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# Regime Insecurity and International Cooperation

M. Taylor Fravel

## Explaining China's Compromises in Territorial Disputes

Following the 1995–96 Taiwan Strait crisis, scholars and policymakers alike have become increasingly concerned about the territorial ambitions of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Gerald Segal, for example, described "an irredentist China with a boulder rather than just a chip on its shoulder."<sup>1</sup> Most recently, a 2005 Pentagon report on Chinese military power expressed concern that "conflicts to enforce China's [territorial] claims could erupt in the future with wide regional repercussions."<sup>2</sup> Yet China has also frequently used cooperative means to manage its territorial conflicts, revealing a pattern of behavior far more complex than many portray. Since 1949, China has settled seventeen of its twenty-three territorial disputes. Moreover, it has offered substantial compromises in most of these settlements, usually receiving less than 50 percent of the contested land.

China's pattern of compromise in its territorial disputes presents several puzzles. For realists, China has not used its power advantages to bargain hard over contested land, especially with its weaker neighbors. Nor has it become

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1. Gerald Segal, "East Asia and the 'Constraint' of China," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Spring 1996), p. 110. See also Richard K. Betts, "Wealth, Power, and Instability: East Asia and the United States after the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Winter 1993/94), pp. 34–77; Aaron L. Friedberg, "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in Multipolar Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Winter 1993/94), pp. 5–33; John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), p. 375; and Denny Roy, "Hegemon on the Horizon? China's Threat to East Asian Security," *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Summer 1994), pp. 149–168.
  2. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: The Military Power of the People's Republic of China, 2005*, p. 9, <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jul2005/d20050719china.pdf>.

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less willing to offer concessions over disputed territory as its power has increased. Instead, China compromised in eight separate disputes as its power grew rapidly in the 1990s. For constructivists, the legacy of “unequal treaties” that ceded land to foreign powers in the nineteenth century and the central role of national unification in modern Chinese history suggest that conflicts over territory should be highly salient for China’s leaders and basically nonnegotiable.<sup>3</sup> In its many compromises, however, China has accepted the general boundaries that these treaties created except in the cases of Hong Kong and Macao.

Analysis of China’s dispute behavior bears directly on the future of peace and stability in East Asia. Behavior in territorial disputes is a fundamental indicator of whether a state is pursuing status quo or revisionist foreign policies, an issue of increasing importance in light of China’s rising power.<sup>4</sup> In addition, China still has active territorial disputes, some of which have resulted in armed conflict in the past. Finally, although key to assessing its international relations since 1949, China’s territorial disputes have not been studied systematically in the academic literature.<sup>5</sup> The few comprehensive studies that do exist examine only China’s settlements in the 1960s, not the 1990s, and were unable to benefit from the flowering of new Chinese-language source materials in the last ten years.<sup>6</sup>

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3. The “unequal treaties” refer to agreements that the Qing dynasty signed with foreign powers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The agreements, often reached after a military defeat, contained one-sided terms requiring China to cede land, pay reparations, open treaty ports, or grant extraterritorial privileges to foreign citizens.

4. On China’s status quo foreign policy in arenas other than territorial disputes, see Alastair Iain Johnston, “Is China a Status Quo Power?” *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Spring 2003), pp. 5–56.

5. Scholars usually examine China’s disputes through analysis of bilateral relations or international law. Examples include Luke T. Chang, *China’s Boundary Treaties and Frontier Disputes* (New York: Oceana, 1982); Pao-min Chang, *The Sino-Vietnamese Territorial Dispute* (New York: Praeger, 1986); George Ginsburgs and Carl F. Pinkele, *The Sino-Soviet Territorial Dispute, 1949–64* (London: Routledge, 1978); Ting Tsz Kao, *The Chinese Frontiers* (Aurora, Ill.: Chinese Scholarly Publishing, 1980); Ying Cheng Kiang, *China’s Boundaries* (Lincolnwood, Ill.: Institute of China Studies, 1985); Alastair Lamb, *The Sino-Indian Border in Ladakh* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1973); Neville Maxwell, *India’s China War* (New York: Pantheon, 1970); J.R.V. Prescott, Harold John Collier, and Dorothy F. Prescott, *Frontiers of Asia and Southeast Asia* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1977); Tsien-hua Tsui, *The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute in the 1970’s* (New York: Mosaic Press, 1983); and Byron N. Tzou, *China and International Law: The Boundary Disputes* (New York: Praeger, 1990).

6. Greg Austin, *China’s Ocean Frontier: International Law, Military Force, and National Development* (Canberra: Allen and Unwin, 1998); Harold C. Hinton, *Communist China in World Politics* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1966), pp. 273–336; Eric A. Hyer, “The Politics of China’s Boundary Dis-

Within the broader study of territory and war, the past decade has witnessed increased study of the peaceful resolution of territorial disputes. Using mostly quantitative analysis, scholars have identified important empirical regularities in patterns of dispute settlement. Paul Huth's pathbreaking 1996 study, for example, found that democracy, alliances, disputes over land with economic value, the existence of multiple disputes, and prior defeat in armed conflict over contested land significantly increased the odds of a settlement being reached.<sup>7</sup> Other scholars have stressed the pacific effects of leadership tenure, the salience of contested land, regime-type homogeneity, third-party intervention, and international norms.<sup>8</sup> More recent efforts examine separately the decisions to open negotiations and offer concessions. In one of the most detailed studies to date, Huth and Todd Allee demonstrate that democratic leaders are less likely to threaten force and more likely to pursue negotiations in their territorial disputes with other states, as well as more likely to offer concessions to other democracies.<sup>9</sup>

Although major progress has been achieved in understanding the peaceful resolution of territorial disputes, several important puzzles remain. While democracies are more likely to pursue peaceful settlement efforts, they represent a minority of participants in twentieth-century territorial disputes. Instead, about two-thirds of the challengers in these conflicts are nondemocracies, such

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putes and Settlements," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1990; and Francis Watson, *The Frontiers of China* (New York: Praeger, 1966). For an important exception, see Allen R. Carlson, "Constructing the Dragon's Scales: China's Approach to Territorial Sovereignty and Border Relations in the 1980s and 1990s," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 12, No. 37 (November 2003), pp. 677–698.

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

8. See, for example, Giacomo Chiozza and Ajin Choi, "Guess Who Did What: Political Leaders and the Management of Territorial Disputes, 1950–1990," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (June 2003), pp. 251–278; Gary Goertz and Paul F. Diehl, *Territorial Changes and International Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Paul R. Hensel, "Contentious Issues and World Politics: The Management of Territorial Claims in the Americas, 1816–1992," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (March 2001), pp. 81–109; Paul K. Huth and Todd L. Allee, *The Democratic Peace and Territorial Conflict in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 138–230; Arie M. Kacowicz, *Peaceful Territorial Change* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994); and Beth A. Simmons, "Capacity, Commitment, and Compliance: International Institutions and Territorial Disputes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 46, No. 6 (December 2002), pp. 829–856. On territorial norms, see Tanisha M. Fazal, "State Death in the International System," *International Organization*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (Spring 2004), pp. 311–344; and Mark W. Zacher, "The Territorial Integrity Norm: International Boundaries and the Use of Force," *International Organization*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (Spring 2001), pp. 215–250.

9. Huth and Allee, *The Democratic Peace and Territorial Conflict in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 138–230.

as China.<sup>10</sup> Although they are on average less likely to seek negotiations than democracies, authoritarian states account for the majority of attempts to pursue peaceful settlement. Moreover, their behavior is difficult to predict. As they face fewer domestic constraints, authoritarian leaders can more easily choose between escalation and cooperation.<sup>11</sup> Precisely because such leaders are more likely to use force than their democratic counterparts, explaining and understanding their decisions to negotiate and compromise should yield important theoretical insights in the study of territorial disputes.

The ambiguity of authoritarian behavior also suggests that the causal mechanisms explaining why and when states might offer concessions require further attention. Although democratic challengers are more willing to pursue negotiations, they are just as likely as authoritarian ones to offer concessions once negotiations begin.<sup>12</sup> Other variables from previous studies that might capture incentives to compromise are often situational, referring to the broader context of the dispute, and do not necessarily reflect the initial motivation for leaders to offer concessions. In addition, many of these variables, such as alliances or the military balance, are relatively stable in any given case and offer less leverage in understanding attempts to compromise over time in the same dispute.

To explain why and when states might compromise in territorial disputes, this article presents a counterintuitive argument about the effects of domestic conflict on foreign policy. Diversionary war theory asserts that leaders facing domestic strife provoke conflicts with other states just to improve their position at home.<sup>13</sup> By contrast, I argue that internal conflict often creates conditions for cooperation, producing a “diversionary peace” instead of war. Embattled leaders are willing to cooperate with other states in exchange for assistance in countering their domestic sources of insecurity. In territorial disputes, leaders are more likely to compromise when confronting internal

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10. In the Huth and Allee data set, democracies are those states with a POLITY net democracy score equal to or greater than 6. Challengers are those states that seek to alter the status quo in a dispute. See <http://www.yale.edu/unsy/jcr/jcrdatadec02.htm>.

11. Huth and Allee, *The Democratic Peace and Territorial Conflict in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 77–78. In this study, variables measuring the political security of authoritarian challengers did not produce strong results. *Ibid.*, pp. 164, 211.

12. Democratic targets, however, are more likely to offer concessions than authoritarian ones. *Ibid.*, pp. 199–201.

13. Jack S. Levy, “The Diversionary Theory of War: A Critique,” in Manus I. Midlarsky, ed., *Handbook of War Studies* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), pp. 259–288.

threats to regime security, including rebellions and legitimacy crises. Facing these types of internal threats, leaders are more likely to trade territorial concessions for assistance from neighboring states, such as suppressing rebels or increasing bilateral trade.

Regime insecurity best explains China's many attempts to compromise in its territorial disputes. Most of China's disputes are located on its long land border adjacent to frontier regions where the authority of the regime has been weak. Ethnic minorities dominate these frontiers, which make up more than half of the country and were never governed directly before 1949. During periods of regime insecurity, especially in the event of ethnic unrest near its international boundaries, China's leaders have been much more willing to offer concessions in exchange for cooperation that strengthens their control of these areas, such as denying external support to separatists or affirming recognition of Chinese sovereignty over these regions.

China's willingness to compromise in territorial disputes carries several implications for international relations theory. First, China's cooperative behavior as an authoritarian state underscores the importance of moving beyond democracy in the study of regime type and cooperation.<sup>14</sup> Second, China's compromises question the role of reputation building in explaining the intractability of territorial disputes between states. China offered many concessions despite clear incentives that its simultaneous involvement in multiple conflicts created to signal toughness and resolve, not conciliation.<sup>15</sup> Third, China's behavior challenges existing arguments about the foreign policies of revolutionary states.<sup>16</sup> In China, radical politics at home failed to produce assertive or belligerent foreign policies in most of its territorial disputes.<sup>17</sup> Fourth, China's cooperative response to regime insecurity helps to explain a key puzzle for the diversionary war hypothesis: why many periods of domestic strife fail to pro-

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14. For one such effort, see Mark Peceny and Caroline C. Beer with Shannon Sanchez-Terry, "Dictatorial Peace?" *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 96, No. 1 (March 2002), pp. 15–26.

15. See, for example, Barbara F. Walter, "Explaining the Intractability of Territorial Conflict," *International Studies Review*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (December 2003), pp. 137–153, especially pp. 149–150.

16. See, for example, Stephen M. Walt, *Revolution and War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996).

17. Perhaps the only clear-cut case of radical politics creating belligerence would be China's 1958 shelling of Taiwan. See Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947–1958* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 194–241. On China's pattern of escalation in territorial disputes, see M. Taylor Fravel, "The Long March to Peace: Explaining China's Settlement of Territorial Disputes," Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 2003.

duce crisis escalation and the use of force.<sup>18</sup> Violence is less common than diversionary war theory predicts because, under certain conditions, leaders can have strong incentives to pursue cooperation instead of war to strengthen their domestic political security.

Although the initiation and escalation of China's many territorial disputes are important topics, this article focuses only on China's territorial compromises. I begin by discussing how regime insecurity creates incentives for cooperation in territorial disputes. I then describe China's ethnic geography and outline why regime insecurity is likely to create incentives for China to cooperate in disputes adjacent to its frontier regions populated by ethnic minorities. The next four sections trace China's efforts to compromise in periods when regime insecurity was most acute: namely, the revolt in Tibet, the failure of the Great Leap Forward, the upheaval following the Tiananmen crisis, and separatist violence in Xinjiang. To demonstrate the link between regime insecurity and cooperation, I tap a range of newly available Chinese-language source materials, including party history documents, oral histories, memoirs, government training manuals, and provincial gazetteers.

### *Regime Insecurity and Cooperation in Territorial Disputes*

The notion of regime insecurity as a source of cooperation extends earlier scholarship on the relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy. To explain alignment in the developing world, Steven David argues that leaders "omnibalance," forming alliances to balance against the most pressing threat that they face, foreign or domestic.<sup>19</sup> For many state leaders, especially in authoritarian regimes and new democracies, the most pressing threats to their political survival emanate from internal political challenges such as rebellions and coups.<sup>20</sup> To maximize their tenure in office, leaders form alliances,

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18. For a complementary explanation based on selection effects, see Giacomo Chiozza and H.E. Goemans, "Avoiding Diversionary Targets," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (July 2004), pp. 423–443.

19. Steven R. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment," *World Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (January 1991), pp. 233–256.

20. On internal insecurity and foreign policy, see Mohammed Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict, and the International System* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1995); Edward Azar and Chung-In Moon, eds., *National Security in the Third World: The Management of Internal and External Threats* (Aldershot, U.K.: Edward Elgar, 1988); and Brian L. Job, ed., *The Insecurity Dilemma: National Security of Third World States* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1992).

even with external adversaries, to balance against more immediate internal foes.<sup>21</sup>

My argument about regime insecurity applies this insight of omnibalancing to international cooperation more broadly. When leaders face internal threats to their survival, they may use foreign policy in addition to domestic tools such as repression to enhance their political security. They may cooperate to achieve different types of support: (1) to gain direct assistance in countering internal threats, such as denying material support to opposition groups; (2) to marshal resources for domestic priorities, not defense; or (3) to bolster international recognition of their regime, leveraging the status quo bias of the international system to delegitimize domestic challengers.<sup>22</sup> When leaders face internal threats, they may also cooperate to enhance their external security and preempt potential attempts by other states to profit from their domestic woes. These effects of regime insecurity are paradoxical: efforts to consolidate political power at home, often through repression, produce efforts to cooperate abroad. While such behavior is peaceful, its source is not necessarily benign.

Regime insecurity offers one causal logic to explain why and when leaders might pursue otherwise costly policies of compromise over disputed territory. In active territorial disputes, leaders choose among three general strategies.<sup>23</sup> A delaying strategy involves doing nothing except maintaining a state's claims through public declarations.<sup>24</sup> An escalation strategy involves the threat or use of force over disputed territory. A cooperation strategy excludes the threat or use of force and involves an offer to compromise by dividing control of contested land or dropping outstanding claims. In most cases, such compromise precedes the final settlement of a dispute in a bilateral treaty or agreement.

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21. For a similar explanation of Egypt's alliances, see Michael N. Barnett and Jack S. Levy, "Domestic Sources of Alliances and Alignments: The Case of Egypt, 1962-1973," *International Organization*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Summer 1991), pp. 369-395.

22. Recent historical and quantitative scholarship provides general support for this logic of regime insecurity in the origins of détente and a finding that politically insecure leaders are less likely to initiate an international crisis than politically secure ones. See Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); and Giacomo Chiozza and H.E. Goemans, "Peace through Insecurity: Tenure and International Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (August 2003), pp. 443-467.

23. Huth, *Standing Your Ground*. These strategies represent ideal types, but they are not mutually exclusive.

24. Leaders can delay by participating in negotiations without offering to compromise in the dispute.



The delaying strategy is usually the least costly alternative at any point in time. Escalation contains many risks, including the uncertainty associated with spirals of hostility or domestic political punishment for military defeat in addition to the costs of war. Cooperation is risky because concessions over territory can carry a high domestic political price, which may weaken a leader's position or even result in political death. From a leader's perspective, continuing the dispute through a delaying strategy is often better than offering concessions or failing on the battlefield.<sup>25</sup>

Although delay is usually the least costly strategy for leaders to adopt, maintaining a claim to another's land still carries a price. By fostering uncertainty about the security of vital interests and mistrust of intentions more broadly, a territorial claim creates poor diplomatic relations with the opposing state. Poor bilateral ties, in turn, limit the potential for cooperation in security, diplomatic, or economic arenas. When a conflict has been militarized, the defense of contested land also diverts scarce resources from domestic priorities.

Regime insecurity generates incentives for compromise by increasing the cost of poor bilateral relations created by the presence of disputed territory. When regime survival is at stake, trading concessions for assistance to enhance regime security often outweighs the benefits of maintaining a claim through delay.<sup>26</sup> State leaders are more likely to offer concessions to manage two types of challenges to regime security: internal threats to territorial integrity and internal threats to political stability.

Internal threats to territorial integrity usually occur as unrest or rebellions that challenge the most basic indicator of a regime's authority—the control of the territory claimed by the state. When a rebellion erupts near international boundaries, territorial disputes adjacent to the area of unrest become much more costly to pursue because neighboring states can provide a range of support for rebels or even seek to intervene in the conflict. Leaders facing unrest or rebellion near their borders will be more likely to trade territorial concessions for direct assistance in crushing the uprising, such as (1) sealing borders; (2) attacking rebel bases; (3) denying refuge or material support to rebels; (4)

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25. Delaying may also carry specific benefits because it allows a state to buy time to strengthen its tactical military position or maintain domestic support from key constituencies. Delaying is especially useful for states that occupy a majority of disputed land because the passage of time consolidates a favorable status quo.

26. Regime insecurity represents one pathway toward territorial compromise. External threats to a state's security may also increase the cost of delay and create incentives for compromise.

extraditing rebel leaders; (5) minimizing inadvertent escalation during hot pursuit; (6) providing assurances not to intervene; or (7) affirming their state's sovereignty over the region of unrest.<sup>27</sup>

Internal threats to political stability appear in the form of social unrest such as large-scale protests that question the legitimacy of a regime. When such threats arise, even when far from borders, territorial disputes become much more costly to pursue because they distract leaders from adequately addressing domestic unrest. Leaders facing political instability will be more likely to trade territorial concessions for direct or indirect assistance in overcoming internal unrest, such as (1) increasing trade and investment to stimulate economic development; (2) minimizing external tensions to marshal resources domestically; (3) delegitimizing domestic rivals; or (4) preempting attempts to profit from a regime's internal weakness.

A key variable is the salience of the contested land. The greater the importance of the territory at stake, the larger the magnitude of the internal threat necessary to make compromise more attractive than delay. In most disputes, some bargaining space exists for trading territorial concessions for assistance in enhancing regime security. In some cases, however, one or more of the disputants sees no possible trade, which endows the dispute with perceived indivisibility and increases the cost of side payments necessary for a peaceful settlement.<sup>28</sup> Such bargaining space is greatly reduced, for example, in disputes over areas populated by coethnics for one or more of the states, such as Kashmir.<sup>29</sup>

Regime insecurity offers a plausible pathway for compromise in territorial disputes for two reasons. First, the majority of twentieth-century territorial disputes involved authoritarian regimes where internal threats to regime security are likely to occur, including popular uprisings, coups, revolutions, and secessions.<sup>30</sup> Second, external cooperation may be particularly important for authoritarian leaders, especially in the developing world, whose political insti-

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27. In the absence of a territorial dispute with a neighboring state, one observable implication of this argument is that leaders will offer concessions in other types of disputes for cooperation in addressing regime insecurity.

28. On indivisibility and territory, see Ron E. Hassner, "To Halve and to Hold: Conflicts over Sacred Space and the Problem of Indivisibility," *Security Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Summer 2003), pp. 1–33; Monica Duffy Toft, *The Geography of Ethnic Violence: Identity, Interests, and the Indivisibility of Territory* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); and Walter, "The Intractability of Territorial Conflict."

29. Huth, *Standing Your Ground*, pp. 141–180.

30. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment."

tutions often suffer from limited capacity or “broadcasting power.”<sup>31</sup> When the state is weak, cooperation with neighbors will be more valuable because these leaders have fewer resources with which to respond to their internal threats.

### *Explaining China’s Compromises*

China has offered substantial compromises in seventeen of its twenty-three territorial disputes active since 1949. As Table 1 demonstrates, it has often agreed to accept less than half of the territory being disputed. In fifteen of these disputes, its willingness to compromise created the conditions for a final territorial settlement through bilateral agreements. By contrast, China has never offered to compromise in six of its twenty-three disputes, consistently adopting delaying strategies instead.<sup>32</sup> Regime insecurity best explains the variation in China’s use of cooperation and delaying strategies.

#### ETHNIC GEOGRAPHY AND REGIME INSECURITY

In China, ethnic geography has shaped the regime’s vulnerability to internal threats. It refers to the density and distribution of ethnic groups within a state. China’s ethnic geography reflects an “empire state,” with an ethnic majority core surrounded by a large periphery of minorities.<sup>33</sup> Han Chinese constitute more than 90 percent of China’s population. They live mostly on roughly 40 percent of the landmass along the coast, an area known as “China proper” or the “inner land” (*neidi*).<sup>34</sup> By contrast, ethnic minorities such as Tibetans and Mongols make up less than 10 percent of China’s population. They reside on

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31. Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

32. As discussed below, disputes over Hong Kong and Macao were settled without compromise when Britain and Portugal agreed to return these territories to China in 1984 and 1987, respectively.

33. Owen Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1940); Mao Zhenfa, ed., *Bianfang lun* [On frontier defense] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 1996); Gerald Segal, “China Changes Shape: Regionalism and Foreign Policy,” Adelphi Paper No. 287 (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1994); Michael D. Swaine and Ashley J. Tellis, *Interpreting China’s Grand Strategy: Past, Present, and Future* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2000), pp. 21–96; Joseph Witney, “China: Area, Administration, and Nation Building,” Department of Geography Research Paper No. 123 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970); and Zheng Shan, ed., *Zhongguo bianfang shi* [China’s frontier defense history] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 1995).

34. Bu He, ed., *Minzu lilun yu minzu zhengce* [Nationality theory and nationality policy] (Huhehaote: Neimenggu daxue chubanshe, 1995), p. 27.

**Table 1. China's Territorial Disputes, 1949-2005**

Disputed Area	Km <sup>2</sup>	Agreements		Description of Settlement
		Talks	Agreements	
Homeland Disputes				
Hong Kong	1,042	1982-84	1984: JD	Territory was returned to China.
Macao	25	1986-87	1987: JD	Territory was returned to China.
Taiwan	32,260	—	—	Dispute is still active.
Frontier Disputes				
Burma border	1,909	1956-57 1960	— 1960: BA 1960: BT 1961: BP	Talks were held after troops clashed on the border. China received 18% of the disputed land; Burma received a strategic highway, a salt mine, and the preferred watershed boundary in north.
Nepal border	2,476*	1960	1960: BA 1961: BT 1963: BP	China received 6% of the disputed land and half of Mt. Everest; Nepal held most of the grazing areas and passes.
India border	125,000	1960	—	China offered to hold 26% of the disputed land; dispute is still active.
North Korea border	1,165	1962	1981-present 1993: MTA 1996: CBMs 2005: PIA	China received 40% of the disputed crater lake on Changbai Mt.; North Korea held the remaining land.
Mongolia border	16,808	1962	1962: BT 1964: BP	China received 29% of the disputed land.
Pakistan border	8,806**	1962	1963: BA 1965: BP	China received 60% of the disputed land but transferred 1,942 square kilometers to Pakistan.
Afghanistan border	~7,381	1963	1963: BT 1965: BP	China did not receive any of the disputed Wakhan corridor.
Russia border (eastern)***	~1,000	1964 1969-78 1987-91	— — 1991: BA 1999: BP	Consensus reached to divide islands evenly according to the <i>thalweg</i> principle. — China received 52% of the river islands; other areas were divided evenly.

Bhutan border	1,128	1984–present	1998: MTA	China reportedly offered to hold 24% of the disputed land; dispute is still active.
Laos border	18	1990–91	1991: BT 1993: BP	China reportedly received 50% of the disputed land.
Vietnam border		1977	—	—
	227	1992–99	1993: PriA 1999: BT	China received 50% of the disputed land.
Russia border (western)*** no data		1992–94	1994: BA 1999: BP	Agreement affirmed the line of actual control.
Kazakhstan border***	2,420	1992–98	1994: BA 1997: SA 1998: SA 2002: BP	China received approximately 22% of the disputed land.
Kyrgyzstan border***	3,656	1992–99	1996: BA 1998: SA 2004: BP	China received approximately 32% of the disputed land.
Tajikistan border***	28,430	1992–2002	1999: BA 2002: SA	China received 4% of the disputed Pamirs; other sectors were divided evenly.
Strategic islands on Russian border***	408	1964 1990–2004	— 2004: SA	— Control of Abagaitu and Hexiazi islands was divided evenly.

#### Offshore Island Disputes

White Dragon Tail Island	~5	1957	No formal agreement	Island was transferred to North Vietnam.
Paracel Islands	~10	—	—	Dispute is still active.
Spratly Islands	~5	—	—	Dispute is still active.
Senkaku Islands	~7	—	—	Dispute is still active.

NOTE: BA (boundary agreement), BP (boundary protocol), BT (boundary treaty), CBMs (confidence-building measures), MTA (maintenance of tranquility agreement), JD (joint declaration), PriA (principles agreement), and SA (supplemental agreement).

\*Figure excludes the dispute over Mt. Everest; \*\*figure excludes the dispute over K2; \*\*\*territory also disputed with the Soviet Union.

the other 60 percent of the landmass enveloping China proper, regions known as the “borderlands” (*bianjiang*) or “outer lands” (*waidi*).<sup>35</sup>

This ethnic geography highlights the varied challenges to maintaining territorial integrity that China’s leaders confronted when founding the PRC in 1949. The political institutions of the new state were strong in the core but weak in the larger frontiers. China proper was relatively easy to govern because the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) inherited from the Ming dynasty a provincial system of direct rule, which vertically integrated townships and provinces with the central government.<sup>36</sup> As the civil war was waged mainly within China proper, the CCP also cultivated a large pool of Han cadres to staff the new government.

By contrast, the institutions of the new state were weak in the frontiers, the regions adjacent to China’s land borders. Many ethnic groups in the borderlands did not identify themselves as members of the PRC and previously sought at various times to seek independence. Unlike China proper, the CCP inherited no institutions of direct rule through which to govern these areas. As strategic buffer zones, the frontiers had historically been governed indirectly through arrangements that granted substantial autonomy to local leaders in exchange for loyalty to the emperor.<sup>37</sup> Indirect rule ensured the exclusion of foreign influence without having to establish a costly system of direct rule, but limited the rapid expansion of state authority in these regions when the PRC was established.<sup>38</sup> As the civil war was waged largely in China proper, the

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35. On the frontier areas, see Ma Dazheng and Liu Ti, *Ershi shiji de Zhongguo bianjiang yanjiu* [China’s borderland research in the twentieth century] (Harbin: Heilongjiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 1998), pp. 1–60; and Niu Zhongxun, *Zhongguo bianjiang dili* [China’s frontier geography] (Beijing: Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991), pp. 1–7.

36. Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985), pp. 71–96.

37. Nicola Di Cosmo, “Qing Colonial Administration in Inner Asia,” *International History Review*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (June 1998), pp. 24–40; and Ma Dazheng, ed., *Zhongguo bianjiang jinglue shi* [A history of China’s frontier administration] (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 2000), pp. 240–434.

38. Many forms of indirect rule were adopted, including the local chieftain system in southwestern tribal areas, military colonies in Xinjiang and parts of Mongolia, a protectorship in Tibet, and vassalage relations in Manchuria and other parts of Mongolia. See Di Cosmo, “Qing Colonial Administration in Inner Asia”; Joseph Fletcher, “The Heyday of the Ch’ing Order in Mongolia, Sinkiang, and Tibet,” in John K. Fairbank, ed., *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 10: *Late Ch’ing, 1800–1911* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 58–90; James Millward, *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759–1864* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998); Luciano Petech, *China and Tibet in the Early Eighteenth Century: History of the Establishment of the Chinese Protectorate in Tibet* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1972); Morris Rossabi, *China and Inner Asia: From 1368 to the Present Day* (New York: PICA Press, 1975); and Warren W. Smith, *Tibetan Nation: A History of Tibetan Nationalism and Sino-Tibetan Relations* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1996), pp. 115–150.

**Table 2. China's Compromises by Type of Dispute**

	Homeland	Frontier	Offshore	Total
Compromise attempted	0	16(14)	1(1)	17(15)
No compromise attempted	3(2)	0	3	6(2)
Total	3(2)	16(14)	4	23(17)

NOTE: The figure in each cell refers to the number of disputes in which compromise was attempted. The figure in parentheses refers to the number of disputes in which a final settlement was reached.

CCP also lacked ethnic minority cadres, which further limited its ability to extend its authority in the frontiers.

China's territorial disputes reflect these different challenges to maintaining the territorial integrity of an empire state.

**HOMELAND DISPUTES.** China has disputed three areas linked to the Han Chinese core. In these disputes, the main challenge to territorial integrity has been to regain those parts of China proper not under PRC control in 1949. They include China's contentious conflicts over Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao. China's leaders view these disputes as key to completing the mission of national unification that began with the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, a goal intertwined with the very legitimacy of the CCP.

Concessions for any reason are unlikely in homeland disputes. The overriding importance of completing national unification suggests that these conflicts are basically nonnegotiable. Few threats, internal or external, would be great enough to make any territorial compromise appear more attractive than delay and the achievement of unification.

As Table 2 indicates, China has never attempted to compromise in a homeland dispute. Disputes over Hong Kong and Macao were settled when Britain and Portugal concluded that the costs of continuing them, especially after the expiry of a ninety-nine-year lease for the New Territories in Hong Kong, far exceeded whatever benefit they still derived from their possession. In a matter of eighteen months of talks with China, Britain's negotiating position changed from demanding an extension of British sovereignty after 1997 to bargaining over the details of the territory's handover to China. Portugal followed Britain's lead and agreed in 1987 to return Macao to China on similar terms.<sup>39</sup> Al-

39. Robert Cottrell, *The End of Hong Kong: The Secret Diplomacy of Imperial Retreat* (London: John Murray, 1993).

though China did agree to maintain existing political institutions in both territories, this did not represent much of a compromise because, since the late 1970s, China had indicated its desire to maintain the political status quo to facilitate investment from these territories.

**FRONTIER DISPUTES.** China has disputed control over sixteen areas along its land border adjacent to its borderlands. These disputes stem from the challenge of consolidating control over vast frontiers through the implementation of direct rule. Frontier disputes arose from the ambiguity surrounding China's land borders when the PRC was established. While large portions of the border had been delimited in the unequal treaties, many of the descriptions contained in these agreements were vague, imprecise, and often not demarcated on the ground. Neighboring states also feared that China might pursue claims to the almost 2 million square kilometers of territory ceded in these agreements. Nevertheless, China has pursued mostly status quo goals in these disputes to secure the boundaries of the late Qing dynasty as defined by the unequal treaties.

Internal threats are likely to create incentives to compromise in frontier disputes. The weakness of the state increases the potential influence of neighbors within these regions, creating an opportunity to trade territorial concessions for support in governing the frontiers. Securing one of the longest land borders in the world poses a logistical challenge for China's armed forces even under optimal conditions. In addition, the presence of ethnic minorities, many of whom aspire to secede, intertwines territorial integrity with political stability.<sup>40</sup> Before the establishment of the PRC, many of these groups enjoyed much stronger economic and cultural ties with neighboring states than with China proper and did not see themselves as members of the new state.<sup>41</sup> As Deng Xiaoping explained presciently in 1950 when describing China's southwestern frontier, "On a border this long . . . if the issue of ethnic minorities is not resolved, then the matter of national defense cannot be settled."<sup>42</sup>

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40. Of the 135 counties adjacent to China's international frontiers, 107 are ethnic autonomous regions. Bu He, *Minzu lilun yu minzu zhengce*, p. 27.

41. Parts of Xinjiang had been ruled or heavily influenced by the Soviet Union before 1949, while India and Nepal maintained special trading privileges in Tibet and hill tribes moved freely across China's southwestern borders in Yunnan and Guangxi. See Andrew D.W. Forbes, *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia: A Political History of Republican Sinkiang, 1911–1949* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Alastair Lamb, *The McMahon Line: A Study in the Relations between India, China, and Tibet, 1904–1914* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1966); and Herold J. Wiens, *China's March toward the Tropics* (Hamden, Conn.: Shoe String Press, 1954).

42. *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* [Deng Xiaoping's selected works] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1994), Vol. 2, p. 161.



When internal threats arise, neighboring states can provide assistance to help China's leaders maintain frontier stability. While separatist unrest near borders poses a direct challenge to the integrity of frontiers, political instability at the core also creates concerns about control of these regions, given the potential for separatist movements and the need to focus state resources elsewhere. With its relative military strength, however, China's territorial claims create suspicion and mistrust among neighbors, which limits the development of bilateral ties. Under these conditions, China's leaders can offer territorial concessions to improve relations with its neighbors and strengthen frontier control.

As Table 2 demonstrates, China has compromised at least once in each of its frontier disputes since 1949. Chinese sources, especially doctrinal studies produced by scholars from the People's Liberation Army (PLA), link the defense of frontiers with internal political stability.<sup>43</sup> These studies assert that insecure borders promote ethnic unrest by increasing external influence within China and reveal suspicions that neighbors may manipulate ethnic tensions to create instability.<sup>44</sup> Diplomatic relations with neighboring states are consistently highlighted as a key tool for maintaining internal control over frontiers in addition to border security, economic development, and political mobilization. Benefits of cooperation with neighbors include policing rebel activity, limiting the potential for miscalculation during pacification campaigns, and expanding cross-border trade.<sup>45</sup>

**OFFSHORE ISLAND DISPUTES.** China has disputed four island groups. In these disputes, China's leaders have sought to secure a maritime frontier that previous governments lacked. Offshore island disputes arose from the ambiguity of sovereignty over small islands, rocks, and reefs that had never been administered by any of the claimants, including China. Today, the value of the islands stems mostly from maritime rights to resources in adjacent waters and as bases for the limited forward deployment of naval forces for surveillance and securing sea-lanes.

Regime insecurity is unlikely to create incentives for cooperation in offshore

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43. See especially Mao, *Bianfang lun*; and Li Xing, ed., *Bianfang xue* [The study of frontier defense] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2004). See also police training manuals for frontier defense, including Cai Xiru, ed., *Bianfang lilun* [Frontier defense theory] (Beijing: Jingguan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996); and Ping Qingfu, ed., *Bianjing guanli xue* [The study of border management] (Beijing: Jingguan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999).

44. Mao, *Bianfang lun*, pp. 232–234, 256–261.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 241–255; and Wang Wenrong, ed., *Zhanlue xue* [The study of military strategy] (Beijing: Guofang daxue chubanshe, 1999), p. 270.

island disputes. Far from the mainland, these small, desolate, and unpopulated islands have little influence on regime security. As they do not target vital interests for similar reasons, China's claims to these islands have a limited impact on bilateral ties. In addition, during periods of regime insecurity, the only assistance that neighbors might offer in exchange for China's concessions would be diplomatic support. As a result, external, not internal, factors are most likely to produce efforts to compromise. Furthermore, as these islands are cheap for the claimants to dispute, requiring few troops to maintain a claim, states are most likely to adopt a delaying strategy to maximize the potential economic or strategic benefits.

China has compromised in only one offshore island dispute since 1949, White Dragon Tail, as discussed below. In its disputes over the Paracel (*xisha*), Spratly (*nansha*), and Senkaku (*diaoyu*) island groups, China has consistently adopted a delaying strategy and never offered to compromise.<sup>46</sup> It has held limited talks with individual states over the Spratlys, but these talks have never touched upon sovereignty, emphasizing instead escalation control.<sup>47</sup> In November 2002, China did sign a declaration with ASEAN states on a code of conduct concerning the South China Sea, but the agreement focused only on broad confidence-building measures, not sovereignty and dispute settlement.<sup>48</sup>

#### REGIME INSECURITY AND TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE

Since 1949, China's pattern of compromise and delay has varied with the presence or absence of threats to regime insecurity: China has attempted compromise in response to these internal threats; otherwise, it has pursued delay.

Unrest among minorities near international boundaries has occurred during three distinct periods since 1949, each of which produced efforts by China's leaders to compromise in its territorial disputes. When a revolt peaked in Tibet in 1959, China moved to compromise in disputes with Burma, Nepal, and India. After ethnic unrest in Xinjiang in 1962, China pursued compromise with Mongolia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Soviet Union. In the 1990s, sustained separatist violence in Xinjiang produced compromises in disputes with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

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46. Austin, *China's Ocean Frontier*.

47. *Zhongguo waijiao* [China's diplomacy] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2001), p. 63.

48. "Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea," November 2002, <http://www.aseansec.org/13163.htm>.

Political instability has also occurred during three different periods, two of which produced attempts to compromise. In the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward in the early 1960s, concerns about bolstering political stability throughout the country created additional incentives to compromise in disputes with Mongolia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Soviet Union, as well as North Korea. Following the 1989 Tiananmen crisis and worries about the viability of its socialist system, China attempted compromise in disputes with its socialist neighbors the Soviet Union, Laos, and Vietnam; in addition, it reached confidence-building agreements with India and Bhutan. A third period of political instability during the early phase of the Cultural Revolution (1966–69) failed to produce efforts to compromise. China's senior leaders, however, created this chaos deliberately, which did not initially reflect a threat to the regime's security from society. Moreover, during the most acute phase, much of the central government ceased to function, including the foreign ministry.

In the absence of internal threats to regime security, China's leaders have adopted delaying strategies instead. China attempted to compromise only twice in disputes before 1960. It did not offer new compromises in any territorial dispute from the mid-1960s until the late 1980s.<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, regime insecurity leaves unexplained three attempts by China to compromise. First, China and Burma held negotiations in 1956 after border patrols clashed. Even though China offered to exchange some disputed areas, the impetus for the talks was to reduce the potential for escalation, as Nationalist troops from Taiwan had taken refuge in Burma and periodically raided the border of Yunnan Province.<sup>50</sup> Second, in 1957, China transferred White Dragon Tail Island (*bailongwei dao*) in the Tonkin Gulf to North Vietnam. Newly available sources indicate that Chairman Mao Zedong ordered this compromise to aid Hanoi in its conflict with the United States.<sup>51</sup> Third, in October 2004, China and Russia agreed to divide control of two disputed river islands: Abagaitu in the Argun River and Heixiazi at the confluence of the Amur and Ussuri rivers. As no internal threats to regime security preceded this

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49. During this period, China held negotiations with the Soviet Union (1969–78), Vietnam (1977), and India (1981–present).

50. Han Huaizhi and Tan Jingqiao, eds., *Dangdai zhongguo jundui de junshi gongzuo (shang)* [The military work of contemporary China's armed forces] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1989), Vol. 1, pp. 367–379.

51. Li Dechao, "Bailong weidao zhengming [Rectification of White Dragon Island's name]," *Zhongguo bianjiang shidi yanjiu baogao*, Vols. 1–2, No. 3 (1988), pp. 21–23; and Mao, *Bianfang lun*, p. 137.

agreement, China's compromise most likely stemmed from external factors, especially the need to deepen ties with Russia.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to regime insecurity, China's relative military power has influenced its willingness to compromise in frontier disputes. With a large standing army, China has more leverage in disputes on its land border where it can most easily project its military power. While the authority of the state remains weak in the frontiers, China's relative strength decreases the risk that other states will perceive concessions in frontier disputes as a sign of weakness. By contrast, China has faced real limits to projecting power in offshore island disputes and faces greater risks that any concessions will be perceived as signaling weakness. Nevertheless, while military power increases the likelihood that China might compromise in a given frontier dispute, it cannot explain the variation in the timing of China's efforts to compromise or the motivation for compromise. On land, its relative power has been largely constant since 1949, while attempts to compromise have varied widely over time.

The following sections examine the relationship between regime insecurity and compromise in China's territorial disputes. The analysis demonstrates a clear correlation between the onset of internal threats and efforts to compromise. Where possible given limited access to archival material, the analysis also demonstrates that China's leaders acted in accordance with the hypothesized mechanisms of regime insecurity.

### *The Tibetan Revolt*

In 1959, a revolt in Tibet against Chinese rule sparked the largest internal threat to the PRC's territorial integrity. The outbreak of the revolt dramatically increased the cost of maintaining territorial disputes with Burma, Nepal, and India. China offered concessions in these disputes in exchange for cooperation to crush the rebellion.

#### UNREST IN THE SOUTHWESTERN FRONTIER

After occupying Tibet in 1951, the PRC confronted severe obstacles to governing the region. Tibet maintained strong social, cultural, and economic ties with

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52. "Russian Foreign Minister Gives TV Interview Focusing on Ties with Neighbors," Moscow NTV (in Russian), November 14, 2004, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) CEP-2004-1114-000063.

its Himalayan neighbors, while the central government lacked any legacy institutions and ethnic cadres with which to integrate Tibet into the new state. As a result, China's leaders chose to govern Tibet indirectly through the Dalai Lama and existing Tibetan institutions. From the mid-1950s, however, a series of armed uprisings against Chinese rule in the ethnic Tibetan Kham region of Sichuan Province grew into a widespread revolt within Tibet proper.<sup>53</sup> At its height in late 1958 and early 1959, the revolt involved perhaps more than 50,000 rebels, who controlled most of Tibet apart from Lhasa, Shigatse, and the main highways.<sup>54</sup> The revolt was especially threatening because of the central government's already weak position in the region and because Tibet's basically undefended international border left it vulnerable to external influence.<sup>55</sup>

Before the Tibetan revolt erupted, China had rebuffed efforts by neighboring states to open negotiations over disputed territory. In 1954, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru touched on the border in their talks, but agreed not to pursue it.<sup>56</sup> In 1956, Nepal sought to open talks with China over their border, but China demurred.<sup>57</sup> The same year, China and Burma held negotiations after a clash between border patrols, but they stalled in early 1957 when China would not accede to Burma's demands concerning four disputed areas.<sup>58</sup>

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53. Gompo Tashi Andrugstang, *Four Rivers, Six Ranges: Reminiscences of the Resistance Movement in Tibet* (Dharamsala: Information and Publicity Office of H.H. The Dalai Lama, 1973); and Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of the Snows: A History of Modern Tibet since 1947* (New York: Penguin Compass, 1999), pp. 170–218.

54. Although A. Tom Grunfeld estimates that the number of rebels ranges from 50,000 to 200,000, Chinese sources indicate that the number ranges from 23,000 to 87,000. See Grunfeld, *The Making of Modern Tibet*, rev. ed. (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), pp. 134–135; Li Peisheng and Li Guozhen, eds., *Pingxi xizang panluan* [Suppressing the Tibetan rebellion] (Lasa: Xizang renmin chubanshe, 1995), p. 17; Jamyang Norbu, "The Tibetan Resistance Movement and the Role of the CIA," in Robert Barnett, ed., *Resistance and Reform in Tibet* (London: Hurst and Company, 1994), p. 189; and Yang Qiliang, *Wang Shangrong jiangjun* [General Wang Shangrong] (Beijing: Dangdai zhongguo chubanshe, 2000), p. 403.

55. The PLA began to garrison the entire border only after the 1959 revolt. See Jiang Siyi and Li Hui, eds., *ZhongYin bianjing ziwai fanji zuozhan shi* [History of China's war of self-defensive counterattack against India] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 1994), p. 86; and Wu Lengxi, *Shinian lunzhan: 1956–1966 ZhongSu guanxi huiyilu* [Ten years of polemics: A recollection of Sino-Soviet relations from 1956 to 1966] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1999), p. 212. Author interview, Beijing, February 2003.

56. Jin Chongji, ed., *Zhou Enlai zhuan* [Biography of Zhou Enlai] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1998), Vol. 3, p. 1492.

57. S.D. Muni, *Foreign Policy of Nepal* (New Delhi: National Publishing House, 1973), p. 104.

58. Jin, *Zhou Enlai zhuan*, pp. 1229–1324; Dorothy Woodman, *The Making of Burma* (London: Cresset Press, 1962), pp. 535–536; and Yao Zhongming, "Zhou Enlai zongli jiejie ZhongMian bianjie wenti de guanghui yeji" [Premier Zhou Enlai's glorious achievement in settling the Sino-

The Tibetan revolt, however, increased the cost to China of maintaining disputes with India, Nepal, and Burma. The main focus of the regime's response to the rebellion was a brutal pacification campaign combined with political reform designed to penetrate Tibetan society and implement direct rule.<sup>59</sup> But achievement of these domestic goals required peaceful borders and stable ties with neighboring states. The presence of territorial disputes threatened to complicate consolidation of central authority in Tibet because neighbors might provide support for rebels or even seek to intervene in the conflict. As PLA units pursued rebels fleeing to the south, they encountered Indian troops and clashed violently on August 25, 1959, near Longju. At the time, Chinese leaders believed that India was harboring rebel groups and allowing them to operate from bases in India.<sup>60</sup>

#### CHINA COMPROMISES WITH BURMA, NEPAL, AND INDIA

In response to growing tensions on the border, China moved to compromise in its territorial disputes with Tibet's neighbors. Although India was the most important state, compromise was also pursued with Nepal and Burma to stabilize portions of Tibet's border and help to pressure India to reach a compromise agreement with China. Immediately following the Longju clash, Zhou ordered an investigation of the incident. On September 8, Mao convened a Politburo meeting, whose participants agreed that China should prepare to seek a negotiated settlement to all aspects of its border dispute with India.<sup>61</sup> After the meeting, China first approached Nepal and Burma to open negotiations. On September 24, Zhou wrote to Burmese Prime Minister Ne Win, stating his interest in reopening talks based on earlier correspondence between the two sides.<sup>62</sup> On October 9, Zhou met with a visiting Nepalese minister and expressed China's willingness to enter into border talks.<sup>63</sup> After a second armed

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Burmese border problem], in Pei Jianzhang, ed., *Yanjiu Zhou Enlai: Waijiao sixiang yu shijian* [Studying Zhou Enlai: Diplomatic thought and practice] (Beijing: World Affairs Press, 1989), pp. 94–111.

59. Li and Li, *Pingxi xizang panluan*; and Yang Chengwu, "Xizang panluan" [The Tibetan rebellion], in *Zongcan moubu: huiyi shiliao* [General Staff Department: Recollections] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1997), pp. 532–548.

60. Maxwell, *India's China War*.

61. Wu, *Shinian lunzhan*, p. 212.

62. On Ne's June 4, 1959, letter and Zhou's last offer of June 1958, see Woodman, *The Making of Burma*, p. 536.

63. Li Ping and Ma Zhisun, eds., *Zhou Enlai nianpu (zhong)* [A chronicle of Zhou Enlai's life] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1997), Vol. 2, p. 260; and Leo E. Rose, *Nepal: Strategy for Survival* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 223.

clash occurred between Chinese and Indian forces in late October 1959, Zhou offered to hold talks with Nehru. In December, Nehru still refused to meet with Zhou.

In January 1960, the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) discussed the Chinese-Indian dispute during a ten-day working meeting in Hangzhou. PBSC members agreed that the border with India should be settled swiftly through negotiations based on the principle of “give and take” (*huliang hurang*). According to one participant’s recollection, the PBSC agreed that “China should make some concessions [and] India should make some concessions.”<sup>64</sup> The PBSC also agreed to adopt a similar approach on China’s other disputed borders and decided that China should seek a quick settlement with Burma and Nepal.

Official documents link these high-level decisions to the internal situation in Tibet. Newly available General Staff Department regulations from May 1960 outlined the leadership’s general policy direction for stabilizing Tibet: “To stabilize our southwestern border region quickly, we must not only bring stability to the interior (*neibu*) but also to the exterior (*waibu*).”<sup>65</sup> An internal PLA bulletin stressed the same theme: “The PLA must work hard to make our southwest and northwest regional borders peaceful and secure. This is the best way to settle the problem of our [frontier] regions.”<sup>66</sup>

Although India remained its most important negotiating partner, China sought first to reach agreements with Burma and Nepal. In early January 1960, Zhou invited Prime Minister Ne Win to visit Beijing. On January 28, 1960, the two sides signed a preliminary agreement, where China acceded to many of Burma’s demands from early 1957.<sup>67</sup> In early February, perhaps persuaded by China’s agreement with Burma, Nehru agreed to meet with Zhou. In early March, before Zhou traveled to New Delhi, Nepalese Prime Minister Bishweshwar Koirala visited Beijing for negotiations in which China and Nepal reached a preliminary agreement to settle their dispute based on the customary line of control.<sup>68</sup> During and after these talks, China also gained

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64. Wu, *Shinian lunzhan*, p. 248.

65. Jiang and Li, *ZhongYin bianjing ziwei fanji zuozhan shi*, p. 458.

66. Quoted in J. Chester Cheng, ed., *Politics of the Chinese Red Army* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution, 1966), p. 191.

67. Jin, *Zhou Enlai zhuan*, pp. 1929–1324; and Woodman, *The Making of Burma*, pp. 535–536.

68. Arthur Lall, *How Communist China Negotiates* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), pp. 199–200; and Yang Gongsu, *Zhongguo dui waiguo qinlue ganshe xizang difang douzheng shi* [History of China’s struggle against foreign aggression and intervention in Tibet] (Beijing: Zangxue chubanshe, 1992), pp. 322–325.

other assistance in securing its southwestern frontier, including agreements with Nepal to regulate the movement of people across the border and to increase border trade, as well as permission to conduct limited military operations on Nepalese territory against Tibetan rebels and in Burma against remnant Nationalist troops.<sup>69</sup>

Before departing for New Delhi, Zhou personally drafted a plan for his talks with Nehru. In his most optimistic scenario, Zhou hoped to reach an agreement that was “the same as with Burma and Nepal,” namely one based on compromise.<sup>70</sup> In those agreements, the acceptance of the McMahon Line with Burma and affirmation of the implied direction of the line with Nepal clearly suggested that China would also accept the line as the boundary in the eastern sector with India, which would have addressed India’s largest concern.<sup>71</sup> Newly available sources indicate that, during the talks, Zhou proposed a territorial swap with Nehru. In their sixth meeting, Zhou offered to recognize India’s position in the eastern sector if India accepted China’s sovereignty over the Aksai Chin area in the west.<sup>72</sup>

The April 1960 talks between Zhou and Nehru failed spectacularly. Nevertheless, China’s attempt to compromise in its dispute with India supports the logic of regime insecurity. The outbreak of rebellion in Tibet dramatically increased the cost of disputing territory with Burma, Nepal, and India. By seeking to focus on the consolidation of authority in Tibet and securing its borders, China dropped any large or inflexible claims it might have pressed against its Himalayan neighbors. Domestic priorities for political stability in Tibet trumped competition over disputed territory. Without the Tibetan rebellion in 1959, China would probably not have even entered into negotiations with these states, much less offered significant territorial concessions.

External balancing offers the main alternative explanation for China’s willingness to compromise following the revolt in Tibet. Based on balance of threat

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69. John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), p. 148; Han and Tan, *Dangdai zhongguo jundui de junshi gongzuo (shang)*, pp. 369–379; and Yang Gongsu, *Zhongguo dui waiguo qinlue ganshe xizang difang douzheng shi*, pp. 324–325.

70. Zhou Enlai quoted in Li and Ma, *Zhou Enlai nianpu (zhong)*, p. 302; and Shi Zhongquan, *Zhou Enlai de zhuoyue gongxian* [Zhou Enlai’s great contributions] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1993), p. 393.

71. The McMahon Line serves as roughly the line of control between China and India in the eastern sector. Britain drew the line during the Simla Conference on Tibet in 1913–14 attended by Chinese and Tibetan representatives, but it was not ratified by the Chinese government. See Maxwell, *India’s China War*, pp. 46–56.

72. Li and Ma, *Zhou Enlai nianpu (zhong)*, pp. 304–314.



theory, this explanation asserts that China settled not to consolidate its domestic position within Tibet, but to balance against external threats from neighboring states to its influence in the region.<sup>73</sup> Despite the emerging Chinese-Soviet split, China's compromise attempts in the early 1960s were not designed to improve China's position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. China's initial offers to compromise with Burma, Nepal, and India occurred in late 1959 and early 1960 when relations between China and the Soviet Union remained cordial despite disagreement over policy toward the United States and other issues that surfaced in 1958. Most important, China's efforts to compromise from January to April 1960 occurred before the July 1960 decision to withdraw the remaining Soviet experts working in China and the Soviet decision to provide India with limited military assistance in the middle of 1961.<sup>74</sup>

Likewise, China's attempts to compromise with Burma and Nepal were not part of an effort to balance against India. Although India was more threatening to China after 1959, this was not due to increased Indian diplomatic activity in the region or a rise in Indian power. Instead, China's leaders viewed India as threatening because of their own insecurity in Tibet and their beliefs about India's ambitions in the area. More generally, if China was seeking to counter India's growing influence in the region, territorial compromise with India probably would not have furthered this objective. If China and India were really only competing for influence over buffer states such as Nepal and to a lesser extent Burma, China probably would have adopted a much more assertive policy in the territorial dispute. Instead, China's leaders were countering internal threats to territorial integrity, which they believed that India could exacerbate or exploit.

### *The Great Leap Forward*

In the spring of 1962, China faced renewed unrest in the frontiers during a period of intense regime instability following the failure of the Great Leap Forward (1958–60).<sup>75</sup> This combination of internal threats to territorial integrity and political stability increased the cost of maintaining frontier disputes with

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73. See, for example, Hyer, "The Politics of China's Boundary Disputes and Settlements"; and Watson, *The Frontiers of China*.

74. Allen S. Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence: India and Indochina* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), p. 73.

75. The Great Leap Forward was a campaign that used mass mobilization techniques, including the collectivization of agriculture, to achieve rapid economic growth.

its neighbors. China pursued compromise in disputes with North Korea, Mongolia, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Soviet Union to recover from the economic crisis by easing external tensions.

#### POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN CHINA PROPER

In early 1962, the dramatic failure of the Great Leap Forward and the devastating famine that it unleashed posed a serious threat to China's political stability. A combination of misguided agricultural policies, natural disasters, and bureaucratic incompetence led to the starvation of somewhere between 20 and 30 million people from 1959 to 1962. Grain production in 1960 was only 75.5 percent of that in 1958. Industrial output also decreased significantly.<sup>76</sup> China's gross domestic product declined by 27 percent in 1961 alone.<sup>77</sup> In response, China's leaders focused on rebuilding the economy and consolidating the regime.<sup>78</sup> Retrenchment became official policy at the Ninth Plenum in January 1961 with the slogan "readjustment, consolidation, filling out, and raising standards." Mao Zedong withdrew from day-to-day policymaking as Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping moved to oversee reconsolidation efforts. To relieve pressure in urban areas, and presumably to quell potential unrest, the Central Committee decided to reduce China's urban population by 25 million through rustication.<sup>79</sup>

At the same time, China also faced renewed internal threats to its territorial integrity. From April to May 1960, more than 60,000 Kazakhs fled from Xinjiang to the Soviet Union, and violent protests erupted in Yining, a town near the border. At the time, China faced gaping vulnerabilities because Xinjiang's border was basically undefended—the PLA maintained only eight frontier defense stations and a total of 110 soldiers on this boundary.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, recent archival research demonstrates that Chinese leaders believed that Moscow was provoking ethnic unrest in the area by issuing false Soviet iden-

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76. Kenneth Lieberthal, "The Great Leap Forward and the Split in the Yanan Leadership," in John King Fairbank and Roderick MacFarquhar, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 14: *The Emergence of Revolutionary China, 1949–1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pt. 1, p. 318.

77. World Development Indicators, various years, <http://devdata.worldbank.org/dataonline>.

78. Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, Vol. 3: *The Coming of the Cataclysm, 1961–1966* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 1–121.

79. Personal communication with Lei Guang, May 2002.

80. *Gongan budui: zongshu, dashiji, biaoce* [Public security troops: Summary, chronology, statistics] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1997), p. 78.

tity papers to Uighurs and Kazakhs, broadcasting propaganda encouraging them to flee, and facilitating the flow of people across the border.<sup>81</sup>

As the domestic situation deteriorated, external challenges to China's territorial integrity exacerbated this regime insecurity. In early 1962, India executed a "forward policy" of establishing posts in disputed areas to challenge China's territorial claims. Although the outposts themselves were not especially threatening, they were viewed as a renewed challenge to China's control of Tibet because they occurred just as China's leaders had completed the pacification campaign and consolidated control of the region. As Zhou explained in 1960, the Indian leadership "want[s] Tibet . . . as a 'buffer state' under India's influence, becoming its protectorate."<sup>82</sup> In March and April 1962, Taiwan's leader, Chiang Kai-shek, mobilized his forces for an assault on the mainland. China's leaders correctly concluded that Chiang sought to profit from instability on the mainland, which increased concerns about territorial integrity and frontier stability more broadly.<sup>83</sup>

Taken together, these events greatly increased China's costs of maintaining territorial disputes along the frontier. To support regime consolidation and economic rebuilding, China pursued a moderate foreign policy and sought to avoid territorial conflicts and tensions on three fronts. In addition, government documents connect this foreign policy orientation with the domestic situation. In January 1962, for example, three foreign policy advisers in a letter to Zhou Enlai and other senior leaders linked the recovery from the economic crisis with a relaxation of tensions abroad.<sup>84</sup>

#### CHINA COMPROMISES WITH NORTH KOREA, MONGOLIA, PAKISTAN, AFGHANISTAN, AND THE SOVIET UNION

As regime insecurity grew in April and May, China moved to open talks with North Korea, Mongolia, and Pakistan. Previously, in 1959 and 1961, it had declined Pakistani attempts to discuss their disputed border. But on February 28,

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81. Li Danhui, "Dui 1962 nian Xinjiang Yita shijian qiyin de lishi kaocha (xu) [Historical investigation of the origins of the 1962 Yita incident in Xinjiang (cont.)]," *Dangshi yanjiu ziliao*, No. 5 (1999), pp. 1–8.

82. *Zhou Enlai waijiao wenxuan* [Zhou Enlai's selected works on diplomacy] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1990), p. 270.

83. See, for example, Wang Shangrong, "Xin zhongguo jiansheng hou jici zhongda zhanzheng" [Several significant wars after the emergence of new China], in Zhu Yuanshi, ed., *Gongheguo yaoshi koushushi* [Oral histories of important events of the republic] (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1999), pp. 277–278.

84. Xu Zehao, ed., *Wang Jiaxiang nianpu* [A chronicle of Wang Jiaxiang's life] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2001), pp. 488–489.

1962, Beijing finally agreed to consider talks, which were announced in May.<sup>85</sup> Likewise, in 1957 and 1960, China had rebuffed Mongolian efforts to open talks. On April 13, 1962, however, it moved to hold negotiations with Mongolia and proposed measures to maintain peace on the border in light of recent tensions.<sup>86</sup> When Mongolia did not reply, Zhou Enlai met with the Mongolian ambassador in early May to press for talks.<sup>87</sup> During this same period, interviews indicate that China also pushed for talks with North Korea, which Beijing had refused to hold in the early 1950s and in 1960.<sup>88</sup> In June 1962, Zhou met with the North Korean ambassador to discuss their border dispute.<sup>89</sup>

Over the summer of 1962, tensions on the Chinese-Indian border continued to escalate. As India expanded the scope of the forward policy, China resumed patrolling in disputed areas. In late July, after a clash in the Chip Chap valley, China used multiple diplomatic channels to open talks with India, repeating these efforts in September and early October. When India would not agree to unconditional talks, China launched a military campaign to bring it to the negotiating table.<sup>90</sup> During this same period, China began to hold talks with North Korea, Mongolia, and Pakistan, reaching draft or final agreements by the end of the year. In all cases, China offered significant concessions, giving North Korea most of the disputed Changbai (Paekdu) mountain area, conceding roughly 12,000 square kilometers to Mongolia, and transferring 1,942 square kilometers to Pakistan.<sup>91</sup>

In the short term, the timing of these agreements was linked to China's failed efforts to compel India to negotiate and the need to secure restive fron-

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85. Mujtaba Razvi, *The Frontiers of Pakistan: A Study of Frontier Problems in Pakistan's Foreign Policy* (Karachi-Dacca: National Publishing House, 1971), pp. 166–193; and Wang Taiping, ed., *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiao shi, 1957–1969* [Diplomatic history of the People's Republic of China, 1957–1969] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1998), pp. 102–104.

86. Wang, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiao shi, 1957–1969*, p. 101.

87. Li and Ma, *Zhou Enlai nianpu (zhong)*, p. 477. See also Cai, *Bianfang lilun*, p. 11; and Han Nianlong, ed., *Dangdai Zhongguo waijiao* [The diplomacy of contemporary China] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1988), p. 154.

88. Author interview, Beijing, June 2002.

89. Li and Ma, *Zhou Enlai nianpu (zhong)*, p. 486.

90. China wanted to hold unconditional talks on all disputed areas, whereas India only agreed to hold talks on the western sector if China withdrew from all areas claimed by India. See Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*.

91. On Pakistan, see Razvi, *The Frontiers of Pakistan*, pp. 175–177. On North Korea, see Cai, *Bianfang lilun*, p. 9. On Mongolia, see Henry S. Bradsher, "Sino-Soviet Rift Catches Mongolia," *Christian Science Monitor*, January 6, 1964; and Wang, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiao shi, 1957–1969*, p. 102.

tiers during a period of regime instability. In addition, however, the successful conclusion of these agreements helped China to prepare for talks with the Soviets, which China's leaders had decided to pursue in the spring of 1962.<sup>92</sup> Similar to China's agreements with Burma and Nepal in 1960, treaties with North Korea and Mongolia, as "fraternal" socialist neighbors, were concluded in part to persuade Moscow to reach a similar agreement with Beijing. In December 1962, for example, the *People's Daily* opined that the Chinese-Mongolian agreement "set a good example for socialist countries in handling their mutual relations."<sup>93</sup>

In April 1963, after announcing negotiations with Afghanistan, China approached the Soviet Union to hold talks. After several months of correspondence, the two sides met in February 1964. Newly released sources indicate that both sides achieved far more progress in settling their differences than was previously known.<sup>94</sup> In particular, the two sides reached a consensus concerning the eastern sector of the border along the Amur and Ussuri Rivers that was almost identical to the agreement signed in 1991, which gave China control of 52 percent of the contested islands totaling roughly 1,000 square kilometers.<sup>95</sup> The two sides also began discussions on the western sector in Soviet Central Asia. Negotiators adjourned in August 1964 and planned to resume talks in Moscow on October 15, 1964, the day after Nikita Khrushchev was sacked. Soviet leadership change and Mao's famous comments to members of the Japanese Communist Party in July 1964 that China had "yet to settle [its] account" for territories ceded to czarist Russia prevented the resumption of talks. Although Mao quickly claimed that he was only "firing empty canons," Soviet leaders concluded that China harbored irredentist claims despite the draft agreement and earlier statements in the 1964 talks that it would accept the boundaries of these unequal treaties.<sup>96</sup>

Similar to compromise attempts after the Tibetan revolt, external balancing

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92. China did not pursue talks immediately because it sought to undertake additional archival research on the historical changes of the border and strengthen the PLA's frontier defense stations before negotiations commenced. Author interview, Beijing, July 2001.

93. *Renmin ribao* [People's daily], December 27, 1962.

94. Li Lianqing, *Lengnuan suiyue: yi bolan de ZhongSu guanxi* [Hot and cold times: The twists and turns of Chinese-Soviet relations] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1999), pp. 323–324; Tang Jiaxuan, ed., *Zhongguo waijiao cidian* [Dictionary of China's diplomacy] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2000), p. 725; and Wang, *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiao shi, 1959–1969*, pp. 254–256. Author interviews, Beijing, July 2001–June 2002.

95. Tang, *Zhongguo waijiao cidian*, p. 725.

96. Yang Kuisong, "The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Rapprochement," *Cold War History*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (August 2000), p. 23.

offers a persuasive alternative explanation for China's behavior in 1962. This explanation asserts that China's many compromises in 1962 reflected concerns about the increasing threat posed by deteriorating relations with Moscow. Nevertheless, China did not seek to settle with these same states during earlier periods of tension with the Soviet Union, especially after the withdrawal of advisers in 1960. Chinese-Soviet ties were relatively stable in 1961, as economic cooperation continued and the sale of MiG fighter aircraft was broached. Moreover, China also held substantive negotiations with the Soviet Union, which is inconsistent with balancing behavior. If China were balancing against the Soviet Union, its best strategy might have been to strengthen its border security, while downplaying the presence of a dispute to bide time to improve its military position. This is precisely what China did after the open split in 1964 with the rapid militarization of the Chinese-Soviet border. Finally, many of these states offered little leverage to China in its dispute with the Soviet Union. Pakistan was a member of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization, an anti-communist alliance, while Afghanistan was not part of the Soviet orbit at the time. Moreover, Chinese-Mongolian ties had deteriorated in the mid-1950s, well before China had moved to settle the dispute, while North Korea was firmly on China's side in its ideological competition with the Soviet Union.

### *Tiananmen Upheaval*

In 1989, the upheaval in Tiananmen Square posed an internal threat to the stability of China's communist regime. This legitimacy crisis, exacerbated by the weakening of other socialist governments worldwide, increased the cost of maintaining territorial disputes with the Soviet Union, Laos, and Vietnam. China offered concessions in these disputes in exchange for cooperation to counter diplomatic isolation and ensure the continuation of Deng Xiaoping's domestic reform agenda.

#### CRISIS AT THE CORE

The end of the Cold War had a paradoxical effect on how China's leaders perceived their security. The decline and then disintegration of the Soviet Union greatly increased China's territorial security, removing any serious threat to its northern border and eliminating potential encirclement by Soviet forces based in Vietnam. Moreover, this appeared to present an ideal moment for China to

regain territory it had long disputed with the Soviet Union and its republics, which were in no position to resist Chinese pressure.

Nevertheless, the end of the Cold War ushered in a period of unprecedented regime insecurity for China's leaders. The demonstrations in Tiananmen highlighted popular dissatisfaction with the CCP's leadership and the state of reform, while the violent crackdown and subsequent suppression further alienated China's leaders from its people.<sup>97</sup> External trends aggravated these internal sources of insecurity.<sup>98</sup> Sanctions and the rapid deterioration of relations with the United States and other Western states threatened to undermine China's opening and reform policy, which required access to foreign capital, technology, and markets. The collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and then the disintegration of the Soviet Union underscored China's vulnerability to internal change and left China's leaders with few diplomatic sources of support for their increasingly embattled regime.

In response, paramount leader Deng Xiaoping led an effort to consolidate the position of the CCP through maintaining domestic stability and continuing economic reform. To support these goals, Deng crafted a moderate foreign policy based in part on improving ties with regional states to counter China's diplomatic isolation and maintain access to markets and sources of investment.<sup>99</sup> Deng instructed in September 1989 that China's leaders "should be calm . . . quietly immerse ourselves in practical work and to accomplish something, something for China."<sup>100</sup> In the months that followed, this became known as the 20-character policy: "Observe things coolly, deal with things calmly, keep a firm footing, hide our capacities and bide our time, get some things done" [*lengjing guancha, chenzhuo yingfu, wenzhu zhenjiao, taoguang yanghui, yousuo zuowei*].<sup>101</sup> Improving ties with neighboring states through ter-

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97. Chinese sources refer explicitly to the concept of political security in contrast to territorial security and economic security. See, for instance, Yan Xuetong, "Shiyan Zhongguo de anquan huanjing [Preliminary analysis of China's security environment]," *Dangdai guoji wenti yanjiu*, No. 4 (1994), pp. 35–41.

98. Richard Baum, *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 247–310.

99. See, for example, Zhang Baijia, "Jiushi niandai de zhongguo neizheng yu waijiao" [China's domestic politics and diplomacy in the 1990s], *Zhonggong dangshi yanjiu*, No. 6 (2001), pp. 29–34.

100. *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* [Deng Xiaoping's selected works] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993), Vol. 3, p. 321.

101. For an authoritative statement of these phrases, see Qian Qichen's entry in Wang Taiping, ed., *Deng Xiaoping waijiao sixiang yanjiu lunwen ji* [Collected papers on the study of Deng Xiaoping's diplomatic thought] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1996).

ritorial compromise, especially other socialist states, was part of this broader strategy. As Foreign Minister Qian Qichen remarked in 1990, "Diplomacy is the extension of internal affairs."<sup>102</sup>

#### CHINA COMPROMISES WITH THE SOVIET UNION, LAOS, AND VIETNAM

China's most important compromise during this period was with the Soviet Union. The impetus for the 1991 agreement, however, came not from Beijing but from Moscow. In 1986, President Mikhail Gorbachev stated that the Soviet Union would accept the *thalweg* principle along the eastern sector of the border, thereby acceding to one of China's long-standing demands and signaling a return to the terms of the 1964 draft agreement.<sup>103</sup> Before the Tiananmen crisis, China insisted upon achieving a package deal that would settle disputes along the eastern and western sectors of the Chinese-Soviet border. After 1989, however, China agreed to pursue separate agreements because improved relations with the Soviet Union had become much more important. In 1990, the pace of talks quickened, with two meetings of the joint working group as well as meetings of a border survey group and an agreement drafting group.<sup>104</sup> In the 1991 eastern sector agreement, China received approximately 52 percent of the disputed areas.<sup>105</sup> China offered further concessions when disputes arose during the demarcation process.<sup>106</sup>

China also compromised in frontier disputes with its other socialist neighbors, Laos and Vietnam. By compromising with these states, China sought not only to normalize relations and thus strengthen neighboring socialist regimes, but also to facilitate the economic development of the frontiers. China and Laos opened talks in early 1990 and signed an agreement to divide evenly their disputed areas in 1991. China and Vietnam opened negotiations in 1991 and reached a preliminary agreement in 1993 on principles for settling their dispute. The animosity created by the 1979 China-Vietnam war and a decade

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102. Quoted in *Beijing Review*, October 15–21, 1990, p. 12.

103. The Soviet decision is consistent with the logic of regime insecurity because the growing Soviet economic crisis prompting glasnost and perestroika increased the cost of strained relations with China.

104. *Zhongguo waijiao gailan* [Survey of China's diplomacy] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1991), p. 235.

105. Tang, *Zhongguo waijiao cidian*, p. 725.

106. Akihiro Iwashita, *A 4,000 Kilometer Journey along the Sino-Russian Border* (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, 2004). Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, China had considered dropping its claim to the Pamir mountains in exchange for the return of Black Bear Island. Author interviews, Beijing, June–July 2001.



of border clashes delayed reaching a final agreement evenly dividing the disputed areas until 1999. Obstacles to a final settlement included the need for massive mine-sweeping operations along the border as well as internal resistance on both sides from those who opposed making concessions to a former adversary.<sup>107</sup> During this period, China signed agreements to increase development of frontier regions through cross-border trade.

At the same time, China also moved to improve ties with India. In 1991, a joint working group established in 1989 began substantive discussions, which led to the signing of the confidence-building agreements in 1993 and 1996.<sup>108</sup> Both agreements helped to stabilize the border, improving relations and reducing potential for inadvertent escalation between the two sides. In 1996, China reportedly again offered a compromise based on exchanging positions in the eastern and western sectors.<sup>109</sup> Similar to Vietnam, the legacy of war and internal opposition posed serious obstacles to a final settlement. The 1993 and 1996 confidence-building measures, however, have established an effective boundary along the Line of Actual Control, giving China most of what it sought—improved ties with an important neighbor to create breathing space for internal consolidation and facilitate regional trade.

External balancing provides an unconvincing alternative explanation for China's behavior during this period: that China sought to balance against increasing U.S. power after the Cold War, not bolster the security of its socialist regime. Two factors weigh against this interpretation. During this period, China's security policy, including defense spending, military ties, and military training, did not keep pace with the dramatic shift in the global balance of power after 1991.<sup>110</sup> If China's compromise attempts were the result of balancing against the United States, they were exceptional from the perspective of Chinese security policy at the time. Second, China's compromises with the Soviet Union preceded its collapse by several years. Although the initiative for

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107. For example, the PLA reportedly withdrew its members from the border joint working group in protest for the concessions that were made. Author interview, Beijing, July 2002.

108. Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu and Jing-dong Yuan, "Resolving the Sino-Indian Border Dispute: Building Confidence through Cooperative Monitoring," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (March/April 2001), pp. 351–376.

109. "Opportunity to Resolve Border Dispute with China Missed," *Telegraph* (Calcutta), May 15, 1997, in FBIS FTS-1997-0515-001285.

110. Alastair Iain Johnston, "Realism(s) and Chinese Security Policy in the Post-Cold War World," in Ethan B. Kapstein and Michael Mastanduno, eds., *Unipolar Politics: Realism and State Strategies after the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 261–318.

these talks stemmed from Moscow, the pace quickened dramatically after the Tiananmen crackdown but before the Soviet collapse. The 1991 Chinese-Soviet draft agreement was concluded in 1990, before the full extent of Soviet weakness was known, and signed in April 1991, before the August revolution that set in motion the collapse of the Soviet Union. Likewise, China compromised in its dispute with Laos and opened talks with Vietnam before the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

### *Xinjiang Unrest*

Soon after the Tiananmen upheaval, ethnic unrest in Xinjiang posed a new internal threat to the PRC's territorial integrity. The demonstrations and armed uprisings increased the cost of maintaining territorial disputes with Xinjiang's neighbors, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. China moved to compromise in these disputes in exchange for cooperation to reduce external support for separatists.

#### INSTABILITY IN THE NORTHWESTERN FRONTIER

In the early 1990s, ethnic unrest erupted in Xinjiang, compounding the legitimacy crisis after Tiananmen. Mounting grievances among Uighur and other ethnic minorities against the central government resulted in an unprecedented number of demonstrations, bombings, assassinations, and armed clashes with security forces throughout the 1990s.<sup>111</sup> Although the scale of unrest was small compared with the Tibetan revolt, it was nevertheless a source of considerable concern for China's leaders, especially after Tiananmen. The ethnic unrest in Xinjiang underscored the breadth of dissatisfaction with the regime in frontier areas at a time when it faced instability and discontent among its core constituents.

China's response to this unrest included a comprehensive effort to engage the newly independent states in Central Asia. For China's leaders, territorial disputes had become much more costly to maintain because they blocked as-

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111. CCP Organization Department, ed., *Zhongguo diaochaobao baogao: xin xingshi xia renmin neibu maodun yanjiu* [China investigative report: Research on internal contradictions of the people under new circumstances] (Beijing: Zhongyang bianyi chubanshe, 2001), pp. 243–281; Man Zongzhou, "Xinjiang minzu fenlie zhuyi de houdong ji fan minzu fenlie douzheng yingdang zhuyi de wenti [Issues to note in Xinjiang's ethnic separatist activities and the antiseperatist struggle]," *Xinjiang sheke luntan*, No. 3 (1996), pp. 43–45; and James Millward, "Violent Separatism in Xinjiang: A Critical Assessment," Policy Studies No. 6 (Washington, D.C.: East-West Center Washington, 2004).

sistance that China sought to maintain stability within Xinjiang. In particular, China needed cooperation with its neighbors to prevent the spread of pan-Islamic and pan-Turkic forces to the region, limit external support for separatists within Xinjiang, and increase cross-border trade as part of a broader strategy to reduce tensions among ethnic groups through development. Attempts to settle outstanding territorial disputes were an important component of China's engagement of the region. Facing renewed internal unrest, China's leaders valued stable and secure borders more than ever before. For example, a leaked document from the CCP's Central Committee on China's Xinjiang policy instructed the government to secure the border and use diplomacy to "urge these countries to limit and weaken the activities of separatist forces inside their border."<sup>112</sup>

#### CHINA COMPROMISES WITH KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGYZSTAN, AND TAJIKISTAN

The collapse of the Soviet Union might have presented China with an ideal opportunity to regain the more than 34,000 square kilometers of territory it claimed in Central Asia. In the context of ethnic unrest, however, China chose to improve ties with the newly independent states to deny external support to separatist groups in Xinjiang. China first pursued compromise in its dispute with Kazakhstan, Xinjiang's largest neighbor, starting talks less than a year after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the 1994, 1996, and 1997 agreements, China made significant concessions, holding roughly 22 percent of disputed areas.<sup>113</sup> In 1996 and 1999, China made similar concessions in agreements with Kyrgyzstan, where it received about 32 percent of the disputed land.<sup>114</sup> The civil war that erupted after the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, stalled negotiations with Tajikistan. Talks resumed in 1997, leading to a preliminary agreement in 1999 that divided one disputed sector evenly and a supplemental agreement in 2002. China made a large concession in this agreement, dropping most of its 28,000-square-kilometer claim to the Pamir mountains, a claim it had pressed since the late nineteenth century.<sup>115</sup>

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112. Central Committee, "Document No. 7 (1996)," in Human Rights Watch, *China: State Control of Religion*, Update No. 1 (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1998).

113. Aleksey Gulyayev, "China-Kazakhstan: The Border Dispute Continues," *Izvestiya*, April 30, 1999, in FBIS FTS-1999-0504-001086; and Zhang Zhouxiang, *Xinjiang bianfang gaiyao* [Summary of Xinjiang's frontier defense] (Urmuchi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 1999), p. 135.

114. Viktoriya Panfilova, "Is Kyrgyzstan Being Reduced in Size?" *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, May 16, 2001, in FBIS CEP-2001-0516-000097; and Zhang, *Xinjiang bianfang gaiyao*, p. 135.

115. In the 2002 supplemental agreement, China received only 1,000 of the 28,000 square kilome-

In return, China received assistance in eliminating external support for separatists within Xinjiang. In numerous public statements, Central Asian leaders pledged their help to China. During the signing of the 1997 border agreement, for example, President Askar Akayev stated that Kyrgyzstan “would not allow any force to make use of its soil to conduct activities against China.”<sup>116</sup> Likewise, Kazakhstan repatriated suspected separatists to China, dissolved political parties, closed newspapers, and arrested suspected militants.<sup>117</sup> China also used the border negotiations as well as demilitarization talks to lead the establishment of a new regional grouping, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which focuses partly on enhancing political stability of member states through trade, counterterrorism cooperation, and confidence-building measures.<sup>118</sup>

The timing of these compromises do not support arguments based on external threats, particularly efforts to balance against U.S. influence in the region. China signed many agreements well before the upsurge of U.S. interest in Caspian oil in the mid-1990s. While China is wary of a U.S. military presence in the region, before the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., on September 11, 2001, this presence was limited to training exercises for peacekeeping operations held in 1997 and 2000. China did become much more concerned about the U.S. presence after the start of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan in October 2001, but by this time Beijing had signed all but one agreement resolving its territorial disputes with Xinjiang’s neighbors. Likewise, the joint statements issued at various summit meetings and through the SCO did not include many direct references to the United States and stressed instead problems associated with the “three forces” of terrorism, separatism, and extremism.<sup>119</sup>

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ters of the Pamir mountain area. See “Tajikistan Transfers 1,000 km Territory to China,” May 21, 2002, Interfax, in FBIS CEP-2002-0521-000161.

116. “Chinese, Kyrgyzstan Presidents Sign Supplementary Border Agreement,” Xinhua News Agency, August 26, 1999, from Lexis-Nexis.

117. See, for example, Jean-Christophe Peuch, “Central Asia: Uighurs Say States Yield to Chinese,” Radio Free Europe, <http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/2001/03/290320011104726.asp>; “Uighur Separatist Exiles See End to Help from Central Asia,” Agence France-Presse, June 18, 1997, from Lexis-Nexis; and Human Rights Watch, *China: Human Rights Concerns in Xinjiang* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2001).

118. Xu Tao and Li Zhiye, eds., *Shanghai Hezuo Zuzhi: Xin anquan guan yu xin jizhi* [Shanghai Cooperation Organization: New security concept and new mechanism] (Beijing: Shishi chubanshe, 2002).

119. *Zhongguo waijiao* [China’s diplomacy] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, various years).

## *Conclusion*

Regime insecurity best explains China's pattern of cooperation and delay in its territorial disputes. China's leaders have compromised when faced with internal threats to regime security—the revolt in Tibet, the instability following the Great Leap Forward, the legitimacy crisis after the Tiananmen upheaval, and separatist violence in Xinjiang. The timing of compromise efforts, official documents, and statements by China's leaders demonstrate that internal threats, not external ones, account for why and when China pursued cooperation.

While further research is necessary, support for the logic of regime insecurity in China's many disputes serves as a plausibility probe for a more general application of the argument. In territorial disputes, similar domestic sources of compromise might arise under two sets of conditions. First, unrest near international borders should create incentives for leaders to cooperate with adjacent states, such as Iraq's 1975 decision to compromise in a dispute with Iran to crush a Kurdish rebellion.<sup>120</sup> Second, state leaders, especially authoritarian ones, should be more likely to compromise in their disputes when facing political instability or legitimacy crises, such as Argentina's decision to compromise in a dispute with Uruguay or Peru's attempts to settle its dispute with Ecuador before the outbreak of the border war in February 1995.<sup>121</sup>

China's cooperation in territorial disputes reveals a pattern of behavior far more complex than a singular view of China as a territorially ambitious state. China's growing military and economic power has not yet translated into increased territorial revisionism. In the past two decades, China has not issued new territorial demands nor increased the scope of land claimed despite its rising power. Since 1949, China has pursued revisionist claims in its homeland disputes and in offshore island disputes over the Spratlys and Senkakus, but these claims have remained constant despite increases in China's power. With the exception of the Senkakus, the PRC claimed all homeland areas and other offshore islands between 1949 and 1951. These claims reflect a vision of what ought to constitute a modern Chinese state, not ambitions conditioned by

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120. Jasim M. Abdulghani, *Iraq and Iran: The Years of Crisis* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 155.

121. Beth A. Simmons, "Territorial Disputes and Their Resolution: The Case of Ecuador and Peru," *Peaceworks* No. 27 (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1999), pp. 11–12; and Joseph S. Tulchin, *Argentina and the United States: A Conflicted Relationship* (Boston: Twayne, 1990), p. 137.

China's position in the international system. China, weak or strong, has sought to unify Taiwan with the mainland.

In its other territorial disputes, China has pursued mostly status quo goals. The handling of the nineteenth-century unequal treaties that often ceded vast tracts of land reflects this complex approach to territory.<sup>122</sup> In negotiations with neighbors since 1949, the PRC has accepted the general boundaries delimited by these very agreements. Not coincidentally, most of these boundaries lie adjacent to ethnic minority regions. The only past agreements that China has sought to overturn are those linked to the territories of Hong Kong and Macao, also not coincidentally the only Han Chinese areas that have been ceded. In addition, by drafting new boundary agreements with neighbors when settling territorial disputes, China has defined the precise location of most of its land borders. These texts, some of them hundreds of pages in length, remove any ambiguity about the extent of the PRC's sovereignty and raise the costs for pursuing future claims that would breach these agreements.

The prognosis for the settlement of China's six remaining disputes is uncertain. Despite the recent mainland visits of Taiwan's opposition leaders, the PRC is unlikely to abandon its long-standing goal of unification. In addition, the increasing strength of the state in the frontier regions suggests that regime insecurity may be less likely to create incentives for compromise in China's last two frontier disputes with India and Bhutan. As the April 2005 Chinese-Indian agreement on principles for settling their dispute demonstrates, external factors are likely to play a stronger role in this conflict's final settlement, even though the parameters of compromise were established decades ago. Offshore, China and the other claimants have little incentive to compromise over sovereignty because these island groups cost little to dispute and may yield economic or strategic advantages. In addition, the role of nationalism in Chinese foreign policy remains a wild card that might constrain the future ability of China's leaders to pursue compromise.<sup>123</sup>

Nevertheless, the territorial settlements made possible by China's compromises have had important strategic effects in East Asia. China's settlements are linked to the absence of war with opposing states. China has not participated

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122. On China's broader approach to sovereignty, see Allen R. Carlson, *Unifying China, Integrating with the World: Securing Chinese Sovereignty in the Reform Era* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005).

123. Nationalism, however, did not constrain China's ability to reach compromises in the 1990s and beyond, including the important 2002 supplemental agreement with Tajikistan.

in military conflict over contested areas with neighboring states with which it has settled territorial disputes.<sup>124</sup> China's compromises have also enabled the active engagement of the region since the late 1990s that is the hallmark of China's "new diplomacy."<sup>125</sup> By settling disputes and eliminating ambiguity about the location of its borders, China has reassured its neighbors about its intentions and potential ambitions, lessening the security dilemma. Regional diplomatic initiatives would have been much more difficult to pursue under the shadow of hot territorial conflicts, especially in light of ongoing tensions over Taiwan. China's continued need to engage East Asia also suggests that these settlements will endure in the coming years.

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124. The one exception concerns clashes on the border with Burma during the Cultural Revolution involving Burmese communist insurgents. See "Burma Lists Toll at China's Border," *New York Times*, November 8, 1969.

125. Evan S. Medeiros and M. Taylor Fravel, "China's New Diplomacy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 6 (November/December 2003), pp. 22–35; and David Shambaugh, "China Engages Asia: Reshaping the International Order," *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Winter 2004/05), p. 67.