

CHINA'S PERCEPTION OF THE STRATEGIC ADVANTAGES OF FIRST STRIKE, PREEMPTION, AND PREVENTIVE WARS

Report

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Submitted to:

Mr. Andrew Marshall
Director
OSD Office of Net Assessment
1920 Defense Pentagon
Room 3A932
Washington, D.C. 20301
703.692.3823

Submitted by:

(b) (7)(C)

Logan, UT 84321
(t) 703.505.6881

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Table of Contents

Section	Page
List of Tables	10
About the Author	11
Acknowledgements	12
Chinese Dynastic Chronology	14
Executive Summary	15
Chapter One	
Introduction	31
I. The Logic of First Strike and Preemption	37
II. The Logic of Preventive War	40
III. The Assumptions of the Study	42
IV. The Methodology of the Study	46
Chapter Two	
The Conceptual Framework and Historical Cases of Preemption in History	52
I. The Conceptual Framework	52
I. A. Failure to Anticipate an Attack	53
I. B. Failure to Determine When an Attack Will Occur	54
I. C. Failure to Anticipate Where an Attack Will Occur	56
I. D. Failure to Anticipate the Means of an Attack	58
I. E. A Note on Strategic Warning	61
II. The Decision to Resort to a Surprise Attack: Controlling the Adversary's Sense of Vulnerability	65
II. A. Barbarossa: The German Invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941	67
II. B. The Japanese Attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941	71
III. Other Aspects of a Surprise First Strike	73
IV. The Consideration of Military Superiority	75
V. The First Strike from the Victim's Perspective	77

Table of Contents

Section	Page
VI. Historical Cases	84
VI. A. Copenhagen, 1801 and 1807	84
VI. B. Mers-el-Kebir: The UK Attacks French Fleet, July 1940	91
VI. C. Nomonhan, or Khalkin Gol, May-September 1939	94
VI. D. The Winter War with Finland	100
VI. E. Bessarabia and Bukovina	104
VI. F. Israel Launches the Six-Day War in 1967	106
VII. The Major Lessons from the Cases of First Strike and Preemption	113
Chapter Three	
China's Perception of First Strike and Preemption	116
I. The Chinese Perception of First Strike and Preemption	121
I.A. China's Willingness to Execute a First Strike is Heavily Influenced by Chinese Strategic Culture	123
I.A.1. Strategic Opportunity Created by <i>Shi</i> and the Opponent	127
I.A.2. The Importance of Deception and First Strike in Chinese Strategic Thought	154
I.A.3. The Empirical Situation: Pre-Crisis, Crisis, War	165
II. Historical Evidence of First Strike and Preemption	169
II.A. Early Chinese History through the Ming Dynasty	170
II.B. The Sino-Dutch War, 1661-1668	187
II.C. The KMT/CCP Civil Wars: The Northern Expedition and Encirclement Campaigns	190
II.D. By the PLA	198
II.D.1. Tibet, 1950	199
II.D.2. Korea, 1950	203
II.D.3. India, 1962	211
II.D.4. Laos, 1964-1972	222
II.D.5. North Vietnam, 1965-1968	223
II.D.6. Soviet Border Dispute, Damansky/Zhenbao Island 1969	230
II.D.7. South Vietnam, 1974	233
II.D.8. Vietnam, 1979 and 1988	235

Table of Contents

Section	Page
III. Lessons and Comparison with European Cases	241
III.A. Chinese Emphasis on Psychological Warfare	242
III.B. Chinese Motivations for War	245
III.C. The Critical Role of Deception	247
III.D. The Importance of Surprise	251
III.E. The Lack of Appreciation of the “Fog of War”	252
III.F. Perception of Nuclear Weapons	252
III.G. The Chinese Conception of Pedagogical War	254
 Chapter Four	
The Logic of Preventive War and Historical Cases	257
I. Major Theme of Western Military History	257
II. Theories of Preventive War	262
II. A. The Importance of Hard Power and Relative Versus Absolute Power	264
II. B. Gilpin’s Power Preponderance	268
Implications for the Sino-American Relationship	269
II. C. Organski and Kugler’s Power Transition Theory	270
Implications for the Sino-American Relationship	275
II. D. Rasler and Thompson’s Modified Power Transition Theory:	276
Implications for the Sino-American Relationship	278
II. E. Copeland’s Modified Power Transition Theory	279
Implications for the Sino-American Relationship	280
II. F. Traditional Balance of Power Theory	281
Implications for the Sino-American Relationship	282
II. G. Mearsheimer’s Offensive Realism	289
Implications for the Sino-American Relationship	299
II. H. Offensive Realism Based on Human Evolution	301
Implications for the Sino-American Relationship	306
III. Historical Cases	308
III. A. German Strategic Motivations against Russia	308
III. B. Russian Strategic Motivations against Germany	310
III. C. British Strategic Motivations against Germany	314
III. D. Israeli Strategic Motivations against Egypt in 1956	321

Table of Contents

Section	Page
IV. The Major Lessons from the Historical Cases of Preventive War	323
Chapter Five	
China's Perception of Preventive War	327
I. Preventive War Logic in Chinese Thought	327
II. Historical Cases	333
II. A. Preventive War Logic in the Warring States Period	335
II. B. Preventive War against the Mongols	339
II. C. The Preventive War Motivation of the Boxer Rebellion	342
III. Lessons and Comparison with European Cases	345
IV. Scenario One: Implications of Slowed Economic Growth for Preventive War	351
V. Scenario Two: Implications of Continued Economic Growth for Preventive War	355
Chapter Six	
Twelve Implications for United States Defense Decision-Makers	359
I. Surprise Succeeds	359
II. Preventive War Logic Is a Consistent Consideration in International Politics	363
III. United States Defense Decision-Makers Must Be Alert to the "Fog of Peace" and "Mirror Imaging"	364
IV. The Chinese Execute First Strikes and Preemption Frequently in War	366
V. United States Expectation Should Be That China Will Escalate First, Either in a Pre-Crisis or Crisis Period, or in War	368
VI. Surprise, First Strike (Kinetic or Non-Kinetic), and Preemption Are Key Aspects of Deception in Warfare and Are Seen As Strategic Asymmetries	376
VII. First Strike, Preemption, and Preventive War Are Attempted When China is the Weaker or the Stronger Power	377

Table of Contents

Section	Page
Twelve Implications for United States Defense Decision-Makers: Continued	
VIII. The Chinese View of Preventive War Is That It is a Viable Strategic Choice	378
IX. Significant Dangers for the U.S. and Stability in Asia Will Result	379
X. China's Strategic Considerations Are Informed by Their Perceptions of U.S. and Indian Power	380
XI. China Faces a Multiple Front Preventive War	381
XII. The Chinese Attitude toward Preventive War Will Evolve as China Becomes More Powerful	383
Chapter Seven	
Conclusions	386
Bibliography	431

List of Tables

Table One	62
The Cases and the Four Aspects of Surprise Attack	
Table Two	300
Theories of Power Politics and Their Predictions for Hegemonic Struggle	

About the Author

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13

permitting me to comprehend how ancient many of these beliefs are and how woven they are in Chinese history and culture, and why they remain.

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**Chinese Dynastic Chronology:
Major Periods in Imperial China**

Legendary Sage Emperors	2852-2255 B.C.
Xia	2205-1766
Shang	1766-1045
Zhou	
Western Zhou	1045-770
Eastern Zhou	771-256
Spring and Autumn	722-481
Warring States	403-221
Qin	221-207
Former Han (Western Han)	206 B.C.-A.D. 8
Later Han (Eastern Han)	23-220
Three Kingdoms	168-280
Six Dynasties	222-589
Sui	589-618
Tang	618-907
Five Dynasties	907-959
Northern Song	960-1126
Southern Song	1127-1279
Yuan (Mongols)	1279-1368
Ming	1368-1644
Qing (Manchus)	1644-1911

Executive Summary

Whether China and the United States are destined to compete for domination in international politics is one of the major questions facing the Department of Defense. In a competition with the People's Republic of China, the United States must explore the major risks associated with the rise of China, including the Chinese leadership's perception of the advantages of first strike, preemption, and preventive war. After having examined the literature on China extensively, this author is not aware of a single study that addresses this important topic, and fraught with considerable danger since this study will demonstrate that China's conception of each of these strategic choices is radically different than those held by the United States.

The central issue of the study is a historical analysis of the Chinese leadership's perception of the value of first strike, preemption, or preventive war in a confrontation with the United States.

The study analyzes each concept in a world historical context in order to determine how Chinese thought is both similar to Western decision-making and different in the evaluation of risk. The study concludes that each is a possibility for PRC leadership, and makes four major arguments.

- First, historical cases of first strikes or preemption and its strategic value for the executor are analyzed—Copenhagen; Mers-el-Kebir; and Soviet moves against Finland, Baltic States, and Romania, 1939-1940—in order to establish causal baseline. The strategic value of each for the executor was significant. First strike and preemption are effective at changing balances of power
- Second, cases of preventive war in the modern era are evaluated—Germany-Russia 1914 and Israel-Egypt 1956—to establish causal baseline. The evidence is mixed. In the modern era, preventive war has failed. The strategic value in the Germany-Russia context was disastrous, but positive for Israel.
- Third, China will readily resort to first strikes and preemption based on its history and strategic culture. China's willingness to execute these strategies is caused by three aspects of their strategic culture:

opportunity created by their *shi* or the *shi* of their opponent; the heavy dependence on deception; and the empirical situation—pre-crisis, crisis, or war. In sum, China’s strategic default option is first strike/preemption. Chinese decision-making to execute first strikes, preemption, and preventive war against major adversaries in four major cases is considered: first, from the Warring States Period (403 B.C.-221B.C.) through the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644); second, in the Sino-Dutch War; third, in the civil war between the Nationalists and Communists; and fourth, by the PRC. These strategies yielded considerable success in each of the cases.

- Fourth, China has little experience with preventive war. There are three cases: during the Warring States Period, against the Mongols, and the Boxer Rebellion. Nonetheless, preventive war initiated by China is seen as a viable strategy in the proper conditions.
- Accordingly, the logic of first strike, preemption, and preventive war as well as the empirical evidence from China’s past, compels the recognition that each action has considerable strategic merit for Chinese leadership today. Based on this analysis of Chinese proclivities, significant risks for United States Defense Decision-makers are identified.

Chapter One serves as the introduction to the study. The strategic logic of first strike, preemption, and preventive war are introduced.

- The logic of first strike is transparent and holds across strategic space and time, from the ancient Greeks to states in the present international system. There are five reasons a state may adopt these strategies.
- The first is the ultimate prize, the possibility of a quick and decisive victory.
- Second, it also places the first move in the hands of that actor, and this, in turn, removes strategic doubt and yields strategic initiative.

- Third, moving first also is a force multiplier, and allows a weaker side to offset the stronger, although it is beneficial as well if the attacking side is stronger.
- Fourth, in most cases, first strike eliminates the costs of facing a fully alerted adversary.
- Fifth, a first strike also eliminates the chances that one will be preempted by an alerted opponent.

The logic of preventive war offers a great power the possibility of resolving a strategic situation in its favor and eliminating the threat to its power and status.

- Preventive war is fraught with risks, and the decision to launch it may entail the destruction of its author, or, worse, its weakening, which would introduce “the dilemma of the victor’s inheritance,” the irony that a successful war may so drain the state, that a third state may benefit.
- In the case of China, we can acutely perceive the danger of preventive war for three major reasons. First, China faces the systemic opportunity to challenge the United States.
- Second, China also has a long history of engaging in first strikes or preemption that does not vary by regime type within the authoritarian context.
- Third, and from the perspective of the Chinese leadership, the Chinese leaders first confront the strategic situation, which is the opportunity to attack the opponent for defensive, but more likely offensive, reasons to advance its goals and diminish or eliminate the power of the foe.

In **Chapter Two**, the study evaluates historical cases of first strike and preemption. Four cases are studied. The study finds that first strike and preemption are effective at changing balances of power.

First, the cases of the United Kingdom's attack against the Danish-Norwegian fleet in 1801 and 1807 successfully achieve surprise in both instances.

Second, on 3 July 1940 the Royal Navy in Operation Catapult attacked the French fleet at anchor at Mers-el-Kebir in French Algeria.

Third, From 1939-1940, the Soviet Union waged war against Japan, Finland, and Romania. In each case, Moscow was successful and the consequences were strategic.

Fourth, Israel's preemption in 1967 rapidly changed the balance of power in the Middle East through the resounding defeat of the Egyptian, Jordanian, and Syrian armies, as well as an Iraqi force defeated completely in Jordan.

The historical lessons of first strike and preemption are that both are tempting strategies for states, and have been across time and culture. This is because they are one of the very few strategies available to states that permit quick and decisive victories, which opens the door to the definitive and strategic resolution of the national security problems confronting a state.

Chapter Three documents Chinese historical and contemporary attitudes towards first strike and preemption. Like the West, as should be expected due to the logic of strategy, there is a long history of first strike and preemption in Chinese military history. The chapter evaluates the causes of first strike and preemption and places these strategic choices in the context of Chinese strategic thought: the orthodox and unorthodox strategies.

First, the study finds that China's willingness to execute a first strike or preempt is rooted in three aspects of China's strategic culture.

- The first is Chinese leadership's perception of *shi*, or strategic advantage. That is to say, the proper configuration of power that will make possible the opportunity for a successful first strike or preemption. Sensitivity to perceptions of opportunity is a central tenet of Chinese strategic thought.

- Second, it is informed by the Chinese confidence in deception in warfare. Deception must be understood broadly and includes first strike and preemption. The responsibility of the Chinese leader is to place the enemy in a position where he does not expect to be attacked; to put the foe in the circumstances where he believes he has the strategic momentum, and that events are proceeding as he has designed.
- Third, the empirical situation is relevant to the opportunity for first strike or preemption. The empirical situation informs the likelihood of the opportunity of success, be it a crisis or in war. In addition, the Chinese have the conception of pre-crisis, which means the use of first strike or preemption before the adversary realizes that he is in a crisis situation. The pre-crisis situation is one of considerable danger and risk for the United States in contemporary international politics.

Second, turning to an examination of four historical cases, we find many examples where the Chinese have executed first strike or engaged in preemption.

- In general, this study finds little variation in Chinese leadership's willingness to launch a first strike or engage in preemption with respect to regime type.
- Whether the Chinese government is imperial, republican, or communist does not have an appreciable impact on whether it is more or less likely to engage in a first strike or preemptive attacks.
- In addition, there is little variation in Chinese willingness to launch these attacks with respect to external foe. While the Chinese faced few potent external foes in their history until the modern era, the study finds that China was as likely to launch first strikes or attempt to preempt against the Mongols as they were against the United States seven hundred years later.

- The first case is from the Warring States to the end of the Ming Period. First strike and preemption were common in the Warring States Period, 403 B.C.-221 B.C.
- The second case is the Sino-Dutch War, 1661-1668, in which the Chinese launched a first strike to destroy the Dutch settlement in Taiwan. After a successful siege, the Chinese were able to eliminate the Dutch presence in Taiwan indefinitely.
- The third case is the civil war between Republican and Communist China. In Republican China, the Nationalists preempted in their most successful campaigns.
- The fourth case is the PLA. For the PLA, first strike and preemption are their *modus operandi*. The study examines eight cases of first strikes by the PLA.

In comparison with the European cases of first strike and preemption, the study has four findings.

- First, Chinese strategic thought advocates and places greater emphasis on surprise, first strike and preemption than does European strategic thought.
- Second, surprise, first strike, and preemption are just as important in European military history, but Europeans give greater discount to the success of these strategies and the risks inherent in them due to an appreciation of Clausewitzian “fog of war,” that is friction in military operations and the risks of escalation. An understanding of each is present in European thought, but absent in Chinese strategy. Crisis stability problems are heightened as a consequence of China’s lack of understanding of the risks associated with these strategies.

- Third, in the course of their military history, and accounting for the relative stability faced by China in contrast to Europe, the Chinese have launched first strikes or preempted more often than European states.
- Fourth, unlike the European or American conception of preemption or war, the Chinese have a conception of pedagogical war. The strategic essence of which is to execute a limited aims campaign to “teach a lesson” to the enemy. That is, the application of coercive military power against the state to cause it to accept Chinese demands or interests. Two consequences result from China’s action. First, although it is rare, “pedagogical strike” should be included as a sub-component of preemption. Second, the timing of the strike was notable. China will jump through windows of opportunity to attack weaker states that challenge its interests as the opportunities arise for Beijing. As a result, the United States should expect that the PRC will execute a pedagogical campaign against weaker states that challenge its interests.
- Upon review of the evidence, the study concludes that the Chinese are likely to execute first strikes and engage in preemption to advance their interests or when they perceive their interests to be threatened. In sum, they have a “hair trigger” on the attack or on the defensive.
- It is critical to recognize that this hair trigger might be pulled in pre-crisis situations, in which U.S. Defense Decision-makers would not expect Chinese action; as well in crisis situations, as U.S. Defense Decision-makers would expect, or in war, when U.S. Defense Decision-makers would also expect the possibility of escalation.

Chapter Four evaluates the logic of preventive war. Preventive war has a long history in Western military history. Preventive wars, like major earthquakes, fortunately are not common. But when they occur, they have a profound effect on the world due to their tremendous cost. If the challenger is successful, the effect is compounded by the challenger’s ability to re-write

the “rules of the road” in international politics—the norms, laws, expectations, and values held by the international community.

- World War I offers the best case in the modern period for the examination of the motives of preventive war. In this case, we have a triad of preventive war motivations.
- The first of these is Germany’s preventive war motivations against Russia. Russian military reforms in the wake of the disastrous Russo-Japanese war, growth in manpower, and French capital investment in Russian railroads and armaments united to make Germany see Russia as a growing threat.
- Likewise, Russia had preventive war motivations against Germany and the Ottoman Empire. St. Petersburg’s concern was that German influence in the Balkans, support for the Ottoman Empire which would permit it to increasingly be better able to resist Russian designs on the Straits, and the decline of Russia’s major ally, France, made conflict with Germany better in the near-term than in the more distant future.
- Great Britain had considerable preventive war motives against Germany due to Germany’s rapid industrialization in the second-half of the Nineteenth-century. The growth in German power translated into Germany’s policy of *Weltpolitik*, or world power status, which reflected Germany’s desire to become a colonial power with a large navy to support its colonial designs.
- Germany was successfully thwarted in its ability to acquire major colonies, but the Naval Laws of 1898 and 1900, authored by Grand Admiral Tirpitz, placed the British and the Germans on a collision course.
- Tirpitz’s strategy was the “risk theory,” or “risk fleet,” a German fleet so large it could substantially weaken the Royal Navy in a war. The

challenge to Britain's naval supremacy was the one element that ensured a profound shift in London's threat assessment.

- Germany was seen as the major threat, and the UK moved to an entente with France in 1904 and Russia in 1907.
- Preventive war concerns affect small states in a regional context as well. The major case here is the Egyptian-Israeli war of 1956.
- With the rise of Nasser, Israel increasingly saw Egypt as its foremost threat. The 1955 arms agreement between Czechoslovakia and Egypt guaranteed the most advanced Soviet weaponry for Egypt, and promised the rapid expansion of its conventional power.
- Israel entered into an agreement with France and Great Britain to attack Egypt, thus permitting Anglo-French intervention to overthrow Nasser. The intervention was terminated after the U.S. withdrew support, but Israel accomplished its objectives of weakening Egypt and securing a reactor and conventional arms from France.
- The historical lessons of preventive war are mixed, both theoretically and empirically. Theoretically, scholars are divided concerning whether the victor or challenger most often starts preventive war and their chances of victory.
- Empirically, when the history of preventive war in European societies is examined, we find that there are fifteen cases of hegemonic struggles since 1500. Of these fifteen, hegemonic war resulted in thirteen.
- In these thirteen cases, we find preventive war motivations present for both the declining hegemon and the rising challenger. The historical cases do reveal that it is usually the challenger who starts the hegemonic war. A lesson from the thirteen cases is that the

challenger seeks conflict too soon, before it has sufficient power to successfully defeat the dominant state.

- The actual cause of the war was typically a crisis such as the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand that provoked the July Crisis, and ultimately World War I.
- However, the cause of the crisis, or other “trigger mechanism” like a military clash of allies, is not defined by the theories used to explain hegemonic war.
- Moreover, theories of preventive war have not been applied to China, and China’s history has not been studied from the perspective of hegemonic wars.

Chapter Five evaluates Chinese perceptions of preventive war. The study makes five major arguments.

The first argument is the recognition of the historical fact: China has been the dominant state in East Asia for most of its 5,000-year history.

- Accordingly, comparatively little Chinese thought has been devoted to understand the circumstances and consequences of preventive war in comparison with their thinking on first strike and preemption.
- Nevertheless, the logic of preventive war is a close twin of the motivations of first strike and preemption as they are concerned with using force to advance and defend the fundamental interests of the state.
- Therefore, much of Chinese strategic thought relates indirectly to the logic of preventive war.

Second, China has explicit considerations of preventive war in its relations with the United States, Japan, and India.

- These considerations are almost always masked by rhetoric that concerns “leadership” and “harmony” or a “harmonious way,” or “harmonious behavior.”

Third, the historical cases of preventive war during the Warring States Period, by the Ming against the Mongols, and the Qing against the Europeans in the Boxer Rebellion, demonstrate preventive war motivations.

Interestingly, at the time of the Boxer Rebellion, Europeans also saw China as a major threat, the “Yellow Peril,” recognizing that if it unified it would have prodigious power, and strove to keep China weak to prevent its rise.

Fourth, there are three major lessons that may be drawn from historical evidence.

- The first of which is there is little variation in motivation for preventive war across the timeline of the Chinese empire. From the Warring States period, through the Mongol threat, to the European threat, the logic of preventive war holds. Thus there is a consistency across time that suggests it remains today, especially as there is not countervailing pressure.
- Second, significantly, there is evidence of Chinese use of preventive war across three conditions of power: rising, stable, or in decline. First, when it is a rising hegemon, in the case of the Qin during the Warring States period, preventive war is selected; second, when it is a stable power, after the Mongol yoke had been thrown off, the Ming wanted to ensure that they could not be challenged again; and third, when they are in obvious decline, they seek to challenge superior military might in order to restore China to its dominant position. This permits the conclusion that China will wage preventive war when it is rising in power, or in a stable position, or in decline.
- Third, the frequency of preventive war executed by China is more notable when we recognize that China has been dominant for most of

its history—it became dominant by 220 B.C. and there have been relatively few significant challengers in its history.

Fifth, when we compare this to the European cases, the study reaches six conclusions.

- First, the study finds that China's willingness to wage preventive war is far higher than European states. Thus, if China's history and strategic culture are prospective, U.S. Defense Decision-makers should expect that preventive war remains a strategic consideration for China.
- Second, European states had significantly more opportunity to contemplate preventive war, given that Europe has not had a hegemon since the creation of the modern state system in 1648. The European situation is almost the reverse of China's, who has held a hegemonic position for most of its history. The European environment had many peer and near-peer challengers throughout its history. Given the potential frequency of hegemonic war, and the fact that it seldom occurred, we may conclude that the balance of power maintained periods of limited wars and limited security competition for most of European history. In this sense, given that they had many chances to wage preventive war, Europeans were more peaceful than the Chinese.
- Third, European states faced a situation like China's today before 1914 when Germany was threatened by the growth of Russian power and challenged, in turn, British power, resulting in World War I.
- Fourth, decision-makers must be sensitive to the fact that the potential for rapid changes in the distribution of power, due to internal collapse or rapid modernization or exogenous shock, may present China with the motivation to attack now, as Israel did in 1956, because the future is politically unacceptable.

- Fifth, China's lack of recent experience with preventive war is dangerous. The United States and Europe have the example of World War I foremost in their experience. Leaders recognize that preventive war is a highly dangerous strategic choice, as World War I was supremely costly for all states involved. China does not have a similar historical experience. This conceptual, historical, and practical unfamiliarity with preventive war may embolden China, and encourage it to take greater risks, viewing it as an enticing and viable strategy to resolve China's strategic problems, and thus pose a more significant challenge to the United States, Japan, and India.
- Sixth, like the European powers before World War I, China confronts a strategic conundrum on the timing of preventive war. If the foe is perceived to be in decline due to the "propensity of things," made possible by *shi* as Jullien identified, there may be a reduced motivation for preventive war if China continues to grow. However, if the enemy is increasing in strength, the "propensity of things" is on its side, and there is greater motivation for action—preventive war—by China to reverse that strategic situation.
- China's key strategic problem is that it faces both situations. The United States and Japan are in relative decline, but India is on the rise. This is a complicated strategic situation. Logic would suggest that India would be the target of preventive war because it is on the rise. However, India and the United States have a tacit alliance, and even if they did not, China would have to assume that the U.S. would react to a preventive war against India. The strength of that deterrent must be significant.

Chapter Six presents the twelve implications for United States decision-makers.

First, the historical lessons of first strike, preemption, and preventive war need to be at the forefront of United States Defense Decision-makers'

evaluations of China's strategic choices because strategic surprise succeeds, as the course of history has shown us.

Second, preventive war logic is a consistent consideration in international politics.

Third, United States Defense Decision-Makers must be alert to the "Fog of Peace" and mirror imaging, both of which pose a considerable danger. The "Fog of Peace" is the assumption that what was true in the past remains true in the present strategic situation. Applied to China, it is the mistaken assumption that the Chinese will not attack first because they have not done so already. There is also the risk of mirror imaging. Due to its authoritarian politics and history, the Chinese are capable of actions the United States is not. The danger arises when United States Defense Decision-makers are not sufficiently sensitive to the lack of constraints the Chinese face when contemplating a bold move, such as a first strike or preemption. The Chinese have fewer institutional barriers or normative restraints to undertaking these actions.

Fourth, Chinese execute first strikes and preemption frequently in war. These actions occur often in their military history.

Fifth, the United States should expect that first strike logic will prevail for China in pre-crisis and crisis situations, as well as during war.

Sixth, surprise, first strike (kinetic or non-kinetic), and preemption are key aspects of deception in warfare as identified by Chinese strategic texts and are seen as strategic asymmetries by the Chinese leadership.

Seventh, the review of the evidence reveals that China will execute first strikes, preempt, or wage preventive war when it is the weaker or the stronger power.

Eighth, the Chinese view preventive war as a viable option, and this must not be dismissed or discounted by United States Defense Decision-makers for five reasons. First, the Chinese do not reject preventive war. Second, China

sees itself as the center of the universe, all others are inferior with varying degrees of inferiority. This racist, solipsistic and ethnocentric view of the world makes preventive war considerations more likely, and echo German loathing and fear of Russia before 1914. Third, when the body of Chinese strategic thought is reviewed, there are many cases where striking first against potential threats is considered. Fourth, United States Defense Decision-makers must recognize that China does not possess the institutional or ideological barriers to waging preventive war. Fifth, the Chinese are in a unique position in their history.

Ninth, significant dangers for the U.S. and stability in Asia result from China's conception of preventive war. It introduces major challenges for the United States in two major respects, both of which revolve around the uncertain future of continued Chinese economic growth. First, if Chinese economic growth weakens, its strategic choice will be informed by its expectations about the future but a difficult one, to confront the United States before it declines further, or delay action with the expectation that its growth will return. Second, if Chinese economic growth remains positive, albeit not at the levels the world has witnessed in the last decades, the Chinese strategic choice will be for confrontation, and the central issue becomes a matter of how to do so most effectively and when to do so. The "when" question is heavily informed by its understanding of the rapidity of the U.S. decline and U.S. willpower.

Tenth, China's strategic considerations are informed by their perceptions of U.S. and Indian power. Chinese conceptions of preventive war are clouded by perceptions about whether the United States is in a gradual decline in relative power or a much steeper one. The same is true for the major U.S. allies like Japan. The attitude toward India is informed by Chinese conceptions about the rapidity of India's rise. There is no question that the balance in relative power between the United States and China is changing in China's favor. The Chinese calculus of when to wage preventive war against the United States is governed by two major causes. First, their expectation of the rapidity of U.S. decline. Second, it is by their expectation of whether U.S. decline may be reversed—perhaps by its technological prowess or other

mechanism—or whether it will encompass significant periods of growth in the course of an overall decline. The same concerns inform Beijing’s view of New Delhi.

Eleventh, China faces a multiple preventive war front. United States Defense Decision-makers must be cognizant that China is both challenger and challenged. This is a strategic conundrum that occurs rarely, and bodes ill for stability in Asia. China will face profound temptations to confront the United States and/or India. The closest historical comparison is with Germany before World War I.

Twelfth, the Chinese attitude toward preventive war will evolve as China becomes more powerful. Chinese leadership will become more receptive to preventive war as a viable choice for confronting the strategic problems it perceives, while providing it with a solution for becoming the dominant state in the international system.

The study’s fundamental conclusion is that the Chinese have a strong proclivity toward first strike and preemption, and an evolving view concerning preventive war. United States Defense Decision-makers should expect that Chinese views about these strategic choices increase the likelihood of conflict with U.S. allies or with the United States itself. United States Defense Decision-makers and other United States Government decision-makers should call attention to Chinese proclivities to escalate as soon as possible: first, to inform the international community of this risk; second, to increase the costs to China of doing so; and third, to prepare USG and its allies for these likely Chinese strategic choices.

Chapter One Introduction

The most potent thing in war is the unexpected.
Julius Caesar

It is pardonable to be defeated, but never to be surprised.
Frederick the Great

All states make strategic choices to address the threats they face and to advance their interests. In the context of the present study, strategic refers to the purpose and context of the attack, not the nature of the actors or the weapons. These choices include attacking an opponent to achieve these objectives, or waiting to be attacked. Striking the first blow has considerable advantages.¹ Analyzing the logic of first strike through a strategic lens reveals that there are five major advantages to the first strike. The first is the ultimate prize, the possibility of a quick and decisive victory. This has been the Holy Grail for strategists throughout the ages, and is the major reason a state resorts to this military instrument in an attack—to vanquish the enemy rapidly and with decisive result. This promise has led to the origin of more

¹ The twin of the first strike is surprise, and this study assumes that surprise is maintained to make the execution of the first strike possible.

wars than probably any other cause in history.² In essence, the first strike may cause the strategic implosion of the victim, leaving him at the hands and mercy of the victor.

Second, it also places the first move in the hands of that actor, and this, in turn, removes strategic doubt and yields strategic initiative. Third, moving first also is a force multiplier, and allows a weaker side to offset the stronger by choosing the time and place of the initiation of conflict.³ Fourth, the first strike eliminates the costs of facing a fully alerted adversary, and, fifth, the chances that attacking side will be preempted by the alerted opponent.

² While coercion is a well-studied concept in international politics, first strike and preemption are not. On coercion, see Lawrence Freedman, ed., *Strategic Coercion: Concepts and Cases* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Kenneth A. Schultz, *Democracy and Coercive Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966); Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960); Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996); Alexander George, *Forceful Persuasion: Coercive Diplomacy as an Alternative to War* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1991).

³ This is emphasized in Michael Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought*, 3rd ed. (London: Frank Cass, 2001); and Edward Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

On the other hand, the costs can quickly exceed the advantages. By starting a conflict, the die is cast, and the state advances down a path the result of which is uncertain and may be disastrous.

A review of the history reveals a dark secret of international politics: striking first works. The surprise first strike is an excellent solution to resolve a state's strategic problems, and is one that allows the state concerned to have some degree, if not perfect control, of the situation. The payoff is so large that it will always remain as a foremost solution to the problems statesmen face. It must be said that it is attractive for others outside the realm of international politics, whether it is the St. Valentine's massacre, where South Side Chicago gangsters under Al Capone eliminated the threat of the North Side George "Bugs" Moran gang, or Apple introducing the iPod or iPhone shortly before its competition to establish market dominance. Moving first works in any competitive realm, and for that reason it will remain the most attractive solution to the problems competitive entities—be they gangs, football teams, or states—confront.

Within in Western political thought, there is a proclivity to dismiss or denigrate surprise, perceiving it instead as deceptive and duplicitous. This bias hinders Western strategists and decision-makers as they seek to understand Chinese strategy. The Chinese have no such tradition or belief.

Deception is a perfectly legitimate strategy, and is considered to be morally neutral. That is to say, one should expect it and use it in turn.

The study defines first strike as an opening attack to deliver a blow or shock (*Frappe*) with strategic purpose, ideally to result in victory, or to place the foe in a significantly disadvantageous strategic position. Such a strike may lead to escalation or result in de-escalation, and the attack may be a limited strike or total one, and be kinetic, non-kinetic or both. First strike is often associated with the failure of nuclear deterrence, and, indeed, that is an important sub-category of the concept.⁴ But, of course, the strategic concept is an ancient one.

Striking first when one strongly suspects the other side is about to attack is preemption. The perception may be accurate, partially accurate or incorrect. Preemption may also be limited or total, and kinetic, non-kinetic, or both.

For the international community, this is less odious than a naked first strike because there is the defensive aspect present, and that defensive aspect can make all of the difference for outside observers. The classic case is Israel in the Six Day War of 1967. While there is controversy about

⁴ An interesting consideration of the motivations and consequences of a nuclear first strike is George H. Quester, *Nuclear First Strike: Consequences of a Broken Taboo* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

whether Nasser was actually going to attack, Israel's preemption was perceived as a necessary solution to a hard strategic situation, one in which Nasser himself put in motion when he blockaded the Straits of Tiran and ordered UN peacekeeping forces to withdrawal from the Sinai.

A third strategic solution to the problems statesmen face is preventive war. Like first strike or preemption, preventive war is taking the strategic initiative to change the status quo by waging war against a weaker opponent now, rather than waiting for the opponent to grow stronger. Better to fight today when one is stronger, than tomorrow when one is less strong and one's foe stronger. German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck famously dismissed preventive war as "committing suicide for fear of death." However, while death is certain, losing a preventive war is not, and, again like first strike and preemption, it offers the promise of solving strategic problems. Preventive war is typically hegemonic, or a major war involving all or most of the great powers, although it need not be. Usually, the declining state initiates a war to negate an adverse change in relative power. The logic is understandable, war today is better than war tomorrow when the state will be relatively weaker than at present.

However, preventive war may also include conflict initiation by a rising, or challenging power. At first, this seems counterintuitive. If time is

on its side, why would a state take a chance and start a war when it will inherit all of the spoils of conquest simply by waiting. Unfortunately, there are two problems with the assumption of certainty. First, there is no guarantee that the dominant state will fall of its own accord—it may, in essence, need to be pushed by a challenger. Second, internal dynamics or politics of the challenger may make it impatient, and impetuously start a conflict to hasten the change the challenger desires.⁵ In fact, the review of the historical record of preventive wars between great powers demonstrates that challengers most often start preventive wars, and sometimes they win.

The use of preventive war by a challenger is of great concern today regarding China. Historically preventive wars have been kinetic, but non-kinetic aspects may be included today. These aspects may be direct or indirect, such as using cyber warfare to transfer wealth or military technology to the rising state. Logically, most of these indirect aspects would involve the challenger transferring knowledge, such as military technology, because the dominant state would have superior military capabilities. Seen through that lens, and used in that intent by China, cyber warfare should be

⁵ Ludwig Dehio makes this argument about Germany before World War I. See Ludwig Dehio, *Germany and World Politics in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1959).

thought of as an aspect of preventive war executed by the challenger against the dominant states.

Thus, these strategic options possess a scintillating and sound logic. That is why they have been favored throughout history. In addition to their strategic attractiveness, they can be made more likely by opportunities present in the international system, or by the aspects of states themselves. In sum, bad states and bad leaders are more likely to resort to these options than democracies. That fact alone is reason to be pessimistic about the future of the Sino-American security competition.

I. The Logic of First Strike and Preemption

The logic of first strike is transparent and holds across strategic space and time, from the ancient Greeks to states in the present international system. As introduced above, there are five reasons a state may adopt these strategies.

The first is the ultimate prize, the possibility of a quick and decisive victory. The first strike may produce both a momentum for the attacker and inability to respond by the defender, which, in turn, causes his strategic implosion. This is what proponents of first strikes desire and this is what is equally tempting and enticing. If it can work, it resolves the problem in an ideal manner for the attacker.

Second, it also places the first move in the hands of that actor, and this, in turn, removes strategic doubt and yields strategic initiative. Going first is going first; the victim is forced to react to the confines of the attack. Everything else being equal, white wins in chess more often because it moves first.

Third, moving first also is a force multiplier, and allows a weaker side to offset the stronger, although it is beneficial as well if the attacking side is stronger. Landing the first blow allows the attacker to concentrate at a place and time that should be most advantageous from a strategic perspective.

Fourth, in most cases, the first strike eliminates the costs of facing a fully alerted adversary. The opponent should be unprepared for the attack militarily but in other aspects as well. Politically, the victim will not have had time to coordinate with allies or mobilize the resources of the population and state. In a psychological sense, the shock of the first strike will be great, as Americans witnessed on 9/11, or so demoralizing as to lead to collapse of the state. For example, Stalin and Molotov's reaction to the German invasion in 1941 was to have a profound crisis of confidence about whether the Soviet Union would survive.

Fifth, a first strike also eliminates the chances that one's side will be preempted by an alerted opponent.⁶ Striking first eliminates that danger, and allows the battlefield to be set to the conditions most amenable to the aggressor.

With respect to the component of surprise, broadly, there are three elements as identified by strategists Klaus Knorr and Patrick Morgan: "the unexpected initiation of hostilities, the unexpected extension of war to a new theater, or the use of an unexpected mode of warfare."⁷

Delving into the concept of surprise more deeply, whether surprise will be successful depends on if the attacker can control the victim's perception of threat. Ideally, the best strategy would be one in which the would-be surprise controls the victim's sense of vulnerability, concern over areas where the surprise will be staged and the degree of tension and mistrust. However, it is unreasonable to expect a would-be surprise to possess the ability to affect all three components. Therefore, before choosing a strategy, the actor must carefully assess the kind of environmental

⁶ Barton Whaley, *Codeword BARBAROSSA* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1973).

⁷ Klaus Knorr and Patrick Morgan, "Strategic Surprise: An Introduction," in Klaus Knorr and Patrick Morgan, eds., *Strategic Military Surprise: Incentives and Opportunities* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1983), pp. 1-7, 2.

constraints he must overcome in order to achieve surprise, and determine whether he has the means to surmount them.

II. The Logic of Preventive War

But, while authoritarian states start a greater number of preventive wars, there is no guarantee that only bad states will launch them. Democratic states too may start these wars for sound strategic reasons. The British entered World War I with preventive war motivations. They believed they were compelled to go to war with Germany in 1914 due to what London believed was the inexorable growth of German power that was explicitly designed to challenge Britain's interests, better known as Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz's "risk theory," or "risk fleet". The possibility of resolving a strategic situation to its great favor and eliminating the great threat to its power and status makes preventive war an option for states irrespective of political systems.

However, preventive war is fraught with risks, and the decision to launch it may entail the destruction of its author, or, worse, its weakening, which would introduce "the dilemma of the victor's inheritance," the irony that a successful war may so drain the state that a third state may benefit. A contemporary example would be were China and the United States to fight a

war, the victor would have so weakened itself that “victory” would aid India’s relative power.

When we consider China, we can acutely perceive the danger of preventive war for three major reasons. First, China faces the systemic opportunity to challenge the United States. There is no other peer competitor to the United States, nor is there any other state with the prospect of becoming so, other than India as a distant third. India does not pose a threat to the United States due to its material power at this time, its democratic political system, and its strategic orientation toward China and Pakistan.

Second, China also has a long history of engaging in first strikes or preemption that does not vary by regime type within the authoritarian context. That is, dynastic China is as likely as Communist China to execute a first strike to initiate war. China’s receptivity to these options is also heavily informed by its strategic thought which has categorized these strategic choices for Chinese leaders in its history.

Third, from the perspective of the Chinese leadership, China confront the strategic situation, which is the opportunity to attack the opponent for defensive reasons—but more likely offensive reasons—to advance its goals, and diminish or eliminate the power of the foe. These opportunities are not

constant, and indeed are rather rare. They arise as a result of the distribution of power, domestic conditions within China and conditions within the foe, including regime stability and the military effectiveness of the Chinese and the opposing army, as well as choices by the Chinese leadership and the leaders of the enemy.

III. The Assumptions of the Study

This study makes four assumptions. The first is that China will not waiver in its desire or ability to confront the United States. This is a solid assumption. As I have shown in previous work, the desire to confront the United States is so strong as to be unyielding. There is greater doubt about the ability of China to confront the United States due to likely economic downturn as a result of domestic causes, such as economic bubbles and structural and environmental problems in its economy. China's economic growth is slow, but due to its hegemonic ambitions, the reduced growth is only likely to extend the time needed to equal, and then surpass, the economic, diplomatic, and military power of the United States.

Second, despite rhetoric about a "peaceful rise" and a "harmonious order," Chinese leadership will be no exception to the iron law of international politics: first strike, preemption and preventive wars are the acme of strategy in the right conditions. Therefore, this study assumes that

China will recognize the strategic value of first strikes, preemption, and preventive war in the correct circumstances.

Third, the study postulates that preventive war by the challenger is a viable option in contemporary international politics. It is easy to dismiss preventive war as strategically maladaptive due to the risks inherent in such a strategy. This attitude is unwarranted and reflects a Western bias. It is unwarranted because preventive war has been a successful strategy in the past and remains so today. Second, the dismissal of preventive war as an unthinkable act by Westerners due to its risks, or its violations of norms of behavior, reflects a Western bias. Preventive war has been a strategic option for political units across time. A myriad of states have chosen it, and even more have contemplated it, including liberal states. Therefore, there is no reason to suspect that China rejects preventive war considerations as a challenger to the United States, or by the challenge posed by India. Analysts in the United States, India, and elsewhere must recognize that China's strategic position is a doubly dangerous one, as it is both the challenger and the challenged in international politics today.

Fourth, the study assumes that the "nuclear revolution" does not overturn strategy and strategic considerations. While the presence of nuclear weapons complicates strategic relationships by increasing the costs

of war, it does not make war impossible for an opponent willing to bear its costs, and for one willing to execute a decapitating or disarming first strike against the opponent. Indeed, the great concern during the Cold War was that the Soviets would be able to execute a successful first strike, and this strategic concern was a prime driver in the strategic force posture of the United States. Today, with a greatly reduced U.S. strategic arsenal, there is the danger that China might race to parity or superiority over the United States. A China at near-parity, parity, or superior in strategic forces would be expected to be a more assertive state, and one where threat of a first strike against the United States would permanently remove American hegemony from East Asia. In addition, nuclear weapons do not prevent security competitions that may result in war due to intentional or inadvertent escalation.⁸

Accordingly, the assumption that nuclear weapons will deter the execution of a first strike, preemption, or preventive war is misplaced. Indeed, if an opponent is seen as vulnerable, nuclear weapons may even embolden an adversary to attack. Because the “nuclear revolution” does not overturn strategy, the study is justified in assuming that it will not affect strategic decision-making.

⁸ See Barry R. Posen, *Inadvertent Escalation: Conventional War and Nuclear Risks* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992).

Finally, a note on the manner in which this academic study is conceived is required. Considerations of first strike and preemption center around two factors: capabilities and intentions. A state must have the capabilities to execute a first strike or preemption. These capabilities traditionally have been kinetic, but may also be non-kinetic, or a combination of both. The introduction of non-kinetic technologies—cyber attacks and cyber weapons, or a computer code that is used, or designed to be used, with the aim of threatening or causing physical, functional, or mental harm to structures, systems, or humans—has greatly broadened the number of states that may launch these attacks. While their effectiveness may be limited, uncertain, or have considerable spillover effects on the state attacked, its allies, and all states connected to its economic infrastructure, they are also capable of doing great damage.⁹ At the same time, kinetic means are more significant as they are able to produce permanent effects on civilian and military lives, weapon systems, infrastructures, and allies.

⁹ A discussion debating the effects of cyberattacks includes: Adam P. Liff, "Cyberwar: A New 'Absolute Weapon'? The Proliferation of Cyberwarfare Capabilities and Interstate War," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 3, (June 2012), pp. 401-428; Adam P. Liff, "The Proliferation of Cyberwarfare Capabilities and Interstate War, Redux: Liff Responds to Junio," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (February 2013), pp. 134-138; Thomas Rid, "Cyber War Will Not Take Place," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (February 2011), pp. 5-32; and Thomas Rid, *Cyberwar Will Not Take Place* (London: Hurst, 2013).

IV. The Methodology of the Study

The study uses a structured, focused case study approach and cross case comparisons to define the motivations of first strike, preemption, and preventive war. It relies on within case explanation to identify: 1) the reasons that states have opted for first strike, preemption, and preventive war; 2) the factors that cause leaders to choose these strategies; and 3) the extent to which these actions contribute to success. The principal mode of investigation used by this study is historical process tracing and contemporary textual analysis.¹⁰ Through this methodology, the investigator attempts to identify the intervening steps or links that might exist between the cause and effect in each case.

The surprise necessary for a successful first strike can be gained via a coordinated campaign of deception designed to mislead the victim's analysis. Deception, in its narrowest sense, implies ruse, trickery, guile, false information, and decoy objects or analysis. For present purposes, deception will mean an attempt to mislead a potential victim through the manipulation, distortion, falsification, camouflage, concealment, or cover of evidence in

¹⁰ Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997). A shorter and more lively and readable classic, one likely to be appreciated by non-professional scholars, is E. H. Carr, *What Is History?* (New York: Vintage, 1961).

order to induce him to react in a manner prejudicial to his interests and favorable to his attacker's objectives.

Deception is often defined in the active sense—that is, as viewed by the practitioner rather than in terms of its effect on the intended victim.

Conversely, surprise is defined as an effect, as viewed by the victim.

This study does not find that distinction acceptable. It agrees with the contention that surprise ought to be viewed from the perspective of the victim so long as it is ascertained that surprise was intended. On the other hand, if deception is viewed solely from the perspective of the practitioner, it is hard to argue that the victim was surprised because he was deceived and not because of internal impediment to information processing in his decision-making. That is, deception must be viewed in terms of the means employed by the practitioner and the effects they had on the intended victim. Circular reasoning will not follow so long as deception and surprise are conceptualized differently.

Surprise may be formulated in terms of its six dimensions. Surprise will refer to those instances in which the intentions of states, the rationales for the actions, the capabilities used in the actions, the military doctrines that dictated the use of those capabilities, the targets of the actions, and/or the timing of the actions were inaccurately predicted or estimated by the targets.

The next task is the specification of the cases that will be used in the analysis and the rationale for selecting them. Since the commencement of the modern period in international politics, the start of World War II, there have been 21 major cases of surprise attacks or preemption.¹¹ A major case is an attack of significant surprise in international politics—significant surprise is a case directly concerning the great powers or superpowers through their involvement; or, like the Yom Kippur War of 1973, the attack directly affects superpower interests. The cases are:

- 1) German invasion of Poland, 1939;
- 2) German invasion of Denmark and Norway, 1940;
- 3) German invasion of Belgium, France, and the Netherlands, 1941;
- 4) German invasion of Russia, 1941;
- 5) Japan's attack of Pearl Harbor and other American and British possessions in the Pacific and East and Southeast Asia, 1941;
- 6) The Soviet invasion of Japanese-occupied Manchuria, 1945;
- 7) North Korean invasion of South Korea, 1950;
- 8) Chinese intervention in Korea, 1950;
- 9) Soviet invasion of Hungary, 1956;

¹¹ The list does not include all cases of surprise attack since 1939. Other notable cases are the Israeli attack on Egypt in 1956; Pakistan's attack on India in 1971; Iraq's attack on Iran in 1980; the Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands in 1982; and, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.

- 10) The Bay of Pigs invasion, 1961;
- 11) Chinese invasion of India, 1962
- 12) Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962;
- 13) Israeli attack on Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, 1967;
- 14) Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, 1968;
- 15) Egyptian-Syrian attack on Israel, 1973;
- 16) China's invasion of Vietnam, 1979;
- 17) Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, 1979;
- 18) U.S. invasion of Grenada, 1983;
- 19) U.S. invasion of Panama, 1989;
- 20) al Qaeda attack against the U.S. and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan, 2001;
- 21) U.S. invasion of Iraq, 2003.

Thus, there is a significant number of first strike and preemptive attacks in the contemporary period of international politics. Indeed, most wars begin with a surprise first strike, and have throughout history. Significantly, these attacks are conventional.

The one category of first strike missing from the list is a nuclear first strike or preemptive attack, and this study will not consider the logic of nuclear first strikes or preemption. As stated above in the discussion of the

study's assumptions, the strategic soundness of first strike, or preemption in the appropriate circumstances, is likely to result in a nuclear first strike, despite the high costs to the victim of such an attack. Analysts should expect that the fundamental strategic logic of attacking first, or of preempting your opponent will, in time, trump the deterrent force of nuclear weapons in a dyad of nuclear states.

For this study, five instances of first strike were selected:

first, the Royal Navy's attack on Copenhagen harbor in 1801 and 1807; Second, the Soviet moves against Japan at Nomonhan in the summer of 1939, moves against Finland in 1939, and against Romania and the Baltic states; third, the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941; fourth, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941; and, fifth, the Israeli attack against the Egyptian-Syrian-Jordanian forces in June 1967.

With respect to preventive war, there are fewer cases in the modern period. Five cases were selected: first, Imperial Germany's strategic motivations against Russia; second, Imperial Germany's strategic motivations against Great Britain; third, Russian strategic motivations against Germany; fourth, British strategic motivations against Germany; and, fifth, Israeli strategic motivation against Egypt in 1956.

Five factors determined the selection of the cases. First, these are cases that are well studied, defined, and analyzed. Therefore, in these cases, the causes and conduct of state behavior is clearly established. Second, they are successful cases of first strike and preemption that provide sufficient fodder for generalizations about why leaders of states choose these actions. Third, the cases permit excellent tests due to cross case variation in state actors (for example, western states like the UK, as well as China) and degree of success, which allows us to better determine when the Chinese leadership are likely to execute these strategic choices. Fourth, the major historical cases are as identified to establish the baseline of strategic motivation and the conditions of strategic success to determine rigorously when the Chinese leadership will act. Fifth, using this baseline, we will be able to conduct a textual analysis of the likelihood of these strategic choices based on Chinese texts and actions.

The study's conclusion is that the strategic logic of each is universal but there are key Chinese influences based on their history of aggression and strategic culture that makes China's use of first strike and preemption likely. The Chinese are also more likely to think of preventive war opportunities against the United States.

Chapter Two

The Conceptual Framework and Historical Cases of First Strike and Preemption

This chapter advances two major objectives. First, it provides the conceptual framework for first strike and preemption and, second, considers the historical cases of first strike and preemption in order to establish a baseline to be used in the discussion of how the Chinese perceive these strategic choices. This study does not examine all cases of surprise attack in international politics, but addresses major cases like the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 and the Japanese attack against Pearl Harbor, as well as significant, but neglected cases like the war between Japan and the Soviet Union at Nomonhan in 1939.¹²

I. The Conceptual Framework

At the outset of the discussion of first strike and preemption, there are three major components to discuss. First, first strike and preemption are strategic choices inextricably linked to surprise. Surprise, in turn, revolves around

¹² Roberta Wohlstetter's analysis remains an excellent consideration. Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1962).

four factors: 1) whether an attack will actually happen; 2) its timing; 3) its location; and 4) the way or manner in which it will be executed.¹³

I. A. Failure to Anticipate an Attack

Whether an attack is expected is dependent on the grand strategic objectives of the attacker and whether the victim can correctly ascertain them, that is, whether it has a correct threat perception. A state's threat perception will be determined to a large degree by the amount of security competition, and estimates of the enemy's capabilities and intentions. In most contexts, the likelihood that no attack would occur or should not be expected is almost zero. Total surprise is very rare. This is because, as Ephraim Kam explains in his classic study, total surprise would mean that "the victim's most basic conceptions about the attacker and himself had proved totally wrong; that no tension was recognized to exist between the two parties prior to the attack; and that the attacker had managed to conceal both his intentions and his military preparations so completely that no significant early warning indicators were available to the victim."¹⁴ What happens far more frequently is that the state attacked will know that an attack was a possibility, even if it conceives of it as not likely, and the fault for its surprise lies elsewhere.

¹³ Ephraim Kam, *Surprise Attack: The Victim's Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 12.

¹⁴ Kam, *Surprise Attack*, p. 13.

I. B. Failure to Determine When an Attack Will Occur

Failure to anticipate when an attack will occur is probably the most common reason for successful surprise attacks. The timing of the attack is clouded by the victim's recognition that a threat exists and fully understands that the risk of war is present, but is surprised when an attack is launched earlier, or later, than expected. All of the first strikes considered since 1939 have involved a surprise related to timing of the attack. For example, Stalin knew that war with Germany was inevitable, but believed that he had many months, if not a year, to prepare for it. Secretary of State Dean Acheson claimed that although there was a measure of concern about the possibility of a North Korean attack on South Korea, it did not seem imminent in the summer of 1950. In 1973, Israeli intelligence estimated that the Arabs would be in a position to attack Israel sometime in 1975 or 1976, while Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan claimed in July 1973 that no general war was expected in the next ten years.¹⁵

There are various reasons for erroneous estimates of the timing of an attack. Often, the victim believes that the military balance is so strong in his

¹⁵ Chaim Herzog, *The War of Atonement* (Tel Aviv: Steimatzky, 1975), p. 41; Haim Bar-Lev, "Surprise and the Yom Kippur War," in Louis Williams, ed., *Military Aspects of the Israeli-Arab Conflict* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Publishing Projects, 1975), p. 261.

favor that his opponent needs more time to get ready for war. This was the case with the Israeli estimate of 1973. The victim also commonly tends to believe that the current political circumstances do not enable the enemy to attack. A related kind of erroneous estimate of the enemy's timing occurs when the victim believes that his opponent seeks to meet his strategic objectives by other means such as covert action, or that he would resort to military force only after other attempts, such as diplomacy, had failed. Stalin believed that Hitler would first try political blackmail before resorting to war. Alternatively, the victim may believe that the optimal time to launch a war has already passed. A U.S. intelligence estimate of the situation in Korea dated October 28, 1950, state that "with victorious U.S. divisions in full deployment, it would appear that the auspicious time for [Chinese] intervention had long since passed."¹⁶ In addition, the victim may find it difficult to pinpoint the timing of the attack because the enemy's own schedule has changed. Barton Whaley found that in sixty-seven strategic surprises, the attack actually began on schedule in only twenty-six.¹⁷

¹⁶ Roy Appleman, *U.S. Army in the Korean War: South to the Naktong, North to the Yalu* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1961), p. 761. Also see John Spanier, *The Truman-MacArthur Controversy and the Korean War* (New York: Norton, 1965), p. 98; and David Rees, *Korea: The Limited War* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1970), p. 111.

¹⁷ Barton Whaley, *Stratagem: Deception and Surprise in War* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Center for International Studies, 1969), p. 177.

Surprise relating to the timing of an attack is a matter of degree as well. If the victim believes that the possibility of war will come in many months or years, the surprise is likely to be very great and his military preparedness will be at a low level.

I. C. Failure to Anticipate Where an Attack Will Occur

The victim may also be surprised where the attack is launched. Although war may be expected, the attack might be far away from the expected theater of operations. Surprise concerning location can occur either when the opponent has the option of attacking several states or when the attacked state is a relatively large one. The classic case of this type of attack is the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. On the eve of the attack, a list of feasible targets estimated by United States analysts included the Burma Road, Thailand, Malaya, the Netherlands East Indies, the Philippines, and the Russian Maritime provinces. Hawaii and other American territories were not included even as potential targets.¹⁸ The same mistake was made by the French, who believed that the Ardennes were impassible. Likewise, the British commander in Singapore believed in 1941 that a Japanese landing on the mainland in Johore with the objective of launching an attack on Singapore

¹⁸ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack*, 79th Cong., 2nd Sess. (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1946), p. 390.

would, due to the conditions on the ground and the thick jungle, be so difficult that the Japanese would never attempt it. Finally, before the Chinese intervention in Korea, the United States assumed that if China were to attack, it would most likely push into Southeast Asia or attack Taiwan.¹⁹

There are two specific reasons for surprise regarding location. First, there is an erroneous analysis by the victim pertaining to the terrain or the enemy's capabilities that results in the conclusion that the attacker would be incapable of overcoming the obstacle. Second, the victim may misjudge the motives and intentions of the enemy, especially when there is an option for attacking more than one country. This was the case in 1940 when it was not clear whether Hitler intended to attack France, Belgium, or the Netherlands. Again in 1941, when it was not clear whether he would attack Great Britain or the Soviet Union, or, similarly, whether Japan would continue to move against Southeast Asian countries or U.S. possessions.

At a strategic level, surprise regarding how the attack is carried out occurs when the means and methods used by the enemy render its military operation more feasible than expected. The victim's perception of the future battlefield may be wrong if he misjudges critical components such as the nature of the anticipated conflict (e.g., covert action, guerrilla warfare,

¹⁹ Glenn Paige, *The Korean Decision* (New York: Free Press, 1968), p. 172.

conventional warfare, or nuclear warfare), the size and type of forces employed, the doctrine and tactics used, and the weapon systems and technological capabilities involved.²⁰

I. D. Failure to Anticipate the Means of an Attack

The main cause of surprise regarding means lies in innovations developed by the enemy, either in technology, or in doctrine and tactics, that increase the enemy's capabilities beyond what was known or assumed by the victim.

Innovations may surprise in two ways. First, the victim does not know about the developing innovation because of the lack of information or because of the misinterpretation of information. For example, the U.S. Navy assumed that, due to its shallow waters, the fleet anchored in Pearl Harbor could not be attacked by air-launched torpedoes. As far as the U.S. Navy knew, the minimum depth for an air-launched attack was about sixty feet, whereas the depth of Pearl Harbor was only thirty to forty feet.

The second way in which innovations may surprise occurs when the existence of a technical or doctrinal development is known to the victim but its use and full impact in combat comes as a surprise. The Israelis were well informed about the Soviet supplied Sagger anti-tank missiles possessed by

²⁰ Kam, *Surprise Attack*, p. 18.

the Egyptians, but the impact of their large-scale use on the battlefield came as a shock nonetheless.

Of course, the classic case of this type of surprise was German operational maneuver, or Blitzkrieg. Blitzkrieg illustrated that a higher degree of surprise may occur when the victim misperceives the very nature of the coming war. The victim has based the central conceptions of his defense on faulty assumptions. There are various reasons for this level of surprise. It can be the outcome of prolonged ignorance of revolutionary doctrinal innovations or an accumulation of severe misjudgments with regard to technological developments. It may also reflect a basic misperception concerning the enemy's ability to conduct modern warfare.

The degree of surprise centered on the German maneuver warfare attack against France in 1940, and then later against the Soviet Union, was revolutionary. Of course, the allies had been aware of the technical capabilities of tanks, but were surprised by armored units operating independently from infantry divisions and with coordinated air support. Thus, the Soviets believed that the Germans would not attempt a Blitzkrieg on a front so broad and so open to counterattack. The Soviets assumed that the main German force would be engaged only after several days, or even

longer, of probing frontier battles.²¹ Similarly, the appearance of Japanese tanks in Malaya came as a great surprise to the British, who insisted that tanks could never operate in a jungle and, thus, did not have a single tank in Malaya. As it happened, the Japanese tanks moved easily between the spacious rows of rubber trees with the result that “the Japanese speed of movement, their ability to overcome obstacles and their bold use of tanks, came as a complete surprise.”²²

As we have seen, four main questions form the basis of the victim’s expectations of surprise attack: 1) whether an attack will occur; 2) when it will; 3) where it will; and 4) how it will be launched. In each case, it is possible to distinguish between high and low degrees of expectation and hence surprise.

Table 1 demonstrates, first, that the degree of surprise and the aspects of surprise attack vary from case to case. Second, we see that a high degree

²¹ Richard Betts, “Surprise without Warning: Why Sudden Attacks Succeed,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 95, No. 4 (Winter 1980), pp. 551-572, 569; Klaus Knorr, “Strategic Surprise in Four European Wars,” in Klaus Knorr and Patrick Morgan, eds., *Strategic Military Surprise: Incentives and Opportunities* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1983), p. 30; and John Erickson, “Threat Identification and Strategic Appraisal by the Soviet Union, 1930-1941,” in Ernest May, ed., *Knowing One’s Enemies: Intelligence Assessment before the Two World Wars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 418.

²² Major-General S. Woodburn Kirby, *The War Against Japan*, Vol. 1, *The Loss of Singapore* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1957), p. 211.

of surprise concerning the actual occurrence of war is relatively rare; when it does happen, it is usually because the states involved had no history of hostility. Low-degree misjudgment as to the occurrence of war is more common. This may happen either when the victim has never been attacked by that enemy, or when the enemy has an option of attacking another country.

Table 1 also shows that surprise over timing is the most familiar case: it happened in all of the cases considered. Thus, an important postulate in modern warfare is that surprise in timing is the most vital aspect of successful surprise attack, and is probably the easiest to achieve as it is in the hands of the attacker.

We see that in most cases the victim was surprised by more than one aspect of the attack. This is not incidental. Erroneous assumptions about whether the attack will occur can lead to mistaken expectations about its timing, location, and the way it is executed.

I. E. A Note on Strategic Warning

Advance warning is the vital link connecting intelligence assessment with countermeasures to enhance readiness and avoid surprise. Without adequate advance warning, military preparedness can never be sufficient to

Table 1
The Cases and the Four Aspects of Surprise Attack

Case	Whether	When	Where	How
Norway 1940	High	High	High	None
France, 1940	None	Low	Low	Low
Holland, 1940	None	Low	Low	High
Russia, 1941	None	High	Low	Low
Hawaii, 1941	Low	High	High	High
Singapore, 1942	High	High	High	High
N. Korea, 1950	Low	Low	None	Low
China, 1950	High	High	Low	Low
Hungary, 1956	High	High	Low	Low
Cuba, 1961	High	High	High	Low
Sino-India, 1962	High	High	None	Low
Cuba, 1962	High	High	High	Low
Egypt, 1967	None	Low	Low	High
Czech, 1968	Low	Low	None	None
Israel, 1973	None	High	None	Low
Vietnam, 1979	High	High	Low	None
Grenada, 1983	High	High	Low	None
Panama, 1989	Low	Low	Low	None
9/11, 2001	High	High	High	High
Iraq, 2003	Low	Low	Low	Low

face the threat. In this sense, surprise may be regarded as the result of failure to issue an advance warning to decision-makers and forces that would allow them to avoid surprise.

Advance warning is comprised of two elements. The first is early warning indicators which are signals that show that the enemy may be intending or preparing to launch an attack. They are the raw materials for the formation of an intelligence assessment pertaining to the possibility of war. Strategic warning is a message sent by the intelligence community to decision-makers, and from them to military forces, warning that hostilities are imminent. It results from assessing the possibility of war, and is aimed at causing the state to take appropriate steps to counter the threat.

Intelligence analysts distinguish between two kinds of strategic warning. The first is warning with regard to the enemy's capabilities—in essence, the determination that the enemy has the forces and means sufficient for launching the attack. The second type of warning concerns the enemy's intentions. It determines that the enemy has decided, or is about to decide, to launch an attack.

Of course, failure to issue a strategic warning can also vary in degree. In most cases of strategic attack considered in Table 1, advance warning was issued by the intelligence community to the decision-makers, but the

warning provided insufficient in light of countervailing forces. The classic consideration is the warning issued to Admiral Husband Kimmel, Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. As he noted in his memoirs, none of the reports from the U.S. ambassador in Tokyo warned of an imminent attack in the area of Hawaii or indicated that an attack there was even probable.²³ The “war warning” dispatch sent by the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) on November 27, 1941 did not warn the Pacific Fleet of such an attack, nor did it modify or repeal the advice previously given to the Admiral by the Navy that no move against Pearl Harbor was being planned by Japan.

The central problem on the United States side was ambiguous language and interpretation. Prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor, Washington had issued several general warnings. On November 24, 1941, Admiral Kimmel received the following message from the CNO: “Chances of favorable outcome of negotiations with Japan very doubtful. This situation coupled with statements of Japanese government and movements of their naval and military forces indicate in our opinion that a surprise aggressive movement in any direction including attack on Philippines or Guam is a possibility.”²⁴

²³ Husband Kimmel, *Admiral Kimmel's Story* (Chicago: Regnery, 1955), pp. 35-36, 45.

²⁴ Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor*, p. 44.

The Congressional investigation after the attacks found that this message contained not orders for Kimmel, but was designed to acquaint him with mounting tensions with Japan. The main warning came on November 27, 1941, which opened with the words: "This is to be considered a war warning," and continued: "an aggressive move by Japan is expected within the next few days.... The number and equipment of Japanese troops and the organization of naval task forces indicated an amphibious expedition against either the Philippines, Thai or Kra Peninsula, or possibly Borneo."²⁵ Thus, while there was a war warning, Kimmel was led to believe that the attack would be far from Pearl Harbor.

II. The Decision to Resort to a Surprise Attack: Controlling the Adversary's Sense of Vulnerability

An analysis of the reasons that an international actor resorts to surprise will rarely be exact. Unknown factors are bound to materialize. Thus, to minimize the chances of being surprised, the study of why a state resorts to surprise must always proceed in conjunction with a careful analysis of, first, the types of surprise that might lie within the reach of the adversary; second, the obstacles his adversary would have to surmount to achieve surprise;

²⁵ United States Congress, *Report of the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack*, pp. 104-105.

third, the way his adversary acts; and fourth, the degree of compatibility between his actions and the surprises that lie within his range.

The most striking characteristic of the history of successful surprise attacks has been the predominance of the need to control the victim's sense of vulnerability. Japan's choice of a target-type strategy of surprise in 1941 depended on its policy makers' belief that they could control Washington's sense of vulnerability by concealing both the rate at which and the extent to which Japan was augmenting its capabilities. Similarly, Egypt-Syria might not have sought to achieve surprise with respect to the time of the attack had they not believed that they could control Israel's sense of vulnerability. In the case of Germany in 1941, the picture was more complex. Hitler seems to have wanted to increase Stalin's sense of vulnerability, but to keep it from rising too high.

The fact that an international actor believes he can control his adversary's sense of vulnerability does not mean that he can select randomly a strategy of surprise. Factors that will be of great concern to him are: 1) the extent to which his power differs from that of his adversary; 2) his adversary's geographic location; and 3) the type of adversarial relationship he has had with his victim.

It was not simple coincidence that the actors who chose the intention-type strategy of surprise were the two whose powers most closely approximated the powers of their adversaries. An international actor who discloses his intention to take aggressive measures to pursue his objectives knows that if he and his victim are equally strong, his threats will be taken more seriously than if the victim is much stronger.

The implementation of an intention-type strategy of surprise is quite difficult. As the Barbarossa illustration shows, an international actor must be able to control the level of tension and mistrust his adversary feels toward him. To do so, he must rely not only on his skills as a negotiator, but also on his ability to control his adversary's sense of vulnerability.

II. A. Barbarossa: The German Invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941

The only addition from the perspective of this study is that the Barbarossa case is interesting because Hitler sought to conceal his intention in a clever and complex way. He did not attempt to keep Stalin's sense of vulnerability low. Initially, the German leader sought to ensure that Germany's eastern borders would not be threatened so that he could freely commit his armies to the west. Hitler appeased his eastern adversary by acquiescing to many of Stalin's demands. At the same time, Stalin was doing what Hitler wanted,

deploying the Red Army in the far west of the country, where it would be unalerted and very vulnerable to the German attack.

Hitler was aware of Germany's inability to engage in a protracted war simultaneously with Britain and the Soviet Union, and concluded that in order to prevent this problem he had to disguise his true intentions from his two rivals. All in all, the task of misleading the British was the least complicated aspect of Hitler's strategy. Hitler sought to convey the impression that Britain could be his next target by deploying close to fifty German divisions throughout Western Europe, and by spreading the rumor that Germany's forces in the east were training beyond the reach of the RAF.

The strategy to mislead the Soviets had to accomplish two distinct but closely connected objectives. On the one hand, Stalin had to be persuaded to deploy the Red Army to the west. On the other hand, it was essential that the Russian leader not feel threatened to the point that he would accelerate the rebuilding of his country's defenses and place his forces on alert. The fulfillment of the two objectives was deemed necessary by Hitler and his generals because they believed that, if Germany fought the Soviet Union before defeating Britain, the war had to be won in a short period of time near the Soviet western border.

In order to avoid a two front war, German troops had to avoid being drawn deeply into Russia's hinterland. Germany's strategy required that: 1) the Soviets deploy the core of their army along the western and southern borders of the Soviet Union; 2) the Soviet Army not be placed on full alert; and 3) that the Soviets be taken by surprise.

To induce the Soviets to deploy the core of their troops along the western border of the Soviet Union, Hitler had to convey a credible threat of war, and let the Soviets know that is where the bulk of the German army was located. Hitler calculated that, if he deployed large forces along Germany's eastern borders, the Soviets would have to reciprocate. Indeed, quite reasonably, they did so.

From the German perspective, there were good reasons to believe that the Soviets could be defeated quickly. What German intelligence missed was that the Soviet military buildup was already well underway, that Soviet military effectiveness was greatly improving, and that its own logistical demands would be formidable and grow ever-more-so if the Soviets continued to fight and retreat.

Hitler erected his strategy of surprise around two beliefs. First, he argued that the Soviets were convinced that it would be detrimental for Germany to attack the Soviet Union before defeating Britain in view of the

fact that Germany was importing considerable amounts of Soviet natural resources and the dubious wisdom of fighting a two-front war.

Second, Hitler speculated that Stalin, regardless of how unenthusiastic he might be about Germany's great military success, had considerable respect for power and, thus, would make great efforts to persuade the German leaders that he had no belligerent intentions if threatened by German actions.

Finally, so that Stalin would refrain from accelerating his defenses, Hitler kept Stalin's sense of vulnerability at manageable levels. Hitler continued to promulgate the view that Britain might still be his forthcoming victim. Hitler expected that Stalin would interpret his unwillingness to respond to any of the proposals forwarded by the Soviets as an indication that the door for conciliation remained open, but that Germany expected more from the Soviet Union.

In the course of the period before Barbarossa, Stalin's reasoning was faulty on two accounts. First, as some of his subordinates were keenly aware, an attack on the Soviet Union by Germany need not have been construed, at least at the outset, as a two front war. To be sure, Germany and Britain were at war with each other, but very few German forces were actually engaged in the war. Second, Stalin failed to realize that by demonstrating that he had no

intention of attacking Germany, he was also making it less costly for Germany to attack the Soviet Union.

II. B. The Japanese Attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941

The fact that an international actor may be able to disclose his intention because he is much weaker than his adversary does not automatically free him to choose a strategy of surprise randomly. For instance, before he decides that he would like to achieve surprise with respect to his target, he must carefully evaluate whether his adversary will believe that the instruments of war will be used against other targets. As with the surprise attacks on Pearl Harbor and on Israel in 1973, the geographic locations of the targets may have been the principal reason that the attackers chose different strategies.

The Japanese leaders opted for a target-type strategy of surprise because they knew that the United States generally denigrated Japanese military capabilities and because they believed that the vast distances separating their targets—American and British possession in Southeast Asia, Guam, and the Hawaiian Islands—would help them conceal their forces as they navigated toward Pearl Harbor. The relationship between these two factors was very important. Tokyo had to keep Washington's sense of vulnerability low to ensure that, as Japan's intention to attack Southeast Asia

was disclosed, Washington would continue to assume that Japan lacked the capability to launch simultaneously two large and exceedingly complex attacks against targets thousands of miles apart and thus would not search for the Japanese armada that was moving toward Pearl Harbor.

Egypt and Syria, on the other hand, although known to be much weaker than Israel, did not have the geographical advantage possessed by Japan. The common border with Israel and the hostile atmosphere that had permeated their relationship prevented the Arab leaders from trying to convey the impression that they would direct their forces against other targets. Their only alternative was to achieve surprise regarding the time of the attack by controlling Israel's sense of vulnerability.

This permits the conclusion that an international actor's disposition to choose either a target- or time-type strategy of surprise will be greater when his power is significantly inferior to that of his adversary than when it is similar.

The ability of an international actor to implement a target-type strategy of surprise, as seen in the analysis of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, demonstrates that to achieve surprise with respect to his target, a state must control his adversary's concern with respect to the geographical areas where he intends to stage the surprise. Moreover, to control his

adversary's concern with respect to the geographical areas where he intends to stage the surprise, a state must control his adversary's sense of vulnerability and be located in an area from which he can pretend that his deployed forces will be used to attack not his adversary, but other targets.

These cases show that, regardless of whether a state opts for a target, time, or intention-type strategy of surprise, there are three other dimensions he must also attempt to conceal: his rationale, military capabilities, and/or military doctrine.

III. Other Aspects of a Surprise First Strike

These cases support the general contention that it is easier for a state to control the sense of vulnerability of an adversary who is significantly more powerful than of one who is equally powerful. It was easier for Japan and Egypt-Syria to control the sense of vulnerability of the United States and Israel, respectively, than it was for Germany to control the sense of vulnerability of the Soviet Union. This permits the recognition that a state that must achieve surprise with respect to his intention is less likely to succeed than one who must achieve surprise with respect to the target or time of his action.

The essential element for a state to achieve surprise is the careful assessment of the systemic constraints that could obstruct the proper

implementation of his strategy. Once that window is open, that is, there is a favorable assessment of the systemic conditions, the key factor becomes the sense of vulnerability, which may be related in terms of: 1) how vulnerable the victim feels vis-à-vis the aggressor; 2) how precise is the aggressor's estimate of his victim's sense of vulnerability; and 3) how well the aggressor can control his victims sense of vulnerability. Thus, an international actor's chance of achieving surprise is inversely related to his adversary's sense of vulnerability and directly related to his own ability to estimate accurately and control his adversary's sense of vulnerability.

The final consideration is the degree to which a state will require certainty that an attack is coming. Stalin's freedom to act in 1941 was severely bounded by his need for certainty that an attack would be forthcoming. So long as there was a ray of hope that Hitler might not attack, Stalin wanted to make sure that his actions would not provide the German leader with a justification to attack. In 1941, Washington had important insights into Tokyo's strategy, but Washington had no information that would have justified an aggressive American reaction, for it was not known that Pearl Harbor would also be attacked. In other words, near certainty that a Japanese attack would ensue did not reduce the uncertainty as to whether Pearl Harbor would be a target.

Therefore, generally speaking, a state's chance of achieving surprise is directly related to the degree of certainty required by his adversary that an act of aggression will be launched against him. The greater the degree of certainty required, the greater the likelihood that surprise will be achieved.

IV. The Consideration of Military Superiority

One of the remarks for which the Duchess of Windsor is famous is her observation that "you can never be too rich, or too thin." To that we would add: "or too powerful." The advantages of military superiority are considerable for deterrence and coercion, as well as for warfighting. For each of those purposes, a state would rather be in a position of military superiority rather than the reverse.

However, military superiority may contribute to surprise and the effectiveness of the enemy's first strike. It is quite natural for analysts and decision makers to believe that the military superiority of their state over the enemy is so overwhelming that it overshadows all other considerations. Such a feeling of invulnerability often leads to underestimating the enemy's capabilities, willpower, adaptability and changes in his military strength. This is the case especially when analysts and decision-makers believe that their state's superiority is long lasting, even permanent due to the state's resources, history, military effectiveness, and proven ability to innovate, as

was the case with the Israeli's before the 1973 war and the United States with China today.

There are three reasons that heavily contribute to a feeling of military superiority. First, the feeling of invulnerability that stems from the possession of secure borders or geographical position. That was particularly important in 1973 for Israel. Second, the belief in military superiority is especially distorting when it assumes that the other side has deep-rooted, permanent deficiencies that cannot be rectified. Third, the belief in superiority is often associated with confidence in second-strike capability that will ensure eventual victory even if the enemy strikes first. That is, there will be sufficient time to recover from any military setback, no matter how disastrous the first strike might be, such as after Pearl Harbor. There are the assumptions that the United States will be able to recover from a first strike, will have sufficient ability to retaliate, and will defeat the attacker, even if so doing requires escalation. Each of those assumptions is questionable in a confrontation with China.

The belief in military superiority is closely linked to the belief in deterrence. When decision-makers believe that their armed forces have an overwhelming superiority, or when they underrate the enemy's capabilities, they tend to be overconfident about their deterrent posture. If deterrence is

believed to be strong, the danger of surprise attack is higher. As their confidence in deterrence rises, decision-makers tend to ignore early warning indicators of impending attack and assume that the enemy does not wish to start a war it will lose, and hence will not start a war. Consequently, their reaction is delayed. Moreover, as preeminent deterrence theorists Alexander George and Richard Smoke recognize, the impression that deterrence is successful may be illusory since “as long as deterrence is not openly challenged, the defender is inclined to assume that deterrence is working.”²⁶

V. The First Strike from the Victim’s Perspective

If we analyze the situation from the victim’s perspective, the first consideration, after having concluded that one of his adversaries may benefit from resorting to a strategy of surprise, is to analyze: 1) his vulnerabilities vis-à-vis his adversary; and 2) how easily could his adversary control his sense of vulnerability.

If the potential victim comes up with a negative answer to the first question and a positive answer to the second questions, he would have good reason to conclude that his adversary might be contemplating a strategy of surprise. At this stage, the potential victim will want to proceed with a

²⁶ Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), p. 567.

careful analysis of: 1) the types of surprises that lie within reach of his adversary; 2) the obstacles his adversary would have to surmount to achieve surprise; 3) the way his adversary behaves, and 4) the compatibility of his actions with the surprises that lie within his range and the obstacles that he would have to surmount to achieve surprise.

Regarding the first concern, a potential victim will want to keep in mind that generally there are two factors that could undermine an actor's ability to implement an intention-type strategy of surprise. First, any state that resorts to such a dramatic step as attacking another actor will usually execute the attack to remedy some major differences. In many instances, the intended victim will be aware of the problem and might even have concluded that his adversary would resort to violent means. The United States and Israel knew very well that their respective adversaries were dissatisfied with the status quo and were preparing for war to alter it.

In some cases, however, when the displeased party does not fully disclose his dissatisfaction, the problem becomes more complex. Stalin was aware that Hitler was displeased with Soviet actions toward German interests. But, the Soviet leader had no way of knowing the intensity of that displeasure, for Hitler had been very careful to conceal it.

During the early stages of implementation of an intention-type strategy of surprise, a potential victim is likely to know very little about his adversary's plan. His adversary's determination to conceal the nature and the extent of his dissatisfaction could be the principal factor contributing to his uncertainty. As the adversary begins to take more complex steps to carry out the strategy, the potential victim is bound to realize that not all is well and that he must begin to consider whether his adversary's past silence might have had a misleading purpose. Although it might not be feasible to come up with a definitive answer, the potential victim must also reassess his original estimates of his adversary's capabilities, and question whether, by underestimating them, he might have unintentionally prompted his adversary to exploit the misperception. Finally, a persistent effort by his adversary to persuade him that his intention is more accurately reflected by his words than by his actions ought to induce the victim to estimate what the adversary might gain if the converse were to be true.

A potential victim may have few doubts that his adversary is on the path to war, but wonders whether he will be among the targets. He can reach a tentative answer by evaluating whether his adversary could disclose his intention to go to war and the identity of some of his targets via a series of conspicuous acts, while conveying the impression that he—the concerned

target—will not be attacked. A potential victim in this kind of predicament must address two issues. First, he will want to know whether his adversary can deploy forces against him in secrecy. A positive answer to this question will not necessarily indicate that an attack might occur. Second, at this juncture, the potential victim must carefully reconsider how well informed he and his adversary are about each other's capabilities. In particular, he will want to consider how his adversary's determination to attack him could be affected if both are unknowingly underestimating each other's actual and potential capabilities, but his adversary knows that his power is being underestimated. This step will be very similar to the one he took to establish the reason his adversary may want to resort to surprise. However, he will have to make a special effort to come up with a more accurate picture of his adversary's capabilities.

Since it is not always feasible to gather the kind of information necessary to develop an accurate projection of his adversary's capabilities, it is very important that the potential victim pay close attention to the type of information his adversary discloses with respect to his own capabilities. Israel, for instance, seemed quite willing to accept false disclosures by Egypt-Syria that they were having problems adapting Soviet weapons to their own needs.

It should not be assumed that the potential victim will be able to infer automatically that he will be among the targets if he discovers that he and his adversary have underestimated each other's strengths. He could conclude that, although the two estimates were off, he is still so much stronger that his adversary would be blind not to notice the discrepancy.

To use this argument as justification for not having been prepared for an attack may be rational, provided rationality is viewed from a very narrow perspective. But, a potential victim must always keep in mind that rational analysis is not bound by any one specific ranking of goals. Thus, a potential victim who is convinced that it would be impossible to overlook his superior strength must ask himself the following: 1) what kind of actor might be undeterred by this reality; 2) what could incite a state to take such a potentially costly step; and 3) what action could limit the costs of taking such a step.

There is little indication that the United States in 1941 took any of these steps. American foreign policy makers had considered the possibility that Japan might try to attack Pearl Harbor by surprise, but little weight was given to this possibility when it became evident that Japan would concentrate its military efforts in Southeast Asia. United States policy-

makers from this point on could not envision the possibility that Japan, with its limited military capability, might launch two operations simultaneously.

This particular conclusion should have warned the Roosevelt Administration that it was time to reassess its estimates. Washington should have asked itself whether Japan might be tempted to attack Pearl Harbor if it had knowingly underestimated the actual and potential strength of the United States and knew that Washington had underestimated Japan's power. Moreover, Washington should have been especially careful to assess: 1) the factors that might incite Japan to disregard the superior power of the United States; and 2) the extent to which surprise could surmount some of Japan's weaknesses.

The steps a potential victim must take in order to reduce the chances of failing to predict when he will be attacked differ very little from those just discussed. If he suspects that he will be attacked, but does not know when, by asking the same set of questions he might be able to discover that his original projection could have facilitated his adversary's task of launching an attack unexpectedly at an earlier time.

Surprise is an art form created through deception and bounded by rationality and misperception. No two strategies of surprise are exactly alike, and yet all surprises are guided by the same principles. These principles of

surprise have obtained over thousands of years of Western, as well as Chinese, history.

The search for surprise is founded on the idea that an actor can induce another to derive a false rational assessment of the first actor's actions without knowing that the interpretations are the result of miscalculations. To discover that his rational analysis may not be an accurate assessment of the first actor's actions, the second actor must always keep in mind that reality is not always apparent, and that illusions are sometimes deliberately created.

There is no sure method for avoiding surprise. But, it is feasible to minimize surprise by understanding the circumstances under which it might be sought, the variety of obstacles that must be surmounted in order to achieve different surprises, and the types of steps that must be taken to overcome such obstacles. Surprise, in its simplest form, is the creation of a false rational, near certainty assessment. The avoidance of surprise in its most complex form is the discovery of where such falseness lies. While that is a seminal point to recognize, it does not detract from an appreciation of how difficult it is to accomplish.

VI. Historical Cases

The study now addresses six historical cases of first strike and preemption in order to provide a historical baseline for comparison with Chinese strategic decision-making.

VI. A. Copenhagen 1801 and 1807

The spectacular military success of Napoleon led to French hegemony on the Continent, and the accompanying growth in French alliances. While Britain imposed a blockade against France, policing vessels and seizing their cargoes if they were deemed to be trading with France, Russia, under the leadership of Tsar Paul and at French instigation, created the League of Armed Neutrality, comprising Denmark-Norway, Sweden, Prussia, and Russia, to enforce free trade with France. The British viewed the League as a major threat, an arm of French power, and as a mechanism to deny Britain the supply of timber from Scandinavian forests, which was a serious short-term threat to the Royal Navy.

In response, in early 1801, the British assembled a fleet at Great Yarmouth for the attack. The British has to act before the Baltic Sea thawed and released the Russian fleet from its bases at Kronstadt and Reval, now Tallinn. A combined Russian-Swedish-Danish fleet would be a formidable challenge to the Royal Navy, and one that they might not be able to overcome

with their other obligations. The British Admiralty ordered Admiral Sir Hyde Parker, with Vice Admiral Lord Nelson as his second in command, to destroy the seapower of the coalition. At first, Parker did not want to move against the League. His preferred strategy was to blockade the Baltic's exit, even though this cautious approach might give the League the time to concentrate their fleet. Nelson's vision was to ignore the Danes and the Swedes, whom he rightfully identified as reluctant members of the League, and to move against the Russians as rapidly as possible. Prussia was discounted because it did not have significant naval power.

On 18 March 1801, the fleet anchored in the Kattegat, the entrance to the Baltic, in preparation for an attack. Nelson's plan was to launch a first strike at the Russian fleet wintering in Revel, as the Russian fleet was the strongest and most dominant force in the Baltic. On 23 March, Parker called a council of war, and informed his subordinates that the Danes were not willing to withdraw from the Confederation, and were strengthening Copenhagen's defenses. Characteristically, Nelson urged an attack immediately: "Let it be by the Sound, by the Belt, or any how, only lose not an hour."

On 26 March, the British fleet moved towards the Sound, the gateway to the Baltic, and the great Danish fortress of Kronenberg. On the 30th of

March, the wind supported an attack and the British fleet passed the Sound, keeping to the Swedish side. In tacit support for the British, the Swedes held their fire, while the Kronenberg fortress fired without effect, as the range was too great. The British fleet anchored five miles below Copenhagen. The British plan was for Admiral Parker to advance to the North with the greater number of ships to preempt any relieving attack by the Swedish fleet or a Russian squadron, while Nelson took his fleet into the channel outside of Copenhagen harbor in which the Danish fleet was anchored, and, sailing northwards up the channel, attacked the Danish fleet whose main strength lay at the northern end of their anchorage around the powerful fortress of Tre Kroner or Trekroner (three crowns, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden), which was at the main entrance of Copenhagen's harbor.

On 2 April, the attack began, and not without damage due to groundings and Danish fire. For two hours the British fleet traded fire with Danish vessels and the fortress. Witnessing the smoke and hearing the fight, Admiral Parker concluded that he should give Nelson the opportunity to break off the action, and hoisted the signal to disengage. This was the event that gave the battle its most famed episode. Nelson ordered that only the acknowledgement was to be flown, while he turned to his flag captain and said: "You know, Foley, I have only one eye. I have a right to be blind

sometimes,” raising his telescope to his blind eye with the remark that “I really do not see the signal.”²⁷ By early afternoon, most of the Danish fleet had surrendered, although elements held out until the next morning. The bulk of the Danish fleet was destroyed or captured. After the Nile and Trafalgar, this was Lord Nelson’s most spectacular victory, although Nelson considered this his hardest fought victory. Despite being hampered by a lack of preparedness, the Danes fought fiercely, and at times desperately to defend their capital city.

The attack opened the Baltic to the British fleet and would have permitted operations against the Russians, and, most probably, British domination of that Sea. However, just before the battle started, on 24 March 1801, Russian Tsar Paul I was murdered in St. Petersburg by members of Court, and replaced by his son, who was strongly opposed to French hegemony. The effect of the Battle of Copenhagen and change of regime in Russia was significant. Russia’s change in policy freed the Danes and the Swedes from the fear of Russian invasion, and thus brought about the collapse of the Northern Confederation, thus frustrating French plans to isolate Britain.

²⁷ Robert Southey, *The Life of Nelson* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896), p. 212.

The second battle of Copenhagen in 1807, also called the bombardment of Copenhagen, gave rise to the verb to Copenhagenize, or to seize or destroy the ships of the victim in a surprise or rapid attack. The cause of the attack was similar to six years before. The threat from Napoleon had grown, and the British were increasingly worried that Napoleon would force Denmark to close the straits, or even invade Zealand and station French forces there to police the straight. Access to the Baltic was a major British interest as it provided a trade link for timber, allowed Britain to support its allies Sweden and Russia, before the Treaty of Tilsit later that year. The Treaty of Tilsit, signed by Napoleon and Tsar Alexander I in July 1807 after Napoleon's victory at Friedland moved Russia back into French orbit for the next five years, and marked the end of the War of Fourth Coalition. Tilsit recognized French hegemony in Central Europe until the decline of French power in 1812, and freed French forces for the Peninsular War in Spain and Portugal.

British fear of a French invasion of Denmark was well founded, in no small part because it was known to the French that Britain had attempted to enlist Denmark into London's alliance with Sweden. Seizure of Denmark would put great pressure on Sweden to abandon its alliance, make passing the straight difficult and likely to cause damage to vessels due to French

shore-based fire. The French could not close the straight to traffic if Sweden did not enter into an alliance with Paris.

British anxiety was heightened after Tilsit, when Lord Liverpool's government learned that the Treaty included stipulations for a maritime alliance of France, Russia, Denmark, and Portugal. There was indeed strong French pressure against Denmark to force it into war against Britain.

To prevent this, and to preclude action by the Danish fleet as well as to keep the Kattegat open for British access to the Baltic, the British preempted French and Danish action by attacking Copenhagen. On 30 July, the British fleet sailed, and London offered Copenhagen a treaty of alliance and mutual defense, for which Denmark would surrender her fleet, to be returned after the war, augmented by twenty British vessels. On 31 July, Napoleon ordered his foreign minister Talleyrand to inform the Danes that they must prepare for war or Marshal Bernadotte's army would invade Holstein. The Danes did not abandon their neutrality, and by so doing compelled the British attack.

By 15 August, the British fleet had assembled outside of Copenhagen, and issued a demarche for the surrender of the Danish fleet. The Danes refused in their reply. The fleet landed troops and defeated the Danish militia south of Copenhagen. The city was encircled, but the British allowed

the residents to evacuate the city. A final refusal of British demands led to the bombardment of the city from 2-5 September. The bombardment started fires that were uncontrollable with the evacuation of most civilians. As a result over a thousand buildings were burned and about 200 civilians killed or injured.

On 5 September, the Danes sued for peace, and agreed to surrender its navy and naval stores. In return, the British pledged to leave Copenhagen within six weeks. About 60 vessels of all types were surrendered, although most were destroyed by the British, including three 74-gun men-of-war on the stocks.

The battle had three effects. First, it demonstrated Britain's willingness to incur risk and international opprobrium to maintain its defense at a time laden with danger for it due to Napoleon's mastery of the European Continent. In this respect, it is similar to Mers-el-Kebir in 1940. It demonstrated to actual and potential allies that Britain would continue to fight, and could do so unexpectedly. Second, it demonstrated to Napoleon that he did not have the ability to deny British actions at the water's edge. This point would be underscored in actions in the Peninsula. Third, it reveals the strategic value of preemption in confrontation for state's willing to incur the risk of such an attack.

VI. B. Mers-el-Kebir: The UK Attacks French Fleet July 1940

When France surrendered to the Germans on 22 June 1940, the British faced a strategic situation as dire as it ever had. Britain stood alone against the Germans with no allies. France had fallen, the United States was neutral although increasingly leaning to the British side under Roosevelt's direction, and the Soviet Union was a German ally, as was Italy and Japan. At sea, the Royal Navy faced the German and Italian navies in the Mediterranean and the German surface and submarine fleet in the Atlantic. Were the strength of the French fleet to be added or allied with the *Kriegsmarine*, the naval balance of power would be shifted, and Great Britain might lose the Battle of the Atlantic as a consequence.

The Germans did not occupy all of France, but left a French government in control, the Vichy government named after the location of its capital with Marshal Philippe Pétain, the hero of Verdun in World War I, as its leader. Admiral François Darlan, the highest-ranking French admiral as Admiral of the Fleet, was appointed Minister of Marine in the Vichy government. On 18 June 1940 in Bordeaux, Adm. Darlan pledged his word of honor on behalf of the French Fleet to the Royal Navy that no French vessel would be allowed to fall into the hands of the Germans.

But, that promise was deemed to be insufficient by the British. Prime Minister Winston Churchill writes of the stark and hard decision to attack the French fleet: "The War Cabinet never hesitated. Those Ministers who, the week before, had given their whole hearts to France and offered common nationhood, resolved that all necessary measures should be taken. This was a hateful decision, the most unnatural and painful in which I have ever been concerned. It recalled the episode of the destruction of the Danish Fleet in Copenhagen Harbor by Nelson in 1801; but now the French had been only yesterday our dear allies, and our sympathy for the misery of France was sincere. On the other hand, the life of the State and the salvation of our cause were at stake."²⁸

The deployment of the French Fleet was divided. Many lesser vessels were in British harbors. In Alexandria, there were a French battleship, four cruisers, and many smaller vessels covered by a strong British battle squadron. At the military port of Oran, Mers-el-Kebir, there were two modern battlecruisers, the *Dunkerque* and the *Strasbourg*, built explicitly to be superior to the German battlecruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*. Additionally, there were two French battleships, several light cruisers, and lesser vessels. At Algiers were seven cruisers, at Martinique was an aircraft

²⁸ Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War Vol. II: Their Finest Hour* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), p. 232.

carrier and two light cruisers, and at Casablanca was the battleship *Jean Bart*, but without her guns. The battleship *Richelieu* was at Dakar.

About two weeks after the French surrender, on the night of 3 July 1940, the Royal Navy in Operation Catapult attacked the French fleet. In British harbors, the French Fleet was seized with only two casualties. At Mers-el-Kebir, after having been given the chance to join the British; or sail with reduced crews to a British port; or sail with reduced crews to a French port in the West Indies; or face destruction of the fleet, the French stalled for time. This was unacceptable to the British who opened fired by early evening. Approximately 1,300 French sailors were killed, one battleship was sunk and five other vessels were heavily damaged. The *Strasbourg* escaped to Toulon, as did the fleet at Algiers. At Dakar on July 8, the *Richelieu* was damaged by aircraft from the *Hermes*. The attacks against the French Fleet occurred despite the promise from Admiral Darlan in June 1940 that the Fleet would not engage in combat. Darlan was as good as his word, and scuttled the remainder of the Fleet at Toulon in November 1942 after the Allied invasion of North Africa.

The attack demonstrated Britain's determination to remain in the war. As Churchill wrote: "The elimination of the French Navy as an important factor almost at a single stroke by violent action produced a

profound impression in every country. Here was this Britain which so many counted down and out, which strangers had supposed to be quivering on the brink of surrender to the mighty power arrayed against her, striking ruthlessly at her dearest friends of yesterday and securing for a while to herself the undisputed command of the sea. It was made plain that the British War Cabinet feared nothing and would stop at nothing.”²⁹

VI. C. Nomonhan, or Khalkin Gol, May-September 1939

The battle of Nomonhan, as it is known to the Japanese, or Khalkin Gol, as it is to the Soviet Union, was one of the most significant and unknown conflicts of World War II.³⁰ This event is important because it, like no other battle, influenced the course of the conflict in Europe and Asia—it protected the Soviet’s eastern flank and sent Japan to war against the United States and British. Its relative obscurity is a result of , first, the battle culminating in the summer of 1939, at a time when events in Europe reached their crescendo with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and Germany’s invasion of Poland.

²⁹ Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, p. 238.

³⁰ The Japanese name for the battle was the “Nomonhan Incident,” after a village in the vicinity of the main fighting. The Soviets called it Khalkin-Gol, after a nearby river the Japanese claimed as the boundary between Manchukuo and Mongolia. The Japanese, in turn, called the Khalkin-Gol River the Halha River.

Second, it is a relatively opaque battle because both sides hid the conflict from the wider world.³¹

The Japanese had occupied Manchukuo, the label they gave to their Manchurian client state, since 1931. This occupation placed the Japanese Kwantung (“East of the Shanhai Pass,” an ancient name for Manchuria) Army in a difficult position. The Kwantung Army was in an uneasy coexistence with the Soviet Union, which occupied the territory to the north, east, and west, due to the tensions between Moscow and Tokyo, as well as their disputes over the actual borders between Manchukuo and the Soviet Union. This situation was ripe for conflict.

The risk of conflict increased in 1937 when the Japanese used Manchukuo as a base of operations to invade China. There had been a series of intense border clashes each year in the period 1935-1937, and there was a short, limited war around Lake Khasan in the USSR, also known as the Changkufeng Incident, in 1938.³² The Soviets responded by sending arms and advisers to the Nationalist (KMT) Chinese government of Chiang Kai-

³¹ An excellent account is Stuart D. Goldman, *Nomonhan, 1939* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2012). The comprehensive study is Alvin D. Coox, *Nomonhan: Japan against Russia, 1939* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985).

³² Hata Ikuhiko, “The Japanese-Soviet Confrontation 1935-1939,” in James William Morley, ed., *Deterrent Diplomacy: Japan, Germany, and the USSR 1935-1940* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), pp. 129-178.

Shek, as well as conducting limited border clashes with the Japanese to signal support for the Chinese and to demonstrate that Japan could not concentrate all of their forces against the Chinese, but instead had to keep looking over its geostrategic shoulder. While there were ideological differences with the KMT, the common threat of Japan cemented the alliance, at the same time, in a classic Realpolitik move, the Soviet Union supported the Communists (CCP) in China, but kept the CCP under close control so that its war against the KMT was kept on a simmer.

From 1937-1939, the Soviets built up their power opposite Manchukuo, so that by 1939, they were clearly stronger than the Kwantung Army, which could never afford to concentrate its forces against the Soviets due to their war in China. Manchukou was always a secondary theater for the Japanese.

Even so, the Kwantung Army command believed that it would be victorious in any war against the Soviets. The first reason for their confidence was a geographical fact: in Manchukuo, they enjoyed interior lines permitting them to shift forces to meet a multi-front attack. The well-developed Manchurian railroads augmented this advantage, while the Soviet railroad network was far less developed, further hindering their movement.

The trans-Siberian railroad had limited capacity and was vulnerable because it ran close to the frontier.

In reality, the material balance far favored the Soviets, as did their leadership. It has to be added that so did the overconfidence of the Kwantung Army, who expected to fight battles with local superiority, defeat the Soviets in a quick campaign, and then use those victories to gain a favorable ceasefire.³³

In 1938, Japanese expectations seem to have been fulfilled. That July, the Red Army crossed the disputed border at the intersection of the Soviet, Manchukuoan, and Korean borders, and occupied a promontory named Chankufeng (Cruel Hill). The Soviets dug in and awaited the Japanese response, which was not long in coming since Tokyo could not let such a move go unchallenged.

The 19th Division of the Imperial Japanese Army countered and expelled the Red Army. A ceasefire quickly followed. The lesson the Japanese took from the experience was that their doctrine was vindicated—superior tactics and spirit had won the day. In addition, the fighting was limited by both sides, and so the Japanese believed any future incidents could be kept localized, while their superior morale would result in victory.

³³ Joseph Miranda, "Analysis: The Battle of Nomonhan, 1939," *World at War*, #32 (October-November 2013), pp. 6-22.

Less than a year later, the Soviets moved first with the assistance of their Mongolian allies. Mongolia was a client-state of the Soviet Union since its founding in 1924 with a small army, which was mostly cavalry. On May 11, 1939, a contingent of Mongolian cavalry crossed the Khalkin-Gol River. The precise demarcation of the border was disputed; the Japanese claimed it was the river itself but the Soviets maintained that it ran on a line 12.5 miles east of the water. In response, the Kwantung Army ordered its 23rd Infantry Division to respond. The Japanese pushed the Mongolians over the river by 15 May. On 17th, the Mongolians returned, continuing the conflict. On the 28th, the Japanese launched a night attack to destroy what they thought was the remaining Mongolian cavalry, but were surprised by Soviet tanks sent to reinforce the Mongolians. The Japanese fell back. Over a month later, on 2 July, the Japanese launched a major attack with the 23rd and 7th Divisions, backed by significant airpower. But, the Soviets had heavily reinforced and Soviet armor and artillery made a tremendous impact, leading to a Japanese withdrawal on 5 July.

The Japanese analyzed their attack and concluded that they failed because of their inability to match Soviet artillery, but that their infantry fought well. The Kwantung Army mobilized every artillery piece available, organizing them into ad hoc artillery corps.

In Moscow, Stalin determined that Khalkin-Gol had to be brought to a quick and victorious conclusion, as the Soviet Union could not afford to be tied down in protracted operations in Asia with tensions building in Europe. To do so, he sent one of the Red Army's rising stars, Lt. Gen. Georgi Zhukov to lead the Soviets in the theater. Stalin had promised Zhukov whatever he needed to win, and strongly reinforced his forces and logistical support, which in turn allowed Zhukov to sustain operations from the railheads to the front.

Zhukov used his superiority for a battle of envelopment that was executed on 20 August. Soviet tanks moved forward under the cover of a heavy artillery barrage. The Japanese response was uncoordinated and piecemeal. By the end of the month, the 23rd Division was shattered, and the 7th badly battered. The Japanese had no choice but to fall back. Zhukov advanced to the line claimed by the Soviets and stopped.

The Soviet offense came as a complete surprise to the Japanese. Tokyo briefly considered escalating with the rest of the Kwantung Army, the 1st, 2nd, 4th, and 8th infantry, and these units might have made a difference earlier in the campaign, but decided to de-escalate. The main consideration was logistical. The Japanese had enough difficulty supporting the 7th and 23rd

Divisions in the face of Soviet power. A ceasefire was reached on 16 September.

From the Soviet perspective, the attack vindicated the triumph of logistics, superiority in armor and artillery, and the use of deception measures, *maskirovka*, to prepare the battlefield for a surprise offensive.³⁴ It also yielded Stalin's good graces for Zhukov, kept in the East away from the disasters of the Winter War against Finland and the German attack of 1941. It also provided a reputation for success that would serve him well two years later when Stalin would call upon him to defeat the Germans at the gates of Moscow.

VI. D. The Winter War with Finland

Although often perceived as a limited aims attack, the Soviet intent when it invaded Finland in November 1939 was to conquer the state, and replace it with a Soviet satellite.³⁵ It was only when the Soviet military was bogged down in the face of fierce Finnish resistance that its war aims changed to a

³⁴ David M. Glantz, "The Red Mask: The Nature and Legacy of Soviet Military Deception," in Hy Rothstein and Barton Whaley, eds., *The Art and Science of Military Deception* (Boston: Artech House, 2013), pp. 193-198.

³⁵ Excellent overviews of this war are Eloise Engle and Lauri Paananen, *The Winter War: The Soviet Attack on Finland 1939-1940* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Stackpole Books, 1973); and Gordon F. Sander, *The Hundred Day Winter War: Finland's Gallant Stand against the Soviet Army* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2013).

limited aims strategy. Having freed itself from Russian rule during the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the Soviet conquest of Finland would have restored the status quo, from the Russian perspective.

The Soviets started to increase tensions with Finland in 1938, as security competition intensified on the Continent. The Soviets made a demand that the Finns cede territory to allow the Soviets to “lean forward” in any war with Germany. The Finns refused to do so.

About a year later, Germany and the Soviet Union signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which had secret protocols that consigned Finland to the Soviet sphere of influence. The Soviets demanded that the Finns move their border on the Karelian Isthmus to a location close to Viipuri and to destroy their defenses on the Karelian Isthmus. In addition, they demanded islands in the Gulf of Finland, the Kalastajansaarento Peninsula in the Arctic, and the lease of the Hanko Peninsula for 30 years while allowing the Soviets to establish a military base there. A divided Finnish government rejected the Soviet offer, but made a territorial counteroffer to which the Soviets did not respond.

The attack on 30 November 1939, about two months after the Soviets finished combat operations against the Poles, was a surprise to the Finns. It was a major attack with 450,000 men made in three different regions: the

Arctic near Petsamo, a central theater that comprised most of the border, and operations in the Karelian Isthmus. The Mannerheim line on the Karelian Isthmus and Finnish tactics denied the Soviets a rapid advance to Helsinki, and thus a quick and decisive victory over the Finns. Although Finnish performance on the other two fronts was not the equal of the Karelian Front, and so the Soviets were able to advance in the central and north.

So, while the Soviets were able to achieve surprise in their first strike in terms of the timing and location of their attacks, they were not able to translate their first strike into a strategic win for two reasons. First, the areas where the Red Army did achieve success, the Northern and Central Fronts, were not strategic, and logistical difficulties made the continuation of the attacks impossible. Second, the Finns recognized that the Clausewitzian center of gravity was the Karelian Isthmus, and thus placed the bulk of their forces there to reinforce robust physical lines of defense—the Mannerheim Line—and its replacements after it fell.

As aid did not come from the Germans, who remained quiet on the conflict due to their improved relations with the Soviets, the Finns received no reinforcements except from Italy. The Anglo-French plan to land forces in Narvik, pass by rail through Sweden to the port of Lulea, was rejected by the Norwegians and Swedes. Despite their rejections, the Anglo-French force left

port en route to Narvik, even though the war had ended by the time the force left. The real objective of the force was to deny the Germans Swedish iron ore. The force served as the motivation for Hitler's decision to attack Denmark and Norway in order to secure the ore for German industry.

Hostilities ended on 12 March 1940 with the Peace of Moscow, less than one month before the German invasion of Denmark and Norway. The effect of the war was to accelerate changes in the Red Army, the power of commissars was reduced in favor of the regular army, military discipline was restored, and equipment improved. Second, for Finland, the effect was traumatic. Finland ceded eleven percent of its territory and lost about thirty percent of its economy.³⁶ During the "Interim Peace," as it is called in Finland, about 8,000 Finns lost their homes on the Hanko peninsula, which the Soviets occupied in accordance with the peace treaty. There was no convenient or efficient way for the Soviets to transport men and equipment to Hanko, and so Molotov pressed the Finns for new negotiations to support transit rights across Finland proper, as well as demanding demilitarization of the Aaland Islands and the revocation of all Finnish mining rights in

³⁶ Curtis Szmania, "A Thorn in Their Side: The Siege of Hanko, 1941," *World at War*, No. 33 (December 2013-January 2014), pp. 46-57, 46.

Petsamo.³⁷ These Soviet demands further strained Soviet-Finnish relations and accelerated the Finnish drift into the German orbit.

Finland's experience in this conflict led to it joining the Germans in Barbarossa, or what the Finns termed the "Continuation War." Significantly, for the first six months of the war, the Soviet presence in Hanko served as a major impediment to Finland's ability to fight in the East on the Karelian front or directly against Leningrad. Soviet troops were withdrawn from Hanko completely by December 1941. Finland's experience in that conflict once again led to a narrow brush with the loss of its sovereignty, which resulted in Finland's decision to cede a veto over its foreign relations to the Soviet Union in return for its neutralization and the maintenance of its domestic sovereignty, ceding the port of Porkkala, a mere twelve miles from Helsinki, for 50 years, although it was returned in January 1956.

VI. E. Bessarabia and Bukovina

On March 6, 1940, Germany and Romania reached a provisional agreement whereby Romania would receive armaments from Germany in exchange for petroleum. The Soviets, in the meantime, had their own plans with respect to Romania. On June 23, 1940 Molotov made it clear to the German ambassador in Moscow that the Soviet Union would resort to force if Romania did not

³⁷ Szmania, "A Thorn in Their Side," p. 48.

105

relinquish control over Bessarabia and Bukovina, and that Moscow expected Berlin to support the Soviets in their action. After intense negotiations and multiple new threats from the Soviet Union, the Germans succeeded in persuading the Romanians to acquiesce to all of Moscow's demands. On June 28, 1940, Romania gave in and relinquished the territories demanded by the Soviets.

Stalin's desire for new territory was not satisfied. At the end of October 1940, certain islands in the Danube were occupied by Soviet troops. Hitler did not want to antagonize Stalin, and again forced the Romanians to yield. These actions by the Soviets solidified Romanian animus toward the Soviet Union, and contributed to their decision to join the Germans in the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. This was a campaign in which the Romanians performed better than their German counterparts expected, but was marred by their performance in taking Odessa in 1941 and by their collapse while holding the line north and south of Stalingrad in November 1942 in the Soviet attack that would lead to the encirclement of the German 6th Army.

VI. F. Israel Launches the Six-Day War in 1967

The archetype for a successful first strike to change the balance of power is Israel in the Six Day War, June 5-11, 1967.³⁸ The Six Day War began with Israel's attack against Egypt, Syria, and Jordan in a seriatim manner based on Israel's conception of the threat posed. Egyptian airfields were attacked first, followed by Syrian, with blitzkrieg attacks against Egypt that reached the Suez canal, a significant thrust against Jordan to capture the West Bank and Old Jerusalem, and lastly, a ground attack against Syria to capture the Golan Heights.

Against each of its adversaries, Israel's first strikes were spectacularly successful against adversaries unprepared for war. They were so successful, in fact, that Nasser blamed their success on U.S. participation—naval aircraft launched from the aircraft carriers, *America* and *Saratoga*, of the 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean. Israel had the advantages of complete surprise in the timing of the attacks, as well as in the targets attacked. Israel also carefully manipulated its adversaries' sense of vulnerability to execute the perfect bolt out of the blue attack.

³⁸ The best analysis of the causes and consequences of the Six Day War is Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). A detailed day-by-day account is Associated Press, *Lightning Out of Israel: The Arab-Israel Conflict* (New York: Western, 1967).

The deep causes of the conflict stem from actions, first, taken by the Soviet Union to entice Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser toward war and, second, by Nasser's own objectives in the conflict. Soviet support for Egypt was expanding and the Soviets promised support in the event of war. Indeed, according to Israeli journalists Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez, the Soviets were responsible for instigating the crisis as a pretext for intervention to overwhelm Israel by Arab invasion twinned with a Soviet attack or to provide an excuse for Soviet attack, much as the Israeli attack on Egypt in 1956 served as the pretext for the Anglo-French invasion.³⁹ That helped to embolden Nasser who was also looking for a way. The trigger was the blockade of the Straits of Tiran and the removal of the UN peacekeepers out of the Sinai, having been in place from 1956-1967, which Israel believed was the first step to action by the Egyptians to an attack.

Nasser took these steps to strengthen his hand in the inter-Arab struggle that arose over Egypt's disastrous intervention in the Yemeni civil war. Jesse Ferris argues convincingly that Nasser's increased pressure on Israel in the Sinai and Straits of Tiran resulted from his need to strengthen his standing in the Arab world due to his humiliating struggle in the Yemeni

³⁹ Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez, *Foxbats over Dimona: The Soviets' Nuclear Gamble in the Six-Day War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

civil war. Nasser's defeat caused him to confront the necessity of withdrawing his forces from the Arabian Peninsula and accepting Saudi financial aid, driving him to increase his pressure on Israel.⁴⁰

From the Israeli perspective, as Yitzhak Rabin later states, "had we failed to react—giving the Egyptians the impression that we were either unaware of their moves or complacent about them—we might be inviting attack on the grounds of vulnerability."⁴¹ While Israel was moving toward attacking, the reverse was happening in Egypt. Israel had effectively manipulated Egypt's sense of vulnerability to the point where Nasser was supremely confident that he could control the timing of events, that is, he would be the one to start the conflict; and now was not the right time to do so despite Soviet urging that it was. The Egyptian military was planning an attack against Israel but pulled back. It was better for Egypt to hold back; "What action can take now that wouldn't give Johnson and Israel another opportunity that they're looking for?" he asked. "Although the world regarded the massing of Israeli troops as routine, the Egyptians were seen as the aggressors, especially after their decisions on UNEF and Tiran."⁴²

⁴⁰ Jesse Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2013).

⁴¹ Rabin quoted in Oren, *Six Days of War*, p. 62.

⁴² Oren, *Six Days of War*, p. 120.

Nasser's change of heart resulted from the fear of American intervention at a time when the Soviet position was yet unknown and Israeli tension continued to build. On June 2nd, Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan explained that Israel's options were: "either accept the blockade as a fail accompli and dig in for permanent defense—not a viable option—or strike the Egyptians at once." He stressed that the country's "one chance for winning this war is in taking the initiative and fighting according to our own designs."⁴³ Dayan's analysis continued: "If we open with an attack and break through with our tanks to Sinai, they have to fight our war. What's more, we have the chance of maintaining our other fronts with limited forces."⁴⁴ He reflected on the fact that, if Israel were surprised by a first strike, "God help us though if they hit us first. Not only would we lose our first strike capability...but we'll have to fight the war according to their plan...and on territory vital to us."⁴⁵

Diplomacy also was a major factor in spurring Israel to preempt. The Israelis believed that the United States would not take action to re-open the Straits, or take concrete steps in the near future in order to solve the problem

⁴³ Dayan quoted in Oren, *Six Days of War*, p. 149.

⁴⁴ Dayan quoted in Oren, *Six Days of War*, p. 149.

⁴⁵ Dayan quoted in Oren, *Six Days of War*, p. 149.

between the Israelis and the Egyptians.⁴⁶ Moreover, the Israelis also believed that UN Ambassador Arthur Goldberg had convinced President Johnson to allow Israel to use force to re-open the Straits. Furthermore, the Israelis believed that after Egyptian Vice President Zakkariya Muhieddin's visit to Washington, the United States would support reviving the UN presence on Israeli territory.⁴⁷ So time was of the essence. The consensus among Israelis was congealing around the idea that this was the time to destroy Nasser and eliminate the Egyptian threat.

The Israeli air force commander, Motti Hod, then presented his plan for a seriatim attack against Egypt and Syria. He claimed that Israel knew the location of all of Egypt's military aircraft and would be able of destroying most of them on the ground in a 1,000 sortie maximum effort. Hod also called attention to Egyptian and Soviet reconnaissance flights over Israel, and illuminated the dangers of waiting. "We're ready to go into operation immediately,...there is no need to wait, not even 24 hours."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Ritchie Ovendale, *The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Wars*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1992), p. 203.

⁴⁷ Oren, *Six Days of War*, p. 150.

⁴⁸ Hod quoted in Oren, *Six Days of War*, p. 151.

Ariel Sharon declared that “the army is ready as never before to repel an Egyptian attack and to wipe out the Egyptian army....A generation will pass before Egypt threatens us again.”⁴⁹

As the Israelis were moving toward war, the Americans gave the “green light” through several media, including, most importantly, Secretary of State Dean Rusk’s off-the-cuff remark. When asked whether the United States would continue restraining Israel, he replied: “I don’t think it’s our business to restrain anyone.”⁵⁰

With the United States tacit approval, the die was cast, and Israel attacked with complete tactical surprise. Nasser was pushed by his own ambition toward a war he had tried to avoid since, conscious of Israeli military power, he believed that such an engagement could only be undertaken by a prepared, united effort, if at all. It was likely that Nasser was hoping for a negotiated settlement and was surprised as the rest of the Arab world when Israel destroyed his air force and invaded the Sinai.⁵¹

The course of the diplomatic negotiations of May and June 1967 indicate that both sides were playing for time, with the Egyptians hoping for a de-escalation of the crisis they put in motion with Soviet assistance. On the

⁴⁹ Sharon quoted in Oren, *Six Days of War*, p. 151.

⁵⁰ Rusk quoted in Oren, *Six Days of War*, p. 153.

⁵¹ Orendale, *The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Wars*, p. 204.

other hand, the Israelis, perceiving the closure of the Straits of Tiran as an act of war, elected to fight before the Arabs could prepare themselves fully.⁵²

The Six Day War reveals the importance of not making bold moves too quickly. Nasser's blockade of the Straits of Tiran and eviction of UNEF were events that might have had an acceptable diplomatic impact had they been executed a year apart, but occurring back to back compelled a response from Israel.

Moreover, Israel was expert at manipulating Egyptian expectations. The Israelis allowed Nasser to believe that he controlled the course of events. Accordingly, Nasser never appears to have imagined that Israel would react as boldly as they did. The Egyptians had a profound failure of imagination of Israel's possible responses, especially after the Israeli invasion and conquest of the Sinai in 1956. This failure was due, in part, to the Soviet arms buildup since then. Strengthened military capabilities gave the Egyptians the illusion that they could fight and defeat the Israeli military. But, augmented military capabilities, divorced from the necessary improvements in military doctrine and training, leadership, and sound strategy, was a recipe for disaster, and set the stage for escalation and the War of Attrition, 1969-1970, and the greater involvement of both superpowers in the conflict.

⁵² Ovendale, *The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Wars*, p. 204.

In the course of military history, and for analysts of surprise first strikes, the Six Day War remains the ideal type of how a state may use these strategic choices to shift dramatically the balance of power.

VII. The Major Lessons from the Cases of First Strike and Preemption

The major lesson from these cases is that first or preemptive strikes have a significant influence in changing the balance of power toward the aggressor. In essence, first strikes are spectacularly successful. In every case considered, taking the initiative had a major affect in favor of the aggressor. Britain defeated all of Napoleon's attempts to control the seas, and thus permit an invasion of the United Kingdom, whether directly as at Trafalgar or through denying him naval allies, and thus power, as at Copenhagen. Thus, Britain won control of the sea during the Napoleonic period, and sustained it through the German challenge of World War I. World War II brought a renewal of that challenge as well as from the surviving French fleet. The twinned threats jeopardized British surface control of the sea that was deemed unacceptable, and resulted in the elimination of a major component of the threat at Mers-el-Kebir.

The Soviet Union deterred a Japanese attack after Nomonhan, and secured its eastern borders from attack. The shock delivered to Japan made the Japanese supremely cautious of Soviet interests for the rest of the war.

This consequence alone made the undeclared war with Japan worth fighting. In the west, it pushed the Finns and Romanians out of critical territory and demonstrated to the Germans that its dominance would be contested, successfully, by the Soviets. Not insignificantly, it placed the Soviet Union in a position to meet the German attack the next year.

In 1967, Israel did nothing less than maintain its strategic position in the war and, through a first strike, recast the strategic construction of the Middle East in its favor. While it is important not to forget the desperate circumstances the Israelis encountered before June 1967 that caused the attack, this case of preemption is an ideal type of how that strategy may alter strategic conditions.

History demonstrates that this is not always the case; there have been significant failures too. As discussed above, Japan's decision in 1941 to attack the United States and British colonial possessions in China and South East Asia were disastrous for Japan despite achieving complete surprise and forcing the United States and Britain back on their heels for most of 1942. Similarly, Pakistan's disastrous preemptive attack with too few aircraft against Indian airfields in the December 1971 war lead to its defeat.

These failures illuminate the second major lesson: the allure of first strike and preemption to change the balance of power will be great for

statesmen. This is so for four major reasons. First, as the historical cases reveal, first strike and preemption offer a solution to a major strategic problem the state confronts. The Soviet Union wanted to protect itself from a two front war, and so it generated a limited conflict with Japan to do so. Second, these strategic solutions promise that the initiative will be with the aggressor, this was especially important for Britain in the Copenhagen cases and in Mers-el-Kebir, as well as for Israel in 1967. Third, the promise of quick and decisive victory is present—with this brief action, the strategic balance may be favorably changed, or the state will be better positioned in the future. The Soviet desire to push its boundaries to the West for offensive as well as defensive reasons is a good example. Fourth, the successful historical precedents are far more likely to be salient in the mind of the decision-maker than the failures. In 1971, the Pakistanis wanted to emulate Israel's 1967 attack, which resulted in disaster for Pakistan. Yet, it is Israel's successful first strike that is remembered, not Pakistan's disaster. Decision-makers learn from successful cases, not failures. Success carries with it the desire for emulation. Added to the attractiveness of a successful historical example is the psychological finding that decision-makers have a bias toward overconfidence that augments the likelihood that first strikes or preemption will be considered viable policy choices.

Chapter Three

China's Perception of First Strike and Preemption

This chapter considers the centrally important questions of why and when China will resort to first strike and preemption. The chapter has four major sections. First, the study considers China's perception of first strike and preemption. It argues that the willingness to execute a first strike or preempt is heavily influenced by China's strategic culture. The relevant aspects of strategic culture are the Chinese evaluation of their *shi* and the *shi* of their opponent; the proclivity toward deception and first strike in Chinese strategic thought; and Chinese decision-makers' consideration of the empirical situation, whether China is in a pre-crisis, crisis, or war situation. Second, the study reviews the historical evidence of first strike and preemption in Chinese history. Four major cases are considered: Early Chinese history through the Ming dynasty; the Sino-Dutch War; the Civil War between the Nationalists and the Communists; and lastly, by the PLA. Third, the study compares these cases with the European ones from Chapter Two. It finds that the Chinese place a much more significant emphasis on the psychological aspects of war; their motivations are different; the Chinese place a greater role on deception; they do as well for surprise; they lack an

adequate appreciation of the “fog of war;” and lastly, the Chinese conception of the use of nuclear weapons is different. The intention is to provide an overview of these issues, while Chapter Five will illuminate China’s understanding of preventive war.

Discussion of Chinese considerations of first strike and preemption are understudied. There is discussion of Chinese development of weaponry that would allow them to execute first strikes and to preempt, such as their considerable ballistic and cruise missile capabilities as well as development of prompt global strike capabilities, as seen by the ICBM-launched WU-14 hypersonic vehicle test in January 2014.⁵³ The concepts of first strike and preemption are occasionally discussed in the blogosphere.⁵⁴ Usually, the discussion focuses on why Chinese military weakness will compel them to attack the United States or its allies. The PLA sees the United States as its most likely adversary, but one to which it is inferior in almost every respect.

⁵³ Bill Gertz, “China Conducts First Test of New Ultra-High Speed Missile Vehicle,” *Washington Free Beacon*, January 13, 2014, available at: <<http://freebeacon.com/china-conducts-first-test-of-new-ultra-high-speed-missile-vehicle/>>. Accessed January 13, 2014.

⁵⁴ See Sydney J. Freedberg, Jr., “China’s Fear of the U.S. May Cause them to Preempt,” *Inside Defense*, October 01, 2013, available at: <<http://breakingdefense.com/2013/10/01/chinas-fear-of-us-may-tempt-them-to-preempt-sinologists/>>. Accessed October 12, 2013. Also see Harry Kazianis, “Would China Strike the U.S. Preemptively?” *The Diplomat*, October 9, 2013, available at: <<http://thediplomat.com/flashpoints-blog/2013/10/09/would-china-strike-the-us-preemptively/>>. Accessed October 12, 2013.

That is positive for deterrence of attack. But, if deterrence fails, “the Chinese are likely to go big or go home. Chinese military history from the Korean War in the 1950s to the Chinese invasion of Vietnam in 1979 to more recent, albeit vigorous but non-violent grabs for the Scarborough Shoal suggest a preference for a sudden use of overwhelming force at a crucial point.”⁵⁵ This is the Clausewitzian center of gravity. “What they do is built very heavily on preemption,” according to China analyst Larry Wortzel, “the problem with the striking at the enemy’s center of gravity is, for the United States, they see it as being in Japan, Hawaii, and the West Coast... that is very escalatory.”⁵⁶ As Chinese security analyst Baohui Zhang wrote: “China, from a position of conventional disadvantage, may have incentive to launch a preemptive strike to level the playing field” before a conflict with the United States.⁵⁷

The secret to America’s battlefield success since 1990, despite all our geostrategic errors, is what we call “joint operations”: the ability to get air, land, sea, space, and cyber forces to work together effectively. That takes decades of often painful practice that the PLA has only just begun. “Today

⁵⁵ Freedberg, “China’s Fear of the U.S. May Cause them to Preempt.” Accessed October 12, 2013.

⁵⁶ Freedberg, “China’s Fear of the U.S. May Cause them to Preempt.” Accessed October 12, 2013.

⁵⁷ Baohui Zhang, “The Modernization of Chinese Nuclear Forces and Its Impact on Sino-U.S. Relations,” *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (2007), pp. 87-100, 87.

their military doctrine is ‘integrated joint warfare,’” said Wortzel. “They’re not there yet.” In fact, Wortzel further added, “they’re just beginning to get people from other services than the ground forces commanding their air force, their Navy, and their Second Artillery. For 50 years, the navy and the air force were commanded by soldiers.” The Chinese are painfully aware that their planes can’t beat US or Japanese planes head-on, their ships can’t beat our ships, their submarines can’t beat our subs. But, that kind of “symmetrical” warfare is not the way either the US or China plans to fight. A typical anti-submarine warfare (ASW) operation, for example, requires surface ships, aircraft from both carriers and land bases, satellites, and friendly submarines to work together to hunt down and destroy the enemy sub.

For the Chinese in particular, they are betting heavily on land-based missiles to take out enemy airbases and ships at sea, with China’s own air and naval forces in a supporting and largely defensive role. The bigger issue is ensuring the Second Artillery can operate relatively seamlessly with the Chinese air force and navy. So far, the three forces rarely train together in peacetime and they have no real-world combat experience fighting together. “Their military was always separated really into a ground force, a navy, and

an air force, and since about '63 a missile force, that never operated together, never," said Wortzel. "They planned independent campaigns."

However, the Chinese are getting better, according to Dean Cheng, in the use of joint command structures in disaster relief operations and, most notably, with their "Vanguard 2009" exercises in the Jinan Military District. It's well worth noting that the officer who commanded both those exercises and much of the response to the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, Gen. Fan Changlong, has since been promoted two ranks to become Senior Vice-Chairman of the Central Military Commission. That makes Gen. Fan senior to China's defense minister and second on the CMC only to Chinese president Xi Jinping himself. According to Cheng, that suggests joint operations are becoming very important, and that Gen. Fan "really lit a fire underneath" the PLA, stating, in essence: "Listen up, people, we're going to take this to the next level."

The Chinese conception of the value of first strike or preemption is intellectually apart from Western conceptions. Western strategic thought has an aversion to what we might call Schlieffen's approach to war, where an entire war is associated with a single idea "thought out in advance, considered in every detail, and adhered to right to the end," requiring constant envelopment of the enemy by extending the front line or by

outflanking marches.⁵⁸ Western military thought is dominated by a Clausewitzian or Moltkean approach. Moltke distrusted “methodical” long-term campaign plans. In fact, he occasionally called strategy a system of mere “expedients,” and he wrote: “The theory of strategy scarcely goes beyond the first premises of common sense.”⁵⁹ Of course, Moltke and Clausewitz did not submit that strategy was improvisation. Both recognized the importance of general principles in warfare, concentration at the decisive point, moving divided and striking united, the value of flank and frontal attacks, and the need to keep the initiative. But, Moltke kept free of doctrinarism, as did Clausewitz to a similar if somewhat lesser degree. U.S. forces are trained to value the initiative and to understand Moltke’s dictum that no plan survives first contact with the enemy.

I. The Chinese Perception of First Strike and Preemption

While the Chinese have points of similarity with Western conceptions of first strike and preemption, there are also significant differences. This section of the chapter considers the Chinese attitude and makes five major arguments accordingly. It first explores the Chinese willingness to undertake a first strike and finds that Beijing’s willingness is heavily informed by the concept

⁵⁸ Ritter, *The Schlieffen Plan*, p. 49.

⁵⁹ Moltke quoted in Ritter, *The Schlieffen Plan*, p. 49.

of *shi*, or strategic advantage. Second, it examines the role of first strike and deception in Chinese strategic thought. Third, it evaluates the empirical conditions that the Chinese leadership believes it faces.

At the outset of this discussion, it is important to note that, in many respects, the United States is in a situation similar to the one Nathan Leites of the Rand Corporation found himself at the outset of the Cold War. At that time, the central question was how do we understand Soviet decision-making and their current and future actions. To answer these questions, Leites developed what he termed “The Operational Code of the Politburo.”⁶⁰

Today we confront the same situation with China. Unlike the Cold War, when the United States had few Sovietologists, the United States has a legion of Sinologists who are tasked with precisely the objectives of analyzing and predicting Chinese behavior. Yet, for all of the writings of countless Sinologists, who purportedly explore the major motivations, actions, and responses of the Chinese, United States decision-makers are still in doubt over Chinese motivations and actions, as well as how they perceive and analyze the world.

As Aaron Friedberg wrote in his exceptional study of the future U.S. relationship with China, “the truth is that China is too important to be left to

⁶⁰ Nathan Leites, *The Operational Code of the Politburo* (Santa Monica: Rand, 1951).

the China hands.”⁶¹ Indeed, it is. Friedberg’s insight underscores the importance of research that questions what are too often shared assumptions about China, and that is, in fact, critical of China and calls attention to the reality of China’s behavior.

Indeed, it is especially important that research is conducted by analysts who are, in essence, outsiders to the “China community” of scholars and policy analyst, and thus are free to critique Chinese policies precisely because the Chinese government has no leverage over them—and so cannot punish or reward them as Beijing sees fit—and are not vested in the “China community” where shared professional assumptions and common approaches to the professional study of China might occlude alternatives.

I.A. The Chinese Willingness to Execute a First Strike is Heavily Influenced by Chinese Strategic Culture

China’s willingness to execute a first strike for strategic purposes is the function of Chinese strategic culture. Strategic culture, whether Western or Chinese, refers to a discrete bounded system of conduct and behavior to which members of the military are supposed to adhere. It is made of written and unwritten rules and conventions as well as distinct beliefs and practices,

⁶¹ Aaron L Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia* (New York: Norton, 2011), p. 269.

such as the use of deception and symbols.⁶² Second, strategic culture can mean the accumulated and transmitted knowledge upon which those involved in making grand strategic choices, both civilian and military, base their arguments, validate their positions, and examine or analyze a situation. Third, strategic culture may be understood as the set of values that determine a society's inclination for war and military organization. In this sense, for instance, Sparta may be seen to have had a more developed strategic culture than Athens. Some societies develop a special preference and readiness for aggressive behavior, such as Japan before its defeat in World War II. Fourth, it may refer to the presence of an aesthetic and literary tradition that values military events and raises the status of those who accomplish martial exploits to the level of heroes in epic poems like the *Iliad*, visual representations, communal celebrations, and state rituals.

For China, investigating strategic culture means understanding the relationship between war, society, and thought beyond the immediate empirical level in order to recognize the ways in which intellectual, civilian, and literary developments intervened to shape the nature of China's military institutions, strategic thought, and cultural proclivities for strategic choices,

⁶² Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 22-27.

such as first strike and preemption.⁶³ In addition, understanding Chinese strategic culture allows analysts to comprehend similarities and differences with the Western experience. The idea of technological change is of major importance in Western strategic culture. Historian of Western warfare Geoffrey Parker has argued that “the Western Way of Warfare” is based on four distinctive elements: advanced technology, superior discipline, continuity of the military tradition, and a cycle of challenge and response.⁶⁴

Eminent Sinologist Nicola Di Cosmo argues that it is difficult to identify similar themes for the Chinese.⁶⁵ While the “Chinese Way of War” may also include the continuity of tradition, embedded in the transmission and discussion of the military classics, and on strategic choices, such as first strikes, it would be difficult to reach a broad consensus about other aspects. For example, technology is far less significant in Chinese imperial history until the nineteenth century when Western weapons began to be produced on an industrial scale and the broader issue of modernization became more significant. Military change certainly occurred in China but in different ways.

⁶³ Nicola Di Cosmo, “Introduction,” in Nicola Di Cosmo, ed., *Military Culture in Imperial China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 1-22, 4.

⁶⁴ Geoffrey Parker, “Comment on Shin’ichi Kitaoka, ‘Army as Bureaucracy: Japanese Militarism Revisited,’ and Arthur Waldron ‘War and the Rise of Nationalism in Twentieth-Century China,’” *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (July 1993), pp. 105-109, 107.

⁶⁵ Di Cosmo, “Introduction,” p. 6.

It was connected with military institutions and organization that occurred at times of conquest or invasion.⁶⁶ Indeed, military thought and practice largely followed their own, largely flat, trajectories, independent from social and intellectual culture or practices. It is remarkable at how little military development there was in Chinese history in contrast to European strategic and technological developments during the same period, from 500 B.C. until present. Chinese military history gives us insight into this lack of development. The special and distinct character of Chinese military history begins with the nature of the historical narrative of military events: It is the celebration or condemnation of a general, the exalted triumph as well as the crushing defeat, the political discussion about a given war and preparation for it, and the outcome of war—be it the end of hostilities by diplomatic agreement or the reorganization of border defenses or the conquest of lands and submission of enemies. What military historian John Keegan wrote of the “face of battle,” actual, detailed accounts of the soldier in battle, do not exist in Chinese accounts.

Strategic culture is a fundamental part of the Chinese strategic calculus regarding first strike or preemption. This calculus has three major

⁶⁶ For a description, see Edward L. Dreyer, “Continuity and Change,” in David A. Graff and Robin Higham, eds., *A Military History of China* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2002), pp. 19-38, 29-35.

elements. The first of which is the Chinese understanding of the strategic opportunity created by *shi*. This will be caused by the actions of the Chinese themselves, but also by opportunities presented by the opponent. Second, the use of deception and first strike in Chinese strategic thought provides a detailed approach to the consistency of these options in Chinese strategic history. Third, the empirical condition of pre-crisis, crisis, or war informs when the Chinese will seek to launch a first strike or preempt. These causes, taken together, permit United States Defense decision-makers to be cognizant of the likely circumstances of when the Chinese are inclined to execute a first strike.

I.A.1. Strategic Opportunity Created by *Shi* and by the Opponent

The first of the causes that will positively influence China's willingness to execute a first strike or engage in preemption is the Chinese perception of the opportunity China itself or the enemy has created. The creation of this opportunity may be the result of placing the opponent into a position where he does not expect the first strike or preemption to occur. This might be done by managing the opponent's perception of risk or his vulnerability to a first strike or preemption.

Such manipulation of an opponent is made possible by the concept of *shi*, or *shih*, [勢], pronounced like "sure." The proper configuration of power

will make possible the opportunity of first strike or preemption. François Jullien emphasizes that the concept of *shi* is centrally important to understanding Chinese strategic thought. It is strategic advantage as we in the West would understand it, but it also emphasizes the potential of a situation.

This introduction to *shi* restates some of the basic tenets explained in Jullien's scholarship: Chinese strategy seeks to avoid direct confrontation, and determines the value of a situation from its potentiality, rather than simply an opportunity for exploitation. This is ever at the mercy of circumstances, and so there are no fixed moral questions. *Shi*, broadly defined as energy or spirit, is a resource of infinite utility renewability, and is never wasted in a pitched battle that risks everything. *Shi* allows for no risk, as everything is predetermined before the confrontation. The Chinese will take action that is in accord with the propensity of trends at any given moment. As the trend changes, so too does Chinese strategy. This is both passive, following the trend, but also active, identifying what possibilities exist in a given condition.

Jullien argues that *shi* is well represented by the flow of water. If a wall retaining a large amount of water is breached, the water can only flow in one direction, and in its surge, it carries everything in front of it.

In the realm of strategy, “disposition,” or the “propensity of things,” is related to the configuration of the land. A general must make the most of the character of the land, low-lying or elevated, accessible or not, but equally important is the moral disposition of the antagonists, whether they are enthusiastic or dispirited. If the general is correct in his application, the enemy will not be in a position to resist, and numerical advantage will give way to the superior application of *shi*.⁶⁷

Properly understanding *shi* is like appreciating the mix of structural conditions and intentional policies in international politics. The structure is the bipolarity of the Cold War or the hegemony of the United States at the present time. That equates to the trend. Within bipolarity or U.S. hegemony, states craft policies to permit them greater freedom of movement, such as France’s “Third Way” in the context of the Cold War, or by developing policies to undermine U.S. hegemony now. That is, identifying what possibilities exist in a given condition. Trend and response are interconnected, but response, rightfully understood, allows the state to operate while developing policies that will lead to the fall of the hegemon. It also suggests which of policies will be most effective: for example, policies

⁶⁷ François Jullien, *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China*, trans. by Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone Books, 1995), p. 28.

that are not noticed, easily dismissed, or do not provoke any reaction until the propensity of things is ripe for change will be the most effective.

The origin of this belief, according to Jullien, is found at the end of the Warring States period in 220 B.C., which marks the foundation of the modern Chinese state. Legalists most forcefully advanced the importance of *shi*. China's first Emperor, Qin Shi Huangdi, the founder of the Qin dynasty, used these classic precepts to consolidate his kingdom and conquer others, which is one of the reasons he is still venerated in China. Emperor Qin used these teachings in his political and military affairs against his own people as well as in foreign relations against other Chinese states. The methods were the same, great emphasis on cooption through bribery and targeting the psychology of rival leaders to defeat them before a direct confrontation in battle occurred.

As one would expect for such an important concept, *shi* also has an impact in the realm of art. *Shi* connects to the omnipresent image of the dragon in Chinese culture. The dragon is such an important symbol because it never exerts its potential and dynamism; it can be anywhere, do practically anything, its form is almost infinitely elastic, and it is always moving. The image of two dragons intertwined similarly suggests collaboration and not

conflict. It is, like *shi*, an infinite source of energy and strength that is both material and spiritual.

Like a work of art, *shi* underlies historical circumstances and gives them efficacy. Different circumstances always require different responses, so one must be careful with their respect for the past. History is mainly composed of gradually developing tendencies, which also have an opposite effect: if one state is rising, another must be declining. The wise statesman thus waits for such tendencies to reach their ripeness, but cannot personally take credit for their development. Also, while China has a tendency to view itself in isolation, it is also aware of how its relative fortunes compare to those of “barbarian states.”⁶⁸

Opportunity may also arise as a result of the actions of an opponent. His actions will provide the Chinese with the opportunity to act against him. These will be any strategic opportunities, and thus include military opportunities but also, more broadly, the economic vulnerabilities of the

⁶⁸ Sinologist Arthur Waldron echoes Jullien’s interpretation of *shi*. He submits that *shi* means the configuration and the tendency of all factors (terrain, weather, forces, morale) that bear on victory. It does not mean “military power” as Johnston translates it, nor “energy” as Griffith does. Closer to the true meaning is “purchase, advantage” or “propensity,” as Jullien defines it. Waldron, “The Art of *Shi*,” p. 39. Henry Kissinger notes that *shi* character combines the elements of “cultivate” and “strength.” Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), p. 533n37. Kissinger argues that *shi* is “strategic position,” and elsewhere in his work as “understanding matters in flux,” *On China*, pp. 31, 235.

opponent and his political or diplomatic vulnerabilities. The Chinese have always been receptive to capitalizing on any of the opponent's weaknesses.

The second vital insight that Jullien notes is how significant the development of ends and means was for Western thought as twin criteria for determining efficacy, which obviously factors heavily into thoughts on strategy and war. Karl von Clausewitz attempted to argue that economy of force with maximum effect as the best way to balance means and ends, but concludes that means are difficult to conceive of in the abstract. The Chinese reject this dichotomy by restricting their consideration to the objectively best way to solve the situation at hand. Because of this, we view war as a highly dangerous game of chance, since means and ends can never fully be resolved, whereas the Chinese seek to fight only battles they know they have already won.

For the Chinese, the concept of strategy identified in ancient Chinese treatises is based on the idea of the potential of a situation. On this point, Jullien writes: "The Chinese consider the potential of a situation to be variable; it cannot be determined in advance because it proceeds from continuous adaptation," the major consequence of which is that "Chinese military strategy is not affected by the theory-practice relationship," but

rather the notion of the potential of the situation.⁶⁹ As Jullien notes, the implication of this is that the Chinese do not identify Clausewitzian “friction” as a salient concept, and therefore does not occupy the central place that it does in Western military thought. This is because whereas friction “is a threat to any plan drawn up in advance, adventitious circumstances are themselves precisely what make it possible for the implied potential to come about and deploy itself.”⁷⁰ The minimization of friction in plans and warfare is one of the major differences between Chinese and Western strategic thought, and it is an issue to which we will return due to its importance.

The third insight relates to the concept of transformation, which is more significant than action. In the West, we isolate the actor, the action and the result; and so we have grandiose epics about personal struggle and treat politics as clay to be molded by strenuous and wise effort. The Chinese emphasize a continuous and ever-changing process in which one is immersed. As the Chinese say: “It becomes manifest without ever having to show itself.” While the Western general concocts a brilliant plan and puts it in motion, the Chinese general takes advantage of circumstances in such a way that victory is practically a natural phenomenon like wind or the flowing of a river. As Jullien writes, in Western “warfare, the sole object of an

⁶⁹ Jullien, *A Treatise on Efficacy*, p. 23.

⁷⁰ Jullien, *A Treatise on Efficacy*, pp. 23-24.

engagement is the destruction of the enemy forces...the ancient Chinese treatise on warfare recommends the exact opposite.”⁷¹ For Clausewitz, “only the engagement itself, in the heat of battle, is truly decisive...in the eyes of the Chinese strategists the engagement is simply a result in that it is the consequence of a transformation that began in some way upstream from the action itself.”⁷²

In fact, a “sage never takes action. He transforms...transformation affects the concerned collection of elements at every point...it is impossible to localize; its deployment is always global;” and just as the sage acts in this manner, the best general “will have gotten the situation to evolve in the desired direction so skillfully, gradually intervening well in advance, that he will have made the victory seem easy.”⁷³ Once the engagement has taken place, people will say, “Victory was a foregone conclusion,’ thereby reducing the merit of the commander,” and yet, without understanding it, “they have paid him the greatest of all compliments. It is because his merit is so complete that the victory seems natural and therefore attracts no notice.”⁷⁴

As with transformation, there is a significant dichotomy between the Western and Chinese conception of opportunity. In his discussion in *A*

⁷¹ Jullien, *A Treatise on Efficacy*, p. 47.

⁷² Jullien, *A Treatise on Efficacy*, p. 50.

⁷³ Jullien, *A Treatise on Efficacy*, pp. 55-58.

⁷⁴ Jullien, *A Treatise on Efficacy*, p. 58.

Treatise on Efficacy, Jullien compares the two notions of opportunity. In the West, we commonly select an opportune moment and action from a list of rationally devised choices that will occur at a fixed moment in time. While genius, particularly military genius as with Napoleon, is adept at choosing opportunity in this way; it is always a flirtation with chance and fortune. For the Chinese, opportunity is a moment of ripeness that is conceived at an early stage and witnessed through its entire development. Chinese “military thought is concerned with spotting the potential of a situation at its embryonic, initial stage...the sooner he spots the initial appearance of the potential, the better he will be able to profit by it.”⁷⁵ There is no probability, and the general acts not because he is bold, virtuous, or understands strategy (as Machiavelli or Clausewitz would argue), but only because it works. This suggests that the Chinese are true realists, even more so than Machiavelli, focusing on the end and using whatever means are available.

An important corollary to the Chinese concept of opportunity is the idea of “Do Nothing (With Nothing Left Undone)” taken from a major theme in the *Laozi*, which details the paradox in Chinese thought that non-action produces more results than action, by inserting one’s self in an immanent process and cultivating results like a gardener feeding a plant. This view is

⁷⁵ Jullien, *A Treatise on Efficacy*, p. 66.

widely shared in Chinese thought, with the only division coming from the Confucians and Legalists (Realists) on the concept of rule: Confucians believe that the ruler's non-action allows individuals to flourish and grow in virtue, while Legalists believe that it forces everyone into a mechanical operation entirely within the service of the state.

The paradox of inaction may be extended to the issue of effect. Citing the *Laozi* extensively, Jullien submits that the Chinese mode of thought concludes that effects result from not pursuing them directly, that one simply works to set things in motion, since the best effects produce perpetual results rather than one singular moment of achievement. This is achieved by attaining "emptiness," which is not quite nonexistence but rather creating a vacuum through which effects can be mature and the individual does not interfere. In a political context, this means that the ruler who tries to do too much is bogged down by excessive regulation and offends others, rather than allowing events to develop and succeeding through minimal action.

Concerning the construction of a strategy. Westerners focus their concept of efficacy on producing a singular effect achieved by deliberate will and concrete in its results. For the Chinese, an effect is the natural progression (emphatically not an outcome) of a process that began "upstream," far in advance when conditions, even reality itself, were far more

malleable. "Upstream from actualization, however, reality is still flexible and fluid; one does not have to confront it head-on, since whatever one might need to pressurize has not yet come about...one can steer it gently, and the slight inflection will be decisive...the more reality is determined concretely, the more cumbersome it is to manage."⁷⁶ Accordingly, Sun-tzu's priorities for attacking the enemy correspond to early stages of planning, that is, it is best to win before fighting and worst to fight in a siege where material conditions are most evident. This is not efficacy as such, but efficiency, streamlining a natural process and not taking any individual credit for performing an action. In this way, the best results are practically invisible, and in a military context, indiscernible to enemy eyes.

In a related work, Jullien argues that there is a sharp contrast between China and the West, in both combat and rhetoric. He cites the work of classical military historians John Keegan and Victor Davis Hanson, who describe the Greek warrior method as generally eschewing subtlety in favor of pitched, conclusive battles in close quarters. Similarly, Greek rhetoric, while certainly subtle and layered, is best described as a clash of directly opposing arguments. This is contrasted with the Chinese love of detour and

⁷⁶ Jullien, *A Treatise on Efficacy*, p. 126.

indirect speech, which frees up room for maneuver and never exhausts one's potential for further action.

This is the contrast between the Western conception of frontal attack and the Chinese conception of oblique attack. As Jullien writes, "Military strategy was much more than a specific technique in ancient China. It reflected some of the most radical elements of Chinese thought and informed many other disciplines," but if there is one "basic principle on which all ancient Chinese treatises insist, it is that of avoiding direct confrontation with an armed enemy."⁷⁷ Traditional forms of Western warfare are avoided. "A frontal clash, in which two armies are engaged face-to-face, was always considered eminently risky and destructive."⁷⁸

Indeed, Jullien argues that for the Chinese, "the whole art of war was crafted with the intention of depriving the other of his ability to defend himself and undermining him from within, even before the confrontation took place, so that at the moment of confrontation the enemy collapsed of his own accord."⁷⁹ In addition, he captures two key elements of Chinese strategy: "In the art of invective, therefore, are two characteristics central to Chinese military strategy. The oblique approach gives the one who is

⁷⁷ Jullien, *Detour and Access*, p. 35.

⁷⁸ Jullien, *Detour and Access*, p. 35.

⁷⁹ Jullien, *Detour and Access*, p. 35.

criticizing, like the one who is fighting, a means not to expose himself, a means to remain unfathomable, while rendering his power of attack inexhaustible.”⁸⁰

As Sun-tzu wrote, “To carry one hundred victories for every hundred battles is not an end in itself, whereas to subjugate the enemy without having engaged in combat is the height of excellence.”⁸¹ Rather than glorifying the battle, the art of war taught how to triumph by avoiding battle altogether.

Equally important, strategy also consisted in attacking the enemy’s plans, or ideas rather than his troops by physical force. The best strategist was the one always able to anticipate the course of events and thereby thwart the enemy’s plans. In contrast, the worst outcome was to end up in attritional warfare or immobilized warfare, such as a siege. This is because attritional or immobilized warfare reduces the initiative and loses flexibility. Accordingly, “Chinese theorists of military strategy advise not the destruction of the enemy,” as this would waste resources, but striking at the enemy’s “‘brain’ rather than at deployed forces, the good strategist inhibited his enemy; it was enough for him to deprive the enemy of his ability to react,” and to paralyze the movements of the enemy.⁸² This is also why the general

⁸⁰ Jullien, *Detour and Access*, p. 52.

⁸¹ Sun-tzu quoted in Jullien, *Detour and Access*, p. 35.

⁸² Jullien, *Detour and Access*, p. 36.

who “dexterously handles his troops...subjugates the enemy without combat and takes his positions without attack.”⁸³

The logic of this makes sense from a military standpoint as it promises victory with as little cost as possible. Seen from an evolutionary point of view, the logic also makes sense, as quick victory minimizes casualties when the combatants are part of a larger Chinese family. Killing other Chinese is something to be minimized, just as siblings and cousins are far less likely to engage in bloodshed than individuals who are not related.

For Jullien, two pairs of concepts are centrally important to this discussion. The first of these is the distinction between the “direct” versus the “oblique,” and the second is the difference between the “straight” versus the “circuitous.” The first distinction has a strategic function, whereas the second is more limited to discussions of tactical operations. “But whatever the application, the resource exploited by Chinese military art always rests on the relationship of direct and indirect.”⁸⁴ As Sun-tzu notes, when maneuvering troops, it might be just as advisable to make the enemy’s advances excessively long and tortuous, so as to exhaust him, by luring him

⁸³ Sun-tzu, “Mou gong pian” *The Art of War*. Also see, Jullien, *Detour and Access*, p. 36.

⁸⁴ Jullien, *Detour and Access*, p. 36.

with false bait as to make one's own progress circuitous and keep one's plans secret in order to surprise the enemy.⁸⁵

In *The Art of War*, Sun-tzu captures the difference between direct and oblique: "an encounter takes place frontally, while victory is gained obliquely."⁸⁶ Jullien submits that, according to commentators on this difference, "frontally" signifies not only facing the enemy but also doing so in a normal, ordinary, and predictable way. Likewise, "obliquely" means not only approaching from the side but doing so in an extraordinary way: unexpected by the enemy, attacking him when he is least prepared.⁸⁷ Confederate General "Stonewall" Jackson's Second Corps flanking attack on General Hooker's Union force at the battle of Chancellorsville in 1863 would be a classic example of this. Another excellent example would be the surprise intervention during the Korean War in October and November 1950.

The distinction between the frontal and the oblique has been considered by other Chinese authors, and more concretely, may be applied to military operations; for example, positioning one's own forces in response to the enemy's position would represent a frontal relationship. In contrast,

⁸⁵ Sun-tzu, "Jun zheng pian" and "Jiu di pian," *The Art of War*.

⁸⁶ Sun-tzu, "Shi pian," in *The Art of War*.

⁸⁷ Jullien, *Detour and Access*, pp. 36-37.

dominating the position of an adversary's troops without taking it would represent an oblique relationship. In other words, without positioning, I control the positioning of the enemy. In a frontal relationship, there is a target. In an oblique relationship, what has not yet occurred or taken concrete form means that there cannot be opposition. The oblique relationship makes it possible to keep the initiative while remaining un-attackable. The oblique relationship upsets the enemy's plans. This is why it is a superior form of warfare.

Essentially, "When the oblique relationship is in effect, not to respond [in kind] makes a victory possible."⁸⁸ The Chinese place considerable importance on not responding, and not responding in an expected manner, in their strategic thought. As a Tang emperor explained, the art of war "consists in creating a frontal relationship from an oblique relationship in such a way that the enemy, seeing it as a frontal relationship, allows me to surprise him obliquely and likewise creating an oblique relationship from a frontal relationship in such a way that the enemy, seeing it as an oblique relationship, allows me to attack him frontally."⁸⁹

⁸⁸ "Qizheng" in Sun Bin, *The Art of Warfare*, quoted in Jullien, *Detour and Access*, p. 38.

⁸⁹ The Tang emperor Tai Zong in "Shi pian" in Sun-tzu, *The Art of War*; quoted in Jullien, *Detour and Access*, p. 38.

This reasoning does seem to be a bit puzzling or confusing, but in actuality, the core ideas and similar military principles are present in Western thought. Concealing motives and surprising the enemy in a tactical or strategic manner are familiar to Western military audiences, as is the anticipation of the enemy's response to any action taken.

However, there are important differences as well. Western ideas about friction, mass, and concentration of force are absent in Chinese strategic thought. The Western archetype of warfare may be the Greek phalanx, an expertly trained, tight formation, maximizing firepower and seeking decisive battle. That essential idea has found many forms over the ages, including columns of infantry in the Napoleonic period or armor advances in the modern. As Jullien notes, "Greek military strategy offers a sharp contrast with Chinese military strategy: the Greeks would have resolutely ignored the infinite expedients of oblique confrontation, relying instead on the violent clash of a victorious or fatal encounter. On the one side, we have mass weight, on the others, the strategy of detour." "Physical pressure" favored by Westerners since the Greeks "is opposed to art of thwarting" the opponent as mastered by the Chinese.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Jullien, *Detour and Access*, p. 42.

From the Chinese perspective, what is different is the belief that the strategist can shape or craft the situation, lulling the opponent, dodging and harassing to tire out an enemy, using circuitousness to dilute the rapidity and decisiveness of a single assault, and, perhaps most importantly, having him make the first, and thus mistaken, move. The origins of this belief, in part, come from the fact that for most of Chinese history, and for most Chinese conflicts, the opponent has also been Chinese. Certainly this was the case when the main Chinese texts were written. Developing one's own strategy and thinking through the opponent's was a little bit like looking in the mirror. The enemy is of the same Chinese "family," and is of a similar strategic culture, outlook, even training. Military doctrine will be similar and objectives known, and leaders will have been equally well schooled in the classic Chinese strategic texts. Thus, the clever opponent, the one more successful at disguising motive, and the one who is more artful in the use of oblique strategies will be the victor.

This argument coincides with Jullien's point that the frontal/oblique strategic dyad, "formulated quasi-definitively in the fifth and sixth centuries of Chinese antiquity, has ceaselessly been reformulated and commented on, to the point that it has become proverbial and seems no longer require

justification.”⁹¹ But, its importance remains relevant in modern China. “In the twentieth century, Mao referred to it once again in his military treatises (which remain, in my [Jullien’s] opinion, the best part of his oeuvre and greatly illuminate his political conduct): to conquer the enemy, one must first disorient him, ‘make noise in the east to attack in the west.’”⁹² For Jullien, the “whole of Chinese military strategy can be summed up in this oblique phrase.”⁹³

The strategy of indirection or oblique approach also applies to Chinese diplomacy. The use of literary references or poetry may seem unusual in the West, but is a common feature in the Chinese practice of diplomacy. Jullien discusses the tradition of Chinese diplomats conducting discussions and negotiations not through direct discourse, but an exchange of poetic quotations that test one’s literary merit and subtle grasp of the matter at hand. While accounts of these exchanges appear dry and ceremonial, they could have tremendous consequences, as the quietest turn of phrase could irrevocably alter state policy. The actual or hidden meaning

⁹¹ Jullien, *Detour and Access*, p. 40.

⁹² Jullien, *Detour and Access*, p. 40.

⁹³ Jullien, *Detour and Access*, p. 40.

of the poems themselves is insignificant; they exist as a stalking horse for their allusions.⁹⁴

This indirection is also a common theme in ancient Chinese strategic writing and prose, in which praise and blame is very quietly conveyed by the selective use and exclusion of facts, some of which appear innocuous by themselves but have great contextual value, such as the way a person's name is used, word order and use of certain adjectives. Connected with this is the use of euphemism, in which even an enemy must be treated with verbal respect. The most glaring example of this is the violent death of a sovereign, which constitutes such a shock against the social order (particularly Confucian filial piety) that it can barely be acknowledged. Indirect discourse, in which poetic imagery evokes particular ideas without having to state them directly, is a common aspect of Chinese strategic thought and culture. Examples of poetry about nature are actually often loaded with political messages.⁹⁵

Indirection also applies to Chinese philosophy. Confucian writings use indirect speech. For Confucius, the value of speech comes from the influence it exerts, through its force of impact, rather than through what is

⁹⁴ Jullien, *Detour and Access*, pp. 75-93.

⁹⁵ Jullien, *Detour and Access*, pp. 151-160.

said.⁹⁶ Because of this, German philosopher G.W. Hegel expressed his deep disappointment with Confucius' writings, stating that they did not live up to his grand reputation. Jullien sees this as fitting, since the "scope" of his words matter more than the words themselves, and he does not have the same focus on rhetoric that early Greek philosophers have. Some have attributed this to Confucius possibly being ironic, but Jullien ascribes it to the laconic and indirect tendencies of Chinese philosophy.

Confucius, unlike Western philosophers since the time of Socrates to John Rawls, does not speak of definitions or essential truths.⁹⁷ Part of the explanation is context, as immediate context shapes every answer Confucius gives; there is no fixed moral solution to a problem that applies to every individual. But, it is also the case that one should not expect Confucius to be an analytical philosopher, with clearly defined definitions and precise arguments. Because the universe does not explain itself through words, he is skeptical that he can explain his philosophy verbally since it is not a moral code outside and apart from the natural world, but a human extension of natural processes, which are better performed than explained.

In their writings, both Confucius and Mencius return to the ever-present image of water flowing, but not as a metaphor for conflict, as

⁹⁶ Jullien, *Detour and Access*, p. 203.

⁹⁷ Jullien, *Detour and Access*, p. 226.

considered below. For them, water is a natural and eternal process that bends to every obstacle and change in circumstance. Mencius refused to engage in direct discourse, which implies his rejection of absolute truth. By always giving indirect and elusive answers, he fits the precise meaning of the particular question without allowing his answer to extend into statements of truth beyond the immediate situation.⁹⁸

The right understanding of the oblique strategy in Chinese strategic thought allows us to understand Deng Xiaoping's 24-character instruction to Chinese officials as an archetype: "Observe carefully; secure our position; cope with affairs; hide our capabilities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership."⁹⁹ The strategic objective of dominance is firm and unalterable but packaged in such a manner to provoke the least resistance or effective counter-balancing coalition.

It is critical to recognize that the Chinese believe that they have created conditions amenable to its supremacy. The Chinese are keenly aware that they are in an ideological struggle, as article in China's military newspaper, *PLA Daily*, stressed. "The ideological field has always been the focus of hostile forces attempts to Westernize and divide China. To subvert a

⁹⁸ Jullien, *Detour and Access*, p. 264.

⁹⁹ Deng's 24-character instruction is quoted in Kissinger, *On China*, p. 438.

government, the hostile forces often start with the ideological field to open up a hole for a breakthrough. Our military should not only defeat the enemy in [sic] the battlefield, but also defeat the enemy in the ideological field.”¹⁰⁰

The editorial continued, “Some may think that China is in close cooperation with the West, as the struggle is not so intense and complicated. One may not know that under the cover of economic cooperation, it is a contest for the future....We should be particularly vigilant as the hostile forces are directly targeting our army, attempting to replicate the course of the Egyptian and Tunisia [sic] coups so as to separate our army from the Communist Party’s banner. We must make the first move and take the initiative to respond rationally to this ‘war.’”¹⁰¹ Today’s PLA is different, in contrast to the Soviet Army, “the reason that the Soviet army in core belief and color, stood still at a critical juncture, and even defected (from the Party), is the most fundamental issue; it is that they lost their ideals and belief and forgot the ‘Party commands the gun’ principle. [As long as] our army maintains the same soul

¹⁰⁰ ZYH and AEF, “PLA Daily: Be Firm in the Battlefield of Ideological Struggle,” *Chinascopie* 18 September 2013, available at: <<http://chinascopie.org/main/content/view/5801/105/>>. Accessed 21 September 2013.

¹⁰¹ ZYH and AEF, “PLA Daily: Be Firm in the Battlefield of Ideological Struggle.”

and inherits the red gene, we will be able to stay firm and stand high in the ideological struggle.”¹⁰²

Understanding *shi* allows analysts, first, to understand why the Chinese place great weight on intelligence gathering, with one of the fundamental strategic goals of intelligence operations is being able to identify and shape events before they become sources of confrontation or contention. With this strategy, the adversary can do nothing about the situation when he is confronted with it. Not only will the battle be won before it is fought, if the Chinese have done their homework, there will not be a battle in the first place. The Chinese seek to win without confrontation, by placing the opponent in such a position that he withdraws or retreats of his own accord.

Second, *shi* provides the Chinese with both the grounding for their policies as well as flexibility for them. One core interest exists and it is one that does not permit flexibility in intent: to advance China’s fundamental interest of dominance. Once we move beyond China’s core interest, we understand that everything else is flexible. The Chinese will change their policies as events develop. The implication of this is that China’s policies will be hard to predict and may border on what seems to be impulsive, such as the dramatic intervention in the Korean War.

¹⁰² ZYH and AEF, “PLA Daily: Be Firm in the Battlefield of Ideological Struggle.”

Third, *shi* allows us to understand how the Chinese will work to undermine their adversaries in the expectation that they will be able to defeat their adversaries without direct confrontation but rather to bring about their collapse from present conditions. Importantly, however, if conflict does occur, the Chinese will seek to defeat their adversaries at the beginning of the conflict with asymmetric strategies and with surprise attacks. As Henry Kissinger writes:

The strategist mastering *shi* is akin to water flowing downhill, automatically finding the right swiftest and easiest course. A successful commander waits before charging headlong into battle. He shies away from an enemy's strength; he spends his time observing and cultivating changes in the strategic landscape. He studies the enemy's preparations and his morale, husband's resources and defines them carefully, and plays on his opponent's psychological weaknesses—until at last he perceives the opportune moment to strike the enemy at the weakest point. He then deploys his resources swiftly and suddenly, rushing “downhill” along the path of least resistance, in an assertion of superiority that careful timing and preparation have rendered a *fait accompli*.¹⁰³

Discerning *shi* properly allows U.S. policymakers to grasp why the Chinese will place great emphasis on a bold, strategically clever attack. For the Chinese, *shi* in this context may be thought of as a “stratagem” intended

¹⁰³ Kissinger, *On China*, p. 30.

to be a masterstroke, not just solid but brilliant. It should be thought of as a strategy of strategic cleverness.¹⁰⁴

In the Chinese strategic tradition, the greatest hero is Zhuge Liang of the Three Kingdoms, a leader best known for his ingenious and deceptive stratagems. Without question, Chinese science and technology have advanced, and this has emboldened the already powerful cultural conviction that China can get much more with less because it is cleverer and better than its adversaries, not only intellectually but also materially.

In its military operations, China will seek to combine local superiority with diplomatic advantage and operational surprise. China will seek to use force decisively, taking maximum advantage of its relative superiorities to create new realities. The Chinese will ruthlessly exploit the openness of democratic societies. The expectation will be that, faced with a rapid, decisive, and quickly terminated operation, the United States and its allies will be unable to do anything effectively and, as a result, will accept the new status quo.

Such a conception is extremely dangerous, and many conflicts in history have been based on such profoundly misguided beliefs, as with the Japanese decision to attack Great Britain, the Netherlands, and the United

¹⁰⁴ Arthur Waldron, "The Art of *Shi*," *The New Republic*, June 23, 1997, pp. 37-39.

States in December 1941. The likelihood that the Chinese are guided along a similar path by their strategic worldview is high. The Chinese have the conviction that they possess superior strategic knowledge and ability, and that China will always be able to outfox and outmaneuver its strategic foes. Likewise, they have the belief that strategic deception plays a key role in their superior strategic abilities. In their self-image, the Han are more cunning and virtuous than the rest. The United States, in contrast, is easily manipulated, although strong and violent, just like an adolescent.

Naturally, such an approach seriously underestimates the ability of the United States and other countries to identify and respond. The conceit among the Chinese that they can manipulate others is supremely dangerous for the stability of Asia.

At the same time, it is a great advantage for the United States to play upon that overconfidence. To understand that an overconfident China will continue to make the mistakes it already has in the South China or East China Sea disputes.¹⁰⁵ That is, making threats, issuing demands, and heavy-handed shows of force are generated by China's overconfidence.

¹⁰⁵ An excellent analysis of these disputes is Sarah Raine and Christian le Mière, *Regional Disorder: The South China Sea Disputes* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

Thus, the willingness of the Chinese leadership to undertake a first strike or to preempt depends upon the leadership's perception of the strategic value of those options. Here, the conception of first strike should be broad so that it includes non-kinetic weapons, such as cyber weapons, or electromagnetic pulse weapons, which may be used apart from or in conjunction with kinetic weapons. In the Chinese strategic experience, the first strike may be followed by a strategic pause to determine if the foe has learned the proper lesson from his Chinese instructor. The key element here is will the foe accept the tutelage, will the foe de-escalate the situation.

I.A.2. The Importance of Deception and First Strike in Chinese Strategic Thought

Chinese strategic thought clearly evinces the important of surprise first strikes and deception in warfare. Indeed, Sun-tzu defined the essence of warfare as deception: "Warfare is the art (*tao*) of deceit."¹⁰⁶ Deception in warfare is war's essence and acme.

As described above, the forms or types of strategic advantage will be consistent but there must be flexibility, as specific conditions will make each situation unique. As Sun Bin wrote: "In the business of war, there is no

¹⁰⁶ Sun-tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, trans. by Roger T. Ames (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), p. 104.

invariable strategic advantage (*shi*) which can be relied upon all times.”¹⁰⁷

Rather, strategists must recognize the irrepressibility of change. The superior strategist gains advantage and victory by revising and redefining his own strength through an immediate yet unannounced responsiveness to the enemy’s shifting position or changing conditions. In this sense, the capable commander does not resist the rhythm of change, but, finding its pulse, translates defining conditions into actions as a means of controlling the situation, anticipating the enemy’s movements, and making victory inevitable. This is echoed by Sun Bin as well: “Thus, the expert at warfare can arrive at the enemy’s weaknesses from observing his strengths, and what he has in excess from observing what he is deficient in. He can see the victory as clearly as the sun or the moon, and is as sure of victory as water is sure to douse a fire.”¹⁰⁸

As Sun-tzu identifies, “Just as the flow of water avoids high ground and rushes to the lowest point, so on the path to victory avoid the enemy’s strong points and strike where he is weak. As water varies its flow according to (*yin*) the fall of the land, so an army varies its method of gaining victory according to (*yin*) the enemy.” He continues, “Thus an army does not have

¹⁰⁷ Sun Bin, *The Art of Warfare*, trans. by D.C. Lau and Roger T. Ames (Albany: State University of New York, 2003), p. 94.

¹⁰⁸ Sun Bin, *The Art of Warfare*, p. 174

fixed strategic advantages (*shih*) or an invariable position (*hsing*). To be able to take the victory by varying one's position according to (*yin*) the enemy's is called being inscrutable (*shen*)”¹⁰⁹

For gaining strategic advantage (*shi*) in battle, Sun-tzu writes, “there are no more than ‘surprise’ and ‘straightforward’ operations, yet in combination, they produce inexhaustible possibilities. ‘Surprise’ and ‘straightforward’ operations give rise to each other endlessly just as a ring is without a beginning or an end. And who can exhaust their possibilities?”¹¹⁰ There is the constant manipulation of expected and unexpected strategies.

Ultimately, for Sun-tzu and his disciples, the expert commander seeks his victory from “strategic advantage (*shih*) and does not demand it from his men. He is thus able to select the right men and exploit the strategic advantage (*shih*). He who exploits the strategic advantage (*shih*) sends his men into battle like rolling logs and boulders.”¹¹¹ Sun-tzu continues, “It is the nature of logs and boulders that on flat ground, they are stationary, but on steep ground, they roll; the square in shape tends to stop but the round tends to roll.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Sun-tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, p. 127.

¹¹⁰ Sun-tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, pp. 119-120.

¹¹¹ Sun-tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, p. 120.

¹¹² Sun-tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, pp. 120-121.

Key studies of Chinese deception in warfare have revealed that there is a long tradition dating to Sun-tzu.¹¹³ Indeed, the military historian of medieval Europe C.W.C. Oman commented: "For centuries war was studied as an art in the East, while in the West it remained largely a matter of hard fighting."¹¹⁴

This is not to argue that deception is unknown in the West, of course it is. Deception plays a role in every war, crisis, and in day-to-day security competition. Deception is used as a matter of state policy for most if not all states. Hence, deception is not uniquely Chinese. Indeed, in one of the most successful cases, the Germans were able to employ deception for their rearmament in the 1920s.¹¹⁵ At the same time, it is important to recognize that the Chinese do have unique practices in deception.

¹¹³ For excellent considerations of Chinese deception in warfare, see Scott A. Boorman, "Deception in Chinese Strategy," in William W. Whitson, ed., *The Military and Political Power in China in the 1970s* (New York: Praeger, 1972), pp. 313-338; Richard Wich, "Chinese Allies and Adversaries," in Whitson, ed., *The Military and Political Power in China in the 1970s*, pp. 291-312; and Samuel B. Griffith II, *The Chinese People's Liberation Army* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), pp. 246-247.

¹¹⁴ C.W.C. Oman, *The Art of War in the Middle Ages A.D. 378-1515* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1953), p. 33.

¹¹⁵ Barton Whaley, *Covert German Rearmament, 1919-1939: Deception and Misperception* (Frederick, Md.: University Publications of America, 1984). Also see Michael Dewar, *The Art of Deception in Warfare* (New York: Sterling, 1989).

First, deception is an element of *yin shi* (贏勢), or opportunity advantage. With *yin shi*, the strategist capitalizes on the enemy's disorder, fatigue, hunger or thirst to give no quarter where he is most vulnerable. It is discrete from, but allied with *ch'i shi* (氣勢), or morale advantage, as when the commander is ready for battle and troops have resolve for battle.¹¹⁶ *Ch'i shi* is human harmony, and may be conceived of as the human factor in leadership.¹¹⁷ It is internal to an individual, and might be thought of as charisma. A classic illustration was in 1966 when Mao went swimming in the Yangtze River. His swimming demonstrated willpower and revolutionary spirit, as well as physical strength: it demonstrated his *shi*. The third form of *shi* is *ti shih* (地勢), or terrain advantage provided by a narrow mountain gorge, coiled pathway, or bottleneck.¹¹⁸

Second, the Chinese link deception to demoralization. It is through deception that an entire army can be demoralized, and its commander made to lose heart. "In warfare rely on deceptive maneuvers to establish your ground, calculate advantages in deciding your movements, and divide up and consolidate your forces to make your strategic changes."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Sun-tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, p. 83.

¹¹⁷ I am grateful to Professor Kai He for sharing his insights about *shi*.

¹¹⁸ Sun-tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, p. 83.

¹¹⁹ Sun-tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, pp. 130-131.

Third, as advanced in *Six Secret Teachings*, deception and surprise are emphasized heavily. To maximize an attack's effectiveness, unorthodox measures should be implemented to manipulate the enemy psychologically and physically. In the context of a campaign, these include false attacks, feints, inciting confusion in the enemy's ranks through disinformation, and then taking advantages of the ensuing chaos, being aggressive and never yielding the initiative. The enemy must be properly evaluated before an attack is undertaken. *Six Secret Teachings* is also famous for its strong advocacy that everything is permitted in order to win in warfare: feigning and dissembling to deceive the enemy, using bribes, gifts and other methods to induce disloyalty among enemy officials and to cause chaos and consternation in their ranks, and debilitating the enemy by providing the tools for his own self-destruction—music, women, and fascinating rarities like jade carvings.¹²⁰ Much like the reception of Machiavelli's writings in the West, other Chinese works advanced the same fundamental message, but in a more nuanced way.

First strike is widely acknowledged as the right strategy to adopt in most circumstances, and certainly to initiate a war. In T'ai Kung's *Six Secret Teachings*, Master T'ai Kung argues: "The technique for military conquest is

¹²⁰ *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China*, trans. by Ralph D. Sawyer (New York: Basic Books, 1993), p. 33.

to carefully investigate the enemy's intentions and quickly take advantage of them, launching a sudden attack where unexpected."¹²¹ Later in the work, he emphasizes again the necessity of surprise: "send forth our elite troops to secretly launch a sudden attack against their center, striking where they do not expect it, attacking where they are not prepared."¹²²

Fourth, in *The Method of the Ssu-Ma*, the advice provided when encountering the adversary is to mount a surprise attack as feint to observe their discipline, but when ready to engage fully, "Mount a sudden strike on their doubts. Attack their haste. Force them to constrict their deployment. Launch a sudden strike against their order. Take advantage of [their failure] to avoid harm. Obstruct their strategy. Seize their thoughts. Capitalize on their fears."¹²³

When the enemy provides the opening, Sun-tzu argues that you must strike: "When the enemy gives you the opening, you must rush in on him. Go first for something that he cannot afford to lose, and do not let him know the timing of your attack. Revise your strategy according to the changing posture

¹²¹ T'ai Kung, *Six Secret Teachings*, in *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China*, p. 52.

¹²² T'ai Kung, *Six Secret Teachings*, in *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China*, p. 83.

¹²³ *The Methods of the Ssu-Ma*, in *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China*, p. 142.

of the enemy to determine the course and outcome of the battle.”¹²⁴ The influence of Sun-tzu is difficult to overstate. All of Chinese strategic thought references him. In contemporary China, he had a very significant impact on Chiang and Mao, particularly on the importance of intelligence and engaging when the circumstances are propitious.¹²⁵

However, in the West, it does not equal the all encompassing aspect that it does in China. In the West, deception is at variance with education and political culture, where transparency and openness are highly regarded. Moreover, it is hard to maintain, as adversarial politics, an often-divided government, rival think tanks and numerous commentators, and a free press ensures that leaks will be published. There are also governmental processes like the Freedom of Information Act that can offer insights into governmental decision-making.

Fifth, it is important to recognize that surprise attack is a mix of orthodox and unorthodox strategies advocated by Sun-tzu, Sun Bin, and, more broadly, in Chinese strategic thought.

Sun-tzu’s basic strategy focuses on manipulating the enemy, creating the opportunity for a victory without war, or, if war is necessary, that it is an

¹²⁴ Sun-tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, p. 162.

¹²⁵ Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 185.

easy victory. To bring this situation about, Sun-tzu advocates the employment of both orthodox, *zheng* (正), and unorthodox, *qi* (奇) troops to wrest the victory. The enemy is lured into untenable positions with prospects of gain, enervated by being wearied and exhausted before the attack, and penetrated by forces that are suddenly concentrated at vulnerable points. Warfare is a matter of deception, of constantly creating false appearances, spreading disinformation, and employing trickery and deceit. When such deception is imaginatively created and effectively implemented, the enemy will be condemned to making fatal errors.

For Sun-tzu, it is the combination of orthodox or straightforward strategies and unorthodox or surprise strategies that produces almost limitless strategic variations that interact and reinforce each other. Together, they can produce strategic advantage. "It is 'surprise' (*qi*) and 'straightforward' (*zheng*) operations that enable one's army to withstand the full assault of the enemy force and remain undefeated."¹²⁶ He continues, "Generally in battle use the 'straightforward' to engage the enemy and the 'surprise' to win the victory. Thus the expert at delivering the surprise assault is as boundless as the heavens and earth and as inexhaustible as the

¹²⁶ Sun-tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, p. 119.

rivers and seas. Like the sun and moon, he sets only to rise again; like the four seasons, he passes only to return again.”¹²⁷

In the *Questions and Replies between T'ang T'ai-tsung and Li Wei-kung*, there is a lengthy discussion about the roles of the orthodox and unorthodox strategies. Two points are salient for this discussion. First, there is a categorization of military leaders that is important as it stresses the need to mix orthodox and unorthodox strategies—if generals “employ orthodox tactics without any unorthodox ones, they are defensive generals. If they employ unorthodox tactics without any orthodox ones, they are aggressive generals. If they employ both, they are generals to preserve the state.”¹²⁸

Second, there is an explicit discussion of the importance of recognizing the “vacuous,” that is, the importance of realizing what is not there, and the “substantial,” the importance of recognizing what is revealed by what your opponent shows you. Both the vacuous and the substantial have *shi*. As Li Ching says: “The unorthodox and orthodox are the means by which to bring about the vacuous and substantial in the enemy. If the enemy is substantial, then I must use the orthodox. If the enemy is vacuous, then I

¹²⁷ Sun-tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, p. 119.

¹²⁸ *Questions and Replies between T'ang T'ai-tsung and Li Wei-kung*, in *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China*, p. 326.

must use the unorthodox.”¹²⁹ Victory will be achieved if “we take the unorthodox as the orthodox to attack him. If we take the orthodox as the unorthodox and the enemy thinks it is the orthodox, then I will use the unorthodox to attack him. I will cause the enemy’s strategic power,” *shi* ” to constantly be vacuous, and my strategic power to always be substantial.”¹³⁰

United States policy-makers have to recognize that from the Chinese perspective, surprise attacks are a strategic predilection, but the Chinese are sensitive that they should never be a necessity or as certain as to be predictable. The lesson from Chinese strategic thought is to expect that if they perceive the United States to possess military superiority, they will resort to unorthodox methods, which today must include cyber warfare, to attack the weaknesses that the United States has revealed through its strengths. That was Sun-tzu’s insight that the enemy’s strengths reveal weaknesses, so the United States must expect that its contemporary strengths will cause the Chinese to resort to unorthodox approaches to defeat the United States.

¹²⁹ *Questions and Replies between T’ang T’ai-tsung and Li Wei-kung*, in *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China*, pp. 336-337.

¹³⁰ *Questions and Replies between T’ang T’ai-tsung and Li Wei-kung*, in *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China*, p. 337. For a broader discussion of the interplay between the orthodox and unorthodox see Ralph D. Sawyer, *The Tao of Deception: Unorthodox Warfare in Historic and Modern China* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), pp. 238-243.

Moreover, United States Defense decision-makers must comprehend that the Chinese have a positive attitude toward the indeterminate or unorthodox element in warfare. For Sun-tzu and Sun Bin, “chance” is not in their vocabulary. It is precisely the ability to manipulate and capitalize upon the indeterminate element in warfare that distinguishes the commander from the gambler.

In contrast, Clausewitz recognizes that chance is an inevitable part of warfare, and “genius,” as in the guise of Napoleon, addresses it.¹³¹ For Clausewitz, absent a genius like Napoleon, chance is a true wildcard that may have propitious or disastrous results for militaries. For the Chinese, the indeterminate element is always a positive element that brings the opportunity for strategic advantage. Thus, the Chinese have historically had a lack of appreciation for the importance of chance and Clausewitzian friction in war.

I.A.3. The Empirical Situation: Pre-Crisis, Crisis, War

The empirical situation is a major factor as well for understanding when the Chinese will execute a first strike or preempt. The central issue here is

¹³¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), Bk. 1, ch. 1 p. 85, 89. For Clausewitz, military genius was defined by Napoleon’s actions and performance. In contemporary professionalized militaries, genius is institutionalized in the joint staff system.

whether the Chinese perceive the situation, which might spark escalation, as normal security competition, and thus something to be dismissed; or is the situation more significant from the Chinese perspective, pre-crisis, crisis, or war. Accordingly, how the Chinese perceive a situation is supremely important for understanding whether it will escalate or not.

It is essential to understand that the Chinese perceive a “pre-crisis” period. Pre-crisis is when the Chinese prepare their first strike and launch a surprising first strike before the opponent recognizes that it is in a crisis situation. The classic case of a pre-crisis scenario is the situation of UN forces before the first Chinese intervention in October 1950. The Chinese were moving toward conflict with the UN without its knowledge. Beijing was obfuscating the situation, conveying conflicting messages to keep the UN unaware that it was moving to attack as rapidly as possible, as discussed below. In 1979, the Chinese were in a pre-crisis situation with Vietnam before Hanoi realized it was going to be attacked.

Pre-crisis is an extension of the Chinese strategic concept of strategic positioning (*xing*, 行). Strategic positioning means preparing for confrontation, ideally, so that it is certain of victory. The rationale for this in Chinese strategic thought comes from Sun-tzu, who writes: “A victorious army is like weighing in a full hundredweight against a few ounces, and a

defeated army is like pitting a few ounces against a hundredweight. It is a matter of strategic positioning,” and “the army that has this weight of victory on its side, in launching its men into battle, can be likened to the cascading of pent-up water thundering through a steep gorge.”¹³²

Two insights flow from Sun-tzu’s argument. First, there is strategic positioning in the strategic sense. This occurs over a longer term, and is the unification of all considerations of *shi* to result in victory, as “pent-up water thundering through a steep gorge.” Second, strategic positioning exists in the tactical sense. The present discussion of pre-crisis situations relates to the tactical sense of strategic positioning, where the Chinese move their diplomatic and military forces to a key position to be victorious when the crisis or war occurs. Accordingly, United States Defense decision-makers should recognize that Chinese decision-makers move into a pre-crisis conception once they have decided to act to achieve strategic positioning.

In crisis, the Chinese leadership thus far has been well aware of the boundaries of the crisis, and thus the degree to which it will push the crisis, and the limits beyond which it is not prepared to go. In rhetoric, the Chinese are typically vituperative toward their opponent to generate and sustain domestic support, which can embolden escalatory pressures, as the Party is

¹³² Sun-tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, p. 116.

well aware. Thus, demonstrations are monitored carefully and kept within parameters.

Of course, there is always the possibility that the course of events will not occur as the Chinese expect: the Chinese may make a mistake or miscalculation; a crisis may escalate beyond their control; or their adversary undertakes an action that Beijing did not expect. This introduces the risk that China will have to be reactive in a crisis situation. Whether that results in crisis escalation or de-escalation is an important issue beyond the purview of the present study but is a topic that deserves careful analysis. The uncertainty of how China will respond makes every crisis a dangerous one. Furthermore, this danger is magnified by the lack of appreciation of Clausewitz's conception of friction, and the related concern that failure by China to plan for friction helps to ensure that the crisis will unfold in a manner different from what the Chinese expect.

In the condition of war, United States Defense Decision-makers should expect a related but stronger form of Chinese crisis behavior. As with crises, in the modern period with the important exception of Korea, the Chinese have fought with strong firebreaks beyond which they will not go. This does not mean that they will be so restrained in the future. Limits on escalation were imposed because of the consequences of the U.S.-Soviet Cold War

competition. China did not want a superpower to come into the conflict to fight against it. The case of Korea was different because the Chinese had a Soviet extended deterrent and Stalin's explicit direction to support the invasion. Unfortunately, China's lack of appreciation of friction in decision-making and conflict has an impact here as well. The course of the war is likely to be affected by lack of understanding of friction and its importance in crisis and on the battlefield.

II. Historical Evidence of First Strike and Preemption

A review of the historical record reveals that first strike is a common behavior in Chinese military history. This study considers nine cases from Chinese military history, spanning a period from the Warring States period, which ended in 221 B.C., through the Chinese dynasties, to modern China in its Republican and Communist incarnations. It finds that there is little variation in regime type, that is, with stronger or weaker courts, or within regime type, dynastic, Republican or Communist China, or with respect to the power of the external foe, whether they were Mongols in the thirteenth century or the United States today.

II. A. Early Chinese History through the Ming Dynasty

For most of Chinese history, the Chinese have faced a variety of significant threats from nomadic tribes. Indeed, the three ethnic groups that conquered and ruled China, the “conquest dynasties,” include the Kitan Liao (916-1125), the Jurchen Jin (1126-1234), the pre-Yuan Mongols (1234-1279), Mongol Yuan (1279-1368) and the Manchus (1644-1911) were largely nomadic.¹³³

The Xiongnu (pronounced “She-ung-new,” 匈奴) were the first significant threat, and were seen as so by the Chinese. They were a confederation of many tribes, and their provenance is uncertain, and may have been Mongolian, Turkic, or Siberian. At its height, the confederation stretched from Korea in the east to the Aral Sea in the west. During their heyday, roughly congruent to the period of the Early Warring States (475-221 B.C.) and the Han Empire (206 B.C.-A.D. 220), the Xiongnu were a formidable foe, capable of defeating infantry-chariot armies but had difficulty with the cavalry-based armies utilized by the later Han. The confederation gradually fell apart, and it is possible that a portion of the Xiongnu drifted west, eventually reaching Europe where they were known as the Huns, and

¹³³ An excellent overview of the nomadic threat is Nicola Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies: The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

dominated the western steppe and eventually contributed to the fall of the Rome.

Turkish tribes were confined to the western parts of Mongolia and were not a significant threat to the Chinese. Although capable of cooperation with the Mongols and Manchus, they were equally likely to be at war with them. The Chinese manipulated the various tribes by supporting one against the other, or by hiring some as a defensive barrier in front of their system of walls. Many Turkic tribes became part of the great Mongolian Empire.

The Mongols generally were similar to the Xiongnu with the important exceptions of, first, their exceptional leadership.¹³⁴ Second, their ruthlessness in conquering was unique—after overrunning an area, the native population either would be massacred, absorbed, or a combination of the two. In less than a century, their empire grew from a portion of Mongolia into the largest contiguous empire in history. Third, the Mongols were willing to adopt new weapons and tactics. The Mongolian armies never were exclusively composed of horse archers; they also had heavy cavalry, armored and lance-armed. As a result, they were capable of effective close combat

¹³⁴ The similarities and important differences are well developed in Bertold Spuler, *History of the Mongols: Based on Eastern and Western Accounts of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, trans. by Helga and Stuart Drummond (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968); and Michael Prawdin, *The Mongol Empire: Its Rise and Legacy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1940).

even at the beginning of a battle. They also deployed both infantry and engineers, many of whom were Chinese, and so could prosecute a siege rather than just blockading a city. The unitary Mongol Empire broke up within a century of Genghis Khan's death, one fraction ruling China for a century as the Yuan Dynasty.

Finally, the Manchurians originated in the southeastern part of Siberia. They are a Tungusic people in contrast to the Han and Mongolians. The first major Manchurian influence on China was the Jin (or Jurchen) who conquered the Kingdom of Liao in 1115 only to fall to the Mongols in 1234. Four hundred years later, the successor to the Jin, the Manchus, would replace the Ming and become the final dynasty of imperial China. Like the Mongols, the Manchus were not strictly horse archers, but also used heavy cavalry and were quick to incorporate skilled Chinese soldiers into their army. Interestingly, in general, once they were in control of China, the Manchurians were very effective at preventing unification of nomadic tribes. They practiced a policy of political and military disruption and actively campaigned against the nomads to prevent their unification. The nomads from the central steppe were never able to establish powerful empires when the Manchurians ruled in China. Only when the foreign dynasties abandoned

their aggressive frontier defenses to deal with rebels within China were the nomads able to make significant advances.

The major invasions of China have had a momentous impact on how the Chinese see the world. For a people as xenophobic and ethnocentric as the Chinese, conquest by an ethnically or racially distinct people has been shattering for their worldview and compelled the examination of the Chinese themselves, as well as the conquering people. Two consistent themes in Chinese accounts of these invasions are that the conquering peoples were either “near-Chinese” in race, and thus Chinese defeat may be explained away, or possessed superior technology that permitted their conquest of China.

Over the course of four centuries, ever larger parts of China were conquered by Inner Asian tribal peoples, culminating in 1276 with the Song surrendered to China’s most successful conquer, the Mongols, who incorporated all of China into their territory. Each of the dynasties of conquest—Liao (907-1125), Jin (1125-1234), and Yuan (1215/1276-1368)—built on the achievements of its predecessors to dominate the Han Chinese.¹³⁵ What is unique about these dynasties is that they attacked China not just for material benefits, as had the Uighurs in the late Tang, but also

¹³⁵ Each of these is well discussed in Thomas J. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

occupied Chinese territory. The Khitans' Liao dynasty occupied a strip along the northern edge of China proper. The Jurchens' Jin (gold) dynasty, defeated the Liao, and continued to conquer all of northern China. The Mongols' Yuan dynasty, after defeating the Jin, were able to conquer all of China and beyond, extending their conquests into Burma and throughout Southeast Asia.

The Liao period is significant because it was the first time China elected to appease and accommodate a foe. In the historic Treaty of Shanyuan, January 19, 1005, the Song agreed to provide the Liao with an annual payment of 200,000 bolts of silk and 100,000 taels (approximately ounces) of silver. In absolute terms, these payments were not especially burdensome, probably equal to revenue of one or two prefectures, or less than one or two percent of the cost of waging war.¹³⁶ As a face-saving device, the Chinese did not call this tribute, which would have implied Khitan superiority, but rather "economic gifts."¹³⁷ The Chinese today see the Treaty as a mistake, a cowardly and humiliating arrangement that reflected the military weakness and incompetence of the Song court.

For the purposes of this study, the Jurchen's Jin Empire is the most significant because it was the first time in modern Chinese history that

¹³⁶ Valerie Hansen, *The Open Empire: A History of China to 1600* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), p. 307.

¹³⁷ Hansen, *The Open Empire*, p. 307.

significant amount of Chinese land was lost through invasion. The Jurchen people originated in the mountains of eastern Manchuria, and in the early twelfth century, Aguda, of the Wanyan clan, formed a confederation of Jurchen tribes, proclaimed it the Jin dynasty, and invaded the north of China in 1126.¹³⁸ Because the Song excelled in art, philosophy and literature, eminent Sinologist John Fairbank refers to their rule as “China’s greatest age.”¹³⁹ The Song dynasty has also been called “the Age of Confucian Rule.”¹⁴⁰ They were responsible for three of humanity’s greatest inventions—gunpowder, the compass, and printed books. Yet, despite these considerable achievements, the Song dynasty was militarily weak. Epithets such as “perennially weak and unable to rise” (*ji ruo bu zhen*) [积弱不振] and “emphasizing civility and belittling martialism” (*zhong wen qing wu*) [重文轻武] are commonly attached to the Song dynasty.¹⁴¹ The Song, unable to resist the nomad cavalry and their skill in siege craft due to their incorporation of Chinese experts, had to retreat south of the Yangzi. The Song retained the Yangzi valley and all land to the south.

¹³⁸ Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Cambridge Illustrated History of China*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 136-185.

¹³⁹ John K. Fairbank, *China: A New History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), this is the title of Chapter 4.

¹⁴⁰ Dieter Kuhn, *The Age of Confucian Rule: The Song Transformation of China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009).

¹⁴¹ Yuan-Kang Wang, *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 34.

The barbarian success placed the Song in a terribly difficult position, and is a historical situation that holds important implications for analysts of Chinese strategy and United States Defense Decision-makers today. In a successful effort at self-preservation, they adopted conciliatory policies toward the Jurchen's Jin Empire. In a remarkable event, they discarded the traditional tribute system. For the first time in Chinese history, neighboring states were accepted as equals, and the Jurchen as formal superiors—the Song had become a vassal state of a non-Chinese dynasty, the Jin. Due to their weakness, officials from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries pursued a realistic and pragmatic foreign policy.

From the Chinese perspective, the unfortunate, if realistic, appraisal of the balance of power did not prevent officials from continuing to despise foreigners as “barbarians.” Indeed, given the powerful xenophobic, racist, and ethnocentric views of the Chinese throughout history, it would be unthinkable for it to be otherwise. As Sinologist Herbert Franke writes, “the principle of reciprocity in diplomatic relations with these states was nothing more than an enforced concession, which was but grudgingly granted because of the Sung's military weakness.”¹⁴² Internal official records and

¹⁴² Herbert Franke, “Sung Embassies: Some General Observations,” in Morris Rossabi, ed., *China Among Equals: The Middle Kingdom and Its Neighbors*,

private correspondence made frequent xenophobic references to the Jin as well as other foreigners. The terms used included “slaves,” *nuli* [奴隶], “caitiffs,” *dan xiao gui* [胆小鬼], “barbarians,” *ye man ren* [野蛮人], and “animals” *chusheng* [畜生].¹⁴³

At the same time, this equality and reciprocity proved to be a stable aspect of Song foreign relations, and could have easily been continued. Song diplomacy was flexible and allowed considerable adaptation to the frequently changing circumstances in international politics. Differences in political power could be expressed by a corresponding difference in pseudo-familial status. The lower the power and prestige of the Song, the lower its adopted family status in relation to the foreign ruling family and vice versa.¹⁴⁴

While not the first to conquer significant portions of Chinese territory, the Mongols were the most successful because they conquered all of it by 1279.¹⁴⁵ The Mongols ruled China as the Yuan dynasty. Not surprisingly, Chinese sentiment toward the Mongols was laced with bitter denunciations

10th-14th Centuries, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 116-148, 121.

¹⁴³ Franke, “Sung Embassies,” p. 121; and Tao Jing-shen, “Barbarians or Northerners: Northern Sung Images of the Khitans,” in Rossabi, ed., *China Among Equals*, pp. 66-86; 71-76.

¹⁴⁴ Franke, “Sung Embassies,” p. 122.

¹⁴⁵ A useful study of the Southern Song dynasty’s reaction to the Mongol invasion is Wang, *Harmony and War*, pp. 95-100.

of the origin of the Mongols. Most remarkable was a bitter denunciation by Zheng Sixiao [郑思肖] (1239-1316). His works describe the Mongols as “of a non-human origin,” (*fei renlei*) [非人类] and compared them to “dogs and goats.”¹⁴⁶

These sentiments were again expressed in the Chinese attitude toward the Manchu and the Qing dynasty, which ruled China from 1644 to 1911. In the Qing dynasty, theoretically similar arguments were made. The Manchus were also portrayed as barbarians, and there was a high degree of racial animosity toward the new dynasty. Important officials refused to serve the new dynasty. They refuted any claim or idea that barbarians could be morally transformed or Sinicized and emphasized a sense of shame in serving a barbarian ruler. According to their thought, there was the strict separation of barbarians and Chinese into distinct spheres, where each could live in accordance with his inborn character.

The Mongol Yuan and Manchus succeed in conquering all of China and ruled as alien emperors, although they were quickly Sinicized. Accordingly, the primary military and diplomatic preoccupation of the Chinese dynasties was its northern frontier. Yet, for most of China's history, a favorable situation obtained: a non-Chinese ruler on the frontier was powerful enough

¹⁴⁶ John D. Langlois, Jr. “Introduction,” in John D. Langlois, Jr., ed., *China Under Mongol Rule* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 17.

within his own lands that his orders were obeyed but so dependent on Chinese goodwill, or vulnerable to Chinese threats, that he kept his people from troubling imperial territory. But, this condition did not always exist due to the strength of the tribes, Chinese weakness, or both.

The closest historical comparison would be from United States history. It would be as though U.S. stopped at the Mississippi River, and citizens traded and warred against the Indians, but never conquered the rest of the territory we know as the United States. In this scenario, the Indians would seldom be strong enough to pose a serious threat, but would be a nuisance and occasionally inflicted serious defeats on the U.S. army. Mostly, however, they traded and could be deterred and coerced successfully.

As war is costly, diplomacy and negotiation often kept the peace. A common tactic for the Chinese was to use brides-and-bribes to address the threat posed by often nomadic and hostile tribes on their borders, such as the Xiongnu, Turks, and Mongols. Not surprisingly, the Chinese first sought to address potential threats and manage border tribes through diplomacy due to its lower cost. These tactics were very successful. As noted expert on this period, Thomas Barfield, explains: “nomads employed a strategy of extortion to gain trade rights and subsidies from China. They raided the frontier and then negotiated a peace treaty with the Chinese court. Native dynasties in

China were willing to pay the nomads off because this was cheaper than going to war with people who could avoid retaliation by moving out of range."¹⁴⁷ Nomads from the central steppe avoided conquering Chinese territory. "Wealth from Chinese trade and subsidies stabilized the imperial government on the steppe and they had no desire to destroy this resource. The Uighurs, for example, were so dependent on this revenue that they even sent troops to put international rebellions in China."¹⁴⁸ With the exception of the Mongols, nomad conquest typically occurred only after the collapse of central authority when China was left no government to extort.

However, just like today, there are strategic occasions where states must resort to war. In these wars, a review of ancient Chinese history reveals that deception, first strike, and preemption were common strategies in the accounts of the major battles we have in our possession, as they were for the contemporaneous Greek and Persian armies, for whom we have better historical accounts. At the Battle of Mu, 1027 B.C., Wu of Chou used a deceptive marching formation to fool his adversary. At Yangtze River, 223 B.C., Wang Chien of the Qin surprised the Ch'u in a sudden attack for a spectacular victory. At Wei River, 203 B.C., Han Hsin built a temporary dam

¹⁴⁷ Thomas J. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China, 221 B.C. to AD 1757* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1989), p. 9.

¹⁴⁸ Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier*, p. 9.

upstream and pretended to flee over the river when his men broke the dam, in turn dividing his opponent's army and permitting its piecemeal defeat.

The Qin dynasty had followed an aggressive policy towards the Xiongnu, but in the Han era, differing approaches can be discerned. In 135 B.C., the peace between the Xiongnu and Han came to an end. The Chinese debated launching an attack to destroy the unsuspecting Xiongnu, and the Emperor Wudi (r. 140-87 B.C.) supported the plan.¹⁴⁹ The expectation was to push the Chinese frontier back to the old Qin boundaries, expand Chinese control into the Tarim Basin and occupy a long segment of the Silk Road there, thus depriving the Xiongnu of its revenue and deterring them from taking additional actions.¹⁵⁰ The Chinese were now suffering considerable casualties at the borders, and an offensive strategy would address the problem. The Chinese debated the issue. Experience had taught them that the Xiongnu were courageous and capable of moving at great speed. As herdsmen and hunters, they had no permanent abode and were difficult to bring under control. The Chinese decided to lay an ambush for them and

¹⁴⁹ Michael R. Drompp, *Tang China and the Collapse of the Uighur Empire: A Documentary History* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 14-16.

¹⁵⁰ David C. Wright, "The Northern Frontier," in Graff and Higham, eds., *A Military History of China*, pp. 57-79, 64; and di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies*, pp. 286-290.

take their leaders prisoner, but the plan was aborted in favor of a show of strength.¹⁵¹

The Chinese monitored the nomadic tribes and seem to have had an effective intelligence network among them. From 119 B.C. to 100 B.C., the Chinese waged a series of wars against the tribes. In 119 B.C., Han armies drove deeply into Xiongnu territory and destroyed the center of Xiongnu power.

In about 60 B.C., the Chinese leader Zhao Chongguo adroitly understood the need to prevent the growth of an anti-Chinese alliance among the nomads, and worked to establish protected colonies among them.¹⁵² The colonies were effective at weakening the Xiongnu's motivation for war, and permitted the Chinese to use them as a constabulary force to fight other nomads. The next major Chinese attack on the Xiongnu would be about hundred years later when Emperor Guangwu would lead a successful campaign against them.

But, the strategic situation was not stable, the Northern Xiongnu state was seen as a threat, and the Chinese attempted to wage a war of

¹⁵¹ Michael Loewe, "The Western Han Army: Organization, Leadership, and Operation," in Di Cosmo, ed., *Military Culture in Ancient China*, pp. 65-89, 71-72. Also see Loewe, "The Campaigns of Han Wu-ti," in Frank A. Kierman, Jr. and John K. Fairbank, eds., *Chinese Ways in Warfare* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 67-122.

¹⁵² Loewe, "The Western Han Army," p. 72.

extermination against them, first in A.D. 73, which was a major failure for the Chinese, and then later in A.D. 89 when the Chinese attacked the Northern Xiongnu while they were at peace.¹⁵³ They fled, discrediting the Chinese effort, but strategically the objective was achieved. By the early 90s, the Northern Xiongnu were no longer a threat.

The Chinese created two client states to rule the land, but that attempt was not a lasting solution. By 167, the Qiang were the new nomadic threat and the Chinese attacked and defeated the Western Qiang. A year later, in what was a campaign of extermination, the Chinese attacked the Eastern Qiang in Liang province, and successfully eliminated that threat.

In 618, a Chinese general, Li Yuan, overthrew the Sui Dynasty, and founded the Tang (618-907) dynasty. They rejected the policy of their predecessors who had emphasized wall building, most significantly the Qin (221-201 B.C.), Han (206 B.C.-A.D. 220), Six Dynasties (A.D. 220-581), and Sui Dynasty (581-618). Instead, they preferred to rely on mobile cavalry armies to fend off the nomads. Rather than completely abandon the walls they inherited from the Sui, the Tang re-garrisoned the walls and used them to funnel raiders toward the field armies where they could be destroyed.

¹⁵³ For an elaboration on these campaigns see Rafe de Crespigny, "The Military Culture of the late Han," in Di Cosmo, ed., *Military Culture in Ancient China*, pp. 90-111.

Under the Tang in 657, China won one of its greatest victories against the Western Turks. Su Dingfang led an army of over 10,000 men against the Turks under Ashina Helu. The decisive battle was fought at the Irtysh (Yexi) River running parallel to the southern edge of the Altai Mountain chain. Su used a decoy force to draw Helu's troops into a trap and thoroughly destroyed the force. The victory consolidated Tang rule over much of modern Xinjiang and allowed the dynasty to establish temporary suzerainty over the territory further to the West.¹⁵⁴

Farther to the east, the Mongols were under constant surveillance by a network of well-paid spies. When indications arose of Mongol aggression, preemptive strikes would be launched deep into the steppe. Unfortunately for the Tan, the mobile armies were nearly as expensive as walls, and their bureaucracy was notoriously corrupt—the declining treasury forced increased reliance on militia infantry from the late 700s. Mongol raids increased, riding deep into China before returning to the steppe laden with the fruits of their conquest.

After the Tang collapsed in 907 under the internal pressure of peasant rebellions and external pressure from the Manchurian Liao. The invading

¹⁵⁴ For an account of this victory see Jonathan Karam Skaff, "Tang Military Culture and Its Inner Asian Influences," in Di Cosmo, ed., *Military Culture in Ancient China*, pp. 165-191, 184.

tribesmen easily broke through the porous walls and destroyed the Tang militia. As a result, China broke into three separate kingdoms. The Xi Xia in western China staved off Mongol raids by hiring another Mongol tribe, the Tanguts, to fight their brethren out in the deserts. The southern Song, far removed from the immediate Mongol threat, were content to fortify their cities. The Liao retained their control over northern China until the Song, in alliance with another Manchurian tribe, the Jin, drove them out in 1121. Most of the fighting was done by the Jin, and after the Liao defeat, the Song controlled most of the conquered region. However, they did so temporarily; the Jin returned in 1126 and drove out the Song from their northern kingdom.

Between 1205 and 1210, most the disparate Mongol tribes rallied to the banner of Genghis Khan.¹⁵⁵ The Mongols encroached on Jin territory beyond the walls and were able to conquer all of China, but did have considerable difficulty in the south due to its different climate, which did not

¹⁵⁵ This was true of both Inner and Outer Mongols. Both groups have had tensions between them and these would resurface after the collapse of the Mongol Empire. See Almaz Khan, "Chinggis Khan: From Imperial Ancestor to Ethnic Hero," in Stevan Harrell, ed., *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), pp. 248-277; and Pamela Kyle Crossley, "Making Mongols," in Pamela Kyle Crossley, Helen F. Siu, and Donald S. Sutton, eds., *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 58-82.

lend itself well to cavalry attacks. The Mongols were ultimately Sinicized and adopted the more luxurious Chinese ways, turning over the task of soldiering to the native Chinese, until they were overthrown by the Chinese in 1368, leading to the Ming dynasty.

The Ming were the only major native Chinese dynasty that did not have a powerful and unified nomadic steppe empire on its northern frontier. The Ming refused to trade with Mongols, and deprived them of the material needed to rebuild their empire. The Ming had thrown off the Mongol yoke with great difficulty, and feared Mongol revanchism. To address the Mongol threat, the Ming rebuilt the northern walls, which had been neglected since 1213. At the same time, huge Chinese armies made periodic raids into Mongol territory to prevent the tribes from coalescing into a significant threat, which kept the Mongols from being able to launch an attack until the mid-1400s.¹⁵⁶

In 1473, the Ming had a major victory over the Mongols. Wang Yueh, a scholar by training, devised a strategy at striking back against the Mongols by adopting their own tactics. He led 4,600 horse archers, equipped like nomads, into the steppes north of Ning-hsia. At Hung-yen-ch'ih, he surprised the camp of Bag Arslan's Mongols while the warriors were away raiding,

¹⁵⁶ Wright, "The Northern Frontier," pp. 74-75.

187

overwhelmed the few guards and captured many horses and other livestock. Bag Arslan learned of this and rode back in haste, but fell into an ambush laid by Wang. The Mongols were decisively defeated.

The final significant conflict under the Ming was in 1593 when their army under Li Ju-sung defeated Hideoshi Toyotomi in Korea. Forty thousand Ming troops under Li Ju-sung entered Korea in January 1593 and advanced on Pyongyang. Opposing them was a force of 18,700 Japanese under the leadership of Konishi Yukinaga. The Japanese deployed for battle in a strong position north of the city. The position could not be outflanked and fortified their front with earthworks and palisades, behind which they drew up their arquebusiers. The Chinese possessed some artillery, but with only 3,000 musketeers were at a disadvantage in firearms. Li had no choice but to order a frontal attack, which began on 10 February. Korean observers were shocked to see the unarmored Chinese infantry repeatedly charging the Japanese line, and being shot down in the hundreds. After two days of fighting, the Japanese were driven from their positions, and retreated to Pyongyang and then to Seoul.

II.B. The Sino-Dutch War, 1661-1668

The Sino-Dutch War, 1661-1668, was Europe's first war with China, and the most significant armed clash between European and Chinese forces until the

Opium War almost two hundred years later.¹⁵⁷ The Dutch founded a colony on Taiwan in 1624, which soon prospered. It also attracted the attention of Ming authorities, who perceived the Dutch as interlopers. The Dutch were on the cutting edge of the military revolution. They had superior fortresses, with considerable capacity for enfilading fire, and broadside sailing ships, which gave them the ability to sail into prevailing winds. But, in the end, the Chinese would win for three reasons.

First, the Dutch were at the end of a supply chain that stretched halfway around the world. Reinforcements and resupply were months away at the earliest, while aid for the Chinese was a fraction of that. Second, Chinese military leadership was skilled and had expert knowledge of the terrain and seas around Taiwan, particularly in the Bay of Taiwan area in southwestern Taiwan, which has been filled in by alluvial deposits over the past three centuries. Third, the Chinese used deception, which they put to great effect at several key instances in the campaign.

One of the most important of which occurred before the war, in October 1633, and was a rare event in Chinese history: a naval battle. The first clash between the Dutch and the Chinese was in the Battle of Liaolou

¹⁵⁷ An excellent detailed history is Tonio Andrade, *Lost Colony: The Untold Story of China's First Great Victory over the West* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011).

Bay off the Chinese coast, near Quanzhou. Ming officials hailed the victory as a “miracle at sea,” and of it, the provincial governor Zou Weilian, wrote “People say that ever since the red barbarians arrived in the Land of Min and Land of Yue several dozen years ago, this kind of victory has been extremely rare.”¹⁵⁸ The principal Dutch erstwhile ally of the time, pirate leader Zheng Zhilong explained: “It seems that this victory is enough to reestablish the prestige and authority of China and, in contrast, to lower the spirits of those crafty barbarians.”¹⁵⁹

The Sino-Dutch War was a seesaw with both sides achieving some victories, the Chinese primarily on land and the Dutch at sea.¹⁶⁰ The war itself was really a sideshow in the confrontation between the remnant Ming and the victorious Qing Manchu dynasties. In a surprise attack made possible by using a waterway unknown to the Dutch, Koxinga, the leader of Ming loyalist forces, was able to capture the Dutch fortress of Proventia. Then, after a long siege, in which a Dutch attempt at relief failed, he succeeded in forcing the surrender of their major base, Fort Zeelandia, in Taiwan in 1662. However, the Dutch continued the conflict and attempted to

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in Andrade, *Lost Colony*, p. 50.

¹⁵⁹ Quoted in Andrade, *Lost Colony*, p. 50.

¹⁶⁰ John E. Wills, Jr., *Pepper, Guns, and Parleys: The Dutch East India Company and China, 1662-1681* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 51-52, 107-112, 234-235.

recapture their major base—they even foraged an alliance with the Qing to aid in the re-conquest. The Dutch did recapture Keelung in northern Taiwan, but were forced to abandon it due to their inability to keep it supplied in the face of Qing naval defeats at the hands of the superior Ming fleet.

While there is not sufficient evidence to include it as an example, other than a probable first strike case, the Chinese invaded Nepal in 1792 to defeat a Gurkha army. In the late 1780s and early 1790s, the Qing dynasty staged two wars with the Gurkha people of Nepal. The Gurkhas invaded Tibet twice in 1788 and 1791. On both occasions, the Qing sent expeditions to Tibet to expel the invaders. In 1792, during the second Gurkha war, the Qing forces invaded Nepal from Tibet, approaching Kathmandu, the capital of the Gurkha dynasty. At this point, the Gurkha king sought a settlement, which was accepted by the Qing, as its expedition suffered tremendous casualties in Nepal.

II.C. The KMT/CCP Civil Wars: The Northern Expedition and Encirclement Campaigns

The Chinese Nationalists fought a series of wars, in which warlordism arose as the consequence of the need for security and the concomitant militarization of politics with the fall of China's last imperial dynasty.

Warlordism emerged over a period of time as military commanders sought to

dominate their region.¹⁶¹ The combination of personal military and political power seen in Republican-period warlordism was not a new phenomenon in Chinese history. Periods between dynasties had often been marked by political fragmentation among competing military leaders. The warlord period began in earnest in 1916, and most of its major wars were fought between 1920 and 1928. The total number of warlords in China in the years between 1916 and 1928 was estimated to be at between 1,300 and 2,000.¹⁶² Their armies fought about 500 wars during the 1910s and 1920s including five major wars.

With the death of Sun Yat-sen in 1925, Chiang Kai-shek recognized that the warlords were the major impediment to unification. To destroy the warlords, he launched the Northern Expedition of 1926-1927.¹⁶³ The campaigns were largely conventional battles between the Nationalist Revolutionary Army and the warlord armies. There were three major campaigns. The first of which was in Hunan and Kiangsi against warlord armies there. The campaign was a great success, and Sinologist Edward

¹⁶¹ An excellent account of this period is Bruce A. Elleman, *Modern Chinese Warfare, 1795-1989* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 138-177.

¹⁶² Philip Jowett, *China's Wars: Rousing the Dragon 1894-1949* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2013), p. 115.

¹⁶³ One of the best succinct accounts of this campaign is Edward L. Dreyer, *China at War, 1901-1949* (London: Longman, 1995), pp. 117-155. For a consideration of China at this time see Frank Dikötter, *The Age of Openness: China Before Mao* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

Dreyer identifies it as: “the high water mark of Chiang Kai-shek’s career as military commander and certainly decisive for the success of the Northern Expedition.”¹⁶⁴ The second major campaign was directed at Fukien and Shanghai. It was a major success as well, but during this time the Chinese Communist Party formally ended its support of the Nationalists. The third campaign was in the North, and with a similar result and with less fighting, as the combat effectiveness of the military was very high in comparison to the warlord armies.

From the perspective of the present study, the campaigns are significant because of the decision by the Nationalist to launch the attacks, effectively making three strategic first strikes. The effectiveness of the army was considerable in these conventional campaigns—deception was used by both sides in the tactical rather than strategic sense.

A major consequence of the Northern Expedition against the warlords resulted in the nominal reunification under a new Nationalist Party (Kuomintang/Guomindang) central government established in Nanjing in 1927. This marked the end of the warlord period in China, although the Nationalists still had no effective control of the northeast or far west of China,

¹⁶⁴ Dreyer, *China at War*, p. 136.

and, in fact, some warlords continued to rule parts of China. Indeed, Yan Xishan's rule over Shanxi province from 1911 to 1949 set the record.

The next significant conflict in China occurred between the Nationalists and Communists. From 1930-1934, a series of five major battles termed "Encirclement Campaigns" occurred. In each, Nationalist forces attempted to encircle and destroy the Red Army. At the conclusion of the last one, the Red Army broke out of its encirclement and started the Long March for 368 days from Kiangsi to Yenan.¹⁶⁵

A major use of deception occurred during the First Encirclement Campaign from December 1930 to January 1931. As the first campaign opened, the Red Army held Chian on the Kan River in central Kiangsi, athwart the province's main line of communication. At Mao's urging, they abandoned this strategic but exposed position and retired eastward, concentrating their 40,000 combat troops in the hilly area of Ningtu country in the southeast of the province. The Nationalists deployed about 100,000 men in the area.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ For Mao's description of these campaigns, see Mao Zedong, *Mao on Warfare* (New York: CN Times Books, 2013), pp. 25-74.

¹⁶⁶ Dreyer, *China at War*, p. 160.

The Red Army employed a variety of ruses to lure the Nationalists into a trap in the mountain defile of Lungkang.¹⁶⁷ They sprang the trap in the predawn hours of 30 December, annihilating the Nationalist force that was of division strength. As an example to other Nationalist officers, the Communists publically beheaded the commander. Wearing the uniforms of captured Nationalists, the Red Army moved east, and on 1 January 1931 surprised and destroyed another Nationalist division at Tungshao. The first campaign consisted of two battles won by tactical surprise, aided in the second case by the ruse with uniforms.

In April 1931, the second campaign started with a reinforced Nationalist attack.¹⁶⁸ Once again, the Red Army lured a Nationalist division into an ambush at Tungku and destroyed it. It then quickly attacked two more Nationalist divisions, destroying one while the other fled. The Red Army then advanced to Kuangchang by 26 May, where it encircled the Nationalist divisions. The PLA was bluffing; they could encircle but not defeat these divisions, which broke out, ending the Second Campaign.

In the Third Campaign, beginning in June, Chiang took personal control and intended to attack the Red Army directly and push them back

¹⁶⁷ For an excellent detailed account, see William W. Whitson, *The Chinese High Command: A History of the Chinese Communist Military Politics, 1927-71* (New York: Praeger, 1973), pp. 268-270.

¹⁶⁸ Whitson, *The Chinese High Command*, pp. 227-228.

against the Kan River and annihilate it there.¹⁶⁹ The Third Campaign involved considerable movement by both sides, with no strategic deception. The Communists were able to achieve some victories but were checked by a final disastrous assault against entrenched Nationalist positions. The Third Campaign might have resulted in a Nationalist victory, and the destruction of the PLA, if the Japanese invasion of Manchuria on 18 September 1931 had not occurred. The Japanese invasion resulted in new political realities and a suspension of conflict.

However, even as the Japanese Kwangtung Army advanced through Manchuria, Chiang was preparing to launch a Fourth Campaign. Chiang's attitude was always that the greatest danger to China came not from the Japanese but from the Communists and, thus, they had to be dealt with as a priority. He thought that once the Communists had been defeated, a stronger and more stable Nationalist government would be able to overcome the Japanese.

In June 1932, the Nationalists launched the Fourth Encirclement campaign, which succeeded in surrounding the Communists. The campaign lasted until April 1933 before the Nationalists had to stop. The Fourth campaign is unique in that, in addition to the usual ambushes of the

¹⁶⁹ Whitson, *The Chinese High Command*, pp. 228-230.

Nationalists made possible by the intelligence provided by the peasantry due to their support of the Communists, it also included preemptive attacks by the Communists. The PLA struck outside of their traditional territory at Nationalist units to throw them off guard, and continued their successful operational movement strategies using interior lines to keep the Nationalists off balance.¹⁷⁰

Chiang was now determined that the next campaign would be the last. He had employed a number of German advisors from 1929, and Colonel General Hans von Seeckt, who headed the Reichswehr from 1919-1926, and Lieutenant General Georg Wetzell planned the campaign.¹⁷¹ The Fifth Encirclement campaign began in September 1933 and lasted until October 1934. The Nationalists cooperated in their advance, reinforcing advancing columns and moving slowly, refusing to be drawn into ambushes.¹⁷² The Communists were surrounded by an effective blockade and slowly starved, until they broke out and started the Long March, from October 1934-October 1935. As preeminent historian of conflict in modern China, S.C.M. Paine

¹⁷⁰ Whitson, *The Chinese High Command*, pp. 275-277.

¹⁷¹ Dreyer, *China at War*, p. 181.

¹⁷² Whitson, *The Chinese High Command*, p. 278.

writes, "Victory in the Fifth Encirclement Campaign marked the zenith of Chiang Kai-shek's power."¹⁷³

With the Communists weakened, Chiang turned his attention to fighting the Communists in retreat, the remnant warlords armies, and the Japanese in Manchuria, and later the Sino-Japanese war.¹⁷⁴ The Nationalists were involved in almost constant conflict throughout the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s against those three categories of opponents. There is no doubt that it was a bitter experience for the Nationalists and China itself.

A Chinese folk tale from the 5th century B.C., the story of King Goujian (勾踐), illustrates this point. During the Spring and Autumn Period of Chinese history, the kingdom of Wu, led by King Fuchai, attacked the kingdom of Yue. The attack resulted in the capture of the king of Yue, Goujian. Goujian was forced into servitude for Fuchai for several years. Upon being granted his freedom, Goujian returned to Yue and rebuilt his military.

¹⁷³ S.C.M. Paine, *The Wars for Asia, 1911-1949* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 75.

¹⁷⁴ Exceptional accounts of the mixed Chinese military performance against the Japanese is found in Franco David Macri, *Clash of Empires in South China: The Allied Nations' Proxy War with Japan, 1935-1941* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012); and Mark Peattie, Edward J. Drea, and Hans van de Ven, *The Battle for China: Essays on the Military History of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-1945* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2011).

To never forget the humiliation he suffered during his defeat, Goujian exchanged his soft silk-padded bedding for a pile of brushwood and hung a gall-bladder on the ceiling of his room; he forced himself to taste the gall-bladder every day before having dinner and going to bed. By imposing such measures of suffering upon himself, Goujian reinvigorated his strength and ultimately conquered Wu twenty years later.¹⁷⁵

“Sleeping on brushwood and tasting gall” *woxin changdan* (卧薪尝胆) has been taught to children for centuries as the proper response to defeat and humiliation. The key is not the humiliation itself, but the way one should respond to the humiliation. For example, Chiang Kai-shek wrote “Avenge Humiliation” *xuechi* (雪耻) in his diary as a daily routine. For Chiang, fate would have for him in his long life no shortage of difficulties, humiliations, and bitterness in the Nationalist experience.¹⁷⁶

II.D. By the PLA

During the civil war and in the course of the use of force by the PRC, first strike and deception are central to the *modus operandi* for the PLA. The

¹⁷⁵ Analyzing the tale and stressing its importance for understanding China today is Paul A. Cohen, *Speaking to History: The Story of King Goujian in Twentieth-Century China* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2009).

¹⁷⁶ For an excellent account of the Chinese civil war see Frank Dikötter, *The Tragedy of Liberation: A History of the Chinese Revolution 1945-1957* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

study considers six major cases of deception, first strike and preemption by the PLA. The PRC was just a year old when Beijing launched two first strikes on its periphery in Tibet and Korea.

II.D.1. Tibet, 1950

With no warning or fanfare, the Chinese invaded Tibet on 7 October 1950. Due to Tibet's isolation, rumors of the invasion were not confirmed until October 24th by Chinese Communist broadcasts, and Beijing seems to have completely conquered Tibet by mid-November 1950. As noted Sinologist Gerald Segal writes, China's objectives in invading Tibet "were straightforward—to gain control of Tibet."¹⁷⁷

Historically, whether New Delhi or Beijing would dominate Tibet was the central issue for Lhasa. Britain had invaded Tibet in 1904 upon receiving intelligence that Russia was to occupy the country. The British preempted, and found no Russian deployment, and while the forces withdrew, the British secured the only diplomatic embassy allowed in Lhasa, twinned with a Chinese trade representative's office. The only formal attempt at a multilateral definition of Tibet's status and boundaries was the abortive Simla Conference in 1913. The collapse of the Chinese empire in 1911 and its

¹⁷⁷ Gerald Segal, *Defending China* (London: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 82.

replacement by the shaky Republic seemed a propitious time to improve British interests. However, Beijing refused to ratify its representatives' initialing of the Simla accords, thus nullifying their legitimacy. Its status remained ambiguous. During the Chinese Civil War, Lhasa probed for greater recognition abroad but failed to win acceptance of Tibetan independence.¹⁷⁸

China claimed Tibet as a typical Chinese province, the size of Western Europe—and 25 percent of the surface area of China—a province where no one spoke Chinese, where no Chinese lived, and without any military deployment by the Nationalist or Communist forces. KMT and CCP diplomacy required that no state was allowed to establish diplomatic relations with China unless it accepted that Tibet was part of China.

The Tibetans made it easy for the Chinese to maintain this position because they refused to establish diplomatic relations with other countries other than Britain and, unofficially, China. From the Tibetan perspective, Tibet was a special territory protected by the Buddha, and so traditional practices of diplomacy were rejected. As were the Westphalian conceptions

¹⁷⁸ Allen S. Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence: India and Indochina* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), p. 5.

of sovereignty and the need to have an army for the defense of the country.¹⁷⁹

Moreover, the Tibetans had no central road network, newspapers, radios, airfields, or wheeled or motorized vehicles. In fact, they were banned.

Tibet served as a demilitarized buffer zone between China and the British Raj, superseded by India after 1947. Of course, the position of the United States changed with the Communist victory. The U.S. recognized that if Tibet had the strength to resist Communist infiltration it would be a useful base of operations against the Communists. Unfortunately, the Chinese invasion precluded a formal or significant presence.

The Chinese invasion of Tibet occurred simultaneously with the intervention in Korea, which indicates a willingness to incur considerable risk. The Chinese could not be certain of the reactions of the U.S., the UN, Indian, and world reaction to the invasions. Yet they acted. In the case of Tibet, the Chinese could be certain that Tibet's isolation prevented news of the invasion from being disseminated and thus there would be no immediate response from the Indians or other powers.

Once conquered, an insurgency started in Tibet with support from the United States, Republic of China, and tacit support from India. The insurgency reached its peak in 1959 when there was an abortive revolt, after

¹⁷⁹ Thomas Laird, *Into Tibet: The CIA's First Atomic Spy and His Secret Expedition to Lhasa* (New York: Grove Press, 2002), p. 93.

which the Tibetan insurgency posed merely an interdiction and nuisance threat thereafter. The major impact of the revolt in the present context was the dramatic altering of the perceptions of the territorial dispute between China and India.¹⁸⁰ China's leaders concluded that India harbored intentions to maintain its influence in Tibet, and this had a direct bearing on the war three years later.

A final consideration that reaffirms China's tough stance on Tibet is the geopolitical significance of the Himalayan highlands. If tensions with India were to increase, as they are likely to given the economic growth of both states, Beijing's control of Tibet enables China to place pressure on India through water resources. Tibet is the origin of several major waterways in Asia, including India's Brahmaputra. Militarizing Tibet, despite New Delhi's protests, could also allow China to substantiate its claim over the northern portion of the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, which Beijing calls "Southern Tibet."

Given the importance of Tibet to China's internal concerns, any liberalization would affect Tibet, and also Xinjiang, negatively from Beijing's perspective. Second, notable as well is China's desire to influence and coerce

¹⁸⁰ M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 81; and Neville Maxwell, *India's China War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), pp. 263-264.

India if necessary. Accordingly, there is little hope for greater autonomy in Tibet.

II.D.2. Korea, 1950

Soviet dictator Josef Stalin gave the green light to Kim Il-sung in January 1950 to invade South Korea. Stalin's decision was made fully expecting U.S. intervention in Korea. Stalin sought a diversion for the United States so that he could strengthen his control over the Central and Eastern European states in the face of a United States' desire to rollback Soviet gains.¹⁸¹ In that objective, Stalin succeeded, although not without moments of despair when it looked like the Chinese would not intervene and Korea would be lost, as Stalin said on October 13, 1950, after ordering Kim's forces to retreat to Chinese and Soviet territory: "Well, what of it? We didn't send our troops in there, so now the Americans will be our neighbors on our Far Eastern border, that's all."¹⁸²

From the Chinese perspective, its intervention in Korea in 1950 was motivated by Mao's desire to destroy UN forces on the peninsula and unite the country under Communist rule. Those objectives were almost achieved before U.S. General Douglas MacArthur's brilliant surprise attack on Seoul's

¹⁸¹ Alexander V. Pantsov, with Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), pp. 375-379.

¹⁸² Stalin quoted in Pantsov, with Levine, *Mao*, p. 384.

port, Inchon, enabled the UN command to advance north of the 38th Parallel, and his mandate broadened to include the reunification of Korea.

Although it is often termed a response to the UN forces crossing the parallel, the Chinese had decided to intervene in the Korean War long before the UN did so. On May 15, 1950, Kim and Mao met, and Mao gave Kim his full commitment, even if the United States comes into the war.¹⁸³ “Kim wanted Chinese troops kept out until they were absolutely needed. Stalin, too, wanted them in only when America committed large numbers of troops for the Chinese to ‘consume.’”¹⁸⁴ In reality, it was the Chinese who suffered most, about 400,000 killed alone of about 3 million who served.¹⁸⁵ On October 1, Stalin signaled to Mao that the time had come for intervention, which Mao ordered on October 2.¹⁸⁶ Mao soon had second thoughts, and faced with a conflict with the United States, telegraphed his reluctance on October 10.¹⁸⁷ Stalin’s reply was unambiguous; if the Chinese did not send troops, the war was lost. On October 13, Mao reversed himself yet again and committed troops, as preeminent Russian Sinologist Alexander Pantsov explains: “Ultimately Mao was unable to oppose Stalin and retreated at the

¹⁸³ Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (New York: Knopf, 2005), p 361.

¹⁸⁴ Chang and Halliday, *Mao*, p. 361.

¹⁸⁵ Chang and Halliday, *Mao*, p. 378.

¹⁸⁶ Chang and Halliday, *Mao*, p. 362.

¹⁸⁷ Pantsov, with Levine, *Mao*, pp. 381-384.

final moment, even though the ‘Leader and Teacher’ refused to provide air cover. Stalin’s influence upon him was too great.”¹⁸⁸

With respect to the timing of the intervention, the Chinese objective was to destroy UN forces in the Pusan perimeter, and major PLA armies (the 38th and 40th) had shifted from opposite Taiwan to Manchuria from mid-June in a major redeployment.¹⁸⁹ More recently, a major Army shifted from opposite Taiwan to Korea on September 12th, three days before the Inchon invasion. China was heavily augmenting its forces in the northeast before the war and before Inchon reversed the tide. Allen Whiting observed in his classic study of China’s decision to attack UN forces that the redeployment was “for the defense of Manchuria in the event of reversals in Korea, or to eventual assistance for the DPRK forces,” should they require assistance.¹⁹⁰

In accord with Whiting’s thesis, more recent scholarship has determined that China entered the war to ensure victory for the North, but unlike Whiting’s argument, China’s motivation was not defensive but offensive, even including confronting the United States, should it intervene.

¹⁸⁸ Pantsov, with Levine, *Mao*, p. 385.

¹⁸⁹ Allen S. Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), pp. 64-67.

¹⁹⁰ Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, p. 64.

Once the U.S. had intervened, the Chinese were determined to push it out of the Korean peninsula.¹⁹¹

Indeed, Mao believed that conquering South Korea was essential to demonstrate that China had arrived as a major force in international politics, as well as for reasons of Communist ideology. China would triumph no matter what due to its confidence in the people's war strategy. "The man-over-weapon doctrine dictated that subjectivity, creativity, flexibility, and other human attributes were far more decisive in warfare than weaponry or technology."¹⁹²

The Chinese Communists had little doubt about the validity of this doctrine since they believed it had been tested successfully in the anti-Japanese War (1937-1945) and the civil war. Following the precedent of these two conflicts, the leaders were confident that the use of relatively untrained and poorly armed soldiers against a militarily more sophisticated and modern enemy would succeed in Korea. By employing tactics of deception, stealth, and fighting at night, they thought that the Chinese army

¹⁹¹ See Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993); and Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995).

¹⁹² Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 10. Also see Peter Lowe, *The Origins of the Korean War* (New York: Longman, 1986).

could overcome technological inferiority; by remaining mobile, mostly traveling by foot over rugged terrain, troops could overcome logistical difficulties.¹⁹³ As it took time and patience for man to beat weapon, the leaders believed that protracted warfare would bring final victory to a spiritually superior but technologically inferior army.¹⁹⁴

What made the soldiers of the PLA stronger than their enemies in the leaders' minds were their high spirits and superior morale sustained by the party's relentless political domination. From its inception, the Party had maintained direct political control over its armed forces through ideological indoctrination—instilling such ideas as emancipation of all the oppressed, anti-colonialism, anti-capitalism, and anti-imperialism, and through organizational means—by establishing party committees and political commissars in the army. For the Party, communist ideology and organizational techniques had worked before and would do so again.

Shaped by communist ideology, as well as Chinese political culture and military history, Mao's belief in human superiority over technological superiority suggested his romantic attitude toward the threat and use of force. Thus, it was quite understandable why intervention would succeed, even if confronted by ROC or U.S. forces.

¹⁹³ Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 11.

¹⁹⁴ Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, p. 11.

Fortunately for the UN, the PLA's central problem was logistical. They could not coordinate the movement of forces from the south to the Yalu, and funnel them through the inherent limitations of Manchuria's road and rail networks, as well as across the Yalu and over North Korean mountain ridges to avoid UN detection. Transport lines into Korea were readily pinpointed and vulnerable to enemy air attack. The Yalu River would not freeze over sufficiently for heavy movement before November. Until then, six major bridges provided access to the front, the most important of which were twin 3,098-foot-long highway and railroad spans linking Antung and Sinuiju.¹⁹⁵

The PLA intervened in Korea in three phases. The First Phase was from October 14-16 1950 when Chinese "volunteers" from the Fourth Field Army began to cross the Yalu in large numbers. The Chinese were sensitive that the concept of volunteers had considerable precedent in international politics, whether Europeans assisting the American Revolution, or aiding both sides in the Spanish Civil War. China's contention that its forces were "volunteers" could not be relied on to deter U.S. military action, but it might discourage or weaken the efforts of America's allies.

On October 26, these forces first attacked South Korean forces, which signaled China's entry into the war without provoking a required response if

¹⁹⁵ Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, p. 123.

the attack were made against U.S. forces. Later in this period, Turkish and U.S. forces from the First Cavalry Division were engaged, from November 1-3, when the Chinese stopped the attacks, and on November 7 when attacks abruptly ceased. At least six PLA armies were deployed at this time: 38th, 39th, 40th, 42nd, 50th, and 66th. Commander of the U.S. 8th Army, Walton Walker, ordered a retreat to the Ch'ongch'on River line. Advance units of the U.S. 24th Infantry Division were within fifteen miles of the Yalu, and retreated down the west coast. That was the high water mark for the UN advance into North Korea. As Whiting observes: "the initial battle between American and Chinese troops had ended in victory for the Communist side, its first since the Inchon landing and the Pusan breakout of mid-September."¹⁹⁶ 180,000 Chinese troops were in North Korea at that time, with at least 90,000 more scheduled to join them within three weeks.

This halt is often described as executed by the PLA to absorb the lessons of the attack. There is no doubt there that the lull did serve to impart lessons, but its cause was inability to sustain the offensive in the face of North Korean terrain and UN airpower.

What is termed the Second Phase Offensive started on November 26th and ended on December 11th. After a second pause to allow supplies to catch

¹⁹⁶ Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, p. 131.

up to the new line of control, the Third Phase Offensive began on January 1, 1951. When it commenced, the UN command was defending a line just above the 38th Parallel. By the end of it on January 9, the UN had been push out of Seoul, and now defended a line well south of the 38th Parallel.

The First Phase Offensive constituted a surprise for MacArthur, the UN command, and Washington. The Chinese had conveyed warning to the UN that it would attack, but these warnings had fallen short of explicit messages. MacArthur was confident that the Chinese would not attack. Once the Chinese were encountered, their rapid withdrawal confirmed in the mind of the UN the combat effectiveness of the PLA. The Second Phase Offensive at the end of November was the major surprise. The components of the surprise were not that additional “volunteers” were fought, but the scale of the attack and its mode took him and his command totally by surprise. By the time of the Third Phase Offensive, the lessons of fighting the PLA were largely understood.

Those lessons were applied to the attritional warfare that lasted for much of the rest of the war. Upon reflection of this case, it is significant, first, that the Chinese were not able to overcome UN resistance in the remainder of the campaign despite explicit claims they would. Second, it is notable that the Chinese were never able to adopt a flexible operational or tactical

doctrine to permit them to break through UN lines, as the Germans did in the Ludendorff Offensives of 1918, or conduct an amphibious assault behind UN lines. Third, despite the opportunities that arose in the course of the war, the Chinese were never again able to surprise UN command as they did in 1950. The Chinese would keep forces in North Korea until 1958.

II.D.3. India, 1962

The motivation behind the Chinese surprise attack against India in 1962 has its immediate cause in the dispute over the McMahon Line designed as part of the Simla Accord in 1913. The Line runs for 550 miles from Bhutan in the west to 160 miles east of the great bend of the Brahmaputra River. The deeper cause was China's desire to damage India's position in the world.

The simmering border dispute became worse when in the spring of 1959, India began over flights and air drops into the disputed territory.¹⁹⁷ Air drops introduced the possibility that the Indians may deliver troops into the area. The Chinese calculus of Indian deployment assumed Indian forces advancing over a tortuous land route were challenged by India's growing ability to support operations in the high Himalayan plateau. This could

¹⁹⁷ Key studies include Maxwell, *India's China War*; and Cheng Feng and Larry M. Wortzel, "PLA Operational Principles and Limited War: The Sino-Indian War of 1962," in Mark A. Ryan, David M. Finklestein, and Michael A. McDevitt, eds., *Chinese Warfighting: The PLA Experience since 1949* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), pp. 173-197.

interdict supply lines to PLA outposts and force their eventual withdrawal. In addition, the Aksai Chin road could be cut. Without an adequate air defense system, western Tibet lay vulnerable to a combined air and ground attack.

The expansion in Indian capabilities generated considerable alarm in China. There was greater sensitivity to air and ground intrusions by the Indians. In November 1961, Nehru announced his “Forward Policy” of creating military outposts in disputed areas, including 43 outposts north of the Chinese Line of Actual Control (LAC).¹⁹⁸ Six months later, on May 19, 1962, China accused Indian troops of intruding on Chinese territory, and, according to a response published in the *People’s Daily*, “the Chinese Government will not stand idly by seeing its territory once again unlawfully invaded and occupied.”¹⁹⁹ The salient phrase “will not stand idly by” had a historic and alarming precedent, having been used before on October 10, 1950 to signal intervention.

In July, the PLA surrounded an Indian post in the Galwan valley but a clash was avoided. A second incident in the Chip Chap Valley resulted in the exchange of fire. Indian advances continued that summer, but Indian forces

¹⁹⁸ Maxwell, *India’s China War*, pp. 173-256.

¹⁹⁹ Quoted in Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, p. 58. Also see Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation*, p. 175.

were outnumbered that summer by the PLA presence with a five-to-one superiority and more modern weaponry. In the North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA), now called Arunachal Pradesh, the Indian army was also expanding, building an outpost at Dhola, near the trijunction of India, Bhutan, and Tibet.

A sharp clash occurred on the night of September 20th at the Namka Chu Bridge held by Chinese troops. The PLA initiated the firefight, and Whiting submits that the Chinese were moving toward confrontation in a preplanned manner. "The primacy temporal benchmarks were monthly, within which weekly timepoints separated tactical moves. In this regard, the September 20th incident is also of interest, coming one month before the massive PLA attack of October 20."²⁰⁰

On October 20th, the Chinese assault began at Namka Chu. Within four days the Chinese had overrun Khinzemane, Dhola, and Tawang, while in the west more than a dozen Indian posts fell with others hastily evacuated.²⁰¹ According to General B.M. Kaul, the commander of the Northeast Frontier Area, "We had given up the whole of northern Ladakh within forty-eight hours."²⁰² There were no large-scale battles, and most engagements were

²⁰⁰ Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, p. 102.

²⁰¹ Maxwell, *India's China War*, pp. 346-359.

²⁰² Kaul quoted in Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, p. 120.

fierce and brief. The combination of shock at the Chinese attack and the overwhelming use of material and manpower by the PLA quickly broke Indian resistance at all points.

Despite the PLA's advantage, its offensive was limited in scope and duration. No attempt was made to pursue the Indian troops at Tsangle, and they escaped into Bhutan. The Chinese did not use human wave attacks as often happened in Korea, but rather adopted standard military tactics. In this respect, Indian commanders noted that "the most impressive display of Chinese training was their uncannily accurate artillery barrages...Their attacks were preceded by supporting fire of pin-point accuracy....The real Chinese success can be attributed to their high command."²⁰³

The initial assault on the central river positions was followed by flanking and enveloping thrusts around the remaining Indian forces in the Namka Chu and Nyam Jung Chu valleys. Forty-eight hours after the attack began, all positions forward of Tawang were wiped out or in jeopardy and New Delhi ordered the evacuation of its main supply base without a fight.

The PLA entered the abandoned base of Tawang on October 25. To the east the same day, probing attacks around Walong encountered stiff resistance and soon subsided. On the western front, the Indian withdrawal

²⁰³ Quoted in Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, p. 120.

outpaced Chinese attacks, resulting in the evacuation of Daulet Beg Oldi before any assault began. However, the PLA did not occupy it since it lay beyond the Chinese claim line. One week after the initial attack, a three-week lull settled over both ends of the boundary. The first phase of the Chinese military offensive was over.

Three weeks separated the first and second phases of the Chinese military offensive. This interval afforded policy-makers the opportunity to determine the necessity as well as the risks of further military action. With the end of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Moscow and Washington had the opportunity to focus on the Sino-Indian war. While nothing the superpowers could do would materially affect the situation before the Himalayan winter set in, their influence would be felt by Beijing and New Delhi.

During the lull, Indian forces in forward positions below Se La ridge in the Northeast Frontier Area could hear intermittent blasting day and night as the PLA built a road from Bum La on the McMahon Line over the old trade route to Tawang.²⁰⁴ Working in full view of Indian aerial and ground observation, the PLA demonstrated its intention to hold and expand the positions gained. At the same time, and just as they did in Korea, secret Chinese deployments also penetrated down the crests of the North Eastern

²⁰⁴ Maxwell, *India's China War*, pp. 369, 388.

Frontier Agency that straddled the narrow valleys and defiles through which Indian reinforcements trundled upward toward the front. This covert deployment later permitted the PLA to cut off the main avenues of retreat easily.

The Indian decision to abandon Tawang as indefensible carried parallel implications for Chinese strategy, and compelled the PLA to move either forward to Se La or backward to a more secure vantage point.²⁰⁵ Under these circumstances road building could only imply a new attack in the near future. Indian behavior communicated the intention to muster whatever force was available indigenously and from other countries for a counterattack at the earliest opportunity. Nehru appealed to Kennedy on October 26, and two days later small arms were provided by the United States and Britain although the weaponry had no effect on the fighting since there was insufficient time for familiarization and training, or to reach the front.²⁰⁶

Beijing played for time while reinforcements were brought in. By mid-November, the PLA had completed its preparations for another attack. On the eve of the coordinated PLA attack that was to hit Chushul and the North Eastern Frontier Agency simultaneously, the Indian forces at Walong

²⁰⁵ Maxwell, *India's China War*, pp. 370-371.

²⁰⁶ Maxwell, *India's China War*, pp. 384-385.

began an offensive to honor Nehru's birthday on November 14.²⁰⁷ The Chinese beat back the attack, inflicting heavy casualties on the Indians. At dawn on November 16, the PLA attacked. By mid-morning, key Indian defenses had fallen and Kaul ordered the brigade to withdraw. PLA ambushes continued on the rear guard units, but there was no pursuit of the Indian forces as they straggled down the Lohit valley toward the Assam plain.²⁰⁸

At Chushul, observers reported a sudden appearance of Chinese infantry units in strength moving into positions on November 17. Chushul itself lay beyond the claim line and was not attacked, but, as at Walong, the initial defenses were overrun in a few hours. At Se La, the main defenses had been reinforced, but, on November 15th, a reconnaissance force encountered a PLA battalion and was wiped out. Two days later, the Chinese attacked in force, compelling Indian command to order a withdrawal. By the night of November 18, all the main prepared defense points in North Eastern Frontier Agency had fallen. Within two day, no semblance of an Indian army remained in North Eastern Frontier Agency.

Retreat became a rout as Kaul suddenly ordered his IV Corps headquarters to move from Tezpur to Gauhati, some one hundred miles west,

²⁰⁷ Maxwell, *India's China War*, pp. 393.

²⁰⁸ Maxwell, *India's China War*, pp. 398-414.

due to his fear that the Chinese would continue unchecked onto the broad Assam plain. Privately, Kaul speculated that the Chinese might make a paratroop landing at Misamari and would attack Tezpur by air.²⁰⁹

The entire North Eastern Frontier Agency had fallen in two days and a victorious PLA force stood at the head of the Chumbi valley. This force might attack through Sikkim to the narrow link of territory that joined Assam with central India. With less than a hundred miles between Nepal and East Pakistan providing the land connection to Assam, the threat seemed so serious a possibility that New Delhi held major units at Siligur rather than release them for reinforcement to the North Eastern Frontier Agency or Assam.

On November 20, the Chinese announced that their forces would go no further, effect a ceasefire, and withdrawal from the line of actual control to a new line about twenty kilometers behind. By any measure, the Chinese victory was overwhelming. The PLA overran 3,750 square miles of the North Eastern Frontier Agency and occupied every foot of contested territory in Ladakh, yet nowhere entered territory not claimed by China. About 722 Chinese and 4,885 Indian soldiers had been killed.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, p. 147.

²¹⁰ Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation*, p. 174.

Politically, New Delhi's defeat was complete, and dramatically captured by Nehru's public appeal to Britain and the United States for direct military intervention at the very moment Beijing was transmitting its unilateral ceasefire and withdrawal decision.²¹¹ All Indian prisoners were repatriated, and all captured equipment was returned. These steps further underscored the disparity of power on the Himalayan front. There were no victory parades in Beijing. Rather, the subtlety of Chinese behavior, Indian self-recriminations, and international reporting conveyed China's message. The three-week delay between offensives and the timing of the withdrawal were determined by tactical considerations of logistical requirements and winter weather.

New Delhi learned a powerful lesson. Nehru lost his leadership of the Afro-Asian world and his illusion that he understood China. Most significantly, the assumption that "China won't fight" was proven to be disastrous. Whiting submits that this view was so dominant in New Delhi that no amount of diplomatic warning could shake it.²¹² Despite the political and military victory, China lost its underdog role as a victim of imperialist diplomacy and projected a sense of power that reinforced the threatening

²¹¹ Indeed, Nehru called for fifteen American squadrons to attack Chinese forces on Indian territory and provide cover for Indian cities. Maxwell, *India's China War*, p. 410.

²¹² Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, p. 168.

image advanced by the United States. From the longer-term perspective, the fact that China crossed the Himalayas in force for the first time in modern history was the most troubling development.

The border disputes remain a major impediment to the improvement of Sino-Indian relations. India and China have held over two-dozen rounds of border talks since negotiations began in 1981. A pair of meaningful agreements reached in 1993 and 1996 created a durable framework to manage the disputed border, but talks have remained deadlocked. In 2010 Premier Wen Jiabao raised alarm in New Delhi when he stated that the dispute would take “a very long time” to resolve.²¹³ Ye Hailin, the Deputy Director for South Asia at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, stated: “Even if we somehow miraculously get a resolution, we still have problems,” with India “in Tibet, in Pakistan, in the Indian Ocean. So why try so hard? It seems every time we try and solve the dispute it only makes things worse.”²¹⁴

In April 2013, there was a contentious standoff when a Chinese border patrol established a camp several miles across the Line of Actual Control in the Ladakh section of Jammu and Kashmir. This underscores the

²¹³ Wen quoted in Jeff M. Smith, “On Sino-Indian Border, Status-Quo Unacceptable,” *The Diplomat*, November 7, 2013, available at: <<http://thediplomat.com/2013/11/06/on-sino-indian-border-status-quo-unacceptable/>>. Accessed November 7, 2013.

²¹⁴ Ye quoted in Smith, “On Sino-Indian Border, Status-Quo Unacceptable,” *The Diplomat*, November 7, 2013.

quiet arms race now taking place at the border. Beijing has floated the idea of freezing military and infrastructure projects along the Line of Actual Control, which would enshrine a substantial Chinese advantage at the LAC in infrastructure due to the vast expansion of development in Tibet. In 2006, after acquiescing to China's build up, New Delhi reversed course. Three years later, it announced that it would raise two new mountain divisions for the border, deploy its most advanced cruise missile and fighters, as well as upgrade several airstrips. In 2013, New Delhi approved the addition of a new strike corps in the eastern sector of the border dispute, the first offensive formation India has deployed to the LAC in 50 years.

For the PRC, it has subtly strengthened its own capabilities. In addition to its superior road and rail network in Tibet, China continually modernizes and expands its arsenal of ballistic missiles, has added airfields to Tibet, and added to its conventional force posture through the presence of advanced fighter aircraft and over 400,000 PLA soldiers in the two military regions opposite India.

In addition to the expansion of capabilities on both sides, the progressively militarized border is subject to increasing incursions across the LAC by border patrols. The Indian government records several hundred such incidents by PLA patrols each year. The Chinese publish no record of

incursions by Indian patrols, but officials suggest that it equals or exceeds the numbers India attributes to the PLA.²¹⁵

While the incursions are mostly harmless, they contain the possibility of escalation. In 2008, reports of prolonged Chinese incursions one kilometer into the Finger Area of Sikkim prompting an increased Indian military presence. Fundamentally, any resolution of the dispute would require territorial concessions from both sides. Yet, as security competition worsens, there is little likelihood that such a compromise is possible.

II.D.4. Laos, 1964-1972

In early 1961, Western and Communist Bloc attention was centered on Laos, where a civil war raged between a rightist general, Phoumi Nosavan, the neutralist force headed by Prince Souvanna Phouma, and the communist Pathet Lao. Laos seemed stabilized once the ceasefire was obtained in 1961. However, The year-old ceasefire ended with a Communist attack on Royal Lao defenses at Nam Tha in May 1962. The Kennedy Administration increased force levels in Thailand to 5,000 and prepared to intervene, but the Communist side reigned in the Pathet Lao for the time being.

²¹⁵ Smith, "On Sino-Indian Border, Status-Quo Unacceptable," *The Diplomat*, November 7, 2013

In May 1964, the U.S. began reconnaissance flight over Communist positions, soon followed by the delivery of T-26 aircraft to the Royal Lao air force. With the shootdown of two reconnaissance planes on June 7-8, Washington added escorts to the flights. On June 9, U.S. aircraft bombed the Pathet Lao headquarters in Khang Kay, also hitting the PRC mission.

Between 1964 and 1972, the PLA moved 15,000 troops into the adjacent provinces of Laos to counter parallel Thai deployments under American direction in support of the Royal Lao against the communist Pathet Lao. Although Chinese forces never entered combat, the detached anti-aircraft units shot down Royal Lao and Air America planes, and contained the potential for escalation, just as the forces stationed in North Vietnam did.

II.D.5. North Vietnam, 1965-1968

From 1965-1968, approximately 50,000 PLA troops were stationed in North Vietnam in direct war support and deterrence posture. The Chinese served the Hanoi regime in four major ways. First, they built a massive military complex and airfield northwest of Hanoi. Second, they strengthened and repaired transportation routes and bridges under repeated attack by ROLLING THUNDER strikes. Third, their presence signaled to the North Vietnamese, the South Vietnamese, and the United States, that the PRC was willing to incur casualties and resist air attack or ground invasion. Fourth,

the Chinese agreed to send volunteer pilots and aircraft to North Vietnam, and to use China as a sanctuary for North Vietnamese aircraft.²¹⁶

In September 1965, two months after President Johnson's July 28 announcement of troop increase from 75,000 to 125,000, doubling the monthly draft calls and indicating that additional forces were likely to be sent, Beijing greatly increased its involvement in five significant ways.

First, its was not conducted under the highest levels of secrecy. Rather the reverse; normal communications were used and the troops wore uniforms rather than adopting the pretense that they were civilian or "volunteers." The logical conclusion is that the PLA deliberately made their presence known to be credible without appearing provocative by publicly confronting the United States.

Second, the deployment was sizable. Between September and December 1965, approximately 35,000 Chinese military personnel crossed the border, which expanded to nearly 50,000 by the early spring of 1966. Those forces remained in roughly the same disposition until President Johnson stopped the bombing of the North in March 1968, after which they gradually returned to China. The only quantitative change detected this time

²¹⁶ Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p. 134.

was an increase from two to three antiaircraft divisions in 1967 concurrent with heavier attacks on Hanoi, Haiphong, and the border area.

The implications of size were twofold. The troops posed a logistics burden of resupply, which considering the damage to North Vietnam by air attack, had to be assumed by Beijing. This in turn made the troops a hostage against the interdiction of transport lines from China, providing Washington with a highly credible indication of PLA determination to keep those lines open regardless of the risk in escalation. These Chinese ground forces were living proof to the North Vietnamese that PRC pledges would be honored even in the face of significant casualties.

A third aspect of the importance was the fact that the PLA did not remain in passive reserve but engaged in combat, inflicted losses, and incurred casualties. The antiaircraft divisions fired on U.S. aircraft and were attacked in return. Engineer, minesweeping, and railroad construction battalions, the bulk of the deployment, worked to keep communications routes open despite casualties but also risked an escalatory reaction by the U.S.²¹⁷ Indeed, the awareness on both sides of the dangers in provocation and escalation resulted in the curious anomaly whereby Washington was the sole official sources to acknowledge the PLA presence in North Vietnam, with no

²¹⁷ Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975*, p. 135.

confirmation from the other side. However, Washington was at pains not to call too much attention to the Chinese presence to avoid arousing American concern or compelling a response.

Fourth, the PLA constructed a large base complex at Yen Bai in the northwest of North Vietnam. The full intent of the PRC's motivations for its construction remains ambiguous. It certainly may have been intended to serve as a redoubt in the event of an invasion overrunning Hanoi and Haiphong. Proximity to China and the surrounding jungle offered a viable refuge on home territory for continued resistance, in contrast to Kim Il-Sung's plight after fleeing Pyongyang. The Korean precedent raised the possibility of Yen Bai serving as a massive Chinese intervention if it had become necessary. Before crossing the Yalu in mid-October 1950, no preparations had been made for the PRC's entry into the war in the form of prepositioned supplies, robust logistical lines, and advance base development. In 1965-1966, Chinese engineers built a network of roads around Yen Bai to ensure that they would have access to the complex.

The PLA presence deterred U.S. intervention but should deterrence fail, using Yen Bai, the stage would be set for a massive Chinese intervention. An American invasion up the Red River would seize the industrial and agricultural heartland of North Vietnam. Another possibility was a combined

attack on infiltration routes whereby an amphibious landing at the nineteenth parallel would cut across the narrow panhandle to access the mass passes that provided entry to the Ho Chi Minh trail. Either of these contingencies would strain North Vietnamese defenses that were already strained by their military intervention in Laos and South Vietnam. Under worse case circumstances, of course, the PLA presence could help block an advance to Chinese borders, as in Korea.

As a fifth and final consideration, the PLA deployment into North Vietnam was accompanied by growing indications of Chinese concern over a possible Sino-American war. There were multiple official and unofficial indicators that China was expecting a U.S. attack. The Chinese perceived U.S. escalation in South Vietnam, from support, to the deployment of advisors, to conventional forces, with the next step being an attack on the PRC provoked by the inability of the U.S. to achieve victory in Vietnam.²¹⁸ The war was also anticipated due to the PRC's Marxist ideology, according to which the monopoly capitalist class determined the course of American imperialism with China as its primary opponent due to Beijing's leadership of the world revolutionary movement.

²¹⁸ Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, p. 190-191.

In sum, Beijing's posture in 1965 and 1966 signaled a willingness to increase the risk of war with the United States by open statements, by unpublicized war preparations in south China, and by the covert deployment of troops to North Vietnam for construction and combat against U.S. bombing. One of the preeminent scholars of the period and of Chinese signaling behavior, Lorenz M. Lüthi, argues that the signals were consistent and credible: China would keep the war limited if the United States did.²¹⁹ Insofar as they addressed a willingness to help in the event of an American invasion, they communicated a feasible Chinese response, underlined by repeated allusions to a "Korea-type war."

In his analysis of Chinese efforts to deter in Korea, with India, and with the United States in Indochina, Whiting concludes that it was only in "Indochina did the PLA make its moves early enough to be credible but covertly enough to avoid public provocation and confrontation. Although the air defense activity of 1964-5 did not deter American attacks against North Vietnam, it did secure the border against interdiction bombing. Moreover, the ground deployments in 1965-66 contributed significantly to American

²¹⁹ Lorenz M. Lüthi, "Reading and Warning the Likely Enemy—a Commentary: Signalling Across Four Continents," *The International History Review*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (August 2013), pp. 807-816. Lüthi reveals that, in June and July of 1965, Tanzania played an important role as interlocutor between the United States and China.

decisions against invasion of the North.”²²⁰ Indeed, Washington remained willing to restrain attacks on Hanoi, the Red River dikes, and the border zone.

The other two cases were deterrence failures. They were so because the opponent must recognize deterrence signals for what they are. Flawed perception impeded both United States and Indian acceptance of Chinese signals on two counts. First, neither Washington nor New Delhi saw their own actions as sufficiently threatening to Beijing to warrant the alarm and anxiety communicated by PRC behavior. Second, in 1950 and in 1962, China was believed to be so weakened by internal problems as to be unwilling, if not incapable, of engaging in external hostilities. United States estimates completely discounted the PLA’s capability against U.S. firepower and assumed that the rational course was to avoid combat. Indian officials discounted China’s willingness to fight due to unrest and famine within China, and dramatically evidenced by the mass exodus into Hong Kong.

A major lesson from these examples is that the Chinese commit to a course of action and follow it through while, at the same time, it is unlikely that China’s adversaries recognize that Beijing has decided to act. In Korea, PLA movements into the northeast appeared insignificant until September, by which time the momentum of policy in Washington and the counterattack

²²⁰ Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, p. 208.

in the peninsula were well underway. The misperception remains that the “point of no return” was reached only with the UN crossing of the thirty-eighth parallel in October, but actually the Chinese committed to war that summer. In 1962, the “forward policy” of the Indians from the fall of 1961 advanced their positions. But, Beijing’s truly serious warnings came in July, and by September the first serious clashes came. So, once again, China started a conflict after preparing for the battlefield without detection from the other side, and without sufficient warning if its intent were to deter an attack. From the victim’s perspective, it is reasonable to believe there is no crisis or the crisis has only begun, with sufficient time for negotiation and de-escalation. This is what makes China so dangerous: it will act before an opponent understands that there is crisis.

II.D.6. Soviet Border Dispute, Damansky/Zhenbao Island 1969

The Sino-Soviet clash on 2 March 1969, is the greatest evidence of Chinese risk taking and the most dangerous point in the Sino-Soviet split.²²¹ After the

²²¹ The best analyses of the Sino-Soviet clashes are Jian Chen, *Mao’s China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008); Zhihua Shen and Danhui Li, *After Leaning to One Side: China and Its Allies in the Cold War* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2011); and Zhihua Shen, *Mao, Stalin, and the Korean War: Trilateral Communist Relations in the 1950s* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, PRC estimates of Soviet intentions demonstrated by the Soviet military build up around China concluded that an attack was possible. A qualitative and quantitative increase in Soviet military capabilities around China's borders had been underway since 1965, and Beijing was clearly aware of this by January 1967. The Chinese may not have been aware of the full dimensions of the Soviet buildup until the winter of 1968-1969, when electronic intelligence was able to detect newly-placed units in areas that indicated considerable advanced preparation.

Whiting suggests that the Czech crisis may "have had a heightened impact through a reevaluation of intelligence pertaining to Soviet military strength which revealed a major increase in the number of Russian divisions, supplemented later that winter by the discovery of new air fields" in Mongolia and medium-range missile fields northeast of China.²²²

In these circumstances, prudence would dictate caution to avoid any pretext for a Soviet invasion. Instead, the Chinese adopted "the best deterrence is belligerence," and escalated the confrontation with Soviet forces on Damansky/Zhenbao Island. Chinese sources acknowledge that patrols at Damansky Island had previously engaged in hostile contact, without

²²² Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, p. 238.

firing, on sixteen occasions between December 1967 and the end of February 1969. They also reported Russian warning on February 25 that any further Chinese presence would be fired upon.²²³

Despite Soviet warnings, on March 2, PLA forces opened fire on Soviet forces, killing 31 Soviets and 20 PLA. There is no question that the Chinese had sought the confrontation. A larger clash erupted on March 15, in which the Soviets used armor with significantly more Chinese casualties. Whiting concludes that these events demonstrate the Chinese policy that places a “premium on deterrent action against a threat to vital interests even when that threat comes from a markedly stronger military power.”²²⁴

The Zhenbao island crisis demonstrated that China would challenge the Soviet Union while the United States was fighting a war in the south. With a characteristic sensitivity to balance of power considerations, China realized that massive Soviet intervention was possible but unlikely. The quick Chinese withdrawal after the small victory of March 2 showed that China had little interest in a military clash. But it was a risky act, that introduced the possibility of Soviet escalation. The war is often interpreted as symbolic—China wished to inflict a small blow against the Soviet Union

²²³ Maxwell, *India's China War*, pp.

²²⁴ Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, p. 240.

and return to the Party's primary concern of the Cultural Revolution.²²⁵ A more critical analysis reveals that China manipulates crisis stability without due appreciation of the risks.²²⁶

II.D.7. South Vietnam, 1974

China and Vietnam contested the sovereignty of the Paracel Islands (Xinsha) since the early 1950s. The Paracels consist of two separate island groups, the Crescent (Yongle) Group in the southwest and the Amphitrite (Xuande) Group in the northeast. No prior agreement or treaty existed for the islands but they were occupied at various times before 1949 by both France and China.

The PRC issued its first claim to the Paracels in 1951 along with its claim to the Spratlys. A PLA garrison established a presence on Woody Island in the Amphitrite Group after Nationalists left in the spring of 1950. Although China supplied this outpost from Hainan, the first naval patrol of the disputed area was not conducted until 1959. The French maintained

²²⁵ Jonathan R. Adelman and Chih-Yu Shih, *Symbolic War: The Chinese Use of Force, 1840-1980* (Taipei: Institute of International Relations, National Chengchi University, 1993), pp. 237-238.

²²⁶ Jonathan F. Solomon, "Demystifying Conventional Deterrence: Great Power Conflict and East Asian Peace," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* (Winter 2013), pp. 117-157, 133.

their presence in the Crescent Group until transferring control to South Vietnam in 1956.

The South Vietnamese were able to evict Chinese fishermen and squatters from the Crescent Group in the late 1950s without fear of Chinese intervention due to the lack of Chinese naval power. As Fravel writes, despite facing clear pressure on its claim, “China was too weak to take action and had to accept the status quo of divided control. China’s navy remained small, and almost all of its ships were deployed in areas around the Taiwan Strait.”²²⁷ Moreover, the U.S. presence surely deterred China from taking any action beyond patrols, even when challenged by the South Vietnamese navy. By 1966, Saigon had withdrawn to only Pattle Island in the Crescent Group. Although China continuously strengthened its base in the Amphitrite Group, building a concrete wharf for medium-sized ships on Woody Island, it did not exploit the advantage, as it was deterred by the strong U.S. presence in the South China Sea.

With the January 1973 Paris Peace Accords, the U.S. presence was on the decline. That decline was legalized in August 1973 when the Congress outlawed the use of U.S. military force in South East Asia. In the face of the abandoned U.S. deterrent, China rapidly increased its forces, and began

²²⁷ Fravel, *Strong Border, Secure Nation*, p. 274.

penetrating the Crescent Group. Too late, South Vietnam tried to restore its presence in the Crescent Group when the Chinese presence became a fundamental threat to Saigon's sovereignty. In January 1974, South Vietnam sent a motley collection of vessels and Marines to evict the Chinese. On January 19, 1974, Chinese and South Vietnamese forces clashed over the Crescent Group. The Chinese brought overwhelming force to bear against the South Vietnamese forces, which surrendered the next day. When the fighting was over, China had seized the Crescent Group in the western part of the archipelago from the South Vietnamese, and completely occupied the Islands. Stealthily, the Chinese had built up their presence on the Islands, allowing their Islands to serve as a base for additional operations, while covertly expanding their presence in the Crescent Group so that South Vietnam would either have to respond or would lose the territory.

II.D.8. Vietnam, 1979 and 1988

In December 1978, Vietnam invaded Cambodia to protect the Vietnamese minority and drive the PRC-backed Pol Pot regime from power. By January 1979, Vietnamese forces had seized Phnom Penh and were on the border with Thailand. In response, the Chinese government complained about numerous border incursions by Vietnamese forces, and threatened punitive action over these violations. In December 1978, Vietnam seized a number of

strategic hills inside China, killed and harassed Chinese fishermen in the Gulf of Tonkin, and claimed the Paracel and Spratly Islands for itself. From December 1978 until February 1979, there were over 700 border clashes with over 300 Chinese killed.

By February, the PLA had moved between 30 and 40 divisions along the Vietnamese border. At the same time, due to the November 1978 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the Soviet Union and Vietnam, China made preparations to defend the north against a potential Soviet counterattack.

On February 17, 1979, Chinese forces executed a surprise attack across the Vietnamese border. The causes of the war were certainly to punish Vietnam for violating China's extended deterrent to Cambodia. While the idea of punishing an "ungrateful ally" and a "disobedient pupil" by hitting Vietnam hard to cause it to rethinking its invasion, at root, the cause was deeper. More significantly, it was a response to the Soviet effort to encircle China.²²⁸ China was using force preemptively to break the Soviet stranglehold. Indeed, the historical record reveals that Deng Xiaoping had made the decision to invade Vietnam before Vietnam invaded Cambodia. Vietnam's treaty with Moscow had thrown down the gauntlet to China's

²²⁸ Robert S. Ross, *The Indochina Triangle: China's Vietnam Policy, 1975-1979* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 253.

regional preeminence. The loss of face suffered in the collapse of the Pol Pot regime and the threat of encirclement from Moscow could be countered by a display of Chinese power. Throwing a quarter of a million men against Vietnam to “explode the myth of Vietnam’s invincibility,” as Deng put it, was designed to blunt Vietnamese pride and restore Chinese credibility, compel Vietnam to withdraw troops from Cambodia, and show that China would act, unlike the West, in the face of Soviet adventurism.²²⁹ “We cannot tolerate the Cubans of the Orient [the Vietnamese] to go swashbuckling in Laos, Kampuchea, or even in the Chinese border areas,” Deng explained, “Now some people in the world are afraid of offending them, even if they do something terrible. These people wouldn’t dare take action against them.”²³⁰

From Beijing’s perspective, Moscow’s reaction was the most important. As Xiaoming Zhang writes: “According to intelligence analysis by the General Staff, Moscow would have three military options in response to the invasion: a massive armed incursion including a direct attack on Beijing; instigation of the armed ethnic minority personnel, who were exiled in the Soviet Union, to attack China’s outposts in Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia; or

²²⁹ Nayan Chanda, *Brother Enemy: The War after the War* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), pp. 358-359.

²³⁰ Deng quoted in Chanda, *Brother Enemy*, p. 359.

use of skirmishes to mount border tensions between the two countries.”²³¹ It was the case that “the Soviet Union did not have adequate forces to conduct any large military operations against China immediately, Chinese leaders, particularly Deng, were convinced that a defensive, limited and brief military action against Vietnam would not provoke Moscow's intervention and an international outrage.”²³² Indeed, “the two previous border conflicts, with the Indians in 1962 and the Soviets in 1969, corroborated this calculation. The desire for a short war also helped subdue domestic opposition and justify Beijing's policy choice. Nevertheless, Chinese leaders could not lower their guard, and simultaneously ordered troops in the northern and north-western military regions to step up combat readiness for possible Soviet strikes.”²³³

The attack was framed by the Chinese as a “self defensive counterattack,” which was an attempt to influence domestic and international opinion.²³⁴ But, the phrase was certainly more than that. The terminology reveals how the Chinese will portray their aggressive first strikes. The victim is to blame for the first strike. Moreover, Vietnam had

²³¹ Xiaoming Zhang, “China's 1979 War with Vietnam: A Reassessment,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 184 (December 2005), pp. 851-874, 859.

²³² Zhang, “China's 1979 War with Vietnam,” p. 859.

²³³ Zhang, “China's 1979 War with Vietnam,” pp. 859-860.

²³⁴ Zhang, “China's 1979 War with Vietnam,” p. 859.

entered a period of crisis with China of which it was not aware. The attack caught Hanoi off guard. "Vietnamese intelligence apparently failed to get the Hanoi leadership to prepare for a Chinese invasion. Despite Beijing's saber-rattling for several months, Vietnamese leaders could not believe 'a fraternal socialist country' would ever attack it."²³⁵ Indeed, "when massive numbers of Chinese troops crossed the border, Premier Pham Van Dong and Chief of the PAVN General Staff Van Tien Dung were visiting Phnom Penh. The broad manner of the PLA assaults also confused the Vietnamese high command from identifying the main axis of the invasion forces and the real objectives of the attack."²³⁶

In the course of the conduct of the campaign, the PLA advanced along five main axes of advance: in the eastern theater of operations against Lang Son and Cao Bang, and in the west against Ha Giang, Lao Cai, and Lai Chao.²³⁷

Vietnam responded by pulling some units out of Cambodia, but principally used units from around Hanoi and local force and militia units. This was a "pedagogical war" because China announced that its intention was to punish Vietnam for its border incursions and implicitly for its invasion of Cambodia. To that end, Beijing announced that it would advance only 50

²³⁵ Zhang, "China's 1979 War with Vietnam," p. 863.

²³⁶ Zhang, "China's 1979 War with Vietnam," p. 863.

²³⁷ Zhang, "China's 1979 War with Vietnam," pp. 861-862.

kilometers into Vietnam. After initial progress against heavy resistance, Chinese forces halted and began an orderly withdrawal that was complete by March 17. China's war with Vietnam was its largest campaign since Korea. The Vietnamese claimed to have killed or wounded 42,000 Chinese, while Beijing claimed to have inflicted 50,000 on Vietnam with a loss of only 20,000.²³⁸ The massiveness of the Chinese attack, the death and destruction it wrought on Vietnam, and the Soviets' inaction certainly added to China's credibility.

It is clear that China is particularly sensitive to perceived threats to territorial integrity and sovereignty.²³⁹ Easily enough to expand PLA responsibilities well beyond defense in favor of provoking an attack. This is worrisome because what China defines as a territorial threat is ambiguous and elastic. It is also transparent that China will use force in other unprovoked cases, such as in the Spratly dispute.

In 1987, China decided to establish a permanent physical presence in the Spratlys. Beijing had claimed these islands since 1951, but had no physical presence. Since that time, the Islands had grown in importance due

²³⁸ Zhang, "China's 1979 War with Vietnam," pp. 866-867; Larry M. Wortzel, "China's Foreign Conflicts since 1949," in David A. Graff and Robin Higham, *A Military History of China* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2002), pp. 267-284, 280.

²³⁹ Allen S. Whiting, "The PLA and China's Threat Perceptions," *The China Quarterly*, No. 146 (June 1996), pp. 596-615.

to the discovery of oil and gas reserves and the ability of states with competing claims to establish a presence. China's first use of force in the Spratlys occurred on March 14, 1988, Chinese and Vietnamese forces clashed on Johnson (Chigua) Reef in the Spratly Islands. In the fighting, three Vietnamese ships were sunk and about 74 Vietnamese sailors killed. In the rest of March, China seized a total of six coral reefs, which had been unoccupied.

China's aggressive posture and its decision to establish a presence in the region created conditions for the clash. In the late fall of 1994, China occupied a seventh feature in the Spratlys, Mischief Reef, in the eastern part of the archipelago, without conflict. Because China's other features are all in the far west, occupation of this reef broadened the scope of waters over which China claimed control. In addition, this seizure prevented the formation of an entente between Vietnam and the Philippines. As with the Paracels, China moved quietly to occupy territory and expand its influence, generally, by metastasizing its control over the territory but also by surprising its opponents when it must.

III. Lessons and Comparison with European Cases

When we compare these cases with the European ones, we find important similarities and differences. The similarities are, first, there are occasions

where first strike and preemption are rational strategies to execute. In essence, all states will do so in the right circumstances. Second, the Europeans typically execute first strikes or preemption in the context of a war. They do not have the conception of “pre-crisis” as the ideal time to act. Third, deception is an important part of the European calculus but there is significantly less emphasis placed on it than in Chinese history and strategic thought, particularly as it relates to the psychological impact on the opponent.

The differences are significant. Chinese strategic thought advocates and places greater emphasis on surprise, first strike and preemption than does European strategic thought. The study delineates seven major differences that are revealed in comparison with European thought.

III.A. Chinese Emphasis on Psychological Warfare

In Chinese thought there is great emphasis placed on the psychological condition of one’s own side and one’s opponent. The first strike or preemptive strategy will have a determinative psychological effect on the opponent that will cause the withdrawal or collapse of the opponent. As the eminent historian of Chinese strategic thought, Peter Boodberg observed in 1930, the crux of the traditional Chinese battle narrative is psychological:

battles are won and lost because something happens that causes the men of one side or the other to lose their nerve and flee the battlefield.²⁴⁰

The psychological emphasis is in large part informed by the strong in-group/out-group distinction that the Chinese apply to the world.

Psychological effects are important in every war or confrontation, including a civil war between Chinese factions. But, the psychological aspect is seen a bit differently when China confronts non-Chinese. There is an assumption, often implicit, of the superiority of the Chinese, as Jullien's consideration of *shi* captures for us.

This assumption, in turn, is caused by the strong ethnocentrism at the heart of what it means to be Chinese. Noted Historian of China S.C.M. Paine of the United States Naval War College writes: the "Chinese made the a priori assumption that Chinese civilization was eternal, supreme, and predestined to triumph. They understood that Chinese dynasties had often been separated by decades of civil war, but they insisted that Chinese history was an unbroken cloth."²⁴¹ They presented themselves, Paine submits, "as guardians of a 5,000-year-old heritage of cultural continuity in contrast to

²⁴⁰ Peter A. Boodberg, "The Art of War in Ancient China: A Study Based upon the *Dialogues of Li Duke of Wei*," (Berkeley: Unpub. Ph.D. diss., University of California, 1930), pp. xix-xx.

²⁴¹ Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895*, p. 335.

the insipid attempts at civilization by the cultural parvenus inhabiting the rest of the globe.”²⁴²

As London School of Economics historian Odd Arne Westad argues: “the Chinese had a value system they called “*Huayiguan* [华夷观 added by Thayer], meaning—in a cultural context—‘Chinese superior, others inferior.’ Over centuries this worldview had influenced the Chinese eye in seeing other peoples and their behavior. As a form of cultural ethnocentrism, it was probably stronger at the time than any similar European phenomenon, not least because it had been shared for half a millennium or more by large parts of the elites of China’s immediate neighbors.”²⁴³

The Chinese are said not only to share a common ancestry but also to derive from progenitors who, in the distant past before the reign of the Yellow Emperor, separated themselves from non-East Asians, thus becoming the “core of the yellow race.”²⁴⁴ Thus, due to religious-cultural and historical influences, racism remains a dominant social perspective and attitude. It allows the Chinese to easily define their worldview, to know who is in the “family” and who is the outsider, from whom they should expect support and

²⁴² Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895*, p. 335.

²⁴³ Odd Arne Westad, *Restless Empire: China and the World Since 1750* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), p. 31.

²⁴⁴ Sautman, “Myths of Descent, Racial Nationalism and Ethnic Minorities,” p. 84.

from whom they should not. Such strong beliefs compel us to recognize that all things “China” or “Chinese” will generate the strongest emotional reactions.

These attitudes were common in the past, explicitly made even when China had its period of doubt during the “Century of Humiliation.” Policy-makers and analysts should prepare for continually greater nationalistic, ethnocentric, and racist appeals as China becomes stronger. As Lucien Pye explains: “The most pervasive underlying Chinese emotion is a profound, unquestioned, generally unshakeable identification with historical greatness...This is all so-evident that they are hardly aware when they are being superior to others.”²⁴⁵ Pye continues: “The Chinese see such an absolute difference between themselves and others that even when living in lonely isolation in distant countries they unconsciously find it natural and appropriate to refer to those in whose homeland they are living as ‘foreigners.’”²⁴⁶

III.B. Chinese Motivations for War

The comparison reveals that China’s wars were not primarily fought to gain territory, although that ambition has been important at times. Most of its

²⁴⁵ Lucien Pye, *The Spirit of Chinese Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 50.

²⁴⁶ Pye, *The Spirit of Chinese Politics*, p. 56.

wars were fought to show determination, embarrass enemies, punish, and defend through aggression—all traditional Chinese concepts that surround conceptions of how the Chinese see themselves and their opponents. Only by understanding the Chinese perception of themselves and their place in the world, can we understand how China's decision-making will be different than the decision-making of Europeans. This perception is comprised of three elements. First, that China is superior to any other state, it is the dominant in any dominant-follower framework; second, China as a revolutionary force victimized by the powerful nations; and, third, China as an equal striving to coexist with other states peacefully.²⁴⁷

Military capability has always been important to Chinese leadership. When China found itself in the unfortunate position of military weakness, Chinese statesmen had to adjust when military capabilities could not match Chinese self-perception. The Chinese preferred to explain away their losses to specific circumstances as with the Opium War, the Sino-Japanese War, and the Sino-Vietnamese War. They could create a new identity, as they did with the Arrow War and the Quemoy Crisis. They interpreted stalemate as victory, as in the Korean War. Success could maintain their preferred image, as at Zhenbao Island or the Sino-Indian War. When we consider the totality

²⁴⁷ Emphasizing these perceptions is Adelman and Shih, *Symbolic War*, p. 238.

of these cases, we can see that the Chinese have a “Hair Trigger,” and are likely to strike when they perceive the strategic opportunity.

III.C. The Critical Role of Deception

Deception is very significant for understanding when China will execute a first strike or preempt—far more so than in European thought. With the Chinese use of force, their efforts at deception and first strike repeatedly served a symbolic function as well as a traditional, *Realpolitik* political role. A critically important point is that the symbolic component was attached to fighting behavior itself, not always to the proclaimed objectives of the war or the consequences of the war. While realist explanations have significant value for understanding Chinese behavior, as they do European behavior, the “reasons” provided for the conflict are rational only if the goals are given, and goals are meaningful only if they fit into a worldview and conception of national identity and interests. Put directly: The Chinese are different due to the emphasis they place on deception and the clever stratagem.

All military traditions have stories of generals who deceive their foes. The Western military tradition starts with a war that ended due to a clever trick—the Trojan Horse—inspired by the Athena, the goddess of wisdom. However, that example also serves to underscore that it was an inspired trick

at the end of a long, attritional war. Ares, not Athena, brought the Trojan War to a situation where the ruse would work.

For China, the emphasis is fundamentally different. China reveres the clever general or strategy, and successful deception is a major theme in Chinese military thought. The most celebrated military mastermind, famous in history and fiction, is the genius at deception, Zhuge Liang. In the famous Battle of the Red Cliffs, he pretends to attack across the Yangtze River in fog using strawmen. He ordered his men to beat wardrums and shout to complete the illusion, drinking wine while the enemy wastes his arrows—to be gathered up and used against them. In another famous story, Zhuge Liang tricks an adversary by opening his city gate and calmly drinking wine on the parapets while children play nearby. The enemy suspects a trap, turns around, and leads the troops away, leaving Zhuge Liang safe in his stronghold, which was actually empty of troops. Ruse is a central trope of traditional Chinese war stories.

The understanding of war as deception thoroughly marks Chinese warfare. For example, in 1660, during Koxinga's leadership during the Sino-Dutch war, a Dutch envoy asked him whether he intended to attack Taiwan, and he replied, "I'll often circulate a rumor that I'm moving west when I'm really intending to move east" and this has become one of the most famous of

the Thirty-Six stratagems: feign east, attack west (*sheng dong ji xi*). That ruse has been remarkably successful, the idea of feigning weakness and luring the opponent into his defeat.

The fundamental fact is that the Chinese invoke deception and deceptive practices far more frequently in their strategic writings and in their strategic culture than Western writers do. Moreover, in their epics and considerations in their strategic works, in battle after battle, the superior commander's weapon of choice is the stratagem—and his opponent almost invariably takes the bait and suffers predictable defeat. Often elaborate schemes are used by the Chinese, and have been throughout history. From these historical considerations and the continuing prominence of stratagems in Chinese battle narratives, we may conclude that the target is most often the enemy's psychology. Much attention is devoted to efforts to raise the spirits of one's own troops or undermine the morale of the enemy through a setback, defeat, or through non-military measures. So important is this that defeat is equated with a blow to morale, such as the death, flight, or capture of the enemy's commander.

For the Chinese, there is a strong form of deception, deeply rooted in Chinese strategic thought, which aims at altering an adversary's intentions and priorities by manipulating his perceptions of reality, and in particular his

perceptions of the various potential outcomes of the conflict.²⁴⁸ The aim is to manipulate his concept of his own objectives and his own “face.” Thus, in Chinese strategic thought, there is the charge for the successful strategist to anger deliberately his opponent in order to encourage the irrationality of arrogance.

The center of gravity for Chinese deception is the manipulation of the opponent’s mind, ideally to the point where he does not fight at all because his will is broken or he does not perceiving fighting to be an option for him. As noted scholar of the Chinese concept of deception, Scott Boorman, writes: “The objective is to hold one’s own intent invariant, while simultaneously maneuvering the enemy into a position where he is willing to grant it.”²⁴⁹ Samuel Griffith argues that the Chinese perceive deception always to be legitimate in the promotion of national interest and national defense. For the Chinese, he submits, “Deception requires active measures of simulation and dissimulation so that the enemy will be deceived, deluded, and mystified. He

²⁴⁸ Scott A. Boorman, “Deception in Chinese Strategy,” in William W. Whitson, ed., *The Military and Political Power in China in the 1970s* (New York: Praeger, 1972), pp. 313-337, 315.

²⁴⁹ Boorman, “Deception in Chinese Strategy,” p. 322.

must be led to believe what one wants him to believe so that his action will action will contribute to the attainment of one's own aims."²⁵⁰

III.D. The Importance of Surprise

Inextricably linked with deception is surprise, knocking the enemy off balance, which may be accomplished by "an entirely unexpected strategic or tactical maneuver which the enemy is too inflexible mentally or too ponderous physically to counter successfully. The enemy is to be worn out, plagued, bothered, harassed, irritated, and given no rest," in order to have a cumulative effect on "the enemy's state of mind, on his morale, and on his ability to plan."²⁵¹ Griffith argues that the Chinese attempt to create cleavages "between allies, between segments of the people, between a ruler and his counselors, between a general and his advisers, between officers and their men" as weaken and sap the morale of the enemy.²⁵²

Reflecting on Chinese military history and geostrategic position, it is certainly plausible that Chinese strategic thought may emphasize first strikes and preemption because they faced surprise attacks from nomads so often. Unlike Europeans, the Chinese were frequently raided, and as the discussion

²⁵⁰ Samuel B. Griffith, II, *The Chinese People's Liberation Army* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), p. 246.

²⁵¹ Griffith, *The Chinese People's Liberation Army*, p. 247.

²⁵² Griffith, *The Chinese People's Liberation Army*, p. 247.

above revealed, they often resorted to preemptive attacks to break up nomadic unification before they had a chance to attack the Chinese.

Preemption worked and made the Chinese more secure. It entered their strategic culture, and remains a part today.

III.E. The Lack of Appreciation of the “Fog of War”

Unlike the Europeans, who appreciate that efforts at deception, first strike and preemption are limited or undermined by Clausewitz’s “Fog of War,” the importance of friction, the appreciation of failure—one’s carefully developed plan may not work—and the risks of escalation. In their strategic thought, the Chinese do not possess these genuine risks and dangers, and places the present Sino-American relationship in peril. Due to their lack of appreciation of these factors, the Chinese are more willing to execute a first strike or preempt than would the United States. Cyber warfare introduces a negative complication because the Chinese willingness to use it without concern for the unintended consequences of such attacks and the risk that it may compel the United States to escalate.

III.F. Perception of Nuclear Weapons

Finally, this study considers the Chinese perception of nuclear weapons during the PLA cases. During the Korean War, the Chinese weighted the

consequences of a U.S. nuclear attack and identified it as not catastrophic for China. In Whiting's assessment, first, Chinese leaders depreciated the impact of a nuclear attack. Mao remarked to an American journalist in August 1946: "The atom bomb is a paper tiger with which the U.S. reactionaries try to terrify the people. It looks terrible but in fact is not. Of course, the atom bomb is a weapon of mass destruction, but the outcome of war is decided by the people, not by one or two weapons."²⁵³ When measuring the impact of the United States nuclear arsenal on Chinese decision-making, it is difficult to deviate from Whiting's observation that "U.S. possession of the atomic bomb does not seem to have compelled reassessment of Mao's strategic doctrine, although the later was developed in the pre-nuclear age."²⁵⁴

The lessons of these crises are that Chinese intervention or conflict is undertaken with no regard to the possibility of a nuclear attack, but rather that the Chinese accept calculated risks, which they accept as justified by overwhelming factors favoring intervention. This perception was not unique to Mao, but is a deeply rooted aspect of Chinese grand strategy.

While the past does not predict the future, neither is the future wholly discontinuous from the past. With a regime as self-consciously directed as that of the PRC, change exists with continuity. Adaptation through learning is

²⁵³ Mao quoted in Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, p. 135.

²⁵⁴ Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, p. 136.

accompanied by repetition from a repertoire of behavioral routines. Past experience provides a perceptual framework for interpreting the present and forecasting the future. Unfortunately, for stability in Sino-American relations, and the other critical dyadic relationships (i.e., Sino-Indian, Sino-Russian, Sino-Japanese, and Sino-Vietnamese), this framework suggests that China is likely to execute a first strike or preempt.

III.G. The Chinese Conception of Pedagogical War

The final significant difference from the European or American conception of preemption and war is the Chinese conception of pedagogical war. The strategic essence of which is to attack in order to execute a limited aims campaign to “teach a lesson” to the enemy. That is, the application of coercive military power against the state to cause it to accept Chinese demands or support its interests.

Wars deliberately started to instruct another state are rare in international politics. Overwhelmingly most states signal displeasure or attempt to coerce other states by diplomatic means as well as military signaling. While it is rare for the Chinese, this type of behavior is not unknown. The classic case of pedagogical war was against India in 1962.

As documented above, the Chinese attack occurred after the Indians violated the McMahon Line and advanced into unoccupied disputed territory.

In retaliation, the Chinese leadership executed a limited pedagogical attack against India in 1962, which has become the ideal model of a “pedagogical strike” in Chinese strategic culture.²⁵⁵

Chinese strategic objectives were framed by the need to repel the Indians, impart the message to them concerning the costs of changing the border unilaterally, to do so before winter made conflict impossible, and to do so without causing escalation. The concern over escalation informed Chinese actions: there would be no penetration of the Indian border, which provided New Delhi with a strong incentive to accept the situation. Strategically, China was returning the situation to the *status quo ante*. That would safeguard China’s interest with respect to India. Of course, the significant element was that India chose to act during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The Crisis opened an ideal opportunity for China to act while the superpowers were focused on its events and its de-escalation. It is India’s misfortune that New Delhi chose to escalate the border conflict just before the superpower crisis gave China a free hand.

Accordingly, China launched its attack against Indians on 20 October, and then defeated the Indian counterattack a month later. In accord with its

²⁵⁵ Senior Colonel Chen Zhou, “Chinese Modern Local War and U.S. Limited War,” in Michael Pillsbury, ed., *Chinese Views of Future War* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1997), pp. 233-245, 240.

aims and discipline, the PLA did not advance beyond the McMahon Line, and, once reached, the PLA executed a rapid retreat to 20km behind the Line of Actual Control.

Two consequences result from China's strategic conception. First, although it is rare, "pedagogical strike" should be included as a sub-component of preemption. Second, the timing of the strike was notable. When opportunities arise, China attack weaker states that challenge its interests.

As a result, the United States should expect that the PRC will execute a pedagogical campaign against weaker states that challenge its interests. Thus, United States decision-makers should expect that similar justification for a limited aims attack might be launched against Vietnam or the Philippines, even in the face of the U.S. extended deterrent.²⁵⁶ It is possible that such rhetorical justification might be used in a war against Japan as well, although China's experience with pedagogical war does support the argument that it would execute pedagogical war against a great power.

²⁵⁶ This requires the ability to deter and dissuade China from taking such an action. For an important article illuminating how to do this see Michael Pillsbury, "The Sixteen Fears: China's Strategic Psychology," *Survival*, Vol. 54, No. 5 (October-November 2012), pp. 149-182.

Chapter Four

The Logic of Preventive War and Historical Cases

This chapter explains the logic of preventive war and considers historical cases in order to establish the baseline for comparison of preventive war motivations in the European context with China's, as Chapter Two did for first strike and preemption. The chapter begins with a review of preventive war in Western military history. Next, the study considers the logic of preventive war through a review of the major theorists of hegemonic war, and explains the implications of their theories for the Sino-American confrontation. Third, major historical cases of preventive war in the European context are presented. Fourth, the three major lessons from these cases are illuminated.

I. Major Theme of Western Military History

In the pantheon of Western military history, World War I provided the best historical case in the modern period. In this cataclysmic war, there were three different dyads of preventive war motivation: The German strategic motivation against Russia; Russian strategic motivation against Germany; and, British motivation against Germany.

In the opening phase of World War I, powerful German forces swept quickly through Belgium, violating that country's neutrality and crushing its resistance, in order to envelop their French opponent and annihilate the bulk of the French army from the rear. Favored by strategic surprise, they came close to winning the war in the west in a matter of weeks. Although the French command had intended to seize the strategic initiative through Plan XVII and its invasion of Alsace Lorraine, the Germans did so successfully through their strategic decision-making regarding where to attack.

The Germans had a strong incentive to seek a quick decision in the west in the face of the Franco-Russian alliance. Berlin knew that the conflict would be a two-front war. Knowing that Russia's capacity for mobilization and deployment was the lowest of all of the major powers, a quick victory over France was essential. The Germans anticipated that it would take them six weeks to defeat France, after which, the bulk of the forces in the west would be transferred to the east to fight the Russians just as they were coming in force due to their slower mobilization rates.

Due to the formidable abilities of the General Staff, German mobilization would operate with clock-like efficiency, as had been demonstrated in 1866 and 1870, and practiced to perfection since then. However, the Franco-German border was narrow; it permitted little room for

strategic maneuver, and with French armies being concentrated there, Germany was required to outflank the French by rapidly attacking through Belgium. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Count Alfred von Schlieffen, gradually formulated the plan between 1895 and 1907, abandoning Gen. Helmuth von Moltke's (the elder) plan to stay on the defensive, and exploit any opportunities or mistakes provided by the French and Russians for offensive thrusts against them.²⁵⁷ As it matured, the Schlieffen Plan consisted of leaving only a thin screen of defensive forces in the east to retard the initial Russian attacks as best they could, delaying until reinforced by victorious western units. A weak force would also be placed in the southwest, luring the French deeper into Germany so that they would not be able to reinforce French units confronting the bulk of the German army. The main German force would strike with overwhelming mass through Belgium like a vast scythe, enveloping the French where he was weakest on the front and, wheeling south, capturing Paris and crushing the main French armies from behind.

Unfortunately, for the Germans, Schlieffen's successor in the General Staff diluted his plan and thus reduced chances for victory in 1914. Reluctant to permit a temporary French advance on German soil, the new Chief of the

²⁵⁷ Gerhard Ritter, *The Schlieffen Plan: Critique of a Myth* (New York: Praeger, 1958), p. 21.

Imperial General Staff, Helmuth von Moltke (the younger), strengthened German forces in the south at the expense of the crucial right wing in the north. Indeed, after the outbreak of the war, when this wing was on its mission, it was weakened further by a high command apprehensive over developments in the east. Two divisions were detached to reinforce the defense against Russia. Ironically, the German forces in the east brilliantly defeated the Russians while these forces were still in transit to East Prussia.

Yet, the modified Schlieffen Plan still caused great surprise among the French military. Three other factors contributed to this. The first was an unexpected display of mobility by the German troops; second, the overall deployment of twice as many troops as the French had anticipated; and, third, the German ability to conceal their precise movements in the early stages of the offensive.

But, it was French planning and their own decisions in the course of the initial stages of the conflict that made the German surprise so complete. French military doctrine was heavily invested in massed infantry attacks against what they believed to be a weaker Germany adversary.²⁵⁸ French military intelligence grossly underestimated German strength. It expected that the Germans would operate with 45 active divisions in the west. This

²⁵⁸ Knorr, "Strategy Surprise in Four European Wars," p. 17.

intelligence failure was based on the assumption that the Germans would not use their reserves in initial combat. To the contrary, the French believed that the Germans would only use their reserves for defensive purposes, just as the French would. In reality, the Germans deployed 83 divisions at the outset of hostilities in 1914, and these divisions fought well.

The French knew about the Schlieffen Plan, which was discussed publicly, but could not be certain that the Germans would actually apply the Schlieffen Plan. Modest changes were made in Plan XVI (the penultimate plan to Plan XVII) of 1908 to provide for the contingency of a German violation of Belgian neutrality, including a larger number of forces positioned in the northwest. Yet, the French expected to be victorious due to the fact that they would seize the initiative in their own attack and thereby foil German plans in the northwest. French planners complacently assumed that any German thrust would not penetrate the heart of Belgium but rather proceed through the difficult wooded mountains of the Ardennes. The French thus misjudged the breadth of the German attack, which constituted a far larger envelopment than the French had considered in any contingency.

As events developed, decisive success escaped the Germans despite stunning victories in the summer battles. The ultimate failure of strategic surprise to work according to Schlieffen's Plan does not reflect a weakness in

Germany's capability to inflict strategic surprise. There was nothing wrong with Schlieffen's plan, and the Germans had at their disposal virtually all the assets to implement it with success. Berlin possessed the ability to rapidly mobilize, superiority and the points of attack, and great mobility in the field, especially for the armies on the German right flanks, which came close to encircling the bulk of the French and capturing Paris, but ultimately failed. The principal problem was that strict adherence to this daring plan allowed only a thin defensive cover along the Franco-German boundary. The younger Moltke preferred to accept greater safety at more locations in the west and east than did Schlieffen, and thus compromised the boldness of the plan. Thus, the crucial right wing was weakened, and the commander wheeled prematurely before the Paris region was reached. The French were able to hold. After the race to the Channel was decided, there would be no turning of the French flank, and the war of attrition began. This was a war Germany could not win against a coalition of superior manpower and material resources.

II. Theories of Preventive War

All expectations about the future of preventive war, and, in particular, its relevance to the future of the Sino-American relationship, are anchored in theories of international politics. These theories frame expectations about

likely scenarios, potential flashpoints, and issues of contention between the two powers. Theories are the foundations upon which scenarios and expectations of the relationship may be built. Accordingly, scenarios and expectations are only as good as their theoretical foundations.

While there are many theories that can inform the discussion of the future Sino-American relationship, for example, the democratic peace theory made famous by Michael Doyle—liberal democracies do not fight other liberal democracies—this study rejects idealistic considerations of the future of the relationship. Rather, it considers theories of power politics, which are the most realistic theoretical approaches to the foundation of the Sino-American relationship, before offering its own theory to understand why confrontation with China is as certain as anything can be in international politics.

Adopting the perspective of power politics permits analysis of an old concept in international politics, far older than theories of liberal democracy or economic interdependence: the struggle for hegemony in international politics. The power political perspective permits us to see similarities, as well as differences, with previous periods of hegemonic conflict, from the Peloponnesian War (434-404 B.C.), the Punic War (264-146 B.C.), the Italian and Indian Ocean War (1494-1516), the Dutch-Spanish War (1580-1608),

the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), the Wars of the Grand Alliance (1688-1713), the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792-1815), the period of the two World Wars (1914-1945), and the Cold War (1946-1992).

Before introducing evolutionary realism to explain the motivations of China's leadership, this study will consider the following theories of power politics relevant for understanding the future of Sino-American confrontation: power preponderance; power transition theory; balance of power; and offensive realism.

II. A. The Importance of Hard Power and Relative over Absolute Power

All power politics theories begin with an understanding that the most useful instrument in international politics is hard power. In international relations, power equals the amount of hard power a state possesses—its military, economic, diplomatic capabilities and effectiveness, population size, geographic position, technological prowess and adaptability, and natural resources. In essence, hard power pivots around three considerations: the number of people who can work and fight; their economic productivity and innovation; and the effectiveness of the political system in exacting and pooling individual contributions to advance national goals. This might be thought of as a country's efficiency and will power to achieve its goals.

Population is an essential component but cannot alone confer international power, as is clearly demonstrated by the relative weakness of Bangladesh, Indonesia, or Brazil. In order to be truly powerful the population must be productive. For this reason developed countries have far more influence than their developing counterparts. In a nutshell, this is why the United States dominates China today. But, those advantages cannot be realized without political effectiveness, the ability of governments to extract resources to advance national goals and the will power to continue in the face of political or economic adversity or military setbacks or failures. Politically effective governments garner relatively more resources and have greater will, and are then able to expand national power. The example of Vietnam is important here. North Vietnam defeated a more populous and affluent South Vietnam, in spite of massive assistance from the United States and allies to Saigon, due to its ruthless extraction of resources, great will power, and assistance from key allies like the Soviet Union and China.

Finally, the number and wealth of allies is sometimes considered in discussions of hard power. This is because allies often augment the dominant state's power through their military effectiveness, intelligence community, economic might, or natural resources. Of course, allies may also introduce problems for the dominant state, seeking to use its power to

advance the ally's interests. But, on the whole, allies are assets that strengthen and deepen the hegemon's capabilities.

To this list of the components of hard power, Harvard political scientist Joseph Nye's description of the importance of soft power—getting others to want what you want—is a significant contribution.²⁵⁹ Stalin's famous quip, "how many divisions has the Pope," was intended to mock the power of the Catholic Church, but history turned his remark on its head. The Pope could not evict the Red Army from Poland in 1945, but Pope John Paul II's role in undermining Communist rule in that country in the late 1970s and 1980s underscores the importance of soft power. Indeed, soft power does have a role to play: witness how Beijing is establishing Confucius Centers, cultural centers promoting Chinese language and culture worldwide that undermine and denigrate Western culture and languages, especially English and the Anglophone world.

But, soft power plays a secondary role. This is because soft power, in the context of the Sino-American confrontation, occurs within the context of hard power. It is the hard power capabilities of China and the United States that will determine the end result of the confrontation.

²⁵⁹ Nye first developed the concept of soft power in Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1991); and more fully developed in Nye's *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005).

The second starting point for all power politics theories is the distinction between absolute and relative power. While the absolute power that a state has is significant, what is more important is the relative power of the state—how it ranks in terms of power against the power of other states.

The example of Great Britain underscores this point. In absolute terms, Great Britain is far more powerful than it was a hundred years ago—it has nuclear weapons after all. However, in relative terms, Great Britain is much weaker than it was a hundred years ago. The rise of Germany, Japan, the Soviet Union/Russia and the United States means that Britain is weaker in comparison. London is worse off than it was a hundred years ago when it ruled the waves and its empire was arguably the world's greatest military power.

International relations theories that focus on changing power relationships support the expectation of a Sino-American clash. Robert Gilpin's power preponderance theory and A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler's power transition theory focus on the consequences of a shift in power between a dominant state and a rising challenger. The theory of the balance of power, perhaps the oldest power politics theory, considers the prospects of alliance relationships for balancing the power of the rising state by the hegemonic state, or the reverse, the challenger wooing away the hegemon's

allies. The theory of offensive realism explains why states must maximize their power for their security in a dangerous world either because anarchy forces them to do so, as Mearsheimer submits, or because it is nature's default option, as Thayer argues. The arguments of this section are found in Table Two.

II. B. Gilpin's Power Preponderance

Gilpin portrays international relations as a political system in which leading states govern.²⁶⁰ They draw on their wealth, power, and status to set the rules of international politics. However, over time economic and technological diffusion occurs in the wake of the hegemonic struggle. As the burdens of international governance and policing weaken the hegemon, challengers that seek to rewrite the rules of governance to their advantage emerge. With its relative power ebbing, the weakened hegemon may become desperate enough to resort to force to forestall the increasingly urgent demands of a rising challenger.

Gilpin's power preponderance theory logically results in pessimism about the future of the Sino-American relationship. The theory's expectation

²⁶⁰ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in International Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981). A more historically detailed discussion that dovetails with the logic of Gilpin's theory is Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987).

is that international trade, investment, and technology transfer, by licit or illicit means, will result in the steady diffusion of United States economic power, benefiting China. As the U.S. confronts the numerous brushfires that threaten its global interests, it will be unable to devote sufficient resources to maintaining or restoring its former relative balances of power it had over emerging peer-competitors, illuminating the classic imperial overstretch problem: too few resources to sustain obligations.

Implications for the Sino-American Relationship

Gilpin's theory predicts that the future of the Sino-American relationship will be like past hegemonic challenges. The United States will find it difficult to maintain the security structure it created, particularly in Asia. Defense spending will be reduced in absolute or relative terms. Its allies will increasingly question the credibility of its deterrent capabilities, as well as Washington's resolve. The result will be the ebbing of its power.

At the same time, the theory fully expects an increase in the likelihood of conflict but is indeterminate whether force will be initiated by a Chinese challenger armed with a force structure that is Washington's equal in most respects, and seeking to support its demands for greater influence over international arrangements. Or, whether conflict is started by a besieged and overstretched American hegemon desperate to head off further decline.

Gilpin's theory is an important one for understanding how changes in the distribution of power occur in the past as well as at present. Its principal limitation is its lack of identification of a motivation for the challenger. If the change in the distribution of power continues to favor China, it is not evident why it will aggress, as time is in its favor.

II. C. Organski and Kugler's Power Transition Theory

A second theory useful for understanding the future of the Sino-American relationship is power transition theory. The major proponents of this theory are A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler.²⁶¹ These scholars envision the international system as a hierarchy of contending states in which the distribution of benefits reflects the interests of the system's dominant actor, the hegemon. When a rising state believes it has the power to recast the international hierarchy, in turn supplanting the hegemon, it is likely to be the aggressor in a major war in order to recast the rules of international politics as the dominant state.

This theory is similar to power preponderance theory because it emphasizes shifts in the capabilities of the dominant state and the rising

²⁶¹ A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). Also important is Jacek Kugler and Douglas Lemke, *Parity and War: Evaluations and Extensions of the War Ledger* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

challenger. One major difference between the two theories is that Organski and Kugler's power transition theory emphasizes the unequal distribution of technological advancement around the world that leads to the rise of challengers that are both powerful and dissatisfied with the status quo in international politics. In time, hegemonic war results. To understand why hegemonic war results, it is important to consider the causes of satisfaction and dissatisfaction for the hegemon and challenger respectively.

The motivations behind warfare are rooted in the relative political satisfaction with how power is distributed and with the interests, institutions, norms, and values, of the global hierarchy. Conflicts are generated by the desire of the state to improve its political position in the hierarchy. The victor in the last hegemonic war designs the institutions, norms, values, and rules for the next era in international politics. The hegemonic state and its allies are comfortable with the "rules of the road" because they created these rules and they support their interests. They control most of the wealth, enjoy most of the prosperity, and, as a result, wield most of the power in global politics.

At the same time, a few states near the top of the hierarchy and most of the states at the bottom are dissatisfied with the existing status quo and want change. They view the international system as not conferring benefits

equal to their expectations and long-term interests. They consider the international system to be unfair, corrupt, biased, skewed, and dominated by hostile forces. The rationale or grievance may be historical, as with Germany prior to World War II, personal, as with Libya, religious, as with Iran, among other causes. Despite differences in perspective, dissatisfied nations all view the global status quo as unfavorable and wish to change it. The largest proportion of dissatisfied states likely resides in the small power category, states with minimal influence in the international system. More worrisome are the great powers. They may have the ability to challenge the hegemon, especially as they reach the point of parity with the dominant state.

For power transition theory, parity is reached when the potential challenger reaches 80 percent of the resources of the hegemon. 80 percent is an arbitrary amount, but it is reasonable because the amount is sufficient for the rising state to consider overtaking the dominant state. It is also reasonable because it is sufficient power for the hegemon to become increasingly concerned with the rising challenger. Parity ends when the challenger exceeds the resources of the dominant state.²⁶²

²⁶² A good discussion is found in Ronald L. Tammen, Jacek Kugler, Douglas Lemke, et al., *Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century* (New York: Chatham House Publishers of Seven Bridges Press, 2000).

In the aftermath of the hegemonic war, the process starts all over again as new technological developments foster the rise of a new challenger and cause the power of the hegemon to wane.

A second key difference from Gilpin's theory is that Organski and Kugler's theory focuses more on what it views with alarm as the "crossover" phenomenon, or the "overtaking" period. This is the period where a challenger is about to overtake the dominant state. The rising power enters a period of very rapid growth in its military power and its economic might. It is poised to overtake the hegemon in relative power.

Historically, this period varies from years in some cases, as with the Anglo-German naval rivalry from 1906 to 1914, to decades, as with a state of constant security competition between Rome and Carthage during the three major conflicts of the Punic Wars period from 264-146 B.C. In general, a shorter crossover period is more dangerous for incidence of hegemonic conflict because of the risk of misperception. Although that point should not be pressed too far, as both the challenger and hegemon are cognizant of the fundamental intent of the other. For the dominant state, the intent is to stay hegemonic. For the challenger, it is to become the hegemon.

The hegemon cannot match the growth of the rising power due to its mature economy and military power. Once this point is reached, hegemonic

conflict is likely. As the gap in relative power closes, the hegemon becomes increasingly determined to prevent the challenger's rise through the combination of economic, diplomatic, and military means. The rising hegemon is equally determined to transition to a new international order whose shape is determined by it. The stakes in this competition are the highest in international politics.

Consequently, the participants will evaluate all means necessary, including war, to realize their objective. Power transition theory expects the rising challenger to initiate the conflict as it overtakes the once-dominant state. The theory cannot define precisely what will be the cause of the conflict, but history shows that a dispute over territory or over allies, or the interests of allies, is likely to be the spark that causes the hegemonic war. Power transition theorists are aware that there may be a series of "sparks" or crises, none of which triggers the conflict, until, in fact, a conflict erupts suddenly. The crises before World War I are good examples of this condition. In the decade before World War I, there were two major crises over competing French and German influence in Morocco in 1905 and 1911, a crisis over Bosnia in 1908, and two small Balkan Wars in 1912-1913 before the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand resulted in the July Crisis, culminating in World War I.

Implications for the Sino-American Relationship

In broad gauge, power transition theory is useful for understanding why the rise of China will be a dangerous period in international politics due to the security competition between the United States and China. It is vague in defining at what point the “challenger” may be identified precisely as a challenger. For example, was China a challenger in 1989 or 1991, which is a period very different from today? The theory would not suggest so, and, indeed, China was seen as an ally of the United States during the 1980s and even into the 1990s as the Soviet Union imploded. Thus, defining the challenger, and so the start of the “crossover” period, is difficult for this theory to do with precision. In addition, the tools used to define the start of the “crossover” period are very broad, i.e., aggregate indications of power. Not considered by the theory, but more relevant would be considerations of relative military effectiveness.

Related to this point is another weakness. Consider China in the 1990s when its relative weakness vis-à-vis the United State was the greatest known in the present period of the Sino-American rivalry. The theory fails to explain why the United States did not act against China during this time when the challenger was weakest militarily and struggling to keep up with the hegemon. In such circumstances, one might expect that the hegemon should

worry about the mere prospect of being overtaken at some point in the future and act early to preclude that outcome while the task is a more manageable one. There is ample precedence for this. Precisely this motivation was behind Germany's determination to fight Russia in 1914, sooner was better than later, before St. Petersburg's power grew and was thus in a "crossover" period of power transition.

II. D. Rasler and Thompson's Modified Power Transition Theory

Karen Rasler and William Thompson, both of who are theorists of international politics, adapted Organski and Kugler's power transition theory, arguing that the cause of the rise of challengers is technological innovation that is concentrated in one state.²⁶³ For example, the Portuguese edge was associated with shipbuilding, navigation, and the Indian Ocean spice trade. For the Dutch, the technological innovations were herring fisheries, shipbuilding, and textiles, in addition to controlling much of intra-European and European-Asian maritime commerce. For the British, they were shipbuilding, Atlantic commerce, and wool textiles. Later, they were cotton textiles, coal, steam engines, iron products and railroads. For the United States, it was steel, agriculture, petroleum, textiles, and later the rise

²⁶³ Karen A. Rasler and William R. Thompson, *The Great Powers and Global Struggle 1490-1990* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994).

of the service and information age economies. As its power grows, the rising state becomes dominant, first, regionally, and then, as its relative power continues to grow, becomes a challenger to the dominant state.²⁶⁴

The basic pattern that emerges is one of innovational waves. Each innovational era plays itself out. The Portuguese could not maintain their monopoly on navigational secrets.²⁶⁵ The Dutch did not have enough power to dominate European commerce forever. The British could not make the transition to steel, chemicals, and automobiles smoothly. Each innovator is succeeded by another state that outperforms the old lead innovator in its specialization and introduces a new area of innovation as well. In the past, different sources of energy were also involved. Wind and peat gave way to coal. Coal gave way to petroleum. In time, there is no doubt that petroleum will give way to nuclear power or some combination of alternative energy sources.

Rasler and Thompson's theory acknowledges that potential challengers are often thwarted at the regional level. They are involved in hot or cold wars that destroy them, which is often the case for continental states.

²⁶⁴ Also useful is the discussion in Karen A. Rasler and William R. Thompson, *War and State Making: The Shaping of Global Conflict* (Boston: Unwin and Hyman, 1989).

²⁶⁵ These and other cases are covered in detail in William R. Thompson, ed., *Great Power Rivalries* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999).

As evidence, they point to the bids for hegemony of France, Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union. The cases of Portugal, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and the United States are distinguished by pronounced and consistent oceanic capability and orientation. Such an orientation presupposes an elite and dominant domestic political coalition that is not biased against trade, navies, and the development of global power. It also implies a preference for developing large-scale commercial networks over acquiring territory for its own sake. Territory is far less valuable than wealth. A less explicit, historical corollary is that these same states were the ones most likely to develop adequate fiscal and credit procedures to be able to take on and defeat their larger and nominally wealthier adversaries at a regional level. Of course, the next step, victory in global warfare against the hegemon is also necessary.

Implications for the Sino-American Relationship

The implications of this theory for the future of the Sino-American confrontation are significant. China's growth over the last decades has been so significant that, absent the United States' presence, it is clearly dominant regionally. Its preference for establishing commercial success over territorial gain where Chinese territory is not concerned is evident, although it has demonstrated a significant willingness to use force to advance its interests. It has a strong currency, and is well developed in the East Asian

commercial hub (China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan) with strong fiscal and credit institutions, which are becoming stronger as China continues its explosive growth.

II. E. Copeland's Modified Power Transition Theory

As did Rasler and Thompson, political scientist Dale Copeland also modified Organski and Kugler's theory.²⁶⁶ His focus is on the challenger. The essence of the argument is that the challenger is to blame for the hegemonic war.

Copeland submits that rising powers are always better off by not aggressing against the declining hegemon. Rather, waiting should be advantageous, as they will become stronger as the hegemon declines in relative power. For Copeland, the motivation for conflict will come from the declining hegemon. In the historical cases of hegemonic war, Copeland argues that it is the declining hegemon who wages preventive war against the aspiring challenger.

There is no doubt that this motivation exists for the declining hegemon. But, it is equally true that the rising hegemon should have a motivation to attack the declining one as well. One can imagine several scenarios where this might happen. A likely one is that the rising state

²⁶⁶ Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000).

decides to attack the hegemon first, rather than waiting for the hegemon to launch a preventive war against it, from which it may never recover. A second scenario would be when the rising power launches an undeclared war against the hegemon, stealthily undermining it in world politics, discovering its weaknesses and vulnerability, wooing its allies away from it, sowing discord domestically, while never giving cause for the hegemon to strike against it, until the hegemon is either too weak or collapses from the weight of its burdens.

Implications for the Sino-American Relationship

The expected consequences for the Sino-American relationship are that the United States should be the entity that takes action against the Chinese to prevent their continued rise in power. While this is the implication of Copeland's theory, it is unlikely that the United States would be so risk accepting given the institutional safeguards that exist in the United States and for historical reasons as well. The United States has never waged preventive war, and both Truman and Eisenhower rejected pleas to do so against the Soviet Union. Both administrations argued that it was against the political principles of the United States, as, indeed, it would have been. There were also many practical considerations to take into account, such as retaliatory damage to Western Europe, Japan, and the United States.

II. F. Traditional Balance of Power Theory

Allies of hegemons and potential hegemons can play a key role in the rivalry between them. Having allies is a sign that a state is militarily powerful, credible, and influential. The fact that over 80 states have an alliance relationship with the United States is an indication of each of these factors in addition to the fact that states want to use U.S. military power to advance their own aims. Having allies also is the closest thing we get to a vote of confidence in world politics. Having many allies usually suggests that the state has significant hard power and thus is a valuable ally. Allies are thus more willing to support the hegemon and its interests.

Conversely, the loss of allies is the closest thing we get to a vote of no confidence. Allies back away from supporting the hegemon because its status is increasingly uncertain, and there is little desire to be on the wrong side of the rising, soon to be dominant, competitor. It makes sense for regional allies to hedge their bets and begin increasing their own military capabilities or enter into an overt or tacit alliance relationship with the new hegemon. When a hegemon is losing the support of its allies, that is a sign that it is losing its hegemonic status.

The logic of the balance of power is that states should balance against the aggregate capabilities of other states according to international relations

theorist Kenneth Waltz, or, more precisely, they should balance against the threat posed by other states, as political scientist Stephen Walt argues.²⁶⁷

Walt submits that the degree of threat is determined by four factors: capabilities, geographic proximity, the offense/defense balance, and indication of aggressive intentions.

The logic of the balance of power emphasizes balancing against the power of other states. Balancing may be internal, creating military power to meet any threat posed, or external, relying on allies to help meet the risks and dangers of international politics.²⁶⁸

Implications for the Sino-American Relationship

The logic also suggests that Beijing should be concerned with the power of the United States in Asia and globally, and seek to offset the danger U.S. power poses to China's interests, but also that China's increasing capabilities will trigger a reaction among its neighbors. This reaction is anchored in uncertainty and concern over how China may use its increasing military might. As political scientist Stephen Walt argues, aggregate power is a

²⁶⁷ Prominent works of international relations on the logic of balancing are Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987); and Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959); and Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

²⁶⁸ Robert Powell, *In the Shadow of Power: States and Strategies in International Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).

concern without a doubt, but so is geographic proximity. For instance, U.S. power may be greater than China's, but the United States is a significant distance from Asia. China is less powerful, but also is a neighbor of India, Russia, and Vietnam. For China's neighbors, proximity trumps aggregate power, making the United States an attractive alliance partner.

For the Sino-American relationship, by the mid-1990s, there were already clear signs of balance of power reasoning among Asian states. Regional actors such as ASEAN were seeking allies to compensate for their limited national strength and Australia and Japan sought to reinvigorate security agreements with the United States.

While balance of power theory does not argue that the interactive process it depicts inevitably results in war, it does view the use of force as one of the options available to states should they conclude that diplomacy backed by military power is ineffective. The logic of balancing provides reasons to worry that the perception of China as a rapidly rising power could lead to military conflict in one of two ways. First, prospective adversaries might see a sustained effort at countering Beijing's growing power as intolerably burdensome and resort to the use of force to end the competition. Or, second, China itself might conclude that relying on its military clout is the most feasible way to offset the dangers posed to its international interests by

the power others possess. Balance of power theory only suggests that the resort to forces is possible, not inevitable.

Given this, the theory is indeterminate concerning the likelihood of the use of force. An argument may be advanced that one of the decisive factors determining whether balancing will be peacefully conducted or result in war is the number of great powers in the international system, distinguishing between two equal great powers, a condition known as bipolarity, or three or more equal great powers, known as multipolarity.

Classical balance of power theorists like Hans Morgenthau or Henry Kissinger drew their insights from European politics during the classic age of diplomacy before the French Revolution and again after the defeat of Napoleon in 1815 to the start of World War I. They argued that multipolarity was more stable—there was less likelihood of great power war because each great power had respected spheres of influence and would be conservative in foreign policy, lest one or more of their allies abandoned them as a reckless great power. The implication of this is that were the world to return to multipolarity with the United States, China, and India equally powerful, at least in an aggregate sense, great power conflict need not occur and the Sino-American rivalry might be muted by the complication of Indian power.

Indeed, this might be beneficial for the United States if India were aligned with it against China.

In contrast, drawing on the experience of the Cold War, Kenneth Waltz argued that bipolarity was more stable.²⁶⁹ The reasons the Cold War stayed “cold” according to Waltz is because bipolarity meant each had only one adversary. The only state that had the power to seriously challenge the United States was the Soviet Union and the reverse. The only country that could destroy the United States was the Soviet Union, and, again, the reverse was true.

Second, because of the great power of the two poles, the United States and the Soviet Union did not require allies to ensure their security. Because of this, the security of the United States did not depend on its allies. Indeed, its allies needed the United States more than Washington needed them. For example, France could terminate its commitment to the force posture of NATO in 1966 without destroying that alliance or threatening the security of the United States. The Soviet Union could lose its great ally China in the Sino-Soviet split without destroying the security of the Soviet Union.

²⁶⁹ This argument can be found in *Theory of International Politics* and in “International Structure, National Force, and the Balance of World Power,” in James N. Rosenau, ed., *International Politics and Foreign Policy* (New York: Free Press, 1969); and “The Emerging Structure of International Politics,” *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (Fall 1993), pp. 44-79.

The third reason that bipolarity is more stable, according to Waltz, is that both superpowers get to know the other very well. Both Moscow and Washington studied the other intensively. One example of this was the nascent science of Kremlinology developed by the United States national security community. Another would be the characterization of the United States as the “main adversary” by the KGB. The central focus of both intelligence communities was the other and so was well studied. Although there were intelligence failures for both sides, the fundamental consequence of this reciprocal understanding was that the risk of conflict due to misperception was reduced, as was the risk that a crisis would escalate. Of course, such risk could never entirely be eliminated.

During the 1990s, many students of international politics, including those in China, believed that the post-Cold War world would move relatively quickly beyond a brief era of American hegemony and that a multipolar world would soon emerge.²⁷⁰ This has not happened as American hegemony has proved to be more robust than anticipated by analysts and scholars of

²⁷⁰ For an early assessment of China’s post-Cold War path see William T. Tow, “China and the International Strategic System,” in Thomas W. Robinson and David Shambaugh, eds., *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 115-157.

international politics.²⁷¹ The stabilizing influence of American hegemony has had a significant impact on reducing rivalries, such as between India and Pakistan, or China and Japan, that otherwise would result in intense security competition or war.

More recently, there was concern among balance of power theorists that the rise of China would be only one of several challenges to the hegemony of the United States. There were concerns that the EU, Russia, a resurgent Japan, and India would emerge as peer competitors. Were that to have happened, balance of power theorists were greatly worried about the higher likelihood of war for the reasons that Waltz identified. In addition, as Aaron Friedberg noted, key political influences that reduced the dangers of multipolarity in Europe after the Cold War—consensus on the lessons from previous wars, long experience at international diplomacy, and the stability of domestic political orders—were absent in East Asia.²⁷² To that list should be added that democracy is not as widespread, there are relatively few

²⁷¹ Scholars expecting a rapid return to a multipolar world were John J. Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Summer 1990), pp. 5-56; and Stephen Van Evera, "Primed for Peace: Europe After the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Winter 1990-1991), pp. 7-57.

²⁷² Aaron L. Friedberg, "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Winter 1993-1994), pp. 5-33; and Friedberg, "The Future of U.S.-China Relations," *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Fall 2005), pp. 7-45.

institutions, and none with the strength of NATO in Europe, and territorial disputes are numerous.

As the post-Cold War period became established, it is clear that the future of international politics will be bipolar between China and the United States. For the balance of power theorists heavily influenced by Waltz's arguments, this should be a force for stability between the two countries and for international politics. An unspoken assumption of such reasoning is that China will act as the Soviet Union did. But, that is not likely given the fundamental differences between the two countries, most notably in the amount of aggregate power China will possess, which will dwarf Soviet power. China will not need allies to be sure, and, indeed, Beijing often seems to be determined to alienate its neighbors and potential allies through its actions in the South China Sea. But, the risks of China rising are far greater than considered by balance of power theorists. The dangers of miscalculation are significantly greater because of the boldness and determination to confront the United States possessed by the Chinese leadership. Accordingly, balance of power theory expects trouble in the Sino-American relationship whether the future of international politics is bipolar or multipolar.

In sum, balance of power theory has been a useful tool to explain significant periods of international history and to identify the dangers and benefits of multipolar and bipolar systems. Throughout history, the dangers identified have repeated themselves as great powers have taken gambles based on disastrous assumptions and incorrect predictions that have resulted in catastrophic wars. But, its usefulness for explaining the future of the Sino-American relationship is doubtful. Simply put, China is not going to behave as balance of power theorists predict.

II. G. Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism

The core idea of offensive realism is that the security of a state may best be realized through maximizing the state's power. More power is preferred to less because generally more power equals more security. This straightforward idea is controversial, not the least among realists themselves, particularly the camp associated with defensive realism. Defensive realists argue that too much power, for example, too much military power, will lead to balancing against the state, and thus threaten the security of the state.

The intent in this subsection is to introduce the theory comprehensively, and this requires commencing our discussion with

classical realism, before turning to Waltz's neorealism, the fountainhead of defensive realism, and then offensive realism.

Classical realism is a theory of international politics associated in contemporary times with George Kennan, Henry Kissinger, Hans Morgenthau, and Reinhold Niebuhr, and sometimes referred to as power politics, *Machtpolitik*, *raison d'etat*, or *Realpolitik*. The essence of the theory is that states seek economic and military power to compete with others in the international system; they do so because they are composed of individuals who are egoistic and strive to dominate others.²⁷³ Egoism and dominance are the proximate causes of the realist argument. Ultimate causes are universal statements that explain proximate causes. Proximate causes are deductively derivable from ultimate causes and focus on explanations of

²⁷³ Raymond Aron, *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations*. Translated by R. Howard and A. B. Fox (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966); E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*. London: Macmillan, 1946); Robert Gilpin, *U.S. Power and the Multinational Corporation: The Political Economy of Foreign Direct Investment* (New York: Basic Books, 1975); Gilpin, "The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism," in Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); George F. Kennan, *Realities of American Foreign Policy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1954); Friedrich Meinecke, *Machiavellism: The Doctrine of Raison d'Etat and Its Place in Modern History* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1984); Hans J. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946); Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (New York: Knopf, 1956); Martin Wight, *Power Politics* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1946); Michael Joseph Smith, *Realist Thought from Weber to Kissinger* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986).

immediate occurrences. Realists use these proximate causes of behavior widely, but none but the present author has explained their ultimate causation.²⁷⁴

The ultimate cause of egoistic and dominating behavior was originally suggested by the eminent theorist of realism, Hans Morgenthau: humans, and thus states, behave as they do because they possess an *animus dominandi*, “the desire for power.”²⁷⁵ They seek power because human nature is fundamentally egoistic and malignant. Thus, conflict and war occur because human nature is bad. Thomas Hobbes provided the foundation for this pillar of realist thought: humans are ruled by their insatiable desire for power. As he describes in *Leviathan*: “I put for a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restlesse desire for Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death.”²⁷⁶ This lust for power has created a state of war where humans live in reciprocal and permanent fear of violent death, and

²⁷⁴ Note the concordance here with the use of *proximate* and *ultimate* causation in evolutionary biology: *proximate* causes of behavior are physiological triggers and mechanisms that give rise to a behavior (e.g. hormone changes cause birds to sing in the spring); *ultimate* causes of behavior are the reasons why such behavior increases Darwinian fitness (e.g. birds sing to defend territory and attract mates).

²⁷⁵ Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, p. 192. Classical realism contains many assumptions that are not addressed here, such as: states desire survival; states are the key actors in international politics; and the nature of international politics is inherently one of conflict.

²⁷⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985[1651]).

where peace is always precarious. Or, as German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck wrote: "The only healthy foundation for a state is egoism, not romanticism, and it is unworthy of a great state to dispute over something which does not concern its own interests."²⁷⁷

Like Hobbes, Morgenthau believed that the human *animus dominandi* manifested itself as the desire to dominate others. An individual's "desire for power...concerns itself not with the individual's survival but with his position among his fellows once his survival has been secured;" he continues, "his lust for power would be satisfied only if the lust became an object of his domination, there being nobody above or beside him, that is, if he became like God."²⁷⁸ So encompassing is this desire for power that the tendency to dominate "is an element of all human associations, from the family through fraternal and professional associations and local political organizations, to the state."²⁷⁹ The British imperialist Cecil Rhodes expressed this sentiment forcefully when he provided this rather remarkable comment: "These stars that you see overhead at night, these vast worlds which we can never reach.

²⁷⁷ Bismarck quoted in A.J.P. Taylor, *Bismarck: The Man and Statesman* (New York: Vintage, 1967), p. 29.

²⁷⁸ Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, p. 193.

²⁷⁹ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, p. 37.

I would annex the planets if I could. I often think of that. It makes me sad to see them so clear and so far away.”²⁸⁰

Two types of behavior were proposed as the proximate causes of the realist argument: egoism and domination.²⁸¹ Egoism refers to the individual’s tendency to place his interests before those of others, his own and his family’s interests before those of more distant relatives, and those of relatives before those of his community, state, and so on in ever-expanding concentric circles.²⁸² The desire to dominate, realists believe, is inherent in people, and this drive often turns into latent or physical aggression against those who oppose one’s objectives.

Leaders of states are expected to mirror this ordering, to place the interests of their state before the interests of others or of the world community, and to strive to dominate other states. Realists argue that only by possessing power can individuals attack and conquer others, in addition to deterring attacks and defending themselves. The principal result of this

²⁸⁰ Quoted in Morgenthau, *Scientific Man Vs. Power Politics*, p. 193.

²⁸¹ Here we are concerned only with the minimal essential human traits necessary to construct the realist argument. We are not making claims about what individual realists do or should do. It is only important to the argument that realists consider these traits significant.

²⁸² Richard D. Alexander, *Darwinism and Human Affairs* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979), p. 44; and Elliott Sober and David Sloan Wilson, *Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 2, 203-204, 224-227.

process is that balances of power will form and reform cyclically, producing both periods of stability and intense security competition in international politics. Indeed, as Morgenthau insists, the desire to attain a maximum of power is universal among states and is one of the “objective laws that have their roots in human nature.”²⁸³

Despite its long history as a theory of international politics and its widespread use by scholars and policymakers, such as E.H. Carr, George Kennan, and Henry Kissinger, the traditional realist argument rests on weak foundations. This is so because the ultimate causation they offer is noumenal, outside the realm of what science can investigate and demonstrate. It is not possible to test whether an *animus dominandi* motivates humans. Morgenthau does not explain how the proximate causes of egoism and domination may be derived logically from the ultimate causes they offer or how they can be tested scientifically. Rather, he asserts that individuals possess a drive to dominate and thus must be egoistic or strive to dominate others. The result is that the theory lacks a scientific ultimate cause.

Kenneth Waltz placed realism on a more scientific foundation by introducing a new realist theory: neorealism or structural realism.

²⁸³ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, pp. 4, 37.

Neorealism points to international anarchy, a phenomenon we can evaluate, as the ultimate cause of state behavior. This more scientific foundation permits us to reach realist conclusions about international politics, such as the importance of power in interstate relations, without having to believe in the metaphysical concept of *animus dominandi* that Morgenthau suggested.

Waltz's core concept in *Theory of International Politics* is the anarchy that reigns in world politics. That is, there is no ultimate authority in international politics comparable to a domestic government that can adjudicate disputes and provide protection for citizens.²⁸⁴ Without governmental authority, Waltz argues, the international system is anarchic, making international politics a dangerous environment, a self-help system, where states must provide for their own protection through arms and alliances.

Anarchy allows Waltz to argue that states must behave much the way Morgenthau expected, but for different reasons. Moreover, he could advance these arguments without arguing that individuals or individual states possess an *animus dominandi*. That is the major distinction between realism and neorealism.

²⁸⁴ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 114-116; and Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Stability of a Bipolar World," *Daedalus*, Vol. 93, No. 3 (1964), pp. 881-909.

The theories share many assumptions in common, including: survival is the goal of states; there is a sharp distinction between international politics and domestic politics; international politics produces similar behavior, or socialization, among states; states are the key actors in international politics; and the use of force is always possible because it is the *ultima ratio* of international politics.

While anarchy provides the ultimate cause of state behavior, Waltz also uses a structuralist analysis in his argument. Structuralism is a method of study that focuses on the interaction of the parts, or units, of a system, seeing them as more useful to study than the individual units themselves. Waltz uses structuralism to demonstrate how the distribution of power in international politics is critical for understanding whether war is more or less likely. He argues that a world where power is largely distributed to two poles, i.e., bipolarity, such as during the Cold War, is more stable than multipolarity, where power is about equally distributed to three or more great powers, such as in Europe before World War II.²⁸⁵

This is because superpowers achieve security more easily in bipolarity. To maintain its security, each superpower will balance against the other. It can do so more effectively in bipolarity than multipolarity because it

²⁸⁵ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 161-193.

faces only one other major threat: the other superpower. By wedding anarchy as an ultimate cause and structuralism as a method of analysis, Waltz created a new realist theory—neorealism—that improves upon Morgenthau’s realism in two ways. First, it does not rely on noumenal ultimate causation; and second, it can explain and predict the likelihood of great power war in international politics.

John Mearsheimer’s contribution to neorealism is also significant. In *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, he argues, like Waltz, that the anarchic international system is responsible for much trouble—wars, suspicion, fear, and security competition—in international politics.²⁸⁶ Also like Waltz, Mearsheimer argues that bipolarity is more stable than multipolarity for three reasons: first, it provides fewer opportunities for war between or among the superpowers; second, there will be smaller imbalances of power between the superpowers; and third, there is less potential for great power miscalculation.²⁸⁷

However, unlike Waltz, who feared that too much power for a state would lead to balancing against it and thus actually threaten its security (the

²⁸⁶ Mearsheimer also argues that because states have offensive military capabilities and can never be certain of the intentions of other states, they are always afraid of each other. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 3.

²⁸⁷ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 338-344.

genesis of defensive realism), Mearsheimer argues that the international system requires states to maximize their offensive power in order to be secure and to keep rivals from gaining power at their expense.²⁸⁸ In fact, this systemic incentive is so powerful that it drives states to pursue hegemony: “A state’s ultimate goal is to be the hegemon in the system.”²⁸⁹ Only by being the hegemon can the state be absolutely sure of its security. For Mearsheimer, states should behave this way not because they are aggressive but because the system requires it: this behavior is the best way to maximize security in an anarchic world.

Mearsheimer’s argument is a major contribution to a growing body of literature within realist thought called offensive realism.²⁹⁰ In general, offensive realists argue that states are compelled to maximize their relative power because of competition in the international system, that is, security can only be reached by acting in this way. As Eric Labs argues, “a strategy that seeks to maximize security through a maximum of relative power is the

²⁸⁸ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, pp. 1-8.

²⁸⁹ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, p. 21.

²⁹⁰ For an analysis of offensive realism and defensive realism see Sean M. Lynn-Jones, “Realism and America’s Rise: A Review Essay,” *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 2, (Fall 1998). An exceptional study of realism, and in some respects the fountainhead of offensive realism, is Ashley Joachim Tellis, *The Drive to Domination: Towards a Pure Realist Theory of Politics* (Chicago: unpub. Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1994).

rational response to anarchy.”²⁹¹ Mearsheimer’s theory of offensive realism is a type of neorealism because the principal causes of state behavior are rooted in the anarchic international system; however, as I show below, offensive realists need not depend on the anarchy of the international system to advance their argument.²⁹²

Implications for the Sino-American Relationship

Mearsheimer’s offensive realism expects intense security competition or war with China because both states will strive to maximize their power within existing constraints. As a result of that activity, which for Mearsheimer is driven by the anarchic condition of international politics, each state will see the other as the only significant threat to its interests and security.

As each will see the other as the principal threat, both will balance against the other with increasing intensity, including arms races, coercive diplomacy, global competition, and crises. Mearsheimer expects the military,

²⁹¹ Eric J. Labs, “Beyond Victory: Offensive Realism and the Expansion of War Aims,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 6 No. 4 (1997), pp. 1-49.

²⁹² Fareed Zakaria proposes a variation of the offensive realist argument which he terms “state-centered realism,” that is significantly informed by neorealism. He submits that in creating a foreign policy, a great power’s intentions will be shaped by its capabilities, but he also recognizes that “state structure limits the availability of national power.” Zakaria thus combines unit-level and systemic causes in his explanation of international politics. Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America’s World Role* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998).

Table 2
Theories of Power Politics and Their Predictions for Hegemonic Struggle

Theory	Causes	Result	Prediction Based on Previous Cases	Implication for Sino-American Competition
Power Preponderance (Gilpin)	Change in Economic Efficiency	Redistribution of Economic Power	Hegemonic State Will Fall	China Wins
Power Transition (Organski and Kugler)	Change in technology	Redistribution of Technological Power Causes Challenger's Economic Growth	Hegemonic State Will Fall	China Wins
Power Transition (Rasler and Thompson)	Innovation in technology	Nurtures Regional Challenger in Commercial Hub	Challenger May Be Defeated Regionally. If Moves to Level of Hegemonic Challenger, Challenger Likely to Win	China Has Acquired Dominance Regionally. Likely that China Wins
Power Transition (Copeland)	Same as Organski and Kugler	Same as Organski and Kugler	Challenger Will Challenge Hegemon	China Likely to Lose
Balance of Power Theory (Walt and Waltz)	Balancing Behavior	Growth of Challenger Should Prompt Balancing Against It	In the Context of Bipolarity, intense Security Competition. In the Context of Multipolarity, Intense Security Competition or War	Balancing against China
Offensive Realism (Mearsheimer)	Anarchy	All they can get. States maximize relative power, with hegemony as their ultimate goal	Intense Security Competition or War	War Likely. Victor Not Determined
Offensive Realism (Thayer)	Human Evolution. Anarchy, danger of predation, and resource scarcity produces Egoism, Dominance, In-Group/Out-Group Divisions	All they can get. States maximize relative power, with hegemony as their ultimate goal	Intense Security Competition or War	War Likely, and Initiated by Chinese. Victor Not Determined

economic, and diplomatic relationship with China to be similar to the Cold War with the Soviet Union. In essence, the future of the Sino-American relationship will be a Second Cold War.

II. H. Offensive Realism Based on Human Evolution

All theories of international relations make assumptions about fundamental human behavior, or “human nature.” Those assumptions used to be derived from anecdotal observation or deduction by philosophers, but in recent years they have become increasingly testable against scientific knowledge about human biology, psychology, and evolution.

This subsection explains the implications of human evolution for offensive realism. I argue that human evolution has profound consequences—not least because competition among humans throughout our evolutionary history also occurred in conditions of anarchy and, not coincidentally, gave rise to a similar behavior as states within the anarchy of the international system. The legacy of human adaptation to anarchic conditions remains with humans today, and has important implications for international relations theory. I argue that the best match between evolved human behavior and theories of international relations, more closely than any other theory, is offensive realism.

Few principles unite the diverse discipline of international politics, but one exception is the concept of *anarchy*—the absence of government in international politics. As discussed above, anarchy is the ordering principle of international relations and the starting point for most major theories of international politics. Indeed, anarchy's impact is so profound that it defines and divides the discipline of *international* politics (politics under conditions of anarchy), in contrast to *domestic* politics (politics under conditions of hierarchy, or government).

In fact, anarchy has been an equally significant influence for the entire 2 million year history of human evolution (and the 3.5 billion year history of the evolution of all life on Earth before that). It is not just that humans lack a world government today; they *never* had such a luxury. The fact that people have been subject to evolution by natural selection for hundreds of thousands of generations, and that human evolution occurred under conditions of anarchy has profound consequences for behavior, including how we perceive and act toward others. Humans evolved in the Hobbesian “state of nature,” and the legacy of this evolution heavily influences human decision-making and action, including in the realm of international politics.

Significantly, human evolution serves as the foundation for theoretical analyses of human behavior, given that our current behavior is a result of

selective pressures in our past, not of today. Theories purporting to explain human behavior make explicit or implicit assumptions about the motivations of humans, and the mainstream theories used in the discipline of international politics to explain the future of relations with China are no exception. General theories are better the more they explain across space and time, that is, the more closely they coincide with empirical behavior across cultures and throughout history. The most parsimonious theories of international relations, therefore, will ultimately need to incorporate evolutionary theory.

The central question is: which theories of international relations used for explaining Chinese behavior most closely match what we now know about human nature from the sciences? In other words, I would like to set out a scientific theoretical foundation for the study of strategy suitable for the 21st century. A considerable amount has changed in the last few years about our knowledge of human nature. This body of work is rapidly advancing into the political science, international relations, and strategic studies literature.

My argument is that offensive realism is the theory that most closely matches what we know about human behavior from the sciences. This leads to predictions about state behavior in competitive environments given that

states are led by human beings.²⁹³ The system and state still matter, but so do leaders and decision-makers. Offensive realism is a theory that is equally useful in explaining human conflict at many levels, from tribal warfare, gang warfare, commercial corporations, civil wars, to great power behavior. Offensive realism captures many human universals, particularly when applied to political leaders.

The strategies that offensive realism predicts capture a human universal: men prefer more resources, more power, and more influence. These strategies are not unique to humans, characterizing male behavior across a wide range of species including most primates and mammals, as well as many other groups of vertebrates such as birds, fish, and reptiles. However, these strategies did have unique implications for humans. Indeed, those goals were so important to Darwinian fitness that they helped to *drive* the evolution of profound human intelligence, which means that people are artful in the mechanisms used to increase power, be it by fighting or threatening to fight, but also by forming coalitions and alliances, co-opting, reducing an incentive to resist by providing a stake in ruling, and by winning status and the admiration of others, however that may be achieved.

²⁹³ Note this is a two-way claim: (1) human nature gives rise to behavior as described by offensive realism; and (2) offensive realism describes human behavior.

Humans also recognize that to seek more is a gamble that might be lost, and so alignment with a stronger power may be the wiser course. Finally, withdrawing from confrontation might be an option—being neutral like Switzerland may be the right choice in some instances. However, rather than shying from power, such weak states are actually maximizing their potential power given limited means and opportunities.

One immediate criticism of this approach—or indeed of *any* theory of international relations based on the role of individuals—is why we should expect *individual* behavior to tell us anything about *state* behavior. This study recognizes that many factors may affect the behavior of states: bureaucracies, organizations, international institutions, culture, or the international system itself, to identify only a few. It also recognizes, as traditional theories of international politics have from the time of Thucydides, that humans do as well. Many factors come between an individual leader and the actual behavior of the state, but that recognition in no way rejects a role for leaders—although it may dampen it. While some theorists might wish to argue that Hitler and Bill Clinton would behave exactly the same at the helm of the same state in the same context, most scholars would allow at least some room for the role of individual behavior.

There are five reasons why human behavior is an important predictor of state behavior in the context of this study. First, the preferences of individual citizens are, at least to some extent, represented in those elected to office and the goals of the state. Second, bureaucracies and organizations are led and run by human beings, whose own dispositions, therefore, affect these apparatuses of the state. Third, state leaders are the actors that make important strategic decisions, which are thus potentially affected by their human dispositions and those of their advisors, even if tempered by decision-making protocols. Fourth, group decision-making mechanisms may increase the influence of relevant human dispositions, precisely because it is *groups* of men that are especially prone to behaviors associated with dominance, aggression, and coalitionary psychology. Finally, a significant part of this argument is that states behave like offensive realists because it is the best strategy under anarchy, just as offensive realism argues and irrespective of human behavior. The role of human behavior might be, at a minimum, to rationalize and bolster it, although I argue that it plays a much more powerful causal role.

Implications for the Sino-American Relationship

The implications of evolutionary offensive realism for the Sino-American relationship are the same as Mearsheimer's. The difference is that the

307

Chinese leadership will be the cause of the intense security competition in that relationship, rather than being caused by the impersonal and constant force of anarchy. Chinese leaders will drive the competition because they are egoists, seek to dominate international politics, are xenophobic, ethnocentric, and racist.

Both theories expect intense security competition or war with China because both states will strive to maximize their power within existing constraints. As a result of that activity, each state will see the other as the only significant threat to its interests and security.

Because each will see the other as the principal threat to its security, both will balance against the other with increasing intensity, including arms races, coercive diplomacy, global competition, and crises. My theory expects that the military, economic, and diplomatic relationship with China to be similar to the Cold War with the Soviet Union. In essence, the future of the Sino-American relationship will be a Second Cold War, but it will be worse for the United States as it will be the economically weaker pole. This economic weakness, over time, will lead to the loss of its dominant position in international politics if China's growth is not stopped or diverted.

III. Historical Cases

The study now addresses four major cases of preventive war in history. As with the discussion of first strike and preemption above, the objective is to establish a historical baseline to compare with Chinese motivations for preventive war. Due to their significance, three of the cases are from World War I, which was the archetype of preventive war motivations in Western history. The final case is Israel's decision to enter into the Anglo-French plan to attack Egypt in 1956 before Egypt could incorporate advanced Soviet arms (provided through Czechoslovakia in a 1955 arms pact) into its military.

III. A. German Strategic Motivations against Russia

Germany feared the expansion of Russian power.²⁹⁴ France and Russia worked to convert the Entente into an alliance. Paris pressed London to confer with Russia about naval issues, while assiduously working to define their own military arrangements with Britain. In the spring of 1914, Sir Edward Grey, the foreign secretary and Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, agreed to commence negotiations with St. Petersburg. Almost immediately, German intelligence learned of this development. When queried about such conversations, Grey denied that any were underway.

²⁹⁴ See James Joll, *The Origins of the First World War* (New York: Longman, 1984).

Berlin thus found itself unable to trust Grey's assurances about these talks and could only assume that Britain had made military and naval arrangements with France.²⁹⁵

During 1912 and 1913, the Franco-Russian alliance within the Triple Entente assumed new meaning. The French wanted immediate Russian pressure on Germany if war came. To assist that aim, the French invested heavily in railway construction that could be used to facilitate the movement of Russian troops. Raymond Poincaré, first as premier and then as president of France, brought new vigor to French diplomacy and spared no effort to strengthen the alliance with Russia.

Russia's population, economy, and military strength were increasing each year. Moreover, Russia enacted the Great Program of 1913 that would significantly increase the speed of its mobilization. By 1917, Russia would theoretically be able to mobilize roughly one hundred divisions for battle within eighteen days of mobilization, "only three days behind Germany in overall readiness."²⁹⁶ Thus, in strictly military terms, one can see why

²⁹⁵ Zara Steiner, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1977); and Samuel R. Williamson, Jr., *The Politics of Grand Strategy: Britain and France Prepare for War, 1904-1914* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969).

²⁹⁶ Norman Stone, *The Eastern Front 1914-1917* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), p. 17.

German military planners concluded Russia would be easier to beat in 1914 than three or four years later.

Germany also viewed with alarm the improvement in Russo-Serbian relations. St. Petersburg had played mid-wife to the Balkan League, a pact signed in 1912 that was directed at both the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. Vigorous Russian diplomatic support of the League, coupled with arms shipments strengthened the ties already in existence due to Russia's pan-Slavism.

Accordingly, the war of 1914 began as a local quarrel that would have resulted in a local war had it not been for the alliance relationships of both sides, which guaranteed that the local quarrel would escalate to a continental war. Once Britain entered the war, it became a world war.

III. B. Russian Strategic Motivations against Germany

Recent historiography has reconsidered Russia's role in the origins of World War I. Purportedly, this has largely been because of the lack of investigation of Russian war aims by scholars, due, in turn, to the unrest of revolution and civil war. However, as eminent historian Sean McMeekin has argued forcefully, that should not be the case, since Trotsky revealed the "secret treaties" of the Entente powers in 1917, and with the publication of vast troves of secret Russian diplomatic correspondences by the Bolsheviks in the

1920s, the world now knows the gist of Russia's war aims.²⁹⁷ Russia wanted to destroy the Ottoman Empire, conquer Austrian Galicia, and bid for European hegemony.

In terms of the immediate crisis, Russia wanted a victory over Germany and was determined to press its aims. The Germans had forced a Russian-climb down over Austria's 1908 annexation of Bosnia, enforced by a German threat against Russia in March 1909, and the Liman von Saunders affair of winter 1913-1914. Von Sanders was a German officer appointed to command the Turkish army corps defending the Straits, and had been allowed to stay on as an adviser as well as commander despite passionate protests from the Russians, which since 1911, had been a renewed object of Russian pressure.

The Russians, for their part, believed that they had suffered enough through a series of diplomatic debacles since the humiliating military defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, the Bosnian annexation, the Balkan wars from which Russia had gained nothing tangible, despite the gains of proxies like Serbia, and the Liman affair—with no compensating victories to cushion the defeats.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷ Sean McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 2.

²⁹⁸ McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War*, p. 11.

Following the Italian and two Balkan wars, it was now universally assumed that Turkey would not last for long in the face of the belligerent hostility of its neighbors. The question was, which power would swallow which pieces of the carcass as the Ottoman Sick Man was carved up? For Russia, the key issue was how could it win control of Constantinople and the Straits.

War was the mechanism by which it could. Petersburg saw the Ottoman Empire as beyond repair, and the Austrian Empire was as well. This left only Berlin to stand in the way of Russian grand strategic objectives, as it was the military and diplomatic power whose strength supplied the rest. Russia's interests in the Straits were a matter of cold, hard national interest. Half of Russia's exports flowed through them, and there was great concern over the two Turkish battleships British yards were building. These ships, coupled with an experienced German officer directing the shore defenses of the Bosphorus, meant that Russia's window for seizing the Straits might soon close forever. Thus, from Russia's perspective, the Ottoman and Austrian Empires were waiting to collapse, which only German power forestalled. Thus, allied with France, and expecting support from London, Russia preferred war with Germany sooner.

The reason the Russians chose war in July 1914 is just as damning as the timing of their secret mobilization. Russia's war was fought for Constantinople and the Straits. That was the consistent threat that united Russia's policy for the last generation. It was Russia that started the continental war. As McMeekin writes, "There were at least as many men in St. Petersburg who wanted war in 1914 as there were in Berlin—and the men in Petersburg mobilized first."²⁹⁹

The decision for the European war was made by Russia "on the night of 29 July 1914, when Tsar Nicholas II, advised unanimously by his advisers, signed the order for general mobilization. General mobilization...meant war."³⁰⁰ The Tsar and his advisers knew exactly what they were doing. Their actions compelled German mobilization. "By keeping quiet about the Period Preparatory to War and then delaying the announcements of both partial and general mobilization, [foreign minister Sergei] Sazonov was able to convince Sir Edward Grey, along with generations of historians, the Russia had begun mobilizing only after Austria's declaration of war on Serbia."³⁰¹ But this is untrue. "Austrian, German, French, and most of all Russian sources confirm that Russia's mobilization measures against *both* Austria and Germany were

²⁹⁹ McMeekin, *The Russian Origins of the First World War*, p. 239.

³⁰⁰ Sean McMeekin, *July 1914: Countdown to War* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), p. 398.

³⁰¹ McMeekin, *July 1914*, p. 397.

well advanced by 28 July, and even more so by 29 July.”³⁰² In reality, “‘Partial mobilization’ was a diplomatic conjuring act designed to show France—and more so, Britain—that Russia was not giving Germany a pretext for war.”³⁰³

With the Russian actions, Germany had to mobilize and enact the Schlieffen Plan. Thus, the European powers were on the path to what all believed would be a short war. Russia was making its latest bid to achieve its nineteenth century goal, which it was confident it would obtain this time.

III. C. British Strategic Motivations against Germany

Despite excellent relations for most of their history, storm clouds in the Anglo-German relationship began to gather when Germany passed naval armament legislation in 1898 and 1900, augmented by Supplementary Bills in 1906, 1908, and 1912. The 1900 Bill called for a doubling of the number of battleships funded in the 1898 Bill, and proved to be a great shock to Britain, as the combined measures posed an immediate and direct threat to the supremacy of the British in the North Sea, and thus to the British homeland. It was a unilateral declaration of a Cold War against Britannia.

The Reich proposed to create a modern battle fleet of 41 battleships, 20 large cruisers, and 40 light cruisers which would be a fleet second only to

³⁰² McMeekin, *July 1914*, p. 397. Emphasis original.

³⁰³ McMeekin, *July 1914*, p. 397.

the Royal Navy, and which would complement the most efficient army in the world. Tirpitz's objective was to challenge British naval supremacy through the creation of the "risk theory," *Risikogedanke*. Germany's calculated risk of challenging the British for naval supremacy in the North Sea in order to wring from London colonial concessions and possibly an alliance, stampeded the two powers into a qualitative and quantitative arms race. By August 1914, Britain had 20 Dreadnought battleships in commission with a further 14 either under construction or planned for completion by 1916; and had 9 battle-cruisers operational. Germany had 15 Dreadnoughts in service in August 1914 and an additional four scheduled for operations by 1916; six battle-cruisers were either operational or near completion, with an additional two due for sea duty by 1917.³⁰⁴

Given this build up, war came for Germany in 1914 some eight years too early as the German yards were eight battleships, seven large, and six light cruisers behind schedule, while the fleet of 60 capital ships envisaged in Tirpitz's master plan would be ready to challenge the Royal Navy only in 1922, or thereafter. Of course, as the course of World War I played out, these vast naval squadrons did not engage in a single decisive encounter in the North Sea between 1914-1918. The chance meeting of the fleets on the last

³⁰⁴ Holger H. Herwig, *"Luxury Fleet:" The Imperial German Navy 1888-1918* (London: Ashfield Press, 1987), p. 4.

day of May 1916 off of Jutland was broken off before either side could land a telling blow. The end came with a whimper in the form of the surrender of the Imperial German Navy in November 1918 in the wake of rebellion and revolution, and in the subsequent decision to scuttle the fleet during internment at Scapa Flow in June 1919.

The weight of the historical evidence compels the recognition that Tirpitz probably did not intend to attack Great Britain and counted instead on British recognition of the danger posed by the German fleet concentrated in the North Sea, which would allow the Kaiser to conduct his overseas policy. The “risk theory” was that the ultimate strength of the fleet would deter any eventual opponent from risking an all-out naval encounter with Germany because even if Britain emerged victorious from battle, the Royal Navy might then find itself at the mercy of a third strong naval power, or even a coalition like France aligned with Russia. In addition, Tirpitz argued that the fleet would enhance Germany’s value as an ally, especially in the eyes of relatively minor sea powers equally in search of a “place in the sun.”³⁰⁵

The “risk theory” foresaw the period of greatest danger to the Reich while the fleet of sixty capital ships was under construction, but that the danger would be past by 1914 or 1915. Until that time, there was the danger

³⁰⁵ Herwig, *Luxury Fleet*, p. 36.

that Britain, angered by and envious of the German fleet, might decide to “Copenhagen” it in German ports, as when Admiral Gambier destroyed the Danish fleet in 1807. In fact, Arthur Lee, the Civil Lord, in 1905 indirectly warned Germany that in case of war “the Royal Navy would get its blow in first, before the other side had time even to read in the papers that war had been declared.”³⁰⁶ Admiral C.C.P. Fitzgerald also called for war before the “Tirpitz-fleet” was completed, as did Admiral Jackie Fisher in 1904 and 1908, who explicitly called for the “Copenhagen” strategy of first strike to be followed.³⁰⁷

There is no doubt that the British saw Germany as its principal threat, surpassing France, the United States, and Russia. From the British perspective, Germany had unleashed a “dagger at the throat” strategy. As Paul Kennedy has written, Tirpitz sought to concentrate in the North Sea an armada of superior German battleships “in the form of a sharp knife, held gleaming and ready only a few inches away from the jugular vein of Germany’s most like enemy.”³⁰⁸ The Imperial Navy now brazenly commented: “If we wish to promote a powerful overseas policy and to

³⁰⁶ Lee quoted in Herwig, *Luxury Fleet*, p. 37.

³⁰⁷ Herwig, *Luxury Fleet*, p. 37.

³⁰⁸ Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise of Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860-1914* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1980), p. 253.

secure worthwhile colonies, we must be prepared first and foremost for a clash with England or America.”³⁰⁹

By 1909, naval intelligence in Britain had carefully monitored German raw materials imports and capability of the shipbuilding industry as a whole. The Admiralty believed that the German yards had reached a capacity equal to Britain’s, erasing an advantage that had provided the Royal Navy with a one- or two-year lead in ship construction. According to historian Arthur Marder, the British drew the “most alarming conclusion” that the Germans would have seventeen dreadnoughts to their twenty-one by the spring of 1912.³¹⁰ London began to believe that it would be hard-pressed to maintain even a 5:4 ratio in dreadnoughts with Germany.

This situation and the reaction of the press produced the British Naval Scare of 1909. At the height of this public outburst, the liberal Asquith government presented its 1909-1910 naval budget to the House of Commons. It proposed the construction of four new dreadnoughts immediately and four more the next year on proof of their necessity. Although the official naval sources in Britain felt a total of six ships would

³⁰⁹ Quoted in Herwig, *Luxury Fleet*, p. 43.

³¹⁰ Arthur J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era, 1901-1914* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), Vol. 1, p. 153.

restore a favorable balance, Conservative MPs and their allies in the press demanded all eight immediately.³¹¹

Neither Germany nor Great Britain appreciated the other. The Germans wanted the assurance of British neutrality in a European war if Germany were attacked. In effect, this would damage the foundation of the British alliance system. In return the British argued for a real reduction, not a slowdown, in the German construction program for 1909-1912. As Marder argued: "The British never appreciated that the French *entente* was for Germany a potential threat to their safety, but no more did the Germans ever realize that in a world of armament races, *Realpolitik* and imperialistic rivalries, naval supremacy was vital to Britain's safety."³¹²

The 1909 scare obliged the British government and navy to respond over and above the pledge of eight new battleships. The dominions were asked to help, and Australia and New Zealand each promised to contribute a battleship to the Royal Navy. As anti-German feeling reached a new high in Britain, limiting naval expenditures was impossible. The political ramifications of the 1909 scare also contributed to Admiral Jackie Fisher's retirement as First Sea Lord in January 1910.

³¹¹ Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, Vol. 1, pp. 160-170.

³¹² Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, Vol. 1, p. 177.

The British government overestimated both the capability of the German shipyards and the time it would take to place new dreadnought in service, but they did not underestimate Tirpitz's determination. In spite of the impact the fleet expansion would have on relations with Great Britain, Tirpitz strongly advocated the continuation of his favored policy of building three battleships per year.³¹³

As a consequence of the tremendous growth of the German Fleet, and demand for colonies, Germany was increasingly seen as a threat to the fundamental interests of Great Britain, ultimately becoming the threat of most concern. When war came in 1914, the opportunity to destroy the German fleet before it became even stronger was welcomed, cautiously, by the Royal Navy as the mechanism to eliminate their greatest threat. Their caution was correct, as the performance of the Royal Navy was not what London expected. The technological superiority of German capital ships, their superior fire, and the U-Boat threat, were some of the major surprises for the Royal Navy in the course of the war.

Given the slenderness of strategic reason to enter the war, it is useful to consider, counterfactually, had Germany not challenged Britain so

³¹³ Gary E. Weir, *Building the Kaiser's Navy: The Imperial Naval Office and German Industry in the von Tirpitz Era, 1890-1919* (Annapolis, Mary.: Naval Institute Press, 1992), p. 103.

brazenly with its fleet, whether there would have been a war at all, or whether Britain would have entered it, or, depending on events, perhaps it would have done so on Germany's side. It is clear that the preventive motivation for war would have been far less acute.

III. D. Israeli Strategic Motivations against Egypt in 1956

Until 1956, Israel was almost completely isolated in international politics and did not have the support of any great power. But, by the mid-1950s, its interests converged with those of France and, to a lesser degree, Great Britain. London and Paris wanted to overthrow Nasser's regime in Egypt, control the Suez Canal, and counter Nasser's pan-Arabism.

These fundamental interests strengthened Israel's willingness to join an attack on Egypt. However, British and French backing was only a necessary and not sufficient condition for such a move. The Israelis also harbored a number of grievances against Egypt that reinforced their desire to participate in the French initiative to attack Egypt to overthrow Nasser and restore the Suez Canal to Anglo-French control.³¹⁴ The military balance between Israel and Egypt had recently been shifted due to the Egyptian-

³¹⁴ For overviews of the campaign's causes and conduct see Moshe Dayan, *Diary of the Sinai Campaign* (London: Widenfeld and Nicholson, 1966); Kenneth Love, *Suez: The Twice-Fought War* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969); Nadav Safran, *From War to War* (New York: Pegasus, 1969); and Hugh Thomas, *Suez* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

Czech arms agreement of September 1955. This agreement was a surprise to Israel and the Western powers, and provided Egypt with a quantum jump in the quantity and quality of weapons available to it. Modern tanks, fighter and bomber aircraft, artillery, and even submarines were introduced for the first time to the Middle East.

October 1956 brought signs of increasing coordination of military planning among Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. There were also rumors of Iraqi forces moving into Jordan.³¹⁵ Thus, Israel anticipated that there would be a shift in the balance of power against it as these weapons were incorporated into the Egyptian military.

In addition, the on and off again Egyptian closure of the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping since 1953, including the air corridor of the straits, was a major obstacle to the development of Israel's economy, the port of Eilat and the Negev. In violation of international conventions, the Egyptians also closed the Suez Canal to any shipping traveling to or from Israel.

The Israelis did not require much pressure to be convinced that they should take part in the Anglo-French operation. The British, French, and Israelis met at Sèvres from October 22-24, 1956, and there worked out the final details of the attack. Israeli mobilization was conducted under the mask

³¹⁵ Dayan, *Diary of the Sinai Campaign*, p. 58.

323

of responding to the threat of Iraqi forces entering Jordan on October 14, which entered Jordan to aid it after an Israeli raid against Jordan, which in turn, was retaliation for a guerrilla raid on Israeli citizens.

The Israeli attack began on October 29 with their move into Sinai and the seizure by paratroopers of Mitla pass. The British and French intervention occurred two days later with the destruction of the Egyptian air force on the ground. This should have been an important lesson for the Egyptians but was unheeded, allowing Israel to repeat the tactic eleven years later.

The legacy for Israel was one of great success. The Straits of Tiran were opened to Israeli shipping and the Sinai Peninsula was demilitarized with a UN force deployed to police it. Most importantly, Israel secured a great power patron in France, which provided sophisticated weaponry and a reactor for the development of Israeli nuclear capability. The strong alliance with France would remain in place until 1967 when de Gaulle ended it.

IV. The Major Lessons from the Historical Cases of Preventive War

There are three major lessons from the historical cases of preventive war. The first of which is that equally powerful states are aggressive as they have only slight advantages in power over their challenger. Germany, Russia, and Israel were clearly aggressive and resorted to force to maintain their

superiority. Some British policy-makers did as well, most notably Admiral Fisher, to address the growth of German seapower, although that was not acted upon.

Second, states are sensitive to the balance of power and changes to the relative power imbalances. This can result in aggression, as the cases of the first lesson identify, but if not aggression, then intense security competition. Britain was greatly alarmed at the German “risk fleet” and its creation and rapid growth. Israel was by the Czech arms deal with Egypt and was motivated to think through a solution to its strategic problem.

Third, are that states do consider windows of opportunity to act against their opponents. Germany perceived that it had limited amount of time to attack Russia before French investment changed the rapidity of Russian mobilization. Britain identified that its security was threatened by the pace of the German naval expansion, and so conflict was better sooner rather than later. Russian decision-makers recognized that they had only a limited amount of time to conquer Constantinople and the Straits before the Ottoman Empire reversed its decline, and so war with Germany was preferable in the near term than over a longer period.

We witness the logic of preventive war in the Cold War as well, with the expression of statesmen in the West, most significantly Churchill, who

were alarmed at the Soviet nuclear program and later in 1969 by the Soviets who were concerned enough about the Chinese nuclear program to plan for its elimination. Although the Cold War did not result in a preventive war, the impulse for preventive war was present, as it is caused by the international system.

If the analysis moves beyond the cases considered, there are a variety of theoretical expectations and a mixed empirical record. Theoretically, the preventive war motivation is expected to be consistently stronger for a declining hegemon, while, as we have seen some theorists argue, it will be the challenger who attacks the dominant state. The fundamental implication is that the preventive war motivation is strong for both the declining hegemon and rising challenger. The “trigger mechanism,” or the proximate cause of the preventive war, such as the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in June 1914, is not well defined by theories of hegemonic war. Moreover, the theories are not applied to China but are drawn from the European context. Empirically, in Europe, of the fifteen cases of hegemonic challenges since 1500, wars resulted in all but two cases.

Of the cases, there is typically a failure for the challenger. This is because most often, the challenger confronts the declining hegemon too early due to its desire to rapidly change the balance between them, seek a change

to its status or what is termed the “status inconsistency” argument. The challenger seeks change precipitously, which causes conflict before the challenger should have done so given the development of power redistribution in international politics.

While it is the case that learning does happen in international politics, there is possibility that, in the Chinese case, Beijing has learned to temper its “status inconsistency” impulses. However, there is strong evidence discussed in more detail in Chapter Five that China has not moderated these impulses based on its behavior from territorial disputes. Indeed, rather than improving, it is becoming worse, and we may expect it to become so as China becomes more powerful.

Chapter Five

China's Perception of Preventive War

This chapter considers Chinese decision-making with respect to preventive war. The chapter first evaluates preventive war logic in Chinese thoughts. Second, it presents the historical evidence based on three historical cases: the first is during the Warring States Period; the second is the struggle against the Mongols; and, the third is the Boxer Rebellion against European powers. Finally, we examine Chinese preventive war motivations with the European cases.

I. Preventive War Logic in Chinese Thought

When we consider Chinese history, we see that China was almost always the hegemon in the course of Chinese history. It was so dominant that it set the international order in the East. Moreover, its dominance was so significant and with such longevity that even when China was conquered by Mongols or the Manchus, the subsequent generations of the conquering peoples were quickly Sinicized. They adopted Chinese customs, values, and, more importantly, interests. Accordingly, there was comparatively little strategic thought devoted to preventive war in comparison with first strike and

preemption. China was in a favorable strategic position not unlike the United States in the contemporary period. It was secure. Nevertheless, the logic of preventive war is a close twin of the motivations of first strike and preemption, as they are concerned with using force to advance and defend the fundamental interests of the state. Therefore, much of Chinese strategic thought relates indirectly to the logic of preventive war.

Due to Chinese power and security, the Chinese could be confident that there were few challengers of sufficient power to confront and defeat them, and none could pose an existential threat to them due to the power of the Chinese to Sinicize their foes. In the unlikely event that the Chinese Court was defeated, the conquering tribe had no experience with ruling an empire as complex as China. The Mongols and Manchu could conquer but they could not rule at variance from Chinese interests. This is because, first, they were dependent on the Chinese bureaucracy to run the empire. The machinery of empire was wholly Chinese. Second, the Chinese offered a superior lifestyle and standard of living that quickly Sinicized the conqueror. The temptations offered by the Chinese Court must have been awe inspiring for a steppe tribe. It is no wonder that tribal societies quickly adopted the material comforts and resource abundance of Court life. In sum, the soft power of Imperial China was substantial.

Accordingly, the Chinese perception of the threat would largely be contemptuous. No enemy represented an existential threat because he was a barbarian and incapable of posing a major challenge to the core interests of the empire. If he were to conquer, he would quickly adopt Chinese practices and interests. In sum, for most of Chinese history, there was no threat that could eliminate China, and so it follows that Chinese strategic thought is missing a developed strategic consideration of preventive war and the circumstances in which it should be waged.

However, that does not mean it is absent in Chinese history, as the discussion below documents. As the study argued in Chapter Four, the logic of preventive war will be present whenever strategists contemplate a future relative distribution of power against a particular threat. Therefore, strategists should expect preventive war motivations in China today, as well as in the powers threatened by China's growth. Even matters that appear to be distant from these concerns are tied to it. For example, from Beijing's perspective, Taiwan and the territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas are seen as internal matters. Of course, the U.S., Japan, and other states do not share China's conception. This is because conquering Taiwan would be a strategic *coup* for the PRC, greatly increasing its power. Therefore, the nature of the dispute is relevant for preventive war considerations. For

China, the Taiwan issue and the other territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas are seen as internal matters and beyond the preventive war considerations. The United States and its allies in the Asia-Pacific have the opposite view. The unification of Taiwan with China would be a strategic *coup* for Beijing that would accelerate its already considerable economic strength, and thus military might. Beijing's victories in its territorial disputes would signal its arrival as regional hegemon, well on the way to displacing the United States as global hegemon. That understanding of the outcome of these disputes is not lost on Beijing. Accordingly, China's view and the perspective of the United States on Taiwan and territorial disputes are in direct opposition, with the United States seeing these disputes as hegemonic, with the accompanying logic of preventive war.

The most transparent evidence of China's consideration of preventive war arises in public pronouncements of "leadership" and Beijing's consideration of its relationship with the United States, Japan, and India. The starkest revelation of this logic was in a signed *Xinhua* editorial in October 2013. A signed editorial indicates that it comes from the highest levels of the Chinese leadership.

The immediate context of the editorial was that it was published during the middle of a major fiscal debate in Washington. The editorial

included a point-by-point refutation of the pillars of U.S. policy in the past five years.³¹⁶ The author accused the U.S. of using the claim of moral high ground to justify illegal detentions, summary executions by drones and torture of prisoners. The editorial proclaimed that the so-called "*Pax Americana*" has been the subterfuge to foment instability, American meddling in the internal affairs of countries, and war initiation and worldwide chaos justified by lies. Moreover, it accused the U.S. of using the sobriquet of "responsibility to protect" the existing international order to advance U.S. aspirations for imperialism. While the Chinese leadership has often criticized the wisdom and self-interests of U.S. policy, it has hesitated to call for a reconstruction of the global system of nations. Nevertheless, that is what this commentary implies.

The editorial is more than another datum point; it is a historical document for four reasons. First, it is a clear sign that Chinese leadership is confident of its strength to challenge the U.S. It shows that the Chinese are ever bolder in challenging the United States across all azimuths, and thus serves as another nail in the coffin of the "peaceful rise." Second, the Chinese are confident that they will win that challenge through the means available to

³¹⁶ Liu Chang, "Commentary: U.S. Fiscal Failures Warrants a De-Americanized World," *Xinhua*, 13 October 2013. Available at: <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/indepth/2013-10/13/c_132794246.htm>. Accessed October 14, 2013.

them. Third, they are confident that they will be able to create a new order—to Beijing's benefit, of course, they will be the center of the political, economic, and military universe. Fourth, this is the first time the Chinese have dared to denounce the U.S.-managed international system, to label American policies as failures and to call openly for a restructuring of global politics and economics by reducing the role of the United States and the role of the U.S. dollar as the world reserve medium of exchange and measure of value. The Chinese leaders know that no safer investment exists than the U.S. economy. However, they resent that the value of their investments depends on the vagaries of U.S. politics. They would like to know whether other national leaders share their views and hope to stimulate a conversation about alternative models. They make clear that their aim is to topple the U.S. from its position of leadership, which they judge has become toxic for world business and promotes political instability.

Of course, this is the same international structure that took them out of poverty into prosperity. It is remarkable that as Beijing labors to create the post-American world, they are embracing greater risk of the collapse of the international order that allowed them to succeed, and reveals that China now believes that it is in a position to accept that risk, that is, to position itself in such a situation where it will win a confrontation. Naturally, this

position implicitly accepts considerable risk, and recognizes that the confrontation may fall short of war, but also that it may not. Western decision-makers should recognize the editorial for what it is, a call for preventive war against the United States.

II. Historical Cases

The study considers three major cases of preventive war in Chinese history. Two considerations are in order. First, as discussed, there were relatively few external challengers to imperial China. Second, this is not to suggest that these are the only cases in which this strategic reasoning occurred. It is only a reflection of the evidence due to the paucity of historical records that reveal the motivation of the imperial court. As the military historian of China, David Graff writes, "Western sinologists who have written on Chinese military history have complained that traditional Chinese battle accounts offer very little information about the substance or details of what happened."³¹⁷ The preeminent historian of China, Herbert Franke, submits that major wars and battles are almost always described in general and

³¹⁷ David A. Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare, 300-900* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 6.

vague terms: “‘The army X was defeated near Y’, ‘the city of Z was taken (or successfully defended)’—such are the usual entries.”³¹⁸

It is an unfortunate fact that Chinese historical documents are far less informative about strategy, tactics, weapons, and all other details of combat than in the West. To some extent, this is because Chinese society did not produce people like Caesar or Thucydides, individuals who were both chroniclers of warfare and active participants. For most of Chinese history, there was a fundamental distinction between the people whose job it was to fight wars and those who were responsible for writing official reports and accounts of military operations and had little knowledge or interest in the details of warfare, and very few details provided by their sources. As Graff writes, “These scholarly official historians were probably more comfortable borrowing elements of their own descriptions of military operations from models of the genre in earlier histories and recycling conventional literary expressions and allusions bearing on combat than trying to offer a precise and accurate reconstruction of the event.”³¹⁹ When they did choose to

³¹⁸ Herbert Franke, “Warfare in Medieval China: Some Research Problems,” in *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan di er jie guoji hanxue huiyi lunwenji*, Vol. 5 (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1989), p. 806.

³¹⁹ Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare, 300-900*, p. 7.

provide details, they usually preferred to focus on a clever stratagem or an unusual feature of the battle or campaign.³²⁰

II. A. Preventive War Logic in the Warring States Period

In early Chinese history, successful balancing occurred against the rise of potential hegemonic threats from the onset of the early state system in 656 B.C. to the beginning of the Third Century B.C. For more than three centuries, all attempts at domination were defeated, and there were relatively equal distributions of power among the states.³²¹ In sum, the balance of power operated well, although there were frequent wars, 256 wars in 436 years (656-221 B.C.), or a war every 1.7 years on average, which is more than twice as frequently as in early modern Europe.³²² During the Warring States period (475 B.C.-221 B.C.), there was interstate conflict where they vied for hegemony, and war occurred even more frequently, about once every 1.42 years due in part to the centralized distribution of great powers in China at this time.³²³ It was in this period that the feudal domains of the early Zhou

³²⁰ Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare, 300-900*, p. 7.

³²¹ Victoria Tin-bor Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 55-64.

³²² Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe*, p. 150.

³²³ Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe*, p. 150.

period came to function as independent states.³²⁴ The leaders engaged in a series of conquests, territorial annexations, and shifting alliances. Over time, the competition resulted in the emergence of several dominant states, which were more powerful because they were on the periphery—Jin in the north, Qi in the east, Chu in the south, and Qin in the west—could expand outward, increasing their strength before turning inward again. In the north, Jin broke up into Zhao, Wei, and Han in 453 B.C., leaving Qi, Chu, and Qin as the strongest powers. They continued to vie for hegemony until the leader of the Qin state, Qin Shihuangdi, prevailed as the dominant ruler in 221 B.C.

Constant warfare in this period stimulated advances in military techniques and technology, much like the growth of the state system in early modern Europe, 1500-1688, when states were established with concentration of authority in the king, a bureaucracy to enforce taxation, and a standing army.

There was nothing that was preordained about the rise of the Qin. It was an important balancer during the Spring and Autumn period, but it had its ups and downs, and seemed a rough and crude place, not that far removed from the Rong, Qiang, and Di tribes along its frontiers with which it regularly

³²⁴ An excellent overview of this period is Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Cambridge Illustrated History of China*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 38-42; and Mark Edward Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires Qin and Han* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007).

fought. But the Qin recruited many advisors, strategists and diplomats from their rivals and enacted reforms. The result was a strong state that could wage aggressive war effectively. So in the Fourth and Third Centuries, B.C., particularly after the Qin defeated the Chu in the wars of 312-311 B.C. and 301-298 B.C., after which they then annihilated the core forces of Wei and Han, eliminating their rival positions by 293 B.C. How the Qin accomplished this is not fully known, and so historians cannot answer the question of why balancing did not occur. We know that the Qin were attacked five times, probably with a preventive war motivation, but it won three of those wars, and preventive war was not waged successfully.³²⁵

However, we do have evidence that the Qin used a combination of stratagems—different policies, strategies and tactic—to conquer and successfully dominate rivals that were originally stronger, and that their motivation was rooted in ancient Chinese practices.³²⁶ The essence of the policy that they adopted was a divide-and-conquer strategy that they maintained over generations. This was successful because, like Bismarck, the Qin had keen insights into how to expand without provoking counter-balancing: incrementally with localized aggression.

³²⁵ Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe*, p. 65.

³²⁶ Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe*, p. 104.

Although they fought fifty-seven wars, with fifty-two initiated by the Qin over the course of 135 years (356-221 B.C.), they never became an unmistakable threat. “Even though piecemeal territorial gains and losses could accumulate over time, it was not obvious to the Qin’s targets that their survival would ultimately be at stake. It was only when Qi’s dramatic demise presented a ‘perceptual shock’ that statesmen were first alerted to Qin’s rise to domination.”³²⁷ The Qin weakened a balance of power response by their divide-and-conquer strategy and through their unorthodox methods of expansion, which included a propaganda campaign about the benefits of unification, bribes and gifts to ensure loyalty, and measures to sow discord and disloyalty in their opponents.³²⁸ As a result, anti-Qin alliances formed very slowly and infrequently and did not have the resources to stop the Qin.

In ancient China, the Qin overcame the balance of power, the costs of expansion, with an aggressive grand strategy that included divide-and-conquer, state reform, and clever stratagems. The Qin, as Victoria Hui describes them, were a “borrower rather than an innovator.”³²⁹ One of the

³²⁷ Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe*, p. 77.

³²⁸ Ralph D. Sawyer, with the collaboration of Mei-chun Sawyer, *The Tao of Spycraft: Intelligence Theory and Practice in Traditional China* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998), p. 19.

³²⁹ Hui, *War and State Formation in Ancient China and Early Modern Europe*, p. 104.

best items they borrowed was the way of deception. The Qin were able to run effective networks of spies, undermine other governments, and deceive foes about their own strengths and plans. Once they had achieved dominance in China, they were not irenic but launched a major campaign against the Xiongnu in 215 B.C.

At this point, it is important to reflect that the contemporary behavior of the PRC is very close to the grand strategic ambitions and policies of the Qin. No doubt, the Chinese want their dominance to last longer than the fourteen years of the Qin. It is also important to recognize that it was in the Warring States period, as Ralph Sawyer argues, that China adopted its fundamental *Realpolitik* identity. China “clearly displayed an ethos of violence and its admiration, contrary to much verbiage about China’s pacific heritage and pervasive depreciation of martial values.”³³⁰

II. B. Preventive War against the Mongols

In late-imperial China, the imperial armies had two major military tasks, and one minor one. The first and more significant was to prevent disorder within the country given the occasional rebellions against imperial rule, such as the Lake Poyang campaign in 1363, which was a major Mongol-led Yuan dynasty defeat, and led to the founding of the Ming dynasty. The second was to

³³⁰ Sawyer, *The Tao of Spycraft*, p. 111.

defend the northern frontiers against nomadic invasions. The northern frontier was the source of the only significant threats. The minor responsibility was to protect the other two land borders, which were seen as “soft” frontiers in which conflicts with foes were manageable at the level of local militia.³³¹ Even when border problems on those frontiers demanded campaigns by the imperial armies, as in Annam in 1406, they were never existential threats.

The Mongols were different. After the Mongol conquest of China in the thirteenth century, the Mongols were seen as a major threat to China. In 1368, the Ming, the next ethnically Chinese dynasty, overthrew the nominally Mongol rule of the Yuan Dynasty. The Ming managed the remnant Mongol threat by diplomacy, the traditional “bribes and brides” policy, as well as military interventions when the Ming Court deemed it necessary. In 1449, the Ming executed a preventive campaign against the Mongols. The campaign was defeated and was a disaster for the Court. In the longer term, it resulted in a significant strategic victory for the Ming as it disorganized the Mongols.

³³¹ Charles O. Hucker, “Hu Tsung-hsien’s Campaign against Hsu Hai, 1556,” in Frank A. Kierman, Jr. and John K. Fairbank, eds., *Chinese Ways in Warfare* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 273-307, 273.

The Tumu crisis had its immediate origins in an Oirat Mongol invasion, under Esen Tayisi, of northern China in the summer of 1449.³³² After a small defeat by the Mongols at Yanghe, the dominant Court official, the eunuch Wang Zhen, was able to convince the twenty-two year old Zhengtong emperor to lead an army of 500,000 men to crush the Mongol threat, and prevent it from becoming a larger threat in the future.

The expedition advanced to the Great Wall, but decided at that point that a campaign into the steppe would be too risky, and so the campaign was declared a success, and returned to Beijing along the same path they came. The army reached Xianfu on 27 August, and on 30 August the Mongols attacked the rearguard near Xianfu and destroyed it. On 31 August, the imperial army camped at the post station of Tumu.

On 1 September the advanced guard of Esen's army clashed with the imperial army and destroyed the Chinese force, which essentially dissolved. It was China's greatest defeat. All major Court officials were killed, and the emperor was captured. However, Esen was not able to translate his victory into a changed strategic situation.³³³ The Chinese refused to bargain for the

³³² The best account of the strategic origins and conduct of the campaign is Frederick W. Mote, "The T'u-mu Incident of 1449," in Frank A. Kierman, Jr. and John K. Fairbank, eds., *Chinese Ways in Warfare* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 243-272.

³³³ Mote, "The T'u-mu Incident of 1449," pp.263-267.

emperor. The Chinese military commander in Beijing, General Yu Qian, famously stated that the life of the country was more important than the life of the emperor. Esen released the emperor four years later. The Oirats fell into infighting while the Ming grew stronger, and so, despite the scale of the defeat, after serving as a menace for over 200 years, from the first serious attacks in 1205, to ruling China from 1279-1368, to 1449, the Mongols never again posed a challenge to the Chinese. The lesson the Chinese took from the disaster was both offensive—the Ming could win against the Mongols despite setbacks, as they were the stronger power—and defensive—to strengthen the Great Wall as the best protection against the Mongol threat.³³⁴

II. C. The Preventive War Motivation of the Boxer Rebellion

The Boxer Rebellion, 1899-1901, is traditionally seen as a reaction to European imperialism and anti-Christian movement. Indeed, both of those motivations were present, and Chinese Christians, in particular, suffered considerably from Boxer attacks.³³⁵ However, the Boxer Rebellion was also an unsuccessful attempt to wage preventive war.³³⁶ The Qing government

³³⁴ Mote, "The T'u-mu Incident of 1449," pp. 270-272.

³³⁵ For a review of its causes see David J. Silbey, *The Boxer Rebellion and the Great Game in China* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012).

³³⁶ Elements of the Chinese motivation behind the First Opium War (1839-1842) may be considered possessing a preventive war element, although the war is not traditionally thought of as a preventive war. See W. Travis Hanes

saw the Boxers as the last tool to be used to evict the Western governments and Japan from Chinese soil. From the government's perspective, the Boxers held the promise to reinvigorate China and to resort it to its proper place as the center of the world. Were the Boxers to fail, China would be unable to resist domination by European powers, the United States and Japan.

Interestingly, Europeans saw China as a major threat at this time, the "Yellow Peril," recognizing that if it unified it would have prodigious power, and strove to keep it weak to prevent its rise. Just as there was concern in Europe about China's rise, so too there was in Japan. One of Japan's motivations in starting the 1894-1895 Sino-Japanese War, the first Sino-Japanese War, was to strike while China was weak.

Unfortunately for the Qing, by 1900, it was clear that they had no ability to resist the increased presence of European powers, the United States, and Japan. They had just lost the 1894-1895 War with Japan. The loss to Japan was humiliating in the extreme as Japan had been a tributary state. For the first time, regional dominance shifted from China to Japan. The complete defeat of the Chinese should have demonstrated for the Qing the necessity of Western reforms. Instead, China remained on course for its next defeat in the Boxer Rebellion.

To readdress the imbalance in the time remaining to China, the Empress Dowager Cixi changed Qing policy in January 1900. She had suppressed the Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists, the Boxers' formal name, at the demand of pro-Western elements in her government, the foreign powers who sought to protect their interests, and Christian missionaries. But now, having rejected a diplomatic solution with the great powers, she supported the Boxers as the instrument to evict the European powers, the United States, and Japan from Chinese soil, and to recapture China's strength through a return to traditional Chinese ways. In this intent, the Boxers may be thought of as a fundamentalist movement, seeking to return to the values of the past for present and future strength. China declared war on the great powers on 21 June 1900.

For Empress Cixi, the Boxer Rebellion would rally the country behind the rebellion and the Qing, restore China's greatness, and defeat the Christians and the imperialists. While that was the intent, it was a disastrous failure for two reasons. First, the Boxers were an imperfect mechanism to achieve these goals. They were united only by their hatred of Christians and the intervention of the imperial powers in China. They disagreed over support for the Qing, and were riven by factions with disparate objectives. Second, the Boxers were strong in number, but weak in combat effectiveness.

345

They had no ability to defeat the European powers, the U.S. and Japan with their modern armies and considerable combat effectiveness.

After reinforcements were able to reach Beijing and lift the siege of the Legation Quarter, On 15 August, the Empress fled Beijing for Xi'an in Shaanxi province. A peace treaty was signed about a year later in which the Chinese agreed to pay indemnities to the great powers. Even after its second defeat in five years, the Qing dynasty refused reforms. The consequence of that was catastrophic for the country. It ensured that China would remain weak and not have the ability to confront its foes on equal or superior terms for many decades to come.

Had reforms been enacted that mirrored those in Japan, China may have been able to suppress the warlords and unify fifty years earlier than it did. Subsequently, a stronger China would have been a more effective deterrent against the Japanese attempt in the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) to colonize China.

III. Lessons and Comparison with European Cases

There are three major lessons that may be drawn from the historical evidence. The first of which is there is little variation in motivation for preventive war across the timeline of the Chinese empire. From the Warring States period, through the Mongol threat to the European threat, the logic of

preventive war holds. Thus, there is a consistency across time that suggests it remains today, especially as there is not countervailing pressure.

Second, significantly, there is evidence of Chinese use of preventive war across three conditions of power: rising, stable, or in decline. First, when it is a rising hegemon, in the case of the Qin during the Warring States period; second, when it is a stable power, after the Mongol yoke had been thrown off, the Ming wanted to ensure that they could not challenge China again; and third, when they are in obvious decline they seek to challenge superior military might in order to restore China to its dominant position. This permits the conclusion that China will wage preventive war when it is in decline, in a stable position, or in decline. This is of significant concern because China faces a rare position in international politics where it is a challenger to the United States but, in turn, is more powerful than its challenger, India. Thus, China faces a two-front preventive war situation, and so all of the risks identified in Chapter Four of preventive war initiation by the challenger or the dominant state are present. Moreover, this dovetails with the lesson from Chapter Four: states are sensitive to relative changes in the balance of power.

Third, the frequency of preventive war executed by China is more notable when we recognize that China has been dominant for most of its

history—it became dominant by 220 B.C. and there have been relative few significant challengers to it in its history. Thus, if we reflect on the fact that China faced a major challenge from four opponents, the Jurchen Jin, Mongols, Qing, and the combined European, Japanese, and U.S. threat, it waged preventive war against two of its four opponents. We cannot know if the Chinese considered preventive war against the Jurchen (1115-1234), and the Mongol threat arose too quickly and effectively for a Chinese response before it was attacked in full bore by a very effective foe. The threat of the Mongols was seared into their consciousness, which explains why the Ming monitored developments among them very closely. The Qing were a threat similar to the Mongols in that the Manchus were not monitored before they became a major threat. Finally, the Europeans were also an unpleasant surprise for the Chinese, but they did manage to wage a preventive war against them. Thus, in two of the four cases, China mounts a preventive war response.

When we compare this to the European cases, we may reach six conclusions. First, as just discussed, we find that China's willingness to wage preventive war is far higher than European states. Thus, if China's history and strategic culture are prospective, United States Defense Decision-makers should expect that preventive war remains a strategic consideration for China.

Second, European states had significantly more opportunity to contemplate preventive war, given that Europe has not had a hegemon since the creation of the modern state system in 1648. The European case is almost the reverse of China's, who has been hegemonic for most of its history. The European environment had many peer and near-peer challengers for most of European history. Given the potential frequency of hegemonic war, and the fact that it seldom occurred, we may conclude that the balance of power maintained periods of limited wars and limited security competition for most of European history. In this sense, given that they had many chances to wage preventive war, Europeans were more peaceful than the Chinese.

Third, European states faced a situation like China's today before 1914 when Germany was challenged by the growth of Russian power and challenged, in turn, British power, resulting in World War I. Despite that unfortunate outcome, it is understandable, as the level of statesmanship required to address one peer competitor is significant enough. To be in a position where the peer competitor both challenger and challenged is a condition of great risk with ease of opportunity for the foes to align with one another.

Fourth, Israel acted in 1956 because there was an unacceptable future, Soviet arms would greatly strengthen its foes. Decision-makers must be sensitive to the fact that the potential for rapid changes in the distribution of power, due to internal collapse or rapid modernization or exogenous shock, may present China with the motivation to attack now, as Israel did, because the future is politically unacceptable. As Chapter Four identified, a major lesson from the European cases is that states do jump through windows of opportunity, as Israel did in 1956, and as did Germany and Russia in the July Crisis.

Fifth, China's relative lack of experience with preventive war is dangerous. The United States and Europe have the example of World War I foremost in their experience. Leaders recognize that preventive war is a supremely dangerous strategic choice, as World War I was supremely costly for all states involved. China does not have a similar historical experience. The lack of experience with preventive war and the consequence of failure may embolden China and cause it to take greater risks and thus pose a more significant challenge to the United States, Japan, and India.

Sixth, like the European powers before World War I, China confronts a strategic conundrum on the timing of preventive war. If the foe is perceived to be in decline due to the "propensity of things" made possible by *shi* as

Jullien identified, there may be a reduced motivation for preventive war if China continues to grow. However, if the enemy is increasing in strength, the “propensity of things” is on its side, and there is greater motivation for action—preventive war—by China to reverse that strategic situation.

China’s key strategic problem is that it faces both situations. The United States and Japan are in relative decline, but India is on the rise. This is a complicated strategic situation. Logic would suggest that India would be the target of preventive war because it is on the rise. However, India and the United States have a tacit alliance, and even if they did not, China would have to assume that the U.S. would react to a preventive war against India. The strength of that deterrent must be significant.

From China’s perspective, the best outcome would be if China continues to grow faster than India, while the United States and Japan continue their relative decline. However, even in this case, a Japanese-Indian-United States alliance remains a formidable, if not insurmountable problem. China could use the carrot or stick against any of the alliance partners in an effort to split the coalition. Beijing’s hope must be that the U.S. and Japan decline so rapidly in relation to its power that the U.S. bows out of the region, Japan is deterred, which then allows Beijing to focus on India.

The timing of the relative growth or decline of each of the powers is critical. If China's growth does not meet expectations, that will embolden the U.S., Japan, and India, while at the same time providing the window of opportunity for China to strike. If India's growth declines, that allows China to focus on the U.S., which is also in decline. If the U.S. declines quickly, while China continues to grow, Japan and India may seek an accommodation with Beijing. If all powers maintain their positions, then there will be intense security competition, and China may be induced to wage a preventive war against the U.S. and India to change the balance of power in its favor.

In sum, the preventive war motivation is present in the PRC's strategic calculus. Preventive war by non-kinetic or kinetic means offers a solution to China's strategic problems in its relations with the U.S., Japan, and India.

IV. Scenario One: Implications of Slowed Economic Growth for Preventive War

This section of the chapter considers a scenario where Chinese economic growth has slowed. We can easily perceive such a scenario in the near future, within five to ten years, where Chinese economic growth slows due to the prodigious problems in their economy. Were this to happen, the Chinese decision for preventive war against the United States or India is likely to be more likely than if growth rates stay as they are at present.

There are two major reasons why slowed growth would cause preventive war to become a more attractive solution to China's strategic problems. First, China has expectations that its economic growth will continue and so its military expansion and strong diplomacy will stay on course. Economic growth is the mainstay of the Beijing Consensus that has provided the intellectual foundation for the expansion of Chinese power in the Third World. Were economic growth to significantly decline, there would be a decline in China's military and, more significantly, international position. Such a situation must be seen for how it would be interpreted in Beijing: direct challenge to China's standing in the world and the legitimacy of the intellectual and local political elites who have supported China. That would be a significant loss of face and international standing.

Second, China's considerable economic growth over the last generation has created legitimacy for the Party. Were growth to have any outcome other than the present growth, the legitimacy of the Party will suffer in direct proportion to the degree of economic decline. The Party will have lost the "Mandate of Heaven" to rule. The domestic consequences of this would be dire for all classes in Chinese society, and would compel a search for alternatives in political structure. It will cause a legitimization crisis for the Party that might lead to violent popular unrest, which, in turn, is likely to

entail a crackdown by authorities. A civil war is conceivable, and would not be far from the minds of the Party leadership. But, even if civil war does not occur, the legitimation crisis will certainly cause sustained unrest among the Chinese people and elites due to the loss of Chinese power, standing in the world and economic opportunity. Linked to this will be the tangible fear that China is returning to weakness, and will be preyed upon by stronger states, and even weaker ones like the Philippines and Vietnam. There will also be profound resentment that India will be surging ahead of China in economic growth, international prestige, diplomatic influence, and, in time, military power.

This is an untenable strategic situation for Beijing. It compels a response to reverse it in the narrow window of opportunity that China would have. Preventive war would be one option, and an attractive one at that for China. This study has emphasized that states do not choose preventive war lightly, and no doubt, Beijing would weigh carefully all of its options. These might include, for example, policies to reverse economic decline and competitiveness, or diplomatic measures that strengthen alliance relationships.

However, these alternatives, while certainly attempted, would be evaluated against their uncertainty, they may not work. All the while, time is

passing so that, at some point, China will be too weak, and perceived as too weak, to reverse its decline.

Were this situation to obtain, there would be great pressure to reverse China's strategic position through preventive war against the United States or India. The military history of China is replete with cases where China jumped through windows of opportunity, and it should be expect that China will use military force to eliminate one of its rivals through covert action or military confrontation. From the Chinese perspective, India and the United States have significant vulnerabilities to internal disruption and unrest as both are multicultural societies with many social and political cleavages that may be exploited. Thus, it is likely that China will seek to weaken both societies through covert means.

It will also try diplomacy to separate the United States from its major allies in the region, Australia, Japan, the Philippines, and India, so that the United States will be isolated from the region—denied bases to host its forces so that it either possess a fraction of its present base structure in the Asia-Pacific, so that it must retreat to Guam and Hawai'i. With such a strategic separation, the United States will have significantly less influence while Beijing will expect that it has sufficient coercive power to do so.

Of course, such efforts may not succeed in weakening one or both of Beijing's rivals, and so direct military confrontation will be selected. The likely target, perhaps counter intuitively, is the stronger. This is because strategically, a solution against the stronger is the only step that will advance Chinese interests—becoming the dominant state. In contrast, if India were eliminated, the United States would remain dominant with a substantial alliance network in place.

China should be expected to deliver a quick and decisive attack against the United States through cyber and/or kinetic means to weaken it with the objective of compelling its withdrawal to its own bases. Although the risks for China are considerable, it is only such an action that has the chance of positively redressing China's weakened circumstances by winning against the United States. Were China to be defeated, unlikely as that is from the perception of the Chinese leadership, that would increase the chance of a nationalistic reaction that would save the regime's position.

V. Scenario Two: Implications of Continued Economic Growth for Preventive War

This section of the chapter considers the opposite scenario: Chinese economic growth continues, albeit at perhaps reduced rates from the present. In this circumstance, the conclusions are that the danger of

preventive war initiated against China is reduced but there is still significant risk of preventive war against the United States. In this scenario, even as it rises, there are two reasons for China's strong dissatisfaction.

First, even as the Chinese continue to grow in power, it is probable that they will become frustrated due to the slow relative decline of the United States. This is because Washington is likely to be able to maintain its military power, alliance networks, and the international norms it created that shape the international system. This is the classic "status inconsistency" motivation for preventive war.³³⁷ The challenger's dissatisfaction with the pace of change in the international system causes it to provoke crises and war to bring about the change it seeks.

Second, China's impatience for change is also a result of the dangerous and destabilizing Han-centric conception of China and its place in the world: China is the *Ultima Ratio*, the dominant force and ultimate authority in international politics. China's Han-centrism contains social Darwinian ideas about racial competition, strong elements of ethnocentrism concerning the

³³⁷ See Thomas Volgy and Stacey Mayhall, "Status Inconsistency and International War: Exploring the Effects of Systemic Change," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (March 1995), pp. 67-84; William C. Wohlforth, "Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War," *World Politics*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (January 2009), pp. 28-57.

superiority of the Chinese, and cultural chauvinism as the intellectual foundations of its belief system.³³⁸

Beijing's efforts to push for rapid change in its favor are legitimized by Han centrism (Han Identity, *Han ren*, 汉人), which is anchored in a racial and cultural identity that is supremacist, rather than an identity centered on civic/political identity (Chinese national identity, *Zhong guo ren*, 中国人), which would be inclusive of Chinese minorities and does not place the Han at the center of Chinese identity.

These elements provide a strong motivation to push for changes in the status quo, accept risk, and undertake destabilizing actions. This includes preventive war against the United States. As with the previous scenario, it is more likely that Beijing will move for preventive war against the United States than India. This is because the United States is the perceived barrier from Beijing's perspective. From this Han-centric view, India is discounted as not worthy of China's strategic attention: India is an overgrown Vietnam, a state that can be difficult, to be sure, but one that is not in the same category as China and the United States.

³³⁸ Han-centric identity and its impact on China and international politics is explored in John M. Friend and Bradley A. Thayer, "How China Sees the World: The Rise of Han-Centrism and What It Means for International Politics," forthcoming manuscript.

As with the first scenario, China will not seek a long war with the United States, or a war of annihilation. The preventive war campaign will be a limited one, executed with the intent to cause the change in status China seeks. Accordingly, China should be expected to deliver a quick and decisive attack against the United States through cyber and/or kinetic means to weaken it with the objective of compelling its withdrawal to its own bases. Although the risks for China are considerable, it is only such an action that has the chance of bringing about the changes China seeks in international politics, and fostering the withdrawal and thus observed decline of the United States.

Chapter Six
Implications for United States Defense Decision-Makers
Considerable Dangers for the United States

This chapter presents the findings of the study for United States Defense Decision-makers. The study presents twelve implications drawn from the arguments of the study. The intent is to inform United States Defense Decision-makers about the framework and allow officials to comprehend first strike, preemption and preventive war in historical contexts as well as to understand the factors that make the Chinese conception of these strategic choices more dangerous than the European experience.

I. Surprise Succeeds

A clear and intuitive lesson of history is that strategic surprise succeeds, and a review of the evidence demonstrates that it often does in international politics. As the study discussed in Chapter One, the value of surprise in the execution of an attack is almost always sought by states when they elect to attack. They seek strategic, operational, and tactical surprise because it offers the possibility of a solution to the strategic problem the state confronts; second, it offers that solution through the prospective of a quick

and decisive victory at low cost; and third, the choice for surprise places the strategic initiative in the hands of the aggressor. As Chapter Three revealed, the Chinese take this impetus for surprise, and magnify it in their strategic thought. Their emphasis on deception and the clever stratagem, and their dismissal of considerations to which Western strategic thought is sensitive, such as the fog of war, results in the expectation that the Chinese will select the strategic choice of a surprise attack. Thus, while it sound like a platitude, this study has demonstrated why it is profound: defense decision-makers must expect surprise.

Surprise is caused by at least one of the following five elements: 1) The failure to anticipate an attack; 2) failure to determine when an attack will occur; 3) failure to anticipate where an attack will occur; 4) failure to anticipate the means of an attack; and 5) once the decision to resort to a surprise attack is made, the adversary will labor to control the victim's sense of vulnerability.

The cases of Barbarossa, the October 1973 War, and Pearl Harbor illustrate why surprise succeeded in each case. In the case of Barbarossa, the Soviet Union was surprised because Stalin never fully realized that Hitler was blaming him for his problems with Britain. Moreover, the Soviet leader was fully convinced that Germany would not attack the Soviet Union because it

lacked the power to fight a new war while still fighting Britain. His mistake was to project the costs and benefits Germany would incur by attacking the Soviet Union without ever considering how these values could be modified by a surprise attack on the Soviets. Had Stalin supplemented the first projection with the second one, he would have realized that Germany would *not* be fighting a two front war if the Soviet Union were defeated rapidly, and that a surprise attack might make a rapid defeat more likely.

The problem with this kind of calculation is that the potential victim must also be able to measure correctly his adversary's own estimates. Stalin seems to have assumed that Hitler knew how powerful the Soviet Union was. However, partly because Stalin had made it so difficult for outsiders to gather reliable information on the Soviet Union, Hitler underestimated its power. Had Stalin considered this possibility, he could have inferred that with the correct information Hitler would find a surprise attack less attractive.

A potential victim can face a similar problem when trying to assess the goals his adversary is hoping to achieve. One of Israel's major mistakes in 1973 was to assume that an Egyptian-Syrian attack would be initiated only to inflict a resounding military defeat on Israel. Since the Arab states were not yet strong enough to fulfill this objective, Israeli policy makers inferred that an attack would not be immediately forthcoming. However, had Israel

considered the possibility that the Arabs might opt for a more modest goal, it would have been in a better position to recognize that its adversaries did not need to augment their capabilities to the extent originally estimated and thus could launch the attack earlier. Moreover, had Israel taken into account the possibility that Egypt-Syria might try to achieve surprise during the attack, it would have also had to reconsider the possibility that the attack could come earlier than originally expected.

With respect to Pearl Harbor, the problem faced by Washington in 1941 was significantly more complex. Its decision makers seem to have realized that, for Japan, becoming the dominant power in East and Southeast Asia was not only a matter of politics and economics, but also a matter of prestige. Thus, Washington had no problem in concluding that Japan would go to war. But, in order to ascertain whether Japan would attempt to launch a surprise attack against Pearl Harbor, Washington should have asked itself how Japan's cost-benefit analysis of going to war would be affected by the knowledge that its capabilities had been underestimated and by the achievement of surprise. Had Washington considered the possibility that it was underestimating Japan's capabilities, the idea of a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor would not have seemed outlandish. Moreover, had this calculation been linked with an estimate of the benefit Japan would accrue

from a successful attack on Pearl Harbor, Washington's reluctance to acknowledge the possibility of such an attack would have been further diminished.

The study now considers twelve implications of the arguments for United States Defense decision-makers. These implications are drawn from the theoretical components of the study, the review of Chinese strategic writings, as well as the European and Chinese case studies.

II. Preventive War Logic Is a Consistent Consideration in International Politics

While much changes in international politics, a constant from the ancient Greeks to the Chinese today is the immutable logic of power politics, which includes the cold calculation of interests and the universal means to advance and defend them, including attacking first and destroying the adversarial state, even it is weaker, before it is better able to hurt the stronger.

As a rule of thumb, United States officials are reluctant to think and act in terms of power politics. Informed by the political philosophy of liberalism, United States officials prefer to see the possibility of improving international conditions by cooperating to create wealth and overcome problems in the international system. Consequently, any impetus for

preventive war is offset by the political culture of the United States and the strategic culture of the United States military.

Chinese leadership is the product of an entirely different political system and is untouched by liberalism. They see the advancement of their interests as first and primary, as both Maoism and Confucianism require. From the perspective of the Chinese statesman, their responsibility is to advance Chinese interests first, foremost, and always. Whether others benefit, and the degree to which they do, is always of secondary or tertiary importance, if it is even considered. Accordingly, United States Defense Decision-makers should expect that preventive war considerations remain viable alternative strategic choices for non-liberal states like China.

III. United States Defense Decision-Makers Must Be Alert to the “Fog of Peace” and Mirror Imaging

United States Defense Decision-makers must be sensitive to the “Fog of Peace” and mirror imaging. First, the “Fog of Peace” is a considerable danger. It is the assumption that what was true in the past remains true in the present strategic situation. Applied to China, it is the mistaken assumption that the Chinese will not attack first because they have not thus far. Peacetime assumptions must be abandoned once China decides on war. This study recognizes that abandoning peacetime assumptions is difficult in a

bureaucratic environment that is likely to be similar to the one that existed pre-Pearl Harbor. There may be some indications of a Chinese first strike, but those are likely to be lost in the “noise” of routine events. Moreover, the officials who are sensitive to the signal of the Chinese attack are likely to be dismissed at best, and be accused of seeking to create a crisis with China.

Second, there is also the risk of mirror imaging, which contributes to the mistaken assumptions of the “Fog of Peace.” Due to its authoritarian politics and history, the Chinese are capable of actions the United States is not, such as first strike and preemption. The danger arises that United States Defense Decision-makers will not be sufficiently sensitive to the lack of constraints the Chinese face when contemplating a bold move, such as a first strike or preemption.

The Chinese have fewer institutional barriers or normative restraints to undertaking these actions. While the United States would have considerable difficulty taking these actions, and thus such actions fall below the realm of consideration for United States Defense Decision-makers, it would be a strategic mistake not to comprehend that these choices are in the realm of possibility for China. Legal or moral constraints that would restrain or govern action in the West cannot be assumed to exist in China.

In addition, United States Defense Decision-makers must assume that the Chinese are apt to strike in a “pre-crisis” situation, before the United States comprehends that it is in a crisis. This poses profound complications for United States Defense Decision-makers, as it requires sensitivity to a pre-crisis Chinese attack. In turn, this raises the risk that the United States might be accused of worsening tensions with China, allowing China to blame the United States for what it would do irrespective of United States actions. The United States might also be accused of worsening crisis instability. As a consequence, it will be very difficult for the United States to take action to deter a Chinese move against its interests in a pre-crisis situation.

IV. The Chinese Execute First Strikes and Preemption Frequently in War

As Chapter Three demonstrates, when Chinese military history is reviewed, it becomes clear that the Chinese frequently resort to first strikes and preemptive war. So often, in fact, it is close to a strategic certainty. These strategies are selected irrespective of regime type or period in Chinese history. Second, the number of first strikes is even more stunning when one recognizes that for almost all of its history, China was the hegemonic power. Moreover, the use of force for China was more attractive as the dominant state—it could expect to defeat its weaker adversaries. The fact that weaker adversaries would comprehend this, would suggest that China had significant

367

deterrent capabilities and this probably accounts for the kowtowed (*koutoued*) relations it had with its neighbors for most of its history.

The final significant difference from the European or American conception of preemption and war is the Chinese conception of pedagogical war. The strategic essence of which is to attack in order to execute a limited aims campaign to “teach a lesson” to the enemy. That is, the application of coercive military power against the state to cause it to accept Chinese demands or interests.

Two consequences result from China’s strategic conception. First, although it is rare, “pedagogical strike” should be included as a sub-component of preemption. Second, the timing of the strike was notable. China will jump through windows of opportunity to attack weaker states that challenge its interests as the opportunities arise for Beijing.

As a result, the United States should expect that the PRC will execute a pedagogical campaign against weaker states that challenge its interests. Thus, it should expect that similar justification for a limited aims attack might be launched against Vietnam or the Philippines, even if there is a U.S. extended deterrent.

The lesson for United States Defense Decision-makers is that the evidence reveals China frequently resorts to first strikes and preemption and their strategic thought encourage and legitimize these attacks.

V. United States Expectation Should Be That China Will Escalate First, Either in a Pre-Crisis or Crisis Period, or in War

United States Defense Decision-makers should expect that China is likely to escalate in a pre-crisis, crisis, or war situation due to their overconfidence. At the same time, Chinese overconfidence is a condition that may be exploited by United States Decision-makers.

The expectation is based on, first, Chinese military history and strategic thought revealed in Chapter Three. Second, it is anchored on Chinese overconfidence in their abilities. This overconfidence is caused by regime type—authoritarian governments have a proclivity towards overconfidence. It is also caused by a bias.

This bias takes two forms. First, the Chinese commonly believe that they are cleverer than others, and so may shape events in an oblique manner or through *shi* [勢], the strategic manipulation of events. This conceit among the Chinese that they can manipulate others is supremely dangerous for Asian stability and ensures that the Chinese may stumble into a crisis. Second, China's leaders are likely to be overconfident. Robert Kurzban and

Dominic Johnson argue that states are no more rational than people.³³⁹ Just as people are overconfident, so are states. Rational states should agree on their differences in power, and should not fight. But, states are susceptible to exaggerated understandings of their ability to control events, their own virtue, and of the future. This bias is one of “positive illusions,” (or adaptive overconfidence) and its origins are in human evolution. The human tendency toward overconfidence was favored by natural selection because of the advantages it conferred. First, it paid off in the long run because the costs of failure arising from overconfidence often matter less than the missed opportunities arising from accuracy or for an abundance of caution. Second, overconfidence has been shown in numerous contexts to facilitate more effective mental, social, and physical functioning. Third, it can increase performance in conflict—even against a stronger opponent because it boosts resolve and bluffs an opponent.

The essence of this argument is that overconfidence is a “strategic error” of the brain. Overconfidence causes people to do strategically useful things from the standpoint of evolution, even if the motivations or capabilities of the actual person are wrong. Sometimes it is beneficial to be

³³⁹ Robert Kurzban, *Why Everyone (Else) Is a Hypocrite: Evolution and the Modular Mind* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010); and Dominic D.P. Johnson, *Overconfidence and War: The Havoc and Glory of Positive Illusions* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

strategically wrong, especially if everyone else believes the same.

These findings suggest that overconfidence can provide significant advantages in challenging, competitive environments like international politics. Since opponents can exploit the same tactic, there will be a competitive escalation, an arms race, among adversaries to outdo one another. All other things being equal, in such an arms race, high-confidence players will beat low-confidence players.

A second study done by Johnson and his colleagues argues that evolutionary theory provides a new way to understand why leaders are overconfident.³⁴⁰ Overconfidence has long been noted by historians and political scientists as a major cause of war. However, the origins of such overconfidence, and sources of variation, remain poorly understood. Mounting empirical studies now show that mentally healthy people tend to exhibit psychological biases that encourage optimism, or positive illusions.

Positive illusions are thought to have been adaptive in our evolutionary past because they served to cope with adversity, harden resolve, or bluff opponents. Today, however, positive illusions may

³⁴⁰ Dominic D.P. Johnson, Rose McDermott, Emily S. Barrett, Jonathan Cowden, Richard Wrangham, Matthew H. McIntyre, and Stephen Peter Rosen, "Overconfidence in Wargames: Experimental Evidence on Expectations, Aggression, Gender, and Testosterone," *Proceedings of the Royal Society (B)*, Vol. 273, No. 1600 (October 2006), pp. 2513-2520.

contribute to costly conflicts and wars. Testosterone has been proposed as a proximate mediator of positive illusions, given its role in promoting dominance and competitive behavior, particularly in men. To date, no studies have attempted to link overconfidence, decisions about war, gender, and testosterone. But in experimental wargames, the authors discovered four major findings: first, people are overconfident about their expectations of success; second, those who are more overconfident are more likely to attack; third, overconfidence and attacks are more pronounced among males than females; and fourth, testosterone is related to expectations of success, but not within gender, so its influence on overconfidence cannot be distinguished from any other gender specific factor.

Overall, these results constitute the first empirical evidence of recent theoretical work linking overconfidence and war. They conclude that states, particularly rising hegemonic powers, appear to overestimate their relative power. A recurring theme among studies of the causes of war, and specifically hegemonic conflict, is that overconfidence is frequently associated with the outbreak of violence.

This proclivity to overconfidence is made worse by the fact that China is an authoritarian state. As a consequence, the safeguards against overconfidence provided by democratic institutions and rival centers of

political power, as between the presidency and Congress, a free press and commentators, and public participation in elections are absent. Mechanisms that would greatly increase the likelihood that overconfidence is checked in the United States are absent in China, with profound consequences for the rest of world as China continues to grow in power and influence. We should expect Chinese leaders to be overconfident as a result of the inflation of their own capabilities and willpower. The consequence is a greater likelihood of increased aggressiveness by China, and of deterrence failure.

As a result, the United States should expect that the Chinese will be the first to escalate a confrontation with the United States or its allies, or will commence hostilities through a limited or comprehensive attack.

At the same time, it is a great advantage for the United States to play upon that overconfidence. An overconfident China will continue to make the mistakes it is presently undertaking in the South China and East China Sea disputes. That is, issuing threats, demands, and heavy-handed shows of force, all of which are examples of China's growing overconfidence.

Given the Chinese proclivity for first strikes, United States Defense Decision-makers should expect that China will escalate by launching a first strike before the United States perceives itself to be in a crisis.

This introduces significant complications for the United States with respect to the identification of a pre-crisis situation and ability to anticipate the parameters of China's first strike, whether it will be kinetic or non-kinetic, directed against allies, or the United States itself. The ability of the United States to preempt a Chinese attack is problematic due to the profound diplomatic and strategic implications it introduces for the United States. In addition, the constellation of forces—the diplomatic, strategic, Congressional, media—that would likely be united against a United States first strike, the likelihood is that the United States would have to absorb the first strike.

The result of having to incur the first blow is likely to have profound consequences for the United States military forces, allies, or the United States homeland. In addition, with the extant constellation of forces all but prohibiting a United States preemptive attack a reasonable assumption, the U.S. deterrent is weakened.

Moreover, with the weakened United States deterrent, the Chinese are emboldened to attack recognizing that a first strike has a greater likelihood of success and that its execution may place the United States, or its major allies, or both, in a strategically untenable position.

The greatest practical problem facing United States Defense Decision-makers is how to deter China in a pre-crisis situation. Recognizing the

dynamics of international politics and the restraints faced by the United States, devising a deterrent solution is formidable, and requires the explicit identification and statement of “red lines” even given the certain condemnation in international politics for raising tensions with China.

In a crisis, the strategic logic dovetails with the consideration of pre-crisis situations. United States Defense Decision-makers should expect China to attack in crisis situations. As with the attack in pre-crisis situations, this introduces significant complications for the United States with respect to a measured response in a crisis situation and ability to anticipate the parameters of China’s first strike, whether it will be kinetic or non-kinetic, directed against allies, or the United States itself.

The ability of the United States to preempt a Chinese attack is problematic due to the profound diplomatic and strategic implications it introduces for the United States if it were to attack in a crisis.

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Building on the discussion of pre-crisis deterrence, if the United States does identify and explicitly states what the “red lines” are, its strategic problems are reduced in crisis situations. As with pre-crisis situations, recognizing the dynamics of international politics and the restraints faced by the United States, devising a deterrent solution in a crisis situation is formidable, and incurs the risk of significant crisis instability and accusations that the United States is escalating the crisis.

The consequence is likely to be that the United States abandons the strategic initiative in favor of China. In sum, there are considerable crisis stability problems with China before a crisis as well as once a state is in one.

In the condition of war as well, the United States should expect that the Chinese will escalate first. This expectation is based on Chinese military history, their classical writings, and their regime type. Their military history

reveals escalation in all of their conflicts, and is a constant theme in their classical military writings. As an authoritarian government, China has greater freedom of action to violate international norms, and greater sensitivity to the requirements of victory for regime legitimacy, maintaining the “mandate of heaven” through demonstrated military success. These factors contribute to the likelihood of Chinese escalation during conflict.

VI. Surprise, First Strike (Kinetic or Non-Kinetic), and Preemption Are Key Aspects of Deception in Warfare and Are Seen As Strategic Asymmetries

The totality of classical Chinese writing on warfare and strategy stresses each of these strategic choices for Chinese decision-makers and their importance. These strategies are linked to deception, as deception makes each possible. Mao reaffirmed the attractiveness of these strategies and their utility for guerrilla, hybrid, or conventional conflict, and this influence remains with the PLA.

United States Defense Decision-makers should expect that first strike and preemption are seen as strategic asymmetries by the Chinese leadership. The historical examples provide the context for the large number of kinetic first strikes in Chinese history. Now that technology has opened the door to non-kinetic first strikes, United States Defense Decision-makers should recognize that the Chinese see non-kinetic first strikes as especially valuable

weapons. There are three critical consequences that result from this. The first is that it makes non-kinetic attacks a weapon of choice, particularly because norms and expectations surrounding their use and likelihood of retaliation are not well articulated. Second, the historical lesson of strategy is that the first strike permits initiative to be created and more likely to be maintained than receiving the first blow. Third, cyber warfare allows the Chinese to deny the United States the ability to fight the war on its terms. Indeed, a cyber first strike may deny the United States such critical capabilities that it will be deterred from acting against Chinese interests

VII. First Strike, Preemption, and Preventive War Are Attempted When China is the Weaker or the Stronger Power

United States Defense Decision-makers should understand that the Chinese will select first strike or preemption when they are stronger than their foe or weaker. As Chapters Three and Five revealed, throughout its history, China has adopted these strategic choices irrespective of their relative power against their foe. This is remarkable in the history of international politics, as few states in European history have done so. This aspect of Chinese history introduces considerable risk for the United States and its allies, as China will adopt those strategies when it is in a position of superior power or the

weaker state. The broad conclusion from the empirical evidence is that the Chinese consider these strategies as perpetually viable strategic choices.

VIII. The Chinese View of Preventive War Is That It is a Viable Strategic Choice

United States Defense Decision-makers should comprehend that China views preventive war as a viable strategic choice. One of the key insights into Chinese future behavior is its behavior in the past, when it was the hegemon of Asia; the known world as far as China was concerned. Five elements are significant in this discussion. First, China's history is worrisome from the perspective of the United States because China did wage preventive war in the three cases identified in Chapter Five.

Second, China sees itself as the center of the universe, all others are inferior, with varying degrees of inferiority. The racist, solipsistic and ethnocentric view of the world makes preventive war considerations more likely, and echo German loathing and fear of Russia before 1914.

Third, preventive war is completely in accord with Chinese strategic thought. When the body of Chinese strategic thought is reviewed, there are many cases where striking first against potential threats is considered. This is found in Sun Tzu and Sun Bin's writings, as well as later works such as T'ai

Kung, *The Six Secret Teachings*, which may be the most comprehensive in scope. T'ai Kung examines all potential aspects of conflict and describes in detail a strategy for every eventuality of weather, terrain, and strength relative to the enemy. Also relevant is Wu Qi's *Wu Zi Bing Fa*, particularly its heavy emphasis that the leader must aggress whenever the enemy is rendered vulnerable, including in preventive war conditions.

Fourth, United States Defense Decision-makers must recognize that China does not possess the institutional or ideological barriers to waging preventive war. Neither does it have the recent historical experience with preventive war that European states have, and that remain in the strategic consciousness of the West.

Fifth, the Chinese are in a unique position in their history in three major respects. First, international politics is returning to "normalcy," that is, the Chinese are once again on the cusp of being the world's dominant state. Second, while they are on the path to dominance, they face the challenge of the United States, a state they simultaneously admire and fear, and its alliance network, for which preventive war is a solution. Third, Beijing faces the challenge of New Delhi. One of the major ironies in international politics today is that, as Beijing seeks to challenge the United States, it faces the rising challenger India.

IX. Significant Dangers for the U.S. and Stability in Asia Will Result

China's preventive war consideration introduces major challenges for the United States in two major respects, both of which revolve around the uncertain future of continued Chinese economic growth. First, if Chinese economic growth weakens, its strategic choice will be informed by its expectations about the future but will be a difficult one: to confront the United States before it declines further; or delay action with the expectation that its growth will return.

Second, if Chinese economic growth remains positive, albeit not at the levels the world has witnessed in the last decades, the Chinese strategic choice will be for confrontation, and the central issue becomes a matter of how and when to do so most effectively. The "when" question is heavily informed by its understanding of the rapidity of the U.S. decline and U.S. willpower.

X. China's Strategic Considerations Are Informed by Their Perceptions of U.S. and Indian Power

China's strategic considerations are informed by their perceptions of whether the United States is in a gradual or rapid decline in relative power. The same is true for the major U.S. allies like Japan.

There is no question that the balance in relative power between the United States and China is changing in China's favor. The Chinese calculus of when to wage preventive war against the United States is governed by two major causes. First, it is governed by their expectation of the rapidity of the United States decline. Second, it is by their expectation of whether U.S. decline may be reversed—perhaps by its technological prowess or other mechanism—or whether it will encompass significant periods of growth in the course of an overall decline.

The conception toward India is informed by Chinese conceptions about the rapidity of India's rise. The same concerns inform Beijing's view of New Delhi. The balance of relative power favors New Delhi. The willingness of Beijing to wage preventive war is controlled by its evaluation of, first, India's growth rates, and whether Indian growth will be consistent, or retarded for significant periods, and coincide with Chinese expectations of their own growth. Second, it will be governed by Chinese estimates of whether the relative growth of the Indian economy matches Chinese economic growth or decline. Third, Chinese willingness to entertain preventive war is informed by their perception of the Indian willingness, as the challenger, to wage preventive war against China.

Interestingly, major European states, like the United Kingdom, France, the EU, or Russia, do not influence the Chinese calculus. This is because these entities are not seen as serious challengers to China.

XI. China Faces a Multiple Front Preventive War

United States Defense Decision-makers must be cognizant that China is both a challenger and the challenged in the calculus of preventive war. This is a strategic conundrum that occurs rarely, and bodes ill for stability in Asia. China will face profound temptations to confront the United States and/or India. In terms of significance, the first strategic decision China must decide is whether or not to challenge the United States. The second significant decision is whether or not to attack India.

United States Defense Decision-makers should have little confidence that China will decide negatively in each of these cases. It is more likely that China will decide to confront one of its foes.

Which will be confronted is difficult to ascertain at this time, but strategic logic dictates that the choice will be to confront the United States. If the United States were to fall or retrench of its own accord, China would inherent global dominance. Should it fail to challenge the United States, U.S. dominance will continue in the absence of a peer competitor, and China's

ambition to realize dominance will not be achieved but is far more likely to be successfully contained or its growth and power reversed.

United States Defense Decision-makers should recognize that the closest historical comparison with contemporary China is the European great powers before World War I. Wilhelmine Germany confronted the wealthier and more powerful Great Britain. While Britain was certainly weaker than Germany in landpower, Britain, with the assistance of its Continental allies, could match German strength on land. Britain was far more powerful in the other aspects of power.

As Chapter Four revealed, Germany saw Britain as a foe, and one that was attempting to strangle the growth of Berlin's power. Britain saw Germany as a growing challenge at sea, economically, and to its colonial empire. By 1907, Great Britain identified Germany as its foremost threat. Germany also saw Russia as a growing threat. As Berlin was the challenger to London, it was challenged by St. Petersburg. In the July Crisis, Germany accepted war against Russia as the solution to the growth of Russian power. Britain accepted war against Germany due to its fear it would win, and be hegemonic on the Continent. This historical example bodes ill for the present condition in international politics. China's motivation for preventive war

against the United States and India is greater than Germany's before World War I.

XII. The Chinese Attitude toward Preventive War Will Evolve as China Becomes More Powerful

Chinese leadership will become more receptive to preventive war as a strategic choice to free it from the strategic problems it perceives and provide it with the means to become the dominant state. An iron rule in international politics is that as a state's power grows, so too does its ambitions. Ambition to defend itself, to shape its environment towards its liking, and to realize its goals and the shared goals of allies. With greater power and ambition, comes an urgency to bring about these changes as rapidly as possible. The state becomes a driver of change against the status quo in favor of its replacement with a power structure, norms and values that reflect its desires and interests.

There is no strategic reason, historical exemption, or theoretical conceptual rationale why China would be an exception to this iron rule of international politics. To the contrary, all of the causal arrows—strategic, historical, and theoretical—point in the opposite direction; China will act as it has, and other great powers have, for millennia.

The consequence is that China's attitude toward preventive war cannot be assumed to be negative: the rejection of preventive war. Rather, like Germany before World War I, the conditions that China faces now, and will continue to do so in the near future—a declining United States and a rising India—means that preventive war against either actor must be seen to be a viable choice for the Chinese leadership.

The study's fundamental conclusion is that the Chinese have a strong proclivity toward first strike and preemption, and an evolving view concerning preventive war.

United States Defense Decision-makers should expect that Chinese views about these strategic choices increase the likelihood of conflict with U.S. allies or with the United States itself. United States Defense Decision-makers and other United States Government decision-makers should call attention to Chinese proclivities to escalate as soon as possible, by informing the international community of this risk, increasing the costs to China of so doing, and preparing the United States and its allies for these likely Chinese strategic choices.

Chapter Seven Conclusions

In the present period of international politics, the primacy of the United States is being challenged as never before. Its fiscal difficulties restrict its ability to respond to the numerous strategic challenges it confronts and meet its military commitments around the world. In addition, it confronts a rising peer competitor. In United States history, the present period is not dissimilar to the period before World War II. Germany and Japan, like China in the present period, were significant challengers to the United States with a proclivity for first strikes and preemptive actions. It took a major war to defeat and reform Germany and Japan. However, China will be far more powerful than Germany or Japan ever could be. China will first rival, and then surpass, the economic might of the United States. Unlike Germany or Japan, it will not be conquered.

This combination of strategic difficulties makes essential that the United States use every means available to maintain its position in international politics, with the first step being an acknowledgment of how dangerous China is. This is an unpalatable message for many decision-makers, analysts, and commentators in the United States, but the strategic

situation must be examined coldly and despite our wishes and hopes that the situation were otherwise. Fundamentally, China is more dangerous because, first, it accepts all of the strategic choices that the United States rejects. Second, United States Defense Decision-makers may be operating under the “Fog of Peace;” first strikes, preemption, and preventive are dismissed because they have not yet happened, and so the assumption is that they will never happen, and this belief is also colored by the fact that the United States would not. Third, China is not a status quo power, but seek to replace the international order created by the West in the last three centuries.

This study explored the strategic choices of first strike, preemption and preventive war in both the Western and Chinese historical contexts. Its fundamental conclusion is that China is more likely to execute first strikes, engage in preemption, and wage preventive war than any state in history. The central issue of the study is an analysis of the historical cases of the Chinese leadership’s perception of the value of first strike, preemption, or preventive war in a confrontation with the United States. The study analyzed each concept in a world historical context in order to determine how Chinese thought is both similar to Western decision-making and different in the evaluation of risk. The study concludes that each is a possibility for PRC leadership, and makes four major arguments.

First, historical cases of first strikes or preemption in history and its strategic value for the executor are analyzed—Copenhagen, Mers-el-Kebir, and Soviet moves against Finland, Baltic States, Romania 1939-1940—in order to establish a causal baseline. The strategic value of each for the executor was significant. First strike and preemption are effective at changing balances of power.

Second, historical cases of preventive war in the modern era are evaluated—Germany-Russia 1914 and Israel-Egypt 1956—to establish causal baseline. Here, the evidence is mixed. In the modern era, preventive war has failed. The strategic value in the Germany-Russia context was disastrous, but positive for Israel.

Third, China will readily resort to first strikes and preemption based on its history and strategic culture. China's willingness to execute these strategies is caused by three aspects of their strategic culture: opportunity created by their *shi* or the *shi* of their opponent; the heavy dependence on deception; and the empirical situation—pre-crisis, crisis, or war. In sum, China's strategic default option is first strike/preemption. Chinese decision-making to execute first strikes, preemption, and preventive war against major adversaries in four major cases is considered: first, from the Warring States Period (403 B.C.-221B.C.) through the Ming (1368-1644); second, in

the Sino-Dutch War; third, in the civil war between the Nationalists and Communists; and fourth, by the PRC. These strategies yield considerable success in each of the cases.

Fourth, China has little experience with preventive war, there are three cases: during the Warring States Period, against the Mongols, and the Boxer Rebellion. Nonetheless, preventive war initiated by China is seen as a viable strategy in the proper conditions.

Accordingly, the logic of first strike, preemption, and preventive war as well as the empirical evidence from China's past, compels the recognition that each action has considerable strategic merit for Chinese leadership today. Based on this analysis of Chinese proclivities, significant risks for United States Defense Decision-makers are identified.

Chapter One considered the strategic logics of first strike, preemption, and preventive war. The logic of first strike is transparent and holds across strategic space and time, from the ancient Greeks to states in the present international system. There are five reasons a state may adopt these strategies. The first is the ultimate prize, the possibility of a quick and decisive victory. The first strike may set in train both a momentum for the attacker and inability to respond by the defender that causes the strategic implosion of the victim. This is what proponents of first strikes desire and

390

this is what is equally tempting and enticing. If it can work, it resolves the problem in an ideal manner for the attacker.

Second, it also places the first move in the hands of that actor, and this, in turn, removes strategic doubt and yields strategic initiative. Going first is going first. The victim is forced to react to the confines of the attack. Everything else equal, white wins in chess more often because it moves first.

Third, moving first also is a force multiplier, and allows a weaker side to offset the stronger, although it is beneficial as well if the attacking side is the stronger. Landing the first blow allows the attacker to concentrate at a place and time that should be the most advantageous to it from a strategic perspective.

Fourth, in most cases, the first strike eliminates the costs of facing a fully alerted adversary. The opponent should be unprepared for the attack militarily but in other aspects as well. Politically, the victim will not have had time to coordinate with allies or mobilize the resources of the population and state. In a psychological sense, the shock of the first strike will be great as Americans witnessed on 9/11 or so demoralizing as to lead to collapse of the state. Stalin and Molotov's reaction to the German invasion in 1941 was to have a profound crisis of confidence about whether the Soviet Union would survive.

Fifth, a first strike also eliminates the chances that one's side will be preempted by an alerted opponent. Striking first eliminates that danger, and allows the battlefield to be set to the conditions most amenable to the aggressor.

The logic of preventive war offers a great power the possibility of resolving a strategic situation in its favor and eliminating the threat to its power and status. Of course, preventive war is fraught with risks, and the decision to launch it may entail the destruction of its author, or worse, its weakening, which would introduce "the dilemma of the victor's inheritance," the irony that a successful war may so drain the state, that a third state may benefit. A contemporary example would be were China and the United States to fight a war, the victor would have so weakened itself, that "victory" only served to aid India's relative power.

In the case of China, we can acutely perceive the danger of preventive war for three major reasons. First, China faces the systemic opportunity to challenge the United States. There is no other peer competitor to the United States, nor any other state with the prospect of so becoming other than India as a distant third. India does not pose a threat to the United States due to its material power at this time, its democratic political system, and its strategic orientation toward China and Pakistan.

Second, China also has a long history of engaging in first strikes or preemption that does not vary by regime type within the authoritarian context. That is, dynastic China is as likely as Communist China to execute a war-initiating first strike. China's receptivity to these strategic options is also heavily informed by its strategic thought which has categorized these strategic choices for Chinese leaders in its history.

Third, and from the perspective of the Chinese leadership, China first confront the strategic situation, which is the opportunity to attack the opponent for defensive—but more likely offensive reasons—to advance its goals, and diminish or eliminate the power of the foe. These opportunities are not constant, and indeed are rather rare. They arise as a result of the distribution of power, domestic conditions within China and conditions within the foe, including regime stability and the military effectiveness of the Chinese and opposing army, as well as choices by the Chinese leadership and the leaders of the opposing state.

In Chapter Two, the study evaluates historical cases of first strike and preemption. Four cases were studied. The study found that first strike and preemption are effective at changing balances of power. First, the cases of the United Kingdom's attack against the Danish-Norwegian fleet in 1801 and

393

1807 successfully achieve surprise in both instances. The grand strategic objectives of Great Britain were accomplished in these cases.

Second, on 3 July 1940, the Royal Navy in Operation Catapult attacked the French fleet at anchor at Mers-el-Kebir in French Algeria. Approximately 1,300 French sailors were killed, one battleship was sunk and five other vessels were heavily damaged. The attack occurred despite the promise from Admiral Darlan that the fleet would not engage in combat. After London's entreaties to the French fleet to join with it for the continuation of the war failed, the British attacked the fleet due to their concern that it might join with the Kriegsmarine in surface actions in the Battle of the Atlantic. The attack demonstrated Britain's determination to remain in the war.

Third, From 1939-1940, the Soviet Union waged war against Japan, Finland, and Romania. In each case, Moscow was successful and the consequences were strategic. Japanese expansion provoked a major Soviet-Mongolian attack at Nomonhan (Khalkin Gol) in August 1939 that decided the debate at the highest levels of the Japanese government concerning whether Tokyo should move to the north against the Soviet Union as the army desired, or south against the British Empire and the United States, as the navy thought. With epochal consequences, the Soviets deterred further Japanese aggression for the remainder of World War II and thus secured

394

their eastern flank and by so doing ensured that they would not fight a two-front war. Soviet aggression against Finland was intended to annihilate that state and provide the Soviets with a major role in Baltic and staging ground for potential moves against Germany. Only a tough Finnish defense and the military clumsiness of the Red Army led to Soviet victory. As a result, the Soviet Union secured its northern flank by ensuring the refusal of the Finnish army to move beyond the November 1939 border with the Soviet Union during World War II.

Soviet conquest of the Romanian territories of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina resulted in the confirmation of Hitler's fears about the aggressiveness of the Soviet Union. Hitler anticipated a move against the Romanian oil fields at Ploesti. The Romanian territory was incorporated into the Soviet defenses and contributed to the weakening of Army Group South. In turn, Army Group South was compelled to depend on the assistance of two Panzer armies from Army Group Center for the classic encirclement of Kiev. As a result, Army Group Center had insufficient strength to conquer Moscow.

Fourth, Israel's preemption in 1967 rapidly changed the balance of power in the Middle East through the resounding defeat of the Egyptian, Jordanian, Syrian armies, as well as an Iraqi force defeated in detail in Jordan.

395

Of course, no strategy is a guarantor of victory. First strike and preemption also are both the inspiration and midwives of spectacular failures. The Japanese navy's attack on Pearl Harbor, the Philippines, and other United States and British possessions in December resulted in the ruin of that Empire. Pakistan's attack against India in 1971 was motivated by Israel's in 1967 but with disastrous results that led to the dismembering of the country.

The historical lessons of first strike and preemption are that both are tempting strategies for states, and have been across time and culture. This is because they are one of the very few strategies available to states that permit quick and decisive victories, which opens the door to the definitive and strategic resolution of the national security problems confronting a state. First strike and preemption are likely strategies for states, and especially so for states that perceive themselves to be vulnerable or for states that seek a rapid and decisive change in the balance of power.

Chapter Three documented Chinese historical and contemporary attitude towards first strike and preemption. As with the West, and as should be expected due to the logic of strategy, there is a long history of first strike and preemption in Chinese military history. The study finds that Chinese strategic thought is critical for understanding when China will launch a first strike or preempt.

There are three relevant elements within Chinese strategic thought. First, the opportunities the Chinese have will have been made possible by *shi*, or strategic advantage. The proper configuration of power that will make possible the opportunity for a successful first strike or preemption. Chinese leadership perception of the opportunity they or the enemy has created is essential to understand. Sensitivity to perceptions of strategic opportunity is a central tenet of Chinese strategic thought. That is, the opportunity might exist for a first strike or preemptive attack, but the Chinese leadership may choose not to execute it due to other strategic concerns. The attack may be kinetic, as was the case in Chinese history, or non-kinetic, such as with cyber attacks or EMP. An additional aspect here is that the leadership may execute a first strike or preemptive attack with a “pedagogical intent.” This is an attack followed by a strategic pause to provide the foe with the strategic decision to escalate or de-escalate. The Chinese claimed they used this strategy in their invasion of Vietnam in 1979—they started the war “to teach the Vietnamese a lesson.” In reality, this was a total war attempt that failed, and thus required a change in Chinese objectives.

Second, Chinese strategic thought influences the likelihood of first strike or preemption. The scope of Chinese military thought reveals that these strategic options are well-considered and seen as viable and common

strategies. The most important theorist is Sun-tzu, identified “deception in warfare” as the epitome of success and the acme of the measurement of the quality of the general.

“Deception in warfare” must be understood broadly. Deception includes first strike and preemption. The responsibility of the Chinese leader is to place the enemy in a position where he does not expect to be attacked; to put the foe in the circumstances where he believes he has the strategic momentum, and events are proceeding as he has designed. In Chinese strategic thought, the use of force is like a sudden cascade of water flowing downhill from mountain peaks. Sun-tzu advocated a mix of orthodox and unorthodox strategies when confronting an enemy. Today, this means that the Chinese will seek to manipulate the United States’ understanding of Chinese behavior and thus Washington’s expectations of what the Chinese will do. At the same time, while first strikes are a strategic predilection, or doctrinal bias, for China, in keeping with the mix of orthodox and unorthodox strategies advocated in Chinese strategic thought, the Chinese are sensitive to the fact that it should never be so predictable as to be certain. If the enemy has a perception that first strike is China’s preferred strategy, and if circumstances permit, Chinese strategists will be certain to manipulate the enemy’s perception until China’s strategy is once again seen as unorthodox.

Third, the empirical situation is relevant to the opportunity for first strike or preemption. The empirical situation informs the likelihood of the opportunity of success. It may be pre-crisis, crisis, or in war.

Turning to the examination of the historical evidence, the study found many examples where the Chinese have executed a first strike or engaged in preemption. There was little variation in Chinese leadership's willingness to launch a first strike or engage in preemption with respect to regime type. Whether the Chinese government is Imperial, Republican, or Communist does not have an appreciable impact on whether it is more or less likely to engage in a first strike or preemptive attacks.

In addition, there is little variation in Chinese willingness to launch these attacks with respect to external foe. While the Chinese faced few potent external foes in their history until the modern era, the study finds that China was as likely to launch first strikes or attempt to preempt against the Mongols as they were against the United States seven hundred years later.

The study considered four cases of first strike and preemption to document its arguments. The first case is from the Warring States to the end of the Ming Period. First strike and preemption were common in the Warring States Period, 403 B.C.-221 B.C. The second case is the Sino-Dutch War, 1661-1668, when the Chinese executed a first strike to destroy the

Dutch settlement on Taiwan. After a successful siege, the Chinese are able to eliminate the Dutch presence on Taiwan permanently. The third case was the civil war between Republican and Communist China. In Republican China, the Nationalists preempt in their most successful campaigns. The most significant of these was against the warlords' armies in the Northern Expedition of 1926-1927; and, equally important, was against the PLA in the Encirclement Campaigns of the early 1930s. The fourth case is the PLA for which first strike and preemption are their *modus operandi*.

In the consideration of PLA use of first strike and preemption, the study examined eight cases of first strikes by the PLA to draw its conclusions, from 1950 to 1988. In the Korean War, the Chinese planned a war of annihilation against UN forces, but logistical difficulties in the face of UN airpower hindered the ability of the PLA to wage a war of annihilation, and became, *de facto*, a first strike against ROK forces in October 1950, followed by a major attack against all UN forces by the end of November 1950, which successfully pushed UN forces south of Seoul, and setting the stage for the war of attrition. In 1962, China attacked India in the Himalayan Mountains. The first strike was supremely successful and led to the devastation of the Indian army. The PLA preemptively deployed about 40,000 troops in Laos from 1964-1972 to deter the U.S. conventional landpower intervention in

that country. As with Laos, the PLA deployed about 60,000 troops in North Vietnam from 1965-1968 to deter U.S. conventional landpower intervention as well. The border dispute with the Soviet Union in 1969 involved a Chinese first strike against Soviet forces on the disputed island in the Amur River. The Chinese attack killed approximately seventy Soviet border troops. The Soviets responded with overwhelming force that forced China off of the island. In January 1974, the PLA attacked and occupied the Parcel (Xisha) Islands of South Vietnam. China attacked Vietnam in 1979 in another attempt at annihilation, the objective was to conquer Hanoi, but Vietnamese resistance was stronger than anticipated. In 1988, China attacked the Vietnamese presence on Johnson Island in the Spratly Island group and, as a result of their victory, defeated a significant Vietnamese presence in the Spratly Island group and killed almost 70 Vietnamese troops.

In comparison with the European cases of first strike and preemption, the study has four findings. First, Chinese strategic thought advocates and places greater emphasis on surprise, first strike and preemption than does European strategic thought. Second, surprise, first strike, and preemption are just as important in European military history, but Europeans give greater discount to the success of these strategies and the risks inherent in them due to an appreciation of Clausewitzian “fog of war,” friction in military

operations, and the risks of escalation. An understanding of each is present in European thought, but absent in Chinese. The fact that the Chinese lack an understanding of the significance of the risks associated with these strategies, significantly heightens crisis instability problems.

Third, in the course of their military history, and accounting for the relative stability faced by China in contrast to Europe, the Chinese launch first strikes or preempt more often than European states. The study notes that non-kinetic options available to China and other advanced militaries make first strike and preemption more likely as they potentially lower the costs of doing so, and introduce the possibility of the inability to attribute the attack. Upon review of the evidence, the study concludes that the Chinese are likely to execute first strikes and engage in preemption to advance their interests or when they perceive their interests to be threatened.

Fourth, the Chinese possess a significant difference from the European or American conception of preemption and war in that they have a conception of pedagogical war. The strategic essence of which is to attack in order to execute a limited aims campaign to “teach a lesson” to the enemy. That is, the application of coercive military power against the state to cause it to accept Chinese demands or interests.

Two consequences result from China's strategic conception. First, although it is rare, "pedagogical strike" should be included as a sub-component of preemption. Second, the timing of the strike was notable. China will jump through windows of opportunity to attack weaker states that challenge its interests as the opportunities arise for Beijing.

As a result, the United States should expect that the PRC will execute a pedagogical campaign against weaker states that challenge its interests. Thus, it should expect that similar justification for a limited aims attack might be launched against Vietnam or the Philippines, even if there is a U.S. extended deterrent.

In sum, they have a "hair trigger" on the attack or on the defensive. It is critical to recognize that this hair trigger might be pulled in pre-crisis situations, in which U.S. Defense Decision-makers would not expect Chinese action, in crisis situations, as U.S. Defense Decision-makers would expect, or in war, when U.S. Defense Decision-makers would also expect the possibility of escalation.

Chapter Four evaluated the logic of preventive war. Preventive war has a long history in Western military history. The first case in recorded history was the Peloponnesian War between Athens, Sparta, and their respective allies. Sparta was the stronger side, and went to war due to its

fear of the growth of Athenian power. Three hundred years later, Rome and Carthage were locked in a similar struggle through three major wars.

Preventive wars, like major earthquakes, fortunately are not common. But when they occur, they have a profound effect on the world due to their tremendous cost. If the challenger is successful, the effect is compounded by the challenger's ability to re-write the "rules of the road" in international politics—the norms, laws, expectations, and values held by the international community.

World War I offers the best case in the modern period for the examination of the preventive war motives. In this case, we have a triad of preventive war motivations. The first of these is Germany's preventive war motivations against Russia. Russian military reforms in the wake of the disastrous Russo-Japanese war, growth in manpower, and French capital investment in Russian railroads and armaments united to make Germany see Russia a growing threat.

Likewise, Russia had preventive war motivations against Germany and the Ottoman Empire. St. Petersburg's concern was that German influence in Balkans, support for the Ottoman Empire which would permit it to increasingly be better able to resist Russian designs on the Straits, and the

decline of Russia's major ally, France, made conflict with Germany better in the near-term than in the more distant future.

Great Britain had considerable preventive war motivate against Germany due to Germany's rapid industrialization in the second-half of the Nineteenth-century. The growth in German power translated into Germany's policy of *Weltpolitik*, or world power status, which reflected Germany's desire to become a colonial power with a large navy to support its colonial designs.

Germany was successfully thwarted in its ability to acquire major colonies, but the Naval Laws of 1898 and 1900 authored by Grand Admiral Tirpitz, placed the British and the Germans on a collision course. Tirpitz's strategy was the "risk theory," or "risk fleet," a German fleet so large it could substantially weaken the Royal Navy in a war. Thus, Britain would be deterred from challenging Germany's colonial ambitions or naval build up. The challenge to Britain's naval supremacy was the one element that ensured a profound shift in London's threat assessment. Germany was seen as the major threat, and the UK moved to an entente with France in 1904 and Russia in 1907.

Preventive war concerns affect small states in a regional context as well. The major case here is the Egyptian-Israeli war of 1956. With the rise

405

of Nasser, Israel increasingly saw Egypt as its foremost threat. The 1955 arms agreement between Czechoslovakia and Egypt guaranteed the most advanced Soviet weaponry for Egypt, and promised the rapid expansion of its conventional power. Israel entered into an agreement with France and Great Britain to attack Egypt, thus permitting Anglo-French intervention to overthrow Nasser. The intervention was terminated after the U.S. withdrew support, but Israel accomplished its objectives of weakening Egypt and securing a reactor and conventional arms from France.

The nuclear age is no stranger to preventive war logic. The United States considered preventive war against the Soviet Union to keep it from becoming a nuclear power. A decade-and-a-half later, the Soviet Union entertained a strike against Chinese nuclear facilities to prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons. A similar logic is present today with Iran's efforts to gain nuclear capabilities.

The historical lessons of preventive war are mixed, both theoretically and empirically. Theoretically, scholars are divided concerning whether the victor or challenger most often starts preventive war and their chances of victory. Empirically, when the history of preventive war in European societies is examined, we find that there are fifteen cases of hegemonic struggles since 1500. Of these fifteen, hegemonic war resulted in thirteen. In

these thirteen cases, we find preventive war motivations present for both the declining hegemon and the rising challenger.

The actual cause of the war was typically a crisis such as the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand that provoked the July Crisis, and ultimately World War I. However, the cause of the crisis or other “trigger mechanism,” like a military clash of allies, is not defined by the theories used to explain hegemonic war. In sum, the theories tell us why decision-makers should be greatly concerned about a hegemonic struggle between the United States and China, and they are able to inform decision-makers about possible crises, but they cannot provide an explanation of sufficient strength to define the nature of the crisis or the factors that will cause escalation or de-escalation. Moreover, theories of preventive war have not been applied to China, and China’s history has not been studied from the perspective of hegemonic wars.

The historical cases do reveal that it is usually the challenger who starts the hegemonic war. A lesson from the thirteen cases is that the challenger seeks conflict too soon, before it has sufficient power to successfully defeat the dominant state. Although little evidence exists for it, there is the possibility that China has learned from the mistakes of previous hegemonic challengers. That is, it will not confront the United States and its

allies too early or precipitously as has happened in the past. Instead, it will wait for the United States to continue its decline in relative power, until, in the Chinese expectation, the United States will recognize its decline and accept defeat. It would do so because it would grasp that it now was the weaker state. However, Chinese assertiveness has been growing worse since 2010, as evidenced by its behavior in its territorial disputes with India and in the East and South China Seas. In each of these cases the Chinese have been at pains to emphasize that they are becoming more powerful and this power may be used to push the United States out of these areas, gradually—at least at this time.

A second aspect of this assertive and challenging behavior is Beijing's message that time is on its side. Whether this is true or not is not the relevant message. The Chinese hope to create the perception that the future belongs to them and that, increasingly at first, and in the not too distant future, states of the region will have to look to China first, if only to gauge Beijing's reaction, before they undertake an action.

Chapter Five evaluates Chinese perceptions of preventive war. The study makes five major arguments. The first is the recognition of the historical fact: China has been the dominant state in East Asia for most of its 5,000-year history. Accordingly, comparatively little Chinese thought has

been devoted to understand the circumstances and consequences of preventive war in comparison with their thinking on first strike and preemption. Nevertheless, the logic of preventive war is a close twin of the motivations of first strike and preemption as they are concerned with using force to advance and defend the fundamental interests of the state. Therefore, much of Chinese strategic thought relates indirectly to the logic of preventive war.

Second, China has explicit considerations of preventive war in its relations with the United States, Japan, and India. These considerations are almost always masked by rhetoric that concerns “leadership” and “harmony” or a “harmonious way,” or “harmonious behavior.”

Third, the historical cases of preventive war during the Warring States Period, by the Ming against the Mongols, and the Qing against the Europeans in the Boxer Rebellion, demonstrate preventive war motivations. Interestingly, at the time of the Boxer Rebellion, Europeans also saw China as a major threat, the “Yellow Peril,” recognizing that if it unified it would have prodigious power, and strove to keep it weak to prevent its rise.

Fourth, there are three major lessons that may be drawn from the historical evidence. The first of which is there is little variation in motivation for preventive war across the timeline of the Chinese empire. From the

Warring States period, through the Mongol threat, to the European threat, the logic of preventive war holds. Thus, there is a consistency across time that suggests it remains today, especially as there is no countervailing pressure. Second, significantly, there is evidence of Chinese use of preventive war across three conditions of power: rising, stable, or in decline. First, when it is a rising hegemon, in the case of the Qin during the Warring States period; second, when it is a stable power, after the Mongol yoke had been thrown off, the Ming wanted to ensure that they could not challenge China again; and third, when they are in obvious decline they seek to challenge superior military might in order to restore China to its dominant position. This permits the conclusion that China will wage preventive war when it is in decline, in a stable position, or in decline. Third, the frequency of preventive war executed by China is more notable when we recognize that China has been dominant for most of its history—it became dominant by 220 B.C. with relatively few significant challengers.

Fifth, when we compare this to the European cases, the study reaches six conclusions. First, the study finds that China's willingness to wage preventive war is far higher than European states. Thus, if China's history and strategic culture are prospective, U.S. Defense Decision-makers should expect that preventive war remains a strategic consideration for China.

410

Second, European states had significantly more opportunity to contemplate preventive war given that Europe has not had a hegemon since the creation of the modern state system in 1648. The European case is almost the reverse of China's, who has been hegemonic for most of its history. The European environment had many peer and near-peer challengers for most of European history. Given the potential frequency of hegemonic war, and the fact that it seldom occurred, we may conclude that the balance of power maintained periods of limited wars and limited security competition for most of European history. In this sense, given that they had many chances to wage preventive war, Europeans were more peaceful than the Chinese. Third, European states faced a situation like China's today before 1914 when Germany was challenged by the growth of Russian power and challenged, in turn, British power, resulting in World War I. Fourth, decision-makers must be sensitive to the fact that the potential for rapid changes in the distribution of power, due to internal collapse, rapid modernization or exogenous shock, may present China with the motivation to attack now, as Israel did in 1956, because the future is politically unacceptable. Fifth, China's relative lack of experience with preventive war is dangerous. The United States and Europe have the example of World War I foremost in their experience. Leaders recognize that preventive war is a supremely dangerous strategic choice, as

World War I was supremely costly for all states involved. China does not have a similar historical experience. This conceptual, historical, and practical unfamiliarity with preventive war may embolden China, encourage it to take greater risks, and view it as an enticing and viable strategy to resolve strategic problems, and thus pose a more significant challenge to the United States, Japan, and India. Sixth, like the European powers before World War I, China confronts a strategic conundrum on the timing of preventive war. If the foe is perceived to be in decline due to the “propensity of things,” made possible by *shi* as Jullien identified, there may be a reduced motivation for preventive war if China continues to grow. However, if the enemy is increasing in strength, the “propensity of things” is on its side and there is greater motivation for action—preventive war—by China to reverse that strategic situation. China’s key strategic problem is that it faces both situations. The United States and Japan are in relative decline, but India is on the rise.

This is a complicated strategic situation. Logic would suggest that India would be the target of preventive war because it is on the rise. However, India and the United States have a tacit alliance, and even if they did not, China would have to assume that the U.S. would react to a preventive war against India. The strength of that deterrent must be significant.

Thus, China faces a strategic situation where it is rising in relation to two of its major foes, and where it is in decline against its challenger. The “propensity of events” moves in positive and negative directions for China. The implications were explored in two scenarios: the first where Chinese economic growth has slowed. Were this to happen, the Chinese decision for preventive war against the United States or India is likely to be more likely than if growth rates stay as they are at present. There are two major reasons why slowed growth would cause preventive war to become a more attractive solution to China’s strategic problems. First, China has expectations that its economic growth will continue and so its military expansion and strong diplomacy will stay on course. Economic growth is the mainstay of the Beijing Consensus that has provided the intellectual foundation for the expansion of Chinese power in the Third World. Were economic growth to significantly decline, there would be a decline in China’s military and, more significantly, international position. Such a situation must be seen for how it would be interpreted in Beijing: direct challenge to China’s standing in the world and the legitimacy of the intellectual and local political elites who have supported China. That would be a significant loss of face and international standing.

In addition, China's considerable economic growth over the last generation has created legitimacy for the Party. Were growth to have any outcome other than the present growth, the legitimacy of the Party will suffer in direct proportion to the degree of economic decline. The Party will have lost the "Mandate of Heaven" to rule. In this situation, were it to obtain, there would be great pressure to reverse China's strategic situation through preventive war against the United States or India. The military history of China is replete with cases where China jumped through windows of opportunity, and it should be expected that China will use military force to eliminate one of its rivals through covert action or military confrontation.

In this scenario, China should be expected to deliver a quick and decisive attack against the United States through cyber and/or kinetic means to weaken it with the objective of compelling its withdrawal to its own bases. Although the risks for China are considerable, it is only such an action that has the chance of positively redressing China's weakened circumstances by winning against the United States. Were China to be defeated, unlikely as that is from the perception of the Chinese leadership, that would increase the chance of a nationalistic reaction that would save the regime's position.

The second scenario is defined by the continuation of Chinese economic growth, albeit at perhaps reduced rates from the present. In this

circumstance, the conclusions are that the danger of preventive war initiated against China is reduced but there is still significant risk of preventive war against the United States. In this scenario, there are two reasons for China's strong dissatisfaction, even as it rises, for two major reasons.

First, even as the Chinese continue to grow in power, it is probable that they will become frustrated due to the slow relative decline of the United States. This is because Washington is likely to be able to maintain its military power, alliance networks, and ability to maintain its international norms in the international system. This is the classic "status inconsistency" motivation for preventive war. The challenger's dissatisfaction with the pace of change in the international system causes it to provoke crises and war to bring about the change it seeks.

Second, China's impatience for change is also a result of the dangerous and destabilizing Han-centric conception of China and its place in the world: China as the *Ultima Ratio*, the dominant force and ultimate authority in international politics. China's Han-centrism contains social Darwinian ideas about racial competition, strong elements of ethnocentrism concerning the superiority of the Chinese, and cultural chauvinism as the intellectual foundations of its belief system.

These elements provide a strong motivation to push for changes in the status quo, accept risk, and undertake destabilizing actions. This includes preventive war against the United States. As with the previous scenario, it is more likely that Beijing will move for preventive war against the United States than India. This is because the United States is the perceived barrier from Beijing's perspective. From this Han-centric view, India is discounted as not worthy of China's strategic attention: India is an overgrown Vietnam, a state that can be difficult, to be sure, but one that is not in the same category as China and the United States.

As with the first scenario, China will not seek a long war with United States, or a war of annihilation. The preventive war campaign will be a limited one, executed with the intent to cause the change in status China seeks. Accordingly, China should be expected to deliver a quick and decisive attack against the United States through cyber and/or kinetic means to weaken it with the objective of compelling its withdrawal to its own bases. Although the risks for China are considerable, it is only such an action that has the chance of bringing about the changes China seeks in international politics, and fostering the withdrawal and thus observed decline of the United States.

Chapter Six presents the twelve implications for United States decision-makers. First, the historical lessons of first strike, preemption, and preventive war need to be at the forefront of United States Defense Decision-makers' evaluations of China's strategic choices. Strategic surprise succeeds often in the course of history. Surprise is caused by at least one of the following five elements: 1) The failure to anticipate an attack; 2) failure to determine when an attack will occur; 3) failure to anticipate where an attack will occur; 4) failure to anticipate the means of an attack; and 5) once the decision to resort to a surprise attack, the adversary will labor to control the victim's sense of vulnerability.

The second message is that preventive war logic is a consistent consideration in international politics. While much changes in international politics, a constant from the ancient Greeks to the Chinese today is the immutable logic of power politics, which includes the cold calculation of interests and the universal means to advance and defend them, including attacking first, and destroying the adversarial state, even it is weaker, before it is better able to strike. As a rule of thumb, United States officials are reluctant to think and act in terms of power politics. Informed by the political philosophy of liberalism, United States officials prefer to see the

417

possibility of improving international conditions, cooperating to create wealth and improving conditions for states in the international system.

The third consideration is that United States Defense Decision-Makers must be alert to the “Fog of Peace” and mirror imaging. A considerable danger, the “Fog of Peace” is the assumption that what was true in the past remains true in the present strategic situation. Applied to China, it is the mistaken assumption that the Chinese will not attack first because they have not done so already. There is also the risk of mirror imaging. Due to its authoritarian politics and history, the Chinese are capable of actions the United States is not. The danger arises that United States Defense Decision-makers will not be sufficiently sensitive to the lack of constraints the Chinese face when contemplating a bold move, such as a first strike or preemption. The Chinese have fewer institutional barriers or normative restraints to undertaking these actions. While the United States would have considerable difficulty taking these actions, and thus such actions fall below the realm of consideration for United States Defense Decision-makers, it would be a strategic mistake not to comprehend that these choices are in the realm of possibility for China.

The fourth lesson is that the Chinese execute first strikes and preemption frequently in war. These actions occur often in their military

history. When Chinese military history is reviewed, it is transparent that the numbers of first strikes and preemptive wars are great. Second, the number of first strikes is even more stunning when one recognizes that for almost all of its history, China was the militarily dominant state. The fact that weaker adversaries would comprehend this, would suggest that China had significant deterrent capabilities and this probably accounts for the peaceful relations it had with its neighbors for most of its history.

Fifth, the United States should expect that first strike logic will prevail for China in pre-crisis and crisis situations, as well as war. This expectation is based on, first, Chinese military history and strategic thought. Second, it is anchored on Chinese overconfidence in their abilities. This overconfidence is caused by regime type—authoritarian governments have a proclivity towards overconfidence. Second, it is caused by a bias. The Chinese commonly believe that they are cleverer than others, and so may shape events in an oblique manner or through *shi* [勢], the strategic manipulation of events. This conceit among the Chinese that they can manipulate others is supremely dangerous for Asian stability and ensures that the Chinese may stumble into a crisis. As a result, the United States should expect that the Chinese will be the first to escalate a confrontation with the United States or its allies, or will commence hostilities through a limited or comprehensive

attack. At the same time, it is a great advantage for the United States to play upon that overconfidence. An overconfident China will continue to make the mistakes it is presently undertaking in the South China and East China Sea disputes. That is, issuing threats, demands, and heavy-handed shows of force, all of which are examples of China's growing overconfidence.

Given the proclivity of China for first strikes, United States Defense Decision-makers should plan for an attack in pre-crisis situations. This introduces significant complications for the United States with respect to the identification of a pre-crisis situation and ability to anticipate the parameters of China's first strike, whether it will be kinetic or non-kinetic, directed against allies, or the United States itself. The ability of the United States to preempt a Chinese attack is problematic due to the profound diplomatic and strategic implications it introduces for the United States. Given the constellation of forces—the diplomatic, strategic, Congressional, and media—that would likely be united against a United States first strike, the likelihood is that the United States would have to absorb the first strike. The result of having to incur the first blow is likely to have profound consequences for the United States military forces, allies, or the United States homeland.

In addition, with the extant constellation of forces all but prohibiting a United States preemptive attack a reasonable assumption, the U.S. deterrent is weakened. Moreover, with the weakened United States deterrent, the Chinese are emboldened to attack, recognizing that a first strike has a greater likelihood of success and that its execution may place the United States, or its major allies, or both, in a strategically untenable position. The greatest practical problem facing United States Defense Decision-makers is how to deter China in a pre-crisis situation. Recognizing the dynamics of international politics and the restraints faced by the United States, devising a deterrent solution is formidable, and requires the explicit identification and statement of “red lines” even in the face of condemnation in international politics for raising tensions with China

As with the pre-crisis situation, the United States should expect that first strike logic will prevail for China in crisis situations. The strategic logic dovetails with the consideration of pre-crisis situations and so United States Defense Decision-makers should expect China to attack in crisis situations. In war, the expectation of United States Defense Decision-makers should be that China will escalate. This expectation is based on Chinese military history, their classical writings, and their regime type. Their military history reveals escalation in all of their conflicts. Escalation is a constant theme in

their classical military writings. As an authoritarian government, China has greater freedom of action to violate international norms, and greater sensitivity to the requirement of victory for regime legitimacy, maintaining the “mandate of heaven,” through demonstrated military success.

The sixth consideration is that surprise, first strike (kinetic or non-kinetic), and preemption are key aspects of deception in warfare as identified by Chinese strategic texts and are seen as strategic asymmetries by Chinese leadership. The totality of classical Chinese writing on warfare and strategy stresses each of these strategic choices for Chinese decision-makers and their importance. Mao reaffirmed the attractiveness of these strategies and their utility for guerrilla, hybrid, or conventional conflict, and this influence remains with the PLA.

Non-kinetic first strike is seen as an especially valuable weapon for first strikes. There are three critical consequences that result from this. The first is that it makes non-kinetic attacks a weapon of choice, particularly because norms and expectations surrounding their use and likelihood of retaliation are not well articulated. Second, the historical lesson of strategy is that the first strike permits initiative to be created and more likely to be maintained than receiving the first blow. Third, cyber warfare allows the Chinese to deny the United States the ability to fight the war on its terms.

Indeed, a cyber first strike may deny the United States such critical capabilities that it will be deterred from acting against Chinese interests.

Seventh, the review of the evidence reveals that China will execute first strikes, preempt, or wage preventive war when it is the weaker or the stronger power. This introduces considerable risk for the United States and its allies, as China will adopt those strategies when it is in a position of superior power or the weaker state. The broad conclusion from the empirical evidence is that the Chinese consider these strategies as perpetually viable strategic choices.

The eighth lesson is that the Chinese view of preventive war is that it is viable and this must not be dismissed or discounted by United States Defense Decision-makers for five reasons. First, the Chinese do not reject preventive war. It is a viable strategic choice for them. One of the key insights into Chinese future behavior is its behavior in the past, when it was the hegemon of Asia; the known world as far as China was concerned. Its history is worrisome from the perspective of the United States because China did wage preventive wars. Second, China sees itself as the center of the universe, all others are inferior, with varying degrees of inferiority. The racist, solipsistic and ethnocentric view of the world makes preventive war considerations more likely, and echo German loathing and fear of Russia

before 1914. Third, when the body of Chinese strategic thought is reviewed, there are many cases where striking first against potential threats is considered. This is found in Sun Tzu and Sun Bin's writings, as well as later works such as T'ai Kung's *The Six Secret Teachings*, which may be the most comprehensive in scope. T'ai Kung examines all potential aspects of conflict and describes in detail a strategy for every eventuality of weather, terrain, and strength relative to the enemy. Also relevant is Wu Qi's *Wu Zi Bing Fa* with its heavy emphasis that the leader must aggress whenever the enemy is rendered vulnerable, including in preventive war conditions. Fourth, United States Defense Decision-makers must recognize that China does not possess the institutional or ideological barriers to waging preventive war. Neither does it have the recent historical experience with preventive war that European states have, and that remain in the strategic consciousness of the West. Fifth, the Chinese are in a unique position in their history in three major respects. First, international politics is returning to "normalcy," that is, the Chinese are once again on the cusp of being the world's dominant state. Second, while they are on the path to dominance, they face the challenge of the United States, a state they simultaneously admire and fear, and its alliance network, for which preventive war is a solution. Third, Beijing faces the challenge of New Delhi. One of the major ironies in international politics

today is that, as Beijing seeks to challenge the United States, it faces a rising challenger in India.

The ninth consideration is that significant dangers for the U.S. and stability in Asia result from China's conception of preventive war. It introduces major challenges for the United States in two major respects, both of which revolve around the uncertain future of continued Chinese economic growth. First, if Chinese economic growth weakens, its strategic choice will be informed by its expectations about the future—to confront the United States before it declines further, or delay action with the expectation that its growth will return. Second, if Chinese economic growth remains positive, albeit not at the levels the world has witnessed in the last decades, the Chinese strategic choice will be for confrontation, and the central issue becomes a matter of how and when to do so most effectively. The “when” question is heavily informed by its understanding of the rapidity of the U.S. decline and U.S. willpower.

Tenth, China's strategic considerations are informed by their perceptions of U.S. and Indian power. Chinese conceptions of preventive war are clouded by Chinese perceptions about whether the United States is in a gradual or rapid decline in relative power. The same is true for the major U.S. allies like Japan. The conception toward India is informed by Chinese

conceptions about the rapidity of India's rise. There is no question that the balance in relative power between the United States and China is changing in China's favor. The Chinese calculus of when to wage preventive war against the United States is governed by two major causes. First, it is governed by their expectation of rapidity of the United States decline. Second, it is by their expectation of whether U.S. decline may be reversed—perhaps by its technological prowess or other mechanism—or whether it will encompass significant periods of growth in the course of an overall decline. The same concerns inform Beijing's view of New Delhi. The balance of relative power favors New Delhi. The willingness of Beijing to wage preventive war is controlled by its evaluation of, first, India's growth rates, and whether Indian growth will be consistent, or retarded for significant periods, and coincide with Chinese expectations of their own growth. Second, it will be governed by Chinese estimates of whether the relative growth of the Indian economy matches Chinese economic growth or decline. Third, Chinese willingness to entertain preventive war is informed by their perception of the Indian willingness, as the challenger, to wage preventive war against China.

The eleventh lesson is that China faces a multiple preventive war front. United States Defense Decision-makers must be cognizant that China is both challenger and challenged. This is a strategic conundrum that occurs

rarely, and bodes ill for stability in Asia. China will face profound temptations to confront the United States and/or India. In terms of significance, the first strategic decision China must decide is whether or not to challenge the United States. The second significant decision is whether or not to attack India. United States Defense Decision-makers should have little confidence that China will decide negatively in each of these cases. It is more likely that China will decide to confront one of its foes.

The closest historical comparison is with Germany before World War I. Wilhelmine Germany confronted the wealthier and more powerful Great Britain. While Britain was certainly weaker than Germany in the realm of landpower, Britain, with the assistance of its Continental allies, could match German strength on land. Britain was far more powerful in the other aspects of power. Germany also saw Russia as a growing threat. As Berlin was the challenger for London, it was challenged by St. Petersburg. In the July Crisis, Germany accepted war against Russia as the solution to the growth of Russian power. Britain accepted war against Germany due to its fear it would win, and be hegemonic on the Continent. This historical example bodes ill for the present condition in international politics. China's motivation for preventive war against the United States and India is greater than Germany's before World War I.

Twelfth, and lastly, the Chinese attitude toward preventive war will evolve as China becomes more powerful. Chinese leadership will become more receptive to preventive war as a strategic choice to overcome problems and, more importantly, as a means for becoming the dominant state. An iron rule in international politics is that as a state's power grows, so too does its ambition. Ambition to defend itself, to shape its environment towards its liking, and to realize its goals and the shared goals of allies. With greater power and ambition, comes an urgency to bring about these changes as rapidly as possible. The state becomes a driver of change against the status quo in favor of its replacement with a power structure, norms and values that reflect its desires and interests. There is no strategic reason, historical exemption, or theoretical conceptual rationale why China is an exception to this iron rule of international politics. To the contrary, all of the causal arrows—strategic, historical, and theoretical—point in the opposite direction, China will act as it has, and other great powers have, for millennia. The consequence is that China's attitude toward preventive war cannot be assumed to be negative: the rejection of preventive war. Rather, like Germany before World War I, the conditions that China faces now, and will continue to do so in the near future—a declining United States and a rising

India—means that preventive war against either actor must be seen to be a viable choice for the Chinese leadership.

Finally, when we reflect on the likelihood of conflict with China, one of the key insights into Chinese future behavior is its behavior in the past when it was the hegemon of Asia, the known world as far as China was concerned.³⁴¹ China sees itself as the center of the universe, all others are inferior with varying degrees of inferiority. This study concurs with Martin Jacques' recognition that: "as China becomes more self-confident, a millennia-old sense of superiority will be increasingly evident in Chinese attitudes."³⁴² He submits that, "China will be characterized by a strongly hierarchical view of the world, embodying the belief that it represents a higher form of civilization than any other."³⁴³ This recognition dovetails with historian Wang Gungwu's [王赓武] argument that the tributary system was based on hierarchical principles, the most important of which "is the principle of superiority."³⁴⁴ This combination of hierarchy and superiority

³⁴¹ Excellent studies are Nicola Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies: The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Stewart Gordon, *When Asia Was the World* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2008).

³⁴² Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), p. 392.

³⁴³ Jacques, *When China Rules the World*, pp. 392-393.

³⁴⁴ Wang Gungwu, "Early Ming Relations with Southeast Asia: A Background Essay," in John King Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order: Traditional*

will reveal itself in China's relations with the rest of the world. Wang suggests that even when China was forced to abandon the tributary system and adapt to the humiliations and disciplines of the Westphalian system, in which all states are sovereign and enjoy formal equality, China never accepted it. "This doubt partly explains the current fear that, when given the chance, the Chinese may wish to go back to their long-hallowed tradition of treating foreign countries as all alike but equal and inferior to China."³⁴⁵

The size of its population and the longevity of its civilization mean that China will always have a different attitude toward its place in the world from the Europe and the United States. China has always believed itself to be universal, or what Jacques calls the "Middle Kingdom mentality."³⁴⁶ In a very real sense, China does not desire to run the world because it already believes itself to be the center of the world, which is its natural role and position. As it becomes a superpower, this attitude will strengthen. China will be guided by the inherent belief in its own superiority and the "proper" hierarchy of relations, in which China is the center.

China's Foreign Relations (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 61.

³⁴⁵ Wang, "Early Ming Relations with Southeast Asia," in *The Chinese World Order*, p. 61.

³⁴⁶ Jacques, *When China Rules the World*, pp. 233-271.

The study's fundamental conclusion is that the Chinese have a strong proclivity toward first strike and preemption, and an evolving view concerning preventive war. United States Defense Decision-makers should expect that Chinese views about these strategic choices increase the likelihood of conflict with U.S. allies or with the United States itself. United States Defense Decision-makers should call attention to Chinese proclivities to escalate as soon as possible by informing the international community of this risk, increasing the costs to China of so doing, and preparing USG and its allies for these likely Chinese strategic choices.

In the present competition with China, the expectation of United States Defense Decision-makers should be that the West will have many lessons to learn. This study has shown that the most important of which is that first strike and preemption are not viable choices for Western decision-makers, but they are for the Chinese.

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