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**WARS, FOUGHT AND UNFOUGHT: CHINA AND THE
SINO-INDIAN BORDER DISPUTE**

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S. RAJARATNAM SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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SINO-INDIAN BORDER DISPUTE**

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Statement of Originality

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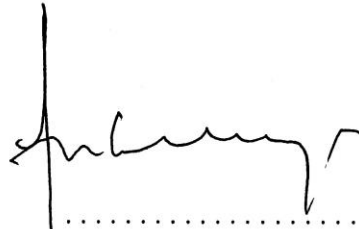
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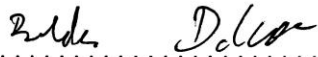
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This thesis contains material from **one** paper published in the following peer-reviewed journal in which I am listed as an author.

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Summary

When do Chinese leaders choose to fight and when do they want to avoid direct military engagement in frontier disputes? The question arises because China fought a war with India in 1962, clashed with the Soviets in 1969 and invaded Vietnam in 1979 over territorial concerns. In 1986-87, however, Sino-Indian military tension on the disputed border subsided without a direct clash. China's conduct is puzzling because the extent of force used by it does not always correspond with the challenge posed by the disputant—Indian fence building in 1967 led to Chinese attacks while similar actions in 1986 invited only limited measures. I argue that the threat environment faced by the state and its leaders is the most important factor that influences China's propensity to use direct or limited force in territorial disputes. The more threatening the environment, the higher the level of force China is likely to use. China is most inclined to use direct force against a territorial disputant when it faces high level of external and internal threats at the time of the border crisis. Under these circumstances, China prefers to use direct force to reduce the external and internal threats. China is most likely to engage in military posturing against a territorial disputant if external threat is low and internal threat is high. This is a hybrid situation in which the leader needs to boost elite unity without antagonizing the great powers, hence the reason for military posturing. China is likely to make concessions in territorial disputes when it faces high external and low internal threats. In this setting, the leader enjoys the support of the political elite and can initiate negotiated territorial settlements without being charged with selling out the motherland. China is likely to delay the resolution of border disputes when external and internal threats are both low. Without foreign or domestic pressures, the leader is likely to choose the least costly way of maintaining the state's territorial claims: delaying the resolution.

Tables, Figures and Maps

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Chapter 1. Introduction: China's Use of Force and the Sino-Indian Border Dispute

The rise of China is possibly the biggest geopolitical development of the twenty-first century. This country has the largest population of the globe, a booming economy, formidable military and nuclear weapons. However, China's rise—and the stability of the Asian region—could be jeopardized if Beijing went to war with another major power. Such a scenario is not entirely unlikely: China fought a war with India, conducted skirmishes against the Soviets and invaded Vietnam in the past. Similar clashes today could cause a major disruption globally, given Beijing's integration into the international system and many other countries' economic dependence on China. Hence, it is imperative to understand what triggers the Chinese use of force. In this dissertation, I delve deep into the Sino-Indian border dispute to decipher China's motivations behind initiating attacks or exercising restraint. I do so by focusing on the 1962 border war, the 1967 clashes and the 1986-87 Sumdorong Chu Valley standoff. These cases demonstrate different levels of the Chinese use of force in various systemic settings, hence they can give us an overview of China's considerations when leaders contemplate the necessity of going to war. The research findings could aid policy makers and strategists in dealing with China and maintaining stability in sensitive areas.

In this chapter I aim to provide an overview of the dissertation's core elements. I start by introducing the central research puzzle. In the second section, I lay out my argument: high levels of threat increase the likelihood of the direct use of force by China. The subsequent two sections discuss the relevance of the question and the dissertation's contribution. Finally, I explicate the dissertation's research design by introducing the assumptions, variables and methods of measurement.

1.1. The puzzle: China's use of force

What makes China fight over disputed territories? The question arises because China fought a war against India in 1962, clashed with the Soviets in 1969 and invaded Vietnam in 1979. On other occasions, China exercised restraint, such as the Sumdorong Chu crisis on the Indian border in 1986-87, or the subsequent Sino-Indian border crises of 2013, 2014 and 2017. In other words, China used force in different degrees in its disputes: on some occasions, it attacked the disputant,

while on others it used force in a limited, demonstrative way. Intriguingly, the extent of force applied by China does not always correspond with the magnitude of challenge posed by the opponent—on the Indian border, fence building in 1967 led to Chinese attacks while the occupation of neutral territory in 1986 invited only military posturing.

Extant works address this question only indirectly because they do not distinguish the different levels of force used by China—there is no differentiation between the direct use of force and military posturing.¹ M. Taylor Fravel proposes that China uses force in territorial disputes as a response to a decline in its “claim strength” which is “the ability of each side to control the land that it contests.”² Why? Because a state’s claim strength allows its leaders to negotiate from a position of strength in territorial settlement attempts. When the adversary augments its claim strength in the dispute, the state perceives a decline in its own bargaining position. States are sensitive to such a decline and want to reverse it. They do so by making threats or use force to coerce the adversary to change its behaviour.³

For instance, Fravel asserts that China fought a war against India in 1962 because the latter established seventy military outposts and occupied 3000 square kilometres of land in the disputed region shortly after societal turbulence in Tibet.⁴ As table 1.1 shows below, Fravel further identifies the 1967 and 1986-87 confrontations on the border as instances of China’s use of force in the Sino-Indian border dispute.

¹ Some of the relevant works include: Eric Hyer, *The Pragmatic Dragon: China's Grand Strategy and Boundary Settlements* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2015); M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Chien-peng Chung, *Domestic Politics, International Bargaining and China's Territorial Disputes* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004); Thomas J. Christensen, "Windows and War: Trend Analysis and Beijing's Use of Force," in *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy*, ed. A. I. Johnston and Robert S. Ross (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); Allen S. Whiting, "China's Use of Force, 1950-96, and Taiwan," *International Security* 26, no. 2 (2001); Huiyun Feng, *Chinese Strategic Culture and Foreign Policy Decision-Making: Confucianism, Leadership and War* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).

² Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 28.

³ *Ibid.*, 28-31, 38.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 175-80.

*Table 1.1
Chinese use of force in frontier disputes.*

<i>Use of force</i>		<i>Causes</i>		
<i>Year and disputant</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Territory controlled</i>	<i>Power Projection</i>	<i>Regime security</i>
1959-1961 India	Occupation of additional territory in Western sector	—	India's clarification of western sector claim; India's support for Tibet	Tibet Revolt
1962 India	Offensive against Indian positions	Indian gains in western sector	Indian deployments in both sectors; creation of IV Corps	Revolt in Tibet; crisis after Great Leap
1967 India	Nathu La and Cho La clashes	—	India's deployment of mountain divisions, Indian fortifications in central sector	Cultural Revolution
1969 Soviet Union	Zhenbao Island ambush	Soviet effort to deny access to disputed river islands	Increased Soviet troops deployments to Far East; forward posture; assertive patrolling	Instability of Cultural Revolution
1980 Vietnam	Assault on Luojia-Pingda Mt.	Vietnamese control of hilltop	—	—
1981 Vietnam	Assault on Faka and Koulin mts.	Vietnamese control of hilltop	—	—
1984 Vietnam	Assault on Lao and Zheyin	Vietnamese control of hilltop	—	—
1986 June India	Occupation of Sumdorong Chu	Indian post near Thag La	Indian forward positions in eastern sector	—

Source: Fravel, Strong Borders, Secure Nation, 64-65.

Fravel's analysis underspecifies the dependent variable because in his theory land occupation, war initiation, small scale attacks and troop deployments of 1986-87 all fall under the amorphous term of the "use of force," which remains undefined in his book. The definition he provides for

this term is in another article: “the decision to execute combat operations over a particular issue at a particular time.”⁵

Fravel’s approach is unfortunate, because his work sheds little light on why China fought a war against India in 1962 but found it enough to use only military posturing in 1986-87, 2013, 2014 and 2017. Regardless of the merits of his work, we are still left with the question: when do Chinese leaders choose to fight and when do they want to avoid direct military engagement?

In order to give a more advanced explanation of the Chinese use of force, I address two major shortcomings of Fravel’s theory. First, I break down the concept of the “use of force” into two subcategories: the direct use of force and the threat of force. This distinction allows me to capture the difference between China’s behaviour in the 1962 border war and the bloodless Sumdorong Chu Standoff in 1986-87 and gives greater explanatory power to my argument.

Second, I depart from Fravel’s “state-centric” approach and focus on the domestic political standing of the paramount leader—Mao and Deng—instead. Fravel’s analysis entirely excludes factional dynamics and treats the Chinese Communist Party as a black box.⁶ This approach downplays the influence of elite politics on a state’s behaviour in a border dispute. I depart from this practice because autocratic leaders rely on elite support, hence their choices are highly dependent on this group.⁷ Instead, I open up the black box of the CCP and explore how succession struggles shape China’s strategic calculus in border disputes. This decision puts border disputes into a new perspective and allows me to draw different conclusions than Fravel. For instance, during the Sumdorong Chu crisis, Deng Xiaoping’s position was insecure due to his disagreements with his designated successor Hu Yaobang. Fravel’s analysis entirely overlooks this factor and claims that the Chinese state was stable at the time.⁸ My analysis, however, incorporates the influence of the succession struggle and suggest that Deng used force at the time to gain support from the domestic political elite.

⁵ M. Taylor Fravel, “The Limits of Diversion: Rethinking Internal and External Conflict,” *Security Studies* 19, no. 2 (2010): 318.

⁶ *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 14.

⁷ Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Randolph M. Siverson, “War and the Survival of Political Leaders: A Comparative Study of Regime Types and Political Accountability,” *The American Political Science Review* 89, no. 4 (1995): 841-52; Daehee Bak, “Autocratic Political Cycle and International Conflict,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* (2017): 16.

⁸ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 201.

1.2. The argument: a neoclassical realist probe

I use a neoclassical realist approach to solve the puzzle at hand. Neoclassical realists contend that the primary variable shaping the behaviour of states is external (systemic) pressure which is filtered through secondary variables—domestic (unit-level) factors.⁹ This school agrees with neorealists that in the long run, international outcomes reflect the structure of the international system. However, neoclassical realism aims to explain the short-term foreign policy decision-making of a state in which domestic variables play the role of an “imperfect transmission belt” of systemic pressures.¹⁰

Neoclassical realism can be divided into three subtypes. “Type I” aims to explain anomalies—state behaviour that defies systemic pressures.¹¹ These include examples of overextension,¹² “overactive” security measures,¹³ underexpansion,¹⁴ and “underbalancing.”¹⁵ “Type II” neoclassical realists elucidate more than just anomalies. They argue that predominantly, systemic threats to the state are vague and distant, providing states with more than one policy option. In these circumstances, unit-level variables, such as leader images or factional politics, shape the final state decision. In rare circumstances when threats to the state are straightforward and imminent, leaders’ choices are mostly structurally determined.¹⁶ Finally, “Type III” neoclassical realism further expands the explanatory power of the school, ranging from short-term crisis decision-making to long term international outcomes. It identifies the clarity and permissiveness

⁹ Gideon Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” *World Politics* 51 (1998): 147-52.

¹⁰ Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven E. Lobell, and Norrin M. Ripsman, “Introduction: Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy,” in *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, ed. Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 4-7.

¹¹ Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 26-27.

¹² Overextension denotes the initiation of expansionist policies that involve higher costs than benefits. Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 8.

¹³ Overactive security measures make more enemies for the state. Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (New Jersey, US and Chichester, UK: Princeton University Press, 1996), 14.

¹⁴ Underexpansion denotes missed opportunities of extending influence when capabilities and circumstances allow it to do so. Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), 44-55.

¹⁵ Underbalancing occurs when countries do not balance against emerging dangers or do it ineffectively because they are reluctant or unable to mobilize their states to counter the threat. Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 10-11.

¹⁶ Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 29; Mark R. Brawley, *Liberal Leadership: Great Powers and Their Challengers in Peace and War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 115-37.

of the international system as independent variables. The four key intervening variables of the theory are leader beliefs, strategic culture, state-society ties and internal institutions. The dependent variables are crisis strategies, foreign policy decisions and grand strategic adjustments. This type of neoclassical realism explains not only state decisions but also the systemic impact of policies shaped at the state level. Leaders' choices to fight wars, draw up peace agreements or revise their trade policies all remould the structure of the international system.¹⁷ Table 1.2 summarizes the three types.

Table 1.2. Types of neoclassical realism.

<i>Type</i>	<i>State behavior explained</i>	<i>Case</i>	<i>Source</i>
Type I:	Overextension: the initiation of expansionist policies that involve higher costs than benefits	Japan in the 1930s	Snyder: <i>Myths of Empire</i> , p. 8, 150.
	Underexpansion: missed opportunities of extending influence when capabilities and circumstances allow it to do so.	US, 1865-1889	Zakaria: <i>From Wealth to Power</i> , pp. 44-55.
	Underbalancing: occurs when countries do not balance against emerging dangers or do it ineffectively because they are reluctant or unable to mobilize their states to counter the threat.	Britain during 1930s, France during the interwar period	Schweller: <i>Unanswered threats</i> , pp. 10-11, 69-85.
Type II:	International system defines policy options, domestic politics determine policy choices from those options	Britain in the late 19 th century	Brawley: <i>Liberal Leadership</i> , pp. 115-137.
Type III:	Short-term decision making and long-term outcomes	Outbreak of World War II	Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell: <i>Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics</i> , p. 85.

Source: Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell: Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics, pp. 26-34.

¹⁷ Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 33-38, 59-61, 80-90, 187-88.

I use “Type II” neoclassical realist framework. I use this type because it combines the most advantageous aspects of Type I and Type II. Type I acknowledges that foreign policy decisions are influenced by domestic political factors, but it focuses overwhelmingly on anomalies. Type III explains more than Type I, but it uses a diluted analytical framework with a plethora of variables, leading to convoluted arguments. Type II strikes a balance between these two because it introduces domestic variables but remains parsimonious. I argue that Chinese decisions to use direct force or engage in military posturing are mainly determined by two factors: external and internal threats. External threat is high if the great powers’ relationship with China is hostile, meaning disagreements over political issues and frequent militarized confrontations. Internal threat is high if there is an ongoing power struggle in the political elite, as this endangers a leader’s rule. My argument is that high level of external and internal threats lead to a higher likelihood of China’s direct use of force against a territorial disputant. This argument falls under “Type II” neoclassical realism because the high level of external threat is indeterminate: states can behave in more than one way in a border dispute in this scenario. The specific path they choose is dependent on the level of internal threat faced by the leader. In what follows, I elaborate on the hypotheses following from this argument.

Type II neoclassical realism is adequate to interrogate the puzzle at hand because of its treatment of internal threats as intervening variables in the causal mechanism. The standard approach would suggest that independent variables cause the intervening variables which in turn lead to the dependent variable. In my dissertation’s context, this would mean that high level of external threat causes high level of internal threat which leads to the use of force by China. This might be the case on some occasions, as the high level of threat emanating from the US and the Soviet Union prompted China to embark on the Great Leap Forward, causing high level of external threat to Mao Zedong who opted to wage war against India (explained in Chapter 3 below). However, the low level of external threats does not necessarily lead to low level of internal threats. In the case of the Sino-Soviet border crisis, the level of external threat to China was low, yet the level of internal threat to Deng Xiaoping was high (explained in Chapter 5 below). This type of discrepancy can be reconciled by using a Type II neoclassical realist approach. Under this framework, intervening variables are not caused by independent variables, but rather act as mediators or “filters” of independent variables—since independent variables are indeterminate,

the intervening variables influence decision making.¹⁸ When external threat is high, the state can manipulate a dispute in multiple ways to mitigate the threat: it can offer concessions or use force. In these cases, the state's decision is informed by the level of internal threat faced by the leader.

1.3. Hypotheses

China is most likely to use direct force against a territorial disputant when external and internal threats are both high. In the case of high external threats, the state faces an existential threat from the great powers: a potential invasion. This external pressure is exacerbated if the leader also faces high internal threat—a challenge from a domestic political actor. Under these circumstances, Chinese leaders aim to utilize the border dispute in a way that reduces both external and internal threats. By fighting a territorial disputant, China can use an external conflict to undermine an emerging coalition against itself. Internally, the leader's goal is to use an external conflict to unite the fractured domestic political elite and thereby preserve his own position. This argument yields my first hypothesis:

H1: In the case of high external and internal threats, China is likely to use direct force in a border dispute.

China displayed this behaviour in the 1962 Sino-Indian border war. Coinciding with the US pressure and the downturn in Sino-Soviet ties, Mao Zedong faced a very threatening domestic environment after the catastrophic consequences of the Great Leap Forward. Mao felt threatened and reasserted his position with a push for a more assertive foreign policy and “domestic political radicalism.”¹⁹ Subsequently, China went to war with India.

On the other hand, China is most likely to engage in military posturing against a territorial adversary if external threat is low and internal threat is high. Under these circumstances, Chinese leaders only have to reduce the internal threat, obviating the need for external deterrence.

¹⁸ Ibid., 16-32.

¹⁹ Mingjiang Li, "Ideological Dilemma: Mao's China and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1962–63," *Cold War History* 11, no. 3 (2010): 411-12; Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 98-101.

Nevertheless, the limited use of force is necessary to strengthen unity among the fractured elite and avoid internal criticism for not defending the motherland. This yields my second hypothesis:

H2: In the case of low external and high internal threats, China is likely to engage in military posturing in a border dispute.

China demonstrated this conduct in the 1986-87 Sumdorong Chu Standoff. In 1986, China discovered an Indian seasonal observation post in the Sumdorong Chu Valley, an area previously unoccupied by the disputants.²⁰ Beijing responded by dispatching its forces to the area to deny the entry of the Indian troops, leading to a standoff between the two armies.²¹ At the time of the standoff, external threat to China was low—there was an upturn in its ties with the Soviets and the US—and Deng was facing high level of internal threat as he was under attack by the reformist faction of the Chinese Communist Party.²² In the process of the standoff, China refrained from using direct force against India.

There are two more hypotheses flowing logically from my variables: China's behaviour in case of low external and internal threats as well as in the case of high external and low internal threats. These conditions do not result in the use of force. China is most likely to make concessions in territorial disputes in case of high external and low internal threats. As mentioned above, high external threats compel the state to adopt a foreign policy that mitigates the threat of an invasion. In the case of low internal threats, leaders are likely to opt for resolving disputes in order to create a buffer around the state that cushions it from a foreign conquest. They do so by conceding territories to a disputant, for such a move reduces the likelihood of war with a neighbour and usually results in amicable ties or a nonaggression treaty.²³ Given that their domestic political position is unchallenged, leaders are immune to charges of selling out the motherland. This yields the third hypothesis.

²⁰ Wenbo Ji, "1987 年中印边界危机回顾与反思 (the 1987 Sino - India Border Crisis in Retrospect: Lessons and Reflections)," *南亚研究 (South Asian Studies)*, no. 1 (2018): 70.

²¹ John W. Garver, "Sino-Indian Rapprochement and the Sino-Pakistan Entente," *Political Science Quarterly* 111, no. 2 (1996): 338.

²² Jing Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 404-06.

²³ Hyer, *The Pragmatic Dragon: China's Grand Strategy and Boundary Settlements*, 4.

H3: In case of high external and low internal threat, China is likely to cooperate in a border dispute.

As China's strategic environment deteriorated due to increased US presence in Asia, the Sino-Soviet split and the upturn in Indo-Soviet relations, Mao Zedong—who still enjoyed domestic support—moved to make concessions and resolve border disputes with Myanmar and Nepal in 1960.²⁴ China also engaged in territorial discussions with India in the same year, where it offered to concede the eastern sector in exchange for the western sector. Nevertheless, India disagreed, and the talks failed.²⁵

China is least likely to use force in the case of low internal and external threats. Under these circumstances, the state faces no threat from the great powers and the leader is not challenged by its successor. Under these circumstances, the aim of the state and its leaders is to preserve its claim to the disputed territory. Leaders are likely to opt for a delaying approach under these circumstances, as this is the least costly way of maintaining a territorial claim.²⁶ This yields the fourth hypothesis.

H4: In the case of low external and internal threats, China is likely to delay the resolution of the border dispute.

This approach was present in China's conduct in most of its border disputes. China had opportunities to engage in negotiations with India, Nepal and Burma in the mid-1950s—when external threat to China was low due to its alliance with the Soviet Union and Mao Zedong's position was unchallenged—but the PRC either postponed or hampered those talks. For instance, Beijing was reluctant to concede four disputed areas to Burma, effectively freezing talks for years.²⁷ This conduct supports the hypothesis as the delaying approach does not involve the use of force. The hypotheses are summarized in table 1.3.

²⁴ Ibid., 81, 92.

²⁵ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 93-96.

²⁶ Ibid., 12-13.

²⁷ Ibid., 71; M. Taylor Fravel, "Shifts in Warfare and Party Unity," *International Security* 29, no. 5 (2018): 56.

Table 1.3
Summary of hypotheses

	<i>Low external threat</i>	<i>High external threat</i>
<i>Low internal threat</i>	Delay <i>India, 1954</i> <i>Burma, 1956</i> <i>Nepal, 1956</i>	Cooperation <i>India, 1960</i> <i>Burma, 1960</i> <i>Nepal, 1960</i>
<i>High internal threat</i>	Military Posturing <i>India, 1986-1987</i> <i>India, 2013</i> <i>India, 2014</i> <i>India, 2017</i>	Direct use of force <i>India, 1959</i> <i>India, 1962</i> <i>India, 1967</i> <i>Soviet Union, 1969</i> <i>Vietnam, 1979</i> <i>India, 2020</i>

It is apparent that the heavy lifting in my argument is done by the external threat, not the internal one. This might seem counterintuitive, because one could expect a leader to be more concerned with threats in his immediate environment rather than the external one. I prioritize external threats because it means the threat of encirclement by a hostile great power—something that could be the first step in a potential invasion. The Chinese leadership was in a constant paranoia during the Cold War, but China faced existential threat only on a few occasions. In 1962, China feared that the US would support Taiwan’s planned attack on the mainland.²⁸ In 1969, Mao feared a nuclear war against the Soviets.²⁹ Under these circumstances, the mitigation of the external threat gains priority, regardless of the leader’s domestic political standing. A stable political leader is likely to opt for a solution of border disputes to establish a friendly neighbourhood, a buffer devoid of foreign military bases around the state. An insecure political leader might opt for a military confrontation to rally external and internal actors. While these two types of policy decisions are entirely different, they are all subordinated to the greater purpose of preventing a foreign invasion.

²⁸ Whiting, "China's Use of Force, 1950-96, and Taiwan," 111-12.

²⁹ Srinath Raghavan, "The Security Dilemma and India–China Relations," *Asian Security* 15, no. 1 (2018): 65.

1.4. Relevance—rising powers, nuclear heavyweights

There are at least three reasons to explore the Sino-Indian border dispute. First and foremost, the participants play an important role in world politics. China and India are not only rising powers, but also the two most populated countries of the world, and they are among the top ten economies.³⁰ Few would doubt that they are going to be more important in the future. The border dispute makes their ties volatile—contested territory is the most frequent cause of interstate wars.³¹ Due to global economic interdependence, a war between these two states over territory might have repercussions beyond their borders. Hence, there is a need to better understand the dispute and the potential trigger points in it.

Second, the possession of nuclear capabilities on both sides creates an imperative to enrich the extant focus on the dichotomous dependent variable of the use and non-use of force. The advent of nuclear weapons brought paradoxical changes to leaders' crisis behaviour. On the one hand, the fear of a nuclear holocaust created an incentive against military hostilities: the Soviet Union and the United States have gone to great lengths to control escalation in crises during the Cold War.³² On the other hand, nuclear capacity also heightened the "provocation threshold," providing leaders with a greater range of actions that can be applied in a crisis without causing war.³³ The case of the Kargil conflict in 1999 shows that nuclear capabilities do not preclude the occurrence of violent interstate crises. On the contrary, it encourages states to pursue their interests in a belligerent way, because they are convinced that a confrontation between nuclear powers would be kept under control.³⁴ In the context of the Sino-Indian border dispute, these changes mean that leaders might be averse to starting wars, but not averse to using force at lower levels. Chinese nuclear weapons are deliverable since 1965,³⁵ yet China fought with India in 1967 but refrained from using force

³⁰ Rob Smith, "The World's Biggest Economies in 2018," *World Economic Forum* (2018).

³¹ Mark W. Zacher, "The Territorial Integrity Norm: International Boundaries and the Use of Force," *International Organization* 55, no. 2 (2001).

³² Russel J. Leng, *Bargaining and Learning in Recurrent Crises: The Soviet-American, Egyptian-Israeli, and Indo-Pakistani Rivalries* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000), 272.

³³ Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict among Nations: Bargaining, Decision Making and System Structure in International Crises* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), 453-55.

³⁴ Christopher J. Watterson, "Competing Interpretations of the Stability–Instability Paradox: The Case of the Kargil War," *The Nonproliferation Review* 24, no. 1-2 (2017): 87.

³⁵ Wu Riqiang, "Certainty of Uncertainty: Nuclear Strategy with Chinese Characteristics," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36, no. 4 (2013): 597.

against it directly in 1986-87. The low likelihood of war between the two sides creates a need to explore ambiguous terrain of “sub-war” conflicts.

Finally, the issue is of contemporary relevance, as the two sides confronted each other in 2013, 2014, 2017 and 2020. While the former two confrontations were low in intensity, the latter two pushed the two nuclear powers to the brink of war. In the summer of 2017, troops on both sides were eye to eye for more than two months as India dispatched troops to the China-Bhutan border to prevent the former from completing its road extension in the disputed area.³⁶ In June 2020, lives were lost on the border after more than four decades of relative tranquillity. This confrontation occurred in the Galwan Valley in the Western sector. 20 Indians died during the confrontation while the Chinese side remained silent about its casualties. Importantly, the two sides did not break their commitment to not using firearms: casualties occurred without a shot being fired.³⁷

Therefore, regardless of the longstanding peace on the border, tensions remain. To understand these tensions, one must look at the historical development and situational nuances of border confrontations. A dissertation that explains the past occurrences of border crises might equip policymaking circles with tools to predict such events and prevent unwanted escalation.

1.5. Contribution

The contribution of the dissertation is fivefold. First, my work sheds new light on how elite division influenced China’s behaviour in the Sino-Indian border dispute. From this perspective, the dissertation joins the works which explored how domestic political dynamics in the early 1960s influenced Chinese foreign policy. These contributions focused on how Sino-US and Sino-Soviet ties changed due to Chinese internal processes, but the way these changes influenced Sino-Indian relations remains unexplored.³⁸ A neoclassical realist framework is adequate for uncovering these

³⁶ The Hindu Net Desk, "Timeline: The Story of the Doklam Stand-Off," The Hindu, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/timeline-the-story-of-the-doklam-stand-off/article19576380.ece>.

³⁷ "Indian Soldiers Killed in China Border Clash Were Unarmed and Surrounded, Families Say," South China Morning Post, <https://www.scmp.com/news/asia/south-asia/article/3091917/indian-soldiers-killed-china-border-clash-were-unarmed-and>.

³⁸ Jun Niu, "1962: The Eve of the Left Turn in China’s Foreign Policy," *Cold War International History Project Working Paper #48* (2005): 1; Li, "Ideological Dilemma: Mao's China and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1962–63."

changes because it allows me to focus on the influence of domestic political changes without downplaying the importance of external factors.

Second, the utilization of such a framework contributes to the refinement of the neoclassical realist research program. When it comes to crises, neoclassical realists are unclear about the interplay between systemic and unit-level variables and their influence on decision making. They point out that severe time limitations during crises heavily restrain a state's policy options, as the relative capabilities of the participants tend to remain constant during a crisis. Among these circumstances, leader images and strategic culture are discussed as the most prominent intervening variables, because severe time constraints allow the state's top executive to make decisions without involving domestic stakeholders.³⁹ My argument challenges this statement and points out that the domestic political challenge faced by the leader plays a more important role than it is proposed by neoclassical realists—it makes the difference between the use or non-use of force.

Third, qualitative research can shed light on the details of diversionary use of force, such as the direction and the nature of the link between internal and external conflict.⁴⁰ The same applies to the work on diversion in autocracies, as the logic of diversion in these regimes remains confusing: is it aimed at the populace or the elite?⁴¹ Is it about rallying the domestic constituencies or signalling competence?⁴² Maybe about diverting attention from domestic problems? While the dissertation will certainly not provide answers and remedies for all these shortcomings and confusion, it will enrich our understanding of the interplay between internal and external conflict as well as autocratic systems' preferences related to the use of force.

Four, the dissertation also focuses on the role of third countries in the dispute, a factor that has been largely neglected so far. While the Sino-Indian dispute is a bilateral issue, third states were involved in it during the Cold War. After the 1962 border war, six African-Asian states—the Colombo Powers—attempted to mediate between the two parties and bring them to the negotiating table. At the end of the day, they failed. Nevertheless, Third World states had a high position on

³⁹ Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 83, 91.

⁴⁰ Jack S. Levy, "The Diversionary Theory of War: A Critique," in *The Handbook of War Studies*, ed. Manus I. Midlarsky (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

⁴¹ Erin Baggott Carter, "Elite Welfare Shocks and Autocratic Foreign Policy: Evidence from China," *Working Paper* (2018); Jeffrey Pickering and Emizet F. Kisangani, "Diversionary Despots? Comparing Autocracies' Propensities to Use and to Benefit from Military Force," *American Journal of Political Science* 54, no. 2 (2010).

⁴² Kyle Haynes, "Diversionary Conflict: Demonizing Enemies or Demonstrating Competence?," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 34, no. 4 (2017).

China's foreign policy agenda during the Cold War. Hence, it is warranted to explore if these states played a role in China's behaviour in border disputes.

Finally, the dissertation relies both on English and Chinese language sources with the aim of providing a balanced account of the dispute. To date, the bulk of the work on the Sino-Indian dispute relied on English language sources, so utilizing Chinese language materials sheds new light on the topic. At the same time, some episodes of the dispute are empirically under-covered. Many of the analyses on the border dispute usually focus on the war of 1962, but the subsequent clashes of 1967 and the standoff of 1986-87 are less often discussed. By conducting an in-depth survey of materials in Chinese, this study enhances the scholarship's understanding of Chinese conduct in the Sino-Indian border dispute and border disputes in general.

1.6. Research design

In this section, I introduce the dissertation's research design. I start with the building blocks of the argument: assumptions, variables and indicators. The causal mechanism I propose is based on independent, intervening and dependent variables. The values of these variables can be measured by a set of indicators that include the number of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) with the great powers, the number of years spent in power by the political successor, and the presence or absence of direct attacks on the disputant. Subsequently, I focus on the method of hypothesis testing. Given that the dissertation seeks to uncover a causal mechanism and the low number of available cases, I chose structured, focused comparison as a testing method.⁴³ The chosen cases are the 1962 war, the 1967 clash and the 1986-87 standoff on the disputed Sino-Indian border, as they show variation on the level of force used by China and the availability of data is the highest related to these historical events. The final section discusses the sources and data collection methods of the dissertation.

⁴³ Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 45-50, 69-71, 210-23.

1.6.1. Assumptions, variables and indicators

I use a neoclassical realist approach in which system-level stimuli are identified as independent variables, and these stimuli are filtered through unit-level factors which act as intervening variables.⁴⁴ My argument is based on four assumptions. First, war is not a direct product of systemic factors, but an outcome of an interactive process in which domestic political conditions also shape the behaviour of states.⁴⁵ Second, state leaders are assumed to be rational actors who make their decisions based on cost-benefit calculations.⁴⁶ Third, the core aim of a leader is to maintain his dominance in the domestic political arena.⁴⁷ Finally, war is costly to the state due to the risk of a potential defeat and the destruction of resources.⁴⁸

The independent variable is the level of external threat to the state, operationalized by observing the great powers' relationship with China. Hostile and friendly relations are difficult to capture in measurable terms. I measure hostile ties with great powers through primary and secondary indicators. The primary indicator is the great powers' threat toward the state's sovereignty and territorial integrity. This can manifest in various ways such as the great powers' military presence in the state's neighbourhood or their interference with issues that the state considers as domestic politics—most prominently, in China's case, the Taiwan question. The secondary indicator is a proxy: the number of militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) between China and the great powers. I extract the numbers from the Correlates of War database (Dyadic Militarized Interstate Disputes Dataset v3.1).⁴⁹ This approach is justified by the work of historians who frequently use militarized confrontations as a measure of hostility or camaraderie in Sino-US and Sino-Soviet ties.⁵⁰ On the one hand, some scholars interpret the lack of border confrontations

⁴⁴ Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," 147-52.

⁴⁵ John A. Vasquez, *The War Puzzle Revisited* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 45.

⁴⁶ Paul K. Huth, *Standing Your Ground: Territorial Disputes and International Conflict* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 36.

⁴⁷ Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson, "War and the Survival of Political Leaders: A Comparative Study of Regime Types and Political Accountability," 842.

⁴⁸ Robert Powell, "War as a Commitment Problem," *International Organization* 60, no. 1 (2006): 169; Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 13.

⁴⁹ Zeev Maoz et al., "The Dyadic Militarized Interstate Disputes (Mids) Dataset Version 3.0: Logic, Characteristics, and Comparisons to Alternative Datasets," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2018).

⁵⁰ Danhui Li, "对 1962 年新疆伊塔事件起因的历史考察——来自中国新疆的档案资料 (a Historical Analysis on the Origins of the 1962 Yita Incident: Based on Xinjiang Archival Materials)," in *北京与莫斯科: 从联盟走向对抗* (*Beijing and Moscow: From Alliance to Antagonism*), ed. Danhui Li (Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press,

as a sign of amity between neighbours. Li Danhui notes that the Sino-Soviet border in Xinjiang was long undefined because locals thought that Chinese and Soviets are socialist brothers bound together by mutual trust.⁵¹ On the other hand, other scholars interpret territorial confrontations as a sign of tensions between neighbours. Niu Jun notes on the 1969 Sino-Indian border clash that there was a spike in Sino-Soviet border incidents starting from 1964, signalling a downturn in bilateral relations.⁵² Finally, Mao's decision to bomb Taiwan was used by Yang Kuisong as an indicator to show hostility in Sino-US ties.⁵³ Given that my cases are placed in the Cold War, the great powers are the US and the Soviet Union.

I code as follows: the higher the number of MIDs involving China and the great powers, the higher the external threat faced by China. In order to further justify this type of measurement I explored the trend of militarized confrontations between China and the great powers during the Cold War. Figure 1.1 below shows that China's relationship with the great powers was most hostile during the 1960s, when the number of MIDs was the highest. This period coincides with China's direct use of force against India in 1962 and 1967. Subsequently, China's relations with the great powers were less hostile, showcased by the lower number of MIDs. At the time of the Sumdorong Chu Standoff in 1986-87, the number of MIDs with the great powers were below 5. After the end of the Cold War, the number of MIDs between China and the Great Powers remained low, suggesting low external threat to China. This is consistent with the trend of "declining rivalry"

2002); Jun Niu, "1969 年中苏边界冲突与中国外交战略的调整(the 1969 Sino-Soviet Border Clash and the Adjustment of China's Diplomatic Strategy)," *当代中国史研究 (Research of Contemporary Chinese History)* , no. 1 (1999); Kuisong Yang, "毛泽东与两次台海危机——50 年代中后期中国对美政策变动原因及趋向 (Mao Zedong and the Two Taiwan Sea Crises: Reasons and Trends of the Changes in China's Us Policy Change in the Middle and Late 1950s)," in *冷战与中国的周边关系 (the Cold War and China's Neighbourhood Relations)* , ed. Dayong Niu and Zhihua Shen (Beijing: 世界知识出版社 (World Knowledge Press) , 2004).

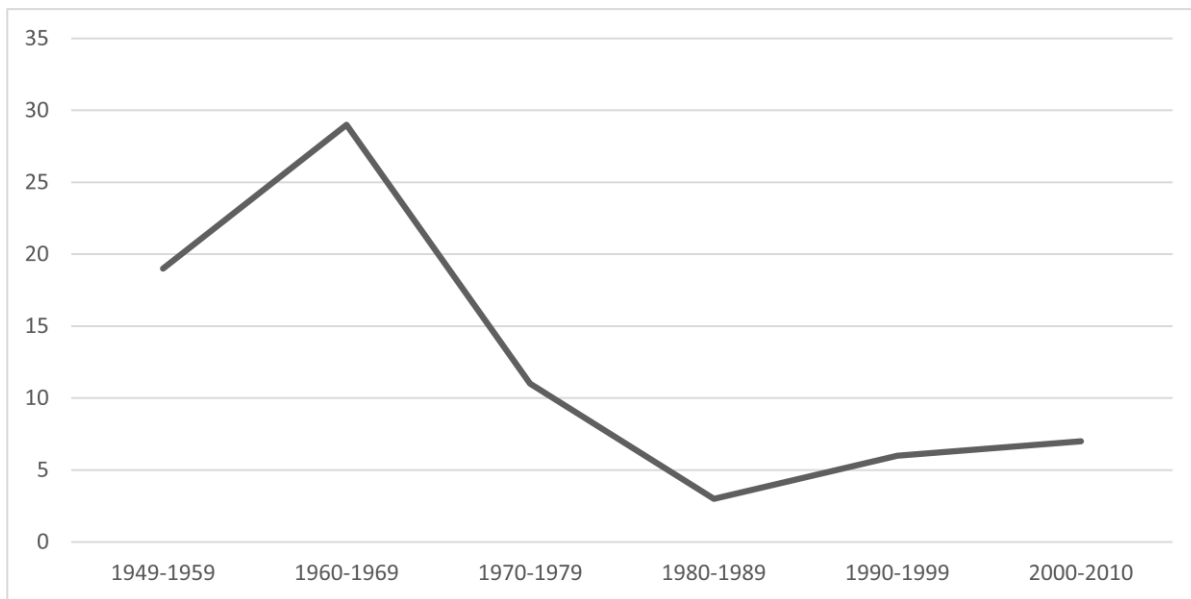
⁵¹ Li, "对 1962 年新疆伊塔事件起因的历史考察——来自中国新疆的档案资料 (a Historical Analysis on the Origins of the 1962 Yita Incident: Based on Xinjiang Archival Materials) ," 486.

⁵² Niu, "1969 年中苏边界冲突与中国外交战略的调整(the 1969 Sino-Soviet Border Clash and the Adjustment of China's Diplomatic Strategy)," 71.

⁵³ Yang, "毛泽东与两次台海危机——50 年代中后期中国对美政策变动原因及趋向 (Mao Zedong and the Two Taiwan Sea Crises: Reasons and Trends of the Changes in China's Us Policy Change in the Middle and Late 1950s) ," 347.

between China and India, as Sino-Indian militarized confrontations decreased after the Cold War. Paul F. Diehl notes the end of the Cold War as a possible explanation for this trend.⁵⁴

Figure 1.1. Chinese MIDs with Great Powers, 1949-2010.



*Source: author's calculations based on CoW data. Maoz, Zeev, Paul L. Johnson, Jasper Kaplan, Fiona Ogunkoya, and Aaron P. Shreve. "The Dyadic Militarized Interstate Disputes (Mids) Dataset Version 3.0: Logic, Characteristics, and Comparisons to Alternative Datasets." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2018): 1-25.*

Hostility with great powers can exacerbate threat perceptions in the state—they might exaggerate the magnitude of the threat posed by a territorial disputant. Indeed, Chinese sources refer to a Soviet-US-Indian collusion against China during the 1962 and 1967 conflicts.⁵⁵ Low number of MID's signal lower levels of external threat facing the state. In this scenario, a disputant's advances on the border can be seen by the state as an isolated, manageable incident

⁵⁴ Paul F. Diehl, "Whither Rivalry or Withered Rivalry?," in *The China-India Rivalry in the Globalization Era*, ed. T. V. Paul (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 262-67.

⁵⁵ 中印边境自卫反击作战史编写组(Writing Group on the History of the China-India self-defensive counterattack war), *中印边境自卫反击作战史(the History of the Sino-Indian Self-Defensive Counterattack War)* (Beijing: 军事科学出版社(Military Science Publishing House), 1994), 2; Xuezheng Ma, *雪域军魂——1965-1968年中印边界斗争纪实 (Army Spirit in Snowy Regions: A Record of the Sino-Indian Border Struggle from 1965 to 1968)* (雪域军魂编委会 (Editorial Committee of Army Spirit in Snowy Regions) , 2006), 124.

rather than a collaboration with great powers. As the Wang Chenghan—former Commander of the Chengdu Military Region responsible for Tibet—memoir suggests, confrontations in the Sino-Indian border region have become less intense after international pressure decreased on China in the 1980s.⁵⁶

The intervening variable is internal threat, denoting a decrease in “the leader’s capability to secure political support from domestic actors.”⁵⁷ Existing works used a number of ways to measure this variable, including the observation of purges and regime crises,⁵⁸ mass unrest,⁵⁹ tenure time,⁶⁰ economic conditions⁶¹ and coup attempts.⁶² In the China-specific setting, Erin Bagott Carter measures leadership security by fluctuations in the stock market,⁶³ while Kai He does the same by observing the leader’s control over domestic factions and the military.⁶⁴ Fravel’s recent work uses three indicators to measure “party unity” in the Chinese context: change of successors, membership stability in decision-making institutions of the CCP and disagreement over party policies.⁶⁵

These measurements are difficult to observe and, on some occasions, (like the stock market method) they are not consistent across extended timeframes. They also rely on abstract concepts such as control over factions or policy debates which are difficult to pin down. Fravel’s approach is better but it is convoluted as it relies on three different indicators which are difficult to observe in the opaque system of the CCP. The measurement I propose below mitigates these shortcomings, as it is parsimonious and more accessible to observation. I measure the level of internal threat by observing the presence or absence of a power struggle at the time of crises. The most serious of power struggles is a succession struggle. A “structural problem” in the Chinese system is that the

⁵⁶ Chenghan Wang, *王诚汉回忆录 (Wang Chenghan’s Memoirs)* (Beijing: People’s Liberation Army Press, 2004), 578.

⁵⁷ Kai He, *China’s Crisis Behavior: Political Survival and Foreign Policy after the Cold War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 39.

⁵⁸ Pickering and Kisangani, “Diversionary Despots? Comparing Autocracies’ Propensities to Use and to Benefit from Military Force,” 483.

⁵⁹ Haynes, “Diversionary Conflict: Demonizing Enemies or Demonstrating Competence?,” 344.

⁶⁰ Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson, “War and the Survival of Political Leaders: A Comparative Study of Regime Types and Political Accountability,” 851-52.

⁶¹ Ahmer Tarar, “Diversionary Incentives and the Bargaining Approach to War,” *International Studies Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (2006): 171.

⁶² Bak, “Autocratic Political Cycle and International Conflict,” 12.

⁶³ Carter, “Elite Welfare Shocks and Autocratic Foreign Policy: Evidence from China,” 10-11.

⁶⁴ He, *China’s Crisis Behavior: Political Survival and Foreign Policy after the Cold War*, 39-40.

⁶⁵ M. Taylor Fravel, *Active Defense: China’s Military Strategy since 1949* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2019), 36.

leader's retreat from the political scene can lead to political instability. In order to avoid this, the leader appoints a successor while still in power. Over time, the leader must delegate more and more power to the successor so that his unrivalled position can ensure a smooth transition of power. As the successor grows stronger, however, he will pose a threat to the incumbent leader. Succession struggles emerge when the successor becomes too threatening to the leader.⁶⁶ Succession struggles are the most vicious power struggles in politics, but internal threat can be posed by other prominent political actors who challenge the leader. In the summer of 1959, for instance, Mao Zedong was criticized by Defence Minister Peng Dehuai who was not a designated successor but still a charismatic leader. Mao Zedong still felt threatened by him and initiated a political purge subsequently.⁶⁷ These challenges are less intense than power struggles, but they still undermine the incumbent's leading position.

So, how do we measure the strength of a challenger? In Chinese domestic politics, power is measured by an actor's access to factional networks.⁶⁸ This, however, is difficult to observe directly. So, I use a proxy indicator, namely the number of years spent in power by the successor. The starting date of "being in power" is the leader's entry to the Politburo or the Politburo Standing Committee, the key decision-making institutions of the Chinese Communist Party.⁶⁹

This type of measurement is justified by the following factors. First, the build-up of factional networks and the expansion of domestic political power requires "years of cultivation."⁷⁰ The longer a successor has been in power, the more powerful he is because he had the opportunity to spread his web of alliances over the system. Conversely, shorter time spent in power prevents the successor from expanding the power base. Second, power struggles are usually followed by a redistribution of power among the survivors. So, longer time spent among the top leadership signals that a political actor had the opportunity to consolidate his power by expanding his factional network after previous power struggles. Liu Shaoqi, for instance, boosted his position tremendously after the Ga-Rao affair in 1954.⁷¹ Finally, this indicator is easy to observe yet it can

⁶⁶ Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 18, 88-92.

⁶⁷ Shihui Chen, "1959年庐山会议及其教训 (the 1959 Lushan Conference and Its Lessons) ," in *中共党史专题讲义 (Lecture Notes on the History of the Communist Party of China)* , ed. Party History Teaching and Research Section of the Chinese Communist Party Central Party School (Beijing: Central Party School Press, 1988).

⁶⁸ Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 77.

⁶⁹ June Teufel Dreyer, *China's Political System: Modernization and Tradition* (New York: Pearson Education, 2006), 88; Fravel, *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949*, 36.

⁷⁰ Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 77.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 78, 81, 104.

capture complex phenomena. The longer the challenger had been in a leading position, the greater the likelihood that he controls factions and has enough clout to challenge the incumbent in policy questions.

The level of internal threat, then, has an inverse relationship with the challenger's time spent in power—the longer time the successor had been a member of the top decision-making bodies, the more insecure the incumbent leader is. In 1962, Mao Zedong's successor was Liu Shaoqi, who had been a Politburo Standing Committee member since 1943.⁷² In 1967, Mao's successor was Lin Biao, who joined the Politburo Standing committee in 1958. In 1986, Deng's designated successor was Hu Yaobang who joined the Politburo Standing Committee in 1981. Since they had spent an extended time in power, these successors benefited from previous power struggles and had extensive networks in the Party or the military, making the incumbent leader insecure.⁷³

The dependent variable is China's dispute behaviour which can involve the use and non-use of force (cooperation and delay). The use of force is understood here as the application of military means to alter the adversary's behaviour "by manipulating costs and benefits."⁷⁴ In the context of a territorial dispute, the use of force can assume two values: direct use of force, and military posturing. Direct use of force means changing the adversary's behaviour by annihilating its military capability to achieve its territorial objectives.⁷⁵ This includes the tactical use of force which does not involve large-scale troop movements, such as the Sino-Indian clashes of 1967 or Sino-Soviet clashes in 1969. Military posturing means changing the adversary's behaviour by improving the state's own military capabilities in the disputed area with the purpose of deterrence.⁷⁶ The key difference that needs to be grasped here is that the direct use of force means an offensive aimed at destroying the enemy's military power which almost inevitably leads to combat casualties. Military posturing, on the other hand, strives to improve the state's own military

⁷² Between 1934 and 1956 the Politburo Standing Committee and the Central Secretariat were the same institution. See: Jianying Wang, "中共中央政治局常委会与中央书记处的组织演变 (Organizational Evolution of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Cpc Central Committee and the Central Secretariat)," *上海党史与党建 (Shanghai Party History and Party Construction)*, no. 7-8 (2013): 13; Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 133.

⁷³ *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 104, 225, 403-06.

⁷⁴ Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Cornell University Press, 1996), 4.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷⁶ M. Taylor Fravel, "The Evolution of China's Military Strategy: Comparing the 1987 and 1999 Editions of Zhanluexue," in *China's Revolution in Doctrinal Affairs: Emerging Trends in the Operational Art of the Chinese People's Liberation Army*, ed. James C. Mulvenon and David M. Finkelstein (Alexandria: Center for Naval Analysis, 2002), 97-98.

capacity in the disputed locale without causing combat casualties. “Cooperation” stands for engaging in negotiations or offering territorial concessions. “Delay” stands for “maintaining the dispute” without using force or making territorial compromises.⁷⁷ The values on the dependent variable are summarized in table 1.4.

*Table 1.4
Values on the dependent variable.*

<i>Level of force</i>	<i>Value on the DV</i>	<i>Indicator</i>
<i>High</i>	Direct use of force	Attack against the adversary
<i>Low</i>	Military Posturing	Occupation of territory, troop deployments
<i>Lowest</i>	No use of force (Delay/cooperation)	Engagement in negotiations, concessions

1.6.2. Definitions

For the sake of clarity, it is necessary to delineate some of the dissertation’s definitions from other, similar concepts. The definition of a territorial dispute is a disagreement between two or more neighbours “over the control or ownership of a piece of land.”⁷⁸ It is not to be confused with a “militarized interstate dispute,” which is “a dispute that includes the threat, display, or use of force by at least *one* of the participants.” A “militarized interstate crisis” is a militarized interstate dispute in which *both* participants display a “willingness to go to war” in order to protect or pursue their interests.⁷⁹

In the operationalization of “external threat,” the definition of great power needs clarification. I use Mearsheimer’s definition according to which a great power is a state that has the nuclear and conventional military capacity that enables it to pose a credible challenge to the international system’s most dominant state. This means that in the event of war, the hegemon could not easily

⁷⁷ *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 15-17.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁷⁹ Russell J. Leng and J. David Singer, "Militarized Interstate Crises: The Bcow Typology and Its Applications," *International Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (1988): 159. Emphasis mine.

overcome its rival, or it might even lose against it.⁸⁰ During the Cold War, this refers to the US and the Soviet Union. In the post-Cold War era, it denotes the US only.

“Internal threat” in this dissertation is different from Fravel’s definition. In Fravel’s work, it means a threat to the CCP, while in my dissertation it means a threat to the leader’s individual domestic political position.⁸¹ This is also an important contribution of the dissertation, because Fravel’s theory almost entirely overlooks this factor. Identifying internal threat this way allows me to explore the influence of succession struggles on Chinese leaders’ behaviour. In the case of the 1986-87 Sino-Indian border crisis, for instance, Fravel argues that China used force because it saw a decline in its claim strength after India established a seasonal outpost in previously unoccupied areas.⁸² However, this does not explain why China refrained from initiating war as it did in 1962, when its claim strength also declined. Fravel’s theory cannot explain this because his theory almost entirely overlooks the influence of domestic factors on China’s use of force—his emphasis is on military capabilities in the disputed area. My argument supersedes this shortcoming by proposing that Chinese leaders are inclined to use force when they are mired in a succession struggle. Combined with the influence of external threats, I can distinguish between the direct use of military force and military posturing.

The “leader” is the statesman in charge of both the civilian (CCP) *and* military (PLA) systems in the Chinese political system.⁸³ Under the examined period, these are Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, as they were the ones located at the top of these systems.⁸⁴ The successor is the second most powerful member of the political leadership who is located in the upper echelons of either the party *or* the military system. In this study, these are Liu Shaoqi (1962), Lin Biao (1967) and Hu Yaobang (1986).⁸⁵

The “use of force” in a border dispute is not to be confused with the “escalation” of the border dispute. The former refers to a *decision*, while the latter denotes a *process* in which the scope or intensity of a dispute expands. This distinction is crucial, because Fravel’s typology of strategies

⁸⁰ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 50-51.

⁸¹ For Fravel’s definition of internal threats, see Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China’s Territorial Disputes*, 59.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 199-201.

⁸³ Caitlin Talmadge, *The Dictator’s Army: Battlefield Effectiveness in Authoritarian Regimes* (Cornell University Press, 2015), 21; Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 136, 419.

⁸⁴ *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 136, 419.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 147, 316, 404-05.

in border disputes seems to conflate these concepts. He defines escalation as a strategy that “involves the threat or use of force to seize land or coerce an opponent in a territorial dispute.”⁸⁶

1.6.3. Scope

China had twenty-three contested borders: sixteen on land, four on the seas and three homeland disputes.⁸⁷ Some of those fall out of the scope of the dissertation. First, offshore island disputes are excluded because they are focused on islands that are not closely related to central national interests “such as homeland territorial integrity or the security of key population centres.”⁸⁸ Furthermore, China’s capability to engage in seaborne clashes against its maritime neighbours was restrained for a long time. In the early years of the PRC, the Navy was dominated by the Army and the former became an autonomous service only in 1977. Under Mao, the Navy’s focus was mostly on coastal defence.⁸⁹ Indeed, the cases of Chinese use of force against its neighbours were predominantly land-based fights against India, the Soviet Union and Vietnam.⁹⁰ These factors suggest that China’s behaviour in maritime disputes might be predicated on a different logic than coercion on land. China’s willingness to go to war with two of its land-based neighbours, India and Vietnam, but its reluctance to engage in a large-scale militarized confrontation with its maritime neighbours further corroborate this point.

Second, homeland disputes (Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao) fall out of scope because these are core legitimacy issues for the CCP. These factors suggest that the Chinese use of force in this issue is animated by different considerations than in the dispute with India. Against this backdrop, the universe of cases are changes (as compared to delay) in China’s dispute behaviour, shown in table 1.5. below.

⁸⁶ Michael Brecher, "Crisis Escalation: Model and Findings," *International Political Science Review* 17, no. 2 (1996): 215. Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 12.

⁸⁷ Appendix B contains a list of these disputes.

⁸⁸ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 268.

⁸⁹ Alexander Chieh-cheng Huang, "The Chinese Navy's Offshore Active Defense Strategy : Conceptualization and Implications," *Naval War College Review* 47, no. 3 (1994): 7-9.

⁹⁰ Excluding the use of force against Taiwan, China used force against disputants 11 times. Only 3 times did China use force in a maritime dispute. Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 64-65.

Table 1.5. Universe of cases: Chinese use or non-use of force in territorial disputes.

Year	Disputant	External Threat	Internal Threat	Years in power	Dispute behaviour	Battle Deaths
1959	India	High	High	Peng Dehuai, 14	Direct use of force	China: 1 India: 11
1960	Nepal	High	Low	-	Cooperation	-
1960	Burma	High	Low	-	Cooperation	-
1962	India	High	High	Liu Shaoqi, 19	Direct use of force	China: 722 India: 4885
1962	North Korea	High	Low	-	Cooperation	-
1962	Mongolia	High	Low	-	Cooperation	-
1963	Pakistan	High	Low	-	Cooperation	-
1963	Afghanistan	High	Low	-	Cooperation	-
1967	India	High	High	Lin Biao, 9	Direct use of force	China: 32 India: 101
1969	Soviet Union	High	High	Lin Biao, 11	Direct use of force	China: 30 Soviet: 91
1979	Vietnam	High	High	Hua Guofeng, 6	Direct use of force	China: 20000
1980	Vietnam	High	High	Hua Guofeng, 7	Direct use of force	Vietnam: 40
1981	Vietnam	High	High	Hua Guofeng, 8	Direct use of force	Vietnam: 100
1984	Vietnam	High	Low		Direct use of force (theory fail)	China: 900
1986-87	India	Low	High	Hu Yaobang, 5	Military Posturing	-
1991	Laos	High	Low	-	Cooperation	-
1997	Vietnam	High	Low	-	Cooperation	-
1998	Kyrgyzstan	Low	Low	-	Cooperation (theory fail)	-
1998	Kazakhstan	Low	Low	-	Cooperation (theory fail)	-
2001	Tajikistan	Low	Low	-	Cooperation (theory fail)	-
2002	Russia	High	Low	-	Cooperation	-
2013	India	Low	High	Constant purges	Military posturing	-
2014	India	Low	High	Constant purges	Military posturing	-
2017	India	Low	High	Constant purges	Military posturing	-
2020	India	High	High	Constant purges	Direct use of force	India: 20 China: 4

Sources:

1. *Agreements and battle deaths: Fravel, Strong Borders, Secure Nation, 54-65. When counting "cooperation", I note only the year when the final border treaty was signed.*
2. *Post-2010 cases: "Timeline: The Story of the Doklam Stand-Off." The Hindu, Joshi, Manoj. "Making Sense of the Depsang Incursion." The Hindu, Pandit, Raja. "India, China Set to End 16-Day Chumar Stand-Off by Saturday." The Times of India. Sun, Yun. "China's Strategic Assessment of the Ladakh Clash." War on the Rocks. "Ladakh: China reveals soldier deaths in India border clash" BBC.*
3. *Years in power: Huang Jing, "Factionalism in Chinese Communist politics," 133, 225, 380, 396; "彭德怀" (Peng Dehuai), "华国锋" (Hua Guofeng)*
4. *Vietnam cases: Zhang Xiaoming, Deng Xiaoping's Long War, 146; Li, Xiaoliang, Legacies of China's Forgotten War, 32, "Chinese Say They Killed 150 Vietnamese Troops", The New York Times*

Out of 25 cases, my argument fails four times.⁹¹ Failed cases relate to Chinese attacks on Vietnamese troops in 1984 and the border agreements with the Central Asian states between 1998-2001. In 1984, external threat to China was high while internal threat to Deng Xiaoping was low. Under these circumstances, the theory would expect China to compromise on some of the territories. Nevertheless, China used direct force against Vietnam. Available documentation suggests that the Chinese use of force on these occasions was about punishing Vietnam for attacking Cambodia.⁹² However, I found no evidence suggesting that Deng Xiaoping was facing high level of domestic political threat. Hence, the theory would expect cooperation from China, but the latter attacked Vietnam instead. In the case of the 1998-2001 settlements with the Central Asian states, the theory would expect delay as external and internal threats were low. However, it would be premature to jump to the conclusion that the theory's success rate is 83% because a delaying approach is difficult to quantify: is the lack of progress between 1964 and 1990 on the Sino-Soviet border one case or more? Nevertheless, we have a broad idea that the theory makes correct explanations 8 out of 10 times.

1.6.4. Null hypothesis and alternative explanations

The research objective is to explain variation in China's dispute behaviour over time. The argument is that the main factor that influences China's policy choices is the level of external and internal threats. The null hypothesis can be articulated as follows:

H0: China's use of force in a border dispute is not a response to a combination of external and internal threats.

I test my hypotheses against the following alternative explanations. The first and most pertinent alternative explanation stems from Fravel's theory on claim strength. "Claim strength" is

⁹¹ Additional references for the table: Xiaoliang Li, "Legacies of China's Forgotten War: The Sino-Vietnam Conflict of 1979," *American Journal of Chinese Studies* 14, no. 1 (2007); "Chinese Say They Killed 150 Vietnamese Troops," *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/05/17/world/chinese-say-they-killed-150-vietnamese-troops.html>; "华国锋 (Hua Guofeng)," *The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China*, http://www.gov.cn/gjjg/2008-10/21/content_1126544.htm; "彭德怀 (Peng Dehuai)," *Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China*, http://www.gov.cn/test/2007-11/16/content_807448.htm.

⁹² Xiaoming Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War: The Military Conflict between China and Vietnam, 1979-1991* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 149.

comprised of two factors: the size of the disputed land occupied by the parties and their power projection capacity in the disputed area. Indicators of these components include troop numbers, number of border outposts and the amount of territory seized by the parties. In essence, Fravel's theory is an application of the preventive war theory in the context of the territorial dispute: a sudden positive or negative shift in the two sides' "claim strength" prompts the use of force by one or both of the disputants.⁹³

This is a plausible explanation, but the theory is unwieldy and Fravel's operationalization of the concept is inconsistent. Apart from the brief mention of the number of military outposts built by the two sides in the 1962 Sino-Indian war, there is no rigorous description of the local military balance between China and the disputants in its various border disputes. Also, in some cases he refers to factors that do not relate to the territorial dispute per se, such as the influence of the 1968 Soviet military intervention in Czechoslovakia on the Sino-Soviet border clash in 1969.⁹⁴

A second potential explanation stems from the strategic interaction between the two sides. According to the literature on crisis bargaining and territorial disputes, coercive actions lead to coercive reactions, increasing hostility and the probability of war.⁹⁵ In the context of the Sino-Indian border dispute, this means that there is a certain threshold above which China uses direct force against India, regardless of the level of external or internal threats. Of course, it is hardly in doubt that such a threshold does exist: if India initiated a full-blown attack on China in the border region, it is highly likely that both a secure and insecure leader would use direct force against it. Apart from this extreme scenario, however, the exact place of this threshold is ambiguous. India crossed this threshold in 1962 and 1967, but not in 1986-87. However, Indian behaviour in the 1967 and 1986 confrontations was similar—it aimed to boost its position by erecting barriers or outposts in disputed territory. This behaviour invited an attack in 1967 but no shooting fight in 1986-87. Therefore, without clear red lines articulated by the Chinese leadership, it is difficult to apply this concept to the cases I analyse.

A third explanation stems from Li Xiaoting's theory of a "militarized worldview." He argues that during the 1949-1953 and 1960-1974 periods, Chinese leaders were convinced that international politics was a perpetual struggle against other states and war was a constant

⁹³ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 27-37.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 174-97, 201-15.

⁹⁵ Vasquez, *The War Puzzle Revisited*, 203-04.

possibility. External actors wanted to undermine China's independence and were inclined to attack it. This worldview changed after Mao's rule as China embraced and assimilated into the international system. As the theory suggests, China was highly prone to use violence during the reign of Mao, when the militarized worldview was at its height. Subsequently, China's propensity for militarized action reduced.⁹⁶ Indeed, Mao Zedong was a revolutionary leader under whom Chinese foreign policy was antagonistic against other powers.⁹⁷ After Mao, revolutionary aims were substituted by developmental ones that influenced the PRC's border policy.⁹⁸ However, the use of force by China cannot be ascribed only to personality, because Deng Xiaoping showcased behaviour similar to Mao's. His decision to invade Vietnam suggests that he was still inclined to attack other disputants when its interests demanded it. Furthermore, China engaged in extended low-intensity warfare against Vietnam after the invasion.⁹⁹ As the testing will show in the conclusion, an argument relying on external variables gives a better explanation because the source of militarized worldview is great power hostility toward China.

1.6.5. Falsifiability and testing

My argument can be falsified via three pathways. First, if a Chinese leader uses force—direct or limited—in the case of low internal threat, the argument fails. On the other hand, the use of force in case of high internal threat does not mean that the theory is confirmed. If a leader uses direct force in the case of low external threat and high internal threats, the theory fails again. Finally, if a leader uses limited force in the border dispute in the case of high external threat, the theory fails once more.

I test my theory with a structured, focused comparison of case studies combined with process tracing. There are three reasons for this choice. First, case studies are not dependent on already existing large datasets like quantitative studies.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, while there are many occasions of Sino-Indian MIDs, the number is still too low for a large- or medium-n analysis. Second, the

⁹⁶ Xiaoting Li, "The Taming of the Red Dragon: The Militarized Worldview and China's Use of Force, 1949–2001," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 9, no. 4 (2013): 387, 91, 97, 400-04.

⁹⁷ Michael B. Yahuda, "Chinese Foreign Policy after 1963: The Maoist Phases," *The China Quarterly*, no. 36 (1968): 96.

⁹⁸ M. Taylor Fravel, "Securing Borders: China's Doctrine and Force Structure for Frontier Defense," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, no. 4-5 (2007): 710.

⁹⁹ Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War: The Military Conflict between China and Vietnam, 1979-1991*, 6-9.

¹⁰⁰ George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, 45-50, 69-71, 210-23.

dissertation must prove that competing hypotheses fall short of explaining the cases under examination and that the dissertation's argument is superior to them. Finally, the variation on the dependent variable is difficult to discern, as it sometimes manifests in the differing levels of intensity in the use of force. These differences are better demonstrated by a qualitative analysis that examines the historical evolution of a case in greater detail.

The cases are designed to show the following. In the event of high external and internal threats, leaders tend to think that those threats are linked and adopt measures that reduce both dangers. They use direct force against a territorial adversary to undermine an emerging hostile coalition and to rally domestic audiences thereby mitigating the external and internal dangers. Attacking a disputant that is aligned with hostile great powers could demonstrate the costs of ganging up against China¹⁰¹ and thereby serve as a deterrent against such an alignment. The unification of the domestic elite against an external adversary reduces the internal threat. In the case of low external and high internal threats, military posturing is likely, because the leader could utilize an external threat to unify the domestic elite, but there is no need to lash out against an external coalition.

The selected cases are the Sino-Indian border war of 1962, the 1967 clashes between Chinese and Indian troops at Nathu La and Cho La as well as the 1986-87 standoff in the Sumdorong Chu Valley. I selected these cases for two reasons. First, they show variation on the independent and dependent variables. The external threat to China was high in 1962 and 1967 as Beijing's relationship with both the Soviet Union and the United States was strained. On the other hand, external threat was low in the 1980s as ties with Washington and Moscow turned for the better. Wang Chenghan—a PLA general formerly dispatched to the Sino-Indian border—argued that this amicable change in the international situation was one of the causes behind the lessening of tensions on the border.¹⁰² The former two cases ended with a direct use of force by China, while the latter only led to troop deployments without orders to attack. The second reason relates to the availability of data. While confrontations of different scale on the Sino-Indian border occurred many times, documentation related to them is classified. The three cases I selected are the best documented, allowing me to execute the comparison.

¹⁰¹ Dong Wang and Weizhan Meng, "China Debating the Regional Order," *The Pacific Review* 33, no. 3-4 (2020): 502.

¹⁰² Wang, *王诚汉回忆录* (*Wang Chenghan's Memoirs*), 578-79.

I deliberately chose only cases which involved the use of force for three reasons. First, one of the main theoretical contributions of the dissertation is to diversify the amorphous theoretical term “use of force” into two categories: the threat of force (military posturing) and the direct use of force. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to discuss as many cases of the Chinese use of force as possible. Discussing the cases in which China did not use force does not contribute much to this endeavour. Second, the Chinese cooperation in territorial disputes has been thoroughly investigated in two recent publications, hence focusing on the use of force is a more significant contribution to existing knowledge.¹⁰³ Finally, Fravel’s theory is the weakest when it discusses the use of force, as he relies on a perceptual variable and vague indicators. Zeroing in on this causal mechanism promises the greatest potential for academic contribution.

The structure of the comparison across the cases unfolds as follows. The first section aims to uncover China’s relationship with the great powers at the time of the conflict. In the second section, I analyse the domestic political setting at the time. Third, I elaborate on how China behaved in the examined period in the Sino-Indian border dispute. Finally, I marshal evidence to connect the three variables. The questions to be asked in each of the cases are:

- Was the external threat high or low? Was there a hostile great power to China in the international system? What were the contentious issues between China and the great powers? How frequent were MIDs with the great powers during the examined period?
- Was there a power struggle in the Chinese political elite at the time of the conflict? How long has the successor been a member of the Politburo or the Politburo Standing Committee?
- Under the given circumstances, what kind of behaviour does the theory predict?
- How did China behave in the dispute? Did it use force?
- What was the level of China’s use of force? Did it increase troop numbers and outposts in the disputed area? Did it authorize an attack against India?
- How did the leader justify the decision to use force?
- Did the response match with the predictions of the theory?

¹⁰³ Hyer, *The Pragmatic Dragon: China's Grand Strategy and Boundary Settlements*; Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*.

1.6.6. Limitations

The greatest limitation of my dissertation is that a crucial link in the causal mechanism relates to threatened leaders and their actions. With this argument, it is a challenge to establish causality, because leaders are unlikely to admit that their decisions were motivated by vulnerability and intended to manipulate either the public or the elite.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the challenge is not unsurmountable. Scholars who work on the diversionary conflict identified several pathways through which diversionary motives can be discerned. First, leaders might frame the enemy as an acute threat to legitimate assertive actions against it. Second, they might use historical references to their past successes as leaders of the nation. Third, they are likely to attempt “converting” the negative sentiments associated with the threat (fear, insecurity) into positive ones (resolve, bravery) through dramatic speeches.¹⁰⁵ Fourth, congruence methods can be used to see if there is correlation between the intensity of domestic difficulties and external uses of force. Fifth, one can identify evidence that fits the underlying logic of rallying efforts, such as “manipulation of public demonstrations.” Sixth, diversionary motivations can be observed by looking at leaders’ evaluation of their domestic standing.¹⁰⁶ Finally, after an act of diversion, the leader is expected to placate the target state in order to avoid a strong backlash.¹⁰⁷ These are all important clues that can support my argument and can be observed through leaders’ justifications for armed action and their behaviour after the conflict.

1.6.7. Sourcing

Any researcher working on China is likely to be challenged on the credibility of his or her sources. There are two reasons for this. First, the Chinese government has long been notoriously opaque about foreign policy decision making and its strategic thinking. Second, primary and secondary Chinese sources tend to strictly follow the government narrative.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, there are a number of scholars, such as M. Taylor Fravel, John W. Garver, Thomas J. Christensen and Charles

¹⁰⁴ "The Limits of Diversion: Rethinking Internal and External Conflict," 315.

¹⁰⁵ Tobias Theiler, "The Microfoundations of Diversionary Conflict," *ibid.* 27 (2018): 327-32.

¹⁰⁶ Fravel, "The Limits of Diversion: Rethinking Internal and External Conflict," 315.

¹⁰⁷ Carter, "Elite Welfare Shocks and Autocratic Foreign Policy: Evidence from China," 6.

¹⁰⁸ For a discussion on this predicament, see: Chung, *Domestic Politics, International Bargaining and China's Territorial Disputes*, 163-64.

Kraus, who have done excellent research on China despite these difficulties. In the process of preliminary research, I contacted all these scholars to get a sense of how they managed to create in-depth accounts of Chinese foreign policy. I also had numerous conversations with RSIS faculty member Li Mingjiang, whose dissertation analysed the Sino-Soviet split based on Chinese archival materials. Since his early work covered a similar timeframe to mine, he gave me a good idea on how to approach data collection in the PRC. Based on this correspondence, I drafted a data collection plan and went on a 7.5-month long fieldwork in China during May-December 2019.¹⁰⁹

In the process of the fieldwork, I visited six cities: Kunming, Chengdu, Shanghai, Beijing, Hong Kong and Taipei. I went to nine archives, three of which did not allow me to look at their materials. In the Sichuan and Yunnan Provincial Archives, I was denied from doing my research with the excuse that they had no post-1949 documentation. According to them, these materials are undergoing digitization, a process that started years ago and will likely take years more. In the Kunming Municipal Archives, the clerk did not allow me to look at the catalogue: she searched it on my behalf. After she found roughly 200 documents with the search word “China-India”, she told me that only 16 of them are publicly available. My application to look at those 16 materials was rejected. Despite these setbacks, I managed to collect materials from the Chengdu Municipal Archives, Shanghai Municipal Archives, Beijing Municipal Archives, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Hong Kong Public Records Office and Archives at the Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica in Taipei. The Sino-Indian border dispute is a sensitive topic in China as it has not been settled yet, so archival sources are scarce on the issue. Archival searches with the key words “Sino-Indian border dispute” result in few or no hits at all. Municipal archives have some materials on how the local cadre evaluated the dispute, but these individuals were not involved in state-level decision making at the time. Therefore, I had to throw my net wide and look for data in other fields. Knowing from previous work that Sino-Indian interaction in the 1950s and 1960s was focused on their Asian neighbourhood and the non-aligned states, I explored if materials on the Non-Aligned Movement, Asian-African Conferences, the Colombo Powers, Indonesia, Myanmar and Pakistan contain any discussions relevant to my research. Fortunately, they did, as China wanted to prevent India from gaining a clout on these platforms and among the neutral states.

¹⁰⁹ Daniel Balazs, "Archival Research in China: Where There's a Will, There's Way," War on the Rocks, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/01/archival-research-in-china-where-theres-a-will-theres-a-way/>.

Against this backdrop, most of the archival materials I collected focus on my first case, the run-up to the 1962 Sino-Indian border war. One section of the materials testifies that before and after the 1962 war, China sought to leverage its ties with other Asian players to win the narrative on the Sino-Indian border dispute. Another group of materials—discussions with foreign state leaders—provide an indirect insight into China’s overall foreign policy direction at the time. A third, small group of materials available from 1962-1965 contain references to the border conflict and to China’s conduct in the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war. As far as the PRC’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs archives is concerned, available materials stop at 1965 because of the Cultural Revolution.

Nevertheless, I was able to collect post-1965 documents from the Shanghai Archives. This is an addition to existing knowledge on the topic, because most of the international relations scholars do not conduct archival research beyond the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, meaning that there are few (if any) works on Chinese foreign policy which use post-1965 archives. The materials I found include internally circulated speeches from leaders such as Qiao Guanhua, Li Xiannian, Huang Hua and Qian Qichen. Again, these speeches do not discuss the Sino-Indian border dispute or even Sino-Indian ties in general, but they give a good insight into the broad direction of Chinese foreign policy and provide support for my theory.

I also sought to gather archival materials in Hong Kong and Taiwan with the hope that they discuss the issues of the Mainland in a more objective manner. The archival materials I collected from Hong Kong focus on China’s foreign policy in the 1980s while some documents from Taiwan discuss the Cultural Revolution.

My work outside of the archives involved visits to 11 libraries: the Yunnan University Library, Yunnan Provincial Library, Sichuan Provincial Library, Chengdu Municipal Library, the collection of the Institute of South Asian Studies at Sichuan University, the collection of the Center for Cold War International History Studies at East China Normal University, Shanghai Municipal Library, National Library of China, Capital Library in Beijing, China Universities Studies Center in Hong Kong and Central Library in Taiwan. The documents I collected from those places include state histories, party histories, diplomatic histories, Cold War histories, leader chronologies, biographies, local gazetteers, academic articles and newspapers. The same applies here as in the case of archival materials: few books discuss Sino-Indian ties specifically. Nevertheless, there are a lot of materials on China’s neighbourhood policy and Cold War diplomacy, all containing information about Sino-Indian ties and the 1962 war. Furthermore, most of the works on the Sino-

Soviet split also discuss the Sino-Indian border dispute and how Khrushchev and Mao differed on it. Difficulties arose when I tried to find materials on the power struggle between Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang in the second half of the 1980s. The student unrests during this time eventually led to the Tiananmen upheaval in 1989, so information on the topic is contained in the Chinese mainland. Nevertheless, I managed to overcome this obstacle by finding relevant materials in Hong Kong and Taiwan, where these issues are discussed more openly.

Against this backdrop, I concluded that data collection from archives and published materials was fruitful. Collecting data through interviews was more complex. Starting from 2013, the Chinese government initiated a large-scale crackdown on previously declassified archival materials, reclassifying ninety percent of the previously available documents.¹¹⁰ The effort extended beyond government agencies, as the Historical Material Center of the East China Normal University was abruptly closed in mid-June, 2019.¹¹¹ One of my sources told me privately that the reason for the closure was that the Center was “leaking” documents to foreign scholars. Subsequently, another source told me that Chinese academics who share archives with foreign scholars run the risk of being punished. Among these circumstances, the academics I have met with were reluctant to say anything on record, even anonymously. They also refrained from sharing the archival materials collected before 2013.

After my fieldwork in China, I set off to India to learn about China’s behaviour from a different angle. My plan was to spend three months there and gather archival materials, books and conduct interviews. The schedule was overwritten by the coronavirus outbreak that was declared as a pandemic by WHO in March 2020. Shortly after the declaration, NTU requested me to abort my fieldwork and return to Singapore. Instead of three months, I spent only five and a half weeks in India.

Even this short time was enough to gather substantive material on the topic. I spent most of my time in the National Archives of India (NAI) and the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML). While the NMML Manuscript collections contain materials relevant to top-level decision making, NAI has archives relevant to bureaucratic procedures. NMML had a lot of

¹¹⁰ Patrick Boehler, "China's Foreign Ministry Curtails Access to Declassified Historic Archives," South China Morning Post, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china-insider/article/1295456/chinas-diplomats-curtail-access-their-historic-archives>.

¹¹¹ "华东师大史料中心 突停业疑遭整肃(East China Normal University Historical Materials Center Abruptly Closed, Purge Suspected)," <https://www.singtao.ca/3535657/2019-06-15/post-華東師大史料中心-突停業疑遭整肅/?variant=zh-cn>.

material pertaining to my first case study, such as the transcripts of talks between Nehru and Zhou Enlai in April 1960. The Subimal Dutt papers contain data pertaining to Tibet and the Barahoti dispute in the central sector. The newly available V. K. Krishna Menon papers had an extensive record of speeches given at the 1961 Geneva Conference. NAI had materials relating to my second case study, such as diplomatic notes exchanged between the Embassies and the Foreign Ministries of the two countries as well as K. Raghunath's—Second Secretary of the Indian Embassy in Beijing in 1967—account on his incarceration in 1967. In NMML, I found a couple of documents in the P.N. Haksar collection pertaining to my third case study. Overall, I managed to gather more than 1500 pages of archival documentation. I complemented this with books.

Apart from the fieldwork, I also conducted an in-depth search for sources available online. One of the most valuable sources is the Wilson Center Digital Archive, from which I managed to collect 200 documents relevant to my topic.¹¹² One advantage of this website is that they have a range of materials available online. These include archives from China, India, Poland, former Soviet Union, Hungary, among other countries—all translated to English. As far as China is concerned, it also includes some materials which used to be available, but they cannot be found now. Another useful website is the Abhilekh Patal, where some of the digitized materials of the National Archives of India can be found.¹¹³ While this collection is far from full, I use it as a supplement, considering that my India trip ended abruptly.

While there is plenty of academic work out there on the dispute, they rarely refer to archives, be it Indian or Chinese archival documentation. Therefore, the data I collected before, during and after my fieldwork allows me to delve deeper into the issue of the Sino-Indian border dispute than it has been done before.

¹¹² I mainly relied on four collections: “China-India Border War, 1962”, “China and South Asia”, “China’s Great Leap Forward, 1958-1961” and “China’s Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976”. These materials can be found under the “Collections” tab of the Wilson Center Digital Archives Website under the following link: <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/collections>

¹¹³ Abhilekh (Sanskrit term for “records”) Patal (Sanskrit term for “platform”) is an online collection of digitized archival materials from the National Archives of India. It is accessible under the following link: <https://www.abhilekh-patal.in/jspui/>

1.6.8. Dissertation outline

The rest of the dissertation unfolds as follows. Chapter 2 takes a deep dive into the literature on the Sino-Indian border dispute. The review is divided into two parts. The first discusses theoretical perspectives on China's use of force and the ways in which these theories have been—or could have been—applied to China's conduct in the Sino-Indian border dispute. In the second section of this chapter, I zero in on the problems of the literature and explain how my dissertation aims to solve them.

Chapter 3 is the first empirical chapter of my dissertation. It analyses the first case, the 1962 border war. The first three sections discuss my variables: China's relations with the US and the Soviet Union (external threat), Mao's domestic political position (internal threat) and China's use of force. In this case, Sino-US and Sino-Soviet relations were both tense, putting immense pressure on China. Mao Zedong felt that in order to stand up to the great powers, China had to boost its industrial development. This led to the ambitious "Great Leap Forward" policy, an initiative with a single-minded focus to emphasize steel production to the detriment of agriculture. Accompanied by national disasters, the result was widespread famine, delivering a blow to Mao Zedong's legitimacy. India's assertive actions on the disputed border occurred against this backdrop. In October 1962, China jettisoned its conciliatory approach to the Sino-Indian border dispute and unleashed a large-scale offensive against India in the Western and Eastern sectors of the disputed border. The fourth section aims to link the three variables, arguing that Mao used the conflict to mitigate external and internal threats.

The fourth chapter analyses my second case study, the 1967 border clashes. Given that the methodology I use is structured, focused comparison, the analysis follows the structure of my first case. At the height of the Cultural Revolution in 1967, China's relationship both with the US and the Soviet Union were strained. Once more, Mao linked external threats with internal threats and unleashed the Cultural Revolution against the Soviet infiltrators in the CCP. In the process of the domestic upheaval, Mao was losing ground fast to the benefit of his successor, Lin Biao. Mao admitted in 1966 that Lin was getting dangerously powerful. Against this backdrop, China used direct force against India once more at Nathu La and Cho La. In the fourth section, I link the variables once more. Just like in 1962, Mao Zedong used direct force against India in order to mitigate external and internal threats.

The fifth chapter looks at my final case, the 1986-87 Sumdorong Chu crisis. In the second half of the 1980s, China's relationship with the great powers significantly improved which manifested in the nascent normalization of Sino-Soviet ties and the frequent interaction between Chinese and US political leaders through state visits. Therefore, China faced no threat of invasion. Nevertheless, Deng Xiaoping was facing a high level of internal threat as Hu Yaobang challenged his rule. Against this backdrop, China engaged in military posturing, as it dispatched troops to the border region and built positions there but refrained from initiating an attack. My argument is that China refrained from a direct confrontation because it faced a low level of external threat, hence Deng only needed to mobilize the internal audience, namely the political elite.

Chapter 6 is my conclusion. In this chapter, I evaluate the dissertation's findings and identify potential avenues for further research. Setting direction for future research in this context means that I take stock of the expectations I had before going on my fieldwork and how the situation on the ground changed them. In short, my sense is that in the current political climate in China, it is challenging to conduct research on the PRC's India policy—be it pre- or post-1989. Because of the ongoing border dispute, individuals are reluctant to talk—if they do, they mostly repeat what is already written in official statements—and available materials follow closely the narrative established by the Chinese government. Nevertheless, even amid this data scarcity, one can make modest contributions—the likes of this dissertation—to the existing knowledge.

Chapter 2. Chinese conflict behaviour and the Sino-Indian border dispute – A literature review

Scholars have used a variety of perspectives to analyse the Chinese use of force and the Sino-Indian border dispute. These analytical vantage points include the influence of internal and external factors, cognitive predilections and strategic culture. Despite the vast amount of writing on the topic, the question of Chinese motivation behind the use of force remains unanswered. My dissertation aims to fill this gap and provide a new perspective by focusing on external and internal factors at the same time. It offers a fresh take on the concept of “internal threat” by focusing on the leader as an individual rather than the government itself. At the same time, my work also innovates the concept of the “use of force” by differentiating between the direct use of force and military posturing.

The chapter first analyses the theoretical approaches that attempt to explain China’s use of force and how they fit to the Sino-Indian border dispute. Subsequently, it points out the shortcomings and gaps left by the literature and explain how the dissertation attempts to address these issues.

2.1. China’s use of force and the Sino-Indian border dispute

The perspectives utilized to make sense of China’s behaviour in the Sino-Indian border dispute include explanations based on external and domestic factors, cognitive factors as well as strategic culture. The first approach premises its argument on the external and internal political environment faced by China at times when it decided to use force in international affairs. Cognitive explanations double down on perceptions and psychological factors that shaped Chinese decision making in the dispute. Finally, the strategic culture school is clustered along the debate about the offensive or defensive nature of China’s use of force.

2.1.1. Internal and external factors

A considerable portion of the literature on China’s use of force locates the explanatory variables of these decisions in China’s external and internal environment. Alastair Iain Johnston’s quantitative study looked at Chinese participation in Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs) to test

the theories of diversionary war, revolutionary foreign policy, balancing, territorial consolidation, and status inconsistency. He confirms the latter two concepts. On the one hand, China was most inclined to use force when it was a young state seeking to solidify its territorial integrity. On the other hand, China was involved in more MIDs when the gap between itself and other great powers of the international system was larger, confirming the status inconsistency theory according to which states are violent if their self-perceived status is not ascribed to them by other actors. As China became more powerful, MIDs have become less frequent. The overall conclusion of Johnston is that China is more inclined to solve issues by force when they relate to territory and if they arise at times of relative weakness.¹

Qualitative work on the question can be divided into two branches. First, Aussenpolitik-type arguments propose that China's actions for compromise or the use of force are animated by external considerations. Neville Maxwell uses the opposing party's strategy as an explanatory variable of China's use of force in these issues. He argues that Zhou Enlai's cooperation strategy was based on four principles: acknowledging the dispute, preserving the status quo before reaching an agreement, the preference for peaceful means, and the reciprocal use of force. This approach was confronted by Nehru's border policy which rested on four principles as well: the refusal to acknowledge the existence of a dispute, the use of force to occupy disputed territories, rejection of preserving the status quo on the border and the repudiation of attempts at peaceful settlement. Given that China's policy was based on the logic of reciprocation, India's insistence on its non-cooperative policy prompted Beijing to punish India by unleashing war on it.²

Sun Xuefeng and Huang Yuxing argue that China's decisions to use force are motivated by external threats while the level of force to be used by it is determined by the balance of capabilities between the two sides. Two types of external dangers prompt Beijing to use force: superpower containment and external support to subversive groups. The authors code the balance of power as advantageous to China if one of the superpowers supports Beijing or remains neutral in the confrontation. It is disadvantageous if China has to fight a superpower without the backing of the other. In the former case, China uses high level of coercion, such as war or extended conflict. In the latter scenario, China initiates less coercive acts, such as military exercises. When it comes to

¹ A. I. Johnston, "China's Militarized Interstate Dispute Behaviour 1949-1992: A First Cut at the Data," *The China Quarterly*, no. 1 (1998): 7-29.

² Neville Maxwell, "Settlements and Disputes: China's Approach to Territorial Issues," *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 36 (2006): 3874, 77.

the conflict with India, the authors identify the external threat as Indian efforts of undermining Chinese rule in Tibet. War was deemed necessary to stop India from continuing its expansion into Aksai Chin and Tibet, leading to further instability in the region. The authors do not directly address the role of superpowers in the conflict, but they identify China's behaviour as highly coercive.³

Shen Zhihua and Julia Lovell argue that China handled its border disputes in an instrumental way, as solving them was a tool to achieve broader foreign policy aims. Given that the border negotiations with India were the most challenging, China used other successful talks with Burma and Nepal to signal to New Delhi that these issues can be solved peacefully. Nevertheless, India rejected China's offer for compromise and responded with greater deployments in the disputed areas. In order to halt Indian advances, China launched an attack against India. According to the authors, China was more focused on its eastern periphery than the western one, so it hoped that the punitive attack will bring stability to the area.⁴

Echoing a similar perspective, Eric Hyer doubles down on the balance of power theory to explain China's approach to its territorial disputes. He argues that the unfriendly environment of the 1960s prompted China to compromise in its border dispute with India. Hyer's brief and descriptive account of the 1962 war is elusive about China's motivations. He points out that Mao perceived Indian behavior as a manifestation of imperialist mindset and that the leader was also apprehensive toward the potential of a bloody confrontation. The post-war account of Hyer focuses on the peaceful negotiations, the 1967 and 1986-87 confrontations are only briefly mentioned. The author argues that achievements in the peaceful talks were caused by systemic conditions such as China's pariah status after the Tiananmen incident or the fundamental change in the relative distribution of power in the international system after the fall of the Soviet Union.⁵

Mohan Malik argues that the border dispute is a part of China's broader containment strategy against India which involves the "encirclement," "envelopment," and "entanglement" of New Delhi by expanding Chinese ties with South Asian states and capitalizing on India's domestic divisions. Settling the border dispute could allow India to devote more of its resources to its

³ Xuefeng Sun and Yuxing Huang, "Revisiting China's Use of Force in Asia: Dynamic, Level and Beyond," *Pacific Focus* 27, no. 3 (2012): 393, 97, 400, 02, 07-08.

⁴ Zhihua Shen and Julia Lovell, "Undesired Outcomes: China's Approach to Border Disputes During the Early Cold War," *Cold War History* 15, no. 1 (2015): 89, 94-103, 07, 09.

⁵ Hyer, *The Pragmatic Dragon: China's Grand Strategy and Boundary Settlements*, 4-12, 17, 44-60, 96.

disputed border with Pakistan and gain a more advantageous position there. China is wary of this scenario, because it fears that if India overpowers its South Asian adversary, it will use its resources to split Tibet from the PRC. Therefore, maintaining the border dispute is a way of restraining India's hegemonic ambitions. Furthermore, Beijing seems to be reluctant to make concessions on the issue because of the importance of resources in the area, the status competition between the two states and India's inflexible conditions among other factors.⁶

According to Tang Shiping, the best theoretical concept that describes Chinese behaviour in the Sino-Indian equation is "offshore balancing." The PRC is not aimed at isolating India, but to prevent New Delhi's "leading position" in South Asia from harming Chinese interests. As far as the border dispute is concerned, Tang uses game theory to make sense of Sino-Indian interaction on the issue. He argues that China used a reciprocating strategy in the dispute, responding to cooperation with cooperation and to defection with defection. Since China had a preference for peaceful resolution of the border dispute, the game started with a cooperative gesture—Zhou Enlai's package deal. India responded with the forward policy, which was an act of defection. China reciprocated with the border war, signalling the end of the game.⁷

Sui Xinmin utilizes game theory to analyse Sino-Indian interactions on the border. He divides the evolution of the boundary dispute into four phases. The first period extends from 1950 to 1959. The game started with Indian activities in the neutral zone located between the McMahon Line and the traditional boundary. In this period, the game was one-sided, as India occupied territories without eliciting a Chinese response, allowing the former to advance its positions up to the McMahon Line. This is explained by the amicable nature of Sino-Indian ties at the time, and China's conviction that India was not a principal source of threat. The second phase covers 1959-1962. In this period, China changed its strategy to reciprocation and called for negotiations. India's rejection led to a zero sum game: any Indian move that remained unanswered was a loss for China. In order to arrest this tendency, China waged a punitive war. The third period covers 1962-1992. This period is characterized by peace maintained by deterrence. China opted for a

⁶ J. Mohan Malik, *China and India: Great Power Rivals* (Boulder, Colorado and London, UK: FirstForumPress, 2011), 76-77, 98-99, 107-08, 51-54.

⁷ Shiping Tang, "中国-印度关系的博弈和中国的南亚战略 (the Game of Sino-India Relations and China's South Asia Strategy)," *世界经济与政治 (World Economics and Politics)*, no. 9 (2000): 27-29.

reciprocating strategy, as it refrained from unprovoked attacks. This type of “armed peaceful coexistence” suggests a status quo orientation from both sides.⁸

Second, contrary to Aussenpolitik arguments, hybrid explanations suggest that China’s use of force and behaviour in border disputes is chiefly shaped by a combination of external and internal factors. Chien-peng Chung utilizes the two-level game framework to explain Chinese behaviour in territorial disputes. He argues that the disputant parties are more likely to seek compromise when historical resentments diminish, a regime is immune to domestic pressure, there are low thresholds for the ratification of international agreements and the level of economic interdependence among the states is high. Regarding the Sino-Indian dispute, the author zeroes in on the domestic peculiarities of the two regimes and their influence on the evolution of the issue. He uses this framework to explain how Nehru was compelled by domestic stakeholders to adopt a forceful posture on the border during the 1959-1962 period, how the change in the CCP’s leadership during the 1970-1980s influenced the border dispute—as Deng Xiaoping revived Zhou Enlai’s territorial swap proposition—and how domestic stakeholders’ satisfaction of the status quo explains the longstanding stalemate in the dispute.⁹

Du Zheyuan uses a “levels of analysis” framework to compare Chinese border confrontations with India in 1962 and the Soviet Union in 1969. On the systemic level, China was a target of the US containment and ties between China and the Soviet Union worsened. On the state level, China was weak and mired in contradictions due to the fallout of the Great Leap Forward initiative. On the individual level, Mao Zedong transformed China as the country confronted more powerful enemies and it evolved from a weak and passive actor into a strong and active one. Due to these factors, China adopted a strategy with the following characteristics. First, the Chinese operations were limited in troop numbers, timeframe and geographic scope. Second, the military moves were conducted under the pursuit of political aims rather than conquest. Third, China was pressured to act, as the situation preceding the war was not beneficial for Chinese adventures abroad: the opponents had advantages over it and Beijing’s domestic priorities were more prominent than

⁸ Xinmin Sui, “中印边境互动：一种博弈视角的分析,” *南亚研究* (*South Asian Studies*), no. 4 (2014): 3-13.

⁹ Chung, *Domestic Politics, International Bargaining and China's Territorial Disputes*, 7-9, 18-20, 96-125, 46-48, 51-60.

external ones. Fourth, the operations were carefully executed and planned. Finally, both of the offensives were rapid and intense.¹⁰

Srinath Raghavan also argues that international and domestic politics are the main shapers of the border dispute. The two sides' "pre-emptive occupation" of disputed areas which eventually led to the war was prompted by domestic and international politics. The pressure of political opposition on Nehru and Chinese insecurity in Tibet led to a breakdown of the 1960 negotiations. Furthermore, China's decision for war was also influenced by the deterioration of Sino-Soviet ties. After the 1962 war until the late 1980s, China wanted to improve its ties with India to distance it from Beijing's ideological competitor, Moscow. In the relatively calm period of 1989-2002, China and India refrained from ramping up tensions on the border so that they can focus on economic development. Since the 2000s, it seems that China took a harder line against India and tensions rose in the disputed areas, because Beijing is wary of India joining Washington's anti-PRC containment strategy.¹¹

There are two trends in the aforementioned works. First, only a few of them attempt to provide us with an explanation on the differing levels of force used by China. Second, the literature assumes that the CCP elite is a unitary, undivided actor and do not discuss how potential division among top policymakers might influence decisions about the use of force. It seems to make sense, then, to explore if there is a potential connection between these two variables.

My dissertation joins the second approach, as it simultaneously uses internal and external variables to explain China's behaviour. However, unlike the existing work, I use a hierarchical approach, because the influence of external factors is stronger than internal ones.

2.1.2. Cognitive approaches

A number of scholars identify cognitive factors as the key motivators of China's use of force. Li Xiaoting's quantitative study suggests that the PRC is most likely to use force when its leaders hold a "militarized worldview," in which other actors in the international system are seen as devious and hostile, war is perceived to be a constantly present possibility and international politics

¹⁰ Zheyuan Du, "'后发制人'与'突然反击'——论中国在 1960 年代的边境战争模式 ('Striking after Enemy's First Attack' and 'Sudden Counterattack': The China's Border War Mode in the 1960s)," *战略决策研究 (Journal of Strategy and Decision-Making)*, no. 6 (2017): 22-23, 27-39.

¹¹ Raghavan, "The Security Dilemma and India-China Relations," 4-11.

is deemed to be a never-ending struggle against one's enemies. According to Li, the possession of such a worldview is the most potent causal factor behind China's use of force, because the PRC was the most violent under the rule of Mao Zedong, when the PRC leaders were infused by such ideas.¹²

In the dyadic setting, qualitative works often apply the security dilemma to make sense of Sino-Indian ties.¹³ John W. Garver argues that the security dilemma influences the Sino-Indian border dispute, because India plays a prominent role in China's self-perceived insecurity stemming from its weak control over Tibet. Indian insecurity, on the other hand, stems from the need to separate its forces against the two-front challenge it faces on its disputed borders with Pakistan and China. This leads to mutual suspicion from both sides: China is wary of India's sponsorship of Tibetan paramilitary organizations, while India is concerned about potential Chinese intervention in a future Indo-Pakistani war.¹⁴

Jonathan Holslag argues that the Sino-Indian security dilemma is most prominent in the military dimension. Although a range of confidence building measures on the border issue were agreed on during the 1990s, tensions remain and manifest in mostly symbolic border incursions. At the same time, Beijing significantly improved its military capabilities in the Lanzhou and Chengdu regions. These improvements are not directly aimed at India, but at maintaining tranquillity in two of China's most restive regions, Xinjiang and Tibet. Wary of growing Chinese armed activity in the boundary region, India responded with boosting its capabilities on the border by relocating troops and improving weapons systems. Overall, Holslag concludes that regardless of globalization and deepening economic ties, the Sino-Indian security dilemma remains a constant, because the two actors' pursuit of legitimate interests are interpreted by as offensive manoeuvres aimed at each other.¹⁵

¹² Li, "The Taming of the Red Dragon: The Militarized Worldview and China's Use of Force, 1949–2001," 388, 91, 400.

¹³ The security dilemma suggests that stemming from the uncertainty of the anarchic society, a core preoccupation of actors is to safeguard themselves from attack by accumulating power. Power, however, is a finite resource which means that one gains more of it at the expense of others. This will lead those external actors to acquire more power to mitigate their insecurity, inducing fear in the first actor that will seek more security again, leading to a malicious cycle of power competition. John H. Herz, "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 2, no. 2 (1950): 157.

¹⁴ John W. Garver, "The Security Dilemma in Sino-Indian Relations," *India Review* 1, no. 4 (2002): 2-9.

¹⁵ Jonathan Holslag, "The Persistent Military Security Dilemma between China and India," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32, no. 6 (2009): 815-21.

Fa Linjing argues that the 1962 war was a result of a worsening security dilemma between the two sides. On the level of geopolitics, Fa points out that while the superficial reason for the war was the Indian advance on the border, the structural cause pertained to the geopolitical importance of Tibet. China “liberated” Tibet to preserve its own security, but India felt threatened by Chinese actions and took a hard line on the border dispute as well as it gave asylum to the “Dalai clique.” In turn, China perceived India’s defensive actions as interference with its domestic politics, setting the stage for a hostile spiral. On the level of ideology, India perceived a threat emanating from the rise of a communist China, while Beijing saw New Delhi’s forceful posture as a move toward imperialist powers. Finally, the Sino-Indian border war has to be seen in the context of Cold War competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. Both superpowers supported India because they wanted to utilize New Delhi to contain their opponent.¹⁶

While the security dilemma is a prominent cognitive approach of analysing China-India relations and the border issue, it is not the only one. Other works focus on the role of perceptions in Sino-Indian ties. Manjeet S. Pardesi zeroes in on the origins of the Sino-Indian antagonism. He argues that there was a difference in perceptions between the two sides starting from the late 1940s, as India saw China as a partner while the PRC believed that India is a surrogate of imperialism. Therefore, Indian attempts to maintain influence in Tibet led to apprehensions in Beijing. As the PLA made its entry to Tibet in the early 1950s, the Indian perception of China changed negatively and it adopted a policy of simultaneous accommodation and coercion toward the PRC. This policy had come to an end in 1959, when the revolt in Tibet led to the Dalai Lama’s flight to India and the eventual militarization of the border dispute.¹⁷

Garver’s work picks up where Pardesi left off. Relying on the psychological concepts of fundamental attribution error and projection, he argues that two beliefs prompted China to use force in 1962. First, CCP leaders were convinced that Indian assertiveness on the border was motivated by aims of impairing Chinese control over Tibet. Garver argues that this perception was mistaken, as Indian interests were focused on gaining greater autonomy for Tibet under Chinese sovereignty and to neutralize Chinese military threat on India’s northern frontier. Therefore, Mao committed a fundamental attribution error, as he ascribed India’s policy to its particular disposition

¹⁶ Linjing Fa, "1959 ~ 1962 年中印冲突原因浅析 (an Analysis of the 1959-1962 Sino-Indian Conflict)," *科技风 (Technology Wind)*, no. 18 (2015): 211, 18.

¹⁷ Manjeet S. Pardesi, "The Initiation of the Sino-Indian Rivalry," *Asian Security* (2018): 2-3, 21-23.

rather than environmental circumstances. He also committed projection, as he blamed India for Tibetan secessionism, not the PRC's faulty policies. These errors influenced China's interpretation of Indian troop movements on the border and the PRC's aggressive government rhetoric coupled with its offensive diplomatic conduct induced Nehru to become more assertive in the dispute. The second belief was that the PRC had to put an end to Indian encroachment on Chinese sovereignty on the boundary. India's assertiveness and rejection of negotiations insulted Chinese nationalist sentiments and consolidated beliefs that only a forceful reaction can deter New Delhi from further provocation.¹⁸

Huang Xiangping and Qi Pengfei look at China's decision for war in 1962 through the lens of crisis management. They identify four characteristics of China's conduct in the 1961-1962 confrontation. First, the influence of ideologies. Mao Zedong thought that India's rejection of negotiation with China represented an imperialist mindset bent on expansion. Second, the crisis was not managed in isolation. Chinese leaders thought that the only way of fending off the Indian threat coupled with pressure from Soviet revisionism and US imperialism is a show of force against India. The third characteristic was centralized decision making. The key choices regarding the Chinese response were made by high level civilian leaders. The final characteristic of China's crisis management was the use of force with the aim of stabilizing the situation and avoiding further hostilities.¹⁹

M. Taylor Fravel suggests that when a state perceives a decline in its bargaining power, it is highly likely to use force to halt this trend. A state's bargaining power declines if the disputant gains greater physical control over the territory. This threat is worsened by a domestic challenge to the state's ruling regime, increasing the likelihood of the use of force. China used force in 1962 because its leaders believed that its bargaining power is declining, as India occupied territories in disputed areas and the government's rule was challenged in Tibet. In 1967, China used force once more because Indian military capabilities improved after 1962 and New Delhi was getting more assertive with its territorial claims. The internal turbulence of the Cultural Revolution magnified

¹⁸ John W. Garver, "China's Decision for War with India in 1962," in *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy*, ed. Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 86-89, 99-109, 23.

¹⁹ Xiangping Huang and Pengfei Qi, "浅析中国政府在中印边界争端中的危机处理 (a Tentative Analysis of the Crisis Management by the Chinese Government in the Sino-Indian Border Dispute) ," *当代中国史研究 (Research of Contemporary Chinese History)* 13, no. 1 (2006): 80-85.

this danger. In 1987, China used force once more, as the balance of bargaining power shifted to India's favour when it built a seasonal outpost in a formerly neutral territory.²⁰

Tien-sze Fang explores the issue through the lens of "asymmetrical threat perceptions." He argues that the chief obstacle in China-India relations is the asymmetry in perceived threats: India is profoundly suspicious about China, while the latter is mainly concerned with its eastern periphery. China, as the more powerful actor, aims to maintain the status quo, while India is bent on altering it. As far as the border dispute is concerned, the India is more anxious about it than China. The 1962 war has been a persistent source of Chinese threat perception in India. China, on the other hand, does not see the issue as an imminent security threat. It flows from this that India has been impatient to solve the dispute within a well-defined time frame while China took a more relaxed attitude on the issue.²¹

Relying on "a perceptual analysis," Yaacov Vertzberger argues that Nehru's faulty evaluation of China's proclivity to use force was based on a range of misperceptions. First, Nehru did not realize the repercussions of his Tibet policy: his reluctance to acknowledge full Chinese rule over the region reminded the PRC of British imperialist behaviour. Second, he mistakenly thought that China highly valued his support for the PRC's UN membership. On the contrary, Beijing thought that the UN was filled with its enemies, with India among them. Finally, he misunderstood Mao himself. For the Chinese leader, peaceful coexistence and war were not mutually exclusive: if peaceful relations lost their utility, war was far from unthinkable between states. Nehru's incomplete understanding of the opponent led to his distorted view on China's evaluation of the Sino-Indian conflict and its inclination toward the use of violence. This eventually led to the war of 1962.²²

Also relying on the role of perceptions, Xiao Jun argues that the Sino-Indian border dispute is one of the "structural contradictions" between the two states, along with India's perception that China is a hindrance in its rise to great power status. According to Xiao, the border problem

²⁰ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 15-41, 174-201.

²¹ Tien-sze Fang, *Asymmetrical Threat Perceptions in India-China Relations* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1-11, 123-24.

²² Yaacov Vertzberger, "India's Border Conflict with China: A Perceptual Analysis," *Journal of Contemporary History* 17, no. 4 (1982): 620-25.

emanates from different perceptions between the two countries: actions that China sees as efforts of pursuing its interests are seen by India as expansion.²³

In his analysis of China's decision for war against India, Thomas J. Christensen relies on the window of opportunity concept. The crux of his argument is that China used violent means in the international area when it saw "an opening window of vulnerability or a closing window of opportunity."²⁴ As far as the 1962 war with India is concerned, the window logic applies indirectly. It was not China, but India who saw that the early 1960s were a propitious time for assertive moves. This perception was caused by a number of factors: Soviet military assistance to India, economic difficulties in China, its lack of control in Xinjiang and Tibet, the distraction with Taiwan, Chinese seclusion from the superpowers and the potential of external intervention on India's behalf. Furthermore, Nehru also wanted to divert attention from domestic difficulties, acquire Western aid and undermine China's reputation in the developing world. Against this backdrop, China used force not because it saw a window of opportunity for itself but because it wanted to alter India's perception of an opportunity for making advances in the border area.²⁵

Manjari Chatterjee Miller introduces the "Post-Imperial Ideology" (PII) concept to look at Chinese and Indian foreign policy. She argues that in the psyche of former colonies, imperial subjugation is conceived as an abhorrent experience, exerting irreversible influence on their identity and behaviour. Miller argues that the PII influenced China's approach to the dispute in four ways during the early 1960s. First, it competed with India for third world leadership, leading to a strain in bilateral ties. Second, during the 1960 negotiations, China saw itself as a victim of India which was pushing for the revision of boundaries. Third, China was willing to concede the eastern sector because it was not seen as an integral part of the PRC, only as an area that was under the influence of Tibet. Aksai Chin, however, was deemed to be an inalienable section of Tibet and Xinjiang, hence China's reluctance to concede it. Fourth, the PII also explains China's one-sided pull-out of forces in 1962, as it sought to adopt a role of a victim that was pushed by bullies.²⁶

²³ This argument echoes the security dilemma, but Xiao does not mention the concept explicitly. Jun Xiao, "中国战略崛起与南亚战略实践 (China's Strategic Rise and Its Strategic Practice in South Asia)," *印度洋经济体研究 (Indian Ocean Economic and Political Review)*, no. 3 (2016): 68-70, 75.

²⁴ Christensen, "Windows and War: Trend Analysis and Beijing's Use of Force," 52.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 50-53, 63-66.

²⁶ Manjari Chatterjee Miller, *Wronged by Empire: Post-Imperial Ideology and Foreign Policy in India and China* (Stanford University Press, 2013), 7-8, 17, 35-36, 54, 61-74, 77-80.

Therefore, the PII provides us with an indirect explanation to the war of 1962, as it explains the sources of the Chinese reluctance to concede to Indian demands.

Mahesh Shankar argues that Nehru insisted on India's claims to Aksai Chin because of reputational considerations. Regardless of his acknowledgement that the territory was not important and the armed forces were unprepared for defending it, Nehru refrained from making concessions because he wanted to avoid conveying weakness and encouraging Beijing to be more assertive to India. At the same time, he was convinced that a symbolic show of force in the disputed territory would be sufficient to stop China from making advances there. These considerations prompted him to embark on the forward policy which eventually led to the 1962 war.²⁷ Nehru later concluded that China attacked India because of status, as it wanted to prevent New Delhi from emerging as the leader of the Third World. Subsequently, the war put bilateral ties on a competitive trajectory. Tensions persisted in the coming decades and emerged to the surface during subsequent crises, such as the 1986-87 standoff. After the restoration of ties with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 visit to China, consultations about the border focused on maintaining tranquillity in the area and delineating the boundary, with more success in the former field than the latter.²⁸

This branch of the literature is highly context dependent in the sense that they shed some light on the 1962 war, but the propositions are difficult to apply to the post-1962 cases. The sources of perceptions are often identified, but those factors are too vague to explain different motivations behind the direct use of force or military posturing. The concept of the security dilemma, on the other hand, is highly dependent on defensive intentions to be applicable—something that is notoriously difficult to discern in territorial disputes, because most of the measures of protecting the status quo can be used to alter it as well.²⁹ Against this backdrop, the aim of my dissertation is to identify factors that are present and play a causal role not only in 1962, but also in the subsequent cases of 1967 and 1986-87.

²⁷ Mahesh Shankar, "Showing Character: Nehru, Reputation, and the Sino-Indian Dispute, 1957–1962," *Asian Security* 11, no. 2 (2015): 99-100, 07-11.

²⁸ "Territory and the China-India Competition," in *The China-India Rivalry in the Globalization Era*, ed. T. V. Paul (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press), 27-47.

²⁹ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 31; Thomas J. Christensen, "The Contemporary Security Dilemma: Deterring a Taiwan Conflict," *The Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2002): 13.

2.1.3. Strategic culture

A further prominent branch of the literature that discusses China's considerations about the use of force is the strategic culture school. Alastair Iain Johnston argues that Chinese strategic culture is dominated by the "parabellum paradigm" which favours the application of offensive power when the balance of capabilities is propitious for China.³⁰ Johnston tested the applicability of his thesis in the Maoist strategic setting and found that the PRC was willing to be violent in its confrontations with other powers. Nevertheless, the Chinese application of violence was dependent on a favourable distribution of industrial and military capabilities between Beijing and the adversary. Furthermore, most of these confrontations were located around China's periphery, suggesting that Chinese leaders attached a great value to safeguarding their state's territorial integrity.³¹

Allen S. Whiting's analysis of China's decisions to use force echoes the argument of Johnston. According to him, China's strategic culture showcases a preference for pre-emptive action in situations when China faces concurrent internal and external threats. In 1962, internal and external threats existed due to turbulence in Xinjiang, offense preparations in Taiwan and Indian advances on the border. Overall, Whiting argues that China used force to halt Indian advances on the border and to signal resolve toward other adversaries such as Taiwan, the Soviet Union and the United States.³²

Contrary to Johnston, Feng Huiyun argues that Chinese strategic culture is defensive and fundamentally different from the western realpolitik belief system. When it comes to the Sino-Indian border war, Feng assesses the operational code beliefs and the subjective games of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and Zhou Enlai. Mao Zedong was a "parabellum" leader who perceived politics to be a hostile competition among actors. Deng Xiaoping, on the other hand, was a "Confucian" leader who was optimistic and the most collaborative among the three statesmen. Between them is Zhou Enlai, who was more optimistic and cooperative than Mao but more pessimistic than Deng. Feng argues that India's forward policy was an act of defection in the two sides' strategic game which prompted Chinese leaders to coalesce behind Mao's preference

³⁰ A. I. Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), ix-x, 25, 61-66, 72, 108, 216, 31, 49-52, 55-57.

³¹ "Cultural Realism and Grand Strategy in Maoist China," in *The Culture of National Security*, ed. Peter Katzenstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 229-35, 48-55.

³² Whiting, "China's Use of Force, 1950-96, and Taiwan," 104-05, 08, 12-13.

for an attack. After two phases of attacks, the PLA unilaterally withdrew its forces which suggests that Zhou's preference for cooperation was accepted and authorized by the other leaders.³³ Feng's work is crucial, because it points out that there are diverging policy preferences among the CCP elite, suggesting that she opens up the black box of the CCP elite to some extent. However, her theory is based on a formal model limited to showing that PRC leaders have different strategic predilections—she does not explicate the process of one strategic preference triumphing over another and becoming an actual policy. The dissertation's aim is to focus on this process and uncover a causal mechanism that connects elite division and the Chinese choices in the border dispute.

Andrew Scobell's work can be placed between the rejection and acceptance of Johnston's propositions, as he argues that both the defensive and offensive paradigms operate in Chinese decisions to use force. Chinese leaders are convinced that their country is defensive, but they believe that other states are inclined to be aggressive, particularly against China. This leads to a paradoxical use of force. China is highly likely to become violent in a crisis, but every time it resorts to such measures, it is convinced of its own defensive intentions.³⁴ For China, India is a competitor of secondary importance that suffers from internal divisions. India appears to gain greater prominence in the PRC's strategic calculus if it is seen as a collaborator in anti-China schemes of other great powers or if it is seen as meddling with Tibetan affairs. Scobell's analysis suggests that China saw India's reception of the Dalai Lama in 1959 as an act of treachery aimed at splitting Tibet from the mainland, while New Delhi was also aggressively grabbing Chinese territory. China's war initiation was an effort of countering these schemes.³⁵

This branch of the literature is mainly preoccupied with establishing if China's strategic culture is offensive or defensive without clearly defining those terms. However, as long as the concepts are not clarified, both of these camps can find confirmation of their theories in some cases. In 1962, for instance, China was both offensive and defensive as it initiated an attack but it also withdrew its forces without occupying territories. Also, the offensive or defensive nature of Chinese behaviour seems to be unhelpful in explaining why initiated war in 1962 but exercised

³³ Feng, *Chinese Strategic Culture and Foreign Policy Decision-Making: Confucianism, Leadership and War*, 2-17, 19-27, 31-32, 55-65, 121-23.

³⁴ Andrew Scobell, "China's Real Strategic Culture: A Great Wall of the Imagination," *Contemporary Security Policy* 35, no. 2 (2014): 211-18.

³⁵ "Himalayan Standoff: Strategic Culture and the China-India Rivalry," in *The China-India Rivalry in the Globalization Era*, ed. T. V. Paul (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 171-81.

restraint in 1986-87. Instead of passing judgment on the defensive or offensive nature of China's uses of force in the Sino-Indian dispute, the focus of my dissertation is to explicate the factors that influence Chinese choices for violence or nonviolent deployments.

2.2. *Unanswered problems and how to solve them*

Two broad trends emerge based on this overview of the literature. First, the "use of force" is an amorphous, vaguely defined concept in most of the extant scholarship. On the one hand, some scholars demonstrate an overwhelming bias for those cases when China engaged in direct warfare against its opponent.³⁶ The problem with this approach is that they overlook those cases when China used force without directly clashing with its enemies. Fravel goes beyond this bias and includes cases when China expanded control over disputed territories but did not engage in direct warfare.³⁷ However, Fravel's approach broadens the scope too much and puts vastly different behaviours in the same category. For instance, the deadly China-India border war of 1962 and the bloodless Sumdorong Chu standoff in 1986-1987 both fall within the category of the "use of force". I further develop this categorization and distinguish between the direct use of force and simple military posturing.

The second characteristic in most of the existing scholarship is that they treat the CCP as a unitary actor and do not consider the possibility of elite splits. While Mao and Deng were strongman leaders indeed, their rule was far from unchallenged. Mao has serious conflicts with his designated successors like Liu Shaoqi and Lin Biao. Deng also had power struggles with Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang. Nevertheless, the existing literature implicitly assumes that these splits had no influence on the Chinese use of force. I challenge this assumption and explore how elite division shaped China's behaviour in border crises.

In sum, all of these approaches leave us with a number of unanswered questions. Why did China initiate a war in 1962 but avoid direct offensives in 1986? Why did it decide to withdraw without occupying any additional territories in 1962? Why did it respond with a direct attack to a nonviolent provocation in 1967? These questions become relevant at a time when the post-2010

³⁶ Christensen, "Windows and War: Trend Analysis and Beijing's Use of Force."; Whiting, "China's Use of Force, 1950-96, and Taiwan."; Feng, *Chinese Strategic Culture and Foreign Policy Decision-Making: Confucianism, Leadership and War*.

³⁷ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*.

Sino-Indian border confrontations suggest that Beijing and New Delhi are war-averse but not conflict-averse. Against this backdrop, crude measures such as the use or non-use of force shed little or no light on the dynamics of post-Cold War confrontations.

I aim to address the two shortcomings of the existing literature by exploring the relationship between the internal threat to the leader and the use of force by the state in a border dispute. Using a neoclassical realist framework, I simultaneously analyse external and internal threat to uncover a new, so far under-explored causal mechanism in Chinese foreign policy. In this process, I differentiate between the direct use of force and military posturing. At the same time, I observe power struggles and investigate if the leader used force in border disputes for diversionary purposes. In the following chapter, I explore these dynamics in the 1962 China-India border war.

Chapter 3. Lightning out of the blue sky – The 1962 border war

In 1962, China fought a war against India. The attack hit the Indians by surprise, as some leading policymakers excluded the possibility of large-scale fighting in the Himalayas. Indeed, Chinese troops preferred to avoid direct confrontation on the border in the 1959-1962 period. What motivated the 1962 offensives then? We have to look for the answer in China's external and internal environment. External threats emanate from hostile ties with the great powers. Internal threats stem from domestic political competitors, most importantly the leader's successor. When external and internal threats are both high, a state's leader is inclined to fight a territorial disputant to utilize the fight to mitigate the external and internal threats. Externally, attacking an adversary can demonstrate a state's resolve to defend its territory (hence act as a deterrent) and could also undermine a potential coalition against the state. Internally, the domestic elite is likely to overcome divisions and rally around the leader to fend off the external threat. Against this backdrop, I argue that China fought India in 1962 to prevent New Delhi from leading the neutral states to the imperialist camp and simultaneously unite the fractured domestic elite.

This chapter unfolds as follows. In the first section, I analyse China's external threat environment in the period of 1958-1962. In this context, external threat refers to hostility in China's relationship with the great powers, namely Soviet Union and the United States. During this period, both great powers represented threats to China's sovereignty or territorial integrity. On the one hand, increasing US military presence in Asia and Taiwan challenged Chinese territorial integrity and endangered its national security. On the other hand, Chinese leaders believed that the Soviet Union's approach to military cooperation, the Taiwan issue and the US represented a threat to Chinese sovereignty. After establishing the claim that external threat to China was high, I elaborate on the Chinese response. Against the backdrop of high external threats, Chinese leaders saw a world of enemies surrounding them. India was one of these enemies, as it slowly drifted toward the imperialist camp—at least in the eyes of Chinese statesmen.

The second section discusses China's response to these circumstances. In order to reduce the external threat, China sought to gain allegiance from the "uncommitted states". The name refers to a group of countries that stood neutrally between the capitalist and socialist camps. Chinese leaders thought that the competition for global primacy focused on these states: whoever wins their support, also wins the Cold War. Winning over these states could have helped China to reduce the external threat emanating from the great powers.

In the third section, I discuss Mao Zedong's domestic political position in the run-up to the border war. In 1958, Mao initiated the Great Leap Forward, an economic programme that sought to boost steel production and propel China into the club of great powers. The initiative turned out to be a major failure, causing major economic disruptions and food shortages. The leadership was divided on how to proceed and Mao's designated successor, Liu Shaoqi rose to be a direct challenge to the Chairman.

In the fourth section, I introduce the processes in the disputed territories that led to the Chinese offensives in 1962. This section includes a discussion of China's move into Tibet in the early 1950s and the subsequent establishment of the Aksai Chin highway. At the same time, I also elaborate on the 1959 Tibet revolt, the Sino-Indian expansion in the border areas and the war itself.

Finally, I link the independent and intervening variables with China's decision for war against India. The 1962 fight served China's external and internal purposes. Externally, China sought to utilize the war to diminish India's influence among the uncommitted states and prevent them from becoming imperialist satellites. Internally, certain aspects of the decision-making process—justification, historical references—suggest that Mao Zedong used force for the purpose of mobilizing the domestic political elite. A boundary dispute relates to national identity and the territorial nature of humans, allowing a challenged leader to manipulate such an issue to his benefit.¹ Therefore, Mao likely used the “rally around the flag” technique to preserve his position.

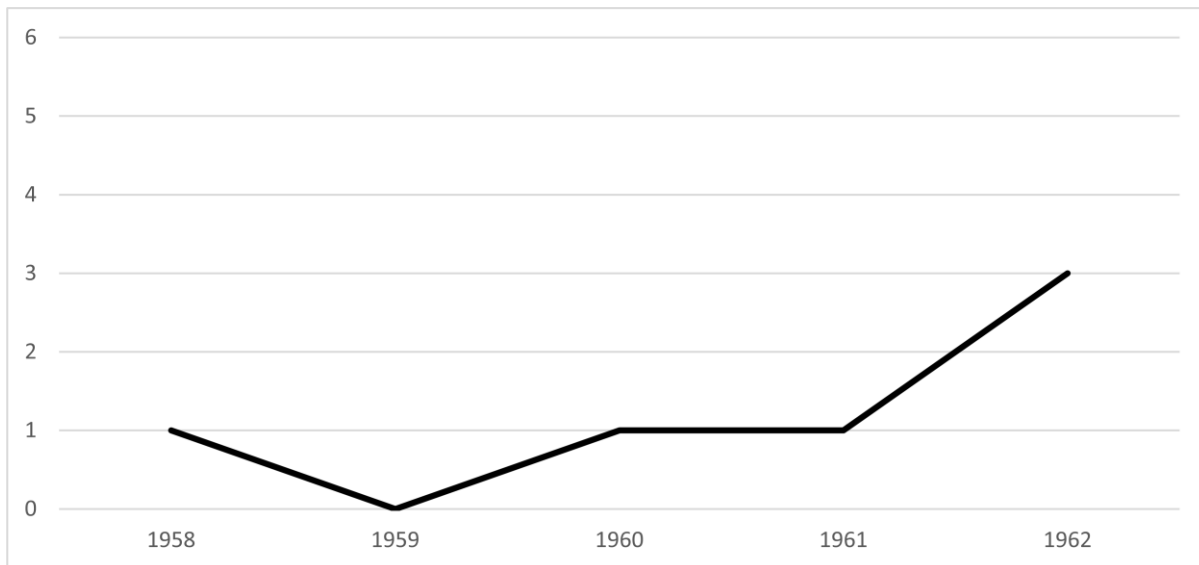
3.1. External threat: China and the great powers, 1958-1962

Hostility in the China-US-Soviet triangle exacerbated between 1958-1962 as the great powers posed direct threats to Chinese sovereignty and territorial integrity. Beijing and Washington disagreed on the Taiwan question which directly challenged Chinese territorial integrity, just as the US military presence in China's periphery. At the same time, the Soviet Union's efforts to boost military cooperation with China backfired as Mao felt that Moscow wanted to dominate his country. Furthermore, Khrushchev disagreed with Mao on his approach to territorial issues such as the Taiwan question and the Sino-Indian border dispute.

¹ Jaroslav Tir, "Territorial Diversion: Diversionary Theory of War and Territorial Conflict," *The Journal of Politics* 72, no. 2 (2010): 416-18.

The secondary indicator I use is the number of MIDs in the China-Soviet Union and China-US dyad. This is a proxy indicator that gives us a general idea about the ups and downs of those relations. In the 1949-2010 period, China had 75 MIDs with the US and the Soviet Union. As figure 3.1 shows, six of those MIDs happened in the 1958-1962 period, three in 1962.

Figure 3.1. Chinese MIDs with Great Powers, 1958-1962.



*Source: author's calculations based on CoW data. Maoz, Zeev, Paul L. Johnson, Jasper Kaplan, Fiona Ogunkoya, and Aaron P. Shreve. "The Dyadic Militarized Interstate Disputes (Mids) Dataset Version 3.0: Logic, Characteristics, and Comparisons to Alternative Datasets." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2018): 1-25.*

3.1.1. Sino-US relations

In the early phases of the Cold War, China and the US were on the opposing sides of the ideological competition between East and West, socialism and capitalism. The US was the nemesis in Chinese foreign policy: the PRC's first military strategy published in 1956 was designed with a potential US invasion in mind.² On more specific terms, the external threat posed by the US to China can be observed through a set of flashpoints between the two states.

² Fravel, *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949*, 72.

First, Sino-US hostility stemmed from the two powers' differences on the Taiwan question which directly relates to the PRC's territorial integrity. From the mainland Chinese perspective, Taiwan is an integral and inalienable part of the People's Republic. The unification of Taiwan and the mainland was and remains one of the paramount goals of the Chinese leadership, to be completed even through violent means. Therefore, any US action that obstructed the reunification process created a threat to Chinese territorial integrity. China did not shy away from using force to prevent the US from gaining a foothold in Taiwan. In 1954, China shelled Jinmen and Mazu islands to prevent the conclusion of the US-Taiwan security treaty and to signal that China could not be divided into two like Korea and Vietnam. In 1958, Mao shelled the islands once more.³ Again, the target of this policy decision was not only Taiwan, but also the US and USSR. Wang Bingnan, then PRC ambassador to Poland argued that there were three aims of China's attack on Jinmen and Mazu on this occasion: to punish Taiwan for its belligerent behaviour, to counter the domineering attitude of the US and to oppose the US-Soviet détente.⁴ On the latter point, Mao expected that a heavy-handed response from Washington—such as the use of nuclear weapons—could reveal the evil nature of the imperialist US and change Khrushchev's approach to the détente.⁵

Subsequently, China and the US revived their ambassador-level talks to reduce tensions in the Taiwan question.⁶ These talks started in August 1955, lasted until February 1970 and involved 136 meetings. The two officials used this platform to discuss various issues of Sino-US relations and the 1958 shelling of Taiwan was one of them.⁷ The US aim during the post-1958 shelling talks was to convince China to relinquish its right to reclaim Taiwan by force. In exchange, the US promised to convince Chiang to retreat from the coastal islands and to discourage him from attacking the mainland. China was reluctant toward such a deal because they thought that this arrangement could have led to the proclamation of two Chinas. China's aim was to convince the

³ Yang, "毛泽东与两次台海危机——50年代中后期中国对美政策变动原因及趋向 (Mao Zedong and the Two Taiwan Sea Crises: Reasons and Trends of the Changes in China's Us Policy Change in the Middle and Late 1950s) ," 354-56, 73-78.

⁴ Bingnan Wang, *中美会谈九年回顾 (Review of Nine Years of Sino-US Talks)* (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 1985), 69.

⁵ Michael M. Sheng, "Mao and China's Relations with the Superpowers in the 1950s: A New Look at the Taiwan Strait Crises and the Sino-Soviet Split," *Modern China* 34, no. 4 (2008): 499.

⁶ Wang, *中美会谈九年回顾 (Review of Nine Years of Sino-US Talks)* , 69-72.

⁷ Weixing Jin, *中美关系史纲 : 1784-2010 (Historical Outline of Sino-US Relations: 1784-2010)* (Hefei: Hefei University of Technology Press, 2014), 223.

US to remove its troops from Taiwan.⁸ On 6 September 1960, the two sides sat together for the hundredth time to discuss the Taiwan issue. Wang summarized the Chinese concerns about the US conduct. First, the US deployed armed forces to the Taiwan Strait in 1958. Second, Eisenhower visited Taiwan and engaged in “anti-China activities”.⁹ This signals that tensions between China and the US remained high after the two Taiwan crises. In late 1960, Kennedy won the US elections and adopted a hardliner policy against China.¹⁰ Wang Bingnan argued that with Kennedy in charge, and with the downturn in Sino-Soviet relations, international pressure on China was getting higher.¹¹ Ultimately, the Sino-US ambassadors to Poland met more than a hundred times to reach a consensus but neither of them budged. The talks ended without significant results in 1963.¹²

Second, the US’s increased military presence in Asia threatened Chinese national security. In 1961, the US Seventh Fleet entered the South China Sea while US troops in Japan initiated combat preparations as the US directly interfered in the Vietnam war. The next year, Kennedy announced that the US would deploy its army and air force in Thailand. These measures caused increasing threat perceptions in China which was aversive toward increased US military presence in its periphery.¹³ Referring to the US threat, Zhou Enlai argued in 1960 that China’s enemy was to the east and it was likely to attack from the maritime domain.¹⁴ Similarly, Vice Premier Chen Yi’s said that the US aimed to destroy China for “they are imperialist, and we are a communist country.”¹⁵ He further said that the US-Japan security agreement was aimed against China. The

⁸ Dayong Niu, "1961-1963 年的中美大使会谈 (the Sino-US Ambassadorial Talks of 1961-1963) ," in *冷战与中国 (the Cold War and China)* , ed. Baijia Zhang and Jun Niu (Beijing World Knowledge Press, 2002), 438-40.

⁹ Wang, *中美会谈九年回顾 (Review of Nine Years of Sino-US Talks)* , 80-82.

¹⁰ Zach Fredman, "'The Specter of an Expansionist China': Kennedy Administration Assessments of Chinese Intentions in Vietnam," *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 1 (2013): 115.

¹¹ Wang, *中美会谈九年回顾 (Review of Nine Years of Sino-US Talks)* , 82.

¹² Niu, "1961-1963 年的中美大使会谈 (the Sino-US Ambassadorial Talks of 1961-1963) ," 458-61.

¹³ Jun Niu, "1962: 中国对外政策“左”转的前夜 (1962: The Eve of the Leftist Turn in Chinese Foreign Policy) ," in *冷战与中国的周边关系 (the Cold War and China's Neighbourhood Relations)* , ed. Dayong Niu and Zhihua Shen (Beijing: 世界知识出版社 (World Knowledge Press) , 2004), 582; Wang, *中美会谈九年回顾 (Review of Nine Years of Sino-US Talks)* , 88.

¹⁴ "Record of Conversation between R.K. Nehru and Zhou Enlai," April 21, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, P.N. Haksar Papers (I-II Installment), Subject File #26, p. 120.

¹⁵ "Notes on the Conversation held between Sardar Swaran Singh and Marshal Chen Yi," April 22, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, P.N. Haksar Papers (I-II Installment), Subject File #26, 93-95.

US threat was so severe that Chinese leaders were bracing for an invasion that might cost them Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Beijing.¹⁶

3.1.2. Sino-Soviet relations

China and the Soviet Union were allies in the early phase of the Cold War, but there was a difference in mutual perceptions about the nature of this relationship. China saw the partnership as a cooperation among equals. The Soviets, however, thought of China as their subsidiary that followed their instructions. On the long term, these differing perceptions led to the downturn in Sino-Soviet ties, as China saw the Soviet approach to the alliance as a threat to PRC sovereignty.¹⁷ The conflict between the two sides surfaced in several issues.

First, naval cooperation. In 1958, Zhou Enlai requested technological aid in nuclear submarine development from Moscow. The Soviets responded by proposing a joint navy.¹⁸ Mao Zedong was suspicious of the idea for two reasons. On the one hand, he thought that Soviet technological aid in the field of naval modernization was dependent on the establishment of a common navy. On the other hand, he also thought that establishing a joint navy with the Soviets would have been an infringement on Chinese sovereignty.¹⁹ In his mind, Khrushchev's proposal signalled that Chinese people were inferior to the Soviets.²⁰ He refused the Soviet suggestion and recalled China's request for technological aid.²¹

¹⁶ "Notes on Conversation held between Sardar Swaran Singh and Marshal Chen Yi on 23rd April, 1960, at Agra," April 23, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, P.N. Haksar Papers (I-II Installment), Subject File #26, 147.

¹⁷ Hezi Maoli, "中苏同盟体制考——1957-1959年的政治过程 (a Study of the Sino-Soviet Alliance: The Political Process from 1957 to 1959)," in *冷战与中国的周边关系 (the Cold War and China's Neighbourhood Relations)*, ed. Dayong Niu and Zhihua Shen (Beijing: 世界知识出版社 (World Knowledge Press), 2004), 209-10, 18-21.

¹⁸ Tianxin Xu, "论 1958-1959 的中苏关系 (a Discussion on Sino-Soviet Ties in 1958-1959)," *ibid.* (2004), 265-71.

¹⁹ Zhihua Shen, "赫鲁晓夫, 毛泽东与中苏未实现的军事合作——关于防空协定, 长波电台及联合舰队问题的在讨论 (Khrushchev, Mao Zedong and the Unrealized Military Cooperation between China and the Soviet Union: Discussion on the Air Defense Agreement, Long Wave Radio Stations and the Joint Fleet Proposal)," *ibid.*, 247-59, 62-63.

²⁰ Xu, "论 1958-1959 的中苏关系 (a Discussion on Sino-Soviet Ties in 1958-1959)," 265-71.

²¹ Shen, "赫鲁晓夫, 毛泽东与中苏未实现的军事合作——关于防空协定, 长波电台及联合舰队问题的在讨论 (Khrushchev, Mao Zedong and the Unrealized Military Cooperation between China and the Soviet Union: Discussion on the Air Defense Agreement, Long Wave Radio Stations and the Joint Fleet Proposal)," 252.

Second, the shelling of Taiwan. Although Khrushchev tried to allay Chinese concerns about the perceived Soviet domination, his actions did not nullify Chinese apprehensions and bilateral ties suffered. In 1958, Mao shelled Taiwan without informing Moscow about his plans.²² The crisis escalated rapidly, as the US sent the Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Strait and more than 3500 troops landed on the island. The Soviets were very apprehensive of this behaviour. Zhou Enlai told the Soviets that China had already contemplated the idea of a localized war with the US in Asia. He pointed out that under such a scenario, China would not need help from the Soviets unless the Americans use larger than tactical nuclear weapons. The Chinese aim behind this comment was to defy Moscow's superior position.²³ Overall, the crisis soured ties between Beijing and Moscow. The Kremlin believed that China violated treaty agreements and undermined the efforts of a US-Soviet détente. Consequently, the Soviets decided to halt their nuclear technological assistance to China. This move came as a further blow to Sino-Soviet ties because the Chinese interpreted it as a Soviet effort of cosyng up to the imperialist West, with the aim of containing China.²⁴

In October 1959, Soviet and Chinese leaders exchanged their perspectives on the Taiwan issue. Khrushchev articulated two criticisms against Chinese actions. First, he disapproved of the intensity of the situation and suggested China to take steps to ease tensions across the Strait. Second, Khrushchev could not fathom the purpose of the shelling. According to him, there were two plausible approaches: if China wanted to take the islands, it should have attacked and occupied them. If Beijing did not want the islands, it should have left them alone without stirring up trouble. The PRC did the worst of these two options: they shelled the islands without taking them. All Khrushchev had to say was that "I do not understand this policy."²⁵

The third issue of contention between the Chinese and the Soviets related to their relationship with third states. An important item on Khrushchev's foreign policy agenda was the détente with the United States. China, however, excluded the possibility of peaceful coexistence with the US, as Washington supported the Kuomintang.²⁶ One of China's biggest fears was that the US and the

²² Ibid., 263.

²³ Xu, "论 1958-1959 的中苏关系 (a Discussion on Sino-Soviet Ties in 1958-1959) ," 265-71.

²⁴ Chaowu Dai, "第二次台海峡危机和中苏关系 (the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis and the Sino-Soviet Relations) ," in *冷战与中国*, ed. Baijia Zhang and Jun Niu (Beijing: 世界知识出版社 (World Affairs Press) , 2002), 269-71.

²⁵ Discussion between N.S. Khrushchev and Mao Zedong," October 02, 1959, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Archive of the President of the Russian Federation (APRF), f. 52, op. 1, d. 499, ll. 1-33, copy in Volkogonov Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Translated by Vladislav M. Zubok, p. 5

²⁶ Dai, "第二次台海峡危机和中苏关系 (the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis and the Sino-Soviet Relations) ," 254-56.

Soviets could cut a disarmament deal that undermined Chinese national interests. In February 1960, Kang Sheng warned the Soviets at a Warsaw Treaty meeting not to commit on behalf of other states in the question of disarmament. He also pointed out that China was not bound to treaties which it had not signed. Kang Sheng's comments elicited a response from Khrushchev in which he criticized Chinese foreign policy and accused the PRC of being extreme nationalist.²⁷

Finally, Soviet involvement in the Yita incident challenged Chinese territorial integrity.²⁸ Chinese and Soviet leaders confronted each other over an unrest in Northwest Xinjiang, in the Yili and Tacheng prefectures.²⁹ The incident involved more than 60 000 Chinese citizens escaping to the Soviet Union across the Sino-Soviet border.³⁰ As China's relationship with the Soviet Union turned for the worse in the 1960s, Moscow changed its policy toward Xinjiang. First and foremost, the Soviets initiated large-scale repatriations of overseas Soviet citizens from Yili and Tacheng. At the same time, they were encouraging Chinese citizens to apply for Soviet citizenship. Second, a proportion of local cadres in Yili were Soviet citizens who reported and collected intelligence on China's domestic political processes. Third, the Soviets distributed propaganda materials through the Chinese postal services, appealing to Chinese citizens to emigrate to the Soviet Union. Fourth, some of the Soviet officials directly interfered with the conduct of Chinese citizens. A consulate employee encouraged Kazakh people to go to the Soviet Union if the Chinese state allows them. These activities were coordinated with the actions of Soviet border guards who periodically opened the border on specific locations to facilitate the outflow of people. These processes peaked in the end of May 1962, when a large number of individuals accumulated at the Yining transport hub. As the staff realized that the number of buses was not enough to handle the workload, they stopped selling tickets, leaving a thousand citizens without an option to cross the border. Some of these individuals lost patience and attacked the local party committee. This occasion entered to the PRC history as the "Yita incident". Subsequently, China pushed the Soviet government to halt its

²⁷ Taiping Wang, *中华人民共和国外交史, 1957-1969 (Diplomatic History of the Prc, 1957-1969)* (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 1998), 232-38, 44-53.

²⁸ "Yita" is short for "Yili-Tacheng."

²⁹ Niu, "1962: 中国对外政策“左”转的前夜 (1962: The Eve of the Leftist Turn in Chinese Foreign Policy) ," 581.

³⁰ Wenzhao Tao, ed. *中美关系史 (the History of Sino-U.S. Relations)* , 3 vols., vol. 2 (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, 2016), 287.

repatriation activities and the PRC also increased the number of its outposts on the Sino-Soviet border.³¹

By elaborating on the state of Sino-US and Sino-Soviet ties, the above section aimed to explicate that in the years preceding the 1962 war, the level of external threat to the Chinese state was high. Chinese leaders treated a joint US-Taiwanese attack against the mainland a possibility, making the US a threat to Chinese territorial integrity. Against this backdrop, China sought to rely on Soviet help to develop its own capacity to counter such an attack. Nevertheless, the Soviets were less than willing to provide China with the weapons and technology it desired. China was threatened by the world's most advanced military and it could not rely on its own ally to counter the threat. As it will be shown in the following section, Beijing feared a Soviet-US containment strategy against China and thought that India was an accomplice in this scheme.

3.1.3. External threats and the Sino-Indian border dispute

Chinese leaders connected these external threats to the Sino-Indian border dispute. For China, Nehru's approach to Tibet and the Sino-Indian border dispute meant that he was sliding toward the political right—as the peasants, workers and intellectuals wanted to take down the bourgeois class, he had to divert their attention with the border dispute.³² At the same time, India was emboldened by the patronage of the Soviet revisionists and US imperialists and it wanted to use this support to consolidate its territorial claims on the ground.³³

Soviet aid to India started in 1955, as a part of the Soviet effort of gaining support from newly independent states, regardless of their ideological inclinations.³⁴ As the Sino-Soviet split intensified, the Sino-Indian border dispute became a flashpoint between the contending parties. Moscow proclaimed its stance in the TASS declaration published on 9 September 1959. In short, they decided not to take sides in the dispute.³⁵ The aim of this was to signal to the US and Western

³¹ Li, "对 1962 年新疆伊塔事件起因的历史考察——来自中国新疆的档案资料 (a Historical Analysis on the Origins of the 1962 Yita Incident: Based on Xinjiang Archival Materials) ," 487-96, 501-08.

³² Neville Maxwell, *India's China War* (Dehradun: Natraj Publishers, 1970), 285.

³³ *Ibid.*, 287.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 276.

³⁵ Chaowu Dai, "印度外交政策, 大国关系与 1962 年中印边界冲突 (Indian Foreign Policy, Great Power Politics and the 1962 Sino-Indian Border Conflict) ," in *冷战与中国的周边关系 (the Cold War and China's Neighbourhood Relations)* , ed. Dayong Niu and Zhihua Shen (Beijing: 世界知识出版社 (World Knowledge Press) , 2004), 517-19.

states that the Soviets had nothing to do with China's belligerence against India.³⁶ Nehru interpreted this as support to India—Moscow's neutral standpoint toward a fraternal party was tantamount to the condemnation of Beijing's stance.³⁷ This approach upset Chinese leaders who thought that a communist brother state was supposed to give unqualified public support to Beijing in its dispute with a capitalist state. In other words, the Soviet declaration was seen by China as an act of betrayal.³⁸ Khrushchev's tacit support to India was equivalent to support of the bourgeois government. The Kremlin ignored China's concerns and further boosted its economic and military aid to India.³⁹

During an October 1959 visit to China, Khrushchev confronted Mao, further exacerbating Sino-Soviet and Sino-Indian ties. Khrushchev believed that the border dispute with India could be settled in a peaceful way, and that "it would be stupid" for the Soviets to take China's side in the conflict. They did not approve of violent clashes and were concerned by the Indian deaths caused by Chinese soldiers during the Longju clash in August. Khrushchev noted that India suffered losses, but China did not. The Soviets were concerned about this because they wanted to prevent India from joining the US camp, but Chinese actions could undermine this effort. Chinese leaders agreed that India was to be kept closer to the socialist camp, but they disagreed with the methods adopted by the Soviets—they regarded their conduct "opportunistic."⁴⁰

At the same time, Chinese leaders were concerned about US-India collaboration as well. As long as the Eisenhower administration treated neutral states with suspicion China had little concern about Nehru's imperialist inclinations.⁴¹ In the second half of the 1950s, however, the US strove to turn India into a champion of the free world in Asia. Washington thought that if India showcased greater development than China, the neutral states would be more attracted to a democratic model. This was crucial to the US because Eisenhower's target was to gain support from neutral actors and prevent them from falling into the communist orbit. This conviction prompted the US to support Indian economic development. This was a cooperation with shared benefits, as India

³⁶ Tao, *中美关系史 (the History of Sino-US Relations)* , 280.

³⁷ Maxwell, *India's China War*, 146-47.

³⁸ Dai, "印度外交政策, 大国关系与 1962 年中印边界冲突 (Indian Foreign Policy, Great Power Politics and the 1962 Sino-Indian Border Conflict) ," 520-21.

³⁹ Maxwell, *India's China War*, 285.

⁴⁰ Discussion between N.S. Khrushchev and Mao Zedong," October 02, 1959, 6-13.

⁴¹ Maxwell, *India's China War*, 266.

needed external aid for its development.⁴² The US attitude toward India became more engaging after Washington learned about the contradictions between Beijing and New Delhi. Leaders in Washington thought that Indian alarm about China was beneficial for Indo-US cooperation.⁴³ The US was channelling more and more money to India. Between 1947 and 1959, the US sent 2 billion USD of aid to India and this amount doubled between 1959 and 1962.⁴⁴

As the US became more proactive toward India and the latter adopted a hardliner attitude toward the border dispute, China connected the dots and concluded that New Delhi was sliding toward the imperialist bloc.⁴⁵ As a result, Chinese leaders routinely explained India's behaviour with imperialist influence. In September 1959, Nehru faced increasing pressure from members of the Indian parliament to give information about the border dispute and China's stance on the McMahon Line. Nehru caved in and approved the publication of a White Paper that contained Sino-Indian correspondence on the boundary issue. Beijing was livid and Chinese leaders argued that US imperialist agents in India pressed Nehru to make this step.⁴⁶ China was also convinced that India utilized the border dispute to ask for loans and aid from the US.⁴⁷

According to a report written in the 1960s by the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, the Indian big capitalist class needed US aid and investments in 1959 because the country was facing economic difficulties. By channelling aid to India, the US assisted the big capitalist class's effort of oppressing the people's struggle. The report suggested that US aid to India increased during 1959-1960, suggesting successful cooperation between Indian capitalists and US imperialists.⁴⁸

The report further argued that after the rise of Kennedy to power, the US's Asia policy continued to use India as a containment tool against China.⁴⁹ Like his predecessor, Kennedy attached significant importance to India in the struggle between the two blocs. Kennedy thought of India as a "counterbalance" against China, and saw the Sino-Indian contention as a struggle for

⁴² Tanvi Madan, *Fateful Triangle: How China Shaped U.S.-India Relations During the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2020), 77-79, 86-87.

⁴³ Maxwell, *India's China War*, 146-47.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 270.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁴⁶ Madan, *Fateful Triangle: How China Shaped U.S.-India Relations During the Cold War*, 119.

⁴⁷ Shanghai Archives, no. A22-1-1070-152: "陈毅副总理报告——国际形势" (Vice Premier Chen Yi's Report: the International Setting), pp. 155-160.

⁴⁸ Shanghai Archives, no. C26-2-84-57: "天下大事报告会——美帝国主义和印度大资产阶级的勾结" (Major events of the world: Collusion between US imperialism and India's big bourgeoisie, 26 April 1963), 64-69.

⁴⁹ Shanghai Archives, no. C26-2-84-57: "天下大事报告会——美帝国主义和印度大资产阶级的勾结" (Major events of the world: Collusion between US imperialism and India's big bourgeoisie, 26 April, 1963), 69-77.

pre-eminence in Asia. In Washington's reading, India's victory in the struggle could showcase that the democratic way of life was superior to the Chinese one. Accordingly, the US approved more than 450 million USD of development aid to India for 1962 and initiated discussions on the providing India with nuclear reactors.⁵⁰

Chinese fears were not entirely unfounded. To some extent, the US indeed supported India in the border dispute even before war broke out in 1962. Eisenhower expressed support for those nations that settled their difference via negotiations rather than resorting to force. In December 1959, he reiterated this support and went somewhat further, saying that the US military served not only Washington but also its allies and partners.⁵¹ He told Nehru that if India had to fight China, the US would prevent Pakistan from stabbing India in the back.⁵² The Eisenhower administration also conducted covert operations to back the 1959 Tibetan revolt against the central Chinese government. In the process of these actions, the US used Indian airspace against which New Delhi did not express strong—or any—opposition.⁵³

Against this backdrop, Chinese leaders voiced concerns that the great powers might interfere with the Sino-Indian boundary dispute. In 1959, Mao argued that because of the extensive length of the border and its distance from the two states' capitals, confrontations are likely to occur if the two sides do not solve the dispute fast. These confrontations, in turn, could be utilized by other countries which wanted to harm Sino-Indian ties.⁵⁴ In 1961, Zhou Enlai made a similar argument and told the Indian charge d'affaires in Beijing that third parties want to utilize Nehru and expand the Sino-Indian border dispute.⁵⁵ Therefore, not only was China under high level of external threat during the run-up to 1962, these external threats were assessed to be directly connected to the Sino-Indian border dispute.

⁵⁰ Madan, *Fateful Triangle: How China Shaped U.S.-India Relations During the Cold War*, 131-33.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 124-25.

⁵² Ranjit Singh Kalha, *India-China Boundary Issues: Quest for Settlement* (New Delhi: Indian Council of World Affairs and Pentagon Press, 2014), 130.

⁵³ Madan, *Fateful Triangle: How China Shaped U.S.-India Relations During the Cold War*, 124-25.

⁵⁴ Feng Xuan, ed. *解密外交档案——1949至1960年的中国外交* (*Declassified Diplomatic Archives: Chinese Diplomacy from 1949 to 1960*) (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Phoenix Books Culture, 2013), 315-16.

⁵⁵ Dai, "印度外交政策，大国关系与1962年中印边界冲突 (Indian Foreign Policy, Great Power Politics and the 1962 Sino-Indian Border Conflict) ," 526.

3.2. *China's response: mobilizing the uncommitted states*

Under these circumstances, China strove to reduce the external threat by establishing a united front against imperialism. To understand this mechanism, we must take a step back and understand how the Chinese Communist Party coped with existential threats before it rose to power. For most of the time before the victory in 1949, the CCP fought against the Nationalists and the Japanese as the weaker party. Their goal was to survive and gain time until they turned enough people to their side and tipped the scales in their favour. Their approach to gathering support was mass mobilization. Once supported by the people, questions of manpower, supply and funding were solved. Weakness turned into strength, and the revolution was victorious.⁵⁶

The name of this strategy is the “united front doctrine” which is a part of Mao’s ideology. The notion stands for a temporary collaboration “between a communist party or state and one or more non-communist political units” for the sake of fighting against a common adversary.⁵⁷ In this worldview, the communists were surrounded by enemies. However, not all of these enemies were the same—there was always one primary enemy and the rest were secondary. The communists’ role was to identify the principal enemy and establish a “united front” against it. In China’s thinking, this “united front” consisted of three groups: progressive (leftist or left-leaning), uncommitted (neutral) and diehard (enemy). The aim of the communists was to win over the neutral actors in order to isolate the enemy.⁵⁸ The target of this approach was to contain and weaken the principal adversary. Once the principal adversary was defeated, the state turned its focus toward its other enemies.⁵⁹ The doctrine was flexible and often relied on temporary alignments. Although the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party were chief antagonists, they had to join forces against the Japanese invaders. However, after they defeated the Japanese, the Kuomintang and the CCP became enemies once more.⁶⁰

After their triumph over the Japanese and the Kuomintang, Chinese leaders emerged with the conclusion that mass movements were the panacea for every problem of the world and they were

⁵⁶ Fravel, *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949*, 40-67.

⁵⁷ J. D. Armstrong, *Revolutionary Diplomacy: Chinese Foreign Policy and the United Front Doctrine* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1977), 13-14.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 23, 27, 36.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

applicable to every context, be it land reform or economic development.⁶¹ They applied the same logic to diplomacy. Chinese leaders strove to establish the broadest possible coalition among the majority of states and rally them against imperialism.⁶² Diplomatic work and propaganda could serve this purpose and promote an “international united front” against the enemy.⁶³

From 1958, China framed the international united front as a broad coalition of states tied together by their common antagonism toward US imperialism. Chinese leaders thought that the US overextended itself to various parts of the globe, hence it lacked the capacity to concentrate overwhelming force in one place. The united front could utilize this by fighting against the US in various spots around the world, thereby disintegrating and slowly weakening it.⁶⁴

As a part of its strategy of establishing an international united front, China sought to win over a group of countries called the “uncommitted states” (zhongjiandidai, 中间地带). The name refers to international actors which stood neutrally between the imperialist and communist camps. The exact membership of the group was fluid and subject to constant revision by Mao. Most of them were newly independent former colonies.⁶⁵ At the same time, states that were members of the imperialist bloc could have become uncommitted states, if leaders in Beijing thought that they were unwilling partners of Washington. In the 1960s, Mao said that the UK and France were held on a leash by Washington against their will—this meant that these states and China had common antagonism toward the US. Furthermore, Zhou Enlai argued that Pakistan was a member of a western alliance, but it was not influenced by western states in its dealings with China.⁶⁶ Hence, China aimed to undermine Pakistan’s relations with the West, and distance it from the US.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Yibo Bo, *若干重大决策与事件的回顾* (*Review of Several Important Decisions and Events*) (Beijing: CCP Party School Press, 1991), 660, 721.

⁶² International Politics Department of Fudan University, *我国对外政策和对外关系* (*Chinese Foreign Policy and International Relations*) (Internal circulation, 1975), 10.

⁶³ Fengxiu Dai, *国防动员战略与对策* (*National Defense Mobilization Strategy and Countermeasures*) (Beijing: Military Science Publishing House, 2004), 113-16.

⁶⁴ Armstrong, *Revolutionary Diplomacy: Chinese Foreign Policy and the United Front Doctrine*, 75.

⁶⁵ A. Doak Barnett, *Communist China and Asia: Challenge to American Policy* (New York: Published for the Council on Foreign Relations by Harper, 1960), 73-75.

⁶⁶ Jiahe Cai, "冷战与 60 年代前期南亚国际关系的变化 (the Cold War and the Change in South Asia's International Relations in the Early 1960s) ," in *冷战与中国的周边关系* (*the Cold War and China's Neighbourhood Relations*) , ed. Dayong Niu and Zhihua Shen (Beijing: 世界知识出版社 (World Knowledge Press) , 2004), 472-73, 81.

⁶⁷ Rudra Chaudhuri, "The Making of an ‘All Weather Friendship’ Pakistan, China and the History of a Border Agreement: 1949–1963," *The International History Review* 40, no. 1 (2017): 46.

Furthermore, China moved to boost ties by pushing for a solution on the two sides' border dispute in 1962.⁶⁸

The uncommitted states were important to China for two reasons. First, Chinese leaders believed that these countries represented a decisive force in the Cold War: the side to which they join would win the East-West ideological competition.⁶⁹ Therefore, socialist and capitalist states were both trying to cajole uncommitted states to support them.⁷⁰ For instance, Mao argued that the US wanted to avoid direct confrontation with the East and it chose to compete by gaining control over the uncommitted states.⁷¹ This approach was seen as an integral part of the US's containment strategy against China.⁷² Furthermore, it was also a part of a greater strategy in which Washington competed with Moscow to channel aid to these countries and acquire allegiance from them.⁷³ Vice-Premier Chen Yi's comments during his 1961 talk with the Indonesian ambassador to China also demonstrate the importance of the uncommitted states to China. While they were discussing Indonesia's position in the upcoming nonaligned conference, Chen Yi pointed out that uncommitted states' disapproval of the US's behaviour could influence Washington's calculus in starting local wars.⁷⁴

Second, many of the uncommitted states were in the proximity of China. Beijing was cautious about the US outreach to uncommitted states in the Chinese periphery. Foreign Minister Chen Yi noted that smaller neighbours of China—Burma, Nepal—did not represent a threat to Beijing, but that could change if they gave home to foreign bases. As China was counting with the possibility

⁶⁸ Cai, "冷战与 60 年代前期南亚国际关系的变化 (the Cold War and the Change in South Asia's International Relations in the Early 1960s) ," 472-73, 81.

⁶⁹ Dai, "印度外交政策, 大国关系与 1962 年中印边界冲突 (Indian Foreign Policy, Great Power Politics and the 1962 Sino-Indian Border Conflict) ," 504-05.

⁷⁰ Shanghai Archives, no. A22-1-1070-152: "陈毅副总理报告——国际形势" (Vice Premier Chen Yi's Report: the International Setting, 1959) , pp. 155-160.

⁷¹ Jun Niu, "毛泽东的危机意识与中苏同盟破裂的缘起 (1957-1959) (Mao Zedong's Crisis Mindset and the Origins of the Sino-Soviet Split (1957-1959)) ," in *冷战与中国*, ed. Baijia Zhang and Jun Niu (Beijing: 世界知识出版社 (World Affairs Press) , 2002), 288-90.

⁷² Yang, "毛泽东与两次台海危机——50 年代中后期中国对美政策变动原因及趋向 (Mao Zedong and the Two Taiwan Sea Crises: Reasons and Trends of the Changes in China's Us Policy Change in the Middle and Late 1950s) ," 383.

⁷³ Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, no. 105-01001-04: "苏联和美国对印度的援助" (Soviet and US aid to India, February-September, 1960) p. 26.

⁷⁴ Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, no. 113-00379-13: "陈毅副总理、耿飚副外长与印度尼西亚驻华大使谈第一次不结盟国家首脑会议情况" (Vice Premier Chen Yi and Vice Foreign Minister Geng Biao talk with Indonesian Ambassador to China on the first Non-Aligned Conference, 31 May, 1961), p. 49.

of a US invasion that might cost it Guangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing, Chinese leaders found it important to boost their relations with the uncommitted states to prevent them from hosting military bases and becoming Washington's satellites.⁷⁵

Against this backdrop, China adopted a friendly policy toward the uncommitted states.⁷⁶ How did India come into the picture? Archives from both sides suggest that China was concerned about India's closeness with the US and New Delhi's influence among the uncommitted states. Chinese leaders were concerned that India could bring neutral states to the imperialist camp. First, in 1959, Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi argued that Nehru's purposes with his border policy was to undermine China's clout in international affairs, to appeal for more US aid and to undermine the Indian Communist Party.⁷⁷

Second, before the first Non-Aligned Movement Conference in 1961, Chinese leaders were concerned that India and Yugoslavia might establish a pro-western third camp and undermine the good relationship between the uncommitted states and socialist states.⁷⁸ To prevent this, they encouraged Indonesia's participation in the conference. They needed Indonesia and the anti-imperialist states invited by it to dilute the influence of India and other pro-American participants.⁷⁹ After the meeting, Chinese leaders concluded that the failure of India and Yugoslavia to establish a pro-western third camp signalled that the Afro-Asian and Latin-American states want to unite their forces and oppose imperialism.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ "Notes on the Conversation held between Sardar Swaran Singh and Marshal Chen Yi," April 22, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, P.N. Haksar Papers (I-II Installment), Subject File #26, 93-95; "Notes on Conversation held between Sardar Swaran Singh and Marshal Chen Yi on 23rd April, 1960, at Agra," April 23, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, P.N. Haksar Papers (I-II Installment), Subject File #26, 147.

⁷⁶ Shanghai Archives, A22-1-1070-152: "陈毅副总理报告——国际形势" (Vice Premier Chen Yi's Report: the International Setting, 1959) , pp. 155-160.

⁷⁷ Shanghai Archives, A22-1-1070-152: "陈毅副总理报告——国际形势" (Vice Premier Chen Yi's Report: the International Setting, 1959) , pp. 155-160.

⁷⁸ Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, no. 113-00443-06: "外交部关于对不结盟国家首脑会议对策的请示" (Request of instructions from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Policy on the Non-Aligned Conference, August 1961) p. 4.

⁷⁹ Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, no. 113-00379-13: "陈毅副总理、耿飚副外长与印度尼西亚驻华大使谈第一次不结盟国家首脑会议情况" (Vice Premier Chen Yi and Vice Foreign Minister Geng Biao talk with Indonesian Ambassador to China on the first Non-Aligned Conference, 31 May, 1961), pp. 42, 47.

⁸⁰ Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, no. 113-00443-06: "外交部关于对不结盟国家首脑会议对策的请示" (Request of instructions from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Policy on the Non-Aligned Conference, August 1961) p. 5.

Third, in 1961, Vice Foreign Minister Geng Biao said to the Sri Lankan ambassador in Beijing that Nehru faced domestic economic and political difficulties, hence it relied heavily on US aid. However, by siding with the imperialists, India “lost the support of the uncommitted parties, leftist parties and the masses.” He also said that India’s overarching aim was to gain control over states in its proximity.⁸¹

In sum, China was aware of its weakness vis-à-vis its enemy, the US. China was a weaker power and it also could not count on its former patron, the Soviet Union. Chinese leaders sought to compensate their disadvantageous position by external mobilization: the establishment of a united front against Washington. The members of this united front were the socialist and uncommitted states. The goal of China’s strategy was to get the majority of states on its side, allowing it to isolate Washington and triumph over imperialism. India’s foreign policy stood in the way of Chinese plans. New Delhi also strove for leadership among the uncommitted states, but this leadership was antagonistic to China’s interests. In Beijing’s reading, if the uncommitted states rallied under India’s flag, they would become an imperialist-leaning bloc that could pose a danger to China. In order to prevent this scenario, China had to diminish India’s influence among them.

3.3. From external threats to internal threat: The Great Failure

3.3.1. The Great Leap Forward and Mao’s setback

Mao’s domestic political weakness was the outcome of a process that started from the high level of external threat to China. The Taiwan Strait crises in the 1950s had a major impact on Mao’s perceptions of international affairs. He argued that China had large territory, long history and large population, but strong countries still ignored it because of its economic weakness.⁸² Indeed, one of the reasons why Mao bombed Taiwan in 1958 was the US’s belittling attitude toward Beijing. He realized that China lacked the material capabilities that could compel the US to recognize the mainland’s rule over Taiwan. Mao’s solution to the problem was state-induced, breakneck economic development with high production targets, in order to snap China out of this undesirable

⁸¹ Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, no. 113-00379-10: “兰新任驻华大使谈对第一次不结盟国家首脑会议的态度” (New Sri Lankan Ambassador to China talks about his country’s stance on the first non-aligned conference, 19 August, 1961) pp. 35-36.

⁸² Bo, *若干重大决策与事件的回顾* (*Review of Several Important Decisions and Events*), 717.

backwardness.⁸³ A local report from 1960 confirms this interpretation as it identifies the US occupation of Taiwan as one of the main pressures that compelled China to push for speedy economic development.⁸⁴

Mao launched the Great Leap Forward at the Beidaihe Conference in August 1958.⁸⁵ The initiative sought to turn China from a backward agrarian state into an industrial power by boosting steel production to a level that surpassed that of the UK and approximates to that of the US.⁸⁶ Cadres and masses acted as one to boost the steel, machinery and construction industries. The initiative mobilized hundreds of millions of Chinese people who built roads and factories in the service of expedited steel production. Enthusiastic Chinese citizens started producing steel in home-made iron smelters in their backyards.⁸⁷ After work, employees had to participate in technology classes to develop their productivity. The masses were also indoctrinated by “communist education”. China established “People’s Communes” under which private property ceased to exist. Land, tools, and materials were commonly owned by the Commune members. At the same time, leaders mobilized the masses and recruited them to the People’s Militia.⁸⁸

A set of mistakes led to the failure of the initiative. First, the Chinese leadership was unaware of the complexity of economic transformation and thought that it can be achieved in a matter of years. Second, they put too much faith in leftist ideas and thought they were infallible. Third, they failed to recognize that economic construction of a state and the revolutionary struggles are two different kinds of issues. The Great Leap Forward was based on the same logic as the Communist revolution: coordinated mass movements were bound to achieve their aims.⁸⁹ This view permeated not only the top leadership, but also local leaders. An October 1958 report from Chengdu asserted

⁸³ Yang, "毛泽东与两次台海危机——50年代中后期中国对美政策变动原因及趋向 (Mao Zedong and the Two Taiwan Sea Crises: Reasons and Trends of the Changes in China's Us Policy Change in the Middle and Late 1950s) ," 355-70.

⁸⁴ Chengdu Archives, no. 095-001-408: ”高举毛泽东思想的红旗，继续升入开展学习黄光耀的运动，和黄光耀式的标兵一道红、一样钻、一齐飞、一样好。(Hold up the red flag of Mao Zedong Thought, and continue to study the movement of Huang Guangyao. Strive to be as red, as hard, as good as the model of Huang Guangyao, 19 July, 1960) ” p. 228.

⁸⁵ Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 221-24.

⁸⁶ Suhua Zhang, *变局：七千人大会始末 (Change: The Seven Thousand Cadres' Conference)* (Beijing: 中国青年出版社 (China Youth Publishing Group), 2006), 10.

⁸⁷ John K. Fairbank and Merle Goldman, *China: A New History*, Second, Enlarged ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts Harvard University Press, 2006), 371.

⁸⁸ Chengdu Archives, no. 95-5-392: “关于今后两个月的工作任务” (On the work objectives of these two months, 27 October, 1958) , pp. 30-31, 34, 38.

⁸⁹ Bo, *若干重大决策与事件的回顾 (Review of Several Important Decisions and Events)*, 720-22.

that “as long as we rely on the majority of masses, there is nothing we cannot achieve.” The same report also argued that any difficulty is surmountable as long as the leadership relies on the “wisdom and talent of the masses.”⁹⁰ Mao even said that the Chinese economy could surpass the Soviet one because of its “tradition of mass movements.” Finally, the leadership thought that the question of agricultural development was settled and merited no attention: their exclusive focus was on the industry. Because the revolutionary CCP activists had become government leaders less than a decade ago, they lacked the experience needed to discover that they were heading toward a catastrophe. With theoretical fallacies guiding the initiative, a range of problems arose. The quality of products was low and the overemphasis on heavy industry created imbalances within the national economy.⁹¹

Some CCP leaders were aware of the mistakes made and realized the unsustainability of the ambitious economic program. Hence, the need arose to evaluate the progress of the initiative. The assessment took place between 2 July and 16 August 1959, at the Lushan Conference and the subsequent 8th Plenum of the 8th Central Committee. Two contrasting perspectives emerged at these gatherings. One camp, led by Mao Zedong, thought that the general party line and the guiding principles of the Great Leap Forward were mostly correct, and errors were marginal. The problems arose because of faulty implementation, not because the guiding principles were flawed. They also thought that most of the mistakes were already corrected or were in the process of rectification. In other words, this camp wanted to downplay the mistakes and brush them under the carpet. The other camp, led by Peng Dehuai, argued that the problems with the Great Leap Forward originated from the guiding principles and these issues were ought to be analysed carefully and thoroughly. Instead of claiming that most the problems were already corrected, they called for further investigation and detailed analyses.⁹²

At the initial stages of the party gatherings, Mao Zedong allowed the debate between these two ideas. Peng Dehuai voiced concerns about the effects of the Great Leap Forward by way of a critical private letter sent to Mao on 14 July.⁹³ This brought a turning point to the process of the conference. Until that point, Mao and the radicals represented a minority. On 23 July, Mao gave a

⁹⁰ Chengdu Archives, no. 95-5-392: “关于今后两个月的工作任务” (On the work objectives of these two months, 27 October, 1958) , pp. 27, 39.

⁹¹ Bo, *若干重大决策与事件的回顾* (*Review of Several Important Decisions and Events*), 690, 720-22.

⁹² Chen, “1959年庐山会议及其教训” (the 1959 Lushan Conference and Its Lessons) ,” 54-58.

⁹³ Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 227-29.

speech in which he lashed out against those who dared to criticize the party line. His charisma lent to him by the victorious Communist revolution galvanized the radicals and the Lushan meeting's original agenda was derailed. What started out as an assessment of the Great Leap Forward turned into an extended criticism of Peng Dehuai and his "collaborators," Huang Kecheng, Zhang Wentian and Zhou Xiaozhou. These individuals were identified as anti-Party elements and were compelled to exercise self-criticism at the 8th Plenum of the 8th CC held from 2 to 16 August.⁹⁴

The Lushan meeting turned out to be a turning point in CCP history. On the one hand, it signalled the advent of an era in which CCP leaders connected external threats with internal threats. Before the Lushan conference, Peng Dehuai visited the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries which criticized China for the Great Leap Forward. This background, combined with his criticism at the Lushan conference, led CCP members label Peng as an agent of imperialism, revisionism and reactionism. On the other hand, a novel perspective of the Lushan Conference was that Mao Zedong treated divisions in the Communist Party as an extension of class struggle. In his reading, those who dared to criticize the Party line were capitalist agents who infiltrated the ranks of the Communist Party. This laid down the basis for a personal cult and destroyed the incipient intraparty democracy.⁹⁵

The CCP leadership became fully aware of the grim consequences of the Great Leap Forward only after 1960. The imprudent economic policy and the compounded effect of disasters led to mass starvation, millions of deaths and cannibalism among Chinese people.⁹⁶ The situation was so grave that Mao had to make self-criticism at a Central Committee meeting held between May 21 and June 12, 1961.⁹⁷

Leaders convened a mass meeting between 11 January and 7 February 1962, called the 7000 Cadres' Conference. The aim of the meeting was to evaluate the experience of the Great Leap Forward, learn from its mistakes and reverse its adverse effects. At the meeting, Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqi differed on how to evaluate Great Leap Forward. The crux of this contestation was about how to present the mistakes and successes of the economic initiative. Liu incurred Mao's anger by overemphasizing the mistakes, downplaying the successes, and voicing criticism against

⁹⁴ Chen, "1959 年庐山会议及其教训 (the 1959 Lushan Conference and Its Lessons) ," 60-65.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 67-71.

⁹⁶ Fairbank and Goldman, *China: A New History*, 368; Bertil Lintner, *China's India War: Collision Course on the Roof of the World* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018), 108-09.

⁹⁷ Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 231.

the Great Leap Forward in front of 7000 people instead of keeping the issue under the lid. Liu was also ambiguous in his attitude toward the ideological foundation of the initiative, the “Three Red Flags”. Nevertheless, Mao restrained himself and avoided openly confronting Liu. As Mao withdrew, Liu and the moderates gained momentum. At the Xilou meeting 21 to 23 February 1962, Liu pressed further and argued that the CCP’s evaluation of the Great Leap Forward was not critical enough.⁹⁸ Chen Yun, another moderate, asserted at this conference that the China’s economy reached such a low point that recovering to the 1957 level would take five years.⁹⁹

Apart from the indirect rhetorical attacks against Mao’s initiative, the Chairman also lost his grip on policy making. Under Liu’s leadership, the moderates effectively rolled back Mao’s earlier measures.¹⁰⁰ Deng Zihui, who conducted fieldwork in Chinese villages, criticized the Great Leap forward and blamed it for the declining agricultural output—the changes introduced by the initiative were too big, too fast, and too many. His idea was to find a balance between the collective economy and private competition on the market.¹⁰¹ The farm output quota system (*baochan daohu*, 包产到户) established fixed rations that farmers had to give to the state, allowing them to keep the portion of goods that exceeded the threshold. This incentivized farming, as higher levels of production meant higher portion of goods available for private use. In addition, the moderates initiated the rehabilitation of previously purged party members (*zhenbie pingfan*, 甄别平反), a measure led by Deng Xiaoping. Other measures included the centralization of the financial system, the reduction of industrial output targets, the encouragement of intraparty democracy and a revised approach to intellectuals and education.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Zhang, *变局：七千人大会始末* (*Change: The Seven Thousand Cadres' Conference*), 322.

⁹⁹ Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 232.

¹⁰⁰ Niu, "1962: The Eve of the Left Turn in China’s Foreign Policy," 32; Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 233-41.

¹⁰¹ Weijun Wei, "党的八届十中全会 (the 10th Plenum of the 8th Central Committee of the Party)," in *中共党史专题讲义* (*Lecture Notes on the History of the Communist Party of China*), ed. Party History Teaching and Research Section of the Chinese Communist Party Central Party School (Beijing: Central Party School Press, 1988), 150-55.

¹⁰² Niu, "1962: The Eve of the Left Turn in China’s Foreign Policy," 32; Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 233-41.

3.3.2. Internal threat and the Sino-Indian border dispute

Not only did Mao lose control over economic measures, but he was also side-lined in foreign policymaking as well. In the early 1960s, the PRC followed a foreign policy that strove to establish a stable external environment, favouring domestic economic restructuring. These were based on the proposals of Wang Jiaxiang, head of the International Department, Central Committee of the CCP. Against the backdrop of external pressure from the great powers and internal difficulties after the failure of the Great Leap Forward, Wang's aim was to prevent a definite fracture in Sino-Soviet ties and a Sino-US war. He wanted to do so by tackling the challenges one by one, with primary focus on the Soviet Union. He thought that the best way of preserving Sino-Soviet unity was to reduce the extreme leftist tendencies in Chinese foreign policy.¹⁰³

First and foremost, he called for an overarching revision of the guiding theory of foreign policy of the PRC, involving its aims, views on the likelihood of a world war and the nature of interstate relations.¹⁰⁴ He argued that the general line of China's foreign policy was to aid socialist states, to peacefully coexist with non-socialist states and to support national liberation movements. While China resolutely opposed imperialism, Wang had some qualifications to this policy. He argued that China was against certain imperialist policies, but Beijing was open to "sit down and negotiate" with imperialists. Moreover, he asserted that mutual coexistence could be achieved without thoroughly obliterating imperialism. What had to be destroyed was not imperialism as a whole, but imperialist policies of aggression—wars and invasions. Furthermore, he argued that armed struggle was not the only way of achieving national independence, hence China did not oppose negotiations between resistance leaders and imperialists. He also took a more nuanced approach toward the likelihood of war: he argued that it could happen, but it could be prevented as well. This contradicted other formulations which predicted the occurrence or absence of war.¹⁰⁵ According to Wang, the contradiction between the capitalist and communist camps did not predestine the occurrence of war. Also, he argued that instead of overemphasizing the potential for world war, leaders should focus on the potential of preventing it.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Zehao Xu, *王稼祥传(Biography of Wang Jiaxiang)* (Beijing: 当代中国出版社(Contemporary China Publishing House), 2006), 365-71.

¹⁰⁴ Niu, "1962: The Eve of the Left Turn in China's Foreign Policy," 27-32.

¹⁰⁵ Editorial Group of the Selected Collection of Wang Jiaxiang's Work, *王稼祥选集(a Selected Collection of Wang Jiaxiang's Work)* (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1989), 447-57.

¹⁰⁶ Xu, *王稼祥传(Biography of Wang Jiaxiang)*, 365-71.

Apart from these theoretical revisions, Wang had four specific recommendations. First, he proposed that China had to issue a comprehensive statement that elaborates on China's foreign policy of peace. Second, China had to promote peaceful coexistence with its enemies. Third, Chinese diplomacy had to pre-empt schemes that sought to isolate it from the international community. Finally, China was not supposed to squander its resources on funding external movements in challenging economic times.¹⁰⁷ It is worth noting that Wang sent his proposals to Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping and Chen Yi, but not to Mao, the nominal chief architect of PRC foreign policy.¹⁰⁸

Chinese foreign policy followed these recommendations until the summer of 1962,¹⁰⁹ manifesting in a set of measures that sought to decrease tension on the Sino-Indian border. First, after the Kongka Pass clashes, Zhou Enlai wrote a letter to Nehru on 7 November 1959, arguing that the troops should withdraw 20 kilometres from the line of actual control on the border and the prime ministers should meet for negotiations on the border. This letter became very important because it was frequently referred to by the Chinese government in subsequent phases of the conflict.¹¹⁰ Most of the Chinese proposals of defusing tensions referred to this letter and argued that the two sides were ought to withdraw behind the lines of actual control they reached up to 7 November 1959.

Second, after the failure of the Sino-Indian border talks in 1960, Beijing took a three-pronged approach to decrease tensions on the border. On the one hand, the PLA pulled out of its advanced positions in the eastern sector and simultaneously increased the number of its outposts in the west. On the other hand, the military adopted a set of stabilizing measures on the border by restraining patrols, exercises and rebels' activities across the border. In addition, Chinese leaders Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi repeatedly pushed for renewed negotiations.¹¹¹

Third, in February 1962, China was willing to "allow joint use of the Xinjiang-Tibet highway, recognize the McMahon Line in the east and form a joint commission to delimit the border in the

¹⁰⁷ Zhongli Zhu, *疾风知劲草：毛泽东与王稼祥* (*Grasses in Gusty Wind: Mao Zedong and Wang Jiaxiang*) (Beijing: CCP Central Party School Press, 1999), 291-97.

¹⁰⁸ Li, "Ideological Dilemma: Mao's China and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1962-63," 393.

¹⁰⁹ Niu, "1962: The Eve of the Left Turn in China's Foreign Policy," 27-32.

¹¹⁰ Xuan, *解密外交档案——1949至1960年的中国外交* (*Declassified Diplomatic Archives: Chinese Diplomacy from 1949 to 1960*), 315-16.

¹¹¹ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 95-96.

western sector.”¹¹² In July 1962, Indian Defence Minister V. K. Krishna Menon and PRC Foreign Minister Chen Yi met at the side lines of the International Conference on the Settlement of the Laotian Question in Geneva. Menon proposed a potential solution for the confrontations in the western sector. He said that both sides should establish outposts in the disputed area with an equal number of personnel. These posts were supposed to be distanced from one another and the troops would be ordered not to provoke each other.¹¹³ Chen Yi refused this proposal but a different source suggests that he did not exclude a potential division of Aksai Chin, signalling the greatest concession offered by Beijing on the issue.¹¹⁴ He also reassured Menon that the conflict would not result in war.¹¹⁵ According to a third, unconfirmed source, this meeting happened between Khrushchev, Menon and Chen Yi. Khrushchev attempted to mediate between the two parties and Chen Yi reiterated China’s preference for a peaceful settlement.¹¹⁶

The above sections were aimed at showing that the internal threat facing Mao in 1962 was high because he had to face a powerful challenger. First, according to the proxy indicator I use, Liu Shaoqi has been in power for 19 years, as he joined the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC)—at that time Secretariat¹¹⁷—in 1943.¹¹⁸ Second, Liu had a strong position because by 1962, the failure of the Great Leap Forward undermined Mao’s impeccable image and authority.¹¹⁹ Finally, the extended time frame that Liu spent in the upper echelons of the CCP allowed him to profit from the drawbacks of other leaders. Liu emerged from the Gao-Rao affair in the mid-1950s as the leader of the Politburo, a critical policy making institution. Liu also benefited from Zhou Enlai’s setback preceding the Great Leap Forward. In 1958, he was designated as the successor of Mao Zedong, gaining a position that exempted him from restraints imposed by the State Council, an organ that previously was powerful enough to obstruct policy implementation. Indeed, Liu

¹¹² Ibid., 100-01.

¹¹³ Jairam Ramesh, *A Chequered Brilliance: The Many Lives of V. K. Krishna Menon* (Gurgaon: Penguin Random House India, 2019), 570.

¹¹⁴ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 187-88.

¹¹⁵ Ramesh, *A Chequered Brilliance: The Many Lives of V. K. Krishna Menon*, 568.

¹¹⁶ J. P. Dalvi, *Himalayan Blunder: The Curtain-Raiser to the Sino-Indian War of 1962* (Dehra Dun: Natraj Publishers, 1969), 150.

¹¹⁷ Between 1934 and 1956 the Politburo Standing Committee and the Central Secretariat were the same institution. See: Wang, "中共中央政治局常委会与中央书记处的组织演变 (Organizational Evolution of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Cpc Central Committee and the Central Secretariat)," 13; Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 133.

¹¹⁸ *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 133.

¹¹⁹ Fairbank and Goldman, *China: A New History*, 373; Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 227.

accumulated enough power that allowed him to bypass Mao in policymaking and solicit merely post-hoc approvals.¹²⁰

3.3.3. Mao's response: internal mobilization

Mao's counterattack against the economic policy of the moderates aimed to distract attention from economic measures to class struggle. In 1956, at the 8th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party the leadership agreed that the class struggle between capitalists and socialists was mostly settled. The main challenge of the Party was to focus on economic development. At the 10th Plenum of the 8th CC in September 1962, however, Mao proposed a different evaluation. According to him, the reactionary class was planning to reinstate their rule lost to the communists. Some citizens were not entirely supportive of the CCP cause and they were only waiting for the opportunity to implement capitalist reforms. Therefore, class struggle was an inevitable constant in Chinese political life, and it found its way into the ranks of the Communist Party. External pressure from imperialism and the domestic pressure of capitalism bred revisionism in the party. So, Mao expanded and perpetuated class struggle in the Chinese political discourse.¹²¹

Apart from these theoretical revelations, Mao also issued specific criticism against three types of measures. First, he opposed other elites' negative assessment about the state of the Chinese economy which he labelled as the "dark wind" (*hei'an feng*, 黑暗风).¹²² This referred to the realistic evaluation of the economy and the implementation of measures that sought to reverse Mao's Great Leap Forward. These policymakers like Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi thought that the leadership so far underestimated the economic dangers of the Great Leap Forward. Hence, there was a need for new measures to reverse negative trends. Mao criticized this group of people for being excessively pessimistic.¹²³ He argued that these evaluations were baseless, as he visited many regional leaders and received positive evaluations from them.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 209, 16, 25-26, 35-36.

¹²¹ Wei, "党的八届十中全会 (the 10th Plenum of the 8th Central Committee of the Party) ," 150-55.

¹²² Li, "Ideological Dilemma: Mao's China and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1962-63," 396.

¹²³ Wei, "党的八届十中全会 (the 10th Plenum of the 8th Central Committee of the Party) ," 150-55.

¹²⁴ Li, "Ideological Dilemma: Mao's China and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1962-63," 396.

Second, he argued that the farm output quota system and the rehabilitation drive resulted in the negative trend of individual farming (*dan'gan feng*, 单干风).¹²⁵ Deng Zihui was criticized for being a capitalist roader.¹²⁶ Finally, Mao criticized the trend of verdict reversal (*fan'an feng*, 翻案风) which fostered revisionism and capitalism in China.¹²⁷ Deng and the others initiated the rehabilitation of those officials who were mistakenly criticized during the Great Leap Forward. Mao Zedong thought that these rehabilitations went too far. He especially mentioned that Peng Dehuai should not be rehabilitated because he was a revisionist.¹²⁸

In the field of foreign policy, Mao attacked Wang Jiaxiang by criticizing the Chinese delegation's approach to the 9 July 1962 meeting on Universal Disarmament and Peace. At this meeting, the Chinese representatives agreed to publishing a declaration that did not have any clause on the opposition to imperialism, leading to concern in other delegations from Asia and Africa. This proved to be a fatal move in Wang Jiaxiang's political career. At the Beidaihe meeting and the 10th Plenum of the 8th Central Committee in September 1962, Mao articulated vicious criticism against the recent conciliatory tendencies in Chinese foreign policy. He argued that rightist tendencies within the party found their way into diplomatic policymaking. Wang's foreign policy suggestions were tantamount to "three reconciliations and one reduction" (*sanhe yishao*, 三和一少): reconciling with imperialists (US), revisionists (Soviet Union) and reactionaries (India) and reducing material support to foreign revolutionary movements.¹²⁹ He put forward his own political line to counteract Wang Jiaxiang's proposals: the "three struggles and one more" (*sandou yiduo*, 三斗一多): struggle against imperialism, revisionism and reactionaries and more assistance to the revolutionary movements.¹³⁰ Ultimately, Mao won the public narrative and Wang Jiaxiang took responsibility for his mistakes at the 10th plenum of the 8th CC in September 1962.¹³¹

¹²⁵ Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 239-41; Li, "Ideological Dilemma: Mao's China and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1962-63," 396.

¹²⁶ Wei, "党的八届十中全会 (the 10th Plenum of the 8th Central Committee of the Party) ," 150-55.

¹²⁷ Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 239-41; Li, "Ideological Dilemma: Mao's China and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1962-63," 396.

¹²⁸ Wei, "党的八届十中全会 (the 10th Plenum of the 8th Central Committee of the Party) ," 150-55.

¹²⁹ Xu, *王稼祥传(Biography of Wang Jiaxiang)*, 365-71.

¹³⁰ Jisen Ma, *The Cultural Revolution in the Foreign Ministry of China* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2004), 152.

¹³¹ Xu, *王稼祥传(Biography of Wang Jiaxiang)*, 365-71.

These criticisms were used as an excuse to go against the moderates, who were branded as class enemies because they downplayed the achievements of the CCP and joined the anti-China block that spread its tentacles around and into the PRC.¹³² Indeed, Mao Zedong labelled Liu Shaoqi and other moderates as “Chinese revisionists.”¹³³ Liu Shaoqi was compelled to make self-criticism at the Tenth Plenum in September 1962.¹³⁴ On 29 September 1962, China announced its new foreign policy direction. It argued that there is a cutthroat international class struggle in the international system and China would resolutely oppose revisionism in foreign parties.¹³⁵

The mobilizing effects of Mao’s comeback can be seen from local documentation aimed at studying the 10th Plenum of the 8th CC in September 1962. A report from Chengdu emphasized two things. First, the economy was getting better every day, showing that the detrimental effect of the Great Leap Forward was waning. Second, the class struggle was present in the international and domestic spheres. Internationally, it meant the fight against imperialism, while domestically it meant the struggle against the capitalist class.¹³⁶ This shows that Mao’s plan worked: the cadre shifted its focus from economic issues and doubled down on class struggle, both domestically and externally.

3.4. China’s “self-defensive counterattack war” against India

The above sections aimed to paint the “big picture” of Chinese foreign and domestic policy during the run-up to the Sino-Indian border war of 1962. Externally, China was under pressure from the US and Soviet Union. Domestically, Mao was losing ground to the moderates. In what follows, I explain how the Sino-Indian border crisis unfolded against the backdrop of these trends.

¹³² Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 239-41.

¹³³ Quoted in Niu, "1962: The Eve of the Left Turn in China’s Foreign Policy," 33.

¹³⁴ Li, "Ideological Dilemma: Mao's China and the Sino-Soviet Split, 1962–63," 397.

¹³⁵ Dai, "印度外交政策，大国关系与 1962 年中印边界冲突 (Indian Foreign Policy, Great Power Politics and the 1962 Sino-Indian Border Conflict) ," 503-13.

¹³⁶ Chengdu Archives, no. 95-5-565: “学习简报 (Study Report, 27 November, 1962) ” pp. 17-19, 38.

3.4.1. 1950-1958: China's "liberation" of Tibet and the Aksai Chin highway

The pre-war contention between China and India started with a debate over a region sandwiched between these two giants: Tibet. CCP leaders found it imperative to extend control over Tibet for four reasons. First, they concluded that China's longstanding weak control over Tibet allowed foreign empires to take away Chinese territory. Therefore, incorporating Tibet was necessary to rectify past mistakes and maintain territorial integrity. Second, in the absence of robust PRC control over Tibet, foreign powers could use the region as a springboard for offensives against China.¹³⁷ The official PRC narrative asserted that the aim of the military entry was to eradicate the influence of imperialism and the Kuomintang in Tibet.¹³⁸ On 25 October, 1950, the Xinhua ran an article claiming that the purpose of the liberation was to prevent an imperialist invasion of China and to develop the PRC's boundary regions.¹³⁹ Third, Tibet was rich in mineral resources that would aid China's economic development. Finally, the vast territory of the region could alleviate the lateral pressure created by the vast Chinese population in the core of China.¹⁴⁰ Against this backdrop, the PLA was instructed to "liberate" Tibet in 1950.

The PLA's entry into Tibet went straight against Indian preferences. While New Delhi freed itself from the shackles of imperialism in 1947, it strove to maintain British India's Tibet policy of keeping the region as a buffer and accepting Chinese suzerainty over it. New Delhi took a symbolic step to enhance Tibet's status in the international system by inviting it to the 1947 Asian Relations Conference where the other participants were state representatives. Furthermore, India sent a set of diplomatic notes to China while it was "liberating" Tibet, in an effort of convincing Beijing to halt its military moves.¹⁴¹ On 21 October 1950, Indian ambassador to China K. M. Panikkar handed over a memorandum to Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Hanfu. The note said that the PRC should not take military action against Tibet for two reasons. First, there was no armed resistance from Tibet. Second, such action had a negative influence on China's efforts of getting a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. Zhang Hanfu refuted the appeal and pointed

¹³⁷ John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2001), 34-37.

¹³⁸ Central Literature Research Office of the CPC and CPC Tibet Autonomous Region Committee, eds., *西藏工作文献选编 (Selected Works on Tibet)* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2005), 37.

¹³⁹ Dalvi, *Himalayan Blunder: The Curtain-Raiser to the Sino-Indian War of 1962*, 8.

¹⁴⁰ Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century*, 34-37.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 43-46.

out that there was no relationship between UN and Tibet issues. On 26 October 1950, Indian Foreign Secretary K.P.S. Menon met with Chinese Ambassador to India Shen Jian and said that India felt remorse about the PLA's actions in Tibet. Shen Jian responded that Indian papers called China's actions as invasion. According to China, this was a misnomer because Tibet already constituted Chinese territory.¹⁴²

China saw Indian actions as interference with Chinese domestic affairs, ignored Indian appeals and proceeded to establish greater control over Tibet. The PLA presence in Tibet triggered national security concerns in India which called for a redirection of its engagement with China. India's approach to Tibet was to establish good ties with China to nullify threats emanating from the new neighbour.¹⁴³ A representative measure in this approach was the signing of the "Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet region of China and India" in 1954. The agreement relinquished Indian privileges with Tibet, implicitly recognized China's sovereignty over the region and established the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (Panchsheel).¹⁴⁴

In order to keep Tibet in check, China needed roads to transport personnel and equipment to the region. As the PLA made its entry into Tibet in the early 1950s, the region did not have any roads that could be used by vehicles. Therefore, the task of the PLA was not only to "liberate" Tibet but also to build roads along the way. The Qinghai road opened in late 1950, while the Sichuan road started operation in the end of 1954.¹⁴⁵ A third route to Tibet was through Xinjiang. It started off as a mule track in 1952, the existence of which was reported to the Indians in 1954. Nevertheless, at that time India ignored the road as it was unsure if it was in Indian territory.¹⁴⁶ Subsequently, the road was upgraded and the Xinjiang-Tibet highway opened in 1957 and it became one of the most crucial components of China's rule over Tibet.¹⁴⁷ The official Indian

¹⁴² CPC Tibet Autonomous Region Committee Central Literature Research Office of the CPC and China Tibetology Research Center, eds., *毛泽东西藏工作文选 (Mao Zedong's Selected Works on Tibet)* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2008), 33-34.

¹⁴³ National Archives of India, PP(JS)3(9)/75: "R. K. Nehru: Our China Policy—A personal assessment (30 July, 1968)" in "Sino-Indian matters, Part II." p. 81.

¹⁴⁴ Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century*, 46-51.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 80-86.

¹⁴⁶ National Archives of India, no. 19(11)WT-60: "Annual Report of trade agent of Gartok on his tour in Western Tibet 1959", pp. 26-27.

¹⁴⁷ Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century*, 84-86.

history of the conflict identifies this move as a critical juncture in China-India ties, as this signalled that China extended its reach over the territory east of the Aksai Chin highway.¹⁴⁸

India learned of the official opening of the Aksai Chin highway via its ambassador to China, after Beijing announced it in the press. Before voicing its concern to China, India sought to clarify the exact route of the highway by sending an army and a police unit to investigate.¹⁴⁹ According to the Chinese narrative, the Indian troops set up a range of markers in the process of their mission and demolished the Chinese outpost at an area called the Observation Point (Tianwendian, 天文点) to strengthen their territorial claims. Chinese troops and border patrol captured fifteen Indian soldiers in Haji Langar (Aji Langan, 阿吉拦干) and Palangkapo (帕郎卡波).¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the police unit managed to complete the mission and confirmed that the Xinjiang-Tibet highway passes through a region that India perceives as its own territory.¹⁵¹ Subsequently, the Indian government sent a diplomatic note to China on 18 October 1958 which pointed out that the highway passes through a territory that is a part of India's Ladakh region. The Chinese official history identifies this note as the first formal expression of India's territorial claim.¹⁵² In what followed, the two sides exchanged a set of diplomatic notes, bringing the so-far tacit contention to the surface. In short, the Chinese government's ambiguity in the 1950s led Indian leaders believe that there was no border dispute at hand. The Chinese, however, considered the issue to be an unsettled question and argued that the two sides should delineate the border after surveys and negotiations. India, however, remained adamant about its claims, arguing that those were supported by geography, tradition and international accords.¹⁵³

In other words, the two sides completed the occupation of two pieces of ownerless land. In the eastern sector, India pushed up its control until the McMahon line, named the region the Northeast Frontier Agency (NEFA) and put it under the administration of the Indian Frontier

¹⁴⁸ P. B. Sinha and A. A. Athale, *History of the Conflict with China* (New Delhi: History Division, Ministry of Defence, Government of India (restricted), 1992), 27-28.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁵⁰ 中印边疆自卫反击作战史写组, *中印边疆自卫反击作战史* (*History of the Sino-India Border Self-Defensive War*) (Beijing: 军事科学出版社 (Military Science Publishing House) , 1994), 39.

¹⁵¹ Sinha and Athale, *History of the Conflict with China*, 28.

¹⁵² 中印边疆自卫反击作战史写组, *中印边疆自卫反击作战史* (*History of the Sino-India Border Self-Defensive War*) , 39.

¹⁵³ Sinha and Athale, *History of the Conflict with China*, 24-30.

Service. In the western sector, China constructed a highway on a former caravan road which went through Aksai Chin and treated it as a crucial strategic asset in its control over Tibet.¹⁵⁴

Available documentation suggests that this episode led to a realization in both sides that the other has a different perception of the alignment of the border. As we will see from the discussion below, this issue became acute when the 1959 Tibetan revolt necessitated a large-scale PLA deployment to the region. Ambiguity about the exact location of the border led to small scale clashes at first and a subsequent push for a peaceful settlement.

3.4.2. 1959-1960: Tibet revolt, Longju and Kongka-Pass clashes, negotiations

The CCP did not exercise full control over Tibet right away. It only took charge of external and commercial affairs directly, while administrative officials could keep their positions, even if they formerly leaned close to the imperialists and the KMT.¹⁵⁵ Despite these accommodative measures, the CCP faced difficulties in maintaining its grip over the region due to logistical, cultural, and administrative challenges. Political reforms implemented by the CCP led to resistance among ethnic Tibetans located in provinces in the proximity of Tibet.¹⁵⁶

In July 1958, local officials Zhang Jingwu and Zhang Guohua met with the Dalai Lama and told him that reactionaries were planning a large-scale rebellion in Tibet. Their intel was correct. From December 1958, Tibetan officials organized several meetings which were nominally aimed at preparations for the pacification of sentiments but were fostering the unrest. The revolt blew up in March 1959 when the Dalai Lama was invited to see a cultural event in the Tibetan Military command of the PLA. His followers prevented him from attending because they thought that the central government was planning to kidnap the Dalai Lama.¹⁵⁷ The revolt involved thousands of

¹⁵⁴ Maxwell, *India's China War*, 89.

¹⁵⁵ Central Literature Research Office of the CPC and China Tibetology Research Center, *毛泽东西藏工作文选 (Mao Zedong's Selected Works on Tibet)*, 44.

¹⁵⁶ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 75-77.

¹⁵⁷ Editors of "Contemporary China" book series, ed. *当代中国的西藏 (the Tibet of Contemporary China)* (Beijing: Contemporary China Press, 1991), 244, 49-55.

antagonists who managed to obtain control over a considerable proportion of Tibet.¹⁵⁸ The central could not prevent the flight of the Dalai Lama to India on 17 March, 1959.¹⁵⁹

On 17 March, Liu Shaoqi chaired a Politburo meeting discussing the Tibet unrest. He and Deng Xiaoping said that since the liberation of Tibet, the central government delayed the implementation of reforms there, giving time for the upper segments of society to adjust to the new situation. However, the unrest showed that sweeping reforms could not be postponed any longer. The central leadership's plan was to settle the unrest first and then implement fundamental reforms in the region.¹⁶⁰

Between 25 March and 5 April 1959, Mao chaired two meetings among top Chinese leaders: an expanded Politburo meeting and the 7th Plenary Session of the 8th Central Committee. During these meetings, the leadership agreed to pacify the rebellion, but they did not aim to oppress the Dalai Lama. On 6 May, Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and Chen Yi met with representatives from eleven socialist countries. Mao Zedong aimed to use the Tibet issue as an example for the people of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The lesson he sought to deliver was that China was not afraid of confronting its enemies. He also thought that the Tibet unrest would be beneficial to China in the long term. Just like the socialist camp became stronger after the 1956 Hungarian revolution, Chinese socialism would become stronger after pacifying the Tibet unrest.¹⁶¹

Certain aspects of Indian behaviour during the Tibetan uprising bothered China. First, almost immediately after the outbreak of the March 1959 rebellion, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru staked his country's claim to disputed territories. In a 22 March 1959 letter to Zhou Enlai, Nehru asserted that the majority of the Sino-Indian border was delineated by treaties signed by the two states' governments while the minority of it was determined by the watershed principle. He cited three treaties that determined the alignment of the border in the central (1890), western (1847), and eastern (1913-1914) sectors, and claimed territories according to those agreements.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ M. Taylor Fravel, "Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation," *International Security* 30, no. 2 (2005): 64-66.

¹⁵⁹ Tsering Topgyal, "Charting the Tibet Issue in the Sino-Indian Border Dispute," *China Report* 47, no. 2 (2011): 122.

¹⁶⁰ Xuan, *解密外交档案——1949至1960年的中国外交* (*Declassified Diplomatic Archives: Chinese Diplomacy from 1949 to 1960*), 301.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 302-09.

¹⁶² "尼赫鲁总理给周恩来总理的信 (1959年3月22日) (Prime Minister Nehru's Letter to Premier Zhou Enlai (22 March 1959))," in *中印边界问题* (*China-India Border Dispute*) (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 1959), 34-37.

Second, Chinese leaders were convinced of the Indian factor in the upheaval. On 17 March, Zhou Enlai pointed out that the rebellion was linked to India and the command centre of rebels were in India's Kalimpong.¹⁶³ Deng argued that the Indian approach to the issue was unjust and China would settle the account with it later. On 25 April 1959, Mao ordered Hu Qiaomu, Peng Zhen and Wu Lengxi to directly criticize India for its purported role in the unrest.¹⁶⁴

Third, India restricted trade with Tibet from April 1959, putting pressure on the Tibetan economy. At the same time, India gave political asylum to the Dalai Lama. The confluence of these factors led Chinese statesmen believe that India wanted to keep Tibet as a buffer between China and itself.¹⁶⁵

After the rebellion, the CCP established direct control over Tibet¹⁶⁶ and set out to improve its military capabilities there. They transported military supplies and aimed to further improve their communications by extending their transport routes from Gartok to Taklakot, Gargunsa to Demchok, Gartok to Hoti and Gartok to Shipke, among others. These communication plans were accompanied by increased troop numbers in the area. In Gargunsa, troop numbers rose from 500 to 3000 and in Taklakot from 200 to 2000. Most of these troop deployments concentrated in the Western sector. According to an Indian report from the time, these preparations could not be justified simply by the pacification campaign: China had expansionist aims in mind.¹⁶⁷ At the same time, China also built up its forces and communications in the Central Sector. An Indian report from October 1960 asserts that the number of Chinese troops in Shigatse was around 15000, while this number in Tangkarfu was around 13000. At the same time, China built road between Rham and Kyiro in the vicinity of the Sikkim-Tibet border. Furthermore, the number of Chinese troops in the vicinity of the China-Bhutan border was between 6000-7000.¹⁶⁸

One of the earliest Sino-Indian border incidents occurred at Khinzemane in the eastern sector on 7 August 1959. According to the Indian account, 200 Chinese troops confronted a dozen Indians and pushed them toward the Drokung Samba bridge (*Zhongkunjiao*, 仲昆桥) which is located to

¹⁶³ Xuan, *解密外交档案——1949至1960年的中国外交* (*Declassified Diplomatic Archives: Chinese Diplomacy from 1949 to 1960*), 301.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 302-09.

¹⁶⁵ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 78-82.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁶⁷ National Archives of India, no. 19(11)WT-60: "Political Situation in Western Tibet" in "Annual Report of trade agent of Gartok on his tour in Western Tibet 1959" p. 29.

¹⁶⁸ National Archives of India, no. 11-60-S: "Telegrams from Indian Trade Agency in Yadong (November 1960)", in "Special report: Indian trade agency Yatung, Tibet" pp. 71-72, 78.

the south of Khinzemane. As the Chinese withdrew, the Indian troops went back toward Khinzemane and set up a picket. A Chinese unit appeared again and requested the Indian troops to pull out of the area. As the Indian troops persisted, the Chinese soldiers made an attempt to outflank them. As their effort failed, the Chinese withdrew once more.¹⁶⁹

Against the backdrop of increasing tensions, Chinese and Indian forces confronted each other for the first time on 25 August 1959 at Longju (Langjiu, 朗久) in the eastern sector.¹⁷⁰ The Assam Rifles established an outpost at this village to handle the inflow of refugees after the Dalai Lama's flight to India. China accused India with transgression and the occupation of PRC territory, a claim that was rebutted by New Delhi.¹⁷¹ In August, a PLA company from the Lhoka (Shannan, 山南) military sub-district went to Migyitun (Majidun, 马及墩) and Jelep (Yaliepu, 雅列普) to carry out "community work" (qunzhong gongzuo, 群众工作). When the forward troops arrived at Jingudi (金古底), a firefight occurred. The confrontation lasted for a day and ended with 2 dead on the Indian side. After the clash, the Indian troops left the outpost and the Chinese occupied it until 29 July 1960, when they withdrew to defend Zhuangnan (庄南) and Migyitun.¹⁷² After the Langjiu clash, the Chinese embassy in India prepared a report on the Indian discourse of the border dispute. The report discussed reports of Indian officials and media outlets on the McMahon Line, the Ladakh border as well as Sikkim and Bhutan. The report concluded that the media outlets of the capitalist class (The Statesman, Hindustan Times, Times of India) wanted to use the border dispute and the "Chinese Communist Threat" to push Nehru into abandoning the policy of non-alignment.¹⁷³

After the clash, Zhou Enlai argued in a letter to Nehru that the Sino-Indian border had not been delineated and China did not recognize the McMahon Line. Nevertheless, China withdrew behind the line for the sake of maintaining stability on the border. Three days later, Zhou delivered a report at the Sixth Plenary Session of the Expanded Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. He argued that the Indian government was trying to put pressure on China to hand over

¹⁶⁹ Dalvi, *Himalayan Blunder: The Curtain-Raiser to the Sino-Indian War of 1962*, 39.

¹⁷⁰ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 82-83.

¹⁷¹ Sinha and Athale, *History of the Conflict with China*, 33, 259-60.

¹⁷² 中印边疆自卫反击作战史写组, *中印边疆自卫反击作战史 (History of the Sino-India Border Self-Defensive War)*, 47.

¹⁷³ Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, no. 105-00944-03: "最近印度有关中印边界问题和锡金、不丹问题的一些提法" (Recent Indian formulations about the border dispute, Sikkim and Bhutan, 10 September 1959), p. 72.

the disputed territories. China was not going to give into the pressure. It aimed to solve the issue through peaceful methods, in accordance with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.¹⁷⁴

The second armed confrontation occurred shortly after the first, on 21 October, at the Kongka Pass (Kongka Shankou, 空喀山口) in the western sector. A Chinese patrol of thirteen encountered more than sixty Indians,¹⁷⁵ namely the police patrol of Havildar Karam Singh.¹⁷⁶ The Indians attempted to encircle the Chinese unit and opened fire on them. The Chinese fought back, leading to six-hour clash that led to the death of nine Indian and one Chinese soldiers.¹⁷⁷

In November 1959, shortly after the Kongka Pass clashes, India moved the 4th Infantry Division to the northeast to boost defences in the eastern and central sectors of the disputed border. The division set up its headquarters in Tezpur. The 11th Infantry Brigade moved to Sikkim in the central sector and the 7th Brigade was deployed to Kameng division in the eastern sector. The 5th Brigade went to the eastern sector as well, to the Subansiri, Siang and Lohit frontier divisions.¹⁷⁸ In the western sector, Indian forces were thin. In late 1959, India had two irregular battalions—Jammu and Kashmir Militia—deployed to the region.¹⁷⁹

During this period, India's approach to the border was aimed at defusing tensions. The eastern sector was predominantly under Indian control, hence New Delhi strove to preserve the status quo and to refrain from actions that could upset China. When the 4th Division moved to the region, troops were instructed to maintain 3 kilometres of distance from the McMahon Line. In the central sector, both sides mostly followed the watershed principle. Aksai Chin in the Western sector was under Chinese control until the Kongka Pass and Fort Kurnak. In September 1959, Nehru admitted that India had to accept the fact of Chinese control over the sector and the highway passing through it.¹⁸⁰

Against the backdrop of increasing tensions, Zhou Enlai visited New Delhi in April 1960 to seek a negotiated solution of the dispute. During the negotiations, both sides explained their

¹⁷⁴ Xuan, *解密外交档案——1949至1960年的中国外交* (*Declassified Diplomatic Archives: Chinese Diplomacy from 1949 to 1960*), 311, 14.

¹⁷⁵ 中印边疆自卫反击作战史写组, *中印边疆自卫反击作战史* (*History of the Sino-India Border Self-Defensive War*), 49.

¹⁷⁶ Dalvi, *Himalayan Blunder: The Curtain-Raiser to the Sino-Indian War of 1962*, 46.

¹⁷⁷ 中印边疆自卫反击作战史写组, *中印边疆自卫反击作战史* (*History of the Sino-India Border Self-Defensive War*), 49.

¹⁷⁸ D. K. Palit, *War in High Himalaya: The Indian Army in Crisis, 1962* (London: Hurst, 1991), 47-48.

¹⁷⁹ Maxwell, *India's China War*, 200-05, 35-36.

¹⁸⁰ Palit, *War in High Himalaya: The Indian Army in Crisis, 1962*, 91.

perspectives on the issue. On simple terms, the two sides agreed that the border was not demarcated on the ground. What they differed on was the principles based on which the border was defined.¹⁸¹ The Indian side insisted that the Sino-Indian boundary in the eastern sector was determined by the Simla Convention and the McMahon line.¹⁸² The Chinese side argued that there were two lines in the eastern sector: the customary boundary and the McMahon line. The McMahon line was to the north of the customary boundary. Between these two lines, there was a region inhabited by tribes. China claimed that its territory extended to the customary border, meaning that it went beyond the McMahon line.¹⁸³ The Chinese side argued that the McMahon line was illegal as it was established through secret notes, without the formal consent of the Chinese Central Government. No previous central Chinese government had recognized it before, so the PRC had no reason to divert from this practice.¹⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the PRC committed to not to cross the McMahon line to avoid armed clashes.¹⁸⁵

In the Western sector, the Indians based their claim on an 1842 treaty. China, however, argued that this treaty did not delineate the border, it only promoted friendship and peace between the contracting parties.¹⁸⁶ From the Chinese perspective, there was never a dispute in the western sector—it arose only in the second half of the 1950s.¹⁸⁷ Their claim extended to a customary border again, just as in the eastern sector.¹⁸⁸ Nehru, on the other hand, claimed that although the Chinese

¹⁸¹ “Record of Talks between PM [Jawaharlal Nehru] and Premier Chou En Lai [Zhou Enlai] held on 21st April, 1960 from 4 p.m. to 6.30 p.m.,” April 21, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, P.N. Haksar Papers (I-II Installment), Subject File no. 24, pp. 29-39.

¹⁸² “Record of the Talks between PM [Jawaharlal Nehru] and Premier Chou [Zhou Enlai] held on 20th April, 1960, from 5 p.m. 7 p.m. at the Prime Minister's Residence,” April 20, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, P.N. Haksar Papers (I- II Installment), Subject File no. 24, pp. 17-26.

¹⁸³ “Record of Talks between P.M. [Jawaharlal Nehru] and Premier Chou En Lai [Zhou Enlai] held on 22nd April, 1960 from 10 A.M. to 1.10 P.M.,” April 22, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, P.N. Haksar Papers (I-II Installment), Subject File no. 24, pp. 40-49.

¹⁸⁴ “Notes on the Conversation held between Sardar Swaran Singh and Marshal Chen Yi,” April 22, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, P.N. Haksar Papers (I-II Installment), Subject File no. 26, pp. 107-108.

¹⁸⁵ “Record of the Talks between PM [Jawaharlal Nehru] and Premier Chou [Zhou Enlai] held on 20th April, 1960, from 5 p.m. 7 p.m. at the Prime Minister's Residence,” April 20, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, P.N. Haksar Papers (I- II Installment), Subject File no. 24, pp. 17-26.

¹⁸⁶ “Record of the Talks between PM [Jawaharlal Nehru] and Premier Chou [Zhou Enlai] held on 20th April, 1960, from 5 p.m. 7 p.m. at the Prime Minister's Residence,” April 20, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, P.N. Haksar Papers (I- II Installment), Subject File no. 24, pp. 17-26.

¹⁸⁷ “Record of Talks between PM [Jawaharlal Nehru] and Premier Chou En Lai [Zhou Enlai] held on 21st April, 1960 from 4 p.m. to 6.30 p.m.,” April 21, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, P.N. Haksar Papers (I-II Installment), Subject File no. 24, pp. 29-39.

¹⁸⁸ “Record of Talks between P.M. [Jawaharlal Nehru] and Premier Chou En Lai [Zhou Enlai] held on 22nd April, 1960 from 10 A.M. to 1.10 P.M.,” April 22, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, P.N. Haksar Papers (I-II Installment), Subject File no. 24, pp. 40-49.

side did not exert control over the area because Indian troops patrolled there without encountering Chinese troops.¹⁸⁹ At the same time, China admitted that there were disputed territories in the central sector at 10 places.¹⁹⁰

Beijing's approach to the solution was to maintain the status quo, meaning the state of affairs after the two countries' independence.¹⁹¹ China claimed that there was a line of actual control in the disputed region, namely the line reached by the administrative and border defence personnel of the respective states.¹⁹² The aim was to maintain these lines of control until the dispute gets settled.¹⁹³ These lines of actual control were to be the basis for the settlement instead of the Simla Agreement and the McMahon line. The Indian side had a different perspective on it. They thought that past agreements had to be observed, regardless of the new governments on both sides.¹⁹⁴

Toward the end of the talks, the Chinese side drew the following conclusions. First, the Indian side failed to understand that China could not recognize the McMahon Line and the Simla Agreement. Second, they also failed to understand that China considered the pre-PRC agreements as null and void. Chinese representatives treated the insistence on the McMahon Line-Simla Convention as an insult. Chen Yi also mentioned that one of the Indian representatives (Desai) claimed that the Sino-Indian dispute was not left over by history but created by China since 1957. This attitude left Chinese believe that India wants to enforce the McMahon Line on them.¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁹ "Record of Talks between PM [Jawaharlal Nehru] and Premier Chou En Lai [Zhou Enlai] held on 21st April, 1960 from 4 p.m. to 6.30 p.m.," April 21, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, P.N. Haksar Papers (I-II Installment), Subject File no. 24, pp. 29-39.

¹⁹⁰ "Record of the Talks between PM [Jawaharlal Nehru] and Premier Chou [Zhou Enlai] held on 20th April, 1960, from 5 p.m. 7 p.m. at the Prime Minister's Residence," April 20, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, P.N. Haksar Papers (I- II Installment), Subject File no. 24, pp. 17-26.

¹⁹¹ "Record of the Talks between PM [Jawaharlal Nehru] and Premier Chou [Zhou Enlai] held on 20th April, 1960, from 5 p.m. 7 p.m. at the Prime Minister's Residence," April 20, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, P.N. Haksar Papers (I- II Installment), Subject File no. 24, pp. 17-26.

¹⁹² "Record of Talks between P.M. [Jawaharlal Nehru] and Premier Chou En Lai [Zhou Enlai] held on 22nd April, 1960 from 10 A.M. to 1.10 P.M.," April 22, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, P.N. Haksar Papers (I-II Installment), Subject File no. 24, pp. 40-49.

¹⁹³ "Record of Talks between P.M. [Jawaharlal Nehru] and Premier Chou En Lai [Zhou Enlai] held on 22nd April, 1960 from 10 A.M. to 1.10 P.M.," April 22, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, P.N. Haksar Papers (I-II Installment), Subject File no. 24, pp. 40-49.

¹⁹⁴ "Notes on the Conversation held between Sardar Swaran Singh and Marshal Chen Yi," April 22, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, P.N. Haksar Papers (I-II Installment), Subject File no. 26, pp. 107-108.

¹⁹⁵ "Notes on Conversation held between Sardar Swaran Singh and Marshal Chen Yi on 23rd April, 1960, at Agra," April 23, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, P.N. Haksar Papers (I-II Installment), Subject File no. 26, pp. 133-142.

Furthermore, Chinese leaders were troubled by Tibetan political activity in India. They were not bothered by the fact that India gave a political asylum to the Dalai Lama. What concerned them was that the Dalai Lama conducted anti-PRC movements and promoted the idea of Tibetan independence. Another aspect that was problematic for China was that India pushed for its territorial claims during the Tibet uprising.¹⁹⁶

Against this backdrop, the talks failed. As Nehru explained, there was “no approach, not even a distant one, towards solution”. The only agreement the two sides reached was to let bureaucrats go over the two sides’ documentation. However, these officials had no mandate to formally solve the border dispute by signing an agreement. After the talks, Zhou held a press conference and proposed six points on which the two sides should agree, but India was reluctant to do so. These six points were the following. First, the acknowledgment of the dispute. Second, the recognition that there was a dividing line of military control between the two sides in the border territory. Third, in the process of solving the dispute, the two sides should rely on geographical principles: watersheds, river valleys and mountain passes. Fourth, the solution of the dispute was to keep in mind the national sentiments of the people in the Himalayas and Karakoram mountains. Fifth, the Chinese called for the abandonment of preconditions. Finally, patrolling was to be stopped until the solution. According to Nehru’s speech in the Lok Sabha on 26 April 1960, the Indians either disagreed with or did not understand these points.¹⁹⁷

3.4.3. 1961 – 1962: Indian Forward Policy, Chinese response

In September 1961, an Indian intelligence report proclaimed that China gained the upper hand in the border dispute. Between June 1959 and September 1961 China established 21 new outposts in the western sector. At the same time, the establishment of these positions entailed the occupation of 4,600 square kilometres of land that India saw as its own. India, on the other hand, had 27 outposts in the western sector. Furthermore, the report argued that China was also boosting its military presence in the eastern sector by building 25 new positions between June 1959 and

¹⁹⁶ “Record of Conversation between R.K. Nehru and Zhou Enlai,” April 21, 1960, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, P.N. Haksar Papers (I-II Installment), Subject File #26, pp. 116-118.

¹⁹⁷ Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, Nehru’s letter to the Prime Minister of Nepal dated 27 April 1960 and Nehru speech in Lok Sabha dated 26 April 1960, in the Jawaharlal Nehru Papers, correspondence no. 703, pp. 142-147, 175.

September 1961. Finally, the report pointed out that 9,000 square kilometres of territory in the western sector was unoccupied and China could expand its control over it.¹⁹⁸

On 2 November, 1961, Nehru and a set of national security advisers had an exchange of minds on how to adapt to the situation. Among others, the participants included Prime Minister Nehru, the Defence Minister V. K. Krishna Menon, the Chief of the Army Staff R. N. Thapar, the Foreign Secretary M. J. Desai, Joint Secretary Defence Harish Sarin, Director of Intelligence Bureau B. N. Mullik and Director of Military Operations D. K. Palit. The meeting started with Menon's brief that pointed to a newly established Chinese outpost in the Chip Chap Valley in the western sector. He argued that the new outpost signals an organized trend of Chinese expansion westwards into Indian territory.¹⁹⁹ Nehru was concerned that control over territory practically meant legal ownership of it. Hence, India felt compelled to hinder China's advances and expand its own control over disputed land.²⁰⁰ Mullik proposed that if India built up physical presence in the Western sector, China would not dare to challenge it. The worst-case scenario was a potential clash when two patrols encountered each other.²⁰¹ Nehru issued instructions that later became known as the "Forward Policy". In the western sector, the army was told to advance its patrol to the furthest possible distance toward the "international border". Their task was to construct positions that hindered Chinese advances. In the remaining sectors, the task was to occupy the whole boundary region.²⁰²

The Indian army was incapable of logistically supporting these outposts. Nevertheless, the Indian leadership decided to go ahead with the plan, building on the assumption that China was not going to fight a war over this issue, especially when it was weak due to the economic crisis and the disturbance in Tibet.²⁰³

The initial push of the Forward Policy came in February 1962 in the eastern sector, as the paramilitary force of the Assam Rifles set up four new outposts in the vicinity of Tawang—two of which were located on the Chinese side of the 1914 McMahon line. Between February and July,

¹⁹⁸ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 177.

¹⁹⁹ D. K. Palit, *War in High Himalaya: The Indian Army in Crisis, 1962* (London: Hurst & Company, 1991), 105-07.

²⁰⁰ B. M. Kaul, *The Untold Story* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1967), 280, 339.

²⁰¹ Palit, *War in High Himalaya: The Indian Army in Crisis, 1962*, 105-07.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Kaul, *The Untold Story*, 280, 339.

India constructed 34 additional posts in the eastern sector, making the aggregate number of outposts there 56.²⁰⁴

India also increased its troop deployments in the area. According to the Chinese official account, the number of Indian troops in the eastern sector reached 22000 by mid-October 1962.²⁰⁵ The Indian side suggests a much lower number. According to Shiv Kunal Verma's 2016 account of the war, there were roughly 9 battalions deployed to the eastern sector with additional 8 companies and Assam Rifles platoons. Based on these numbers, the number of Indian troops in the eastern sector were roughly 8000.²⁰⁶

Due to bad weather, India's push in the western sector started somewhat later, in March 1962. Indian efforts to expand control over territory concentrated on the Chip Chap Valley and the Galwan Valley. India expanded its control over 3,000 square kilometres of land which China claimed to be its own.²⁰⁷ By October 1962, India established 77 military outposts in the western sector, with 43 of them in Chinese claimed territory. India also increased the number of troops in the western sector. According to the Chinese side, by late September 1962, Indian troop numbers reached 5600.²⁰⁸ Again, the Indian side gives a lower number. It claims that India had approximately one brigade group—comprised of four battalions—deployed to Ladakh. Those were the 14 and 7 J & K Militia, 1/8 Gorkha rifles and 5 Jat.²⁰⁹ That gives us a lower number than the Chinese side suggest, roughly 3200 troops.²¹⁰

The disposition of troops and outposts was a source of concern for China. India dispatched troops to territories in which China previously halted patrols as a de-escalatory measure. Furthermore, the new Indian outposts were positioned to dominate their Chinese counterparts.²¹¹

China's response was built on solid intelligence obtained from Tibetan informants. They built forward dumps in the disputed areas—Le, Tsona Dzong and Marmang. They also built a road to Marmang close to the Thag La ridge from where they initiated the 20 October offensive. They also

²⁰⁴ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 180.

²⁰⁵ 中印边疆自卫反击作战史写组, *中印边疆自卫反击作战史 (History of the Sino-India Border Self-Defensive War)*, 81.

²⁰⁶ Shiv Kunal Verma, *1962 : The War That Wasn't* (New Delhi: Aleph, 2016), 138, 90, 227.

²⁰⁷ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 176-78.

²⁰⁸ 中印边疆自卫反击作战史写组, *中印边疆自卫反击作战史 (History of the Sino-India Border Self-Defensive War)*, 106-07.

²⁰⁹ Sinha and Athale, *History of the Conflict with China*, 308, 27.

²¹⁰ According to Verma, one battalion was comprised of 700-800 troops at the time. Verma, *1962 : The War That Wasn't*, 37. Dalvi, *Himalayan Blunder: The Curtain-Raiser to the Sino-Indian War of 1962*, 123.

²¹¹ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 176-78.

set up prisoner of war camps and improved their infrastructure and communication in the disputed area.²¹²

China established 94 outposts in the disputed region, while India had 111 of them.²¹³ China had roughly 16000 troops dispatched to the whole of the disputed region.²¹⁴ The Indian side gives a higher aggregate number, roughly 20000.²¹⁵ Chinese sources claim that 10300 of their troops were deployed to the Eastern Sector.²¹⁶ The Indian side gives a higher number, 13000-14000.²¹⁷ According to Chinese sources, the number of Chinese troops dispatched to the western sector was 6300.²¹⁸ The Indian side gives us a higher number again, roughly 7200 troops.²¹⁹

The aforementioned discussion suggests that there is discrepancy in the exact number of troops on both sides depending on what sources we rely on. Indian accounts suggest that 20000 Chinese troops fought 11200 Indian troops in the first phase of the war. The Chinese side claims that 16000 Chinese troops fought 27600 Indian troops.

On 6 May 1962, Chinese troops started to test the ground. Approximately 100 Chinese soldiers approached an Indian outpost in Daulat Beg Oldi in the western sector. The staff at the post was gearing up for an attack as the Prime Minister ordered them to stand fast. In the end of the day, Chinese troops fell back without attacking the position.²²⁰

In July 1962, India established its presence in the Galwan Valley in the western sector when a 4/8 Gorkha Rifles platoon constructed an outpost there. Six days later, China had a battalion dispatched to the area and isolated the position from reinforcement and supply.²²¹ According to Dalvi's account, 300 Chinese soldiers confronted 40 Gorkhas on this occasion.²²² Chinese troops were as close as 100 meters to the Indian position. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs

²¹² Dalvi, *Himalayan Blunder: The Curtain-Raiser to the Sino-Indian War of 1962*, 152-54.

²¹³ Sinha and Athale, *History of the Conflict with China*, 70-74; 中印边疆自卫反击作战史写组, *中印边疆自卫反击作战史 (History of the Sino-India Border Self-Defensive War)*, 106-07.

²¹⁴ Feng Cheng and Larry M. Wortzel, "Pla Operational Principles and Limited War: The Sino-Indian War of 1962," in *Chinese Warfighting: The PLA Experience since 1949*, ed. Mark A. Ryan and David M. Finkelstein (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), 182-84.

²¹⁵ Verma, *1962 : The War That Wasn't*, 144, 326-28.

²¹⁶ 中印边疆自卫反击作战史写组, *中印边疆自卫反击作战史 (History of the Sino-India Border Self-Defensive War)*, 86, 88.

²¹⁷ Verma, *1962 : The War That Wasn't*, 144, 91, 99.

²¹⁸ 中印边疆自卫反击作战史写组, *中印边疆自卫反击作战史 (History of the Sino-India Border Self-Defensive War)*, 86, 88.

²¹⁹ Verma, *1962 : The War That Wasn't*, 326-28.

²²⁰ Palit, *War in High Himalaya : The Indian Army in Crisis, 1962*, 177.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 178-79.

²²² Dalvi, *Himalayan Blunder: The Curtain-Raiser to the Sino-Indian War of 1962*, 150.

cautioned the Chinese Ambassador that further moves could elicit fire from Indian troops. The threat possibly worked because Chinese troops withdrew from the area.²²³

Subsequently, China established interlocking positions between Indian outposts and supply points. This move allowed China to assume the role of the victim because every time the Indians tried to reach the dropping zones or remove Chinese troops, they could be labelled as aggressors, giving a reason for China to open fire.²²⁴ Subsequently, a shooting fight occurred in the Chip Chap Valley on 21 July, 1962 which signalled the first exchange of fire between the two sides since the Kongka Pass clash of 1959. The two sides accused each other with initiating the fight. The event was followed by a Chinese diplomatic protest which charged the Indians with invasion and disregard of Chinese initiatives of a negotiated settlement.²²⁵ In August 1962, Chinese and Indian forces clashed once more in the western sector, at the Pangong Lake. According to Dalvi, China established thirty more outposts, occupied more disputed territory and increased forward patrols after the incident.²²⁶

Tensions were less severe in the eastern and central sectors. In the east, Chinese troops were closing in on the McMahon line and had at least three divisions deployed there against India's two brigades there. In the central sector, India had one infantry brigade deployed against China's one division there.²²⁷

3.4.4. 1962 October – 1962 November: a “self-defensive counterattack war”

China fought its “self-defensive counterattack war” (*ziwei fanjizhan*, 自卫反击战) against India in two rounds of offensives with a pause between them. The fight was triggered at Dhola, an Indian post established in the westernmost corner of the eastern sector.²²⁸ This was a highly sensitive area to China, as both the August 1959 Longju clashes and the failure of the 1960 talks suggest that China did not accept India's position in the region.²²⁹ The Assam Rifles established an outpost

²²³ Palit, *War in High Himalaya : The Indian Army in Crisis, 1962*, 178-79.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 181.

²²⁵ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 68, 185-86.

²²⁶ Dalvi, *Himalayan Blunder: The Curtain-Raiser to the Sino-Indian War of 1962*, 149.

²²⁷ Palit, *War in High Himalaya: The Indian Army in Crisis, 1962*, 183-84.

²²⁸ Verma, *1962 : The War That Wasn't*, 56, 113.

²²⁹ Dalvi, *Himalayan Blunder: The Curtain-Raiser to the Sino-Indian War of 1962*, 133.

there in early June 1962.²³⁰ In China's view, the post was located within PRC territory. Chinese troops first requested the Assam rifles to abandon the post in the beginning of September 1962. On 8 September, Chinese troops turned up at the outpost again, this time 60 of them. Fearing an armed Chinese move, the Indian platoon commander exaggerated the number of the enemy and reported that 600 PLA troops were encircling the Indian position. Indian top policymakers decided to respond by removing Chinese forces from the area and initiated "Operation Leghorn" on 19 September. As Indian forces geared up for the task, tensions in the area soared.²³¹ On 20 September, a Chinese soldier threw a grenade at an Indian outpost, leading to a subsequent firefight between the two sides. Two Chinese troops died while India left the fight with 5 wounded. On 10 October, 800 Chinese troops attacked 50 Indians from the 9 Punjab. India lost 6 lives and 11 soldiers were wounded. The Chinese side announced 100 casualties without distinguishing dead from wounded.²³²

Chinese troops did not sit by idly. They started to infiltrate Indian lines on 18 October and initiated an attack on 20 October. Chinese forces dominated the area with 10 000 troops deployed there against India's 7th Brigade.²³³ According to Dalvi, the Chinese had 20 000 troops there against roughly 600 Indians.²³⁴

The Namka Chu fight marks the beginning of the China's first offensive against India, lasting until 27 October.²³⁵ After the Indian 7th Brigade was destroyed, Chinese troops moved toward southeast, reaching the vicinity of Tawang on 23 October. This force joined another one that came via Khinzemane. On 23 October, a third force approached Tawang through Bum La. Tawang as evacuated on the same day and Chinese troops occupied it on 25 October.²³⁶ China additionally occupied Qiangdeng, Kalong, Khinzemane and the Drokung Samba Bridge.²³⁷

In the western sector, operations were concentrated in the Chip Chap Valley, Galwan Valley, Panggong Lake and Demchok. There China destroyed 37 military outposts²³⁸ and regained control

²³⁰ Maxwell, *India's China War*, 295, 304.

²³¹ Dalvi, *Himalayan Blunder: The Curtain-Raiser to the Sino-Indian War of 1962*, 198.

²³² *Ibid.*, 219, 92.

²³³ Verma, *1962 : The War That Wasn't*, 118-21, 44, 55-56.

²³⁴ Dalvi, *Himalayan Blunder: The Curtain-Raiser to the Sino-Indian War of 1962*, 365-67.

²³⁵ Sinha and Athale, *History of the Conflict with China*, 315.

²³⁶ Maxwell, *India's China War*, 368-70.

²³⁷ 中印边疆自卫反击作战史写组, *中印边疆自卫反击作战史 (History of the Sino-India Border Self-Defensive War)*, 2.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

of 1900 square kilometres of disputed territory.²³⁹ There was no Chinese offensive in the central sector.²⁴⁰

On 24 October, China issued a declaration with three proposals for the settlement of the dispute. The first was to agree that the border dispute should be settled via peaceful means. Before amicable settlement, the two sides' troops were to withdraw 20 kilometres from the Line of Actual control in all the three sectors. Second, China committed to withdraw its troops to the north of the McMahon line in the Eastern sector. In the central and western sectors, China called for a guarantee that the two sides would not cross the line of actual control which was equal to the traditional boundary in these areas. Third, China said that the two Prime Ministers should meet once more to push for an amicable settlement of the dispute.²⁴¹

The pause between the two offensives lasted from 27 October to 18 November. During this time, Chinese officials frequently interacted with their Indonesian counterparts, asking them to convince India of accepting China's proposals.²⁴² For a short while, there was a slight change in India's approach. On 12 November 1962, Indonesian Foreign Minister Subandrio conveyed India's message to China according to which the Xinjiang-Tibet highway was located within Indian territory, Ladakh. Nevertheless, India was willing to make a compromise and "give" it to China. India also proposed that for the sake of Chinese national security, it was willing to hand over disputed territories to China on a lease-basis, even to the extent of 900 years.²⁴³ On 16 November, Subandrio conveyed another Indian message which said that given the strategic importance of the Western sector to China, India was willing to withdraw from it and this move could serve as a basis for negotiations. This could have also meant the basis for a swap deal: India gives the Western sector to China for the Eastern Sector. China, however, did not buy into vague prospects. The Chinese representative said that both sectors belonged to China and the Indian

²³⁹ Cheng and Wortzel, "Pla Operational Principles and Limited War: The Sino-Indian War of 1962," 186.

²⁴⁰ Sinha and Athale, *History of the Conflict with China*, 294.

²⁴¹ 中印边疆自卫反击作战史写组, *中印边疆自卫反击作战史 (History of the Sino-India Border Self-Defensive War)*, 119.

²⁴² Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, no. 105-10787-06: "约见苏班德里约谈中印边界问题" (Meeting with Subandrio on the Sino-Indian border dispute, 14 November, 1962), p. 81.

²⁴³ Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, no. 105-01787-06: "苏班德里约外长和李代办讨论中印边界问题" (Subandrio and Chinese Charge D'affairs Li discuss the Sino-Indian border dispute, 12 November, 1962), p. 74.

proposal was just a new move to expand its territory. China insisted on a ceasefire and withdrawal of troops first.²⁴⁴

Troop deployments did not stop during this time. In the eastern sector, China accumulated 2 divisions in Tawang and Walong.²⁴⁵ At the same time, China accumulated 3 battalions (approximately 2200 troops) in the Menchukha (梅楚卡), Limijin (里米金) and Doudeng (都登) area.²⁴⁶ Altogether, China had over 22000 combat troops deployed to the eastern sector.²⁴⁷

In the western sector, China had a regiment and a battalion in the Spanggur area. In the central sector, China deployed one infantry division and two regiments, artillery and mortars by November 1962.²⁴⁸

Indian forces saw a rapid boost between the two offensives. In the eastern sector, India inducted the 5th and 23rd infantry divisions under IV Corps. Furthermore, one brigade as well as a squadron of armour was dispatched to the area.²⁴⁹ India increased the number of its troops to thirty thousand, half of which was located in the Tawang-Tezpur section.²⁵⁰ In the Western Sector in Ladakh, forces increased from an infantry brigade to a whole division—the 3rd Himalayan division based in Leh (Liecheng, 列城). Two additional infantry brigades and three battalions were also inducted. Overall, troop numbers reached fifteen thousand. Most of these deployments were aimed at protecting Leh.²⁵¹ The Chinese official history claims that Indian troop numbers on the whole of the disputed border reached 50 thousand by mid-November, 30 thousand of them in the eastern sector.²⁵²

The final phase of the war took place between 18 November (in the eastern sector: 16 November) and 21 November. During these battles, China overtook Walong, Se La and Bomdi La in the eastern sector. In the western sector, Chinese operations focused on the Spanggur lake area

²⁴⁴ Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives no. 105-01787-06: “苏班德里约对中印边界问题提出两点建议” (Subandrio’s advice on the Sino-Indian border dispute, 24 November, 1962), pp. 85-86.

²⁴⁵ Sinha and Athale, *History of the Conflict with China*, 164, 315-16.

²⁴⁶ 中印边疆自卫反击作战史写组, *中印边疆自卫反击作战史 (History of the Sino-India Border Self-Defensive War)*, 151-53.

²⁴⁷ Verma, *1962: The War That Wasn't*, 259.

²⁴⁸ Sinha and Athale, *History of the Conflict with China*, 293, 333.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 373-74.

²⁵⁰ 中印边疆自卫反击作战史写组, *中印边疆自卫反击作战史 (History of the Sino-India Border Self-Defensive War)*, 124.

²⁵¹ Sinha and Athale, *History of the Conflict with China*, 332, 73-74.

²⁵² 中印边疆自卫反击作战史写组, *中印边疆自卫反击作战史 (History of the Sino-India Border Self-Defensive War)*, 124, 29.

and removed six Indian outposts from the region.²⁵³ The official Indian history estimates 2616 casualties on the Indian side, a number that includes dead and heavily wounded. The same source estimates “at least 1000” Chinese casualties.²⁵⁴ The Indian Defence Ministry published slightly different numbers for India: 1383 dead, 1696 missing and almost 4000 captured.²⁵⁵ BM Kaul argued that there were 1380 killed, 550 detained and 1660 missing.²⁵⁶ A Chinese source from the Academy of Military Science puts 8800 casualties on the Indian side and 2400 on the Chinese one.²⁵⁷ None of these sources distinguish the dead from the heavily wounded. Fravel, who looked at multiple sources, suggests that 4885 Indian and 722 Chinese soldiers died during the war.²⁵⁸ Map 3.1 below showcases the disputed border and the areas where the aforementioned battles took place.

Map 3.1. Key areas of the disputed territory.



Source: Verma, Shiv Kunal. “1962 : The War That Wasn't.” New Delhi: Aleph, 2016, p. 60.

²⁵³ Feng Cheng and Larry M. Wortzel, "Pla Operational Principles and Limited War: The Sino-Indian War of 1962," in *Chinese Warfighting: The PLA Experience since 1949*, ed. Mark A. Ryan, David M. Finkelstein, and Michael A. McDevitt (Armonk, NY and London: East Gate Books, 2003), 186-87.

²⁵⁴ Sinha and Athale, *History of the Conflict with China*, 377-78.

²⁵⁵ Maxwell, *India's China War*, 424.

²⁵⁶ Kaul, *The Untold Story*, 433.

²⁵⁷ Zhongxing Wang, "60年代中印边境冲突与中国边防部队的自卫反击作战 (Sino-Indian Border Conflict in the 1960s and the Self-Defensive Counterattack War of the Chinese Border Troops)," *当代中国史研究 (Research of Contemporary Chinese History)*, no. 5 (1997): 23.

²⁵⁸ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 174.

3.5. *Connecting the dots*

China's decision to fight India served the purpose of reducing external and internal threats. Externally, China had a hostile relationship with the superpowers, and it sought to establish a united front against them. In the Chinese view, India obstructed this plan because it had considerable influence among the uncommitted states, but it was a reactionary state following the US. Therefore, China sought to utilize the conflict to undermine New Delhi's influence among the uncommitted states and prevent India from bringing those states into the US camp.

China started to rally African-Asian states before the war itself. In 1959, Subimal Dutt noted that China adopted a mixed policy toward the border dispute. On the one hand, China appealed to Asian states, emphasizing that it was trying hard to reach an agreement, but India was intransigent. On the other hand, the PRC was expanding its control over disputed territory. Dutt also noted that there was a contradiction between the Chinese claims of pleading for an agreement and their continuous occupation of Longju in the eastern sector.²⁵⁹ China's approach worked before it initiated the offensives. Afro-Asian states were inclined to accept China's standpoint before the war. Certain countries were unwilling to accept India's self-proclaimed leadership of the nonaligned movement and therefore were sceptic about the Indian claims in the issue. They made their judgment about the case on the only evidence they saw, namely China's calls for negotiations and India's refusal of them.²⁶⁰

Chinese documentation gives some credibility to Dutt's claim and suggests that China had plans of punishing India years before the war. In the same year, Chen Yi pointed out that China was ought to "counterattack" those incumbent parties in other states which implemented anti-communist or anti-Chinese policies. However, he pointed out that these counterattacks should be limited, and they were to serve the purpose of "educating the people". For instance, if India was conducting anti-Chinese policy for a long time, China was supposed to counter it for a month.²⁶¹

How did a fight with India serve Chinese ambitions? As far as the Sino-Soviet conflict was concerned, the war possibly helped China because it revealed India's collaboration with the US

²⁵⁹ Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, "Shri S. Dutt, Foreign Secretary, addressing the Conference of Governors on the 28th October 1959" in Subimal Dutt papers, subject file no. 109, pp. 8-9.

²⁶⁰ Maxwell, *India's China War*, 248.

²⁶¹ SA, A22-1-1070-152: "陈毅副总理报告——国际形势" (Vice Premier Chen Yi's Report: the International Setting, 1959) , pp. 155-160.

and demonstrated that Moscow was supporting a capitalist lackey, thereby committing an ideological mistake. At the same time, it could weaken the Nehru government and foster the struggle of the “oppressed” people there.²⁶²

Regarding the uncommitted states, Mao possibly aimed to use the border war to prevent India from assuming a leading position of neutral states and taking them to the imperialist camp. Mao believed that the uncommitted states were hesitant by design: they disliked capitalism but were also averse toward the communist revolution. However, the uncommitted states would choose China’s side if Beijing demonstrated formidable power, respected their interests and displayed resolve against the enemies.²⁶³

Mao engineered military and diplomatic manoeuvres in a way that would allow China to gain support among the uncommitted states. First, the opportunity to fight with India was offered to Mao initially in July. Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Enlai came up with two proposals to halt the Indian advances on the border. One option was to forcefully remove Indian outposts. The other alternative was to find a nonviolent way to expel the enemy. At the time Mao refrained from engaging in conflict. He believed that waiting longer will allow China to win compassion and support from the international audience.²⁶⁴ It is plausible to argue that Mao’s aim with this tactic was to gain the moral high ground in the border dispute. V. K. Krishna Menon’s evaluation of China’s conduct confirms this. In a discussion with Canadian High Commissioner to India Chester Ronning on the day of the Chinese attack, Menon argued that China “resorted to the vilest type of propaganda to isolate” India from Asian-African states.²⁶⁵

Second, China continued to utilize the conflict to rally African-Asian states during the war. Between the two phases, the US offered military aid to India on 29 October 1962. India promptly accepted the assistance. The Chinese Premier emphasized this in his correspondence with the African-Asian states, arguing that India was publicly requesting US military aid. State media argued that the Nehru government showed its real face and discarded nonalignment. India sold itself out to imperialism and joined the anti-China plot promoted by it.²⁶⁶

²⁶² Maxwell, *India's China War*, 349.

²⁶³ Armstrong, *Revolutionary Diplomacy: Chinese Foreign Policy and the United Front Doctrine*, 39-41.

²⁶⁴ 中印边疆自卫反击作战史写组, *中印边疆自卫反击作战史 (History of the Sino-India Border Self-Defensive War)*, 66.

²⁶⁵ Quoted in Ramesh, *A Chequered Brilliance: The Many Lives of V. K. Krishna Menon*, 593.

²⁶⁶ Maxwell, *India's China War*, 378.

China was actively trying to turn a third actor, Indonesia, to its side. In a letter dated 28 October 1962, Zhou Enlai wrote a letter to Sukarno to clarify the confusion about what China means by the “Line of Actual Control”. In the Eastern sector, the LAC was largely identical to the McMahon Line. In the Central and Western sectors, the LAC stood for the traditional boundary between the two sides. Zhou Enlai also explained that China seeks to restore the status quo of 7 November 1959, while India wanted to restore the status quo of 8 September 1962 or 20 October 1962. China argued that India occupied Chinese territory in the 1959-1962 period, hence Beijing was reluctant to accept any changes that happened after November 1959. According to Zhou, China tried to solve the issue peacefully, but India interpreted this as vulnerability. Repeated Chinese efforts to talk failed because India was insisting on unfair preconditions. India also sought to revise the distribution of territory by unilateral military measures. Hence, China was forced to defend itself. The letter closes with Zhou’s praise of African and Asian states which tried to aid the peaceful solution of the dispute. He also pointed out that Asian-African states were to unite and confront their common, most vicious enemy: imperialism and colonialism.²⁶⁷ On 23 November 1962, the Chinese Embassy in Myanmar argued that China’s declaration on the Sino-Indian border dispute benefitted Chinese foreign policy because it could be used to win over uncommitted parties, laymen to the dispute, and the public opinion overall.²⁶⁸

Third, China’s efforts of rallying the African-Asian states continued after the war. In late 1962, Zhou Enlai told the Mongolian leader Tsedenbal: “The most important issue at the moment is to expose the scheme of Indian reactionaries and their representatives. If we do not expose the full extent of their reactionary statements and actions, they could become more dependent on the US and endanger the socialist cause.”²⁶⁹

China also sent Vice Foreign Minister Huang Zhen to lobby for the Chinese cause in Myanmar, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the Arab League, Ghana and Guinea. The aim of these visits to elaborate on

²⁶⁷ Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, no. 105-01786-02: “周恩来总理就中印边界问题致函印度尼西亚总统苏加诺” (Zhou Enlai’s correspondence with Sukarno regarding the Sino-Indian border dispute) pp. 42-45, 53-75.

²⁶⁸ Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, no. 105-01490-01: “告讨论我国声明情况” (Report on our Declaration) , p. 16.

²⁶⁹ Soviet archives quoted in Dai, “印度外交政策，大国关系与 1962 年中印边界冲突 (Indian Foreign Policy, Great Power Politics and the 1962 Sino-Indian Border Conflict) ,” 550.

China's position on the dispute, put pressure on India, promote Chinese interests in the upcoming Colombo Conference and to depict India as an agent of the US and the Soviet Union.²⁷⁰

The aim of the Colombo Conference after the border war was to formulate proposals that could serve as a basis for resurrecting Sino-Indian border negotiations. On 27 December 1962, the Indonesian Ambassador to China argued that one of the clauses of the Colombo Proposals stipulated that China was supposed to withdraw behind the 7 November 1959 LAC and the demilitarized zone would be co-administered by China and India. Although this was disadvantageous to China, the aim of the Colombo Powers was to convince India to negotiate and prevent it from aligning with the West.²⁷¹ On 11 January, 1963, the Sri Lankan Prime Minister and the Indonesian Foreign Minister visited China to elaborate on the Colombo Proposals. Top Chinese leaders Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Enlai all interacted with these envoys, and their formulations are telling. Liu Shaoqi said that India's longstanding rejection of negotiations and insistence on preconditions was a manifestation of great power chauvinism: India thought itself to be superior to others. Therefore, China's reluctance to engage with India was not targeted at the Colombo powers but toward India's great power chauvinism. He also said that India is maintaining tension to request aid from the US. He also pointed out that India has long eschewed its nonaligned policy and was an ally of the US and the UK. Zhou continued the India-bashing and listed a range of independence movements which New Delhi refused to support—suggesting that India was not a true proponent of Afro-Asian independence. Additionally, India became subservient to the US and sent troops to oppress Congo.²⁷²

International engagements after the Colombo Conference were also utilized to diminish India's influence among the African-Asian states. On 17 June 1963, Zhou Enlai had a meeting with journalists from 7 African-Asian countries. He said that before 1962, China was doubtful about Pakistan's entry to the US alliance system with the excuse of defence from India. Now that China was "invaded" by India, they understood the Pakistani concern. Zhou also offered that China

²⁷⁰ Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, no. 117-01057-01, "黄镇副部长出访缅甸、印尼、锡兰、阿联、加纳、几内亚六国转卷," (Vice Foreign Minister Huang Zhen visits Myanmar, Indonesia, Ceylon, United Arab Emirates, Ghana and Guinea), pp. 103-104, 114, 123

²⁷¹ Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, no. 105-01787-06: "苏卡尼所谈问题" (A Discussion with Sukarni, 27 December, 1962) , p. 112.

²⁷² Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, no. 105-01792-08: "锡兰总理、印尼外长访华会谈情况" (Report of Discussions with the Sri Lankan Prime Minister and Indonesian Foreign Minister, 11 January, 1963) , pp. 89-92.

could share their experience of interacting with India for the benefit of other African-Asian countries.²⁷³

Some of the narratives from the Indian side follow a similar logic. Kaul suggests that China attacked India to demonstrate its military power and draw them away from Indian influence. Similarly, he argues that China unilaterally withdrew its forces to showcase that it was acting in self-defence rather than aggression.²⁷⁴ Looking at Dalvi's evaluation, it seems that the 1962 border war delivered a major blow for India's engagement with the nonaligned states. Only Ethiopia and Malaysia supported India and criticized China publicly after the war. This mild reaction from the African-Asian states served as a "sobering factor" in India's evaluation of the war.²⁷⁵

The 1962 war served Chinese interests in an additional way as well. In the Chinese reading, struggle raised political consciousness. From 1959, China argued that a group of reactionary states emerged on the international stage and they served the imperialists. In China's reading, India was the leader of this camp. From this perspective, China benefited from the war, because war could raise the political consciousness of the people who would then strive to topple their reactionary leaders.²⁷⁶ In other words, the war against India could have laid down the basis of the Indian communist revolution that could take down Nehru's reactionary government.

Therefore, China's primary aim was to utilize 1962 border war to reduce the high level of external threat to its national security. Depicting India as an aggressor and an imperialist agent undermined its influence among the uncommitted states. Using this method, China could indirectly pre-empt the formation of an anti-Chinese coalition that could have included India and a vast number of neutral states. How did the use of force address the internal threat Mao faced? Mao was cognizant of the interplay between external conflict and internal unity. He said that if a country faces the threat of an invasion, domestic actors would side-line their internal problems and unite to fend off the external danger.²⁷⁷

A number of indicators established in section 1.7.6. were present in 1962 and therefore suggest that Mao used external force to boost his domestic political standing. First, several sources suggest

²⁷³ Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, no. 105-01842-04: "1963 年以来刘少奇主席、周恩来总理、陈毅副总理有关巴基斯坦的谈话摘要" (Summaries of post-1963 talks on Pakistan by President Liu Shaoqi, Premier Zhou Enlai and Vice Premier Chen Yi, March-May, 1963) , pp. 26-27.

²⁷⁴ Kaul, *The Untold Story*, 434-35.

²⁷⁵ Dalvi, *Himalayan Blunder: The Curtain-Raiser to the Sino-Indian War of 1962*, 482.

²⁷⁶ Armstrong, *Revolutionary Diplomacy: Chinese Foreign Policy and the United Front Doctrine*, 75-76.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

that Mao Zedong himself evaluated his position as shaky. In August 1962, Mao complained that financial and economic organs did not report to him: his instructions in policy making and implementation were not needed. He perceived these institutions as “independent kingdoms,” operating without his supervision.²⁷⁸ Later he also admitted that he was apprehensive toward the rise of “rightists” at the 7000 cadres’ meeting.²⁷⁹ Second, Mao invoked his past successes when he called for war, suggesting manipulative intentions:

We fought a war with old Chiang [Kai-shek]. We fought a war with Japan and with America. With none of these did we fear. And in each case we won. Now the Indians want to fight a war with us. Naturally, we don’t have fear.²⁸⁰

Third, Mao appears to have used grandiose rhetoric to transform doubts and fear about the war into resolve which is also consistent with the diversionary logic. At a meeting in early October, he pointed out to his colleagues that China would be condemned by the United States, Soviet Union and other powers if it fought with India. Nevertheless, he believed that China should not be cowed by this prospect. “It is better to die standing, than to die kneeling,” he said.²⁸¹ Such a speech fits the diversionary logic of trying to convert negative emotions (fear) into positive ones (courage).²⁸² Finally, the diversionary logic expects that the belligerent tries to tone down tensions after the diversionary use of force. It is possible that China paused between the two offensives and ultimately pulled out for this reason.

The above section sought to substantiate the point that China’s war with India in 1962 allowed China to reduce external and internal threats. Externally, the dispute could be used to tarnish India’s reputation among the uncommitted states. Internally, the dispute was used to divert Chinese foreign and domestic policy to a direction favourable to Mao’s rule. On the one hand, the moderates’ foreign policy of retrenchment was diverted to a more bellicose one, as the fight with India suggests. On the other hand, the moderates’ domestic policy of economic construction was diverted toward a focus on class struggle.

²⁷⁸ Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 238-39.

²⁷⁹ Zhang, *变局: 七千人大会始末 (Change: The Seven Thousand Cadres' Conference)*, 318-22.

²⁸⁰ Quoted in Garver, "China's Decision for War with India in 1962," 115.

²⁸¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 117.

²⁸² Theiler, "The Microfoundations of Diversionary Conflict," 327-32.

3.6. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to provide an explanation for China's decision to fight a war with India in 1962. In a departure from the existing literature, I put the dispute into the broader context of Chinese Cold War foreign policy. During the Cold War, China was mainly preoccupied with managing its relationship with the great powers, the US and the Soviet Union. In the examined period, China's relationship was strained both with Washington and Moscow. On the one hand, China was wary of a coordinated invasion from the US and Taiwan. On the other hand, China could not count on the Soviet Union, as Moscow "betrayed" the socialist camp and pushed for a *détente* with Washington. China's response to this pressing international setting was external and internal mobilization. Externally, China saw international affairs as a competition for the support of the uncommitted states—the camp which wins them over wins the Cold War. China's response to the highly threatening systemic setting was to prevent these states from coming under Indian and imperialist influence. Internally, China embarked on an ambitious economic development programme, the Great Leap Forward. The initiative failed and Mao's leading political position came under severe threat. The war with India came as a panacea to both problems. Externally, China could utilize the dispute to present India as a belligerent and China as a victim with the aim of gaining support from uncommitted states. Internally, the war with India united the elite that was divided over economic policymaking. As the following chapter will show, China used a similar logic in its 1967 confrontation with India.

Chapter 4. The 1967 clashes – India’s payback?

Five years after the 1962 war, Chinese and Indian forces clashed again. China’s use of force was much smaller in scale this time, concentrated only in the central sector. Nevertheless, it still deteriorated to a shooting fight that cost the lives of soldiers on both sides. Just like in 1962, Mao Zedong likely reacted to external threat emanating from the great powers and internal threats originating from domestic political actors. In such circumstances, a leader is likely to adopt radical measures to stay in power. Attacking a territorial disputant is one of the few available options. Externally, it can be used to undermine a coalition against the state. Internally, the domestic political elite can overcome divisions and unite their forces against the external adversary—allowing the leader to maintain grip on power.

The aim of this chapter is to test my argument that China used direct force against India in the autumn of 1967 because China faced high level of external and internal threats. In the first section, I focus on China’s external threat environment. External pressure on China was even higher than in 1962. Its ties with the US remained tense—China felt threatened by the potential expansion of the Vietnam war. At the same time, Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated further—border talks failed and the Soviets increased troop numbers on China’s northern boundary. Mao felt threatened by a potential invasion orchestrated in coordination by the US and the Soviet Union. Against this backdrop, Chinese leaders saw India as a collaborator of Washington and Moscow.

The second section discusses China’s response to external pressure. CCP leaders externalized the experience of the victorious communist revolution and sought to win over the majority of states in order to isolate and destroy imperialism and revisionism. Just like in 1962, Beijing saw the African, Asian and Latin American states as potential partners in a united front against the great power adversaries and sought to secure their allegiance. China also wanted to prevent India from assuming leadership of these states, as New Delhi could have led them to the imperialist camp.

The third section elaborates on Mao’s domestic political position. As Mao unleashed the Cultural Revolution, he had to concede more and more of his power to his successor, Lin Biao. The Cultural Revolution tore the Chinese political stage into factions, leading to relentless infighting. Mao sought to bring unity to Chinese political life among these dire circumstances. However, his domestic position was weak because Lin Biao managed to accumulate substantial political and military power as the successor.

In section four I focus on the events on the border in the autumn of 1967. As China put military pressure on India during the 1965 India-Pakistan war, Sino-Indian tensions steadily increased in the central sector. Parallel to the deterioration of the Chinese domestic situation with the Cultural Revolution, shoving matches became commonplace at the Jelep La, Nathu La and Cho La passes. Tensions erupted into shooting fights in September and October in the vicinity of Nathu La and Cho La.

Section five aims to explicate how China's action on the Sino-Indian border served China's aim of mitigating external and internal threats. Externally, India was a liability to Chinese security—as the foremost hatchet man of the revisionists and imperialists, New Delhi could lead Third World states into the wrong fold, increasing the external threat to the PRC. The attack prevented this scenario and served China's aim of gathering support from the Third World.

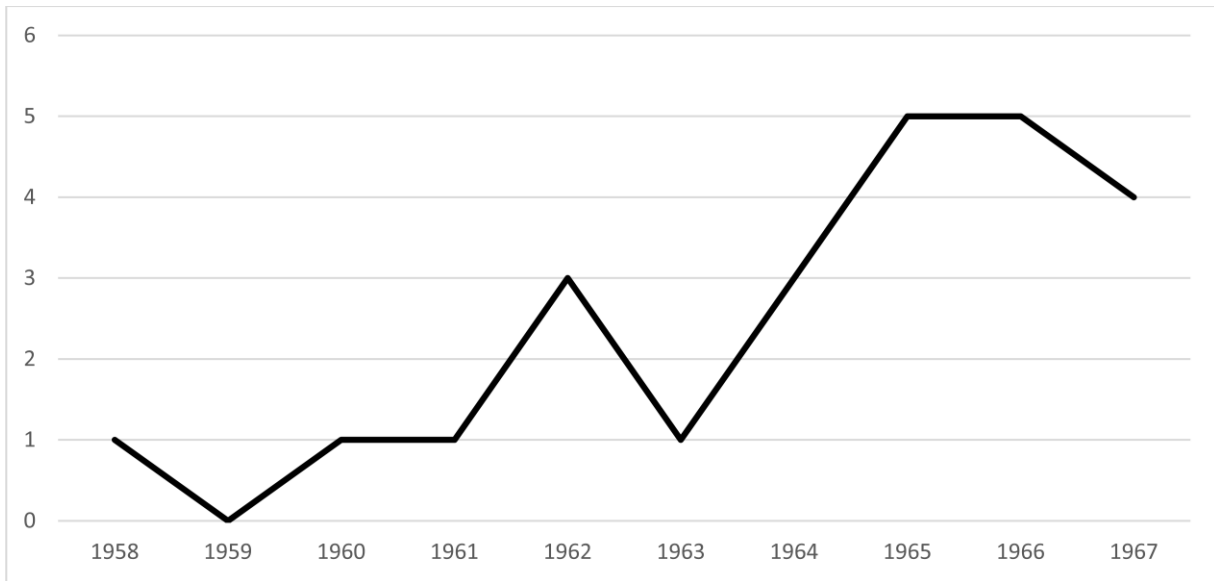
Internally, the attack allowed Mao to increase unity within the army and the political elite that was divided during the Cultural Revolution. The fighting factions were provided with the opportunity to overcome their internal division and focus on the external enemy. However, China's gambit did not pay off because the Indian Army of 1967 was not the same as the one in 1962. After India's heavy-handed response, fighting ceased after in the matter of days and Beijing refrained from further skirmishes.

4.1. External threat: China and the great powers, 1962-1967

Much like in 1962, China faced a highly threatening external environment in 1967. The primary indicators of the high external threat were acts of the superpowers which endangered China's territorial integrity. In 1965, the US increased its military involvement in China's periphery by deploying combat troops to Vietnam. Chinese leaders were concerned that the war might expand to Chinese territory. At the same time, the Sino-Soviet split deepened after 1962—border negotiations failed in 1964, Moscow and Beijing failed to cooperate in their aid to Vietnam and the Soviets increased the number of their troops on the Sino-Soviet border. As the discussion below will show, China linked these external threats to its dispute with India. Chinese leaders feared a US-Soviet-Indian anti-Chinese coalition. The secondary indicator of high external threat is the number of MIDs in the China-US and China-USSR dyads before the 1967 clashes. As figure 4.1

suggests, there was a steady increase in the number of confrontations. Specifically, there were 18 of them in the 1963-1967 period, compared to the 6 of the 1958-1962 period.

Figure 4.1. Chinese MIDs with Great Powers, 1958-1967.



*Source: author's calculations based on CoW data. Maoz, Zeev, Paul L. Johnson, Jasper Kaplan, Fiona Ogunkoya, and Aaron P. Shreve. "The Dyadic Militarized Interstate Disputes (Mids) Dataset Version 3.0: Logic, Characteristics, and Comparisons to Alternative Datasets." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2018): 1-25.*

4.1.1. Sino-US relations

During the examined period, Sino-US contention was most prominent on three levels: global, regional and bilateral. Globally, the US was striving for hegemony and China was in its way.¹ US leaders thought that China was likely to engage in military adventures and that China's aid to communist movements in Southeast Asia signalled that the PRC was aiming for hegemony on the

¹ Jun Niu, "论 60 年代末中国对美政策转变的历史背景 (on the Historical Background of the Change in China's Us Policy in the Late 1960s)," *当代中国史研究 (Research of Contemporary Chinese History)* , no. 1 (2000): 61-62.

continent.² The US National Security Council argued that Washington's security interests were best served by a weak and isolated China.³ Hence, the Kennedy government sought to exploit the Sino-Soviet split.⁴

Regionally, China was apprehensive toward the US's involvement in Vietnam. In 1963, the Kennedy administration believed that the loss of Vietnam would have given China an advantage in the competition between the two camps.⁵ The US also noticed that North Vietnam was oscillating between boosting ties with the Soviets and the Chinese. Washington was hoping that North Vietnam would move closer to the Soviets. Therefore, from the second half of 1963, the aim of US foreign policy was to undermine Chinese-North Vietnamese relations. After the assassination of Kennedy and the rise of Johnson, Washington still aimed to prevent Chinese expansion in Southeast Asia.⁶

In March 1965, more than 3000 US marines deployed to Vietnam, signalling direct US involvement in the conflict.⁷ At the same time, Washington increased its surveillance activities against China in the South China Sea.⁸ During 1965-1967, US aircrafts made incursions into Chinese airspace over Hainan, Guangxi and Yunnan provinces. On multiple occasions, these aircrafts fired missiles on Chinese assets. On 12 May 1966, for instance, US aircraft opened fire on Chinese military airplanes and downed one of them.⁹

US actions created a direct danger to Chinese national security.¹⁰ First, China was concerned that the war might escalate and reach Chinese territory. The Chinese leadership thought that even if the US wanted to restrain its bombing to the territory of North Vietnam, escalation could get out

² Robert Garson, "Lyndon B. Johnson and the China Enigma," *Journal of Contemporary History* 32, no. 1 (1997): 74-76.

³ Tao, *中美关系史 (the History of Sino-US Relations)*, 256.

⁴ Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 246.

⁵ Fredman, "'The Specter of an Expansionist China': Kennedy Administration Assessments of Chinese Intentions in Vietnam," 131.

⁶ Tao, *中美关系史 (the History of Sino-US Relations)*, 256-57, 61.

⁷ Yixian Xie, ed. *中国外交史, 1949-1979 (a Diplomatic History of China, 1949-1979)* (Zhengzhou: Henan People's Publishing House, 1998), 331.

⁸ Niu, "论 60 年代末中国对美政策转变的历史背景 (on the Historical Background of the Change in China's Us Policy in the Late 1960s)," 53-54.

⁹ Xie, *中国外交史, 1949-1979 (a Diplomatic History of China, 1949-1979)*, 335.

¹⁰ Niu, "论 60 年代末中国对美政策转变的历史背景 (on the Historical Background of the Change in China's Us Policy in the Late 1960s)," 61-62.

of hand and endanger China.¹¹ Second, Chinese leaders also thought that the Vietnam war was an integral part of Washington's containment strategy against China.¹²

To signal misgivings, Chinese leaders issued several threats to the US and made commitments to Vietnam. Beijing promulgated that invasion of Vietnam was equivalent to the invasion of China.¹³ Zhou Enlai's four-sentence warning to the US in 1965 signalled that China was ready to fight the US. First, Zhou said that China had no intention of provoking Washington. Second, if any country in Asia, Africa, or anywhere else was invaded by the US, China would assist its fight against encroachment. Third, China was prepared to fend off a potential US invasion. Finally, he issued a warning that said that once war started, escalation could not be controlled.¹⁴

Therefore, the aim of Chinese involvement in the Vietnam war was to avoid the geographic expansion of the conflict. In June 1965, Chief of General Staff Luo Ruiqing reached an agreement with the North Vietnamese on more concrete issues. First, as long as the US kept its military only in South Vietnam and only bombed North Vietnam, the latter had to manage the conflict on its own. Second, if the US used its navy to attack Vietnam, China was ready to use its navy to counterattack it. Finally, if US ground troops entered North Vietnamese territory, China would interfere on the side of the North Vietnamese.¹⁵

During its involvement, China provided Vietnam with weapons, equipment, and military personnel. The first batch of Chinese volunteers arrived in the summer of 1965 to fight against the US. Altogether, China sent more than 150000 "volunteers" to participate in the war.¹⁶ Chinese sources suggest that these troops were involved in more than two thousand battles against the US and shot down more than 1500 of their planes.¹⁷ "Semi-official" Chinese data suggests that the PRC's death toll was above 4000.¹⁸ Military personnel involved engineers, air defence, railway,

¹¹ Tao, *中美关系史 (the History of Sino-US Relations)* , 268-72.

¹² Xie, *中国外交史, 1949-1979 (a Diplomatic History of China, 1949-1979)* , 330.

¹³ Tao, *中美关系史 (the History of Sino-US Relations)* , 270.

¹⁴ Xie, *中国外交史, 1949-1979 (a Diplomatic History of China, 1949-1979)* , 337.

¹⁵ Tao, *中美关系史 (the History of Sino-US Relations)* , 271.

¹⁶ Chen Jian, "China's Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1964-69," *The China Quarterly*, no. 142 (1995): 376.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ "China Admits Combat in Vietnam War," Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1989/05/17/china-admits-combat-in-vietnam-war/6b9cb8a4-4d18-48bf-80d2-bea80f64057c/>; Ma, *The Cultural Revolution in the Foreign Ministry of China*, 348.

and logistic experts.¹⁹ In 1967, the Chinese pledged that if the US used nuclear weapons in the war, China would use nuclear weapons to destroy the US military base in South Vietnam.²⁰

On the bilateral level, Sino-US contention focused on the Taiwan question that was a subject of discussion at the Sino-US ambassadorial talks in Warsaw. Just like his predecessors, Johnson was reluctant to withdraw US troops from Taiwan. China, on the other hand, maintained its previous “bundle” policy: without solving the Taiwan question first, no other issues of Sino-US relations could be addressed.²¹ For instance, in 1965, US leaders discussed the issue of exchanging reporters, professors and doctors. When Washington proposed the idea, China declined by arguing that as long as the question of US involvement in the Taiwan was not settled, no other agreements could have been reached.²² On 29 July 1964, China accentuated longstanding grievances against the US. On the one hand, it accused Washington with supporting Taiwanese ambitions of mounting an attack on the mainland. On the other hand, the US was also charged with military adventurism, because it bombed the Chinese economic and cultural committee building in Laos.²³

4.1.2. Sino-Soviet relations

Between 1962 and 1967, Sino-Soviet relations were getting worse as well, posing a threat to Chinese sovereignty and territorial integrity. First, the two sides made no progress on settling their disputed border. In September 1963, the Chinese minister for national security investigated the Sino-Soviet border in the North and found that the Soviets doubled their forces in the area and increased the number of their outposts as well. Subsequently, China’s Central Military Commission had a meeting on how to handle pressure on the Sino-Soviet border. Troops were ordered to prepare for a potential attack from the north.²⁴

Against the backdrop of increasing tensions, the two sides initiated border negotiations in February 1964. The Chinese and Soviet delegations exchanged maps in April 1964 and identified

¹⁹ Xie, *中国外交史, 1949-1979 (a Diplomatic History of China, 1949-1979)*, 336.

²⁰ Tao, *中美关系史 (the History of Sino-US Relations)*, 273.

²¹ Jin, *中美关系史纲: 1784-2010 (Historical Outline of Sino-US Relations: 1784-2010)*, 228-29.

²² Tao, *中美关系史 (the History of Sino-US Relations)*, 224.

²³ Jin, *中美关系史纲: 1784-2010 (Historical Outline of Sino-US Relations: 1784-2010)*, 228-29.

²⁴ Zhihua Shen, *中苏关系史纲——1917-1991 年中苏关系若干问题再探讨 (Reviewing and Reconsidering the History of Sino-Soviet Relations, 1917-1991)* (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2016), 503-06.

a 35 000 km² of disputed territory.²⁵ In May 1964, the Soviets were inclined to accept the Chinese proposal of conducting negotiations based on a former agreement instead of the line of actual control. This period marked certain progress during the talks, as the two sides almost settled the eastern sector of the border. Nevertheless, the progress was ephemeral.²⁶ On 10 July 1964, Mao Zedong met with the Japanese Socialist Party representatives and uttered words that meant a crucial rupture in the negotiations. He said that some land was taken from China by Tsarist Russia and the accounts have not been settled since.²⁷

On 15 August 1964, the Soviets adopted a hard line after Mao's words to the Japanese delegation. On the one hand, they argued that the talks had to be relocated to Moscow. On the other hand, the Soviets proposed a precondition of settling the dispute in the eastern sector: the reclamation of the Heixiazi island.²⁸ The Chinese delegation leader warned that if the Soviets were not willing to talk based on the Sino-Russian treaty, China might use other means to solve the dispute and restore the lands it historically claims.²⁹ At the end of the day, the Chinese were ready to sign some preliminary agreements, but the Soviets lost interest and insisted on continuing in Moscow. The delegation returned to the Soviet Union on 22 August 1964. Overall, it was Mao's words in July 1964 that derailed the negotiations.³⁰

Subsequently, the two sides criticized each other on different forums. On 2 September 1964, a Pravda editorial argued that China was bent on expansion.³¹ On 15 September 1964, Khrushchev pointed out that the Chinese dynasties of the past were just as expansionist as Tsarist Russia because they invaded other countries such as Mongolia. He also pointed out that if a country attacked the Soviet Union, Moscow would use all weapons at its disposal to fight back and protect

²⁵ Zhenyou Wang and Pengfei Qi, "1964 年中苏第一轮边界谈判的历程及基本经验 (the Process of the First Round of the Sino-Soviet Boundary Negotiations in 1964 and Its Basic Experiences)," *Contemporary China History Studies* 22, no. 2 (2015): 115.

²⁶ Shen, *中苏关系史纲——1917-1991 年中苏关系若干问题再探讨 (Reviewing and Reconsidering the History of Sino-Soviet Relations, 1917-1991)*, 529-31.

²⁷ Wang and Qi, "1964 年中苏第一轮边界谈判的历程及基本经验 (the Process of the First Round of the Sino-Soviet Boundary Negotiations in 1964 and Its Basic Experiences)," 116-17.

²⁸ Niu, "论 60 年代末中国对美政策转变的历史背景 (on the Historical Background of the Change in China's Us Policy in the Late 1960s)," 54-57.

²⁹ Wang and Qi, "1964 年中苏第一轮边界谈判的历程及基本经验 (the Process of the First Round of the Sino-Soviet Boundary Negotiations in 1964 and Its Basic Experiences)," 117.

³⁰ Niu, "论 60 年代末中国对美政策转变的历史背景 (on the Historical Background of the Change in China's Us Policy in the Late 1960s)," 54-57.

³¹ Wang and Qi, "1964 年中苏第一轮边界谈判的历程及基本经验 (the Process of the First Round of the Sino-Soviet Boundary Negotiations in 1964 and Its Basic Experiences)," 117-18.

its territory. These comments had a deep influence on Mao who thought that Khrushchev might want to attack China.³²

After the border talks broke down, the Soviets started to boost military cooperation with Mongolia and increased troop numbers in the Far Eastern Command.³³ In 1966, the Soviets signed a 20-year military agreement with Mongolia, further exacerbating Chinese threat perceptions.³⁴ In the same year, the Soviet embassy in China reported that the situation on the Sino-Soviet border (Zhenbao island) was ripe for a confrontation and Moscow should prepare accordingly. In 1967, a further report argued that the Chinese were preparing for an offensive and Moscow had to prepare for a counterattack.³⁵ A Soviet cable noted that Chinese provocations in the area started to increase in early 1967.³⁶

Second, Mao's apprehension toward Moscow manifested in the two sides' confrontations on their aid to North Vietnam against the US. The core of this issue was that the Soviets had no borders with Vietnam, hence all their aid had to traverse through China. Therefore, they reached out to China with a set of requirements in 1965 to ease the logistical burden and improve the flow of materiel to Vietnam. The Soviets had three requests. First, they wanted to send a brigade (4000 troops) to Vietnam and wanted to transport them via the Chinese railway. Second, they wanted China to provide them with access to one or two airports to use as a base for their MIG-21 units that would participate in the Vietnam war. The Soviets wanted to station 500 troops in China to defend those airports. Third, Moscow wanted China to provide it with an air corridor to transport the MIG-21 and other weapons. China saw these requests as going beyond the scope of traditional military aid. Beijing suspected that Moscow's ulterior aim was to exert control over China.

³² Shen, *中苏关系史纲——1917-1991年中苏关系若干问题再探讨* (*Reviewing and Reconsidering the History of Sino-Soviet Relations, 1917-1991*), 506-12.

³³ *Ibid.*, 535.

³⁴ Danhui Li, "中苏援越抗美问题上的矛盾与冲突 (1965-1972) (Sino-Soviet Contradiction and Confrontation on the Issue of Aiding Vietnam in Its Struggle against the Us (1965-1972))", in *冷战与中国* (*the Cold War and China*), ed. Baijia Zhang and Jun Niu (Beijing: 世界知识出版社 (World Affairs Press), 2002), 381-82.

³⁵ Niu, "1969年中苏边界冲突与中国外交战略的调整(the 1969 Sino-Soviet Border Clash and the Adjustment of China's Diplomatic Strategy)," 71.

³⁶ "苏联政府致兄弟党政府的情况通报：中国在珍宝岛的军事挑衅 (the Soviet Government's Report to the Brotherly Government's About the Chinese Provocation on the Zhenbao Island)", in *俄罗斯揭秘档案选编：中苏关系* (*Collection of Russian Declassified Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations*), ed. Zhihua Shen (Shanghai: Orient Publishing Center, 1969), 361.

Chinese leaders refused most of these.³⁷ At the end of the day, China facilitated Moscow's aid to Hanoi, but it revised the operational details. Instead of "establishing a united transport system" with the Soviet Union, China demanded full and uninhibited control over the logistics of the Soviet materials within Chinese territory.³⁸

This section sought to explicate that in conjunction with the increasing hostility in Sino-US relations, Sino-Soviet relations were going downhill as well. Sino-Soviet border talks failed and the communist leaders also differed on how to aid North Vietnam's fight against the US. The following section will address the interplay between these external threats and Sino-Indian relations.

4.1.3. External threats and Sino-Indian relations

Chinese leaders had a grim view of the world in the 1960s. According to them, the US invasion of Vietnam threatened Chinese national security, while Washington also aided the Kuomintang's guerrilla warfare in China's southeast. The US also allied with Japan to contain China. At the same time, the Soviets wanted to conquer China and India was encroaching on PRC territory.³⁹ Leaders in Beijing also connected the threats emanating from the great powers, thinking that Washington and Moscow collaborated to contain Beijing.⁴⁰ Historical experience led Chinese leaders believe that a détente between great powers comes at the price of the national interests of weaker states—hence the Soviet-US détente was bound to cost Chinese interests.⁴¹ On 27 May 1964, Mao warned his colleagues in the Politburo Standing Committee that China had to prepare for a combined attack from the Soviet Union and the United States.⁴² In his reading, the US and the Soviet Union were both gearing up for expansion, hence China had to prepare for a fight and promote world

³⁷ Li, "中苏援越抗美问题上的矛盾与冲突 (1965-1972) (Sino-Soviet Contradiction and Confrontation on the Issue of Aiding Vietnam in Its Struggle against the Us (1965-1972)) ," 388-91.

³⁸ Jian, "China's Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1964-69," 383.

³⁹ Ma, *The Cultural Revolution in the Foreign Ministry of China*, 242.

⁴⁰ National Archives of India, no. C/104/3-A/CH/63: "The full text of an article entitled 'the origin and development of the differences between the leadership of the cpsu and ourselves' published today [6 September 1963] by the editorial departments of the people's daily and the journal red flag" in "Letters Exchanged between the Chinese and Russian Parties", pp. 235-237.

⁴¹ Niu, "1969年中苏边界冲突与中国外交战略的调整(the 1969 Sino-Soviet Border Clash and the Adjustment of China's Diplomatic Strategy)," 69.

⁴² Li, "中苏援越抗美问题上的矛盾与冲突 (1965-1972) (Sino-Soviet Contradiction and Confrontation on the Issue of Aiding Vietnam in Its Struggle against the Us (1965-1972)) ," 385.

revolution.⁴³ On 21 May 1965, Zhou Enlai also accentuated that China had to prepare to simultaneously fight the Soviets and the US.⁴⁴ On 28 March 1966, Mao Zedong met with a Japanese Communist Party representative and told him that the Soviets were planning to attack China from Xinjiang and the north-eastern provinces. He also argued that Moscow and Washington were jointly plotting to divide China.⁴⁵ Against this backdrop, he called on the nation to prepare for “war and famine” in April 1967.⁴⁶

Some aspects of Soviet and Indian foreign policy led leaders in Beijing believe that India joined Washington and Moscow in their anti-Chinese plot. On 12 December 1962, Khrushchev gave a report to the Supreme Soviet in which he addressed the Sino-Indian border dispute. Most of his comments fell short of what China expected from a communist brother state. First, Khrushchev mentioned that China undermined India’s nonalignment policy which was widely supported around the world. Second, Khrushchev did not pass a judgment on which side was right or wrong in the dispute. He only mentioned that the border war was a “sad story”. Third, he mentioned that the conflict promoted nationalism and “war mania”. Finally, he blamed China for India’s oppression of the Indian Communist Party.⁴⁷

Even after this speech, the aftereffects of the Sino-Indian war kept haunting Sino-Soviet relations. The Soviets surmised that China’s purpose with the war was to undermine the peaceful tendencies in international relations and it had negative influence on the entirety of global affairs.⁴⁸ They further claimed that China was selfish in the Sino-Indian border dispute because it ignored the consequences the fight had for the communist party and working class of India.⁴⁹ Furthermore, China’s behaviour undermined the establishment of a united front against imperialism in Asia and

⁴³ Niu, "1969 年中苏边界冲突与中国外交战略的调整(the 1969 Sino-Soviet Border Clash and the Adjustment of China's Diplomatic Strategy)," 71-74.

⁴⁴ Tao, *中美关系史 (the History of Sino-US Relations)*, 294.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 295-97.

⁴⁶ Ma, *The Cultural Revolution in the Foreign Ministry of China*, 242.

⁴⁷ “Report from the Chinese Foreign Ministry, 'The Soviet Union’s Stance on the Sino-Indian Boundary Question and Soviet-Indian Relations',” April, 1963, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, PRC FMA 105-01272-01, pp. 20, 23-27.

⁴⁸ National Archives of India, no. C/162(10)CH/63: “Statement of the Soviet Government, 21 September, 1963” in “Tripartite Nuclear Test Ban Treaty—Exchanges between the Chinese and the Russians” p. 205.

⁴⁹ National Archives of India, no. C/162(10)CH/63: “Statement of the Soviet Government, 21 September, 1963” in “Tripartite Nuclear Test Ban Treaty—Exchanges between the Chinese and the Russians” p. 218.

relations within the socialist bloc, as the Soviets and other socialist states did not agree with China's approach.⁵⁰

At the same time, India boosted cooperation with the US. A 1963 report from the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences suggested that there was a steep increase in Indo-US military and economic cooperation. It points out that Indian military officials visited the US after the 1962 Sino-Indian border war and that the US sent Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs W. Averell Harriman to India to coordinate an anti-Chinese strategy and pledge military aid. The US was assisting the construction of the Indian radar system, while India let US aircraft enter Indian airspace. At the same time, the US was sending warships to Indian harbours. US-Indian commercial interaction also deepened, and India became the largest US aid recipient in the world. China saw this as a full-blown US-Indian collusion against China. The report goes as far as to propose an unsubstantiated claim that India allowed the US to build a military base on its territory and joined the Southeast Asian alliance system.⁵¹

Both Washington and New Delhi thought of Beijing as a significant threat. India considered China to be its most vicious enemy, while Presidents Kennedy and Johnson thought that China represented a bigger threat to peace than the Soviets.⁵² The Johnson administration saw India as one of the dominos in Asia and wanted to avoid its fall. The US assistance to India at this time emphasized economic aid due to Beijing's engagement in Vietnam and New Delhi's weaknesses in the economic realm. Due to the Sino-Soviet split, the US and the Soviet Union shared the goal of restraining Beijing, so the US tacitly accepted the Soviet cooperation with India. For instance, the US did not interfere with Moscow's mediation effort between India and Pakistan in 1965-1966.⁵³

The escalation of the Vietnam war did not bring positive changes to Sino-Indian relations. As India made attempts to promote peace between the warring parties, Chinese leaders thought that New Delhi's strove to consolidate Soviet-Indian partnership that aimed to separate China from "Vietnam and other nations."⁵⁴

⁵⁰ National Archives of India, no. C/162(10)CH/63: "Statement of the Soviet Government, 21 September, 1963" in "Tripartite Nuclear Test Ban Treaty—Exchanges between the Chinese and the Russians" p. 216.

⁵¹ Shanghai Archives, no. C26-2-84-57: "天下大事报告会——美帝国主义和印度大资产阶级的勾结" (Major events of the world: Collusion between US imperialism and India's big bourgeoisie, 26 April, 1963) , 57-77.

⁵² Madan, *Fateful Triangle: How China Shaped U.S.-India Relations During the Cold War*, 151.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 189-90.

⁵⁴ National Archives of India, no. PP(JS)3(9)/75: "R. K. Nehru: Our China Policy—A personal assessment, 30 July, 1968" in "Sino-Indian matters, Part II." p. 86.

This section aimed to establish that China's external environment was highly threatening in the run-up to the 1967 clashes on the Sino-Indian border. The escalation of the Vietnam war was threatening to expand into Chinese territory, while the US was implementing a containment strategy against Beijing.⁵⁵ Against the backdrop of deepening ideological confrontation, Sino-Soviet border talks failed in 1964 and the two sides' cooperation in aiding Vietnam faltered. China linked the threats emanating from the superpowers and argued that India was part of the anti-Chinese plot of Moscow and Washington. As the next section will show, Mao chose to respond to these external threats with external mobilization.

4.2. China's response: uniting the Third World against Washington and Moscow

Against this backdrop of Chinese hostility with the two superpowers, China wanted to prevent the neutral states from becoming US or Soviet allies.⁵⁶ The notion "Third World" replaced the idea of the uncommitted states. There were two types of Third Worlds. The first type included Asia, Africa, Latin America and the second type was the group of capitalist and developed states of Western Europe.⁵⁷ The second group referred to the reluctant allies of imperialism, looking for ways to free themselves from Washington.⁵⁸ Mao argued that both Third Worlds were against the Soviet Union and the United States, meaning that they could become partners of China in its crusade against imperialism. Therefore, the geopolitical importance of these states was elevated, and Chinese leaders went on to boost ties with them through state visits around Africa and South Asia.⁵⁹

During these engagements, China consistently emphasized the same message to these states. They wanted to shape the perceptions of these states by pointing out the importance of unity between Africa and Asia, the necessity of identifying the principal enemy and the prominence of

⁵⁵ Garson, "Lyndon B. Johnson and the China Enigma," 76-77.

⁵⁶ Cai, "冷战与 60 年代前期南亚国际关系的变化 (the Cold War and the Change in South Asia's International Relations in the Early 1960s) ," 481.

⁵⁷ Danhui Li, "中苏分裂与“文革”时期的中国外交 (the Sino-Soviet Split and China's Cultural Revolution Foreign Policy) ," in *中华人民共和国专题史稿 (Draft History of the People's Republic of China)* , ed. Dehong Guo, Haiguang Wang, and Gang Chao (Chengdu: Sichuan People's Press, 2004), 490.

⁵⁸ Armstrong, *Revolutionary Diplomacy: Chinese Foreign Policy and the United Front Doctrine*, 89.

⁵⁹ Cai, "冷战与 60 年代前期南亚国际关系的变化 (the Cold War and the Change in South Asia's International Relations in the Early 1960s) ," 481.

national liberation movements. According to the united front doctrine, the probable aim of this policy was to isolate the US by establishing a broad coalition against it.⁶⁰

In 1964, Mao revised his theory. China was not separated from the Third World anymore but became a part of it. This idea surfaced in Mao's comments when he met with a French delegation in January 1964. He said that the Third World should be united all the way from London through Paris to China.⁶¹ On a similar note, Zhou Enlai's comments to the representatives of Laos, North Vietnam and Cambodia suggest that these Southeast Asian states were at the forefront in the fight against US imperialism while China was at the rear. China had to support them so that they can put up a good fight against imperialism.⁶²

The theoretical groundwork for China's grand strategy of establishing a united front was further developed in Lin Biao's 1965 article titled "Long Live the Victory of the People's War". The core message of the article was to externalize China's strategy adopted against Japanese imperialism. During the Japanese invasion, Mao's purpose was to establish the broadest coalition of people to create numerical superiority against the invaders. Their target was to unite 90% of the Chinese population under their banner so that they can isolate the enemy. At that time, 80% of the Chinese population were peasants. Relying on this segment of the population, the CCP established the strategy of "villages encircle the cities" (*nongcun baowei chengshi*, 农村包围城市). The rationale was the following. During the invasion, the Japanese imperialists based themselves in the cities and controlled major logistical arteries in China. Hence, the communists and other defenders of the country established their bases in the villages. Over time, supporters of the Communists reached a critical mass, and triumphed not only over the Japanese but also the Kuomintang.⁶³

Lin Biao's article attempted to externalize this strategy to diplomacy. He argued that in the Cold War, Western Europe and North America were the "cities of the world", while Asian, African and Latin American states were the villages. Again, China wanted to achieve numerical superiority

⁶⁰ Armstrong, *Revolutionary Diplomacy: Chinese Foreign Policy and the United Front Doctrine*, 81.

⁶¹ Li, "中苏分裂与“文革”时期的中国外交 (the Sino-Soviet Split and China's Cultural Revolution Foreign Policy) ," 492-93.

⁶² Shanghai Archives, no. A33-2-22-1 "周总理接见老挝爱国战线党和中立派联合友好代表团全体成员的谈话记录" (Record of talks between Premier Zhou and the Lao Patriotic Front Party and the Joint Friendship Delegation, 13 October, 1964), p. 12.

⁶³ Biao Lin, *人民战争胜利万岁 (Long Live the Victory of the People's War)* (Beijing: People's Press, 1965), 3, 6, 15-16, 18.

and isolate the enemy—this time in the international context.⁶⁴ In the 1965-1972 period, the number of newly independent states grew rapidly: 104 of the 140 countries of the world were these states. Accordingly, their weight in international politics increased as well. In the Chinese narrative, these countries had different culture, history and economy, but they had one thing in common: their opposition to colonialism and imperialism.⁶⁵

Therefore, the essence of foreign policy remained to establish the broadest possible coalition with Asian, African and Latin American states, isolate imperialism and triumph over it. Although the US was a formidable adversary, numerical superiority could have nullified its military prowess. The Asian, African and Latin American states had to eradicate imperialism by disintegrating it and destroying its tentacles in separate corners of the world. Lin Biao also criticized revisionists in his article. Revisionists argued that the oppressed people of the world could have achieved independence without armed struggle. According to Lin, this was a ploy to convince the resistance to lay down their arms so that the Soviets and the Americans can dominate the world.⁶⁶ Supporting oppressed people's struggle for power abroad was a primary task of Chinese foreign policy.⁶⁷ Lin's theoretical propositions were confirmed by the leadership.⁶⁸

Foreign Minister Chen Yi's comments at a 29 September 1965 press conference also suggest that China was working on uniting Asia and Africa against imperialism. When discussing the Second Afro-Asian conference, Chen said that the first point on the agenda was supposed to be the denunciation of US imperialism. He also mentioned that China was willing to collaborate with other states in the quest of eradicating colonialism and imperialism. Finally, he mentioned that China was ready for a war against the US, India and the Soviet Union.⁶⁹ In early 1966, Zhou Enlai argued that the target of the international united front should be the United States because it was invading other countries and strived for global hegemony.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Ibid., 39-40, 44.

⁶⁵ Xie, *中国外交史, 1949-1979 (a Diplomatic History of China, 1949-1979)*, 328.

⁶⁶ Lin, *人民战争胜利万岁 (Long Live the Victory of the People's War)*, 47, 51.

⁶⁷ Li, "中苏分裂与“文革”时期的中国外交 (the Sino-Soviet Split and China's Cultural Revolution Foreign Policy)," 480-86.

⁶⁸ Niu, "论 60 年代末中国对美政策转变的历史背景 (on the Historical Background of the Change in China's Us Policy in the Late 1960s)," 458.

⁶⁹ Chen Yi, "China's Foreign Policy," *Survival* 7, no. 9 (1965): 321-22, 25-27.

⁷⁰ Niu, "1969 年中苏边界冲突与中国外交战略的调整 (the 1969 Sino-Soviet Border Clash and the Adjustment of China's Diplomatic Strategy)," 67.

Beijing's strategy of establishing a China-led united front against imperialism had consequences for Sino-Indian relations: it led to a vicious competition between Beijing and New Delhi for the allegiance of the uncommitted states. China's tactic was to establish itself as a reliable partner of African-Asian states and undermine India's standing among them. Beijing claimed that China was committed to Afro-Asian solidarity, but India "hired itself out to US imperialism" and collaborated with the Soviet Union. China also charged India with aggression against its neighbours and expansionism.⁷¹ Chinese leaders framed India as a reactionary state with a weak economy that was not a good example to follow. Furthermore, China wanted to undermine India's standing as a nonaligned state with the narrative that the US and the Soviet Union controlled New Delhi through their aid and the latter obeyed imperialism in exchange. This was put into sharp contrast with the African-Asian states' anti-imperialist standing.⁷²

Chinese propaganda strove to persuade the African-Asian states that Beijing's development path was superior to India's. The PRC also emphasized India's military loss and dependence on foreign aid.⁷³

As the Sino-Indian schism deepened, the African-Asian states disintegrated into factions at international conferences. China, Pakistan, Cambodia, Indonesia was one faction against India, Yugoslavia and other nonaligned nations. An Indian analysis suggest that the other four states combined forces to assume "the leadership of the Afro-Asian world".⁷⁴ India, on the other hand, cooperated with the Soviets on international platforms against China. Indians sided with the Soviets in their confrontations with China, while the Soviets backed India on the Sino-Indian border dispute if it was raised on these fora.⁷⁵ One debate between the two camps arose when New Delhi was keen on inviting the USSR to the second Afro-Asian conference.⁷⁶ This became a cause of major concern in China and Beijing went to great lengths to prevent the Soviets from participating. At the end of the day, China succeeded by ganging up with Pakistan, Indonesia and

⁷¹ National Archives of India, PP(JS)3(9)/75: "Note given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, 15 September, 1966" in "Sino-Indian matters, Part II." p. 14.

⁷² National Archives of India, PP(JS)3(9)/75: "J. S. Mehta: Counter Strategy to meet the Chinese diplomatic hostility towards India, 27 January, 1965" in "Sino-Indian matters, Part II." pp. 52-53.

⁷³ Madan, *Fateful Triangle: How China Shaped U.S.-India Relations During the Cold War*, 170.

⁷⁴ National Archives of India, no. 118(78)/WII/64: "The Indian Delegation's Report on the Preparatory Meeting of Ministers at Djakarta for the Second Afro-Asian Conference" in "Non-aligned Conference at Cairo, 1964", p. 44.

⁷⁵ J. A. Naik, *Russia's Policy Towards India: From Stalin to Yeltsin* (New Delhi: M. D. Publications, 1995), 140-42.

⁷⁶ National Archives of India, no. 118(78)/WII/64: "The Indian Delegation's Report on the Preparatory Meeting of Ministers at Djakarta for the Second Afro-Asian Conference" in "Non-aligned Conference at Cairo, 1964", pp. 44-52.

Guinea in their opposition to the Soviet involvement and India conceded to their requirement.⁷⁷ This suggests that China wanted to prevent India from becoming a leader of the Third World, as New Delhi could have led those states toward China's great power enemies.

4.3. *Internal threat: Cultural Revolution*

4.3.1. Internal threat and the Cultural Revolution

The Soviet threat exerted a major influence on Chinese domestic politics. Mao linked internal dissent to external Soviet revisionism. As these apprehensions deepened, Mao feared a collaboration between external and internal adversaries and moved the focus of the class struggle from the international domain to the domestic one.⁷⁸ Mao connected certain domestic political moves—farming quota system, political rehabilitations—with similar Soviet policies that he deemed revisionist. Hence, he thought that some members of the CCP were Soviet agents. He turned his attacks from class enemies to the Soviet agents within the CCP. This change served as the basis of the Cultural Revolution.⁷⁹

One of the main concerns of the Chinese leadership at the time was Soviet interference with a potential coup d'état against Mao. It was not clear who would plot such a coup, but Chinese leaders expected the Soviets to dispatch troops to assist it. On 17 June 1966, Foreign Minister Chen Yi gave a speech to the officials of the Chinese foreign ministry in which he pointed out that more than 60 coups had taken place in African, Asian and Latin American countries during the 1960-1966 period. Therefore, the danger of a coup was present in China as well, since Beijing was the core of the crusade against imperialism and colonialism. The Soviets were likely to interfere because Moscow sought to boost ties with the US the two superpowers were planning to jointly encircle China. The Soviets dispatched three divisions to the Soviet-Mongolian border. The CCP

⁷⁷ National Archives of India, no. 118(78)/WII/64: "The Indian Delegation's Report on the Preparatory Meeting of Ministers at Djakarta for the Second Afro-Asian Conference" in "Non-aligned Conference at Cairo, 1964", pp. 44-52.

⁷⁸ Kuang-Sheng Liao, "Linkage Politics in China: Internal Mobilization and Articulated External Hostility in the Cultural Revolution, 1967-1969," *World Politics* 28, no. 4 (1976): 598.

⁷⁹ Li, "中苏分裂与“文革”时期的中国外交 (the Sino-Soviet Split and China's Cultural Revolution Foreign Policy) ," 483-84.

leadership was convinced that if a coup was to happen, the Soviets would send in their troops to assist it.⁸⁰

The real internal threat to Mao was posed by party bureaucrats. Although he was the top leader of China, he could not exercise effective control over the country, because his orders were not executed by party bureaucrats. These officials accepted Mao's rule nominally, but when it came to policy implementation, they ignored or defied him.⁸¹ As expected, Mao's initial efforts to bring the bureaucrats down were undermined in the implementation process. The party bureaucrats established a Cultural Revolution Group in accordance with Mao's orders, but the initial members of this group included Liu Shaoqi's supporters such as Peng Zhen, Lu Dingyi and Zhou Yang. The result was that Mao's instructions met with resistance, even in issues like the publication of an article that criticized a Beijing opera called "The dismissal of Hai Rui"—a story of a Ming dynasty official who was demoted because he dared to oppose the emperor.⁸²

Mao was enraged. He concluded that revisionism was rampant in the central leadership and capitalism could return to China.⁸³ Since he lacked the clout to do away with those who dared to defy him, he had to utilize forces that were not controlled by the bureaucratic machinery: the PLA cadre.⁸⁴ An influential PLA leader, Lin Biao, in turn, needed civilian support to triumph over his competitor within the army, Chief of Staff Luo Ruiqing.⁸⁵ Pushed by the circumstances, Maoist radicals and Lin Biao established a partnership in February 1966 at the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces.⁸⁶ This meeting laid down the ideological groundwork of the Cultural Revolution. The forum's summary proposed that the literary world was controlled by antisocialist and anti-CCP elements, providing Mao with ideological legitimacy in his fight against the party bureaucrats. After Mao gained an approval from the Central Military Commission, he acquired enough clout to wage a campaign against those who dared to oppose him. A new Cultural Revolution Group was established, this time filled with Maoist supporters.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ Ma, *The Cultural Revolution in the Foreign Ministry of China*, 12-14.

⁸¹ Fairbank and Goldman, *China: A New History*, 384.

⁸² Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 268-76.

⁸³ Zhefeng Hu and Huamin Yu, *毛泽东与林彪 (Mao Zedong and Lin Biao)* (Beijing: New World Press, 2015), 333.

⁸⁴ Fairbank and Goldman, *China: A New History*, 387.

⁸⁵ Jurgen Domes, "The Cultural Revolution and the Army," *Asian Survey* 8, no. 5 (1968): 351-52.

⁸⁶ Hong Yung Lee, *The Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: A Case Study* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 14.

⁸⁷ Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 257, 92-94.

Mao formally initiated the Cultural Revolution at the 11th Plenum of the 8th CC in August 1966. At the same meeting, Lin Biao was designated as Mao's successor while Liu Shaoqi was demoted to be the sixth most powerful member of the party.⁸⁸

Officially, the Cultural Revolution had four main targets. First, intellectuals and academics. Second, the "Chinese Khrushchev" (revisionists) and his representatives within the CCP. Third, the "capitalist roaders". Finally, landlords and rich farmers.⁸⁹

The Red Guards were tasked with taking down these actors. The name originates from the 1930s, when the Red Guards were farmers assisting Mao's Red Army in its fight against the Kuomintang and the Japanese. During the Cultural Revolution, the name referred to students in military outfit and red armband. They raged on the streets of China with the purpose of removing foreign products and promoting Maoist thoughts. They committed atrocities against religious leaders and Chinese citizens wearing foreign clothes. They encouraged the humiliation of university professors.⁹⁰

4.3.2. Radical foreign policy and Sino-Indian relations

Before 1967, the Cultural Revolution was loyal to its name and was limited to the cultural field and publications. In January 1967, however, the participants expanded the scope of the movement. The movement shed its disguise of cultural aims and turned its focus toward the acquisition of political power. The process started by the overtake in Shanghai Communist Party Committee. On 4 January, the rebels published an article in *Wenhuibao* (文汇报, a leftist newspaper) arguing that capitalists infiltrated the party, deceived the working class and hindered production. These infiltrators were also planning a new wave of attack against the Cultural Revolution.⁹¹ On 9 January, Mao Zedong himself endorsed the article. The article was reprinted in the *People's Daily*

⁸⁸ Academia Sinica Archives (Taiwan), no. 11-31-50-00-004: "中共政情及外交部敌情研究资料" (Research on the Political Situation of the Communist Party of China and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1964-1969) pp. 142-145; Angang Hu, *毛泽东与文革 (Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution)* (Hong Kong: Strong Wind Press, 2009), 156, 61, 67.

⁸⁹ Academia Sinica Archives (Taiwan), no. 11-31-50-00-004: "中共政情及外交部敌情研究资料" (Research on the Political Situation of the Communist Party of China and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1964-1969) p. 142.

⁹⁰ Academia Sinica Archives (Taiwan), no. 11-31-50-00-004: "中共政情及外交部敌情研究资料" (Research on the Political Situation of the Communist Party of China and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1964-1969) , pp. 60-62.

⁹¹ Youzhi Chen, *内乱与抗争 (Civil Strife and Struggle)* (Beijing: Beijing People's Press, 2011), 49.

with Mao's editorial note that approved of its message. This lent the rebels legitimacy to take over control from the party bureaucrats. The rebels toppled the Communist Party Committee in Shanghai, laying down the groundwork for expanding these takeovers to whole China.⁹²

However, the rebel "seizure of power" across the country did not go as smoothly as expected. Out of the 29 provinces of China, the PLA supported the rebels only in six. In the remaining 23 provinces, the PLA was either neutral or did not support the rebels in any way.⁹³ Hence, the rebels had difficulties in overcoming the established party apparatus that countered them with strikes, the disruption of production, takeover of trade unions and establishing competing mass organizations.⁹⁴ Confrontations emerged between rebels and incumbents in Anhui, Jiangsu, Beijing and other locales.⁹⁵ In the period from 30 April to 10 May 1967, more than 100 violent conflicts occurred, resulting in more than 60,000 casualties.⁹⁶

These conflicts happened between two camps. On the one hand were the "radicals" who wanted to let the masses go unchecked and remove the capitalists from the party. Moderates, on the other hand, wanted to keep the masses in check and maintain order.⁹⁷

While rebel movements proliferated over the country, the moderates sought to keep radical leftist influence out of the Foreign Ministry. On 26 December 1966, Zhou Enlai gave a speech to the rebels in which he pointed out that if political struggle entered the Foreign Ministry, state secrets could leak out, compromising Chinese foreign policy.⁹⁸

In January 1967, Chen Yi also instructed the rebels to refrain from interfering with foreign affairs. On 6 February, he drafted a document on how to deal with the radicals damaging foreign embassies and it was approved by Mao—suggesting that the Chairman was not happy with radical practices either.⁹⁹

Their efforts failed. Lin Biao, Jiang Qing and Kang Sheng purged Chen Yi and put their own associate, Wang Li, in charge of the foreign ministry in July 1967.¹⁰⁰ The radicals recalibrated

⁹² Ibid., 50.

⁹³ Domes, "The Cultural Revolution and the Army," 356.

⁹⁴ Gittings John, "The Chinese Army's Role in the Cultural Revolution," *Pacific Affairs* 39, no. 3/4 (1966): 284.

⁹⁵ Chen, *内乱与抗争 (Civil Strife and Struggle)*, 52.

⁹⁶ Domes, "The Cultural Revolution and the Army," 357.

⁹⁷ Hu, *毛泽东与文革 (Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution)*, 209.

⁹⁸ Ma, *The Cultural Revolution in the Foreign Ministry of China*, 54.

⁹⁹ Niu, "论 60 年代末中国对美政策转变的历史背景 (on the Historical Background of the Change in China's Us Policy in the Late 1960s)," 57-60.

¹⁰⁰ Li, "中苏分裂与“文革”时期的中国外交 (the Sino-Soviet Split and China's Cultural Revolution Foreign Policy)," 480-86.

China's foreign policy toward the promotion of Mao Zedong Thought on foreign land.¹⁰¹ Diplomatic incidents followed and China's bilateral ties with its neighbours worsened.¹⁰²

Sino-Indian ties suffered as well. On 4 June 1967, K. Raghunath—second secretary of the Indian Embassy in Beijing tasked with heading the Information Services of India—and his colleague P. Vijai were arrested while taking pictures in the vicinity of a Buddhist temple close to the Chinese capital. The Chinese authorities accused Raghunath with espionage and the impersonation of Pakistani and Nepalese diplomats.¹⁰³ On 13 June, the two Indians were charged and convicted with espionage. On the morning of 14 June, Chinese authorities brought them to the airport for deportation. India retaliated by charging two employees of the PRC Embassy in New Delhi—Chen Lu-Chih and Hsieh Cheng-Hao—with subversive activities and compelling them to deportation.¹⁰⁴ The deterioration of relations did not stop there. An Indian mob surrounded the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi, obstructing the work of employees there on 14 June.¹⁰⁵ The mob got out of control and attacked the embassy, injuring 8 Chinese employees on 16 June.¹⁰⁶ On 17 June, a Chinese mob surrounded the Indian Embassy in Beijing.¹⁰⁷ One of the Chinese rebels took down the Indian national emblem from the front door while another one broke the front window with a stone.¹⁰⁸ Tensions subsided only after the two Chinese Embassy employees were taken home by a Chinese aircraft after sustaining injuries from the mob attack.¹⁰⁹

A subsequent Indian analysis revealed that the Raghunath affair went beyond bilateral relations. The incident served as a deterrent to the foreign diplomatic personnel in China. As factional fights intensified, the antagonists charged each other in newspaper articles. Inadvertently, state secrets leaked out and made it to the pages of Red Guard newspapers. Therefore, foreign

¹⁰¹ Nianlong Han, ed. *当代中国外交 (Modern Chinese Diplomacy)* (Beijing: Chinese Social Sciences Press, 1987), 209-11.

¹⁰² National Archives of India, no. PHN/104/1/67: "Extract from I.S.I. Transmission 7 August 1967" in "China" p. 160.

¹⁰³ Vandana Menon, "Remembering the War We Forgot: 51 Years Ago, How India Gave China a Bloody Nose," *The Print*, <https://theprint.in/security/remembering-the-war-we-forgot-51-years-ago-how-india-gave-china-a-bloodynose/127356/>.

¹⁰⁴ Probal DasGupta, *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory over China* (New Delhi: Juggernaut Books, 2020), 114-17.

¹⁰⁵ National Archives of India, no. PHN/104/1/67: "Note Given by the Embassy of China in India, to the Ministry of External Affairs, new Delhi, 15 June, 1967" in "China" pp. 79-80.

¹⁰⁶ National Archives of India, no. PHN/104/1/67: "Note given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, June 19, 1967" in "China" p. 87.

¹⁰⁷ National Archives of India, no. PHN/104/1/67: "Text of protest note dated 18.6.1967 delivered by the Ministry of External Affairs to the Charge d'Affaires, Chinese Embassy, New Delhi" in "China" p. 83.

¹⁰⁸ Ma, *The Cultural Revolution in the Foreign Ministry of China*, 126.

¹⁰⁹ DasGupta, *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory over China*, 122.

diplomats had direct access to sensitive information about China—all they had to do was to go to the streets and buy newspapers. As the rebels noticed the unwanted side effect of the revolution, they forbade diplomats from reading sensitive posters and buy newspapers. The diplomats ignored the warning, and maintained their intelligence gathering activities. The purpose of the incarceration and deportation of Raghunath was to deter other diplomats from collecting intelligence.¹¹⁰

Parallel to diplomatic tensions, China turned up anti-Indian propaganda as well. After the Indian elections in February 1967, Chinese newspapers claimed that the new Indian government was more reactionary and more obedient to imperialism than the previous one. Articles also lashed out against Tibetan protest in front of the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi.¹¹¹ In July 1967, the Naxalbari rebellion in the India made it to the pages of the People's Daily. In May, a landowner beat up a sharecropper when the latter asked for his dues. Upset people captured the landowner with his men and killed them. A couple of days later, a police officer was killed by local workers as he was investigating a case of forcible harvesting. Such incidents proliferated and evolved into deadly communist activism in Bengal. The Chinese press ran an article titled “Spring Thunder over India” in which it lauded the acts of the peasants.¹¹² The commentary argued that India was independent, but it was still a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, as it remained dependent on Britain, the US and the Soviet Union. The piece also asserted that Maoist principles were applicable to the Indian context and instructed the rebels to use the villages and peasants as base to encircle the cities and the ruling class. Their only way to success was through armed struggle and the toppling of the establishment.¹¹³

The aim of this section was to show that in the summer of 1967, Mao was losing grip on policymaking. The rebels were useful in his effort of initiating a revolution but he lost control over them. Mao and Zhou failed to keep the rebel influence out of the Foreign Ministry, further signalling the point that Mao was hardly at the helm. The radicals put their own associate, Wang

¹¹⁰ National Archives of India, no. PHN/104/1/67: Note from Charges d'Affaires R. D. Sathe in the Embassy of India in Peking to Shri A. K. Damodaran, Deputy Secretary (E.A.), Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, 22 July, 1967” in “China” pp. 141-148.

¹¹¹ National Archives of India, no. HI/1012(14)/67: “Political Report for the month of March 1967” in “Monthly political reports (other than annual reports) from Peking,” pp. 85-86.

¹¹² DasGupta, *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory over China*, 90-91.

¹¹³ “印度的春雷” (Spring Thunder over India), People's Daily, 5 July, 1967.

Li, in charge and cemented rebel control over the Foreign Ministry. In what follows, I aim to show that not only did Mao lose control over civilian affairs, but his grip on the military also faltered.

4.3.3. Mao's weakness and Lin Biao's strength

With the deepening of Cultural Revolution, the radicals sought to get the PLA involved. The moderates disagreed, leading to a vicious debate between the two factions.¹¹⁴ Their dispute revolved around the influence of the Cultural Revolution on the PLA. The radicals thought that the PLA was on the verge of revisionism, necessitating purges among its cadre.¹¹⁵ The moderates argued that purges in the PLA could lead to anarchy.¹¹⁶ In his criticism, Foreign Minister Chen Yi—a moderate—offended Mao with three of his comments. First, he mentioned Khrushchev's succession of Stalin, a sensitive topic for Mao due to his animosity with the former. Second, Chen criticized the Yan'an rectification campaign, a political movement that put Mao on the top of the CCP—again pushing Mao the wrong way. Third, Chen Yi criticized the Cultural Revolution for compelling confessions from individuals and subsequently treating those confessions as credible sources of information—this implied that the Cultural Revolution had bigger mistakes than the Yan'an rectification campaign. With this, Chen Yi criticized two movements which Mao saw as his achievements.¹¹⁷

Chen Yi's comments pushed Mao toward a political alliance with Lin Biao and the radicals.¹¹⁸ With the support of Mao and Lin, the radicals triumphed over the moderates.¹¹⁹ Moderates lost clout over policy making as the radicals took over the responsibility of running the daily affairs of the CCP Central Committee.¹²⁰ At the same time, Lin Biao established himself as the most powerful military leader within the PLA with no peer competitor in sight.¹²¹

¹¹⁴ Hu, *毛泽东与文革 (Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution)*, 231-32.

¹¹⁵ Tao Zeng, "争议的抗争——所谓“二月逆流”的前前后后 (Just Resistance: The Story of the So-Called "February Adverse Current")," in *回首“文革” (Looking Back on the "Cultural Revolution")*, ed. Hua Zhang and Caiqing Su (Beijing: Chinese Communist Party Literature Press, 1999), 970.

¹¹⁶ Chen, *内乱与抗争 (Civil Strife and Struggle)*, 56.

¹¹⁷ Ma, *The Cultural Revolution in the Foreign Ministry of China*, 108.

¹¹⁸ Chunming Jin, "文化大革命“史稿”(Historical Draft of the Cultural Revolution) (Chengdu: Sichuan People Press, 1995), 236.

¹¹⁹ Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 304-07.

¹²⁰ Ma, *The Cultural Revolution in the Foreign Ministry of China*, 110.

¹²¹ Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 307.

The radicals achieved what they wanted. The Cultural Revolution devoured the PLA, leading to chaotic results. The PLA was supposed to “support the left” (*zhizuo*, 支左) but the troops could not distinguish who was and was not a leftist: hence, they did not know whom to support.¹²² Both factions claimed to be revolutionary and called their opponents anti-Maoists.¹²³ Overall, the PLA involvement in the Cultural Revolution confirmed the moderates’ fears: the troops got involved in local fights and divided into factions.¹²⁴

What the radicals really wanted was the PLA’s support for their favoured local factions.¹²⁵ In April, the central leadership instructed the PLA not to do anything with rebel organizations before coordinating with Beijing first.¹²⁶ The goal with this move was to unite the PLA and the rebels approved by radicals. By this time, there were unrests all over China. In Yunnan, local party leaders arrested and sent rebels to labour camps. In Sichuan, the local cadre confronted the incoming Red Guards, leaving 2500 people injured in the provincial capital, Chengdu.¹²⁷ The Cultural Revolution in Guangzhou faltered and led to extended fights between the contestants.¹²⁸ The central leadership chose to handle these incidents by sending investigating teams to the troubled localities to get a grip of the situation and mediate between fighting factions.¹²⁹ As the Party descended into chaos, military officials remained the sole organized group within the PRC which made them the most potent political entity at the time. Therefore, Mao’s capacity of exercising power became dependent on the PLA and most importantly, Lin Biao.¹³⁰

The Wuhan incident of July 1967 occurred against this backdrop. The loss of power by military leaders other than Lin led to a disconnect between the PLA Headquarters at the centre and Regional Military Commands. In the case of Wuhan, this manifested in PLA’s support for different mass organizations. Under the leadership of local commander Chen Zaidao, the Wuhan Military

¹²² Chen, *内乱与抗争 (Civil Strife and Struggle)* , 63.

¹²³ National Archives of India, no. PHN/104/1/67: “Some aspects of the current phase of China’s Cultural Revolution, report prepared by the Ministry of External Affairs (East Asia Division), 10 March, 1967” in “China” pp. 31-31A.

¹²⁴ Hu, *毛泽东与文革 (Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution)* , 229.

¹²⁵ National Archives of India, no. HI/1012(14)/67: “Monthly Political Report for the month of July, 1967” in “Monthly political reports (other than annual reports) from Peking,” p. 156.

¹²⁶ Nianyi Wang, *大动乱的年代(the Age of Great Turmoil)* (Zhengzhou: Henan People's Press, 1996), 228.

¹²⁷ Thomas W. Robinson, "The Wuhan Incident: Local Strife and Provincial Rebellion During the Cultural Revolution," *The China Quarterly*, no. 47 (1971): 415-17.

¹²⁸ National Archives of India, no. PHN/104/1/67: “Some aspects of the current phase of China’s Cultural Revolution, report prepared by the Ministry of External Affairs (East Asia Division), 10 March, 1967” in “China” pp. 31-31A.

¹²⁹ Robinson, "The Wuhan Incident: Local Strife and Provincial Rebellion During the Cultural Revolution," 417.

¹³⁰ Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 257, 92-94.

Region backed the moderates.¹³¹ The “moderates” were the ones endangered by the Cultural Revolution: local political and military cadre, senior workers and the public security organs. The central leadership in Beijing supported the “radicals” who were university and high school students with zealous love toward Mao Zedong, seeking to remove “capitalist roaders” from the establishment.¹³² The issue of contention between them was that the moderates were against the removal of cadre from the Hubei and Wuhan Party Committees because they thought those officials made laudable political contributions. The rebels, on the other hand, wanted to remove the local officials.¹³³

The radical rebels had little chance against the moderate establishment, hence they asked for help from Beijing. The central leadership, including Mao, visited Wuhan to handle the issue personally.¹³⁴ Wang Li—member of the Cultural Revolution Small Group and deputy editor of *Hongqi*, a Central Committee journal dealing with theoretical issues—and Xie Fuchi—Vice Premier of the State Council and head of the Peking City Revolutionary Committee—were tasked to carry out the investigation.¹³⁵ Zhou Enlai made a speech on 18 July that was supposed to serve as a guideline for the work of Wang Li and Xie Fuchi. He made several points arguing that the local military command was on the wrong side of the conflict and that the radicals were correct.¹³⁶ During their inspection, Wang and Xie both repeatedly articulated their support toward the radicals and wanted to withdraw Chen Zaidao’s decision to dismantle a radical organization. Chen Zaidao and the moderates were upset with this proposal and they abducted Wang and Xie on 20 July. They were kept in custody for less than a day before their evacuation.¹³⁷ Mao had to leave Wuhan in secret—an unprecedented event since he rose to the highest echelons of the CCP.¹³⁸

Once the central leadership made it out safe, the Beijing sent in the 8190 and 8199 Airborne units, parts of the 15th Corps and the East China Sea Fleet to handle the situation. These units triumphed over those supporting the moderates and the situation was officially solved on 21 August. Chen Zaidao was charged with planning the abduction of Zhou Enlai, criticizing Jiang

¹³¹ Ibid., 309-11.

¹³² Robinson, "The Wuhan Incident: Local Strife and Provincial Rebellion During the Cultural Revolution," 423-25.

¹³³ Wang, *大动乱的年代*(*the Age of Great Turmoil*), 255.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 256-57.

¹³⁵ Robinson, "The Wuhan Incident: Local Strife and Provincial Rebellion During the Cultural Revolution," 419.

¹³⁶ Wang, *大动乱的年代*(*the Age of Great Turmoil*), 257.

¹³⁷ Robinson, "The Wuhan Incident: Local Strife and Provincial Rebellion During the Cultural Revolution," 424.

¹³⁸ Wang, *大动乱的年代*(*the Age of Great Turmoil*), 260.

Qing, ignoring central instructions, and colluding in the abduction of Wang and Xie.¹³⁹ The number of casualties (tortured and dead) in the course of the incident exceeded 180000.¹⁴⁰

One problem between Mao and Lin Biao was their different perspective on how to handle the wronged cadre of the Wuhan incident. Lin and the radicals wanted to purge them while Mao thought that it was better to “educate” them and promote unity. Wang Li tried to convince Mao that Chen had committed major mistakes and he had to be purged.¹⁴¹ Lin Biao was also in favour of purging Chen Zaidao. Mao, however, extended his protection to Chen. He called Chen Zaidao “comrade”, signalling that he held no major grudge against him. He also ordered an investigation in his case instead of purging him directly. Nevertheless, Lin Biao and the other radicals marshalled enough support to push through their will and removed Chen Zaidao from office on 27 July 1967.¹⁴²

After the Wuhan incident, unrests flared up in other spots, such as the one in Ningxia province in the end of August. The local military supported the radicals, and the central leadership approved the use of arms against the demonstrating crowds, leading to the death of more than a hundred citizens. In Guangxi, there were armed confrontations in 19 counties.¹⁴³ As chaos reigned all over China, the PLA was instructed to manage the country. Soldiers were responsible for handling administration, agriculture and industrial production.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Robinson, "The Wuhan Incident: Local Strife and Provincial Rebellion During the Cultural Revolution," 427-33.

¹⁴⁰ Chen, *内乱与抗争 (Civil Strife and Struggle)*, 73.

¹⁴¹ Yanchi Quan, *微行——杨成武在 1967 (Yang Chengwu in 1967)* (Guangzhou: Guangdong Tourism Press, 1997), 67, 120, 35.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 135-36, 40.

¹⁴³ Wang, *大动乱的年代 (the Age of Great Turmoil)*, 269-72.

¹⁴⁴ National Archives of India, no. HI/1012(14)/67: “Political Report for the month of March 1967” in “Monthly political reports (other than annual reports) from Peking,” p. 85.

4.3.4. Mao's political comeback

The above sections aimed to show that while the Cultural Revolution was predicated on Mao's personal cult, his position as the leader of the CCP was insecure in 1967. Based on the dissertation's indicator, by 1967, Lin has been in the top CCP leadership for 9 years, as he entered the Politburo Standing Committee in May 1958.¹⁴⁵ He usurped the second most powerful position within the CCP in 1966.¹⁴⁶ Lin utilized the succession struggle between Mao and Liu to accumulate power. The more Mao needed Lin to do away with those political stakeholders who opposed him, the more Lin could expand his own power base.¹⁴⁷ Lin used the support from the Maoists to do away with two of his competitors in the PLA, Luo Ruiqing and He Long.¹⁴⁸ He also used his alliance with Mao to gain advantage over leaders of other PLA factions such as Chen Xu and Nie Rongzhen. At the time of the Wuhan incident, Lin was already so powerful that he singlehandedly defused the crisis. Mao, on the other hand, had to escape from Wuhan under the cover of the night.¹⁴⁹

Not only did Mao lose control over the PLA, Lin Biao and his associates also managed to take over the foreign ministry. This meant that Mao's gambit to use radicals against his political opponents backfired. The radicals hijacked Mao's reputation and accumulated power under the disguise of serving the Chairman. As a result, Mao lost control over the PLA and Chinese foreign policy at the same time. After the Wuhan incident, he was intent on making good on his losses.

He sought to reverse the chaos unleashed by the Cultural Revolution. After the Wuhan incident, he embarked on a field trip to Central and East China.¹⁵⁰ He visited the provinces of Hebei, Henan, Hunan, Jiangxi and Zhejiang among others. He proposed a set of measures to address the chaos.¹⁵¹ They involved the mitigation of tensions between the two factions and the

¹⁴⁵ Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 225.

¹⁴⁶ Academia Sinica Archives (Taiwan), no. 11-31-50-00-004: “中共政情及外交部敌情研究资料” (Research on the Political Situation of the Communist Party of China and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1964-1969) pp. 142-145

¹⁴⁷ Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 284-87.

¹⁴⁸ Yan Jiaqi, Gao Gao, and D. W. Y. Kwok, *Turbulent Decade: A History of the Cultural Revolution* (University of Hawai'i Press, 1996), 190-91, 200-03.

¹⁴⁹ Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 310.

¹⁵⁰ Academia Sinica Archives (Taiwan), no. 11-31-50-00-004: “中共政情及外交部敌情研究资料” (Research on the Political Situation of the Communist Party of China and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1964-1969) pp. 142-145

¹⁵¹ Wang, *大动乱的年代(the Age of Great Turmoil)*, 273-74.

establishment of a “Great Alliance” between them.¹⁵² During his field trip, Mao used Yang Chengwu—the Chief of General Staff at the time—as an interlocutor between himself and Zhou Enlai. In the process, Mao requested Yang to keep distance from Lin during his trips to Beijing. He did not want any information about his animosity toward Lin to leak out. During these trips, Yang did not report to Lin Biao, only to Zhou Enlai. He also visited the old marshals but not Lin. This was unusual, given that Yang Chengwu was the Chief of General Staff at the time and was expected to report to Lin.¹⁵³ Mao also criticized Lin Biao’s 9 August speech that he gave during the reorganization of the Wuhan Military District. Lin mentioned that the success of the Cultural Revolution was dependent on Mao Zedong’s mighty reputation. Mao Zedong was disconcerted by this comment and said that those who rely on his reputation would get into trouble.¹⁵⁴

Relating to cadres, he argued that it made no sense to remove everyone, because only a little portion of them were capitalists.¹⁵⁵ Most of the cadres could remain in their positions.¹⁵⁶ Even those cadres who made mistakes were allowed to continue their work if they were willing to correct their wrongs.¹⁵⁷ Mao also sought to protect his allies in the reversal process. When Yang Chengwu complained to Mao that the old marshals in Beijing—Ye Jianying, Chen Yi among others—were concerned about ongoing purges, Mao reassured him that the old marshals had nothing to worry about.¹⁵⁸ Mao also told Yang Chengwu that a new institution was to be established with the responsibility of rehabilitating the wrongfully purged old cadre.¹⁵⁹

At the same time, Mao sought to reduce radical influence in Chinese politics and foreign policy. Mao and Zhou Enlai were reluctant to go straight against Lin and top-tier radicals. The PRC was already torn apart by the chaos of the Cultural Revolution and taking down Lin could have pushed it even further into mayhem. Therefore, Zhou and Mao did not go against Lin Biao and Jiang Qing directly. On 25 August 1967, Zhou instructed Yang Chengwu to brief the Chairman

¹⁵² Academia Sinica Archives (Taiwan), no. 11-31-50-00-004: “中共政情及外交部敌情研究资料” (Research on the Political Situation of the Communist Party of China and the Enemy Situation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1964-1969) pp. 142-145

¹⁵³ Quan, *微行——杨成武在 1967* (*Yang Chengwu in 1967*), 148-50, 84-85, 92-95, 225-26, 34.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁵⁵ Wang, *大动乱的年代* (*the Age of Great Turmoil*), 274.

¹⁵⁶ Chen, *内乱与抗争* (*Civil Strife and Struggle*), 75.

¹⁵⁷ Wang, *大动乱的年代* (*the Age of Great Turmoil*), 274.

¹⁵⁸ Quan, *微行——杨成武在 1967* (*Yang Chengwu in 1967*), 123-24.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 225.

about the chaos in the Foreign Ministry and the 7 August Wang Li's speech.¹⁶⁰ Wang Li encouraged rebels to take over the task of personnel appointments and to take down Chen Yi. Wang Li's support galvanized the rebels who engaged in controversial acts such as setting the British Embassy on fire.¹⁶¹ After Mao understood the situation, he argued that Wang Li and his accomplices undermined the Cultural Revolution. He ordered their arrest.¹⁶² At the same time, they left major radical players like Jiang Qing, Lin Biao and Kang Sheng unharmed, in order to maintain the modicum of political stability in the higher echelons.¹⁶³

On 1 September, the Peking Municipal Party Committee promulgated a resolution that instructed the rebels to revise their crusade against the capitalists within the party. Instead of armed confrontations, they were to use political methods of criticism and rectification against suspicious elements. On 5 September, the directive was expanded to whole China when Jiang Qing instructed rebels to stop attacking embassies and taking weapons.¹⁶⁴

The aim of this section was to elaborate on Mao Zedong's political position before the 1967 clashes on the Sino-Indian border. The Cultural Revolution was Mao's gambit to do away with elements within the party who opposed him. Unintendedly, he initiated a process that led to chaos all over China and weakened his own position as a leader. Therefore, the internal threat Mao faced at the time was high. His successor, Lin Biao, had been a PBSC member for nine years and accumulated formidable power at the time, making him a top member of the military. While Mao could not rein in the Wuhan crisis, Lin Biao managed to get the situation under control. The following sections focus on the parallel processes that went down on the Sino-Indian border.

¹⁶⁰ Tao, *中美关系史 (the History of Sino-US Relations)* , 299-301.

¹⁶¹ Ma, *The Cultural Revolution in the Foreign Ministry of China*, 195-96.

¹⁶² Chen, *内乱与抗争 (Civil Strife and Struggle)* , 76.

¹⁶³ Quan, *微行——杨成武在 1967 (Yang Chengwu in 1967)*, 182, 92.

¹⁶⁴ Melvin Gurtov, "The Foreign Ministry and Foreign Affairs During the Cultural Revolution," *The China Quarterly*, no. 40 (1969): 89-91.

4.4. China's use of force: Nathu La and Cho La clashes

4.4.1. 1965: India-Pakistan war and China's role

In order to understand the 1967 confrontations, we have to take a look at how the situation evolved on the border in the years after the 1962 war. While the fight subsided in 1962, tensions persevered. Although the Chinese government withdrew its forces after the war, it strove to maintain its presence in the area. Less than a year after the war, China set up 26 civilian outposts in the disputed area. 16 posts were in the eastern, 3 in the central,¹⁶⁵ and 7 in the western sector.¹⁶⁶ 22 of these posts—16 in the eastern sector and 6 in the western sector—were located within a zone that was supposed to be “demilitarized”, in accordance with the Chinese government’s proposals in 1962.¹⁶⁷ While these posts were “civilian”, India considered their establishment to be the “remilitarization” of Ladakh.¹⁶⁸ In the end of 1964, Zhou Enlai issued a statement regarding the seven civilian posts in the Western sector (Ladakh). He said that Indian demands of China withdrawing those posts were “unreasonable”. He also reiterated China’s claim to 90000 square kilometres of territory in the eastern sector—NEFA.¹⁶⁹

As time passed, the situation further deteriorated. In 1965, the Chinese Foreign Ministry became more assertive in its communication with India. On 27 August 1965, the Chinese government notified India that its troops stole 800 sheep and 59 yaks from Tibetan herdsmen. China requested India to return the animals and the four captured shepherds.¹⁷⁰ As India denied the Chinese claims, Beijing threatened with another war. On 24 September 1965, A. B. Vajpayee and other demonstrators brought 800 sheep in the front of the Chinese Embassy in Delhi as a way

¹⁶⁵ National Archives of India, no. C/125(106)CH/63: “Lok Sabha starred question no. 2414 regarding 26 Chinese civilian posts along Sino-Indian frontier, 19 August, 1963” pp. 3-5.

¹⁶⁶ National Archives of India, no. C/125/97/65/CH: “Lok Sabha starred question no. 877 regarding remilitarization of the 20 km demilitarized zone by China, 15 September, 1965” pp. 14-16.

¹⁶⁷ National Archives of India, no. C/125/117/CH/63: “Rajya Sabha starred question no 63 regarding Chinese military posts in demilitarized zone in Ladakh, 16 August, 1963” p. 15.

¹⁶⁸ National Archives of India, no. C/125/97/65/CH: “Lok Sabha starred question no. 877 regarding remilitarization of the 20 km demilitarized zone by China, 15 September, 1965” pp. 14-16.

¹⁶⁹ National Archives of India, no. C/125/19/65/CH: “Rajya Sabha starred question no. 695 regarding Chinese Prime Minister’s statement of non-withdrawal of posts in western sector, 2 March, 1965” pp. 10, 13-14.

¹⁷⁰ G. S. Bajpai, *China's Shadow over Sikkim: The Politics of Intimidation* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 1999), 147.

of protesting Chinese threats. In return, China accused the Indian government with agitating mobs.¹⁷¹

Chinese and Indian troops almost came to blows during the second India-Pakistan war of 1965. During the war, Beijing provided support to Pakistan in two forms. The first form was diplomatic, manifesting in a range of declarations that identified India as a provocateur and an expansionist power.¹⁷² On 8 September, China warned India that some of its military structures were established exactly within the Tibet Autonomous Region.¹⁷³ China also linked Indian aggression against Pakistan to Chinese national security. In addition to criticizing Indian aggression, Beijing also demanded New Delhi to vacate territories that it occupied in the central sector of the disputed Sino-Indian border. Although the note was targeted at Indian actions on the Sino-Indian boundary, it was an act of diplomatic pressure on New Delhi to change its conduct toward Pakistan.¹⁷⁴

The second form of the Chinese support was military. On 16 September, Beijing issued an ultimatum to India, demanding New Delhi to remove its military structures from Chinese territory within three days.¹⁷⁵ There were three pertinent points in the ultimatum. First, the Chinese side asserted that Indian actions were supported by the US. Second, China argued that it could not sit by idly and watch an Indian "invasion" of Pakistan. Finally, Beijing also pointed out that Pakistan's war was a just fight because it was defensive.¹⁷⁶ The ultimatum signalled that China was willing to attack India once more. India tried to mitigate the situation by proposing joint surveys with China to investigate the exact whereabouts of the military structures, but China refused to cooperate and bolstered its forces in the central sector.¹⁷⁷ The 31st Infantry Regiment of the PLA arrived at Yatung (Yadong, 亚东) on 17 September 1965. The 31st regiment was responsible for Dongju La (Dongjula, 东巨拉), Jelep La (Zelila Shankou, 则里拉山口), Nathu La (Natuila, 乃堆拉) and Yala (yala, 亚拉) passes while the Yatung independent battalion was defending the Cho

¹⁷¹ DasGupta, *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory over China*, 51-56.

¹⁷² Xiaohu Cheng, "第二次印巴战争中中国对巴基斯坦的支援 (Chinese Aid to Pakistan During the Second India-Pakistan War)," *外交评论 (Foreign Affairs Review)*, no. 3 (2012): 76-82.

¹⁷³ DasGupta, *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory over China*, 35.

¹⁷⁴ Cheng, "第二次印巴战争中中国对巴基斯坦的支援 (Chinese Aid to Pakistan During the Second India-Pakistan War)," 76-82.

¹⁷⁵ DasGupta, *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory over China*, 35-36.

¹⁷⁶ Ma, *雪域军魂——1965-1968年中印边界斗争纪实 (Army Spirit in Snowy Regions: A Record of the Sino-Indian Border Struggle from 1965 to 1968)*, 55.

¹⁷⁷ DasGupta, *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory over China*, 45-49.

La (Zhuola, 卓拉) pass. By 19 September, most of the Chinese units reached the vicinity of the strategically important mountain passes in the central sector.¹⁷⁸ Chinese troops also became more assertive and demonstrated close to the Indian positions at Nathu La and Cho La. On 17 September 1965, China charged India with causing disturbance on the border and PLA units started to move toward Nathu La from the Chumbi Valley.¹⁷⁹

The Chinese rules of engagement involved five restrictions. First, troops could not to fire first. Second, they had to avoid provoking the Indian side. Third, they had to stand firm and avoid leaving any impression of weakness. Fourth, they could not cross the border—at least the Chinese interpretation of the borderline. Finally, the CMC forbid them to leave traces behind themselves.¹⁸⁰

China was also preparing for a trilateral military cooperation with Indonesia and Pakistan. On 17 September, military officials from the three sides discussed coordination of military aid to Pakistan. China's actions were motivated by the apprehension that external pressure might cause internal changes in Pakistan and a US-friendly regime might emerge.¹⁸¹

China concentrated its forces in the central sector because that was the closest to the China-India and India-Pakistan borders. At the same time, this section of the border was a sore point for China, as India has initiated a massive build-up there: in 1965, there were 37 Indian outposts only in the Jelep La.¹⁸² Map 4.1 below is a shows the distribution of Indian outposts in the various passes of the central sector.

¹⁷⁸ Ma, *雪域军魂——1965-1968年中印边界斗争纪实* (*Army Spirit in Snowy Regions: A Record of the Sino-Indian Border Struggle from 1965 to 1968*), 76-79.

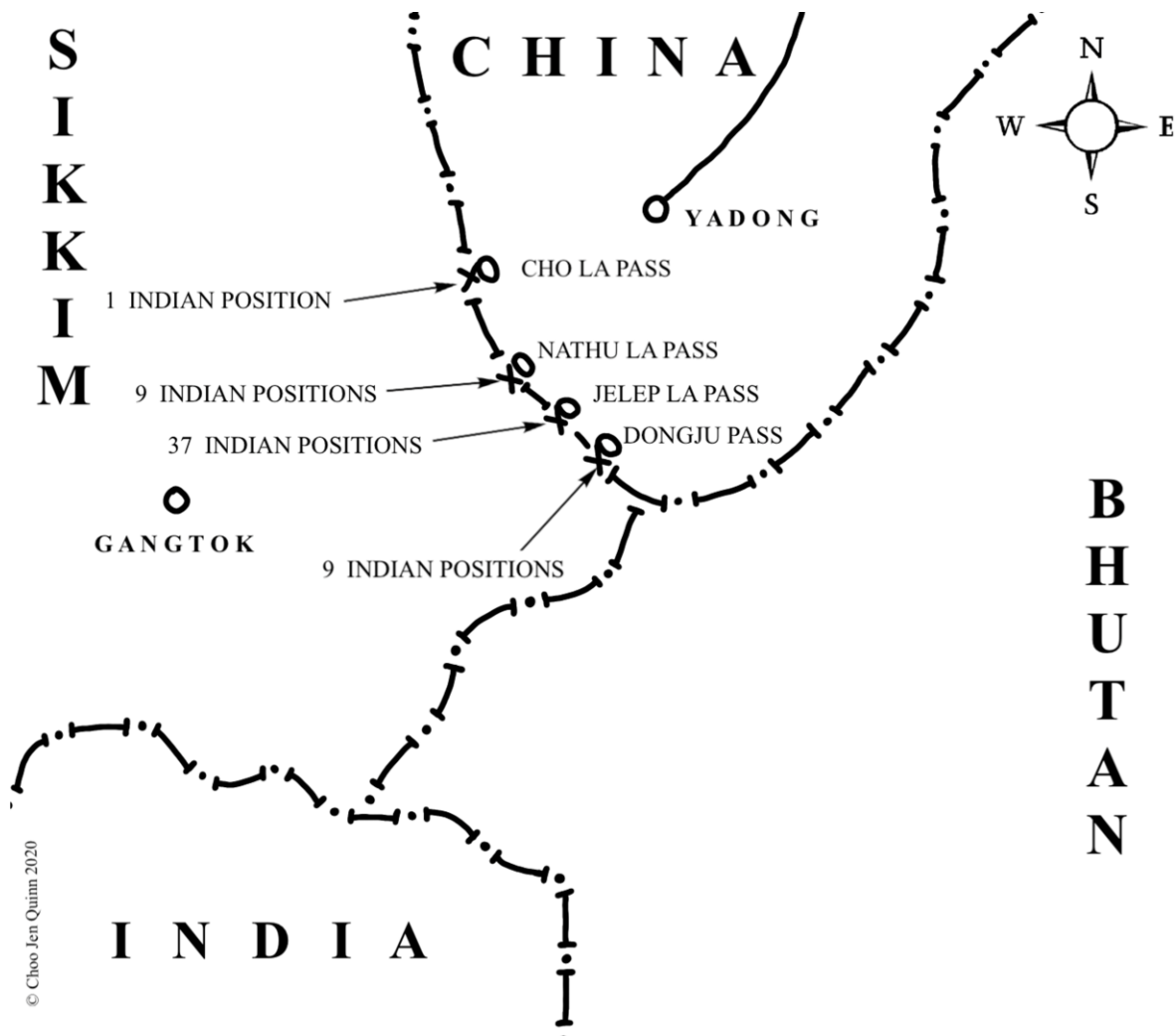
¹⁷⁹ DasGupta, *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory over China*, 56-66.

¹⁸⁰ Ma, *雪域军魂——1965-1968年中印边界斗争纪实* (*Army Spirit in Snowy Regions: A Record of the Sino-Indian Border Struggle from 1965 to 1968*), 81.

¹⁸¹ Cheng, "第二次印巴战争中中国对巴基斯坦的支援 (Chinese Aid to Pakistan During the Second India-Pakistan War)," 76-86.

¹⁸² Ma, *雪域军魂——1965-1968年中印边界斗争纪实* (*Army Spirit in Snowy Regions: A Record of the Sino-Indian Border Struggle from 1965 to 1968*), 55.

Map 4.1. Distribution of Indian outposts in the central sector in 1965.



Source: Ma, Xuezheng, “Army Spirit in Snowy Regions”, p. 112. Map not to scale and is for explanatory purposes only. The international boundaries on the maps are not purported to be correct nor authentic.

As the pressure from China grew, 33 Corps of the Indian Army—commanded by Lieutenant General G. G. Bewoor—ordered troops to withdraw from Nathu La and Jelep La. The order came from the corps headquarters in Siliguri. Major General Sagat Singh—commander of the 17th Mountain Division responsible for defending Nathu La—refused to obey. He argued that if India pulled back, the Chinese could occupy Nathu La without directly attacking India. That would have

given China an advantageous position to go through the Siliguri corridor and join forces with the Pakistani Army in East Pakistan. While Sagat refused to withdraw from Nathu La, the Indian Army abandoned Jelep La. Sagat's hunch was correct: while China did not attack Indian forces, it occupied Jelep La. Nathu La, however, remained under Indian control. China was eager to take over Nathu La but refrained from direct confrontation in the second half of 1965. They assembled loudspeakers to broadcast propaganda and initiated four skirmishes.¹⁸³

On 19 September, the Pakistani President Ayub Khan and Foreign Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto visited China to ask for Beijing's intervention. China did not commit to anything specific, only urged the envoys to be prepared to fight a long war and lose cities to India. In the long term, India would exhaust itself and Pakistan could win.¹⁸⁴ On 19 September, China extended the deadline of its ultimatum until 22 September. At the same time, New Delhi and India engaged in verbal warfare in which the Indians denied Chinese accusations of establishing outposts on PRC territory.¹⁸⁵ As the war proceeded, the US was concerned that Chinese involvement could undermine the West's prowess in Asia. Hence, Washington and Moscow cooperated on a ceasefire proposal to decrease tensions between Pakistan and India.¹⁸⁶

On 20 September, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution that demanded India and Pakistan to stop fighting.¹⁸⁷ Under the prospect of a two-front war, India decided to cease fire with Pakistan.¹⁸⁸ The two South Asian states agreed on a ceasefire on 22 September.¹⁸⁹ China argued that the Tashkent agreement that concluded the 1965 war between India and Pakistan was a plot of the Soviet revisionists who wanted to promote Indo-Pakistani alliance against China.¹⁹⁰

The 1965 troop movements are best conceived as a prelude to the 1967 confrontations rather than a case. Some of my argument's influencing factors were already present at this time. In 1965,

¹⁸³ DasGupta, *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory over China*, 56-66.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 43-49.

¹⁸⁵ Ma, *雪域军魂——1965-1968年中印边界斗争纪实* (*Army Spirit in Snowy Regions: A Record of the Sino-Indian Border Struggle from 1965 to 1968*), 122, 26.

¹⁸⁶ Chaudhuri, "The Making of an 'All Weather Friendship' Pakistan, China and the History of a Border Agreement: 1949-1963," 57.

¹⁸⁷ Cheng, "第二次印巴战争中中国对巴基斯坦的支援 (Chinese Aid to Pakistan During the Second India-Pakistan War)," 76-86.

¹⁸⁸ DasGupta, *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory over China*, 43-49.

¹⁸⁹ Ma, *雪域军魂——1965-1968年中印边界斗争纪实* (*Army Spirit in Snowy Regions: A Record of the Sino-Indian Border Struggle from 1965 to 1968*), 134.

¹⁹⁰ National Archives of India, PP(JS)3(9)/75: Note from J. S. Mehta to FS/JS (Pak) Secretary-I DS(EA) dated 7.6.1967 in "Sino-Indian matters, Part II." p. 28.

external threat to China was high—Sino-Soviet border negotiations broke down and the US deployed combat troops to Vietnam. At the same time, internal threat to Mao was high—his successor Liu Shaoqi and the party bureaucrats were powerful enough to defy and ignore the Chairman. These conditions worsened in the period between the second India-Pakistan war and the 1967 clashes, as the Cultural Revolution erupted and further undermined Mao's position.

4.4.2. 1967: Nathu La and Cho La clashes

We do not have as many materials on the 1967 clashes as we do on the 1962 war. There are two possible reasons for this. First, this conflict was much smaller in scale than the 1962 or the 1986 crises. Second, to my best information, none of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs archives are available after 1965, making it difficult for historians to reconstruct the events. The best sources we have on the Chinese side are three memoirs. First, Wang Chenghan—Deputy Commander of the Tibet Military Region at the time—wrote a memoir in which he discusses his deployments to the Sino-Indian border.¹⁹¹ Ma Xuezheng, the Deputy Chief of Staff of the 31st Regiment in 1967 who spent the period of 1965-1968 dispatched to the central sector of the Sino-Indian border also published his memoir which covers the 1965 and 1967 confrontations in the disputed areas.¹⁹² Third, we have a Ren Rong—Deputy Political Commissar of the Tibet Military Region in 1967—memoir that briefly discusses the Cultural Revolution in Tibet and the 1967 confrontations.¹⁹³ On the Indian side, there is a recent book by Probal Dasgupta which gives us a good sense of the Indian calculations at the time.¹⁹⁴ At the same time, we can reconstruct some events by relying on Indian archival materials.

After a near-crisis in 1965, political and military tension between the two sides kept building up. In the September-December period of 1965, three clashes happened between China and India, one in each of the western, eastern and central sectors. The Indian side accused China with

¹⁹¹ Wang, *王诚汉回忆录 (Wang Chenghan's Memoirs)*.

¹⁹² Ma, *雪域军魂——1965-1968年中印边界斗争纪实 (Army Spirit in Snowy Regions: A Record of the Sino-Indian Border Struggle from 1965 to 1968)* .

¹⁹³ Rong Ren, *戎马征程 (the Journey of an Army Horse)* (Beijing: History of Chinese Communist Party Publishing House, 2001).

¹⁹⁴ DasGupta, *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory over China*.

abandoning the Colombo Proposals. Beijing made no reference to any commitments made and charged India with intruding into Chinese territory.¹⁹⁵

A Chinese source claims that India improved its infrastructure on the border by building airports, roads and outposts in 1966. It also accumulated material and deployed a large number of troops there. According to Chinese statistics, Indian troops intruded into Chinese territory 73 times and Indian airplanes violated Chinese airspace 71 times.¹⁹⁶ As the two parties were ramping up pressure on the border, China started to broadcast propaganda in the central sector on 3 July 1966.¹⁹⁷ India responded in kind.¹⁹⁸ The Chinese propaganda centred around four themes: China followed a peaceful foreign policy, promotion of peaceful settlement of the border dispute, the history of friendship between Chinese and Indian people as well as the criticism of India's expansion. The Sino-Indian propaganda warfare lasted until 1973.¹⁹⁹

On 2 February 1967, India charged China with undermining the former's cordial ties with Sikkim. China retorted that what India called a "special relationship" was actually a big power oppressing a small one.²⁰⁰ This was a revision of China's previous stand on India-Sikkim relations: in 1960, Zhou Enlai acknowledged India's special relationship with Sikkim and Bhutan.²⁰¹ China also accused India with "hiring itself out" to the imperialists and their followers. At the same time, Beijing refuted charges that India made vis-à-vis the Colombo Proposals, saying that those were only "proposals" and had no binding force.²⁰²

The 1967 confrontations in the central sector occurred in the process of the two sides' efforts of expanding control over the Chumbi Valley.²⁰³ Chinese sources note 11 aerial and 150

¹⁹⁵ "Note Given by the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, to the Embassy of China in India (4 December, 1965)," in *India-China Relations 1947-2000: A Documentary Study*, ed. Avtar Singh Bhasin (New Delhi: Geetika Publishers, 2018), 4641; "Note Given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China (27 January, 1966)," in *India-China Relations 1947-2000: A Documentary Study*, ed. Avtar Singh Bhasin (New Delhi: Geetika Publishers, 2018), 4645-47.

¹⁹⁶ Wang, *王诚汉回忆录 (Wang Chenghan's Memoirs)*, 482-84.

¹⁹⁷ National Archives of India, PP(JS)3(9)/75: "Note given by the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, to the Embassy of China in India, 25 November 1967" in "Sino-Indian matters, Part II." p. 12.

¹⁹⁸ DasGupta, *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory over China*, 123.

¹⁹⁹ Ren, *戎马征程 (the Journey of an Army Horse)*, 307.

²⁰⁰ National Archives of India, no. PHN/104/1/67: "Note given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking to the Embassy of India in China, 4 May, 1967" in "China" pp. 20-22.

²⁰¹ National Archives of India, no. C/125/96/65/CH: "Lok Sabha Starred question no. 3090 regarding Sikkim-Tibet border, 15 September, 1965" p. 10.

²⁰² National Archives of India, no. PHN/104/1/67: "Note given by the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, to the Embassy of China in India, 2 February, 1967" in "China" pp. 10-11.

²⁰³ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 197-99.

land-based Indian incursions between April and June 1967.²⁰⁴ An early sign of the upcoming clash occurred in a Chinese note sent to the Indian Embassy on 11 April, 1967. The Chinese side asserted that India removed the “Mani pile” of stones at Kailu La that marked the customary border between China and Sikkim. At the same time, India built seven stone piles that extended over two thousand meters and were in territory that China claimed. China identified two reasons behind the Indian conduct. First, the Indian government wanted to distract Indian people from domestic difficulties. Second, New Delhi wanted to use this move to gather support from the US and the Soviets. This note was closed with a warning: if India did not learn from its past mistakes, it would be “bound to eat the bitter fruits” of its actions.²⁰⁵

On 30 April, Chinese troops discovered that India occupied a strategically important position in the vicinity of the Cho La pass. The takeover of the spot—which Ma Xuezheng calls #100 position—signalled that Indian troops moved closer to the Chinese troops. Also, they have established new outposts in the central sector, some of them as close as 11 meters to the Chinese ones. As a response, Ma Xuezheng ordered an infantry squad supported by an artillery squad to retake the position.²⁰⁶

The PLA further accumulated its forces after 29 July 1967 in the same area.²⁰⁷ During a patrol, a platoon of the 6th infantry company discovered that there was an Indian outpost in the Cho La pass. As the main force of the platoon was making an entry to the position, a shooting fight erupted between the two sides. When the dust settled, China gained control over the position. Subsequently, the 8th infantry company supported by two artillery companies were sent to the area as reinforcements.²⁰⁸ In a diplomatic note from the same month, China claimed that Indian military

²⁰⁴ Ren, *戎马征程 (the Journey of an Army Horse)*, 307.

²⁰⁵ "Note Given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China (11 April, 1967)," in *India-China Relations 1947-2000: A Documentary Study*, ed. Avtar Singh Bhasin (New Delhi: Geetika Publishers, 2018), 4693-94.

²⁰⁶ Ma, *雪域军魂——1965-1968年中印边界斗争纪实 (Army Spirit in Snowy Regions: A Record of the Sino-Indian Border Struggle from 1965 to 1968)*, 203-04.

²⁰⁷ "Note Given by the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, to the Embassy of China (11 September 1967)," in *India-China Relations 1947-2000: A Documentary Study*, ed. Avtar Singh Bhasin (New Delhi: Geetika Publishers, 2018), 4763-64.

²⁰⁸ Ma, *雪域军魂——1965-1968年中印边界斗争纪实 (Army Spirit in Snowy Regions: A Record of the Sino-Indian Border Struggle from 1965 to 1968)*, 208-19.

aircraft repeatedly intruded Chinese airspace over Tibet and Xinjiang. The note also pointed out that India was provoking China in the central sector since the beginning of 1967.²⁰⁹

At Nathu La, the line of actual control ran along vantage points, but the two sides disagreed on to whom the specific points belonged. As a result, patrols often encountered each other, leading to tension and confrontations. On 13 August, Chinese soldiers ventured into territory that India deemed its own and started to dig trenches. Two days later, Indian troops were celebrating India's Independence Day, causing consternation among the Chinese troops on the other side. Tension was increasing, confrontations were getting more frequent. Sagat Singh thought that demarcating the border would allay the mood. Hence, Indian troops started to lay down a barbed wire fence on what they believed to be the border.²¹⁰ As Indian troops sought to build a fence along the watershed at Nathu La, Chinese soldiers obstructed them in their work.²¹¹

Subsequently, confrontations and brawls occurred in the area in early September.²¹² On 2 September, an Indian patrol encountered Chinese troops, leading to a scuffle. On 5 September, Indian troops continued to lay the barbed wire fence, but soon were shut down by Chinese troops.²¹³ On 7 September 1967, more than 60 Indian soldiers marched into territory the Chinese saw as their own and continued to build a wired fence.²¹⁴ The situation led to a melee fight between the two sides.²¹⁵ The Chinese political commissar left the fight with his nose and glasses broken. The political commissar's misfortune upset the Chinese troops. Indian troops had to abort their mission of laying the barbed fence.²¹⁶

On 11 September, Chinese troops from the 4th Company halted the work of 200 Indian soldiers.²¹⁷ China had two regiments deployed at the Chumbi Valley at that time.²¹⁸ As the Chinese

²⁰⁹ National Archives of India, no. HI/108/68: "Note given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, 19 July, 1967" in "Notes-Memoranda and letters exchanged between India and China" pp. 21-22.

²¹⁰ DasGupta, *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory over China*, 124-30.

²¹¹ National Archives of India, no. WII/104/3/67: Telegram from Foreign Secretary to Foreign missions dated 13 September 1967 in "India-China-USA Relations", pp. 151-152.

²¹² "Note Given by the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, to the Embassy of China (11 September 1967)," 4763-64.

²¹³ DasGupta, *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory over China*, 132.

²¹⁴ Wang, *王诚汉回忆录 (Wang Chenghan's Memoirs)*, 482-84.

²¹⁵ National Archives of India, no. WII/104/3/67: Telegram from Foreign Secretary to Foreign missions dated 13 September 1967 in "India-China-USA Relations", pp. 151-152.

²¹⁶ DasGupta, *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory over China*, 135-36.

²¹⁷ Ma, *雪域军魂——1965-1968年中印边界斗争纪实 (Army Spirit in Snowy Regions: A Record of the Sino-Indian Border Struggle from 1965 to 1968)*, 224-25.

²¹⁸ National Archives of India, no. WII/104/3/67: Telegram from Foreign Secretary to Foreign missions dated 13 September 1967 in "India-China-USA Relations", pp. 151-152.

called for reinforcements, 3 infantry and 1 artillery companies moved to the various mountain passes of the central sector.²¹⁹ The situation deteriorated to a brawl between the Chinese and Indian troops and the Indian troops beat the PLA political commissar again. Chinese troops withdrew after the spat and the Indians continued the fence construction. At 7:45AM, Chinese border troops opened machine gun fire on the fence building Indians. After thirty minutes of firing, they unleashed artillery fire on their enemy. The Indians could not respond with artillery immediately because they needed an approval from Indira Gandhi first. Once Prime Minister Gandhi gave the green light, the better positioned Indian artillery opened fire and inflicted heavy casualties on the PLA.²²⁰ Map 4.2. below shows the distribution of Chinese and Indian outposts at Nathu La before the conflict.

²¹⁹ Ma, *雪域军魂——1965-1968年中印边界斗争纪实* (*Army Spirit in Snowy Regions: A Record of the Sino-Indian Border Struggle from 1965 to 1968*), 236.

²²⁰ DasGupta, *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory over China*, 143-45, 50-53.

Map 4.2. The distribution of Chinese and Indian outposts at Nathu La before the 1967 clashes.



Source: Ma, Xuezheng, *Army Spirit in Snowy Regions*, p. 184. Map not to scale and is for explanatory purposes only. The international boundaries on the maps are not purported to be correct nor authentic.

After this clash, Wang Chenghan—Deputy Commander of the Tibet Military Region—was dispatched to the area to supervise combat operations. The Chinese rules of engagement were to adhere to the principles of self-defence: every move by the enemy had to be reciprocated but not exceeded in intensity.²²¹ Two days later, another confrontation ensued at the Nameless Lake. According to Ma, this clash was different from others because it occurred at a new place and the

²²¹Wang, 王诚汉回忆录 (*Wang Chenghan's Memoirs*), 482-84.

Indians fired with greater calibre. China was “compelled to counterattack” (*beipo huanji*, 被迫还击) and it destroyed 6 Indian outposts and 6 artillery positions. On 14 September, Ma was instructed to cease fire as the enemy was withdrawing.²²² According to an Indian source, 340 Chinese and 88 Indian soldiers died during this confrontation.²²³ Ma Xuezheng claims that China only lost 32 lives while India suffered 607 casualties. There is no specification of Indian battle deaths from the Chinese side.²²⁴

At Cho La, a confrontation occurred over a boulder. India claimed it to be the boundary between the two sides while China claimed it for itself. Once again, a brawl emerged during which a Chinese soldier injured his Indian counterpart with a bayonet. Indian soldiers arrived to support their compatriots and Chinese troops positioned themselves close to the Indians. Once again, Chinese troops opened fire, faster than they did at Nathu La. On this occasion numerical superiority was on the Chinese side, with 120 Chinese soldiers and 30 Gorkha soldiers. India made up for its numerical inferiority with superior gunfire as they unleashed mortars on the advancing Chinese troops. Their approach worked and the Chinese advance was halted. China did not use artillery fire on this occasion. China asked for a truce within hours and fighting subsided. Chinese soldiers also fled positions they occupied during this short fight.²²⁵ China also removed 9 outposts and one artillery position.²²⁶ In this round, 30 Chinese and 15 Indian soldiers perished.²²⁷ According to Ma Xuezheng, China lost 2 lives, while India suffered 159 casualties at Cho La—without specification.²²⁸ Map 4.3 below shows a detailed illustration of Cho La and its surroundings.

²²² Ma, *雪域军魂——1965-1968年中印边界斗争纪实* (*Army Spirit in Snowy Regions: A Record of the Sino-Indian Border Struggle from 1965 to 1968*), 262.

²²³ DasGupta, *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory over China*, 143-45, 50-53.

²²⁴ Ma, *雪域军魂——1965-1968年中印边界斗争纪实* (*Army Spirit in Snowy Regions: A Record of the Sino-Indian Border Struggle from 1965 to 1968*), 269.

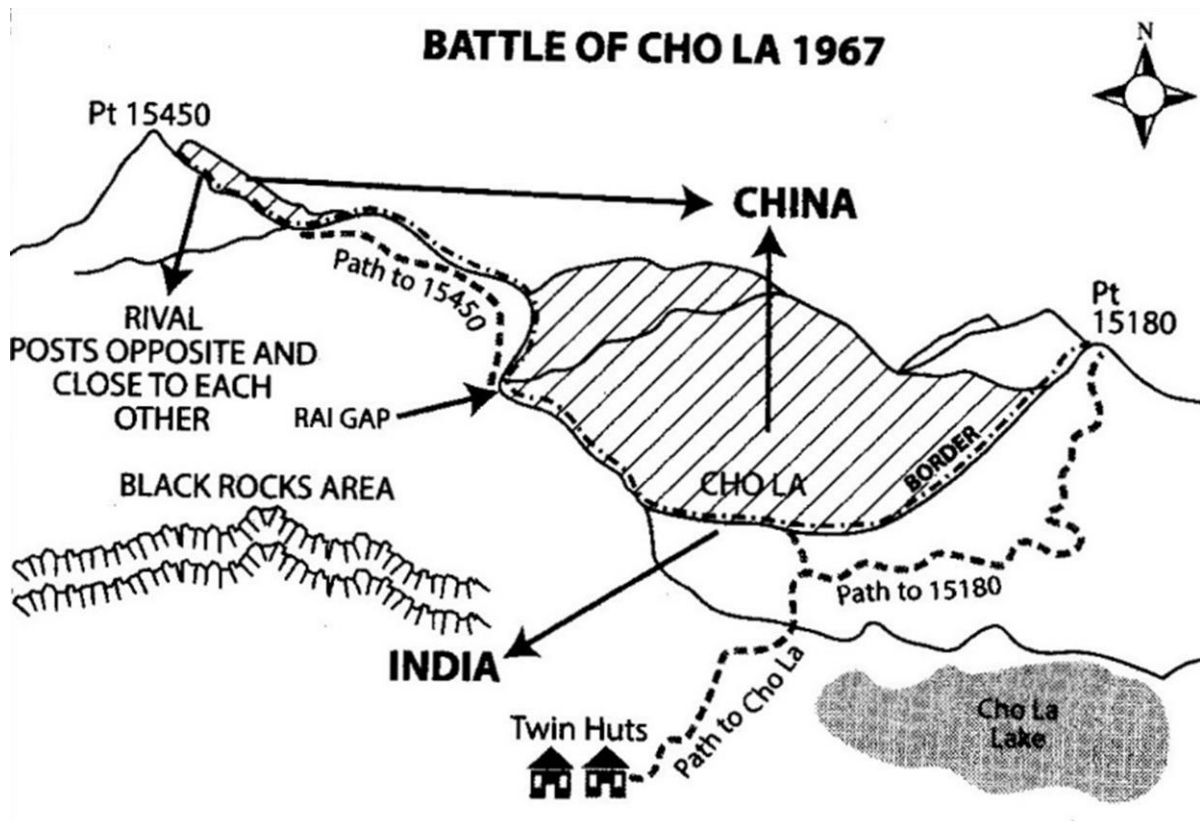
²²⁵ DasGupta, *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory over China*, 159-74.

²²⁶ Ma, *雪域军魂——1965-1968年中印边界斗争纪实* (*Army Spirit in Snowy Regions: A Record of the Sino-Indian Border Struggle from 1965 to 1968*), 269-75.

²²⁷ DasGupta, *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory over China*, 174.

²²⁸ Ma, *雪域军魂——1965-1968年中印边界斗争纪实* (*Army Spirit in Snowy Regions: A Record of the Sino-Indian Border Struggle from 1965 to 1968*), 275.

Map 4.3. The Cho La Clash



Source: DasGupta, *Watershed 1967*, p. 156. Map not to scale and is for explanatory purposes only. The international boundaries on the maps are not purported to be correct nor authentic.

The overall deaths were 370 on the Chinese and 103 on the Indian side.²²⁹ According to the Chinese source, China lost 34 lives while India suffered 766 casualties, without addressing the specific death count.²³⁰ No sides acquired additional territory, China even withdrew 3 kilometres

²²⁹ DasGupta, *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory over China*, 174.

²³⁰ Ma, *雪域军魂——1965-1968年中印边界斗争纪实* (*Army Spirit in Snowy Regions: A Record of the Sino-Indian Border Struggle from 1965 to 1968*), 269-75.

from its positions after the fight.²³¹ In the overall course of the 1967 clashes, China removed 29 Indian outposts.²³²

It is an open question if the Chinese moves were approved by the central leadership or not. Fravel suggests that the latter might be the case because the Tibetan Military District established frontline headquarters in Yadong only *after* the Nathu La confrontations. This went against the standard procedures of the PLA, as the army usually established headquarters *before* troop engagement.²³³ On the contrary, Indian sources surmise that it had approval from higher level PLA leadership because of the 4-day time lag between the melee fight and the actual attack as well as the use of artillery.²³⁴

Two factors suggest that the latter perspective is more valid. First, the central leadership sought to maintain strict control over the military regions during the Cultural Revolution. Regional commanders had to ask for approvals on decisions pertaining to troop movements. For instance, the Tibet Military Region Commander sought CMC approval for a military parade which involved “5000 troops and two artillery regiments”. After the Wuhan incident of July 1967, the central leadership concluded that regional forces were politically unreliable and further strengthened its control over them. In August 1967, Lin Biao notified regional commanders that if they took any decisions without the centre’s endorsement they would be relieved from their position.²³⁵ Given this strict central control over the regional forces, it is likely that the use of artillery also required approval from the CMC.

Second, China’s use of force on the Sino-British border at Hong Kong suggests that top leaders knew what was happening. In the spring and summer of 1967, Sino-British ties reached a low point because the British authorities cracked down on worker protests in Hong Kong. Mainland authorities were outraged and explored ways of supporting the workers of Hong Kong. As tensions simmered, a bloody confrontation occurred on the Hong Kong-Mainland border in July 1967. Chinese protesters gathered on the frontier to demonstrate against the British atrocities. The Hong Kong police used tear gas to disperse the crowd. Some of the tear gas shells fell on the Chinese

²³¹ DasGupta, *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory over China*, 174.

²³² Ma, *雪域军魂——1965-1968年中印边界斗争纪实* (*Army Spirit in Snowy Regions: A Record of the Sino-Indian Border Struggle from 1965 to 1968*), 275.

²³³ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 198.

²³⁴ National Archives of India, no. WII/104/3/67: Telegram from Foreign Secretary to Foreign missions dated 13 September 1967 in “India-China-USA Relations”, pp. 151-152.

²³⁵ Quoted in Harvey Nelsen, “Military Forces in the Cultural Revolution,” *The China Quarterly* 51 (1972): 446, 56-57.

side of the border but the Chinese guards did not respond by the use of force. Zhou Enlai was discontent with the border troops' conduct and criticized them. On 8 July, Chinese militants crossed the border to ambush a Hong Kong police outpost and exchanged fire with them. As the militants withdrew, the military supported them with covering fire. Five Hong Kong policemen and two Chinese militants died in this confrontation. Zhou Enlai was content with the troops' conduct this time. However, he pointed out that the military and militants had to refrain from further fights.²³⁶

China's use of force followed essentially the same pattern on the Sino-Indian border. In July 1967, China expressed support for the Naxalbari revolutionary movement in India. Subsequently, Chinese troops tussled with Indian soldiers without using force on 7 September. They followed up with an ambush four days later. They used force again at Cho La on 1 October and refrained from further skirmishes. Given the similarity of the two cases, it is plausible that the central leadership was aware of what happened at Nathu La.

4.5. Connecting the dots

Against the backdrop of severe scarcity of materials on the topic, it is challenging to establish causality—one might never find a memo in which CCP leaders elaborate on their reasons for fighting India. Nevertheless, we have enough data to draw descriptive inferences and test their strength against competing explanations. The first link I aim to establish here is the one between the highly threatening external environment and the Sino-Indian confrontation. China's propaganda machinery routinely made this connection in the run-up to the 1967 clashes. One of the recurring themes in China's anti-Indian propaganda were New Delhi's alliance with the US and the Soviet Union. India was depicted as the centre of anti-China schemes of imperialists and their lackey dogs. Indian leaders were the foremost "hatchet men" of the Soviets and the Americans in their efforts of oppressing liberation movements of African and Asian people. The Soviets and the US were charged with using their investments and aid to control India.²³⁷

²³⁶ Ma, *The Cultural Revolution in the Foreign Ministry of China*, 179-86.

²³⁷ National Archives of India, PP(JS)3(9)/75: "Chinese propaganda against India, 3 October, 1967" in "Sino-Indian matters, Part II." Pp. 58-74.

Chinese leaders' vicious criticism against India in the 1965 India-Pakistan war also mentioned that New Delhi's invasion was supported by the US and the Soviet Union.²³⁸ According to China, the Soviets behaved the same way as they did in 1959 and 1962: they supported India with the aim of establishing an anti-Chinese coalition.²³⁹ At this time, Chinese leaders thought that China was being encircled by the US and the Soviets, and India assisted this plan with its war against Pakistan.²⁴⁰ Chinese leaders also thought that Soviet and US leaders utilized the conflict to attack China by accusing it with inflaming the confrontation. In March 1966, Chen Yi visited Pakistan and argued that Washington and Moscow wanted to promote an Indo-Pakistani partnership against China.²⁴¹

In a May 1966 note, the Chinese Foreign Ministry charged India with being the accomplice of imperialism and its followers, "hiring itself out and serving as their pawn."²⁴² A 28 April 1967 Peking review commentary again suggested that Washington and Moscow wanted to utilize India to close their containment hoop around China that extended from Japan, Taiwan and South Vietnam to China's western and northern neighbourhood.²⁴³

A Xinhua article from May 1967 also connected the threat emanating from the US, the Soviet Union and India. China was upset about the newly elected Indian government's move of improving relations with Pakistan. Beijing argued that India was a puppet following the advice of the US and the Soviets. The purported aim behind the scheme was to establish an anti-China coalition. According to the article, the US used its aid to blackmail India and Pakistan into joining Washington's anti-China plot. The effort failed, so India proposed a disarmament scheme that would stabilize the gap between Indian and Pakistani military capabilities at 4-1. According to the article, India wanted to perpetuate military superiority over Pakistan.²⁴⁴

²³⁸ Niu, "论 60 年代末中国对美政策转变的历史背景 (on the Historical Background of the Change in China's Us Policy in the Late 1960s)," 54-57.

²³⁹ Tao, *中美关系史 (the History of Sino-US Relations)*, 295.

²⁴⁰ Yongpeng Mu, *中美印三边关系 (Sino-US-Indian Trilateral Relations)* (Beijing: World Knowledge Press, 2010), 79.

²⁴¹ Armstrong, *Revolutionary Diplomacy: Chinese Foreign Policy and the United Front Doctrine*, 169, 71.

²⁴² National Archives of India, no. WII/104/3/67: "Note Given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking to the Embassy of India in China, 4 May, 1966" in "India-China-USA Relations", p. 10.

²⁴³ "U.S.-Soviet Pawn against China, Peking Review Commentary on the New Indian Government, (28 April, 1967)," in *India-China Relations 1947-2000: A Documentary Study*, ed. Avtar Singh Bhasin (New Delhi: Geetika Publishers, 2018), 4695.

²⁴⁴ National Archives of India, no. PHN/104/1/67: "U.S.-Soviet attempt to patch up Indo-Pakistan China alliance, 22 May, 1967" in "China" pp. 101-101A.

Anti-Indian propaganda reached its peak in September and October 1967, while guns were blazing in the Himalayas. As expected, China argued that the attack was planned and instigated by India, with the help of Soviets and the US.²⁴⁵ Shortly before the conflict, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that Indian soldiers' action to spread barbed wire in the vicinity of Nathu La in 1967 was a "component part of the world-wide anti-Chinese chorus" led by the US and Soviet Union.²⁴⁶ A 14 September article about the Nathu La clashes supported the claim with the US and Soviet arm supplies to India. It referred to India as the principal anti-China containment tool of Moscow and Washington. India's other purpose was to use the dispute to request more funds from the Soviets and the US,²⁴⁷ shown by the recent visits of Finance Minister Morarji Desai to the US and Minister of Defence Sardar Swaran Singh to the Soviet Union. Furthermore, India wanted to establish China as a threat to Sikkim to undermine the improvement in relations between Sikkim and Beijing.²⁴⁸

Finally, the logic behind the Chinese use of force in Hong Kong that occurred approximately two months before the Nathu La clash also supports the interpretation that China used force in order to undermine an international plot against it. Foreign Ministry cadre at the time argued that the imperialists, revisionists and reactionaries were collaborating to contain China. They interpreted the British crackdown on worker protests as an element of the "anti-China conspiracy". Hence, China's assistance to the protesters in Hong Kong was not only about nurturing revolutions but also about undermining the international anti-Chinese containment.²⁴⁹

The second link I aim to establish is between China's efforts to prevent India from becoming a leader of the uncommitted states and the 1967 clashes. On 6-7 September 1965, the Chinese Embassies in Pakistan and India lobbied for China's support for Pakistan in the conflict. China's aid could serve four purposes. It could have restrained Indian expansion, influence domestic politics in New Delhi, shape India's reputation among the African-Asian states and undermine the

²⁴⁵ National Archives of India, no. HI/1011(63)/68: "Hostile Propaganda, 1967" in "Annual Reports—Political Officer in Sikkim, Gangtok" p. 26.

²⁴⁶ "Note Given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China (10 September 1967)," in *India-China Relations 1947-2000: A Documentary Study*, ed. Avtar Singh Bhasin (New Delhi: Geetika Publishers, 2018), 4760.

²⁴⁷ People's Daily, "印度反动派又错打了算盘" (Indian reactionaries miscalculate once more), 14 September 1967.

²⁴⁸ National Archives of India, no. HI/1012(14)/67: "Monthly Political Report for the month of September, 1967" in "Monthly political reports (other than annual reports) from Peking," p. 179.

²⁴⁹ Ma, *The Cultural Revolution in the Foreign Ministry of China*, 180.

Soviet-US scheme against China.²⁵⁰ These statements are vague—what influence in domestic politics? Influence Indian reputation among Asian-African states in what way? Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi labelled India as an aggressor in the India-Pakistan war.²⁵¹ Hence, China probably wanted to establish India as an aggressor in contrast to the peace-loving Afro-Asian states.

We have no similar documentation for 1967, as archives are not available. Nevertheless, we established above that China's routinely connected the Sino-Indian contention to the Asian-African states. Indian archives argue that after the 1962 war, China engaged in "heightened diplomatic activity in the Afro-Asian world".²⁵² A note from 4 May 1966 suggested that India's oppression of Sikkim "has long been spurned by the awakened Afro-Asian peoples."²⁵³ Another note from 15 September 1966 said that while China was promoting African-Asian solidarity, India appeased the US and the Soviet Union, pursued expansionism and intimidated its neighbours.²⁵⁴ Hence, it is probable that China's actions in 1967 were dictated by a similar logic to those of in 1965: to undermine India's reputation among the uncommitted states. This could have prevented those states from becoming US allies.

The final point to prove is that Mao's decision for a direct confrontation with India was a diversionary use of force. Certain aspects of the Mao-Lin contention qualify as indicators established in chapter 1. Like in 1962, Mao was antagonistic toward his successor. He issued a specific, but indirect criticism against Lin. Mao Zedong argued that Nie Rongzhen was an honest, responsible man. This was a reference to a debate between Mao and Lin during the revolutionary war. Lin Biao was against a punitive expedition to the east from Xishan, he wanted to go and fight guerrilla warfare in Gannan, in the northeast of China. As Mao returned from the punitive expedition to the East, he lashed out against the idea of going to the northeast to wage guerrilla war. Lin Biao did not take responsibility, but Nie Rongzhen did, and did so voluntarily. That is why Mao called Nie Rongzhen an honest and responsible man. This was an indirect criticism

²⁵⁰ Cheng, "第二次印巴战争中中国对巴基斯坦的支援 (Chinese Aid to Pakistan During the Second India-Pakistan War)," 83.

²⁵¹ Yi, "China's Foreign Policy," 321-22, 25-27.

²⁵² National Archives of India, PP(JS)3(9)/75: "Chinese Propaganda against India, 30 May, 1967" in "Sino-Indian matters, Part II." p. 60.

²⁵³ National Archives of India, no. PHN/104/1/67: "Note given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking to the Embassy of India, 4 May 1967," in "China" p. 21A.

²⁵⁴ National Archives of India, PP(JS)3(9)/75: "Note given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, 15 September, 1966" in "Sino-Indian matters, Part II." p. 14.

against the character of Lin Biao, who was the only person in the CCP and the PLA who has never admitted his mistakes publicly during his career.²⁵⁵

Mao was also unhappy with Lin Biao hijacking the Chairman's personal reputation for his own purpose of furthering the Cultural Revolution. Given that Mao was weak in the run-up to the Cultural Revolution, he supported Lin Biao's efforts to establish Mao's personality cult to gain extra clout.²⁵⁶ Lin Biao called Mao the "great helmsman, great teacher, great leader and great commander".²⁵⁷ Later, however, Mao changed his opinion about the promotion of a personal cult. In April 1966, he told Lin Biao not to propagate him in that way. Propaganda was supposed to focus on Marxism, not on an individual leader.²⁵⁸

In a 1966 private letter to his wife, Jiang Qing, Mao complained about Lin. He said that Lin was frequently talking about the concept of coup d'état, and his perspectives on it concerned Mao. Mao also observed that the Party was too obedient to Lin: they did whatever he said. He also stressed that Lin made him approve things that Mao did not agree with—this was unprecedented in the Chairman's life. Lin also ignored Mao's plea to tone down the Maoist personal cult.²⁵⁹ According to the letter, Lin was assertive and he used Mao's patronage to get rid of his enemies.²⁶⁰ Mao, however, also acknowledged that he needed Lin's clout to overcome the "rightists" within the party.²⁶¹ Mao showed the letter to Zhou Enlai, his trusted aide. Upon reading the letter, Zhou Enlai requested Mao's approval to show it to Lin Biao, with the purpose of signalling that the propaganda was excessive.²⁶²

The Nathu La clashes were mentioned multiple times in the People's Daily in September 1967. The media propagated the confrontations as a victory for China, quoted foreign states' criticism of

²⁵⁵ Quan, *微行——杨成武在1967* (*Yang Chengwu in 1967*), 149.

²⁵⁶ Hu and Yu, *毛泽东与林彪* (*Mao Zedong and Lin Biao*), 335.

²⁵⁷ Quan, *微行——杨成武在1967* (*Yang Chengwu in 1967*), 149.

²⁵⁸ Hu and Yu, *毛泽东与林彪* (*Mao Zedong and Lin Biao*), 337-38.

²⁵⁹ Dongxing Wang, *汪东兴回忆：毛泽东与林彪反革命集团的斗争* (*Reflections of Wang Dongxing: The Struggle of Mao Zedong and the Lin Biao Counterrevolutionary Clique*) (Beijing: Contemporary China Press, 2004), 9, 11.

²⁶⁰ Mao Zedong, "给江青的信 (Letter to Jiang Qing)," in *建国以来毛泽东文稿* (*Mao Zedong's Selected Works since the Foundation of the People's Republic of China*) (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press (Internal Circulation), 1998), 71.

²⁶¹ Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 294, 313-16.

²⁶² Hu and Yu, *毛泽东与林彪* (*Mao Zedong and Lin Biao*), 339.

Indian “provocations” and often referred to the wisdom of Mao Zedong in those articles.²⁶³ These articles probably boosted Mao Zedong’s standing. Furthermore, the Chinese use of force also promoted unity within Tibet, where the people established mass organizations, society fragmented into two opposing factions and the 18th Corps of the PLA contended with the 11th Independent Division.²⁶⁴ The rebel factions sought to remove Zhang Guohua, the Communist Party Secretary of Tibet.²⁶⁵ In order to put an end to the chaos, the central leadership instructed the PLA to detach itself from mass organizations in September 1967.²⁶⁶ On 18 September, Zhou Enlai instructed Deputy Political Commissar Ren Rong to promote unity between the two contending factions. Since both were revolutionary organizations, they had to establish a “great alliance” among themselves. Rong also had to stop the fights and restore order. On 1 October 1967 (the day of the Cho La clash), Ren Rong made a speech at the National Day Celebration. He called for unity and increased vigilance in protecting the “southwest gate” of China. Subsequently, a small working group was established to unite the contending parties.²⁶⁷ Against this background, it is plausible that Chinese leaders sought to utilize an external conflict with the purpose of uniting contending PLA factions against an external enemy.

One question worth pondering is: why did China attack India and not another disputant? First and foremost, after the clear-cut victory of 1962, Chinese leaders probably thought that India was a low-hanging fruit and could be beaten again. On the other hand, India was strong enough to attract the attention of the domestic elite and unite them. Secondly, the previous sections

²⁶³ “本报评论员：印度反动派又错打了算盘”（People’s Daily Commentary: The Indian reactionaries miscalculated again）People’s Daily, 14 September, 1967; “阿尔巴尼亚报纸严厉谴责印度反动派向我国进行军事挑衅：印度反动派继续侵略必将遭到更可耻失败”（The Albanian newspapers severely condemned the Indian reactionaries for making military provocations against China: the Indian reactionaries’ continued aggression is bound to suffer even more shameful failure）People’s Daily, 15 September 1967; “巴基斯坦舆论谴责印度反动派对中国挑衅：印度加紧反华是为了乞求美苏更多施舍”（Pakistani public opinion condemns Indian reactionaries for provoking China: India is stepping up anti-China activities to beg the US and the Soviet Union for more alms）People’s Daily, 18 September 1967; “本报评论员：苏修集团是印度侵略者的后台”（People’s Daily Commentary: The Soviet revisionist clique is the backstage of the Indian aggressors）People’s Daily, 21 September 1967; “造谣污蔑、胡言乱语、自相矛盾、漏洞百出：印度反动派否曲侵华真相的谎言不攻自破”（Rumors, slanders, nonsense, contradictions, and loopholes: The lies of the Indian reactionaries to deny the truth about their invasion of China are self-defeating）People’s Daily, 26 September 1967.

²⁶⁴ Nelsen, “Military Forces in the Cultural Revolution,” 459; Ren, *戎马征程* (*the Journey of an Army Horse*) , 309-11.

²⁶⁵ *戎马征程* (*the Journey of an Army Horse*) , 309-11.

²⁶⁶ Nelsen, “Military Forces in the Cultural Revolution,” 462.

²⁶⁷ Ren, *戎马征程* (*the Journey of an Army Horse*) , 309-11.

demonstrated that China saw India as a major obstacle in its plan of establishing a united front against imperialism and revisionism. So, Mao could kill two birds with one stone by attacking India. First, he could remove Indian influence on the African-Asian states and prevent them from becoming allies of imperialism. Second, he could rally the elite under his own leadership against the foreign aggressors.

The evidence I gathered supports that China's use of force in 1967 was a response to the high level of internal and external threats, just like in 1962. Nevertheless, there was a significant difference in the extent of force used by China. 1962 was a war while in 1967 there were only small-scale clashes. Why? There are two potential explanations for this. First, the previous sections demonstrated that the PLA was in shambles in the second half of 1967, as they participated in domestic struggles and were tasked with maintaining order within the country. The PLA of 1967 could not have achieved the same feat as the PLA of 1962. However, for the purposes of Mao, a small-scale clash was enough to vent out against the Soviets and the US while trying to restore unity within the Party. Second, India knew what was coming. A January 1967 intelligence report from Tokyo suggested that China might light up the border to divert the attention from domestic turbulence to external threats.²⁶⁸ Indian missions in East Europe also confirmed the intelligence received from Tokyo. They argued that external aggression from China was likely because Mao lost control over the revolutionary fervour of Chinese rebels that were fighting each other. The problem could have been solved by channelling their energy toward an enemy outside the PRC.²⁶⁹ Such reports were reiterated from Belgrade and Tokyo in August 1967.²⁷⁰ Overall, India demonstrated that it was better prepared in 1967 than in 1962. The swift and resolute response probably deterred the PLA from looking for further trouble.

4.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I elaborated on my argument by looking at the case of the 1967 Sino-Indian confrontations in the central sector of their disputed border. The starting point of the argument was

²⁶⁸ National Archives of India, no. PHN/104/1/67: J. N. Dixit telegram to Shri K. R. Narayanan, Director, Ministry of External Affairs dated 23 January, 1967 in "China" p. 6.

²⁶⁹ National Archives of India, no. PHN/104/1/67: "Report titled 'Current trends in China's foreign policy, 1967'" in "China" pp. 138.

²⁷⁰ National Archives of India, no. PHN/104/1/67: "Extract from I.S.I. transmission 7 August 1967" in "China" pp. 160.

that in 1967, China faced a highly threatening external environment due to Beijing's hostility with Washington and Moscow. With the US, ties were tense for three reasons. First, the US's containment policy against China created a threat to Beijing. Second, Washington's heightened involvement in Vietnam threatened China with the potential of the expansion of the war into Chinese territory. Third, the two sides made no progress on the Taiwan question.

With the Soviets, there were two main sources of contention. First, the two sides could not ease tensions on their disputed border: there were a growing number of militarized confrontations between the two sides and bilateral efforts of a settlement failed. Second, Chinese and Soviet leaders had disagreements on their aid to Vietnam's fight against the US. Soviet requests for using Chinese logistical infrastructure were rejected due to Chinese concerns about sovereignty. Mao later linked these two threats and believed that Washington and Moscow are crafting a global scheme aimed at destroying China. These external threats merged over time: China was preparing for a coordinated invasion by Washington and Moscow. At the same time, India was seen as the main accomplice of the Soviets and the US.

These external threats ate their way into Chinese domestic politics. Mao's Cultural Revolution was aimed at destroying the Soviet infiltrators in the CCP. In the process of tearing down the Party, however, Mao delegated much of his power to his successor, Lin Biao, and Lin's associates. This way, Mao practically lost control over the military and the Foreign Ministry, as it was shown by the Wuhan incident and China's chaotic foreign policy in the summer of 1967.

Like in 1962, Mao sought to reduce the external and internal threats. Externally, China wanted to undermine India's influence among the Asian-African states—a purpose that could be served by the confrontations on the border. Internally, Mao wanted to stage a political comeback by uniting China that was divided by factional fights during the Cultural Revolution. Fighting an external enemy (India) could serve this purpose.

The context of the 1967 confrontations with India, therefore, are like that of the war in 1962: high external threat leading to high internal threat, leading to China's direct use of force. The scale of China's use of force was much lower than in 1962 which can be explained by two intervening factors: division within the PLA and India's level of preparedness for the conflict. In the subsequent case of the 1986-1987 Sumdorong Chu standoff, I test how the theory fares in a different systemic environment, where China's ties with the great powers were not hostile.

Chapter 5. 1986-1987 – The bloodless crisis in the Sumdorong Chu Valley

In the previous two chapters, I discussed the evolution of Chinese foreign policy. In the 1950s, China's arch enemy was the US and Beijing's foreign policy was aimed at destroying imperialism. In the 1960s, China saw the Soviets revisionists and partners of US imperialists, hence the PRC antagonized both superpowers. By the end of the 1960s, China's animosity concentrated solely on the Soviets. In 1968, the Soviets militarily intervened in Czechoslovakia to crack down on liberal reforms and promulgated the "Brezhnev Doctrine", namely the Kremlin's right to interfere with any satellite state's domestic politics if it strayed away from the socialist path.¹ This left Chinese leaders concerned of a potential Soviet intervention in China and served as one of the factors that led to the 1969 Sino-Soviet confrontations on the border.² As Sino-Soviet ties deteriorated, China moved to improve ties with the US and India to strengthen its position vis-à-vis Moscow. In 1970, Mao reached out to Indian charge d'affaires Brajesh Mishra and proposed that the two sides should settle their quarrels. As they set out to implement Mao's idea, the third Indo-Pakistan war broke out in 1971.³ During the war, China gave moral support for Pakistan but made no actual military moves—unlike in 1965.⁴ In 1976, China and India restored ambassadorial ties. Subsequently, China sought to boost ties with India to move it away from the Soviet Union.⁵

The Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 had major influence on Sino-US, Sino-Soviet and Sino-Indian ties. Before the invasion, Sino-US ties deepened after to the establishment of diplomatic relations and Deng's visit to the US. At the same time, the Sino-Soviet schism deteriorated because of Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia. The invasion of Afghanistan reinforced both of these trends, since Chinese leaders saw the invasion as part of the Soviet grand scheme of containing China.⁶

Beijing countered the Soviet expansion by cooperating with the US, Pakistan and the *mujahideen* (Afghan rebel forces). On the one hand, China supported US economic sanctions against the Soviets. During the January 1980 visit of US Defence Secretary Harold Brown to China,

¹ Raghavan, "The Security Dilemma and India–China Relations," 65-66.

² Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 203.

³ Raghavan, "The Security Dilemma and India–China Relations," 65-66.

⁴ Andrew Small, *The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 14.

⁵ Raghavan, "The Security Dilemma and India–China Relations," 65-66.

⁶ A. Z. Hilali, "China's Response to the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan," *Central Asian Survey* 20, no. 3 (2001): 327, 30.

it also agreed to allow US planes to fly over Chinese territory while delivering arms to the Afghan resistance. On the other hand, China provided the Afghan rebels with land mines, anti-aircraft machine guns, land mines and anti-tank rockets among other military equipment. They also established rebel training facilities in Xinjiang. Finally, China aided Pakistan and the Pakistan-based *mujahideen* units.⁷

These dynamics also had some influence on Sino-Indian relations. China wanted to boost ties with India to draw it away from the Soviet trajectory.⁸ India, on the other hand, was interested in improving ties with third actors to become less dependent on the Soviets.⁹ Nevertheless, India recognized the Vietnam-supported Heng Samrin government in Cambodia and reversed all the progress made in the improvement of Sino-Indian ties.¹⁰

The aforementioned dynamics served as the prelude to the 1986-87 Sumdorong Chu standoff. Unlike in 1962 and 1967, China exercised restraint on this occasion. I argue that this change in China's behaviour occurred because Beijing's ties with the great powers improved. When a state faces low level of external threats, the threat of a foreign invasion dissipates and the strategic calculus changes. Nevertheless, the lack of external threat does not mean that leaders are secure: they can still face high level of internal threat posed by domestic challengers. If a border crisis occurs under these circumstances, the leader faces a hybrid situation: the external environment requires peace but the internal requirement demands a resolute stand. A leader is highly likely to address these hybrid circumstances with hybrid measures and opt for military posturing without a direct attack.

The aim of this chapter is to substantiate my argument that China only used the threat of force against India in the Sumdorong Chu crisis because its external environment was less menacing than in 1962 and 1967, while internal threat was high due to the Deng-Hu succession struggle. The first section discusses the upturn in Sino-US and Sino-Soviet relations. Sino-US ties were improving and saw a breakthrough in August 1982 when they reached an agreement on US arms sales to Taiwan. Sino-Soviet relations started to improve after Brezhnev's March 1982 Tashkent speech in which the Soviet leader proclaimed Moscow's intention of mending ties with Beijing.

⁷ Ibid., 339.

⁸ Ibid., 340.

⁹ Partha S. Ghosh and Rajaram Panda, "Domestic Support for Mrs. Gandhi's Afghan Policy: The Soviet Factor in Indian Politics," *Asian Survey* 23, no. 3 (1983): 262, 76; Hilali, "China's Response to the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan," 340.

¹⁰ "China's Response to the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan," 340.

The second section focuses on China's diplomatic adjustment prompted by these positive changes. Against the backdrop of low external threats, China's foreign policy did not involve the mobilization of external actors, as Beijing waged no crusade against imperialism or revisionism. The third section zeroes in on the benign turn in China's perception of Indian foreign policy: Beijing no longer saw India as a lackey of the superpowers. The fourth section elaborates on the leadership struggle between Deng Xiaoping and his successor, Hu Yaobang. They disagreed on Deng's retirement, party reforms and the leadership's treatment of student protests leading to Hu's removal from the top leadership. The fifth section explicates the strategic and diplomatic moves that occurred in the course of the Suidong Chu crisis: when push came to shove, China opted to limit its advances in the disputed region to keep tensions at bay. The sixth section connects these processes and argues that Deng chose this approach because he was confronted by contradictory imperatives: the external environment required prudence while the domestic setting pushed him to be resolute. The outcome was the hybrid decision of dispatching troops without authorization to attack.

5.1. External threat: China and the great powers in the 1980s

External threat to China in the 1980s was lower than in the 1960s. The primary indicators of this trend are increasing leadership visits, multiple channels of communication as well as enhanced trade and cultural cooperation with the superpowers. In the case of the US, the two sides achieved a significant result in 1982 by signing the "United States-China Joint Communiqué on United States Arms Sales to Taiwan". This agreement fixed a longstanding Chinese concern about US arms sales to Taiwan by capping the quantity and quality of these transactions at the 1979 levels. Subsequently, Sino-US relations ushered in an era of frequent exchanges between top officials from the two countries.

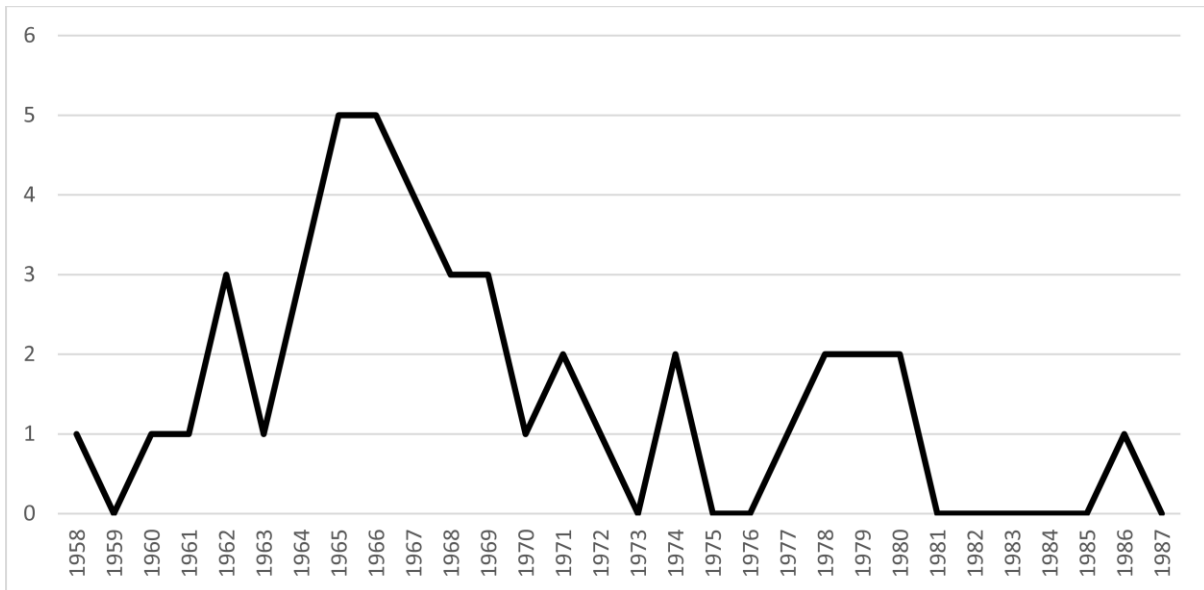
Relations turned for the better on the Sino-Soviet front after 1982. Brezhnev expressed Moscow's willingness to normalize ties with China in the Tashkent speech.¹¹ Subsequently, Chinese and Soviet leaders started the normalization process via multiple channels. On the one

¹¹ Brezhnev gave the Tashkent (located in the southwest part of the Soviet Union, today it is the capital of Uzbekistan in Central Asia) speech on 24 March 1982. It was a major Soviet overture to China in which he pushed for the normalization of Sino-Soviet ties. See: "Sino-Soviet Relations," *Survival* 24, no. 4 (1982).

hand, Vice-Foreign Ministers interacted via yearly dialogues. On the other hand, China sent special envoys to the funerals of Soviet leaders who passed away between 1982-1985 to interact with incoming Soviet leaders.

In figure 5.1 below, the secondary indicator showcases a significant decrease in the number of MIDs between China and the great powers during the 1980s. Between 1980-1987, the number of such confrontations was 3, compared to 18 in the 1963-1967 period and 6 in the 1958-1962 period. This suggests that in the run-up to the 1986-1987 Sumdorong Chu Standoff, China faced low level of external threat.

Figure 5.1. Chinese MIDs with Great Powers, 1958-1987.



Source: author's calculations based on CoW data. Maoz, Zeev, Paul L. Johnson, Jasper Kaplan, Fiona Ogunkoya, and Aaron P. Shreve. "The Dyadic Militarized Interstate Disputes (Mids) Dataset Version 3.0: Logic, Characteristics, and Comparisons to Alternative Datasets." Journal of Conflict Resolution (2018): 1-25.

How did this manifest on the ground? The following two sections will elaborate on the status of Sino-US and Sino-Soviet ties during the 1980s to showcase that compared to the 1960s, external

pressure on China decreased. This led to an amicable turn in Sino-Indian relations, as the two sides reinvigorated border negotiations.

5.1.1. Sino-US relations

Decreased hostility in Sino-US ties is observable through their interaction on the Taiwan issue and improved military ties. First, the two sides made breakthroughs on the Taiwan problem. When the US and China established diplomatic relations in 1979, the former agreed not to sell weapons to Taiwan for a year. As the moratorium ended in 1980, the US moved to sell defence equipment (spare parts) and advanced military aircraft to Taiwan. China was livid about the plan and approached the US in 1981 with two requests. First, the quality and quantity of the weapons sold to Taiwan were not to exceed the level of those established under the Carter administration (1977-1981). Second, the US had to decrease and eventually stop weapons sales to Taiwan. The US was ready to commit to the first request, but it was reluctant to stop defence sales entirely. The two sides' negotiations bore fruit in the summer of 1982.¹² In the "United States-China Joint Communiqué on United States Arms Sales to Taiwan" signed on 17 August 1982, Washington committed to restrain the quality and quantity of defence equipment sold to Taiwan at the 1979 level, the year when China and the US established diplomatic ties.¹³ Subsequently, Chinese leaders referred to this communique as one of the pillars of Sino-US relations. This signals progress compared to the deadlock of the 1960s.¹⁴ In July 1985, Chinese President Li Xiannian visited to the US, marking the first occasion that a PRC head of state put foot on US soil.¹⁵ He met with top level policymakers such as President Ronald Reagan, Vice President George H. W. Bush, Secretary of State George Pratt Shultz and Secretary of Defence Caspar Weinberger. During these meetings, Li Xiannian explained China's approach to peaceful unification with Taiwan: the one

¹² Jin, *中美关系史纲: 1784-2010 (Historical Outline of Sino-US Relations: 1784-2010)*, 256-63.

¹³ Tingbiao Hong and Zhirong Zhang, *当代中国外交新论 (Theory of China's Contemporary Foreign Policy)* (Hong Kong: Inspiration Publishing (励志出版社), 2004), 214-15.

¹⁴ Han, *当代中国外交 (Modern Chinese Diplomacy)*, 342-47.

¹⁵ Wenzhao Tao, ed. *中美关系史 (the History of Sino-US Relations)*, 3 vols., vol. 3 (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, 2016), 169-72.

country, two systems principle.¹⁶ The policy means that within China (one country) the parallel existence of socialism and capitalism (two systems) is allowed by the central government.¹⁷

There were subtle changes that somewhat appeased China during these times. After Defence Minister Zhang Aiping's US visit in June 1986, the US sold C-130 military transport aircraft to Taiwan. Before doing so, however, they notified China, to avoid ruffling feathers. Furthermore, the US rejected Taiwan's request for more modern military aircraft.¹⁸

The second indicator of better Sino-US ties is the improved military interaction between the two sides. Military delegations exchanged visits and defence universities established cooperation in this period.¹⁹ In May 1980, the US Secretary of Defence Harold Brown announced that the US was going to authorize military exports to China, involving radars and logistical helicopters.²⁰ In September 1983, US Secretary of Defence Weinberger visited China and this trip became a crucial juncture in Sino-US military ties. It created an institutional framework for Sino-US military cooperation, under which concrete projects commenced between the two states. Furthermore, it also established a basis for technological cooperation between the two sides. In June 1984, Chinese Defence Minister Zhang Aiping paid a reciprocal visit to the US, signalling the first occasion that a Chinese Defence Minister put foot on US soil. During the visit, the two sides agreed to boost national defence and military technology cooperation. On 12 June, Zhang Aiping and Weinberger signed an agreement that laid down the principles of Sino-US military interaction—this was the first military technology agreement between the two states.²¹ The US was also increasing technological transfers to China. In 1986, the US Senate Foreign Affairs Committee approved the transfer of avionics worth USD 550 million that China could use to improve its military aircrafts.²²

¹⁶ Li Gong, *峰谷间的震荡——1979年以来的中美关系 (Peaks and Valleys: Post-1979 Sino-US Relations)* (Beijing: China Youth Publishing, 1996), 158.

¹⁷ "White Paper: The One-China Principle and the Taiwan Issue: The Taiwan Affairs Office and the Information Office of the State Council, 21 February 2000," *China Report* 36, no. 2 (2000): 281.

¹⁸ Gong, *峰谷间的震荡——1979年以来的中美关系 (Peaks and Valleys: Post-1979 Sino-US Relations)*, 162-63.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 181.

²⁰ Zengpei Tian, *改革开放以来的中国外交 (China's Foreign Policy since the Reform and Opening)* (Beijing: World Affairs Press, 1993), 423.

²¹ Tao, *中美关系史 (the History of Sino-US Relations)*, 180.

²² Li Gong, ed. *当代中国外交 (Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy)* (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2019), 148-49.

In November 1986, three US Navy warships made a port call in the Chinese city of Qingdao, an act that was unprecedented in PRC history.²³

Sino-US ties improved in various other fields, such as political and economic cooperation. However, the strides made on the Taiwan issue and the enhanced military interaction substantiates the point that the US was less of a threat to Chinese sovereignty and territorial integrity than in the 1960s. Although Chinese and US representatives engaged in talks over a hundred times in Geneva and Warsaw during the 1950s and 1960 but they failed to address the Taiwan question which relates to China's core interests.²⁴ This changed in the 1980s when the two sides made tangible progress on the issue of weapons sales to Taiwan. In the military field, the US boosted its military presence on China's periphery in the 1960s, sparking fears of containment in Beijing. In the 1980s, instead of containing China, the US expanded military cooperation with it.

5.1.2. Sino-Soviet relations

The 1980s brought changes to Sino-Soviet relations, eventually leading to the normalization of ties between the two states. The process started on 24 March 1982 when Brezhnev gave a speech in Tashkent and made statements that sent positive signals to China. First, he acknowledged that China was a socialist country.²⁵ Second, he recognized PRC sovereignty over Taiwan.²⁶ Third, the Soviets were preparing for border negotiations and wanted to boost mutual trust in the disputed region. Fourth, he expressed that the Soviets were ready to agree on measures to improve Sino-Soviet ties, but only without preconditions.²⁷

Subsequently, Deng Xiaoping convened a meeting with China's Foreign Ministry officials in the summer of 1982 and articulated the "three obstacles" that stood in the way of normal Sino-Soviet ties.²⁸ China was concerned about Soviet military engagements on its periphery, hence the three obstacles focused on these areas. First, Chinese leaders believed that Vietnam invaded

²³ Tian, *改革开放以来的中国外交 (China's Foreign Policy since the Reform and Opening)*, 424.

²⁴ Niu, "1961-1963 年的中美大使会谈 (the Sino-US Ambassadorial Talks of 1961-1963)," 438-40, 42-61.

²⁵ Qiufeng Ji, *中国外交历程, 1949-1989 (the Course of Chinese Diplomacy, 1949-1989)* (Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2018), 190.

²⁶ Hong and Zhang, *当代中国外交新论 (Theory of China's Contemporary Foreign Policy)*, 241-43.

²⁷ Hua Li, *北京与莫斯科: 结盟·对抗·合作 (Beijing and Moscow: Alliance-Antagonism-Cooperation)* (Beijing: 人民出版社 (People's Publishing House), 2007), 346.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 346-47.

Cambodia with Soviet help and they wanted Moscow to cease its assistance. Second, China was apprehensive of the large number of Soviet troops on the Sino-Soviet and Sino-Mongolian borders.²⁹ Third, China also wanted the Soviet Union to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan.³⁰ The Soviet reaction to this stance relied on three points. First, they criticized China for setting preconditions for the normalization. Second, they argued that the Sino-Soviet diplomatic normalization could not harm the interests of third states—referring to China’s request of halting support for Vietnam. Third, they aimed to convince their Chinese counterparts that the Soviets represented no danger to China.³¹

The two sides interacted through various channels to reconcile their respective positions. One of them was the dialogue between the Deputy Foreign Ministers. These officials were scheduled to meet in Beijing and Moscow alternately to discuss the removal of the three obstacles.³² This forum became a constant channel of interaction until the two sides announced the normalization of their ties in 1989.³³ The most important function of this mechanism was to maintain interaction between the two sides.³⁴

The “funeral diplomacy” was another avenue of communication. In 1982, 1984 and 1985, three Soviet Party Secretaries—Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko respectively—passed away. China sent special envoys to all of these funerals where Chinese delegation had the chance to interact with the new Soviet leader.³⁵ The aim of Deng Xiaoping was to boost mutual understanding between the two sides and inquire about the China policy of the new leaders.³⁶

The third channel was the dialogue between the Chinese and Soviet vice-foreign ministers and foreign ministers. Through this platform, the two foreign ministers exchanged thoughts on bilateral ties and on some occasions concluded agreements. For instance, the resurrection of border talks was agreed upon by the two sides during such a meeting.³⁷

²⁹ Hong and Zhang, *当代中国外交新论 (Theory of China's Contemporary Foreign Policy)* , 241-43.

³⁰ Han, *当代中国外交 (Modern Chinese Diplomacy)*, 349-52.

³¹ Hongxu Wang, Hao Sun, and Lin Liang, *邓小平与中国外交 (Deng Xiaoping and China's Diplomacy)* (Beijing: Chinese Democratic and Legal Press, 2017), 253.

³² Hong and Zhang, *当代中国外交新论 (Theory of China's Contemporary Foreign Policy)* , 241-43.

³³ Gong, *当代中国外交 (Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy)* , 147-48.

³⁴ Li, *北京与莫斯科: 结盟·对抗·合作 (Beijing and Moscow: Alliance-Antagonism-Cooperation)* , 348-49.

³⁵ Han, *当代中国外交 (Modern Chinese Diplomacy)*, 349-52.

³⁶ Wang, Sun, and Liang, *邓小平与中国外交 (Deng Xiaoping and China's Diplomacy)* , 255-66.

³⁷ Li, *北京与莫斯科: 结盟·对抗·合作 (Beijing and Moscow: Alliance-Antagonism-Cooperation)* , 348-49, 52.

Despite the frequent interactions, Sino-Soviet normalization was at an impasse, as the two sides did not budge from their respective positions. Gorbachev broke this deadlock in 1986. On 26 July, he gave a speech in Vladivostok that became a crucial point in the process of normalization. First, he diverted from the usual Soviet adage of condemning preconditions and the influence of the normalization on third states' interests.³⁸ Second, he proclaimed that the Soviets would decrease troop numbers on the Sino-Soviet and Sino-Mongolian borders.³⁹ Third, he pledged to remove 6 regiments from Afghanistan by late 1989.⁴⁰ Fourth, he also accepted the Chinese position of drawing the boundary between China and the Soviet Union in accordance with the *thalweg* principle (fixing the border as the central line of a river).⁴¹

The two sides also revived border talks in 1987,⁴² meeting once in February and for the second time in August.⁴³ This marked the initial push for the later solution of the Sino-Soviet border dispute.

The aim of these sections was to point out that in the 1980s, China faced lower external threat than it did in the 1960s. The best way of observing the decreased hostility between China and the great powers was to look at how their bilateral cooperation evolved. In the case of the US, the two sides made progress on the Taiwan problem and enhanced military cooperation. In the case of the Soviets, the two sides engaged each other on various platforms and gradually reduced the threats to Chinese territorial integrity. In the following section, I focus on how the decreased external threat influenced China's foreign policy and its ties with India.

5.2. *Readjustment of Chinese foreign policy*

Against the backdrop of decreasing external threats, there was a change in Chinese leaders' perception of the likelihood of a new world war. In the 1960s, Chinese leaders thought that a world war was inevitable. In the 1980s, they thought that it was possible, but not inevitable. The two superpowers were trying to expand their power worldwide and confrontations in this process could

³⁸ Ibid., 355-56.

³⁹ Wang, Sun, and Liang, *邓小平与中国外交* (*Deng Xiaoping and China's Diplomacy*) , 268.

⁴⁰ Hong and Zhang, *当代中国外交新论* (*Theory of China's Contemporary Foreign Policy*) , 241-43.

⁴¹ Li, *北京与莫斯科: 结盟·对抗·合作* (*Beijing and Moscow: Alliance-Antagonism-Cooperation*) , 356.

⁴² Gong, *当代中国外交* (*Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy*) , 147-48.

⁴³ Wang, Sun, and Liang, *邓小平与中国外交* (*Deng Xiaoping and China's Diplomacy*) , 271.

lead to global conflict.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the forces of peace outweighed those of war. The Third World was the guarantor of peace. 75% of the world's states belonged to the Third World and they strove for economic development for which they needed a peaceful external environment.⁴⁵ On the other hand, many states of the international system experienced the destruction of war hence they wanted to avoid repeating it.⁴⁶

With this new evaluation of the international setting in mind, China revamped its diplomatic conduct and dubbed it "Independent Foreign Policy". Chinese leaders started to articulate this concept in the summer of 1982. On 2 August 1982, Deng Xiaoping hosted the French foreign minister. He expressed his admiration toward the European state's independent policy and said that China sought to emulate France's example. In the same month, Chinese leaders further elaborated the concept in their interaction with the UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar. On 20 August 1982, Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua met with him and explained that China was not dependent on any of the superpowers: it did not balance with the US against the Soviets or vice versa. On 21 August 1982, Deng Xiaoping met with de Cuellar and said that Chinese foreign policy was built on three longstanding principles: anti-hegemony, preservation of world peace and cooperation with Third World states.⁴⁷

The content of this policy was more rigorously introduced at the 12th Party Congress in September 1982 and was further refined in subsequent speeches. One of the most fundamental revisions related to the driving force of Chinese foreign policy. Before the 1980s, Chinese foreign policy was threat-driven. In the beginning of the Cold War, China saw the US as the biggest threat and wanted to mobilize states to destroy imperialism. Subsequently, the Soviet Union became the main threat to China.⁴⁸ In the late 1970s, China jettisoned this approach and instead of waging a crusade against imperialism, the primary aim of foreign policy was to serve the state's economic development and national reunification.⁴⁹

China described its revamped foreign policy as independent, nonaligned, omnidirectional and peaceful.⁵⁰ On 1 September 1982, Deng Xiaoping emphasized in his speech that China's foreign

⁴⁴ Han, *当代中国外交 (Modern Chinese Diplomacy)*, 337-38, 40-41.

⁴⁵ Ji, *中国外交历程, 1949-1989 (the Course of Chinese Diplomacy, 1949-1989)*, 184-86.

⁴⁶ Han, *当代中国外交 (Modern Chinese Diplomacy)*, 337-38, 40-41.

⁴⁷ Tao, *中美关系史 (the History of Sino-US Relations)*, 133-39.

⁴⁸ Gong, *当代中国外交 (Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy)*, 144-46.

⁴⁹ Lowell Dittmer, "The 12th Congress of the Communist Party of China," *The China Quarterly* 93 (1983): 121.

⁵⁰ Gong, *当代中国外交 (Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy)*, 144-46.

policy was “independent” because it did not serve as a satellite of any other country. CCP General Secretary Hu Yaobang further elaborated the concept and said that China strove not to be dependent on any foreign state or international organization. Both in its Soviet and US policy, China had certain principles on which it would not budge. In the case of the Soviets, these were the three obstacles of the normalization of bilateral ties. Vis-à-vis the US, China was adamant about the “One China” principle.⁵¹ At the same time, China sought to simultaneously boost ties with the US and the Soviets and refrained from playing out the two superpowers against each other. Despite the difficulties in Sino-Soviet relations, it was disinclined to deepen its quasi alliance with the US and balance against Moscow.⁵²

The newly introduced concept of “nonalignment” in Chinese foreign policy was closely related to this. After its reliance on the Soviet Union and later the US, China became nonaligned and followed its own national interests.⁵³ As a rationale for this change, Hu Yaobang identified two drawbacks of relying too much on a great power. First, China’s capacity to engage third states would be limited—it could not make friends with the superpower’s enemy. Second, as an ally of a great power, China would be compelled to accept the wrongdoings of certain states such as the allies of the great power. In other words, China’s space for diplomatic manoeuvres would be limited. Even worse, Beijing could have become a “pawn” on the chessboard of great powers. Instead, China strove to remove the zero-sum nature of China-US and China-USSR relations.⁵⁴

“Omnidirectional” foreign policy meant that China eschewed the ideological edge of its external outreach.⁵⁵ For instance, while Vietnam was a socialist country from the Third World, China still opposed it because of the invasion of Cambodia.⁵⁶

Finally, “peaceful” meant that China’s main aim was to restrain hegemony.⁵⁷ “Hegemony” was not related to size, military power or wealth. Rather, it manifested in policy decisions: invasion, aggression or expansion.⁵⁸ Hence, China’s peaceful foreign policy aimed to counter these policies.

⁵¹ Tao, *中美关系史 (the History of Sino-US Relations)*, 133-39.

⁵² Ronald C. Keith, "The Origins and Strategic Implications of China's 'Independent Foreign Policy'," *International Journal* 41, no. 1 (1985): 100.

⁵³ Han, *当代中国外交 (Modern Chinese Diplomacy)*, 337-38, 40-41.

⁵⁴ Keith, "The Origins and Strategic Implications of China's 'Independent Foreign Policy'," 101.

⁵⁵ Ji, *中国外交历程, 1949-1989 (the Course of Chinese Diplomacy, 1949-1989)*, 184-86.

⁵⁶ Yixian Xie, ed. *中国外交史, 1979-1994 (a Diplomatic History of China, 1979-1994)* (Zhengzhou: Henan People's Publishing House, 1998), 184.

⁵⁷ Han, *当代中国外交 (Modern Chinese Diplomacy)*, 473.

⁵⁸ Gong, *当代中国外交 (Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy)*, 164.

At the same time, China showed no inclination distinguish between the two superpowers: it criticized both for their incorrect policies.⁵⁹ For instance, China criticized the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the US invasion of Grenada.⁶⁰ Foreign Minister Qian Qichen's 1983 speech further added that China needed a tranquil external environment so that it could focus on economic development.⁶¹

As a part of this adjustment, China sought to improve its image in the Third World. Before, its reputation was tarnished for being too preoccupied with the crusade against Soviet hegemony and playing down the criticism against US hegemony.⁶² China sought to repair ties with the Third World by identifying itself as a member of this group and establishing an atmosphere of community. Chinese leaders pointed out that the PRC and the Third World shared the mission of opposing imperialism, hegemony and colonialism.⁶³ China also promoted the rights and interests of Third World states, supported their political independence and economic development.⁶⁴

Furthermore, China supported the Third World effort of establishing a new international economic order. Chinese leaders believed that the post-world war economic system was obsolete and unjust, leading to an increasing gap between developing and developed states. Although Third World states were independent, they were still exploited and controlled by imperialism and developed states.⁶⁵ China made two crucial steps in the early 1980s to further this agenda. First, at the October 1981 Cancun conference on economic issues, there was a debate between developing and developed states, namely the Third World and the US. The developing states wanted to reform the existing economic order while the US wanted to maintain it. Reagan had some negative remarks on collective farming, saying that it leaves people starving. This was perceived as an attack against socialist and communist states. Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang retorted Reagan's

⁵⁹ Dittmer, "The 12th Congress of the Communist Party of China," 121.

⁶⁰ Xie, *中国外交史, 1979-1994 (a Diplomatic History of China, 1979-1994)*, 176.

⁶¹ Shanghai Archives, no. B123-11-418-1: "中共中央宣传部关于印发钱其琛同志《关于国际形式和我国对外政策问题》报告记录稿的通知," (CCP Central Committee Propaganda Department's notification on printing and distributing the records of comrade Qian Qichen's Report on "International Situation and China's Foreign Policy", (5 January 1983)), p. 10.

⁶² Shanghai Archives, no. B123-11-418-1: "中共中央宣传部关于印发钱其琛同志《关于国际形式和我国对外政策问题》报告记录稿的通知," (CCP Central Committee Propaganda Department's notification on printing and distributing the records of comrade Qian Qichen's Report on "International Situation and China's Foreign Policy" (5 January 1983)), pp. 11, 14, 16-17.

⁶³ Han, *当代中国外交 (Modern Chinese Diplomacy)*, 467.

⁶⁴ Gong, *当代中国外交 (Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy)*, 144-46.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 166-67.

claims and won praise from the Third World states. Second, there was also a debate on whom to choose as the next UN Secretary General, the candidate supported by the Third World (first Tanzanian Ahmed Salim Ali, then Peruvian Javier Pérez de Cuéllar) or the US (Austrian Kurt Waldheim). China used his veto power in the UN Security Council to back the Third World candidate and de Cuéllar was eventually elected and assumed his position in 1982.⁶⁶

Apart from these moves, Chinese top leaders frequently interacted with Third World leaders to establish a sense of camaraderie with them. On 24 February 1982, Zhao Ziyang met with Prime Minister Maati Bouabid from Morocco and argued that China belongs to the Third World because it is a developing socialist state and its shares a common destiny with other developing states. On 18 March 1982, Zhao met with Foreign Minister Félix Tientarboum from the Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) and said that China wanted to boost South-South cooperation, North-South dialogue and establish a new international economic order. On 25 March 1982, Deng Xiaoping met with the foreign minister of Brazil and reiterated China's commitment to boosting ties with Third World States.⁶⁷

While there was an effort of uniting Third World states, the goal and methods of this outreach changed. In the 1960s, China wanted Third World states to *attack* and destroy imperialism. In the 1980s, China supported Third World states in their economic development, political independence and *self-defence* against hegemonic invasions. At the same time, the method of outreach changed as well. During the revolutionary foreign policy of the 1960s and 1970s, Chinese leaders thought that mobilization and support had to manifest in economic aid. Mao thought that this was China's "contribution to humanity," and an indispensable part of Chinese foreign policy.⁶⁸ In 1983, however, Foreign Minister Qian Qichen argued that China's support to Third World states had to be predominantly political, rather than economic. He argued that revolution and economic

⁶⁶ Shanghai Archives, no. B123-11-418-1: "中共中央宣传部关于印发钱其琛同志《关于国际形式和我国对外政策问题》报告记录稿的通知," (CCP Central Committee Propaganda Department's notification on printing and distributing the records of comrade Qian Qichen's Report on "International Situation and China's Foreign Policy" (5 January 1983)), pp. 11, 14, 16-17.

⁶⁷ Tao, *中美关系史 (the History of Sino-US Relations)*, 133-39.

⁶⁸ Shanghai Archives, no. B170-3-122-122: "李先念副总理和华国锋、余秋里、乔冠华同志在出口商品生产工作会议上的讲话" (Speeches by Vice Premier Li Xiannian and Comrades Hua Guofeng, Yu Qiuli and Qiao Guanhua at the Working Conference on Production of Export Commodities (10 March 1972)) p. 20.

development of Third World states had to be endogenous with little reliance on external actors.⁶⁹ As the cutthroat superpower competition subsided, it is plausible that Chinese leaders saw no need for proactively attacking imperialism and funding these efforts.

Therefore, the outreach to Third World states remained a consistent part of Chinese foreign policy. Nevertheless, the purpose of this outreach changed. In the 1960s, it was about turning uncommitted states against the superpowers. In the 1980s, the target became less belligerent, as it was about revising the established international economic order and promoting economic development.⁷⁰ China's approach to a certain Third World country was not influenced anymore by the state's alignment with the US or the USSR.⁷¹ In the following section, I focus on how this new approach to the Third World influenced Sino-Indian relations.

5.3. China's foreign policy adjustment and China-India relations

While China had hostile ties with the great powers in the 1960s, it saw India as their puppet in an anti-Chinese coalition. Therefore, some aspects of China's South Asia policy were directed against India, such as arms support to Pakistan in 1965 and 1971. China justified those moves by calling Indian actions hegemonic, expansionist and domineering.⁷² At the same time, China had a negative view of India and its friendship with the Soviets. In 1972, Vice Premier Li Xiannian said that the 1971 Indo-Soviet friendship treaty was targeted against China.⁷³

Starting from the second half of the 1970s, however, Chinese perception of Indian foreign policy changed. In 1978, the Chinese Foreign Trade Ministry circulated a document which observed that India was reluctant to obey Soviet control. The same document also pointed out that

⁶⁹ Shanghai Archives, no. B123-11-418-1: “中共中央宣传部关于印发钱其琛同志《关于国际形式和我国对外政策问题》报告记录稿的通知，” (CCP Central Committee Propaganda Department's notification on printing and distributing the records of comrade Qian Qichen's Report on “International Situation and China's Foreign Policy” (5 January 1983)) , pp. 16-19.

⁷⁰ Han, *当代中国外交 (Modern Chinese Diplomacy)*, 468-75.

⁷¹ Gong, *当代中国外交 (Contemporary Chinese Diplomacy)* , 155.

⁷² National Archives of India, FIII-103(9)-82: “Note for the cabinet committee for political affairs—Part I (31 January 1979)” and “Foreign Minister's visit to the People's Republic of China (27 February 1979)” in “Visit of Foreign Minister of India to China from 12 to 19 February 1979” pp. 7, 95.

⁷³ Shanghai Archives, no. B170-3-122-153: “李先念副总理接见广交会代表的讲话” (Vice President Li Xiannian's speech at the Canton Fair (15 April 1972)) , p. 2.

China should utilize the visit of an Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry delegation to improve mutual understanding and bilateral ties.⁷⁴

This change matured over time and China became more forthcoming in the border dispute. Going into the 1980s, there was a difference in ambitions between the two sides. India was eager to settle the dispute, arguing that without settlement, the normalization of Sino-Indian ties was incomplete. India was opened for engaging in the fields of economy, trade, culture and science, but it was also eager to solve the border dispute at the same time. Beijing's stand was that the border dispute was too sensitive and complex to address, hence they wanted to side-line the issue until engagement in other areas would create favourable circumstances for settlement.⁷⁵ Indian analysts argued that the Chinese tactic was to delay dispute resolution and deepen bilateral ties until India would concede some of its claims.⁷⁶

At the outset, there was miscommunication between the two sides. In an interview given to the Press Trust of India on 11 February 1979, Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua asserted that India concurred with China that the border issue should not be an obstacle for the improvement on China-India relations. Subsequently, Indian External Affairs Minister A. B. Vajpayee issued a clarification that settling the border dispute was a precondition for the full normalization of ties.⁷⁷ During the subsequent Vajpayee visit to China, India conveyed the message that the border dispute was a paramount issue in the normalization of Sino-Indian bilateral ties and China recognized the importance of the border imbroglio.⁷⁸ There was no significant breakthrough, but the two sides

⁷⁴ Shanghai Archives, no. B170-3-514-65: “对外贸易部关于接待印度工商联合会代表团的计划,” (Plan of Ministry of Foreign Trade to host an Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry delegation (31 July 1978)), pp. 66, 68-69.

⁷⁵ National Archives of India, FIII-103(9)-82: “Note for the Cabinet Committee for Political Affairs-Part II, India-China boundary question (31 January 1979)” and “Foreign Minister's visit to the People's republic of China (27 February 1979)” and “Recent Chinese Pronouncements on the India-China boundary question” in “Visit of Foreign Minister of India to China from 12 to 19 February 1979” pp. 26, 28, 94, 116.

⁷⁶ National Archives of India, no. FIII-103-5-82: “Letter from Indian Embassy in China to Indian Ministry of External Affairs on 8 November, 1979” in “Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua's visit to India—26th June to 1st July 1981” p. 40.

⁷⁷ “Interview by Mr. Huang Hua, Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China, with the Press Trust of India (11 February 1979),” in *India-China Relations 1947-2000: A Documentary Study*, ed. Avtar Singh Bhasin (New Delhi: Geetika Publishers, 2018), 4880; “Clarificatory Statement to the Press by Atal Bihari Vajpayee on Huang Hua's Interview with Press Trust of India Released on 11th February 1979,” in *India-China Relations 1947-2000: A Documentary Study*, ed. Avtar Singh Bhasin (New Delhi: Geetika Publishers, 2018), 4882.

⁷⁸ National Archives of India, FIII-103(9)-82: “Foreign Minister's visit to the People's republic of China (27 February 1979)” in “Visit of Foreign Minister of India to China from 12 to 19 February 1979” p. 94.

agreed to maintain the status quo and stability in the border region.⁷⁹ Vajpayee ended his visit prematurely to express the Indian government's discontent with China's invasion of Vietnam.⁸⁰ China framed its military move as a lesson taught to Vietnam—the same formulation they used in 1962, in their war against India.⁸¹

Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua visited India in June 1981. During the visit, officials agreed to revive border negotiations.⁸² There were two potential options of negotiating on the border. An “overall settlement” comprised of China's acceptance of India's position in the eastern and central sectors and India's confirmation of China's stand in the Western sector.⁸³ This was the China-favoured “package deal”, first proposed by Zhou Enlai during the April 1960 negotiations. In 1979, Deng Xiaoping reiterated Zhou Enlai's offer to A. B. Vajpayee.⁸⁴ Later, Deng pitched the deal again in an interview with Krishna Kumar from the Indian media outlet *Vikrant* on 21 June 1980.⁸⁵ China justified its approach by arguing that the only economically valuable section of the border was the eastern one, hence it was the most debated area. In contrast, the western sector was a barren wasteland strategically valuable to China because of the Xinjiang-Tibet highway.⁸⁶

In the Indian reading, the package deal favoured China.⁸⁷ India was inclined to take a partial approach which dealt with each sector individually. New Delhi's ambitions were to get its position accepted in the eastern sector and to confirm the Himalayan watershed as the border in the central sector.⁸⁸ In the Western sector, India preferred to reach an agreement along the 8 September 1962

⁷⁹ "Note by the Ministry of External Affairs on the Recent India-China Exchanges on the Border Issue. The Place of the Border Problem in the over-All India-China Relations; Talks During Vajpayee's Visit (24 May, 1980)," in *India-China Relations 1947-2000: A Documentary Study*, ed. Avtar Singh Bhasin (New Delhi: Geetika Publishers, 2018), 4918.

⁸⁰ National Archives of India, FIII-103(9)-82: “Foreign Minister's visit to the People's republic of China (27 February 1979)” in “Visit of Foreign Minister of India to China from 12 to 19 February 1979” p. 93.

⁸¹ Kalha, *India-China Boundary Issues: Quest for Settlement*, 189.

⁸² Xie, *中国外交史, 1979-1994 (a Diplomatic History of China, 1979-1994)*, 125-28, 88.

⁸³ National Archives of India, FIII-103(9)-82: “Note for the Cabinet Committee for political affairs – Part II, India-China boundary question (31 January 1979)” in “Visit of Foreign Minister of India to China from 12 to 19 February 1979” p. 22.

⁸⁴ National Archives of India, no. FIII-103-5-82: “Letter from Indian Embassy in China to Indian Ministry of External Affairs on 8 November, 1979” in “Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua's visit to India—26th June to 1st July 1981” p. 42.

⁸⁵ Nancy Jetly, "Sino-Indian Relations: A Quest for Normalization," *India Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (1986): 56.

⁸⁶ "Note by the Ministry of External Affairs on the Recent India-China Exchanges on the Border Issue. The Place of the Border Problem in the over-All India-China Relations; Talks During Vajpayee's Visit (24 May, 1980)," 4915.

⁸⁷ Jetly, "Sino-Indian Relations: A Quest for Normalization," 65.

⁸⁸ National Archives of India, no. FIII-103(9)-82: “Note for the Cabinet Committee for political affairs – Part II, India-China boundary question (31 January 1979)” in “Visit of Foreign Minister of India to China from 12 to 19 February 1979” pp. 27-28.

lines of control that put the Chip Chap and Galwan Valleys as well as Demchok under Indian ownership.⁸⁹

The two sides made good on their promise and border talks started in December 1981.⁹⁰ In the first round, China reiterated the package proposal. Indian Foreign Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao refused the Chinese offer, arguing that it dismissed the validity of the McMahon Line and affirmed gains China made by violent means. There was little tangible progress during the second (May 1982) and third (January-February 1983) rounds, but India agreed not to harp on the legal aspects of the dispute and find a mutually beneficial solution.⁹¹

At the fourth round in October 1983, China diverged from its previous insistence on the package deal and agreed to negotiate sector by sector—as long as the final solution was a comprehensive one.⁹² India, on the other hand, accepted the Chinese proposal of decoupling the border dispute and other aspects of the bilateral relations.⁹³ As a result of these talks, the two parties sought to move cooperation in other fields. In August 1984, China and India granted each other the most favoured nation status.⁹⁴ The aim of this agreement was to boost bilateral commerce between China and India by diversifying export products and simplifying currency exchange.⁹⁵

In the fifth round (September 1984), China's standpoint was more flexible and showed willingness to recognize the McMahon Line with small adjustments. China also wanted portions of territory in Aksai Chin which India saw as its own. Ultimately, these negotiations failed as Prime Minister Indira Gandhi sought to adopt a hardliner position before the upcoming Indian elections.⁹⁶

In June 1985, China proposed to resume cross-border commerce in Tibet to boost bilateral ties. China and India also pledged to periodically exchange academics and journalists to deepen mutual understanding.⁹⁷ In November 1985, China turned the tables on India during the sixth

⁸⁹ Jetly, "Sino-Indian Relations: A Quest for Normalization," 65.

⁹⁰ Xie, *中国外交史, 1979-1994 (a Diplomatic History of China, 1979-1994)*, 125-28, 88.

⁹¹ Sumit Ganguly, "The Sino-Indian Border Talks, 1981-1989: A View from New Delhi," *Asian Survey* 29, no. 12 (1989): 1126-31.

⁹² Jetly, "Sino-Indian Relations: A Quest for Normalization," 58.

⁹³ Ganguly, "The Sino-Indian Border Talks, 1981-1989: A View from New Delhi," 1126-31.

⁹⁴ Xie, *中国外交史, 1979-1994 (a Diplomatic History of China, 1979-1994)*, 125-28, 88.

⁹⁵ "Trade Agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of India (15 August 1984)," in *India-China Relations 1947-2000: A Documentary Study*, ed. Avtar Singh Bhasin (New Delhi: Geetika Publishers, 2018), 4940-42.

⁹⁶ Ganguly, "The Sino-Indian Border Talks, 1981-1989: A View from New Delhi," 1126-31.

⁹⁷ Jetly, "Sino-Indian Relations: A Quest for Normalization," 59.

round of border negotiations. As the two sides sat down to discuss the alignment of the border in the eastern sector, China asked India to make concessions there.⁹⁸ It was during this period that China requested India to concede Tawang. Ceding this territory to China would significantly hinder India's capacity of defending its northeast.⁹⁹ This was a revision of the previous Chinese stand which would have agreed to the Indian claim in exchange for New Delhi's acceptance of Beijing's claim in the Western sector. Progress stalled, as none of the sides diverted from their positions.¹⁰⁰ In the same year, the two sides agreed on exchange of TV/radio programmes and reporters. This included cooperation on producing documentaries and the celebration of the other's National Day.¹⁰¹

The seventh round of talks in July 1986 happened against the background of the Sumdorong Chu crisis.¹⁰² The incident featured on the agenda of this round of talks. The Indian side requested China to withdraw from Wangdong, one of the flashpoints of the crisis in the eastern sector. In exchange, India pledged to cease patrols in the area.¹⁰³ After this round, Wan Li, the Chinese representative met with Indian officials and emphasized that China and India needed patience to solve the dispute.¹⁰⁴ Importantly, this period marks a Chinese attempt of internationalizing the border dispute, as Beijing circulated a Xinhua note and two commentaries in New York at the UN. India did not address the issue directly and the Chinese effort of internationalization of the dispute failed.¹⁰⁵

At the eighth round of talks in November 1987, the two sides emphasized the importance of avoiding a fight and their interest to boost economic and commercial cooperation.¹⁰⁶ In the same

⁹⁸ CREST Collection, no. CIA-RDP04T00907R000200530001-3: "China-India Border Tensions: Origins and Prospects (29 January 1987)", pp. 1-2, 4-5.

⁹⁹ John Garver, "The Unresolved Sino-Indian Border Dispute: An Interpretation," *China Report* 47, no. 2 (2011): 109.

¹⁰⁰ CREST Collection, no. CIA-RDP04T00907R000200530001-3: "China-India Border Tensions: Origins and Prospects (29 January 1987)", pp. 1-2, 4-5.

¹⁰¹ "Press Release Issued in New Delhi on Feb 11, 1985 on the Memorandum of Understanding between India and China on the Exchange of Radio and Tv Programmes," in *India-China Relations 1947-2000: A Documentary Study*, ed. Avtar Singh Bhasin (New Delhi: Geetika Publishers, 2018), 4946.

¹⁰² Xie, *中国外交史, 1979-1994 (a Diplomatic History of China, 1979-1994)*, 125-28, 88.

¹⁰³ Ganguly, "The Sino-Indian Border Talks, 1981-1989: A View from New Delhi," 1126-31.

¹⁰⁴ Xie, *中国外交史, 1979-1994 (a Diplomatic History of China, 1979-1994)*, 125-28, 88.

¹⁰⁵ Kalha, *India-China Boundary Issues: Quest for Settlement*, 198-99.

¹⁰⁶ Ganguly, "The Sino-Indian Border Talks, 1981-1989: A View from New Delhi," 1126-31; Garver, "Sino-Indian Rapprochement and the Sino-Pakistan Entente," 325, footnote 3.

year, the two sides signed a trade protocol that pledged to boost the bilateral trade volume of China and India to more than USD 150 million between January 1987 and March 1988.¹⁰⁷

The aim of this section was to point out that against the backdrop of decreased external threat, China's perception of India changed. The propaganda of India being the foremost hatchet man of Soviet revisionism and US imperialism faded out, giving place to calls for boosting Sino-Indian ties. As a result, the two sides also sat down to talk about the border dispute. Although they made no breakthrough, the gesture indicates that hostility between India and China decreased. The less threatening external environment prompted China to create peaceful circumstances for the sake of its economic development. Against this external threat environment, China had little to benefit from a border confrontation with India. This acted as a disincentive against the direct use of force in the Sino-Indian border dispute. In what follows, I focus Deng's domestic political situation during the time of the Sumdorong Chu crisis.

5.4. Internal threat: Deng vs. Hu

During Deng Xiaoping's rule, the Chinese political scene was divided into two camps. On one side were the reformers, promoting close cooperation with Western states and the party's retrenchment in state and economic affairs.¹⁰⁸ Their members like Hu Yaobang, Yu Guanyuan or Hu Jiwei argued that Mao's mistakes during the Cultural Revolution happened because of errors in his theory on class struggle. Some of them also thought that the socialist economy was not beneficial for China's development.¹⁰⁹ They further claimed that the party had to serve the interests of the people and its members had to be treated as equals of the average citizen, without any privileges.¹¹⁰

The conservatives, on the other hand, were against freewheeling intellectual debates and thought that those discussions had to follow party directives.¹¹¹ Senior leaders like Chen Yun or

¹⁰⁷ "Press Release Issued in New Delhi on May 27, 1987 on the Trade Protocol Signed between India and China," in *India-China Relations 1947-2000: A Documentary Study*, ed. Avtar Singh Bhasin (New Delhi: Geetika Publishers, 2018), 4955.

¹⁰⁸ CREST Collection, no. CIA-RDP04T00907R000200130001-7: "Key Questions in the Fall of China's Hu Yaobang (May 1987)", pp. v., 1-16.

¹⁰⁹ Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 366-67.

¹¹⁰ Jiwei Hu, *从华国锋下台到胡耀邦下台* (*Down Falls of Communist Tycoons: From Hua Guofeng to Hu Yaobang*) (Hong Kong: Mirror Books, 1997), 338-45.

¹¹¹ CREST Collection, no. CIA-RDP04T00907R000200130001-7: "Key Questions in the Fall of China's Hu Yaobang (May 1987)", pp. v., 1-16.

Hu Qiaomu argued that China had to stick to the socialist road, as the planned economy during 1962-1965 had great achievements.¹¹² They also thought that instead of serving the people, the Party had to rule over them.¹¹³ The conservative view was that people who wanted liberalization in China subscribed to the western definitions of democracy, liberty and human rights while they denied the socialist equivalents of these concepts. Conservatives also criticized reformists for denying the leading position of Marxism.¹¹⁴

Deng's rule was mired in a constant dilemma of oscillating between these two groups because he needed economic reforms to maintain the CCP's rule over the Chinese society but also needed to stick to conservative ideas to keep his own rule within the CCP. This led to Janus-headed policymaking: after every success in reform policies, Deng had to make moves which secured the support of hardliners. For instance, Deng's victory over Hua's faction and his economic reforms in 1978 were immediately met with a pushback from conservatives in 1979. Deng had to appease them to maintain his rule, so he handed over the economic portfolio to Chen Yun and his allies. In 1980, when Deng regained the initiative after the success of local reforms, he transferred economic planning to Zhao Ziyang, a liberal minded leader.¹¹⁵ Hu Yaobang's reformist orientation and Deng's oscillating policymaking led to tensions between the two statesmen. The contradiction between Deng and Hu clustered around three issues: Party reforms, Deng's retirement and the management of student protests.

First, Deng had to make a stand between conservatives and liberals on how to reform the Party. The conservative faction wanted to initiate a political movement to purge everyone who had non-leftist thoughts.¹¹⁶ Hu Yaobang had other type of party reforms in mind. He wanted to establish a party that was more objective and open to criticism.¹¹⁷ He argued that media reports should not be one sided but simultaneously report good and bad events.¹¹⁸ As Deng forged ahead with economic

¹¹² Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 366-67.

¹¹³ Hu, *从华国锋下台到胡耀邦下台* (*Down Falls of Communist Tycoons: From Hua Guofeng to Hu Yaobang*), 338-45.

¹¹⁴ Dongbing Shi, *早逝的英華：胡耀邦下台的前前後後* (*When a Heroic Flower Dies Young: The Step Down of Hu Yaobang*) (Hong Kong: Cosmos Books, 1995), 222-25.

¹¹⁵ Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 406-08.

¹¹⁶ Hu, *从华国锋下台到胡耀邦下台* (*Down Falls of Communist Tycoons: From Hua Guofeng to Hu Yaobang*), 331-37.

¹¹⁷ Shi, *早逝的英華：胡耀邦下台的前前後後* (*When a Heroic Flower Dies Young: The Step Down of Hu Yaobang*), 222-25.

¹¹⁸ Hu, *从华国锋下台到胡耀邦下台* (*Down Falls of Communist Tycoons: From Hua Guofeng to Hu Yaobang*), 331-37.

reforms, he was unable to keep corruption in check, giving an opportunity to the conservatives to expand their clout over policymaking. In 1985, the hardliner-controlled Central Committee Discipline Inspection Commission organized a conference aimed at correcting the party's conduct. The conference revealed major acts of corruption, and conservatives won the day by ascribing the mistakes to the reformists. Deng had to appease the hardliners, so the CCP launched a campaign against corruption in the Party—the anti-bourgeois liberalization movement.¹¹⁹

The leadership ordered Hu Yaobang to carry out the campaign which required him to perform two tasks tantamount to a political suicide. On the one hand, he had to conduct corruption investigations against some of the most powerful politicians in China, turning him into “the most wanted man” among CCP leaders.¹²⁰ On the other hand, Hu was supposed to purge liberal minded leaders in the CCP who the basis of his power were. Unsurprisingly, Hu did not obey Deng's order.¹²¹

Overall, Hu Yaobang was too assertive in his reform efforts, as he decided to take on leftist political heavyweights like Hu Qiaomu. At the same time, he did not follow Deng's orders and was lenient with the reformers. These factors did not play out well with Deng, who was more inclined to support the subtler leftists.

Second, the management of the student protests also sparked contention between Deng and Hu. The student movements of the second half of the 1980s were inspired by intellectuals who called for democracy and the freedom of expression. They also had quarrels with socialism as a state system: they argued that it was an institution that accumulated power by relying on violence.¹²² These intellectuals encouraged students to take action for democratic reforms. In 1985, students protested for democracy and criticized the CCP cadre for enriching themselves instead of serving the people.¹²³

A bigger wave of student unrest in 1986 started with a late November meeting in the city of Hefei in Anhui province when students and teachers debated the question of electing local

¹¹⁹ Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 393-97.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 403.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 404.

¹²² Yuan Hua, *痛史明鉴——资产阶级自由化泛滥及其教训* (*Painful History: The Flood of Bourgeois Liberalization and Its Lessons*) (Beijing: Beijing Press, 1991), 64-72.

¹²³ Shi, *早逝的英华：胡耀邦下台的前前後後* (*When a Heroic Flower Dies Young: The Step Down of Hu Yaobang*), 193-96, 200, 11-20.

representatives.¹²⁴ Some of the intellectuals proposed that they should adopt an American-style election when the candidates make speeches about their plans and the people vote for their favoured politician. Local cadres abhorred the idea of having free elections, calling it an act of capitalist liberalism. This argument led to a heated debate, physical confrontation and subsequent protests in Hefei. The protests later spread over to big cities like Shanghai and Beijing.¹²⁵

Deng Xiaoping and other Chinese leaders were attentive to these trends. The leadership had no major problem with conceding to some of the students' requests—their concern was that the movement attracted international attention toward China and the PRC's image took a beating. Hence, the leadership wanted to contain the movement.¹²⁶ Deng Xiaoping's main concern about the protests was that they could lead to chaos, just as it happened during the Cultural Revolution. He advocated a heavy-handed response, arguing that the issue could be solved by cracking down on "bourgeois liberalization" and strengthening socialist education among the students. If the party implemented these measures, the voices for democratization would die out without supporters. Conservatives like Deng Liqun and Hu Qiaomu were convinced that the student unrest was a bourgeois plot, hence they supported Deng.¹²⁷

The reformists disagreed. In Hu Yaobang's reading, the protests showed that if China did not carry out political reforms—such as the separation of powers—economic reforms would not succeed, and the people would not support the party. Therefore, he adopted a "wait and see approach" in handling the student unrest. Other reformist leaders like Hu Qili thought that the student movement was not entirely wrong and some of the students' requests represented the people's needs in general.¹²⁸ Therefore, Hu and Deng disagreed on how to handle the student protests. Deng called for hardliner measures, such as expulsions and arrests.¹²⁹ Hu Yaobang wanted to take less radical steps, such as engaging and consulting with the students.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ CREST Collection, no. CIA-RDP04T00907R000200130001-7: "Key Questions in the Fall of China's Hu Yaobang (May 1987)", p. 15.

¹²⁵ Shi, *早逝的英華：胡耀邦下台的前前後後* (*When a Heroic Flower Dies Young: The Step Down of Hu Yaobang*), 280-88.

¹²⁶ Julia Kwong, "The 1986 Student Demonstrations in China: A Democratic Movement?," *Asian Survey* 28, no. 9 (1988): 983.

¹²⁷ Shi, *早逝的英華：胡耀邦下台的前前後後* (*When a Heroic Flower Dies Young: The Step Down of Hu Yaobang*), 193-96, 200, 11-20.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 193-96, 200, 11-20, 80-88.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 291-98.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 299-305.

A final area of contention between Hu Yaobang and Deng was the question of the latter's retirement. A CIA report from May 1987 suggests that this was the most prominent cause of disagreement between the two leaders. As a successor, Hu lost his patience with Deng and the old conservatives. So, he started to build up his own power to gain more clout in policymaking. He did so by appointing his own allies to key positions to boost his own influence.¹³¹

When Deng Xiaoping met with a Japanese official on 21 July 1985, he mentioned that promoting younger politicians was high on the agenda at the time. He also mentioned that he was going to retire soon, handing over the helm to Zhao Ziyang and Hu Yaobang. Zhao Ziyang speculated that Deng would announce his retirement in September 1985. Hu Yaobang, however, was doubtful about this. He believed that Deng would utilize his seniority—younger leaders could not have asked him to retire if other senior leaders wanted him to stay—and retain his grip on power. Hu and Zhao agreed that as long as Deng remained on the top, they could not forge ahead with their own agendas. They were planning to propose Deng's retirement to him by referring to his health.¹³²

Hu's hunch was correct. Deng had plans to retire at the 13th Party Congress in October 1987, but he changed his mind and announced in 1986 that he would remain at the helm longer. By this time, Hu had dispersed his supporters in central party organs and could have posed a credible challenge to Deng. An unnamed Chinese leader also ordered a poll in China's representations in foreign countries to find out their views on the necessity of Deng's retirement. Deng was possibly concerned that Hu and his allies in the central leadership might press him to retire against his will.¹³³

On 24 May 1986, Hu made a speech in Sichuan where he argued that more than a hundred members of the CCP Central Committee should retire—implying that those above 60 should not be involved in politics. In other words, Hu wanted the old cadre to step down.¹³⁴ At a subsequent Politburo meeting, members of the Chinese leadership confronted each other over the necessity of Deng Xiaoping's retirement. Older comrades like Hu Qiaomu and Peng Zhen insisted that Deng

¹³¹ CREST Collection, no. CIA-RDP04T00907R000200130001-7: "Key Questions in the Fall of China's Hu Yaobang (May 1987)", pp. v., 1-16.

¹³² Shi, *早逝的英華：胡耀邦下台的前前後後* (*When a Heroic Flower Dies Young: The Step Down of Hu Yaobang*), 201-08.

¹³³ CREST Collection, no. CIA-RDP04T00907R000200130001-7: "Key Questions in the Fall of China's Hu Yaobang (May 1987)", pp. v., 1-16.

¹³⁴ CREST Collection, no. CIA-RDP04T00907R000200130001-7: "Key Questions in the Fall of China's Hu Yaobang (May 1987)", pp. v., 1-16.

had to remain in power to maintain stability and because China was in an era of transition that needed an experienced leader. Younger cadres like Hu Yaobang and Xi Zhongxun argued that genuine political reforms such as the rule of law required the retirement of Deng. Hu Yaobang tried to calm tensions down by saying that Deng's retirement would not mean his complete removal from decision-making, but the meeting failed to reach a consensus.¹³⁵

On 23 September 1986, Hu gave an interview to the Washington Post and suggested that the succession problem in the CCP would be solved at the 13th National Party Congress in the autumn of 1987. Outsiders and CCP members interpreted this comment as a signal of Deng's retirement at the upcoming Congress. Hardliners used this as an excuse for attack and accused Hu of leaking party secrets and causing upheaval within the CCP. Hu Yaobang was pressed to step down in January 1987.¹³⁶

Stemming from these three areas of contention—party reforms, student protests and Deng's retirement—the contradiction between Deng and Hu reached a nadir by late 1986. Deng made up his mind to remove Hu from his position by compelling him to resign. He invited Hu to a meeting among leading officials to discuss the recent issues in China. The moderator of the meeting was Bo Yibo, other participants included the old cadre such as Li Xiannian, Hu Qiaomu and Peng Zhen. The participants unleashed vicious criticism against Hu Yaobang. They argued that the student unrest was his responsibility. He was charged with embracing western capitalist concepts of democracy and liberty. He ignored the guidance of old comrades and defied the leader Deng Xiaoping. His sins caused “disastrous consequences” to the party. Hu Yaobang shielded leading figures of the student unrest and tolerated their criticism and humiliation of the party. At the end of the meeting, Deng said that Hu was relieved from his position as General Secretary so that he can spend some time with investigating his own mistakes.¹³⁷

This section aimed to show that just as Mao in 1962 and 1967, Deng was also insecure in 1986. Hu Yaobang, formally entered the PBSC and assumed the position of CCP General Secretary in 1981, suggesting that his time in power during the Sumdorong Chu standoff was five years. The years he spent in power allowed him to marshal support and pose a threat to Deng. He

¹³⁵ Shi, *早逝的英華：胡耀邦下台的前前後後* (*When a Heroic Flower Dies Young: The Step Down of Hu Yaobang*), 260-68.

¹³⁶ Huang, *Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*, 404-05.

¹³⁷ Shi, *早逝的英華：胡耀邦下台的前前後後* (*When a Heroic Flower Dies Young: The Step Down of Hu Yaobang*), 307-15.

defied Deng's instructions, advocated Deng's retirement and picked fights with veteran CCP leaders. This acted as an incentive for the use of force in the Sino-Indian border dispute, since a hardliner stand could allow Deng Xiaoping to marshal support from conservatives in the party and the military.¹³⁸ He could use this support to preserve his position as the leader. Juxtaposed with the benign external environment, we can see that Deng was facing contradictory imperatives. Externally, China wanted to avoid disruption in the international system. Internally, Deng could boost his domestic political position with a forceful response. In what follows, I explain how China coped with these contradictory imperatives.

5.5. *China's use of force: Sumdorong Chu Standoff*

Between the 1962 border war and the 1980s, the Indian army designated Se La—a pass to the south of Tawang—to be the line of defence if a clash with China occurred again.¹³⁹ In 1981, the Indian Army decided to push further north (toward China) in the area in order to defend Tawang. The most ambitious proposal was to capture the Thag La ridge—the flashpoint of the 1962 war—while more restrained ideas involved the occupation of Hathung Ridge (Hadong Shanji, 哈东山脊).¹⁴⁰ India started to bolster its capacity in the region under “Operation Falcon”, an exercise initiated by General K. V. Krishna Rao in 1981.¹⁴¹ On the one hand, this involved increasing troop numbers to prepare for a potential crisis.¹⁴² On the other hand, India built three bases and six helipads between 1983 and 1987 in the vicinity of the Wangdong ridge.¹⁴³ Some in the Indian government and military establishment doubted the wisdom of this move because they thought that the low level of China's military activity in the eastern sector did not justify it.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁸ Robert G. Sutter and Richard P. Cronin, "China-India Border Friction: Background Information and Possible Implications (Crs Report for the Congress, Congressional Research Service, 19 June 1987)," 8.

¹³⁹ Vijay Kumar Singh (with Kunal Verma), *Courage and Conviction: An Autobiography* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2013), 158.

¹⁴⁰ Ji, "1987 年中印边界危机回顾与反思 (the 1987 Sino - India Border Crisis in Retrospect: Lessons and Reflections)," 69-71.

¹⁴¹ Manjeet S. Pardesi, "Managing the 1986-87 Sino-Indian Sumdorong Chu Crisis," *India Review* 18, no. 5 (2019): 541.

¹⁴² T. V. Rajeswar, *India: The Crucial Years* (Noida: Harper Collins Publishers India, 2015), 228.

¹⁴³ CREST Collection, no. CIA-RDP04T00907R000200530001-3: "China-India Border Tensions: Origins and Prospects (29 January 1987)", pp. 1-2, 4-5.

¹⁴⁴ Rajeswar, *India: The Crucial Years*, 188, 89, 230.

India's moves were not restricted to the eastern sector of the Sino-Indian boundary. China lost a crucial strategic advantage over India in the western sector as well. The Karakoram Highway (operating since 1978) allowed Beijing to observe and prepare against potential Indian moves of obstructing connectivity between Xinjiang and Tibet.¹⁴⁵ Prompted by US "cartographic aggression"—after 1972, US maps showed Siachen on the Indo-Pakistan border to be a part of Pakistan rather than of India—the Indian Army captured Siachen in 1984.¹⁴⁶ This nullified the Chinese advantage over India and enabled the latter to cut connection between mainland China and Pakistan without Beijing noticing it in time to react.¹⁴⁷

Parallel to these moves of the army, the Indian Intelligence Bureau (IB) sent expeditions to the Sumdorong Chu area in Arunachal Pradesh from 1983.¹⁴⁸ They established an outpost there in 1985.¹⁴⁹ The move was prompted by the construction of a road on the Thandrong pasture. Although they had no proof, Indian officials thought that China built the road and argued that the establishment of an outpost was necessary to counter the PLA.¹⁵⁰ India's newly established outpost allowed India to observe China's military deployments beyond the Thagla ridge. The troops left the position as winter approached.¹⁵¹ The Sumdorong Chu confrontation emerged after the Intelligence Bureau unit returned to this seasonal post in the summer of 1986. They found at least forty Chinese soldiers and defensive structures at the post.¹⁵²

The IB patrol was nearly encircled and needed military extraction. During the operation, the local unit (9 Guards operating under IV Corps, which was commanded by Lieutenant General N. S. Narahari) also established positions on the heights surrounding the Chinese troops. Subsequently, the Army deployed more troops to Zimithang, to the south of Hathung La.¹⁵³ Indian troops reportedly fired on Chinese soldiers in the Thandrong pasture.¹⁵⁴ China did not fire back but moved to terminate the perceived Indian encroachment on its territory. In June 1986, troops of

¹⁴⁵ Pardesi, "Managing the 1986-87 Sino-Indian Sumdorong Chu Crisis," 538.

¹⁴⁶ Singh (with Kunal Verma), *Courage and Conviction: An Autobiography*, 138-39.

¹⁴⁷ Pardesi, "Managing the 1986-87 Sino-Indian Sumdorong Chu Crisis," 539.

¹⁴⁸ Singh (with Kunal Verma), *Courage and Conviction: An Autobiography*, 158.

¹⁴⁹ Neville Maxwell, "Sino-Indian Border Dispute Reconsidered," *Economic and Political Weekly* 34, no. 15 (1999): 914; Others claim this happened in 1984, see Pardesi, "Managing the 1986-87 Sino-Indian Sumdorong Chu Crisis," 534-43.

¹⁵⁰ Rajeswar, *India: The Crucial Years*, 187-89.

¹⁵¹ Maxwell, "Sino-Indian Border Dispute Reconsidered," 914-15.

¹⁵² DasGupta, *Watershed 1967: India's Forgotten Victory over China*, 211-14.

¹⁵³ Singh (with Kunal Verma), *Courage and Conviction: An Autobiography*, 158.

¹⁵⁴ Rajeswar, *India: The Crucial Years*, 190.

the Chengdu Military Region constructed a defensive outpost, roads and a helipad in the area.¹⁵⁵ The two sides also stepped up their patrols. These patrols occasionally crossed each other's paths, increasing the likelihood of a direct conflict.¹⁵⁶ In some areas, the troops from the two sides were within 10 meters from each other.¹⁵⁷

Beijing explained that the Sumdorong Chu valley was Chinese territory, so they merely reinstated patrols in the area. To India's diplomatic protest from June 1986, China responded with a Foreign Ministry statement that the territory was to the north of the Chinese claim line, it was on the Chinese side of the Line of Actual Control and north of the McMahon Line. Therefore, India's protest was invalid and the conduct of the Chinese troops was entirely legal.¹⁵⁸

Three factors complicated crisis management. First, India was anxious as it had reports coming in that China tried to collect taxes in the eastern sector. Second, the crisis region was sensitive—it was in the same area as Dhola, a trigger point for the 1962 war. Finally, the Sumdorong River shifted its course northwards. This meant that according to the watershed principle, the Sumdorong Chu region was within Indian territory. However, it was north of the McMahon line, validating a Chinese claim for it.¹⁵⁹

In July 1986, political leaders from the two sides met and discussed the crisis at Sumdorong Chu. China argued that it wanted to settle the border dispute, but it made no steps to accommodate Indian concerns.¹⁶⁰ In the same month, the then governor of Sikkim T. V. Rajeswar met with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and briefed him about the situation in the eastern sector. According to Rajeswar, the Indian army made a folly by setting up an outpost in 1985 because Chinese military presence there was negligible. The Prime Minister was taken aback by the argument and asked for documentation relevant to the issue.¹⁶¹ In November 1986, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi held a ministerial meeting to assess the situation on the border after which India adopted a dual track

¹⁵⁵ Ji, "1987 年中印边界危机回顾与反思 (the 1987 Sino - India Border Crisis in Retrospect: Lessons and Reflections)," 71-74.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁵⁷ Maxwell, "Sino-Indian Border Dispute Reconsidered," 914-15.

¹⁵⁸ Xie, *中国外交史, 1979-1994 (a Diplomatic History of China, 1979-1994)*, 125-28, 88.

¹⁵⁹ Pardesi, "Managing the 1986-87 Sino-Indian Sumdorong Chu Crisis," 537.

¹⁶⁰ "Press Release Issued in New Delhi on August 01, 1986 of the Statement Made by the Minister of External Affairs, Shri P. Shiv Shanker, in the Lok Sabha on August 1, in Response to a Calling Attention Notice from Shri Dharam Pal Singh Malik and Three Others Regarding the Situation Arising out of the Chinese Intrusion into Indian Territory and Construction of Helipad in the Sumdorong Chu Valley Area of Tawang District of Arunachal Pradesh," in *India-China Relations 1947-2000: A Documentary Study*, ed. Avtar Singh Bhasin (New Delhi: Geetika Publishers, 2018), 4952.

¹⁶¹ Rajeswar, *India: The Crucial Years*, 190.

policy to protect its interests. On the political-administrative front, the Indian Parliament passed a bill of transforming NEFA into Arunachal Pradesh—the 24th state of India in late 1986. China was upset by the move and refused to recognize Arunachal, arguing that India invaded Chinese territory.¹⁶² China issued protests in late 1986 and early 1987,¹⁶³ warning of “serious consequences”.¹⁶⁴

The Sumdorong Chu crisis happened against the backdrop of Chinese demands to India to make concessions in the eastern sector. However, Beijing did not clarify the specific extent of concessions, only requested New Delhi to agree to the “principle of concessions”. Against this background, the Indian leadership found China’s military moves concerning.¹⁶⁵ India accelerated its deployments and construction activities. On 24 November 1986, the Indian army occupied Moreda (莫惹打). In late 1986 and early 1987, it established 10 outposts in the vicinity of Namka Chu and occupied Dhola, a flashpoint of the 1962 war. In the course of the crisis, India also occupied strategically important mountain passes such as Sulula Pass (苏如拉山口, Surula Shankou), Tulung Pass (土伦山口, Tulun shankou), Hathung Pass and Jinshan (津山). Using these positions as a springboard, Indian forces proceeded to establish 7 outposts in territories that China deemed to be its own. These moves were complemented by increased troop deployments starting from March 1987.¹⁶⁶ India staged a large scale military exercise named Operation “Chequerboard.” The aim of the exercise was to probe the Indian army’s preparedness in the northeast and to see how Washington and Moscow would behave in a potential China-India conflict.¹⁶⁷ During the exercise, India deployed twelve divisions and an independent brigade to the disputed region (according to a Chinese estimate).¹⁶⁸ A CIA source suggests lower number, five mountain divisions, roughly 50000 troops.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶² Xie, *中国外交史, 1979-1994 (a Diplomatic History of China, 1979-1994)*, 125-28, 88.

¹⁶³ Sutter and Cronin, "China-India Border Friction: Background Information and Possible Implications (Crs Report for the Congress, Congressional Research Service, 19 June 1987)," 5-6, 8-10.

¹⁶⁴ Pardesi, "Managing the 1986-87 Sino-Indian Sumdorong Chu Crisis," 539.

¹⁶⁵ Kalha, *India-China Boundary Issues: Quest for Settlement*, 201.

¹⁶⁶ Ji, "1987 年中印边界危机回顾与反思 (the 1987 Sino - India Border Crisis in Retrospect: Lessons and Reflections)," 74-76.

¹⁶⁷ Rajeswar, *India: The Crucial Years*, 228.

¹⁶⁸ Ji, "1987 年中印边界危机回顾与反思 (the 1987 Sino - India Border Crisis in Retrospect: Lessons and Reflections)," 74-76.

¹⁶⁹ CREST Collection, no. CIA-RDP04T00907R000200530001-3: “China-India Border Tensions: Origins and Prospects (29 January 1987)”, p. 5. This is corroborated by Fravel: Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 200.

The Indian Air Force also deployed to Assam and North Bengal to support the troops. Some claim that India had plans to attack China but cancelled those moves twice.¹⁷⁰ These engagements showcased that India was ready to fight a tough war with China in the eastern sector. India was most concerned about defending Tawang, as the Sumdorong Chu confrontation happened in the vicinity of this area.¹⁷¹

The Chinese counterpart of “Operation Chequerboard” was the “874” exercise. The objective of the PLA was to establish and defend positions in Wangdong, Longju and Namka Chu.¹⁷² The exercise was initiated on 5 January 1987 by the General Staff Department. The rules of engagement were not to initiate fire while building the outposts and to establish Chinese positions without removing Indian ones.¹⁷³ A Chinese source suggests that the PLA’s main objective was to stop the Indian advances rather than rolling them back.¹⁷⁴

Operations of the 874 exercise started in May 1987. The main forces involved in the exercise were the 52nd Mountain Infantry Brigade and the 2nd Regiment of the Lhoka military sub-region. Available sources suggest that China’s main concern was to decide how to establish its blocking positions. One potential approach was to set up the outposts only on the northern side of the Namka Chu river and the other was to cross the river and set up positions on the southern side as well. China’s initial inclination was to build up position on both sides.¹⁷⁵ However, building them up on the southern bank was risky, because India was in a more advantageous position there. The Chinese plan was to establish those posts in interlocking pattern, in the empty spaces between the Indian outposts. They wanted to consolidate their position on both sides without starting an armed confrontation. On 22 May, the troops noted that the snow at Namka Chu did not melt, so plans of outpost construction were delayed. At Longju, the construction went ahead as planned.¹⁷⁶

During the delay, the GSD ordered the Chengdu Military Region on 28 May to give an analysis of the potential Indian responses of setting up positions on both banks of the Namka Chu. Chengdu’s report argued that the likelihood of an armed conflict was low if China built positions

¹⁷⁰ Maxwell, "Sino-Indian Border Dispute Reconsidered," 914-15.

¹⁷¹ Pardesi, "Managing the 1986-87 Sino-Indian Sumdorong Chu Crisis," 541.

¹⁷² Yong Wang, "由“旺东事件”看安全危机应对 (Analyzing Crisis Management through the Case of the Wangdong Incident)," *Study Times*, no. 7 (2014): 2.

¹⁷³ Xuedong Wang, *傅全有传(Biography of Fu Quanyou)* (Beijing: People's Liberation Army Press, 2015), 477.

¹⁷⁴ Ji, "1987 年中印边界危机回顾与反思 (the 1987 Sino – India Border Crisis in Retrospect: Lessons and Reflections)," 76-79.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Wang, *傅全有传(Biography of Fu Quanyou)*, 477-83.

In early June 1987, Chinese Vice Premier Qiao Shi made a visit to Bangladesh, requesting the South Asian country to ban India from using Bangladeshi territory transport military goods to the border region in case of a conflict between China and India. This request was reportedly granted a month later during the Bangladeshi President's visit to China.¹⁸⁰

In contrast to the 1962 and 1967 confrontations, the two sides kept diplomatic channels open with the hope of alleviating tensions. These instruments of statecraft involved unilateral statements and bilateral engagement as well. On 3 March 1987, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi noted that India was hoping for a peaceful resolution of the Sino-Indian border dispute. On 16 April, Rajiv Gandhi visited Chinese Ambassador Li Lianqing and expressed hopes for improved Sino-Indian relations. On 17 April, the Indian Defense Minister K. C. Pant made an informal stopover in Beijing on his way back from his official visit to North Korea. On 20 April, Deng Xiaoping met with the E. M. S. Namboodiripad, General Secretary of the Indian Communist Party (Marxist) and pointed out that the only way of solving the China-India border dispute was the package deal. On 22 April, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman stated that Chinese troops engage in routine patrols and the PRC did not start accumulating troops on the border. This statement came as a rejection of claims by the Indian media that China was planning to fight a war with India. On 6 May, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman issued a different statement saying that China was compelled to boost defences on the border, but these measures were not as severe as portrayed by the media. On 21 May, Chinese Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian refuted claims about armed clashes between troops on the border. On 29 May, during his talks with the Head of the Japanese Defense Agency Kurihara Yoshiyuki, Chinese Defense Minister Zhang Aiping noted that the situation on the border was not a violent confrontation, merely friction between the two sides. On 7 June 1987, during her trip to Kolkata, the Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Liu Shuqing refuted claims that the two sides increased troops numbers clashed with each other. She also said that the PRC was in favour of negotiations rather than forceful methods on the border.¹⁸¹

The Indian side also downplayed tensions on the rhetorical level. On 3 March 1987, Rajiv Gandhi told the Indian Parliament that India preferred a peaceful solution to the border dispute.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Pardesi, "Managing the 1986-87 Sino-Indian Sumdorong Chu Crisis," 543.

¹⁸¹ Ji, "1987 年中印边界危机回顾与反思 (the 1987 Sino - India Border Crisis in Retrospect: Lessons and Reflections)," 80-83.

¹⁸² Nayanima Basu and Srijan Shukla, "Sumdorong Chu, Ladakh-Like India-China Face-Off Which Took 9 Yrs to End but without Violence," The Print, <https://theprint.in/past-forward/sumdorong-chu-ladakh-like-india-china-face-off-which-took-9-yrs-to-end-but-without-violence/451517/>.

On 30 May 1987, Chief of Staff of the Indian Army General Krishnaswamy Sundarji gave a speech at the Indian Defence College and said that the reports about tensions were exaggerated. On 3 June, Rajiv Gandhi told the media that China was unlikely to attack India.¹⁸³

Diplomatic efforts eventually came to fruition and tensions started to ease in June.¹⁸⁴ On 14 June, Indian Foreign Minister Narayan Datt Tiwari visited China with the purpose of decreasing tensions on the border and pushing for normalized ties between the two sides. Tiwari met with Vice Foreign Minister Liu Shuqing to discuss the specifics of defusing the conflict. Tiwari argued that a precondition for the resolution of the border dispute is to maintain stability on the border—in other words, to avoid a clash of forces.¹⁸⁵

Liu pointed out that the border dispute represented a double challenge at the time. On the one hand, there was the historical problem of the undemarcated border. She suggested that the dispute could only be solved by mutual concessions and mutual respect toward the 7 November 1959 LAC.¹⁸⁶ On the other hand, she also argued that the key to resolving tensions was in the hands of India: New Delhi had to respect the 7 November 1959 Line of Actual Control and withdraw any troops that trespassed it. The two sides also arranged that the next round of the Sino-Indian border talks will take place in New Delhi. On a subsequent meeting with Wan Li, Acting Premier of the State Council, Tiwari also expressed India's willingness to re-establish friendly ties with China. Rajiv Gandhi also sent a private envoy to China to ease tensions. The private envoy also pushed for the elevation of the Sino-Indian border talks from the bureaucratic to the political level.¹⁸⁷

Tensions subsided on the ground in July 1987, when the Indian and Chinese representatives met on the border and reached an agreement on withdrawing troops from the area of confrontation. The aim of this agreement was to achieve a favourable atmosphere before the coming round of Sino-Indian border talks.¹⁸⁸ An Indian source suggests that the likelihood of a nuclear attack by

¹⁸³ Ji, "1987 年中印边界危机回顾与反思 (the 1987 Sino - India Border Crisis in Retrospect: Lessons and Reflections)," 83.

¹⁸⁴ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 200.

¹⁸⁵ Ji, "1987 年中印边界危机回顾与反思 (the 1987 Sino - India Border Crisis in Retrospect: Lessons and Reflections)," 83-84.

¹⁸⁶ Xie, *中国外交史, 1979-1994 (a Diplomatic History of China, 1979-1994)*, 125-28, 88.

¹⁸⁷ Ji, "1987 年中印边界危机回顾与反思 (the 1987 Sino - India Border Crisis in Retrospect: Lessons and Reflections)," 83-84.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

Pakistan prompted General Sundarji to abandon his plans and showed willingness to withdraw troops until the Hathung La range.¹⁸⁹

After Operation Chequerboard, the Indian Army initiated Operation Kartoos, an exercise aimed at boosting Indian positions in the western sector. The inspiration for this move came from the Ashoke Handoo—Brigadier General Staff of XV Corps—plan that wanted to push Indian positions beyond the Indus River and Chang La. Before the exercise, there was an empty buffer zone between Indian positions and the Line of Actual Control. Under Operation Kartoos, Indian units moved forward until the Line of Actual Control, thereby occupying the buffer zone and further strengthening their positions in Ladakh.¹⁹⁰

The aim of this section was to give a background on the Sumdorong Chu crisis. Most importantly, it showed that on this occasion, China did not use direct force as the two sides did not come to blows as they did in 1962 and 1967. Military posturing allowed China to show resolve while minimizing the likelihood of an unwanted costly conflict. In what follows, I focus on how the external and internal environment shaped China's behaviour in the crisis.

5.6. Connecting the dots

In this section, I substantiate following points. First, Chinese leaders saw their external environment less threatening than they did in the 1960s. Second, the internal threat faced by Deng was high. Against this background Deng sought to keep tensions at bay, but he also needed to marshal support from conservative elements within the CCP. This led to military posturing—without direct engagement—in the Sumdorong Chu crisis.

During this time, Chinese leaders felt less threatened by the great powers. They thought that there were no imminent threats to Chinese national security, the PRC's international position elevated and it had the opportunity to implement a more consistent foreign policy that did not involve oscillating between the superpowers.¹⁹¹ Speeches of Chinese leaders at the time corroborate this argument. In his 1983 speech, Deputy Foreign Minister Qian Qichen pointed out that war was not inevitable. As long as non-hegemonic states countered the hegemonic tendencies

¹⁸⁹ Rajeswar, *India: The Crucial Years*, 231.

¹⁹⁰ Singh (with Kunal Verma), *Courage and Conviction: An Autobiography*, 159.

¹⁹¹ Tao, *中美关系史 (the History of Sino-US Relations)*, 133-39.

they could preserve peace.¹⁹² On 28 April 1984, Deng met with Reagan and explained that the international system was unstable but there was a good prospect for peace. He also argued that Sino-US relations were mired in problems, but they were on an upward trajectory.¹⁹³ Chinese leaders thought that the eruption of total war was unlikely, hence they decided to decrease the number of its troops by one million in 1985.¹⁹⁴ As a part of this reform, the Central Working Group proposed to remove two infantry brigades from the Sino-Indian border.¹⁹⁵

While China challenged both the superpowers in the 1960s, India could have expected US or USSR support in a Sino-Indian border clash. In the 1980s, China repaired ties with Moscow and Washington, hence the potential for great power patronage evaporated.¹⁹⁶ Soviet leader Gorbachev visited New Delhi in November 1986. Publicly, he emphasized that the Soviet Union did not wish to take sides. Privately, however, he affirmed the Soviet Union's commitment to help India preserve its territorial integrity. However, he did not clarify if a border confrontation with China in the Eastern sector would entail a threat to India's territorial integrity. China appreciated that Gorbachev refrained from taking India's side in public. At the same time, the US distanced itself from the dispute by not articulating support to any of the two sides.¹⁹⁷

China did not think of New Delhi as a puppet of the superpowers anymore, nor did it see India as an actor with harmful influence on the Third World states. Instead, Chinese leaders argued that India and China shared the common goal of economic development which necessitated a peaceful external environment. Against this backdrop, China saw India as a partner in preserving peace and stability in Asia.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹² Shanghai Archives, B123-11-418-1: “中共中央宣传部关于印发钱其琛同志《关于国际形式和我国对外政策问题》报告记录稿的通知，” (CCP Central Committee Propaganda Department's notification on printing and distributing the records of comrade Qian Qichen's Report on “International Situation and China's Foreign Policy” (5 January 1983)) , pp. 2-3, 15.

¹⁹³ Tao, *中美关系史 (the History of Sino-US Relations)* , 165.

¹⁹⁴ Fravel, *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949*, 173.

¹⁹⁵ Wang, *傅全有传(Biography of Fu Quanyou)*, 453-67.

¹⁹⁶ Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, “India & China, analysis by V. V. Paranjpe (15 September 1987)” in P.N. Haksar Papers (3rd collection), subject file no. 238, p. 66.

¹⁹⁷ Kalha, *India-China Boundary Issues: Quest for Settlement*, 205.

¹⁹⁸ "Interview Given by Vice Premier Teng-Hsiao-Ping to Indian Journalists (14 February 1979)," in *India-China Relations 1947-2000: A Documentary Study*, ed. Avtar Singh Bhasin (New Delhi: Geetika Publishers, 2018), 4896; "Commentary by Xinhua Correspondent Zhou Cipu on Sino-Indian Relations, June 24, 1980," in *India-China Relations, 1947-2000: A Documentary Study*, ed. Avtar Singh Bhasin (New Delhi: Geetika Publishers, 2018), 4922-24.

In a significant departure from previous practice, China acknowledged that India was aiming to boost relationships with its neighbours.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, China appreciated India's role in the Third World and argued that New Delhi was important in the fight against imperialism and hegemony.²⁰⁰ Beijing also thought that boosting ties with India could elevate the PRC's image in the Third World.²⁰¹ In 1981, Li Xiannian met with a Pakistani media delegation and mentioned that China wanted to improve Sino-Indian relations. According to Li, China was committed to solving the border dispute, but he complained that India wanted China to make unreciprocated concessions. He argued that China could not agree because it would have upset Chinese citizens.²⁰² On 9 May 1980, Chinese Premier Hua Guofeng and Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi met in Belgrade at Yugoslavian leader Josip Broz Tito's funeral. Hua argued that China was eager to improve ties with India and would assist New Delhi in playing "a more useful role in international affairs."²⁰³ In other words, Sino-Indian ties improved as China's external environment was less threatening.

Wang Chenghan—former Commander of the Chengdu Military Region responsible for Tibet—connects the decreasing external threat to less intense Sino-Indian border confrontations. Before the 1980s, Sino-Indian confrontations on the border were tense and frequent. Whenever troops met on the border, standoffs or fait accompli attempts followed. After 1980, however, international circumstances changed, and tensions eased on the border. He refers to a specific case on 7 August 1980 when the PLA border troops captured 40 Indians from the Indian Army's 63rd Brigade, serving under the 17th Mountain Division. This encounter did not lead to shoving matches or attempted territorial revisions between the two sides. China released the troops on 20 August, and the Indians parted with the slogan of the 1950s: "Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai".²⁰⁴ Indian archives

¹⁹⁹ National Archives of India, no. FIII-103(9)-82: "Foreign Minister's visit to the People's Republic of China – (27 February, 1979)" in "Visit of Foreign Minister of India to China from 12 to 19 February 1979" on p. 95.

²⁰⁰ National Archives of India, no. WII-104-36-81: "Visit of Chinese Foreign Minister (July 1981)" in "India-China intention to hold negotiation on border dispute (FM of China visit to India)" p. 22.

²⁰¹ National Archives of India, no. HI-106(6)-79: "China's Foreign Policy after Mao (8 February 1979)", pp. 14, 16.

²⁰² Shanghai Archives, no. B285-2-1290-25: "中央广播事业局关于李先念同志会见巴基斯坦广播电视代表团的谈话记录" (Central Broadcasting Bureau's record of the conversation between Comrade Li Xiannian and the Pakistani media delegation (18 August 1981)), pp. 6, 7-8.

²⁰³ "Press Release on the Meeting in Belgrade between Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Chinese Chairman Hua Guofeng (New Delhi, 9 May 1980)," in *India-China Relations 1947-2000: A Documentary Study*, ed. Avtar Singh Bhasin (New Delhi: Geetika Publishers, 2018), 4911.

²⁰⁴ Wang, 王诚汉回忆录 (*Wang Chenghan's Memoirs*), 578.

refer to the same case.²⁰⁵ Indian leaders interpreted this as a sign of goodwill from China. Indian analysis speculates that China accommodated India because Beijing was expecting difficulties as it distanced itself from the US and the Soviets. On the other hand, they thought that the PRC wanted India to rely less on the Soviets.²⁰⁶

Indeed, China's improved ties with the superpowers seems to have influenced the course of the Sumdorong Chu crisis. Given that the Soviets and the US improved their ties with China, they had no interest in seeing a China-India conflict. China, however, signalled that such a conflict could erupt during the Sumdorong Chu crisis. In October 1986, Deng Xiaoping met with US Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and argued that China might "teach a lesson" to India in case the latter did not stop its encroachment on Chinese territory. In March 1987, Deng said again that China might educate India, this time to US Secretary of State George Shultz.²⁰⁷ In April 1987, Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission Yang Shangkun visited the US and told his counterparts that China had to respond if India maintained its aggressive manoeuvres. This backdrop gives some support to Maxwell's claim that a second Sino-Indian war was against US interests and Washington probably conveyed this to PM Rajiv Gandhi, contributing to the sudden dissipation of tensions in the summer of 1987.²⁰⁸ If the US indeed wanted to avoid a Sino-Indian collision, it is possible that the Chinese threats prompted Washington to dissuade India from escalation.

At the same time, Manjeet Pardesi argued that the Soviet Union's neutral stand was one of the factors that contributed to the lack of escalation during the Sumdorong Chu crisis. The Soviet Union did not extend support for India and it was also repairing ties with Beijing. PM Rajiv Gandhi visited Moscow in July 1987 and learnt that the Soviets wanted to adopt a neutral position. Hence, India could not count on Soviet support in a possible conflict with China.²⁰⁹

In sum, there seems to be a connection between China's more benign external environment and the lack of escalation of the Sumdorong Chu standoff. On the one hand, as China had better ties with the great powers, it saw Indian foreign policy less harmful to Chinese interests. On the

²⁰⁵ National Archives of India, no. FIII-103-5-82: "India-China Relations" in "Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua's visit to India—26th June to 1st July 1981" p. 162.

²⁰⁶ National Archives of India, no. FIII-103-5-82: "India-China Relations" in "Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua's visit to India—26th June to 1st July 1981" p. 162.

²⁰⁷ Pardesi, "Managing the 1986-87 Sino-Indian Sumdorong Chu Crisis," 537, 42.

²⁰⁸ Maxwell, "Sino-Indian Border Dispute Reconsidered," 914-15.

²⁰⁹ Pardesi, "Managing the 1986-87 Sino-Indian Sumdorong Chu Crisis," 540-43.

other hand, India could not count on great power patronage in case of a Sino-Indian conflict, as Washington and Moscow were keen on having good ties with Beijing. This possibly acted as a deterrent for New Delhi.

Internally, the Deng-Hu rivalry was at its height during the Sumdorong Chu crisis. Deng's effort to boost party unity had an international element to it. He thought that in the process of the fight against bourgeois liberalization, China had to showcase to the outside world that it was stable politically and its leadership was united in their anti-capitalist struggle.²¹⁰ After he won the political contention, Deng aimed to convince external powers that the CCP elite was united. On 20 January 1987, he met with the President of Zimbabwe and summarized the events for him. According to his account, the student unrest erupted because the leadership was weak and irresolute in its fight against bourgeois liberalization, a mistake committed by Hu Yaobang. Deng assured the President of Zimbabwe that the party handled this issue without major disruption.²¹¹

A US Congressional Research Report from 1987 points to these internal dynamics in a way consistent with my argument. It argues that the CCP reformists were criticized for mistakes in economic policy and for surrendering Chinese interests to boost economic ties with foreign states.²¹² As Deng was under attack from the reformists, adopting a tough stance on the Indian dispute could have allowed him to gather support from the conservatives and triumph over Hu.

The fall of Hu Yaobang tells us that Deng Xiaoping's position in 1986-87 was similar to that of Mao in 1962 and 1967. Deng's reputation decreased as liberals called for his retirement and intellectuals were dissatisfied with the Party's performance under his lead. Against this backdrop, Deng was making a comeback with the help of the conservative faction of the CCP right at the time of the standoff on the Sino-Indian border. Deng was caught in a contradictory situation. On the one hand, the decreased external threat obviated the need for an all-out conflict with India. New Delhi's actions were not interpreted as part of a bigger scheme of containing China. On the other hand, decreased reputation back home required a muscular stand to win support from the conservatives. Under these circumstances, China refrained from using direct force and engaged only in military posturing. This hybrid approach allowed China to show resolve without engaging

²¹⁰ Shi, *早逝的英華：胡耀邦下台的前前後後* (*When a Heroic Flower Dies Young: The Step Down of Hu Yaobang*), 291-98.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 337.

²¹² Sutter and Cronin, "China-India Border Friction: Background Information and Possible Implications (Crs Report for the Congress, Congressional Research Service, 19 June 1987)," 5-6, 8-10.

in a costly fight. In what follows, I compare the explanation's strength against the alternative explanations.

5.7. Conclusion

Unlike in 1962 and 1967, China did not use direct force against India in 1986-87—Beijing found military posturing sufficient. I argued that Beijing chose to do so because the external threat faced by China was low while the domestic threat faced by Deng Xiaoping was high. Sino-US relations had a breakthrough with the 1982 agreement on US weapons sales to Taiwan. This accord was followed by the proliferation of high-profile visits, increase in bilateral trade and deepening military interactions. On the Sino-Soviet angle, ties slowly took an upturn with the 1982 Tashkent speech which initiated a glacial process toward normalization. Just like in the case of Sino-US relations, Chinese and Soviet leaders interacted with each other via various channels, such as the meetings between deputy foreign ministers or the funeral diplomacy. China pushed the Soviets to make concessions on the “three obstacles,” namely their support to Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, troops on the Sino-Soviet and Sino-Mongolian border and the invasion of Afghanistan.

Against the backdrop of decreasing international pressure, China's foreign policy moved from focusing on threats to focusing on development. There were no more calls of destroying imperialism, only opposition to imperialist policies of invasion. As expected, Sino-Indian relations also turned for the better against this backdrop. India was not seen as an imperialist/revisionist lackey that could lead the Third World states to the wrong fold. On the contrary, Beijing thought that boosting ties with India could elevate the PRC image in the Third World. Against this backdrop, China and India reinstated border talks with the purpose of settling their border problem.

The situation was less rosy on the domestic front. Deng Xiaoping came under attack by his reformer successor, Hu Yaobang. Hu picked fights with some of the most ensconced conservatives and ignored Deng's guidance in the anti-bourgeois liberalization campaign. He also hard-pressed Deng to retire, compelling the latter to double down on the conservatives to preserve his own power.

The Sumdorong Chu crisis occurred against this backdrop. As Chinese and Indian forces encountered each other on the border, both sides' kneejerk reaction was to establish outposts and increase troop numbers in the area. When push came to shove and China had to decide to cross the

Namka Chu or not, Beijing played it safe and refrained from escalating tensions. Subsequently, the confrontation was scaled down and the crisis was defused without a shooting fight. I argued that China used this hybrid approach to the crisis because Deng found himself among conflicting imperatives. The lack of external threats and China's preference for a peaceful environment compelled him to avoid war. The domestic power struggle however, pushed him to take a resolute stand. Hence, he decided to use force in a symbolic way to demonstrate resolve. In what follows, I recapitulate the findings and propose future avenues of research.

Chapter 6. Conclusion – Stability and war in China’s neighbourhood

In this dissertation, I set out to solve the puzzle of China’s behaviour in border disputes. I embarked on this journey because a cursory look suggests that China’s militarized behaviour is inconsistent in these disputes. Beijing showed an overwhelming preference for peaceful settlements and solved the majority of its territorial contestations in the 1960s and 1990s. Nevertheless, China took up arms against three disputants on its land-based frontiers: India, Vietnam, and the Soviet Union. Across these disputes, China used force in different degrees varying from military posturing to an all-out war, an invasion and a skirmish. Existing analyses treat all these actions within the same bracket, calling it the “use of force”. I found this categorization underspecified. In a world where military posturing on the China-India border and the East and South China Seas is becoming an often-used tool of Chinese statecraft, it is imperative to find out which factors influence Chinese leaders’ decision to attack a disputant or use force merely for demonstrative purposes.

The first section of this chapter answers this question by recapitulating the findings of my research with a specific focus on my argument and the examined case studies. In the second section, I test my argument against alternative explanations drawn from the theories of claim strength, militarized worldview and strategic interaction. Subsequently, I go beyond the temporal scope of the dissertation and explore the applicability of my argument in the post-Cold War setting in the third section. In the fourth section, I elaborate on the theoretical and practical implications of the research before I close with laying out avenues for future research.

6.1. Findings

I used a neoclassical realist framework to uncover the patterns in the Chinese use of force in its land-based border disputes. According to neoclassical realism, the primary determinant of state behaviour is the international system. However, this does not mean that domestic politics do not exercise influence on foreign policy. Rather, they play a secondary role by acting as an imperfect transmission belt of external stimuli. In other words, the broad contours of foreign policy are determined by external factors while the specific choices within those restraints are shaped by domestic imperatives. I adapted this framework to my analysis by identifying external and internal threats as the main determinants of the Chinese use of force in border disputes. I argued that China

is most likely to use direct force against a disputant in the face of external and internal threats. External threat in this context means the danger to Chinese sovereignty and territorial integrity emanating from the superpowers. Internal threat, on the other hand, stands for the danger posed to the leader's domestic political position. It is intuitive to expect a state to retrench at a time when it is facing external and internal threats. The Chinese strategic calculus, however, works in counterintuitive ways. The more threats China faces, the higher the likelihood of the Chinese use of force.¹ Externally, China can utilize the conflict to undermine a possible coalition of against itself. Internally, the conflict is useful to the leader as he can gain support from the elite in the face of an external conflict.

China used direct force against India during the 1962 and 1967 Sino-Indian border confrontations. In 1962, China had difficult relations with both Washington and Moscow. The US posed threat to Chinese territorial integrity with its increasing military presence in Asia and interference with the Taiwan problem. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, represented a threat to Chinese sovereignty by its domineering attitude in military cooperation, neutral stand on the Sino-Indian border dispute and interference with the Yita incident. In order to meet these external pressures, China sought to mobilize the "uncommitted states" against the superpowers. Since these states represented the majority of the international system, China aimed to isolate the US with their support and triumph over imperialism. However, India was in China's way. India was a reactionary agent with significant clout among the uncommitted states—hence, India's leadership of these countries would have meant that they end up on the side of imperialism instead of isolating it. China tried and failed to co-opt India through the border negotiations of 1960, while troops were getting closer to each other in the disputed areas.

Parallel to these processes, Mao Zedong's domestic political position was endangered by his successor, Liu Shaoqi. Mao's leadership was in a precarious situation after the crushing failure of the Great Leap Forward, his economic initiative that pushed the Chinese economy to the brink of collapse and caused severe famine in the country. After the leadership realized the failure, the moderates gained clout and side-lined Mao in policy making. Mao was concerned about this trend and sought to stage a political comeback starting from the summer of 1962. With his resurgence, he called for a renewed focus on class struggle and a more confrontational foreign policy.

¹ Whiting, "China's Use of Force, 1950-96, and Taiwan," 103-31.

The 1962 Sino-Indian border war occurred against this backdrop. The war served the Chinese purpose of reducing external and internal threats. Externally, China could undermine India's leadership of the uncommitted states, preventing neutral states from drifting toward imperialism. Internally, Mao benefited from the war as he managed to keep his leadership position, despite Liu Shaoqi's challenge.

In 1967, the external and internal setting of China was similar. External threat emanated from the US and the Soviet Union once more. Chinese leaders felt threatened by the possibility that US operations in Vietnam war could expand to Chinese territory, endangering the PRC's territorial integrity. Furthermore, Beijing and Washington failed to break out of the deadlock of the Taiwan problem. Sino-Soviet relations took a nosedive in the middle of the 1960s. The two sides initiated border negotiations in 1964 but they failed in less than a year without any progress made. So, the Soviet threat to Chinese territorial integrity remained. Moreover, China and the Soviets confronted each other over their aid to North Vietnam's struggle against the US—Beijing perceived Moscow's demands of supplying Vietnam through Chinese territory as threats to Chinese sovereignty.

Against this backdrop of deteriorating relations with the great powers, China feared the emergence of an anti-China bloc composed of the US, Soviet Union and India. Chinese propaganda frequently referred to India as the foremost accomplice of the US-Soviet scheme against China. During the 1965 India-Pakistan war, China identified the US and the Soviet Union as the hidden hand instigating India's aggressive behaviour. Just like before the 1962 war, India's bid for leadership among the uncommitted states posed a security threat to China, as New Delhi was seen as aligned with China's enemies. Hence, it was imperative for Beijing to undermine India's influence among these states.

Domestically, Mao Zedong's was in a dangerous position once more. As he lost clout to the party bureaucrats, he was side-lined and ignored in policymaking which infuriated him. Hence, he unleashed non-bureaucratic actors—the Red Guards and the PLA—to bring down the Party bureaucracy. His plan succeeded but he was unable to get back in the saddle. As he relied heavily on the PLA and radical elements, Mao had to delegate more and more of his power to them, making him weaker by the day. The epitome of this trend was the Wuhan incident, when Mao was unable to reconcile the bloody confrontation between the radicals and moderates. The incident spiralled out of control and Mao had to flee Wuhan. Lin Biao, Mao's designated successor at the time stepped in to mitigate the situation. After the incident, Mao went on an inspection trip within China

to promote unity among the contending parties. Mao and Zhou realized that taking down Lin Biao or other first-tier radicals could exacerbate the domestic chaos caused by the Cultural Revolution. Hence, they moved to purge second-rate radicals like Wang Li, a temporary leader of the Chinese Foreign Ministry in 1967. Therefore, just like in the 1962 case, Mao was in the progress of regaining political power in the run-up to the confrontation. As Mao was touring the state calling for unity, guns blazed in the Himalayas once more. A Chinese official at the time pointed out that instead of fighting against each other, the various factions in China should focus on protecting their border. Hence, it is plausible that the 1967 confrontations were part of a bigger plan in which China sought to mobilize the uncommitted states and unite the various domestic political factions against a common enemy.

China is most likely to engage in military posturing during times of low external and high internal threats. These circumstances put conflicting imperatives on the leader: the external environment demands restraint while the domestic threat calls for a muscular posture in a border crisis. Military posturing addresses both of these demands because it demonstrates resolve without stoking a large-scale conflict.

In the 1980s, external pressure on Chinese territorial integrity and sovereignty subsided. Sino-US ties improved after the two sides sealed the 1982 communique on US weapons sales to Taiwan. Subsequently, high level political leaders exchanged visits and the two militaries established incipient cooperation. On the Soviet front, relations turned for the better after 1982 Tashkent speech in which Brezhnev expressed his country's willingness to boost ties with China. Subsequently, the two sides utilized various channels to discuss China's demands of removing the "three obstacles" to normalize of Sino-Soviet ties. While progress of normalization was slow, the Soviets represented less threat to China than they did in the 1960s.

Against this backdrop, Chinese leaders' perception of the likelihood of a world war changed. They thought that such a conflict could be avoided because the forces of peace outweighed the forces of conflict. Accordingly, China revised its foreign policy at the 12th Party Congress in 1982. The PRC's previously threat-driven foreign policy was turned into a development-driven one. As a part of this revision, China also discarded its previous policy of mobilizing the uncommitted states against the superpowers. China incorporated itself into the Third World and instead of encouraging these states to unite their forces and take down imperialism, Beijing emphasized their self-defence and supported their economic development. For China, Third World states became

the major force behind international peace, not a group to be mobilized for destruction. As expected, this revision influenced Sino-Indian relations. After realizing the importance of the border dispute for India, China agreed to engage in negotiations to settle the problem. While no breakthrough occurred during these talks, frequent meetings between officials served as a channel of communication between the two sides. At the same time, the two sides committed to deepen cooperation in other fields like trade and cultural exchange.

The relatively benign external environment did not secure Deng from domestic challengers. As he appointed Hu Yaobang to succeed him, division arose between the two statesmen. Their disagreements revolved around the student protests, party reform and Deng's retirement. As Hu refused to obey Deng's instructions, the schism between the two politicians deepened and eventually became unsurmountable. Deng decided to side with the conservative faction and purged Hu in early 1987.

The Sumdorong Chu standoff occurred against this backdrop. China discovered an Indian seasonal outpost in the eastern sector, and it responded by destroying it and establishing a permanent military installation there. As Indian troops found Chinese soldiers upon their return, New Delhi initiated large-scale military deployments to the region. China responded in kind and a large-scale standoff ensued. War lingered in the air as Deng Xiaoping repeatedly argued that China could teach a second lesson to India. Chinese forces strove to ascertain if India wanted to cross the Namka Chu river and establish military presence on its northern bank. Eventually they concluded that India's aim was to prevent China from crossing the river rather than having a foothold on the northern side. Against this evaluation, China decided to stand down without exacerbating tensions further. My argument suggests that against the backdrop of decreasing external pressure and a revised foreign policy, China had little to benefit from fighting India. Nevertheless, Deng needed the support of conservatives in the face of Hu Yaobang's challenge. Therefore, Deng had to strike a balance between avoiding an unnecessarily costly war while demonstrating resolve. China's decision to dispatch troops without attack orders served this purpose.

In the case of high external and low internal threats, a leader is likely to make concessions in a border dispute. This mitigates the external threat as it creates a buffer zone around the state against a potential invasion. Internally, a stable leader can afford to make concessions as he is immune to allegations of selling out the motherland. China did this in the 1960s, when it solved its border disputes with Nepal, Myanmar, Pakistan and Mongolia. In the case of low external and

internal threats, the leader is most likely to opt for a delaying approach, as this is the least costly way of maintaining a claim. China adopted this approach in most of his disputes, including the maritime ones.

6.2. *Alternative explanations*

6.2.1. Claim strength

One of the most relevant alternative explanations comes from M. Taylor Fravel's work on China's behaviour in territorial disputes. According to Fravel, China is most likely to use force in a border dispute if it perceives a decline in its claim strength. Fravel defines claim strength as the state's capacity to control the disputed territory. When state leaders believe that the state's claim strength declines because the opponent occupies land or deploys troops there, Beijing is inclined to use force to maintain its bargaining position in the border dispute.²

Fravel uses this as an explanation for China's use of force against India in 1962, 1967 and 1986-1987. In 1962, China saw a decline in its bargaining power because India expanded control over disputed territories and increased troop numbers there. China fought a war to stop India from further encroachments.³ Fravel lists the following points to support his argument. First, CCP leaders expected India to push further north and build more positions in Tibet and Aksai Chin with the purpose of detaching Tibet from the core territories and establish it as a satellite state. Second, Chinese leaders believed that India wanted to exploit China's internal difficulties to gain more territory. Third, the Chinese leadership was convinced that peaceful negotiations would be insufficient to bring stability to the frontier. Finally, China's unilateral withdrawal reflects that it wanted to maintain its claim strength in the region rather than expanding into Indian territory.⁴

In the case of 1967, Fravel refers to three aspects that support his theory of Chinese actions motivated by the decline in claim strength. First, the Indian army became more powerful after 1962 and seven mountain divisions were dispatched to the Sino-Indian border. Second, India was pushing further in the boundary region as it kept on erecting fences in spite of Chinese warnings.

² Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 28-29.

³ *Ibid.*, 180-97.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 195-97.

Finally, Chinese leaders overreacted the Indian moves on the border because the Cultural Revolution exacerbated their threat perceptions.⁵

Fravel uses the same argument in the case of the Sumdorong Chu crisis in 1986-1987. He argues that three aspects explain China's behaviour in the crisis. First, India's establishment a seasonal post in the vicinity of Thag La in the eastern sector in 1984 was a revision of the status quo in China's reading. Second, India was boosting its position on the border for the sake of defending Tawang, causing a decline in China's claim strength. Third, as border negotiations reached a dead end in 1985, China and India became more intransigent in the dispute.⁶

Fravel further argues that China refrained from attacking India for a number of reasons. First, Indian moves concentrated into one section of the eastern sector rather than on the whole border. Second, China could deploy troops to the region at the same pace as India, so it could maintain its claim strength throughout the crisis, obviating the need for an attack. Finally, the Chinese government faced no internal threats because it had a strong grip over Tibet and CCP legitimacy was unchallenged.⁷

A general weakness of Fravel's theory is the reliance on a perceptual variable. A perceptual variable is difficult to measure and can be subject to arbitrary interpretation. Fravel attempts to use proxy indicators of occupied territory and power projection but the link between material decline in bargaining power, perceived weakness and the use of force remains elusive. The lack of precise measurement of power projection capabilities and occupied territory makes the theory more confusing: on one occasion Fravel himself admits that "assessing the precise balance of forces is tricky."⁸

My argument departs from Fravel's in two ways. First, his theory is underspecified, meaning that war initiation and troop deployments all fall under the amorphous concept of the "use of force". My theory distinguishes between the direct use of force—a move that aims to destroy the opponent's fighting capabilities—and military posturing—troop movements without attack orders. Therefore, my argument can explain the differences between the Chinese behaviour of 1962 and 1986-87, making it more complete than Fravel's.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 199-200.

⁷ Ibid., 201.

⁸ Ibid., 204.

This leads me to the second difference between Fravel's theory and my argument. He cannot explain the variation in China's use of force because his theory uses mainly one external variable (claim strength) to explain the use of force. His internal variable, regime security has no influence on the extent of use of force. The decision to use force or not is mainly determined by the state's claim strength. My approach is more sophisticated with greater explanatory power as it introduces an additional variable, leader security. Only by accounting for the interplay between external and internal factors can we explain why China attacked India directly in 1962 and 1967 but refrained from the use of force in 1986-87.⁹

In 1962 and 1967, China used direct force against India because Chinese state sovereignty and territorial integrity was under threat by the great powers *and* Mao Zedong's leading position was also in danger—hence the Chairman needed conflict to generate support from external and internal actors. In 1986-87, China's state sovereignty was secure as Beijing's ties with the great powers were improving. Nevertheless, Deng Xiaoping's leading position was in danger due to the challenge from his successor, Hu Yaobang. Hence, Deng needed to adopt a position that mobilizes internal actors without upsetting the peaceful trend in the international system—military posturing served this purpose.

This argument works because I depart from Fravel's conceptualization of internal threat. His theory assumes the state to be a unitary actor, precluding the possibility of division within the CCP.¹⁰ This is problematic because in the case of the Sumdorong Chu crisis, Fravel's approach suggests that there was no internal threat. Without accounting for the internal threat, the theory fails to explain why China refrained from attacking India directly, as it did in 1962 and 1967. My approach argues that there was an internal threat at the time, due to the struggle between Hu Yaobang and Deng Xiaoping. Once a theory accounts for this type of division and juxtaposes it with the level of external threat to China, it can explain the differences between China's behaviour during the 1962, 1967 and 1986-87 crises.

Even more importantly, my argument has greater explanatory power than the claim strength theory in the post-Cold War environment. In recent cases of border conflicts, China predominantly uses military posturing in its border disputes rather than large-scale attacks or invasions. Fravel's

⁹ Ibid., 38.

¹⁰ Ibid., 13. Fravel was criticized for this, see Arthur Waldron, review of *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, M. Taylor Fravel, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 68, no. 4 (2009): 1253.

theory, however, does not account for the qualitative difference between waging war and increasing troop numbers in disputed areas. According to Fravel, the 1962 border war that imposed a death toll on both sides and the 2013 Depsang standoff in which Chinese and Indian troops merely set up tents in one another's vicinity both fall within the same category. However, war and direct clashes are more significant than standoffs because of the costs they entail. Hence, it carries theoretical and practical value to find out what prompts China to go beyond merely dispatching troops and initiate offensives against its opponents. Theoretically, the study of war is one of the most important sub-field of international relations. In practice, policymakers can utilize this knowledge for more effective management of border crises to limit escalation. Therefore, my dissertation builds on and goes beyond Fravel's theoretical and practical contributions.

Furthermore, it is also imperative to eschew the preconceived notion of authoritarian unity. Just because the CCP is the sole ruler of the Chinese political stage, the party elite is hardly unified on every issue. Given that the leader's rule is highly dependent on this group, it is necessary to incorporate the influence of leadership splits into our analyses. Putting more emphasis on this variable could allow us to uncover new causal mechanisms of Chinese foreign policy.

6.2.2. Strategic interaction

Another alternative explanation stems from the two sides' strategic interaction: the more aggressive one side is the more force the other side is likely to use to counter it. The theoretical grounding for such an explanation can be found in Vasquez's work on territorial disputes and war. Vasquez suggests that wars are caused not so much by power differentials, but the methods states use to handle their disputes. Realpolitik approaches usually lead to war instead of settling issues in a peaceful manner. Increased armaments, for instance, trigger threat perceptions among rivals and lead to hostile spirals and eventually wars. Coercive bargaining leads to response in kind and increasing hostility between the two parties.¹¹ In the context of China-India relations, this means that the more assertive India gets, the greater the likelihood of an aggressive Chinese response.

The logic of this explanation can be extended to all three cases. Before the 1962 war, India occupied thousands of square kilometres of disputed territory, prompting an attack from China. In

¹¹ Vasquez, *The War Puzzle Revisited*, 90.

1967, China's attacked India because of the latter's assertive actions in the central sector. In 1986-87, China did not use direct force against India because the latter was less assertive than in the 1962 and 1967 confrontations.

This explanation would only apply if we treated the three cases in isolation. If we put the 1967 clashes into the context of the 1962 war and the 1987 nonviolent standoff, however, the explanation's utility is limited in two ways. First, the extent of the provocation by India in 1967 was miniscule compared to that of 1962. While in the latter case there was an occupation of thousands of square kilometres of territory, in the former case it involved only the establishment of several outposts and building fences. Yet, China decided to use direct force against its adversary. This is even more puzzling if we contrast it with China's behaviour in the 1986-1987 standoff, when the extent of Indian provocation was comparable to that of 1967, yet the PLA exercised restraint.

Second, if strategic interaction would really be the main motivation behind China's actions, Beijing should have attacked India shortly after the border war when it occupied territories near Namka Chu and Khinzemane on 6 May 1963.¹² These shortcomings of the strategic interaction explanation suggest that Chinese considerations behind its actions in 1967 might have been influenced by additional factors, not only India's behaviour at the time.

The underlying problem of this argument is that it is difficult to conceptualize the different levels of assertiveness. When it comes to border disputes, one might argue that there are qualitative differences between forward patrolling, the increasing of troops in the disputed region and the actual occupation of territory by establishing outposts or building any other type of infrastructure. However, even this type of conceptualization obscures the difference between Indian actions of 1962 and 1987, because both occasions involved forward patrols and occupation of territory. Even if we somehow conceptualize assertiveness, the argument does not work well on the 1967 and 1986-87 cases. In 1967, however, territorial occupation and troops deployments were smaller in scale than in 1962. So, China should have used limited force against India, yet it initiated an offensive. During the Sumdorong Chu Crisis of 1986-87, India deployed nearly 50,000 troops to the border, a number exceeding the deployments of 1962. So, China should have used direct force against India, as it did in 1962. Nevertheless, Beijing refrained from direct engagement.

¹² Ji, "1987 年中印边界危机回顾与反思 (the 1987 Sino - India Border Crisis in Retrospect: Lessons and Reflections)," 69.

This points to a general weakness of the strategic interaction argument, namely that it works with ambiguous concepts between which the boundaries are blurred. My argument provides a clearer explanation because the difference in the value of the independent variable is better observable: while China had hostile ties with the great powers in the 1960s, its relations improved with the US and the Soviet Union during the 1980s. Without the threat of invasion on the strategic calculus, Deng Xiaoping was more flexible in crisis decision making.

6.2.3. Militarized worldview

A third potential explanation stems from the “militarized worldview” argument proposed by Li Xiaoting. He claims that Beijing’s use of force is best explained by CCP leaders’ perception of international affairs. Li defines the militarized worldview as a collection of beliefs. In a militarized world, every actor is the state’s enemy, war is an ever-present possibility and even in the absence of war, struggle against the opponents is constant. According to Li, this worldview was prominent among the CCP leader in the periods between 1949-1953 and 1960-1974.¹³ This division closely correlates with Beijing’s propensity to initiate direct attacks against India.

This argument can be extended to all three cases as well. In the 1960s, Chinese actions were motivated by leaders’ perceptions of a hostile world surrounding them—most states around the PRC were deemed to be enemies. Therefore, it was necessary to attack India in order to pre-empt a potential invasion of Chinese sovereignty. The logic seems plausible, as China’s foreign policy during the Cultural Revolution involved attack in all directions. In the case of the Sumdorong Chu crisis, the argument would suggest that China refrained from using direct force against India because Deng was a fundamentally different leader from Mao Zedong: while the latter had an ideological perspective of the world, the former was pragmatic.

A closer look, however, suggests that connecting China’s behaviour in the Sino-Indian border dispute only to Chinese leaders’ hostile worldview is problematic for a number of reasons. First, it cannot explain why China offered multiple concessions while Mao Zedong was infused by the militarized worldview in 1962. Second, Li Xiaoting does not address the source of the militarized worldview which is external: the hostility between China and both superpowers. Third, he does

¹³ Li, “The Taming of the Red Dragon: The Militarized Worldview and China’s Use of Force, 1949–2001,” 391, 97.

not address how the internal division between leaders influences the militarized worldview. Zhou Enlai's comments to Myanmar's Prime Minister Ne Win in 1967 suggest that he was not in favour of the revolutionary policy and tried to reign in belligerent tendencies in the Foreign Ministry.¹⁴ How does this affect the influence of worldview on foreign policy? My argument does not suffer from this shortcoming because internal division is incorporated into it.

Fourth, the militarized worldview argument points to a trend and does not explain a process. For instance, even the pragmatic Deng fought a war with one of China's neighbours—Vietnam—just like his predecessor. Apart from invading Vietnam in 1979, smaller scale clashes also occurred on the Sino-Vietnamese border before and after the invasion. Consequently, the pragmatic Deng argument has limited explanatory power in the 1986-87 case. It also overlooks the importance of the international system, namely that Deng could embark on a pragmatic foreign policy mainly because the less threatening international environment allowed him to do so. To make a counterfactual argument, if China's ties were strained both with the US and the Soviet Union, Deng might have had a difficult job of initiating the reform and opening policy and keeping tensions at bay during the Sumdorong Chu standoff. Therefore, my argument is superior to the pragmatic Deng theory because it uncovers a greater share of the logical process that influenced China's conduct in the Sumdorong Chu standoff.

6.3. Extending the argument

The Sumdorong Chu standoff was followed by a significant decline in the two sides' military deployment on the disputed border. After Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 visit, India withdrew three mountain divisions from the border. In 1995, both China and India removed outposts from the vicinity of Sumdorong Chu, bringing greater stability to the area. Apart from these efforts of demilitarization, the two sides also adopted a set of confidence building measures. They established the vice-minister level working group to deal with the border issue. In 1993, they signed the "Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas" and established the Expert Working Group responsible for the implementation of it. In 1996, they signed the "Confidence-Building Measures in the

¹⁴ Yangyong Chen, *苦撑危局：周恩来在 1967* (*Holding on During Desperate Times: Zhou Enlai in 1967*) (Chongqing: Chongqing Publishing House, 2005), 284-86.

Military Field Along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas". In 2003, they established yet another mechanism for dealing with the border issue, the Special Representatives working group. Other confidence building measures involved the establishment of a hotline between the two sides' militaries and the establishment of meeting points between local commanders—these mechanisms allow for more seamless communication between Chinese and Indian troops.¹⁵

These measures laid down a new basis for the two sides' interaction on the border and maintained decades of tranquillity in the area. However, it did not mean perpetual sunshine and rainbows there. According to an Indian study, 30 border incidents occurred in the 2003-2014 period. More than half of these incidents lasted less than a day: the PLA predominantly withdrew upon being discovered by Indian troops. The default approach of India was to wave banners at the Chinese "intruders" to compel them to pull out from the disputed area.¹⁶

Still, some of the incidents blew up. In 2013, a three-week standoff occurred in the western sector at Daulat Beg Oldi when Chinese troops confronted India over building an observation post in the vicinity of the LAC. A platoon-sized PLA unit entered to disputed territory and set up a camp with tents. The Indo-Tibetan border police responded in kind and built a camp 300 meters from the Chinese position. Flag meetings failed to solve the issue, so India sent an army unit to the scene. Tensions decreased after 5 May; the resolution was most likely achieved through diplomatic channels. This happened just a month before Li Keqiang's visit to India. The Indian government suggested that it was an intentional provocation.¹⁷ In September 2014, troops were eyeball to eyeball again when China obstructed the Indian construction of a canal in the Western sector. According to reports, 1000 Chinese troops crossed the LAC and a standoff occurred. As Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj met with her Chinese counterpart Wang Yi to discuss the issue, Chinese troops withdrew. This standoff occurred at the time when Xi Jinping met with Modi in New Delhi.¹⁸ In June 2017, India dispatched forces to the China-Bhutan border to stop China's road extension in the Doklam area. The two sides locked horns for more than 70 days on this occasion.¹⁹

¹⁵ Ji, "1987 年中印边界危机回顾与反思 (the 1987 Sino - India Border Crisis in Retrospect: Lessons and Reflections)," 90-91.

¹⁶ Mihir Bhonsale, "Understanding Sino-Indian Border Issues: An Analysis of Incidents Reported in the Indian Media," *Observer Research Foundation, Occasional Papers*, no. 143 (2018): 6, 14.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14, 19-20.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁹ The Hindu Net Desk, "Timeline: The Story of the Doklam Stand-Off".

Analysts argued that China was caught off-guard by India's heavy-handed response and stood down.²⁰ These three cases qualify as "military posturing" as we saw no confirmed battle deaths, suggesting the lack of direct engagement between the two sides.

Based on the scarce evidence available, my argument can shed some insight on China's behaviour during these confrontations. As per the dissertation's indicators, external threat to the Chinese state was low. Sino-US relations mainly focused on cooperation in the first ten years of the 2000s. At the same time, the two powers focused on other issues rather than engaging in a geopolitical competition. The US was busy dealing with a range of issues like Iraq, Afghanistan and the 2008 economic crisis. China, on the other hand, was preoccupied with its economic development. Sino-US interaction focused on mitigating the adverse effects of the economic crisis, climate change, nuclear proliferation and other issues on which there was mutual agreement between the two sides. The Obama administration continued its engagement after the rise of President Xi Jinping and kept its focus on areas like climate change, environmental pollution and nuclear security.²¹ In the meanwhile, China normalized its relations with Russia and the two states demarcated their border. Subsequently, bilateral ties have been driven by deepening economic interaction, energy trade and military collaboration.²²

Indeed, Chinese analyses of China-India relations during the 2013-2017 period show low (but increasing) level of concern about a potential anti-China coalition. An analysis of the 2013 standoff suggests that the Indian government sought to handle it with caution.²³ At the same time, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh criticized the Indian media for hyping up the minor confrontation and emphasized that the two sides could solve the border dispute peacefully.²⁴ A different Chinese commentary dismissed the likelihood of a more severe China-India conflict on the border in 2013.²⁵ In 2014, Chinese analyses downplayed the possibility of an India-Japan coalition because

²⁰ Rory Medcalf, "Doklam: Who Won?," The Lowy Institute, <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/doklam-who-won>.

²¹ Robert Sutter, "Barack Obama, Xi Jinping and Donald Trump's Pragmatism Fails as U.S.-China Differences Rise in Prominence," *American Journal of Chinese Studies* 24, no. 2 (2017): 69-70, 72, 74, 76-77.

²² Jo Inge Bekkevold, "Conclusion: Sino-Russian Relations in the 21st Century," in *Sino-Russian Relations in the 21st Century*, ed. Jo Inge Bekkevold and Bobo Lo (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 300.

²³ Fan Liu, "印媒为何炒作中印边境“帐篷对峙” (Why Does India Hype up the Border Incident)," *Global Times*, <https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJAgnI>.

²⁴ "印反对党炒“边界对峙” 执政党主张低调处理 (Indian Opposition Party Speculates "Border Confrontation", Ruling Party Advocates Low-Key Handling)," *Global Times*, <https://world.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJAmgN>.

²⁵ Liang Yang et al., "西媒印媒渲染中印对峙危机 高层互动破解揣测 (Western and Indian Media Ruminates China-India Crisis, High-Level Talks Dismiss Speculations)," *Global Times*, <https://world.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJAmbv>.

China had better ties with India.²⁶ Reports from this year articulated concerns about other aspects of India's behaviour, such as its insistence on the recognition of the McMahon Line and New Delhi's infrastructural development in the border region.²⁷ An in-depth scholarly analysis of the Chinese reaction to the Doklam standoff of 2017 argues that the official response was measured and refrained from words like "invasion" (*ruqin*, 入侵) and preferred "illegal entry" (*feifa yuejie*, 非法越界) instead.²⁸ This suggests that Chinese leaders did not fear a containment strategy during these confrontations.

At the same time, we see signs that President Xi Jinping's domestic standing has been volatile since the beginning of his rule. Since we are limited in looking into the black box of the current CCP leadership, we can only rely on theories and circumstantial evidence. On the former, Bak's work suggests that domestic struggles for power peak in the beginning and end of autocratic tenures.²⁹

On the latter, we do have information suggesting that Xi Jinping's rule is mired in constant power struggles, power consolidation, purges and controversial decisions such as the abolishment of presidential term limits. For instance, President Xi Jinping mobilized members of the Shanghai Gang and other various CCP factions to win his initial power struggle against his major competitors such as the head of domestic security apparatus Zhou Yongkang.³⁰ Xi Jinping openly spoke about domestic conspiracies directed against him by Zhou and other top CCP leaders such as head of the CCP General Office Ling Jihua and PLA General Xu Caihou.³¹ In 2017, Xi Jinping purged Chongqing Party Secretary Sun Zhengcai, a CCP heavyweight who was labelled as Xi's

²⁶ Hailin Ye, "中国该如何看待印度与日本接近? (What Should China Make of India-Japan Ties)," *Global Times*, <https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJE90R>; "日华媒: 日本应该换一种思维看待中印关系 (Overseas Chinese Media: Japan Should Rethink China-India Relations)," *Global Times*, <https://oversea.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJFCnT>.

²⁷ Yuanchun Wu, "港媒: 解决中印领土争端 印度心急想吃热豆腐 (India's Hastiness to Solve the Border Dispute Is Counterproductive)," *Global Times*, <https://oversea.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJFGnV>; Shengyi Li, "港媒: 中印边界后撤 但印军军事活动仍频繁 (Hong Kong Media: China and India Withdraw from Border, but Indian Military Activities Are Still Frequent)," *Global Times*, <https://oversea.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJFKGi?w=280>.

²⁸ Peifeng Guan and Chuanjuan Zhang, "洞朗对峙引发的国内反应及反思 (China's Response and Reflection to the Dong Lang Stand-Off)," *Journal of Boundary and Ocean Studies* 2, no. 5 (2017): 71.

²⁹ Bak, "Autocratic Political Cycle and International Conflict," 6.

³⁰ Peng Li, "Timeline: The Downfall of China's Security Chief," *Financial Times*, <https://www.ft.com/content/74216aa0-170d-11e4-8617-00144feabdc0>; Guoguang Wu, "Continuous Purges: Xi's Control of the Public Security Apparatus and the Changing Dynamics of Ccp Elite Politics " *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 66 (2020): 1-3.

³¹ Tai Ming Cheung, "The Chinese National Security State Emerges from the Shadows to Center Stage," *ibid.*, no. 65: 5.

potential successor. Xi proceeded to fill the CCP Politburo and its Standing Committee with his allies at the subsequent 19th Party Congress in October 2017.³² So, we can tentatively establish that during the Sino-Indian crises of 2013, 2014 and 2017, the external threat to China was low while internal threat to Xi was high. Under these circumstances, China opted for military posturing in the disputed border region which is consistent with my argument.

In 2020, Sino-Indian tensions started on 5 May at the Pangong Tso lake, in the western sector when 250 Chinese and Indian soldiers fought and threw stones at each other.³³ The two sides have been building up their forces in this area recently, leading to a steady increase of friction testified by the 2017 and 2019 confrontations at the Pangong Tso Lake. This is an extremely sensitive territory because it is not under exclusive control of any of the sides: China controls the majority of land there but India retains one third of it.³⁴ On 9 May, 150 soldiers confronted each other in the central sector, at Nathu La. Soldiers on both sides sustained injuries. These initial brawls were quickly handled by military officials on the spot.³⁵ With the purpose of mitigating tensions, Chinese and Indian Corps Commanders met on 6 June and the two governments subsequently claimed that “the situation was improving”.³⁶ Contrary to these claims, a deadly clash occurred on 15 June, leaving 20 Indian soldiers dead in the Galwan Valley in the Western sector.³⁷ China has lost four soldiers.³⁸

These tensions led to direct use of force by China, causing 20 battle deaths on the Indian side. So, there is a significant change compared to the 2013, 2014 and 2017 confrontations. According to my theory, this change could only be explained if there was a change in China’s environment and it faced high external and internal threats at the same time. Certain aspects of the conflict suggest that the argument is plausible. On the one hand, China is facing an increasingly threatening external environment. After the rise of the Trump administration, the US is taking an increasingly

³² Joseph Fewsmith, "The 19th Party Congress: Ringing in Xi Jinping’s New Age," *ibid.*, no. 55 (2018): 4.

³³ Yun Sun, "China's Strategic Assessment of the Ladakh Clash," *War on the Rocks*, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/06/chinas-strategic-assessment-of-the-ladakh-clash/>.

³⁴ Jeff Smith, "Fistfighting in the Himalayas: India and China Go Another Round," *The Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/fistfighting-in-the-himalayas-india-and-china-go-another-round/>.

³⁵ Sun, "China's Strategic Assessment of the Ladakh Clash".

³⁶ Krishn Kaushik, "In Recent Statements, Both India and China Repeatedly Spoke of Peaceful Resolution," *The Indian Express*, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/statements-india-china-peaceful-resolution-6462358/>.

³⁷ "Indian Soldiers Killed in China Border Clash Were Unarmed and Surrounded, Families Say".

³⁸ "Ladakh: China Reveals Soldier Deaths in India Border Clash," *BBC*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-56121781#:~:text=China%20has%20for%20the%20first,%22%2C%20said%20Chinese%20state%20media.>

assertive position vis-à-vis China.³⁹ Analyses in the Chinese media often interpret this as a containment strategy against Beijing.⁴⁰

This pressure concentrates in many areas, including the South China Sea dispute, where Washington directly challenges Beijing's claimed sovereignty. The US proclaimed that Chinese claims are unlawful and adopted excluded more than 20 Chinese companies—those participating in China's island building activities—from the US market. The US Navy also staged more than ten Freedom of Navigation operations within 12 nautical miles of features claimed by China. Furthermore, US military aircraft manoeuvred over the South China Sea more than forty times in 2019.⁴¹

US pressure goes beyond the South China Sea. Washington crafted an Indo-Pacific strategy which identifies China as a "revisionist power".⁴² As a part of this outreach, the Quad—maritime cooperation between India, Australia, the US and Japan—is on the road to revival to check China's clout across the Indo-Pacific.⁴³ At the same time, the US sent three more destroyers to Japan in 2018—a move that Chinese analysts saw as containment against China.⁴⁴ Against the backdrop of the China-US trade war, a People's Daily article from 2018 argued that China should learn from Mao Zedong and stand resolute against external pressure.⁴⁵ Some aspects of Chinese behaviour suggest that leaders heeded the advice, as Beijing partly pushed back against the pressure with increasing PLA activity in the South China Sea.⁴⁶

³⁹ Ralph Jennings, "Why Trump Has Gotten Extra Tough in Monitoring China at Sea," Voanews.

⁴⁰ "遏制中国？美国完成向日本增派 3 艘神盾驱逐舰 (to Contain China? The United States Completes the Dispatch of 3 Additional Aegis Destroyers to Japan)," People's Daily, <http://military.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0524/c1011-30011245.html>; "美国主导印太联盟对付中国 专家：是个过时主意 (Us-Led Indo-Pacific Alliance against China Is an Outdated Idea)," People's Daily, <http://military.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0905/c1011-30273724.html>; Taiping Wang, "美国对华政策调整是冷战思维作祟 (the Adjustment of U.S. Policy Towards China Is the Cause of the Cold War Mentality)," Global Times, <https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnK7vEF>; "美国国防战略重回“大国竞争” 遏制中国崛起 (U.S. Defense Strategy Returns to "Great Power Competition" to Contain China's Rise)," Global Times, <https://mil.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnK6tz2>.

⁴¹ Oriana Skylar Mastro, "The PLA's Evolving Role in China's South China Sea Strategy," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 66 (2020): 1-2.

⁴² "Indo-Pacific Strategy Report," Department of Defense, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>.

⁴³ Jeff Smith, "Democracy's Squad: India's Change of Heart and the Future of the Quad," War on the Rocks, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/08/democracys-squad-indias-change-of-heart-and-the-future-of-the-quad/>.

⁴⁴ "遏制中国？美国完成向日本增派 3 艘神盾驱逐舰 (to Contain China? The United States Completes the Dispatch of 3 Additional Aegis Destroyers to Japan)".

⁴⁵ Ma Su, "毛主席如何应对外部压力 (How Chairman Mao Coped with External Pressure)," People's Daily, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2018/1130/c223633-30434843.html>.

⁴⁶ Mastro, "The PLA's Evolving Role in China's South China Sea Strategy," 11.

Against this backdrop, analyses frequently point out that Washington aims to use India against China or drive a wedge between the two Asian countries. In 2018, one analyst interpreted the revival of the Quad as an anti-Chinese move by multiple actors.⁴⁷ Further Chinese articles argued that the US wants to use India to contain China.⁴⁸

However, analyses also point out that India is the weak link in the US plot, arguing that New Delhi would never become Washington's ally because of its strategic autonomy.⁴⁹ This is a key point that might explain why China often lashes out against India recently. There are two ways of exploiting this weakness of the anti-Chinese plot and wooing away India from the US: reassurance and pressure. Reassurance means that good Sino-Indian ties would convince New Delhi that it is unnecessary to become Washington's ally. Military pressure, on the other hand, supposed to signal that joining Washington entails security risks.⁵⁰ The post-2010 pattern of Sino-Indian interaction suggests that leaders in China deemed "pressure" to be more effective.

Against this backdrop, the Chinese analysts' assessment of the Galwan clash connected India's actions to an emerging Indo-US coalition against China. This is similar to those arguments about international anti-Chinese plots in the 1960s. Hu Shisheng et al.'s analysis of the Galwan clash suggests that difficulties on the border arise partly because India was emboldened by Washington's strategic outreach to New Delhi.⁵¹ At the same time, Long Xingchun argued that India provoked China because of the deepening Sino-US rivalry provided it with a good opportunity.⁵² Some arguments go beyond the scope of the China-US rivalry and argue that India was trying to capitalize not only on US support, but also the positive overtures from Japan and

⁴⁷ Xingchun Long, "龙兴春：以“Quad”为支柱的“印太战略”不利于东盟 (Long Xingchun: "Quad" as the Pillar "Indo-Pacific Strategy" Is Not Good for Asean)," *Global Times*, <https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnKf58h>.

⁴⁸ "社评：印太战略，想既埋中国又埋印度的坑 (Social Commentary: The Indo-Pacific Strategy Aims to Undermine Both China and India)," <https://mil.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnK8Wjq>; "美国主导印太联盟对付中国专家：是个过时主意 (Us-Led Indo-Pacific Alliance against China Is an Outdated Idea)"; "新闻分析：美出售顶尖航母设备意图拉拢印度 (News Analysis: Us Sells Top Aircraft Carrier Equipment to Win over India)," *People's Daily*, <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2017/1024/c1002-29604771.html>.

⁴⁹ Xingchun Long, "'印太'装不下印度的大国雄心 ('Indo-Pacific' Can't Hold India's Great Power Ambitions)," *Global Times*, <https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnKaesm>; "安全合作无法把印度绑上美国的“印太战略”(Security Cooperation Cannot Tie India to the Us "Indo-Pacific Strategy")," *Global Times*, <https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnKl0dk>.

⁵⁰ Wang and Meng, "China Debating the Regional Order," 502, 06.

⁵¹ Shisheng Hu, Yu Wang, and Chuanxi Liu, "从加勒万河谷冲突看印度陆锁式安全思维困局 (the Land - Locked Mentality in Security through the Lens of the Galwan Conflict)," *Indian Ocean Economy Studies*, no. 4 (2020): 22.

⁵² Xingchun Long, "龙兴春：印度不要错把风险当机会 (Long Xingchun: India Should Not Misconceive Risk as Opportunity)," *Global Times*, <https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/3yPADyem8P8>.

Australia.⁵³ Qian Feng asserted that India and Japan might be looking for ways to coordinate their actions in the South China Sea and China-India border disputes to put pressure on China.⁵⁴ A different argument suggested that the US was hoping for a Sino-Indian conflict, hence it encouraged Indian advances.⁵⁵ Similarly, a Global Times commentary noted that India provoked China on the border because Washington's support to New Delhi made the latter believe that its military is stronger than the PLA.⁵⁶ One editorial published during the 2020 standoff suggested that India should steer clear from becoming a "pawn" of the US "attacking China," otherwise China-India economic ties would "suffer a devastating blow". Washington's involvement in bilateral issues such as the border dispute would only obfuscate the bilateral relationship, the article suggested.⁵⁷

Internally, President Xi Jinping is engaged in continuous political struggles that became the hallmark of his rule. We do not see a challenger to Xi, but signs of division in the highest echelons of the CCP are omnipresent since in the 2012-2020 period. In April 2020, Chinese authorities initiated corruption investigations against Sun Lijun, the vice minister of public security. This signalled a new round of purges aimed against politicians who were the former allies of Xi Jinping.⁵⁸ Parallel to this process, Xi was challenged in the field of economic policy. As the COVID19 pandemic hit the Chinese economy, Premier Li Keqiang called for the promotion of street selling in June 2020. This contradicted Xi Jinping and his faction which worked hard to eliminate this business model. A couple of days after Li Keqiang's statements, Chinese state media issued criticism against the "street stall economy", suggesting that contradiction between the Premier and President was coming to the fore.⁵⁹ In August 2020, Xi struck again and purged

⁵³ "社评：落实中印五点共识，新德里需有诚意 (Commentary: Indian Sincerity Is Needed to Implement the 5-Point Consensus of China and India)," Global Times, <https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/3zqAkZb6QmG>.

⁵⁴ Feng Qian, "Hard for India, Japan to Form a United Front against China," Global Times, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1198416.shtml>.

⁵⁵ "社评：印度莫受美国忽悠，印媒莫炒作煽动 (Commentary: India Must Not Be Deceived by the United States, and Indian Media Should Not Hype)," Global Times, <https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/3yWtFzxYf8e>.

⁵⁶ "印度须走出对边境局势的两个误判 (India Must Get Rid of Two Misjudgments About the Border Situation)," Global Times, <https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/3ygDO8tnCOo>.

⁵⁷ "Advisable for India Not to Engage in Us-China Confrontation," Global Times, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1190096.shtml>.

⁵⁸ Wu, "Continuous Purges: Xi's Control of the Public Security Apparatus and the Changing Dynamics of Ccp Elite Politics " 4-5.

⁵⁹ Katsuji Nakazawa, "China's Street-Stall Debate Puts Xi and Li at Odds," Nikkei Asian Review, <http://asia.nikkei.com/remotexs.ntu.edu.sg/Editor-s-Picks/China-up-close/China-s-street-stall-debate-puts-Xi-and-Li-at-odds>.

Shanghai Public Security Bureau Chief Gong Dao'an.⁶⁰ Overall, Wu Guoguang argues that “profound political discontent exists in Xi’s China.” Elite discontent stems from Xi’s emphasis on totalitarian governance, his effort to prolong his tenure as president and the insecurity of the upcoming power succession. These trends are likely to worsen in the future.⁶¹ Against this backdrop, it is plausible that Xi was pushed by external and internal pressure in this confrontation.⁶²

China’s behaviour in the China-India border dispute throughout the 1962-2020 period suggests that there are continuities, changes and lessons learned in the PLA’s strategic culture. As my dissertation suggests, the main continuity is that threats are the dominant factors which motivate the PLA’s use of force. The documentation cited above is replete with references to threats as explanations behind China’s use of force. In the 1960s, Chinese leaders often justified their confrontational action by referring to the US-Soviet collusion against Beijing. In the 2000s, China similarly refers to a US-led anti-Chinese containment scheme provoking Chinese acts of “self-defence”. A second continuity is China’s preoccupation with great powers, rather than regional actors. During the Cold War, China did not see India as a significant threat in and of itself. India constituted a source of danger to China when it was aligned with the great powers. The same narrative applies today, as the China argued that India was “provoking” Beijing because New Delhi was emboldened by Washington. Finally, the Chinese use of force appears to be symbolic. China settled its border disputes through peaceful negotiations. When it used force against the disputant, it was aimed at sending a message rather than acquiring additional territories. There are also a number of changes in China’s conduct which possibly stem from lessons learned throughout the years. China fought a full-blown war with India only once, in 1962. Subsequently, China’s movements on the border concentrated to only one sector. It is plausible that the PLA learned that war in two sectors in the Himalayas is costly, and the “message” they want to deliver could be signalled through geographically contained conflicts. Hence, they resorted to narrowly focused confrontations ever since. A second change appears to be the lower intensity of conflicts. While pushing and showing in 1967 led to clashes involving artillery fire, most of the Sino-Indian

⁶⁰ Chris Buckley, “‘Drive the Blade In’: Xi Shakes up China’s Law-and-Order Forces,” New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/20/world/asia/china-xi-jinping-communist-party.html>.

⁶¹ Wu, “Continuous Purges: Xi’s Control of the Public Security Apparatus and the Changing Dynamics of Ccp Elite Politics ” 6-8.

⁶² M. Taylor Fravel, “China’s Sovereignty Obsession: Beijing’s Need to Project Strength Explains the Border Clash with India,” Foreign Affairs, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-06-26/chinas-sovereignty-obsession>.

confrontations today are kept under the threshold of deadly conflict. This is possibly the beneficial effect of the intricate system of confidence building measures in place since 1988.

I can extend the argument to cases other than the Sino-Indian border dispute and time frames other than the Cold War. External and internal threat shaped China's behaviour in post-Cold War foreign policy crises such as the Yinhe incident (Chinese civilian vessel harassed by US authorities) or the bombardment of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999. High levels of external and internal threats made Chinese leaders more coercive in these situations.⁶³ Furthermore, the argument is also applicable to states other than China. Among other factors, high levels of international tension with the USSR (external threat) and political failures (internal threat) made the US president more susceptible to use force abroad during the Cold War.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the diversionary use of force is dependent on a state's strategic surroundings. If a nondemocratic state has rivals in the international system (such as China had during the Cold War), it is more inclined to use force against other states (not only the rival) during times of domestic turmoil.⁶⁵ This suggests that not only China, but other autocracies are also likely to be aggressive in their neighbourhood during times of concurrent external and internal threats.

With that being said, the theory seems to be best suited to explain great power behaviour. In this context, great power stands for states that are capable of dominating their own region, such as China in East Asia or Vietnam in Southeast Asia. For instance, Vietnam was in a similar situation to that of China before it invaded Cambodia in 1978. Externally, Vietnam was keen on boosting unity among the countries of Indochina and China's support to Cambodia was counterproductive to this aim. Hence, Vietnam's "most important motive for" invading Cambodia was the latter's alignment with Beijing.⁶⁶ Internally, Vietnam was facing significant food shortages due to imprudent development policy choices after the reunification of North with South. The economic situation left the leadership distressed to the extent that they were inclined "to run international risks even for the sake of minor palliatives."⁶⁷

⁶³ He, *China's Crisis Behavior: Political Survival and Foreign Policy after the Cold War*, 38, 49, 67, 139-41

⁶⁴ Charles W. Ostrom and Brian L. Job, "The President and the Political Use of Force," *The American Political Science Review* 80, no. 2 (1986): 545-50.

⁶⁵ Sara McLaughlin Mitchell and Brandon C. Prins, "Rivalry and Diversionary Uses of Force," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 6 (2004): 946.

⁶⁶ Brantly Womack, "Asymmetry and Systemic Misperception: China, Vietnam and Cambodia During the 1970s," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 26, no. 2 (2010): 113-15.

⁶⁷ Jitendra Mohan, "Why Vietnam Invaded Kampuchea," *Economic and Political Weekly* 16, no. 4 (1981): 121-25.

Smaller powers, however, seem to defy the theory's expectations. The potential of Chilean-British cooperation (high external threat) had no influence on the Argentine junta's decision to invade the Falkland Islands in 1982. Similarly, US neutrality in the dispute (low external threat) had no significant influence in the junta's decision-making either.⁶⁸ Hence, the level of external threat seemingly had no influence on Argentina's behaviour. Peru, on the other hand, intentionally sought to tone down tension on its disputed border with Ecuador in the early 1990s in order to devote its attention to settle domestic problems.⁶⁹ My theory would expect a settlement on this occasion. Similarly, the high level of external pressure due to the Vietnamese expansion rendered the Thai-Cambodian border dispute dormant for thirty years.⁷⁰

The explanation for this probably lies in a state's reaction to threat. The aforementioned discussion suggests that great powers react to threats with aggression. Smaller powers, however, respond with retrenchment. There are three potential explanations for this. The first and most obvious answer lies in state capacity. It appears that great powers have the capacity to fend off challenges, even in the face of domestic difficulties. Small powers, on the other hand, might not afford to do it. Secondly, small powers might have great power patrons that protect them, deterring foreign encroachment.⁷¹ Third, great powers might be more sensitive to reputational concerns.⁷² If a great power lets a disputant's occupation of disputed territory go without punishment, other actors might read it as a sign of weakness and press the great power for more concessions. Attacking and triumphing over another power, however, could help great power create a deterrent against challenges from other great powers.

6.4. Implications

There are a number of theoretical implications of the argument. First, the findings shed new insights on the nature of diversion. One of the most pertinent questions of the diversionary conflict

⁶⁸ Amy Oakes, "Diversionary War and Argentina's Invasion of the Falkland Islands," *Security Studies* 15, no. 3 (2006): 443-44, 58-59.

⁶⁹ David Scott Palmer, "Peru-Ecuador Border Conflict: Missed Opportunities, Misplaced Nationalism, and Multilateral Peacekeeping," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 39, no. 3 (1997): 115.

⁷⁰ Thitinan Pongsudhirak, "All Quiet on the Thai-Cambodian Front: Drivers, Dynamics, Directions," *South East Asia Research* 26, no. 4 (2018): 337.

⁷¹ Pardesi, "Managing the 1986-87 Sino-Indian Sumdorong Chu Crisis."

⁷² Mahesh Shankar, *The Reputational Imperative: Nehru's India in Territorial Conflict* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2018).

is the direction between external and internal struggle: does external pressure generate domestic division or is it the other way around? My findings suggest that it is a circular process: external pressure leads to domestic division which leads back to external conflict. In the 1962 and 1967 cases, the process started from outside of China. As discussed in chapter 3, Mao decided to embark on the Great Leap Forward because he wanted China to become powerful and a peer competitor to the superpowers. On the one hand, Mao believed that if China was powerful enough, the US would not dare to interfere with the Taiwan problem.⁷³ On the other hand, Mao wanted to surpass the development of the Soviet Union and assume leadership of the communist camp.⁷⁴

The Great Leap Forward, in turn, led to domestic division among the CCP elite, as not all of the leaders agreed on the correctness of the programme. The threat to Mao's leadership then led to a more assertive foreign policy and probably his decision to go to war with India in 1962. In 1967, the process was similar. The Soviet Union was increasing pressure on China by refusing to budge on the disputed border and criticizing China's support for Vietnam in its fight against the US. As Mao was side-lined in policymaking, he feared a collaboration between the Soviets and their agents within the CCP, so he started the Cultural Revolution to hunt down the Soviet infiltrators.⁷⁵ As his position was undermined in the ensuing chaos, he possibly opted to engage in foreign conflicts to boost domestic unity. In both of these cases, external pressure led to domestic division which resulted in external conflict. Is this a generally applicable pattern to the diversionary conflict or is it dependent on regime type? It is likely that this is merely one of the processes of the diversionary use of force and the other mechanisms await exploration.

Second, the dissertation sheds greater light on autocratic leaders' proclivity toward the use of diversionary force. Existing work agrees that elite support is crucial for autocratic leaders, so their external behaviour is shaped by their standing among this group. The exact influence of elite support, however, is debated. One strand of the literature suggests that secure leaders are more likely to initiate foreign conflict. Bueno de Mesquita and Randolph M. Siverson suggest that the longer an autocrat remains in power, the more likely that he will initiate conflict abroad because

⁷³ Yang, "毛泽东与两次台海危机——50年代中后期中国对美政策变动原因及趋向 (Mao Zedong and the Two Taiwan Sea Crises: Reasons and Trends of the Changes in China's Us Policy Change in the Middle and Late 1950s) ," 347-78.

⁷⁴ Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia, "The Great Leap Forward, the People's Commune and the Sino-Soviet Split," *Journal of Contemporary China* 20, no. 72 (2011): 865-68.

⁷⁵ Li, "中苏分裂与“文革”时期的中国外交 (the Sino-Soviet Split and China's Cultural Revolution Foreign Policy) ," 483-84.

he accumulates reputation over time which protects him from the negative repercussions of it.⁷⁶ Using a slightly different logic, Jessica L. Weeks suggests that autocratic leaders who are not accountable to domestic audiences are more likely to initiate conflict because of tend to have personal preferences for the external use of force and they are immune to domestic political punishment.⁷⁷

A different strand in the literature suggests that a leader's insecurity serves as a motivation for initiating foreign conflict, echoing the diversionary conflict argument. Pickering and Kisangani propose that autocrats are sensitive to unrest within the elite because their rule depends on the support of a few influential players rather than the public.⁷⁸ Weak autocrats are inclined to use diversionary force when they possess no domestic political tools that would allow them to use internal methods to respond to elite challenge. Therefore, the only viable way of unifying the elite is an external conflict.⁷⁹ Chiozza and Goemans, on the other hand, argue that weak leaders who enjoy no institutional safeguards—they are threatened by “forcible removal,” such as assassinations or revolts—use external conflict to solve internal challenges.⁸⁰

The findings of my dissertation suggest that the answer to the conundrum probably lies in the nature of external conflict—there is difference between fighting against “invaders” in a territorial dispute or initiating different kinds of external conflicts. Jaroslav Tir asserts that a boundary dispute is a convenient tool for gathering domestic support, because these contests relate to identity perceptions and the territorial nature of humans, allowing a challenged leader to manipulate such an issue to his benefit.⁸¹ An external territorial conflict, then, can help a challenged leader in a number of ways. First, an interstate war or crisis can justify coercive domestic measures against his domestic opponents—they can argue that internal unity is a prerequisite for winning an external conflict. Second, an external conflict might compel domestic opponents to stand with the leader—

⁷⁶ Bueno de Mesquita and Siverson, "War and the Survival of Political Leaders: A Comparative Study of Regime Types and Political Accountability," 841, 44-52; This finding was confirmed later by Bak: Bak, "Autocratic Political Cycle and International Conflict," 16.

⁷⁷ Jessica L. P. Weeks, *Dictators at War and Peace* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2014), 29-33.

⁷⁸ Pickering and Kisangani, "Diversionary Despots? Comparing Autocracies' Propensities to Use and to Benefit from Military Force," 486-90.

⁷⁹ "Democracy and Diversionary Military Intervention: Reassessing Regime Type and the Diversionary Hypothesis," *International Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (2005): 23-29, 34-39; "Diversionary Despots? Comparing Autocracies' Propensities to Use and to Benefit from Military Force," 486-90.

⁸⁰ Giacomo Chiozza and H. E. Goemans, *Leaders and International Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 5, 18.

⁸¹ Tir, "Territorial Diversion: Diversionary Theory of War and Territorial Conflict," 416-18.

otherwise they might be labelled as traitors. Finally, a victory can improve a leader's prestige and legitimacy.⁸² China's behaviour in the Sino-Indian border dispute supports this argument. Chinese leaders were threatened in all of the three examined cases, and they adopted a hardliner stand against the challenge on the border. This suggests that no Chinese leader wants to look weak when a border crisis occurs at a time of elite division. However, without external pressure, embattled leaders seem to be less aggressive.

Third, my dissertation shows that taking CCP unity for granted or not can lead to significantly different conclusions. Fravel's analysis on the Sumdorong Chu Standoff suggests that there was no internal threat at the time because the Chinese state was secure. My analysis, on the other hand, argues that the level of internal threat was high because the leader himself was insecure—despite the fact that there was no imminent threat to the Chinese state. Hence, Fravel's analysis cannot account for the lack of direct confrontation in 1986-87, while my analysis can.

Departing from the unitary state assumption opens up the possibility of having a new perspective on old and new questions of Chinese foreign policy. For instance, is it possible that internal threat influences not only China's border policy but foreign policy in general? Was there an individual angle in Mao's decision to intervene in the Korean conflict? How do domestic power struggles influence China's relations with states that are not its neighbours, such as the US?⁸³ Is there an individual angle on President Xi Jinping's approach to the Sino-US trade war? Finally, does the level of internal threat influence the leader's decision to use force in a maritime or a land-based dispute? Do land-based disputes generate greater unity than maritime ones?

There are also practical implications of the research which is most relevant to China's neighbours. In 1962, Indian leaders like Nehru committed the mistake of believing that China was reluctant to fight because it was facing domestic difficulties. Indeed, it might be a kneejerk reaction of China's neighbours to occupy disputed territories at a time when China is preoccupied with external and internal challenges. The historical record suggests that this might be an imprudent choice, given that the PRC was most prone to conflict during the 1960s, when it was facing external threats from the Soviets and the US as well as internal turbulence due to the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.⁸⁴ Actually, the record suggests that Beijing becomes more sensitive

⁸² Chiozza and Goemans, *Leaders and International Conflict*, 19-25.

⁸³ There is some work being done on this angle, see: Carter, "Elite Welfare Shocks and Autocratic Foreign Policy: Evidence from China."

⁸⁴ Johnston, "China's Militarized Interstate Dispute Behaviour 1949-1992: A First Cut at the Data," 10.

and belligerent at times of external and internal struggle. Hence, disputants should tread carefully during those times to avoid unwanted conflict. Forceful approaches are unlikely to yield benefits when China's under threat, but negotiations could—Beijing offered significant concessions to its neighbours in the 1960s and 1990s, when the regime and state was endangered.

What does this mean to states outside of the region? China's behaviour in its border disputes substantiates one major point: there are some issues on which China makes no concessions, no matter what.⁸⁵ This gives support to the proposition that exerting pressure on China related to issues that it regards as its core interest—Taiwan, Hong Kong, Tibet—is unlikely to yield benefits. Hence, the EU's efforts to couple economic and political outreach in which it criticizes China for its actions in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, is unlikely to yield benefits and could be counterproductive in which Brussels fails to deliver both economic and political results.⁸⁶ The same applies to the US. The trade war might be useful to gain economic concessions from China. However, political pressure on China to make concessions on Tibet, Taiwan and Xinjiang are unlikely to pay off and could be counterproductive to Sino-US bilateral relations due to the sensitivity of these issues.

6.5. Avenues for future research

Future research can go toward different directions, such as identifying better indicators or analysing the Sino-Indian border dispute in different timeframes. First, the indicators identified in this dissertation work well in the Cold War setting, but their utility is limited in the post-Cold War era. As far as external threat is concerned, the indicator is still applicable, as the level of Chinese aggression increases with the hostility between Beijing and other great powers. With the fall of the Soviet Union, the biggest threat to China is posed by the US. Although Washington poses no threat of invasion, the FONOPs and weapons sales to Taiwan still challenge Chinese sovereignty over areas that Beijing sees as its own.

A revision of indicators might be more adequate in the case of internal threats. After the death of Mao, Deng made efforts of institutionalizing the succession within the CCP and limiting the

⁸⁵ Tiang Boon Hoo, "Hardening the Hard, Softening the Soft: Assertiveness and China's Regional Strategy," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 40, no. 5 (2016).

⁸⁶ David M. Herszenhorn, "Merkel Gets China Video Chat Instead of 'Jewel in the Crown'," Politico, <https://www.politico.eu/article/merkel-gets-china-video-chat-instead-of-jewel-in-the-crown/>.

presidential terms.⁸⁷ Hence, successors did not spend an extended time period with waiting for their ascendance to presidency that could breed succession struggles. So, research focusing on the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao eras could focus on regularities in “autocratic political cycles”⁸⁸ to identify times of internal threat to the reigning president. Given that in those cases the presidential term was capped at ten years, one would expect leader insecurity in the beginning and toward the end of that period.

As far as the time frame is concerned, one has to be realistic about the availability of sources on the border dispute. There are two aspects to this. First, India is not a primary partner of China, hence there is less material on Sino-Indian relations than on Sino-Soviet or Sino-US ties. Second, the border dispute is unsettled, hence post-1949 materials on it are scarce. Nevertheless, my trips to the provincial archives in China suggested that they have materials accessible from the republican era. Since the border dispute can be originated from the 1914 Simla dialogue, the evolution of the issue between 1914 and 1962 might be worthy of academic attention and findings could contribute to international relations theory.

The purpose of this dissertation was to shed more light on Chinese dispute behavior. The findings can serve as a guide for maintaining stability in volatile areas where disputes have not been settled yet. Although my focus was on a land-based dispute, it can serve as a frame of reference to all of China’s current disputants. It is intuitive to expect a state to retrench at a time when it is facing external and internal pressures. China’s use of force, however, works in counterintuitive ways: the more threats China faces, the higher the likelihood that it will unleash deadly force against its territorial disputants. Hence, my findings suggest that the age-old adage of hitting the enemy when it is the weakest might not be applicable to China in border disputes. On the contrary, an attempt to utilize the opportunity of a threatened China to further territorial claims by *fait accompli* is unlikely to pay off for any of the disputants. Moving for a solution on these occasions might have greater dividends. As Fravel pointed it out, border disputes are costly distractions at a time when China faces external or internal challenges.⁸⁹ Hence, those times might be good for pushing for a solution at the negotiating table.

⁸⁷ Jinghan Zeng, "Institutionalization of the Authoritarian Leadership in China: A Power Succession System with Chinese Characteristics?," *Contemporary Politics* 20, no. 3 (2014): 299-307.

⁸⁸ Bak, "Autocratic Political Cycle and International Conflict."

⁸⁹ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, 12-13.

Appendix A – China-Great Powers (United States and Soviet Union) and China-India Militarized Interstate Disputes, 1949-2010

Year	China-Great Powers	China-India	Year	China Great Powers	China-India
1949	1	0	1981	0	0
1950	3	1	1982	0	0
1951	2	0	1983	0	0
1952	2	0	1984	0	0
1953	3	0	1985	0	1
1954	2	1	1986	1	1
1955	2	1	1987	0	1
1956	2	1	1988	0	0
1957	1	0	1989	0	0
1958	1	1	1990	0	0
1959	0	1	1991	0	0
1960	1	1	1992	0	0
1961	1	2	1993	1	0
1962	3	2	1994	2	0
1963	1	0	1995	1	0
1964	3	1	1996	1	0
1965	5	1	1997	0	0
1966	5	1	1998	0	0
1967	4	2	1999	1	0
1968	3	0	2000	1	0
1969	3	1	2001	3	0
1970	1	0	2002	1	0
1971	2	1	2003	0	1
1972	1	0	2004	0	0
1973	0	1	2005	0	0
1974	2	0	2006	0	0
1975	0	1	2007	0	1
1976	0	0	2008	0	0
1977	1	0	2009	2	1
1978	2	0	2010	0	0
1979	2	1			
1980	2	0			
			Total	62	24

Source: author's calculations based on CoW data. Maoz, Zeev, Paul L. Johnson, Jasper Kaplan, Fiona Ogunkoya, and Aaron P. Shreve. "The Dyadic Militarized Interstate Disputes (Mids) Dataset Version 3.0: Logic, Characteristics, and Comparisons to Alternative Datasets." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2018): 1-25.

Appendix B – China’s territorial disputes (1949-2005)

<i>Disputed area</i>	<i>Size (square km)</i>	<i>Agreement*</i>	<i>Proportion of territory ceded by China</i>	<i>Force</i>
Frontier disputes				
Burma border	1,909	Y: 1960	82%	—
Nepal border	2,476 Mt. Everest	Y: 1961	94%	—
India border	~125,000	—	—	Y
North Korea border	1,165	Y: 1962	60%	—
Mongolia border	16,808	Y: 1962	65%	—
Pakistan border	8,806 K2 Mt.	Y: 1963	40%	—
Afghanistan border	~7,381	Y: 1963	100%	—
Russia border (eastern)	~1,000	Y: 1991	48%	Y
Bhutan border	1,128	—	—	—
Laos border	18	Y: 1991	50%	—
Vietnam border	227	Y: 1999	50%	Y
Russian border (western)	N/A	Y: 1994	No data	—
Kazakhstan border	2,420	Y: 1994	66%	—
Kyrgyzstan border	3,656	Y: 1996	68%	—
Tajikistan border	28,430	Y: BA	96%	—
Abagaitu and Heixiazi along Russian border	408	Y: 2004	50%	—
Homeland Disputes				
Hong Kong	1,092	Y: 1984	—	—
Macao	28	Y: 1984	—	—
Taiwan	35,980	—	—	Y
Offshore Island Disputes				
White Dragon Tail Island (Vietnam)	~5	Y: no date	100%	—
Paracel Islands (Vietnam, Taiwan)	~10	—	—	Y
Spratly Islands (Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Taiwan)	~5	—	—	Y
Senkaku Islands (Japan)	~7	—	—	—

*In this column I refer to the date of the boundary treaty conclusion. In the absence of a treaty, the date of the agreement, supplementary agreement or joint declaration is noted. Source: *Fravel, Strong Borders, Secure Nation*, 46-47.

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