THE MILITARY LENS:
Doctrinal Differences, Misperception, and Deterrence Failure
in Sino-American Relations
by
Christopher P. Twomey

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Abstract
Nations, because of their different strategic situations, histories, and military cultures can have dramatically different beliefs about the nature of effective military doctrine, strategy, and capabilities. This dissertation argues that when such doctrines—or "theories of victory"—differ across states, misperceptions and false optimism are likely to occur. In turn, these can impede international diplomacy and statecraft by making communication and common assessments of the balance of power more difficult. When states are engaged in strategic coercion—either deterrence or compellence—these problems can lead to escalation and war. To develop this unique explanation for the pernicious problem of false optimism, this dissertation draws on scholarship on the sources of doctrine, strategic culture, misperception, strategic coercion, and deterrence theory. It assesses the argument through case studies of attempts at strategic coercion in early Cold War Sino-American conflicts in Korea and the Taiwan Strait. The dissertation also tests the proposed theory against the conventional approach of deterrence theory that focuses on the "objective" quality of the signaling. The cases rely on process tracing using both primary and secondary sources from each side, and they support the dissertation's proposed theory in broad terms as well as in their details. The two attempts of deterrence surrounding the Korean War failed. There, the signaling between the two great powers depended heavily on each side's own doctrinal theory of victory. These different doctrinal lenses further impeded the conduct of diplomacy between the two by blurring the interpretation of those signals as well as the overall assessment of the balance of power. In the third case (deterring conflict in the Taiwan Strait), the two sides had much more similar theories of victory, and misperception and conflict were avoided. By providing a unique analytic perspective on military capability, this dissertation suggests policymakers need to carefully consider the perceptual framework regarding military doctrine of those they are trying to influence.
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A Note on Romanization

Following its common usage in the People’s Republic of China, and increasingly internationally, the pinyin system of Romanization is used in referring to Chinese names, places, and other words. A very few phrases that are commonly transcribed in other Romanization systems are left in the more familiar format: thus, Chiang Kai-shek is not changed to pinyin (Jiang Jieshi), nor is the Kuomintang changed (to Guomindang). However, another large category of exceptions comes from quoted material and bibliographic references. For these cases, this dissertation makes use of the Romanization style chosen by the book or article in question. A few of the most common occurrences of names are listed here to reduce any confusion.

Mao Zedong = Mao Tse-tung
Zhou Enlai = Chou En-Lai
Lin Biao = Lin Piao
Nie Rongzhen = Nieh Jung-chen
Peng Dehuai = P’eng Te-huai
Ye Jianying = Yeh Chien-ying
Abbreviations

AMS: PLA’s Academy of Military Science
CAS: close air support
CCF: Chinese Communist Forces
CCP: Chinese Communist Party
CIA: Central Intelligence Agency
CMC: Central Military Commission
CPV: Chinese People’s Volunteers
CPVF: Chinese People’s Volunteer Forces
DIA: Defense Intelligence Agency
DoD: Department of Defense
DV: dependent variable
FEAF: Far East Air Force (of the U.S.)
FEC: Far East Command (based in Tokyo)
FRUS: Foreign Relations of the United States
GMD: Guomindang (alternate Romanization for KMT)
IV: independent variable
JCS: Joint Chiefs of Staff
KMT: Kuomintang
NBDA or NEBDA: Northeast Border Defense Army
NIE: National Intelligence Estimate
NKPA: North Korean People’s Army
NSC: National Security Council
PLA: People’s Liberation Army
PLAAF: People’s Liberation Army Air Force
PLAN: People’s Liberation Army Navy
PW or POW: prisoner of war
RCT: regimental combat team
SITREP: situation report
TOE: table of organization and equipment
UNC: United Nations Command
USAF: United States Air Force
USN: United States Navy
Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

As to war and the resources of either party, a detailed comparison will not show you the inferiority of Athens ... For our naval skill is of more use to us for service on land, than their military skill for service at sea. Familiarity with the sea they will not find an easy acquisition. If you who have been practicing at it ever since the Persian invasion have not yet brought it to perfection, is there any chance of anything considerable being effected by an agricultural, unseafaring population, who will besides be prevented from practicing by the constant presence of strong squadrons of observation from Athens?

—Pericles, exhorting his fellow Athenians to war

After the second invasion of the Peloponnesians a change came over the spirit of the Athenians. Their land had now been twice laid waste; and war and pestilence at once pressed heavy on them. They began to find fault with Pericles, as the author of the war and the cause of all their misfortunes, and became eager to come to terms with Sparta...

—Thucydides, describing the Athenians' mood two years later

This dissertation explains an understudied source of misperception and false optimism in international relations. Nations have different doctrines and hold different beliefs about the nature of effective military doctrines, strategies, and capabilities. That is, they have different beliefs about how to win wars, different “theories of victory.” This dissertation suggests that when these differences are large, diplomacy and signaling will be more difficult and this will lead to coercive failure and escalation or conflict. In addition to documenting this causal chain, this dissertation explains how to avoid it by

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tailoring signals to the perceptual framework of one’s adversary with regard to military doctrine and effectiveness, to their theory of victory.

At its core, the logic of the argument is based on the difficulty of accurately measuring power. Assessing an adversary’s relative power is a critical task for nations. At a broad level, it helps to determine the level of threat faced by one’s nation, and thus the costs and benefits of various courses of action in the foreign sphere. Understand the cost-benefit calculations an adversary is making is also important since such calculations play a role in shaping the adversary’s behavior. Additionally, in specific crises, understanding an adversary’s intent requires interpretation of his signals. Since these signals often rely on threats to use force, the actual deployment of military assets, or the limited use of force, understanding these signals also requires understanding the degree of power that they represent from the adversary’s perspective. When miscommunication occurs, attempts at strategic coercion—be they compellent and deterrent in nature—are more likely to fail. In all these ways, then, *different theories of victory serve as lenses impeding the conduct of diplomacy* between potential adversaries, shaping the signaling and blurring the interpretation of those signals as well as the overall assessment of the balance of power. Alternatively, to use a different analogy, doctrines and theories of victory provide the language of diplomacy in cases of strategic coercion. When the two sides speak different languages, *important signals are likely to get lost in translation.*

This chapter outlines several aspects of this argument, laying the groundwork for the rest of the dissertation. It begins with a discussion of the topic at a broad level, highlighting the questions and puzzles that this dissertation addresses and the answers it
Chapter 1: Introduction

proposes. Then it outlines the remainder of the dissertation, summarizing the theory and the evidence that supports it. Finally, this chapter concludes with a brief discussion of some of the literature that this dissertation builds on and expands from: deterrence and compellence, credibility, the measurement of power, strategic culture, and the dangers of false optimism.

Question and Topic

Is war rational? If states want to minimize costs while maximizing benefits, why would they ever resort to war? Why would adversaries be unable to strike an agreement in accordance with their relative power and avoid costly military conflict? Perhaps war is best thought of as a bargaining failure; if so, how central is the role of information asymmetries in such bargaining failures? How important are misperception, miscalculation, and miscommunication in the outbreak of conflict? These questions lie at the center of important debates in political science. Attempts at strategic coercion, responses to such attempts by others, decisions to cross the use of force threshold, to escalate in a limited conflict, these all depend on a state expecting some positive return from its action. That assessment, in general, depends on some evaluation of the relevant military balance, perhaps conducted formally through a military net assessment.


3 At least, positive relative to the expected alternate outcome.
or campaign analysis process or through methods that are more informal. However, as this dissertation will make clear, different actors will often analyze the same military situation differently. Further, the conduct of international diplomacy depends on the ability to send signals, and nations often use military force—explicitly or implicitly—to do this. However, again, evaluating an adversary’s military signals can be more difficult in some cases than in others. Thus, this dissertation examines misperceptions and false optimism that stem from different theories of victory that can lead to coercive failure and costly uses of force.

Assessing an adversary’s relative power is a critical task for nations for two main reasons. First, such assessments help to determine the level of threat facing a nation. Assessment of their adversaries’ relative power also shapes nations’ expectations about the outcomes of possible wars and, thus, the desirability, or lack thereof, of specific wars. Further, assessments of adversary’s intent often include some assessment of their cost-benefit analysis about the future. Second, under the best of circumstances, communication between potential adversaries is difficult. When sending signals, nations need to understand how others measure power and send signals appropriate to their adversaries’ perspectives. However, in circumstances where the two sides face off with different perceptions about the nature of military capability (a relatively common occurrence, as will be discussed), this can be very challenging. In international relations, this sort of miscommunication can lead to false optimism and, in turn, war.4

Thus, the central argument advanced in this dissertation is: when nations have different doctrines and hold different beliefs about the nature of effective military strategies and capabilities, diplomacy and signaling will be more difficult, potentially leading to escalation or conflict. There are two stages to this causal statement; each is expressed as a hypothesis in the following chapter. The first portion links the different beliefs to misperception; the second extends that to miscommunication and crisis outcomes (escalation or conflict). In the first part of this causal chain, this dissertation hypothesizes that different theories of victory should be likely to lead to an underestimation of one’s adversary (rather than other misperceptions) due to organizational, perceptual, and cultural dynamics that lead to an exaggerated degree of confidence in the strategies and doctrines that one uses oneself. The second part of the causal chain explains how this sort of false optimism can lead to mistaken views about the overall balance of power and about the degree of intent and capability in an adversary’s signals within a crisis.

Sino-American relations provide an excellent window into the phenomena of misperception, miscommunication, and false optimism caused by differences in theories of victory. Consider the period of the 1950s. Beijing ignored American threats, implicit or explicit, of nuclear attack and strategic air attacks. Mao’s widely reported public views of nuclear weapons as “paper tigers” were mirrored by private comments of similar substance. Similarly, Chinese threats of intervention based on a strategy of “People’s War” did not create any trepidation in Washington (at MacArthur’s command in Tokyo the reaction was closer to derision). Both sides viewed the other’s key military doctrine with disdain. Not only did this lead to difficulties in assessing the
overall balance of power between the two, but it also made sending coercive signals between them very difficult. As two of the empirical chapters will show, this contributed to outbreak and escalation of the Korean War in significant ways. However, in another theater with a different strategic context—the Taiwan Strait—the nations’ theories of victory were more similar. Consequently, in the third case examining deterrence in that strategic geography, there were no misperceptions nor miscommunications, and most importantly, no war.

In short, this dissertation argues that when nations hold different beliefs about the nature of effective military strategies and capabilities, diplomacy and signaling will be more difficult leading to escalation or conflict. The process of cajoling, convincing, or bribing an adversary to do one’s bidding often requires sending nuanced signals regarding one’s own intent and capabilities. When these signals are sent via threats to use, or the actual use of, military forces that the other side does not fully comprehend, diplomacy is impeded.

Organization of the Dissertation

This chapter has introduced the question posed and the answer proposed. It has pointed to the importance of identifying the sources of misperception that might lead to diplomatic failures in cases of strategic coercion. It has suggested different theories of victory as a possible cause. After summarizing the rest of the dissertation, this chapter will conclude by identifying a number of literatures relevant to these hypothesized answers.
The next chapter continues to develop this causal chain more rigorously. It begins by defining the universe of inquiry of the study (attempts at strategic coercion including both deterrence and compellence) and the concept used as the independent variable (theories of victory). It proceeds to ground that concept in its doctrinal and strategic context. Then, it makes use of the existing political science literatures in a number of areas to identify specific hypotheses that will flesh out the proposed causal chain based on two separate hypotheses. These hypotheses move from the sources of beliefs of theories of victory to those theories themselves, then to the difference in perceptions that they can cause, and finally to the negative international outcomes that can arise from those. These hypotheses draw on psychological and organizational dynamics that have been used before (in different ways) in the field of political science. Along the way, a number of brief examples are detailed. Chapter 2 also draws out specific empirical predictions that come from the theoretical hypotheses that can be used to evaluate them. Finally, the chapter explains the methodologies used in the dissertation (qualitative cases studies, process tracing, alternate theories, etc.) and explains the criteria used for case selection.

The rest of the dissertation focuses on three specific attempts at strategic coercion. The first two are failed attempts at deterrence that resulted in the American decision to cross the 38th parallel and the Chinese decision to support North Korea’s invasion in the first place. The one successful attempt of strategic coercion by the Americans deterred China, and led it to postpone its invasion of Taiwan. Chapter 3 begins the discussion of this empirical material. Since Sino-American thinking about the two Korean War cases both depended on the same two theories of victory held by Washington and Beijing, these
are discussed in a single chapter. This chapter argues that the two sides’ theories of victory were very different. At the time, American doctrine focused on using airpower and nuclear weapons to win general wars and considered mobile, integrated formations of armor, infantry, and artillery to be dominant on land. On the other hand, China expressed disdain toward atomic weapons and strategic bombing and relied instead on a “People’s War” doctrine to defeat what it considered its main threat: invasion of China proper. Beijing emphasized infantry, quantity over quality, and guerrilla tactics. The two sides understood the language of military affairs quite differently, or, put another way, viewed the world through very different military lenses.

Chapter 4 makes use of this characterization of the independent variable and asks, “Did it have the hypothesized relationship with the dependent variable?” The case finds that it did. Specifically, when the United States crossed the 38th parallel, it did so after ignoring and explaining away a series of Chinese signals. Many of the signals that Beijing sent were clearly based on its own views regarding military effectiveness. The United States, with dramatically different views, did not view those signals as particularly threatening nor, therefore, credible. This case presents strong evidence that both the sending and interpretation of signals were impeded by the two sides’ theories of victory. The Chinese threats to the United States simply got lost in translation and deterrence failed.

Chapter 5 looks at a different, earlier decision, with the positions of the two sides reversed. It asks, what role did the two sides’ views on military affairs have on the statecraft leading up to China’s decision to approve the North Korean invasion of the South in June of 1950? The chapter shows that American signals were heavily infused
with its own doctrine. While other factors were certainly important in explaining the outcome of this case, the limited data on the Chinese interpretation of the American signals does support the contention that Beijing underestimated American intent and capability in ways consistent with China's theory of victory. Particularly notable is China's surprise once the battle was joined when the PLA's substantial losses in battle forced a reappraisal of its strategy on its leaders. Beijing's theory of victory had led it to expect otherwise.

The final empirical chapter moves away from the Korean peninsula and the theories of victory discussed in the third chapter. Chapter 6 examines the U.S. deployment of the 7th Fleet to the Taiwan Strait in 1950 and the Chinese decision to postpone their planned invasion of the island indefinitely. Since the primarily military theater here is naval, with successful amphibious operations being the critical goal, it is important to understand how the two sides viewed warfare in this environment. This chapter argues that, in the wake of Chinese learning at the end of its civil war, the two sides had a broadly similar view of amphibious warfare. This shared understanding of military effectiveness meant that even though the signal that the United States sent in this case was militarily weak (very little of the 7th Fleet deployed in the short term), the Chinese understood American intent and capabilities quite clearly and adjusted their behavior accordingly.

Finally, the concluding chapter summarizes these results. The cases provide initial support for the hypotheses and suggest that additional work on them is merited. The chapter also suggests important ways that policymakers can use the insights from this dissertation to reduce the prospects for misperceptions across nations and better
advance national interests without recourse to avoidable war. Finally, it discusses the contributions that this dissertation makes to the field.

**Situating the Project in the Existing Literature**

This project fits within the existing literature in several ways. First, it builds on the existing understandings of when deterrence works and when it fail. Second, its independent variable is grounded in the concept of strategic culture. Third, the key causal mechanism that it relies on (in part) is an important, recognized danger in international relations: false optimism. Fourth, it has some (limited) implications for spiral and security dilemma research. In short, the dissertation integrates insights from several literatures and speaks to a number of important debates in the field. Each of these areas is discussed in turn.

*What We Know about Achieving Deterrence Success*

Clearly, this proposed theory does not have a monopoly on possible explanations for the failure of deterrence and compellence. Before moving on, these alternative (or, perhaps, supplemental) explanations should also be discussed.

There is a large literature attempting to explain the success or failure of deterrence policies. There are three key elements to the study and conduct of strategic coercion in international relations: credibility, capability, and communication (often referred to as the

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5 The next chapter will discuss the term “strategic coercion,” a blanket term that includes both of these and defines the universe of applicability of the proposed theory. In general, see Lawrence Freedman, *Strategic Coercion: Concepts and Cases* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

three Cs). Political science has long emphasized the importance of and difficulties in assessing an adversary's credibility. Less studied but equally important for the conduct of international diplomacy is assessing an adversary's capabilities. Least studied is the way credibility and capability are communicated. The work on each of these is discussed in turn here.

**Credibility and Intent**

It is clear that motivations by both actors play a central role in the likelihood of success in strategic coercion through their effects on credibility and willingness to fight.

The perceived intent of both sides plays a role. The credibility of the country making
the deterrent or compellent threat will be enhanced if it is believed to care a lot about the issue and if it is expected to follow through with its threat if the opponent does not comply. On the other side, highly motivated aggressors are harder to deter (or coerce) than are status quo powers.

It is because of the importance of motivations that compellence is thought to be much harder than deterrence. In cases of compellence, one side is being asked to surrender something it already has. Since people tend to care more about things they have than things they do not yet possess, they are more likely to defend them forcefully.

Qualitative work also tends to emphasize the importance of credibility. George and Smoke stress their finding that the challenger’s perception of the credibility of the commitment is critical. George and Simons highlight eight key factors that lead to success of deterrent policies: clarity of objective, strong motivation, asymmetry of motivation, sense of urgency, strong leadership, domestic support, international support, fear of unacceptable escalation, and clarity of terms. Many of these are directly related to the clarity of the signal.

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11 Jervis, Perception and Misperception, 79ff.


13 See Schelling, Arms and Influence, 69-91.

14 See the discussion of prospect theory at footnote 9 in the following chapter


Capability
Relative capability plays a role in international politics in many ways. 17 States choose policies toward other states based, in part, on the relative balance between them. 18

Measuring that balance accurately is critical, as Morgenthau notes:

As for the assessment of the power of other nations, either to overrate or to underrate it may be equally fatal to the cause of peace. By overrating the power of B, A may prefer to yield to B’s demands until, finally, A is forced to fight for its very existence under the most unfavorable conditions. But underrating the power of B, A may become overconfident in its assumed superiority. A may advance demands and impose conditions upon B which the latter is supposedly too weak to resist. Not suspecting B’s actual power of resistance, A may be faced with the alternative of either retreating and conceding defeat or of advancing and risking war. 19

Further, states often use military forces to signal their interests and capabilities.

There is a significant amount of work making use of large-N methods to assess whether deterrence works (or not) in general, and it has identified capability—particularly locally deployed capability—as a primary factor of importance. 20 That is, many scholars have attempts at coercive diplomacy rather than deterrence per se. However, it is clear from George and Simons’ work (see pp. 13-15 esp.) that their assumptions are compatible with the study of the practice of deterrence. Clearly, compellence is a very demanding form of coercion and may require even more of the signaling party than does deterrence itself.

17 This statement is one of few that realists, liberals, Marxists, and constructivists would all agree with, at least in part. For recent realist treatments that explicitly focus on power, see Dale C. Copeland, The Origins of Major War (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); John J. Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001). For exemplary liberal treatments, see Robert O. Keohane, After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Economy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); Andrew Moravcsik, The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998). Constructivists generally accept the role of power, but suggest that—beyond a limited degree of ‘rump materialism’—the more important questions center on what precisely constitutes power in different cases and periods (e.g., economic wealth, the military capability to defend, the military capability to punish, soft power, religious leadership, etc.). See Alexander Wendt, Social Theory of International Politics (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 96ff.

18 Of course, other factors matter as well. For a discussion of both the role of power in shaping the choice between balancing and bandwagoning, and a discussion of other factors that play a causal role, see Stephen M. Walt, The Origins of Alliances (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987).


20 On the one hand, Huth and Russett argue that it works, and on the other, Lebow and Stein argue that it does not. See Christopher H. Achen and Duncan Snidal, "Rational Deterrence Theory and Comparative Case Studies," World Politics 41, no. 2 (1989); Paul K. Huth, "Reputations and
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concluded that greater capability enhances deterrence. Similar conclusions apply to instances of compellence or other influence strategies. Generally, this capability is measured as the overall relative power between the two countries, although some variants of the quantitative models consider only the local power that could brought to bear (that is, forces in the area, relevant to carrying out a threat).

However, measuring power is recognized to be very difficult. Policymakers have no simple index to which they can turn. General opacity in the international system certainly plays some role here, as do incentives to misrepresent. The ambiguity and capriciousness of feedback, the lack of conclusive tests, and the dynamic

21 Issues of relatively capability permeate Schelling, Arms and Influence. Also see George and Smoke, Deterrence in American Foreign Policy.


24 Blainey, The Causes of War.

25 Van Evera, Causes of War, 47, 83, 137. See also Les Aspin, "Games the Pentagon Plays: Views from the House (2)," Foreign Policy, no. 11 (1973); Barry R. Posen and Stephen W. Van Evera, "Overarming and Underwhelming," Foreign Policy, no. 40 (1980).
nature of the balance itself all deepen these problems. 26 Further, shifts in the power
balance make assessments of relative power even more difficult, and Wohlforth
emphasizes the dangers that such situations have historically posed: “[The] four crisis
phases in the Cold War ... [were] shaped by a change in the power relationship
differently interpreted by the two sides.” 27 Andrew Marshall, the long-time head of the
Office of Net Assessment in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, noted these problems
trenchantly decades ago:

> The fact that estimating procedures [for the military balance] are so vague and
impressionistic at one level, and so mechanical at another level, is not altogether
surprising. As discussed above, the conceptual problems in constructing an adequate or
useful measure of military power have not yet been faced. Defining an adequate
measure looks hard, and making estimates in real situations looks even harder. 28

Adding the effects of strategy into the mix makes analysis even more complex, leading
military establishments to rely on oversimplified “dominant indicators.” 29 Thus, the
assessment of military capability should not be viewed simply as a data collection
exercise, but rather as a complex process of interpretation that can be shaped by many
factors. This is the approach taken by this study. 30

**Communication**

Communication is the least studied of the “three Cs,” as Jervis noted in 1970,

Military and economic resources, the main instrumentalities of power, have been widely
studied. Less has been written about the role of diplomatic skill, and the authors of this

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29 Scott Sigmund Gartner, *Strategic Assessment in War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997).

30 Compounding these well-studied impediments, this dissertation argues, actors also bring to their
assessments of power their own biases and predilections based on their own theories of victory, history,
and military heterogeneity in doctrine and force structure.
Twomey, The Military Lens

Literature have rarely focused on the full range of techniques by which a state can influence the inferences others are making about it and have not explored in any detail the ways desired images, which may be accurate or inaccurate, not only supplement the more usual forms of power, but are indispensable for reaching certain goals.31

Studying communication per se can be complicated by the frequent use of tacit signaling by states to communicate over matters of great importance.32 "Tacit bargaining takes place whenever a state attempts to influence the policy choices of another state through behavior, rather than by relying on formal or informal diplomatic exchanges."33 Neither George and Simons nor Schelling (the two classics in the field of coercive diplomacy) focus on impediments to communication. Rather, they both generate a set of prescriptions at the abstract level for deterrence and compellence to succeed that focus on credibility, capability, and some assurances that the threats are contingent. Beyond commendable admonitions for "clarity" in the threat, the difficulties associated with communication are not examined in depth.34 Yet the issues involved are complex.

Jervis notes the links between perception and difficulties in communication:

The signaling actor may try to compensate for the fact that ambiguous signals sent in an environment of noise are especially susceptible to distortion. This would be relatively easy if all actors had the same perceptual predispositions. Introspection would then permit the actor to understand the influences present when the signals were received and allow him to correct for them. But these predispositions vary and are determined by complex factors, some of which are beyond the knowledge of even the most careful and intelligent observer.35


33 Downs and Rocke, Tacit Bargaining, 3.

34 See George and Simons, The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy; Schelling, The Strategy of Conflict; Schelling, Arms and Influence.

35 Jervis, The Logic of Images, 134.
The impediments to communication caused by this sort of perceptual difference are precisely the focus of this dissertation.

Thus, deterrence and compellence can be thwarted many ways. One side may lack the capability to adequately threaten the other side. The threat might be communicated unclearly. Each side’s assessment of the other’s motivations might lead them to doubt its credibility. The theory proposed in this dissertation by no means contradicts any of these. It merely suggests that, in addition, differences in theories of military doctrine across the two sides will make it more difficult for them to interpret signals and assess the overall balance. *Differing perceptions about the nature of military capability across states can impede international diplomacy and statecraft by making communication—the third and least studied element of strategic coercion listed above—more difficult.* The substance of the communication in question can be related to either capability or credibility. If one does not know how one’s adversary understands military power, then one also does not know how he will interpret any military signals one sends. This can lead to mistakes in communicating one’s credibility. In international politics, miscommunication can lead to war, so this topic merits further research.

*Culture, Strategic Culture, and Communication*

The depth of the ability of culture to shape people’s understanding of the world can be substantial. Some psychologists and linguists argue different ways that languages—one component of culture—treat numbers can shape basic cognitive
processes like counting. The argument that culture shapes perceptions and political outcomes has a long and well-respected lineage in political science. The contributions of political culture to the field have been particularly large. Much of this early work aimed to explain differences in political development, and the differences in Asian nations were often emphasized.

Beyond political culture, several other facets of culture can play a role in shaping perception about international security issues: strategic culture, civil-military culture, and organizational culture. The first of these is of particular interest for this project, although the others contribute as well. A number of scholars have productively examined the role of culture in the study of national security affairs. In this vein,


39 Scobell suggests this list (and also includes political culture): Andrew Scobell, China's Use of Military Force: Beyond the Great Wall and the Long March (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4-8.

several scholars have found this concept to be useful in the study of Chinese security policy.\textsuperscript{41} Constructivist scholarship has been a source of analytic rigor in the renewed attention to the role of culture in foreign policy.\textsuperscript{42}

This dissertation continues in the footsteps of these earlier works. It attempts to make use of the self-conscious attention to positivist rigor that characterizes more recent scholarship on strategic culture.\textsuperscript{43} However, it focuses on a narrower form of strategic culture than many other works. Johnston centers his definition of the term on beliefs regarding "the role of and efficacy of military forces in interstate political affairs."\textsuperscript{44} As

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\textsuperscript{43} For the most forceful advancing of that issue, see Johnston, "Thinking About Strategic Culture." For a response that emphasizes the difficulties of such analytic rigor in the context of mutually constitutive beliefs and behavior, see Colin S. Gray, "Strategic Culture as Context: The First Generation of Theory Strikes Back," \textit{Review of International Studies} 25, no. 1 (1999).
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\textsuperscript{44} This definition is paraphrased from Clifford Geertz, see Johnston, "Thinking About Strategic Culture," 46. This is essentially the definition Johnston uses in his own empirical study of the role of strategic culture: Johnston, \textit{Cultural Realism}.
\end{flushright}
will be clear below, the term “theory of victory” is used here to describe beliefs at a
different level, one closer to doctrine and the operational art of military strategies and
tactics. The usage in this dissertation more closely accords with that referred to by
Scobell as the “organizational culture” of different national militaries.45

Another difference between the approach taken here and that in most recent work
on strategic cultures is one of perspective: Much of the existing work focuses on
explaining the sources of strategic culture or their persistence in the face of changing
geopolitical circumstances. In both cases, strategic culture primarily serves as a
dependent variable. Instead, this project uses strategic culture as an independent
variable that might explain miscommunication and conflict. Thus, the conceptual work
on strategic culture is useful as a building block here.

The argument made in this dissertation has many parallels with existing
scholarship on role of culture in the social sciences. Authors who work in this area have
often stressed the difficulties in communicating across different cultures in general.
Indeed, there is a sizable industry of business consultants offering help in “cross-cultural
communication.” Linguists and anthropologists are familiar with such difficulties.
Similarly, the role of culture and norms in shaping perceptions is well documented in the
constructivist literature.46 At a somewhat different level of analysis, Mark Haas argues
that different national governmental ideologies can also impede communication and

45 Scobell, China’s Use of Military Force, 7-8.

46 See Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory," 186-88, in particular;
Katzenstein, Cultural Norms and National Security, espec. Chapter 5: The Self-Defense Forces and
External Security; Thomas Risse-Kappen, "Collective Identity in a Democratic Community: The Case
complicate threat assessments. This dissertation applies those insights to a different substantive area.

Finally, constructivist approaches help to explain the causal mechanism advanced here. Geertz defines culture as "webs of significance" created by individuals in social settings (taken from Weber). To adapt the term to the focus of this study, when national leaders face off across different military doctrinal cultures, they will be using different "webs of significance" to evaluate power and signals. A particular signal that is significant in one strategic culture may not be understood as significant in a different strategic culture. This is a recipe for endemic miscommunications and misunderstandings.

Thus, this dissertation draws on work on strategic culture and constructivism in explaining international security outcomes.

**False Optimism**

Overestimation of an adversary or underestimation of him can cause problems in international politics. Many scholars have studied the various sources and dangers of overestimation of one's opponent, as discussed below. This dissertation focuses on a

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47 Mark Haas, "Ideology, Threat Perception, and Great Power Politics through Two Centuries" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Virginia, 2001).


49 This is a central tenet of the spiral theory and of the security dilemma. See the discussion in the following section. In terms of the sources of overestimation in general, several arguments are possible. For instance, Lowi argues that there is a domestic political incentive for overselling in the United States. See Theodore Lowi, *The End of Liberalism: The Second Republic of the United States*, Second ed. (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 1979). Huntington argues that military leaders assess threats conservatively, that is, to maximize protection of their own forces. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State; the Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge,: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), 66. A more instrumental view is
separate problem—a perceptual problem caused by different theories of victory—and this problem generally leads to underestimation of an adversary and its own set of negative consequences. That is not to suggest, however, that either underestimation or overestimation of an adversary is in some abstract sense a larger problem in international politics. Both misperceptions have dangers. Both are common.\(^{50}\)

That said, the dangers of false optimism in general are well-understood to be substantial:\(^{51}\)

This historical record suggests that false optimism is a potent and pervasive cause of war. False expectations of victory widely coincide with the outbreak of war. This suggests that false optimism is a strong and common cause of war.\(^{52}\)

There is similar agreement on the problems that can arise in deterrent situations when an aggressor sees its adversary as being relatively weak.\(^{53}\) The implications of false optimism for the entire deterrence success literature discussed above are clear: false optimism will make states less likely to be successful in deterrence and compellence. Thus it certainly merits attention.

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\(^{52}\) Van Evera, Causes of War, 34.

\(^{53}\) This is the primarily conclusion of the large-N work on deterrence theory. See for instance, Huth and Russett, "What Makes Deterrence Work?." For a good review of this literature, see Levy, "When Do Deterrent Threats Work?." For other views on this issue, see Achen and Snidal, "Rational Deterrence Theory and Comparative Case Studies."; Huth and Russett, "Testing Deterrence Theory."; Huth and Russett, "Deterrence between Enduring Rivals."; Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, "Rational Deterrence Theory: I Think, Therefore I Deter," World Politics (1989).
Chapter 1: Introduction

Escala\tion, Spirals, and Security Dilemmas

Other important sources of escalation in international security theory are security
dilemmas and spirals. At its heart, escalation that stems from these sources comes
from false pessimism. For the most part, this project focuses on the dangers of the
failures of deterrence and compellence; however, the first implication of this project’s
theory is opacity, it is worth discussing the dangers of misperceptions that lead to the
opposite problem.

The spiral model suggests that wars are caused by states over-responding to
misperceived threats and creating security dilemmas:

many works use this approach theoretically or to survey a range of cases. See Alexander L. George
and Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, Avoiding War: Problems of Crisis Management (Boulder: Westview

For an application of these concepts to WWI, see Laurence Davis Lafore, The Long Fuse; an
Interpretation of the Origins of World War I, 2d ed. (Philadelphia, Penn.: Lippincott, 1971); Barbara
and the Origins of the First World War, ed. Steven E. Miller, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Stephen Van

55 On treating spirals and deterrence failure as opposing models, there is a long-standing literature
treating spirals and deterrence failure as opposing models of avertable conflict. Among the earliest
are Evan Luard, "Conciliation and Deterrence: A Comparison of Political Strategies in the Interwar
and Postwar Periods," World Politics 19, no. 2 (1967); Arnold Wolfers, Discord and Collaboration:
Essays on International Politics (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), see in particular
Chapter 9. The citations that have shaped the modern debate are Glaser, "Political Consequences of
Military Strategy."; Jervis, Perception and Misperception, Chapter 3. See also his Glaser, "The
Security Dilemma Revisited." A recent, rigorous empirical examination of the two theories
applicability can be found in Davis, Threats and Promises, 20. Other notable cites are Richard H.
Moss, "The Limits of Policy: An Investigation of the Spiral Model, the Deterrence Model, and
Miscalculations in U.S.-Third World Relations" (Princeton University, 1987); Martin Patchen,
Resolving Disputes between Nations: Coercion or Conciliation? (Durham, N.C.: Duke University
Press, 1988); Glenn Harold Snyder and Paul Diesing, Conflict among Nations: Bargaining, Decision
1977); Paul C. Stern and others, "Deterrence in the Nuclear Age: The Search for Evidence," in
Perspectives on Deterrence, ed. Paul C. Stern et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Philip
For a discussions on the differences between nuclear and conventional weapons and their bearing on
these two theories, see Barry R. Posen, "Crisis Stability and Conventional Arms Control," Daedalus
Twomey, The Military Lens

When states seek the ability to defend themselves, they get too much and too little—too much because they gain the ability to carry out aggression; too little because others, being menaced, will increase their own arms and so reduce the first state’s security.56

Given the assumption (or empirical fact) of anarchy,57 states must assume the worst and maintain security forces to protect themselves. In situations other than perfect defense dominance,58 these forces will threaten others who will respond with their own build up, thus forcing the first nation to respond in kind. This concept is very closely related to the security dilemma—“an increase in one state’s security decreases the security of others.”59 The security dilemma is at the heart of the spiral model; and the prisoner’s dilemma is the game theoretic representation of it.60 As Jervis notes in this model “symmetrical beliefs produce incompatible policies”61 and will combine with inherent cognitive failings and misperceptions and that these will together lead to war.62 Self-fulfilling prophesies are likely as each nation views the other’s reactive buildups as a sign

56 Jervis, Perception and Misperception, 64.


58 This term is used here in the terms of the offense-defense literature. For the classic statement of the impact of this variable see Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma." For an application of this to WWI, see Van Evera, "The Cult of the Offensive." For an extensive study using this variable to explain large variations in the frequency of war across time, see Van Evera, Causes of War.


61 Jervis, Perception and Misperception, 65.

62 Ibid., 75.
of its inherent aggressive intent. Jervis has described a number of different explanations for this addressing the role of cognitive failings and shortcoming in worsening spirals (e.g., "the world is ganging up on me", "I didn't mean it that way", etc.).

A simple policy prescription arises from this model: it is "often not to the state's advantage to seek a wide margin of superiority over its adversary." The historically grounded literatures on crisis diplomacy and crisis management making this point are quite extensive. For instance, Lebow and Stein argue that the faith of scholars and policymakers alike in deterrence as the key to winning particular Cold War crises—and indeed the entire Cold War—is soundly misplaced. Instead careful attention to accommodative steps accounts for the avoidance of war in these periods.

The spiral literature included a number of related themes. There is a large literature on arms races that is formal in nature. The pioneering work in this area is referred to as a Richardsonian model. These models have been applied to stocks of particular weapons (most often nuclear missiles) and military budgets, as well as factors such as fatigue in each country. Beginning with Huntington, there is also a substantial literature on the historical association of arms races with wars. Crisis stability in

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63 Ibid., Chapters 4-10.
64 E.g., George and Bar-Siman-Tov, Avoiding War.
65 Lebow and Stein, We All Lost the Cold War.
Twomey, *The Military Lens*

nuclear situations can be productively analyzed from this perspective.  In a seminal book, Robert Axelrod examined used game theory to examine the prisoner’s dilemma—a game theoretic construct that captures the central elements of the spiral model. In this study, he found that the optimal solution for competing in an iterated prisoner’s dilemma is a strategy of “tit for tat.” Refinements on this early work have taken the form of adding uncertainty and noise into the simulation, making the real world application of such models more robust.

While much of this work is instructive, it speaks primarily to the dangers of overestimation of an enemy and to the dangers of false pessimism (and ways to resolve it). Both theoretically and empirically, this project has found that an underestimation of the enemy has been the more likely consequence of differences in military doctrine. However, as will be discussed below, opacity is also an important consequence. In some circumstances, such opacity may tend toward an overestimation of the enemy and an undue pessimism. In these cases, the large literature on spirals and security dilemmas warns us of profound dangers as well.

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68 Posen, *Inadvertent Escalation.*


Parallel Arguments

A number of scholars working in some of the above areas have come to parallel conclusions to that of the dissertation’s overall argument. However, none make it their focus theoretically, nor subject it to thorough empirical evaluation. Nevertheless, this scholarship does provide an important starting point for the work presented here.

A few simply raise similar points in passing, and thus do not evaluate it empirically in detail. For instance, Betts provides a tantalizing critique of rationality in international security, noting the tension of “Culture versus Coercion”:

Coercive strategies aimed at an adversary’s will depend on communication. Cultural blinders prevent the common frames of reference necessary to ensure that the receiver hears the message that the signaler intends to send.71

At a more general level, Jervis writes:

Perception is laden with interpretation and theory. Almost no inferences—perhaps none at all—are self-evident in the sense that all people under all circumstances looking at the information would draw the same conclusion. Thus knowing how theorists read a signal does not tell us how the perceiver does.72

What Jervis calls for to overcome this problem for the understanding of signaling and deterrence is the following:

Scholars can then look at the image an actor is trying to project, the behaviors that it adopts to do so, and then, shifting attention to the perceiver, examine what influences the perceiver and what inferences it draws. At the next stage we can see what the perceiver thinks it must do in order to send the desired message in response, what it does to reach this goal, and how the actor in turn judges both the other’s behavior and determines how the other perceived its behavior. I suspect it is rare for actors, especially adversaries, to understand the situation the same way, to be able to discern how the other sees them and their behavior, or even to know what signals are taken to be most important.73


73 Ibid., 310.
This dissertation implements that research strategy.\textsuperscript{74} There are a few pieces of research that focus on similar lines of reasoning to this dissertation in slightly different empirical contexts. There is other excellent scholarship emphasizing the role of ideational factors in coercive bargaining situations that focuses on the role "dispute settlements as normative referents."\textsuperscript{75} Scott Sigmund Gartner emphasizes the power of organization lenses in various national security bureaucracies in shaping perceptions of success and failure in war.\textsuperscript{76}

Lastly, in a few cases, scholars pursuing different theoretical goals have found empirical support for phenomena that are very similar to that studied in this dissertation. Mearsheimer emphasizes the role of one specific doctrine—blitzkrieg—in causing optimism and deterrence failure in his Conventional Deterrence.\textsuperscript{77} Cohen argues that different concepts of operation and strategies led American analysts to underestimate the dangers posed by the Soviet Red Army.\textsuperscript{78} Arquilla notes that continental powers engaging in land-sea wars often misperceive significant aspects of the conflict.\textsuperscript{79} Finally, Shimshoni points out that states relying on qualitative advantages and surprise have a particularly difficult time deterring their adversaries. Such states cannot enhance the credibility of their threats by pointing out their own military advantages, because doing

\textsuperscript{74} Jervis goes on to note the empirical difficulties in doing this, however, and the relatively few empirical examples of work that have pursued this time-consuming research strategy.

\textsuperscript{75} Gelpi, \textit{The Power of Legitimacy}, 38.

\textsuperscript{76} Gartner, \textit{Strategic Assessment in War}.


\textsuperscript{79} Arquilla, \textit{Dubious Battles: Aggression, Defeat, and the International System}.
so will erode the prospects for surprise. This point closely parallels the argument made here.  

This dissertation builds on many of these theorists to draw out their core, shared issues, place them in a common, general framework, and evaluate their plausibility through detailed empirical testing.

**Summary**

Thus, this project draws on theoretic work on strategic culture, the sources of military doctrine, the causes and dangers of misperception, and the measurement of power. Empirically, it incorporates approaches used productively in an existing body of work on crisis diplomacy. It contributes to the understanding of the role of information asymmetries in leading to war as a bargaining failure, but it does so by outlining a source of asymmetry that has not been studied (and one that requires unique policies to correct). If this argument is correct, it has important implications for international theorists in the areas of rationalist views of war, the roles of military doctrine in shaping international outcomes, the importance of sub-state variables in shaping international systemic outcomes, the understanding of the sources of deterrence

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81 This is a wide-ranging literature. Most notable is: George and Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*.

Twomey, *The Military Lens*

failure, and the importance of crisis diplomacy and statecraft. A few other literatures that are relevant to this project are discussed in the next chapter in detail.

The dissertation's argument also has important policy prescriptions for national leaders. Scholars have long known of the dangers stemming from "the inability of foreign policymakers to view events from the perspective of their adversaries." This dissertation closely examines one important facet of miscommunication that comes from specific perceptual differences, and suggests that the existing concern with an adversary's views of his national interests is incomplete. In addition, national leaders must focus on their adversary's theory of victory, recognizing that will shape its assessment of the balance of power and its interpretation of signaling in the conduct of statecraft. While some steps can be taken to tailor signals to an adversary's theory of victory, in general, this dissertation emphasizes the inherent difficulties of deterrence and compellence.

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83 Each of these is discussed in turn in Chapter 7: Conclusion and Implications.

84 First, the universe of cases explained by the theory is bounded by the concept of strategic coercion and limited war. Second, many other scholars have studied this dissertation's independent variable—theories of victory—as a dependent variable. Systemic and geographic imperatives, technologic advancement, past historic practice, and organization structures and practices are all argued to play a role in shaping nation's perceptions regarding optimal doctrines. Finally, the causal logics of the two hypotheses that the dissertation focuses on depend on organizational and psychological logics that are well established in political science. Again, each of these is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

85 Again, the final chapter discusses these.


Chapter 2. THEORY AND METHOD

The core of this chapter is a detailed statement of the causal argument advanced in the dissertation. When nations have different doctrines and hold different beliefs about the nature of effective military strategies and capabilities, diplomacy and signaling will be more difficult, potentially leading to escalation or conflict. There are two stages to this causal statement, each expressed as a hypothesis below: the first portion links the different beliefs to misperception; the second extends that to miscommunication and crisis outcomes (escalation or conflict). The logic of each will be sketched out in turn, and then predictions are derived to allow for testing in the dissertation’s empirical work. The chapter also includes an explanation of the methodology of inquiry pursued in the remainder of the dissertation. First, however, the terms used in the theory used must be defined explicitly.

Definitions

This section defines two terms important to the project. The dissertation uses strategic coercion to describe the universe of cases studied here and differences in doctrine or theories of victory serve as the main component of the independent variable. Each term, and its links to existing literatures, is discussed in turn.
The Project’s Universe: Attempts at Strategic Coercion

This project focuses on one important way that attempts at strategic coercion can fail. This is a large universe of cases since, “the use of intimidation of one kind or another in order to get others to comply with one’s wishes is an everyday occurrence in human affairs.”1 Therefore, it is important to be precise about what constitutes strategic coercion. This section discusses definitional points regarding both the goals served by such a policy and the tools and means used to advance those goals.

The Goals of Strategic Coercion

Lawrence Freedman has introduced the term “strategic coercion” which he defines as “the deliberate and purposive use of overt threats to influence another’s strategic choices.”2 He adopts the term in his study as a way to subsume deterrence and compellence/coercive diplomacy, which share many similar elements, under the same umbrella concept.3 Both can be thought of as part of a “threat based bargaining process.”4 As he notes each of these term’s historical origins have somewhat artificially enhanced the difference between them.


3 Ibid.

essentially symmetrical relationship with the Soviet Union, while coercive diplomacy was bound up with its asymmetrical relationship with smaller powers.  

Different scholars use these various terms in slightly different ways, as discussed below.

In terms of the goal of the threats under strategic coercion, there is widely understood to be a distinction between stopping someone from doing something in the future (deterrence) and inducing them to do something that they would not have otherwise done (compellence). Schelling separates the two, emphasizing that compellence is more difficult than deterrence. Others also follow this distinction.

The central difference between deterrence and compellence centers on what psychologists refer to as the “perceptual reference point.” This highlights the question of whether the issue at stake is perceived to be something that one does not already have or something that one already possesses. Prospect theory speaks to precisely this issue and finds it to be a useful distinction.

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6 Somewhat more ambiguous is categorizing an attempt to stop someone from something they are currently engaged in doing. Focusing on the future aspect of this behavior suggests that it is deterrence; emphasizing that it has already been started leads to a categorization as compellence. This raises precisely the point of perceptual reference points, discussed in the following paragraph. It also emphasizes the difficulty in drawing clear, bright lines between the concepts, a difficulty resolved by considering them jointly.


Going a step further in categorizing the use of threats, George subdivides compellence, separating two concepts: "coercive diplomacy" and, in what he refers to as the offensive side of policy, 'blackmail strategies'.¹⁰ For George, coercive diplomacy aims to undo something whereas the more offensive "blackmail" tries to force the opponent to do something completely new that it had not planned to do. Jakobsen provides an excellent chart to help think about these various concepts and how they relate to each other.

**Figure 2-1: Categorizing the Use of Threats in International Relations**

![Diagram showing categorization of threats in international relations]

*Source: Adapted from Peter V. Jakobsen, Western Use of Coercive Diplomacy after the Cold War: A Challenge for Theory and Practice. New York, N.Y.: St. Martin's Press, 1998, p. 12, Figure 2.1: "Overview of existing terms concerning the use of threats."

This builds on Schelling's dichotomy and Freedman's umbrella term, discussed above, but adds some further detail by clarifying the two potential goals of compellence.

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¹⁰ Alexander L. George, "Coercive Diplomacy: Definition and Characteristics," in *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy*, ed. Alexander L. George and William E. Simons (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 7. However, note that George's term 'coercive diplomacy' would seem to include many cases of deterrence since it includes "efforts to persuade an opponent to stop ... an action." However, he explicitly rules out deterrence cases from his definition. (For both these points, see again George, "Coercive Diplomacy: Definition and Characteristics," 7.) Freedman refers to this usage as "neither tenable in practice nor useful analytically". Freedman, "Strategic Coercion," 18. To avoid precisely this sort of confusion, the broader term coined by Freedman—strategic coercion—will be used here.
However, in practice, the boundary lines within the various forms of compellence, deterrence, and coercion are not so clear. Nearly all scholars working in the field make this point somewhere in their work. George notes the distinctions between his offensive and defensive forms of compellence are not always obvious.11 Byman and Waxman present their views succinctly in the title of a figure: "Deterrence and Compellence Blur in Practice."12 Another scholar points out the various subjective factors that play a role in answering the critical question of is a threat aimed at deterrence or compellence: “The answer depends on two points: the level of analysis and who defines the status quo and how. … In any event, the deterrence-compellence ordering is problematic, if useful at all, in explaining the bargaining outcome….“13 Others agree that the line between deterrence and compellence is not as clear as it would appear.14

Clearly, there is a range of tasks to which coercive tools might be applied. In order of increasing difficulty, one can try to persuade an adversary to: not do something it was planning to do, stop something it is currently doing, undo something it has recently done, or do something new that it did not want to do. Nevertheless, these seem likely to be differences of degree rather than of nature. More fundamentally, the process of weighing capabilities, creating credibility, and communicating any of those demands is

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12 Daniel Byman, Matthew C. Waxman, and Eric V. Larson, Air Power as a Coercive Instrument, MR-1061-AF (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1999), 12.

13 Jonathan Shimshoni, Israel and Conventional Deterrence: Border Warfare from 1953 to 1970 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 174. He expresses a similar, broader reaching concern on p. 25. Davis makes a similar point, and his model explicitly draws on prospect theory, so his finding that this central distinction is difficult to apply in the real world is instructive. James W. Davis, Jr., Threats and Promises: The Pursuit of International Influence (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 421 (see also his discussion of related difficulties on p. 415).

similar regardless of the goal of the coercive attempt. Therefore, this dissertation will not restrict its universe to any one of these concepts, but will focus on strategic coercion, thus including both deterrence and compellence attempts. Several in the field also make this broader view of coercion the subject of their research.15

Finally, when discussing the goals of deterrence, scholars and analysts often draw a distinction between general and immediate deterrence.16 General deterrence is a state of affairs that exists between potential adversaries before a crisis. While neither side has made an explicit threat, both sides are aware that they must consider the other's interests as they ponder any future action. If general deterrence appears to be insufficient to ensure a nation's interests, that nation may choose to make a specific threat: "if our opponent attacks our country (or our ally), we will retaliate by doing the following...." At this point, general deterrence has broken down and the policy being pursued is immediate deterrence. A similar distinction could be made on the compellence side: some compellent attempts are made more overtly than others are.

Of course, there are potential grey areas. Oblique threats, expressions of interest in a region, statements that one country is monitoring the moves of another, all these fall

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short of an explicit deterrent threat that would clearly move a situation out of the realm of
general deterrence and into that of immediate deterrence. Thus, these two concepts as
well are better thought of as part of a continuum. Thus, when studying strategic
coelection, it is important not to neglect cases that are not full blown cases of immediate
deterrence but lie somewhere along the continuum toward the general deterrence ideal
type. General deterrence can fail for the same reasons that immediate deterrence does:
questions about capability and intent. Analysts should not ignore the potential to learn
more about it. (This is particularly the case given that one prominent theorist has
recently argued that general deterrence will be increasingly important in the post-Cold
War world.17)

The Tools of Strategic Coercion

If strategic coercion is the use of threats or actual force to achieve any of a broad
range of goals, what more can one say about the tools used to ensure its success? Two
areas are worth discussing: the use of force itself, rather than mere threats of its use, and
the use of incentives versus carrots.

All students of strategic coercion in all its various forms would agree that it
should be distinguished from simply forcing an adversary to do something by using
overwhelming force. Rather, strategic coercion depends at least in part on threats
(implicit or explicit) to achieve its goals.18 The distinction between using military
power as a means of brute force to achieve a goal and the use of threats involving
military power can trace its origins (at least) to Clausewitz, who writes, on the one hand

18 Jakobsen, Western Use of Coercive Diplomacy, 1.
Twomey, The Military Lens

war is an act of force, and there is no logical limit to the application of that force. Each side, therefore, compels its opponent to follow suit; a reciprocal action is started which must lead, in theory, to extremes.19

On the other, he writes that “modifications in practice” in many areas impede this tendency toward all out war. Thus, he concludes, “war is never an isolated act”; “war does not consist of a single short blow”; and “in war, the result is never final.”20 These factors lead to wars responding to the needs of politics:

If we keep in mind that war springs from some political purpose, it is natural that the prime cause of its existence will remain the supreme consideration in conducting it... Policy, then, will permeate all military operations, and in so far as their violent nature will admit, it will have a continuous influence on them.21

This interjection of policy into the use of force characterizes the realm of strategic coercion.

Another way of raising this same issue is to discuss the phenomenon of limited war. Since most wars fall short of all-out conflict, they retain an element of bargaining.22 This is particularly the case for so called limited wars that made up the bulk of American military policy during and after the Cold War.23 Similarly, most arms races could escalate even further or more rapidly, and thus are also examples of limited

20 Ibid., 78-80.
21 Ibid., 87.
international conflict. On another dimension, scholars often write about militarized and non-militarized crises. Rather than sharply distinct modes of interaction, diplomatic crises, militarized crises, limited wars, and total wars are better thought of as lying along a continuum of conflict. Any study of bargaining along this continuum need not shy away from considering several different sorts of interaction for examination. However, excluding the bargaining that occurs within total war does seem appropriate, as it lacks both the ability to threaten more and the fear that the other side might do more—by definition, the combatants are already doing their utmost. Thus, both non-militarized crises and limited wars are to be considered in the universe of cases that this dissertation evaluates.

Most scholars explicitly take a broad view regarding whether strategic coercion can include some uses of force, while still distinguishing that from the pure brute force method of military compellence. Thomas Schelling, in a chapter entitled "The Diplomacy of Violence," emphasizes the difference between nations getting what they want through brute force rather than threats, intimidation, and blackmail, "between the unilateral, 'undiplomatic' recourse to strength, and coercive diplomacy based on the power to hurt." Pape also points out that "coercion ... [is] logically distinct from the imposition of demands after complete military victory." He nevertheless focuses on a class of events that are characterized by the heavy use of force, because even there, the communicative nature of the use of force is central. Jakobsen and Freedman both make

parallel points. Alexander George appears to take a somewhat more restrictive view of coercive diplomacy, stressing the importance of threats rather than the actual use of force.

The general intent of coercive diplomacy is to back a demand on an adversary with a threat of punishment for noncompliance that will be credible and potent enough to persuade him that it is in his interest to comply with the demand. ... It should be kept in mind that coercive diplomacy is essentially a diplomatic strategy, one that relies on the threat of force rather than the use of force to achieve the objective. If force must be used to strengthen diplomatic efforts at persuasion, it is employed in an exemplary manner, in the form of a quite limited military action, to demonstrate resolution and willingness to escalate to high levels of military action if necessary.

However, as is clear from a careful reading of that passage, even here some recourse to use of force still falls under the rubric of coercive diplomacy for George, so long as it is aimed primarily at communication of threats of even greater violence. Violence can play such a communicative role in all conflicts except those that have escalated to Clausewitz’s theoretical extremes.

The approach adopted in this dissertation will follow this broad definition, widely shared in the field that allows strategic coercion to include the uses of force so long as they have some communicative element and are not part of a total war strategy.

Another question regarding the nature of tools to implement strategic coercion is what exactly is threatened. Again, there are some core, shared elements in the field. While most work on deterrence or compellence has focused on threats to punish, other threats are also possible. Glenn Snyder has pointed out that military force can be used either to deny victory to an adversary or to directly hurt him and that both of these may useful to threaten in coercive diplomacy.

29 Glenn Herald Snyder, Deterrence by Denial and Punishment (Princeton, N. J.: Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs Center of International Studies, Princeton University, 1959); Glenn Herald Snyder, Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security (Princeton, N.J.:
strategies can be used both to deter and to compel. Schelling and Pape raise similar points, and Shimshoni goes further to point out that, in conventional deterrence, the distinction can be easily blurred. The usage adopted here will include both of these tools of influence—punishment and denial.

Further, threats and signals can be made explicitly or tacitly. While much attention focuses on the former, it is important not to neglect the latter for several reasons. First, they are ubiquitous. Arquilla finds that “tacit signals” using military forces were used in 60 percent of the cases he studied. The entire tit-for-tat literature sparked by Axelrod’s work centers on tacit signaling. Beyond that, to some scholars, tacit signals convey an exceptional clarity:

> Despite their lack of nuance and heavier costs, relative to verbal communication, tacit measures have, in theory, three great strengths. First, if they are unsubtle, they are also unambiguous. Language is rich, and its very complexity can be used to obfuscate as easily as to clarify. A warship in the harbor may provoke many things but certainly not confusion.

Thus, this study will address strategic coercion with either explicit or tacit signals.

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30 Freedman, "Strategic Coercion," 26ff. For a less supportive view on this point, see Art, "The Four Functions of Force," 155.

31 Pape, Bombing to Win, 13; Schelling, Arms and Influence, 2; Shimshoni, Israel and Conventional Deterrence, 15. Pape provides an example of denial being used for coercion in the later stages of the Korean War during the early part of the Panmunjom negotiations. Pape, Bombing to Win, 140.


34 See the discussion in the previous chapter at note 69 on Axelrod’s work.

35 Arquilla, "Louder Than Words," 157. As discussed in the rest of this dissertation, unfortunately military signals are not always so clear-cut.
Finally, many scholars of strategic coercion focus on both incentives and threats, or carrots and sticks, as tools of policy. This is theoretically attractive because both incentives and threats can manipulate the cost-benefit analysis by a potential adversary. However, this dissertation will not address incentives, while it acknowledges that they can certainly be useful in achieving a nation’s goals. This is done because the causal dynamic highlighted (misperceptions caused by different theories of victory) here focuses on impediments to communication of threats, primarily.

Thus, for the purposes of this project, strategic coercion is defined as the process of one nation trying to convince another nation to do something it would not have done through threats (implicit or explicit) and limited uses of violence, either by opposing an

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37 For similar treatment, see Cortright and Gabbitas, "Incentives for Nuclear Restraint," 6.

38 That said, different theories of victory might lead to an under-appreciation of the carrot offered by an adversary. Suppose the United States withdrew tactical aircraft from a region, but left its ground troops in place. Nations who focused more on ground forces as sources of power would not appreciated the full incentive that the United States was trying to signal. This too would have negative effects on international diplomacy and peace. However, this study excludes this sort of phenomenon for simplicity’s sake.
adversary’s actions or punishing him. With the caveats discussed above, this is similar to the usage of the term by others in the field.  

The theory below should apply when strategic coercion is attempted. That is, attempts at strategic coercion are the universe of cases for the theory. As noted above, this is a very large set of cases as threats, implicit or otherwise, are frequent in international politics. It is in these cases that communication regarding intent and assessments of the balance of power are critical issues between nations.

Doctrines and Theories of Victory

The difference between two nations’ theories of victory is the independent variable in this study. Thus, some explicit and detailed discussions of what “theory of victory” means and where one comes from are warranted. Posen defines a military’s theory of victory in the following passage

Every military organization, explicitly or implicitly, has a theory of victory, a notion of the combination of human and material resources and tactics that it believes is most likely to produce success on the battlefield. The theory of victory is the organization's military doctrine.

Others use the term in similar ways, with some variations.

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39 In addition to the citations discussed above, see, Byman, Waxman, and Larson, Air Power as a Coercive Instrument, 10; Schelling, Arms and Influence, Chapter 1: The Diplomacy of Violence. Note that Schultz, while lacking a precise definition of coercive diplomacy, clearly makes use of the broader meaning that used here. Kenneth A. Schultz, Democracy and Coercive Diplomacy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Jakobsen uses the term “coercive diplomacy” to mean the same thing that “strategic coercion” is used for here. Jakobsen, Western Use of Coercive Diplomacy.


Military strategies link force structures to political or military goals.\footnote{Twomey, The Military Lens} Below that level, military doctrine sketches out a generic understanding of how elements of military power can be used to achieve victory. Doctrine refers to a concept below nations’ grand strategies, but above their operational or tactical military strategy.\footnote{Twomey, The Military Lens} Doctrines can be based on organizational frameworks, specific technologies, or more conceptual elements.\footnote{Twomey, The Military Lens}

Examples from current American security policy might illuminate this discussion. Military doctrine does not refer to the new U.S. strategies of maintaining and ensuring global predominance and the pre-emption of threats.\footnote{Twomey, The Military Lens} Those more appropriately fit at the level of a grand strategy.\footnote{Twomey, The Military Lens} Nor does it refer to the specific U.S. strategy of the left hook in the first Gulf War; this is more of an operational or tactical strategy.\footnote{Twomey, The Military Lens} Rather, in the context of policy today, American military doctrine is the theory of victory for
conventional wars based on heavy use of airpower and precision guided munitions aimed to decapitate an adversary, followed up by heavy mechanized forces and very highly mobile infantry forces, as needed.\footnote{For a representative statement see \textit{FM 3-0: Operations}, FM 3-0 (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, June 14, 2001); General Henry H. Shelton, \textit{Doctrine for Joint Operations}, JP 3-0 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, September 10, 2001). For an earlier example, see the 1982 edition of FM 100-5 that introduced AirLand Battle.} This is a conception of how the United States plans to win wars in general, of the fundamental basis of military power.

Choosing optimal doctrines and strategies is not straightforward and is better thought of as an art than a science. There is no single, optimal strategy to achieve a given goal with a given force structure.\footnote{Making an even broader point is Richard K. Betts, "Is Strategy an Illusion?," \textit{International Security} 25, no. 2 (2000).} Indeed, doctrines can range widely as can understandings of the fundamental basis of military power. For example, a nation might emphasize any one of the following: blitzkrieg, submarine blockade, conventional strategic bombing, intense tactical air without an associated ground force, sea control based on a battleship navy, highly trained light infantry, etc. (And indeed nations might emphasize one of these in one strategic geography and another elsewhere.) Empirically, Weigley traces more than a dozen different “ways of war” for the United States alone over its first 200 years.\footnote{Russell Frank Weigley, \textit{The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977). Note Weigley’s use of the term strategy is similar to the use of “theory of victory” in this dissertation (see his definitional comments on pp. xviii-xix). However, strategy is a broad term, one used differently by many people. Therefore, it is not selected here.}

Building on the usage of Posen and others described above, this dissertation defines a “theory of victory” as a belief about what constitutes effective military power at a fundamental level and how it should be used operationally and tactically. It
Twomey, *The Military Lens*

includes—indeed, is centered on—doctrine, but also consists of the make up of military forces as well as some elements of grand strategy. It is a blanket term to describe a generic understanding of how to win wars. It is a mental construct, albeit one that is often informed by past empirical experience and one that clearly has tangible effects on policy. It guides the procurement of forces, shapes the doctrine with which those forces are used, and prioritizes grand strategic goals for the nation.

Other terms express similar meaning, although none has gained wide currency, and each has some limitations. Applegate refers to “military cultures” which would seem to exclude sources of such beliefs from more material factors. 51 Weigley’s term “the way of war” comes very close to the meaning used here, but might be a bit broader, since it centers on grand strategic questions (which are included primarily as supplementary to doctrinal issues in the usage here). 52 Further, the term “theory of victory” also reminds us that such a perspective need not have been actually tested, that it might remain theoretical only (whereas Weigley’s research is focused on the actual conduct of war). The term used here term is also similar to Builder’s description of the different “concepts of war” that the various services have within the U.S. military. 53 The term “concept of operations” (or CONOPS) is also similar, although less precise as it can refer to a wide range of scales (e.g., the concept of operations for the B-2 bomber as well one for use of military force by the United States in the periphery for the purposes of

51 Or at least it would suggest that such sources are less important than sociologic sources. This is not a fight this dissertation engages, as for its purposes, the sources of such beliefs are less relevant than their effects. See R. A. D. Applegate and J. E. Moore, “The Nature of Military Culture,” *Defense Analysts* 6, no. 3 (1990).

52 Weigley, *The American Way of War*.

regime change). As noted in the previous chapter, this concept overlaps with Scobell’s “organizational culture” of the PLA in his discussion of the possible cultural influences on China’s propensity to use military force.54 One study of recent American uses “force structure and doctrine” to define the scope of a similar topic:

For the armed forces, force structure and doctrine represent two critical characteristics that define the military capabilities upon which leaders can draw. Force structure incorporates doctrinal decisions and assumptions about mission execution. It incorporates specific mixes of personnel, equipment, organizational structure and assumptions about operational effectiveness. It constrains options for employing the military (e.g., inability of active forces to sustain themselves for long deployments required call up and deployment of National Guard and Reserves in Desert Storm). Doctrine provides the conceptual framework that relates military means to desired ends. [According to the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff] “Military doctrine presents fundamental principles that guide the employment of forces … doctrine deals with the fundamental issue of how best to employ the national military power to achieve strategic ends.” Doctrine operationalizes a theory of military action. It is the driving force behind training and preparation for military operations by units and the tactical and operational levels.55

Thus, the dissertation will focus on nations’ broad theories of victory as well as their narrower doctrines in its evaluation of the independent variable.

Theory

With those definitions on the table, this chapter now turns to the specific causal chain proposed by the theory. It begins with a summary of the existing work that explains the sources of doctrinal beliefs before moving on to the next two stages of the causal chain proposed by the dissertation. First, differences in theories of victory should lead to an overestimation of one’s own power relative to that of one’s adversary.


Second, such an overestimation should lead to increased prospects for failure of strategic coercive policies and unnecessary conflict.

The Origins of Strategic and Doctrinal Beliefs

This dissertation does not explain the sources of different theories of victory but rather their effects. It is nevertheless important to understand the range of influences on leaders’ perceptions of optimal strategies and to be aware of indicators of their perceptions. The large literature on these topics has shown that many factors shape nations’ perceptions regarding optimal strategies. This section briefly discusses four categories of these.

First, systemic and geographic imperatives can have a powerful effect forcing doctrinal innovation. Military defeat punishes laggards, and the international system presents powerful incentives to find effective military solutions to strategic dilemmas. Some argue that others in the international system emulate effective military strategies under the right conditions. (Different scholars note that, at least in peacetime, the


imprecision of intelligence makes such emulation very challenging.\textsuperscript{59} Financial
shortfalls and other resource constraints can also play a similar role in shaping a nation's
choice of strategy. (That is, there may be situations when states are forced to choose a
strategy because is the only one they can afford.)

Second, closely related to this third image argument is the role that technologic
advancement has in leading to innovation. When such advances occur, new options are
available to states in terms of weapons and tactics. Sometimes, states will indeed avail
themselves to these new opportunities, shaping their views of strategy.\textsuperscript{60} For instance,
one historian argues that the proliferation of a variety of technologies—the railroad,
artillery, and improved personal arms—drove the adoption of general staffs, an
organizational change.\textsuperscript{61} The rise of general staffs, in turn, then led to new opportunities
at the strategic and operational levels. Thus, some scholars argue, the link between
technologic innovation and change in doctrine is not necessarily linear, but rather is often

\textsuperscript{59} Rosen, \textit{Winning the Next War}, 61. Rosen notes that in the first decade of the interwar period, the
United States based its intelligence regarding Japan primarily on open sources. This was clearly
insufficient for guiding doctrinal innovation, as he notes. Nevertheless, both sides pursued parallel
innovations (independently, and at great cost) in the area of carrier-based airpower.

\textsuperscript{60} For a forceful statement on the role of technology in fomenting innovation, see Martin L. Van Creveld,

\textsuperscript{61} Dallas D. Irvine, "The Origin of Capital Staffs," \textit{The Journal of Modern History} 10, no. 2 (1938).
quite complex and depends on many other factors (organizational politics, budgetary factors, etc.).

A third important source of such perceptions is past historic practice. One manifestation of this is the well-known adage that ‘states often prepare to fight the last war’. When states have found viable strategies, they are reluctant to change them. The process of learning from history, however, is not straightforward and debates over what lesson history conveys are endemic.

Fourth, organizational structures and practices can also shape doctrine by reifying the lessons of history, setting standard operating practices, and defining actors’ interests. A variety of hypotheses have been introduced regarding organizational sources of innovation: the intervention of civilian leaders, the nature of the institutions of civilian oversight, inter-service and inter-branch rivalry, continuity in the officer corps, and

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64 For a historical perspective on the role of such debates in the U.S. Army’s process of learning from history, see Carol Reardon, *Soldiers and Scholars: The U.S. Army and the Uses of Military History, 1865-1920* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1990).


the historically-derived organizational culture. Much work also emphasizes the impediments that organizations throw up to innovation. Organizations can also shape doctrine more directly: A professionalized force has options available to it that a conscript military does not due to the skill levels of its officers and non-commissioned officers.

Thus, the sources of theories of victory are numerous. All of these four categories of factors might affect a nation’s theory of victory, that is, their own understanding of how their military forces should be used to maximize their effectiveness in the pursuit of some goal. Again, this vast body of work is an important precursor to this dissertation’s argument, but this project does not attempt to assess the accuracy of specific sides of the debate on the sources of military doctrine.

Since states have different factor endowments, recent histories in security affairs, and their own national and organizational cultures, analysts should expect to find significant variation in theories of victory across space and time. While different factor

68 Elman, “The Logic of Emulation”.
endowments are important to understanding the sources of the Sino-American

differences, in many other cases other issues are at the foundations of the differences in
theories of victory. (Further, even in the context of material disparity, nations can have
similar understandings of theories of victory if other factors are important.)

Nevertheless, this dissertation will not systematically survey the variation of this, the
independent variable. At least one study concludes that there are significant differences
in military cultures, even among European and North Atlantic nations:

The results are rather unambiguous. First, it evolved that fairly large differences exist
between military cultures, as discerned among the samples of student officers. For
example, the cultural differences between the Canadian academy and the Italian academy
are quite considerable and systematic. … Furthermore, the dispersion among the
various military academies on all cultural dimensions proved to be even larger than in the
original Hofstede study of civilian employees.

While the variable in question in those studies is not precisely the same as the military
cultural aspects that are the focus of this dissertation, that study is suggestive of
substantial and fundamental cross-national differences. Furthermore, anecdotal
evidence suggests that significant differences in theories of victory across two nations are
common. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, examples from the Napoleonic
wars, several dyads in World War II (U.S.-Germany and France-Germany), and the Arab-
Israeli war of 1973 are found to exhibit wide differences in theories of victory (and
something similar seems to have existed in the Peloponnesian wars).

72 That said, clearly the cases below do not simply reduce to capability differences. In the chapters that
follow, the United States is just as prone to overestimating its own capabilities as is China.

73 The cases below provide examples of this. See Chapter 6: China Postpones the Invasion of Taiwan.

74 Joseph L. Soeters, "Value Orientations in Military Academies: A Thirteen Country Study," Armed
Forces and Society 24, no. 1 (1997): 24. The Hofstede study had focused on cross-national
comparisons of workers at various IBM subsidiaries. It, too found a wide range of national
differences.
notes the large doctrinal differences between the French and Germans before WWII.\textsuperscript{75} Arquilla argues something similar occurred in World War I and the wars of Louis XIV.\textsuperscript{76} Shimshoni finds evidence for a related phenomenon in the Arab-Israeli conflicts in 1954 and 1967.\textsuperscript{77} It likely occurs between the United States and China today.\textsuperscript{78} Thus, there is some evidence that the phenomenon exists widely.

The chart below shows the link between these various factors and nations' beliefs about theories of victory and effective strategies and capabilities as the arrow labeled under $H_{\text{existing literature}}$ (really, this is best thought of as a set of—sometimes competing—hypotheses, but for simplicity's sake, that is reduced here).

**Figure 2-2: The Theory's Precursors**

Rather than join the debate on the sources of doctrine or explain the origins of nations' theories of victory, this dissertation will look to their effects. Once a nation has arrived at a set of beliefs that constitute its theory of victory, the implications are

\textsuperscript{75} Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*.


\textsuperscript{77} Shimshoni, *Israel and Conventional Deterrence*.

substantial. Scholars have long recognized the inflexibility of doctrinal thinking in other spheres. William Graham Sumner, a prominent sociologist and political scientist at Yale writing at the dawn of the 20th century, wrote forebodingly of doctrines in foreign policy:

Now when any doctrine arrives at that degree of authority, the name of it is a club which any demagogue may swing over you at any time and apropos of anything. In order to describe a doctrine, we much have recourse to theological language. A doctrine is an article of faith. ... A doctrine is an abstract principle; it is necessarily absolute in its scope and abstruse in its terms; it is metaphysical assertion. It is never true, because it is absolute, and the affairs of men are all conditioned and relative.  

As is the case for doctrines of foreign policy, so too it is with those of military affairs.

The effects of a particular doctrine are wide-ranging. Future force procurement decisions will be made based on that decision. Training is geared to implement it (even at senior levels of the military). Political leaders will also be educated in it by the military leadership. Further, once incorporated into a nation’s doctrine, these beliefs are often applied to unexpected situations through the creation of standard operating procedures that are relatively inflexible yet widely applied.  

As Lt. Colonel Richard Lacquement, a professor at the Naval War College, notes,

In the short-response time, come-as-you-are nature of most international crisis situations, the employment of the armed forces places critical importance on existing forces and their existing organizational routines (SOPs, doctrine, etc.). The structure and doctrine of armed forces establishes how they operate.


80 The classic statements on the role of standard operating procedures in foreign policy are: Graham T. Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," American Political Science Review 63, no. 3 (1969); Graham T. Allison, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis (Boston: Little Brown, 1971).

81 Lacquement, "Preaching after the Devil's Death", 13.
Indeed, while military doctrine is necessary in order to rehearse and plan, once accepted
it reinforces a belief system about its own efficacy.\footnote{82}{In addition to the discussion below on the difficulties of innovation, Smith also discusses the rigidity and persistence of doctrine. Perry M. Smith, "The Role of Doctrine," in American Defense Policy, ed. John E. Endicott and Roy W. Stafford, Jr. (Baltimore, Mary.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).} Even sharp external shocks may not be enough to lead to change:

The enemy's sudden attack [at Pearl Harbor] produced no quick reorientation of
American ideas about the use of air power. The first impulse was to resurrect schemes concocted under different circumstances. As in many other matters, so too in the use of
air power. Pearl Harbor was not the watershed it came to seem.\footnote{83}{Michael S. Sherry, The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 117.}

This inflexibility of doctrine, coupled with its application to a wide range of policies and
issues, emphasizes its importance as a variable in and of itself.

Thus, the choice of doctrine, and more broadly a theory of victory, has important
impacts in terms of shaping the very way national leaders think about international
security.\footnote{84}{For other effects of doctrine, see the discussion in the previous chapter regarding the overestimation of dangers.} The hypotheses below outline the specific causal argument of these impacts.

\textit{Hypotheses}

The literature discussed above analyzing the sources of doctrine treats doctrine as
a dependent variable. This dissertation uses doctrine and related thinking regarding
theories of victory instead as an independent variable. Essentially, the dissertation has a
two-part argument: differences in theories of victory lead to misperceptions; these in turn
lead to miscommunications, escalation, and conflict through deterrence failure and
coercive failure more generally. Each is expressed as a separate hypothesis. The first
is stated as $H_1$, below.
Hypothesis #1

$H_1$: When two nations have different theories of victory, they will be more likely to misperceive each other's capabilities relative to their own, and these misperceptions, ceteris paribus, will lead to underestimation of the adversary.

This hypothesis has two components. The first predicts opacity as a result of differing theories of victory. The second focuses on the primary way that opacity manifests itself: underestimation. (This component also has a "ceteris paribus" assumption built in, which will be discussed at the end of this section).

The hypothesis relies on seven underlying logics. Each of these explains why $H_1$ is likely to hold. In cases where two nations have different theories of victory, these different logics explain why it is that nations will be prone to underestimating their adversaries. They are based on various organizational, cultural, and perceptual arguments. Each is explained in turn.

Causal Logics.
The first three logics depend primarily on the logics of organizational politics and the effects of culture on perception. The next four logics trace their roots to perceptual arguments, primarily from the psychology literature.

First, the military innovation literature suggests that organizations, and militaries in particular, are reluctant to innovate. In general, organizations are reluctant to

change, have trouble thinking outside of established ideas, and resist changing 'standard operating procedures. Militaries are particularly sensitive to this since not only does change threaten the organization, but also it involves putting soldiers’ very lives at risk. Because they denigrate innovation in their own organization, they should also discount its value to others. This can be the case even when other countries have successfully innovated and all that the country in question must do is to emulate others.86

The well-known example of the horse cavalry between the world wars in the U.S. Army exemplifies well. Even after the carnage on the front lines of the European battlefields at the Somme and Verdun and the success of tanks at the end of the war, a dominant group of horse cavalry officers in the interwar period continued to insist that the horse was a superior weapons platform to the tank because it was more maneuverable and flexible.87 As a result, at the outbreak of WWII in Europe, the United States had a mere 28 tanks in service that were not obsolete.88 Even as late as 1944, desires by military leaders to continue emphasize high mobility precluded the deployment of heavy armor and anti-tank weapons.89 The merits of such a doctrine when facing German Tiger tanks seems quite irrational in hindsight, but would have appeared justified in the context of the prevailing understanding of cavalry doctrine at the time.


86 On impediments to emulation, see Elman, “The Logic of Emulation”, *passim*, 101ff.

87 See *Ibid.*, 169; Katzenbach, "The Horse Cavalry in the Twentieth Century."

88 Elman, “The Logic of Emulation”, 177. Note that even these were all light and medium tanks. Note the Germans were not entirely immune from the hold of horse cavalry. Guderian writes of one of his division’s "curious fear of hostile cavalry." General Heinz Guderian, *Panzer Leader* (Cambridge, Mass.: DeCapo Press, 1996), 99.

Second, strategies are costly, risky endeavors. Getting them implemented is difficult and often requires military (and political) leaders to oversell their merits and denigrate alternatives. For instance, "The U.S. lacked a competitive tank engine in the period before World War II, but in the absence of hard data to the contrary, the chief of the [American] Ordnance Department was able to assert in 1938 that U.S. tank engines were among the best in the world." Other cases of best-case assumptions in the context of poor information regarding an adversary abound. One U.S. Army general (and military historian) writes sweepingly:

On every occasion, modern nations involved in recent small wars have overestimated the destructive power of their own forces. Inevitably, this overestimate has led to optimism and expectations greater than either men or machines could deliver. Munitions intended to destroy a conventional force may have little or no effect against an elusive, dispersed, entrenched enemy not encumbered by vulnerable heavy equipment or lines of communication. A concentrated bombardment that would shock the life out of a Western unit might have only a temporary effect on the fighting strength of a tough Third World unit inured to hardship and prepared to die for a cause.

The downplaying of alternatives is similarly common in other historic periods. For instance,

Air Corps leaders had reached a doctrinal decision by 1935 as to the efficacy of unescorted long-range strategic bombardment and were unwilling either to question that decision or even to observe technological advances that might cause them to modify this doctrine...

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91 Rosen, Winning the Next War, 188.

92 Ibid., 194. Also see Smith, "The Role of Doctrine."


All of these trends would lead to an overestimation of one's own capabilities relative to the adversary.

Third, strategic culture, as with any culture, can shape perceptions in critical ways. By creating norms and expected patterns of behavior, culture profoundly shapes one's understanding of reality. At a very fundamental level, "culture refers both to a set of evaluative standards, such as norms or values, and to cognitive standards, such as rules or models defining what entities and actors exist in a system and how they operate and interrelate." Military cultures are known to have important effects on grand strategic preferences. On a related note, one scholar writes, "each organization employs a different informational lens to interpret these data [from their own conflicts]. He goes on to argue that these assessment criteria are quite constant over time, even outlasting specific policy preferences or goals in a conflict.

Theories of victory are a sort of military strategic and doctrinal culture, and thus have this type of effect on perceptions of power and signals. Differences in such

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98 Scott Sigmund Gartner, Strategic Assessment in War (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), 3.

99 Ibid., passim.
cultures will lead to differences in perceptions about power and signals across countries, precisely what this hypothesis predicts. This will increase the chance for misperceptions in such situations.

Fourth, leaders understand what they have had experience with. If they lack experience with a military weapon or strategy, then it is hard for them to understand it. Further, if they lack advisors with experience with the weapon or strategy, this problem is exacerbated. One example of this comes out of John Arquilla’s work on “why ‘losers’ start wars.”100 One of the answers to this question that he finds is the “imperfect understanding of sea power and its role in land-sea war” by leaders from continental powers.101 The same phenomenon can occur more generally whenever leaders lack an understanding of their adversary’s theory of victory.

Fifth, differences in military forces of a qualitative nature are harder to assess than those of a quantitative nature. Andrew Marshall makes a similar point:

By far the most interesting implicit estimate of military power emerges, I would conjecture, from what one would call the symmetry syndrome of more standard or, perhaps, classical military planning. This is the typical reaction pattern: If an opponent buys bombers, we tend more to increase our bomber forces, rather than to increase our air defense; when an opponent deploys an ABM system, we deploy an ABM system. ... Classical military force posture planning, I believe involved an attempt to achieve a posture of rough postural symmetry with the potential enemy, subject always to the often inadequate peacetime budgets and a variety of bureaucratic, institutional constraints to be discussed below. Symmetry is defined in terms that if the enemy has so many divisions, the planners say we ought to have so many divisions; if he has so many naval ships of various classes, we should have the same proportional number; the balance of our forces would reflect the balance of the enemy’s forces.102

100 Arquilla, Dubious Battles: Aggression, Defeat, and the International System. The passage quoted is the title of chapter 5 in the book, although that question underlies the entire project as well.

101 Ibid., 121. Note that the findings of this dissertation are almost the opposite: when a land power faced off against a sea power (over Taiwan), there were few mistakes, and deterrence and peace prevailed. However, when a sea power faced a land power on land (in Korea) mistakes and escalation were pervasive. This suggests that something deeper is at play, at least in these cases.

This is also related to an inductive conclusion that comes from a study of Arab-Israeli conflict from 1953 to 1970.\footnote{Shimshoni, \textit{Israel and Conventional Deterrence}, 226-28. Shimshoni’s excellent work closely parallels the argument offered here, and this dissertation attempts to build on his useful contribution. The approach taken here broadens the conclusions of Shimshoni’s work by focusing not just on qualitative differences in forces, but also by emphasizing that doctrinal and grand strategic differences exhibit similar dynamics. Shimshoni’s primary conclusions focus on the role of surprise and an emphasis on quality (over quantity) in procurement and deployment. Qualitative differences more generally are discussed only in passing in the conclusion. The hope here is to build on his insights there by explicitly designing a research program to evaluate this point.} That study was structured to address the traditional elements of deterrence theory, noting their particular difficulties in cases of conventional conflict: relative interests, relative power, reputation, the conduct of diplomacy itself, the potential for domestic politics to intervene, etc. A key part of the story that the author tells, however, was the ability of forces to adapt to threats posed by an adversary and thus the ephemeral advantage presented by some qualitative differences. That is,

Because conventional forces are adaptable, divulging information in the hope of enhancing deterrence gives an opponent an opportunity to design around the revealed capabilities, so that eventually deterrence is undermined by knowledge. Yet if the opponent knows too little, he will also remain undeterred.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 227.}

Expanding on this insight, this argument supporting $H$, emphasizes that not only is diplomacy impeded because nations have incentives to be coy about the sources of their power when they depend on qualitative differences, but the evaluation of qualitative differences is simply more challenging than those based on quantitative differences.\footnote{This point is consistent with, although not made explicitly in, \textit{Ibid.}}

It is more difficult to think about different sorts of forces facing off than different numbers of forces. It is relatively easy to think about how an extra division or warship will affect a particular military balance, especially if they are similar to a state’s own forces of that type. However, considering the effects of a new type of tank or submarine...
is much more challenging. Conducting net assessments or campaign analysis with fundamentally different sorts of forces is particularly challenging.\footnote{Note that this component of $H_1$ does not predict either over or under-estimation, but only that some error in estimation will occur. The other five components of this hypothesis do support underestimation \textit{per se}.}

\textit{Sixth}, leaders believe their views are correct because they chose them. That is, a psychological defense mechanism of self-justification occurs. The fundamental attribution error—a concept thoroughly grounded in psychological experimental research— is closely related to this point.\footnote{On the use of attribution theory in international relations, see Jonathan Mercer, \textit{Reputation and International Politics} (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).} The fundamental attribution error emphasizes that contextual justifications for choices get less emphasis than they merit.

For instance, when subjects are told that a lecturer has been ordered to defend a particular position, they nevertheless believe that the subject does indeed believe the content of his speech.\footnote{Erica Goode, "How Culture Molds Habits of Thought," \textit{New York Times}, August 8 2000. For an example of political science research that utilizes this concept, see Mercer, \textit{Reputation and International Politics}.} Similarly, a particular theory of victory might be chosen for any number of reasons (as discussed above) other than functional optimality. However, once it is chosen, the context or situation that led to its selection will drift to the background, and people will tend to ignore the reasons why a militarily sub-optimal strategy might have been chosen.

One scholar of doctrine notes precisely this phenomenon in his field of study.

Social psychologists have shown that stating an idea often leads to changes in personal convictions…. Getting people to commit themselves publicly to a particular belief can lead them to internalize that belief. … if ‘saying is believing,’ many aspects of the military’s culture [and thus doctrine, in the author’s mind] may have originated as politically expedient strategies.\footnote{Kier, \textit{Imagining War}, 156.}
Beyond ignoring the shortcomings of one’s own theory of victory, the phenomenon of self-justification easily leads to a denigration of different views by an adversary. In turn, the adversary has the same beliefs about both his own and his adversary’s beliefs. Both cannot be correct at the same time.

Seventh, psychologically, humans are predisposed to have an exaggerated sense of themselves. Psychologists refer to this as a ‘positive illusion’. The key research underpinning this phenomenon suggests:

most people exhibit positive illusions in three important domains: (a) They view themselves in unrealistically positive terms; (b) they believe they have greater control over environmental events than is actually the case; and (c) they hold views of the future that are more rosy than base-rate data can justify.

This finding is widely held in the field of social psychology: “there are at least 121 articles on perceived invulnerability and optimistic biases about risk and future life events alone, a listing that does not include a number of relevant references on optimism as a trait concept.” Beyond that, there is increasing evidence that this phenomenon, in some manifestation, exists across cultures, including, of particular interest to this study,

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111 Taylor and Brown, "Positive Illusions," 22.

112 Ibid.: 25.

This psychological phenomenon has already been productively applied to the study of international conflict. From the perspective of this dissertation, it should lead to underestimation of the adversary. However, this effect will occur whether or not the theories of victory are similar or different. Thus, on first glance, it would not seem to speak to the hypothesis introduced above. Thus, regarding this last psychologically derived argument (and to some extent the fourth point as well), some additional discussion is necessary. There are reasons to expect them to be particularly pronounced in cases of different theories of victory. That is because in many circumstances, cognitive errors will be overcome:

Groups of at least seven or eight decisionmakers (and probably as few as two, three or four), especially across time, would correct cognitive biases made by one individual, or the group would at least override an individual's error even if the individual persevered in his or her cognitive misperception—the group would refuse to make the same simple error as a particular individual. Further, most individuals would correct their errors if they were made aware of them.

However, there are situations when it will be easier to correct such biases and some situations that will make it harder to do so.

When a state compares its own capabilities to an adversary's, if they are similar in nature, such exaggerations would seem harder to sustain. However, differences in the nature of capabilities (or strategies) should allow for a wider range of dissonance.


Scholarship in the psychology literature has noted, "it is often hard to distinguish reality from illusion. This is especially difficult when one is dealing with people's interpretations or subjective perceptions of stimuli and events that do not have a sure, physical basis." 117 When both sides are operating under similar theories of victory, assessments of one's opponents forces and plans will be less subject to "interpretations or subjective perceptions" than if the two sides have very different theories of victory. As noted above, there is no objectively rational strategy or doctrine; they are more art than science. 118 Thus, correcting one's own bias or that of others will be more challenging in such cases where the differences between how the two sides view effective war making reduce the clear basis upon which assessments might be made.

Summary.
The graphical representation above in Figure 2-2 can be expanded to include this hypothesis as shown in the flow chart below.

117 Taylor and Brown, "Positive Illusions," 22.
118 Again, see Betts, "Is Strategy an Illusion?."
Figure 2-3: The Causal Chain of $H_1$

This figure moves first from the sources of doctrines and theories of victory to them. Then, when those theories differ substantially, they can interact across nations leading to differences in perception between them.

Complications and Extensions.
For the theory to be correct, it is not necessary for all of these seven factors to hold in a particular instance. Any one of them will lead a state to perceive an adversary's capabilities as being relatively weaker than the adversary itself views them to be. Their relative absence will decrease the likelihood of the miscommunications and differences in perception that this hypothesis predicts. Thus, when nations have relatively similar theories of victory, both sides are more likely to understand coercive threats similarly.\(^{119}\) (Of course, strategic coercion or coercive diplomacy can fail for

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\(^{119}\) Shimshoni makes a similar observation within one of his cases, but does not develop it. He describes the better prospects for clear communication between Jordan and Israel in the mid-1950s than in 1948 because both sides had a lengthening and relatively intense history of small-scale border raids. This made it easier for each side to understand the implications of other's moves in this regard. However, it is unclear to what extent Shimshoni views that as caused by learning about the other side's intent or
many reasons other than miscommunication, for instance, if the two sides both care
deeply about a particular issue.¹²⁰)

Note also that the latter five rationales will all apply to cases where innovation has
not occurred, but where one adversary has nevertheless chosen a strategy different from
that of its opponent. Budgetary reasons or factors particular to a local strategic
geography might cause this. (Indeed, there is already recognition that power
assessments in the former circumstances is particularly difficult: “The elusiveness of the
balance of power is intensified by the differences in states’ resources.”¹²¹)

This hypothesis predicts a difference in perception between the two sides
regarding each other’s capabilities. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that this
hypothesis is not predicting misperception by one of parties per se. Clearly, if there is a
difference of perception and an objective reality,¹²² then one of two sides is misperceiving
the situation (and thus this dissertation will generally use the language of
“misperception”¹²³). However, this hypothesis is agnostic as to which of the two sides is
correct and which is wrong. Indeed, it is quite possible that both sides are
misperceiving the actual situation. Measuring power and capabilities is inherently

¹²⁰ Again, see the discussion in the previous chapter on deterrence failure in general.

¹²¹ William Curti Wohlforth, The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions During the Cold War (Ithaca:
Cornell University Press, 1993), 305.

¹²² Contrary to some critical theorists, this dissertation takes the approach that there is a reality that is
generally knowable or observable. For the alternate view, see, for instance, Hayward R. Alker,
Rediscoveries and Reformulations: Humanistic Methodologies for International Studies (New York:

¹²³ Jervis does the same thing, avoiding the question of who is right and focusing on the differences in
perception. See Jervis, Perception and Misperception, 29.
difficult. Judging which side perceives correctly and which is not (in cases where the
two sides' perceptions differ) is a complex task, and it is not the goal of this
dissertation. Rather, the goal here is to focus on the effects of different perceptions,
regardless of which side is correct.

The theory also does not make predictions regarding the perceptions of offense or
defense dominance. Again, this is clearly a very important variable in the study of
international security. However, the theory proposed here does not make any
predictions about proneness to offensive ideologies. Rather, it suggests that under
circumstances of doctrinal differences, states will be overconfident regarding their own
forces compared to those of the adversary regardless of whether they expect offense or
defense to be more important in future conflicts.

Opacity, Inflation, and Underestimation.
Each of those seven factors supports the overall hypothesis, suggesting that
differences in theories of victory can lead to misperceptions regarding an adversary’s
military power. Thus, all support the opacity component of the hypothesis. Most go
further to also explain why, ceteris paribus, one should expect that opacity to lead to an
underestimation.

124 Again, that is the conclusion of a large body of work. See footnote 22, in the previous chapter. That
would suggest that such dual misperceptions are relatively common. Measuring that—the frequency
of dual misperceptions—is not the goal of this dissertation, which has not been designed to do that
effectively.

125 That said, given that in many cases these misperceptions result in violent conflict, the objective reality
of the power balance and the efficacy of specific theories of victory can be measured.

126 See Snyder, The Ideology of the Offensive; Van Evera, "The Cult of the Offensive."; Stephen Van
This is not to say that in all circumstances the opacity that comes from the
difference in theories of victory will lead to underestimation. In some cases, threat
inflation, or overestimation, may be more likely.

For instance, motivated biases will often trump other factors. Thus, in the 1970s
and 1980s, elements of the U.S. military were able to make use of the opacity that came
from the differences in theories of victory between the United States and the Soviet
Union to inflate the Soviet threat, leading to increased budgets. While opacity might
make such threat inflation easier, when organizations are strongly motivated to
exaggerate a threat they will often find a way to do so, regardless of the clarity with
which analysts might see the world. The role of such motivated biases is well
studied. In cases where such motivated biases are high, they will dominate the more
subtle effects being examined here and will play a major role in shaping the eventual
perception regarding the adversary.

127 Posen, "Measuring the European Conventional Balance."
128 A recent example is the second Bush Administrations concerns with Iraq's connections to Al Qaeda in
2003 that were widely viewed as fallacious by civilian analysts (and indeed many governmental
bureaucrats as well). No opacity was at work here, just motivated bias by the neoconservative
elements in the political leadership. See Chaim Kaufman, "Threat Inflation and the Failure of the
129 For recent work, see Kellett-Cramer, "National Security Panics"; Kellett-Cramer, "9/11, Exaggerating
Threats and the Poverty of Psychological Theories for Explaining National Misperceptions."; Van
Evera, Causes of War, Chapter 6. For earlier works, see Model III in Allison, Essence of Decision.
For the classic statement of the way in which bureaucracies can pursue their motivated biases, see
Halperin, Clapp, and Kanter, Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy, espec. Chapter Nine:
Maneuvers to Affect Information. For more specific work on the role of military biases for offensive
operations, in part due to their effects on budgets, see Posen, The Sources of Military Doctrine; Snyder,
The Ideology of the Offensive.
Similarly, some argue that there is a general pressure in international relations at the systemic level toward conservatism. Such conservatism will be prudent in an uncertain and anarchic world. To the extent this is true, this would thus lead to pressure toward overestimation of the adversary. This too can be thought of as a form of "motivated bias".

This study has not been designed to assess the relative impacts of these two sorts of misperceptions in international affairs (that is, motivated bias toward threat inflation and the organizational and cognitive based hypothesis above leading to underestimation). Rather, it aims to sketch out a plausibility probe of the less studied of these, that is, the way in which differences in theories of victory can lead to chronic underestimations of the adversary, *ceteris paribus*. Thus, it makes predictions about very specific circumstances when pressure for overestimation (coming from neo-realism's anarchy, budgetary competition, or elsewhere) will face a countervailing dynamic working in the opposite direction due to the organizational, cultural, and psychological factors listed above.

Examples.

An excellent example of the phenomenon described by the above hypothesis occurred in the early part of World War II as the United States considered how to face Germany on the plains of Europe. There, American beliefs about the nature of armored warfare led to a set of policy decisions that hurt it when battle was joined. Elman's description of the issues involved summarizes the point well:

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With respect to U.S. tanks, the belief that tank vs. tank combat could be avoided, combined with a continuing stress on mobility, led to an almost complete reliance on medium tanks. It was quickly recognized that light tanks were of little use on the modern battlefield. In addition, official American doctrine had no place for slow, heavy tanks that could take on German Panthers and Tigers. Although it was recognized that Sherman medium tanks would be unequal to German heavy tanks in a fight, official policy held that such combat was a matter of choice not necessity. This policy rested on two errors. The first was relying on tank destroyers, which with the exception of a few later and more powerful models, were unequal to the task. The second was the mistaken belief that tank vs. tank combat was an option that the U.S. ground forces could choose to decline at their convenience. The fact was that tanks did fight tanks, and the U.S. tanks were not very good at it.

In short, between 1941 and 1946, U.S. reactions were heavily influenced by pre-existing organizational sub-cultures, and by the results of decades of bureaucratic infighting.  

It was only after the defeats at the Battle of the Bulge in 1945 that the United States began experimenting with heavier tanks on the battlefield, even though they had engaged Tigers (Panzer Mark VI) as early as 1943 in Tunisia.  

Beyond the lack of hardware, the United States had doctrinal problems as well. The U.S. Army had been slow to come to accept the role for an independent armor force. As late as 1939, official doctrine stated, “As a rule, tanks are employed to assist the advance of infantry foot troops, either preceding or accompanying the infantry assault echelon.”  

Before the 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers, armor was an integral part of either


Twomey, *The Military Lens*

Even officers later identified with armor breakthrough battles still firmly supported horse cavalry in 1940.\(^{135}\)

The result of these limitations of hardware and doctrine was straightforward: As Elman writes, “The Germans destroyed a lot of American tanks.”\(^{136}\) In this case, the American theory of victory, as manifested through weapons purchases and doctrinal thinking, led to an underestimation of the enemy that resulted in substantial losses and casualties.

Guderian similarly shows the link between a difference in doctrine across nations and an assessment of the balance of power between them:

Despite possessing the strongest forces for mobile warfare the French had also built the strongest line of fortifications in the world, the Maginot Line. Why was the money spent on the construction of those fortifications not used for the modernization and strengthening of France's mobile forces? The proposals of de Gaulle, Daladier, and others along these lines had been ignored. From this it must be concluded that the highest French leadership either would not or could not grasp the significance of the tank in mobile warfare.\(^{137}\)

For Guderian here, the differences in doctrine between France and Germany lead him to deprecate the quality of leadership on the other side.\(^{138}\)

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134 For discussion of this period, see Jonathan M. House, *Toward Combined Arms Warfare: A Survey of 20th-Century Tactics, Doctrine, and Organization* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1985); Johnson, *Fast Tanks and Heavy Bombers*. Johnson notes that there had been a brief period when independence of the Armor arm was possible, through the “Mechanized Force,” but that “interbranch frictions, most notably the opposition of the chief of infantry” led MacArthur to quash that organizational creativity. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

135 Patton is an excellent example. See Patton and Blumenson, *The Patton Papers, 1885-1940*, 1034, *inter alia*.


138 It is certainly arguable that this judgment was correct. However, the maligning of the Maginot Line in military history seems excessive. It achieved its operational goal of deterring a German attack directly across the French-German border. The attack of May 1940 went around the Maginot Line and was successful in no small part due to luck. (Ernest R. May, *Strange Victory: Hitler’s Conquest of France* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000).) Furthermore, the key point here is that the perception of the adversary was heavily influenced by the difference between the two sides’ doctrines.
As Napoleon weighed his strategy against the British at the dawn of the 19th century, he too made a number of underestimations attributable to the vastly different approaches to warfare that the British and French held at the time. Sea power had many advantages at the time:

In brief, six times as many guns of much heavier caliber, could be transported daily by Nelson’s fleet as by Napoleon’s army, at one-fifth of the logistic cost and at five times the speed.\(^\text{139}\)

Yet, Napoleon’s inability to understand British prowess at naval warfare caused him to repeatedly overestimate his own capabilities relative to the British. In 1805 his “grandiose plan”\(^\text{140}\) to invade England had many problems that stemmed from his limited understanding of naval affairs:

Although Napoleon could impose a ruthlessly enforced timetable for the grand army’s marches from Boulogne to Austerlitz, he could not so order the movements of wind driven ships. The ocean was not the “drill-ground” he assumed it to be and his plan took little account of the difficulties of evading the blockading British.\(^\text{141}\)

Similarly, he was convinced that flat bottom boats would be sufficient for the crossing:

“the channel, he declared, ‘is a ditch one can jump whenever one is bold enough to try it.’”\(^\text{142}\) His overconfidence was directly related to his ignorance about warfare at sea:

[Napoleon] not only sustained a larger strategic vision than any of his subordinates could frame; he was also driven by a far more powerful resolution, all the stronger because his ignorance of the sea dissolved the difficulties that they—and Villeneuve in particular—knew to lie between the vision and its realization.

His resulting defeat was legendary: “Trafalgar was, in short, a massacre.”\(^\text{143}\)


These examples highlight the importance of doctrinal and strategic thinking on power assessments; that is, they underscore the first hypothesis, linking doctrinal differences to perception. The next hypothesis (and the examples that follow it) suggests the importance of this type of effect on international security.

**Hypothesis #2**

The second component of the dissertation's logic is expressed as H₂.

\[ H₂: \text{An underestimation of an adversary's capabilities—that comes from } H₁—\text{can lead to deterrence and coercive failure, escalation, and conflict because it complicates } (H₂ₐ) \text{ assessments of the balance of power and } (H₂₉) \text{ interpretation of the adversary's signals.} \]

This hypothesis explains the ways in which false optimism leads to war by highlighting two distinct, but interacting, causal chains: one pertains to capability, the other to intent.

First, underestimation of an adversary's capabilities leads to a misunderstanding of the overall military balance (H₂ₐ). As Jervis notes, “Since the interpretation of indices depends on theories, perceivers are likely to go astray when these are incorrect.”¹⁴⁴ This can lead the underestimating nation to think that it is stronger than it really is. As a result, that nation may pursue more assertive policies than it would have if it correctly estimated its adversary's capabilities. This can lead to failures of strategic coercion and unnecessary conflict. A large body of work on the causes of war has suggested this causal chain.¹⁴⁵ This is the first possible outcome highlighted by H₂.

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Second, when a nation underestimates an adversary’s capabilities, then signals that the adversary sends using its own capabilities will look relatively weak to the first nation \( (H_{2B}) \). Nations often use such signals to communicate the degree of their interests.\(^{146}\) Indeed such signals appear attractive because they promise exceptional clarity.\(^{147}\) However, the universal clarity of military signals should not be overstated. When nations have different views about the efficacy of the adversary’s forces and strategies, such signals about depth of interests will be hard to interpret. A warship in the harbor is clear to states that know what that represents. However, for states with no background in naval warfare, the meaning is less clear, as the related examples below suggest. At a broad level, Van Evera makes a similar point:

States rarely exaggerate their own will, but they often underestimate the enemy’s. As a result, they misjudge the endurance or the materiel that each will commit to the war, seeing an illusory balance in their own favor. This fosters false expectations of victory.\(^{148}\)

The logic of this causal chain of \( H_2 \) specifies a specific source of the misperception that Van Evera writes of, that is, difficulties in signaling by the two sides during attempts at strategic coercion.

Both causal chains—misperceptions of the overall military balance or miscommunications of the depth of one side’s interest—can result in the failure of coercive diplomacy. *Worse, they have the potential to interact.* States expect their adversaries to make decisions based on cost-benefit analyses, and this will affect one state’s understanding of the other side’s intent. That is, if state A thinks its adversary,

\(^{146}\) Arquilla, "Louder Than Words," 163. See also Downs and Rocke, *Tacit Bargaining."

\(^{147}\) Arquilla, "Louder Than Words," 157. See the discussion above regarding implicit coercive threats on page 59.

state B, believes a particular conflict will lead to B’s own destruction (an assessment made on capability grounds), then first state, A, is likely to expect restraint by B (a judgment about the adversary’s intent). State A is likely to make this judgment about how A thinks B sees the outcome of the future conflict on the basis of A’s own theory of victory. However, in B’s actual assessment, B is likely to use its own theory of victory to make that determination, and the two side’s theory of victory might be quite distinct. Intentions always must be informed by the costs and benefits of pursuing specific goals. The problem is, however, each side makes such cost-benefit calculations using its own theory of victory to enlighten their analysis.

When strategic coercion fails, violence is often the result as states follow through on their deterrent or compellent threats for both reputational and intrinsic reasons. Thus, this hypothesis predicts the potential the militarization of a crisis or an escalation of an existing conflict.

Examples.
Several examples of this second hypothesis leap from the annals of military history. In 1973, Israeli assessments of the balance of power between themselves and the Arab states suggested a wide margin of comfort. Less than two months before the devastating attacks that began the Yom Kippur War, the Israeli Defense Minister


concluded, "The balance of forces is so much in our favor that it neutralizes the Arab considerations and motives for the immediate renewal of hostilities." That same summer, then Deputy Prime Minister and heroic general from the War of 1948, Yigal Allon suggested, "Egypt had no military option at all."  

However, the Israeli estimates were substantially incorrect, as the initial Egyptian advances in the Sinai showed. Two key differences between the Egyptians and the Israelis were central to this overconfidence. Egypt had made good use of mobile surface to air missiles (particularly the SA-6 system) and had integrated man-portable anti-armor weapons (Sagger and RPG-7s) in their infantry formations. These weapons and the associated doctrinal changes allowed the Egyptians to make substantial gains. "At least half of the first attacking Israeli planes were shot down by the unexpectedly accurate and devastating Egyptian antiaircraft fire." One of the front-line IDF armored brigades lost nearly all of its 100 tanks to infantry forces. These two innovations reduced key Israeli military advantages.

This example highlights the way in which different theories of victory can lead to underestimation of the adversary’s capabilities by complicating assessment of the balance of power (as predicted by $H_{2\alpha}$). The Israelis did not understand the changed Egyptian capabilities.


153 In this case, the weapons themselves were critical. Thus, it is important to keep the focus on a "theory of victory" rather than the more limited doctrine.

154 Dupuy, *Elusive Victory*, 419.

155 Ibid.
Twomey, *The Military Lens*

capabilities and how they would fit in their overall theory of victory. That, in turn, led to mischaracterizations of the overall balance of power in Jerusalem.

World War II again provides several examples of this phenomenon. One historian describes its occurrence in the outbreak of war in the west: French and British leaders made no effort to understand how or why German thinking might differ from theirs.\(^{156}\) Guderian also provides an excellent example of the other phenomenon highlighted in this hypothesis, that of inferring intent of the adversary through the lens of one’s own doctrine (H\(_{2B}\), above). He writes,

> But so far as the French leaders were concerned, we were amazed that they had not taken advantage of their favorable situation during the autumn of 1939 to attack, while the bulk of the German forces, including the entire armored force, was engaged in Poland. Their reasons for such restraint were at the time hard to see. We could only guess. Be that as it may, the caution shown by the French leaders led us to believe that our adversaries hoped somehow to avoid a serious clash of arms.\(^{157}\)

Here, Guderian is inferring French intent or motivation from French action. Of course, that is commonplace. What is of interest from this dissertation’s perspective is that the action in question—French inaction—seems clearly based on the theory of victory that held sway in the Hotel de Brienne (that is, one that had neglected the offensive potential for blitzkrieg warfare). This link between a perception regarding the adversary’s theory of military to his intent is precisely the point of the hypothesis.\(^{158}\) A policy taken

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156 May, *Strange Victory*, 480.


158 And, as noted above, while one of the two sides must be misperceiving the situation, the theory advanced in this dissertation is making no predictions about which side that is. Rather, it makes use of the difference in perception between the two sides. In terms of this specific case, while the usual historiography of the Battle of France would suggest that Guderian was right, and that the Maginot line should not have been emphasized as much, some scholars would point out that it played a key role in deterring Hitler’s attack prior to May 1940. Again see May, *Strange Victory*; Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*.

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primarily because of a particular doctrine communicates a mistaken view of French intent to Germany.

**Summary of the Entire Theory**

For international communication to be effective, both sides must understand the language of diplomacy. When that language depends on military threats, different theories of victory can lead to problems in translation and thus, unnecessary conflict. In order to send an effective signal to an adversary, nations have to understand how that adversary will interpret the signal. Military measures often are taken to express will or intent. This demands that nations understand their adversary’s perceptual framework. When a nation sends a deterrent or coercive signal by using military force, or the threat of it, the perceptual framework through which an adversary will interpret the signal depends on its views of what constitutes effective military strategies and capabilities. When these views are substantially different across nations, the signals will be difficult to interpret. Because of the tendency to overstate one’s own power, in general (as outlined in \( H_1 \)), the signals will be too weak to appropriately shape the adversary’s views, leading to deterrence or coercive failure and thus escalation or conflict.\(^{159}\)

Before concluding this discussion of the theory, it is useful to return to expand on Figure 2-2 and 1-3 to show how these three elements fit together. Figure 2-4, below, works from the sources of beliefs of theories of victory to those theories themselves, then to the difference in perceptions that they can cause, and finally to the negative international outcomes that can arise from those. Again, this project focuses on the

\(^{159}\) Of course, strategic coercion can fail for many reasons other than miscommunication, for instance, if the two sides both care deeply about a particular issue. Again, see the discussion in the previous chapter.
middle link primarily, and to a lesser extent the final link. \( H_2 \) and especially \( H_{\text{existing}} \) have already been the subject of much research, thus the primary value added from this dissertation will come from testing \( H_1 \).

Figure 2-4: The Complete Causal Chain

To make this causal discussion complete, it should be noted that if there is a difference in theories of victory, then both sides will likely have their perceptions of the other’s military power affected. This should lead to both sides underestimating their adversary in an overall power sense and to underestimate the signals that the other sends using its capabilities.\(^{160}\) Thus, a complete version of the causal flow chart above would include the effects on both states, as shown below.

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\(^{160}\) Again, these underestimations are relative to the perceptions of the other side in terms of both the overall balance and the strength of the signals it intends to send.
Figure 2-5: The Interaction of Both States’ Perspectives

Research Methodology

These two hypotheses will be evaluated through the study of several cases. This section describes the grounds for choosing the specific cases after outlining several aspects of the research methodology, including a discussion of specific empirical predictions of the general theoretical hypotheses, consideration of alternate explanations, the manner in which each case is approached, and coding criterion.

Predictions

These two hypotheses lead to eleven specific predictions that should be apparent in the empirical record. These are essentially indicators of the validity of the theory and
can be used to test it. They are grouped here into several different categories. First, perceptions about war and the balance of power should exhibit underestimation of the enemy and overconfidence regarding a state’s own capability. Second, signaling and judgments about intent should be conducted through the lens of one’s own theory of victory. Third, actors should be surprised once reality contradicts their perceptions. Finally, extreme values on the independent variable (at either an individual or national level) should lead to extreme outcomes. Specific predictions in each of these categories are listed below.

**Perceiving the Balance of Power and the Nature of War**

1) Differences in theories of victory should correlate with states underestimating an adversary’s capabilities, *ceteris paribus*. Conversely, similarities in beliefs should correlate with states having more accurate assessments of each other’s military capabilities, *ceteris paribus*.

2) Before conflict, leaders of states with different theories of victory should denigrate the other side’s theory of victory relative to their own.

3) Leaders of states with different theories of victory should not have nuanced discussions of the merits of their adversaries’ strategies, nor recognize that their adversaries’ financial and strategic situations mandate their choice of strategy.

4) Each side should believe that battles will be dominated by factors emphasized by its own theory of victory.

**Signaling and Intent Issues**

5) When signaling to the other side, each side should send signals that make use of forces in accordance with its own theory of victory.

6) A state’s assessment of its adversary’s intent should depend, in part, on the first state’s understanding of the adversary’s cost-benefit analysis. Furthermore, that understanding will likely be incorrect because the first state will assess costs and benefits differently than its adversary when the two sides have different theories of victory.

7) Leaders of states with different theories of victory should downplay the likelihood of the other side getting involved in a conflict or in further raising the stakes in it.

**Perceptions Meet Reality: Surprise!**

8) Actual battle outcomes, when they occur, should deviate further from leaders’ expectations when nations have more different theories of victory guiding their forces.

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(a) In cases where one side forced the battle on the other, the side taking the initiative should be surprised at its difficulties on the battlefield.

(b) In cases where both sides pursued battle, both sides should be surprised at their difficulties.

(c) More generally, any leader who believes s/he has a viable strategy in the context of the current conflict should be surprised at its (relative) shortcomings when battle is actually joined.

(d) Leaders often have incentives to conceal their surprise, so it may manifest itself as hastily reinforcing or last minute changes in strategy.

9) Leaders should be surprised about the degree of adversary interest in an issue when the signaling over the issue made use of military forces (or threats about them) that are different than their own. (Indeed, they may ascribe aggressive motives to the other side because of this.)

Extreme Values on IV Lead to Extreme Indicators

10) Larger differences between the two states' theories of victory should correlate with a larger or more frequent underestimation of the adversary's capability.

11) Leaders (both political and military) deeply versed in their own theory of victory should be more likely to misperceive and miscalculate than leaders less imbued with that particular view.

Investigation of the empirical record in the cases is centered on these predictions as well as the hypotheses more generally. These predictions focus on relatively operationalized factors stemming from the hypotheses, and thus ease the task of assessing the theory's validity. To the extent the cases do align with these predictions, the dissertation's hypotheses are supported.

Again, per the discussion preceding Figure 2-5, since these logics should apply to both sides, the predictions should as well. Thus, both sides ought be surprised at how difficult military operations are, at their adversary's intent, etc.

(These predictions, along with the hypotheses they support, are reprinted on a single page at the end of this chapter for easy reference.)
Additional explanations

Clearly, this proposed theory does not have a monopoly on possible explanations for failures of strategic coercive attempts. The previous chapter, in the section entitled "What We Know about Achieving Deterrence Success," discussed a number of alternate insights. It will be useful to draw on these to create a baseline for comparison with the proposed theory. If the proposed theory provides no "value-added" in terms of increased accuracy of prediction over the existing theories, then they ought be sufficient. The roles of several of these various alternate factors are suggested in the chart below, using the graphical framework introduced above.

Figure 2-6: The Complexity of the Real World

The argument that the "'objective' quality of the signal" is key to coercion success or failure represents the most important elements conventional wisdom about

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assessing the prospects for success in strategic coercion. Therefore, this will be used as an Alternate Hypothesis (and is labeled as such on the figure). Stated precisely, the hypothesis that will be tested is:

\[ H_{\text{Alternate}}: \text{Weak signals are more likely to lead to coercive failure and escalation, while strong signals are more likely to lead to coercive success.} \]

This simple version of the basic deterrence logic will be used to incorporate arguments about strength or weakness of the coercer’s capabilities (both local and global) as well as the clarity of the signal.

This Alternate Hypothesis will be used to evaluate the proposed theory; it will serve as a foil for the approach that focuses on the difference in the theory of victory. Thus, this dissertation conducts a Lakatosian three-cornered test. Does consideration of the doctrinal differences allow us to predict coercive failure better than focusing on the “objective” size and quality of the signal alone? While labeled an Alternate Hypothesis, the proposed theory of doctrinal differences should be thought of as additive rather than strictly alternative. That is, it seems quite clear that the Alternate Hypothesis has some validity. The question is, will accuracy of explanation and prediction be significantly increased by consideration of the hypotheses suggested here in addition to the Alternate Hypothesis? The increase in accuracy must be significant since by adding additional factors to consider the complexity of the entire undertaking increases. Thus, the

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163 Again, see the discussion in the introduction chapter on the three Cs.

Twomey, *The Military Lens*

dissertation’s theory sacrifices parsimony in the hopes of gaining accuracy. This research design evaluates that aspiration.

Beyond that, complexity of the real world, as shown by the above discussion of the myriad of influences on the success of strategic coercion, should lead to modesty in claims. There are many sources of misperceptions and this dissertation focuses only on a single one. Nevertheless, it is an important one, for reasons outlined in both the introduction and conclusion chapters.

**Case Procedure**

For each of the cases, the dissertation uses congruence tests, process tracing within the cases, and the method of differences across the cases to evaluate the hypotheses and associated predictions. Predictions derived from the hypotheses allow for detailed process tracing to assess the causal force of the theory in the case material. Assessing these various ancillary predictions of the theory generally requires examination of leaders’ statements, policies implemented, and reactions to the adversary’s behavior. Process tracing within cases can provide relatively robust grounds to assess the validity of a theory as it characterizes not only macro-level outcomes but micro-level processes.

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by which the outcomes occur and judges whether these correspond with the theory’s predictions.\footnote{On the merits of process tracing, see Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, \textit{Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences} (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, forthcoming, 2004).} The data requirements for this methodology are, thus, substantial.

After a brief summary of the relevant history, each case begins with an \textit{evaluation of the two nations’ beliefs} regarding doctrine and effective military strategies. Drawing on existing work on strategic beliefs and doctrine,\footnote{See the citations at and following note 14 in this chapter.} the cases use contemporaneous writings on strategy, tactics and doctrine, as well as the make up of military forces to code this, the independent variable. Within the cases, the strategic contexts of importance at different periods vary. Thus, the relevant beliefs are not always the same across cases and must be coded accordingly.

Next, each case assesses the \textit{signaling} involved in a particular period. That is, what was the nature of the signaling? Did it depend on implicit or explicit threats of the use of force? Was the force in question easily comprehensible to the other side?

The last of these questions obviously begins to bring the responding side, and the following section in each case formally takes that up by assessing the \textit{interpretation} of the signals explicitly. How well were the signals interpreted? Did the responder’s theory of victory impede this process?

Finally, any evidence relevant to either side’s \textit{post-event evaluation} (that is, from after the attempt at strategic coercion fails or succeeds) is assessed. Was either side surprised by the difficulties their forces faced? About the degree of opposition from their opponent? These questions are suggested by the predictions section above, and will help to ascertain the accuracy of the theory in these cases.
Coding Theories of Victory (the IV)

Theories of victory are likely to vary across nations and across time. The various sources of doctrine, as discussed above, are one set of influences; additionally, nations might have different goals or different national interests. In order to describe the differences between any two theories of victory (that is, the independent variable for $H_1$), it is useful to be familiar with the range of possible beliefs at a general level.

For this purpose, many factors can be used to compare nations' theories of victory. One dimension is clearly the make up of the forces: are the actual components of forces between two nations similar? Do both have an air force, for instance? If so, does a similar mix of fighter and bombers characterize them both? Several dimensions are useful in coding this dimension: manpower based versus technology and machine-based (i.e., labor versus capital); maneuver versus firepower and fortifications; preferences for quantity over quality; emphasis on one service over another; reliance on particular platforms within services; etc.

A second dimension looks directly at the military doctrine tactics planned for with a given set of forces. That is, a force made up of approximately 80 divisions with some 2500-3000 tanks might concentrate their tanks or spread them out across the army. A doctrine might emphasize flanking maneuvers or head-on attacks (or similarly, mobility versus positional warfare). Offensive strategies might be preferred to defensive ones. One force might be optimized to attrit an adversary across the entire front, while another

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169 This was the case for the two sides in the opening days of WWII in Western Europe. On May 10, 1940 on the Western Front, the British and the French together deployed 3074 tanks to the German deployment of 2439, and the allies deployed 93 first line divisions to the Germans’ 76. May, Strange Victory, 477-78.

170 Again, for arguments on this point, see Posen, The Sources of Military Doctrine; Snyder, The Ideology of the Offensive; Van Evera, "The Cult of the Offensive."; Van Evera, Causes of War.
might aim to secure an initial breakthrough and exploit it.\footnote{See Mearsheimer, \textit{Conventional Deterrence}, 67-133.} Yet another dimension would look to the political goals that military force is aimed to advance.\footnote{This tends to get close to the concept of a grand strategy. See Posen, \textit{The Sources of Military Doctrine}, 13.} Will victory be secured by reducing the relative power of the adversary’s military or will the adversary’s society and economy itself be punished?

Evaluating questions such as these allows the difference in theories of victory to be coded in each case. The examples above serve as a starting point for that evaluation, although in specific cases, other elements also play a role. Clearly, the potential variation is very large. At different periods and in different theaters, some of the questions will be more important than others. Each case goes to substantial lengths to characterize accurately the appropriate theory of victory for the conflict in question.

The two sides’ writing on strategy, tactics and doctrine, as well as their make up of military forces, are used to evaluate these and to code the differences between two nations’ theories. Even in authoritarian countries, there is a significant amount of material available on such doctrinal and strategic debates in the public sphere.\footnote{This was the case even for the Soviet Union during the peak of the Cold War. “Careful sifting of a very rich open Soviet military literature can contribute great to [the study of Soviet concepts of operations]. Senior Soviet officers, in far larger numbers than their Western counterparts, write reams of history and contemporary military analysis. Despite the stultifying and false character of their ideological framework, which makes these works tiresome to read and frequently hard to accept, they merit study” (Eliot A. Cohen, "Toward a Better Net Assessment: Rethinking the European Conventional Balance," \textit{International Security} 13, no. 1 (1988): 212.)} Those sources, as well as selected declassified (or leaked) documents will be used.
Case Selection

Three Sino-American cases from the early cold war test these hypotheses in this dissertation. The cases focus on particular stages within crises in which critical decisions were being made regarding the future. In particular, they focus on the outcome of attempts at strategic coercion. This focus on crisis periods is warranted since the hypotheses center on the difficulties in signaling and interpretation, and crises are often periods of intense communication between the two sides. Thus, these cases are data rich.

The three cases evaluated in this dissertation are:

a) The United States decision to cross the 38th parallel,
b) China’s earlier approval of North Korea’s invasion of the South, and
c) The Chinese decision to postpone the invasion of Taiwan in the face of the American deployment of the Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Strait.

All three occur in 1950, which permits the extensive data collection and detailed analysis that the research procedure outlined above requires. The first two attempts at strategic coercion were not successful and resulted in avoidable escalations of conflict. In the third attempt, strategic coercion was successful, and the great powers avoided expansion of their conflict to another theater.

These three cases focus on several of the most important strategic coercive attempts that could have succeeded in this period. That is, there were other coercive attempts (discussed below), but they failed because the basic national interests of one (or really both) of the two parties involved were fundamentally in conflict, rather than some misperception. Miscommunication did not cause the other escalations, and a better understanding of the two sides’ interests and plans would not have avoided them. There
is widespread agreement that such cases are not usefully studied in a deterrence or strategic coercion framework.\(^{174}\)

Undoubtedly, there are other theories that contribute to the understanding of the Korean War in general, and these decisions in particular. Bipolarity in general meant that conflict between the east and west was very likely in this period.\(^{175}\) Security dilemmas certainly contribute to the understanding of China's behavior,\(^ {176}\) as does window theory (i.e., the Korean War presented either a window of vulnerability or opportunity for China).\(^{177}\) This dissertation is not designed to determine which of these different approaches (or others) best explains the Korean War. Rather, it tests two different theories against each other to probe their validity more generally.

(Indeed, some of these alternate theoretical approaches complement that taken here in terms of providing a rich explanation for the Korean War. International relations scholarship emphasizes the particularly acute dangers posed by states motivated by both


\(^{175}\) This is a theme in John Lewis Gaddis, Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Waltz, Theory of International Politics.

\(^{176}\) Allen Suess Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1960).

insecurity and greed. Arguments using the logics of the security dilemma and closing windows explain sources of Chinese insecurity. The theory presented in this dissertation contributes to the explanation of greed: Chinese leaders expected victory to be cheap.

**The Merits of the Chosen Cases**

There are several reasons why these three cases are particularly attractive for study. These different crises within an individual conflict can be considered a 'set of crises.' By selecting such closely related cases, the analyst can immerse himself in the history and culture of the countries involved. Doing so allows him to "reduce the 'property space'" and create "comparable cases" in Lijphart’s terms. This is particularly important given the substantial requirements with regard to data collection that assessing this theory requires (as noted above).

Sino-American interaction presents excellent cases for study as plausibility probes for this theory since, in two of the cases, the two sides had such vastly dissimilar perspectives on military power: faith in People’s War was at its height in this period in China, whereas the United States was heavily dependent on airpower, capital intensive ground forces, and nuclear weapons. Thus, two of the cases have extreme values in the independent variable, and examining instances of strategic coercion that occur under those conditions should be useful. Nevertheless, these cases also provide a relatively

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179 On the importance of such immersion, see King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, 37ff.

180 Lijphart, "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method," 687.

easy test (or a hoop test). If the theory does not provide explanatory value here, it should not be expected to elsewhere.

Additionally, across the entire set of cases, there is variation in the value of the independent variable as in the third case there is a low value on the difference of theory of victory. As King, Keohane and Verba write, "Selecting observations for inclusion in a study according to the categories of the key causal explanatory variable causes no inference problems." Thus, choosing cases because they vary in the independent variable is a useful research strategy.

Thus, these cases jointly allow a degree of both empirical thoroughness and methodologic rigor that other cases, more widely separated in time or space, would not.

Another reason why these Sino-American cases are important to study is that they will provide particular relevance for modern American foreign policy for two reasons. First, both then and now, the United States faces an adversary that is substantially behind in technologic terms. It will be clear from subsequent chapters that this is a central element of the cases. Today, the United States is vastly ahead of any potential adversary. It seems likely that some lessons drawn from an earlier period with a similar difference might have particular relevance for current American foreign policy.

Second, Sino-American relations continue to be fraught with tension and occasional recourse to attempts at strategic coercion. Further, many scholars argue

182 King, Keohane, and Verba, Designing Social Inquiry, 137.
that culture and ideology play important roles in shaping Chinese foreign policy in general. Learning more about the ways in which miscommunications and misperceptions occurred to the two in the past can help us to avoid them in the future. This is critical for the avoidance of nuclear and large-scale conventional war in an era where some prognosticate a long-term competition between these two countries.

Even if the phenomenon examined here lacks general applicability, the United States has overestimated its own capabilities in the past, and seems likely to do so in the future. This merits examination.

**Cases Not Chosen**

Two important events in this period are coercive attempts that had no chance of success. Thus, they are not treated as cases. First, the U.S. decision to intervene in the war in late June could not have been deterred by the Chinese: nothing the Chinese could have threatened would have changed the American calculus. Washington, at that point, already expected the Chinese (and possibly the Soviets) to get involved in the war.

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187 On American expectations that China and the Soviets would get involved in the early days of the war, see several different primary sources: "Memorandum of National Security Council Consultants' Meeting, Thursday, June 29, 1950," in United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the*
Given that, there is nothing more the Chinese could have threatened, and indeed there is no evidence that the Chinese even attempted deterrence at that point.

Second, the U.S. attempt to deter Chinese intervention after Washington had crossed the 38th parallel was unlikely to succeed for several reasons. First, the Chinese viewed any American presence in that part of Korea an inimical to their interests and when they entered the war, they seem to have expected large-scale war with the United States to ensue. Thus, deterrence failure is not the primary explanation for the

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188 The key piece of evidence here comes from a telegram Mao drafted to send to Stalin. 毛泽东，"关于决定派军队入朝作战给四斯大林的电报"，1950年十月二日、<<建国以来毛泽东文稿>>, 第一册9/1949-12/1950(北京:中央文献出版社, 1987)第539页。Mao Zedong, "Telegram to Stalin regarding the decision to send troops to Korea for combat", October 2, 1950, Mao Zedong's Manuscripts Since the Founding of the State (Beijing, Central Party Documents Publishers, 1987) p. 539. For the most thorough advocacy of this argument, see Thomas J. Christensen, "Threats, Assurances, and the Last Chance for Peace: The Lessons of Mao's Korean War Telegrams," International Security 17, no. 1 (1992). For a broadly concurring view, that emphasizes the key decisions were all taken in October as the United States approached the 38th parallel and not later as they approached the Yalu, see Scobell, China's Use of Military Force.

eventual entry of Chinese forces; rather, the logic of the security dilemma is. However, the Chinese optimism about the conflict that the second case (Chapter 5) outlines did likely play some supporting role here. However, it would have reduced the prospects for deterrence success and done so in ways that are similar to the failings discussed in the second case. Thus, it need not be expounded upon at length separately.

Thus, in these two other cases, difficulties in communication and assessing the balance of power are unlikely to have had a large effect. In the other three cases Sino-American cases from this period, there is at least the potential for such an effect; thus, they merit examination here.

Other cases from outside the early Cold War Sino-American conflict, however, would likely speak to the issues raised by the hypotheses but are suboptimal for testing for other reasons. The German views of Blitzkrieg might be contrasted with the French views of static defense leading up to May of 1940. However, these differences, important as they are, are not as large in scale as are those in the Sino-American case. The first U.S.-Iraq war also has some important differences in terms of modern precision guided munitions, airpower, etc., but it is too recent to get good information out of even the U.S. government, let alone the Iraqi archives. The Arab-Israeli conflicts of 1967 and

190 See the discussion in the previous chapter entitled "Escalation, Spirals, and Security Dilemmas." For discussion of the Chinese entry into the Korean War as explained by the security dilemma, see Chapter 5. Allen Whiting was the original proponent of this view. Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu.

1973 in particular, but perhaps also in 1948, also exhibit a large degree of this difference in doctrines and beliefs. These have been examined productively from a similar perspective to that of this dissertation, and it is worthwhile to see if a broader theoretical approach will travel geographically to Asia.

The following chapter begins that task.

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192 Shimshoni, *Israel and Conventional Deterrence.*
Theory Summary Sheet

Hypotheses

H₁: When two nations have different theories of victory, they will be more likely to misperceive each other's capabilities relative to their own, and these misperceptions, ceteris paribus, will lead to underestimation of the adversary.

H₂: An underestimation of an adversary's capabilities — that comes from H₁ — can lead to deterrence and coercive failure, escalation, and conflict because it complicates (H₃a) assessments of the balance of power and (H₃b) interpretation of the adversary's signals.

H₃ : Weak signals are more likely to lead to coercive failure and escalation while strong signals are more likely to lead to coercive success.

Predictions

Perceiving the Balance of Power and the Nature of War

1) Differences in theories of victory should correlate with states underestimating an adversary's capabilities, ceteris paribus. Conversely, similarities in beliefs should correlate with states having more accurate assessments of each other's military capabilities, ceteris paribus.

2) Before conflict, leaders of states with different theories of victory should denigrate the other side's theory of victory relative to their own.

3) Leaders of states with different theories of victory should not have nuanced discussions of the merits of their adversaries' strategies, nor recognize that their adversaries' financial and strategic situations mandate their choice of strategy.

4) Each side should believe that battles will be dominated by factors emphasized by its theory of victory.

Signaling and Intent Issues

5) When signaling to the other side, each side should send signals that make use of forces in accordance with its own theory of victory.

6) A state's assessment of its adversary's intent should depend, in part, on the first state's understanding of the adversary's cost-benefit analysis. Furthermore, that understanding will likely be incorrect because the first state will assess costs and benefits differently than its adversary when the two sides have different theories of victory.

7) Leaders of states with different theories of victory should downplay the likelihood of the other side getting involved in a conflict or in further raising the stakes in it.

Perceptions Meet Reality: Surprise!

8) Actual battle outcomes, when they occur, should deviate further from leaders' expectations when nations have more different theories of victory guiding their forces.

a. In cases where one side forced the battle on the other, the side taking the initiative should be surprised at its difficulties on the battlefield.

b. In cases where both sides pursued battle, both sides should be surprised at their difficulties.

More generally, any leader who believes s/he has a viable strategy in the context of the current conflict should be surprised at its (relative) shortcomings when battle is actually joined.

d. Leaders often have incentives to conceal their surprise, so it may manifest itself as hastily reinforcing or last minute changes in strategy.

9) Leaders should be surprised about the degree of adversary interest in an issue when the signaling over the issue made use of military forces (or threats about them) that are different than their own. (Indeed, they may ascribe aggressive motives to the other side because of this.)

Extreme Values on IV Lead to Extreme Indicators

10) Larger differences between the two states' theories of victory should correlate with a larger or more frequent underestimation of the adversary's capability.

11) Leaders (both political and military) deeply versed in their own theory of victory should be more likely to misperceive and miscalculate than leaders less imbued with that particular view.
Chapter 3. **Facing Off over Korea: Comparing Theories of Victory**

The next two chapters examine cases of the U.S. decision to cross the 38th parallel into North Korea and Mao's decision to support North Korea's invasion. These two cases depend on a similar assessment of the two sides' military capabilities. Therefore, it will be simpler to assess the independent variable, that is the differences between the two sides' theories of victory, jointly for those cases. This chapter does that.

It begins with an examination of American thinking about military effectiveness, before turning to China's views and contrasting the two. The conclusion summarizes the very large differences between the two countries' theories, thus making explicit the coding for this period.

**The U.S. Theory of Victory on Land**

The generic American theory of victory in 1950 centered primarily on the use of strategic bombing and atomic weapons in a general war context. Beyond this, American strategic thought emphasized the utility of tactical airpower, mechanized forces, and combined arms in the event of conventional war. Each of these emphases is discussed below.

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1 The third case, Mao's decision not to attack Taiwan in that same year, involves a rather different military calculation, and so the independent variable is treated entirely separately in its chapter.
Strategic Bombing in General ... 

One of the key beliefs for American policymakers was the perceived effectiveness of strategic bombing in general. This view traced its roots to the pre-WWII era and had changed little over time.

An understanding of American air power and of the problem of aerial warfare can be achieved only in the context of cultural and intellectual history. The ways people have thought about air power proved so remarkably consistent, despite rapidly changing technology over a half-century, that a mere recital of a particular invention or an individual bombing raid sheds little light on the appeals and uses of air power. The bomber in imagination is the most compelling and revealing story.\(^2\)

Beliefs about the lessons of WWII reified this belief: “Immediately after the war, it appeared relatively certain that strategic bombing would be an integral part of any proper military effort.”\(^3\) This perception came out of the “formative common experience” held by senior military leaders from the previous world war.\(^4\) The Strategic Bombing Survey, conducted at the behest of President Roosevelt, came to simple, sweeping conclusions: “Allied air power was decisive in the war in Western Europe.”\(^5\) Indeed, even aside from atomic weapons, discussed below, the Air Force continued to foresee a important role for conventional strategic bombing: “Many targets were not appropriate for scarce and


expensive atomic weapons anyway, and a requirement would continue for conventional bombing forces.\(^6\)

\[\text{... And Atomic Weapons Specifically}\]

Integral to and intertwined with the beliefs regarding the efficacy of strategic bombing was a confidence in the utility of atomic weapons. This thoroughly permeated national security thinking at the time. The Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs had important effects on American thinking about the usefulness of nuclear weapons: "the advent of atomic weapons and the image of the mushroom cloud surely strengthened the vague perception that strategic bombing would remain a deadly aspect of war."\(^7\)

While Dulles's New Look strategy, which publicly emphasized nuclear weapons over every other sort of armament through its reliance on "massive retaliation," was not to become policy until a few years later, even at this point, nuclear weapons were at the core of American thinking about international conflict in general.\(^8\)

Strategic bombing with atomic weapons had been at the core of U.S. war plans ever since the military began thinking seriously about the prospects of armed conflict with the Soviet Union.\(\ldots\) Comparatively, atomic weapons were cheap, and Truman accepted plans and approved budgets that made the United States dependent on their use should war erupt.\(^9\)

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The Joint Outline Emergency War Plan of October 1949 called for attacks on over a hundred Soviet cities with multiple weapons on most and a reserve of over 70 weapons. Similarly, long term planning in 1949 was also assuming that nuclear weapons would be at the center of warfare:

At the close of 1949 the Joint Staff drew up Dropshot, a long-term procurement plan for a hypothetical war in 1957. ... Dropshot proposed ending the war as soon as possible, and that meant a massive atomic campaign. It proposed up to 435 atomic bombs for use in the first month against industrial and military targets in the Soviet Union and its satellites.

The Navy was trying to secure a role for itself in delivering nuclear weapons as a way to ensure its relevance for the defense of the country, and even Army generals were emphasizing the centrality of retaliatory strategic bombing to American grand strategy at this time. Kennan had unsuccessfully tried to wean U.S. policy away from nuclear weapons and toward a conventional defense of Europe, but had been rebuffed by Acheson. This emphasis on nuclear exchanges prevented consideration of other forms of warfare.

Some kind of air-atomic war dominated strategic thinking, and all the more so with the continued slashing of nonatomic forces. The Joint Chiefs gave no attention to any strategic alternatives. For instance, they never took up a State Department view in 1948 and 1949 that the United States should have highly mobile divisions to fight limited wars of containment, not atomic wars of annihilation or conquest.

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11 George W. Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power: The U.S. Navy, 1890-1990* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), 313. While the war game focused on 1957, not 1950, as it was conducted in 1949, it does illustrate the thinking about what constituted important weapons on the eve of the Korean War from the perspective of the American military leadership.

12 *Ibid.*, 296-97. There were however contrary arguments also being made within the navy at the time. See Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power*, 304.


15 Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power*, 302-3.
A survey of American doctrine of the Korean War period concluded, "Americans, including the government, succeed[ed] in convincing themselves that the atomic bomb was a sovereign remedy for all military ailments." 16

It is important to emphasize that the reliance in doctrine on strategic bombing and atomic weapons was pervasive. As the last two quotes in the paragraph above make clear, the atomic arsenal was not thought of as solely relevant to World War III. Rather, analysts felt it would be useful in general, in any conflict. As discussed below, there was little nuanced consideration of "limited war," making this oversimplification easier to sustain.

The American arsenal was impressive. 17 At its core were 369 atomic warheads, ready to be loaded on long-range bombers. 18 The higher efficiency of the atomic bombs after completion of the "Sandstone" research program had allowed the United States to produce 63 percent more warheads with the same stockpile of fissile material, which had


17 On the tendency of American military and strategic leaders to regard any size arsenal as too small, see Rosenberg, "The Origins of Overkill." An arsenal of several hundred weapons has been regarded as more than adequate for a number of nuclear powers over the past several decades. See Avery Goldstein, Deterrence and Security in the 21st Century: China, Britain, France, and the Enduring Legacy of the Nuclear Revolution (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000).

18 See the Natural Resources Defense Council's web page at www.nrdc.org which has historical data on both American and Soviet nuclear arsenals. While the precise month of this figure (369 warheads) is not apparent from the NRDC database, the previous year's figure (of 235 warheads) suggests that a significant arsenal existed throughout the year of 1950. Similarly, Leffler suggests an arsenal of "a little under 300 in June 1950." Leffler, A Preponderance of Power, 324.

Finally, DOE provides similar, although slightly smaller, numbers. It lists 170 weapons available in 1949 and 299 in 1950, and also notes that there were 264 warheads built in 1950, and some 135 warheads retired (which includes weapons taken out of service to be modified into more efficient designs in subsequent years). The total megatonage available in 1950 is just under 10 megatons. See "DOE Facts: Summary of Declassified Nuclear Stockpile Information", Department of Energy, Office of the Press Secretary, Washington, DC (1994) available online as of July 15, 2004 at http://www.osti.gov/html/osti/opennet/document/press/pc26.html.

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Twomey, The Military Lens

meant a recent surge in the quantity of bombs. Further, according to several analysts, "by January 1949 actual and foreseen shortages of bombers and bombs had begun to be alleviated." Overall, SAC was beginning to improve substantially on its late 1940s position across the board in integration of capabilities.

By 1950, the command operated 225 atomic bomb carrying aircraft (including B-29s, B-50s, and 34 B-36s), flew 263 combat ready crews, and was training forty-nine more. Eighteen bomb assembly teams were fully qualified, and four would be added by June. Even pessimists were forced to conclude that by August of 1949, "Strategic Air Command began to achieve a measure of deterrent capability." Nevertheless, on January 31, 1950, the President Truman had decided to move forward even further in this area by publicly beginning research on the thermonuclear bomb. The Soviets' ability to respond against the American homeland at this time was extremely limited.

Atomic strategy at this point focused on strategic bombing rather than tactical battlefield attacks. While development of large artillery guns for use with atomic weapons had begun in late 1949, tactical weapons were not available in significant numbers until mid-1952. Nevertheless, the tactical use of nuclear weapons had also

20 Gacek, The Logic of Force, 33. See also Rosenberg's discussion which contrasts the period from 1945-48, when weapons and delivery systems were scarce, to the period after 1949 when those limitations relaxed significantly. Rosenberg, "The Origins of Overkill."
22 Ibid., 187.
23 Bundy, Danger and Survival, 197.
124
been considered and studied. Atomic weapons were expected to in many cases substitute for shortfalls in conventional armament. For instance, one study "led the JCS to task the Strategic Air Command in the fall of 1949 with the 'retardation of Soviet advances in Western Europe.'" Further, once the Korean War broke out atomic use was repeatedly discussed. When MacArthur, the battlefield commander, proposed using nuclear weapons in December of 1950, he sent to Washington "a list of retardation targets which he considered would require 26 bombs ... [including] 4 bombs to be used on invasion forces and 4 bombs to be used on critical concentrations of enemy air power, both targets of opportunity." (Interestingly, some of the other "retardation targets" apparently included locations within China.)

Thus, in the United States the utility of atomic weapons was thought to ubiquitous.


27 Rosenberg, "The Origins of Overkill," 16. Note that the arsenal the United States had at the time was far from ideal for this sort of targeting. Nevertheless, the weapons could have been used in a tactical setting, had the President so ordered.


30 Again see Foot, *The Wrong War*, 115.
Twomey, *The Military Lens*

**General War**

Closely related to this emphasis on nuclear weapons at the time was a near exclusive focus on general war rather than limited war. 31 "A school of detailed writings about limited war did not appear until the 1950s." 32 This led American strategists to avoid worrying about how to win a local, limited war of containment (which would have very likely involved a heavy focus on enhancing conventional capabilities) and to rather focus on ensuring the apocalyptic, general war would be devastating to the Soviets.

Having prepared in the late 1940s for general war, the government and the services were caught off guard by the North Korean attack in June, Defense Secretary Louis Johnson admitted in his first top-level conference on the crisis that his department had no war plan for Korea and thus no recommendation. The Joint Chiefs as well did not attempt formal estimate of the military situation in Korean, and they were not sure what would be required to mount United States military operations in the area. 33

NSC-68 began to address this by alluding to the prospect of limited wars, but it had not developed sophisticated analysis to consider such prospects. 34 One military historian characterized the thinking at the outset of the Korean War as follows:

So ingrained was the American habit of thinking of war in terms of annihilative victories, that occasional warnings of limited war went more than unheeded, and people, government, and much of the military could scarcely conceive of a Communist military thrust of lesser dimensions than World War III. 35

Thus, American strategic thought remained centered on general war.


Chapter 3: Facing Off over Korea

Heavily Armed, Mechanized Ground Forces

In terms of ground force doctrine in general, mechanized and combined arms were viewed as optimal for conventional forces in general by the United States. Again, the point of this section is to describe the general doctrinal perspective towards armor and combined arms held by the U.S. military. In some cases, specific geographic areas would not have the equipment to fully implement that doctrine. Nevertheless, the leadership nationwide would be still be indoctrinated by the theory of victory, so it is important to understand its characteristics.

The standard “table of organization and equipment” (TOE, the list of equipment allotments for generic military units and how they are organized) in 1950 had 143 tanks in each of America’s eight infantry divisions. This was only slightly lower than the number of tanks deployed in Soviet armored units of the same size at the end of World War II. The U.S. Army also had a dedicated armor division, a cavalry division, at least four armored cavalry regiments, and six independent regimental combat teams that would have also been heavy in terms of allotment of armor.

In terms of stockpiles army-wide, there were even more tanks available than the TOE would suggest: there were enough tanks for each division to be equipped with 300, 36

36 Clay Blair, The Forgotten War: America in Korea (New York: Times Books, 1988), 48, note. The divisions in the Far East Command were substantially less well endowed in this regard, having only 22 tanks assigned to each infantry division and a small detachment of armor available to corps and army level commands.

37 Typically, Soviet armored corps were regarded as the equivalent of Western (or German) divisions during WWII. These were generally armed with 165-195 tanks; thus, the American infantry units were a quarter lighter than Soviet armored units. See Williamson Murray and Allan Reed Millett, A War to Be Won: Fighting the Second World War (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 286; R. J. Overy, Why the Allies Won (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 211.

with a similar number available for replacement use and parts. Additionally, “machine guns and towed artillery were in plentiful supply,” although more modern heavy equipment was less abundant. At the time of the Korean War “the average American infantry division had a third more artillery than its World War II predecessor.” Note however, that even these comparatively large endowments were viewed as insufficient at the time from the U.S. Army’s perspective, thus underlining the depth of their beliefs in the utility of mechanization and armor in general.

Combined Arms and Close Air Support

Beyond quantity of equipment, the doctrine of combined arms emphasized the value of integrating multiple types of capabilities in military operations to take advantage of their synergies. The U.S. Army of WWII had increasingly integrated heavy weapons to every level of its force structure, swapping infantry units for heavy weapons units at the company and platoon levels. Training emphasized flexibility, combined arms, and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Serviceable</th>
<th>Unserviceable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M-24 Chaffee (light tank)</td>
<td>&lt;900</td>
<td>2557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-4A3 Sherman (medium tank)</td>
<td>1826</td>
<td>1376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-46 Patton (newest medium tank)</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>&lt;3045</strong></td>
<td><strong>3933</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note this excludes holdings of the M-26 Pershings, for unknown reasons.) While these were mostly WWII vintage tanks, so was the T-34 used by the North Koreans. The forces available to MacArthur lacked the relatively large armor component that would imply, as discussed in Chapter 5; however, the point here speaks to the culture of the military in general.

39 Author’s calculations based on data from *Ibid.*, 43-46. Schnabel list the following holdings for what was a 10 division army at the time:


42 On the eve of the American entry into WWII, the U.S. Army undertook a major organization change, moving from a square divisional structure (with four regiments) to a triangular divisional structure (with three regiments). This change was first tested at a large scale at the famous Louisiana Maneuvers. Jonathan M. House, *Toward Combined Arms Warfare: A Survey of 20th-Century*
jointness. The primary organizational structure for the army at the outbreak of the Korean War, the regimental combat team or RCT, was a direct descendant from the late WWII innovation of the combined arms task forces that integrated armor, artillery, and infantry at the battalion and regimental levels. These continued to be emphasized at the time in the Asian theater: "Divisions were directed to complete RCT field exercises and develop effective air ground combat procedures." This focus on combined arms permeated the American ground forces at all levels. In general, it gave even infantry units an armored punch and significant mobility.

The utility of close air support (CAS) to augment ground forces was another lesson from the WWII experience. Indeed, the doctrinal manuals still in use in 1950 derived directly from the history of that period:

Close air support as practiced in Korea was rooted in Field Manual (FM) 31-35, Air-Ground Operations. First published in August 1946, this manual distilled the lessons and procedures learned by the Army's 12th Army Group and the Army Air Force's Ninth Air Force primarily in Europe during World War II.

While the Air Force had focused its efforts on strategic bombing, the other services emphasized CAS, and indeed, during the Korean War "tactical support from Navy and

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44 Schnabel, United States Army in the Korean War, 55.

45 Again, it is true that the units deployed in the Far East Command were understrength and did lack some of their organic transport assets and much of their organic armor. However, the point here is that the culture of the American doctrinal thinking about war, the theory of victory in general, focused on these elements.


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Marine Corps aircraft was excellent. That said, the Air Force did not completely abandon the CAS mission. In early discussions regarding the appropriate American response to the North Korean attack, this belief was clear. U.S. Navy officers wanted an immediate 'fly-over' of American airplanes for psychological effect while the aggressors pondered the terms of the Security Council resolution... The [U.S.] Air Force was considering the possibility of sending tactical air unit to South Korean airfields, a move which would involve the commitment of ground forces to protect the bases, but the Navy believed that the situation was 'made to order' for carrier based air power.

American ground forces not only expected their air forces to defend them from the enemy’s planes, but CAS was integral to their views on joint operations. Indeed, General Ned Almond, MacArthur’s Chief of Staff and latter commander of X Corps, was a strong proponent of CAS over the use of airpower in its more strategic roles. Even the Air Force was not exempt: the B-29, an Air Force owned airframe typically used for strategic attacks, was used in the CAS role during the war.

**Other Doctrinal Influences**

In Korea, the additional strategic concept of isolating the battlefield influenced American thinking. American strategy in Italy as well as island hopping in the Pacific

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48 While the Air Force chaffed at requirements to serve at the behest of ground commanders throughout WWII and in the Korean War, there was constant pressure for it to do so. Indeed, in the opening days of the Korean War nearly all air strikes were made in direct support of ground forces (to the clear chagrin of senior Air Force leaders): “FEAF was directed to employ its aerial predominance in close support of ground units to the exclusion of all else. This absolutely precluded a proper interdiction program.” (Quoted from a USAF Historical Study by William W. Momyer, A. J. C. Lavalle, and James C. Gaston, *Airpower in Three Wars* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983), 190, see also 188.)


carried key lessons for peninsular Korea. In the Italy campaigns during WWII, the
United States relied on a sequence of amphibious landings in Sicily, Solarno, Anzio,
etc. This allowed the United States to take full advantage of the strategic mobility that
its dominant Navy provided. Both in Italy and in the Pacific, the United States focused
also on isolating the battlefield through the use of airpower and naval forces, thus
limiting the adversary’s ability to resupply and reinforce. Tactical and operational
interdiction were key strategies here. The American leaders were confident these tactics
would apply easily and decisively in Korea.

Thus, the American theory of victory had several elements. Across all of these,
however, was one essential element: a substitution of capital for manpower.
This is
something scholars have identified in American military policy across a wide span of
time.

Observers [of the American civil war] noted that the Americans would rarely close with
the enemy but chose instead to fight at ranges of a quarter mile or more and throw
enormous quantities of lead at each other, often for hours without end. What these
observers witnessed first hand has become immutably associated with the American way

52 Weigley, The American Way of War, 385.

53 Thomas B. Buell et al., The Second World War: Europe and the Mediterranean, ed. Thomas E. Griess,

54 While it is common to bemoan the state of the American military budget in 1950 (thus suggesting that
even capital was not being provided to the U.S. military), that concern needs to be put into context.
The following chart shows budgets for several great powers in 1949 and 1950. The United States and
the Soviet Union are on a rough par. Beyond that, U.S. spending dwarfed the rest of the world.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>U.K.</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>Russia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>$2.0 b</td>
<td>$1.2 b</td>
<td>$3.1 b</td>
<td>$13.5 b</td>
<td>$14.0 b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>$2.6 b</td>
<td>$1.5 b</td>
<td>$2.4 b</td>
<td>$14.6 b</td>
<td>$15.5 b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Source: “National Material Capabilities” (version 2.1), Correlates of War Project, The University of
Michigan, Principal Investigators: J. David Singer and Melvin Small, originally created July 1990,
updated April 1999.
of war—the willingness of Americans to expend firepower freely to conserve human life.\(^5\)

With these various beliefs—strategic bombing, nuclear weapons, combined arms—the United States was to face off against China in northeast Asia. The contrast between the two could hardly be greater.

**China’s Theory of Victory on Land**

As the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) shifted their focus from their own violent rise to power to the emerging international Cold War, they faced an adversary in the United States that maintained a military radically different from its own. The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) had just emerged victorious from two decades of civil war and a seven-year fight against Japan. In both conflicts its adversary was better equipped and often more numerous. These experiences left it with a robust set of strategic beliefs that it incorporated into its theory of victory.

Much of the evidence in this section comes from doctrinal discussions within the PLA. As such, it is heavily laced with Maoist propaganda, and it is tempting to write it off as such: Actual military leaders would not follow such guidance, would they? To do so would simply ignore the critical power that Maoist ideology held over China, even at this early date.\(^5\) During the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, Maoist thought was elevated further, nearly to the status of a religion. In the pre-Korean War period, the worship of Mao did not rise to that level; nevertheless, it is important not to overstate the

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56 While there was some variation of beliefs between Mao and a few leaders who were less supportive of his views, on balance, there was widespread acceptance of Mao’s views within the senior leadership. The role of dissenting views is discussed later in this chapter and also in Chapter 6.
contrast between the periods.\textsuperscript{57} Indeed, some argue this earlier period is the true high point of belief in Maoist People's War.\textsuperscript{58} As Zhang Shuguang argues in his persuasive \textit{Mao's Military Romanticism} these ideas profoundly shaped policy.\textsuperscript{59} Indeed, China's evolving military culture continues to shape Beijing’s foreign and security policy today.\textsuperscript{60} 

Other scholars agree on the importance of Maoism to security policy and doctrine:

Western scholars tend to mock the notion of “man over weapons.” ... It is easy in retrospect to dismiss what was in actuality the enormously stifling effect of Maoist doctrine on innovated thinking in the Chinese officer corps. When Liu [Shaoqi] gave his lectures in the early 1950s, Mao's military thought had not yet ascended to the biblical proportions it would assume in the 1960s. Nonetheless, Liu had to struggle against an incipient Maoist orthodoxy in attempting to turn the attention of younger officers to problems about which Maoist thought offered little but dismissive (albeit morale boosting) aphorisms.\textsuperscript{61}

Similarly, Ellis Joffe, while conceding that Maoist “doctrine is merely a rationalization,” goes on to emphasize the substantial effects that such ideas—particularly when they are grounded in a long history that supports them—can have on shaping people’s perceptions.\textsuperscript{62} In a slightly different issue-area, but one that had many parallels to that discussed here, Lucian Pye writes that “political culture continues for many reasons to be singularly important in shaping Chinese politics” and speaks of “the special importance

\textsuperscript{57} On this historiography, see Edward L. Dreyer, \textit{China at War, 1901-1949} (London; New York: Longman, 1995).


\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Ibid.}


\textsuperscript{61} Evan A. Feigenbaum, \textit{China's Techno-Warriors: National Security and Strategic Competition from the Nuclear to the Information Age} (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 22.

of political culture for understanding China.”63 Finally, the PLA put Maoist doctrine into practice in a number of tangible ways, as this section will show.

The Chinese beliefs regarding the nature of warfare began with an assessment of the likely threat they would face (general invasion) and a view on the appropriate way to deal with that (lure them in deep). Mao downplayed the importance of nuclear weapons and emphasized the role of People’s War and infantry forces more generally. These are the doctrinal beliefs that the Chinese People’s Volunteers64 took with them into battle in Korea. The following sections will describe each of these points.

**Fear of Invasion, But Confidence in Strategic Value of Hinterland**

Across a long span of history, Chinese leaders had frequently faced adversaries aiming to conquer all of China.65 In the wars against the Guomingdang (GMD) and the Japanese, the communists had faced an existential threat, one that aimed to occupy the entire area of the Chinese empire. Chinese writing throughout this period emphasized this threat, as Segal notes:

> A military operation designed to control all China was of great concern to CCP strategists, in large measure because the Communists’ campaigns against Chiang Kai-shek as well as the Japanese dealt with just such a problem. Thus, it is not surprising that more than any other threat to China, the problem of general invasion is the one most comprehensively analyzed.66

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64 The People’s Volunteers was the name given to the PLA units that deployed to Korea to provide a veneer of separation between them and Beijing. Beijing exerted complete and direct control over these forces.


Mao maintained this threat perception during the Korean War, with one Chinese scholar writing that Mao had expressed fears that Japanese might deploy troops to the Korean peninsula. Indeed, these views regarding the nature of the threat to China (a land invasion and occupation) likely remained in place at least until 1961. While at one level this appears to parallel American concerns regarding general (rather than limited war), the focus of the two was fundamentally different: China was worried about an invasion of its own territory, whereas the United States was concerned about the conquest of Europe and the potential for a nuclear exchange.

Because of this concern, and because of the relative weakness of China, Chinese general strategic thinking emphasized the policy of "trading space for time" by "luring the enemy in deep." Chinese doctrine recognized that China had a vast hinterland into which its military could withdraw. The CCP had pursued this strategy with eventual success against the Japanese in WWII, and Mao repeatedly wrote of the value of this strategy in the war in that conflict. The main point of Mao's famous "On Protracted


70 Mao Tsetung, "Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War [December 1936]," 113.


War” (written in May of 1938) is to describe this strategy. Indeed, he continued to advocate avoiding positional war in the civil war through late 1947, favoring instead mobile, guerrilla warfare that avoided preoccupation with controlling territory.

That history shaped views about the future. “Mao made it plain that in defeating an invader, geography was China’s first ally… The essential principle that China’s vastness aids the defender and allows space to be traded for time, is an accurate one.”

One specialist on Chinese security concurs:

To sum up, China’s physical geography suggests that defending China, while not easy, is by no means impossible. Land invasion—the only fundamental threat to China’s national security—is made difficult by aspects of topography. While China is vulnerable to certain border challenges or seaborne threats, its geography makes it easier to defend rather than attack “core China.”

This concept was not just theoretical for the communist leadership; in late 1949, the Chinese took steps to implement the strategies called for by this aspect of their theory of victory.

In order to respond to this, instead of maintaining a positional defense along the coast, the Chinese Communists also decided to build an in-depth defense—a defensive zone of several layers with forces deployed in such a way to maneuver and reinforce on another. … This was an essential element of traditional Chinese strategy: houfazhiren, to gain mastery by striking only after the enemy has struck.

As a result, China did not need to preemptively attack any would be aggressor but rather could await the onset of war with some security that this patience would not jeopardize

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74 Mao Tsetung, "The Present Situation and Our Tasks [December 25, 1947],” in Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-Tung (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1966), 349. Note that this is quite late in the war as the KMT was to begin to rapidly crumble early in 1948.

75 Segal, Defending China, 48-49.

76 Ibid., 14.

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China’s overall security. Even in the case of nuclear war, China’s strategy would center upon “drawing American ground forces into China’s interior.” At a tactical level, the CCP had utilized this approach many times during the civil war, and once the Korea War broke out, they turned to it again:

Peng suggested to Mao that UN forces be lured into preset ‘traps’ as far north as possible so that individual UN units would be extended with longer supply lines and thus be more easily isolated and destroyed. Mao quickly approved the plan. Peng instructed that each CPVF [Chinese People’s Volunteer Force] army would withdraw its main force farther north but leave one division ‘to conduct mobile and guerilla warfare...to wipe out small enemy units while engaging and luring larger enemy units to the trap.’

Thus, Mao and the other Chinese leaders felt that they had a solid approach to the main type of threat they perceived from the outside.

Views on Atomic Weapons

The atom bomb is a paper tiger that the U.S. reactionaries use to scare people. It looks terrible, but in fact it isn’t. Of course, the atom bomb is a weapon of mass slaughter, but the outcome of a war is decided by the people, not by one or two new types of weapon.

—Mao Zedong, 1947

Mao’s well-known statements that nuclear weapons were mere “paper tigers” may have been more bravado than representative of his true beliefs. Nevertheless, when compared to American perceptions, throughout the early part of the Cold War he did view them as relatively weak weapons. In their well-regarded history of China’s

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78 Segal, Defending China, 14.

79 Chen Jian, Mao’s China and the Cold War, 189. As discussed below, this commentary occurred in the late 1950s, but on this point there is a large degree of consistancy across time in Mao’s thinking.

80 Yu Bin, "What China Learned from Its 'Forgotten War' in Korea," in Mao’s Generals Remember Korea, ed. Li Xiaobing, Allan Reed Millett, and Yu Bin (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 15.


82 Ibid.
nuclear program, Lewis and Xue conclude: "For Mao in the late 1940s, the strategic calculus was clear. The struggle against imperialism could be intensified and need not be intimidated by the American nuclear threat."83

Mao and his colleagues held their pejorative views of atomic and nuclear weapons over a sustained period, as a number of strong pieces of evidence show.84 For instance, in an internal debate in July 1948, Mao and Zhou argued for the weakness and irrelevance of nuclear weapons for important global security affairs.85 Even as late as 1961, some members of the Chinese leadership were still downplaying the importance of nuclear weapons. One of the most senior military leaders, and a member of the standing committee of the Military Affairs Committee (the most powerful body in the PLA and the PRC),86 stated "Although atomic bombs are very powerful they can only be used to destroy the centers and the economic reserves of the opponent during the strategic bombing phase...."87

Other pieces of evidence come from conversations that Chinese leaders had with the Soviets. In one such exchange, not only did Zhou Enlai suggest that the Communist nations should not fear a nuclear war, he went so far as to discourage Soviet retaliation in

84 The consistent nature of these beliefs is important as it suggests that confidence in the Soviet alliance and the extended deterrence it might have provided is not critical in shaping this view. Both before 1949 and after the late 1950s that support would have looked rather weak.
85 Ryan, Chinese Attitudes toward Nuclear Weapons, 20.
86 Note that in both the transitions from Deng Xiaoping to Jiang Zemin and from Jiang to Hu Jintao, chairmanship of this committee was the last title that the outgoing leader retired from, attesting to its importance.
87 Quoted in Hsieh, "China's Secret Military Papers," 90.
the event of tactical nuclear weapons usage against China by the United States. He went on with bravado:

Inflicting blows on the offshore islands, the PRC has taken into consideration the possibility of the outbreak in this region of a local war between the United States and the PRC, and it is now ready to take all the hard blows, including atomic bombs and the destruction of cities.

In another case, Khrushchev’s memoirs recall Mao’s pejorative views of the aftermath of nuclear war expressed in 1955-56: “War is war. The years will pass, and we’ll get to work producing more babies than ever before.” In yet another instance in September 1958, Mao had also advised the Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko on how to respond to a war between the United States and China. Chen Jian summarizes:

The Chinese chairman, according to Gromyko, stated that if the Americans were to invade the Chinese mainland or to use nuclear weapons the Chinese forces would retreat, drawing American ground forces into China’s interior. The chairman proposed that during the initial stage of the war, the Soviets should do nothing but watch. Only after the American forces had entered China’s interior should Moscow use “all means at its disposal” (which Gromyko understood as Soviet nuclear weapons to destroy them).

It is also very clear that nuclear weapons did not receive serious analytical study in China until well after the period under study in the rest of this dissertation. Chinese consideration of the dangers of nuclear weapons in the Korean War was extremely simplistic. Even beyond that, before 1955 there had been no formal study of what atomic weapons could do against China. Only in July of that year did the top 200 leaders in the CCP finally receive a briefing on the subject. Even this was only a scant

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88 Chen Jian, *Mao’s China and the Cold War*, 71 and 189. Note these discussions occurred in the late 1950s, at which point the Chinese had significantly hardened their views of nuclear weapons. That Zhou would nevertheless discourage Soviet retaliation at that late point only emphasizes how little he feared nuclear weapons in general.


90 Quoted in Lewis and Xue, *China Builds the Bomb*, 66.

91 Chen Jian, *Mao’s China and the Cold War*, 189.

92 See the discussion in the following chapter.
25 pages long, covering different aspects of nuclear war, such as what the weapons could do to cities, to forces in the field, etc.93 Before 1957, the PLA had not engaged in training that would allow it to survive a nuclear attack.94 As late as 1961, the Chinese discussions of U.S. nuclear doctrine appear exceedingly simplistic.95

Finally, Mao's recent military experiences in general likely colored his views on nuclear weapons in particular and the threats they posed to Chinese cities. He wrote of the irrelevance of cities to the communist strategy in 1947:

When we abandoned many cities on our own initiative in order to evade fatal blows from superior enemy forces and shifted our forces to destroy the enemy when he is on the move, our enemies were jubilant. They took this to be a victory for them and a defeat for us. They became dizzy with this momentary 'victory'. ... But now with the lapse of time, Chiang Kai-shek and his U.S. masters began to change their tune. Now all our enemies, domestic and foreign are gripped by pessimism. They heave great sighs, wail about a crisis, and no longer show any sign of joy. ... They had overestimated their own strength, underestimated the strength of the revolution and rashly unleashed the war, and so were caught in their own trap. Our enemy's strategic calculations failed completely.96

His thinking on the dangers of atomic weapons descended from precisely that sort of thinking. Cities were not important to CCP strategists. The words of the acting Chief of Staff during the Korean War exemplified this in September 1950: "After all, China lives on the farms. What can atom bombs do there?"97

Before moving on, it is important to discuss an important alternate view regarding Mao's thoughts on nuclear weapons. Mark A. Ryan, in his 1984 book, Chinese

93 Interview with Shen Zhihua, Beijing, September 2002. Shen is one of only a few historians of Chinese foreign policy outside the government and government-controlled research centers who has access to the Chinese archives.

94 Lewis and Xue, China Builds the Bomb, 217.


96 Mao Tsetung, "Our Present Situation and Our Tasks [Report to the Central Committee of the CCP, 12/25/1947]," in Selected Military Writings of Mao Tsetung (Beijing, PRC: Foreign Language Press, 1972).

97 Quoted in Segal, Defending China, 100. The original source is Panikkar's autobiography.
Attitudes toward Nuclear Weapons, presents a somewhat dissenting view from the picture painted above.\textsuperscript{98} The overall tenor of the book is to argue that the Chinese, contrary to their public statements, recognized the importance of nuclear weapons. Ryan summarizes the Chinese views before the Korean War as follows:

An overview of the CCP reaction to nuclear weapons during 1945-49 finds that the CCP, even before gaining power, became extremely interested in nuclear weapons and perhaps realized earlier than most groups or nations some of the profound implications of the new technology.\textsuperscript{99}

Ryan’s evidence on the post-Korean War period is strong. However, he himself notes that evidence on Mao's private position in this early period is quite slim. In particular, Ryan notes the limitations of his key source on the question: “Halperin goes on to summarize the impact of these Yan’an debates without, however, offering any documentation for how he came to know of the debates, or, for that matter, how he knew what was going on ‘in the back of his [Mao’s] mind.’”\textsuperscript{100} Indeed, continuing his thinking regarding the pre-Korean war period, Ryan notes,

The public, surface tone of reaction, that of disparagement, was quickly set by Mao. This disparagement was in part a defensive, propagandistic reaction to a hard new reality and in part, a natural corollary of deeply held ideological and historical tenets regarding the ultimate superiority of men over weapons. These tenets were reinforced through survival and victories against the much better armed Japanese and KMT armies, and in the decades to come the nuclear-armed United States would assume a role analogous to that of those earlier foes.\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{98} Ryan, Chinese Attitudes toward Nuclear Weapons.

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 21.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 18. The Yan’an debates are said to have taken place during the civil war (in approximately 1946), long before the CCP gained power, while it was holed up in the Red Army’s redoubt deep in the interior of Northwest China.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 21.
Ryan is right to be cautious about assuming that true beliefs differ from those expressed in public.\textsuperscript{102} He is also right to emphasize the constraining role of ideology. While Ryan presents clear evidence that by the early 1950s Mao's China was well on its way to recognizing the importance of nuclear weapons, his position on the period of interest to this study—May and October 1950—is more nuanced.

Ryan's view recognizes the legacy of Maoist ideology. When his discussion is coupled with the evidence presented above which included private statements by Mao, reports from senior military leaders, and discussions of the state of knowledge regarding weapons, a fairly strong case can be made: On balance, there is significant evidence that at the time of the outbreak of the Korean War, Mao and the senior Chinese leadership substantially denigrated the utility of nuclear weapons in comparison to their western counterparts.

\textit{People's War}

In the wake of the Communist victory in the civil war, the focus of Chinese tactical and operational doctrine was on a form of "People's War" that encapsulated "a vision of a highly politicized guerrilla army."\textsuperscript{103} As one security studies expert puts it: "The Chinese were different not simply by virtue of the inferior equipment ... but more generally, by virtue of a different approach to warfare."\textsuperscript{104} Blending both tactics and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[102] Indeed, Lucian Pye argues that in Confucian cultures, and China's in particular, public statements are a better representation of an actors true beliefs than private statements that can be easily disavowed. Pye contrasts this with Western views that see private statements as less influenced by incentives to appease various audiences. See Pye, \textit{The Spirit of Chinese Politics}, 248.
\item[103] Jencks, \textit{From Muskets to Missiles}, 69.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
strategic level thought, Mao’s military philosophy emphasized guerilla warfare and the strategic depth that China’s geography provided. It had many specific components.

Individual Tactics
Perhaps the main emphasis of People’s War was on morale and manpower over material. As Mao succinctly pronounced, “Weapons are an important factor in war, but not the decisive factor; it is people, not things, that are decisive.” Similarly, he wrote, “the richest source of power to wage war lies in the masses of the people.” Zhang, a Chinese scholar who has carefully studied Maoist doctrine, expands on this statement, summarizing Mao’s thinking:

Mao firmly believed that a weak army could win in a war against a strong enemy because he was convinced that “man” could beat “weapon.” Given Mao’s confidence in a human being’s subjective capability to determine defeat or victory in war, the CCP chairman romanticized military affairs. Yet as he calculated the probability of victory for a weak army, he found his theory logical, realistic, and plausible.

Whitson, a leading scholar of the PLA, refers to this disparagingly as an “infantry small-arms syndrome.”

For Mao, it was not just sheer numbers (although these were clearly important), but the motivation of his soldiers that would guarantee victory. He had written that the

105 Whitson and Huang, The Chinese High Command.
106 People’s War also had a strategic component that fit into Marxist revolutionary thought, but this is not relevant to the study at hand. On the tactical and strategic elements of People’s War, see Chen-Ya Tien, Chinese Military History: Ancient and Modern (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1992), 223ff. On the role of the strategic elements of Chinese ideology and how they too impeded communication between China and other countries who had different visions, see Mark Haas, “Ideology, Threat Perception, and Great Power Politics through Two Centuries” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Virginia, 2001).
108 Ibid., 261.
109 Zhang Shuguang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 29. Italics in the original.
110 Whitson and Huang, The Chinese High Command.
Chinese people would have the advantage in the war against Japan since China's “advantages lie in the progressive and just character of her war.”111 Mao thought the Japanese soldier to be inferior, not for racist reasons, but because their “weapons are not in the hands of politically conscious soldiers.”112 Similarly, he wrote,

We must make full use of this move, political mobilization, to get the better of him. This move is crucial; it is indeed of primary importance, while our inferiority in weapons and other things is only secondary.113

In addition to bolstering the morale of one's own troops, another benefit of fighting for a just cause was that it would make the PLA attractive for potential defectors, who played an important role throughout China's civil war.114

In addition to these factors, a few other emphases should be mentioned. Mao stressed the centrality of surprise in People's War. While he recognized that it certainly also played a role in conventional warfare as well, “there are fewer opportunities to apply it [in conventional battles] than there are in guerrilla hostilities. In the latter speed is essential.”115 Another important element for Mao was concentration of forces while on the offensive, but dispersal while on the defensive.116 Finally, Maoist People's War emphasized the importance of troops reducing their logistical requirements substantially by providing for their own sustenance while in the field and by relying on simple means for shelter. These factors meant that threats to logistical lines (posed by airpower or fast

112 Ibid., 259.
113 Ibid., 228.
116 Tien, Chinese Military History, 238ff.
moving ground forces) would be likely to be downplayed since logistics in general were perceived to be less important.

**Integration of the Various Tactics**

Weaving together these various strands of People’s War theories, Mao’s emphasis on guerilla tactics counseled: “The enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue.” In practice, this meant that Chinese operations were characterized by the

... use of relatively untrained and under-armed soldiers against a more sophisticated enemy. By using impressive deception and stealth the Chinese overcame technological inferiority. By using remarkable mobility, mostly by foot over rough terrain, the Chinese overcame logistical inferiority.

Mao’s large, high morale forces would be used to concentrate large numbers of forces to overwhelm or annihilate entire enemy units. He wrote,

In every battle concentrate an absolutely superior force (two, three, four, and sometimes even five or six times the enemy’s strength), encircle the enemy forces completely, strive to wipe them out thoroughly, and do not let any escape from the net.

Whitson and Huang’s *The Chinese High Command*, a definitive survey of the PLA, suggests that this particular pronouncement represented not only Mao’s strategic thought, but a consensus of the senior military leadership at the time.

This strategy had been used many times with great success during the civil war.

The west referred to it as a “human wave” or “human sea” tactic. Chinese communist

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117 Mao Tsetung, "Problems of Strategy in China’s Revolutionary War [December 1936]," 111.

118 Segal, *Defending China*, 101.

119 Mao Tsetung, "The Present Situation and Our Tasks [December 25, 1947]," 349. On the importance of this document to Maoist thought, see Whitson and Huang, *The Chinese High Command*, 492.

120 Whitson and Huang, *The Chinese High Command*, 492.

121 For examples, see Dreyer, *China at War, 1901-1949*; Wilson, *China’s Revolutionary War*.

forces would gather four or five times as many troops as their opponent, or even more. They would surround the opponent (often by luring them to the end of a long supply line) and utterly destroy his forces. This was ambush on a very large scale. These tactics substituted for more complex “fire and maneuver” infantry practices that have dominated infantry warfare in the west since WWI. The Chinese communist forces lacked the non-commissioned officers necessary to lead such challenging tactics. Cohen describes the Chinese tactics as follows:

[The Chinese] attacked mainly by night, using large quantities of hand grenades, light machine gun and mortar fire ... from very close ranges. They usually approached from the rear, after drawing enemy fire by sniping and bugle or pipe music. Operationally, the Chinese had a more supple approach...: feinting, probing, or withdrawing ... in order to test enemy reactions or to confuse and intimidate them.

Similarly, a military historian describes the PLA’s tactics during the Korean War:

Since the CCF had no close air support, no tanks, and very little artillery, it specialized in fighting under cover of darkness. The whistles, bugles, and horns were not only signaling devices (in place of radios) but also psychological tools, designed to frighten the enemy in the dark and cause him to shoot, thereby revealing the position of men and weapons. The fighting tactics were relatively simple: frontal assaults on revealed positions, infiltration and ambush to cut the enemy’s rear, and massed manpower attacks on the open flanks of his main elements. War correspondents were to describe the attacking waves of the CCF as a “human sea” or “swarm of locusts.”

This theory of victory was substantially different from the heavy, combined arms focus of the American forces.

**Implementation in Practice**

These doctrines were not just theoretical for the Chinese but were put into practice throughout the military. In terms of capabilities, the PLA was an exceptionally

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123 Whitson and Huang, *The Chinese High Command*, 13. While the material shortcomings discussed elsewhere also limited Chinese strategic choice in other areas, with regard to fire and maneuver tactics, simple technology had allowed for German infantry infiltrations at the end of WWI. The Chinese could have pursued something similar, if only they had had sufficient small unit leadership.


large, under-equipped force. Late in the civil war it had grown quite rapidly: “from 475,000 regulars in mid-1945 to 1,278,000 in mid-1946 and 1,950,000 a year later.

Despite the windfall in Manchuria [of captured Japanese weaponry], these troops were not well armed.” Indeed, for equipment throughout the late part of the civil war, the communist forces relied on captured weapons whether from the KMT or the Japanese. By the outbreak of the Korean War, it remained a large infantry force, of over 5 million men in some 250 divisions, still very poorly outfitted. One military analyst writes

In terms of equipment, the Chinese Communist Army of 1950 was primitive by any standards. It has been compared to an army of 1914, without the trucks and the artillery, primarily an army of infantrymen. There were few trucks, little artillery, very limited communication (particularly via radio), no air support, and no antiaircraft defense. Logistical support in the civil war had been provided by the local population.

Another scholar emphasizes its backwardness in these, and other, areas,

On the eve of the Korean War, the PLA remained an infantry army with acute deficiencies in heavy artillery, armored vehicles, and ammunition. Military officers still lacked technological know-how as well as familiarity with operational tactics such as coordination of joint operations, armor-infantry-artillery team work, and close air support. There was, at that time, no sign of plans to modernize and regularize the PLA.

Indeed, as they entered the Korean War, many Chinese noted that their armament did not even reach North Korean standards, let alone western ones. “Colonel Wong [a Chinese liaison office to the North Korean military] noted that, by Chinese standards, the North Koreans themselves had been magnificently equipped by the Soviets.”

126 Dreyer, China at War, 1901-1949, 317.
127 Ibid., 318.
129 Ibid., 417.
standard TOE for divisions from China and North Korea, the latter had nearly twice as many light machine guns, three times as many heavy machine guns, and six times as many trucks. On the other hand, China held the advantage in horses and mules. The PLA was well configured to implement a People’s War strategy.

By the later stages of the Korean war, the PLA was able to arm this poorly equipped force with substantial amounts of advanced material from the Soviets. However, at the time that the decisions were being made regarding the outbreak and participation in the war, no such capabilities existed. More importantly, the doctrinal lenses that the associated doctrine would have brought were absent as well.

The PLA Air Force

While it is not necessary to evaluate each service individually, it is worth describing the People’s Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) briefly, given the importance that that service plays in American strategic thought of the time. Simply put, there was little history of any airpower in the Chinese Communist military history. The CCP had faced a substantial air force in its GMD opponents in the civil war: “the inventory of the Nationalist air force expanded to over a thousand aircraft by the end of the war.” Nevertheless, the communists, themselves, never had an air force of any consequence, and the senior leaders consistently demeaned the value of it.

Before 1937, the communist forces had only possessed two planes, and by the beginning of the long march (October 1936), neither was flying. This fledgling air force was disbanded a number of times before 1945: by attrition in the early 1930s, by the arrest of all the members of the Xinjiang Aviation unit in a political purge in 1942, by financial pressure in 1943 (which forced the student pilots to “terminate their studies and cultivate the land or work in shops”), and by bureaucratic fiat in 1945. Throughout this period, material factors clearly restrained the communists from considering a modern air force, but Mao’s attitude helped ameliorate the perceived costs of this.

In June 1950, while discussing the air force issue with other Chinese leaders, an emotional Mao remarked that the Communist way to deal with enemy airpower was to ‘not fear death, but be brave, and dare to sacrifice lives.’ The hardships Mao experienced during his revolutionary career unquestionably contributed to his determination to build a strong air force when the time came. However, his experiences also influenced him to maintain the view that the human factor could overcome the machine.

Thus, in addition to financial reasons for the slow growth of the Chinese air force, Mao’s attitude also played a role.

Once the Chinese began to create their own air force, several factors continued to ensure a very different approach to airpower from the Americans. The Chinese exported a People’s War philosophy from the ground-based, guerrilla context that it had originated. This manifested itself in several ways. First, the early Chinese doctrine regarding air power viewed it as primarily a defensive asset, as a component of People’s

135 Of one of those planes, Zhang writes “The Red Army had no choice but to dismantle the airplane and hide it in a remote mountain area. Local people unearthed the plane in 1951 and turned it over to the government.” *Ibid.*, 19.

136 *Ibid.*, 19, 21, and 23, respectively.

War in the sky. This was in sharp contrast to the usage of airpower by nearly every great power in the second world war.

Second, morale of pilots was emphasized far beyond any justifiable degree:

In the military tradition of the Chinese Communists, CCP military leaders regarded the human factor as one of the most important elements of victory or defeat. Even though the U.S./UN forces had higher-quality equipment and technology, they believed that a weak force like the CPV [Chinese People’s Volunteers] could discharge its duties in Korea and overwhelm superior enemy forces if its soldiers maintained high morale in combat. Following this military tradition, PLAAF leaders were convinced high morale could make the young inexperienced Chinese pilots brave, an important factor that would help them improve combat efficiency and cope with other war-related difficulties. Throughout the Korean War, the Chinese air force placed much emphasis on morale and political mobilization to improve combat efficiency.139

In short, “the PLAAF still believed in the efficacy of its man-over-weapons doctrine. Young Chinese pilots would be able to defeat the enemy, they argued, because they had come from ground forces accustomed to difficult situations and were willing to sacrifice themselves for China.”140 One of the official histories of the Chinese air force extolled the virtues of the bravery and valiance of the Chinese pilots and concluded: “The experience of the People’s Volunteer Air Force in the war to resist America and support Korea revealed a single truth for all to see: Under the conditions of modern warfare, human factors are the determining factor for victory or defeat.”141 Unfortunately, however, such emphasis on morale, bravery, and élan was to be found ill-suited to modern air combat:

Inflated combat morale, while welcomed, also caused anxiety among Chinese pilots, who were eager to redeem themselves with personal glory and individual success. The basic principles of air operations—teamwork, protecting each other, and tactics—were often

138 Zhang Xiaoming, Red Wings over the Yalu, 48 and 103.

139 Ibid., 178.

140 Ibid., 205.

ignored. According to PLAAF records, five of eight regimental commanders were killed in action over Korea because of their brashness. 142

Third, the Chinese continued to deemphasize training and education. While this might be appropriate for a guerilla or light infantry army, it posed significant problems for the development of an air force. The poor education level of the Chinese soldiers impeded the communists’ ability to create a viable air force throughout the revolutionary period. 143 The education problems that had made pilot training difficult before 1949 continued after liberation, even when they relied on the Soviets for training their pilots. 144 Indeed, the Chinese often viewed the Soviet training standards for pilots as too rigorous, suggesting a rather low emphasis on the quality of training coming from their own leadership. 145

In sum, the Chinese air force exhibits sharp contrasts with that of the United States. It played a minor role in PLA thinking about warfare, and even that small role was characterized by a different understanding of airpower than the United States had.

Dissent among the Chinese Leadership and other Caveats

There were dissenters to this Chinese theory of victory, and there were contrary trends in Chinese military history. While the characterization above is accurate in describing the dominant element in CCP military thought, it is worthwhile to consider some of the exceptions to this overall trend.

142 Zhang Xiaoming, Red Wings over the Yalu, 179.

143 See Ibid., 17-27 passim, which emphasizes the student pilots’ “limited reading and writing skills” (p. 26).

144 Ibid., 41, 119-120, and 181.

145 Ibid., 44. In a later period, as the Chinese began to develop their air force more significantly in the latter stages of the Korean War, they chose to rely on Soviet doctrine, thus again presenting a contrast from the American approach. Zhang Xiaoming, Red Wings over the Yalu, 27.
A number of PLA leaders who had been trained for extensive periods at the Yunnan Military Academy or at the Whampoa Military Academy did not buy into the People’s War thinking. In both locations they would have been was exposed to Japanese and German military science.\textsuperscript{146} Yunnan Military Academy was notable for its high quality in the waning days of the Qing Dynasty. Whampoa was the military institute created by Sun Yat-sen and led by Chiang Kai-shek that created the first professional army in post-dynastic China. These academies stressed much more the role of firepower, professionalized divisional-level leaders, the utility of the technical branches, and many other concepts at odds with Maoist People’s War. The role of leaders with such backgrounds are discussed in the cases.

In the latter stages of the civil war, People’s War no longer had a monopoly on Chinese strategic thought. Whitson writes that in 1947 Chinese doctrine represented a compromise between the Maoist “peasant ethic” and Soviet and (Westernized) warlord strategies.\textsuperscript{147} Additionally, by the end of the civil war, battles had become much more conventional.\textsuperscript{148} However, this is generally the case after 1948, when the tide of the civil war swung dramatically in the favor of the CCP. The lessons from this period would seem primarily relevant to future “mopping up” campaigns, not to wars against the most dangerous adversaries. Further, even at this period, the PLA remained a very poorly mechanized force with regard to artillery and tanks, especially in comparison to


\textsuperscript{147} Whitson and Huang, \textit{The Chinese High Command}, 89 and Chapter 11: Strategy and Tactics.


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the KMT. For instance, in the pivotal HuaiHai Campaign in late 1948, the CCP faced a force of similar size to that of its own, but one in which "most of whom were better trained and better equipped than the CCP forces." The disparity in aircraft was even wider, as discussed above. Thus, it is important not to overstate the importance of these late battles in terms of their lasting legacy on CCP thinking.

Sources of Chinese Doctrine

As suggested above, the PLA's doctrinal and strategic beliefs have many sources. Many of these elements can be traced to Sun Tsu and other sources of classical military thought in Chinese history. Clearly, some strategies were not chosen freely but were—in part—forced on them by external pressure. Similarly, the backwardness of the Chinese economy has played a role:

The persistence of the "People's War" concept, of the commissar system, and, indeed, of the whole "Maoist" approach to military affairs, has been largely a result of China's relatively low level of industrial development.

However, some elements trace their roots to centuries of factor endowments in the Chinese civilization. The views regarding the importance of manpower had a long history in Chinese military thought. The reliance on defections for victory, and

149 See Mao's own concerns regarding tanks and aircraft in Mao Tsetung, "Carry the Revolution through to the End [December 30, 1948]," in Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-Tung (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1966), 384.

150 Westad, Decisive Encounters, 206.

151 Although, as with many classic strategic texts, there are many different lessons that could be drawn from Sun Tsu. Georges Tan Eng Bok, "Strategic Doctrine," in Chinese Defence Policy, ed. Gerald Segal and William T. Tow (London: Macmillan, 1984), 5; Tien, Chinese Military History, 212ff.

152 Dreyer, China at War, 1901-1949, 321. Echoing this is Hsieh, "China's Secret Military Papers."


therefore the importance of the justness of one’s own cause, also can trace its roots through millennia of Chinese history. Whitson refers to many elements of People’s War as stemming from a “peasant ethic” of warfare, as distinct from the other major influences on Chinese strategic thought: warlordism and Soviet advisors and training.\textsuperscript{155} Further, recent history reified these ancient themes. Many of these strategies had stood them in good stead against the better-armed and better-equipped KMT in the civil war.\textsuperscript{156} Mao had consistently argued on behalf of these strategies throughout that conflict.\textsuperscript{157} Immediately before the collapse of the KMT forces, he wrote, “but none of these efforts can save the Chiang Kai-shek bandit gang from defeat. The reason is that our strategy and tactics are based on a People’s War; no army opposed to the people can use our strategy and tactics.”\textsuperscript{158} Immediately after the collapse of his civil war adversaries, Mao explained the victory by virtue of the People’s War strategy.\textsuperscript{159} These views remained dominant in the PLA for years to come. In 1961, one of the most senior military leaders of the PLA wrote confidently “if there is a war within three to five years, we will have to rely on hand weapons … In the even event of war within the next few

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\textsuperscript{155} Whitson and Huang, The Chinese High Command, passim, espec. 22-23.  
\textsuperscript{156} For Mao’s view on the better equipped KMT army, and ways to overcome it, see Mao Tsetung, "Problems of Strategy in China’s Revolutionary War [December 1936]," 95ff.  
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 112-13, 141.  
\textsuperscript{158} Mao Tsetung, "The Present Situation and Our Tasks [December 25, 1947]."  
\textsuperscript{159} Mao Tsetung, "On the Great Victory in the Northwest and on the New Type of Ideological Education Movement in the Liberation Army [March 7, 1948]," in Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-Tung (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1966), 358-59.
years we can defeat the enemy by using close combat although we have no special weapons.160

Finally, the organizational culture of the Chinese military certainly played some role:

For many reasons, the Soviet and Chinese armies have not responded to the technological imperative the same way. Perhaps the most important single factor has been the makeup of the respective officer corps. By the outbreak of the Chinese civil war, PLA officers were tested, experienced, and thoroughly reliable both politically and military. … During their civil wars, both the Soviet and Chinese communists engaged in a type of warfare which was more concerned with winning over populations than with destroying enemy forces. The “dual-command” system of a military commander and a coequal political commissar can work very well in such a situation.161

This organizational structure could be expected to oppose any attempt at fundamental reform.

Thus, the Chinese theory of victory traces its roots to a number of factors: material and strategic constraints, historical legacies, and organizational politics.

Summary

Based on all this recounting, the evidence strongly supports a characterization of the two countries facing each other with very large differences in their theories of victory. China and the United States faced each other with vastly different military capabilities and beliefs about how best to use them. The two sides’ views on nuclear weapons can only be described as opposites. The beliefs regarding tactical air and combined arms on the U.S. side and People’s War on the Chinese side are also far, far apart. The

160 Marshal Yeh Chien-ying, quoted in Hsieh, "China's Secret Military Papers," 85. See also pp. 84 and 90.

161 Jencks, From Muskets to Missiles, 25.
independent variable here is one of two very different views about the nature of warfare. The two nations' theories of victory could hardly be more distinct.

Beyond the discussion above, one can argue that the two sides faced each other not only with different theories of victory but that they faced off across different technologic ages or eras. In Van Creveld's classic description of the links between *Technology and War*, he presents a typology of four different ages that summarize the development of militarily relevant technology since 2000 BC. From these descriptions, it seems clear that China and the United States not only had different theories of victory, but were facing each other across different historical stages (the Chinese being in the Ages of Machines whereas the United States would be better placed late in the subsequent Age of Systems). At a very fundamental level, the two sides faced off with different militaries.

Looking forward to the two Korean War chapters, while each case has the same IV broadly speaking, there are differences of emphasis. The most relevant portion of the independent variable in the chapter immediately following this one (Chapter 4) focuses on relatively narrow elements that are specific to combat in the Korean Peninsula. That is appropriate for the decision being studied in that chapter: the United States' crossing of the 38th parallel. Chapter 5 relies on the general, very broad level thinking by both sides regarding the nature of conflict to assess the Chinese decision to support the North Korean invasion. This broad level thinking is centrally relevant for the decision to go to war in a general deterrence situation. Nevertheless, a full characterization of either side's theory of victory includes elements of both levels of thinking (that is, the

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general war and the specific regarding ground combat in Korea). Regardless of whether one is talking about general thinking about the nature of warfare of the specifics of ground force doctrine, the final coding is the same, of widely distinct theories of victory between the two countries.

The dissertation now turns to examining the tragic effects of this difference.
Chapter 4. **The United States Crosses 38th Parallel (Case Study #1)**

The previous chapter summarized the vast differences in the American and Chinese theories of victory. In early 1950, the United States emphasized the utility of firepower and nuclear weapons in general wars and relied on mobile, integrated formations of armor, infantry, and artillery for ground combat. The contrast with the Chinese was acute. Beijing expressed disdain toward atomic weapons and strategic bombing and relied instead on "People's War" to defeat what it considered its main threat: invasion of China proper. Lightly armed, poorly trained soldiers confident in Maoist ideology were central to Chinese thinking. The two sides viewed the world through different military lenses. This chapter examines the effect of the large value of the theory's independent variable on the outcome of a Chinese attempt at strategic coercion.

After the North Korean attack on June 25, 1950, the United States rapidly rushed to aid the collapsing South Korean forces. Initial hopes that a mere commitment of American forces would be enough to lead to a change of heart in Pyongyang, Moscow, and Beijing were dashed as the North Korean offensive continued apace.¹ Throughout the summer of 1950, the ground war went poorly for the United States and consisted of a long retreat back to the Pusan Perimeter. After that line solidified in early August, the

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subsequent Inchon landings of September 15 were a resounding success, forcing the United States to consider more directly its plans regarding crossing the 38th parallel and its goals for North Korea. The Chinese sent a large number of signals—both explicit and implicit—to the United States, warning it against continuing its offensive. Washington, however, downplayed the significance of these signals believing that the Chinese would not get involved, and the Americans drove north. The eventual attack by the PLA in November fundamentally altered the course of this conflict as well as hardening the Cold War writ large. This section outlines the role that the two sides' theories of victory played in this colossal miscalculation.

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Chapter 4: The United States Crosses the 38th Parallel

**Figure 4-1: The American Offensive in Korea, Fall 1950**

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**Historical Background**

While this is not the place for extensive historical background, it is important to emphasize that the U.S. decision to cross the 38th Parallel was contingent on a belief that

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the Chinese and Soviets would not get significantly involved if it did so.5 This was clear from the orders that MacArthur received, among many other sources. However, once the United States crossed the 38th Parallel, the opportunities to avoid a Sino-American war were severely constrained. As the Chinese finalized their decisions about intervention in early October, the U.S. crossing of the 38th parallel loomed large in their deliberations. Thus, the signaling and interpretation regarding this issue was very consequential. If this dissertation’s theory deepens the understanding of this catastrophic error, it teaches something valuable.

The U.S. advance against North Korea moved very rapidly beginning in early September. Planning for crossing the 38th parallel began only days before the actual Inchon landings took place. “The decision [to cross the 38th] was embodied in NSC-81, written mostly by Rusk, which authorized MacArthur to move into North Korea if there were no Soviet or Chinese threats to intervene.”6 NSC-81/1 was dated September 9, 1950 and was approved and ordered implemented by the President on September 11, 1950.7 It permitted crossing the 38th for the purposes of destroying the retreating North Korean forces, although not for the general occupation of North Korea.8 Nevertheless,

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5 Note this is clearly not the case for the U.S. decision to intervene in Korea in the first case when much thinking focused on Korea as but the first foray in a global communist offensive.


8 The key language is: “The United Nations forces have a legal basis for conducting operations north of the 38th parallel to compel the withdrawal of the North Korean forces behind this line or to defeat these forces.” National Security Council, "F.R.U.S., 1950, Vol. 7," 716. The document makes no
NSC-81 did pave the way for the general invasion of North Korea, while putting that decision off at the time:

It would be expected that the U.N. Commander would receive authorization to conduct military operations, including amphibious and airborne landings or ground operations in pursuance of a roll-back in Korea north of the 38th parallel, for the purpose of destroying the North Korean forces, provided that at the time of such operations there has been no entry into North Korea by major Soviet or Chinese Communist forces, no announcement of intended entry, nor a threat to counter our operations militarily in North Korea.\(^9\)

On October 1, MacArthur called on the North Koreans to surrender in sweeping terms, directing the following message to them: "I ... call upon you and the forces under your command, in whatever part of Korea situated, forthwith to lay down your arms and cease hostilities under such military supervisions as I may direct.\(^{10}\) Obtaining no such response, MacArthur received final authority to cross the border on October 2. \(^{11}\) By October 3, "the ROK I Corps was well inside North Korea on the east coast.\(^{12}\) Four days later, the UN passed its "go anywhere" resolution, and the first U.S. troops crossed on that same day. Throughout these moves toward the North, it is very clear U.S. policymakers were making contingent decisions based on the expectation that China and the Soviet Union would not get involved in a significant way.\(^{13}\)

\(^9\) Ibid.


\(^{11}\) While NSC-81/1 was approved on September 11, MacArthur's orders implementing it were not sent until September 27, and he did not receive final authority to cross the border until October 2. In part, this delay was due to the change in leadership at the Pentagon, with Marshall taking over for Johnson who had resigned. Schnabel, *United States Army in the Korean War*, 181.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., 202.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 178.
At about the same time, the Chinese side was making its final decisions. There had long been a belief in the United States historiography regarding the Korean War that the Chinese decision to intervene came as a result of American troops directly threatening Chinese territory as they neared the Yalu.\textsuperscript{14} It is now clear that this was not the case and indeed that there was little chance for peace between the two once the United States crossed the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel (as discussed below).\textsuperscript{15} Indeed, the Chinese had had serious concerns once the United States stabilized its lines in South Korea, much earlier.

The Politburo discussion of August 4\textsuperscript{11} and Mao's telegram demonstrate unmistakably that the CCP leadership had seriously considered sending troops to assist North Korea in fighting the UN forces in early August, more than one month before the Inchon landing.\textsuperscript{16}

Once Mao heard of the Inchon landings and of the United States regaining the initiative, he seems quite firm in his own mind regarding the necessity of intervention.\textsuperscript{17} Other Chinese leaders agreed that mere defense of the Yalu was not enough:

Nie's talks [of early August with senior military leaders of the NEBDA] demonstrated clearly that the purpose of China's military preparations had gone beyond the simple defense of the Chinese-Korea border.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{14} For the classic statement in this vein, see Allen Suess Whiting, \textit{China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War} (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1960).

\textsuperscript{15} For the argument that any U.S. presence north of the 38th parallel was inimical to Chinese national interests, see Christensen, "Threats, Assurances, and the Last Chance for Peace," 136-37.

\textsuperscript{16} Chen Jian, \textit{China's Road}, 143. At the end of August, a group of senior PLA officials held a meeting in which they anticipated the Inchon landings. (See discussion in Chapter 6.) While there is no evidence that the Chinese had expected this in early August, the Chinese were anticipating the prospect of an American victory as necessitating their involvement. From the evidence available, it is unclear what would have constituted such a victory: merely the successful defense of the South or rollback in the North. Christensen suggests that the Chinese were already anticipating the crossing of the 38th at this point. See Thomas J. Christensen, \textit{Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958} (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 157.

\textsuperscript{17} Chen Jian, \textit{China's Road}, 161.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid.}, 139. Nie Rongzhen was the acting head of the PLA.
By early October, the situation worsened appreciably from the Chinese perspective. As the UN called for the North Koreans to capitulate on October 1, Chinese intelligence reports from the front painted increasingly bleak pictures:

On October 2, an intelligence report reached Beijing indicating that U.S./UN vanguard units had begun crossing the 38th parallel. Twenty-four hours later, another report confirmed that American troops were moving into North Korea in large numbers.19

In a secret report given to the Chinese Peoples Consultative Conference, Zhou Enlai echoed this point “New dispatches of October 1 and 2 indicated that U.S. troops had already crossed the 38th Parallel and that the South Korean army had penetrated far north of it.”20 (Note that according to American records, as discussed above, these two reports were false, but what matters here is China’s perception of reality.)

Finally, the Chinese leaders undertook their fateful decision. On October 2, an enlarged session of the Politburo Standing Committee met to discuss Chinese policy.

Mao summarized the decisions taken there in a telegram he drafted to send to Stalin21:

Under the present situation, we have decided that on October 15 we will begin dispatching the twelve divisions that have been transferred in advance to south Manchuria. They will locate themselves in appropriate districts of North Korea (not necessarily all the way to the 38th parallel). While they do combat with the enemy who dares to advance and attack north of the 38th parallel, in the first period fighting a defensive war to destroy small enemy detachments and gaining a clear understanding of the situation, they will await the arrival of Soviet weapons the equipping of our Army;


21 Note, however, that as best one can tell, the telegram was not sent. For the actual telegram sent, see “Document 12: Ciphered telegram from Roshchin in Beijing to Filipov [Stalin] 3 October 1950 conveying 2 October 1950 message from Mao to Stalin” in Alexandre Y. Mansourov, “Stalin, Mao, Kim, and China’s Decision to Enter the Korea War, September 16-October 15, 1950,” Bulletin of the Cold War International History Project, no. 6-7 (1995/96): 114. On the utility of this drafted telegram for scholarship in general, see Chen Jian, "Commentaries: Comparing Russian and Chinese Sources: A New Point of Departure for Cold War History," Bulletin of the Cold War International History Project, no. 6-7 (1995/96); Christensen, Useful Adversaries, 159ff.
On October 4, the full Politburo met to ratify Mao’s decision. After contentious and inconclusive debate, it reconvened the next day. At Mao’s instructions, Peng Dehuai spoke forcefully in support of intervention: “Peng’s speech transformed the mood of the meeting, and the discussion now centered on the advantages of sending troops to Korea.”

The key element in this hardening in Chinese policy was the U.S. crossing of the 38th parallel. For instance, a report written by the senior commanders of the regional command of the PLA nearest the North Korean border, the Northeast Border Defense Agency (NEBDA), in late August had counseled patience. It had “suggested that the best timing for entering the war might be when the UN forces had counterattacked back across the 38th parallel, because this would put China in a politically and militarily more favorable position to defeat the enemy.”

While Mao’s leadership was paramount in October (Lin Biao, and others, were opposed to intervening), the aggressive U.S. policy eased his burden in securing wide support for his preferred policy:

Mao might not need to yield to the different opinions held by his colleagues, but it would have been foolish for him not to take them into consideration. In fact, unless China’s

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22 Christensen, Useful Adversaries, 272. See also Chen Jian, China’s Road, 176.

23 Odd Arne Westad, Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War, 1946-1950 (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 322. See the discussion of the following chapter on some of this dissent.

24 Chen Jian, China’s Road, 184.

25 For one of the earliest arguments that this was the case, see Christensen, "Threats, Assurances, and the Last Chance for Peace."

26 Chen Jian, China’s Road, 152.

27 Ibid., 153. Again, see more on the dissenters in China in the following chapter.
Not only was Mao constrained by the views of his fellow leaders in Beijing, he had to consider the attitudes of those allied leaders in North Korea and the Soviet Union. It was not until the UN troops crossed the 38th parallel that the North Korean's formally requested assistance from China.

In the early Cold War, the evidence available strongly supported the argument that war might still have been avoided once the United States crossed the 38th parallel had MacArthur kept his forces from approaching the Yalu River. Based on evidence made available only more recently, it is increasingly clear this was not the case. Indeed, some argue that mere American entry into South Korea in June and July of 1950 was enough to make war with the United States hard to escape. While this remains contentious, there is increased agreement that once the United States crossed the former border between North and South Korea, there was little opportunity to avoid war. Even the lull in fighting in November is now understood to be a tactical military trap rather than a

28 Ibid., 155.
29 Ibid., 160.
30 Ibid., 171.
31 Most famously, this is the argument of Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*.
32 This is the argument of Chen Jian, *China's Road*.
Twomey, *The Military Lens*

diplomatic signal. There was no lost chance at the “narrow neck” of the Wonsan-
Pyongyang corridor. American forces anywhere in North Korea, not just on the Yalu,
sparked the Chinese insecurity. The security dilemma was extremely severe at this
point, and it would have been hard to imagine the Chinese escaping its grasp.

By mid-October, both sides had made their key decisions. Chinese troops began
crossing the Yalu River on October 18, 1950. The armies of the United States and
China were destined to meet in North Korea.

**Signaling by China**

There were a large number of Chinese signals aimed directly at the United States
in this case. Thus, this is clearly a case of immediate deterrence (rather than general
deterrence). This section will begin by surveying the public and private diplomatic
signals sent, and then examine the parallel military signals that the Chinese undertook.

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35 Precisely using the security dilemma language is Barry R. Posen, “The Chinese Intervention in Korea: A Case of Inadvertent Escalation” (Draft Manuscript, MIT, 1989). One can array scholars moving northward up the peninsula as to where the line was that the United States could not cross without provoking the Chinese to entering the war. At the water's edge (that is, outside of Korea) is Chen Jian. Moving northward, Christensen and Scobell argue the line was at the 38th. Posen suggests it is at the narrow neck, and Whiting argued it was at the Yalu. This author's sense is that the evidence available at this point favors the 38th parallel.


37 See the discussion in the introductory chapter at note 13 for this distinction.
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Diplomatic and Public Signals

Propaganda served (and serves) many purposes for the Chinese regime, addressing both domestic and international audiences. The propaganda department recognized the importance of the Korean War for domestic politics of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP):

This is an important event at the present time. The United States has thus exposed its imperialist face, which is not fearsome at all but is favorable for the further awakening of the Chinese people and the people of the whole world. All over China, we have to use this opportunity to echo Foreign Minister Zhou’s statement and to start a widespread campaign of propaganda, so that we will be able to educate our people at home and to strike firmly the arrogance of the U.S. imperialist aggression.

However, following the withdrawal of Stuart in 1949, the United States had no formal lines of communication with the Chinese, so propaganda was also important as a means of international communication. Public statements were the primary residual means of direct communication between China and the West. This certainly exacerbated the problems in communication the two sides faced.

Initially, immediately after American intervention in the Korean War, Chinese signals were rather mild. At the level of public diplomacy, the restraint was notable: "China’s initial public reaction demonstrated its caution, watchfulness, and explicitly

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38 Jonathan D. Spence, The Search for Modern China, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1990), 514-519.


Twomey, *The Military Lens*

defensive posture.’’41 In late July, the weekly *World Culture* wrote: “China also had adopted the principles of non-intervention in Korea’s domestic affairs ... the Soviet Union, each new democratic state, and all peace loving peoples in the world sympathize with Korean people’s liberation movement but that does not imply that they should intervene with arms.’’42 However, by the week of July 17-24, 1950 a “Hate the U.S.” campaign began in China43 and “August marked the start of [China’s] more aggressive stance” in terms of propaganda.44

Indeed, by the end of the summer, the Chinese diplomacy as well had shifted, from a policy of searching for negotiated solutions (i.e., supporting the Soviet peace initiative in early August) to explicitly threatening the United States that it would intervene. These warnings began in late September.45 Initially, China made two rather oblique warnings. First,

On 20 August Chinese foreign minister Zhou Enlai sent a message to the United Nations that deviated from past statements emanating from Beijing in its emphasis on Korea rather than Taiwan. Because “Korea is China’s neighbor,” Zhou declared, “the Chinese people cannot but be concerned about the solution of the Korean question.”46

Within a week of that warning (on August 26th), a Chinese magazine stated more explicitly that China viewed the Korean question as a potential security threat.47 Later,

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46 Stueck, *The Korean War*, 64.

47 Ibid.
On September 25, Nieh Jung-chen, acting chief of staff of the PLA, told [Indian Ambassador to Beijing] Panikkar that the Chinese would not “sit back with folded hands and let the Americans come up to the border.”

Zhou Enlai chimed in on 30 September, stating, “The Chinese people absolutely will not tolerate foreign aggression, nor will they supinely tolerate seeing their neighbors being savagely invaded by the imperialists.” On October 3, the Chinese stepped up their diplomacy one more time:

Even more dramatic was Chou En-lai’s late-night meeting with Panikkar on October 3 in which the Chinese premier made it unmistakably clear that if U.S. troops crossed into North Korea, Chinese contingents would enter the war. ‘The South Koreans did not matter,’ Chou explained, ‘but American intervention into North Korea would encounter Chinese resistance.’

On October 10, the government mouthpiece newspaper, the Renmin Ribao, published a statement relaying Zhou’s Foreign Ministry warning issued that day:

The American war of invasion in Korea has been a serious menace to the security of China from its very start ... The Chinese people cannot stand idly by with regard to such a serious situation created by the invasion of Korea by the United States and its accomplice countries and to the dangerous trend toward extending the war...The Chinese people firmly advocate a peaceful solution to the Korean problem and are firmly opposed to the extension of the Korean war by America and its accomplice countries. And they are even more firm in folding that aggressors must be answerable for all consequences resulting from their frantic acts in extending aggression.

Blair interprets this as “very close to a declaration of war.”

Beyond these diplomatic warnings, throughout this period Beijing tried to project a view of itself as a strong nation that should not be trifled with. Beijing tried to ensure

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48 Foot, The Wrong War, 79.
49 Schnabel, United States Army in the Korean War, 197.
50 Foot, The Wrong War, 79.
51 Although by this time, both South Korean and American troops had already crossed the border. They would have had to retreat to abide by the warning at this point, although this would seem quite possible given the scale of the conflict that was to follow.
that its own domestic situation was in order so that it would not convey an image of weakness to the Americans.\textsuperscript{54} It also played up the role of the Sino-Soviet Alliance as another way to emphasize the dangers of threatening it.\textsuperscript{55}

Thus, throughout this period, diplomatic warnings were numerous and—over time—increasingly robust and clear.

\textit{Military Signals and Policy}

In addition to this signaling using various diplomatic and public sources, "the Chinese reinforced that policy with active preparations for military intervention in Korea."\textsuperscript{56} Chinese military moves had begun quite early. As Mao explained several years later to a Soviet delegation, "After the war broke out, we first shifted three armies and later added another two, putting a total of five armies on the edge of the Yalu River."\textsuperscript{57} The Central Military Commission (CMC) is the institution that both exerts control over the military for the CCP as well as integrates military and political decision-making.\textsuperscript{58} As discussed at length in chapter 6, the CMC meeting of July 7 had ordered forces redeployed from Fujian to Manchuria.\textsuperscript{59} At CMC meetings from August 7

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{54} Zhang Shuguang, \textit{Deterrence and Strategic Culture}, 93.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 95.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Stueck, \textit{The Korean War}, 64.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Cao Guoliang, Li Shishun, and Xu Yan, \textit{The Development of Mao Zedong's Military Thought}, Revised ed. (Beijing: The People's Liberation Army Press, 2001), 372.
\end{itemize}
through the 10, Chinese leaders continued to lay the groundwork for defensive deployments to the Korean-Chinese border, including significant troop deployments. The forces gathered there were to number 225,000 by the end of the summer. These were reinforced further as the United States solidified the Pusan perimeter in early August when Mao,

... informed his generals in the northeast that they must be prepared to fight within a month. Later in August he extended the period of preparation to the end of September, but he also called for twelve armies to be stationed along the Yalu, and an increase of eight over his order of early July. These decisions percolated through the Chinese chain of command, with the PLA Chief of Staff writing,

North Korea would very likely experience a setback and some complications in the war. Thus, according to the CMC's decision, I telegraphed an order to the strategic reserve forces on August 5: "Complete all the necessary preparations within this month. Be ready for the order of new movement and engagement." These strategic reserve forces consisted of three multi-division armies.

As the Inchon landings approached, Chinese preparations intensified even further. On August 23, Mao and Zhou Enlai "decided to reiterate to the NEBDA that no matter what the difficulties, all preparations for operations should completed by the end of September." In early September, the Chinese moved the headquarters of the crack 4th Field Army to Shenyang so that it would be closer the North Korean border. Logistics

60 Chen Jian, China's Road, 136.
61 Zhang Shuguang, Deterrence and Strategic Culture, 91.
64 Chen Jian, China's Road, 148.
65 Spurr, Enter the Dragon, 70-71.
preparations were made at the same time. China sent military observers to North Korea to assess the tactical situation in late September.

Clearly, many of these steps were taken to create the material conditions that would allow the Chinese to intervene. However, such military moves also had communicative goals and served to bolster the diplomatic warnings that were being issued, as summarized above. Most historians of the period treat these military moves as having such communicative goals. (E.g., both Allen Whiting and Zhang Shuguang clearly view the movement of forces as intentional, deterrent signals by Beijing.) Mao had a practice of doing precisely this, that is, using military deployments to send deterrent signals to the Americans. As discussed in the following chapter, Mao believed that his large deployment of troops to coastal regions in Northern China in 1949 had deterred the United States from getting involved in the civil war in its waning days.

(Mao’s fears in the civil war were reasonable, given the role the U.S. had played on the mainland in support of the KMT.) In that case, there is direct evidence that the

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67 Chen Jian, *China's Road*, 163.

68 Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 64-67; Zhang Shuguang, *Deterrence and Strategic Culture*, 90-94.


70 American troops had finally withdrawn from Mainland China in June of 1949. (U.S. forces declined from over 100,000 in 1945 to 4,000 in 1948 before finally being completely withdrawn in June of 1949.) While there had been some skirmishing between the Red Army and U.S. Marines (leading to a total of over forty American casualties) in the late periods of the Chinese Civil War, the last significant action occurred in April of 1947. (See Henry I. Shaw, Jr., *The United States Marines in North China, 1945 - 1949* (Washington, D. C. 20380: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, 1968.) For a recent treatment of the U.S. role in supporting and running guerilla
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Chinese leadership viewed its military moves as both communicative as well as enhancing capability. For instance, the Central Military Committee emphasized the deterrent nature of the deployment “with [these preparations we can dissuade the United States from realizing its ambition of armed intervention [in China].”

According to the conventional wisdom in the deterrence literature, tested here as the Alternate Hypothesis, these strong signals should have had a high probability of leading to deterrence success. However, these signals—large-scale infantry deployments—were heavily imbued with the Chinese theory of victory. This is precisely the outcome predicted by the dissertation (Prediction #5: “When signaling to the other side, each side should send signals that make use of forces in accordance with their own theory of victory.”) Despite both sets of signals (at the diplomatic and military levels), the United States crossed the 38th parallel, leading to the Chinese involvement. The following section outlines the U.S. perception of the strong Chinese signals and explains why they were not understood.

**Interpretation by the United States**

How did American decisionmakers interpret these threats? Were they even aware of them? What role did their beliefs about the nature of war play? This section answers these questions.

operations against coastal China after 1951 see Frank Holober, *Raiders of the China Coast: C.I.A. Covert Operations During the Korean War* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1999).

The primary conclusion in Washington and at MacArthur’s headquarters in Tokyo was that China would not intervene (supporting Prediction #7 which suggests leaders will downplay the likelihood of the adversary getting involved). At the Wake Island meeting on October 15, only a few weeks before the first battle with PLA, Truman and MacArthur discussed this issue explicitly.

When Truman asked him [MacArthur] to comment on the likelihood of Communist China’s entering the war, MacArthur said that his answer was ‘speculative,’ but he guessed ‘very little.’ Of the 300,000 Chinese troops in Manchuria, he continued, ‘Only 60,000 could be gotten across the Yalu River, and if they tried to get down to Pyongyang, there would be the greatest slaughter.’

(In that exchange, as in many instances discussed in this dissertation, the assessments of capability and intent by the Chinese were intertwined, each mutually supporting the other.) The two leaders later claimed to agree entirely on the situation in the region.

This section examines a range of reasons for this confidence. It begins by addressing the conventional argument that the messenger of several of the signals (Ambassador Panikkar) was not trusted. This argument generally is used to bolster the Alternate Hypothesis, which centers on the objective quality of the signal as explanations for deterrence success or failure. If the signals were not clearly sent, then the Alternate Hypothesis would indeed predict the resulting deterrence failure. However, as will be shown, this is not the case; Panikkar is not to blame for the deterrence failure.

The section goes on to show that the military threats were heard in Washington, but that they simply were not viewed as threatening. The subsequent section evaluates the acute and pervasive surprise that the U.S. leadership felt when the Chinese did in fact intervene and did so at great cost to American soldiers and marines.

Role of Panikkar

In the conventional wisdom, Beijing’s message did not get through to Washington because of the latter’s mistrust of the chosen messenger, the Indian Ambassador stationed in Beijing, Kavalam M. Panikkar. The argument goes that he was viewed as a self-promoter and a communist sympathizer in Washington. Britain was also said to view him as unreliable.

However, Panikkar’s reliability was not as suspect as the later historiography would have it. Although the United States was looking to find alternate lines of communication to use with Beijing, it had long used India as a way to send signals to Beijing. It had also looked to India as a way to receive messages from Beijing. Indeed, Panikkar, himself, had long been used as a conduit for information from Beijing. Only a few days before his first warning, he had been suggesting, based on conversations with Zhou Enlai and other forms of information, that China would not intervene, and this message was treated seriously in the United States. After the outbreak of war between the United States and China, Washington continued to use Indian emissaries as intermediaries to Beijing. Beyond this history of using Panikkar and India as conduits,

73 Foot, The Wrong War, 79.
75 See the concerns expressed in “Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Chinese Affairs (Clubb) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Rusk),” October 26, 1950 in F.R.U.S., 1950, Vol. 7, 1000-02.
76 Foot, The Wrong War, 83.
77 Dean Acheson, Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department (New York, NY: Norton, 1969), 452.
78 This occurred on September 21, 1950. Stueck, The Korean War, 90.
it is indisputable that the warnings were conveyed to Washington: "The State Department got word of this threat early the following day."

Further, it was not only isolated warnings from Panikkar that got through, but rather a wide range of sources of information. One report in early September gives essentially the same warning that was repeated frequently later. In it, the Consul General in Hong Kong received a letter purporting to reproduce discussions of a "Peking conference," including the following from Zhou Enlai: "When asked [about the] position of China should North Korean troops be pushed back to Manchurian border, Chou [Zhou Enlai] replied China would fight [the] enemy outside China’s border and not wait until enemy came in." Other sources abounded: "From Hong Kong and Taibei, word did filter into the State Department that Beijing would commit troops to Korea if U.S. soldiers advanced north of the 38th parallel." Similarly,

Indications of Chinese intentions grew increasingly disturbing. On [September 29], the State Department received word, indirectly through the embassy in Moscow, that the Dutch chargé in Beijing believed Chinese officials were considering military intervention in Korea if U.S. troops entered the North. On 2 October Wilkinson in Hong Kong sent a partial text of a Zhou Enlai speech of 30 September, which included the assertion that "the Chinese people absolutely will not tolerate foreign aggression nor will the supinely tolerate seeing their neighbors being savagely invaded by foreigners..."

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79 Nehru was used as late as the Panmunjom negotiations. Robert Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 166. During the early part of the war, the Indians were used several times. See "Memorandum by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Merchant) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Rusk)," November 16, 1950 in *F.R.U.S., 1950, Vol. 7*, 1164.

80 Stueck, *The Korean War*, 94, see also 91.


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The report from the Moscow embassy was also passed through the CIA, suggesting that it too, got wide distribution in the U.S. government. Beijing's final and most ominous warning noted above, from the Foreign Ministry on October 10, clearly found its way to senior leaders in Washington. All these messages corroborated Panikkar's warnings, and yet they too were ignored.

When Panikkar conveyed messages Washington wanted to hear, it listened. When he passed on messages that Washington did not want to hear, it labeled him as unreliable. Panikkar's warnings were not the only ones being ignored. His role in the miscalculations is not causal.

**Ignorance of the Military Signals Was Not an Excuse**

Throughout this period, not only was the United States aware that the Chinese were engaged in diplomatic signaling through Panikkar and many other sources, but it was also aware that Beijing was conducting heavy military movements in the region. American ignorance of these moves cannot account for the failure of Chinese signals.

A few examples will serve to make the case on the military side: "U.S. intelligence picked up the steady movement of Chinese forces northward toward Korea..." General Charles Willoughby, MacArthur's G-2 or intelligence officer, estimated on July 3 that "the Chinese had stationed two cavalry divisions and four armies..."

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85 "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Ambassador at Large (Jessup) (October 12, 1950)," in *F.R.U.S., 1950, Vol. 7*, 931. In that document, Jessup's transmits a message from the British foreign service dated October 11 referring to the Chinese statement of the day before.

in Manchuria. This would have been a force totaling approximately 140,000 men.

By the end of August, he announced "... sources have reported troop movement from Central China to Manchuria for sometime which suggest movements preliminary to entering the Korean theater." At that point, he estimated that some 246,000 soldiers were in Manchuria, and 80,000 were in the village of An-tung, just across the Yalu.

Following Inchon, Willoughby raised his estimate of Chinese forces in Manchuria to 450,000. His staff reported that there were some 38 divisions in Manchuria on October 4.

While many of these Chinese moves might have been explained away as defensive deployments, some specifics are less easily dismissed. On October 5, Willoughby prepared a Daily Intelligence Summary (DIS). This was the key intelligence document put out by Willoughby’s office and,

contained the raw data for MacArthur's intelligence assessment. The DISs, which could be 30 pages long and frequently longer, contained detailed accounts of the day's fighting in Korea, a good deal of political material on all countries in the FEC region (including Japan and China), as well as special appreciations and order of battle annexes.

87 Schnabel, United States Army in the Korean War, 198. See also Foot, The Wrong War, 79.

88 This is a summary of the contents in “Daily Intelligence Summary #2913 (August 31, 1950),” as described in General Charles Willoughby, "The Chinese Communist Potential for Intervention in the Korean War (Undated)", p. 2, The Charles A. Willoughby Papers, Box 10, Military History Institute Library, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, Penn.

89 Schnabel, United States Army in the Korean War, 179.

90 Ibid., 199.


92 Eliot A. Cohen, "Only Half the Battle: American Intelligence and the Chinese Intervention in Korea, 1950," Intelligence and National Security 5, no. 1 (1990): 132. Cohen notes “Three copies of the DIS were sent every day to Washington by courier from Tokyo taking three to five days, apparently, to arrive there. Another 54 copies went by registered mail” (p. 146, note 7). Beyond that, the State Department staff on the ground in South Korea had access to Eighth Army and X Corps intelligence reports as they were produced. They often cabled summaries of these to Acheson in Washington.
This particular DIS was immediately telexed to Washington; in it, Willoughby noted that
many of these troops were massing at border crossings:

... A build-up of Chinese forces along the Korean-Manchurian border has been reported
in many channels, and while exaggerations and canards are always evident, the potential
of massing at the Antung and other Manchurian crossing appears conclusive. This mass
involves a possible 9-18 divisions organized into 3-6 armies of the total strength of 38
divisions and 9 armies now carried in all Manchuria ... the potential exists for Chinese
Communist forces to openly intervene in the Korea War if UN forces cross the 38th
Parallel. 93

There were also some reports in the American bureaucracy in Washington of Chinese
forces crossing the Yalu on October 5. 94 By mid-October, Willoughby was reporting
that scores of divisions were being forward-deployed, not just moved to Manchuria in
general: "Intervention is a decision for war, on the highest level, i.e., the Kremlin and
Peiping. However, the numerical and troop potential in Manchuria is a fait accompli.
A total of 24 divisions are disposed along the Yalu River." 95 Two weeks later, his staff
estimated the number of forward-deployed divisions along the river to be twenty-nine. 96

Throughout this period, the United States remained confident in its ability to
monitor the movements of the Chinese through Air Force reconnaissance and intelligence
assets. 97 When convoys were sighted coming south from the border (a very common

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93 "Daily Intelligence Summary #2948 (October 5, 1950)," quoted in Willoughby, "The Chinese
Communist Potential for Intervention in the Korean War (Undated)", p. 3. The Daily Intelligence
Summary of 4 days later reinforced that conclusion. See also Schnabel, United States Army in the
Korean War, 200.

94 Schnabel, United States Army in the Korean War, 200.

95 "Daily Intelligence Summary #2957 (October 14, 1950)," quoted in Willoughby, "The Chinese
Communist Potential for Intervention in the Korean War (Undated)", p. 3.

96 "Daily Intelligence Summary #2971 (October 28, 1950)," summarized in Ibid., p. 4.

97 Wainstock, Truman, Macarthur, and the Korean War, 88.
occurrence\(^98\)), the standard operating procedure was to continue to monitor the road with aircraft, thus guaranteeing information. For instance:

The most significant enemy activity was the unconfirmed sighting of extensive vehicular convoy movements south, toward and through, Pyongyang. Constant air surveillance of the routes between Sariwon and Sunchon is now being maintained.\(^99\)

While these reports were never confirmed, prisoner of war [POW] reports by the end of October were presenting a picture of at least small-scale infiltration.\(^100\) General Almond, commander of X Corps, even personally interrogated some of the Chinese prisoners.\(^101\) Nevertheless, these reports never led to a fundamental rethinking of strategy at the military level, let alone the geo-political level.

Other intelligence sources, outside of the military chain of command, also echoed these reports through State reports that originated in Moscow, Hong Kong, and Taibei, as well as through the reporting of other allied nations' foreign ministries and military attaches. For instance, "Earlier intelligence reports had indicated that, since July, sizable Chinese ground forces had been moving into Manchuria from distant regions of the country."\(^102\) The CIA, in a major survey regarding the prospect of Chinese entry in early September 1950 also noted the enormous force in Manchuria:

\(^98\) Such reports litter the SITREP's beginning in September and continuing through the Chinese offensives. See, for instance "Joint Daily SITREP No. 69 (September 4, 1950)," "Joint Daily SITREP No. 98 (October 3, 1950)," "Joint Daily SITREP No. 102 (October 7, 1950)," etc., all in Joint Daily SITREP Collection.

\(^99\) "Joint Daily SITREP No. 99 (October 4, 1950)," in Ibid.

\(^100\) See "Joint Daily SITREP, No. 124 (October 30, 1950)," in Ibid. In this SITREP, summaries of recent POW interrogations are reported, including discussion of a 5,000 person convoy crossing one of the Yalu Bridges and the presence of several units at regimental strength (including artillery).


\(^102\) Stueck, The Korean War, 90.
Following the fall of Manchuria there were approximately 565,000 Military District (MD) troops in Manchuria (including 165,100 ex-Nationalists), and possibly 100,000 to 125,000 of these MD troops have now been integrated into the regular army and organized as combat forces. These units, as well as the remaining MD troops, probably are Soviet-equipped. In addition, reports during the past three months have indicated a considerably increase in regular troop strength in Manchuria. It is estimated that the major elements of Lin Piao's 4th Field Army—totalling perhaps 100,000 combat veterans—are now in Manchuria and are probably located along or adjacent to the Korean border, in position for rapid commitment in Korea.

Approximately 210,000 Communist regulars under Nieh Jung-chen's commander are presently deployed in the North China area. Some of these troops have been reported enroute to Manchuria.103

Even more ominously, "Washington also received a report, based on air reconnaissance, of a large mechanized convoy moving into North Korea from Manchuria."104 There were also signs of Communist air forces massing north of the Yalu on October 18:

The Commanding General, FEAF, has reported the observation ... of 75-100 aircraft at Antung Airfield, Manchuria. The observation of this unusually heavy concentration of aircraft was made by six crew members of an aircraft from the 31st Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron. ... The aircraft on Antung were spaced in six rows of 14 aircraft each, and there were additional aircraft scattered around the airfield.105

When follow up reconnaissance flights sortied, they found the airfield empty.

Indeed, in some cases the intelligence was falsely suggesting the Chinese had already entered North Korea in the days immediately before the United States crossed the 38th Parallel. Two separate Daily Intelligence Summaries (DISs) for the UN Command made this point. The first on October 3 "reported some evidence that twenty Chinese communist divisions were in North Korea and had been there since September 10."106

The second on October 5 "noted the purported entry into North Korea of nine Chinese


104 Stueck, The Korean War, 93-94. It appears this was conveyed on October 4, 1950.


106 Schnabel, United States Army in the Korean War, 199.
Twomey, *The Military Lens*

divisions. Based on evidence from the Chinese side, it is clear these reports are false, and indeed, it appears the DIS did not find the reports to be entirely convincing (and the reports convey that). Nevertheless, they were included in the final reports and would have shaped American leader’s understandings at the time.

Again, while some of this evidence might have been explained away as primarily defensive deployments, not all of it could. The massing of troops at border crossings is a clear sign of offensive capability. Reports of troops (even when false) in North Korea is another sign of the same. Moving large numbers of troops to forward positions does not make sense for a military force geared toward defense. Finally, the numbers were simply of a scale that should have raised eyebrows. At the time that Chinese troop numbers in Manchuria were thought to be nearly half a million, the total U.S. force on the Korean Peninsula was less than 150,000.

All the while, MacArthur continued to insist that there was no sign of “present entry into North Korea by major Soviet or Chinese Communist Forces.” Even at a much a later point, once the Chinese forces engaged the U.S. forces in North Korea, the United States continued to ignore important evidence such as prisoners-of-war who spoke

107 Ibid., 200.

108 Blair suggest that at the end of October X Corps had some 50,000 U.S. soldiers with something just over 100,000 in Eighth Army (the latter includes both the Commonwealth Brigade and 1-2 Korean divisions. Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 366-67. Using a different methodology: at the time of the Inchon landing, including the landing force, there were 6 divisions plus approximately 3 unattached task forces of brigade strength, in Korea, which suggests approximately 140,000 troops.

Chinese and claimed to be from large Chinese units that were not known to be in
Northeast China, let alone North Korea.  

The point here is, while the numbers were often somewhat lower than actual
Chinese deployments, American decisionmakers had access to estimates from a variety of
sources that were approximately correct regarding the scale and pace of Chinese
deployments.  

They simply did not find them threatening. The CIA’s summary
statement of October 12, 1950 illustrates these blinders well:

Despite statements by Chou En-lai, troop movements to Manchuria, and propaganda
charges of atrocities and border violations, there are no convincing indications of an
actual Chinese Communist intention to resort to full-scale intervention in Korea.

One wonders what evidence would have been convincing to the CIA if statements by
senior leaders, troop deployments of enormous scale, and preparing the populace through
propaganda were not. A similar reaction existed within the theater. General Ridgway
wrote later,

As for the intervention of the Chinese, MacArthur simply closed his ears to their threats
and apparently ignored or belittled the first strong evidence that they had crossed the
Yalu in force.

10 Wainstock, Truman, Macarthur, and the Korean War, 79. Indeed, even more interestingly, the later
prisoners of war reports in mid-November—those suggesting that the Chinese were withdrawing after
their First Campaign—were given credence. Thus, when the reports fit the bias of underestimating
the enemy, they were heard. Otherwise, they were ignored.

11 Cohen makes precisely the same point: “Although FEC [the Far Eastern Command] consistently
underestimated the number to troops actually in Korea … it tracked the buildup in Manchuria more
accurately. FEC estimated that regular forces (i.e., excluding district troops and militia) totaling
116,000 men in July had grown to 217,000 men in early August and grown to at least 415,000 and
possibly 463,000 by early November. Ironically, then, FEC intelligence had a better grasp of the size
and disposition of Chinese forces not in contact with UN troops in Korea, than of those who actually
were.” Cohen, “Only Half the Battle,” 133.

12 Central Intelligence Agency, "Document 197. ORE 58-50 Excerpt, 12 October 1950, Critical
Situations in the Far East," 450.

13 Matthew B. Ridgway, The Korean War: How We Met the Challenge: How All-out Asian War Was
(Garden City, N.Y.; Doubleday, 1967), 67. There is no question that Mao and the Chinese
leadership did their best to minimize the signs of their presence in Korea, particularly in November of
1950. Nevertheless, as shown above, the United States did have information of substantial forces in
It is important to point out that this wide range of evidence was reaching a wide range of people in the American leadership. Certainly, MacArthur was highly motivated to move northward. However, Ridgway suggests the biases were not just confined to MacArthur, but were endemic throughout the U.S. military:

But it was not just the High Command [MacArthur’s HQ] who refused to read the clear meaning of the mounting evidence. Typical of the reluctance of all our troops, even the lower ranks to take the Chinese threat seriously was the reaction of the forces positioned in and around the village of Unsan, just north of the Chongchon River, and about sixty miles south of the Yalu, at the end of October. Reports came in from several different quarters concerning the presence of large concentrations of Chinese troops. ... [Ridgway then chronicles seven different such reports at the tactical level] ... Still the United States command was reluctant to accept this accumulating evidence.114

Ridgeway continues, describing the cavalier attitude at various army, corps, divisional, and even regimental levels. It seems a stretch to argue that MacArthur’s attitude would have overrode potential concerns throughout his command structure. Beyond that, the CIA reports went to a wide audience in Washington and Tokyo. Clearly, the reports that were trickling up through the foreign embassies would reach the Secretary of State. This multitude of intelligence streams cannot be explained away by invoking MacArthur’s incentives to ignore them. The blinders were worn much more widely. The next section explains why that was the case.

*People’s War Was Not Threatening*

So, if Panikkar’s credibility cannot account for the failure of communication, and if the United States knew of the Chinese military signals, what does account for the catastrophic deterrence failure? American leaders heard the Chinese warnings, but they just did not find them—underpinned as they were with a People’s War strategy—to be

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114 Ibid., 52-53.
particularly threatening. Evidence from a variety of sources bears this out and strongly supports the link between different theories of victory and underestimation ($H_1$) as well as several of the theory's component predictions. In this case, differences in theory of victory did correlate with underestimation (Prediction #1). Leaders did denigrate their adversary’s theory of victory (Prediction #2), did not have nuanced discussions of their adversary’s strategy (Prediction #3), and believed that Washington’s view of warfare would be dominant on the battlefield (Prediction #4). Further, the very large difference in the theories of victory led to large and frequent underestimations (Prediction #10). This section will summarize the strong, process tracing evidence on these points.

At a narrow level, American views of Chinese doctrine as ineffective clearly shaped the assessments of Chinese capabilities:

The JIC [Joint Intelligence Committee] also considered that the past combat experience of the PLA soldiers was inappropriate to the operations in Korea. Their previous fighting had involved “hit and run” guerilla tactics; they had never met “a well-trained force with high morale equipped with modern weapons and possessing the will and the skill to use those weapons.” In addition, China had “practically no capability” of reinforcing or supporting the North Korean navy and not much in the way of an air force either.\footnote{Foot, The Wrong War, 81. The JIC report was dated July 6.}

this point, "Open intervention would be extremely costly unless protected by powerful
Soviet air cover and naval support." 117

**Figure 4-2: B-29s attacking Chinese position in North Korea**

Cohen makes the point that the successes of the USAF earlier in the conflict,
against the North Korean forces, biased the view of airpower's utility later. He
describes studies coming out of the Far East Command on the Air Force campaigns
against the North Koreans in the first phase of the war, as they attacked down the length
of the peninsula.

  Situations in the Far East."

118 Source: ARC Identifier: 542229 (ca. 01/1951); Still Picture Records LICON, Special Media Archives
  Services Division (NWCS-S), National Archives at College Park.
on the campaigns against the NKPA. These retrospective analyses suggested that a massive air interdiction campaign, coupled with close air support of American troops during the previous summer had played a critical role in the destruction of the NKPA. These findings—based largely on interrogation of NKPA prisoners—paved the way for MacArthur’s blithe remark to President Truman at Wake Island, “if the Chinese tried to get down to Pyongyang there would be the greatest slaughter.”

This growing—and, one must say, solidly based—faith in the efficacy of close air support and air interdiction of enemy lines of communication colored not only MacArthur’s command decisions, but the nature of supporting intelligence assessment. This overconfidence in the efficacy of air power would color FEC’s estimates of Chinese military effectiveness and the Chinese strategic calculus until after the launching of the second Chinese attack in November.19

Cohen’s suggestion that the U.S. confidence in airpower affected the American assessment of Beijing’s strategic calculus is precisely the argument of this dissertation. The Daily Intelligence Summary for 12 October, read by the president, explained why it did not expect Chinese entry:

The Chinese Communists undoubtedly feared the consequences of war with the United States… In the unlikely event that the Chinese entered the war without the benefit of Soviet naval and air support, they were bound to suffer costly losses… This report agreed with many others that from a military standpoint, the most favorable time for the intervention had passed.20

Again, this assessment of intent that comes from estimations of capabilities is predicted by \( H_{2B} \) and Prediction #5.

As mentioned above, an RB-29 from the 31st Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron had sighted a large deployment of MiGs near the Yalu on October 18 that disappeared the next morning. However, this datum, too, was explained away:

Stratemeyer [the air force commander in theater] certainly did not believe that the Chinese meant to use these fighters to attack his planes since they had not done so when the observation aircraft, an easy target, had come close. “I believe it especially significant,” he told Vandenberg, “that, if deployment for possible action in Korea were under way, it would be highly unlikely that aircraft would have been positioned to attract attention from south of the border.”21


121 *Ibid.*, 231. See also Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Korea, 1950-1953*, 217-19. Interestingly, it appears that the planes were lined up on the airfield in Antung without the benefit of revetments for
Here Stratemeyer is projecting his own understanding of military doctrine on to the Communist forces. He concludes the Communists were bluffing because he would have ensured the secrecy of his own deployment had he been on the other side.

Similarly, the U.S. discussions of its own capability vis-à-vis the Chinese exuded confidence. Even well into the main Chinese intervention in late November, the Chief of Naval Operations was suggesting, "the Chinese were probably afraid of attacks on their cities and might hold off for that reason." As noted in the previous chapter, Mao and the other senior Chinese leaders had long been cavalier about the vulnerability of the Chinese cities.

Not only was People's War not viewed as threatening, but also the prospect of limited war was downplayed, if considered at all. As one contemporary intelligence officer argues, an important reason for the massive intelligence failures leading up to the war was that the United States conflated war with the Chinese in Korea with general war against the Soviets.

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It is unclear precisely the nature of these planes, although data from the Chinese and Soviet side suggest it was a deployment of Soviet Air Force MIG-15s (or, possibly, MIG-9s). The first large scale transfer of planes from the Soviet Union to China occurred on October 14, and it seems unlikely that they would have been deployed a mere 4 days later. See Zhang Xiaoming, *Red Wings over the Yalu: China, the Soviet Union, and the Air War in Korea*, 1st ed. (College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 61 and 84ff. The Soviets had been deployed in the area and were used along the Yalu throughout November and December. Only in late March 1951 did the Soviets become heavily involved in the air war (from bases in both North Korea and China). See Zhang Xiaoming, *Red Wings over the Yalu*, Chapter 6: Soviet Air Operations in Korea.


123 See P.K. Rose, "Two Strategic Intelligence Mistakes in Korea, 1950," *Studies in Intelligence*, no. 11 (2001). Note that Rose seems to downplay the degree of cooperation that did exist among the various communist countries. More recently available evidence from those countries has deepened the understanding of that cooperation. Still, Rose's treatment of the U.S. analysis process is excellent.
The United States was caught by surprise because, within political and military leadership circles in Washington, the perception existed that only the Soviets could order an invasion by a "client state" and that such an act would be a prelude to a world war. Washington was confident that the Soviets were not ready to take such a step, and, therefore, that no invasion would occur.\textsuperscript{124}

This, too, is consistent with the perceptions stemming from the American theory of victory. As noted in the previous chapter, there was a near exclusive focus on general war, and—until after the Korean War—little consideration of the particular nature of limited wars.

All of these assessments were precisely what this dissertation's theory would predict. Washington viewed Chinese military signals through the lens of American strategic beliefs and doctrine, leading it to underestimate their significance. The hypothesis linking the misperception of an adversary's signals to the underestimations of them that come from differing theories of victory (H\textsubscript{2B}) is strongly supported here.

\textit{China Had Already Missed Its Chance}

Another major contributor to the American tendency to ignore the evidence of Chinese intent and capability to intervene was the timing of the Chinese signals.\textsuperscript{125} In short, many believed that China had already missed its best chance to intervene. This perception was heavily dependent on American strategic perspectives regarding optimal strategies. In the American view, the best time to intervene would have been when the

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.: 3.

\textsuperscript{125} Along these lines one CIA operative has recently argued that the United States ignored signs of the Chinese troop deployment because of its belief that Chinese intervention would be equated with general war, a situation they did not foresee as likely. \textit{Ibid.} As discussed in the previous chapter, the United States was heavily focused on the prospect for general war between the United States and the Communist nations. That author summarizes similar information to that presented above, but is less able to document the link between the ignoring of that evidence (which certainly occurred) to the specific American expectation of intervention only in the context of general war.
United States' back was to the wall at Pusan, and it was most vulnerable. American strategic doctrine would have suggested an attack at that point to pursue a complete victory. Willoughby, MacArthur's intelligence officer, put it succinctly in October: "The auspicious time for intervention has long since passed." Even signals from foreign embassies were discounted on these grounds. For instance, the American ambassador in Russia, Alan G. Kirk, used this line of argument to undermine the signals he had received from contacts in Moscow regarding the likelihood of Chinese entry if the United States crossed the 38th parallel:

In commenting on this information, Kirk says he finds it difficult to accept these reports as authoritative analyses of Chinese Communist plans. He takes the line that the logical moment for Communist armed intervention came when the UN forces were desperately defending a small area in southern Korea and when the influx of an overwhelming number of Chinese ground forces would have proved a decisive factors.

The CIA made the same point in its own summary analysis under the heading "Factors Opposing Chinese Communist Intervention" by arguing: "From a military standpoint the most favorable time for intervention in Korea has passed." Thus, "policymakers in Washington simply did not believe Beijing's warnings" because—viewed through the American perceptual lens—the militarily advantageous time to intervene had already passed. The official Army history of the war concurs on this point.

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130 Ibid., 450. And note that the general conclusions of this study, as noted elsewhere, did not expect Chinese entry.

131 Chen Jian, *China's Road*, 169-170.
In China, other factors seemed more important in timing their intervention. Some sources of delays on the Chinese side stemmed from difficulties in logistics and intra-alliance coordination issues. However, if the Americans inferred anything from this, they mistook a limitation in capabilities for a signal of intent. But more fundamentally, as noted above, the Chinese strategic thinking emphasizing the value in waiting until the U.S. supply lines were long, precisely the opposite of the American view. A report written by the senior commanders of the NEBDA in late August made clear the differences in Chinese thinking. It "suggested that the best timing for entering the war might be when the UN forces had counterattacked back across the 38th parallel, because this would put China in a politically and militarily more favorable position to defeat the enemy." Other Chinese sources concur, emphasizing long vulnerable supply lines of the United States as they moved north.

Chinese behavior should not have puzzled those familiar with Mao's strategy in previous wars. A key point in Maoist thought was the trading of space for time. The ideal moment to attack an enemy of superior firepower came when its forces advanced beyond their major supply bases into rugged terrain lacking easily defensible lines of transportation and communication.

(To some extent, this misperception can be viewed as a difference in perspective about intent: the United States viewed Chinese motivations as primarily offensive, thus suggesting that the best time to attack would be at the high tide of the North Korean offensive. Had the United States considered the prospect for defensive motivations

132 See Schnabel, United States Army in the Korean War, 277.
133 On the former see Chen Jian, China's Road, 148. On the latter see Thomas J. Christensen, Worse Than a Monolith: Alliances in U.S.-PRC Security Relations (forthcoming).
134 Chen Jian, China's Road, 152.
135 Ibid. Also see Zhang Shuguang, Mao's Military Romanticism, 76.
136 Stueck, The Korean War, 112.
The Chinese, because of their views on warfare thought the best time to intervene militarily would be as the United States moved north, with long supply lines. "Lure them in deep." The United States thought the best time for the Chinese to have intervened would have been earlier, when American forces were pinned down. These different perspectives shaped each side's policy, and through that, the American assessment of the meaning of Chinese signals and thus their intent. Both sides expected their view of warfare to be borne out on the battlefield (Prediction #4) nor was there any attempt to have a nuanced discussion of the adversary’s thinking on the same issue (Prediction #3).

**Dissenting Views from Outside the Military Leadership**

Some American analysts did better at assessing the signals from China than others. While the CIA was often wrong, it was rarely as extreme as the Pentagon in its cavalier appraisal of the Chinese threat. Writing in early November, the Agency concluded that "The Chinese Communists ... main motivation at present appears to be to establish a limited "cordon sanitaire" south of the Yalu River.” On November 24, the day before

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137 "Memorandum by the Director of the central Intelligence Agency (Smith) to the President," November 1, 1950, in *F.R.U.S., 1950, Vol. 7*, 1025. See also the CIA's NIE of November 8, 1950.
the Chinese attacked in force, the CIA submitted yet another NIE on the prospect for Chinese intervention in which it became increasingly cautious: "It is estimated that [the Chinese Communists] do not have the military capability of driving the UN forces from the peninsula, but that they do have the capability of forcing them to withdraw to defensive positions for prolonged and inconclusive operations."  

Interestingly, the senior China analyst at the Department of State, Edmund Clubb, was able to interpret many of these signals remarkably well even at a very early date. Writing after the first battle that destroyed the 8th Cavalry (discussed in detail below) but before the large-scale Chinese attacks of late November, he joined the debate over the true intent of the Chinese. He is worth quoting at length. After noting that there was now undisputable evidence that the Chinese were directly involved in fighting, he goes on to warn that Chinese intent was not likely to be limited. 

It seems unlikely that the Chinese Communists would be prepared to venture into the Korean theater in such a limited manner as would confront them with the danger of being promptly bloodied and thrown out by the force which they themselves had consistently characterized as a "a paper tiger". The recrudescence of Chinese Communist propaganda whipping up enthusiasm of the Chinese people for "resistance to aggression in Korea" would appear to indicate that a large effort may be involved. ... The move of intervention would be designed, in short, to achieve some real measure of victory. Although firm information to reach conclusions is still lacking, therefore, it would be hardly safe to assume other than that (1) the Chinese Communists, if they are intervening directly in Korea, propose to do so in considerable force ...  

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139 Clubb was later purged from State in the McCarthy era. For an interesting discussion of this period, see Paul G. Pierpaoli, Truman and Korea: The Political Culture of the Early Cold War (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999).

140 "Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Chinese Affairs (Clubb) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Rusk)," November 1, 1950 in F.R.U.S., 1950, Vol. 7, 1023-25.
Clubb also made similar points in a number of memos in early November. Others at State expressed views similar to Clubb’s. Even mid-level officials there recommended great caution. Indeed, even Acheson seemed more able to recognize the Chinese threats for what they were than the military leadership was.

Leaders who are outside the military or are not well versed in strategic thinking should be less vulnerable to the pernicious effects of biases from various theories of victory (as suggested in Prediction #11). This appears to be such a case: Clubb and others at State (and to a lesser extent, others outside the Pentagon) were far more correct than the military leaders at the Pentagon and in the field, described above. Even though most of these assessments came too late to avoid the escalation of the war (although had they been listened to, the U.S. defeats would have been lessened), their differences with contemporary military officials are notable and are explained by this dissertation’s theory.

Summary

It was thus that a range of military and diplomatic warnings did not lead to deep introspection in Washington over the prospects of Chinese involvement. In a recent

141 E.g., “Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Chinese Affairs (Clubb) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Rusk),” November 4, 1950 in Ibid., 1038-41. Cohen echoes this point regarding Clubb’s views; see Cohen, "Only Half the Battle," 141.


143 Foot points out that Livingston Merchant and U. Alexis Johnson both recommended caution. Foot, The Wrong War, 80.

144 “There is no doubt but that Chinese military intervention is substantial, there is no reason to suppose that it will not increase, and that very serious political and military implications are thereby raised.” Dean Acheson, “The Secretary of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom,” November 6, 1950, in F.R.U.S., 1950, Vol. 7, 1052. Note that this statement occurs after the smaller scale Chinese offensive.

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book on the senior American leadership in the war, one scholar summarizes the American analysis in mid November 1950:

Despite the high number of American casualties, China's increased bellicosity, and the CCF presence in North Korea, both the U.N. Command and Washington downplayed the threat of large-scale Chinese intervention. Although it had shifted from the academic to the serious, said MacArthur, full-scale Chinese intervention appeared “unlikely.” On whether the Communists had made a decision to mount a full-scale offensive, said the CIA, all available evidence remained inconclusive. Washington knew neither how many Communist Chinese were in North Korea, said Bradley, nor their military objective. “Our people,” said General Charles D. Palmer later, “didn’t want to accept the fact that the Chinese were there in force.” Washington preferred, added Willoughby, “the opiate of wishful thinking, the myopic resignation of the ostrich.”

Eliot Cohen comes to a similar conclusion:

The failures—or more accurately, semifailures—in warning and order of battle intelligence have received a good deal of attention from students of the Chinese surprise attack in 1950. Another more serious and generally ignored type of intelligence failure occurred, however; failure to gauge the enemy’s way of war, his methods, strengths, and weaknesses. It is in the picture of the enemy held by U.S. forces in the Far East that we find one of the chief sources of the failure of the winter of 1950.

The United States crossed the 38th parallel not due to a lack of information about the size of the Chinese force or its intentions (as the Alternate Hypothesis would have predicted), but rather because Washington was unable to evaluate the signals because of biases that derived from beliefs about the effective use of military power. This strongly supports the link between the misperception from differing theories of victory and the faulty interpretation of the adversary’s signals (H2B) as well as providing support for the link between those misperceptions and assessments of the general balance of power (H2A).

**Post-Event Evaluations by the United States**

Several of the theory’s secondary predictions center on post-event evaluations from the two sides. In particular, was there a degree of surprise regarding the enemy’s

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intent (Prediction #9) and the effectiveness of his military forces and doctrines once the war was joined (Prediction #8)? The following sections develop answers to these questions. So firm were American beliefs about Chinese intent that the initial reaction to the PLA’s entry—both on the ground in Korea and up the chain of command—was one of denial. The next section goes on to document American surprise at the effectiveness of the Chinese forces through, among other pieces of evidence, contemporary evaluations during the war and post-war changes in American forces and strategies.

**Initial Reactions of Denial**

The thickness of the blinders worn by the U.S. decisionmakers is illustrated by their initial reaction to the Chinese intervention. This section presents evidence on both the tactical and strategic levels; then some dissenting voices from these appraisals are discussed. As with the Chinese side in the previous case, this material supports the dissertation’s theory in many areas. First, it further bolsters the case for the hypothesis linking differing theories of victory to underestimation (H₁). It also supports several of the predictions linking this underestimation of the adversary to perceptions of the overall balance of power, the denigration of the adversary, and the simplistic discussions of his strategies (Predictions #1-3). The large difference between the two countries’ theories of victory should and did lead to large scale and high frequency of misperceptions (Prediction #10). Beyond that, the evidence presented here links the flawed interpretation of the Chinese signals to the underestimations of capability that the theory predicts (and thus supports H₂b and the associated Prediction #7). Even in the face of hard evidence to the contrary, American leaders continued to believe that the Chinese
would not intervene. Lastly, there is significant evidence that the Air Force in particular assumed that the tactics and doctrines from its theory of victory would be key to winning battles on the ground (thus supporting Prediction #4).

Tactical Level Over-Confidence
Tactically, there were many miscalculations. Even after the Chinese First Offensive destroyed a South Korean division and severely damaged several other South Korean regiments, Eighth Army intelligence was estimating only 2,000 Chinese soldiers in its sector, grouped in two regiments. 147 As POW reports accumulated after the beginning of that offensive, the U.S. commanders faced some disturbing information: the number of different large units that the prisoners claimed to be from was high. Rather than conclude from this that the Chinese had a sizable force in country, the intelligence staff of Eighth Army offered this novel interpretation to Washington in a cable on November 1 (as passed on by the State Department):

On basis [of] information obtained from Sino prisoners[, ] which of course [is] subject to confirmation[, ] 8th Army Intelligence considers there now [to be] two Sino regiments, [and it is] possible a third, in [the] 8th Army sector of North Korea. Appears these units were formed by taking one battalion each of six divisions said to constitute [the] Sino 39th and 40th Armies, deployed along Manchurian-North Korean border.

Information from [the] 10th Corps area indicates a total of 18 Sino prisoners [have been] taken through October 31. It is believed these Chinese come from units of Sino Communist 42nd Army.

8th Army Intelligence is of [the] view, with which Embassy [is] inclined to concur, [that the] Sino Communists will avoid overt intervention 148

147 Blair, The Forgotten War, 378. These reports were from October 30 and 31, 1950.

Twomey, The Military Lens

The more straightforward, and in retrospect accurate, conclusion would have been that the three Armies had moved in themselves, en masse.149

The first significant engagement between the U.S. forces and the PLA came in early November.150

As darkness fell on the night of November 1, CCF troops hit the 8th Cavalry Regiment of the 1st Cavalry Division near Unsan. As their blaring bungles and screeching whistles 'startled' the Americans, they attacked with mortars, grenades, and rifle and machine-gun fire, surrounding some units and forcing others to retreat through the hills. After two days of fighting, the Chinese had "effectively destroyed the 8th Cavalry Regiment."151

The official Army history records flatly that the Regiment was "very roughly handled."152

An American General in Korea on a fact finding mission concluded "the Chinese had destroyed the 8th Cavalry Regimental Combat Team."153 Ridgway notes that the regiment "lost more than half its authorized strength at Unsan, and a great share of its equipment, including twelve 105-mm. Howitzers, nine tanks, more than 125 trucks, and a dozen recoilless rifles."154

Even when Chinese became heavily involved with the U.S. forces, American perceptions of confidence were hard to shake. The story of the destruction of the 8th Cavalry itself unfolds as a series of underestimations of the enemy. The Regiment originally deployed wearing summer uniforms "believing [their] assigned task would be a

149 The command and control difficulties of selecting individual battalions from different divisions and reconstituting them under new regimental leadership would have been severe. The whole point of having divisional headquarters units is a recognition that battalions are not so easily plugged in to different command structures.

150 The offensive began a few days earlier, on October 25, although initially only South Korean units were hit. See Blair, The Forgotten War, 371.

151 Wainstock, Truman, Macarthur, and the Korean War, 77.

152 Schnabel, United States Army in the Korean War, 235.

153 Quoted at Ibid., 257.

simple power punch through a thin NKPA line, followed by a one- or two-day dash to the Yalu, then a return to the home base in Japan by Thanksgiving Day.155 In the days before the Chinese attack, its 3rd Battalion, deployed on point, was "casually disposed" in a valley rather than in surrounding high ground, and the battalion commander ignored suggestions to move toward that safer position.156 Only after the Regiment was completely cut off was it ordered to withdraw, and by that time, its plan to do so "had no chance of succeeding."157 An attempt to use another heavily reinforced regiment to open a corridor to Unsan, where the 8th was holed up, was jauntily ordered as the following situation report (SITREP) conveys: "Other elements of the 5th RCT are enroute to assist the 8th U.S. Cavalry RCT."158 However, this effort, too failed in the face of surprisingly strong Chinese opposition. The very next day the SITREP's tone is more pessimistic: "Heavy resistance from strong enemy forces prevented the 5th and elements of the 7th U.S. Cavalry RCT's from reaching the 8th U.S. Cavalry RCT (-) which was isolated by a hostile envelopment in the Unsan area."159 Only then was it clear that the 8th had been destroyed as a functioning formation.

155 Blair, The Forgotten War, 380.
156 Ibid., 381.
157 Ibid., 383.
158 "Joint Daily SITREP, No. 128 (November 2, 1950)," in Joint Daily Sitrep Collection.
159 "Joint Daily SITREP, No. 129 (November 3, 1950)," in Ibid. See also Blair, The Forgotten War, 384.
The confusion was not limited to the 8th Cavalry. Corps commanders across North Korea were "profoundly puzzled" by the situation they faced. Chinese troop formations were not even shown on operational maps until November 6, 1950. On November 12, the X Corps intelligence chief took stock of the recent battles and reports of significant Chinese forces to his north and northwest, but nevertheless was confident of his units ability to remain on the offensive and victorious:


161 Blair, The Forgotten War, 450.

162 See Joint Daily Sitrep Collection. The first time Chinese units show up is in "Joint Daily SITREP, No. 128 (November 6, 1950)." At that point three units are listed: the 55th, 56th, and 124th divisions.
Three unconfirmed reports from different sources have indicated the buildup of enemy strength in the northeaster section of Korea, in the vicinity of Hoeryong and Chongjin. The reports claim that large Chinese Communist units are present in this area. Should this information be true, it would indicate a significant increase in the enemy’s capabilities on the east coast avenue of approach to the Korean border.

Conclusions:

a. The enemy will, if strongly attacked, continue his retreat to the north.\textsuperscript{163}

Two days later, Quinn’s optimism continued to show in his reports:

Several recent unconfirmed reports, primarily from civilian sources, indicate a possible concentration and build up of enemy forces in the area west and southwest of Choshin Reservoir. Considerable number of CCF troops have been reported in this locality and air observers have sighted at least one convoy moving southwest from Yudam-ni toward Chang-ni. The enemy is in position to attempt a penetration of the UN front between the X Corps and Eighth Army, although such an operation would be faced by extremely difficult cross country movement. The enemy’s capability to launch an attack against the X Corps from the west is restricted by the mountainous terrain through which such an attack would have to be made. Winter weather will still further limit this capability.\textsuperscript{164}

The most Quinn is willing to allow is that the Chinese might be driven by a need to forage for supplies, and be forced to attack: “The enemy has demonstrated his ability to cross difficulty ground, and the cold and lack of food may encourage him to attack in order to obtain supplies.”\textsuperscript{165} Quinn’s overall, optimistic conclusions about the prospects for the X Corps offensive at the end of his report remained unchanged.

By November 25, on the eve of the second Chinese offensive, again Quinn shows an awareness of the buildup of the Chinese, but retains an almost Panglossian confidence. In terms of awareness of the enemy, he reports:

Additional indications of a CCF buildup on the west flank of X Corps in the Sachang-ni Yongdong-ni sector have been received. ... All of this evidence tends to substantiate the statements of civilians, refugees, PWs [prisoners of war], deserters and other sources that

\textsuperscript{163} G-2 (Colonel William Quinn), "Headquarters X Corps, Periodic Intelligence Report #47 (November 12, 1950)". Military History Institute Library, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, Penn. In the next day’s report, Quinn downplays reports of Chinese soldiers in rear areas.

\textsuperscript{164} G-2 (Colonel William Quinn), "Headquarters X Corps, Periodic Intelligence Report #50 (November 15, 1950)". Military History Institute Library, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, Penn.

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
strong reinforcements, including large numbers of CCF have been recently moving into the area between Sachang-ni and Choshin Reservoir.\textsuperscript{166}

He briefly mentions this force’s offensive potential buried in the analysis of his report, but his final conclusions omit any mention of risk:

Conclusions:
- b. Enemy forces in the western sector of the X Corps zone will attempt to defend generally along the line Chagangjin-Yudam-ni-Sachang-ni. If forced to withdraw, they will take up new defensive positions in the Chiang-no redoubt area.\textsuperscript{167}

While suggesting they have the capability to defend (although even here he hints that they will not be able to hold the line again the X Corps), he does not emphasize that they also have a dangerous offensive capability.

Quinn’s boss, General Almond, shared that optimism. On the morning of November 28, after the Chosin Reservoir battle had begun, he blustered to his commanders:

The enemy who is delaying you for the moment is nothing more than remnants of Chinese divisions fleeing north. ... We’re still attacking and we’re going all the way to the Yalu. Don’t let a bunch of Chinese laundrymen stop you.\textsuperscript{168}

Immediately Almond ordered an offensive into the teeth of the waiting Chinese. In the Chosin Reservoir battle that followed two marine regiments were cut off and a “rescue” task force of brigade strength suffered 40 percent casualties.\textsuperscript{169}

Soldiers on the ground had taken their cues from their leaders.

On the night of November 25 Eighth Army was almost casually disposed. The men had two successful days of combat under their belts; the task lying ahead did not appear to hold great danger. Few men took the precaution of digging foxholes in the frozen ground.\textsuperscript{170}

\textsuperscript{166} G-2 (Colonel William Quinn), "Headquarters X Corps, Periodic Intelligence Report #60 (November 25, 1950)", Military History Institute Library, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, Penn.

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{168} Quoted in Blair, \textit{The Forgotten War}, 462.

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 508 and 520.

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 440.
The next day, the main Chinese attack pushed the Eighth Army into the longest retreat in American military history.

During the retreat of Eighth Army along the western side of the peninsula, there was a real danger of its line of retreat being cut. However, the American forces realized this only belatedly. General Dutch Keiser, commander of the 2nd Infantry Division had trouble believing he had been outflanked by Chinese soldiers without motor transport.

Keiser continued to misread his situation grossly. He persisted in the belief that the roadblock was shallow or "local," that with a concerted "push" and with FEAF help it could be overcome, that the road beyond the block was "clear." 171

As a result, his 2nd Division suffered over 30 percent casualties. 172 Within days, Keiser, his assistant, and several of his regimental commanders were fired. 173

**Strategic Level Over-Optimism**
Both Tokyo and Washington continued to grossly underestimate the threat posed by the Chinese, even after the mauling of the 8th Cavalry in the first days of November.

**The View from Tokyo.**
MacArthur was initially unruffled by the early defeat:

The eventual response from Tokyo was, however, one of irritation and impatience at Walker's failure to move forward on schedule. No matter how thoroughly convinced the 1st Cavalry Division might have become that the Chinese had entered the war in force, the Commander in Chief [MacArthur] persisted in a mood of renewed optimism. 174

Indeed, on November 4, he exuded confidence regarding the low likelihood that the Chinese would intervene in spite of the mauling a regiment under his command had just received. 175 By the sixth, however, he was pleading for permission to bomb bridges and

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171 Ibid., 482.
172 Ibid.
173 Ibid., 497.
175 Wainstock, *Truman, MacArthur, and the Korean War*, 82.
supply lines near the Chinese border.\textsuperscript{176} By the ninth, he had stopped debating Chinese intent; he now assumed they were going to intervene in force. But he continued to believe in his own robust capabilities, particularly in the ability of airpower to “interdict Chinese reinforcements from Manchuria and to destroy those already in Korea.”\textsuperscript{177}

However, as soon as the Chinese pulled back, in the tactical lull between their First and Second Offensives, MacArthur’s confidence returned.\textsuperscript{178}

His intelligence reports were, indeed, ambiguous. Chinese units are not listed on the Daily Joint SITREP maps until November 6, and the narrative of these reports only refers to generic “enemy forces” as the attackers against the 8th Cavalry and the ROK units.\textsuperscript{179} Some reports suggested only a minimal Chinese presence in North Korea,\textsuperscript{180} while others implied a larger force.\textsuperscript{181} MacArthur sided with the former, concluding in mid-November that he was facing

\textsuperscript{176} Schnabel, \textit{United States Army in the Korean War}, 243-44.

\textsuperscript{177} Wainstock, \textit{Truman, Macarthur, and the Korean War}, 84.

\textsuperscript{178} See Schnabel, \textit{United States Army in the Korean War}, 251. This tactical lull was intended to create precisely that sense. Again see 陶文钊, <<中日关系史>> Tao Wenzhao, \textit{History of Sino-American Relations}, 32; Yu Bin, "What China Learned (2001)," 15. It is notable how readily the United States fell into the trap.

\textsuperscript{179} “Joint Daily SITREP, No. 128 (November 6, 1950),” in \textit{Joint Daily SITREP Collection}. Note Posen finds a similar phenomenon in a different set of daily reports (identified as “United Nations Command, GHQ, G-3 Operations Reports” available from British archival force; note these have a slightly different correlation between date and numbering, suggesting a different set of reports although their content overlaps heavily). See Posen, “The Chinese Intervention in Korea: A Case of Inadvertent Escalation”, 58, note 73.


Chapter 4: The United States Crosses the 38th Parallel

certainly no more than 30,000. ... They could not possibly have got more over with the surreptitiously covert means used. If they had moved in the open, they would have been detected by our Air Forces and our Intelligence.\(^{182}\)

In fact, his own intelligence at the time was estimating the “accepted” Chinese strength in North Korea to be 51,600 and “probable total” to be 76,800.\(^{183}\) In the context of this early defeat followed by ambiguous evidence, MacArthur nevertheless eagerly anticipated the beginning of his offensive: “this should for all practical purposes end the war.”\(^{184}\) (One military historian’s disparaging reference to this statement is suggestive of the degree of overconfidence that MacArthur possessed: “Seldom in any war had a commanding general so foolishly revealed his hand.”\(^{185}\))

Both MacArthur and his intelligence officer attributed their apparent success at forestalling further defeats through November to UN airpower.\(^{186}\) MacArthur’s pronouncement on 24 November, literally the day before the second Chinese attack exudes such confidence. “My air force for the past three weeks, in a sustained attack of model coordination and effectiveness, successfully interdicted enemy lines of support from the north so that further reinforcement therefrom has been sharply curtailed and essential supplies markedly limited.”\(^{187}\)

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182 “Memorandum of Conversation, by the Ambassador in Korea (Muccio),” November 17, 1950 in Ibid., 1175.


184 Schnabel, United States Army in the Korean War, 273.

185 Blair, The Forgotten War, 435.

186 Schnabel, United States Army in the Korean War, 275.

187 MacArthur was likely basing this conclusion on the tactical lull between the Chinese First and Second Offensives aimed to create precisely this sort of overconfidence. For MacArthur’s quote, see Ibid., 277-78. At that point in time, there is no evidence MacArthur feared that the troops he believed were cut off posed any fundamental danger to his command. That was to change in the days to come.

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Air Force commanders shared similarly biased views. The official Air Force history asserted: "Red China's Fourth Field Army was suffering frightful losses from Fifth Air Force attacks and from Eighth Army ground fire." However, since that force went on to retake the South Korean capital, the official history had to go on, allowing that somehow "it had enough strength to rout American ground forces defending Seoul."188 (The surprise of that author at the Chinese capabilities is almost palpable.189 One can imagine their reaction: "What? The enemy's army was still able to defeat us after we'd hit them with everything we had. Inconceivable! They must be willing to tolerate horrendous losses.")

Intelligence was a persistent problem for the MacArthur's command. As late as December 26, the United States had no real idea how many Chinese troops it was facing:

No one yet had a good idea of how many CCF troops had been committed to Korea or if the CCF had crossed the 38th Parallel in full force to invade South Korea. On the Eighth Army situation maps, Ridgeway remembered, the CCF was depicted merely by a large red "goose egg" with "174,000" scrawled on its center. The true figure was closer to 300,000.190

This was despite a truly massive intelligence gathering effort that had amassed some 27,643 photographs from aerial reconnaissance efforts.191 Again, the American confidence in their reconnaissance technology was to lead them to underestimate their adversary

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189 One is reminded of the demonization and dehumanization of the enemy that Dower chronicles in a different war across race lines. John W. Dower, War without Mercy (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).
190 Blair, The Forgotten War, 569.
Just as the destruction of the 8th Cavalry in late October and early November had occurred through a series of underestimations of the enemy, the strategic retreats of Eighth Army and X Corps exhibited repeated miscalculations. Initially, following the renewed Chinese attacks in late November, Eighth Army was to hold a line running east from Sinanju, some 70 miles from the Yalu River (and the border with China). Days later, it was to hold at Pyongyang, a further 50 miles south. Its next stopping point was near the 38th parallel, but again it was forced to displace, surrendering Seoul for the second time in the war.¹⁹²

Similarly, X Corps went from (1) being ordered to counterattack to relieve pressure on Eighth Army to (2) defending a defensive line in the Hamhung-Wonsan sector on November 30 to (3) withdrawing completely from North Korea on Christmas Eve.¹⁹³ Twenty-five years after the fact, General Almond, commander of the X Corps, still had trouble coming to terms with the mobility of the light Chinese forces on foot:

I have already said that the gap between the two forces [X Corps and Eighth Army] was interrupted by a difficult mountain range or series of mountain ranges and no road system between. It would have been impossible for any force to break the gap and supply itself except by air which the Chinese didn’t possess.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² For the detailed narrative of the retreat, see Blair, The Forgotten War, Part 8: Disaster and Retreat. Also see Futrell, The United States Air Force in Korea, 1950-1953, Chapter 8: Two Months of Defeat and Retreat.

¹⁹³ Blair, The Forgotten War. Note that the JCS at least was less overly optimistic regarding X Corps than MacArthur’s command by the end of November.

Twomey, The Military Lens

Of course, breaking the gap was precisely what the PLA’s 42nd and 38th Armies did.195

Blair, in the definitive military history of the United States in the Korean War, summarizes the blinders that inhibited MacArthur’s vision:

By November 28 it must have been clear to Douglas MacArthur that he had blundered badly in Korea. The wine of victory had turned to vinegar. In a broad sense, Inchon had become another Anzio. He had been outsmarted and outgeneraled by a “bunch of Chinese laundrymen” who had no close air support, no tanks, and very little artillery, modern communications, or logistical infrastructure. His reckless, egotistical strategy after Inchon, undertaken in defiance of warnings from Peking and a massive CCF buildup in Manchuria, had been an arrogant, blind march to disaster. What must have been even more galling and humiliating was that MacArthur was on record with everyone from the president on down as unequivocally assuring that the CCF would not intervene in Korea in force, and if it did he would “slaughter” it with his air power. His considerable intelligence-gathering apparatus had scandalously failed to detect or interpret the massive scope of the CCF intervention. His air power had abjectly failed to “slaughter” any appreciable number of CCF or even to knock out all the Yalu bridges.196

As an aside, clearly some of the scale of the American defeat in November and December can be blamed on the specific operational strategies that MacArthur chose. In particular, two decisions stand out. First was the withdrawal of X Corps from Inchon and its reinsertion on the opposite side of the peninsula at Wonsan. This had the effect of slowing the pursuit of the retreating North Korean forces, leading to the need to chase them all the way to the Yalu with a large American force. It also divided the U.S. force dangerously. Second, once redeployed MacArthur did not demand that the X Corps make contact with the Eighth Army to its west. Rather, he relied on the rugged mountain terrain to serve as a defensive obstacle protecting his force. These two

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195 For description of the Chinese strategy here, see Shen Zonghong, Meng Zhaohui, and others, The History of the War to Resist America and Support Korea by the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army (Beijing: Military Science Press, 1999), 29-37.

196 Blair, The Forgotten War, 464.
decisions dramatically worsened the rout when the Chinese pressed their Second Offensive.\footnote{See \textit{Ibid.}}

What is interesting from the perspective of this dissertation is that those two "mistakes" were deeply rooted in the American doctrine of the time. The standard operating procedure for an offensive in peninsular terrain focused on a series of flanking amphibious landings.\footnote{See the discussion in Chapter 3.} The United States had pursued this strategy in Italy, the Philippines, and elsewhere in WWII. MacArthur’s use of X Corps was a textbook application of this. Second, with regard to the absence of a link up of the two main American forces in North Korea, again the treatment of the rugged mountain terrain as a relatively impassible obstacle came straight out of American doctrinal thinking. Not only was there no major supply route through this area, but also tactical mobility of mechanized forces would have been highly constrained. The United States did not carefully consider that the Chinese forces might view the terrain much less forbiddingly. Thus, American doctrine even informed the mistakes the Americans made in Korea, and the doctrinal differences between China and the United States amplified their scale.
Clearly much of the evidence presented above focuses on MacArthur. However, some focuses on other leaders in theater, and the following section focuses on the view from outside his command entirely. This evidence cannot be simply explained away by blaming MacArthur’s uniquely extreme views. Eliot Cohen comes to similar conclusions in his analysis of the misperceptions in the Korean War:

Attempts to pin the blame for the intelligence failure (which was only part of a large operational failure) on one individual vastly oversimplify, and in some respects distort, the nature of the intelligence failure in Korea.²⁰

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200 Cohen, "Only Half the Battle," 129.
In short, a range of commanders in the Far East found it very difficult to change its prior beliefs about the likelihood of Chinese intervention and their capabilities if they did intervene. The Chinese were able to use these blinders very effectively as they prepared their surprise attack in late November. Escaping the lens that the American theory of victory imposed proved to be very difficult.

The View from Washington.
The situation in Washington was little better. One can almost hear the bewilderment in the voice of the Army Chief of Staff on October 31: “the intervention was conforming to none of the patterns envisaged by the Joint Chiefs in their studies and in their directives to General MacArthur.”\textsuperscript{201} Other examples of difficulties in adjusting to the new situation abound.

Initially, and in spite of evidence to the contrary, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) continued to express a modicum of confidence. In a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on November 9 (that is, after the loss of the 8\textsuperscript{th} Cavalry), they suggested that absent Soviet action, the United States could not be pushed out of Korea by China.\textsuperscript{202} They specifically noted that a defensive line short of the Chinese-Korean border could be held without any reinforcements. However, they also concluded “The Chinese Communists are presently in Korea in such strength and in a sufficiently organized manner to indicate that unless withdrawn they can be defeated only by a determined military operation.”\textsuperscript{203} To remedy that some, although apparently not substantial, reinforcement would be needed: Elsewhere they refer to the need for “some augmentation

\textsuperscript{201} Schnabel, \textit{United States Army in the Korean War}, 234.


\textsuperscript{203} \textit{Ibid.}, 1120.
of military strength in Korea" if the goal was to "force the action to a successful conclusion in Korea." Further, these flag officers suggested no change in the standing orders under which MacArthur was operating. This implies that little had changed in their minds and their overall military confidence remained, despite a substantial degree of uncertainty.

Cohen writes that after the First Offensive

The Defense Department was more sanguine [than Edmund Clubb at State], acknowledging that a limited intervention was underway but denying evidence of "indications of psychological preparation for war in Korea" [by the Chinese]

Washington authorities, notably the JCS, seemed to believe that as long as direct clashes along the Yalu could be avoided, so too could war with China—hence proposals by the Army Chief of Staff, General J. Lawton Collins, that MacArthur stop five miles from the border.

A series of meetings between senior representatives from the Departments of State and Defense, generally including both secretaries, all the Joint Chiefs, and often several service secretaries took place beginning in late November. These provide an excellent window on the perspective of the top leadership in Washington. On November 21, only days before the main Chinese attack but well after the sting of the first offensive, several of the Joint Chiefs were optimistically discussing the positioning of a line that could be held just shy of the Yalu River.

[Army Chief of Staff] General [Lawton] Collins suggested that General MacArthur, after the attack is well launched and is succeeding, could announce that it was his intention only to go forward to destroy the North Korean units and that he intended to hold the high ground overlooking the Yalu with ROK forces, assigning the rest of the UN forces to rear areas.

204 Ibid.
205 Ibid., 1121.
206 See discussion below in this chapter.
207 Cohen, "Only Half the Battle," 140-43. He cites a telegram from the Army Chief of Staff to MacArthur in the first passage.
208 Philip Jessup, "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Ambassador at Large (Jessup) (November 21, 1950)," in Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, ed. United States Department of State.
Similarly, at the same meeting, General Marshall expressed continued enthusiasm for supporting MacArthur's planned offensive. Others rejected the consideration of a cease-fire a sign of weakness.

After the main Chinese offensive began in late November, the American leadership belatedly began to shift its view. Several examples are illustrative. First, a day after the main Chinese offensive began, the United States understanding of the magnitude of the problem it faced remained exceedingly poor: X Corps was ordered to continue with a previously planned offensive of its own in the hopes that it would relieve pressure on 8th Army. Within days not only was such thinking considered childish by the JCS, but also there were serious concerns regarding the ability to extract X Corps.

In a later session of the State-Defense group on December 1, the military leaders switched to talking about holding a few enclaves. Third, rather than rejecting consideration of a cease-fire out of hand as they had on November 21, representatives from Defense and State had a long conversation about what would be required in this regard to make such an agreement palatable on December 1.

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209 Ibid., 1204-7.
210 Ibid.
211 Blair, The Forgotten War, 456.
212 Regarding such plans as childish, see Ibid., 472. Regarding concerns over the safety of X Corps as a whole, see General Bradley's comments in "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Ambassador at Large (Jessup)," December 1, 1950 in F.R.U.S., 1950, Vol. 7, 1223.
214 "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Ambassador at Large (Jessup)," December 1, 1950 in F.R.U.S., 1950, Vol. 7, 1223-34. It was the center of attention again at the subsequent meeting Philip Jessup, "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Ambassador at Large (Jessup) (December 3, 1950)," in
One of the clearest examples of the American inability to contemplate Chinese involvement despite clear signals to the contrary came in the November 21 meeting of the joint State-Defense group. Throughout the meeting there was no mention of the possibility of China increasing its forces and initiating a massive attack on the U.S. force. To emphasize, this meeting occurred after it was quite clear that the Chinese had a large force deployed in Manchuria, had at least some forces inside of North Korea, and had already dealt a large American unit a severe defeat. The meeting was one of the few opportunities for all the senior leaders in charge of American security policy to get together in the same room. Despite this, no one thought it worthwhile to bring up the prospect of large-scale Chinese involvement. Again, as noted above in a different context, ignorance of the data was not an excuse. Leaders in Washington were getting timely copies of MacArthur's "Daily Intelligence Summaries" or DISs. Later, when the joint State-Defense group met again, a few days after the full scale Chinese attack had occurred, Acheson, seemingly somewhat chagrined, made clear that previous discussions had not raised the prospect of the situation that they were now facing:

Secretary Acheson opened the discussion by referring to the desire to resume the very useful session which had previously been held. It was now necessary to consider the

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216 Many of the important DISs were telexed immediately by MacArthur's headquarters. (See, for instance, Willoughby, "The Chinese Communist Potential for Intervention in the Korean War (Undated)", p. 3.) Beyond that, the State Department staff on the ground in South Korea had access to Eighth Army and X Corps intelligence reports as they were produced. They often cabled summaries of these to Acheson in Washington. See, for instance "The Charge in Korea (Drumright) to the Secretary of State (November 1, 1950)," reprinted in *F.R.U.S., 1950, Vol. 7*, 1022. As noted earlier in the chapter, in the worst case the DISs would arrive by courier some 3 to 5 days after being published. (Cohen, "Only Half the Battle," 146, note 7.)
contingency which had not been covered in the previous discussion; namely, what to
doin case the offensive failed.217

Either the note taker (Ambassador Philip Jessup) or Acheson is a master of
understatement. Previous sessions of the senior foreign and military policymakers of
the United States government had managed to ignore the possibility of a Chinese attack
despite significant evidence that one was, at the very least, possible. That such a
prospect had been imminent at the previous meeting must have been simply unthinkable
to them.

**Change over Time**

By the end of November, the signs of a Chinese intervention in force were too
large for even MacArthur to ignore. After his back-and-forth at the beginning of the
month, he had settled into a confident frame of mind through mid-November. However,
once the PLA’s second campaign began at the end of the month, he was to send near
hysterical requests for more troops.218 At home in Washington, senior Army officials
began to consider the prospects for a complete withdrawal from the peninsula.219

A month after that, in early January 1951, General Ridgway was forced to
abandon Seoul.220 By this point, the JCS, again contradicting their earlier assessment as

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219 Ibid., 298.

the Chinese intervention capabilities had become too clear to deny, "concluded that the Chinese Communists had enough strength to drive MacArthur out of Korea." 221

**Surprising Difficulties in Implementing Strategies**

One problem for the United States was that it found that missions it had expected to face were more difficult than expected. "The B-29 attacks on the key bridges in North Korea demonstrated both the difficulty of hitting such point targets and the enemy's growing ability to bypass and repair damaged bridges." 222 Hitting troops on the move also proved problematic:

> Each day at dawn the Chinese concealed their mobile equipment in ravines, under bridges, and in other carefully hidden positions along the main supply routes. Such targets were exceedingly difficult to locate and harder to destroy. 223

Because of these difficulties, the Air Force shifted its emphasis to hitting supply centers, (known to civilians by a different name: cities). 224 Yet, this was no panacea, as this strategy, too, did not prove as effective as the Air Force had expected initially. 225

> More generally, the Air Force found its doctrine poorly designed to combat a light infantry-based army. 226 Close air support missions were plagued with problems, particularly those strikes conducted by the Air Force. 227 Dr. Robert Stearns, an

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223 *Ibid.*, 263, 703. One might have thought this same message would have been learned in WWII.


226 One tactic the Air Force was forced to rely on was the bombing of villages it “knew” to be inhabited by enemy fighters. *Ibid.*, 67.

independent, academic evaluator appointed by the Secretary of the Air Force, provided a generally positive preliminary assessment of the service’s performance at the end of 1950. However, he did note some interesting shortcomings: “He did concede that joint doctrine and communications had to be improved, and a better antipersonnel air weapon would be useful against masses of enemy manpower.” Similarly, while using animals and porters as their primary logistics train certainly had drawbacks for the CPV, it also had advantages: “the relative invulnerability of marching troops to enemy air and armored attack.” Beyond that, “indeed the lack of motorized transport was something of an advantage in that it permitted off-road movement over difficult terrain and thus increased the ability of the CCF to avoid detection and attack by UNC air forces.”

The Air Force faced substantial challenges trying to find Chinese troops who used “excellent camouflage discipline ... in the heavily wooded mountainous terrain.” Further, in this conflict, with less emphasis on logistics by the enemy, airpower aimed at interdiction was bound to have less effect. Note this is precisely the sort of limitation this dissertation’s theory would predict: the air force was poorly prepared for a sort of adversary that it did not expect to fight.

This raised specific problems: the official air force history entitled one section on the use of heavy bombers in October, “General O’Donnell Runs Out of Targets.”

228 Crane, American Airpower Strategy in Korea, 1950-1953, 61.
229 Shrader, Communist Logistics in the Korean War, 143 and 173, respectively.
231 Even the official Air Force history admits as much. See Ibid. See also Pape, Bombing to Win, 145. A more appropriate strategy would have focused much more on close air support rather than deep interdiction.
Beyond that, moreover, the destruction of the original target set had been of only limited utility: One scholar of strategic bombing concluded that by the end of that month they had "achieved no perceptible effect on the course of the war."233

MacArthur's assessment of the utility of airpower declined dramatically over time. According to one of MacArthur's planning officers at the time, General Wright, "this belief in the effectiveness of air power was one of General MacArthur's greatest weaknesses in dealing with the Chinese."234 By 3 December, a mere week after he had expressed such confidence about the role that airpower had played in cutting off Communist logistics, MacArthur had changed his tune dramatically. He now argued that the terrain did not favor American predominance in the air and on the sea, seemed to have a new respect for Chinese mobility on foot across rough terrain, and expressed concerns that his forces were at risk.235 (The Chinese continued to surprise the United States with their tactical mobility on foot well into the summer of 1951.236)

**Chinese Reactions Made Missions Even Tougher**

Not only were anticipated missions more difficult than expected, but the Chinese tactics also created problems for the United States. Because American planes, particularly the vaunted B-29, were ill-suited for night strike operations,237 the Chinese soon developed a preference for night movements which meant that U.S. air strikes

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233 Pape, *Bombing to Win*, 145. That said, the Chinese certainly felt the American airpower was imposing costs. See the discussion in the following chapter.


235 Ibid., 281.

236 Ibid., 389.

became rather ineffective and flares had to be used to attempt to remedy this.\textsuperscript{238} By May of 1951, these problems were becoming even more pronounced as the Chinese further adapted to the Americans. "[I]t was becoming increasingly difficult to locate and strike enemy interdiction targets in daylight. The CCF and NKPA were beginning to implement even more effective camouflage discipline and habitually moved their men and vehicles into cover and concealment during the daytime and moved only at night."\textsuperscript{239}

The tenacity of the Chinese response to the American campaign was impressive:

The Navy, Marines, and Fifth Air Force were all assigned separate sectors to bomb. Roads were cratered, tetrabedral tacks were dispersed to puncture tires, and delayed-action and butterfly bombs were dropped to discourage repairs. Results again were disappointing. Enemy repair crews exploded the harassing charges with rifle fire or accepted the casualties necessary to fill the craters. Sometimes they just bypassed blockages on secondary roads. .... [E]nemy countermeasures soon turned the tide. The communists built duplicate highway bridges across key waterways and cached whole bridge sections near important crossings so repairs could be completed quickly\textsuperscript{240}

Additionally, the vulnerability of the B-29s had been emphasized by the destruction of an attacking formation in October 1950: three B-29s were shot down, five were seriously damaged, and only one returned unscathed.\textsuperscript{241} Following that, a decision was made:

"Pending more effective fighter cover to protect the bombers against the increasing number of Communist MIG fighters, the B-29 attacks on bridges and other facilities in the northwestern corner of Korea were suspended on 12 April 1951."\textsuperscript{242}

\textsuperscript{238} Cagle and Manson, \textit{The Sea War in Korea}, 380-83.

\textsuperscript{239} Shrader, \textit{Communist Logistics in the Korean War}, 180.

\textsuperscript{240} Crane, \textit{American Airpower Strategy in Korea, 1950-1953}, 83.

\textsuperscript{241} Ibid., 86.

\textsuperscript{242} Shrader, \textit{Communist Logistics in the Korean War}, 179.
Twomey, The Military Lens

Not only did American offensive airpower strategy not live up to expectations against the vastly different Chinese forces they faced, but also even defensive counter air (DCA) missions found an unexpected challenge:

Night heckling raids by wood and fabric PO-2 biplanes were becoming [in Fall of 1951] quite a nuisance. The “Bed Check Charlies” were almost impossible to detect, even with radar, and one managed to damage F-86s at Kimpo with two small bombs on 23 September. The Air Staff was concerned that the enemy’s ability to “operate with slow obsolete biplanes almost at will” showed a serious weakness in Far East Command air defenses.243

One manifestation of this is apparent in comments from the deputy head of logistics for the United States, General Darr H. Alkire, who was explicit in his admiration for the Chinese ability to keep the supplies moving:

It has frequently been stated by commanders in Korea that the one man they would like to meet when the war is over is the G-4 [logistics commander] of the Communist forces. How he has kept supplies moving in the face of all obstacles is a real mystery. He has done it against air superiority, fire superiority, guts, and brawn.44

Limited War

Another area is suggestive of the role of American theories of victory in shaping American misperceptions. As the war unfolded, it became quite clear that the U.S. military leaders are chafing against the requirement of limited war. As noted in the previous chapter, prior to the Korean War, the United States had been preparing for general war, another world war that would demand the full attention of the nation. However, the war they found themselves in required that they limit their exposure to avoid being dragged into to an even wider peripheral conflict.245 One example of this friction was the concerns over hot-pursuit of enemy fighters across the Chinese-Korean

243 Crane, American Airpower Strategy in Korea, 1950-1953, 84.
244 Shrader, Communist Logistics in the Korean War, 225-26.
245 For discussion of this, see Jessup, "Memorandum of Conversation (Jessup) 12/3/50," 1276-82. Present at this meeting were the secretaries of State and Defense, the Joint Chiefs, the service secretaries, and senior advisors from State and Defense.
The air force strongly opposed restrictions on their ability to defend their vulnerable bombers, but national policymakers recognized the importance of preventing the war from spreading. Similarly, the Air Force often expressed enthusiasm for using nuclear weapons in a variety of manners. MacArthur frequently called for additional divisions to be deployed to the peninsula from the strategic reserve. A more thorough anticipation of the risks of limited war would have prepared the military for this eventuality and likely decreased their optimism regarding their prospects in such a conflict.

Change in U.S. Strategies

These difficulties faced by the United States against the Chinese led to many changes in the American approach to war. When Ridgway took over from MacArthur in 1951, he began to implement some of these. At times, he pushed the United States to become more like the PLA in certain regards:

The enemy, it is true, traveled light, traveled at night, and knew the terrain better than we did. He was inured to the weather and to all kinds of deprivation and could feed himself and carry what weapons and supplies he needed by whatever means the land offered—by oxcart, by pony, even by camel, a number of which had been brought in by the Chinese, or on the backs of native workmen, even on the backs of the troops themselves. There was nothing but our own love of comfort that bound us to the road. We too could get off into the hills, I reminded them, to find the enemy and fix him in position.

At other times, he counseled a reinvigorated focus on firepower, while again noting the issue of mobility off roads:

The Chinese greatly outnumbered the UN forces, and could reinforce their front-line troops extensively. But our superior firepower more than redressed the balance.

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247 E.g., Dower, *War without Mercy*, 701.
248 Blair, *The Forgotten War*.
Twomey, *The Military Lens*

Heretofore, we had not been taking advantages of this superiority, through lack of intensive training, through use of pursuit tactics that scattered our forces, or from allowing ourselves to grow roadbound. By February 1951, Field Artillery battalions that had been undergoing intensive training in the States and had long been earmarked for our use began to join the I and IX Corps, enabling those forces to return to normal old-fashioned tactics of coordinated action.\(^{250}\)

Finally, by the end of the war, Ridgway was increasingly relying on the use of fortifications to deal with the human wave tactics of the Chinese.\(^{251}\) This was a shift from tactics that had emphasized mobility before the war.\(^{252}\)

After the war, the U.S. military more broadly undertook a number of reforms that suggested it had learned important lessons from the Chinese. One effect of the war was to immunize the Navy and Marines from some of the heavy competition from the Army and Air Force in preceding years of inter-service rivalry:

In the Korean War naval air and the Marine Corps plays such conspicuous and valuable roles that their future are part of the Navy was never again challenged, and the conceptual and operations value of sea power in a limited, protracted war confirmed.\(^{253}\)

More specifically, the Navy was able to restart its long cherished plans for a supercarrier that would provide it with the ability to combine surface control missions with substantial strike capabilities:

The *Forrestal*, successor to the ill-fated *United States*, was a product of the Korean War, which had changed many minds about many things. Within weeks of the North Korean invasion, Defense Secretary Johnson, who had scrubbed the *United States* told Admiral Sherman [then Chief of Naval Operations], 'I will give you another carrier when you want it,' and the *Forrestal* went into the budget for fiscal year 1952.\(^{254}\)

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\(^{250}\) Ibid., 111.

\(^{251}\) See for instance the discussion of the defense of the Kansas Line in the summer of 1951 at *Ibid.*, 180ff.

\(^{252}\) On the American reliance on mobile armor formations in general before the Korean War, see the previous chapter. On the use of integrated combined arms formations in the early stages of the Korean War utilizing the few M-24 Chaffee tanks available to Eighth Army, see Roy Edgar Appleman, *South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu: June-November 1950* (Washington:, Office of the Chief of Military History Dept. of the Army, 1961), Chapter 9ff.


Also, limited war became explicitly part of American thinking about the use of force.\textsuperscript{255}

Thus, it is clear that combat in Korea faced the United States with many unexpected challenges. Most importantly, the utility of airpower against the Chinese had been vastly overestimated before the war.\textsuperscript{256} But also, the United States was forced to reassess its thinking about the mobility and combat effectiveness of poorly armed infantry forces. All of this strongly supports the dissertation’s theory, which predicts surprise regarding the adversary’s capabilities and intent once war is joined (Predictions #8 and #9). Thus, this section directly supports the link between different theories of victory and underestimation of the enemy ($H_1$). Differences in theories of victory directly contributed to a misperception of the adversary’s relative capabilities. This suggests that American assessments of the balance of power and of Chinese signals before the war likely suffered from the misperceptions that this dissertation has outlined (with regard to the variants of $H_2$), and indeed that previous sections of this chapter have shown.

\section*{Conclusion}

In this case, both way the Chinese sent military signals and the way the United States evaluated those signals and the overall situation strongly support the theory. The military signals that the Chinese sent were based entirely on its own theory of victory:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{255} See Christopher M. Gacek, \textit{The Logic of Force: The Dilemma of Limited War in American Foreign Policy} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
\item \textsuperscript{256} In particular, the emphasis on interdiction was misplaced. However, as the quotes above discuss, CAS against difficult to find light infantry targets was also problematic.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
large scale infantry deployments (as anticipated by Prediction #5). The United States viewed these through its own lens of understanding of military effectiveness and downplayed both the likelihood that the Chinese would get involved in the war (H₂b and Predictions #6 and #7) and the effectiveness of the Chinese forces if they did get involved (H₂a and Predictions #1-4). Both these assessments were tragically wrong, as subsequent events were to show. The Chinese did intervene in force, and when they did so, American forces were repeatedly surprised at their effectiveness and their willingness to join battle (Predictions #8 and #9).

Clearly, this theory does not have a monopoly on explanations for this American misperception. However, the Alternate Hypothesis set forth in the theory chapter does not do particularly well. Again, the Alternate Hypothesis represents the primary approach to strategic coercion in the literature and suggests “Weak signals are more likely to lead to coercive failure and escalation while strong signals are more likely to lead to coercive success.” In this case, the strength of the “objective” signal that the Chinese sent was indeed substantial: numerous diplomatic warnings coupled with the redeployment of a large portion of the Chinese army. Nevertheless, for the reasons this dissertation’s theory predicts, the United States was unable to anticipate the Chinese reaction.

Thus, this case offers strong support for the dissertation’s hypothesized links from differences in theories of victory to underestimation of the adversary to miscommunications and misperceptions that worsen conflict.

257 Although clearly the Chinese had little leeway here, given the makeup of the PLA.
Chapter 5. **China’s Approval of the North Korean Invasion (Case Study #2)**

The previous chapter presented a strong case in support of the dissertation’s theory in its analysis of the U.S. decision to cross the 38th parallel in spite of strong signals from the Chinese. There, the role of the misperceptions caused by doctrinal differences were central to understanding how that attempt at strategic coercion failed.

This chapter turns to an earlier decision, looking at the Chinese approval of the North Korean invasion that occurred in May 1950. This decision is complex, and clearly many explanations play a role in shaping the outcome, as will be discussed. However, throughout the more oblique diplomacy in this time period, the role of the American and Chinese theories of victory can be seen, shaping the tacit signals between the countries and their interpretation of them. This case highlights those factors and suggests they can helpfully contribute to the understanding of this case, without denying the important role of other explanations.¹

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¹ For instance, clearly other actors on the Communist side had less distinct differences in their theories of victory with the United States. Both the Soviets and the North Koreans (who had implemented Soviet doctrine and been supplied with Soviet weapons) used combined arms strategies, even sometimes supported by airpower. Thus, the dissertation’s proposed theory cannot explain their behavior at all. (They are, however, discussed briefly in a section at the end of this chapter.) On the Chinese side, however, some explanatory value for the theory will be shown.
Historical introduction

In the spring of 1950, the Chinese civil war was winding down. Mao had proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China six months before, and Chiang Kaishek had fled to Taiwan.² In Europe, the Cold War was rapidly heating up with the formation of NATO and the Warsaw Pact as well as the recent Soviet nuclear test. Asia was joining the fray with the declaration of the Sino-Soviet Alliance. The United States was in the process of drawing down its forces in the wake of WWII, although NSC-68 was beginning to be circulated in the inner corridors of Washington.³ Following decisions taken by various Communist leaders in April and May 1950 discussed below, Kim Il Sung finalized his plans for invasion and attacked on June 25. The effects of that decision on international affairs were tremendous, including the approval of NSC-68, the rearmament of Japan, and indeed the militarization of the Cold War.⁴

Among scholars of the Korean War, there had long been a debate over the role of the Soviets and the Chinese in the outbreak of the Korean War. There is now enough evidence to end it. Scholars have long known that Beijing, like Moscow, had been a strong supporter of the communist movement in the North.⁵ There is evidence that Kim traveled to China in April and May of 1949 where he met with Mao, Zhou Enlai, Zhu De

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² For an excellent military history of the civil war, see Dick Wilson, *China's Revolutionary War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).


⁵ On this support in general, see Song Liansheng, *Recollections on the Korean War* (Kunming: Yunnan People's Press, 2002), 172-73.
(the leader of the PLA), Gao Gang (the regional military leader for the PLA in the Northeast), and others. Later, early in 1950, Chinese General Nie Rongzhen, then Chief of Staff of the PLA returned three divisions who had been fighting on the communist side in the Chinese Civil War to the control of the North Korean communists, under Kim’s command. The CCP’s Central Committee ordered that these 14,000 troops keep their weapons as they deployed to Korea. This brought the total number of Korean troops sent back from China to Korea after the communists’ victory in the Chinese Civil War to over 50,000. Many of these same troops were to later serve as the spearhead of the attack southward in June. Similarly, there is some evidence that Chinese military officers played important roles in North Korea’s strategic planning over the course of the year prior to the attack. Further, the head of the North Korean air force had been one of fewer than 20 soldiers sent to the Soviet Union for training by the Chinese communists during the early part of the Chinese Civil War when the PLAAF

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6 Korea Institute of Military History, The Korean War, 3 vols. (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), vol. 2, p. 6. KIDA cites Soviet archival evidence published by the Korean Foreign Ministry for this information, but does not explain in detail the nature of that source.


9 Chen Jian, China’s Road, 110.

Twomey, *The Military Lens*

was in its embryonic stage (and before there was any independent North Korean military to speak of). 11

However, far more critical than this direct military support for the North was Mao’s formal approval of Kim Il Sung’s attack. There is now widespread consensus that Mao played an integral role here, along with Stalin. 12 Even most Chinese scholars, including some writing within China, place Mao at the center of the decision making, together with Stalin and Kim. 13 There is some evidence that Mao and Stalin may have discussed Korea in February of 1950. 14 Similarly, there is indirect evidence that Mao was encouraging the North Koreans to attack in late April or very early May. This comes from a telegram from the Soviet Ambassador in Pyongyang (Shtykov) to the Soviet Foreign Minister in Moscow. In it, Shtykov relates a conversation among the North Korean ambassador to China, Mao, and Zhou Enlai.

Mao Zedong added further that the unification of Korea by peaceful means is not possible, solely military means are required to unify Korea. As regards the Americans, there is no need to be afraid of them. The Americans will not enter a third world war for such a small territory. 15

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15 It is unclear where Shtykov learned of this, although it is possible that Kim related the meeting to him. "Document # 13: 12 May 1950, ciphered telegram, Shtykov to Vyshinsky re meeting with Kim Il Sung" in Kathryn Weathersby, "New Russian Documents on the Korean War," *Bulletin of the Cold War International History Project*, no. 6-7 (1995/96): 38-39. This clearly occurs before Kim’s trip to Beijing, discussed below.
These two points, however, remain unverified.

On the other hand, the rest of the story is clear. Kim Il Sung, after much begging, had received permission from Stalin to attack the South in April of 1950, pending approval from Mao. Thus, in May of 1950, Kim went to China. While the minutes of the meetings between Mao and Kim in Beijing that followed are not available, there is very strong circumstantial evidence that Mao gave Kim the approval he sought. A few key sources are illuminating. First, documents released from Russian archives confirm that Kim Il Sung left for Beijing on May 13, 1950. Second, Khrushchev’s memoirs contain his recollections of this visit:

Stalin decided to ask Mao-Tse-tung’s opinion about Kim Il-sung’s suggestion [to invade the South] … Mao Tse-tung also answered affirmatively. He approved Kim Il-sung’s suggestion. 17

Third, Kim was indeed planning to discuss his invasion plans with the Chinese on this trip, hoping to “inform the Chinese Communists of the intention to achieve unification by force, and explain about his meeting with Stalin in Moscow.” Fourth, one scholar writes,

There is even some reason to believe that, during Kim’s May 1950 visit to Beijing, Mao offered to position three Chinese armies along the Yalu River as backup for the North Koreans but was assured that he precaution was unnecessary. 19

Sixth, it is clear plans for a forthcoming attack were in fact discussed since Zhou Enlai, at the request of Mao, telegrammed Stalin to solicit his view on this planned attack. 20 Mao

was looking for confirmation that Stalin had indeed given his contingent approval to Kim. Stalin replied that he had, but reiterated that it was up to Mao to make the final decision. These telegrams between Zhou and Stalin are critical. The first makes clear that Kim and Mao were discussing the invasion, and Stalin’s reply makes clear Mao was, at the very least, a potential veto gate.21

Chen Jian is the leading Chinese scholar on the Korean War working in the West. His argument, while cognizant of the limitations of the historical record, remains the most thorough look at Chinese decision making on this point. He concludes,

In short, Kim came to Beijing largely because Stalin wanted him to get Beijing’s support for his attack on the South. Although Mao seemed to have some reservations, he never seriously challenged Kim’s plans. When Kim left China he thus had every reason to inform Stalin and his comrades in Pyongyang (and we have every reason to believe that he did) that he had the support of his Chinese comrades. ... Thus Kim’s visit to Beijing represented another crucial step toward the coming of the Korean War, and Beijing’s Korea policy escalated further the potential confrontation between China and the United States in East Asia.22

Another Chinese scholar, one with access to Chinese archives, comes to a similar conclusion: “After receiving this telegram [Stalin’s response to Zhou’s query], Mao threw his support behind Kim’s military plan.”23 Other scholars immersed in this history agree that Mao approved the attack.24

21 See the telegrams reprinted in Ibid.
22 Chen Jian, China’s Road, 112-13.
Chapter 5: China Approves the Invasion

The official South Korean history of the war summarizes the Chinese role in the lead up to the war even more damningly:

Communist China was deeply involved second only to the Soviet Union in North Korea’s invasion plot. It encouraged Kim Il Sung to invade South Korea by promising that if the U.S. or the Japanese rendered assistance to South Korea after the eruption of the war, China would assist North Korea. In addition, it provided North Korea with the decisive support for the war preparations by transferring the Korean troops in the Chinese Communist Forces to North Korea and rendering to North Korea necessary advice for the war direction. 25

Thus, this case will examine Mao’s decision as a failure of the United States to deter China. 26 Of course, Stalin and Kim were certainly strong proponents for the war, and each played an important role in persuading Mao to go along with the war. 27 Indeed, Kim in particular was impressive in his persistence and skill in manipulating both Mao and Stalin. 28 Kim’s argument that the war would be over before the American’s could intervene went a long way to persuading the leaders of both China and the Soviet Union. Additionally, several scholars argue that Mao had only limited freedom of action in this case, given his relationship with Stalin. 29 Mao did not want to be seen by the Soviet leader as a Titoist in Asia at this early stage in the budding Sino-Soviet relationship. 30

Nevertheless, had Mao been thoroughly and strongly deterred by the United States and thus decided to actively oppose the attack, it seems likely that the entire chain

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26 Again, see the brief discussion at the end of the case regarding explanations for Soviet and North Korean behavior.
28 Shen Zhihua, "Sino-North Korean Conflict."
30 Chen Jian, China’s Road, Chapter 5: The Decision for War in Korea; Thornton, Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War, passim.
of events leading the to the Sino-American conflict in Korea would have been avoided. Had Mao deeply feared the threats potentially posed by American military power, he likely could have found the wherewithal to slow the drumbeat of war among the Communists in Northeast Asia. This case will provide contribute to the understanding of why Mao was, instead, moderately optimistic regarding China’s prospects in a war with the United States.

What Kind of Case?

As will be clear, the U.S. signaling was generally rather oblique. What this case presents, then, is an instance of failed general (rather than immediate), extended deterrence of China by the United States. As noted in Chapter 2, scholarship of deterrence in international relations often distinguishes between general and immediate deterrence. This case is not a primarily an instance of immediate deterrence because the specific threats toward China were limited. Rather, Washington expected its general posture aimed at deterring Communist expansion everywhere to achieve the results in Asia, too. The signals that Washington was sending often pertained to that general posture, rather than the Korean Peninsula per se.

This sort of general deterrence is commonplace in Sino-American relations as well as in international relations. One pair of scholars (one American, one Chinese) writes of this sort of deterrence four years later in the same theater:

31 Among other failures, to be sure. There certainly was a failure to deter Stalin as well, to say nothing of Kim. However, Mao also played a role, as has been argued, and—for the purposes of this study, the U.S.-China dyad—is of greatest interest.

32 See the discussion in the Chapter 2 at note 16.
Certainly American power constrained and influenced Chinese actions; the very U.S. military presence, which was augmented in the Western Pacific during the crisis, may be defined as a political-military deterrent.33

There were certainly elements of this sort of thinking in the spring of 1950 as well.

While achieving successful general deterrence is relatively challenging, nevertheless, this sort of case is worth studying for several reasons. First, the differences between immediate and general deterrence lie on a continuum, and cases along the middle range of that continuum will instruct about both extremes, as noted earlier. Second, the United States did send some direct signals to China directly on the Korean case, raising at least some elements of immediate deterrence. Third, different theories of victory can impede communication of intent and capability through the same dynamics in both immediate and general deterrence. Thus, this case will provide some insight into the dissertation's theory.

In part because of this large element of general deterrence in this case, the subsequent analysis will focus on very broad level doctrinal thinking by the two sides. This is appropriate given that the decisions at this point were quite broad, with neither side well focused on this particular adversary in this particular theater. Thus, the assessment of threat posed by the other would have been at a very broad level.

**Signaling by United States**

There are a number of different elements in the U.S. signaling policy and general deterrent posture. Particular policy statements at the diplomatic level, recent shifts in

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33 John Wilson Lewis and Litai Xue, *China Builds the Bomb* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1988), 27. Note that an important advantage of a general deterrent posture, as opposed to an immediate deterrent one, is that it can avoid provoking one’s adversary. Lewis and Xue argue that this played a role in the period before the 1954-55 crisis. See Lewis and Xue, *China Builds the Bomb*, 31.
military posture, both nuclear and conventional, and the general tenor of relations
between the two countries in the Cold War each conveyed some suggestion of U.S. intent
toward China and the situation on the Korean peninsula. This section evaluates each in
turn. In sum, this multifaceted signaling policy should have sent only a limited signal of
general deterrence to the Chinese. However, beyond that, several important elements of
the policy were based on an American conception of military strategy that would have
been difficult for the Chinese to interpret.

Changes in Grand Strategy

The highest level of America grand strategy at this time was the Truman Doctrine,
or containment. First announced in a specially called joint session of congress,
President Truman laid out a very clear policy: “I believe that it must be the policy of the
United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed
minorities or by outside pressures.” Even at that time, it was clear to the world that the
shift in American policy was broader than an aid package to Greece and Turkey, but

34 One might distinguish between the President’s Truman Doctrine speech on aid to Greece and Turkey
in March of 1947 that proposed “to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by
armed minorities or by outside pressure” and the blueprint for containment, Kennan’s Mr. X article of
four months later, which counseled “confront[ing] the Russians with unalterable counterforce, at every
point where they show signs of encroaching upon the interests of a peaceful and stable world.”
However, the concepts are closely related and historically intertwined and will be treated as such here.
For both quotes and discussion, see Thomas G. Paterson, J. Garry Clifford, and Kenneth J. Hagan,
241-45. Also see Warren I. Cohen, The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations, vol. 4
(New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 38-41; John Lewis Gaddis, Strategies of
University Press, 1982), Chapter 3 Implementing Containment.

35 Address of the President of the United States: Recommendation for Assistance to Greece and Turkey,
March 12, 1947 available at the Truman Library’s online collection at
http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/doctrine/large/folder5/tde02-1.htm

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rather included a set of principles that might be applied more widely: “Truman's ‘Doctrine’ Becomes Law At Last” intoned the New York Times.\textsuperscript{36}

By late 1949, it was clear that this containment policy was to be both comprehensive and firm, representing a hardening of American policy.\textsuperscript{37} There had been a shift away from Kennan’s strongpoint strategy that dominated in the late forties to a more comprehensive defensive perimeter or containment strategy. NATO was created in July of 1949. Truman’s December 1949 signature of NSC-48, focused explicitly on the security situation in Asia, furthered this trend by making explicit that containment would be applied more broadly in Asia than before.

NSC-68 epitomized this changed emphasis in policy. While not formally signed until after the Korean War’s outbreak, its tenets were viewed sympathetically by many in the foreign policy establishment in the early part of 1950. Nevertheless, fear of opposition from within the Budget Bureau and from others concerned with the domestic tax burden prevented NSC-68 from being implemented at the time. These budgetary concerns are sometimes overdrawn. While the pre-Korean War buildup budgetary situation looked severe compared to the post-Korean War budgets, by other standards, the situation was not so dire.


The post-WWII cuts had already bottomed out, and had done so at a level approximately similar to that of the Soviet Union.

Aside from the budgetary concerns it provoked, NSC-68 served as a list of the Administration’s public talking points on its foreign policy. The ideas in NSC-68 embodied a shift toward a much more assertive American policy. “U.S. diplomacy was imbued with an offensive spirit.” It focused heavily on enhancing American military capabilities to provide for robust deterrence of threats. It argued that, in order to “prevent disaster,” U.S. military forces must be able to

a. To defend the Western Hemisphere and essential allied areas in order that their war-making capabilities can be developed;

b. To provide and protect a mobilization base while the offensive forces required for victory are being built up;

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39 Gaddis, Strategies of Containment, 107-08.

40 Melvyn P. Leffler, A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992), 357.
c. To conduct offensive operations to destroy vital elements of the Soviet war-making capacity, and to keep the enemy off balance until the full offensive strength of the United States and its allies can be brought to bear; ... 41

Thus, by early 1950, even before the outbreak of the Korean War, there was some hardening in American general deterrent policy—particularly declaratory policy, so critical to deterrence—against Communist aggression.

**Nuclear Weapons Policy**

On the nuclear side, several aspects of the American policy toward Communist nations—in general and in Asia—bear mentioning. In this period, American decisionmakers were extremely confident in the signals that implicit moves could send, particularly if they involved atomic weapons. Relatively low-key deployments of B-29 bombers had been used to send deterrent signals to the Soviet Union in the past: in 1948, two squadrons had been deployed to Britain during the first Berlin Crisis as a signal to Moscow. 42 Roger Dingman describes the legacy of that crisis:

Democratic and Republican statesmen looked back to the dispatch of two squadrons of B-29s to Western Europe during the Berlin Blockade of 1948-49 for guidance on how best to use American nuclear superiority... In the summer of 1948, American statesmen doubted that the B-29 deployment contributed directly to settlement of the Berlin Blockade crisis. But as time hazed over the particulars of this episode, they came to believe that atomic arms could be instruments of "force without war." Their credibility might even exceed their actual capability if they were used, without overt threats, for the purposes of deterrence rather than compellence. Thus American statesmen and soldiers brought to the Korean War the conviction that atomic arms, if properly employed, could be extremely valuable tools for conflict management.

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42 Scott Douglas Sagan, *Moving Targets: Nuclear Strategy and National Security* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 15. These had been falsely described in public as "nuclear-capable" although the specific planes sent were not modified to carry the weapons. That said, an additional signal was sent at that time by putting the planes that had been so modified on high alert status in the continental United States.
Similarly, Richard Betts describes a series of crises in which nuclear deterrence was attempted without explicit atomic or nuclear threats being made. 43

Further, the United States had recently developed the capacity to launch nuclear strikes from the continental United States. The first operational B-36 Peacemakers had entered the Strategic Air Command’s (SAC’s) inventory in 1948, and by 1950 SAC could call on three squadrons of such planes for strikes. 44 Several long-range operational test flights had displayed their capabilities in the late 1940s.

SAC celebrated the success of the program by staging a long-range navigation and bombing mission that extended from taking off at Carswell through dropping a 10,000-pound “dummy” bomb in the Pacific Ocean near the Hawaiian Islands and returning to Carswell. The unrefueled mission covered 8,100 miles in 35 1/2 hours. The mission was, in a way, a “LeMay triumph” in that the bomber made an approach over Honolulu undetected by the local air defense system—on 7 December 1948! Early in 1949, another B-36 crew set a long-distance record of 9,600 miles. The B-36 covered the distance in 43 hours, 37 minutes. ... There was little doubt that the vast Soviet communications monitoring system was taking note of these and other similar demonstrations of long-range strategic “reach.” 45

This brandishing of planes capable of delivering weapons at exceptional range should have also sent a general signal to the Soviets.

Beyond the intercontinental bombers, forward-deployed nuclear-capable bombers played an active part of the American general deterrence of communism in Asia.

Through the early fifties, the bulk of the American deterrent was to be launched from overseas bases, if war ever came. 46 The B-29 was—with the B-36—the primary

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45 Adams, Inside the Cold War a Cold Warrior’s Reflections, 39.

46 For a fascinating discussion of the standing U.S. plans in approximately 1950, as well as discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of various permutations of overseas basing, overseas refueling, and
platform for the delivery of nuclear weapons in this period. Again, the United States had used overseas deployment of this very plane to send signals in previous cases. In Asia, similar tacit signals were also being sent; from October 1949 to June 1950, Guam hosted B-29 training missions.47 (The same B-29s were to later fly missions in Korea.48) By familiarizing the Andersen Air Force Base staff with the maintenance and deployment needs of the B-29 platform, the U.S. military made future immediate deterrent steps—like the deployment of nuclear-capable B-29s—easier. Indeed precisely that step, the deployment of 10 nuclear capable B-29s, was taken early in the Korean War in late July.49

Again, it was believed in Washington that such tacit signals would be heard: “The decisions of late July 1950 demonstrated the strength of Washington’s belief that such weapons, even if deployed without explicit statements of intent, could serve as deterrents.”50 The confidence in the utility of such tacit signals was shown at a later date as well: as conflict between China and the United States got closer in the fall, the United

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47 It appears these were conventional B-29s, although that would not have been apparent to anyone other than the highest-ranking Americans.


49 Roger Dingman, "Atomic Diplomacy During the Korean War," in Nuclear Diplomacy and Crisis Management, ed. Stephen Van Evera (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 126-27. The New York Times reported this deployment, so it would have been well known to the Chinese. Note that earlier in the Korean War, on July 10th, the United States had sent a similar force of nuclear-capable B-29s to bases in England to allow for potential attacks on Soviet bases from within Europe should the conflict expand. Those bombers were deployed with “everything but the nuclear cores aboard.” Ibid.

States was again sending not so subtle nuclear threats by very publicly deploying heavy, atomic-capable B-29s to the region in July.\footnote{Conrad C. Crane, \textit{American Airpower Strategy in Korea, 1950-1953} (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 27; Mark A. Ryan, \textit{Chinese Attitudes toward Nuclear Weapons: China and the United States During the Korean War} (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1989), 26.}

All these various policies were aimed at deterring communist aggression globally. However, the way that they conveyed that message would have appeared less threatening to the Chinese. China would have feared neither destruction of its industrial base nor the prospect of the "full offensive strength" of the United States being brought to bear. Given Beijing's theory of victory, those elements did no seem particularly threatening.\footnote{Rather, what likely would have appeared threatening was the forward deployment of very large numbers of American troops.}

\textit{Acheson's Speech}

It is commonplace in the scholarship of early cold war American foreign policy to bemoan Secretary of State Dean Acheson's infamous National Press Club speech of January 12, 1950. In it, the conventional wisdom focuses on the exclusion of South Korea (and Taiwan) from the U.S. defense perimeter in East Asia, and this is often thought to have played a major role in convincing various Communist nations to go on the offensive. The original source of that entire argument stems from partisan attacks.\footnote{Republican critics of Acheson's foreign policy on Capital Hill first popularized the argument that Acheson invited the Korean invasion. See James Chace, \textit{Acheson: The Secretary of State Who Created the American World} (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 222.} This view is overstated because it relies on a selective reading of the speech and it ignores how the speech was received at the time.
A more careful reading of the speech suggests that this signal was unlikely to have been as important as is sometimes suggested for several reasons. First, the idea of a "defensive perimeter" that is the focus of so much attention in the historiography is mentioned only in passing and is not developed at all in the speech. The most frequently quoted portion is: “This defensive perimeter runs along the Aleutians to Japan and then goes to the Ryukyus ... from the Ryukyus to the Philippine Islands.” However, quoting this portion alone is extremely misleading as it implies that the phrase “this defensive perimeter” refers to a concept that had already been introduced in the speech. That was not the case. Earlier portions of the speech neither mention nor presage the concept of a defense perimeter per se. Rather, it is introduced abruptly.

Second, as the rest of the speech makes clear, other parts of the region, although not Korea, are indeed explicitly excluded from the sphere of American interests. Elsewhere in the speech Acheson notes the limited role of the United States in Southeast Asia and contrasts that with the more substantial obligations owed to Korea: “There [Korea] our responsibilities are more direct and our opportunities more clear.”

Finally, Acheson’s speech did speak specifically of a response to military threats in the region outside of Japan and the Philippines:

So far as the military security of other areas in the Pacific is concerned, it must be clear that no person can guarantee these areas against military attack. Should such an attack occur...the initial reliance must be on the people attacked to resist it and then upon the commitments of the entire civilized world under the Charter of the United Nations which

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55 One is only led to infer that this defense perimeter is necessary to the defense of Japan. Ibid.: 115-116.

56 Ibid.: 117.
so far has not proved a weak reed to lean on by any people who are determined to protect their independence against outside aggression.57

While Gaddis finds this last sentence a “perhaps excessively elegant circumlocution,” its intent seems clear enough.58 Looking back at the reference to the UN, a modern reader tends to ascribe current-day thinking regarding the UN to that quote. This would suggest that it was a rhetorical flourish, and that the UN, in fact, should have been viewed as precisely a weak reed to lean on. However, to do so is to project backward current American thinking on that organization. At the time, the UN was viewed as a relatively robust institution, even in the international security arena.59 For instance, when Acheson eventually heard that the North had attacked South Korea on June 24, the first action he approved, before even informing the president or calling a meeting with the JCS, was to raise the issue at the UN.60 Dean Rusk similarly attests to the perception of the importance of the UN at the time.61 Other examples of the perceived importance of the UN in that era litter the historical record.62

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57 Ibid.: 116.


59 Furthermore, by this time the Soviets were already boycotting that body in protest over the prevention of the PRC taking China’s seat that was at the time held by the ROC/Taiwan representative. The Soviets began their boycott on January 10, 1950. Thus, communists in Beijing and Pyongyang could not count on the UN being kept out of any Korean conflict. Woodrow J. Kuhns, ed., Assessing the Soviet Threat: The Early Cold War Years (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1997), Chronology.


61 Dean Rusk, Richard Rusk, and Daniel S. Papp, As I Saw It, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), 164.

Rather than viewing the speech as an abandonment of Korea, it is more appropriate to see it as a statement that describes a range of American interests in the region. As one historian writes,

In the soft-spoken language of diplomacy, however, Acheson had actually stated that the United States would unilaterally defend areas which were strategically important to it and would participate with the United Nations to check aggression against other free peoples in the Pacific.63

In summary, while Acheson does not offer a blanket promise of aid to South Korea, he certainly does not imply Washington is indifferent to its fate.

**Communist Interpretation of the Acheson Speech**

Furthermore, what is most important is not a close textual analysis of the speech or an assessment of how it “ought” have been interpreted. Rather, the perceptions of the speech at the time are what matters. In terms of the perceptions in the United States and apparently within the Communist bloc, the most important parts of the speech were those that focused on Russian attempts to take Manchuria from China and on suggestions that the United States might abandon Taiwan. Based on the currently available evidence from the Communist side, it appears that it was only after the outbreak of the Korean War that the portion on the defensive perimeter received much attention.65

On the Korean side, the foremost scholar of Korean thinking during this period, Bruce Cummings, concludes, “It turns out that the North Koreans thought Acheson included the ROK in his perimeter, a bit of a daunting fact for Acheson’s presumed


64 Again, it is critical to know both the perceptions of what signals the United States thought it was sending as well as understanding how those were interpreted on the other side. Both sides’ perceptions are relevant.

Acheson’s view was that those countries inside what he called a defense line, meaning those subjugated countries, Japan, the Philippines, and South Korea, such countries would be America’s ‘direct responsibilities’ [for defending].

The currently available evidence on Chinese perceptions — while again based on only limited information — also suggests that the speech did not shape (or reshape) their view about American Korea policy in a fundamental way. Several points lead to this conclusion. First, it is clear they studied this speech in detail. There is clear evidence that the Chinese (and the Soviets) not only listened to this speech, but also adjusted their assumptions about America policy with regard to the Sino-Soviet alliance because of it.

Shi Zhe, who served as Mao’s interpreter for many years including during the negotiations over the Sino-Soviet Alliance in Moscow in 1949 and 1950, describes the discussions between Stalin and Mao regarding the speech in some detail. However, all the focus in his narrative is on the issues regarding Mongolia and Manchuria and American accusations of Soviet designs on them. There is detailed discussion on these points, and of the discussion between Mao and Stalin over the appropriate response to

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66 Ibid., 423. Emphasis in the original.

67 Ibid., 424. Emphasis added.


69 Shen Zhihua, "Sino-Soviet Relations and the Origins of the Korean War." See also Chen Jian, China’s Road, 102.

70 Shi Zhe, Beside the Great Men of History (Beijing: Central Documents Press, 1991), 454ff.
this accusation from the Americans. However, nowhere in his account is the "defensive perimeter" portion of the speech mentioned.

Similarly, Shen Zhihua is a Chinese historian who is generally regarded by Westerners as having good access to archival data, but also one who publishes independent from government-run presses. In his *Mao, Stalin, and the Korean War* (published in Hong Kong where there are fewer impediments to scholarship on sensitive subjects), he discusses at length the issues of the Chinese and Soviet decision-making during the treaty negotiations (these spanned the date of the speech). Shen does indeed discuss the Acheson speech. However, drawing on Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue, he focuses on it in the context of the Sino-Soviet treaty negotiations and the U.S. wedge strategy, all relating to the issue of Manchuria. It is not surprising that the issue of territorial sovereignty of a former part of China would receive much attention. This had clearly been a contentious issue in the treaty negotiations, and the Chinese also had other areas—Tibet, for instance—that they were concerned about at the time.

Beyond the work of these two Chinese scholars, a few other pieces of evidence are suggestive of the Chinese views. A few months after Acheson's National Press Club speech, Zhou Enlai responded with disdain toward a claim by Acheson that

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71 Ibid., 456.


Twomey, The Military Lens

United States lacked territorial aspiration in Asia in a different speech. Historian Zhang Shuguang summarizes Zhou’s comments as follows:

Zhou Enlai retorted that the Truman administration wanted to “cheat us again.” The U.S. would always want to control Taiwan, Korea, and Indochina, and that was why “the U.S. government is still supplying the KMT with bombers to bomb the Chinese mainland; ... the U.S. is doing the same thing to support such puppet regimes as Baota [Baoda] and Syngman Rhee ... so as to suppress the Vietnamese and Korean liberation movements to strengthen U.S. control over those places.”

That further suggests that the Acheson speech was not the key source of Chinese perceptions regarding the U.S. role in the region.

Once war broke out, the Chinese government repeatedly criticized American policy over Taiwan as going against their previously stated official “hands off” policy toward Taiwan. However, in none of these instances is American policy toward Korea criticized with the same accusations of hypocrisy. For instance, the day after the United States ordered its forces to Korea and the Taiwan Strait, Mao decried the American hypocrisy in the latter case:

Only January 5 Truman stated that America would not interfere with Taiwan, but now it is clear that the words he spoke were lies. Moreover, he is also shredding the American policy of non-interference in Chinese internal affairs.

Through his comments, there is no mention of American lies about Korean policy, or the shredding of the Acheson National Press Club speech’s tenets. Similarly, when Shen

74 The direct quotes are Zhou’s words from a speech that was made on the March 18, 1950. The remaining text is Zhang’s commentary. See Zhang Shuguang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 44. For the text of the Acheson speech that Zhou is reacting to, see Dean Acheson, "United States Policy toward Asia (Mach 15, 1950)," Department of State Bulletin 22, no. 560 (1950).


76 If there had been a Chinese perception that the United States had abandoned South Korea, would it not be likely that there would also be accusations of hypocrisy over that as well?

77 Song Liansheng, Recollections on the Korean War, 197.
Zhihua discusses the outbreak of the war, he makes no reference to the speech. The official history of the Korean War published by the PLA press makes no mention of it.

Clearly, all this is indirect and circumstantial evidence. Ideally, access to Chinese archives would allow us to answer this definitively. However, the data presented above does suggest there is not a large paper trail pointing to the Acheson speech *per se* as leading the Chinese to support the war. Perhaps the Chinese have hidden this record to deemphasize their role in the outbreak of the war. While deeper access to Chinese records may help to deepen scholars’ understanding of this critical issue, at this point the historic record lacks explicit evidence linking the Acheson speech to the failure of deterrence.

Again, all of this suggests that the conventional wisdom regarding the Acheson speech—and thus the Alternate Hypothesis’ conventional wisdom regarding the failure of general deterrence in Korea—overemphasizes the weakness of the diplomatic signal and its causal importance. The leadership of the United States did not conceive of the Acheson speech as an abandonment of Korea. At the time of this writing, there is no

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78 Shen Zhihua, *Mao, Stalin, and the Korean War*, see his discussion throughout Chapter 4: Crossing the 38th Parallel, but in particular following page 192. Shen does note that Stalin had changed his position on whether to support the North’s plans to invade the South: “therefore, one can absolutely confirm that Stalin’s decision to change his policy toward the Korean peninsula was made between January and April of 1950.” (Ibid., 198.) However, Shen goes on to attribute this change to the recent signing of the Sino-Soviet alliance, increasing Stalin’s confidence in the power of the Communist side. (Ibid., 198-99.) Elsewhere he focuses on Stalin’s perceptions of the power of atomic weapons in previous crises (specifically the Berlin Crisis of 1948), suggesting that the Soviet acquisition of a nascent atomic arsenal played some role. (Ibid., 204.)


80 However, it seems that an accusation of American hypocrisy and policy inconstancy might be made without any admission of Chinese culpability in this regard.
direct evidence available that the Chinese leaders (or other communist leaders) took the speech to have that meaning either. The Acheson speech is only one part of the international context at the time. Until there is affirmative evidence that this speech played a large role in shaping Communist perceptions, scholars should continue to look for other, empirically supported explanations for the perceptions that led China to support the war.

**Other Diplomatic Signals**

The United States sent a number of other signals regarding the issue. Senior American foreign policy elites made showy visits to South Korea. Ambassador-at-Large Philip Jessup (a senior policymaker in State with responsibility for East Asia) was there in January of 1950,81 and John Foster Dulles (a consultant to Acheson at the time) visited Korea in June of 1950 in a prominent tour of the region.82

Acheson, in speeches before and after the National Press Club appearance, had emphasized the strength of the U.S. interests in the region in general and its willingness to defend those interests with military force. On January 5 he stated:

> It is a recognition of the fact that, in the unlikely and unhappy event that our forces might be attacked in the Far East, the United States must be completely free to take whatever action in whatever area is necessary for its own security.83

On March 15, he reinforced this message, mentioning Korea by name (although not directly committing American military support):

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81 Stueck, *The Road to Confrontation*, 161.


President Truman has declared his belief that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures and that we must assist free peoples to work toward their own destinies in their own way. The aid we extend may be of a kind appropriate to the particular situation; it must be fitted into the responsibilities of others, and it must be within the prudent capabilities of our resources. In some situations, it will be military assistance, in others, it may be grants or loans, ... In still others, the need may be for technical assistance. There are not new principals nor is the application of them to the Far East a new departure. In Vietnam, Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand, for example, we have demonstrated our desire to help where such help can strengthen the cause of freedom. 84

These speeches should have sent moderate signals to the Chinese, and Chinese sources suggest they were being read with care by the Chinese leadership. 85

**Military Signals**

Beyond American policy at the grand strategic level and diplomatic signals, the U.S. military deployments in East Asia provided relatively tangible signals regarding American interests. Many of these various force deployments emphasized the importance of Korea to the United States. However, the U.S. theory of victory critically shaped these, and they would have been difficult for the Chinese to interpret.

After the Japanese surrender, the United States had rushed a two-division corps to the Korean peninsula, garrisoning all territory below the 38th parallel. 86 These troops eventually numbered some 45,000. Their withdrawal was initially proposed by the Pentagon in 1947 as a way to hoard its declining military forces, although Acheson had

84 Acheson, "United States Policy toward Asia (Mach 15, 1950)," 471.


stymied this plan for years.\textsuperscript{87} However, by June 1949 the last of these combat troops were withdrawn from Korea.\textsuperscript{88} This withdrawal decision precisely paralleled the Soviet withdrawal from the North, where Moscow’s last two divisions had pulled out at the end of 1948. Both sides of the Cold War were reducing their on-the-ground commitment to Korea.

Nevertheless, other American signals would have softened this blow to Seoul. First, the Korean Military Advisory Group (KMAG) remained in place and expanded to 500 men (as well as another 150 air force officers).\textsuperscript{89} This was the largest such group anywhere in the world at that time.\textsuperscript{90} It integrated American advisors down to the division level with the South Korean military. Its emphasis on combined arms training and integration between the services would have been lost on the Chinese. Further, the withdrawing American forces left some $110 million worth of military equipment.\textsuperscript{91} This transfer was made publicly and included over 40,000 vehicles as well as substantial small arms, ammunition, and artillery.\textsuperscript{92} All of this would have been downplayed in importance in Chinese doctrine.\textsuperscript{93} U.S. aid was used to equip and train the South

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\textsuperscript{89} Foot, The Wrong War, 57.

\textsuperscript{90} Cumings, The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 2, 385.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 473.

\textsuperscript{92} James F. Schnabel, United States Army in the Korean War, vol. 3 Policy and direction: the first year (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History United States Army/GPO, 1972), 35. The transfers were discussed openly in congress in 1949.

\textsuperscript{93} Clearly the ROK arms were, in fact, insufficient to face the North’s attack when it came.
\end{flushright}
Chapter 5: China Approves the Invasion

Korean military. The size of the force that Washington aimed to create had increased from 50,000 to 65,000 as the United States was withdrawing in 1949. The South Korean military had grown further to 100,000 by 1950, and Ambassador Muccio traveled to Washington in May of that year to secure increased aid for the growing Korean military. The Truman Administration had battled with budget hawks in Congress—and won—to preserve an $11 million military assistance package in 1949 under the provisions of that year’s Mutual Defense Assistance Act. South Korea was one of only three named recipients for grant aid under Title III of this auspiciously named program. The fight over the aid packages continued the following year, with the Administration again having to overcome an initial defeat in Congress. Eventually (in January or February of 1950), it secured a $100 million aid package for Korea in fiscal 1951 (July 1950-June 1951). This came on the heels of a $150 million aid package in fiscal 1950.

Further, Korea was frequently the scene of American displays of force such as fleet and airpower deployments. For instance, “the navy was persuaded to have an

94 Stueck, The Road to Confrontation, 159.

95 Ibid., 165.

96 Ibid., 159.


98 Cumings, The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. 2, 425. For discussion of the domestic politics, and in particular of the high cost the Administration was willing to pay for securing passage of the various Korean Aid bills, see Christensen, Useful Adversaries, Chapter 4. Christensen puts the initial (proposed) aid figure for FY 1951 at $60 million. While this aid was in theory not to be spent on military hardware, it was not unheard of for exactly that to happen. See Christensen’s discussion of the contemporaneous aid package to Taiwan. Christensen, Useful Adversaries, Chapter 4.

99 Stueck, The Road to Confrontation, 159.
American cruiser and two destroyers visit Inchon in the fall of 1949.\(^{100}\) Other deployments in the region were commonplace:

In late March 1950 the aircraft carrier *Boxer* scrambled forty-two jets for flights over central Vietnam as a demonstration of American "military strength" and two weeks later it sent fifty planes roaring over Pusan and Taegu. The carrier *Valley Forge* left on a similar mission in mid-May, with an accompanying task force of twenty ships, to show the flag in "the troubled Orient."\(^{101}\)

None of these deployments would have looked particularly threatening through the Chinese doctrinal lens.

Finally, the Air Force retained a significant position in the Far East. The prodigious holdings of FEAF (the U.S. Far East Air Force) included *fourteen strike squadrons* of various aircraft, as well as an additional nine squadrons of air defense fighters.

**Figure 5-2: FEAF Holdings in East Asia\(^{102}\)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Squadron Type</th>
<th>Number of Sq</th>
<th>Plane</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bomber</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>B-26</td>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>B-29</td>
<td>Guam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighter-Bomber</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>F-80C</td>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>F-80C</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighter-Interceptor/Air Defense</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>F-80C and F-82</td>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>F-80C and F-82</td>
<td>Okinawa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The United States continued to show its commitment to maintaining a robust Air Force presence even in the context of a global reduction in military forces in the late 1940s. "On 23 July 1949, a devastating typhoon damaged Okinawan air facilities so severely

\(^{100}\) *Ibid.*, 161.


\(^{102}\) Data compiled from Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Korea, 1950-1953*, 2-4. The only aircraft included are tactical ones. There were also sundry reconnaissance, transport and search and rescue units.
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that the Air Force could not continue operations without extensive reconstruction."\textsuperscript{103}

Over opposition from Air Force leadership (who had other funding priorities), MacArthur, the Army Chief of Staff, and others were able to convince JCS, and eventually the President, that rebuilding the Okinawan airbase was key to the American deterrent posture in the region. The president’s active support of this measure led to congressional approval of a measure for over $50 million to rebuild the bases in October of 1949.\textsuperscript{104} More generally, the Air Force was expected to play a significant role in any American combat in the region. Indeed, Kennan later explained why he had been rather sanguine about the American military position in the area:

\begin{quote}
I had been assured by a very high Air Force officer, on the occasion of my visit to Japan in 1948, that we had no need for any ground forces in Korea anyway, because the Air Force could control from Okinawa, through our strategic bombing campaign, anything that went on in the way of military operations on the Korean peninsula.\textsuperscript{105}
\end{quote}

Again, this sort of deployment would not have resonated in Beijing.

Thus, there were some military signals supporting the American general deterrent posture. While none were direct or particularly large, it would be inappropriate to characterize them as trivial either. Nevertheless, in each case they depended on factors of military capability (training, combined arms, airpower, naval deployments) that would have been foreign to the People’s War doctrine prevalent in Chinese thinking at the time. Thus, they support this dissertation’s theory through Prediction #5 that states, “When signaling to the other side, each side should send signals that make use of forces in accordance with their own theory of victory.”

\textsuperscript{103} Harry R. Borowski, \textit{A Hollow Threat: Strategic Air Power and Containment before Korea} (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982), 202.

\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Ibid.}, 202-4.

\textsuperscript{105} George Frost Kennan, \textit{Memoirs}, 1st ed. (Boston.: Little Brown, 1967), 482. See also Stueck, \textit{The Road to Confrontation}, 158.
Summary

American signaling policy came in several forms. First, the hardening of American containment policy at the global level relied on offensive strikes and punishment strategies. Second, there were diplomatic statements that were ambiguous and certainly less than robust, although they did not represent a complete abandonment of Korea. Finally, a number of military deployments and displays of force were made in and around the Korean peninsula.

These policies, in sum, should have sent at least a limited, general deterrent signal to the Chinese. Thus, the Alternate Hypothesis—which summarizes the conventional wisdom regarding deterrence and emphasizes the importance of the “objective” quality of the signal—would suggest that there was only a moderate chance for deterrence success. Undermining those prospects even further, as the dissertation’s theory would predict, the military and grand strategic elements of these signals were deeply infused with the American theory of victory (again supporting Prediction #5 regarding sending signals with one’s own theory of victory). This would have made them difficult to interpret by the Chinese. The following section examines that claim.

Interpretation by China

There is only limited evidence on the intricacies of Chinese decision-making, but what is available is supportive of the theory’s predictions. This section lays out several different arguments. First, there is substantial evidence that the Chinese had a deep confidence that their tactics would be capable against the American forces. Second, there is substantial evidence of Chinese denigration of the dangers posed by the
American atomic arsenal. Finally, Mao (and Stalin) downplayed the threat of American involvement in Asia, and this appears to be related to his firm belief of Chinese superiority militarily.

That said, clearly other factors entered into Chinese decision making in this case. While a previous section emphasized that the Acheson speech is often overemphasized and that some aspects of American policy were hardening, neither of those points completely undermines the conventional view about this case. American deterrent policy was very general, and some aspects of policy were relatively weak. However, as the remainder of this chapter will show, coexisting with that was a degree of relative optimism about military factors in China. This section argues that this false optimism also contributed to the Chinese decision to support the invasion plans.

Portions of the evidence presented below in support of the first two points (confidence in the Chinese military) stem from four to five months (sometimes more) after China decided to approve Kim II Sung’s attack plan in May of 1950. While such a gap is not an extended period of time, neither is it trivial. The data comes from the period when China was preparing to respond to the U.S. crossing of the 38th parallel with an intervention of its own. It is not surprising that more information would be available on Chinese perceptions as the prospect of Sino-American conflict increased through the summer. Nevertheless, the geopolitical logic explaining that decision is unquestionably different from that explaining the May decision. However, this evidence does speak

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106 As noted earlier as well, at a later point, once the United States seems likely to move into North Korea, there is a degree of insecurity about the long term competition with the West in Beijing. However, this security dilemma logic does not contribute substantially in this earlier period.

107 This is discussed in the section on case selection in Chapter 2 as well as the introduction to the previous chapter on the U.S. decision to cross the 38th parallel. In short, the May decision could have been deterred, while the October one was less amenable to strategic coercion. (Clearly, it could have
to the issue of the relatively high degree of confidence that the Chinese felt with regard to its military forces in a conflict against the United States. It seems very likely that this confidence also existed in May of 1950 as Mao was deciding whether or not to approve Kim’s plans. (Nothing had occurred between May and the early fall that would have increased China’s confidence about facing the United States; indeed it is quite possible that it would have decreased.\footnote{That is, the Chinese did not have reason to change their perception of their relative power in a positive direction between May and the late summer and early fall. A case could be made that the Chinese should have been less confident in August and even less in September as the United States first stabilized its lines in Pusan, then went on the offensive in Inchon. This would mean that Chinese confidence in May was even higher than one would infer from the statements recounted in sections below from the late summer and early fall.}) Thus, evidence from the later period should be useful in allowing us to extrapolate Chinese beliefs from May.

**Confidence about Conventional Battles**

As they finally explicitly faced the prospect of war with the United States, the Chinese felt they had grounds for a degree of optimism regarding a number of tactical issues. This evidence strongly supports the link between different theories of victory and underestimation ($H_1$) as well as several of the theory’s component predictions. First is simply the prediction that there should be correlation between differences in theories of victory and underestimation (Prediction #1). Second is the prediction that states with different theories of victory will denigrate their adversary (Prediction #2), as discussed above. Further, the theory also predicts “Larger differences between the two states’ theories of victory should correlate with a larger or more frequent underestimation of the

\footnote{Nevertheless, the operational and tactical level perceptions that are presented in this section would seem likely to be persistent as they are not dependent on the geopolitical rationale for the war.}
adversary’s capability” (Prediction #10). All three of these predictions are borne out by the evidence presented in this section.

The optimism of Chinese leaders as they faced the increasingly likely prospect of conflict with the United States was widespread. In August, Zhou had conducted research into the American army at Mao’s request. His findings suggested weaknesses such as “the heavy American dependence on logistical support.” Similarly, a detailed assessment made by field commanders from late September makes explicit the sources of Chinese confidence. The following summary of that report, with a number of direct quotes from actual document, merits reprinting at length:

First, the U.S. forces were politically unmotivated because “they are invading other people’s country, fighting an unjust war, and thus encountering opposition not only from the American but other peace-loving peoples around the world,” whereas the Chinese forces would “fight against aggression, carrying on a just war, and thus will have the support of our people and other peace-loving peoples; and more important our troops have a stronger political consciousness and higher combat spirit.” Second, the U.S. troops were inferior in terms of combat effectiveness, because, “although they have excellent modern equipment, their officers and soldiers are not adept in night battles, close combat, and bayonet charges.” By contrast, the CCP troops “have had rich experience over the past ten years in fighting an enemy of modern equipment ... and are good at close combat, night battles, mountainous assaults, and bayonets charges.”

Third, the U.S. forces were not tactically flexible, since “American soldiers always confine themselves to the bounds of military codes and regulations, and their tactics are dull and mechanical.” On the other hand, the CCP forces were “good at maneuvering flexibility and mobility and, in particular, good at surrounding and attacking enemy’s flanks by taking tortuous courses, as well as dispersing and concealing [our own] forces.”

Fourth, American soldiers were not capable of enduring hardship. “They are afraid of dying and merely relying on firepower [in combat, while] ... on the contrary our soldiers are brave and willing to sacrifice life and blood and capable of bearing hardship and heavy burdens,” attributes that would remedy the disadvantage of inferior firepower.

Finally, the U.S. forces had greater logistical problems. The U.S. was “carrying on a war across the [Pacific] Ocean and has to ship most of the necessities from the American continent—even if it can use supply bases in Japan, [for instance] it is transporting drinking water from Japan—and therefore its supply lines are much longer, eventually making it difficult for them to reinforce manpower and supplies.” Meanwhile, the Chinese would be close the rear bases and “back by [their] fatherland.” The

organization of supplies would also be much easier; because "we have less trucks and artillery, we won’t consume that much gasoline and ammunition." In this passage, note in particular the references to U.S. military weakness due to numbers of troops, long supply lines, tactical inflexibility, lack of appropriate political motivation, and the dismissal of nuclear weapons. Conversely, the Chinese side was thought to benefit from the justness of its cause, their ability to move on foot, their aptitude for hand-to-hand fighting, and their light logistics tail. These Chinese military lens clearly shaped both those perspectives.

Mao’s own optimism regarding his ability to withstand American attacks can be seen in discussions regarding the possibility of Sino-American war as China contemplated intervention in Korea in early October 1950. (This is not to say that Mao was blithely and universally optimistic; see the discussion below.) At that point, Mao was certainly cognizant of the prospect that the United States might attack China:

Once the Chinese military (of course, the name we will use will be the volunteer army) has engaged the U.S. army inside of Korea, we have to prepare for America to declare and get into war with China. We also must prepare, at least, for the United States to bomb large cities and industrial bases within China and of the navy attacking our coastal zone.

He went on to downplay this danger however, noting that it was not as important as victory on the battlefield—"most importantly, destruction of the 8th Army"—and

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10 Zhang Shuguang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 76-77. The bracketed editorial clarifications are all Zhang’s. Zhang’s footnote does not make clear the precise date, although it is clear it comes from late September 1950.

11 Shen Zonghong, Meng Zhaohui, and others, The History of the War to Resist America and Support Korea by the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army (Beijing: Military Science Press, 1999), 9. Note this language appears to come from the unsent version of Mao’s telegram to Stalin on October 2, 1950. For discussion of this, and translation of the complete document, see Thomas J. Christensen, "Threats, Assurances, and the Last Chance for Peace: The Lessons of Mao’s Korean War Telegrams," International Security 17, no. 1 (1992). As argued elsewhere, even though this telegram was not sent, it still has utility for assessing Mao’s thinking.
sugge\textsuperscript{s}t\textsuperscript{ing} that the population could be mobilized to create air defense forces.\textsuperscript{112} It is unclear why the local peasantry would have better luck at air defense than did the PLA, who at least had some dedicated anti-aircraft artillery. Mao's confidence in his ability to destroy the 8\textsuperscript{th} Army seems quite excessive as well. Mao's writing on this almost precisely the same as his writing in 1947 when facing the corrupt and inept KMT army, discussed in an earlier chapter.\textsuperscript{113} In this case, he called for overwhelming numerical superiority—"my army needs four times the troop strength as the enemy's"—and expected this to allow him to "thoroughly annihilate one army of the enemy."\textsuperscript{114} The consistency of Mao's strategy against vastly different military adversaries is instructive of the persistent influence of China's theory of victory on analysis. At a somewhat later date, Christensen writes of a "the optimistic tone of Mao's communiqués" to Stalin, Zhou Enlai, Peng Dehuai, and others on military issues before February 1951.\textsuperscript{115}

Other instances of relative Chinese confidence abound. One of Mao's generals later wrote of the perceptions at the time:

> During the past several decades, our army had always defeated well-equipped enemies with our poor arms. Our troops were skillful in close fighting, night combat, mountain operations, and bayonet charges. Even though the American army had modern weapons and advanced equipment, its commanders and soldiers were not familiar with close fighting, night combat, and bayonet charges.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{112} Shen, Zonghong, Meng Zhaohui, and others, \textit{The History of the War}, 9.

\textsuperscript{113} See Chapter 3: Facing Off over Korea, in the section entitled "Integration of the Various Tactics."


\textsuperscript{115} Christensen, "Threats, Assurances, and the Last Chance for Peace," 144, note 63. See also Chen Jian, \textit{China's Road}, 143.

\textsuperscript{116} Xuezhi Hong, "The CPVF's Combat and Logistics," in \textit{Mao's Generals Remember Korea}, ed. Li Xiaobing, Allan Reed Millett, and Yu Bin (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 115.

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The Chinese expected bayonet charges to play a large role in the hypothetical next war; the United States thought that in general strategic bombing and nuclear exchanges would be central. Again, this is precisely what the theory would predict: “Each side should believe that battles will be dominated by factors emphasized by their own theory of victory.” (Prediction #4)117

On October 24, 1950 in a speech to the People’s Consultative Congress, Zhou Enlai wrote, “Our Army is capable of resolving the problem. The Air Force and Navy will not go because only next year will we establish them. But should we wait until our strength has grown before intervening? No!”118 When it intervened, writes one Chinese scholar and military historian, “the CPV employed all of these familiar tactics: numerical superiority, mobile operations, and surprise.”119

Another Chinese source quotes the Current Events Bulletin of the Central Committee of the CCP of October 26, 1950. This was an internally circulated, classified source that would have only been available to senior Chinese decisionmakers. This report also expresses their confidence in any conventional battle:

[The United States] has economic strength and superiority of weapons and equipment, but its invasion actions toward the five continents has received the opposition of the people of the world and led to its political isolation. Militarily speaking, it also has many weak spots: its front line is long, its rear areas are far away, its troops are not numerous, its morale is not high. Its allied friends—England, France, etc.—are no longer great powers. Japan and West Germany have yet to arm. Atomic weapons are

117 And it is irrelevant to the theory which side was correct in their expectations. The widely disparate views shaped their threat assessments.


now held by others, and furthermore do not determine victory or defeat. The final victory will certainly belong to the Chinese and Korean people.120

Thus, the Chinese confidence on conventional grounds was widespread.

Mao's Doubts
This is not to say that Chinese optimism was not unchecked, by any means. It is clear that Chinese entered the war with much trepidation. Mao is reputed to have paced the floor for a few days as the final moves were being made, and much of the back and forth communication with Stalin in early October did center on the provision of Soviet air support (which did not materialize until much later).121 However, the most shrill of the Chinese communications seem clearly to be attempts by the Chinese to get the best possible bargain from their Soviet patrons.122 Clearly, such an ideal bargain would include air support and mechanized weapons. But the key point is, when the Soviets rebuffed the personal request for air support of Zhou Enlai, who had flown to Moscow on short notice in early October, the Chinese went ahead with their decision to intervene nevertheless. From their perspective it seems, air support would have been a welcome addition, but was not deemed absolutely critical to military operations.

Across all these pieces of evidence, the Chinese assessment of both sides’ capabilities is precisely predicted by this dissertation’s theory: Differences in theories of victory correlate with underestimation (Prediction #1). Leaders denigrated their adversary’s theory of victory (Prediction #2) and did not have nuanced discussions of

120 Shen Zonghong, Meng Zhaohui, and others, The History of the War, 10.
121 For the best recreation of Mao's decision making here, see Chen Jian, China's Road, 171-209.
122 Ibid., 199.
their adversary’s strategy (Prediction #3). Indeed, the lack of sophistication in considering American strategies and capabilities is precisely that suggested in that prediction. The very large difference in the theories of victory led to large and frequent underestimations (Prediction #10). The optimism that comes from the difference in the two sides’ theories of victory supports H, and likely informs conclusions regarding the dangers of war with the United States in the first place. That is, it supports the link between mistaken assessments of the balance of power that come from the underestimation of the adversary and escalation of the conflict (H2a).

Again, this data regarding Chinese perceptions of the prospects for war with the United States comes from periods after May 1950. Nevertheless, it illustrates the enduring Chinese views regarding air power and mechanization that were present both before and after the key decision was taken. These perceptions would have informed Chinese decisionmakers as they faced the decision of whether to support Kim’s invasion plan since one possible outcome they would have had to consider was war with the United States.

Confidence in the Face of Atomic Weapons

A second element of the Chinese confidence in their forces’ ability to fight the Americans came on the issue of nuclear weapons. As the evidence will show, once the Korean War broke out, a wide range of Chinese leaders continued to express confidence in their ability to address this potential threat. Again, much of the evidence presented below focuses on Mao’s thinking about potential American atomic weapon use in late 1950, not earlier that same year. However, if the Chinese leadership did not find American atomic weapons threatening at this later point, when any uncertainty about
American involvement in Korea had been resolved, it is unlikely that they would have felt differently in May when they decided whether to support Kim’s invasion plans.\footnote{One argument why this might not be the case would be to note that the Chinese might have increased their confidence over time that the United States would not use such weapons since they had not done so in the war from June to October. This, however, only invalidates arguments regarding the likelihood of use of atomic weapons, not the confidence about the Chinese ability to overcome them if used.}

In part, Chinese leaders likely took some limited solace in the signing of the Sino-Soviet alliance as a way to provide some extended deterrent to China. However, it is unlikely they had complete confidence the reliability of his Soviet ally. They would have been concerned about the Soviet side’s negotiating behavior earlier in 1950. In Moscow, the Soviets had expressed great reluctance to include catch phrases like “with all means at its disposal” in the key provision of the treaty: “In the event of an invasion of one of the signatory countries by a third country, the other signatory country shall render assistance \textit{with all means at its disposal}.” Only after much foot dragging by Moscow, was the provision inserted. (Even then the Soviets also were able to limit the scope of the alliance to conditions that were formally “in a state of war”, providing Stalin with some leeway should Chinese behavior appear to put the Soviets in a corner.\footnote{The aforementioned points regarding the motivation on the wording and in particular on Stalin’s desire to limit his commitment on the atomic side especially are drawn from Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue, \textit{Uncertain Partners}, 118. (A similar point is made in Avery Goldstein, \textit{Deterrence and Security in the 21st Century: China, Britain, France, and the Enduring Legacy of the Nuclear Revolution} (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), 66.) The full text of this key paragraph in the Sino-Soviet Treaty is “Both Contracting Parties undertake jointly to adopt all necessary measure at their disposal for the purpose of preventing the resumption of aggression and violation of peace on the part of Japan or any other state that may collaborate with Japan directly or indirectly in acts of aggression. In the event of one of the Contracting Parties being attacked by Japan or any state allied with her and thus being involved in a state of war, the other Contracting Party shall immediately render military and other assistance by all means at its disposal.” See Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue, \textit{Uncertain Partners}, Document 45, p 260. The second caveat explicit in the treaty that gets less attention is the provision regarding “Japan or any other state allied with her...” Clearly, this implied the United States. However, the formal U.S.-Japan alliance was not signed until 1951, so this too likely provided Stalin some wiggle room on his commitments.}) This reluctance by Stalin likely did not inspire great faith in Mao regarding the reliability of...
his extended nuclear deterrent. Similarly, Goldstein’s study of Chinese nuclear deterrence thought points out “Even before a formal treaty of alliance was signed, Soviet behavior under Stalin had provided reason for China to worry about the possibility of abandonment.” Goldstein goes on to argue that these concerns remained unanswered throughout the 1950s.

As the two sides were edging toward conflict, the United States sent a number of subtle nuclear threats. Beginning in early July, the United States had engaged in noisy signaling of nuclear threats by deploying heavy, atomic-capable B-29s to both Northern Europe and to the Asian region in a very public manner. However, the Chinese were by no means cowed by these threats. The Chinese media emphasized that nuclear weapons lacked tactical utility. Ryan’s study of the Chinese views of nuclear weapons summarizes the “systematic, integrated party line dealing with nuclear weapons” of the Chinese policymakers once they had decided to intervene in the Korean War: “The United States had certain glaring weaknesses in its military posture in Korea … It was futile to try to use nuclear weapons to compensate for these weaknesses. Bombing per se, including nuclear bombing, could not be a decisive military tactic.”

125 See other discussions, with Stalin downplaying the utility of the Soviet arsenal at the time, at Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue, Uncertain Partners, 108.
127 Ibid., Chapter 3.
128 The best discussion of this can be found in Dingman, "Atomic Diplomacy During the Korean War."
131 Ryan, Chinese Attitudes toward Nuclear Weapons, 39-40. Ryan suggests this view applied “during the period from late October 1950 through January 1951.”
Chapter 5: China Approves the Invasion

At the same time, private, internal commentaries echoed these public views. At a meeting of the commanders at divisional level and above of the Northeast Military Region on August 13, 1950, one senior participant recalled that the military leaders relied on international popular opposition to prevent the United States from using the weapons:

We then explicitly assessed the factor of nuclear weapons and concluded that it was men, not one or two atomic bombs, that determined the outcome of war. And an atomic bomb use on the battlefield would inflict damage not only on the enemy’s side but also on friendly forces. Furthermore, the people of the world opposed the use of nuclear weapons; the United States would have to think twice before dropping them. 32

Such thinking seems more appropriate for pacifist idealists and political propagandists than for hard-nose military line unit commanders. Senior leaders at the same meeting shared this approach, focusing on their ability to overcome such weapons:

Top CCP leaders speculated ... that the atomic bomb might be used. They understood that if the United States were to use the atomic bomb in Korea China had no way to stop it. But they would not be scared by such a prospect and would try to use conventional weapons to fight the Americans. ... In short, the dominant voice of the conference favored the CCP Politburo’s opinion that China should not be scared by the bomb.’ 33

Internal briefing papers were making similar points in November:

The atomic bomb itself cannot be the decisive factor in a war ... the atomic bomb has many drawbacks as a military weapon ... it can only be used against a big and concentrated object like a big armament industry center of huge concentration of troops. Therefore, the more extensive the opponents’ territory is and the more scattered the opponents’ population is, the less effective will the atomic bomb be.’ 34

A later discussion held by operational military commanders toward the end of the war was similarly Panglossian and simplified. 35


133 Chen Jian, China's Road, 142-4. Indeed, in the early days of the Korean War

134 This is a quote from the internal circulation (neibu) Current Affairs Handbook (Shishi shouce) on November 5, 1950. Quoted in Ryan, Chinese Attitudes toward Nuclear Weapons, 42. While some in the United States would make similar points at the time, the overall tenor in the United States would have been quite the opposite.

Mao, in particular, was dismissive of the value of nuclear weapons for the United States in this case. At the 9th meeting of the Central Committee on September 5, 1950, he argued:

We will not let you (the United States) attack us. If you absolutely want to do so, then go ahead. You attack us your way, we will attack you ours. You attack using atomic weapons, we will attack using hand grenades; we will grab on to your weaknesses, and after this, in the end, defeat you.136

As a sign of his confidence about this issue, in his telegram to Mao conveying his decision to enter into war to Stalin, Mao makes no mention of nuclear weapons.137

A scholarly assessment from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 1994 is highly critical of Mao's views on nuclear weapons. It characterizes them precisely as above, that is, as strongly denigrating the weapons' utility.138 This study goes on to explicitly make the point of this dissertation's theory:

In the case of Sino-U.S. conflict, we can see that Chinese leaders, particularly Mao Zedong, and the American leaders used different criteria to assess atomic bombs or atomic warfare. They lacked the basis to reaching a common understanding.139

Similarly, Chen Jian describes the view of top leaders from the CCP as they moved closer to intervention later in the summer:

Top CCP leaders speculated ... that the atomic bomb might be used. They understood that if the United States were to use the atomic bomb in Korea China had no way to stop it. But they would not be scared by such a prospect and would try to use conventional weapons to fight the Americans. ... In short, the dominant voice of the conference favored the CCP Politburo's opinion that China should not be scared by the bomb.140

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136 沈,孟,等<<抗美援朝战史>> Shen Zonghong, Meng Zhaohui, and others, The History of the War, 5.

137 For a work that emphasizes this point as significant and related to Mao's pejorative views of such weapons, see Chen Jian, China's Road, 179. For a view that places less emphasis on this, see Christensen, "Threats, Assurances, and the Last Chance for Peace," 137, note 43.


139 Ibid.: 14.

140 Chen Jian, China's Road, 142-4.
Certainly some of the Chinese confidence stemmed from a belief that the United States was unlikely to use nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{141} Nevertheless, even this judgment contains some assessment of the likely utility of the use of such weapons for the United States; it involves some cost-benefit analysis. As the Chinese made that estimate, they substantially downplayed the benefits that would accrue to the United States relative to the perceptions on that issue in the United States.\textsuperscript{142} (This imputation of intent from capability precisely that predicted in $H_{2A}$ of this dissertation.)

Additional evidence on this point can be found once the two sides were engaged in conflict. At various times during the war,\textsuperscript{143} and particularly during the long drawn out negotiations over ending the Korean War, the United States made threats—sometimes oblique, sometimes less so—regarding atomic weapons to push the Chinese negotiating position. In early 1951, Truman deployed not only atomic-capable bombers, but bombers loaded with actual atomic weapons to the region.\textsuperscript{144} However, as one scholar well versed in Chinese sources regarding the Korean War concluded,

There is no evidence to show that the Beijing leadership, while forming this tough strategy [regarding its negotiating position at Panmunjom], paid any significant attention to whether or not the Americans would use nuclear weapons in Korea. Although military planners in Beijing probably considered the possibility that the Americans would use nuclear weapons for tactical targets in Korea, Mao and the other Chinese leaders firmly believed that the outcome of the Korean conflict would be determined by ground operations. Not surprising at all, then, when Mao and the other CCP leaders analyzed

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 178.
\item \textsuperscript{142} And again, the critical issue is that the two sides differ in their valuation of a particular strategy, not which side is correct. Different perspectives, right or wrong, will make communication more difficult.
\item \textsuperscript{143} There may have been attempts to quietly threaten the Chinese in May of 1951, although precisely what was being demanded of the Chinese is unclear from the available historical record (perhaps simply not expanding the war further, although it is odd this threat would be conveyed to the Chinese rather than the Soviets). See Dingman, "Atomic Diplomacy During the Korean War," 140-41.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
the means Washington might use to put pressure on the Communists, they did not even bother to mention the atomic bomb.\textsuperscript{145}

If the Chinese were not threatened by (or could not understand) the more explicit threats in late 1950 and 1951, then there is no chance they would have been deterred by the mere possession of atomic weapons by the United States in early-mid 1950. Again, this evidence supports the link between different theories of victory and underestimation (H\textsubscript{1}) and the predictions regarding the perceptions of the adversary’s strategies, the overall balance of power, the nature of war, and the effect of extreme values on the independent variable (Predictions #1-3 and #10).

The evidence above suggests large degree of confidence on the Chinese side regarding both conventional and atomic warfare. This confidence supports the link between different theories of victory and underestimation of the adversary (H\textsubscript{1}) and likely shaped China’s views about the overall balance of power (thus, supporting Predictions #1 and #10 and H\textsubscript{2A}) and also about the degree of intent that the American policies would have communicated. In turn, this led to difficulty in interpreting the adversary’s intent—H\textsubscript{2B}—and downplaying the likelihood that he will indeed get involved—Prediction #6 and #7.

**Beliefs regarding American Intent**

In addition to exhibiting confidence regarding Chinese capabilities, Mao did not expect the United States to get involved in the Korean War. This directly supports Prediction #7: “Leaders of states with different theories of victory should downplay the

likelihood of the other side getting involved in a conflict or in further raising the stakes in it.” Khrushchev, in his memoirs, writes of Mao’s perceptions as the Chinese leader was approving the invasion in May: Mao “put forward the opinion that the USA would not intervene since the war would be an internal matter which the Korean people would decide for themselves.”

Similarly, in December of 1949, Mao summarized his and Stalin’s shared views on the general situation in Asia:

Stalin said that the Americans are afraid to fight a war. Americans order others to fight, but they too are afraid. According to this thinking, it would be very hard for war to arise. We agree with this estimate.

Merely a fortnight later, on January 5, 1950 in Beijing, senior military leaders in China were downplaying the possibility of the United States sending troops to defend Taiwan in the event of a PRC invasion there on military grounds. The proponent of this was Su Yu, the leader in charge of the invasion of Taiwan, who was speaking at a “military conference”. Chen Jian summarizes:

From a military perspective, Su saw a vulnerable America. He believed the that United States needed at least five years to mobilize enough troops to enter a major military confrontation in the Far East. Su’s conclusion was that “in terms of their attitude toward Taiwan, the American’s would not send troops to Taiwan but might send in planes, artillery, and tanks.”

(Note that the two pieces of evidence presented here predate the Acheson speech so certainly cannot have been affected by it.) After the Korean War broke out Zhou Enlai expressed a similar optimism about American behavior in the face of Chinese people’s

146 Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, 368.

147 Emphasis added. Mao was summarizing a conversation he had with Stalin on December 16, 1950 two days later in a telegraph to Liu Shaoqi. See Pei Jianzhang, *Foreign Relations History*, 17. For a comparison of this source to two others on the same meeting, see Chen Jian, "Commentaries: Comparing Russian and Chinese Sources: A New Point of Departure for Cold War History," *Bulletin of the Cold War International History Project*, no. 6-7 (1995/96): 20.

148 Chen Jian, *China's Road*, 102. Chen implies this is not a response to President Truman’s speech later on the same day in Washington, and given the 13 hour time difference this is almost certainly the case.

War strategies: “The unity of our nation and our people is so important and so powerful that any imperialist attempt to invade China would be frightened away by it.” Each of these examples suggests that at a general level, the Chinese were inclined to downplay the likelihood of American intervention.

The two leading Chinese scholars writing on this period from the United States also agree. Zhang Shuguang writes that Chinese military commanders were “alarmed at the vigorous American military reaction to the Korean events” in June of 1950. Chen Jian supports this at a number of points, for instance: “Mao Zedong and others in Beijing should not have been surprised by the North Korean invasion, but they were certainly shocked by the quick and unyielding American reaction.” As discussed above, there is evidence from the Russian archives that Mao was encouraging the North Koreans to use force for reunification and to not expect American entry. Other scholars point out that Mao had not expected any substantial U.S. military commitment before the war.

It is easy to understand why this might have been the case given the perspective on American strategy outlined above, as suggests: “An underestimation of an


152 Chen Jian, *China's Road*, 126. See also pp. 134-5.


adversary's capabilities can lead to deterrence and coercive failure, escalation, and conflict in international crises because it complicates assessments of the balance of power.” Since Mao thought U.S. intervention would be costly to the Americans (for the reasons discussed in previous sections), and because he thought the United States cared about such costs, he likely downplayed the likelihood of the United States getting involved. Part of this view came from a general view that communist leaders believed that contradictions among the capitalist forces would be unlikely to lead them to unify in opposition to any communist gains.155 These logics had shaped Chinese interpretation of previous cases. There was also the belief that communist forces had deterred the United States from intervening in the Chinese civil war:

The United States refrained from dispatching large forces to attack China, not because the government didn’t want to, but because it had worries. The first worry: the Chinese people would oppose it and the U.S. government was afraid of getting hopelessly bogged down in a quagmire.156

All of this supports the hypothesis linking underestimation to faulty assessment of the balance of power and coercive failure (H2a) and the prediction that leaders will downplay the likelihood of their adversary’s involvement (Prediction #7). Particularly in the cases of Mao’s December 1949 assessment and that of the military conference in January 1950, the quotes explicitly link the assessment of American intent to a pejorative view of American capabilities that stems from the Chinese theory of victory.


Twomey, The Military Lens

**Dissent in China**

While it is correct to characterize the dominant view in China as optimistic regarding its own capabilities compared to the Americans, there were some prominent dissenters.\(^{157}\) These tended to come from military leaders who had been exposed to western training.

Thus, Zhu De in particular repeatedly advocated that additional resources be dedicated to artillery, air defense, logistics, and air support.\(^{158}\) Zhu De was one of the most senior military leaders in China and was commander-in-chief of the PLA at the time. He had been trained at the Yunnan Military Academy and later taught at Whampoa Military Academy where as noted above, he would have been exposed to German operational arts.\(^{159}\) Zhu De also served under Chiang Kai-shek in a number of capacities. All of which is to suggest that he had reason to view warfare somewhat differently than did Mao.

Similarly, at an early August 1950 discussion, Ye Jianying had argued with Mao, over the merits of sending troops to Korea and the speed with which they could be

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157 Peng Dehuai is sometimes regarded as a dissenter as well. See Andrew Scobell, *China's Use of Military Force: Beyond the Great Wall and the Long March* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 84-86. However, the evidence for this is debatable. Within 24 hours of being appraise of the plan to send Chinese troops to Korea in October of 1950 he goes from believing that “troops should be sent to rescue Korea to believing it was “essential” or required that they do so. Neither of these seems fundamentally opposed to intervention. Further, there is little sense of particular concern regarding the prowess of American weaponry or its air force in Peng’s statements at the time.

158 Yu Bin, "What China Learned (2003),” 129. On Zhu De, see also Scobell, *China's Use of Military Force*, 86.

deployed. Ye was a senior Chinese military leader who had been trained at the Yunnan School, and who also served as an instructor at Whampoa. Some line officers within the Northeast Border Defense Army (NEBDA) also seemed cognizant of the many of their equipment and training problems.

Lin Biao is another leader often cited as one who had a more conventional view of military operations than Maoist doctrine permits. (His later turn toward extreme Maoist rhetoric is often explained with reference to another aspect of his character: “a shrewd and increasingly cynical Lin began to tailor his advocacy to the prevailing wind.”) Indeed, during the late 1950s and early 60s, Lin Biao’s contributions towards modernization and professionalization of the PLA were substantial.

On 29 September 1959, in his first major policy speech, Lin set the tone for much of what was to follow … A subtle but significant modification was also made to Mao’s doctrine that “men are superior to material.” Lin’s new formulation was that “men and material form a unity with man as the leading factor.” Later in the year, Lin also reinstated Su Yu as vice-minister of defense. Su had been fired in October 1958, for advocating all-out priority to PLA modernization.

Lin’s emphasis on preserving professionalism and enhancing modernization within the military remained strong even during the tumultuous Cultural Revolution.

Thus it is not surprising that Lin’s views led him to a deep skepticism about the merits of Chinese involvement in Korea. Unfortunately, there is no evidence

160 Ryan, Chinese Attitudes toward Nuclear Weapons, 27. Ryan cites the memoirs of one of Peng Dehuai’s assistants on Mao’s argument. See also Scobell, China’s Use of Military Force, 89.

161 Zhang Shuguang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 62.


Twomey, *The Military Lens*

regarding his position in May 1950, as the decision to support the North Korean’s invasion in the first place was being made. However, there is information regarding Lin’s views on Chinese intervention in October 1950. At that point, he would have been the obvious leader to take command of the Chinese forces in Korea. He was a well-respected military leader who commanded the Fourth Route Army, the seasoned army already deployed in the Northeast that was later to serve as the core of the intervention force. Furthermore, he was quite close to Mao. However, he refused the job offer from China’s paramount leader (never an easy task in authoritarian dictatorships). Publicly, this was said to be because of his poor health. However, there is significant evidence that this story is, at best, incomplete. Peng Dehuai, the eventual commander, writes in his autobiography: “Mao needed a willing military commander since his first choice, Lin Biao, clearly was reluctant to take the assignment.”

No mention of the health issue here, and indeed “reluctance” and a need for someone “willing” suggest that there was more going on here. More sharply worded on this point, however, is the autobiography of Nie Rongzhen, at that time Chief of Staff of the PLA:

Lin Biao opposed sending our troops to Korea. At first, Mao had chosen Lin to command the CPVF in Korea, but Lin was so fearful of this task that he gave the excuse of illness and obstinately refused to go to Korea. It was strange to me because I had never seen him so timid in the past when we worked together.\(^\text{167}\)

Chen Jian as well characterizes Lin as opposed to the war, citing memoirs of Chai Chengwen, a Chinese diplomat stationed in Pyongyang, as well as documents and

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165 Again see Scobell, *China’s Use of Military Force*, 87-89.


recollections of the relevant Politburo and senior leadership meetings. Lin apparently led some other dissenters in the Politburo Standing Committee meeting of October 4, although little is known of their identities.

Thus, there clearly was some dissent regarding the utility of People’s War against the American forces, and this led some leaders to oppose the war in early fall. However, as is made clear above, the dissent seems centered in a few leaders who were least identified with a People’s War doctrine or leaders who had been exposed to western thinking about military affairs. In these cases, their own theory of victory was closer to that of the United States, and so their assessments of the Chinese prospects were much more pessimistic. Unfortunately, Mao and the most important other top leaders held different views.

This section thus supports the prediction from the theory chapter that suggested that leaders less wrapped up in their side’s theory of victory will be less likely to make the underestimating errors associated with this theory (Prediction #11).

Post-Event Evaluations by the Chinese

Again, the theory chapter suggests that in addition to direct evidence through process tracing, a number of other, related, ancillary predictions of the theory can be used to test it. Several of those pertain to surprise by the countries after a failure of strategic coercion. This section shows that the American response surprised Mao and the Chinese leadership. There is clear evidence that they had misjudged American intent

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168 Chen Jian, *China’s Road*, 152, 185. See also associated notes.
169 Ibid., 182.
(Prediction #9). The theory also makes predictions about Chinese assessments of both its and the U.S.'s doctrines after war has been joined by both sides. The shock shown at all levels—tactical, operational, and strategic—in China as well as at the effectiveness of American airpower comes up repeatedly and strongly supports Prediction #8 which anticipates precisely this reaction. These assessments led to significant changes in the PLA. Since part of the calculus for the Chinese regarding supporting Kim's intervention in the first place was based on the prospect of China getting involved in a wider war (and confidence about that), this evidence strongly supports $H_1$ this dissertation's theory.

Again, as with the previous section, some of the evidence presented here will come from the fall of 1950. (Although some data does come from June and July 1950, so is less far removed from the Chinese decision of May and does not raise these issues.) For the most part, however, there is no alternative, even if complete access to Chinese archives was possible. Of course, the only way to assess how Chinese perceptions of their relative capabilities stacked up in the real world is to examine them during and after a military conflict. Due to particulars about alliance relations in the Korean War, the Sino-American conflict did not begin until five months after Mao gave his approval for the war to begin. However, the Chinese surprise at that point would have been based on (and contrasted with) beliefs that were in place in May 1950 as well. Thus, that

170 In full, Prediction #8 reads:

8. Actual battle outcomes, when they occur, should deviate further from leaders' expectations when nations have more different theories of victory guiding their forces.
   a. In cases where one side forced the battle on the other, the side taking the initiative should be surprised at its difficulties on the battlefield
   b. In cases where both sides pursued battle, both sides should be surprised at their difficulties
   c. More generally, any leader who believes s/he has a viable strategy in the context of the current conflict should be surprised at its (relative) shortcomings when battle is actually joined.
   d. Leaders often have incentives to conceal their surprise, so it may manifest itself as hastily reinforcing or last minute changes in strategy.
information is useful here for evaluating the various predictions of the dissertation’s theory, as outlined above.

**Surprise at American Entry**

As argued above, Mao had not expected the United States to get involved in the Korean War. Beyond the points raised above, his surprise at U.S. entry is shown through his behavior after the war broke out. The U.S. response led to substantial changes in Chinese policy in several areas, something that would be unlikely had the Chinese anticipated the American action. Chinese policy toward the United States shifted at a grand strategic level, moving to a more confrontational mode toward not only Korea, but also toward Indochina and Taiwan. On July 7th, not even two weeks after the outbreak of war, the Central Military Commission (CMC) quickly made a decision to act: “There emerged a consensus that the Sino-Korean border defense must be strengthened immediately since ‘it is necessary to prepare an umbrella before it rains.’”

Note that this same logic would have applied in May or throughout June had the Chinese expected the United States to become significantly involved. While *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* is not logically correct, nevertheless, this evidence is suggestive. It seems likely that the Chinese were not expecting a substantial and effective American engagement or they would have made these moves earlier.

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171 And as noted, the Chinese knew of the North Korean plan to attack, so that event cannot be the cause of the change in Chinese behavior.

172 Chen Jian, *China’s Road*, 130ff.


174 While the Chinese claim to have had no prior knowledge of the precise date of the North Korean offensive, they should have had some rough sense of this following the May meetings.
As it was, only immediately following the CMC meeting was the PLA to move large numbers of troops. These had been deployed in Fujian, the obvious jumping point for an invasion of Taiwan, but were moved towards the northeast, where they would form the core of the NBDA. Further, these early Chinese moves to redeploy troops were particularly hurried, with large units given very short timeframes to complete their orders. Note also, these moves occurred in mid-July, well before the war began to turn in favor of the United States (at which point a different logic—defensive concern over Manchuria—might explain the Chinese moves). All this suggests that the U.S. action surprised Mao and the senior Chinese leadership, and they had misjudged American intent in the diplomatic and military signaling before the war.

_Strategic Level Evidence_

When American and Chinese forces met in November 1950, the Korean War proved disastrous for Maoist military thought. Whitson writes that after the outbreak of the war, the role of the “peasant ethic” in Chinese military thought declined. He summarizes the lessons learned:

The first year of the Korean War thus challenged the 1947 ten-point compromise between Mao and his generals. On the strategic level, the belief of senior Communist officials that a quick battlefield victory would demoralize the United Nations troops proved not only erroneous but terribly costly in trained manpower. At the tactical level, commissar emphasis on political ideology soon rang false, as officers and men rediscovered the virtues of small-unit professional leadership as the greatest assurance of battlefield performance and loyalty. These lessons reinforced the post-1951 trend toward

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175 Chen Jian, _China's Road_, 132.


modernization in the PLA and had an immediate impact upon the preparation of the
second great wave of PLA units assigned to Korea.\textsuperscript{178}

Later, he continues,

A few senior leaders and many younger leaders learned that the best-trained and best-
indoctrinated infantry soldier, lacking properly coordinated air and artillery support, is a
poor match for massed modern firepower, coordinated by a single staff through
sophisticated communications. They learned other disheartening lessons about the
efficacy of guerrilla warfare, Mao’s thought, and “People’s War.”\textsuperscript{179}

Several quotes from senior Chinese leaders emphasize this point. Mao later wrote:

The War to Resist America and Support Korea served as a large classroom for us. At
that time we engaged in a big practice exercise. This exercise was much more useful
than ordinary military training.\textsuperscript{180}

This suggests that Mao learned something new about American tactics and warfare from
the war. Zhou Enlai had a similar impression, writing in 1952:

Although in terms of equipment, weapons, and firepower we were weak compared to the
American imperialists, we learned many things from our enemy’s side. Now we have
practiced, and we know how to drive back their attacks. . . . If this war had not occurred,
we would not have been able to learn from these experiences.\textsuperscript{181}

Both of these quotes blandly suggest that in Korea the United States taught the Chinese
forces some lessons. Given that archival material is only selectively released by a CCP
bureaucracy that uses historiography (and hagiography) to justify the party’s continued
authoritarian rule, one should not expect too much more. (Indeed, at a general level,
even now one only sees occasional critiques of Mao’s conduct of the war in China. For
instance, one Chinese scholar writes specifically of Mao’s “rash determination to entirely

\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 95.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., 462.
\textsuperscript{180} Liao Guoliang, Li Shishun, and Xu Yan, The Development of Mao Zedong’s Military Thought, Revised ed.
(Beijing: The People’s Liberation Army Press, 2001), 452.
\textsuperscript{181} Zhou Enlai, Zhou Enlai’s Selected Military Writings, 297.
Twomey, *The Military Lens*

destroy the UN Army” following the successful second campaign leading to “suffering many serious setbacks in subsequent campaigns.”

Outsiders can be more honest. In his memoirs, Khrushchev writes of the persistent optimism of the Chinese forces as they entered the Korean War, and the mistaken nature of those beliefs:

In the archives you can find documents in which P’eng Te-huai gave his situation reports to Mao-Tse-tung. P’eng composed lengthy telegrams expounding elaborate battle plans against the Americans. He declared categorically that the enemy would be surrounded and finished off by decisive flanking strikes. The American troops were crushed and the war ended many times in the battle reports which P’eng sent to Mao, who then sent them along to Stalin.

Unfortunately, the war wasn’t ended quickly at all. The Chinese suffered many huge defeats. ... China bore terrible losses because her technology and armaments were considerably inferior to those of the Americans. On both the offensive and the defensive, Chinese tactics depended mostly on sheer manpower.

At a military strategic level, the entire shift to ‘rotational warfare’ in 1951 also suggests an evolving understanding of the war by the Chinese. Rather than an early, comprehensive victory, Chinese leaders recognized they would be fighting the war over a sustained period, thus necessitating a regular rotation of troops into Korea from PLA reserves. Mao’s own explanation of this to Stalin expresses the belated nature of the recognition of this point:

First, it is clear from the most recently conducted campaigns of the Korean War that the greater part of the enemy has not suffered destruction and therefore is not going to abandon Korea. If we are going to destroy the enemy in any large numbers, then we need time. We ought make preparations for at least two years...After losing several hundred thousand Americans over a period of several years, they will have to recognize the difficulty that they are in and pull back. Then we can settle the Korean question.

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184 This is drawn from a telegram from Mao to Stalin on March 1, 1951, reprinted in Michael H. Hunt, *Crisis in U.S. Foreign Policy: An International History Reader* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997), 227-28.
The latter portion of that quote is particularly interesting given that Mao had earlier bemoaned the loss of a “over a hundred thousand battle and non-battle casualties” of his own in less than three months of fighting. This hints at his views of the relative casualty sensitivity of the two sides: several hundred thousand casualties over a period of many years would cause a strategic reappraisal in the United States, but losses on a pace of several hundred thousand in a single year would not be a problem for China.

All of this suggests that at a strategic level, the Chinese were surprised by the prowess of the American military it faced with its own People’s War strategy. This surprise at the adversary’s capabilities on the battlefield is precisely what the theory predicts (Prediction #8). In turn, this supports the overall hypothesis that there was an underestimation and that it was linked to the difference in the theories of victory between the two countries (H$_1$).

**Chinese Casualties Were Much Higher than Expected**

Mao’s views on casualties in mid-1951, above, had come a long way. Before the war, Chinese expectations were much more optimistic. In August of 1950, Beijing considered the possibilities of casualties explicitly. Addressing the question of how to replace casualties within the NBDA, Zhou Enlai spoke of “selecting 10,000 men from all other PLA forces for the NBDA replacements.”\textsuperscript{185} At a meeting of the CMC, the members “estimated that casualties of around 200,000 (60,000 deaths and 140,000 wounds [sic]) would occur in the first year of the war and that proper medical support should be prepared.”\textsuperscript{186} In January 1951, a mere six weeks after beginning his main

\textsuperscript{185} Quoted in Zhang Shuguang, *Mao’s Military Romanticism*, 64.

\textsuperscript{186} Chen Jian, *China’s Road*, 151.
offensive, Peng Dehuai already reported having lost half his men, which translates into at least 200,000 casualties. By June 1951, the UN estimated the PLA had suffered some 577,000 casualties. That was only months after the war started. American estimates put total Chinese casualties for the war at 1 million, with the vast majority of those coming before the end of 1951 (and thus the end of the period for which the Chinese estimated incurring 200,000 casualties). After this point, the war settled into relatively static combat with no further major Chinese offensives.

Again, this strongly suggests that the cost-benefit analysis that Beijing had in mind when deciding to take steps that led toward war was far too optimistic.

**Tactical Level Evidence for Ground Combat**

A large amount of evidence regarding Chinese shock at their ineffectiveness compared to the UN forces is also available. Some has been alluded to above; much more will be presented here. The two great powers fought their initial battles in November of 1950. The Chinese soon found that the difficulties in surrounding and wiping out large enemy units—the primary operational strategy for the PLA—were pronounced. American tactical mobility and the substantial firepower available even to small American units caused these problems for the Chinese. Beyond that, the PLA found the logistics demands of a foreign war to be taxing, and the American air force, in their view, caused significant problems. The following sections develop these points.

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188 Lewis and Xue, *China Builds the Bomb*, 8.
Chapter 5: China Approves the Invasion

Views on American Tactical Mobility

The Americans' tactic of rapid withdrawal without the collapse of units also had not been expected by the Chinese (although it had been planned by the U.S. military even before hostilities broke out). The United States would simply retreat to stretch the Chinese lines of communication and would do so even when not under direct pressure.

This led to problems for the Chinese, as Segal describes,

There were signs that the strategy of ambush and luring in deep had its limits against a more modern and mobile force than Chiang Kai-shek's forces. U.S. troops soon found that Chinese forces could not fight lengthy continuous battles without having to stop for supplies and new instructions to get to the front. The swift U.S. withdrawal to the 38th parallel far outstripped the pace that the less flexible Chinese command and logistics system was designed to handle.

Peng Dehuai, as well, noted these difficulties keeping up with the rapidly moving U.S. forces:

Because of their high level of mechanization, the U.S., British, and puppet troops were able to withdraw speedily to the Chongchon River and the Kechon Area, where they started to throw up defense works. Our troops did not pursue the enemy because the main enemy force had not been destroyed even though we had wiped out six or seven battalions of puppet troops and a small number of American troops.

Even much later in the war (in the middle of 1951), Peng complained about the same problem:

Except our energetic pursuit of anti aircraft artillery (including both low and high attitude weapons), increasing military strength outside of battles of the five campaigns in the areas of tactics, technology, and leadership still has many limitations. In too many opportunities to wipe out the enemy, he has again escaped. This deserves thorough discussion, self-criticism, and rectification. What important shortcomings does our military have?


193 Emphasis added. 彭德怀*彭德怀关于几个战术问题的讲话要点*(8/15/51),从*抗美援朝战争期间彭德怀的两次讲话*中共党史资料,1998年12月总第68辑 彭德怀,*Summary of Lecture
Other scholars note that the Chinese were surprised by the speed of American offensives and counterattacks as well.\(^4\)

**Destroying Americans Units once Engaged**

Once the U.S. forces had been found and fixed, the Chinese forces still had trouble destroying them (which they had been able to do against similarly engaged Japanese or KMT forces). "Luring them in deep" was not effective when "they" could then set up hasty, but strong, defensive positions from which they could easily hold off the ill-equipped Chinese forces.\(^5\) Again, Peng notes

> If we encircled a U.S. regiment, our troops would need two days to wipe it out because they were poorly equipped and the enemy air force and mechanized units would do everything to rescue the encircled unit. Only once did our troops wipe out an entire U.S. regiment and none of its men was able to escape; this took place in the Second Campaign. Otherwise our troops were able to wipe out only whole U.S. battalions. If a U.S. battalion encircled in the night were not wiped out while it was still dark, the Americans had the means to rescue it the following day.\(^6\)

Similarly, another scholar, Yu Bin, writes:

The First Campaign also revealed some major problems in the CPVF, however. One was its inadequate firepower, which was so weak that a much larger CPVF unit was often unable to overcome a small enemy unit (battalion level) in a hastily built defensive position. The CPVF was also unable to pursue retreating UN forces because of its unmotorized infantry and lack of supplies. These difficulties were therefore one of the main reasons for its 'disappearance,' which has been widely interpreted by Western analysts as part of the CPVF's strategic plan after the initial engagement with the UN forces.\(^7\)

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\(^4\) Zhang Shuguang, "Command, Control, and the PLA's Offensive Campaigns," 97, 105, 107-8, and 111.

\(^5\) *Ibid.*, 102. This was the case even for the first offensive, in October and November of 1950. Yu Bin, "What China Learned (2003)," 128 and 130.


\(^7\) Yu Bin, "What China Learned from Its 'Forgotten War' in Korea," in *Mao's Generals Remember Korea*, ed. Li Xiaobing, Allan Reed Millett, and Yu Bin (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 15.
Difficulties with Logistics for the PLA

The problems that the logistics system had faced were substantial. Beyond the paucity of military equipment, the PLA troops lacked basic supplies critical for survival in general.

First, we had a big problem feeding our soldiers in the war. Since enemy airplanes bombed us frequently, grain could be transported to the front only with difficulty. Even though some reached the front, our troops could not cook their food. Cooking needed fires, and fires caused smoke, which would surely expose our troops' position and attract enemy air raids. There was almost no way to solve this problem. During our five offensive campaigns, many CPVF troops had to allay their hungers with "one bite parched flour and one bite snow." We should say that the parched flour had played a significant role in our food supply during the mobile warfare period. However eating parched snow caused diarrhea.198

Zhou Enlai, who was organizing supply issues for Mao during the war, recognized that the food supplies that the PLA had brought along were insufficient and "every day he called twice" to check on the production of winter clothes.199 The general supply situation was so bad that on January 22, 1951, Zhou was forced to hurriedly call for a meeting of the senior political-military leaders (including Nie Rongzhen and others) to discuss logistics. This was the first time that such a meeting had been formally held regarding the Northeast army and the forces in Korea.200 This poor preparation meant difficulties for the troops in Korea:

[A] large number of CPV troops were severely frostbitten and unable to fight. Some had even died of exposure. The troops had virtually no protection against frostbite; they coated their faces with pork fat and wrapped their feet in straw.201

Indeed this problem complicated the ability of the PLA to prosecute their offensives, as discussed above: "one Chinese military historian points out that the CPV’s defeat in May,

198 Nie Rongzhen, "Beijing's Decision to Intervene," 54.
200 Ibid.: 53.
201 Zhang Shuguang, "Command, Control, and the PLA's Offensive Campaigns," 104.
1951 demonstrated the Communist forces’ inability to overwhelm the enemy without air cover to guarantee the delivery of supplies. Even given these limitations, the demands on the domestic transportation system back in China were tremendous, requiring the use of a full 20 percent of all Chinese trains in fall of 1951.

The Dangers of the USAF

The Chinese certainly had not appreciated the full extent of the dangers that the U.S. Air Force would pose. It exacerbated all of the problems listed above. For instance, the U.S. bombing campaign was having significant effects on logistics. Mao reported to Stalin with a tone of chagrin, “At the same time, the enemy has been constantly bombing transport lines. Only sixty to seventy percent of the resupply materiel for our forces are reaching the front lines, and the remaining thirty to forty percent is being destroyed.” Zhou Enlai’s biography also emphasizes the difficulties posed by the enemy’s air force to the logistics flows, particularly for those heading to the front lines. The tactical effects of all UN air strikes were devastating: “The Chinese admitted that for three years their ground forces were unable to carry out large military activities in the daytime because of such intensive bombing.” When the fledgling Chinese air force first took to the sky against the UN forces, it repeatedly suffered

203 Nie Rongzhen, "Beijing's Decision to Intervene," 56.
204 Telegram from Mao to Stalin, March 1, 1951, reprinted in Hunt, *Crises in U.S. Foreign Policy*, 228.
206 Zhang Xiaoming, *Red Wings over the Yalu*, 204.
setbacks, causing the Chinese leadership to pull it back for additional preparation on two separate occasions.207

**Other Problems**

In some cases, the Chinese simply found themselves fighting a war they did not understand. The PLA’s use of artillery was rudimentary and dealing with counter battery fire proved problematic. As late as October of 1951, a full year after Chinese entry, Peng Dehuai—the top military commander of the PLA forces in Korea—was providing basic admonitions to the senior leadership of the 3rd Army that would have been familiar to any enlisted soldier in the artillery corps in the United States Army:

> Under this condition of our inferiority to the enemy in terms of range, if we are unrealistic and fire our own artillery from exposed, open positions, this is not appropriate. If we do not carefully attend to camouflage and cover, we will immediately encounter unnecessary personnel losses.208

A similar disconnect with modern warfare is apparent in the following passage:

> Amazingly, enemy horse cavalry made daytime appearances. FEAF aircraft found several cavalry units and inflicted heavy losses to men and horses. Pilots reported that the horsemen neither dismounted nor took cover when attacked.209

Both these are consistent with a peasant, infantry army facing an adversary whose tactics created foreign and heretofore-unseen dangers.

It is not only the problems that the PLA faced that are instructive. It is the acute surprise they felt. In short, nearly all the tenets of People’s War were not working against the Americans. Alexander George found evidence for this in his survey of some 300 prisoner of war interviews from the Korean War. He summarized,

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207 Ibid., 107, 155.

208 Peng Dehuai, "Summary of Lecture on Several Tactical Problems (October 15, 1951)," 2.

As remarks of the kind just quoted imply, PLA military doctrine was discredited in the eyes of the Chinese soldiers by what they had experienced in Korea. It is of particular importance to note that disillusionment with Mao Tse-tung’s doctrine extended to combat cadres. ... The eighteen hard core prisoners (mostly junior combat cadres at company and lower levels) were virtually unanimous in reporting that they and their fellow soldiers had come to question the applicability of PLA military doctrine to the conditions of combat and the nature of the enemy in Korea.210

George also relates the plaintive pleas from battalion and regimental elements for “reinforcements of airplanes and artillery.”211 From nearly a hundred interviews of soldiers who had entered Korea with the first wave of Chinese forces in the fall of 1950, more than 85 percent found their training to be “totally inadequate” for the Korean War.212 This figure is particularly astounding since these forces, committed to the war at the outset, were among the best-trained and equipped forces of the PLA at the time.213

The Full Range of Tactical Problems

Peng Dehuai summarized the wide scope of problems that the Chinese forces faced at the end of the Third Campaign, in early January 1951:

By now the Chinese People’s Volunteers had fought three major campaigns in a row in severe winter after their entry into Korea three months before. They had neither an air force nor sufficient anti-aircraft guns to protect them from enemy bombers. Bombed by aircraft and shelled by long-range guns day and night, our troops could not move about in the daytime. And they had not had a single day’s good rest in three months. It is easy to imagine how tired they were. As our supply lines had now been extended, it was very difficult to get provisions. The strength of our forces had been reduced by nearly 50 percent due to combat and non-combat losses. Our troops badly need reinforcements and rest and reorganization before they could go into battle again.214


213 Former KMT troops were used as well, but mostly later in the war. The troops involved in the earlier campaigns were drawn heavily from the Fourth Route Army, the most storied in PLA history from the Chinese Civil War.

All of the evidence presented in the sections suggests that the PLA had not expected to face such a capable military, as the dissertation’s theory would predict in the context of such differing theories of victory (Prediction #8). The repeated surprise at the shortcomings of the Chinese way of war is clearly apparent in the evidence above. This suggests that the Chinese were likely to have misperceived the overall balance of power before the war, contributing to errors in their decision-making and their assessment of the U.S. side.

Changes in Doctrine during the War and After

After the Chinese had entered the Korea War and engaged the UN forces, they made a number of changes in PLA doctrine and strategy. These, too, are suggestive of the failure of the Chinese side to accurately assess the other side’s capabilities. Many of these changes addressed difficulties stemming from the unexpected effectiveness of the Americans against People’s War strategies.

Some of these changes refined the PLA’s tactics:

Overwhelming UN firepower, in turn, forced the CPV to change its tactics ... The CPV adopted its so-called mobile defense tactic. It would deploy its forces lightly at the front while reserving the main units at greater depth. This helped reduce casualties from UN fire and maintained some flexibility for mobile operations. 215

Other scholars note a Chinese shift toward static, attritional warfare that was not in part of a Maoist People’s War strategy and had not been part of the PLA’s original plan. 216

For the infantry itself, infiltration tactics, utilizing highly trained small units (and not large masses of poorly trained units as would have been called for under a People’s War

215 Yu Bin, "What China Learned (2003)," 133. This is a standard implementation of a defense-in-depth strategy, useful against a mobile, armored adversary.

216 Pape, Bombing to Win, 155.
strategies) were increasingly used. The logistics system was thoroughly overhauled in the wake of the bloody losses of the Fifth Campaign. Yu Bin provides an excellent summary of the range of military changes:

From the conclusion of the Fifth Campaign until the end of the war, the CPV adopted more cautious and realistic strategies, including maintaining a relatively stable front line, increasing CPV air force, artillery, and tank units; and beefing up logistical supplies. Indeed the CPV increasingly became a mirror image of its American counterpart in its calculation and operation of the war. In the end, the CPV emphasized professionalism, the role of firepower, and improved capabilities.

Additionally, very rapidly during the war, Chinese forces moved away from the political emphasis inherent in People’s War strategies.

The Chinese also made changes in the nature of units brought to Korea. Whitson notes that the second set of units the PLA deployed to the Korean theater put increased emphasis on the technical branches: “artillery, anti-tank, engineer, railway-guard, and eighteen out of twenty two new air divisions were committed in an apparent process of modernization under fire.” The PLA Army Groups committed to the fifth offensive by the Chinese (in spring 1951) were much better equipped, having received Soviet weaponry for most of their order of battle. After the war, Peng proposed

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217 Peng Dehuai, "Summary of Lecture on Several Tactical Problems (October 15, 1951)." 3. Again, this comes from a lecture in mid-1951 by Peng to the senior leadership of the 3rd Army. In it, he emphasizes the importance of company and battalion infiltration, of highly trained, “crack” troops who would aim to destroy command and control targets, as well as of artillery. Again, this is a contrast from aiming to wipe out entire units, as was called for under traditional People’s War tactics. The tactics are clearly reminiscent of German doctrinal innovation late in WWI facing a similar strategic terrain: static front lines well supported with substantial firepower.

218 Evan A. Feigenbaum, China’s Techno-Warriors: National Security and Strategic Competition from the Nuclear to the Information Age (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 17.

219 Yu Bin, "What China Learned (2003)," 137. Clearly these military changes were coupled with changes in political or geo-strategic goals. However, these are clearly related: the changed political goals resulted from difficulties faced on the battlefield.

220 Whitson and Huang, The Chinese High Command, 95.

221 Ibid.
increasing the relative weight of the artillery, air defense, armored, engineers, and other technical branches still further, all at the expense of the infantry.  

Additionally, and of the largest long-term importance, after the war, the PLA began to strongly emphasize modernization. The link between this and the lessons of the war are indisputable: “The impact of the Korean War on the modernization of the Chinese army can hardly be overestimated.” As a specific example, the Chinese undertook a program of training guided by the PLA’s Academy of Military Science [AMS] that went was very different from previous military education:

PLA training for conventional warfare was to employ combined arms operations in the Soviet model. AMS recommendations indicate that future training was to go beyond simply combining ground force arms to include all three services in addition to the infantry, artillery, and tank and air defense units of the ground forces. The PLA was taking its first steps toward joint warfare.

In a recent comprehensive study on the evolution of China’s national military science and technology research programs, Feigenbaum describes the depth of change that followed the war in this regard.

Doctrinal differences erupted full-force within the PLA, although the precise tenor and scale of the disputes remain difficult to gauge even five decades later. As early as 1952, Liu Bocheng, a hero of the civil war, began to deliver a series of now-famous lectures to division-level officers at the PLA’s new Military Academy in Nanjing that offered a theoretical rationale to undermine Mao’s doctrine of “man over weapons.” After the Korean armistice, the practical impact of American firepower combined with Liu’s theoretical insights to establish what Lewis and Xue have termed a “new baseline of knowledge” for military professionals. The academy began to teach the “lessons” of Korea in the classroom and nurtured an entire generation of Chinese senior officers on the notions of “modern,” mechanized, technologically oriented warfare that had emerged from the PLA’s brutal encounter with American technology in Korea.

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222 Wang Yan et al., Biography of Peng Dehuai (Beijing: Modern China Press, 1993), 505.


225 Feigenbaum, China's Techno-Warriors, 18.
Twomey, The Military Lens

Peng Dehuai’s biography suggests that these lessons reverberated far beyond the military and explains the emphasis on military technology in the 1952 five year plan with reference to the war: “That was the plan made during the period while the war was still continuing, [calling for] large scale development of technology in all branches of the armed services.”²²⁶ When Peng presented a 10-point report the senior military leadership of the PLA in early 1954, less than six months after the war, the bulk of the discussion focused on modernization and technology development.²²⁷

Changes in the focus of the senior leadership paralleled these changes in the mid-level officer training. Liu Shaoqi, later to serve as defense minister, served as commandant of the Nanjing Academy during this time of debate and change. There he battled against the established Maoist ideology.²²⁸ Peng Dehuai (Minister of Defense through much of the later 1950s) tried to implement these changes throughout the mid- and late-1950s.²²⁹ As Feigenbaum writes,

Under Marshal Peng Dehuai, the high command spent much of the 1950s trying to cope with vast gaps in Chinese readiness and technology revealed by the Korean War. Influenced by Soviet doctrine, these men recognized the sharp divergence between the army’s guerrilla traditions and its need for modern weapons. Thus [they were] united by a nearly universal sense that the PLA’s guerrilla heritage had lost relevance in the face of enemy firepower.²³⁰

The struggles over professionalization (or man versus weapons) of the PLA throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s centered on interpreting the lessons of the Korean War.²³¹

²²⁶ 王, 等 <<彭德怀传>> Wang Yan and al, Biography of Peng Dehuai, 502.
²²⁷ Ibid., 510-513.
²²⁸ Feigenbaum, China’s Techno-Warriors, 22. Discussing the Nanjing School in similar terms is Whitson and Huang, The Chinese High Command, 462.
²³⁰ Feigenbaum, China’s Techno-Warriors, 27.
²³¹ Joffe, Party and Army, 48-50.
Ellis Joffe, a doyen in PLA studies for the last several decades, summarizes these doctrinal and force structure changes:

It is difficult to evaluate the less tangible aspects of the Korean War's impact on the Chinese military leaders, but there can be little doubt that it was a traumatic experience for them. It hammered home the fact that their army would have to undergo a sweeping technological and organizational transformation before it could lock horns with a modern military force; it exposed them to the manifold problems of modern warfare for which their rich storehouse of experience provided no solutions; and it dramatically demonstrated the limitations and liabilities of their hitherto successful strategy and tactics. In sum, the Korean War not only gave the Chinese an almost newly equipped army, but it also probably raised serious doubt in the minds of at least some leaders regarding the continuing validity of many facets of their experience.

These shifts suggest that the Chinese found their previous doctrine lacking in comparison to their adversaries, thus calling into question the assessments of power and intent that sprang from them. This is precisely what the theory predicts: nations should be surprised at their relative weakness on the battlefield (Prediction #8). The existence of such surprise strongly suggests that their original estimation of the adversary was mistaken ($H_i$).

**Slowly Budding Interest in Airpower**

The problems posed by American airpower were noted above. However, even after the war began, Mao continued to downplay the role of airpower. His persistent reluctance to fully appreciate the impact of airpower on his ground forces was a constant source of tension with the operational commander on the ground, Peng Dehuai. Mao repeatedly pushed Peng to move faster and to push harder, while Peng would point out the severe damage American airpower was imposing. Similarly, Mao expressed...

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232 Ibid., 12.

233 Zhang Xiaoming, *Red Wings over the Yalu*, 114.
skepticism about the effects of airpower to line commanders who, having been on the receiving end, knew better:

Zhu Guang, commander of the 2nd Artillery Division, later recalled that when he returned to Beijing several months later, Mao invited him to his office and asked for Zhu’s opinion about how serious a threat UN airpower was to ground operations, and how many casualties were actually inflicted upon Chinese forces by aircraft. The chairman appeared displeased with those he thought exaggerated the role of enemy airpower.\textsuperscript{34}

However, eventually Peng and others were able to change Chairman Mao’s mind, and secure additional support for the PLA Air Force. Both it and the Navy received added attention after some of the sharp losses of the battles with the United States:

By mid-1951 U.S. intelligence estimated that there were “10,000 Soviet military advisers throughout China.” Soviet assistance had made substantial improvements to the Chinese air force and navy and was expected to increase sharply.\textsuperscript{35}

After the war, the air force received particular attention. Rather than undergoing a demobilization, as is the case in many countries following the conclusion of a large scale war, the Chinese aimed to more than double the size of their air force within a mere five years.\textsuperscript{36} After the war, Peng emphasized the importance of the air force for the future security of the PLA.\textsuperscript{37}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{234} Ibid., 115. While it is possible that Zhu Guang was, in fact, exaggerating the role of American airpower, that is inconsistent with the line of reasoning Zhang is making when he uses this evidence. Zhang presents this data to bolster a point he made regarding Mao’s “reservations about the effect of the enemy’s airpower in Korea.”
\item \textsuperscript{235} Lewis and Xue, \textit{China Builds the Bomb}, 7.
\item \textsuperscript{236} Zhang Xiaoming, \textit{Red Wings over the Yalu}, 209.
\item \textsuperscript{237} 王,等 <<彭德怀传>> Wang Yan and al, \textit{Biography of Peng Dehuai}, 506.
\end{itemize}}
\end{flushright}
Chapter 5: China Approves the Invasion

Rethinking Nuclear Weapons

Chinese thinking regarding nuclear weapons changed in the wake of the Korean War and, even more, the 1954–55 Taiwan Straits Crisis. Early inklings of this were apparent during the later stages of the Korean War.

Thereupon, the Chinese Peoples’ Volunteers launched an urgent campaign to construct fortifications, including, “in the frontline battlefield, Anti-Atom shelters … built deep in the middle of the mountains.” And then too there were the deliberate leaks: “We purposefully let the spies of the other side … get some intelligence of the preparations we were waging.”

Parallel to these military defense measures for their forces in the field, the Chinese were engaged in a significant civil defense program at home. By 1953, the Chinese were carefully following the changes in the American nuclear posture under Eisenhower.

By 1955, Mao’s conversion on the issue of nuclear weapons was complete.

By 1955, this French advice and assistance had helped raise the level of consciousness in Beijing about the bomb and its potential significance for China. Mao characterized that significance for his senior colleagues in 1958, when he told them that without atomic and hydrogen bombs, “others don’t think what we say carries weight.” Mao thus understood the importance of nuclear weapons and the power they bestowed.

Chinese scholars, too, place Mao’s conversion on this issue to the mid-to late-1950s.

Again, these shifts emphasize that when faced with incentive to consider more carefully atomic weapons, Mao was forced to change his view on them. This

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239 Lewis and Xue, *China Builds the Bomb*, 15. Note the citations for this passage are interviews with senior Chinese leaders at the time. The precise timeframe they refer to is unclear, although Lewis and Xue imply that it is during the armistice negotiations.


241 Lewis and Xue, *China Builds the Bomb*, 18; Pape, *Bombing to Win*, 171. See also Lewis and Xue, *China Builds the Bomb*, 256 note 35. This continued as the United States shifted from “massive retaliation” to “flexible response” in its nuclear doctrine. Lewis and Xue, *China Builds the Bomb*, 195.

242 Lewis and Xue, *China Builds the Bomb*, 36.

Twomey, *The Military Lens*

emphasizes the superficial way that nuclear weapons had been considered in the past, supporting Prediction #3 which expects an absence of nuanced discussion regarding the adversary. It also suggests he likely had underestimated their utility in the previous period, as this theory would predict. Again, this supports the main hypothesis linking differences in theories of victory to underestimation of the adversary ($H_1$).

**Summary**

Thus, in nearly every relevant area, the American intervention surprised the Chinese. They had misjudged American intent, underestimated their own casualties, and were deeply mistaken regarding the dangers posed by airpower and mechanized, combined arms formations. After the war, the PLA made numerous doctrinal and strategic changes in response. This all suggests that the Chinese, when deciding whether to support Kim’s invasion plan in May in the first place, were basing their thinking on a flawed cost-benefit analysis. The costs of potential conflict with the United States were much higher than they expected. All this supports one component of the dissertation’s theory, linking differences in theory of victory to underestimation, as well as specific predictions of that theory regarding surprise at the adversary’s capabilities and intent (Predictions #8 and #9).

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244 Some of these misjudgments may have come from ignorance about American doctrine and limited study by the PLA regarding American doctrine and tactics from WWII. However, such ignorance is clearly related to the fact that the American doctrine was so different from that of the Chinese. Had they been more similar, such ignorance would have been dramatically easier to overcome.
An Aside on Soviet and North Korean Motivations

This case examined the failure of the United States to deter Chinese support for the Korean War. What of Soviet and North Korean support? While this dissertation does not aim to explain those nations' policies, they are worth discussing briefly before turning to the next case. For both of those countries, the theory of victory was more similar to that of the United States than that of the Chinese. Clearly, they were not precisely the same (on atomic weapons and strategic bombing in particular there were significant differences), but the Soviets—and the North Koreans whom they taught—did focus on the importance of combined operations, blitzkrieg-type breakthroughs led by tanks, and to some extent on tactical air support. Thus, they should not have been subject to the same over-optimistic biases that this dissertation argues the Chinese fell victim to. Nevertheless, both were in favor of the invasion. Does this contradict the dissertation's theory?

Simply, those two cases of enthusiasm for the war have other explanations. For the North Koreans, there was a strong motivated bias in favor of foreseeing victory. Only by claiming that they were likely to succeed would they be able to secure the support of their two patrons. Reunification was a political and nationalist goal of the highest order, and the support of their allies was required for it. In negotiations with the Soviets and the Chinese, the North Koreans constant downplayed the likelihood that


the United States would intervene. Additionally, the potential costs of a general war would not be borne primarily by them, so the risks of that were not central to their decisionmaking. 247

The Soviets were likely taken in to some extent by Kim's enthusiasm. But beyond that, for them, and Stalin in particular, an additional rationale applied. As noted above, Chen Jian and Richard Thornton separately argue that Stalin wanted to keep Mao dependant on, and to some extent subservient to, Moscow for his survival. 248 In order to achieve this, China had to be in a state of perpetual conflict with the United States. (In at least one account, Stalin saw a greater likelihood of American intervention than Mao did. 249) Dragging the Chinese into the Korean War would accomplish that like no other policy, and so Stalin expressed his support for the war, so long as the Chinese agreed—who as discussed earlier, were to take the lead in supporting communism in East Asia. After May 1950, Stalin's trap was set.

This dissertation makes no claims to explain all cases of false optimism. 250 Other explanations for optimism, false or otherwise, certainly exist. Beyond that, not all wars are explained by false optimism. More to the point, not all participants in a particular war need have the same motivation for entry into it. The dissertation has little to say about the Soviet and North Korean rationales for entering the war. However, for the Chinese in this period, the dangers of getting involved in a potentially catastrophic

247 That should be relevant, for instance, for consideration of atomic issues.

248 Chen Jian, China's Road, Chapter 5: The Decision for War in Korea; Thornton, Odd Man Out: Truman, Stalin, Mao, and the Origins of the Korean War, passim.

249 Khrushchev, Khrushchev Remembers, 368.

250 See the discussion in the "Theory and Method" chapter.
conflict with the United States were viewed with false optimism. Certainly some of that optimism came from Kim's persuasion of Mao that China would not get involved. However, based on the discussion above, it also seems likely that the role of doctrinal difference contributed to Chinese misperceptions and false optimism.

Neither of these above rationales that swayed Moscow and Pyongyang applied to Beijing. The Chinese were likely to bear the direct costs of any escalation themselves, and Korean unification was not a nationalist issue in Beijing. Further, they had no interest in deepening the rift with the United States just as Washington was moving away from alignment to the KMT on Taiwan. For the Chinese, the optimism regarding the possibility of facing the United States had to come from other sources. This chapter has tried to lay out at least a partial explanation for that.

**Conclusion**

This case provides some moderate support for the dissertation's theory. The effects of the two sides' theories of victory certainly shaped each side's perception of its capabilities relative to the other, strongly supporting H₁. The two sides' theories of victory also seemed to have blurred their assessments of the balance of power (H₂A) and shaped the pre-war diplomacy (H₂B) in ways that contributed to the deterrence failure. These points are clearly apparent in the way that the United States used threats and force to send general deterrent signals. There is also circumstantial evidence that the Chinese interpreted U.S. signals as predicted given the context of doctrinal differences. It is there that this case is weakest (although the shortcomings stem from a limitation of available evidence more than the existence of contradictory evidence.) Further, the
dramatic post-war re-evaluation of People’s War strategies by the PLA suggests that its leaders felt their prior theory of victory had been incorrect in many ways, also supporting the theory (H₁, in particular).

The explanation suggested by the Alternate Hypothesis focusing on the objective strength and clarity of the signal in accounting for this failure of general deterrence also does a reasonable job of explaining the case, although it does leave open some questions. As noted, post-hoc concerns over Acheson’s speech seem unlikely to entirely explain the case, and there were some military signals sent. Absent the difficulties in interpreting these signals that this dissertation explains, it would seem that the Chinese should have been more cautious in May 1950. The Alternate Hypothesis should predict a low chance for deterrence success and, in fact, deterrence failed. However, at least some of the processes by which deterrence failed appears to have followed the paths predicted by this dissertation’s theory.

Thus, in this case both theories contribute to a rich understanding of the outcome. While the Alternate Hypothesis has traditionally been the focus of scholarly explanation, based on the limited evidence available, the dissertation’s argument also receives some support. The next case turns to a different theater of Sino-American conflict to see how the proposed theory works there.
Twomey, *The Military Lens*
Chapter 6. CHINA POSTPONES THE INVASION OF TAIWAN (CASE STUDY #3)

Historical Background

This case shifts to look at a different theater. In April of 1949, Communist forces crossed the Yangtze—the critical piece of strategic geography in continental China dividing the north from the south. KMT resistance in the south rapidly crumbled. Immediately thereafter, Mao began to turn his attention to the next and final phase of the civil war, Taiwan.

Taiwan was paramount among a range of Chinese concerns, for both offensive and defensive reasons. The Central Military Commission warned “If we fail to solve the Taiwan problem in a short period, the safety of Shanghai and other coastal ports will be severely threatened.” Indeed, Shanghai was regularly being attacked from the air at the time, and Chinese air defense forces were only having limited success at stymieing the enemy.

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1 Zhou Enlai characterized the Chinese grand strategy at the time as “the concept of confronting the United States on three fronts.” The three fronts were Taiwan, Indochina, and Korea. Quoted in Chen Jian, China’s Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 94.


Plans were gathering momentum to take Taiwan by mid-1950, with most analysts, both contemporary and subsequent, viewing the KMT’s situations as hopeless. More than 30,000 transferred soldiers had reinforced the Chinese Communist Navy. By spring 1950, the Communists had assembled a motley armada of 5000 vessels for the invasion by commandeering freigheters, motorized junks, and sampans and refloating naval warships that had been sunk in the Yangtze River. Further, they gathered and trained over 30,000 fishermen and other sailors to man the flotilla.

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Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson later revealed that between June 10 and June 24, 1950, the strength of the [3rd] field army [stationed across from Taiwan] swelled from 40,000 to 156,000 men. Also prior to June 25, elements of Lin Biao's 4th Field Army moved from south China to the Shanghai area.

Construction of regional military infrastructure was also progressing rapidly: “in 1950, the PRC was actively building or rehabilitating 6 airfields in the Taiwan Strait area.” The 1950 Chinese New Year’s proclamation by the official Xinhua news agency mentioned that Taiwan would be attacked that year. American sources also thought the invasion was imminent. The CIA predicted in March that Mao’s forces “are estimated to possess the capability of carrying out their frequently expressed intention of seizing Taiwan during 1950, and will probably do so...”


6 David G. Muller, China as a Maritime Power (Epping: Bowker, 1983), 55. Muller cites a report from the Office of Naval Intelligence, U.S. Navy from 1955 for this data.

7 Chinese New Years in 1950 would have been celebrated on February 17. Although much later in the year, Mao chastised the head of Xinhua for this broadcast. See 毛泽东，"关于在宣传中不说打台湾,西藏的时间给胡乔木的信", 1950 年九月二十九日 <<建国以来毛泽东文稿>>, 第一册:9/1949-12/1950(北京:中央文献出版社，1987). Mao Zedong, "Letter to Hu Qiaomu Regarding Not Mentioning the Time for the Attacks on Taiwan and Tibet in Propaganda Broadcasts (September 29, 1950)," in Mao Zedong’s Manuscripts since the Founding of the State (Beijing: Central Party Documents Publishers, 1987).
during the period June-December.\textsuperscript{8} This judgment was repeated in an updated appraisal written dated April 10.\textsuperscript{9} In another report, the CIA noted:

\begin{quote}
Despite reported Communist dissention over such matters as the degree of subservience to the USSR, policy toward the West and methods to alleviate peasant unrest, there is no conclusive evidence of disagreement concerning the necessity for the early occupation of Taiwan and Hainan and the elimination of the Nationalist Navy and Air Force.\textsuperscript{10}
\end{quote}

According to American weekly intelligence digests prepared by the Far East Command in July and August 1950, the Chinese had originally planned to start probing operations in July with the main assault to follow in early August.\textsuperscript{11}

While it is unclear precisely where the actual Chinese timetable for invasion stood during late-June 1950, contemporary scholars generally all agree it was imminent. The range of expected start dates only runs from weeks to nine months hence.\textsuperscript{12}

In Washington, even at the earliest stage of the Korean War, on June 25, concerns about Chinese goals vis-à-vis Taiwan were paramount. The Secretary of Defense recommended immediately assessing Taiwanese security needs, and viewed the North


\textsuperscript{9} See again "Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Rusk) to the Secretary of State (April 17, 1950)," in \textit{Ibid.}


\textsuperscript{11} Muller, \textit{China as a Maritime Power}, 16-7.

Korean attack as a Communist feint, presaging a broader offensive. At the first Blair
House meeting, Kennan argued that while not the first stage of a general war, the Korean
attack was likely the first in what would be a multi-pronged offensive by the
communists. Truman was so concerned about this prospect that the only order to come
out of the first Blair House meeting was for the Pentagon to make some assessment of
where else the Soviets might attack and to prepare plans to meet that eventuality. It is
in this context that during the second Blair House meeting, the President also ordered the
neutralization of the Taiwan Strait by the Navy's Seventh Fleet. This proposal echoed
a recommendation made on May 19 by hard-line anti-Communist John Foster Dulles,
who was then serving as a Consultant to the Secretary of State. In a paper circulated to
senior State Department leaders, he suggested

> If the United States were to announce that it would neutralize Formosa, not permitting it
either to be taken by Communists or to be used as a base of military operations against the
mainland, that is a decision we could certainly maintain…

Just over a month later, Acheson found reason to draw upon precisely that idea. Thus, a
mere two days after the outbreak of the Korean War, the United States signaled its intent

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14 Ibid., 74.
15 William Whitney Stueck, *The Road to Confrontation: American Policy toward China and Korea,
16 See Blair, *The Forgotten War*, 75. Note that this decision was cast as an attempt to neutralize—and
indeed communication went out to Jiang to cease bombing and commerce raiding. Glenn D. Paige, *The
Korean Decision, June 24-30, 1950* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1968), 183-4. However,
MacArthur's military orders as of June 29 still did not mention anything regarding restraining Jiang.
17 The paper was also supported by Rusk and Nitze.
18 Marolda, "The U.S. Navy and the Chinese Civil War, 1945-52", 149. Other proposals to neutralize
Taiwan in various circumstances had also been made. Rosemary Foot, *The Wrong War: American
64.
to defend Taiwan against a Chinese offensive. In the more than 50 years since then, there has been no invasion.

This case asks to what extent did the two sides' theories of victory in the naval sphere contribute to the outcome of deterrence success in this case.

Figure 6-1: The Taiwan Strait Area
The Two Sides’ Theories of Victory at Sea

While the previous two cases centered on warfare in the Korean Peninsula (and potentially in China proper), this case demands consideration of a different military environment. Thus, it cannot rely on Chapter 3’s characterization of the two sides’ theories of victory. For the Taiwan Straits theater, the relevant military forces are obviously naval and air forces.

One set of naval forces and doctrines was indeed quite different across the two nations. The two sides’ views of the sea control mission—competing for control of sea lines of communication—were far apart. Chinese naval doctrine was rather poorly formed at the end of their long civil war:

The PLA did not have a naval tradition when the Communists came to power in 1949. The famed military writings of Mao Zedong do not mention naval warfare or the role of seapower in national strategy. 19 Thus, the PLA was forced to look elsewhere for its doctrine in this regard.

Although the PRC in its first decade had no coherent body of maritime strategic thought of its own, the Soviet Union did. Soviet doctrine concerning the development and employment of a navy was adopted wholesale by the Chinese. 20

The dominant Soviet strategic thought at the time was known as the Young School, which emphasized coastal defense, submarines, small patrol and attack craft, and land based aircraft, but no oceanic capability. 21 This actually meshed rather well with a People’s War approach. The Chinese tactics were grounded in a related doctrine:

Formulated by the former navy commander-in-chief Admiral Xiao Jingguang in 1950, the doctrine was a copy of the Soviet ‘small battle’ theory, which prescribed naval

19 Muller, China as a Maritime Power, 47.
20 Ibid., 48.
21 Ibid., 49. All instructors at the first Chinese naval academy were Soviets, and submarine tactics were emphasized. Muller, China as a Maritime Power, 11. For discussion of the force that this approach put into the field in its first few years (a submarine-heavy one) see Gene Z. Hanrahan, "Report on Red China’s New Navy," United States Naval Institute Proceedings 79, no. 8 (1953): 848ff.
warfare conducted by light warships, shore-based planes and submarines. Nothing is more revealing about the Navy in its formative years than Xiao’s following instructions: “The navy should be a light type navy, capable of coastal defense. Its key mission is to accompany the ground forces in war actions. That basic characteristic of this navy is fast deployment, based on its lightness.”

Thus, the Chinese navy (such as it was at the time) specialized in “well-coordinated sneak attacks, delivered from all quarters by torpedo and gun boats. This might be thought of as an adaptation of guerrilla tactics to naval warfare.”

In contrast, the U.S. view of naval warfare focused heavily on carrier air and large strike ships. The war plan in 1949 called for the Navy to engage in a “mainly defensive, a sea-control campaign of running convoys for the coalition” against the Soviets. A long-term plan written in the same year by the Joint Staff foresaw the following role for the Navy in the event of war: “protecting communications to the United Kingdom, destroying Soviet naval power, and securing overseas bases.” The U.S. Navy had long viewed sea control as its central goal. The justification for this after WWII was a need to be able to strike Soviet submarines at their bastions and pens


27 *Ibid.*, 285, 290. Note there was also some discussion in the navy about obtaining a deep strike mission using nuclear weapons for strategic attacks. However, in this period, the navy was unable to secure this mission from the Air Force. Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power*, 296.
early in the war to allow the United States to have freedom of movement on the seas.\textsuperscript{28} This, in turn, required having carrier battle groups with their own mobile striking power.

However, for the purposes of this case, the key comparison is in doctrine regarding amphibious operations. The coercive attempt here is one of deterring a Chinese amphibious invasion of Taiwan. Thus, the question is, did the Chinese have difficulty understanding the threat posed to their invasion plans by the Americans due to differences in the two nation’s amphibious operations doctrine. In particular, would the Chinese be likely to underestimate the threat posed by the American 7\textsuperscript{th} fleet?

\textit{American Amphibious Operations Doctrine}

As noted above, the long-term plans for the U.S. Navy in 1950 focused on sea control, so the World War II experience retained a heavy influence on the less studied issue of future amphibious operations. At the broadest level, American thinking about amphibious operations set a high bar: it focused on opposed amphibious landings. While this sounds obvious, for many nations amphibious doctrine focused on the less challenging goal of unopposed landings.\textsuperscript{29}

In any amphibious operation, whether opposed or not, the United States recognized one overriding threat: "The principle danger in such an operation is an attack on the invading force by an opposing navy."\textsuperscript{30} If the opposing navy can attack the

\textsuperscript{28} Baer, \textit{One Hundred Years of Sea Power}, 289.

\textsuperscript{29} See the discussions of British and Japanese doctrine before World War II in Allan Reed Millett, "Assault from the Sea: The Development of Amphibious Warfare between the Wars-the American, British, and Japanese Experiences," in \textit{Military Innovation in the Interwar Period}, ed. Williamson Murray and Allan Reed Millett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid.}, 51.
landing force’s vessels, particularly the vulnerable shallow-draft landing craft and tank landing ships, defeat will likely result. Moreover, this was not the only difficulty an attacker must surmount, in the eyes of the American theory of victory. Millett summarizes the key doctrinal thinking in the United States regarding amphibious operations:

The amphibious force would have to isolate the objective area, then pound the defenders into a stupor with naval gunfire and close air support. The landing itself would require a violent assault by a combined arms team, probably over a broad front, perhaps a beach of a thousand yards’ width or more. To secure the beachhead, the landing force would need rapid reinforcement, complete with artillery and tanks. The greatest threat to a landing was disruptive air and naval attack, which might pull critical fleet units from the objective area, but a combined air and ground counterattack was the most immediate concern. A counterlanding might give the enemy a striking advantage because it would be difficult for a landing force to protect its supply line and logistics support areas as well as defend the perimeter of its own enclave. An amphibious expeditionary force could not rely on guile for success, but would require local superiority in every element of air, naval, and ground combat power.31

The U.S. experience from WWII covered a great many campaigns: Patton’s unopposed landing in North Africa, MacArthur’s island hopping in the Pacific, the landings in Italy and eventually the largest amphibious operation ever conducted, the Normandy landings.32 In the Pacific theater, where nearby airfields were generally not available, carrier-based air was critical. On the other hand, in the Sicily and Normandy landings, carriers were absent, and land-based craft provided the air support (both defensive and offensive).33 Those two American landings also did not involve Marines whose entire doctrine centered on amphibious operations. Rather, regular Army divisions that had

31 Ibid., 77.


33 Baer, One Hundred Years of Sea Power, 311.
received some training in this sort of operation were used (supported by Seabees).\textsuperscript{34}
(Interestingly, the role of close air support was limited in Army doctrine for amphibious
operations.\textsuperscript{35})

Another important element in American doctrine centered on the use of
commercial shipping. Again, Millett describes the U.S. Navy's thinking:

The navy followed the prewar assumption that it could create an amphibious transport
force by converting merchantmen and liners to military service, including the installation
of davits and cranes capable of handling landing craft.\textsuperscript{36}

Of course, there was also widespread use of dedicated military amphibious craft and
ships.

In 1950 the United States could look with pride on it amphibious capabilities.
They had been tested in demanding battle conditions during WWII and continued to
evolve and improve. How did the Chinese doctrine and equipment compare?

\textit{Chinese Amphibious Operations Doctrine}

On the issue of amphibious operations, there would have been a surprising degree
of shared understanding between Beijing and Washington. At a broad level, China
faced the same strategic situation that the U.S. military had in World War II: the need to
develop doctrine for \textit{opposed} amphibious landings. Several specific factors regarding
the Chinese Navy merit discussion. First, in contrast to the backward PLA ground force
(that is, the Army \textit{per se}), for idiosyncratic reasons the Chinese Navy was relatively
modern. Further, the naval doctrine regarding amphibious warfare evolved substantially

\textsuperscript{34} The U.S. forces that landed on the first day of the Normandy landings were the 1st and 4th Infantry
Divisions of the U.S. Army.

\textsuperscript{35} Millett, "Assault from the Sea."

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Ibid.}, 83-4.
in response to a series of failures at the end of the civil war. A successful attack on Hainan displayed many of these improvements, and the PLAN continued to improve after that point with an eye toward the imminent invasion of Taiwan. These points are explained in turn, below.

**The Roots of the PLAN: The Nationalist Navy**

It is important to note that the Chinese Navy—or the People’s Liberation Army Navy (the PLAN) as it was officially known—was relatively professionalized and technically advanced, at least in comparison to the PLA ground force. There were two main sources for the leaders in this service: graduates of Soviet training academies and KMT defectors. Over 400 students were in the Soviet Union receiving naval training at the end of the civil war.\(^{37}\) Even more numerous were the recent defectors from the KMT.\(^{38}\)

While the Soviet naval advisors and instructors played an important role in the beginnings of the Communist naval force, the core of the new navy was formed by the 2,000-odd former R.O.C. naval personnel who defected in 1949, most of them with their ships.\(^{39}\)

Some analysts go even further in emphasizing the role of the KMT turncoats, noting that the PLAN’s very organization was imported from the losing side of the civil war:

General Chang’s “navy” was the forerunner of Red China’s present navy; yet it was Communist in name only. Most of the officers and men were Nationalist deserters, while the naval craft were captured or brought over from the enemy. With the exception of the highest command echelon and the ever-watchful political commissars, Red China’s first navy was made up almost in toto of the enemy.\(^{40}\)

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\(^{37}\) Muller, *China as a Maritime Power*, 19.


\(^{39}\) Muller, *China as a Maritime Power*, 13.

\(^{40}\) Hanrahan, "Report on Red China’s New Navy," 847. Cummings is similarly sweeping regarding the PLAN in 1950: "the only naval personnel were those who had defected from various segments of the
Twomey, The Military Lens

This would have substantial effects in creating a different organizational culture in the PLAN versus the other branches of the communist forces. Reforming the political thought of these former KMT sailors and officers was an important concern for the nascent PLAN.\textsuperscript{41} The recent defectors were sent to a parallel track of training academies in Communist China, one that focused solely on political indoctrination and rehabilitation.\textsuperscript{42}

Many of the defectors had even been trained in the West, underscoring their familiarity with the American way of war.

The officers and sailors from the KMT were a special new type of serviceman. Most had received relatively high levels of education and they were politically quite sensitive. Many had gone to England or the United States to receive training or take delivery of a warship.\textsuperscript{43}

For some of these officers, their very exposure to Western ideas furthered their disillusionment with the corrupt KMT regime.

Most of the bright young officers and sailors sent off to study in the United States and Great Britain in 1930s and early 1940s were dedicated to the creation of a strong Chinese navy and knew that this could not be accomplished under the nationalist regime. Many were thus susceptible to the appeals of the Communists to defect for the good of China.\textsuperscript{44}

Beyond that, in general, intellectuals were more welcome in this service than they were in the army.\textsuperscript{45} As the official naval history notes:


\textsuperscript{42} Muller, \textit{China as a Maritime Power}.

\textsuperscript{43} Lu, Jiang, \textit{et al.}, \textit{History of the Navy}, 23.

\textsuperscript{44} Muller, \textit{China as a Maritime Power}, 9.

People recruited from the ground forces [to the navy] normally were required to have achieved more than an elementary school degree. In order to supply the navy with people having technical ability, the Central Military Committee [CMC] required each field army to comprehensive assess their people. As many as possible of the following were to be provided to the navy: anyone who has previously served in the navy, worked on board a ship, studied shipping, and has even a little bit of knowledge regarding machinery or has driven tanks or cars. The CMC was very diligent in attracting intellectuals to the navy.46

The defecting troops, and often their ships, formed the core of the new Navy.

Indeed, the very first naval vessel that the PLA obtained was a KMT vessel—a tank landing ship captured in 1947—and the tactics learned from that ships crew were put to good use in later river crossings by the PLA in the civil war.47 The Nationalist flagship—the Chongqing, formerly the HMS Aurora, a 7400-ton cruiser—defected on February 24, 1949 and would eventually go on to serve as the PLAN’s flagship. In April, 1949, another 26 ships and other craft, from destroyers to amphibious landing craft to gunboats, also defected.48

Zhang Aiping, who had been deputy commander of the central China military, was appointed commander and commissar. He accepted the task of organizing the foundation of the navy around the naval vessels that had defected and joined our side from the KMT.49

This first naval unit in the PLAN was made up entirely of the ships that had defected from the KMT’s Second Fleet.50 By 1950, “the PRC Navy found itself in possession of some 30 landing ships of U.S. World War II construction, all left behind by or defected

47 Ibid.
48 Muller, China as a Maritime Power. Also see Hanrahan, "Report on Red China's New Navy," 847.
49 卢, 江, 等<<海军史>> Lu Ruchun, Jiang Jitai, et al., History of the Navy, 15.
from the ROC navy."\textsuperscript{51} This was enough to move 20,000 amphibious assault troops at a time. (Another source suggests slightly higher holdings.\textsuperscript{52}) In addition to these captured ships, the PLAN also relied on salvage operations and some foreign purchases: “Between late 1949 and early 1950, China bought forty-eight used warships totaling 25,470 tons.”\textsuperscript{53}

These former KMT officers were well versed in amphibious operations, and provided a core of expertise for the PLAN to refine. The Nationalist Navy had conducted unopposed amphibious landings numerous times, including a major operation in August 1947.\textsuperscript{54} As the civil war turned against the Nationalists, their navy conducted a series of amphibious extractions, often while the ground element was under attack, a particularly challenging tactical situation.\textsuperscript{55} Further, they had experience using naval gunfire support in many of these battles.\textsuperscript{56}

This legacy of ties to the KMT’s navy and in particular the elements of professionalization (particularly relative to the army), exposure to western training, and experience with amphibious operations in the PLAN helped lead it to a relatively similar understanding of amphibious warfare as that of the American Navy.

\textsuperscript{51} Muller, \textit{China as a Maritime Power}, 53.
\textsuperscript{52} Cummings, "The Chinese Communist Navy," 69. Cummings puts the figure at 50 landing ships, and also emphasizes the large number of ex-U.S. vessels.
\textsuperscript{54} Muller, \textit{China as a Maritime Power}, 8.
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Ibid.}
The PLAN’s Early Experience with Amphibious Operations

Beyond these background conditions, the Chinese communist leadership had recently learned quite a bit in this area against a relatively advanced foe. Their attempts to conquer the small coastal islands of Jinmen, Zhoushan, and Dengbu in late 1949 had led to abysmal defeats.

Mao’s assessment of the October 1949 attack against Jinmen was stark: “This is our biggest loss of the war.” In that battle, a KMT navy-led counter attack led to tremendous Chinese Communists losses, totaling nearly 10,000 men. One Western analyst noted the poor preparation for that attack: “landing in scantily-armed junks and on rafts, with no support from artillery or aircraft, the PLA forces were mauled, losing thousands of men without ever gaining a beachhead.”

The attack on Dengbu was yet another setback:

But, under conditions lacking naval cooperation, sometimes one could not avoid paying a heavy price. For instance, on October 3, 1949, the PLA 21st Army, 61st Division sent a force of five battalions strength to attack Dengbu Island in eastern Zhejiang province. That day, troops landed smoothly and secured the capture of 600 of the enemy. However, on the second day the enemy’s second regiment reinforced from the sea. Facing the enemy on three sides, the PLA landing force had no other alternative but to fight out in retreat. Casualties reached 1490 men.

The official Chinese naval history, after relating a series of examples from this period, suggests a conclusion that would be shared by military leaders in the Pentagon, “the bloody facts show, if you want to breakthrough an ocean blockade to liberate offshore islands, the navy, ground force, and air force must all work in cooperation.”

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57 Westad, Decisive Encounters, 301.
58 Zhang Shuguang, Mao's Military Romanticism, 53.
59 Muller, China as a Maritime Power, 16.
60 Lu Ruchun, Jiang Jitai, et al., History of the Navy, 18.
61 Ibid.
These setbacks taught the Chinese many lessons about the conduct of such landings. For instance, they began to focus on providing the troops with specialized training for amphibious landings, something prior Chinese operations had lacked. Soon they would be using translated U.S. Marine amphibious warfare manuals. At this point, the Chinese communists were using regular Army divisions rather than dedicated marines, just as the United States had occasionally done in WWII. They established the Navy as a separate branch of the PLA on April 14, 1950. From their prior defeats, “they again learned that without the support of regular navy ships, landing operations by small boats could be disastrous.” They prepared to remedy this problem as well. Further, these defeats had also emphasized the importance of follow-on logistics support: Although PLA forces eventually security their beachheads, most of their boats were left aground when the tide went out. The first wave could not be reinforced, and Ye Fei and

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64 On the Chinese, see footnote 62, above. The first dedicated marine unit in the PLA was established in 1953.

65 卢, 江, 等<<海军史>> Lu Ruchun, Jiang Jitai, et al., History of the Navy, 15.

other PLA commanders were forced to watch helplessly as the defending Nationalist forces destroyed their troops. 67

Thus, the key lesson of the importance of controlling the sea to prevent the opposing navy from attacking or reinforcing was emphasized. 68 The PLAN would have to address this problem, too.

Over time, the PLA had internalized many of the lessons from these earlier campaigns. They also benefited from Soviet training of an amphibious assault group in late 1949 and early 1950. 69 By April of 1950, they were ready to resume their attacks on the offshore islands.

The Attack on Hainan

The diligence and dedication following their earlier defeats allowed them to win a resounding victory on Hainan. Hainan is a large island, similar in size to Taiwan itself that had been held by some 300,000 well-equipped KMT soldiers. Hainan was not only defended by troops on the ground, but by Nationalist Navy’s Third Naval Squadron, consisting of 3 destroyer escorts and 15 other smaller warships. 70 The squadron engaged in aggressive patrolling of the Hainan Strait on a regular basis and also patrolled the nearby coastline of the mainland, sinking Communist shipping there, preventing any large amphibious force from gathering. 71 This allowed the KMT Navy to fend off eleven separate probing attacks during March and early April 1950. 72 Many of these led

67 Ibid., 251.
68 Again this was central to the thinking in the United States as well: Millett, "Assault from the Sea," 51.
69 Westad, Decisive Encounters, 304.
71 Ibid., 126.
72 Ibid., 128.
to the loss of scores of Communist boats and hundreds of Communist soldiers and sailors. However, these taught the Chinese communists an extremely important lesson:

Perhaps most importantly, the preliminary operations revealed to the Communists that the main invasion fleet would be destroyed if the relatively lethal Nationalist Navy and Air Force patrol units were not driven from the strait.

In contrast to other times in the Civil War, during this battle the Nationalist military did not collapse, but rather “by most accounts fought long and hard against the invasion forces. There were no mass defections to the Communists before the island’s fall.” American military attachés in Hongkong reported that the Nationalist Navy and Air Force were “doing their most effective work since the end of World War II with morale and reliability the highest in years.”

To achieve their victory against this force, the Chinese relied on a hodgepodge landing fleet, closely coordinated timing, and some naval gunfire support. The eventual armada used for the Hainan operation included 400 boats of assorted types. “Many of the vessels were armed with light artillery pieces, antitank guns, mortars, and machine guns.” (This use of civilian shipping reinforced with military hardware again was something the United States had relied on in several instances in the Second World War.)

Responding to the lessons of previous defeats, this motley navy, supported by large

75 *Ibid.*, 134. For a countervailing view, albeit one little detail, to back it up, see Muller, *China as a Maritime Power*, 16.
76 “Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Rusk) to the Secretary of State (April 26, 1950),” in *F.R.U.S., 1950, Vol. 6*, 333.
amounts of coastal artillery and antiaircraft fire was able to defend the strait for the initial landing and the critical resupply sorties that followed.\textsuperscript{78}

The Nationalist Navy and Air Force was [sic] driven from the strait, after a hard-fought interdiction effort... Having previously learned the hard way what Nationalist sea and air forces could do to invasion flotillas, the Communists lined either side of the strait with coastal artillery and antiaircraft weapons that effectively covered the entire water way. On the 18th, for example, the Third Naval Squadron flagship, \textit{Tai Ping} [a former U.S. Navy ship], was heavily damaged by radar-directed Communists coastal artillery. Squadron Commander Wang was wounded and the ship's executive officer was killed.\textsuperscript{79}

Adequate logistical supplies were delivered. The Chinese also used advanced forces to prepare beachheads that the main force would land on later.\textsuperscript{80}

The victory was complete, with the KMT forces routed. While many retreated to Taiwan, many others were killed and captured before they could embark.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 131.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{80} Westad, \textit{Decisive Encounters}, 304-5. Note that the Chinese used guerrilla forces already on the ground. In practice, this seems quite similar to the American practice of using paratroopers and other special forces for the same mission. The Normandy invasion had relied on three paratroop divisions (two American, one British) to delay the German reinforcements from hitting the amphibious beachheads.
The Chinese communist confidence after the success at Hainan rose appreciably. Senior CCP leaders believed that many of the lessons of this experience had prepared PLA well for the upcoming invasion of Taiwan. Following this victory, Liu Shaoqi (soon to be groomed as Mao’s successor) trumpeted the “PLA’s mastery of the art of the sea-borne landings.”


82 Clearly, coastal artillery would be insufficient to sanitize the entire Taiwan Strait, although most other tactics were directly relevant to this theater.

Looking toward Taiwan

As the Chinese looked forward to the invasion of Taiwan, they recognized "victory would depend on cooperative operations of the three services." 84 They also knew they could draw on units that were now experienced in conducting successful amphibious assaults against an opposed coastline. 85

Many of these elements of matured Chinese thinking regarding amphibious operations would have been quite familiar to the U.S. Navy. Nevertheless, there no question the Chinese forces were not as well equipped and as technologically capable as the United States' forces. However, in the case where this was most acute, the PLA was striving to improve (again, primarily because of the lessons of its earlier failures).

Thus, while airpower had not played a major role in the Chinese history of amphibious operations, 86 the Chinese certainly recognized the importance of at least land-based air power in this sort of operation. Mao wrote in July of 1949:

We must start preparation for the invasion of Taiwan. In addition to ground forces, we need to rely on internal cooperators and an air force. Our action will succeed if we meet one of the two conditions; and our hope will be even greater if both conditions are satisfied. 87

Similarly, Liu Shaoqi emphasized the same message early the following year:

Regarding Zhoushan, Taiwan, Jinmen, and Hainan islands ... if we do not have air support as well as a certain amount of naval support, advancing across the sea for an

84 He Di, "The Last Campaign to Unify China," 80.
85 These would be the forces from the Third and Fourth Field Armies that were to be used again against Taiwan as they had against Zhoushan, Hainan, and others. Marolda, "The U.S. Navy and the Chinese Civil War, 1945-52", 159.
87 “Letter, Mao Zedong to Zhou Enlai, 10 July, 1949” in Zhang Shuguang and Chen Jian, eds., Chinese Communist Foreign Policy and the Cold War in Asia: New Documentary Evidence, 1944-50, 123.
amphibious attack cannot be done. Today's report from Hainan and Jinmen makes these points clear. 88

Later, Mao implored the Soviets to provide the Chinese with an air force having the amphibious assault of Taiwan in mind 89 and indeed as mid-1950 approached China was increasingly getting the support of Soviet air assets. Likely Mao and Liu were particularly emphatic about the utility of air support here given that the sea surrounding Taiwan could not be defended using coastal artillery as had several of the earlier islands taken by the PLA.

The Soviets had recently deployed several squadrons of MiG-15s, the premier jet fighter in the world at the time, to Shanghai. The Soviets continued to fly them (for purely defensive missions), as there were no available Chinese pilots, although they did so wearing Chinese uniforms. 90 The KMT had flown bombing strikes against the mainland with some effect throughout 1949 and 1950, and this deployment was intended to address that. 91 This is the first time the MIG-15 flew in combat. While there are no records of plans to use these fighters to defend the seas around an amphibious invasion fleet, the possibility of this can certainly not be excluded without further access to


89 Zhang Xiaoming, Red Wings over the Yalu: China, the Soviet Union, and the Air War in Korea, 1st ed. (College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 32-33.

90 These deployments occurred in March of 1950. Zhang Shuguang, Deterrence and Strategic Culture, 72-3; Zhang Xiaoming, Red Wings over the Yalu, 61, 78-84. Note that it appears these forces were redeployed from Lushan, and did not represent net additions to the Soviet forces in China. Rather they were moved from a place where they did not enhance Chinese security to a somewhere that they were more relevant. See Michael H. Hunt, The Genesis of Chinese Communist Foreign Policy (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1995), 181.

91 For discussion of the costs of these attacks, see 王焰等 <<彭德怀传>>(北京:当代中国出版社:1993), Wang Yan et al., Biography of Peng Dehuai (Beijing: Modern China Press, 1993), 530.
Chinese and former Soviet archives. They certainly had the capability to play a role here, and the Soviet role in supporting the Chinese intervention in Korea is now recognized to be far heavier than previously understood.

Beyond that, much of the Soviet aid to China provided in the wake of the signing of the Sino-Soviet Alliance on February 14, 1950 was being used to improve Chinese military capabilities with an eye toward Taiwan.

Although Stalin cautiously did not agree to use Soviet air and naval assets to support the attack again Taiwan, in the end he did agree an appropriate opportunity to liberate Taiwan required preparation. He also agreed that one half of the Soviet aid to China, a loan of $300 million (U.S.), would be used to order equipment that would be most important in order to attack Taiwan.

Zhou Enlai pressed hard for that hardware to be delivered that same year (1950) so that the invasion plans would be kept on track. By some reports, rather than half of the loan being used for military hardware to be aimed at Taiwan, the entire $300 million was. While the Chinese did not develop their own Higgins landing craft until the

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92 Even the original MiG-15, notoriously short-legged, would still have had the range to provide defensive combat air support for such a fleet. Its range of 500 miles would limit its role in a Taiwan contingency from its Shanghai bases, although it would be able to serve as defensive air support for a fleet in the northern portion of the Taiwan Strait. Beyond that, moving to more appropriately located airbases would have increased its potential substantially (and, as discussed above, military infrastructure construction in that region had been proceeding rapidly in 1949 and 1950). For the MiG-15bis, this range concern would have been even less of a concern.

93 While they rules of engagement nominally restricted them to the coastline, on at least one instance, the Soviet fighters were prepared to attack Nationalist naval vessels, suggesting some confidence with over-the-water operations. Zhang Xiaoming, Red Wings over the Yalu, 82.

94 See Ibid.

95 See Ibid.

96 See Ibid.

97 Sergei Goncharov, John Lewis, and Litai Xue, Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 99-100. Goncharov et al concur that at least half of it was certainly used for military purposes and provide some evidence that the rest might have been as well.

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1960s, they had captured scores of the real thing from retreating KMT forces.\textsuperscript{98} There is certainly more to building a navy or an air force that simply buying the hardware, but this does speak to the issue of the recognition in China of the importance of these two services for the amphibious mission.\textsuperscript{99}

Similarly, Beijing's repeated postponements of the invasion of Taiwan before mid-1950 generally had been made to allow more time for training of highly specialized amphibious assault troops.\textsuperscript{100} The Chinese were in the process of demobilizing large portions of their army, while preserving a core of forces that would be able to attack Taiwan.\textsuperscript{101} (In this vein, Zhou Enlai initially took a rather sanguine view of the U.S. deployment of the Seventh Fleet, noting it would allow more time to prepare.\textsuperscript{102})

Finally, other small-scale naval engagements after Hainan continued to allow the PLAN to hone its skills at sea.

The campaign near Lajiwei Island was considered the PLA Navy's first direct warfighting engagement, and the designation of some gunboats as an attack squadron,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{98} Bernard D. Cole, \textit{The Great Wall at Sea: China's Navy Enters the Twenty-First Century} (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 18.
\item \textsuperscript{99} And note also that the PLAAF was prepared to fight in Korea in the middle of 1951 after a crash course in tactics and organization. It is likely that this force would have fared better against the KMT air force than it did again the UN in the Korean War. See Zhang Xiaoming, \textit{Red Wings over the Yalu}.
\item \textsuperscript{102} Quoted in "Recollection, Xiao Jinguang, "The Taiwan Campaign was Called Off," 30 June 1950, reprinted in Zhang Shuguan and Chen Jian, eds., \textit{Chinese Communist Foreign Policy and the Cold War in Asia: New Documentary Evidence}, 1944-50, 155.
\end{itemize}
This battle in late-May 1950 showed an increasing amount of command and control sophistication by the Chinese, including not least the coordination of multiple forces in a single naval battle. Of particular interest was the use of the small fleet to clear the area of KMT naval vessels before sending the vulnerable amphibious element to sea. This lesson was increasingly firmly ingrained within the PLAN.

Summary
Thus, in this case, the difference between two nations’ theories of victory—the independent variable—was relatively small. Both sides understood the paramount importance of defending the landing force from attack from the opponent and of ensuring a steady supply of reinforcements and resupply over the same waters. Whether the threat was from the opponent’s navy or air force, it had to be neutralized if there was to be any chance for an amphibious operation to succeed. Beyond that, the Chinese shared with the Americans a recognition of the utility of naval gunfire support, specially trained amphibious assault troops, and specialized landing craft. Lastly, the Chinese at least aspired to create an air force to support their fleet and the landing force.

Interestingly, one piece of evidence emphasizes the degree to which the Chinese understood the American view of amphibious operations. Basically, the senior members of the PLA anticipated the Inchon landings in the Korean War.

103 Huang, "What China Learned," 256.
104 Zhang Shuguang, Mao's Military Romanticism, 53.
105 While substantially behind the United States with regard to airpower, the intensity with which Mao and his compatriots pursued an air force seems deeper in the Taiwan theater than in the deliberations regarding crossing the Yalu.
On August 23 the staff of the Operation Bureau of the PLA’s General Staff convened a meeting to discuss the situation on the Korean battlefield, chaired by Zhou [Enlai’s] military secretary Lei Yingfu (who had then also been appointed as the Bureau’s vice director). After debating different options and conducting a simulated scenario on maps, the participants unanimously concluded that the enemy’s next step would be a landing operation at one of five possible Korean ports, Wonsan, Nampo, Inchon, Kunsan, and Hungnam. Among these ports, the most likely and threatening one would be Inchon. 

The report’s detail about the strategic level goals of such an attack was quite accurate. Zhang quotes the report directly:

To make a large-scale landing of its main force on our flank rear areas (near Pyongyang or Seoul) and at the same time employ a small force to pin down the [North Korean] People’s Army in its present positions, enabling it to attack from the front and rear simultaneously. In that case the People’s Army would be in a very difficult position.

This was precisely the plan that X Corps put into place in its first landing on the peninsula. That the PLA senior leaders were able to anticipate the likelihood and the dangers posed by MacArthur’s daring plan suggests they shared his understanding of how amphibious warfare was to be carried out effectively. Indeed the detail of the Chinese understanding about this plan stands in noted contrast to many of the discussions regarding the American strategy on the Korean peninsula. This sort of nuanced discussion is supportive of Prediction #3.

Signaling by the United States

American signaling regarding Taiwan consisted of both diplomatic and military elements. The former were clear and forceful. The latter were much less strong, and were conveyed through the use of forces integral to the American theory of victory for amphibious operations. That is, the signals followed the predictions that stem from the

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106 Chen Jian, China’s Road, 147.
107 Zhang Shuguang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 73.
108 See Blair, The Forgotten War, Chapters 7-9, passim.
dissertation's theory (specifically Prediction #5). These signals are both discussed in turn.

**Diplomatic Signals**

The American announcement of June 26 was very clear. On the morning of June 26 at a well-covered press conference, Truman announced the U.S. policies of providing air, naval, and logistics support to the South Koreans and the policy of neutralizing the Taiwan Strait. The President stated that the 7th Fleet would "neutralize" the Taiwan Strait. He did so because "the occupation of Formosa by communist forces would be a direct threat to the security of the Pacific area and to United States forces performing their lawful and necessary functions in that area (surrounding Korea)."109 Later, supplementing this diplomatic signal, the commander of the Seventh Fleet joined MacArthur on a trip to Taibei in August of 1950.110 However, far more important than these words and gestures were actions.

**Military Signals**

The United States' rapid reinforcement of South Korean positions in June and July should have sent a broad signal about the robustness of American containment policy in general. (That said, the American performance on the battlefield in this period may have undermined that signal to some extent.)


In the Taiwan Strait itself, the deployment of Seventh Fleet was the sole military signal. However, the American forces available in the region were rather limited. The vaunted Seventh Fleet at this point consisted of a single aircraft carrier (the USS Valley Forge), one heavy cruiser (the USS Rochester), and eight smaller destroyers. Even this small force was not sent to the Strait, however:

As a result of budgetary constraints, American naval power in the western Pacific was seriously understrength. Given the navy’s tasks in Korea, few ships or planes were left to protect Chiang Kai-shek. Until late July, little was done around Taiwan except reconnaissance flights with navy airplanes. A month after the Korean attack, a destroyer division traveled southward from the Yellow Sea through the Taiwanese straits, but on 1 August it headed north again. On 4 August, the Seventh Fleet formed a new task group, consisting of only three destroyers, to patrol the waters separating Taiwan from the mainland. Thus the announcement that the United States would prevent a Communist attack on the Nationalists’ last stronghold was largely a bluff.

As this passage suggests, there was little permanent deployment to the Strait by surface ships, at least initially. The few early passing shows of force (some listed above) are worth discussing in detail, however. A single destroyer, the Brush, was dispatched to Keelung to evaluate Taibei’s defensive needs on June 28. On the morning of June 29, the Valley Forge sent some 29 planes through the Strait, although it appears the carrier did not traverse those waters itself. The bulk of the fleet did not stop in Taiwan, rather, it continued north, arriving in Okinawa on the 30th where it was to begin operations in support of the Korean War.

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112 Stueck, The Road to Confrontation, 196.
114 While deploying a modern Nimitz-class carrier in the waters surrounding Taiwan, rather than in the Strait itself, sends a powerful signal, naval air at this time was exceptionally limited in range. Thus, the issue of whether the Valley Forge traversed the Strait is important.
115 Malcolm W. Cagle and Frank Albert Manson, The Sea War in Korea (Annapolis, Mary.: Naval Institute Press, 1957), 34; Field, History of United States Naval Operations: Korea, 54-55. Crane suggests that the Valley Forge continued to consider the situation in the Taiwan Strait for a few days.
While the Seventh Fleet had received orders from the JCS to defend the Strait,\footnote{Mark A. Ryan, \textit{Chinese Attitudes toward Nuclear Weapons: China and the United States During the Korean War} (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1989), 206, note 3.} for the next several months the bulk of the operations to "neutralize" the Taiwan Strait were carried out by patrol planes. However, even here, the size of the squadrons deployed was quite small. Further, the emergency nature of the 1950 patrol was clearly reflected in the way it was set up and carried out.\footnote{Marolda, "The U.S. Navy and the Chinese Civil War, 1945-52", 174.} While five squadrons of naval patrol planes were deployed to support operations around the Korean Peninsula (where they could also count on the surface fleet for support and information), a mere two patrol squadrons were deployed to the Taiwan Straits area—VP-46 and VP-28.\footnote{Cagle and Manson, \textit{The Sea War in Korea}, 375, 520.} Each was equipped with nine patrol planes. Their missions eventually began on July 16 and 17, north and south of Taiwan respectively.\footnote{Field, \textit{History of United States Naval Operations: Korea}, 110.} The squadrons were initially based out of the Pescadores, islands in the middle of the Strait, and Okinawa, just to its northeast.\footnote{Cagle and Manson, \textit{The Sea War in Korea}, 384.} However, as the weather worsened in October, they were moved to the Philippines and Okinawa, decreasing their ability to closely and regularly monitor the situation.\footnote{Marolda, "The U.S. Navy and the Chinese Civil War, 1945-52", 174.}

The official U.S. Navy history of the war suggests the patrols were "brandished [as] a weapon of publicity against the Chinese Communists."\footnote{Field, \textit{History of United States Naval Operations: Korea}.} Another historian makes a similar point, noting that

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
\textit{The Sea War in Korea, 384.}
\end{flushright}
Twomey, The Military Lens

During this first patrol, in July 1950, MacArthur approved Struble’s [commander of the Seventh Fleet] recommendation that the patrols be publicized. The U.S. interest in the inviolability of Taiwan, first demonstrated by the Seventh Fleet’s June 29th aircraft flyover of the strait, was to be made absolutely clear. For deterrence to work this was considered an essential measure.  

Thus, there are grounds to believe that the Chinese would have been aware of this deployment.

As for the capability inherent in this initial deployment, a U.S. Naval War College history claims:

These two squadrons maintained a continuous 24-hour patrol of the Formosan Straits and the China coast ... A round-the-clock coverage of the China coast was maintained with two flights of landplanes of seven to eight hours’ duration during the daylight hours and one seaplane patrol during the period of darkness. 

It does not take much reading between the lines to note the bravado in this report. Covering a coastline of several hundred miles with a single aircraft patrol at night leads to very thin coverage. Occasionally, these patrols would sound warnings of possible invasion fleets massing. One report on December 7, 1950 found some 750 junks in two separate fleets (far larger than the usual fishing fleet size) at sea. That these fishing fleets were not noted gathering at the Chinese ports, but only caught after underway, steaming towards Taiwan, is suggestive of the thinness of the American coverage.

Acheson recognized these concerns “conced[ing] that the reconnaissance has been inadequate as a basis for firm conclusion on this point [the possible buildup of unusual

\[\text{123 Marolda, “The U.S. Navy and the Chinese Civil War, 1945-52”, 177.}\]

\[\text{124 Cagle and Manson, The Sea War in Korea, 384. Note that Cagle suggests that these patrols were “supported by ready-duty destroyers from the Seventh Fleet maintained in constant readiness in Formosan waters” (Cagle and Manson, The Sea War in Korea, 384.) but there is no evidence that such arrangements existed before late July or early August. Indeed, Field directly contradicts this. Field, History of United States Naval Operations: Korea, 67.}\]

\[\text{125 Cagle and Manson, The Sea War in Korea, 384-85. In this particular instance, the fleet turned around within hours.}\]
concentrations of junks." Further, it was not until August 2, 1950, that the rules about what reconnaissance would be allowed were actually finalized. (MacArthur had attempted a unilateral decision on this issue a few days earlier, likely prompting this policy to be determined by Washington.) The final rules were relatively restrictive and did not allow crossing into Chinese territorial waters. It appears from the discussion between the representatives from the Departments of State and Defense that prior reconnaissance had taken place even further offshore.

Aside from the issue of detection, it would have taken several days for ships from Korean waters to respond to any convincing evidence that a landing attempt was underway. However, typically, the first response was to send out additional reconnaissance planes to reconfirm the sighting the next day, adding to the potential delay a true invasion force would have benefited from.

Eventually the air reconnaissance patrols were reinforced. They were joined on July 18 by two fleet submarines, the Catfish and the Pickerel, who conducted reconnaissance along the Chinese coast. However, this deployment was not

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127 See Note 2 in “Memorandum by the Executive Secretary (Lay) to the National Security Council (August 2, 1950),” in Ibid., 407.

128 See “Joint Daily SITREP No. 34 (July 31, 1950)” in Joint Daily SITREP Collection, (Carlisle, Penn.: Military History Institute Library, U.S. Army War College, 1950). This was the situation report for the entire Far Eastern Command.


130 Marolda, “The U.S. Navy and the Chinese Civil War, 1945-52”, 117. While some air support might have been provided by the prop-driven twin-Mustangs (F-82) based in Okinawa, the jet fighters there, the F-80s, would have been out of range.

announced (thus negating any potential deterrent value), and was temporary, with the boats returning to Japan on July 30. One brief deployment of surface ships to the area—including the heavy cruiser Helena and 4 destroyers—was ordered on July 26 in response to stepped up reports of an imminent attack. The deterrent value of this deployment was very clearly in the mind of the Joint Chiefs in their directive to MacArthur (who had protested of the need for Seventh Fleet assets in Korea). They noted that the:

presence of elements of 7th Flt in Formosa Strait and waters of Formosa even for a short time, would be an effective demonstration of U.S. intentions and a deterrent to invasion.

The Helena and its fleet was soon relieved by a smaller fleet. This was centered around the Juneau—a light anti-aircraft cruiser—and also included an escort of two destroyers. This group was formed into Task Group 77.3, which was permanently tasked with the defense of the Taiwan Strait in early August. While not a trivial deployment, this fleet, by itself, would have been insufficient to stop an invasion fleet. The PLA had fought off attacks by one or two destroyers in their campaigns against the KMT. By

133 Field, History of United States Naval Operations: Korea, 125. One source suggests only a total of four destroyers. See Marolda, "The U.S. Navy and the Chinese Civil War, 1945-52", 182.
135 Field suggests the date of August 1 (Field, History of United States Naval Operations: Korea, 128.). Whereas Marolda puts it at August 4 (Marolda, "The U.S. Navy and the Chinese Civil War, 1945-52", 1183.). One of the destroyers was the USS Maddox, which was later to play a prominent role in the Gulf of Tonkin Incident of 1964 of Vietnamese waters.
136 Huang, "What China Learned."
winter, the group was reinforced more significantly with another cruiser and a third
destroyer. 137

American Insecurity about the Capabilities Used to Signal

Not only was the initial force deployed relatively small, but also local American
commanders repeatedly expressed concerns over whether it would be sufficient to defend
Taiwan. Throughout the Korean War, the dual responsibility of the Seventh Fleet—to
neutralize the Taiwan Strait and to support the war in Korea—was imbalanced, strongly
favoring the Korean mission. The Joint Chiefs recommended to the Secretary of
Defense that this problem be addressed by ensuring,

... the Chinese forces on Formosa must be prepared, within reason, to resist attack. It is
imperative, therefore that the capabilities of the Chinese Nationalist forces be assessed at
the earliest possible date; that immediate and positive steps be taken to insure that such of
their military equipment as requires maintenance be rendered usable; and that
deficiencies of matériel and supplies essential to the Chinese Nationalist forces be met.138

There were repeated attempts to reinforce the small deployment by the U.S. Navy to the
Taiwan Strait, however in each case, the requests were rebuffed because the requested
forces were needed even more urgently in Korea.139 The Seventh Fleet’s commander
“complained that he could not fight in Korea and stop a PRC invasion at the same
time.”140

137 Field, History of United States Naval Operations: Korea, 398.

138 "Memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense (Johnson)," July 27, 1950, in

139 Field, History of United States Naval Operations: Korea, 58, 62-63, 67, 120, 266. Also on the pull of
Korea for forces also tasked with the defense of Taiwan, see Robert Frank Futrell, The United States

140 Roger Dingman, "Atomic Diplomacy During the Korean War," in Nuclear Diplomacy and Crisis
With regard to the prospect for a Chinese Communist invasion of Taiwan, the United States remained concerned through much of 1950. In early July, the CIA reported "an analysis of recent Chinese Communist troop movements, propaganda and press comment indicates that the Peiping regime may now be capable of launching an assault against Taiwan." Later that month, the Joint Chiefs themselves expressed a number of similar concerns:

They concluded, "neither the Seventh Fleet nor Chiang's troops were capable of stopping an invasion." They went on, "recommend[ing] approval for Chinese Nationalist 'offensive-defensive' actions [i.e., preemptive attacks] there, despite President Truman's previous rejections of that course of action." Also in late July, the CIA concluded,


Even after the U.S. deployments to the region were regularized, a large number of "war 
scares" in the Taiwan Strait—and the degree to which they caused grave concern in 
Tokyo and Washington—emphasized the perception of potential danger here, at least in 
Washington's eyes. By October, the CIA was more confident of the American ability 
to defend the island (so long as the Soviets did not intervene), but noted the "Chinese are 
now capable of launching an invasion against Formosa with about 200,000 troops and 
moderate air cover,"

Indeed, even in the spring of 1950, before the outbreak of the Korean War (and 
its demands on the 7th Fleet's assets), the U.S. military leadership had felt that they lacked 
the forces available in the region to adequately defend Taiwan from Mainland China.

Paul Nitze, head of Policy Planning at State at the time and the primary author of NSC-68, 
recalled a discussion with John Foster Dulles. Nitze had just explained to Dulles that 
the group drawing up NSC-68 had consulted thoroughly with the Pentagon regarding 
what areas they had the forces to defend, and the Pentagon had rejected Taiwan. Dulles 
pushed Nitze further on this point:

What we should have asked, Dulles argued, was if the President determined that it was of 
great political importance that Taiwan be defended, could the Joint Chiefs of Staff make 
the forces available? So I [Nitze] went back to the Joint Chiefs and they went through 
the analysis in great detail. The upshot was that the Chiefs decided that we could not 
prudently make the forces available to defend Taiwan despite a determination that it was 
politically important to do so.

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147 "Memorandum Prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency: C. Threat of Chinese Communist 
Invasion of Formosa," October 12, 1950, *F.R.U.S., 1950, Vol. 6*, 529. This memo was prepared for 
the Wake Island conference between Truman and MacArthur.

148 Nitze does not elaborate more fully on the date.

149 In this period, the United States was also moving away politically from a decision to support the KMT, 
so the question was moot. That said, the fact that it was discussed at senior levels is interesting.

(To be sure, that passage speaks to both intent and ability. However, as Nitze, himself, noted, concurring with part of this dissertation's argument, these are often closely interrelated.)

Clearly, the above several paragraphs speak primarily to American perceptions of the military balance here with the forces that were available at the time. What matters more for assessing the dissertation's theory is the Chinese perception. Yet, in the absence of detailed information on how prepared the Chinese were—in a military sense—to invade, this is nevertheless useful. It helps to bound the question and suggests that the Chinese may have had a reasonable degree of capability relative to that the United States had in the region.

Additionally, however, given the pessimism regarding their own position, it is clear that the United States was not overestimating its own capabilities, as it had done in the prior two cases. This, too, is as this dissertation's theory would predict: more similar theories of victory should lead to less over-optimism (Predictions #1 and #10).

Thus, in a military sense, the "deployment" of the 7th Fleet was less strong that it might have appeared. For a month, there was a single show of force by a carrier and a series of air patrols. After that only a small fleet was deployed, and it was frequently pulled to Korean waters—days away from the Strait—to support the war effort there.

151 The passage cited above implies there are forces elsewhere that might be up to the task, but that it would be imprudent to do so. However, things are not so neatly divisible, as many examples in this dissertation have shown and as Nitze notes in the paragraph immediately following:

There is always an inter-relationship between capabilities and intentions, tactics, and strategy. Because of the limitations of means—we had only seven active divisions at the time of the outbreak of the Korean War—our policy choices were obviously constrained. We had to tailor planning to the means available. As the means increased, we could contemplate other, more powerful reactions in other places. However, we did not foresee any time when U.S. means combined with those of our allies, would be such as to give us an unlimited range of political/military options. See Ibid. 
Beyond that, U.S. military leaders repeatedly expressed concern throughout the fall that they would be unable to stop a significant Chinese attack.

**Interpretation by China**

There is limited information available about the Chinese interpretation of this threat. However, their response was immediate, and suffered from none of the wildly optimistic misperceptions that the other cases exhibit. This section will provide strong support for the theory: in the absence of large differences in theories of victory, there was no underestimation of the United States (thus supporting \( H_1 \)) and no subsequent misperception of American signals or capabilities that might have led to an avoidable military conflict in the Strait (thus supporting \( H_{2A} \) and \( H_{2B} \)). Minimal differences in the theory of victory correlate with more accurate perceptions (Prediction #1), and there was no questioning of American intent (as expected by Predictions #6 and #7).

Prior to the outbreak of the Korean War, the Chinese were increasingly expecting the United States to avoid direct military involvement in the conflict.\(^{152}\) As mentioned in a previous chapter, Beijing had previously believed that the United States could be deterred from intervening in the Chinese Civil War. This had come from the Chinese experience late in the Civil War when they deployed a large force, purely for the purposes of signaling to the United States the dangers of large-scale intervention, along the Northeastern coastlines of China. The lack of a U.S. response convinced Mao that he had deterred the United States from intervening. (In fact, there is little evidence that

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\(^{152}\) As mentioned in Chapter 5, on January 5, 1950, hours before the President’s speech, senior military leaders in China were downplaying the possibility of the United States sending troops to defend Taiwan in the event of a PRC invasion there on military grounds. Chen Jian, *China’s Road*, 102.
the United States was strongly considering intervention at that point, and it had already reduced its forces from Chinese territory—which had numbered several thousand in 1948.) Nevertheless, according to Mao's perspective, the lack of American involvement in the Chinese civil war implied that the United States would be unlikely to interfere once the invasion of Taiwan was underway.\(^{153}\)

Additionally, even before President Truman's "hands off" speech, Chinese military leaders argued that the United States was too overstretched to get directly involved.\(^{154}\) The President's speech itself signaled the beginnings of the public moves toward abandonment of Chiang Kai-shek.\(^{155}\) Beyond that, as argued at the beginning of this chapter, the Chinese plans for the invasion of Taiwan were clearly moving forward. They would come crashing to a halt after June 27 (i.e., after the U.S. declaration regarding the neutralization of the Taiwan Strait).

The deployment of the Seventh Fleet caused the Chinese to abandon their plans. In the context of amphibious operations, this new policy by the United States spelled disaster for Mao's plans. (In Korea, in contrast, as shown in the previous chapter, doctrinal blinders continued to nourish false optimism by the Chinese from the initial decision to intervene and even for several months after People's War tactics should have by been thoroughly discredited.)


\(^{154}\) Chen Jian, China's Road, 102.

Chapter 6: China Postpones Invasion

Following the announcement of the 7th Fleet deployment, a number of orders were issued immediately in Beijing to push back the invasion of Taiwan. On June 30, just over two days after Truman's declaration, Zhou Enlai ordered “the date for the invasion of Taiwan to be postponed. The army should continue to demobilize, and the establishment of the air force and navy should be strengthened.” The formal order from the CMC to relocate troops that had previously been slated for the invasion of Taiwan was issued on July 7. In early August, they were shifted northeast where they would participate in the Korean intervention. Also in early August, the CMC gave its formal approval to an extended delay, postponing the invasion until after 1951. Not only were troops moved, but military construction projects were also discontinued. At the beginning of this chapter, work on a number of airbases was mentioned, “but these projects ceased at the beginning of the Korean War as assets were shifted to northeastern China.”

In terms of detail on why this decision was taken, it is clear from several other pieces of evidence that the Chinese leaders found the American threat to be both credible and very capable. For instance, one Chinese scholar provides added context to Zhou’s original statement postponing the invasion:

Zhou Enlai pointed out the General Staff Headquarters and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must watch the Korean battlefield’s situation attentively and carefully. However,


158 Chen Jian, China's Road, 132.

159 Song Liansheng, Recollections on the Korean War, 204.

160 Muller, China as a Maritime Power, 55.
Twomey, *The Military Lens*

... the demobilization work should still continue according to plan. Only the plan to liberate Taiwan must immediately be abandoned because of the 7th Fleet that the Americans had stationed in the Taiwan Strait. According to the memoirs of Xiao Jinguang, on June 30, 1950, Zhou conveying the Central Committee's analysis of this situation to him [Xiao], saying "the changed situation adds to the problems we face in attacking Taiwan. Because the U.S. blocks the Taiwan Strait ... the ground forces should continue to demobilize, and we'll continue to establish our navy and air force. We will postpone the attack on Taiwan." 161

Similarly, while the 3rd Field Army had prepared hard for the invasion, the top political leadership of the PRC quickly recognized a need to abandon these plans: However, in an internal directive, the Central Committee [of the CCP] had to admit: it [China] did not have the ability to compete with the United States in a trial of modern navies." 162

Finally, a tantalizing report regarding the reaction in Beijing to the American deterrent threat comes from a Chinese Nationalist agent who reportedly attended a high level meeting in Beijing. He passed on the conclusion of the senior Communist cadres, that the Chinese assault fleet would "last only a few [hours] against 7th Flt and U.S. Air Force." 163

In each of these three pieces of data, the specific dangers posed by the U.S. Navy (and in at least one case, the Air Force) are tied to the decision to postpone the attack. Thus, the Chinese understood that even this minimal deployment would decimate any prospects for a successful invasion. They understood both the capability that the signal entailed (H2a) and the intent that it conveyed (H2b). After this, there was no longer any

161 Song Liansheng, *Recollections on the Korean War*, 204. Xiao Jinguang was a senior Chinese military leader, veteran of the revolutionary war, and was to go on to command the PLAN. Chen Yi was another senior communist leader who served as a senior military leader under Zhu De during the civil war and later was mayor of Shanghai and Minister of Foreign Affairs.

162 *Ibid.*, 197. The precise date of this "internal directive" is unclear from the text of Song's book, although it appears to be only a few days after June 28, 1950.

doubt regarding whether the United States would intervene and what that intervention would mean to the Chinese invasion plan if it did so.

Summary

This case suggests several conclusions. First, it suggests that the Alternate Hypothesis that focuses on the ‘objective’ quality of the signal as being critical for coercive success is partially supported, but only partially. The signal was, at best, moderately sized. In terms of ‘objective’ quality, it certainly was quite clear (Truman’s speech left little ambiguity), but the strength of the military signal was quite weak at first. Over time, it grew to be—at the most—a moderately strong military signal. Nevertheless, deterrence held. The Alternate Hypothesis can take some credit for explaining this, but not exclusive credit.

More convincingly, this case supports the argument advanced by this dissertation. There is evidence to support the contention that neither side had an unduly high view of its own capabilities: for weeks, the United States was worried about its ability to defend Taiwan and some branches of government were not reassured until the full buildup for the Korean War was underway in early 1951. The Chinese had backed down in the face of only a moderate deterrent threat. Thus, this case supports H1., clearly and directly.

This case further suggests that in instances where the two sides have similar theories of victory, international communication is easier (H2B) and joint assessments of

164 The alternate explanation cannot be rescued completely by invoking Mearsheimer’s stopping power of water. (See John J. Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 114-28.) The stopping power of water may have played a role in amplifying the clarity of the American signal to the Chinese, but Mao’s views changed over the feasibility of the attack directly in response the U.S. moves. An exclusive focus on the stopping power of water cannot explain that.
Twomey, *The Military Lens*

the military balance are likely to be similar ($H_{2A}$). In this case, an only moderately sized
signal was sent. However, the signal was so clear and the military language so
straightforward, that it was sufficient to deter the Chinese from continuing on this path.
Because both sides understood amphibious war similarly, they both instantly understood
the damage even a few surface ships or a rapidly deployed air squadron could do to a
Chinese landing force. In this case, there is none of the “explaining away” of the
adversary’s capabilities that other cases displayed. Both sides knew how to interpret
this signal. No translation was needed.
Chapter 7. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This final chapter summarizes the results of the three cases, highlighting the strongest arguments made in each, as well as acknowledging their key shortcomings. It then turns to the implications of this research for both practitioners and theorists. In short, the dissertation has found initial support for the proposed relationship between doctrinal differences, misperception, and coercive failure. Nations look at the world through their own military lens. Doctrinal differences impeded communication and signaling between the United States and China. This, in turn, contributed to deterrence failure and escalation of conflict in the cases.

For effective international communication, both sides must understand the language of diplomacy. When that language depends on military threats, different theories of victory can lead to problems in translation and thus unnecessary conflict. Looking forward, policymakers in similar situations to those studied in this dissertation—attempting to deter or compel an adversary with a different doctrine than their own—need to recognize the acute difficulties in such a project and adjust their behavior and expectations accordingly.

Summary

Although additional concurring empirical work would bolster the confidence in these findings, these three cases provide tentative, initial support for the hypotheses. In two of the cases, deterrence failure and subsequent escalation occurred in the context of
deep differences between the two nations’ theories of victory. The causal role of the doctrinal difference is clear-cut in one case (the United States crossing the 38th), and more ambiguous because of limitations in evidence in the other (China’s approval of the invasion). In a third case, more similar theories of victory permitted the straightforward communication of intent and capabilities between the two nations over Taiwan. Beyond this, the eleven ancillary predictions of the dissertation’s theory received wide support across all three cases. While each of the three cases supported the dissertation’s theory, the Alternate Hypothesis received only mixed support. (That said, clearly combining the two will lead to the most accuracy.)

The cases present several different types of evidence. In all three cases, the outcomes correlate with predictions based on the characterization of the relevant theories of victory. However, this would be only thin evidence for a qualitative research project. Much more convincing is the data presented that shows that the process by which the outcome occurs indeed corresponds to the detailed predictions of how the proposed theory should work. Thus, the strongest evidence presented in each of the cases is process tracing data.

In the case of the U.S. decision to cross the 38th parallel, the data presented above makes very clear that the United States explained away the Chinese threats for precisely the reason predicted by the dissertation’s theory. That is, in a series of quotes from both civilian and military sources, American analysts and decisionmakers would move with ease from statements belittling China’s doctrine of People’s War to statements concluding that Chinese capabilities were weak relative to those of the United States. They would then use those relative weaknesses in PLA capability to derive an assessment
of Chinese intent that downplayed the likelihood of Chinese intervention. This led to mistakes in American policy that critically shaped the Korean War, and indeed the entire Cold War.

In the case focusing on Chinese decision making in May of 1950 regarding approval of Kim’s invasion plan, the limitations of the historic record impede analysis to some extent. Nevertheless, in December 1949 and January 1950 Mao and other senior Chinese leaders linked their expectations about a general withdrawal from Asia by the United States to perceptions about American military relative weakness. Again, in turn, these assessments of American weakness were made using language that suggested that a People’s War doctrine underpinned the analysis.

In contrast, in the Taiwan Straits case, the evidence available about Chinese decision-making suggests that similarity in doctrine reduced the prospects for coercive failure. In various quotes describing the reasoning of senior Chinese leaders as they abandoned their planned attack, it was precisely the dangers the American Navy would have posed invasion that accounted decision. In that case, there was no evidence of the pervasive false optimism that the other two cases exhibited.

Thus, in each of the three cases, there is process tracing evidence that the precise biased perception that the theory predicts was in fact used to draw conclusions about the situation and the adversary’s behavior.

Beyond that, however, the specific predictions regarding related phenomenon are also borne out pervasively in the associated historic record. In all three cases, it is very clear that the signals sent were products of the sending nation’s theory of victory. The military signals were clearly products of the dominant doctrine on each side.
Additionally, in the two cases of coercive failure, there is copious evidence that United States and China were both surprised by the effectiveness of their adversary and the limitations of their own forces. Indeed, this was endemic, ranging from shock regarding specific tactical issues and the strategic success of the opponent to a broader surprise over the opponent's involvement in the conflict.

In total, then, all three cases provide some initial support for the proposed theory. Significant differences in theories of victory did indeed lead to misperception, miscommunication, and miscalculation. In turn, these errors played important roles in key deterrence failures in the Korean War, leading to a substantial worsening of that conflict. On the other hand, mistakes and escalation were avoided in the case where the theories of victory were more similar. The conventional wisdom regarding deterrence failure that focuses on the "objective" clarity of the signal did not explain the cases as well as the proposed theory.

The figure, below, summarizes these judgments.

Figure 7-1: Summary of Cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis/Variable Case</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>H0: 'Objective' Quality of Victory</th>
<th>IV: Difference in Theory of Victory</th>
<th>H1: Diff Theory of Mil Victory -&gt; Underest.</th>
<th>H2: Underest. -&gt; Coercive Failure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Crosses 38th Parallel</td>
<td>Deterrence Failure</td>
<td>Weakly Supported</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Strongly Supported</td>
<td>Strongly Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Approval of NK Invasion</td>
<td>Deterrence Failure</td>
<td>Supported</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Moderately Supported</td>
<td>Weakly Supported (poor evidence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China postpones Taiwan Invasion</td>
<td>Deterrence Success</td>
<td>Weakly to Moderately Supported</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Strongly Supported</td>
<td>Moderately Supported (poor evidence)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Clearly, both sides were surprised. As noted in the theory chapter, that is certainly a possibility. Both sides had high expectations of quick victory against their adversary. Instead, what each got was a bloody stalemate that did little to advance its national interests.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

Future research will help to deepen the understanding of these hypotheses more generally. Until additional work is done, however, it is important to consider how this project might contribute to the understanding of international conflict, signaling, and beliefs about war.

Implications for Policy

Attempts at coercion of one sort or another are pervasive in international politics. The United States has done this in more than half a dozen major cases just since the end of the Cold War. It is remarkable how often such attempts fail, even when the nation attempting coercion is, like the United States, dramatically more powerful than the target nation by conventional measures of power. This dissertation helps to explain this sort of failure.

2 Several cases seem promising. Cases from the U.S.-Vietnamese War, would illustrate to what extent learning occurs between the same two adversaries. (Three decisions would appear worthy of study: a. The 1962 decision by China to support the North Vietnamese; b. The escalations following the Gulf of Tokin incident; and c. Chinese attempts to deter the United States from widening the war in 1965 and 1966.) Other cases might focus on Chinese crisis diplomacy with a country less far ahead in technology and less distinct in doctrine and theory of victory. In this regard, the Sino-Vietnamese war of 1979 and the Sino-Indian war of 1962 seem promising. Clearly there would also be advantages from the perspective of generalization to adding a case completely outside of this dyad. One way to do this would be to build on Jonathan Shimshoni’s work on the Arab-Israeli wars. (Jonathan Shimshoni, Israel and Conventional Deterrence: Border Warfare from 1953 to 1970 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).) In particular, study of the 1973 war, which Shimshoni does not examine, would seem interesting from the perspective of this study. Another promising case might be WWII; witness the examples discussed in the Theory and Method chapter, above. The Napoleonic period seems particularly promising given the range of conflict that occurred, as does the pair of U.S.-Yugoslavia/Serbia crises in the 1990s. (Barry R. Posen, "Military Responses to Refugee Disasters," International Security 21, no. 1 (1996); Barry R. Posen, "The War for Kosovo: Serbia's Political-Military Strategy," International Security 24, no. 4 (2000).) Other cases from perhaps the Crimean War, the Indo-Chinese war of 1962, Austro-Prussian War (see Thomas J. Christensen, "Perceptions and Alliances in Europe, 1865-1940," International Organization 51, no. 1 (1997): 70-76.), etc., might also be helpful.

The dissertation also lays out a path for states to avoid these dangers. Deterrence theory has long emphasized the importance of assessing what an adversary values to enhance coercive threats. This dissertation points out that in many cases that is insufficient. For deterrence or compellence to succeed, states also have to understand how the target understands military power. In order to send an effective deterrent or compellent signal, states have to understand the perceptual lens through which that signal will be evaluated. This requires understanding the adversary’s theory of victory.

Perhaps the most important policy implication of this study is simply that coercion of either form —compellence or deterrence—is very, very difficult. State leaders need to understand that and be restrained in their expectations about shaping other countries’ behaviors. Target states with differing doctrinal lenses will often misunderstand threats, and pursuing the steps outlined below to avoid this may not completely vitiate this problem. Compellence and deterrence promise victory on the cheap: Rather than having to rely on brute force to achieve one’s goals, threats backed up by limited uses of force might suffice. However, this dissertation warns that compellence and deterrence will often fail, leaving the threatening state in a position where brute force will have to be used to achieve its goals. For many goals, this more costly policy will not be worth the stake at hand.

This dissertation’s conclusions are particularly relevant today for two reasons. First, in the context of the ongoing revolution in military affairs (RMA), it is likely that the United States will view warfare very differently than any of its adversaries do.4 The

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4 For descriptions of the RMA, see Vice Admiral Arthur K. Cebrowski, Retired, Planning a Revolution: Mapping the Pentagon’s Transformation, WebMemo #292 (Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation, June 12, 2003); Donald Rumsfeld, "Transforming the Military," Foreign Affairs 81, no. 3 (2002).
U.S. theory of victory increasingly emphasizes a number of exotic technologies: precision guided munitions, space-based intelligence gathering, electronic warfare, information warfare, stealth, heavy strategic bombers, standoff weaponry, "total battlespace awareness," and systems integration. In every single one of those areas, the United States has a substantial lead on the entire globe.

However, when the United States sends deterrent or compellent signals relying on the threat or actual use of this sort of military power, it should avoid assuming that its adversaries will view American forces as Washington does. For instance, Saddam Hussein is said to have remarked, "The United States relies on the Air Force, and the Air Force has never been the decisive factor in the history of war." This likely led to misperceptions and miscalculations on the part of Iraq before the first Gulf War.

Indeed, this problem is likely to become even more pronounced over time as the United States continues to invest heavily in high-technology weapons programs and systems integration. Today, the United States spends more on military research and development than any other country spends on its entire military budget. Over time, the gap between the American theory of victory and that of nearly all of its potential adversaries is likely to widen. The dangers outlined in this dissertation will also grow, and must be carefully guarded against.

Second, because this dissertation looks at Sino-American cases, it is likely to have continuing relevance to those two great powers. The interaction between the two is

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6 A similar case could be made in the second Gulf War regarding Hussein's expectations for various guerilla strategies.

7 Research and development spending in the 2004 budget totals some $61.8 billion.
likely to shape international politics in the East Asian region, if not more widely, for the next century. Thus, learning more about how the two sides can reduce the prospect for unintended conflict is valuable. The lessons of this dissertation are likely to be particularly apt given that the differences between Chinese and American military technology remain very substantial. The problems that faced the two in Korea in 1950 may well arise again. Attention to the two sides’ understanding of military power through their theories of victory will help to ameliorate this danger.

Indeed, one prominent argument suggests that China is engaged in a deliberate effort to develop asymmetric strategies that might be used in a coercive manner to counter current American conventional dominance. Since that “asymmetry” is defined relative to the U.S. strategy, this is, by definition, a theory of victory very different from that of the United States. This will have the effect of making communication of military threats more difficult for both sides. Washington and Beijing will not understand the overall balance of power and the degree of intent communicated by military signals when the other side’s theory of victory is different than its own. There are some signs,

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10 Christensen, "Posing Problems."; Department of Defense, Annual Report on the Military Power of the People's Republic of China (Report to Congress Pursuant to the FY2000 National Defense Authorization Act) (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, July 12, 2002). Note the Pentagon's attention on this is promising, particularly on the power balancing side. However, understanding the adversary's signals based on asymmetric tactics will remain challenging.
however, that Chinese strategy is moving toward that of the United States. This may actually be a healthy sign from the perspective of crisis stability.

Again, many students of strategic coercion preach similar general lessons to those that this dissertation counsels. Morgenthau has a section in the final chapter of his *Politics Among Nations* entitled "Diplomacy Must Look at the Political Scene from the Point of View of Other Nations." One recent examination of deterrence policy with the post-Cold War era in mind concludes:

That solution [to the problems posed by post-Cold War deterrence] is to examine as closely as possible the particular opponent's thinking—its beliefs and thought filters—to better anticipate its likely behavior in response to U.S. deterrence policies, and structure those policies accordingly.

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11 In particular, here one thinks of the PLAAF’s focus on tactical airpower, the move toward sea control rather than the People’s War/Soviet Young School model that focuses on coastal defense and submarine forces.

12 These shifts are not without other costs, to be sure. However, they should reduce the potential for dangerous misperceptions. Indeed, to the extent that the Chinese shifts are toward strategies that favor first strikes, this is not a healthy trend at all, as the large spiral model literature has pointed out. There is a debate on the direction of Chinese military strategy. Pessimistic on the score discussed here is Christensen, "Posing Problems." More optimistic accounts can be found in Solomon M. Karmel, *China and the People's Liberation Army: Great Power or Struggling Developing State?,* 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Michael O'Hanlon, "Why China Cannot Conquer Taiwan," *International Security* 25, no. 2 (2000); Robert S. Ross, "Navigating the Taiwan Strait: Deterrence, Escalation Dominance, and U.S.-China Relations," *International Security* 27, no. 2 (2002).


With regard to China in particular, this is also a frequent plea. Shimshoni also makes similar policy prescriptions; however, his conclusions suggest more hawkish policies in general, even though he notes that this has its own set of dangers (making war more likely in the long term). This dissertation suggests that by tailoring signals to the adversary, leaders can cut the Gordian knot. They will not attract aggressors in the short run, but at the same time will not provoke security dilemmas in the long run.

More generally, the existing work on “putting yourself in your adversary’s shoes” generally focuses on considering his national interests. How important is a specific piece of territory to him? Would a particular concession be difficult to make? This project points out that this is insufficient. This dissertation contributes to the points made on mirror imaging in general by providing specific evidence of this phenomenon, locating it in one very important issue-area, and explaining why it occurs by making explicit its causal mechanism. Policymakers need to understand how their adversary assesses power, which requires understanding his perspective on effective military doctrines, his theory of victory.

Clearly, the independent variable of this study is not directly manipulable by policymakers. It is not easy for nations to change their theory of victory. As was noted above, the various theories regarding the sources of theories of victory are deeply rooted in systemic pressures, technologic opportunities, bureaucratic procedures, and

16 The importance of focusing on the Chinese perceptions of the world is emphasized in Melvin Gurtov and Byong-Moo Hwang, China under Threat: The Politics of Strategy and Diplomacy (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 4-5.

17 Shimshoni, Israel and Conventional Deterrence, 201.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

historic experience. Nevertheless, several specific steps can be taken to remedy this problem.

First, states should strive to tailor their signals to the perceptual framework of their adversaries with regard to military doctrine and effectiveness, that is, to their theory of victory. Policymakers can send signals that will be easier for the other side, with its distinct theory of victory, to interpret. While one side’s military may not be optimized to implement the other’s doctrine, it may, nevertheless, have some forces that might be particularly relevant to the adversary. These can be used to enhance the clarity of the signal, even if the signaling state does not value them highly.

Second, leaders can also “red team” their own net assessments of the adversary’s forces. This is not, however, a call for instructing intelligence analysts to make worst-case assumptions. Rather, analysts and scholars who are experts in the country being studied should conduct their honest appraisal of what they understand the adversary to believe regarding its own forces. The value of such red teaming is not that it will allow a state to better assess the overall balance of power, but rather it will allow the state to

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18 Thus, for the United States in 1950, leaving a substantial ground presence in Korea would have been a more clear signal to China than airpower deployments. This would have likely led to a different conversation between Kim and Mao in May of 1950. For China, deploying troops to North Korea earlier (i.e., in August) would have likely deterred the United States from crossing the 38th parallel in October. Clearly, at times material conditions will not allow a state to send precisely the signal it would like. The cost of very expensive signals must be weighed against the cost of inadvertent war however.

Twomey, The Military Lens

better understand what its adversary thinks the balance of power is, and thus provides
some insights into how the adversary views the world.

Third, a final important policy prescription is to engage in military-to-military ties. These will have the effect of allowing both sides to better understand the other’s theory of victory. This, in turn, will improve the prospects for avoiding unnecessary escalation.

The dangers that this dissertation highlights are severe and can lead to unnecessary conflict. However, they are not inevitable and can be reduced if given appropriate attention.

**Implications for Theory**

This study speaks to several different theoretical literatures in political science. Most importantly, this dissertation speaks to the large deterrence literature. Its key conclusion is that deterrence is more difficult than many posit. Achieving successful deterrence is not simply a matter of making credible threats. Rather, it requires understanding how those threats will be interpreted. While substantial attention has been paid to the Alternate Hypothesis in the existing literature (emphasizing the role of having the capability to back up a deterrent threat), other areas would seem to warrant additional study. In particular, understanding how different countries perceive power and how they communicate threats seems critical from the evidence presented here. The approach used in this dissertation is only one of many possible ways to examine these issues. Others will likely bear fruit as well. Regardless, the results of this dissertation suggest that net assessments and weighing the balance in particular dyads is insufficient. Rather, focusing on the perceptions as they are influenced by their theories of victory on
both sides—whether they are correct or incorrect—will likely enhance the predictive value of such analysis.

What this requires, however, is detailed knowledge of the countries that one is trying to influence. Without strong language skills and deep understanding of other countries, this knowledge will be impossible to obtain. However, for someone trained in these areas, the information regarding national approaches to military strategy is readily available. Even relatively closed societies often publish doctrinal debates in open sources.\textsuperscript{20} This would suggest more emphasis in political science on area studies and historical knowledge and less on abstract theory. Unfortunately, “area studies in the United States is under siege.”\textsuperscript{21} Put bluntly, this threatens American national security.

Second, there is a substantial formal literature on the causes of war that views war as a failure of bargaining.\textsuperscript{22} One of the primary sources of such failures in this literature is deliberately created informational asymmetry:

Rational leaders may be unable to locate a mutually preferable negotiated settlement due to private information about relative capabilities or resolve and incentives to misrepresent such information. Leaders know things about their military capabilities and willingness to fight that other states do not know, and in bargaining situations they can have incentives to misrepresent such private information in order to gain a better deal.\textsuperscript{23}


\textsuperscript{21} Peter J. Katzenstein, "Area and Regional Studies in the United States," \textit{PS: Political Science and Politics} 34, no. 4 (2001). For a general discussion on the status of area studies within the field of political science today, see the roundtable discussion in the same issue. For a concurring view on the importance of this body of scholarship, see David C. Kang, "Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks," \textit{International Security} 27, no. 4 (2003): 83.

\textsuperscript{22} Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, "An Expected Utility Theory of International Conflict," \textit{American Political Science Review} 74 (1980).

This study draws attention to a different informational problem: opacity and the importance of perceptual bias.\textsuperscript{24} As the argument of this dissertation makes clear, there are times when informational asymmetries do not come from each side's incentive to misrepresent. Rather, each side's perceptual bias makes it very difficult for them to see information in the same way as its opponent does. This is the case even when one side is trying to communicate—not trying to obfuscate—by sending signals to communicate its capabilities and intent. Rather than informational asymmetries being voluntary and intentional, they are unavoidable and deeply ingrained. This calls for a fundamentally different understanding of the rationality of war.

Another literature that this project speaks to is the effects of military doctrine. There is already one well-understood link between military doctrines and crisis outcomes. Scholars know that offensive doctrines can worsen the security dilemma and increase the propensity for spirals.\textsuperscript{25} This danger is profound and continues in many areas today.\textsuperscript{26} However, this project points to another potential problem that traces its roots to a related independent variable that also deserves study. Military doctrines can impede communication and increase the prospects for unnecessary conflict.

\textsuperscript{24} Note opacity is the core of the critique of Fearon made by Kirshner. Jonathan D. Kirshner, "Rationalist Explanations for War?," \textit{Security Studies} 10, no. 1 (2000).


\textsuperscript{26} Christensen, "China, the U.S.-Japan Alliance, and the Security Dilemma in East Asia."; Christensen, "Posing Problems."; Ashley J. Tellis, C. Christine Fair, and Jamison Jo Medby, \textit{Limited Conflict under the Nuclear Umbrella: Indian and Pakistani Lessons from the Kargil Crisis}, MR-1450-USCA (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2001).
Finally, this project also highlights the importance of opening up the black box of the state. There is a view that the most important insights into international relations come from studying the international system and the relations among the units.\(^{27}\) This project suggests that important elements in explaining the outbreak of war come from not only state level variables, but even sub-state level variables: the nature of thinking about how to win wars generally comes from within the military. Given that these factors have been shown to be critical to understanding the outbreak and nature of conflict between two of the major powers in the Cold War system,\(^{28}\) then ignoring such factors sacrifices too much at the alter of parsimony.

Thus, the dissertation has important policy prescriptions and theoretical implications. Strategic coercion is a high stakes foreign policy under the best of circumstances. When nations see the world through different military lenses, the risk of misperception and miscommunication in the conduct of their diplomacy and statecraft grows even higher. Mitigating these dangers will help advance the cause of peace and stability.


\(^{28}\) Indeed, given that some have argued that the Korean War was a central cause of the militarized competition between the United States and the Soviet Union that came to be known as the Cold War, than understanding this case is even more important. Robert Jervis, "The Impact of the Korean War on the Cold War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 24, no. 4 (1980).
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Biographical Note

Christopher P. Twomey will join the faculty of the Department of National Security Affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California as an Assistant Professor in the fall of 2004. He has previously spent the two years as an Adjunct Assistant Professor and Instructor in the Political Science Department at Boston College (2003-04). He has spent three summers working as a consultant for the RAND Corporation on strategic issues and one year as Policy Researcher for Asia at the University of California's Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation. He has also held fellowships from or been affiliated with Harvard's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, MIT's Security Studies Program and Center for International Studies, the National Security Education Program (Washington, DC), and the Chinese Academy of Social Science in Beijing. He earned a Masters degree from the Graduate School of International Relations and Pacific Studies at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) in 1993. He also received his B.A. from UCSD in Economics in 1990.

His research interests center on security studies, Chinese foreign policy, strategic culture, statecraft, and East Asian security in theory and practice. He has authored several book chapters, published in such journals as Security Studies and Issues and Studies, and co-edited Power and Prosperity: The Links between Economics and Security in Asia-Pacific (1996). He is a member of a multinational research team organized by the Stimson Center examining the relationship between the U.S.-Japan Alliance and China. He is also a member of the Sino-American Security Dialogue, an annual conference bringing together security scholars from the two countries. During the Afghan and Iraq Wars, he served as a military affairs expert on a local television network affiliate and has published in selective mass media outlets. He has lived in China several times, most recently in 1998-99, speaks and reads Chinese, and has traveled widely in Asia.