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**AWAITING A SPARK:
HOW THREE CHINESE TERRITORIAL DISPUTES
COULD JEOPARDIZE PEACE IN ASIA**

by

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December 2013

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COULD JEOPARDIZE PEACE IN ASIA**

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth and modernization of China's economic, political, and military strength over the past two decades has inspired growing acrimony and concern in the United States. Washington strongly desires the continued peace and stability in Asia, and China's subsequent rise may eventually threaten American interests in the Pacific. Furthermore, China's various territorial disputes could upset regional stability, and as China grows stronger, it may decide to use its increasing military strength to push for resolutions to the disputes in China's favor. The question remains: how likely is China to use force to solve its territorial disputes and, should China use force, will the United States ultimately be drawn into the conflict?

Case studies that involve three of the most potentially volatile of China's territorial disputes in Central Asia, India, and the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands seem to suggest that war is not inevitable, and that historically China has very rarely gone to war to resolve a territorial dispute. Ultimately, historical analysis suggests that China prefers to maintain its territorial disputes so they can be used in diplomatic negotiations as bargaining pieces, and that China has only gone to war when it has lost all bargaining power. Therefore, the current situation, wherein China seemingly has increased its bargaining leverage as its military power has grown, seems to suggest that for the near term, war is highly unlikely.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
EEZ	exclusive economic zone
ETIM	East Turkestan Islamic Movement
GWOT	Global War on Terrorism
NGO	non-governmental organization
PAP	People's Armed Police
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
U.S.	United States

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND

The rapid growth and modernization of China’s economic, political, and military strength over the past two decades has inspired growing acrimony and concern within the Pentagon. Washington is concerned that as Beijing’s international power expands, it might “take advantage of a more advanced military to threaten the use of force, or actually use force, to facilitate desirable resolutions...of territorial claims.”¹ While the focus of the international community has largely been centered on the continued threat of an invasion of Taiwan and China’s contested territorial claims in the South China Sea as the most likely sources of Chinese aggression, there are numerous lesser-known territorial disputes along China’s periphery that could result in armed conflict—and could ultimately necessitate an American military response—in the near term.

B. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

This thesis asks the question how likely is a Chinese territorial dispute to lead to war and ultimately upset the regional stability of Asia? To examine this question this thesis provides an analysis of three of the most inflammatory of China’s disputed territorial claims and their potential for conflict: the Senkaku Islands, the China-India border, and the Islamic borderlands of China’s tumultuous boundary with several Central Asian states. In each case study, this thesis considers the historical origins of each dispute, as well as what the most likely Chinese response to an escalation of hostilities in the future would be. More broadly, this thesis also asks what factors make territorial disputes so particularly contentious and how might a better understanding of the political motivations behind territorial disputes influence future American foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific region.

¹ M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders Secure Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 1.

C. IMPORTANCE

Stephen Van Evera declares that “states fight when they think they will prevail...when they believe that conquest is easy.”² With the fall of the Soviet Union and the rapid modernization of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in the two decades since the destruction of the Berlin Wall, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has found itself able to further advance its military influence on the Asian continent. Over the past decade, while the United States (U.S.) military has been tied down in Iraq and Afghanistan, China has strengthened its capabilities in the region, causing analysts, such as Aaron Friedberg to suggest that China is “acquiring the capabilities to project its power, extend its influence and defend its increasingly far-flung interests” and ultimately challenge U.S. influence in Asia.³ Thus, as Van Evera’s thesis suggests, as China’s military capability relative to its neighbors increases, China may soon decide to act aggressively to secure its longstanding territorial interests in the region.

As the United States military adjusts over the coming years to Washington’s much-publicized “pivot to the Pacific,” the likelihood of American involvement in a Chinese territorial dispute increases. As the pivot illustrates, American strategic interests are tied to the continued peace and stability of Asia. The United States has no desire to see a territorial dispute in Asia escalate into war, and as Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Jonathan Greenert declared with regards to a potential conflict with China, the United States “need[s] to avoid any kind of conflict, avoid miscalculation, and the best way to do that is to sort out how to talk to each other...learn how to communicate.”⁴ Therefore, it is paramount for the United States to be fully aware of the background and motivations behind China’s territorial disputes so Washington can handle these issues diplomatically while also being prepared to act in the event that the status quo within the region changes. Furthermore, understanding how the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)

² Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 255.

³ Aaron Friedberg and Robert Ross, “Here Be Dragons—Is China a Military Threat?,” *The National Interest*, no. 103 (September/October 2009): 20.

⁴ Kyodo News Agency, “U.S. Official Urges Communication To Avoid Territorial Flare-Ups,” *The Early Bird*, May 15, 2013.

and the PLA act in response to increased tension along China's immediate periphery will go a long way toward answering the larger strategic question that has concerned Washington: does China wish to usurp American geopolitical influence in Asia?

I argue in this thesis that China's rise does not have to threaten the security of the United States. Additionally, China's ascension could provide the United States with a key ally in the region. Like the United States, China's interests are greatly tied to the continued peace and stability of the Pacific. Along its western border in particular, where China faces the daunting prospect of the infiltration of Islamic extremists from the Central Asian states of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan into the Uyghur separatist movement in Xinjiang, there is a great potential for political and military cooperation between Washington and Beijing. Additionally, as China's power rises, the closer its strategic interests in Asia may eventually align with American foreign policy. Therefore, if a greater effort is made in Washington to understand the context behind China's territorial concerns, the United States may find itself in a better position to understand China's intentions and ultimately be able to better use diplomacy to avoid unnecessary conflict. Guaranteeing the peaceful resolution of China's territorial disputes is in everyone's best interest, and thus a greater understanding of China's past and future policy in regards to its contentious borders may prove to be the difference between war and peace.

D. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES

The primary issue that emerges in any study of Chinese military intentions is that there is no broad consensus among China analysts as to what China's true intentions are in building up its military capabilities. Opinions in Washington regarding China's military buildup and the likelihood of Chinese aggression in Asia range from alarmists who fear a second coming of the Cold War, to pragmatists, such as Taylor Fravel who believe that China is most likely to solve its territorial disputes through diplomacy and that war among China and its neighbors is highly unlikely.⁵ While China's ability to settle territorial disputes with diplomacy since the end of the Cold War suggests that

⁵ Fravel, *Strong Borders Secure Nation*, 319.

Fravel's thesis has merit, China has acted aggressively in the past when diplomacy failed, and China's growing strength may increase its willingness to use the military option. Either way, this topic is primed for debate.

Another problem that has emerged in this study is it is mostly focused on the Chinese reaction to territorial disputes and may not be able to take into account an irrational action by one of China's neighbors. For example, should rising nationalism and political pressure compel Japan to attempt to forcefully remove the PLA-N from the Senkaku islands, Beijing—despite a desire to resolve the situation diplomatically—may be pushed into a situation where it has no other option but to respond to Japanese aggression militarily. A final issue that came about during the course of this study is the difficulty in predicting the actions of non-state actors. Non-state actors, such as terrorist groups are often not rational actors and may not be deterred from violence despite China's overwhelming military superiority in the region. This will become of primary concern in the analysis of China's rugged western border, where Beijing's major issue is not with the Central Asian states of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan themselves—most territorial disputes there have been resolved or deferred since the breakup of the Soviet Union—but with the threat of Islamic radicalism spreading into Xinjiang province and fostering religious animosity among the Uyghur minority.⁶

Each case study examines several hypotheses regarding Chinese territorial disputes. For structural purposes, these hypotheses may be divided among hypotheses concerned with China's political motivations for ramping up territorial disputes, China's likely response to an increase in hostility over a contested region, and the implications to U.S. interests in the region. With regard to China's political ambitions, two competing hypotheses are examined. One hypothesis stipulates that China's heightened rhetoric regarding contentious territorial issues, such as the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute with Japan is merely a ploy by the CCP to distract an increasingly informed public from growing domestic concerns within China and drum up support for the party. Conversely, another hypothesis contends that China has nothing to gain politically from inflaming its

⁶ Fravel, *Strong Borders Secure Nation*, 165–166.

neighbors over largely uninhabited and strategically insignificant borders and thus is unlikely to be willing to go to war in a heightened situation.

Regarding China's likely response to an act of hostility in a disputed region, this thesis hypothesizes that the PLA is likely to use its technologically superior military to overwhelm its enemy in an attempt to end the conflict quickly and decisively. China has no desire to be caught in a protracted struggle with a numerically inferior adversary, where the international community is likely to become more engaged—resulting in the escalation of the conflict--and the possible involvement of the United States military. This said, a competing hypothesis regarding China's likely response to a territorial dispute centers around Fravel's thesis that China is most likely going to use diplomatic means and pursue compromise in its territorial disputes. In this scenario, China would use a territorial dispute as leverage to achieve a compromise with the competing nation on another political concern. A prime example of this is highlighted by Fravel in *Strong Borders Secure Nation*, in which he describes China's compromise in the mid-1990s over the contested border with the newly formed Central Asian nations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan in order to secure their commitment not to support the Uyghur separatist movement in Xinjiang.⁷

Lastly, in regards to the implications on U.S. foreign policy in the region, one hypothesis this study puts forward is that an increased American military presence in the region (i.e., "the pivot to the Pacific") is likely to exacerbate the political tension in the region and may have the adverse effect of hardening the Chinese resolve to pursue military solutions to their territorial disputes. A competing hypothesis stipulates that the United States may reduce the probability of conflict in the region by pursuing a "lighter footprint approach" militarily, and instead work to improve diplomatic coordination with Beijing via the State Department and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in an effort to enhance Beijing and Washington's shared interests in the region.

Of the proposed hypotheses this thesis examines, the strongest case can be made for the hypothesis that the CCP is using territorial disputes as merely a means to secure

⁷ Fravel, *Strong Borders Secure Nation*, 159.

domestic power. Historical evidence has shown that the PRC has rarely used military force over the course of the past few decades, and thus increased rhetoric is likely the result of the CCP to rally its citizens around the flag, and thus consolidate its control over an increasingly liberalizing civil society.

E. METHODS AND SOURCES

The primary method for analyzing Chinese territorial disputes and the proclivity of each to escalate into conflict is a historical examination of three case studies. By underscoring the theoretical causes behind territorial disputes combined with the historical background to each of the three disputes, predictions about the possibility of future escalation in each case can be reached. In each case study, hypotheses regarding China's military buildup, territorial aspirations, and Beijing's likely response to an escalation of conflict will be tested against historical evidence and current developments. Subsequently, conclusions can then be drawn regarding how these conclusions should affect U.S. foreign policy and what recommendations can be made concerning future American involvement in the region.

This said the examination of China's lesser-known territorial disputes does not involve a detailed discussion of the remarkable modernization of the PLA, nor a comparison of China's military capability relevant to its neighbors. Therefore, in writing this thesis, the assumption can be made that China *can* satisfy these territorial disputes militarily if it so desires, and thus, the real question is whether Beijing *will* ultimately pursue military solutions to these issues—which could bring instability to the region and possibly compel U.S. involvement. Furthermore, this study is focused mostly on Chinese intentions, and thus unforeseen aggressive action by Japan, India, or the Central Asian states played a much smaller role in the development of the thesis.

F. THESIS OVERVIEW

This examination of China's lesser-known territorial disputes and their proclivity for conflict is divided into six chapters:

- Introduction
- Major Theoretical Perspectives on Territorial Disputes
- Case Study I: The Central Asian States and Xinjiang province
- Case Study II: Aksai-Chin and the China-India Border
- Case Study III: The Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands
- Conclusions and Implications to U.S. Foreign Policy in Asia

The theoretical perspectives section focuses exclusively on the works of historians and political scientists—such as Taylor Fravel and John Mearsheimer—and discusses the major schools of thought (pragmatists and alarmists) regarding the significance of analyzing territorial disputes and their general propensity to escalate into conflict. The case study on Xinjiang province and the Central Asian states focuses primarily on China’s Uyghur Separatist movement and the influence of Islamic militants potentially crossing the border and conducting terrorist attacks against CCP and PLA elements in Xinjiang. Xinjiang is important because it represents a unique opportunity for Chinese and American interests to potentially collaborate, as both nations share a desire to root out Islamic radicals in the region. The case study on Aksai-Chin and the China-India border analyzes the historical causes of the 1962 Sino-Indian border war, what policies led to a general reconciliation of the dispute in the 1990s, and why tension along the border has flared up again over the past year. This case study is of particular importance because it has led to conflict in the past and despite diplomatic agreements, remains a point of contention between the two most-populous nations in the world. The potential for a massive land war in Southeast Asia, though remote, is particularly troublesome due to the ownership of nuclear weapons by both countries.

The case study regarding the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands focuses on the growing nationalism within both China and Japan—which is intensified by the lasting legacy of Japanese imperialism during the early twentieth century—and why this intense hatred and distrust of one another has created a potentially catastrophic situation in the East China Sea. Furthermore, the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands dispute is of particular importance to the United States due to Washington’s Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security with Japan, which necessitates American military assistance in the event Japan is attacked. A

Chinese threat to the islands, which the United States has declared will be defended as part of the treaty, thus represents a real threat of war with the PRC. Thus, outside a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, no situation in Asia represents perhaps a bigger threat of a superpower war between Washington and Beijing than the Chinese rift with Tokyo over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands.

Lastly, the section on implications to U.S. policy in Asia takes a closer look at the overall likelihood of conflict in the region, as well as discusses the major issues that could lead to escalation. With this analysis, conclusions will be made about what the United States should do to help ensure the continued peace and stability of the region, and how the actions of the Chinese can facilitate these policies. Based on the research, this section assesses whether Washington should pursue realist policies in the region and seek to use its military power to deter Beijing from action, or whether it should take liberal measures and work to lessen its military footprint in the region, while utilizing diplomatic channels and economic interdependence to draw the PRC deeper into the international community. By studying the history of these territorial disputes and understanding how they fit into the bigger theoretical context regarding the causes of conflict, answers to these fundamental questions are proposed.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. INTRODUCTION

Analysis of the potential for escalation of a Chinese territorial dispute into a regional war requires a further examination of existing literature regarding whether China's rise is a harbinger of potential chaos in Asia. Furthermore, a thorough discussion of why territorial disputes in general are so potentially dangerous is also necessary. In this context, this chapter examines the scholarly debate about whether China can rise peacefully or not, while also discussing why an escalation of a territorial dispute is the most likely cause for an uptick in hostilities between Washington and Beijing.

Consequently, an examination of the potential escalation of a Chinese territorial dispute into war encompasses two primary literatures: one on China's strategic position in the world today; and another on the broader role of borders and territorial disputes as a cause on international conflict. These literatures help to answer the major research questions addressed in this thesis by providing numerous interpretations and conclusions regarding both China's military aspirations in the region and the overall relevance of the study of territorial disputes in predicting future conflict.

B. IS CHINA'S RISE DANGEROUS?

There are two prevailing schools of thought regarding the political ramifications of Beijing's rise: alarmists who see China as an emerging power bent on establishing regional hegemony in Asia; and pragmatists who believe the recent history of the PRC shows a political regime that needs stability to maintain power and that has more often than not dealt with its territorial disputes with diplomacy instead of violence.

The leading voice of the alarmist school of thought regarding the China threat is realist theorist John Mearsheimer. In his book, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Mearsheimer argues that China presents the most dangerous potential threat to Washington.⁸ Mearsheimer openly attacks the neo-liberal view that the threat of a great

⁸ John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 362.

power war has been expelled from the world and contends that China's political rise and increasing military influence in Asia is a prime example of realist policies. Accordingly, Mearsheimer argues that China represents the "high church of *realpolitik* in the post-Cold War world" and that its actions since the fall of the Berlin Wall have been designed to establish its role as the dominant power in Asia.⁹ Mearsheimer sees little room for cooperation between China and the United States on security issues because Beijing believes that "the United States is bent on preventing China from becoming the dominant great power in Northeast Asia" and thus stands in the way of the achievement of the PRC's strategic goals in the region.¹⁰ Asserting that relations between Beijing and Washington have "worsened" since the end of the Cold War, Mearsheimer contends the CCP sees the United States—due to its continued alliance with Japan and unspoken support for Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion of the island—as its most likely potential enemy.¹¹

Mearsheimer does acknowledge that China has avoided the use of military force since the end of the Cold War, but he argues it should not be forgotten that Beijing has "demonstrated [in the past] that is willing to employ the sword to achieve particular political goals."¹² Furthermore, Mearsheimer argues China's lack of military action over the past two decades has been due to its "limited power-projection capability, and therefore it cannot be too aggressive toward other states in the region."¹³ To solve this issue, Mearsheimer points to China's massive military modernization program over the past three decades, which he views as evidence that China's current inaction in the region will not last indefinitely.

Mearsheimer concludes that the current American foreign policy to "engage" China instead of "contain" it is misguided. He insists, "a wealthy China would not be a

⁹ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 375.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 376.

¹³ *Ibid.*

status quo power but an aggressive state determined to achieve regional hegemony.”¹⁴ China will do so, Mearsheimer continues, not because it is an evil nation, but “because the best way for any state to maximize its prospects for survival is to be the hegemon in its region of the world.”¹⁵ Thus, because it is not in America’s best interest to allow China to assume hegemony over Asia, a potential conflict in the Pacific theater is highly possible in the coming decades.

Since writing *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Mearsheimer has revisited the issue of the rise of Chinese political power in Asia. In his 2010 essay, “The Gathering Storm: China’s Challenge to U.S. Power in Asia,” Mearsheimer reasserts his position that a potential war between Beijing and Washington is likely to occur in the not-so-distant future.¹⁶ Rehashing his previous assessment that China is merely following traditional realist doctrine by expanding its influence in the Asia-Pacific region, he writes that Beijing’s strategic interests are undoubtedly going to challenge American hegemony in the Pacific. Mearsheimer argues that China’s military buildup is rational, asking the question, “Why would China feel safe with U.S. forces deployed on its doorstep? Following the logic of the Monroe Doctrine, would not China’s security be better served by pushing the American military out of the Asia-Pacific region?”¹⁷ Conversely, Mearsheimer argues that the United States has no desire to relinquish its role as the hegemonic power in Asia, and thus “can be expected to go to great lengths to contain China and ultimately weaken it to the point where it is no longer a threat to rule the roost in Asia.”¹⁸ Consequently, Mearsheimer concludes that a war between a rising China and the United States is becoming increasingly likely.

The closest supporter of Mearsheimer’s thesis is Aaron Friedberg, who argues in an essay titled “Here Be Dragons” that China’s rise is a direct challenge to American strategic interests in Asia. Friedberg contends that China’s military modernization has

¹⁴ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 402.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ John Mearsheimer, “The Gathering Storm: China’s Challenge to U.S. Power in Asia,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3 (2010): 382.

¹⁷ Ibid., 390.

¹⁸ Ibid.

been directed specifically at developing the capabilities to limit the ability of the American military to dictate its will in the Pacific. These capabilities are known as an “anti-access/area-denial” strategy, and Friedberg declares China’s goal is “not to match the American’s ship-for-ship and plane-for-plane but rather to develop certain specialized capabilities designed to make it difficult, if not impossible, for U.S. forces to operate freely anywhere close to China’s coasts.”¹⁹ Furthermore, like Mearsheimer, Friedberg disagrees with the current American policy to “engage” China, because “despite America’s fervent embrace in recent years, [China] has shown no inclination whatsoever to slow [its] military buildup.”²⁰ Thus, Friedberg concludes, China does not see the United States as an ally but as a “strategic competitor” in Asia.

While not as fervent as Friedberg, Unryu Suganuma also shares Mearsheimer’s contention that China’s rise could result in a great power conflict in Asia. A Japanese international relations theorist, Suganuma believes the rise of Japanese nationalism, combined with China’s increasingly aggressive policies concerning the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, could lead to a third Sino-Japanese War. In his book, *Sovereign Rights and Territorial Space in Sino-Japanese Relations*, Suganuma points to irredentism as the likely cause for the increased hostility between the two nations over a seemingly insignificant group of rocks. Therefore, China and Japan each believes that it has a historical “right” to the islands, and that “challenges to the territorial integrity of the state become challenges to the definition of the people and their history.”²¹ Suganuma declares that China’s military rise makes a diplomatic resolution of the territorial dispute unlikely. In particular, China’s increased capability has put it in a unique position of strength regarding the Japanese, and thus, the “Chinese will not make any compromise” with its former colonizer.²² Furthermore, Suganuma concludes that China’s increased self-confidence expands to include the potential of an escalated conflict with the United States, whom it sees likely to intervene on behalf of its ally Tokyo. As evidence,

¹⁹ Friedberg and Ross, “Here Be Dragons—Is China a Military Threat?,” 21.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

²¹ Unryu Suganuma, *Sovereign Rights and Territorial Space in Sino-Japanese Relations* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), 1.

²² *Ibid.*, 159.

Suganuma cites a speech in 1993 by CCP leader Jiang Zemin, who declared, “we are not afraid of...confrontation and challenge with hegemonists [*sic*]. For the motherland’s sovereignty, independence and dignity, we are ready to pay a price.”²³ Thus, outside the complete withdrawal of Japanese territorial claims for Diaoyu/Senkaku—which he believes is highly unlikely—Suganuma concludes that the territorial disputes between China and Japan are likely to lead to conflict.²⁴

The second school of thought on Chinese territorial intentions, dubbed pragmatists in this work, contends that China’s recent political rise and military buildup do not pose a direct threat to peace and stability in Asia. The leading voice of this school of thought is Taylor Fravel, whose 2008 book *Strong Borders Secure Nation* is an encompassing look at the history of the PRC’s territorial disputes. Fravel’s main thesis is that upon examination of China’s past, it is apparent that China will most likely use diplomatic measures—and will therefore restrain from using violence—in order to secure its territorial claims. Fravel points out that since the founding of the PRC in 1949, China has “participated in twenty-three...territorial disputes with its neighbors...yet it has pursued compromise and offered concessions in seventeen of these conflicts.”²⁵ Therefore, Fravel believes an analysis of China’s history proves it is much more likely to pursue diplomacy and compromise over contested regions than use military force.

The crux of Fravel’s argument is his contention that a state is more likely to bargain in a dispute when it is in a position of greater strength than its adversary. Thus, as China’s relative power grows, Beijing is much more likely to pursue diplomatic measures to resolve any disputes that may arise. Conversely, Fravel insists China’s history has shown it is more willing to use military force in a situation where its bargaining power has declined. Fravel contends the most dangerous situation is “when a state concludes that an adversary is strengthening its relative position in a dispute...[therefore] inaction becomes more costly than threatening or even using force to halt or reverse its decline.”²⁶

²³ Suganuma, *Sovereign Rights and Territorial Space in Sino-Japanese Relations*.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 162.

²⁵ Fravel, *Strong Borders Secure Nation*, 2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

Thus, Fravel concludes that as long as Beijing continues to have the superior bargaining position regarding its territorial disputes, then it is likely to use military force only as a last resort. Additionally, Beijing's compromises in past disputes have "signaled its acceptance of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbors" and thus lessened the chances of future conflict on its borders.²⁷ However, Fravel warns China will use force "when its vital interests are at stake" (such as in Taiwan). Nevertheless, Fravel concludes that Taiwan "provides a poor indicator of China's territorial ambitions in the region and its willingness to resort to force in the future" since it is seen within Beijing as a "core interest" and not a territorial dispute.²⁸ Therefore, while the potential for Chinese military action may persist, Fravel believes it will not be the result of any enduring territorial dispute.

Other scholars who share Fravel's opinion that future Chinese aggression on its borders is unlikely are David Finklestein and Robert Ross—though they differ on why Chinese aggression is unlikely. Finklestein, in his essay "Chinese Perceptions of the Costs of a Conflict," concludes that the likelihood of Chinese military aggression in a territorial dispute—particularly regarding Taiwan—decreases significantly as China's ties to the West and the ASEAN countries strengthen. Finklestein contends the PRC is foremost concerned with economic reform and modernization, and that the escalation of a territorial dispute into war would place their long-term goals of economic prosperity at risk. Therefore, Finkelstein argues, "A protracted struggle might drag in the developed Western world and Japan and dramatically and adversely affect the nature of foreign investment and...assistance to long-term economic and other modernization programs."²⁹ Consequently, Finkelstein contends that China cannot afford to risk its growing economic and political power over what he views are superfluous territorial claims.

Ross, on the other hand, believes that China will not act aggressively in Asia due to its continued inferiority compared to the United States military. Ross concludes that

²⁷ Fravel, *Strong Borders Secure Nation*, 9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 319.

²⁹ David M. Finkelstein, "Chinese Perceptions of the Costs of a Conflict," in *The Costs of Conflict: The Impact on China of a Future War*, ed. Andrew Scobell (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2001), 24.

Washington remains the preeminent power in Asia and will do what is necessary to check Chinese aggression in the region. Ross acknowledges that China's confidence in its military capabilities has increased in recent years, but he counters that China faces "enduring difficulties...in developing advanced weaponry, [its forces continue to be vulnerable] to U.S. capabilities and [Washington has consistently been able to] adjust defense policy to maintain superiority in the western Pacific."³⁰ Therefore, despite its rapid modernization, the PLA still remains inferior to Washington's capabilities, and thus the continued presence of the American military in Asia will continue to act as a deterrent to Chinese aggression for the foreseeable future.

C. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON TERRITORIAL DISPUTES: WHY ARE THEY SO VOLATILE?

In regard to the theoretical causes and implications of territorial disputes, the most comprehensive academic work on the subject is Paul Huth's 1998 book *Standing Your Ground: Territorial Disputes and International Conflict*. Huth contends that the lack of study in international politics regarding territorial disputes can be drawn from an overarching bias among scholars to only focus on the actions of major Western and European powers—who have maintained fairly stable physical borders over the past century.³¹ Huth argues that a study of territorial disputes is necessary because history has proven that territorial disputes are likely only to end in military violence. Huth's main thesis is that political leaders have no incentive to compromise in territorial disputes because it would be seen domestically as a significant "foreign policy defeat for the leadership and risked popular...opposition. Thus, disputes involving issues of ethnic irredentism, national unification, or the recovery of lost national territory were generally not settled by compromise."³² These domestic influences on the political decision-making process stand as the primary evidence Huth points to in supporting his thesis. In the end, Huth contends, "foreign policy decision makers are...leaders who view security

³⁰ Friedberg and Ross, "Here Be Dragons—Is China a Military Threat?," 31.

³¹ Paul K. Huth, *Standing Your Ground: Territorial Disputes and International Conflict* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 3.

³² *Ibid.*, 184.

policy as both a potential threat to their position of domestic political power, as well as an opportunity to strengthen their domestic political position.”³³ Therefore, an analysis of Huth’s argument suggests that the PRC is unlikely to compromise over its territorial claims in the Diaoyu Islands because doing so would be seen among the Chinese people as a political defeat to the hated Japanese. Taken a step further, in an instance where political unrest in China escalates to a level the CCP is uncomfortable with, they can drum up nationalistic fervor over Japan’s claims to the islands to help consolidate their control over the country.

Building upon Huth’s thesis, Krista Wiegand’s book *Enduring Territorial Disputes* argues that territorial disputes often go unresolved as a result of their ability to be used as a bargaining chip in non-territorial negotiations. Wiegand asserts that certain states can “benefit from the endurance of disputes when other salient disputed issues exist...[which] provides an opportunity for states to pursue a strategy of issue linkage and coercive diplomacy.”³⁴ Thus, Wiegand—like Huth—concludes that states typically have little incentive to settle territorial disputes and are much more inclined to pursue military action if a dispute persists over a long period of time.³⁵ Therefore, Wiegand believes the only way to remove the threat of conflict regarding a territorial dispute is to encourage greater cooperation among the rival states. Following the neo-liberal maxim that greater international cooperation and interdependence breeds peace and security, Wiegand proposes that states that engage in territorial disputes should join a “shared alliance, [sign] treaties on another [less contentious] issue, or [increase] trade or investment...so they are more willing to work toward resolution [of territorial concerns].”³⁶ Hence, Wiegand concludes, “by resolving the other disputed issues [such as lack of trade or bilateral cooperation] states...have an incentive to engage in territorial dispute settlement attempts or even be willing to drop their territorial claims.”³⁷

³³ Huth, *Standing Your Ground*, 185.

³⁴ Krista E. Wiegand, *Enduring Territorial Disputes: Strategies of Bargaining, Coercive Diplomacy, and Settlement* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 294.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

This said, does China's recent military buildup give it any added advantage in resolving its territorial claims in Beijing's favor? Interestingly, Huth's thesis does not seem to support that argument. Huth contends that while increased military power does play a role in "deterring large-scale attacks," it is not as useful in preventing the smaller-scale "border raids and armed insurgencies" likely to drum up over a contested territory.³⁸ Therefore, China's massive military modernization program is unlikely to discourage the Uighur separatists in Xinjiang from taking advantage of China's porous border with the Central Asian states since China's development of an advanced fifth generation fighter aircraft or a new ballistic missile is going to have little tactical value in a border skirmish. In the eyes of the Uighur's, China's military might means little because their objective is not to invade and overthrow the PRC, but to create a situation within Xinjiang that further escalates the tension among the local population and further bolsters the insurgency. While Beijing may attempt to increase its military presence in the province to quell the insurgency, Huth's thesis suggests that may only worsen the situation by infuriating the local population.

Furthermore, Huth argues that since territorial disputes are mostly driven by domestic political fervor, a nation's particular military power is of little consequence in the declaration of territorial claims and it will "not deter weak countries from making territorial claims or compel weak countries to make territorial concessions."³⁹ Therefore, while China's navy has increased its power projection capability within the South China Sea, it has not deterred the significantly weaker Philippine or Vietnamese navies from asserting its rights to territorial sovereignty over the Scarborough Shoal or the Parcel Islands. Consequently, Huth's concludes that no matter the disparity in the relative military capabilities of two nations, if there is a domestic outcry for the resolution of a territorial dispute, then a given nation is unlikely to back down from a territorial claim and will be unlikely to compromise its territorial interests, even in the face of an overwhelming military threat.

³⁸ Huth, *Standing Your Ground*, 188.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Huth's thesis infers that an uptick in domestic instability within China could cause the CCP to escalate tensions in a territorial dispute as a means to distract the local population from domestic concerns. Conversely, Taylor Fravel sees little reason to assume that a Chinese territorial dispute is likely to escalate due to domestic tensions. Fravel challenges the contention that domestic unrest could trigger an escalation of a territorial dispute and says China, since the end of the Cold War, represents an excellent test case for debunking that theory. Dubbed "Divisionary War Theory" by Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder, the belief is that "leaders are more likely to escalate crisis during periods of domestic political unrest, using tensions abroad to unite and rally society at home."⁴⁰ Fravel disagrees with this analysis and instead asserts that while China has been rife with domestic turmoil over the past two decades, countless case studies has proven that "China usually pursued cooperation in its territorial disputes, not escalation."⁴¹ The evidence seems to support Fravel's argument, because despite significant domestic turmoil, and an increasingly superior military capability relative to its neighbors, "China has only used force twice since 1990, first with the occupation of Mischief Reef in late 1994 and then during the 1995–96 Taiwan Strait crisis"—which should be considered an outlier to China's typical response to a territorial dispute since Taiwan has long been labeled a "core interest" for Beijing.⁴² Therefore, while territorial disputes clearly remain contentious issues, the CCP has shown little reason over the past two decades to cause the United States to believe that—outside of Taiwan—the PRC will pursue an aggressive military response to resolve its territorial disputes. As Fravel indicates, Beijing has been much more likely over the past twenty years to resolve its issues through bilateral diplomacy.

This said, is past performance a real indicator of future action as Fravel suggests? John Mearsheimer would surely disagree. As he points out in his essay "The Gathering Storm," while China may have pursued peaceful solutions in the past, it is no guarantee that it is likely to do so in the future. Mearsheimer argues that "it is impossible to identify

⁴⁰ Fravel, *Strong Borders Secure Nation*, 307.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, 309.

who will be running the foreign policy of any country five or 10 years from now, much less whether they will have aggressive intentions,” and therefore past performance cannot be used as an accurate predictor of future intentions.⁴³ Thus, China may have perfectly innocent intentions today; however, any number of domestic or international geopolitical events could occur in the coming years to change the strategic thinking of the PRC. Consequently, it would be extremely foolhardy for the United States to use past events as the sole factor in determining the likelihood of an escalation of conflict in the Pacific, and thus it is prudent for Washington to take some precautionary measures—i.e., stationing additional naval assets in the region as part of the “Pivot to the Pacific”—in the event of an unanticipated outbreak of hostilities.

Territorial disputes are potentially dangerous because they encompass emotions, such as nationalism, xenophobia, and irredentism, which are not tangible and thus unlikely to lead to compromise. Furthermore, China’s sudden rise and military expansion has come so quickly, its true ambitions and capabilities in the region are hard for foreign policy analysts to predict. Consequently, existing literature regarding both territorial disputes and China’s rise provide conflicting scenarios of what China’s future ambitions in Asia may hold. Furthermore, the inherent pessimism exhibited in both the Huth and Wiegand books—regarding the high potential for conflict surrounding territorial disputes—suggests that there remains a cause for concern among advocates for the status quo in Asia, and Washington must be cognizant of the potential for conflict in the region.

⁴³ Mearsheimer, “The Gathering Storm,” 383.

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III. THE CENTRAL ASIAN STATES AND XINJIANG PROVINCE

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the first of the three case studies discussed in this thesis: the role of the PRC in dealing with the Uyghur separatist movement in Xinjiang province and how China's long and relatively unguarded border with the Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan could increase instability within China. This chapter examines the historical causes of the conflict within Xinjiang, and will also discuss if either the Uyghur's or the Han have a legitimate historical claim toward governance of the region. Furthermore, due to the potential influx of modern-day mujahedeen into Xinjiang from these Central Asian states—as well as from Afghanistan and Pakistan—the PRC has been careful in dealing with the internal stability caused by the Uyghur separatists. Therefore, this chapter also analyzes competing hypotheses regarding China's likely response to the situation and discusses whether China's historical and more recent actions in the region offer any insight toward its future direction in dealing with this insurrection. Lastly, this chapter discusses the potential implications for U.S. foreign policy within Central Asia, and whether American desire to combat violent extremism in Central Asia could offer an avenue for increasing bilateral military engagement with the PLA. Consequently, this chapter ultimately concludes that the Uyghur separatist movement in Xinjiang has provided Washington an excellent opportunity to engage China not only on counterterrorism but also in regards to the protection of universal human rights. Therefore, the United States must pursue a peaceful settlement of this situation via existing neo-liberal institutions, such as the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of human rights.

B. BACKGROUND

The morning of September 11, 2001 was a watershed moment for international relations in Central Asia. The decision by Al-Qaeda to hijack commercial airliners and crash them into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon shifted the attention of the American government to Central Asia—and to the staunch Islamic militarism that

seemed to be cultivated there. The subsequent U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001 brought the full brunt of the American military to China's western border, and helped confirm Beijing's desire to solidify multilateral relations with Russia and the Central Asian nations as a consequence of expanding American firepower in the region.⁴⁴ More importantly, however, the September 11 attacks on the United States and the subsequent American Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) created for Beijing an excellent avenue for responding to the international condemnation centered on its heavy handed approach in suppressing the Uyghur revolts in Xinjiang.

Linking the Uyghur movement to the broader global jihadist movement championed by Al-Qaeda, Beijing attempted to change the narrative regarding Xinjiang from an internal national separatist movement to an external international issue centered on the influx of Al-Qaeda supported radical Islamic terrorism.⁴⁵ Consequently, the Uyghur separatists became referenced by the PRC as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), and the actions of the PLA and the People's Armed Police (PAP) in Xinjiang was therefore justified when the United States government—arguably seeking to increase Beijing's support for the broader GWOT and the eventual invasion of Iraq—labeled the ETIM as an international terrorist organization. This decision was ultimately “the single most important act lending validity to China's claims that it faces a substantial Uyghur terrorist threat...[since it] resulted in grave consequences affecting the lives of Uyghurs” by supplying to China the international approval necessary to violently suppress the Uyghur's.⁴⁶

Therein lay the great quandary for American politicians desperate to recruit Chinese assistance to take a greater role in helping defeat violent extremist organizations: is the potential for economic and military assistance for counterterrorist operations from the Chinese really worth accepting Beijing's definition of a terrorist organization? As the United States has withdrawn from its military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and

⁴⁴ Fravel, *Strong Borders Secure Nation*, 144.

⁴⁵ Sean Roberts, “Imaginary Terrorism? The Global War on Terror and the Narrative of the Uyghur Terrorist Threat,” *The Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies (IERES), Elliott School of International Affairs*, Washington, DC: George Washington University, 2012, 5–6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

subsequently stepped back from the broader GWOT—which President Barack Obama now labels as Overseas Contingency Operations—there seems to be a renewed emphasis among some in Washington getting China to answer for its human rights violations in Xinjiang. Therefore, U.S.-China relations regarding Xinjiang seem to be at a crossroads, particularly as the U.S. turned its attention once again toward the Pacific after a decade of war in the Middle East.

C. HISTORICAL CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT

The main cause of the conflict between the Uyghur separatists and the Han-dominant PRC rests in their stark disagreement over which group has historical precedence over governance of Xinjiang. As Stephen Van Evera declares in his essay “Hypotheses on Nationalism and War,” how one side or another interprets history plays a major role in the potential volatility of a conflict. Therefore, he hypothesizes that “the more divergent of the beliefs of the nationalities about their mutual history...the greater the risk of war.”⁴⁷ Consequently, applying Van Evera’s hypothesis to this case study, the fact that the Uyghurs and the Han have vastly different opinions about Chinese historical roots in Xinjiang means that they are not likely going to be able to come to a compromise in this situation, and therefore violent escalation of the conflict is likely to occur.

Ironically, another of Van Evera’s hypotheses implies that violent escalation in Xinjiang is unlikely due to the huge advantage of Chinese military power in the region. Van Evera declares that “stateless nationalisms whose statehood is unattainable will lie dormant...deterred by the power of the central state. Nationalism...can produce war when the power-balance between [the state and the nationalists] shifts to allow the possibility of successful secession.”⁴⁸ Thus, the simple fact that it is nearly impossible for the Uyghurs to win their independence from China should prohibit them from rebelling. Despite this, however, the Uyghurs have ignored the overwhelming dominance of the PLA in Xinjiang and have continued to push for independence. Thus, in order to analyze

⁴⁷ Stephen Van Evera, “Hypotheses on Nationalism and War,” *International Security* 18, no. 4 (1994): 9.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

why this dispute is so inflammatory, Van Evera's first hypothesis must be examined and a detailed discussion of the history of the dispute must be made.

The Han and the Uyghurs differ greatly on the historical governance of China over Xinjiang, which has ultimately led to the escalation of the conflict between the two groups. The Uyghur' are culturally and ethnically tied to the larger nomadic Turkic populations of Central Asia who migrated to Xinjiang over a thousand years ago. On the other hand, Beijing has long declared that Xinjiang has been part of a greater "China" for thousands of years—and therefore, belonged to the Chinese long before the Uyghur's settled there. Conversely, the Uyghurs insist that Chinese governance did not arrive in Xinjiang until the eighteenth century. Frederick Starr in the book "Xinjiang" declares that history is on the side of the Uyghurs, concluding "until the eighteenth century no Chinese dynasty had continuously controlled for any length of time...the entire territory [of Xinjiang]...[therefore] current Chinese claims that Xinjiang has been part of China for 5,000 years have only rhetoric on their side."⁴⁹ Starr declares that imperial Chinese rule over Xinjiang did not come to Xinjiang until the conquest over the region by the Qing Empire in 1759. Consequently, he contends that while China's historical claims may be exaggerated, Beijing's control of the region "does not have to be ancient to be significant...[because the Qing] conquest established the mechanisms of control...that have characterized Chinese attitudes toward Xinjiang ever since."⁵⁰ Ultimately, Starr concludes that before the Qing conquest, formal governance over Xinjiang was essentially non-existent, and thus it was the Manchus (and thereafter their successors the Chinese) who legally established the political structure that became Xinjiang province.

Taylor Fravel, however, contends that the Qing exhibited very little administrative control over Xinjiang and that the province was "ruled as a military colony and was not integrated into the centralized provincial system of administration."⁵¹ Fravel is correct; for over the first century of Qing control over Xinjiang, the province had no formal

⁴⁹ S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland* (New York: Central Asia Caucus Institute, 2004), 48.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Fravel, *Strong Borders Secure Nation*, 109.

administrative ties to Beijing, and was simply an imperial territory somewhat akin to a British colony during the same time period. This is mostly due to internal debates within the Qing court over the strategic value of Xinjiang, with some officials bemoaning the lack of agricultural worth of the region that they dubbed a “barren wasteland,” while other officials believed the region served as a “vital buffer...[to protect] against invasion from the west.”⁵² Ultimately, the strategic buffer that Xinjiang was seen to provide overrode Qing concerns over its seeming lack of agricultural value and the region remained under Qing control not as a tributary, but as a “special administrative zone” overseen by military commanders and “soldiers [who] worked fields adjoining their garrisons.”⁵³

Therefore, it is clear the Qing had a tremendous influence in shaping the political infrastructure of Xinjiang. Through various unique policies, the Qing laid the foundation for the transition of Xinjiang from a Qing military colony to a formally administrated province of Qing China by 1884.⁵⁴ In its incorporation of Xinjiang, Starr highlights four essential policies the Qing instituted that dramatically shaped the political trajectory of the region. First, the Qing immediately replaced the traditional tribal and nomadic rule that had existed over the region for centuries with a “Chinese-style administration system.” Secondly, in so doing, the Qing replaced the “local Turkic...princes and Manchu and Mongol military officials” that had ruled the area with a “solidly ethnic Han officialdom,” which entrenched Qing dominance over the region. Third, the Qing instituted a large Han Chinese immigration to the region, a policy that would be repeated again by the CCP in the second half of the twentieth century. Lastly, the Qing pushed for the “cultural assimilation” of the local population “through Confucian education.”⁵⁵ All of these policies cemented Qing governance over the region and helped lay the foundation for the territory’s official administration into Qing China in 1884.

⁵² Starr, *Xinjiang*, 61.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

Following the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911 the new Chinese Republic lost a measure of control over Xinjiang. After Yuan Shikai took control over the government in Beijing, Yang Zengxin took control of Urumchi, the capital of the province, leaving Yuan little choice but to recognize his rule over Xinjiang.⁵⁶ Starr asserts that while Xinjiang officially remained apart of China, “Yang [merely] paid lip service to Chinese authority [and] ran his province as an autocracy.”⁵⁷ This is not a unique situation for the post-Qing warlord era, for during this time, the majority of the Chinese provinces were ruled by independent dictators who ruled each region as his own kingdom.

This distinctive period of quasi-independent rule in Xinjiang continued after the end of the warlord era as Chiang Kai-Shek and the Nationalists seized power. Fravel claims that “during the [entirety of the] Republican era...Han Chinese warlords controlled the area, but [ruled] in almost complete independence of [Chiang’s] government...[and] maintained far closer administrative and economic ties with the Soviet Union than with China proper.”⁵⁸ Ultimately, however, Xinjiang remained under de-facto Chinese control despite all of the political turmoil that engulfed China in the first half of the twentieth century: from the fall of the Qing, to the autocratic conditions of the warlord state period, to the Japanese invasion, the rise and fall of Chiang and the Nationalists, and ultimately the rise of Mao and the CCP in 1949. Throughout it all—unlike other frontier Chinese territories, such as Tibet and Mongolia—Xinjiang never declared independence from China.

Upon assuming control of the country, the CCP faced a daunting prospect in defending its control over Xinjiang, particularly in the wake of the Sino-Soviet split that emanated between the two communist nations beginning around 1960. Mao quickly realized that Xinjiang remained isolated from China proper, which maintained minimal contact with Beijing and the majority of whose “trade was conducted with adjacent Soviet republics, not with the provinces of China proper.”⁵⁹ The Soviet influence in the

⁵⁶ Starr, *Xinjiang*, 68.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁵⁸ Fravel, *Strong Borders Secure Nation*, 102.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

region was substantial, with the majority of the local Uyghur population finding closer cultural, racial, and spiritual ties to the Soviets than the Han. Therefore, with the onset of the split with Moscow, Beijing faced a major challenge in defending its massive and mostly undefended border with the USSR and its satellites in Central Asia. As Fravel argues, the CCP believed the “USSR was deliberately seeking to destabilize” Xinjiang, and therefore, Beijing “moved quickly to strengthen its control of the border.”⁶⁰

Ultimately, due the tenuous diplomatic situation with Moscow, and the fear that they would instigate a Uyghur rebellion in order to help destabilize Chinese control in the region, the CCP took two successive steps in 1962 to consolidate its control in Xinjiang. In order to quell any Soviet influence over the Uyghur’s, Beijing first “closed all Soviet consulates in Xinjiang...and [then] ceased all border trade...with the Soviet Union and Mongolia.”⁶¹ After cutting off Soviet influence in Xinjiang, Beijing took the steps to try to secure their contested western border in the hopes of decreasing the availability of outside assistance to the Uyghurs. Seeing their disputed western border with the Soviet Union as a diplomatic bargaining chip, Beijing quickly worked to resolve disputes with its neighbors in “North Korea, Mongolia...and Afghanistan,” and in all cases, China was consistent in its “willingness to compromise” in its territorial claims in order to limit foreign intrusion in Xinjiang.⁶² Consequently, Beijing reached out to Moscow and while talks eventually “deteriorated...[and] produced no final agreement, both sides [did] reach a consensus on how to delimit the Chinese-Soviet border...that was almost identical to the agreement they signed in 1991.”⁶³

In the end, the Sino-Soviet split intensified and the agreement that was nearly reached in 1964 was shelved for nearly three decades. With the threat of a Soviet invasion becoming increasingly more likely in the late 1960s, Beijing fortified its military position and backed away from any bilateral discussions. However, the policy of compromise that China clearly showed in the run-up to the Sino-Soviet split—and its

⁶⁰ Fravel, *Strong Borders Secure Nation*, 104.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 119.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 120.

subsequent backing away from diplomatic engagement afterwards—shows that it was the internal threat of rebellion in Xinjiang that ultimately influenced Beijing to compromise on its territorial disputes. Fravel concludes that it was “the timing of compromise efforts (which occurred almost simultaneously after the promulgation of the fear in Beijing of a Soviet-sponsored Uyghur uprising)...[that] explains why and when China [cooperated].”⁶⁴ Ultimately, this highlights the blatant insecurity the CCP has felt in regard to its authority in Xinjiang, and that despite China’s claims to the contrary, the Uyghurs have a legitimate grievance in concern to their historical subservience to the Han.

D. THE FALL OF THE SOVIET UNION AND HOW IT CONTINUES TO SHAPE CHINESE POLICY IN XINJIANG

The fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent independence of its former Central Asian republics set the stage for China’s latest round of diplomatic compromise on its border. In the early 1990s, as former Communist governments in Eastern Europe and the USSR crumbled in the wake of the end of the Cold War, a new era of nationalist sentiment spread across the world. From Eastern Europe to Central Asia, former Soviet republics gained political independence, with a large percentage of the new states being formed around ethnic lines. While the fall of Communism brought political freedom to the Turkic and Persian peoples of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, it brought no such political governance to the Uyghurs.

The PRC, feeling the full brunt of the anti-Communist movement with the brutal student protests at Tiananmen Square in 1989, moved quickly to squash the resurgent Uyghur calls for independence. Understanding that the stability of the regime was essential—particularly to maintain the momentum of the sweeping economic reforms occurring in China at that time—Beijing again used its disputed western border as a diplomatic bargaining chip to buy the allegiance of the new governments in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, as well as kick start the three decade old discussion with Moscow. By again compromising on its territorial concessions, Beijing secured the

⁶⁴ Fravel, *Strong Borders Secure Nation*, 125.

allegiance of the Uyghur's most likely allies. These territorial agreements set the stage for the annual meetings between the nations known originally as the Shanghai Five, which soon resulted in the landmark foundation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) with the addition of Uzbekistan in 2001. As Fravel notes, the roots of Chinese internal insecurity regarding Xinjiang played a major role in the founding of the SCO, in which all the founding states “pledged a shared opposition to ‘separatism’...and “matched China’s objectives...to cooperate to oppose ethno-nationalist movements...[and] counter internal threats from pan-Islamic forces.”⁶⁵ Therefore, while the end of the Cold War enflamed nationalist sentiment among the Uyghurs, Beijing used the tenuous political situation to secure new allies on their vital western border, while depriving the Uyghurs of their only potential external outlet of support.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, DC on September 11, 2001, gave the Chinese further opportunity to marginalize the Uyghur calls for national independence. Ironically, cursed by their Muslim faith—during a time of widespread and reactionary anti-Muslim sentiment among the major powers of the world—the Uyghurs were unfairly tied to the ethnically Arab Islamic terrorists, whom the Uyghurs shared no similarity with other than their faith. Ostracized by the Chinese and ignored by the majority of the international community, the Uyghurs are left in the desperate situation where they cannot protest Chinese rule without risking being labeled a part of the ETIM and being subjected to Beijing’s brutal counter-terrorist measures. As Elizabeth Van Wie Davis points out in her essay “Uyghur Muslim Ethnic Separatism in Xinjiang,” the tragic part is “there is no single Uyghur agenda,” while some are calling for an independent state of East Turkistan, a large percentage just wants to “maintain [their] cultural distinction within an autonomous relationship with China,” while another group wants to integrate further with Beijing.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Fravel, *Strong Borders Secure Nation*, 159–160.

⁶⁶ Elizabeth Van Wie Davis, “Uyghur Muslim Ethnic Separatism in Xinjiang, China,” *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 35, no. 1 (2008): 1.

Ironically, Beijing's policy toward the Uyghurs since 2001 has only intensified the violence in the region. As Sean Roberts notes, Beijing's labeling of the Uyghur Separatists as terrorists has increased the potential for violence because "it could turn Islamic extremists against China...[and ultimately give the] relatively few Uyghur militants something that has thus far been elusive for them, external support."⁶⁷ Furthermore, Roberts goes on to conclude that as the Uyghur's become more alienated, Beijing's harsh policies "could sway much more substantial popular support among [the] Uyghur's toward such militants."⁶⁸ If Beijing's ultimate goal is to maintain stability in the province, then backing off its harsh counter-terrorist campaign in Xinjiang may be a wise policy.

Another policy the CCP has instituted in Xinjiang in order to stem anti-government violence has been to ramp up economic assistance to the region. The CCP remains convinced that a major motivating factor for the anti-government demonstrations is the substandard economic conditions that persist in Xinjiang, especially when compared to the booming Chinese east coast, and that by simply pumping money into the region the CCP can buy the allegiance of the disenfranchised Uyghurs. This is not a new policy, as Beijing has long believed that the improvement of the standard of living in Xinjiang would help decrease the anti-government violence there, as Hao Yufan and Lui Weihua point out, "from 1950 to 2008, the central government invested 386.23 billion Yuan in Xinjiang, accounting for 25.7 percent of the total investment in the region."⁶⁹ The numbers suggest Beijing's economic policy in Xinjiang has been largely successful from the outset, with the increase of government investment and subsidies in the region leading to an increase in "per capita net income of famers in Xinjiang [by] 28 times more than that of 1978 and 1.2 times more than that of 2000 when the western development campaign was launched."⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Roberts, "Imaginary Terrorism," 30.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Hao Yufan and Lui Weihua, "Xinjiang: Increasing Pain in the Heart of China's Borderland," *Journal of Contemporary China* 21, no. 74 (2012): 206.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 208.

While central government assistance has improved the economic conditions in the province, a large percentage of the Uyghurs remain dissatisfied, which suggests the roots of the dispute are much deeper than the simple economic disparity between the Chinese coast and the frontier. Stan Hok-Wui Wong and Hiroki Takeuchi take this thesis a step further and suggest that although the region as a whole has seen increased economic investment, the average Uyghur farmer is not reaping the benefits. They argue that due to the unusual demographic conditions in Xinjiang—where a large portion of the Uyghur minority lives in rural areas, far from government control—economic assistance is likely to merely line the pockets of local government officials, and not reach the dissatisfied local population. Therefore, because the local government remains dominated by the Han, the Uyghurs are unlikely to receive the benefits of increased government expenditure in Xinjiang. They conclude that in situations where one ethnic group dominates the political process, “the social group that is excluded from the policymaking process [will not benefit from the] new economic opportunities brought by the center...[because] the social group that controls the local government has little incentive...to set policies that take care of the excluded group’s preferences.”⁷¹ Thus, while the Chinese government claims to be providing economic benefits to the Uyghurs, the locals—who have received none of the promised benefits—grow even angrier with the Chinese government, ultimately increasing the risk of violence. In the end, because the dispute in Xinjiang remains based on ethnic discrimination, no amount of financial stimulus by Beijing will quell the unrest in the region.

All this said, the Uyghur separatist movement retains differing interpretations of the historical precedence of Beijing’s governance over the area and about how each government defines what it means to be culturally “Chinese.” Therefore, of all of the policies Beijing has taken in order to stem the political violence in the region, the most damaging of them all has come from the continued forced migration of large percentages of Han Chinese to Xinjiang by the CCP, and the bitterness this has created among the Uyghurs who feel this policy was done to shut the Uyghurs out of their own local

⁷¹ Stan Hok-Wui Wong and Hiroki Takeuchi, “Economic Assistance, Central–Local Relations, and Ethnic Regions in China’s Authoritarian Regime,” July 3, 2011, [http://people.smu.edu/htakeuch/pdfs/Economic%20Assistance%20\(Resubmission%20Master%20Copy\).pdf](http://people.smu.edu/htakeuch/pdfs/Economic%20Assistance%20(Resubmission%20Master%20Copy).pdf), 37.

government. As Colin Mackerras asserts, the root of Uyghur unrest remains directly linked to “the migration of Han people to Xinjiang [since the 1950s, which] was enough to affect the demographic make-up of the region, giving Uighurs [*sic*] the feeling of dispossession in what they regard as their own territory.”⁷² Therefore, Beijing’s attempts to saturate the ethnic community in Xinjiang with the Han, has only increased Uyghur feelings of repression and further instituted the mentality of “us versus them” among the disassociated local population.

The PRC has been unable to stop the steady stream of anti-government and separatist protests in Xinjiang because the problem is rooted in the deep-seated cultural differences between the Han and the Uyghurs—who see the Han as foreign colonizers of their land. While the memory of European imperialism remains a point of contention within Beijing, the policies it has undertaken to limit the political influence of the Uyghurs reeks of hypocrisy. As Anna Hayes concludes, the Han and the Uyghurs have a shared history, one of “territorial annexation and imperial aggression...[like the Han, the Uyghurs history] is also based on territorial annexation and imperial aggression, only in this instance it is by the Chinese, not European powers.”⁷³ Therein lies the problem, the dispute in Xinjiang is based on a vast disagreement over national identity, and ultimately Beijing is left with no viable peaceful option, ergo the potential for violence in Xinjiang—either instigated by the Uyghurs or the PLA—remains very high.

E. U.S. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Despite the end of the war in Iraq and the drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, the United States remains committed to the eradication of global terrorist networks. As the American Embassy attack in Benghazi in September 2012 and the Boston Marathon bombings in April 2013 exhibit, despite the death of Osama Bin Laden the United States remains vulnerable to terrorist attacks at home and abroad. Therefore, it

⁷² Colin Patrick Mackerras, “Causes and Ramifications of the Xinjiang July 2009 Disturbances,” *Sociology Study* 2, no. 7 (2012): 499.

⁷³ Anna Hayes, “Competing Historical Accounts and the Importance of Nationalized Mythology: Han Chinese Imaginaries and Uighur Realities,” *The British World: Religion, Memory, Society, Culture: Refereed Proceedings* (2012): 353.

remains in the best interests of the United States to pursue strong partnerships with foreign governments in its counter-terrorism campaign, particularly with those in the predominantly Muslim North Africa, Middle East, and Central Asia.

Beijing's struggle in Xinjiang against the internationally recognized ETIM terrorist group presents an opportunity for the United States to cooperate with China on a global scale. Despite the fears of realists, such as Mearsheimer, a rising Chinese military can provide America with a very capable ally in its newly named Overseas Contingency Operations. However, the United States must be careful in its pursuit of a potential partnership with China on counter-terrorism. Of foremost concern to the United States is that it needs to ensure an already suspicious Chinese government, that counter-terrorism measures in Central Asia are not aimed at increasing the American military presence on China's fragile western border. China already feels Washington is attempting to encircle them politically with its multiple bilateral alliances with nations immediately to China's north, east, and south. A major U.S. presence in Central Asia would—in their eyes—complete the circle and may cause Beijing to act more belligerently toward the United States. Therefore, as the United States withdraws from Afghanistan, it is important that it now pursue a much lighter footprint in the region, in order to reassure China that counter-terrorism measures are not being used as an excuse to permanently pre-position large-scale and long-term military forces in Central Asia.

Thus, small operations forces would ultimately be used to highlight a successful U.S. counter-terrorism approach in the region, with the emphasis being not on projecting American military power, but on training and empowering the armed forces of Central Asia to better defeat terrorist networks in their nation. Furthermore, the United States should continue to reach out to their counterparts in Beijing through “good faith” measures, such as intelligence sharing on suspected terrorist members and groups in Xinjiang, as well as bilateral counter-terrorist exercises. This said, in its engagement with China, the United States must also be careful not to sit idly by if China continues to violently oppress its ethnic minorities—such as the Uyghurs—in the name of counterterrorism. It is important the United States make clear the difference between the ETIM and other Uyghur separatist organizations. The United States must work to use

diplomatic soft power to continue to push for the maintenance of an international standard for the rule of law and human rights. As Van Wie Davis concludes, the GWOT has led some to believe that increased counter-terrorism efforts “will lead to an increase in human rights abuses globally. Many of the human rights groups that watch Xinjiang...fear that China is using the war on terror to disregard the human rights of Uyghurs.”⁷⁴

Therefore, it is important for the United States to maintain vigilance in its pursuit of not overstressing the definition of what it means to be a “terrorist.” An in-depth look at the situation in Xinjiang proves the dispute is much deeper than the current Chinese narrative that it is merely an infiltration of sovereign Chinese territory by foreign Islamic extremists. Despite claims to the contrary, the Uyghurs are a distinct ethnic people who have been subjugated and politically underrepresented during the rule of the predominantly Han PRC. The CCP see the Uyghur separatists as a direct threat to regime stability, which is a microcosm of their nascent fears of a renewed pro-democracy campaign within China proper, and thus have decided to whitewash the entire Uyghur movement under the guise of international terrorism in an effort to quiet domestic unrest. Ultimately, the United States must monitor the situation very carefully because the “Chinese [may] worsen the problem by targeting and antagonizing nonviolent Uyghurs,” which may lead to a violent escalation of the conflict, or even an Islamic inspired Uyghur revolution.⁷⁵ While Fravel’s thesis clearly shows that China’s interactions with its neighbors in Central Asia have favored compromise over conflict, its domestic responses in Xinjiang provide a more foreboding outlook to the future. Beijing has tried non-violent measures, such as forced immigration and economic assistance, in an attempt to satisfy the Uyghurs, but such efforts have not delivered the intended results. Therefore, it is highly likely the Chinese will resort to more aggressive means, in the name of counter-terrorism, in order to stop the political chaos in the province. As their actions in Tiananmen two decades ago have shown, when regime stability is questioned, the CCP has no problem using military force against its own people. Thus, China’s anticipated

⁷⁴ Van Wie Davis, “Uyghur Muslim Ethnic Separatism,” 11.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

reaction to an escalation of the situation in Xinjiang can be expected to be on par with the government responses in Libya and Syria in recent years, and could therefore, ultimately threaten the peace and stability of Asia.

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IV. AKSAI-CHIN AND THE CHINA-INDIA BORDER

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the second of the three case studies discussed in this thesis, the burgeoning rivalry between China and India, and considers how disagreements regarding their disputed border could lead to a second iteration of the Sino-Indian border war of 1962. This chapter discusses the historical background of the territorial dispute, as well as provides an analysis of the causes and repercussions of the short one-month war, and addresses whether the legacy of that war has had any effect on current Chinese foreign policy in the region. In so doing, this thesis examines competing hypotheses by Taylor Fravel and Brahma Chellaney regarding China's motivations for launching military operations against India in 1962, and discusses how those motivations play a factor in China's current foreign policy regarding India. Therefore, this chapter will also analyze China's recent actions along the Indian border—including PLA incursions into Indian territory in the spring of 2013—and asks whether China's actions are a prelude to a future military operation against India, aimed at reclaiming “lost” Chinese territory. Additionally, this chapter discusses the potential implications for U.S. foreign policy in the region if there is an uptick in hostility between Beijing and New Delhi, and finally it also analyzes competing hypotheses debating whether a Sino-Indian rivalry would actually provide positive benefits for the United States, while also discussing who Washington would ultimately support if the recent border tensions between the two nations were to escalate into a large scale war. Accordingly, this chapter concludes that the United States must continue to engage both China and India politically and economically, and must work diligently in order to avoid either nation. Ultimately, the United States can benefit from strategic competition between New Delhi and Beijing, but it must be careful not to encourage the situation too overtly or it risks alienating either of the two rising Asian powers.

B. BACKGROUND AND COMPETING HYPOTHESES REGARDING FUTURE SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS

As the summer of 2013 drew to a close, China and India found themselves at a crossroads in their bilateral relationship as recent tensions along their disputed border led to diplomatic friction between the two Asian powers. As political hostilities have flared—particularly after the PLA’s recent incursions into the Indian administered region of Arunachal Pradesh in mid-August⁷⁶—there has been increasing concern that the world’s two most populous nations might find themselves on a debilitating diplomatic spiral that may lead to war. A potential conflict between the large nations, heightened by the possession of nuclear weapons by both, may present a daunting prospect for the United States as it looks to maintain regional stability in Asia.

The central issue in the Sino-Indian border dispute is the infamous “McMahon line” agreement between Great Britain and Tibet in 1914, which effectively established the border between India and present-day China. India recognizes this line as its official border, but the Chinese continue to contest this agreement on the basis that Tibet had no sovereign right to sign to the treaty.⁷⁷ Separated by the Tibetan plateau and the massive Himalayan mountain range, China and India had little political contact until after Tibet was annexed by the PRC in 1951. However, after absorbing Tibet, China began to question India’s territorial claims along its border, which ultimately became a driving force in the brief 1962-border war. Despite the resounding Chinese victory in 1962, the border remained contested well after the resumption of diplomatic relations after Mao Zedong’s death in 1976. Despite the renewal of diplomatic relations and the resumption of negotiations “to resolve their border disputes” in 1981, there has been little traction in diplomatic talks. While Braham Chellaney points out that while the “two sides have signed three vaunted border related accords [in 1993, 1996, and 2005]...negotiations [regarding the settlement of the border] stand deadlocked.”⁷⁸ Thus, even after three

⁷⁶ British Broadcasting Company News, “China Accused of Incursion in India’s Arunachal Pradesh,” August 22, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-23790860>.

⁷⁷ Bruce A. Elleman et al., *Beijing’s Power and China’s Borders: Twenty Neighbors in Asia* (New York: M.E. Sharp Inc., 2013), 196.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 50–51.

decades of ongoing deliberation and negotiations, the Chinese and Indian positions regarding their contested border have changed very little since the 1962 border war. Therefore, Chellaney argues that as China's military continues to gain strength and influence in Asia, it has begun to rebuild infrastructure along the Indian border while also preparing military assets to be deployed to the disputed regions of Aksai-Chin and Arunachal Pradesh in order to give it greater flexibility if tensions with New Delhi escalate. Consequently, Chellaney concludes, "by building new railroads, airports and highways in Tibet, China is now in a position to rapidly move additional forces to the border to potentially strike at India at a time of its choosing."⁷⁹ Taking Chellaney's thesis to heart, it would seem that China's deployment of troops to Arunachal Pradesh in August might signal that aggressive action by Beijing to re-take the disputed region may occur in the near future.

This said, the presence of increasing economic interdependence in the form of bilateral trade between China and India, may act as a counterweight to any underlying reasons for conflict between the two nations. As Bruce Russett and John Oneal conclude in their book *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations*, "countries that are interdependent bilaterally or economically open to the global economy...have an important basis for pacific relations and conflict resolution."⁸⁰ Dubbed economic interdependence theory, the crux of Russett and Oneal's theory is that two countries that have strong economic ties are highly unlikely to go to war out of fear of disrupting the mutually beneficial economic relationship. With this theory in mind, there is considerable weight behind the idea that China and India are unlikely to let border tensions disrupt their burgeoning economic relationship by going to war. Consequently, the *Wall Street Journal* has reported, China and India are greatly

⁷⁹ Brahma Chellaney, "Rising Powers, Rising Tensions: The Troubled China-India Relationship," *SAIS Review* 32, no. 2 (2012): 103.

⁸⁰ Bruce Russett and John R. Oneal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations* (New York: Norton, 2001), 155.

increasing their economic ties as “bilateral trade [between the two] rose by about a third to nearly \$76 billion [in 2012]...and the countries hope to boost this trade to \$100 billion by 2015.”⁸¹

The growing bilateral trade between China and India may encourage Beijing and New Delhi to avoid an escalation of a territorial dispute, however, it would be foolhardy to assume that conflict will not occur at some point in the future between the two nations just because of economic ties. John Mearsheimer, in his essay, “The Gathering Storm: China’s Challenge to U.S. Power in Asia,” argues that power and influence are key to motivating states actions and that “economic interdependence does not have a significant effect on geopolitics one way or the other.”⁸² Mearsheimer concludes by referencing the fact that the nations in Europe “were all highly interdependent and prospering in 1914,” yet they ended up going to war anyway.⁸³

Whether territorial disagreements or economic interdependence plays a larger role in determining the volatility of Sino-Indian relations in the coming years is anyone’s guess. However, it is paramount for the United States to understand the historical roots of the recent surge in tensions. With a greater understanding of the underlying causes of the rift, the United States can better anticipate if China’s recent actions really are a dark harbinger of coming aggression as Chellaney’s thesis would suggest.

C. HISTORICAL CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT AND THE 1962 BORDER WAR

Despite being two of the most ancient societies in all of Asia, the Chinese and the Indians had very little political contact until the twentieth century, due to the vast mountainous Himalayan mountain regions and the Tibetan plateau, which had long served as a buffer between the two societies.⁸⁴ Thus, when the CCP rose to power after

⁸¹ Romit Guha and Brian Spegele, “China-India Border Tensions Rise,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 26, 2013, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887323789704578446970130137416.html>.

⁸² Mearsheimer, “The Gathering Storm,” 393.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Elleman et al., *Beijing’s Power and China’s Borders*, 48.

the Chinese Civil War and subsequently annexed Tibet in 1951, bringing Chinese troops to the Indian border for the first time in nearly two centuries, it marked the beginning of an official Chinese and Indian diplomatic relationship.

Ironically, despite Chinese aggression in Tibet, New Delhi was one of the first countries to recognize the legitimacy of the PRC. India, which had only gained independence from Britain a couple years before in 1947, saw in China a “benign neighbor that had, like India, only recently emerged from the ravages of colonialism.”⁸⁵ Therefore, despite the vast cultural and political differences between the two nations, New Delhi hoped to find in Beijing a kindred spirit with whom it could establish friendly diplomatic and economic ties. This desire for friendship with Beijing led India to deny a vote in the “United Nations General Assembly in November 1950 on the then-independent Tibet’s appeal for international help against Chinese aggression,” despite the fact that in doing so New Delhi was giving up its strategically important land buffer with China.⁸⁶

Furthermore, in order to solidify an Indian and Chinese friendship, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru signed in 1954 “a largely one-sided pact with Beijing...under the rubric...[of] ‘five principles’ of peaceful coexistence.”⁸⁷ Dubbed the Panchsheel Agreement, this treaty included “a formal Indian recognition of the new Chinese control over Tibet, with India formally forfeiting all the extraterritorial rights and privileges it had enjoyed in Tibet until the Chinese invasion.”⁸⁸ Despite relinquishing all claims of sovereignty within Tibet to Beijing, India received nothing from this treaty outside of a vague promise of friendship from Beijing. Ironically, “India’s formal acceptance of the Chinese claim over Tibet came without extracting a reciprocal Chinese acceptance of the then prevailing Indo-Tibetan border.”⁸⁹ Chellaney argues that ultimately, despite its benevolent intentions, the Panchsheel Agreement set into motion the events that would

⁸⁵ Elleman et al., *Beijing’s Power and China’s Borders*, 48.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

lead the two nations to war eight years later, for “no sooner had the Panchsheel Agreement been signed than China laid claim to some Indian frontier areas and then furtively intruded south of two mountain passes specified as border points in that accord.”⁹⁰ As relations between Beijing and New Delhi intensified over this overt breach of agreement, China prepared its troops to forcibly seize territory in the disputed regions along the McMahon line, which culminated in China’s invasion of India in October 1962.

The war itself was brief and resulted in a sweeping victory for the Chinese. China, having the superior military forces and the element of surprise, decimated the Indian forces along the border and solidified its administration over Aksai-Chin—which possessed significant strategic value to Beijing because the only major highway connecting Tibet to Xinjiang ran through Aksai-Chin. After achieving its strategic objectives, China announced a unilateral ceasefire on November 20, 1962 after only thirty-two days of fighting.⁹¹

Five decades later, the legacy of the one-month long war continues to resonate in Sino-Indian border relations. Chellaney argues that China decided to launch the invasion of India because the world was distracted by the Cuban Missile Crisis, and quotes PRC premier Zhou Enlai’s infamous declaration that “the war was intended to teach India a lesson,” as an example of Beijing’s callousness.⁹² Exactly what that lesson is remains unclear, though Chellaney clearly infers that the lesson is not to trust China. Consequently, India, which had reached out so openly for friendship with China, was shocked and dismayed by China’s aggression in 1962. Reviewing Prime Minister Nehru’s sentiments on the day of the Chinese invasion, it is clear why a legacy of distrust between the Chinese and the Indians remain to this day. After the Chinese launched their assault, Nehru decried “there are not many instances in history where one country has gone out of her way to be friendly and cooperative with the government...of another country and to plead their cause in the councils of the world, and then that country returns

⁹⁰ Elleman et al., *Beijing’s Power and China’s Borders*, 50.

⁹¹ Chellaney, “Rising Powers, Rising Tensions” 102.

⁹² Elleman et al., *Beijing’s Power and China’s Borders*, 50.

evil for good.”⁹³ Therefore, Chellaney concludes that the legacy of this betrayal will continue to hamper the Sino-Indian political relationship for many years.

An alternative analysis of the causes and implications of the 1962 border war is provided in Taylor Fravel’s book, *Strong Borders Secure Nations*. In his analysis, Fravel argues that China had little desire to go to war with India, because its policy of diplomatic negotiations had resulted in the one sided Panchsheel Agreement. Ultimately, however, Fravel declares that aggressive actions by India in the disputed regions forced China’s hand. Fravel mentions that as late as April 1960, China was prepared “to negotiate a settlement...[presenting India] a ‘package deal’ in which each side would recognize the disputed land held by the other. China would keep Aksai Chin...and India would retain...territory south of the McMahon Line in the east.”⁹⁴ Unfortunately, Fravel argues India sensed that China’s strength regarding its territorial claim in Aksai-Chin was declining, and thus, New Delhi rejected the Chinese proposal and decided in 1961 to push Beijing for a better deal. Fravel contends, “by late 1961, India sought to strengthen its position in what became termed the ‘forward policy’ of increasing its military presence in disputed territory...[while maintaining] a diplomatic stance of refusing to negotiate.”⁹⁵ Ultimately, Fravel concludes that China’s own perception of its declining position of strength in the territorial dispute coupled with the increase of Indian military presence in the disputed region led China to decide that the use of force was the only way to achieve its political objectives.

Therefore, China’s willingness to use force...has varied with perceptions of decline in its claim strength and bargaining power in the dispute...Decline in claim strength corresponds with decisions to use force in 1962, 1967, and 1986. By contrast, during periods of stable claim strength in the 1970s and since the 1990s, China has refrained from using force.⁹⁶

⁹³ Elleman et al., *Beijing’s Power and China’s Borders*, 50.

⁹⁴ Fravel, *Strong Borders Secure Nation*, 174.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Thus, Fravel contends that despite the fact that Chinese launched the initial assault, it was actually Indian aggression that forced China's hand to use military force. Therefore, history has shown that China is most dangerous when it feels that it has lost the bargaining power to settle a dispute diplomatically. Thus, it remains in India's best interests not to antagonize the Chinese and to continue to reach for a mutually beneficial resolution of the territorial dispute.

Despite a renewal of diplomatic relations after Mao's death and a resumption of border negotiations in 1981, the two sides remain steadfast in their determination not to compromise along their shared border. Chellaney declares in his essay, "Rising Powers, Rising Tensions" that this constitutes "the longest and most fruitless negotiating process between any two nations in modern world history," and that neither the Chinese nor the Indians believe a resolution in the near future is forthcoming. Referring to PRC Premier Wen Jiabo's comments in 2010 declaring that any resolution of the disputes "will take a fairly long period of time," Chellaney openly wonders, "What does China (or India) gain by carrying on the border negotiations?"⁹⁷

Chellaney believes that recent Chinese incursions into the disputed regions, as well as its renewed claims on Arunachal Pradesh, mirror Chinese actions in the months leading up to the 1962 border war. Thus, Chellaney concludes that a rapid escalation of the conflict may occur in the near term. Fravel's thesis, on the other hand, suggests that China's moves to secure its position in Aksai-Chin while increasing rhetoric regarding Arunachal Pradesh signifies that China is merely looking to increase its bargaining position, and as long as India does not instigate political tensions by increasing its military position along the border there remains a real possibility of progress in diplomatic negotiations. A closer look at China's recent actions along the contested border is necessary to determine whether Chellaney or Fravel's thesis carries more weight in this instance.

⁹⁷ Chellaney, "Rising Powers, Rising Tensions," 102.

D. ASSESSING RECENT CHINESE ACTIONS: RENEWED CHINESE AGGRESSION?

Chellaney argues that China's recent resurgence in its territorial claims over Arunachal Pradesh—punctuated by the alleged movement of PLA troops to the region—mirrors its annexation of Tibet in 1951 and its movement into Aksai-Chin during the 1962 border war. Chellaney declares that China greatly desires the rich water resources in Arunachal Pradesh, and aims to “build a dam near the Tibet-Arunachal border that would be more than twice as large as the Three Gorges Dam.”⁹⁸ Ultimately, by moving troops to the disputed region, Beijing wants to force India to accept the region as a part of China like it did with Tibet over 50 years ago. Therefore, Chellaney contends that this ties directly to “China's long-standing negotiating stance: what it occupies is Chinese territory, and what it claims must be shared...through a settlement based on mutual accommodation and...understanding.”⁹⁹ Chellaney's description of this very “passive-aggressive” Chinese diplomatic position suggests China is looking to take advantage of India's unwillingness to escalate the dispute into open warfare.

In contending that Chinese aggression against India is on the rise, Chellaney lists several areas that indicate China is looking to bully India into acquiescing in its territorial claims. Firstly, Chellaney points to an increase in Chinese media pressure on India. Describing the increase of criticism of India by China's state-run newspaper, *The People's Daily*, which berated India's “recklessness and arrogance” regarding the territorial disputes, Chellaney contends that this represents a “throwback to the coarse rhetoric China used in the buildup to war in 1962.”¹⁰⁰ Secondly, Chellaney contends that China is looking to “build pressure on New Delhi over Kashmir” where the PLA has boosted its presence in the disputed region by increasing PLA deployments and funding strategic projects, such as infrastructure building in the area.¹⁰¹ Lastly, Chellaney declares that all of this has come with an increase in suspicion within India over China

⁹⁸ Elleman et al., *Beijing's Power and China's Borders*, 52.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

deliberately arming Kashmir-based Islamic militants.¹⁰² In response to these recent Chinese incursions, India has reacted exactly as Fravel would not advise, “by strengthening its military deployments in Arunachal Pradesh...to prevent any [future] Chinese land-grab.”¹⁰³ Thus, as negotiations regarding their contested border continue to stagnate, and as both China and India increase their military presence within the region, a violent escalation of the dispute similar to the situation in 1962 remains a possibility. This time however, with advanced military capabilities on both sides of the McMahon line, including the looming presence of nuclear weapons, a second iteration of the Sino-Indian war figures to be much more catastrophic.

Despite the dire predictions of nuclear warfare, it is important to note that despite an ongoing territorial dispute between India and China for over fifty years, the situation has not escalated to open warfare since the announcement of the cease-fire in November 1962. Furthermore, despite renewed antagonism on both sides regarding Arunachal Pradesh, the major factor in Sino-Indian diplomatic relations remains their ever-increasing economic cooperation. As economic interdependence theory suggests, the financial costs of a war over Aksai-Chin and Arunachal Pradesh will greatly outweigh any strategic gain caused by the war. Furthermore, the daunting prospect of losing the war, and therefore losing the strategic territory while also severely damaging the economic relationship should serve as a sizeable deterrent to an escalation of tensions. As Fravel implies, Chinese military maneuvers within the disputed regions should not be viewed as a harbinger of future military aggression, but actually represents a process of solidifying political bargaining chips in anticipation of future diplomatic negotiations. Therefore, China’s recent actions along the McMahon line should be a sign to New Delhi that it is open to revisiting its 1960 territorial proposal. Whether India accepts this proposal or not is debatable, but growing economic ties between the two nations should keep the conflict from spiraling out of control.

¹⁰² Elleman et al., *Beijing’s Power and China’s Borders*, 56–57.

¹⁰³ Chellaney, “Rising Powers, Rising Tensions,” 102.

E. U.S. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

While war between India and China remains highly unlikely in the near term, an increase in strategic rivalry between the two rising Asian nations does remain a distinct possibility. Ignoring their territorial dispute, it is important to note that these are two rising economies who reside in very close proximity of each other. Furthermore, both countries are vying for increased strategic power and influence in Asia, which seems to suggest that there will at least be some level friendly competition between the two nations in the coming years. How the United States responds to an increase in competition between the two nations is a question subject for debate.

There is little question that the United States, eager to balance China's rising power in Asia, has long seen the rising Indian democracy as a potential counterweight to Chinese influence. India, "which sees itself as a bridge between the West and the East, [and] shares basic values more with Europe than with China," thus represents a huge potential ally for the West if China ever decides to become more aggressive in Asia.¹⁰⁴ However, India's long-standing policy of diplomatic independence, coupled with the United States strategic relationship with Pakistan, has further complicated Washington's efforts to reach out to India. Furthermore, the United States increasing economic interdependence with Beijing has caused some analysts to question whether the United States would actually side with India if New Delhi were to find itself in a hypothetical war with China.

While China and the United States are not stated enemies, there is little doubt that they are fast becoming competitors for political, economic, and military influence in Asia. Evoking the old adage "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," an Indian challenge to China may ultimately produce tangible benefits to Washington. As Evan Braden Montgomery argues in his essay, "Competitive Strategies against Continental Powers: The Geopolitics of Sino-Indian-American Relations," the United States stands to benefit greatly from a Sino-Indian rivalry. Declaring that the United States biggest concern regarding China's military rise focuses on their development of naval and space

¹⁰⁴ Elleman et al., *Beijing's Power and China's Borders*, 48.

technology, Montgomery argues that an uptick in hostility between China and India would allow “Washington [to] exploit the geographic asymmetry...by ensuring that Beijing continues to confront land-based security challenges.”¹⁰⁵ Therefore, an increase in tensions along the Sino-Indian border would force Beijing to divert economic assets to land-based military technology, and away from the naval and aerospace arena, that concerns American military strategies the most. Thus, while the United States should not encourage open hostility between Beijing and New Delhi, it does stand to benefit from an underlying distrust between the two neighbors. Maintaining superiority in naval and aerospace missions is a critical element in deterring a rise in Chinese aggression in Asia. Therefore, if Beijing is forced to divert necessary funds away from these programs and toward land forces, the United States should be able to continue its leading role in the Pacific.

The worst-case scenario for the United States would be if tensions between India and China were ever to destabilize to the point that war erupts. The 1962 war had little strategic effect on the United States because of its limited scope. As Chellaney notes, the United States was obviously distracted by the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, and thus, paid little heed to China’s invasion of India. A similar incident in 2013 would have much larger strategic consequences for the United States. While the United States will quietly celebrate an increased rivalry between India and China, it certainly does not want the two nations to go to war. Rehashing the economic interdependence debate, it is clear that the United States has deep economic ties to both nations, and a subsequent war between the two would hurt American economic interests in the region. Furthermore, while the United States has openly championed India’s successful democracy and clearly sees New Delhi as a potential balancer against Chinese assertiveness, it is debatable whether the United States would even support India in a war with China, and may in fact inwardly support Beijing. Chellaney certainly argues this point by declaring that the United States is “becoming Sino-centric,” and that President Barak Obama’s

¹⁰⁵ Evan Braden Montgomery, “Competitive Strategies against Continental Powers: The Geopolitics of Sino-Indian-American Relations,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36, no. 1 (2013): 83.

administration “has kept mum on the Sino-Indian border tensions, instead of cautioning Beijing against any attempt to forcibly change existing frontiers.”¹⁰⁶

In conclusion, it remains evident that the Sino, Indian, and American diplomatic triangle remains a challenging predicament for American foreign policy in the near future. Attempting to balance increasing economic ties to the two Asian nations, while also positioning itself for a potential increase in tensions with China in the Pacific, the United States must be careful not to overstep its bounds by pushing for a more assertive New Delhi. India remains reluctant to increase its security ties with the United States, outside of joint-military exercises, and New Delhi’s concerns over Washington’s lasting loyalty in regards to China and Pakistan will complicate American efforts to increase ties with India as a balance to China. Consequently, as Montgomery concludes, the United States can benefit from Chinese and Indian tensions, even if it is just as an independent observer. In the end, it is paramount that the United States embraces any way to divert Chinese advancements in military technology away from naval and aerospace missions. Therefore, the current American foreign policy approach to attempt to foster relations with India while also pursuing continued economic and political engagement with China remains the best course for the near future.

¹⁰⁶ Elleman et al., *Beijing’s Power and China’s Borders*, 57.

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V. THE DIAOYU/SENKAKU ISLANDS DISPUTE

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the third of the three case studies discussed in this thesis—the bitter dispute between the PRC and Japan over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands—and discusses the probability that increased tensions between the two Asian powers could draw the United States into war. This chapter surveys the historical roots of China’s territorial claim over the Japanese administered islands, while also discussing the political debate between China and Japan regarding Tokyo’s claims that the islands were *Terra Nullis* (belonged to no one) prior to its occupation in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, this chapter also compares three competing hypotheses from Krista Wiegand, Unryu Suganuma, and Taylor Fravel concerning China’s foreign policy regarding Diaoyu/Senkaku and whether—based on China’s past actions—a resolution of this conflict is plausible or not. Lastly, this chapter discusses the potential implications for U.S. foreign policy in the region if tensions between China and Japan over Diaoyu/Senkaku continues to escalate, and examines the influence of the 1952 United States-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security in regards to Tokyo’s and Beijing’s policies over the islands. Lastly, this chapter discusses the potential pitfalls to peace in the dispute and provides policy recommendations for Washington in an effort to keep this conflict from escalating into war. Accordingly, this chapter concludes that in order to achieve a peaceful solution to the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands dispute, the United States must continue to stress to both Beijing and Tokyo the great benefits of mutual development over the islands natural resources. Therefore, the United States must continue to work through existing international institutions and bilateral discussions in order to put aside the competing historical claims of ownership of the islands and instead focus future discussions toward mutual economic benefits.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ This chapter acknowledges that the Republic of China (Taiwan) also claims to have sovereignty over the islands due to its historic position that it is the “legitimate” government of China. Consequently, since Taipei’s claims are identical to Beijing’s, and because this chapter is dedicated to examining the potential of a third Sino-Japanese war, it was the author’s decision to focus only on Beijing’s and Tokyo’s role in the dispute.

B. BACKGROUND

At the center of the dispute between China and Japan over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands are natural resources. While the islands themselves are relatively insignificant and uninhabitable, control of the islands means exclusive control over the waters surrounding the islands. As Zhongqi Pan points out in his article, “Sino-Japanese Dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands: The Pending Controversy from the Chinese Perspective,” dispute over the islands intensified in 1968 when “a report of the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East suggested possible large hydrocarbon deposits in the waters off Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands.”¹⁰⁸ The potential access to the natural resources in the waters surrounding the Senkakus is staggering, as Krista Wiegand points out in her book *Enduring Territorial Disputes*: “a 2005 estimate of oil resources in the East China Sea is 100 to 200 billion barrels, [which is] enough to provide energy sources to either [China or Japan] for fifty to eighty years.”¹⁰⁹ Consequently, Pan argues that:

Sovereignty over the islets could affect 40,000 km² of surrounding continental shelf or exclusive economic zone (EEZ) area... Given both China and Japan’s increasing voracious appetite for energy, natural resources, particular the possibility of the hydrocarbon potential of the seabed surrounding the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, are understandably regarded as central in the dispute.¹¹⁰

Ultimately, the financial benefits of exclusive drilling rights in the Senkakus has enflamed tensions between China and Japan over ownership of the islands and is the primary factor in regards to the high potential for conflict between the two nations.

This said, outside of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, perhaps no other territorial dispute has a greater proclivity for leading to conflict than the quarrel between China and Japan over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. The dispute, which has festered for the past four decades, has intensified since September 2012 “after Japan’s government bought three of

¹⁰⁸ Zhongqi Pan, “Sino-Japanese Dispute Over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands: The Pending Controversy From the Chinese Perspective.” *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 12, no. 1 (2007): 72.

¹⁰⁹ Wiegand, *Enduring Territorial Disputes*, 106.

¹¹⁰ Pan, “Sino-Japanese Dispute Over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands,” 72.

the five unoccupied islands in the chain from a private owner.”¹¹¹ The Japanese government declared the move was done “to block a proposal” by Tokyo Governor Shintaro Ishihara—a prominent Japanese nationalist— “to buy and develop the islands” in an attempt to end the territorial dispute with Beijing.¹¹² The purchase of the islands by the Japanese government greatly angered the PRC—which has long declared that the islands have belonged to China since the Ming Dynasty—and prompted Beijing into increasing its air and naval presence around the disputed islands. As Hannah Beech’s article, “Angry Skies: Japanese Jets Scramble as Tensions With China Escalate” notes, “over the past year, Chinese warships have made historic forays into waters near the contested islands, as have flotillas of Chinese coast-guard vessels,” as China has ramped up its military operations in the vicinity of the Senkakus in protest of Tokyo’s occupation of the territory.¹¹³ Due to the heightened Chinese and Japanese military presence around the islands, the potential for conflict—even accidental—has increased significantly.

Conversely, as discussed in Chapter IV of this thesis, China’s growing economy—which is becoming more entrenched into the international market as it expands globally—provides a great incentive for Beijing not to escalate the conflict. Similar to its relationship with India, China has significantly increased its economic ties and trade relations with Tokyo over the past decade. This growing economic interdependence between China and Japan should conceivably encourage Beijing and Tokyo not to go to war over the disputed islands, for as Bruce Russett and John Oneal argue, “countries that are interdependent bilaterally or economically open to the global economy...have an important basis for pacific relations and conflict resolution.”¹¹⁴ With this in mind, Mark J. Valencia concludes in his essay, “The East China Sea Dispute: Context, Claims, Issues, and Possible Solutions,” that “a compromise—joint

¹¹¹ Associated Press, “Japan PM: China Vessels Still Intruding in Japanese Waters, but Door Remains Open to Dialogue,” *Washington Post*, September 27, 2013.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Hannah Beech, “Angry Skies: Japanese Jets Scramble as Tensions with China Escalate,” *Time*, September 18, 2013, <http://world.time.com/2013/09/18/angry-skies-japanese-jets-scramble-as-tensions-with-china-escalate/>.

¹¹⁴ Russett and Oneal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations*, 155.

development [of the islands by China and Japan]—is motivated by the realization that a positive China-Japan relationship is simply too important to be destroyed by these disputes.”¹¹⁵

Ultimately, whether conflict or compromise prevails in this dispute is highly dependent on the politicians within Tokyo and Beijing and whether they prioritize economic interdependence over nationalist ideals. Therefore, in any analysis of this dispute, an examination of rising popular nationalism must be made, with specific attention paid to the increased influence of Japanese nationalists after Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s landmark victory in the September 2012 and July 2013 Japanese Parliamentary elections. Since reassuming power—after a five year hiatus—Abe has ramped up nationalist sentiments within Japan, including attempting to “remove constitutional barriers to Japan’s right to collective defense and to transform Japan’s Self-Defense Forces into ‘National Defense Forces’...[all] against the backdrop of an increasingly nationalistic tone of foreign policy debate in Japan.”¹¹⁶ The preservation of Japanese administration over the Senkakus is a primary concern for Japanese nationalists, such as Abe, and thus, a more nationalist Japanese political leadership may be more willing to use military force in order to defend what it deems as sovereign Japanese territory. Consequently, rising nationalism within Japan has intensified anti-Japanese sentiment within the domestic population of China, who fear Japanese nationalists are attempting to reverse six decades of Japanese pacifism and restore Japanese Imperial power. Therefore, growing nationalism within Japan and China may eventually prove to be counterproductive to the increasing economic ties between Tokyo and Beijing, and could ultimately increase the likelihood of conflict between the two nations.

Lastly, unlike the other two cases examined in this thesis, the United States has a major stake in any future conflict between China and Japan. Tokyo represents Washington’s closest ally in Asia, and as the U.S. government seeks to increase its influence in the burgeoning Asia-Pacific region with its “pivot to the Pacific,” the

¹¹⁵ Mark J. Valencia, “The East China Sea Dispute: Context, Claims, Issues, and Possible Solutions,” *Asian Perspective Seoul* 31, no. 1 (2007): 127.

¹¹⁶ Tsuneo Akaha, “The Return of an Unscrupulous Japan,” *The Asahi Shinbum*, July 16, 2013, http://ajw.asahi.com/article/forum/politics_and_economy/east_asia/AJ201307160021.

continued peace and stability within the region becomes even more paramount. Ultimately, the United States-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security underscores Washington's commitment to Japan's defense if it is attacked, and the United States has declared that the treaty covers the defense of the islands. This past April, U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel declared that Washington "opposes any unilateral or coercive action that seeks to undermine Japan's...control...[and while the U.S.] does not take a position on the...sovereignty of the islands...we do recognize they are under the administration of Japan and fall under our security treaty obligations."¹¹⁷ Therefore, Washington's commitment to Japan's defense remains strong, and in the event of military conflict over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, it can be expected that the United States will be compelled to intervene in support of its closest Asian ally. Therefore, it remains in the best interest of the United States to keep the Diaoyu/Senkaku Island dispute from escalating into military conflict.

C. HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE DISPUTE

The crux of the dispute between China and Japan over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Island rests in each nation's interpretation over who first laid claim to the islands. The Chinese contend that the islands—which they call the Diaoyu Islands—have been an integral part of "China" since the Ming dynasty, and Japan's annexation of the islands in 1895 was an illegal act that represented a "gross encroachment upon China's territorial integrity and sovereignty."¹¹⁸ Conversely, the core of Tokyo's claim to the islands rests on the legal principle of *Terra Nullius* (the islands originally belonged to no one). As Zhongqi Pan argues, "Japan justifies its sovereignty claim to the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands by evoking international law concerning how *terra nullius* becomes a specific state's territory."¹¹⁹ Pan's contention is that the Japanese believe that because no one previously had inhabited the islands, they were openly available for Japanese annexation.¹²⁰ Therefore,

¹¹⁷ Koji Sonoda and Takashi Oshima, "U.S. Warns Against 'Coercive Action' Over Senkaku Issue," *The Asahi Shinbun*, April 30, 2013, http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201304300129.

¹¹⁸ Wiegand, *Enduring Territorial Disputes*, 100.

¹¹⁹ Pan, "Sino-Japanese Dispute Over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands," 77.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

in order to accurately account for whose claim to the islands has further credence, an analysis of China's historical legacy in the Senkakus is necessary.

As Krista Wiegand points out in *Enduring Territorial Disputes*, China's historical claim to the islands has precedent for there is significant "evidence of the islands being used as early as 1372 by [Chinese] sea captains as nautical reference points, and as part of the coastal defense system during the Ming...and Qing Dynasty."¹²¹ Han-yi Shaw concurs with Wiegand's sentiment in his book, *The Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands Dispute*, in which he declares that there is "much evidence from Chinese, Ryukyuan, and Japanese historical records that demonstrate that the Diaoyutai/Senkaku were traditionally recognized as Chinese territory by all three countries."¹²² Shaw argues that the basis of China's claim began after the Ryukyu Kingdom became a Ming tributary state in 1372. Due to the beginning of this diplomatic relationship, the Chinese emperor sent envoys to the Ryukyu Kingdom on multiple "investiture missions."¹²³ Over the course of these missions, the Chinese envoys were required to compose detailed "mission reports" where they "recorded the route they took to reach the Ryukyu Kingdom."¹²⁴ These reports provided detailed and specific reference to the discovery of the uninhabited Diaoyu/Senkaku islands, which forms the basis of the Chinese claim of sovereignty over the islands. Consequently, Shaw contends that "not only do these reports demonstrate that the disputed islands were first discovered and used by the Chinese as navigational aids over a period of about five hundred years...they [also] contained passages indicating Chinese ownership of the islands."¹²⁵ Furthermore, Shaw points out that in addition to being traditionally recognized by its neighbors as sovereign Chinese territory, both Ming and Qing China "displayed state authority over the disputed islands through effective

¹²¹ Wiegand, *Enduring Territorial Disputes*, 98.

¹²² Han-yi Shaw, *The Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands Dispute: It's History and an Analysis of the Ownership Claims of the P.R.C., R.O.C., and Japan* (Baltimore: University of Maryland School of Law, 1999), 43.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

control.”¹²⁶ The central point of Shaw’s argument is that the islands clearly meant more to Ming and Qing China than its utility as a navigational aid for Chinese sailors, because “the disputed islands were incorporated into the Chinese naval defence [*sic*] system beginning from the Ming...and lasting well into the Qing dynasty.”¹²⁷ Ultimately, Shaw’s contention is that the historical evidence provides ample proof that “the islands were considered Chinese territory...[and that] China’s title over [the islands] was perfected by its official and exclusive usage of [the islands].”¹²⁸

While opponents of China’s historical claim question the relevance of Ming China’s use of the islands as navigational aids as fundamental proof of Chinese ownership of the islands, Shaw argues that “given the remoteness and inhabitability of these islands in pre-modern times, what more could Imperial China have done to display its ownership...other than...[use] them as navigational aids...and military posts?”¹²⁹ Shaw concludes that the mere ability of the Chinese to use these islands as navigational aids and naval anchorages is evidence enough to prove Japanese and Ryukyu acceptance of Chinese sovereignty over Diaoyu/Senkaku because “China would...not have been able to randomly deploy its naval ships at its own discretion to territories recognized as belonging to [Ryukyu] or Japan without stirring agitation among them.”¹³⁰ Therefore, in regards to China’s historical claims of ownership of the islands, Wiegand and Shaw believe the facts back up the Chinese claim.

Consequently, what happened to cause China to lose authority over the islands? Unryu Suganuma argues in his book, *Sovereign Rights and Territorial Space in Sino-Japanese Relations*, that China became its own greatest enemy by initially denying western attempts to open its ports up to international trade, highlighted by the Qianlong emperor’s decision in 1793 to reject the McCartney mission.¹³¹ Suganuma contends that

¹²⁶ Shaw, *The Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands Dispute*, 55.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 55–56.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Suganuma, *Sovereign Rights and Territorial Space in Sino-Japanese Relations*, 158.

“because of the slow Chinese response [to modernization], many Chinese territories were lost by signing unequal treaties [as a result of Chinese military inferiority],” and consequently, because of the chaos that engulfed China during the end of the 19th century as a result of the loss of China’s political power, “the Chinese people of the twentieth century virtually forgot over half a millennium of the history of the...islands, including the fact that their ancestors discovered them, used them as navigation aids, [and] defended them.”¹³² Suganuma concludes that this internal chaos within Qing China “provided a golden opportunity for the Japanese to claim sovereignty of these islands,” for ultimately, as China’s relative power was fading at the beginning of the 20th century, Japan’s power was ascending.¹³³

How the Japanese gained control over the islands remains the central point of the current debate. China’s official position regarding Japan’s occupation of the Diaoyu islands is “that the islands were ceded to Japan as part of the April 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki that ended the First Sino-Japanese War, and therefore should be returned to China under the Cairo and Potsdam Declarations...which stated that Japan must return all territories seized through war.”¹³⁴ The Japanese, on the other hand, declare that the islands were not a part of the Treaty of Shimonoseki because they had already claimed the islands on the basis of *terra nullis* before the treaty was signed. To support this argument, Zhongqi Pan cites the following statement regarding Japan’s official position regarding the islands:

From 1885 on, surveys of the Senkaku Islands had been thoroughly made by the Government of Japan through the agencies of Okinawa Prefecture and by way of other methods. Through these surveys, it was confirmed that the Senkaku Islands had been uninhabited and showed no trace of having been under the control of China. Based on this confirmation, the

¹³² Suganuma, *Sovereign Rights and Territorial Space in Sino-Japanese Relations*, 158.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ International Crisis Group, Brussels, “Dangerous Waters: China-Japan Relations on the Rocks,” Asia Report No. 245, April 8, 2013, 2.

Government of Japan made a Cabinet Decision on 14 January 1895 to erect a marker on the Islands to formally incorporate the Senkaku Islands into the territory of Japan.¹³⁵

Ultimately, because of this fundamental difference between Tokyo and Beijing regarding exactly how and when the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands were first incorporated under Japanese administrative control, the issue has found little room for compromise, and thus, continues to persist.

The Japanese, for their part, insist that China's current declaration that the islands should have been returned to Beijing as a result of the Cairo and Potsdam declarations regarding the Post-World War II world is inconsequential. Tokyo maintains that Beijing's silence in regards to the signing of the 1951 Treaty of San Francisco, which permitted American jurisdiction over the islands, represents solid proof that the Chinese did not see the islands as historic Chinese territory. Accordingly, Zhongqi Pan declares that the Japanese government insists that because "China expressed no objection to the status of the islands being under the administration of the United States under Article III of the San Francisco Peace Treaty clearly indicates that China did not consider the Senkaku Islands as part of [China]."¹³⁶

Unfortunately, for the Japanese, their position regarding China's apparent lack of objection to the San Francisco Peace Treaty is false. First and foremost, the PRC—due to Washington's recognition of the Republic of China as Beijing's official government—was not invited to attend the peace conference and was therefore not a party to its signing. Consequently, Pan declares that the Chinese have never accepted the terms of the peace treaty. He asserts that China has "never seen the...treaty as legally binding," and therefore they have objected to it since its induction. Furthermore, Pan argues that even though China did not specifically mention the islands in their dismissal of the treaty's legality, that does not mean that China ceded ownership of the islands to the United States—and ultimately—Japan. Pan maintains that it remains "unnecessary for China to enumerate its specific grievances regarding each particular article. [Therefore]

¹³⁵ Pan, "Sino-Japanese Dispute Over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands," 77.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

Japan could not take its claim to the Diaoyu Islands for granted just because China did not exclusively and specifically express objection” to specific articles in the treaty. Consequently, Pan concludes that because China saw the entire treaty in 1951 as illegal and unbinding, its silence regarding Diaoyu/Senkaku until the 1970s should not be seen as an admission of Japan’s sovereignty over the islands.

Ultimately, whether Beijing really believed in 1951 that the islands represented sovereign Chinese territory or not is relatively inconsequential. The fact remains that after the discovery of natural resources in the seabed of the waters surrounding Diaoyu/Senkaku in 1968, China quickly made its position on the issue known. Due to the presence of the vast hydrocarbon deposits in the area, Pan contends, “the dispute came into the open in 1969 after the U.S. and Japan issued a Joint Statement, which led to the Ryukyu Reversion Agreement signed in 1971 that included the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands as part of Okinawa to be returned to Japanese rule.”¹³⁷ This decision infuriated the Chinese, who refused to accept Japanese legal authority over the islands, which would consequently deliver them exclusive access to the natural resources in the waters surround the islands. Understanding that the Ryukyu Reversion Agreement would soon return the islands under Japanese administration, China acted quickly to make their claim to the islands, and in December 1970, “formally stated that the Diaoyu Islands (and Taiwan) were China’s sacred territory and that exploitation of the area by foreign countries would not be tolerated.”¹³⁸ Therefore, the issue continues to remain at an impasse to the present day, with neither side being able to fully utilize the resources in the area, out of fear of escalating the dispute into conflict. Pan concludes, “while military conflict between China and Japan over the islands is unlikely, so is any form of resolution of the dispute,” because neither side appears willing to budge in regards to their position.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Pan, “Sino-Japanese Dispute Over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands,” 73.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 87.

D. ANALYSIS OF THREE HYPOTHESES: WHAT'S NEXT, RESOLUTION, CONFLICT, OR THE STATUS QUO?

Understanding that Japan and China remain fiercely divided regarding the legality of Tokyo's current administration over the islands, it is necessary to discuss what the prospects for resolution—or conflict—over the islands are in the near future. In so doing, this section examines three competing hypotheses regarding the future volatility of the dispute: Unryu Suganuma's thesis regarding the role of irredentism and how it increases the risk of conflict, Krista Wiegand's argument concerning China's history of delay and coercive diplomacy and how it will use its rising power to influence the dispute, and lastly, Taylor Fravel's thesis concerning China's history of compromise in its territorial disputes and why China has yet to compromise over the Diaoyu/Senkakus. While all three hypotheses concur that conflict remains at the present moment unlikely, they all admit the potential for escalation remains present and has increased over the last decade.

Unryu Suganuma argues that irredentism, which he defines as “some historical argument in which the past discovery, occupancy, or access to the ‘land of the people’ takes precedence, has played the major role in dictating the current impasse in the territorial dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands.¹⁴⁰ He declares that because irredentism is rampant on both sides of the dispute, it has made compromise between Tokyo and Beijing very difficult.¹⁴¹ Therefore, Suganuma contends that a peaceful resolution to the dispute remains very unlikely in the immediate future, as both China and Japan continue to claim that they have historical rights to the islands. Consequently, because the dispute remains “rooted in the deep history of Sino-Japanese relations [due to their] geographical closeness...[and] complicated cultural interchange,” Suganuma concludes that the only way the dispute can be resolved is if Tokyo and Beijing are able to prioritize future mutual benefits over the “historical, geographical, and cultural contexts” surrounding the conflict.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Suganuma, *Sovereign Rights and Territorial Space in Sino-Japanese Relations*, 1.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 157–158.

With this in mind, Suganuma supposes that there are only three plausible resolutions to the dispute. The first, and what he deems is the most likely, resolution to the dispute is what he labels the “Joint Development Scenario” whereby “both China (including Taiwan) and Japan may join together to develop the Diaoyu Islands while the sovereign right of the...islands is shelved.”¹⁴³ Suganuma believes that this is the most likely scenario because “China has [already] made a proposal to jointly develop the islands,” ultimately he contends that all this resolution will take to occur is a Japanese acquiescence to shelve the dispute and agree to mutually develop the area.¹⁴⁴ Due to the dispute, Tokyo has been unable to fully benefit from the natural resources present in the area, and Suganuma contends that this is a major motivating factor for Japan to agree to shelve the discussion of sovereignty and mutually develop the area with Beijing. The second scenario Suganuma supposes is what he calls the “Japanese Unilateral Development Scenario,” which he declares is the “most unlikely way to resolve the issue.”¹⁴⁵ In this scenario, Suganuma supposes that the Japanese could unilaterally develop the natural resources around Diaoyu/Senkaku during a possible period of “civil war or ethnic unrest” within China. Because this scenario requires total chaos to engulf the Chinese government, ultimately distracting them from Japanese actions concerning the islands, Suganuma believes this scenario is highly unlikely. Lastly, and the most dangerous resolution to this outcome is what Suganuma declares is the “Third Sino-Japanese War Scenario,” whereby if China’s political and military strength gets to the point where it no longer sees the presence of the United States as a viable deterrent to military action they could look to forcefully resolve the issue.¹⁴⁶ Suganuma concludes that what makes this scenario even more dangerous is that the United Nations will be unable to broker a peace because both Beijing and Washington maintain positions on the UN Security Council. Ultimately, he declares that the “international community would

¹⁴³ Suganuma, *Sovereign Rights and Territorial Space in Sino-Japanese Relations*, 159.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 160–161.

simply have to stand by and watch the messy war in the East China Sea.”¹⁴⁷ However, Suganuma maintains this scenario remains presently unlikely, and that ultimately, the situation can and should be resolved by Tokyo and Beijing shelving their irredentist claims and developing the natural resources around the islands together, to their mutual benefit.

Krista Wiegand also hypothesizes that joint development of the Diaoyu/Senkaku’s is the best path toward a resolution of this dispute, declaring it to be the “most rational strategy” for Beijing to take.¹⁴⁸ However, while China continues to push for joint development of the islands, there remains “little incentive for China to drop its territorial claim” because it comes at a very small political cost since China remains the challenger in the dispute.¹⁴⁹ Wiegand asserts that China maintains its territorial claim to the islands, despite pushing for joint development, because this ties directly to their history of coercive diplomacy whereby they use these territorial disputes as “bargaining leverage” in order to get diplomatic concessions from their neighbors on other issues.¹⁵⁰ Ultimately, Wiegand concludes that the Chinese are very unlikely to push for any concrete resolution of the conflict while there remain other strains on diplomatic relations between China and Japan, such as the history textbook controversy, the role of the Japanese Self Defense Forces, and Japanese Nationalists attempts to revise Japan’s pacifist constitution. Therefore, Wiegand argues the Chinese will keep the territorial dispute as a relevant point of contention until “relations [with Japan] have improved significantly enough that there are no longer any disputed issues...that are significant enough to link to the territorial dispute.”¹⁵¹ Hence, Wiegand concludes that the territorial dispute is likely to “continue to endure” with China continuing to maintain diplomatic leverage.

¹⁴⁷ Sugauma, *Sovereign Rights and Territorial Space in Sino-Japanese Relations*, 161.

¹⁴⁸ Wiegand, *Enduring Territorial Disputes*, 141.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 141.

Like Wiegand, Taylor Fravel argues that there remains little incentive for the Chinese to compromise over the islands, and therefore, Beijing will continue to pursue a “delaying strategy” regarding the dispute in order to “bide time and...avoid damaging China’s [economic] relations with Japan.”¹⁵² Furthermore, Fravel expands upon this point in his essay, “Explaining Stability in the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands Dispute,” by contending that China will continue to pursue a delaying strategy in regards to the islands because “compromise must yield some tangible benefit that exceeds the expected value of sovereignty over the land at stake and the likely costs...of compromise...[Therefore] if the net benefits of compromise are limited, then states should persist with a delaying strategy in a dispute.”¹⁵³ Therefore, because the benefits of compromise do not override the benefits of delay, China will continue to avoid compromise.

Ultimately, while his overarching thesis is that China has avoided conflict and mostly compromised in its territorial disputes, Fravel concludes that because of the lack of incentive to compromise, the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands—along with Taiwan—remain the most likely of China’s territorial disputes to lead to war.¹⁵⁴ Yet, while Fravel notes that the rise of nationalism in both China and Japan “may also further reduce the already slim odds of compromise” over Diaoyu/Senkaku, “nationalist pressures...have not translated into increasingly frequent threats to use force or an unwillingness to compromise.”¹⁵⁵ Ultimately, Fravel insists the reason China will not compromise over Diaoyu/Senkaku is because it does not have to. Despite the tension, China continues to exhibit a healthy economic relationship with both Tokyo and Washington, and so far increased rhetoric over the islands has not led to any rash calls for military action. Therefore, Fravel contends that the dispute will continue to simmer, with little likelihood

¹⁵² Fravel, *Strong Borders Secure Nation*, 271.

¹⁵³ M. Taylor Fravel, “Explaining Stability in the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands Dispute,” *Getting the Triangle Straight: Managing China–Japan–US Relations*, Washington, DC: *The Brookings Institution* (2010), 159.

¹⁵⁴ Fravel, *Strong Borders Secure Nation*, 316.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 312.

of compromise or escalation, with settlement only possibly “in the event of a grand bargain amid a broader Japanese-Chinese entente, in which improved bilateral relations outweigh the value of controlling the islands.”¹⁵⁶

In conclusion, all three authors continue to insist that while the dispute maintains the threat of escalation, an all out war over the islands remains unlikely. Ultimately, they all conclude that both China and Japan can benefit significantly from ignoring the nationalist calls regarding historical ownership over the islands, and just focus on the mutually beneficial track of joint development. Unfortunately, due to their violent history and close geographic proximity, a deep distrust of one another remains, and has played a significant role in hindering joint development.

E. U.S. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Recognizing that the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands dispute is unlikely to lead to a peaceful compromise in the near future, it is imperative the United States continues to pursue peaceful diplomatic solutions to the dispute. This said, because Japan represents the key American ally in the Asia-Pacific region, it remains clear the United States will use military force to defend its national interests in the event of a war with China. Therefore, it is critical for Washington to take the steps necessary to avoid what would be a devastating and destabilizing war in the Pacific.

In his essay, “The East China Sea Dispute: Context, Claims, Issues, and Possible Solutions,” Mark J. Valencia lists four major actions that must be taken by Washington, Tokyo, and Beijing to ensure that escalated tensions regarding the islands does not lead to war. First, Valencia suggests the United States should work to remove Taiwan’s claim over the islands “by making clear that [Washington’s] recognition of the PRC as the sole legitimate government of China carries with it recognition of the PRC as the sole representative of Chinese claims to the continental shelf and [exclusive economic

¹⁵⁶ Fravel, *Strong Borders Secure Nation*, 317.

zone].”¹⁵⁷ By taking this action, Valencia argues that this would “encourage Japan to do likewise, and could incidentally help improve Sino-Japanese relations.”¹⁵⁸

Secondly, Valencia insists that both Beijing and Tokyo should also work together to discourage nationalist groups within their nations from taking provocative actions (such as protests, demonstrations, attempts to plant flags) regarding the islands. Valencia argues that the governments of China and Japan should not advocate such acts and that they must be willing to “disapprove” of them publicly.¹⁵⁹ Valencia declares that by publicly voicing their disapproval of these provocations, it will help further instill trust between the two countries and will alleviate tensions. Third, Valencia insists the international community must work with Beijing and Tokyo at developing international institutions that emphasize “preventive diplomacy.” Valencia argues that the purpose of this institution would not be resolution of the territorial dispute, “but rather to consider ways of managing the dispute nonviolently and preventing, or at least controlling, escalation should there be more flare-ups.”¹⁶⁰ As a model, Valencia suggests the ASEAN Regional Forum, which represents an excellent international institution that allows the United States to work with member states in Southeast Asia to help avoid escalation of regional conflicts.

Lastly, Valencia recognizes that the most significant threat of an escalation of this dispute is by Japan firing upon a Chinese military vessel it has deemed has violated its territorial air space or waters. In order to avoid this scenario, Valencia declares that the United States must help broker a bilateral agreement between Tokyo and Beijing regarding strict international guidelines for the movement of military vessels within each other’s territorial space. Valencia’s hope is that such an agreement could “lead to a ‘Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the East China Sea,’ [which he declares would be] similar but more robust than that reached by the multiple claimants to the South

¹⁵⁷ Valencia, “The East China Sea Dispute: Context, Claims, Issues, and Possible Solutions,” 162.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

China Sea, of which China is the most prominent.”¹⁶¹ Valencia concludes that by taking these actions, Sino-Japanese relations are bound to improve. Ultimately, he asserts that improved Sino-Japanese relations would remove the obstacles surrounding joint development and could lead to a bilateral agreement between Tokyo and Beijing to ignore historical claims of ownership over the islands and invest in a mutually beneficial plan to take advantage of the islands natural resources.

Therefore, as Valencia’s proposals suggest, there remains actions that the United States can take to help encourage improved bilateral relations between China and Japan regarding the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands and the East China Sea. Due to its close economic relationship with both nations, it is imperative that the United States continues to encourage and emphasize economic interdependence within East Asia. While military conflict remains unlikely, it remains paramount for the United States to continue to provide and promote economic incentives and international institutions to help avoid escalation.

Conversely, one counterargument to the thesis is the increasing role of nationalism within both countries. Shinzo Abe’s return to power in Japan—arguably on the back of his more aggressive foreign policy platform—may represent a growing trend among the Japanese to push for a revision of Japan’s pacifist constitution and increase the capability and significance of the Japanese Self Defense Forces. Consequently, rising nationalism within Japan is bound to spur similar nationalist sentiments within China, which could encourage both governments to bolster their domestic support by taking harder stances regarding the disputed islands. So far, as Fravel argues in *Strong Borders Secure Nation*, these increased nationalist sentiments have yet to lead to an escalation of the conflict or an unwillingness to participate in diplomacy from either side, but it is a factor to which the United States must continue to pay close attention. In the end, however, as all the authors reviewed in this chapter suggest, the best path toward promoting peace in the region is for the United States to continue to promote close

¹⁶¹ Valencia, “The East China Sea Dispute: Context, Claims, Issues, and Possible Solutions,” 164.

economic relationships among its partners in Asia, and work to develop the necessary international institutions in order to provide guidance and direction in the event of any further escalation of China's territorial disputes.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS TO U.S. FOREIGN POLICY IN ASIA

A. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to review the information discussed over the course of this thesis, while also providing some broader conclusions regarding future U.S. foreign policy in Asia. Moreover, this chapter first revisits the debate between alarmists and pragmatists outlined in Chapter I of the thesis. Paying specific attention to the differing conclusions regarding China's rise to power, this chapter seeks to put China's rise into context, using the historical information discussed in the three case studies as supporting evidence. Secondly, this chapter expands upon the case studies examined in this thesis in order to draw specific lessons learned regarding long-term U.S. strategy in Asia. Accordingly, recommendations concerning the potential future expansion or regression of American influence in Asia are consequently made. Lastly, this chapter provides concluding thoughts and observations regarding the future security situation within Asia, and provides suggestions for how Beijing and Washington can work together to promote the continued peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region.

B. TAKING CHINA'S RISE IN CONTEXT: IS CONFLICT LIKELY?

Over the past two decades, the rapid modernization of China's PLA has provoked great consternation in Washington regarding Beijing's motivations behind the buildup, and how it may affect American strategic interests in Asia. The Chinese CCP has sought to reassure alarmists in Washington that China's military buildup is being done with peaceful intentions, insisting that the increase in China's military capability is only natural due to its economic ascendance and its subsequent increased role in the international community. In his article "It is Completely Justifiable to Reinforce the Wall Around One's House," Chinese journalist Meng Yan declared "when [conditions] of a

household improves, it is...natural [to]...improve the fence or the wall around the house. Now, as [China] gets richer, it is natural that we allocate...money to strengthen our national defense and armed forces.”¹⁶²

Such statements, however, have done little to temper the fears of Western observers who continue to insist that China’s military buildup is being done to reassert Chinese dominance in Asia. Steven Mosher, in his book, *Hegemon: China’s Plan to Dominate Asia and the Rest of the World*, paints a much more sobering picture of Chinese intentions. Mosher declares that China’s military rise is being done specifically to seek revenge against Western imperialism during the “Century of Humiliation” and that “only the complete recovery of China’s lost possessions and its hegemonic status would fully vindicate China’s humiliation at the hands of [its] perceived inferiors.”¹⁶³ Furthermore, in referencing disagreements between CCP leader Jiang Zemin and top PLA generals regarding China’s strategic military goals at the beginning of the 21st century, Mosher declared that such arguments were not the result of disagreement regarding long-term goals, but merely about the timing of future Chinese actions. Mosher argues that there is no debate regarding “China’s long-term strategic goals...[China’s leaders] are of one mind that Taiwan should be recovered, Japan neutralized, and the US driven out of Asia.”¹⁶⁴ Therefore, Mosher’s conclusion is that China sees military conflict with the United States as inevitable and has therefore built up its forces in anticipation of this conflict with “the unspoken goal...to break America’s back in Asia and thus end America’s reign as the sole superpower in the world.”¹⁶⁵

Nevertheless, despite the insistence of alarmists, such as Mosher, it remains difficult to ascertain exactly what China’s true intentions are for the future. Therefore, going forward it is necessary to analyze the recent history of China objectively and attempt to draw conclusions from its past decisions to either act aggressively or

¹⁶² Meng Yan, “It Is Completely Justifiable to Reinforce the Wall Around One’s House,” *Jiefangjun Bao Online*, March 9, 2013.

¹⁶³ Steven W. Mosher, *Hegemon: China’s Plan to Dominate Asia and the World* (San Francisco, CA: Encounter Books, 2001), 68.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

compromise diplomatically. In so doing, several immediate conclusions can be drawn. First, despite the fearful rhetoric of the alarmists, the expansion of China's military to this point is understandable. At the beginning of the military modernization and reforms of the 1980s, China's military was woefully ill equipped to defend itself. Beijing's military was overly reliant on strength in numbers and not technology, and after witnessing Washington's crushing victory over Saddam Hussein's massive Iraqi army during the 1991 Persian Gulf War, China quickly understood it could no longer rely on numerical superiority in armed personnel alone in order to deter an American invasion. Therefore, China wisely began to heavily invest in its military modernization in order to catch up to the world's more advanced militaries. Understanding that this military modernization came hand in hand with double-digit economic growth within China, it is not difficult to question China's intentions. Ultimately, the bottom line behind China's recent military modernization program was that China recognized it not only lagged behind the United States in terms of military capability, but also found that many of its neighbors—Taiwan included—far surpassed Beijing's military capability.

Another major conclusion that can be drawn about the potential for future Chinese aggression is that China's rise has been done within the norms of the current international system. China has embraced free-market capitalism by gradually opening up its economy to Western markets and has invested heavily market-based institutions, such as the World Trade Organization. Furthermore, by opening up its economy, China has become increasingly interdependent with the United States and its neighbors in South Korea and Japan. As Doug Bandow observes in his article, "There's a Great Deal for the U.S. to Celebrate in China's Rise," economic investment and trade between China and the United States "now exceeds a half trillion dollars a year."¹⁶⁶ This increased economic interdependence, Bandow concludes, is bound to lead to increased cooperation on a number of other issues, such as "peacekeeping, anti-piracy operations, environmental protection, humanitarian relief, combating terrorism, and conflict resolution."¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Doug Bandow, "There's a Great Deal for the U.S. to Celebrate in China's Rise," *Forbes*, June 4, 2013.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Ultimately, because the CCP understands that regime survival is tied directly to economic growth, it is highly unlikely to implement rash foreign policy decisions, which could have a destabilizing effect on China's economy. This, above all other issues, remains the largest deterrent to Chinese military aggression in its territorial disputes.

Then again, despite the compelling arguments for deterrence regarding Chinese aggression, the nebulous aura surrounding China's long-term strategic intentions has furthered fostered distrust from the international community. John Mearsheimer highlights this growing distrust over China's intentions. Referencing the 2009 Australian Defense White Paper, Mearsheimer quotes Australia's concern that "the pace, scope and structure of China's military modernization have the potential to give its neighbors cause for concern if not carefully explained, and if China does not reach out to others to build confidence regarding its military plans."¹⁶⁸ Mearsheimer's argument is simple: while China continues to insist its intentions are peaceful and that it has no desire to act aggressively towards its neighbors or the United States, it continues to invest large sums of money into the development of a modern military that for all intents and purposes has been designed for the specific purpose of discouraging American involvement in the event of an escalation of tensions with Taiwan.

Ultimately, by working to limit the capability of the American military to influence foreign policy in the Pacific, Mearsheimer believes the main reason behind China's military modernization is to enable it to "dominate the Asia-Pacific region much as the United States dominates the Western hemisphere."¹⁶⁹ Therefore, while China rightly has little desire to go to war with the United States, it does want to create a situation where the United States cannot dictate the political behavior of China or its neighbors. In the end, Mearsheimer declares that China's long-term goal is to return to its dominant position over the rest of Asia.

While pragmatists, such as Taylor Fravel have pointed to China's recent history of compromise in its territorial disputes as proof that alarmist fears regarding a stronger

¹⁶⁸ Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm," 382.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 389.

China are unwarranted, Mearsheimer quickly dismisses this argument. Accordingly, Mearsheimer sees little utility in the history argument, because he believes that “past behavior is...not a reliable indicator of future behavior because leaders come and go and some are more hawkish than others.”¹⁷⁰ Mearsheimer contends that in the past, China has resisted aggression because it was not strong enough to fulfill its broader goals. Subsequently, he argues that the real indicator to China’s intentions will come when it reaches a subsequent position of military strength that it does not have to fear the interference of outside actors, such as the United States. It is then, Mearsheimer concludes, that “we will see how committed [China] is to the status quo.”¹⁷¹ If Mearsheimer’s contention holds true, once China reaches a dominant position of power, it will be free to act out its true intentions and will reclaim its position as the hegemonic power in Asia.

Bruce Elleman echoes Mearsheimer’s sentiment that the situation with China is constantly changing, and therefore, it is currently impossible to develop concrete conclusions regarding China’s true intentions. Referencing an analysis done in 2000 by Michael Swaine and Ashley Tellis regarding potential changes in a nation’s external behavior as it reaches great power status, Elleman declares that there are multiple key “behavioral changes that Beijing might adopt” that would signal a change to a more aggressive Chinese foreign policy, such as:

The [augmentation] of military capabilities, the [development of] a sphere of influence, [an increased desire to] redress past wrongs, [the rewriting of] the prevailing ‘rules of the game’ to reflect its own interests, and [a preparation of its forces]...to ‘thwart preventive war or to launch predatory attacks on its foes.’¹⁷²

Disturbingly, Elleman argues that over the past few decades, China has embraced all of those behavioral changes. He concludes that the sixth behavioral trait Swaine and Tellis lists regarding a rising nations desire to seek to “acquire new or reclaim old territory for their resources or for symbolic reasons by penalizing, if necessary, any opponents or

¹⁷⁰ Mearsheimer, “The Gathering Storm,” 384.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 385.

¹⁷² Elleman et al., *Beijing’s Power and China’s Borders*, 324.

bystanders who resist such claims,” remains the ultimate indicator of an embrace by Beijing of a more aggressive foreign policy.¹⁷³ Therefore, Elleman’s contention is that, should China attempt to use its increased political and military power to force the resolution of a territorial dispute, it is a signal that China’s long-term desire is indeed regional hegemony.

Therefore, China’s actions over the next decade must be monitored carefully. The study of recent history has shown that Beijing has not typically gone to war over its territorial disputes, often preferring to use them as political bargaining chips in order to secure favorable diplomatic agreements with its neighbors. Furthermore, it is also true that there are many reasons currently deterring China from the installment of an aggressive foreign policy strategy. Certainly, that remains the case today, as China’s economy continues to develop and its military power—while steadily improving—remains inferior to Washington’s. Ultimately, as both Mearsheimer and Elleman suggest, the real test of China’s intentions will come once it assumes the role of a dominant economic and military power, which it may achieve within the next few decades. By that time, domestic and economic challenges within the United States may have taken its toll on Washington’s power projection capabilities, leaving it unable to check Chinese aggression in Asia. How China reacts to this situation will truly decide whether Beijing’s long-term goals align with globalization and economic interdependence or a return to Chinese hegemony over Asia.

C. MAPPING LONG-TERM U.S. STRATEGY IN ASIA: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE CASE STUDIES

Understanding that future Chinese actions regarding its territorial disputes remains uncertain and subject to change, what lessons can be learned from the three case studies examined in this thesis and how can that be applied to long-term U.S. strategy in Asia? Ultimately, what the case studies have shown is that while tensions over these three disputed regions have increased over the past decade or so, the risk of an escalation of conflict within Asia continues to remain low. As discussed, current factors, such as

¹⁷³ Elleman et al., *Beijing’s Power and China’s Borders*, 325.

increasing economic interdependence with its neighbors and the continued presence of American military forces in the region, serves as powerful deterrents to Chinese aggression over its territorial disputes. Therefore, current factors have created a unique opportunity for cooperation between the United States and China. As China's subsequent power grows, the United States may find it more difficult to influence Chinese foreign policy, and therefore, it is important that it act proactively to encourage China's continued peaceful rise and acceptance of international political norms. Encouragingly, all three case studies provide the United States with ample opportunity for mutual benefit and cooperation with Beijing.

In Central Asia, Washington has an excellent opportunity to cooperate with China on counterterrorism. As Bruce Elleman concludes, the greatest risk over the escalation of tensions in Central Asia “remains the transnational threat of terrorism, especially Islamic fundamentalist influence over the Uyghurs of Xinjiang.”¹⁷⁴ This mounting fear of Islamic radicalism dictating actions among the Uyghur minorities in Xinjiang has prompted Beijing's harsh responses to any and all forms of Uyghur protests against the central government. The United States, having spent the last decade battling Islamic terrorists while subsequently developing positive relationships with moderate Muslim politicians in both Iraq and Afghanistan has the unique experience necessary to assist Beijing with its ethnic issues within Xinjiang. If Beijing is willing, the United States has a wealth of experience regarding the international Islamic terrorist networks within Central Asia—including the ETIM currently embedded in Xinjiang—which could be made available to Beijing through increased intelligence sharing or bilateral counterterrorist exercises between the two nations. Ultimately, developing a mutual trust between the two nations military and intelligence services would go a long way in fostering positive diplomatic relations and could play a major role in encouraging a rising China to relinquish any hegemonic aspirations.

However, as the Central Asian case study suggests, any increased cooperation between Washington and Beijing regarding counterterrorism must be done in an ethical

¹⁷⁴ Elleman et al., *Beijing's Power and China's Borders*, 318.

manner. One major advantage of increased cooperation regarding Beijing's counterterrorist policies would be the opportunity for Washington to campaign for the protection of the human rights of non-violent Uyghurs. As Elizabeth Van Wie Davis argues in her essay, "Uyghur Ethnic Separatism in Xinjiang China," many in the international community "fear that China is using the war on terror to disregard the human rights of Uyghurs...Not only are human rights abuses abhorrent...but also the Chinese worsen the problem by targeting and antagonizing nonviolent Uyghurs."¹⁷⁵ In Xinjiang, the United States must continue to champion the preservation of human rights, for it knows full well from its experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan that the perception of human rights abuses will only foster greater public outcry and increase the risk of violence. If both the United States and China want to resolve the situation within Xinjiang peacefully, it is paramount that Washington encourages Beijing to stop its blanket persecution of Uyghur Muslims—and encourage dialogue between the CCP and peaceful Uyghur separatists—while shifting its counterterrorist efforts toward eliminating Islamic radical networks within Xinjiang. Thus, should Beijing and Washington be open to cooperation and dialogue regarding the proper execution of a counterterrorist campaign within the disputed region, positive developments within Xinjiang can occur in time.

As in Central Asia, positive developments can be ascertained from the study of the Sino-Indian border dispute. Firstly, despite a recent uptick in rhetoric between Beijing and New Delhi regarding its contested border in Arunachal Pradesh, it remains highly unlikely that Sino-Indian border tensions will result in any kind of military conflict. As the case study suggests, increased hostilities between the two nations regarding this disputed region can mostly be attributed to political handwringing, as Beijing attempts to use the dispute as a political bargaining chip in future diplomatic negotiations with its neighbor and emerging economic rival. Therefore, for the United States, positive developments can occur from an increased Sino-Indian competition.

¹⁷⁵ Van Wie Davis, "Uyghur Muslim Ethnic Separatism," 11.

Specifically, the United States as an independent observer can gain significant political influence with both New Delhi and Beijing as both nations compete for American support for their territorial claims. While the United States has long seen India as a key potential ally to balance against a rising China, perhaps the best policy for Washington is to remain neutral in any escalated Sino-Indian dispute. New Delhi has shown little resolve to ally formally with the United States to begin with, and any future attempt by Washington to promote a formal alliance against China would inevitably alienate Beijing and could encourage them to begin to act more aggressively against American interests in Asia. Since the United States greatly desires that a rising China respect the current international political and economic institutions within Asia, this policy could be disastrous.

Going forward, Washington should do everything in its power to encourage Chinese engagement and cooperation, and should avoid any actions that could foster distrust with the emerging nation. Therefore, the United States should continue to encourage continued political and economic cooperation with both nations, and cement its position as a political and economic partner to both Asian powers. Consequently, as discussed in Chapter IV of this thesis, in the event that China's long-term aspirations turn out to be aggressive, an increased Sino-Indian rivalry would play a valuable role in diverting Chinese military funds away from naval expansion and modernization. As Evan Montgomery argues in his essay, "Competitive Strategies against Continental Powers: The Geopolitics of Sino-Indian-American Relations," "should Beijing respond to an Indian military buildup it would confront significant opportunity costs, potentially diminishing the resources that it could devote to the aerospace and maritime capabilities that are most worrisome to the United States."¹⁷⁶ As Montgomery's conclusion suggests, the greatest threat the U.S. military faces in promoting its strategic interests in Asia is China's rising naval and aerospace capability exercised in an anti-access area denial strategy; therefore, any situation that diverts Beijing's attention away from the pursuit of this capability will yield tangible strategic benefits to the United States.

¹⁷⁶ Montgomery, "Competitive Strategies against Continental Powers: The Geopolitics of Sino-Indian-American Relations," 92.

Lastly, the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands dispute can also yield positive benefits for American interests in Asia. This said, of the three case studies examined in this thesis, the Diaoyu/Senkaku island dispute remains the most dangerous. China and Japan have a very unique and combative history, as the bitter memory of Japanese aggression during the early 20th century continues to fuel hostility and encourage nationalistic irredentism within both nations. Furthermore, the discovery of vast natural resources in the waters surrounding the islands has only enflamed tensions over the ownership of the islands. Thus, it remains paramount for China, Japan, and the United States to remain engaged in discussions regarding the dispute, with the best policy to shelve Chinese and Japanese historical claims of ownership and instead focus on the development of the natural resources to the mutual benefit of both nations.

While the diplomatic relationship between Tokyo and Beijing remains fragile and subject to conflict, over the past decade, both nations have worked to downplay historical disputes—such as the islands dispute—and worked to encourage mutually beneficial economic relations. As Taylor Fravel concludes, “both sides have managed the dispute effectively and prevented it from becoming a central issue in China-Japan relations.”¹⁷⁷ Therefore, this has established a noteworthy precedent in Sino-Japanese relations whereby both nations have emphasized economic gains over long-standing political rivalry, animosity, and distrust. Consequently, the mutual development of the islands can provide tangible benefits for both nations and would go a long way toward rebuilding positive relations. As Krista Wiegand argues in *Enduring Territorial Disputes*, the last thing China wants is to disturb increasing economic relations with Tokyo. Ultimately, Wiegand insists that because “Chinese policymakers have prioritized economic development and modernization over sovereignty,” there remains a great incentive for China to seek a compromise in its territorial dispute with Japan centered on the joint development of the islands natural resources.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, in order to avoid being drawn into a potentially catastrophic conflict between its key ally in Asia and its most dangerous

¹⁷⁷ Fravel, “Explaining Stability in the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands Dispute,” 160.

¹⁷⁸ Wiegand, *Enduring Territorial Disputes*, 141.

potential adversary, it is paramount that the United States continues to emphasize the economic benefits of joint development. Only then, can this potentially debilitating dispute be settled.

All this said, what is the road ahead for American foreign policy regarding China's territorial disputes? Ultimately, in order to best counter the challenges associated with these varying territorial disputes, Washington must remain flexible and seek to promote both neo-realist and neo-liberal measures in its dealings with Beijing. China has risen within the context of the current international political and economic structure. It greatly values its permanent position on the UN Security Council and it has continued to promote the development of multi-national institutions, such as the World Trade Organization, East Asian Forum, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. In this context, it is clear that China has worked hard to become a responsible and respected member of the international community. The United States would be wise to pursue neo-liberal measures in its foreign relations with China, and continue to promote China's involvement in peaceful and productive international organizations in order to encourage China to rise peacefully. Furthermore, getting China to embrace neo-liberal maxims would ultimately discourage Beijing from using military force, as Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye argue in their essay, "Power and Interdependence," "the use of force often has costly effects on non-security goals."¹⁷⁹ Therefore, engagement with China along neo-liberal measures can help promote peace and cooperation within the region.

However, the United States must not completely embrace neo-liberal measures alone. It is extremely dangerous to assume that membership in international institutions and economic interdependence alone will ensure peace—one needs only reference the political situation in Europe in late July 1914 to understand the folly of blind faith in liberalism—and therefore, the United States must also take the appropriate measures in case China decides to act aggressively. As John Mearsheimer infamously stated in *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, China represents the "high church of *realpolitik* in the

¹⁷⁹ Richard K. Betts, ed., *Conflict After the Cold War: Arguments on Causes of War and Peace*, 4th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2012), 168.

post-Cold War world.”¹⁸⁰ Accordingly, Mearsheimer declares that China’s decision to embrace economic and military modernization over the past few decades has been done to counter American influence in Asia, and ultimately, restore Chinese hegemony in the region. Consequently, China’s economic rise and military modernization has subsequently prompted the expansion of realist maxims within Washington in order to balance Beijing’s military expansion via the highly publicized “pivot to the Pacific,” which emphasizes the forward deployment of American military assets to the Asia-Pacific region and a reliance on nuclear deterrence to prevent aggressive Chinese military action. Nonetheless, neo-realists, such as Mearsheimer, will argue that the United States should not fear the expansion of China, for as the history of the Cold War suggests, the reemergence of a bipolar balance of power could lead to renewed peace and security due to mutual respect and fear.¹⁸¹

Consequently, the continued presence of American military assets in Asia will continue to serve as a stabilizing factor within the region, particularly in regards to its security alliance with Japan. As Charles Glaser argues in his essay, “Will China’s Rise Lead to War,” an adoption of realist measures against China does not mean war with China is inevitable. Glaser admits that the forward presence of American military forces in Asia constrains China’s ability to act unilaterally against its neighbors, which fosters anger and hostility in Beijing. However, he also declares that the presence of the U.S. military in Asia “benefits China by enabling Japan to spend far less on defense... [and therefore] China has seen the alliance as adding to regional stability, because it fears Japan more than the United States.”¹⁸² Therefore, in order to continue to promote peace and stability in the region, the continued presence of American military assets in the region remains vital.

¹⁸⁰ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 375.

¹⁸¹ John Mearsheimer, “Why We Will Soon Miss the Cold War,” *Atlantic Monthly* 266, no. 2 (1990): 39.

¹⁸² Charles Glaser, “Will China’s Rise Lead to War: Why Realism does Not Mean Pessimism,” *Foreign Affairs* no. 90 (March/April 2011): 83.

D. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND OBSERVATIONS

The three case studies examined in this thesis suggest that war with China in the near future remains very unlikely. Although China has seemingly embraced many realist measures in fostering its political rise with the development of a robust and expensive military modernization program, China has also risen peacefully within the context of the current international political structure and has championed its involvement in peaceful international institutions. Furthermore, historical evidence has proven that despite bordering numerous hostile neighbors, the PRC has rarely gone to war to settle a territorial dispute. This thesis ultimately agrees with Taylor Fravel and Krista Wiegand's argument that China has historically sought to avoid war over disputed territories because it values their use as political bargaining chips.

Additionally, looking ahead, there is a variety of reasons that will continue to discourage China from acting aggressively to solve its territorial disputes. Despite its rising political, economic, and military power, China remains constrained. Any aggressive action it decides to take will ultimately undermine the massive economic growth on which the CCP has staked its political legitimacy. China has strong economic ties to Central Asia, India, and Japan, and therefore, any pursuit of a military solution to its territorial disputes in these regions would greatly hinder China's growth. This said, the examination of these three case studies suggests it would be foolhardy for the CCP to act aggressively to resolve its territorial disputes. Thus, there remains a great incentive for China to continue to work within the current international system. While Beijing may continue to harbor strong desires to reclaim its "lost" territories, restore Chinese authority, and ultimately, reinstate Chinese hegemony over the region, it will most likely attempt to do so via continued economic growth and political bargaining. Thus, the United States should continue to engage China from a neo-liberal perspective, in the hope that China's entrenchment in international institutions and norms will foster peaceful intentions in Beijing.

Conversely, however, while the United States continues to promote neo-liberalism within Asia, it must remain dedicated to maintaining its military deterrent in the event China decides to act irrationally. While there are a multitude of reasons for

China to pursue peaceful resolutions to its territorial disputes, it only takes one irrational actor to offset the current peace and stability in the region. To illustrate this point, realist thinker Kenneth Waltz, in his book, *Man, the State and War*, brought up Jean-Jacques Rousseau's infamous quote that in order for the world "to be peaceable and for harmony to be maintained, all the citizens without exception would have to be [equally] good...if by ill hap there should be a single self-seeker or hypocrite...he would certainly get the better of his pious compatriots."¹⁸³ Thus, the United States must be prepared to act in the event of an irrational decision by the Chinese. Therefore, the current emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region that is illustrated by the American "pivot" to the Pacific is a wise foreign policy objective.

As the conclusions drawn by realists, such as Mearsheimer, Waltz, and Glaser attest, realist-balancing policies are not fundamentally destabilizing. Ultimately, such actions help promote peace due to the mutual respect for the capabilities of the other side that results from realist measures being adopted by rival nations. China will continue to pursue a position of stronger influence within Asia no matter what the United States does. Beijing may accept the diplomatic realities presented through its involvement in liberal institutions, but that will not change China's intentions if its ultimate goal is to become the dominant power in Asia. Furthermore, if the United States were to rely on international institutions alone, and subsequently, decrease its military presence in the region, then it would have given up its capability to deter Chinese aggression, and could, therefore, find it extremely difficult to bargain with China and promote its peaceful rise.

All of this said, in the end, an economically strong and peaceful China will present a positive development for both the United States and the rest of Asia. It can be argued that the most dangerous and chaotic period of Asian history came during the period in which China was at its weakest; in the decades immediately following the breakup of the Qing Dynasty. Given the presence of a politically and militarily weak adversary in China, the rising militant regime in Tokyo took advantage of the vulnerability of China, and subsequently, waged a war of violent conquest that

¹⁸³ Kenneth Neal Waltz, *Man, The State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 169.

reverberated throughout Asia. Therefore, it remains in the best interest of the United States and Asia as a whole for China to be politically strong, because a strong China has historically deterred aggression, and therefore, maintained the peace and stability of Asia. Furthermore, as Taylor Fravel concludes, a strong and satisfied China is very unlikely to resort to force to resolve a territorial dispute.¹⁸⁴ Taiwan, of course, remains the outlier, but in every other case, cooperation and compromise can lead to a positive resolution of China's disputes. China understands this more than anyone, because it continues to hold onto its territorial claims as valuable political bargaining chips. The challenge for the United States and China's neighbors is to figure out exactly what China's ultimate price is.

¹⁸⁴ Fravel, *Strong Borders Secure Nation*, 319.

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