eight months from November 1950 through June 1951 provided the greatest dynamism in the war, as the Chinese mounted a series of five campaigns with declining degrees of success. During this time, the United States was forced to assess whether actions in Korea were a diversionary prelude to a Soviet offensive launching World War III or were limited to the Korean peninsula. The Americans also had to determine to what degree the Chinese were acting on orders from Moscow and whether Soviet forces would join the fray in Korea. As the tide of battle turned in January and the over-extension of the Chinese lines of communication permitted the UN forces to stabilize and mount counter-offensives, the failure of the Soviets to intervene on a large scale provided clear evidence that the war was not the opening act to a global Soviet gambit. With the failure of the Chinese Fifth Campaign in May, the stage was set for negotiations. Fighting would continue for another two years as negotiations dragged out, yet the prospect of communist expansion of the war was diminished. The arrival of the Eisenhower Administration brought a fresh approach to negotiations and a new American policy. Coupled with the death of Stalin just a few weeks into the Eisenhower presidency, the sides were able to conclude negotiations and in July 1953 sign an armistice ending the major fighting between the United States and China.
### Table 5.1: PRC Campaigns During Korean War

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRC Operation</th>
<th>Approximate Dates</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Campaign</td>
<td>Oct. 25 - Nov. 8</td>
<td>Initial Chinese entry and engagements</td>
<td>Demonstrate PRC presence in Korea; tactical withdrawal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Campaign</td>
<td>Nov. 24 - Dec. 8</td>
<td>Massive Chinese counteroffensive</td>
<td>Successfully repel UN offensive and force rapid UN retreat south</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Campaign</td>
<td>Dec. 31 - Jan. 8</td>
<td>Offensive push to Seoul</td>
<td>Drive UN from North Korea; capture Seoul but stop due to stretched LOCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Campaign</td>
<td>Jan. 25 - Mar. 8</td>
<td>Response to UN countering operations</td>
<td>Failed counter, forced to retreat to 38&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; parallel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Campaign</td>
<td>Apr. 15 - May 20</td>
<td>Offensive following removal of MacArthur</td>
<td>Failed attempt leading to beginning of negotiations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Goals

**China:** The early successes of the Chinese caused Mao to pursue the goal of completely expelling America from the Korean peninsula in a rapid manner. On December 4, 1950, Wu Hsiu-Chuan, the head of the Chinese delegation attending the UN Security Council meetings, informed UN Secretary General Trygve Lie that Chinese demands for a cease fire included the complete withdrawal of all UN troops from the Korean peninsula, the withdrawal of the Seventh Fleet from the Taiwan Straits area and the admission of the PRC to the UN.\(^261\) From November 1950 through February 1951, Chinese media continuously emphasized the goal of completely removing American forces from Korea.\(^262\) Despite consistent reports from his field commanders

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\(^{261}\) **FRUS** 1950, V. 7: 1378-79 (Telegram from Ambassador Austin to Secretary of State Acheson).

warning of insufficient logistical support and exhaustion of the troops, Mao directed his forces on a series of rapid fire campaigns aimed at forcing the UN off the peninsula before it had time to regroup and supplement its own forces. However, beginning with the limited but costly success of the third campaign, and followed by the failure of the fourth and fifth campaigns, Mao accepted the impossibility of total victory and changed his goal from the total elimination of American forces to a return to the pre-war status quo.

USSR: Stalin’s goals likely remained constant throughout this period - to tie down and bleed American forces, while simultaneously containing Chinese power and ensuring Chinese dependence upon the Soviet Union. If the original Chinese intervention had been successful, it would have benefited Stalin by virtue of Kim Il-Sung’s close ties with the Soviets, giving Stalin a strategically placed seaport on the Pacific as well as a strongpoint along China’s Pacific flank. If China were not successful, Stalin would have maintained deniability, diverted American forces from Europe, and weakened a potential threat in Mao. Accordingly, as long as the United States was willing to accept a limited war and abstain from hostilities against supply sources in the Soviet Union or China, Stalin would have no incentive to end the war.

United States: The American goal since early December 1950 was a return to the status quo. Considerations of punishing the aggressor North Koreans or unifying the peninsula under South Korean leadership had been completely abandoned following the massive Chinese intervention. Even more important however, Truman was determined to avoid escalation of the Korean war into a global war.

Capabilities

Communist forces: In the early 1950s the United States held a large advantage over the Soviet Union in terms of atomic weapons, as the U.S. nuclear stockpile in June 1950 was just below 300 bombs. CIA estimates placed the Soviet arsenal at approximately 22 nuclear

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263 Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 212.

264 Hunt, 192; Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 212-13; S. Zhang, 149.

265 See e.g. Yu, 9 n.2.

266 Soman, 31.
weapons in 1950, with expected increases to 50, 95, 165, and 235 from 1951 to 1954 respectively.\textsuperscript{267} However, the Soviet Union had an overwhelming advantage in terms of mobilized conventional ground power, having nearly 175 active combat divisions with the potential for rapidly calling up another 145 divisions.\textsuperscript{268} The total number of active military and internal security forces in the Soviet Union was estimated at nearly ten million troops.\textsuperscript{269} The Soviet Air Force was also quantitatively superior to that of western nations, with an estimated 20,000 aircraft on active status and another 20,000 in storage.\textsuperscript{270} From a naval standpoint, the Soviets were far behind the west, although their submarine fleet could present problems. From this 1950 foundation, the Soviets engaged in a heavy increase, as a CIA estimate in 1954 asserted the Soviets increased defense spending by fifty percent between 1950 and 1952.\textsuperscript{271}

At the start of the second campaign in November 1950, the PRC had between three and four hundred thousand troops in Korea.\textsuperscript{272} In addition to the six field armies already in Korea, Mao brought in three additional field armies, the 20\textsuperscript{th}, 26\textsuperscript{th}, and 27\textsuperscript{th}, each consisting of four divisions rather than the standard three, giving him a force of some thirty divisions inside


\textsuperscript{268} Koch, 173 (reprinting NIE-3, Nov. 15, 1950, “Soviet Capabilities and Intentions”).


\textsuperscript{270} Koch, 174 (reprinting NIE-3, Nov. 15, 1950, “Soviet Capabilities and Intentions”).

\textsuperscript{271} Ibid., 208 (reprinting NIE 11-5-54, Jun. 7, 1954, “Soviet Capabilities and Main Lines of Policy Through Mid-1959”).

\textsuperscript{272} Appleman, 751; Foot, 101; Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 287; Yu, 17.
Korea. In addition, the Chinese had another two hundred thousand troops in reserve in Manchuria. Soviet supplied military assistance also continued to pour into Korea, including arms for approximately sixty-four Chinese infantry divisions and twenty-two Chinese air divisions. Direct Soviet military assistance to North Korea nearly tripled between 1950 and 1951. Moreover, Soviet troops, including ten tank regiments, were deployed to Chinese cities freeing up PLA troops for duty in Korea, while Soviet air defense and air combat units were deployed in both China and North Korea. Soviet military advisors took part in planning all strategic offensive campaigns. American officials believed Soviet anti-aircraft personnel, engineers, signal and radar personnel, and other technicians were deployed to Korea, with one estimate of over 15,000 Soviets in Korea in September 1951.

273 Appleman, 768.


275 Ibid., 201; Petrov, 28. This included almost all of the ammunition requirements, as Chinese production accounted for only one tenth of requirements. However, Chinese sources claim that the Soviets constantly tried to reduce the amount of aid to which they had agreed and stretch delivery of assistance out over several years. Xu Xiangqian, “The Purchase of Arms From Moscow,” in Mao’s Generals Remember Korea, eds. Xiaobing Li, et al. (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 141-44.

276 Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 147.

277 X. Li, et al., 4; Rongzhen, 58; Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 167, noting the Soviets provided a “first rate jet air force” once the Chinese entered the war. Foot, 97, cites contemporary reports as indicating the presence of fifteen Soviet divisions in Manchuria as well as some forty thousand Soviet artillery troops outfitted in Chinese uniforms near Fengcheng. Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 200, place the number of Soviet air divisions deployed to the region at 13.


First contact over North Korea with Soviet military aircraft came in early November.\textsuperscript{280} Soviet air support was originally limited and operated largely independently of the Chinese and Korean ground units it was meant to support.\textsuperscript{281} Over time, the Soviet air presence increased, as Stalin used the war to rotate Soviet pilots in and out in order to gain experience. By spring 1951, the JCS noted nearly 4,000 Soviet aircraft were in the area.\textsuperscript{282} According to one author, by 1952 the Soviet aerial presence in the Korean war consisted of “three fighter aviation divisions, two antiaircraft artillery divisions, one aviation technical division, and three independent regiments: a night fighter regiment, a naval fighter aviation regiment, and a searchlight regiment.”\textsuperscript{283} Throughout the war, the Soviets kept their air support generally restricted to the area of the front lines and the friendly rear areas, meaning Soviet aircraft routinely appeared in Korean territory, but avoided operations against UN lines of supply or other rear echelon targets. Moreover, the Soviets refrained from providing the Chinese with heavy or medium bombers that might be used against such targets.\textsuperscript{284} By June 1952, a National Intelligence Estimate held that Soviet aerial operations over North Korea were “so extensive that a de facto air war exists over North Korea between the UN and the USSR.”\textsuperscript{285}

In late 1950, the Chinese had approximately three hundred aircraft in Manchuria, including nearly two hundred bombers, which could potentially be used in Korea.\textsuperscript{286} Chinese air

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{280}] FRUS 1950, Vol. VII: 1026-27 (Telegram Charge in Korea to Secretary of State, Nov. 2, 1950).
\item[\textsuperscript{281}] Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 200.
\item[\textsuperscript{282}] FRUS 1951, Vol. VII: 357 (Memo on Dos - JCS Meeting, Apr. 18, 1951).
\item[\textsuperscript{284}] Stueck, The Korean War: An International History, 119.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
power first made a meaningful appearance with the fourth campaign; however, the Chinese pilots were less skilled than the Soviets and during the first few months flew older MiG-9’s, making them no match for American pilots.\textsuperscript{287} By the start of 1952, the Chinese had over one thousand aircraft in Manchuria, including 800 jets.\textsuperscript{288} In July, American intelligence estimated nearly 2,200 combat aircraft, including 1,300 jets were no located in northern China.\textsuperscript{289} When Chinese piloted MiG-15’s finally appeared on the battlefield, the emergence of the American Sabre fighters helped negate this equipment upgrade.

Chinese tactics of human wave assaults were rendered increasingly ineffective as the Chinese traveled farther from their logistical bases and as the UN troops were able to retreat to fortified defensive positions in early 1951. Mass assaults put pressure on the UN troops, but resulted in tremendous casualty figures for the Chinese.\textsuperscript{290} The toll on Chinese infantry units resulted in field commanders requiring an additional three Chinese army groups during March-April 1951.\textsuperscript{291} By April 1951, nearly a half million PLA soldiers were in Korea along with over 200,000 North Korean troops.\textsuperscript{292} In order to fill out these divisions, the Chinese threw former KMT soldiers into the battle as well as Koreans impressed into service. Accordingly, prisoner of war (POW) figures markedly rose around this time as the foot soldiers able to escape the threat

\begin{flushend}
\textsuperscript{287} Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 201.

\textsuperscript{288} \textit{FRUS} 1952-1954, Vol. XV: 11 (Telegram CINCUN to Department of the Army, Jan. 7, 1952).


\textsuperscript{290} In the first month of the 4\textsuperscript{th} campaign, January 26 - February 24, 1951, Far East Command estimated communist casualties at 130,000. Stueck, \textit{The Korean War: An International History}, 168 n.4. By the end of the fifth campaign, total estimated enemy casualties stood at over 1.2 million. Schnabel, 405.

\textsuperscript{291} Stueck, \textit{The Korean War: An International History}, 168.

\textsuperscript{292} \textit{FRUS} 1951, Vol. VII: 326 (U.S. Briefing to Allied Ambassadors on Korea, Apr. 10, 1951); Schnabel, 380.
\end{flushend}
of on-the-spot execution for retreat welcomed the opportunity to surrender. The fifth campaign began April 22, 1951 and resulted in an estimated seventy thousand Chinese casualties in the first week, yet gained at most only thirty-five miles, leading the Chinese commander Peng Dehuai to petition Beijing for permission to cease offensive operations early. For the second phase, the Chinese continued to pour in new troops to replace the huge losses, bringing the total of PLA troops in Korea to nearly 550,000, along with approximately 200,000 North Korean troops. However, when the second phase of this campaign produced similar poor results, the stage was set for negotiations. American estimates of enemy casualties suffered during the first four days of the second phase stood at 68,000. A July 1951 National Intelligence Estimate placed Chinese casualties in Korea at 577,000 as of June 16, 1951, although it also noted that Chinese force strength in total continued to rise.

In June 1951, Stalin urged Mao to deploy more Chinese air assets in the war, asserting that Mao should immediately deploy eight Chinese air divisions to Korea; however, Mao rejected this advice when Stalin refused to provide additional Soviet materiel assistance as requested by Mao. The massive losses suffered during the fifth campaign had reduced total

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293 FRUS 1951, Vol. VII: 374 (Telegram Ambassador in Korea to Secretary of State, Apr. 21, 1951). Stueck, The Korean War: An International History, 169, asserts that these troops were reduced to foraging for grass and roots in order to survive since resupply was completely disrupted.


295 FRUS 1951, Vol. VII: 443 (U.S. Briefing to Allied Ambassadors on Korea, May 18, 1951, citing total of 768,000 communist troops in North Korea).

296 Ibid., 445 (U.S. Briefing to Allied Ambassadors on Korea, May 22, 1951).


communist forces in North Korea to approximately 460,000; however, from the beginning of armistice negotiations in July 1951 through March 1953, the number of PLA troops in Korea continued to rise. By September 1951, communist troop strength in Korea was again approaching 700,000. The Chinese took advantage of the reduction in hostilities between November 1951 and early 1952 to rotate fresh troops into Korea and better organize a sustainable resupply system. A National Intelligence Estimate in early December 1951 counted over a combined total of over 800,000 troops in Korea and Manchuria. Per American estimates, less than 400 tanks and very limited artillery supported forces in Korea at this time. By January 1952, the Chinese brought nearly seven hundred thousand troops into Korea in addition to establishing a network of primitive supply depots. As of April, the total figure of communist troops in Korea had climbed to nearly 900,000 in addition to a substantial build-up of armor and artillery. A July 1952 estimate noted nearly 950,000 total communist troops as well as providing evidence of the artillery buildup, noting that in July 1951 communist forces had fired an estimate 8,000 mortar and artillery rounds; however, in July 1952, the communist forces fired an estimated 187,000 mortar and artillery rounds. Yet even with this increase, the Chinese remained dependent on Soviet provision of heavy weaponry and ammunition, as

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302 Ibid., 1267.


305 Ibid., 438 (NIE 55/1, Jul. 30, 1952).
reflected in Zhou En-lai’s admission to Stalin in August 1952 that China still could not produce ammunition for its artillery pieces. An April 1953 intelligence report estimated communist forces at 1.13 million in Korea, with another 225,000 in Manchuria. As of spring 1953, a reported 1.35 million PLA troops were deployed in Korea.

By late 1952, approximately twelve thousand Soviet troops were in Korea, with as many as seventy thousand Soviet troops in China. However, the Soviets refused to transfer the most modern weaponry out of Soviet control and refused Chinese requests for naval assets in 1952. Chinese air power tripled in strength between 1951 and 1953. Despite a tremendous casualty rate when encountering American aircraft, by June 1953, the Chinese and DPRK combined had approximately 2,500 combat aircraft available, including over 1,400 jet fighters. Reports indicated Soviet II-28 jet bombers were moved into Manchuria in late 1952, threatening to escalate matters via bombing in UN rear areas; however, no such attacks actually occurred.

307 Ibid., 867 (NIE-80, Apr. 3, 1953).
308 Crane, 83; Stueck, The Korean War: An International History, 305.
309 Regarding Soviet troops in Korea, see Chai Chengwen, “The Korean True Negotiations,” in Mao’s Generals Remember Korea, eds. Xiaobing Li, et al. (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 262 n. 35; regarding Soviet troops in general, see Christensen, 168.
311 S. Zhang, 120. By the end of the war, Stalin had provided the PRC with over 370 MiG-15s. Goncharov, Lewis and Litai, 202. By one account, over the course of the war, the Soviets provided over 4,400 aircraft to fight against UN forces in Korea. DSB V. 28, 383 (Mar. 9, 1953, Address of U.S. Representative to UN General Assembly made Feb. 25, 1953).
In April 1953, local Soviet forces available for rapid insertion into Korea should Stalin decide to intervene included roughly fifteen divisions (220,000 - 250,000 troops), approximately 5,600 aircraft, including over 1,700 jet fighters and over 300 jet bombers, and a Pacific fleet consisting of 320 surface vessels including 34 destroyers and 2 cruisers, as well as nearly one hundred submarines.\footnote{FRUS 1952-1954, Vol. XV: 868 (NIE-80, Apr. 3, 1953).}

Chinese troops in Korea suffered tremendously from a lack of supplies, including winter clothing, food, and medical attention.\footnote{Xuezhi, 106-38.} Logistical problems caused Peng Dehuai to advise against pursuing a third offensive after the PLA had pushed the UN forces south of the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel, but he was obliged to initiate the attack at Mao’s insistence.\footnote{Yu, 18.} This offensive succeeded in compelling the UN evacuation of Seoul in early January 1951, but the stretched lines of communication did not permit the PLA to pursue in the face of an orderly retreat. A logistical system largely dependent on human transport was remarkably successful, but it could not be sustained for long distances. Only with the UN counterattack at the end of January did Mao finally come to realize the significance of the disparity between his primitive army and the UN force he was confronting.\footnote{Stueck, The Korean War: An International History, 159.}

During the length of the Korean War, according to a PRC source, the Chinese suffered over one million casualties, including 152,000 killed, 383,000 wounded, 450,000 hospitalized, and over 25,000 POW/MIA.\footnote{X. Li, et al., 6 (citing Xu Yuan (1993) “Chinese Forces and Their Casualties in the Korean War,” Chinese Historians 2: 51-54.). Realistic accounts would likely substantially increase the number of POWs; however, the refusal of the CCP to admit that POWs preferred not to be repatriated after the war accounts for the abnormally low figure.} Soviet sources estimated Chinese losses at over 300,000 in the
first few months. Given that the five major Chinese campaigns were conducted from October 1950 through June 1951, this loss of manpower clearly affected the Chinese will and ability to escalate matters following June 1951.

**UN forces:** With mobilization efforts having begun in July 1950, American military potential was rapidly being turned into military capability in 1951. Total U.S. active duty military personnel more than doubled between 1950 and 1951, remaining in excess of 3.5 million until 1954. By June 1951, the total force posture included eighteen army divisions, two and one-third Marine divisions and two Marine air wings, eighty-seven air force wings and close to four hundred naval warships. Deliveries of military equipment tripled from less than $500 million per month in June 1950 to over $1.5 billion in June 1951, indicating the United States had restarted the tremendous military mobilization capacity of the U.S. economy. By 1952, another three army divisions had been added, the navy had increased to 408 combat ships including sixteen carriers, the Marine Corps fleshed out three full divisions and three air wings, and the Air Force increased the number of active air wings to ninety-six. Except for the Air Force, force size leveled off by 1953; however, production of military supplies went from $23.8 billion in fiscal year 1952 to $32.3 billion in fiscal year 1953.

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320 Secretary of Defense Semiannual Report, January 1 to June 30, 1951: 2; 198. Although each division varied somewhat in size, a typical U.S. infantry division at this time was approximately 18,000 troops. Secretary of Defense Semiannual Report, January 1 to June 30, 1952: 81.


322 Secretary of Defense Semiannual Report, January 1 to June 30, 1952: 3.

323 Secretary of Defense Semiannual Report, January 1 to June 30, 1953: 2, 39.
U.S. forces in Korea as of December 1950 included approximately 113,000 ground troops, supported by nearly 60,000 sailors and 30,000 airmen. Yet despite massive Chinese intervention, no new American ground units were immediately sent to Korea. In fact, in December there was only a single combat-ready division in the United States, the 82nd Airborne: no new units would be ready until June 1951.\(^{324}\) Washington promised MacArthur he would receive some thirty thousand replacements for casualties in December 1950, but then failed to ship them until after the new year, and then at about two-thirds of the number promised.\(^{325}\) When MacArthur asked in light of this for a reconsideration of the ROC offer of troops, Washington refused. Naval reinforcement did arrive as the Seventh Fleet was augmented by a cruiser, four destroyers, and two transports from the Sixth Fleet, and a battleship, an aircraft carrier group, eight destroyers, and two transports from the Second Fleet.\(^{326}\)

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\(^{324}\) Schnabel, 294.

\(^{325}\) Ibid., 195; Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History*, 133.

\(^{326}\) Secretary of Defense Semiannual Report, January 1 to June 30, 1951: 149.
ROK troops played an increasingly large role in the defense of South Korea, having recovered from a force of no more than thirty thousand effectives at the end of June 1950, to a size of approximately one hundred thousand in October 1950, and nearly four hundred thousand troops by June 1952.\textsuperscript{327} In addition to U.S. forces, sixteen other nations provided military assets to the UN command in Korea, including nearly nine thousand troops; however more than ninety percent of the combat troops came from South Korea and the United States.\textsuperscript{328}

With new allied contributions and some National Guard replacements sent in early 1951, by the time of the fifth campaign there were just below 270,000 UN personnel in addition to 240,000 ROK troops.\textsuperscript{329} In response to the Chinese buildup from summer 1951 through winter 1952, General Ridgeway estimated that three additional American divisions would be necessary for him to obtain military victory in Korea, and even then the casualty figures would be large.\textsuperscript{330} Still, Truman was reluctant to increase the amount of forces in Korea, as he clung to the idea of limited war.

U.S. industrial and technological superiority began to make its presence felt by 1952. That year, the introduction of the F-86 Sabre jet allowed American pilots to obtain a 9:1 shoot down ratio over the MiG-15’s used by the communists.\textsuperscript{331} By the end of the war, this had improved to 13:1.\textsuperscript{332} However, even as of 1953, Far East Air forces was limited to 176 F-86s as compared to the nearly 700 MiGs in the region.\textsuperscript{333}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{327} Secretary of Defense Semiannual Report, January 1 to June 30, 1952: 98.
\item \textsuperscript{328} Stueck, \textit{The Korean War: An International History}, 3, 138.
\item \textsuperscript{329} Schnabel, 387. Roughly 250,000 of these were American. \textit{FRUS} 1951, Vol. VII: 365 (Memo Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern Affairs, Apr. 18, 1951).
\item \textsuperscript{330} Stueck, \textit{The Korean War: An International History}, 262.
\item \textsuperscript{331} Secretary of Defense Semiannual Report, January 1 to June 30, 1952: 7.
\item \textsuperscript{332} Secretary of Defense Semiannual Report, January 1 to June 30, 1953: 249. In three years, American forces destroyed over one thousand enemy aircraft, including 838 MiG-15’s. 248.
\item \textsuperscript{333} Crane, 81.
\end{itemize}
During 1951-1953, American capabilities, including nuclear weapons, rapidly increased. Whereas a limited supply of nuclear weapons may have limited Truman’s willingness to threaten or use such weapons in the Korean theater, this problem was significantly less prevalent by 1952.\textsuperscript{334} On April 7, 1951, an Air Force squadron of B-29s armed with cores for nine atomic weapons was sent to the western Pacific.\textsuperscript{335} Tactical nuclear weapons became an available option by October 1951.\textsuperscript{336} In November 1952, the United States successfully tested its first hydrogen bomb. By the beginning of the Eisenhower Presidency, U.S. nuclear delivery systems included carrier based aircraft as well as bombers located at overseas American bases.\textsuperscript{337} Moreover a 280 mm atomic cannon was introduced in 1953 providing ground based tactical nuclear capability.\textsuperscript{338}

Following Eisenhower’s assumption of office in 1953, the United States embarked on a major build-up of force in Korea. In order to give credence to the American ultimatum to the Chinese to either negotiate in good faith and without dilatory ploys or face the end of negotiations, Eisenhower worked to put in place military assets with the potential to carry out the threat. Accordingly, in spring 1953, two additional American divisions were deployed to Korea, bringing the total American contingent in Korea to approximately 325,000.\textsuperscript{339} This force was

\textsuperscript{334} Weigley, 390 (regarding the limited supply of nuclear weapons).

\textsuperscript{335} Crane, 79; Stueck, \textit{The Korean War: An International History}, 181. Soman, 74-75, reports these B-29s were originally destined for Okinawa but were stopped by Truman in Guam.


\textsuperscript{337} Dingman, 53; Weigley, 400.

\textsuperscript{338} Soman, 33.

backed by an additional 300,000 troops in the theater deployed in Japan, Okinawa, and the Philippines, placing the total U.S. troop strength in the Far East at over 629,000.\textsuperscript{340}

**Interests**

\textit{China:} Mao’s interests in Korea remained largely the same as those identified in the original decision to intervene.\textsuperscript{341} However, having recognized that he would be unable to accomplish the goal of complete expulsion of U.S. forces from the peninsula, the reputational aspects of his interests now took highest priority. In fact, most of the basic issues leading to an armistice were resolved within the first few months: the sticking point was largely a matter of repatriation of communist prisoners of war. Mao could not accept the fact that a sizeable percentage of POW’s did not wish to return to communist China. Had he accepted the principle of non-forced repatriation, he would be admitting that the communist regime lacked popular support and relied on compulsion for legitimacy. Many of these POW’s were former KMT soldiers who had been impressed into PLA service as the war had dragged on; thus, the return of these individuals was insignificant to the communists except as a symbol. Secondly, Mao was under pressure from Stalin to keep the war going. Because China was utterly dependent on the Soviets for military, economic and technological aid, Mao could not afford to disregard “advice” from Moscow at this time.

\textit{USSR:} Stalin’s interest in Korea had mainly to do with the peninsula’s proximity to Japan. While he would have naturally desired to eliminate American troops from the mainland and to emplace a friendly regime in South Korea so as to facilitate naval movement from Soviet Pacific ports through the Korea Straits, control over the Korean peninsula could not guarantee either of these. Stalin looked upon the industrial capacity of Japan as the real prize of the Asian Pacific. By obtaining communist domination of the Korean peninsula, Stalin could place constant pressure on Japan, nurture a neutralization movement therein that would seek a removal

\textsuperscript{340} DOD Deployment of Military Personnel, 1953.

\textsuperscript{341} See pp. 139 et seq., supra.
of American forces, and ultimately obtain control of the Japanese islands through either political coercion or military force.\textsuperscript{342}

Still, as long as the Korean War dragged on in a limited fashion, it served Stalin’s interests quite nicely. American troops would be committed to a secondary theater, permitting Stalin to increase pressure in Europe should he so choose. Although American defense mobilization increased markedly with events in Korea, it was likely to have done so in any event, as indicated by the promulgation of the Truman doctrine, conclusion of NATO, and the issuance of NSC-68, all undertaken prior to Kim’s crossing the border. Communist propaganda was provided fresh material on a daily basis to charge the Americans with imperialist, aggressive behavior threatening peoples thousands of miles from the American homeland. Simultaneously, opportunities for Sino-American ties were eroding and the Chinese were drawn deeper into dependency on the Soviet Union for both military assistance and, with the emplacement of an American economic embargo on China, raw materials as well. Likewise, Chinese military power was tied down in such a manner as to foreclose any possibility of threat to Soviet interests in Mongolia, Xinjiang, and even Darien and Port Arthur. Accordingly, Stalin was content to encourage Mao to draw out the war and to demonstrate “endurance and patience,” while counseling the Chinese leader to “be firm when dealing with America” as if the Chinese were to lose, they would “never recapture Taiwan.”\textsuperscript{343}

\textsuperscript{342} Weathersby, “Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945-1950: New Evidence From Russian Archives,” notes that Japan was the primary issue with respect to Soviet interests in Korea, but characterizes Soviet interests as defensively rather than offensively oriented.

\textsuperscript{343} Weathersby, “New Russian Documents on the Korean War,” 59 (Document 65: telegram from Stalin to Mao dated June 5, 1951, advising Mao to draw out the war); 72 (Document 95: telegram from Stalin to Mao dated Nov. 19, 1951, advising Mao that “[the Americans] are more in need of rapidly concluding [negotiations]” and that the Chinese should continue “to pursue a hard line, not showing haste and not displaying interest in a rapid end to negotiations.”) The quotes are found in “Stalin’s Conversations with Chinese Leaders,” 12-13 (providing translation of official Soviet record of conversation between Stalin and Zhou En-Lai, August 20, 1952).
United States: American interests in Korea were the same as those underlying the original American intervention. However, in addition, the United States now had to consider the loss of face that would ensue should the Chinese successfully force the UN off the peninsula. Having already committed American troops, a withdrawal would likely cause the collapse of resistance to communism throughout Asia. Yet, America also sought to avoid escalation and deter direct Soviet entry into the conflict because it meant the almost certain escalation to world war. Although the United States held an atomic edge, the destruction of Western Europe that would occur in a general war had grave consequences for the American economy. Moreover, the Soviets would likely be able to deliver a small number of atomic weapons on the American homeland. These would have little military effect, but could generate tremendous political effect in a country that had not seen battles fought on the American homeland since the Civil War nearly a century prior.

Risk Propensity

During this period, U.S. leaders often thought of the communist world as a unified monolith receiving direction from Moscow. Chinese intervention was considered a Soviet directed enterprise; hence, American policy-makers were less concerned with how to deter Beijing than how to deter Moscow. Both Secretary Acheson and President Truman made clear their feelings in a December 4, 1950 meeting with the British that the Chinese communists were “subservient to Moscow” and “complete satellites” of Russia that would remain so “as long as the present Peiping regime is in power.” Chief of Staff General Omar Bradley charged the Soviets were “intimately involved in planning” in Korea, asserting the Korean conflict was just

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344 See pp. 143-44, supra.

345 Kalicki, 50.

one phase of the larger U.S. - Soviet war. In May 1951 Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Dean Rusk labeled the whole of China as a “Slavic Manchukuo.”

Once the Chinese engaged UN forces in Korea, the Truman administration was faced with the question of whether this was the initial Soviet front in the onset of World War III, or was instead a local challenge that might be contained. Still centered on European affairs, the Truman administration was intent on keeping the conflict confined to Korea and avoiding Soviet intervention. Thus, Truman refused to grant MacArthur permission to engage targets inside China, or to deploy naval forces too near Soviet waters.

The Truman administration ruled out the use of nuclear weapons, due to fears of sparking Soviet intervention. Yet in 1950, the Soviets had very limited capability to strike the U.S. homeland. Under standard escalation logic, U.S. use of nuclear weapons in Korea against Korean and Chinese forces, triggering Soviet use of nuclear weapons against either U.S. troops in Korea or in Japan would trigger U.S. use of nuclear weapons against the Soviet homeland. Since the Soviets had a far more limited capacity to strike the American homeland, the balance of nuclear capabilities weighed heavily in favor of the United States. Thus, with Stalin’s cautious approach, likelihood of initial Soviet retaliation for American use in Korea, or even in China, seems questionable. As nuclear strategy was still in its infancy and no tradition of firebreak between conventional and nuclear force had been established, the imbalance in capabilities suggests not only the dubiousness of Soviet nuclear retaliation, but also the improbability of Soviet intervention pursuant to the Sino-Soviet Treaty of 1950. Yet, the Truman administration sought to avoid escalation if possible asserting that attacking China

347 Foot, 137.
348 Ibid., 140; Stueck, The Korean War: An International History, 193.
349 Schnabel, 286.
350 Kalicki, 68. Christensen, 166, implicitly adopts Truman’s argument when he argues that if the United States had bombed targets in Manchuria, it would have triggered the Sino-Soviet Treaty and resulted in the outbreak of World War III.
would involve America in the “wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time, with the wrong enemy.”

American allies were opposed to expanding the war into China. Because the war was being fought under the mantle of international collective security action, U.S. leaders were obliged to listen to allied opinion. Following Chinese intervention, the British and Indians lobbied for ending American support for the KMT and admission of the PRC into the UN in exchange for a ceasefire at the 38th parallel. In addition, many American allies refused to go along with the American embargo on communist China. Between July 1, 1950 and November 30, 1951, at least 167 British merchant ships engaged in trade with communist China, at a rate of 48 port visits per month. Although the Truman administration in spring 1951 considered instituting some type of trade sanctions against states that provided militarily vital materials to China, no major actions were taken following the UN approval of an economic embargo against China on May 18, 1951.

Pessimism reigned in Washington from late November 1950 until the counter-offensive undertaken by General Ridgway in January 1951. Thereafter, renewed optimism caused

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351 Weigley, 390 (quoting Truman’s Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Omar Bradley.)


354 British controlled Hong Kong served as a major entrepot for the import of military supplies into communist China. Stueck, The Korean War: An International History, 191.

355 FRUS 1952-54, Vol. XIV: 2 (Memo Secretary of State to British Secretary of State Foreign Affairs, Jan. 8, 1952).

reappraisal of the strategic situation in Korea. Having rejected MacArthur’s calls for a naval blockade, use of ROC troops in Korea, support of ROC operations against the mainland, and removal of restrictions against UN bombing across the Chinese border, the JCS then penned a memo to the Secretary of Defense calling for each of these measures save the use of ROC troops in Korea, in a graduated incremental approach. Yet, with the hope borne from success, these options were again pushed to the background as the stalemate that would prevail for the next two years began to take shape. Acheson continued to argue against operations beyond the 38th parallel despite the reversal of fortunes.

In early 1952, the communists launched a major new propaganda offensive against the United States, alleging the use of biological weapons by American forces. Both Chinese and Soviet officials trumpeted these charges which received significant press attention globally. Although there was no evidence behind the charges and the communists were unwilling to allow neutral inspections, the campaign successfully portrayed the United States in a negative light, further eroding international support for the UN operation. Recently uncovered evidence from Soviet archives provides confirmation that the charges were completely fabricated.

Domestically, President Truman faced declining popular approval ratings. While popular support for the action in Korea was strong at 66% in August 1950, it dropped markedly to just 39% in December following the Chinese intervention. Although support for the war rebounded some to 45% in April with the successes of Ridgeway, Truman’s own approval ratings remained abysmal, plunging to less than 30% during parts of 1951 and 1952.

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357 Schnabel, 328. See FRUS 1951, Vol. VII: 41-42 (Telegram JCS to MacArthur, Jan. 9, 1951, rejecting the recommended measures); Ibid., 71-72 (Memo JCS to Secretary of Defense, Jan. 12, 1951, recommending measures rejected for MacArthur).

358 Schnabel, 353.

359 Weathersby, “Deceiving the Deceivers: Moscow, Beijing, Pyongyang and the Allegation of Bacteriological Weapons Use in Korea.”


361 Ibid., 45, 199.
Accordingly, Truman may have been reluctant to undertake escalatory measures due to a perceived lack of support.

By spring 1952, nearly a year into the negotiations without reaching an agreement, American patience was growing thin. Public support for the war had dropped from 47% in August 1951 to 37% in March 1952. General Mark Clark assumed command of the UN forces in May 1952 and promptly began a bombing campaign aimed at increasing pressure on Chinese negotiators. In June, the Yalu River power stations were bombed for the first time. By fall, American policymakers were reaching a consensus that Soviet intervention was unlikely and that greater military pressure was necessary in order to force the Chinese negotiators to begin bargaining in earnest. However, by this point, Truman had long since announced his intention not to run and was uncomfortable taking drastic new initiatives only weeks before leaving office. Still, in order to protect his party’s position in the November elections, it was necessary to indicate some advance or at least hope for change with respect to the situation in Korea. As it was, the 1952 elections brought about a one seat Republican majority in the Senate and an eight seat lead in the House.

American casualties in the Korean War affected the risk propensity of American leaders; however, the effects worked in both directions. Truman was reluctant to undertake major operations that might result in large numbers of U.S. casualties, yet at the same time, he was unable to withdraw and abandon Korea after having already shed American blood to defend it. Nearing the end of the first year of involvement, U.S. casualty figures stood at approximately sixty thousand. By November 1951, that total had climbed to almost one hundred thousand.

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362 Ibid., 45.
363 Foot, 177.
365 Foot, 197-98.
367 Ibid., 238.
Over the course of the war, the United States suffered approximately 142,000 casualties, including 30,606 deaths, 103,327 wounded, and 3,054 missing in action.  

Eisenhower’s assumption of office in 1953 brought a new outlook on the Korean War, viewing the Cold War as a long-term proposition that would require a sustained state of strength for the United States to emerge victorious. Contrary to NSC-68, which advocated meeting communist aggression wherever and whenever it might occur, Eisenhower and his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles sought a more cost-effective means of defeating the Soviet Union. Under an aggressive containment policy, even if the United States should succeed in meeting all the communist challenges, the economic toll upon the country would be overwhelming. Eisenhower feared that under this policy, the country might be turned into a garrison state in the name of protecting democracy. Thus, Eisenhower sought to lessen the costs of standing up to communism by pursuing a new policy based on responding to communist assaults at a time and place of American choosing, and with methods of American choice. Given the American lead in nuclear weapons development, this suggested that rather than directly and universally engaging conventional forces, an area in which the Communists enjoyed superiority, the United States might respond with nuclear strikes as it saw fit. By adopting such a policy, it was hoped that deterrence would allow the United States to maintain a balanced budget while still providing for national security.

Because of these beliefs, Eisenhower was intent on getting the United States out of Korea and ending the indefinite drain on American resources presented by a limited war. Accordingly,

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368 Schnabel, 1; Secretary of Defense Semiannual Report, July 1 to December 31, 1953: 1.
369 Weigley, 400-01.
372 DSB V. 32, 13 (Jan. 3, 1955)(Press Release, Dec. 21, 1954 quoting Secretary Dulles as noting, “The present policies will gradually involve the use of atomic weapons as conventional weapons for tactical purposes.”)
a tactical escalation would be favored over continuing with the status quo if such would result in either military victory or, more likely, greater movement in negotiations. When Eisenhower came to believe that the Chinese communists were intentionally delaying a final settlement in early 1953, he responded by preparing to expand the war both geographically and, in keeping with the new look policy, qualitatively via serious consideration of the introduction of nuclear weapons.\footnote{Foot, 24, 213-14.} Still, as had Truman, Eisenhower viewed Soviet and Chinese aggression through the lens of Munich; thus, despite his desire to end the war quickly, he was determined not to appease aggression and end the war on any terms offered.

With Eisenhower came John Foster Dulles as Secretary of State. Dulles had served as a special assistant to the Truman administration, undertaking significant responsibility including the negotiation of the Japanese Peace Treaty; however, with Acheson as Secretary, a Europe-first policy for the United States was set in stone.\footnote{Mann, 82; Stueck, The Korean War: An International History, 90.} Dulles was less wed to the European establishment, and was prepared to place Asian policy on level footing. Moreover, Dulles was committed to reversing what he saw as a purely reactive American policy by reclaiming the initiative via the New Look.\footnote{Even as a special consultant to the Truman administration, Dulles had warned of the dangers of following a strictly defensive policy in Asia. See FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 164 (Paper Prepared by Dulles for Secretary of State Acheson, dated Nov. 20, 1950).}

With the death of Stalin in March 1953, a new opportunity arose to pursue an end to the War. In typical Stalin fashion, the Soviet leader had separated responsibility such that no obvious successor stood out. Thus, the group of would-be successors had to focus on domestic politics to consolidate their own positions, making Soviet escalation less likely. Additionally, the death of Stalin made Mao the senior communist statesman. Although still wed to Soviet aid, Mao was far less willing to accept a subservient role to any of the Soviet underlings who might emerge as the new CPSU Chairman. Accordingly, a major influence for continuing the war was removed with Stalin’s death.
Eisenhower enjoyed greater flexibility of action than did Truman with respect to military affairs, due to Eisenhower’s prestige as a victorious military commander in World War II as well as his personal popularity with the electorate. In contrast to Truman, who left office with approval ratings barely above 30%, Eisenhower came into office with approval ratings nearing 70%. In addition, popular support for the war in Korea shot up from 37% in October 1952 to 50% in January 1953. Coupled with high popular expectations, Eisenhower likely felt more able to engage in risky conduct than Truman had been.

From a prospect theory viewpoint, the United States would have likely assimilated the success in Korea through October into the baseline. Thus, the Chinese intervention pushing UN forces below the 38th parallel would be viewed as a loss. Accordingly, America would be more risk acceptant to reacquire the territory it had gained after the Inchon landing. However, the context of the situation worked against this as the United States lacked allied support, had questionable domestic support, and feared initiating a global war. Thus the question was framed not in terms of occupying additional territory in North Korea versus merely holding on to South Korea, but was viewed as continuing in a local limited war versus potentially escalating to global war. The Truman administration’s unwillingness to escalate indicates the actual limited value it placed on the reputational interests at stake in Korea. Foreshadowing events in Indochina a decade later, achieving military victory was rendered secondary to preventing escalation from December 1950 through early 1953. The change in Presidential administrations in 1953 brought a fresh perspective to the problem and a different frame for the crisis. Eisenhower viewed maintaining a limited war as a greater loss than did Truman, because of the economic drain on American resources. Accordingly, Eisenhower was more willing to risk escalation in order to avoid such a loss.

**Declaratory Policy**

The United States was remarkably silent in the immediate aftermath of MacArthur’s reports noting massive Chinese intervention. No clear warnings or signals were given from Washington to indicate large-scale intervention would be met with a strong reaction by U.S.

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376 Mueller, 199.

377 Ibid., 45.
forces. As the Chinese pushed the UN forces back, the Truman administration failed to take clear steps indicating a price would be imposed for this intervention, nor did the President act decisively to demonstrate a commitment in terms of mobilizing greater military capability. Truman refused to attack China and refused to send reinforcements to the American units under attack in Korea, yet he also refused to withdraw from the peninsula. MacArthur was denied permission to bomb Chinese power plants or bridges along the Yalu, to launch aerial strikes against Chinese logistics bases or lines of communication, to use tactical atomic weapons, to use conventional forces past the Yalu, or to accept Chiang’s offer of KMT troops. UN goals quickly reverted back to the limited aim of restoration of the antebellum status quo.

On November 30, 1950, during a press conference in which he asserted that American “national security and survival” were at stake in Korea, President Truman responded to a question by stating that nuclear weapons were under consideration, as was every type of weapon the United States had. The President then noted that he was against using it as it “is a terrible weapon and it should not be used on innocent men, women, and children who have nothing whatever to do with this military aggression. That happens when it is used.” That afternoon, the White House issued a press release attempting to minimize the President’s comment, asserting that mere possession of a weapon implied usage was “under consideration,” but emphasizing that only the President could order the employment of an atomic bomb. Thus, rather than serving to deter the Chinese, the effect was to demonstrate U.S. reluctance to even admit discussion of nuclear weapons in the face of European pressure to abstain therefrom. Accordingly, Mao and Stalin could only have been emboldened by this clear signal of unwillingness to utilize a dimension wherein the United States held unquestioned advantage.

378 Foot, 89-90, 114; Kalicki, 66-67.


380 Ibid.

381 Ibid. The news conference created a major reaction internationally, despite the clarification statement issued later in the afternoon. Such a reaction merely reaffirmed the terrific deterrent potential inherent at the time in discussing nuclear weaponry - a potential the United States failed to use.
In the face of this burgeoning military crisis, the Truman administration initially reacted by declaring a trade embargo on China December 3, 1950. The following day, the service secretaries lobbied Truman for more decisive action, asserting that “policies dictated by caution are as likely, or more likely, to involve us in war with Russia than those which indicate firmness of purpose.” Finally, in mid-December, after the scope of the Chinese intervention became clear and UN forces were compelled to retreat, the United States undertook a major defense build-up. December 16th, the President declared a national emergency and established the Office of Defense Mobilization to oversee an immediate increase in military capabilities, as seen in the funding increase displayed in Figure 5.2.

![Figure 5.2: U.S. Defense Spending, 1947-1953](source: Office of the Undersecretary of Defense (Comptroller), Green Book FY2002)

In addition, in February 1951 America made known its willingness to keep U.S. troops in Japan beyond the conclusion of a peace agreement via a security treaty with the new Japanese government. A series of statements reaffirming U.S commitment to defend the Philippines

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382 Foot, 126.

383 Schnabel, 299. On January 6, 1951, Congress approved a second supplemental of $17 billion to the fiscal year 1951 defense budget bringing the total for the fiscal year to $42 billion.

384 DSB V. 24, 253 (Feb. 12, 1951)(Speech of Ambassador John Foster Dulles); DSB V. 24, 577 (Apr. 9, 1951); DSB V. 24, 699 (Apr. 30, 1951); DSB V. 24, 727 (May 7, 1951); DSB V. 24, 768 (May 14, 1951).
were also issued.³⁸⁵ Mutual Defense Treaties were signed with the Philippines on August 30, 1951³⁸⁶ and with Australia and New Zealand on September 1, 1951.³⁸⁷ A peace treaty and security treaty were signed with Japan on September 8, 1951, authorizing U.S. military basing rights in extension of the occupation.³⁸⁸ Military assistance programs in place under the 1949 Mutual Defense Act were stepped up under the Mutual Security Act of 1951 although there was a significant lag time between appropriations and expenditures, as seen in Figure 5.3.³⁸⁹

![Bar graph showing appropriations and expenditures from FY1950 to FY1954.](image)

*Figure 5.3: Mutual Defense Assistance, 1950-1954*

*Source: Compiled from Semiannual Reports of Secretary of Defense, 1950-55*

Most of this assistance was directed toward Europe in the beginning; however, with the election of Eisenhower in 1952, the FY1954 assistance began to reflect the greater role assigned

³⁸⁵ [DSB V. 24, 727 (May 7, 1951)(Speech by Ambassador Dulles).](#)

³⁸⁶ [DSB V. 25, 335-36 (Aug. 27, 1951).](#)

³⁸⁷ [DSB V. 25, 147-49 (Jul. 23, 1951).](#)

³⁸⁸ [DSB V. 25, 448-59 (Sept. 17, 1951). The occupation officially ended in 1952; however, a simultaneous security treaty provided basing rights for American troops.](#)

³⁸⁹ [President Truman budget request to Congress, DSB V. 24, 888 (Jun. 25, 1951); DSB V. 25, 51-52 (Jul. 9, 1951); DSB V. 26, 408 (Mar. 10, 1952).](#)
to Asia, as indicated in Figure 5.4.\textsuperscript{390} The United States increasingly began to pick up the tab for the defense of Indochina, moving from approximately 15 percent in 1951 to over 30 percent of the total cost in 1952 and approaching 70 percent of the cost by 1954.\textsuperscript{391} During this time period, the United States also established Military Assistance Advisory Groups in Thailand and Formosa in addition to the Groups already in the Philippines and Indochina.\textsuperscript{392} At this time, the United States was spending nearly $5 billion a year in Korea.\textsuperscript{393} These moves provided clear and credible signals that the United States was intent on remaining in the Asian-Pacific.

\textit{Figure 5.4: Foreign Defense Assistance Appropriations, 1950-1954}

\textit{Source: Department of State, American Foreign Policy 1950-1955 Basic Documents, Vol. 2. Statistical Review of Foreign Aid Programs}

\textsuperscript{390} The Far East share of Mutual Security Program funds went from 12% in fiscal year 1953 under the budget prepared in the Truman administration to 49% in fiscal year 1954, the first fiscal year under the Eisenhower administration. This stayed relatively high over the next few years as the Far East share was 54%, 52%, and 53% of the MSP funds for fiscal years 1955-1957 respectively. \textit{DSB} V. 38, 222 (Feb. 10, 1958).

\textsuperscript{391} \textit{DSB} V. 26, 453 (Mar. 24, 1952); \textit{DSB} V. 26, 1010 (Jun. 18, 1952); \textit{Dos} V. 27, 474 (Sept 6, 1952); \textit{DSB} V. 29, 594 (Oct. 5, 1953); \textit{DSB} V. 30, 582 (Apr. 19, 1954).

\textsuperscript{392} \textit{DSB} V. 26, 466 (Mar. 24, 1952).

\textsuperscript{393} \textit{DSB} V. 27, 474 (Sept. 6, 1952).
In March 1951, following Ridgeway’s success in reversing the course of the war and in the aftermath of the failed fourth campaign of the Chinese, MacArthur noted in the press his dissatisfaction with a policy of stopping at the 38th and referred to his mission as the unification of Korea.\footnote{FRUS 1951, Vol. VII: 234 (MacArthur interview with UP, Mar. 15, 1951).} Several days thereafter, MacArthur issued a press statement noting the weaknesses of the Chinese military establishment, implying a threat to expand the war, and closing with a solicitation for the enemy to open talks for surrender.

These military weaknesses have been clearly and definitely revealed since Red China entered upon its undeclared war in Korea. Even under inhibitions which now restrict activity of the United Nations forces and the corresponding military advantages which accrue to Red China, it has been shown its complete inability to accomplish by force of arms the conquest of Korea.

The enemy therefore must by now be painfully aware that a decision of the United Nations to depart from its tolerant effort to contain the war to the area of Korea through expansion of our military operations to his coastal areas and interior bases would doom Red China to the risk of imminent military collapse.\footnote{FRUS 1951, Vol. VII: 266 (Statement Release by General MacArthur, Mar. 24, 1954).}

In April 1951, Truman faced an internal crisis when the dispute with MacArthur over the correct manner of prosecuting the war was made public. MacArthur’s statements criticizing the Chief Executive for adopting a strategy that MacArthur perceived as not being aimed at winning resulted in Truman dismissing MacArthur from his post.\footnote{MacArthur argued that the United States should adopt a more aggressive posture, attacking the sources of Chinese strength in Manchuria and thus limiting the Chinese capability to wage war in Korea. Truman argued that so doing would risk Soviet intervention. MacArthur discounted this by pointing to the unquestioned American superiority in terms of nuclear weapons, arguing that Truman, in overseeing the post World War II demobilization, had expressly based American security on Strategic Air Command’s nuclear deterrent capabilities. Thus, Truman’s faith in the nuclear deterrent that he had championed appeared to be lacking in the first instance of practical necessity since Truman was uncertain that the Soviets would be deterred from attacking U.S. targets if U.S. planes attacked Chinese targets. See John W. Spanier, American Foreign Policy Since World War II, 4th ed. (New York: Praeger, 1971), 99-100.} Immediately upon firing MacArthur, President Truman addressed the nation in a radio speech explaining that the United States sought
to maintain a limited war and prevent the escalation of fighting into Manchuria so as to avoid a
general war.⁴⁹⁷ In so doing, President Truman expressly conceded the initiative to the enemy,
placed UN forces on the strategic defensive and invited an enemy offensive. The strongest
deterrent offered was a statement that if the Chinese “take further action which will spread the
conflict” they would have “the awful responsibility for what may follow.”⁴⁹⁸ Naturally, in the
face of this public feud and the resulting unplanned turnover of command, the Chinese
commenced their fifth campaign testing the UN forces, but encountered little success. General
Ridgeway proved an able, albeit unenthusiastic director of Truman’s limited war policy and
helped establish the static front that existed over the following two years.

In October 1951, with the Chinese simply posturing in negotiations while building up
capabilities for another offensive, American B-29’s undertook “simulated atomic missions” over
North Korea which, when coupled with the publicity surrounding the AEC Chairman’s statement
regarding the availability of tactical nuclear weapons, provided an increased although still
implicit nuclear threat to China.⁴⁹⁹ Shortly thereafter, Mao canceled the planned Chinese fall
offensive and ordered adoption of a defensive posture.⁵⁰⁰ Soman characterizes this exercise as
one of the “strongest nuclear signals” sent during the war.⁵⁰¹

In spring 1952, American impatience with Chinese intransigence at the negotiating table
again led to imposition of increased American military operations, including major bombing
operations. While this signaled American resolve to reach some conclusion, the imminent
departure of the Truman administration undercut the strength of the signal.

⁴⁹⁷ American Foreign Policy 1950-1955, Vol. II: 2609-14 (Address by the President, Apr. 11,
1951).

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 2612 (Address by the President, Apr. 11, 1951).


⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ Soman, 78.
The entrance of the Eisenhower administration brought about a new phase in American policy toward Korea. Following the election, Eisenhower visited Korea in December 1952, during which he stated that the communists were not impressed by words, but only “by deeds.” In February 1953, a new round of attacks was staged on Chinese communist positions, South Korea’s authorized number of troops was increased and ROK ammunition stocks were replenished, and Eisenhower announced the “unleashing” of Chiang Kai-Shek in Taiwan. The new Secretary of Defense testified publicly before the Congress regarding potentially expanding operations in Korea.

The United States also undertook actions designed to communicate willingness to implement the nuclear aspect of the New Look policy. First, Dulles articulated the policy to Nehru, making clear that the United States would no longer agree to an indefinite limited war with stagnant negotiations; second, the same threat of escalation was given by the American Ambassador in the Soviet Union, Chip Bohlen, to Georgy Molotov; and third, nuclear capable Matador missiles were transferred to Okinawa in spring 1953. Supporting these direct warnings were veiled threats in the form of references to American nuclear capabilities.

In May, a U.S. proposal was put forth at the peace talks, backed by the threat that rejection thereof would result in the American withdrawal from negotiations and a new focus on achieving military victory. Throughout the negotiations, the United States repeated warnings

402 Kalicki, 80.

403 Foot, 209; Secretary of Defense Semiannual Report, January 1 to June 30, 1953: 62.


405 Foot, 213-24; Kalicki, 81; Soman, 95; S. Zhang, 122-26.

406 Crane, 72; DSB V. 28, 412 (Mar. 16, 1953, Address of CICS General Bradley on Mar. 2, 1953 referring to U.S. influence via atomic weaponry);

407 Dulles, 360 (noting an armistice was achieved “at least in part, because the aggressor, already denied territorial gains, was faced with the possibility that the fighting might, to his own great peril, soon spread beyond the limits and methods which he had selected, to areas and methods that we would select.”); Dwight D. Eisenhower, Mandate for Change, 1953-1956 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1963), 181 (noting he intentionally “dropped the word” of intent to use
that failure to observe the agreed to terms would result not only in the renewal of hostilities, but “in all probability, it would not be possible to confine hostilities within the frontiers of Korea.”

Thus, the United States effectively presented the communists with an ultimatum to accept an armistice or face American attacks on Chinese territory.

**Deterrence Outcome**

The tepid response of the United States following the initial Chinese intervention encouraged the Chinese to escalate their intervention. Rather than acceding to his field commander’s advice, President Truman continued to straddle the fence by approving MacArthur’s offensive but denying the tools necessary for victory. Thereafter, Truman’s dogged insistence on avoiding escalation rendered victory impossible. With the assumption to office of Eisenhower and a corresponding increase in the expressed willingness of the President to attempt military victory in Korea, the Chinese displayed an increased willingness to negotiate seriously. The first major breakthrough came in late March 1953 following Stalin’s death, when Zhou En-Lai accepted a U.S. offer to trade sick and wounded POWs. With this, substantive negotiations got underway and following an American ultimatum in May to either negotiate in good faith or return to hostilities, a cease-fire agreement was reached. In July an armistice was signed, effectively ending the Korean War.

The balance of capabilities favored the United States because of American nuclear superiority; however, local capabilities were far more even. Given Truman’s refusal to utilize American capabilities, nuclear or conventional, to their full extent, the local balance became the most relevant factor. UN airpower and seapower dominated the skies and oceans, while Chinese manpower was nearly five times that of UN forces. With artificial targeting restrictions diminishing the potential efficacy of airpower, ground forces became decisive. Superior

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any type of weaponry and no longer confine hostilities to Korea, so that such word might be relayed to the Soviets and the Communist Chinese); Foot, 210.

408 DSB V. 29, 341 (Sep. 14, 1953) (Address of Secretary of State Dulles in St. Louis, Sep. 2, 1953).

American technology and organization permitted the UN forces to maintain their positions despite being vastly outnumbered, but chances for a major breakthrough under such conditions were slim. Moreover the shorter lines of communication enjoyed by the communists and their willingness to accept high casualty rates made sustaining a battle of attrition far easier for Mao than for the United States. With respect to atomic weapons, the Soviet nuclear arsenal was markedly inferior to that of the Americans, particularly as the United States developed tactical nuclear weapons and announced the decision to pursue a thermonuclear weapon.

With respect to escalation, the balance of interests was relatively equal. Neither the communists nor the UN favored escalation to global war. The Chinese had no nuclear capability and were wholly dependent on the Soviet Union for modern weaponry. Thus, they could not escalate matters absent Soviet approval. The Soviets likely had little interest in pursuing global war at the time due to their nuclear inferiority. While they held advantageous positions in Europe due to the western post-war demobilization, the Soviets still lacked a powerful industrialized economy capable of competing with the West once the United States was placed on a war-time industrial schedule. Unfortunately, this also could work in the opposite manner, as the Korean invasion had sparked a remobilization effort in the west that might have led Stalin to conclude his position would only deteriorate from the present. Yet, consistent with orthodox Leninism, Stalin’s cautious approach, resisting adventurism and awaiting the time when the correlation of forces would be clearly in the favor of the communists, made this an unlikely course of action.

Under Truman, the defender’s risk propensity was low. Truman was determined to avoid escalation of the situation, even at the cost of abandoning an attempt at victory in Korea. For Truman, the relevant frame was one of global security rather than theater interests; however, in keeping with the new more aggressive containment policy, Truman was intent on meeting, or as argued by Christensen, perhaps forced to meet, Communist advances wherever they might occur. Thus, a stalemate resulted. The Eisenhower Administration was also concerned with the global picture, but saw limited engagements such as Korea as a drain on the national coffers that could be repeated endlessly. Accordingly, Eisenhower viewed maintenance of the status quo as a loss, prompting him to adopt a more risk acceptant posture in pursuing an end to the war.
Looking at the above factors together, the credibility of the American deterrent was questionable at best for most of this period. No clear superiority in capabilities (outside of the nuclear realm) or interests was self-evident, while U.S. risk propensity was limited. Thus, the clarity of the declaratory policy and the risk propensity of the challenger would have been of great significance in this crisis. Under Truman, the United States adopted an ambiguous declaratory policy. Actions demonstrated an intent to remobilize and to maintain a presence in the Pacific for the long-term, but actions limiting the war in Korea also indicated a fear of provoking the Chinese or Soviets and a willingness to accede to determined communist aggression. The Eisenhower administration exhibited greater willingness to invoke implicit nuclear threats, but the clarity of these declarations is debatable. Zhang argues that the nuclear threats from Eisenhower were unclear and not credible to Mao.410 Rather than stemming from American policy choices, Zhang attributes the end of the War to Chinese economic fatigue, exacerbated by the lack of Soviet economic generosity.411 Stueck likewise argues that the threats of American escalation, including potential use of atomic weapons, were immaterial to the end of the war; arguing that the Soviet Union could withstand U.S. atomic attacks. However, Stueck fails to note Soviet risk aversion that would override attendant survival capabilities.

The United States failed to prevent the Chinese from continuously expanding the number of troops and committing a tremendous amount of resources to the war; however, the absence of major Soviet intervention or Soviet permission to the Chinese to engage U.S. targets outside of Korea indicates that the U.S. objective of preventing geographic escalation was obtained. Still, it is likely that this had to do with Soviet risk propensity rather than initial U.S. deterrence efforts. Because of Stalin’s risk aversion, even a deterrent threat of low credibility would have been sufficient to prevent the Soviets from intervening. By simply remaining in place and not withdrawing from the peninsula, the United States probably demonstrated greater resolve than Stalin and Mao anticipated. Yet, the policies adopted permitted an additional two and one half years of war, resulting in thousands of additional deaths on both sides as well as for the Korean

410 S. Zhang, 150.

411 Ibid., 146.
civilian population. Ultimately, the parties simply reverted to their respective territorial positions of pre-June 25, 1950. On the other hand, it is likely that the comparative clarity of the Eisenhower administration, including not only the deterrent threats against escalation but the coercive threats aimed at war termination, played a major role in bringing about the end of the war. In the face of large Chinese troop increases, provision of increased armor and artillery to communist troops in Korea, and the deployment of advanced Soviet jet bombers to Manchuria, all of which threatened to seriously escalate matters, Eisenhower’s pointed threats to meet or even initiate escalation in Korea, backed by the deployment of additional American firepower to the peninsula, helped deter communist escalation.\(^{412}\)

The failure of the United States to deter initial Chinese intervention and massive Chinese participation, coupled with the failure of the United States to retaliate against the Chinese for these actions undermined American credibility in Asia over the next twenty-five years. While America successfully used the UN as a tool to confront aggression and did not simply abandon Syngman Rhee’s government, it did permit the aggressors to go unpunished and it signaled a marked fear of engaging in a major ground war with China.

**Chinese Intervention in Indochina, 1950-54**

In the weeks following the North Korean invasion of South Korea, France believed direct Chinese intervention in Indochina was likely.\(^{413}\) U.S. intelligence was less certain of direct Chinese participation, but did envision a Chinese supported Viet Minh offensive beginning in the fall of 1950.\(^{414}\) Once the Chinese intervened in Korea and no subsequent world war followed,

\(^{412}\) The communist build-up might simply have been an attempt to influence armistice negotiations; however, if so, Eisenhower’s policies were still effective in deterring the communists from pressing the military option and settling for the American offer put forth in late May.


\(^{414}\) Ibid., 871 (Telegram Minister at Saigon to Secretary of State, Sep. 3, 1950); Ibid., 878 (Memo from Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern to Secretary of State, Sep. 11, 1950).
the likelihood of a major Chinese intervention in Indochina lessened, due to the commitment of Chinese resources to Korea. However, with the conclusion of the armistice in Korea in July 1953, the potential for Chinese activity in Indochina again became a major concern.

By winter of early 1954, the French were losing the battle for Indochina and had pinned significant hopes on engaging the Viet Minh in a battle at Dien Bien Phu. This crisis presented the greatest opportunity for American intervention in the first Indochina war. Whereas Truman and Eisenhower had relied on French troops to fight the Viet Minh, the French were now on the verge of collapse and were directly seeking American assistance. Eisenhower was faced with the decision of providing American military aid with the attendant possibility of provoking the Chinese to intercede militarily, or of letting the French lose and risking a quick overthrow of the entirety of Indochina.

**Goals**

Zhai describes the Chinese policy towards Indochina in this period as “the result of a convergence of geopolitical realities, ideological beliefs, personality, and political circumstances.”\(^{415}\) From the regime’s outset, Chinese communists looked to regain imperial influence over bordering states. The large Chinese population spread across Southeast Asia was seen as a potential avenue of approach in spreading the communist ideology.\(^{416}\) Mao also provided support to indigenous communist groups; however, his goals and those of the local communists were not always in accordance. In this case, Mao sought to expel the French government from Indochina and establish separate socialist regimes in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, whereas the Viet Minh sought to control all of Indochina from Hanoi. At this point, however, both Ho and Mao were in full agreement as to the goal of ejecting the French.

The United States sought to avoid the expansion of CCP influence and communism in general in Southeast Asia, without placing the U.S. government in a position of opposition to genuine nationalist movements occurring in Asia. If the French could assist in containing

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\(^{415}\) Zhai, 2000: 5. If this is correct, it suggests the difficulty application of rational actor analysis would have in accurately assessing this situation.

communism, then the United States would support a continuing French role in Indochina; if the French could not control communist expansion, then there was little point in supporting French imperial pretensions. However, the United States could not accept Ho Chi Minh’s claims that he was primarily a nationalist and was not bound to the socialist internationalism. Thus, U.S. policymakers sought to avoid placing the Viet Minh in power, leaving America with no realistic option but to support the Bao Dai government despite its lack of popularity or effectiveness.

**Capabilities**

*Communist forces:* Shortly after the PRC was established in October 1949, Chinese communist troops began to appear at the Tonkin border.\(^{417}\) No reports of major Chinese participation in Vietnam occurred through February 1950.\(^{418}\) However, in March 1950 Mao began sending military advisors and materiel to Ho Chi Minh while troops continued to mass along the border.\(^{419}\) At the same time, Chinese communists built military training schools in the bordering Chinese province of Yunnan for Viet Minh cadres.\(^{420}\) The April 1950 seizure of Hainan provided China with a new base that could be used to extend the range of aerial operations into Annam and Cochin China. Following the Korean invasion in June, Mao increased the level of Chinese assistance to the Viet Minh. Simultaneously, the Viet Minh began planning a new campaign along the border in order to secure the lines of communication with

\(^{417}\) Ibid., 691 (Memo from Asst Secretary of State Far East Affairs to Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Jan. 5, 1950). Modern Vietnam was traditionally divided into three areas; from north to south - Tonkin, governed from Hanoi; Annam - governed from Hue; and Cochin China, governed from Saigon.

\(^{418}\) FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 726-27 (Telegram from Consul General in Saigon to Secretary of State, Feb. 11, 1950, relaying point of view of French High Commissioner Pignon).

\(^{419}\) Ibid., 772-73 (Telegram from Ambassador in France to Secretary of State, citing French military report, Apr. 8, 1950); Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 104-05; Kalicki, 106; Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 18; S. Zhang, 176. John Foster Dulles publicly asserted the presence of Chinese assistance to the Viet Minh as early as March 29, 1950 when he charged the PRC with sending two thousand troops, technical advisors, a thousand supply trucks, weapons and ammunition, as well as providing and maintaining communications systems in Vietnam for Ho.

\(^{420}\) Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 19.
A Chinese military advisory group was established in July 1950 and deployed in August. New rail lines and roads were built in September 1950 from south China to the Indochina border capable of handling heavy military equipment.

American assessments in September 1950 numbered Chinese troops on the border at approximately one hundred thousand. By September 1950, the PRC had provided Ho with nearly 14,000 rifles, 1,700 automatic weapons, 300 bazookas, 150 artillery pieces, ammunition, communications gear, food, medicine and uniforms. Chinese materiel assistance to the Viet Minh continued to rise during the early 1950s, offsetting the increase in American aid to the Bao Dai government. In late December 1950, U.S. intelligence estimated Chinese strength at the border had increased to approximately 185,000 troops, some of which might already have crossed the border in Tonkin, concluding that continued Chinese aid without a reciprocal increase in French strength would result in Viet Minh conquest of Tonkin within six to nine months. In 1952, the number of Chinese troops on the border was estimated at nearly

421 Ibid., 26.
422 Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 132.
424 Ibid., 878 (Memo Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern to Secretary of State, Sep. 11, 1950). French assessment put the number at between 150,000 and 200,000. Ibid., 409 (Minutes of Meeting by U.S., British and French representatives in Paris, Aug. 3, 1950).
425 Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War, 133; Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 20, reports 150 mortars and only 60 artillery pieces. See also FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 869 (Telegram Secretary of State to Legation at Saigon, Sep. 1, 1950, noting “increasing indications” of Chinese communist support to the Viet Minh).
426 FRUS 1952-1954, Vol. XIII: 21 (Telegram Minister in Saigon to Secretary of State, Jan. 25, 1952); Ibid., 31 (Memo Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern to Secretary of State, Feb. 11, 1952).
An American intelligence estimate from March 1952 suggested the Chinese had nearly 300,000 troops in southern China, of which it could commit and support 150,000 to Indochina without affecting operations in Korea. An estimated 15,000 Chinese “advisors” were believed to already be assisting the Viet Minh in country. Estimates of between 150,000 and 200,000 Chinese soldiers adjacent to the border remained fairly consistent until the fall of Dien Bien Phu in May 1954.

The Viet Minh could field between 100,000 and 160,000 troops in 1950, although in practical terms many of these lacked firearms and were wholly dependent on local support. Between twenty and thirty thousand of these had undergone military training in Chinese camps. By the end of 1950, the Viet Minh had close to 225,000 troops, of which roughly 100,000 were armed regulars. For the next year and a half, China continued to provide materiel assistance and substantial numbers of advisors, but abstained from committing combat troops. Chinese advisors dominated Viet Minh military affairs, as plans based on Maoist tactics were first sent to the CCP for approval, then passed on to Ho. The 1950 fall campaign began

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430 Ibid., 55.

431 Duiker, 427 (suggesting 160,000). A report prepared by the Bao Dai government in January 1950, placed the number of Viet Minh troops at approximately 100,000. FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: (708) (Telegram from Consul General in Saigon to Secretary of State, Jan. 31, 1950). An American official report suggested Ho Chi Minh had roughly 75,000 armed men and another 75,000 supporters lacking arms. Ibid., 717 (Memo from Secretary of State to President, Feb. 2, 1950).

432 Duiker, 427 (suggesting 20,000); FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 878 (Memo Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern to Secretary of State, Sep. 11, 1950, asserting 30,000).


434 Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 28-29.
in mid-September as the Viet Minh took Dongkhe, followed in rapid succession by Cao Bang, Lang Son and Laocai - all French posts near the Chinese border. In these raids, the Viet Minh not only caused thousands of French casualties, but captured huge amounts of weaponry from the abandoned French outposts. By the end of 1950, the Chinese – Vietnam border area was effectively under Viet Minh control, allowing for uncontested shipment of Chinese supplies. Nationwide, Ho Chi Minh’s forces controlled roughly two-thirds of Indochina, although the French government held the major cities. By 1952, the Governor of Tonkin, sarcastically but perhaps correctly, described government military action as government infiltration of Viet Minh territory.

The Viet Minh were stronger in the south than in the Tonkin region for most of 1950; however, as Chinese aid increased and the flow of returning Chinese trained Viet Minh soldiers increased, Tonkin became the primary battlefield. Guerrilla operations continued in Annam and Cochin China, but larger conventional attacks in the 1950 fall offensive took place in Tonkin. Viet Minh strength was almost entirely composed of infantry and guerrillas. While the Chinese had provided some limited artillery and larger caliber gun capability, small unit tactics were the norm. The Viet Minh lacked any air power or sea power.

Buoyed by the success of the fall 1950 campaign, the Viet Minh undertook a campaign in 1951 based on more conventional offensive operations despite warnings from the PLA advisors that these were ill-considered at present. Chinese advisors explained that, first, Beijing was

435 FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 881-82 (Telegram Consul at Hanoi to Secretary of State, Sep. 17, 1950); Ibid, 881-82 (Editor’s footnote describing fall of French outposts).

436 Mann, 89, asserts that the French lost 10,000 weapons to the Viet Minh in October 1950.

437 Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 31.


440 Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 34.
focused on Korea and thus was limited in the equipment and support that might be funneled to the Viet Minh. Second, the French had superior weaponry, despite the Viet Minh’s use of heavy mortars for the first time and increased anti-aircraft artillery fire. 441 Third, the Viet Minh had not cultivated the necessary civil support to permit a popular overthrow of the French. The Viet Minh campaign was unsuccessful, resulting in a retreat and return to guerrilla operations. The failure resulted in complete Viet Minh subordination to the “suggestions” of PLA advisors for the next few years.

In 1951, Ho had requested troops from China to assist with the northwest campaign, but Mao refused, although he did agree to deploy PLA forces at the border. 442 The Soviets approved the northwest campaign, but advocated the conduct of negotiations with France once the Viet Minh obtained a few military victories to provide bargaining leverage. 443 In early 1952, China massed over 200,000 troops at the Indochina border in fulfillment of Mao’s pledge to Ho to increase troops at the border, while raising speculation in Washington that intervention was imminent. 444 In October 1952, having increased their forces to approximately 400,000 armed supporters, of whom nearly 160,000 were full time soldiers, the Viet Minh began a new campaign in the northwest region of Vietnam aimed at securing an avenue of approach into Laos. 445 Using Maoist tactics, the Viet Minh systematically attacked isolated French outposts in


442 Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 37.

443 Ibid. The Soviets by and large were unconcerned with southeast Asia as a strategic asset at this point, considering communist activity more as a bargaining chip to be played to permit the Soviets to obtain concessions in Europe. Ibid., 52. Still, much of the aid provided by the PRC was Soviet made, including weapons, ammunition, and vehicles. FRUS 1952-1954, Vol. XIII: 303 (Memo Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern Affairs to Under Secretary of State, Nov. 24, 1952); DSB V. 30, 539 (Apr. 12, 1954) (Speech by Secretary of State in New York, Mar. 29, 1954, noting Soviet origin of Viet-Minh military supplies).

444 DSB V. 26, 654 (Apr. 28, 1952); DSB V. 27, 99 (Jul. 21, 1952).

445 FRUS 1952-1954, Vol. XIII: 288 (Memo Director of Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs to Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern Affairs, Nov. 18, 1952). By spring
overwhelming numbers and by December established easy transit between Vietnam and Laos without Chinese units crossing the border.

Prior to 1953, Mao and Zhou maintained that Ho should adopt a patient conservative attitude, focusing on Maoist guerrilla strategy of assuming a mobile defensive posture and only attacking over-extended enemy elements with numerically superior forces.\textsuperscript{446} Ho desired to move more expeditiously, but as Soviet aid was non-existent at this time and the Viet Minh were dependent on Chinese arms and ammunition, he could do no more than lobby for increased materiel assistance. In late 1953, with the Korean armistice in place, the Chinese gave their approval to a stepped-up Viet Minh offensive, providing additional materiel aid to support the new aggression. By early 1954, the Chinese provided 116,000 small arms, 420 heavy artillery pieces, and untold ammunition.\textsuperscript{447} When the French decided to make a stand at Dien Bien Phu in January 1954, the Viet Minh were prepared to undertake a siege, predicated on continued Chinese supply. As the siege wore on in spring 1954, the Chinese provided additional artillery, air defense equipment including 37 mm anti-aircraft artillery, multiple rocket launchers and even some small tanks.\textsuperscript{448}

\textit{French and U.S. forces:} By early 1950, nearly half the French army, half the French Air Force, and a quarter of the French navy were deployed in Indochina.\textsuperscript{449} While U.S. policy supported the French in steadfastly confronting the communists in Indochina, American officials,

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\textsuperscript{446} S. Zhang, 178.

\textsuperscript{447} Ibid., 181.

\textsuperscript{448} Zhai, \textit{China and the Vietnam Wars}, 49; \textit{FRUS 1952-1954}, Vol. XIII: 937 (Telegram Ambassador Saigon to DOS, Jan. 3, 1954). Tsouras, 64, asserts that the Viet Minh were receiving American made equipment captured by the Chinese in Korea that was newer than the equipment the United States was directly supplying to the French in Indochina.

\textsuperscript{449} \textit{FRUS 1950}, Vol. VI: 88-89 (Meeting regarding Griffin Mission, May 11, 1950); Ibid., 155 (Minutes of Dept. of State Meeting, Nov. 8, 1950).
particularly the Euro-centric Acheson, were concerned about how this commitment would effect Western European defenses. French casualties in Vietnam were taking a serious toll: by January 1950 losses in Indochina to the French officer corps were equal to the total number of newly commissioned French officers. Indigenous pro-Bao Dai troops were estimated at between forty and fifty thousand in early 1950, increasing as the year progressed. Total French Union forces numbered close to 135,000. By year’s end the ranks of pro-government forces had swelled to over 300,000, including approximately 150,000 French Union forces and between 150,000 and 200,000 native troops, although many of these were used for local security and paramilitary functions rather than front-line combat. By 1952, the total number of indigenous troops in Indochina was in excess of 300,000, with approximately half of these under French command and half making up the independent military forces of the associated states. “Vietnamization” of the conflict undertaken by the French resulted in a decrease in French forces assigned to Indochina, with nearly a twenty percent reduction between 1950 and the end of 1952, and continued decreases called for in 1953. Still, the increases in the indigenous forces more

450 Ibid., 706 (Telegram from Consul General at Saigon to Secretary of State, Jan. 31, 1950).
451 Ibid., 708 (Telegram from Consul General at Saigon to Secretary of State, Jan. 31, 1950, citing 40,000); Ibid., 736 (Report on MDAP for Indochina, FY 1951, Feb. 16, 1950, citing “upwards of 50,000”); Ibid., 805 (Telegram Charge at Saigon to Secretary of State, May 6, 1950, counting 60,000 Vietnamese government troops).
452 Ibid., 717 (Memo from Secretary of State to President, Feb. 2, 1950, suggesting 130,000); Ibid., 746 (Draft of NSC-64, Feb. 27, 1950, assessing strength at 140,000); Ibid., 797 (Memo by Griffin to Secretary of State, May 4, 1950, placing strength at 130,000).
454 DSB V. 26, 454 (Remarks of Officer in Charge of Indochina Affairs, Mar. 24, 1950); FRUS 1952-1954, Vol. XIII: (214) (Secretary of State to Embassy India, Jun. 28, 1952); Condit, 216.
455 FRUS 1952-1954, Vol. XIII: 291 (Memo Director Office of Philippine and Southeast Asia Affairs to Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern Affairs, Nov. 18, 1952); Ibid., 333 (Memo Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern Affairs to Deputy Under Secretary of State, Dec. 29, 1952).
than covered French losses in terms of sheer numbers, as by 1954 the French Union forces in Indochina totaled well over 400,000.\textsuperscript{456}

Despite the manpower committed to Indochina, France failed to provide sufficient materiel, as evidenced by the total absence of tanks or large anti-aircraft artillery, and the combined total of only twenty-one field artillery batteries in all of Indochina.\textsuperscript{457} While an anti-guerrilla campaign would not require the heavy equipment necessary in conventional warfare, it nonetheless did require tactical firepower, including field artillery, aerial reconnaissance and close air support capability in order to sustain the offensive spirit for ground troops. However, as U.S. aid increased, this problem was cured, leading an American observer to report in mid-1953 that “with the exception of a possible increase in artillery, I think it is fair to say there is no logistics problem” in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{458}

French air forces in the region consisted of approximately one hundred aircraft; however, the lack of Viet Minh airpower permitted these assets to be somewhat effective as long as the Chinese did not intervene. Only two usable airfields existed in Tonkin, one at Hanoi and one at Haiphong. As the threat of Chinese intervention increased in 1950, the French Ambassador to the United States noted the paucity of French aircraft in Indochina, voicing a need for U.S. air support, foreshadowing the formal request for tactical air support from the United States made September 14, 1950.\textsuperscript{459} France even went so far as to request the United States loan an aircraft carrier to France for use in Indochina.\textsuperscript{460}


\textsuperscript{457} FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 850 (Telegram Minister at Saigon to Secretary of State, Aug. 9, 1950).


\textsuperscript{459} FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 840 (Memo on Meeting re Common Western Policy in SE Asia, Jul. 31, 1950); Ibid., 880 (Telegram Acting Secretary of State to Legation in Saigon, Sep. 16, 1950, noting results of meeting of foreign ministers).

\textsuperscript{460} Ibid., 924 (Telegram Secretary of State to Embassy in France, Nov. 17, 1950).
Of note, General MacArthur questioned the caliber of the French military, describing the French military in World War II as “poor” and suggesting the current French military was “doubtful.” Likewise, the military leader of the MDAP mission to Indochina was critical of French spirit, tactics, utilization of equipment, and overall generalship. Thereafter, the Joint Chiefs of Staff chimed in with remarks critical of French military plans and leadership to date. Such criticism would remain the pattern, with the exception of the first few months of General Navarre’s command in the second half of 1953, for the remainder of the French deployment.

The French strategy in Indochina was defensive and reactionary, completely ceding the initiative to the Viet Minh. After five years of fighting, by 1950 the French had accomplished little more than establishing strong-point outposts in rural areas from which patrols might be conducted during daylight hours. Efforts at clearing campaigns begun in 1949 produced

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462 FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 926 (Memo by Deputy Director MDAP to Secretary of State, Nov. 20, 1950); FRUS 1952-1954, Vol. XIII: 384 (Memo conversation DOS Office Indochina Affairs, Feb. 4, 1953, criticizing French failure to fully utilize assets in theater and comparing average monthly flight hours on U.S. aircraft in Korea (100) with aircraft in Indochina (40)).


464 Even during the final stand at Dien Bien Phu when the fort had been surrounded on the ground and artillery had destroyed the post’s airstrips leaving aerial drops as the sole means of resupply, French efforts often resulted in no more than half of the intended supply reaching friendly hands due to the unwillingness of French pilots to drop from the lower, more dangerous altitudes necessary for accuracy. FRUS 1952-1954, Vol. XIII: 1324 (NSC Meeting, Apr. 13, 1954).

465 In February 1954 the French Army Chief of Staff was reported as asserting that “young officers who served in Indochina were of no use to him in Europe, because they show too much initiative.” FRUS 1952-1954, Vol. XIII: 1043 (Telegram Ambassador Saigon to DOS, Feb. 12, 1954).

466 FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 846 (Telegram from Minister at Saigon to Secretary of State, Aug. 7, 1950).
minimal results. Adding to the problems was the French fear of the Communist Chinese and their resulting unwillingness to engage in aerial reconnaissance in the border region - a problem that undoubtedly aided the hugely successful 1950 fall offensive of the Viet Minh.\footnote{Ibid., 894 (Telegram Minister at Saigon to Secretary of State, Oct. 15, 1950, noting “continuing squeamishness about taking any action which would provoke Chinese communists”).} Throughout the early 1950s the French continued to engage in holding operations, conducting minimally effective patrolling offensives, while Viet Minh strength in rural areas steadily increased.\footnote{FRUS 1952-1954, Vol. XIII: 11 (Telegram Minister at Saigon to DOS, Jan. 16, 1952).} Additionally, the mutual lack of confidence between the French and the indigenous anti-communists prevented the French from emplacing an effective political and social program to accompany the military operations. With France unwilling to grant complete independence to Vietnam, there was no ability to gain a complete victory over the communists.\footnote{French reluctance to grant independence to Indochina stemmed in large part from French fears of setting a precedent applicable to French North Africa. Kissinger, Ending the Vietnam War, 17.}

The successful fall 1950 offensive brought about recognition among local French military officials that they were now at a materiel disadvantage relative to the Viet Minh, who were readily supplied by the Chinese. Accordingly, the campaign in Tonkin was no longer strictly a guerrilla war. Still, the French government was against increasing the military commitment to Indochina or pursuing greater offensive operations, for fear that should the Viet Minh begin to lose, the Chinese would intervene.\footnote{FRUS 1952-1954, Vol. XIII: 190-91 (U.S. - French discussions, Jun. 16, 1952); Ibid., 232 (Telegram Secretary of State to Embassy Saigon, Aug. 1, 1952); Ibid., 390 (Telegram Ambassador Saigon to DOS, Feb. 7, 1953).} For example, in 1952 the Commander of French Forces in Indochina was unable to conduct a desired offensive as planned in Tonkin due to Paris’s refusal to send sufficient aircraft. Having already reduced his plan’s requirement for airlift of paratroops from six to three battalions, the Commanding General was informed he would have to make due
with airlift able to transport only a single battalion.\textsuperscript{471} By the time American aircraft were obtained via a loan program, the Viet Minh had already begun their own offensive, forcing the French to react and ending the possibility of a government offensive.

Indigenous forces were trained and commanded by French officers, resulting in a shortage of qualified senior military leaders among the Vietnamese. The French government refused to supply arms to indigenous units unless a certain percentage of the officer corps was French.\textsuperscript{472} Fearing the potential that an indigenous army might turn on them, the French refused to create a truly independent national force until late 1950.\textsuperscript{473} Accordingly, Washington was forced to depend on French military capabilities in Indochina’s defense. Recognizing the propaganda vulnerability of the United States to claims that it was actively assisting imperialism, U.S. policymakers repeatedly attempted to condition American aid on genuine independence for Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, but were continuously rebuffed.\textsuperscript{474} Limiting the intensity of American pressure was the fear that France could grant complete independence and immediately withdraw from the region, effectively allowing Ho control over the area. This situation provided a divided foundation from which to work for the United States, as French officials blamed failures on incompetent or corrupt Vietnamese officials, while the Vietnamese blamed the French for failing to supply sufficient resources, both politically and militarily; meanwhile, both sides sought to directly acquire U.S. economic support.\textsuperscript{475} Slowly this situation improved, as by

\textsuperscript{471} Ibid., 226 (Telegram Ambassador in Saigon to DOS, Jul. 27, 1952, citing conversation with General Salan, Commander of French Forces in Indochina).

\textsuperscript{472} FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 706-07 (Telegram Consul General Saigon to Secretary of State, Jan. 30, 1950).

\textsuperscript{473} Ibid., 860 (Telegram Ambassador in France to Secretary of State, Aug. 17, 1950). French officials suggested that the costs of such a program were prohibitive; however, if the United States would foot the bill, they were prepared to accept the idea.

\textsuperscript{474} See e.g. FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 857-58 (Memo of DOS Policy Planning Staff re Policy in Indochina, Aug. 16, 1950).

\textsuperscript{475} Ibid., 819-20 (Telegram Ambassador in France to Secretary of State, May 31, 1950).
1952 an indigenous officer corps had been trained sufficient to allow twenty of the fifty-two native battalions to have five or less French officers attached.476 Although the United States had begun to take some action to increase the amount of assistance to the French in Indochina in the months prior to the Korean invasion, large-scale aid did not come until after Kim’s invasion into South Korea.477 Immediately after the invasion, eight C-47 aircraft were delivered, while additional supplies including infantry gear for twelve indigenous battalions, heavy machinery for engineering, anti-aircraft artillery with ammunition, and both naval vessels and aircraft were organized for delivery to Indochina.478 In response to the communist successes in the fall of 1950, America provided the French with aircraft, artillery pieces and napalm bombs per the Mutual Defense Act.479 Still, American officials, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were set on avoiding the commitment of American ground troops to Indochina, pursuant to the logic that such would provoke a general war with China, which would quickly lead to global war with the Soviet Union, wherein the primary theater would be Western Europe.480 Accordingly the total number of U.S. military personnel in Indochina remained less than 150 through 1953.481 From 1950 through 1954 the United States progressively bore a


477 Prior to Kim’s invasion, U.S. military assistance to Indochina was set at $15 million, earmarked primarily for purchases of five C-54 transport planes and 37 mm ammunition for aircraft. FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 76-77. Following the Korean invasion, aid was raised to $31 million, jumping in fiscal year 1951 to over $210 million. Condit, 207-11.

478 FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 836 (Memo Secretary of State to President, Jul. 3, 1950). Infantry gear arrived in August and some fifty F6F fighter aircraft arrived in October. Naval landing craft for troops and supplies, as well as the engineering equipment also was delivered by November. Ibid., 935 (Telegram from Sec State to Embassy in France, Nov. 22, 1950).

479 Secretary of Defense Semiannual Report, January 1 to June 30, 1951: 68. Planes included B-26 bombers in addition to previously noted F6F fighters. Condit, 209.


481 DOD Deployment of Military Personnel, 1953.
greater share of the financial burden of combating communism in Indochina. By 1952, U.S. materiel assistance had come to over 53 million rounds of ammunition, 8,000 transport vehicles and trailers, 650 combat vehicles, 200 military aircraft, 200 naval vessels, 14,000 automatic weapons and 3,500 radio sets.\(^ {482}\) In 1953 alone, American assistance included an additional 700 tanks and combat vehicles, nearly 14,000 trucks, over 100 naval vessels and approximately 175 aircraft in additional to large numbers of artillery pieces, small arms and machine guns, and ammunition.\(^ {483}\) Thus, by 1954 the problem was no longer a lack of materiel, but rather was the refusal of Paris to permit the field commander to take measures necessary to proceed with offensive operations.

Available American military capabilities were limited during this period due to the American commitment of forces in Korea and the emphasis placed on Europe. In early 1953 during one of the first meetings between the JCS and the new State Department leadership under Eisenhower, in response to a question asking whether it was “possible to hold a beachhead in Indochina,” Chairman of the JCS General Bradley asserted, “Our present capabilities are not enough.”\(^ {484}\) Eisenhower’s unleashing of Chiang Kai-Shek in February 1953 was an attempt at indirect assistance in that the resultant immobilization of PLA forces adjacent to Taiwan helped to reduce the availability of Chinese forces for use in Indochina. Even following the Korean armistice, American capabilities in theater were still tied to Korea. When the armistice appeared to be holding, Eisenhower reduced the American deployment in Korea by two divisions; however, rather than retaining these units in theater for possible use in Indochina, the units were sent stateside.\(^ {485}\)

From December 1953 through March 1954, both the French and the Viet Minh built up forces at Dien Bien Phu, with a result of nearly fifteen thousand French soldiers being arrayed


\(^ {483}\) Leighton, 520.


against between thirty and forty thousand Viet Minh troops. The United States provided additional B-26 bombers and maintenance personnel in late January 1954, and again in March 1954. This marked the first significant deployment of U.S. military personnel to Indochina, although these were not combat troops. Following the March 13, 1954 attack on Dien Bien Phu, the United States responded by sending two aircraft carrier groups to the South China Sea and deploying a group of B-28 bombers to Indochina. The aircraft carriers were reportedly equipped with aircraft capable of being armed with tactical nuclear weapons. However, despite the deployment, no U.S. assets were actually used, as the French refused the conditions accompanying the American offer. Dien Bien Phu was overrun in May, leading to the phased withdrawal of French forces pursuant to the Geneva agreements concluded in July 1954.

**Interests**

*China:* Mao’s interests in Indochina were first, to establish China as an activist supporter of the international socialist revolution, thereby laying a foundation for a later claim to leadership of the socialist world; second, to recreate an environment of small tributary states paying homage to the great middle kingdom, only in modern socialist trappings; third, to remove the threat posed by a western government on his southern flank; and fourth, to establish ease of movement in the border area so as to permit CCP troops to effectively hunt down the remaining KMT elements making use of the southern borders. With these interests, Mao need not pursue

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487 Ibid., 1002; 1159.

488 As of June 1954, there were approximately 4,600 U.S. servicemen in Indochina. DOD Deployment of Military Personnel, 1954.

489 S. Zhang, 182.

490 Kalicki, 114.

491 Kuisong, 3.
the complete immediate “liberation” of all of Indochina; rather, he needed only to secure the northern border area while maintaining good relations with Ho.

Mao undoubtedly sought in the long-term to dominate all of Southeast Asia, for the reasons listed above as well as to increase pressure on Japan by assuming control over the food exports from the region to Japan. Yet before he could proceed with designs on Japan, Mao still had significant work to do in consolidating his power on the mainland.

Restraining Mao in 1950 was Stalin’s interest in not provoking France. French opposition to the rearmament of West Germany coincided with the Soviet interest in keeping the Germans disarmed. If the Chinese communists intervened in Indochina, France might realign her priorities to establish the communists as a greater threat than the Germans. Accordingly, Stalin was disinclined to provide assistance to the Viet Minh or to the Chinese for use in Vietnam. Following the Korean invasion in June 1950, Mao was also led to avoid opening a second front, hundreds of miles from the Korean front to compete for scarce resources.

United States: The primary interest of the United States in Indochina between 1950-54 was to make clear that the United States would not retreat in the face of communist pressure. Typically explained in terms of the domino theory, American policymakers feared that the loss of Vietnam would result in a simultaneous loss of Laos and Cambodia. From there, the communists would be in position to mount pressure on Thailand and Malaya, and eventually Burma and India. Should this occur, the Middle East would be next in line, threatening the

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494 See e.g. FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 750 (Memo by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern to Assistant Secretary, Mar. 7, 1950). Suggestions were floated in 1950 that the United States might be better served by concentrating assistance in Thailand as Chinese backed infiltration of Indochina might be too far along for U.S. aid to matter. The relative competence of the independent Thai government compared to the corrupt colonial regimes in Indochina promised a foundation more resistant to communist overtures. See e.g. Ibid., 152-53 (Telegram from Ambassador in Thailand to Secretary of State, dated Oct. 20, 1950); 153-55 (Memo from DoD Southeast Asia Aid Policy Committee Member Major General Malony, dated Oct. 31, 1950).
free world’s oil supplies. If the United States failed to stand up to the communists in Indochina, pro-western governments in Asia would be forced to reconsider their political orientation given the proximity of the communist giants, China and the Soviet Union. Communists had established an impressive record of aggression in Asia in only a short time including the invasion of South Korea, the invasion and occupation of Tibet, and major insurgencies in Indochina, Malaya, and the Philippines. Failure to defend Indochina could result in the collapse of American credibility as an ally such that further military pressure might not even be necessary to complete the communist empire in Asia. Accordingly, the American offshore defensive perimeter would be pushed back and replaced by defense outposts in Hawaii and Guam.

Non-communist governments in Southeast Asia also provided the United States with a Pacific entry to mainland Asia. Should Indochina fall and the domino theory play out, the United States would be totally dependent on the South Korean state for a Pacific harbor on the mainland. Absent this gateway, the entry of American ground forces into Pacific Asia would have to come through the Indian subcontinent, creating lengthy and vulnerable lines of communication in the event of a major ground war with the Chinese or Soviets.

A secondary interest in Indochina was the area’s wealth in terms of raw materials, including rice, rubber, timber and mineral resources. Both China and the Soviet Union coveted access to these materials, especially in the face of the concerted economic pressure organized by the west to cut off strategic military supplies to the communist states. In the event that the dominos did begin to fall, the United States was particularly concerned about the potential coupling of Indochina’s resources with the existing industrial capacity of Japan. However, American interest was not simply in denying these resources to the communists, but

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497 Foot, 40. Secondarily, communist acquisition of Southeast Asia would deny Japan access to resources and markets, weakening it as an outpost of western ideals.
was in actively protecting western access to the critical materials found in Indochina. For example, in the face of a potential Chinese intervention in Indochina in late summer 1950, the United States adopted new measures aimed at reducing natural rubber consumption in order to increase the American strategic stockpile of rubber. Along the same lines, U.S. officials feared that the fall of Indochina would permit greater communist access to Indonesian resources, including gas and oil, timber, rubber, tin, and rice.

If the west was determined to make a stand in Asia, both geography and psychology suggested that control over the Tonkin region was vital. The mountainous Laotian border and the general lack of roads sufficient for modern military lines of communication made retention of Tonkin imperative. American assessments determined that should Tonkin fall, there was “no militarily defensible position for the West north of the Isthmus of Kra.” These geographic obstacles represented far less of a problem to the guerrilla forces of the Viet Minh. Secondly, as Tonkin was directly adjacent to the Guangxi province of China, French loss of Tonkin would greatly facilitate Chinese communist aid. Finally, if it was accepted that the communists were intent on expanding, defending the present borders would demonstrate resolve and a rejection of appeasement. Permitting the conquest of Tonkin would only serve to put in motion an incremental shift in the balance of power.

On the other side of the ledger, the United States had an interest in avoiding the appearance of supporting imperialism. By assisting the French financially, the United States had already drawn the suspicion of nationalists in former colonial states. Even the Thai government

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499 Ibid., 133-34 (Telegram from Secretary of State).

500 Ibid., 750 (Memo Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern to Assistant Secretary, Mar. 7, 1950).

501 Ibid., 181 (Telegram from Consul General in Singapore to Secretary of State, Dec. 16, 1950, noting British diplomatic conference consensus that holding Tonkin region was imperative).

had expressed disgust at the arrogance of the French in asserting “independence” for Vietnam in 1950, but retaining it within the French Union. Privately, some French officials in Vietnam also recognized the impossibility of the French position as well. Should the United States send its own troops to Indochina, communist propaganda would be sure to depict the deployment as the evolution of American imperialism. Should the United States raise, train and equip indigenous forces, such materiel might find its way into Chinese communist hands either through the black market or through successful Chinese military offensives. Given this Hobson’s Choice, the United States opted to back the French, largely because officials in Washington saw events in Indochina as having progressed to an either-or choice of Bao Dai’s government or Ho Chi Minh, with no viable third alternative. Not until July 1953 was a true grant of sovereignty provided by the French, yet by this late juncture, the public relations effect was greatly reduced.

**Risk Propensity**

Basing their interests in Indochina on the domino theory, American policymakers would be apt to accept substantial risks in preventing the first domino from toppling. However, numerous other factors including concern over Chinese belligerence, limited U.S. forces in

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503 *FRUS* 1950, Vol. VI: 693-94 (Telegram Ambassador in Thailand to Secretary of State, Jan. 12, 1950); 697 (Telegram Ambassador in Thailand to Secretary of State, Jan. 19, 1950); Ibid., 724 (Telegram Ambassador in Thailand to Secretary of State, Feb. 8, 1950, noting Asiatic resentment of colonialism as stronger than aversion to communism); Ibid., 739 (Telegram Ambassador in Thailand to Secretary of State, Feb. 17, 1950, asserting neighbors of Indochina consider Bao Dai government “a French creation and a French puppet”). Likewise, India, Burma and the Philippines were reluctant to recognize these new governments due to concerns over true independence.

504 *FRUS* 1950, Vol. VI: 839 (Telegram Minister at Saigon to Secretary of State, Jul. 25, 1950, noting French General Carpentier as believing the Viet Minh were the only group in Vietnam with “faith in its own cause” and suggesting many Vietnamese were “secretly pleased” with communist successes in Vietnam and in Korea as antipathy toward colonialism was far stronger than ideology.


being, lack of multilateral support, French imperialism, and poor French assistance worked to dull American risk acceptance.

In March 1950, U.S. officials noted that Chinese communist aid was now flowing to Ho Chi Minh, although they did not believe a Chinese invasion was imminent. Still, the Joint Chiefs of Staff described the military situation in Indochina as one of “pressing urgency.” After the Korean invasion, the French government became increasingly panicked about possible Chinese intervention, asserting French intelligence had determined a Chinese invasion was likely as soon as the rainy season ended. In August, the American Ambassador in France noted the possibility that France might even reverse its position and vote for PRC admittance to the UN in return for a PRC pledge not to invade Indochina. Conversely, U.S. intelligence reported PRC troops moving northward for a possible invasion of Taiwan or intervention in Korea.

In 1950, most U.S. officials were firmly opposed to the idea of committing ground forces to Indochina, even in the event of Chinese intervention. While financial support was being provided and naval and air support were being contemplated, committing ground troops, particularly in light of the Korean commitment, was considered beyond the capabilities of the present U.S. force given its other missions globally. George Kennan, in his role as Counselor in the State Department, characterized the situation in Indochina as “hopeless” and believed the United States should more or less abandon the area as indefensible.

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507 FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 763 (Telegram from Charge’ Saigon to Secretary of State, Mar. 18, 1950).

508 Ibid., 782 (Secretary of Defense to Secretary of State, Apr. 14, 1950).

509 Military campaigns were most likely during the dry season of October through May; during the summer months, heavy rains made operations extremely difficult.

510 FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 852 (Telegram from Ambassador in France to Secretary of State, Aug. 12, 1950).

511 Ibid., 856 (Telegram Secretary of State to Embassy in France, Aug. 15, 1950).


By 1952-53, the United States believed that Chinese intervention was likely in either of two events; first, if the French appeared to be on the verge of victory and reunifying the country, or second, if U.S. forces intervened in a significant manner to assist the French.\(^514\) In addition, Eisenhower was concerned that an armistice in Korea would merely shift Chinese attention to Indochina. However, the United States refused to commit, even in private, to American assistance military in the event of Chinese intervention.\(^515\) U.S. officials were willing to issue a warning to China backed by naval and air power, provided there was consensus among America’s major allies to such a course of action and a guarantee of allied support.\(^516\) However, the discussed deterrent threat was limited to a naval blockade of the Chinese coast and other measures to hinder the Chinese economy; overthrowing the communist regime was held to be too risky a goal as it was believed to be likely to incite Soviet intervention leading to global war.\(^517\) Allied support however, was not forthcoming. Ho Chi Minh’s successful trumpeting of nationalist propaganda coupled with legitimate resentment toward France’s intransigence in divesting itself of its anachronistic imperial policies ensured UN abstention from meaningful involvement. The British government was opposed to such a commitment due to its desire to keep its profitable enterprises intact in Hong Kong. Throughout the crisis, including the disastrous ending at Dien Bien Phu, the British opposed intervention of any type, seeking to sit quietly on the sidelines of what it implied was a Franco-American problem.\(^518\)

As the French incurred continuing economic and military manpower liabilities in Indochina, the United States feared that France might withdraw its forces completely. Although supportive of greater independence for the states of Indochina, the United States recognized the

\(^{514}\) S. Zhang, 156.


\(^{516}\) This included both Administration officials and congressional leaders. Ibid., 211 (Telegram Secretary of State to DOS, Jun. 27, 1952); Ibid., 1224 (Memo Secretary of State meeting with Congressional Leaders, Apr. 3, 1954).

\(^{517}\) Ibid., 214 (Telegram Secretary of State to DOS, Jun. 27, 1952).

\(^{518}\) Ibid., 1203 (Telegram Secretary of State to Embassy UK, Apr. 1, 1954).
need for a continuing presence in the short term of a mature power in order to defend against communist encroachment. Disinclined to deploy its own forces, America thus was intent on maintaining a French force in the region. From 1951 forward, U.S. concerns over possible French withdrawal, and the likely resulting choices of either abandonment of Indochina to communism or American deployments of troops thereto dominated American Vietnam policy discussions. When the French continually refused to provide necessary personnel, such as pilots, aircraft maintenance personnel, or other technicians, the United States was wary that France was intentionally “dragging its feet” in order to induce American entry into the war.

American analysis found little likelihood of Chinese intervention in 1952. Noting the French economic burden and the lack of offensive spirit, a National Intelligence Estimate described the French position as deteriorating and likely to lead to withdrawal in the long term. Moreover, Bao Dai failed to provide effective leadership, repeatedly traveling abroad and accumulating a personal fortune while his government struggled to find funds. Accordingly, no Chinese intervention was necessary in the short term. A follow-up NIE in August followed the same general line, finding the French committed to a holding action that eliminated any chance of victory, but also suggesting that Chinese intervention was unlikely given the gains of the Viet Minh under the present circumstances.

Following the Korean Armistice in 1953, Paris argued that if the United States could negotiate with the communists, so too could France. Thereafter, the French wielded the threat of entering into negotiations with Ho Chi Minh as an effective bargaining tool to squeeze more

519 See e.g. Ibid., 333 (Memo Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern Affairs to Deputy Under Secretary of State, Dec. 29, 1952).

520 Ibid., 583 (Telegram Charge Saigon to DOS, May 29, 1953).

521 Ibid., 54-55 (NIE 35-1, Mar. 2, 1952).

522 Ibid., 227 (Telegram Ambassador Saigon to DOS, Jul. 30, 1952); Ibid., 341 (Telegram Ambassador Saigon to DOS, Jan. 9, 1953).

523 Ibid., 243 (NIE 35-2, Aug. 29, 1952).
money and materiel support from the United States.\footnote{Ibid., 700 (Telegram Ambassador France to Secretary of State, Jul. 27, 1953); Ibid., 935 (Telegram Consul Hanoi to DOS, Dec. 29, 1953).} Concerns over French withdrawal dominated the campaign season opening in fall 1953. While the apparently offensive-minded General Navarre was a welcome relief to U.S. military planners, the apparent interest of the government in Paris in divesting itself of the war in Indochina concerned American politicians. French press accounts began to portray Ho Chi Minh as the “Asian Tito” in an attempt to redeem Ho so that France could withdraw from Indochina while denying that it was giving in to Moscow directed communism.\footnote{Ibid., 1084-85 (Telegram Charge France to DOS, Feb. 27, 1954).} As French political resolve withered away, Eisenhower became determined not to deploy American troops as a replacement for the French in Indochina.\footnote{Ibid., 947 (NSC Meeting, Jan. 8, 1954).}

In early 1954, the French officially agreed to conduct talks with the Viet Minh and Chinese in Geneva. Thereafter, the Viet Minh markedly stepped up pressure on Dien Bien Phu in an effort to obtain a superior bargaining position during negotiations. Chinese assistance reached a crescendo for this effort.\footnote{Ibid., 1146 (Memo Director Policy Planning Staff to Secretary of State. Mar. 23, 1954).} PLA materiel and PLA advisors were in place in Viet Nam in large numbers; however, PLA infantry did not cross the border. By this point however, the French had created a political disaster by placing their prestige on the line in a militarily indefensible position. Unless a major military victory was obtained, the government in Paris would likely fall with an expectation that the successor government would directly seek negotiations with the Viet Minh, even at the cost of a divided Vietnam. While the loss of Dien Bien Phu from a military standpoint would not be decisive, particularly if significant casualties could be inflicted on the Viet Minh attackers, the political costs assumed make-or-break proportions. Encircling the French outpost while holding the high ground, Viet Minh troops decimated the French under a constant torrent of artillery fire and infantry assaults. Eisenhower considered intervening, but deploying ground troops was thought to be too dangerous. Military commanders questioned whether U.S. logistical capabilities were even capable of supporting
significant ground operations in Indochina. Chinese officials recognized there was no need at this point to intervene; rather, they could simply let the French suffocate in the stranglehold they had voluntarily created.

The U.S. baseline in Indochina was unclear. Having minimal traditional interest in the region, there were few established beliefs in the United States regarding Indochina. While communist domination would surely be considered a loss, continued French colonial administration was an unacceptable status quo, both on moral grounds and on geopolitical grounds that French military forces were being drained in a secondary theater when the defense of Europe was less than certain. Eisenhower compared a failure to confront Chinese aggression in Indochina to the world’s failure to confront Hirohito, Mussolini, and Hitler a generation earlier, but absent allied support, Eisenhower would not commit U.S. forces. In sum, a truly independent regime able to provide for its own security against communist infiltration would be a gain, suggesting the United States would be risk averse in pursuing this goal.

**Declaratory Policy**

In 1950, the United States originally sought to avoid activities that might result in any commitment of U.S. ground troops to mainland Asia. While infamous for omitting South Korea from the Pacific defense perimeter, Secretary of State Acheson’s January 12 National Press Club speech had also caused concern in Vietnam among some of the anti-communist contingent there by its failure to mention Indochina. American military aid for Indochina in fiscal year 1950 amounted to barely ten million dollars. However, the United States accorded official recognition to the Bao Dai government in Vietnam in February 1950, assuaging these concerns to some extent, while the Chinese and Soviets accorded recognition to Ho Chi Minh’s regime.

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528 Kalicki, 109-10.


530 FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 832 (Telegram Charge’ in Saigon to Secretary of State, Jun. 29, 1950); Ibid., 896 (Telegram Minister at Saigon to Secretary of State, Oct. 15, 1950).

531 Mann, 78.
In April 1950, Truman gave his approval to NSC-64, a policy planning document that endorsed the provision of military assistance to Indochina.\textsuperscript{532} The following month, the United States publicly announced its first economic and military aid package to the French backed governments in Indochina.\textsuperscript{533} In a public statement May 8, 1950, Secretary of State Acheson noted:

The United States Government, convinced that neither national independence nor democratic evolution exist in any area dominated by Soviet imperialism, considers the situation to be such as to warrant its accord ing economic aid and military equipment to the associated states of Indochina and France in order to assist them in restoring stability and permitting these states to pursue their peaceful and democratic development.\textsuperscript{534}

Accordingly, rather than constituting a sea change in U.S. policy, the June 25 North Korean invasion merely resulted in a reaffirmation and hastening of the ongoing shift in U.S. policy toward Indochina. President Truman’s statement of June 27 held in relevant part, “I have similarly directed acceleration in the furnishing of military assistance to the forces of France and the Associated States of Indochina and the dispatch of a military mission to provide close working relations with these forces.”\textsuperscript{535}

In August, in response to an Indian government request, the United States made known its grant of ten million dollars for military assistance to Thailand, assuming that the Indian government would make this known to the Communist Chinese thereby further demonstrating American commitment to Southeast Asia.\textsuperscript{536} A military assistance agreement was signed with the Thai government October 17, 1950. The same day, the State Department released a public statement as follows:

\textsuperscript{532} Jian, \textit{China’s Road to the Korean War}, 115.

\textsuperscript{533} Foot, 40.

\textsuperscript{534} \textit{FRUS} 1950, Vol. VI: 812 (Editorial note quoting Secretary of State’s Statement, May 8, 1950).

\textsuperscript{535} \textit{DSB}, V. 23, 5 (Jun. 27, 1950).

\textsuperscript{536} \textit{FRUS} 1950, Vol. VI: 415 (Telegram Secretary of State to Embassy in India, Aug. 3, 1950).
[The United States Congress has appropriated for military assistance in the Far East approximately one-half billion dollars. In view of the importance of the operations in Indochina, the major part of this sum is being used to provide military equipment, including light bombers, for the armed forces both of France and of the Associated States of Indochina.

This assistance will provide a very important part of the equipment required by the forces contemplated for activation in 1951 in France and for current operations in Indochina. Deliveries of equipment are being expedited and, with respect to Indochina, a particularly high priority has been assigned.537

In late November, the United States announced the extension of military aid directly to the Associated States of Indochina.538 On December 23, 1950 the United States reached agreement with France and the Associated States of Indochina calling for mutual defense assistance. Franco-American consultation regarding Indochina continued through the early 1950s, resulting in occasional public statements noting the importance of Indochina to the free world and providing for increased military assistance.539 During 1951 the United States looked into the development of a collective security alliance in the region to help deter Chinese advances; however, support at the time was lacking, resulting in the United States instead concluding bilateral treaties with Japan and the Philippines, and a trilateral pact with Australia and New Zealand.

U.S. military assistance to Indochina was repeatedly reviewed and increased between 1950 and 1954.540 In February 1952, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed calling for provision of $200 million of American military equipment to French forces in Indochina.541

537 Ibid., 893 (Editorial Note quoting DSB, Oct. 30, 1950, 704).

538 DSB V. 23, 940 (Dec. 11, 1950).


In June 1952, Secretary Acheson publicly warned that if the Chinese intervened in Indochina, the United States would respond.\footnote{Foot, 180.} In July 1952, the American Ambassador to India told Nehru that Chinese intervention in Indochina “would in all probability touch off much broader and explosive military action.”\footnote{FRUS 1952-1954, Vol. XIII: 221 (Telegram Ambassador India to DOS, Jul. 11, 1952).} Given the relatively close ties between the Chinese and the Indian Ambassador in Peiping, communications to the Indian government were a proxy for communications with the PRC; thus, such a statement would be assumed to be passed on to Mao.


As the Korean armistice negotiations began to show signs of movement in spring 1953, American officials asserted that an armistice on the peninsula followed by Chinese intervention in Indochina would result in America’s shedding the restraints observed so far on attacking mainland China.\footnote{DSB V. 28, 605 (Apr. 27, 1953)(Dulles speech of April 16, 1953).} On March 28, 1953 a communiqué was issued following French-American talks on Indochina in which the following warning was given:

Should the Chinese Communist regime take advantage of a [Korean] armistice to pursue aggressive war elsewhere in the Far East, such action would have the most serious consequences for the efforts to bring about peace in the world and would conflict directly with the understanding on which any armistice in Korea would rest.\footnote{FRUS 1952-1954, Vol. XIII: 436-37 (Communiqué, Mar. 28, 1953).}

Following the Korean armistice, the United States continued to state that the introduction of PRC troops into Indochina would constitute a breach of the armistice. However, in a speech in St. Louis during September, Secretary Dulles noted for the first time that intervention by the PRC in Indochina would result in “grave consequences which might not be confined to

\footnote{Foot, 180.}
Indochina.’’ This warning was reiterated the next day and again in December. Thus, U.S. declaratory policy explicitly threatened China that the protected sanctuary afforded during the Korean conflict would not be repeated should the PLA intervene in Indochina.

To make clear the American commitment not to withdraw from Asia once an armistice in the Korean War had been officially recognized, Eisenhower and Dulles increased the share of mutual security funding going to the Far East. Whereas under Truman and Acheson, the east had received less than ten percent of foreign military assistance appropriations, the new administration sought to triple this. The share of military assistance going to the Pacific area rose from 14 percent in fiscal 1953 to 38 percent in fiscal 1954 under Eisenhower. Congress originally allocated $400 million in military assistance to the French backed governments in Indochina for fiscal year 1954; however, following the armistice in Korea and the increased fighting in Vietnam and Laos, it passed a supplemental funding bill providing an additional $385 million. By March 1954, the United States was providing nearly eighty percent of the funding for the war in Indochina.

In February 1954, President Eisenhower undercut the deterrence policy he had helped put in place when he stated the following during a news conference:

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547 DSB V. 29, 342 (Secretary of State Speech before the American Legion in St. Louis, Missouri, Sep. 14, 1953). This speech was approved in advance by the President. FRUS 1952-1954, Vol. XIII: 782 (NSC Meeting, Sep. 9, 1953).

548 DSB V. 29, 405 (Oct. 5, 1953) Address of Undersecretary of State on Sep. 15, 1953; Kalicki, 83.


550 Secretary of Defense Semiannual Report, January 1 to June 30, 1954: 58. It should also be noted that Marshall Plan spending ended in this period as well, thereby affecting the percentages of aid.


552 The U.S. tab was $1.4 billion compared to French expenditures of $394 million for fiscal year 1954. Kalicki, 102.
No one could be more bitterly opposed to ever getting the United States involved in a hot war in that region than I am; consequently, every move that I authorize is calculated, as far as humans can do it, to make certain that that does not happen.

... I cannot conceive of a greater tragedy for America than to get heavily involved now in an all-out war in any of those regions, particularly with large units.\(^{553}\)

By making such remarks publicly, Eisenhower unwittingly placed tremendous obstacles in the way of providing a clear and credible deterrent to the Chinese. Concerned about relations with Congress and avoiding the impression that the French were out-bargaining the United States in getting nearly $800 million dollars, Eisenhower was likely intending to send a message to Paris that he would not be bullied or threatened into committing U.S. troops; however, that message undoubtedly was received by both friends and enemies in Indochina as well. Shortly thereafter, the United States transferred two American destroyers to the ROC fleet, furthering the idea that the United States was following a policy of building up indigenous militaries through arms transfers and funding due to a reluctance to deploy American forces.\(^{554}\)

In March 1954, the Secretary of State noted:

The imposition on Southeast Asia of the political system of Communist Russia and its Chinese Communist ally, by whatever means, would be a grave threat to the whole free community. The United States feels that that possibility should not be passively accepted, but should be met by united action. This might involve serious risks. But these risks are far less than those that will face us a few years from now, if we dare not be resolute today.\(^{555}\)

As the siege at Dien Bien Phu continued into April, Secretary Dulles noted in a press conference that the use of Chinese soldiers manning anti-aircraft artillery was coming close to creating a situation calling for an “all-out American response.”\(^{556}\)

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\(^{554}\) DSB V. 30, 398 (Mar. 15, 1954) (Address of Secretary of State Far Eastern Affairs, Feb. 20, 1954, at which U.S. destroyers turned over to ROC).


\(^{556}\) FRUS 1952-1954, Vol. XIII: 1267 (Referred to in Telegram from Ambassador India to DOS, Apr. 6, 1954).
highlighted American military assistance to the French, promising continued support of money and materiel to the area as might be requested.\textsuperscript{557} Yang Kuisong specifically notes the March 29\textsuperscript{th} and April 5\textsuperscript{th} statements of Dulles as influencing Mao to “abandon his thought of expanding the war in Indochina.”\textsuperscript{558}

By mid-April it was becoming apparent that despite sustaining massive casualties, the Viet Minh were likely going to be able to force a French surrender at Dien Bien Phu absent U.S. intervention. Finding a decided lack of allied support for such a move and unwilling to intervene unilaterally, particularly given the likelihood of French withdrawal in any event, the United States began to emphasize the need for collective defense in the region. In mid-April, successive joint American communiqués with the English and the French announced that the United States was looking into the possibility of establishing a regional collective security organization in Southeast Asia in an attempt to deter China.\textsuperscript{559} The United States continued to assert that intervention of Chinese troops would be a grave threat, but it now coupled this with reference to meeting the threat through “unity of will and, if need be, unity of action.”\textsuperscript{560} Thailand publicly embraced the idea, providing evidence that the notion was not merely rhetoric but might be a policy capable of rapid implementation.\textsuperscript{561} This was followed by publication of an off-the-record statement by Vice President Nixon advocating the use of American troops in Indochina in the event of French withdrawal.\textsuperscript{562} However, in May, the United States retreated as Secretary Dulles


\textsuperscript{558} Kuisong, 7.


\textsuperscript{560} DSB V. 30, 582-83 (Apr. 19, 1954); DSB V. 30, 589 (Apr. 19, 1954).


\textsuperscript{562} FRUS 1952-1954, Vol. XIII: 1346-47 (Memo Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern Affairs to Secretary of State, Apr. 17, 1954). A DOS press release was immediately released attempting to minimize the Vice President’s statements by characterizing them as only one of several
noted, “The present conditions [in Indochina] do not provide a suitable basis for the United States to participate with its armed forces.” Moreover, Dulles stressed that collective action was required: American military force would not be introduced unilaterally. In this regard, Dulles announced the United States would renew consultations with friendly governments in the region as to the development of a Western Pacific collective security pact. Hedging his bets, Dulles did note that should PLA troops intervene in Indochina, the situation would be different and America stood by prior statements that such intervention would have grave consequences.

American officials held meetings with allies regarding the situation in Indochina in an attempt to signal American interests, but the lack of allied enthusiasm for military action resulted in an ambiguous message. The United States was behind defending Indochina conditioned on the French grant of independence to Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, but most European allies were unwilling to spend resources in Southeast Asia. Following Dien Bien Phu, French officials had little stomach for maintaining a defense of Indochina and during the Geneva Conference, effectively abandoned their hopes of a future role in the region. The United States attempted to communicate free world resolve to stand up to communist aggression through such measures as publicly increasing military assistance to Thailand during the week prior to the conclusion of the conference and through its subsequent dissent and refusal to join in the Geneva agreement, but allied support was minimal.


Ibid., 2395 (Secretary of State Speech, Jun. 11, 1954).

S. Zhang, 167.

Regarding increased military aid to Thailand, see DSB V. 31: 125 (Jul. 26, 1954).
U.S. declaratory deterrence policy was mixed during this period. Military assistance agreements indicated American interests, but under the Truman Administration, there was little public discussion of consequences to a Chinese intervention. When Eisenhower took office, the threats became more clear during the first year. Only toward the end, did the United States begin to retreat from earlier statements; however, by this time, the danger of direct Chinese intervention was abating due to the success of the Viet Minh. Kalicki asserts that the U.S. message regarding U.S. policy toward Indochina was ambiguous because of the variation in tone emanating from administration leaders, identifying Eisenhower as moderate, Secretary of State Dulles as hostile, and Chairman of the JCS Radford as particularly hostile. 569 However, the direct identification of what should be avoided and what consequences such action would produce was relatively clear under Eisenhower. Moreover, the American expenditure of approximately $15 billion in the defense of South Korea provided strong evidence of American determination not to abandon the region to communism. 570

Deterrence Outcome

On May 7, 1954, the French surrendered at Dien Bien Phu. Negotiations in Geneva between the interested parties had already begun. With the French surrender, the loss of the northern part of Vietnam was a fait accompli. The questions to be determined at Geneva were the extent of territory to be officially ceded to the communists, and the procedures to follow concerning attempted unification. Having lost on the battlefield, the French proceeded to capitulate at the bargaining table as well, resulting in an agreement that the United States refused to even sign. 571 On July 21, 1954 the Geneva Accords were signed by the combatants, bringing into effect a cease fire in Vietnam, a division of the country along the 17th parallel, and plans for unification elections in Vietnam within 2 years as well as the neutrality of independent Cambodian and Laotian states. That the communists never planned on abiding by these

569 Kalicki, 86.

570 See DSB V. 29, 521 (Oct. 19, 1953) (Address of Assistant Secretary of State for Far East Affairs in New York, Oct. 9, 1953, citing $15 billion figure).

agreements is made clear by Zhou’s statement to Pham Van Dong in July, urging the Viet Minh not to argue over whether the division occurred at the 16th or 17th parallel, as “after French withdrawal, the whole of Vietnam will be yours.”

Although the Viet Minh were disinclined to accept a division of Vietnam given their recent battlefield successes, both the Chinese and the Soviets counseled Ho to sign on to the agreement. Mao had exhausted his resources in the civil war followed by the Korean War and, given the new Soviet interest in pursuing peaceful coexistence, was constrained in the amount of materiel assistance he could now count on receiving from Moscow should the situation in Indochina flare up. Moreover, with the armistice in Korea holding, Mao was intent on returning attention to China’s claim to Taiwan. By securing his immediate southern border so as to remove the immediate threat to his southern flank from a western government as well as eliminating a base of operations for KMT refugees, Mao had accomplished his primary goals. The Soviets had never established close relations with Ho; thus, with Khrushchev focused on consolidating power in the Kremlin and relaxing international tensions, Soviet advisors pushed for settlement in Indochina as well.

Still concerned with the possibility of direct Chinese entry into Indochina, Dulles proceeded to follow through with a collective security pact aimed at deterring Chinese ambitions. In September 1954, the Manila Pact establishing the South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) was concluded, providing an explicit American commitment to its steadfast allies in the region, the Philippines, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, and Pakistan. Because of prohibitions contained in the Geneva Accords, Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam were prevented from entering into the alliance; however, in a protocol to the Manila Pact, the United


573 Ibid., 58-59.

574 Regarding peaceful coexistence, see Malenkov’s 1954 public statement rejecting the Leninist claim that war was an “unavoidable byproduct of capitalism.” Kalicki, 96.

575 France and Great Britain rounded out SEATO’s membership.
States extended SEATO’s requirements to the free states of Indochina in order to deter communist expansion.

The balance of capabilities favored the United States in this matter; although as in Korea, the American political decision to abstain from making full use of these capabilities permitted a much more even field of battle. For much of the period, Chinese capabilities were tied up in Korea. Lacking the rapid mobility of a modern military power, commitment of Chinese resources to one theater eliminated the possibility of dual use, unlike the American air power that could conduct operations in Korea and Indochina simultaneously. Additionally, the Chinese lacked the same Soviet backing they might have counted on in Korea, as the relationship between Moscow and the Viet Minh was far more distant than that between Moscow and Pyongyang, both geographically and politically. Yet, the style of combat employed in Indochina was akin to the tactics used by Mao during the Chinese civil war, giving him confidence that he could use guerrilla warfare to overcome technological inferiority.

As in the other contested arenas, China’s proximity to Indochina enhanced its interests in the region. However, unlike Korea, even should the communists take all of Indochina, they would still find themselves sharing a border with a strong western ally in Thailand and a maritime border with British controlled Malaya. Thus, Mao’s primary interests were in securing the immediate Chinese border in the Tonkin region, establishing a foundation for future Chinese regional hegemony, and acquiring a reputation for devotion to socialist internationalism in order to push him toward his desired role as head of the communist world globally. Matched against American interests in demonstrating resolve and preventing aggressive communist expansion, it would appear Mao’s interests outweighed those of the United States.

The United States was risk averse in this case given its ongoing commitment in Korea and the Taiwan Straits and its lack of historical ties to Indochina. Moreover, given the limited capabilities of the military as the United States began to remobilize, further dispersal of American power would be of serious concern. As most other Asian states were dissatisfied with the tenor of French decolonization efforts, unqualified support of the French risked diminishing U.S. prestige across the third world. When coupled with the balance of capabilities and interests, the American deterrent in this case would have been only marginally credible.
U.S. declaratory policy was surprisingly clear in this case, as both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations warned the Chinese that direct intervention would result in an American response. Moreover, diplomatic agreements and alliances made clear the U.S. intent to avoid withdrawal. Still, this clarity may have been born of the fact that Chinese intervention was unlikely due to continuing French failures against the Viet Minh. In the event, American officials attributed the absence of intervention to successful American deterrence, citing the warnings issued the prior fall.\footnote{American Foreign Policy 1950-1955: Basic Documents, Vol. II: 2387 (Secretary of State Speech, May 7, 1954).}

Mao’s risk acceptant attitude toward intervention in Indochina at this time was offset by the lack of need. Chinese materiel and financial assistance seemed likely to accomplish Mao’s goals without the need to challenge the United States. Thus, although of questionable credibility, the clarity of the U.S. declaratory deterrent was sufficient within the context to keep Mao from crossing the border and overwhelming the French defenders.

**North Vietnamese Intervention in Laos, 1950-54**

The Viet Minh created and maintained the Pathet Lao in the late 1940s and early 1950s. No significant indigenous nationalist movement existed in Laos following the disbandment of the Lao Issara in 1949, in large part as the French had been only nominally in charge in most regions of the country.\footnote{See e.g. Sisouk Na Champassak, Storm Over Laos (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1961), 27; \textit{FRUS} 1950, Vol. VI: 716 (Memo from Secretary of State to President, Feb. 2, 1950)(noting lack of significant revolutionary movement in Laos or Cambodia); \textit{DSB} V. 28 709 (May 18, 1953), (Press Release of Lao Government, May 5, 1953 noting dissolution of Lao Issara in 1949 and disassociating Souphanouvong and the Viet Minh from the Lao people).} Thus, the Royalist Lao government found itself competing with the Viet Minh for the loyalty of various tribes scattered throughout the administrative state of Laos.\footnote{Langer and Zasloff, 46-47.} Small-scale communist activity continued in northern and eastern Laos through fall 1952; however, no major campaigns were launched during this period. Preparatory action for a
full scale invasion began in fall 1952 with Ho’s initiation of the northwest campaign clearing the way between northern Vietnam and Laos. In March and April 1953, Giap led an assault into Laos aimed at the ancient capital in Luang Prabang, followed by an attack on the Plain of Jars.\footnote{Zhai, \textit{China and the Vietnam Wars}, 43.} With the coming of rainy season in May, the Viet Minh were forced to retreat across the border; however, they stashed food and ammunition caches before leaving, suggesting a planned return once the new campaign season began in the fall. In early 1954, the Viet Minh again invaded Laos in large numbers, threatening Luang Prabang as well as the administrative capital Vientiane.

**Goals**

Ho’s immediate goals in invading Laos were to weaken the French by opening another front, and to obtain ease of movement for Viet Minh guerrillas seeking to move through eastern Laos in order to infiltrate southern Vietnam and establish a secure line of supply for existing Viet Minh guerrilla units in the south. In addition, he sought to establish Vietnamese dominance in Laos in furtherance of his desire to place himself at the head of a united Indochina.

The United States sought to limit communist expansion into Laos due to the long border between Laos and Thailand. Although the Thais had cooperated with the Japanese government during World War II, in the post-war era their image had been transformed from imperial lackeys into independent, anti-communist stronghold. Should Laos fall, it would be difficult to prevent communist penetration into Thailand, and from there into Burma. Thus, the United States sought to prevent Viet Minh expansion into Laos that might threaten the royal government, although it was less concerned with border violations along the Vietnamese-Laotian border. In other words, the U.S. was not attempting to deter the border crossing, but was attempting to deter threats to the continued existence of the Royal government and to the independent state of Thailand.

**Capabilities**

*Communist forces:* The Viet Minh provided arms and training to the Pathet Lao from their post World War II creation through the early 1950s.\footnote{Langer and Zasloff, 35-38.} However, as Ho was dependent on

\footnote{Zhai, \textit{China and the Vietnam Wars}, 43.}

\footnote{Langer and Zasloff, 35-38.}
Chinese materiel assistance, the weapons given to the Pathet Lao were basically a limited number of small arms. Between 1951 and 1954, the PRC transferred 82,000 tons of small arms to Ho, permitting Ho to move some along to Laos.\(^{581}\) In 1951-52 Pathet Lao operations in Laos were minimal. In November 1952 the Laotian King asserted there were no more than 500 Viet Minh left in Laos, making the conflict to the east a Vietnamese affair rather than an Indochina war.\(^{582}\) However, in spring 1953, the Viet Minh opened a new offensive in Laos, reintroducing a sizable Vietnamese presence therein. By fall 1953, the Chinese were toning down their earlier discouragement of more aggressive Viet Minh actions in Laos, and by winter, PLA advisors were actually urging the Viet Minh to continue actions in Laos and push south into Cambodia, so as to place the communists in as strong a position as possible when heading into the planned negotiations in summer 1954.\(^{583}\) Mao promised to provide Ho with the weaponry needed to confront the French forces in larger battles, including artillery pieces as well as some tanks.\(^{584}\)

**Royal Lao and United States forces:** Because of the French perception that Laos offered little profit potential, Laos was still woefully underdeveloped in the 1950s. The Royal Lao government had negligible military capability matching its minimal governing authority in many areas outside the immediate Vientiane area. An absence of lines of communication made it nearly impossible to project power throughout the country in any event. Existing roadways tended to travel in an east-west direction rather than north-south, permitting easier transit for the Viet Minh than the Royal Lao into Luang Prabang.\(^{585}\) In 1950, the new Lao government had a


\(^{582}\) *FRUS* 1952-1954, Vol. XIII: 299 (Telegram Ambassador Saigon to DOS, Nov. 22, 1952). The accuracy of this is a matter of debate. See e.g. Langland, 632 (asserting presence of four Viet Minh battalions in Laos for training purposes).

\(^{583}\) Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 44-46.

\(^{584}\) Ibid., 45.

\(^{585}\) Langer and Zasloff, 15.
single aircraft at its disposal, and virtually no armored ground vehicles.\textsuperscript{586} As of early 1952, the Lao army consisted of less than 10,000 troops, with less than 100 Lao officers.\textsuperscript{587} Even after reports in late 1952 of the Viet Minh bypassing the delta area in Tonkin and using Laos as an alternative route to Annam, the Laotian military remained only 12,000 strong, supplemented by a National Guard of approximately 6,000.\textsuperscript{588}

Having already suffered an invasion during the campaign season of 1953, the Laotian military was still woefully under-equipped the next season. Although the number of troops had doubled to approximately 24,000 with the same 6,000 strong National Guard, the defense of Laos was still in the hands of France. Absent airlift of French forces to defend Luang Prabang, made possible by the American loan of thirteen C-47 transports and six C-119 “flying boxcars,” the Viet Minh could have easily taken the entire county.\textsuperscript{589}

U.S. capabilities were far superior to anything the Pathet Lao and Viet Minh could amass, but the will of the United States to use these capabilities was in serious doubt. Moreover, the Viet Minh excursions into Laos were generally guerrilla operations for which the United States had little training. The rear area most vulnerable to American air power was in China - an area America political leaders had declared off limits. Tanks, heavy artillery or other modern weapons were of limited use in fighting a guerrilla enemy whose base was secure for political reasons.

\textsuperscript{586} \textit{FRUS} 1950, Vol. VI: 728 (OIC Saigon to Secretary of State, Feb. 13, 1950).


\textsuperscript{588} Ibid., 320 (U.S. Summary of Ministerial Meeting as NATO Council, Dec. 15-18, 1952); Ibid., 415 (Telegram Charge Vientiane to DOS, Mar. 19, 1953). Regarding reports of Viet Minh in Laos, see Ibid., 316 (Telegram Ambassador UK to Secretary of State, Dec. 15, 1952); Ibid., 323 (Memo Conversation Secretary of State, Dec. 22, 1952).

\textsuperscript{589} Regarding the loan of U.S. planes, see Leighton, 523.
The United States did attempt to support the military capabilities of the Royal Lao government. In September 1953, the United States agreed to provide the French with an additional $385 million in furtherance of the Navarre Plan.\textsuperscript{590}

**Interests**

*Viet Minh:* Ho’s main interests in Laos were twofold. First, he sought to establish communist control over the northern and eastern regions of Laos so as to protect his own flanks and to permit his forces to move freely in these areas in order to infiltrate southern Vietnam via Laos. Second, Ho sought to establish Viet Minh control over all of Indochina. With limited forces, Ho could not hope to occupy Laos indefinitely, but might place his Pathet Lao followers in control.

On a second level, Ho was beholden to Soviet and Chinese interests if he was to continue to receive materiel aid. By expanding into Laos and threatening Thailand, the communists would likely force the United States to either commit troops to Thailand to ensure its defense or abandon Southeast Asia north of Malaya. Either decision represented a relatively cheap gain for the Soviets. Should Washington abandon Thailand, U.S. prestige would suffer markedly throughout Asia. If the Americans chose to defend Thailand, additional U.S. troops would be pinned down outside the European theater for an indefinite length of time. Mao would have been less enamored of bringing American troops to Thailand, but with no Sino-Thai border and with Mao’s dependence on Soviet aid in the ongoing Korean War, he would have been unlikely to press any grievances with the Kremlin over Viet Minh expansion into Laos. Later, Mao would attempt to undermine Soviet and Viet Minh influence in Laos by establishing his own channels of communication with Laotian communists.

Finally, the relatively unfortified Laos-Vietnam border made operations against Laotian border towns militarily easy. Thus, actions against Laos served propaganda functions in that they provided victories that could be used to boost communist morale while simultaneously undermining that of the west, and they suggested an unstoppable offensive constantly expanding into new nations.

\textsuperscript{590} Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 44.
**United States:** U.S. interests in preventing Viet Minh intervention in Laos were basically the same as the American interests in preventing Chinese intervention in Indochina. The twist was in deterring the different form of communist aggression. Should the Viet Minh successfully take Laos, communist minorities in other Southeast Asian states might be emboldened to revolt against existing governments. Despite the fact that there was no true indigenous Laotian communist movement, propaganda efforts of the communists would characterize the revolt as entirely local.

Laos and Cambodia were of little inherent interest to the United States. Neither possessed significant economic potential other than opium profits. Most onlookers considered Laos to be a lesser part of the Vietnam problem; that is, if Vietnam should fall, Laos would undoubtedly fall as well. Even Thailand, the state with arguably the most to lose in the event of a communist victory in Laos was reluctant to distinguish events in Laos from those in Vietnam. Lao government officials admitted that ideology was of minor importance to the people; rather, they would “tend to align themselves with the side which appeared strongest.” Yet this political indifference did not translate into geographic indifference.

Geographically, Laos was important in that it provided a buffer between Vietnam and Thailand that the United States sought to maintain. Approximately five million Lao populated northeast Thailand, worrying Thai officials that Viet Minh control over Laos could be used to appeal to the Lao in Thailand to form a fifth column. Second, control over Laos would allow the Viet Minh to surround Tonkin from three sides, making it likely that operations in

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591 *FRUS* 1950, Vol. VI: 724 (Telegram from Ambassador in Thailand to Secretary of State, Feb. 8, 1950 regarding Thai recognition of Bao Dai government as well as new independent governments in Laos and Cambodia).

592 Ibid., 727 (Telegram Officer in Charge Saigon to Secretary of State, Feb. 13, 1950).


Vietnam would have to be scaled back to more defensible positions no farther north than central Annam.

Risk Propensity

By 1950, U.S. policymakers saw Ho Chi Minh as a communist rather than a nationalist. A common argument advanced in the literature surrounding U.S. involvement in Vietnam has been that Ho was first and foremost a nationalist and that the United States missed the opportunity to win Ho to its side by failing to oppose French imperialism following World War II.\(^595\) By this argument, the Soviet advances in Europe and Mao’s success in China created a scare causing Americans to see any challenges to western order as communist inspired. While this may have been at work to some degree, in this case the argument ignores the fact that Ho was a communist party member since the 1920s, serving in the Comintern in Europe, China and the Soviet Union prior to returning to Vietnam. As stated by American Ambassador Loy Henderson during an address at New Delhi in March 1950,

> It is impossible, in the opinion of the United States, for a Communist in the Moscow sense of the term to be a genuine nationalist. My government is convinced that any movement headed by a Moscow-recognized Communist such as Ho Chi Minh must be in the direction of subservience to a foreign state, not in that of independence or self-government.\(^596\)

Despite the assertions contained in the Truman Doctrine, the United States was reluctant to become involved in conflicts that appeared as nationalist rebellions. With the Viet Minh receiving favorable treatment in world press due to myopic French policies and successful communist propaganda, Indochina appeared as just this type of conflict. Even in the Philippines, America’s closest and most reliable Asian ally, the United States avoided sending combat troops to participate in operations against the Huk rebellion, despite significant Huk gains during 1949-1951.\(^597\) Accordingly, the United States was averse to committing combat troops in conflicts that at least had the appearance of civil wars.

\(^{595}\) See e.g. Stoessinger (1978).

\(^{596}\) DSB V. 22, 565 (Speech by Ambassador Henderson, Mar. 27, 1950).

\(^{597}\) The Huks, short for *Hukbong Magpapalya ng Bayan* (National Liberation Army), were a communist guerrilla movement that emerged out of the *Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon*
In late 1952, U.S. officials became concerned over potential Viet Minh incursions into northeast Laos. The Viet Minh were assessed to be capable of controlling the border areas at will, while Laotian forces were considered of little combat value. In March 1953, these concerns came to a head as Viet Minh units pushed past the border into the northeast provinces, followed in April by a move toward the traditional capital of Luang Prabang. French officials informed their American counterparts that they wanted the King to evacuate Luang Prabang due to fears it might be captured by the advancing communist force. However, the French refused to take the matter up before the UN as suggested by the United States, fearing that the UN would simply provide a forum for other states to condemn France’s continued imperialist policies. The expatriate Laotian Prince Souphanouvong, in concert with the Viet Minh, set up a resistance government in Sam Neua in April. Thereafter, the Viet Minh withdrew in mid-May from most of Laos, more likely due to the onset of rainy season then to deterrence or military opposition. (People’s Army Against Japan) front from World War II. The Huk movement made steady gains in the late 1940s and early 1950s until the appointment of Ramon Magsaysay as Philippines Minister of Defense. Combining social and political offensives with targeted military operations and American intelligence assistance, Magsaysay completely crushed the Huk rebellion by early 1954. See Clifton W. Sherrill, *Insurgency, Secession and Encroachment: Contemporary National Security in the Republic of the Philippines*, Thesis (Southwest Missouri State University, 2000), 112-118.


599 Ibid., 337 (Memo Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern Affairs to Under Secretary of State, Dec. 30, 1952).

600 Ibid., 490 (Telegram Secretary of State to DOS, Apr. 23, 1953); Ibid., 491 (Telegram Charge in Saigon to DOS, Apr. 24, 1953).

601 Ibid., 543 (Telegram Secretary of State to Embassy France, May, 6, 1953).

602 Toye, 85.

603 Ibid., 86; Lack of supply and fatigue may also have played a role in the Viet Minh withdrawal. FRUS 1952-1954, Vol. XIII: 559 (Telegram Charge Laos, to DOS, May 9, 1953).
Summer of 1953 saw the appointment of a new French Commander in Indochina, General Navarre, who promised a more aggressive offensive-oriented approach in Indochina. Adopting a set of principles that came to be known as the Navarre Plan, he sought to create additional strike forces, avoid dispersing and immobilizing troops in isolated strong points, and retake the initiative throughout the region. American officials were originally pleased with the new commander, but as French actions failed to match the announced approach the early optimism gave way to a more realistic assessment of French intentions.

Believing the Viet Minh would attack Laos again, Navarre dropped six battalions of paratroops at Dien Bien Phu in November 1953 to block the northern entry to Laos and firm up the French position at Lai Chau. Over the next four months, both the French and the Viet Minh built up their forces around Dien Bien Phu. The French hoped to lure the Viet Minh into a regular engagement, believing the French forces would not lose a pitched battle. However, simultaneously, the French government in Paris had announced a willingness to negotiate with Ho Chi Minh and was proceeding on a diplomatic path toward abandoning Indochina. While building up at Dien Bien Phu, the Viet Minh pushed a small attack group into central Laos in December 1953. Increasing to a size of nearly fourteen battalions, the Viet Minh again threatened Luang Prabang, causing Paris to issue statements concerning its feared downfall despite the field Commander’s confidence in its defense. French and Laotian units were able to hold the line against the Viet Minh invaders throughout February.

The repeated threats to Laos were framed against a reference point of French imperial Laos. With no economic interest in Laos, the United States was working against a blank slate. Thus, the interest was almost wholly in Thailand. There, the issue was framed as defending the only state in Southeast Asia that has maintained independence over the prior century and that currently was a valued U.S. ally in the region. Accordingly, permitting the collapse of Laos so
as to have the communists directly across the border from Thailand would be seen as a significant loss, leading to greater risk acceptance for the United States.

**Declaratory Policy**

In response to the April 1953 invasion of Laos, the United States issued the following statement:

> [The United States] expresses its sympathy with the people of Laos in their present emergency and its fervent wishes to them, to their troops, and to those of the French Union in their efforts to resist and turn back the invaders. The United States will continue to provide and will study ways and means of making more effective its assistance to the Associated States of Indochina and to France in the struggle to destroy Communist aggression in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.  

In May, American cargo aircraft were dispatched to the nationalist government in Hanoi to aid in operations in Laos. A press statement was issued by the State Department announcing that the United States “had already taken steps to expedite the delivery of critically needed military items to the forces defending Laos.” Shortly thereafter, Undersecretary of State Smith noted that the U.S. government was “in close contact with the governments of Laos and France” and was “determined to do all in our means under present circumstances to help them meet the situation.”

Following the Viet Minh incursion into Laos, the U.S. increased military assistance to Thailand, including provision of military equipment directly to the Thai government to help secure the Thai eastern flank. Military assistance, including ammunition, was sent to Thailand on an expedited basis to meet the requests of the Thai government. Official U.S. policy held

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607 DSB V. 28, 708 (May 18, 1953) (Press Statement of Secretary Dulles, May 9, 1953).


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that the situation in Indochina “threatened the security of the United States and its allies in the Pacific area,” calling the area “vital the peace and safety of the United States.”

Significantly, the United States supported bringing the matter before the United Nations, whether via French or Thai introduction; however, the French government opposed such a move on the basis that discussion in the UN would simply digress into attacks on French colonialism. Thus, the declaratory policy that might have emerged via a UN resolution was never permitted to come to fruition.

On February 10, 1954, in response to the Vietnamese infiltration into Laos, President Eisenhower publicly stated that he was “doing all he could” to avoid U.S. involvement in Indochina. Yet just five days later, the American Far East Air Forces Commander, General Weyland, noted the dispatch of twelve B-26 bombers and some 250 American technicians to Indochina to assist the French. Thereafter, Viet Minh forces concentrated efforts on Dien Bien Phu, reducing the threat to Laos and Thailand, and keeping the United States from having to make a decision as to intervention.

**Deterrence Outcome**

The key point turned out to be the northwestern outpost of Dien Bien Phu. In response to Ho’s northwestern campaign, the French decided to fortify the Dien Bien Phu post in hopes of preventing the establishment of a secure line of communication between Luang Prabang and the Viet Minh strongholds in north-central Vietnam. Ho decided to directly confront the French at Dien Bien Phu in hopes of dealing the French a devastating blow. As Viet Minh forces converged around the post, Admiral Radford threatened American aerial intervention, successfully discouraging some Vietnamese officers from pursuing a fully committed attack. 

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613 Kalicki, 99.

614 Ibid., 100.

Thus, the failed January 1954 Viet Minh offensive resulted in the Chinese decision to deploy anti-aircraft artillery units in anticipation of retaliatory U.S. air strikes so as to bolster Viet Minh courage.

When the French refused to comply with American conditions for military assistance and the British showing no signs of acceding to plans for allied intervention, the French defeat became inevitable. The final Viet Minh assault of May 1 led to the surrender of the French one week later. In Laos, “regroupment zones” were established in the Sam Neua (Xam Nua) and Phong Saly (Phongsali) areas adjacent to Vietnam, to which Pathet Lao forces were to be permitted safe passage. All foreign forces, including Viet Minh, were to be removed from Laos and Cambodia, with both countries adopting neutral governments and avoiding military alliances.\textsuperscript{616} In the event, the Viet Minh led Pathet Lao remained an active organization in control of the northwest provinces.

The balance of capabilities in this crisis favored the United States, although the limitations American officials set for themselves drastically reduced the U.S. advantage. Refusal to commit American ground forces even in the event of a Viet Minh invasion left a deterrent threat based solely on airpower. As the Viet Minh were not technically a governing entity with responsibility over specific territory, this meant the target set for aerial attack was effectively limited to military units. However, as the Viet Minh operated almost always in small mobile units, this meant the United States would have great difficulty locating suitable targets.\textsuperscript{617} French forces in Laos were concentrated in strong points, leaving most of the territory to the Viet Minh. Thus, unless willing to escalate above its threats, the balance of capabilities was far more even than would appear at first blush.

The balance of interests was likely in favor of the defenders. Ho’s driving motivation was to disperse French forces and overtax French defensive capabilities. Although the Chinese and Soviets may have sought greater expansion into Laos, for Ho the operations in Vietnam were

\textsuperscript{616} A force of five thousand French soldiers was permitted to remain in Laos to help build the Laotian military.

\textsuperscript{617} Even when the Viet Minh used forces of battalion size or larger, they did not travel or mass in such units until reaching the objective, retaining the mobility initiative in Von Moltkian fashion.
of primary importance. Conversely, the United States had accepted communist control of the northern region of Vietnam outside the Hanoi-Haiphong delta region, but was particularly concerned over a potential push into Laos due to the potential effects in Thailand. When the Viet Minh crossed the border, U.S. officials were anxious as to any further extension of the offensive. Had the communists actually seized Luang Prabang, American forces may have been dispatched to Thailand for deployment in Laos.

U.S. risk propensity was unclear. While undoubtedly viewing Viet Minh invasion of Laos as a loss, the lack of allied support, the minimal domestic public support, the commitment in Korea, and the lack of commitment in Vietnam all worked against committing U.S. troops to the protection of Laos. Yet, Washington recognized that the line had to be drawn somewhere, and the new administration was likely anxious to demonstrate it would not be so soft in Asia as it accused the Truman administration of being. Thus, when the Viet Minh crossed into Laos in spring 1953, Dulles and Eisenhower may have been willing to send a strong signal had the weather not turned, ending the offensive.

As Ho was very risk acceptant in this event, and as neither the capabilities nor interests were perceived as overwhelming, only a crystal-clear declaratory policy would have been apt to influence Ho. Such a declaratory policy was not issued. American statements were decidedly ambiguous, although actions did support the idea that U.S. force could be involved if the situation in Laos was intensified; however, Ho’s goals were the main reason why he did not pursue additional action.

First Taiwan Straits Crisis, 1954-55

In the retreat to Formosa in December 1949, the KMT occupied numerous islands only a few miles off the Chinese mainland. Included among these were the Tachen islands, the Matsu islands off the coast from the city of Fuzhou, and the Quemoys (also known as the Jinmen, Kinmen or Chinmen islands) off the coast of the port city of Amoy. Located over two hundred miles north of Formosa, the Tachens held no intrinsic value to the defense of Formosa. Conversely the Matsu group and Quemoy group were directly across the Taiwan Strait and thus of far greater significance to Formosa geographically. Together all of these islands were known
as the “offshore islands,” often simply referred to as if there were only two physical islands, Quemoy and Matsu. The major Quemoy island is approximately six kilometers from the mainland, easily within the range of ordinary artillery of the period. The Matsus are slightly farther from the coast, still within distance of the existing long-range artillery, but less vulnerable to precise strikes.

Having forced the Americans back to the 38th parallel and then fought to a standoff in Korea and having assisted the Vietnamese communists in imposing substantial losses on the French leading to a negotiated withdrawal in Geneva in summer 1954, Mao was now able to turn his attention to Taiwan. In September 1954, Communist China began shelling Quemoy. Matsu and the Tachen Islands were also targeted, although throughout the fall no amphibious invasions were attempted. By January 1955, the continued attacks were taking their toll on public opinion in both Taiwan and the United States. Permitting the Chinese communists to retain the initiative while ROC defenders endured constant shelling wreaked of defeatism. Escalatory measures by the Chinese in January brought about a change in American policy leading Washington to adopt a more explicit policy of declaratory deterrence. Tensions continued to mount through the spring, until in April, Zhou Enlai publicly announced China’s desire to lessen tensions at the Bandung Conference.

Goals

China: Although Mao undoubtedly sought to conquer Taiwan eventually, many analysts identify the Chinese goal in 1954 as dissuading the United States from signing a Mutual Defense Treaty with Taiwan. In point of fact, Chiang had been pushing for inclusion in a multilateral Western Pacific security pact since July 1953, and a bilateral defense treaty with the United

618 There were approximately 48 offshore islands held in 1954 by the ROC, although most of these were considered inconsequential. FRUS 1952-54, Vol. XIV: 544 (Memo DOS Policy Planning Staff to Director, Policy Planning Staff, Aug. 20, 1954).


620 Clubb, 519.
States following the conclusion of the U.S. - ROK treaty in October 1953. Others suggest that Mao was showing his displeasure with the conclusion of the SEATO agreement that was to be signed during the Manila conference scheduled to open September 6, 1954. While these reasons may have affected the tactical timing of the shelling, the strategic goals of Mao to take the offshore islands and Taiwan can hardly be in doubt. Mao had tried and failed miserably to take Quemoy in 1949, yet he continued to work toward building up a force capable of mounting a successful operation against the offshore islands. As early as 1952, Mao was developing plans to seize the offshore islands. Moreover, the Manila Pact establishing SEATO was signed in early September 1954 and the bilateral U.S. - ROC defense treaty was signed in early December 1954, yet the PRC escalated the violence in the offshore islands in January 1955. Mao could not have believed that the United States would renege on these promises having formalized American commitments via treaty; thus, mere dissuasion from entering into alliances appears unfounded as the primary goal.

Upon the nationalist evacuation of the Tachen Islands in early February 1955, the communist government responded by noting that the “liberation” of the Tachens aided the PLA in its quest to “liberate” Formosa. In discussions with the British, Zhou Enlai specifically

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621 FRUS 1952-54, Vol. XIV, see the following: 343 (Telegram Ambassador ROC to DOS, Dec. 19, 1953, providing a ROC authored draft); 367 (Telegram Charge ROC to DOS, Feb. 24, 1954); 367 (Memo Asst. Secretary of State Far Eastern to Secretary of State, Feb. 25, 1954); 368 (Memo, Office of Chinese Affairs, Feb. 27, 1954); 399 (Memo Asst. Secretary of State to Secretary of State, Mar. 31, 1954); 407 (Telegram Secretary of State to Embassy ROC, Apr. 8, 1954); 491 (Memo Ambassador ROC to Secretary of State, Jul. 8, 1954).

622 Kalicki, 132; G. Li, 147.

623 A Special National Intelligence Estimate prepared during the first week after shelling began assessed the PRC objective as seizure of the offshore islands. FRUS 1952-54, Vol. XIV: 596 (Special NIE 100-4/1-54, Sep. 10, 1954). This estimate suggested the PRC was uncertain of American intent and would make probing moves, expanding where it found the least resistance. 596-97.

624 S. Zhang, 195.

rejected any attempt to negotiate over the offshore islands, asserting the PRC’s intent to “liberate” them as well. 626 Thus, it is most likely that the attacks on the offshore islands in 1954-55 were designed to test U.S. resolve to defend the KMT in the aftermath of a limited American response in Korea and an American abstention in Indochina. If Mao detected unwillingness to defend the offshore islands, he would most likely have launched a full-scale amphibious invasion thereof, followed by incremental probes against Formosa in the same manner.

United States: The American goals in the Taiwan Straits crisis were to prevent Taiwan from falling into the hands of the communists, to keep the KMT as a viable alternative government of China, and to demonstrate resolve to stand up to the Chinese aggression that had paid off successfully in Korea and Indochina. Accordingly, protection of the offshore islands was of minimal importance for the first of these goals; however, ensuring the communists did not forcefully take the offshore islands was a major factor if the latter two goals were to be met.

Capabilities

Communist forces: PRC military forces totaled nearly two and a half million active troops, most of which were infantry although the air force and navy were each approximately sixty thousand strong. 627 The army included one hundred and sixty infantry divisions, five armored divisions, three parachute divisions, six cavalry divisions and nineteen artillery divisions, along with forty independent regiments and thirty-five independent battalions. 628 The air force had between fifteen hundred and two thousand aircraft available, nearly half of which consisted of Soviet made jet fighters. The navy was primarily a brown water navy, the sole light cruiser in the fleet believed to be out of commission. The most advanced operational vessels were six patrol boats, backed by thousands of old junks, although Soviet assistance including


628 Ibid.
submarines was in the pipeline for delivery.\textsuperscript{629} Backing these forces were public security forces providing an additional million troops or more.\textsuperscript{630}

During this time, the PRC was still “almost totally dependent on the USSR for aircraft and heavy military equipment.”\textsuperscript{631} The economic plan adopted in Beijing had focused on creating heavy industry and transport capacity, but spending on military campaigns had drained the meager national resources.\textsuperscript{632} In addition, the PLA lacked experience in many elements of modern warfare, having conducted a primitive, albeit at times brutally effective, campaign in Korea. Trade restrictions in place in the west prevented the Chinese from obtaining materiel outside the communist bloc. Even there, the inability of the Chinese to pay in hard currency limited the amount of aid China was able to obtain.\textsuperscript{633} Yet, while the technological capability of the Chinese communist military was limited, the sheer size of the Red Army made the PLA an enemy to be reckoned with. Absent American military assistance, the PRC could simply overwhelm the much smaller ROC forces.

American planners assessed the number of Chinese troops necessary for a successful invasion of Quemoy at 150,000 - easily within the capability of the communists as nearly 425,000 troops, many Korean War veterans, were stationed within 150 miles of Amoy.\textsuperscript{634}

\textsuperscript{629} Ibid., 584 (NSC meeting, Sep. 9, 1954). \textit{DSB} V. 32, 753 (Nov. 7, 1955).


\textsuperscript{631} Ibid., 393 (National Intelligence Estimate, 10-2-54, Mar. 15, 1954).


\textsuperscript{633} \textit{FRUS} 1952-54, Vol. XIV: 403 (Background paper from DOS for Geneva Delegation, Apr. 6, 1954).

\textsuperscript{634} Ibid., 584 (NSC meeting, Sep. 9, 1954); Ibid., 566 (Special National Intelligence Estimate 100-4-54, Sep. 4, 1954). Soman, 120, provides a figure of between 160,000 and 200,000 PLA troops within 150 miles of Quemoy.
Moreover, two jet fighter squadrons were located in the vicinity of Amoy.  Despite the lack of modern naval vessels, the JCS still considered the threat of a Chinese amphibious attack serious. Testing in the United States had revealed that sinking an invasion fleet of Chinese junks would be much more difficult than assumed.

Indications of a forthcoming Chinese operation against the offshore islands began to appear in spring 1954. In April, the American Ambassador in Taiwan cabled Washington noting that an attack on the offshore islands would likely be the first move the Chinese made prior to an operation designed to obtain Formosa. In May, the communists occupied previously unfortified islands near the Tachen islands, including Dongji Island to serve as a staging area. Moreover, a concentration of naval vessels and a buildup of ground troops in the area from Linhai to Wenzhou threatened an amphibious invasion of the Tachens. Tensions continued to rise during the summer; by August, the Taiwanese Ambassador was warning of imminent attacks on the Tachens and requesting clarification of what exactly U.S. policy would be.

Soviet conventional forces were still at record highs as Khrushchev had not yet affirmed the political control in Moscow necessary to cut troop strength in favor of higher technology forces. Accordingly, Soviet active duty forces during the first Taiwan Strait Crisis totaled nearly

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635 Estimates differed as to local airpower capabilities of the PRC. Army Chief of Staff Matthew Ridgeway argued that the Chinese could launch an attack force of 550 jets and 150 piston driven fighters, as well as 250 bombers within twelve to eighteen hours. The Chairman of the JCS, Admiral Radford, disagreed, noting American intelligence would have far greater warning of such an assemblage. FRUS 1952-54, Vol. XIV: 606-07 (Memo CJCS to Secretary of Defense, Sep. 11, 1954).

636 Ibid., 356 (Memo recording discussion at NSC Meeting, Feb. 4, 1954).

637 Ibid., 413 (Telegram Ambassador ROC to Deputy Operations Coordinator in the Office of the Undersecretary of State, Apr. 21, 1954).

638 Ibid., 425 (Ambassador ROC to DOS, May, 20, 1954); S. Zhang, 197.


640 Ibid., 550 (Charge ROC to DOS, Aug. 26, 1954).
six million troops. Along with 175 Soviet active combat divisions, the Soviet bloc countries could contribute 230 additional active combat divisions. The Soviets had over 1,100 long range bombers and almost 3,000 shorter range bombers supplemented by over 12,000 tactical aircraft. The Soviet surface fleet was still inferior to the American fleet, with approximately 200 destroyers and another 30 cruisers. The submarine fleet was made up of over 400 vessels.

**ROCV and U.S. forces:** As early as 1950, the KMT had deployed approximately seventy thousand troops in the offshore islands. Despite the overall reduction in KMT troops since 1950, Chiang continued to place a large number of his forces in these island groups. When the shelling began in September, nearly 79,000 of the total 420,000 ROC army troops were stationed in the offshore islands. These troops consisted of some Chiang’s best units, including troops trained by American advisors and equipped with supplies provided via the Mutual Defense

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641 Tsouras, 121; Evangelista, 4, asserts that only 4.8 million troops were authorized and that actual Soviet strength was “significantly less” than this.


643 Ibid.

644 Ibid.

645 *FRUS* 1950, Vol. VI: 390 (Charge in China (Taiwan) to Secretary of State, Jul. 24, 1950). Note that sources vary markedly as to specifying the numbers of troops in the offshore islands, conflating disposition of troops on Quemoy with the total for all of the offshore islands.

Roughly three divisions were located on Quemoy, approximately 5,000 troops on Matsu, and an additional 15,000-20,000 troops in the Tachens.\footnote{FRUS 1952-54, Vol. XIV: 584 (NSC Meeting, Sep. 9, 1954).}

The ROC Army consisted of twenty-four infantry divisions comprising 280,000 troops, two armored divisions comprising 23,000 troops, support services made up of 45,000 troops, and training and headquarters units totaling an additional 46,000 troops.\footnote{Ibid., 544 (Memo DOS Policy Planning Staff to Director Policy Planning Staff, Aug. 20, 1954); Ibid., 564-66 (Special National Intelligence Estimate 100-4-54, Sep. 4, 1954).} Of the combat forces, nearly seventeen percent were assessed as unfit for duty by American intelligence.\footnote{Ibid.}

The ROC Navy, made up of nearly 28,000 sailors and close to 15,000 Marines, had a limited inventory of three destroyers, six destroyer escorts, thirty-eight patrol boats, nine mine layers, thirty-five amphibious ships and about twenty auxiliaries.\footnote{Ibid., 636 (NIE 43-54, Sep. 14, 1954).} In October, the United States helped upgrade this capability by turning over the first of many landing craft.\footnote{Ibid.} There was no naval air capability. While the ROC Navy was considered superior to the PRC Navy, it was a weak organization. Most of the officers were former army officers with limited training in naval tactics or strategy, often placed in command via a patronage system rather than on account of merit.\footnote{Ibid., 584 (NSC Meeting, Sep. 9, 1954); Ibid., 636 (NIE 43-54, Sep. 14, 1954).}

The ROC Air Force was significantly more capable, comprising eight and one half combat groups.\footnote{FRUS 1952-54, Vol. XIV: 638 (NIE 43-54, Sep. 14, 1954).} Nearly 70,000 strong, the Air Force included anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) air
defense units. All total, the Air Force had approximately 385 combat aircraft, including 84 F-84 jet fighter-bombers. American assessments placed this service at the top of the ROC military, but inferior to the communists due to the Soviet provided MiG’s. Still, this force had limited range, as noted by Chiang’s admission in 1950 that his Formosan based aircraft could not effectively provide an aerial defense of the Tachen Islands.

American military assistance to Taiwan totaled nearly $950 million, including nearly $360 million for fiscal year 1954. Although only half of this amount had actually reached Formosa by the end of fiscal year 1954, American assistance was instrumental in supporting nearly two-thirds of the ROC military force. An additional $239 million in military assistance was planned for fiscal years 1955-56. In spring 1954, the American Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) to Taiwan established in May 1951 increased from roughly fifty personnel to over 750. U.S. naval personnel deployed to Taiwan numbered over 3,000.

Militarily, Chiang’s forces could harass the mainland, but absent massive foreign assistance or an internal counter-revolution in the PRC, Chiang was no longer a threat to the stability of the communist state. Throughout the crisis Chiang’s forces defended themselves, but abstained from initiating large-scale counteroffensives. Defensive fortifications on Quemoy and Matsu were upgraded with American assistance until finally completed in late March,

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659 Ibid.
660 Clubb, 518; S. Zhang, 193.
making a Chinese amphibious operation nearly impossible.\textsuperscript{663} Military sources suggested that Quemoy and Matsu were sufficiently prepared, that absent the use of overwhelming PRC airpower, ROC units would likely be able to repel a Chinese attack. However, if the PLA Air Force did become involved in a large way, then U.S. assistance would be required, most likely including tactical atomic weapons strikes on PLA Air Force mainland bases.\textsuperscript{664} Nonetheless, even if the KMT forces could survive, control of the islands provided little offensive capability.

Local U.S. military capability was reduced substantially following the Korean armistice. Far East forces went from approximately 500,000 in June 1954 to 291,000 a year later as only three U.S. army divisions remained in the Far East after three other army divisions and the $1^{st}$ Marine Division returned stateside.\textsuperscript{665} However, with respect to the Taiwan Straits, ground power was secondary. Naval and air power would provide defense as well as offensive striking power should the United States find itself engaged with the PRC in hostilities. Based in Japan and the Philippines, the Seventh Fleet and the Far East Air Force continued to exercise a strong presence in the region. By September 5\textsuperscript{th}, three U.S. aircraft carriers were in relative proximity to Quemoy.\textsuperscript{666}

As the New Look policy was implemented under Eisenhower, the Air Force’s share of resources expanded. From just 48 active air wings in 1950, the Air Force increased to 131 active air wings by June 1956, including 118 combat air wings.\textsuperscript{667} Far East Air Forces operating out of Japan and the Philippines provided significant local airpower to support the naval airpower provided by the Seventh Fleet.

\textsuperscript{663} Kalicki, 150.

\textsuperscript{664} FRUS 1955-57, Vol. II: 367 (Memo President’s Staff Secretary to President, Mar. 15, 1955, citing discussion with CINCPAC).


\textsuperscript{666} Soman, 124.

\textsuperscript{667} Secretary of Defense Semiannual Report, January 1 to June 30, 1956: 4.
**Interests**

*China:* China’s interests in the Taiwan Straits had both domestic and foreign policy bases. Mao wanted to eliminate his rival Chiang Kai-Shek and destroy the KMT once and for all, eliminating any competition to the CCP. By taking Taiwan, Mao could also signal the futility of opposition to anti-communist groups in Xinjiang and Tibet. In addition, the conquest of Taiwan would demonstrate to the Chinese people that the new communist government was the best hope for restoring ancient glory. From a foreign policy standpoint, Mao wanted to avoid the presence of a potential base for imperial attack as well as the embarrassment of hostile control over islands just off the Chinese mainland. Mao was probably less concerned with the military impact of nationalist control of the offshore islands. While some minor guerrilla operations against mainland targets may have been supported from the offshore islands, by most accounts such operations had largely ceased shortly after the Korean War armistice. The Nationalists lacked the equipment or funding to continue such attacks without American aid, and with the armistice American interests in tying down PLA troops in the area subsided. Accordingly, for nearly a year, harassing operations from the offshore islands were minimal.

While Mao sought to eliminate the KMT, he was also reluctant to create a clear division between the mainland and Formosa for fear of enabling a “two-Chinas” policy to gain favor worldwide. Thus, if he obtained the offshore islands but not Formosa, he risked establishing conditions for a split along the lines of dual states in Germany, Korea, and Vietnam.

*United States:* American interests were primarily reputational. Characterized as both a “protective shield” and a “strategic gateway” for China, possession over Taiwan presented undeniable military advantages. However, as American strategy aimed to prevent U.S. participation in a land war against China, it appeared that the prospects for actually using Taiwan as a base of operations against the mainland were remote. Still, allowing the Chinese to take

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669 Ibid.
Taiwan could present significant problems for the exercise of American air and naval power based in Japan, Okinawa and the Philippines. Given that U.S. strategy had moved toward greater reliance on air and naval power pursuant to the retaliatory deterrence philosophy embraced in the new look, Formosa’s importance was arguably much greater in the mid-1950s than it had been just five years earlier. Nonetheless, irrespective of Formosa’s geographic military value, America’s credibility as an ally was directly in question. If the United States failed to protect the KMT in Taiwan, not only would other American allies be forced to reconsider their alliances, but the non-aligned nations would be likely to reorient their policies in favor of the communists.

With respect to the offshore islands, the United States saw limited military value in continued ROC possession. While KMT troops in the offshore islands had tied down nearly half a million PLA troops, by 1954 the likelihood of a ROC invasion was so small that the PLA troops were no longer immobilized. Continued possession of Quemoy also limited the value of the port of Amoy as a potential staging point for an invasion force aimed at Formosa, yet there were numerous other ports that were viable as replacement staging areas. While a single small airfield was located on Quemoy, neither the Tachens nor Matsu could even provide a usable airfield. As early as 1950, General MacArthur had recommended that American protection be

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671 Ross, “Navigating the Taiwan Strait,” 54. Cf. Don E. Kash, “United States Policy for Quemoy and Matsu,” Western Political Quarterly 2 (December 1963), arguing that the survival of the KMT would be little affected by the loss of the offshore islands and that disaffected American allies would have no choice but to stand by the United States regardless of an American failure to defend the offshore islands.

672 Per the supporters of defending the offshore islands, advantages of retention included protecting the morale of the KMT, conducting psychological warfare, launching commando raids, gathering intelligence, harassing PRC maritime operations, sabotage, and escape and evasion. FRUS 1952-54, Vol. XIV: 603 (Memo CJCS to Secretary of Defense, Sep. 11, 1954). However, none of these functions were exclusive to the offshores, and these advantages were not considered “essential” to the defense of Formosa.
extended to Taiwan and the Pescadores, but not to the offshore islands.\textsuperscript{673} The Joint Chiefs of Staff concurred in this position in 1950, leading the United States to adopt the position that American assistance would only be forthcoming in the defense of Formosa and the Pescadores, not the offshore islands, although the U.S. government would not impede the defense of these islands by ROC forces.\textsuperscript{674} In fact, by 1954 the Americans would have preferred that the KMT withdraw completely from the offshore islands, removing them as a potential flashpoint. While the JCS, outside of the Army Chief of Staff, all supported assisting the ROC with the defense of the offshore islands, they could not characterize the defense as “essential” to the defense of Formosa.\textsuperscript{675}

The psychological value of defending territory against communist attack extended to a lesser degree to the offshore islands. Chiang’s decision to keep a large force in Quemoy ensured that the island would be bound up with the defense of Formosa. Should Quemoy and Matsu be abandoned, Chiang claimed that the morale of the KMT would crack and the communists might successfully move directly to take Formosa. The United States was particularly concerned over this given the KMT’s flight from the mainland in 1949 without engaging in a last-ditch battle to save the regime.\textsuperscript{676} Moreover, the ties of the overseas Chinese to Chiang’s government provided an obstacle to communist China’s efforts to nurture regional trading relationships.\textsuperscript{677} Fall of the offshore islands might signal the overseas Chinese that Chiang’s government was impotent.

\textsuperscript{673} FRUS 1950, Vol. VI: 374 (Editor’s n. 3, noting Telegram C-57148, from Gen. MacArthur to the Department of the Army, Jul. 3, 1950).

\textsuperscript{674} Ibid., 380 (Letter Secretary of Defense to Secretary of State, Jul. 17, 1950); Ibid., 387 (Telegram from Secretary of State to Embassy in China, Jul. 22, 1950).

\textsuperscript{675} FRUS 1952-54, Vol. XIV: 598 (Memo of the CJCS to Secretary of Defense, Sep. 11, 1954).


\textsuperscript{677} Kalicki, 134. The overseas Chinese community was estimated to consist of between twelve and thirteen million people in 1954, rendering it a significant factor.
Washington saw no alternative to Chiang around which anti-communist Chinese might rally; thus, the survival of Chiang’s regime became an interest in itself.

Although the psychological importance of the offshore islands was considered a significant matter, even the supporters of their armed defense were not prepared to risk ground troops. Believing that the commitment of ground forces to the offshore islands would be certain to lead to general war with China, officials found it difficult to explain why these tiny islands would be worth such a risk when the United States had refused to engage in a general war with China over Korea or Indochina in the preceding two years. Nonetheless, defense of the offshore islands was seen as valuable in order to deter further communist aggression in Asia. Given the communist victories at Dien Bien Phu and the capitulation of the French in Geneva, Secretary Dulles was adamant that further concessions could not be made. 

**Risk Propensity**

The American reference point in this crisis was a free Taiwan. Despite the Cairo Declaration’s recognition that Formosa was properly under the jurisdiction of the mainland Chinese government, events subsequent thereto reoriented American policy. Seeing the defensive value of denying Formosa to the communists, Washington quickly assimilated a free Taiwan into its concept of the status quo reference point, as predicted under prospect theory’s instant endowment effect. Conversely, Mao’s reference point was based on an 1895 state of affairs, wherein prior to the Treaty of Shimonoseki, Beijing exercised political rule over Formosa. Accordingly, anything short of Chinese control was seen by Mao as a loss, while for the United States Beijing’s acquisition of Formosa would be seen as a loss.

Prior to the shelling, Indochina was rated a higher concern to the United States than Formosa. U.S. policy was to avoid becoming entangled in another ground war in Asia.

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678 [FRUS 1952-54, Vol. XIV: 545 (Telegram Secretary of State to Embassy Japan, Aug. 20, 1954)].

679 Ibid., 554 (Memo Reports and Operations Staff, Aug. 31, 1954).

Moreover, the New Look policy, relying on the use of nuclear weapons should war occur, was believed to mean war would quickly escalate to global war with the Soviets. Accordingly, Washington sought to limit instances where crises might develop. For example, despite the PRC engaging U.S. aircraft in international airspace on a “quite frequent” basis, American officials did not respond militarily to such provocations and actively sought to avoid releasing such information to the press in order to avoid inflaming public passions.681

Approximately six weeks prior to the commencement of shelling, the PRC shot down a British commercial airliner flying from Bangkok to Hong Kong, resulting in numerous fatalities, including three Americans.682 In response the United States sent two aircraft carriers into the vicinity, where two days later Chinese aircraft engaged two U.S. planes, resulting in the PRC aircraft being quickly shot down.683 The Chinese government charged the American planes with wanton aggression while the U.S. government stuck by its story that the planes were engaged in searching operations when attacked by the Chinese. Globally, many interpreted the events as American retaliation and evidence of a more forceful U.S. policy in the region.

During this period, Secretary of State Dulles had become convinced of the necessity to stand up to the Chinese in the offshore islands; however, he was bedeviled by the lack of allied support. Reflecting cognitive biases related to availability, Dulles compared Chinese activity to the expansionism preceding the Second World War. In a speech in Los Angeles on June 11, 1954, Dulles compared the modern world’s unwillingness to stop Chinese aggression, as evidenced by the failure to respond in Tibet, the extension of diplomatic recognition to the PRC government, and the agreements reached at Geneva regarding Indochina, to the failure of collective action in restraining Japanese aggression in Manchuria twenty three years earlier.684

681 Ibid., 429 (Memo by National Security Assistant of NSC Meeting, May 22, 1954).
684 Ibid., 486 (Memo Conversation, Director Office Chinese Affairs, Secretary of State, and Chinese Ambassador, Jul. 1, 1954, ).
To Dulles, the offshore islands were endowed with a symbolic importance similar to that placed on Dien Bien Phu by the French in Indochina. With these comparisons, it is clear that Dulles would place great emphasis on defending the offshore islands. Still, both Dulles and the President were extremely reluctant to become involved in a war with the Chinese without the aid of allies. Neither Britain nor India supported an American guarantee of the offshore islands. Japan was non-committal, but generally believed to be opposed, while only South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines were believed in favor.

In contrast, Chairman of the JCS Admiral Radford argued, in terms reminiscent of MacArthur’s argument to Truman five years prior, that American policy under the New Look was fundamentally based on being able to use nuclear weapons, and that allied support was a secondary concern. Allowing world opinion, including allied opinion, to dictate the non-use of these weapons left America in a vulnerable position, damaging American interests to a far greater extent than could temporary international outrage at nuclear use. Thus, if need be, the United States should be willing to act unilaterally.

American officials were originally uncertain as to the degree of Soviet support for the Chinese actions. The first major statement from the Soviet government did not come until October, when Khrushchev visited Peking and asserted that the Soviet people were solidly behind the Chinese goal of “liberating” Taiwan. However, by the turn of the new year, intelligence was consistently indicating that the Soviets did not want to become embroiled in

685 Soman, 124.
687 Ibid., 569 (Special National Intelligence Estimate, 100-4-54, Sep. 4, 1954).
688 Brands, 150.
major hostilities. President Eisenhower expressed his personal belief that even in the event of hostilities on the mainland, the Soviets might abstain from providing troops and simply offer materiel support to the Chinese. While estimates as to the probability and the target of Chinese attacks consistently changed during early 1955, estimates of Soviet intentions remained consistent. Only should the survival of the PRC regime be threatened did U.S. analysts expect the Soviets would intervene directly.

Notably, American officials in this crisis recognized the difference in values between the Chinese leadership and Americans. Given the record from the Korean War where PLA Generals mounted human wave campaigns resulting in massive Chinese casualties, American policymakers should have been alert to the disparity in values between themselves and CCP leaders. While discussing the 1954 floods that ravaged the Yangtze valley and the possibility of sending U.S. food aid to the PRC as a humanitarian gesture to avoid mass starvation, CIA Director Allen Dulles noted that the current PRC government “would regard the loss of fifty million people as a gain.” Secretary of State Dulles contrasted the Chinese who he described as fanatics with the Soviets who he characterized as “cold and calculating.” By late March 1955, the President himself described the Chinese as “reckless, arrogant, possibly over-confident and completely indifferent as to human losses.”

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690 FRUS 1955-57, Vol. II: 147 (Telegram from Ambassador USSR to DOS, Jan. 27, 1955); 289 (Telegram from Ambassador USR to DOS, Feb. 18, 1955, noting restrained character of Soviet observation of five year Sino-Soviet anniversary).

691 Ibid., 192 (Letter from President to SACEUR, Feb. 1, 1955); Ibid., 261 (Letter from President to British Prime Minister Churchill, Feb. 10, 1955).

692 Ibid., 378 (NIE 100-4-55, Mar. 16, 1955).


695 Ibid., 405 (Eisenhower Diary Entry of Mar. 26, 1955).
Once the shelling began, Secretary Dulles suggested the Chinese related Quemoy to the Manila Conference as they had Dien Bien Phu to the Geneva Conference.\footnote{FRUS 1952-54, Vol. XIV: 572 (Secretary of State to DOS, Sep. 5, 1954).} Dulles believed the Chinese were employing force in an attempt to strengthen their bargaining position. Although not physically present in Manila, the display of force might frighten some of the Asian states in to minimizing the actual effects of SEATO.

In mid-October, the Eisenhower Administration concluded that a bilateral defense treaty might help demonstrate commitment to Taiwan without formally tying U.S. forces or prestige to the defense of the offshore islands. While the treaty was also used as a carrot to help gain ROC acquiescence to floating the issue of Formosa’s disposition before the UN, officials delayed treaty talks until after the November congressional elections in order to determine the partisan makeup of the Senate as this would directly influence the likelihood of treaty ratification.\footnote{Ibid., 762-63 (Telegram from Acting Secretary of State to Embassy ROC, Oct. 14, 1954); Ibid., 798 (Memo Conversation between Secretary of State and ROC Foreign Minister, Oct. 27, 1954).} Notwithstanding the eventual overwhelming support in ratifying the treaty, domestic politics continued to play a major role in American East Asian policy. Following the President’s submission of the Mutual Defense Treaty to the Senate on January 6, 1955, concern arose in the Administration over a Democratic National Committee Memorandum questioning the advisability of ratification.\footnote{FRUS 1955-57, Vol. II: 20-22 (NSC Meeting, Jan. 13, 1955).}

On November 1, the communists conducted an aerial attack in the Tachens, followed by a second attack in the Tachens and an escalation in shelling of Quemoy.\footnote{FRUS 1952-54, Vol. XIV: 822 (Memo of Briefing by National Security Assistant, Nov. 1, 1954); Ibid., 852 (Memo Conversation between Asst. Secretary of State for European Affairs and British Ambassador, Nov. 3, 1954).} On November 23, the PRC deliberately attempted to raise tensions again by announcing the conviction and sentencing of thirteen American prisoners, including eleven airmen and two Department of the Army
civilians, shot down during the Korean war. 700 Indeed, by publicizing the matter, no other inference can be supported but that the Chinese were attempting to escalate the crisis via manipulation of American public opinion. The midterm elections gave the Democrats, who had made Taiwan Straits Policy an issue, control over both houses of Congress. 701 Thus, the Chinese were likely trying to press the advantage by deliberately provoking the United States to attempt to force a Congressional backlash against American involvement. In the event, the attempt backfired as Eisenhower no longer was constrained by party electoral concerns of playing to the median voter, but was now free to adopt a stronger policy. Although Eisenhower’s popular approval ratings slipped toward the end of 1954 to less than 60%, they quickly rebounded with the more assertive U.S. policy of 1955, reaching the 75% level by the middle of the year. 702

Indications in December 1954 indicated a potential escalation of Chinese military activity, as the PRC built up aircraft at airfields adjacent to the offshore islands and as Soviet tankers increased deliveries of jet fuel. 703 This buildup of air power in the southeast coastal regions continued into April 1955. 704

The Chinese stepped up pressure in early 1955, conducting an air raid over the Tachens on January 10 and mounting an attack on and seizing the island of Yijiang near the Tachens on January 18, 1955. 705 These were the heaviest attacks in the area since the prior September, with

700 Brands, 135; Soman, 127; FRUS 1952-54, Vol. XIV: 945 (Secretary of State to Consulate General in Geneva, Nov. 23, 1954).

701 The administration was acutely aware of electoral concerns from September through November, and took both congressional and public reaction into account in determining policy. See e.g. FRUS 1952-54, Vol. XIV: 611 (Memo Secretary of State, Sep. 12, 1964).

702 Mueller, 199.

703 DSB V. 31, 1000 (Dec. 27, 1954).

704 DSB V. 32, 757 (May 9, 1955)(Statement of Secretary of State during Apr. 26 press conference).

705 FRUS 1955-57, Vol. II: 10 (Memo CNO to National Security Advisor, Jan. 11, 1950); Chang, 98; Clubb, 524. Yijiang is also listed in some reports as Yikiang, Ichiang, I-chiang, or Yijiangshan.
the air raid involving between sixty and one hundred PLA Air Force aircraft and the attack on Yijiang carried out by nearly four thousand PLA troops.706 Thereafter, the Chinese brought long range artillery to Yijiang capable of striking the Tachens.707 These actions stimulated the Eisenhower Administration to reconsider the ambiguity policy that was in place and seek authority from Congress to possibly use military force to defend the offshore islands. Dulles noted that the United States could no longer “play a fuzzy game,” but must instead now make clear its resolve to assist Formosa.708 The President suggested in a national security meeting that failure to act now would be comparable to the appeasement that occurred in Munich in 1938.709 Eisenhower and Dulles convinced Chiang to evacuate the immediately threatened Tachens, but only at the cost of entering into an agreement with Chiang Kai Shek guaranteeing U.S. assistance in the defense of Quemoy and Matsu.710 Indeed, the original understanding called for simultaneous announcements of evacuation of the Tachens and of a public American guarantee of Quemoy; however, U.S. officials backtracked on the public announcement under pressure from the British who sought to promote a ceasefire within the UN structure.711 The Chinese took no action to prevent the evacuation of the Tachens, but quickly occupied the islands in early February following the KMT withdrawal. Thereafter, the Chinese engaged in a military buildup


707 Ibid., 152 (Memo Conversation of Secretary of State with ROC Foreign Minister, Jan. 28, 1955).

708 Ibid., 49 (Conversation Secretary of State with ROC Foreign Minister, Jan. 19, 1955); 60 (Conversation Secretary of State with Congressional Leadership, Jan. 20, 1955).


710 Ibid., 43 (Memo Conversation of President and Secretary of State, Jan. 19, 1955); 156 (Memo Conversation of Secretary of State and ROC Foreign Minister, Jan. 28, 1955); 175 (Memo on Presidential Meeting, Jan. 30, 1955); Chang, 104.

711 British diplomats consistently advocated a complete retreat from all of the offshore islands. See e.g. FRUS 1955-57, Vol. II: 309 (Telegram Secretary of State to DOS, Feb. 25, 1955).
adjacent to Quemoy. Intelligence assessments continued to assert that the driving motivation for the PRC was an intent to seize the offshore islands.\textsuperscript{712}

In February 1955, a major shake-up in the Soviet government took place when Soviet Prime Minister Georgi Malenkov was unceremoniously removed from office. American officials had demonstrated little understanding of what was actually occurring in the power struggle since Stalin’s death in 1953; thus, the replacement of Malenkov by Nickolai Bulganin was given great publicity.\textsuperscript{713} The extent of Khrushchev’s power as Party Chairman was probably underestimated at this time, so Malenkov’s removal was not the “despotic disarray” announced by the U.S. government.\textsuperscript{714} Accordingly the potential disruption of Sino-Soviet relations was overblown. American intelligence reports suggested that while a potential PRC-USSR rift was a long term possibility, at present there were no signs of friction.\textsuperscript{715} Still, some interpretations of the crisis insist that American policy in getting tougher in spring 1955 was based upon a belief that a wedge could be driven between Red China and the Soviets.\textsuperscript{716}

In early February, American intelligence asserted for the first time that the primary purpose of the PRC’s pressure in the offshore islands was to provide domestic propaganda. CIA Director Allen Dulles’s suggestion regarding the communist regime’s need for a foreign adversary is consistent with prior analyses of the Soviet regime, noting the important role of a foreign nemesis in terms of justifying continuing repressive measures under the totalitarian


\textsuperscript{713} In fact, following Stalin’s death, the CIA presented an intelligence estimate stating the Malenkov was the heir apparent and that “no immediate challenge to [Malenkov’s] position” was expected in the near future. Three days later, Malenkov resigned as party chairman in favor of Khrushchev. Koch, 5 (reprinting SE-39, Mar. 12, 1953, titled “Probable Consequences of the Death of Stalin and the Elevation of Malenkov to Leadership in the USSR”).

\textsuperscript{714} DSB V. 32, 328 (Feb. 28, 1955); DSB V. 32, 375 (Mar. 7, 1955).


communist party. While the American presence in Formosa was considered a major intrusion by the CCP, this intelligence estimate predicted the Chinese would attempt to maintain tension, but would not follow through with war.717 A Special National Intelligence Estimate in mid-February affirmed this analysis.718 Yet, in late February, upon receipt of a briefing by the CINCPAC and upon traveling to Southeast Asia and Taiwan, Secretary Dulles provided a far more pessimistic analysis, noting his conviction that the PRC was intent on launching an attack on Quemoy and Matsu in the immediate future.719 Reports that the PRC had been building up airfields, artillery positions, and roadways along the coast adjacent to Quemoy and Matsu while the United States had been restraining Chiang from attacking such concentrations influenced the Secretary’s assessment of the situation.720 Burma’s Prime Minister U Nu advised Dulles on February 26 that during his visit to the PRC in December, the Chinese made clear their intent to take Taiwan by force.721 Indeed, not only did Dulles now perceive an imminent attack on the offshore islands, but he expressed his belief that an attack on Formosa would inevitably follow.722 In Mid-March a new national intelligence estimate assessed that the Chinese communists recognized their inability to take Formosa given the U.S. commitment, but would likely continue to probe American intentions in the offshore islands by initiating attacks therein.723 Throughout March and early April 1955 reports continued to note Chinese preparations on the mainland, leading

718 Ibid., 274 (SNIE 11-4-55, Feb. 15, 1955).
719 Ibid., 300 (Telegram Secretary of State to DOS, Feb. 21, 1955).
720 Ibid., 308 (Telegram Secretary of State to DOS, Feb. 25, 1955).
721 Ibid., 341 (Editorial Note).
722 Ibid., 308 (Telegram Secretary of State to DOS, Feb. 25, 1955).
723 Ibid., 377-79 (NIE 100-4-55, Marr. 16, 1955).
Dulles to believe that American military action would most likely be required to subdue the fanaticism prevalent in Peiping.\textsuperscript{724}

Following his return to the United States and further briefings on Chinese preparatory moves, Dulles discussed the possibility of using tactical nuclear weapons in the defense of Quemoy and Matsu, agreeing that if such were found necessary, orders for their use would be issued.\textsuperscript{725} Dulles then advised the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the administration intended to use tactical nuclear weapons in the defense of Quemoy and Matsu if necessary.\textsuperscript{726} Both the President and CJCS noted that eliminating PRC artillery positions threatening the offshore islands would be nearly impossible without using nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{727}

With the reports of continued Chinese buildup opposite the offshore islands, the balance in capabilities with respect to the offshore islands shifted to the communist Chinese. Chiang sought American concurrence with a plan to attack the air bases under construction to prevent this shift, yet Eisenhower, concerned as to both allied and domestic public opinion, rejected a preemptive strike. Still, in recognition of the shift in capabilities, Eisenhower once again changed his mind and decided to inform Chiang that the United States would not assist in the defense of the offshore islands. In mid-April, the President sent the CJCS and the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs to Taiwan on a mission to convince Chiang to withdraw from Quemoy and Matsu in exchange for an American promise to blockade the

\textsuperscript{724} Re reports of buildup, see Ibid., 346 (NSC Meeting, Mar. 10, 1955); 357 (Presidential Meeting, Mar. 11, 1955); 370-71 (Memo Conversation Secretary of State and Australian Prime Minister, Mar. 14, 1955); 386 (Memo Secretary of Defense to JCS, Mar. 22, 1955); 465 (Telegram Chief MAAG Formosa to CINCPAC, Apr. 8, 1955); 490 (Telegram Chief MAAG Formosa to CINCPAC, Apr. 17, 1955). Re fanaticism, see Ibid., 352 (Minutes of Cabinet Meeting, Mar. 11, 1955).

\textsuperscript{725} Ibid., 336-37 (Memo Conversation President and Secretary of State, Mar. 6, 1955).

\textsuperscript{726} Ibid., 337 (Memo of Conversation Secretary of State and Senator George, Mar. 7, 1955).

\textsuperscript{727} Ibid., 390 (NSC Meeting, Mar. 24, 1955).
Chinese coast. Stunned at the American flip-flop, Chiang refused the proposal along with the sweeteners offered by the President of deployment of a Marine battalion on Formosa.

**Declaratory Policy**

Since the introduction of the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan area following Kim Il-Sung’s southward sprint in 1950, the de facto American Policy had been to guarantee the defense of Taiwan. Yet the original orders to the Seventh Fleet were silent as to the defense of the offshore islands. This policy had been accepted over time; thus, when President Eisenhower noted in a press conference in August 1954 that “any invasion of Formosa would have to run over the Seventh Fleet,” it merely reaffirmed what had been in practice for the prior four years.

With the conclusion of the Korean Armistice in 1953, to help appease Rhee, the United States signed a Mutual Defense Treaty with South Korea increasing the network of bilateral U.S. alliances in the region. Chiang Kai-Shek sought a defense treaty with the United States as well, but Washington was hesitant due to a desire to avoid irrevocably tying American policy to the actions of Chiang. As no treaty commitment was forthcoming, Chiang requested that the United States make a formal statement regarding patrolling the Taiwan Straits in defense of the offshore islands, in recognition that the islands were vital to the defense of Taiwan. This request was refused, although the United States attempted to signal its interest in protecting the

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728 Ibid., 495 (Memo Conversation of Secretary of State and President, Apr. 17, 1955).

729 Ibid., 513-16 (Message from Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern to Secretary of State, Apr. 25, 1955).

730 For Eisenhower’s quote, see *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIV: 675 n.2 (Ambassador Soviet Union to DOS, Oct. 2 1954). In May, 1954 the Officer in Charge of Political Affairs in the State Department’s Office of Chinese Affairs explicitly noted in a public address that the United States had “no intention of turning our backs on the Republic of China on Formosa” and that the “United States will continue its military, economic, and political support of the government of the Republic of China.” *DSB* V. 30, 862 (Jun 7, 1954).


732 *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIV: 416 (Ambassador ROC to DOC, May 11, 1954). This request was repeated in July by the ROC Ambassador. Ibid., 486 (Memo Conversation Secretary of State and ROC Ambassador, Jul. 1, 1954).
offshore islands via having elements of the Seventh Fleet visit the Tachen Islands twice in 1954 prior to the shelling taking place.\textsuperscript{733}

In August, Secretary Dulles was pointedly asked at a news conference whether the United States would defend the offshore islands. Dulles responded that some of the offshore islands might be “so intimately connected with the defense of Formosa, that defense thereof would be necessary.”\textsuperscript{734} This represented the first declaratory statement by a high official as to U.S. policy toward the offshore islands. While non-committal, it did suggest an affirmative answer to the question.

On August 14, 1954 the convening of the Manila Conference on collective security in Southeast Asia was publicly announced with a start date of September 6, 1954.\textsuperscript{735} Thus, in spite of increased rhetoric aimed at the United States, America signaled a refusal to be cowed by Chinese activity.

In reaction to the shelling beginning in early September, U.S. policy makers were divided as to what type of policy should govern. Some officials believed the offshore islands were not important and should be evacuated or even abandoned, while others were convinced that the psychological effect of conceding the islands to communist aggression would be disastrous. Further splitting the administration was the nature of declaratory policy. For example, the majority of the Joint Chiefs of Staff favored defending the islands with U.S. air and naval forces, provided that permission to target mainland positions was granted; however, they rejected the idea of a public announcement aimed at deterring the Chinese, fearing that if the Chinese were willing to bear heavy losses, they might succeed in taking Quemoy despite U.S. assistance.\textsuperscript{736}

\textsuperscript{733} Ibid., 495 (Memo Conversation between ROC Ambassador and Director, Office of Chinese Affairs, Jul. 16, 1954); Ibid., 434 (Memo NSC meeting, May, 27, 1954); Ibid., 543 (Memo DOS Policy Planning Staff to Director Policy Planning Staff, Aug. 20, 1954).

\textsuperscript{734} Ibid., 562 n.1 (Memo Asst. Secretary of State Far Eastern to Acting Secretary of State, Sep. 4, 1954).


Thus, if the U.S. were to make a public announcement, the Chinese might attack and bear the losses just to discredit the United States publicly. Accordingly, some policy makers favored maintaining the same policy of deliberate ambiguity, to “keep the communists guessing as to our intention respecting defense of the offshore islands.”\(^{737}\) Others, such as Major General William Chase, Chief of the Military Assistance Advisory Group, advocated an explicit public declaration of American intent to defend the offshore islands.\(^{738}\)

Once the shelling began, the President was disinclined to defend the offshore islands at all for fear the Chinese would be willing to accept heavy casualties regardless of U.S. policy. Thus, American prestige would be damaged should it attempt and fail to offer a defense.\(^ {739}\) Offsetting this was the fact that the United States was, regardless of treaty or statement, the guarantor of non-communist states in Pacific Asia, particularly Formosa. In fact, the U.S. government had urged Chiang to defend the offshore islands and had encouraged his deployment of troops thereupon in 1950-1951.\(^ {740}\) Accordingly, failure to defend would also damage American prestige.\(^ {741}\) Also militating against a guarantee was Eisenhower’s fear of setting a precedent that would require American security guarantees across the world that would tie down large numbers of American forces indefinitely risking economic ruin.\(^ {742}\)

\(^{737}\) FRUS 1952-54, Vol. XIV: 549 (Memo Asst Secretary of State Far Eastern to Secretary of State, Aug. 25, 1954). See also Ibid., 623 (NSC Meeting, Sep. 12, 1954, citing Vice President Nixon as supporting a policy to “play poker in order to keep the Communists guessing” as to U.S. reactions).

\(^{738}\) Ibid., 625 (Telegram Ambassador ROC to Director of the Office of Chinese Affairs, Sep. 13, 1954).

\(^{739}\) Ibid., 573 (Memo telephone conversation between President and Secretary of State, Sep. 6, 1954).

\(^{740}\) Ibid., 433-34 (Memo NSC meeting, May, 27, 1954).

\(^{741}\) Secretary Dulles noted this point as well, suggesting that the longer U.S. aid was provided, the more American prestige was put on the line, regardless of the ambiguity of the policy. Ibid., 612 (Memo Secretary of State, Sep. 12 1964).

\(^{742}\) Ibid., 617 (NSC Meeting, Sep. 12, 1954).
Although not releasing a substantive statement, upon conclusion of the Manila conference on September 9, Secretary of State Dulles made a short visit to Taipei intended to signal once again American interest and resolve in standing behind Chiang Kai-Shek. In Manila, Dulles had signed the Manila Pact establishing SEATO. Although the Geneva Accords prevented the Indochinese states from joining SEATO, member states extended the collective security guarantees to the territory held by these three states.\(^{743}\) While this organization established a regional collective security organization, it was the presence of the bilateral treaties that enabled a closed system of defense to surround the Chinese.

In October, clinging to a policy of ambiguity but desperately attempting to maneuver away from a potential war with China over the offshore islands, the administration worked with British and New Zealand allies to introduce the matter to the UN. Fearing that Chiang would see this as an attempt to bail out, talks of a bilateral U.S.-ROC treaty once again were undertaken to soothe Chiang.\(^{744}\) The United States continued to publicly acknowledge its commitment to defend Taiwan and the Pescadores per the Korean War orders to the Seventh Fleet, but was less direct with respect to the offshore islands.\(^{745}\) In mid-October, the United States transferred two American made destroyers to Japan, indicating an intent to increase Japanese military power.\(^{746}\) On December 4, the United States attempted to provide some clarity by signing a Mutual Defense Treaty with the Republic of China guaranteeing the security of Taiwan and the Pescadores; however, the treaty was based on the same ambiguous policy of leaving defense of offshore islands to the discretion of the President.\(^{747}\)

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\(^{743}\) \textit{DSB} V. 31, 431 (Sept. 27, 1954).


\(^{745}\) \textit{DSB} V. 31, 801 (Nov. 29, 1954).

\(^{746}\) \textit{DSB} V. 31, 644 (Nov. 1, 1954).

\(^{747}\) \textit{DSB} V. 31, 895 (Dec. 13, 1954). The treaty was subsequently ratified in early February 1955.
In late January, Yijiangshan, an island near the Tachens, was the subject of an invasion by the PRC, leading the President to comment that the Tachen Islands were not a “vital element” to the defense of Taiwan.\footnote{PPPUS 1955: 186 (Presidential News Conference, Jan. 19, 1955); see also American Foreign Policy 1950-1955: Basic Documents, Vol. II: 2481-82 (Secretary of State News Conference, Jan. 18, 1955, in which Secretary Dulles asserted “I would not say the Tachen Islands are in any sense essential to the defense of Formosa and the Pescadores, which we do regard as vital to us”).} Forced at this point, however, to react to the increased Chinese aggression lest the forward positions of the KMT be picked off one by one, the Eisenhower Administration pushed for and rapidly received authorization from Congress to conditionally defend the remaining offshore islands under nationalist control. Known as the “Formosa Resolution,” this act confirmed authority to use U.S. military assets in the defense of the offshore islands, provided that the President made a finding that the defense thereof was required or appropriate in assuring the defense of Formosa and the Pescadores.\footnote{DSB V. 32, 213 (Feb. 7, 1955).} The specific text employed in the Joint Resolution held,

> “[The President] is authorized to employ the armed forces of the United States as he deems necessary for the specific purpose of securing and protecting Formosa and the Pescadores against armed attack, this authority to include the security and protection of such related positions and territories of that area now in friendly hands and the taking of such other measures as he judges required or appropriate in assuring the defense of Formosa and the Pescadores.”

The act received overwhelming support, passing the House by a margin of 409-3 and the Senate by a margin of 85-3.\footnote{Brands, 139} While the resolution was far short of a clear statement, the context of the resolution provided an unmistakable warning to the Chinese. Statements by administration officials amplified the warning by connecting the Chinese statements characterizing seizure of the offshore islands as a first step towards “liberation” of Taiwan with the Resolution’s condition that defense of the offshore islands was permissible if the defense was related to the defense of Formosa and the Pescadores.

\footnote{Brands, 139}
Taiwan. Moreover the immediate reaction from Zhou En-Lai railing against American intervention suggested the Chinese held no illusions as to the importance and effect of the resolution. Meanwhile, Washington authorized the basing of an American Air Force F-86 wing in Taiwan, as both a symbolic and a military signal to Peiping.

Thereafter, the Americans were successful in convincing Chiang to withdraw from the Tachens, although at the cost of a private guarantee to help defend Quemoy and Matsu. From February 2nd through the 11th, the U.S. Navy aided in evacuating ROC military forces and civilians from the Tachen islands, which were subsequently occupied by the communists. On February 5th, the State Department released a statement reiterating the Formosa Resolution policy that the “U.S. government will extend assistance to the Republic of China in defending such related positions and territories now in its hands as the United States deems to be essential to the defense of Formosa and the Pescadores.” The Communist Chinese repeatedly asserted that the taking of the Tachen Islands was a staging maneuver for an assault on Formosa – the very condition required for U.S. military assistance. Meanwhile, the U.S. Senate ratified the Mutual Defense Treaty by a vote of 64 to 6 on February 9, 1955. Still, U.S. policy reflected ambiguity by asserting that the policy was dependent on what the PRC actually did; thus, the United States could not identify with clarity its intended actions. As put by Secretary Dulles,

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753 Ibid., 123 (Telegram from JCS to CINCPAC, Jan. 25, 1950).

754 DSB V. 31, 255 (Feb. 14, 1955); Clubb, 524.


“It is inevitable that the situation should be in some ambiguity, because, as I say, these areas [Quemoy and Matsu] are outside the treaty area and the question of the use of U.S. force for their defense depends upon the circumstances under which an attack upon them occurs.”

During this period, President Eisenhower began to put in place the idea of “massive retaliation” relying more heavily on the omnipresent offensive retaliatory threat. As noted by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, “The present policies will gradually involve the use of atomic weapons as conventional weapons for tactical purposes.” In keeping with this policy, the United States rejected plans to establish a permanent SEATO force in being, contrary to the position taken in NATO, breeding some questions among the SEATO partners about U.S. commitment in the region. In essence, the plan embraced an existential deterrent, a deterrent based not on deployed forces, but on the existence of the agreement.

In February, President Eisenhower gave a speech to the Foreign Policy Association citing the “immense destructive power” of the American nuclear arsenal. Secretary Dulles conducted a tour of Asia in late February and early March to attend the first meeting of the SEATO Council, to make a first hand assessment of the situation among American allies in the region and to ascertain potential reactions to American use of tactical nuclear weapons in the region. While in Taipei, Dulles publicly noted that his talks with Chiang had covered the offshore islands as they were now in friendly hands and were such that the President might judge them to

758 DSB V. 32, 527 (Mar. 28, 1955).
761 DSB V. 34, 1067 (Jun. 25, 1956).
762 From the Final Communiqué of the 3rd SEATO Council meeting, “The Council believes that the military threat to the region is deterred by the very existence of SEATO and the collective defense represented by its members.” DSB V. 36, 528 (Apr. 1, 1957).
763 Pruessen, 91.
be important to the defense of Formosa. Upon returning to Washington, Dulles reiterated these ideas, implying that should an attack be made on the offshore islands in the immediate context, given the Chinese statements linking the offshore islands with plans to take Taiwan the United States would likely see such an attack as a component part of operations against Formosa and would thus be apt to respond.

As the crisis continued into spring 1955, the administration sought to escalate the deterrent aimed at the PRC by making more common and more direct nuclear threats. In a television address on March 8, 1955, the President stated that he considered nuclear and conventional weapons interchangeable. On March 12, Secretary Dulles noted improvements being made to America’s nuclear arsenal. The administration decided that a public relations campaign was necessary to educate and prepare the American public for the potential use of nuclear weapons. On March 15, the Secretary of State reportedly suggested that in the event of general war with China, the United States would probably use tactical nuclear weapons. Speeches of March 16 and March 17 by the President and Vice President respectively discussed the possibility of using nuclear weapons. President Eisenhower noted that “in combat where

766 Chang, 106-117; Clubb, 526; Kalicki 145-51; S. Zhang, 212-217.
767 Chang, 106; S. Zhang, 213.
768 Brands, 142.
these things can be used on strictly military targets and for strictly military purposes, I see no reason why they shouldn’t be used just exactly as you would use a bullet or anything else.”

The President reiterated this idea in a news conference one week later, specifically refusing to rule out the use of nuclear weapons in defense of Quemoy and Matsu. On March 25, the Chief of Naval Operations reportedly suggested that war with the PRC was imminent, and that the expected Chinese assault on Quemoy and Matsu could be met with a nuclear response. When asked whether the United States would respond to an attack on Quemoy and Matsu, the President refused to directly commit to an affirmative response, but explained that it was important for the defense of Formosa that ROC morale be sustained, thus implying American interest.

In spite of the declarations coming from Washington during January through March, the deterrent threat was still far from clear. Unquestionably, the statements had pushed the declaratory deterrent policy further towards an explicit undertaking, yet the administration had carefully withheld from making a direct commitment to the offshore islands. In April, the Indonesian Ambassador noted to an American official that U.S. policy on the offshore islands was so ambiguous that he could not report to his government as to American intentions, nor could many other diplomats in Washington with whom he had discussed the matter.

On April 20, senior American officials, including the CJCS, traveled to Formosa bringing news of Eisenhower’s reversal of the pledge to defend the offshore islands; however, press accounts speculated that the visit was to discuss war plans against the Chinese. Coming on the

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776 Chang, 117.
heels of the public statements and actions indicating a new resolve in Washington to end the crisis, this visit most likely provoked the carefully choreographed announcement of Zhou Enlai at Bandung on April 23, 1955. There, Zhou noted:

The Chinese people are friendly to the American people. The Chinese people do not want to have war with the United States of America. The Chinese Government is willing to sit down and enter into negotiations with the United States Government to discuss the question of relaxing tensions in the Far East and especially in the Taiwan area.\footnote{American Foreign Policy 1950-1955: Basic Documents, Vol. II: 2496 n.2 (Apr. 23, 1955).}

The United States responded to the statement by expressing a willingness to talk with the PRC.\footnote{PPPUS 1955, 425-440 (Presidential News Conference, Apr. 27, 1955).} Following this statement tensions relaxed, a de facto ceasefire took hold and talks between the United States and the PRC ensued in Geneva.

**Deterrence Outcome**

This crisis provides the classic example of failing to adopt a clear declaratory deterrent policy. By embracing ambiguity in an attempt to avoid committing U.S. prestige while spreading the American deterrent umbrella over as wide an area as possible, the United States found itself involved in a crisis.\footnote{An additional criticism commonly made of the American policymakers in this crisis is that ties to Chiang unnecessarily placed American credibility on the line. See e.g. Brand, 148. However, this criticism is unwarranted in so much as American credibility had already been placed on the line by the limited response in Korea and the failure to respond in Indochina. That Chiang was the recipient of America’s decision to draw a line at the offshore islands is of little importance.} Attempts to modify the policy by incremental moves intended to signal the Chinese of America’s resolve to defend Taiwan failed. The Chinese continued to assemble a sizeable invasion force opposite the Tachens, openly engaging in hostile attacks against KMT manned outposts in early 1955 with an eye towards capturing them. Only after the crisis had extended for several months and the Chinese had attacked Yijiangshan did the American policymakers decide to adopt a more explicit public policy of deterrence in the form of the Formosa Resolution. While the Resolution was still based on ambiguity, by early February
the defense of Quemoy and Matsu had become symbolically linked with American resolve to a point that there was little doubt the United States would have to assist in the defense thereof. According to at least one modern Chinese communist author, the Formosa Resolution caused Mao to delay a planned attack on the Tachens.\textsuperscript{780} Followed up by increased publicity given to the idea of using nuclear weapons, U.S. deterrence policy finally reached the state of effectiveness. In reaction to this policy, it appears that the PRC decided to back down.\textsuperscript{781} In April 1955 at the Bandung Conference in Indonesia, Zhou Enlai stated that China was willing to negotiate and did not want war with the United States.

The balance of capabilities weighed heavily in favor of the United States. Soviet ties to the Chinese were not as close as they had been in Korea, as the Soviets dealt with the domestic politics surrounding succession to Stalin. While the communists had significant aerial assets, they were no match for the U.S. airpower. Chinese naval power was minimal. Simply defending Formosa against a communist invasion attempt would be relatively simple for local American forces. Defending the offshore islands would be much more difficult should the communists decide to make a major effort; however, such attacks would expose Chinese weakness. Robert Ross asserts that the “gross disparity in conventional military capabilities” was a major factor in

\textsuperscript{780} G. Li, 150.

\textsuperscript{781} This conclusion is a matter of debate in the academic literature. S. Zhang, 220-22, agrees that the Chinese negotiations were spurred by the nuclear threats, and in fact played a major part in Mao’s decision to seek nuclear weapons for China. Soman, 97, argues that the Chinese statement at Bandung was wholly unrelated to U.S. policy. G. Li, 152, argues that the U.S. policy was a complete failure, as the increased resolve of the United States so cost allied support that the context permitted China to then seek negotiations in a more equal setting. Chang, 117, takes a middle of the road approach, assessing that Zhou’s statement might have been a product of U.S. policy, or might have been a product of Soviet refusal to support China in a major war against America. However, Chang, 127, then attributes avoidance of war to Chinese restraint rather than American diplomatic skill. Such analysis clearly confuses a fundamental point; that being, war avoidance is not the first priority of foreign policy. If it were, submission to aggression would be the best policy. Diplomacy involves pursuing national interests, some of which are valued more highly than war avoidance. Indeed, regardless of how close American policy came to involving the United States in a war with China, the fact is that China retreated and no war resulted. Accordingly, the American policy must be described as a success.
deterring Chinese military operations aimed at Taiwan.\textsuperscript{782} Likewise, Whiting claims that the U.S. order to retaliate successfully deterred the Chinese from opening fire on U.S. forces.\textsuperscript{783}

The balance of interests was in favor of China with respect to Taiwan, and overwhelmingly in favor of China with respect to the offshore islands. By this time, American officials had become convinced that the security of Formosa was vital to America’s position in the Pacific. If the communists took Formosa, they could easily threaten American positions in Japan, Okinawa and the Philippines. Moreover, having been pushed back after Chinese entry into the Korean War and having suffered losses at the negotiating table in Geneva, the reputation of the west was on the line in this crisis. Permitting the Chinese to benefit from naked aggression would destroy western credibility and possibly push several Asian states towards an accommodation with the communists. However, not only was Mao seeking to destroy his long-time rival for domestic purposes, he wanted to remove the international embarrassment of hostile control of islands less than five miles from the mainland border. In addition, he sought to improve Chinese security in the coastal regions and continue to press his winning streak for propaganda purposes. Thus, both sides had important interests at stake such that neither was clearly superior to the other.

U.S. risk propensity shifted across the course of the crisis. While resolved to defend Formosa at all times, the United States wished to abandon the offshore islands at the outset of the crisis. As time went by, despite the lack of a declaratory U.S. commitment to the defense of the offshore islands, a perceived de facto commitment evolved. As reputation was one of the interests at stake, this perceived guarantee was as important as an official one. Thus, when the ambiguous policy was clearly failing in January 1955, U.S. leaders decided it was necessary to defend Quemoy and Matsu and privately informed Chiang Kai-Shek so. Yet, two months later, U.S. leaders recanted this pledge and, again in private, notified Chiang. This dynamism suggests the lack of a clear baseline valuation of the offshore islands. While policy toward Formosa was such that communist occupation would be a major loss, no clear consensus surrounded the
offshore islands. Thus, Washington was risk acceptant with respect to defending Taiwan, but much less risk acceptant with respect to the offshore islands.

Mao was risk acceptant in this crisis, but could not overcome the disparity in capabilities with respect to Taiwan. The clarity of U.S. declaratory policy made it readily apparent that an attack on Formosa would be met with a U.S. military response. However, the ambiguity of American policy toward the offshore islands led Mao to indulge his risk acceptance and attack the Yijiang in January. When the United States responded with clarifying measures such as the Formosa Resolution, and public comments suggesting the possibility of a nuclear response to further Chinese aggression, Mao chose not to follow through with his preferred attacks on the offshore islands. The shift away from ambiguity provided the additional information to guide Mao in the face of uncertain credibility.

Second Taiwan Straits Crisis, 1958

In July 1958, tensions in the Taiwan Straits increased markedly as China mobilized and deployed troops in coastal areas while simultaneously escalating public demonstrations and rhetoric aimed at both Chiang Kai-Shek and the United States. The “liberate Taiwan” campaign proceeded to gain intensity throughout August, providing plenty of warning of impending Chinese action. On August 23, 1958, the PRC launched an attack against the Quemoy and Matsu islands, primarily using deeply entrenched artillery to pound the offshore islands. Torpedo boats and patrol craft fired on ROC naval vessels in the area as well. Although there were some reports of aerial attack, the communists refrained from initiating a major aerial offensive. Attacks continued through September 4th when the United States released a White House statement. When attacks resumed two days later, along with a Chinese call for resuming talks with the United States, American naval escort operations of ROC ships resupplying the offshore islands began. Chinese artillery continued to pound the islands, although the Chinese made certain to avoid firing upon American ships. After early snags, the resupply efforts began to progress, breaking the communist siege. By early October, the Chinese called off the artillery

784 Whiting, The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence, 266.
attacks temporarily, resuming them on a bizarre every-other-day basis for a short period before allowing the crisis to fade away.

**Goals**

*China:* Mao’s goals at the outset of this crisis are the subject of much debate. Various goals attributed to Mao include testing U.S. resolve to defend Taiwan, testing U.S. resolve to defend the offshore islands, testing Soviet resolve to stand by the Sino-Soviet alliance, ensuring the continued connection between Taiwan and the offshore islands so as to prevent a two-China solution from arising, controlling KMT harassing operations from the offshore islands, demonstrating support for Arab nations following the American and British intervention in Lebanon and Jordan, creating a bargaining chip to win concessions from the west on other matters and creating a crisis to mobilize the domestic population for the GLF. Based on the most recently released evidence from Chinese and Soviet sources, it appears that Mao was likely motivated by several of these factors. Significantly, it appears that while Mao probably desired to strike and then wait to see U.S. reaction prior to making a decision to actually invade Quemoy and Matsu, his subordinates were likely unaware of this and undertook operations aimed at invasion immediately. Only with the strong U.S. reaction did Mao clearly turn to the rationale that he was merely “drawing a noose” around the Americans so as to tighten or relax international tension as he saw fit. Indeed, the shelling operations, propaganda broadcasts

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785 Regarding testing U.S. resolve to defend Taiwan, see Whiting, “China’s Use of Force, 1950-96, and Taiwan,” 109. Regarding testing resolve over the offshore islands, see Whiting, The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence, 266. Regarding prevention of a two-China situation, see G. Li, 160-67. Regarding controlling KMT harassment, see Zubok, 264-65. Regarding Lebanon and Jordan, see Xiaobing, Jian and Wilson, 208 (translating Memoir of Wu Lengxi); Whiting, “China’s Use of Force, 1950-96, and Taiwan,” 109 and Zubok, 264 (translating conversation of Khrushchev and Mao at Beijing, 2 October 1959 in which Mao asserts he never intended “large scale military actions in the area of Taiwan” but only sought to “create complications” for America due to the intervention in Lebanon). Regarding creating a bargaining chip see FRUS 1958-1960, Vol. XIX: 219-220 (Memo of conversation between ROC Ambassador and Deputy Undersecretary of State Murphy, Sep. 18, 1958). Regarding mobilizing the domestic population, see Christensen, Useful Adversaries, and Whiting, “China’s Use of Force, 1950-96, and Taiwan,” 109.

786 Xiaobing, Jian and Wilson, 208, 210 (translating Memoir of Wu Lengxi).
calling for surrender and original preparations for invasion strongly contradict the idea that Mao
never intended to occupy the islands.\footnote{Ibid., 208 (translating Memoir of Wu Lengxi, “Chairman Mao told me that in fact we were not unwilling to take over Jinmen [Quemoy] and Mazu [Matsu]. Our decision [on the landing], however, not only concerned Jiang Jieshi [Chiang Kai-Shek], but also had to give special consideration to America’s position.”)} Neither of Mao’s speeches to the Supreme State
Conference of September 5\textsuperscript{th} or 8\textsuperscript{th} contain even oblique references to the idea of protecting
against a two-China policy.\footnote{Whiting, \textit{The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence}, 264-65. Whiting characterizes the tenor of
these speeches as “defensive” and suggesting “anxiety” on Mao’s part due to his evident
miscalculation of the American reaction.} Rather, the speech to the Supreme State Conference of September
8\textsuperscript{th} expressly identified evacuation by the KMT troops as the desired outcome.\footnote{Ibid., 264.}

Li Zhisui argues that Mao never intended to attack Taiwan at this point, quoting Mao in
July 1958 as asserting “Let’s leave Taiwan alone. Taiwan keeps the pressure on us. It helps maintain our internal unity. Once the pressure is off, internal disputes might break out.”\footnote{Zhisui, 262.} While this may well be so, it leaves open whether Mao intended to take Quemoy and Matsu at this point. The American resolve to defend Taiwan as demonstrated via the 1954 treaty and 1955 threats to escalate matters made military attacks against the ROC untenable.

With respect to the avoidance of a two-China solution, it is instructive to note that an
American press release of August 11 - over three weeks prior to the onset of shelling - clearly disassociated the United States from such a solution.\footnote{DSB V. 39, 389-90 (Sep. 8, 1958) (Press Release, Aug. 11, 1958).} The press release contained the text of a long memorandum distributed by the State Department to its missions abroad regarding U.S. non-recognition of China. Therein, the State Department indicated a two-Chinas solution “overlooked or ignored certain facts of basic importance,” most importantly the fact that both sides to the controversy bitterly opposed such a solution.

\footnote{Ibid., 208 (translating Memoir of Wu Lengxi, “Chairman Mao told me that in fact we were not unwilling to take over Jinmen [Quemoy] and Mazu [Matsu]. Our decision [on the landing], however, not only concerned Jiang Jieshi [Chiang Kai-Shek], but also had to give special consideration to America’s position.”)}
Mao’s stated reasons for engaging the KMT on Quemoy and Matsu in 1958 were to demonstrate China’s support for the peoples of the Middle East and to publicize China’s resistance to American imperialism following U.S. troops landing in Lebanon in July.\textsuperscript{792} However, evidence including troop redeployment and training shows that Mao began preparing for this latest round of offshore island attacks as early as January 1958, a full six months prior to American Marines landing in Beirut.\textsuperscript{793} Indeed, some troop deployments to Fujian province took place as early as December 1957, supporting the idea that Mao was inspired to undertake the latest attacks by the Soviet technological breakthroughs.\textsuperscript{794} Moreover, the Chinese representative invited to speak at the UN explicitly stated that the main objective of the PRC in the current matter was the evacuation of the KMT from the offshore islands.\textsuperscript{795} Thus, it is more likely that rather than Mao being provoked by U.S. aggression, Mao intended to test American resolution, particularly after the lack of an American response to the Hungarian crisis of 1956 and the muted U.S. response to the Suez crisis of the same year. As Mao is reported to have said in a speech before government officials on September 5, he had not anticipated that “the world would

\textsuperscript{792} See e.g. G. Li, 156. On July 15, 1958, U.S. Marines landed in Beirut to help restore order to the civil war torn country by limiting outside interference. Within a few days a bargain was struck permitting a truce and within three weeks hostilities ended, allowing the last Marines to depart before the end of October.

\textsuperscript{793} Short, 491. Gurtov and Hwang, 83-84, allege that Mao undertook the action to “bring the United States to its senses” after an alleged coup attempt against Sukarno in May 1958, U.S. aid to Tibet in 1958, alleged construction of missile bases in Korea, U.S. threats to intervene in Laos, and lastly the U.S. landing in the Middle East. The evidence of early preparations discounts this Chinese apologist work as well. U.S. awareness of a Chinese buildup across from Taiwan was publicly announced as early as March in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. DSB V. 38, 700 (Apr. 28, 1958) (Testimony of Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern Affairs, Mar. 28, 1958).

\textsuperscript{794} With respect to troop deployments, see S. Zhang, 235.

become so disturbed and turbulent." Accordingly, it is likely that Mao’s goals were dependent on U.S. reactions.

United States: Eisenhower’s major goal in the crisis was to avoid damaging American credibility with respect to other Asian allies and friends. Quemoy and Matsu were considered of marginal military significance as neither significantly enhanced the potential for a successful Chinese communist invasion of Taiwan. The proximity of the islands to mainland China made KMT possession of the islands far more threatening to China than communist possession would be to Taiwan. However, the lack of airstrips in the contested islands significantly lessened their value as forward defense outposts for the KMT. From an operational standpoint, the islands would be useful primarily as a stepping off point for guerrilla infiltration or for attacks on communist shipping. Thus, the main strategic value in the islands was the psychological impact possession gave to the KMT. Maintaining the islands provided Chiang with a tangible connection to the mainland. Ceding the islands to the communists would indicate an acceptance of communist domination of the mainland and suggest the end of any foreseeable chance for Chiang to return.

As the PRC-KMT conflict presented a major front in the American battle to contain Asian communism, maintenance of KMT morale was important to the United States. Should the KMT be relegated to irrelevance, the Japanese as well as the South Koreans and anti-communist governments in Southeast Asia might reconsider their present alignment with the United States. If the United States could find a means to maintain credibility without retaining

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796 Whiting, The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence, 265.

797 See also G. Li, 159, asserting the plan was to shell for ten days, then stop and assess U.S. reactions. By this account, the September 4th White House statement was irrelevant to the decision to stop shelling.

798 FRUS 1958-1960, Vol. XIX: 57-58 (Memo from Asst. Sec State Policy Planning to Secretary of State, Aug. 15, 1958); 176 (Letter from Secretary of State to British Prime Minister Macmillan, Sep. 12, 1958); 218 (Memo Secretary of State conversation with UN Secretary General, Sep. 27, 1958).

799 Ibid., 176 (Letter from Secretary of State to British Prime Minister Macmillan, Sep. 12, 1958).
possession of the islands, defense of the offshore islands was not inherently important. However, since Chiang had tied his fortunes to the offshore islands, as long as the United States based its policy on supporting the KMT, the offshore islands were important. Still, because the importance was psychological rather than military, the United States could afford to ignore most of the islands in these groups and concentrate only on the larger namesake islands for the most part. Thus, the U.S. goal in 1958 was not only the defense of Taiwan, but the defense of the offshore islands as well.

**Capabilities**

*Communist forces:* The size of the PLA had been considerably reduced since the Geneva accords of 1954, resulting in a force of between two and three million troops by 1958. However, the reduction in numbers was coupled with an increase in capability. Soviet technology transfers and Chinese industrial development gave the PLA improved military capabilities since the start of the decade. By 1958, the PLA Air Force had grown to include over 4,350 planes including nearly 1,800 jet fighters and 450 jet bombers. As before, the crisis revolved not around manpower, but around air and sea power.

When the shelling of Quemoy began on August 23, Mao had approximately four hundred and sixty Soviet made heavy artillery pieces, eighty ships, two hundred fighter aircraft, and six anti-aircraft artillery regiments in the region. These aircraft were spread among five different airfields in Fujian and Chekiang, and consisted mainly of Mig-15’s and 17’s, although the

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800 S.F. Antonov, “Summary of a Conversation with the Chairman of the Central Committee Communist Party of China, October 14, 1959,” Translated in Cold War International History Project Bulletin 3 (Fall 1993): 56, notes a figure of two million. U.S. estimates varied from 2.5 million (DSB V. 38, 224 (Feb. 10, 1958) (Budget Message of the President to Congress, Jan. 18, 1958)), to 3 million (DSB V. 38, 700 (Apr. 28, 1958) (Testimony of Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern Affairs before Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Mar. 28, 1958)).


Chinese may have had some Mig-19’s at this point as well. Such a heavy concentration of aircraft in these regions had only begun in early August. In addition, a force of three armies, each fleshed out to include nearly 46,000 troops, were located in Fukien province.

The ROC military in 1958 was composed of twenty-one active divisions, a strong air force and a navy that together comprised nearly 650,000 troops, although only half this number could be considered combat troops. The Air Force included American made Sabre jets, generally considered superior to the PLA Air Force’s MiG 15’s and 17’s, some of which were equipped with Sidewinder air to air missiles. While the ROC air force was far inferior quantitatively to the PLAAF, having only 450 jets and another 375 piston driven aircraft, the quality of the equipment helped nullify this communist advantage. Moreover, ROC pilots had the benefit of American training, helping to create a marked advantage over PLA Air Force pilots. However, the ROC Navy was considered quite poor in general, due not to the quality of materiel but to the lack of trained naval officers. To assist ROC capability, the United

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803 FRUS 1958-1960, Vol. XIX: 270 (Memo of CIA briefing at NSC meeting, Sep. 25, 1958). Whiting (1975: 266). By this point China could produce indigenous versions of Soviet designed Mig-15’s and 17’s, and was perhaps on the cusp of producing Mig-19’s. Gill, 49.


805 Watson, 224.

806 DSB V. 40, 376 (Mar. 16, 1959) (Testimony of Secretary of State Far Eastern Affairs before Senate Subcommittee on Disarmament, Feb. 23, 1959); Watson, 224 (estimating ROC military at approximately 450,000, with only 320,000 combat troops).

807 Kalicki, 192.

808 Watson, 224.

809 By the end of the crisis, ROC aircraft accumulated a record of shooting down eight Communist Chinese aircraft for every ROC plane shot down. DSB V. 40, 496 (Apr. 6, 1959).

810 FRUS 1958-1960, Vol. XIX: 117 (Memo of DOS meeting in Washington, Sep. 2, 1958). Most of the ROC Naval Officer Corps was composed of former Army officers who lacked any specialized training in naval strategy or tactics.
States pledged to expedite the shipment of equipment for seven ROC divisions as well as provide six F-100 Super Sabres to Taipei.\footnote{FRUS 1958-1960, Vol. XIX: 76 (Telegram from JCS to CINCPAC, Aug. 25, 1958).} In addition, twelve eight-inch Howitzers with ammunition were delivered to the KMT.\footnote{Ibid., 101.} Significantly these howitzers were considered capable of firing nuclear shells.\footnote{Kalicki, 192.} In addition to direct military aid, U.S. defense support obligations to Taiwan under the Mutual Security Program for fiscal year 1957 totaled eighty million dollars.\footnote{DSB v. 38, 223 (Feb. 10, 1958).}

Chiang kept nearly 86,000 troops stationed on Quemoy to help draw American protection to the island and to maintain the appearance of a possible return to the mainland. In addition, another 23,000 were deployed in the Matsus.\footnote{Watson, 224.} Contrary to popular belief, this number had increased only marginally since the first Taiwan Straits crisis. Chiang had maintained a force of six divisions in the offshore islands since the early 1950s.\footnote{The force on Quemoy fluctuated from 79,000 in 1954 to 85,000 in 1956, 87,000 in 1957 and then 85,000 in 1958. FRUS 1958-1960, Vol. XIX: 356 (Telegram DOS to Embassy in Poland, Oct. 8, 1958).}

**ROC and U.S. forces:** By 1958, the U.S. military had been reduced considerably since the Korean War. In just five years, the army was reduced from 1.55 million to 900,000, the navy from 794,000 to 681,000, the Marine Corps from 249,000 to 189,000 and the air force from 978,000 to 871,000.\footnote{Secretary of Defense Semiannual Reports, January 1 to June 30, 1953 and January 1 to June 30, 1958. January 1 to June 30.} In total, the active duty services saw a reduction of nearly one million positions. The U.S. army introduced its new pentomic division structure in 1957 intended to give infantry divisions increased mobility as well as integrating atomic weapons potential. Thus, the army claimed that despite reducing the standard troop strength of an infantry division from...
17,500 to 13,700, the new division actually boosted potential firepower. The American nuclear arsenal in 1958 was made up of over seven thousand weapons of varying yields.

At the time shelling began in August 1958, the United States maintained nearly 7,000 troops as well as two air bases in Taiwan, along with an additional 12,000 sailors afloat in the Taiwan area as part of the Seventh Fleet. Once shelling began, the United States augmented the number of USAF F-100s in Taiwan. In addition, firepower was readily available from Japan and Okinawa, as well as air and naval power from U.S. bases in the Philippines. Total American troop strength in the Far East was slightly more than 200,000, while another 64,000 servicemen were in relative proximity at bases in Hawaii and Guam. The JCS advised the Commander In Chief, Pacific Fleet (CINCPAC) that a squadron of fifteen nuclear capable B-47 bombers at Guam would also be at the ready. The two army divisions stationed in Korea would likely not be available for any operations in Taiwan, as operations in Taiwan would undoubtedly heighten tensions in Korea. However, an army NIKE air defense missile unit was immediately sent to Taiwan. Matador surface to surface missiles (SSM) were already located on the island.

An air strike force, including new supersonic F-104 fighters and a Marine Air Group from Japan were deployed to Taiwan as well. In the Straits, the 7th Fleet, including 3 carrier groups along with cruisers and destroyers, was augmented by two additional carrier groups and 

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818 Secretary of Defense Semiannual Report, January 1 to June 30, 1958: 105. Tanks and armored personnel carriers were completely removed from Airborne Divisions.

819 Soman, 38.


supporting vessels.825 A sixth carrier, the Essex, along with four additional destroyers was
deployed to the Strait from the Middle East two days after shelling began.826 Chinese
assessments of American power in the region held that the Americans placed “six aircraft
carriers, three heavy cruisers, forty destroyers, and two air force divisions” in the Taiwan Straits,
with a reinforcement of three thousand additional U.S. Marines in Tainan.827 Additional
capabilities were found in Hawaii and Alaska in the form of a third Pacific theater army division.

U.S. forces also had the advantage of having conducted several military exercises in the
region with SEATO partners. In 1957, five different SEATO exercises were held in Thailand,
the Philippines, and the South China Sea.828 In addition, the United States participated in
bilateral exercises in the region and multilateral exercises that did not include the entirety of the
SEATO membership.

Interests

Both the Chinese and the American interests in the crisis were primarily psychological.
Control over the offshore islands provided little military or economic advantage.829 It was highly
unlikely that Mao would have expected the United States to completely withdraw protection
from Chiang on Taiwan. Hence acquisition of the offshore islands would primarily serve to
indicate progress toward the elimination of the KMT. Although control of the offshore islands
would help diminish harassing operations mounted by Chiang, these were strategically
insignificant. Communist shipping moved relatively freely around the ports near the KMT

825 Ibid.


827 Xiaobing, Jian and Wilson, 211, 213 (translating Memoir of Wu Lengxi).


829 Communist control over the islands would permit the communists to defend their coastline
more easily and perhaps avoid nationalist naval blockades, thus aiding the communist
economically; however, control over the islands was not mandatory to adopting a more active
naval policy.
occupied islands. On the negative side for Mao, acquisition of the offshore islands would further the potential of the two Chinas concept gaining popular acceptance worldwide by establishing a clear geographic divide.

Chiang was wholly committed to the defense of the offshore islands. To Chiang, evacuation would constitute an admission that a return to the mainland was a dead issue. Although relegated to Formosa for eight years, the concept of returning to govern mainland China was the raison d’être for the KMT. Absent this goal, the KMT would have no purpose. For the American administration, the survival of Taiwan and the survival of the KMT were synonymous. Should the KMT be defeated militarily or politically on Formosa, U.S. officials believed that the island would be lost to the communists. No other political entity was considered strong enough to withstand communist pressure. Therefore, political concerns of Chiang were in fact central to American policy-makers. When Chiang argued that evacuation of the offshore islands would demoralize the country and effectively discredit the “heroic defense of 1954-55,” the United States had to listen.

From an American point of view, permitting the communists to take the offshore islands through military action would only spur further communist aggression. As long as the Chinese were successful in gaining more territory, it was folly to believe their appetite for expansion would be sated. Rather, having succeeded through military bluster in the offshore islands, the


832 Ibid., 226 (Telegram Embassy in ROC to DOS, Sep. 19, 1958); Ibid., 372 (Telegram Embassy in ROC to DOS, Oct. 10, 1958).

833 Kash, 920, argues that a stand at the islands would be ineffective following the American refusal to become engage in a ground war in Indochina. Yet by this logic, once set in motion no policy could ever be successfully reversed, due to prior history.

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Chinese would be inspired to pursue similar tactics to acquire Taiwan. Thus, the argument was not the straw man decision of choosing to defend the islands or relinquishing them to enjoy peace, but was rather the decision of choosing where to take a defensive stand. For the administration, the United States had first to overcome the ghosts of Munich by rejecting the idea of appeasement, and second, to accept that the position at Quemoy and Matsu was akin to the French position at Dien Bien Phu: the fact of confrontation was not at issue, only the location was undetermined.\(^{834}\)

Secretary Dulles was interested in doing more than simply employing a reactive containment policy; rather, he supported attempts at rolling back communism where possible. In this light, maintenance of a free Chinese government was considered essential should the opportunity arise to dislodge the sitting communist government. Drawing on experience from the failed Hungarian uprising of 1956, Dulles argued that had a free Hungarian government existed at that time, the result might have been much different.\(^{835}\) Sending in U.S. troops to support the uprising would be too dangerous; however, supporting indigenous opposition made good sense.

**Risk Propensity**

The United States was uncertain of Mao’s intentions when the shelling began, but were cognizant of the effect the Sputnik launch likely had on the communist leader, as evidenced by his public rejection of “peaceful coexistence” and his April 1958 actions toward Japan, leading to a recognition that demonstrating resolve was of the utmost importance.\(^{836}\) On August 27, radio broadcasts from the PRC declared a communist landing on Quemoy imminent, asserting

\(^{834}\) Re Munich, see *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. XIX: 251 (Meeting of Eisenhower with UK Foreign Minister, Sep. 21, 1958); Re Dien Bien Phu, see Ibid., 181 (Memo of Secretary of State meeting with ROC Ambassador, Sep. 13, 1958).

\(^{835}\) Ibid., 367 (Record of DOS - DOD meeting, Oct. 10, 1958).

\(^{836}\) S. Zhang, 243-44. Regarding actions toward Japan, see *DSB* V. 40, 376 (Mar. 16, 1959) (Testimony of Secretary of State Far Eastern Affairs before Senate Subcommittee on Disarmament, Feb. 23, 1959).
that the PRC was determined to liberate the offshore islands and Taiwan.\footnote{FRUS 1958-1960, Vol. XIX: 101 n. 6 (Telegram Embassy in ROC to DOS, Oct. 6, 1958); DSB V. 39, 415 (Sep. 15, 1958) (Press Release, Aug. 28, 1958).} Radio transmissions in the first few days carried calls for the defenders on Quemoy to surrender.\footnote{Kalicki, 187-88; Christensen, 195.} Intelligence reports showed that a sufficient aerial capability was in place for the communists to inflict severe damage on the offshore islands and that the PRC had in fact requested advances in fuel imports from the Soviet Union.\footnote{FRUS 1958-1960, Vol. XIX: 86-87 (CIA briefing at NSC meeting, Aug. 27, 1958).} However, the reports also revealed a lack of ground and naval transport concentration suggestive of an amphibious invasion.\footnote{Ibid., 103.} A Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) prepared August 26, concluded that China was merely probing U.S. resolve to defend the offshore islands. If the United States did not come to their defense, the communists would likely attempt to take Quemoy and Matsu, but action against Formosa was considered unlikely.\footnote{Ibid., 81-82 (SNIE 100-9-58, Aug. 26, 1958).} Accordingly, the estimate suggested that an explicit guarantee of the offshore islands defense would deter Chinese aggression.\footnote{Ibid. at 82.}

Secretary of States Dulles saw the shelling as the opening gambit of a new operation aimed at extending communist control throughout Asia based on limited war techniques.\footnote{Ibid., 132 (Secretary of State Memo, Sep. 4, 1958).} Rather than engaging in massive conventional military operations that would undoubtedly trigger an American response, the Chinese would organize, train, and supply indigenous revolutionaries where possible while directly using Chinese military assets in only a limited fashion. Thus, if the United States adopted a policy that called for U.S. intervention only in the event of a direct assault, the Chinese would be free to utilize slow steady pressure to strangle non-communist
poles, beginning with the siege on the offshore islands.\textsuperscript{844} While this could be an expensive endeavor for the communists, the benefits of dictatorial control of the state, including a command economy, could permit such a sustained campaign far longer than might be possible in a democratic state. Accordingly, Dulles favored a policy calling for a strong U.S. response to deter the Chinese from even attempting such a campaign. Should the Chinese not be deterred, Dulles advocated using conventional arms initially, but if a quick PRC reversal did not follow, then tactical nuclear weapons would likely be necessary.\textsuperscript{845} Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Twining was likewise inclined to consider nuclear weapons as an operational asset.\textsuperscript{846} Dulles expressly admitted the risks of such a policy, but argued that the risks of non-action were even greater.\textsuperscript{847}

It is also likely that American officials were influenced by the reversal of U.S. policy during the first Taiwan Straits crisis. Having concluded a deal with Chiang calling for KMT evacuation of the Tachen Islands in exchange for an American guarantee to assist in the defense of Quemoy and Matsu, the Americans backtracked following Chiang’s evacuation by refusing to make the pledge public and then withdrawing the pledge altogether two months later. Notification of the withdrawal occurred at the same time Zhou Enlai was making his statement at Bandung that resulted in an end to the crisis, thereby minimizing the damage done by the U.S. reversal. However, the fact that Zhou’s announcement followed the stiffest U.S. declaratory policy suggested that the reversal was ill-considered and reflected poorly on U.S. officials. As these same men were in office in 1958, the prior implicit abandonment of Chiang may have influenced them to take a strong stand from the outset to demonstrate America’s resolve not only to the communists, but to Chiang as well.

\textsuperscript{844} Ibid. at 132.

\textsuperscript{845} Ibid., 133 (Secretary of State Memo, Sep. 4, 1958).

\textsuperscript{846} Ibid., 121 (Memo of meeting, Oct. 2, 1958). Twining saw nuclear weapons as “much more effective and less costly.”

\textsuperscript{847} Ibid., 139 (Letter from Secretary of State to UK Prime Minister Macmillan).
From the outset, U.S. officials believed the Soviets were most likely opposed to engaging in significant military adventure at the time and probably feared that the Chinese could be dragging them to the brink of war.\textsuperscript{848} Intelligence reported no Soviet mobilization efforts, leading U.S. policy makers to discount Soviet intervention unless the crisis escalated to include major attacks on the Chinese mainland.\textsuperscript{849} The Soviets were largely silent on the matter until the issuance of a letter from Khrushchev to Eisenhower on September 7, in which the Soviets noted that “the interests of the security of [the PRC] are inseparable from the interests of the security of the Soviet Union,” and that “an attack on the Chinese People’s Republic … is an attack on the Soviet Union.”\textsuperscript{850} Despite this belated support, U.S. officials saw little evidence at the time of serious Sino-Soviet discordance.\textsuperscript{851}

The United States received almost no allied support for a defense of the offshore islands. The official position of the British was that it recognized the legal right of the PRC to the offshore islands, but opposed the use of force to seize them.\textsuperscript{852} Even those European allies who supported the maintenance of a free Chinese government on Formosa were unwilling to defend islands just a few kilometers off the mainland coast. Not even Japan would support military action in defense of Quemoy and Matsu, likely out of fear that the New Look policy would mean the immediate employment of nuclear arms - a proposition to which the Japanese government was militantly opposed.\textsuperscript{853} The only states openly supportive of the U.S. policy were South Korea, South Vietnam and the Philippines, all of which were dependent on U.S. support.\textsuperscript{854}

\textsuperscript{848} Ibid., 65 (Memo from Asst. Secretary of State Far East to Secretary of State, Aug. 20, 1958).
\textsuperscript{849} Ibid., 243 (Memo detailing DOS meeting, Sep. 20, 1958); Accinelli, 122.
\textsuperscript{851} DSB V. 38, 700 (Apr. 28, 1958) (Testimony of Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern Affairs before Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Mar. 28, 1958).
\textsuperscript{853} Ibid., 122.
\textsuperscript{854} Kash, 918.
lack of popular support globally was a major concern for Eisenhower and likely influenced his decision-making. 855

As the crisis entered its second week, the limited nature of Chinese utilization of air assets, coupled with the heavy employment of artillery and torpedo boat attacks made apparent the Chinese were attempting a siege of the islands rather than a frontal assault. Thus, U.S. immediate concerns centered on resupply efforts as opposed to resisting an amphibious invasion. Again drawing on past experience, Dulles repeatedly compared the resupply effort to the Berlin airlift of 1948-49. 856 If America displayed firm resolve, the communists would not escalate matters. Early resupply efforts proved difficult; however, by late September, experience and necessity combined to enhance ROC resupply efforts such that the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered the siege effectively broken. 857 Thereafter, the greatest concern became sustaining morale of the defenders on the islands and discouraging Chiang from counterattacks.

A second Special National Intelligence Estimate prepared in mid-September concluded that the Chinese would likely continue interdiction operations, but were unlikely to mount a direct attack. 858 Notably, the estimate contained an assessment that the Chinese were willing to take “considerable risk.” Around the same time, the CIA produced a report characterizing the PRC interdiction efforts as “highly effective.” 859 Again, no Soviet involvement was foreseen

855 FRUS 1958-1960, Vol. XIX: 267 (Memo meeting of President and Secretary of State, Sep. 23, 1958, during which Eisenhower noted that as much as two-thirds of world opinion was opposed to the policy the United States was following).

856 Ibid., 245 (Memo DOS meeting, Sep. 20, 1958); 303 (Memo of Secretary of State meeting with New Zealand Prime Minister, Sep. 30, 1958); 375 (Memo of Secretary of State meeting with Senator Green, Oct. 12, 1958); DSB V. 39, 565 (Oct. 13, 1958).

857 Ibid., 296 (Memo of JCS meeting with Eisenhower, Sep. 29, 1958). Inspection of Quemoy during the initial stoppage in shelling in early October revealed minimal damage to ROC artillery due to PRC attacks. Ibid., 349 (Telegram Commander Taiwan Defense Command to CINCPAC, Oct. 8, 1958).

858 Ibid., 205-06 (SNIE 100-11-58, Sep. 16, 1958).

859 Ibid., 208 (Editor’s note of Sep. 18, 1958 CIA report).
absent major escalation of the crisis. Still, comments made by Khrushchev did concern some American policymakers who were unsure whether Khrushchev was merely engaging in rhetoric or was perhaps suffering “delusions of grandeur” based on his assertions that Soviet strength had prevented the French and British from seizing the Suez Canal, kept Turkey and The United States from attacking Syria, and deterred American from invading Iraq during its recent landing in Lebanon.

As in 1954, the attacks on the offshore island began just a few weeks prior to Congressional elections in the United States. Once again, U.S. policy in the Taiwan Straits became a partisan issue, with the Democrats attacking the Republican administration’s ties to Chiang Kai-Shek. Selling a policy that risked war over what appeared to be meaningless islands was difficult. Thus, Eisenhower was not only constrained by world opinion, but by domestic opinion as he sought to minimize Republican congressional losses. In a nationally televised address, Eisenhower sought to drum up domestic support by analogizing the situation to the world’s failure to stand up to aggression at Munich and in Manchuria a generation earlier.

Throughout the crisis, Eisenhower’s popular approval ratings remained safely above 55%.

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860 Eisenhower had answered Khrushchev’s letter by denying the charges levied therein and suggesting the Soviet Chairman discuss matters with Mao. Khrushchev thereafter sent a second letter marked by bluster and rhetoric that the U.S. President refused to accept, instructing it be returned to the Soviets as unfit for international diplomacy. Somewhat surprisingly, the Soviets had reacted in a relatively restrained manner to the rejection, reaffirming the U.S. assessment that the Soviets were less than enthusiastic about the Chinese activities.


862 Accinelli, 126-27.

863 In the 1958 midterm elections the Democrats picked up forty-nine additional seats in the House and sixteen additional seats in the Senate, one of the largest shifts in history.

864 *DSB* V. 39, 482 (Sep. 29, 1958) (Speech of President, Sept. 11, 1958).

865 Mueller, 200.
Declaratory Policy

From 1953 to 1955, U.S. defense spending dropped almost one-third in terms of defense spending as a percentage of gross national product. Reflecting the “New Look” policy emphasizing the usability of nuclear weapons, this budget reduction may have been interpreted by Mao as a lack of resolve to use conventional force. As Mao was less concerned with nuclear weapons, this reduction likely contributed to his decision to test American resolve again. Figure 5.5 shows a dramatic reduction in the amount of worldwide military assistance emanating from the United States under the mutual security program; however, this reduction reflected cutbacks in support provided to Europe more than Asian reductions. This also could be understood as a retreat from a defensive posture to a policy overwhelmingly dependent on retaliatory deterrence as effectuated by nuclear weapons. Still, the United States did try to maintain some defensive deterrent posture, concluding a new military assistance agreement with

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Cambodia in early 1955, and staging joint military exercises with SEATO partners beginning in 1955. In 1957, the UN undertook to upgrade and replace armaments in South Korea to show the North Koreans that their violation of the Armistice armaments freeze would not go unaddressed. In addition, 1957 saw the establishment of a permanent SEATO military planning office in Bangkok. Also, in May 1957, the U.S. State Department publicly announced plans to deploy nuclear-capable Matador surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs) in Taiwan. These missiles reportedly arrived at the Hsin Chu airfield along the northwest coast of Taiwan on May 6, 1957.

On August 24, 1958, President Eisenhower notified the government of the United Arab Republic that the Essex and four destroyers were to be moved through the Suez Canal on their way to the area of the Taiwan Straits, fully expecting that the socialist Nasser government would make this fact known to the Soviets and China. On August 29th, the President directed the 7th Fleet to carry out escort operations protecting ships supplying the offshore islands. At the same time, nuclear capable B-47 bombers in Guam were placed on a heightened state of alert.

Lining up in favor of providing a clear strong deterrent to the Chinese regarding U.S. will to defend the offshore islands were the Secretary of State, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of

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868 DSB V. 34, 448 (Mar. 19, 1956); DSB V. 40, 608-09 (Apr. 27, 1959).
869 DSB V. 37, 58 (Jul. 8, 1957); DSB V. 37, 393 (Sept. 2, 1957).
870 DSB V. 38, 513 (Mar. 31, 1958).
871 S. Zhang, 226.
872 Ibid., 239.
874 S. Zhang, 249.
875 Ibid..
Staff, and the U.S. Commander of the Taiwan Defense Command. On August 28, a State Department press release cited Secretary Dulles’ recent letter to the Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, as noting:

The Secretary pointed out that the ties between the offshore islands and Formosa have become closer, that their interdependence has increased, and that he believed that it would be ‘highly hazardous’ for anyone to assume that if the Chinese Communists were to attempt to change the situation by force and now attack or seek to conquer these islands, that could be a limited operation.

Official U.S. policy took the same approach as it had in 1955, claiming the Joint Resolution authorizing Presidential discretion in using force to defend offshore islands was still in effect. On September 4, the White House released a prepared statement by Secretary of State Dulles in which Dulles cited both the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1954 and the Joint Resolution of Congress from 1955 as providing authority for American intervention. The press release carefully noted that official Beijing radio announced the purpose of the shelling operations was to take Formosa and the offshore island by force. The statement then explained that the use of force in this matter suggested “widespread use of force transcending the offshore islands” and threatening peace everywhere. While denying that the President had made a determination that defense of the offshore islands was necessary to the defense of Taiwan, the statement noted:

[W]e have recognized that the securing and protecting of Quemoy and Matsu have increasingly become related to the defense of Taiwan (Formosa). This is indeed also recognized by the Chinese Communists. Military dispositions have

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880 Ibid.
been made by the United States so that a Presidential determination, if made, would be followed by action both timely and effective.\footnote{Ibid., 134-36 (White House Press Release, Sep. 4, 1958).}

Immediately following the statement, the Chinese abruptly stopped shelling. On September 6, shelling began again; however, at the same time, Zhou En-lai issued a call for the resumption of U.S. - PRC ambassadorial talks. These talks, on hold since June, began again in Poland on September 15. Thereafter, press reports disclosed the deployment of nuclear capable Nike Hercules missiles to Taiwan, effectively communicating the none-too-subtle message to its intended audience as revealed by reference thereto in Khrushchev’s September 19 letter to Eisenhower.\footnote{Ibid., 236 (Telegram Khrushchev to Eisenhower, Sep. 19, 1958).}

Noting the Chinese backtracking, U.S. officials maintained a strong deterrent policy. In a September 9 press conference, Dulles refused to state as a matter of fact that the decision had been made to defend the offshore islands, but in response to a reporter’s question, Dulles advised “I think you can guess the answer to that if you read the statement of September 4.”\footnote{DSB V. 39, 490 (Sept. 29, 1958) (Press Conference, Sep. 9, 1958).}

In a late September press conference, Secretary Dulles referred to retaining large forces in the offshore islands in the event of a sustainable cease fire as “foolish,” leading to concern by the KMT that the PRC might interpret this as an indication of concession, or lack of resolve.\footnote{DSB V. 39, 602 (Oct. 20, 1958).} However, no new communist adventures were undertaken. Most likely this was merely a careless statement by Dulles who was concerned over Congressional opposition to the administration’s policy and sought to avoid a direct statement that might result in a congressional demand for consultation pursuant to a planned use of force.

In October, the Chinese announced a one ceasefire, followed by an extension of the ceasefire. U.S. statements were guarded, indicating a willingness to let the incident fade away. However, on the eve of Secretary Dulles’ trip to Taipei, Mao again unleashed an artillery barrage on Quemoy. This was understood as Mao’s expressing displeasure at the meeting rather than
engaging in a new probing mission. Still, the joint communiqué issued at the end of the U.S. -ROC meetings included the statement that “It was recognized that under the present conditions the defense of the Quemoys, together with the Matsus is closely related to the defense of Taiwan and the Penghus.”

Deterrence Outcome

When the United States quickly came to Chiang’s relief, making less than subtle hints about the possibility of using nuclear weapons against mainland China, Mao quickly reversed course. Immediately following the September 4th statement of Dulles, Mao temporarily halted the shelling campaign for two days. The strong American response and clear show of force to defend Taiwan and the offshore islands led to a rapid Chinese reassessment. When shelling began anew on September 6, the problem became not one of deterring an amphibious invasion, but of surviving a siege. American escorts of ROC convoys in international waters suggested American resolve to assist in the defense of the offshore islands, although American ships did not provide escorts for the ROC resupply ships within waters recognized by international law as Chinese. When it became clear that the siege would fail, the PRC sought to find a face-saving device for ending the crisis. On October 5, Peng Dehau announced a one-week suspension of shelling based on “humanitarian consideration” as long as U.S. escorts were discontinued. One week later, the PRC announced a two-week extension of the cease-fire; however on October 20, the communists rescinded the cease-fire alleging American escorts had occurred. This announcement coincided with a visit of Secretary of State Dulles to Taipei. With the offshore islands well stocked, the resumed shelling was inconsequential, leading to the October 25th bizarre announcement that shelling would only occur every other day.

On October 23, 1958, with the crisis over, the United States and Taiwan issued a joint communiqué noting that “the Chinese communists, with the backing of the Soviet Union, avowedly seek to conquer Taiwan, to eliminate free China, and to expel the United States from

886 Short, 491.
the western Pacific generally.... 887 Thereafter, the release explicitly stated that “under the present conditions, the defense of the Quemoys, together with the Matsus, is closely related to the defense of Taiwan and Penghu.” 888

This incident serves as a model of successful deterrence based on a clear policy. 889 Unsure of Chinese intentions at the outset, the United States demonstrated a commitment to aid Taiwan via its deployment of forces to the area and increase in military materiel aid to the KMT. As the shelling continued, the United States released a clear deterrent statement in Secretary Dulles September 4 press release, noting that the defense of Quemoy and Matsu were increasingly relevant to the defense of Taiwan, so as to invoke the Formosa Resolution of 1955 permitting the President to utilize military force to defend the offshore islands. The release was immediately followed by a short suspension of shelling as the Chinese leadership realized the depth of American commitment and sought to fall back to its lesser aims. When strangulation of the islands failed as well, the Chinese were forced to retreat once again under cover of the inane “every other day” shelling policy until the world’s attention was refocused.

The balance of capabilities in this crisis was overwhelmingly in favor of the United States. Given the localized nature of the dispute and the apparent desire of the Soviets to minimize their involvement in the crisis, American naval and airpower coupled with ROC airpower, were far superior to PRC capabilities. Although the PLA could punish the offshore islands via heavy artillery barrages, it had little hope of storming the islands and taking possession as long as the United States was willing to use its power to prevent an amphibious landing. The PRC had no chance whatsoever of a successful attack on Taiwan.

The balance of interests still favored China in this crisis, but U.S. concerns over demonstrating credibility were of major importance. Having avoided a hot war in Asia over the prior three years, the United States did not want to revert to a policy of appeasement accepting Chinese incremental aggression. Thus, even though the offshore islands were of little military


888 Ibid.

889 Cf. Kalicki, 206-07 (asserting U.S. policy was marked more by ambiguity in 1958).
value, the psychological value accorded them helped offset the obvious interest of the PRC in claiming possession.

America was more risk acceptant under the New Look policy in that it articulated a deterrent policy and created a conventional force posture built not on universal defense but on the threat of a U.S. counter-offensive. While Soviet developments in missile technology undoubtedly were reason for pause, the Soviet Union played only a minor role in this crisis, remaining silent until after Dulles’ September 4th statement had made clear the U.S. will to defend the offshore islands.

Mao’s risk propensity was beginning to decline by this time as he had been in power for nearly a decade and had amassed interests that could be threatened by major military conflict. American declaratory policy under these circumstances may have succeeded even under conditions of ambiguity; however, in the crisis, declaratory policy was clear. As soon as the U.S. commitment was communicated to Mao, the Chinese began to back down, searching for a way to save face while avoiding a direct conflict with the United States.

**North Vietnamese Expansion into Laos and South Vietnam, 1959-64**

The Geneva Accords of 1954 brought about a division of Vietnam along the 17th parallel with Ho Chi Minh’s Viet Minh in control of the northern half and the French backed Bao Dai government in control of the southern half. Per the accords, both sides were to work toward unification elections in 1956, with both sides abstaining from violence and military alliances in the meantime. Each side charged the other with violations of the accords from the outset, making it clear within just a few months that elections were unlikely to occur. In 1955 the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) was founded with Ngo Dinh Diem as President. The scheduled elections were canceled as Diem claimed the North was denying access for campaigning purposes. In the North, the PRC blatantly violated the accords by sending PLA forces to train and equip Viet Minh troops, increasing the number of Viet Minh divisions from seven to twenty and exporting large amounts of heavy artillery to Hanoi.\(^{890}\)

\(^{890}\) *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. XIX: 201 (Memo of meeting between Cambodian Prince Sihanouk and Assistant Secretary of State Robertson, Sep. 16, 1958).
With respect to Laos, the 1954 Geneva Accords called for a neutralization of the state and a complete withdrawal of all foreign military forces. In the event, the Pathet Lao withdrew to designated regroupment zones in the northeast Laotian provinces of Sam Neua and Phong Saly; however, Vietnamese officers continued to recruit, train, and command the Pathet Lao guerrillas. Moreover, contrary to the agreement, the Pathet Lao refused to turn over control of the regroupment zones to the government. Attempts at reconciliation between the Pathet Lao and the Royal Lao government were undertaken in the mid 1950s as North Vietnam struggled with its own internal problems. These efforts failed and in 1959 open combat erupted once more. Various attempts at bringing together the Pathet Lao led by Prince Souphanouvong, the rightists led by General Phoumi Nosavan, and the neutralists led by Prince Souvanna Phouma met with little success. Nosavan was able to take power in 1959 due in part to his ability to attract American economic support; however, his government was immediately confronted with hostilities brought about by the communists.

Pursuant to a May 1959 decision of the DRV Central Committee of the Communist Party, Ho escalated military operations once again in July 1959. Mao’s disastrous Great Leap Forward had left China in economic shambles, leading Mao to once again look to foreign adventure as a means of diverting attention, justifying hardship, and ensuring total personal control over the country. Thus, Mao was willing to support Ho in his escalation of guerrilla operations in South Vietnam and conventional operations in Laos directed against the Phoumi Nosavan government. By August 1960, this led to a coup by the “neutralist” Kong Le that

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891 Langer and Zasloff, 62.
894 Kochavi, 95. Zhai suggests that China’s support of Ho’s escalatory moves in Laos stemmed less from diversionary reasons than from genuine Chinese fear that Laos was to be the newest American base in its attempt at encircling the PRC. Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 94).
895 Pham Von Dong journeyed to Beijing in October 1959, where he requested and received Chinese approval and assistance for stepped up operations. Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars,
resulted in not only greater freedom of action for the Viet Minh forces in eastern Laos, but in direct Soviet provision of aid to the Hanoi-run Laotian communists. Nosavan retained control over Vientiane, but the DRV backed Pathet Lao held northeastern Laos, including the central area known as the Plain of Jars. Hostilities continued through 1960 and into 1961. At this point, U.S. policymakers faced a decision of whether to intervene to deter further advances by the communists and risk a clash with either the Chinese or Soviets, or to write off Laos. After the crisis intensity escalated to dangerous proportions, a ceasefire was reached in May, leading to another conference in Geneva.

In early 1962 with the talks in Geneva deadlocked, the Pathet Lao ended the ceasefire by opening fire on government forces at Louang Nam Tha, less than 25 miles from the Chinese border. Four battalions of DRV regulars then engaged in a conventional assault of Louang Nam Tha leading to the collapse of the government position a day later. Pathet Lao forces began advancing to the Thai border, raising fears in Thailand of a potential invasion. Around the same time, Chinese forces began building a new Chinese airfield to the northwest of the Laotian border. At this point, Kennedy undertook a series of actions designed to deter further advances in Laos.

Meanwhile, Ho had been increasing the flow of communist guerrillas to South Vietnam in an effort to destroy the South Vietnam government via guerrilla warfare rather than through overt conventional means. Following the 1962 ceasefire in Laos, activity in South Vietnam overshadowed the continued communist fighting in Laos. Having accomplished his goal of securing eastern Laos, Ho was less interested in pushing through with a complete seizure of Laos than in first unifying Vietnam. Using an infiltrated guerrilla army and supplementing it with

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82) As economic conditions worsened in China in early 1960, support for Ho’s military operations increased. Ibid., 83.


897 Kochavi, 116.
regular North Vietnamese troops, Ho placed continuous pressure on the Saigon regime until American forces began to take a larger role following the North Vietnamese attack on American naval vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin in August 1964.

Goals

North Vietnamese goals in South Vietnam were to use guerrilla tactics to destabilize the South Vietnamese government, resulting in its overthrow and the ascendance of a communist government while projecting the image that the insurrection was of popular origin and not precipitated by the government of the north. Activities in Laos were directly related to the North Vietnamese decision to increase insurgent operations in South Vietnam. Thus, the immediate goal of sending troops to Laos was to regain control over the border regions enabling the North Vietnamese to use the infamous Ho Chi Minh trail to infiltrate guerrillas and supplies deep into South Vietnam.

Additionally, Ho maintained pressure in Laos to please his supporters in Beijing who sought to further a militant advance of communism internationally. Ho’s long-term goal in Laos was to establish a Vietnamese dominated government in Vientiane - a goal that was not shared by Beijing and thus a potential source of tension between Hanoi and Beijing.

The American goal in South Vietnam was to prevent the North Vietnamese from successfully orchestrating the overthrow of the South Vietnamese government via the infiltration of communist guerrillas or the direct invasion of the North Vietnamese Army. The American goal in Laos was to prevent the collapse of the Royal government and prevent communist incursions into Thailand. Fearing provocation of a Chinese response, the United States was apparently reconciled to acceptance of Viet Minh control of eastern Laos despite its importance as a supply route for guerrillas in South Vietnam.

Capabilities

Communist forces: North Vietnamese forces in 1959 were believed to be between 300,000 and 350,000 troops organized into thirteen divisions and 16 separate regiments. Prior

898 Langer and Zasloff, 70-71; Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 107.

899 DSB V. 38, 224 (Feb. 10, 1958) (President’s Budget Message to Congress, Jan. 18, 1958); DSB V. 38, 700 (Apr. 28, 1958) (Testimony of Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern Affairs
to Ho’s decision to escalate hostilities, approximately six thousand communist troops were deployed in Laos. New Vietnamese troops were inserted into Laos in late 1959, however, the exact numbers thereof were unknown. By 1962, an estimated nine thousand Viet Minh were believed to be directing Pathet Lao forces in Laos. \(^900\) Notably, the Viet Minh could not operate in Laos as they could in Vietnam. As foreigners, the ability of the Vietnamese to fade into and move discreetly among the population at large was far less than in Vietnam. \(^901\) Thus, to establish control of areas, the DRV forces were forced to adopt conventional tactics more often than in Vietnam.

Pathet Lao forces were minimal. In 1957, there were only six thousand total Pathet Lao. That number jumped to nine thousand by 1960, and almost 20,000 by 1962; however, this expansion was in large part due to an influx of Viet Minh beginning in 1961. \(^902\) Between March and May 1961, communist forces in Laos rose from approximately 10,000 to 16,500. \(^903\) By the time of major military operations in 1962, the Pathet Lao and North Vietnamese forces in Laos combined numbered close to forty thousand. \(^904\) While most of the Pathet Lao weaponry was obtained from Vietnam, the Chinese did provide weaponry and supplies for nearly 20,000


\(^901\) Kissinger, Ending the Vietnam War, 30.

\(^902\) Joseph J. Zasloff, The Pathet Lao (Lexington, Mass: Lexington Books, 1973), 69-70. The extent of Vietnamese infiltration is best shown by evidence of nearly 700 Vietnamese deaths in Laos during spring 1961. Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 107. Given a force of only 20,000, such a relatively large number of fatalities suggests a major portion of the Pathet Lao were in fact DRV regulars.

\(^903\) FRUS 1961-1963, Vol. XXIV: 157 (Memo Director of Intelligence, Joint Staff to President’s Military Advisor, May 1, 1961).

\(^904\) Ibid., 771 (Memo President’s Meeting with Congressional Leaders regarding Laos, May 15, 1962).
directly to the Pathet Lao in early 1961. Direct Chinese aid was again provided in 1962 for the attacks on Louang Nam Tha. In addition, the Soviets provided direct aid via airlift to the rebel forces in Laos in 1960-61, including weapons such as 105 mm. howitzers and mortars enabling the rebels to mount conventional offensives against governmental troops. By 1962, the communist forces had forty PT-76 amphibious tanks and 152 mm artillery. In early 1962, a U.S. intelligence estimate held that the communist forces in Laos now possessed superior armor and artillery compared to Laotian government forces. Both Soviet and North Vietnamese planes were used to transport North Vietnamese paratroops into Laos as well. By March 1961, American officials noted over one thousand Soviet sorties had been flown to Laos.

In South Vietnam, Ho called upon thousands of Viet Minh troops that had been planted in the south following the Geneva Accords and supplemented by Viet Minh infiltration through

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905 Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 96. By 1965, Whiting asserts there were nearly fifteen thousand PLA troops in Nam Tha and Phong Saly provinces in northern Laos. Whiting, The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence, 236.

906 Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 104.


910 DSB V. 44, 114 (Jan 23, 1961) (DOS Press Release, Jan. 3, 1961, noting 184 illegal Soviet flights in the areas of Vang Vieng (Muang Vangvieng), Phong Hong (Muang Phon-Hong), Sam Neua (Xam Hua) and Xieng Khouang (Xiangkhoang) between December 15, 1960 and Jan 2, 1961).

Laos and Cambodia in the prior five years. In late 1960, he established the National Liberation Front as a front organization for the Viet Minh guerrillas in the South. Known colloquially as the Viet Cong, these forces grew from 7,000 at the start of 1961 to approximately 12,000 in late spring and to 17,000 by October. By February 1962, the Secretary of State estimated there were nearly 20,000 Viet Cong guerrillas in South Vietnam, while a State Department intelligence report concluded there were 13,000 Viet Cong regulars, another 13,600 irregulars, and over 100,000 sympathizers in South Vietnam. These official estimates likely understated the actual presence of Viet Cong due to political pressure from Washington to provide positive news regarding the conflict in Vietnam. By 1964, there were an estimated 39,000 Viet Cong regulars believed to have infiltrated from the north. These guerrillas were distributed throughout South Vietnam, obtaining refuge in the mountains along the Laotian border as well as in the villages of the Mekong delta. Thus, no traditional front existed whereby the conventional armed forces of the government could exert their numerical superiority; rather, government forces tried to maintain security by dispersing their strength to protect the whole state.


914 A.J. Langguth, Our Vietnam: The War, 1954-1975 (New York: Touchstone Books, 2000), 173-74, reports that an official figure of 16,305 Viet Cong was provided by the DOD in May 1962 prior to a visit to Vietnam by Secretary of Defense McNamara, after the original estimates of 40,000 Viet Cong were rejected as unacceptable for political reasons.


916 DSB V. 47, 530 (Oct. 8, 1962) (Address by Director of DOS Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Sep. 18, 1963).
Prior to 1959, Soviet military assistance to the DRV was limited to shipments of small arms, communications gear, and a handful of surplus tanks.\textsuperscript{917} Soviet aid did not increase appreciably until late 1960, when the Soviets upped their aid in an attempt to try to stave off Chinese hegemony in Southeast Asia. Before 1965 however, the Soviets supplied lower quality Eastern bloc made arms rather than Soviet produced equipment, including recoilless rifles, mortars, machine guns, and rifles.\textsuperscript{918} Ho naturally sought to exploit the Sino-Soviet conflict for his own benefit by playing both sides off one another in a competition for influence in the DRV; however, the Soviets rejected Ho’s requests in 1963-64 for even greater arms supplies.\textsuperscript{919} Fortunes turned again in Ho’s favor with the ascent of Brezhnev in late 1964 and in February 1965, the Soviets signed a deal with the DRV to provide large amounts of military aid.\textsuperscript{920}

Between 1959-1963, China provided enormous amounts of aid to the DRV, including 270,000 small arms, 10,000 artillery pieces, over 200 million rounds of small caliber ammunition, over 2 million artillery shells, thousands of radio transmitters, trucks, a handful of aircraft and naval craft, and over 1 million military uniforms, as well as food, medical supplies and other assistance.\textsuperscript{921} Chinese materiel aid increased markedly during 1963.\textsuperscript{922} Following the Gulf of Tonkin incident in 1964, China delivered 15 MiG-15’s and MiG-17’s to the DRV, began


\textsuperscript{919} Mott, 241.

\textsuperscript{920} Ibid., 240-41.


training for North Vietnamese pilots, and began construction of air bases near the Sino-Vietnamese border.923

Anti-communist forces: Laotian government forces were small, approximately 25,000 troops as of 1960, poorly trained, and ill-equipped.924 Among the most important government armaments were a handful of M-24 tanks and 105 mm howitzers received from the United States in 1957.925 In response to the communist uprising in 1959, the United States provided limited military aid, including four T-6 aircraft.926 Total American military and technical aid to Laos for the five years prior to the crisis was only $300 million.927 Poor transportation infrastructure made it difficult for the government troops to move around the country, particularly in the eastern mountains. Government forces increased steadily between 1959 and 1962, resulting in a force of nearly 80,000 government troops by the battle for Nam Tha in May 1962.928 In 1963, the United States delivered six T-28 fighter-bombers to the Royal Lao Air Force for use against the communist insurgents.929


927 George, Hall, and Simons, 38.

928 FRUS 1961-1963, Vol. XXIV: 771 (Memo President’s Meeting with Congressional Leaders regarding Laos, May 15, 1962). In May 1961, government forces numbered 38,500; by November 1961 the total was up to 67,000. Ibid., 157 (Memo Director of Intelligence, Joint Staff to President’s Military Advisor, May 1, 1961); Ibid., 525 (Memo Executive Secretary of DOS to National Security Advisor, Nov. 26, 1961).

South Vietnam’s military forces at the beginning of 1961 included 150,000 active duty troops and a “Civil Guard” force of 120,000 of dubious quality.\textsuperscript{930} During the year, the United States financed the training of an additional 20,000 troops.\textsuperscript{931} Although they had minimal fixed wing airpower, 15 piston-driven fighters, 30 transport aircraft, and no jets, the government did have almost 25 helicopters specifically provided by the United States for use in counter-insurgency operations.\textsuperscript{932} In May 1961, Vice President Johnson traveled to South Vietnam where he announced agreements for the United States to increase military aid to South Vietnam, expand the MAP funds to help increase the size of the South Vietnamese military, deploy American military specialists to aid the South Vietnamese, and increase economic assistance to improve political support for the Diem government.\textsuperscript{933} In 1962, the active military increased to 200,000, supplemented by the Civil Guard and Self Defense Forces that combined to provide another 124,000.\textsuperscript{934}

By 1959, total active duty American military strength hovered just below the 2.5 million mark. With Kennedy’s defense policy moving away from the Eisenhower New Look emphasis on nuclear weapons and refocusing on a flexible response capability intended to provide the United States with greater control over the escalation process, conventional force levels were increasing. Combat ready Army divisions went from eleven to sixteen between 1961 and 1962, sealift and airlift capabilities were increased, tactical air squadrons were increased by thirty percent, and procurement of conventional munitions rose nearly fifty percent.\textsuperscript{935} In the theater,


\textsuperscript{931} Ibid., 525 (Memo Executive Secretary of DOS to National Security Advisor, Nov. 26, 1961).

\textsuperscript{932} Ibid., 39 (Report of Inter-Agency Task Force on Laos, Jan. 23, 1961); Ibid., 62 (Memo Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs to President, Apr. 3, 1961).


large U.S. contingents of American forces in Japan (65,814), Korea (49,827), Okinawa (42,057) and the Philippines (23,236) anchored the American presence. ³³⁶ Less than one thousand American service personnel were in South Vietnam in 1959, while only twenty Americans were in Laos providing maintenance training to French and Laotian technicians. ³³⁷

In spring 1962, the United States deployed a thousand man Army battle group to Nong Khai, Thailand along the Laos border near Vientiane, placing them in position to quickly insert into Laos if necessary. ³³⁸ In May, a Marine Battalion Landing Team roughly two thousand strong was sent ashore, along with both Marine Corps air assets and a U.S. Air Force fighter squadron. ²³⁹ Completing this build-up, the Seventh Fleet sent two aircraft carriers into the Gulf


³³⁸ Langer and Zasloff, 79.

of Siam. American naval power was counted on to provide offensive striking power via carrier based aircraft, while the small ground presence was intended to prevent the complete collapse of the Royalist government as well as signal the resolve of the United States to defend its treaty partner Thailand.

**Interests**

*North Vietnam:* Ho’s main interest in Laos was related to his reunification efforts in Vietnam. Given the narrow waist of Vietnam, infiltrating guerrillas directly across the North-South border was difficult. Moreover, while Chinese ships based in Hainan could deliver some supplies via a maritime route, the presence of the American Seventh Fleet made this a dangerous method on which to rely. Thus, Ho needed freedom of movement in eastern Laos and eastern Cambodia in order to infiltrate and supply guerrillas in South Vietnam most efficiently. Unlike the conflict in the early 1950s, Laos was not simply a second front that served to divert the strength of the defender in Annam and Cochin China. Accordingly, Ho would likely have been content to secure the eastern region refrain from operations expanding into the north-central plains or pushing toward Thailand, at least until reunification of Vietnam had been accomplished. In fact, such operations served western interests by providing support to the western claims of communist imperialism and causing Thailand to invoke the SEATO treaty so as to enhance the possibility of bringing American military forces to the area. Nonetheless, as China and Russia had interests in Laos, and as Ho was dependent on these states for arms, he had to satisfy their wishes. Of course Ho still maintained interests in establishing Vietnamese hegemony over all of the Indochina region, so that while he likely opposed the timing of the operation in Laos, he did not object to the goal of installing a communist government via Vietnamese led military force.

Soviet interests in Laos were to prevent Chinese domination of the region while also demonstrating Soviet leadership of the international communist movement. The increasing Sino-Soviet friction became evident in Laos, as the Chinese became frustrated over their inability

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to control the DRV-led Pathet Lao in the face of Soviet assistance. Chinese interests in Laos were to establish a friendly government on the border, prevent the American encirclement of China, and demonstrate that militant Maoist methods were superior for spreading communism. Thus, both the Soviets and Chinese wanted Ho to keep pressure on in Laos for their own parochial reasons irrespective of the increased difficulty such caused for Ho in Vietnam.

United States: American interests in South Vietnam and Laos were similar to the interests identified in Indochina at the beginning of the decade. However, following the division of Vietnam at the Geneva Conference in 1954, Eisenhower placed particular emphasis on holding Laos. Although the subject of some debate, Eisenhower reportedly told Kennedy during a briefing following the latter’s election in 1960 that Laos was the key to Southeast Asia and that the United States should be prepared to defend it even without allied support. Also at stake for the United States was the relevance of SEATO. As a protocol state to the agreement, Laos was a beneficiary of SEATO’s provision of collective defense. If the United States failed to stop communist aggression in Laos, SEATO would prove empty and Thailand would be forced to reassess its ability to hold out as an anti-communist government. Neither the French nor the British appeared willing to support SEATO military action, making the United States the sole sponsor should SEATO be kept alive.

Risk Propensity

By the late 1950s, American leaders, while concerned with Khrushchev’s proclivity toward recklessness, were more comfortable dealing with the Soviets than with the Chinese. Soviets appeared to make an attempt at participation in the international system via established

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941 Chae-jin Lee, 523.

diplomatic procedures, whereas the Chinese seemed to defy all traditional diplomatic norms.\footnote{This was reflected in the State Department’s more favorable assessment of Soviet compliance with the 1962 Geneva Agreement than of Chinese compliance. DSB V. 51, 269 (Aug. 24, 1964) (NBC interview of Secretary of State, Aug. 5, 1964). See also DSB V. 53, 863 (Nov. 29, 1965) (Address of Ambassador at Large Averill Harriman, noting the apparent temperance of the Soviets in contrast to the Chinese).} In the words of one analyst, Mao’s government was considered “inherently aggressive and fundamentalist” as well as “fatally irresponsible and utterly unpredictable.”\footnote{Kochavi, 98; See also Schulzinger, 240-41.} Thus, Chinese actions were viewed through a cognitive filter that colored the Chinese as ruthless expansionists.

By the early 1960s, American officials began to publicly note indications of a potential Sino-Soviet split, but did little to exploit it.\footnote{DSB V. 41, 577 (Oct. 26, 1959) (Press Conference of Secretary of State, Oct. 6, 1959); DSB V. 42, 409 (Mar. 14, 1960) (Address by Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern Affairs, Feb. 19, 1960).} While recognizing that the split could help the west by presenting the Soviets with a new security threat in the east that might pin down a substantial number of Soviet troops, U.S. officials were also cognizant of the fact that both sides were still avowed communists dedicated to the establishment of a global socialist empire. Although the Soviets were advancing ideas of peaceful coexistence and disavowing the inevitability of world war, they still supported the use of violence, through so-called “wars of national liberation,” to defeat the west. As noted by one America analyst, the Sino-Soviet conflict was not a dispute over ends, but rather over the means of accomplishing the ends: how best to destroy the United States.\footnote{DSB V. 49, 82 (Jul. 15, 1963) (Address of Deputy Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Jun. 20, 1963, citing unnamed Soviet official).}

While hindsight suggests Khrushchev’s 1961 address supporting “wars of national liberation”\footnote{Khrushchev speech “For New Victories of the World Communist Movement,” cited in DSB V. 50, 565 (Apr. 13, 1964) (Address of Secretary of Defense, Mar. 20, 1963).} was aimed at ensuring Soviet standing as the leading communist power in the face of a rising Chinese challenge that Moscow had grown complacent and conservative in the throes
of its superpower position, at the time, the address was perceived in the United States as a challenge to the inexperienced Kennedy. Soviet activity in the Asian Pacific reinforced this interpretation, as the Soviet airlift of arms to communist rebels in Laos, the delivery of arms, advisors, and economic assistance to Ho in North Vietnam, and the funding and arming of communists in Indonesia provided evidence that Khrushchev was making good on his threats. Thus, American officials had to believe that failure to act would result in more and more challenges, placing the United States squarely within the domain of losses.

The United States was unclear as to which state was the main sponsor of the Hanoi regime, thus it was uncertain how the Sino-Soviet conflict would impact affairs in Indochina. Given the geographic proximity of China and the traditional suzerainty exercised by the Chinese over the Tonkin region, China seemed the natural choice. However, China had yet to industrialize on a scale sufficient to allow it to produce advance military technology on a large scale, although it was able to produce the small arms and ammunition required in a guerrilla war. Moreover, as the Sino-Soviet dispute was largely over the degree of militarization appropriate in pursuing global domination, both sides had an incentive to provide generous aid to the regime in Hanoi in order to gain political support. Accordingly, the conflict may have actually enhanced both the amount of materiel aid and the degree of public rhetorical support that Ho would receive in the short term. In 1963, Mao assured Ho that if the United States attacked, he could regard China as a strategic rear. In Hanoi, Truong Chinh favored the less militant Soviet line; however, both Le Duan and Le Duc Tho favored the aggressive Chinese policy. Moreover, as

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948 Kissinger, Ending the Vietnam War, 28; Langguth, 118.
949 DSB V. 46, 180 (Jul. 30, 1962) (Secretary of State Television Interview, Jul. 8, 1962).
950 Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 117.
951 Ibid., 123. Le Duan was the number two ranking member of the North Vietnamese Politburo while Truong Chinh was the third ranked member. Le Duc Tho was ranked seventh during this time. Chau, 773.
the Soviet Union sought to pressure the North Vietnamese to pay off their debts, Ho naturally swung more towards the Chinese.\textsuperscript{952}

In response to the 1961 communist offensive, Congress was opposed to any deployment of U.S. forces to Laos.\textsuperscript{953} While grudgingly acceptant of the increase in defense spending following the presidential campaign’s emphasis on foreign policy, deployment of American ground troops to Asia less than a decade after the Korean War’s conclusion was still anathema. Moreover, questions regarding the quality of the Laotian military forces, the will of the people to stand up to communism, and the objectives to be obtained via introduction of U.S. forces worked to diminish enthusiasm for a formal commitment of American troops.

For Kennedy, deployment of American troops to Laos would have been seen as a major political risk. The Bay of Pigs fiasco in spring 1961 undoubtedly made Kennedy wary of exercising military options. This attitude likely changed following the Vienna summit in June 1961 between Kennedy and Khrushchev in which the Soviet leader attempted to bully the young American President and the August 1961 erection of the Berlin Wall. When the shooting in Laos heated up in 1962, Kennedy was likely intent on demonstrating that he would not be cowed by the Soviets. Given that his public approval ratings had hovered around 75% from his assumption of office throughout 1961, Kennedy was not domestically constrained from taking a more aggressive stand.

America’s fellow SEATO members France and Great Britain were unwilling to support either multilateral action via SEATO or unilateral American military action in Laos. Despite having experienced over a decade of European intransigence with respect to American led efforts to prevent communist expansion in Asia, Washington was reluctant to proceed without allied support. However, unlike the most recent crises involving Taiwan, the crisis in Laos directly threatened a SEATO member, Thailand, as well as a SEATO protocol state, Laos. Thus, the JCS warned the President that American acceptance of the European refusal to act via SEATO was

\textsuperscript{952} Zhai, \textit{China and the Vietnam Wars}, 124.

\textsuperscript{953} Kochavi, 108.
In prospect theory terms, the existence of SEATO was a part of the baseline. Attacks rendering SEATO irrelevant would deprive the United States of an important propaganda tool used in fighting charges equating the American presence in Asia with imperialism as well as a tool used to sell the U.S. commitment in Asia to American voters concerned with the economic costs of continued U.S. presence. Thus, the end of SEATO would be construed as a significant loss in Washington.

In the 1962 Laos crisis, the American government was constrained by mistrust and frustration with the existing Laotian political and military leadership. Despite funding the government military forces, Phoumi Nosavan refused to accept American military advice. With the collapse of the government position at Nam Tha in May, Washington lost all confidence in Phoumi and sought to remove him from power.955

In late 1962, events in Southeast Asia took a back seat to the Cuban missile crisis. Despite communist violations of the Geneva Agreement from July, American attention was focused exclusively on the events playing out in the Caribbean. Following the resolution of this crisis, Kennedy likely felt that he had successfully maneuvered through a crisis more severe than that in Laos. Thus, he may have felt more able to engage in strong behavior in South Vietnam.

For the United States, the reference point in Vietnam was a divided country. American aid had supplanted French influence in the south, such that the survival of the South Vietnamese state was now tied to American credibility. Having already invested in sustaining South Vietnam since 1955, a collapse of the government would be seen as a loss in Washington.956

Pursuant to prospect theory, when faced with a loss, a decision-maker will be more apt to engage in activity risking even greater losses in order to prevent the initial loss. In contrast, Ho Chi Minh’s reference point was a unified Vietnam, free of western influence. Anything short of this


955 Ibid., 756 (Telegram DOS to Embassy Laos, May 12, 1962).

956 This baseline is revealed in the comment of National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy who noted in 1961 that “Laos was never really ours following 1954 [Geneva Accords], South Vietnam is.” Langguth, 152.
would be considered as within the domain of losses. Accordingly, as North Vietnam mounted
attacks in South Vietnam via the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese regulars, both sides
considered themselves to be in the realm of losses, suggesting that both sides would be more risk
acceptant. Moreover, as both sides viewed the other as seeking gains, both sides likely believed
the other would more easily back down, further enhancing risk propensity.\textsuperscript{957}

By the summer of 1963, U.S. officials were growing increasingly critical of President
Diem for his domestic political tactics, most notably the restraints placed on the Buddhists.\textsuperscript{958} In
November, Diem was killed in a military coup that was at a minimum tacitly supported by
Washington. Over the next few years, a series of governments were formed and dissolved in
South Vietnam before some stability finally emerged under Nguyen Van Thieu in the late 1960s.
The rapid turnover of governments paralyzed the implementation of political and economic
programs fundamental to defeating the communist insurgency. During this period, the Viet
Cong took advantage of governmental chaos to increase their tempo of operations, escalate the
rate of infiltration, and step up propaganda work throughout South Vietnam. In addition, the
unsettled domestic political situation in South Vietnam exacerbated U.S. political problems in
obtaining American popular support for actions in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{959} With a parade of military
officers, provisional committees, and weak civilian leaders struggling to hold office, selling the
American public on the need to send U.S. forces to protect South Vietnam was difficult.
Moreover, the lack of a stable domestic government enhanced the appeal of communist
propaganda that American force was simply a continuation of western imperialism over the
Vietnamese people.

This crisis illustrates one of the fundamental tenets of prospect theory. Retaining
Indochina in the western camp was of marginal value when viewing the international situation as
a whole. American power would not be enhanced or diminished significantly regardless of

\textsuperscript{957} Jervis, “Political Implications of Loss Aversion,” 192.


63\% of the American public was paying “little or no attention” to actions in Vietnam.
which side of the east-west divide claimed Indochina. Yet, unlike rational choice’s emphasis on measuring “absolute states,” prospect theory emphasizes relative gains and losses. Accordingly, the fact that American prestige had been committed in Indochina such that communist acquisition of the area would be viewed as a loss enables us to understand why what would seem an inordinate amount of effort was spent in holding on to Indochina.

Another factor bearing on American risk propensity in Vietnam was the collective motivated bias of Washington. Lacking clear information on what exactly was happening in Vietnam, determined not to suffer further erosion of American credibility in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs incident in early 1961, and hoping to retain the White House in 1964 without Vietnam exploding into the front pages, American policymakers had an interest in believing that the situation could be handled. Accordingly, the risks of escalatory commitment of U.S. prestige in the form of military advisors were downplayed while the chances of successfully defeating the communists were overemphasized. In short, decisions in Vietnam were likely strongly colored by affect.

The American baseline in Laos and South Vietnam at this time was one of non-communist governments in both states, although Laos was a neutral state while the South Vietnamese government was strongly anti-communist. Despite the weaknesses of the respective local governments, the communist insurrections were clearly perceived as externally instigated and as examples of communist imperial behavior. For American not to act would be to cede credibility in Asia and risk the retraction of the American defense perimeter established in the offshore island chain. Thus a failure to act would place the United States in the domain of losses, suggesting an enhanced risk acceptance, particularly with respect to South Vietnam, although this risk acceptance was lessened by several other mitigating factors.

960 Regarding the desire to prevent Vietnam from becoming a major campaign issue prior to the 1964 Presidential election, see Langguth, 173-74.

961 Jervis, “Political Implications of Loss Aversion,” 192 (noting motivated bias works to enhance the perception that risky policy will succeed).
Declaratory Policy

When the Pathet Lao illegally occupied two northern provinces of Laos following the Geneva Accords of 1954 and engaged in hostilities with the Laotian government until a negotiated settlement in 1957, the United States made little effort to deter the Viet Minh sponsored group from sustaining the occupation. Although the United States did attempt to signal a commitment to assist the governments in Indochina through their inclusion in SEATO and through military assistance agreements, no explicit deterrent policy was articulated. Likewise the Eisenhower administration had placed new emphasis on Asia in terms of funding in the Mutual Security Program; however, through 1958, three quarters of all U.S. mutual defense assistance going to the far East was spent in three countries: South Korea, Japan and Taiwan. Thus, there were only limited indications prior to 1959 that the United States would become actively involved in preventing Viet Minh intervention in Laos.

In fiscal year 1961, military assistance funding for Vietnam and Laos under the mutual security program was less than $350 million combined. Moreover, actually physical shipments of materiel reflected a lag time of years more often than months due to the bureaucratic requirements attached thereto, as illustrated in Figure 5.7.

\[962\] DSB V. 41, 278 (Aug. 24, 1959).

\[963\] For example, in May 1955, the United States signed a Mutual Defense Assistance Pact with Cambodia.

\[964\] Secretary of Defense Semiannual Report, January 1 to June 30, 1958: 78.

Following the communist attacks in August 1959, the United States issued a press release condemning the communist aggression in Laos, labeling the offensive as foreign supported, reiterating American support for the Royal Lao government, and approving of the Lao government’s appeal to the UN. The U.S. statement concluded by noting:

It is obvious that any further augmentation of the invading force or continued material support thereof by communists in north Vietnam will require a major change in the nature and magnitude of the Royal Lao Government’s need for support. The United States is confident that the free world would recognize such a new danger to peace and would take the action necessary. For its part, the United States supports that view.966

When the United States was challenged by the Soviet Union regarding U.S. “control” over Laos, the State Department issued a statement explicitly declaring, “No American personnel are commanding, advising, or serving with Lao units….We have no troops in Laos. We do not have in Laos, nor have we provided that country, any heavy or modern equipment. We have no bases

in Laos, nor airstrips….”967 Thereafter, the members of SEATO met to discuss Laos, but decided against taking any military action or issuing specific deterrent threats.968

When military action heated up again in Laos in September 1960, the United States issued another warning to the communists not to intervene, noting:

The United States has no desire to intervene in the internal affairs of Laos. It has consistently adhered to and supported the policy that their affairs should be settled by peaceful means by the Lao themselves. It would, however, be immediately concerned by the efforts of any other outside power, or the agents thereof, to take advantage of the disturbed conditions prevailing and to intervene directly or indirectly.969

This was followed in December 1960 by a note refuting Soviet claims of American aggression in Laos, condemning the Soviet airlift of supplies to the rebel movement, and reiterating the warning that the United States would support Laotian independence and resist externally sponsored efforts aimed at communist domination.970

Kennedy informed the Soviets that the United States would not allow a communist takeover of Laos, via a March 9, 1961 message from Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson in Moscow and via a March 18, 1961 message from Secretary Rusk to the Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko.971 On March 23, 1961, Kennedy warned of U.S. resolve to defend Laos, asserting “there must be a cessation of the present armed attacks by externally supported Communists. If these attacks do not stop, those who support a genuinely neutral Laos will have to consider their response.”972 Kennedy specifically noted that such considerations would be

967 DSB V. 41, 344 (Sept. 7, 1959); DSB V. 41, 374 (Sept. 14, 1959).


971 George, Hall, and Simons, 57.

made both in Washington and in the context of the SEATO Council. In conjunction with this statement, Kennedy ordered elements of the Seventh Fleet to the South China Sea, placed forces in Okinawa on alert, set up a helicopter repair base in Udorn, Thailand, and positioned supplies and equipment at bases in Thailand near the Laotian border. At the SEATO meeting in March, a communiqué was issued stating that the externally assisted communist offensive in Laos was viewed with “grave concern” by the SEATO Council and that if such actions continued, SEATO members were prepared “to take whatever action may be appropriate in the circumstances.” In addition the communiqué noted the “efforts of an armed minority…to destroy the Government of South Vietnam” and noted the Council’s declaration of “firm resolve not to acquiesce in any such takeover.” In early May, Vice President Johnson made a trip to South Vietnam, demonstrating the importance America placed on events therein. Yet despite the strong statements and the appearance by Johnson, the United States failed to deploy ground troops to Southeast Asia to stop the continued Pathet Lao attacks. Moreover, the warnings by Kennedy never identified specific actions that would bring about American intervention.

On May 12, 1961, a new Geneva conference opened with Laos as the main topic. At the conference, an unsteady agreement on the neutrality of Laos was reached. While this temporarily allowed the crisis to subside so as to lessen the pressure on the United States to follow through with its threats, Pathet Lao operations still continued.

Despite the ceasefire agreement, fighting continued in Laos, flaring up with renewed intensity in early 1962. With the increased communist activity and hesitant U.S. response, the Thai Foreign Minister was moved to visit Washington in March 1962 where he sought and


976 Ibid.

977 George, Hall, and Simons, 60.
received assurances of U.S. commitment to protect and defend Thailand. Thus, when the heavy fighting in Laos caused communist troops to approach the Thai border in May 1962, Kennedy responded by sending the Seventh Fleet to the Gulf of Siam, deploying two squadrons of U.S. planes to an airbase in Bangkok, and dispatching U.S. troops to Thailand, including a detachment of two thousand U.S. Marines. Thereafter, Kennedy informed the Soviets that they must ensure no further military moves were taken. Once a ceasefire was reached, the Secretary of State noted that if the Chinese attempted to move into the area, they would find the Laotian government “would have the strongest possible support from the people of other countries.” Tempering these moves was the public spat between American leaders in Washington and the strongest anti-communist leader in Laos, Phoumi Nosavan. American differences with Phoumi were reportedly “widely known,” and resulted in the cessation of U.S. aid to Nosavan and an attempt to remove him. In July 1962, a formal agreement was reached with respect to Laos, attempting to neutralize the country and prevent the introduction and continuation of all foreign military troops in Laos. As part of the agreement, Laos agreed to forego foreign military alliances and reject protection from SEATO.

Beginning in June 1961, the United States agreed to step up aid to Vietnam due to the increased level of communist hostilities in South Vietnam, yet it still abstained from acting in Laos. In October 1961, President Kennedy sent a letter to Diem in which he assured the South Vietnamese President that “the United States is determined to help Vietnam preserve its

979 DSB V. 46, 904 (Jun. 4, 1962) (Statement by President, May, 15, 1962); DSB V. 48, 638 (Apr. 29, 1963); Whiting (1975: 66); Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 104.
independence, protect its people against Communist assassins, and build a better life through economic growth.” In December 1961, Kennedy reiterated this commitment, publicly stating:

At [the time of the 1954 Geneva Accords], the United States, although not a party to the Accords, declared that it “would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security.” We continue to maintain that view… We shall promptly increase our assistance to your defense effort….

Through the next 3 years, the U.S. began to increase its military assistance levels, including the deployment of military advisors to Vietnam, numbering in the thousands by 1963. The Military Assistance Advisory Group was replaced by a larger Military Assistance Command in 1962. Likewise, official statements continued to criticize the communist attacks and to note the gravity of Indochina’s security to U.S. security, yet these statements refrained from explicitly committing to U.S. combat troop deployments. Weakening the deterrent policy, U.S. officials became openly critical of Diem in 1963, thereby suggesting the United States would be less inclined to support the South Vietnamese government. In September 1963, President Kennedy publicly stated, “We are prepared to assist [the people of Vietnam], but I don’t think the war can be won unless the people support the effort, and, in my opinion, in the last 2 months the Government has gotten out of touch with the people.”

In February 1964, the United States began naval patrols off the North Vietnamese coast aimed at intelligence collection. Two months later at the SEATO Conference in April 1964, the member nations issued their strongest communiqué to date. The members, with the


985 DSB V. 46, 12 (Letter from President Kennedy to President Diem, Dec. 14, 1961).


987 Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 114.


989 These were the “Desoto patrols” that were the reason for the American presence in the Gulf of Tonkin in August 1964. Langguth, 272.
exception of France, “expressed grave concern about the continuing Communist aggression”
against South Vietnam, “agreed that members of SEATO should remain prepared, if necessary,
to take further concrete steps within their respective capabilities in fulfillment of their obligations
under the Treaty,” and “agreed that the defeat of the communist campaign is essential not only to
the security of the Republic of Vietnam, but to that of Southeast Asia.”990 In June 1964, Johnson
appointed a soldier, General Maxwell Taylor, rather than a diplomat to serve as Ambassador to
South Vietnam, indicating the American expectations for Indochina.

In June 1964, Johnson used Canadian diplomatic channels to advise the DRV that it
would not tolerate continued heavy guerrilla actions in the South; however, a full-fledged
commitment did not arrive until 1965.991 Despite Viet Cong attacks on November 1, 1964 at
Bienhoa targeting U.S. B-57’s and on December 24, 1964 at Saigon targeting U.S. military
officers at the Brink Hotel, Johnson took no retaliatory action.992 Thus, U.S. actions suggested
weakness and uncertainty of purpose, further encouraging the communists to continue in spite of
political statements.

Deterrence Outcome

U.S. deterrence efforts enjoyed short-term success in Laos as the Royal government was
not immediately overthrown and the communists were kept from the Thai border. On the other
hand, the product of the deterrence induced negotiations in Geneva was a long-term failure as
communist guerrillas remained in Laos, dramatically influencing the course of the war in
Vietnam and eventually resulting in the communist seizure of power in Laos in 1975. The first
ceasefire in 1961 was regularly violated as the communists used the conference in Geneva as a
tactical delay to consolidate their position in northeastern Laos free of American harassment.
Still, the United States was successful in preventing the immediate collapse of the Vientiane

990 DSB V. 50, 692 (May 4, 1964) (Text of SEATO Communiqué, Apr. 15, 1964). France
abstained from any declaration.


992 Karnow, 418, 423.
government and in keeping the communists at a distance from the Thailand border. When the communists renewed open conflict in spring 1962, the dispatch of American forces to Thailand sent a clear signal that the United States was prepared to act. The Soviet government apparently was not interested in pursuing the matter and agreed to a neutralization of Laos. Thus, talks in Geneva intensified producing a formal settlement in 1962. With this, the Soviet airlift of supplies to Laos stopped and Soviet interest in the country declined. However, North Vietnamese troops remained in Laos and Hanoi continued to make use of the Ho Chi Minh trail throughout the war in Vietnam although the communists did not engage in any major operations threatening Thailand. As a price for the agreement, the United States and Laos agreed to forego SEATO protection of Laos in the future. Despite the Geneva Accord calling for a withdrawal of all foreign military forces from Laos, only forty DRV troops were counted leaving Laos by the International Control Commission. Thus the July 1962 agreement was wholly ineffective in its intent to neutralize Laos; however, it did help to shift the overt fighting to South Vietnam, prevent the immediate fall of Laos to the communists, and stem the feared domino effect in Southeast Asia.

Deterrence attempts in South Vietnam were a major failure. Guerrilla activity increased rapidly between 1959 and 1964 successfully bringing about the collapse of the Diem government in November 1963 as well as a number of successor governments thereafter. Continued North Vietnamese infiltration and supply, coupled with incompetent South Vietnamese governance made the collapse of the South Vietnamese state a real probability by 1964.

The general balance of capabilities was in favor of the United States in both Laos and South Vietnam. The government in Hanoi was smaller, less technologically advanced, and wholly dependent on external supply for its military forces. Locally, the United States enjoyed


994 Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 110.

995 Chae-jin Lee, 536.

996 Langland, 638.
overwhelming firepower dominance as well. Although the Laotian forces were ineffective, U.S. forces could have easily made a major difference in Laos due to the nature of the fighting. As the invading Vietnamese could not melt into the population of Laotians, conventional operations were more necessary in Laos, which would enable the U.S. forces to utilize their air dominance as well as overwhelming armor and artillery advantages. In contrast to Laotian forces, South Vietnamese forces were relatively well equipped and competent in battle. Had U.S. airpower been added to South Vietnamese ground troops, communist lines of communication could have been cut and guerrillas already in country strangled. A Chinese response would have turned the war from a guerrilla fight to a conventional fight, again providing an edge to the American forces. Interdicting Chinese infiltration along the border via American airpower would have been relatively easy. Moreover, given the distance of the Soviet Union from Indochina, the likelihood of Soviet intervention, as compared to the Korean War, was decidedly less.

The balance of interests in Laos was relatively even. Absent Soviet and Chinese objectives, American and North Vietnamese interests in Laos were not in direct conflict in the short-term. Rather than attempting to close off Vietnamese use of eastern Laos, American officials had indicated a willingness to accept such, provided the Vietnamese did not threaten the Royal government in Vientiane or the government in Thailand. However, as Ho was bound to masters in Beijing and Moscow, he had to continue to apply pressure further west than he would have otherwise desired. As neither Ho nor the United States was intent on fighting over central Laos, the key interests to consider were those of Moscow given its airlift sustaining the Vietnamese led Pathet Lao offensive.

The balance of interests in South Vietnam was clearly in favor of Hanoi. The United States sought to prevent the collapse of Southeast Asia and to maintain credibility for SEATO. While these were clearly important interests, for Ho the question was one of survival. Nationalist pressure to reunite the state was intense, Maoist economic programs in the north had not succeeded, and the viability of Ho’s regime was in doubt. By mounting a major offensive in the South, Ho could generate increased aid from Moscow and Beijing, reaffirm his control on the communist government in Hanoi, and satisfy the popular desire for Vietnamese consolidation.

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American risk propensity in Laos was at best moderate while in South Vietnam it was more risk acceptant. Although U.S. officials saw a policy of inaction in the face of communist attacks as residing within the domain of losses, the context of the challenges moderated their risk acceptance. Congress was not supportive of introducing American troops in an Asian ground war. Major allies were not interested in pursuing military options. The corruption and incompetence of the regimes in Vientiane and Saigon made obtaining American popular support for military operations difficult. The Sino-Soviet conflict made it unclear how either of these state would react to American intervention, given the struggle between the two to be seen as the true leader of the internationalist socialist movement. However, under the Geneva Accords of 1954, Laos was rendered neutral whereas South Vietnam clearly fell into the Western camp. Accordingly, the collapse of the South Vietnamese state would be considered more of a loss than the collapse of Laos. In sum, given the disparity in capabilities, offset by the difference in interests and the moderate nature of American risk propensity, the credibility of the American deterrent was no better than average in South Vietnam and bordering on incredible for Laos.

Ho was moderately risk acceptant toward Laos and particularly risk acceptant toward operations in South. Given the degree of credibility of the American deterrent, a clear declaratory policy was necessary in order to have a chance to succeed. In Laos, the clarity of American policy was sufficient to succeed. Deployment of U.S. Marines coupled with warnings from SEATO helped temporarily calm the crisis in 1962. In South Vietnam, the risk propensity of Ho was probably such that regardless of clarity, deterrence would not have succeeded. In any event, the declaratory policy undertaken was far from clear. Increases in military assistance were offset by failure to deploy troops, criticism of the existing government, and the willingness to cede SEATO’s guarantee evidenced in the 1962 Geneva Accords on Laos.

**Chinese and Soviet Intervention in Vietnam, 1964-1969**

The North Vietnamese attack on the U.S.S. Maddox in the Gulf of Tonkin on August 2, 1964, followed by reported attacks on the Maddox and the U.S.S. Turner Joy on August 4, provided the impetus for the dramatic escalation of U.S. activity in Vietnam.\(^{997}\) American naval

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aircraft retaliated for the attacks by bombing North Vietnamese naval facilities. Immediately thereafter, the Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution providing President Johnson with the requisite authority to use military force as he saw fit in Vietnam. With this resolution, the stage was set for a major increase in the American presence in Vietnam. However, American ground troops did not begin to arrive in force until following the Viet Cong raid on U.S. security forces’ barracks at Pleiku in February 1965. The United States responded to the communist attack by sending American aircraft from three aircraft carriers after a Viet Cong training site at Dong Hoi in North Vietnam. When the Viet Cong responded with another guerrilla attack on American interests in Qui Nhon and Phuc Long, a second bombing mission was undertaken. Two days thereafter, Johnson decided to instigate a continuous bombing campaign against the north, known as Operation Rolling Thunder. In addition, two battalions of U.S. Marines landed in country, representing the first American combat troops to be deployed in Vietnam. American involvement increased dramatically in the following months, resulting in hundreds of thousands of American troops coming to Vietnam over the next five years.

The introduction of large numbers of U.S. forces on mainland Asia immediately raised the possibility of Chinese or Soviet intervention in Vietnam. Chinese officials had expressly noted that they would not sit idly by should the United States deploy ground troops in Vietnam. Fearing a replay of Korea, American officials paid attention to these warnings and sought to make clear that the removal of the regime in Hanoi was not the American objective and that American ground forces would not be used to invade North Vietnam. Nonetheless, the presence of Soviet aircraft in North Vietnam and the North Vietnamese use of airbases in Chinese territory brought American military forces into direct conflict with those of the communist giants. With the logic of controlled escalation far from certain, nuclear warfare could not be discounted as a possibility.

**Goals**

The Chinese sought to aid the North Vietnamese in violently overthrowing the government in Saigon, in order to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union as the

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leading exponent of socialist revolution in the third world. Beijing also sought to prevent the collapse of the communist regime in Hanoi and to prevent the formation of a pro-western government directly on their southeast border.

The Soviets had several goals in Vietnam. First, they sought to establish that the Chinese were incapable of assuming the mantle of world leadership of the communist bloc due to their lack of industrial capability and technological base, as well as their over-heated rhetoric. Second, by providing aid to the North Vietnamese such as jet aircraft and surface to air missiles, the Soviets sought to demonstrate their ability to match the west in terms of military power. Third, the Soviets looked to repeat the events of Korea by having American forces become bogged down in a battle of attrition in a secondary theater, creating war-weariness in the United States and reducing the chances of American military responses to other third-world challenges.

The goals of the United States were to restrain Chinese aggression in the region, to help the government of South Vietnam survive in the face of externally sponsored communist pressure, and to demonstrate American resolve to stand up to communist challenges globally. In addition, the United States sought to calm fears that the United States might retreat to an isolationist policy and reduce its alliance commitments in Europe in the face of growing Soviet nuclear power.

Capabilities

Communist forces: Soviet armed forces in 1964 were estimated at over 3.5 million active duty troops. Khrushchev had engaged in reductions on the order of two million troops in the late 1950s in order to help modernize the Soviet military, increase reliance on missile warfare, and perhaps free up resources for desired economic plans. However, with the downfall of Khrushchev, Soviet troop levels began to steadily climb once again, as noted in Figure 5-8 below. In addition, the Soviets continued to spend extraordinary amounts on the development of their nuclear arsenal in an effort to catch up with and surpass the American nuclear force.

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999 W. Lee, 272; Tsouras, 121.

1000 Evangelista, 1, asserts that conventional Soviet forces were cut by nearly half between 1953 and 1961.
Nonetheless, Soviet strategic forces remained qualitatively inferior to American forces, in large part due to the superior ballistic missile submarine force of the United States that helped ensure a survivable retaliatory force.

![Figure 5.8: Soviet Armed Forces, 1963-1969](source: William T. Lee (1977: 272))

Following the August 1964 events in the Gulf of Tonkin, the Chinese repositioned four air divisions and one anti-aircraft artillery division to fields close to the Vietnam border, as well as immediately sending several MiG-15s and MiG-17s to Hanoi directly.\(^{1001}\) In addition, they began constructing new airfields, including bases at Ningming, approximately 120 miles northeast of Hanoi, and Peitun-Yunnani, approximately 220 miles to the northwest of Hanoi.\(^{1002}\) Although Chinese planes were scrambled whenever American planes began to approach the border, the Chinese generally refrained from crossing into North Vietnamese airspace.\(^{1003}\)

\(^{1001}\) DSB V. 51, 337 (Sep. 7, 1964) (Interview with Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, Aug. 15, 1964); Schulzinger, 243; Whiting, The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence, 176; Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 132.

\(^{1002}\) Whiting, The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence, 176. Whiting argues that these bases were duplicative of existing facilities, suggesting that the bases were built for North Vietnamese rather than Chinese pilots.

\(^{1003}\) Ibid., 180.
A major restraint on Chinese capabilities was Beijing’s continued reliance on Soviet technology and Soviet oil. The withdrawal of Soviet technicians, advisors, and materiel aid at the start of the decade presented the PLA with significant maintenance problems for their more technologically advanced Soviet built weaponry, particularly aircraft. Chinese industry was incapable of turning out advanced weaponry on its own. In addition, the Chinese had not yet developed the domestic petroleum industry to the extent necessary to supply major military operations. 1005 While the Soviets had not cut off oil exports to China, the intensifying conflict made this a possibility that Mao could not overlook in determining whether to intervene in Vietnam.

In 1965, North Vietnamese troop strength was approximately 400,000. 1006 Although heavily reliant on infiltrating guerrillas into the south, Hanoi had deployed a regular North Vietnamese army unit, the 2nd Battalion from the 325th Division, into South Vietnam as early as April 1965. 1007 American estimates of Viet Cong strength in 1964 were between 20,000 and 25,000 regulars, with another 60,000 to 80,000 irregulars. 1008 By early 1965, there were an estimated 35,000 Viet Cong regulars in South Vietnam, with another 60,000 to 80,000 irregulars (local Viet Cong supporters who would take up arms as needed). 1009 Within the first six months of the introduction of American ground forces, Viet Cong strength nearly doubled, with an estimated 65,000 Viet Cong regulars, 80-100,000 irregulars, and 30,000 agitation and


1005 DSB V. 48, 279 (Feb. 25, 1963) (Interview with DOS Director of Intelligence and Research, Feb. 11, 1963).

1006 Tsouras, 133; DSB V. 52, 174 (Address by Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern Affairs, Jan. 23, 1965).


1009 DSB V. 52, 174 (Address by Assistant Secretary of State Far Eastern Affairs, Jan. 23, 1965).
propaganda (agitprop) personnel now in place.\textsuperscript{1010} Moreover, intelligence indicated another eight North Vietnamese Army (NVA) battalions had entered South Vietnam.\textsuperscript{1011} By 1967, communist guerrilla were infiltrating into the south at a rate of nearly 20,000 per month.\textsuperscript{1012}

Soviet military assistance to the DRV escalated rapidly beginning in 1965, with nearly $1 billion in Soviet military aid coming between 1965-68, and nearly $4 billion by 1973.\textsuperscript{1013} In February 1965, the Soviets and North Vietnamese signed “formal military and economic agreements.”\textsuperscript{1014} The Soviets provided high quality technology to the DRV in order to counter the Chinese and in order to test their equipment against American arms in a live battlefield setting.\textsuperscript{1015} Among the Soviet exports to North Vietnam were advanced fighters, including MiG-15s, 17s, 19s, and 21s, SA2 and SA7 surface to air missiles, Mi-6 Hind helicopters, An-24 transport planes and Il-28 bombers, PT-76 tanks, and advanced air defense systems.\textsuperscript{1016} By the late 1960s communist air defense over North Vietnam was very dangerous, consisting of over eight thousand AAA guns, two hundred SAM batteries, and computer controlled radar systems.\textsuperscript{1017}

\textsuperscript{1011} DSB V. 53, 13 (Jul. 5, 1965) (Secretary of Defense News Conference, Jun. 16, 1965).
\textsuperscript{1012} Karnow, 350.
\textsuperscript{1013} Mott, 240. Because price estimates of Soviet-made goods are widely varying due to the nature of a command economy, the figure quoted should be taken simply to convey a rough approximation of the amount of goods transferred.
\textsuperscript{1015} Gaiduk, 252. Along with testing their own equipment, the Soviets were able to systematically analyze captured American equipment to garner technical information used to modify and update their own systems.
\textsuperscript{1016} Gaiduk, 250; Mott, 242; Tsouras, 133; Whiting, The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence, 175.
\textsuperscript{1017} Karnow, 472.
The amount of Soviet aid reaching the DRV was limited by China’s interference with and piracy of arms shipments transported along Chinese railways to the DRV. Mao refused to permit the Soviets clearance to airlift supplies across Chinese airspace to North Vietnam, and refused to approve construction of Soviet storage depots in southern China.

Between 1964-1969, China dispatched hundreds of thousands of PLA troops to serve in North Vietnam, with a peak total at any one time coming in 1968 with approximately 170,000 PLA troops deployed. Contemporaneous American assessments vastly underestimated Chinese deployments in North Vietnam, holding there were between 25,000 and 45,000 Chinese troops. The first major deployment came in summer 1965, when 35,000 Chinese troops entered North Vietnam. Most of these were engineering units, anti-aircraft artillery units, and logistical support; however, these troops freed up North Vietnamese troops for combat duty in the south. The PLA troops built an airfield at Yen Bai northwest of Hanoi as well as building and repairing roads and bridges that were hit by American bombs. In addition, the Chinese may have provided PLAAF piloted MiG-21s to participate in combat in North Vietnam.

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1018 Gaiduk, 251; Tao, 423; Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars*, 156.

1019 Jie, 294-95.


1021 Schulzinger, 256.


1025 Gill asserts the Chinese did supply pilots for combat operations in North Vietnam; however, Zhai asserts the Chinese promised to provide Chinese pilots, but ultimately chose not to send PLAAF pilots. Gill, 54; Zhai, “Beijing and the Vietnam Conflict, 1964-1965: New Chinese
These troops were mostly withdrawn by 1969 and materiel aid from China reduced due to a growing sense of frustration within China that the Vietnamese were becoming increasingly pro-Soviet. Yet between 1964 and 1972, the PRC supplied over 70 earlier version MiGs to the DRV, over 40 small naval vessels, 100 T-59 tanks, 37,000 artillery pieces, over 2 million rifles, 18.8 million artillery shells and 270 million rounds of small arms ammunition as well as some surface to air missiles with PLA crews. In addition, China provided food, clothing, and medical supplies.

The effect of the steadily increasing tension in the Sino-Soviet conflict on the amount of aid both sides could provide to the DRV was unclear. Both needed to maintain readiness in case hostilities broke out at the Sino-Soviet border, yet both sides sought to establish themselves as the true leader of the internationalist social movement. Between 1965 and 1969, the Soviets increased their Far East forces from 17 to 27 divisions, and following the Ussuri River clashes in 1968 and 1969 continued the increase to a high of nearly 48 divisions in the mid-1970s.

South Vietnamese and U.S. forces: In the mid-1960s, the United States still held a sizeable advantage over the Soviets in terms of nuclear weaponry. With strategic nuclear forces in 1965 on the order of 850 intercontinental ballistic missiles, 300 submarine launched ballistic missiles, and 900 strategic bombers, half of which were kept on fifteen-minute alert status, the United States had a strong deterrent to a communist initiation of atomic war. In terms of
conventional forces, the United States went from 2.48 million active duty troops in 1961 to 3.09 million in 1966, topping out at 3.54 million in 1968 before Nixon began reducing troop levels in 1969.\textsuperscript{1031} However, in terms of defense spending as a percentage of gross domestic product, spending actually declined from 8.2\% in 1961 to 6.7\% in 1965, before increasing to a high of 8.9\% in 1968.\textsuperscript{1032}

In January 1965, the United States had nearly 21,000 troops in Vietnam; however, these were not combat troops. Following the Pleiku bombing in February, Johnson introduced naval aviation assets as well as U.S. air force jets into Vietnam, while sending two Marine Corps Battalions ashore to provide security for a Hawk air defense unit at Danang.\textsuperscript{1033} By March these units were engaged in combat action, leading to an incremental buildup of troops. In July, the number of American troops in Vietnam reached 75,000.\textsuperscript{1034} By year’s end, nearly 130,000 American troops were deployed to Vietnam.\textsuperscript{1035} Thereafter, deployments rose steadily until the height of commitment in 1968 when well over half a million American servicemen were in Vietnam. While ground power remained largely restricted to South Vietnam, American air power operated over North Vietnam, Laos, and by the early 1970’s Cambodia.

In 1964, the South Vietnamese armed forces totaled approximately 210,000; however, by early 1965, that figure grew as American aid financed the expansion of the South Vietnamese military.\textsuperscript{1036} Coupled with paramilitary security forces, the total of South Vietnamese under

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{1031} DOD Green Book, Table 7-5, 198.
\textsuperscript{1032} DOD Green Book, Table 7-7, 202.
\textsuperscript{1033} Greenstein and Immerman, 585.
\textsuperscript{1034} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1035} DOD Deployment of Military Personnel, 1965.
\textsuperscript{1036} DSB V. 52, 291 (Interview with Director of Far East Bureau’s Office of Regional Affairs, Feb. 7, 1965).
\end{flushright}
arms at the end of 1965 exceeded 500,000. This number continued to grow throughout the progression of the war.

Table 5.2: U.S. Forces in Vietnam and Far East, 1959-1972

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Vietnam</th>
<th>Far East</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>819</td>
<td>209,332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>794</td>
<td>191,362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>959</td>
<td>210,348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>8,498</td>
<td>232,184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>15,620</td>
<td>236,563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>17,280</td>
<td>238,064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>129,611</td>
<td>355,946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>317,007</td>
<td>582,107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>451,752</td>
<td>759,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>537,377</td>
<td>786,025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>510,054</td>
<td>760,994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>390,278</td>
<td>610,079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>212,925</td>
<td>395,007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>35,292</td>
<td>220,910</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Significantly, the guerrilla tactics employed by the Viet Cong did not provide the military success necessary to win the war. Only after the North Vietnamese Army invaded, using conventional military tactics, did the South Vietnamese government collapse. Thus, while


1038 The term “Far East” includes major U.S. deployments in Japan, Okinawa, Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam, Thailand, and Guam, as well as much smaller deployments in the Pacific Islands, Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Cambodia, Laos, Burma and Hong Kong. Although official breakdowns changed the area makeup for regional figures during this time, I have used individual country figures to ensure the “Far East” category in the table presents a consistent area from 1959-1972. The annual figures are based on the totals at the end of the fiscal year.
guerrilla tactics undoubtedly had a major political impact, in terms of military capabilities, they could never have defeated the United States armed forces had the American political will to fight remained.

**Interests**

Soviet interests in Vietnam were secondary. Originally, the Soviets supported the Vietnamese in order to maintain their position as head of the international socialist movement, to restrain the development of Chinese hegemony in the area, to obtain a strongpoint in China’s southern flank, and to drain American strength in a protracted engagement. During the Cultural Revolution, Chinese behavior effectively prevented the second of these goals and made accomplishing the third far easier. Moreover, China’s bizarre conduct made Moscow more concerned over the prospects of war with the PRC than with the United States. Accordingly, by 1969, the Soviets were inclined to support American attempts at withdrawing with some type of honor, in order to avoid the prospect of an American decision that the only way out was to escalate matters.¹⁰³⁹

Chinese interests in Vietnam included geopolitical security concerns, Chinese nationalist-imperialist ambitions, maintaining justification for internal repression (diversionary), and, perhaps most importantly, demonstrating that Maoist guerrilla methods were the proper strategy for pursuing global socialist domination. Should the Vietnamese communists succeed in overthrowing the South Vietnamese government, Mao would assert that violence was the most effective means of defeating western supported regimes. The fact that both Khrushchev and Brezhnev had publicly supported wars of national liberation and thus had equal claim to ideological consistency with a North Vietnamese victory as did Mao was apparently lost on the Chinese leader. Zhai asserts that the ideological interest was a prime reason why Mao rejected negotiations in 1965-66, as such might signify support for the Soviet peaceful coexistence stand, undercutting Chinese prestige.¹⁰⁴⁰ A second interest of China may have been to allow the

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¹⁰³⁹ Gaiduk, 251.

Vietnamese to engage in bloodletting sufficient to keep Ho a supplicant to Mao and further Mao’s clear interest in establishing Chinese regional hegemony.\textsuperscript{1041}

American interests in Vietnam shifted across time. Originally, U.S. officials feared the loss of Vietnam would set in motion a collapse of friendly governments across Southeast Asia, as described under the domino theory. Moreover, Vietnamese success would only embolden the fanatical Chinese government, encouraging greater challenges. By the time of the Cultural Revolution, the domino theory had less currency as a regional concern, but officials feared that Vietnam could provide a symbolic domino that might echo globally. Should the United States abandon Vietnam, it would be met not only with challenges in Southeast Asia, but in the Caribbean, South America, and Africa as well.\textsuperscript{1042} The specific fear of China had lessened, but the general fear of third world challenges had increased.

By the late 1960s, U.S. leaders from both parties sought to extricate the United States from the war in Vietnam, yet finding a face-saving means of withdrawal presented a major problem. Should the United States simply pack up and abandon the effort in South Vietnam, American credibility as an ally would be severely diminished. Given the support Brezhnev was promising to “national liberation” movements around the world, abandonment would be apt to result in the birth of new challenges to American interests across the globe. While U.S. resistance in Southeast Asia had exacted a terrific toll on the Asian communists sufficient to limit their both their desire and ability to continue with aggressive expansion in the near term even should they succeed in Indochina, these costs were under-publicized and thus less apparent to would-be challengers in other regions. Accordingly, U.S. officials were less concerned that the fall of Vietnam could set off a chain reaction reaching Japan and the Philippines in the east and Burma and India in the west than they had been at the outset of the war. In short, despite the operational failures in Vietnam, the grand strategic objective of stemming communist expansion had been largely accomplished via the attrition accompanying nearly twenty years of combat. Accordingly, the primary U.S. interest in Vietnam was withdrawing gracefully.

\textsuperscript{1041} Karnow, 345.

\textsuperscript{1042} See e.g., \textit{DSB} V. 52, 607 (Apr. 26, 1965) (Address of President, Apr. 7, 1965).
Risk Propensity

The Johnson administration made a calculated decision not to attempt to mobilize American public opinion in support of the war in Vietnam. Whether this was due to fear such an effort would detract from his domestic social agenda or due to his fear that such could not be effectively mobilized is not certain. As Summers argues, the failure to seek a declaration of war from Congress was a drastic mistake as a declaration serves more than just a procedural function, but serves the substantive function of ensuring public support via Congress and formalizing a national commitment. Johnson likely failed to conceive of the matter in these terms, but instead chose to avoid seeking a declaration of war so as to maintain the “limited” nature of the war and continue his policy of diminishing potential provocation of China.

Popular support for the war in Vietnam varied over time; however, there is no consensus on the scope or source of opposition. Kissinger asserts that support among the American public for the war never fell below fifty percent. Other polls suggest that popular support fell markedly below fifty percent by 1969. One interpretation argues that public support remained strong; however, elite opinion rejected the war. While much of the disparity in numbers may be due to the way questions were posed and the agenda of the poll-takers, part of the disparity represents ambivalent feelings in the American public regarding the war. For example, the same poll that found 68% of the public supported a congressional requirement that all U.S. troops be withdrawn from Vietnam by the end of 1971, found that 55% of the public opposed such a congressional requirement if it meant the communist takeover of South Vietnam. What does appear clear in Figure 5.9 is that public support for the war, however


1044 Kissinger, Ending the Vietnam War, 9. Given the proliferation of polls and the variety of questions asked, one can likely find specific polls to support multiple positions; thus, the numbers presented here are offered with express caution.

1045 Mueller, 54-55.

strong, did deteriorate over time as the military activity did not produce results susceptible to easy assessment. Thus, Johnson probably enjoyed his greatest flexibility to adopt a risk-acceptant policy at the outset of the conflict, with support for escalation declining. The declining support for the war mirrored the declining popular approval ratings of Johnson which slipped from over 70% upon assuming office to 50% by mid-1966 and below 40% in 1968.\textsuperscript{1047}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure5.9.png}
\caption{U.S. Public Support of Vietnam War, 1965-1969}
\textit{Source: Mueller (1973: 54-55) citing American Institute of Public Opinion (AIPO) polls.}\textsuperscript{1048}
\end{figure}

Domestic political concerns may have also affected the timing and scope of American actions in Vietnam in 1964. The incidents in the Gulf of Tonkin came in August, just three months prior to the Presidential election in which the opposition candidate, Senator Barry Goldwater, made Johnson’s foreign policy a major campaign issue. By engaging in a decisive militant response to the North Vietnamese attacks, Johnson may have been able to capitalize on the “rally-round-the-flag” effect accompanying the use of force to overcome Goldwater’s portrayal of Johnson as unduly soft, and thus solidify a victory in the November election. In fact, \textsuperscript{1048}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{1047} Ibid., 200-201.
\textsuperscript{1048} The particular question asked was “In view of the development since we entered the fighting in Vietnam, do you think the U.S. made a mistake in sending troops to fight in Vietnam?” As is evident, the question sponsors a negative answer; thus, the results offered here are offered not for the truth of the matter asserted but as evidence probative of the changing state of opinion.
\end{quote}
when considering bombing operations against the North prior to the Tonkin incident, rather than focusing on how bombing might best accomplish a military mission, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy argued that “the main object [of the bombing] is to kill as few people as possible while creating an environment in which the incentive to react is as low as possible.”

Following the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, U.S. leaders believed the Soviet Union had demonstrated a willingness to negotiate in order to avoid general war. In contrast, the Chinese had bitterly denounced the Soviets for “backing down” in the crisis, upped their rhetoric condemning the Soviets as reactionaries, and continued their drive toward development of a Chinese nuclear force. Thus, when the Chinese demonstrated they had achieved nuclear capability in October 1964, American officials were more concerned with potential Chinese escalation than with Soviet activities in Southeast Asia. On the other hand, the Sino-Soviet conflict removed China’s only source of advanced weaponry that would be necessary should the Chinese find themselves involved directly with the United States. Accordingly a case could be made that the Chinese rhetoric was another instance of Mao’s applying Sun-Tzu’s principle of deception and feigning strength when weak.

October 1964 also presented the United States with uncertainty regarding the Soviet Union when Khrushchev was ousted from power on October 14. Although Brezhnev and Kosygin appeared to adopt a similar foreign policy, this was unclear at the time. Still, Soviet defense spending estimates suggested only small increases following the U.S. involvement in Indochina beginning in 1959, helping to lead American officials to discount the possibility of Soviet intervention in the form of ground troops by the latter 1960s.

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1049 Langguth, 287.

1050 Schulzinger, 241.

1051 The Communist Chinese author Gong Li characterizes Chinese policy in this period as marked by a “superficial hard-line image combined with policy pragmatism.” G. Li, 359.
In January 1965, the Chinese conducted joint air exercises along the border. The same month, Sukarno withdrew Indonesia from the UN as part of his policy of confrontation with Malaysia. American officials believed Chinese backed communist elements in the Indonesian government were manipulating Sukarno, creating a dangerous situation in the strategically vital Straits of Malacca and Sunda. Around the same time, Chinese sponsored communist agitation and propaganda activities increased in Thailand. Chinese leadership issued warnings that should the United States attack North Vietnam, China would not sit idly

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1052 William Lee’s National Security Expenditures (NSE) estimates provide an alternative method for estimating Soviet defense spending. The graphic presented demonstrates the relative stability of spending via either method of estimates.

1053 Whiting, The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence, 177.

1054 Rostow, 48.

1055 Tao, 426, asserts that Mao directly promised Sukarno 100,000 small arms in 1965. See also Kuisong, 26.

by. Additionally, the Chinese promised to send military materiel assistance, and, if requested, Chinese soldiers. Thus, the United States had to evaluate whether the Chinese were merely posturing to prevent increased American participation in Vietnam or whether they were preparing to escalate Chinese operations in the various communist insurgencies underway in Southeast Asia. If the latter, American officials could hardly stand by and allow the situation in Vietnam to deteriorate unless willing to write off Southeast Asia, accept a loss of credibility as an alliance partner globally, and bear the propaganda harm that Chinese success would entail. From a prospect theory perspective, this would suggest a domain of losses, making the United States more risk acceptant.

When the United States undertook bombing missions against North Vietnam, the Chinese responded by providing both materiel and a large number of engineering and construction troops, as well as air defense units to North Vietnam. Unlike the situation in Korea, the Chinese deployment was not disguised and was known to American policymakers. Thus, the United States paid greater attention to potential Chinese intervention in Vietnam than their predecessors had in Korea nearly 15 years earlier. When the United States suspended bombing operations in May 1965, the Chinese rejected the overture. In September 1965, U.S. officials observed indications that the Chinese were preparing for war. Civil defense measures were undertaken, factories were designated for dismantling and transferal north, and air raid drills were increased in southern and coastal areas. A second bombing pause undertaken around Christmas 1965 was also ignored, causing Washington to fear Chinese intervention was imminent.

At the beginning of 1966, American officials noted the positive implications of the fact that Chinese rhetoric had gone from promising troops if North Vietnam so requested to a

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1057 Schulzinger, 242.

1058 Ibid., 249.

1059 Stoessinger, 76-82.

1060 Zhai, China and the Vietnam Wars, 160.

1061 Schulzinger, 254; Whiting, The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence, 190.
promise to provide aid if both Hanoi and Beijing agreed in the necessity therefor.\textsuperscript{1062} However, the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 added a further complicating factor for American politicians. The bizarre events in China including the virtual destruction of diplomatic relations with numerous countries, the purging of long-time communist leaders, and the chaos accompanying Mao’s approval of Red-Guard actions, made it nearly impossible for American officials to anticipate Chinese reaction to American policies in Vietnam. This unpredictability likely had the effect of enhancing American restraint as Mao, perhaps unknowingly, made use of the logic contained in Schelling’s theory of “the threat that leaves something to chance.”\textsuperscript{1063} Only after the chaos brought by the Cultural Revolution had materially affected China’s capability to wage war did the United States begin to discount the likelihood of Chinese intervention.\textsuperscript{1064}

To the North Vietnamese, China’s obstinate behavior towards the Soviet Union demonstrated Chinese self-interest was more important than assisting the Vietnamese in winning the war. Chinese refusal to assist the Soviets in delivering supplies via aircraft and Chinese siphoning of Soviet aid delivered via land routes infuriated Hanoi, thereby contributing to the Vietnamese shift towards the Soviet Union in the latter 1960s.\textsuperscript{1065} Moreover, the shift of the war from guerrilla operations to greater conventional operations following the Tet Offensive necessitated more advanced weaponry than the Chinese could supply, also accounting for the pro-Soviet realignment.\textsuperscript{1066} Thus, when the United States suspended bombing in March 1968, the North Vietnamese agreed to talks in spite of Chinese criticism.\textsuperscript{1067}

\textsuperscript{1062} Schulzinger, 259.

\textsuperscript{1063} Schelling, \textit{The Strategy of Conflict}, 187-203.

\textsuperscript{1064} Schulzinger, 259-60.

\textsuperscript{1065} Zhai, \textit{China and the Vietnam Wars}, 154.

\textsuperscript{1066} Ibid., 179.

\textsuperscript{1067} Ibid., 172.
The Tet Offensive of 1968 resulted in disastrous losses for the Viet Cong, effectively destroying their military power; however, the propaganda value of the offensive was extraordinary given the statements of American officials that the war was being won and would soon be over. This operation more than any other signified one of the major problems of American officials in conducting the war. Washington failed to appreciate the Vietnamese willingness to accept casualties.\footnote{Karnow, 20.} Mirror-imaging American values on the communists, U.S. planners based their policy on the belief that the communists could not bear massive casualty rates. In this, the United States repeated the mistake of the French the decade before. The North Vietnamese Army began to take a larger role following Tet in order to keep the pressure on U.S. forces. By late 1968, despite tactical successes, the United States no longer had the political will to continue the fight. Nixon’s plan of Vietnamization followed resulting in the withdrawal of American combat troops from 1969 through 1972.

**Declaratory Policy**

In response to the August 2, 1964 attacks on the Maddox in the Gulf of Tonkin, the United States issued an official protest to North Vietnam stating, “The United States government expects that the authorities of the regime in North Vietnam will be under no misapprehension as to the grave consequences which would inevitably results from any further unprovoked offensive military action against United States forces.”\footnote{DSB V. 51, 258 (Aug. 24, 1964) (U.S. protest to North Vietnam, Aug. 3, 1964).} On August 3, the President released a statement noting he had instructed the Navy “to attack any force which attacks them in international waters, and to attack with the objective not only of driving off the force but of destroying it.”\footnote{DSB V. 51, 259 (Aug. 24, 1964) (Statement of President, Aug. 3, 1964).} Following the second North Vietnamese attacks on the Maddox and Turner Joy on August 4\textsuperscript{th}, the United States responded by launching 64 sorties from carrier based aircraft attacking four North Vietnamese patrol boat bases and a supporting oil depot on August 5\textsuperscript{th}.\footnote{DSB V. 51, 266 (Aug. 24, 1964) (Statement by Secretary of Defense before Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committees, Aug. 6, 1963).} In addition the
United States sent an additional aircraft carrier to the region, moved interceptors and fighter-bombers into South Vietnam, moved fighter-bombers to Thailand, sent an antisubmarine force into the South China Sea, and placed selected Army and Marine Corps forces on heightened states of alert.\textsuperscript{1072}

In addition to the physical military preparations, the President sought and received Congressional support in the form of a Congressional Resolution providing authority for additional actions the President deemed advisable. On August 7, 1964 Congress passed a Joint Resolution, commonly known as the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which held in relevant part:

\begin{quote}
The Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression…. The United States is … prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member of protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in the defense of its freedom.\textsuperscript{1073}
\end{quote}

The resolution was passed unanimously in the House of Representatives and by a margin of eighty-eight to two in the Senate, further enhancing the deterrent effect. The statements coming from the United States were directed overwhelmingly at North Vietnam, with only indirect swipes at China. In contrast, the Soviet Union was specifically absolved of blame. In an interview less than two weeks after the incident, the Assistant Secretary for Far East Affairs noted:

\begin{quote}
It is very difficult to say what the motives were that led the North Vietnamese to take this action of attacking our naval vessels operating in international waters. It is possible that they had consulted with the Communist Chinese. One cannot say. I think it is clear that the Soviet Union had no part whatever in the action, and it has said some adverse things about our reaction, but I don’t think that they were in any way participants in it and had no consultation whatever before.\textsuperscript{1074}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{1072} Ibid., 267


\textsuperscript{1074} DSB V. 51, 339 (Sep. 7, 1964) (Interview with Assistant Secretary Far Eastern Affairs, Aug. 15, 1964).
As early as 1962 the United States sought to avoid escalation of the conflict in Southeast Asia by referring to American nuclear superiority. In a speech on America’s Asian Policy, the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs announced:

> Our nuclear weapons and delivery systems are the most powerful and most flexible in the world. And we intend to preserve this clear superiority. We have, I believe, made it perfectly clear that nay resort to nuclear weapons will be answered with complete devastation of the aggressor.\footnote{DSB V. 47, 280 (Aug. 20, 1962) (Address of Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Jul. 30, 1962).}

In January 1965, Secretary of State Rusk publicly noted the deployment of the Polaris ballistic missile submarine, U.S.S. Daniel Boone, to the Seventh Fleet, thereby providing an implicit nuclear warning to both Moscow and Beijing.\footnote{DSB V. 52, 166 (Address of Secretary of State, Jan. 23, 1965).} On February 7, 1965 President Johnson publicly ordered the withdrawal of American dependents from South Vietnam, while simultaneously announcing the deployment of a Hawk Air Defense Battalion.\footnote{PPPUS 1965, 153.} Yet, after the bombing over North Vietnam began in February, Secretary of Defense McNamara minimized this by stating “there is no military requirement for the use of nuclear weapons in the current situation.”\footnote{DSB v. 52, 752 (May 17, 1965) (Secretary of Defense News Conference, Apr. 26, 1965).}

Following the decision to retaliate with American bombing runs over North Vietnam for the Pleiku barracks attack, the U.S. State Department refused to characterize events as constituting a state of war, but instead asserted that the bombing was “collective defense against armed aggression.”\footnote{DSB V. 52, 403 (DOS Statement, Mar. 4, 1965).} Part of this was undoubtedly due to the Constitutional allocation of power that held only Congress could issue a declaration of war; however, the characterization was illustrative of the attitude of Johnson administration officials. Johnson chose not to call up the reserves or National Guard and permitted student draft deferments; thus, avoiding public
mobilization for the war.\textsuperscript{1080} Rather than seeing the conflict in Vietnam as a war that must be fought in terms of winning and losing, McNamara, Rusk and Johnson perceived the military operations as a process of political signaling, aimed at strengthening negotiating positions.\textsuperscript{1081} Despite Secretary of State Rusk’s statement that no sanctuary would be observed, when North Vietnamese aircraft fled across the border into China, American planes did not follow.\textsuperscript{1082} Indeed, Washington intentionally forbade the destruction of all North Vietnamese airbases so as to minimize the need for North Vietnamese planes to cross the Chinese border which might result in pursuing American aircraft violating Chinese airspace and provoking Chinese intervention.\textsuperscript{1083}

While focused largely on efforts at reassuring China of the American lack of hostile intentions, the United States did engage in efforts at direct deterrence. In August 1965, the Secretary of State noted \textquote{The [Chinese] must recognize that here are very large hazards if they themselves elect to pursue this by direct intervention.}\textsuperscript{1084}

The United States repeatedly made clear its desire to avoid escalation and expansion of the war in Vietnam, even prior to the first deployment of American combat troops.\textsuperscript{1085} The United States largely refused to send ground troops across the 17\textsuperscript{th} parallel into North Vietnam. Bombing missions inched north in a step-by-step fashion with a buffer zone at the Chinese border observed until late 1967 when Washington believed China was no longer as likely to

\vspace{1cm}
\textsuperscript{1080} Summers, 35.

\textsuperscript{1081} Ibid., 23-41 With this, Johnson chose not to rely on professional military advisors but instead depended on civilian analysts. Summers, 48.

\textsuperscript{1082} Whiting, \textit{The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence}, 180 (citing Rusk as warning in July 1965 that no sanctuary would be allowed and that hot pursuit of enemy aircraft would be permitted even if that meant violating Chinese airspace).

\textsuperscript{1083} Ibid., 180.

\textsuperscript{1084} \textit{DSB} V. 53, 435 (Sep. 13, 1965) (CBS Interview with Secretary of State, Aug. 23, 1965).

\textsuperscript{1085} \textit{DSB} V. 51, 262 (Aug. 24, 1964) (President’s Message to Congress, Aug. 5, 1964); \textit{DSB} V. 52, 64 (NBC Interview of Secretary of State, Jan. 3, 1965);
intervene due to the chaos of the Cultural Revolution. Targets of the bombing missions were selectively chosen for political rather than military reasons. In April 1965, President Johnson noted that the options of using nuclear weapons in Southeast Asia was “never even discussed.” As the American officials intended, China took note of the relatively limited operations of the United States in Vietnam as a signal of America’s desire not to become involved in a war with China. In a 1968 conversation with Pham Van Dong, Mao commented on the lack of an American invasion of North Vietnam, the refusal of U.S. aircraft to pursue Vietnamese fighters into Chinese territory, and the fact that the United States did not publicize Vietnamese use of Chinese airfields or the presence of Chinese troops in North Vietnamese.

From these events, Mao concluded that the United States would not escalate things to threaten China. While this was the object for Johnson administration officials, the de facto cession of escalation dominance emasculated American deterrence and enabled the Chinese to provide vital assistance to the North Vietnamese without fear of American retaliation.

Over the course of the ensuing build-up of American forces, Johnson and Rusk repeatedly emphasized American determination not to withdraw and to fully support the South Vietnam government; however, such statements were almost always coupled with assertions of willingness to begin unconditional negotiations and expressions of a desire not to escalate matters. In June 1965, the White House publicly explained the mission of U.S. ground troops

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1087 For example, as Karnow points out, the United States never targeted the Red River dikes despite the potential flooding and resultant devastation to the North Vietnamese war making capability such might have caused. Likewise, the United States refrained from carpet bombing heavily populated areas. Karnow, 431.


1090 See e.g. DSB V. 52, 488-89 (Apr. 5, 1965) (Statement of President, Mar. 20, 1965, in which Johnson asserted he had publicly outlined this basic policy nearly fifty times); DSB V. 52, 824 (May 24, 1965) (Message from the President to Congress, May 4, 1965); DSB V. 53, 264 (Aug. 16, 1965) (Statement of the President, Jul. 28, 1965). This attitude toward negotiations was new in 1965, as evident from Secretary of State Rusk’s statements in an April 1964 press conference
in Vietnam as “to secure and safeguard important military installations…[with the] associated mission of active patrolling and securing action in and near the areas thus safeguarded.” In addition, troops could assist Vietnamese forces when attacked if the theater commander found that such was “urgently required.” The next month, the Secretary of State publicly admitted to the presence of Soviet SAMs in Hanoi, but defended the U.S. policy of not targeting such on the basis that since they were no operational at present, they were “not relevant.” In short, the administration was setting up U.S. troops as static targets, unable to take the initiative, and limited to defensive operations. Thus, the deterrent value of expressions of American resolve was systematically undercut by statements expressing a willingness to continue the war on communist terms. By removing the threat to escalate, but refusing to withdraw, Johnson allowed Ho to control the war. As long as the guerrilla war was going well in South Vietnam, Ho had no motivation to enter into negotiations.

In March 1968, Johnson suspended bombing operations above the 20\textsuperscript{th} parallel. With the commencement of talks in Paris, Johnson announced the cessation of all bombing operations in North Vietnam on November 1, 1968. When such resulted in the Chinese withdrawing their troops from North Vietnam, Nixon began to look for ways to further divide the communist world. In early 1969, Nixon eased trade and travel restrictions to China as well as ending the patrol of the Taiwan Straits by the Seventh Fleet. Recognizing that promotion of a Sino-Soviet conflict would do more to prevent unchecked Chinese expansion than politically viable American military efforts, Nixon effectively ended American deterrence attempts in Vietnam with respect to preventing escalation involving Chinese or Soviet forces.

when asked about negotiations with North Vietnam: “[T]here is no known question, at least no question that I know about, on which negotiations would appear to be successful…I do not see the basis for a negotiation.”

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{1091} DSB V. 52, 1041 (Jun 28, 1965) (White House Statement, Jun. 9, 1965).
\item \textbf{1092} Ibid.
\item \textbf{1093} DSB V. 53, 184 (Aug. 2, 1965) (ABC Interview with Secretary of State, Jul. 11, 1965).
\item \textbf{1094} Zhai, \textit{China and the Vietnam Wars}, 181.
\end{itemize}
Deterrence Outcome

The purpose of American troop deployment to Vietnam was to contain China. American interest in Vietnam stemmed not from a vital strategic geographic locale, access to a particular natural resource, or inherent importance to the U.S. economy; rather it arose from context. Permitting Vietnam to fall to the communists without acting to defend it would wreak a psychological toll on America’s other Asian allies. If Vietnam were allowed to collapse, the march of Maoist communism across the rest of Southeast Asia would seem inevitable. If, however, U.S. military force came to the defense of Vietnam, allies would be more inclined to find the American security commitment credible.

In the event, Vietnam eventually fell to the communists, ten years and millions of casualties after American troops deployed. However, American forces fought long enough and benefited from strategic opportunities as they developed, most notably the Sino-Soviet split, to restrain Chinese regional hegemony. Indeed, less than five years after the Vietnamese “victory” of the communists, Vietnam and its erstwhile Chinese patron were involved in a border conflict. Moreover, complex conflicts in Laos and in Cambodia between rival communist factions kept China from consolidating control over Southeast Asia. These divisions remained until Mao had long passed and the Chinese government had undertaken substantial reforms aimed at discarding many of the most extreme of Mao’s policies. While China remains an authoritarian state with the CCP firmly entrenched in power, it has been forced to switch from military to economic attempts at fulfilling its hegemonic ambitions. In short, while the fall of Vietnam was a tactical loss to the United States, the manner in which the battle was fought permitted the United States to obtain the greater strategic victory of containing China and substantially degrading the communist strength.\footnote{In 1950 an MDAP report on Southeast Asia identified as one of the three options for U.S. policy in Southeast Asia, the following: “A holding operation which does not anticipate full success on its own merits but which would envisage holding as much as possible, even at a high price, and long enough for some other eventuality to develop which would of its own weight and magnitude automatically solve the general problems or, at least, the menace of Southeast Asia for the United States. However fumbling, open to criticism, and expensive such a solution might be, it could well be justified if there were some definite and properly timed eventuality in mind and planned.” \textit{FRUS} 1950, Vol. VI: 166 (Final Report of the Joint MDAP Survey Mission to}
With respect to escalation, the ultimate balance of capabilities was found in the comparison of the nuclear arsenal of the United States with that of the Soviet Union. For the period in question, the United States retained strategic superiority, despite McNamara’s attempt to emplace an assured destruction philosophy that renounced superiority. Although China had a nuclear arsenal, it was in its infancy and posed a threat more to American forces deployed in the Pacific than to the American homeland. Accordingly, should events have escalated out of control, the United States held the strongest hand. From a conventional military standpoint, the balance was less favorable to the United States. The sheer manpower available to the Chinese and the willingness of Chinese leadership to suffer casualties presented a major problem. Soviet conventional forces were also larger than American forces; however, a large number of these were tied down by responsibilities in the European theater. The Sino-Soviet conflict also ameliorated the quantitative disadvantage of the United States in that neither of the communist giants could leave their long border undefended. The qualitative advantage of American forces over the Chinese was obvious; however, the Soviet forces were a different matter. Advanced jet-fighters, missile technology and radar could provide American air power with operational difficulties. Finally, the United States was faced with maintaining a functional logistic train traversing the Pacific Ocean. China enjoyed the advantage of operating on interior lines of communication, able to move supplies by rail, truck, or bicycle. America attempted to signal its will to carry on despite this imbalance, eventually escalating its commitment to over half a million troops locally. In sum, the conventional balance of capabilities favored the communists, provided the Chinese manpower could be joined with Soviet technology. Without such joint efforts, the United States probably enjoyed a slight edge.

Neither the Soviets nor the Americans had interests at stake in Vietnam sufficient to risk nuclear war. As the Soviets had little use for Vietnam other than as propaganda success and a possible warm-weather naval port, they were able to enjoy the role of providing problems for both the United States and China without having to go on the defensive themselves. The Soviets

Southeast Asia, Dec. 6, 1950). While the report favored a more active approach and the U.S. government hardly identified a “definite eventuality,” much less planned for it, the policies followed produced a result not dissimilar to that described above.
sought to bleed the Americans in a battle of attrition, allowing them to spend resources and bear casualties in a secondary theater. Likewise, the Soviets would prefer to see the Chinese become involved, provided Moscow could control escalation, for the same reasons. Chinese interests were probably more important than those of the other members of the triangle, as Mao has both domestic and foreign policy concerns in the Vietnam War. Seeking to mobilize domestic opinion prior to the Cultural Revolution, he needed a successful campaign against the United States. Internationally, he sought to replace Moscow at the head of the world socialist movement. For the United States, interests included preventing Chinese expansion and confirming alliance credibility. By 1967, the first of these was less pressing to China’s own actions, yet the United States still feared establishing a global precedent. On balance, China had the most at stake.

The American administrations were decidedly risk averse across the course of the war. Despite the continuing build-up of American troops in the theater, Washington followed a policy of extreme restraint. Although Johnson followed Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy in seeking to avoid appeasing aggression, he was not fully committed to preserving the South Vietnamese regime. Chinese aggression across Southeast Asia demanded some action; hence the decision to deploy forces in the first place. Yet Johnson was determined not to let the foreign policy issues destroy his chances for implementing the legislative agenda of the great society. Popular opinion might have permitted riskier behavior at the outset of the conflict, but the failure to mobilize public opinion left Johnson with a steadily eroding base so that by 1967 when Chinese intervention was no longer as feared, Johnson likely lacked the domestic support for riskier moves. The United States was able to clearly distinguish Vietnam from Korea with respect to the Soviet Union, further reducing risk propensity. In Korea, Truman saw the aggression as the possible first stage of a global Moscow-directed offensive. In Vietnam, it was clear that Moscow was merely acting opportunistically. Thus, the consequences of failure in Vietnam were far less drastic, resulting in lesser risk acceptance.

Given these factors, American deterrence credibility was fairly low. However, as Brezhnev was risk-averse at this point and Mao was moving toward greater risk aversion, a clear declaratory policy could have had a significant impact. Unfortunately, U.S. declaratory policy
was far from clear. The deployment of force and the subsequent build-up were countered by repeated assertions of peaceful intentions, assurances that U.S. operations would remain limited, actions that demonstrated extreme caution, and a failure to commit the full power of American strength to military victory. Thus, as Washington concentrated on signaling rather than fighting, the weakness of American military resolve was made clear. Accordingly, the deterrence effort was a failure as the military assistance from both Moscow and Beijing continued and ultimately drove the United States out of Vietnam, preparing the way for a communist victory.
In Chapter Two, I presented a theory of deterrence based on credibility and the risk propensity of the challenger. Credibility was explained as a function of the balance of capabilities, the balance of interests, and an assessment of the defender’s risk propensity. To measure risk propensity, I turned to prospect theory. Prospect theory predicts risk propensity by looking at how an issue is framed in reference to a particular baseline and whether the alternative courses of action available to a decision-maker will be considered as losses or gains relative to that baseline. Yet prospect theory does not account for how a decision-maker sets his baseline. Although it tells us gains may be incorporated into the baseline more quickly than losses, it does not attempt to explain an original reference point. To ascertain how these baselines might be set, I adapted Jervis’ work on motivated and unmotivated biases reflecting psychological predispositions stemming from personal history and ideological preference to ascertain the reference points needed for prospect theory’s relational analysis. Combining capabilities, interests, and defender’s risk propensity, I obtained an assessment of the credibility of the defender’s deterrent threat.

To evaluate the likelihood of success of the deterrence effort, I looked at both this measure of credibility and the challenger’s risk propensity. Where credibility is unclear, a challenger may be willing to defy the threat. By definition, the greater the risk propensity of the challenger, the more likely he will defy the deterrent threat. I argue that in cases where credibility is marginal, such as in cases of relatively even capabilities and relatively even levels of interest, a clear declaratory policy by the defender can enhance the credibility of his threat. Contrary to arguments asserting the value of ambiguity, I contend that ambiguity is harmful in that it places vital interests at risk in order to protect less than vital interests. By following a
deterrent policy based on clarity, I suggest that defenders can provide information to risk acceptant challengers that may prevent attacks on vital interests when credibility is at issue. While the logic of such is elementary, prior studies of deterrence typically discount the declarations of parties to crises under the assumption that such statements will be regarded as self-serving rhetoric. This study contributes to the deterrence literature by highlighting the role of declaratory policy as a relevant and significant aspect of deterrence.

In addition to highlighting the role of clarity, this study consciously moves away from the rational actor approach in favor of the psychological approach to studying deterrence. As emphasized by Payne, deterrence is undeniably a psychological function. To be successful, a defender must impress upon the challenger the negative consequences that will follow should the challenge be undertaken. Only by understanding what a challenger values can this be done efficiently. Attempting to construct a deterrent by engaging in rational actor cost/benefit analysis often overlooks this crucial point. The value structure that underlies cost/benefit analysis cannot be assumed or mirror-imaged onto the challenger. Rather, the defender must take note of the values actually held by the challenger. The failure of the systems analysts in the Johnson Department of Defense to understand that North Vietnamese leaders were willing to endure massive casualties stands as a prominent example of a failure to appreciate the challenger’s values. Rational actor analysis based on western abhorrence to loss of life concluded that American troop escalation should deter North Vietnamese aggression. In the event it did not. The deterrent produced by rational actor analysis was fatally flawed by its failure to properly understand challenger values.

One measure of the success of the theory presented might be to compare predictions as to deterrence success under both rational deterrence and contextual deterrence models. While promising at first blush, generating a fair rational choice model in order to produce predicted results is difficult. Reflecting my criticism of rational choice as applied, with the exception of George and Smoke I find a lack of significant discussion in existing rational deterrence models.

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1 Payne, 30.
regarding the value system of the challenger.² Generally, authors assume universal value structures permitting mechanistic balance of conventional military force measures and geographic proximity to decide the likelihood of deterrence success. Rational deterrence theory is silent with respect to how one might evaluate a value system. While the expected utility model provides a convenient device for accounting for different values, it provides no guidance as to how to recognize what is driving the subjective utility valuations. Accordingly, I assert that a properly developed rational choice model requires an investigation of the value systems of actors, much like what has been presented herein. Yet, even with this condition met, rational choice models still require probability estimates that I argue are impossible to calculate with sufficient precision given the limited nature of information in many cases.

The theory advanced herein combines individual psychological analysis with prospect theory’s contextual analysis to provide a clearer picture of challenger values. Although less susceptible to quantification and large-N study because of the necessity for detailed individual attention, the theory does set forth a generic structure for assessing individual deterrence episodes. The cases selected in this study are limited, intentionally, to crises wherein the challenger states were dominated by a single individual. However, the theory could be modified to apply to crises involving challengers with more than a single dominant leader. Supplementing psychological predispositions, the researcher could analyze institutional behavior using insights from bureaucratic politics models. For democratic challengers, sociological studies might enhance or perhaps replace individual psychological studies.³ In short, while the limitations of the present study are expressly acknowledged, such limits should not be necessarily attributed to the theoretical framework provided.

² George and Smoke, 505.

³ In this study, when assessing the defender’s risk propensity, particular attention was paid to the President and Secretaries of State as the leading foreign policy officials of the United States; however, contextual analysis was emphasized due to the democratic structure of the government and the lesser likelihood of a single individual’s historical experiential influences dominating the state’s decision-making.
Three Phases of Clarity

Having developed an estimate of the challenger’s risk propensity in Chapter Four and having assessed the credibility of the defender’s deterrence effort by analyzing the balance of capabilities, the balance of interests, and the defender’s risk propensity in Chapter Five, we can now look at how declaratory policy may have influenced the success of deterrence.

Clarity, 1950-1954

The clarity of the American policy in the final week of June 1950 and the effect it had on Chinese plans to attack Formosa stand in direct contrast to the general ambiguity of American declaratory policy over the next two and a half years. The American policy with respect to defending the island of Formosa was explicit. President Truman clearly and concisely announced that no attack on Formosa would be permitted and immediately deployed the Seventh Fleet to carry out this mission. Conversely, U.S. policy in Korea was far more ambiguous. The United States failed to announce what its primary goal was, failed to advise China not to intervene in Korea and back it with some credible threat, failed to make clear its resolve to prevent China from intervening, and failed to act decisively at the initial Chinese intervention. Thus, despite the fact that China had a greater interest in capturing Formosa than in defending North Korea and despite the greater perceived legitimacy in the rest of the world for Chinese claims to Taiwan, China opted not to assault the KMT on Formosa, but did intervene in Korea.

Part of this may be attributable to the different operational capabilities required in these missions. China lacked both the naval and aerial capabilities necessary for a major amphibious landing. Also, in an amphibious operation the Chinese would be unable to utilize the guerrilla techniques with which they were familiar. However, China lacked the air cover, as well as the armor, mechanized infantry, logistical capabilities, and communications gear necessary for major infantry operations. Moreover, China’s operations in Korea were generally conventional large unit operations rather than guerrilla tactics. Finally, China lacked an indigenous nuclear capability to deter American use of tactical nuclear weapons. Yet China chose to risk operations in Korea while passing on the mission in Taiwan.

Another potential explanation for Mao’s intervention in Korea and abstention from attacking Taiwan is the influence of Stalin. When Mao met with Stalin in Moscow in December
1949, Stalin brushed off Mao’s request for assistance in attacking Chiang Kai-Shek on Taiwan, explaining that it was important not to give the Americans a pretext to intervene in the area. Meanwhile, Stalin had been convinced by Kim Il-Sung that the United States would not respond to a North Korean invasion of the South. When the United States did respond to Kim’s attack, Stalin sought to use Chinese troops to prop up his puppet regime in North Korea so as to avoid public Soviet involvement while still acting to assist Kim. In early July 1950, Stalin requested Mao make preparations to intervene and following the successful UN landing at Inchon, Stalin requested Mao proceed to send troops to prevent the North Korean collapse. However, while Mao was generally deferential to Soviet wishes at this time due to the CCP’s dependence on Soviet economic, technological, and military aid, Mao was far from a Soviet tool. In fact, when Zhou En-Lai went to Moscow, he originally informed Stalin that the Chinese would not intervene, particularly without Soviet air support. Rather than angrily threatening to cut Soviet aid to China or place coercive pressure on China, Stalin merely noted that they must begin planning to receive refugees from Kim’s government and prepare a guerrilla campaign to be waged across the border. Thus, Stalin’s desire for Chinese participation was undoubtedly a motivating factor, but it was not a direct order. Mao had a realistic option of refusing to engage in Korea even in the face of Stalin’s expressed desire.

The Chinese interest in continuing the war in Korea following the failed Fifth Offensive in May 1951 was substantially diminished. Mao recognized the inability of the PLA to forcefully expel UN forces from South Korea, but was prevented from ceasing operations by his need to maintain face domestically as well as by his dependence on the Soviet Union, whose leadership preferred to see the war continue. Following the Chinese intervention, Truman and Acheson quickly revealed that the most important American objective was to maintain the limited scope of the war. Military victory was a distant second. Thus, when Mao realized that he could not win via force, he still had the option of attempting to meet his political objective by engaging in a battle of attrition. Although the United States sought to clarify its intent to remain in the region via its conclusion of defense treaties and provision of military and economic assistance, it also made clear its unwillingness to escalate pressure on China. Accordingly, Mao could afford to ignore the American deterrent aimed at preventing him from escalating. He continued to
introduce greater numbers of troops into the region, building up a force well in excess of one million Chinese soldiers in Korea by the war’s end. Thus, despite Mao’s lesser interests and declining risk acceptance as compared to his interests in and risk propensity toward Taiwan, Mao continued.

The Soviet Union chose not to escalate matters in Korea, suggesting the American deterrent was effective in that respect; however, given the nuclear imbalance, the limited interests of Stalin in Korea, and the characteristic risk aversion of the Soviet leader, it is likely that American declaratory policy had little role to play. The credibility of the deterrent provided by the balance of capabilities and interests was sufficient to provide enough certainty for a risk averse actor to avoid acting. Thus, declaratory policy was less significant relative to Stalin for this event.

The coincidental nature of the death of Stalin only weeks after the assumption of office by Eisenhower clouds the impact of the clearer declaratory policy undertaken by Eisenhower and Dulles in 1953. With Stalin out of the way and Mao ascending to the post as longest tenured leader of a major communist power, Mao was no longer as constrained by the Kremlin’s wishes. Moreover, Moscow was consumed by the question of succession and was less concerned with the Korean War. Accordingly, it is possible that even with Truman in office, Mao might have been more willing to reach an armistice. Yet, the fact that Eisenhower dropped the Truman administration shackles and embarked on a clearer policy threatening China with U.S. escalation of the conflict unless serious negotiation was undertaken cannot be ignored. In any event, the evidence is consistent with the notion that clarity of declaratory deterrent policy enhances deterrence.

From 1950 through 1954, the United States sought to deter Chinese intervention in Indochina. In this conflict, the attempted deterrent was only moderately credible. Although the United States held the advantage in capabilities, it had already extended its assistance in Korea and Europe to the degree that further commitments would be questionable. Moreover, the conflict in Indochina was being fought as a guerrilla war, making the technological advantages of the U.S. forces less decisive. In terms of interests, neither side placed the same degree of importance on Indochina as they did on Korea. Lastly, the lack of allied support for operations
in Indochina and the propaganda nightmare of appearing to aid French imperialism limited the U.S. risk acceptance in Indochina. Mao was likely risk acceptant in this venture, making declaratory policy an important factor. American declaratory policy grew increasingly clear from 1950 through early 1954; however, as the French incompetence played out at Dien Bien Phu and the United States found itself faced with the prospect of a unilateral intervention, threats of “grave consequences” for Chinese intervention subsided. Whether the declaratory policy was the decisive factor is not clear, as in the event the Viet Minh obtained victories without the need for Chinese intervention. Chinese materiel assistance enabled these victories; yet, the United States had made little if any attempt at deterring materiel assistance. Thus, Mao did not have to decide whether to intervene. Accordingly, while this case provides no evidence inconsistent with the theory presented, it cannot serve as evidence unequivocally supporting the theory either.

Lastly during this period, the United States attempted to deter the Viet Minh invasion of Laos. While the credibility of the deterrent was marginal, the challenger was using the crisis as a means to strengthen his hand elsewhere. When the primary interest called for a concentration of resources, the challenger withdrew his threat in order to pursue that primary interest. Accordingly, the United States did not have to make a determination as to whether it would engage in a clearer policy by deploying troops or even intensifying its threats.

This comparison of cases in the same five-year period suggests that clarity of declaratory policy does affect the success of deterrence. During this period, the United States had no substantially greater interest in any of the three locations. In fact, the greatest U.S. interest would have been in deterring further attacks on U.S. forces already committed to Korea. Yet, the Chinese ignored the American deterrent to intervention in Korea and continued to pour troops into Korea in spite of American attempts to deter escalation. Likewise, the Chinese provided major military assistance to the communists in Indochina. In contrast, where American policy was clearest and where Chinese interests were most substantial, the Chinese did little. Moreover, when American policy under a new administration changed to reflect greater clarity, the mainland crisis in Korea ended. While the various confounding factors such as Stalin’s death in Korea and the Viet Minh’s victory in Indochina without the need for massive Chinese
intervention provide alternative explanations to events, they do not undermine the theory presented.

**Clarity, 1954-1958**

The Taiwan Straits Crisis of 1954-55 provides perhaps the strongest support for the value of a clear declaratory policy. The balance of capabilities favored the United States in fall 1954 when Mao began shelling the offshore islands. Although the Soviets had detonated a thermonuclear weapon and improved their long-range delivery capability, the United States arsenal was still capable of inflicting greater damage on the Soviet homeland. Moreover, the transition process following the death of Stalin was still incomplete, requiring Khrushchev to devote energy and attention to domestic affairs. Thus, Khrushchev, while supportive of his Chinese allies, was unlikely to permit Mao’s desire to unseat Chiang on Formosa to lead to general war.

From a conventional standpoint, capabilities favored the United States as well; however, having experienced the Chinese willingness to bear casualties in Korea, unfavorable casualty ratios could not be considered as presenting a safe deterrent. American air and naval assets could wreak havoc on a Chinese invasion fleet sailing for Taiwan; yet there was no guarantee that the entire fleet could be destroyed prior to reaching the island. American technological superiority was far less relevant with respect to potential Chinese attacks on the offshore islands lying only a few miles off the mainland border. By attacking and destroying nationalist forces on these islands, Mao hoped to cause the collapse of the regime in Taipei, lessening the likelihood that American power would be used to prevent an amphibious invasion.

Despite the increased importance assigned to Taiwan by the United States relative to early 1950, Chinese interests still outweighed American interests in this crisis. Domestic pressure, security concerns, nationalist inclinations, and personal antipathy all fueled Mao’s drive to eliminate Chiang. American interests included protection of the offshore defense strongholds in Japan, Okinawa and the Philippines, as well as reputational interests. However, the United States had no interest in the offshore islands, other than preventing Chiang’s collapse.

The United States was risk acceptant with respect to Taiwan, but risk averse with respect to the offshore islands. Officials in Washington were predisposed to view Taiwan as a genuinely
independent island as it fit with their policy preferences. Because of its proximity to and similarity with other American forward defense points in the western Pacific, Taiwan was considered important to American security. The baseline of a free Taiwan had been assimilated into the American picture of the status quo, such that Chiang’s defeat would be a major loss, suggesting greater risk acceptance in Washington. On the other hand, the offshore islands held none of these attributes. As they were situated only a few miles from the mainland, they had little geographic value other than as a means of pressuring China. They were meaningless to other American positions. Allies who disliked Chiang readily conceded that the United States might defend Taiwan, but there was nearly universal rejection of the defense of the offshore islands. Save for the fact that Chiang had placed sizeable numbers of troops on the islands, the United States would have had no interest whatsoever in defending them.

These three factors combined to produce limited credibility to the U.S. deterrent of an attack on the KMT. Given Mao’s risk acceptance, absent a clear declaratory policy, he would be likely to initiate an attack. At the time of the attack, U.S. declaratory policy was ambiguous. Taiwan had neither a bilateral alliance with the United States, nor was it invited to join SEATO. The United States refused to issue a specific policy as to what it would and would not defend, although it had made informal pronouncements guaranteeing the security of Taiwan. Throughout the fall of 1954, Washington consciously adopted an ambiguous policy toward the offshore islands, in hope that the Chinese would be dissuaded from attacking. A bilateral defense treaty with Taiwan was signed, but was limited to the defense of Taiwan and the Penghus. When the Chinese escalated matter by attacking Yijiangshan in January 1955, Dulles began to realize that the policy of ambiguity was failing. The Formosa Resolution attempted to increase clarity, although it did so only incrementally as it still made no promises to the offshore islands. Thereafter, the United States convinced Chiang to withdraw from the Tachens in exchange for a private promise to defend the Quemoys and Matsus. Following the Chinese occupation of the Tachens and continued buildup of forces adjacent to Quemoy, U.S. officials began to indulge in implicit nuclear threats, connecting the nuclear option with the potential defense of the offshore islands. While there was never an explicit guarantee, and in fact there was a private last-minute reversal of the private promise to defend Quemoy and Matsu,
infuriating Chiang, the public tenor reached the stage of effectiveness in late April, as reflected in Zhou’s Bandung statement seeking to lessen tensions.

Thus, this single case provides a strong example, wherein capabilities and interests are held relatively constant, of a publicly ambiguous policy that was failing, shifting to a much clearer policy and resulting in success. The clarity borne of the President’s, Vice-President’s, and Secretary of State’s references to nuclear weapons undoubtedly sparked concern in Beijing leading to the reduction in tensions.

The Second Taiwan Straits Crisis reaffirmed the effectiveness of a clear policy. With the international situation having changed since 1955 due to the launch of Sputnik and the domestic situation in China having changed with the preparation for the Great Leap Forward, Mao decided to test American resolve in the offshore islands. Again, capabilities favored the United States for the same reasons as three years earlier. Again, interests favored Mao with respect to the offshore islands. The risk propensity of the United States was likely higher during this second crisis due to both the adoption of the New Look and to the guilt from the fact that Dulles and Eisenhower had been willing to sell out Chiang just prior to the statement at Bandung. However, this time the relative clarity of the American position was evident from the start. Four days after the attacks started, the Secretary of State testified before Congress that the relationship between Taiwan and the offshore islands had become even closer and that it would be “highly hazardous” for the Chinese to try to take these islands in a limited operation. A week later, a White House press release noted the same thing, making clear that military preparations had been made and the United States was ready to act immediately upon the President’s orders. The result was an immediate cessation of Chinese shelling for two days and a Chinese call to resume negotiations. Although Chinese attacks began again, the Chinese carefully backtracked from prior radio broadcasts describing the operation as a prelude to the liberation of Taiwan. When American ships escorted KMT ships to within three miles of the mainland in order to engage in resupply for the offshore islands, Chinese artillery batteries made sure to avoid firing at U.S. vessels on orders delivered from Beijing. When the success of resupply efforts became obvious in early October, the Chinese halted shelling, then in a unique attempt at saving face, resumed shelling on an every-other-day basis. During this time the Chinese made sure to steer clear of concentrating
forces in anything appearing like an invasion force so as to avoid provoking a U.S. strike. Although the shelling continued on the alternate day basis for some time, it was quickly reduced to perfunctory lobbing of a few shells with no military purpose.

In sum, the clarity of American policy dramatically diminished the intensity of the crisis by causing the Chinese to suspend operations for two days and then follow a path of political theater disconnected from military significance. By immediately adopting a clear policy, the United States avoided the continued attrition battle favored by Mao as demonstrated in Korea, Indochina, and the first Taiwan Straits Crisis.

**Clarity, 1959-1969**

The final period of this study includes the deterrence efforts in Laos and Vietnam during the Second Indochina War. The United States sought to deter the North Vietnamese from attacking in both Laos and South Vietnam. U.S. efforts in Laos were similar to efforts undertaken in the early 1950s. As before, the United States held the advantage in terms of capabilities. Because the North Vietnamese were obliged to engage in more conventional operations in Laos than in Vietnam, the technological capabilities of the United States in terms of air power, armor and artillery could have been brought to bear more than in a pure guerrilla conflict. Both the North Vietnamese and American interests in Laos were centered on how conflict therein would affect neighboring states. For Ho Chi Minh, Laos was important as a transit route to be used in the North Vietnamese campaign to unify Vietnam. Operations pushing beyond the eastern mountains were undertaken to satisfy Ho’s sponsors in Beijing and Moscow, but were of secondary importance to Ho. The United States had already demonstrated a willingness to accept communist domination of the eastern region as evidenced by its failure to respond to the Pathet Lao’s refusal to integrate with the Royal Lao Armed Forces per the terms of the 1954 Geneva Agreement. Thus, Washington was basically interested in protecting Thailand and preventing the publicity that would surround the collapse of the Royal government. Accordingly, the balance of interests was relatively even. With Laos having been marked by instability, there was no baseline of a strong or unified Vientiane government; thus, the United States would not have considered the fall of Laos to be a major loss. Still, it marked a first step toward westward expansion, which in the context of the Cold War represented a propaganda
loss. Therefore, U.S. risk propensity was relatively neutral. Combined, these elements provided a deterrent of only marginal credibility.

Given Ho’s moderately risk acceptant attitude toward Laos, a clear declaratory policy could have been particularly useful in preventing a North Vietnamese attack. However, U.S. policy was not clear for most of the period. In 1961, the United States succeeded in pressuring the Vietnamese through their Soviet sponsors to agree to negotiations in Geneva, temporarily reducing tension in Laos. When fighting resumed in 1962, the United States demonstrated greater clarity by deploying Marines to Thailand and taking other military preparatory measures. This resulted in an agreement on Laos that ended the crisis in the short term and resulted in the Soviet departure from Laos. With less pressure to continue in Laos, Ho scaled back operations therein and refocused on stepping up attacks in South Vietnam. Thus, it appears clarity assisted in influencing Soviet policy, which in turn influenced Vietnamese policy; however, in a direction Ho likely preferred to take regardless of American policy.

In South Vietnam, the United States enjoyed an even greater advantage due to the local capabilities of the South Vietnamese military. Had the political will existed, American military power could have dramatically affected North Vietnamese infiltration by cutting the communist lines of communication. Absent this will, the guerrilla nature of the conflict helped the communists overcome their military disadvantage. Conversely, the balance of interests was overwhelmingly in favor of the North Vietnamese. Whereas the United States was again defending reputation interests, the North Vietnamese were seeking to ensure the survival of their regime. The economic success of the South relative to the North increased pressure on Ho to take some action, as did the intense nationalism felt by many of his supporters. Taking a page from Mao’s book, Ho sought to enhance domestic stature and attract foreign aid by engaging in “foreign” adventurism. American risk propensity was only moderate in South Vietnam at this point. The lack of allied support for military operations and the fear of becoming tied down in an Asian ground war combined to temper American enthusiasm for restraining communism.

Combined with this marginal credibility was Ho’s extreme risk acceptance. Thus, only a very clear declaratory policy would have been able to deter North Vietnamese action. American policy was not so clear. Increases in military assistance were undermined by criticism of the
government. Deployment of American military advisors made threats of SEATO intervention less likely. With the negotiated abandonment of the SEATO guarantee to Laos in 1962, the resolve of the United States to stand by in the face of communist pressure was further called into question. Thus, the deterrent attempt was an unmitigated failure.

Having failed to deter the North Vietnamese attacks on South Vietnam, the United States sent troops to Vietnam. This immediately presented the problem of deterring Soviet or Chinese intervention. With respect to capabilities, the nuclear advantage of the United States was sufficient to deter either of the communists from threatening to escalate to general war. However, conventional capabilities were less favorable. Soviet technology, most notably in terms of air power and air defense, could be teamed with Chinese manpower to present formidable problems for the U.S. military. The logistical difficulties of supporting an operation involving a half million troops thousands of miles from the United States were staggering. In contrast, the Chinese could send troops and supplies by ground directly across the border. The balance of interests was relatively even between the Soviets and Americans, but favored the Chinese over the Americans. Moscow was able to enjoy the potential of America again spending its resources and tying down its military forces in a secondary theater in a battle of attrition with the Chinese. The Soviets also were able to take advantage of the fighting to learn about American technology, measure its performance, and experiment with their own systems in a live laboratory. To Mao, the war was an opportunity for China to demonstrate that it was the true heir to the international socialist leadership. Deep in the Sino-Soviet conflict, Mao sought recognition as a theorist and practitioner; making Vietnam an ideal place for him to validate his ideas. In addition, Mao was preparing his next great purge, the Cultural Revolution, in which he needed to mobilize the population for a new round of drastic measures. The war also presented a more immediate threat to their security due to the shared border with North Vietnam. However, Beijing likely did not fear an American invasion.

Washington was risk averse with respect to escalation. Framing the issue in terms of the status quo versus action that might precipitate general war, the United States clung to the status quo, even at the cost of foregoing military victory. Combined with the capabilities and interests, this presented a deterrent of low credibility. Yet, since Brezhnev was risk averse and Mao was
becoming more risk-averse, a clear declaratory policy might have had particular impact. In the event, American declaratory policy was weak, offsetting threats with pleas for negotiation, and assuring the Chinese of peaceful intentions more often than warning them of potential dire consequences. Given the poor credibility and ambiguous U.S. policy, both the Chinese and Soviet, as predicted under the theory provided, continued to assist the Vietnamese throughout the war. While neither state openly entered the war, both provided materiel assistance as well as specialized military capabilities helping to push the United States to send hundreds of thousands of troops to Vietnam during the 1960s. Accordingly, American deterrence was a failure in this endeavor, eventually resulting in the U.S. decision to withdraw beginning in 1969 and accept the collapse of the South Vietnamese government six years later under pressure of a conventional communist offensive.

**Assessing the Hypotheses**

With the preceding look in Chapter 5 at how declaratory policy worked, it is useful to review how these findings fit within the theory. Table 6.1 below, summarizes the major findings with respect to credibility, challenger’s risk propensity, declaratory policy and case outcome. At the end of Chapter Two, I suggested three hypotheses derived from the theory presented. The first hypothesis held:

\[ H1: \text{A state employing an ambiguous deterrent policy will have a great likelihood of experiencing attacks on vital interests than will a state employing a clear deterrent policy.} \]

In this study, each of the nine crises was stipulated to involve vital interests to the United States. Of the nine cases reviewed, an ambiguous declaratory policy was employed throughout in four of them. In each of these four cases, the deterrence attempted met with either mixed results or complete failure. In two other cases, an ambiguous deterrent policy was employed at the beginning of the crisis; however, as the crisis continued, the declaratory policy became increasingly clear. In both cases, the deterrence effort originally met with mixed results, yet when the policy became clear, the deterrence effort obtained greater success. In each of the remaining three cases, a clear declaratory policy was applied throughout the crisis. Two of these
Table 6.1: Summary of Cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Credibility</th>
<th>Challenger’s Risk</th>
<th>Declaratory Policy</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Intervention in Korea</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Very risk acceptant</td>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
<td>Failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Attack on Taiwan</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Very risk acceptant</td>
<td>Very Clear</td>
<td>Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Intervention in Indochina</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Risk Acceptant</td>
<td>Clear</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRV Intervention in Laos</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Very risk acceptant</td>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
<td>Failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Taiwan Straits Crisis</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Risk acceptant</td>
<td>1954: Ambiguous</td>
<td>1954: Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Taiwan Straits Crisis</td>
<td>Moderate-Strong</td>
<td>Mao: Moderately risk acceptant Khrushchev: Without influence</td>
<td>Very Clear</td>
<td>Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese and Soviet Escalation in Vietnam</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Mao: Risk acceptant declining Brezhnev: Risk averse</td>
<td>Very ambiguous</td>
<td>Mixed / Failure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
efforts met with success, while the third achieved mixed results. While only a small sample of cases, these results clearly support the first hypothesis.

Alternative explanations may be offered on a case by case basis as to why the respective deterrent efforts employed succeeded or failed. Undoubtedly, many of the factors emphasized in these alternative explanations were influential to some degree. Indeed, an attempt to reduce the causal explanation behind success to a single factor is neither useful nor convincing. Nonetheless, it is significant that successful deterrence seems to be so strongly correlated with a clear declaratory policy. Given that prior work on deterrence has generally dismissed declaratory policy as mere rhetoric lacking credibility, these results suggest declaratory policy should not be overlooked. In the search for information, declaratory policy offers a low-cost source for the challenger, disseminated by an actor with an interest in establishing a reputation for truthfulness. As such, it should be and, based on these results is, considered by a challenger deciding on a future course of action.

The second hypothesis presented in Chapter 2 involved the distribution of attacks between vital and non-vital interests, holding:

\[ H2: \text{A state employing an ambiguous deterrent policy will experience fewer total attacks (vital and non-vital interests combined) than will a state employing a clear deterrent policy} \]

Because this study looked only at a small subset of actual deterrence crises, it is impossible to properly evaluate the second hypothesis. To assess this hypothesis, it is necessary to look at the entirety of a state’s security environment rather than a limited subset of cases. Ideally we could envision a consistent policy across locations at a given time as this would provide the greatest benefit of clarity; however, even in the limited set of cases presented, we see that the clarity of U.S. deterrence policy varied by location during the same time. For example, the clarity expressed in deterring a Chinese attack on Taiwan during 1950 contrasts markedly with the ambiguity surrounding the attempts to deter Chinese intervention in Korea during the same period. Thus, to fairly evaluate this second hypothesis, it is necessary to look at all the deterrence efforts of a state during a given period against the full spectrum of challengers.

Additionally, it is necessary to consider the direction of causality, as a state employing varied policies may choose the level of clarity based on its assessment of the likelihood of having
to follow through. Of course, such a strategy defeats the objective of establishing a reputation for credibility and thus undermines the theoretical justification for paying attention to declaratory policy. Indeed, attempting to vary clarity based on estimate of being challenged is simply an exercise in extending the deterrence umbrella. By expanding the “defended” area, the credibility of the deterrent is lessened, leading to a greater likelihood of challenges being made to truly vital interests. While game theory is replete with mixed strategies, which in this instance might suggest application of a clear policy in some cases and an ambiguous policy in others, the nature of the benefits of clarity make consistency paramount. Although effective deterrents should be individually tailored to the specific targets, it is also necessary to remember that deterrence is generally a public game with an attentive audience measuring how a defender acts and reacts. Thus, unlike many theories that are tempered by moderation and avoidance of extremes, the ideal theoretical application under the reasoning set forth herein is a policy based on “extreme” clarity.

The logic of the second hypothesis reflects the ideas behind general deterrence more than immediate deterrence. Theoretically, a clear deterrent policy would establish with precision those areas where the defending state would fight, accompanied by an equally clear, albeit tacit, policy marked by an absence of declarations regarding areas where the defending state would not fight. To obtain the greatest benefits of clarity, a state should adopt a clear declaratory policy with respect to general deterrence efforts. While a state could theoretically reject any effort at general deterrence and only engage in immediate deterrence efforts, it seems implausible that a state would actually do so. Accordingly, a study focused only on immediate deterrence efforts such as this fails to provide a true test of the hypothesis. Evaluation of this hypothesis requires the ability to compile a set of general deterrence attempts and an ability to estimate the counter-factual of what a challenger might have done in the absence of the general deterrence efforts. Because the general deterrence may operate to depress potential challenges even before they are brought for high-level considerations, it will be exceptionally difficult to discern when deterrence was actually successful and when it was unnecessary.

The third hypothesis presented in Chapter 2 held:

\[ H3: \text{A state with a more risk-acceptant leader will be less likely to be deterred from acting in the face of ambiguous declaratory policy.} \]
Of the cases reviewed, four of the crises involved leaders assessed as “very risk acceptant” at some time during the crisis. In three of these cases, the declaratory policy of the defender was ambiguous and in one it was clear. In each of the ambiguous cases, the deterrence effort failed. In the single clear case with a very risk acceptant leader, the deterrence effort succeeded. In five of the cases, leaders were estimated to be “risk acceptant.” In three of these cases the declaratory policy was ambiguous, in one case it was clear and in one it was very clear. In the three cases of ambiguity, two ended with mixed results and one ended in failure. In the case of a clear policy, deterrence success was also mixed; however, in the case of the very clear policy, the deterrent was a success. Thus, where risk acceptance was in play, clear declaratory policy succeeded two out of three times, whereas ambiguity failed outright four times and provided mixed results in the remaining two events.

Where challengers were risk neutral or risk averse, ambiguity was employed twice and clarity once. In these cases, ambiguity provided mixed results both times while clarity provided success. Per the theory, one would expect that even ambiguity should have provided pause enough to a risk averse leader to permit deterrence success; however, the three cases involving these circumstances in the study do not support this idea. Nonetheless, the specific relationship articulated in the hypothesis is supported by the study’s results. Again, the case study nature of this project makes over-generalization of the results found dangerous. The theory offered holds up well with respect to the results of the cases studied; however, these results are limited to the context of these cases. Indeed, in accordance with George and Smoke’s formulation, the results might be termed contingent generalizations, from which further study might proceed.

**Policy Implications**

Assuming that there might be some value in better understanding deterrence by concentrating on this contextual deterrence approach, the obvious question is what does this theory suggest for policy application? Academic posturing devoid of policy significance may generate interesting if little read publications, but if we are to gain from better understanding, we have to identify how this theory should influence policy choices. Three areas stand out: First, the theory requires that officials make a conscious effort at identifying and prioritizing state
interests. Because this is a cumbersome and difficult task that defies consensus, it is too often ignored. However, even in the face of disagreement, it is necessary to have some statement of interests underlying the comprehensive national strategy. In this, the theory presented here and rational deterrence theory (RDT) are in agreement. Yet, national strategy often identifies vital interests in terms of generalizations and platitudes. An annual review of vital national security interests identifying with specificity those locations, regimes, and resources that must be protected, and those actors and threats that must be protected against is mandatory. Consensus is not necessary to develop a prioritized list. Indeed, such a review is an executive function rather than a shared power. Absent a foundational understanding of prioritized concretely identified interest, comprehensive strategic planning, including deterrence, is impractical.

Second, unlike RDT, this theory places specific emphasis on understanding the value structure of specific challengers. A single generic deterrent is not appropriate for all situations and actors. Thus, the government must rely on area specialists to inform deterrence efforts. This does not mean the adoption of clarity in some instances and the adoption of ambiguity in others. Rather, it means the consistent adoption of clarity - only clarity must be tailored to the perceptions of the directly intended audience. For example, recognizing that imposition of mass casualties is not a universally effective deterrent might pay large dividends in terms of avoiding future costly commitments. This also means a return to thinking in terms of specific cultures and regions rather than an approach based on a single set of presumably shared values. From a practical standpoint this means investment in intelligence. Collecting information from open sources as well as covert sources in a continuous process in order to stay abreast of current moods and to predict coming shifts can greatly strengthen deterrence formulations.

Third, the theory directly rejects the calculated ambiguity policy of maximum deterrent extension. By adopting clear policies and removing uncertainty, the defender might avoid the most egregious challenges. For example, under current policy, the United States has rejected the use of chemical or biological weapons under any circumstances pursuant to international treaties. At the same time, the United States has provided security assurances in association with the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty that it will not use nuclear weapons against a state unless that state has nuclear weapons itself or is a member of an active alliance that does. Accordingly,
when faced with a non-nuclear challenger’s threat to use biological or chemical weapons, the United States is limited to conventional capabilities in devising a deterrent threat if it is to abide by its international commitments. This led to the uncomfortable position of attempting to retain such commitments while still suggesting that weapons of mass destruction could be used in retaliation to chemical or biological attacks on American troops in the 1991 Iraq war. By following a policy of clarity, the United States would be forced to declare how it would retaliate should it depend on a retaliatory deterrent. Through clarity, the government might improve its ability to negotiate, maintain its security, and force other states to openly accept the consequences of their actions without retreating to the safety of “misperception.”

In the current security environment focused on terrorism, clarity can continue to play an important role. Making clear to states that harbor terrorists or display willful blindness to ongoing terrorist activity emanating from their jurisdiction that continued conduct along these lines will result in specifically identified consequences within a specifically identified time period could prove invaluable. Moreover, clarity can be decisive in preventing attacks from non-state actors as well. By identifying those things that are most important to non-state potential terrorists and communicating the threat that such things will be placed at risk should the actors engage in terrorism, deterrence can be effective. Again, intelligence and understanding of the value structure of these actors is paramount. Human lives, including their own, may be unimportant to a certain sector; yet, it is likely that some value can be identified that is important to either these actors or to those in a position to help influence these actors.

In practice, a comprehensive and consistent policy of clarity is made extraordinarily difficult in any pluralist government. Not only do special interests differ over the identity of vital interests, but they differ over how to implement particular policies even when agreed on the objectives. Bureaucratic impediments to execution offer further opportunities to deviate from clarity. Shared powers or checks distributed among separate branches of government may deny the operation of clarity. Thus in practice, perhaps the objective may be to lessen ambiguity as much as possible rather than to remove it altogether.
Concluding Thoughts

Given the limitations of a case study approach, it is impossible to make claims regarding the generalizability of the findings. With the multitude of variables that influence how foreign policy decisions are made, it is probable that close inspection of any given case can provide numerous supportable theses as to why a particular decision was made. Accordingly, the realistic goal is to look at cases in depth in hopes of discerning patterns that either support or reject a particular explanation. As such patterns develop, modifications and reformulations of theories should be made to clarify and strengthen explanatory and predictive power. To claims that case studies can only produce “nice-laws” or “context dependent” predictions, I note full agreement. Social science asserting the discovery of inviolable laws should be viewed with more than a little skepticism. At the risk of shedding the academic’s coat of qualification, all theories of international relations are conditional. Discarding cases that fail to perform as expected in order to produce desired results undermines the discipline. Thus, despite the weaknesses and limitation of case studies, I submit that such are necessary to find meaningful policy guidance.
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During my enlistment in the United States Marine Corps, I was privileged to attend the Defense Language Institute to study Arabic, finishing just in time for service in Operation Desert Shield/Storm. Following several months in the desert, I served in the Philippines prior to, during, and after the eruption of Mount Pinatubo, participating in humanitarian efforts in Operation Fiery Vigil. Upon completion of my service, I enrolled in the University of South Alabama where I graduated magna cum laude with a B.A. in political science in 1994. I graduated with honors from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock School of Law in 1997 and immediately went into private practice in Florida. I returned to school in 1998 to accept a fellowship offer at Southwest Missouri State University where I had the opportunity to study under Dr. William R. Van Cleave and Dr. J.D. Crouch, earning a Master’s degree in Defense and Strategic Studies in 2000. That fall, I entered the Florida State University Department of Political Science doctoral program where my major focus has been International Relations with a minor concentration in Public Policy.

My research interests include national security policy, nuclear weapons policy, and the study of practicable deterrence. Geographically, my research has emphasized the Asian Pacific, including work on both the Philippines and Japan. In my work, I look to bridge the divide between academic theory and political practice. Rather than being content with future impact, I look for scholarly research to provide a more immediate, tangible effect on public policy by addressing problems in both a realistic fashion and in accessible terms. With these foundations, I look forward to participation in both academics and administration.