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Tying The Adversary's Hands: Provocation, Crisis Escalation, And Inadvertent War

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Tying The Adversary's Hands: Provocation, Crisis Escalation, And Inadvertent War

Abstract

Recent tensions on the Korean peninsula and in the South China Sea have led to concerns that provocative actions, such as harsh rhetoric and low-level violence, might embroil the United States in an unwanted war. The international relations literature, however, does not offer a coherent theory of provocation and crisis escalation. Instead, scholars and policymakers rely on intuition or other mechanisms of escalation, such as those based on accidents, threat perception, or imperfect signaling to explain the dangers of provocation in crises. Drawing on recent insights in social psychology and the study of resolve, this dissertation advances a novel theory of provocation that explains how provocative rhetoric and military actions can distinctly lead to unwanted crisis escalation and conflict. I test my theory at the individual level with a survey experiment and use the findings to develop three game-theoretic models that analyze how provocation affects crisis dynamics in different strategic contexts. To show that these mechanisms can significantly impact real crises, I closely examine the Sino-India War of 1962 and Sino-Soviet Border Conflict of 1969 using primary Chinese sources, and briefly review three additional cases of more recent crises. In the conclusion, I discuss the implications for coercive diplomacy and crisis management.

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Hyun-Binn Cho

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TYING THE ADVERSARY'S HANDS: PROVOCATION, CRISIS ESCALATION,
AND INADVERTENT WAR

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Dedicated to my parents, Dr. Hee-Kyung Kang and Dr. Myung-Rae Cho.

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ABSTRACT

TYING THE ADVERSARY'S HANDS: PROVOCATION, CRISIS ESCALATION, AND INADVERTENT WAR

Hyun-Binn Cho

Avery Goldstein

Recent tensions on the Korean peninsula and in the South China Sea have led to concerns that provocative actions, such as harsh rhetoric and low-level violence, might embroil the United States in an unwanted war. The international relations literature, however, does not offer a coherent theory of provocation and crisis escalation. Instead, scholars and policymakers rely on intuition or other mechanisms of escalation, such as those based on accidents, threat perception, or imperfect signaling to explain the dangers of provocation in crises. Drawing on recent insights in social psychology and the study of resolve, this dissertation advances a novel theory of provocation that explains how provocative rhetoric and military actions can distinctly lead to unwanted crisis escalation and conflict. I test my theory at the individual level with a survey experiment and use the findings to develop three game-theoretic models that analyze how provocation affects crisis dynamics in different strategic contexts. To show that these mechanisms can significantly impact real crises, I closely examine the Sino-India War of 1962 and Sino-Soviet Border Conflict of 1969 using primary Chinese sources, and briefly review three additional cases of more recent crises. In the conclusion, I discuss the implications for coercive diplomacy and crisis management.

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CHAPTER 1 : Introduction

During the fall of 2017, vituperations between the leaders of the United States and North Korea escalated to unprecedented heights. U.S. President Donald Trump threatened North Korea with “fire and fury” and mocked North Korea’s leader, Kim Jong-un, as “Little Rocket Man.”¹ Kim threatened to respond with the “highest level of hardline countermeasure in history” and berated President Trump as a “mentally deranged U.S. dotard.”² This escalating “war of words” between the two leaders led to widespread apprehension that verbal provocations might spiral into an unwanted conflict. A poll conducted by the Pew Research Center in October 2017 found that 84% of the U.S. public thought President Trump was “really willing to use military force against North Korea” and 65% thought North Korea was “really willing to following through on its threat to use nuclear weapons” against the United States.³ In November 2017, the U.S. Senate held its first hearing in four decades to review, and potentially circumscribe, the president’s authority to order a launch of nuclear weapons.⁴

Concerns about provoking unwanted escalation, either through heated rhetoric or military actions, are a perennial feature of interstate crises. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara argued that a key advantage of a naval blockade over an airstrike was that “it avoids a sudden military move which might provoke a response from the U.S.S.R. which could result in escalating actions leading to general war.”⁵ More

¹New York Times (March 9, 2018) “Trump and Kim Jong-un, and the Names They’ve Called Each Other.”

²New York Times (September 22, 2017) “Full Text of Kim Jong-un’s Response to President Trump.”

³Pew Research Center (Nov. 2017) “Increasing Public Concern Over North Korea’s Nuclear Capability, Intentions.”

⁴United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (2017) *Full Committee Hearing on the Authority to Order the Use of Nuclear Weapons*. URL: <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings/authority-to-order-the-use-of-nuclear-weapons-111417>.

⁵U.S. Department of State (1962) Minutes of the 505th Meeting of the National Security Council, 20 October 1962. In *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1962-63*. Vol. 11, Cuban Missile and the Aftermath. Document 34. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

recently in the South China Sea, Chinese efforts to build artificial islands, and U.S. freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs), have raised concerns that even small provocations might spark a wider conflict.⁶ In a visit to the region in 2013, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry warned that “it is vital that claimants refrain from provocative unilateral actions.”⁷

Indeed, in recent years, unintended crisis escalation has received attention as a prominent way in which the United States could find itself at war with another major power, such as China. The latest RAND report on the dangers of a U.S.-China War, subtitled “Thinking Through the Unthinkable,” states that “because a Sino-U.S. war could be extremely costly for the victor, it is not likely to result from premeditated attack by either side.” “Yet,” the report warns, “Sino-U.S. crises could occur and involve incidents or miscalculations that lead to hostilities.”⁸ Similarly, in 2013, Avery Goldstein argued that “the gravest danger in Sino-American relations is the possibility the two countries will find themselves in a crisis that could escalate to open military conflict.”⁹ Even Graham Allison, who warns that the United States and China may be “destined for war” because of “Thucydides Trap” – the recurring historical pattern in which a rising power has fought a war with a ruling power – turns to an inadvertent process of escalation to explain why a U.S.-China war might actually occur.¹⁰ Recognizing that a U.S.-China war can be “hard to imagine” because the “consequences would be so obviously disproportionate to any gains either side could hope to achieve,” Allison nevertheless argues that “the underlying stress created by China’s disruptive rise creates conditions in which accidental, otherwise inconsequential events

⁶Washington Post (July 3, 2017) “China vows to step up air, sea patrols after U.S. warship sails near disputed island.”

⁷John Kerry (2015) “Press Availability in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (August 6).” URL: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/08/245768.htm>.

⁸David C. Gompert, Astrid Stuth Cevallos, and Cristina L. Garfola (2016) *War with China: Thinking Through the Unthinkable*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, p. 3.

⁹Avery Goldstein (2013) “First Things First: The Pressing Danger of Crisis Instability in U.S.-China Relations.” *International Security*. 37.4, pp. 49–89, pp. 49-50.

¹⁰Graham T. Allison (2017) *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

could trigger a large-scale conflict.”¹¹ Indeed, each of his “five plausible paths to war” – scenarios in which the United States and China could end up fighting a war – involve an unintended escalatory incident.¹²

The international relations (IR) literature, however, is ill-equipped to guide us through the dangers of provocation in an unwanted process of crisis escalation to war. There is no theoretical framework with which to analyze how heated rhetoric between Trump and Kim can lead to unwanted escalation. There is no clear logic that explains how provocative military actions in the South China Sea can lead to escalation and conflict similarly to heated rhetoric but differently from other mechanisms of escalation. Indeed, in stark contrast to literatures that explain unwanted crisis escalation through the role of accidents, threat perceptions, or imperfect signaling, the role of provocation in crisis escalation remains poorly understood. What does it mean to provoke an adversary? How does a mechanism of provocation lead to crisis escalation and the outbreak of war? And how does this mechanism differ from, and relate to, other mechanisms of crisis escalation?

This dissertation examines provocation and its distinctive logic of crisis escalation to war. Specifically, this dissertation contributes to our understanding of provocation in interstate crises by addressing three puzzles. First, what does it mean conceptually to *provoke* an adversary? Provocation is a ubiquitous term used by policymakers, pundits, and political scientists, but its meaning remains elusive.¹³ I thus offer a coherent conception of provocation that distinguishes it from other concepts such as *threat*, on the one hand, and from the role of *anger*, on the other. Second, how does provocation lead to crisis escalation and the outbreak of war? I provide a theory of provocation that explains the unique causal mechanisms through which provocative rhetoric and military actions can

¹¹Allison 2017, pp. 155, 184.

¹²Ibid., pp. 156-184.

¹³See the literature review later in this chapter.

lead to crisis escalation and conflict. By doing so, I outline a *logic of provocation* and distinguish it from three alternative logics of unwanted escalation that I identify in the IR literature. I refer to these alternative logics as an *accidental escalation logic*, a *security dilemma logic*, and a *crisis bargaining logic*.¹⁴ Third, how important is provocation in crises? Only when we have a clear understanding of what provocation is and how it operates can we identify and measure its role in crises. I show through historical case studies, a survey experiment, and game-theoretic models that provocation can significantly impact crisis escalation, bargaining dynamics, and the likelihood of war.

By advancing these three arguments, I challenge two conventional views on provocation. One is the view that the dangers of provocation are primarily about triggering ‘crazy’ outcomes. This caricatured version of provocation accentuates explosive, hysterical, and erratic crisis outcomes, such as a leader launching nuclear war in a fit of anger, or a crisis ‘spiraling out of control’ after a crass escalatory move. In contrast to this caricatured version of provocation, I explain the relationship between provocation and crisis escalation within a broadly rationalist framework. I draw on recent insights from social psychology, game theory, and the ‘behavioral turn’ in IR to offer a logic of provocation that makes the escalatory processes of provocation more theoretically tractable. This logic of provocation

¹⁴On accidental escalation and brinkmanship, see, for example, Thomas C. Schelling (1966) *Arms and Influence*. 2008th ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, Robert Powell (1985) “The Theoretical Foundations of Strategic Nuclear Deterrence.” *Political Science Quarterly*. 100.1, pp. 75–96, and Robert Powell (1990) *Nuclear Deterrence Theory: The Search for Credibility*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. On the security dilemma, see, for example, Robert Jervis (1976) *Perceptions and Misperceptions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, Robert Jervis (1978) “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma.” *World Politics*. 30.2, pp. 167–214, Charles L. Glaser (1992) “Political Consequences of Military Strategy: Expanding and Refining the Spiral and Deterrence Models.” *World Politics*. 44.4, pp. 497–538, Charles L. Glaser (1997) “The Security Dilemma Revisited.” *World Politics*. 50.1, pp. 171–201, Charles L. Glaser (2010) *Rational Theory of International Politics: The Logic of Competition and Cooperation*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, and Andrew H. Kydd (1997) “Game Theory and the Spiral Model.” *World Politics*. 49.3, pp. 371–400. And on crisis bargaining, see, for example, James D. Fearon (1994) “Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes.” *American Political Science Review*. 88.3, pp. 577–592, Robert Powell (1996) “Stability and the Distribution of Power.” *World Politics*. 48.2, pp. 239–267, and Branislav L. Slantchev (2011) *Military Threats: The Costs of Coercion and the Price of Peace*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

explains both the microfoundations – individual-level processes – of provocation and the causal pathways through which bargaining can break down after a provocation even when there is an *ex ante* bargaining range that both states prefer to war.¹⁵

I also challenge the conventional wisdom that provocation rarely affects crisis escalation. Provocation sceptics argue that the dangers of provocation are overblown because we seldom observe impulsive and explosive outcomes in interstate crises. Yet, leaders often try to avoid provoking their adversary during crises, even when the stakes are high, and these decisions significantly impact how crises unfold regardless of whether leaders are wrong to make them. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, for instance, although President Kennedy took deliberate steps that raised the risk of conflict, such as publicly announcing that he would stand firm, he also took numerous measures to avoid provoking the Soviets, such as rescinding a previous decision to violently retaliate when a U-2 was shot-down in Soviet airspace and rejecting the option of invading Cuba.¹⁶ Indeed, the act of avoiding provocation has important strategic implications for crisis escalation and military strategy. For example, states may try to avoid provocation by resorting to covert military operations or by “advancing without attacking” – taking actions below the threshold of eliciting a violent military response from the adversary such as by engaging in “gray zone” conflicts

¹⁵On the breakdown of bargaining and causes of war, see, for example, James D. Fearon (1995) “Rational Explanations for War.” *International Organization*. 49.3, pp. 379–414.

¹⁶See, for example, Glenn Snyder and Paul Diesing (1977) *Conflict Among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making, And System Structure in International Crises*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, and Allison 2017.

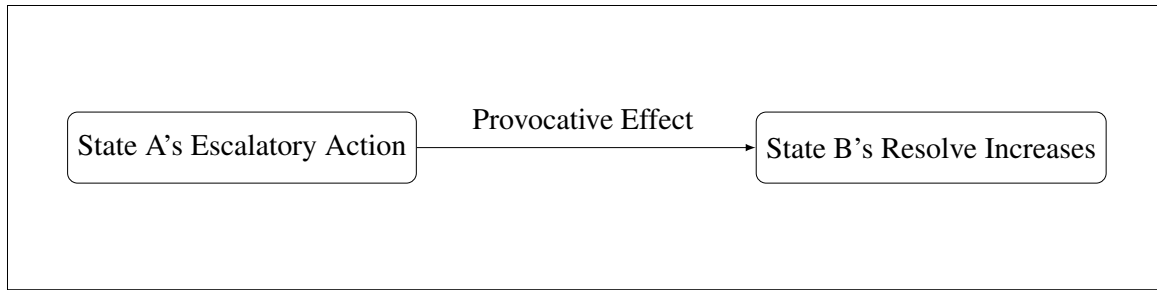


Figure 1: A provocative effect is a particular type of causal effect that one state’s escalatory action has on increasing its adversary’s resolve to escalate during a crisis.

that use civilian militia forces.¹⁷

Another reason why the provocation sceptic’s view is problematic is because it is often premised on the caricatured version of provocation. That is, because provocation sceptics often view provocation in terms of explosive outcomes, they believe that provocation rarely affects crises. But, as I elaborate later, provocation can have dangerous unobserved consequences because of a fundamental inferential problem that arises when leaders and analysts see an escalatory action by an adversary during a crisis: did the adversary escalate because they are belligerent, because they feel threatened, because they did not get the signal, or because they were provoked? Without a clear understanding of what we are looking for, we will be unable to assess the role of provocation in crises. Only by accurately conceptualizing provocation and understanding its distinctive escalatory logic can we begin to identify its pernicious effects.

The first step I take in conceptualizing provocation is to conceive of a unique causal effect.

¹⁷Dan Altman (2018) “Advancing without Attacking: The Strategic Game around the Use of Force.” *Security Studies*. 27.1, pp. 58–88. On “gray zone” conflicts, see, for example, Amy Chang, Ben FitzGerald, and Van Jackson (Mar. 2015) *Shades of Gray: Technology, Strategic Competition, and Stability in Maritime Asia*. Washington D.C.: Center for a New American Security; and Adam P. Liff (2018) China’s Maritime Gray Zone Operations in the East China Sea and Japan’s Responses. In *China’s Maritime Gray Zone Operations*. Ed. by Ryan D. Martinson and Andrew S. Erickson. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press. On covert military operations and escalation, see Austin Carson (2016) “Facing Off and Saving Face: Covert Intervention and Escalation Management in the Korean War.” *International Organization*. 70.1, pp. 103–131, and Austin Carson and Keren Yarhi-Milo (2017) “Covert Communication: The Intelligibility and Credibility of Signaling in Secret.” *Security Studies*. 26.1, pp. 124–156.

Provocation comes from the Latin word *provocare*, which means *to challenge* or *to call forth*.¹⁸ In academic and public commentary, provocation often means words or deeds by one actor that somehow aggravate another actor, such as in the expressions, “North Korea’s missile test is a major provocation,” or “President Trump’s comments on China are highly provocative.” I argue, however, that these statements are effectively meaningless without first clarifying what I call a “provocative effect” – the change in the *recipient’s incentives to escalate* that are caused by the supposedly ‘provocative’ action. More precisely, a “provocative effect” is a causal effect of an action by State A that increases State B’s *resolve* to fight for a given stake in dispute by changing a unique subset of variables. Thus, I ask not whether an action (i.e. words or deeds) by one state should be called a ‘provocation,’ but whether that action has a provocative effect on the adversary.¹⁹ This shifts the focus of the above expressions to questions such as the following: “Did North Korea’s missile tests have a provocative effect on the United States?” “How large are the provocative effects of President Trump’s comments on the Chinese public? This focus on provocative effects on the recipient parallels the substantive interest in the IR literature on actions that threaten a recipient even without the threatening intent of the sender, or actions that credibly signal resolve in the recipient’s eyes.²⁰ Moreover, this conceptual move is consistent with recent work on provocation, such as Todd Hall, who views provocations as “constituted by their effects:” if an action elicits a particular kind of response, he defines that action as a provocation.²¹

Once we start thinking about the provocative effects of one state’s actions on the recipient

¹⁸From the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

¹⁹Commentators will likely use the term ‘provocation’ for their own purposes. Relatedly, see Austin Carson (Aug. 2017) “Hidden in Plain Sight: Escalation Control and the Covert Side of the Vietnam War.” *Working Paper*.

²⁰See, for example, studies on the security dilemma and crisis bargaining in footnote 14.

²¹Todd H. Hall (2017) “On Provocation: Outrage, International Relations, and the Franco-Prussian War.” *Security Studies*. 26.1, pp. 1–19, pp. 2,3. Also see Allan Dafoe, Sophia Hatz, and Baobao Zhang (Feb. 2017) “Coercion and Provocation.” *Working Paper*.

state, the question then becomes two-fold: what are the causal mechanisms through which one state's escalatory actions during a crisis increase the recipient's resolve, and how does this causal mechanism differ from other escalatory mechanisms, such as those based on threat perception or imperfect signaling? The unique subset of variables that cause a provocative effect defines the boundaries of a provocative effect and distinguishes its causal mechanism from other mechanisms of crisis escalation. As I explain later, the role of anger and honor concerns typify this subset of variables that produce a provocative effect. Once I clarify the causal mechanisms through which these variables produce a provocative effect, I bring in the story from the 'sender's' side and analyze the strategic interactions between the provoked and the provocateur. For instance, why would a state ever behave in a provocative manner if it knows that its adversary will become more resolved to escalate?

At this juncture, however, it is important to note that "provocative effects" can potentially explain a host of crisis behavior other than explosive outcomes. First, by provoking an increase in the adversary's resolve to fight rather than concede the stake, an issue that was once unimportant may become highly salient. For example, if Japan or China were once willing to concede the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, actions by Japan that have a "provocative effect" on China make it harder for China to back down (and easier to escalate), even when the intrinsic value of the islands to China, or the relative military capabilities of the two sides, remain unchanged.²² Second, if an opponent's actions have a provocative effect, a defending state that would have conceded a stake in dispute can become resolved to stand firm and thereby 'switch' to face war. Indeed, if both states in a crisis are initially unresolved to fight for the stake in dispute, but become resolved during the course of a crisis because their opponent's actions have a provocative effect, then a 'minor dispute'

²²By intrinsic value, I refer primarily to the strategic, economic, and historical value of a stake. The distinction that I draw is further clarified when I explain the escalatory mechanisms later in this chapter and the following chapter.

can snowball into a serious crisis and result in a deliberate but unintended war. I refer such a war as an *inadvertent war*.²³ Third, and conversely, provocative effects in a crisis may go unnoticed if a dramatic outcome such as war is not observed. For instance, even if a belligerent state's provocative actions increase a defending state's resolve and 'switches' it to stand firm, a war may never materialize if the belligerent state is bluffing and only escalates short of war. Thus, provocative effects may dangerously shift the undercurrents of a crisis but go unnoticed by analysts if they focus solely on explosive outcomes or observed crisis behavior, such as Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs) data-set outcomes. This makes it imperative to go behind the scenes and look into why a state made the escalatory decisions they did.

The inferential difficulty of unobserved provocative effects means that careful archival work and process-tracing in case studies is crucial for identifying the role of provocation in crises. This difficulty compounds another methodological challenge: identifying the causal mechanisms of provocation at the individual-level. In this dissertation, I tackle both challenges by fielding a survey experiment to test the micro-mechanisms of provocation and examining two historical cases in-depth to demonstrate the role and significance of provocation in real crises. The two case studies are the Sino-India War of 1962 and the Sino-Soviet Border Conflict of 1969, and both draw on primary Chinese sources and archival material. In the concluding chapter, I briefly review three additional cases and discuss the wider importance of provocation in crises.

A final challenge that confronts the study of provocation in crises is its strategic usage. Avoiding provocation often comes into conflict with other strategic goals during a crisis, such as taking costly actions to coerce an adversary. Snyder and Diesing, for instance,

²³On a foundational definition of inadvertent war, see Alexander L. George (1991) *Avoiding War: Problems of Crisis Management*. Boulder, C.O.: Westview Press, pp. 8-9. In the next chapter, I build onto George's definition and distinguish *inadvertent war* from *accidental war* and other pathways that lead to war.

claim that avoiding provocation in crises is central to ameliorating the dilemma between bringing to bear greater coercive pressure and avoiding the risk of war: “successful coercion while minimizing [the] risk [of war] also requires avoiding provocativeness in one’s threats and declarations.”²⁴ Yet, in some instances, states provoke other states deliberately. In the infamous “Ems Dispatch” incident, Prussian Chancellor Otto von Bismarck doctored a telegram in an insulting tone and released it to the press to infuriate the French and provoke them into hastily launching a war. The Franco-Prussian War ended in France’s defeat and ultimately led to the unification of Germany.²⁵ Thus, whether provocative effects lead to unwanted crisis escalation not only depends on the magnitude of the provocative effect, but on the strategies that states adopt.

In other situations, however, states deliberately provoke an adversary not to stir up war, but to signal resolve. During the 1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis, for example, China deliberately bombarded waters near Taiwan in protest at the Taiwanese president being issued a visa by the United States.²⁶ Unlike Bismarck’s strategy, China’s deliberate provocation signaled resolve to use force to prevent Taiwanese independence – a threat that is largely viewed as credible in the eyes of outside observers.²⁷ How can provocation be used strategically both to stir up war and to signal resolve? And if a state wants to signal resolve to coerce another state to back down, should it avoid provocation or deliberately provoke? To make things even more complicated, a state may claim to be provoked even when it was not.²⁸ In the Gulf of Tonkin incident of 1964, for instance, U.S. President Lyndon Johnson shored

²⁴Snyder and Diesing 1977, p. 218.

²⁵See, for instance, Hall 2017.

²⁶For studies on the incident, see, for example, Robert S. Ross (2000) “The 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Confrontation: Coercion, Credibility, and the Use of Force.” *International Security*. 25.2, pp. 87–123. Notably, Ross refers to the incident as a “confrontation” rather than a “crisis.”

²⁷On China’s signaling and military provocations in other cases, see Oriana Skylar Mastro (Apr. 2009) “Signaling and Military Provocation in Chinese National Security Strategy: A Closer Look at the Impeccable Incident of March 2009.” *Journal of Strategic Studies*. 34.2, pp. 219–244.

²⁸For instance, see Carson 2017.

up domestic political support to become more involved in Vietnam by claiming that a U.S. naval vessel had been ambushed by the Vietnamese. Yet, it is unclear whether the incident actually occurred.²⁹ How can we reconcile these different, often competing, strategic uses of provocation and their impact on crisis escalation?

I tackle these questions using game-theoretic modeling. As Thomas Schelling recognized, game theory can provide important insights into strategic situations “in which the best course of action for each participant depends on what he expects the other participant to do.”³⁰ At the very least, game-theoretic models allow me to compare provocative effects with other escalatory mechanisms in the standard crisis bargaining model given the same set of assumptions. For example, how does a provocative effect differ from the escalatory dangers of imperfect information and inadequate signaling? And given that we know that an *ex post* costly war can arise because of incentives to misrepresent private information, the indivisibility of the stake in dispute, or commitment problems, how does a provocative effect lead to war differently, if it differs at all? I address these questions by integrating provocative effects into the standard crisis bargaining model and developing three formal, game-theoretic models that each focuses on a different strategic usage of provocation. The first model demonstrates how a defending state can use a tripwire or naval blockade to place the burden of provocation on the potential aggressor and deter challenges to the status quo. The second model shows how states can deliberately provoke an adversary to signal resolve and coerce the adversary to back down. The third model shows how states can engage in “gray-zone” conflicts to coerce an adversary into conceding a stake without using overt

²⁹See John M. Schuessler (2015) *Deceit on the Road to War: Presidents, Politics, and American Democracy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 78-83, and Elizabeth N. Saunders (2015) “War and the Inner Circle: Democratic Elites and the Politics of Using Force.” *Security Studies*. 24.3, pp. 466–501.

³⁰Thomas C. Schelling (1960) *The Strategy of Conflict*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 5, 9-10 For a discussion of the advantages of game theory for analyzing strategic interactions in international relations and other contexts, also see Robert Powell (1999) *In the Shadow of Power: States and Strategies in International Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 34-35 and Michael Suk-Young Chwe (2013) *Jane Austen, Game Theorist*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, pp. 1-34.

military force. This final model also shows that an *inadvertent war* can arise rationally and through a different pathway from existing escalatory logics. Together, these abstract models allow me to generalize my arguments and findings beyond my case studies.

In sum, by conceptualizing a provocative effect, explaining its logic, and demonstrating its significance, this dissertation makes the case for treating provocation as a distinct variable in the study of interstate crises. Although the literature on crisis bargaining and signaling has produced many important insights, there is no *a priori* reason that variation in how provocative an action is to an adversary is any less important than, say, variation in how credibly an action signals resolve.³¹ Indeed, even if a signal credibly communicates resolve to an adversary, if that signal is provocative, I find that it can nevertheless ‘switch’ the adversary to resisting and lead to unwanted conflict.

Provocation in International Politics

To be sure, provocation has not gone unnoticed by scholars or policymakers. How far does our existing literature help us explain provocation and its effects on crisis escalation and conflict? Robert Jervis once claimed that “states sometimes fail to deploy threats that would benefit them and on other, probably more numerous, occasions employ threats that provoke rather than deter.”³² In international politics, there is no higher authority above sovereign states, so the use and threat to use military force are important means for states to survive

³¹On signaling, see, for instance, Robert Jervis (1970) *The Logic of Images in International Relations*. New York: Columbia University Press, James D. Fearon (1997) “Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Hand Tying versus Sinking Costs.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. 41.1, pp. 68–90, Anne Sartori (2005) *Deterrence and Diplomacy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, Robert F. Trager (2010) “Diplomatic Calculus in Anarchy: How Communication Matters.” *American Political Science Review*. 104.2, pp. 347–368, Keren Yarhi-Milo (2013) “Tying Hands Behind Closed Doors: The Logic and Practice of Secret Reassurance.” *Security Studies*. 22.3, pp. 405–435, and Robert F. Trager (2015) “Diplomacy of War and Peace.” *Annual Review of Political Science*. 19.1, pp. 205–28.

³²Robert Jervis (1989a) “Rational Deterrence: Theory and Evidence.” *World Politics*. 41.2, pp. 183–207, p. 198.

and compete in an essentially self-help environment.³³ The provocative effects of using threats and violence in interstate crises, however, have been relatively understudied. This section reviews the IR literature for studies on provocation and finds that “provocation” or its verb form, “to provoke” is used in at least six different ways. Unsurprisingly, therefore, there is no scholarly consensus on what provocation means and how it impacts crisis escalation.

The most prevalent view of provocation is that of inciting individual leaders to take rash actions. In an infamous incident in October 1960, then leader of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, allegedly banged his shoe on a desk in outrage during a U.N. meeting, and this “instilled in his adversaries the thought that here was a man who might quite easily be provoked into rash behavior.” According to Snyder and Diesing, this image of a “highly emotional and provokable Khrushchev” contributed to President Kennedy’s fear of a Soviet “spam reponse” two years later during the Cuban Missile Crisis.³⁴ More recently, the widespread concern over the “war of words” between President Trump and Kim Jong-un is similarly based on the view that leaders may become provoked to take impulsive actions. These concerns about provocation share two features in common: they focus on individual leaders and their predisposition toward explosive reactions.

Second, provocation appears in the literature as an expression of something that is threatening. Ballistic missile tests by North Korea are often referred to as “provocative,” yet they pose a threat to U.S. security by advancing missile technology that can reach U.S. territory. Similarly, mobilizing troops into disputed territory is sometimes said to “provoke” escalation because the troops pose a threat to the status quo. This substitutive

³³See Hans J. Morgenthau (1948) *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, and Kenneth N. Waltz (1979) *Theory of International Politics*. Boston, Mass.: McGraw-Hill.

³⁴Snyder and Diesing 1977, p. 223.

role of the term “provocation” for something that is “threatening” is relatively innocuous in contexts where the substitution is evident. But confusion arises when the substitutive role of provocation is ambiguous, such as in contexts where provocation could mean threatening a state’s security, enraging a leader, or both. We can begin to disentangle the meaning of “provocative” from “threatening” by thinking about three types of variation that scholars have identified in explicitly issued verbal threats. One type of variation is in the sincerity of the threat (i.e. whether it is a bluff), a second type of variation is in the scope of what is being threatened (e.g. whether the demand is limited or ambitious), and a third type of variation is in whether the threat is fashioned in an insulting or a humiliating way.³⁵ To say that a verbal threat is “provocative” or “threatening,” therefore, does not make clear what is changing along at least three types of variation. Yet, if the two terms are used interchangeably for each type of variation, a threat that is more credible and demanding can reasonably be said to be more threatening, but a threat that is more humiliating or insulting does not necessarily pose a larger objective threat. We could thus distinguish a threat that is more humiliating and insulting as more “provocative,” and a threat that is more credible or demanding as more “threatening.” But even if we were to delineate provocative from threatening actions according to this third type of variation, it would not get us very far. What is causing the provocative effect? Does the recipient feel humiliated, angered, or something else?

Third, in the crisis bargaining literature, provocation appears as a form of “audience costs.”³⁶ James Fearon once claimed that when a state’s “public declaration creates

³⁵See, for example, Slantchev 2011, and Snyder and Diesing 1977, pp. 218-21.

³⁶On audience costs, see, for instance, James D. Fearon (1994) “Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes.” *American Political Science Review*. 88.3, pp. 577–592, Kenneth Schultz (1998) “Domestic Opposition and Signaling in International Crises.” *American Political Science Review*. 92.4, pp. 829–844 Michael Tomz (2007) “Domestic Audience Costs in International Relations: An Experimental Approach.” *International Organization*. 61.4, pp. 821–840, Jack Snyder and Erica D. Borghard (2011) “The Cost of Empty Threats: A Penny, Not a Pound.” *American Journal of Political Science*. 105.3, pp. 437–456, and Joshua D. Kertzer and Ryan Brutger (2016) “Decomposing Audience Costs: Bringing the

audience costs for the opponent as well, the state is risking provocation.”³⁷ The intuition here is that if a state’s public threat engages the opponent’s public and increases the opponent’s audience costs, the opponent will find it harder to back down. In this sense, increasing the opponent’s audience costs can “provoke” the opponent to take escalatory actions. Building onto this intuition, Shuhei Kurizaki developed a game-theoretic model in which threats made during public diplomacy, unlike threats made behind closed doors, raise audience costs for both the home state and the opponent, thereby making it harder for *both* states to back down. Thus, Kurizaki argued that previous crisis bargaining models have “underestimated the provocative consequences of publicly issued threats and how those threats can engage the receiver’s domestic audience, which may eventually lock-in the receiver to resisting.”³⁸ Yet, Kurizaki’s model cannot explain variation in provocation *within* public threats. Put in terms of audience costs, it does not explain why some public threats can increase the opponent’s audience costs more than other public threats. More recently, however, Gottfried and Trager find evidence of this type of variation. Through a survey experiment, they find that when an adversary uses aggressive rhetoric in a public threat, the target state’s public is more disapproving of their government for making a large concession.³⁹ Thus, public threats that use aggressive rhetoric can provoke the target state’s public and make backing down harder for their leaders. This finding is consistent with Fearon’s and Kurizaki’s notion of provocation, even though Gottfried and Trager don’t explain their findings in terms of provocation. What remains unclear, however, is why aggressive rhetoric has this provocative effect. The authors suggest that concerns about

Audience Back into Audience Cost Theory.” *American Journal of Political Science*. 60.1, pp. 234–249.

³⁷James D. Fearon (1992) “Threats to Use Force: Costly Signals and Bargaining in International Crises.” PhD thesis. UC Berkeley, p. 173.

³⁸Shuhei Kurizaki (2007) “Efficient Secrecy: Public versus Private Threats in Crisis Diplomacy.” *American Political Science Review*., pp. 543–558, p. 556.

³⁹Matthew S. Gottfried and Robert F. Trager (2016) “A Preference for War: How Fairness and Rhetoric Influence Leadership Incentives in Crises.” *International Studies Quarterly*. 60.2, pp. 243–257.

honor play an important role, but they do not test this proposition.⁴⁰

Fourth, provocation is often associated with the role of honor as a motive for war. In Thucydides's telling, honor was one of three motives – along with fear and interest – behind the Athenian drive for empire.⁴¹ More recently, Lebow finds honor to be an important motive for why nations fight wars, and Dafoe and Caughey find that U.S. presidents from a southern honor culture more frequently enter international conflicts.⁴² Honor can thus be an important motive for war, but what is the relationship between honor and provocation? The existing literature reveals at least three different ways in which the relationship between honor, provocation, and escalation can be understood. One is the idea that if an actor's honor is challenged, a more honorable actor will be more provoked to escalate. Barry O'Neil proposes that challenges that test a proposition that an actor wants to have believed by others should be distinguished from other types of actions as a "class of provocatives."⁴³ In this view, challenging an actor to prove her honor is a provocation. In many cultures, however, proving one's honor involves taking actions that incur "some cost or risk," such as a duel or joust.⁴⁴ Given that an actor is provoked to prove her honor, then, the escalatory mechanism is that a more honorable actor is more likely to escalate and engage in a costly action.

A second idea that links honor, provocation, and escalation is that a more honorable actor who is provoked can take costlier and riskier actions to better vindicate her honor. This idea involves two separate insights. One is that by introducing variation into the type of response

⁴⁰Gottfried and Trager 2016, p. 247.

⁴¹Allan Dafoe, Jonathan Renshon, and Paul Huth (2014) "Reputation and Status as Motives for War." *Annual Review of Political Science*. 17.371-93, p. 371.

⁴²Richard Ned Lebow (2010) *Why Nations Fight: Past and Future Motives for War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Allan Dafoe and Devin Caughey (Apr. 2016) "Honor and War: Southern U.S. Presidents and the Effects of Concern for Reputation." *World Politics*. 6.2.

⁴³Barry O'Neill (1999) *Honor, Symbols, and War*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, p. 109.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 91,101.

an actor can take when a challenge to honor is perceived, a provoked actor can gain or recoup more honor by escalating to higher levels that engage in costlier and riskier actions. The other insight is that perceived challenges to an actor's honor can arise incidentally in contexts other than a challenge to duel or joust, such as in the context of crisis bargaining. Pointing out that honor concerns can arise for an actor who is threatened by an adversary to concede a stake in dispute, Thomas Dolan develops a formal crisis bargaining model in which an honorable actor can "vindicate" her honor by incurring greater costs to fight a war.⁴⁵ Although Dolan does not use the language of provocation, such as defining what provocation means in his model, the escalatory mechanism that his model highlights can be interpreted in terms of provocation: given a provocation that engages an actor's honor, a more honorable actor who has a choice of escalating to higher levels will escalate with costlier and riskier actions to better vindicate or redeem her honor.

A third idea is that some actions by an opponent challenge an actor's honor whereas other actions by the opponent do not (or hardly do at all). In a crisis bargaining context, this third type of variation is in whether an escalatory action by one actor counts as a provocation to another actor – or, to borrow O'Neil's terminology, whether the action counts as being in a "class of provocatives." Dafoe, Hatz, and Zhang, for instance, argue that a coercive action that is meant to induce a target state to back down during a crisis can counterproductively provoke the target state to escalate if it engages the target state's honor and reputation.⁴⁶ In this sense, if a coercive action challenges the target state's honor, it can be counted as a provocation. Indeed, Dafoe and his colleagues find through a survey experiment that when an opponent's attempt to coerce the target state by buzzing fighter jets accidentally kills the target state's pilot, the target state's public is more supportive of taking costlier

⁴⁵Thomas Dolan (2015) "Demanding the Impossible: War, Bargaining, and Honor." *Security Studies*. 24.3, pp. 528–562.

⁴⁶Dafoe, Hatz, and Zhang 2017.

and riskier escalatory measures than when a fatality does not occur. Moreover, the authors find supporting evidence that this higher public resolve to escalate is associated with the public's view that the fatality-inducing coercive action of the opponent engages their sense of honor and reputation. In this way, the authors argue that honor and reputation provide a causal mechanism that explains the escalatory logic of provocation. It is important to note, however, that the authors' honor-based explanation of provocation is one of at least three different mechanisms that link honor, provocation, and escalation. The escalatory mechanism that this third idea highlights is the following: *given how honorable an actor is*, an opponent's action that engages the actor's honor will make the actor more willing to take costlier and riskier escalatory measures than an action by the opponent that does not engage the actor's honor.

Together, these three mechanisms advance our understanding of honor and provocation. But several important questions remain. Paraphrasing recent debates about the role of reputation in international politics, *to whom do honor considerations adhere?*⁴⁷ Dolan and Lebow ascribe honor concerns to leaders and even states, whereas Dafoe et al., focus on the public. How can the different levels of analysis be reconciled to understand honor and provocation? Furthermore, how does the view that provocation is driven by honor concerns relate to the view that provocation is about rash and impulsive outcomes?

Fifth, provocation is closely associated with the role of emotions in international politics. Todd Hall, for instance, integrates insights from the social psychology of anger to study provocation.⁴⁸ His work makes at least five contributions to the literature. First, as mentioned above, Hall defines provocations in terms of their effects: "provocations

⁴⁷Jonathan Renshon, Allan Dafoe, and Paul Huth (2018) "Leader Influence and Reputation Formation in World Politics." *American Journal of Political Science*. forthcoming.

⁴⁸Hall 2017.

are constituted by their effects – outraged reactions.”⁴⁹ More specifically, he defines provocations as “actions or incidents that state actors perceive as intentionally and wrongfully challenging or violating their values and goals, thereby eliciting outraged reactions that spur rash, aggressive responses.”⁵⁰ Second, drawing on recent experiments on the emotions of anger in social psychology, Hall specifies several micro-mechanisms that link anger to individual behavioral outcomes. For example, multiple experiments find that anger increases risk-taking and impatience in individuals. Thus, Hall argues that anger-induced changes in risk and time preferences can lead to “rash, aggressive state actions,” such as war. Third, Hall distinguishes outraged reactions at the public- and leadership-levels, and explains how the two levels interact to produce state-level outcomes. One mechanism that he outlines is similar to audience costs. Referring to audience costs as “the possible penalties policymakers will face for breaking promises to their domestic publics,” Hall claims that “popular outrage in response to a provocation works along these lines.”⁵¹ Another mechanism, however, is the transmission of emotions from one level to another. Public assemblies, media reporting, and social media can transmit and amplify emotions of outrage across the populace and impact the potential choices of leaders. Fourth, Hall argues that emotions of anger can “enjoy a longer life-span” than is commonly assumed because anger can “reverberate” within a political system through elite cues and the media.⁵² Thus, he builds the case that provocation can more meaningfully impact international politics than the fleeting effects one might expect when considering the individual in isolation.

Hall also raises several important points about the strategic use of provocation. His case study of Bismarck’s deliberate provocation that led to the Franco-Prussian War not only highlights that provocation can be used strategically, but that a state can be provoked

⁴⁹Hall 2017, p. 3.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 2,3.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 11.

⁵²Ibid., p. 13.

to launch a war even after a crisis has been resolved in its favor. The Spanish throne succession crisis that had led to deteriorating Franco-Prussian relations was mostly resolved on France's terms, but Bismarck was nevertheless able to provoke France to launch a war. Furthermore, Hall argues that not all "outraged reactions" are driven by genuine emotions of anger. For example, leaders may engage in "performative outrage" for domestic political reasons or for "emotional diplomacy," which demonstrates to another country how provocative that country's actions are.⁵³ Interestingly, Hall also argues that leaders who put on perfunctory displays of outrage can become genuinely angry because emotions of anger are transmitted from the public and media. Hall thus identifies several different strategic usages of provocation, but he leaves many questions unanswered. For example, can outraged reactions strengthen the bargaining position of the provoked state and lead to peace rather than "rash, aggressive" outcomes? Indeed, Hall acknowledges that a fruitful area for future research is "the intersection of provocation and strategic calculation."⁵⁴

Sixth, the literature on counterinsurgency and terrorism offers several insights on provocation. Stathis Kalyvas, for instance, argues that counterinsurgency campaigns that use "indiscriminate violence" against rebels and civilians can have a "counterproductive effect" that provokes civilians to join the rebel's cause.⁵⁵ Andrew Kydd and Barbara Walter claim that among the five principle strategies of terrorism, one is to deliberately provoke the enemy to overreact: "a provocation strategy is an attempt to induce the enemy to respond to terrorism with indiscriminate violence, which radicalizes the population and moves them to support the terrorists."⁵⁶ How can these ideas on provocation in

⁵³Todd H. Hall (2015) *Emotional Diplomacy: Official Emotion on the International Stage*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

⁵⁴Hall 2017, p. 28.

⁵⁵Stathis Kalyvas (2006) *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 151-4.

⁵⁶Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter (2006) "The Strategies of Terrorism." *International Security*. 31.1, pp. 49-80, p. 51 Also see Kalyvas 2006, p. 151.

the context of counterinsurgency and terrorism help us understand provocation among states? Unfortunately, they have limited applicability. Of the five mechanisms that Kalyvas outlines to explain how an incumbent government's use of indiscriminate violence can provoke civilians to join rebels, four involve cost-benefit calculations among the three domestic actors. For example, indiscriminate violence fails to provide clear incentive structures for civilians to comply with the incumbent because it makes compliance "almost as unsafe as noncompliance."⁵⁷ Rebels can also take advantage of these incentive structures by providing protection to civilians in return for their support. The application of such three-way cost-benefit calculations to provocation among states, however, is unclear. But a fifth mechanism that Kalyvas outlines is based on emotions, and this mechanism is more directly relevant to provocation in interstate crises. Civilians perceive indiscriminate violence to be "deeply unfair" because it "targets people independently of what they did or could have done."⁵⁸ Such perceptions of unfairness, moreover, leads to anger that makes civilians harbor a "desire for revenge" and become "more willing to undertake risky actions."⁵⁹ Emotions also play an important role in interstate crises, but even then, neither violence nor indiscriminate violence is a necessary condition for a provocative effect to arise – a verbal insult hurled by one leader to another could provoke the other to escalate a dispute. Moreover, although the terrorist strategy of deliberately "provoking" a government to overreact is well recognized, it is unclear how this "goading" mechanism operates: is it through increased perceptions of threat, emotions of anger, or something else?⁶⁰ Thus, although the literature on counterinsurgency and terrorism provides important insights into provocation, it has limited applicability when thinking about provocation in interstate

⁵⁷Kalyvas 2006, p. 154.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 153.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 154.

⁶⁰On provocation in the terrorism and counterinsurgency literature, see, for example, David B. Carter (2016) "Provocation and the Strategy of Terrorist and Guerilla Attacks." *International Organization*. 70.1, pp. 133–173; and Brian Blankenship (2018) "When Do States Take the Bait? State Capacity and the Provocation Logic of Terrorism." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. 62.2, pp. 381–409.

crises.

In sum, this review shows that we lack both a coherent conception of provocation and a clear way to disentangle provocation from related terms and escalatory mechanisms in crises. Provocation is often understood as entailing anger and irrational responses, and is frequently associated with concepts such as threats and honor. Recent advances in theorizing provocation, moreover, have involved the role of emotions in international politics. But the literature on crisis bargaining has evolved within a rationalist framework, and integrating provocation with its core insights, such as the role of imperfect information and the view that war is costly, has presented a challenge. The difficulty is not only in reconciling “logics of appropriateness” with “logics of consequences,” but in reconciling different levels of analysis. While the game-theoretic literature on crisis bargaining focuses on strategic interactions between states, provocation has often been concerned with individual-level processes. How, then, can we reconcile these different views of provocation as a single, distinctive phenomenon and explain its unique escalatory logic?

The Argument in Brief

Words or deeds by one state that have a *provocative effect* on the adversary during a crisis increase the adversary’s resolve to escalate by changing two groups of variables, one typified by the role of anger, and the other by honor concerns. The *logic of provocation* explains the causal mechanisms through which these two groups of variables produce a provocative effect at both the individual and state levels. By explaining how one state’s escalatory actions during a crisis increase the adversary’s resolve through two groups of variables and at both the individual- and state-levels of analysis, the logic of provocation captures several existing notions on provocation as a coherent and distinctive escalatory mechanism.

Experiments in social psychology find that emotions of anger increase an individual's willingness to take risks. Recent experiments in political science, moreover, find that individuals who have more risk-accepting dispositions are more resolved to stand firm and fight in international conflicts.⁶¹ I thus theorize that actions by a state that anger the adversary during a crisis increase the adversary's resolve to escalate a crisis by incidentally increasing the adversary's risk-tolerance. More broadly, if one state's escalatory actions during a crisis increase the adversary's resolve to escalate by incidentally – rather than permanently – changing individual-level *dispositional factors*, such as risk or time preferences, that action has a provocative effect.

In contrast, insulting or humiliating actions by a state can heighten the adversary's honor concerns so that the adversary views backing down as less palatable (e.g. lose more honor) and escalation as more appealing (e.g. validate honor). This mechanism increases the adversary's resolve to escalate by changing the adversary's non-material stakes in the crisis: it increases the adversary's honor at stake. More broadly, if one state's actions during a crisis increase the adversary's resolve to escalate by changing the adversary's non-material stakes in the crisis, such as honor, prestige, or status concerns, that action has a provocative effect.⁶² Another way to think about these perceived non-material stakes in the crisis, however, are as a particular subset of situational factors that comprise the strategic environment of the crisis, similarly to discovering energy resources in disputed territory and making the territorial stake in dispute more economically valuable to the adversary. As I explain below, increasing an adversary's resolve by changing non-material stakes,

⁶¹Joshua D. Kertzer (2016) *Resolve in International Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, and Joshua D. Kertzer (2017) "Resolve, Time, and Risk." *International Organization*. 71.S, S109–S136.

⁶²On status, see, for example, Jonathan Renshon (2016) "Status Deficits and War." *International Organization*. 70.3, pp. 513–550; Joslyn Barnhart (2016) "Status Competition and Territorial Aggression: Evidence from the Scramble for Africa." *Security Studies*. 25.3, pp. 385–419, and Jonathan Renshon (2017) *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. On prestige, standing, and related concepts, see, for example, Richard Ned Lebow (2008) *A Cultural Theory of International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, and Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth 2014.

such as honor and status concerns, differs in important ways from an audience cost-type mechanism.

I thus define a provocative effect as the following: any action by one state that increases its adversary's resolve during a crisis by changing dispositional factors or non-material stakes in the crisis has a *provocative effect*. Given that non-material stakes are a type of situational factors, this definition builds onto Joshua Kertzer's recent formulation of resolve in international politics as arising from an interaction between dispositional factors (i.e. individual traits) and situational factors (i.e. features of the strategic environment).⁶³ Kertzer finds, for instance, that individuals who are relatively risk-acceptant and who face lower costs of war, are more resolved to stay the course in a war, but individuals with different dispositions respond more sensitively to different situational factors. The notion of a provocative effect advanced in this dissertation follows this formulation of resolve, but also differs from Kertzer's work in important ways. For one, it does not take an individual's disposition as a constant. Instead, emotions of anger triggered by one state's actions during a crisis can incidentally change the disposition of individuals in the adversarial state and increase their resolve.

A provocative effect is a unique causal mechanism of crisis escalation at the individual level. As I elucidate later, threat perceptions or imperfect signaling, for instance, lead to crisis escalation through different causal mechanisms. To the extent that threats or signaling can also trigger anger or honor concerns that increase the adversary's resolve, however, they can concurrently have a provocative effect. This is unsurprising: threats and signaling can affect each other, and to say that they can also affect anger and honor concerns is a straightforward proposition.⁶⁴ What is new, however, is that a provocative effect

⁶³Kertzer 2016, and Kertzer 2017.

⁶⁴See, for instance, Robert F. Trager (2013) "How the Scope of a Demand Conveys Resolve." *International Theory*. 5.3, pp. 414–445.

provides a clear answer to the following two questions: what exactly is a provocation-based mechanism of crisis escalation and how does it differ from other escalatory mechanisms?

The two individual-level mechanisms of anger and honor concerns outlined above have two *ideal-type* state-level effects. One is that it increases the resolve of individual leaders by increasing risk-taking or raising the non-material stakes that leaders view to be engaged in the dispute. The second is that it increases the public's resolve through the same individual-level mechanisms, but this increase in public support for escalation constrains the leaders' choices to escalate or back down. This second mechanism at the state level can be thought of as a change in a situational factor – the political costs of war – that increases the leader's resolve. Indeed, Kertzer's formulation of resolve in terms of dispositional factors and situational factors helps us think about provocative effects at both the individual- and state-levels of analysis. From the perspective of the leaders of a state who make the decisions to escalate or back down in a crisis, a provocative effect changes their decision calculus by changing dispositional factors and/or situational factors. The two types of situational factors are the change in non-material stakes as perceived by the leaders and the political costs of war (e.g. public opinion) that constrain the leaders. The dispositional factors are the change in risk preferences of the leaders. Together, a provocative effect at the individual level has these two state-level ideal-type effects that impact crisis escalation.

To be sure, these individual- and state-level mechanisms – the logic of provocation – may be counteracted by some variables and intervened by others. For example, a strong signaling effect of the state's actions may overwhelm a weak provocative effect; a non-democratic political regime in the adversarial state may mitigate the pressures from the public that constrain its leaders. These possibilities, however, do not falsify the mechanisms themselves. The outcome of any particular foreign policy decision to escalate in a crisis rests on a confluence of factors and is therefore context-dependent. What *would* falsify

the above mechanisms, however, is a consistent finding in a controlled environment that an increase in anger has, on average, no effect on risk-taking and resolve. Similarly, my theory would be falsified if an increase in the adversary's honor concerns, all else equal, *lowers* the adversary's resolve. I thus test my theory with a survey experiment and find supporting evidence. And because an adversary's decision to escalate depends on an assessment of multiple factors, such as signaling effects, I analyze the impact of provocative effects on crisis escalation through both game-theoretic models and historical case studies.

Wider Implications

The wider contributions of this dissertation are three-fold. The first is theoretical: it contributes to efforts to more closely integrate rational and non-rationalist approaches.⁶⁵ As Fearon and Wendt point out, rationalism and constructivism share “substantial areas of agreement” and “the challenge now should be to combine insights, cross boundaries and, if possible, synthesize specific arguments in hope of gaining more compelling answers and a better picture of reality.”⁶⁶ I advance our understanding of how non-material variables can be analyzed within a rationalist framework by showing that one state's perceived non-material stakes in a crisis can be *endogenous* to another state's actions during the crisis. Insulting or humiliating actions by one state can increase the honor concerns of its adversary, and thus, increase the adversary's resolve to escalate during a crisis. This role of honor concerns differs from previous studies, such as those that view states as being driven predominantly by honor, and opens up the possibility of prestige or status concerns to also operate during a crisis in a similar way.

⁶⁵The term “rational” is used broadly, and I do not attempt to adjudicate between competing conceptions of rationality. I use the term “non-rational” rather than “irrational,” however, to mean ‘not explicitly within a rational framework.’

⁶⁶James D. Fearon and Alexander Wendt (2002) Rationalism v. Constructivism: A Skeptical View. In *Handbook of International Relations*. Ed. by Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth A. Simmons. London: Sage Publications, pp. 52, 68.

The second is methodological. Because my theory integrates psychological and material variables at both the individual- and state-levels of analysis, I adopt a novel multi-method approach to triangulate evidence. I conduct a survey experiment to test individual-level mechanisms, I integrate the findings into game-theoretic models to analyze how provocation affects crisis dynamics, and I draw on case studies to show that provocation can significantly impact real crises.

The third is practical. My findings have important policy implications for coercive diplomacy and crisis management. If provocation entails a different pathway to crisis escalation and war from misperceived threats or inadequate signals, then overlooking these unique pathways creates an additional danger of crisis escalation by breeding inaccurate policy prescriptions. By clearly delineating the causal mechanisms of provocation from alternative logics of escalation, I discuss the policy implications for coercive diplomacy in the South China Sea in the conclusion.

Plan of Dissertation

The next chapter presents the theoretical arguments in more detail and explains how the logic of provocation uniquely leads to crisis escalation and the outbreak of war.

The third chapter tests my theory of provocation at the individual level with a survey experiment. I find that if a foreign state takes an escalatory action during a crisis that angers respondents in the home state, this increased anger leads to a substantial and statistically significant increase in support for more escalatory measures against the foreign state.

The fourth chapter integrates the findings from the survey experiment to develop three formal, game-theoretic models of crisis bargaining. Each model analyzes a different coercive military strategy in a crisis: a tripwire/naval blockade, deliberate provocation to

signal resolve, and “gray-zone conflicts”/military skirmishes.

The fifth chapter examines the logic of provocation through a case study of the Sino-India War of 1962. Given the stakes in dispute, it is puzzling why a war occurred: China and India fought over Himalayan territories that were so remote that India did not realize that China had built a new highway through them until after the fact. Building on three months of fieldwork in China, and a fieldtrip to India, I draw on archival records, memoirs, and interviews to present evidence in support of the logic and significance of provocation.

The sixth chapter examines how the logic of provocation affects nuclear crises through a case study of the Sino-Soviet Border Conflict of 1969. This case is the only incident in which a nuclear-armed China escalated to armed conflict with another nuclear state, yet the crisis ostensibly escalated over trivial stakes: China and the Soviet Union escalated to nuclear threats over skirmishes that erupted on a strategically irrelevant river island.

The seventh chapter briefly reviews three additional cases of recent crises: the mid-air collision of the U.S. EP-3 surveillance plane and a Chinese fighter jet in 2001, the bombardment of South Korea’s Yeonpyeong Island by North Korea in 2010, and the standoff at Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea between China and the Philippines in 2012. The first of these cases thus examines the logic of provocation in the context of an accidental clash, the second examines the logic of provocation in a non-Chinese context, and the third examines the logic of provocation in a gray zone conflict that resulted in a revision of the status quo.

The final chapter summarizes the main arguments and findings of the dissertation. It then discusses directions for future research and the implications of the theory and findings for IR theory, coercive diplomacy, and crisis management. The chapter concludes by discussing the dangers of provocation today in the South China Sea and beyond.

CHAPTER 2 : Provocation, Crisis Escalation, and Inadvertent War

How does provocation lead to crisis escalation and the outbreak of war? And how does this pathway differ from and relate to other pathways to war? In the introductory chapter, I offered a definition of a *provocative effect* and sketched out the *logic of provocation* that produces that effect. In this chapter, I elucidate the logic of provocation and explain why it is a distinctive logic that leads to crisis escalation and war. I proceed in five parts. I begin by defining key concepts and the scope conditions of my theory. I then explain my theory of provocation in two stages. I first explain the microfoundations: how one state's actions in a crisis can provoke and increase the resolve of individuals in the adversarial state. Here, I bracket the question of who these individuals are and of what consequence their increase in resolve has on state-level decisions. Next, I explain how increases in resolve at the individual level lead to increases in resolve at the state level. It is these state-level increases in resolve that ultimately affect the decision calculus of the adversary to escalate or back down in a crisis. Third, I explain how the logic of provocation differs from and relates to three alternative logics that I identify in the IR literature. I refer to these alternative logics as an *accidental escalation logic*, a *security dilemma logic*, and a *crisis bargaining logic*. Fourth, I explain how the logic of provocation leads to a distinctive type of deliberate but unintended war – what I call an *inadvertent war*. I define inadvertent war and explain how this type of war differs from war that arises from the three alternative logics of escalation. The final section concludes.

Provocative Effects and Resolve in Interstate Crises

A provocative effect is a particular causal effect that one state's escalatory action during a crisis has on increasing its adversary's resolve. Accurately conceptualizing a provocative

effect, and distinguishing the logic of provocation that produces that effect, thus requires a clear definition of resolve in interstate crises. But why conceptualize a provocative effect in terms of resolve? There are three main benefits. One is that resolve provides a conceptual framework with which to synthesize several existing views on provocation – from anger to honor concerns, and from the individual- to the state-levels of analysis. A second benefit is that resolve makes emotional and non-material variables more tractable within a rationalist framework – it puts them on the same playing field as other variables that affect resolve in the crisis bargaining model and in behaviorist accounts of resolve, such as the costs of war, relative military capabilities, and the value of the stake in dispute. Third, as I demonstrate later in this chapter, understanding how anger and honor concerns affect resolve clarifies how provocative effects differ from alternative mechanisms of escalation.

Joshua Kertzer recently advanced an interactionist theory of resolve in international politics. According to Kertzer, resolve is determined by the interaction of *disposition factors* and *situational factors*.⁶⁷ Dispositional factors are individual traits, such as an individual's patience and risk preferences. Situational factors are features of the strategic environment, such as the costs of war and the reputational costs of backing down. Through laboratory and survey experiments, Kertzer finds that individuals who are relatively impatient and risk-acceptant, and individuals who face lower costs of war or greater costs of backing down are, among others, more resolved to stay the course in a war. Individuals with different dispositions, however, respond more sensitively to different situational factors. Thus, resolve in international politics is determined by dispositional factors, situational factors, and their interaction.

Importantly, Kertzer views resolve as a “second-order volition.” That is, resolve “refers not

⁶⁷Joshua D. Kertzer (2016) *Resolve in International Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, and Joshua D. Kertzer (2017) “Resolve, Time, and Risk.” *International Organization*. 71.S, S109–S136.

to the substance or content of an actor's desire – whether to fight, quit smoking, save money, and so on – but to the steadfastness, dogged persistence, or 'sticktoitiveness' with which it is being pursued."⁶⁸ This notion of resolve as a "steadfastness of purpose" is reflected both in Kertzer's measure of resolve in his laboratory and survey experiments and in his choice of the substantive foreign policy area in which to study resolve in international politics. The foreign policy area that Kertzer focuses on is military interventions: "although resolve manifests itself in any number of domains (from crisis bargaining to international trade negotiations to counterterrorism campaigns), in this book I focus specifically on resolve in the realm of military interventions."⁶⁹ His measure of resolve in military interventions thus involves *how long* actors are willing to stay in a conflict in which the United States has already intervened in as well as whether to intervene in the first place.

I apply Kertzer's formulation of resolve to interstate crises. My notion of resolve, however, differs from Kertzer in one crucial respect: it involves a 'first-order volition.' That is, I define resolve in interstate crises as the *relative preference* between escalating and backing down, and this notion includes the "content of the actor's desire – whether to fight." In interstate crises, there is a critical threshold at which a crisis becomes an interstate war, and simply staying in a crisis with "steadfastness of purpose" does not lead to war unless at least one state is resolved to initiate a war.⁷⁰ If states can decide to deliberately cross the Rubicon, there is an important difference in the resolve of states in a crisis: a state can be either resolved or unresolved to fight a war. I define resolve for war depending on whether the state is a defender or a potential aggressor: *a potential aggressor is resolved for war* when it prefers to fight a war to obtain a stake rather than live with the status

⁶⁸Kertzer 2016, pp. 3, 9.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 32.

⁷⁰Arguably, states could drift into war and continue to fight purely by accident. This is a historically doubtful proposition, as several authors points out. Even if one side were to initiate a war by accident, unless the defending side is resolved to fight back, it would capitulate immediately, and there should be no real war to speak of.

quo in peace, and *a defender is resolved for war* when it prefers to fight a war rather than concede that stake under threat.⁷¹ Thus, although resolve in interstate crises runs along a continuum on which a state can be more or less resolved to escalate, along this continuum, there are states that are resolved and unresolved for war. To say that resolve in interstate crises involves a first-order volition, however, does not mean that a willingness to ‘stick it out’ is entirely absent. In many crises, states engage in a political ‘war of nerves’ in which they try not to blink first; indeed, in Fearon’s seminal article on audience costs, states that escalate to higher levels of tension during a crisis are modelled as staying longer in the crisis temporally.⁷² Defining resolve as the relative preference to escalate or back down, moreover, makes clear that variables that weigh in on either side of the balance affect resolve. For instance, lower costs of war increase a state’s resolve by making escalation less costly whereas higher audience costs increase a state’s resolve by increasing the costs of backing down.

Since resolve in interstate crises is a central concept in my theory, *interstate crises* are an important scope condition to my theory. I define interstate crises as *a confrontation between states that involves a threat to one or more basic values, along with an awareness of finite time for response to the value threat, and a heightened probability of the initiation of military hostilities*. This definition adapts Brecher and Wilkenfeld’s definitions of both a “foreign policy crisis,” which involves a single state, and an “international crisis,” which involves two or more states.⁷³ The main difference with Brecher and Wilkenfeld’s definitions is that, whereas the authors include *intra-war crises*, I relict my definition to

⁷¹These definitions follow from the crisis bargaining literature. The first definition correspond with Powell’s definition of a “dissatisfied” state. See Powell 1996, 1999.

⁷²James D. Fearon (1994) “Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes.” *American Political Science Review*. 88.3, pp. 577–592. Also see Powell’s adaptation of the Rubenstein model to interstate crises, which involves modelling multiple rounds of bargaining and a temporal discount factor. Powell 1996.

⁷³Michael Brecher and Jonathan Wilkenfeld (1997) *A Study of Crisis*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, p. 3.

levels of escalation leading up to the (potential) outbreak of war. My definition of interstate crises is also more lenient than other definitions of crises in at least three respects: (1) the phrase “basic values” is more lenient than Hermann’s “high-priority goals” or Goldstein’s “vital national interests;” (2) the phrase “heightened probability” includes an increase in probability “from ‘very low’ to ‘low,’ ‘low’ to ‘high,’ and from ‘high’ to ‘very high,’” (3) the phrase “military hostilities” includes military conflicts that occur at lower levels of violence than interstate wars.⁷⁴ Overall, therefore, my definition lowers the bar for what counts as an interstate crisis. This is important for my argument for two reasons. First, I relax the definition that crises must be driven by “high stakes” because part of my argument is that the perceived stakes in the dispute are themselves endogenous to what states do *during* a dispute. Second, I am not only interested in how intense military-diplomatic standoffs lead to war, but how low-level disputes can snowball into intense standoffs and subsequently lead to war. For instance, if, as Goldstein argues, “the gravest danger in Sino-American relations is the possibility the two countries will find themselves in a crisis that could escalate to open military conflict,” then it is paramount that we understand how lower-level disputes can escalate into such crises.⁷⁵ Thus, although a more restrictive definition of interstate crises does not fundamentally change my analysis or findings, it would miss a great deal of potentially dangerous escalatory processes that my theory can explain.

These definitions of resolve and interstate crises are integral to understanding provocative effects, but a final point worth emphasizing is that a provocative effect is a causal effect that one state’s escalatory action has on increasing its *adversary’s* resolve. What makes a provocative effect unique is the specific types of variables that mediate this increase in the adversary’s resolve: dispositional factors and non-material stakes. Figure 2 depicts these ideas; the following section elucidates them.

⁷⁴Brecher and Wilkenfeld 1997, pp. 3-4; Goldstein 2013, p. 51.

⁷⁵See *ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

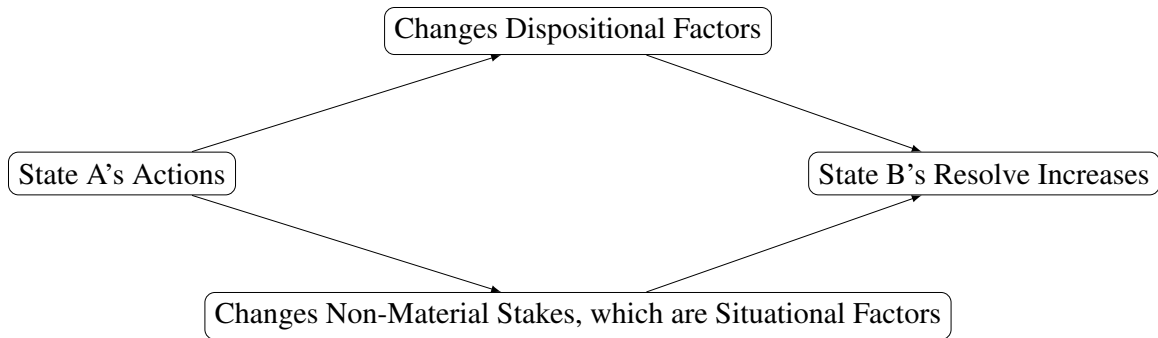


Figure 2: A Provocative Effect

The Logic of Provocation

The logic of provocation answers the following question: *how can one state's actions increase the adversary's resolve by changing dispositional factors and non-material stakes?* There are several causal mechanisms that produce a provocative effect for both sets of variables and at both the individual level and state level. In the next two subsections, I focus on the microfoundations: I explain how each of the two sets of variables produce a provocative effect at the individual level using the examples of anger and honor concerns. In the third subsection, I explain how the same two sets of variables increase resolve at the state level.

Anger and Dispositional Factors of Resolve

How can the escalatory actions of one state during a crisis increase the resolve of individuals in an opposing state by changing the dispositions of those individuals? Although individual traits are relatively invariant over time, escalatory actions by one state during a crisis can incidentally – rather than permanently – change dispositional factors by triggering different emotions. Social psychologists have long found that different emotional states affect an individual's assessment of risk. An influential study by Eric Johnson and Amos Tversky in 1983, for instance, finds that inducing a positive mood in

individuals leads to optimistic risk assessments whereas inducing a negative mood leads to pessimistic risk assessments.⁷⁶ In contrast to this “valence” theory of emotions, recent studies find that different negative emotions lead to different changes in risk preferences, thus lending credence to the “appraisal tendency” theory of emotions. In particular, emotions of anger have been found to increase risk-taking. Through a series of groundbreaking studies in 2000 and 2001, Jennifer Lerner and Dacher Keltner find that individuals who are angry or experimentally induced to become angry perceive less risk and make more risky choices.⁷⁷ Negative emotions of fear and anxiety, however change risk preferences in the opposite direction. As Jonathan Renshon and Jennifer Lerner summarize, “[f]ear engenders pessimistic risk assessments and a preference for risk-averse options. In contrast, anger produces optimistic risk assessments and a preference for risky options.”⁷⁸ Thus, although an individual’s disposition towards risk-taking is relatively stable over time, they can change incidentally when the individual’s emotions are induced to change.⁷⁹

Importantly for the study of international politics, social psychologists also find that foreign actions against one’s state can induce anger and change an individual’s risk preferences. In a two-wave national survey experiment on the U.S. public that began within two weeks after the 9/11 attacks, Lerner and her colleagues found that anger was an overwhelming emotional response to the attacks and that more angry individuals had lower

⁷⁶Eric J. Johnson and Amos Tversky (1983) “Affect, Generalization, and the Perception of Risk.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 45.1, pp. 20–31.

⁷⁷Jennifer S. Lerner and Dacher Keltner (2000) “Beyond Valence: Toward a Model of Emotion-Specific Influences on Judgement and Choice.” *Cognition and Emotion*. 14.4, pp. 473–493; Jennifer S. Lerner and Dacher Keltner (2001) “Fear, Anger, and Risk.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 81.1, pp. 146–159. Also see Larissa Z. Tiedens Jennifer S. Lerner (2006) “Portrait of The Angry Decision Maker: How Appraisal Tendencies Shape Anger’s Influence on Cognition.” *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*. 19.2, pp. 115–137

⁷⁸Jonathan Renshon and Jennifer S. Lerner (2012) Decision-Making, the Role of Emotions in Foreign Policy. In *The Encyclopedia of Peace Psychology*. Ed. by Daniel J. Christie. Malden, M.A.: Blackwell, p. 3.

⁷⁹Also see Todd H. Hall (2017) “On Provocation: Outrage, International Relations, and the Franco-Prussian War.” *Security Studies*. 26.1, pp. 1–19, p. 6; and Neta C. Crawford (2000) “The Passion of World Politics: Propositions on Emotion and Emotional Relationships.” *International Security*. 24.4, pp. 143–144.

risk-assessments of unrelated events, such as catching the flu.⁸⁰ Respondents who were experimentally induced to feel more anger towards the attacks, moreover, exhibited lower risk estimates of future terrorist-related dangers. Because these findings use a real world incident on a nationally representative sample – rather than a fictional scenario on college students in a lab – they lend credence to the view that foreign actions against one’s state can anger individuals and change their risk preferences. The implication, as the authors summarize, is that “an angry country could endorse different policies than a fearful one.”⁸¹

Foreign actions that activate anger indeed affect preferences for risky hardline foreign policies. Drawing on a national survey of the U.S. public that was fielded between the 9/11 attacks and the beginning of the Iraq War, Leonie Huddy and her colleagues find that anger towards Saddam Hussein and anti-American terrorists “leads to a reduced perception of the war’s risks and promotes support for military intervention.”⁸² In a laboratory experiment, Alan Lambert and his colleagues find that individuals who are asked to write freely about the 9/11 attacks are on average significantly angrier.⁸³ Over three experiments that use different 9/11 primes, moreover, they find that individuals who are reminded about 9/11 are consistently angrier and more approving of president George W. Bush and the Iraq War, even when controlling for political ideology and authoritarian dispositions. In a fourth experiment, the authors find that compared to a control group of participants who are asked to write about their mundane daily activities, a treatment group of participants who are asked to write about an experience that angered them in their personal lives have

⁸⁰Jennifer S. Lerner et al. (2003) “Effects of Fear and Anger on Perceived Risks of Terrorism: A National Field Experiment.” *Psychological Science*. 14.2, pp. 144–150.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 144.

⁸²Leonie Huddy, Stanley Feldman, and Erin Cassese (2007) On the Distinct Political Effects of Anxiety and Anger. In *The Affect Effect: Dynamics of Emotion in Political Thinking and Behavior*. Ed. by W. Russell Neuman et al. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 202–230, p. 228. Also see Leonie Huddy et al. (2005) “Threat, Anxiety, and Support for Antiterrorism Policies.” *American Journal of Political Science*. 49.3, pp. 593–608.

⁸³Alan J. Lambert et al. (2010) “Rally Effects, Threat, and Attitude Change: An Integrative Approach to Understanding the Role of Emotion.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 98.6, pp. 886–903.

significantly higher approval ratings of fictitious politicians who hold a hardline foreign policy position. Thus, not only can a foreign action against one's state anger individuals, but angered individuals can be more supportive of hardline foreign policies.

I therefore argue that one state's escalatory actions during a crisis can increase the resolve of individuals in the adversarial state by activating anger and prompting a more risk-accepting outlook of the world. To be clear, this theoretical expectation builds onto Kertzer's notion of resolve, but also differs from it. Whereas Kertzer views an individual's risk preferences to be invariant, I argue that these dispositions can vary according to different emotions. Whereas Kertzer holds constant an individual's disposition and investigates variation across individuals, I argue that *given an individual's underlying disposition*, a foreign action that activates anger can incidentally change those dispositions and increase an individual's resolve. In this view, individual attributes such as risk preferences that formulate resolve are dependent not only on the individual's emotions, but ultimately, on the escalatory actions of the adversarial state. In short, individual dispositions are endogenous to the actions of the adversary during a crisis.

What angers? An important reason is perceived social injustices. Julie Goldberg, Jennifer Lerner, and Philip Tetlock, for instance, find that people who learn about a social injustice are not only more angry, but more likely to inflict harsher punishment to perpetrators of an unrelated injustice.⁸⁴ Perceived injustices can also activate anger in the realm of international politics. In counterinsurgency campaigns, Kalyvas points out that the use of indiscriminate violence can be counterproductive because they are viewed by civilians as "deeply unfair" and trigger "emotional reactions" of "moral outrage."⁸⁵ In addition to

⁸⁴Julie H. Goldberg, Jennifer S. Lerner, and Philip E. Tetlock (1999) "Rage and Reason: The Psychology of the Intuitive Prosecutor." *European Journal of Social Psychology*. 29.5-6, pp. 781-795.

⁸⁵Stathis Kalyvas (2006) *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 153-154. Also see the literature review in the previous chapter.

social injustices, social psychologists identify a variety of factors that are conducive at producing anger, such as the “belief that another person (as opposed to the situation or the self) was responsible for the negative event”⁸⁶ In this regard, deliberate actions are more likely to anger than accidental ones. In international politics, deliberate attempts to coerce a target to capitulate can backfire if they anger the target. As Matthew Kocher, Thomas Pepinsky, and Stathis Kalyvas find, U.S. aerial bombardments during the Vietnam War were often ineffective because they targeted civilians indiscriminately and provoked a backlash among the local populace to resist capitulation.⁸⁷ Similarly, during interstate crises, taking escalatory actions to signal resolve and coerce the adversary to back down may anger individuals in the adversarial state. Although perceived social injustices vary by culture and the individual, coercive actions such as harming the target state’s children or elderly are likely to trigger widespread indignation.⁸⁸ For foreign actions against one’s state to activate anger, however, individuals must also sufficiently identify with the state as a relevant group. Recent studies on emotions in international politics indeed find that an individual’s association with the state can “impel individuals to respond with similar emotions to the losses, achievements, or insults that befall their polity.”⁸⁹

To be sure, foreign actions against one’s state can elicit a variety of emotions in individuals. The aforementioned studies by Huddy et al. and Lambert et al., for instance, find that the 9/11 attacks elicit both emotions of anger and anxiety in individuals in the United States, and that the two emotions affect support for the Iraq War in opposite directions.⁹⁰

⁸⁶Jennifer S. Lerner 2006, p. 117.

⁸⁷Matthew Adam Kocher, Thomas B. Pipinsky, and Stathis Kalyvas (2011) “Aerial Bombing and Counterinsurgency in the Vietnam War.” *American Journal of Political Science*. 55.2, pp. 201–18.

⁸⁸On social psychological studies on punitiveness or moral outrage and revenge in international relations, also see Peter Liberman (Feb. 2007) “Punitiveness and U.S. Elite Support for the 1991 Persian Gulf War.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. 51.1, pp. 3–32, and Oded Lowenheim and Gadi Heimann (2008) “Revenge in International Politics.” *Security Studies*. 17.4, pp. 685–724.

⁸⁹Todd H. Hall and Andrew A.G. Ross (2015) “Affective Politics after 9/11.” *International Organization*. 69.4, pp. 847–879, p. 857.

⁹⁰Huddy, Feldman, and Cassese 2007; Lambert et al. 2010.

A foreign action can thus have a provocative effect while triggering concurrent changes in emotions that have a dampening effect on resolve. Moreover, a foreign action that has a provocative effect can trigger concurrent changes in other variables, such as threat perceptions or beliefs about the foreign actor's military capabilities. A distinct question from whether a provocative effect can occur is thus whether a provocative effect will be the dominating effect when a foreign action triggers changes in multiple variables in a crisis. The answer to this latter question, of course, is that it depends on the relative weight of these changes for any given foreign action in a particular context. For the 9/11 attacks, the studies by Huddy et al. and Lambert et al. both find that anger is a dominating emotion among U.S. respondents and that the emotion of anger significantly shifts preferences for hardline foreign policies. In the experimental study by Lambert et al., the authors find that individuals who are asked to write freely about the 9/11 attacks experience far larger increases in anger than anxiety, and over three experiments with different 9/11 primes, anger consistently has a larger effect than anxiety on determining attitudes toward the Iraq War. As the authors put it:

“although the [9/11] experimental manipulation had a strong and significant impact on anger and anxiety, these effects on attitude were entirely mediated by anger. Indeed, once anger was controlled for, there was a small tendency for anxiety to be related in the opposite way to these attitudes. This finding is consistent with several studies in the emotional appraisal area...”⁹¹

Thus, although the relative impact of anger depends on the specific foreign action and the context in which it takes place, activating anger can have substantial effects on an individual's attitude towards conflict and escalation.

⁹¹Lambert et al. 2010, p. 891. When the authors control for emotions (both anger and anxiety), they find that the 9/11 primes either have no effect or a small residual effect on attitudes toward the Iraq War.

Can emotions of anger last long enough to impact foreign policy outcomes? Reportedly, President Kennedy's first reaction upon hearing about Soviet missiles in Cuba was that of outrage, but more tempered reason took hold as the crisis unfolded.⁹² As a recent annual review of the role of emotions in decision making points out, however, "it cannot be said that time heals all wounds."⁹³ Although psychologists have shown that an individual's emotions indeed subside over time, the authors caution that "[a]nyone who has ever observed a family member nurse a grudge for years would question the boundary conditions of time delay."⁹⁴ Moreover, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Todd Hall points out that emotions of anger can have a longer shelf-life when they circulate within a group. In a polity, emotions of anger can even gain "resonance" and become amplified through media effects and political cues, thus attaining staying power to meaningfully impact state-level outcomes.⁹⁵

A final point worth mentioning is that the effects of anger on an individual is influenced by whether the individual is in a position of accountability. Jennifer Lerner, Julie Goldberg, and Philip Tetlock find that angry individuals who know that they will be held accountable for their anger-driven actions are less likely to make rash decisions.⁹⁶ Insofar as provoked citizens are not held accountable for their preferences for escalation, the affects of foreign-action induced anger can be stronger for the public than for the individual leader who is in a position to make a decision for the state to escalate. As I argue later, however, the political affects of a provoked public can lead to greater resolve at the state level even if

⁹²Graham T. Allison (1969) "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis." *The American Political Science Review*. 63.3, pp. 689–718, p. 713.

⁹³Jennifer S. Lerner et al. (2015) "Emotion and Decision Making." *Annual Review of Psychology*. 66, pp. 799–823, p. 811.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 811.

⁹⁵Hall 2017, p. 13.

⁹⁶Jennifer S. Lerner, Julie H. Goldberg, and Philip E. Tetlock (June 1998) "Sober Second Thought: The Effects of Accountability, Anger, and Authoritarianism on Attribution of Responsibility." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. 24.6, pp. 563–574.

the individual leader is unperturbed by angry emotions because changes in public opinion constrain the leader's choices to escalate or back down.

Honor Concerns and Situational Factors of Resolve

A second mechanism through which a state's escalatory action during a crisis has a provocative effect on individuals in the adversarial state is by increasing honor concerns. Insulting or humiliating actions by the foreign state can heighten the adversary's honor concerns both by making backing down appear more dishonorable and by making escalation appear a better validation of honor. These two effects are two sides of the same coin, and together, I call them heightened honor concerns. Importantly, increasing honor concerns for individuals in the adversarial state differs from an anger-based provocative effect. Whereas an anger-based mechanism increases the adversary's resolve by incidentally increasing the risk-taking dispositions of individuals, an honor-based mechanism increases the adversary's resolve by increasing the honor at stake that individuals find to be engaged in the crisis. An escalatory action by the foreign state that increases the adversary's honor concerns, such as an insult or humiliation, increases what the adversary has to lose if it backs down (i.e., lose more honor) and what it has to gain if it escalates (i.e., gain or redeem honor). As a result, the adversary's relative preference between backing down and escalating tilts towards the latter.

To be clear, changing honor concerns also differs from changing honor dispositions. Rather than changing the adversary's 'global' value-system regarding honor, an honor-based provocative effect changes the adversary's 'local' honor concerns by increasing the honor at stake in the specific crisis.⁹⁷ For instance, an actor who has been insulted can hardly

⁹⁷It is possible that increasing an actor's honor concerns have "carry-over" effects into other issue areas, such as incentivizing the actor to find ways to redeem or validate honor through the escalation of other disputes. Yet, heightened honor concerns does not necessarily increase honor dispositions, and escalating other disputes would not make backing down in the face of insults in the current dispute any less dishonorable.

be expected to become more honorable towards others. Thus, an honor-based mechanism of a provocative effect is different from mechanisms that incidentally change dispositions, such as an anger-based mechanism, even though both an anger-based mechanism and an honor-based mechanism can be triggered by the same escalatory action by the foreign state. Indeed, the seeming similarity between activating anger and honor concerns is one reason why the two have so often been indistinguishably implicated with the notion of provocation. Yet, insulting and humiliating actions by the foreign state can increase the adversary's resolve both by increasing the adversary's general risk-taking attitudes through anger as well as by increasing the adversary's honor concerns in the specific crisis.

An honor-based mechanism of a provocative effect also differs from existing studies on honor in IR that focus on variation in how much value different actors attach to honor. As Renshon points out, there are at least two sources that explain this type of variation. One is 'honor cultures.'⁹⁸ In Dafoe and Caughey's study of U.S. presidents and the Southern honor code, for example, variation across U.S. presidents in how much each values honor – as measured by whether the president spent his formative years in a Southern 'honor culture' – helps predict whether a president is more likely to escalate international disputes.⁹⁹ A second source of this variation is individual honor dispositions. Kertzer, for instance, finds that individuals with higher "honor orientations" are more resolved in international conflicts.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, O'Neill's argues that in challenges to prove one's honor through a joust, the challenged individual is more likely to accept a challenge if she attaches a higher value to being, and being seen as, honorable.¹⁰¹ In these studies, therefore, the relevant variation is 'across-actor variation' in how honorable actors are – how much value different actors attach to honor. In contrast, the relevant variation that a provocative effect highlights

⁹⁸Also see Lebow's notion of "honor societies."Lebow 2008.

⁹⁹Dafoe and Caughey 2016.

¹⁰⁰Kertzer 2016, pp. 42-44.

¹⁰¹O'Neill 1999, pp. 92-96.

is ‘within-actor variation’ in honor concerns. *Given how honorable the adversary is*, certain escalatory actions by the foreign state during a crisis can heighten the adversary’s honor concerns more than other escalatory actions.¹⁰² In this sense, the mechanism accords with Dafoe and Weiss’s claim that certain actions by a foreign state can provoke individuals in the target state through a logic of honor and reputation.¹⁰³

Granted, there may be interaction effects between how honorable an individual is and the escalatory action by the foreign state. That is, whether and by how much a given escalatory action by the foreign state triggers honor concerns could differ depending on the particular individual. For example, a minor public affront may make backing down significantly more unpleasurable for an individual who values honor highly; but for an individual who values honor moderately, it may make backing down only marginally worse. These are important additional considerations for an honor-based logic of a provocative effect. In this dissertation, however, I focus on the first step, which moves the discussion from ‘across-actor variation’ to ‘within-actor variation.’ To paraphrase Renshon’s admonition for the study of status in IR, by focusing on honor concerns, an honor-based provocative effect shifts the discussion from whether honor matters to how it matters. All honor-based mechanisms of international conflict are not created equal.¹⁰⁴

Indeed, the notion of honor concerns explicitly mirrors Renshon’s notion of status concerns. Renshon argues that in the study of status in IR, there is a “traditional focus on status-seeking or general preferences for status,” but “while preferences for higher status can

¹⁰²An important assumption that is required to make this mechanism work is that the adversary attaches a non-negative utility to honor. That is, if the adversary enjoys being dishonorable, such as enjoying conceding a stake after being insulted rather than without being insulted, the mechanism would not work. A separate consideration is that the adversary may view backing down after an insult as *more* honorable, such as finding it to be a “magnanimous” gesture that promotes the greater good of peace. If insults make backing down appear more worthwhile, it would not have a provocative effect.

¹⁰³Dafoe and Weiss 2016.

¹⁰⁴Jonathan Renshon (2016) “Status Deficits and War.” *International Organization*. 70.3, pp. 513–550, pp. 514, 522.

be taken as a constant, the level of concern over relative status is not.”¹⁰⁵ If status concerns for a given actor can vary, then “we must know *when* status moves up the list of priorities.”¹⁰⁶ According to Renshon, “[i]n international politics, one significant factor that leads to heightened status concerns is dissatisfaction with one’s relative position.”¹⁰⁷ Regarding the consequences of increased status concerns, he argues that “once triggered, heightened status concerns raise the value of status for those actors.”¹⁰⁸ Put differently, “status concerns may lead to ‘status seeking’ – behavior or actions undertaken in order to gain status –but may also lead to actions designed to preserve one’s current position or slow one’s decline.”¹⁰⁹ Hence, “once [actors] decide a situation requires defending or increasing their status, they should be willing to pay far more to keep x amount of status than they would be had those concerns not been triggered.”¹¹⁰ To improve or maintain status, Renshon then points out that states must take actions that can change the beliefs of the “status community.” A primary contender for such actions is international conflicts: “[m]ilitarized conflicts – which are public, dramatic, and salient – represent a chance for the international community to simultaneously calibrate its judgements concerning how much international standing a given state possesses (or should possess).”¹¹¹ In support of these arguments, Renshon presents experimental, statistical (i.e, large-N), and historical evidence. In his historical case studies of Britain’s decision to join France and Israel to launch the 1956 Suez War, and Egypt’s decision to intervene in the 1962 Yemen Civil War, he finds that in both cases, “a ‘trigger’ served to activate the status dissatisfaction and catalyze the conflict initiation predicted by [the theory of] status dissatisfaction.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁵Renshon 2016, p. 514; Jonathan Renshon (2017) *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, p. 26.

¹⁰⁶*ibid.*, p. 52. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, p. 256.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, p. 252.

Although honor and status are distinct concepts, the mechanism through which one actor's actions can trigger honor and status concerns for another actor is similar, and this raises the possibility that provocative effects can also arise from increasing the adversary's status concerns. Honor and status are different in at least two respects. One difference is that status involves relative positions whereas all members of a group can be honorable.¹¹³ Another difference is that honor involves an "innate quality." As O'Neill points out, "a person might possess personal honor while others do not know about that quality."¹¹⁴ So, although an honorable actor might desire social recognition for being honorable, an honorable actor would choose an honorable option over a dishonorable one even when nobody else knows about the decision because the honorable actor would be unable to live with herself otherwise.¹¹⁵ Status, on the other hand, is inherently social because it involves actors' beliefs about what other actors believe.¹¹⁶

Despite these important differences between status and honor, however, a foreign state's actions during a crisis could increase the adversary's status concerns and increase their resolve to escalate. As Renshon points out, when Egyptian president Nasser decided to intervene in the Yemen Civil War, "the shock of humiliation that was caused by the Syrian secession from the UAR" was the main trigger that led to a "fierce desire to preserve Egypt's standing." Similarly for Britain, Nasser's decision to nationalize the Suez Canal was the "precipitating blow that brought the slow decline of Britain into focus." Thus, Renshon argues that "the events in the British and Egyptian case suggest a role for humiliation in precipitating heightened status concerns."¹¹⁷ If a foreign state's actions during a crisis are humiliating to the adversary, therefore, the adversary's status concerns could rise to make

¹¹³Renshon 2017, pp. 37-38.

¹¹⁴O'Neill 1999, p. 193.

¹¹⁵Dolan 2015, p. 531.

¹¹⁶Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth 2014; and Renshon 2017.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 265.

backing down appear worse and escalation more appealing.¹¹⁸ Indeed, Renshon suggests that “status concerns raise the value of status, which in turn should lead to greater escalatory behavior.”¹¹⁹

In this light, an honor-based provocative effect is but an example of a broader mechanism of a provocative effect that operates by raising the adversary’s non-material stakes in the crisis, such as concerns about honor, status, prestige, and standing. Again, there are crucial differences between honor, status, prestige, and standing. For instance, whereas prestige involves second-order beliefs – “one actor’s beliefs about the beliefs of another actor” – status involves higher-order beliefs among several actors – “many actors’ beliefs about what other actors also believe.”¹²⁰ Nevertheless, the same mechanism through which actions by the foreign state can increase the adversary’s *concerns* over honor, status, or prestige can increase the adversary’s resolve. Richard Ned Lebow, for instance, contends that a “slight” can reduce an actor’s “prestige” and “standing.”¹²¹ Joslyn Barnhardt argues that “[s]tates are particularly inclined to engage in status competition when their status has been called into question by an instance of disrespect or by a humiliating international event.”¹²² During an interstate crisis, therefore, a slight that increases the adversary’s concerns about prestige and standing, or a disrespectful action that increases the adversary’s concerns about status, can make backing down worse and escalation more appealing for the adversary. Provocative effects can thus arise by increasing a variety of non-material stakes in the crisis for the adversary: increasing the adversary’s honor, prestige, or status at stake in dispute makes backing down worse and escalation relatively more appealing. This mechanism,

¹¹⁸Different kinds of humiliations may trigger status concerns rather than honor concerns. For example, first-order humiliations

¹¹⁹Renshon 2017, p. 92.

¹²⁰Renshon 2016, p. 519. Also see O’Neill 1999, p. 8.

¹²¹Richard Ned Lebow (2010) *Why Nations Fight: Past and Future Motives for War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹²²Joslyn Barnhart (2016) “Status Competition and Territorial Aggression: Evidence from the Scramble for Africa.” *Security Studies*. 25.3, pp. 385–419, p. 390.

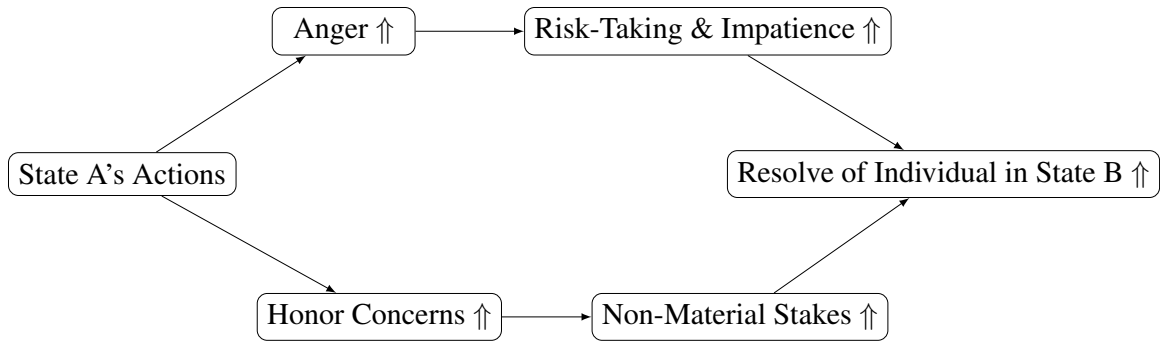


Figure 3: The Individual-Level Logic of Provocation Through Anger and Honor Concerns

together with the anger-based mechanism, is depicted in Figure 3.

The upshot of all this is that honor-based provocative effects, and provocative effects that arise by changing non-material stakes more broadly, operate via changing what I call *situational factors that have subjective meaning*. As discussed above, changing honor concerns differs from changing honor dispositions. Moreover, changing status concerns differs from changing “Social Dominance Orientations,” which social psychologists use to measure dispositional sensitivity towards status.¹²³ If changing the non-material stakes in the crisis differs from changing dispositions, are they better understood as changing situational factors of resolve? I argue that they are, with the caveat that these situational factors possess some distinctive characteristics. Unlike relative military capabilities, which include estimates of the foreign state’s military capabilities that are private information to the foreign state, an action by the foreign state during a crisis that changes non-material stakes of the adversary change the value of those stakes directly rather than by changing the adversary’s beliefs. Updating the adversary’s beliefs through signaling does not change the value of those parameters, but rather, the probability that a particular value (or range of values) is more likely.¹²⁴ Of course, certain escalatory actions by the foreign state may

¹²³On SDO, see Renshon 2016, 2017.

¹²⁴Beliefs about the adversary’s honor concerns is a separate consideration that I address in the game-theoretic chapter.

indeed change the value of certain situational factors for the adversary, such as changing the local balance of power through the mobilization of military forces.¹²⁵ These changes are different from changing the non-material stakes of a crisis because the latter have subjective value to the adversary. What about the intrinsic value of the stake in dispute? The value of the stake in dispute, such as a strip of territory, is subjective to the crisis disputants, and is often conceptualized as including both intrinsic and non-material values, such as strategic, economic, historic, cultural, symbolic, and status values.¹²⁶ Although both intrinsic and non-material stakes have subjective value, *non-material stakes are endogenous to insulting or humiliating actions by the foreign state during the crisis*. This is because non-material stakes have subjective meaning as well as subjective value. One can also imagine a foreign action during a crisis that increases the intrinsic value of the stake for the adversary, such as the discovery of oil reserves (without otherwise aggravating the adversary) in the disputed strip of territory. Although this could increase the adversary's valuation of the stake so that the adversary becomes more resolved, this mechanism would hardly accord with our common concerns of "provoking" an adversary during a crisis. I thus categorize non-material stakes in the crisis as a particular subset of situational factors – situational factors that have subjective meaning. An honor-based mechanism of provocative effects thus increase the resolve of individuals in the adversarial state by changing situational factors that have subjective meaning.

Distinguishing situational factors that have subjective meaning is not academic hair-splitting. To the contrary, it has important theoretical dividends for understanding current disputes, such as the dispute between Japan and China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. Once inconsequential rocks in the sea can snowball into stakes that are viewed as

¹²⁵Slantchev 2005, 2011.

¹²⁶See, for instance, Stacie E. Goddard (2006) "Uncommon Ground: Indivisible Territory and the Politics of Legitimacy." *International Organization*. 60.1, pp. 35–68; and Monica Duffy Toft (2006) "Issue Indivisibility and Time Horizons as Rationalist Explanations for War." *Security Studies*. 15.1, pp. 34–69.

increasingly difficult to concede when the escalatory actions by each side engage the national honor of its counterpart. This is not to say that parallel changes in the valuation of the stake, such as the discovery of resources in the vicinity of the islands, or parallel changes in the relative military capabilities of Japan and China have been absent over the course of the dispute. Rather, it is to recognize the endogenous role that each side's actions to jockey for control of the islands have on making it harder – rather than easier – for both sides to arrive at a resolution of the dispute. Moreover, in contrast to incidental changes in risk-taking dispositions that last as long as emotions of anger persist, changes in situational factors that have subjective meaning, such as heightened honor and status concerns, may persist longer and throughout the course of a dispute unless relieved by some action that extinguishes such concerns.

Finally, honor concerns are also different from audience costs because honor concerns can increase even when the foreign state's actions are only known to the individual leader. As mentioned above, honor involves an "innate quality," so an insult made in private can increase an individual leader's honor concerns and make backing down less appealing. Yet, when the foreign state's actions are known to the public, heightened honor concerns, as well as greater emotions of anger, can increase the public's resolve. This heightened public resolve, moreover, can constrain the choices of leaders to escalate or back down in a crisis. This mechanism via the public warrants a more detailed discussion of how provocative effects operate and impact resolve at the state level.

From the Individual Level to the State Level

This dissertation is ultimately interested in explaining how provocative effects change a state's decision calculus to escalate rather than back down in a crisis. The preceding two subsections explain how one state's actions during a crisis can provoke an increase in the

resolve of individuals in the adversarial state, but leaves open the question of who these individuals are and of what consequence their increase in resolve has on incentivizing a state to escalate. This subsection thus explains the link between increasing an individual's resolve and increasing a state's resolve.

At the state level, there are two *ideal-type* mechanisms through which the individual-level mechanisms of a provocative effect increase the adversary's resolve: changes in state-level dispositional factors and changes in state-level situational factors. A provocative effect that operates through changes in state-level dispositional factors are simply changes in the individual leader's own disposition, such as the leader becoming more risk-taking because of anger. Similarly, a provocative effect that increases the individual leader's perceived non-material stakes in the crisis, such as concerns about honor, prestige, or status, operate through changes in situational factors that have subjective meaning to the individual leader. Yet, at the state level, there is another situational factor through which provocative effects increase the adversary's resolve: changes in public opinion in the adversarial state that constrain the choices of the adversary's leader. If the adversary's public becomes more resolved during a crisis because the foreign state's actions anger them or increase their concerns about national honor, public opinion will shift in favor of escalating rather than backing down in the crisis. This shift in public opinion that arises through individual-level provocative effects increases the cost of backing down and lowers the costs of escalation for the adversary's leader. More broadly, changes in the opinion of members of a group that constrains the leader's choices, such as members of the elite that constrain an autocrat's decisions, can be seen as changes in a situational factor that increase's the leader's resolve.¹²⁷ Thus, there are three pathways through which provocative

¹²⁷Jessica Weeks, for instance, argues that authoritarian leaders can also face audience costs. Jessica L. Weeks (2008) "Autocratic Audience Costs: Regime Type and Signaling Resolve." *International Organization*. 62.1, pp. 35–64.

| Provocative Effect Increases Resolve | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| | Dispositional Factors | Situational Factors | |
| Individual's Resolve | Anger increases risk-taking | Higher honor concerns raise non-material stakes | |
| State's Resolve | Leader's risk-taking increase through anger | Leader's honor concerns increase | Public anger/honor concerns constrain leader's options |

Table 1: The Logic of Provocation at the Individual Level and State Level

effects at the individual level increase the adversarial state's resolve to escalate in a crisis: two that operate through situational factors, and one that operates through dispositional factors. Of these three pathways, two are straightforward applications of the individual-level mechanisms to the individual leader of the adversarial state. In what follows, I thus focus on explaining the "third pathway" that operates through changes in public opinion by distinguishing it from other mechanisms such as audience costs and "rally-'round-the-flag effects." Table 1 summarizes the logic of provocation at the state and individual levels.

Provocative effects that engage the public differ from audience costs in two important respects. First, provocative effects increase the adversary's costs of backing down regardless of whether the adversary's leader makes a public commitment to stand firm. Audience cost theory predicts that a leader who makes a public commitment during a crisis and later back tracks from that commitment incurs a public opinion penalty. The most well known example is making a public threat to stand firm and later backing down, but other examples include mobilizing military forces and later capitulating, and making a public promise *not* to escalate and later deciding to escalate anyway.¹²⁸ In contrast, a provocative effect increases the adversary's public costs of backing down without the

¹²⁸For the latter type of audience costs, see Jack S. Levy et al. (2015) "Backing Out or Backing In? Commitment and Consistency in Audience Costs Theory." *American Journal of Political Science*. 59.4, pp. 988–1001 and Kai Quek (2017) "Type II Audience Costs." *Journal of Politics*. 79.4, pp. 1438–1443.

adversary's leader having to make any prior commitment that generates audience costs. In this sense, a provocative effect 'imposes' audience costs on the adversary. Indeed, Fearon recognized early on that audience costs affect crisis dynamics in two ways: "by creating costs that the *sender* of the signal will suffer if it backs down later, and second, by making it more costly for the *receiver* of the signal to back down."¹²⁹ It is in this second sense that provocative effects are similar to audience costs, but even then, provocative effects are agnostic about whether the provocateur (sender) will suffer costs if it backs down, and whether the adversary (receiver) has made a prior commitment that generates audience costs. Moreover, provocative effects and 'imposed audience costs' are imperfect substitutes because provocative effects are strictly concerned with increases in resolve that are caused by changes in dispositional factors and non-material stakes; it is not concerned with changes in public opinion that are caused by other mechanisms such as the public viewing their government as incompetent. In this regard, provocative effects are a subset of 'imposed audience costs.'

To be clear, because a provocative effect increases the adversary's public costs of backing down regardless of whether the adversary's leader has made a prior commitment to stand firm, the theoretical expectation is that public approval in the adversarial state will fall *both* in instances when the adversary's leader backs down without making a prior commitment *and* when the adversary's leader backs down after making such a commitment. This expectation is consistent with, but differs from, another claim in the literature. Dafoe and Weiss argue that coercive actions that provoke the adversary lower public approval of backing down when the adversary's leader has not made a prior public commitment to stand firm.¹³⁰ A provocative effect shares this theoretical expectation, but also predicts

¹²⁹James D. Fearon (1992) "Threats to Use Force: Costly Signals and Bargaining in International Crises." PhD thesis. UC Berkeley, pp. 145-146. Emphasis in original. Also see Kurizaki 2007 and Chapter 1 for a discussion of audience costs.

¹³⁰Allan Dafoe and Jessica Chen Weiss (Oct. 2016) "Provocation, Public Opinion, and Crisis Escalation:

lower public approval in the adversarial state when the adversary's leader backs down after making such a commitment. If there were two otherwise identical worlds in which a leader issues a public threat and backs down, but in one world the leader issues the threat after a foreign action that has a provocative effect on the public, public approval for subsequently backing down should be lower in the world in which the public is provoked. This argument does not necessarily mean, however, that the adversary's leader can generate more audience costs after a foreign action that has a provocative effect on the public. The question of how much audience costs the adversary's leader can generate after a provocative action by the foreign state is a distinct and more involved question because it requires comparing the *relative change* in two public approval levels: public approval for backing down without making a commitment to stand firm and public approval for backing down after making a commitment to stand firm. I thus address this question towards the end of this subsection. The theoretical expectation here is instead more simple: both public approval levels for backing down will fall. This leads to two testable hypotheses for a provocative effect on the adversary's public.

Hypothesis 1: A foreign action during a crisis that is more angering or raises honor concerns reduces public support for not escalating.

Hypothesis 2: A foreign action during a crisis that is more angering or raises honor concerns reduces public support for backing down after escalating.

A provocative effect differs from audience costs in a second respect: a provocative effect can reduce the costs of escalation as well as increase the costs of backing down. If the adversary's public becomes more resolved because the actions of the foreign state

Evidence from China." Unpublished Manuscript. The authors refer to this condition as "inaction" and distinguish it from backing down after taking an escalatory step, such as making a public commitment to stand firm.

make them angrier and more concerned about national honor, they can become both less approving of their leaders for backing down and more approving of their leaders for escalating. These two changes in public opinion may appear equivalent – indeed, they both increase the adversary’s resolve by changing the relative weight of escalating or backing down from opposite sides of the scale. Yet, lower public costs of escalation are enjoyed only in the event that the leader escalates.¹³¹ Since these two costs are different, one may tip the balance and make the adversary resolved to escalate when the other is insufficient to do so alone. Consequently, a provocative effect may ‘tie the adversaries hands for war’ by reducing the adversary’s costs of escalation rather than increasing the adversary’s costs of backing down.¹³²

How different are the public costs of escalation and the public costs of backing down? Consider the political costs of escalating to war. The costs of war that figure into any state’s decision to fight or back down include both the *material costs of war* and the *political costs of war*. The material costs of war include the financial costs of deployment, the negative impact on the economy, and the lives that will be lost in battle. The political costs of war include international condemnation, opposition within elite groups of decision-making, and domestic public opinion against war. Dan Reiter, for instance, argues that a principle reason that preemptive wars are so rare is because of “the political costs of attacking first.”¹³³ As he points out, these political costs accrue at the international level

¹³¹On audience costs for “backing in” rather than “backing out,” or what Quek refers to as “Type II audience costs,” see Levy et al. 2015 and Quek 2017. Neither of these ideas, however, lower the costs of escalation – on the contrary, they increase the costs of escalation. To be clear, a provocative effect does not have to shift the adversary’s public opinion to a clear majority in favor of escalating to increase the leader’s resolve to escalate. Even if a leader expects a lower approval rating for escalating than not escalating, a leader may decide to escalate if that lower expected approval rating is higher than it was before the provocative action by the foreign state. It is in this sense that the leader would “enjoy” lower costs of escalation by escalating.

¹³²On hand-tying mechanisms, see James D. Fearon (1997) “Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Hand Tying versus Sinking Costs.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. 41.1, pp. 68–90.

¹³³Dan Reiter (1995) “Exploding the Powder Keg Myth: Preemptive Wars Almost Never Happen.” *International Security*. 20.2, pp. 5–34, p. 6.

and can have substantial inhibiting effects for using military force: they influenced Nasser's decision to dismiss the Egyptian military's advice to preempt in 1967, Israel's decision to forego a preemptive strike in 1973, and President Kennedy's decision to reject a surprise attack on Cuba as the "Pearl Harbor" option during the Cuban Missile Crisis.¹³⁴ In terms of elite-level political costs, Elizabeth Saunders points out that "elites' ability to stymie a president's legislative agenda or other policy aims can alter how the leader evaluates the political costs of fighting or staying out of a conflict"¹³⁵ Elite-level political support for a war thus saves a leader valuable political capital that she would otherwise have to expend on fighting a war. Similarly, greater public support for war lowers the political costs of war. As a result, even when the material costs of the war remain the same, lower political costs of war reduce the overall costs of war.

A provocative action by the foreign state reduces the adversary's political costs of war. Narrowly, we can think of this mechanism as a change in domestic public opinion that relieves the political constraints on leaders to escalate; more broadly we can think of it as providing leaders with a *pretext* or *justification* that reduces their political costs of escalation. Legalistic considerations aside, if leaders assess that a foreign action during a crisis has angered or increased honor concerns among the public or political elites, they may find a political window of opportunity to escalate. For instance, as Lebow points out, although U.S. President Johnson was reluctant to escalate the Vietnam War because it could adversely affect his chances of re-election, "[t]he Gulf of Tonkin incident provided him with the opportunity to cut dramatically the political costs of escalation."¹³⁶ Similarly, Saunders highlights how the Gulf of Tonkin incident reduced elite-level opposition to

¹³⁴Reiter 1995, pp. 26-8.

¹³⁵Elizabeth N. Saunders (2015) "War and the Inner Circle: Democratic Elites and the Politics of Using Force." *Security Studies*. 24.3, pp. 466–501.

¹³⁶Richard Ned Lebow (1981) *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

war: “[t]he Gulf of Tonkin incident illustrates the elite-centered nature of Johnson’s deceptions...Only when the North Vietnamese provided him with a pretext, in the Tonkin Gulf in August 1964, did Johnson go to Congress [to seek approval to escalate the war].”¹³⁷ The causal pathway of a provocative effect that is being theorized here is neither that a justification offered by the government reduces the political costs of war nor that any escalatory action by a foreign state can be used as a pretext. Rather, the relationship is that a foreign action that has a greater provocative effect can provide a stronger pretext for the adversary’s leader to cut her political costs of escalation.

Of course, states may try to take advantage of provocative effects because they provide pretexts, and doing so can have significant strategic implications in crises. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk cautioned against an airstrike on Cuba because it could “give an umbrella for [the Soviets] to take action with respect to Berlin.”¹³⁸ The implication is that a less provocative escalatory action might *not* provide such a pretext. Furthermore, whether a provocative incident is real, fabricated, or deliberately incited, even a state that has been preparing to go to war can be inhibited from initiating hostilities unless an action by the foreign state reduces its political costs of escalation. As Arthur Stein notes, in 1846, after Mexico refused to sell California and New Mexico to the United States and rejected U.S. claims that the Rio Grande marked the border of Texas, U.S. President James Polk mobilized troops to the border but did not declare war until the troops became embroiled in a border incident. Only when his troops became embroiled in a border incident that gave him a strong justification to use force did he go to Congress for authorization for a war: “President Polk had searched for a peaceful resolution...but he was prepared to go to war. Even then, he preferred to await an incident that would make the United States the responder rather than the initiator.”¹³⁹ In

¹³⁷Saunders 2015, p. 493.

¹³⁸Reiter 1995, pp. 26-7.

¹³⁹Arthur A. Stein (2000) *The Justifying State: Why Anarchy Doesn’t Mean No Excuses*. In *Peace*,

this way, even if a war is premeditated, a leader may be ‘all-but-resolved for war’ without a provocative action by the foreign state that provides a strong justification to attack.

Reducing the adversary’s political costs of war through a provocative effect, however, is also distinct from a “rally-’round-the-flag” effect.¹⁴⁰ As Dafoe and Weiss point out, a rally effect predicts “unconditional” support for a leader’s performance when a foreign threat arises, so public approval for the leader should be higher even when the leader backs down.¹⁴¹ In contrast, a provocative effect predicts an increase in public support for the leader conditional upon the leader escalating, and lower public support for the leader conditional upon the leader backing down. Thus, the theoretical expectation is about public approval for the leader’s policy choices rather than public approval for the leader herself. This leads to a third testable hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: A foreign action during a crisis that is more angering or raises honor concerns increases public support for escalating to war.

These three hypotheses together allow us to see that provocative effects are not just different from audience costs, but they affect how much audience costs the adversary’s leader can generate. Specifically, a provocative effect on the adversary’s public reduces the *belligerence costs* component of audience costs that the adversary’s leader can generate. As Kertzer and Brutger find, generating audience costs involves at least two different types of costs: an “inconsistency cost” whereby the public punishes the leader because the leader says she will stand firm but later backs down, and a “belligerence cost” whereby the public punishes the leader for making a threat to stand firm in the first place.¹⁴² Audience costs as

Prosperity, and Politics. Ed. by John E. Mueller. Boulder, C.O.: Westview Press, p. 239.

¹⁴⁰The literature on rally effects is extensive. For Mueller’s seminal article see John E. Mueller (1970) “Presidential Popularity from Truman to Johnson.” *American Political Science Review*. 64.1, pp. 18–34.

¹⁴¹Dafoe and Weiss 2016.

¹⁴²Joshua D. Kertzer and Ryan Brutger (2016) “Decomposing Audience Costs: Bringing the Audience Back

measured in traditional survey experiments, however, involve a “double-barreled treatment effect” that obfuscates these two types of costs.¹⁴³ That is, while survey experiments have measured audience costs in terms of the difference in public approval for backing down after escalating and public approval for not escalating, this measure is a straightforward summation of inconsistency costs and belligerence costs:

Audience Costs = Public Approval for Backing Down - Public Approval for Not Escalating

Inconsistency Costs = Public Approval for Backing Down - Public Approval for War

Belligerence Costs = Public Approval for War - Public Approval for Not Escalating

AUDIENCE COSTS = INCONSISTENCY COSTS + BELLIGERENCE COSTS

These measures make clear that a provocative effect reduces belligerence costs for the adversary because public support for war is expected to increase (Hypothesis 3) and public support for not escalating is expected to decrease (Hypothesis 1). Yet, a provocative effect also increases the adversary’s inconsistency costs because public support for backing down is expected to decrease (Hypothesis 2) while public support for war is expected to increase (Hypothesis 3). These two theoretical expectations lead to an indeterminacy regarding whether provocative effects reduce or increase the overall audience costs that the adversary can generate. Through a survey experiment in the next chapter, however, I find – somewhat surprisingly – that a provocative effect can reduce belligerence costs more than it increases

into Audience Cost Theory.” *American Journal of Political Science*. 60.1, pp. 234–249.

¹⁴³See, for example, Michael Tomz (2007) “Domestic Audience Costs in International Relations: An Experimental Approach.” *International Organization*. 61.4, pp. 821–840, Robert F. Trager and Lynn Vavreck (2011) “The Political Costs of Crisis Bargaining: Presidential Rhetoric and the Role of the Party.” *American Journal of Political Science*. 55.3, pp. 526–545, Matthew S. Levendusky and Michael C. Horowitz (2012) “When Backing Down Is the Right Decision: Partisanship, New Information, and Audience Costs.” *Journal of Politics*. 74.2, pp. 1–16, and Graeme A. M. Davies and Robert Johns (2014) “Audience Costs among the British Public: The Impact of Escalation, Crisis Type, and Prime Ministerial Rhetoric.” *International Studies Quarterly*. 57.4, pp. 725–737.

inconsistency costs so that the overall audience costs that the adversary generates *declines*. Thus, provocative effects are both different from audience costs and impinge on how much and what type of audience costs the adversary's leaders can generate.

A separate question is how regime type intervenes between a provocative effect on the adversary's public and whether the adversary's leader has a greater incentive to escalate in a crisis. Similarly to audience costs, although a provocative effect on the adversary's public is more likely to influence the decision of the adversary's leader in democratic regimes, this effect will not be restricted to them; as Jessica Weeks finds, audience costs can constrain leaders in non-personalist autocratic regimes.¹⁴⁴ Also like audience costs, the particular audience that holds the most sway over the leader's decision may differ across regime type. For instance, a provocative effect on an autocratic adversary may incentivize the adversary's leader to escalate more by increasing the resolve of elites than by increasing the resolve of the public. In the extreme, a provocative effect on the adversary's domestic audience may have no effect on the adversary's leader's decision to escalate or back down in a crisis. In this sense, the theorized pathway linking the individual level with the state level through changes in public opinion is an ideal type. But even if the adversary's domestic audience plays no role in the decision calculus of the adversary's leader, such as in personalist regimes, a foreign action can have a provocative effect on the adversary's leader directly by angering her or increasing her honor concerns.

Finally, although a foreign state's actions during a crisis can shift public opinion in the adversarial state because of a variety of reasons, it is only a provocative effect if this shift occurs through changes in dispositional factors and non-material stakes. For instance, a foreign state's actions during a crisis could, somewhat counterproductively, make the adversary's public believe that a war with the foreign state will be shorter and

¹⁴⁴Weeks 2008.

less costly than initially anticipated; all things equal, this updated belief would increase public approval of a conflict with the foreign state. Although this mechanism increases the resolve of the adversary's public, it does not count as a provocative effect because the increase in resolve does not occur through changes in dispositional factors or non-material stakes. This observation highlights two final points. First, a provocative effect that engages the adversary's public are a subset of public opinion changes that affect the adversary's decision to escalate. Second, a provocative effect is not the only mechanism through which a state's actions during a crisis increase the adversary's resolve. Triggering public opinion changes in the adversarial state through other mechanisms can increase the political costs of backing down and lower the political costs of escalation for the adversary's leader and hence increase the adversary's resolve. In the next section, I explain in more detail how a provocative effect differs from both changes in other variables that affect the adversary's resolve and other mechanisms of escalation that don't involve changes in the adversary's resolve.

Provocation, Crisis Escalation, and Three Alternative Logics

How does the logic of provocation differ from and relate to other mechanisms of crisis escalation? Is the logic of provocation a distinctive mechanism of crisis escalation? The answer to these questions has important implications for understanding the unique dangers of crisis escalation and conflict that arise from the logic of provocation.

A provocative effect is a unique mechanism of unwanted crisis escalation at the individual level. Put differently, other mechanisms of unwanted crisis escalation don't increase the resolve of the adversary by changing dispositional factors and non-material stakes. That said, provocative effects can arise concurrently with other mechanisms of escalation that are triggered by the same escalatory action of the foreign state. Below, I identify three

widely-known logics of unwanted escalation in the IR literature and then compare them with the logic of provocation. I refer to these alternative logics as the *accidental escalation logic*, *security dilemma logic*, and *crisis bargaining logic*. Together, these comparisons clarify how the logic of provocation is a distinctive mechanism of crisis escalation.

Accidental Escalation Logic

A major concern that arises during crises is accidental escalation. The logic of accidental escalation is seemingly intuitive, but it involves two steps. The first is the accidental escalatory step itself, such as fighter jets accidentally colliding and killing a pilot. Such accidents are fundamental to Schelling's "threat that leaves something to chance" and hence, the strategy of brinkmanship: "If two climbers are tied together...one can credibly threaten to fall-off *accidentally* by standing near the brink."¹⁴⁵ The second, and arguably more important, step in the logic of accidental escalation is whether an accident triggers additional unwanted escalation in a crisis. In this regard, the danger of accidental escalation is closely associated with the notion that crises can 'spin out of control.' Yet, as Robert Powell points out, an accidental clash might "set the dice rolling," but for a crisis to escalate further, it must be "followed by a series of interacting decisions" that are made to escalate *deliberately*.¹⁴⁶ The logic of accidental escalation, however, does not explain whether and why states will make a deliberate decision to escalate after an accident. One reason why states may escalate deliberately after an accident is preexisting military rules of engagement: certain contingencies require pre-planned escalatory steps as a response, so a crisis may semi-automatically escalate several additional steps after an accidental clash. But if a state is unresolved to escalate past a certain point in a crisis, the logic

¹⁴⁵Thomas C. Schelling (1960) *The Strategy of Conflict*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Emphasis added.

¹⁴⁶Robert Powell (1990) *Nuclear Deterrence Theory: The Search for Credibility*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 21-22. Also see Powell 1985.

of accidental escalation predicts that the crisis will not escalate past that point because the state will prefer to back down. Nothing in the logic of accidental escalation explains how the adversary's resolve might increase during a crisis.

The logic of provocation differs from the logic of accidental escalation in two key respects. First, the logic of provocation explains how an accidental clash can increase the adversary's resolve. An accidental clash during a crisis can increase anger and honor concerns for the adversary, thereby making it harder to back down, and easier to escalate, for the adversary. In this way, a minor dispute can escalate into a crisis, or a crisis can escalate to an armed conflict, even when the initial stakes in the dispute do not seem to justify such escalation. Thus, an accidental clash can provoke the adversary to escalate past a point that it was previously unwilling to surpass. A second difference between the logic of provocation and the logic of accidental escalation, however, is that the former does not require any accident to occur. Although an accidental clash during a crisis can have a provocative effect on the adversary, a deliberate but limited strike on the adversary can also have a provocative effect. Indeed, as discussed above, deliberate actions are more likely to provoke than accidental ones. Furthermore, if states take deliberate steps to escalate a crisis following an accident, but those deliberate steps are also provocative, a vicious cycle of escalation can ensue in which states keep increasing each other's resolve. In this way, a crisis may 'spiral out of control' as provocative effects during the course of the crisis endogenously increase risk-taking dispositions and the non-material stakes in the crisis.

Security Dilemma Logic

A second logic of unwanted crisis escalation follows the logic of the security dilemma, or more precisely, the spiral model.¹⁴⁷ Status quo states that take steps to ensure their security

¹⁴⁷Jervis 1976, pp. 58-113; Jervis 1978; Glaser 1992; Glaser 1997; and Kydd 1997; Glaser 2010.

can threaten the security of other status quo states and prompt these states to take escalatory measures that ultimately undermine the first state's security, thus triggering a spiral of unwanted escalation. Although the security dilemma is not a theory of crisis escalation, its logic underscores the popular notion that 'misunderstandings' between states can lead to unwanted escalation during crises. What is crucial for the logic of the security dilemma, however, is that states feel *threatened*. Uncertainty about another state's intentions or perceptual biases of individuals in the state – misperceptions – can make a state feel threatened even when the other state is in fact benign.

The logic of provocation differs from a security dilemma logic of unwanted crisis escalation in two crucial respects. First, whereas a security dilemma logic arises when perceived threats to security become more acute, a provocative effect can arise even when a state appears less threatening. For instance, if the foreign state reacts in an underwhelming but insulting way to its adversary during a crisis, the adversary's leaders and public may become angrier and more concerned about national honor even though they find the foreign state less threatening than previously thought. Thus, neither threats nor threat perceptions are perfectly correlated with anger or heightened honor concerns. But again, anger and honor concerns – and, more broadly, changes in dispositional factors and non-material stakes – can increase concurrently for the adversary when the foreign state's actions appear more threatening to the adversary. Indeed in some instances, appearing more threatening may itself cause an increase in anger or honor concerns. Yet, two distinct logics operate when the adversary feels that its security is threatened and when it feels angrier or more concerned about honor.

The second difference between the logic of provocation and the security dilemma logic is that the former operates even when one of the states in the crisis is a "revisionist" or

“greedy” state.¹⁴⁸ For a security dilemma logic to drive unwanted escalation in a crisis, the crisis disputants must be status quo states – they must not desire a change in the status quo through the use of military force (i.e. be revisionist), particularly for non-security related reasons (i.e. be greedy).¹⁴⁹ But even if a state is revisionist or greedy, its actions during a crisis can have a provocative effect on its adversary, and this provocative effect can lead to unwanted escalation. Why would a revisionist or greedy state want to avoid crisis escalation if it is prepared to use military force to revise rather than live with the status quo in peace? If war is costly, a revisionist or greedy state would prefer to induce a concession of the stake through means short of war than to fight a war to obtain the stake.¹⁵⁰ Escalatory actions that have a provocative effect on the adversary during a crisis, however, increase the adversary’s resolve so that even an adversary that was previously unresolved to fight to defend the stake can become resolved to resist and fight.

Crisis Bargaining Logic

The ‘crisis bargaining logic’ best captures the view that ‘miscalculations’ can lead to unwanted crisis escalation.¹⁵¹ There are two central mechanisms that underpin the logic of unwanted escalation in game-theoretic models of crisis bargaining, both of which differ from the logic of provocation. First, unwanted escalation results from imperfect information regarding the adversary’s resolve. Under conditions of imperfect information, a foreign state that is uncertain of its adversary’s resolve can take a calculated risk to escalate; but after escalating, the foreign state may find that its adversary is indeed resolved, thus ending up with tensions that it would have preferred to avoid had it had perfect information. In this way, the foreign state may ‘miscalculate,’ or ‘underestimate,’ its

¹⁴⁸On greedy states, see Glaser 2010, pp. 4,12, 37.

¹⁴⁹What constitutes the status quo, however, can be contested.

¹⁵⁰On costly war, see Fearon 1995.

¹⁵¹On crisis bargaining models, see, for example, Fearon 1994; Powell 1996; Fearon 1997; and Slantchev 2011.

adversary's resolve.

The logic of provocation differs from this mechanism because the central problem is not so much imperfect information about the adversary's resolve, but imperfect information about whether and by how much the adversary's resolve will increase. The crucial question to ask in terms of provocation is not "is the adversary resolved to fight?" but instead, "will my own actions increase the adversary resolve, and make the adversary resolved to fight?"

Second, according to the crisis bargaining logic of escalation, unwanted escalation also arises from signals that are not credible.¹⁵² Under conditions of imperfect information, signaling allows states to 'update beliefs' about each other's resolve and make more informed decisions to back down or escalate. But signaling can also result in unwanted escalation because it does not always allow states to update beliefs with certainty: states may only have an updated estimate of each other's resolve and make a rational gamble to escalate. Indeed, the difficulty of credibly signaling resolve to an adversary is central to studies on "costly signals" and whether and under what conditions "cheap talk" can credibly communicate resolve.¹⁵³

The logic of provocation differs from this mechanism because a signal can have a provocative effect even if it allows an adversary to update beliefs with certainty. More succinctly, credible signals can provoke. For instance, if a foreign state generates audience

¹⁵²On signaling, see, for example, Robert Jervis (1970) *The Logic of Images in International Relations*. New York: Columbia University Press; Fearon 1997; Kenneth Schultz (1998) "Domestic Opposition and Signaling in International Crises." *American Political Science Review*. 92.4, pp. 829–844; Anne Sartori (2005) *Deterrence and Diplomacy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Robert F. Trager (2010) "Diplomatic Calculus in Anarchy: How Communication Matters." *American Political Science Review*. 104.2, pp. 347–368; Kristopher W. Ramsay (2011) "Cheap Talk Diplomacy, Voluntary Negotiations, and Variable Bargaining Power." *International Studies Quarterly*. 55.4, pp. 1003–1023; Keren Yarhi-Milo (2013) "Tying Hands Behind Closed Doors: The Logic and Practice of Secret Reassurance." *Security Studies*. 22.3, pp. 405–435; Robert F. Trager (2015) "Diplomacy of War and Peace." *Annual Review of Political Science*. 19.1, pp. 205–28; and Austin Carson and Keren Yarhi-Milo (2017) "Covert Communication: The Intelligibility and Credibility of Signaling in Secret." *Security Studies*. 26.1, pp. 124–156.

¹⁵³See previous footnote for literature.

costs by making a public statement, the adversary may correctly update its belief that the state is now resolved to defend the stake; yet the statement may nevertheless anger and increase honor concerns for the adversary's public and increase the adversary's resolve to fight rather than back down.

In sum, these comparisons make clear that the logic of provocation differs from an accidental escalation logic, a security dilemma logic, and a crisis bargaining logic. A foreign state's escalatory actions during a crisis can anger and heighten honor concerns for the adversary and increase the adversary's resolve even when no accidents occur, when heightened perceptions of threat do not arise, and when signaling credibly conveys resolve to the adversary.

Provocation, War, and Three Alternative Logics

The logic of provocation can explain the occurrence of war when the other logics predict peace. This conclusion is straightforward to derive from the above discussion: accidents, threats, and inadequate signals do not equate with increasing anger and honor concerns. But how exactly do these escalatory logics result in the outbreak of war and in what ways do these competing logics differ from or relate to each other? A precise understanding of these differences is essential for crafting government policies that can prevent the logics from unfolding into unwanted conflict. In terms of theory, identifying the differences in these logics to war allows us to see why anger and honor concerns should be grouped together as one logic and distinguished from alternative logics.

The short answer to how the four pathways to war differ is that they are different in terms of whether and how they change the adversary's resolve for war. In the remainder of this section, I first explain how the logic of provocation can lead to war, and then I review each

of the three alternative escalatory logics to address (1) how they explain the outbreak of war, (2) whether they can explain a war that arises by increasing the adversary's resolve, and (3) in what ways the logic of provocation explains war differently. On the basis of this comparative analysis, I then justify why anger and honor concerns should be grouped together but distinguished from other escalatory logics that lead to war.

The Logic of Provocation and Inadvertent War

The logic of provocation causes the outbreak of war by increasing the adversary's resolve for war through anger and heightened honor concerns.¹⁵⁴ Contrary to the conventional wisdom, however, a war that arises through such mechanisms need not be sudden and impulsive, even though it can be. Why? If war is costly, there should always be an *ex ante* bargaining space in which two states can find a mutually preferable deal to war.¹⁵⁵ This means that such a bargaining space exists even when a potential aggressor and a defending state are resolved for war.¹⁵⁶ War arises not simply because states are resolved for war, but because private information, incentives to misrepresent them, and the indivisibility of stakes prevent resolved states from arriving at a mutually acceptable bargain. Thus, even if a provocative effect makes an initially unresolved state 'switch' to become resolved for war, this resolved state may continue to bargain in order to reach a more efficient outcome short of war and only initiate war after bargaining fails. In this way, a war that arises from a logic of provocation need not be sudden and impulsive and can be fully consistent with the widely known rational causes of war advanced by Fearon.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴See Chapter 4 for three ways in which this logic can lead to war in different strategic contexts.

¹⁵⁵Fearon 1995.

¹⁵⁶Given my definitions of a defender that is resolved for war and a potential aggressor that is resolved for war above, this point is consistent with Powell's observation that two states cannot be "dissatisfied." See Powell 1996, p. 249.

¹⁵⁷As I discuss in Chapter 4, the logic of provocation can operate under the same assumptions that Fearon uses to argue explain the rational causes of war. See Appendix B for the proof of the formal, game-theoretic models.

What the logic of provocation highlights, however, is that the rational causes of war only lead to a deliberately initiated war if at least one state is resolved for war. That is, private information, incentives to misrepresent them, and the indivisibility of stakes will never lead to war within the crisis bargaining framework if both states are unresolved for war. By definition, a defending state that prefers to concede the stake under dispute rather than put up a fight, and a potential aggressor that prefers to live with the status quo than fight to revise the status quo, will eventually back down in a crisis even though they might try to misrepresent their private information by taking escalatory steps before capitulating. Thus, being resolved for war is a necessary but insufficient condition for a deliberately initiated war. Logically, this leaves only two options through which a deliberately initiated war can arise in a crisis: one or both states are resolved for war from the outset of the crisis, or one or both states become resolved for war during the course of the crisis.¹⁵⁸

When two states are unresolved for war at the beginning of a crisis, but a deliberate war arises because at least one state becomes unintentionally resolved during the course of the crisis, I define such a war as an *inadvertent war*. This definition reformulates Alexander George's definition of an "inadvertent war" as "a war that is authorized during the course of a crisis, even though at the outset of the crisis central decision makers did not want or expect war."¹⁵⁹ The logic of provocation, then, provides a causal mechanism for an inadvertent war. When two states are unresolved at the outset of a crisis, one state's escalatory actions can have a provocative effect on its adversary and make its adversary resolved for war regardless of the adversary's desire to become resolved.

An inadvertent war differs from an "accidental war" because the latter can arise between unresolved states (e.g. a commander presses a wrong button).¹⁶⁰ An inadvertent war

¹⁵⁸I assume there are two states in a crisis for simplicity of exposition.

¹⁵⁹George 1991, pp. 8-9.

¹⁶⁰On accidental war, see, for example, Geoffrey Blainey (1973) *The Causes of War*. 3rd ed. New York: Free

also differs from a war that arises because a state miscalculates and escalates to find its adversary already resolved for war (i.e. was resolved from the outset of the crisis). And, an inadvertent war differs from a war that arises because the adversary generates resolve deliberately, such as by generating audience costs to tie its own hands.

The tragedy that inadvertent war highlights is that escalatory steps that states take during the crisis bargaining process can tie their adversary's hands for war when neither state was resolved at the outset of the crisis. When two unresolved states in a crisis engage in escalatory actions to test each other's resolve or misrepresent their private information about being unresolved, these escalatory actions can provoke their adversary and make their adversary resolved for war. This provoked 'switch' in resolve, moreover, is difficult to infer by observing the adversary's behavior during a crisis: when resolve is so hard to signal during crises, how can we distinguish an adversary that was already resolved from an adversary that became resolved during the course of the crisis through a provocative effect? Provocation can thus alter the underlying incentives of a crisis in dangerous and unobservable ways, and the historical record of inadvertent wars must carefully account for whether states were unresolved at the outset of the crisis and whether resolve increased inadvertently. In Chapters 5 and 6, I closely trace two historical cases to see if armed conflict can be explained through this inadvertent logic.¹⁶¹

Accidental Escalation Logic and War

The accidental escalation logic explains the outbreak of war in two ways, both of which follow directly from how the logic explains unwanted crisis escalation. First, accidental

Press, pp. 127-145; and Scott D. Sagan (1995) *The Limits of Safety Organizations, Accidents, and Nuclear Weapons*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

¹⁶¹On inadvertent escalation from conventional war to nuclear war, see for example, Barry Posen (1991) *Inadvertent Escalation: Conventional War and Nuclear Risks*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press; and Caitlin Talmadge (2017) "Would China Go Nuclear?: Assessing the Risk of Chinese Nuclear Escalation in a Conventional War with the United States." *International Security*. 41.4, pp. 50-92.

war can arise. When the accident that occurs during a crisis is not a clash of fighter jets, but instead an accidental initiation of all-out attack, war can, in principle, arise by accident. Indeed, as Powell points out, in the context of nuclear brinkmanship, the assumption at the core of Schelling's "threat that leaves something to chance" is that the ultimate "sanction" – the initiation of an all-out nuclear attack – could be realized accidentally, not merely the possibility of any accidental clash occurring.¹⁶² Second, war can arise if an accidental clash leads to additional crisis escalation that reaches the outbreak of war. But, as mentioned above, if both states in the crisis are unresolved for war, the logic of accidental escalation by itself cannot explain how a crisis will escalate to war.

Consequently, we must make one of three assumptions for the logic of accidental escalation to explain how states can keep escalating after an accident and reach the outbreak of war. One is that one or both states in the crisis are resolved for war. When crisis participants or analysts believe that this assumption is unlikely to hold, such as when the stake in dispute is of low value, they will be less worried about the potential for unwanted crisis escalation; put differently, they will be more confident that there will be a "firebreak" at which point one state prefers to concede than fight. A second assumption is that multiple accidents occur. For instance, an accidental clash of fighter jets could be followed by a miscommunication in the chain of command that initiates an attack. The possibility of multiple accidents occurring is truest to Schelling's notion of crises 'spinning out of control,' and in this way, states that are unresolved to pass a certain point in a crisis can accidentally surpass that point. The third assumption, however, is that other escalatory logics 'kick-in' after an accident so that one or both states become more resolved to deliberately escalate the crisis. Unless multiple additional accidents follow from the initial accident, we must make this assumption if we are to explain how states can arrive at outcomes that they were previously

¹⁶²Powell 1985; Powell 1990.

unresolved to entertain.

In sum, the logic of accidental escalation explains war without being able to explain how the resolve of the adversary can increase during the course of a crisis. The logic of accidental escalation, therefore, cannot explain the outbreak of inadvertent war. For the logic of accidental escalation to explain the outbreak of war, it must either assume that states are already resolved for war or that war occurs by accident.

Security Dilemma Logic and War

The security dilemma logic of unwanted crisis escalation offers two important explanations of war. One is the logic of preemptive war. This logic is as follows: a status quo state that feels threatened by its adversary comes to believe that war is imminent and thus decides to strike before it is struck to increase its chances of prevailing. Incentives to preempt can indeed be an important reason for crisis instability. Yet, contrary to this standard account of preemptive war, if the state that believes it faces an imminent threat of war is unresolved for war, it would prefer to concede the stake in dispute rather than launch a war preemptively. It follows that this standard logic of preemptive war must make the assumption that at least one of the states in the crisis is initially resolved for war.

A second reason that war can arise from a security dilemma logic of unwanted crisis escalation is that one state believes that the other state's intentions are too belligerent to satisfy. For instance, a defending state may initially prefer to concede a small stake rather than fight a costly war to defend that stake, but the defending state may come to believe that the potential aggressor would only demand more after it conceded the small stake, and as a result, the defending state could become resolved to fight for the small stake. Such a situation can arise when the potential aggressor insufficiently reassures the defending state that it would be satisfied once it obtains the small stake. If the defending state

refuses to concede the small stake because it believes the potential aggressor's intentions are 'unlimited,' and the 'aggressive' state initiates war to obtain this stake for security-related reasons, then war can arise from a security dilemma logic of unwanted crisis escalation.

This second pathway to war provides an explanation of inadvertent war. In the above example, the defending state's resolve 'switches' from being unresolved to resolved for war, and the reason is because the aggressor's actions during the crisis increases its adversary's belief (i.e. the defender's belief) that the aggressor's appetite is too large to satisfy. Thus, when one state's actions make its adversary believe that the perceived stake under threat is too large to concede, these actions can increase the adversary's resolve for war. A hypothetical example illustrates this logic. If Japan privately prefers to concede the Senkakus rather than fight a war with China to defend the islands, but China's actions during a crisis make the Japanese believe that the Chinese want to occupy other islands under Japan's administrative control that the Japanese are willing to defend, then the Japanese may become resolved to fight for the Senkakus.¹⁶³

In sum, a security dilemma logic of unwanted escalation can explain how one state's actions can increase the adversary's resolve during the course of a crisis: by increasing the perceived stake under threat. Consequently, the logic of provocation is not the only explanation for an inadvertent war. Yet, as discussed above, increasing anger and honor concerns can explain an increase in the adversary's resolve (in the current example, the

¹⁶³This logic of war is broadly consistent with what Powell's calls the "risk-return trade-off." Powell argues that when an aggressor makes a demand to a defending state to concede a stake, the more that the aggressor demands, the more likely that the defending state will reject that demand. Thus, the greater the potential return, the larger the risk of war. In the security dilemma logic, the defender may believe that the aggressor's intentions are more extensive than the small stake in dispute, even when the aggressor makes no explicit demand and the aggressor is in fact satisfied with the status quo. Both the security dilemma logic and the "risk-return trade-off," however, rely on the logic that war breaks out because a larger (or more valuable) stake comes under threat and increases the defender's resolve for war. See Powell 1999, pp. 90-113, 133-139. Also see Ron Gurantz and Alexander V. Hirsch (2017) "Fear, Appeasement, and the Effectiveness of Deterrence." *Journal of Politics*. 79.3, pp. 1041-1056.

'defender's' resolve) even when the stake in the dispute, and the intrinsic value of the stake, is held constant. So, for example, when Japan and China dispute the sovereignty of the Senkaku/Daiyou islands, and neither side believes that the other is willing to use force to occupy a larger piece of territory, increasing one side's anger or honor concerns can increase that side's resolve to use force.

Crisis Bargaining Logic and War

The crisis bargaining logic of unwanted crisis escalation explains the outbreak of war through the same logic that it explains unwanted crisis escalation. First, under conditions of imperfect information, a state may underestimate its adversary's resolve and escalate to find that its adversary is resolved and initiates war. Second, under conditions of imperfect information, an adversary's signal of resolve may not be credible, so a state may escalate to find that the adversary is resolved and initiates war.

Neither of these mechanisms, however, involves increasing the adversary's resolve. Put differently, for both mechanisms to lead to war, the adversary must be resolved for war from the outset of the crisis. Because the adversary prefers to fight a war rather than live with the status quo, if its demand is rejected, and a bargain cannot be struck, it initiates war. War therefore results from imperfect information about the adversary's resolve and the inadequacy of signaling. In contrast, the logic of provocation explains how war can arise when one state's actions make a previously unresolved adversary become resolved for war. For instance, if the adversary's signal was a bluff, but the defending state's rejection of the adversary's demand insults and humiliates the adversary, the adversary may become resolved for war.

There are, however, other mechanisms consistent with the crisis bargaining protocol that can explain an increase in the adversary's resolve and the outbreak of inadvertent war. For

example, as Fearon and Kurizaki point out, generating audience costs by making public threats can engage the adversarial state's public to unintentionally increase the adversary's audience costs and resolve for war.¹⁶⁴ As mentioned above, however, the logic of provocation differs from this 'imposed audience costs' mechanism at the individual-level. Whereas audience costs cannot arise without an audience, the logic of provocation can increase the adversary's resolve even when the adversary's leader is provoked in private. Another mechanism that can explain inadvertent war within a rationalist framework is when a state's escalatory actions during a crisis unintentionally signal weakness. If the adversary comes to believe during the course of a crisis that its chances of prevailing in a war are higher than previously thought, this updating of beliefs will increase the adversary's resolve for war. This mechanism can operate even when there is no audience, such as when a private comment by the foreign state's leader unintentionally makes the adversary's leader believe the foreign state's military capabilities are weaker than initially thought.

In sum, although the two crisis bargaining logics of unwanted escalation cannot explain inadvertent war, other mechanisms within a rationalist framework can. For instance, 'imposing audience costs' or taking actions that make one's military capabilities appear weaker than the adversary initially believed both increase the adversary's resolve for war during a crisis. The dangers of the logic of provocation are thus more similar to the ways in which these mechanisms impact crisis escalation. Yet, the logic of provocation is also different from these mechanisms because it increases the adversary's resolve by changing dispositional factors and non-material stakes.

¹⁶⁴Fearon 1992; Kurizaki 2007.

Why Anger and Honor Concerns are Grouped as Provocative Effects

Why should anger and honor concerns be grouped together as one logic when they are not the only mechanisms through which one state's escalatory actions in a crisis can increase the adversary's resolve for war? Having analyzed the different pathways through which alternative logics of crisis escalation can lead to war, we are in a much better position to address this question. The answer is two-fold. First, at the individual-level of analysis, anger and honor concerns explain how a foreign state's actions during a crisis can increase the adversary's resolve for war even when the stake in dispute, and the intrinsic value of that stake, is held constant. Thus, in contrast to a security dilemma logic through which one state's intentions may be perceived by its adversary as desiring a larger stake than is currently in dispute, increasing the adversary's resolve through changes in dispositional factors and non-material stakes do not require a perceived enlargement of the stake under threat to increase the adversary's resolve. Second, anger and honor concerns are two mechanisms that are consistent with our common usage of the term 'provocation.' Increasing the adversary's resolve during a crisis by unintentionally appearing weak, for instance, can hardly be said to be 'provocative.' Moreover, both anger and honor concerns can increase the adversary's leader's resolve even when an insult is made to the leader in private. In these ways, increasing the adversary's resolve through changes in dispositional factors and non-material stakes, although different in their micro-mechanisms, are much more similar to each other than they are to the alternative logics of crisis escalation that can lead to war. It is for this reason that they define provocative effects.

Conclusion

Pundits, policymakers, and political scientists frequently refer to the dangers of provocation in interstate crises, but there has been no coherent theory of provocation and crisis

escalation in the IR literature. This chapter fills that gap. The logic of provocation proposed in this chapter explains through a rationalist framework how angering or increasing the honor concerns of the adversary during a crisis increase the adversary's resolve to escalate. At the individual level, angering the adversary incidentally changes dispositional traits such as increasing risk-taking, whereas insulting or humiliating actions that increase the adversary's honor concerns make backing down more dishonorable and escalation relatively more appealing. More broadly, one state's actions that increase the adversary's resolve by changing dispositional factors and non-material stakes have a provocative effect. At the state level, these micro-processes increase a state's resolve through two ideal-type pathways: they increase the leader's resolve directly or increase the public and elite's resolve, thereby constraining the leader's choices.

The logic of provocation differs from the logics through which accidents, threats, or signaling failures lead to unwanted crisis escalation. Thus, the logic of provocation can explain the occurrence of conflict when the other logics predict peace. Moreover, the logic of provocation highlights the danger of a particular type of unwanted conflict – what I call an inadvertent war. This type of war arises when both states in a crisis are unresolved for war at the outset of a crisis, but their escalatory actions during the crisis unintentionally tie their adversary's hands for war. A comparative analysis of competing logics of unwanted escalation found that while accidents and signaling failures cannot explain this type of conflict, threat perceptions and increasing the adversary's audience costs can. The dangers of the logic of provocation in crises are thus more similar to the dangers of these latter two types of escalatory logics, but it is still distinct because it operates by changing dispositional factors and non-material stakes.

Finally, by theorizing a logic of provocation in terms of increasing the adversary's resolve, this dissertation aims to challenge the widespread view that the dangers of anger and honor

concerns are only marginal in interstate crises. If war is costly, there should exist an *ex ante* bargaining space in which states that are resolved for war can still find a mutually preferable bargain to war, so if increasing the adversary's anger or honor concerns make the adversary become resolved for war during a crisis, the adversary may continue to bargain and initiate war only after bargaining fails. Seen in this light, searching for provocative effects by looking solely at escalatory crisis outcomes, such as armed conflicts in the MID's data set, severely underestimates the dangers of the logic of provocation in interstate crises. The next chapter thus tests the micro-level logic of provocation through a survey experiment. The subsequent chapter incorporates the findings from the survey experiment into three new game theoretic models to show that the logic of provocation drastically changes crisis dynamics when states can avoid or take advantage of provocations. The two chapters after that then closely trace two historical cases to illustrate how the logic of provocation can lead to unwanted crisis escalation and conflict.

CHAPTER 3 : Testing the Microfoundations of Provocation

Do anger and honor concerns triggered during a crisis increase resolve? Conventional wisdom seems to have it both ways. On the one hand, it seems intuitive that angering individuals and heightening their honor concerns would increase their resolve. On the other hand, the role of anger and honor are often thought to be only marginally relevant for resolve, especially if actors are assumed to be ‘rational.’ Observational studies face particularly stiff challenges in adjudicating between these views because the role of anger and honor concerns need to be isolated to identify their causal impact on resolve. Yet, measuring changes in an individual’s level of anger or honor concerns – let alone isolating their causal effects – present distinct challenges for case studies or cross-country regressions. For instance, if the adversary’s public appears angrier and more concerned about national honor after an escalatory action by the foreign state, and then demands a retaliatory response, how can we know if the adversary’s public became more resolved, and whether anger and honor concerns were responsible for that change? Furthermore, how much weight do anger and honor concerns carry if they do increase resolve?

I address these questions and test the logic of provocation at the individual level with a survey experiment on the American public. As discussed in the next section, survey experiments on the public provide a unique opportunity to study the microfoundations of provocation. The results of the study also provide strong support for my theory. Not only does a foreign action that increases anger and honor concerns significantly increase the public’s resolve, but increased anger and honor concerns are directly responsible for more than a third of this increase in resolve. Moreover, the results show that honor concerns increase resolve depending on whether individuals are ‘doves’ or ‘hawks:’ increasing honor concerns have the greatest impact on increasing resolve for those individuals who would

otherwise oppose escalation – doves. Also, somewhat contrary to conventional wisdom, the experiment finds that audience costs are significantly *smaller* when the foreign state’s escalatory action is more provocative. The reason is because a provocative effect reduces belligerence costs: when the public is angered and more concerned about national honor, they are less punishing of the president for escalating a crisis in the first place. Taken together, these results provide strong evidence in favor of the logic of provocation, and show that provocative effects on the public differ from our common understanding of audience costs.

The findings in this chapter also contribute to our body of knowledge on provocation in several ways. First, in contrast to studies that use case studies or anecdotal evidence, this chapter demonstrates in an experimental setting that a foreign state’s actions that anger and engage national honor can increase the resolve of individuals to escalate a dispute.¹⁶⁵ Second, in contrast to existing survey experiments on provocation and honor, this chapter demonstrates that both emotions of anger and honor concerns can increase the adversary’s resolve.¹⁶⁶ And third, in contrast to studies in social psychology that find terrorist attacks can increase anger, risk preferences, and support for more hard-lined foreign policies, this chapter demonstrate that escalatory actions by a foreign state can increase honor concerns as well as anger to increased resolve during interstate crisis.¹⁶⁷

The next section discusses the advantages and disadvantages of conducting survey experiments on the public to study provocation. The subsequent sections present the research design, the results, and a discussion of the results. The final section concludes by explaining how the findings from the survey experiment mutually reinforce the findings from the other empirical chapters.

¹⁶⁵See, for example, Hall 2017.

¹⁶⁶See, for example, Dafoe and Weiss 2016; and Dafoe, Hatz, and Zhang 2017.

¹⁶⁷See, for example, Lerner et al. 2003; Huddy, Feldman, and Cassese 2007; Lambert et al. 2010.

Why a Survey Experiment on the Public?

Survey experiments have become increasingly popular in IR.¹⁶⁸ A major advantage of using survey experiments is that the experimental design allows the researcher to better identify causal effects. Controlling for confounding variables through random assignment and manipulating the explanatory variable in isolation increases the researcher's confidence in causal validity. Although not a silver bullet, survey experiments thus contrast with statistical studies that use observational data, such as cross-country regressions, because unobserved confounders in such studies make it difficult to isolate the causal effect the researcher wants to uncover. A second advantage of survey experiments is that non-material factors, such as perceptions, beliefs, interests, and emotions can be studied with much precision. Inferring an individual's real emotions or beliefs from archival material can be challenging because of the limited availability of evidence, the existence of contradictory evidence, and the subjective interpretations of evidence by the individual researcher. Moreover, asking interviewees to reflect on their perceptions or preferences for decisions made in the past can suffer from post-hoc rationalizations. Survey experiments not only allow the researcher to directly and subtly induce respondents to (sometimes unknowingly) reveal their preferences or beliefs, but to compare the outcomes of those inducements with a 'control group' of respondents who have not been exposed to the inducements. Thus, when the research question concerns the investigation of causal effects and non-material factors, survey experiments can be a particularly useful tool for studying international politics.

That said, survey experiments also suffer from at least three important limitations. For one, they apply to a limited range of research questions, particularly those that focus

¹⁶⁸For some recent examples, see Scott D. Sagan and Benjamin A. Valentino (2017) "Revisiting Hiroshima in Iran: What Americans Really Think about Using Nuclear Weapons and Killing Noncombatants." *International Security*. 42.1, pp. 41–79; and Kai Quek and Alastair Iain Johnston (2017/18) "Can China Back Down?: Crisis De-escalation in the Shadow of Popular Opposition." *International Security*. 42.3, pp. 7–36.

on causal effects and the individual-level of analysis. Thus, many important questions in IR cannot be addressed by survey experiments, such as why interstate wars recur or what the causes are for the outbreak of World War II. A second limitation is external validity. If a survey experiment was conducted on a representative sample of a country's public, for instance, would the results be generalizable to the country's leaders? Of course, how serious the problems of external validity are for any given survey experiment depend not only on whether the results travel, but on whether the results need to travel. A research question that focuses on the public need not test whether the same results hold with leaders. But although many survey experiments in IR have been conducted on the public, some with research questions that focus on leaders have indeed been able to conduct survey experiments on leaders. For example, Renshon, Yarhi-Milo, and Kertzer conduct survey experiments on current and former members of the Israeli Knesset.¹⁶⁹ These survey experiments still encounter external validity issues, such as whether Israeli Knesset members are like U.S. leaders, but their research marks an important improvement over existing survey experiments.

A third limitation concerns the realism of survey experiments. Even when a survey experiment is administered to the target population, and the treatment, such as a hypothetical vignette, is not fantastical, respondents may react differently when they are asked about a scenario in a survey experiment and when they encounter that same scenario in reality. For instance, if leaders are asked about their views on nuclear war, would they maintain those views when they actually see or become involved in a nuclear war? Although it is important to understand the potential consequences of certain hypothetical scenarios in international politics, relying solely on the results of survey experiments that use hypothetical vignettes may lead to dangerously misleading conclusions.

¹⁶⁹Jonathan Renshon, Keren Yarhi-Milo, and Joshua D. Kertzer (Oct. 2016) "Democratic Leaders, Crises, and War." *Working Paper*.

In general, then, survey experiments can be a particularly useful tool for studying questions in international politics that focus on causal effects of non-material factors at the individual-level of analysis. Survey experiments are likely to be less useful, however, if the public is asked about questions that should be directed at leaders (and vice versa), or when entire research projects or ‘research paradigms’ rely solely on survey experiments that use hypothetical scenarios to draw conclusions.

The survey experiment in this chapter avoids these common pitfalls while taking advantage of the opportunity to identify the causal effects of non-material factors at the individual-level of analysis. Because the survey experiment is conducted on the public, we cannot know from the experiment whether the results would be generalizable to leaders. I thus address issues of external validity and realism by employing complementary research methods in subsequent chapters, such as historical case studies that closely trace leaders’ decisions using archival evidence and abstract game-theoretical models that generalize the logic of provocation beyond specific regional and historical contexts. The distinct advantage of the survey experiment in this chapter, therefore, is to complement these other research methods by identifying the causal effect of anger and honor concerns on the resolve of individuals. Moreover, although the logic of provocation applies to both leaders and the public, the key hypotheses derived in Chapter 2 explicitly focus on the public. Consistent with the vast literature on public opinion and audience costs, a survey experiment on the public thus allows me to show that a provocative effect on the public can potentially constrain a leader’s decision to escalate or back down in a crisis and thereby increase resolve at the state level.

Before outlining the research design, I summarize the key hypotheses that I test in the survey experiment. I expect a foreign action that increases anger and honor concerns during a crisis to (1) lower support for not escalating the crisis, (2) lower support for making

a threat of force and subsequently backing down, and (3) increase support for making a threat of force and subsequently escalating to war. In addition to these hypotheses, I test whether these changes in public support are indeed caused by increases in anger and honor concerns and not by other changes triggered by the foreign state's action. Thus, (4) I expect anger and honor concerns triggered by the foreign state's actions to *mediate* increases in resolve. Finally, (5) I expect a provocative effect to reduce belligerence costs and the overall audience costs that the state's leader generates.

Research Design

I administered a survey experiment on 1,202 respondents in the United States on August 22, 2017 through Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Although MTurk is not a representative sample of the U.S. public, it nevertheless serves as an informative sample for studying public opinion regarding foreign policy.¹⁷⁰ The design of the survey experiment builds onto existing experimental studies on audience costs, particularly the study pioneered by Michael Tomz which uses the "repel an invader" scenario for its vignette.¹⁷¹ The "repel an invader" scenario is a hypothetical scenario in which one unidentified country, "the invader," uses military force to invade and occupy territory in an unidentified "neighboring country." This neighboring country, moreover, is said to be friendly with the respondent's home country – in this case, the United States. Respondents then get to read about the U.S. president's response to this ensuing crisis, but each respondent is randomly assigned to read one of several vignettes. In the current experiment, following Kertzer and Brutger, I randomly assign respondents to read one of the following

¹⁷⁰Adam J. Berinsky, Michele F. Margolis, and Michael W. Sances (2014) "Separating the Shirkers from the Workers? Making Sure Respondents Pay Attention on Self-Administered Surveys." *American Journal of Political Science*. 48.3, pp. 739–753.

¹⁷¹Tomz 2007. Also see Richard K. Herrmann, Philip E. Tetlock, and Penny S. Visser (1999) "Mass Public Decisions to Go to War: A Cognitive Interactionist Framework." *American Political Science Review*. 93.3, pp. 553–73.

three vignettes so that I can later calculate belligerence costs and inconsistency costs: (1) the U.S. president decides to *stay out* of the conflict, (2) the U.S. president decides to make a threat of military intervention, but subsequently *backs down* from the threat when the invader continues its invasion, or (3) the U.S. president decides to make a threat of military intervention, and subsequently follows through with the threat by *escalating to war* when the invader continues its invasion.¹⁷² The outcome of the crisis is held constant across the three conditions by stating in each vignette that the conflict ends with the invader gaining 20% of the contested territory. In the war condition, extra information is provided that U.S. forces experience no casualties.¹⁷³

The key difference with prior experiments is that in the current experiment, respondents are randomly assigned to either the control group, which reads the standard “repel an invader” scenario as described above, or the ‘provocation treatment group,’ which reads a more provocative version of that scenario. That is, those in the ‘provocation treatment group’ first read a scenario in which the invader’s actions are more ‘provocative’ than simply invading its neighbor, and then they read one of the three policy responses by the U.S. president. In contrast, those in the control group first read the standard “repel an invader” scenario and later read one of the three policy responses by the U.S. president. The structure of the experiment is thus a 2x3 fully-factorial design.

The “provocation treatment” vignette was chosen through a pre-test that surveyed 100 respondents on MTurk on August 7, 2017. The pre-test asked respondents to read three different vignettes that extend the “repel an invader” scenario and then answer questions such as which one angers them the most, which one they find the honor of the United States to be the most engaged, and which one they find the most “provocative.” The three

¹⁷²Kertzer and Brutger 2016.

¹⁷³Ibid.

scenarios are the following:

“A country sent its military to take over a territorial region in a neighboring country...”

1. “During the initial stages of the country’s military operation, 31 U.S. military service men and women who were on a humanitarian mission in the country were attacked and killed.”
2. “During the initial stages of the country’s military operation, a U.S. tour group fleeing from the area was attacked, killing 31 people, 9 of whom were children.”
3. “During the initial stages of the country’s military operation, their military commander publically called all Americans ‘sons of whores’ and ‘lazy cowards,’ declaring that ‘they are too afraid to interfere.’”

The results of the pre-test found the second scenario to be the most provocative. A majority of the respondents ranked the second scenario as the scenario that angers them the most, the scenario that is the most “provocative,” and the scenario in which they would be most likely, relatively speaking, to support U.S. troops being sent to fight a war.

The pre-test also asked respondents to briefly explain their reason for choosing a particular scenario. Many of the respondents viewed the death of innocent U.S. citizens in the second scenario, particularly the act of killing children, as an injustice that should be punished. Respondents were less angered by U.S. troops being killed, for instance, because soldiers “know the dangers” of risking their lives. Yet, the second scenario ranked as the *lowest* among the three to engage the honor of the United States. The scenario that ranked highest in terms of honor concerns was the third scenario with the abusive language. A frequent

reason that the third scenario was seen as engaging the honor of the United States is that “it applies to all of us” and it directly challenges “what we stand for.” Since the second scenario ranked highest on most of the questions in the pre-test, however, I chose it as the provocation treatment vignette. To make the vignette more realistic in the survey experiment, I reduced the number of U.S. civilian casualties from 31 to 13, and the number of children who died from 9 to 6.¹⁷⁴

To provide as much continuity as possible between the provocation and control vignettes, I added a second sentence to the standard “repel an invader” scenario in the control vignette. Thus, after the standard line in the scenario that reads, “A country sent its military to take over a territorial region in a neighboring country,” I added the sentence, “During the initial stages of the country’s military operation, the militaries of the two sides clashed.” The language of the second sentence was deliberately crafted to sound innocuous – it states what the reader should already expect to happen. Moreover, the vignette does not confirm that the clashes resulted in casualties, even though it leaves open such a possibility.

Measuring Anger and Honor Concerns

To measure anger and honor concerns, the survey asked respondents several questions immediately after reading the first vignette describing the invading country’s actions. But because asking respondents how angry they feel after the first vignette may itself prompt respondents into thinking about anger, I applied insights from the *appraisal tendency* theory in social psychology. Respondents were asked how they feel about the invading country’s actions in terms of six negative emotions, three that have been found to be closely associated with anger and three that have been found to be closely associated with anxiety:

¹⁷⁴On August 17, between the pre-test and the survey experiment, a terrorist attack occurred in Barcelona in which a car drove into a group of pedestrians and killed 13 people.

angry, mad, irritated, and anxious, afraid, and nervous.¹⁷⁵ The ordering of these emotions was randomized, and respondents had to choose how strongly they felt the emotion from a five-point scale: “Hardly at all,” “A little,” “Moderately,” “Quite a bit,” and “Very much.” Unlike the valence theory of emotions, which views negative emotions, such as sadness, to have a different effect on behavior from positive emotions, such as joy, the appraisal tendency theory of emotions views different negative emotions to have different effects on risk-preferences.¹⁷⁶ As mentioned in the theory chapter, studies have found that a foreign state’s actions towards one’s country can generate negative emotions of anger and fear/anxiety, but whereas anger increases risk-taking, fear and anxiety reduce risk-taking. Thus, by asking respondents about two groups of negative emotions that are expected to influence risk-taking in opposite ways, I avoid priming all respondents into thinking about anger.

The survey then asks all respondents how strongly they view the invading country’s actions as engaging the honor of the United States and how provocative they find the invading country’s actions. These two questions are measured on the same five-point ordinal scale as the six emotions. As I discuss later when evaluating the results, however, the two questions may have the effect of treating all respondents into thinking about honor and provocation.

Measuring Resolve

The dependent variable in this study is resolve in interstate crises. Consistent with the definition of resolve in interstate crises in Chapter 2, I measure resolve in terms of the respondent’s relative preference to escalate or back down in the crisis. After reading the second vignette, which describes the U.S. president’s policy response, respondents are asked to register their level of support for the decision. For instance, respondents who

¹⁷⁵Lerner and Keltner 2001; Lambert et al. 2010.

¹⁷⁶See Chapter 2 for a discussion of these views.

read about the U.S. president staying out of the conflict get to offer their level of support for staying out, whereas respondents who read about the U.S. president making a threat and subsequently escalating to war get to offer their level of support for the war. The respondent's level of support is measured on a seven-point scale: "Strongly Disapprove," "Disapprove," "Somewhat Disapprove," "Neither," "Somewhat Approve," "Approve," and "Strongly Approve."

Controls and Manipulation Checks

To check if my provocation treatment correctly manipulated respondents, and to ensure that respondents were paying attention to my vignettes, I employed two strategies. First, I included a manipulation/attention check immediately after respondents answered questions on their emotions, honor concerns, and views on provocation regarding the first vignette. This question asked respondents something that they would know for sure if they had read the vignette: "What happened to U.S. citizens in the scenario you read?" The question gave respondents two options: "There was no mention of U.S. citizens," and "They were attacked and killed, including children." Because this question also came just before respondents read the second treatment vignette, it was intended to act as a reminder of the first vignette. Second, respondents were made aware upfront that they were about to read several vignettes with pauses for questions in between. At the beginning of the survey, I included an introduction that largely followed the text in existing survey experiments on audience costs but added a note of caution that the scenarios that the respondent were about to read were both hypothetical and told in multiple parts.

Finally, the survey asked all respondents a battery of background questions as controls. The standard controls were age, gender, education, income, and political leaning. In addition to these standard controls, however, I included questions to control for

“militant assertiveness.” These questions have been used by previous studies to measure how dispositionally “dovish” or “hawkish” individuals are.¹⁷⁷ Following these studies, therefore, I asked respondents whether they agree or disagree with the following three statements: “The best way to ensure world peace is through American military strength,” “The use of force only makes things worse,” and “Going to war is unfortunate, but sometimes the only solution to international problems.” Each question measures the respondent’s response on a five-point scale: “Strongly Disagree,” “Disagree,” “Neither agree or disagree,” “Agree,” and “Strongly Agree.”¹⁷⁸

Results

The results are presented in four parts. The first shows how the provocation treatment affects anger and honor concerns. The second shows how the provocation treatment affects resolve. The third shows how anger and honor concerns mediate resolve. The fourth shows how a provocative effect changes audience costs.¹⁷⁹

First, the provocation treatment successfully manipulated anger and honor concerns. The mean level of anger in the provocation treatment group is 3.9 on the five-point scale, while it is 2.7 in the control group. This difference is statistically significant at conventional levels. Honor concerns in the treatment group, moreover, is 2.5 on the five-point scale, while it is 1.9 in the control group. The difference is again statistically significant. These results, together with the difference in the means of the other emotions, can be seen in Figure 4. The horizontal bars in the figure show the 95% confidence intervals.

These results show that the provocation treatment is an appropriate treatment to find a

¹⁷⁷Herrmann, Tetlock, and Visser 1999; Ryan Brutger and Joshua D. Kertzer (2018) “A Dispositional Theory of Reputation Costs.” *International Organization*. 72.3, pp. 693–724.

¹⁷⁸See Appendix A for the entire survey.

¹⁷⁹See Appendix A for additional analyses of the survey experiment.

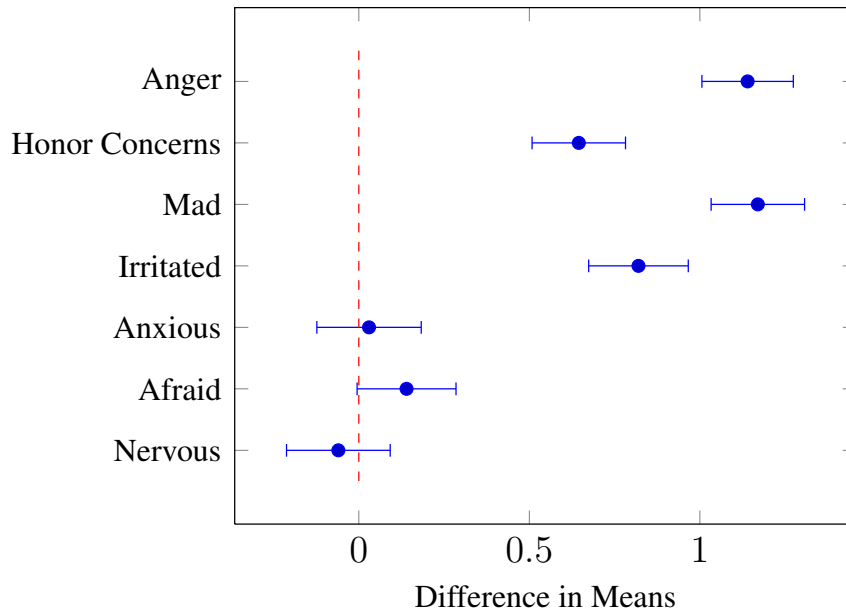


Figure 4: Emotions and Honor Concerns in Control vs Provocation Conditions

provocative effect. Not only does the treatment significantly increase anger and honor concerns while leaving anxiety unaffected, but this result is robust to whether anger and anxiety are measured in terms of similar emotions. All the emotions that relate to anger are significantly different from zero in the two conditions, whereas all the emotions that relate to anxiety are indistinguishable from zero. Thus, if I subsequently find that the treatment increases the resolve of the respondents, there are grounds to believe that this increase occurs through anger and honor concerns.

Second, the provocation treatment indeed increases the resolve of the respondents. Support for staying out, for backing down, and for war all change in the expected directions. When comparing the control condition to the provocation condition, on the seven-point scale, mean support for staying out of the conflict decreases from 4.28 to 3.49, support for backing down decreases from 3.17 to 2.61, and support for escalating to war increases from 4.56 to 4.81. These results are consistent with Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2, and Hypothesis 3. Table 2 summarizes these findings.

| Mean Support From a Seven-Point Scale | | | |
|--|-----------------|------------------|------------|
| | Stay Out | Back Down | War |
| Control | 4.28 | 3.17 | 4.56 |
| Provocation | 3.49 | 2.69 | 4.81 |
| Observations in each cell is between 173-221 | | | |

Table 2: Public Support in the Control and Provocation Conditions

Although Table 2 shows that resolve increases in the provocation condition, it does not show which of these increases are statistically significant. Figure 5 shows that the difference in support to stay out, and the difference in support to back down, are significantly different from zero at conventional levels. The difference in support for war, however, is insignificant. These results confirm Hypothesis 1 and 2, but do not confirm Hypothesis 3. Overall, the results provide strong evidence in favor of a provocative effect.

Third, do anger and honor concerns mediate these provocative effects? In other words, are anger and honor concerns doing the ‘heavy lifting,’ or is resolve higher in the provocation treatment because of other reasons? I compute the Average Causal Mediation Effect (ACME) of anger and honor concerns using the mediation package by Raymond Hicks and Dustin Tingley.¹⁸⁰ The results show that 37% of the total decline in support to stay out of the conflict, and 53% of the total decline in support for backing down, is explained by anger. These results are both substantively large and statistically significant at conventional levels. Moreover, the results are robust to the inclusion of honor concerns and “militant assertiveness” as controls.

These outcomes demonstrate that anger from a foreign state’s escalatory actions in a crisis

¹⁸⁰Raymond Hicks and Dustin Tingley (2011) “Causal Mediation Analysis.” *The Stata Journal*. 11.4, pp. 1–15; Also see Kosuke Imai et al. (2011) “Unpacking the Black Box of Causality: Learning About Causal Mechanisms from Experiments and Observational Studies.” *American Political Science Review*. 105.4, pp. 765–789.

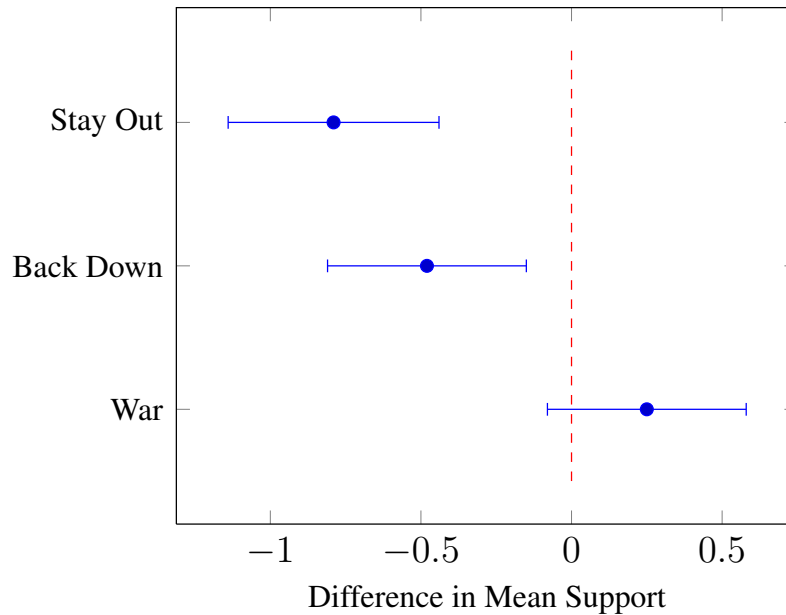


Figure 5: Resolve in the Control vs Provocation Conditions

can significantly increase resolve. The findings are also consistent with existing studies in social psychology that find anger to increase risk-taking and support for hard-lined foreign policies, as well as Hall’s claim that public outrage triggered by a provocation can have constraining effects on the leadership through a similar mechanism to audience costs.¹⁸¹

Heightened honor concerns also increase resolve. Without “militant assertiveness” as a control, 16% of the total decline in support for staying out is explained by honor concerns. This result is statistically significant at conventional levels. When “doves” and “hawks” are controlled for, however, the ACME of honor concerns is indistinguishable from zero for all three policy responses. In the next section, I show that an important reason that honor concerns become statistically ‘insignificant’ when “militant assertiveness” is controlled for is that there is a surprising interaction effect between provocation and whether the respondent is a “dove” or “hawk.” Figure 6 shows the results of the mediations analyses for anger and honor concerns, including “militant assertiveness” as a control.

¹⁸¹Lerner et al. 2003; Huddy, Feldman, and Cassese 2007; Lambert et al. 2010; and Hall 2017.

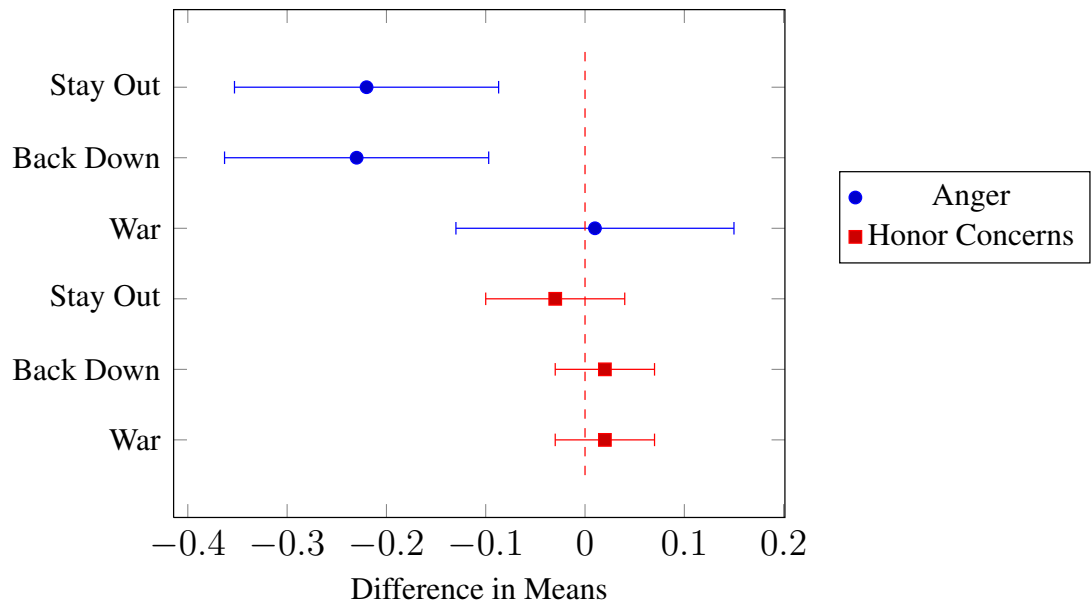


Figure 6: Mediating Effect of Anger and Honor Concerns on Resolve

Finally, I find that overall audience costs are *smaller* after a provocation. The reason is that a provocation reduces belligerence costs. As explained in Chapter 2, belligerence costs, inconsistency costs, and audience costs can be computed by comparing the support levels for the three different policy responses by the U.S. president. In particular, audience costs are a straightforward summation of belligerence costs and inconsistency costs.¹⁸² I find that in both the control and provocation conditions, belligerence costs are reversed into what I call *belligerence premiums*: support for war is higher than support for staying out. This public ‘reward’ for escalating to war jumps from 0.28 in the control condition to 1.32 in the provocation condition. This large public reward for escalating to war when the public is angrier and more concerned about honor is the principal reason that audience costs are smaller. Put differently, because a provocation reduces public support for backing down, the additional audience costs that the leader generates by making a threat and subsequently backing down are smaller. In this way, audience costs are not only different from a provocative effect, but they are conditional upon a provocative effect.

¹⁸²Kertzer and Brutger 2016.

| Mean Support From a Seven-Point Scale | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| | Audience Costs (Back Down - Stay Out) | Inconsistency Costs (Back Down - War) | Belligerence Costs (War - Stay Out) |
| Control | -1.11 | -1.39 | 0.28 |
| Provocation | -0.8 | -2.12 | 1.32 |

Table 3: Decomposing Audience Costs in the Control and Provocation Conditions

The unusual finding that there is a belligerence premium in the control condition is likely because of two reasons. First, the question on honor concerns after the first vignette may increase resolve for all respondents relative to traditional audience cost survey experiments because it can lead all respondents to think more about honor than other experiments. Second, the additional sentence in the “repel an invader” scenario in the control condition that mentions ‘the two militaries clashing’ might be more angering than the standard scenario. If either of these are true, however, it supports the view I propose in this dissertation that increased anger and honor concerns increase resolve and reduce belligerence costs.

What about inconsistency costs? As expected, inconsistency costs increase in the provocation condition: they jump from -1.39 in the control condition to -2.12 in the provocation condition. Although inconsistency costs increase, however, overall audience costs decline because the reduction – indeed reversal – in belligerence costs is greater than the increase in inconsistency costs. In fact, audience costs fall from -1.11 in the control condition to -0.8 in the provocation condition. Thus, after a provocation, not only does the composition of audience costs change, but, somewhat counterintuitively, a leader can find it harder to generate audience costs. These results, together with the change in belligerence costs, are summarized in Table 3.

Discussion

The results of the survey experiment provide strong evidence in support of the logic of provocation. When a foreign escalatory action in a crisis increases anger and honor concerns, the resolve of individuals to escalate the crisis increase. Moreover, this increase in resolve is mediated through greater anger and heightened honor concerns.

Two main areas, however, need further clarification. First, why don't honor concerns mediate resolve when "doves" and "hawks" are controlled for? One possible reason is that the current study asks the "militant assertiveness" questions at the end of the survey and hence after the provocation treatment and the question on honor concerns. Consequently, respondents in the provocation condition would have answered the militant assertiveness questions with heightened honor concerns, increased anger, and a higher support for war; in short, they could have become more "hawkish." This means that the "militant assertiveness" measure could be 'soaking up' heightened honor concerns, which, in turn, makes honor concerns appear to be statistically insignificant when both are included in the mediation analysis. I indeed find that in the provocation condition, respondents are more hawkish when answering the second "militant assertiveness" question, "The use of force only makes things worse." To be more precise, the mean value of this question is significantly different in the two conditions at statistically conventional levels. Yet, the substantive size of this difference is 0.15 – only a fraction of a point on the seven-point scale. Thus, when I exclude this question from the mediation analysis, I find that the ACME of honor concerns is still statistically insignificant. Moreover, when I only include responses to the first "militant assertiveness" question in the mediation analysis, I find that the ACME of honor concerns remains insignificant, even though the mean values of the responses to this first question are statistically indistinguishable in the provocation

and control conditions. These results suggest that the “militant assertiveness” questions ‘soaking up’ honor concerns is not a significant reason for why the mediating role of honor concerns is statistically insignificant when “doves” and “hawks” are controlled for.

Another possible reason that honor concerns don’t mediate resolve when controlling for “militant assertiveness” is that “hawks” are more easily provoked. As discussed in the theory chapter, there may be interaction effects between provocation and individual dispositions: hawks may be significantly provoked through honor concerns when doves are not, so when doves and hawks are not controlled for, honor concerns are significant. To investigate this possibility, I split the sample into doves and hawks and conduct mediation analysis of honor concerns in each subgroup. I use the second “militant assertiveness” question as my benchmark to distinguish doves and hawks, and because the mean response to this question was 3.1 on a five-point scale, I define doves as those who answered 3 (“Neither agree or disagree”) and above (“Agree” and “Strongly Agree”).

Surprisingly, I find that honor concerns significantly mediate resolve among *doves*: 17% of the total decrease in their support for staying out is explained by heightened honor concerns, and this result is statistically significant at conventional levels. Among hawks, however, the ACME of honor concerns is statistically insignificant. As a robustness check, I re-define doves as those who answered the second militant assertiveness question as 4 and above. I still find that honor concerns significantly mediate resolve among doves, while they are insignificant among hawks. In fact, with this more restrictive definition of “doves,” I find that the mediating role of honor concerns is even larger for the subgroup: 20% of the total increase in support for staying out is mediated by heightened honor concerns, and this result is statistically significant at conventional levels. These result show that the interaction effects of provocation are large and significant among doves but not hawks. That is, a foreign action significantly increases honor concerns and support for staying out

among doves, but the same foreign action does not increase honor concerns and support for staying out among hawks. This may be because hawks are already highly disapproving of staying out of a conflict, so the “provocativeness” of a foreign action has little effect of their support for staying out. These results are consistent with, but also extend the findings of, interactionist theories of resolve and dispositional theories of foreign policy.¹⁸³

A second caveat is that the current study does not measure risk-preferences directly. An alternative research design would have been to conduct two separate survey or laboratory experiments: one to study whether a particular provocation vignette changes the value of dispositional factors, such as risk-taking, and a second to study how such a provocative vignette affects resolve. If the first-stage of such a study is successful, however, it would largely confirm the findings of existing studies. As discussed in the theory chapter, existing studies in social psychology find that foreign actions against one’s state, such as terrorist attacks, can increase anger, risk-preferences, and support for more hard-lined foreign policies.¹⁸⁴ The current study builds onto and extends these findings in two ways. First, it finds that escalatory actions by a foreign state during an *interstate crisis* can also heighten anger and honor concerns. Second, it finds that heightened anger and honor concerns increase resolve principally by reducing support for staying out or backing down. None of the studies that investigate the effects of terrorist attacks cited above investigate these two dependent variables. In this regard, my findings are consistent with Dafoe and Weiss, and Dafoe, Hatz, and Zhang, who find that support for “not escalating” drastically falls after a provocative coercive action in a crisis context.¹⁸⁵ Yet, the current study also differs from these existing studies because Dafoe and his colleagues do not investigate the role of anger.

¹⁸³Kertzer 2016; and Brutger and Kertzer 2018.

¹⁸⁴Lerner et al. 2003; Huddy, Feldman, and Cassese 2007; and Lambert et al. 2010.

¹⁸⁵Dafoe and Weiss 2016; and Dafoe, Hatz, and Zhang 2017.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I tested the logic of provocation at the individual level with a survey experiment on the U.S. public. The results strongly support my theory: an escalatory action by a foreign state during a crisis that increases anger and honor concerns increases resolve. When Americans are more angered by a foreign state's actions, or find the foreign state's actions increase their concerns about the national honor of the United States, they are significantly less supportive of not escalating the crisis. Moreover, when a foreign action provokes Americans, they are more punishing of the president for making a threat and subsequently backing down from that threat. Indeed, greater anger is directly responsible for more than a third of the reduction in support to not escalate and more than half of the reduction in support for making a threat and subsequently backing down. Thus, if one state's actions during a crisis increase anger and honor concerns for individuals in the adversarial state, these individuals will become more resolved to escalate the crisis. These results indicate that provocative effects can significantly incentivize states to escalate crises.

At the state level, greater public resolve increases the leadership's costs of backing down. In democratic countries such as the United States, these constraining effects of increased public resolve may be particularly acute. In autocratic regimes, the constraining effects of public opinion are likely to matter less, but we can speculate that similar provocative effects may arise for the autocrat's relevant audience, such as members of the elite or the military. Furthermore, the surprising finding in the current study that heightened honor concerns are significantly more likely to increase the resolve of "doves" rather than "hawks" is particularly worrisome because it suggests that provocative effects will change the preferences of precisely those groups who we usually depend on to have a pacifying effect on decisions to escalate, such as doves in the administration or dovish academics.

To be sure, decisions to escalate during a crisis are not solely dependent on how provocative a foreign state's actions are. And drawing implications for leaders from a survey experiment on the public raises issues of external validity. I address these two concerns in the following chapters. In the next chapter, I integrate the findings of the survey experiment into the standard crisis bargaining model to develop three formal, game-theoretic models and analyze how provocative effects impact crisis escalation when states take into account a variety of strategic considerations. The discussion in that chapter is free from mathematical expressions as the details of the formal models are deferred to Appendix B. In Chapters 5, 6, and 7, I examine five cases to demonstrate how the logic of provocation can affect both leaders and the public in real crises.

CHAPTER 4 : Signaling, Crisis Bargaining, and Strategic Uses of Provocation

In their 1977 classic, *Conflict Among Nations*, Snyder and Diesing argue that “successful coercion while minimizing [the] risk [of war] also requires avoiding provocativeness in one’s threats and declarations.”¹⁸⁶ If coercive actions during a crisis have a provocative effect that increase the adversary’s resolve to escalate, then states may well want to take coercive actions that avoid provocative effects to achieve their goals of coercive diplomacy. As intuitive as the ‘avoid provocation’ dictum may sound, however, it requires clarification. As Fearon points out, a more provocative threat could signal greater resolve to the adversary and help the coercer induce the adversary to back down.¹⁸⁷ Conversely, avoiding provocation may signal weakness, invite further escalation, and lead to unwanted crisis outcomes. Should states avoid provocative actions during crises, or can provocative actions signaling resolve to aid coercive diplomacy? And if provocative actions can help coercive diplomacy, when do provocative effects lead to unwanted crisis escalation and conflict?

The short answer is that it depends on the strategies that states adopt. In this chapter, I show that provocation can be strategically beneficial for states looking to coerce their adversaries even when provoking the adversary increases the probability of war. Furthermore, I identify and model three different common strategies that states might use to take advantage of the logic of provocation, despite the potential risk of war. I do so by integrating the results of the survey experiment into the standard crisis bargaining model and developing three new game-theoretic models. Each formal model analyzes a different strategic usage of the logic

¹⁸⁶Snyder and Diesing 1977, p. 218.

¹⁸⁷Fearon 1992, pp. 110, 173.

of provocation. The first shows that a defending state can set up a tripwire/naval blockade to place the burden of provocation on the aggressor and deter challenges to the status quo. The second demonstrates how states can rationally engage in deliberate provocations to signal resolve, such as China's decision to bombard the Taiwan Strait in 1996 or North Korea's decision to bombard Yeonpyeong Island in 2010. The third shows how states can use paramilitary forces in "gray-zone" conflicts to make territorial gains while avoiding overt provocations, such as China's use of maritime militia forces in the South China Sea today. No prior knowledge of game theory is required to follow the discussion in this chapter. Mathematical expressions, as well as the proof and details of the models, are fully deferred to Appendix B.

The findings in this chapter complement the findings in the other empirical chapters in two respects. Because the models are abstract and deductive, they generalize my claims about provocation in interstate crises beyond my case studies. Moreover, because the models demonstrate that provocation can impact a variety of crisis situations and signaling strategies, they suggest that the logic of provocation is more pervasive in international politics than commonly thought.

The models also contribute to the existing literature on crisis bargaining. First, the deliberate provocation model challenges the notion that provocation should be avoided in crises by demonstrating how and under what conditions deliberate provocations can signal resolve. Second, the models in this chapter are the first to formalize a logic of gray zone conflicts and a hand-tying mechanism of tripwires. And third, the gray zone conflict model demonstrates that even within the assumptions of the standard crisis bargaining model, such as war being costly, the logic of provocation can rationally lead to an inadvertent war in which two initially unresolved states provoke each other during the course of a crisis and end up tying each other's hands.

The next section briefly discusses the costs and benefits of using game theoretic models to study provocative effects in crises. The subsequent sections each analyze a different strategic usage of the logic of provocation. The final section summarizes and concludes.

The Advantages and Disadvantages of Game Theory

One state's decision to escalate during a crisis rests on a confluence of factors. Even when we make the assumption that a state is a unitary actor, whether a state escalates depends on a number of considerations such as how much it values the stake compared to incurring the costs of war, how much it believes the adversary values the stake enough to fight rather than back down, how much its beliefs about the adversary change after the adversary attempts to signal its resolve, and how much its own actions provoke and change the adversary's decision calculus to escalate. Thinking through one state's decision calculus to escalate during a crisis can thus get quite complicated, but thinking through whether a crisis will escalate and lead to war is still more complex because we must take into account the interactive effects of the adversary's strategic calculations as well.

As Powell points out, game theory is a specialized tool for analyzing situations in which actors are "strategically interdependent in the sense that each actor's optimal course of action depends on what the other actors will do."¹⁸⁸ As Michael Chwe puts it, "[g]ame theory considers interactions among two or more [actors] and is built upon rational choice theory, which looks at the choice of a single individual."¹⁸⁹ "Individual choices can be quite complicated," he continues, "but [game-theorists] model them crudely in order to focus on their interaction, how each [actor's] choice depends on the choice of others."¹⁹⁰ Thus, the focus of game theory is on the strategic interaction of actors who each wants to make

¹⁸⁸Powell 1999, p. 34.

¹⁸⁹Chwe 2013, p. 9.

¹⁹⁰Ibid., p. 15.

optimal choices. The two key objectives of game theoretic analysis are to understand the decision making rationale of each actor within a strategic context, and to explain the overall outcome that the interaction of their decisions produce. For example, in the “prisoner’s dilemma,” once we carefully consider each prisoner’s decision calculus, we can explain the tragic outcome that the prisoners arrive at through the interaction of their decisions.¹⁹¹

What is the theoretical purchase of game theory for this study, and at what cost does it come? In addition to the general benefits of gaining greater internal validity of deductive logics, game theoretic modeling allows me to address specific questions such as the following: Can deliberately provoking an adversary to signal resolve be a rational strategy? If so, under what conditions? Can two states that are unresolved at the beginning of a crisis provoke each other and tragically end up in an inadvertent war when each are making optimal choices? If so, how? Other benefits of using game theory arise from following the standard crisis bargaining model in particular. Injecting the role of provocative effects into the standard model allows me to see not only how the bargaining dynamics and outcomes of that model change, but how the rational causes of war that are derived from that model, such as the role of private information and the incentives to misrepresent them, are affected by the inclusion of provocative effects.

The benefits of using game theory don’t come for free. In addition to the well-known critiques of game theoretic models in general, such as the claim that they make oversimplifying assumptions, the models in this chapter face several potential criticisms specific to the study of provocation.¹⁹² Most importantly, skeptics might point out that the models do not test the individual-level mechanisms of provocative effects. The

¹⁹¹See, for example, Jervis 1978, p. 171.

¹⁹²Game theorists might counter that non-formal theorizing often entails too many implicit assumptions. For a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of formal modeling, see, for example, Powell 1999, pp. 24-38.

crisis bargaining models developed in this chapter are at the state-level of analysis, and injecting the role of provocative effects into crisis bargaining dynamics require modeling assumptions of how provocative effects operate at the individual level and how they are transmitted to the state level. My modeling assumptions of these individual-level provocative effects, however, are based on the findings from the survey experiment in Chapter 3, where I test the microfoundations of the logic of provocation. The survey experiment found that provocative effects reduce a state's political costs of escalation by increasing the public's resolve. I thus model provocative effects at the state level as an increase in public resolve. In effect, this modeling device is similar to the way that audience costs are modelled, especially how one state's actions can increase the adversary's audience costs: provocative effects increase the adversary's resolve at the state level by making backing down relatively harder than escalation, thereby having a hand-tying effect on the adversary.¹⁹³

Finally, skeptics of the models may also question whether anger and honor concerns should be analyzed within a rationalist framework at all. The extent to which emotions, psychology, and non-material factors are consistent with a rational choice paradigm is fiercely contested.¹⁹⁴ Despite the ongoing debate, some authors, such as Barry O'Neill and Thomas Dolan, have integrated honor and other non-material factors into game theoretic models of international politics.¹⁹⁵ Herbert Simon even goes so far as to claim that "in order to have anything like a complete theory of human rationality, we have to understand what role emotion plays in it."¹⁹⁶ The integration of anger and honor concerns into the

¹⁹³On increasing the adversary's audience costs, see Kurizaki 2007. On the difference between a provocative effect on the adversary's public and increasing the adversary's audience costs, see the discussion in Chapter 2.

¹⁹⁴See, for example, Fearon and Wendt 2002; Rose McDermott (2004) *Political Psychology in International Relations*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, pp. 14-17; and Stephen Peter Rosen (2005) *War and Human Nature*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press

¹⁹⁵See, for instance, O'Neill 1999; and Dolan 2015.

¹⁹⁶Herbert A. Simon (1983) *Reason in Human Affairs*. Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, p. 29.

models developed in this chapter, however, are justified with a more modest claim. The key is to realize that only a specific dimension of anger and honor concerns need modeling: the causal effect that anger and honor concerns have on increasing resolve. The game theoretic models in this chapter neither attempt nor require the modeling of all the ways in which anger and honor concerns affect crises because that is not what my theory tries to explain. Instead, provocative effects are conceptualized as a specific type of causal effect that one state's escalatory actions have on increasing its adversary's resolve, and the logic of provocation that explains the causal mechanisms is based on experimental results in Chapter 3 that find anger and honor concerns to have a causal impact on resolve. Thus, the models in this chapter translate these causal effects of anger and honor concerns on resolve into the crisis bargaining framework.

Adding Provocation to the Classic Crisis Bargaining Model

What happens to the standard crisis bargaining model when we add provocative effects? As mentioned above, based on the survey experiment results in Chapter 3, I operationalize provocative effects as an increase in the resolve of the adversary's public, and this mechanism is akin to increasing the adversary's audience costs. Thus, provocative effects have a hand-tying effect on the adversary.¹⁹⁷ To see this, recall that the survey experiment finds that a foreign action that angers and increases honor concerns for the adversary's public reduces both public support for not escalating and public support for backing down after escalating. These changes in public support essentially make escalating less costly for the adversary's leadership: assuming that the adversary's leaders are accountable to the public (or are constrained by some group, such as elites or the military), all things equal, the relative preference of the adversary's leaders between backing down and escalating

Also see, Jon Elster (1996) "Rationality and the Emotions." *The Economic Journal*. 106.438, pp. 1386–1397.

¹⁹⁷On hand-tying effects and audience costs, see Fearon 1994, 1997.

tilts more towards the latter.¹⁹⁸ Whether the adversary's hands actually get tied – whether the balance fully tilts in favor of escalating and gets 'locked in' – however, depends on how large the provocative effect is and what other factors in the crisis can counter-act the provocative effect.

Injecting provocative effects operationalized in this way into the standard crisis bargaining model shows that crises become more dangerous and the prospects of successful coercive diplomacy become unambiguously worse. Despite potential complications, such as how other factors might counter-act provocative effects, this result is straightforward to argue. Consider a situation similar to the “repel an invader” scenario in which a defender issues an ultimatum to an aggressor to stop its belligerent behavior, as in Figure 7. If the defender's ultimatum has a provocative effect on the aggressor, compared to the standard model in which no provocative effects exist, the aggressor will become more resolved to fight with the defender and thus more likely to reject the defender's threat. All things equal, in this simplistic account, provocative effects increase the likelihood of war compared to the standard model.¹⁹⁹ Conversely, if a defender issues an ultimatum to compel an aggressor to cede some territory, but the ultimatum has a provocative effect, one of two outcomes would pertain depending on variants of the standard model: the aggressor would be less willing to cede any given amount that the defender demands, which increases the likelihood of war, or the defender would anticipate this and lower her demands, so that defender is able to roll back the aggressor to a lesser degree. Both of these outcomes are worse for the defender than compared to the standard model. The overall conclusion that we can draw from injecting provocative effects into the standard crisis bargaining model is that when

¹⁹⁸See Appendix B for details.

¹⁹⁹War would only arise if the defender is resolved for war, however, and so it is within this parameter space in which the likelihood of war increases. This account, moreover, does not consider how a provocative effect can signal resolve because additional manipulations must be made to the standard model to include such dynamics. See the following sections in this chapter.

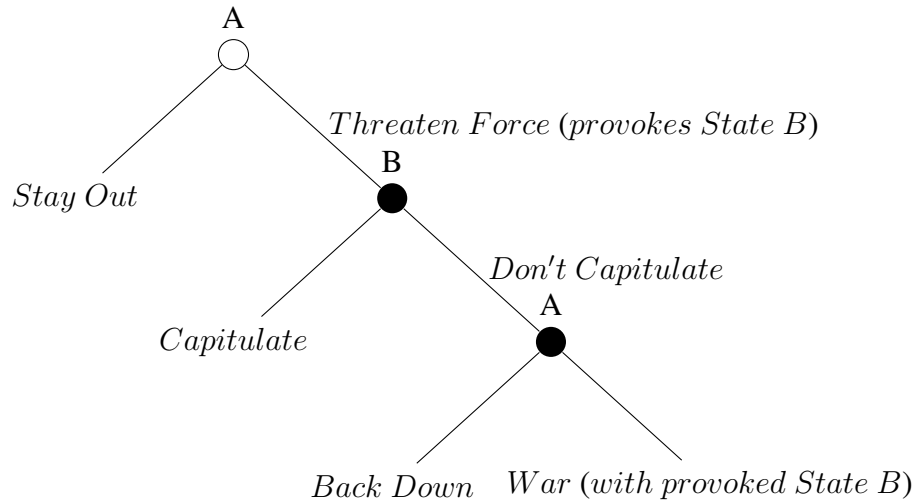


Figure 7: Standard Crisis Bargaining Model with Provocative Effect on State B

attempts at coercion have a provocative effect, they unambiguously undermine the goals of coercive diplomacy.

But do provocative effects always undermine coercive diplomacy? In the following three sections, I examine how the logic of provocation can be used to achieve the goals of coercive diplomacy through different military signaling strategies in crises.

Tripwires and Naval Blockades

Since the Cold War, the United States has stationed troops in South Korea to serve as “tripwire” forces. As Schelling observed, by placing U.S. troops in harms way, tripwire forces ensure that the United States intervenes in the event of a local conflict, and by ensuring U.S. intervention, they have a deterrent effect.²⁰⁰ But how do tripwire forces signal a state’s resolve to intervene and engage in a costly conflict? One view is that tripwires signal resolve by sinking costs. A rich literature on signaling has now emerged in IR that focuses on “costly signals” and whether and under what conditions “cheap talk”

²⁰⁰Schelling 1966, p. 47.

can credibly communicate resolve.²⁰¹ The prime examples of costly signals are sunk costs signals and hand-tying signals.²⁰² Whereas sunk costs signals operate by paying up the difference between a resolved and unresolved type, hand-tying signals operate by irreversibly tilting one's relative preference between backing down and escalating in favor of the latter. In short, whereas sunk cost signals "burn money," hand-tying signals "burn bridges."²⁰³ The rationale that tripwires signal resolve by sinking cost is thus that they paying upfront the costs of deploying and maintaining military forces that an unresolved type would be unwilling to pay.

Despite the plausibility of this argument, however, the sunk costs explanation of tripwires suffers from two important limitations. First, it contradicts a widely held belief that stationing only a small number of troops can sufficiently convey resolve. The intuition here is that compared to, say, a U.S. force deployment that is meant to defend against an attack, fewer U.S. troops need to be deployed to serve as tripwire forces as it would take relatively few U.S. military casualties in the event of an attack to ensure that the United States intervenes. More precisely, the contradiction between this view and the sunk cost argument is two-fold: whereas the sunk costs mechanism focuses on the costs paid up front, this second view focuses on the costs paid in the event that a conflict breaks out; whereas the sunk costs mechanism suggests paying a sufficiently "large" cost upfront, this second view suggests paying only a "small" cost in the event that an attack occurs. A second limitation of viewing tripwires as sunk costs is that a sunk cost mechanism cannot create resolve. The key difference between a sunk cost and hand-tying mechanism is that the latter signals resolve by creating resolve – it burns bridges when an actor might otherwise want to back down – whereas sunk costs signals convey resolve only when an actor is already resolved.

²⁰¹See, for example, Jervis 1970, Fearon 1997, Sartori 2005, Kurizaki 2007; Trager 2010; Ramsay 2011; Slantchev 2011; Yarhi-Milo 2013, and Trager 2015; and Carson and Yarhi-Milo 2017.

²⁰²On the differences between sunk cost signals and hand-tying signals, see Fearon 1997.

²⁰³On burning bridges, see Schelling 1966, pp. 43-44.

In essence, a sunk cost explanation for tripwires implies that the United States would be resolved to intervene regardless of whether U.S. troops are harmed by the outbreak of local conflict. Irrespective of whether this is factually true for the United States, at minimum, the sunk costs argument does not capture the increase in U.S. resolve that harming U.S. troops is thought to create.²⁰⁴ Thus, there is not much about ‘tripping the wire’ when tripwires are theorized in terms of sunk costs.

I argue that the logic of provocation can provide one explanation for how tripwires can create resolve when tripwire forces are harmed. The intuition is that in the event that a defending state’s tripwire forces are harmed, the defending state’s public and elites become provoked and more resolved for costly military action, and as a result, the defending state’s political costs of intervention decline. Thus, tripping the wire mobilizes domestic political opinion in favor of costly armed conflict, even if the conflict is in a remote location and the public would not otherwise support a costly intervention. From the aggressor’s point of view, when confronted with a tripwire, it must choose between backing down or provoking the defender to a greater degree than if there were no tripwire. Put differently, when confronted with a tripwire, the aggressor must choose between backing down or an action that increases the defender’s resolve so much that the defender’s hands for war could get tied. If the defender gets the tripwire right, the defender should thus be able to make the aggressor believe that tripping the wire would be sufficiently provocative as to ensure that the defender’s hands get tied. In this way, a defending state can use the logic of provocation to deter challenges to the status quo by setting up a situation in which the burden of provocation falls onto the aggressor. These dynamics are captured in the model in Figure 8.

²⁰⁴The United States may well be resolved, say, to defend South Korea in the event that North Korea invades the South, even without tripwire forces. The United States and South Korea are treaty allies.

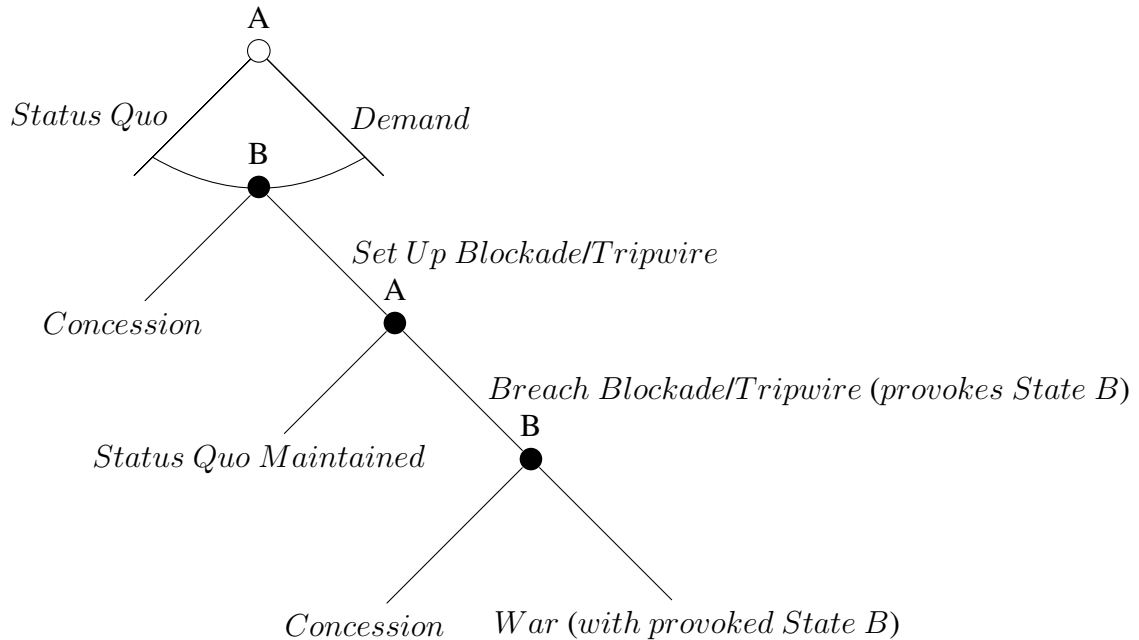


Figure 8: A Provocation Model of a Naval Blockade / Tripwire.

A similar logic operates by setting up a naval blockade. Although a naval blockade can serve multiple purposes, such as strangling a country’s economy, one purpose is to place the burden of provocation on the aggressor. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, the U.S. naval “quarantine” cordoned off access to Cuba to prevent Soviet ships from delivering missiles. One important function that the quarantine served was that it placed the burden of escalation on the Soviets. As Schelling notes, by staying stationary along a path that the adversary needs to transit through, the decision to impose kinetic damage by breaking through the quarantine fell on the Soviets: the quarantine had the “quality of deterrent ‘stage-setting.’”²⁰⁵ In terms of the logic of provocation, the idea of the U.S. naval quarantine was that if the Soviets broke through the blockade forcefully, it would have such a large provocative effect on the U.S. public and elites that the United States would find it even harder to back down in the crisis – it would be compelled to retaliate and escalate the crisis. Thus, the naval quarantine during the Cuban Missile Crisis placed a burden of provocation

²⁰⁵See Schelling 1966, pp. 70, 77.

on the Soviets to deter them from advancing, and this deterrent mechanism is identical to the mechanism outlined in the tripwire model. Through either strategy, a defender can use the logic of provocation to deter challenges to the status quo.

Signaling Resolve With Deliberate Provocations

States sometimes deliberately provoke an adversary to entice them into war. Bismarck adopted this strategy to provoke the Franco-Prussian War; terrorists and insurgents deliberately provoke governments to overreact with violence and repression so that the local population becomes more aggrieved and supportive of the rebel's cause.²⁰⁶ At other times, however, states deliberately provoke their adversary to signal resolve. When China deliberately bombarded the immediate waters of Taiwan during the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1995-96, or when North Korea deliberately bombarded South Korea's Yeonpyeong Island in 2010, their deliberately provocative behavior appeared to signal resolve to use force. But if provocative effects increase the adversary's resolve and make the adversary more likely to escalate, how can deliberate provocations signal resolve and coerce the adversary to back down?

The logic of provocation in the tripwire/naval blockade model can be reversed to demonstrate how engaging in deliberately provocative actions can signal resolve. The intuition is that although provocative effects increase the adversary's resolve and risk making the adversary resolved for war, by running a higher risk of making the adversary resolved for war than an unresolved type would be willing to run, a resolved type of foreign state can signal its resolve. Because a provocative effect increases the adversary's resolve, even an initially unresolved adversary can 'switch' to become resolved for war if it is sufficiently provoked. But if the foreign state has imperfect information about how resolved

²⁰⁶See, for instance, Hall 2017; Kydd and Walter 2006; Carter 2016; and Blankenship 2018.

the adversary initially is and how much more resolved the adversary will become after being provoked, from the foreign state's perspective, provoking the adversary runs a risk of making the adversary resolved for war. If the foreign state is a resolved type, however, it would be more willing to take this risk of provoking the adversary and tying the adversary's hands than an unresolved type. Thus, the resolved type can 'outbid' an unresolved type by taking a higher risk of provocation to signal its resolve. I refer to this strategy of deliberate provocation to signal resolve as *manipulating the risk of provocation*.

For this strategy to work, however, several conditions must be met. One condition is that the adversary must not become too provoked as to actually become resolved for war: the adversary's hands must not get tied. Even if the foreign state is able to signal its resolve by engaging in deliberately provocative behavior, if the provocation 'overshoots' and makes the adversary resolved for war, then the signaling strategy will fail at coercing the adversary to back down.²⁰⁷ Consequently, the strategy requires careful calibration of deliberate provocations by the foreign state that hit a provocation 'sweet spot.' Countries such as North Korea are well known to calibrate its level of provocation just enough to aggravate its adversary and signal its willingness to use force while stopping short of provoking all-out war. In Chapter 6, I also show that China attempted to use a similar signaling strategy against the Soviet Union during the Sino-Soviet Border Conflict of 1969. A second condition, as the game theoretic model finds, is that such a 'sweet spot' must exist. If 'outbidding' an unresolved type by running a higher risk of tying the adversary's hands necessitates actually having to tie the adversary's hands, then a deliberate provocation strategy to signal resolve would be counterproductive.

²⁰⁷Even if the foreign state ultimately fails to coerce the adversary to back down through its provocative signal, however, the strategy may be rational for the foreign state in expectation. Put differently, the foreign state may still prefer to run the risk of failing by overshooting than to not try to send a provocative signal at all.

Note that signaling by manipulating the risk of provocation differs from brinkmanship.²⁰⁸ Observers sometimes refer to provocative strategies as brinkmanship because engaging in escalatory actions can lead to accidents that trigger spirals of unwanted escalation. Yet, as discussed in Chapter 2, brinkmanship differs fundamentally from the logic of provocation because the former relies on the probability of a random occurrence – an accident. In contrast, manipulating the risk of provocation does not require any accident to occur. Instead, the risk that is being manipulated is provoking the adversary so much that the adversary becomes resolved for war. The difference between brinkmanship and manipulating the risk of provocation is thus in the type of risk that is being manipulated. The former locates uncertainty in a random event occurring – autonomous risk – whereas the latter locates uncertainty in factors that are private information to the adversary: how resolved the adversary initially is and how resolved the adversary will become when it is provoked.

In sum, although provocative effects increase the adversary's resolve and make the adversary more likely to escalate, if the foreign state engages in a sufficiently provocative action that runs a higher risk of making the adversary resolved for war than an unresolved type is willing to run, then it can signal its resolve. Signaling resolve, however, does not guarantee that the adversary backs down. If by taking a sufficiently high risk of provocation the foreign state ends up making the adversary resolved for war, then the foreign state's gambit would fail at coercing the adversary to back down even though it is able to signal resolve. Only when the foreign state is able to calibrate its level of provocation so that it hits a provocation 'sweet spot' that is sufficiently high to outbid an unresolved type, but not high enough to make its adversary resolved for war, can the strategy of manipulating the

²⁰⁸On brinkmanship and game-theoretic models of brinkmanship, see, for example, Schelling 1966; Powell 1985; Powell 1990; and Robert Powell (2015) "Nuclear Brinkmanship, Limited War, and Military Power." *International Organization*. 69.3, pp. 589–626.

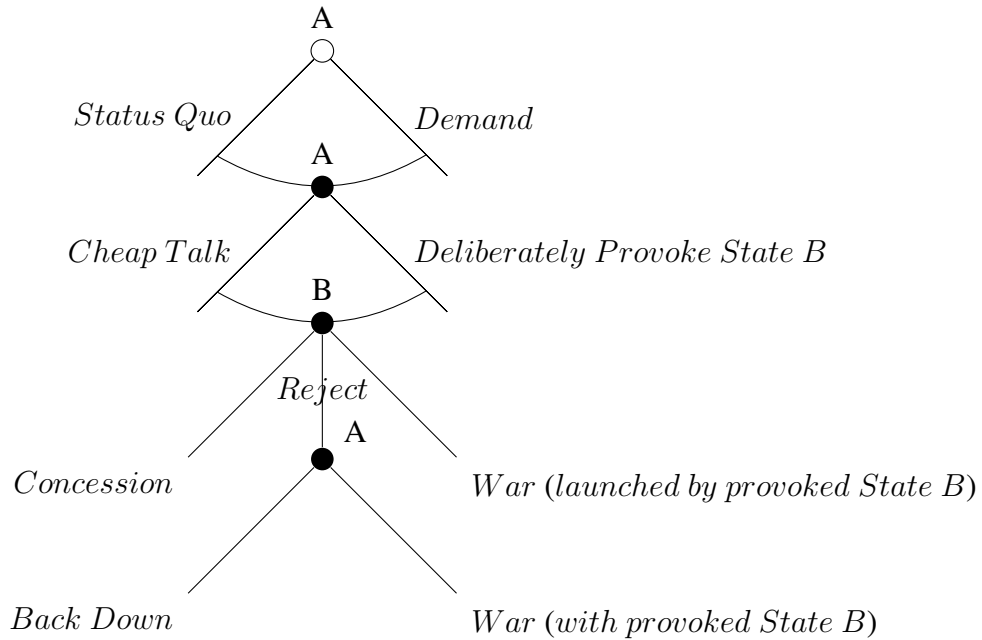


Figure 9: A Model of Signaling Through Deliberate Provocation.

risk of provocation succeed.

Gray Zone Conflicts, Military Skirmishes, and Inadvertent War

Gray zone conflicts are an increasingly menacing challenge to defense analysts and policymakers around the globe.²⁰⁹ These conflicts are characterized by means of violence short of war and the use of civilians and other non-conventional tools in an attempt by one side to revise the status quo. For example, China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) commands to a significant degree local “fishermen militia” forces to exert a Chinese presence in the South China Sea, and Russia appears to have resorted to military personnel in unmarked uniforms – “little green men” – to extend its control in Ukraine.²¹⁰ Why

²⁰⁹On gray zone conflicts, see, for example, Chang, FitzGerald, and Jackson 2015.

²¹⁰On China’s gray zone strategy and maritime militia, see, for example, Conor M. Kennedy and Andrew S. Erickson (Mar. 2017) “China’s Third Sea Force, The People’s Armed Forces Maritime Militia: Tethered to the PLA.” *China Maritime Report No. 1*. China Maritime Studies Institute. U.S. Naval War College; and Liff 2018. On Russia’s intervention in Ukraine, see, for example, Roy Allison (2014) “Russian ‘Deniable’ Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules.” *International Affairs*. 90.6, pp. 1255–1297.

do states engage in conflicts in this “gray zone”? A central reason is to avoid provoking a backlash of escalation to overt military force. The aggressor tries to revise, and the defender tries to prevent a radical revision of the status quo without escalating to militarized violence. The corollary to this incentive to stay within the gray zone, however, is that gray zone conflicts are also typified by the presence of an escalatory danger to open armed conflict and war. Both states want to avoid provoking their adversary precisely because their adversary might become willing to resort to armed conflict and war if sufficiently provoked. On the one hand, this danger induces caution; but on the other hand, it perversely incentivizes states to take advantage of their opponent’s inhibitions to engage in provocative behavior.

I thus analyze a strategic interaction in which an aggressor, who is known to be unresolved to initiate a war outright to revise the status quo, nevertheless engages in gray zone conflicts in an attempt to revise the status quo by taking advantage of the defender’s inhibitions of provoking the aggressor. How can an aggressor who is known to be unresolved for war signal resolve to a defender and coerce the defender to concede a stake?²¹¹ For example, if states correctly believe that China is unresolved to launch a war outright to take control of the islands within its “nine-dashed line” in the South China Sea, how can the Chinese coerce an opponent to concede an island?

The logic of such a strategy can be demonstrated by combining the two arrows of provocation in the two strategies discussed above (i.e. the tripwire/naval blockade strategy and the deliberate provocation strategy). The strategy thus involves two steps: the aggressor first deliberately provokes a defender through gray zone aggravations, and then places the burden of provocation on the defender so that the defender fears provoking the aggressor and concedes the stake in dispute. The game-theoretic model shows not only that this

²¹¹To be clear, I use the phrase ‘aggressor’ to refer to a state that implements a strategy to change the current division of the stakes in its favor. Thus, I use it for ease of exposition rather than as a pejorative term.

strategy can be rational, but that it can successfully coerce a defender to concede a stake, even when the defender knows that the aggressor is currently unresolved to initiate a war. The risk of this strategy, however, is that it can lead to an inadvertent war.

The intuition of the logic is as follows. The aggressor deliberately provokes the defender through gray zone aggravations to signal that it will *become resolved in the event that it is provoked back*. Thus, although the aggressor is not yet resolved for war, it signals that it is a type that will become resolved for war if sufficiently provoked. The aggressor then places the burden of provocation on the defender, such as by encircling the defender's militia forces, so that the defender must forcefully break the encirclement to provoke the aggressor back, initiate armed conflict, or concede the stake in dispute. If the aggressor is able to signal its type by hitting a provocation 'sweet spot,' and then sets up a situation in which the defender must provoke the aggressor back to a sufficient degree, then the aggressor can revise the status quo without using overt military force. By implementing this assertive strategy, however, the aggressor risks 'overly provoking' the defender so that a defender who would have been willing to concede the stake unintentionally becomes resolved to initiate war. In this case, since the aggressor is also not yet resolved for war (i.e. it has not yet been sufficiently provoked), the aggressor's gambit fails, and both states end up in an inadvertent war.

A similar dynamic can play out with military skirmishes. Although such skirmishes use military troops rather than militia or constabulary forces, they operate below the level of a military battle and can have a provocative effect on the adversary. By initiating skirmishes to provoke a defender, and then mobilizing troops to block the defender's path of retreat, the aggressor can employ a strategy akin to the gray zone strategy above to coerce a defender to concede a stake through means short of war. This strategy differs from engaging in brinkmanship strategies where skirmishes risk accidental escalation to all out

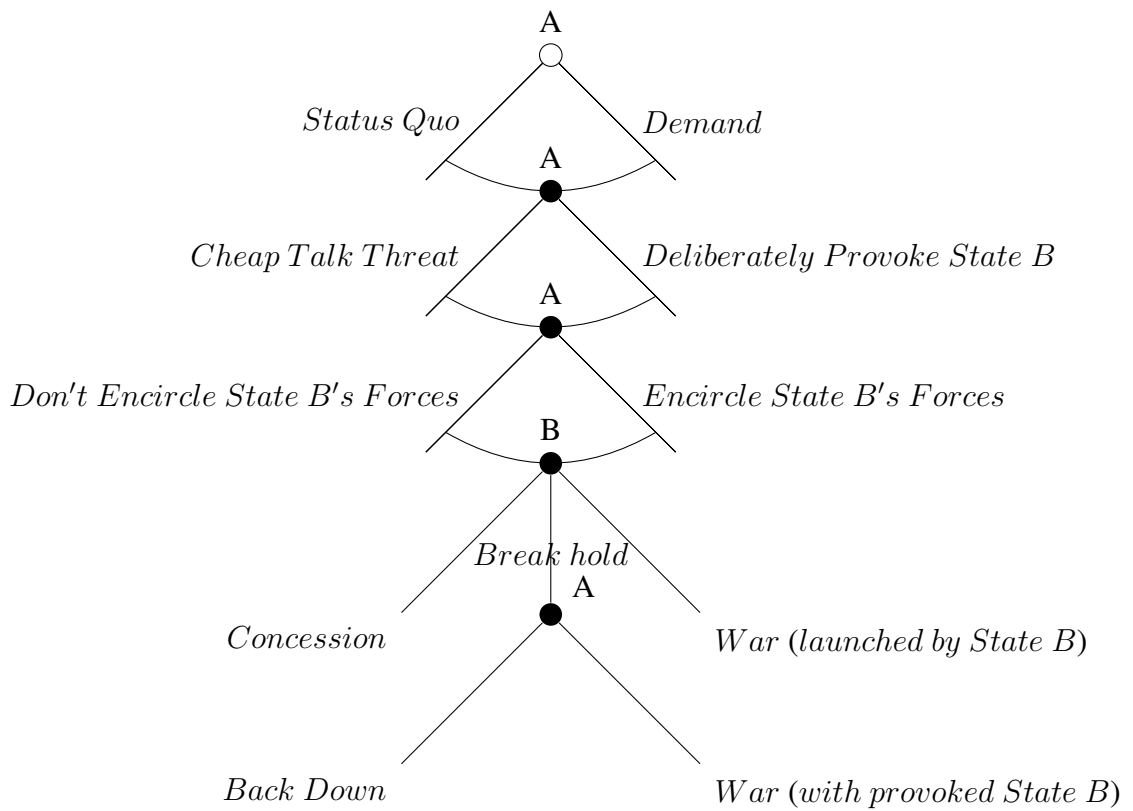


Figure 10: A Model of Gray Zone Conflicts / Military Skirmishes and Inadvertent War.

war, strategies to present the defender with a *fait accompli*, or strategies that deliberately provoke an opponent to goad them into initiating a war.²¹²

Conclusion

Thomas Schelling, an early proponent of using game theory to analyze international politics, once lamented that

“when we characterize American troops in Europe as a trip wire or plate-glass window or propose that a threatened enemy be provided a face-saving exit; when we advert to the impotence of a threat that is so enormous that the threatener would obviously shrink from carrying it out or observe that taxi drivers are given a wide berth because they are known to be indifferent to dents and scratches, we are evidently deep in game theory. Yet formal game theory has contributed little to the clarification of these ideas.”²¹³

In this chapter, I developed game-theoretic models to analyze the strategy of creating credible commitments through tripwires, the strategy of signaling resolve through deliberate provocations, and the strategy of engaging in “gray-zone” conflicts. Not only are the models the first to formalize the logic of these strategies, but they all do so by integrating provocative effects into the standard crisis bargaining framework.

The results of the game-theoretic analysis shed new light on these strategies and the role of provocation in crises. First, contrary to the view that tripwires merely sink costs, an aggressor’s actions that ‘trip the wire’ can have a hand-tying effect on the defender

²¹²On brinkmanship, see Schelling 1966. On the strategy of *fait accomplis*, see Ahmer Tarar (Dec. 2017) “A Strategic Logic of the Military *Fait Accompli*.” *International Studies Quarterly*. 60.4, pp. 742–752; and Dan Altman (Dec. 2017) “By *Fait Accompli*, Not Coercion: How States Wrest Territory from Their Adversaries.” *International Studies Quarterly*. 61.4, pp. 881–891. On goading strategies, see Kydd and Walter 2006; Carter 2016; and Hall 2017.

²¹³Schelling 1960, p. 119.

by provoking and increasing the resolve of the defender's public, thus increasing public support for military action even in remote locations where the public might otherwise be unwilling to support a costly conflict. Second, contrary to the view that provocative actions should be avoided to achieve the goals of coercive diplomacy, deliberately provoking an adversary can signal resolve and induce an adversary to back down by running a risk of tying the adversary's hands that only a resolved state would be willing to take. Third, contrary to the view that engaging in low-level conflicts can lead to war because of threat perceptions or accidents that spiral out of control, two states that are unresolved for war at the outset of a crisis can end up in a deliberately initiated war by taking rational steps that nevertheless provoke their adversary and ties their adversary's hands.

More broadly, this chapter makes clear that provocative effects in interstate crises are not always unwanted. States can use the logic of provocation to their advantage through multiple strategies, and provocative effects impact crisis escalation and the outbreak of war depending on the strategies that states adopt. These considerations become important as we examine historical case studies in the following two chapters because explaining how provocative effects lead to crisis escalation is not as simple as saying that one state's actions provoked its adversary to escalate. Instead, we must understand the strategic considerations that the states in the crises were making, such as whether they were trying to use the logic provocation to their advantage, and how they managed the trade-offs of avoiding provocation and increasing coercive pressure. Thus, the case studies in the following chapters both illustrate various aspects of the models discussed in this chapter and demonstrate that the logic of provocation can importantly affect crisis escalation dynamics and outcomes.

CHAPTER 5 : The Sino-India War of 1962

“He who plays with fire will eventually be consumed by fire.”

– From diplomatic note sent by China to India. September 13, 1962.²¹⁴

The Sino-India War of 1962 erupted over a territorial dispute on the border and claimed more than 2,000 lives. The Himalayan territory that the two sides ended up fighting over, however, was so remote that before the crisis, the Indians were oblivious to months of construction work by the Chinese to build a new highway through it. Indeed, at the outset of the crisis, India’s Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, publicly declared that “nothing can be a more amazing folly than for two great countries like India and China to go into a major conflict and war for the possession of a few mountain peaks, however beautiful the mountain peaks might be.”²¹⁵ Similarly, China’s Chairman, Mao Zedong, assured Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev at the beginning of the crisis that “[our] border conflict with India – this is only a marginal border issue, not a clash between the two governments...The border issue with India will be decided through negotiations.”²¹⁶ Why did China and India fail to arrive at a negotiated settlement regarding their border and commit the “great folly” of going to war over “a few mountain peaks”?

The logic of provocation helps explain why China and India ended up in a war in three

²¹⁴“Note given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beijing, to the Embassy of India in China, 13 September 1962.” The expression starts mid-sentence. See Ministry of External Affairs of India (1963) *Notes, Memoranda and Letters Exchanged Between the Governments of India and China. July 1962-October 1962*. White Paper VII. New Delhi: Government of India, p. 68.

²¹⁵Ministry of External Affairs of India (1962.) *Prime Minister on Sino-Indian Relations*. Vol. 1. Part I. New Delhi: Government of India. Statement made in the Indian parliament on September 10, 1959.

²¹⁶Archive of the President of the Russian Federation (APRF) (1959) ““Discussion between N.S. Khrushchev and Mao Zedong,” October 02, 1959.” *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive*, f. 52, op. 1, d. 499, ll. 1-33, copy in Volkogonov Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Translated by Vladislav M. Zubok. URL: <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112088>.

important respects. First, although Nehru initially expressed a willingness to compromise on the border in public, a provocative border incident in October 1959 hardened his resolve to resist the Chinese. Not knowing this switch in Nehru's resolve, an internal Chinese report shows that the Chinese leadership still believed that Nehru would be willing to strike a deal at the border negotiations in April 1960. Transcripts of the negotiations, however, reveal that the Indians rejected a deal even when the Chinese made multiple overtures consistent with Nehru's initial public position on the border dispute. Thus, the logic of provocation explains how provocations on the border fed into Nehru's distaste of being coerced and made him reluctant to compromise.

Second, the logic of provocation helps explain why, later in the crisis, the Indians became resolved to use military force to roll back the Chinese and risk a major conflict. The crisis escalated step by step as coercive actions of both sides provoked and increased the resolve of their opponent. The recently leaked internal Indian report of the war, the "Henderson Brooks report," reveals that although the Indian leadership made multiple efforts to avoid provoking the Chinese, in September 1962, after Chinese troops repeatedly encircled and intimidated Indian troops, the Indian leadership decided to forcefully drive back the Chinese despite protestations within the leadership and from field commanders that the Chinese might react on a larger scale. Indeed, the logic of provocation helps account for why the Indian leadership was so sanguine about the risks of an armed confrontation with China despite inadequate military preparations and escalatory actions by the Chinese that matched Indian efforts to apply coercive pressure.

Third, the logic of provocation helps explain why the Chinese initiated their "Self-Defensive Counter-Attack" that marks the beginning of the Sino-India War. Both Mao's own statements and internal Chinese documents that were captured by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency at the time show that the Chinese resisted multiple opportunities

to “counter-attack” Indian troops and decided to strike only when they gained a strong pretext. When the Indians began their “eviction” operations of the Chinese using a small military detachment and declared in public that Indian territory will be “freed” from “Chinese intruders,” the Chinese found that the political costs had declined sufficiently to launch a major military operation that penetrated deeply into Indian territory on two fronts simultaneously.

These arguments contrast with five competing explanations for the war. The diversionary war hypothesis posits that one or both sides wanted to divert domestic attention away from internal woes by escalating the border dispute to a war. The miscalculation hypothesis posits that one or both sides underestimated their opponent’s resolve to fight and unwittingly escalated the border dispute to end up in war. The classic audience costs hypothesis posits that the leadership of one or both sides attempted to ‘tie their own hands’ for war by making public statements to stand firm or mobilizing their military to increase the public costs of backing down. The security dilemma hypothesis posits that although both states merely tried to ensure their own security, one side’s actions threatened the security of the other and led to a spiral of unwanted escalation that ended in war. Finally, an extension of the security dilemma hypothesis posits that the Indians became reluctant to compromise in the border dispute because they came to believe during the course of the crisis that the Chinese would only demand more if they made a concession. As I argue later in this chapter, however, the first four arguments suffer from the limitation of being unable to explain India’s switch in resolve during the course of the crisis, and the final argument is unable to explain China’s decision to launch its “Self-Defensive Counter-Attack.” Thus, the logic of provocation contributes to the existing literature on the Sino-India War by accounting for why both state’s resolve for conflict increased at three crucial junctures during the crisis bargaining process.

The next section justifies the case study method and case selection. The subsequent sections explain the case and discuss the competing explanations for the war. The final section concludes.

Why a Case Study, and Why the 1962 War?

There are several advantages of using the case study method for the purposes of this dissertation. Above all, I can examine how significantly the logic of provocation affects escalation in real crises. This contrasts with the survey experiment in Chapter 3, which uses a hypothetical scenario, and the game-theoretic models in Chapter 4, which use abstract deductive logics. Case studies also allow me to examine how leaders are affected by the logic of provocation. Closely tracing a leader's decision to escalate a crisis using archival evidence complements both the public opinion survey experiment and the inter-state crisis bargaining models. Moreover, case studies allow me to demonstrate how to identify the logic of provocation in a crisis context. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the logic of provocation can have important unobserved consequences in crises that analysts can miss, especially when focusing solely on crisis outcomes such as MID's data set outcomes. If so, it is not always obvious where to look for evidence that the escalatory logic of provocation is in play. Analyzing a historical case in-depth can thus aid practitioners and analysts to better identify the pernicious effects of provocation in crises and distinguish these effects from alternative escalatory mechanisms.

Given these advantages of the case study method, I choose the Sino-Indian War for two reasons. First, the logic of provocation appears to be a key driver of crisis escalation, but existing accounts of the war fail to explore this logic. The crisis escalated over relatively trivial stakes – little-known territories in the Himalayas – so it seems plausible that the logic of provocation contributed to unwanted escalation. Yet, if analysts are overlooking the role

of provocation even in cases in which provocation played a crucial role, it becomes all the more important to locate, explain, and highlight this role. For instance, there is a view among Indian analysts that provocation did not play a significant role in the war because there is evidence that the Chinese assiduously prepared for their assault in October 1962.²¹⁷ This view, however, relies on the notion that provocation is only responsible for rash crisis outcomes. Second, the case appears to have important implications for understanding the possible processes of unwanted escalation in ongoing disputes today. In particular, analysts have expressed concern that disputes in the South China Sea could escalate to war even when the stakes do not appear to justify such conflict. Studying the Sino-India War could shed light on whether the logic of provocation contributed to inadvertent escalation and thus help us prevent the pathways through which provocation leads to war in the South China Sea.

Background

China and India were both young modern states when they went to war in 1962. India emerged from the grips of British colonialism in 1947 and China emerged from a “century of humiliation” to Western and Japanese encroachment when the communists established the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Although China entered the Cold War aligned with the communist block, and India pursued a policy of non-alignment, a shared sense of victimhood helped China and India overlook their ideological differences and maintain cordial relations.²¹⁸ If shared experiences were not enough, geopolitical realities pushed China and India closer together. China faced Chiang Kai-shek’s government in

²¹⁷ Author interview no. 2 in New Delhi, June 2015. The interviewee made this point without claiming that he himself ascribes to this view.

²¹⁸ See, for example, the first encounter between China’s leader Mao Zedong and India’s leader Jawaharlal Nehru. People’s Republic of China Foreign Ministry Archives (1954) ““Minutes of Chairman Mao Zedong’s First Meeting with Nehru,” October 19, 1954.” *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PRCMFA 204-00007-01, 1-10*. Obtained by Chen Jian and translated by Chen Zhihong. URL: <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117825>.

Taiwan to the east, and India faced Pakistan – a foe from the First Kashmir War of 1947 – to the west, so the Chinese and Indians had strong incentives to avoid a two-front conflict and get along. Indeed, India was an early supporter of the PRC obtaining a seat at the United Nations against Chiang Kai-shek’s Republic of China in Taiwan.²¹⁹

The same historical experiences that allowed China and India to bond, however, had also sown the seeds of tension on the border. When India gained independence, it inherited its borders from the British empire, which included the “McMahon Line” that delineated India from Tibet and other neighbors on the northeaster frontier. This McMahon Line was a product of the Simla meetings of 1914 in which the Indian foreign secretary at the time, Sir Henry McMahon, arrived at a border agreement with Tibetan delegates.²²⁰ The Chinese, however, were loath to recognize borders that the British empire had drawn both because of China’s humiliating “unequal treaties” with Britain after the Opium Wars and because the Chinese viewed border agreements made by Tibetans as agreements by a vassal state that were devoid of Beijing’s authorization.

The geopolitical calculus that pushed China and India closer together, moreover, began to change as the Chinese military moved into Tibet in 1951. When the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) consolidated communist control in Tibet, two major concerns arose for India. First, Tibet, which had a deep historical and spiritual affinity with India, would lose its autonomy. Second, and perhaps more importantly, Indian and Chinese military forces would stand face to face with each other for the first time in the long history of both nations. These concerns led to an agreement on April 29, 1954, in which India recognized Chinese sovereignty over Tibet, and China gave Tibet a special political status

²¹⁹Purnendu Kumar Banerjee (1990) *My Peking Memoirs of The Chinese Invasion of India*. New Delhi: Clarion Books, p. 53.

²²⁰See, for example, Neville Maxwell (1970) *India’s China War*. London: The Trinity Press, pp. 39-64; and Allen Whiting (1975) *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence: India and Indochina*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, pp. 3-6.

of an autonomous region.²²¹ The agreement heralded a new era of Sino-Indian friendship as the two sides jointly declared the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, known as *Panchsheel* in India. The Five Principles remain a central pillar of Chinese foreign policy to this day and include non-interference in domestic affairs and respect for territorial integrity. *Panchseel* became a hallmark of Nehru's policy of non-alignment as it eschewed violence and upheld Mahatma Gandhi's mandate for peace. The agreement over Tibet, however, did not dispel the security concerns that both states had along their border. As Figure 11 shows, China and India now shared an extensive border along the Himalayas – some 3,500km – that can be divided into the western, central, and eastern sectors. Soon after the agreement, both sides began making efforts to provide for their own security by setting up posts or building roads into border areas.²²² Because the border between the two newly founded states had never been officially delimited or demarcated, however, efforts to strengthen border control soon led to skirmishes.

Three events in 1959 threw this brewing border dispute to the forefront of domestic politics. First, in March 1959, there was a large uprising in Tibet that was heavily suppressed by the PLA. The incident resulted in the Dalai Lama fleeing to India and being granted asylum. In India, the Chinese crackdown was viewed as both a breach of the 1954 agreement that Tibet will be granted autonomy and an outrage that violated the spiritual identity of the Indian people.²²³ In China, the uprising was seen as a “provocative act” that broke the 1954 agreement as the Chinese believed that India had assisted the rebels and thus meddled in

²²¹Renmin Ribao [People's Daily] (1954) ““Agreement between the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet Region of China and India,” April 29, 1954.” *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive*. April 30. URL: <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121558>.

²²²See Wang Hongwei (2011) *A Critical Review of the Contemporary Sino-Indian Relations*. Kathmandu: Tibetology Publishing House, pp. 112-117 and Srinath Raghavan (2010) *War and Peace in Modern India*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 241-243.

²²³John Garver (2006) China's Decision for War with India in 1962. In *New Directions in the Study of Chinese Foreign Policy*. Ed. by Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross. Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 86–130, p. 98.

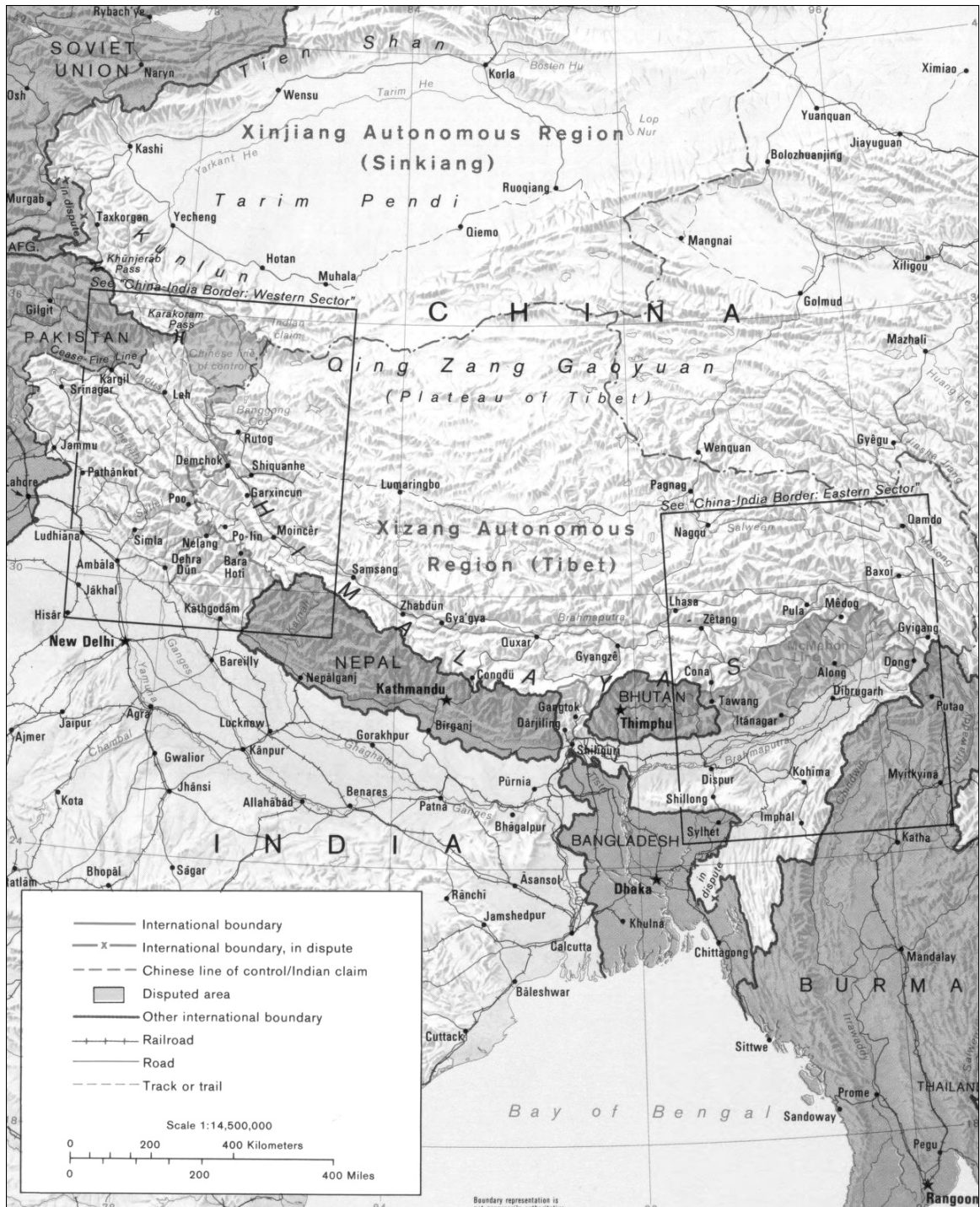


Figure 11: Map of the China-India Border. United States Central Intelligence Agency. (1988) China-India border. [Washington: Central Intelligence Agency] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2001629010>

China's internal affairs.²²⁴ The military ramifications of this incident were far reaching. The PLA forces that were mobilized to Tibet were ordered to seal-off boundary areas and prevent defeated rebels from fleeing, thus leading to new posts being built further into disputed areas by both sides. Second, on August 25, an armed clash erupted between Chinese and Indian border troops at Longju, in the eastern border region. One Indian soldier was killed and another injured.²²⁵ This incident led to a flurry of accusations from both sides that the other began the shooting, and in the words of India's Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, fostered "great resentment" towards China throughout India. Third, adding insult to injury, the Indian government released information on August 28 that China had built a new highway to Tibet and claimed that it transgressed Indian territory in the western border region, the Aksai Chin plains. Yet, the Indian government had not even known about the highway until embassy officials in Beijing read about it in a Chinese newspaper one month prior to its opening.²²⁶ News about the Chinese highway not only inflamed Indian public opinion, but in the Indian parliament, political elites called for the highway to be bombed: "Will not the Government of India at least consider the advisability of bombing the [Chinese] road built in our own territories out of existence?"²²⁷

September 1959- April 1960: Road to Negotiations

Despite these developments, in September 1959, neither side expected a war. The Indians, moreover, hinted at a willingness to make territorial concessions. By the time of the

²²⁴Liu Xuecheng (1994) *The Sino-Indian Border Dispute and Sino-Indian Relations*. Lanham, MD : University Press of America, p. 24. On recent revelations that India was cooperating with the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), see Bruce Riedel (2015) *JFK's Forgotten Crisis: Tibet, The CIA, and Sino-Indian War*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

²²⁵P.B Sinha, A.A Athale, and S.N. Prasad, eds. (1992) *History of the Conflict with China, 1962*. New Delhi: History Division, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, p. 33.

²²⁶Subimal Dutt (1977) *With Nehru in the Foreign Office*. Calcutta: Minerva Associates (Publications) PVT., p. 117.

²²⁷Question raised by D.P. Singh to Prime Minister Nehru in Lok Sabha (lower house), August 28, 1959. Ministry of External Affairs of India 1962. P. 99.

negotiations in April 1960, however, room for a negotiated settlement all but disappeared because a provocative incident occurred.

Soon after the armed clashes at Longju, Nehru made it publicly clear that he held two positions regarding the border dispute. First, regarding the disputed areas of territory, Nehru displayed a willingness to compromise, being lenient towards the western sector while holding steadfast to the McMahon Line in the eastern sector. Speaking in the lower house of India's parliament, Lok Sabha, Nehru stated on August 28 that "[w]e stick with the McMahon Line. But it is quite another thing that along this long line there may be minor arguments about a mile here or a mile there...We admit that these are differences which exist and which should be settled."²²⁸ The McMahon line was the de facto border in the eastern region, so Nehru had made a clear public statement that he would largely stick with that line. In contrast, Nehru declared in parliament on September 12 that:

This place, Aksai Chin area, is in our maps undoubtedly. But I distinguish it completely from other areas. *It is a matter of argument as to what part of it belongs to us and what part of it belongs to someone else. It is not at all a dead clear matter.* ... That has nothing to do with the McMahon Line. It has nothing to do with anything else. That particular area stands by itself.²²⁹

Thus, Nehru clearly stated in public that he saw the western border region – the Aksai Chin plains where the Chinese had built their new highway – differently from the eastern region. Indeed, not only did Nehru send public overtures that he was willing to compromise on Aksai Chin, but his denigration of Aksai Chin as “a territory where not even a blade of grass

²²⁸Ministry of External Affairs of India 1962. P. 91.

²²⁹ibid., p. 148. Emphasis added. Two days prior, Nehru also said in Parliament that India had “always looked upon the Ladakh area [near the Aksai Chin plains] as a different area, as I may say so, some vulgar area so far as the frontier is concerned because *the exact line of the frontier is not at all clear as in the case of the McMahon Line* [in the eastern sector].” ibid., p. 134. Emphasis added.

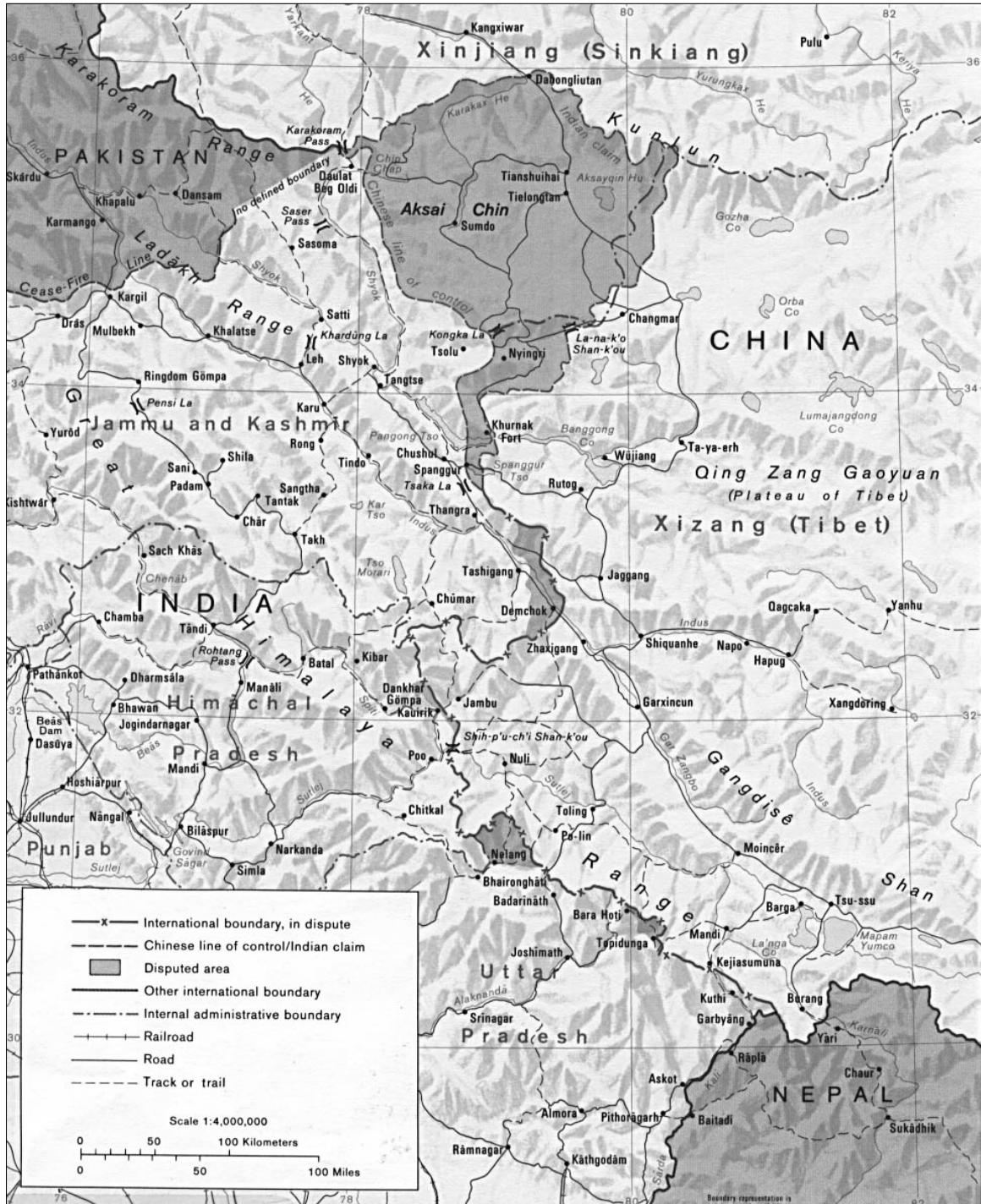


Figure 12: Map of the Western Sector of the China-India Border. United States Central Intelligence Agency. (1988) China-India border: Western Sector. [Washington: Central Intelligence Agency] Retrieved from The University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas Libraries, https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/china_indiaw_border_88.jpg

grows” was criticized domestically as an effort to prepare the country for a concession.²³⁰ One frustrated politician even quipped in parliament, “No hair grows on my head. Does it mean that the head has no value?”²³¹

Nehru certainly did not make his public statements regarding the border on a whim. According to R.K. Nehru, a former foreign secretary of India and ambassador to China, experts had advised Prime Minister Nehru as far back as 1953 that India’s claim to Aksai Chin was “not too strong.” The prime minister had thus been “agreeable” to adjustments in “Aksai Chin and one or two other places” given that they were “part of a satisfactory overall settlement” with China.²³² Moreover, Nehru was not the only one in his administration who thought that Aksai Chin was of little value. According to B.N. Mullik, India’s Intelligence Bureau director at the time of the unfolding Sino-Indian border crisis, by 1959, “the attitude of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) was that this part of the territory [in Aksai Chin] was useless to India.”²³³ In an MEA meeting in January 1959 that discussed the significance of China’s new highway in Aksai Chin, the Indian Chief of Army Staff also claimed that the highway “was of no strategic importance to India.”²³⁴

Second, however, Nehru saw the dispute with China as something beyond remote areas of territory: “It is not a question of a mile or two or ten or even a hundred miles. It is something more precious than a hundred or a thousand miles and it is that which brings up people’s passions to a high level.”²³⁵ What did Nehru view as so crucial in the dispute with China that had aroused the passions of the Indian people? On September 12, Nehru

²³⁰Ministry of External Affairs of India 1962. Pp. 134-135.

²³¹Ministry of External Affairs of India (1962) *Prime Minister on Sino-Indian Relations*. Vol. 1. Part II. New Delhi: Government of India, p. 37. Question raised by Tyagi to Prime Minister Nehru in Lok Sabha, December 4, 1961.

²³²Raghavan 2010, p. 240.

²³³B.N Mullik (1971) *The Chinese Betrayal: My Years With Nehru*. New York: Allied Publishers, p. 205.

²³⁴Ibid., p. 240.

²³⁵Nehru speaking in India’s upper house, Rajya Sabha, on September 10, 1959. Ministry of External Affairs of India 1962. P. 135

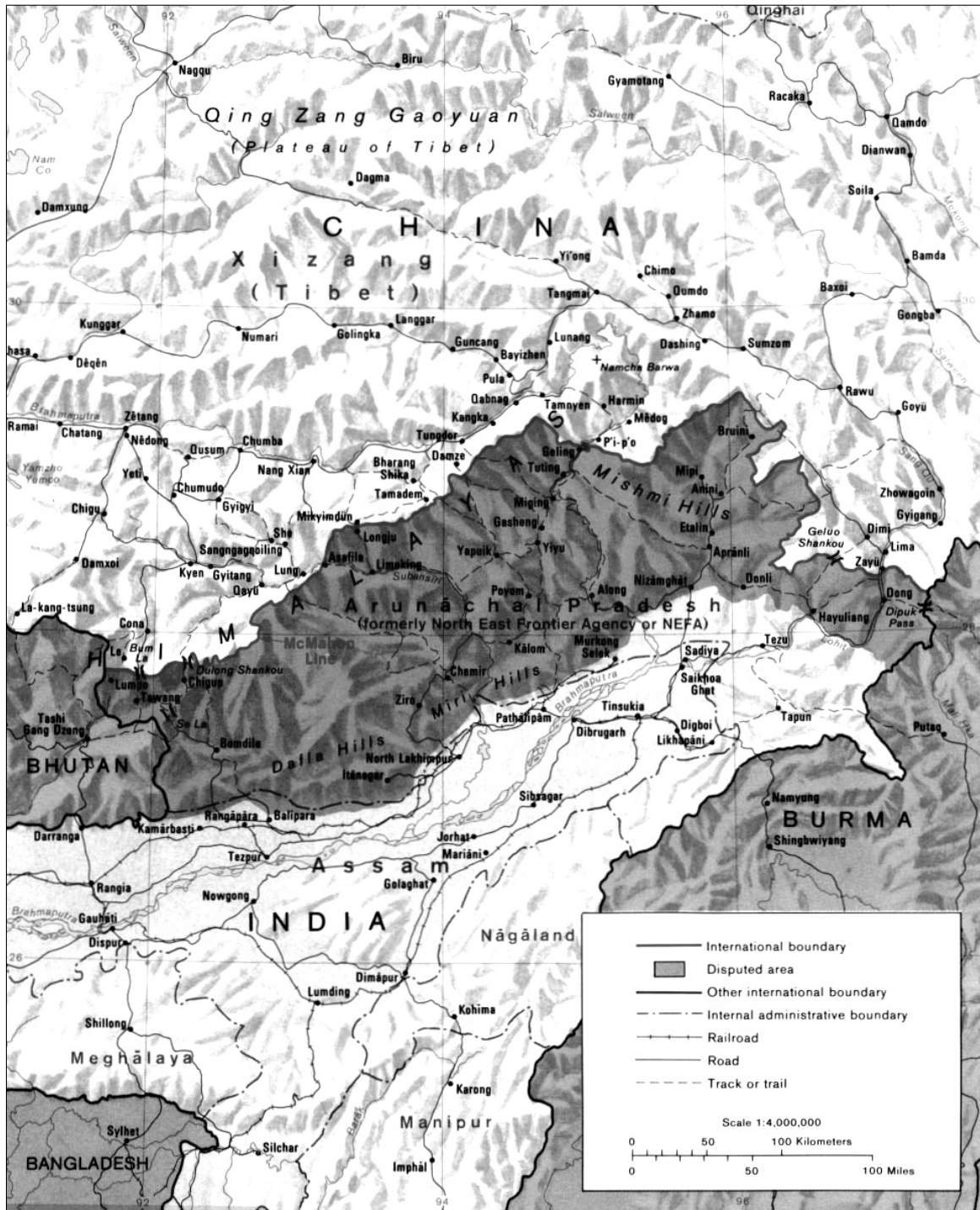


Figure 13: Map of the Eastern Sector of the China-India Border. United States Central Intelligence Agency. (1988) China-India border: Eastern Sector. [Washington: Central Intelligence Agency] Retrieved from The University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas Libraries, https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/china_india_e_border.88.jpg

declared in parliament that,

*[i]t is not a yard of territory that counts but the coercion. Because, it makes no difference to China or India whether a few yards of territory in the mountain are on this side or on that side. But it makes a great deal of difference if that is done in an insulting, aggressive, offensive, violent manner, by us or by them. All that counts.*²³⁶

Thus, although Nehru indicated that he was willing to take a conciliatory stance regarding Aksai Chin – an area that was so remote that his government was oblivious to months of construction work by the Chinese on a new highway – he was concerned that the violent skirmishes on the border by the Chinese to claim such territory would provoke a backlash of harder resistance.

Yet, Nehru was optimistic that a major conflagration with China will not occur. Even after receiving Chinese Prime Minister Zhou Enlai's letter of September 8, which stated that China could not accept the McMahon Line because it was a vestige of British colonialist aggression, Nehru claimed in parliament on September 12 that "I do not expect, and I do not want the House to imagine that something very serious is going to happen on our frontiers. I do not at all expect that to happen."²³⁷ In a private letter to his chief ministers, Nehru wrote as late as October 16, 1959, that "[s]o far as our border with Tibet-China is concerned...I do not think there is going to be a major conflict there."²³⁸

On October 21, however, an armed clash erupted at Kongka Pass in the western border region which hardened Nehru to resist a border deal. This incident left nine Indians and at least one Chinese dead.²³⁹ In contrast to his reply to Zhou on September 26, Nehru's letter

²³⁶Ministry of External Affairs of India 1962. P. 148. Emphasis added.

²³⁷Ibid., p. 155.

²³⁸Jawaharlal Nehru (1989) *Letter to Chief Ministers 1947-1964*. Ed. by G. Parthasarathi. Vol. 5. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 297.

²³⁹These numbers can be found in the official letters that were exchanged between China and India.

to Zhou on November 16 now attached a new precondition for negotiations with China: the withdrawal of Chinese forces from Aksai Chin.²⁴⁰ As Allen Whiting points out, this “constituted a fundamental impasse since such a withdrawal would leave the Akai Chin road defenseless [for China].”²⁴¹ Indeed, Nehru became averse to the idea of conceding Aksai Chin even before Dr. Gopal, the director of the historical division of the MEA whom Nehru had sent to the archives in London to research India’s territorial claims, returned to India in November 1959. According to Dr. Gopal, he found Nehru to be in a state of “defiance and resistance against the idea of handing over territory to the Chinese,” even before he took Nehru through the material he had found.²⁴² By December, Nehru expressed his frustration with China publicly: “Any attack on its honour, on its integrity, on the integrity of its territory, no nation tolerates, and takes risks, grave risks even, to protect all that. Because, you cannot barter these things, your self-respect and honour.”²⁴³ This statement contrasts with Nehru’s more lenient view on the border prior to the Kongka Pass incident. As Neville Maxwell points out, “the Kongka Pass incident came to have a drastic effect on Nehru’s thinking as well as on public opinion.”²⁴⁴ Srinath Raghavan concurs: “[a]fter the Kongka Pass incident, Nehru was disinclined to concede anything to China under duress.”²⁴⁵

Chinese archival evidence, however, show that while the Chinese leadership recognized Nehru’s initial willingness to concede Aksai Chin, they failed to recognize the change in Nehru’s position after the Kongka Pass incident. A report from the PLA General Staff

See Ministry of External Affairs of India (1960) *Notes, Memoranda and Letters Exchanged Between the Governments of India and China. November 1959-March 1960*. White Paper III. New Delhi: Government of India, pp. 3,11,74

²⁴⁰Ibid., p. 49.

²⁴¹Whiting 1975, p. 53.

²⁴²Steven A. Hoffman (1990) *India and the China Crisis*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 82-83. On the arrival of Dr. Gopal to India, see Maxwell 1970, pp. 119-120.

²⁴³Nehru speaking in Lok Sabha on November 25, 1959. Ministry of External Affairs of India 1962. P. 193

²⁴⁴Maxwell 1970, p. 132.

²⁴⁵Raghavan 2010, p. 260.

Department (GSD) on October 29, 1959 – less than a week after the Kongka Pass incident – concludes that “it seems that India plans to recognize our present border in the western sector in return for our recognition of the ‘McMahon Line’ in the eastern sector.”²⁴⁶ The report was also optimistic that a major conflict with India will not occur: “It shows that India is prepared to enter into negotiations with us and that the tense situation at the border may ease somewhat.” Not realizing Nehru’s hardened resolve, on November 3, the Chinese leadership held a conference in Hangzhou and decided that a new policy should be adopted to ease tensions and bring India to the negotiating table.²⁴⁷ This was the “separation policy” (*geli zhengce*) which led to a letter by Zhou on November 7 that proposed a 20km withdrawal by both sides. Nehru rejected this proposal in his letter on November 16, which, as mentioned above, demanded a Chinese withdrawal from Aksai Chin. From November 1959, China unilaterally ceased patrolling border areas. But when Zhou went to New Delhi for border negotiations in April 19, 1960, Nehru had already become reluctant to compromise India’s borders.

During the week-long negotiations in New Delhi, the Chinese sent multiple feelers for a deal in which China would abide by the McMahon Line in the east if India recognized China’s claim in the west. The Indians, however, rejected this ‘swap deal.’ Unfortunately, some authors disagree about whether China actually offered such a deal during the negotiations. Then Indian foreign secretary Dutt, for example, claims that the Indians were never presented with a forthright deal as the Chinese were never willing to formally recognize the McMahon Line in the east.²⁴⁸ Others claim that both sides recognized the deal that China put on the table as China indicated its willingness to *de facto* maintain the

²⁴⁶Report from the PLA General Staff Department, ‘Behind India’s Second Anti-China Wave’. October 29 1959 (1959) “History and Public Program Digital Archive, 105-00944-07.” *Translated by 7Brands.*, pp. 84–90.

²⁴⁷Lei Yingfu (1997) *Zai zuigao tonghuaibu dang canmou: Lei Yingfu huiyilu [Staff Officer at the Supreme Command: General Lei Yingfu’s Recollections]*. Nanchang: Baihuashou wenyi chubanshe, pp. 202-203.

²⁴⁸See, for instance, Dutt 1977, p. 131.

McMahon Line.²⁴⁹ The transcripts of the negotiations from Indian archives, however, now reveal that Zhou made ample overtures to Nehru for a swap deal. According to India's official records of the talks, in a meeting that lasted over three hours on April 24, Zhou told Nehru that,

“[o]ur position in this area [in Aksai Chin] is like India's position in the eastern sector.

...In the eastern sector, we acknowledge that what India considers its border has been reached by India's actual administration. But similarly, we think that India should accept that China's administrative personnel has reached the line which it considers to be her border (in the western sector).

...Your Excellency [Nehru] stated in parliament that the boundary in the western sector was vague.

...[in the eastern sector] of course, we could not recognise the McMahon Line or the Simla Convention; but if a settlement was reached, naturally we would change our maps.”²⁵⁰

These passages clearly indicate that Zhou wanted a swap deal during the New Delhi negotiations. Three features of the above passages stand out: (1) Zhou recognizes that China's stronger interests in the west parallel India's stronger interests in the east, (2) Zhou proposes that India should recognize China's claim line in the west, but stops short of proposing that India should do the same for China's claim in the east, and (3) Zhou suggests that China will withdraw its claims in the east, and change Chinese maps accordingly, even

²⁴⁹For recent historical accounts that present evidence in favor of India recognizing the swap deal, see Raghavan 2010, p. 264 and Mahesh Shankar (2015) “Showing Character: Nehru, Reputation, and the Sino-Indian Dispute, 1957-1962.” *Asian Security*. 11.2, pp. 99–115

²⁵⁰Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (1960) ““Record of Talks between Prime Minister Nehru and Premier Zhou Enlai,” April 24, 1960.” *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, P.N. Haksar Papers (I-II Installment), Subject File No.24*. URL: <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121124>, pp. 5-12.

though China will not formally recognize the McMahon Line. Zhou's sincerity in reaching a negotiated settlement and *de facto* maintaining the McMahon Line is also evinced by the fact that only weeks before the border negotiations in New Delhi, China had concluded a well-publicized border agreement with Burma that abided by the McMahon Line. Indeed, Russian archives show that China was willing to maintain the McMahon Line with India well before the negotiations. In a meeting on October 2, 1959, Mao told Khrushchev that "[y]ou will see for yourself later that the McMahon Line with India will be maintained, and the border conflict with India will end."²⁵¹

The Kongka Pass incident therefore played an important role in hardening Nehru's position on a negotiated settlement, but the historical evidence is unclear on whether the incident was an accident or a deliberate attempt at coercion. The evidence *does* suggest, however, that China understood that pushing India too far would provoke a political backlash and reduce room for a bargain. On October 3, only weeks before the incident, Zhou told Indian communist party leaders in a meeting that there were two basic approaches that China could take towards the border dispute with India: "one type is to yield (*rangbu*), the other type is to struggle (*douzheng*)." He continued to tell them that China would "on the one hand give those in the center of India's political spectrum some leeway and actively win them over, while on the other hand resolutely carry out a struggle."²⁵² However, after the Kongka Pass incident, the political climate in India turned so bellicose that even the Indian communist party passed a resolution "deploring the shooting."²⁵³

²⁵¹ Archive of the President of the Russian Federation (APRF) 1959.

²⁵² Jin Chongji, ed. (1998) *Zhou Enlai Zhuan [A Biography of Zhou Enlai]*. Vol. 3. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, p. 541.

²⁵³ Mullik 1971, p. 243.

May 1960-November 1961: Temporary Lull

After the negotiations failed, both sides intensified efforts to strengthen border areas while simultaneously making sincere efforts to avoid provocation. On May 5, 1960, Zhou sent a telegram to Mao stating that PLA units in Tibet and nearby regions should “seize the opportunity to control advantageous terrain” and “decisively set up posts” within several kilometers of China’s claim line. Once such posts were set up, however, the relevant units were to “continue to stop patrolling.” If encountered by Indian troops, they were to “persuade them to leave and avoid armed conflict.” The next day, Mao approved this policy and Deng Xiaoping was entrusted with its implementation.²⁵⁴ On May 29, 1960, Indian foreign secretary Dutt signed a minute which proposed to set up new posts and patrol yet-unoccupied territories while strictly avoiding provoking the Chinese.²⁵⁵

Captured PLA documents by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) at the time reveal an important reason why Beijing wanted to avoid armed conflict. In 1960, China was mired in troubles within and without because of the famine after the failed Great Leap Forward, the constant threat from Chiang Kai-shek on the east coast, and the decision by the Soviet Union to cut off aid to China after Mao’s polemics against Khrushchev in April 1960.²⁵⁶ One of the principal reasons that China openly confronted the Soviet Union was to gain leadership within the communist block and among the Third World countries. It is within this context that the following central PLA directive of November 14, 1960 was dispatched to western border units:

We absolutely cannot view the provocations and attacks of the neighboring country

²⁵⁴Liu Wusheng and Du Hongqi (2000) *Zhou Enlai junshi huodong jishi, 1918-1975 [Chronicle of Zhou Enlai’s Military Activities]*. Vol. 2. Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, p. 525.

²⁵⁵See Maxwell 1970, p. 200, Hoffman 1990, p. 94, Mullik 1971, p. 307, and Raghavan 2010, p. 271.

²⁵⁶M. Taylor Fravel (2008) *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China’s Territorial Disputes*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, Chp. 2.

on our border merely from the military standpoint. We must not replace policies with emotions and erroneously regard the struggle strategy of avoiding armed clashes as an indication that we are weaker than the neighboring country...[if you do not] ask for orders or wait for directions from above before opening fire and striking back...*we might gain a greater military victory, but politically we would fall into the trap of the other side and would cause only great injury to the party and state – the biggest mistake.*

...By doing our utmost to avoid armed clashes with them, we make their provocations and tricks politically unfeasible...Thus, in the political and foreign policy struggle, we will be in the position of initiative, reason, and advantage from beginning to end.”²⁵⁷

These passages reveal two important points. First, they show that Indian actions on the border were angering PLA troops and registering as provocative by Chinese central authorities. Second, they reveal a rationale why the Chinese leadership wanted to avoid armed conflict: *even if China could achieve a military victory* in a border conflict with India, the *political costs* of such an engagement would be too high to make the conflict feasible – it would be “the biggest mistake.” Indeed, in other passages, the document claims that a key objective of Indian provocations on the border is to “develop pretexts” and provides an example of how a recent border incident between Chinese and Nepalese troops was used by “imperialist and foreign reactionaries” to “slander us” and “put us politically on the defensive.”²⁵⁸

Indeed, General Lei Yingfu, then deputy director of the GSD’s Operations Department, also recalls that in November 1959, after the Kongka Pass incident, “our PLA officers and men had already reached the level of boiling rage and anger as we received endless cables

²⁵⁷ Arthur Cohen (1963a) *The Sino-India Border Dispute II DD/I Staff Study POLO XVI [Top Secret]*. 3 Parts. Washington D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, pp. 57, 60. Emphasis added.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 58-60.

and calls demanding that we should hit back against the Indian invaders.”²⁵⁹ Moreover, after the Chinese leadership decided to pursue a “separation policy,” Lei remembers that “many comrades were puzzled: having commanded three major military campaigns such as the war against the United States in Korea, why was Mao so ‘soft’ on India?”²⁶⁰ Lei notes that it eventually became clear that Mao’s decision for restraint was to make “a strong impression on global public opinion that the PLA had controlled itself.”²⁶¹ In this light, it is understandable that Chinese central authorities wanted to assure border units of China’s broader policy of restraint. It is also apparent that China understood the logic of provocation to work both ways: provoking India would reduce leeway for a bargain, but if India provoked China sufficiently, the political costs of launching a Chinese attack would also fall.

November 1961-October 1962: Road to War

On November 2, 1961, the Indian government launched a new policy to address the border dispute. This policy advanced patrols and posts further into disputed areas, and as a result, became known as the “forward policy.” Although the forward policy was in many ways a mere extension of India’s existing policy, as Bruce Riedel points out, “India’s implementation of the Forward Policy served as a major provocation to China.”²⁶² In terms of the logic of provocation, the forward policy was both an attempt to signal India’s resolve in the border dispute by deliberately being more provocative, and an attempt to place the onus of provocation on the Chinese to either engage forward deployed Indian troops or withdraw. The forward policy thus exhibited key elements of the “Gray Zone Conflict / Military Skirmishes and Inadvertent War” game-theoretic model discussed in Chapter 4.

²⁵⁹Lei 1997, p. 202

²⁶⁰Lei 1997, pp. 202-203.

²⁶¹Lei 1997, p. 203.

²⁶²Riedel 2015, p. 111.

The decision for the forward policy reached on November 2 stated that,

“[in the western region] we are to patrol as far forward as possible from our present positions towards the International border. This will be done with a view to establishing our posts which should *prevent* Chinese from advancing further and also *dominating* from any posts which they may have already established in our territory. This must be done without getting involved in a clash with the Chinese, unless this becomes necessary in self defense.²⁶³

Thus, by moving Indian border forces as close as possible to Chinese posts, the Indians wanted to apply both a non-violent compellent pressure to reoccupy existing Chinese positions (i.e. exert a “dominating” presence) and a potentially violent deterrent pressure to “prevent” further Chinese advances. Still, the Indian were careful not to provoke the Chinese too much by getting involved in a violent clash of arms. Branislav Slantchev puts India’s quandary succinctly: “India was pursuing a military policy which hoped to somehow force the Chinese out of areas where the Chinese were militarily superior without provoking the Chinese into resisting force with force.²⁶⁴

Yet, as the recently leaked top secret Indian internal review of the war, the Henderson Brooks report, states, “[t]his probe forward activated the Chinese.”²⁶⁵ In early April 1962, the Indians ordered two battalions to move around Chinese forces in Chip Chap Valley, near the western border, and retake Chinese posts.²⁶⁶ The first Chinese reaction came on April 22, when one of the Indian posts near Chip Chap Valley “was threatened and had

²⁶³Henderson Brooks and P.S. Baghat (1963) *Henderson Brooks-Baghat Report*. Indian Army, p. 8. This Indian report was partially leaked online by Neville Maxwell in February 2014. Emphasis added.

²⁶⁴Slantchev 2011, p. 186.

²⁶⁵Brooks and Baghat 1963, p. 13.

²⁶⁶Arthur Cohen (1963b) *The Sino-India Border Dispute III DD/I Staff Study POLO XVI [Top Secret]*. 3 Parts. Washington D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, pp. 27-28.

to withdraw. Later, the Chinese established three posts in that area.”²⁶⁷ Indeed, Nehru admitted in parliament on May 3 that “[s]ometimes [our] check-posts are behind their check-posts, behind their lines. It is not a straight line. And this has rather annoyed them.”²⁶⁸ On May 14, Zhou convened a meeting with senior military commanders and stated that China must prepare for possible armed conflict on its borders with India and complete necessary preparations by the end of June.²⁶⁹ On June 6, the Chinese politburo met to discuss the military steps to take in response to the events on the Indian border,²⁷⁰ and on June 20, the GSD issued instructions to western border units to implement “counter-nibbling” measures and take the initiative in the border dispute.²⁷¹ Thus, by June, China was making military preparations in case a confrontation with India became inevitable. On June 23, moreover, the Chinese ambassador to Warsaw met with his U.S. counterpart and received strong assurances that the United States would not support an invasion of the mainland by Chiang Kai-shek. As the Chinese ambassador recounts, “this had a great impact on policy decisions at home at the time.”²⁷² Indeed, when President Kennedy reconfirmed the U.S. position publicly a few days later, the possibility of a two-front war for China drastically declined.²⁷³ China could now redirect its attention to its dispute with India in the west.

²⁶⁷Brooks and Baghat 1963, p. 11.

²⁶⁸Ministry of External Affairs of India 1962, pp. 86-87.

²⁶⁹Liu and Du 2000, p. 564

²⁷⁰Liu Chongwen and Chen Shaochou, eds. (1996) *Liu Shaoqi Nian Pu (The Chronicles of Liu Shaoqi)*. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe.

²⁷¹Jiang Siyi and Li Hui, eds. (1994) *Zhong Yin bianjing ziwei fanji zuozhan shi [An operational history of the Chinese-Indian border counterattack in self-defense]*. Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, p. 137. This Chinese study of the Sino-India War is for internal circulation among cadres.

²⁷²Wang Bingnan (1985) *Zhong Mei Hui Tan Jiu Nian Hui Gu (Nine Years of Sino-U.S. Talks in Retrospect)*. Beijing: Shi jie zhi shi chu ban, pp. 89-90.

²⁷³Roderick MacFarquhar (1997) *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*. Vol. 3. Oxford ; New York : Published for the Royal Institute of International Affairs Studies of the East Asian Institute by Oxford University Press and Columbia University Press, pp. 272-273.

In July 1962, the Chinese implemented a new border policy called “armed coexistence.” On July 5, 1962, overruling Western Command’s May 16 recommendation that a post should *not* be set up in the Galwan River area in Aksai Chin because of possible Chinese reactions, Indian Army Headquarters ordered a platoon strength post to be established.²⁷⁴ On July 10, Chinese forces encircled the Indian post and laid an effective siege. India reacted by changing its instructions to border troops from “fire only if fired upon” to “fire in self-defence.”²⁷⁵ On July 14, while maintaining the siege, Mao said at a GSD secretariat meeting that although China had all the reason to strike India, it must still demonstrate restraint. He gave two main reasons: first, Nehru’s true colors needed to be fully exposed, and second, it must be made clear that India is the wrongdoer in the border dispute so that the international community can sympathize with and support China.²⁷⁶ On July 20, Mao thus adopted a new strategy of “armed coexistence” (*wuzhuang gongchu*) to counter India’s “forward policy.” This new policy was given expression by a 20-character slogan: “never yield, but strive to avoid bloodshed; create interlocking positions for long-term armed coexistence.”²⁷⁷ On the ground, this strategy meant that China would set up “counter-encircling posts” in a “zig-zag pattern.” The very next day, however, a violent clash broke out near Chip Chap Valley – the first armed clash since the Kongka Pass incident of 1959. A day after this incident, India changed its instructions to border troops again, this time allowing discretion to fire if “threatened.”²⁷⁸

As Oriana Mastro points out, China’s “political objective of gradually ratcheting up military and political pressure was to force [an Indian] acceptance of unconditional negotiations.”²⁷⁹

²⁷⁴Brooks and Baghat 1963, p. 12.

²⁷⁵Maxwell 1970, p. 239, Sinha, Athale, and Prasad 1992, p. 78

²⁷⁶Jiang and Li 1994, pp. 142-143.

²⁷⁷Jiang and Li 1994, p. 143. Also see Fravel 2008, p. 185.

²⁷⁸Brooks and Baghat 1963, p. 14, Maxwell 1970, p. 243, Sinha, Athale, and Prasad 1992, pp. xx, 78, Cohen 1963b, p. 35

²⁷⁹Oriana Skylar Mastro (Oct. 2012) “The Great Divide: Chinese and Indian Views on Negotiations 1959-62.” *Journal of Defense Studies*. 6.4, pp. 71–108, p. 94.

From July 22 to 23, China's foreign minister, Marshal Chen Yi, met with Indian defense minister Krishna Menon on the sidelines of a United Nations conference in Geneva.²⁸⁰ According to one of the few available accounts of these meetings from a participant, the two sides met three times to discuss the border dispute and eventually arrived at an agreement in which Aksai Chin was to be divided so that the areas around the highway go to China and other parts of the border are adjusted in India's favor.²⁸¹ The apparent agreement fell apart, however, because Nehru was first unavailable to approve the release of a joint communique before Chen Yi had to depart for Beijing and then publicly denied that the meetings ever took place when the story was leaked by the Indian press.²⁸² Although this account of the failed meetings is difficult to corroborate with other historical sources, we can assert with more confidence that the Indians at least wanted to explore the possibility of a deal because several sources recount India's efforts at diplomacy immediately after the Geneva conference. According to the Indian charge d'affaires in Beijing at the time, he was instructed to "immediately see [Z]hou and inform him that the Government of India would be prepared to send a ministerial-level delegation to [Beijing] to discuss, without preconditions, all bilateral problems and disputes."²⁸³ Due to diplomatic protocol, however, he was only able to meet with Chen Yi, and Chen drew the line: the Indian proposal was a trap loaded with ammunition for propaganda and it was unacceptable unless India withdrew all false claims on Chinese territory.²⁸⁴

Following this private rebuff, the Indian government made one final effort at public diplomacy. This effort, however, ran into the constraints of India's own domestic public

²⁸⁰Liu Shufa, ed. (1995) *Chen Yi Nian Pu [The Chronicles of Chen Yi]*. Beijing: Ren min chu ban she, p. 926.

²⁸¹Arthur Lall (1981) *The Emergence of Modern India*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 155-6. Lall was a senior official in the Indian foreign ministry.

²⁸²Ibid., pp. 156-157.

²⁸³Banerjee 1990, p. 51.

²⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 51-52.

opinion. On July 26, India sent an official diplomatic note to China that omitted explicit references to preconditions while stating a desire to hold negotiations.²⁸⁵ As Whiting asserts, this note not only indicated more flexibility in India's position because Nehru had long maintained that China should withdraw its forces from Aksai Chin before talks can take place, but that more dovish factions within the Indian leadership were vying to forestall an impending war.²⁸⁶ When the Chinese replied on August 4 by reconfirming that "[t]here need not and should not be any pre-conditions," however, India back-tracked by stating in its note of August 22 that "discussions cannot start unless the status quo of the boundary in [Aksai Chin] which has been altered by force since 1957 is restored."²⁸⁷ In the interim month, the Indian media had latched onto the seeming concession that the Indian government was willing to make, and the news even made it into the international press. As the *Times* of London reported on August 13, 1962:

The feeling is strong in Delhi that the Indian Government has reached a turning point in its policy towards China and the border dispute, and the last week has seen an outpouring of exhortation in the press that Mr. Nehru abjure the "road to dishonour." That he is tempted to take that direction, writing off [Aksai Chin] in return for negotiations and some hazy settlement, has been inferred by almost all observers here from the passage in Delhi's most latest Note to [Beijing] (July 26)...²⁸⁸

The article is a telling indication that the hands of the Indian government were all but tied.

²⁸⁵Ministry of External Affairs of India 1963, p. 4. The note only mentioned that negotiations should take place "as soon as the current tensions have eased and the appropriate climate is created."

²⁸⁶Whiting, Maxwell, and Banerjee, are among those who suggest that Indian defense minister Menon was behind these diplomatic attempts.

²⁸⁷Ministry of External Affairs of India 1963, pp. 18, 37.

²⁸⁸"Hint of Concession to China" (1962). *Times (of London)*.

Indeed, although the Chinese hoped that escalating tensions would bring the Indians back to the negotiating table without preconditions, by applying military pressure short of war, China's policy of "armed coexistence" had provoked the Indian public.²⁸⁹ Moreover, similarly to India's "forward policy," China's "armed coexistence" both provoked the Indians and simultaneously placed a burden of provocation on its adversary since the Indians now had to decide between breaking the encirclement of Chinese troops with military force or backing down in the dispute. As Taylor Fravel points out, the "Chinese leaders hoped that the policy of armed coexistence would *compel* an Indian retreat or at least *arrest* the momentum of the forward policy."²⁹⁰ From the Indian perspective, this assertive Chinese policy of armed coexistence should have given them a reason to pause and reflect on the efficacy of the forward policy. The official Indian history of the war, for instance, notes that China's escalatory actions in July demonstrated that "the basic assumption behind the forward policy" that China would keep avoiding confrontations was "no longer valid."²⁹¹ Yet, as John Garver observes, instead of re-evaluating the forward policy, "Indian leaders made that policy still more aggressive."²⁹² According to the Henderson Brooks report, Indian Western Command *did* send a letter to the General Staff Branch Army Headquarters on August 17, reappraising the situation in Aksai Chin as one in which it was "vital" that India "did not provoke the Chinese into an armed clash" and the forward policy was "held in abeyance" until western units were strengthened.²⁹³ The reappraisal, however, fell on deaf ears. Moreover, when Chinese troops surrounded another Indian post in September, the Indians decided to take another step on escalation ladder rather than back down.

²⁸⁹See Garver 2006, pp. 107-108 and Raghavan 2010, p. 285.

²⁹⁰Fravel 2008, p. 186. Emphasis added.

²⁹¹Sinha, Athale, and Prasad 1992, p. xx.

²⁹²Garver 2006, pp. 108-109.

²⁹³Brooks and Baghat 1963, pp. 15-16.

When Chinese troops encircled India's Dhola post, this time in the eastern sector, on September 8, the Indian leadership decided to roll back the Chinese out of Indian territory using military force. In a meeting on September 12, the Indian leadership made several important decisions regarding the border dispute. First, the endangered Dhola post was to be relieved, and its vicinity was to be reinforced with extra units. Second, Indian border troops were given even more latitude to use their firearms, now being instructed not only to fire if threatened, but if the Chinese entered Indian territory.²⁹⁴ Third, all Chinese troops were to be evicted from India's northeastern territory, if necessary, by force. Although the Army Commander stated in the meeting that the Chinese were likely to retaliate along the eastern border, and the Director of the Intelligence Bureau pointed out three specific locations that the Chinese might target, the Indian government accepted this possibility and instructed that every effort should be made to retake posts that might be lost to Chinese reactions.²⁹⁵ Dhola post was successfully relieved on September 15.²⁹⁶ By September 21, however, Indian and Chinese troops were regularly exchanging fire.²⁹⁷ In a meeting in the Indian defense minister's room on September 22, the Indian Chief of Army Staff raised the possibility that China could also react in Aksai Chin and hence in both the eastern and western border regions.²⁹⁸ The Indian foreign secretary believed that the Chinese would not respond in a major way, but the Chief of Army Staff asked for, and was issued, written orders from the government to "throw the Chinese out as soon as possible."²⁹⁹

²⁹⁴Brooks and Baghat 1963, pp. 60, 73.

²⁹⁵Ibid., p. 60.

²⁹⁶See Brij Mohan Kaul (1967) *The Untold Story*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers, p. 359 John Parashuram Dalvi (1969) *Himalayan Blunder: The Curtain-Raiser to the Sino-Indian War of 1962*. Bombay: Thacker and Company Limited, pp. 208-209. Kaul was the Corps commander in charge of India's entire northeastern border during the war; Dalvi was commander of 7 Infantry Brigade, which operated in the Dhola area when the war broke out.

²⁹⁷See Brooks and Baghat 1963, p. 76 and Niranjana Prasad (1981) *The Fall of Towang, 1962*. New Delhi: Palit and Palit, p. 39. Prasad was commander of 4 Infantry Division and Brigadier Dalvi's immediate superior.

²⁹⁸Brooks and Baghat 1963, p. 63.

²⁹⁹ibid., pp. 61,63, Kaul 1967, p. 362

In reaction to the Chinese move to encircle Dhola post, the Indian leadership therefore took an escalatory step that risked war with China. As the Henderson Brooks report puts it, much of the Indian leadership was “prepared to gamble on the basis of the Chinese not reacting to any great extent.”³⁰⁰ But it was a gamble nonetheless, and the Indian leadership knew that there were conflicting assessments of how strongly the Chinese would react, including the possibility of war. Mullik, who was director of India’s Intelligence Bureau at the time, even claims that all decisions by the Indian government from June 1962 onwards were taken with “not only the possibility but almost the certainty” of the Chinese reacting by an “attack on our positions in [the western region] and elsewhere.” We can therefore say that the Indians were resolved enough to risk war by September 12, and at the latest, by September 22, 1962.³⁰¹

On October 4, India raised an entirely new Army Corps – IV Corps – to take command over the northeastern frontier and oversee the eviction operations. The defense of India’s northeastern borders had until then been the responsibility of XXXIII Corps, but its commander was accused of foot-dragging and insubordination after he made several appreciations to upper echelons that Indian forces were logistically unprepared to carry out eviction operations as envisioned by the Indian leadership.³⁰² The new IV Corps was headed by a politically well-connected commander, Lieutenant General Kaul, who was until then the Indian Chief of General Staff. Although the Indian defense ministry claimed that the new Corps was part of “normal administrative reorganization,” it nevertheless signaled the Indian leadership’s determination to expedite eviction operations and reclaim

³⁰⁰Brooks and Baghat 1963, p. 83.

³⁰¹Mullik 1971, p. 331.

³⁰²For instance, on September 12, the XXXIII Corps commander sent an appreciation to upper commanders stating that the Indian build-up in the Dhola area was weaker than the Chinese. See Brooks and Baghat 1963, p. 59, Dalvi 1969, p. 193, and Kaul 1967, pp. 356-357. XXXIII Corps also resisted deploying 7 Infantry Brigade to the Dhola area, the principle form of reinforcement it was ordered to send on September 9. On September 27, XXXIII Corps sent a message to Eastern Command complaining that higher commanders should not interfere with the tactical decisions of field commanders. See Brooks and Baghat 1963, pp. 79, 81

Indian territory before winterly conditions set in.³⁰³ IV Corps's core mission was to expel the Chinese from an area just northeast of Dhola post. Dhola post was situated on the south bank of a small mountain river called Namkachu, and the Indian leadership was determined to clear the area across Namkachu up to a place two miles away called Thagla Ridge. According to the Indian leadership, Thagla Ridge marked the international border.

By mid-October, a battle broke out between Indian and Chinese forces in the eastern sector. When Kaul arrived to take the reins of the operation, 4 Infantry Division commander Prasad, who was operating in the Dhola area, cautioned the Corps commander and prompted him to send a message to his superiors on October 6 stating that an overwhelming Chinese response to Indian eviction efforts could not be ruled out. On October 7, after completing reconnaissance of the Dhola area, Kaul sent another message to the Chief of Army Staff and Army Commander expressing his concern that any initial success he might have on the battlefield would be put in jeopardy as the Chinese were sure to put in a counter-attack.³⁰⁴ Despite these misgivings, Kaul commenced eviction operations the very next day. Without drawing Chinese fire, Kaul successfully dispatched a platoon to take up positions across the Namkachu. The Chinese, however, had already decided, on October 6, to “resolutely repulse any Indian attack and hit them hard so it hurts.” On the same day that Kaul commenced eviction operations, moreover, the Chinese notified their Soviet ally of their intentions to strike-back at the Indians.³⁰⁵ On October 10, the Chinese put their decision into effect, engaging the Indian troops north of the Namkachu and swiftly inducing a withdrawal back across the river.

³⁰³“Indian Border Force Change” (1962). *Times of India*. Also see Brooks and Baghat 1963, p. 88.

³⁰⁴*Ibid.*, p. 92.

³⁰⁵Xu Yan (1993) *Zhong Yin bianjie zhizhan lishi zhenxiang [The True History of the Chinese-Indian Border War]*. Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, p. 108, Yang Shengqun and Yan Jianqi, eds. (2009) *Deng Xiaoping Nian Pu (The Chronicles of Deng Xiaoping)*. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, p. 1728

As Prasad recalls, the Chinese did not “indulge in indiscriminate killings” and “allowed the defeated garrison to withdraw honourably.”³⁰⁶ As the Henderson Brooks report points out, the Chinese decision to allow a withdrawal is noteworthy because they could have prevented one.³⁰⁷ This thus indicates that although China found the time ripe to hit back, thereby taking an escalatory step from Mao’s call for restraint in July, China’s decision to use violence was still shy of initiating a war. In this sense, China’s decision to engage Indian troops at Thagla Ridge and induce a withdrawal can be seen as a “tit-for-tat” response to India’s attempt to forcefully evict the Chinese. The Chinese display of force, moreover, sent a strong signal to Indian commanders in the field and prompted a reappraisal by the IV Corps commander Kaul: “I had now seen with my own eyes the superior resources of the Chinese in the battle that morning.”³⁰⁸

After the battle at Thagla, Kaul flew back to New Delhi and had a meeting with the Indian leadership to re-evaluate plans to evict the Chinese. The outcome of this crucial late-night meeting of October 11 was that Indian forces were to withhold eviction operations but maintain the Namkachu line.³⁰⁹ Kaul issued orders to border troops in accordance with this decision on October 14, but the *Times of India* ran an article the next day quoting Nehru as declaring, on October 12, that orders had been issued “to free Indian territory in [the northeastern sector] of Chinese intruders.”³¹⁰

³⁰⁶Prasad 1981, p. 64. As Prasad admits, the plan that was used to evict the Chinese “was in effect merely a make-believe paper” that he drawn-up “tongue-in-cheek” under the Army Commander’s “arm-twisting” and he had made Kaul aware of the origins of the plan. *ibid.*, p. 56

³⁰⁷Brooks and Baghat 1963, p. 94.

³⁰⁸Kaul 1967, p. 383.

³⁰⁹No minutes of this crucial late-night meeting were taken, and the accounts of several participants of the meeting differ. For instance, the Henderson Brooks report refers to a report by the Army Commander as stating that no decision was made at the meeting, while Mullik states that a decision was indeed made. See Brooks and Baghat 1963, p. 95 and Mullik 1971, p. 364. Kaul says that the opinions of the Army Commander and Army Chief of Staff at the meeting were to cancel the order to attack and hold current positions. See Kaul 1967, pp. 385-386. It is clear from the Henderson Brooks report, however, that Kaul gave out an order to hold positions on October 14.

³¹⁰“Chinese Itching to Deploy Paratroops on Border” (1962). *Times of India*.

Meanwhile in China, General Liu Bocheng, the head of the Chinese military strategy small group, and one of the principle architects behind China's military operations in the border dispute with India, advocated a "blitzkrieg strategy" (*su zhan su jue*) against Indian forces that took advantage of "the movement of troops during the night and a surprise attack at dawn."³¹¹ On October 17, Kaul was taken ill and flew back to Delhi. That same day, the Chinese Central Military Commission issued the order to "annihilate the invading Indian army." On October 18, the Chinese politburo gave the final order to launch a "Self-Defensive Counter-Attack," and on the dawn of October 20, the Chinese struck simultaneously on the eastern and western fronts.³¹²

Why did the Chinese decide to initiate a "Self-Defensive Counter-Attack" in late-October, after resisting multiple opportunities to strike? Why did the Indians make their policy "still more aggressive" when their frontier forces were inadequately deployed and the assumption that the Chinese would keep avoiding confrontations was proven wrong? Indeed, why did the Indians become resolved to risk war when they were initially open to compromise?

The Role of Provocation

If the logic of provocation is operative in the crisis, we should expect to see actions by one state that anger or increase the honor concerns of its adversary to increase the adversary's resolve to escalate. If this increase in resolve is sufficiently large, the adversary can become resolved for war even when it was previously unresolved. That is, even if the adversary is initially willing to concede the stake in dispute, it can switch to become willing to fight for

³¹¹Li Mancun, Chen Fu, and Hwang Yuzhang, eds. (1992) *Liu Bocheng Zhuan [A Biography of Liu Bocheng]*. Beijing: Dangdai zhongguo chubanshe, pp. 669-671. Liu made these comments between October 10 and 17.

³¹²Jiang and Li 1994, p. 179. Also see *Deng Xiaoping Nian Pu* 2009, p. 1730.

that same stake.³¹³

The available evidence suggests that the logic of provocation contributed significantly to the outbreak of war in three key respects. First, the logic of provocation explains why Nehru changed his initially conciliatory position regarding the border dispute in Aksai Chin and thus became resolved to resist a deal with the Chinese. This increase in Nehru's resolve can be seen by contrasting both private and public accounts of his views before and after the Kongka Pass incident of October 21, 1959. Before the Kongka Pass incident Nehru declared in the parliament that "the exact line [in Aksai Chin] is not at all clear as in the case of the McMahon Line" (September 10), and "[i]t is a matter of argument as to what part of [Aksai Chin] belongs to us and what part of it belongs to someone else" (September 12). Also before the Kongka Pass incident, India's former foreign minister claims that Nehru was privately "agreeable" to "adjustments" in Aksai Chin as long as it was "part of a satisfactory overall settlement." After the Kongka Pass incident however, Nehru sent a letter to China (on November 16) attaching a new precondition to border talks: the withdrawal of Chinese troops from Aksai Chin. In private, when India's director of the historical division of the MEA, Dr. Gopal, returned to India in November, he found Nehru to be in a state of "defiance and resistance against the idea of handing over territory" even before he took Nehru through the results of his research from the London archives. Thus, Nehru's resolve clearly increased after the Kongka Pass incident, as he switched from being open to the idea of compromising Aksai Chin to becoming resolved to confront the Chinese in the border

³¹³Note, however, that even if a provocative effect exists, it can be overwhelmed by other factors in a crisis, so whether an increase in resolve through a provocative effect translates into a decision to escalate depends on considerations such as how large the provocative effect is compared to other factors in the crisis. For example, the adversary may become more resolved because of a provocative effect, but simultaneously come to believe the foreign state is much more powerful than initially believed, and if the latter effect is larger than the provocative effect, the adversary may not decide to escalate. As a result, a provocative effect may be operative in a crisis and only have unobserved effects. Whether provocative effects overwhelm all other factors in any particular crisis situation is beyond what the theory can explain. Instead, such considerations of how large a provocative effect has to be compared to other factors to translate into decisions (i.e. outcomes) to escalate are analyzed through game-theoretic models in Chapter 4.

dispute.

This increase in Nehru's resolve is explained in part by the logic of provocation. Although Nehru initially expressed a willingness to come to an agreement with China over Aksai Chin, he also viewed a territorial concession in face of Chinese border provocations as dishonorable. On September 12, he declared that "I will not submit to coercion. I will not submit to dishonor."³¹⁴ In November 25, he declared that "You cannot barter these things, your self-respect and honor." Thus, border provocations increased Nehru's resolve by increasing the honor he saw at stake – it changed a situational factor. A few days after the Kongka Pass incident, Nehru also privately expressed his anger towards the Chinese: "[i]t is natural...that there should be a strong reaction in the country of indignation and resentment [against the Chinese]. We all feel that."³¹⁵ The Kongka Pass incident, therefore, provoked Nehru to resist a 'swap deal' with China.

Second, this resolve to resist a deal does not by itself show that India had become resolved enough to fight a war for Aksai Chin because there was no imminent threat of war at the time. Instead, subsequent coercive actions by the Chinese increased India's resolve for war. As China began to push back against India's "forward policy" with "armed coexistence," instructions to Indian border units changed progressively: on July 10, 1962, when the Chinese laid a siege on an Indian post in Galwan Valley, instructions to Indian border units changed from "fire only if fired upon" to "fire in self-defence;" on July 22, a day after the new skirmishes in Chip Chap Valley, Indian border troops were given the discretion to fire if "threatened;" and on September 12, Indian border troops were given the latitude to fire if the Chinese "entered Indian territory."³¹⁶ Indeed, by September 22, after Chinese

³¹⁴Ministry of External Affairs of India 1962. P. 146 Statement made in parliament (Lok Sabha) on September 12, 1959.

³¹⁵Nehru 1989, p. 3. Letter of October 26, 1959.

³¹⁶See, Maxwell 1970, pp. 239, 243; Sinha, Athale, and Prasad 1992, pp. xx, 78; and Brooks and Baghat 1963, pp. 14, 60, 73.

troops had repeatedly encircled and pressured Indian border posts to withdraw, the Indian leadership became resolved to “evict” the Chinese by taking the risk of initiating the violent use of force despite protestations within the leadership and from field commanders that the Chinese might react on a larger scale. Moreover, when the Indian government had tried a final effort at diplomacy on July 26 by sending the Chinese a diplomatic note that omitted references to a Chinese withdrawal from Aksai Chin as precondition to talks, Indian public opinion vociferously opposed the move: “[there was] an outpouring of exhortation in the press that Mr. Nehru abjure the ‘road to dishonour.’” Thus, China’s overt attempts to apply military pressure on India appears to have both lowered the Indian leadership’s perceived risks of a violent showdown with the Chinese and lowered Nehru’s political costs of contravening his public persona as a champion of *Panchsheel* by using violence to evict the Chinese.

Third, for China, its increase in resolve can best be inferred from its decision to eschew multiple opportunities to strike back at India before launching the “Self-Defensive Counter-Attack” in October 1962. Again, both public and internal accounts can be corroborated to support this view. Although China had been building up its frontier forces since May 1962, PLA documents captured by the CIA show that the Chinese leadership was wary of using force against India – even if they could attain a “military victory” – because the political costs of such a conflict would be too high. Indeed, Beijing saw an attack on India as a political “trap” that the “imperialists” could use to “slander” and mobilize against China. Furthermore, Mao said that China must not hit back during the Galwan Valley incident in July 1962 because Nehru’s “true color” must be exposed for the world to see. It was only after India declared and began using overt force to evict the Chinese that Beijing believed that the international political costs to strike back had fallen sufficiently through Indian provocations.

Indeed, the Chinese attached great importance to avoiding the international political costs of being vilified as the aggressor in the border dispute.³¹⁷ As the Chinese historian Xu Yan puts it: “Mao was cautious because a large scale attack on India might have repercussions on the United States and Soviet Union and create misunderstandings from Asian countries.”³¹⁸ Furthermore, gaining a strong justification to strike back also complemented Mao’s well-known doctrine of *houfa zhiren*, or “second-strike dominance.”³¹⁹ As the internally circulated Chinese account of the Sino-India War points out, “this war required, among other things, political mobilization...It required Mao and the CCCP’s [stratagem of] *gaining mastery by striking only after the enemy has struck*.”³²⁰ Indeed, General K.S. Thimayya, who served as India’s Army Chief of Staff until a few months before the initiation of the forward policy, even suggests that China’s “actions in overrunning our post in Dhola Bridge and in occupying Thagla Ridge, must have been for a specific aim of forcing us to react so as to give them a good excuse for launching an attack on us.”³²¹ No publicly available evidence exists that China deliberately pursued a strategy of provoking an overreaction from Indian forces. But the logic of provocation tells us that regardless of whether China deliberately or unintentionally provoked India, India’s public declarations and forceful actions to evict the Chinese in October 1962 provided a pretext for China to launch an attack, thereby drastically reducing the international political costs of war that had hitherto restrained it.

³¹⁷ Author interview no. 3 in Beijing, June 2015.

³¹⁸ Xu 1993, pp.110-111.

³¹⁹ See, for example, Thomas J. Christensen (2006) *Windows and War: Trend Analysis and Beijing’s Use of Force*. In *New Directions in the Study of Chinese Foreign Policy*. Ed. by Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross. Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 50–85, p. 64.

³²⁰ Jiang and Li 1994, p. 180.

³²¹ Kodandera Subayya Thimayya (1963) “Chinese Aggression and After.” *International Studies*. 5.1-2, pp. 50–53. Lorne Kavic, quoting Thimayya, also suggests that India’s forceful actions may have eased China’s decision to initiate war. See Lorne J. Kavic (1967) *India’s Quest for Security: Defence Policies, 1947-1965*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 172-173.

Alternative Explanations

I examine five alternative arguments. Two are consistent with a crisis bargaining logic and two with the security dilemma logic of crisis escalation.

Diversionsary War Hypothesis

First, a diversionsary war hypothesis posits that in September 1962, India and China wanted to divert domestic attention away from internal troubles and garner political support by engaging in a conflict. Yet India held its third general elections in March 1962, and there were no political upheavals after the elections. So although the initiation of the forward policy in November 1961 may have been affected by political considerations relating to the elections, diversionsary war is an inadequate explanation of why India made its policy more aggressive at Dhola and became resolved to risk war by September 1962. Moreover, as Whiting argues, diversionsary war also fails to explain China's decision to escalate the border dispute with India because China faced more severe threats with which it could foment a sense of crisis, such as the threat from Chiang Kai-shek in the east, but chose not to do so.³²²

Miscalculation Hypothesis

Second, a miscalculation hypothesis posits that India underestimated China's intentions and/or capabilities. According to this view, Indian leaders were almost delusional in thinking that the Chinese would not attack or that India could win a war with China because of the new roads and posts it had built up since 1960. In contrast to a simple miscalculation, Vertzberger claims that perceptual biases made the Indian leadership discount information

³²²Whiting 1975, p. 72.

that was inconsistent with their beliefs about Chinese capabilities and resolve.³²³ As seen above, Indian field commanders indeed sent multiple messages to upper echelons warning of the danger of pressing the Chinese, and these messages did little to steer the Indian leadership away from confrontation. Yet after the battle at Thagla Ridge, Nehru clearly believed that Chinese capabilities were formidable and that a war was imminent. In a private letter to his chiefs ministers on October 12, 1962, Nehru wrote that,

“[t]his incident [at Thagla Ridge] and other facts have brought into light that the Chinese had been strengthening their forces very considerably...This situation in the North East Frontier is definitely a dangerous one, and it may lead to major conflicts. We shall, of course, try to do our best. But it seems likely that conflicts on a bigger scale might take place there.”³²⁴

On this very day, however, Nehru declared in public that Indian forces will “free Indian territory...of Chinese intruders.” Nehru thus continued to confront the Chinese despite recognizing the possibility of large scale conflict.

Classic Audience Costs Hypothesis

Third is a classic audience costs hypothesis.³²⁵ This hypothesis asserts that the Indian government deliberately raised the costs of backing down by making public commitments to resist China, thus tying their own hands. The government of India certainly faced gargantuan public pressures to resist China. In an interview after the war, India’s wartime defense minister, Krishna Menon, stated that “[s]o inflamed was the state of Indian public opinion [at the time] that if any Defense Minister or Prime Minister had wanted to let the

³²³Yaacov Y.I. Vertzberger (1984) *Misperceptions in Foreign Policy Making: The Sino-Indian Conflict, 1959-1962*. Boulder, C.O.: Westview Press.

³²⁴Nehru 1989, p. 531. Emphasis added.

³²⁵I distinguish a ‘classic’ audience costs argument from an ‘imposed’ audience costs argument.

Chinese take our territory in the hope that we would take it back soon...he could not have done so.”³²⁶ Yet, a classic audience costs argument does not distinguish audience costs that are generated by the Indian government from audience costs that are “imposed” by provocative statements and actions by China. Several actions by the Indian government indeed had the effect of generating audience costs, such as the public release of the letters between Nehru and Zhou regarding the border dispute and Nehru’s public statements that Indian forces will evict the Chinese from Indian territory. But a defining characteristic of Nehru throughout the two-year period leading up to the war was his persistent efforts to temper public emotions and maintain political flexibility in dealing with the border dispute. For instance, he warned in public that “any step that we may take now cannot be taken in a huff, if I may say so, because we are angry and we do something regardless of the consequences of that step.”³²⁷ In private, he cautioned his chief ministers that “no correct policy can be evolved in a state of anger.”³²⁸ Yet, the armed confrontations in Longju and Kongka Pass in 1959 and in the Galwan Valley and Chip Chap Valley in 1962 galvanized the Indian public to oppose a concession. By the summer of 1962, moreover, even diplomatic gestures by the Indian government to drop preconditions to talks were met with the public’s wrath. The audience costs that the Indian government faced thus arose both from its own words and deeds as well as the behavior of the Chinese.³²⁹ As for China, a classic audience costs hypothesis has limited relevance since Chinese leaders faced no risk of electoral punishment if they backed down. But to the extent that they faced greater political pressure to resist capitulation later in the crisis, a classic audience costs hypothesis neglects the public costs that were inflicted on China by Indian actions and statements to

³²⁶Krishna Menon’s Interview to Inder Malhotra (November 20, 1967) “Look Back Without Anger.” *The Statesman*. Also, author interview no. 3 in New Delhi, June 2015.

³²⁷Ministry of External Affairs of India 1962. P. 115. Statement made in parliament (Lok Sabha) on September 4, 1959.

³²⁸Nehru 1989, p. 293. Letter of October 16, 1959 (before the Kongka Pass incident).

³²⁹On audience costs in authoritarian regimes, see Weeks 2008.

thrust forward.

Security Dilemma Hypothesis I

Fourth is a security dilemma hypothesis. According to the security dilemma logic of crisis escalation, China was a status quo state that wanted to maintain stability in Tibet by building a road through Aksai Chin, but the loss of Aksai Chin threatened India's security, and India's efforts to return to what it perceived as the status quo with the Chinese vacated from Aksai Chin threatened China in return. The central problem with this security dilemma hypothesis, however, is that regardless of whether China or India was a status quo state, India initially displayed a willingness to live with a new status quo in which the Chinese remained in Aksai Chin. At the outset of the crisis, India's Chief of Army Staff even claimed that the Aksai Chin road had "no strategic importance to India." It was only later in the crisis that India became resolved over Aksai Chin, and this increase in resolve cannot be explained by a corresponding increase in the strategic value that India attached to controlling Aksai Chin itself: the boisterous calls in India to reclaim Aksai Chin by risking war barely mentioned Aksai Chin as a vital Indian security interest. Instead, and as noted above, it was the provocative effects of Chinese actions and statements during the crisis that played a crucial role in increasing Indian resolve over Aksai Chin.

Security Dilemma Hypothesis II

Fifth is an extension of the security dilemma logic: India came to believe that ceding Aksai Chin will be taken as a sign of weakness that invites further Chinese aggression and expansionism. I refer to this as an 'extended security dilemma' hypothesis for two reasons. First, if India was initially unresolved over Aksai Chin, but later became resolved because they thought that a concession would invite more Chinese aggression, then India must have inferred from Chinese actions later in the crisis that China presented a larger threat that was

grave enough to counter with force.³³⁰ Shankar, for instance, advances a similar argument that focuses on the role of reputation:

“Nehru feared that being accommodative on the territorial issue would be construed as weakness in Beijing, encouraging only further challenges to India’s security and interests. As a result, despite acknowledging their limited interest in territory, the Indian government chose to stand firm on Aksai Chin even as [Z]hou made an ostensibly reasonable offer to resolve the dispute.”³³¹

Thus, India became resolved over Aksai Chin because it wanted to avoid a “reputation for weakness” in its relations with China.³³² This argument is compatible with a security dilemma logic to the extent that when India did not find China sufficiently threatening, it was willing to concede Aksai Chin, but when it came to believe that China was an expansionist state that would not stop at Aksai Chin, it saw a concession as dangerously leading to a “reputation for weakness.”

Second, for the present hypothesis to be a security dilemma, India’s greater perceived threat from China must have been a misunderstanding. Indeed, as Mastro convincingly argues, after China initiated their “Self-Defensive Counter-Attack” in October 1962, the Indians hardened their belief that holding formal negotiations would “signal weakness” and “encourage China to use more military force.”³³³ If this logic is applied *prior* to the war, India became resolved because it was *insufficiently reassured* by China that a concession in Aksai Chin will not lead to further demands.

³³⁰Raghavan presents an argument along these lines. Raghavan 2010, pp. 263-4. A similar logic is what Schelling refers to as “salami tactics.” See Schelling 1966, pp. 66-9.

³³¹Shankar 2015, p. 100.

³³²Ibid., p. 105.

³³³Mastro 2012, pp. 75, 87-91.

This ‘extended security dilemma’ hypothesis certainly has merits as several Indian cabinet members thought that China would not stop at Aksai Chin.³³⁴ Yet, if this hypothesis is true, India should have initiated its forceful eviction operations in locations where the Chinese had intruded farthest – and hence, where India’s reputation for weakness was most evident – and where Indian operations were in the strongest positions to succeed. Dhola post was neither. The post was indeed situated in the eastern sector, where India’s presence was stronger than in the western sector. But as the Henderson Brooks Report makes clear, Dhola post suffered from an inadequate induction of troops and was set up *north* of the McMahon Line even on Indian maps that were given to China. The Indians, moreover, were aware of this discrepancy.³³⁵ This means that Dhola post was in a location which conferred the least legitimacy to counter “Chinese expansionism,” yet it was at this post that India made its policy “still more aggressive.” Thus, although the extended security dilemma hypothesis can partially explain India’s increase in resolve, the timing and location of India’s decision to escalate and risk war remains unaccounted for by this hypothesis.

Conclusion

Two years prior to the outbreak of the Sino-Indian War, only a few days before the deadly incident in Kongka Pass, Nehru confided in a private letter to his chief ministers the following concern:

“Recently we have had deep resentment and anger at the development on our border with Tibet-China. And, again, there was adequate justification for it. But I have observed how easily national passions are roused and how they can sweep us off our feet. Our newspapers, or many of them, add to this feeling of passion and resentment.

³³⁴ Author interview no. 1 in New Delhi, June 2015. Also see, for instance, Maxwell 1970; and Mullik 1971.

³³⁵ Brooks and Baghat 1963, pp. 53-4.

If no check of reason and calm thought was applied to these situations, we would be led step by step to a position from which there was no escape except major conflict.”³³⁶

The tragedy that befell India and China was that although both sides were aware of the dangers of provocation, “step by step” they ended up in a war that they expected to avoid. How did this happen? The two year build-up to the war gave decision makers in both states ample time to defuse the crisis and find a peaceful resolution, yet both sides instead spent the two years trying to alter the local balance of forces, establish ‘facts on the ground,’ and demonstrate decidedly that they were no ‘pushover.’ These actions, rather than strengthening each side’s bargaining position, provoked their opponent and chipped away at the bargaining space from which a settlement could be struck. In India, China’s forceful attempts to drive home a bargain incensed the Indian public and elites, driving up the political costs for the Indian leadership to back down and whisking away the chances for a deal. In China, India’s policy to thrust forward riled Chinese border troops and lowered China’s international political costs of launching an assault by providing a justification for a “Self-Defensive Counter-Attack.”

Was the Sino-India War an *inadvertent war*? For the war to have been an inadvertent war, a crucial requirement is that both sides are unresolved for war at the outset of the crisis. This chapter found that India was unresolved for a border war in 1959 as Nehru publicly expressed a willingness to compromise on Aksai Chin. After the Kongka Pass incident of October 21, 1959, however, Nehru became decidedly less conciliatory, and by September 22 1962, the Indian leadership become resolved enough to risk war as they decided to evict Chinese border troops from Indian territory by using military force. There is no evidence, however, that the Chinese were unresolved at the outset of the crisis. That is, there is no evidence that the Chinese would have been willing to withdraw from Aksai

³³⁶Nehru 1989, p. 294. Letter of October 16, 1959.

Chin rather than put up a fight in 1959. Yet, there is no evidence to the contrary either: no available evidence definitively shows that the Chinese were initially resolved to fight for Aksai Chin. In this sense, the available historical evidence does not determine whether the Sino-Indian War was an inadvertent war. What the evidence does suggest, however, is that both sides correctly understood that India was initially willing to compromise at the outset of the crisis. Soon after Nehru's public statements in the parliament, an internal Chinese report concluded that the Indians were willing to make a border deal, and when Zhou Enlai went to New Dehli for the border negotiations in 1960, he even reminded Nehru that "Your Excellency [Nehru] stated in parliament that the boundary in the western sector was vague." What the Chinese failed to appreciate, however, was that the Kongka Pass incident hardened Nehru to resist a deal. Moreover, over a two-year period, efforts by both sides to pressure the other to back down only made it easier for their opponent to resort to arms. The Sino-India War, therefore, was not the perfect inadvertent war, but it was a tragedy driven by the logic of provocation.

CHAPTER 6 : The Sino-Soviet Border Conflict of 1969

This case study explores how the logic of provocation affects crisis escalation between nuclear powers. I address three questions. Why did a crisis over seemingly small stakes – in this case, a river island – escalate to nuclear war scares? How did the logic of provocation contribute to this outcome? And what influence did the presence of nuclear weapons exert on the escalatory process?

I find that although the larger rivalry and growing rift between the two communist powers was an important reason that border skirmishes escalated to nuclear threats, the logic of provocation explains two key features of the crisis. First, Mao adopted a deliberate provocation strategy to signal resolve, but this signaling strategy backfired as Mao underestimated how much it would provoke the Soviets.³³⁷ Second, following Soviet threats of a nuclear attack, the Chinese worried that further provoking the Soviets would provide a pretext for the Soviets to carry out their threat. As proponents of the “nuclear revolution” argue, a primary effect of nuclear weapons in the crisis was to force both the Chinese and Soviets to exercise general caution and restraint.³³⁸ As Sechser and Fuhrmann point out, however, the case fails to live up to the expectations of brinkmanship theorists because neither side relied on threats of a nuclear attack that would accidentally be launched on major population centers.³³⁹ The logic of provocation, I contend, explains what Sechser and Fuhrmann refer to as this “awkward puzzle” in the crisis. The Chinese primarily feared that provoking the Soviets would provide a pretext and increase the

³³⁷On the strategy to signal resolve through deliberate provocation, see the discussion in Chapter 4.

³³⁸On the nuclear revolution and the restraining effects of nuclear weapons, see Robert Jervis (1989b) *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press; and Avery Goldstein (2000) *Deterrence and Security in the 21st Century: China, Britain, France, and the Enduring Legacy of the Nuclear Revolution*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

³³⁹Todd S. Sechser and Matthew Fuhrmann (2017) *Nuclear Weapons and Coercive Diplomacy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 216-217.

Soviets' resolve to launch a *deliberate* nuclear attack. This fear of provoking a deliberate nuclear attack thus had a subduing effect on China's decisions to further escalate the crisis. But why did the Chinese fear provoking a deliberate nuclear attack if they also possessed nuclear weapons that could deter the Soviets?

Existing research on this case, while almost all acknowledging that the Chinese became worried about a deliberate Soviet nuclear strike, pays insufficient attention to why this fear was so large given that China also possessed nuclear weapons.³⁴⁰ I argue that China's fear of provoking a deliberate Soviet nuclear strike was rational because the Soviets faced strong incentives for a preventive strike and not just a nuclear first strike. China's nuclear arsenal at the time was so limited that a preventive strike could have pushed back their nuclear capabilities for decades. The possibility of a preventive strike, although still unlikely, thus became a real concern for the Chinese. Because there was a non-negligible possibility of a deliberate strike, and not just an accidental strike, however, the Chinese worried that more provocative border skirmishes could increase the Soviets' resolve to launch such a strike. In this sense, the vastly asymmetric nuclear balance made possible the Chinese fear of provoking a nuclear attack, but this role of nuclear asymmetry differs from Matthew Kroenig's argument that nuclear inferiority constrains risk-taking in brinkmanship.³⁴¹ Instead, as Avery Goldstein points out, China's nascent nuclear capabilities during the 1969 crisis meant that the Soviets faced incentives for a preventive strike.³⁴² These Soviet incentives, in turn, spurred China's fear of provoking the Soviets to launch such a strike deliberately.

³⁴⁰On China's conventional deterrent posture, see Lyle J. Goldstein (2006) *Preventive Attack and Weapons of Mass Destruction: A Comparative Historical Analysis*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 89-93.

³⁴¹Matthew Kroenig (2013) "Nuclear Superiority and the Balance of Resolve: Explaining Nuclear Crisis Outcomes." *International Organization*. 67.1, pp. 141-171.

³⁴²Goldstein 2000, p. 101. To distinguish the author with Lyle Goldstein, I include the authors' first name in the text.

China's fear of a preventive nuclear strike by the Soviets, however, only partially explains why China suddenly dropped its long-held pre-condition to border talks and agreed to Soviet demands to hold negotiations. Put differently, although the Chinese feared a Soviet nuclear strike, it is difficult to conclude that the Soviet threat was fully credible or that fears of a Soviet nuclear strike alone led to China's decision to back down in public. Rather, China's decision to suddenly relax tensions with the Soviets is best explained by a combination of two factors: Soviet attempts to compel the Chinese with nuclear coercion and credible U.S. signals to normalize relations that coincided with Soviet nuclear threats. Newly available archival evidence now allows us to see the exact timing of key conciliatory signals from the United States that reached the Chinese. In addition to Chinese and Russian archival sources, I thus draw on recently available Romanian archives and *The President's Daily Brief* by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.

After presenting evidence that supports the logic of provocation, I evaluate four alternative explanations for why and how the crisis escalated. First, the diversionary war hypothesis posits that a dispute over a small river island escalated to nuclear threats because Chinese and Soviet leaders wanted to divert domestic attention away from internal woes through an external conflict. Second, the brinkmanship hypothesis posits that the crisis escalated because the Chinese and Soviets tried to coerce each other by generating risks that the crisis spirals out of control. Third, the stability-instability paradox hypothesis posits that stability induced by mutual deterrence at the nuclear level paradoxically emboldened the Chinese and Soviets to engage in escalatory behavior at the conventional level.³⁴³ And fourth, the 'China courts the United States' hypothesis posits that the Chinese escalated their border dispute with the Soviets to clear the way for rapprochement with the West. As I later discuss, however, the available evidence best supports the logic of provocation.

³⁴³On the "stability-instability" paradox, see Glenn Snyder (1965) *The Balance of Power and the Balance of Terror*. In *The Balance of Power*. Ed. by Paul Seabury. San Francisco, C.A.: Chandler.

The next section justifies my case selection. The following sections describe the chain of events in the case and discuss why the crisis escalated to nuclear threats. The final section concludes.

Why Choose the 1969 Crisis?

The 1969 crisis is useful for examining how provocation affects nuclear crises for three reasons. The first is its substantive importance. With rising tensions between the United States and China in the South China Sea, and concerns about a U.S. “bloody nose” strike on North Korea, the 1969 crisis offers an important opportunity to study the role of provocation when conventional conflict breaks out between nuclear powers. The universe of cases from which to choose a case to study these dangers, however, is limited. In fact, there is only one other case: the 1999 Kargil War between India and Pakistan. Within this limited pool, the 1969 crisis has received much less attention despite it being the only crisis in which China, as a nuclear power, escalated to conventional conflict against another nuclear power. Second, the 1969 crisis appears to escalate over meager stakes. Similarly to the 1962 war, which escalated to conflict over unfamiliar territories in the Himalayas, the 1969 crisis ostensibly escalated to conflict and even nuclear war scares over a little-known river island. This high level of escalation over seemingly small stakes presents a puzzle in which the logic of provocation may plausibly play a significant role. Yet, the existing literature on the 1969 crisis does not examine the role of provocation.

Finally, skeptics may worry that the 1962 Sino-India War and 1969 Sino-Soviet Border Conflict are unhelpful cases for studying the role of provocation in crises because China’s leader in both cases, Mao Zedong, was an unusual risk-taker. That is, concerns may arise over the generalizability of the two cases to understand how provocation affects crises. It is certainly possible that Mao was an outlier in terms of risk preferences. That said, the

danger of provoking escalation in crises in which risk-acceptant leaders such as Kim Jong-un or Donald Trump may become involved make these two cases arguably more, rather than less, important for understanding the role of provocation in interstate crises.

Background

The Sino-Soviet Border Conflict of 1969 refers to a series of conventional battles on the border that year that brought the two countries to the brink of nuclear war. Not only was it the most dangerous nuclear crisis since the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, but China's first military crisis as a nuclear power. China conducted its first nuclear test in 1964 and successfully tested its first hydrogen bomb in 1967.³⁴⁴ The border dispute that animated the 1969 crisis had been an open source of tension since 1963, but the roots of the crisis cannot be understood without reference to the broader political fall-out between China and the Soviet Union.³⁴⁵ The two communist powers signed their Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance on Valentines Day, 1950, but before the turn of the decade, they were "sleeping in the same bed, dreaming different dreams" (*tong chuang yi meng*).³⁴⁶ In 1959, the Soviets reneged on their promise to help China build nuclear weapons, and by July 1960, they pulled out their nuclear scientists altogether.³⁴⁷ Between Mao's polemics against Khrushchev in 1962, and Brezhnev's designation of China as a principle threat during the World Communist Congress in June 1969, relations between the two communist

³⁴⁴See John Wilson Lewis and Litai Xue (1988) *China Builds the Bomb*. Stanford: Stanford University Press and Robert S. Norris (1994) *British, French, and Chinese Nuclear Weapons*. Boulder, C.O.: Westview Press.

³⁴⁵See Thomas W. Robinson (1972) "The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute: Background, Development, and the March 1969 Clashes." *American Political Science Review*. 66.4, pp. 1175–1202, Richard Wich (1980) *Sino-Soviet Crisis Politics: A Study of Political Change and Communication*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Melvin Gurtov and Byong-Moo Hwang (1980) *China Under Threat: The Politics of Strategy and Diplomacy*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

³⁴⁶Lampton uses this Chinese expression to describe U.S.-China relations between 1989 and 2000. See, David M. Lampton (2000) *Same Bed, Different Dreams: Managing U.S.- China Relations, 1989-2000*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

³⁴⁷See, for example, Michael S. Gerson (Nov. 2010) *The Sino-Soviet Border Conflict: Deterrence, Escalation, and the Threat of Nuclear War in 1969*. Center for Naval Analyses, pp. 8-9.

giants steadily deteriorated.

In May 1963, following increasing Chinese incursions into the Sino-Soviet border and China's decision to assert its territorial claims with India through a border war in November 1962, the Soviets reversed their long-held position of refusing to negotiate their borders by proposing border talks with the Chinese.³⁴⁸ Secret Sino-Soviet border talks began in February 1964, and one of the main points on the agenda was where the border lay along the Ussuri and Amur rivers, as nearly seven hundred river islands were at stake.³⁴⁹ The Soviets were apparently willing to concede many of these river islands to China, including Zhenbao/Damansky Island, but they were interested in retaining a select few for their strategic value. The Chinese were open to such an arrangement, and the Soviets indicated a willingness to sign a treaty. The key point of contention, however, was China's demand that the Soviet Union recognize that the current Sino-Soviet border was a result of "unequal treaties" that the Chinese were forced to sign before the PRC was established.³⁵⁰ The Chinese denied that their aim was to reclaim territories before the treaties were signed and stressed that they were willing to base the negotiations on the current border as long as the Soviets acknowledge the nature of the border. An admission that the current border was a product of "unequal treaties," however, would have been a major humiliation for the Soviets because China referred to its treaties with Britain that ceded territories such as Hong Kong as "unequal treaties." Moreover, within the context of increasing Sino-Soviet competition, such a concession would undermine the political authority of the Soviet Union within the communist camp. Thus, what Mao was looking for was a *political concession* from the Soviets. Yet, the Soviets refused to make such a concession, claiming that doing

³⁴⁸Arthur A. Cohen (1991) The Sino-Soviet Border Crisis of 1969. In *Avoiding War: Problems of Crisis Management*. Ed. by Alexander L. George. Boulder, C.O.: Westview Press, pp. 271-272.

³⁴⁹See Arthur A. Cohen (Apr. 1970) *Intelligence Report: The Evolution of Soviet Policy and the Sino-Soviet Border Dispute ESAU XLV/70 [Top Secret]*. Washington D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, pp. iii-iv; Robinson 1972, p. 1180, and Gurtov and Hwang 1980, p. 210.

³⁵⁰Gerson 2010, pp. 12-3.

so would provide a rationale for other countries to contest Soviet borders.³⁵¹ The talks soon arrived at a deadlock. On July 10, 1964, Mao criticized the unyielding Soviet stance in an interview with the Japanese press. Four days later, judging that Mao had betrayed the secretive nature of the talks to gain political advantage, the Soviets left the negotiating table.³⁵²

Five important developments occurred during the five-year interim between 1964 and 1969. First, Soviet conventional forces along the Sino-Soviet border increased two-fold.³⁵³ Khrushchev fell from power only months after the border talks with the Chinese were suspended, and when Leonid Brezhnev took his place in October 1964, he expedited a conventional military build-up along the Chinese border. Second, in 1966, the Soviet Union and Mongolia signed a treaty that allowed the Soviets to station military forces in Mongolia and hence much nearer to China.³⁵⁴ Third, 1966 also marks the year in which China began its Cultural Revolution. Mao attempted to reinvigorate revolutionary ideals among the masses and root out political opposition within the party by overturning the whole of Chinese society. But the country soon fell into turmoil as students ransacked governmental bodies and elites were forced into manual labor in the countryside. Although Mao and his clique survived the three-year ordeal relatively intact, the political instability that the Cultural Revolution created provided an additional incentive for the Soviets to strengthen their border defenses. Fourth, in spring 1967, the Soviets deployed tactical nuclear weapons to the Chinese border.³⁵⁵ Fifth, on August 21, 1968, the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia. The so-called “Brezhnev Doctrine” justified the use of military force to stabilize fellow communist countries. With China and the Soviet Union increasingly at

³⁵¹Cohen 1970, pp. 8-9.

³⁵²Ibid., pp. 10-12.

³⁵³See Fravel 2008, p. 204; Goldstein 2006; Gerson 2010, p. 16.

³⁵⁴Xu Yan (1994) “1969 nian ZhongSu bianjie de wuzhuang chongtu” [The 1969 armed conflict on the Chinese-Soviet border].” *Dangshi yanjiu ziliao*. 5, pp. 2–13, p. 5.

³⁵⁵Cohen 1970, p. 24.

loggerheads, and China embroiled in political difficulties of their own making, the Soviet decision to wage war on a neighboring communist country shocked the Chinese.³⁵⁶

Despite these developments, throughout the 1964-1969 period, China and the Soviet Union were unable to restart border negotiations. The key stumbling block from 1964 – China’s insistence that the Soviets acknowledge the Sino-Soviet border as a product of “unequal treaties” – remained firmly in place. Skirmishes between Chinese and Soviet border troops, however, became more frequent and violent. By March 1969, moreover, these skirmishes erupted into open armed conflict.

March - August 1969: Clashes on Zhenbao Island and Elsewhere

On March 2, 1969, a violent clash on Zhenbao/Damansky Island killed 31 Soviet border troops.³⁵⁷ Zhenbao Island is a small river island located in the Ussuri River in the Eastern border region, as shown in the upper right map in Figure 14. Although China and the Soviet Union were quick to blame the other for starting the incident, recent historical evidence from both sides strongly indicate that the incident was a carefully planned ambush by the Chinese.³⁵⁸ On the morning of March 2, Soviet border troops found Chinese soldiers on Zhenbao Island, and in a routine manner, approached them to ward them off the island.³⁵⁹ The border skirmishes up to that point had not involved live exchanges of fire, as each side was forbidden to shoot unless in self-defense.³⁶⁰ But as the Chinese retreated, the Soviet troops were caught off-guard as a hidden group of Chinese soldiers suddenly opened fire on them. Soviet reinforcements came too late to save the men, and the incident ended in

³⁵⁶See Cohen 1970, p. 30, Gurtov and Hwang 1980, p. 191.

³⁵⁷Gerson 2010, p. 3. Henceforth, I refer to the island as Zhenbao Island.

³⁵⁸For instance, see Yang Kuisong (2000) “The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Rapprochement.” *Cold War History*. 1.1, pp. 21–52, Lyle J. Goldstein (2001) “Return to Zhenbao Island: Who Started Shooting and Why it Matters.” *The China Quarterly*. 168.December, pp. 985–997, and Fravel 2008, pp. 202-14.

³⁵⁹Cohen 1991, p. 277.

³⁶⁰Gerson 2010, p. 3.

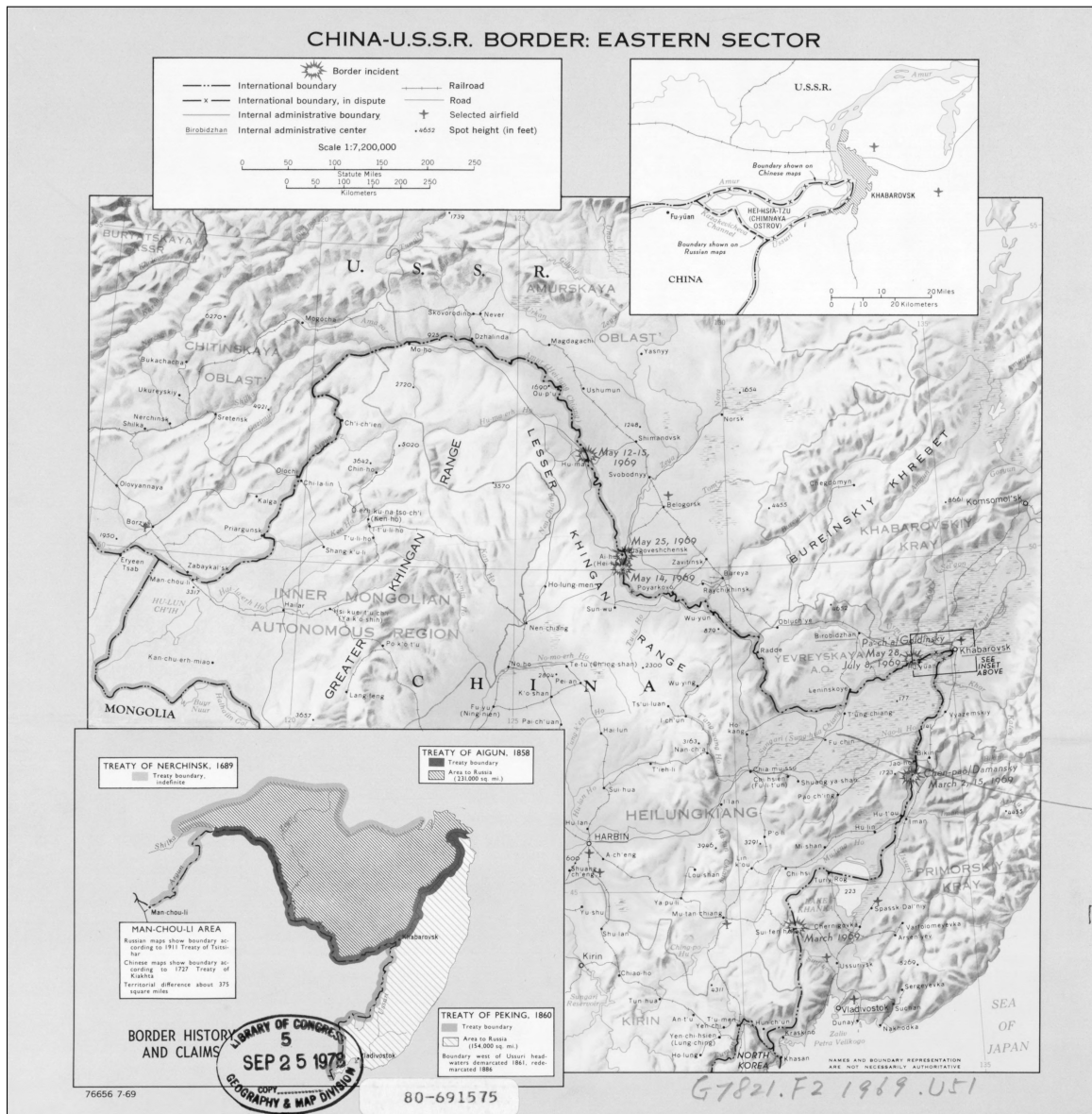


Figure 14: Map of Sino-Soviet Border Conflicts in the Eastern Sector, 1969. United States Central Intelligence Agency. (1969) China-U.S.S.R. border, eastern sector. [Washington: Central Intelligence Agency] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/80691575/>

a humiliating defeat for the Soviets. News of the incident shocked the Soviet leadership. When Brezhnev called the Chief of Staff of the Soviet Border Guard Forces, who had flown to the site of the battle from Moscow the following day, he asked whether the battle meant that China had launched a war against the Soviet Union.³⁶¹

The March 2 firefight was by far the largest clash between the two sides at the time. Violence had broken out on Qiliqin Island on January 5, 1968, leaving four Chinese dead, and on Zhenbao Island on January 23, 1969, resulting in twenty eight Chinese casualties.³⁶² Indeed, between December 1967 and the clash on March 2, 1969, sixteen border incidents occurred on or near Zhenbao Island, nine of which occurred within the two months between December 27, 1968, and February 25, 1969.³⁶³ Amidst these skirmishes, the Chinese had prepared to use force against the Soviets as early as January 1968.³⁶⁴ After the confrontation on Qiliqin Island on January 5, 1968, the Central Military Commission ordered Shenyang and Beijing Military Regions to develop plans to “counter Soviet provocations.”³⁶⁵ Following the skirmishes on Zhenbao Island on January 23, 1969, the Heilongjiang Military District proposed a plan to strike the Soviets, and on February 19, Beijing approved the plan. The Shenyang Military Region then transferred more than

³⁶¹Viktor M. Gobarev (1999) “Soviet Policy Towards China: Developing Nuclear Weapons 1949-1969.” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*. 12.4, pp. 1–53, p. 44.

³⁶²Li Danhui (1996) “1969 nian Zhong-Su bianjie chongtu: yuanqi he jieguo [The causes and consequences of the border conflict between China and the Soviet Union in 1969].” *Dangdai Zhongguo shi yanjiu*. 3.39-50, p. 43; Niu Jun (1999) “1969 nian Zhong-Su bianjie chongtu yu Zhongguo waijiao zhanlie de tiaozheng [The Sino-Soviet border conflict of 1969 and the adjustment of China’s diplomatic strategy].” *Dangdai Zhongguo shi yanjiu*. 1, pp. 66–77, p. 71; Yang 2000, pp. 24-15; Goldstein 2001, p. 987; Fravel 2008, pp. 207-212; Gerson 2010, pp. 19-20.

³⁶³Neville Maxwell (1973) “The Chinese Account of the 1969 Fighting at Chenpao.” *The China Quarterly*. 56, pp. 730–739, p. 733; Fravel 2008, pp. 207-209. The Soviets also acknowledged several of these incidents. See, SAPMO-BArch J IV 2/202/359 (1969) “Soviet Report to East German Leadership on Sino-Soviet Border Clashes March 02, 1969.” *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive Translated by Christian F. Ostermann*.

³⁶⁴See, Xu 1994, p. 6; Yang 2000, p. 28; and Goldstein 2001, p. 988.

³⁶⁵See Li Ke and Hao Shengzhang (1989) *Wenhua dageming zhong de renmin jie fangjun [The People’s Liberation Army During the Cultural Revolution]*. Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi ziliao chubanshe, pp. 318-319; and Fravel 2008, p. 211.

six hundred troops to take up positions on Zhenbao Island.³⁶⁶ Chinese border troops tried to provoke an incident with the Soviets at least twice before the March 2 conflict, but the Soviets avoided a confrontation.”³⁶⁷

On March 15, the Soviets launched a reprisal on Zhenbao Island. The scale and intensity of the fighting that ensued was an order of magnitude larger than the March 2 firefight, with the Soviets mobilizing armored vehicles and launching artillery barrages. The overwhelming Soviet response led to a crushing Chinese defeat. The Soviets claimed several hundred Chinese lives, and one Chinese account estimates that the Soviets incurred 200 casualties, 91 of which were fatalities.³⁶⁸ The possibility of war rose dramatically after the nine-hour fight. From March 15 to March 19, the Soviets put their far east Strategic Rocket Forces – their strategic nuclear forces – on high alert.³⁶⁹

Less than a week after the Soviet reprisal on Zhenbao Island, on March 21, Soviet premier Alexi Kosygin called Mao through a direct line to propose holding border talks. The call, however, was rejected by the Chinese. On March 22, Chinese premier Zhou Enlai wrote a report to Mao in which he suggested that China should avoid direct phone calls with the Soviets and communicate only through official diplomatic channels. Mao approved the report and responded that China should “make preparations to hold talks with the Soviets.”³⁷⁰ But when the Soviets proposed to hold talks through an official diplomatic note on April 11, the Chinese responded by neither rejecting nor accepting the proposal, and instead telling the Soviets to “please calm down a little and do not get excited.”³⁷¹ A

³⁶⁶See Li and Hao 1989, pp. 318-319; Xu 1994, pp. 5-6; Yang 2000, pp. 28-29; and Fravel 2008, pp. 211-212.

³⁶⁷Li Danhui as cited in Goldstein 2001, p. 988.

³⁶⁸See, Maxwell 1973; Xu 1994, pp. 7-8; and Fravel 2008, p. 202.

³⁶⁹Cohen 1970, p. 50.

³⁷⁰Mao Zedong (1998) *Jianguo Yilai Mao Zedong Wengao [Mao Zedong's Manuscripts since the Founding of the People's Republic of China]*. Ed. by Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjuish. Vol. 13. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, p. 21.

³⁷¹Cohen 1991, p. 282.

second effort by the Soviets to reach the Chinese resulted in low-level consultations, but even after China's Ninth Party Congress on April 24, the Chinese had not replied to the Soviet proposal to resume border talks.

When the Chinese finally replied to the Soviets on May 24, they raised a pre-condition to holding border talks: the Soviets must acknowledge the current border as a product of "unequal treaties."³⁷² The Soviets, having demonstrated their superior firepower in the March 15 confrontation, were in no position to make such a concession. From China's point of view, however, the March 15 confrontation was insufficient to compel them back to the negotiating table. Indeed, after the desperate attempts by the Soviets to begin talks, the Chinese were so confident that the Soviets would not escalate the dispute that they reoccupied Zhenbao Island by April 3.³⁷³ Subsequent skirmishes along the border further confirmed that neither side was willing to escalate border confrontations into a larger conflict. On May 2, for instance, more than three hundred Chinese troops crossed over the border of Xinjiang, in the western border region, and advanced a mile into Soviet territory. Despite multiple protests by the Soviets to withdraw, Chinese troops refused to leave until May 28. During this confrontation, however, not a single fatality occurred.³⁷⁴

August - September 1969: The Soviets Threaten Nuclear Attack

If the Soviets wanted to compel the Chinese back to the negotiating table, they needed more leverage. Moreover, the incentives for the Soviets to get China to talk were increasing because the continuation of border skirmishes throughout the summer of 1969 made the maintenance of the status quo increasingly costly. On August 19, the Soviet mouthpiece, *Pravda*, warned the Chinese to stop their attempts to turn the Soviet border into a "bleeding

³⁷²Gerson 2010, p. 32.

³⁷³Pang Xianzhi and Feng Hui, eds. (2013) *Mao Zedong Nian Pu 1949-1979 [The Chronicles of Mao Zedong 1949-1979]*. Vol. 6. Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, p. 241. Also see Cohen 1991, p. 281.

³⁷⁴Cohen 1970, p. 54.

wound” with their “endless armed conflicts.”³⁷⁵ Faced with the prospects of indefinite border skirmishes with the Chinese, the Soviets decided to up the ante by playing their nuclear card.

The Soviets took several steps to raise the specter of nuclear war. Although Soviet radio broadcasts had been alluding to nuclear war since the March confrontations on Zhenbao Island, in June, Soviet bomber units from the western region were moved to Mongolia.³⁷⁶ From August 1 to 10, the Soviets declared a stand-down of all flights in the eastern border region.³⁷⁷ As Henry Kissinger, who was President Nixon’s national security adviser at the time, recounts in his memoirs, “[s]uch a move, which permits all aircraft to be brought to a high state of readiness simultaneously, is often a sign of a possible attack, [and] at a minimum it is a brutal warning in an intensified war of nerves.”³⁷⁸ On August 6, while the stand-down was still in effect, the Soviets revealed that a former Deputy Commander of the Strategic Rocket Forces – whom the Chinese ambassador to Paris complained was the Soviet’s best rocket expert – had been appointed as the new head of the Far Eastern Military District.³⁷⁹ Against this backdrop, on August 13, the Soviets instigated a violent border confrontation in the western border region.³⁸⁰ This incident involved a Soviet infantry regiment - around three hundred Soviet soldiers backed by tanks and armored vehicles – and a full Chinese infantry battalion. The incident claimed at least twenty Chinese lives, and according to accounts from both sides, ended in a resounding Chinese defeat.³⁸¹ As later discussed, this incident had a significant impact on Mao’s approach to the border

³⁷⁵Cohen 1970, pp. 67-68.

³⁷⁶Gerson 2010, p. 32.

³⁷⁷The top secret CIA report estimates that the Chinese “probably detected the unprecedented stand-down.” See Cohen 1970, pp. 65,70.

³⁷⁸Henry Kissinger (1979) *White House Years*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company. Kissinger recalls that the United States detected this Soviet move into September.

³⁷⁹Cohen 1970, p. 75.

³⁸⁰See Kissinger 1979, p. 177.

³⁸¹The official number of fatalities have not been released. See, Gobarev 1999, p. 46; Fravel 2008, p. 213; and Cohen 1970, p. 65.

dispute and increased the Chinese leadership's concern that the Soviets were looking for a pretext to launch a nuclear strike on China's nuclear facilities. Allen Whiting, who at the time was working for the U.S. Department of State, wrote a top secret memo to Kissinger on August 16 assessing that "Soviet military deployments and political behavior indicate an increasing probability of a Soviet attack on China, presumably aimed at destroying China's nuclear capability."³⁸²

The most potent Soviet nuclear threat, however, was arguably one made during a luncheon between a mid-level U.S. diplomat and Soviet embassy official in Washington D.C. on August 18, because as soon as the contents of the discussion that day were released to the U.S. press, the Chinese took drastic measures to prepare for a war. According to the memorandum of conversation of William Stearman, the U.S. diplomat, the Soviet official, Boris Davydov, "asked point blank what the US would do if the Soviet Union attacked and destroyed China's nuclear facilities."³⁸³ The Soviets were well aware that the U.S. had considered, but ultimately aborted, a similar strike in 1964, soon after China had tested their first nuclear bomb. Thus, after assuring Stearman that "he was completely serious," Davydov "asked if the US wouldn't really welcome this move since Chinese nuclear weapons could threaten it too."³⁸⁴ Although these questions had not come through the highest diplomatic channels, the Soviets appeared to be asking whether the United States would be complicit to such a strike, as it would confer mutual advantages. The possibility of a Soviet strike raised alarm bells in Washington. Kissinger found the threat of a Soviet strike on Chinese nuclear facilities sufficiently important that on August 25 he ordered a National Security Council subcommittee to "prepare contingency plans for

³⁸²Memo from Allen Whiting to Henry Kissinger (Aug 16, 1969) "Sino-Soviet Hostilities and Implications For U.S. Policy." *NSF, Country File, China*.

³⁸³William L. Stearman's Conversation with Boris N. Davydov (Aug 18, 1969) "Memorandum of Conversation. China: US reaction to Soviet Destruction of CPR Nuclear Capability: Significance of Latest Sino-Soviet Border Clash; Internal Opposition." *U.S. Department of State*.

³⁸⁴*ibid.*

American policy in case of a Sino-Soviet war.”³⁸⁵

Declassified U.S. documents now show that Kissinger and his associates came to two major conclusions following the August 18 luncheon.³⁸⁶ First, although they deemed it unlikely that the Soviets would risk the dangers of a nuclear strike, they could not rule out the possibility entirely. The Soviets had sent out similar feelers to other governments and groups around the world, and even a small chance of conflict had to be taken seriously. A successful Soviet attack would not only “create around the world an impression of approaching Soviet dominance,” but be difficult to challenge with U.S. military force because American public opinion would not support a war to defend the Chinese.³⁸⁷ Second, they advocated that the United States publicly oppose such a strike. They reasoned that this would both reduce the possibility that the Soviets would launch such a strike and free the United States from being accused by the Chinese as having colluded with the Soviets.³⁸⁸ Kissinger and Nixon were already putting into motion several channels to improve relations with China, so they wanted to avoid undermining these efforts.

Chinese sources show that the Soviet nuclear threat during the luncheon in August had an immediate impact on Chinese decision making. On August 27, U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) director Helms met with the foreign policy press and told them that the Soviets had asked U.S. officials about possible U.S. reactions to a Soviet strike on Chinese nuclear facilities.³⁸⁹ That same day, the Chinese Central Committee and Central Military Commission jointly issued an order to establish a “Leading Group for People’s

³⁸⁵Kissinger 1979, p. 183.

³⁸⁶For an overview of this new material, see W. Burr (2001) “Sino-American Relations, 1969: The Sino-Soviet Border War and Steps Towards Rapprochement.” *Cold War History*. 1.3, pp. 73–112.

³⁸⁷Kissinger 1979, p. 186.

³⁸⁸From the Secretary of State to the President (Sep 10, 1969) “Memorandum for the President. The Possibility of a Soviet Strike Against Chinese Nuclear Facilities.” *SN 67-69, DEF 12 China*.

³⁸⁹Kissinger 1979, p. 184.

Air Defense,” which was to be headed by Zhou Enlai.³⁹⁰ On August 28, U.S. media outlets covered Helms’s story as a major headline. That same day, the Chinese Central Committee issued an order to border provinces and regions to maintain “high alertness” and “be full prepared to fight a war against aggression.”³⁹¹

The relief to these mounting tensions came in the first week of September. During Vietnamese communist leader Ho Chi Minh’s funeral in Hanoi, the Soviets relayed a message to the Chinese that Kosygin would be willing to visit Beijing and engage in high-level talks regarding the border. In relaying this message, the Soviets were making the most of the opportunity that Zhou Enlai was in town: the Chinese were so worried about a Soviet attack that Zhou only made a day trip to Vietnam.³⁹² The Soviet message was delivered on September 6 and September 10. The Chinese replied by agreeing to talk *without* the preconditions that the Soviets had to acknowledge the “unequal treaties.”³⁹³ Thus, an about-face had occurred in China’s negotiating position. The Soviets received the Chinese reply only after Kosygin had departed for Europe, so he flew back to Beijing as soon as he landed and heard that the Chinese had agreed to talk.

Why did the Chinese decide to drop their pre-condition to talks in September 1969 when they had stressed its importance since 1964? Did the Soviet threat of a nuclear strike importantly affect this decision? There is no consensus in existing scholarship, but some authors argue that the Soviet threat of a nuclear attack compelled China back to the negotiating table. Thus, these authors claim that the 1969 border crisis is a successful case of nuclear coercion.³⁹⁴ This view, however, overlooks a confounding factor: the timing

³⁹⁰See, for instance, Yang 2000, pp. 36-37; and Gerson 2010, pp. 40-41.

³⁹¹Chinese Archives (1969) “August 28, 1969. The CCP Central Committee’s Order for General Mobilization in Border Provinces and Regions.” *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Obtained and translated by Michael Schoenhals.*

³⁹²Yang 2000, p. 37.

³⁹³Gerson 2010, p. 46.

³⁹⁴See, for instance, Robinson 1972; and Gerson 2010, p. 46.

of U.S. initiatives to normalize relations with China. Nixon had already put into motion several diplomatic channels to reach out to China by the summer of 1969. Because direct communication and trust between the United States and China – a communist country – was limited, Nixon sent similar messages of rapprochement to China through multiple governments friendly with China. One of these messages was sent through Pakistan, and Kissinger discusses this channel at length in his memoirs, *White House Years*. Another important channel, however, was the Romanians.

The Romanian archives that have become available in recent years demonstrate that the Romanians delivered to the Chinese a credible U.S. message to normalize relations the day after the Soviets proposed talks to Zhou in Hanoi. The transcripts from the meeting between Nixon and the Romanian president Nicolae Ceausescu on August 4, 1969 show that Nixon asked the Romanians to relay a message to the Chinese that the U.S. government would be willing to talk about normalizing relations at a time and location that China felt comfortable with.³⁹⁵ Romania had close relations with China at the time because after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, both were concerned that they could be next in line for such an invasion. Moreover, Romania was one of the countries that had openly disagreed with Brezhnev's tirade against China during the World Communist Congress in the summer of 1969. On August 23, the Romanians telegrammed the U.S. message to China. Although the Pakistani channel was unable to get through to the Chinese until October, the Romanians were also able to sit down with the Chinese to discuss the sincerity of the U.S. message in September. According to the transcripts of a meeting on September 7 between premier Zhou and his Romanian counterpart, Ion Gheorghe Maurer, Maurer told Zhou that “[f]irst of all, Nixon expressed without any reservation his wish of finding a way

³⁹⁵A.N.I.C. fond CC of RCP—Chancellery, file 109/1969, f.2-10. (2008) Document No. 4: Minutes of the Meeting of the RCP CC Executive Committee Regarding US President Richard Nixon's Visit to Romania (2-3 August), and the Discussions that Took Place on that Occasion, 4 August 1969. In *Inside China's Cold War*. Ed. by Christian F. Ostermann. The Cold War International History Project.

to normalize relations with China.”³⁹⁶ Responding to Zhou’s questions, Maurer elaborated that “[o]ur impression was that this wish was sincere, in other words, it corresponds to certain important American interests...They talked to us about this wish several times.”³⁹⁷ Thus, between receiving the Soviet note to hold border talks on September 6, and replying to the Soviets on September 10, the Chinese received a message through a trusted source that the United States was serious about normalizing relations.

From China’s perspective, the message relayed by the Romanians also arrived within a context in which Mao had already begun to consider closer relations with the United States. On February 19, 1969 Mao had instructed four Chinese marshals to prepare a report assessing trends in global affairs.³⁹⁸ The marshals’ first report of July 11, 1969, “A Preliminary Evaluation of the War Situation,” concluded that the Soviets are “a more serious threat to [China’s] security than the U.S. imperialists.”³⁹⁹ The second report of September 17, “Our Views about the Current Situation,” was even more radical than the first. It proposed that China should be “firm on principles and flexible in tactics,” and specifically recommended that China should “respond positively when the timing is proper” to U.S. overtures to improve relations.⁴⁰⁰ The August 13 border incident that was instigated by the Soviets occurred between these two reports and contributed to the change in tone regarding the Soviets since Mao himself had become more openly interested in relations

³⁹⁶A.N.I.C., fond RCP CC— External Relations Division, file 72/1969, f. 31-34 (2008) Note of Conversation between Ion Gheorge Maurer and Zhou Enlai on 11 September 1969, September 11, 1969. In *Relatiile Romano-Chineze, 1880-1974 [Sino-Romanian Relations, 1880-1974]*. Ed. by Ioan Romulus Budura. History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Translated by Madalina Cristoloveanu, pp. 943–959.

³⁹⁷Ibid.

³⁹⁸See, for example, Yang 2000, p. 35; and Goldstein 2000.

³⁹⁹Report by Four Chinese Marshals, Chen Yi, Ye Jianying, Xu Xiangqian, and Nie Rongzhen, to the Central Committee (June 1992) “A Preliminary Evaluation of the War Situation (excerpt), July 11, 1969.” *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Zhonggong dangshi ziliao [CCP Party History Materials]*. 42. Translated for CWIHP by Chen Jian with assistance from Li Di, pp. 70–75.

⁴⁰⁰Report by Four Chinese Marshals, Chen Yi, Ye Jianying, Nie Rongzhen, and Xu Xiangqian, to the Central Committee (June 1992) “Our Views about the Current Situation (Excerpt), September 17, 1969.” *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Zhonggong dangshi ziliao [CCP Party History Materials]*. 42. Translated for CWIHP by Chen Jian with assistance from Li Di, pp. 84–86.

with the United States.⁴⁰¹ In July, moreover, the United States had lifted several trade and travel restrictions regarding China, and on August 8, the U.S. Secretary of State gave a public speech in Canberra that the United States was “seeking to open up channels of communication” with China.⁴⁰² It is within this context that the Soviets made nuclear threats coupled with a border skirmish in August. It is also within this context that the U.S. message was relayed by the Romanians and coincided with the Soviet proposal for talks. The arrival of the U.S. message thus gave the Chinese a greater incentive to immediately defuse tensions with the Soviets and engage the United States.

Given this confounding factor, it is difficult to conclude that the Soviet nuclear threat was sufficient to compel the Chinese back to the negotiating table. That is, despite evidence that the Chinese leadership felt worried about such an attack, such as the August 28 order to prepare for war, whether the Chinese would have backed down from a Soviet threat in a counterfactual world in which the United States had not extended an olive branch at the same time remains an open question. What is more reasonable to infer from the newly available evidence is that the Soviet threat of a nuclear strike and the U.S. message for closer ties combined to convince China to drop its long-held precondition to talks. This interpretation of the newly available evidence is also consistent with Avery Goldstein’s view that “Beijing’s insecurity while it lacked confidence in its nascent nuclear deterrent encouraged the diplomatic warming to the West and the United States in particular.”⁴⁰³ Thus, given that China had incentives to open up to the west, when Soviet threats combined with U.S. messages to normalize relations, the Chinese dropped their pre-condition to border talks with the Soviets and pursued closer ties with the United States. What this combination does not explain, however, is why the Chinese became more worried about a

⁴⁰¹ See, for example, Yang 2000, p. 35; and Gerson 2010, p. 39

⁴⁰² Kissinger 1979, pp. 181-182; and Yang 2000, p. 44.

⁴⁰³ Goldstein 2000, p. 101.

Soviet strike *after* agreeing to talks.

September-December 1969: Zhou-Kosygin Talks and Afterwards

The Zhou-Kosygin talks took place at the Beijing Airport on September 11. Although the full transcripts are unavailable, several archival documents record key parts of the conversation. For example, a Soviet report of the talks on the following day is available in the Soviet archives, and two transcripts of discussions between a Romanian delegation and Zhou in Beijing only “fifteen minutes” after the Zhou-Kosygin talks are available in the Romanian archives.⁴⁰⁴ These documents reveal two important points about the Zhou-Kosygin talks. First, Zhou expressed his concern about a Soviet attack on China’s nuclear facilities and assured Kosygin that China is uninterested in attacking the Soviet Union. Zhou and Kosygin thus agreed that the two sides will not attack each other and will withdraw forces from the border area. Second, both sides agreed to re-open border negotiations.

Soon after the talks, however, the Chinese leadership realized that Kosygin had not given any clear assurances that the Soviets will refrain from using nuclear weapons against China. Moreover, because no high-ranking official came out to the airport to greet Kosygin when he arrived in Moscow, the Chinese leadership worried that even the limited assurances that Kosygin had given to Zhou might not carry weight in the Soviet politburo.⁴⁰⁵ On September 18, Zhou sent a letter to Kosygin to confirm their verbal agreement at the Beijing Airport. On September 19, Mao said that “on National Day [October 1] this year, local and military

⁴⁰⁴See Russian Archives (Sep 11, 1969) ““Soviet Report, Information on A.N. Kosygin’s Conversation With Zhou Enlai,” September 11, 1969.” *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, SAMPO-BArch J IV 2/202/359*. Translated by Mark H. Doctoroff. and Romanian Archives (Sep 11, 1969) “Note of Conversation between Ion Gheorge Maurer and Zhou Enlai on 11 September 1969.” *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, A.N.I.C., fond RCP CC External Relations Division, file 72/1969, f. 31-34*. Published in *Relatiile Romano-Chineze, 1880-1974 [Sino-Romanian Relations, 1880-1974]*, edited by Ioan Romulus Budura, (Bucharest, 2005), pp. 943-959. Translated by Madalina Cristoloveanu.

⁴⁰⁵Yang 2000, p. 40.

comrades need not go to Beijing, for I fear that the enemy will seize the opportunity to annihilate our capital city” (*pa diren chenji xiaomie women de zhongxin*).⁴⁰⁶ Compounding this paranoia was the Czechoslovakia precedent: the Soviets had invaded Czechoslovakia after creating a political lull. The Chinese leadership thus worried that the Soviets would use the border talks to lower China’s guard and launch a surprise attack. Kosygin replied to Zhou’s letter on September 26 by proposing to start border talks on October 20 in Beijing. Through September 20 to 29, however, the Chinese leadership convened a military combat readiness conference in which Zhou emphasized the “particular need to prevent the enemy from launching a surprise attack.”⁴⁰⁷ On September 23 and September 29, moreover, China conducted a rapid succession of nuclear tests. Such closely scheduled nuclear tests were unprecedented for China, and they may have been intended to remind the Soviets that the Chinese, too, possessed massively destructive capabilities.⁴⁰⁸ On October 17, however, Mao and the Central Committee decided that the senior leaders in Beijing will disperse into various parts of the country by October 20.⁴⁰⁹ On October 19, Lin Biao, who was Mao’s designated successor and defense minister, ordered China’s strategic nuclear forces to begin conducting “launching preparations” – an order also referred to as “Order Number One.”⁴¹⁰

Why was the Chinese leadership so worried about a Soviet nuclear strike? Existing studies point out that consulting the feasibility of a nuclear strike through private diplomatic channels enhanced the credibility of the Soviet nuclear threat.⁴¹¹ The key evidence that

⁴⁰⁶ *Mao Zedong Nian Pu* 2013, p. 267.

⁴⁰⁷ Liu Zhinan (1999) “1969 nian Zhongguo zhanbei yu dui MeiSu guanxi de yanjiu he tiaozheng [1969, Chinese Combat Readiness and Research and Adjustments to the U.S.-Soviet Relationship].” *Dangdai Zhongguo shi yanjiu*. 3, pp. 41–57 as cited in Xu Jinzhou (2015) Analysis of 1969’s “Order Number One”. In *Selected Essays on the History of Contemporary China*. Ed. by Zhang Xingxing. Leiden: Brill, pp. 168–193, p. 177.

⁴⁰⁸ Gerson 2010, p. 49.

⁴⁰⁹ See, for example, *Mao Zedong Nian Pu* 2013, pp. 270-271; and *Deng Xiaoping Nian Pu* 2009, p. 1948.

⁴¹⁰ Zhang 2015.

⁴¹¹ A recent study by the Center for Naval Analysis, for instance, points out, that “Beijing’s perception

supports this view is that China took actions to prepare for such a contingency soon after they learned that the Soviets had approached the Americans. If this view is correct, however, it must also explain why the Chinese could not rely on their own nuclear weapons to deter the Soviets from such an attack. In 1969, China's ability to strike the Soviet Union with nuclear warheads was certainly limited.⁴¹² China's bombers would have had to fly one-way missions in order to reach key Soviet targets and drop their nuclear ordinance, yet their ability to penetrate Soviet air defenses was in doubt.⁴¹³ As Avery Goldstein points out, however, although "Beijing could not be confident of its ability to dissuade Moscow by threatening retaliation with nuclear weapons," Moscow would have had to worry about the "unconventional" ways in which the Chinese could deliver nuclear warheads on Soviet territory.⁴¹⁴ In the event that a Soviet first strike fails to completely eliminate China's nuclear arsenal, even one or two nuclear weapons being detonated on Soviet soil would impose enormous costs and disrupt the Soviets' ability to effectively compete against the United States.

If China's nuclear arsenal was not enough to deter the Soviets, then its conventional forces posed an impressive deterrent threat. Lyle Goldstein argues that China's threat to wage a conventional war – what Mao called a "people's war" – played a key role in ultimately deterring the Soviets from launching a nuclear strike.⁴¹⁵ Even after acquiring nuclear weapons, Mao often claimed that China could absorb a nuclear strike and still engulf an aggressor in a sea of people and impose unacceptable costs.⁴¹⁶ For instance, at the Ninth Party Congress in April 1969, Mao declared that "It is easy for us to fight [an invading

of the credibility of Soviet nuclear threats changed when Chinese leaders learned that Moscow had been approaching foreign governments." See, (Gerson 2010, p. vii).

⁴¹²Lewis and Xue 1988.

⁴¹³April 1969

⁴¹⁴Goldstein 2000, p. 72.

⁴¹⁵Goldstein 2006, pp. 89-93.

⁴¹⁶For a similar argument that China relied on conventional deterrence during the crisis, see Gerson 2010.

enemy] since he will fall into the people's encirclement."⁴¹⁷ In fact, Mao also said in an interview with a U.S. journalist in 1968 that China "in a sense, is still a non-nuclear power. With this little nuclear weaponry, we cannot be counted as a nuclear country. If we are to fight a war, we must use conventional weapons."⁴¹⁸ But this begs the question: why would the Soviets risk launching a nuclear strike on Chinese nuclear facilities if China could also impose significant costs on the Soviet Union after such an attack?

The Soviet incentives to launch a strike were twofold. First, because China's nuclear capabilities were so limited, the Soviets faced incentives of a preventive strike, and not just a nuclear first strike. Although the internal deliberations of the Soviet politburo are still unavailable, the arguments that Davydov made during his luncheon with Stearman on August 18 provide an intriguing glimpse into how the Soviets wanted to rationalize a strike on China's nuclear facilities. Regarding Soviet incentives, Davydov argued that "the Chinese nuclear threat would be eliminated for decades." He also added that "in the not too distant future [China's nuclear] capability could become a serious threat to the Soviet Union," and reminded Stearman that there was once a time when the United States "doubted the ability of the Soviet Union to catch up with it in the nuclear field." Regarding the escalatory risks of striking China's nuclear facilities, Davydov "believed that this would not cause the Chinese to attack the Soviet Union because they would fear a more massive Soviet attack in retaliation."⁴¹⁹ Thus, according to Davydov, China's growing nuclear capabilities presented the Soviets with a steadily deteriorating status quo.

Second, Soviet leaders may have believed that the increasing border skirmishes in recent years reflected China's increasing confidence in their nuclear deterrent.⁴²⁰ As a secret

⁴¹⁷*Jianguo Yilai Mao Zedong Wengao* 1998, pp. 35-41.

⁴¹⁸"Conversation Between Mao Zedong and E. F. Hill, November 28, 1968" as quoted in Goldstein 2000, p. 72.

⁴¹⁹William L. Stearman's Conversation with Boris N. Davydov Aug 18, 1969.

⁴²⁰Gobarev 1999, pp. 36,

U.S. intelligence report on August 12 assessed, “Soviet leaders might feel that even a small number of Chinese missiles would alter the strategic situation, and that as the force grew, the Chinese would be under fewer inhibitions in using their ground forces.”⁴²¹ This ‘nuclear emboldenment’ argument meant that reversing China’s nuclear deterrent capabilities through a surgical strike could help reduce border skirmishes with China and thus stop Chinese attempts to turn the Soviet border into a “bleeding wound.” To this end, the mobilization of Soviet conventional forces and tactical nuclear weapons to the Sino-Soviet border also bolstered the credibility of the Soviet nuclear threat. By amassing conventional forces along the border, the Soviets could reduce the costs of a Chinese conventional retaliation on the ground following a Soviet nuclear strike.⁴²² By deploying tactical nuclear weapons, the Soviets could also challenge China’s superior manpower.

In sum, Soviet incentives for a preventive strike, and the Soviet desire to put an end to Chinese border incursions, gave the Chinese strong reason to be concerned about a deliberate nuclear attack. Indeed, the second report by the four marshals on September 17, warned that the Soviets are

conspiring to launch a surprise nuclear attack on our nuclear facilities. The Cultural Revolution in our country is still under way, our nuclear weapons are still under development, and the Vietnam War has not ended. A group of adventurers in the Soviet revisionist leadership want to seize this opportunity to use missiles and tanks to launch a quick war against China.”⁴²³

Thus, when combined with both Brezhnev’s surprising decision to invade Czechoslovakia

⁴²¹National Intelligence Estimate (Aug 12, 1969) “The USSR and China.” *United States Intelligence Board*. NIE 11/13-69 [Secret Controlled Dissemination].353, p. 7.

⁴²²*ibid.*, p. 7; and Gobarev 1999, pp. 40-41.

⁴²³Report by Four Chinese Marshals, Chen Yi, Ye Jianying, Nie Rongzhen, and Xu Xiangqian, to the Central Committee 1992.

in 1968, and Soviet efforts to inquire through various diplomatic channels the repercussions of a nuclear strike on China, the Soviet nuclear threat gained extra credibility when a credible threat of a deliberate nuclear strike would have otherwise been difficult to make during a nuclear crisis.

Despite China's paranoia of a Soviet nuclear attack, however, the Chinese were unrelenting in the border talks. After agreeing to the talks, China and the Soviet Union were unable to arrive at an agreement. In fact, a border deal was only struck several decades later, in 1991, after the complete dissolution of the Soviet Union.⁴²⁴

The Role of Provocation

Why and how did the crisis escalate to conventional conflict and nuclear war scares? The logic of provocation explains the escalatory process of the crisis in two important respects. First, China's use of force against the Soviets on Zhenbao Island on March 2 was a deliberate provocation to signal resolve to the Soviets. Second, although China and the Soviet Union exhibited general caution and restraint in the shadow of their nuclear weapons, both sides avoided larger provocations on the border because they worried that such provocations could be used by their adversary as a pretext to launch a deliberate attack. The first of these two points reaffirms and further clarifies findings in the existing literature; the latter point fills an important gap.

Zhenbao Island is barren and only nine-tenths by three-tenths of a mile.⁴²⁵ With the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, and the escalating skirmishes along the Sino-Soviet border, however, the Chinese wanted to show through deliberately provocative behavior that they

⁴²⁴Thomas W. Robinson (2003) *The Sino-Soviet Border Conflicts of 1969: New Evidence Three Decades Later*. In *Chinese Warfighting: The PLA Experience Since 1949*. Ed. by Mark A. Ryan, David M. Finkelstein, and Michael A. McDevitt. New York: M. E. Sharpe, p. 198; Fravel 2008, pp. 137-144.

⁴²⁵Cohen 1991, p. 277.

were willing to put up a fight to protect their borders from the Soviets. To implement such a strategy, Zhenbao Island conferred an important advantage: the provocative effects of an armed clash could be controlled. Not only was the island far removed from strategically important Chinese and Soviet settlements and military installations, but the terrain was tactically advantageous because the side nearer to the Chinese river bank was elevated.⁴²⁶ Moreover, the island was among several that the Soviets were willing to concede during the 1964 talks and were of little value to the Soviets.⁴²⁷ Indeed, in a report sent to East Germany on the day that the March 2 firefight broke out, the Soviets claimed that “[t]here are no settlements on the Island of Damansky and it is of no economic importance at all.”⁴²⁸ Somewhat ironically, then, the island’s limited intrinsic value provided an ideal spot to carry out a strategy to signal resolve through deliberate provocation.

Although scholars disagree about China’s broader motivations to strike the Soviets on Zhenbao, many of them agree that it was intended to send a signal of resolve to the Soviets. Taylor Fravel, for instance, argues that China’s decision to use force on Zhenbao Island can be explained by their perceived decline in claim strength in the border dispute. The Soviets had increased their border forces two-fold between 1964 and 1969, and China wanted to reverse this weakened bargaining position by confronting the Soviets militarily. Yet, according to Fravel “[w]hen China launched its ambush on Zhenbao, it signaled not only its resolve to defend its territorial claims that the Soviet Union had threatened but also its commitment to resist Soviet coercion more broadly.”⁴²⁹ Yang Kuisong, a Chinese historian, argues that China’s decision to strike the Soviets is best explained by

⁴²⁶Cohen 1991, p. 280; Fravel 2008, p. 213.

⁴²⁷Ibid., p. 213.

⁴²⁸SAMPO-BArch J IV 2/202/359 (1969) “Soviet Report to East German Leadership on Sino-Soviet Border Clashes, March 02, 1969.” *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive*, Translated by Christian F. Ostermann.

⁴²⁹Fravel 2008, p. 203.

domestic incentives.⁴³⁰ According to Yang, Mao wanted to foment a sense of domestic unity following the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution by escalating an external conflict. But even Yang agrees that China's ambush sent a signal of resolve to the Soviets: "[i]n ordering Chinese troops to fight the Zhenbao battle, Beijing's leaders, Mao in particular, had no further military aims beyond teaching the Soviets 'a bitter lesson,' so that Moscow would stop further military provocation on the Sino-Soviet borders."⁴³¹ Similarly, Thomas Christensen argues that "[f]orce was used [by the Chinese on Zhenbao Island] to teach the U.S.S.R a lesson and demonstrate China's resolve."⁴³²

When Mao attempted to manipulate the risk of provocation by using force on Zhenbao Island, however, he was successful in two respects, and unsuccessful in a third.⁴³³ After fighting broke out on Zhenbao Island on March 2, Mao declared, "[w]e should stop here. Do not fight anymore."⁴³⁴ When the second battle broke-out on March 15, moreover, Mao told Lin Biao that "[o]ur nuclear bases should be prepared, be prepared for the enemy's air bombardment."⁴³⁵ Thus, Mao clearly wanted to limit the degree of provocation and understood that he was taking a large risk when engaging the Soviets. In taking this risk of provocation, Mao's deliberate provocation was provocative enough that it successfully made the Soviets believe that Mao could do something even more rash and capricious on the border, as I explain later. Moreover, Mao's deliberate provocation successfully signaled resolve without pushing the Soviets over the brink of war. Despite his careful calibration of provocation, however, Mao underestimated how provoked the Soviets would

⁴³⁰Yang 2000. See next section for a discussion of these domestic incentives.

⁴³¹Yang 2000, p.30

⁴³²Thomas J. Christensen (2006) *Windows and War: Trend Analysis and Beijing's Use of Force*. In *New Directions in the Study of Chinese Foreign Policy*. Ed. by Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross. Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 50–85, p. 69.

⁴³³Cohen 1970, p. 37 and Gerson 2010, p. 27.

⁴³⁴Yang 2000, p.30.

⁴³⁵Mao Zedong's Talk at a Meeting of the Central Cultural Revolution Group (Excerpt), March 15, 1969 (1994) *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Zhonghua renmin gongheguo shilu [A Factual History of the People's Republic of China]*. Vol. 3. 1. Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe, pp. 467–469.

become to engage in coercive actions short of war. As Lyle Goldstein points out, “[t]he largely detrimental consequences [of China’s March 2 assault], including the severe Soviet threats that developed subsequently, seem not to have been foreseen by Beijing.”⁴³⁶ In Yang’s assessment, “[i]t was beyond Mao’s worst expectations that the situation should have deteriorated to such an extent.”⁴³⁷ And Aurthur Cohen, who wrote the CIA’s top secret report on the crisis in 1970, later noted that “although Mao had limited the degree of provocation in each firefight, the overall policy of disputing territorial claims with force was a provocation by definition.”⁴³⁸ Thus, an important source of unwanted escalation in the crisis was China’s decision to signal resolve through a strategy of deliberate provocation. As the game-theoretic model discussed in Chapter 4 finds, a deliberate provocation strategy to signal resolve can be rational even if it risks provoking the adversary to escalate the crisis. A principal drawback of such a strategy, however, is that it can lead to unwanted escalation even when it successfully signals resolve.

As the crisis unexpectedly escalated after the March 2 firefight, the Chinese avoided provocations that would provide a pretext for the Soviets to launch a deliberate attack. Although the Chinese firmly met Soviet probes on the border throughout the summer of 1969, these skirmishes were kept to much lower levels of violence than the March firefights on Zhenbao. An important reason that these skirmishes were kept limited was because Mao worried that the Soviets were trying to goad Chinese troops into committing a larger provocation. At the Ninth Party Congress on April 28, 1969, Mao declared “I say we must not be provoked (*wo shuo buyao shou tiaobo*). If [the Soviets] invite me to come out, I will not come out. But if they attack me, I will deal with them.”⁴³⁹ During the August

⁴³⁶Goldstein 2001, p. 997.

⁴³⁷Yang 2000, p. 35.

⁴³⁸Cohen 1991, p. 288. The CNA report makes a similar assessment to the above authors. See Gerson 2010, p. 27.

⁴³⁹Zedong 1998, p. 38.

18 luncheon, moreover, Davydov hinted that the Soviets could use China's provocations on the border as a pretext to strike China's nuclear facilities. According to Stearman's memorandum of conversation, Davydov "inferred that there was a certain advantage to the Soviet Union in these border provocations by saying that he actually feared the day when the Chinese began putting on a reasonable, peaceful front behind which they could quietly continue increasing their nuclear strength without raising any alarm."⁴⁴⁰ Davydov's argument was also consistent with Allen Whiting's top secret assessment made two days prior to the luncheon: "to the degree a pretext is available through a well-publicized record of Chinese 'provocations,' the Soviet leadership can argue its case [for a preventive strike] to audiences presumably prejudiced against the Chinese and alarmed by China's growing nuclear threat."⁴⁴¹

Perversely, Chinese fears of the Soviets using a pretext to launch an attack peaked after the two sides agreed to hold border talks. According to Chen Yi, who was one of the four marshals tasked to prepare the report for Mao on trends in global affairs, by October 14, Mao "estimated that the Soviet Union might use the opportunity of the Sino-Soviet border negotiations to suddenly launch an attack, especially a nuclear strike."⁴⁴² Moreover, during Zhou Enlai's conversation with the Romanian delegation only minutes after he had talked with Kosygin at the Beijing Airport, Zhou asked Maurer, "Do you think there is a possibility [the Soviets will] use the same pretext [as when they invaded Czechoslovakia] in other countries?"⁴⁴³ The CIA also made a similar assessment a week after the Zhou-

⁴⁴⁰William L. Stearman's Conversation with Boris N. Davydov Aug 18, 1969.

⁴⁴¹Memo from Allen Whiting to Henry Kissinger Aug 16, 1969.

⁴⁴²*Chen Yi Nian Pu* 1995, p. 152.

⁴⁴³A.N.I.C., fond RCP CC—Foreign Affairs Department, file 72/1969, f. 35-65 (Bucharest, 2005) Minutes of Conversation between the Romanian Delegation to Ho Chi Minh's Funeral, Led by Ion Gheorge Maurer, and the Chinese Delegation, Led by Zhou Enlai, 11 September 1969. In *Relatiile Romano-Chineze, 1880-1974 [Sino-Romanian Relations, 1880-1974]*. Ed. by Ambassador Romulus Ioan Budura. History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Translated by Madalina Cristoloveanu, pp. 963-982, p. 431 In fact, Zhou asked the Romanian delegation the same question three times during the meeting. Following a summary of his conversations with Kosygin, Zhou concluded by saying that "[w]e do not know what [the Soviets] will do in the future so that is why we have to be vigilant." (ibid., p. 429) Zhou then abruptly speculated that "There

Kosygin talks. President Nixon's daily intelligence briefing by the CIA on September 20, 1969, states that "the Chinese may fear that Moscow's announcement of a halt in incidents [after the Zhou-Kosygin talks] leaves the Soviets in a position to make any future clashes seem all the more serious, thus justifying military measures against the mainland itself."⁴⁴⁴

From the Soviet point of view, although they raised the specter of nuclear war, they wanted to avoid a large scale conflict on the border that would distract them from effectively competing in the Cold War against the United States. In particular, Brezhnev wanted to avoid a conflagration on the border that would provoke the Chinese and give Mao a pretext to launch a raid into Soviet territory. In a journal article on July 25, 1969, Brezhnev wrote that "[w]e will not allow the Soviet Union to be provoked into thoughtless acts of any kind."⁴⁴⁵ Indeed, given Mao's penchant for taking military risks, such as his decision to launch a raid deep into Indian territory during the 1962 border war, and his decision to intervene in the Korean War against superior U.S. and allied conventional forces, Mao's deliberate provocation on the Sino-Soviet border appears to have unnerved the Soviet leadership.⁴⁴⁶ Three additional pieces of evidence support this view. First, the Soviets immediately reached out to the Chinese to hold talks after the two firefights in March. Second, the Soviets relinquished the opportunity to occupy Zhenbao Island after

might be no more noise on the border." As the topic of the discussion shifted to Romania's concerns about being pressured from the Soviets like China or even being invaded like Czechoslovakia, Zhou asked Maurer whether he thought the Soviets have good a "justification" that can be used against Romania. Not receiving a clear answer, Zhou then asked more directly, "[c]ould it be possible that [the Soviets] are trying to use the same pretext as in Czechoslovakia...?" (A.N.I.C., fond RCP CC—Foreign Affairs Department, file 72/1969, f. 35-65 Bucharest, 2005, p. 430) When the Romanian delegation claimed that the Romanian leadership is much more unified and stable, and thus that the Soviets would not be able to use the same pretext they used to invade Czechoslovakia against Romania, Zhou again asked Maurer: "Do you think there is a possibility [the Soviets will] use the same pretext in other countries?" Thus, although Zhou did not ask the question directly, it appears that Zhou was curious about whether the Soviets might use a flimsy pretext to attack China.

⁴⁴⁴The President's Daily Brief (Sept 20, 1969). *Central Intelligence Agency of the United States of America*.

⁴⁴⁵From Brezhnev's July 25, 1969 article in *Problems of Peace and Socialism*, as quoted in Cohen 1970, p. 64.

⁴⁴⁶On China's decision to use force against India in 1962, see Chapter 5. On China's decision to intervene in the Korean War, see, for example, Whiting 1975; and Thomas J. Christensen (2011) *Worse Than a Monolith: Alliance Politics and Problems of Coercive Diplomacy in Asia*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

their victory on March 15. And third, the Soviets never made a clear public threat of nuclear attack through their leaders and instead opted to issue nuclear threats only indirectly through low-level diplomatic channels.⁴⁴⁷ This provided a face-saving way for the Chinese to back down. In sum, although the crisis escalated to nuclear war scares in China, the way in which the crisis escalated shows that both sides wanted to coerce their adversary without provoking and increasing their adversary's resolve to initiate a larger conflict.

This interpretation of the events in 1969 addresses a crucial gap in the existing literature. As Sechser and Fuhrmann point out, although the 1969 crisis appears to follow the logic of nuclear brinkmanship because both sides put their nuclear forces on high alert and engaged in conventional conflicts that could spiral out of control, the fear of a nuclear "catastrophe" being accidentally unleashed on major population centers played only a limited role in the decision calculus of the two states. The authors thus refer to this as an "awkward puzzle."⁴⁴⁸ The logic of provocation, coupled with China's nascent nuclear capabilities at the time, provides an explanation to this puzzle: rather than being concerned about an accidental all-out nuclear war, the Chinese were concerned that a provocation on the border would provide a pretext for the Soviets to launch a *deliberate* nuclear strike to destroy its nuclear facilities. This view agrees with Avery Goldstein's findings that China faced "threats of a preventive surgical strike against [its] minimal nuclear facilities."⁴⁴⁹ Moreover, it agrees with scholarship that finds Mao, as well as contemporary Chinese nuclear experts, exhibit a surprisingly sanguine view of the possibility of accidental escalation to nuclear war.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁷The Soviets actively denied speculations that preparations for such an attack were under way as rumors of a Soviet preemptive strike were hurting the Soviets politically. See Cohen 1970, p. 72.

⁴⁴⁸Sechser and Fuhrmann 2017, pp. 216-217.

⁴⁴⁹Goldstein 2000, p. 101.

⁴⁵⁰See, for example, M. Taylor Fravel and Fiona S. Cunningham (2015) "Assuring Assured Retaliation: China's Nuclear Posture and U.S.-China Strategic Stability." *International Security*. 40.2, pp. 7-50.

Alternative Explanations

I examine four alternative explanations for why and how the 1969 crisis escalated.

Diversionsary Conflict Hypothesis

The diversionsary conflict hypothesis is that one or both sides escalated border skirmishes in order to divert domestic political attention away from internal woes.⁴⁵¹ Several authors have argued that China's decision to ambush the Soviets on Zhenbao Island on March 2 can be explained by a diversionsary logic. Lyle Goldstein, for instance, argues that "[t]his case...may provide important evidence for the so-called 'diversionsary' theory of conflict."⁴⁵² Yang Kuisong makes a similar claim based on Chinese archives that he was able to access in which Mao states that "we should let [the Soviets] in, which will help us with our mobilization."⁴⁵³ To be sure, China was going through a tumultuous period because of the unintended consequences of the Cultural Revolution. But as Fravel points out, "[p]olitical instability and unrest were almost a constant feature of Chinese politics during the Cultural Revolution," yet, Mao decided to strike the Soviets on Zhenbao when domestic scene was relatively calm and hence "when it was arguably least needed."⁴⁵⁴ Moreover, this escalation occurred only once, and it is unclear why Mao chose to escalate against the Soviets when China faced several external threats, such as Taiwan or the Americans in the Vietnam War.⁴⁵⁵ Finally, as Lyle Goldstein, Yang, and Fravel all note, Mao was surprised by how the Soviets reacted to the Zhenbao ambush and became genuinely worried about an attack by the Soviets by the summer of 1969.⁴⁵⁶ In other

⁴⁵¹On diversionsary war more broadly, see, for example, Alex Weisiger (2013) *Logics of War: Explanations for Limited and Unlimited Conflicts*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 50.

⁴⁵²Goldstein 2001, p. 995.

⁴⁵³Yang 2000, p. 30.

⁴⁵⁴Fravel 2008, p. 214.

⁴⁵⁵Ibid., p. 214.

⁴⁵⁶Goldstein 2001, p. 989; and Yang 2000, p. 49; and Fravel 2008, pp. 215-216.

words, even if, as Chinese historian Niu Jun observes, “it cannot be denied that [the Chinese ambush on Zhenbao] and China’s internal political situation are closely linked,” a diversionary logic fails to explain why the crisis subsequently escalated to nuclear threats and genuine war scares.⁴⁵⁷ As Fravel concludes, Chinese “mobilization did occur, but as a result of Mao’s miscalculations about the Soviet response, not as a strategy for addressing domestic instability.”⁴⁵⁸

Nuclear Brinkmanship Hypothesis

Proponents of nuclear brinkmanship might expect a nuclear crisis between China and the Soviet Union to escalate because both sides would try to coerce their opponent with escalatory steps that generate a risk that the crisis spirals out of control.⁴⁵⁹ To be sure, China’s nuclear capabilities at the time were limited, but they still presented the Soviets with the risk of “first strike uncertainty” – the risk that a first strike would not completely eliminate all of China’s nuclear weapons and thus lead to a devastating Chinese nuclear retaliation.⁴⁶⁰ Given this possibility of nuclear retaliation, proponents of brinkmanship might predict that issuing threats of a deliberate nuclear attack would lack credibility, and as a result, that China and the Soviet Union would become engaged in a war of nerves in which each side makes threats that “leave something to chance.”⁴⁶¹ Contrary to such expectations, however, China hardly engaged in nuclear brinkmanship during the 1969 crisis. Instead, after its ambush of Zhenbao Island on March 2, China exhibited the utmost restraint until tensions finally simmered down at the end of the year. Moreover, although the Soviets took several steps consistent with brinkmanship, such as putting their nuclear forces on high alert and issuing a no-fly zone over the eastern border region, their primary nuclear

⁴⁵⁷Niu 1999, p. 71.

⁴⁵⁸Fravel 2008, p. 215.

⁴⁵⁹On brinkmanship, see Schelling 1960, 1966.

⁴⁶⁰On “first strike uncertainty” and China’s limited nuclear capabilities, see Goldstein 2000, pp. 44, 72.

⁴⁶¹On threats that leave something to chance, see Schelling 1960.

threat to China was a threat to strike Chinese nuclear facilities *deliberately*. As Sechser and Fuhrmann argue, the case thus fails to live up to core expectations of brinkmanship theorists.⁴⁶²

Although the case does not feature several aspects of brinkmanship, however, it does not necessarily *disconfirm* brinkmanship theory. A necessary condition for a brinkmanship logic to unfold in a nuclear crisis is that the stakes are worth risking nuclear catastrophe. The stakes in the Sino-Soviet Border Conflict of 1969 were certainly not as trivial as they appear at first blush because they involved both the disputed territories along the border as well as the reputation and leadership of the two communist powers. But neither side made demands that fundamentally undermined the other's security. Indeed, as mentioned above, after the Soviet Union's demise, China and Russia arrived at a border agreement peacefully in 1991. In this sense, the 1969 crisis is at best a borderline case in terms of meeting the minimal requirements for brinkmanship to unfold.⁴⁶³ That is, rather than a case that disconfirms the expectations of brinkmanship, the case doesn't exhibit many features of brinkmanship because the scope conditions of brinkmanship theory barely apply.

Stability-Instability Paradox Hypothesis

Proponents of the "stability-instability" paradox argue that in nuclear crises, stability caused by mutual deterrence at the nuclear level will paradoxically lead to instability at the conventional level.⁴⁶⁴ Thus, according to this view, (1) nuclear states that escalate a crisis by engaging in conventional conflict will do so with the belief that their adversary will be unable to make credible threats of a nuclear attack, and (2) conventional superiority

⁴⁶²See footnote 337.

⁴⁶³I am grateful for conversations at the George Washington University's Carnegie Endowment nuclear security workshop in fall 2017 for bringing this point to my attention.

⁴⁶⁴Snyder 1965.

will importantly determine the outcome of nuclear crises.⁴⁶⁵ What is less clear, however, is whether the stability-instability paradox predicts that conventional conflicts will become *more* frequent in nuclear crises than in crises between two non-nuclear powers, or whether it predicts that the effects of nuclear weapons will simply be to “cancel each other out.” The case study in this chapter does not attempt to adjudicate between these views because it does not examine the counterfactual scenario in which China and the Soviet Union do not have nuclear weapons. At a minimum, however, if the stability-instability paradox is operative in the 1969 crisis, we should expect to see the Chinese and Soviets taking escalatory actions with the belief that their adversary will be deterred at the nuclear level. Furthermore, the conventional balance should play an important role in resolving the crisis. These expectations contrast with the theoretical expectations of brinkmanship: (1) nuclear states that escalate a crisis by engaging in conventional conflict will do so to generate risks that the crisis spirals out of control, and (2) “competition in risk-taking,” rather than conventional superiority, will importantly determine the outcome of nuclear crises.⁴⁶⁶

In favor of the stability-instability paradox, the Soviets may have believed that the Chinese were emboldened to engage in border skirmishes because of China’s growing nuclear capabilities. Moreover, the conventionally superior Soviets successfully coerced the Chinese to return to the negotiating table. Yet, contrary to the expectations of the stability-instability paradox, existing studies on the case mostly converge on the view that the Chinese leadership worried about a Soviet nuclear attack. This fear of a nuclear attack, rather than Soviet conventional superiority, deterred the Chinese from engaging in more provocative conventional clashes on the border throughout the summer of 1969.

⁴⁶⁵Robert Jervis (1984) *The Illogic of American Nuclear Strategy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press; and Charles L. Glaser (1990) *Analyzing Strategic Nuclear Policy*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

⁴⁶⁶On the differences between brinkmanship and the stability-instability paradox, see, for example, Jervis 1989b. On the role of conventional superiority in brinkmanship, see Powell 2015. On competitions in risk-taking, see Schelling 1966, p. 94.

Furthermore, the Soviets actively tried to make credible threats of a deliberate nuclear attack in an attempt to compel the Chinese to return to the negotiating table. Although we cannot conclusively determine from the available archival evidence whether Mao's initial decision to ambush the Soviets on Zhenbao Island was driven in part by a belief that the Soviets will be deterred at the nuclear level, the subsequent Chinese fear of a deliberate Soviet nuclear attack and the Soviet attempts to threaten such an attack count as decisive evidence against the stability-instability paradox hypothesis. A recent report by the Center of Naval Analysis agrees with this assessment: "nuclear weapons had little apparent influence on China's decision to attack the Soviets on 2 March. China was neither emboldened nor more cautious because of its rudimentary nuclear capability."⁴⁶⁷

China Courts the United States Hypothesis

Several authors argue that China escalated its border dispute with the Soviets to court the United States.⁴⁶⁸ According to this view, Mao ambushed the Soviets on Zhenbao Island to send a signal to the United States that he was willing to improve relations, and these overtures eventually led to the historic diplomatic breakthrough between Nixon and Mao in 1972. An important piece of historical evidence that is used to support this argument is the memoirs of Mao's long-time nurse, Wu Xujun, as he recounts a conversation in which Mao told him that China's relations with the Soviet Union were equidistant to those with the United States. Yet, as Yang Kuisong points out, even if we are to believe what Wu says, the exact date of Wu's conversation with Mao is unclear, so the conversation could have taken place after the crisis with the Soviets escalated.⁴⁶⁹ Indeed, the four marshal's first report that designated the Soviets as China's principal threat was released in July 1969, several months after the firefights on Zhenbao. Moreover, Fravel points out that in the immediate aftermath

⁴⁶⁷Gerson 2010, p. v.

⁴⁶⁸See, for example, Li 1996.

⁴⁶⁹See Yang 2000, pp. 46-47.

of the March 2 firefight, Chinese propaganda was directed towards U.S. imperialism rather than the Soviet Union.⁴⁷⁰ Thus, although Mao tried to take advantage of the escalating tensions with the Soviets in 1969 by probing the sincerity of U.S. diplomatic initiatives and commissioning studies to reassess China's foreign policy, as Niu Jun argues, Mao's willingness to improve relations with the United States is better understood as a result rather than a cause of China's ambush on Zhenbao Island.⁴⁷¹

Conclusion

This chapter finds that the logic of provocation accounts for why and how the Sino-Soviet Border Conflict of 1969 escalated in two important respects. First, the Chinese deliberately staged an armed provocation to signal their resolve to defend China's borders from the Soviets. Although this provocation was carefully calibrated to signal resolve without provoking all-out war – it was launched on a strategically irrelevant river island – Mao underestimated how provoked the Soviets would become to engage in coercive measures short of war. Thus, this strategy to signal resolve through deliberate provocation backfired and ultimately led to unwanted crisis escalation.

Second, however, both sides engaged in coercive actions that avoided provoking their adversary and providing their adversary with a pretext to launch an attack. After the initial clashes on Zhenbao Island, the Chinese feared that larger conflagrations on the border would provoke the Soviets and provide the Soviets with a pretext to launch a preventive nuclear strike on China's nascent nuclear facilities. This led to genuine nuclear war scares in China, so although the Chinese firmly met Soviet probes on the border after the Zhenbao

⁴⁷⁰Fravel interprets this Chinese behavior as a sign that the Chinese did not use the conflict for diversionary purposes and that they did not want to further provoke the Soviets. See Fravel 2008, p. 215. Also see, John Garver (June 1980) "Chinese Foreign Policy in 1970: The Tilt Towards the Soviet Union." *The China Quarterly*. 82, pp. 214–249.

⁴⁷¹Niu 1999. Also see Goldstein 2001, p. 990.

Island clashes, they refrained from escalating those confrontations throughout the rest of the crisis. The Soviets threatened surgical nuclear strikes on China but also wanted to avoid being provoked into a larger border war. Coupled with Mao's penchant for daring military maneuvers, such as his decision to conduct a deep raid into Indian territory in the 1962 Sino-India border war and his decision to intervene in the Korean War against U.S. and allied forces, Mao's deliberate provocation on Zhenbao Island both provoked the Soviets but also made the Soviets worry that Mao wanted to provoke the Soviets into a costly border conflict. The Soviets thus took numerous measures to minimize provocation and provide the Chinese with a face-saving way to back down, such as issuing nuclear threats only indirectly through low-level diplomatic channels and refraining from occupying Zhenbao Island even after demonstrating their superior firepower in clashes with the Chinese. In this way, the logic of provocation explains the peculiar way in which the 1969 crisis escalated to nuclear threats.

The available evidence also suggests that alternative explanations suffer from several shortcomings to explain why and how the 1969 crisis escalated. Contrary to the 'diversionary war hypothesis,' China escalated against the Soviets when they arguably least needed to garner domestic political support, and it remains unclear why China or the Soviet Union would choose their border dispute to mobilize public opinion when each had other external threats that they could escalate. Contrary to the 'nuclear brinkmanship hypothesis,' the threat of an accidental nuclear attack being unleashed on major population centers played little role in either side's decision calculus to escalate or back down, even though the Soviets took several steps consistent with brinkmanship, such as putting their nuclear forces on high alert. Contrary to the 'stability-instability paradox hypothesis,' China was worried about the possibility of a Soviet nuclear strike, and this fear deterred China from escalating conventional confrontations with the Soviets on the border after the

initial clashes on Zhenbao Island. And finally, contrary to the hypothesis that Mao wanted to court the United States by escalating tensions with the Soviets on Zhenbao Island, Mao appears to have taken advantage of deteriorating Sino-Soviet relations *after* the Zhenbao Island to improve ties with the United States.

The 1969 crisis thus demonstrates that the logic of provocation can significantly affect escalation in nuclear crises. In the next chapter, I briefly review three more recent crises in which the logic of provocation plays an important role.

CHAPTER 7 : Three Short Case Studies

In this chapter, I explore the broader relevance of the logic of provocation in interstate crises by briefly reviewing three additional cases. These cases are the following. (1) The mid-air collision of a U.S. EP-3 reconnaissance plane and a Chinese fighter jet in 2001. This case examines the logic of provocation in the context of an accidental clash. (2) The North Korean bombardment of South Korea's Yeongpyeong Island in 2010. This case examines the logic of provocation in a non-Chinese context. (3) The standoff at Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea between China and the Philippines in 2012. This case examines the logic of provocation in the context of a gray zone conflict that resulted in a revision of the status quo. Although these incidents escalated to varying levels of military violence and diplomatic tensions, they are consistent with my definition of interstate crises in Chapter 2. To reiterate, I deliberately chose a definition that 'lowers the bar' for what counts as a crisis because I am interested in how low-level, as well as high-intensity, incidents can inadvertently escalate to large conflicts. Thus, excluding low-level incidents would remove a great deal of dangerous escalatory processes that my theory can potentially help explain. Moreover, although these cases (fortunately) did not escalate to large-scale conflict, they form a core group of recent incidents in the Asia-Pacific that have generated much public consternation about the possibility of an unwanted conflict embroiling the United States.

The EP-3 Mid-Air Collision in 2001

On April 1, 2001, a U.S. Navy EP-3 surveillance plane collided mid-air with an intercepting Chinese F-8 fighter jet over the South China Sea. The collision killed the Chinese pilot, Wang Wei, who had attempted to eject himself from the falling plane, and severely damaged the EP-3, which made an emergency landing at China's Hainan military airfield with all

crew members alive. Chinese authorities thereupon detained the EP-3 crew – all twenty four members – and a diplomatic storm ensued over the cause of the incident and the release of the EP-3 and its crew. In local time, the incident occurred at 9:15 a.m. on a Sunday, but in Washington D.C., it was past 8 p.m. on a Saturday. The first public statement regarding the incident was thus released by U.S. Pacific Command (PACCOM), which is located approximately midway between these two time zones. The statement, released six hours after the incident, read that “[w]e expect that the PRC government will respect the integrity of the aircraft and the well-being and safety of the crew in accordance with international practices, expedite any necessary repairs to the aircraft, and facilitate the immediate return of the aircraft and crew.”⁴⁷² Unfortunately, however, according to Chinese scholar Wu Xinbo, this initial U.S. statement irked the Chinese: “its demands appeared excessive and arrogant to Beijing and only worked to evoke negative feelings from China.”⁴⁷³

Twelve hours after the incident, at 9 p.m. in Beijing, the U.S. ambassador to China, Joseph Prueher, met with China’s Assistant Foreign Minister, Zhou Wenzhong. Having initially been unable to get through to the PLA headquarters or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) by phone, Prueher was met with protests by Zhou that the culpability for the incident lay with the EP-3, which, according to Zhou, had suddenly turned toward the Chinese fighter jet. Prueher disagreed with Zhou’s account of the incident and requested that the U.S. gain access to the EP-3 crew members. Zhou turned down this request. Whether Zhou assured Prueher that the crew members were safe or made any clear demands

⁴⁷²Dennis C. Blair and David B. Bonfili (2006) *The April 2001 EP-3 Incident: The U.S. Point of View*. In *Managing Sino-American Crises: Case Studies and Analysis*. Ed. by Michael Swaine, Tuosheng Zhang, and Danielle F. S. Cohen. Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Admiral Dennis Blair was the U.S. Pacific Commander at the time of the incident. The CRS Report of the incident claims that the Chinese made the first public statement, which contradicts Admiral Blair’s own account. See Shirley A. Kan et al. (Oct. 10, 2001) *China-U.S. Aircraft Collision Incident of April 2001: Assessments and Policy Implications*. CRS Report for Congress, RL30946.

⁴⁷³Wu Xinbo (2007) “Understanding Chinese and U.S. Crisis Behavior.” *The Washington Quarterly*. 31.1, pp. 61–76, p. 67.

to Prueher, however, is unclear.⁴⁷⁴ At the time, the Chinese were still formulating their position regarding the incident.⁴⁷⁵ At 10 p.m. a MFA spokesman made China's first public announcement about the collision. While declaring that "appropriate arrangements" had been made for the crew, the statement described the incident in the same manner that Zhou had told Prueher and called for the United States to accept full responsibility.⁴⁷⁶

Ambassador Prueher and PACCOM Commander Admiral Dennis Blair both held press conferences in which they sought to refute China's account of the incident. Eighteen hours after the collision, Admiral Blair claimed at his press conference that the Chinese fighter jet "bumped into the wing of the EP-3 aircraft" and that "intercepts by Chinese fighters over the past couple of months have become more aggressive."⁴⁷⁷ At 10 p.m. on April 2 in Beijing, Prueher had a second meeting with Zhou. Prueher again expressed his disagreement with China's accounts of the incident, but he was told that the crew members could be visited the following day. At this meeting, however, Zhou demanded that the U.S. side offer an apology.

At 11:38 a.m. on April 2 in Washington D.C. (10:38 p.m. on April 2, Beijing time), President George W. Bush made his first public statement about the incident. Notably, he said that "The first step should be immediate access by our Embassy personnel to our crewmembers. I am troubled by the lack of a timely Chinese response to our request for this access." Moreover, he added that "Failure of the Chinese Government to react promptly to our request is inconsistent with standard diplomatic practice and with the expressed desire of both our countries for better relations."⁴⁷⁸ From the U.S. point of view, it was still unclear

⁴⁷⁴Blair and Bofili's account and Zhang's account of this meeting differ. See Blair and Bonfili 2006, pp. 380-381; Zhang Tuosheng (2006) *The Sino-American Aircraft Collision: Lessons for Crisis Management*. In *Managing Sino-American Crises: Case Studies and Analysis*. Ed. by Michael Swaine, Tuosheng Zhang, and Danielle F. S. Cohen. Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, p. 395; Wu 2007, 67.

⁴⁷⁵Zhang 2006; Wu 2007.

⁴⁷⁶Kan et al. Oct. 10, 2001.

⁴⁷⁷Washington Post Apr. 02, 2001.

⁴⁷⁸George W. Bush (Apr. 2, 2001) "Remarks on the United States Navy Surveillance Aircraft Incident in the

that the Chinese were attempting to take the EP-3 crew members as hostages, and such concerns evoked memories of the U.S.-Iran hostage crisis of 1979-80.⁴⁷⁹ Indeed, President Bush recalls in his memoirs that during the EP-3 incident, “[t]he Iranian hostage crisis was at the forefront of my mind.”⁴⁸⁰ For the Chinese, however, President Bush’s statement came across as harsh. According to John Keefe, who was special adviser to Ambassador Prueher at the time, “[t]he Chinese apparently heard an implicit threat in his words.”⁴⁸¹

At the time, the U.S. had also diverted three destroyers in nearby waters to the South China Sea. In accordance with a comment during President Bush’s statement to assist the Chinese in searching for the lost Chinese pilot, who, until then, was missing but not confirmed dead, the three U.S. warships were in the area in case the Chinese accepted the U.S. offer to aid the search.⁴⁸² As Wu points out, however, mobilizing destroyers into the region “reminded the Chinese of gunboat diplomacy pursued by the Western powers in China during the ‘Century of Humiliation’ from 1840 to 1949.”⁴⁸³ On April 2, the Pentagon announced that it had withdrawn its three destroyers because the Chinese had rejected the U.S. offer to help. On April 3, China’s largest newspaper, the *Renmin Ribao* [People’s Daily] reported, quoting a U.S. defense official, that the United States had removed the three ships that had been “lingering in the region to ‘monitor the situation.’”⁴⁸⁴

On the morning of April 3 in Beijing, China’s President Jiang Zemin made his first public statement about the incident. Jiang called on the United States to “bear full responsibilities”

South China Sea.” *Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project.* URL: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=45667>.

⁴⁷⁹Blair and Bonfilii 2006, pp. 379-380.

⁴⁸⁰George W. Bush (2010) *Decision Points*. New York: Crown Publishers, p. 426.

⁴⁸¹John Keefe (2001) *Anatomy of the EP-3 Incident, April 2001*. Alexandria, V.A.: Center for Naval Analysis, pp. 6-7 Also see, Wu 2007.

⁴⁸²CNN (Apr. 3, 2001) “China grants U.S. access to spy plane crew.”

⁴⁸³Wu 2007, 68.

⁴⁸⁴People’s Daily (Apr. 3, 2001) “Pentagon Orders 3 US Warships in South China Sea to Move out.” I cite the English language articles as from the People’s Daily, and the Chinese language articles as from Renmin Ribao.

for the collision and “stop [surveillance] flights on China’s coastal airspace to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents and to facilitate the development of Sino-U.S. relations.”⁴⁸⁵ Later that day (near midnight of April 2, EST), U.S. officials finally met with the detained EP-3 crew and found them to be in good health. At 4:03 p.m. on April 3 in Washington D.C., President Bush made a second public statement regarding the incident. Although he acknowledged that U.S. officials were able to meet with the crew members, and that the crew were in good health, he stated that

“Our approach has been to keep this accident from becoming an international incident. We have allowed the Chinese Government time to do the right thing. But now it is time for our service men and women to return home, and it is time for the Chinese Government to return our plane.

This accident has the potential of undermining our hopes for a fruitful and productive relationship between our two countries. To keep that from happening, our service men and women need to come home.”

As Admiral Blair observes, President Bush “sounded much tougher” in this second statement. Jessica Weiss concurs: “Bush toughened his stance.”⁴⁸⁶

On April 4, *Renmin Ribao* carried an article on its front page that summarized Jiang’s statement regarding the incident from the previous day. Several other articles in the paper that day called for an apology from the United States – notably, one quoting Zhou as demanding an apology from Prueher – but the article summarizing Jiang’s speech was

⁴⁸⁵Renmin Ribao [People’s Daily] (Apr. 4, 2001) “Jiu mei zhencha ji zhuang hui wo junyong feiji shijian jiangzemin zhuxi fabiao tanhua [President Jiang Zemin made a speech on the US reconnaissance plane crashing and destroying our military aircraft].” Author’s translation of a *Renmin Ribao* summary of the statement.

⁴⁸⁶Jessica Chen Weiss (2013) “Authoritarian Signaling, Mass Audiences, and Nationalist Protest in China.” *International Organization*. 67.1, pp. 1–35, p. 22. Also see Jessica Chen Weiss (2014) *Powerful Patriots: Nationalist Protest in China’s Foreign Relations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 74

free from such references. Later in the day, however, Jiang made a second public statement in which he emphasized that the United States should apologize for the incident.⁴⁸⁷ *Renmin Ribao* carried an article on its front page the following day that included in its header that Jiang said “the United States should apologize [*daoqian*] to the Chinese people.”⁴⁸⁸

In a press briefing in Washington D.C. on April 4, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell publicly expressed his regret: “We regret that the Chinese plane did not get down safely, and we regret the loss of the life of that Chinese pilot.”⁴⁸⁹ Later that evening, he also wrote a letter in his personal capacity to China’s Vice Premier, Qian Qichen, expressing regret over the missing pilot.⁴⁹⁰ In fact, one day earlier, Secretary Powell had used the word “regret” when responding to a question during a press briefing: “Unfortunately, [the collision] apparently was fatal for the pilot of the Chinese plane and I regret that.” Yet, when asked if the Chinese were demanding an apology, he unequivocally stated that “I have heard some suggestion of an apology, but we have nothing to apologize for. We did not do anything wrong.”⁴⁹¹ On April 5 in Washington D.C., President Bush also publicly expressed his regret for the missing Chinese pilot: “I want to make this clear. First, I regret that a Chinese pilot is missing, and I regret one of their airplanes is lost.”⁴⁹²

On April 6 in Beijing, in a letter replying to Secretary Powell, Vice Premier Qian made

⁴⁸⁷Kan et al. Oct. 10, 2001, p. 3.

⁴⁸⁸*Renmin Ribao* [People’s Daily] (Apr. 5, 2001) “Jiangzemin qianwang lamei liu guo fangwen qian zhichu meifang yinggai xiang zhongguo renmin daoqian. [Before Jiang Zemin went to visit the six Latin American countries, he pointed out that the US should apologize to the Chinese people].”

⁴⁸⁹Colin L. Powell (Apr. 4, 2001) “Remarks Following Meeting with King Abdullah of Jordan.” URL: <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2001/2006.htm>. Also see Kan et al. Oct. 10, 2001, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁹⁰Blair and Bonfili 2006, p. 382; and Zhang 2006, 399.

⁴⁹¹Colin L. Powell (Apr. 3, 2001) “Briefing for the Press Aboard Aircraft En Route to Andrews Air Force Base.” URL: <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2001/1932.htm>.

⁴⁹²George W. Bush (Apr. 5, 2001) “Remarks by the President at American Society of Newspaper Editors Annual Convention.” URL: <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/04/20010405-5.html>. Also see Zhang 2006, 399; and Weiss 2014, p. 76

it clear that the U.S. statements of regret were unacceptable and further requested that the U.S. side make an apology to the Chinese people.⁴⁹³ From April 5 and April 11, delegates from both sides held eleven rounds of negotiations on the wording of an apology letter and the release of the EP-3 crew.⁴⁹⁴ According to Keefe, who participated in these talks, the Chinese were “acutely sensitive to public opinion about this incident...University students wanted to hold demonstrations to vent their anger.”⁴⁹⁵ Even though the Chinese leadership prevented protests from spilling out onto the streets, and actively sought to limit the Chinese media from worsening public opinion, Chinese “netizens” – members of the online community – were incensed and demanded a tough response to the United States. One comment even lamented that “Mao Zedong would have been stronger.”⁴⁹⁶

The final letter that emerged from these negotiations on April 11 included the expression “very sorry” twice. In the English version, the expressions were part of the following two sentences: “Please convey to the Chinese people and to the family of pilot Wang Wei that we are very sorry for their loss,” and “[w]e are very sorry the entering of China’s airspace and the landing [of the EP-3] did not have verbal clearance, but very pleased the crew landed safely.” In Chinese, the phrase was “expressing deep apology” (*shen biao qian yi*).⁴⁹⁷ The letter, moreover, was addressed to China’s Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan from Ambassador Prueher “[o]n behalf of the United States government.”⁴⁹⁸ Upon receiving this letter, all twenty four members of the EP-3 flew out of Hainan on April 12.⁴⁹⁹

Although the release of the crew resolved the crisis, the two sides also had to negotiate the

⁴⁹³Zhang 2006, 399-400; and Kan et al. Oct. 10, 2001, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁹⁴Zhang 2006, 400.

⁴⁹⁵Keefe 2001, p. 10. Also see, Weiss 2014, p. 24.

⁴⁹⁶As quoted in Shirk 2007, p. 239. On China’s efforts to prevent protests, see Weiss 2013; and Weiss 2014.

⁴⁹⁷Zhang 2006, 400.

⁴⁹⁸George W. Bush (Apr. 11, 2001) “Letter from Ambassador Prueher to Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Tang.” *Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project*. URL: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=78791>.

⁴⁹⁹Kan et al. Oct. 10, 2001, p. 6.

terms of releasing the damaged plane. The EP-3 was carrying classified material despite attempts by the crew to destroy the material during their emergency landing.⁵⁰⁰ Although the United States requested that the plane be repaired and flown out, it was eventually divided into four pieces and flown out on a Russian heavy-lift aircraft on July 5.⁵⁰¹ As one senior PLA general claims, “We couldn’t agree to let [the EP-3] fly out because [Chinese] public opinion wouldn’t accept it.”⁵⁰²

The Role of Provocation in the EP-3 Incident

The logic of provocation explains three important aspects of how the crisis developed. First, it explains how *both* the accidental collision *and* the subsequent statements made by U.S. officials provoked the Chinese public. As discussed in Chapter 2, provocative effect can arise both from accidents and deliberate actions, and deliberate actions after an accident that are provocative can further exacerbate a crisis. As seen in the above case, although the Chinese government made efforts to limit public outrage to the incident, the Chinese public nevertheless became indignant and restive. The public anger in China from the EP-3 incident was also exacerbated by a previous U.S.-China crisis in 1999, when a U.S. fighter jet accidentally bombed a Chinese embassy in Belgrade during an air strike in Kosovo. The incident killed several Chinese embassy officials, and the Chinese public was loathe to accept that the incident was an accident. Thus, even though U.S. statements from the outset of the EP-3 incident were relatively restrained and non-confrontational, the initial public statements by President Bush were received by the Chinese as harsh and “arrogant.” According to Wu, “Bush’s strong worded statement caused the Chinese side to toughen its

⁵⁰⁰EP-3 Cryptologic Assessment Team (July 2001) “EP-3E Collision: Cryptologic Damage Assessment and Incident Review.” *Department of the Navy and National Security Agency of the United States [Top Secret/Comint/Noform/XI]*.

⁵⁰¹Blair and Bonfili 2006, p. 386; and Kan et al. Oct. 10, 2001, pp. 7-8.

⁵⁰²As quoted by Shirk. See Shirk 2007, p. 236.

stance.”⁵⁰³ Indeed, President Bush admits in his memoirs that although the Iran hostage crisis was initially on his mind, “I later learned that China’s handling of the EP-3 crisis was based on the government’s belief that the Chinese people had perceived weakness in the response to America’s accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999.”⁵⁰⁴

Second, the logic of provocation contributes to the existing literature on the incident by highlighting how actions within the public domain – and not just differences between public and “quiet” diplomacy – can have a provocative effect. Several Chinese scholars have argued that the initial decision from the U.S. side to pursue public diplomacy put pressure on the Chinese leadership and made the incident more difficult to resolve.⁵⁰⁵ This argument is consistent with an ‘imposed audience costs’ argument discussed in Chapters 1 and 2.⁵⁰⁶ In contrast, as also discussed in those chapters, the logic of provocation highlights variation even *within* public diplomacy: different rhetoric used in public statements can be more provocative than others.⁵⁰⁷ For example, had President Bush expressed his desire to resolve the incident using more considerate language from China’s point of view at the outset of the crisis, the same demands for the quick release of the crew and plane may not have had such a provocative effect on the Chinese, thus minimizing the “public pressure” on the Chinese even when conducting public diplomacy. Indeed, even Wu points out that “Beijing sometimes pays more attention to symbolic gestures than to substantive issues.”⁵⁰⁸

Finally, the logic of provocation highlights the importance of the final letter to the Chinese. Despite public statements of regret by Secretary Powell and President Bush, the Chinese

⁵⁰³ Wu 2007, 68.

⁵⁰⁴ Bush 2010, p. 426.

⁵⁰⁵ See, for example, Zhang 2006; and Wu 2007.

⁵⁰⁶ See, for example, Fearon 1992; and Kurizaki 2007.

⁵⁰⁷ On studies that find this type of variation without engaging the literature on provocation, see, for example, Gottfried and Trager 2016. Similarly, the logic of provocation can also explain variation in provocative effects within secret diplomacy.

⁵⁰⁸ Wu 2007, 72.

leadership found the statements unacceptable because they were insufficient to undo the anger and increased honor concerns among the Chinese public. As Shirk observes, “[t]he Chinese rebuffed oral statements of regret for the loss of life by Secretary of State Colin Powell and President Bush as inadequate and insisted on a formal written apology in order to show the public that their leader could defend China’s honor.”⁵⁰⁹ From a crisis management point of view, the Chinese leadership’s demands successfully addressed the provocative effects of the accident and the subsequent statement made by U.S. officials: given that the public and military had become provoked to take a tough stance, rather than take an escalatory step to satisfy this greater resolve to resort to military force, the Chinese leadership made a demand that could directly undo the provocative effects on the public. This shows that, even though deliberate actions in a crisis can be more provocative than accidental actions, and factually assessing the cause of an accident and the intentions of those who are culpable are important parts of the negotiating process, evidence of culpability can be less important in reducing provocative effects than offering statements of remorse and sympathy. This is especially likely to be true when one of the states in the crisis has the ability to tightly control information and evidence regarding an incident domestically, because the public will find it hard to evaluate such evidence. Fortunately, U.S. leaders soon recognized and adroitly addressed Beijing’s concerns to pacify its provoked citizens. Indeed, as Weiss points out, “one of the most striking findings from the EP-3 crisis is how sensitive American officials were to Chinese nationalism in the absence of street protests. U.S. officials understood the difficulty of managing public anger.”⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁹Shirk 2007, p. 235.

⁵¹⁰Weiss 2013, p. 25.

The Bombardment of Yeonpyeong Island in 2010

On an otherwise unextraordinary afternoon in November 2010, North Korea suddenly launched an indiscriminate artillery barrage on a populated South Korean island only sixty five miles from Seoul.⁵¹¹ At 14:34 hours on November 23, North Korean frontier units in the West Sea (Yellow Sea) shelled Yeonpyeong Island for twelve minutes, firing approximately 24 rounds.⁵¹² Four minutes prior to initiating the barrage, the North also launched two MiG-23ML fighter jets towards the South.⁵¹³ At 14:47 hours, one minute after the first round of shelling had ended, South Korean 155mm K-9 battery units returned fire, sustaining a barrage for eight minutes. Nearly half way through this first round of South Korean fire, at 14:50 hours, the ROK Air Force scrambled two KF-16 fighter jets.⁵¹⁴ After a fifteen minute pause in firing, at approximately 15:10 hours, the North initiated a second round of fire, this time lasting for about twenty minutes. During this second barrage, the South returned fire from 15:25 hours until 15:41 hours. Both sides then ceased firing.⁵¹⁵ Although the extent of damage on the North is still unknown, it was later confirmed that the North had killed two South Korean marines and two civilians.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹¹I refer to the Republic of Korea (ROK) as South Korea, or ‘the South,’ and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) as North Korea, or ‘the North,’ for ease of exposition.

⁵¹²Donga Shinmun [Donga Daily] (Nov. 24, 2011) “Buk pogyuk, nam daeung jechoosung [A reconstitution of North’s bombardment and the South’s response].”

⁵¹³Joseph S. Bermudez (Jan. 11, 2011) “The Yŏnp’yŏng- do Incident.” 38 *North.*, p. 10.

⁵¹⁴Joongang Ilbo [Joins Daily] (Mar. 28, 2011) “Yeonpyeongdo pogyuk deh nalagan F-15 juntoogi ”Bukhan heanpo giji delildeh gongdeji missile ubsutda [On the F-15 that was launched during the Yeonpyeong Island bombardment, ”there was no air-to-surface missile to strike North Korea’s artillery]”; Bermudez Jan. 11, 2011, p. 7

⁵¹⁵There are conflicting accounts in Korean and English-language sources on when the first round of fire ended and the second round commenced. The reports are in agreement, however, about the start time and end time of the entire exchange and that at least two rounds of fire were exchanged. See *Yeonpyeongdo pogyuk dobal sagun [Yeonpyeong Island bombardment provocation]*. Bukhan information portal [North Korea information portal], Ministry of Unification, Republic of Korea. URL: <http://nkinfo.unikorea.go.kr/nkp/term/termDicaryPrint.do?dicaryId=67&menuNm=knwldgDicary>; Maeil Kyungjae [Maeil Business Newspaper] (Nov. 11, 2013) “Bukchuk dobal shigandaebuyul Jechoosung [A timeline of the North’s Provocation]”; and Bermudez Jan. 11, 2011.

⁵¹⁶According to one account, five people died in the North as a result of the exchange. See Chosun Ilbo [Chosun Daily] (Dec. 28, 2010) “Yeonpyeongdo pogyuk dangshi bookhangoon 5myung jeonsa...‘youngung’ chingho bada [5 North Korean troops dies during the Yeonpyeong Island bombardment...honored as

The North's purported reason for launching the attack was that the South's live fire during a military exercise earlier that day had landed in North Korean waters.⁵¹⁷ The North contests its maritime border with the South, which is known as the Northern Limit Line (NLL), and in October 1999, declared a maritime line-of-control that reaches further south.⁵¹⁸ At 08:20 hours on the day of the attack, the North had sent the South Korean military a written warning that the military drill scheduled for that afternoon would be "simulating an invasion of the North." In a statement after the attack, a North Korea news agency complained that the South had "recklessly fired into our sea area."⁵¹⁹ South Korea's Minister of Defense, Kim Tae-young, latter confirmed that although the South had received a warning from the North that morning, the warning had largely been dismissed because the North often sent warnings and threats without later following through.⁵²⁰ Moreover, the military exercise that day was an annual event that had been held since 1996, and North Korean protests to such exercises had become routine. In August 2010, for instance, the North fired 130 rounds of artillery into the sea in protest of the South's military exercises.⁵²¹ Thus, when the South Korean military received the North's warning on November 23, and South Korean intelligence had detected unusual activities in the North in preceding days, the expectation was that the North might lob a few shells into the sea.⁵²² The North's attack on Yeonpyeong Island, however, became the first time since the armistice to the Korean War in 1953 that the North had directly targeted South Korean territory and killed its civilians.

'heroes.']"

⁵¹⁷Analysts also believe that Kim Jong-un masterminded the attacks to demonstrate his military credentials while being groomed as the North's next leader. See, for example, New York Times (Nov. 23, 2010[b]) "South Koreans and U.S. to Stage a Joint Exercise"

⁵¹⁸Bermudez Jan. 11, 2011, p. 1.

⁵¹⁹New York Times (Nov. 23, 2010[a]) "'Crisis Status' in South Korea After North Shells Island."

⁵²⁰Bermudez Jan. 11, 2011.

⁵²¹Michael A. McDevitt et al. (Sept. 2012) *The Long Littoral Project: East China and Yellow Seas*. Center for Naval Analyses, pp. 42-43.

⁵²²Jong dae Kim (2013) *Suhae junjeng: Jangsung 35 myungeui junguneulo jaegoosunghada [West Sea war: a reconstruction through the testimony of 35 generals]*. Seoul: Medici Media.

Within the first ten minutes of the North's artillery fire, at 14:40 hours, the South Korean President, Lee Myung-bak, and his aides were evacuated to an emergency bunker in the presidential quarters, Cheong Wa Dae (the Blue House).⁵²³ At 14:50 hours, the South's military alert level was raised to the highest level of *Jindotgae I*.⁵²⁴ At that time, defense minister Kim was at the National Assembly, and at 15:06 hours, one politician interrupted the proceedings to demand an explanation from the minister because there was breaking news online that the North had fired twenty rounds at South Korean troops. Defense minister Kim asked for some time to clarify the incident, and at 15:35 hours, briefed lawmakers that the two sides had exchanged fire at Yeonpyeong Island.⁵²⁵ Meanwhile at the bunker, the president issued his first public comment, which the media reported at 15:40 hours: "Prevent escalation [*hwakjun bangji*]."⁵²⁶ The comment immediately received negative coverage in the Korean press because it was perceived as a signal of weakness when South Korean troops were still engaged in fighting. Indeed, at 15:50 hours, a revised comment was released: "manage well [*guanli jal hela*] so that it doesn't escalate." At 16:00 hours, this messages was again revised to "pay attention so [*manjunul gihala*] that it doesn't escalate," and at 16:30 hours, the message changed once again to "respond firmly [*danhoyi daeung*] and make sure that the situation does not worsen [*akhwa*]."⁵²⁷ Thus, the comments were revised to excise any expressions of limiting escalation. Later that evening, a Cheong Wa Dae spokesperson insisted that the president's initial comment had been miscommunicated as there had been no initial comment by the president to refrain from escalation. Meanwhile at 16:35 hours, the president finally began an emergency meeting with the minister of defense and the minister of foreign affairs.⁵²⁸

⁵²³Kim 2013, p. 293.

⁵²⁴Yonhab News (Nov. 23, 2010) "Buk heanpo sakyuk sigandaebuyul hyunhyuang [A timeline of the North's artillery barrage]."

⁵²⁵Kim 2013, pp. 293-294.

⁵²⁶Ibid., p. 297.

⁵²⁷Ibid., p. 299.

⁵²⁸Ibid., p. 299.

As scenes of dark smoke and disarray on Yeonpyeong Island filled TV screens around the world, the South Korean government was put in a quandary: Should it escalate or should it back down? On the one hand, although the South was now in a justifiable position to send a strong deterrent signal to the North by taking an escalatory step, the government came under immense pressure to retaliate more forcefully to satisfy the public's sense of injustice. In March 2010, the North had torpedoed a South Korean naval vessel, the *Cheonan*, killing forty six sailors, but had received no military reprisals from the South. Although there was much skepticism domestically regarding the evidence that the North had caused the tragedy, the right-leaning government had pledged to respond firmly to future North Korean provocations. Yet, as the South Korean Ministry of Defense later confirmed, during the fighting over Yeonpyeong Island, the North had fired an approximately 170 rounds while the South had responded with only 80 rounds. During President Lee's emergency meeting with the defense and foreign ministers (about half an hour in), South Korea launched four F-15Ks and two KF-16s fighter jets armed with air-to-surface missiles.⁵²⁹ The two KF-16s that were initially dispatched were only armed with air-to-air missiles, so they would have been unable to target the North Korean battery units that had fired at Yeonpyeong Island – they would only have been able to engage the North Korean MiGs. The newly dispatched fighter jets, however, were in a position to strike the North's battery units if so ordered.

On the other hand, if the South Korean response was too strong, and was construed by the North as disproportionate or an unacceptable reprisal, then the crisis could escalate to a large-scale conflict or prompt future reprisals by the North against the South. Thus, an air strike on North Korean battery units carried a significant risk of escalation. There are conflicting accounts, however, of what transpired next. In an interview at the end of his presidency, President Lee claimed that he ordered the fighter jets to strike the North Korean

⁵²⁹Kim 2013, p. 298.

units, but the military told him that he did not have the authority to do so because according to the rules of engagement after the armistice, the United Nations Command Commander, U.S. General Walter Sharp, had to also approve of such a decision.⁵³⁰ According to the South Korean military, President Lee never gave such orders, and the civilians in the leadership wanted to prevent further escalation of the crisis.⁵³¹ The military acknowledges, however, that there were conflicting views within the command regarding the rules of engagement. According to U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates' memoirs, during the "very dangerous crisis" on November 23, 2010:

South Korea's original plans for retaliation were, we thought, disproportionately aggressive, involving both aircraft and artillery. We were worried the exchanges could escalate dangerously. The president [Obama], [Secretary of State] Clinton, [Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff] Mullen, and I were all on the phone often with our South Korean counterparts over a period of days.⁵³²

This passage suggests that the South Korean government seriously considered an escalatory reprisal involving the ROK Air Force. Although the internal deliberations of the South Korean leadership, and discussions among U.S.-ROK leaders, are yet unclear, ultimately, the South Koreans refrained from launching retaliatory air strikes against the North.

South Korean public opinion, however, had turned drastically hawkish following the attacks. According to a poll by the ASAN Institute, a leading South Korean foreign policy think tank, a week after the attacks, 80% of the South Korean public agreed that the military

⁵³⁰Chosun Ilbo [Chosun Daily] (Feb. 5, 2013) "Lee Recalls Getting Tough with N.Korea."

⁵³¹Chosun Ilbo [Chosun Daily] (Jun. 2, 2014) "Yeonpyeongdo pogyuk sogukdaeung...gookbang jangguan hooboja nonlan [Passive response to Yeongpyeong Island bombardment...candidate for defense minister in controversy]."

⁵³²Robert M. Gates, ed. (2014) *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, p. 497.

should have responded more forcefully [*ganglyukhan goonsajuk daeung*].⁵³³ According to a survey by the East Asia Institute (EAI), another leading South Korean foreign policy think tank, a week after the attacks, only 21.8% of the South Korean public said that “preventing escalation” was a positive aspect of the government’s response during the crisis. Moreover, 68.6% of the public said that a “limited military reprisal” would be “an appropriate way to resolve the issue.” To get a sense of how significant this shift in public opinion is, after the *Cheonan* incident earlier that year, which killed forty six sailors, the same survey by the EAI found that only 28.2% of the public said a limited military reprisal would be an appropriate way to resolve the issue.⁵³⁴ Thus, an indiscriminate attack that killed two combatants and two civilians may have outraged the South Korean public more than an attack that killed forty six combatants.⁵³⁵

After the incident, South Korea insisted on holding another military exercise in the West Sea. The purported reason was to complete a drill that the North’s attack on Yeonpyeong Island in November had interfered with.⁵³⁶ Despite the outpouring of international condemnation that South Korea was destabilizing the region, and North Korea’s warning of “deadly retaliations,” the South Korean government held a military exercise at Yeonpyeong

⁵³³Joongang Ilbo [Joins Daily] (Nov. 30, 2010) “80%...”Yeonpyeongdo pogyuk deh duh ganglyukhi goonsa daeung hessuya [80% say “should have responded more forcefully with the military during the Yeonpyeong Island bombardment”].”

⁵³⁴Neyoung Lee and Hanool Chung (Nov. 28, 2010) “Bukhanuei yeonpyeongdo pogyuki kookminyuloneh michin younhyang [The effect of North Korea’s bombardment of Yeonpyeong Island on South Korean public opinion].” *East Asia Institute Issue Briefing*. 91.

⁵³⁵The large differences in South Korean public opinion after the *Cheonan* incident and Yeonpyeong Island incident likely reflect the influence of several factors in addition to a provocative effect. For instance, whether the North was responsible for the *Cheonan* incident was hotly contested domestically, as many on the political left argued that the right-leaning South Korean government was covering up for an accident by drumming up anti-communist fervor reminiscent of the Cold War. Moreover, unlike the bombardment of Yeonpyeong Island, the North claims that it was not responsible for the *Cheonan* incident. Yet, the Yeonpyeong Island incident may well have had a larger provocative effect on the South Korean public because of the use of indiscriminate violence by the North and the death of civilians. Recall that the pre-test survey in Chapter 3 found that an important reason that the American public found the death of innocent civilians more provocative than the death of U.S. soldiers is because soldiers “know the dangers” of armed conflict.

⁵³⁶The Korea Herald (Dec. 20, 2010) “S. Korea conducts live fire drill on Yeonpyeong.”

Island on December 20, 2010.⁵³⁷ Although the North's warning turned out to be a bluff, it appears that the South took the risk of provoking the North once again to demonstrate its resolve.⁵³⁸

The Role of Provocation in the Yeonpyeong Island Crisis

How does the logic of provocation aid our understanding of the dangers of unwanted escalation in this crisis? There are at least two important points that the logic of provocation helps explain. Consider in more detail the South Korean government's choices after the initial exchanges of fire by local military units. On the one hand, an otherwise adequate deterrent military response by the South Korean government ran the risk of appearing perfunctory, and at worse, conciliatory in the eyes of the South Korean public. Put differently, in addition to considerations to clearly signal resolve as the signaling literature might expect, the government also had to consider whether such a signal to the North – and the escalatory step it entails – would be enough to satisfy the South Korean public's sense of injustice and outrage. Thus, the North's actions may have had a provocative effect on the South that created incentives to escalate more that would be desirable than if the South only wanted to signal resolve to the North. The logic of provocation highlights and helps explain this source of escalatory risk in the crisis. Ultimately, the South Korean government chose not to satisfy the public's desire for a tough response, but this decision meant that the government had to pay a price in terms of public opinion. Although we cannot know for sure through observational data whether there was a provocative effect on the South Korean public, this interpretation of the crisis is consistent with the logic revealed in the results of the survey experiment in Chapter 3.

On the other hand, if the South responded too strongly, and the action was construed by the

⁵³⁷Korea Times (Dec. 20, 2010) "S. Korea stages live-fire drill amid tension."

⁵³⁸Author interview no. 1 in Seoul, June 2018.

North as disproportionate or an unacceptable reprisal, then this could have led to additional unwanted escalation or motivated future reprisals on the South. Any given level of response by the South, therefore, not only entailed a danger of inadequately signaling resolve, but a risk of fanning rather than dampening the flames of the crisis by making the North feel ‘obliged’ to respond with a more forceful escalatory act. This source of uncertainty – variation in how large the provocative effect would be on the North – is explained by the logic of provocation. A disproportionate reprisal by the South could increase honor concerns for North Korean military leaders, or increase their risk-tolerance through anger, thus making backing down less palatable and escalation more appealing than before. This view contrasts with the role of threat perceptions: there was no indication that the South (or the North) was mobilizing for war or preparing a preemptive offensive. Instead, a central risk of war in the crisis appears to be each side’s choice of retaliatory response; if either chose a response that was too provocative, it risked triggering further escalation, and possibly a war that neither side expected or wanted – an inadvertent war.

The Standoff at Scarborough Shoal in 2012

Scarborough Shoal (*Huangyan dao* in Chinese and *Panatang Shoal* in the Philippines) is located 135 miles from the Philippines and 543 miles from China, and until May 2012, remained under the administrative control of the Philippines.⁵³⁹ The shoal is claimed by China, the Philippines, and Taiwan, and is among several features in the South China Sea that are disputed by neighboring states. Through a two-month standoff in 2012 between Chinese and Philippine ships, however, the status quo was revised in favor of the Chinese as they seized de facto control of the shoal. How did administrative control of the shoal change hands during the two-month standoff, and how does the logic of provocation help

⁵³⁹M. Taylor Fravel (2017) *Threading the Needle: The South China Sea Disputes and U.S.-China Relations*. In *Strategic Adjustment and the Rise of China: Power and Politics in East*. Ed. by Robert Ross and Øystein Tsunjo. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

us better understand the processes that led to this outcome?

On April 10, 2012, a Philippine naval vessel, the BPR *Gregorio del Pilar* was dispatched to Scarborough Shoal to arrest the crew of eight Chinese fishing trawlers that had been operating in the area. Uniformed Philippine soldiers boarded the trawlers to arrest the crew for poaching, took photos of the crew and their catch, and then briefly left the trawlers to conduct the formal arrest. During this brief interval, however, the Chinese fishing crew contacted Chinese authorities, and two China Marine Surveillance (CMS) vessels that were nearby were immediately dispatched to prevent the arrest.⁵⁴⁰ One of these vessels was the 1,300 ton CMS 75, and the other was the 1,700 ton CMS 84. When the two Chinese vessels arrived on scene, they demanded the withdrawal of the Philippine vessel from the shoal. The BPR *Gregorio del Pilar* refused to leave, claiming that the shoal was within Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).⁵⁴¹ Despite the Philippine naval vessel's superior firepower, however, it made no attempt to escalate a confrontation, as doing so could have triggered a military conflict with the Chinese.⁵⁴² Yet, later that day, the Philippine Navy released the photos of the Chinese fishermen.⁵⁴³ Immediately catching the attention of the international press, an intense standoff at Scarborough Shoal thus ensued.

When Philippine President Benigno Aquino III was informed about the standoff, he

⁵⁴⁰Conor M. Kennedy and Andrew S. Erickson (Mar. 2017) "China's Third Sea Force, The People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia: Tethered to the PLA." *China Maritime Report No. 1*. China Maritime Studies Institute. U.S. Naval War College, p. 9.

⁵⁴¹Michael Green et al. (May 2017) *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia: The Theory and Practice of Gray Zone Deterrence*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic, International Studies; Lanham, M.D.: Rowman, and Littlefield, pp. 100-101. This report is perhaps the most comprehensive account of the 2012 incident that is publicly available to date. The summary of events in this chapter relies heavily, but also builds, on the report.

⁵⁴²Ryan D. Martinson (2018) "Echelon Defense: The Role of Sea Power in Chinese Maritime Dispute Strategy." *CMSI Red Books*. 15. <http://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cmsi-red-books/15>, p. 1.

⁵⁴³Associated Press (Apr. 13, 2012) "Three fishing boats involved in standoff between China and the Philippines leave shoal." URL: <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Latest-News-Wires/2012/0413/Three-fishing-boats-involved-in-standoff-between-China-and-the-Philippines-leave-shoal>.

ordered the BRP *Gregorio del Pilar* to be replaced with a (non-military) coast guard vessel. According to his Executive Order No. 57 from September 2011, the guidelines for dealing with foreign vessels in this type of incident was “white to white, gray to gray,” meaning that coastal guard vessels were to be deployed against foreign coastal guard vessels, and military vessels were to be deployed against foreign military vessels. Only when a Philippine naval ship was nearby could it become involved in maritime law enforcement.⁵⁴⁴ On April 12, the Philippines replaced the BRP *Gregorio del Pilar* with the BRP *Pampanga*, a 540 ton coast guard vessel armed with a machine gun. As a report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies aptly points out, the Philippines had successfully “demilitarized its presence in the Scarborough Shoal.”⁵⁴⁵

Unfortunately, this effort to de-escalate tensions was not immediately reciprocated by the Chinese. Instead, a 1,000 ton Fisheries Law Enforcement Command (FLEC) ship with a deck-mounted gun, the FLEC 303, arrived on scene as the BRP *Gregorio del Pilar* was replaced.⁵⁴⁶ According to the CSIS report, there are at least three competing explanations for this Chinese move. One is that the Chinese deliberately rejected Philippines’ efforts to reduce tensions. Another is that the Chinese received confusing signals, as the Philippine media had referred to the decision to dispatch the BRP *Pampanga* as a move to “show our presence” and back up Philippine forces in the area. Third, the Chinese may have demanded that they match the presence of the Philippine gunboat, and the Philippines may have accepted such a demand.⁵⁴⁷

On April 13, the Chinese CMS 75 left the shoal, which in effect made the FLEC 303 a replacement. But when the CMS 75 departed, it was accompanied by several Chinese

⁵⁴⁴Green et al. 2017, p. 101.

⁵⁴⁵Ibid., p. 102.

⁵⁴⁶Ibid., p. 102.

⁵⁴⁷Ibid., p. 102.

fishing trawlers that had been in the lagoon. Later that evening, the FLEC 303 also left the shoal escorting the remaining Chinese fishing trawlers. These moves left only one vessel from each side at Scarborough Shoal: the Chinese CMS 84 and the Philippine BRP *Pampanga*. Manila claimed that this was a result of negotiations with the Chinese.⁵⁴⁸

With only one vessel from each side remaining at Scarborough Shoal, however, the two sides failed to agree on which of the two vessels should leave first. The Chinese claimed that the Filipinos should be the first to withdraw because multiple Chinese ships had already been moved out of the area. The Filipinos declined, and Secretary del Rosario publicly declared a “stalemate.”⁵⁴⁹ Shortly thereafter, the CMS 75 returned to the shoal. On April 16, the Philippines replaced the BRP *Pampanga* with another coastal guard vessel, the BRP *EDSA III*. On this day, both sides announced an impasse in negotiations.⁵⁵⁰

On April 17, the Philippines announced that it would seek international arbitration to resolve the Scarborough Shoal dispute. This decision was met with strong protests from the Chinese. On April 19, the Chinese dispatched their fastest FLEC vessel, the FLEC 310, to join the fray. The FLEC 310 was a 2,600 ton vessel with a deck gun, machine guns, and a helicopter pad.⁵⁵¹ The next day, a Chinese news article reported that Major General Luo Yuan – a well-known PLA hawk – had warned that if the Philippines “makes excessive provocations [*guodu tiaoxin*], the Chinese Navy will surely attack.”⁵⁵² Undeterred, Manila continued to “internationalize” the dispute. On April 22, Secretary del Rosario made an appeal to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) through the Philippine

⁵⁴⁸Green et al. 2017, p. 103.

⁵⁴⁹Ibid., p. 103.

⁵⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 103-105.

⁵⁵¹Ibid., p. 106.

⁵⁵²Fenghuang [Phoenix] (Apr. 20, 2012) “Jiefangjun shaojiang: Feilubin zai gan tiaoxin haijun hui zhong quan chuji [Major General of the PLA: The Philippines will dare not provoke the Navy to attack].” Also see Andrew Chubb (Apr. 27, 2012) “Who does Major-General Luo Yuan speak for?” *southseaconversations (blog)*. URL: <https://southseaconversations.wordpress.com/2012/04/27/who-does-major-general-luo-yuan-speak-for/>.

press: “All, not just the Philippines, will ultimately be negatively affected if we do not take a stand [against the Chinese].”⁵⁵³

The following day, a spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in the Philippines announced that two ships had been withdrawn from the shoal.⁵⁵⁴ The CMS 84 had left on April 20, the FLEC 310 had left on April 22, and the CMS 75 had been replaced by a 1,100 ton vessel, the CMS 71.⁵⁵⁵ The Chinese had thus removed all but one vessel from the shoal. “The withdrawal of the two ships,” the spokesperson claimed, “proves once again China is not escalating the situation as some people said, but de-escalating the situation.”⁵⁵⁶ On April 22, the Philippines had also replaced the BRP *EDSA III* with the BRP *Pampanga*, their only remaining vessel in the standoff. Protesting that the Chinese ships were still positioned just over the horizon, however, the Philippines deployed a second ship from the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, the 1,000 ton MCS 3006.⁵⁵⁷

As the confrontation between the two sides showed no signs of abating, on April 26, the Philippines publicly sought support from the United States. The two countries are allies bound by a Mutual Defense Treaty from 1951, but at the outset of the crisis, Philippine officials had told the Chinese that they would not seek direct involvement of the United States to resolve the standoff. The Chinese had also warned both the Philippines and the United States that the latter, which is not a direct claimant, should stay out of the dispute.⁵⁵⁸ Meanwhile, U.S. officials had been careful not to embolden the Filipinos during the standoff by refraining from clarifying whether the Mutual Defense Treaty could

⁵⁵³Inquirer (Apr. 22, 2012) “Take a Stand, Asean told.” Also see Green et al. 2017, p. 107.

⁵⁵⁴Renmin Ribao [People’s Daily] (Apr. 24, 2012) “Zhongguo liang sou zhifa chuan shi li huangyan dao fei guanfang he meiti jixu jihua maodun [China’s two law enforcement vessels are leaving Huangyan Island. Philippine officials and the media continue to intensify conflicts].” Also see, Green et al. 2017, p. 107.

⁵⁵⁵Ibid., p. 107.

⁵⁵⁶People’s Daily (Apr. 24, 2012) “China deescalates situation in Huangyan Island by withdrawing two vessels.”

⁵⁵⁷Green et al. 2017, p. 108.

⁵⁵⁸See, for example, Fravel 2017, p. 243.

be evoked if Philippine forces came under attack at Scarborough Shoal.⁵⁵⁹ With the Philippines' decision to seek U.S. help, and a U.S.-Philippine "2+2" ministerial meeting between the secretaries of defense and foreign affairs scheduled for April 30, however, the Chinese media reacted. Although articles in the *Renmin Ribao* were relatively muted – only lodging protests against the Philippines – online articles were more vitriolic. For example, in an article on April 26, Major General Luo Yuan re-interpreted a Chinese military strategy of Mao Zedong to "strike only after being struck first" by arguing that China had all the reason to strike back in the standoff because the Philippines had "fired the first shot" in the strategic sense of harassing Chinese fishermen.⁵⁶⁰ According to Bill Hayton, this article alone was commented more than a hundred thousand times by users of *Weibo* – a Chinese online platform similar to Twitter.⁵⁶¹

By April 30, the Chinese had not only re-deployed both their FLEC 310 and CMS 75 to the vicinity of the shoal, but sent a fourth coastal guard vessel, the CMS 71, as well as ten fishing trawlers to join the standoff. The Chinese thus had fourteen vessels in the Scarborough Shoal area, while the Philippines only had two.⁵⁶² At the U.S.-Philippine "2+2" meeting, however, U.S. statements stopped short of clarifying whether the United States would be obliged to defend the Philippines at Scarborough Shoal.⁵⁶³ Instead, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated that "we do not take sides on the competing sovereignty claims to land features in the South China Sea," and Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta affirmed that "[w]e are improving the Philippines maritime presence and

⁵⁵⁹Mira Rapp Hooper (2015) "Uncharted Waters: Extended Deterrence and Maritime Disputes." *The Washington Quarterly*. 38.1, pp. 127–146; and Fravel 2017.

⁵⁶⁰Luo Yuan (Apr. 26, 2012) "Luo Yuan: Zai Huangyan dao bu ying "che huo", er ying zeng bing [Luo Yuan: At Huangyan Island, we should not "withdraw" but increase troops]." *Huanqiu [Global Times]*. On Mao's strategy and applications to the PLAN, see Martinson 2018, p. 33.

⁵⁶¹Bill Hayton (2014) *The South China Sea: The Struggle for Power in Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 175.

⁵⁶²Green et al. 2017, p. 110.

⁵⁶³Ely Ratner (Nov. 21, 2013) "Learning the Lessons of Scarborough Reef." *The National Interest*.

capabilities with the transfer of a second high-endurance [coast guard vessel] this year.”⁵⁶⁴ The Chinese media responded positively to the U.S. decision to stay out of the dispute, but it was hardly enough to placate Chinese netizens. According to Andrew Chubb, on May 2, the English-language Chinese newspaper, the *Global Times*, published results of an in-house public opinion survey that found 80% of the Chinese public supporting retaliation to “provocations” in the South China Sea.⁵⁶⁵

The Chinese then appeared to exert coercive economic pressure. On May 3, Manila complained that Chinese authorities were holding Philippine banana exports at its ports. Bananas were the Philippines’ second largest agricultural export, and 15% of those exports went to the Chinese market.⁵⁶⁶ The Chinese, however, claimed that the quarantine was unrelated to the standoff. On May 11, large-scale anti-China protests were held in Manila and at Chinese diplomatic posts throughout the world.⁵⁶⁷

Faced with what Filipinos perceived as economic coercion from the Chinese, on May 18, President Aquino sent a secret envoy to China without informing foreign secretary del Rosario. Meanwhile at Scarborough Shoal, twenty three Chinese dinghies had appeared in the lagoon on May 9. In an effort to reduce tensions, Manila announced a fishing ban in much of its EEZs, which included Scarborough Shoal. This decision was a seeming reciprocation of the annual Chinese moratorium on fishing in nearby waters during the summer season. Yet by May 21, the total number of Chinese vessels at the shoal increased

⁵⁶⁴Remarks With Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, Philippines Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario, and Philippines Defense Secretary Voltaire Gazmin After Their Meeting (Apr. 30, 2012). U.S. Department of State. URL: <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2012/04/188982.htm> Also see Fravel 2017, p. 244.

⁵⁶⁵Andrew Chubb (2013) “Propaganda as Policy? Explaining the PLA’s “Hawkish Faction” (Part Two).” *China Brief Volume*. 13.6.

⁵⁶⁶Green et al. 2017, p. 112.

⁵⁶⁷See John D. Ciorciari and Jessica Chen Weiss (2016) “Nationalist Protests, Government Responses, and the Risk of Escalation in Interstate Disputes.” *Security Studies*. 25.3, pp. 546–583, p. 580; and Green et al. 2017.

to ninety seven. Five of these were government vessels, sixteen were fishing trawlers, and the rest were dinghies.⁵⁶⁸ The backdoor diplomacy by President Aquino's envoy, however, apparently made some headway as the number of Chinese vessels around Scarborough Shoal fell to thirty five by May 27. Moreover, Manila announced that the Chinese had lifted their quarantine of Philippine banana exports.⁵⁶⁹

On June 6, President Aquino travelled to the United States to meet with President Barack Obama. During his visit, no public clarification was provided as to whether the bilateral defense treaty extended to Scarborough Shoal. Although it is unclear exactly what the two leaders discussed regarding the standoff, in a joint statement at the Oval Office on June 8, President Aquino thanked President Obama "for all the expressions of support that even now has led to the resolution of situations within our territory."⁵⁷⁰

Accounts of the standoff sharply diverge after President Aquino's visit to the United States. What is known is the following. On June 15, Manila withdrew its two remaining vessels from Scarborough Shoal under the guise of avoiding a typhoon. On June 17, the Philippines announced that the Chinese vessels were expected to withdraw from the shoal as part of an agreement. In a press briefing on June 18, however, a Chinese FMA spokesperson denied such an agreement had been reached: "We wonder where the so-called China's commitment of 'withdrawing ship' comes from."⁵⁷¹ The Philippine defense minister threatened to re-deploy vessels to the shoal on June 21, and by June 22, Philippine

⁵⁶⁸Green et al. 2017, p. 115. Also see Martinson 2018, p. 2.

⁵⁶⁹Green et al. 2017, pp. 116-117.

⁵⁷⁰*Remarks by President Obama and President Aquino of the Philippines after Bilateral Meeting* (Jun. 8, 2012). White House, Office of the Secretary Press. URL: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/06/08/remarks-president-obama-and-president-aquino-philippines-after-bilateral>. Also see Green et al. 2017, p. 118.

⁵⁷¹*Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei's Regular Press Conference on June 18, 2012* (Jun. 18, 2012). Embassy of The People's Republic of China in the Republic of the Philippines. URL: http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t945079.shtml.

vessels were re-stocked and ready to be dispatched.⁵⁷² Foreign Secretary del Rosario claimed on June 25 that the Chinese had withdrawn, but a Philippine air reconnaissance mission found the next day that three CMS ships and two FLEC ships were around the shoal while six fishing trawlers and seventeen dinghies were in the lagoon.⁵⁷³ Manila never ordered their vessels to be re-deployed. Beijing thus had administrative control of the Shoal.

What is disputed is whether the Chinese agreed to withdraw. According to one account, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Kurt Campbell, negotiated an agreement with the Chinese in early June in which both sides would withdraw their vessels simultaneously.⁵⁷⁴ When the Philippines committed to the agreement by pulling out their two vessels on June 15, however, the Chinese reneged. The recently leaked emails of Secretary Clinton provide some support for this account.⁵⁷⁵ On June 17, a top aide, Jake Sullivan, sent an email to Secretary Clinton mentioning that “Kurt sent the below excerpt to Tom.”⁵⁷⁶ The following is the entire un-redacted paragraph of the excerpt in which the Scarborough Shoal standoff is mentioned:

“To create the right environment we need Chinese though to follow through on their commitments to ‘de-escalate’ over Scarborough. We put a lot of pressure on the [Filipinos] to step back and if anything it looks as if Chinese are consolidating their position – and watching us carefully.”

Although the passage does not definitively state that the Chinese had made a commitment to withdraw, it does show Kurt Campbell expressing surprise that the Chinese had not yet

⁵⁷²Green et al. 2017, p. 119.

⁵⁷³Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴Financial Times (Jul. 14, 2014) “US strategists face dilemma over Beijing claim in South China Sea”; Green et al. 2017, p. 118.

⁵⁷⁵Ibid., p. 118.

⁵⁷⁶Email from Jake Sullivan to Hillary Clinton (Jun. 17, 2012) “Available at the following website:” URL: <http://graphics.wsj.com/hillary-clinton-email-documents/>.

‘stepped back’ as the Filipinos had done.

According to a second account, the Chinese never agreed to withdraw. Instead, Assistant Secretary Campbell’s interlocutor, China’s Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Fu Ying, simply agreed to relay the deal to her superiors in Beijing. Indeed, when Fu was later asked about the agreement in public, she replied “I do not know what agreement you are referring to.”⁵⁷⁷ Moreover, the Chinese had later told President Aquino’s envoy that they needed two days to issue a face-saving statement before withdrawing *gradually*. Manila’s public statement calling on the Chinese to reciprocate the withdrawal, however, apparently abrogated any deal that had been made.⁵⁷⁸

After China gained de facto control of Scarborough Shoal, the Philippines has focused on international arbitration. Soon after the two-month standoff, Manila tried to gain support from ASEAN members at an upcoming meeting. The members, however, for the first time in the history of the organization, failed to arrive at an agreed statement.⁵⁷⁹ In January 2013, Manila filed an arbitration case to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. In October 2015, the court found that the Philippines has jurisdiction over Scarborough Shoal. Yet, the Chinese rejected the ruling, and the shoal remains under Chinese administrative control to this day.

The Role of Provocation in the Scarborough Shoal Standoff

Although important parts of the 2012 Scarborough Shoal incident are still unclear, this brief account highlights at least two important roles of the logic of provocation. First, the Chinese appear to have taken advantage of a seemingly provocative action by the Philippines to escalate and seize administrative control of the island. As Christensen

⁵⁷⁷Financial Times Jul. 14, 2014.

⁵⁷⁸Green et al. 2017, p. 119.

⁵⁷⁹Ratner Nov. 21, 2013.

argues, “as in its dealings with the Philippines over the Scarborough Shoal, Beijing has exploited provocations by others to attempt to legitimize Chinese efforts to consolidate control over territory that China has long claimed but not administered.”⁵⁸⁰

To be clear, for the preceding year at least, the Chinese encountered what they perceived as foreign attempts to undermine China’s presence and territorial claims in the South China Sea. In fall 2011, the United States implemented a new policy to “pivot,” or “rebalance,” to the Asia-Pacific, which included efforts to bolster relations with regional allies.⁵⁸¹ When Secretary Clinton visited Manila to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the alliance in November 2011, moreover, she declared that “[w]e will always stand and fight with you to achieve the future we seek,” and publicly referred to the South China Sea as the “West Philippine Sea” – the Philippine name for the sea which had only recently begun to be used by the Philippine government.⁵⁸² Indeed, the BRP *Gregorio del Pilar*, which had been used in the attempt to arrest the Chinese fishermen at Scarborough Shoal on April 10, was a decommissioned U.S. coastal guard vessel that the Philippines had received in May 2011.⁵⁸³ Yet, the Philippines’ attempt to arrest the Chinese fishing crew at Scarborough Shoal by sending the BRP *Gregorio del Pilar* was by no means a uniquely escalatory act by itself, since the Philippine Navy had already arrested Chinese fishermen at Scarborough Shoal in the past.⁵⁸⁴ Rather, the release of the shameful photos of the Chinese crew combined with the attempted arrest and triggered “an outcry among the Chinese general public.”⁵⁸⁵

Against this backdrop of real threats to its territorial claims and improvements in the

⁵⁸⁰Thomas J. Christensen (2015a) “Obama and Asia: Confronting the China Challenge.” *Foreign Affairs*. 94.5, pp. 28–36, p. 32.

⁵⁸¹See, for example, Kurt Campbell (2016) *The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia*. New York: Twelve: Hachette Book Group.

⁵⁸²Fravel 2017, p. 243.

⁵⁸³*Ibid.*, p. 242.

⁵⁸⁴M. Taylor Fravel (Nov. 1, 2012) “China’s Island Strategy: ”Redefine the Status Quo.”” *The Diplomat*.

⁵⁸⁵Fu Ying and Wu Shicun (May 6, 2016) “South China Sea: How We Got to This Stage.” *The National Interest*.

Philippines' maritime capabilities, Beijing appears to have taken advantage of the window of opportunity presented by a provoked – and more resolved – public to seize administrative control of Scarborough Shoal.⁵⁸⁶ This argument can be made in two steps, and doing so helps reconcile several seemingly contradictory views about the 2012 standoff:

(1) Although former vice foreign minister Fu Ying and Wu Shicun argue that “China was forced to take countermeasures” during the standoff because of pressures from Chinese public opinion, as Chubb points out, there is limited evidence that Chinese public opinion tied the hands of the Chinese government.⁵⁸⁷ Yet, it is also clear that the Chinese public was restive after the incident. By June 12, one public opinion survey found that “63.5 percent [of the Chinese public] opposed the idea that it is not worth fighting for China’s rights on small remote islands.”⁵⁸⁸ The logic of provocation highlights that the role of China’s hawkish public during the standoff is better understood as lowering the Chinese government’s political costs of escalation for rather than tying its hands. The government could have gained greater freedom of action in the dispute by providing justifications to back down or perhaps by severely restricting hawkish views being publicly expressed and disseminated, but it chose to refrain from doing either.⁵⁸⁹

(2) If the Chinese government could have gained greater freedom of action during the standoff, but chose not to do so, this suggests that they took advantage of provoked public opinion. Finding that responses to the standoff were muted in *Renmin Ribao*, Frances Yaping Wang argues that the Chinese government did not engage in an exerted

⁵⁸⁶Although not in the context of discussing provocations, Zhang also highlights China’s opportunism in the South China Sea: “China also took other’s behavior as an opportunity to control land features.” Ketian Zhang (2017) “Calculating Bully – Explaining Chinese Coercion in the South China Sea (1990-2015).” *Working Paper.*, p. 49.

⁵⁸⁷Fu and Wu 2016; Andrew Chubb (2018) “Assessing public opinion’s influence on foreign policy: the case of China’s assertive maritime behavior.” *Asian Security*. Forthcoming.

⁵⁸⁸Global Times (Jun. 12, 2012) “Maritime rights are ‘worth fighting for’.”

⁵⁸⁹On justifications to reduce the costs of backing down for China, see Levendusky and Horowitz 2012; and Quek and Johnston 2017/18.

propaganda campaign during the Scarborough Shoal standoff because the Chinese public's relatively hawkish views regarding the standoff were already in line with the government's general desired direction.⁵⁹⁰ In contrast, Chubb suggests that because a variety of assertive opinions regarding the standoff were expressed in the other media outlets and in the online community, "China's authorities made a deliberate choice to channel the public's attention towards the issue as part of an effort to pressure the Philippines to back down."⁵⁹¹ These two views are seemingly difficult to reconcile because if the Chinese government wanted to channel the public's attention, major publications such as *Renmin Ribao* should have contributed to fanning the public's enthusiasm for a tough response; on the other hand, if the government did not engage in a propaganda campaign, it at least allowed hawkish opinions to be expressed online, some of which went viral by attracting hundreds of thousands of comments. Thus, a third interpretation is that the Chinese government neither promoted the standoff in its major newspapers, nor clamped down to minimize assertive opinions, but instead simply took advantage of provoked public opinion by allowing it to play out through some media outlets, thus lowering the political costs of taking assertive actions to seize control of Scarborough Shoal.

A second important role of the logic of provocation in the crisis is that the Chinese appear to have taken advantage of the reluctance of the United States and the Philippines to further provoke China. By engaging in the gray zone, – using fishermen militia forces and coastal guard vessels to keep the level of escalation below the threshold of overt military force – the Chinese placed the burden of provocation on the Philippines and the United States. As Fravel points out, "China's use of fishing vessels and government ships left the United States with the uncomfortable choice between escalating its involvement in the dispute

⁵⁹⁰Frances Yaping Wang (2017) "The Dog That Barks: Understanding Propaganda Campaigns on Territorial Disputes." *Working Paper.*, pp. 27-28.

⁵⁹¹Andrew Chubb (2018) "Assessing public opinion's influence on foreign policy: the case of China's assertive maritime behavior." *Asian Security*. Forthcoming, pp. 10-11.

and potentially taking sides with the Philippines or acceptance of China's control of the shoal."⁵⁹²

To be sure, China's actions also provoked the Philippines. As Robert Kaplan observes, "[c]ertainly, what sparked the intense, emotional reaction among Filipinos against China [during the standoff] was the knowledge that written into Chinese naval behavior at Scarborough Shoal was a large dose of condescension, something that was deeply humiliating."⁵⁹³ This provocative effect on the Filipinos likely contributed to their willingness to resist capitulation even when the Chinese made seemingly conciliatory gestures during the standoff. Moreover, if the United States was indeed able to broker a deal of mutual withdrawal between the Chinese and Filipinos, but the Chinese reneged on that deal, China's decision to do so would have likely irked U.S. officials and increased their resolve to respond more forcefully. Ultimately, however, China's gray zone strategy successfully limited the degree of provocation on the Philippines or the United States and prevented escalation to the use of military force. Conversely, although the Chinese appear to be unresolved to initiate the use of military force, foreign actions that heighten honor concerns or emotions of anger may make the Chinese resolved to do so. The reluctance of the United States or Philippines to provoke the Chinese appear to reflect such concerns. Thus, even if China is unresolved to use military force, it can take advantage of the reluctance of foreign states to provoke and increase China's resolve. This consideration of the logic of provocation is consistent with the game-theoretic discussions in Chapter 4.

⁵⁹²Fravel 2017, p. 244.

⁵⁹³Robert D. Kaplan (2014) *Asia's Cauldron: The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific*. New York: Random House, p. 128.

Conclusion

Through a brief review of three recent crises, this chapter shows how the logic of provocation can help us better understand a greater variety of cases. Together, they also shed light on incidents directly relevant to understanding the dangers of unwanted crisis escalation in the Asia-Pacific. The following summarizes the key findings from each case study.

The 2001 EP-3 case examines the logic of provocation in the context of an accidental clash that led to heightened tensions between the United States and China. It finds that the statements made by U.S. leaders after the accident had a significant provocative effect on the Chinese public, perhaps even more so than the accident itself. This highlights the escalatory dangers of deliberate actions after an accident. Moreover, although Chinese scholars have pointed out that the U.S. decision to pursue public diplomacy made the incident more difficult to resolve, the logic of provocation points out that even within public diplomacy, different rhetoric in public statements can have varying degrees of provocation. Finally, the logic of provocation also highlights the importance of the apology letter for the Chinese. Even though U.S. leaders publicly stated their regret, the Chinese insisted on a letter expressing an apology because such a document could be displayed to the public and directly undo the provocative effects among Chinese citizens.

The 2010 Yeonpyeong Island case examines the logic of provocation in a non-Chinese context. It finds that the logic of provocation explains a key source of uncertainty in the crisis. In contrast to existing studies on signaling, the North's provocation put the South Korean government in a position in which sending an otherwise adequate deterrent signal to the north, such as by making a small reprisal, may have been insufficient to mollify the public's anger. Put differently, the provocative effect that the North's indiscriminate

artillery barrage on a populated South Korean island had on the South Korean public meant that the South's government had incentives to escalate more than was necessary to signal resolve to the North. The government ultimately chose not to escalate, but paid a steep price in terms of public opinion. Conversely, had the South taken a disproportionately escalatory step to retaliate against the North, the North might have 'felt obliged' to respond. The locus of uncertainty that the logic of provocation captures is that it is difficult to gauge – from the South's point of view – what the North would consider a proportionate response, or what they would find unacceptably humiliating. The South's response appears to have been underwhelming (the North fired 170 rounds while the South only fired 80 rounds) principally because of the fear of having an undesired provocative effect on the North. This source of risk differs from concerns such as being misperceived by the North as a 'threat.'

Finally, the 2012 Scarborough Shoal case examines the logic of provocation in the context of a gray zone conflict that resulted in a change in the status quo. It finds that the Chinese took advantage of the logic of provocation in two ways. First, it took advantage of provocation to seize administrative control of the shoal. When the Philippines attempted to use Naval officers to arrest Chinese fishermen at the shoal, and then publicized shameful photos of the fishermen after the failed arrest, the fuming Chinese public demanded a tough response. The Chinese government neither publicized the ensuing standoff in the *Renmin Ribao* to garner public support nor clamped down on other media sources or online fora that expressed hard-lined views, and instead took advantage of the window of opportunity that the jump in the public's resolve had provided. Second, however, Beijing also appears to have taken advantage of the reluctance of the United States and Philippines to provoke the Chinese. By engaging in the gray zone – using fishermen militia and coastal guard forces – Beijing placed the burden of provocation on the United States and Philippines. Yet, both the United States and the Philippines appear to be reluctant to further anger or humiliate

the Chinese, believing that doing so would only increase Chinese resolve to respond with military force. Conversely, by keeping in the gray zone, Chinese actions have avoided provoking a stronger U.S.-Philippine response, and without a larger provocation, the two allies were reluctant to engage in a military confrontation with the Chinese.

Interestingly, comparing the three cases reveals an important point about provocation that was not given attention in previous chapters. In all three cases, the provocative effect of the foreign state's actions during the crisis was amplified because of a previous crisis or incident. In the 2001 EP-3 case, the Chinese public was roiled particularly because they viewed U.S. actions in light of the 1999 U.S. bombing incident of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. In the 2010 Yeonpyeong Island case, the South Koreans became outraged because many viewed the North's actions in light of the sinking of the *Cheonan*, which killed forty six South Korean sailors earlier that year. And in the 2012 Scarborough Shoal case, in preceding years, the Chinese public had already become increasingly hard-lined against the United States and Philippines because of incidents such as the publicized efforts to strengthen Philippine-U.S. relations and the U.S. decision to 'pivot' to the Asia-Pacific. Thus, there appears to be a danger of cumulative provocative effects.

One way of addressing this concern methodologically would be to conduct a longitudinal case study which looks at a given dispute over time. For example, by looking at the Senkaku/Diaoyu island dispute over time, we could explore whether incidents over the years generated an emotional attachment or increased the prestige or honor value of the islands when previously, China or Japan would have been willing to strike a deal. Theoretically, cumulative provocative effects could, over the years, make an initially insignificant dispute become increasingly difficult to compromise on. If analysts were thus to examine only an intense crisis in which disputants escalate to the use of force, the snapshot in this longer dispute would miss how the non-material value of the stake or the

emotions involved in the dispute escalated to make a peaceful resolution more unlikely. This again highlights the danger of unobserved provocative effects in ongoing ‘low-level’ disputes: although a provocative effect during one incident may not suddenly explode into a large scale conflict, over time, they may make disputes increasingly more dangerous. A full examination of these theoretical dynamics are beyond the scope of this study, but the final chapter discusses the danger of the logic of provocation today and the broader implications of the findings of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 8 : Conclusion

“[T]he only conflict that is worse than one that is intended is one that is unintended.”

– Former U.S. Vice President Joe Biden. December 3, 2013, Tokyo.⁵⁹⁴

In recent years, scholars and policymakers have frequently warned of the dangers of unintended crisis escalation and conflict. The dangers of an unintended conflict, particularly in the Asia-Pacific, have also animated much public debate, prompting experts to scrutinize a variety of scenarios in which incidents in the South China Sea or on the Korean peninsula could unintentionally escalate to a major war involving the United States.⁵⁹⁵ In contrast to such scenario-based approaches to study the dangers of unwanted conflict, however, this dissertation revisits our theories of unwanted crisis escalation and war. In contrast to existing theories of unwanted escalation, this dissertation develops a novel theory of crisis escalation based on a *logic of provocation*. In this concluding chapter, I summarize my key arguments and findings. I then discuss extensions of the theory, and the implications of the findings for IR theory, coercive diplomacy, and crisis management. Finally, I reflect on the dangers of provocation today.

Summary of Argument

In the introductory chapter, I stated that by conceptualizing a provocative effect, explaining its logic, and demonstrating its significance, this dissertation makes the case for treating

⁵⁹⁴Joe Biden (Dec. 3, 2013) *Remarks to the Press by Vice President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan*. Office of the Vice President, The White House. URL: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/12/03/remarks-press-vice-president-joe-biden-and-prime-minister-shinzo-abe-jap>.

⁵⁹⁵Goldstein 2013; Gompert, Cevallos, and Garfola 2016; Philip Gordon (2017) “A Vision of Trump at War: How the President Could Stumble Into Conflict.” *Foreign Affairs*. 96.3, pp. 10–19; Allison 2017

provocative effects as a distinct variable in interstate crises. In this section, I summarize the first two of these arguments; the next section summarizes the key findings that support the third.

To understand more systematically how provocation leads to unwanted crisis escalation and conflict, I began by shifting the question from “what is a provocation?” to “what does it mean to be provoked”? This shifted the focus of the question to the recipient – the state which is provoked – in a manner comparable to the studies in IR that focus on actions that are threatening to a recipient even without the threatening intent of the sender, or signals that are credible in the recipient’s eyes. The next step was then to conceptualize the recipient being provoked as a particular causal effect that the sender’s actions (i.e. words or deeds) have on the recipient. I thus defined a provocative effect in terms of three features: (1) a foreign state’s escalatory action during a crisis increases its adversary’s resolve to escalate, and this increase in resolve arises through (2) a change in dispositional factors, such as an increased willingness to take risks, and/or (3) a change in the non-material stakes in the crisis, such as greater concerns about honor or status. Thus, during a crisis, when the adversary’s resolve increases because the foreign state’s escalatory action triggers changes in (2) and/or (3), I say that the foreign state’s escalatory action has a *provocative effect* on the adversary.

The *logic of provocation* explains the mechanisms through which one state’s actions can change dispositional factors and non-material stakes to increase the adversary’s resolve. This argument was made at both the individual-level and the state-level of analyses. At the micro level, if individuals in the adversarial state are angered by the foreign state’s actions, these individuals can become more willing to take risks to escalate the crisis. Thus, dispositional factors incidentally change to increase the adversary’s resolve. If the individuals in the adversarial state are insulted or humiliated so that their concerns

about national honor, prestige, or status increase, then the non-material stakes in the crisis increase for these individuals and make backing down appear worse (e.g. lose more honor) and escalation more appealing (e.g. vindicate honor). Increasing the adversary's non-material stakes in the crisis, however, can be viewed as a change in a situational factor. Whereas emotions of anger incidentally change risk preferences, which is a dispositional factor, increasing the adversary's non-material stakes in the crisis change a situational factor that comprises the strategic environment, similarly to discovering energy resources in disputed territory and making the territorial stake in dispute more economically valuable to the adversary. Thus, increasing the adversary's honor concerns during a crisis changes a situational factor that increases the adversary's resolve.

I then outlined two ideal type pathways through which provocative effects at the individual level make escalation more likely at the state level. One pathway is that the individual leader becomes provoked. If the leader becomes angered so that her willingness to take risks increases, or if the leader is insulted or humiliated so that she finds backing down more dishonorable and escalating a better validation of her honor, then, all things equal, the leader will become more resolved to escalate. Another pathway is that the leader's choices become constrained because the public or elites become provoked. Even if the leader is herself unperturbed by emotions of anger or the prospects of greater dishonor, if the public or political elites are incensed and demand an action that vindicates the nation's honor, the leader will, all things equal, become more resolved to escalate because her public costs of backing down increase and/or her political costs of escalating decline. Because these are ideal type mechanisms, variables like regime type can have an intervening effect, such as making changes in public opinion more impactful in democracies and making changes in the opinion of elites or the military more impactful in autocracies.⁵⁹⁶ Importantly, these

⁵⁹⁶Autocratic regimes may also have audience costs. In some autocracies, such as personalist regimes, however, the leader may be effectively free from domestic political constraints. See, for example, Weeks

extensions of the second pathway do not falsify the mechanism itself, which differs, for instance, from changes in public opinion that arise because the government's own actions during a crisis are seen by its public as an indication of incompetence.⁵⁹⁷ Taken together, if the adversary's resolve increases through either of these two pathways, the foreign state's action has a provocative effect.

Summary of Findings

Do provocative effects exist, and can they importantly impact crisis escalation? I deployed a variety of methods to evaluate my theory: a survey experiment, game-theoretic models, and case studies. I summarize the findings of each method.

The survey experiment on the American public in Chapter 3 tested the logic of provocation at the individual level. Adapting a vignette from the "repel an invader" scenario so that the invader which attacks its neighbor also kills several U.S. tourists fleeing from the area, I found that compared to the standard scenario, the U.S. public is both significantly more angered at the incident and more punishing of the U.S. president if the president does not take tough action against the invader. Conducting mediation analysis, I found that the increase in anger is indeed heavily responsible for the increase in public resolve: the increase in anger explains more than a third of the decrease in public support for the president when the president does not take any action, and more than half of the decrease in support for the president when the president makes a threat to intervene and later backs down. This outcome clearly demonstrates that a foreign action that is more angering to the American public increases the public's resolve in the crisis. For honor concerns, I find that, compared to the standard scenario, although the scenario in which the invader also kills

2008, and Weeks 2012.

⁵⁹⁷See, for example, Alastair Smith (1998) "International Crises and Domestic Politics." *American Political Science Review*. 92.3, pp. 623–638; and Tomz 2007.

U.S. tourists increased honor concerns for the American public, whether this increase in honor concerns translated to greater resolve was conditioned by whether the individual was “hawkish” or “dovish:” honor concerns only significantly increased resolve among doves. Thus, this finding demonstrates that a foreign action that increases honor concerns for the general U.S. public increases resolve for a particular subset of the population.⁵⁹⁸ Together, increases in public resolve from anger or heightened honor concerns are likely to constrain the leader’s choices between escalating or backing down. Autocratic leaders who are also constrained by the public or political elites may experience similar pressures to escalate if a foreign action triggers emotions of anger or heightens honor concerns.⁵⁹⁹

The formal game-theoretic models developed and discussed in Chapter 4 integrated these findings from the survey experiment into the classic crisis bargaining model to examine how provocative effects that constrain a leader’s choices can affect crisis escalation dynamics. I found that provocative effects on the adversary unambiguously make coercive diplomacy more difficult and dangerous. If a state tries to signal its resolve to an adversary, but provokes the adversary while doing so, even if the signal is credible, the adversary becomes more likely to reject a demand and escalate the dispute. Conversely, in variations of the standard model, a state may have to reduce its demands on the adversary to take into account the provocative effects on the adversary’s public, so that, for instance, a state trying to roll back an aggressor can only obtain a smaller amount of territory through coercive diplomacy.

In addition to integrating provocative effects into the standard model, I developed three formal crisis bargaining models to analyze how states might try to take advantage of the logic of provocation and how crisis dynamics might change as a result of such strategic

⁵⁹⁸On dispositional theories of foreign policy preference see Brutger and Kertzer 2018.

⁵⁹⁹On audience costs on autocratic leaders, see Weeks 2008.

behavior. In contrast to the modified standard model, I found that states can indeed wield the logic of provocation to their advantage, and that the logic of provocation affects crisis dynamics depending on the strategies that states adopt. The first model shows that a defending state can set up a tripwire or naval blockade to place the burden of provocation on a potential aggressor and successfully deter the aggressor from challenging the status quo. This model thus contrasts with the view that tripwires merely sink costs, and captures an important part of the logic behind why only a small number of U.S. forces are stationed in South Korea today. The second model shows that a state can engage in deliberately provocative behavior to signal resolve: by taking a risk of provoking its adversary so much that the adversary's hands gets tied, a resolved type of state can 'outbid' an unresolved type of state by taking highly provocative actions, and these actions can convince the adversary that the state is resolved. This model thus captures the apparent decision calculus of China's bombardment of the Taiwan Strait in 1996 and North Korea's bombardment of Yeonpyeong Island in 2010. Moreover, this deliberately provocative signal allows the state to gain a larger concession from its adversary than a "cheap talk" signal. The final model analyzes gray zone conflicts. It shows that even when a state is *known* to be unresolved to initiate the overt use of force, it can nevertheless engage in provocative behavior at low levels of escalation to signal that it will become resolved to use force in the event that it is provoked back. Furthermore, by then placing the burden of provocation on the adversary, the adversary may prefer to concede the stake in dispute rather than provoke the state or escalate to the overt use of force first. This model thus captures important dynamics in gray zone conflicts such as in the South China Sea today.

Chapters 5 and 6 each examined a historical case in-depth to demonstrate the existence and significance of the logic of provocation in real crises. The first case study examined the Sino-India War of 1962. I found that the logic of provocation helps explain how a crisis over

seemingly meager stakes – barely known territories in the Himalayas – escalated to war in three important respects. First, a provocative incident on the border which killed Indian troops infuriated Indian Prime Minister Nehru so much that he worked back his initial public statements that expressed a willingness to compromise on the disputed territory. “I will not submit to coercion. I will not submit to dishonour,” he proclaimed. Second, later in the crisis, the logic of provocation helps explain why, against their initial intentions, the Indians escalated to use violent military force and risk a major conflict with the Chinese. Despite issuing multiple orders to avoid provoking Chinese troops, when the Chinese responded to the forward deployment of Indian troops by encircling and intimidating them, the Indian leadership decided to forcefully “evict” the Chinese and dismiss internal warnings that such a move would risk triggering a larger conflict. Third, PLA documents captured by the CIA at the time, as well as a memoir from a Chinese general involved in the crisis, reveal that Chinese border troops were roiled by Indian actions near the border – they even wondered why Chairman Mao was being so “soft” on the Indians when Mao had fought against the United States and Japan in previous wars. Mao, moreover, said only three months before the outbreak of war that the Chinese should not strike the Indians because the world had to first know about Nehru’s “true colors.” Only when the Indians began using a small military detachment to forcefully roll back the Chinese, and Nehru reportedly declared in public that he would “free” Indian territory, did the Chinese launch their “Self-Defensive Counter-Attack,” penetrating deeply into undisputed Indian territory on two fronts simultaneously. Thus, Mao appears to have calculated not only the increase in Chinese resolve from perceived Indian provocations, but the pretext that an overt Indian action would provide to lower China’s international political costs of launching a large scale strike.

The second in-depth case study examined the Sino-Soviet Border Conflict of 1969. This

case study thus explores how the logic of provocation affects a crisis between nuclear powers. The logic of provocation helps explain two important features of this crisis. First, the Chinese engaged in a deliberate provocation to signal resolve to the Soviets, but although the signal communicated China's mettle, it provoked the Soviets, and the crisis escalated in ways that surprised Mao. On March 2, 1969, the Chinese ambushed Soviet border troops on a small river island. At the time, Sino-Soviet relations had turned acrimonious, and a border dispute had led to an increasing number of skirmishes. Moreover, in the preceding year, the Soviets had invaded a fellow communist country, Czechoslovakia, in the name of restoring stability and reinvigorating socialism. In this context, China's deliberate provocation sent a signal of China's determination to stand up to the Soviets, and the small river island – far from any strategically important Chinese or Soviet military installments – provided an ideal location to send the signal while controlling unwanted provocative effects. Despite Mao's apparent calculation to control the provocative effects of his staged provocation, however, the Soviets reacted. Only two weeks later, the Soviets retaliated on a much larger scale on the island. When the Chinese refused to come to the negotiating table, the Soviets began sending indirect threats of a nuclear attack. One threat appears to have made the Chinese particularly worried about a deliberate Soviet nuclear strike. During a luncheon between a mid-level Soviet and U.S. diplomat in August, the Soviet diplomat asked what the U.S. response would be to a Soviet nuclear strike on China's nuclear facilities. When the U.S. press carried this story, the Chinese were so alarmed that they issued an immediate order to prepare the nation for war. Second, the logic of provocation explains the peculiar way in which the crisis subsequently escalated under this threat of a deliberate Soviet nuclear attack. The Chinese became cautious not to provoke the Soviets with a large-scale border incident because they feared that such an incident will provide the Soviets with a pretext to launch a nuclear attack. The Soviets, on the other hand, worried that Mao might be capricious enough to instigate a border war if

provided with a sufficient pretext, and thus, they resisted engaging in large scale border confrontations following the battles in March. The logic of provocation helps explain these peculiar considerations during the crisis, which contrasts, for instance, with the expectations of brinkmanship theorists. Instead of the dangers of a “nuclear catastrophe” being unleashed *accidentally*, China was more concerned about provoking and providing a pretext so that the Soviets would launch a nuclear attack *deliberately*.

Chapter 7 reviewed three short cases to probe the broader relevance of the logic of provocation. The first case was the 2001 EP-3 incident in which a U.S. surveillance plane and a Chinese fighter jet accidentally clashed mid-air over the South China Sea. This case thus examined the logic of provocation in the context of an accidental clash. It found that the logic of provocation helps explain several aspects of the incident. First, although the loss of the Chinese pilot was an important source of anger for the Chinese, deliberate U.S. actions taken immediately after the accident – public statements by U.S. leaders – unwittingly escalated the crisis as the Chinese found the statements harsh and “arrogant.” Second, although Chinese analysts argue that the incident was more difficult to resolve because the U.S. side engaged in public diplomacy rather than “quite” – or secret – diplomacy, the logic of provocation highlights that even within public diplomacy, there is important variation in how provocative one state’s actions can be for another state. For instance, more considerate rhetoric in U.S. public statements at the outset of the crisis could have put less pressure on Chinese leaders, even as both sides pursued public diplomacy. Third, the logic of provocation highlights the importance of the U.S. letter of apology in resolving the dispute. Although U.S. leaders, including Secretary Powell and President Bush, made public statements of “regret,” the Chinese found such expressions unacceptable and demanded a written apology. In the words of Shirk, the letter was crucial “to show the [Chinese] public that their leader could defend China’s honor.” This letter immediately led

to the release of the EP-3 crew members, who were detained in China for eleven days after making an emergency landing from the mid-air collision.

The second short case was the 2010 Yeonpyeong Island incident in which North Korea suddenly bombarded a populated South Korean island only sixty five miles from Seoul, killing two South Korean marines and two civilians. This case thus examines the logic of provocation in a non-Chinese context. I found that the logic of provocation helps explain two sources of danger in the crisis that other logics overlook. First, in addition to considerations about sending a signal of resolve to the North Koreans, the South Korean government appears to have been burdened by the need to take an escalatory action that satisfies the public's sense of outrage and injustice. Even if the South Korean government could credibly signal its resolve to the North by escalating in response to the North's attacks, it may have been punished by the South Korean public for not taking a "tough enough" response. This incentive to escalate more than is required for the purposes of signaling to an adversary is contrary to the expectations of many existing signaling logics but captured by the logic of provocation. Second, and conversely, had the South responded in a highly escalatory way to pamper the public rather than send a signal of resolve to the North, and such a response was construed by the North as disproportionate or unacceptably humiliating, the North might have 'felt obliged' to further escalate the crisis. Thus, there was a source of risk in which the South could have 'over-shot' with a reprisal and fanned the flames of the crisis. Ultimately, the South's response was wholly underwhelming – it returned only 80 rounds of artillery fire when the North fired 170 rounds – and this tepid response may reflect a concern that a stronger reprisal could provoke unwanted escalation to a large-scale conflict on the peninsula.

The final short case was the 2012 Scarborough Shoal standoff in the South China Sea between China and the Philippines. This case thus examined the logic of provocation in

a gray zone conflict that resulted in a revision of the status quo. The logic of provocation highlights two important aspects of this incident. First, the Chinese appear to have taken advantage of provocative actions by the Philippines to seize administrative control of the shoal. When the Philippines attempted to arrest Chinese fishermen at the shoal by deploying a naval vessel, and later released shameful photos of the fishermen, the Chinese public became indignant. Although the Chinese public was already somewhat hawkish towards disputes in the South China Sea, following this outburst of public anger, the Chinese government neither promoted the incident in the *Renmin Ribao*, nor clamped down on expressions in the media advocating a hard-lined response, and instead exploited the window of opportunity that the increase in public resolve presented by seizing de facto control of the shoal. Second, the Chinese also appear to have taken advantage of the reluctance of the Philippines and its ally, the United States, to further provoke China. By engaging in the gray zone – using fishermen militia and coastal guard vessels – Chinese actions successfully placed the burden of provocation on the United States and the Philippines. Ultimately, China’s gray zone strategy was successful in revising the status quo without provoking a large-scale conflict or even a militarized response.

In sum, through a survey experiment, three formal game-theoretic models, and five case studies, this dissertation finds strong evidence in support of the logic of provocation. This result highlights the need to treat provocative effects seriously and as a distinct variable in the study of interstate crises.

Looking Within and Without: Directions for Further Inquiry

As outlined in Chapter 2, the scope conditions of my theory of provocation is interstate crises. In this section, I outline three directions for further inquiry within, and three extensions of the theory without, these scope conditions.

First, looking within interstate crises, what explains variation in the severity of provocative effects? There are at least two sources that explain this variation. One is the type of action by the foreign state. Kim Jong-un's televised message calling President Trump a "mentally deranged U.S. dotard," the public release of shameful photos of Chinese fishermen by the Philippines in the Scarborough Shoal standoff of 2012, and the accidental mid-air collision of the U.S. EP-3 with a Chinese fighter jet in 2001 are all examples of a particular action involving the foreign state that can have a provocative effect. If the action is deliberate rather than an accident, moreover, the foreign state has some control over determining how seriously the adversary will be provoked. For example, the foreign state's leader may refrain from making insults or make more harsh ones during a public speech. On the other hand, there are variables that make any given action involving the foreign state have a larger provocative effect on the adversary. The cultural context in which the foreign state's insults and humiliating actions are viewed, whether the individual in the adversarial state is particularly mercurial or irritable, and whether the adversarial state's leader is insulated from the public or military are all variables that are likely to affect how intensely any given action involving the foreign state during a crisis has a provocative effect on the adversary. These variables, moreover, are outside the control of the foreign state. These two sources of variation are captured in the game-theoretic models in Chapter 4. Because these models focus on deliberate actions by the foreign state, the former source of variation is modeled as an action that the "sender" can manipulate, and the latter source of variation is modeled as something that the sender has imperfect information.⁶⁰⁰ Future research should further explore these and any other sources of variation that explain the intensity of provocative effects. This dissertation has instead focused on clearly conceptualizing provocative effects and theorizing their escalatory logic; indeed, if we were to undertake a study to explain

⁶⁰⁰The models can potentially be manipulated to examine accidents. Moreover, some deliberate actions can increase the likelihood of accidents.

variation without these prior steps, it is unclear what exactly we would be studying the variation of.

Second, how prevalent are provocative effects in interstate crises? And relatedly, how common are inadvertent wars? Although this dissertation studies five interstate crises and draws anecdotes from several others, it does not examine the frequency with which provocative effects or inadvertent wars occur. Doing so would not only require studying a large number of cases, but such a study would have to overcome the challenges of identifying unobserved provocative effects. As discussed in Chapters 1, 2, and 4 provocative effects can dangerously change the underlying incentives of a crisis, but depending on other factors, such as whether provocative effects are manipulated to signal resolve or how bargaining plays out after one side gets provoked, provocative effects may not result in escalatory crisis outcomes such as open military conflict. Similarly, coding inadvertent wars requires carefully identifying whether the states in the crisis were unresolved at the outset and whether their resolve increased inadvertently.⁶⁰¹ Thus, studying the prevalence of provocative effects and inadvertent wars is likely to be rewarding but challenging. If the findings in this dissertation are any indication, however, because the case studies in this dissertation find that provocative effects have been overlooked in existing studies of crises, provocative effects and inadvertent wars may well be more pervasive features of international politics than meets the eye.

Third, do provocative effects accumulate over time in a given dispute? This question entails the converse challenge of having to study one dispute over a long period of time. As the three short cases show, prior crises and incidents can influence the magnitude of provocative effects in a current crisis. In the 2001 EP-3 incident, for example, the Chinese viewed U.S.

⁶⁰¹Note that Alexander George's edited volume has case studies on inadvertent wars, but those cases use a definition of inadvertent war that is different from the definition used in this dissertation. See Chapter 1 and George 1991.

statements and actions in light of the 1999 incident in which a U.S. fighter jet accidentally bombed a Chinese embassy in Belgrade. Can provocative actions at low levels of escalation in disputes such as the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands accumulate over time so that actions in later crises have a larger effect on emotions and considerations of honor and prestige? Future work should investigate such possibilities through longitudinal case studies that evaluate cumulative provocative effects in a single dispute.

Extensions of the Logic of Provocation

Relaxing the scope conditions of my theory, worthwhile extensions of the logic of provocation include its application to inter-state wars, intra-state conflicts, and unconventional forms of violence.

Can the logic of provocation help explain why some interstate wars become more violent or last longer than the combatants initially anticipate?⁶⁰² Richard Smoke argues that interstate wars can escalate in a similar manner to how a game of poker escalates: as a state incurs costs during a war, “the stakes rise” and “the costs one is willing to pay and the risks one is willing to run [to win the war] also tend to rise.”⁶⁰³ To illustrate his point, Smoke notes that “after the death or maiming of millions of young men and after the colossal economic costs, neither side in World War I was able to settle for the modest objectives with which it had begun.”⁶⁰⁴ What this logic overlooks, however, is that much of the costs of war that a state incurs are imposed by the foreign state – it is the foreign state that kills one’s soldiers – and particularly violent or cruel actions by the foreign state during wartime can anger and increase honor concerns for its adversary to become more resolved to fight. In short,

⁶⁰²On explaining war duration, see, for example, Weisiger 2013.

⁶⁰³Richard Smoke (1977) *War: Controlling Escalation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 24.

⁶⁰⁴*ibid.*, p. 24. This argument also relates to the “sunk cost fallacy” in which actors tend to “throw good money after bad.” On the sunk cost fallacy, see, for example, [see Renshon]. Also see Dafoe, Hatz, and Zhang 2017.

provocative effects during a war may fuel violence and contribute to mission creep.

Similarly, as Kocher, Pepinsky, and Kalyvas find, during the Vietnam War, U.S. aerial bombing campaigns were often ineffective because they indiscriminately targeted civilians and provoked a backlash of resistance.⁶⁰⁵ The micro mechanisms of the logic of provocation can help explain why a target faced with indiscriminate violence from a foreign aggressor can become more resolved to resist capitulation and fight. Yet, the logic of provocation during wartime also differs from the logic in interstate crises. During crises, provocative effects on the public indirectly translates into higher resolve at the state level by changing public opinion and constraining the leader's choices. By contrast, during wartime, provocative effects on civilians or soldiers in combat can *directly* translate into higher resolve at the state level by increasing resolve to fight on the battlefield.

Can the logic of provocation also help explain how a conventional war might escalate to a nuclear war? Although provocative effects alone are unlikely to be large enough for a state to decide to launch an all-out nuclear war on another nuclear state, they may be sufficiently large for a state to become more resolve to take additional escalatory actions that increase the *risk* of nuclear war. In a world of mutually assured destruction, launching an all-out nuclear war on another nuclear state would be virtually suicidal. This means that angering or increasing the honor concerns of the adversary are unlikely to increase the adversary's resolve sufficiently to make the adversary prefer to launch an all-out nuclear attack rather than concede the stake in dispute. That said, a provocative effect may sufficiently increase the adversary's resolve to further escalate a crisis or conventional conflict in ways that raise the risk that nuclear war breaks out. For instance, a sufficiently large provocative effect on the adversary during a limited conventional war may make the adversary more resolved to expand the conflict and raise the risk that the war accidentally spirals out of control to

⁶⁰⁵Kocher, Pipinsky, and Kalyvas 2011.

the nuclear level.⁶⁰⁶ In this way, provocative effects can increase the adversary's resolve to take another escalatory step in a game of nuclear brinkmanship.

Alternatively, provocative effects may increase the adversary's resolve to risk "inadvertent escalation" to nuclear war.⁶⁰⁷ Caitlin Talmadge argues that a conventional attack on an opponent's strategic nuclear capabilities may unintentionally trigger nuclear retaliation by making the opponent mistakenly believe that its nuclear forces are being dangerously eroded.⁶⁰⁸ From the point of view of the foreign state that launches this conventional counterforce strike, escalation to the nuclear level through this mechanism would be inadvertent rather than accidental because the foreign state made a deliberate decision to attack its opponent's nuclear capabilities, and the opponent launched nuclear weapons deliberately in return. If the foreign state's leaders are sufficiently provoked by their opponent's prior actions during the conventional phase of the conflict, however, then reduced perceptions of risk through emotions of anger may make the foreign state's leaders more resolved to risk this inadvertent escalation to nuclear war and launch a conventional counterforce strike. In a separate paper, I plan to explore these and several other potential pathways through which the logic of provocation heightens the danger of unwanted escalation to a nuclear war.⁶⁰⁹

Finally, the logic of provocation might provide valuable insights into intrastate conflicts and unconventional forms of violence, such as terrorism. In addition to clarifying the micro mechanisms of how the use of indiscriminate violence in counterinsurgency campaigns can be counterproductive, the logic of provocation may explain more broadly how violent

⁶⁰⁶On limited war as strategy of manipulating risk, see Schelling 1966, pp. 104-116. For an analysis of the trade-offs between brining to bear greater conventional military power and raising the risk that a conventional conflict spirals out of control to nuclear war, see Powell 2015.

⁶⁰⁷On "inadvertent escalation" to nuclear war, see Posen 1991.

⁶⁰⁸Talmadge 2017. For a related argument, see Posen 1991.

⁶⁰⁹Hyun-Binn Cho (2018) "Provocation, Brinkmanship, and the Escalation of Nuclear Crises." *Working Paper*.

government crack downs on citizens can backfire and provoke violent rebellion.⁶¹⁰ For instance, would violent forms of suppressing street protests help an authoritarian regime such as in China to stay in power or would the use of violence on citizens provoke outrage and undermine stability? During the Arab Spring, how did emotions of anger affect perceptions of risk, and what were the non-material stakes that changed to motivate the masses to take to the streets? In the context of terrorism, the logic of provocation may shed light on the micro mechanisms behind why a terrorist attack can provoke governments and “goad” a violent overreaction.⁶¹¹ Although studies in social psychology find that emotions of anger in response to the 9/11 attacks are an important reason why Americans support hard-lined policies against terrorism, concerns about honor or prestige may also motivate Americans to support retaliatory policies.⁶¹² But can the logic of provocation also help explain why a government would be more willing to use violence against its own citizens in response to a domestic terrorist or guerrilla attack? Indeed, does the public become more resolved by the terrorist attacks to support such hard-lined government policies domestically? Existing research on terrorist strategies of provocation overlook the role of anger and honor concerns, but integrating the role of provocative effects, like integrating provocative effects to analyze interstate crisis bargaining dynamics, may yield valuable new insights.

⁶¹⁰On dilemmas to crack down on unruly masses in authoritarian regimes, see, for example, Milan W. Svobik (2012) *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; and Bruce J. Dickson (2016) *The Dictator's Dilemma: The Chinese Communist Party's Strategy for Survival*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

⁶¹¹On the provocation logic of terrorist and guerrilla attacks, see, for example, Kydd and Walter 2006; Carter 2016; and Blankenship 2018.

⁶¹²On experiments in social psychology that find that anger importantly explains support for hard-lined policies against terrorism, see Chapter 2.

Broader Theoretical Implications

This dissertation has broader implications for the role of theory and theory-building in IR. Since gaining ascendance as a distinct field of inquiry after the Second World War, the study of international politics and theory-building within the field has closely reflected political developments in the real world. A recent case in point is the theorizing of unipolarity since the end of the Cold War.⁶¹³ As Nuno Monteiro laments, however, in recent years, IR has suffered from a “hegemony of causal-identification concerns” which focuses on narrow hypothesis testing rather than theory development.⁶¹⁴ The flip side to this stunt in theoretical development in IR is that scholars – not to mention analysts and policymakers – have often been too quick to apply existing theoretical ideas to understand current challenges to international security, such as the dangers of unwanted crisis escalation in the Asia-Pacific. This is not to say that distinct IR theories for Asia, say, are necessarily required or possible, but rather, to acknowledge that a research focus on different historical periods or regions can highlight gaps in IR theorizing that can inspire theories that are generalizable across the field.⁶¹⁵ This dissertation has made a self-conscious attempt to pursue such a course of inquiry by identifying a seeming gap in understanding on-going security challenges in the Asia-Pacific context and working ‘back up’ to develop a theory at the general level. The diverse methods that this dissertation has culled, such as a survey experiment on the American public, and the development of abstract game-theoretic models, are also deliberate efforts to generalize the theoretical claims made Chapter 2. The case studies that focus on the Asia-Pacific are conscious efforts to re-focus on the initial point of departure and examine in greater detail the significance of the general theory in

⁶¹³See, for example, Nuno P. Monteiro (2014) *Theory of Unipolar Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 19.

⁶¹⁴Ibid., p. 19.

⁶¹⁵On discussions of IR theory for Asia, see, for example, Alastair Iain Johnston (2012) “What (If Anything) Does East Asia Tell Us About International Relations Theory?” *Annual Review of Political Science*. 15, pp. 53–78.

context. In these ways, this dissertation contributes to the broader theory-building efforts in IR and the attempts to bridge theory development, regional expertise, and cutting-edge methodological tools.

Implications for Coercive Diplomacy and Crisis Management

The implications of the logic of provocation for coercive diplomacy are threefold. First, combining signals of resolve with reassurances can ameliorate a security dilemma, but they are inadequate to avoid the pitfalls of provocative effects. Reassurance means conveying to the target that the state has limited intentions so that coercive pressure will be relieved if compliance is forthcoming.⁶¹⁶ But even when the target is reassured that the state does not mean to fundamentally harm it, actions that have a provocative effect will increase the resolve of the target to resist and fight. Put differently, addressing perceptions of threat won't necessarily pacify an angered adversary or diminish the adversary's heightened concerns about honor and prestige. Second, simply making stronger signals of resolve won't always overcome unwanted provocative effects. Even credible signals can have a provocative effect, so the adversary can become resolved to escalate and engage in armed conflict even when it correctly updates its belief that the foreign state is resolved to fight. Put differently, if a provocative effect 'switches' the adversary to become resolved to stand firm, clearly communicating that the foreign state is willing to stand firm will fail to avert a clash of arms. Third, avoiding or minimizing provocative effects is not always the best way to achieve the goals of coercive diplomacy. The logic of provocation can be used strategically to deter challenges to the status quo, such as by setting up a tripwire and placing the burden of provocation on a potential aggressor.

In terms of crisis management, offering apologies and devising face-saving ways for the

⁶¹⁶Christensen 2015b, pp. 190, 209.

provoked state to back down are important ways to undo unwanted provocative effects. An apology can reduce the public costs for the provoked state's government to back down by making the foreign state – the supposed 'provocateur' – undo its own provocative effect. The EP-3 incident in 2001 highlights how written apologies, and not just high-level statements of regret, can undo provocative effects on the public. Similarly, the foreign state can undo its own provocative effects by devising a face-saving way for the provoked state to back down. Interestingly, such face-saving devices often involve pretexts to de-escalate. In the 2012 Scarborough Shoal incident, for example, there was apparently a deal in which both China and the Philippines withdraw their vessels from the shoal under the guise of an approaching typhoon.

These strategies to undo provocative effects differ from two other ways to de-escalate crises. One is that the provoked state's government offers justifications to back down. For example, Levendusky and Horowitz find that after escalating a crisis, a government can reduce the public costs of backing down by offering a justification to its citizens that the government has received new information about the foreign state.⁶¹⁷ Kai Quek and Alastair Iain Johnston find that, within the context of China, the government can reduce the public backlash to backing down in a crisis by offering a variety of different justifications, such as the need to maintain peace for economic development.⁶¹⁸ A second way to de-escalate or prevent escalation in a crisis is for the provoked state's government to clamp down on street protests or media sources that voice support for an escalatory response. This strategy is more feasible in an authoritarian regime such as China, and as Weiss' research on China suggests, restricting the public from expressing anger at the foreign state can reduce public pressure on the provoked state's government to escalate and send a signal

⁶¹⁷Levendusky and Horowitz 2012.

⁶¹⁸Quek and Johnston 2017/18.

to the foreign state that the provoked state is serious about resolving the crisis peacefully.⁶¹⁹ The danger with providing justifications for the public or clamping down on the media, however, is that they can backfire. For example, Davies and Johns find that government justifications to back down in a hostage crisis can worsen public opinion by being seen as an appeaser; similarly, cracking down on citizens for advocating a hard-lined response may further frustrate the public by preventing them from venting their anger and ultimately prove too costly and counterproductive.⁶²⁰ In contrast to these two strategies, asking for and receiving an apology from the foreign state or cooperating with the foreign state to devise face-saving ways to back down can directly undo the provocative effects created by the foreign state. Such strategies of crisis management are also likely to minimize backlashes if the provoked state's government concurrently provides justifications to back down.

A separate question, however, is how actual provocative effects should be distinguished from claims of provocative effects. States have incentives to misrepresent provocative effects because an increase in their resolve can be used for bargaining leverage. Yet, because provocative effects are defined in terms of resolve, if an adversary is genuinely provoked so that, say, it 'switches' to become resolved for conflict, then the adversary should be able to signal its newfound resolve. Put differently, if the adversary was previously unresolved but becomes resolved because of a sizable provocative effect, it should be willing to take costly actions to signal resolve that it would have previously been unwilling to take, such as sinking sufficiently high costs. If the adversary can clearly send a different signal of resolve before and after being provoked, then in principle, the adversary can credibly communicate a genuine provocative effect. If the adversary can credibly signal a provocative effect in this way, and expresses a desire to de-escalate the crisis,

⁶¹⁹See Weiss 2013; and *ibid.*

⁶²⁰See Graeme A. M. Davies and Robert Johns (2014) "Audience Costs among the British Public: The Impact of Escalation, Crisis Type, and Prime Ministerial Rhetoric." *International Studies Quarterly*. 57.4, pp. 725–737; and Weiss 2013.

offering an apology or face-saving way for the adversary to back down can successfully avert dangerous escalation to an unwanted conflict.

Both the idea of using apologies or face-saving devices are certainly not novel, but they have often received insufficient attention.⁶²¹ In part, this is because they have lacked a theoretical underpinning in the study of interstate crises, unlike, say, the role of inter-state communication channels to minimize misperceptions or misunderstandings, or the role of formal governmental crisis-response bodies to minimize accidental miscommunications between government agencies or down the chain of command. The logic of provocation thus offers more theoretical grounding for the use of these crisis management strategies.

The Dangers of Provocation Today

Living in an age of 24-hour live news coverage and daily tweets from President Trump make international politics today uniquely susceptible to provocative effects. Certainly, whimsical insults fired over to Pyongyang by the U.S. president should be eschewed in favor of clear-eyed, long-term strategy. Moreover, in the Asia-Pacific, nationalistic education in countries such as China and South and North Korea, and China's "century of humiliation" and cultural emphasis on face-saving, make provocative effects a distinct danger. In this context, the idea that China's behavior in the South China Sea can be changed by 'increasing the costs of non-compliance' through with U.S. FONOPs overlooks the logic that imposing such costs can provoke and increase China's resolve to resist. Increasing the strength of the U.S. signal or reassuring China of the limited intentions of the United States, moreover, will not fully alleviate this logic. This calls for greater caution to manage and take advantage of the logic of provocation. Similarly, analysts have expressed concern that an unwanted war might break out over 'rocks' in the East China Sea – the

⁶²¹For example, O'Neill discusses these issues in his pioneering work. See O'Neill 1999.

Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Although a low-level escalatory incident is unlikely to suddenly provoke a large-scale conflict, actions taken by one side to intimidate or harass the other may make the dispute increasingly intractable by driving up the non-material stakes that the disputants view to be engaged. As the dispute currently stands, fortunately, neither side in the dispute appears to be willing to use overt military force to change the status quo. If so, however, provocative effects that harden each side's resolve may well be more dangerous than misperceptions of threat.

Although the dangers of provocation have not gone unnoticed by analysts, they have hitherto lacked a precise language and logic in IR. Consequently, these dangers have not been integrated with recent studies of crises and unwanted conflict. This dissertation provides such a language and logic, and demonstrates the importance of including provocative effects in our study of interstate crises. Moreover, although this dissertation has focused on applying the logic of provocation to the Asia-Pacific, the logic is likely to travel to other regions and contexts. The specific types of actions and statements that anger or increase an individual's honor concerns, and the pathways and institutions through which these dispositional and situational changes impact foreign policy outcomes will be context-dependent. Future research should identify these variations and explore their significance. The first step, however, is to understand the distinctive logic behind them and be clear about the unique dangers and opportunities that this logic presents.

APPENDIX A

Full Qualtrics Survey

Description and disclaimer

Description and disclaimer: This survey is for a study on foreign relations. It will ask you to read a hypothetical scenario in foreign affairs and answer questions that give your opinion. The survey should take about 5 minutes and you will be compensated monetarily for completing it. There are no large risks associated with taking the survey, and although you are unlikely to benefit personally, the results will help further our understanding of foreign relations. Also, all responses will be held in confidence and identifying information such as names, emails, or addresses will not be collected. MTurk IDs will only be used for compensation. Participation in the survey is voluntary, and once you begin, you are free to end participation at any time. In order to participate, however, you must live in the United States. For further questions on your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board. If you have read the above and agree to participate in the study by taking the survey, please press "I agree."

- I agree to participate in this study and take the survey.
- I do not agree to participate.

Survey Instructions

Survey Instructions: The following questions are about U.S. relations with other countries around the world. You will read about a hypothetical situation our country is facing but

may well face in reality in the future. We will describe the situation in 3 steps, and ask for your opinions regarding the situation at each step. Please read each step carefully.

(Randomize the following vignette Bloc A)

A1. A country sent its military to take over a territorial region in a neighboring country. During the initial stages of the country's military operation, the militaries of the two sides clashed.

A2. A country sent its military to take over a territorial region in a neighboring country. During the initial stages of the country's military operation, a U.S. tour group fleeing from the area was attacked, killing 13 people, 6 of whom were children.

(Randomize questions 1 through 6)

How does the country's action make you feel? For the following six responses, use the five-point scale to record your answer.

Question 1: Angry

1. Hardly at all. 2. A little. 3. Moderately. 4. Quite a bit. 5. Very much.

Question 2: Afraid

1. Hardly at all. 2. A little. 3. Moderately. 4. Quite a bit. 5. Very much.

Question 3: Irritated

1. Hardly at all. 2. A little. 3. Moderately. 4. Quite a bit. 5. Very much.

Question 4: Anxious

1. Hardly at all. 2. A little. 3. Moderately. 4. Quite a bit. 5. Very much.

Question 5: Nervous

1. Hardly at all. 2. A little. 3. Moderately. 4. Quite a bit. 5. Very much.

Question 6: Mad

1. Hardly at all. 2. A little. 3. Moderately. 4. Quite a bit. 5. Very much.

Question 7:

Do you think the attacking country's actions engages the honor and reputation of the United States? Record your answer using the following five-point scale.

1. Hardly at all. 2. A little. 3. Moderately. 4. Quite a bit. 5. Very much.

Question 8:

How provocative do you find the attacking country's actions? Record your answer using the following five-point scale.

1. Hardly at all. 2. A little. 3. Moderately. 4. Quite a bit. 5. Very much.

Question 9:

In the scenario you read about above, what happened to U.S. citizens?

- There is no mention of U.S. citizens.
- They were attacked and killed, including children.

(Randomize the following vignette Bloc B)

B1. The U.S. president said the United States would stay out of the conflict. The attacking country continued to invade. In the end, the U.S. president did not send troops.

B2. The U.S. president said that if the attack continued, the U.S. military would push out the invaders. The attacking country continued to invade. In the end, the U.S. president did not send troops.

B3. The U.S. president said that if the attack continued, the U.S. military would push out the invaders. The attacking country continued to invade. In the end, the President ordered the U.S. military to engage.

(All respondents read the following vignette)

The conflict ended with the attacking country gaining 20% of the contested territory in the neighboring country.

Question 10:

How strongly do you approve or disapprove of the way the president handled the situation, on a seven-point scale?

1. Strongly Disapprove
2. Disapprove
3. Somewhat Disapprove
4. Neither
5. Somewhat Approve
6. Approve
7. Strongly Approve

Question 11:

Briefly explain why you gave this approval rating given the behavior of the attacking country.

Question 12: (This question is used for a separate paper.)

In a statement afterwards, the U.S. president explained that his decision was based on new intelligence that he received. The intelligence community and military experts also agreed with the president's decision. How much do you approve of the president's decision now, on a seven-point scale?

1. Strongly Disapprove
2. Disapprove
3. Somewhat Disapprove
4. Neither
5. Somewhat Approve
6. Approve
7. Strongly Approve

Question 13:

What is your gender?

1. Male
2. Female
3. I prefer not to answer

Question 14:

What is your age?

1. 18 - 29
2. 30 - 44

3. 45 - 64

4. 64 or older

Question 15:

What is your level of education?

1. High school or below

2. Some college

3. College/university

4. Graduate/professional School

Question 16:

What is your annual level of income?

1. Less than \$19,999

2. \$ 20,000 - \$ 29,999

3. \$30,000 - \$39,999

4. \$40,000 - \$49,999

5. \$50,000 - \$59,999

6. \$60,000 - \$69,999

7. \$70,000 - \$79,999

8. \$80,000 - \$89,999

9. \$90,000 - \$99,999

10. More than \$100,000

Question 17:

What is your political leaning?

1. Very liberal 2. Liberal 3. Moderate 4. Conservative 5. Very conservative

Question 18:

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? “The best way to ensure world peace is through American military strength.” Record your answer using the following five-point scale.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neither agree nor disagree 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

Question 19:

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? “The use of force only makes things worse.” Record your answer using the following five-point scale.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neither agree nor disagree 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

Question 20:

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? “Going to war is unfortunate, but sometimes the only solution to international problems.” Record your answer using the following five-point scale.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neither agree nor disagree 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

Additional Analyses of Survey Results

None of the average values in the control and treatment group for the five controls are significantly different from each other as none of them pass the t-test at conventional levels.

| | Control Group | Treatment Group |
|-------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Gender | 1.4 | 1.4 |
| Age | 2 | 1.9 |
| Education | 2.2 | 2.3 |
| Income | 4.9 | 4.8 |
| Political Leaning | 2.6 | 2.6 |

Table 4: Average values of the control variables in the control and treatment conditions.

Attrition: 13 respondents failed the manipulation check (i.e. answered Question 9 wrong).

APPENDIX B

1. A Provocation Model of a Naval Blockade / Tripwire

Two-sided imperfect information game regarding costs of war

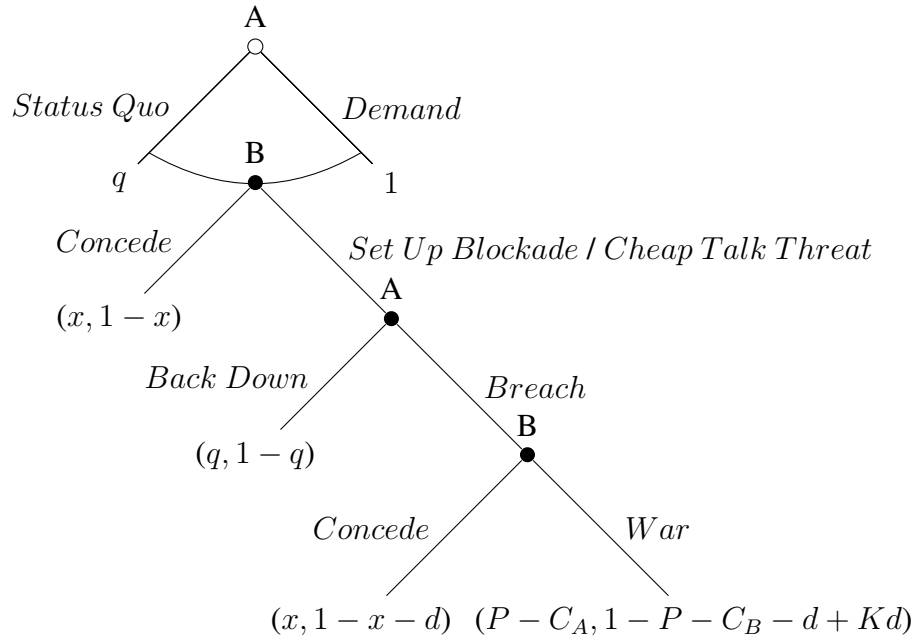


Figure 15: Extensive Form of Provocation Model of a Naval Blockade / Tripwire.

Assume that there are two states A and B, one with a low cost of war and one with a high cost of war, $C_{A_L} < C_{A_H}$, $C_{B_L} < C_{B_H}$. Under the status quo, a stake of value 1 is divided between A and B such that A owns $q > 0$ and B owns $1 - q$. At the beginning of the game, A can either “demand” q to maintain the status quo or demand a revision of the status quo so that it gets x , where $x \in (q, 1]$. If A demands x , B can choose to either concede or make a threat of war, where the threat is either a “trip wire” military blockade, which incurs sunk costs $0 < d \ll C_A$ that are imposed by A if A breaches the blockade, or a “cheap talk threat” which incurs no sunk costs, $d = 0$. Intuitively, d can be thought of as the number

of troops or ships that B has to place in harms way when it sets up a blockade, and in this model, d is determined exogenously. If B concedes, the game ends with the payoffs $(x, 1 - x)$. If B makes a threat, A can then choose to back down or escalate. If A decides to back down, the status quo is maintained and the game ends with the payoffs $(q, 1 - q)$. If A decides to escalate, B then makes the final choice between initiating a war in defense of the stake or conceding the stake. If B concedes, the game ends with the payoffs $(x, 1 - x - d)$, such that if B had set up a blockade and concedes after the blockade is breached, it not only loses the amount x , it has to live with the sunk costs that have been imposed on it by A, $d > 0$. If B decides instead to initiate a defensive war, the game ends with both states receiving their war payoff as each fights for the entire stake until one side is completely victorious. State A's payoff for war is $P - C_A$, where the parameters are defined identically to that in Figure 15. State B's payoff for war is defined analogously, except that d is the sunk costs that A imposes, $K \in [0, 1]$ is a parameter which represents how provocative an act is, and Kd is the overall extent by which B becomes provoked by A's imposition of costs: $1 - P - C_B + Kd - d$. Thus, B becomes more resolved by the amount Kd , and this can be thought of as the extent by which its political costs of war decrease: it has the effect of B's overall costs of war, C_B , becoming smaller by the amount Kd . Consistent with the insight that war is always costly, assume that even if the political costs of war fall, there will always remain some material costs of war, such that $C_A > 0$ and $Kd < C_{B_L}$.

The information structure of the game is as follows. Let r be A's initial belief that B is the low cost type and $1 - r$ as A's initial belief that B is the high cost type. A updates its belief to r' and $1 - r'$ at the third node using Bayes Rule. Let e be B's initial belief that A is the low cost type and $1 - e$ as B's initial belief that B is the high cost type. B updates its belief from e to e' and e'' at the second and fourth nodes, respectively, using Bayes Rule. The solution concept is perfect Bayesian equilibrium.

Proposition A. If B cannot set up a blockade, such that the only threat it can make is a cheap talk threat, $d = 0$, there exists a pooling equilibrium. At the first node, both a dissatisfied and satisfied type of A, $C_{A_L} \leq C_A^ < C_{A_H}$, make a large demand greater than the status quo, x_H , as long as $C_{A_H} \leq \dot{C}_A$. At the second node, both types of B make a cheap talk threat, and at the third node, both types of A escalate, $C_A^* < C_{A_H} \leq \dot{C}_A$, so that B initiates war at the final node if the low cost type and concedes if the high cost type. Beliefs are $r = r' \in (0, 1)$ and $e = e' = e'' \in (0, 1)$.*

If the low cost type of A is dissatisfied, it has a cost of war that is low enough to meet the following cut point:

$$C_A^* \equiv P - q \geq C_A$$

Thus, the low cost type of A is dissatisfied if $C_{A_L} \leq C_A^*$. If the low cost type of A is dissatisfied and the high cost type of A is satisfied: $C_{A_L} \leq C_A^* < C_{A_H}$.

Given that the low cost type of A is dissatisfied and the high cost type of A is satisfied, neither type of B can be dissatisfied because both states cannot be dissatisfied simultaneously with the assumptions that war is costly, that both agree on the distribution of power, and that both states are not risk-loving⁶²². This means that there exists a “large demand” and “small demand” that A can make that leaves the high cost type and low cost type of B indifferent between war and peace at the final node, respectively:

$$\text{Large Demand: } x_H \equiv P + C_{B_H} = x_H$$

$$\text{Small Demand: } x_L \equiv P + C_{B_L} = x_L$$

If A demands x_L , then B always concedes, but is indifferent between conceding at the

⁶²²Powell 1996, p. 249.

second node and final node. If A demands x_H and the game reaches the final node, the high cost type of B concedes and the low cost type of B initiates war.

If both types of A demand x_H , then at the third node, both types of A escalate if the high cost type of A's expected utility of escalating is at least as great as backing down and living with the status quo: $r'(P - C_{AH}) + (1 - r')(x_H) \geq q$. At the second node, if B sees the demand x_H , its updated beliefs that A is the low cost type are identical to its initial beliefs because both types of A make the demand: $e' = e \in (0, 1)$. Given B's updated beliefs and given that both types of A escalate at the third node, if B is the high cost type and the only threat it can make is a cheap talk threat, $d = 0$, it is indifferent between conceding x_H at the second node and making a cheap talk threat knowing that it will concede at the final node. Given this indifference of the high cost type of B at the second node, in the proposed equilibrium, the high cost type of B always escalates by making a cheap talk threat. If the low cost type of B sees the large demand and the only threat it can make is a cheap talk threat, it always makes a cheap talk threat knowing that it will initiate war at the final node. Because both types of B make a cheap talk threat, at the third node, A's updated beliefs that B is the low cost type are identical to its initial beliefs: $r' = r \in (0, 1)$. Given A's updated beliefs, for both types of A to escalate at the third node, the high cost type of A must have a cost of war that is low enough to satisfy the following cut point:

$$\dot{C}_A \equiv \frac{P + C_{BH} - q}{r} - C_{BH} \geq C_A$$

Thus, if $C_{AH} \leq \dot{C}_A$, both types of A are resolved enough to escalate at the third node after demanding x_H at the first node.

At the first node, A demands x_H if the expected utility of doing so is at least as great as demanding x_L , which will be accepted by B for sure:

$$\ddot{C}_A \equiv \frac{P + C_{BH} - q}{r} - C_{BH} \geq C_A$$

Note that $\ddot{C}_A = \dot{C}_A$. This is because both types of B make the cheap talk threat at the second node. Thus, if $C_{AH} \leq \dot{C}_A$, both types of A make the large demand at the first node. In equilibrium, both types of B make a cheap talk threat at the second node, and both types of A escalate at the third node. At the final node, B updates its beliefs to $e'' = e' = e$ and initiates war if the low cost type, but concedes if the high cost type. Thus, in this equilibrium in which B cannot set up a blockade, B can neither deter A nor distinguish A's type. ■ Q.E.D

Proposition 1. If B can set up a blockade, $d > 0$, there exists an equilibrium in which the low cost type of B sets up a blockade and deters all but the truly dissatisfied types of A. At the first node, the low cost type of A is dissatisfied and the high cost type of A is satisfied, $C_{AL} \leq C_A^ < C_{AH}$, but both make a reduced large demand greater than the status quo, $\dot{x}_H = P + C_{BH} - Kd$, where the large demand is $x_H = P + C_{BH}$, as long as the high cost type of A's initial beliefs that B is the low cost type are $r \leq r^*$. At the second node, only the low cost type of B sets up a blockade as long as the sunk costs that B has to incur after a blockade is breached are sufficiently small, but still large enough that the high cost type of B would be unwilling to set up a blockade, $\hat{d} < d \leq \hat{d}$. The blockade thus signals B's type, so at the third node, the satisfied type of A backs down and the dissatisfied type of A breaches the blockade to face certain war at the final node. The high cost type of A's initial beliefs are $r \leq r^* \in (0, 1)$ and the low cost type of A's initial beliefs are $r \in (0, 1)$, but both update to $r' = 1$ if B sets up a blockade. B's beliefs that A is the low cost type are, $e = e' \in (0, 1)$, but updates at the final node to $e'' = 1$ if A breaches the blockade.*

The low cost type of A is dissatisfied and the high cost type of A is satisfied if $C_{AL} \leq C_A^* <$

C_{AH} , where C_A^* is defined in the proof of Proposition A.

There exists a “reduced large demand” and “reduced small demand” that makes the high cost and low cost type of B indifferent between peace and war at the final node in the event that B’s blockade is breached:

$$\text{Reduced Large Demand: } \dot{x}_H \equiv P + C_{BH} - Kd = x_H$$

$$\text{Reduced Small Demand: } \dot{x}_L \equiv P + C_{BL} - Kd = x_L$$

If A demands \dot{x}_L , B always concedes at the second node in order to avoid incurring sunk costs that A imposes by breaching the blockade. If A demands \dot{x}_H and the game reaches the final node, B concedes if the high cost type but initiates war if the low cost type.

If A demands \dot{x}_H , then at the third node, both types of A escalate if the high cost type of A has a cost of war that is low enough to meet the following cut point:

$$\hat{C}_A \equiv \frac{P + C_{BH} - Kd - q}{r'} - C_{BH} + Kd \geq C_A$$

Thus, if $C_{AH} \leq \hat{C}_A$, both types of A escalate at the third node after demanding \dot{x}_H .

Given that both types of A demand \dot{x}_H , at the second node, B’s updated beliefs are identical to its prior beliefs: $e' = e \in (0, 1)$. Given these updated beliefs, in an equilibrium in which B’s blockade deters all but the dissatisfied types of A, the low cost type of B sets up a blockade when it sees \dot{x}_H as long as d is small enough to satisfy the following cut point:

$$\hat{d} \equiv \frac{P + C_{BH} - q - e(P + C_{BL} - q)}{K - eK + e} \geq d$$

Thus, if $d \leq \hat{d}$, then the low cost type of B sets up a blockade and if $d > \hat{d}$ then the low cost type of B concedes \dot{x}_H at the second node. Similarly, if the high cost type of B sees the

demand \dot{x}_H , it sets up a blockade if d is sufficiently small to meet the following cut point:

$$\hat{d} \equiv \frac{(1-e)(P + C_{BH} - q)}{K - eK + e} \geq d$$

Thus, if $d \leq \hat{d}$, then the high cost type of B sets up a blockade, but if $d > \hat{d}$, then the high cost type of B concedes \dot{x}_H at the second node.

If Bs set up a blockade, A will update its beliefs at the third node to $r' \in (0, 1)$ when $d \leq \hat{d}$, but to $r' = 1$ when $d > \hat{d}$ because $\hat{d} < \hat{d}$. Given A's beliefs at the third node and given that $C_{AL} \leq C_A^* < C_{AH}$, both types of A will escalate if $d \leq \hat{d}$ as long as $C_A^* < C_{AH} \leq \hat{C}_A$, but the high cost type of A will back down and the low cost type of A will escalate if $\hat{d} < d \leq \hat{d}$ because only the low cost type of A is dissatisfied. To see this, note that because $r' = 1$ when $\hat{d} < d \leq \hat{d}$, imputing $r' = 1$ into \hat{C}_A yields $\hat{C}_A = C_A^*$. This means that the cut point for A to escalate at the third node becomes $C_{AL} \leq \hat{C}_A = C_A^* < C_{AH}$. Thus, if both types of A demand \dot{x}_H , the low cost type of B will set up a blockade to deter all but the dissatisfied types of A as long as $\hat{d} < d \leq \hat{d}$.

Given $\hat{d} < d \leq \hat{d}$, at the first node, both types of A demand \dot{x}_H if the expected utility of doing so for the high cost type of A is at least as great as demanding \dot{x}_L , which is guaranteed to be accepted by B. Since $r' = 1$ when $\hat{d} < d \leq \hat{d}$, both types of A demand \dot{x}_H if the high cost type of A has an initial belief r that is high enough to satisfy the following inequality: $r(q) + (1-r)(\dot{x}_H) \geq \dot{x}_L$. Rearranging yields the following cut point:

$$r^* \equiv \frac{C_{BH} - C_{BL}}{P + C_{BH} - Kd - q} \geq r$$

Thus, given $\hat{d} < d \leq \hat{d}$ and $C_{AL} \leq C_A^* < C_{AH}$, both types of A demand \dot{x}_H at the first node if $r \leq r^*$.

Finally, recall from the proof of Proposition A that when the only threat that B can make is a cheap talk threat, there exists an equilibrium in which satisfied types of A demand x_H and escalate when threatened by a cheap talk threat: $C_{AL} \leq C_A^* < C_{AH} \leq \dot{C}_A$. Proposition 1 thus implies that when B can make a threat by setting up a blockade, and the blockade places sufficient military assets that would incur sunk costs in the range of $\hat{d} < d \leq \hat{d}$ when breached, then although these satisfied types of A will challenge B by demanding x_H when they believe that the probability that B is the low cost type is sufficiently low, $r \leq r^*$, the low cost type of B will successfully deter these types from further escalating the crisis and make them back down by setting up a blockade. ■ Q.E.D

2. Signaling Through Deliberate Provocation

A's cost of war, B's power, and the degree that B is provoked as private information

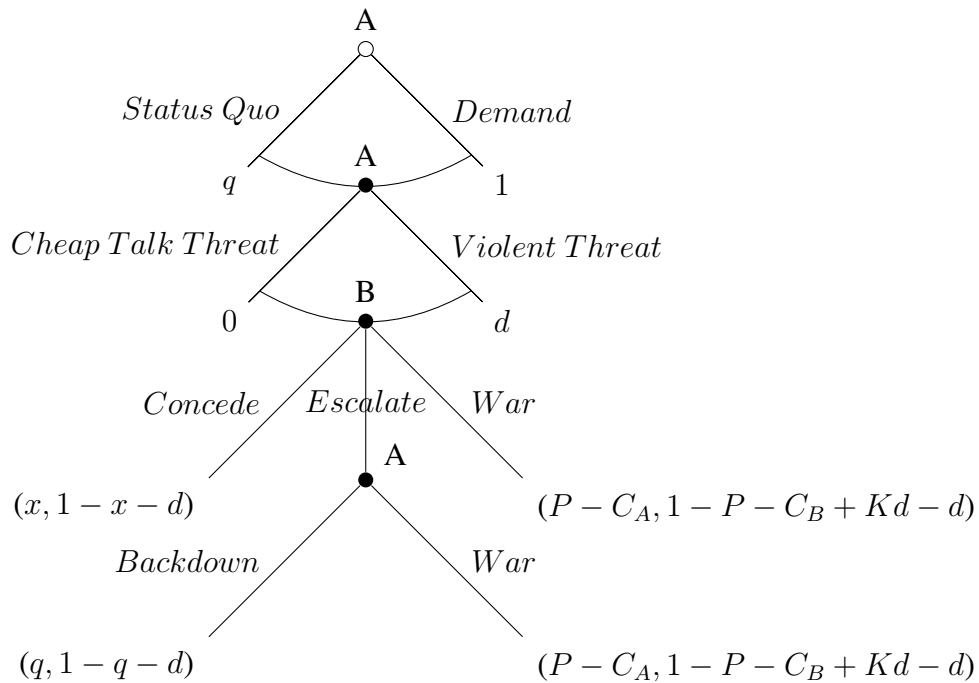


Figure 16: Extensive Form of Model of Signaling Through Deliberate Provocation.

In the model, two states A and B live under the status quo with a division of a stake of value 1, such that A owns $q > 0$ and B owns $1 - q$. At the first decision node, A makes a demand that can be as small as q and as large as 1. If A “demands” q , the division of stakes is maintained and the game ends. If A demands $x > q$, it can then make a threat of *demonstrative violence* by choosing an amount of sunk costs, d , to impose on B from a continuous scale. This amount is assumed to be small enough that it leaves the strategic balance unaffected, and thus it can be as low as zero – a “cheap talk threat” – but never as great as B’s overall costs of war: $d \in [0, C_A)$. If A demands $x > q$ and makes a threat, B must then decide to either concede the demand, reject the demand by initiating a war itself, or reject the demand by escalating to the final node. If B concedes the demand, the game ends with a revised division of the stake and B also having to incur the sunk costs that A imposed: $(x, 1 - x - d)$. If B initiates war, both sides are assumed to fight for the entire stake until one side is completely victorious, such that each side receives its expected war payoff, $(P - C_A, 1 - P - C_B + Kd - d)$, where the parameters are identical to the previous model. But unlike the previous model, B is assumed to have private information regarding the true value of K , while K is uniformly distributed over a commonly known distribution function. This assumption is based on the intuition that when a state provokes another state, it does not know for sure how provocative the receiving state will view the act. Because war is always costly, assume that $C_B > Kd$, but note that this does *not* bar the provoked state from becoming dissatisfied. If B rejects the demand by escalating to the final node, A then has the final decision to either initiate a war or back down. If A backs down, it receives the status quo payoff, q , but B may end up with a payoff that is worse than the status quo even though it retains the status quo division of the stake because A imposes sunk costs: $1 - q - d$. If A initiates war, both states fight for the entire stake until one side is completely victorious so each receives its expected war payoff: $(P - C_A, 1 - P - C_B + Kd - d)$.

The information structure is as follows. Assume that two types of each state exist. A has private information regarding its cost of war: B has an initial belief that A is the low cost type, C_{A_L} , with probability e and the high cost type, C_{A_H} , with probability $1 - e$. At the third decision node, B updates its beliefs that A is the low cost type to e' using Bayes Rule. Assume that B has private information regarding its capabilities: A believes that B is either the strong type, $1 - P_L$, with probability r , or weak type, $1 - P_H$, with probability $1 - r$. Note that P_H means that A is powerful compared to the weak type of B. State A updates its beliefs at the final node to r' and $1 - r'$ using Bayes Rule. Further assume that the degree of provocation, K , is uniformly distributed over a commonly known distribution function while only B knows the true value. The solution concept is perfect Bayesian equilibrium.

Proposition B. If both types of A make a cheap talk threat, $d = 0$, and both types of A and B satisfy $P_H - C_{A_H} \geq q$ and $P_L - C_{A_L} < q$, there exists a pooling equilibrium in mixed strategies. At the first node, both types of A make a risky demand $x_H^ = e(P_H + C_B - q) + q$, and at the second node, both types of A make the cheap talk threat. At the third node, the strong type of B rejects the demand by escalating while the weak type of B mixes between escalating and conceding with a probability of escalating that satisfies $\tilde{m} \leq m < m^*$. At the final node, A updates its beliefs to $r'^* < r' \leq \tilde{r}'$ so that the high cost type of A backs down, but the low cost type of A initiates war. A's updated belief that B is the strong type is at least as large as its initial belief, $r' \geq r$, where $r, r' \in (0, 1)$. B's initial beliefs and updated beliefs are identical, $e = e' \in (0, 1)$.*

First consider the parameter space in which when A knows B's type for sure at the final node, both types of A are dissatisfied and hence prefer to initiate war against the weak type of B, but are satisfied and hence prefer to back down and live with the status quo when up

against the strong type of B:

$$P_H - C_{A_H} \geq q \text{ and } P_L - C_{A_L} < q \quad (\text{i})$$

Now note that there does *not exist an equilibrium in which A knows B's type for sure at the final node given that the inequalities of (i) are satisfied*. If A knows B's type with certainty at the final node, A will initiate war when it is up against the weak type of B but back down when it is up against the strong type of B. For this to be true, there must be a demand that the weak type of B is always willing to concede while the strong type of B always rejects: by seeing B escalate, A would then know with certainty that B is the strong type. Yet such a demand cannot exist in equilibrium because the weak type of B has an incentive to deviate by rejecting the demand and imitating the strong type of B in order to make A back down at the final node. Thus, any potential equilibrium in which A ends up knowing B's type for sure will be undermined because B has an incentive to bluff and doing so will leave A uncertain of B's type at the final node.

However, given that the inequalities of (i) are satisfied, there exists an equilibrium in which the weak type of B mixes and A's updated beliefs at the final node leave it uncertain of B's type. This equilibrium exists if B sometimes concedes a risky demand and sometimes rejects the same demand by escalating to the final node so that it makes the high cost type of A back down but the low cost type initiate war:

$$\text{High Cost A: } r'(P_L - C_{A_H}) + (1 - r')(P_H - C_{A_H}) = q$$

$$r'^* \equiv \frac{P_H - C_{A_H} - q}{P_H - P_L} = r' \quad (\text{ii})$$

Thus, as long as B can make A's belief $r' > r'^*$ at the final node by playing a mixed strategy, the high cost type of A will back down at the final node. Also note, however, that when

$r' > r'^*$, the low cost type of A will prefer to initiate war as long as r' is below a cut point \tilde{r}' :

$$\text{Low Cost A: } r'(P_L - C_{A_L}) + (1 - r')(P_H - C_{A_L}) \geq q$$

$$\tilde{r}' \equiv \frac{P_H - C_{A_L} - q}{P_H - P_L} \geq r'$$

Thus, given that the inequalities in (i) are satisfied, if $r'^* < r' \leq \tilde{r}'$, the high cost type of A will back down and the low cost type of A will initiate war at the final node.

Given that A's beliefs fall within this equilibrium range at the final node, both types of A can make a risky demand at the first node that leaves the weak type of B indifferent between escalating to the final node and conceding. Because B's updated belief at the third node will be identical to its initial beliefs if both types of A make a risky demand, $e = e' \in (0, 1)$, the risky demand, x_H^* , is defined as the following:

$$x_H^* \equiv e(P_H + C_B - q) + q = x_H$$

Assume that x_H^* is the maximum demand that A can make that keeps the weak type of B indifferent given B's beliefs, e , such that in out of equilibrium play, the weak type of B would escalate if A demanded more. Given this risky demand, the weak type of B mixes between escalating to the final node and conceding the risky demand with probability m and $1 - m$, respectively, where $m \in (0, 1)$:

$$\text{Weak B: } m[e(1 - P_H - C_B) + (1 - e)(1 - q)] + (1 - m)[1 - x_H^*] = e(1 - P_H - C_B) + (1 - e)(1 - q) = 1 - x_H^*$$

Here, the weak type of B plays escalate with a probability that is sufficient to make A's beliefs at the final node $r'^* < r' \leq \tilde{r}'$. Using Bayes Rule, we can first derive the upper bound of the probability with which the weak type of B must play escalate, such that it

makes A update its beliefs to $r' > r'^*$:

$$Prob[B \text{ is Strong} | B \text{ escalates}] = \frac{Prob[B \text{ escalates} | B \text{ is Strong}] * Prob[B \text{ is Strong}]}{Prob[B \text{ escalates}]}$$

$$r'^* = \frac{1 * r}{r(1) + (1 - r)(m)} \quad (\text{iii})$$

$$m^* \equiv \frac{r - rr'^*}{r'^* - rr'^*} = m$$

Thus, if the weak type of B plays escalate with a probability $m < m^*$, then $r' > r'^*$ and the high cost type of A will back down at the final node. Note, however, that r' is bound below by r because as m reaches 1, r' reaches r : $r' \geq r$. This means that if the weak type of B plays escalate with a low enough probability, even the low cost type of A will prefer to back down at the final node. The lower bound with which B plays escalate can be found analogously to the upper bound:

$$\tilde{m} \equiv \frac{r - r\tilde{r}'}{\tilde{r}' - r\tilde{r}'} = m$$

Thus, as long as the weak type of B plays escalate with a probability $\tilde{m} \leq m < m^*$, then the high cost type of A will back down at the final node and the low cost type of A will initiate war. Recalling that the weak type of B's expected utility function is $m[e'(1 - P_H - C_B) + (1 - e')(1 - q)] + (1 - m)[1 - x_H^*] = e'(1 - P_H - C_B) + (1 - e')(1 - q) = 1 - x_H^*$, we can see that the weak type of B will be indifferent between a range of probabilities with which it plays escalate in the proposed equilibrium as long as $\tilde{m} \leq m < m^*$. Given that the weak type of B mixes, the strong type of B prefers to escalate when it sees the risky demand:

$$\text{Strong B: } e(1 - P_L - C_B) + (1 - e)(1 - q) > 1 - x_H^*$$

At the first decision node, both types of A make the risky demand, x_H^* . Note that a “pooled safe demand” does not exist because if there is a such a demand that leaves the strong type of B indifferent between escalating and conceding, $e(1 - P_L - C_B) + (1 - e)(1 - q) = 1 - x_L^*$, where $e' = e \in (0, 1)$, then the weak type of B’s expected utility of escalating, $e(1 - P_H - C_B) + (1 - e)(1 - q)$, is always worse than conceding – even if the weak type mixes – which in turn implies that if the strong type of B rejects the demand, A will believe with certainty that B is the strong type at the final node and will back down. This leads the strong type of B to have an expected utility of $1 - q$ if it escalates, which contradicts the above statement that the strong type of B’s expected utility of escalating is $e(1 - P_L - C_B) + (1 - e)(1 - q)$, where $e' = e \in (0, 1)$.

Thus, both types of A demand x_H^* at the first decision node if their expected utility of doing so is at least as great as the status quo, which is always the case. To see this, first note that if the high cost type of A demands x_H^* and B rejects by escalating to the final node, A can simply back down at the final node to live with the status quo. The low cost type of A can also do no worse than the status quo by demanding x_H^* because it is dissatisfied given its equilibrium beliefs at the final node, $r'(P_L - C_{A_L}) + (1 - r')(P_H - C_{A_L}) \geq q$, so if B rejects x_H^* , it can initiate war and expect a utility that is at least as great as backing down to live with the status quo. These two statements on the equilibrium behavior of A at the first node can be seen from the following inequalities, where Ω can be substituted for $r'(P_L - C_{A_L}) + (1 - r')(P_H - C_{A_L})$ to ease the exposition:

$$\text{High Cost A: } r(q) + (1 - r)[m(q) + (1 - m)(x_H^*)] \geq q$$

$$\text{Low Cost A: } r[r'(P_L - C_{A_L}) + (1 - r')(P_H - C_{A_L})] + (1 - r)[m\{r'(P_L - C_{A_L}) + (1 - r')(P_H - C_{A_L})\} + (1 - m)\{x_H^*\}] \geq q$$

$$\text{Low Cost A: } r(\Omega) + (1 - r)[m(\Omega) + (1 - m)\{x_H^*\}] \geq q$$

Note that the expected utilities of both the high cost and low cost types of A have a lower bound and upper bound depending on the exact probability with which the weak type of B plays escalate within the range $\tilde{m} \leq m < m^*$.

Thus, in this pooling equilibrium in mixed strategies, both types of A demand x_H^* and make the cheap talk threat, the strong type of B always rejects the demand by escalating to the final node while the weak type of B mixes between conceding the demand and escalating to the final node, such that A backs down at the final node if the high cost type and initiates war if the low cost type. Beliefs are such that $e = e' \in (0, 1)$ and $r^{j*} < r' \leq \tilde{r}'$ where $r' \geq r$ and $r, r' \in (0, 1)$.

Proposition 2. There exists an equilibrium in which the low cost type of A deliberately provokes B to signal its type and obtain a larger concession from B than is possible without provoking B. The two types of A and B satisfy $P_H - C_{A_H} \geq q$, and the strong type of B is also initially satisfied, $P_L + C_B > q$, but can become dissatisfied after a provocation by A, $P_L + C_B - Kd \leq q$. The low cost type of A first makes a reduced high demand, $\tilde{x}_H = P_H + C_B - Kd$, where the high demand is $\hat{x}_H = P_H + C_B$, the risky demand is $x_H^ = e(P_H + C_B - q) + q$, and $\hat{x}_H > \tilde{x}_H > x_H^*$. It then provokes B by imposing costs d^* , thereby manipulating a risk of provocation k^* and k_s^* that are just high enough that the high cost type of A would prefer not to risk because the chances of provoking B into war are too great. When B sees the provocation signal, it updates its beliefs that A is the low cost type to $e' = 1$, but $e' = 0$ otherwise, even though it was initially uncertain of A's type, $e \in (0, 1)$. Given $e' = 1$, the weak type of B escalates if the true degree of provocation turns out to be sufficient to make it resolved, $K \geq K^*$, but concedes otherwise. The strong type of B escalates to the final node if the true degree of provocation does not make it dissatisfied, $K < \hat{K}$, but launches a war if it becomes dissatisfied, $K \geq \hat{K}$. At the final node, A remains uncertain of B's type because both types of B may escalate at the third node, $\rho' \in (0, 1)$,*

but as long as $\rho'^* < \rho' \leq \tilde{\rho}'$, the low cost type of A initiates war while the high cost type of A backs down. When the low cost type of A has sufficiently high initial beliefs that B is the strong type, $r > \rho'^*$, it can signal its type to B and will do so when its expected utility is at least as great as demanding x_H^* with a cheap talk threat. The high cost type of A lives with the status quo.

First recall from the inequalities of (i) that if A knows B's type for sure at the final node, as long as $P_H - C_{A_H} \geq q$, A will initiate war when B is the weak type.

Given that $P_H - C_{A_H} \geq q$ holds, now consider the parameter space in which the strong type of B is also initially satisfied, $P_L + C_B > q$, but can become dissatisfied after being provoked, $P_L + C_B - Kd \leq q$: if A provokes B sufficiently, the strong type of B will prefer to initiate war rather than live with the status quo at the third node. This means that A cannot be dissatisfied at the final node, and hence will never initiate war, when A believes with certainty that B is the strong type, $\rho' = 1$, because two states cannot be dissatisfied (or potentially dissatisfied) simultaneously given our assumptions.⁶²³ It follows that the second inequality from (i), $P_L - C_{A_L} < q$, will also be satisfied.

Given the above, however, as long as A is uncertain that B is the strong type at the final node, there exists a parameter space in which A can be dissatisfied and hence will initiate war even when B is a strong type that can become dissatisfied. Letting ρ' be A's updated belief at the final node when it provokes B at the second node, this parameter space exists if the low cost type of A has a belief that B is the strong type that is low enough to satisfy $\rho' < \tilde{\rho}'^*$, where $\tilde{\rho}'^* = \tilde{r}'$ and \tilde{r}' is defined in the proof of Proposition B. Thus, if $\rho' < \tilde{\rho}'$, even though the strong type of B is potentially dissatisfied, A can also be dissatisfied.

At the third node, given that B know's that A is the low cost type for sure, $e' = 1$, and

⁶²³Powell 1996, p. 249.

$\rho' < \tilde{r}'$ holds, then the high and low demands can be defined as follows:

Weak B: $1 - P_H - C_B = 1 - \hat{x}_H$; High Demand: $\hat{x}_H \equiv P_H + C_B$

Strong B: $1 - P_L - C_B = 1 - \hat{x}_L$; Low Demand: $\hat{x}_L \equiv P_L + C_B$

Note that $\hat{x}_H > x_H^*$ and $\hat{x}_L > x_L^*$, where x_H^* and x_L^* are defined in the proof of Proposition B.

Given the high and low demands, the low cost type of A can signal its type by first making a *reduced high demand* and then provoking B to manipulate a risk that the high cost type of A would be unwilling to run. To see this, first note that the reduced high demand, \tilde{x}_H , is simply a demand that is smaller than the high demand by an amount that takes into account the extent of provocation when A provokes B, Kd , where the degree of provocation, K , is an estimated value from a known distribution function:

Reduced High Demand: $\tilde{x}_H \equiv \hat{x}_H - Kd = P_H + C_B - Kd$

When A demands \tilde{x}_H and provokes B by imposing costs d , given that $\rho' < \tilde{\rho}'$ and $e' = 1$, there arises a possibility that even the weak type of B will reject \tilde{x}_H if the true value of the degree of provocation, K , turns out to be large enough to make the weak type of B resolved. This cut point K^* can be found by rearranging the following inequality:

Weak B: $1 - P_H - C_B + Kd \geq 1 - \tilde{x}_H$

$$K^* \equiv \frac{P_H + C_B - \tilde{x}_H}{d} \leq K$$

Thus, if the true value of the degree of provocation K turns out to be below K^* , then the weak type of B concedes \tilde{x}_H . But if $K \geq K^*$, then the weak type of B rejects \tilde{x}_H . Moreover, we can see from the above inequality that the more sunk costs d that A imposes

on B, the larger the denominator will be and thus the lower the cut point K^* will be. This means that A can manipulate a risk of provocation k that K is at least as large as K^* by imposing more or less sunk costs d , given that it demands \tilde{x}_H :

$$k \equiv Prob[K \geq K^*]$$

If B is the strong type, given that $\rho' < \tilde{\rho}'$ and $e' = 1$, not only does it never concede \tilde{x}_H , if the degree of provocation is above a certain cut point, \hat{K} , its utility of war will be so high that it becomes dissatisfied:

$$\text{Strong B: } 1 - P_L - C_B + Kd \geq 1 - q$$

$$\hat{K} \equiv \frac{P_L + C_B - q}{d} \leq K$$

Thus, although the strong type of B always prefers to reject \tilde{x}_H , if $K \geq \hat{K}$, the strong type of B becomes dissatisfied and if $K < \hat{K}$, the strong type of B is satisfied but resolved. Let k_s be the probability that K is large enough that the strong type of B becomes dissatisfied:

$$k_s \equiv Prob[K \geq \hat{K}]$$

To summarize, the above gives rise to the following utility functions of the weak and strong types of B depending on the true degree of provocation:

$$\text{Weak B: If } K \geq K^*, \text{ then } 1 - P_H - C_B + Kd^* \geq 1 - \tilde{x}_H$$

$$\text{Weak B: If } K < K^*, \text{ then } 1 - P_H - C_B + Kd^* < 1 - \tilde{x}_H$$

$$\text{Strong B: If } K \geq \hat{K}, \text{ then } 1 - P_L - C_B + Kd^* \geq 1 - q$$

$$\text{Strong B: If } K < \hat{K}, \text{ then } 1 - q > 1 - P_L - C_B + Kd^* > 1 - \tilde{x}_H^*$$

Note that if B prefers to reject \tilde{x}_H , as long as $e' = 1$ and $\rho' < \tilde{\rho}'$, it remains indifferent between initiating war at the third node and escalating to the final node because it is certain that A will initiate war at the final node. Multiple equilibria can thus arise because of B's indifference, but in the proposed provocation equilibrium, B only initiates war if it is the strong type and becomes dissatisfied. For the proposed provocation to hold, it is important that the strong type of B may choose to initiate war or escalate to the final node: a sufficient possibility of B initiating war dissuades the high cost type of A from imitating the provocation signal while the possibility that both types of B reject the reduced high demand to escalate to the final node keeps A uncertain of B's type at the final node, so that only the low cost type of A is willing to initiate war. For the low cost type of A to initiate war and the high cost type of A to back down at the final node, A's updated beliefs in the proposed provocation equilibrium must satisfy $\rho'^* < \rho' \leq \tilde{\rho}'$, where $\rho'^* = r'^*$ and r'^* is defined in the proof of Proposition B.

Given \tilde{x}_H , at the second decision node, the low cost type of A can generate k and k_s by imposing more or less costs, d , and thus signal its type by manipulating a risk of provocation that satisfies two conditions. First, by manipulating a risk of provocation that is high enough, the high cost type of A would find the risk of provoking B to initiate war at the third node unbearable and would thus prefer to live with the status quo than imitate the low cost type of A. Second, given that the first condition holds, k and k_s must also satisfy A's own updated beliefs at the final node so that the low cost type of A initiates war and the high cost type of A backs down, $\rho'^* < \rho' \leq \tilde{\rho}'$. The first condition is thus met when the following inequality is satisfied:

$$\text{High Cost A: } r[k_s(P_L - C_{A_H}) + (1 - k_s)(q)] + (1 - r)[k(q) + (1 - k)(\tilde{x}_H)] < q \quad (\text{iv})$$

Let k^* and k_s^* be the values of k and k_s , respectively, that satisfy the above inequality:

$$k^* \equiv 1 - \frac{rk_s(P_L - C_{AH} - q)}{(1-r)(q - \tilde{x}_H)} > k$$

$$k_s^* \equiv \frac{(1-k)(1-r)(q - \tilde{x}_H)}{r(P_L - C_{AH} - q)} > k_s$$

The low cost type of A can manipulate these risks of provocation to signal its type by imposing some equilibrium amount of costs, d^* , that gives rise to the desired probabilities k^* and k_s^* . The low cost type of A chooses to manipulate k or k_s depending on the size of the reduced high demand, and hence whether k_s is smaller or larger than k , and also how these probabilities affect its own updated beliefs at the final node. These, in turn, depend on the specific distribution function of K . In order to demonstrate that the above inequality can hold in equilibrium, a numerical example is provided later. Suffice it to say for now that we can let d^* be the equilibrium costs imposed that sets the cut point K^* to an equilibrium value K^{**} , which gives rise to the probability k^* : $k^* = Prob[K \geq K^{**}]$. If $k_s < k$, then manipulating k^* will also analogously generate k_s^* :

$$k^* = Prob[K \geq K^{**}]$$

$$d^* \equiv \frac{P_H + C_B - \tilde{x}_H}{K^{**}} \leq d$$

In the proposed provocation equilibrium, if the low cost type of A manipulates a risk of provocation k^* and k_s^* , B will believe with certainty at the third node that A is the low cost type, $e' = 1$, but otherwise, $e' = 0$. Given this updated belief, A initiates war at the final node when the low cost type, but would have backed down when the high cost type as long as $\rho'^* < \rho' \leq \tilde{\rho}'$. Thus, in order for the second condition to be satisfied, we can use Bayes Rule to find the cut points that k^* and k_s^* must meet:

$$\rho' = \frac{(1 - k_s^*) * r}{r(1 - k_s^*) + (1 - r)(k^*)} \tag{v}$$

$$\overline{k^*} \equiv \frac{(1 - k_s^*)(r - r\rho'^*)}{\rho'^* - r\rho'^*} = k^*$$

$$\underline{k^*} \equiv \frac{(1 - k_s^*)(r - r\tilde{\rho}')}{\tilde{\rho}' - r\tilde{\rho}'} = k^*$$

$$\overline{k_s^*} \equiv 1 - \frac{k^*(\rho'^* - r\rho'^*)}{r - r\rho'^*} = k_s^*$$

$$\underline{k_s^*} \equiv 1 - \frac{k^*(\tilde{\rho}' - r\tilde{\rho}')}{r - r\tilde{\rho}'} = k_s^*$$

Thus, k^* and k_s^* can take any value as long as $\underline{k^*} \leq k^* \leq \overline{k^*}$ and $\underline{k_s^*} \leq k_s^* \leq \overline{k_s^*}$.

Lemma 1: When $r \leq \rho'^$ there exists no k^* that satisfies $\underline{k^*} \leq k^* \leq \overline{k^*}$ and no k_s^* that satisfies $\underline{k_s^*} \leq k_s^* \leq \overline{k_s^*}$. Thus, the low cost type of A can only manipulate a risk of provocation to signal its type when it's initial beliefs that B is the strong type are sufficiently high: $r > \rho'^*$.*

Recall from equation (iii) that $r \leq r'$ because m is smaller than 1. Similarly, when k is smaller than $1 - k_s$, $r \leq \rho'$. To see this, we can rearrange equation (v) in terms of k :

$$k = \frac{(1 - k_s)(r - r\rho')}{r' - r\rho'} \tag{vi}$$

Thus, when $r \leq \rho'$, then k is smaller than $1 - k_s$ by the proportion $\frac{r - r\rho'}{r' - r\rho'}$. Substituting equation (vi) for the k in equation (iv) yields the following:

$$\frac{P_H + C_B - Kd + q}{P_H + C_B - Kd + P_L - C_{AH}} < \rho$$

Now recall from equation (ii) that $r'^* \equiv \frac{P_H - C_{AH} - q}{P_H - P_L} = \rho'$ and $\rho'^* = r'^*$. Thus when $\rho \leq \rho'^*$ we get the following:

$$\frac{P_H + C_B - Kd + q}{P_H + C_B - Kd + P_L - C_{A_H}} \leq \frac{P_H - C_{A_H} - q}{P_H - P_L} \quad (\text{vii})$$

Rearranging this inequality in terms of q , yields the following:

$$q \leq P_L - C_{A_H}$$

Thus, the inequality (vii) only holds when $q \leq P_L - C_{A_H}$, and yet we assumed at the outset that $q > P_L - C_{A_H}$. Thus, only when $r > \rho^*$ can the low cost type of A manipulate a risk of provocation to signal its type.

The above demonstrates that the low cost type of A can signal its type through provocation when $r > \rho^*$, but whether it will choose to do so depends on whether its expected utility is at least as great as the expected utility of making the risky demand and cheap talk threat as was seen in Proposition B. The low cost type of A thus sends the provocation signal if the following inequality holds:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Low Cost A: } & r[k_s^*(P_L - C_{A_L}) + (1 - k_s^*)\{\rho'(P_L - C_{A_L}) + (1 - \rho')(P_H - C_{A_L})\}] + (1 - r) \\ & [k^*\{\rho'(P_L - C_{A_L}) + (1 - \rho')(P_H - C_{A_L})\} + (1 - k^*)(\tilde{x}_H)] \geq r[r'(P_L - C_{A_L}) + (1 - r') \\ & (P_H - C_{A_L})] + (1 - r)[m\{r'(P_L - C_{A_L}) + (1 - r')(P_H - C_{A_L})\} + (1 - m)(x_H^*)] \end{aligned}$$

To get a better sense of whether the above inequality holds, we can substitute Ω for $r'(P_L - C_{A_L}) + (1 - r')(P_H - C_{A_L})$ and Θ for $\rho'(P_L - C_{A_L}) + (1 - \rho')(P_H - C_{A_L})$ to derive the following expression:

$$r[k_s^*(P_L - C_{A_L}) + (1 - k_s^*)(\Theta)] + (1 - r)[k^*(\Theta) + (1 - k^*)(\tilde{x}_H)] \geq r(\Omega) + (1 - r)[m(\Omega) + (1 - m)(x_H^*)] \quad (\text{viii})$$

Thus, if inequality (viii) holds and $r > \rho^*$, the low cost type of A demands \tilde{x}_H and manipulates a risk of provocation k^* and k_s^* to signal its type to B rather than demanding x_H^* and making the cheap talk threat.

The following numerical example shows that there exists parameter spaces that satisfy inequality (viii), thus demonstrating that it is rationally possible to signal through deliberate provocation. First recall that at the final node, if A knows B's type for sure, it initiates war when B is the weak type and backs down when B is the strong type. We can assign the following values that satisfy these conditions:

When $q = 0.4$,

Low Cost A: $q \leq P_H - C_{A_L} = 0.55$ and $q > P_L - C_{A_L} = 0.35$

High Cost A: $q \leq P_H - C_{A_H} = 0.45$ and $q > P_L - C_{A_H} = 0.25$

Note that the difference between the low and high cost types of A is 0.08 and the difference between the strong and weak type of B is 0.15. Given these values and the utilities of war for A, we can assign B's utility of war for when it is weak and when it is strong. Note that these values are consistent with the view that war is always costly:

Weak B: $1 - P_H - C_B = 1 - \hat{x}_H = 0.3$; High Demand: $\hat{x}_H = 0.7$

Strong B: $1 - P_L - C_B = 1 - \hat{x}_L = 0.5$; Low Demand: $\hat{x}_L = 0.5$

Given these values, we can further assign the risky demand as $x_H^* = 0.58$.

When A is uncertain of B's type at the final node in equilibrium, the low cost type of A is dissatisfied while the high cost type of A is satisfied. When B plays a mixed strategy, it will make the high cost type of A prefer to back down at the final node. We can thus derive the high cost type of A's equilibrium belief r'^* when B mixes:

High Cost A: $r'(P_L - C_{A_H}) + (1 - r')(P_H - C_{A_H}) = q$

$$r'(0.25) + (1 - r')(0.45) = 0.4$$

$$r^{I*} = 0.25$$

Furthermore, we can derive the upper bound of A's updated belief at the final node so that the low cost type of A will initiate war rather than back down:

$$\text{Low Cost A: } r'(P_L - C_{A_L}) + (1 - r')(P_H - C_{A_L}) = q$$

$$r'(0.35) + (1 - r')(0.55) = 0.4$$

$$\tilde{r}' = 0.75$$

Given these values, recall that Proposition B states that both types of A make the risky demand at the first node. Assigning $r = 0.65$ we can use Bayes Rule to derive the lower bound with which the weak type of B plays escalate, \tilde{m} (recall that $r' \geq r$ and $r^{I*} = 0.25$, thus $r' > r > r^{I*}$):

$$\tilde{r}' = \frac{1 * r}{r(1) + (1 - r)(m)}$$

$$0.75 = \frac{1 * 0.65}{0.65(1) + 0.35(m)}$$

$$\tilde{m} = 0.61904$$

Thus, as long as the weak type of B plays escalate with a probability that is $m > m^*$, then the low cost type of A will initiate war at the final node and the high cost type of A backs down. The weak type of B is indifferent between the various probabilities with which it can play escalate, as long as $\tilde{m} < m < 1$. In this example, this means that $0.65 < r' < 0.75$.

With these upper bounds and lower bounds for r' , we can find the low cost type of A's expected utility of war, Ω .

$$\Omega \equiv r'(P_L - C_{A_L}) + (1 - r')(P_H - C_{A_L}) \geq q$$

Lower Bound ($m = \tilde{m}$): $\underline{\Omega} = 0.75(0.35) + 0.25(0.55) = 0.4$

Upper Bound ($m=1$): $\overline{\Omega} = 0.65(0.35) + 0.35(0.55) = 0.42$

Thus, $0.4 < \Omega < 0.42$

Given m , we can see that the high and low cost types of A prefer to make the risky demand than live with the status quo because the low bound is no worse than the status quo but the upper bound is better than the status quo:

High Cost A: $r(q) + (1 - r)[m(q) + (1 - m)(x_H^*)] \geq q$

High Cost A Upper Bound: $0.65(0.4) + (0.35)[0.61904(0.4) + (0.38096)(0.58)] = 0.42400$

Low Cost A Upper Bound: $r(\underline{\Omega}) + (1 - r)[m(\underline{\Omega}) + (1 - m)(x_H^*)]$

$0.65(0.4) + 0.35[0.61904(0.4) + 0.38096(0.58)] = 0.42400$

Low Cost A Lower Bound: $r(\overline{\Omega}) + (1 - r)[m(\overline{\Omega}) + (1 - m)(x_H^*)]$

$0.65(0.42) + 0.35[1(0.42) + 0(0.58)] = 0.42$

Thus, depending on the exact probability with which the weak type of B mixes, the high cost type of A's expected utility is at least 0.4 and as great as 0.424. The low cost type of A's expected utility is also as great as 0.424 but no lower than 0.42.

Moving onto Proposition 2, we first have to establish conditions under which the high cost type of A is unwilling to manipulate a risk of provocation after making a reduced high demand while the low cost type of A prefers to make a reduced high demand rather than make the risky demand. With $\tilde{x}_H = 0.62$, $k = 0.48$, and $k_s = 0.42$ because $k_s < k$ in this example, the following can be derived:

$$\text{High Cost A: } r[k_s(P_L - C_{A_H}) + (1 - k_s)(q)] + (1 - r)[k(q) + (1 - k)(\tilde{x}_H)] < q$$

$$0.65[0.42(0.25) + (0.58)(0.4)] + (0.35)[0.48(0.4) + (0.52)(0.62)] < 0.4$$

$$0.39909 < 0.4$$

Thus, with the above values, the high cost type of A will be unwilling to manipulate a risk of provocation, $k = 0.48$ and $k_s = 0.42$. With $k^* = 0.48$ and $k_s^* = 0.42$, we can derive A's updated beliefs at the final node, ρ' , after provoking B and observing B escalate:

$$\rho' = \frac{(1 - k_s^*) * r}{r(1 - k_s^*) + (1 - r)(k^*)}$$

$$\rho' = \frac{0.58 * 0.65}{0.65(0.58) + (0.35)(0.48)}$$

$$\rho' = 0.692$$

We can then use ρ' to derive the low cost type of A's expected utility of war at the final node, Θ :

$$\Theta = \rho'(P_L - C_{A_L}) + (1 - \rho')(P_H - C_{A_L})$$

$$\Theta = 0.692(0.35) + (0.308)(0.55) = 0.4116$$

Finally, we can impute Θ to see if the low cost type of A's expected utility of making a reduced high demand at the first node and then imposing costs on B to manipulate a risk of provocation k^* and k_s^* is at least as great as its expected utility of making a risky demand:

$$\text{Low Cost A: } r[k_s^*(P_L - C_{A_L}) + (1 - k_s^*)(\Theta)] + (1 - r)[k^*(\Theta) + (1 - k^*)(\tilde{x}_H)]$$

$$0.65[0.42(0.35) + 0.58(0.4116)] + 0.35[0.48(0.4116) + 0.52(0.62)] = 0.432712$$

Recall that if A makes a cheap talk threat and risky demand, its expected utility is greater than 0.4 and lower than 0.424, which are both lower than 0.4327. Thus, the low cost type of A is not only able to signal its type by manipulating a risk of provocation, it prefers to do so rather than make a risky demand and pool with the high cost type of A. ■ Q.E.D.

3. Gray Zone Conflicts / Skirmishes and Inadvertent War

A's cost of war, B's power, and the degree that B is provoked as private information

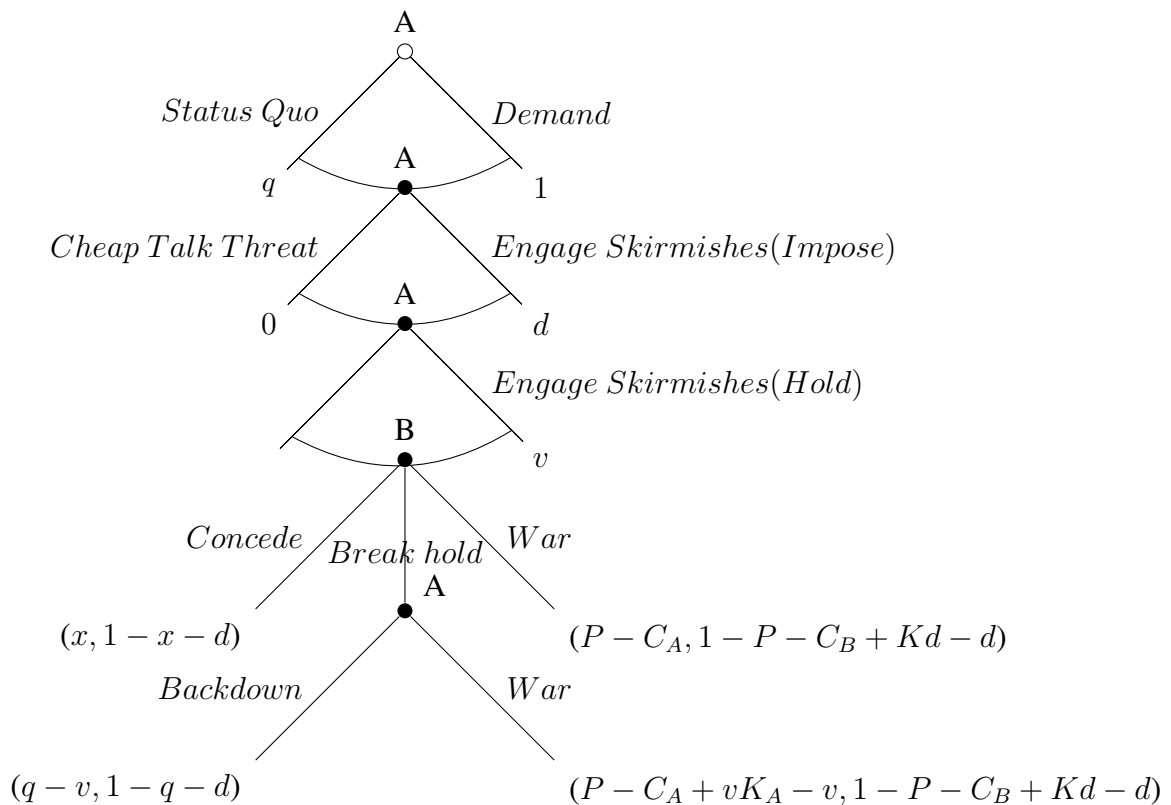


Figure 17: Extensive Form of Model of Gray Zone Conflicts and Inadvertent War.

There are two states A and B, and A owns $q > 0$ and B owns $1 - q$ under the status quo. Assume that both states know that the other is initially unresolved. At the first node, A can either “demand” q to end the game with a payoff of $(q, 1 - q)$, or it can demand, $x > q$.

If A demands x , it can then make a threat by engaging in military skirmishes. It does so by first choosing a small level of sunk costs to impose on B, $d \in [0, C_B)$, and then also choosing a level of sunk costs it wants to risk by putting its own forces in harms way, $v \in (0, C_A)$. The latter can be thought of as the number of troops A decides to use to encircle B's forces. Assume that A knows how much it will be provoked by putting its own troops in harms way, $K_A \in [0, 1]$, but only has an estimate of how provoked B will be when it imposes costs: $K \in [0, 1]$, is uniformly distributed over a commonly known distribution function. State B has private information on K . These conditions ensure that war is always costly: $C_B > Kd$ and $C_A > vK_A$. When B sees A engage in military skirmishes, it can concede the demand, reject the demand by initiating a war itself, or reject the demand by breaking A's hold and thereby imposing costs on A. If B concedes, the game ends with each side receiving $(x, 1 - x - d)$. If B initiates war, both sides fight over the entire stake of 1 until one side is completely victorious, so that each receives its expected utility of war: $(P - C_A, 1 - P - C_B + Kd - d)$. If B decides to break A's hold and escalate to the final node, A then has the final opportunity to back down or initiate a war. If A backs down, although the status quo division of the stake remains unchanged, each side has to live with the sunk costs that it's counterpart imposed through the skirmishes, so the two states end up with a payoff of $(q - v, 1 - q - d)$. If A initiates a war, the two sides fight over the entire stake until one side is completely victorious, thus receiving their expected utility of war. But because A has also been provoked by B breaking A's hold, A's expected utility of war now reflects both the sunk costs in has incurred, v , and the extent by which it has become provoked, vK_A : $(P - C_A + vK_A - v, 1 - P - C_B + Kd - d)$. Finally, assume that A has private information regarding its costs of war, C_A , and B has private information regarding its capabilities, $1 - P$, where two types of each state exist.

The information structure is as follows. Assume that A has private information on its cost

of war: B has an initial belief that A is the low cost type, C_{AL} , with probability e and the high cost type, C_{AH} , with probability $1 - e$. At its second decision node, B updates its beliefs that A is the low cost type to e' using Bayes Rule. Also assume that B has private information on its capabilities: A believes that B is either the strong type, $1 - P_L$, with probability r , or weak type, $1 - P_H$, with probability $1 - r$. Note that P_H means that A is powerful compared to the weak type of B. State A updates its beliefs at the final node using Bayes Rule to r' and $1 - r'$. Further assume that both states know the true value of how much state A will be provoked when A chooses a number of troops to encircle B and B breaches this encirclement, K_A , but B has private information on how provoked it will become when state A chooses a level of costs to impose on it, K . Because A has private information regarding its costs of war, the assumption that both A and B know the true value of K_A means that B can still be uncertain of whether A is resolved: provocation is conceptualized as a decrease in the political costs of war, and insofar as A's overall costs of war are uncertain to B, B may not know if vK_A is large enough to decrease A's overall costs of war and make an initially unresolved A become resolved. The solution concept is perfect Bayesian equilibrium.

Proposition 3. There exists an equilibrium in which both types of A and B are status quo states and one type of B is unresolved at the beginning of the crisis, but the low cost type of A obtains a concession from B by engaging in provocative skirmishes that risk inadvertent war, even when B knows that both types of A are status quo states. The low cost type of A demands $\tilde{x}_H = P_H + C_B - Kd$ and engages in a skirmish to both manipulate a risk of provocation \hat{k} and \hat{k}_s by imposing costs \tilde{d} on B and also force B to re-impose costs $v^ \leq v < \hat{v}$ on A if B wants to escalate, so that the low cost type of A becomes resolved for war at the final node. When B sees the demand and skirmish, it updates its beliefs to $e' = 1$, but to $e' = 0$ otherwise. Given that $e' = 1$, the weak type of B escalates to impose*

costs v on A if the true degree of provocation is high enough to make it resolved, $K \geq K^*$, but concedes the demand otherwise. The strong type of B launches a war at the fourth node if the true degree of provocation is sufficiently large to make it dissatisfied, $K \geq \hat{K}$, and escalates to impose costs v on A otherwise. A remains uncertain of B's type at the final node, $r' \in (0, 1)$, but the low cost type of A launches an "inadvertent war" because it becomes dissatisfied and $\hat{r}' < r' \leq \tilde{r}'$. At the outset of the game, the low cost type of A demands \tilde{x}_H and engages in the above skirmishes if its expected utility of doing so is no worse than living with the status quo; the high cost type of A chooses to live with the status quo. Initial beliefs are $e \in (0, 1)$ and $r \in (0, 1)$.

Both types of A and B are unresolved to go to war to change or defend the status quo at the beginning of the crisis, but the low cost type of A and strong type of B are types that can become resolved after they are provoked. If both types of A and B are satisfied initially, then $P_H - C_{A_L} < q$ and $P_L + C_B > q$.

Given these types of A and B, the low cost type of A and strong type of B can become resolved if the following are satisfied. First, when A knows B's type for sure at the final node (and hence, after A is provoked by B at the third node), both types of A prefer to initiate war against the weak type of B, but prefer to back down against the strong type of B:

$$v^* \equiv \frac{q - P_H + C_{A_H}}{K_A} \leq v$$

$$\hat{v} \equiv \frac{q - P_L + C_{A_L}}{K_A} > v$$

Thus, when $v^* \leq v < \hat{v}$, only the low cost type of A is dissatisfied at the final node. Second, if both types of A can become dissatisfied against the weak type of A at the final node, there also exists a parameter space in which when A remains uncertain of B's type,

only the low cost type of A is dissatisfied and hence initiates war. The low and high cost type of A's updated beliefs at the final node that define this boundary are the following:

$$\tilde{r}' \equiv \frac{P_H - C_{A_L} + vK_A - q}{P_H - P_L} \geq r'$$

$$\hat{r}' \equiv \frac{P_H - C_{A_H} + vK_A - q}{P_H - P_L} < r'$$

Thus, if A is still uncertain of B's type at the final node after updating, and its updated beliefs fall within the range $\hat{r}' < r' \leq \tilde{r}'$, then the low cost type of A will prefer to initiate war and the high cost type of A will prefer to back down at the final node. Finally, given that only the low cost type of A initiates war at the final node when A is uncertain of B's type, and B knows that A is the low cost type for sure at the fourth node, it is possible that the strong type of B becomes dissatisfied and initiates war at the fourth node after A provokes it by imposing costs:

$$\text{Strong B: } 1 - P_L - C_B + Kd \geq 1 - q$$

$$\text{Weak B: } 1 - P_H - C_B + Kd < 1 - q$$

Thus, the above parameter space gives rise to the possibility that even though both types of A and B are satisfied at the beginning of the crisis, both A and B can become dissatisfied during the crisis if they are provoked, given their beliefs.

Given that A and B are types that satisfy the above criteria, if A provokes B after demanding \tilde{x}_H and is able to make B believe with certainty at the fourth node that A is the low cost type, the weak type of B rejects \tilde{x}_H if $K \geq K^*$, and concedes the demand otherwise, where K^* is defined in the proof for Proposition B. The strong type of B initiates a war if it becomes dissatisfied, $K \geq \hat{K}$, and escalates to the final node otherwise, where \hat{K} is defined in the proof for Proposition B.

After demanding \tilde{x}_H , the low cost type of A can manipulate a risk of provocation that the high cost type of A is unwilling to risk and then encircles B by choosing a level of sunk cost that it will have to incur if B breaches its encirclement, $v^* \leq v < \hat{v}$, so that the low cost type of A will become dissatisfied at the final node. The risk of provocation that the low cost type of A has to manipulate can be found analogously to that in the previous Proposition, but the key difference here is that if A backs down at the final node after being provoked by B, it also ends up with a payoff that is worse than the status quo because B imposes sunk costs, v . Given that $v^* \leq v < \hat{v}$ and $\hat{r}' < r' \leq \check{r}'$ holds, the following inequality must thus be satisfied:

$$\text{High Cost A: } r[k_s(P_L - C_{AH} + vK_A) + (1 - k_s)(q - v)] + (1 - r)[k(q - v) + (1 - k)(\tilde{x}_H - v)] < q$$

Let \hat{k}_s and \hat{k} be values of k_s and k that satisfy the above inequality, where k and k_s are defined in Proposition B. Depending on the exact distribution function of the true value of K , the low cost type of A can manipulate an optimal mix of these risks of provocation (together with the reduced high demand and level of sunk costs that it has to incur) to signal its type by imposing some equilibrium amount of costs, \tilde{d} , that sets the cut point K^* to an equilibrium value \tilde{K} , that gives rise to the probability $\hat{k} = Prob[K \geq \tilde{K}]$:

$$\hat{k} = Prob[K \geq \tilde{K}]$$

$$1 - P_H - C_B + \tilde{K}d \geq 1 - \tilde{x}_H$$

$$\tilde{d} \equiv \frac{P_H + C_B - \tilde{x}_H}{\tilde{K}} \leq d$$

If $k_s < k$, then manipulating \hat{k} will also analogously generate \hat{k}_s . For \hat{k} and \hat{k}_s to be in equilibrium, they must affect A's own beliefs at the final node so that the high cost type of A would back down but the low cost type of A initiates war: $\hat{r}' < r' \leq \check{r}'$. Using Bayes

Rule, we can derive the following cut points:

$$\bar{\hat{k}} \equiv \frac{(1 - \hat{k}_s)(r - rr')}{\hat{r}' - r\hat{r}'} = \hat{k}$$

$$\underline{\hat{k}} \equiv \frac{(1 - \hat{k}_s)(r - r\check{r}')}{\check{r}' - r\check{r}'} = \hat{k}$$

$$\bar{\hat{k}}_s \equiv 1 - \frac{\hat{k}(\hat{r}' - r\hat{r}')}{r - r\hat{r}'} = \hat{k}_s$$

$$\underline{\hat{k}}_s \equiv 1 - \frac{\hat{k}(\check{r}' - r\check{r}')}{r - r\check{r}'} = \hat{k}_s$$

Thus, as long as $\underline{\hat{k}} \leq \hat{k} \leq \bar{\hat{k}}$ and $\underline{\hat{k}}_s \leq \hat{k}_s \leq \bar{\hat{k}}_s$, then $\hat{r}' < r' \leq \check{r}'$.

The low cost type of A will thus be able to signal its type if it imposes \tilde{d} , but it will do so only if its expected utility of sending the signal is at least as great as the status quo:

$$r[\hat{k}_s(P_L - C_{A_L} + vK_A) + (1 - \hat{k}_s)\{r'(P_L - C_{A_L} + vK_A - v) + (1 - r')(P_H - C_{A_L} + vK_A - v)\}] + (1 - r)[\hat{k}\{r'(P_L - C_{A_L} + vK_A - v) + (1 - r')(P_H - C_{A_L} + vK_A - v)\} + (1 - \hat{k})(\tilde{x}_H - v)] \geq q$$

Substituting Φ for $r'(P_L - C_{A_L} + vK_A - v) + (1 - r')(P_H - C_{A_L} + vK_A - v)$ yields the following:

$$\text{Low Cost A: } r[\hat{k}_s(P_L - C_{A_L} + vK_A) + (1 - \hat{k}_s)(\Phi)] + (1 - r)[\hat{k}(\Phi) + (1 - \hat{k})(\tilde{x}_H - v)] \geq q$$

Thus in equilibrium, if the low cost type of A is willing to demand \tilde{x}_H and manipulate \hat{k}_s and \hat{k} , it can signal its type by risking an inadvertent war. When B sees this signal, the weak type of B updates its beliefs to $e' = 1$ and plays according to its type and cut points K^* and \hat{K} , as mentioned above. A initiates war at the final node because $v^* \leq v < \hat{v}$ and $\hat{r}' < r' \leq \check{r}'$. The high cost type of A lives with the status quo because imitating the strong type and risking inadvertent war has a lower expected utility. ■ Q.E.D.

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