SETTLING THE SCORE:
THE INTERACTIVE EFFECT OF TALKING AND FIGHTING ON WAR
DURATION AND TERMINATION

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Abstract

When will states talk while fighting and when will they evade wartime negotiations? What explains stretches during wars in which there is fighting without talking? The current international relations literature focuses on the causes of war, the durability of post-conflict agreements, and when talks lead to the termination of the war. However, the field ignores a question central to the resolution of limited wars: at what point do leaders finally agree to launch talks during the course of the war? Because the theoretical literature largely assumes that talk is cheap, conflict analyses have failed to explain decisions regarding whether to open talks with the enemy, an obvious precursor for a peace agreement.

This dissertation evaluates the Vietnam War, the Sino-Indian War, and the Korean War – using interviews and primary and secondary sources – to better analyze how information from the battlefield and the bargaining table interact to shape leaders’ decisions about peace talks. I present a ‘ratchet effect’ model to explain the variation in countries’ positions on wartime negotiations. I argue that states fear that a willingness to talk will communicate weakness to their opponents. Their opponents in turn could be encouraged to escalate to a level that is unsustainable or unfavorable to them. The risk of this dynamic explains the long periods of fighting in which there are no direct talks and offers to talk are not taken seriously by either side.

However, not all countries perceive this risk equally. The state with less room to escalate is acutely concerned about the ratchet effect and will therefore set strict preconditions on talking and rarely, if at all, make offers to talk. The country with more room to escalate offers talks but refuses to concede to any preconditions because it is confident in its ability to achieve its goals militarily. Only when the incentive to escalate has been adequately reduced by the mounting
costs of war will leaders be willing to relax their positions on preconditions to allow for the emergence of peace talks.
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Abbreviations

CC: Central Committee
CC CPC: Central Committee of the Communist Party of China
CCP: Chinese Communist Party
CD: Cost differential
CIA: Central Intelligence Agency
CMC: Central Military Commission
CPP: Credible Commitment Problem
CPV: Chinese People’s Volunteers
CWIHP: Cold War International History Project
CWIHPB: Cold War International History Project Bulletin
DIME: Diplomacy, information, military, economics
DMZ: Demilitarized Zone
DPRK: Democratic People’s Republic of Korea
DRV: Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam)
GVN: Government of Vietnam (South Vietnam)
ICC: International Control Commission
ISAF: International Security Assistance Force
JCS: Joint Chiefs of Staff
KMT: Guomindang (the Chinese Nationalists)
KPA: Korean People’s Army
LAC: Line of Actual Control
LBJ: Lyndon B. Johnson
MACV: Military Assistance Command-Vietnam
NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NEBDA: Northeast Border Defense Army
NEFA: North-East Frontier Agency
NLF: National Liberation Front
NSAM: National Security Action Memorandum
NSC: National Security Council
NVN: North Vietnamese
PLA: People’s Liberation Army
PLAAF: People’s Liberation Army Air Force
POL: Petroleum, Oil and Lubricant
POW: Prisoner of War
PRC: People’s Republic of China
ROK: Republic of Korea
UN: United Nations
UNC: United Nations Command
UK: United Kingdom
USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VC: Vietcong
VWP: Vietnamese Worker’s Party
WWI: World War I
WWII: World War II
Chapter One

Introduction

Not every war need to be fought until one side collapses... if one side cannot completely disarm the other, the desire for peace on either side will rise and fall with the probability of further successes and the amount of effort these would require.¹

- Carl Von Clausewitz

The rule of war is not determined by human will, neither the enemy’s, nor that of ours. War has its own rules. Even when the enemy wants to stop, it is difficult for him to do so.²

- Zhou Enlai, Chinese Premier

Why do wars continue on as long as they do before the participants finally agree to negotiate?³ What explains stretches during wars in which there is fighting without talking? What jeopardizes efforts to coordinate diplomatic and military strategy, prolonging the war in question, increasing the costs in terms of life and materiel? What explains stretches during wars in which there is fighting without talking? The current international relations literature focuses on the causes of war, the durability of post-conflict agreements, and when talks lead to the termination of the war. However, the field ignores a question central to the resolution of limited wars: at what point do leaders finally agree to start peace talks? Leaders often refuse to talk, which suggests that they perceive negative consequences associated with communicating a desire to

¹ Carl von Clausewitz, On War, Michael Howard and Peter Paret (eds), (Princeton: Princeton University, 1984), 91-92.
talk independently of whether concessions must be made to reach a settlement. But because the theoretical literature largely assumes that talk is cheap, conflict analyses have failed to explain this hesitancy to open talks with the enemy, an obvious precursor for a peace agreement.

The failure of states to end wars in a timely manner is perhaps even more puzzling than the greatly studied question of why states ever fight to begin with. One of the most powerful insights in international relations is that incomplete information about an adversary’s power and intentions may hinder two states from reaching a peaceful bargaining outcome they both prefer to war. Fighting may occur when two sides disagree about their relative strength, the costs of a potential conflict, or their adversary’s willingness to fight. If conflict occurs because of uncertainty about the war’s likely outcome, then conflict should end once a clear military trend emerges. Yet, wars rarely end at this juncture, and often continue past the point where rational approaches to war termination would predict they should be ended. The conventional wisdom is that this is partly because leaders do not think about how to end a war before they enter into it and somehow get ‘locked in’ once they initiate a conflict. Therefore, any theory of war termination needs to be able to “not only explain why the participants could not reach an agreement without fighting, but also why they fought as long as they did before agreeing to stop.”

In the case of limited wars, states must first agree to wartime talks through which they can then reach a consensus about how to cease hostilities. This dissertation therefore aims to

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4 For more on state’s incentives to misrepresent information, see James D. Fearon, “Rationalist Explanation for War.” *International Organization* 49, No. 3 (Summer 1995): 379-414.
6 For examples of this phenomenon, See Iklé, *Every War Must End*, Chapter One.
7 R. Harrison Wagner, “Bargaining and War,” *American Journal of Political Science* 44, No. 3 (July 2000): 3. For this argument that understanding the causes of war termination is analytically prior to an understanding of the causes of war initiation, see Goemans, *War and Punishment*, 11-12.
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address a more fundamental question on war termination: When will states be willing to engage in talks during wartime and when will they refuse? Past research on war duration and termination has failed to provide an adequate explanation for the materialization of wartime talks or lack thereof. This may be the result of a widely held view that private diplomatic communications are “cheap talk since a state with low resolve may have no disincentive to sending them.” This implies that rational actors should not revise their beliefs about an opponent that demonstrates a willingness to talk. The assumption prominent in the formal literature that countries talk to each other continuously throughout a war is also likely to have stalled progress on the subject. In reality, however, almost all interstate wars exhibit periods in which states merely fight without talking. Given that a country can increase the probability of resolution, thereby decreasing the expected costs of the war, by constantly making ceasefire proposals, it is puzzling why states would refuse to engage in wartime negotiations.

This dissertation calls into question an underlying assumption of war termination and crisis bargaining theories: if talk is cheap, then why do leaders often refuse to engage in talks during wartime? Why do they agonize over the timing and conditions for talks? Concessions, which are defined as offering more in the current period than the previous round of bargaining, are correctly considered costly beyond what is immediately sacrificed if the offer is accepted. But demonstrating a readiness to talk can be risky even if an offer to start talks is not received favorably. As Thomas Schelling noted over five decades ago, “one side or both may fear that

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8 James D. Fearon, “Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes,” *The American Political Science Review* 88, No. 3 (Sept 1994): 590, fn 2. The underlying assumption of the audience costs literature is that talk is cheap and only under certain conditions when leaders will be punished for going back on their word will threats and promises have a modicum of credibility.


10 I would like to thank Michael McKoy for helping me clarify my thinking on this point.
even a show of willingness to negotiate will be interpreted as excessive eagerness.”

An anecdote from WWI history illustrates this point. On July 15, 1915 a Member of Parliament asked the British Prime Minister whether he would consider “taking steps to find out the terms of peace which the enemy Governments will entertain.” Even though this move did not include articulating specific concessions Britain would be willing to make for such a peace, the Prime Minister refused. While the reason for this refusal was not specified in the parliamentary debate, the subsequent comment by another member that such questions were “detrimental to the public interest” reveals concerns about the reputational consequences of talking with the enemy. This anecdote suggests that decision makers believe the willingness to engage in talks, in and of itself, may be informative. However, there is no theory within international relations that captures what leaders believe the willingness to talk may reveal and how this impacts strategic decisions.

This dissertation challenges the assumption that the decision to engage in talks while fighting is not a strategic decision; in other words, talk is not costless. The majority of the work on learning from bargaining behavior conducted in the formal tradition fails to provide insights because it assumes the continuous exchanges of offers during wartime or that the content of the offer is the primary source of information. Rational actor approaches assume that the time

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12 Iklé, *Every War Must End*, 76-80. Another member presses the Prime Minister asking if he will “keep his eye upon, encourage, and take advantage of any movement for bringing this war to an early and satisfying conclusion.” To this the prime minister stated that he had nothing to add to his previous response of no. It was highly controversial at the time to suggest any course of action that included Great Britain offering terms of peace first.
13 A notable exception is Branislav Slantchev’s model of war in which the making and rejecting of offers has informational value. However, he assumes that making demands always signals strength and conversely making concessions signals weakness. Empirically, this is an unwise assumption given that there have been numerous cases in which states increase their war aims after defeat and reduce their war aims after victory. See Branislav L. Slantchev, “The Principle of Convergence in Wartime Negotiations,” *The American Political Science Review* 97, No. 4 (December 2003): 621-632.
between bargaining rounds is merely the result of substantial discounting which causes significant delay between offers.\textsuperscript{14} War termination theories at best underestimate, if not ignore, the fact that the willingness to even engage in the process of negotiation can be perceived as an informative signal regardless of the state’s intentions. An observation made by Fred Iklé is particularly germane: though much is made of the negotiations and diplomacy before the outbreak of WWI, little is said of the fact that the principle governments on both sides stubbornly opposed talking while fighting.\textsuperscript{15} Given that cutting one’s losses is always difficult, what determines when it is time to engage in talks to facilitate an agreement that would prevent more losses?\textsuperscript{16}

I argue that under certain conditions, leaders may be concerned that demonstrating a willingness to talk will not only fail to facilitate an end to hostilities, but may even encourage the enemy to ratchet up its war fighting efforts. This dynamic, which I term the interstate ratchet effect, explains the absence and occurrence of peace talks better than conventional war termination approaches. Because a state may ratchet up its fighting if it believes such a move will successfully compel a less resolved opponent to quickly settle, then exchanging offers does not always reduce the expected cost of war.\textsuperscript{17} Wars may therefore be drawn out not because of lack of bargaining space or concerns about the nature of the post-war world, but because the interstate ratchet effect causes leaders to refuse to talk. Combat outcomes and perceptions of resolve, defined here as the willingness to absorb future costs, greatly determine when leaders

\textsuperscript{15} Iklé, \textit{Every War Must End}, 87.
\textsuperscript{16} Iklé, \textit{Every War Must End}, 64, 80. Iklé argues that waiting for the best time is merely a way to procrastinate; leaders come up with excuses after military victory and defeat for why it is not the right time to make concessions.
will be prepared to take the risks associated with initiating talks. However, a third interaction variable, the cost differential (CD), is critical to how states measure this risk. The CD is the difference between the amount of resources currently being expended in the limited war and the amount a state has at its disposal in a total war scenario. The country with the smaller CD has less room to ratchet up its war effort, and therefore perceives the greatest risk associated with signaling an eagerness to talk.

Since talks require at a minimum two participants, the main question that needs to be answered in a theory about the emergence of wartime negotiations is: why would the country that perceives itself to have the smaller CD ever agree to negotiate? I argue that at a certain point in the war, the smaller CD country believes that it has absorbed and inflicted sufficient pain to convince its adversary that escalation will not yield the desired benefits. The pain of war, in turn, convinces the larger CD country that even though it could escalate, such a move would bring minimal gains, making a strategy of facilitating peace talks a better option. At this point, when the country with the smaller CD believes it has established a reputation for toughness and the country with the larger CD believes escalation would be ineffective, both sides will pursue talks in good faith to end the war.

Why Study Peace Talks?

Understanding the factors that affect a state’s decision to engage in peace talks is especially important in contemporary international relations because an ever increasing majority of modern wars are limited wars that end in a negotiated settlement, not the military defeat of one side.\textsuperscript{18} Also, bargaining and negotiation occur during every war, even if the war ends in a

\textsuperscript{18} Pillar, \textit{Negotiating Peace}. Elizabeth Stanley refers to the literature that assumes war ends when one side gives up and accepts the more powerful side’s demands as the realpolitik
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different way (for example, one side is rendered incapable of fighting, is expelled from the combat theater, withdraws from combat without reaching an explicit agreement or the war is absorbed by a bigger war).\textsuperscript{19} Talks are a precondition for the termination of limited wars, which are expected to end by negotiated settlement. This dissertation assesses the conditions under which leaders may be willing to engage in talks to allow for such a settlement and when they will opt instead to fight without talking. By focusing attention on this one decision, whether or not to engage in wartime talks, we can gain insight into the potential obstacles to a timely resolution to a given conflict. For over a decade the international security literature has called for research that treats war as a process, not merely the result of bargaining failure; this project addresses this request by demonstrating qualitatively how the interaction between talking and fighting affects the course and conclusion of war.

Beyond the theoretical imperative, understanding the conditions under which states are more or less inclined to engage in wartime talks may serve to inform policy as well. I argue that states are reluctant to engage in peace talks because they are concerned this may inspire the other belligerents to escalate, thereby increasing the costs of continued fighting. Developing ways to credibly signal a genuine desire to end the war through talks and accurately read the signals of others is necessary for timely war termination. Operationally, this means that an effective military strategy should condition operations on the timing and goals of a given diplomatic approach. See Elizabeth A. Stanley, Paths to Peace: Domestic Coalition Shifts, War Termination, and the Korean War, (Stanford: Stanford University, 2009), 45.

\textsuperscript{19} For types of war endings, see Pillar, Negotiating Peace, 13-16. I also assume that nations fight wars in pursuit of post-war objectives. While arguments have been made that bureaucratic interests or individual leaders’ preferences drive a nation to war, national war aims that may serve these parochial interests are still stated and pursued through fighting. Domestic dynamics are indeed important, but negotiation requires a degree of strategic interaction with the enemy, which forces participants to take the enemy into account when making wartime decisions. The unavoidable reciprocity of bargaining while fighting warrants a focus on the dyadic level of analysis.
strategy in order to exploit positive combat outcomes to the greatest ability at the bargaining table. This dissertation provides evidence that combat success alone is insufficient to cause the opponent to compromise and come to the negotiating table in a limited war environment. Instead, an operational commander needs to develop a theory for why the adversary would negotiate and how the application of military pressure impacts this decision. In the case of Vietnam, the U.S. belief that military pressure and third party pressure from the Soviet Union (USSR) and later China would convince Hanoi to talk while fighting was flawed,\textsuperscript{20} this strategy was bound to fail given Hanoi’s perceptions of the prohibitively high costs associated with acquiescing under pressure and the uncertainty about any benefits. At certain points in the war, the dynamics of the interstate ratchet effect make assurances even more critical than threats for the immediate success peace talks.

Secondly, this research may have implications for civil-military relations. If it proves true that neither diplomatic maneuvering nor military prowess alone promises a beneficial conclusion to an armed conflict, this means that military leaders and diplomats should jointly devise a strategy of fighting and talking that takes the greatest advantage of military victories and reduces the costs of operational defeat.\textsuperscript{21} Practical steps could include participation of both diplomatic and military leaders in war games and contingency planning to learn how to best coordinate to affect adversaries actions and perceptions during times of conflict.

The findings of this dissertation project also provide insight into when the United States should play the role of mediator to help third parties end their conflicts. It is to the benefit of the

\textsuperscript{20} For more on this strategy, see Gideon Rose, \textit{How Wars End: Why We Always Fight the Last Battle}, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 168.

\textsuperscript{21} The view that lack of coordination in strategy during crisis and war leads to suboptimal outcomes for these reasons has been prevalent in the author’s informal discussions with political and military leaders involved in U.S. China policy.
international community to reduce the obstacles to peace talks and to deter states from exploiting
their power to harm as a means of maximizing their bargaining leverage. The United States
could play the role of the outside guarantor that offers to talk were made in good faith and not
probes of resolve. This could reduce the prevalence of coercive diplomacy in the international
system and reduce the duration and costs of conflicts that do erupt.

While not explicitly addressed in most scholarship, there is a moral imperative on the part
of scholars to understand the dynamics of conflict and develop recommendations for how
decision makers can ensure any war fought is short and executed at the lowest level of violence
possible. Though not a comprehensive measure of the costs of war, over four million people
were killed in the Korean War on all sides, four million in the Vietnam War, and approximately
1,500 in the Sino-Indian War.\(^{22}\) In over a decade of war in Operation Iraqi Freedom and
Operation Enduring Freedom, 6,480 U.S. service members have died and over 50,000 have been
wounded in action.\(^{23}\) Civilian causalities in Afghanistan were the highest in 2012 than they had
been since the invasion and reaching over 12,793 total in the past six years.\(^{24}\) If one includes
deaths due to starvation, displacement, disease, and the general state of crime and lawlessness
that accompany war, the number is exponentially higher. In part because the United States only
reports its own dead, the civilian death toll in Iraq has also been a subject of debate, though an

\(^{22}\) China did not release any casualty figures while India report 1,383 killed. See James Barnard
\(^{23}\) For the profiles of each individual, see “Faces of the Fallen,” The Washington Post,
http://apps.washingtonpost.com/national/fallen/. See also
statistics.
independent organization puts the number between 112,000 and 123,000 killed.\textsuperscript{25} Identifying the interstate ratchet effect as a major impediment to the timely resolution of conflicts and how the interaction between one’s diplomatic and military strategy can mitigate or intensify this dynamic may provide insight into contemporary conflicts that could help reduce the duration and level of destruction.\textsuperscript{26}

The Limits of the Theory

This is a dissertation about the conditions under which talks emerge during the course of a war. It does not attempt to explain the content of offers exchanged at the negotiating table, when talks eventually lead to a war termination settled, whether that agreement is upheld, or when talks break down. Moreover, my theory does not address in great detail the political psychology of war, why decision makers feel opening talks demonstrate weakness, and the conditions under which their fears are warranted. In other words, this dissertation will convincingly argue that the fear that a willingness to talk will project weakness affects decision-making, but I do not address the origin or rationality of that fear. Moreover, a whole additional project could look at the ways states try to probe the adversary’s position on talks. While I provide some thoughts on this issue in the conclusion, the scope of this project does not include a theory whether states will employ third party mediators, private individuals, or government delegations to gauge the opponent’s interest in launching peace talks.

Methodology

\textsuperscript{25} \url{http://www.iraqbodycount.org/}. Some estimates range up to one million. See Jonathan Steele and Suzanne Goldenberg, “What is the real death toll in Iraq?” \textit{The Guardian}, 18 March 2008.

\textsuperscript{26} For a debate about how to convince Taliban leaders to engage in talks during wartime, see Dexter Filkins, “U.S. Uses Attacks to Nudge Taliban Toward a Deal,” \textit{The New York Times}, October 14, 2010.
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In order to assess whether leaders do indeed think strategically about whether and when to engage in talks during wartime and the factors that affect this calculus, I conduct structured focused comparisons. Through process tracing, which entails “identifying steps in a causal process leading to the outcome of a given dependent variable of a particular case in a particular historical context,” I attempt to trace the links between possible causes and observed outcomes. This is particularly important because my theory argues even though all states fear offering talks project weakness, belligerents behave differently because of the divergence in their cost differentials. The general framework of the case studies, sometimes called the mediated stimulus-response model, looks at one state’s behavior and the impact it expects its actions to have on its adversary, then examines how the action was actually perceived by the other side, how it responds, and how it expects its response to be interpreted. Perceptions and beliefs are best deciphered from memoirs and primary sources that touch upon how the relevant parameters changed during the course of a war and how these dynamics impacted decisions about ending the war. Consequently I examined histories, archival documents, and conducted interviews to see whether the causal process I put forth is in fact evident in the sequence and values of the intervening variables in a particular case. I believe this is the best way to test under what conditions leaders offer talks, especially because perceptions are difficult to capture quantitatively.

The dependent variable my theory is characterized as diplomatic behavior, which captures a state’s decision to pursue or eschew official wartime talks. The terms talks and negotiations are used interchangeable and refer to everything from official talks between

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governments to secret engagements among key individuals condoned by the governments in question. Diplomatic behavior, whether a state proposes talks, is determined by the interaction of the cost differential and combat outcomes and the costs of war. The universe of cases therefore includes all interstate militarized disputes in which the annihilation of the opponent’s military is not the condition for war termination. In other words, my theory is applicable to all wars in which participants have limited aims, which makes settlement through negotiation a possibility.29 I focus solely on diplomatic decisions in wartime because warfare ensures that states pay real costs if they fail to reach a negotiated settlement. If a state refuses to engage in talks, it “may lose the war, may win it but at an unacceptable cost, or may find itself in a seemingly endless stalemate with ever-increasing costs.”30 Peacetime diplomatic behavior is theoretically distinct in that states may delay resolution of an issue indefinitely at negligible cost.31

There have been numerous calls in the literature for a project that collects data on various diplomatic events during war and better analyzes claims regarding the relative importance of battlefield and nonbattlefield information.32 This dissertation project attempts to fill this gap by employing case study analysis of learning and decision-making dynamics during three wars: the

29 For a list of other candidates for case study analysis, see Pillar, Negotiating Peace. It is important to note that even in these cases, the threat of escalation to total war is always a possibility, however negligible.
31 The Taiwan issue is a good example of two governments unwilling to engage in talks to resolve the dispute without any real consequences in the current period.
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Korean War, the Sino-Indian War and the Vietnam War. Vietnam is a crucial case to test my theory because there is great variation in the independent variable, the cost differential, while in Korea the asymmetry in ability to escalate is negligible. The Korean War is also an interesting case because there are periods in which the two sides are fighting for total victory, others in which the war is limited and therefore my theory should apply. The Sino-Indian War is a case with great contemporary relevance, as the border dispute still colors the relations of those two rising powers. Lastly, the Chinese decision making in the war with India and North Vietnamese perspective in the Vietnam War are both understudied; field research in India, Vietnam and China will allow me to compile original data about the process and termination of these conflicts never before assessed. The data compiled from primary and secondary sources will be used to evaluate my theory against the alternative perspectives covered in the next chapter.

This dissertation is presented in eight additional chapters. In chapter two, I present my theory for when and why states talk while fighting. I test my theories along with alternative hypotheses for the case of the Vietnam War in chapter three and four, the Sino-Indian War in chapter five and six, and the Korean War in chapter seven and eight. In the final chapter I touch upon future avenues for research, outline my conclusions, and present the theoretical contributions and policy implications of this research.

In the next chapter, I will present in detail my theory about when and why states will refuse to talk while fighting. I argue that states want to engage in talks only when they believe it will facilitate an end to hostilities. Particularly, states want to avoid a situation in which offering or accepting talks makes them worse off by changing the adversary’s beliefs in an undesired direction, thereby decreasing the probability of war termination and increasing the costs of war. This argument is different from the information-oriented, credible commitment or domestic
politics arguments currently dominant in the war termination literature. These schools of thought posit that wars drag because it takes a long time to resolve the informational asymmetries that led to war or states have updated their beliefs sufficiently but other factors such as domestic politics or credible commitment concerns keep them from ending the war. I do not argue that informational asymmetries or concerns about states upholding the eventual agreement do not matter, especially in terms of the dynamics of reaching an actual settlement, only that differing capacities for wartime escalation, concerns about looking weak and the negative repercussions of talking while fighting better explains why leaders either eschew or pursue wartime talks.
Chapter Two

To Talk While Fighting?

This chapter presents my theory for why only some states offer talks and outlines the conditions under which wartime talks will emerge. First, I will explain how my theory contributes to broader debates in international relations theory. Second, I will describe the competing explanations for when talks will occur during limited wars. Lastly, I will outline my theory for the conditions under which participants will be willing to engage in wartime negotiations, which state will offer talks, and which will not. I describe how the dynamics of limited wars and the different abilities of states to ratchet create obstacles to wartime negotiations. I argue that the destruction of war moderates these obstacles by convincing the belligerents that escalation is not worth the additional costs, reducing fears that an extended olive branch will only be met with greater military might.

The Argument: Implications for Theory

My theory interacts and contributes with multiple strands of international relations theory. Of these, my argument has the most implications for the war termination literature. My theory also has implications for the credible commitment problem and the bargaining model of war more generally.

War Termination

Scholars have focused increasingly on war termination in recent years, leading to three main arguments for when and why wars end. The information approach argues that wars end when states have learned enough about the balance of power and resolve to reach a deal both sides prefer to continued conflict. Within this approach, some argue that battlefield outcomes are
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the primary source of information, implying that wars end when a clear victor emerges.\(^\text{33}\) Others posit that the making and rejecting of ceasefire proposals have informational value that outweighs that provided by the battlefield.\(^\text{34}\) A third subgroup focuses on fighting as a part of the bargaining process and posits theories regarding how states learn from the interaction of bargaining and combat outcomes. The second type of war termination argument, the credible commitment problem (CCP), lies within the unitary rational actor tradition. Proponents of this approach posit that even when states know the terms of an agreement that would be acceptable to both sides, they fail to settle because of the inability of the losing party to guarantee it will not reignite the war when it is more beneficial to them.\(^\text{35}\) Lastly, wars may fail to end in a timely manner because of domestic political dynamics. For example, individual leaders may maximize their personal utility, only stopping the war when the expected utility of war termination outweighs that of continuing the conflict and ending the war at a later date. Battlefield outcomes and the nature of the opponent both play a role in this calculus, as does the nature of the domestic political system within which the leader operates.\(^\text{36}\)

The Information Approach

One of the most powerful insights in international relations theory is that incomplete information allows for miscalculation and misperceptions that can lead to war. Dan Reiter posits five factors over which states may have disagreement due to incomplete information: aggregate military power, military technology, comparative interactions and effectiveness of the two sides’

\(^{33}\) Smith, *Stopping Wars*. The logic is that the battlefield is the sole source of information that is not subject to manipulation by the adversary. See also Powell, “Bargaining and Learning;” Wagner, “Bargaining and War.”

\(^{34}\) Slantchev, “Convergence in Wartime.”

\(^{35}\) Fearon, “Rationalist Explanation for War;” Reiter, *How Wars End.*

\(^{36}\) Goemans, *War and Punishment.*
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military strategies, resolve, and the likelihood and/or impact of third-party intervention.\(^\text{37}\) If wars start because of a fundamental disagreement between states about how it will unfold, then wars should end when the belligerents’ expectations about the outcome of the war converge. Even if one side has a lower probability of victory in the overall conflict, “the weaker side may have an incentive to keep fighting if the short-term cost of capitulation is large and the long-term likelihood of success is not too bleak.”\(^\text{38}\) For such a belligerent to be convinced otherwise, there must be a clear, undeniable military trend that suggests not only defeat on the battlefield in the present, but also in the future.\(^\text{39}\)

A lesser but related condition for negotiated settlement to a conflict is that both sides agree on the relative likelihood of various outcomes and the payoffs associated with each.\(^\text{40}\) Without this convergence in expectations, both participants may believe fighting will get them a better bargain in future periods and hence will continue the hostilities.\(^\text{41}\) In other words, all states want to end the war as early as possible, but they do not want to offer more or demand less than is strictly necessary. This clarifies why it would be suboptimal, and under some conditions, irrational, for a state to clearly articulate its post-war aims before it learns about its opponent

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\(^{37}\) Reiter, *How Wars End*, 11-13. Resolve is unique from the other four because it is a particularly difficult variable to operationalize quantitatively.


\(^{39}\) Smith, *Stopping Wars*, 312.

\(^{40}\) Kirshner contests that even with complete information about military capabilities, players may have difficulty assessing who would win the war. The outcome of combat results from complex calculations that depend on a broad range of unknown and hard to measure factors such as strategy, leadership, and morale. Random factors such as weather or luck can also wield a great influence. See Jonathan Kirshner, “Rationalist Explanations for War?” *Security Studies* 10, (Autumn 2000): 143-150.

\(^{41}\) If states are very patient and value the future, they may fight instead of accepting an offer to cease hostilities. See Slantchev, “Convergence in Wartime,” 629.
through combat. Both conceptions of the role of incomplete information in war initiation and continuation rest on the view that “war is coercive bargaining and ends because opponents succeed in coordinating their expectations about what each is prepared to concede.” The convergence of expectations about the balance of power and willingness to fight is a necessary condition for termination of armed conflict through negotiated settlement.

Within the information approach, the duration of war depends on the distribution of uncertainty and the rate at which information is accrued. The sources of information that lead to an eventual convergence of expectations are a point of contention among scholars. Some scholars argue that the war termination offers themselves provide information about the true balance of power or resolve, thereby changing beliefs and subsequent offers. For example, Branislav Slantchev argues that the making and rejecting of offers can have a screening effect in that there are some offers that only a weak state would accept. Also, the more offers that are made, the greater the informational content, and the higher the probability that the two sides will learn enough about each other to reach a negotiated settlement.

While there is a general consensus that leaders and organizations learn from information gauged from the bargaining environment or crisis behavior, many hypothesize that war fighting

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42 This is exactly the policy recommendation that Gideon Rose makes in his studies about the result of war termination bargaining. See Rose, *How Wars End.*
44 Slantchev, “Convergence in Wartime,” 621. However, as Goemans points out, learning alone is not sufficient for states to be able to reach a negotiated settlement that both sides prefer to continuing the war; one may reduce its war aims, but not by enough for a settlement if the other side has increased them by a larger margin. See Goemans, *War and Punishment.*
45 Though not discussed, the author acknowledges that states obtain information from sources other than combat and the bargaining environment, such as intelligence, media and public opinion.
46 For a good review, see Reiter, *How Wars End,* Chapter Two.
47 However, like in Slantchev’s model, making demands usually signals strength and conversely making concessions signals weakness. See Slantchev, “Convergence in Wartime.”
48 Slantchev, “Convergence in Wartime.”
itself provides participants with little meaningful information.\(^{49}\) One reason this may be the case is that the fog of war makes it difficult for participants to reach a shared understanding of the actual outcome of a given engagement, let alone do so in a timely manner. The human mind is limited in its capacity to engage in accurate calculations when hundreds of variables are involved. The situation can be so complex that even with perfect information, actors can miscalculate and disagree on the expected outcome of war.\(^{50}\) The military strategist Carl von Clausewitz argued that “a great part of the information obtained in war is contradictory, a still greater part is false, and by far the greatest part is of a doubtful character.”\(^{51}\) The argument here is not that leaders are biased or have difficulty processing information, but that the data is merely unavailable.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, some scholars argue that not only are the outcomes of combat informative, but also that “fighting is a source of information that is much less subject to manipulation by adversaries.”\(^{52}\) Because war is a pure information source, states may “use war as a credible means to reveal private information about their military capabilities.”\(^{53}\) In a standard bargaining model, learning depends on different types behaving differently. But in fighting, even if different types behave the same (for example, both opt to continue fighting), participants can still learn about the balance of military power. As Robert Powell articulates, the probability that a state is facing a stronger opponent increases with every fight that does not end in that state’s collapse. In this way “fighting conveys information that is less subject to strategic manipulation” and is therefore a relevant source of information regarding one’s prospects of total


\(^{50}\) Kirshner, “Rationalist Explanations for War?”

\(^{51}\) von Clausewitz, *On War*.

\(^{52}\) Wagner, “Bargaining and War,” 478.

\(^{53}\) Fearon, “Rationalist Explanation for War,” 478.
victory. According to war termination scholar H.E. Goemans, signaling “does not take place in a series of offers and counteroffers, but occurs on the battlefield, in the interaction of the belligerents’ military strategies.” Historical examples of political and military leaders learning from combat outcomes abound. On August 8, 1918, after several of his divisions had been defeated, German General Erich Ludendorff revised his confidence in ultimate victory, demanding that Germany seek armistice. Italian dictator Benito Mussolini realized that the war was over for Italy when Allied forces landed in Sicily. The United Nations (UN) abandoned its plans for reunification of the Korean peninsula once the Chinese proved their resolve by entering the conflict and launching a major counteroffensive.

A theory of war termination based solely on learning through combat about the prospects of total victory has difficulty explaining why wars continue long after the balance of power and resolve are revealed. Such a theory has particular difficulty explaining why states would ever fight up until the complete destruction of their military or why stalemates persist without a negotiated settlement to end the war. Because of these issues, some scholars have argued that expectations converge more as the result of diplomatic history than combat history. Combat is seen as relevant only in that “the primary function of force in bargaining is to improve one’s bargaining position by increasing the costs of disagreement for one’s adversary.”

The debate about whether the political environment or military environment has the greatest impact on war termination is a false one. Rationally speaking, countries would not invest

55 Goemans, War and Punishment, 27.
56 Iklé, Every War Must End, 36.
57 As Leventoglu and Slantchev argue “to think that it takes many years of near constant interaction for opponents to learn enough about each other is surely stretching the theory.” See Bahar Leventoglu and Branislav L. Slantchev, “The Armed Peace: A Punctuated Equilibrium Theory of War,” American Journal of Political Science 51, No. 4 (October 2007): 756.
money in their militaries if there were no correlation between military victories and the likelihood the war would end on their terms. Moreover, states would not be so adamant about scrambling for a great military success right before talks if combat outcomes had no impact on the eventual deal. On the other hand, if talks were just a formality because both sides agree on the settlement based on their shared beliefs about the balance of power, there would be no need to hammer out the details of an agreement at the bargaining table. While most can agree that what happens on the battlefield and around the negotiation table both greatly impact the process and conclusion of war, there is no theory that posits exactly how bargaining and fighting interact to affect beliefs and consequently war duration and termination.\footnote{One notable theoretical exception a model devised by Branislav Slantchev in which states mostly learn from the bargaining environment because the battlefield is so noisy, but combat outcomes provide a check on the degree to which states can manipulate private information about their military power. For a review of how this model differs from others, see Slantchev, “Convergence in Wartime,” 622.} This dissertation project sheds light on this process by qualitatively evaluating how political and military leaders view the process of fighting, the conditions under which talks emerge, and how fighting and readiness to talk affect perceptions about how the war will unfold.

More problematic for conflict studies is the lack of known studies that test the external validity of the information-oriented hypothesis as it relates to uncertainty about parameters other than the distribution of military power, in particular resolve and costs of the war. Scholars assume that states learn about resolve through the process of war, but it is unclear how this occurs or what exactly constitutes the ‘resolve’ variable.\footnote{Goemans, War and Punishment, 27-28.} Weaker states may fight stronger ones because they feel that they can win if they just outlast their opponent, or at least can get a better deal than if they chose not to fight. This dynamic is not captured by most studies, which
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instead conceptualize resolve as the willingness to fight in period one. This leads to the hypothesis that wars that erupt due to uncertainty about resolve are relatively short; the idea is that some states are bluffing to get a better agreement and war separates the weak from the strong challengers early on in war. However, I would argue that resolve in the post-initiation period is best understood as the total amount of resources one side is willing to expend for the issue. Cost tolerance is connected to this choice in that the costs you can inflict depend on “whether you are willing to pay the costs it takes to hurt the enemy.” For example, in the early stages of the war in Kosovo, many believed Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic would reject the ultimatum to withdrawal because he “may opt to risk a NATO bombing campaign rather than surrender control over Kosovo. He may assume he can absorb a limited attack and the allies will not support a long campaign.” This dissertation addresses the ways in which combat informs participants about the future costs of continuing the war and the likelihood their opponent would concede if threatened with a heightened war effort.

To sum up, theories concerning the importance of information flows from bargaining or fighting are not incorrect, but they are incomplete. What happens if the two sources of information are contradictory, for example a state makes an unreasonable demand which signals

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61 Ramsay, “Settling it on the Field.”
62 Ramsay, “Settling it on the Field.” Powell argues that war resulting from uncertainty over costs or resolve are likely to be settled more quickly and short of large scale fighting than are wars arising out of uncertainty over distribution of power. See Powell, “Bargaining and Learning.”
63 Goemans, War and Punishment, 29.
64 Wagner, “Bargaining and War,” 482.
65 Though distinct from the distribution of power, a state’s resolve determines what resources each side will bring to bear and how the will use them and is therefore intimately connected to battle performance. When militaries are doing poorly, they can give up increase the level of activity, or change the activity. Evaluating performance, establishing a new strategic measure of effectiveness, and changing one’s level activity is all costly however. See Stephen Rosen, Innovation and the Modern Military: Winning the Next War, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).
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strength but loses a battle which signals weakness? In warfare, capabilities, strategy, and resolve are dynamic; how do we understand learning when we take into account that these variables are constantly changing, leading to new uncertainties? To understand the interactive effects of fighting and talking, my causal model specifies how information from the battlefield interacts with countries’ position on talks to shape the perceptions and beliefs of political and military leaders.

The Credible Commitment Problem (CCP)

The underlying assumptions of the credible commitment problem are that there is no higher authority to force states to live up to their agreements and states are strategic. There are two types of situations that create commitment problems that may impede war termination. First, even though both sides may prefer a particular agreement to continued warfare, one or more states may be unable to credibly commit to uphold said agreement when they stand to reap immediate gains from reneging. The second category, the time inconsistency credible commitment problem, is the most prominent in the war termination literature.

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66 Scott Sigmund Gartner, Strategic Assessment in War, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).
67 Dan Reiter argues that different types of battlefield information (favorable or unfavorable; expected or unexpected; clear or unclear outcome) affect perceptions differently. While I agree with this premise, my theory posits that leaders interpret this battlefield information differently depending on corresponding diplomatic behavior. Paul Pillar argues that leaders decide on terms of settlement to demand and then use force to support those demands. This is different from my theory because it is not interactive; I argue that states will determine what they can get and what it will cost at different levels of war based on perceptions about enemy’s willingness to absorb and inflict costs. In other words, the degree of force and terms of settlement are not independent of each other, and must be considered simultaneously. See Reiter, How Wars End; Pillar, Negotiating Peace.
68 Time inconsistency credible commitment problems are also an important factor in the outbreak of wars. There are four large classes of war that can should be understood as the result of time inconsistency commitment problems: preventative war to attack before the balance of power shifts, fear of first strike when offense has the advantage, conflicts over issues that affect future
states may face no incentive to defect in the current period, they cannot credibly commit to upholding the agreement in future periods because of uncertainty about future preferences, shifts in power and changes in the type of game played. CCP captures the idea that actions in a political actor’s long-term interest may not be in his interest at any particular moment and that states are unable to fix future choices in the current period.

In the time inconsistency CCP, the sequence of moves is such that when the time comes for a state to uphold its commitment, it is not longer in its interest to do so. Ethnic conflict can be understood in this way, as the result of a bargaining breakdown due to the inability of the majority to credibly commit not to abuse minority groups; even though a bargain exists that is preferable to war for both parties, once the new state consolidates its power the majority could renege on any promises made to the minority. Bargaining in the shadow of power is also affected by these dynamics. Robert Powell demonstrates that in a repeated game, if a dissatisfied state is rising in power quickly or concessions lead to large shifts in power, then its competitor cannot make any concessions without fearing the dissatisfied state will then ask for greater concessions. Consequently, even when states know what agreement would be accepted by both sides, they fail to settle because of the inability of the participants to credibly commit to not reignite the war at a later date when they can demand greater concessions. To reduce the

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70 Fearon, “Fighting Rather than Bargaining.”

71 Powell, “War as a Commitment Problem.” It is interesting to note that the theoretical focus in the CCP literature is usually on the difficulties of the winning side to credibly commit to not to exploit its increase in bargaining advantage due to an increase in relative power in the future. However, in the war termination literature, case studies focus on losing countries stubbornly continuing to fight to get a better deal.

likelihood of future conflict, and perhaps to obtain an even greater level of security than they enjoyed before the war, states may believe that they need to gain a significant military advantage over their opponent before they stop fighting. 73 Though this approach does not directly address the emergence of peace talks, logically the CCP approach would posit that talks emerge when the belligerents believe that any agreement made would be self-enforcing. 74

In empirical tests weighing the relative explanatory of information-oriented approaches and the CCP argument for how wars end, historical evidence tends to support the latter. 75 However, in many cases, while CCP may make the belligerents reluctant to reach an agreement, it cannot explain how and why wars end because the problem is not resolved before an agreement is reached. 76 Furthermore, the standard understanding of the credible commitment mechanism does not explain how fighting resolves the problem short of the total destruction of the opponent’s military or state. 77 In contrast, my theory argues that the primary obstacle to wartime negotiations is anxiety about how the willingness to engage in talks will affect the level of violence an adversary will chose to employ, and consequently the costs of war. When both the threat of escalation and the desire to do so have been reduced, then states will take the necessary steps to facilitate the emergence of talks.

**Domestic Political and Cognitive Explanations**

73 Iklé, *Every War Must End.*  
75 For the most thorough and recent testing of these two arguments, see Reiter, *How Wars End.*  
76 Erik Gartzke leverages this point to argue that CCP cannot explain the initiation of wars either. See Erik Gartzke, “War is in the Error Term,” *International Organization* 53, No. 3 (Summer 1999): 571-72. Leventoglu and Slantchev address these problems through a model of war in which credible commitment problems can arise under limited conditions, and consequently in equilibrium players can only end wars at specific windows of opportunity. Nonetheless, without clear evidence that the credible commitment problem was resolved in specific cases, it is difficult to argue that the presence of concerns about the likelihood of renewed conflict keeps states from ending wars. See Leventoglu and Slantchev, “The Armed Peace.”  
77 For more on this critique, see Leventoglu and Slantchev, “The Armed Peace.”
Lastly, in this section I address a branch of the war termination literature that relaxes the unitary rational actor assumption to explain why wars last longer than rational approaches would predict. H.E. Goemans in his study of the conclusion of WWI argues that leaders do indeed update their beliefs about the likelihood of success in a conflict, but may continue to fight even when the prospects of military victory are grim because of domestic political concerns. For many, “nothing is more divisive for a government than having to make peace at the price of major concessions.” In many cases, those arguing to end the war through offering concessions are labeled traitors and leaders that do so may face a great decrease in their approval.

Specifically, if a leader personally expects high costs as a consequence of making concessions to facilitate the end of the war, he may prefer to engage in riskier military strategies to increase the chances of success, which in turn increases the chances of a worse military defeat. Because mixed regime leaders have the greatest likelihood of losing power and facing the harshest punishment, they are the most likely to adopt this strategy of gambling for resurrection.

While compelling, there are several reasons Goemans’ theory does not accurately capture the fundamental dynamics of war termination. First, he assumes that the obstacle to war termination is the side that is losing the war militarily. Not only does this ignore the fact that often it is the willingness to absorb and impose costs that determine bargaining power, not conventional military force, it also eliminates the possibility that the two sides cannot reach an agreement because the ‘winning’ side demands too much. During WWII, the Japanese leadership knew the United States was stronger militarily, but it refused to concede nonetheless. Imperial

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78 Iklé, *Every War Must End*, 59.
79 Goemans theory may explain why wars with losing mixed regimes continue longer than expected, but not why other types of states fight unnecessarily prolonged wars. A gamble of resurrection is conventionally understood as “a military strategy that increases one’s chances of decisive victory in the way while increasing one’s chances of decisive defeat and lowering the chances of securing a moderate outcome.” H-Diplo Roundtable, Volume III, No. 19 (2012): 23.
Japan believed the U.S. demand for unconditional surrender was prohibitively costly and that it could inflict high enough costs on an invading U.S. force so as to end the war on better terms.\textsuperscript{80} Goemans also assumes that a rational actor should increase its war aims if it learns it is stronger than previously estimated (after victory) but decrease them if it learns that the opponent is more resolved than expected.\textsuperscript{81} These conditions are not mutually exclusive; his theory is indeterminate for the frequent case in which a state learns it is stronger than expected but the opponent is more resolved.

But more importantly, just as before the war, the relevant variable is not what one will accept to end the conflict, but perceptions about the costs one’s opponent is willing to bear given their objectives.\textsuperscript{82} If a state thinks the other side is more resolved, why would it reveal this information to its opponent by changing its war aims when this could just encourage the adversary to demand more to end the conflict? Because of incentives to misrepresent, it is unlikely that states accept the espoused war aims of other states at face value. As Goemans himself points out,

It is impossible for the combatants to predict during a war when and on what terms the war will end. Neither side knows his opponent’s private information; therefore, neither

\textsuperscript{80} Reiter, \textit{How Wars End}, 193-198.
\textsuperscript{81} Goemans, \textit{War and Punishment}, 27-29. His argument that domestic politics are important because leaders sometimes formulate war aims to buy off their people for the sacrifices they have made during wartime is also unsound. This is his explanation for why Germany increased war aims during WWI even though they thought they would lose, but it is unclear why German leaders thought this would lead to greater profits for the people. Not only does having higher war aims reward the people with nothing in the present period, but it may reduce the likelihood that the opposing side agrees to end the war.
\textsuperscript{82} Because Goemans does not include dyads in his empirical analysis, it is impossible to decipher whether mixed regimes fight longer wars because they refuse to capitulate or because they believe their opponent will offer a better bargain when threatened with a prolonged conflict. It is not surprising that total military personnel involved has no hypothesized effect on the duration of war, but difference in the military personnel available to the states involved may. This dyadic relationship, however, is not tested by Goemans.
sides knows which events would constitute new information for his opponent, nor how he would react to it; each only knows that fighting reduces the asymmetry of information.\textsuperscript{83}

Lastly, Goemans theory explains why wars with losing mixed regimes continue longer than expected, but not why other types of states fight unnecessarily prolonged wars.

Elizabeth Stanley puts forth a different argument within the domestic politics tradition. Stanley focuses on the dynamics of the governing coalition, allowing for different leaders within a particular regime to face different constraints based on their particular obstacle to peace. Leaders benefit from war at a particular time or they may not know that they should end the war because of obstacles to receiving and processing information. Lastly, some leaders may be reluctant to end a war because they rely on the support of hawkish elements, either domestic constituencies or external allies. For bargaining space to open up, therefore, leaders facing one of these three obstacles must be removed from power. In forty-one percent of wars since WWII, the change in expectations about the war occurred when a shift in the domestic governing coalition transpired, not because the leaders themselves changed their views.\textsuperscript{84}

A different domestic political view of prolonged war posits that states do not learn about their prospects of military victory because of bureaucratic politics. Field commanders have a monopoly over battlefield information and they tend exaggerate tactical successes and believe that time is on their side. Civilian political leaders, on the other hand, are concerned mainly with the domestic implications of the war’s aftermath, but must look to the military for information about the morale and effectiveness of the troops. Wars do not end when military performance suggests they should because military officials withhold information to buy more time to seek

\textsuperscript{83} Goemans, \textit{War and Punishment}, 52.
\textsuperscript{84} Stanley, \textit{Paths to Peace}, especially Chapter Nine.
military victory.\textsuperscript{85} Another line of argument is that military organizations focus on obtaining information about the details of particular battles and campaigns as well as their daily operational activities. As a result, insufficient time is devoted to piecing it all together to prepare forecasts about the course of the war. In other words, detailed estimates and day-to-day intelligence may come at the expense of broader evaluations.\textsuperscript{86} It is possible that the data is available, but “there is simply too much going on for an individual or organization to understand everything about how a side’s forces are performing.”\textsuperscript{87}

Scholars in the tradition of cognitive psychology argue that states do not end wars in a timely manner because of cognitive obstacles to learning. Leaders may just ignore unfavorable information until a decisive defeat causes a psychological shock great enough to make them aware of grim realities.\textsuperscript{88} Additionally, there are many types of cognitive bias that limit the decision maker’s ability to make correct assessments and decisions, such as information processing bias or hyper vigilance (the inability to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information).\textsuperscript{89} While this may explain residual variation, cognitive approaches do not address the basic underlying dynamics of war termination; these theories cannot account for the variation in war duration, level of destruction, the timing of the end of the war, or even why states eventually move to end the war if, as some argue, these biases are ever present.

To contribute theoretically to the war termination literature, I relax three assumptions that run through the aforementioned theories. First, limited wars are not created equal and therefore

\textsuperscript{86} Iklé, \textit{Every War Must End}, 18.
\textsuperscript{87} Gartner, \textit{Strategic Assessment}, 8.
\textsuperscript{88} Iklé, \textit{Every War Must End}, 37.
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characterizing wars as total or limited is insufficient. The level of violence and type of limited war leaders choose to persecute substantially impacts perceptions about the relative costs of continuing or stopping a war at a given juncture. Second, past research has focused heavily on how states learn about the balance of military power, not granting sufficient attention to how beliefs about resolve and the costs of war change over the course of the conflict. Lastly, I allow for the possibility that proposing talks or a specific negotiated settlement is potentially costly even if no agreement is reached. In many cases, wartime negotiations can be perceived as costly in ways that change the participants’ behavior even if the perceptions themselves are inaccurate, as they can often be in complex situations such as war. Understanding the initial decision to talk provides insight into one channel through which states may learn about the balance of resolve and attempt to manipulate their opponents’ perceptions of this variable.

Diplomatic Behavior during Wartime: Four Perspectives

This dissertation has theoretical implications for the literature on war termination, the bargaining model of war and credible commitment theory. Most of this literature does not directly posit hypotheses about why talks emerge or fail to emerge during wartime, but alternative perspectives can be indirectly derived from the logic of the literature. These perspectives include resolving information asymmetries, resolving the credible commitment problem, change of leadership, and preferences and policies of third parties.

Perspective 1: Resolved Information Asymmetries

The first perspective is that states will refuse to talk until a clear battlefield victor has emerged.  

Because “the readiness to talk can be so revealing” states may delay “explicit

90 Blainey, The Causes of War; Wagner, “Bargaining and War.”
diplomacy until after an armistice is reached”\textsuperscript{91} or least until there exists “a common perception of the trend of military events.”\textsuperscript{92} Therefore, bargaining does not occur until states no longer have incentive to reveal information by fighting.\textsuperscript{93}

While the idea that states condition negotiating strategies on their performance in war is not a new idea, the literature provides an incomplete explanation for how exactly this occurs.\textsuperscript{94} If states learn from combat outcomes, talks should theoretically emerge after each military exchange. However, we do not see this empirically. Moreover, if a war broke out because one side was bluffing about its resolve to fight, the observable implication would be talks after the first exchange, which is also rare empirically. As James Fearon inquired, “why don’t we observe intense bargaining, serious offers, and a high probability of settlement after the first and each subsequent battle?” Moreover, this strand of argumentation posits that states fight then talk, instead of engaging in the two simultaneously. This perspective also has difficulty explaining why leaders would ever break off talks once initiated.

If wars end when there is a convergence in expectations about the range of settlements acceptable by all belligerents, this implies that states will agree to talks believing that the process will end in an agreement in a timely manner. However, if talks were costless, then both sides could meet on a daily basis to discuss any points of contention in hopes of facilitating some resolution regardless of the final settlement they think they could achieve. An explanation about how the content of the offers brings participants to the negotiation table has difficulty explaining

\textsuperscript{91} Slantchev, “Convergence in Wartime,” 622. This quote demonstrates that the idea that readiness to talk is revealing is not a new idea. However, my causal model explains what leaders believe it reveals, how this impacts their decisions, and when they decide to engage in talks nonetheless.

\textsuperscript{92} Wagner, “Bargaining and War,” 482; Pillar, \textit{Negotiating Peace}, 199, 220.

\textsuperscript{93} Wagner, “Bargaining and War,” 472.

\textsuperscript{94} Slantchev, “Convergence in Wartime,” 124.
why some peace talks continue on for weeks, months, or even years at a time. Talks do not have to entail concessions; states can always begin with a limited agenda if they find talks in their interest. As Paul Pillar argues, “if both sides are willing to talk, negotiations on all issues will take place anyway.”\(^95\) Lastly, this perspective cannot explain why states would be willing to talk even when they think in the near term such a step is unlikely to lead to war termination.

**Perspective 2: Self-Enforcing Agreement**

In the war termination literature, the CCP literature highlights the concerns about the long-term implementation of any peace agreement. Specifically, the belief that any agreement both sides would prefer to war is unenforceable in the post-war world (potentially leading to the reigniting of the war) could compel states to evade talks. The severity of the CCP is determined by the range of status quo distributions that are invulnerable to renegotiation, during or after the war. If you carry this argument for the start of the war to its logical conclusion, the CCP approach would posit that talks materialize when both sides believe any agreement reached would be self-enforcing. This could potentially occur when one side has lost a sufficient amount of military capacity such that it is unlikely to reignite the war at a later date. The victor will be willing to engage in talks when a rapid shift in power post-war is highly improbable.\(^96\) The loser, on the other hand, wants to engage in negotiations as well at this point in order to avoid state collapse. This explanation for the emergence of talks is problematic because few militaries fight until they are completely exterminated; even Japan in WWII maintained its political

\(^{95}\) Pillar, *Negotiating Peace*, 246.

\(^{96}\) Leventoglu and Slantchev add a slight modification in that peace becomes possible after enough resources are destroyed such that the value of a successfully first strike, which would give a state total victory, is low enough. See Leventoglu and Slantchev, “The Armed Peace.”
leadership and a self-defense force largely intact after the war.\textsuperscript{97} As Clausewitz notes, “the disarming of the enemy, is rarely attained in practice and is not a condition necessary to peace.”\textsuperscript{98}

Surrender also requires a great degree of trust in one’s opponent because, as Thomas Schelling articulates, “surrender is the process following military hostilities in which the power to hurt is brought to bear.”\textsuperscript{99} In Schelling’s view, the winning side trades its capacity for inflicting further harm for concessions. For example, the United States promised not to inflict further harm on Japan or its emperor if it surrendered. After the Japanese surrendered and the U.S. military occupied the country, it had the power and ability to execute the emperor. Though the United States did not renege on its promise in this case, I would argue that it is unclear how two states which could not credibly commit to an agreement before the war manage to do so in its midst.

In a seminal piece on civil war, James Fearon posits another type of CCP that creates an obstacle to wartime negotiations. Fearon argues that during a civil war, the government may make an offer that only weak insurgent groups would accept, which allows the government to screen weak types from strong types. After a weak type accepts, however, then the government can ratchet down its offer. The possibility of this ratchet effect makes it impossible for the government to credibly commit to follow through with any offer, and therefore no insurgent group accepts and the civil war persists. This “ratchet effect” thus makes states unwilling to risk revealing their type through bargaining and instead opt for fighting.\textsuperscript{100} This dynamic explains

\textsuperscript{99} Schelling, \textit{Arms and Influence}.
\textsuperscript{100} Fearon, “Fighting Rather than Bargaining.”
why in most wars there is a period of time in which the government will only make frivolous offers that neither type of opponent will accept.\textsuperscript{101}

While this theory explains why a rebel group may not accept an offer, it does not go far enough to explain why participants would refuse to engage in talks. My theory explains this by arguing that the screening effect comes into play before offers are accepted or rejected, with the willingness to participate in an exchange of offers at all. Furthermore, I argue that the main obstacle to peace is the fear a readiness to talk will project weakness and consequently encourage the opponent to ratchet up its war effort, not ratchet down the settlement terms once an agreement is made. In Fearon’s theory, it is the content of offers and the response that is informative; in my theory, it is the readiness to talk in and of itself that can be informative. I also allow for possibility that the belief that talks signal weakness affects state behavior, even if that perception is incorrect. In short, both theories are address the strategic thinking of belligerents about the utility and consequences of talking while fighting, but stress different causal mechanisms that affect the decision about whether to offer talks during the course of a war.

\textbf{Perspective 3: Shifts in the domestic political situation}

Leaders and their publics may avoid talks because they have “gotten so caught up in beating the enemy that they find it hard to switch gears and think clearly about constructing a stable and desirable political settlement.”\textsuperscript{102} A leader facing particularly high costs for failure may gamble for resurrection, creating an obstacle to talks.\textsuperscript{103} Even if the leadership recognizes the clear military trends are not in its favor, the governing coalition may still refuse to engage in talks because “a radical change in strategy is not politically possible without admitting

\textsuperscript{101} Fearon, “Fighting Rather than Bargaining.”
\textsuperscript{102} Rose, \textit{How Wars End}, 4.
\textsuperscript{103} For more on this choice, see Goemans, \textit{War and Punishment}.
failure.”¹⁰⁴ Elizabeth Stanley argues that this is the primary reason why it took the participants of the Korean War over two years after entering into talks to reach an armistice. Specifically, “because a sudden departure from a previous policy raises serious questions about the wisdom of having pursued it for so long, political entrapment puts decision-makers in a no-win situation.”¹⁰⁵

In an authoritative history of the end of the Pacific War, Leon Sigal argues that many Japanese leaders wanted to end the war, but failed to seek mediation for fear of opposition at home; “the need to avoid premature exposure to the domestic political risk of seizing the diplomatic initiative” prevented Japan from pursuing talks with the United States.¹⁰⁶ More generally, leaders may be concerned that if they undertake a diplomatic initiative and it is rejected, the enemy does not respond, or talks break down, they could pay high political costs. Leaders will be particularly averse to engaging in talks if there is a lack of internal consensus on the purpose and utility of negotiations.¹⁰⁷

While domestic political dynamics may impact the type of settlement leaders are willing to agree to, this perspective provides little insight into why leaders would refuse to meet with their wartime counterparts. In particular, if the concern were regarding audiences at home, why would leaders even avoid private or secret meetings? These domestic political arguments also assume that the public is against peace talks; however, after years of paying the costs of war, it is possible the public feels exactly the opposite. Without including the position and perceptions of the enemy, the domestic political arguments about the costs of changing policy cannot explain

¹⁰⁴ Stanley, Paths to Peace, 56.
¹⁰⁵ Stanley, Paths to Peace, 56.
¹⁰⁷ For more on how an internal consensus is needed in addition to a consensus between governments to end the war, see C. R. Mitchell and Michael Nicholson, "Rational Models and the Ending of Wars,” Journal of Conflict Resolution 27 (September 1983): 495-520.
why the same leadership may evade then pursue talks or start and stop talks multiple times during its time in power.

**Perspective 4: Preferences and Policies of Third Parties**

A state’s decision about whether or not to engage in talks may be driven by the preferences and policies of third party actors such as allies, enemies, or the international community. A state may show reluctance to offer talks to appease an ally or refuse any offers at another country’s insistence. This is most likely the case in the context of great power politics in which weaker states are fighting the war, but receive support and benefits from more powerful states that have their own interests to protect. Because the war effort may suffer from a reversal in such support, a state may cater its wartime policies to the preferences of its more powerful ally. The motivation may also be reputational; states may refuse to entertain offers to talk because of third party audience costs. A state may want to demonstrate strength to another potential adversary through obstinacy against its current opponent. In contrast, a state may want to show a willingness to end the war through negotiations to shift the blame for the conflict onto their opponent and therefore shield themselves against international pressure or condemnation. The possibility that third parties have diverging beliefs from the main participants and that those perceptions, not those of the participants themselves, determine when talks emerge, is explored further in the case studies.

**Talking while Fighting: A Theory**

Why do wars continue on as long as they do before the participants finally agree to talk? What explains stretches during wars in which there is fighting without talking? In this section, I present a new theory for why states often refuse to engage in talks during wartime. I argue that because states cannot rule out the possibility that eagerness to talk will communicate weakness
and consequently encourage their opponent to ratchet up the war to a level that is unsustainable or unfavorable to them, they are reluctant to offer or accept offers to talk.\textsuperscript{108} The possibility of this dynamic, which I term the interstate ratchet effect, explains the long periods in the beginning of a war in which talks are not present and any offers made are not taken seriously by either side.\textsuperscript{109} The possibility of this dynamic makes it imperative for states to avoid appearing weak and susceptible to military pressure. The intensity of the interstate ratchet effect is a product of the level of limited war being fought and differences in the ability of its participants to escalate. Only when the incentive to escalate has been adequately reduced by the mounting costs of war will leaders be willing to take the risk associated with offering or agreeing to talks. Wars may therefore persist even if there is a possible agreement that both sides prefer to war because of the potentially misplaced fear that taking the diplomatic initiative to facilitate talks will seem like retreat under threat. As Henry Kissinger wrote of the Vietnam negotiations, “the frequently heard advice to ‘take risks for peace’ is valid only if one is aware that the consequences of an imprudent risk are likely to be escalation rather than peace.”\textsuperscript{110}

The causal model presented in this chapter is designed to predict the diplomatic behavior of states, specifically whether or not they offer peace talks, and describe the causal mechanisms behind these positions and the conditions under which talks finally emerge. First, leaders

\textsuperscript{108} Iklé, \textit{Every War Must End}, 85. For some historical examples in which leaders believed that initiated or even accepting offers to talk would make them look weak, see Smith, \textit{Stopping Wars}, chapter 3. Though I focus on the practical consequences of looking weak, some argue that leaders do not want to look weak for psychological reasons; they want to avoid potential humiliation, loss of pride, and damage to their self-image. For more on this point, see Smith, \textit{Stopping Wars}, 57-58.

\textsuperscript{109} Wittman articulates this point in a different way by arguing that deescalating the war may increase the value of continuing the war for the smaller side, thereby decreasing the chances of a settlement. See Donald Wittman, “How a War Ends,” \textit{Journal of Conflict Resolution} 23, No. 4 (December 1979): 743-763.

believe that agreeing to engage in talks will have negative consequences. Specifically, they fear, rightly or not, that their opponents will take the willingness to engage in wartime talks as a sign of weakness. Second, states are concerned that if their opponent thinks they are weak and therefore lack willingness to absorb or inflict costs in future periods, their opponent will ratchet up its war effort to a level that is unfavorable or unsustainable. This could reduce their bargaining leverage or even force an unconditional surrender by pushing the conflict to the point where they can no longer fight. Third, not all states perceive this risk equally. I label the difference between the costs associated with the level at which a state is fighting a limited war in a given period and the amount it is able to inflict and absorb at the total war level the cost differential (CD). Those with less room to escalate, or the smaller perceived CD, generally view talks as too risky given the possibility of the interstate ratchet effect and are consequently the most vigilant about whether offers to talk are genuine or probes of resolve. My theory therefore predicts that the smaller CD country will set strict preconditions on talks and rarely, if at all, make offers to talk. Fourth, in the early stages of the war states with the larger perceived CD face little risk of the interstate ratchet effect and believe that escalation will be more effective than talks for ending the conflict on favorable terms. These countries therefore offer talks often to allow for the possibilities of peace talks, but refuse to adhere to any preconditions to facilitate their launch. Fifth, fighting reduces the obstacles to peace talks by mitigating the risk of the interstate ratchet effect. With the mounting costs of war, the state with the larger perceived CD realizes that military pressure has limited effectiveness and therefore is willing to adhere to limited preconditions to facilitate the opening of talks. The state with the smaller perceived CD believes it has adequately dissuaded the opponent from ratcheting by proving its toughness through fighting and therefore relaxes its preconditions to permit talks to materialize.
This causal model which explains the absence of talks and their eventual emergence will be tested in subsequent chapters in three major case studies: the Vietnam War, Sino-Indian War, and Korean War. Because I will be evaluating diplomatic behavior throughout the course of these wars, there are hundreds of observations that will be considered in assessing my theory. My causal model is dyadic in nature. In the Korean War and Vietnam War, my analysis focuses on the two main participants, the United States and China and the United States and North Vietnam respectively. This is not to say that third parties or domestic audiences do not play a role in the story, but that their role is secondary and will also correspond with the above hypotheses. Specifically, the perceptions of allies, enemies, and third part neutrals about the utility and risks of wartime negotiations fall along the same spectrum of the participants; they fear talks demonstrate weakness and combat outcomes affect their beliefs about the effectiveness of escalation and the prospects for bona fide talks to end the war. Displays of strength are often for the benefit of third party actors or states may want to portray themselves as reasonable and not to blame for the ongoing hostilities, even as they evade peace talks. However, in contrast to the fourth alternative perspective outlined in this chapter, I argue that third party audience costs do not determine when states engage in talks, but only influence how a state presents its independent choices to relevant third party actors.

**Fear Readiness to Talk Communicates Weak Resolve**

While military capabilities are measurable in theory, resolve is “much less easy to determine and can only be gauged approximately by the strength of the motive animating it.”\(^{111}\) Resolve is defined as the ability and willingness to absorb and inflict costs during the course of the war. Many studies treat resolve as the willingness to fight at all; in crisis bargaining, a state

\(^{111}\) von Clausewitz, *On War*, 77.
may bluff that it is willing to fight over an issue only to back down immediately once talks break down into war. However, just as there are different levels of war, there are different types of resolve. During the course of the war, resolve is better understood as the drive to fight another day given the expected costs.

One reason past research cannot adequately explain the initiation, duration and termination of war is that it narrowly focuses on the implications of the military balance and combat victories and does not adequately address how states learn about resolve. The standard information-oriented hypothesis is that “bargaining space is created when as a result of the fighting the actors have convergent expectations about the outcome on the battlefield.”\(^{112}\) But the balance of resolve also has a great influence on the process of the war and diplomatic behavior. Because “a diminished ability to hurt the enemy, not simply military victory, is a major reason to stop fighting,” states may have an incentive to continue fighting even if the prospects of military victory are grim if they think the other side will concede first or that they will get a better deal in the future.\(^{113}\) For example, Reiter argues that information approaches to war termination cannot explain the end of WWII because Germany did not concede when it became obvious that the Allies were stronger militarily. But as Iklé points out, even though German leaders had learned about the relative balance of military power, they still believed that their nation “had an edge in willingness to bear the costs and pain of further warfare.”\(^{114}\) In other words, German leaders believed they could translate their resolve into real gains at the bargaining table at a minimum, or victory if they could outlast their opponents.

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\(^{112}\) Goemans, *War and Punishment*, 310.

\(^{113}\) Slantchev, “Convergence in Wartime,” 123.

\(^{114}\) Iklé, *Every War Must End*, 31. In other words, gradual build up or increase in violence will not accomplish the desired effect. At the same time, if the adversary knows it is a one-time attempt, such a gamble for resurrection, it is unlikely to work.
The fact that war rarely consists of one decisive act allows states to evaluate the amount of resources to dedicate to the conflict and dynamically adjust depending on combat performance and assessments of enemy resolve.\textsuperscript{115} While states can reveal their military abilities through fighting, the literature is less clear on how states try to signal resolve of their opponent during the course of a conflict. A country’s position on wartime negotiations is one source of information states can use to devise information about resolve. A common perception is that “the more the leadership fears the costs and risks of continued fighting, the more urgently will it seek a design for the war that promises to end the fighting quickly.”\textsuperscript{116} In other words, the willingness to engage in peace talks may be perceived as a sign of diminishing ability or willingness to continue fighting. Unfortunately for some, “in war, the will is directed at an animate object that reacts.”\textsuperscript{117} In other words, in addition to causing potential humiliation, loss of pride, damage to self-image, and other negative psychological effects, the perception of weakness can seriously heighten the costs of war by encouraging one’s opponent to ratchet.\textsuperscript{118} Paul Pillar in his study on bargaining during wartime captures this dilemma leaders face when he warns “be cautious in making the first ever offer to negotiate, lest the enemy interpret this as a sign of weakness and harden his position.”\textsuperscript{119} In a seminal piece on war termination, Donald Wittman articulates this point a different way by arguing that deescalating the war may increase the value of continuing the war for the other side, and therefore decrease the chances of a settlement.\textsuperscript{120} The bottom line

\textsuperscript{115} The very nature of war impedes simultaneous concentration of all forces. For more on how war is never an isolated act, see von Clausewitz, \textit{On War}, 78-80.
\textsuperscript{116} Iklé, \textit{Every War Must End}, 38.
\textsuperscript{117} von Clausewitz, \textit{On War}, 149.
\textsuperscript{118} Smith, \textit{Stopping Wars}, 57-58.
\textsuperscript{119} Pillar, \textit{Negotiating Peace}, 246.
\textsuperscript{120} Wittman, “How a War Ends.”
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is that under certain conditions, showing an eagerness to end the war may actually hinder the resolution of the conflict.

Because of these potential costs, states strive to employ strategies that create an image of strength. 121 Delaying talks may be a credible signal of strong resolve because it is extremely costly; without wartime negotiations, the possibility for war termination by negotiated settlement is practically nonexistent. While inefficient, such a delay in talks “may be required to convey private information credibly.” 122 For example, in labor economics the “willingness to endure a strike might be the only convincing evidence that the firm is unable to pay a high wage.” 123 Applied to war termination, delaying talks may be the only way a state can credibly signal its willingness to absorb the costs of war in future periods if it fails to prove military might on the battlefield. As Clausewitz notes, “the will is not a wholly unknown factor; we can base a forecast on its state tomorrow on what it is today.” 124 Fighting screens the weakly resolved from the strongly resolved in this way; by refusing to negotiate, a state may hope to communicate that whatever the opponent is prepared to offer in that period is insufficient given the state’s resolve to persecute the war. This leads us to the first component of the ratchet model: States fear, rightly or not, that their opponents will take the willingness to engage in wartime talks as a sign of weakness.

One key difference between war and labor strikes, however, is that there is a maximum punishment that the management can inflict on the workers (deny them a day’s wage) and that the workers can inflict on the management (deny them a day’s production). However, escalation

121 Smith, Stopping Wars, Chapter Three.
124 von Clausewitz, On War, 78.
in international relations is different in that “each side decides at what rate it wishes to inflict harm on the other side.”\textsuperscript{125} There are two ways to ratchet up the war effort to increase the enemy’s war costs, either by elevating one’s own effort level to conduct operations or use “the duration of the war to bring about a gradual exhaustion of his physical and moral resistance.”\textsuperscript{126} Because the type of war fought is not typically a constant, the costs also change during the course of the war. This brings us to the next section on escalation during limited wars.

**The Dynamics of Limited War**

War has long been considered “merely the continuation of policy by other means.”\textsuperscript{127} In the modern world, virtually all wars are characterized by periods of fighting, periods of repose, and periods of bargaining that can overlap both of these. As prominent strategist Thomas Schelling noted over four decades ago, war is a struggle of wills, “a competitive struggle to determine the disagreement outcome in a bargaining game in which states use force and the threat of force to influence other states.”\textsuperscript{128} War is not just defined by the destruction of the enemy through military means. The process and outcome of war is also affected by how states employ the use and threat of force to make diplomatic gains and how they use diplomatic cunning to leverage the most benefit from battlefield outcomes.\textsuperscript{129}

The level of violence and the factors that determine how a country conducts the war also characterize the nature of war fighting. Prussian strategist Carl von Clausewitz posited that the

\textsuperscript{126} von Clausewitz, *On War*, 93.
\textsuperscript{127} von Clausewitz, *On War*, 87. A strand of the formal literature on war initiation modeled war as an exit option to bargaining. However, this approach was been discarded in recent work due to its empirical inaccuracy.
\textsuperscript{128} Wagner, “Bargaining and War,” 481.
\textsuperscript{129} In this way, it is unproductive to model war as “an ‘outside option’ which, if exercised, ends the bargaining.” See Powell, “Bargaining and Learning,” 344.
ideal war is absolute war in which states fight to the natural extremes in terms of power and will in an attempt to disarm each other.\textsuperscript{130} For Clausewitz, absolute war was a philosophical construct largely because of friction; only ‘real war’ occurs in nature because a campaign is never conducted exactly according to plan due to variables outside any commanders’ control such as chance, weather, boldness, psychological, political and moral factors, and so forth. Clausewitz’s conception of absolute and real war is designed to stress more than the difference between total and limited violence, it also stresses the pauses and pace of real war. Clausewitz argues, “real war falls short of the total violence that is its essence in theory because, among other reasons, war does not consist in a single act or in a group of simultaneous actions, but extends over time with periods of action and inaction alternating.”\textsuperscript{131}

The nature of war also varies as a result of the participants’ strategic decisions about how to prosecute the war, specifically what tactics, operations, and strategy to employ. Wars “can have all degrees of importance and intensity, ranging from a war of extermination to simple armed observation.”\textsuperscript{132} On the most basic level, there are two types of war, limited and total, in which the first is best understood as a continuous variable while the latter is discrete. When states wage war to the full extent of their national strength or to annihilate the opponent, this is total war.\textsuperscript{133} In total war states do not consider engaging in peace talks because the aim is to achieve total victory and seize everything that was at stake. The pursuit of total victory is common when the issue at stake is indivisible.

\textsuperscript{131} Paret, “Genesis,” 19.
\textsuperscript{132} von Clausewitz, On War, 81.
\textsuperscript{133} A war can be total for one side and limited for the other. Also, a conflict can be characterized as a total war even if the country in question only employs limited assets if its aim is the complete destruction of the enemy.
TALKING WHILE FIGHTING?

There are three reasons why a state would opt to fight a limited war instead of a total war. First, as British strategist Liddell Hart articulates, a government “may calculate that the overthrow of the enemy’s military power is a task definitely beyond its capacity, or not worth the effort,” and that its objectives can be secured by other means.\textsuperscript{134} In a conflict between two nuclear powers with second strike capabilities, for example, escalating to the point of threatening another state’s existence has become unthinkable. Secondly, overthrow may not be necessary given the issue at hand. States often choose to pursue a limited war “not because [their] means precluded greater effort . . . but because their intentions were too limited to justify anything more.”\textsuperscript{135} Lastly, states may be reluctant to escalate to the total war level for fear of how a particular third party will react. The prospect that at a certain level of violence other states may feel it necessary to intervene in ways that would be detrimental to one’s cause could moderate violence.

A critical insight to understanding wartime diplomatic behavior is the fact that not all limited wars are created equal. Limited war is best characterized as a spectrum of violence in which the far extreme is total war and each movement toward this end increases the costs inflicted on the enemy. The nature of limited war is such that participants are not fighting at full capacity; “either side could win by increasing its efforts in some way, provided that the other side [does] not negate the increase by increasing its own efforts.”\textsuperscript{136} This movement along the spectrum, or escalation, can come in many forms. Herman Kahn posed three: increasing the intensity, widening the area, or compounding escalation.\textsuperscript{137} Increasing intensity includes using new or more equipment, or attacking new targets. Widening the area could entail expanding the

\textsuperscript{134} Hart, \textit{Strategy}, 334.
\textsuperscript{135} Paret, “Genesis,” 23.
\textsuperscript{136} Kahn, \textit{On Escalation}, 3.
\textsuperscript{137} Kahn, \textit{On Escalation}, 4.
agreed battle zone or attacking areas that were previously considered geographic sanctuaries. Compound escalation refers to taking the fight to the enemy in a completely different theater or attacking its allies.\footnote{Kahn, \textit{On Escalation}, Introduction.} States employ different strategies of escalation, but all drive toward the same objective: increasing the costs associated with continuing the war into the next period. In each period of conflict, therefore, states need not only to make a choice between war and negotiated settlement, but also about what whether or not to ratchet.\footnote{For a deeper treatment, see Wagner, “Bargaining and War,” 472.}

My causal model assumes that states will not mobilize and expend the maximum amount at their disposal given how much they value the issue at hand; instead, they hope to win at minimum cost.\footnote{In this way, the costs of war are not constant, but vary as perceptions of resolve and military capabilities change throughout the conflict. This is similar to an auction; if one player is willing to pay $100 for an item, and the other is only willing to bid $70, then the first player should bid $70.01, not $100.} States will choose the minimum level of effort possible to accomplish their goals; they will only ratchet up the war effort if they believe the payoff will be greater than the costs.\footnote{Kahn, \textit{On Escalation}, 3.} When making this choice in a limited war, states consider the peace terms that could be obtained if negotiations were launched immediately, how the military situation may deteriorate or improve if the state continues to fight, and how this would impact the possible negotiated settlements, and the costs of continued fighting.\footnote{A version of these points was put forth by Iklé, \textit{Every War Must End}, 15.} All these factors are greatly depend on how the adversary responses and reacts. Belligerents hope to minimize the costs of war and therefore would like to discourage their enemies from escalating within the realm of limited war. States will refrain from escalating to higher levels of violence if they:

1) Expect the military gains of increased violence to be canceled out by the enemy’s counter escalation or intervention by third parties on the part of the enemy;
2) Fear that an increase in violence will expand fighting to intolerably costly levels;
3) Fear escalation could inflict destruction and death on their own territory;
4) Wish to minimize the social and economic costs in order to avoid internal dissension;
5) Need to keep some military in reserve for coping with emerging threats.\textsuperscript{143}

The interstate ratchet effect may be sparked if agreeing to talks communicates that one is unable or unwilling to counter-escalate, escalate to intolerable levels, or expand the harm on one’s homeland. If belligerents believe they can obtain their goals militarily at an acceptable cost, they have little incentive to pursue peace.\textsuperscript{144} As Paul Pillar asserts, “the enemy will decline to negotiate . . . if he believes he is militarily capable of achieving it directly, and if his calculations of costs and benefits makes direct achievement appear more attractive than a negotiated settlement.”\textsuperscript{145} If a state believes that its opponent will not or cannot match its escalation, it may perceive the benefits of ratcheting up its war effort to outweigh the costs. This dissertation posits that states are indeed concerned that demonstrating an eagerness to talk projects weakness, an incapacity or lack of desire to match any escalation.\textsuperscript{146} This brings us to the second component of the causal model: States are concerned that if their opponent thinks they lack the willingness to absorb or inflict costs in future periods, their opponent will ratchet up its war effort to a level that is unfavorable or unsustainable.

Because states fear responding favorably to the prospect of talks may have a real impact on their prospects in war, they may eschew or delay talks and only carefully consider genuine offers. States may offer talks for a number of reasons other than facilitating a timely end to a war. Talks can be employed to 1) stall or break up an alliance (or deny/delay military assistance), 2) glean strategic intelligence about the attitude of the enemy (its resolve to continue or political

\textsuperscript{143} Iklé, \textit{Every War Must End}, 40.
\textsuperscript{144} See Smith, \textit{Stopping Wars}, Chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{145} Pillar, \textit{Negotiating Peace}, 245.
\textsuperscript{146} I will discuss in the next chapter how fighting reduces this concern.
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divisions within the enemy camp), or 3) hurt the enemy’s war effort, for example by “heed[ing] the enemy’s hopes for peace and heighten divisions in the enemy camp.”

Demonstrating a readiness to talk could reduce troop morale, negatively impacting military effectiveness. Therefore, if one side plans to exploit offers to talk to decipher whether escalation will have positive returns then even states that want to end the war may refuse to engage in talks. States may try to test the resolve of an opponent by putting out peace feelers only to rescind offers to talk if they learn they are facing a weakly resolved opponent. This can make it difficult for a state that genuinely to open talks to end the war to make its intentions known. At the end of WWII, for example, the Japanese political elite that hoped to end the war tried to communicate to the United States its desire to start peace negotiations multiple times, barely succeeding. The interstate ratchet effect is the result of a type of CCP; a state cannot credibly promise to implement an offer to engage in talks instead of ratcheting after that offer has been accepted.

However, not all states are equally concerned about the interstate ratchet effect and the intentions behind offers to talk. For a country fighting an enemy that is operating close to maximum capacity, the risk of the interstate ratchet effect is minimal due to the limited resources that remain at its enemy’s disposal. On the other hand, if there is a vast difference between the resources a country has mobilized for the conflict and the amount they are able to mobilize, then their opponent’s anxiety about the interstate ratchet effect will be more acute. I refer to the

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147 Sigal, *Fighting to the Finish*, 27.
149 Sigal argues that the desire to bolster morale at the front lines partly affecting Japanese military leaders adverse position on negotiations. See Sigal, *Fighting to the Finish*, 244-245.
150 Iklé, *Every War Must End*, 33-34.
difference between the costs associated with the level at which a state is fighting a limited war in a given period and the amount it is able to inflict and absorb in a total war as the cost differential (CD). States with the smaller perceived CD view talks as too risky given the possibility of the interstate ratchet effect and are consequently the most vigilant about whether offers to talk are genuine or probes of resolve. Such states will create strict conditions for the launch of talks in order to better decipher its enemy’s intentions with respect to peace talks. If the country with the larger perceived CD state concedes to preconditions, this provides some reassurance that it desires bona fide talks because it is willing to pay a price for their materialization. Under these conditions, the smaller CD state may accept talks. This does not mean that talks will definitely occur at this point or that participants will reach an agreement; the theory is probabilistic and allows for the possibility that the opponent may still refuse peace feelers or war termination offers. This brings us to two central hypotheses about the position of countries on wartime negotiations in the beginning stages of a war:

H1: States with the smaller perceived CD are more acutely concerned about the interstate ratchet effect and therefore they will set strict preconditions for the launching of talks and rarely, if at all, make offers to talk.

\[152\] It is important to note that the mobilization of resources does not equate to the costs the country is willing to bear for the issue at hand, though it is proportional. Each country when it mobilizes assets for war fighting has an estimate of the percent that will be expended, and the amount that will be spared from destruction. Moreover, the more resources that are mobilized, the worse the consequences will be in the case of operational failure. In other words, the amount that must be sacrificed to obtain particular political ends depends on the enemy as well as the balance of military power brought to bear.

\[153\] Probabilistic theories assume “there is a stochastic component to human behavior, that under apparently identical conditions, state leaders might choose to do one thing at one time and something quite different another, but with some predictable probability of doing each.” See D. Scott Bennett and Allan C. Stam, *The Behavioral Origins of War*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2004), 4.
H2: States with the larger perceived CD offer talks often, but refuse to adhere to any preconditions to facilitate their launch because they believe escalation will effectively end the conflict on terms favorable to them.

Given the perceived risks associated with talking while fighting, when do talks finally emerge? Leaders face a dilemma: once the balance of power has become clear (and consequently the range of possible settlements), they want to signal their willingness and ability to stop the fighting only if it increases the probability of a settlement. Leaders must be careful only to accept genuine attempts by the adversary to negotiate; as Paul Pillar warns, “beware of an enemy seeking negotiations only to benefit from their side-effects-in particular, to erode your side’s support and morale.” In other words, two conditions must be met for states to become less wary of talks. First, the smaller CD country’s concerns that talks indicate weakness and will encourage ratcheting must be alleviated. Such anxiety will only reduce if they believe they have adequately proven strong resolve through fighting to convince the larger CD country that further escalation will not yield desirable results. Second, leaders in the larger CD country must come to believe that they are not militarily capable of achieving their goals directly and therefore seek resolution through bona fide negotiations instead. Domestic politics can play a role in shaping these perceptions; for example, domestic backlash to the mounting costs of war can make escalation difficult, thereby reducing the smaller CD country’s concerns about the interstate ratchet effect. Domestic pressure can also limit the amount a country can escalate at different points throughout the war, thereby limiting the degree to which the ability to escalate can be

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155 This screening effect and the role of combat as an additional source of information are similar to the theoretical framework found in Fearon, “Fighting Rather than Bargaining.”
TALKING WHILE FIGHTING?

leveraged. Therefore, fighting reduces the obstacles to peace talks by mitigating the risk of the interstate ratchet effect. This change in beliefs will compel a parallel change in states’ position on talks that allow for wartime negotiations to finally begin. This leads to the second set of hypotheses, which address the conditions under which talks will emerge:

H3: The state with the smaller perceived CD will relax its preconditions once it believes it has earned a reputation for toughness.

H4: The state with the larger perceived CD will adhere partially to preconditions once it loses confidence in its ability to directly achieve its goals militarily.

My causal theory can be considered an informational theory of war termination in that combat outcomes determine the severity of the obstacle to talks that the interstate ratchet effect produces. Specifically, the interstate ratchet effect creates the most severe obstacle when leaders cannot credibly commit to reducing and eventually ceasing hostilities if their counterpart agrees to talks. The willingness of leaders to engage in talks while fighting depends partly on their military position and partly on whether they believe their opponents will negotiate in good faith. Combat outcomes determine the degree to which states are concerned about ploys; if one side has a substantial military advantage, the victor will less concerned about what readiness to talk may communicate to its adversary. If instead a state has significantly less room to escalate or the participants have reached a stalemate, such states will be concerned about the risks associated with the interstate ratchet effect until they have absorbed and inflicted great enough costs to credibly demonstrate strong resolve.
Though the focus of my theory is dyadic, the pressure and positions of third parties and international organizations play a part by influencing the material and reputational costs of escalating violence, prolonging war, or even ending the war depending on one’s proclivities.

When states want to make a genuine offer to engage in talks, they try to probe the other side’s position on talks. There are various ways leaders may balance the imperative to signal their willingness to engage in talks while minimizing the risk that their opponent will exploit this willingness to talk in ways that undermine the war effort. First, a state may use a unilateral change in its minimal terms of settlement or bargaining preconditions as a signal of willingness to engage in bona fide negotiations. Second, leaders may probe the enemy’s attitudes about the prospect of talks indirectly through third parties or individuals working through unofficial channels. Third, leaders may make public declarations and attempts to engage in talks. Lastly, states may escalate or deescalate military operations in an attempt to signal a willingness to negotiate and/or compel the adversary to engage in talks.

The literature on war termination at best underestimates if not ignores the fact that willingness to engage in peace talks can be construed as an informative signal. Anne Sartori does counter the view that talk is cheap, arguing that a state can “establish a reputation for using its threats honestly, and then leaders of other states are more likely to believe its threats in subsequent international disputes.”

Though an important purpose of diplomacy is “to communicate an adversary’s resolve to fight,” my theory hypothesizes that states fear demonstrating the readiness to talk could be detrimental to its interests. A state may be rightly concerned that agreeing to talks under military pressure will present the image that the

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156 Sartori, *Deterrence by Diplomacy*, 50.
157 Sartori, *Deterrence by Diplomacy*, 44.
opponent’s military efforts are effective, leading to more of the same instead of a reduction of the violence.

States are strategic about wartime talks and their timing. Specifically, the concern that the opponent will exploit its power to hurt in order to obtain further concessions once one signals a desire to negotiate may keep states from making offers that both sides would prefer to continuing the war. My theory therefore challenges the view that rational actors will move to end the war once both sides have learned enough about their prospects of military victory. Instead, wartime negotiations may not decrease the perceived costs of the war under certain conditions. Simply put, if states offer talks as a probe of resolve, with the intention to ratchet if they think this may push the opponent to a conclusion on more favorable terms, then showing a willingness to talk may be a bad idea. These dynamics will be further explored and clarified in the next six chapters on the Vietnam War, Sino-Indian War, and Korean War.
Chapter Three

The Vietnam War, 1965-1968: A Diplomatic Failure?¹⁵⁸

This chapter examines why talks did not occur between North Vietnam and the United States during the first three years of the Vietnam War. I analyze North Vietnamese and U.S. strategic thinking regarding the nature and timing of peace talks from the beginning of the war up to the Tet Offensive with information gathered through interviews with former Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) political and military leaders in Hanoi, Vietnam, analysis of original documents, as well as secondary sources.¹⁵⁹ I will address the following questions: why did it take so long to begin formal negotiations? What were the barriers to talking while fighting before 1968 and why did the North Vietnamese change their position when they did? What were the dominant U.S. views about the purpose of talks and how did this change 1965-1968? In what ways were Hanoi and Washington concerned that engaging in talks would affect the strategic environment? What costs and benefits did their leaders perceive to be associated with talks at different times throughout the war? Why was North Vietnam more reluctant to explore the possibility of talks than the United States? How did the position of third parties on the utility of negotiations impact either side’s diplomatic behavior?

¹⁵⁸ A version of this chapter was presented at the Midwest Political Science Association (MPSA) conference, March 2011.

¹⁵⁹ These interviews were conducted in Mandarin, Chinese through a Mandarin-Vietnamese interpreter. Though the identities of interviewees will remain anonymous, the types of people interviewed include former DRV ambassadors, DRV spokesman, participants in the Paris Peace talks, an assistant to the DRV ambassador in China, former Army and Air Force officers, a member of the international commission for control and supervision of the Geneva Accords, prominent Vietnamese international relations experts, official note taker for the Paris Talks, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials. See Appendix One for a list of the interview questions. Early histories of negotiations are based solely on the views of U.S. and GVN officials; in 1978 Hanoi refused to issue a visa to Goodman and overseas DRV officials cancelled any appointments that were made. See the preface of Allan E. Goodman, The Lost Peace: America’s Search for a Negotiated Settlement of the Vietnam War, (Stanford: Hoover Institute Press, 1978).
I argue in this chapter that each country’s perceived cost differential (CD, or the difference between the costs absorbed at the current level of limited war and the amount of resources available in a total war scenario) determined their positions on talks. North Vietnam, as the country with the smaller perceived CD, was concerned that agreeing to talks would project weakness. Hanoi believed signaling weakness had real consequences in that the United States could be encouraged to ratchet up the degree of military force used against Hanoi. Given these risks, Hanoi never offered talks and refused to accept U.S. offers unless the Johnson administration adhered to the strict precondition of halting all bombing against North Vietnam. The United States, on the other hand, as the country with the larger perceived CD, was less concerned about the ratchet effect and therefore proposed talks often. However, because the United States believed during the first three years of conflict that it could accomplish its aims directly through the use of military force, its leadership refused to make concessions and accept preconditions to facilitate their launch for the first three years of the war. The next chapter covers how North Vietnamese and American perspectives about war and peace talks changed, mitigating the ratchet effect and allowing for the emergence of the Paris Peace talks.

While U.S. involvement in Indochina began decades before, United States was not committed to all out war in Vietnam until July 1965. In late 1964, early 1965 President Lyndon B. Johnson fundamentally altered the U.S. commitment to South Vietnam by initiating regular bombing of the North and sending ground combat troops into the South for the first time. Rolling Thunder, the bombing campaign that ran from March 2, 1965 to October 31, 1968, was “a program of measured and limited air action jointly with GVN [Government of

Vietnam] against selected military targets in DRV, remaining south of 19th parallel.”  

According to Robert Pape, the objective of the American bombing campaigns was “to force Hanoi to cease supporting the insurgency in the South and enter serious negotiations for peace between North and South Vietnam.”  

On March 8, 1965 the first American ground troops, Marines from the 3rd Battalion, 9th Marine Expeditionary Force, arrived at Da Nang, South Vietnam, by sea.  

This escalation marked the emergence of a consensus in the United States, though fragile, that gradually increasing military pressure would compel the North Vietnamese to seek a settlement on favorable terms, specifically that the North would stop supporting and directing subversive operations in the South. During the three years that followed, the United States tried to engage in talks with the North Vietnamese to facilitate such a settlement, directly and indirectly supporting over 2,000 attempts to open talks without preconditions. Though the beliefs of the United States and intermediaries about the likelihood that the DRV would accept an offer to talk varied over these three years, in the end the North Vietnamese always refused.

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162 “Washington Approves Rolling Thunder,” in Herring, The Pentagon Papers, 114. The first U.S. bombs were actually dropped in the North in response to National Liberation Front (NLF) attacks on U.S. Army barracks in Pleiku on February 7, 1965 and then again when the NLF attacked enlisted quarters at Qui Zhon on February 10th. For more on ROLLING THUNDER, see Herring, America’s Longest War, 173-179. For more on the different stages and objectives of the bombing campaign, see Robert Pape, Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), especially 177-189.  
163 Pape, Bombing to Win, 174.  
164 Herring, America’s Longest War, 155-156.  
This search for negotiations with Hanoi between 1965 and 1968 has consequently been characterized as “one of the most fruitless chapters in U.S. diplomacy.”

The rest of this chapter proceeds as follows: first, I outline the various U.S. directed or supported initiatives to open talks from 1965 to 1968. During this period, though U.S. decision makers believed offering to talk could project weakness, this did not translate into a concern that Hanoi would ratchet because U.S. ability to counter-escalate was vastly superior. This chapter then describes how policymakers, confident they could directly achieve U.S. objectives militarily, were unlikely to agree to Hanoi’s preconditions to facilitate talks. In the second part of the chapter, I establish how North Vietnamese diplomatic behavior from 1965 to 1968 was in accordance with my causal model. Specifically, as the country with the smaller perceived CD, North Vietnam feared that agreeing to talks would convince the United States that military pressure was effective and the United States in turn would ratchet up its war effort to a level that was unsustainable for Hanoi. The DRV was therefore vigilant about whether offers to engage in wartime negotiations were probes of its resolve or genuine attempts at war termination, insisting on preconditions as a credible sign of good faith.


While the North Vietnamese were severely cautious about demonstrating a willingness to talk until 1968, President Johnson in contrast entertained ways to launch talks numerous times between 1965-1968. The Johnson administration did make a number of attempts to get peace talks started before April 1968, but nothing came of these alleged extensions of the olive branch.

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While the United States in principle was open to talks, it refused to adhere to Hanoi’s precondition of halting the bombing campaigns, which made the emergence of talks unlikely. Moreover, U.S. willingness to seek a peaceful settlement varied throughout the conflict. Before the war began, many advisors were open to the idea of settling the issue through negotiations. But after escalation, calls for a diplomatic solution quickly quieted, and those that favored military coercion over diplomatic feelers gained influence. By February 1965, there was a general consensus in the U.S. government that “a program of restrained but gradually rising pressure would at some point induce the North Vietnamese to seek a settlement on terms favorable to the United States.” But in early 1965, talks were seen as premature and detrimental to U.S. objectives in Indochina because they would undermine the effective employment of military force. As a State Department memorandum written following the approval of Rolling Thunder articulates, “We have every expectation that any ‘talks’ that may result from our Security Council initiative would in fact go on for many weeks…and would above all focus constantly on the cessation of military action against the DRV.” In other words, though the United States was open to talks, as long as decision makers believed they could obtain their goals militarily, they were unwilling to accept any preconditions to entice the North Vietnamese to the table.

To understanding the U.S. position on negotiations, one must distinguish between pre- and post-escalation, as well as how the purpose of diplomatic maneuvers changed over time.

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169 Thies, When Governments Collide, 3.


171 For information on U.S. views during the pre-pre escalation period of 1962-1963, see Goodman, The Lost Peace, 14-18. During this period Hanoi rebuffed any offers to negotiate
An examination of how U.S. and North Vietnamese views on talking changed once fighting broke out also serves to demonstrate how the determinants of diplomatic behavior during peacetime are different from those during wartime. The histories of this period that fail to separate out these dynamics either overstate or understate the U.S. desire to talk while fighting, and consequently the possibility of a negotiated settlement before January 1973. In reality, the Johnson administration’s position was consistent; its core leadership was open to talks without preconditions that would lead to the end to the conflict on U.S. terms. Before President Johnson significantly escalated the conflict in March 1965, the majority opinion wanted to postpone any peacetime negotiations until Saigon was in a stable, stronger position. But once the prospect of ratcheting up the war effort materialized after the August 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident, there was some consideration about whether fighting or talking would best achieve U.S. goals.

After the decision to escalate was made in the spring and summer of 1965, introducing U.S. forces into the country and expanding air strikes, the talking option was available but less emphasized than military coercion. The United States was open to talks during this period, in particular for the purpose of creating a channel through which Hanoi could capitulate if so desired. By the end of the summer, after numerous attempts to use bombing to force Hanoi into talks failed, doubt about the leverage the threat of escalation gave the United States started to creep into the minds of policy makers. It would take over two years of bloody conflict for the administration to realize Hanoi was not going to cave under the amount of pressure the United States was willing to impose. In the next chapter, I will explain how this realization convinced the Johnson administration that it had overestimated the effectiveness of military pressure and because it thought the collapse of the Saigon government was imminent. The U.S. goal during this period was to dissuade Hanoi from employing certain methods, such as terrorism, to achieve their goals.
peace talks may better serve U.S. war objectives. This change in thinking led to the United States adhering to limited preconditions to facilitate the opening of talks.

**Pre-escalation**

Leading up to the outbreak of full hostilities in the spring of 1965, the United States was dead set against entering into negotiations of any fashion, direct or indirect, bilateral or through an international convention, whose purpose was resolving the Vietnam issue.\(^{172}\) Historian Frederik Logevall in his book on the Johnson administration’s decision making process argues that “American policymakers from mid 1963 onward were not merely skeptical of the possibility of finding an early political solution to the war but acutely fearful of such a prospect and strongly determined to prevent one… A negotiations option never emerged, even after important elements within South Vietnam expressed support for it.”\(^{173}\) U.S. officials spurned United Nations (UN) Secretary General U Thant’s attempts to get the relevant parties together in August 1964, explaining President Johnson needed to focus on the election that November. After the election, U Thant tried once again, communicating to the American ambassador to the UN, Adlai Stevenson, that the Burmese government had agreed to host talks. The U.S. response was unwelcoming; Secretary of State Dean Rusk told the Secretary General to shelve the proposal because the time was not right for talking.\(^{174}\)

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\(^{172}\) In the early 1960s, before war seemed inevitable, advisors to then President Kennedy were more open to the idea of resolving the Vietnam issue through talks. National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 52, signed by President Kennedy’s National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy on May 11, 1961, authorizes the U.S. Ambassador in South Vietnam “to begin negotiations looking toward a new bilateral arrangement with Vietnam, but no firm commitment will be made to such an arrangement without further review by the President.” See Herring, *The Pentagon Papers*, 51.


The United States’ biggest fear in 1964 and early 1965 was that Hanoi would launch a grand peace initiative, forcing the United States to respond to international pressure to enter into what the administration viewed as premature negotiations. Because of this concern, the administration also sought “to control any negotiations and would oppose any independent South Vietnamese efforts to negotiate.”175 Because Hanoi clearly had the upper hand before the Americanization of the conflict, the North Vietnamese were sincere in their desire to achieve a political solution before U.S. escalation in March 1965. Hanoi was confident in its ability to achieve its objectives pre-escalation for the same reasons that the United States was anxious about talks; South Vietnam was in chaos at the time and many South Vietnamese leaders were open to negotiations as well.176

After President Johnson was elected for a full term in November 1964, Hanoi even signaled to the United States that it was open to peace talks. The DRV had articulated through Canadian diplomat Blair Seaborn a degree of flexibility concerning diplomacy, but the United States refused to meet with DRV representatives to find out the details of its diplomatic position.177 For the United States, the purpose of Seaborn's visit to Hanoi was to communicate an ultimatum, to “convey to the North Vietnamese U.S. determination to stand firm in Vietnam.”178 Seaborn was asked to reassure Hanoi of the limited nature of U.S. objectives (no military bases in the area or intention to overthrow Hanoi in North Vietnam) and to hint at the

175 Logevall, Choosing War, 269. The quote is from James C. Thomson Jr.’s notes from a November 27, 1964 meeting.
176 In December 1964, Ambassador Taylor expressed a common concern that come January the South Vietnamese National Assembly would be dominated by elements favoring peace. In early 1965, the administration was still fearful that the GVN and DRV would negotiate an end of the war that would threaten the independent, noncommunist nature of South Vietnam. See Logevall, Choosing War, 302-303, 311-313.
177 See Logevall, Choosing War, 296-297.
178 Herring, The Pentagon Papers, 95. Logevall, Choosing War, 296; Pape, Bombing to Win, 185.
economic benefits given to Communist countries that have not sought territorial expansion.\textsuperscript{179} In spite of this, Hanoi continued in January and February 1965 to send out signals of willingness to enter into talks whose primary purpose would be complete U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam.\textsuperscript{180} Luckily for the United States, Hanoi played its hand poorly, and though it signaled a willingness to talk, it failed to push the issue to the point that the United States would have felt international and domestic pressure to respond.\textsuperscript{181}

But peacetime negotiations have different dynamics than those during war, particularly with respect to the costs associated with the failure to resolve an issue and the consequences of showing weakness. After a November 1, 1964 National Liberation Front (NLF) attack on the U.S. airbase Bien Hoa that left four Americans dead and five aircraft destroyed, the U.S. position on talks changed. By the end of the month, Assistant Secretary John McNaughton presented the President with three options for expanding the war devised by a working group. The first option, Option A, was to continue along the present course with the “continued rejection of negotiating in the hope the situation will improve.” Option B, referred to as the ‘fast full squeeze,’ called for major attacks on North Vietnam. This strategy could be coordinated with negotiations, but only “with absolutely inflexible insistence on our present objectives.”\textsuperscript{182} Option C, referred to as a ‘progressive squeeze and talk’ or a ‘slow squeeze,’ consisted of combined military pressure with

\textsuperscript{179} This may have been the result of a recommendation made by John McNaughton, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, that in addition to any military action, the United States should “establish immediately a channel for bilateral U.S.-DRV communication. This could be in Warsaw or via Seaborn in Hanoi. Hanoi should be told that we do not seek to destroy North Vietnam or to acquire a colony or base.” McNaughton was, however, against seeking wider negotiations in the UN or in Geneva. He notes that regardless, “we should evaluate and pass on each negotiating opportunity as it is pressed on us.” See “McNaughton Proposals, November 1964,” in Herring, \textit{The Pentagon Papers}, 102.

\textsuperscript{180} Logevall, \textit{Choosing War}, 366.

\textsuperscript{181} Logevall, \textit{Choosing War}, 400-401.

\textsuperscript{182} Logevall, \textit{Choosing War}, 258.
VIETNAM WAR, 1965-1968

offers to negotiate. This option, which included “an orchestration of communications with Hanoi and a crescendo of additional military moves against infiltration targets,” would be designed “to give the U.S. the option at any point to proceed or not, to escalate or not, and to quicken the pace or not.” Negotiations were not central to the plan, but the working group recommended that the United States ‘play it by ear’ and indicate a willingness to talk under the right conditions (i.e. once Hanoi was ready to give up). This third option was the one that the group favored. Among Johnson’s advisors, there was disagreement about what the bombing would accomplish and how it should be carried out, but all agreed the United States had to do something. By February 1, 1965, the United States was committed to a major escalation of the war.

The United States position on talks was to avoid meaningful negotiations under all three options until an escalation of military action could better secure U.S. core objectives. In Option C, negotiations would be a way to keep the channels of communication open in case Hanoi decided to settle the dispute on American terms. This was the administration’s main position on talks until the costs of war changed its view on the effectiveness of graduated military pressure and utility of talks in early 1968. This does not mean that everyone within the administration agreed the best course before 1968 was to be open to talks but not make any real concessions so as to facilitate their emergence; several midlevel officials were distressed by the administration’s “complete unwillingness to negotiate on any terms except those that amounted

185 Logevall, Choosing War, 258.
186 Herring, The Pentagon Papers, 85.
187 Logevall, Choosing War, 265.
188 Logevall, Choosing War, 265.
CHAPTER THREE

to Hanoi’s unconditional surrender.”189 Before escalation to full-out war, the China expert on the National Security Council (NSC) James Thomson had gone as far as to suggest early negotiations from an inferior position, even if the end result was a unified, communist Vietnam.190 Though still part of the debate, this anti-escalation, pro-negotiation sentiment in late 1964 still constituted the minority position. On December 1964, the United States was preparing to move to Phase Two of its Vietnam policy, which consisted of air attacks of mounting severity between the 17th and 19th parallel and possibly the stationing of one division or two battalions in Northern South Vietnam. During this phase, the administration would not actively pursue talks, but the United States was open to unconditional talks as a way to facilitate Hanoi’s surrender.191

Post-escalation

In the early days of the war in 1965, there were so many initiatives to launch talks that this period is often referred to as ‘the secret search for peace.’192 Though chalked up to the United States, many of these were actually indirect peace efforts of third party individuals and countries (President Johnson personally counted more than seventy of these). These initiatives were problematic in that the failure to respond to them caused political problems given that domestic audiences were weary of war.193 However, if President Johnson did respond to them, or went as far as to launch peace initiatives of his own to test the diplomatic waters, he “risked raising false hopes, sending the wrong signals to Hanoi, or undermining the Saigon

189 Logevall, Choosing War, 266.
190 Logevall, Choosing War, 277-278.
191 Logevall, Choosing War, 275.
192 For more on this, see Thies, When Governments Collide; Kraslow and Loory, The Secret Search for Peace.
193 I argue the third party audience costs do not determine when states engage in talks, but they are still important because they influence how states present their decisions to the relevant third party actors. For more on the role of domestic and international audiences, see Chapter Two.
government.”194 As President Johnson stated with a palpable degree of frustration “publicity seekers and amateurs cannot have a hand in our affairs with other nations.”195 Unfortunately, the President had no way of preventing these types of activities. Given this dilemma, the Johnson administration never did figure out how to appropriately react to third party initiatives and its handling of these efforts was “confused, disorganized, and aimless as the war itself.”196

One example of such an initiative was the La Pira attempt.197 At the direction of the Italian foreign minister, Italian law professor and peace activist Georgio La Pira visited Ho Chi Minh, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong, and two representatives of the NLF in October 1965 under a veil of great secrecy.198 La Pira relayed back to Rome that Ho expressed an eagerness for peace and would agree to negotiations if a ceasefire were declared that covered all of Vietnam. Given the negative publicity the administration received for allegedly dismissing U Thant’s peace initiatives in 1964, it decided to issue a response to Italian Foreign Minister Fanfani’s letter on the subject. The U.S. response did not indicate faith in the initiative nor did reputational concerns change the U.S. negotiating position. William Bundy captured the conventional State Department wisdom when he criticized that a “bushy-tailed and eager” La Pira had gotten nothing but the party line, “it was much more on sound and fury than substance.”199 Bundy may have been correct; when the news of the contact became public,

194 Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 89.
196 George C. Herring, *The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War: The ‘Negotiating Volumes’ of the Pentagon Papers* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), xvi. For additional examples of how peace moves by private citizens were handled in other wars historically, see Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 90-91.
197 For a more detailed account, see Kraslow and Loory, *The Secret Search*, chapter eight.
199 Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 94.
Hanoi vehemently denied that any peace probe had taken place, calling the report “sheer groundless fabrications.”

This vignette illustrates an important point about the U.S. position on negotiations after the escalation in late spring, early summer of 1965. While U.S. leaders did not believe much would come of their offers at this point, they were less cautious about portraying themselves as eager to talk than Hanoi, which categorically refused to engage with the United States during this period. The United States was still concerned that demonstrating a readiness to talk would send the wrong signal, but given that it had more room to escalate, it was not fearful that Hanoi would respond by ratcheting up the war to a relatively unfavorable level. U.S. decision makers still believed at this point that graduated military pressure would be more effective than negotiating at achieving U.S. objectives, but did not see great risks in offering to open communication channels to allow for a diplomatic breakthrough. If Hanoi responded to what it perceived as weak U.S. resolve by escalating, the United States could easily counter such efforts.

By the spring of 1965, the administration had decided that it would be better to come out in front of these initiatives and launched a major peace offensive. The goal was to establish a level of control instead of merely reacting to the peace moves of private citizens and third parties. As part of this policy, President Johnson paused bombing and sent top officials including Vice-President Hubert H. Humphrey and diplomat W. Averell Harriman to thirty-four capitals to deliver the message to 115 governments that he was prepared to negotiate without conditions. The President himself sent personal messages to heads of state, utilizing both old and new communication channels to indirectly communicate to Hanoi his desire for peace and the need for parallel signs of restraint if talks were to be opened. Though the peace offensive

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201 Herring, LBJ and Vietnam, 100.
was designed to address domestic and international criticism, the Johnson administration was
genuine in its desire to create channels through which the DRV could communicate its desire to
capitulate to U.S. demands. Though considered a remote possibility, now that the United States
was increasing its military effort and consequently the amount of pain it was inflicting, the
thinking was that the DRV might want to end the conflict before further progression in the
Americanization of the war.

There were a number of initiatives directed by the administration in the off chance that
they could lead to peace. An example of one of these was MAYFLOWER, the bombing pause
launched on May 10, 1965. The United States tried to send a message to Hanoi through the
Soviet ambassador in Washington that a reduction in DRV activities in the South could lead to
the extension of the bombing pause instituted earlier that month. The Soviets refused to serve as
an intermediary and the North Vietnamese embassy in Moscow would not receive the U.S.
ambassador. President Johnson took this as an unequivocal rebuff, a spitting in the face in the
words of his Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara.\(^\text{202}\)

XYZ was another initiative that failed to produce tangible results even though it had the
full support of the President. President Johnson chose George Ball, an experienced diplomat
who had served in Vietnam in the early 1950s, to be point man for the mission. The primary
purpose of XYZ was to probe the meaning of DRV statements to decipher whether there existed
the possibility for serious talks. In August and September 1965, Edward Guillion, the U.S.
unofficial envoy, and Mai Van Bo, the DRV’s commercial representative in Paris, engaged in the
most serious and substantial discussions about prospects for peace that would take place between

\(^{202}\) Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 97.
representatives from each side between 1965-1968.\textsuperscript{203} But 3 September 1965, Bo pulled out of the discussions and cut off the contact as quickly as it had started for reasons that are still unknown today.\textsuperscript{204}

At various times North Vietnamese reactions to U.S. offers, though not favorable, seemed hopeful. In 1966, in efforts code-named PINTA, there was direct diplomatic contact between the U.S. ambassador Henry Byroade and the North Vietnamese consul general Vu Huu Binh in Rangoon, Burma where both men were stationed. At first, the North Vietnamese seemed open to the idea of starting talks, but by February 19, 1966, “whatever interest the North Vietnamese might have had in substantive negotiations had disappeared.”\textsuperscript{205} Some historians argue that MARIGOLD, the code name for attempts by the Polish government to facilitate talks between the two sides from June through December 1966 was a missed opportunity for peace.\textsuperscript{206} While it is still unknown whether the Polish interlocutor had indeed secured an agreement from Hanoi to begin negotiations under the condition that the United States first pause bombing and then Hanoi would take steps to de-escalate as well, nothing concrete came from the attempt in the end.\textsuperscript{207} While some of the details of the encounter are still classified, the U.S. position was that the Polish initiative “had been concocted by ‘well-meaning friends’ of North Vietnam as an effort to

\textsuperscript{203} Herring, \textit{LBJ and Vietnam}, 98-99.
\textsuperscript{204} For more on this interaction, see Robert K. Brigham, \textit{Guerrilla Diplomacy: The NLF’s Foreign Relations and the Viet Nam War}, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1999, 46-52.
\textsuperscript{205} Thies, \textit{When Governments Collide}, 121. For a complete description of the mission, see pp. 112-122.
\textsuperscript{207} Herring, \textit{LBJ and Vietnam}, 104-106. See also Hershberg, “Who Murdered ‘Marigold.’” Captured DRV documents characterized talks at this point as ‘premature.’ See Goodman, \textit{The Lost Peace}, 39.
draw up what might be acceptable to the United States and sell it to Hanoi.”  

President Johnson believed that “the simple truth was that the North Vietnamese were not ready to talk to [the United States].”

The next partially administration-directed initiate to open talks that fell under the auspices of the peace offensive was SUNFLOWER. This attempt to initiate talks involved a personal letter to Ho Chi Minh from President Johnson, a direct approach to the North Vietnamese embassy in Moscow, and contact between the British prime minister and Soviet premier Alexei Kosygin. Occurring in early 1967, nothing came of the Moscow contact as the situation stalemated quickly around the issue of de-escalation. The British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, most likely “enticed by the prestige that could be gained from a successful intercession,” initiated the third contact. The Johnson administration was not pleased with Wilson’s move, but felt there was little harm in going along so as not to antagonize the British who had been supportive of the United States throughout the war. Most likely due to overeagerness, Wilson seriously mismanaged the interaction, presenting an offer before clearing it with the Johnson administration first. But while these last two components of SUNFLOWER did not receive the full backing of the administration, President Johnson did make a significant overture in his letter to Ho Chi Minh when he proposed direct talks between trusted representatives. However, he also took the harsher position that bombing would only stop after

211 For a good timeline of these events, see Goodman, *The Lost Peace*, 46-55.
infiltration into South Vietnam came to an end, a promise of mutual de-escalation was insufficient.\textsuperscript{213} The result of SUNFLOWER was that confusing signals were sent to Hanoi. The DRV did not respond, but if it had, it would have most likely rejected Johnson’s tougher proposal as well as Wilson’s slightly altered version given that it had rejected the softer MARIGOLD proposals.\textsuperscript{214}

By 1967, there were five main open channels of communication between Hanoi and Washington, but four of these were directed by foreign governments (Romania, Norway, Sweden, and Italy) and were viewed with caution by the United States.\textsuperscript{215} The only proactive initiative coming from the administration itself was in the summer and fall of 1967 when Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, convinced the war could not be won militarily, committed himself to PENNSYLVANIA along with then U.S. Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach. This initiative was a “concentrated, ‘all-out’ effort to secure a negotiated settlement.”\textsuperscript{216} Using two French intermediaries, they tried to develop a new formula for de-escalation in which the United States would stop the bombing with the understanding that this move would lead, in a timely manner, to productive discussions and the DRV would not take advantage militarily. Hanoi rebuffed this proposal, but the administration persisted. By the fall of 1967, nothing had come from the initiative and President Johnson was inclined to listen to General Wheeler that the United States should be bombing more, not less. With the support of his cabinet, he moved to reject McNamara’s request to extend the bombing pause, killing any prospect of talks coming out of PENNSYLVANIA.\textsuperscript{217} Katzenbach argued, perhaps self-

\textsuperscript{213} For more text of the letter, see Goodman, \textit{The Lost Peace}, 50. \\
\textsuperscript{214} For more on SUNFLOWER, see Herring, \textit{LBJ and Vietnam}, 109-111. \\
\textsuperscript{215} Goodman, \textit{The Lost Peace}, 56. \\
\textsuperscript{216} Herring, \textit{LBJ and Vietnam}, 115. \\
\textsuperscript{217} Herring, \textit{LBJ and Vietnam}, 117-118.
servingly, that it was “the closest thing we have yet had to establishing a dialogue with North Vietnam.”

While the United States was much more open to talks than Hanoi, stubbornness over the conditions under which those talks would begin was characteristic of the vast majority of peace moves before 1968. There were definitely limits to the risks the United States was willing to take for peace; there were, for example, no serious attempts to make direct contact with Hanoi and only unconditional talks were offered. Attempts made through private, indirect channels did not yield any results either. I argue in a later section that this was partly because as the smaller CD country Hanoi was vigilant about entertaining only genuine offers and Ho Chi Minh thought U.S. attempts to initiate talks were deceitful and hypocritical. To a certain degree, his perceptions were correct. Without much fanfare, the peace offensive was abandoned and the administration resumed bombing January 1967.

A Silent Adversary: North Vietnamese Position on Wartime Negotiations, 1965-1968

In contrast to the United States, Hanoi made no offers to talk and responded negatively or not at all to U.S. efforts for the first three years of the war. Throughout this period, U.S. hope for talks varied because it was difficult to decipher Hanoi’s position on negotiations; it was common for one intermediary to say something and for a DRV official to later contradict it. However, the bottom line from the United States perspective according to Dean Rusk was that Hanoi never

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218 Herring, LBJ and Vietnam, 117.
219 Talks were unlikely to happen “with the sides holding incompatible goals, mouthing appealing rhetoric, and going about their military business.” John Prados, The Blood Road: The Ho Chi Minh Trail and the Vietnam War, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1999), 135.
220 Herring, LBJ and Vietnam, 101. In his memoirs, President Johnson argues that there were nine major initiatives in the search for negotiations with Hanoi 1964-1968 and the only reason they failed was because Hanoi was unresponsive or responded negatively. He argues, however, that the peace offensive was a sincere attempt to get talks started. See Johnson, The Vantage Point, 579-589.
made one genuine peace attempt. As previously noted, before the start of the war when the ratchet effect comes into play, North Vietnam was more open to talks. In December 1958, the DRV Prime Minister Pham Van Dong offered to negotiate arms reductions with Saigon. In March 1962, the DRV foreign minister Ung Van Khiem had formally requested that the co-chairs of the 1954 Geneva conference, Britain and the USSR, consult with ‘interested countries’ about how the Geneva Accords could be preserved.

Militarily, the North Vietnamese were hoping to avoid a major escalation of conflict with the United States, and consequently they limited their activities in the South while pushing for multilateral negotiations. Thus, in July 1962, senior Politburo member Le Duan ordered the southern resistance to keep the fighting confined to the mountain and rural areas of South Vietnam, thinking that attacks on urban environments would more likely induce an American intervention beyond its advisory presence. In late 1962, Ho Chi Minh himself was still calling for negotiations, albeit to facilitate the peaceful reunification of Vietnam. Even though the DRV was open to a political solution before the outbreak of war, North Vietnamese officials approached the issue of diplomacy with a lack of urgency. They preferred a wait-and-see

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222 For more of Rusk’s views, see Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It: A Secretary of State’s Memoirs*, (New York: Tauris 1990).
223 This was mainly because, in the view of J. Kenneth Blackwill who ran the British consulate in Hanoi at the time, Hanoi was confident in the long-term trends and was wary of provoking significant Chinese involvement and alienating the USSR given the complexities of the Sino-Soviet split. See Logevall, *Choosing War*, 9-10.
224 Perceived as a propaganda ploy, the Diem government rejected the suggestion. See Prados, *Vietnam: The History of an Unwinnable War*, 66.
228 For more on the potential reasons for this lack of urgency, see Logevall, *Choosing War*, 10-12.
approach to actively pursuing negotiations partly because even then they did not want to be seen as “too eager for a peaceful resolution to the conflict in South Vietnam.”\textsuperscript{229}

But Hanoi became much less flexible about its negotiating position after U.S. air strikes began because the costs of looking weak increased in tandem. A State Department analyst captured the transformation, arguing Hanoi demonstrated “a sudden reversal from a more open-ended position on possible negotiations” to a hard position. In early March, Hanoi began to shut down all the channels it had used to try to open talks in the months before such as contacts with the French, a western news correspondent in Cambodia, and the connection with Seaborn. By April 4, 1965, Pham Van Dong communicated to French diplomats stationed in Hanoi that negotiations were impossible in the foreseeable future.\textsuperscript{230} With the exigency to avoid war abandoned, Hanoi escalated in response, sending a sizable number of its own troops south.\textsuperscript{231}

The difference in North Vietnamese and U.S. positions on wartime negotiations is largely due to differences in the CDs of the two countries, the difference between the amount of resources mobilized and those available. The United States was less concerned about looking weak because Hanoi was incapable of significantly increasing the costs inflicted given it was fighting at almost full capacity. The United States, however, had military force it held in reserve. At its peak, in April 1969, the United States had 543,400 troops in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{232} While this was a large force, the total size of U.S. active duty forces, which made up two-thirds of the fighting force in Vietnam, was approximately 8.7 million for the war years. Even though domestic politics and the desire to avoid Chinese intervention did put constraints on the degree to which

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\textsuperscript{229} Logevall, Choosing War, 12.
\textsuperscript{230} Logevall, Choosing War, 366-367.
\textsuperscript{231} Though Ho Chi Minh had previously sent in technical and military experts, only two regiments of combat troops had infiltrated the south by early 1965. See Logevall, Choosing War, 367.
\textsuperscript{232} Herring, America’s Longest War, 182.
\end{flushleft}
CHAPTER THREE

the United States could ratchet, U.S. ability was still vastly superior to that of North Vietnam. Furthermore, if the United States were to ratchet up its war effort upon perceiving Vietnamese weakness, in addition to incurring more costs, Hanoi would obtain a worse bargain once talks actually begin at a minimum. Depending on the degree of escalation, Hanoi may be unable to sustain the war effort at all and state collapse could become a real possibility. In short, the potential costs associated with a ratcheting up of the U.S. war effort were prohibitively high for Hanoi.

Agreeing to talks could also undermine the Vietnamese war effort. The DRV was propagating “everything for war” in order to mobilize the people for the war effort; engaging in talks early in the conflict might cause the people to reduce resistance and fighting. Perhaps Kissinger explained the dilemma best when he argued, “if negotiations give the impression of being a camouflaged surrender, there will be nothing left to negotiate. Support [of the Vietnamese people] for the side which seems to be losing will collapse.” In other words, as one former DRV ambassador active during the war articulated, talks ‘too early’ would weaken Hanoi’s ability to conduct people’s war. Along these lines, the leadership believed its war fighting abilities would improve as the people were mobilized and aid and training came in from

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233 One interviewee, a former liaison officer and official DRV note taker during the Paris Peace talks, described the desired relationship between the government and the people to enhance the war effort as one of unity. Author’s interviews. Hanoi, Vietnam. March 2011. As one high-ranking diplomat noted, the mobilization of the people had just begun 1965-1966. If Hanoi agreed to talks early in the war, the people would not understand why the talks were taking place. Author’s interview with a former DRV ambassador. Hanoi, Vietnam. March 2011.


235 Author’s interview with former DRV ambassador and spokesman; author’s interview with a former assistant to the Ambassador in China who worked extensively on the U.S.-Vietnam relationship from 1964 to 1973. Other interviewees, including a former Army officer that served on the international commission for control and supervision of the Geneva Accords and participated in the Paris Peace Talks, expressed this position. Hanoi, Vietnam. March 2011.
China and the Soviet Union, the former of which was opposed to negotiations.\textsuperscript{236} Because of the potential consequences of looking weak, Hanoi was only willing to consider talks with massive preconditions that would screen out offers that were mere probes of resolve as well as hamper the U.S. war effort, which was ultimately unacceptable to the United States. The fear that demonstrating a willingness to talk would make North Vietnam worse off by changing U.S. beliefs in an undesired direction was the most acute during the first three years of combat.

Hanoi’s refusal to talk while fighting was not an indication of ideological aversion to negotiating with the enemy. Interviews with political and military leaders active in the war period reveal that the North Vietnamese always knew the conflict would eventually end by negotiated settlement. The question for political and military leaders was the timing and conditions under which the talks would begin.\textsuperscript{237} On April 8, 1966, the DRV put forth a four point proposal for talks that demanded the United States cease all acts of war against the DRV and withdrawal all of its troops.\textsuperscript{238} In January 1966, a DRV Foreign Ministry spokesperson announced that these points, including the cessation of U.S. bombing, were preconditions for talks. However, according to the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Gromyko, Hanoi

\textsuperscript{236} Author’s interview with former DRV ambassador and spokesman. Hanoi, Vietnam. March 2011.

\textsuperscript{237} Author’s interview with former diplomat and prominent historian, Hanoi, Vietnam. March 2011. A former Army officer who was on the international commission for control and supervision of the Geneva Accords and participated in the Paris Peace talks also articulated this point and as did several other high-ranking career diplomats.

\textsuperscript{238} Hanoi’s four points essentially called for: 1. “Recognition of the basic national rights of the Vietnamese people—peace, independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity,” which required the United States to withdraw all of its military from South Vietnam and cease all acts of war on North Vietnam. 2. Respecting the military provisions of the 1954 Geneva Accords, which included, inter alia, tight restrictions on the presence of foreign military personnel which the United States had long since surpassed. 3. “The internal affairs of South Vietnam must be settled by the South Vietnamese people themselves in accordance with the program of the NFLSV [NLF].” 4. Vietnam’s “peaceful reunification” should likewise “be settled by the Vietnamese people in both zones, without any foreign interference.” See Hershberg, “Who Murdered ‘Marigold,’” 25-26.
could accept the four points as the basis for a settlement, not a precondition for talks. Hanoi’s position on talking while fighting was clarified in January 1967 at the 13th plenum of the Vietnamese Worker’s Party (VWP). There, the Central Committee (CC) ratified the policy of “stepping up diplomatic struggle,” which consisted of negotiating with the United States to facilitate an end to the war but also to win over international public opinion. That same month, two-time DRV Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh vocalized for the first time a clear position on talks, stating “it is only after the unconditional cessation of U.S. bombing and all other acts of war against the DRV that there could be talks between the DRV and the U.S.” Though these conditions were not fully met, Hanoi did eventually agree to open official talks with the United States on April 3, 1968 in response to President Johnson’s decision to stop all bombing north of the 20th parallel on March 31, 1968.

Why did it take so long for talks to begin? There were ample opportunities for talks to begin sooner; the United States had made offers directly and indirectly to the DRV both in the lead up and during the war. Why did the North Vietnamese refuse to engage in talks during wartime until March 31, 1968?

My causal model posits that states fear that their opponents will take the willingness to engage in wartime talks as a sign of weakness, encouraging the adversary to ratchet up of its war effort in response. The state with the smaller CD, in this case North Vietnam, is more likely to view talks as too risky to engage in given the possibility of a ratchet effect. The state with the larger CD, in this case the United States, still believes that talks may signal weakness, but given the negligible possibility of the interstate ratchet effect, it is less cautious and more willing to

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offer talks. The historical record outlined in this chapter confirms that Hanoi did not offer talks and insisted on strict preconditions before accepting. The United States, on the other hand, offered talks numerous times, but refused to accept preconditions to facilitate their launch because it believed escalation would effectively end the conflict on terms favorable to them. In the next section I take the next step and demonstrate that both countries believed a willingness to talk would signal weakness, but Hanoi was more concerned than the United States about the consequences of looking weak.

Perceptions of Weakness and the Interstate Ratchet Effect

The conventional wisdom in Hanoi in the early stages of the war was that if it agreed to talks before it demonstrated toughness through combat, the United States would conclude that it was softening the Vietnamese will through military pressure. As the DRV premiere articulated “we cannot take a position which the USA might understand as a sign of weakness. We have to be very careful.”242 Any validation that the DRV was weak could then result in an increase in the intensity of the U.S. wartime effort and escalation of the conflict.243 The DRV felt it could only reduce this obstacle to talks if it convinced the United States through toughness in combat that it would not capitulate to U.S. military pressure.244 The United States was a self-confident country that believed its military was strong and effective at achieving its national security objectives.245

243 Author’s interviews. Hanoi, Vietnam. March 2011. Most interviewees, including a former DRV ambassador and spokesman; career diplomat active during the war; a Lieutenant General that was active duty during the war; a high-ranking diplomat that participated in the Paris Peace talks; and several other high-ranking career diplomats, articulated this position.
244 Author’s interviews with former DRV ambassador, high-ranking career diplomat, prominent Vietnamese academic, and liaison officer and official DRV note taker during the Paris Peace Talks. Hanoi, Vietnam. March 2011.
As one high-ranking career diplomat argued, only the costs of war could change U.S. perceptions. The fact that North Vietnam was a poorer, weaker country than the United States colored the strategic thinking of North Vietnamese leaders. Specifically, given the great imbalance in military power, the North Vietnamese saw the potential for the interstate ratchet effect as an existential threat. According to a DRV liaison officer and official note taker for the Paris Peace talks, the question was not whether the United States could crush Vietnam; the outcome of the conflict depended on the amount of resources the United States was willing to commit to the conflict. The United States had absolute power in the military, economic and diplomatic realms, which resulted in a psychology of fear that pervaded the DRV leadership. Holding the threat of escalation over the heads of North Vietnamese leaders was an essential part of U.S. strategy; Maxwell Taylor described the rationale of U.S. escalation strategy as “an upward trend in any or all of these forms of intensity will convey signals which, in combination, should present to the DRV leaders a vision of inevitable, ultimate destruction if they do not change their ways.” The North Vietnamese saw the attempts of countries, which were sympathetic to Vietnam’s cause to convince Hanoi to enter talks as emanating from the grave concern that the

246 Author’s interviews. Hanoi, Vietnam. March 2011. High-ranking Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials, some of whom participated in the Paris Peace talks and a former DRV ambassador and spokesman, expressed this position most adamantly.
248 Author’s interview with DRV liaison officer and official note taker that participated in the peace talks. Hanoi, Vietnam. March 2011. A former diplomat that now holds a prominent position at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Diplomatic History Studies also stated that Hanoi believed the United States had won over many countries and had convinced them to put pressure on Vietnam to begin talks on US terms. This is potentially why attempts by intermediaries to launch peace talks failed 1965-1968.
249 Pape, Bombing to Win, 179.
United States would destroy Vietnam. Attempting to limit the intensity of the U.S. war effort was therefore the key to victory in the eyes of the North Vietnamese.

In addition to increasing the costs imposed on them, the North Vietnamese feared that a U.S. ratcheting up of the war effort could eventually undermine their ability to continue their struggle for control over the whole country. The Americans believed that “by expanding its aggression in South Vietnam and escalating its bombing in North Vietnam, they [could] bring Vietnam to its knees.” Therefore, it was of great importance to convince the United States that exerting military pressure on the North was not an effective strategy. If the United States felt otherwise, this could lead to an escalation of the violence and expansion of war aims. Early on in the war when Hanoi felt that the United States overestimated its military strength and underestimated North Vietnamese resolve, its strategy was to reject wartime negotiations, even during bombing pauses. The main reason for this was to “avoid suggesting that bombing could affect North Vietnamese behavior.” Therefore U.S. strategy of pausing the bombing to give Hanoi an opportunity to respond either by deescalating or offering a modified version of its basic position encapsulated in the four points was destined to fail; “Hanoi’s signaling interest in negotiations through restraining its military activities would be tantamount to signaling that the bombing could change DRV policy.” According to a Lieutenant General in the Vietnamese Air Force who was on active duty during the war, a sign of weakness could encourage the United

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251 Zhou Enlai and Pakistani President Ayub Khan, Karachi, 2 April 1965 in Westad et al. (eds) “77 Conversations,” No. 6 (May 1998): 77.
States to support the South more, and perhaps even result in an attempt to conquer the North.\textsuperscript{254}

Because of the risk of the interstate ratchet effect, there was “no possibility that Vietnam [would] yield [to American pressure]” even as bombing tonnage increased against North Vietnam from 63,000 in 1965 to 136,000 in 1966 to 226,000 in 1967.\textsuperscript{255}

If the North Vietnamese gave in under this mounting pressure, it would communicate to the United States, and also perhaps to domestic audiences that were the backbone of the fighting, that Hanoi accepted defeat.\textsuperscript{256} The notes and comments of U.S. officials suggest that this was a legitimate concern; a state department official at the time wrote in his journal, “for Hanoi to enter talks would involve a serious loss of face.”\textsuperscript{257} When the DRV finally agreed to talks that included South Vietnam, prominent American advisors agreed that this was a sign of weakness and implied that the United States had won militarily.\textsuperscript{258} Stopping the bombing before agreeing to talks was important not only for strategic reasons, but for domestic reasons. If this precondition were met, then the probability talks would undercut morale among the people and the armed forces would be greatly reduced. Also, the interstate ratchet effect would be less likely under these conditions, as the U.S. offer to talk would likely be a genuine attempt instead of a probe given that the United States would be paying real costs to make it.

Vietnamese concerns that talks signaled weakness are captured in the three principles of Hanoi’s fighting while negotiating strategy as articulated by General Vo Nguyen Giap. The first

\textsuperscript{254} Author’s interview with a Lieutenant General in the Vietnamese Air Force that was active during the war. Hanoi, Vietnam. March 2011.

\textsuperscript{255} Herring, America’s Longest War, 173; “Zhou Enlai and Pakistani President Ayub Khan, Karachi, 2 April 1965,,” in Westad et al. (eds) “77 Conversations,” No. 6 (May 1998): 77. Zhou Enlai makes similar assertions during the course of the conversation.

\textsuperscript{256} Author’s interview with prominent academic at Vietnam National University. Hanoi, Vietnam. March 2011.

\textsuperscript{257} Goodman, The Lost Peace, 57.

\textsuperscript{258} Herring, LBJ and Vietnam, 173.
principle is that in the phase of war before talks are launched, the DRV would not respond to U.S. offers made during bombing pauses to avoid suggesting that the bombing was effective in influencing their behavior. This was referred to as the “tradition of determination to fight and win.” The second operational principle captured the importance of credibly signaling commitment to a protracted struggle; prolong both the talking and the fighting to erode the adversary’s will. The third principle was that Hanoi’s decisions about fighting and talking would be made independently of allies’ attempts to influence or pressure. This last principle explains why Hanoi was unresponsive to Moscow’s attempts to act as intermediary and “would accept no advice” according to Chinese leaders, on “the question of whether or when to negotiate.”

The United States, though more powerful militarily, was not immune to the concern that offering talks would send the wrong signal to Hanoi about U.S. resolve. Such a course of action was unadvisable to many, including Ambassador to South Vietnam Henry Cabot Lodge, who feared that “any further initiative by us now [before we are strong] would simply harden the Communist resolve not to stop fighting.” Officials worried throughout this period that any initiative to start talks, regardless of the emphasis or purpose, would send the wrong signal to Hanoi about U.S. resolve. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) were particularly concerned that acting eager to negotiate would project weakness and fail to bring an end to the conflict. As articulated in a JCS memo to Secretary McNamara on October 14, 1966, “another bombing pause will be regarded by the North Vietnamese leaders, and our Allies, as renewed evidence of lack of U.S. determination to press the war to a successful conclusion.” The JCS noted that public offers to settle the war by peaceful means “are not only nonproductive, they are counter-productive.

logical case can be made that the American people, our Allies, and our enemies alike are increasingly uncertain as to our resolution to pursue the war to a successful conclusion.” In MARIGOLD, for example, President Johnson was concerned that a bombing halt would be interpreted by Hanoi as a sign of weakness. In his memoirs, Johnson would speculate that his offers to talk probably convinced Hanoi that he desired peace at any price.

Advisors were also concerned that demonstrating a willingness to talk would change the strategic environment in ways that were unfavorable to the United States. Hanoi’s alleged interest in talks could be a ploy, a way “to compel the United States to de-escalate and nothing more.” The Washington Post speculated that throughout MARIGOLD North Vietnam was sending out false signals to try to trick the United States into halting the bombing. In this way, showing a willingness to engage in wartime negotiations could have a direct impact on the U.S. ability to employ force effectively. McNamara, who was already contemplating moving towards a talking while fighting strategy in October 1966, also worried that moves toward a compromise could also cause “serious psychological problems among the men who are risking their lives to help achieve our political objectives.” Advisors were also concerned about the impact launching negotiations would have on the morale and effectiveness of the South Vietnam troops. Even before escalation, the United States was “in a terrible bind: if we started to negotiate, Saigon would refuse to stand and fight.”

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263 Herring, LBJ and Vietnam, 106.
264 See Lyndon B. Johnson, The Vantage Point. Dean Rusk, Secretary of State at the time, made the same observation in his memoirs. See Dean Rusk, As I Saw It.
265 “McNaughton Hints at Compromise,” in Herring, The Pentagon Papers, 140.
266 Herring, LBJ and Vietnam, 107.
267 “McNamara Opposes Escalation,” in Herring, The Pentagon Papers, 166.
268 Goodman, The Lost Peace, 16.
In conclusion, U.S. decision makers believed, just like the North Vietnamese, that demonstrating an eagerness to talk could communicate weak resolve. However, given the U.S. preponderance of power and greater room for escalation, American decision makers were less concerned about the consequences of showing weakness and were therefore more open to talks, albeit without preconditions. Assistant Secretary John McNaughton articulated in a January 19, 1966 memo that the ability to ratchet was essential to alleviate risks associated with showing a willingness to talk:

It may be that while going for victory we have the strength for compromise, but if we go for compromise, we have the strength only for defeat-this is because a revealed lowering of sights from victory to compromise (a) will unhinge the GVN and (b) will give the DRV the ‘smell of blood.’ [Any moves toward talks] requires a willingness to escalate the war if the enemy miscalculates, misinterpreting our willingness to compromise as implying we are on the run.\(^{269}\)

The United States also had considerations beyond Vietnam; if it were to halt bombing to pave the way for talks as discussed in 1967, in the words of Johnson’s National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, this “would be to give the Communists something for nothing, and in a very short time all the doves in this country and around the world would be asking for some further unilateral concessions.”\(^{270}\) The ideal situation was one in which the United States could facilitate peace talks without conveying the wrong signals to Hanoi and without taking positions that would be harmful to U.S. interests if negotiations actually materialized.\(^{271}\)

**Probes of Resolve or Genuine Attempts at Peace?**

The history of the two countries’ positions on wartime negotiations demonstrates that Hanoi was indeed less likely to make offers to talk given the risks. This correlates with the first

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\(^{269}\) “McNaughton Hints at Compromise,” in Herring, *The Pentagon Papers*, 140.


\(^{271}\) For more on this argument, see Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 119-120.
hypothesis in my causal model which argues that the state with the smaller perceived CD will be more acutely concerned about the interstate ratchet effect and therefore will set strict preconditions for accepting talks and rarely, if at all, make offers to talk. In this section I demonstrate that given the possibility of the interstate ratchet effect, Hanoi was indeed vigilant about whether offers to talk were genuine or probes of resolve.

The DRV understood that there was a fine balance between the struggle on the military and diplomatic fronts. Hanoi wanted to show strength by not appearing too eager to talk, but also wanted to appear flexible to convince the United States that talks, not military pressure, would yield the best results. Also, as an individual active in the diplomatic corps during the war articulated, if other countries believed the United States was genuine in its offers to seek a peaceful settlement to the war, it may look bad in the eyes of world opinion for Hanoi to refuse.\textsuperscript{272} Given the importance of understanding the intentions behind U.S. offers, the North Vietnamese devoted great energy to assessing the U.S. position on talks and identifying the best time to agree to talks. As a result, the Party leadership commissioned many internal studies with the aim of assessing U.S. resolve and searching for indications of a genuine desire to end the war.\textsuperscript{273}

In late 1966, the United States attempted to offer talks to Hanoi in order to allow for the possibility of a negotiated end to the war, as well as to appease domestic and international pressure and probe Hanoi’s position.\textsuperscript{274} This period, characterized as a peace offensive by the North Vietnamese, included various attempts mostly through intermediaries to get Hanoi to

\textsuperscript{272} Point made by former DRV ambassador and spokesperson. Author’s interviews. Hanoi, Vietnam. March 2011.
\textsuperscript{273} Former DRV ambassador and spokesperson. Author’s interviews. Hanoi, Vietnam. March 2011.
\textsuperscript{274} Herring, America’s Longest War, 203.
engage in talks.\(^{275}\) However, before 1968, U.S. offers to start talks were seen as ‘insincere.’ The peace offensive was seen as a strategy in which the goal was to probe Vietnamese resolve and win over countries to put pressure on Vietnam to begin talks on U.S. terms.\(^{276}\) The troop buildup, which resulted in over half a million U.S. combat troops in Vietnam, was ongoing in parallel to the peace offensive; this suggested to Hanoi that President Johnson was using the offers to start talks to cover up the intensification of the U.S. war effort. From Hanoi’s perspective, if the United States was sincere in offering talks, why was it simultaneously increasing troops and bombing?\(^{277}\) A DRV radio news broadcast denounced the U.S. search for talks in January 1966, arguing “the facts have shown that every time the U.S. authorities want to intensify their aggressive war they talk still more glibly about peace. The present U.S. peace efforts are also a mere attempt to appease public opinion at home and abroad.”\(^{278}\) In February, Hanoi broadcasted that U.S. attempts to launch peace talks were disingenuous as long as the bombing continued.\(^{279}\)

The North Vietnamese concluded that at this point in the war, the United States was probing its resolve in hopes of undermining the North’s war effort. Even when the United States

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\(^{275}\) Author’s interviews with a prominent academic at Vietnam National University and high-ranking diplomats active in the war period. Hanoi, March 2011. The peace offensive is the term interviewees used to describe the 1965-68 period in which the United States attempted to convince Hanoi to enter into negotiations.

\(^{276}\) Author’s interview with a prominent academic at Vietnam National University. Hanoi, Vietnam. March 2011. Though not the focus of this paper, the United States had similar concerns about Vietnamese intentions. Hanoi also considered a strategy of offering talks to keep President Johnson off balance and take advantage of any bombing pauses to escalate its war effort. For more on the different leaders’ positions on talking while fighting, see Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy*, chap 3.

\(^{277}\) Author’s interview with a former Army officer that participated in the Paris Peace talks. A Lieutenant General with experience working with the Political Bureau of the General Staff also made this point.

\(^{278}\) Goodman, *The Lost Peace*, 35.

\(^{279}\) Goodman, *The Lost Peace*, 35.
paused bombing, as it did in May 1965, Hanoi thought this was a “worn-out trick of deceit and threat.” When President Johnson called for a five-to-seven day bombing halt to facilitate the emergence of talks under the auspices of MAYFLOWER, Hanoi refused to respond to the initiative. The official communist newspaper, Nhan Dan, condemned the pause as “a deceitful maneuver to pave the war for American escalation.” Several western observers agreed with this critique of the disingenuous nature of the offer, arguing that President Johnson only wanted “to convince critics at home and abroad that North Vietnam and China were preventing negotiations, not the United States.”

As then Chinese foreign minister Chen Yi summarized in December 1965, “our two parties agree that the United States shows no sign of wanting to have peace. They just want to open the talks to deceive public opinion.” The conventional wisdom in Vietnam was that the United States was offering talks in 1966 and 1967 to get Vietnamese forces to quit fighting so that the United States could gain the military advantage. Le Duan claimed in 1966 that the Americans were using the prospect of talks as a ploy and were “attempting to widen the war in a move to save them from a sad predicament and quagmire, but, on the other hand, [were] trying to force [Hanoi] to the negotiation table for some concessions.” As Chinese Premiere Zhou Enlai articulated, the U.S. precondition of an ‘unconditional cease-fire’ was designed to give “the

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puppet troops in South Vietnam … some breathing space, so that the United States would be able to strengthen its military presence in South Vietnam.”

The first U.S. attempt to open talks with Hanoi provides insight into why Hanoi had such concerns about the genuine nature of U.S. offers to engage in peace talks. Before the full-fledged Americanization of the war, the United States had tried to compel Hanoi to stop supporting the insurgency in the South. From June 1964 to June 1965, the United States attempted to communicate to Hanoi through J. Blair Seaborn, the Canadian representative to the International Control Commission (the ICC was tasked with overseeing adherence of both sides to the Geneva Accords). Seaborn was tasked with conveying the threat of air strikes if the DRV did not reign in the Viet Cong and the pledge of assistance and withdrawal of personnel from South Vietnam if they did. Though not really a concession, this last point would allow Ho Chi Minh to agree without losing face domestically or internationally. Additionally, Seaborn was tasked with probing the DRV outlook on the war, specifically he was to look for sources of weakness such as factionalism between the Party and the government, civil-military strife, or internal disagreement about how to manage relationships with the USSR and China. But because of the purpose of his mission, demonstrating a readiness to talk may have convinced the United States that Hanoi lacked the will to fight, so Hanoi refused. Later, potential misunderstandings created by heightened concern about the interstate ratchet effect stood in the way of talks. For example, President Johnson sent a letter to Ho Chi Minh in February 1967 indicating a genuine desire to pursue settlement through peaceful means; unfortunately an

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287 Thies, When Governments Collide, 32.
288 For more on this mission, see Thies, When Governments Collide, 47-50.
289 Author’s interview with a former diplomat who now holds a prominent position with Vietnam’s diplomatic history studies. Hanoi, Vietnam, March 2011.
ultimatum issued by the NSC arrived at the same time and Hanoi decided it was still too risky to agree to talks under such direct military pressure.\textsuperscript{290}

Just as concerns about looking weak did not prevent the United States from offering unconditional talks because of the minimal possibility of the ratchet effect, the reduced risk also allowed the United States to be less cautious about responding only to bona fide offers to talk. For example, as part of the peace offensive, President Johnson appointed W. Averell Harriman as ‘peace ambassador,’ giving him the task of following any and every lead “no matter how dubious or unpromising.”\textsuperscript{291} The Johnson administration thought the risks involved in showing an eagerness to talk were worth the risk given the possibility that Hanoi would enter talks or even concede defeat. Limited war theory emphasizes “the importance of keeping open and regularly using diplomatic channels to send and receive signals and carry out the bargaining process.”\textsuperscript{292} Both in the lead up to talks as well as during negotiations, “it would be necessary to ‘orchestrate’ military pressures with diplomatic communications” in order to get the most favorable outcome.\textsuperscript{293} What officials in the Johnson administration wanted was a way to reassure Hanoi of the limited nature of U.S. objectives so as to encourage capitulation and to communicate the threat to escalate if the DRV did not cease to support the insurgency in the South. For example, on February 7, 1965 President Johnson’s National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy recommended that in addition to the policy of sustained reprisal, the United States “should plan quiet diplomatic communication of the precise meaning of what we are and

\textsuperscript{290} Author’s interview with a former diplomat who now holds a prominent position with Vietnam’s diplomatic history studies. Hanoi, Vietnam, March 2011.
\textsuperscript{291} Herring, \textit{LBJ and Vietnam}, 103.
\textsuperscript{292} Herring, \textit{LBJ and Vietnam}, 89.
\textsuperscript{293} Thies, \textit{When Governments Collide}, 3.
are not doing, to Hanoi, to Peking and Moscow.” He advocated accepting negotiations in any form as long as it was on the basis of a Vietcong stand down in violence. A week later, a state department cablegram announcing the decision to implement Rolling Thunder noted that the United States would also “make plain that we are ready and eager for ‘talks’ to bring aggression to an end.” Regardless of any Security Council deliberations or talks that may emerge, the memo wanted to communicate to the Government of South Vietnam that military action would continue.

Secretary McNamara agreed with the policy of opening channels of communication to facilitate more effective coercive diplomacy. In a July 20, 1965 memo on talking while fighting, he argued that in addition to military moves, the United States,

Should take political initiatives in order to lay groundwork for a favorable political settlement by clarifying our objectives and establishing channels of communications. At the same time as we are taking steps to turn the tide in South Vietnam, we would make quiet moves through diplomatic channels (a) to open a dialogue with Moscow and Hanoi, and perhaps the VC, looking first toward disabusing them of any misconceptions as to our goals and second toward laying the groundwork for a settlement when the time is ripe.

The Johnson administration suspected that Hanoi had less than sincere reasons to consider talks, such as using wartime negotiations to stall with the hopes of improving its position on the battlefield. Even after President Johnson’s March 1968 appeal for talks, most analysts of the contemporary battlefield situation believed that Hanoi agreed to start talks to facilitate an end to

the bombing, not terminate the war. Nonetheless, the United States was less vigilant about entertaining only bona fide talks because of the low potential costs and the significant political benefits. Offers to talk could dampen the threat of horizontal escalation in the form of USSR involvement and consolidate the support of the U.S. public. McNamara also supported peace initiatives before anticipated escalation as a good way to test whether escalation was producing tendencies in Hanoi toward negotiations. Also, as historian George Herring explains, even when “U.S. officials were certain that the feelers were dead-ends they recognized from past experience that for political reasons they could not turn a deaf ear even to the most far-fetched proposals.”

To Ratchet or not to Ratchet? U.S. Views on Escalation

Throughout the course of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, presidents and their advisors debated the level of force, and consequently commitment, the United States should adopt in its efforts to defend South Vietnam. Whether the DRV had the will and capacity to respond in a way that would negate any benefits gained from ratcheting up the war effort was a critical variable. As hypothesis two predicts, the United States with its larger CD did offer talks often, but refused to adhere to any preconditions to facilitate their launch. This decision resulted from the belief that escalating to higher levels of war would be more effective than peace talks for ending the conflict on favorable terms. However, the level of war chosen depended on U.S. beliefs about the different costs and benefits of different levels of violence. This section discusses how and why the United States chose the level of limited war it did and describes decision makers’ views on escalation.

300 Goodman, The Lost Peace, 65.
301 Herring, LBJ and Vietnam, 9.
302 Herring, LBJ and Vietnam, 111.
From 1965-1968, views on the appropriate mixture of fighting and talking evolved from including negotiations to relying heavily on fighting, back to stressing the importance of talks during wartime. One of the objectives of escalation was “to make it emphatically clear that we are prepared to furnish assistance and support for as long as it takes to bring the insurgency under control.”\textsuperscript{303} Just as before the conflict escalated to a ground war when Secretary McNamara argued that the United States should be able to launch retaliatory actions immediately, and be in a position to initiate the program of ‘graduated overt military pressure’ with 30 days notice,\textsuperscript{304} the ability to ratchet up the war effort at a moment’s notice was an important component of signaling resolve. In September 1964 President Johnson (LBJ) went ahead and approved preparations for retaliatory bombing of the North “in the event that Hanoi responded to graduated military pressure.”\textsuperscript{305} Bombing was seen as a way to get Hanoi to enter into talks under U.S. terms because the program “would continue the pressure and would remain available as a bargaining counter to get talks started (or to trade off in talks).”\textsuperscript{306} Most officials in Washington did not believe in the lead up to the war that a smaller, weaker country such as North Vietnam could stalemate U.S. power.\textsuperscript{307}

Two factors in particular colored the thinking of officials in the Johnson administration about the effectiveness of escalation. First, as in any limited war in which the participants are choosing the optimal point on the spectrum of violence, the United States wanted to know whether the DRV and its supported Vietcong could negate the increase in U.S. efforts through

\textsuperscript{303} “McNamara’s March 1964 Assessment of Situation in Vietnam,” in Herring, The Pentagon Papers, 91.
\textsuperscript{304} “McNamara’s March 1964 Assessment of Situation in Vietnam,” in Herring, The Pentagon Papers, 93.
\textsuperscript{305} Prados, Vietnam: The History of an Unwinnable War, 110.
\textsuperscript{306} “McNamara Opposes Escalation,” in Herring, The Pentagon Papers, 163.
\textsuperscript{307} Goodman, The Lost Peace, 17.
escalation of their own. They were not concerned that Hanoi could escalate to a level unsustainable to them, but as one U.S. official explained in an interview, “We were trying to fight the war with an absolute minimum of force. We believed we could calibrate our use of force and find the precise mixture of men and bombs required to weaken Hanoi’s will without destroying North Vietnam.”308 Second, U.S. decision makers perceived a limitation to the amount they could escalate given U.S. public opinion, international opinion, and most importantly, the possibility that at a certain level of limited war the Soviets or Chinese would get involved and provide the North Vietnamese with direct combat support.

Even before the United States dedicated ground troops to the conflict, President Johnson and his advisors were debating whether escalation would be efficient and effective at achieving U.S. objectives. The director of the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Roger Hilsman, raised such concerns, articulating that “the Viet Cong is obviously prepared for a long struggle . . . it may step up its military effort in reaction to the growing GVN-U.S. response.”309 This had been a constant theme throughout the 1,000 days of President Kennedy’s tenure in which he significantly escalated the U.S. commitment in Vietnam.310 Assistant Secretary McNaughton in his well-known November 1964 memo on policy options listed a number of reasons why military action against the DRV could be counterproductive, the first of which was that “the VC could step up its activities” in South Vietnam.311 A conversation between President Johnson and national security advisor McGeorge Bundy’s aide, Mike Forrestal captures U.S. confidence but also considerations of counter-escalation:

LBJ: Don’t you think the time has come to touch them up a little bit? [referring to hitting North Vietnam]
Forrestal: Yeah, but would it make any difference? It will just make them tougher.
LBJ: Well, don’t you think if they get tougher, we have to get tougher?

A related concern was that Saigon would be unable to respond effectively to a Vietcong-North Vietnamese reaction to a wider war, which would undermine the legitimacy of the South Vietnam government in the eyes of the Vietnamese people. At the lower levels, the United States expected a degree of counter escalation because it was in the DRV’s interest to show it had this ability.

While U.S. officials saw escalation as an effective means to obtain their aims, the prospect of horizontal escalation did put a ceiling the chosen level of violence. Throughout the war, policy planners and decision makers alike contemplated how certain actions and degrees of escalation would impact decision making in Moscow and Beijing. McNamara in his March 16, 1964 memorandum to President Johnson about the state of the Vietnam War put forth three possible courses of action: 1) “negotiate on the basis of ‘neutralization’” 2) “initiative GVN and U.S. Military Actions Against North Vietnam” or 3) “initiative measures to improve the situation in South Vietnam.” The downside to retaliatory actions and graduated overt military pressure against North Vietnam, Secretary McNamara warned, was that there “would be the problem of marshalling the case to justify such action, the problem of communist escalation, and the

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312 As told by Forrestal to John Prados. Prados, Vietnam: The History of an Unwinnable War, 110.
313 For more on this point, Logevall, Choosing War, 261-5.
314 Logevall argues that China was not on the minds of U.S. policy makers as much as one might think; in the thousands of transcripts of Working Group discussions, Logevall concludes, “it is startling how seldom analyses of China’s posture and aims appear.” Moreover, when the topic of Chinese intentions did come up, there was little consensus among influential thinkers. Logevall, Choosing War, 291.
problem of dealing with the pressures for premature or ‘stacked’ negotiations.” In a memo written a year later, Bundy warned that the United States had to be prepared for Communist counteraction against U.S. forces if indeed it executed the sustained reprisal policy against North Vietnam that he recommended. Two months later, then Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) director John A. McCone warned Taylor, Rusk, McNamara and Bundy that changing the mission of the ground forces in South Vietnam from advisors to static defense, coupled with the air campaign, could encourage China and the USSR to increase their support of the DRV and Vietcong. In December 1965, Secretary McNamara reiterated his faith in U.S. military might to accomplish U.S. objectives, arguing that a U.S. commitment of approximately 600,000 men would be sufficient to prevent the DRV/VC “from sustaining conflict at a significant level.” The problem was, according to McNamara, that if this deployment level is reached, Chinese intervention becomes a real possibility. In other words, the United States is faced “with any prospect of military success marred by the chances of an active Chinese intervention.”

Even skeptical members of the administration such as Assistant Secretary McNaughton who believed that the USSR would confine itself to political actions and China’s military actions would remained limited, still considered the possibility of horizontal escalation in their policy memos. International public opinion also played a role in creating a ceiling for escalation; one of the basic U.S. aims in the war was to “emerge from crisis without unacceptable taint from

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317 “CIA Assessment of Air War,” in Herring, The Pentagon Papers, 120.
318 The JCS were more optimistic, arguing that McNamara needed to take into account the cumulative effect of the air campaign on Vietcong morale, capacity, and ability to move men and material. See “McNamara’s Early Doubts,” in Herring, The Pentagon Papers, 136-7.
Secretary McNamara also felt that U.S. freedom of action was restricted by public opinion. Specifically, in October 1966, he argued that the United States had the military capacity available to inflict enough pain on the North to have “a radical impact” but such a bombing campaign “would require an effort which we could make but which would not be stomached either by our own people or by world opinion; and it would involve a serious risk of drawing us into open war with China.”

It was partly this fear of Chinese or Soviet intervention or even a nuclear confrontation that led President Johnson to reject the military’s major proposals for more ground forces and expansion of targeting packages in the policy debate of 1967 about whether to escalate or maintain current levels and seek a negotiated peace.

One of the problems with relying on ratcheting up the war effort is that it heightened Hanoi’s concerns that the United States would escalate to seek broader objectives. The North Vietnamese did not trust that U.S. objectives were as limited as American officials claimed. In the words of McNamara, “they firmly believe that American leadership really does not want the fighting to stop, and, that we are intent on winning a military victory in Vietnam and on maintaining our presence there through a puppet regime supported by U.S. military bases.” Consequently, Hanoi would be concerned that offers to talk were just probes to try to figure out whether such an escalation would be effective. In response, McNamara recommends that the United States “take steps to increase the credibility of our peace gestures in the minds of the enemy...charges of U.S. bad faith are not solely propagandistic, but reflect deeply held...
McNamara recommends a bombing halt in North Vietnam as a way of reassuring Hanoi that the United States was not committed to the destruction of North Vietnam. Additionally, he urged his colleagues to help him think of ways to credibly communicate to the North Vietnamese the U.S. intention to completely withdraw from South Vietnam once the conflict ended.

But Hanoi would not be reassured that the United States wanted to engage in bona fide talks to facilitate the end of the conflict until 1968, when the costs of war had convinced U.S. officials that escalation was not the panacea it was previously thought to be. The next section explains how the United States learned through combat outcomes that Hanoi had the will and ability to sustain the war effort at higher levels of violence. It would take three years of fighting before President Johnson would come to the understanding that the U.S. ability to ratchet up its war efforts failed to provide it was the leverage necessary to end the war on its terms. The next chapter addresses how combat outcomes alleviated Hanoi’s concerns about the ratchet effect and paved the way for war termination talks.

324 See “McNamara Opposes Escalation,” in Herring, The Pentagon Papers, 165.
325 Goodman, The Lost Peace, 34.
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The Emergence of the Paris Peace Talks

In a televised speech on March 31, 1968, President Johnson announced that the United States would seek a diplomatic solution to the war and ordered an immediate end to bombing of North Vietnam above the 20th parallel. In conjunction, he also informed the American public that he would not run for reelection. Hanoi, to the surprise of many, responded favorably for the first time to an offer to talk, partly because the DRV leadership believed that Johnson’s public plea was a genuine attempt to end the war.327 Discussions concerning the format and content of the talks began the next day and the two sides finally met in Paris in May 1968 to formulate a peace agreement. Five years later, the Vietnam War ended with the signing of the Paris Peace Accords on January 27, 1973. Why did the North Vietnamese respond favorably to President Johnson’s peace proposal allowing for the emergence of wartime negotiations in April 1968? What were the main factors that pushed Hanoi to calculate that the benefits involved in talking while fighting outweighed the potential costs? Also, why did President Johnson unilaterally agree to the precondition to stop bombing in order to pave the way for talks in April 1968, when the administration had been so against the move before?

In chapter three, I argue that a fear that eagerness to talk would be interpreted by the United States as weakness and trigger the interstate ratchet effect kept North Vietnam from talking for the first three years of the war. Though the United States made offers to engage in negotiations, Hanoi believed the United States had no desire to engage in bona fide talks during these early years, but was instead probing Hanoi’s resolve and attempting to undermine its war efforts. Given these perceived risks, Hanoi was determined to only entertain offers if the

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327 Asselin, A Bitter Peace, 5.
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adversary were to accept preconditions, which would credibly demonstrate an intention to engage in talks in good faith. These dynamics coupled with U.S. faith in escalation as an effective way to compel an end to the war on U.S. terms created obstacles to talks.

In this chapter, I conclude this case study of diplomatic behavior during the Vietnam War by evaluating the last two hypotheses of my causal model that specify the conditions under which states are the most likely to engage in talks. I argue that combat outcomes reduce the obstacles to peace talks by mitigating the risk of the interstate ratchet effect. The United States as the state with the larger CD lost confidence in the wake of the Tet Offensive on January 30, 1968, that it could accomplish its goals directly through military force. Furthermore, the rising domestic discontents with the war put limitations on the amount the United States could escalate. Only at this point in March 1968 was President Johnson willing to adhere to some of Hanoi’s preconditions to demonstrate that the weight of the U.S. effort would shift to peace talks.

The Tet Offensive was a turning point in Hanoi’s thinking as well. North Vietnam was finally open to the idea of talks in April 1968 because it was confident that it had adequately demonstrated toughness through fighting and consequently had discouraged the United States to escalate higher within the realm of limited war. The North Vietnamese relaxed their strict preconditions and agreed to talks even though President Johnson did not halt all bombing because they believed Johnson’s offer signaled genuine interest in a political resolution to the conflict. The fact that the United States halted bombing, albeit temporarily, reduced both the probability that talks would undercut morale in the North Vietnamese Army and that the United States would ratchet up its efforts in lieu of talks. This meant that even though Hanoi was still concerned that demonstrating a willingness to talk would signal weakness, because talks could
potentially facilitate a negotiated settlement for the first time, North Vietnam’s leadership felt it worth the risk.

In this chapter, I will also assess the validity of three alternative arguments. First, the information-oriented approach to war termination argues that states can reach an agreement they both prefer to continuing the war when there is a convergence in expectations about the likely victor. Without this convergence in expectations, both states may believe fighting will get them a better bargain in future periods and hence continue the hostilities. In this vein, negotiations are likely to be productive, and therefore conducted, only after combat has revealed the true balance of power and resolve and states no longer have an incentive to reveal information through fighting. Second, the credible commitment perspective posits that a sufficient amount of the military capacity of one side was destroyed by April 1968 such that any agreement made would finally be self-enforcing, and therefore both sides were willing to finally engage in wartime negotiations. The third alternative explanation is that third party actors determine the timing of talks. Specifically, the preferences and policies of Vietnam’s largest benefactors, China and the Soviet Union, and the position of American allies or the U.S. domestic public determined when both sides were ready to engage in talking while fighting. Because the domestic leadership in the United States and North Vietnam did not change in 1968 (President Johnson stepped down in January 1969 and Ho Chi Minh died in September that year), the domestic politics argument that talks occur after a change in leadership has already been ruled out.

The United States Changes its Position on the Effectiveness of Escalation

328 If states are very patient and value the future, they may fight instead of accepting an offer to cease hostilities. See Slantchev, “Principle of Convergence,” 629.
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In 1965, the United States went to war with great optimism about its ability to compel the North Vietnamese through military means to stop its support of the insurgency in the South and “success was anticipated at little cost.”\textsuperscript{330} For U.S. decision makers, flexible escalation against Hanoi was to accomplish everything that talks could not. Not only would the United States have to show a determination to inflict heavy costs on the DRV, but credibly committing to a prolonged conflict was equally, if not more important. As McNamara noted in a memo drafted July 1, 1965, “so long as the Communists think they scent the possibility of an early victory . . . we believe they will persevere and accept extremely severe damage to the North.”\textsuperscript{331} To avoid this, the United States needed the ability to ratchet up the war effort quickly, “to conduct the application of force so that there is always a prospect of worse to come.”\textsuperscript{332} U.S. strategy, labeled ‘search and destroy’ would aggressively exploit “superior military forces…to gain and hold the initiative…pressing the fight against VC-DRV main force units in South Vietnam to run them to ground and destroy them.”\textsuperscript{333}

As a result, the amount of American forces in Vietnam consistently increased throughout President Kennedy and President Johnson’s time in office. As of December 31, 1963, there were 16,300 American troops in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{334} In April 1965, National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 328 enlarged the ground forces by adding 18,000-20,000 troops and two additional Marine Battalions and one Marine Air Squadron. The memo also noted a change in mission for

\textsuperscript{330} Herring, America’s Longest War, 171-172. For more on the U.S. mood at the start of the conflict, see chapter 5.
\textsuperscript{331} “McNamara Urges Major Expansion of Ground Forces,” in Herring, The Pentagon Papers, 129-130.
\textsuperscript{332} “Bundy urges ’sustained reprisal,’” in Herring, The Pentagon Papers, 112.
\textsuperscript{333} “McNamara Urges Major Expansion of Ground Forces,” in Herring, The Pentagon Papers, 129.
\textsuperscript{334} Prados, Vietnam: The History of an Unwinnable War, 79.
all Marine Battalions “to permit their more active use.” Secretary McNamara wrote in November of that year that because of the communist ability to supply the North Vietnamese, the United States should dedicate more troops than was contemplated at the time (220,000 in phase I, and 112,000 in Phase II by the end of 1966). McNamara recommended 400,000 by the end of 1966, with perhaps the addition of 200,000 more troops in 1967. This recommendation was based on his assessment that the North Vietnamese would enlarge their forces from the equivalent of 110 battalions to 150 by the end of 1966. As previously argued, the United States was not concerned about the ratchet effect because Hanoi’s ability to counter-escalate was limited, but Hanoi’s military capacity did influence the level at which the United States fought the war because it wanted to gain its objectives at minimum cost. In July of that year, President Johnson approved General Westmoreland’s request for an additional 44 battalions. By the end of 1966, the United States had over 400,000 ground troops in Vietnam.

The air war also followed this pattern of graduated escalation. After a brief bombing pause in early 1966, the Johnson administration expanded bombing in June to attack Vietnamese petroleum, oil and lubricant (POL) and moved bombing closer and closer to major cities such as Hanoi and Haiphong and the Chinese border. Attack sorties had risen from 4,000 per month at the end of 1965 to 6,000 per month in the first quarter of 1966 and 12,000 per month by October 1966. By October 1966, approximately 84,000 attacks sorties had been flown, 45 percent of which flew between March and October 1966. By late 1966, seeds of doubt that escalation

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335 “NSAM 328 Enlarges Ground Forces and Changes Mission,” in Herring, The Pentagon Papers, 121.
337 Herring 1993, 132. For more on the rationale for POL bombing, see “Walt Rostow on POL Bombing,” and “JCS Order POL Attacks,” in Herring, The Pentagon Papers, 144-145.
could accomplish U.S. objectives at an acceptable cost began to spring up in the mind of Secretary McNamara. At this point, the United States was losing four men and aircraft and $20 million per 1,000 sorties. McNamara admits in a November 17, 1966 memo:

> Bombing is yielding very small marginal returns, not worth the cost in pilot lives and aircraft... Thus, in spite of an interdiction campaign costing at least $250 million per month at current levels, no significant impact on the war in South Vietnam is evident. The monetary value of damage to [North Vietnam] since the start of bombing in February 1965 is estimated at about $140 million through October 10, 1966.

By 1967, the United States had more than a half a million troops in theater, had dropped more bombs on Vietnam than in all of WWII campaigns combined, and was spending more than $2 billion dollars a month on the war. With each B-52 sortie running an estimated $30,000, the loss of 950 aircraft between 1965-68 costing roughly $6 billion and “astronomical” ammunition costs, it became clear that “the United States was paying a heavy price for no more than marginal gains.”

U.S. political and international support was waning by the end of 1967 as well. In the fall 1967, the Johnson administration launched a “many flags” campaign, an attempt to recruit more ground troops among its allies. European allies refused to supply even a token amount of force; most Pacific allies were reluctant to refuse, but only sent a small number of forces. The most supportive of the allies, Australia, sent 8,000 troops and paid for them; the South Koreans provided the most at 60,000, but in exchange for generous economic incentives. Though the military leadership was arguing to Congress in November 1967 that the war was being won

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militarily, congressional opposition to the war was increasing as well.\textsuperscript{344} The United States had assumed with its strategy of attrition that it “could inflict intolerable losses on the enemy while keeping its own within acceptable bounds.”\textsuperscript{345} It was becoming clear to many observers in the United States by mid-1967 that “the hopes of a quick and relatively inexpensive military victory had been misplaced.”\textsuperscript{346}

This was partly because the North Vietnamese had shown a significant ability to absorb and counter U.S. escalation up until that point. In the case of the bombing, McNamara writes that the North Vietnamese assigned roughly 300,000 additional personnel to their lines of communication. The DRV ability to counter U.S. escalation, thereby reducing its efficacy, was McNamara’s concern in November 1965 when he lamented in a memo to President Johnson, “we expect them, upon learning of any U.S. intentions to augment its forces, to boost their own commitment and to test U.S. capabilities and will to persevere at higher level of conflict and casualties.”\textsuperscript{347} In December 1965, a State Department report estimated the Vietcong to have control over 20 percent of the villages and 9 percent of the rural population, 23,000 in elite fighting personnel, plus 100,000 irregulars and sympathizers.\textsuperscript{348} CIA analysts noted in 1966 that the air war was fast approaching the point of diminishing returns without producing the desired effect on North Vietnamese behavior and war fighting effort.\textsuperscript{349} Assistant Secretary John

\textsuperscript{344} General Westmoreland visited Washington in November 1967 and told a Joint Session of Congress that the war was being won militarily. See Kissinger, “The Viet Nam Negotiations,” 211.
\textsuperscript{345} Herring, America’s Longest War, 188.
\textsuperscript{346} Herring, America’s Longest War, 191. For specific criticisms of this strategy, see Kissinger, “The Viet Nam Negotiations,” 213-216.
\textsuperscript{347} “McNamara’s Early Doubts,” in Herring, The Pentagon Papers, 134-135.
\textsuperscript{348} “State Department Pessimism on Vietnam,” in Herring, The Pentagon Papers, 136.
\textsuperscript{349} Goodman, The Lost Peace, 45.
McNaughton had similar concerns, writing on January 19, 1966 that the North Vietnamese had thus far successfully matched U.S. deployments.\footnote{\textit{“McNaughton Hints at Compromise,”} in Herring, \textit{The Pentagon Papers}, 138.} 

The issue was not that the United States was not doing damage, had no room to escalate or feared Vietnamese escalation. In December and early January 1967, 122,960 attack sorties were flown in Rolling Thunder and SEA DRAGON offensive operations involved 1,384 ship-days on station. Air strikes destroyed or damaged 5,261 motor vehicles, 2,475 railroad rolling stock, and 11,425 watercraft during this period. Economic losses in North Vietnam amounted to more than $130 million dollars in 1967 according to U.S. estimates, which at the time was over half the total economic losses since the war began.\footnote{\textit{“CINCPAC Late 1967 Report on War,”} in Herring, \textit{The Pentagon Papers}, 211-213.} The United States also had almost twice as many forces in South Vietnam than the DRV did with the enemy force peaking at about 240,000 troops just before the Tet Offensive.\footnote{\textit{“Wheeler’s Post-Tet Report to the President,”} in Herring, \textit{The Pentagon Papers}, 215.} In other words, the United States had a significantly greater military capacity than the DRV and was only employing a portion of it even at the height of the war. The United States always had the option to inflict even greater pain on North Vietnam through mining ports, dikes and locks or even invading North Vietnam. According to intelligence estimates, more than three-quarters of the North’s war-related industries and military supply systems had been insulated from attack due to U.S. self-imposed target restrictions.\footnote{See Goodman, \textit{The Lost Peace}, 34. One main reason for these restrictions was concern that escalation to that level would bring the USSR and/or China into the fight.} The question in Washington was whether the costs of future escalation would yield comparable benefits in terms of DRV behavior and war fighting capacity.

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\footnotetext[352]{The United States also had almost twice as many forces in South Vietnam than the DRV did with the enemy force peaking at about 240,000 troops just before the Tet Offensive.}
\footnotetext[353]{In other words, the United States had a significantly greater military capacity than the DRV and was only employing a portion of it even at the height of the war. The United States always had the option to inflict even greater pain on North Vietnam through mining ports, dikes and locks or even invading North Vietnam. According to intelligence estimates, more than three-quarters of the North’s war-related industries and military supply systems had been insulated from attack due to U.S. self-imposed target restrictions. The question in Washington was whether the costs of future escalation would yield comparable benefits in terms of DRV behavior and war fighting capacity.}
On March 18, 1967, General Westmoreland requested more troops, which set off a heated debate in the United States about whether to escalate or reach a negotiated compromise. He asked for 555,741 troops in 1967, but received only 85 percent of the amount requested. Westmoreland wrote that under these conditions, objectives could not be met. Later in 1967 he argued that to meet objectives, he required two and two-thirds divisions, ten tactical fighter squadrons with one additional base and a full mobile riverine force, or approximately 671,616 troops. Though the JCS supported Westmoreland’s request, President Johnson under advisement by McGeorge Bundy and Secretary McNamara, rejected the request. Secretary McNamara advocated scaling back U.S. objectives and seeking a negotiated settlement for peace. In November that year he reiterated his position that bombing should be halted, war contained at existing levels and handed over to Saigon forces, and negotiations be opened. Radical for the time, such a view may well have cost him his job.

The main argument against ratcheting up the war effort was the cost and risk given the limited effectiveness of pursuing objectives directly through military force only. First, the cost in U.S. lives of additional bombing sorties was high, one pilot for every forty sorties in heavily defended areas not to mention the immeasurable cost in terms of public and international opinion. Second, the most important risk was “the likely Soviet, Chinese and North Vietnamese reaction to intensified U.S. air attacks, harbor mining, and ground actions against North Vietnam.” U.S. thinkers were starting to come to the conclusion that the DRV “was

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356 For more on the debate, see Herring, *The Pentagon Papers*, 174-207.
determined to match U.S. military expansion” if it could.\textsuperscript{359} According to McGeorge Bundy, if the North Vietnamese have it “in their power to ‘prove’ that military escalation does not bring peace,” they will do just that.\textsuperscript{360} Even though the United States still possessed the ability to ratchet up the war effort in March 1968, the costs of war convinced the United States that its ability to ratchet did not give it the leverage it desired at an acceptable cost. The United States always planned to limit the forces employed to what was “truly essential to the carrying out of our war plan.”\textsuperscript{361} Employing limited force was problematic because “short of threatening and perhaps toppling the Hanoi regime itself, pressure against the North will, if anything, harden Hanoi’s unwillingness to talk and her settlement terms if she does.”\textsuperscript{362} Through combat the United States eventually learned about the will and capabilities of the North Vietnamese. As a commissioned Institute for Defense Analyses study laments in August 1966: “Initial plans and assessments for the ROLLING THUNDER program clearly tended to overestimate the persuasive and disruptive effects of the U.S. air strikes and, correspondingly, to underestimate the tenacity and recuperative capabilities of the North Vietnamese.”\textsuperscript{363}

If Henry Kissinger is correct that war cannot be settled through negotiations “until there had been a military showdown,” the Tet Offensive was the closest approximation to that moment. Tet symbolized the turning point in the war in that it led to an end to the U.S. policy of gradual escalation that had been in place since 1965.\textsuperscript{364} On January 30, 1968, the North Vietnamese and NLF units unleashed a series of coordinated attacks across South Vietnam, from

\textsuperscript{359} “McNamara Turns Dove,” in Herring, \textit{The Pentagon Papers}, 194-195.
\textsuperscript{360} “McGeorge Bundy Opposes Escalation,” in Herring, \textit{The Pentagon Papers}, 188.
\textsuperscript{361} “McNamara Seeks to Limit Ground Forces,” in Herring, \textit{The Pentagon Papers}, 146.
\textsuperscript{362} “McNamara Turns Dove,” in Herring, \textit{The Pentagon Papers}, 199.
\textsuperscript{363} “IDA Assessment of the Bombing,” in Herring, \textit{The Pentagon Papers}, 152.
the demilitarized zone (DMZ) to the Ca Mau peninsula, hitting 36 out of 44 provincial capitals, 5 out of 6 major cities, 64 district capitals, and 50 hamlets.\textsuperscript{365} Tet was a disastrous military failure for the DRV but a big political success because it demonstrated DRV resolve and staying power beyond U.S. expectations.

Though the offensive was a tactical failure (most attackers were repulsed and the North Vietnamese casualties were nearly ten times higher than those of Saigon and Washington), Hanoi still came out “with an overwhelming psychological and political victory.”\textsuperscript{366} Because the U.S. administration had asserted that the South was stable, its articulations on the state of the war were called into question. The Tet Offensive forced the Johnson administration to admit that its policies were not working and seriously examine alternatives to a degree it had not previously.\textsuperscript{367} It was the shock of Tet alone that led to changes in the U.S. position on bombing, specifically, increasingly willingness to pause bombing unconditionally.\textsuperscript{368} In March 1968 after the Tet Offensive, President Johnson’s Senior Advisory Group met to discuss U.S. prospects and options in the war. They came to the conclusion that incrementally more American troops and more bombs would not win the war for the United States; the majority of the group recommended negotiations. At the luncheon meeting of the group, General Wheeler argued that it was the worse time to negotiate because General Westmoreland was turning the war around in the aftermath of the Tet Offensive. At this, Henry Cabot Lodge whispered to Dean Acheson that any move could be considered an improvement given that the United States was “in worse shape militarily than [it] have ever been.”\textsuperscript{369}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{365} Herring, \textit{LBJ and Vietnam}, 153.
\item \textsuperscript{366} Asselin, \textit{A Bitter Peace}, 5; Herring, \textit{America’s Longest War}, 226.
\item \textsuperscript{367} Herring, \textit{LBJ and Vietnam}, 151.
\item \textsuperscript{368} For more on this argument, see Goodman, \textit{The Lost Peace}, 3.
\item \textsuperscript{369} Kimball, \textit{Nixon’s Vietnam War}, 53-54.
\end{itemize}
Henry Cabot Lodge was one of many influential Americans that concluded after Tet that whatever could be done to win the war would not be worth the cost. The military could not offer any assurance that it could win the war with the 206,000 additional troops General Westmoreland requested or by extending the bombing closer to the center of Hanoi and Haiphong as recommended by the JCS. Through combat, the top military leaders of the United States had come to the conclusion that the enemy could match at least the recommended U.S. escalation and they could not estimate how many more troops might be required as a result.

As the Clifford task force, which conducted the first full-scale strategic review of U.S. policy in Vietnam since the start of war, concluded in February 1968: “we seem to be in a sinkhole . . . we put in more-they match it. We put in more-they match it.” Clifford warned of “more and more fighting with more and more casualties on US side and no end in sight.” McNamara insisted that even if the military could come up with a plan that promised victory, it would not be worth the price.

Given the ineffectiveness of escalation, after three years of warfare, the United States was ready to meet some of Hanoi’s preconditions articulated in its Four Point Proposal in order to pursue a negotiated end to the war. In the most dramatic and credible peace move to date, President Johnson set forth new peace proposals in his March 31, 1968 speech in which he also indicated that he would not run for President later that year and that there would be no bombing north of the 20th parallel. President Johnson agreed to limit bombing without any guarantee that the Hanoi would also de-escalate and for its part Hanoi did not back down or reformulate its

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371 For more on this debate, see Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 159.
four-point stand before the April 1968 talks began. This was not the first time that the United States had agreed to limited preconditions to demonstrate its desire to negotiate in good faith. On September 29, 1967, President Johnson delivered a speech in which he offered to stop the bombing of North Vietnam if Ho Chin Minh would agree to begin serious negotiations for a peaceful settlement of the conflict and not use the pause to increase infiltration of supplies and troops into South Vietnam. Hanoi did not respond favorably to the President’s offer, known as the San Antonio Formula, because it was unwilling to relax its preconditions until it had demonstrated toughness through fighting. Six months later after the Tet offensive, Hanoi had accomplished this goal. As a result, even though the United States had still not met all North Vietnamese preconditions in its March 1968 offer for talks, Hanoi accepted.

Johnson’s direct appeal did not imply that U.S. concerns about what talks meant and signaled had dissipated; the President himself was still concerned that Hanoi’s acceptance of talks was a ploy and he was being duped by the DRV. The view that “the mere fact of negotiations could soften U.S. resolve and limit the administration’s ability to prosecute the war” was also still prevalent. However, the balance of costs and benefits had shifted; ratcheting up the war effort was no longer an option and the United States was therefore willing to partially giving in to Hanoi’s preconditions to make peace talks happen. Moreover, while talking, the fighting would continue. During the remainder of 1968, the United States mounted its largest ground operation in South Vietnam to date, continued with its destructive air offensives, accelerated its Pacification program, and launched its new strategy of Vietnamization. U.S.

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374 Herring, LBJ and Vietnam, 173.
375 Herring, LBJ and Vietnam, 164.
376 Herring, LBJ and Vietnam, 150. The U.S. mounted three times the number of B-52 strikes in 1968 (3,000 total) than it did in 1967 and the tonnage of bombs nearly doubled. The United
forces in Vietnam peaked in 1969 at 534,000.\textsuperscript{377} The difference after March 31 was that the United States would also seek mutual de-escalation and disengagement through negotiations, even at South Vietnam’s expense.\textsuperscript{378}

**Hanoi Establishes a Reputation for Toughness**

In the lead up to the Tet Offensive, there was a debate in Hanoi similar to that which was raging in Washington D.C. about the utility and timing of talks. Le Duan, like President Johnson, had to moderate between those that advocated an emphasis on political struggle and those that wanted to rely on military force to obtain North Vietnam’s goals. Central to this debate was the question of whether to enter into negotiations with the United States. Ho Chi Minh’s heir apparent, Pham Van Dong, favored talks “to test the waters.” Le Duan, Le Duc Tho, and senior generals believed that Hanoi needed to further demonstrate its military prowess to mitigate the risks, and therefore advocated a large military offensive, which eventually came in the form of the Tet Offensive.\textsuperscript{379} Though even after Tet the North Vietnamese government did not completely trust U.S. intentions, they did at that point “see some advantages of the diplomatic struggle.”\textsuperscript{380}

My causal model posits that combat outcomes are important to this transition. Specifically, fighting allows the country with the smaller perceived CD, North Vietnam, to demonstrate resolve by inflicting sufficient enough costs to discourage a ratcheting up of the war effort if an eagerness to talk is revealed. I argue that Hanoi was willing to relax preconditions

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\textsuperscript{378} Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 165-166.

\textsuperscript{379} For more on this internal North Vietnamese debate, see Prados, *The Blood Road*, 232-233.

and engage in talks in April 1968 because it believed it had demonstrated resolve and the United States had perceived and understood the situation as such. Hanoi believed the United States had recognize the limits on the employment of U.S. power, and that the international pressure the United States would receive if it deliberately expanded the war gave the DRV some freedom of action without exposing Hanoi to “the great weight of superior U.S. weaponry.” As one official from the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted, when the United States had taken enough blows, they will want to quit. If the Vietnamese were to accept talks before this point, it will make them look fearful. In the case of the Vietnam War, Hanoi believed that the military situation would be ripe for talks once the United States had incurred enough costs such that escalation was no longer desirable. Subsequently, when the United States adhered to limited preconditions for talks, Hanoi would then know that a genuine desire to end the war through political means had emerged. In the words of General Nguyen Van Vinh, fighting while talking only became practical when the prior stage of combat evolved past the point at which “both sides are fighting indecisively.” In this respect, there was a major difference between 1965 and 1967; in 1965, the U.S. military position was very strong, but by 1967 the trend was shifting.

The Tet Offensive launched January 1968 was a turning point for both the United States and Hanoi - a moment in which the leadership of both countries realized objectives could not be obtained by military means alone. The Tet Offensive “convinced most Americans that the war could not be won in an acceptable time and at an acceptable cost.” In Kissinger’s words, it “marked the watershed of the American effort. Henceforth, no matter how effective our actions,
the prevalent strategy could no longer achieve its objectives within a period or with force levels politically acceptable to the American people.\textsuperscript{386} The United States was facing an economic crisis and the war was increasing the economic burden by $3.6 billion a year.\textsuperscript{387} The U.S. leadership was starting to realize it had vastly underestimated the capacity of the North Vietnamese to resist, and consequently the costs of war.\textsuperscript{388} Because of these views, President Johnson rejected General Westmoreland’s request for 206,000 more troops in March 1968.\textsuperscript{389} The same month, Secretary of Defense Clifford advised the President to change approach to one that focused on negotiated settlement rather than military victory.\textsuperscript{390} As the main VWP party leader in the South, Nguyen Van Linh (known by Muoi Cuc), articulated “President Ho and the Politburo told us that the enemy was suffering big defeats, so they had to accept negotiations even though they were still persistent.”\textsuperscript{391}

In other words, Hanoi believed they had demonstrated through combat that they were not weak and that they would be able to withstand a ratcheting up in U.S. war effort, negating the benefits of such a move.\textsuperscript{392} The domestic political reaction in the United States to Tet Offensive further limited the degree to which the United States could escalate, which served to reassure Hanoi even more. Therefore the Vietnamese leadership believed that accepting talks with limited preconditions at this point would more likely facilitate an end to the war than result in an escalation on the part of the United States. Moreover, though only admitted in some circles in Vietnam, historians argue that the Tet Offensive demonstrated to both sides that “military victory

\textsuperscript{386} Kissinger, “The Viet Nam Negotiations,” 216.
\textsuperscript{387} Herring, America’s Longest War, 245.
\textsuperscript{388} Herring, America’s Longest War, 172.
\textsuperscript{389} Herring, America’s Longest War, 242.
\textsuperscript{390} Herring, America’s Longest War, 236.
\textsuperscript{391} Conversation between Mao Zedong and Pham Van Dong, Beijing 17 November 1968, “77 conversations,” 151.
\textsuperscript{392} Herring, America’s Longest War, 242.
was highly problematic under current or foreseeable circumstances.”

Hanoi incurred major losses in personnel, supplies and materiel; after the offensive the DRV was coming dangerously close to losing the ability to wage war. Before Tet, the battles were fierce, but no one side was winning decisively; the military situation could be best described as a stalemate. Hanoi believed then that the United States was very confident in its military abilities and consequently its ability to obtain U.S. objectives through force alone. The U.S. response to Tet, coupled with adherence to the precondition of the cessation of bombing, indicated to Hanoi that “Johnson was desperate to end the war.”

Even though Hanoi had demanded an unconditional bombing halt before talks could commence, according to a notable North Vietnamese diplomat active during the war, Hanoi accepted Johnson’s proposal because they believed that the expected benefits of talks, an end to the war at the maximum and a cessation of bombing at a minimum, outweighed the risks. Hanoi therefore responded favorably to Johnson’s diplomatic overture for the first time since the outbreak of hostilities, stating:

It is clear that the American government has not seriously and fully met the just demands of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam government, or of progressive public opinion in the United States and the rest of the world. Nevertheless . . . the Democratic Republic of Vietnam government declares that it is prepared to send representatives to meet and to determine with American representatives the unconditional cessation of the bombing and all other actors of war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to start negotiations.

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393 Asselin, A Bitter Peace, 5.
394 Author’s interviews. Hanoi, Vietnam. March 2011. Almost all the interviewees conceded the fact that Vietnam suffered great losses. Particularly notable was that a Lieutenant General in the Vietnamese Air Force noted that the losses were so great it would have been difficult for Hanoi to recuperate.
396 Asselin, A Bitter Peace, 10.
398 Asselin, A Bitter Peace, 5.
CHAPTER FOUR

This statement clarifies that though not all of Hanoi’s preconditions were met, agreeing to talks was worth the risk given that the U.S. was unlikely to escalate in response and Hanoi was suffering from the bombing campaigns. Furthermore, President Johnson had paid real costs to launch these talks, both politically and personally, reducing the likelihood that the offer was a ploy. Once the U.S. government apparatus had made the move to stop bombing, a ratchet effect would be more difficult politically, making it less likely. Not everyone agreed, however, that the risk of looking weak had been adequately reduced and the United States wanted to engage in bona fide negotiations. The Chinese were still concerned in April 1968 that North Vietnamese willingness to negotiate once Johnson agreed to stop bombing North of the 20th parallel, as well as their flexibility on the location of the talks, proved that “Vietnamese comrades find it easy to compromise. The world’s people can’t help thinking that you are facing some difficulties in your struggle.”

The Chinese position was that President Johnson was offering talks for domestic political reasons, specifically to survive an election year, and “his objectives, and his calculations [were] not [propitious] for any concrete outcome of the meeting … Johnson does not consider that the negotiations, meetings, or contacts will bring about any result. For him, at present, open contacts represent some assets.”

It is interesting to note that once the North thought the United States sincerely offered talks because they wanted to end the war, the North was determined to impose greater costs on the United States to get a better deal. The North Vietnamese articulate to Mao Zedong after the

399 See conversation between Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong, Beijing, 13 April 1968 in Westad et al. (eds) “77 Conversations,” o. 31 (May 1998): 122.
400 Zhou Enlai and Pham Van Dong, Beijing, 13 April 1968 in Westad et al. (eds) “77 Conversations,” No. 31 (May 1998):124. In is important to note that the Chinese were categorically against negotiations until their rivalry with the Soviet Union heated up in late 1968. For more details, see Thomas J. Christensen, Worse than a Monolith: Alliance Politics and Problems of Coercive Diplomacy in Asia, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), especially chapter six.
PARIS PEACE TALKS

Paris Peace Talks had already commenced that the U.S. readiness to talk indicated weak resolve. This coupled with the bombing halt, waning patience of the American public with the war, and President Johnson’s decision not to run for re-election, made the North Vietnamese much less concerned about the interstate ratchet effect. Therefore, Hanoi began to consider that an increase in its war effort could lead to a settlement favorable to the North Vietnamese:

Pham Van Dong: Sitting at the negotiating table does not mean [we] stop fighting. On the contrary, fighting must be fiercer. In that way, we can attain a higher position... we see that because we are strong, we can force the US to stop bombing in the North. Therefore, [this] is the time we should fight more...
Mao Zedong: Is the number of American troops welcoming talks [and] wishing to go home big or small?
Muoi Cuc: Big. We will fight more, and at the same time, push the task of mobilizing the people and demoralizing the enemy.401

At this juncture, Hanoi hoped that its willingness to engage in talks would give the United States “an occasion to de-escalate the war and make new concessions at the bargaining table.”402 Hanoi understood after Tet that it could not achieve its goals at an acceptable price through military means only; according to a former DRV ambassador and spokesman, Hanoi hoped that the United States would be convinced to de-escalate through talks.403 Though the United States was less concerned about the ratchet effect than North Vietnam before Tet, the United States was even less concerned after. The Tet offensive came close to total warfare for the North Vietnamese; Hanoi threw everything it had at the United States and the United States had tactically come out on top. In other words, even if the United States looked weak in its attempts to negotiate, the Vietnamese had less residual ability to ratchet up beyond the Tet level. The United States had incurred sufficient costs through fighting without talking and had little to

402 Asselin, A Bitter Peace, 8.
lose by showing an eagerness to talk. Given the U.S. position, the DRV understood that it needed to be flexible to facilitate a process that would eventually lead to the end of the war.

**Alternative Perspectives on Diplomatic Behavior**

There are three possible alternative explanations for North Vietnamese and U.S. diplomatic behavior during the Vietnam War. First, the United States offered bona fide talks and Hanoi accepted once both countries had learned the balance of power and resolve and therefore the range of settlements that would be acceptable to both sides. Second, the credible commitment approach would argue that talks emerged when both sides believed the resulting agreement would be self-enforcing. Third, the role of third parties, such as allies or the domestic public in the case of the United States, determined when talks emerged. This section analyzes each of these alternatives in turn. While combat outcomes, learning, and third party actors influenced perceptions about the ratchet effect and prospects for peace, none of these approaches alone can account for the diverging U.S. and North Vietnamese positions on talks and why talks finally emerged in April 1968.

**Resolved Information Asymmetries**

The information-oriented approach to understanding war termination posits that if wars start because of a fundamental disagreement between states about how it will unfold, then wars end when learning leads to a convergence in expectations about the outcome of the war. In the case of the Vietnam War, this would imply that talks emerged in April 1968 because this is when a clear, undeniable military trend presented itself and beforehand decision makers were still
uncertain about the balance of power.\textsuperscript{404} Admittedly, combat outcomes had an impact on what each side thought it could obtain through negotiation; for example, some argue that the United States was less eager to seek negotiations in 1967 because the official view was the tide had turned and the United States was winning the war.\textsuperscript{405} Furthermore, the idea that learning through combat plays a key role in impacting negotiation decisions is not at odds with my theory; I argue that after absorbing a certain amount of costs through combat, states are discouraged from further ratcheting up their war effort. Once there is no longer incentive to ratchet up the war effort to a level that is unfavorable to the opponent, then states can offer and accept proposals to launch talks with minimized risk.

Even though combat mitigates the problem of the interstate ratchet effect and shapes beliefs about the possible range of settlements acceptable to both sides, learning the balance of power and resolve between the participants does not determine when states are willing to talk while fighting. In the case of the Vietnam War, as both sides met in Paris for the first time in May 1968, they still lacked consensus about this issue; both sides, even during negotiations, thought they could turn the war around.\textsuperscript{406} This may have been because the realities of the Vietnam War suggested that balance of military power was unlikely to determine the victor. Specifically, both sides employed strategies of attrition. When the victor is determined by which side outlasts the other, a clear military trend may not emerge until the very end of a conflict. Both sides knew that the United States was more powerful from the beginning, but the conflict

\textsuperscript{404} Smith, \textit{Stopping Wars}, 312. Though most of the literature focuses on uncertainty about the balance of power, states disagree about the nature of other factors such as aggregate military power, military technology, comparative interactions and effectiveness of the two sides’ military strategies, resolve, and the likelihood and/or impact of third-party intervention. See Reiter, \textit{How Wars End}, 11-13.

\textsuperscript{405} Goodman, \textit{The Lost Peace}, 46.

\textsuperscript{406} For more on this argument, see Kimball, \textit{Nixon’s Vietnam War}, 283.
was more akin to a game of chicken in which the loser would be the one that swerved first. As Kissinger insisted, a “fourth-rate power like North Vietnam” must have a “breaking point.”\footnote{Herring, \textit{America’s Longest War}, 275.} In addition, if beliefs about the course of the war were determined by military power only, the Tet Offensive, which represented a tactical defeat for the North Vietnamese and the NLF, would not have had such a “tremendous impact on the United States” in that the North “came away with an overwhelming psychological and hence political victory.”\footnote{Henry Kissinger, \textit{Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America’s Involvement in and Extrication from the Vietnam War}, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 429.}

The historical record sheds doubt on the idea that talks began because both sides finally understood the range of settlements acceptable to both sides and therefore were confident in a quick resolution of the issue. Even though the Paris Peace Talks immediately deadlocked, the North Vietnamese supported their continuation. As U.S. officials complained, the Vietnamese seemed prepared to “even read the telephone directory if necessary to keep non-productive talks going.”\footnote{Herring, \textit{America’s Longest War}, 256.} Hanoi felt that President Nixon’s initials offers were no better than those of President Johnson, and decided to hold out for a “more propitious opportunity” to reach a settlement, though they continued to talk while fighting. The North Vietnamese delegation went so far as to call President Nixon’s offer a ‘farce’ and vowed to sit in Paris “until the chairs rot.”\footnote{Herring, \textit{America’s Longest War}, 278.} Before the Paris Peace Accords were finally signed on January 27, 1973, all sides had engaged in hundreds of “futile plenary sessions since 1968.”\footnote{Herring, \textit{America’s Longest War}, 226.} Hanoi’s shift from refusing to engage in talks to a strategy of talking while fighting was not because they believed they would get a favorable offer in a timely manner. Furthermore, the settlement eventually agreed upon in 1973 had been proposed before, and therefore the content of the offer alone cannot determine when
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talks start or even when they end. In January 1973, President Nixon accepted an agreement that called for the unilateral withdrawal of U.S. forces from Indochina and restricted aid to Thieu. Three years and thousands of deaths earlier, with the presence of over 400,000 U.S. troops in South Vietnam, Jeffrey Kimball argues that the United States was in a better bargaining position. If they had agreed to a schedule of unilateral withdrawal by a certain date three years earlier, they could have gotten more concessions from Hanoi and saved a significant amount of resources.  

To his credit, when President Johnson offered talks publicly and directly for the first time in March 1968, he did not believe that the North Vietnamese would quickly negotiate an end to the war. Instead, he was pessimistic about a negotiated settlement from the start, sensing that Hanoi sought talks only to bring an end to the bombing, not the war. This pessimism was warranted; there were 174 negotiation sessions between January 25, 1969 and January 18, 1973 with no evidence on the record that either side thought the deliberations would actually lead to the settlement of the war. Talks even broke down once in December 1971, though both sides came back to the table in January. In other words, identification of a range of settlements that both sides preferred to war had yet to occur when talks began; President Johnson and his advisors had not even agreed among themselves at that point what goal they would seek in Paris. Furthermore, South Vietnam was still against talks when they began in May, exemplified by President Thieu’s move in October of that year to obstruct talks. That spring,

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412 For more on this argument, see Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 192.
416 For more on this, see Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 175.
and arguably for the five years following, both sides were still jockeying for superiority on the battlefield and the upper hand at the negotiating table. President Nixon was equally skeptical when he assumed office the next year that talks would quickly terminate the war. As Nixon articulated, “Ho Chi Minh and his battle-hardened colleagues had not fought and sacrificed for twenty-five years in order to negotiate a compromise peace. They were fighting for total victory. But in the hope that I was wrong, I vigorously pursued the negotiating process.”

On the theoretical side, it is difficult to account for talking while fighting with the information-oriented approach. Without a theory concerning the conditions under which talks may be costly, the information approach insufficiently explains why states refuse to talk while fighting before convergence. If talk is cheap, even before a convergence of expectations, one would expect talks to occur throughout the fighting. Moreover, if both sides had determined the balance of power and resolve, and this had compelled them to negotiate an end to the conflict, then what is the purpose of the continued fighting? Though talks began in May 1968, negotiations did not enter their final stage until after Hanoi’s Spring Offensive of 1972. Why did the Paris Peace talks drag on for almost five years if there was no disagreement about settlements that both sides would prefer to war? A related argument credits the use of force for successfully pushing one side into talks when it was not inclined to do so. Robert Pape argues

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418 One high-level Foreign Ministry official noted that the North Vietnamese were unclear after the Gulf of Tonkin incident how the conflict was going to escalate and what the fighting was going to be like. Author’s interviews, Hanoi, Vietnam. March 2011. For a more thorough examination of why the information oriented approach is insufficient to explain war termination behavior, see Reiter, *How Wars End*.
419 Given this, most formal models of this dynamic assume that they do. See Powell, “Bargaining and Learning; Wagner, “Bargaining and War;” Slantchev, “The Principle of Convergence.”
420 This dragging on of the war was not without severe costs. The United States lost an additional 20,553 troops during this four-year period. Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 320.
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that the first major bombing campaign against the North Vietnamese, President Johnson’s
Rolling Thunder, failed but Richard Nixon’s Freedom Train and Linebacker bombing campaigns
in 1972 succeeded in getting concessions from the North Vietnamese and compelling Hanoi to
sign the Paris Peace Accords in 1972.\textsuperscript{421} Specifically, Linebacker I persuaded Hanoi to accept
the terms of the agreement and Linebacker II restored their commitment to uphold the agreement
when it looked like they may renege.\textsuperscript{422} Whether escalation and the use of military coercion
successful pushed both or either side to agree on settlement terms is outside the scope of this
project. But this position does not explain why the United States was more eager than Hanoi to
erenter into talks, why talks emerged in 1968, when force leads to intransigence and not
capitulation, and lastly, what determines how much force is enough during the course of a war.

Self-Enforcing Agreements

The credible commitment perspective posits that a sufficient amount of military capacity
had been destroyed in the fighting such that both sides believed that any agreement would be
self-enforcing. At the time the talks began in 1968, both the United States and North Vietnam
had enough military capacity in reserve to violate any potential agreement. Not only that, but
some argue that both sides expected the violation of the agreement. In December 1972, when
General Haig met with South Vietnam President Thieu to convey the terms President Nixon was
to present to the North Vietnamese, Thieu predicted that “after all American forces were
withdrawn, Hanoi would resume its guerrilla warfare, keeping its provocation below the level
that would justify American retaliation,”\textsuperscript{423} a judgment which proved correct. From Hanoi’s
perspective, the peace agreement had only served as “a brief respite before a renewed

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\textsuperscript{421} Pape, \textit{Bombing to Win}, 174, 195.
\textsuperscript{422} Pape, \textit{Bombing to Win}, 202-205.
\textsuperscript{423} Kissinger, \textit{Ending the Vietnam War}, 419.
Henry Kissinger in his memoirs noted, “we had wrung a tenuous compromise from these ideologues, but it took a greater act of faith than I was capable of to believe that they would abide willingly by an inconclusive outcome.” He continues on that the United States “hoped to convince Hanoi’s leaders of the futility of resuming military operations by insisting on a strict performance of the Paris accords. But deep down I knew, with a sinking feeling, that ultimately this would not impress them.”

Immediately after the signing, there were reports of violations on both sides as South Vietnamese and North Vietnamese forces strove to seize as much territory as possible in the hours before the ceasefire was to go into effect. Days after the Paris Peace Accords were signed, Pham Van Dong stated nonchalantly in a meeting with Henry Kissinger that if the relationship with the United States were not to develop on the basis of solid mutual interest, then the peace agreement would become “only a temporary stabilization of the situation, only a respite.” President Nixon had predicted a potential incursion, and consequently had promised South Vietnam president Thieu that the United States would use airpower to support them if Hanoi violated the agreement. Historian George Herring posits that President Nixon knew that “a war-weary nation and a rebellious Congress were not inclined to permit them to return,” but he may have made such a promise in hopes of shifting the blame for the inevitable fall of South Vietnam to Congress. In other words, the credible commitment problem had not been resolved before talks began in 1968; they had not even been resolved by the time all sides came to an agreement almost five years later in January 1973. The Paris Peace Accords served only to

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establish a framework for continuing the war without direct U.S. participation; “North Vietnam
still sought unification of the country on its terms; South Vietnam still struggled to survive as an
independent nation . . . the cease-fire thus existed only on paper.”

**Role of Third Parties: Power Politics and Hanoi**

Another possible explanation for why Hanoi changed to a strategy of ‘fighting while
talking’ at the time it did takes into account the power politics of the Cold War period. The
United States believed that Hanoi was “extraordinarily dependent on the international
environment. It could not continue the war without foreign material assistance. It counts almost
as heavily on the pressures of world public opinion.” The political and military support of
China and the Soviet Union was indeed vital to the Vietnamese war effort and consequently the
Sino-Soviet rivalry had a great impact on the prospects for peace in Vietnam. The Soviets
supported a negotiated settlement to the war, but they were first unable and then unwilling to
push Hanoi into talks before 1968. China, on the other hand was firmly against talks, and
therefore strove to undercut Soviet peace efforts from 1965 to 1968. Chinese Premier Zhou
Enlai most likely reflected the opinion of Chinese leaders when he advised Vietnamese comrades
that ‘the Soviet revisionists want North Vietnam to talk with the U.S., to cast the NLF aside and
sell out its brothers.’ For their part, the Soviets, and Brezhnev and Kosygin in particular,
“wanted to keep the Chinese from expanding their influence in North Vietnam and were
sympathetic to any course-including negotiations-that would accomplish this aim.”

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430 Herring, *American’s Longest War*, 323.
432 Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, and Ho Chi Minh, 17 May 1965 in Westad et al. (eds), “77
conversations,” No. 10 (May 1998), 85.
rivalry dynamic made it difficult for the United States to obtain its objectives in Vietnam through coercive diplomacy.\textsuperscript{434}

In the beginning stages of the war, Chinese support was greater than that of the Soviet Union. In February 1964, Le Duan, Ho Chi Minh’s number two, criticized the Soviet Union for being too passive in the revolution. This caused the USSR to limit further material aid to the Vietnamese Communists and consequently to provide only rhetorical support for the war effort. China was the main provider of aid to Vietnam (1955-65 Chinese aid totaled more than half a billion U.S. dollars) at least until late 1967.\textsuperscript{435} From 1965 to 1971, 320,000 Chinese troops would rotate in and out of the Vietnamese theater, with a peak of 170,000 forces in country in 1967-68 and the last People’s Liberation Army (PLA) units leaving in 1971.\textsuperscript{436} According to an internal Chinese Communist history, the 150,000 air defenses forces provided by China accounted for 38 percent of the downed U.S. aircraft during the Vietnam War.\textsuperscript{437} China even promised to dedicate ground troops to the conflict in Vietnam if the United States escalated by invading the North with ground troops or bombing China.\textsuperscript{438} Though Soviet assistance increased greatly after an important visit to Hanoi by Soviet Premier Kosygin in February 1965, troops were never offered.

The connection between Vietnamese communist leader Ho Chi Minh and Chinese communist leader Mao Zedong went much deeper than war materiel, foodstuffs, advisors, and

\textsuperscript{434} For more, see Christensen, \textit{Worse than a Monolith}, Chapter Six.
\textsuperscript{436} Christensen, \textit{Worse than a Monolith}, 184. For more on the Chinese contribution to the war, see Prados, \textit{The Blood Road}, 362-363.
\textsuperscript{437} For more on Chinese support of the North Vietnamese during the war, see Christensen, \textit{Worse than a Monolith}, 184-187.
\textsuperscript{438} Christensen, \textit{Worse than a Monolith}, 185.
international support. Ho seemed to be a revolutionary in Mao’s own image, relying on the peasantry to lead the revolution and people’s war to advance the communist position. Also, in 1954, Chinese Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai had played a key role in devising the Geneva Accords that facilitated the withdrawal of France from Indochina and had convinced the North Vietnamese to sign them. This agreement stipulated that Vietnam would be divided along the 17th parallel temporarily until 1956 when national elections would be held to determine who would govern Vietnam. Those elections never occurred; the North Vietnamese argue it is because the United States knew that the communist party would win and the United States argues that the North had violated the agreement by supporting and directing an insurgency in the South. The North Vietnamese felt that their Chinese comrades sold them out at Geneva, and this would remain a point of contention in the relationship throughout the war. When Hanoi decided to open contacts with Washington in April 1968, China was uneasy with the idea, fearing Hanoi had accepted talks before it had established an ‘advantageous position.’ Zhou Enlai along with Deng Xiaoping had warned Ho Chi Minh three years earlier that the Soviets would use its aid to the Vietnamese communists as leverage to trick Hanoi into

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441 Chinese leaders were also annoyed that Hanoi never seemed to heed their advice and pursued its own strategy. The Tet offensive is case in point; the Chinese preferred that Hanoi pursue protracted guerilla warfare, but this offensive was a traditional large-scale counteroffensive. See Prados, The Blood Road, 362-363.
CHAPTER FOUR

talks with the United States.\(^{442}\) China was also concerned that if the North became revisionist, this could lead to a war of aggression against China, a domino theory with Chinese characteristics.\(^{443}\) After Hanoi decided to engage in talks, Zhou Enlai expressed concern during four meetings with Pham Van Dong from 13 to 19 April 1968 that the DRV had de-escalated its war efforts, which would have a negative impact on its diplomatic struggle.\(^{444}\) Later, at an October 1968 meeting, Chen Yi claimed the DRV ‘lost the initiative’ when it started to pursue direct talks during wartime. Beijing was also against Hanoi accepting quadripartite talks, which gave the South Vietnamese government legitimacy as representatives of the people in the South, which was thought to strengthen the U.S. position.\(^{445}\) Zhou urged a group of Vietnamese party leaders on April 20, 1969 to spend less time and money on the negotiations in Paris and more on the war effort.\(^{446}\) Part of the underlying motivation for China’s position was its conviction that the VWP was willing to ally with the USSR against China if the war ended.\(^{447}\)

While China was adamantly against negotiations 1965-1968, the Chinese position began to change in late 1968, months after Hanoi enter into peace talks with the United States.\(^{448}\) Mao Zedong said himself in November of 1968, “We agree with your slogan of fighting while negotiating. Some comrades worry that the U.S. will deceive you. But I tell them not to.

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\(^{443}\) Tonnesson, “Tracking Multi-Directional Dominoes,” 36.


\(^{448}\) For a detailed account of the factors affecting this shift, see Christensen, Worse than a Monolith, chapter six and seven.
PARIS PEACE TALKS

Negotiations are just like fighting. You have drawn experience, understand the rules. But sometimes they [the U.S.] can deceive you.” In April 1969, Zhou Enlai and Kang Sheng admitted that their previous position against negotiations had been incorrect, though they stood by their position that the effectiveness of negotiations depended on military successes. As a result, Beijing advised the DRV to return to the strategy of a ‘people’s war’ to weaken the United States as much as possible while negotiations took place. Once relations warmed between the United States and China, with the two countries heading towards rapprochement marked by Kissinger’s secret visit in May 1971 to Beijing, Chinese leaders jetted their aversion to a negotiated end to the Vietnam conflict altogether. Zhou Enlai reportedly made a secret visit to Hanoi immediately after the Kissinger visit to urge the Vietnamese communists to negotiate a peace agreement with the United States. The Chinese even tried to convince the Vietnamese communists to consider allowing a coalition government that included Thieu’s government to remain in the South in order to facilitate a negotiated settlement.

East Asia scholar Thomas Christensen argues that the Sino-Soviet rivalry in particular created obstacles for the emergence of talks before 1968. The Soviets would have pushed Hanoi

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451 China also did not support Hanoi’s demand for US cessation of bombing as a precondition for talks. As Chen Yi once expressed, “The Four Points are enough. We think that they condition of the cessation of bombing North Vietnam will make the matter more complicated.” Hanoi seemed to not heed China’s advice, instead declaring in January 1967 that the “complete and unconditional cessation of U.S. bombing and other acts of war against the DRV” were preconditions for talks. See Nguyen, “Interpreting Beijing and Hanoi,” 51-52.
to engage in talks in early 1965, but the Chinese were pulling in the opposite direction. As a document from the Soviet archives indicates, “the United States, the Soviet Union, also the Vietnamese themselves would move forward toward negotiations, even if [they have] different positions and different approaches. The Soviet Union advocates a political solution … The Chinese leaders resist a political solution with full vigor.”

Historical evidence suggests, however, that the North Vietnamese did not side with the USSR or the Chinese on whether to pursue or evade talks with the United States. Instead, they pursued a bargaining strategy that was in their best interests and skillfully played one side off the other in order to maximize the military support they received from both. As Christensen writes, before 1968, the North Vietnamese were more than happy to align with their Chinese comrades against talking while fighting. The Vietnamese political leaders interviewed argued that they did not greatly consider China’s position when Hanoi made its decision to start talks. This is reflected in Pham Van Dong’s diplomatic response to Zhou Enlai’s criticism of Hanoi’s decision to start talks in which he asserts, “you have stated your opinion in a constructive way, and we should pay more attention to it. Because, after all we are the ones fighting against the US and defeating them. We should be responsible for both military and diplomatic activities.”

Pham Van Dong expressed the Vietnamese position directly to Mao Zedong on November 17,

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455 According to Robert Pape, there is evidence that the Soviets and Chinese tried to get Hanoi to reach an eventual agreement in 1971, but not in 1972. Neither side put adequate pressure on Hanoi; the Soviets maintained their level of aid throughout 1972 and in mid-June the Chinese increased theirs to earlier levels. In other words, not only were the Soviet and Chinese positions on negotiations not a factor in determining the emergence of talks in 1968, they also did not change Hanoi’s behavior in 1972. See Pape, Bombing to Win, 206-207.
456 See Christensen, Worse than a Monolith, 189-191.
1968 when he argued that “ultimately, it is we [Vietnamese] who make the decisions based on
the actual situation in Vietnam and on how we [Vietnamese] understand the rule of war.”

While the North Vietnamese informed and consulted with the Chinese on war developments, “all
the North Vietnamese are first of all Vietnamese nationalists.”

When the DRV decided to negotiate with Washington independently of China’s views,
this did not come without a cost. Coupled with a tightening relationship with the USSR, the
decision to pursue talking while fighting in 1968 most likely caused China to reduce its military
deliveries to Hanoi 1968-1971 and withdraw its troops by the end of 1970. Admittedly, by
1968, Hanoi’s reliance on China had decreased because of an increase in Soviet aid and a
reduced probability that the United States would escalate to a level that would require a Chinese
response. Furthermore, the North Vietnamese were confident that the Chinese would never
completely withdraw their support given that Vietnamese independence was vital to China’s
national security. The Chinese had always been concerned about an American strategy of
encirclement; avoiding this outcome is one of the reasons Mao Zedong decided that China would
intervene in the Korean War. Chinese military assistance increased again from 1971-1975,
possibly because Mao’s concerns about American escalation had decreased by the early

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458 Tonnesson, “Tracking Multi-Directional Dominoes,” 40.
460 Chen Jian and Zhai Qiang reach this conclusion. See Zhai, “Beijing and the Vietnam Peace
Talks.” For more on the role of the NLF in this balancing act, see Brigham, Guerrilla
Diplomacy, Chapter Four.
461 Author’s interview with former DRV ambassador and spokesman. Hanoi, Vietnam, March
2011.
462 As Zhou Enlai articulated on April 29, 1968, “for a long time, the United States has been half-
encircling China. Now the Soviet Union is also encircling China. The circle is getting complete,
except [the part of] Vietnam.” Conversation between Zhou Enlai, Kang Sheng, and Pham Van
Dong, Beijing, 29 April 1968 in Westad et al. (eds.), “77 conversations,” No. 34 (May 1998):
127.
In short, when the Vietnamese concerns about the ratchet effect were mitigated and the bombing halt made the Vietnamese believe the United States wanted to genuinely engage in talks to end the war, Chinese opposition did not prevent the change in the DRV’s approach.

**The Role of Third Parties: U.S. Domestic Public**

For the United States, public opinion played an influential role in leaders decisions about the Vietnam War. As historian George Herring comments, President Johnson’s March 1968 speech “appears to have been designed to quiet the home front as much as anything else.” But for President Johnson, strategic thinking about Hanoi and the effectiveness of escalation played more of a role in determining the nature and timing of talks than domestic political pressures. President Johnson treated the American public as a group that needed to be placated once strategic decisions were made, not as part of the consultation process. Johnson’s creation of an interagency committee to manage the flow of information to Americans and a pro-war lobby to generate support for his policies exemplifies his strategy of managing public opposition.

Before the spring 1965 escalation, public opinion was divided and indifferent enough that President Johnson had the ability to choose whatever course he felt necessary. A University of Michigan study shows that there were Americans supportive of every option. When asked if the United States should get out of Vietnam immediately, 37 percent strongly opposed withdrawal,

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464 Herring, *LBJ and Vietnam*, 152.

465 Johnson was known for his ability to read the public and his attempts to manipulate public opinion. For more details, see Prados, *Vietnam: The History of the Unwinnable War*, esp Chapter Four. Logevall argues that the international context, about what U.S. involvement signaled in terms of credibility of alliance commitments, was had a greater impact on determining whether to expand the war. See Logevall, *Choosing War*, esp. Chapter Nine.

466 Prados, *Vietnam: The History of the Unwinnable War*, 149-150.
while 18 percent were in favor. At the same time, when asked if U.S. forces should be used in the fight, 32 percent were opposed, 24 percent were supportive. Lastly, 28 percent favored pursuing a settlement that might lead to a unified, neutral Vietnam and only 23 percent rejected the idea.\footnote{Logevall, \textit{Choosing War}, 282. These findings were more or less in line with those of a contemporary Council on Foreign Relations poll.} In other words, there was no a strong movement for or against peace talks early on in the war. Later on, between November 1967 and March 1968 when President Johnson launched talks, the public’s support for the war remained remarkably steady. The public view of Johnson’s conduct of the war had hit an all-time low by March 1968, but given the fact that he was not seeking reelection, desire for increased popularity is an unlikely driver for his decision to limit the bombing to facilitate the emergence of talks.\footnote{Herring, \textit{America’s Longest War}, 242-243.} Herring argues that public opinion did not play a great role in the decisions of March 1968; none of Johnson’s civilian advisers favored expansion of the war and President Johnson had rejected Westmoreland’s proposals for a large troop increase before public protests reached significant proportions.\footnote{Herring, \textit{America’s Longest War}, 244-245.} Moreover, while public discontents had convinced some elites that the United States should withdraw from Vietnam, President Johnson decided to make some conciliatory gestures to the North Vietnamese, but “did not alter his policy in any fundamental way or abandon his goals.”\footnote{Herring, \textit{America’s Longest War}, 245.}

The narrative presented in this chapter shows that public opinion affected how the administration presented its policies and decisions, but had less impact on what decisions were actually made. The peace offensive exemplifies this point; though designed to convince the U.S. public, and perhaps international audiences, that the United States would go to great lengths to negotiate an end to the war, in reality the United States position on unconditional talks was
inflexible during this period even though aspects of the public were for talks. During 
MARIGOLD, the New York Times had gone as far as to insist that the United States halt 
bombing in the interest of peace, even if the North Vietnamese just took military advantage. 471 
But there was equal pressure on President Johnson to fight communism and avoid 
disengagement. Specifically, significantly reducing pressure on Hanoi to make room for talks 
could be politically costly if leveraged by the right. 472 In short, while public opinion against 
increased involvement in Vietnam contributed to U.S. policy makers’ loss of confidence that the 
pure ability to escalate could be employed effectively to end the war on favorable terms, the 
public’s call for an end to the war was insufficient to compel the Johnson administration to 
accept Hanoi’s preconditions without Hanoi’s surprising ability to counter escalation and inflict 
mounting costs on the United States. Once he decided to seriously negotiate with Vietnam, his 
administration leveraged this position to placate the U.S. and global public. LBJ spent more time 
trying to undermine and discredit the movement than cater to it. 473

International pressure from allies and friends was also consistently pro-negotiated 
settlement throughout and before the Americanization of the war. A poll printed on New Year’s 
Day 1965 in the New York Times finds no support for a wider war among U.S. allies and their 
reluctance to contribute to the war effort discussed above confirms this sentiment. According to 
then bureau chief Sydney Gruson, U.S. allies did not buy the argument that the use of force 
would improve its position in Indochina, they “no longer see much point in the argument that the 
United States would be negotiating from weakness: in their opinion, the weakness only increases

471 Herring, LBJ and Vietnam, 107
472 Goodman, The Lost Peace, 58.
473 Prados, Vietnam: The History of the Unwinnable War, 196-206. Though Johnson was also 
anxious about the far right, he tried to draw them in and invoke their support. See Prados, 
Vietnam: The History of the Unwinnable War, 167.
PARIS PEACE TALKS

with time.” 474  Once at war, the allies had difficulty understanding U.S. aversion to initiating bombing pauses to facilitate the start of talks. Given the preponderance of U.S. power, “the risk would be low that Hanoi could take any appreciable advantage of an end to the bombing, which was, after all, only one aspect of the war.” 475

Conclusion

In this chapter I establish that before April 1968 the North Vietnamese refused to engage in talks without strict preconditions because they were concerned about the interstate ratchet effect. They believed that offers to talk were not sincere in that the United States had no intention of engaging in bona fide negotiations. Instead, Hanoi feared that if it agreed to talks under military pressure, this would only encourage the United States to ratchet up its war effort, imposing even greater costs on North Vietnam and undermining its war effort. Only when the United States learned through fighting that the costs associated with achieving its objectives militarily through escalation were prohibitively high did a potential benefit to talks, specifically the potential of ending the war and facilitating U.S. troop withdrawal, emerge for the North Vietnamese that was great enough to counter the potential downsides.

I argue that the costs, the loss of personnel and materiel, caused the United States to lose faith in the effectiveness of the ratchet effect as leverage against Hanoi and therefore discouraged further escalation within the context of the limited war. The increasing public discontents with the war also put some limitations on U.S. escalation options. This compelled the Johnson administration to partly agree to Hanoi’s preconditions for talks in order to demonstrate a genuine desire to negotiate an end to the war. Even once talks started up, diplomatic maneuvering continued as each side wanted to be careful not to seem more eager than the other.

474 Logevall, Choosing War, 301.
475 Goodman, The Lost Peace, 37.
Even though the U.S. and its negotiators took frequent initiatives for private meetings with the North Vietnamese, they tried to put the ‘onus’ of requesting such meetings on Hanoi, a tactic also practiced by the other side.\textsuperscript{476} Hanoi would deny or postpone meetings to demonstrate displeasure with the United States or to buy time to build up an offensive.\textsuperscript{477} In conclusion, the concern that an eagerness to talk would demonstrate weakness which would have a real impact on the battlefield environment remained, but as the incentive to ratchet up the war effort decreased due to the costs of war and Hanoi’s confidence it had demonstrated resolve, wartime negotiations were well-worth the risk for both sides.

\textsuperscript{476} Kimball, \textit{Nixon’s Vietnam War}, 107.
\textsuperscript{477} Kissinger, \textit{The White House Years}, 1016-1017.
Chapter Five:

The Sino-Indian War of 1962: A Divergence in Views\(^478\)

India is always prepared to resolve differences by talks and discussions, but on the basis of decency, dignity and self-respect and not under the threat of military might of any country, however strong it may be.

Jawaharlal Nehru, Indian Prime Minister\(^479\)

They wouldn’t talk with us! What should I do! We tried several times, but it wouldn’t work.

Zhou Enlai, Chinese Premier\(^480\)

In this chapter I address the question of why talks did not occur for the duration of the 1962 Sino-Indian border war. I analyze Chinese and Indian strategic thinking regarding the prospects of peace talks in the lead-up to and throughout the short war, with information gathered through archival work at the Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, interviews with former Indian political and military leaders and scholars, and secondary sources. While there have been extensive studies about the causes and effects of the war, none unpack the Chinese and Indian positions on wartime negotiations and why they differed.\(^481\) To provide insight into

\(^{478}\) A version of this chapter was published as “The Great Divide: Chinese and Indian Views on Negotiations 1959-62,” *Journal of Defence Studies* 6, No. 4, October 2012: 71-109. This chapter was also presented at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi, September 2012. The full case study, chapters five and six, were presented at the Center for the Advanced Study of India (CASI), Indian Security Studies Workshop, University of Pennsylvania, April 2013.


SINO-INDIAN WAR

this period of diplomatic history, this chapter will address the following questions. What were China’s and India’s positions on talks about the border dispute before the war, and how did these change once war broke out? What negative consequences did the Indian leadership fear would result from demonstrating a willingness to talk in the face of perceived Chinese aggression? In contrast, why did the Chinese leadership persist before and during the war in trying to convince the Indians to come to the table, even though Beijing was unwilling to adhere to India’s preconditions as a first step?

I argue that my interstate ratchet effect model best explains China’s and India’s positions on wartime negotiations. This model suggests that states are concerned their opponent will interpret any willingness to talk during the war as a sign of weakness. Such a perception could have real consequences in the war by encouraging the opponent to ratchet up its war effort to a level that is unfavorable or unsustainable. But not all countries perceive this risk equally; the difference in each country’s capacity to escalate – that is, the costs it is able to inflict and absorb – largely accounts for diverging views about wartime negotiations. I use the term cost differential (CD) to denote this difference between the costs a country incurs and inflicts fighting a limited war in a given period, and the costs it is able to inflict and absorb in total war.

In the case of the Sino-Indian War, my model predicts that India, as the state with the smaller perceived CD, would view talks as too risky given the possibility of a ratchet effect and would consequently be more skeptical about whether offers to talk were genuine or probes of resolve. Therefore, India would set strict preconditions on the launching talks and rarely, if at all,

Palit, War in High Himalaya (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992); Neville Maxwell, India’s China War, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970). Steven Hoffman conducts a more detailed analysis of Indian strategic thinking during the war. He lists nine strategic and tactical war decisions critical in shaping the war, but none of them include India’s decision about whether or not to talk while fighting. For the complete list, see Steven A. Hoffman, India and the China Crisis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 176.
make offers to talk. Historical records support this hypothesis. India was reluctant to show an eagerness to talk with China because it worried that would only encourage China to use more force to strengthen its claims and compel India to settle on its terms. This was a concern that intensified when skirmishes escalated to all-out war. On the other hand, as the country with the larger perceived CD, China was less concerned that offers to talk would encourage New Delhi to ratchet up its war effort. China was thus more open about frequently offering talks without preconditions, which it did even before it controlled much of the disputed territory. However, because Beijing believed its superior capacity to escalate would allow it to achieve its goals, it staunchly refused to concede to any preconditions to start talks.

Map #1: General Map of the eastern sector
Source: Maxwell, India’s China War, back matter.

The Sino-Indian War began on October 20, 1962 at five in the morning, when massed Chinese artillery began a heavy barrage on a weak Indian garrison in Namka Chu Valley, in an
area China considers Southern Tibet and India calls Arunachal Pradesh. The assault that followed opened up a path that would allow the Chinese to press forward 160 miles in a month.\textsuperscript{482} By November 20, 1962, China had driven out all organized Indian armed forces from any territory claimed by China in the eastern sector, allowing it to control the whole area between the McMahon Line and the Outer Line.\textsuperscript{483} The next day, the Chinese announced a unilateral ceasefire and a withdrawal of troops to twenty kilometers from the line of actual control (LAC) in all sectors. Although the main attack was not launched until October 20, Chinese aggression began on September 8 when Chinese troops took Thag La ridge, according to an Indian perspective.\textsuperscript{484} Either way, during those ten weeks of escalating conflict, there was no formal declaration of war by either side.

The underlying cause of the war was territorial disputes, which emerged once China established control over Tibet in October 1950, thereby sharing a border with India for the first time. The Sino-Indian border is divided into the eastern, middle, and western sectors; the boundary has never been formally delimited, demarcated, and accepted by both governments.\textsuperscript{485} Both countries claim Aksai Chin in the western sector, which China considers a part of Xinjiang.

\textsuperscript{482} For more on the tactical details of the war, see Dalvi, \textit{Himalayan Blunder}, Chapter One.
\textsuperscript{483} This refers to the highlighted area on the map, which India considers as part of Arunachal Pradesh. See Maxwell, \textit{India’s China War}, 408; Xuecheng Liu, \textit{The Sino-Indian Border Dispute and Sino-Indian Relations}, (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc: 1994), 36. See Map #1, General map of the eastern sector.
\textsuperscript{484} Dalvi argues that the war started earlier, on September 8, 1962 with the confrontation at Thag La ridge when the Chinese crossed the McMahon Line. The second phase was when Indian leaders were insisting on the eviction of the Chinese force at any cost and marshaled an insufficient force at Lumpu. This phase, extending from September 20 to October 3, ended in deadlock and with the realization that the Chinese force was militarily superior. The third phase for India, October 3-10, was when Lt Gen Kaul was given command as well as the task of expediting the operation. General Dalvi’s 7 Brigade was moved to Namka Chu and the war culminated in a skirmish at Tseng Jong. The skirmishes at Towang, Sela Pass, and Bomdilla occurred in the final phase, when the 7 Brigade was annihilated and the Chinese declared a unilateral ceasefire on October 20. See Dalvi, \textit{Himalayan Blunder}, 185.
\textsuperscript{485} For more on the border dispute, see Liu, \textit{The Sino-Indian Border Dispute}.
and India a part of Ladakh. In the east, India accepts the McMahon Line as its legal border and refers to the disputed territory as Arunachal Pradesh (formerly North-East Frontier Agency, or NEFA).\textsuperscript{486} China disputes the McMahon Line and claims the territory in question is part of Tibet. In the middle sector, the two countries contend various points along two border junctions.\textsuperscript{487}

![Map #2: Sino-Indian Border with disputed areas](image)

Source: Fravel, Strong Borders, 81.

To promote its claims, New Delhi launched the Forward Policy in 1959, which directed Indian patrols to penetrate the spaces between Chinese posts while avoiding clashes. This policy sought to block any further Chinese advances into Indian-claimed territory and to establish a

\textsuperscript{486} The Simla Convention of 1914 put the McMahon line into effect. China repudiates it largely because accepting this line implies that Tibet did indeed have the sovereignty in March 1914 necessary to agree to treaties. The Indian government continued the policy of its British predecessor; New Delhi would treat the McMahon Line as the boundary for its eastern sector, leaving it up to the Chinese to protest the Indian fait accompli in the tribal areas. However, India did not articulate a clear position on the boundary in the western sector in the earlier years of her independence, failing to make a formal claim to Aksai Chin until 1958 at which point the Indian presence there even fell short of what China considered to be the legitimate boundary. See Maxwell, \textit{India’s China War}, 88.

\textsuperscript{487} Liu, \textit{The Sino-Indian Border Dispute}, 1-2.
greater presence in Aksai Chin that could be used later as bargaining leverage to compel a greater Chinese withdrawal. In the three years before the war, India set up 43 ‘strong points’ in the west. At the time, China seemed preoccupied with the challenges of a dire economic situation resulting from the Great Leap Forward, which ended in disaster and the hunger-related deaths of tens of millions. These difficulties, coupled with the perceived instability of Tibet, Xinjiang, and the ongoing civil war with the Nationalists on Taiwan, suggested to India that Chinese forces were tied down. Internationally, India believed its neutral status in the Cold War, as well as Chinese fear of potential Soviet or U.S. intervention, would prevent China from following through on its threats to use force. Moreover, the two superpowers direct involvement seemed even more unlikely by mid October 1962, when the Soviet Union and the United States faced off for thirteen days during the Cuban Missile Crisis. While the confrontation ended on October 28, the U.S. blockade did not formally end until the light bombers and missiles were removed on November 20, the same day China declared a unilateral ceasefire. All these international and domestic difficulties caused Indian leaders to falsely believe that Beijing would be unable or unwilling to counter its provocative territorial policy. India overestimated the impact of these factors on the readiness and resolve of Chinese forces. India was trying to expel the Chinese forces from territory that it claimed, but which was effectively under Chinese control.

488 For more on the forward policy, see Maxwell, India’s China War, 173-256; Liu, The Sino-Indian Border Dispute, 31-32.
489 Maxwell, India’s China War, 430.
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The Forward Policy was highly provocative in the eyes of Beijing, which believed New Delhi was changing the status quo with the use of force. China was particularly sensitive to threats in the western sector, which was key to the security of the Xinjiang-Tibet highway. The Highway was important because it strengthened Beijing’s recently established control over these territories. It also connected PLA troops in Tibet with those facing Soviet troops in the northwest, which became even more important as Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated. China thus interpreted India’s Forward Policy as an attempt to maintain influence in Tibet and challenge Chinese authority there. Beijing issued many warnings to New Delhi in the years before the war that further encroachments in the western sector would invite retaliation across the McMahon Line. During this period, China felt like the aggrieved party; but despite these sensitivities, its leadership continued to push for talks with India.

In the period leading up to the war, as part of the Policy, India refused most Chinese offers to negotiate over the boundary, partly because Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru denied that a territorial dispute existed. New Delhi did express a willingness to discuss the alignment of the boundary in specific areas, but this was conditional on Chinese withdrawals from all territory India claimed. This precondition was softened at times, for example in January 1960, when the Indian government, believing that its interests may be best served by

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492 Relations began to worsen after Stalin’s death in 1953 and the ideological divide widened with China’s great leap Forward and Khrushchev’s destruction of Stalin’s cult of personality. The relationship reached a perigee in 1968 when the two countries fought a border war in northwest China.

493 Fravel, Strong Borders, 177-178. John Garver argues that this misperception about malign Indian intentions in Tibet was a main impetus for the war. Garver, “China’s Decision,” 86-130.

494 “Note of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China to the Indian Embassy in China, December 26, 1959,” Documents on the Sino-Indian Boundary Question (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1960), 55-57, hereafter known as Documents on the Boundary. See also, Maxwell, India’s China War, 74, 88, 137.
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probing the Chinese position, agreed to summit talks in April.495 In contrast, China acknowledged that part of its border was undetermined, and stated its intent to maintain the status quo until such a determination was made through friendly negotiations.496 Unlike India, China did not put forth any territorial claims as preconditions for negotiations before the war broke out.497 The only tangible result of the 1960 summit talks was the establishment of an expert working group to determine the areas of disagreement between the two sides through examination of maps and documents.498 The results were referred to as the officials’ report. After the summit talks, Chinese leaders began to think that escalation would be more effective at achieving their goals by compelling the Indians to engage in talks.499

With the outbreak of the war, however, India’s position hardened further as it perceived Chinese offers to talk as disingenuous. The first Chinese offer to engage in talks came only four days after the start of the war, in the form of a three-point proposal put forth by Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai. He argued for the need to reopen peaceful negotiations, respect the LAC, and withdraw forces to 20 kilometers behind that line, and recommended that the prime ministers of India and China hold talks again.500 In a released statement, the Chinese reasserted their proposal to disengage and enter into talks. To put pressure on New Delhi, the statement also deliberately reminded international audiences that India had rejected China’s proposals for talks without

495 Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 148, 163.
497 Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 165.
499 Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 170. While China would accept the alignment of the McMahon line as the boundary, it could not accept the legality of the Anglo-Tibetan agreement that created the line, as this would be admitting that Tibet was sovereign and Chinese actions were more of an invasion than a reassertion of administrative control. Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 99.
preconditions three times.\textsuperscript{501} However, China’s escalation to war had not been effective at changing India’s position on negotiations; New Delhi rejected Zhou’s three-point proposal immediately, as “[New] Delhi refused to acquiesce in the claims that China had established by force.”\textsuperscript{502} There would be no wartime negotiations during the 1962 Sino-Indian border war.\textsuperscript{503}

This case study provides insights into the strategic thinking of Indian and Chinese leaders, as well as their perspectives on deterrence, escalation, great power politics and diplomacy during these critical years of the Cold War. These chapters also provide the historical context for both countries’ approach to territorial issues and the legacy of the ongoing Sino-Indian border dispute. Unlike the Vietnam War, the Sino-Indian War was not a question of existential threat to either party and both countries had an ability to escalate beyond the level of warfare that characterized the 1962 conflict. This makes the Sino-Indian War a “least likely” case for my ratchet model; when less is at stake and the relative CDs are less imbalanced, concerns about ratcheting should arguably be less influential. Therefore, the fact that the Indian leadership was still more concerned than the Chinese about the repercussions of demonstrating a readiness to talk strongly supports my theory for explaining countries’ positions on wartime negotiations. Further, the fact that the war ended without talks ever occurring allows for a more detailed examination of the causal process from the evolution of a country’s position on wartime negotiations to the emergence, or lack, of talks.

\textsuperscript{501} Varma, \textit{Struggle for the Himalayas}, 372-373.
\textsuperscript{502} Beijing defined the LAC as that which existed on November 7, 1959; Zhou’s proposals therefore implied that China would keep the areas it occupied in the west while India would give up areas where it had sited posts. See Srinath Raghavan, \textit{War and Peace in Modern India: A Strategic History of the Nehru Years}, (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2010), 306.
\textsuperscript{503} Moreover, India would not agree to launch such official discussions on the border until two decades later.
The rest of this chapter proceeds as follows: First, I outline the military balance of power between China and India at the time of the conflict, to establish that both sides believed India had a smaller CD and therefore less room to escalate. Second, I examine China’s attempts to launch talks, and India’s response, before and during the war. Nehru did grudgingly accept China’s proposals to discuss the border issues a number of times before the war. However, after China invaded territory India considered its own in September 1962, India hardened its position and did not agree to talks throughout the war. China, on the other hand, consistently offered talks without preconditions, even though it, too, felt itself to be the aggrieved party. Lastly, I discuss in more detail the strategic thinking behind India’s evasion of talks and why China was less reluctant to show an eagerness to resolve the issue through negotiations.

Relative Cost Differentials

While India may have underestimated China’s willingness to use force to counter the Forward Policy, causing false optimism among Indian political and military leaders alike, in reality China had more military resources at its disposal for war fighting. From 1959-1962, China was clearly more powerful militarily than India, both locally and in terms of the resources it could mobilize nationally. Until 1947, the Himalayan belt had been dominated by the British who, in addition to having a local preponderance of power, could bring vast economic and military resources to bear from outside the subcontinent. When the British left in 1947 this “prepared the way for a reversal of the balance… the emergence in China of a strong central authority, with the establishment of the People’s Republic in 1949, confirmed the shift.”

In contrast, the Indian armed forces had experienced a decade of neglect in the 1950s, partly because of a lack of external threats and a need to focus expenditures on domestic issues.

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504 Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 70.
after independence. To the extent that India did improve its defenses, it did so for the possibility of war with Pakistan or internal security requirements.\textsuperscript{505} By 1953, the Indian army had approximately 350,000 men organized into seven divisions, six of which were infantry and only one armored, each with varying levels of training and readiness.\textsuperscript{506} Even though India was challenging a “militarily far superior” China with its Forward Policy, the Indian political elite was convinced that regardless of India’s actions, China would not attack because of internal economic challenges related to the Great Leap Forward and external challenges related to the deteriorating relationship with the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{507}

After the Longju and Kongka Pass skirmishes of 1959, the Indian Army expanded with greater purpose, transferring 4 Division to the northeast from Punjab and creating a new division, the 17\textsuperscript{th}.\textsuperscript{508} In the western sector, with only two battalions of militia, no regular troops, supporting arms, or roads, the Army’s resources were considered deficient for even a limited defensive task.\textsuperscript{509} At the end of 1960, Western Command informed Army Headquarters that a division was needed, but only one regular and two militia battalions were deployed.\textsuperscript{510} Even though India’s strength in the western sector had increased slightly by mid-1961, its position had worsened largely due to logistical challenges; its roads did not even reach Leh, and air or mule

\textsuperscript{505} For more on the condition of the armed forces, see Maxwell, \textit{India’s China War}, 179-199.  
\textsuperscript{506} Maxwell, \textit{India’s China War}, 181.  
\textsuperscript{508} Maxwell, \textit{India’s China War}, 182.  
\textsuperscript{509} The logistics more than anything defined the Army’s lack of capability. See Maxwell, \textit{India’s China War}, 200, 202.  
\textsuperscript{510} Maxwell, \textit{India’s China War}, 205.
mainly supplied the troops. China on the other hand had easier terrain to surmount as well as the labor and equipment to build roads up to their westernmost posts.\footnote{Maxwell, India’s China War, 204-205.}

By summer 1962, sixty Indian posts faced a full Chinese division, which outnumbered them five to one.\footnote{Allen S. Whiting, The Calculus of Chinese Deterrence: India and Indochina (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1975), 78.} A contemporary reporter went farther, writing that China enjoyed a ten to one superiority in the western sector and all the advantages of terrain and communications.\footnote{Maxwell, India’s China War, 241.} Furthermore, on October 8\textsuperscript{th} the Chinese Central Military Commission (CMC) ordered veteran, high-quality divisions in Chengdu and Lanzhou military regions to move into Tibet.\footnote{Garver, “China’s Decision,” 118.} China could move by truck and had all regular supporting arms for its troops, while the Indian troops had to trek by foot and the 114 Brigade had only one platoon of medium machine guns.\footnote{Maxwell, India’s China War, 236.} As General Daulat Singh of Western Command argued, given Chinese numerical superiority and the position of the Indian posts on the valley floors dominated by the high ground held by the Chinese, India was “militarily…in no position to defend what [it] possess[ed], let alone force a showdown.”\footnote{Maxwell, India’s China War, 254.} The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) intelligence in the days before the war came to the similar conclusion that the military balance in the front regions weighted heavily in China’s favor in terms of number of troops, number of heavy weapons, and logistic roads supporting front line forces.\footnote{Garver, “China’s Decision,” 121.} In terms of China’s calculation of risk, according to a recently declassified CIA report, at the time “the Chinese apparently calculated that they could bear the
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Indians handily and that their opponents would fight alone.” History would show that China predicted accurately on both accounts. Indian Defense Minister Krishna Menon apparently reported at a full cabinet meeting on 1 August that in a full clash, “Indian forward posts would be wiped out immediately and the Chinese could, if they desired, push the Indians far beyond their 1960 claim without serious resistance.”

India was at a disadvantage as well in terms of air power; the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) had MiG-21s and night capable MiG-19s and MiG-17s which would create great difficulties to Indian forces. Because India lacked night interceptors, the Indian Intelligence Bureau assessed that China would be able to undertake missions as far as Madras without challenge. While the Chinese faced logistical challenges with only six airfields in Tibet, they did possess an overall numerical superiority with over eight times the Air Defense aircraft and almost twice as many ground attack aircraft. Regardless, air power did not play a critical role in the war because of Indian strategic thinking about its risks and utility. The Indian Army was dependent on resupply by air and Chinese retaliation to Indian use of air power could adversely affect India’s ability to resupply its troops. Also, India wanted to avoid escalation beyond the border and believed that employment of offensive air assets could encourage China to engage in strategic bombing against Indian population centers, communications and transport links.

In the first few days of the war, it became apparent to both sides that China had a significant advantage in terms of the resources it had available along the border as well as the amount it held in reserve. Minister of Defense Krishna Menon admitted, “the Chinese have very

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519 “CIA Report,” 40.
considerable superiority in numbers and fire-power. We have been heavily out-numbered and out-weaponed. While the Indian forces had only a few machine guns, three-inch mortars and pre-WWI rifles, China enjoyed a full complement of weaponry to include heavy mortars, recoilless guns and automatic rifles. The prime minister’s public statements were much more optimistic about the balance of power, but when the Corps Commander of the western sector articulated his concern that Nehru’s “assurances bore no relation to the facts of the situation,” he was consoled that the remarks had only been for public consumption. Even internationally India was seen as the weaker power; in a verbal note to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in February 1960 after the two armed clashes in 1959, Soviet leaders stated “one cannot possibly seriously think that a state such as India, which is militarily and economically immeasurably weaker than China, would really launch a military attack on China and commit aggression against it.”

In conclusion, from 1959-1962, the balance of military might was not in India’s favor. But even though India accepted that China was militarily superior and Beijing had more room to escalate, the leadership believed that as long as clashes were small in scale, the Indian Army could fare well against the Chinese. This made avoiding escalation vital to India’s strategy for success. Moreover, among decision makers and consultants, there was a general expectation

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522 Whiting, *Chinese Calculus*, 78.
523 Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 203.
525 Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 199.
526 The Directorate of the Military Operations had recommended the use of offensive air power to redress the adverse balance of power in the western sector, however the need to limit escalation may be why India underutilized its air assets during the course of the war. For more on
of a long war; as Nehru stated, “we must realize, however, that this is going to be a long-drawn-out affair. I see no near end of it.” Showing resolve while being careful not to encourage escalation was critical to catering to public opinion while protecting national interests in a potentially protracted war.

Indian and Chinese Positions on Talks, 1959-1962

According to my model, the disparity in India and China’s cost differentials should result in a marked difference in Indian and Chinese willingness to engage in talks. Given that Delhi could not demonstrate resolve through combat success, Indian decision makers had to refuse to talk to credibly communicate that the use of force would be ineffective against them. According to my model, the necessity for India to demonstrate resolve and refuse talks without China first accepting strict preconditions should increase as the two countries moved from limited skirmishes to all out war. China, in the superior military position and with much room to escalate, should be more willing to take the risks of exhibiting a readiness to talk in order to facilitate the end of the conflict.

The Chinese government, and in particular Premier Zhou Enlai, did consistently offer talks to the Indian government both in the lead up to and during the war. China promoted talks even before it seized control over disputed lands when India was in the better negotiating position with forty-three established checkpoints in those areas. Each offer was confronted with Indian strategic thinking about employing offensive airpower and Indian fears of escalation, see Sukumaran, “The 1962 India-China War,” 334-343.


Hoffman, India and the China Crisis, 163-175.

the same obstacle; China wanted talks without preconditions and India found this unacceptable. According to a recently declassified CIA report, as of January 1961 “the Chinese tried publicly and privately to persuade Nehru to drop his withdrawal precondition and to convince him of their desire to attain an overall settlement.”\textsuperscript{530} But Nehru was waiting for “a modest Chinese conciliatory gesture indicating a small degree of willingness to make a concession to the Indian position.”\textsuperscript{531} China was persistent about trying to get Nehru to the table during this period; according to the same report, before the war China “absorbed a continuous volley of Indian insults and rebuffs without striking back politically or militarily, apparently aware that either kind of riposte would compel Nehru to leave the dispute open indefinitely.”\textsuperscript{532} Part of the problem was the Chinese believed that ratcheting up the force employed along the border would eventually compel the Indians to come to the negotiating table, while sensitivities in Delhi about the potential consequences of looking weak made this outcome increasingly unlikely with every loss. As then Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi lamented, “they will continue their foolhardy behavior, the Indians will only give up once they have hit a wall.”\textsuperscript{533}

While still wary of Chinese intentions, India did demonstrate a greater willingness to talk to China before the war than after it broke out. The difference in positions before and during the war is connected with the costs of looking weak and possibility of a costly ratcheting up of the war effort. Once China shifted to reliance on military force to coerce India, fears that looking weak would only intensify Chinese aggression intensified in parallel, making talks less likely.

\textsuperscript{530} “CIA Report,” v-vi.
\textsuperscript{531} “CIA Report,” 41.
\textsuperscript{532} “CIA Report,” 5.
\textsuperscript{533} “Chen Yi fuzongli jiejian yini zhuhua dashi Sukani tanhua jilu (guanyu yafei huiyi hezhong, yindu bianjie wenti) [Record of discussion, Vice-Premier Chen Yi meets with Indonesian ambassador to China (regarding the India boundary question during the Afro-Asia meeting) \textit{Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives}, Doc. 105-01789-07, November 17, 1962, 3-4. Hereafter cited as “Chen Yi discussion.”}
Because of the reduced risks of looking weak during peace time, Nehru was willing to actively pushed back on public opinion and Parliament pressure again talks before escalation. He personally felt that refusing to talk to the Chinese was infantile: “it is childish nonsense…do not talk; do not have tea with him; do not have lunch with him! Is this the way to carry on this great debate, this great argument, in this great conflict with another country?"\(^{534}\) While Nehru was not willing to submit the McMahon Line to the process of negotiation before the war, he was willing to talk about minor adjustments along the border and particular portions like Longju.\(^{535}\)

Before the war, there were frequent exchanges between the two sides but China’s complete evacuation of the western sector and agreement that discussions would only cover that sector, were the official preconditions for any broader discussions.\(^{536}\) For example, in the spring of 1958, representatives from the two countries did meet to discuss Bara Hoti, a small town in the middle sector to which personnel from both countries had been sent.\(^{537}\) The debate over talks further intensified as the two sides fought a number of skirmishes from 1959 to 1962. The first of these, the Longju incident on August 25, 1959, was sparked when Indian troops intruded south of Migyitun and fired on Chinese border guards who returned fire.\(^{538}\) Nehru was still flexible about talks at this point and argued to the House in a discussion about the skirmish that even though “we think we are right let us sit around a conference table and settle [the border issues].”\(^{539}\)

\(^{535}\) Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 75.
\(^{536}\) Fravel, *Strong Borders*, 187; Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 102.
\(^{537}\) “A Note on the Border Disputes, September 26, 1959,” *Documents on the Boundary*, 108-110.
\(^{538}\) India recounted the skirmish, known as the Longju incident as exactly the opposite, with Chinese forces entering Indian territory and engaging its border guards. Feng and Wortzel, “PLA Operational Principles,” 177.
\(^{539}\) However, broader discussions about McMahon Line were unacceptable because national dignity and self-respect were felt to be at stake. See Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 117.
The second military confrontation erupted two months later when India sent a patrol of about seventy men of the special border police to head up the Changchenmo valley to set up a border post there. They came into contact with Chinese troops at Kongka Pass where China had already set up a post. A shooting exchange resulted in nine Indians killed, seven taken prisoner, and possibly one Chinese killed. After these first two clashes China took the initiative to try to bring about dialogue. In a November 7 letter, Zhou proposed talks, a demilitarized zone, and a meeting of prime ministers. Nehru rejected a meeting of prime ministers twice during this period because China failed to meet its preconditions of withdrawal. In spite of this, Nehru continued to insist that India would “negotiate and negotiate and negotiate to the bitter end. I absolutely reject the approach of stopping negotiations at any stage.” Nehru argued that talking was still useful for probing the position of one’s opponent even when it failed to yield tangible results. In January 1960 the Indian government went farther and relaxed its position and agreed to a summit between the prime ministers. This flexibility was created by Nehru’s insistence that they would only talk, not negotiate, as long as China held to the view that the boundary had never been delimited. However, the summit proceeded because “although any

540 Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 110.
543 Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 147.
544 Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 140.
545 Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 141.
546 Nehru insisted that the purpose was to talk, not negotiate, which to him implied concessions would be granted.
negotiations on the basis [China] suggested are not possible,” Nehru still thought, “it might be helpful” to meet with Zhou.547

China, however, continued to insist that there should be no such preconditions on the talks and any such discussions should be preliminary to more comprehensive talks about the boundary.548 Zhou wrote in reply to Nehru’s acceptance of summit “although there are differences of opinion between our two countries on the boundary question, I believe that this in no way hinders the holding of talks between the two Prime Ministers; on the contrary, it precisely requires its early realization so as to reach first some agreements of principle as a guidance to concrete discussions and settlement of the boundary question by the two sides.”549

Not surprisingly, little came of Zhou’s April visit in spite of his efforts to put forth proposals on how the two sides could settle the boundary dispute and should refrain from patrolling along all sectors of the boundary in the meantime. After the failed summit, Zhou complained that Nehru was ‘unreliable and impenetrable’ and generally impossible to negotiate with.550 In July, Chen Yi approached Indian diplomats to reiterate China’s willingness to negotiate a settlement; Zhou himself would be willing to visit India again to sign an agreement.551

From December 1961 through April 1962, the Chinese consistently appealed to the Indians to come to the table to discuss their differences but the Indian government refused. Chinese patrols within twenty kilometers inside China’s side of the LAC, which were suspended

547 “Prime Minister Nehru’s Letter to Premier Chou En-lai, February 5, 1960,” Documents on the Boundary, 143.
548 For more on this, see Maxwell, India’s China War, 108.
549 “Premier Chou En-lai’s Letter to Prime Minister Nehru, December 17, 1959,” Documents on the Boundary, 27.
551 Fravel, Strong Borders, 95.
in November 1959, were resumed after these diplomatic efforts failed. In the three months leading up to the border war, India officially rejected Chinese offers to negotiate three times. However, a degree of flexibility in India’s position against talks without a Chinese withdrawal continued to sporadically appear before the war. On July 13, 1962, for example, Nehru allegedly told the Chinese ambassador to India that he was prepared to hold talks on the basis of the officials’ report. According to a recently declassified CIA report, the Sino-Soviet dispute convinced some Indian leaders that China might soften its position and consider a partial withdrawal from Aksai Plain to facilitate the emergence of talks. Nehru agreed to allow the Secretary General of the Ministry of External Affairs, R.K. Nehru, to stopover in China on his way to the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Mongolian People’s Republic to probe China’s position on border issues. Nothing came of the exchange in which R.K. Nehru reiterated India’s preconditions for talks and China still adamantly refused to accept them. After R.K. Nehru left Shanghai on July 17, the Chinese expressed surprise that “a high-level Indian official would travel to China merely to ‘repeat demands and adhere to positions’ which had been rejected.”

On July 21, 1962 the third skirmish broke out in Chip Chap valley; two Indian soldiers were wounded. As with the other skirmishes, this compelled India to embark on diplomatic moves designed to facilitate a reduction of tensions and enhance understanding between the two countries. While India was still concerned that readiness to talk would demonstrate weakness,

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554 “Zhu yindu dashi Pan zili liren shi xiang yinfang cixing baihui qingkuang,” [The situation in which Pan from the Chinese embassy leaves his post and pays an official visit to say goodbye] Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, Doc. 105-01807-01, July 13, 1962. Zhou Enlai also mentioned this in an interview years later. See Whiting, Chinese Calculus, 80.
555 “CIA Report,” 11.
556 “CIA Report,” 11.
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before China’s strategic shift exemplified in the fall offensive, Indian elites did not take seriously the possibility of Chinese use of force.\textsuperscript{558} India believed its status as a neutral power would prevent China from responding to Indian incursions.\textsuperscript{559} This allowed for a degree in flexibility in India’s position on negotiations that dissipated once war broke out. According to numerous accounts, two days after the skirmish both sides attempted to use a meeting in Geneva on the neutrality of Laos as an opportunity to defuse tensions; Nehru instructed Minister of Defense Krishna Menon to convey Delhi’s concerns and Zhou directed Chen Yi to explore ways to arrest the deterioration in relations.\textsuperscript{560} It is important to note that Nehru still urged Menon not to take the initiative in broaching the border dispute with Chen Yi for concerns that this would be construed as a sign of weakness and willingness to accept a compromise settlement.\textsuperscript{561} Chen proposed that he and Menon issue a joint communiqué announcing future talks and initiatives to prevent border conflict, but unfortunate timing prevented this.\textsuperscript{562}

A CIA report captures a different story in which Menon was acting of his own initiative and he only received reluctant approval to talk to Chen “coupled with a warning to make no

\textsuperscript{558} For a list of Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Protests to India, see Whiting, \textit{Chinese Calculus}, 210.

\textsuperscript{559} Christensen, “Windows and War,” 63-64.

\textsuperscript{560} Zhu yindu dashi Pan zili liren shi xiang yinfang cixing baihui qingkuang,” [The situation in which Pan from the Chinese embassy leaves his post and pays an official visit to say goodbye] \textit{Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives}, Doc. 105-01807-01, July 16, 1962, 28.

\textsuperscript{561} “The Sino-Indian Border Dispute, Section 3:1961-1962,” CIA Report reference title Polo XIV, 5 May 1964, 11. The Indian desire for a face-to-face meeting at Geneva was also conveyed to the Chinese ambassador in Delhi. See Zhu yindu dashi Pan zili liren shi xiang yinfang cixing baihui qingkuang,” [The situation in which Pan from the Chinese embassy leaves his post and pays an official visit to say goodbye], \textit{Chinese Foreign Minister Archives}, Doc. 105-01807-01, July 5, 1962.

\textsuperscript{562} Garver, “China’s Decision,” 111. Raghavan, \textit{War and Peace}, 288. China thought India’s attempts were disingenuous given that New Delhi persisted with the forward policy. China also wanted to issue a joint statement before the end of the conference, but Nehru’s approval came after the convention had already ended.
commitments to the Chinese foreign minister.”563 However, according to personal accounts, at this point India had decided to open talks with China without any preconditions, which was a significant departure from its previous position.564 The charge d’affaires in Beijing was instructed to “immediately see Chou and inform him that the Government of India would be prepared to send a ministerial-level delegation to Peking to discuss, without preconditions, all bilateral problems and disputes.”565 This flexibility was also evident in a July 26th Indian Ministry of External Affairs note, which seemed to abandon India’s longstanding insistence on withdrawal as a precondition for talks. Adopting an ambiguous position, the note posited that Delhi was “prepared, as soon as the current tensions have eased and the appropriate climate is created, to enter into further discussions on the India-China boundary question on the basis of the report of the officials.”566 According to a declassified CIA report, it was Defense Minister Krishna Menon that had worked to establish this more flexible policy and succeeded in convincing Nehru to temporarily drop the withdrawal precondition for negotiations.567

But China insisted on an explicit Indian rejection of the precondition.568 This was partly because Beijing wanted to portray itself as strong, but also as the victim of India’s aggression in the eyes of the Third World.569 On August 3, Chen Yi stated publicly that, regarding the precondition of a Chinese withdrawal from Ladakh, “no force in the world could oblige us to do

563 “CIA Report,” 38.
564 Raghavan, War and Peace, 290. Moscow’s desire for a negotiated solution may have played a role. See P.K. Banerjee, My Peking Memoirs of the Chinese Invasion of India (New Delhi: Clarion Books, 1990), 52.
565 Maxwell, India’s China War, 51.
566 “Note given by the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, to the Embassy of China in India, 26 July 1962, White Paper 7, 4.
568 “CIA Report,” iv.
569 Christensen, “Windows and War,” 64.
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something of this kind." The next day, Beijing agreed that talks should take place on the basis of the officials’ report, but India’s insistence that China create the “appropriate climate” before talks could begin was understood as a repeated call for withdrawal. As a July 21, 1962 article in the CCP newspaper the People’s Daily, posits, “if the Indian side unreasonably insists that China relinquish its own territory as a prerequisite to the avoidance of conflicts and the holding of negotiations, then has not China every reason to demand that the Indian side should first of all withdraw from the 90,000 square kilometers of Chinese territory south of the ‘McMahon Line’ which it has occupied?” As Chen Yi noted, “the present proposal was loaded with ammunition for Indian propaganda against the Chinese. It was a trap and therefore not acceptable.” After this failed attempt at flexibility in preconditions, Delhi returned to the previous position on August 22 that “discussions cannot start unless the status quo of the boundary in this region which has been altered by force since 1957 is restored and the current tension removed.”

India’s willingness to accept more limited preconditions in the period before the war had dissipated and along with it “the only period of serious negotiatory prospects in 1962.”

Beijing’s determination to cajole India into a discussion on all disputed territories without any preconditions persisted. On September 8, a Chinese force suddenly advanced down Thag La ridge against an Indian post in the eastern sector, launching what Indian decision makers considered to be the first phase of the war. At this point, it became impossible for India to accept talking while fighting because it would communicate that the use of force was effective, which

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570 “CIA Report,” 41.
572 Whiting, Chinese Calculus, 81.
573 Banerjee, Peking Memoirs, 53-54.
574 Whiting, Chinese Calculus, 90. Part of the reason was domestic; see CIA report 41-42.
575 “CIA Report,” 91.
could in turn encourage further aggression. After the incursion, Beijing “formally propose[d] that the two Governments appoint representatives to start these discussions from October 15 first in Peking and then in Delhi, alternatively.” Delhi agreed to holding talks, but insisted again on preconditions, specifically that the status quo ante in Ladakh had to be restored before any talks could commence. On September 20th regular battalions of the two countries exchanged fire for the first time since the Chinese had advanced to Thag La ridge. China reiterated its position that the two sides should pull back twenty kilometers and launch discussions. India agreed to talks, but only “to define measures to restore the status quo in the Western Sector.” In other words, India would enter talks only if China withdrew from Thag La and acknowledged that talks would only be about mutual withdrawals in the western sector. China refused to accept any preconditions and India responded by rejecting this third attempt to open talks with a blunt note stating it would “not enter into any talks and discussions under duress or continuing threat of force.” The situation appeared to be deteriorating when the Chinese launched a battalion-sized assault on an Indian patrol entrenched in Tseng Jong on October 10th in which six Indians were killed, eleven wounded, and China had a hundred casualties. Though both sides had been

576 Author’s interview with Indian journalist who covered events during the war. New Delhi, August 2012.
577 “Note given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, 13 September 1962,” White Paper 7, 73.
579 Dalvi, Himalayan Blunder, chapter nine.
580 Maxwell, India’s China War, 327.
582 Liu, The Sino-Indian Border Dispute, 34.
actively preparing for hostilities, this move convinced Lt. Gen. Kaul, the newly appointed Corps Commander of the IV Corp, that the Chinese “meant business.”

Ten days later, China launched the first massive attack, marking the official beginning of the war. Four days into the war, Zhou put forth a three-point proposal in which the two countries would agree to resolve the issue peacefully, pull back to the LAC, and organize a meeting of the prime ministers. Zhou expressed a willingness to meet in either China or India and proposed that “matters relating to the disengagement of the armed forces of the two parties and the cessation of armed conflict” be negotiated by Chinese and Indian representatives. As a former Indian ambassador explained, “China was superior so [it] could afford to be magnanimous” in its readiness to talk. Nehru held steadfast to preconditions, arguing, “despite the crisis in confidence created by the earlier Chinese aggression, we are…prepared to consider entering into talks…provided it was agreed that the status quo along the entire boundary as it prevailed before 8th September 1962, should be restored.” China continued to insist for talks without preconditions, arguing that wartime negotiations would “in no way prejudice the position of either side in maintaining its claims with regard to the boundary.” In a letter to Bertrand Russell, Zhou Enlai explained that China proposed the opening of peace negotiations on October 24, but “the Indian side not only refuses to conduct peaceful negotiations but is

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583 Dalvi, Himalayan Blunder, 292.
584 For more on how China’s change in its estimation of India’s aggressiveness led to this decision, see Christensen, “Windows and War,” 50-85.
585 “Letter from Premier Chou En-lai to Prime Minister of India, 24 October 1962,” White Paper 8, 1.
587 Author’s interview with Indian former ambassador to Russia, New Delhi, August 2012.
588 “Letter from the Prime Minister of India, to Premier Chou En-lai, 14 November 1962,” White Paper 8, 12.
589 “Letter from the Prime Minister of India, to Premier Chou En-lai, 14 November 1962,” White Paper 8, 8.
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preparing to launch attacks on an even larger scale.” On November 14, 1962, the Chinese ambassador wrote to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “in the last two weeks we have appealed for peace talks, but Nehru’s government under the encouragement of the American imperialists, continues to clamor for war.”

In the midst of the war, India’s insistence on preconditions became the focus of diplomatic exchanges, as Nehru’s strategic goal was to win back the territory considered previously under Indian control through fighting or talking. While Nehru’s first letter to Zhou was considered civil, the second in contrast declared that agreeing to talks without China first adhering to the preconditions “would mean mere existence at the mercy of an aggressive, arrogant and expansionist neighbor.” At this point, India insisted that Chinese troops withdraw over Thag La ridge and Indian forces return to their posts that had been set up under the Forward Policy before talks could begin. Though the increased hostility in Nehru’s tone in the second letter can be attributed to domestic political pressures as the note was public, Nehru still refused to give in to demands to break off diplomatic relations or submit the dispute to the United Nations. From India’s point of view, attempts at a peaceful resolution were thwarted by China; as Nehru noted, “we would like to sit at the negotiating table with the Chinese. We are

591 “Yinni gejie duizhong, yindu bianjie chongtu de fanying,” [Indonesia’s comprehensive reaction to China and the Sino-Indian border dispute], November 14, 1962, Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, Doc. 105-01493-04, 16.
592 Maxwell argues as well that the Indians were even more adamant about their position on not negotiating a boundary settlement after the Chinese attack than before. See Maxwell, India’s China War.
593 “Letter from the Prime Minister of India, to Premier Chou En-lai, 14 November 1962,” White Paper 8, 12.
594 Maxwell, India’s China War, 377.
ready. But the government has explained to them that for this it is necessary that the position on
the border that existed 3 months ago be restored.”

While the Chinese were more willing to publicly communicate eagerness to talk than the
Indians, they were unwilling to agree to talks with preconditions attached. After the Chip Chap
valley clash, China rejected India’s proposed condition for resumption of talks that China
withdrawal its forces from all Indian claimed territory to create “the appropriate climate” for
talks stating that ‘there need not and should not be any pre-conditions for such discussions.”

Before the war broke out, China proposed three times to “negotiate the Sino-Indian boundary
question without any preconditions but all three times met with the refusal of the Indian
Government. The Indian Government insisted that negotiations could not start until "China has
withdrawn from vast tracts of China’s own territory.”

Three days after receiving Zhou’s three-point proposal, Nehru responded that India was willing to engage in talks to “arrive at agreed
measures which should be taken for the easing of tensions and corrections of the situation
created by the unilateral forcible altercation of the status quo along the India-China boundary”
but only if China pulled its troops back to the positions they had held on September 8.

In a telegram to the Indonesian ambassador, the Chinese ambassador to India protested this
precondition as “not fair, irrational and China cannot accept it.”

In a November 6th note, China summed up two countries’ position on talks:

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596 AVPRF, f. 090, op. 24, d. 6, p. 80, ll. 134-139; document obtained by J. Hershberg;
translation by K. Weathersby, CWIHP, 265.
597 “Note given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, 4
599 “Letter from the Prime Minister of India to the Prime Minister of China, 27 October 1962,” in
White Paper 8, 4-7.
600 “Wo zhu yindu shiguan he yinni zhu yindu shiguan guanyu zhong, yindu bianjie wenti de
jiejiu [Exchange between our embassy in India and Indonesia’s embassy in India concerning the
Firstly, it is India which refuses to negotiate…from July 26 to October 6, 1962 alone seven notes ere exchanged between China and India on the question of holding negotiations. The Chinese Government thrice put forward the proposal for holding discussions speedily and unconditionally on the boundary question…but the proposal was thrice turned down by the Indian Government. The Indian side even opposed the Chinese Government’s proposition that during the discussions neither side should refuse to discuss any question concerning the boundary. [India also] first advanced the pre-condition that China should withdraw from large tracts of China’s own territory in the western sector, then it advanced another pre-condition, that China should withdraw from another tract of China’s own territory in the eastern sector, and it has all along obstinately stated that no discussions can be held unless the Chinese side accepts its preconditions. In this way, the Indian Government…finally categorically shut the door on negotiations.

This next section addresses how the dynamics of war and disparities in military power resulted in diverging views about the utility and costs of demonstrating an eagerness to talk. I argue that states fear that their opponents will take the willingness to engage in wartime talks as a sign of weakness, encouraging in turn a ratcheting up of their adversary’s war effort to a level that is unsustainable or unfavorable to them. The country, which has less room to escalate, in this case India, did not offer talks because it saw a greater risk in showing an eagerness to talk. Chinese offers to talk were seen as ploys to weaken India’s position and probes of resolve, not genuine attempts to resolve differences through peaceful negotiations. The country with more room to escalate, in this case China, offers talks but refuses to concede to preconditions because it believes that escalation will allow it to achieve its objectives effectively. In short, though both countries believed a willingness to talk would signal weakness, Delhi was more concerned than Beijing about the consequences of perceived weak resolve because it was militarily inferior.

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Perceptions of Weakness and the Interstate Ratchet Effect

In the interstate ratchet model, the fear that weakness will encourage escalation and hurt one’s war fighting prospects becomes a primary factor in decision making only once hostilities break out. Only at this point does the debate about how talking will impact fighting and vice-versa move center stage. In the case of the Sino-Indian War, these factors were introduced when China attacked Thag La ridge, launching what India considers the first major act of aggression. Once the two countries were engaged in combat, Indian leaders had to consider how its position on talking would affect its success in fighting. Because China could escalate the conflict to a level that would be potentially unsustainable for India, the necessity to demonstrate toughness became a primary objective. As a result, India became much less flexible about its negotiating position because the potential negative consequences of looking weak increased. As the conflict escalated, the possibility that agreeing to talks would signal weakness was too risky for India.

The fear was that demonstrating a readiness to talk could inspire China to ratchet up its aggression, which could lead to the further loss of territory. Because of this, India “could not talk under the shadow of a gun.” As Nehru articulated at an impromptu press conference in mid-October “our instructions are to free our territory…as long as this particular aggression lasts [at Thag La], there appears to be no chance of talks.” Particularly referencing the Longju incident, Nehru speculated that China’s intent was to “just show [India its] place…so that we

602 Maxwell argues as well that the Indians were even more adamant about their position on not negotiating a boundary settlement after the Chinese attack than before. See Maxwell, India’s China War.
603 Author’s interview with India military general, former commander of Ladakh. New Delhi, August 2012.
604 Maxwell, India’s China War, 342.
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may not get uppish...it is pride and arrogance of might that is showing, in their language, in their behavior to us and in so many things that they have done.”

China’s September 8th occupation of Thag La ridge was seen in this light, the foreshadowing of a Chinese strategy to counter Indian moves in the west by escalating in the east. Consequently, India felt that “to deter further incursions in NEFA [it] had to demonstrate resolve in the Thag La ridge.”

Nehru assessed that China was “using the boundary question to assert superiority, even perhaps dominance, over India.”

China was using its superior military position to bully India; and giving in would only invite more coercion.

Talks were seen as surrender and “if India bowed down to it, she would be dragged down to unknown depths.” Given this, Nehru explained to his Chief Ministers that the message New Delhi wanted to communicate to China was that “India is no weak country to be frightened by threats and military might...we will always be willing to negotiate a peace but that can only be on condition that aggression is vacated. We can never submit or surrender to aggression.”

Delhi’s need to show toughness and signal resolve was further exacerbated by the fact that when the war started, India was unsure of what end state China ultimately sought. It was unclear whether the Chinese intended to do more than just adjust the frontier by pressing farther

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605 Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 120-121.
606 Raghavan, *War and Peace*, 294. For many Indian leaders, this move was seen as the first phase of the war. See Dalvi, *Himalayan Blunder*, 185. Nehru also felt that September 8th was when the “massive aggression on India” began. See “Letter from the Prime Minister of India, to Premier Chou En-lai, 14 November 1962,” *White Paper* 8, 11.
607 Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 120.
608 Author’s interview with Indian journalist who covered events during the war. New Delhi, August 2012.
609 Gopal, *Nehru*, 221.
610 Gopal, *Nehru*, 221.
611 Author’s interview with Indian general, former commander in Ladakh. New Delhi, August 2012.
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into Indian territory. Some were concerned that China harbored even greater ambitions. As one scholar writes, “China’s first objective in the pursuit of its destiny is to become undisputed leader of Asia…it is India which represents simultaneously a rival to China of major proportions and a very vulnerable target of opportunity.” Others believed China’s objectives were limited in that it was only interested in acquiring Ladakh, which was vitally important for its position in Tibet. Furthermore, because political and military leaders had been inaccurate in their prewar thinking that China would never attack India, all previous beliefs were jettisoned. This led to worse case scenario thinking about Chinese territorial ambitions, which the second wave of attacks only served to reinforced. After this phase of operations, launched on November 16, 1962, China seemed likely to advance to Leh in the west and drive onto the plains of Assam in the east. Lt Gen Kaul even ordered his IV Corps headquarters to move from Tezpur to Gauhati because of fears that the Chinese would continue unchecked into Assam. The lost of Tripura, Manipur and Nagaland in the east also seemed imminent and Chinese PLA was poised for incursion into Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh in the middle sector.

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612 Varma, Struggle for the Himalayas, 164. At least in one Chinese document from the Chinese ambassador in India to the foreign ministry sent before the war in July 1962, Indian provocations could lead to war, and “such a war could possible not stop at the border.” See Zhu yindu dashi Pan zili liren shi xiang yinfang cixing baihui qingkuang,” [The situation in which Pan from the Chinese embassy leaves his post and pays an official visit to say goodbye], Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, Doc. 105-01807-01, July 5, 1962.
614 Varma, Struggle for the Himalayas, 165.
615 Author’s interview with Indian former ambassador and participant in the India-China Joint Working Group on the boundary issue. New Delhi, August 2012. See also Whiting, Chinese Calculus, 147.
616 Whiting, Chinese Calculus, 146.
617 Gopal, Nehru, 228.
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As China pushed in Ladakh toward Chushul, Nehru fretted on November 19 that the war was “no longer a border war between India and China; it is an invasion of India.”618 In writing to President Kennedy to request air cover, Nehru characterized the situation as “really desperate.”619 Nehru worried that China’s ambitions “not only cover[ed] the Himalayan slopes on our side but also include important parts of Assam. They have their ambitions in Burma as well.”620 The government went as far as to believe India needed “to brace themselves for the possible bombing of Delhi.”621 Additionally, “authorities feared that if Chinese bombers made token attacks on Calcutta or Delhi there would be a stampede of these incredibly crowded cities.”622 The British and Americans posited numerous reasons for the Chinese to escalate and take NEFA if they thought it possible. The territory could be used as a bargaining chip to gain Ladakh or as a forward base for extending Beijing’s power through the subcontinent. China could also try to make Bhutan, Sikkim and Nepal protectorates of China instead of India by revealing India’s inability to defend them.623

Given concerns that China would ratchet up the war effort and push beyond the border, Delhi needed reassurance that after accepting talks, China would not be encouraged to advance farther.624 For this reason, India maintained strict preconditions, for “if the Chinese professions of peace and peaceful settlement of differences are really genuine, let them go back at least to the

618 Rowland, History, 172.
619 Raghavan, War and Peace, 308.
620 Dalvi, Himalayan Blunder, 491.
621 Varma, Struggle for the Himalayas, 174.
622 Whiting, Chinese Calculus, 147.
623 Whiting, Chinese Calculus, 163. There was no basis for these concerns in Chinese strategic thinking. See Whiting, Chinese Calculus, 164-165.
624 Author’s roundtable discussion at the United Services Institution (USI) of India, New Delhi, August 2012.
position where they were all along the boundary prior to 8th September 1962.”

625 Without such a move, which would also reduce China’s ability to escalate and push farther forward into the heartland of India, India could not take the risk of demonstrating an eagerness to talk. Because talks were proposed “while the Chinese forces in great strength [were] occupying large areas of Indian territory” Nehru interpreted these offers as nothing short of as “a demand for surrender.” 626 India’s position would be unwavering without a credibly signal of benign intentions: “New Delhi’s willingness to negotiate is not unconditional and cannot be until China vacates its aggression and thereby acknowledges supremacy of peaceful and friendly negotiations.” 627 This contributed to a situation in which interwar negotiations were unlikely to emerge. As one Indian Parliamentarian remarked in favor of unconditional talks, “if you want to take back all the territory from China, before the start of the negotiations, then what is there to negotiate?” 628

Nehru always believed that the border problem could only be resolved through negotiations but that the pressure of international opinion combined with a sufficient demonstration of Indian resolve would create the conditions for this by convincing China that the increasing use of force was ineffective. Moreover, this strategy would have to be done carefully to avoid escalation. 629 Because Chinese intentions were unknown, and fear of escalation was strong, “it would be an utter absence of prudence to rush into some step, the end of which we

625 “Annexure to letter from the Prime Minister of India to Premier Chou En-lai, 27 October 1962,” White Paper 8, 6.
626 “Annexure to letter dated 14 November 1962, from the Prime Minister of India,” White Paper 8, 17.
627 Maxwell, India’s China War, 139.
628 Jetly, India China, 168.
629 Raghavan, War and Peace, 283.
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cannot see.”630 At a October 15 press conference in Colombo, Nehru articulated that demonstrating resolve was critical to protecting India’s interests: “we have to defend ourselves, otherwise they will march on… the attitude of the Chinese Government is to seize territory and then have talks. India is not prepared for that.”631 Nehru was confident, because of his perceptions of China’s economic troubles and external difficulties with the Soviet Union and the United States, that demonstrating resolve would be sufficient for deterring Chinese intrusions in Ladakh.632 China was using its superior military might to bully India, and conceding would only convince the Chinese that the use of force was effective against them. This may cause China to ratchet up and employ even greater force against India, who would be unable to escalate in kind given its smaller CD. Consequently, Delhi was “hostile to the idea of making concessions under military pressure.”633 As Nehru wrote to Zhou three weeks into the war in a commentary on the three-point proposals:

China has undertaken since 8th September, deliberately and in cold blood, a further massive aggression and occupied larger areas of Indian territory and is now making the magnanimous offer of retaining the gains of the earlier aggression plus such other gains as it can secure by negotiations from the latest aggression on the basis of the Chinese three point proposals. If this is not the assumption of the attitude of a victor, I do not know what else it can be. This is a demand to which India will never submit whatever the consequences and however long and hard the struggle may be…to do otherwise would mean mere existence at the mercy of an aggressive, arrogant and expansionist neighbor.634

631 Varma, Struggle for the Himalayas, 150.
632 Raghavan, War and Peace, 297.
633 Author’s interview with Indian former ambassador and participant in the India-China Joint Working Group on the boundary issue. New Delhi, August 2012.
634 “Letter from the Prime Minister of India, to Premier Chou En-lai, 14 November 1962,” White Paper 8, 12.
Probes of Resolve or Genuine Attempts at Peace?

Indian leaders also rebuffed China’s offers to launch talks because they felt the offers were not genuine. The war came of a shock to India, whose political and military leaders were convinced that China would never attack.\(^{635}\) As then IV Corps Commander Lt Gen Kabul wrote in June 1962, “I am convinced that the Chinese will not attack any of our positions even if they [Indian posts] are relatively weaker than theirs.”\(^{636}\) In the early 1950s Nehru agreed with this assessment because he thought India’s friendship would act as a restraint; but by 1959 such allusions had vanished. However, Nehru still held that “the Chinese are unlikely to invade India because they know that this would start a world war, which the Chinese cannot want.”\(^{637}\)

Nehru in particular felt betrayed by the Chinese assault because he had been such a fervent supporter of the PRC since its founding. As he wrote in a letter to Zhou Enlai, the Chinese position on the boundary issue came “as a great shock to [India]. India was one of the first countries to extend recognition to the People’s Republic of China and for the last ten years we have consistently sought to maintain and strengthen our friendship with your country.”\(^{638}\) India had even relinquished its special British-era privileges over Tibet and endorsed Chinese sovereignty there in the 1954 Sino-Indian agreement.\(^{639}\) After the Chinese assault, Nehru experienced “the complete loss of confidence in the bona fides of the professions for a peaceful settlement repeatedly made by the Government of China.”\(^{640}\) On October 27, in a letter to Zhou

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\(^{635}\) For the reasons for the intelligence failure, see Raghavan, *War and Peace*, 278-279.
\(^{636}\) Sinha and Athale, *Conflict with China*, 82.
\(^{637}\) Raghavan, *War and Peace*, 279.
\(^{638}\) “Prime Minister Nehru’s Letter to Premier Chou En-lai, September 26, 1959,” *Documents on the Boundary*, 101-102.
\(^{640}\) “Letter from the Prime Minister of India, to Premier Chou En-lai, 14 November 1962,” *White Paper* 8, 11.
argued that “there have been repeated declarations by [China] that they want to settle the differences on the border question with India by peaceful means,” but Chinese actions at the time were “in violent contradiction with these declarations.” As one Member of Parliament stated, October 20th ended the “chapter on disillusion” in Indian history.

Indian leaders had various theories about why China was offering talks even though it was likely to rely more on force and escalation to accomplish its goals. Zhou’s three point proposal, for example, merely “signaled a shift in tactics by Beijing: a pretense of conciliation and negotiation would replace border intimidation.” China wanted to legitimize its use of force after hostilities began and in the lead up to the war offers to talk were designed to test India’s intentions and allowed China “to prepare a public case for its position before further escalating its military pressure.” According to one Parliamentarian, agreeing to talks under aggression was “just a plea to put the formal seal of approval on the surrender of Indian territory.”

India scholar Srinath Raghavan argues that China’s response to India’s insistence that talks could not begin until China withdrew from Indian claimed territories in Ladakh, was one of “disingenuous reasonableness” and its appeals for talks without preconditions were “aimed at convincing the international community of India’s intransigence.”

The offers were also seen as a ploy to gain military advantage. According to a former commander of Ladakh, China’s main goal in offering talks was to legitimize its claim to Aksai Chin and stall while it obtained strategic depth for the western highway and gain control over

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642 Jetly, India China, 194.
643 Rowland, History, 137.
644 Whiting, Chinese Calculus, 109.
645 Jently, India China, 167.
646 Raghavan, War and Peace, 291-292.
certain features that would fortified its protection of its gains. For another Indian general, they were a tactical ploy to allow the military to rest and recuperate. As Brigadier Dalvi argues, the Chinese desire to talk was a feint designed to stall for time and “restrict [the Indian] military response to the low key of a border dispute.” According to Dalvi, the Chinese tried to use the promise of talks to “sap [India’s] will to fight.” He characterized Chinese offers as disingenuous, as they were offered at “the petty local level” but were demoralizing for the troops nonetheless. It was confusing because, in the view of Dalvi, “enemies do not exchange diplomatic niceties and lethal fire on the same night.”

The Chinese were probing India’s resolve; as Nehru argued, if the professions of peace and the desire to settle the issue through talks was genuine, they would go back “at least to the position where they were all along the boundary prior to September 8…India will then be prepared to undertake talks and discussions at any level mutually agreed.” Concerns about accepting only bona fide offers talk may be why, according to the Indian vice consul in Shanghai, India would be prepared to negotiate “if there were a third party that could mediate, like the Soviet Union.”

In the next section, I argue that because China had more room to ratchet up its war effort, it was less concerned about the consequences of communicating weakness. Because of this difference in military might, China was willing to offer talks. However, China was unwilling to

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647 Author’s interview with India military general, former commander of Ladakh. New Delhi, August 2012.
648 Author’s interview with Brigadier Gurmeet Kanwal. New Delhi, August 2012.
649 Dalvi, Himalayan Blunder, 160.
650 Dalvi, Himalayan Blunder, 221.
651 Dalvi, Himalayan Blunder, 221-222.
652 Varma, Struggle for the Himalayas, 156.
pay the costs of adhering to preconditions to facilitate the emergence of talks because its leadership believed in the efficacy of force to accomplish China’s objectives.

**To Ratchet or not to Ratchet? Chinese Views on the Effectiveness of Escalation**

The Chinese leadership believed that escalating violence along the border would compel India to engage in unconditional negotiations with China about boundary issues. The purpose of the limited attack was to test Indian responses and ideally bring about a settlement. China, however was preparing for contingency preparations for more serious warfare if limited fighting failed to bring about Chinese objectives.\(^{654}\) Beijing had decided that the policy of restraint and diplomacy had failed partly because “the Indian side always regarded China’s self-restraint and forbearance as a sign that China is weak and can be bullied.”\(^{655}\) From the Chinese perspective, they had been magnanimous, willing to negotiate even though “India occupied more than 90,000 square kilometers of Chinese territory in the eastern sector, provoked two border clashes in 1959 and made claim to large tracts of Chinese territory.”\(^{656}\) Moreover, Beijing perceived Zhou’s repeated visits to India as tokens of sincerity (Zhou had visited four times, while Nehru had only visited China once).\(^{657}\) Beijing considered its military action against India to be a “self-defensive counterattack” which had two phases. In the first, China strove to drive Indian troops across what it considered to be the border. When India responded with strong military reaction, the objective changed to wiping out the Indian troops completely. In the second phase, which began in late October, China sought to punish India by penetrating deeply into Indian territory and destroying

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\(^{654}\) Whiting, *Chinese Calculus*, 160.

\(^{655}\) Note given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, 6 November 1962,” *White Paper 8*, 63.


\(^{657}\) Garver, “China’s Decision,” 104.
its fighting capacity.\textsuperscript{658} The political objective of gradually ratcheting up military and political pressure was to force the acceptance of unconditional negotiations, and then escalate to major military action to show Delhi that its forward policy was ill conceived.\textsuperscript{659} In his statement of agreement with the decision for war, Zhou asserted, “as I see it, to fight a bit would have advantages. It would cause some people to understand things more clearly.”\textsuperscript{660} Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi articulated the view that “India cannot completely avoid talks. According to our estimates, currently India will fight for a short period, and in the end it will accept peaceful negotiations.”\textsuperscript{661}

From the perspective of China’s leadership, escalation was necessary to teach “the invaders” that they would not be able to conduct similar “nibbling” in the future without severe costs.\textsuperscript{662} Mao’s instructions to the PLA when he decided on October 6\textsuperscript{th} to conduct a major attack later that month, “if they attack, don’t just repulse them, hit back ruthlessly so that it hurts,” exemplifies this faith in escalation. Only a massive blow would conclusively demonstrate to Delhi China’s resolve to never accept the McMahon line.\textsuperscript{663} The shift towards a greater reliance on use of force occurred the summer of 1962 in which there was “an increase in PRC diplomatic probes for negotiations while Peking’s propaganda posture and PLA activity signaled a stiffening in Chinese resistance to Indian advances.”\textsuperscript{664} According to Mao, what China needed was not a local victory but to inflict a defeat so crushing that it would “knock Nehru to

\textsuperscript{658} Cheng and Wortzel, “PLA Operational Principles,” 181.
\textsuperscript{659} Whiting, \textit{Chinese Calculus}, 98.
\textsuperscript{660} Shi Bo, \textit{Zhongyin Dazhan Jishi} (Record of events in the big China-India War) (Beijing: Dadi chubanshe, 1993), 189.
\textsuperscript{661} “Chen Yi discussion,” 5.
\textsuperscript{662} Xu Yan, \textit{ZhongYin Bianjie ZhiZhan Lishi Zhenxiang} [The Historical Truth of the Sino-Indian War Border], (Hong Kong: Tiandi Tushu, 1993), 110.
\textsuperscript{664} Whiting, \textit{Chinese Calculus}, 77.
the negotiating table.” In short, Beijing “regarded its ‘counterattack’ as a self-defense measure necessary to reopen negotiations for peace.” The Chinese offensive focused on hitting the eastern sector in particular because Nehru had long contended that the McMahon Line was a fact and not up for discussion; hitting there would be an attack on Nehru’s ‘hegemonist attitude’ and “compel them to negotiate to thoroughly resolve the border issue.” Four days after the war began, the CMC stated that there would be a lull to give India the opportunity to accept peaceful negotiations; “if India refused again to talk, we will again firmly attack the Indian reactionaries to compel them to sit down and talk.” In the midst of the conflict, Chen Yi articulated the position that “winning victories will put pressure on India” and that to pave the way for talks, China was “willing to concede and disengage.” Chinese decision makers believed there was an opportunity to reopen peace talks with the India immediately after the war began.

Even though China was in a better position militarily than India, concerns about horizontal and vertical escalation, as well as global public opinion, did limit the degree to which China was willing to ratchet up its war effort. China wanted to avoid the involvement of outside powers. Two days before China declared a unilateral ceasefire, President Kennedy had warned, “if China advanced any further they would be forcing the hand of the President of the United

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666 Cheng and Wortzel, “PLA Operational Principles,” 188.
667 Xu, *Lishi Zhenxiang*, 111.
669 “Chen Yi discussion,” 6.
Chinese leaders were concerned that if they ratcheted up the war effort too much, this would inspire the United States, Great Britain, or even the Soviet Union to come to India’s aid, to China’s detriment. Chen Yi commented in the middle of the war that India knew that the armed conflict along the border will not expand into a larger war between the two countries, but used the border war to gain international advantage. While such comments were partly designed to portray India as the aggressor in the eyes of the developing world, the fact that a secret foreign affairs document also argued that India was using the border dispute to get American military assistance for its defense modernization suggests this was indeed a real Chinese concern. Concerns about a U.S. decision to intervene or enlarge the fighting during the second offensive in mid-November were heightened after it was apparent that the Chinese assault had been a devastating success.

China also wanted to avoid escalating to the point that it provoked a major war with India beyond the border and this concern resulted in differing views on how hard of a posture to adopt during the opening days of the war. The breaking of relations and formal state of war would “complicate China’s already difficult internal and external affairs by increasing the defense burden of a long, tortuous frontier amidst a rebellious populace while providing India with more leverage on Russia, American and Afro-Asian support.” China scholar Allen Whiting argues that the general halt to PLA attacks, lack of publicity for PLA victories and the low-key posture in official references to the fighting suggest that even during the war Zhou Enlai was attempting

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672 “Chen Yi discussion,” 3.
to minimize the escalatory possibilities and maximize the prospects of a settlement.\footnote{Whiting, \textit{Chinese Calculus}, 134-35.} Communist newspapers were given the directive to use the terms “conflict, fighting or dispute” to describe the conflict to stress it was not a larger war but localized conflict.\footnote{“CIA Report,” 63.}

Like India, China was concerned about looking weak, whether this would encourage Indian aggression, and whether India had any intention of resolving the border issue peacefully through talks.\footnote{Fravel makes a related argument about China’s behavior in territorial disputes that “regime insecurity magnified the perceived nature and severity of external threats, further increasing the utility of using force to signal resolve to China’s adversaries.” See Fravel, \textit{Strong Borders}, 219.} In his report to Zhou Enlai about sources of Indian aggression, Lei Yingfu argued that the Forward Policy was the result of the belief in India that China “was weak and could be taken advantage of” and “barks but does not bite.”\footnote{Lei Yingfu, as told to Chen Xianyi, \textit{Zai zuigao songshuibu dang sanmo --- Lei Yingfu jiangjun huixilu} (Serving on the staff of the high command - memoir of General Lei Yingfu), (Nangchang, Jiangxi province: Baihuazhou wenyi chubanshe, 1997), 209.} Chinese leaders accused Nehru of “using peaceful negotiations as cover for plans of nibbling Chinese territory.”\footnote{Whiting, \textit{Chinese Calculus}, 92, 95.} The CIA characterized China at the time of being “obsessively concerned with the possibility of Indian duplicity and with avoiding any impression of weakness.”\footnote{“CIA Report,” 41.} As Mao himself argued in his decision for war “we cannot give ground, once we give ground it would be tantamount to letting them seize a big piece of land equivalent to Fujian province.”\footnote{Garver, “China’s Decision,” 115.} In a letter to the Soviet Union, the Central Committee of the CCP writes “we believe that if one carries out only the policy of unprincipled adjustment and concessions to Nehru and the Indian government, not only would it not make them change their position for the better, but, on the contrary, in the situation of the growing offensive on their side, if China still does not rebuff them and denounce them, such a
policy would only encourage their atrocity.”683 This was a serious concern given that India’s aggressive Forward Policy was believed to reflect India’s intention of making Tibet an Indian colony or protectorate.684 China also believed that India offers to talk in the lead up to the war were not genuine: “India is being two-faced (两手做法). On the one hand, they express a willingness to engage in peace talks, on the other, they avail themselves of the western sector to the best of their ability, push against our borders, set up sentry posts, occupy space, bring about a fait accompli, in order to bargain.”685 Because of China’s military superiority and confidence that escalation would compel Delhi to enter into talks, the risk of looking weak was outweighed by the need to continuously provide India with the opportunity to defuse tensions.

One of the problems with relying escalation along the border in the fall of 1962 to accomplish its goals is that this heightened Delhi’s concerns that China would ratchet up its war effort to seek broader objectives. The Indians did not trust that Chinese objectives were as limited as its leadership claimed, even after the ceasefire was implemented. Consequently, Delhi was concerned that offers to talk were mere probes designed to decipher whether such an escalation would be effective. India’s concern about Chinese escalation was so acute that the USSR tried to convince Delhi “to accept that it is only a border dispute and China has no intention of invading India” and China’s unilateral withdrawal as sufficient proof for Beijing’s

684 Fravel, Strong Borders, 194; Garver, “China’s Decision,” 120.
685 “Zhu yindu dashi Pan zili liren shi xiang yinfang cixing baihui qingkuang,” [The situation in which Pan from the Chinese embassy leaves his post and pays an official visit to say goodbye] Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, Doc. 105-01807-01, July 16, 1962, 28.
“willingness for a peaceful settlement.” But for India, actions spoke louder that words, and in this light offers to talk were seen as a façade, a demand of unconditional surrender.

In this chapter, I demonstrated that China was persistent in its attempts to open talks; as a CIA assessment argues, “ever since the Chou-Nehru talks of April 1960, the Chinese leaders without exception had been receptive to any high-level Indian exploratory approach to talks.” Though Zhou Enlai communicated Beijing’s desire to begin peace talks consistently throughout the war, Nehru would not be reassured that this reflected a genuine desire to end the conflict peacefully unless China first adhered to his strict preconditions as a show of faith. But Beijing, as the country with the greater CD, was confident its ability to escalate would compel India to negotiate a settlement to the boundary dispute eventually, and therefore China refused to accept any preconditions to talks before the ceasefire. I showed that these dynamics, coupled with worse case scenario thinking about China’s intentions in Delhi, created obstacles to talks that endured throughout the conflict.

The next chapter explains why talks never occurred during the brief border war. I will argue that because it was so short, Delhi never had the opportunity to muster the ability to demonstrate the will and ability to counter Chinese aggression. Because of this, India had to demonstrate its resolve through a tough diplomatic stance. Without a Chinese withdrawal to the September 8 status quo, Indian leaders could not be sure that China would not take advantage of perceived weakness to broaden the border conflict. The Chinese leadership had miscalculated that there was no need to accept India’s preconditions, believing instead that because of its larger

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686 Nayar, *Between the Lines*, 201.
687 Comments received by the author in a roundtable discussion at USI and author’s interview with an information adviser and prominent journalist who covered the events of the war, New Delhi, August 2012.
CD, it could use its ability to escalate and inflict pain on India to push it towards wartime negotiations. Unfortunately for the cause of peace and stability then and now, with territory at stake, communicating an eagerness to negotiate when Chinese intentions were still uncertain was a risk that no Indian leader could take.
Chapter Six:  
The Second Offensive to a Unilateral Ceasefire

After a month of fighting, Indian leaders still refused to engage in border talks. This was in contrast to the expectations of the Chinese leadership, which had previously been confident that China’s relatively greater ability to escalate would compel India to negotiate on Chinese terms. China subsequently changed strategies and tried to coax the Indians to the table by accepting to a degree Delhi’s previously proclaimed preconditions for talks with a partial withdrawal from NEFA. India, given its failure to score any military victories up to this point, still felt too vulnerable to communicate a readiness to talk. From Delhi’s perspective, the complete Chinese withdrawal from territory taken during the month-long war was necessary to guarantee China’s intentions to stop its coercion and resolve the dispute peacefully. China would never agree to these strict preconditions, however, and without the opportunity to demonstrate toughness, Delhi would never relax them to allow for the emergence of talks.

Each country’s assessment of their relative ability to escalate and the impact talking while fighting would have on its adversary’s strategic thinking greatly determined both China and India’s negotiating positions as the war wound down in late November, early December 1962. In chapter five, I argued that fear among the Indian political elite that accepting talks after Chinese aggression would only encourage Beijing to ratchet up its use of force was the primary driver of India’s diplomatic strategy in the lead up and during the war. In this chapter, I will demonstrate that this fear persisted after China declared a ceasefire, and with it India’s refusal to engage in talks. Because Indian elites believed that they failed to demonstrate toughness before the ceasefire was declared, they were not convinced that Beijing’s incentives to escalate had been adequately reduced.
However, Chinese leaders had come to the conclusion during the month of fighting that its ability to ratchet would not convince India to engage in talks on its terms. As a result, Beijing declared a unilateral ceasefire, the elements of which partially adhere to India’s preconditions for bilateral talks. This was insufficient, however, for an India that felt it had not inflicted enough costs on Beijing to adequately reduce Chinese incentives escalate and take even more territory. Because of this, even though China unilaterally withdrew from much of the territory it had occupied during the war, this move was not enough to assure Delhi that China would not turn around and use force to accomplish its goals in the near future. Delhi therefore never relaxed its preconditions and talks never emerged. This chapter evaluates the termination of the war and addresses a number of questions: what was the thinking behind China’s decision to adhere to limited preconditions of a withdrawal in order to facilitate the emergence of talks after only thirty days of fighting? Why did the Indians reject China’s ceasefire proposals and refuse nonetheless to engage in talks even after China began a partial withdrawal? In short, why did negotiations fail to emerge as envisaged in the Chinese ceasefire proposal?

India’s fear of encouraging escalation and China’s changing assessment about its ability to compel Nehru to engage in border talks with threats of escalation is the strongest explanation for both countries’ bargaining positions. The evidence supporting alternative hypotheses that talks never emerged because (1) the position and influence of great powers, such as the Soviet Union and the United States, prevented it; or (3) domestic pressures in India were against talks, is not as robust. While there was uncertainty about China’s willingness to use force, India’s readiness level, and the reaction of great powers, little uncertainty about the balance of power remained after thirty days of Chinese victories. Therefore, the lack of a convergence of expectations about combat outcomes cannot explain why talks did not emerge in November
1962. Second, the Soviet Union and the United States were not greatly involved in the border war, partly because they were preoccupied with the Cuban Missile Crisis. For India, even when support from the United States did arrive, it was too late and too little to make a great difference. Moreover, the Soviet Union remained relatively neutral, though it voiced a preference for talks, which never emerged. Lastly, domestic politics in India were against talks and Nehru, as a democratic leader, was beholden to his public’s preferences. Because the domestic political criticisms of talks were consistent with the ratchet model, specifically that agreeing to them would only demonstrate weakness and encourage further aggression, it is difficult to prove or disprove this alternative hypothesis without more evidence. However, the fact that Nehru pursued border talks before the war even in the face of domestic criticism suggests that when he believed China would engage in bona fide talks that would allow for the resolution of the border issue on favorable terms to India, domestic pressure was not enough to keep him from pursuing talks.

This chapter proceeds as follows: first, I evaluate how combat outcomes inspired a change in Chinese thinking about escalation as a tool to compel Indian capitulation to border talks. When it became apparent that they had previously been overly optimistic, Chinese elites changed strategy and offered a ceasefire as a token of China’s desire to engage in bona fide talks. Second, I argue that India refused to relax its preconditions because it was not convinced that Chinese reliance on threats and force had come to an end. In contrast, in the mind of Indian leaders, their military had fared poorly which could only call into question Indian resolve in the eyes of Beijing. Lastly, I evaluate the explanatory power of two alternative hypotheses concerning Indian and Chinese diplomatic behavior during the 1962 war.
China Changes its Position on Escalation, Accepts Limited Preconditions

Beijing’s confidence in escalation as a tool to compel India’s capitulation on border talks drove the Chinese leadership to launch its offensive on October 20, 1962. China’s objective in advancing South of the McMahon line was precisely to thoroughly “rout the Indian reactionaries and to shatter their plan of altering the border status quo by armed force, and to create conditions for a negotiated settlement.”689 China paused for three weeks during the first and second phases of the military offensive to allow for the possibility that India would plead for, or at least agree to, talks. The lull also gave policy makers in Beijing the space “to determine the necessity as well as the potential gains and risks of further military action.”690

But the lull did not engender the Indian desire to talk that China was hoping for. Instead of recognizing the dire nature of its situation, “Indian behavior communicated the intention to muster whatever force was available indigenously and from foreign sources, particularly American and Russian, for a counterattack at the earliest opportunity.”691 India saw the timing of the ceasefire differently; its leadership judged that “for China to continue the war against such a [strong and serene] India and with growing problems of supplies and logistics and against an army recovering from the initial blows would secure little advantage, especially as the Soviet Union was moving away from neutrality, the United States was ready to provide full support to India and world opinion in general was critical of China.”692 The threat of third party intervention was heightening with the end of the Cuban Missile Crisis, which meant the Soviet Union and the United States could focus more attention on the Sino-Indian War.693

689 Maxwell, India’s China War, 418.
690 Whiting Chinese Calculus, 137.
691 Whiting, Chinese Calculus, 138.
692 Gopal, Nehru, 230.
693 Whiting, Chinese Calculus, 137.
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According to a CIA report, the Chinese were surprised by the Indian refusal to engage in talks once Beijing had demonstrated resolve with the initial assault. In particular, “the sharpness of the Indian turn toward the U.S. and UK for equipment and supplies.” Not only was India not budging on its preconditions, but also” the Indian government [had] so far rejected [Zhou’s] three proposals and continue to expand the border conflict.” It became apparent that China was not getting anywhere with its attempts to knock Nehru to the negotiating table through the threat of escalation. The Chinese leadership began to reevaluate the utility of escalation in bringing about talks, shifting to a strategy of fulfilling Nehru’s preconditions to a degree with a partial withdrawal to credibly communicate its intentions to engage in bona fide talks.

On November 19, Zhou Enlai summoned New Delhi’s charge d’affaires and informed him that two days later the PLA would halt at the undisputed border of Assam, proclaim a unilateral ceasefire on all fronts, and withdraw from the territory taken in NEFA during the war. The Chinese Government hoped that the Indian government would respond positively to the ceasefire proposal and then officials from the two countries could finally meet to engage in talks about the details of the ceasefire and other boundary issues. In an official statement, China warned that it reserved the right to retaliate if Indian forces came any closer than twenty kilometers from their side of the LAC and suggested a meeting of prime ministers to discuss a settlement. The hope was that India would respond positively to these initiatives by taking corresponding measures and subsequently the two countries could appoint officials engage in

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694 “CIA Report,” v.
696 For the text of the ceasefire proposal, see “Statement given by the Chinese Government, 21 November 1962,” White Papers 8, 19. For more on the ceasefire and withdrawal, see Whiting, Chinese Calculus, 147-150.
698 For more on the ceasefire, see Whiting, Chinese Calculus, 417-443.
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talks about the logistics of the withdrawal, “matters relating to the 20 kilometers withdrawal of the armed forces of each party to fix a demilitarized zone, the establishment of check posts by each party on its side of the line of actual control as well as the return of captured personnel.”

During the war, China had occupied all the contested territory in Ladakh and had overrun 3,750 square miles of NEFA. Then, without any pressure or threat against their newly won positions, Chinese troops unilaterally abandoned territory a month later. The Chinese leadership considered this unilateral withdrawal to be a sufficient demonstration of good faith and therefore expected Nehru to relax his preconditions and come to the negotiating table. As Zhou wrote in November 1962, “the 1959 line of actual control and not the present line of actual contact between the armed forces of the two sides is full proof that the Chinese side has not tried to force any unilateral demand on the Indian side on account of the advances gained in the recent counter-attack in self-defense.” To emphasize that China was partly meeting Nehru’s preconditions, Zhou followed up with “As Your Excellency is surely aware, in concretely implementing this proposal the Chinese armed forces will have to withdraw much more than twenty kilometers from their present position in the eastern sector.” In its statement laying out the ceasefire proposal, the Chinese government specifically notes that it is agreeing to these limited preconditions to “reverse this trend” of expansion of the conflict and “promote the

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700 Whiting, Chinese Calculus, 149.
701 For more on the remarkable nature of this decision, see Whiting, Chinese Calculus, 163-164.
702 Without negotiations, retention of the won territories would only feed into the Indian narrative of Chinese expansionism. See Whiting, Chinese Calculus, 164.
703 “Letter from Premier Chou En-lai, to the Prime Minister of India, 4 November 1962,” White Paper 8, 8.
704 “Letter from Premier Chou En-lai, to the Prime Minister of India, 4 November 1962,” White Paper 8, 8.
realization of [Zhou’s] three proposals.”\textsuperscript{705} As the ceasefire proposal articulated, “these measures taken by the Chinese Government on its own initiative demonstrate its great sincerity for stopping the border conflict and settling the Sino-Indian boundary question peacefully. It should be pointed out, in particular, that, after withdrawing, the Chinese frontier guards will be far behind their positions prior to September 8, 1962.”\textsuperscript{706}

A week past and nothing from Delhi. On November 30, the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a memorandum demanding further clarification of China’s ceasefire proposals before any decision could be made. India wanted China to clarify its interpretation of the McMahon Line among other things. The Chinese Government felt that all these issues could be “discussed and settled by the officials and India…was obviously deliberate haggling and evading an answer to the substantive question.”\textsuperscript{707} China argued that two sides should start talks and the “implementation of these proposed [ceasefire] arrangements [would] not in any way prejudice either side’s position in regard to the correct boundary alignment.”\textsuperscript{708} Because of this, “both sides should defer the differences on the boundary question for settlement by future negotiations, and refrain from haggling over them now endlessly.”\textsuperscript{709} China grew frustrated with Delhi’s insistence that China define the LAC before it could respond to the ceasefire proposals, retorting that “this

\textsuperscript{707}“Memorandum given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, 8 December 1962,” \textit{White Paper 8}, 33.
\textsuperscript{708}“Letter from Premier Chou En-lai to the Prime Minister of India, 28 November 1962, \textit{White Paper 8}, 25.
\textsuperscript{709}“Memorandum given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, 26 November 1962,” \textit{White Paper 8}, 23.
is no reason for putting off a meeting…but exactly points to the urgent need for holding such a meeting. Differences can only be solved through meetings and discussions.”  

Over two weeks after China had communicated the ceasefire proposal, India still had not given a direct response. In a December 8th memorandum, the Chinese government asked in frustration: “Does the Indian Government agree, or does it not agree, to a cease-fire?” Again, the Chinese government reminded India that it had partly met its preconditions for talks: “it must be stressed that the Chinese frontier guards are withdrawing from the nearly 20,000 square kilometers of Chinese territory north of the traditional customary line in the eastern sector of the Sino-Indian border in order to urge the Indian Government to make a positive response and seek a peaceful settlement of the Sino-Indian boundary question.” China once again urged India to enter into talks, reassuring India that during these official talks the two sides could address any specific details related to India’s questions and concerns about the ceasefire. But India continued to maintain, “there must first be a cease-fire and withdrawal arrangement commonly agreed by the two sides.” China argued that the failure to have such an agreement ahead of time was “no reason for putting off a meeting of officials of the two sides, but exactly points to the urgent need for holding such a meeting. Difference can only be solved through meetings and discussions; they would never be reduced, let alone removed, if not meeting is held.”

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710 “Memorandum given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, 29 December 1962,” White Paper 8, 46.
711 Memorandum given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, 8 December 1962,” White Paper 8, 34.
713 Memorandum given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, 8 December 1962,” White Paper 8, 35.
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Even though China withdrew from some of the territory captured during the war to facilitate the emergence of talks, adherence to India’s strict precondition of the complete restoration of the September 8th status quo ante was categorically ruled out. Zhou characterized Indian demands as “humiliating conditions such as forced on a vanquished party.” From the Chinese perspective, restoring the state of the boundary as it prevailed prior to September 8th meant validating India’s Forward Policy; the difference between that status quo and the November 1959 position proposed by Beijing was that through the Forward Policy India had occupied through force huge tracts of land that China considered its own. Furthermore, if Beijing agreed to withdraw to the November 7, 1959 position in the west and allow India to revert to the September 8th position, this would involve China conceding 5,000-6,000 square miles of territory. China believed its ceasefire proposal had “already shown great forbearance and accommodation” by using the November 7, 1959 LAC which was the “result of India’s forcible violation of the traditional customary line and its seizure of large tracts of Chinese territory.” The strict precondition meant “India wants China to satisfy the greater past of India’s territorial claims on China even before the negotiations start.”

In short, China could not agree to India’s preconditions in toto, which it considered “an unreasonable demand” because such agreement would “prejudice China’s position in regard to the boundary.” Then chairman of the CCP, Liu Shaoqi, argued in the immediate aftermath of

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715 “Letter from Premier Chou En-lai, to the Prime Minister of India, 4 November 1962,” White Paper 8, 10.
716 “Memorandum given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, 29 December, 1962,” White Paper 8, 44.
718 “Memorandum given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, 8 December 1962,” White Paper 8, 33.
the war “preconditions are not necessary for talks. We talk with the United States without any preconditions. We didn’t put forth the precondition that they withdraw from Taiwan before negotiations… In the world there are few examples of countries positing preconditions for talks. This is great power chauvinism and we will not concede to it. They attacked once, and we beat them back. Attack again, and we will beat them back again.”

Moreover, Beijing was not convinced that once India’s preconditions were fulfilled, it would then:

be prepared to negotiate the boundary question in earnest… [Delhi] holds in effect that India-occupied Chinese territory is not negotiable, that the question of Indian-craved Chinese territory is not negotiable either, and that negotiations, if any, must be confined to China’s withdrawal or India’s entrance… In these circumstances, it can be foreseen that no results will be obtained even though boundary negotiations are held.

In China’s opinion, India’s refusal to accept limited preconditions demonstrated that the Indian side still wanted to stage a comeback in order to “hold what they have taken by force over a period of years” which was “absolutely unacceptable to the Chinese side.”

The Chinese also urged other countries to put pressure on India to enter into talks. As Allen Whiting argues in his book on Chinese deterrence, “since bilateral deterrence and diplomacy had proven futile, multilateral maneuvers to isolate and discredit India became of

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720 Liu Shaoqi zhuxi jiejian yinni fuzhuxi buzhang subandeliyue tanhua jilv (tan Liu Shaoqi fangwen Yinni, zhongyindu bianjie he yafei liuguo huiyi wenti,” [Meeting Minutes for when Chairman Liu Shaoqi receives Indonesian vice-minister (they discussed the issues of Liu’s trip to Indonesia, the Sino-Indian border, and the Colombo meeting]. Beijing Foreign Ministry Archives, doc. 105-01792-04, January 3, 1963.


722 Note given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, 6 November 1962,” White Paper 8, 63.
prime importance.” For example, three days before the ceasefire was announced, Chen Yi asked the Indonesian ambassador to talk to the Indians and tells them that the Chinese position is to peacefully resolve the border dispute and Beijing does not wish to expand the conflict. This was partially a tactic to reassuring China’s neighbors of its peaceful intentions as well as win support among countries that had decided to meet to put forth proposals for resolving the Sino-Indian dispute. Six Afro-Asian countries had decided to meet in Colombo, Sri Lanka December 10-12, 1962 to evaluate the border conflict and devise some proposals that may bring both sides together to the negotiating table. Both China and India vocalized support for these countries efforts and tried to make their case. Chen, in his meeting with the Indonesian ambassador, laments that the big issue is that at Nehru will not reverse course, even though he knows his military cannot fight this war. In Zhou’s words, “our government’s position is very clear, we accept in principle the six powers talks...the problem now is to see what Nehru’s position will be. Today he is one way, tomorrow he is another, we have no way of knowing really what he wants. We have showed the whole world our genuine desire for peaceful negotiations, our side has initiated a ceasefire, withdrawal of troops, returned to India all the ammunition we seized, we have already taken many steps, but Nehru has not taken one step forward.”

Zhou tried also to appeal to Nehru’s sensitivity toward the opinions of the developing world, arguing that Asian and African countries wanted the two sides to peacefully negotiate and

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723 Whiting, Chinese Calculus, 139.
724 Chen speculates the reason for this is that Nehru wants a pretext to receive US aid. “Chen Yi discussion,” 4.
725 “Gengbiao fuwaizhang jiejian yinnizhuhuadashi sukan tanhua jiyao(tan guanyu zhong,yindu bianjie wenti, malaixiyawenti, yafeihuiyi wenti deng)” [Minutes of the talks between Assistant Foreign Minister and Indonesia Ambassador to China(talk about the Sino-Indian border issue, the Malaysian issue, the Afro-Asian conference, etc.] No. 105-01160-01, January 24, 1963, 2.
they “should not disappoint their eager expectations.”

In January, China continued its strategy to gain international support and leverage other countries to put pressure on Nehru to relax his preconditions for talks, publicizing that:

India want us to pull out of a large portion of territory in the western sector then have the two sides jointly manage it, we cannot give this point consideration. Furthermore it is intolerable to China. Wanting us to acknowledge the pre 9/8 state of affairs is like wanting us to let them recover their pre 9/8 position of aggression… We support the convening of the Colombo meeting, as I previously explained, our position on it is not that we don’t want to talk, its Nehru that refuses to talk, we hope you all will make a great effort, just like the conference communiqué position to date, to promote Sino-India bilateral direct negotiations.

As the Chinese ambassador explained to his counterparts, the reason China supported the Colombo conference was not to encourage these countries’ intervention in the border dispute, but to encourage India to enter into bilateral talks.

China was also trying to enhance its reputation as leader of the developing world, at India’s expense. Though there is no evidence that global reputational costs drove Chinese decision making about the desirability of talking while fighting, China’s offers to talk were often filled with rhetoric directed at the developing world. For example, in the ceasefire proposal, asserting that “the Chinese Government calls upon all Asian and African countries and all peace-loving countries and people to exert efforts to urge the Indian Government to take corresponding measures so as to stop the border conflict, reopen peaceful negotiations and settle the Sino-

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726 Whiting, *Chinese Calculus*, 139.
727 “Zhou Enlai zongli he Chen Yi fuzongli tong yinfi fuzuxi bujiang jian waijiao buzhang subandeliyue de tanhua jilv,” [Notes from the meeting between Premier Zhou Enlai and Vice Minister Chen Yi with Indonesian Vice Chairman and Foreign Minister], 105-01792-01, January 4, 1963, 3-5.
Indian boundary question.” In the statement calling for a unilateral ceasefire, the Chinese Government warned that if India violated the ceasefire “China reserves the right to strike back in self-defense, and the Indian Government will be held completely responsible for all the grave consequences arising there from. The people of the world will then see even more clearly who is peace-loving and who is bellicose, who upholds friendship between the Chinese and Indian peoples and Asia-African solidarity and who is undermining then, who is protecting the common interests of the Asia and African peoples in their struggle against imperialism and colonialism and who is violating and damaging these common interests.”

India never agreed to open talks. In a letter Nehru received on November 30, 1962, Zhou Enlai expressed regret for India’s lack of response and proposed again that the officials of the two countries meet to discuss the withdrawal and establishment of check posts by each party. The next section evaluates Indian strategic thinking and why it refused to enter into talks with China even after Beijing agreed partly to its preconditions by conducting a partial withdrawal. I will argue that India did not relax its preconditions to allow for the emergence of talks because it felt it had not yet adequately demonstrated toughness.

**India fails to establish a reputation for toughness; pushes strict preconditions**

Why did India refuse to relax its preconditions to allow for the emergence of talks, even after China declared a unilateral ceasefire and withdrew from huge tracts of territory it had previously occupied? In this section I argue that India had not demonstrated toughness at this point in the conflict, and therefore believed that it had not adequately persuaded China against using force to obtain its goals. This meant that Chinese attempts to open talks were still

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731 Nayar, *Between the Lines*, 183.
perceived with suspicion, and even as their troops withdrew, the fear of counter-attack remained. Under these conditions, the risk of talks was still too great and India’s leadership believed it should improve its position on the ground before it considered talks.

During the three-week lull between China’s first and second offensive, India did not seriously consider talks and instead worked to improve its positions. Nehru had proclaimed a state of emergency on October 26th to mobilize the public for a protracted war. India began to organize new army units and move large amounts of troops and materiel to the eastern and western sectors; according to Chinese sources, as many as 389 packs were airdropped on November 10 alone. The two brigades in NEFA present in early October grew to two divisions and in the west at Chushul, a full brigade now protected the airstrip and village. On November 12, the Home Minister publicly declared “India was now strong enough to repulse the Chinese attackers and was building its military might to dive the invaders from Indian soil.”

Despite the heavy publicity about imminent American and British aid, “little of this equipment could reach forward Indian positions for immediate use, much less allow time for familiarization and for the systematic stockpiling of spare parts and ammunition.” Nehru had requested U.S. military aid on November 19, but the Kennedy administration preferred to defer the issue to the British. This did not stop China from being concerned that the “U.S. and UK would begin a crash program to modernize India divisions and mold them into a force capable of eventually striking back effectively at the PLA.” According to then U.S. Ambassador

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732 Note given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, 6 November 1962,” White Paper 8, 64; Note given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, 16 November 1962,” White Paper 8, 63.
733 Maxwell, India’s China War, 387-check
734 Whiting, Chinese Calculus, 145.
735 Hoffman, India and the China Crisis, 218-219.
736 “CIA Report,” 63-64.
Galbraith, on 1 December 1962 India’s Foreign Secretary M.J. Desai broached the topic of a ‘tacit air defense pact’ between the two countries, proposing that “the Indians would prepare the airstrips and radar; if the Chinese came back [the Indians] would commit their tactical aircraft and [the United States] would undertake defense of [India’s] cities.” China urged “the Indian side not to reject the good-will and appeal of the Chinese side for a peaceful settlement and for avoiding the expansion of the conflict” and warned that it was “keeping a close watch on the movement of Indian troops.” With India showing no signs of opening discussions after the first offensive, China decided to launch a second and final offensive.

India did not fare well the second time around. The Chinese beat back the attack and inflicted heavy casualties on Indian forces before launching their own assault at dawn on November 16th. Only a few hours later, India’s key defenses had fallen and General Kaul ordered the brigade to withdraw. India had failed to demonstrate toughness, and with this failure ended the only known instance of Indian offensive action during the war. After this point, India was on the defensive, losing battle after battle until no semblance of an Indian Army remained in NEFA after November 20th. The war had “deflated Indian military pretensions” and “so intensely humiliated the India leaders and so vitally affronted the pride of the nation” that the desire for vindication was strong. Once India could build up its military, the feeling that India needed to demonstrate military strength “may well prevail over the more sober calculation” that it should talk with the Chinese and hash out a political settlement even on China’s terms.

737 Hoffman, *India and the China Crisis*, 218.
739 Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 145.
740 Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 146.
But given the mood in Delhi, this was unlikely; instead, “the miserably beaten Indians may try again eventually when their forces and spirits have been refurbished.”

All in all, India never seized the initiative nor inflicted any significant losses on the Chinese side during the war. During the month of fighting, 1,383 Indian soldiers were killed, 1,696 missing, and 3,968 captured. According to PLA archival records, India fare even worse with 4,897 killed or wounded and 3,968 captured. China fared much better, with only 722 Chinese soldiers killed, 1,697 wounded and none captured. As Allen Whiting argues, India’s defeat was nothing short of total humiliation, with India pleading for help from the United States and Great Britain while China magnanimously announced a unilateral ceasefire. China graciously returned all territory seized in NEFA as well as meticulously itemized equipment that had been captured. Lastly, all 4,000 Indian prisoners were repatriated. These steps further hammered home to “Asian sensitivities the disparity of power on the Himalayan front.” India had failed to put up a serious fight; “the PLA had inflicted such a degrading defeat on India forces that Nehru was more than ever before unable to consider negotiations as a real course because such a course would have been viewed as surrender after the battle.”

Under these circumstances, Indian elites viewed the ceasefire proposals as a reflection of Chinese “efforts to establish claims to Indian territory by force, both before and after their massive attack on Indian outposts and forces on 20 October 1962.” It did not help that the

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741 “CIA Report,” 70.
742 Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 424; all the captured Indians were released May 25, 1963. Liu, *The Sino-Indian Border Dispute*, 36.
743 Cheng and Wortzel, “PLA Operational Principles,” 188.
744 Whiting, *Chinese Calculus*, 149.
745 “CIA Report,” 64.
746 Hoffman, *India and the China Crisis*, 225
proposals came with a threat of further escalation if India did not comply. Specifically, if Indian troops:

Continue their attack after the Chinese frontier guards have ceased fire… again advance to the line of actual control in the eastern sector…and/or refuse to withdraw but remain on the line of actually control in the middle and western sectors; and cross the line of actual control and recover their positions prior to September 8… China reserves the right to strike back in self-defense and the Indian Government will be held completely responsible for all the grave consequences arising therefrom.\footnote{“Statement given by the Chinese Government, 21 November 1962,” White Paper 8, 20.}

China pointed out four areas in particular that were sensitive and closed to Indian forces. Beijing implicitly warned that any effort on the part of India to establish a military presence there would be met with force. Moreover, if India started setting up check posts again anywhere else on the LAC or the Chinese side of it, China would inform the Colombo powers to garner international support and then move to destroy Indian forces.\footnote{“CIA Report,” 70.} China articulated this point in bilateral meetings with Colombo powers; if India enters territory after China withdraws and sets up administrative control, there will be no talks and China will respond.\footnote{“Gengbiao fuwaizhang jiejian yinnizhuhuadashi sukanji tánhua jiyao (tan guanyu zhong,yindu bianjie wenti,malaixiyawenti, yafeihuiyi wenti deng)” [Minutes of the talks between Assistant Foreign Minister and Indonesia Ambassador to China (talk about the Sino-Indian border issue, the Malaysian issue, the Afro-Asian conference, etc.)]. Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, doc. 105-01160-01, January 24, 1963, 10-11.}

Indian newspapers reported on December 1, 1962, that Chinese frontier guards began to withdraw to positions 20 kms behind the November 7, 1959 LAC.\footnote{Nayar, Between the Lines, 170-171.} Such a move was unprecedented; as one India official commented, “the Chinese withdrawal to their original lines after a victory in the field [was] the first time in recorded history that a great power has not exploited military success by demanding something more.”\footnote{Maxwell, India’s China War, 419.} But Indian leadership
UNILATERAL CEASEFIRE

“maintain[ed] that there first be a ceasefire and withdrawal arrangement commonly agreed by the two sides” before representatives from the two countries could meet. The withdrawal of Chinese troops had to be complete; if China was basing the withdrawal on the LAC of November 7, 1959, this was unsatisfactory because it granted China 2,500 square miles of territory China had occupied over the previous three months of attacks and invasion.⁷⁵² Any arrangement “can only be on the basis of undoing the further aggression committed by the Government of China on Indian territory on the 8th September, 1962.”⁷⁵³ As Nehru articulated to the lower house of Parliament after the Chinese proposed a ceasefire, “we cannot have any kind of talks, even preliminary talks, unless we are satisfied that the condition we had laid down-about the 8th September position being restored-is met.”⁷⁵⁴

But China’s ceasefire proposal was perceived by India as “proposals for settlement on [China’s] own terms. If they are not accepted, China would again use military pressure to enforce these terms.” This was not far from the truth: in his letters, Zhou Enlai emphasized that without Indian agreement, the ceasefire was “unstable” and it could “again develop into a border conflict” because the two sides cannot reach an agreement.⁷⁵⁵ According to Zhou, India understood that China “will be on [its] guard and always ready. If India intrudes again into the western sector, [China] will counterattack. Nehru is clear on this point.”⁷⁵⁶ But India also did not

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⁷⁵³ “Memorandum given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, 29 December, 1961,” White Paper 8, 44.
⁷⁵⁴ Maxwell, India’s China War, 431.
⁷⁵⁵ “Letter from Premier Chou En-lai to the Prime Minister of India, 30 December 1962, White Paper 8, 47.
⁷⁵⁶ “Zhou Enlai zongli he Chen Yi fuzongli tong yinni fuzhuxi bujiang jian waijiao buzhang subandeliyue de tanhua jilv,” [Notes from the meeting between Premier Zhou Enlai and Vice Minister Chen Yi with Indonesian Vice Chairman and Foreign Minister]. Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, doc. 105-01792-01, January 4, 1963, 3-5.
want to communicate that the use of force was an effective tool in resolving the border dispute, and therefore could “never agree to [such] military dictation.” Though in China’s view, the unilateral ceasefire with its partial adherence to India’s preconditions of withdrawal “fully demonstrates China’s sincerity for a peaceful settlement,” this move was not enough of a guarantee of Chinese good intentions. If anything, “the further aggression since 8th September 1962 and the massive Chinese invasion following later fully confirmed Indian fears of the possibility of aggression by its expansionist neighbor.” China’s attempts to open talks were therefore seen as probes of resolve even after the ceasefire was declared. Because of this, “to talk about Chinese goodwill and the appeal of the Chinese Government for a peaceful settlement in the face of Chinese aggressive actions and massive attacks is absurd and only serves to expose the Chinese Government’s deception and duplicity.”

For these reasons, the Indian leadership decided that the complete adherence to preconditions was necessary before talks could begin. After the unilateral withdrawal of Chinese forces on December 1, 1962, Nehru was still unwilling to consider negotiations due to fears of projecting weakness. Given the uncertainty about China’s intentions, and the failure to prove Indian forces could stand up to Chinese aggression, India needed to be sure that China was not intent on ratcheting up its war time effort if it perceived India to be weak in resolve. For these reasons, India refused to relax its preconditions, arguing instead that “if China is really sincere

757 Note give by the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, to the Embassy of China in India, 5 December 1962,” White Paper 8, 70-71.
758 “Note given by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peking, to the Embassy of India in China, 31 December 1962, White Paper 8, 73.
759 Note given by the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, to the Embassy of China in India, 4 January 1963,” White Paper 8, 75.
760 “Note give by the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, to the Embassy of China in India, 5 December 1962,” White Paper 8, 69.
761 Gopal, Nehru, 234.
about settling the India-China border differences by talks, discussions and peaceful means, why
does it regard the Indian proposal to restore the status quo that existed prior to the further
Chinese invasion of India on 8th September 1962 as unreasonable? Even after China intruded
into the Indian territory of NEFA, “all that India asked even then was that the invading Chinese
troops should withdraw to their side of the frontier before talks and discussions could be
undertaken. This is categorized as a pre-condition sought by India. Evidently the Chinese believe
in the principle of taking what they can by force and asking for negotiations for the rest.” As
Prime Minister Nehru articulated once more the next month, “before a suitable atmosphere for
any worthwhile talks between us is created, I think that at least the further aggression committed
by the Chinese forces since the 8th of September 1962 should be removed and the positions as it
existed then should be restored.”

Adherence to preconditions would demonstrate China’s willingness to engage in bona
fide negotiations because it would allow India to establish check posts to enhance its ability to
defend itself against another Chinese assault. Ever since China had “committed this aggression
[the 8 September taking of Thag La Ridge] it had become impossible to believe that Chinese
professions for peace and peaceful discussions between the two Governments expressed in their
letter of 13th September could have been anything more than hypocritical.” The official Indian
position, on the other hand, was that New Delhi,

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762 Note given by the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, to the Embassy of China in India,
763 Note given by the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, to the Embassy of China in India,
764 “Letter from the Prime Minister of India to the Prime Minister of China, 1 January 1963,”
White Paper 8, 4951.
765 Note give by the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, to the Embassy of China in India, 5
December 1962,” White Paper 8, 70.
had shown in considerable detail the insincerity with which the Chinese Government advanced proposals for entering into talks and discussions with the Government of India on the border question…The massive invasion of India mounted since 8th September 1962 is clear confirmation of the fact that China had no intentions to find a peaceful solution, but was bent on enforcing its untenable claims on Indian territory by military force.\textsuperscript{766}

India questioned the genuine nature of China’s ceasefire proposal, arguing that China had made the proposals “in the hope that they would be able to confuse world opinion under the guise of peaceful intentions and, at the same time, succeed in compelling India to come to terms in accordance with the military dictates of China.”\textsuperscript{767} As a statement made by the opposition parties excluding the Communist party stated, “the Chinese offer of a unilateral ceasefire is only another of their notorious maneuvers, calculated to cause confusion and disruption in our national front, gain time for consolidation and build up for another infamous offensive and present us from mobilizing resources from inside and outside and create doubts in the minds of our friends in world democracy.”\textsuperscript{768} India interpreted China’s December 10\textsuperscript{th} Colombo statement advocating for talks as “an unveiled threat to the effect that peaceful negotiations can only reopen on the basis of terms dictated by Communist China.”\textsuperscript{769}

Even though it refused to enter into talks, India accepted the Chinese ceasefire in a de facto fashion.\textsuperscript{770} Through warfighting China had achieved its main aim of securing control over Aksai Chin in exchange for Indian control over NEFA. India refused to explicitly accept the ceasefire proposals because it did not want “to grant legitimacy to China’s ‘line of control’”

\textsuperscript{766} Note give by the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, to the Embassy of China in India, 5 December 1962,” White Paper 8, 69-70.
\textsuperscript{767} Note given by the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, to the Embassy of China in India, 4 January 1963,” White Paper 8, 78.
\textsuperscript{768} Maxwell, India’s China War, 420.
\textsuperscript{769} “Indians Allege Naked Threat,” The Straits Times, December 10, 1962.
\textsuperscript{770} Hoffman, India and the China Crisis, 224.
though this “would not change the fact that India was now forced to tolerate it.” India did however accept the Colombo proposals, which suggested that China withdraw 20 kilometers from the ceasefire line only in the Western Sector and India remain where it was. These proposals, created December 10-12, 1962, when representatives of six Asian and African states met in Colombo to discuss how best to diffuse tensions along the Sino-Indian border, were more beneficial to India than China’s ceasefire proposals because it could have check posts right on the ceasefire line in Ladakh and even go beyond it. Furthermore, Indian forces would not have to stay 20 kilometers from the McMahon Line. Though India accepted these proposals, its position on the conditions under which talks could occur remained the same.

Alternative Perspectives on Diplomatic Behavior

There are two possible alternative explanations for why talks did not emerge between Indian and Chinese during the 1962 Sino-Indian War. First, the influence of great powers such as the Soviet Union and the United States determined India and China’s positions on wartime negotiations. Second, Nehru was constrained by domestic political pressures that were against talks. China, however, being an autocracy, did not face the same constraints and therefore could offer talks throughout the conflict.

Great Power Politics

One possible explanation for Chinese and Indian positions on wartime negotiations is that great powers such as the Soviet Union and the United States compelled China and India to take the positions that they did. The Soviet position on the dispute was of vital importance to both sides. The Chinese leadership actively tried to change the USSR’s views and Nehru’s desire to preserve Soviet goodwill had compelled him to meet Zhou Enlai despite acute domestic criticism.

771 Hoffman, India and the China Crisis, 226.
772 Hoffman, India and the China Crisis, 226.
in April 1960. \footnote{Yaacov Y.I. Vertzberger, *Misperceptions in Foreign Policymaking: The Sino-Indian Conflict, 1959-1962*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), 86, 89. China published pamphlets on India’s reactionary social structure and otherwise arguing that India was not worthy of Moscow’s support.} After the clash at Longju, Khrushchev articulated that the Soviet Union considered both countries to be friendly to them; “the Chinese People’s Republic to which we are bound by unbreakable bonds of brotherly friendship, and the Republic of India, with who we have been successfully developing friendly relations.” \footnote{Ram, *Politics of Sino-Indian Confrontation*, 89.} Though the USSR did not want India to seek assistance from the West, its leadership also could not fathom breaking with socialist China.

Because of these interests, the Soviet Union supported talks between the two countries. In a meeting between Khrushchev and Nehru right before Zhou Enlai was set to come to India for their summit meeting in 1960 after a series of skirmishes had erupted between the two sides, Khrushchev told Nehru that the Soviet Union “took no definite stand [on the Sino-Indian dispute] and will do out best to hold that line…This conflict is a sop to aggressive forces and is against the interest of the forces working for peace.” \footnote{Raghavan, *War and Peace*, 281.} As tensions escalated in the fall 1962, the Soviet Union made efforts to “look for measures of peacemaking” to facilitate a negotiated settlement between the two countries. \footnote{Ragahvan, *War and Peace*, 300, 303.} Within hours of the Chinese attack on October 20th, a letter from Khrushchev was delivered to Nehru urging him to accept Chinese proposals for talks and Moscow began to waver on the question of whether to supply India with MiG fighters. \footnote{Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 365-366.} Moscow believed Chinese attempts to end the conflict were genuine and asked Delhi not to postpone peace by putting preconditions on talks. \footnote{Nayar, *Between the Lines*, 157.} Moscow also put pressure on China, though
unsuccessfully, to make political concessions to India because Khrushchev believed Sino-Indian relations were the greatest obstacles to enhanced Indian ties to the Socialist bloc. After the outbreak of the war, Moscow promoted Zhou’s three-point proposal, arguing that they provided an acceptable basis for negotiation. The Cuban Missile Crisis, which was unfolding at the same time, only served to enhance Moscow’s desire to see the two sides enter into talks. Khrushchev articulated that the USSR hoped both sides “would not be taken in by such provocations and would resort to common sense in settling their differences. As a result, the USSR urged both sides in a 5 November Pravda editorial to “sit down at the conference table as quickly as possible” to find “a mutually acceptable solution” to avoid a situation in which the conflict led “to a prolonged bloody war.”

But the USSR stopped short of trying to exert influence to compel both countries to enter into talks, partly because of other priorities, partly because its influence over China at the time was questionable. The relationship between China and the Soviet Union began to deteriorate as early as 1958 due to ideological differences, distrust, and jealous rivalries for international leadership between Khrushchev and Mao. Two years before the border war, the USSR had already withdrawn their economic advisors from China and refused to help them build the atomic bomb. The Soviet Union’s leverage over China had therefore decreased and in any case, the USSR was pushing for China’s preferred policy, unconditional talks.

779 Vertzberger, Misperceptions, 86.
780 Liu, The Sino-Indian Border Dispute, 28. The USSR did not want India to seek assistance from the west, but could not fathom breaking with socialist China. Hence its efforts to facilitate a negotiated settlement between the two countries. See Ragahvan, War and Peace, 303.
781 Nayar, Between the Lines, 194.
782 Whiting, Chinese Calculus, 141.
783 Christensen, Worse than a Monolith, Chapter Five.
Though India was not privy to the details of the split, its leadership viewed the neutral Soviet position as a positive development: “India feared their mounting quarrel with China would estrange them from Moscow… Russian neutrality over the Sino-Indian dispute was all that the Indian Government could have hoped for and more than it expected.”

USSR had significant leverage on Delhi, especially since the USSR “promised to stand by its agreement to supply India with MiG-21 fighter planes, the first deliveries expected in December.” But India was still reluctant to rely on the Soviet Union for support: “Soviet shifts on the matter of MiG-21 delivery to India were so frequent, so opportunistic, and so obviously related to Sino-Soviet relations…that some India leaders gained the distinct impressions…that India could not look for any vigorous support from the Russians” in the event of a future conflict. India also did not respond positively to the USSR suggestions to negotiate with China immediately. While the Soviet Union’s push for talks did not inspire flexibility in India’s stance on talks with preconditions, it did influence Nehru’s rhetoric and encourage a more conciliatory tone in letters to the Chinese.

Most other countries, especially those that were nonaligned in orientation, avoided involvement in the war. The United States, Great Britain and Canada, however, did provide India with some limited military support. For example, on November 3, 1962 a U.S. arms shipment arrived in four C-130 transport planes. The day after the Chinese attack, Nehru sent a message to President Kennedy requesting small arms, and the United States complied. But Nehru was not prepared to ask the great powers to intervene in any way until mid November when he sent

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784 Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 146.
785 Whiting, *Chinese Calculus*, 141.
786 “CIA Report,” 61.
787 Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 243.
789 Nayar, *Between the Lines*, 141, 156.
an urgent appeal to President Kennedy for support in the form of air power.\textsuperscript{790} A formal U.S.-
Indian pact was signed November 14, 1962 and five days later Nehru requested U.S. and British
bomber support to interdict the advancing troops. President Kennedy warned China on
November 20\textsuperscript{th}, “if China advanced any further, they would be forcing the hand of the President
of the United States.”\textsuperscript{791} As one Chinese official complained to a western reporter in November
1962, “as long as the Indians go on attacking us they will get anything they want out of the
United States. They are making millions of dollars out of these skirmishes, they’ll probably go
on forever.”\textsuperscript{792}

But India could not for ideological and practical reasons rely on the West. First, the
ideology in India was one of nonalignment and as a former British colony that had fought for its
independence, its leaders were deeply suspicious of western motives. For example, Home
Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri’s believed that western countries were at the time “trying by all
means and methods to sow the seeds of hostility between two great Asian Powers, to weaken the
traditional friendship between the Indian and Chinese peoples and provoke a conflict.”\textsuperscript{793} Nehru
was also resistant to accepting aid early in the conflict because he believed it would entail a
reduction in India’s independence, which was unacceptable given India’s ideological emphasis
on strategic autonomy.\textsuperscript{794} China’s decision to announce a unilateral ceasefire was not influenced
by the prospect of western aid to India either; Zhou Enlai’s initial presentation of China’s

\textsuperscript{790} Nayar, \textit{Between the Lines}, 168.
\textsuperscript{791} Liu, \textit{The Sino-Indian Border Dispute}, 40.
\textsuperscript{792} Maxwell, \textit{India’s China War}, 379.
\textsuperscript{793} Nayar, \textit{Between the Lines}, 134.
\textsuperscript{794} Averell Harriman did hint that the promise of U.S. arms was dependent on India resolving the
Kashmir issue with Pakistan. While there was never a chance India would have surrendered a
large part of the Kashmir valley in return for military aid, Nehru did humor the Americans by
meeting with Pakistan President Ayub, to ‘talk’ but not ‘negotiate.’ See Maxwell, \textit{India’s China
War}, 436.
decision to declare a unilateral ceasefire came 24 hours before Nehru appealed publicly for U.S. and British aid. In any case, Beijing was confident that military deliveries could not be made before winter closed down the front.\(^{795}\)

Though the perceptions of allies, enemies, and third party neutrals did not determine China and India’s position on talks, they did color how both countries presented their independent choices to relevant third party actors. Both sides wanted to portray themselves reasonable and constructive actors that were not to blame for the ongoing hostilities, even as they evaded peace talks or employed military force. China focused its attention on gaining the support of Afro-Asian nations, and even while at war with India, promoted its image of being “moderate, self-absorbed, and non-belligerent.”\(^{796}\) China strove unremittingly to obtain international support for its position; for example, China called upon Afro-Asian nations numerous times to use their influence to convince India to enter into peaceful talks.\(^{797}\) As one Indian editorial wrote of Delhi’s dilemma, if talks succeeded, “China’s prestige and power will be enhanced in the eyes of the smaller Asian countries” and if talks were to break down “India will be held up as

\(^{795}\) Whiting, *Chinese Calculus*, 149-150.

\(^{796}\) Christensen, *Worse than a Monolith*, 172.

\(^{797}\) “Wo zhu yindu shiguan he yinni zhu yindu shiguan guanyu zhong, yindu, bianjie wenti de jiechu, gaoxu wuguan qu yinni shiguan tanhua zhongdian” [The exchange between China’s embassy in India and Indonesia’s embassy in India about the Sino-Indian border question, the important points of the defense attaché Gao Xu’s visit to the Indonesian embassy]. *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, doc. 105-01493-06, November 19, 1962, 67; “Chen Yi fuzongli jiejian yini zhuhua dashi Sukani tanhua jilu (guanyu yafei huiyi hezhong, yindu bianjie wenti) [Record of discussion, Vice-Premier Chen Yi meets with Indonesian ambassador to China (regarding the India boundary question during the Afro-Asia meeting)] *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, doc. 105-01789-07, November 17, 1962, 3-4. The goal was to make India look bad for refusing while China seemed like it was open to negotiating a settlement. See Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 249.
unreasonable, [but better] to be held up temporarily as unreasonable than to be dismissed as weak and pusillanimous.”\textsuperscript{798}

New Delhi attached great importance to obtaining Russian sympathy for its cause. Nehru often argued, especially to Moscow, that India was eager to negotiate, which was convincing partly because it seemed unlikely that a country as weak as India would actually challenge China militarily.\textsuperscript{799} As Nehru wrote to President Nasser, “it is the Government of China who are not only refusing to undertake talks and discussions for easing of tensions and for settling differences… but are creating further tension and conflict in another section of the boundary, viz, the Eastern sector.”\textsuperscript{800} In a letter to Khrushchev, Nehru argues further that it is not India that insists on preconditions, but China, whose refusal to withdrawal created the most stringent precondition for talks.\textsuperscript{801} Nehru appealed to Khrushchev for sympathy and support, asserting that India had “been prepared for discussions which might lead to a peaceful settlement” but discussions were impossible “when actual and new aggression [was] continuously taking place, and vast Chinese armies [were] moving further into out territory?”.\textsuperscript{802}

\textbf{Indian Domestic Politics}

Without greater direct evidence of Nehru’s decision making process, it is difficult to prove or disprove that desire to avoid domestic political critiques did not drive his decision to avoid talks with the Chinese. The difficulty lies in the fact that the domestic political critiques are consistent with the logic of the ratchet model in that both argue that Nehru did not want to demonstrate a readiness to talk because this would make him look weak. Domestic politics in

\textsuperscript{798} Maxwell, \textit{India’s China War}, 152.  
\textsuperscript{799} Maxwell, \textit{India’s China War}, 281.  
\textsuperscript{800} Nayar, \textit{Between the Lines}, 144.  
\textsuperscript{801} Nayar, \textit{Between the Lines}, 151.  
\textsuperscript{802} Nayar, \textit{Between the Lines}, 153.
India, in particular the aversion to negotiating with the Chinese, undoubtedly contributed to Nehru’s reluctance to open talks on the border issue. Among the Indian public, there was some debate about whether or not to talk with the Chinese before the war, though calls for meaningful negotiations were minor and not mainstream.\textsuperscript{803} The range of opinion in the country swung from those who some wanted to consult with United States or Great Britain before entering into talks, other resolutely opposed talks until China completely withdrew, others against talks even under these conditions.\textsuperscript{804} Admittedly, Nehru was deeply concerned about the power of opposition within his party and in outside circles and its ability to threaten his political power and stature, this misperception colored his judgments.\textsuperscript{805} The Congress Party of which he was the leader maintained its superiority throughout this period on the national stage, opposition parties such as the Socialist Party, the Swatantra Party (capitalist conservative party), Jana Sangh (a Hindu Nationalist Party) and even the Communist Party demanded a firm and uncompromising attitude toward China.\textsuperscript{806} The strongest pressure group, however, was the right wing of his Congress Party. Nehru was in a state of perpetual fear that this faction would align with his other rivals if he did not take a strong stance against China. As Nehru scholar Srinath Raghavan argues, “Nehru knew that any overtures on his part prior to conciliatory moves by Beijing would strongly be resented.”\textsuperscript{807}

The mood in India during the conflict was to correlate any agreement to negotiate with surrender; one member of Parliament argued “the mere suggestion that India should agree to

\textsuperscript{803} Maxwell, India’s China War, 153. The masses did not participate in the political process, and therefore public opinion here refers to the positions of a small upper-class group, often referred to as the middle class.

\textsuperscript{804} Varma, Struggle for the Himalayas, 187.

\textsuperscript{805} For this argument, see Vertzberger, Misperceptions, 136-150.

\textsuperscript{806} For more on the positions and strategies of these parties, see Vertzberger, Misperceptions, 139-142.

\textsuperscript{807} Raghavan, War and Peace, 283.
talks must be treated as high treason." For India political elites as well as its domestic public, talks were seen as a concession to settle the border dispute on China’s terms, view that only hardened after conflict erupted. As Nehru pointed out in the aftermath, “if there was any argument about any part of these frontiers, we were perfectly willing to discuss this matter peacefully and decide it by peaceful methods. But we were not prepared, and are not prepared to have any decisions thrust upon us by aggression and military means." Parliamentarians made a similar argument throughout this period of conflict that India’s case was weakened by the Government’s eagerness to negotiate and that offering to make a no-man’s-land out of the corner of India “put a premium on aggression.” But talks were never initiated “because the Chinese were capable of making further border advances under the guise of talks.” After the ceasefire, opposition in Parliament continued to push for a firm promise that Nehru would not agree to talks unless the Chinese vacated every inch of soil that was considered India’s and public opinion was nearly unanimous that Delhi should reject it outright. The ceasefire was viewed as “fraudulent” or even as an ultimatum. As one member of Parliament articulated, “decency, dignity and self-respect require that we negotiate only after the barbarians are driven out.”

However, it is difficult to decipher whether the Indian political elites made such statements to cater to domestic public opinion, or because they were genuinely concerned that agreeing to talks could encourage China to expand and escalate force, which is consistent with

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808 Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 376. For more on the role of Parliament in India’s China policy, see Jetly, *India China Relations*.
809 “Letter from the Prime Minister of India to the Prime Minister of China, 1 January 1962,” *White Paper* 8, 50.
810 Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 139.
812 Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 419.
813 Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 420.
814 Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 420.
the ratchet model. A few pieces of evidence suggest that while domestic politics intensified the ratchet effect dynamic, these considerations were not the dominant driver. Specifically, while the domestic public was consistently against talks, at numerous points during the conflict Nehru was willing to articulate a readiness to talk when the strategic conditions were favorable. Before the full outbreak of the war, even after India stated categorically that it would not discuss the boundary issue, when Nehru believed China’s desire to end the dispute was sincere he agreed to a summit meeting with Zhou Enlai without preconditions.\textsuperscript{815} The reversal of policy was not lost on observers, and this move did indeed intensify the domestic criticism of the Government.\textsuperscript{816} In July and August of 1962, India again “made a half-way turn away from its previous position and edged toward negotiations”\textsuperscript{817} by abandoning its standing demand that China withdraw from disputed territory before talks could begin. The note took an ambiguous position, stating that India was “prepared, as soon as the current tensions have eased and the appropriate climate is created, to enter into further discussions on the India-China boundary question on the basis of the report of the officials.”\textsuperscript{818} Nehru made this move to improve relations with China, “even at the risk of inviting [domestic] accusations of weakness in the face of threats and aggression.”\textsuperscript{819}

This note unsurprisingly aroused sharp opposition in Delhi. Under the heading of “The Road to Dishonour,” the Hindustan Times chastised the government, claiming “it has all but sanctified the illegal gains of Chinese aggression in Ladakh as the price for the opening of a new round of negotiations with the overlords of Peking. In so doing it has broken faith with the

\textsuperscript{815} Maxwell, \textit{India’s China War}, 148.  
\textsuperscript{816} Maxwell, \textit{India’s China War}, 149.  
\textsuperscript{817} Whiting, \textit{Chinese Calculus}, 84.  
\textsuperscript{818} “Note given by the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, to the Embassy of China in India, 26 July 1962, \textit{White Paper} 7, 4.  
\textsuperscript{819} Gopal, \textit{Nehru}, 214.
people of India—the people and the Parliament.\textsuperscript{820} In the lead up to the war Nehru complained “the India press had to a ‘considerable extent’ tied the hands of Indian diplomats in dealing with the Chinese.”\textsuperscript{821} He urged members of Parliament and the media to take a more moderate approach to China to avoid creating an atmosphere that made diplomacy and crisis management difficult.\textsuperscript{822} The Indian public was against talks largely because of heavy pressure to recover the ‘lost’ territories and Nehru did receive flack when he went against it. Once he agreed to the publication of the correspondence between the two countries, the language of the documents became tougher and less flexible.\textsuperscript{823} Liu Shaoqi articulated his frustration in January 1963 at India’s refusal to meet China half way because domestic necessity encouraged Delhi to maintain the border dispute.\textsuperscript{824}

Even in the face of heightened domestic pressures once the war broke out, Nehru refused to change the contours of his China policy. Nehru was a practical man; “while Nehru was anti-Communist in Indian domestic terms, he tried always to separate that from his approach to Communist governments. He saw the establishment of the People’s Republic of China as the triumph of nationalism and as a manifestation of Asia’s political renaissance rather than as a victory for Communism.”\textsuperscript{825} Nehru’s positive perception of China before the war and support of its United States bid did not resonate well in the international sphere and domestic critics accused him of appeasement, in particular with respect to India’s lack of response to China’s

\textsuperscript{820} Whiting, \textit{Chinese Calculus}, 87.  
\textsuperscript{821} “CIA Report,” 43.  
\textsuperscript{822} Vertzberger, \textit{Misperceptions}, 145.  
\textsuperscript{823} Vertzberger, \textit{Misperceptions}, 146.  
\textsuperscript{824} “Liu Shaoqi zhuxi jiejian yinni fuzhuxi buzhang subandeliyue tanhua jilv (tan Liu Shaoqi fangwen Yinni, zhongyindu bianjie he yafei liuguo huiyi wenti,“ [Meeting Minutes for when Chairman Liu Shaoqi receives Indonesian vice-minister (they discussed the issues of Liu’s trip to Indonesia, the Sino-Indian border, and the Colombo meeting] \textit{Beijing Foreign Ministry Archives}, doc. 105-01792-04, January 3, 1963.  
\textsuperscript{825} Maxwell, \textit{India’s China War}, 92.
invasion of Tibet.\textsuperscript{826} After the war broke out, Indian public opinion made it difficult to change course, but Nehru and his advisors set the collision course, and therefore domestic political pressure “cannot be blamed or credited for having formed the Indian approach.”\textsuperscript{827} Even at this point, Nehru’s position on Sino-Indian relations was positive and measured, arguing, “it is a matter of considerable consequence that China and India should be friends.”\textsuperscript{828} During the conflict, when there was immense domestic pressure for Nehru to break off diplomatic relations with China, he refused to do so.\textsuperscript{829} When Parliament demanded Nehru reject the ceasefire, he “seemingly flouting those demands with reiterations of his old pledge to talk to anyone, at any time- ‘even to an enemy in the midst of war.’”\textsuperscript{830} While the reason behind such pledges was largely rhetorical - Nehru did not want to seem like he was rebuffing the Colombo powers proposals for the two sides to talk – these strategic considerations did trump the domestic political ones.\textsuperscript{831}

While I would argue that these examples suggest the pressure did not inspire Nehru to change his positions, it is clear that domestic politics did push him to over rationalize and attempt to gain legitimacy for his policies. He leveraged his reputation as an expert diplomat, as well as the successes of his foreign policy in the past, to convince Parliament and the public that his objectives were consistent with India’s national interests and traditional values.\textsuperscript{832} China’s adherence to preconditions, to show some willingness to compromise, was therefore necessary not only to confirm China’s intention to engage in bona fide talks, but also to as a face saving

\textsuperscript{826} Maxwell, \textit{India’s China War}, 92.  
\textsuperscript{827} Maxwell, \textit{India’s China War}, 102.  
\textsuperscript{828} Maxwell, \textit{India’s China War}, 116.  
\textsuperscript{829} Maxwell, \textit{India’s China War}, 443.  
\textsuperscript{830} Maxwell, \textit{India’s China War}, 431.  
\textsuperscript{831} Maxwell, \textit{India’s China War}, 431.  
\textsuperscript{832} Vertzberger, \textit{Misperceptions}, 148.
measure for Nehru. In other words, the domestic pressure against talks limited Nehru’s maneuverability and hardened his rhetoric, but India would have agreed to talks if Nehru believed China was not going to escalate and would instead resolve the dispute peacefully. But by focusing on this one case, it is difficult to disentangle the need to demonstrate toughness for external audiences from the incentive to do so to internal audiences. If the correlation of forces were reversed, my theory would predict that China, without these domestic factors, would behave similarly to India. While this hypothetical situation cannot be tested, the evidence from the Korean War and Vietnam War cases in this dissertation demonstrate that larger CD countries do offer talks even in the face of domestic pressures and the smaller CD countries refuse even when they have no domestic pressure to do so.

Conclusion

In the end, India did not enter into talks as China’s ceasefire proposal urged. After the unilateral withdrawal, “Chinese leaders continued to insist…. on a ‘quick positive response’ as though they believed it might be forthcoming from the prime minister. If they believed, even for a short period, that Nehru would talk because he knew now that he could not fight, they were radically wrong. Their military attack had precisely the effect of ensuring that he would be forever their political enemy.” China openly offered talks without preconditions before and during the war because it was confident that its asymmetric ability to escalate would compel the Indians to negotiate on China’s terms. When Beijing realized that India would absorb the costs of war longer than predicted, to facilitate the emergence of wartime talks, Chinese leaders adhered in part to India’s preconditions for withdrawal by pulling back to the positions they had held November 1959.

833 Jetly, India China, 171.
834 “CIA Report,” 64-65.
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But the withdrawal was insufficient for an Indian leadership whose fear of the ratchet effect was not mitigated by a history of demonstrating toughness through fighting. If anything, Indian leaders were more acutely aware of the possibility that China could ratchet up their war effort and take all the territory in dispute. India wanted to first demonstrate toughness to discourage future aggression, before engaging in talks. As the Indonesian ambassador articulated to Chinese, India is not prepared for talks because it wants to obtain military assistance and building up its national defense first, so it can talk from a position of strength.\(^{835}\) Without first demonstrating toughness, India needed greater assurances that China’s attempts to open talks were genuine, making the strict adherence to Nehru’s precondition of withdrawal to the pre-September 8\(^{\text{th}}\), 1962 status quo a necessary step. But Beijing would never agree completely to India’s preconditions; as a CIA post-conflict assessment lamented, the border dispute “probably will remain unsettled for many years, primarily because the Indians will continue to insist that the Chinese withdraw from the Aksai Plain.”\(^{836}\)

The forward policy was not revived and threats to force China “to vacate their aggression” died down in the early months of 1963.\(^{837}\) The reality was that the Indian army was in no position to violate the ceasefire and seize their previous positions; in fact the Indian Army was under orders to preserve the ceasefire and avoid provoking the Chinese even as no negotiations remained India’s official stance.\(^{838}\) Beijing’s policy, by all accounts, remained the same for the decades to follow, its “long-standing offer to negotiate a boundary settlement on the

\(^{835}\) “Yinni waijiaobu, Yinni zhuwai shijie he Yinni baozhi dui zhong, yindu bianjie wenti de fanying, [The reaction of Indonesia’s Foreign Minister, overseas diplomatic envoys, and newspapers to the Sino-Indian border issue].” \textit{Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives}, doc. 105-01160-03, May 17, 1962, 11.

\(^{836}\) “CIA Report,” 69.

\(^{837}\) Maxwell, \textit{India’s China War}, 442.

\(^{838}\) Maxwell, \textit{India’s China War}, 423.
basis of the status quo when India is ready to do so still stands.”\(^8\)\(^3\)\(^9\) After the war, India was even more resistant to talks than before, as Nehru said “we cannot have any kind of talks, even preliminary talks, unless we are satisfied that the condition we had laid down—about the 8\(^{th}\) September position being restored—is met.”\(^8\)\(^4\)\(^0\) Under these conditions, wartime negotiations never emerged between China and India and the border dispute remains a contentious issue to this day.

\(^8\)\(^3\)\(^9\) Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 443.
\(^8\)\(^4\)\(^0\) Maxwell, *India’s China War*, 430-431.
Chapter Seven

Pursuing Total Victory in the Korean War, June 1950 – January 1951

This case study examines why talks did not occur during the first year of the Korean War between the U.S.-led United Nations coalition and North Korea. While there were many players in the Korean War, I focus on the strategic thinking of the United States and China regarding the nature and timing of peace talks as well as touch upon the Soviet and North Korean roles by analyzing original documents as well as secondary sources. A number of questions will shape the inquiry: Did either side consider talking while fighting before June 1951 and if not, why not? What were the negative consequences states hoped to avert by evading talks? How did beliefs about the effectiveness of military force impact policies on negotiating? How did concerns about escalation shape states’ decisions on the battlefield and in the diplomatic realm?

In this chapter I argue that in the first six months of the war, talks did not occur because North Korea, China and the United States were moving towards and eventually seeking total victory. It was not until January 1951 that the at least one side, the United States, began to fight a limited war and consequently that my ratchet model begins to explain diplomatic behavior. When North Korea launched its invasion, Kim was pursuing total victory to reunify the peninsula under his control. Therefore, he did not consider or offer talks to allow for a negotiated compromise. When the United States entered the war, concerns about escalation to a global conflict involving both the United States and the Soviet Union limited its use of military force and focused its efforts on demonstrating toughness. But as the Truman administration mobilized and assessed the probability of Chinese intervention to be negligible after Inchon, it too espoused a strategy of total victory. Consequently U.S. troops pushed north of the 38th parallel in an attempt to unify the peninsula with military force on October 7, 1950. After Chinese intervened
in response, and the subsequent reassessment of the costs of victory, the United States began to reconsider its goal of total victory in December 1950 and transitioned to the limited goal of preserving the integrity of South Korea early the next year.\footnote{841}

China switched positions on talks as its role, assessment of its ability to escalate, and war aims changed. Before China became involved militarily in October 1950, the government was supportive of talks because it would reduce the need for Chinese involvement. Given that China was not a participant at this time, its leadership was not concerned that such support for a compromised resolution would communicate weakness and impact military effectiveness (which was not in play at the time). After intervention, China did not offer talks because Mao was pursuing total victory even throughout the failures of the third and fourth offensives, when the optimism in the communist camps diminished. In chapter eight, I will describe the subsequent transition to limited war and how Chinese diplomatic behavior adheres to the expectations of the ratchet model.

Throughout the conflict, U.S.-led United Nations (UN), Chinese and Korean troops would clash on the ground while Soviet, Chinese and U.S. aircraft fought in the air. Though fifteen countries sent troops into Korea to support the UN mission against North Korea, and the North Koreans were supported by both China and the Soviet Union, this study focuses on the bargaining positions of two of the greatest combatants and the most influential players, China and the United States.\footnote{842} While the North Koreans were a major player on the battlefield, they

\footnote{842} The first to offer military support were Britain, New Zealand, Netherlands, France, Canada, Australia, Thailand, and Turkey. For more on the establishment of the UN Command, see Malkasian, \textit{The Korean War}, 17. The fifteen countries that offered troops to the UN mission were useful politically and psychologically, but not decisive militarily. Therefore, the UN participating countries had little say over the course and end of the war. See Dean Acheson, \textit{The Korean War}, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc, 1971), 20.
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relied on external support to prosecute the war. U.S. preferences dominated the decisions made by the UN Command (UNC) and the United States dominated the UN even institutionally. For example, during the armistice talks, the formulating and transmitting of policy positions occurred through the U.S. government apparatus, not UN channels.  

The course of the war was therefore determined for the most part by U.S. and Chinese interests, though the views of the UN allies and the Soviet Union were taken into account to varying degrees in the process.

The Korean War is an important case for understanding talking while fighting because it helps clarify how the ratchet effect is unique to limited wars. At certain points during the war, both sides were seeking total victory and at others they adhered to the constraints of limited warfare. During the periods in which one side was seeking total victory, the prospect of a compromised negotiated settlement was absent, and therefore my ratchet effect model is not applicable. But during the periods of limited conflict which are covered in Chapter Eight, I argue that my ratchet model best explains why neither China nor the United States offered talks and why neither country accepted external attempts to open talks until June 1951.

The Korean War is also a good test for the ratchet model because unlike the later cases of the Vietnam War or Sino-Indian border war, neither China nor the United States was confident that it had a greater ability to escalate and counter the escalation of its opponent. The balance of power was too close, with neither country confident it had the larger CD and the overall conflict ending in a stalemate. The lack of certainty about prospects for escalation was partly because of the changing landscape of the war’s participants. First, as Kim Sung Il moved across the border, it was unclear whether the United States would get involved initially, and after the U.S. response,

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844 The hypothesis that other players had more influence in determining Chinese and U.S. diplomatic behavior is explored in the section on alternative hypotheses in Chapter Eight.
whether the Chinese and Soviet Union would follow suit. China was also uncertain whether the United States would attack supply lines or sanctuaries in Mainland China, and whether the United States would resort to using atomic bombs in the fighting. The United States was uncertain whether the Soviet Union would escalate to defend its allies if the United States expanded the war. Therefore, during the limited war periods, both China and the United States were acutely concerned about signaling weakness. They turned to external parties, therefore, to probe for the conditions under which the participants were willing to talk. Third party countries were also the only ones to make any proposals to launch talks.\textsuperscript{845}

The rest of this chapter proceeds as follows: first I evaluate the beginning stage of the war and argue that talks did not occur during this period because North Korea was seeking total victory and the U.S. was focused on demonstrating toughness and therefore would only talk if North Korea withdrew to the status quo ante. I then discuss how U.S. solidified its total war strategy after the Inchon landing and with China’s entrance into the war, and how the Chinese were determined to push the UN forces off the peninsula for good. The next chapter will discuss how both sides had came to the realization by late winter, early spring that they could not accomplish their goals through military force alone, but still did not accept talks for three months until the threat of escalation had been sufficiently reduced by the mounting costs of war.

\textsuperscript{845} In the case of the Korean War, all discussion of whether or not to engage in talks is centered on potential ceasefire negotiations, not a peace treaty. Additionally, both sides often asserted what they hoped would be on the agenda for discussion, as well as what they thought the armistice provisions needed to be in order to pave the way for a compromised peace. However, the agenda items and the future armistice provisions articulated were not always presented as conditions for talks. Zhou’s seven points and the UN’s proposal for a basis for a ceasefire were not preconditions for talks to open up. China’s desire for any ceasefire talks to include a discussion of foreign troop withdrawal was not presented as something the United States had to agree to before talks could begin. But, the United States did insist before talks began that only military issues would be discussed, and political issues such as Taiwan would not be on the agenda.
The Beginnings: June 1950-October 1950

Neither North Korea nor the United States offered talks during the period before China intervened in October 1950. The North Koreans were pursuing a total victory by attempting to reunify the peninsula under Kim Il Sung’s control while the U.S. and UN were still mobilizing their forces. During this period, my ratchet model only applies to the United States, which was not confident it had a greater ability to escalate partly because of uncertainty about potential responses of China and the Soviet Union. Therefore, the Truman administration was focused on demonstrating toughness to check communist aggression and refused to talk unless North Korea adhered to the precondition of withdrawal to the status quo ante bellum. Once the United States gained the upper hand in the conflict after the Inchon landing, it began its own transition to establishing the complete destruction of North Korea as its war aim, which undermined any hopes for a negotiated settlement. Therefore, during these three months of combat, the only players that were open to the idea of entering talks to facilitate a negotiated settlement were the noncombatants, specifically UN countries led by India and Great Britain and the Soviet Union and China.

On June 25, 1950, North Korean forces crossed the 38th parallel in a blitzkrieg assault. Many in the United States were confident before the war that South Korea could defend itself, but this belief quickly dissipated once the war started. At the time of the assault, U.S. order of battle estimates had the North and South Korean armies at approximately equal strength, though

846 It was not until the end of July that American and ROK forces outnumbered the KPA along the front, 92,000 (of which 47,000 were Americans) to 70,000. Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History*, (New York: Modern Library, 2010). 16.
this did not take into account the superior battle experience of the Korean People’s Army (KPA), many of whom had just returned from fighting in the Chinese civil war. Furthermore, the KPA had 150 Soviet T-34 tanks and a small air force of 70 fighters and 62 light bombers.\textsuperscript{849} These advantages allowed the KPA troops to take Seoul in three days before driving fifty miles into South Korea the first week, forty miles the second, and eighteen miles the third week to take over more than half of South Korea.\textsuperscript{850}

Two months before Kim launched the invasion, he had visited Mao Zedong asking for assistance in a potential war, a request he had made of the USSR’s Josef Stalin earlier in April. Mao believed, though not with complete confidence, that the United States would not get involved in a war on the peninsula. Mao and his fellow Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders also greatly miscalculated U.S. military strength before the war and believed that such an inadequate regional force posture would preclude any major U.S. military intervention.\textsuperscript{851} Kim assured him that regardless of U.S. intentions, his army would capture all of Korea in two or three weeks. In other words, the communists could accomplish their goals before U.S. intervention would even be possible.\textsuperscript{852} In the first few days of the war, the North Korean forces, with their superior training and better equipment, held the initiative on the battlefield. Kim Il Sung was so confident in his ability to unite the peninsula under his control that he believed Chinese direct help to either be unnecessary or undesirable.\textsuperscript{853}

\textsuperscript{849} Cumings, \textit{The Korean War}, 6.
\textsuperscript{851} Chen, \textit{China’s Road}, 126.
\textsuperscript{852} Malkasian, \textit{The Korean War}, 16.
The Soviet Union was also hopeful that Kim Il Sung would secure a quick and easy victory against the South Koreans.\textsuperscript{854} With inferior equipment and a general deficiency in military preparedness, which was weakened further by the North’s espionage and subversion activities, the balance of power was clearly in the North’s favor.\textsuperscript{855} The Soviet Union discounted the possibility of U.S. intervention as well because of previous U.S. congressional opposition to economic and military assistance to South Korea, U.S. commitments in Europe, and the lack of sufficient available forces in Japan to play any significant role.\textsuperscript{856} In addition to these operational limitations, a number of high-level officials including General MacArthur and Secretary of State Dean Acheson had implicitly and explicitly left South Korea out of the U.S. defense perimeter in public statements. Acheson had also made disparaging remarks about the power and purpose of the UN for military action, arguing that it would only be useful for political purposes.\textsuperscript{857} However, Stalin was still concerned about provoking a general war with the United States. Given the risk of U.S. intervention, Stalin refused to deploy Soviet forces in the fight and strongly requested that the PRC send forces instead when it looked like the DPRK would be defeated in the Fall 1950 without military assistance.

To the communists’ surprise, the United States did respond quickly to the North Korean invasion, deciding in 36 hours that it would dispatch troops to aid South Korea. Two days after the invasion, the UN Security Council, thanks to the boycotting of the Soviet Union, passed a resolution condemning the attack and levied sanctions on Kim Il Sung’s regime. While pursuing international measures, President Truman also ordered the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Strait to

\textsuperscript{854} Whiting, \textit{China Crosses the Yalu}, 38.
\textsuperscript{855} Whiting, \textit{China Crosses the Yalu}, 38.
\textsuperscript{856} Whiting, \textit{China Crosses the Yalu}, 38-9. This assessment was largely predicated on the assumption that it would be a short war.
\textsuperscript{857} For the specific language of both comments, see Whiting, \textit{China Crosses the Yalu}, 39.
ensure that the CCP did not take advantage of the international crisis to seize the final territories held by the KMT. Three days later, Truman authorized the use of naval and air resources from the Far East Command in the conflict and approved the use of ground forces to join the troops of 15 UN member nations. Twelve days later, the UN Security Council authorized the creation of a unified United Nations Command (UNC) directed by an American commander to expel the North Koreans. Within a week, it was evident that the United States had underestimated the combat effectiveness of the KPA troops; MacArthur’s initial request for troops expanded from two divisions to eight. By mid-August, it was clear that the North Korean troops performed better than expected and UN forces may not be able to maintain even the small perimeter in the southeastern corner of South Korea around Pusan. The U.S. and British military leaders believed that UN forces only had an even chance of regaining the territory up to the 38th parallel and that this would take at least three to four months.

There is no evidence to suggest that Kim considered in his wartime deliberations what role talks would play and when. It makes sense that in these early days of war before UN troops reversed DPRK gains that the costs and merits of talks were not considered by Kim, Stalin or Mao given that all three were planning a total war that would only end with the destruction of the other side, the South Korean government. In other words, my ratchet model does not apply to North Korean strategic thinking in the early days of the Korean War and calculations about how the readiness to talk impacts military effectiveness only come into play later in the war when destruction of South Korea is no longer the primary war aim.

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859 Reiter, *How Wars End*, 70.
860 Reiter, *How Wars End*, 70.
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The ratchet model does apply to U.S. position on talks however, because U.S. forces were fighting a limited war during this period. During this first phase of conflict, the United States was adamant that no political concessions should be made to the aggressor, especially when U.S./UN forces were in a disadvantageous position still mobilizing their forces. The United States was uncertain whether the communist camp would escalate and expand the war to include China or even the Soviet Union. Some U.S. policy makers, like Dean Acheson, believed the Soviet Union was the primary actor and the United States needed to show resolve to discourage more aggression. The United States could not be confident under these conditions that it had a greater CD than the opponent. Consequently, during the first two months of the war, while North Korea was seeking total victory, the United States was focused on mobilizing troops and demonstrating resolve in order to avoid communist escalation. As a result, neither side offered talks.

Additionally, North Korea and the United States refused proposals to start talks made by other countries, which launched ‘unsolicited’ initiatives to bring about a peace settlement to the Korean issue at the war’s outset. The British, which contributed to the UN force, launched one such effort immediately after hostilities began. British Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Sir David Kelley, met with a Soviet official from the British section and urged him to communicate to his government to use its influence to bring about a peaceful resolution. USSR Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromkyo responded on July 6 to U.S. Ambassador Alan Kirk to inquire about the details of the British proposal. Kirk proceeded cautiously to show resolve, expressing Acheson, The Korean War, 89.

Acheson criticizes the British Foreign Office, asserting that they believed without great evidence that the Soviet Union would negotiate to compromise on difficult issues. Acheson considered these proposed solutions almost an act of surrender. See Acheson, The Korean War, 35.
that the United States desired the status quo ante and that a peaceful settlement could only be considered once North Korea completely complied with the UN Security Council’s request for a ceasefire and withdrawal of all North Korean troops to north of the 38th parallel. The United States was focused on demonstrating toughness, and thought that conceding to talks at this point would project weakness and spark the ratchet effect. According to Acheson, “we were not willing to bargain any positions in exchange for an end to aggression.”

Acheson formally communicated the U.S. rejection of the British-Soviet proposal three days later. The Truman administration maintained the position that “we would agree to nothing that rewarded an aggressor.” As Acheson told the United Kingdom (UK) foreign minister on July 10, it was “imperative that (1) the aggressor not be militarily successful and (2) the Soviets not be paid any price whatever for calling off an attack which they should never have started.”

While the British were attempting to bring about talks, so too were the Indians. Indian officials approached Russian and American officials in their home countries, in India, and in the UN. On July 1, Indian ambassador in Beijing secretly approached the Chinese Vice Foreign Minister to “put forward tentatively the suggestion that the question [of Korea] could probably be solved by referring it to the Security Council, with China taking her legitimate place, and consequently the Soviets giving up their boycott and returning to their vacant seat.” Ten days later, China, still not a combat participant at this point, responded favorably to India’s proposal, most likely after consultation with the Soviet Union. China most likely saw that Indian support not only for its UN seat, but more importantly, on the Taiwan issue, would put international

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863 Acheson, The Korean War, 36.
864 Acheson, The Korean War, 38.
865 Foot, Substitute for Victory, 23.
866 For more details on this Indian initiative, see Acheson, The Korean War, 37-39.
867 Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 59.
pressure on the United States to dislodge its fleet from the Taiwan Strait.\footnote{Whiting, \textit{China Crosses the Yalu}, 60.} Prime Minister Nehru followed up with letters to both Stalin and Acheson on July 13th, arguing that conceding the UN seat to the PRC was necessary so that Moscow and Washington could then work together to find a peaceful resolution to the war. Stalin appeared amenable to the suggestion, responding favorably on July 15th with the recommendation that a five-power conference be held for the new Security Council to hear the cases of both North and South Korea.\footnote{Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, 22. Acheson writes in his memoirs that the Russians rejected the proposal outright. Acheson, \textit{The Korean War}, 38.}

The fact that both China and the Soviet Union supported mediation and talks at this point, and this was insufficient to push North Korea and the United States in that direction, calls into question an alternative hypothesis that the preferences of great powers determined the negotiating policies of the war’s participants. This realpolitik approach would mean that the greater communist powers, the Soviet Union and China, determined North Korean decisions about peace talks. While North Korea was still pursuing total victory, the CCP clearly understood that the balance of power on the peninsula between North and South Korea had shifted considerably since U.S. involvement; its leadership was no longer certain that the DPRK would be able to take and hold the peninsula on its own.\footnote{Chen, \textit{China’s Road}, 127.} Mao was concerned about a reversal or a possible stalemate.\footnote{Chen, \textit{China’s Road}, 141-142.} After U.S. intervention, it became clear to Stalin as well that he had underestimated U.S. resolve and capacity to engage in major military operations in East Asia.\footnote{Chen, \textit{China’s Road}, 155.}
Even so, Stalin and Mao believed that with their support, Kim Il Sung could still unite the peninsula under his control.\textsuperscript{873}

However, because neither China nor the USSR was engaging in combat at this point, their strategic thinking was not focused on demonstrating toughness on the battlefield but instead on how to reach a resolution without having to commit themselves militarily. At this stage with neither country providing troops towards the conflict, their influence was likely limited; it was unclear whether the Russians could have even convinced the North Koreans to accept the three points of the June 25 UN resolution.\textsuperscript{874} U.S. policymakers assessed that the Soviet desire to engage in talks to end the conflict were genuine; as Soviet expert Charles Bohlen argued at the time, the Soviets probably wanted to find a way out of a “situation which obviously has taken a turn unanticipated by them.”\textsuperscript{875} But the positions of these external parties did not override North Korean considerations of self-interest, nor did they shift the U.S. focus from discouraging greater communist aggression.

One of the reasons the United States would not talk unless North Korea adhered to certain preconditions such as withdrawal to the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel was the Truman administration was weary of encouraging communist aggression. This idea that demonstrating resolve in the face of aggression was necessary to thwart further aggression was articulated clearly in a CIA report on Soviet intentions, proposing, “the decisiveness of the U.S. reaction to the Korean invasion will

\textsuperscript{873} This was not without its complications. tThere was much debate about who should provide what and whether assistance would be overt or covert.\textsuperscript{874} Acheson, \textit{The Korean War}, 36. A different version of events, in which Gromkyo responds to the British and then the British foreign minister relays the message to the U.S., is recounted in Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, 21-22.\textsuperscript{875} Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, 22.
thus cause the Kremlin to move cautiously.”\textsuperscript{876} In response to a letter from British Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin, who was trying to arrange peace talks, Acheson wrote on July 10, 1950 that “our policy is aimed at as early and complete a liquidation of the Korean aggression as was militarily possible, without concessions that would whet Communists appetites and bring on other aggressions elsewhere.”\textsuperscript{877} The United States wanted to demonstrate toughness before considering peace in order to better avoid taking actions that could signal weakness.\textsuperscript{878}

The reasons behind U.S. refusal to talk began to change as the tide of the war began to turn in the UNC’s favor for the first time with the halting of the KPA advance in early August.\textsuperscript{879} The first major UN victory occurred the second week of August when 20,000 U.S./UN troops counterattacked the DPRK Sixth Division near Masan. A debate emerged in the United States about the merits of expanding its war aims to rolling back communism, in other words taking over North Korea and establishing a unified Korea.\textsuperscript{880} South Korean President Rhee was in support of such a policy change. He argued that the events of the past months showed that the North Koreans would not respect the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel, and therefore “no peace and order could be maintained in Korea as long as the division at the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel remained.”\textsuperscript{881} On August 10\textsuperscript{th}, U.S. delegate to the UN Warren Austin stated publicly that the goal of UN action on the peninsula was a unified Korea.\textsuperscript{882} A week later, he reiterated this point at an open session, stating the war aim to be the unification of the entire peninsula under UN auspices. Austin called for

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\textsuperscript{877} Acheson, The Korean War, 37.
\textsuperscript{878} Acheson, The Korean War, 37.
\textsuperscript{879} Cumings, The Korean War, 14.
\textsuperscript{880} However, As early as July 13, 1950, Truman suggested at a press conference that the possibility of crossing the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel was on the table. See Reiter, How Wars End, 67.
\textsuperscript{881} Chen, China’s Road, 164.
\textsuperscript{882} Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 70.
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free and fair elections on the whole Korean peninsula, arguing that the “United Nations ought to have free and unhampered access to and full freedom to travel within all parts of Korea…We are waiting and while we wait the strength of the United Nations increase.” Austin’s speech at the UN demonstrates that the United States was transitioning to a stage of seeking total victory in which it was not in the mood to pursue compromise.

While the United States was transitioning to a strategy of total victory, the Communist camp began to consider the possibility that the North Koreans would be unable to defeat UN forces alone. On August 4, 1950, the Soviet delegate Jacob Malik put forth a resolution to the UN that invited PRC representatives and those of the “Korean people” to come together to discuss the Korean question that would allow for the end of hostilities and the removal of all foreign troops from Korea. On September 1, Malik reiterated his preference that Pyongyang and Seoul launch talks and added this specific language into his original resolution. Zhou Enlai cabled Lake Success expressing China’s support for this resolution. Indian and British delegates weighed in as well, calling for the DPRK withdrawal, suggesting that the status quo ante bellum may be an acceptable basis for the suspension of hostilities, and calling for a committee of non-permanent Security Council members to discuss the specifics of post-withdrawal. From the Soviet perspective, there was little risk in putting forth a resolution considering it was not a combatant and the contents of the proposal basically amplified an idea already put forth by India.

By September 3, 1950, when North Korea made a major assault in the Second Battle of the Naktong Bulge with 98,000 men against 180,000 UNC troops, it became clear that the

883 Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 79.
884 Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 69.
885 Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 70.
886 Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 69-70.
DPRK’s strength was diminishing. Ten days later, U.S. forces landed at Inchon and within two weeks the U.S. X corps joined with General Walker’s Eighth Army, which had been launching a counterattack out of the Pusan perimeter. With victory in sight, General MacArthur issued a demand for North Korea’s unconditional surrender, opening the ultimatum with “the early and total defeat and complete destruction of your armed forces and war-fighting potential is now inevitable.” Zhou had tried to convince Kim to consider the possibility of strategic withdrawal even before Inchon, but Kim reportedly replied that “he ha[d] never considered retreat.” After Inchon, the Soviets urged the North Koreans to retreat quickly so that their forces in the south would not be cut off from those up north. This advice was not followed because of a combination of stubbornness and overconfidence; the North Korea offensive began to disintegrate and DRPK forces were driven back across the 38th parallel.

At this point, the North Koreans began to reassess the prospects for total victory. The Russians characterized Kim Il Sung at this point as genuinely “nervous. In the present difficult situation one can feel some confusion and hopelessness.” Because the situation was so desperate, the North Korean leadership sent a letter to Stalin on September 30 begging for direct military assistance. North Korean leader Kim Il Sung along with Pak Hon-yong, Secretary of the Korean Workers’ Party, sent Mao an emergency letter on October 1, “urgently soliciting that the Chinese People’s Liberation Army directly enter the war to support [North Korea].”

888 Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 112.
889 Christensen, Worse than a Monolith, 75.
890 Christensen, Worse than a Monolith, 76.
891 “Ciphered Telegram, Shtykov to Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and Instantsia (Stalin) 29 September 1950,” in “The Cold War in Asia,” Cold War International History Project Bulletin, Iss. 6/7, Winter 1995/6, Doc. 5, 111. Cold War International History Project Bulletin will hereafter be abbreviated to CWIHPB.
892 Chen Jian, “China’s Road to the Korean War, Cold War International History Project Bulletin, Iss. 6/7, Winter 1995/6, 88. Hereafter known as Chen, CWIHPB.
Mao and Stalin confessed that the situation was grave and difficult for the North “to cope with the crisis with [their] own strength.”\(^893\) The North Korean leaders argued that they would fight their hardest, but if “the enemy continue[s] to attack the areas north of the 38\(^{th}\) parallel,”\(^894\) then “the American aggression ultimately will be successful.”\(^895\) Kim appealed to the USSR’s self-interest in his request for an appropriate air force and manpower, stating that the North Koreans were doing everything they could “so that Korea will not be a colony and a military springboard of the U.S. imperialists” against bordering USSR.\(^896\)

To try to slow down the reversal, Soviet Foreign Minister Vyshinsky presented a draft resolution to the Political Committee of the General Assembly of the UN calling for an immediate ceasefire on October 2.\(^897\) Numerous other countries made efforts to promote a ceasefire that would prevent the U.S./UN from crossing the 38\(^{th}\) parallel.\(^898\) But crossing the 38\(^{th}\) parallel to seek total victory had broad support within the United States, which only increased as U.S./UN troops achieved one military success after another.\(^899\) There were also strategic reasons to pursue the destruction of North Korea; U.S. policy makers believed that “stopping to negotiate at this juncture would incur greater risks than boldly marching forward. Halting the movement north, it was thought, would be equated with indecisiveness and timidity, and this fear of

\(^{893}\) Chen, China’s Road, 172.
\(^{894}\) Shu Guang Zhang, Mao’s Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953, (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1995), 75.
\(^{895}\) “Ciphered Telegram DPRK leader Kim Il Sung and South Korean Communist leader Pak Hon-Yong to Stalin (via Shtykov), 29 September 1950, CWIHPB, Doc. 6, 112.
\(^{896}\) “Ciphered Telegram DPRK leader Kim Il Sung and South Korean Communist leader Pak Hon-Yong to Stalin (via Shtykov), 29 September 1950, CWIHPB, Doc. 6, 112.
\(^{898}\) Foot, Substitute for Victory, 25-6. Some of the countries involved include India, the Netherlands, the USSR, Ukraine, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Belorussia.
\(^{899}\) Foot, Substitute for Victory, 25.
appearing weak was so potent that, even when it became clear that crossing the parallel had indeed led Chinese ‘volunteers’ to enter into the fighting, the fear overrode doubts about the possible outcome of this changed military situation.”

Many State Department officials agreed the crossing was necessary to punish the Communists and teach them a lesson about using force to obtain their goals. John Foster Dulles, who was not a member of the Truman administration but was serving as a special representative to negotiate a peace treaty with Japan, posited that the failure to march beyond the border would provide “asylum to the aggressor.” The director of the Office of Northeastern Asian Affairs, John M. Allison, stressed the importance of communicating clearly “that he who violates the decent opinions of mankind must take the consequences and that he who takes the sword will be punished by the sword.”

General MacArthur stressed that only such boldness “would check Communist expansion everywhere and thus obviate the necessity of our being fully prepared to meet aggression elsewhere.” Part of the impetus to pursue total victory was the fact that limited war was a controversial idea in American domestic politics in the 1950s. Republicans, in an attempt to undermine the Truman administration, presented limited war as an appeasement of Communism. After General MacArthur was dismissal, he himself argued in front of Congress that limited war was immoral. He contended “once war is forced upon us, there is no other alternative than to apply every available means to bring it to a swift end…War’s very object is victory, not prolonged indecision. In war there is no substitute for victory.”

This debate about crossing the 38th parallel was predicated on the assumption that neither China nor the USSR would intervene if the United States were poised to take over its communist

900 Foot, Substitute for Victory, 26-7.
901 Chen, China’s Road, 166.
902 Chen, China’s Road, 166.
903 Malkasian, The Korean War, 45.
While both the State Department and the Defense Department believed the Soviet Union’s attitude toward the conflict was extremely cautious, officials still viewed Soviet interference in August and September 1950 as likely, especially if Soviet leaders were confident that such a move “would not involve a substantial risk of global war.”

Dean Acheson in his memoirs recalls that at a meeting at the Blair House after the North invaded, the general consensus among President Truman’s top leaders was that the Soviet Union was unlikely to escalate the conflict to a general war even if the United States intervened. On September 11, 1950, Truman signed NSC report 81/1 which authorized the invasion of North Korea provided that China or the Soviet Union did not intervene. In the event that they did, the UN would assume a defensive role in order to avoid escalating to a general war. This document defined U.S. war aims to be Korea’s “complete independence and unity.”

U.S. policymakers believed that by taking precautions, such as only operating on Korean soil and only deploying South Korean forces in Korea’s northeastern provinces, that they could avoid Soviet or Chinese intervention. As then Chief of Staff Omar Bradley remarked in his memoirs decades later, “NSC 81/1 reflected a drastic change in our concept of the Korean War. Our initial intervention had been launched as an effort to ‘save’ South Korea. Now we had broadened out war aims to include complete destruction of the North Korean Army and political unification of the

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904 George Kennan, who was staying on at the State Department to advise Acheson during the war, was one of the few that thought the crossing was too risky because it could precipitate a Soviet and/or Chinese intervention.
905 Chen, China’s Road, 167.
906 Acheson, The Korean War, 21.
907 Reiter, How Wars End, 68.
908 Chen, China’s Road, 168.
909 Chen, China’s Road, 168.
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country.\textsuperscript{910} The goal now would be to force enemy capitulation through the persistent application of force.

With NSC 81/1, the United States officially instituted a policy of total victory, and as a result there were no more discussions about the merits of offering talks to facilitate a negotiated solution. While there was a risk involved in marching north of the 38\textsuperscript{th}, the consensus was in line with Acheson’s belief that “a greater risk would be incurred by showing hesitation and timidity.”\textsuperscript{911} In the end, U.S. decision makers decided it was important to demonstrate resolve and UN forces crossed the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel on October 7\textsuperscript{th} to pursue the expanded war aim of total victory. To that end, the UN General Assembly passed the “Go after the DPRK” resolution the same day, which gave General MacArthur and the Western powers carte blanche to occupy all of North Korea and rearrange its political and economic systems to their liking.\textsuperscript{912} The United States would not entertain talks for the next four months because the total defeat of North Korea was the minimal condition for terminating hostilities.\textsuperscript{913}

As U.S. policy makers were debating the merits of expanding the war in August and September, China began to issue formal warnings and protests to the United States. These statements expressed Chinese concerns about U.S. intentions to expand the war. On September 24, in response to the alleged and accidental U.S. bombing of a Chinese city close to the border, Zhou Enlai argued that the United States intended to “extend the war of aggression against Korea, to carry out armed aggression on Taiwan, and to extend further its aggression against

\textsuperscript{910} Reiter, \textit{How Wars End}, 68.
\textsuperscript{911} Chen, \textit{China’s Road}, 169.
\textsuperscript{912} This resolution recommended that: “a) All appropriate steps be taken to ensure conditions of stability throughout Korea; b) all constituent acts be taken, including the holding of elections, under the auspices of the UN, for the establishing of a united, independent and democratic government in the sovereign state of Korea.” See Mansourov, “Stalin, Mao, Kim,” 101.
\textsuperscript{913} Whiting, \textit{China Crosses the Yalu}, 78.
The next day, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Chief of Staff General Nie Rongzhen commented to the Indian ambassador to the PRC that China could not “sit back with folded hands and let the Americans come to the border.” Nie hinted that the Chinese understood the risk of general war with the United States, but the PRC was not afraid to enter the war and strive for total victory by driving the UN off the peninsula. He intimating that “we known what we are in for, but at all costs American aggression has to be stopped. The Americans can bomb us, they can destroy our industries, but they cannot defeat us on land…They may even drop atom bombs on us. What then? They may kill a few million people. Without sacrifice a nation’s independence cannot be upheld.” On September 30, Zhou issued a public warning to the United States that “the Chinese people…will not supinely tolerate seeing their neighbors being savagely invaded by the imperialists.”

But the United States did not believe these threats to be credible. U.S. policy makers underestimated Chinese military capabilities and resolve, primarily because they believed the new regime in Beijing was myopically focused on domestic issues. A CIA report argued that the best time for Chinese intervention would have been before Inchon when, as the U.S. ambassador to Moscow Alan Kirk argued, “UN forces were desperately defending the small area of Taegu-Pusan, when the influx of overwhelming numbers of Chinese ground forces would have proved the decisive factor” but that window of opportunity had passed. On October 3, 1950, the CIA daily summary argued that “the Chinese Communists have long had the capability for military

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914 Chen, *China’s Road*, 164.
915 Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 93.
916 Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 107.
917 Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 93.
918 For more on the reasons behind China’s failure to deter the United States, see Christensen, *Worse than a Monolith*, Chapter Three and Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu.*
919 Chen, *China’s Road*, 169.
intervention in Korea on a scale sufficient to materially affect the course of events” but that China is unlikely to intervene openly “if, as now seems likely, they anticipate that war with the UN nations would result.” The CIA assessed that China “undoubtedly fear[ed] the consequences of war with the US” and therefore would not get involved even though Beijing was “capable of intervening effectively, but not necessarily decisively.”

Before October 1950, U.S. policy makers were working under the assumption that China’s most likely course of action would be covert assistance to North Korea. Even when China moved some of its best PLA units, such as the 38th, 39th, and 40th Armies of the 13th Army Corps under the Fourth Field Army to Northeast China along the North Korean border, the United States failed to correctly read the signals of potential Chinese involvement. Combined with preexisting forces in that area (the 42nd Army and First, Second and Eighth Artillery Divisions), these forces made up the Northeast Border Defense Army (NEBDA). Over two months after the initial North Korean invasion, China had amassed more than 260,000 troops along the border, prepositioned a preliminary amount of supplies, and had begun the domestic propaganda campaign necessary to mobilize the Chinese people to support a Chinese intervention. But the United States ignored these warnings and on October 1, 1950 ROK troops crossed the 38th parallel followed by U.S. forces six days later.

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920 “Daily Summary Excerpt, 3 October 1950, Possible Communist Intervention in Korea, CIA declassified reporting, 445.
922 Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*.
923 These forces had been moved to the Northeast border the day the UN command was created. See Chen, *China’s Road*, 136. For more on the formation of NEBDA, see Zhang, *Mao’s Military Romanticism*, 58-60.
China Joins the Fight

Chinese ‘volunteers’ crossed over into Korea around October 16 in secrecy and China launched its first campaign against South Korean forces on October 25 in Unsan, successfully forcing a retreat.\textsuperscript{925} Soviet air force units first engaged U.S. forces on November 1950 while protecting the Yalu River bridge, which was the route for CPV to enter Korea.\textsuperscript{926} China was successful in subsequent battles against UN troops. China used U.S. overconfidence to its advantage, in Peng Dehuai’s words “purposely showing ourselves to be weak, increasing the arrogance of the enemies, letting them run amuck, and luring them deep into our areas.”\textsuperscript{927} General MacArthur underestimated Chinese military prowess and fell into the trap. In late November UN forces entered deep into Chinese held areas, and on November 25 China launched a devastating counteroffensive, pushing UN troops so far south that by December CPV and KPA troops had regained control over most of North Korea territory. The unexpected Chinese involvement, and the massive UNC retreat in November 1950, caused confusion and panic in Washington. The United States was not aware that China had intervened until prisoners of war (POW) notified UN/U.S. forces in early November. Once the Chinese intervened, the United States began to reconsider the total victory principle but would not abandon the policy until February 1951. This move discussed in greater detail in Chapter Eight, created the possibility of a negotiated settlement thereby reactivating the dynamics of the ratchet effect model.

\textsuperscript{925} For a comprehensive chronology of the war, see Malkasian, \textit{The Korean War}, 9. For the disposition and deployment of select Chinese communist armies May-November 1950, see Whiting, \textit{China Crosses the Yalu}, 119. For more details about this offensive, see Whiting, \textit{China Crosses the Yalu}, 131.
\textsuperscript{927} Chen, \textit{China’s Road}, 211.
Chinese strategic thinking in the fall of 1950 and winter of 1951 followed a similar pattern to that of the United States up until this point; in Mao’s pre-intervention deliberations, he expressed the need to demonstrate toughness and the impact U.S. escalation could have on the achievement of Chinese war aims. But once China entered the war, it focused on achieving total victory by pushing UN forces off the peninsula. China would therefore not offer or entertain talks during this period because the CCP was not positioning itself to resolve the war through negotiated settlement. Because my ratchet model only applies to limited wars in which the destruction of the enemy is not the minimal conditions for war termination, it only comes into play to explain Chinese diplomatic behavior in spring 1951 when Mao abandons plans for total victory.\footnote{This decision will be explored in great detail in Chapter Eight.}

The Chinese leadership’s deliberations before intervention demonstrate that while it was believed that total victory was possible, the war’s outcome depended on how much the United States escalated throughout the course of the war. After Mao received Stalin’s request on October 1st for China to enter the war to assist North Korea, the CCP leadership took about two weeks to consider the costs and benefits of intervention. Mao himself seemed quite committed to enter the war with great force, but his comrades had serious doubts, which Mao conveyed to Stalin.\footnote{Christensen, \textit{Worse than a Monolith}, 77.} In a telegram on October 3, 1950, Mao writes to Stalin “we originally planned to move several volunteer divisions to North Korea to render assistance...However having thought this over thoroughly, we now consider that such actions may entail extremely serious consequences.”\footnote{“Ciphered telegram from Roshchin to Beijing to Filippov (Stalin), 3 October 1950, conveying 2 October 1950 message from Mao to Stalin,” \textit{CWIHPB}, Doc. 12, 114.}
According to Mao, the Chinese leadership had decided on a more cautious approach because of three principle considerations. First, the Chinese army was poorly equipped, ill-prepared and “there is no confidence in the success of military operations against American troops.” Secondly, Mao believed it was “most likely” that Chinese intervention would provoke an expanded war between China and the United States. Given this “many comrades in the CC CPC [Central Committee of the Communist Party of China] judge that it is necessary to show caution here.” Third, many of the political elites argued that the focus of the CCP should be on peaceful construction or domestic resentment could emerge. Mao made it clear to Stalin that even given all these reservations, a “final decision had not been taken.” Four days later, Mao communicated a more positive response after Peng Dehuai weighed in decisively on October 5, helping Mao convince wavering comrades to support Chinese intervention. However, this pledge of Chinese support was still conditional on the timeliness and scope of Soviet military support; when it seemed like both were lacking, the Chinese leadership was again indecisive about intervention and Mao halted preparations for entering Korea on October 12. The next day, in an emergency Politburo meeting, the Chinese decided on war even without the desired Soviet military assistance.

According to an October 2 telegram Mao drafted but never sent, he was committed to going to war and believed that China would be victorious, but knew that he would have to

931 Ciphered telegram from Roshchin to Beijing to Filippov (Stalin), 3 October 1950, conveying 2 October 1950 message from Mao to Stalin,” CWIHPB, Doc. 12, 114.
932 Ciphered telegram from Roshchin to Beijing to Filippov (Stalin), 3 October 1950, conveying 2 October 1950 message from Mao to Stalin,” CWIHPB, Doc. 12, 115.
933 Mansourov, “Stalin, Mao, Kim,” 100. In this case, Mao thought internal instability could also result because “China’s national and petty bourgeoisie would openly oppose” the decision to resist the United States. See Zhang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 78.
934 Christensen, Worse than a Monolith, 91.
935 For more about this decision process, see Christensen, Worse than a Monolith, 72-86.
convince his colleagues of the merits of this policy and dangers of the alternatives.\textsuperscript{936} In this telegram to Stalin, Mao argued that Chinese troops should be able to “eliminate the invaders from the United States and from other countries, and drive them out [of Korea].”\textsuperscript{937} Mao did articulate the possibility of a stalemate, which would cause tremendous internal and external pressure on China. But he considers this to be only as a worse case scenario and had the confidence in his troops to achieve total victory over the United States.\textsuperscript{938} Mao understood that the U.S. had technological superiority, but believed that the more seasoned Chinese troops, if equipped by the Soviets and supported by the Soviet air force, would prevail.\textsuperscript{939} These factors, coupled with his faith in the strategy employed during the civil war of concentrating “forces four times larger than the enemy” would allow Chinese forces to separate and then destroy UN forces.\textsuperscript{940} Mao was optimistic that with the correct cost-imposing strategy, the U.S. would lose resolve and abandon Korea. In his writings On Protracted War, he argued that against a stronger opponent, victory is unlikely to be quick. Specifically, Mao argues that the most effective military policy for a weak army in strategic defense against a strong army” is “luring the enemy to penetrate deep.”\textsuperscript{941}

While he did not send the October 2 telegram to Stalin, the telegram’s contents provides insights into Mao’s thinking about how China would achieve total victory against the United States. This confidence in that China could drive UN forces off the peninsula under the right conditions had been expressed earlier by the PLA. On August 13, 1950, at a conference convened by the 13\textsuperscript{th} Army Corps, the PLA leadership expressed that China possessed several

\textsuperscript{936} Christensen, \textit{Worse than a Monolith}, 90.

\textsuperscript{937} Chen, \textit{China’s Road}, 178.

\textsuperscript{938} Chen, \textit{China’s Road}, 178.

\textsuperscript{939} Chen, \textit{China’s Road}, 178-9.

\textsuperscript{940} Chen, \textit{China’s Road}, 179.

\textsuperscript{941} Mao Zedong, \textit{On Protracted War}, 224, cited by Whiting, \textit{China Crosses the Yalu}, 133.
advantages over the United States that would allow it to achieve total victory in Korea. First, Chinese troops outnumbered UN forces three to one. Second, the PRC had more than four million troops at home to draw upon while the United States did not have many troops, and a great percentage were not available because they were dedicated to other missions in Western Europe and North America. China also had the geographic advantage of being closer to the battlefield and therefore having shorter logistics and supply lines. Lastly, the participants believed that Beijing would win the sympathy of the global public. This moral high ground coupled with the superior morale of Chinese troops would confer even greater advantages on China.\footnote{Chen, China’s Road, 144.}

The idea that manpower and morale of the troops could overcome a technologically superior opponent, if the conditions were right, was one of the main tenets of the People’s War doctrine.\footnote{As Shu Guang Zhang states “Mao’s confidence in a human being’s subjective capability to determine defeat or victory in war, the CCP chairman romanticized military affairs.” For more on how this romanticism affected Mao’s decisions during the Korean War, see Zhang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, especially Chapter Two.} In a September 5, 1950 meeting, the CCP leadership also emphasized the significant impact of bravery and courage to help the troops overcome their fear of fighting the Americans.\footnote{Zhang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 189.} The CCP’s confidence in this man-over-weapon doctrine was real, in particular because the leadership insisted it had been tested successfully in the anti-Japanese War 1937-1945.\footnote{Zhang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 10.} The 13th Army Corps reported to the CMC in late September that they thought that by employing “traditional methods such as concentration of [our] superior force, penetration, circling and disintegration, close combat, night strikes and quick battles” they could “gradually

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Chen} Chen, China’s Road, 144.
\bibitem{Zhang} As Shu Guang Zhang states “Mao’s confidence in a human being’s subjective capability to determine defeat or victory in war, the CCP chairman romanticized military affairs.” For more on how this romanticism affected Mao’s decisions during the Korean War, see Zhang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, especially Chapter Two.
\bibitem{Zhang1} Zhang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 189.
\bibitem{Zhang2} Zhang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 10.
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wear done the enemy so that [China could] switch to an advantageous position and fight a protracted war.”

But not everyone was in agreement with Mao. At a meeting of the top rank CCP leaders on October 4, many voiced strong opposition to sending ground troops onto the peninsula. Gao Gang, for example, argued that the PRC had to focus on solving its domestic economic problems. Moreover, it was obvious just from evaluating the comparative statics in industrial production that China did not have the ability to engage with the United States in a general war. Lin Biao also objected based on military calculations; with limited artillery and no naval or air support, the losses would be massive. The Chinese leadership “consider[ed] that the most unfavorable situation would be that the Chinese forces fail to destroy American troops in large numbers in Korea, thus resulting in a stalemate, and that, at the same time, the United States openly declares war on China, which would be detrimental to China’s economic reconstruction.”

But Mao was adamant that there were internationalist and national reasons to fight the United States. Mao admitted that Chinese forces were conventionally weaker than U.S. forces, and once the U.S. intervened in Korea, Mao became fearful for his nation’s security. Peng Dehuai articulated one of Mao’s motivations in an October 5 meeting when he argued that allowing the United States to occupy both Taiwan and Korea up to the Yalu river posed to great of a security risk to the CCP, which was still consolidating power after the civil war. Zhou agreed with Mao’s position, stating at the same meeting “if the U.S. imperialists defeated North

946 Zhang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 77.
947 Zhang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 80.
948 Chen, China’s Road, 176.
949 Christensen, Worse than a Monolith, 74.
950 Christensen, Worse than a Monolith, 91.
Korea, the cause of peace would suffer and the Americans would become more aggressive.”\footnote{Chen, \textit{China’s Road}, 143.} As Peng Dehuai argued in support of Mao’s desire to assist North Korea, “Even if [China] is devastated [by the U.S. forces] in war, it would only mean that our liberation war lasted a few years longer. Should its troops be poised on the bank of the Yalu River and Taiwan, the U.S. will be able to find a pretext to invade us at any time.”\footnote{Zhang, \textit{Mao’s Military Romanticism}, 82.} In other words, intervening in Korea was necessary to prevent the United States from amassing forces and then using bases in Korea and Taiwan to attack the PRC later. Given that the United States had was still not fully mobilized for war, it was better to fight the Americans in the fall 1950 than later.\footnote{Christensen, \textit{Worse than a Monolith}, 92.}

While some of Mao’s rhetoric was most likely exaggerated to achieve a consensus among the top CCP leaders concerning the necessity of intervention, he did believe that if China intervened quickly that total victory was possible.\footnote{Zhang, \textit{Mao’s Military Romanticism}, 80.} This optimism created the general consensus among committee members at the Politburo meetings on October 4 and 5 that China would prevail over the United States with its advanced weapons and equipment because of its superior manpower, moral strength and the support of its people.\footnote{Chen, \textit{China’s Road}, 184.} The optimism also depended on the effort and resources the United States would dedicate to the fight. Peng estimated that the maximum amount of forces the enemy could assemble on the front line in the short-term would be three U.S. and three ROK divisions, which he felt confident China could handle.\footnote{Zhang, \textit{Mao’s Military Romanticism}, 92.} Before the first assault, Mao pointed out that victory depended on “how much the enemy air raids would subdue our soldiers to hinder our assaulting actions.”\footnote{Zhang, \textit{Mao’s Military Romanticism}, 100.} Mao conceded that the United States
would enjoy air superiority and that China would have 300 planes combat ready no earlier than February 1951.\footnote{Zhang, \textit{Mao’s Military Romanticism}, 79.}

But even if the United States did declare war on China after its limited intervention, Mao believed the conflict would still be centered on the Korean peninsula, and therefore he was not greatly fearful that U.S. air and naval assets would launch attacks against Chinese coastal cities. In a letter to Stalin on October 15, 1950, Mao offered this assessment of China’s prospects:

We are not assured that our troops are able to wipe out an entire U.S. army once and for all. But since we have decided to go into the war against the Americans, we should be prepared so that, when the U.S. high command musters up one complete army to fight us in one campaign, we should be able to concentrate our forces four times larger than the enemy…and to use a firing power one and a half to two times stronger than that of the enemy…so that we can guarantee a complete and thorough destruction of one enemy army.\footnote{Chen, \textit{China’s Road}, 176-177.}

Deng Hua, then commander of the 13\textsuperscript{th} Army Corps, concurred with this assessment that the United States possessed superior firepower and great mobility. But he believed, like Peng Dehuai, that with the correct strategy, the United States would not be able to leverage these advantages. He proposed that instead of engaging in a frontal offensive, that they focus on seeking out weak links in the American lines, destroy its transportation and communication networks, and then destroy the American troops by separating and surrounding them.\footnote{Chen, \textit{China’s Road}, 144-145.} In other words, with the correct strategy, victory over the United States was a possibility. Therefore, Mao pushed China into the Korean War fighting its first battle on October 25, 1950, with hopes that the CPV would push imperialists forces off the peninsula for good. Mao believed that United States, Britain, and France did not have domestic support for the war, cabling to Peng in the field...
on November 18, 1950, that “as long as our forces can win a few more victories and wipe out a few more thousand enemy troops, the entire international situation will turn [to our favor].”

Once at war, the Chinese government launched a propaganda campaign to enhance the support of the people for their efforts in Korea called the “Great Movement to Resist America and Assist Korea.” One goal of this campaign was to convince the people that the U.S. was not as strong as they feared, but was instead a “paper tiger” that was isolated from the world because of its aggressive and reactionist politics. Four arguments were offered to the people for why the United States was militarily vulnerable: 1) it was over committed around the world 2) its geographic location made the logistics of fighting a war in Asia difficult 3) the manpower of the U.S. military was limited and many would not support expending it on wars in Asia 4) unlike China, the United States did not have strong allies to help it fight the war.

After China’s entrance into the war, a number of foreign officials began again to brainstorm ways to bring the two sides together into ceasefire talks. UK foreign minister Ernest Bevin, for example, raised the possibility of setting up a demilitarized zone south of the Yalu River and then retreating to neck of the peninsula (around the 40th parallel). General MacArthur called the proposal tantamount to appeasement of Munich proportions; Maj Gen Charles L. Bolte, who was in the army’s Plans and Operations division in Washington, agreed that a “show of strength [would] discourage further aggression while weakness [would] encourage it.”

Acheson raised the idea at a November 21 meeting with Defense department officials, but at this point U.S. political elites were still focused on total victory. The general consensus was that General MacArthur should proceed with the “home-by-Christmas” offensive scheduled for

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961 Zhang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 111.
962 Chen, China’s Road, 192.
963 Foot, Substitute for Victory, 27.
November 24 and only when it was deemed successful should the United States consider political proposals. Giving in now would mean abandoning territory already fought and won; furthermore the Chinese communists would take this move, in the words of Acheson, “as an indication of the greatest weakness on our part.”

The United States began to reevaluate its policy of total victory when this offensive, designed to bring the war to an end, failed. As General MacArthur articulated on November 28, 1950:

We face an entirely new war…this has shattered the high hopes we entertained…that…the war in Korea could be brought to a rapid close by over movement to the international boundary and the prompt withdrawal thereafter of United Nations forces.

On the same day as the failed offensive, President Truman met with the NSC to discuss the possibility of ending the war, potentially with a ceasefire, to avoid the costs of further escalation or a long-term commitment. But there was opposition to talking to the Communists at this point for fear it would communicate weakness, especially after the recent loss. On December 1, 1950, the State Department and Defense Department held a joint meeting to discuss the next steps in the war; officials in both departments were now questioning whether the United States should extend the conflict or seek political ways of ending it. The next day, during a meeting about ways forward, suggestions of approaching the Chinese or Russians with a proposal for a ceasefire either through the Indians or directly through the Russians, were vetoed. The same week Acheson received a note from George Kennan stressing this was the worst time to negotiate with the Communists because the United States must only do so from a position of

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Foot, *Substitute for Victory*, 27.
Foot, *Substitute for Victory*, 27.
strength. If the United States moved to open talks now especially after this great defeat, the Communists “would correctly interpret it as weakness.” General Marshall argued on December 1, 1950 that to consider talks when U.S./UN casualties were mounting, would “represent a great weakness on the part” of the United States. Acheson concluded that the best thing to do at this point would be to fight the Chinese to a standstill, not seek talks or escalate to bombing and blockading China.

Map #3: Chinese First, Second and Third Offensives

China’s first two offensives, the first from October 27 to November 2, 1950 and the second from November 25 to December 9, were extremely successful. These two offensives convinced Mao that his goal of total victory with the complete withdrawal of U.S. troops from the peninsula was achievable. Mao articulated in a December 3 meeting with Kim that “there exists a possibility

969 Acheson, *The Korean War*, 82.
971 Acheson, *The Korean War*, 82-83.
972 Chen, *China’s Road*, 212.
of resolving the conflict quickly, but anything unexpected may happen to protract the war.”

Kim Il Sung who wanted to avoid a protracted war in which he no longer had the support of Chinese troops, responded that “we should not give the enemy breathing time…we ought to advance in the crest of the victory to seize Pyongyang and Seoul and to press the enemy to withdraw from [the whole of] Korea.” Mao believed the United States would most likely concede to China if under pressure. With this in mind, the Chinese leadership decided in early December to reject any offers for talks and instead pursuing a total victory strategy.

The USSR leadership agreed with China’s position. A telegram to the USSR representative to the UN captures this position, arguing that “your proposal about the cessation of military activity in Korea we consider incorrect in the present situation, when American troops are suffering defeat and when the Americans more and more often are advancing a proposal about a cessation of military operations in Korea in order to win time and prevent the complete defeat of the American troops.” Any ceasefire arrangement would have to include the demand for withdrawal of all foreign troops from Korea and for the Korea question to be resolved by the Korean people themselves. The time was not yet ripe to talk of peace. As Stalin wrote to Zhou Enlai in a ciphered telegram on the same day, he agreed with the CCP leadership that China “should not be too open and show all [its] cards too early…we think that the time has not arrived for China to show all its cards, while Seoul is still not liberated.”

The fact that both the United States and China were pursuing total victory did not discourage external actors from attempting to convince both sides to enter into peace talks. Prime

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975 “7 December 1950, VKP(b) CC Politburo decision with approved message to Vyshinsky in New York,” CWIHPB, Doc. 48, 52.
976 “7 December 1950, ciphered telegram, Gromyko to Roshchin transmitting message from Filippov (Stalin) to Zhou Enlai,” CWIHPB, Doc. 49, 53.
Minister Atlee rushes to Washington to convince Truman to make an offer to Beijing, such as a seat in the UN and returning Taiwan, in exchange for a ceasefire.\textsuperscript{977} Truman demonstrated his aversion to this plan, arguing that he did not believe letting the PRC into the UN would do any good, and that past issues with the Chinese “had not made him have any friendly feelings toward [Beijing.]”\textsuperscript{978} Truman criticizes the suggestion more bluntly in his private diaries, describing the situation in which the United States would give in to such conditions for a ceasefire as “fantastic.”\textsuperscript{979} Members of the administration believed making a deal of this sort would only encourage more aggression. As Secretary Acheson commented at the Atlee meeting, “the question was whether you could buy [the enemy] off or whether you would not merely get more pressure.”\textsuperscript{980} Truman was adamant that they would “not pay anything” for the sake of peace. The communist camp would have to be the first to propose a ceasefire, the cession of hostilities would have to occur at the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel, and any truce would not have any political conditions attached to it.\textsuperscript{981}

As China approached the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel, representatives from India, England, Sweden, and the general secretary of the UN Trygve Lie appealed several times to the PRC representative Wu Xiuquan inquiring about the conditions under which China would agree to end military operations in Korea. These countries were hoping China would be willing to return to the status

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\textsuperscript{977} \textit{Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, Korea,}” United States Department of States, (1950): 1451.
\textsuperscript{979} Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, 29.
\textsuperscript{980} \textit{Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, Korea,}” United States Department of States, (1950): 1452.
\textsuperscript{981} Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, 30-31.
\end{flushleft}
quo ante bellum." But unfortunately for their peace efforts, in a 4 December 1950 instruction to Peng Dehau, Mao argued that crossing the 38th was necessary because “we would never agree to start an armistice negotiation unless the U.S. imperialists withdraw to south of the 38th parallel.” Thirteen non-western countries headed by India stepped in anyways, and on December 5th handed Beijing a peace proposal, urging Beijing to stop at the 38th parallel and discuss the resolution of the Korea issue at a meeting of the big powers. Towards that end, the Indians introduce two draft resolutions on December 12 into the First Committee of the General Assembly. The first of these called for a three-person group to determine a realistic basis for a ceasefire and the second called for a conference to settle issues of concern in the region.

Under American pressure, the UN prioritized the first resolution. On December 14, the UN passed a 13-nation resolution and established a working group to explore the basis for a ceasefire agreement that could be reached by all parties. India stressed to Beijing that the UN resolution was not inspired or directed by any Western power, and that they would take into account Chinese interests in any discussion if Beijing would agree to a ceasefire. The United States supported the proposal, but according to Dean Acheson, did so with the hopes that China would reject it. The United States had faced a difficult choice between supporting it, which may lead to the loss of the Koreans and the fury of Congress and the press” or not supporting it and losing legitimacy and leverage in the UN. If China had agreed, it is unlikely that talks would have emerged under these conditions in any case. The JCS had put forth the acceptable U.S.

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982 “7 December 1950, ciphered telegram from Roshchin conveying message from Zhou Enlai to Soviet Government,” CWIHPB, Doc. 47, 52.
983 Xia, “Negotiating with the Enemy,” 48.
984 Chen, Mao’s China, 91.
985 Foot, Substitute for Victory, 29.
986 Chen, Mao’s China, 91.
987 Chen, Mao’s China, 92.
988 Chen, Mao’s China, 93.
conditions for a ceasefire early in the month. These terms all deliberately emphasized the military aspects of the conflict, and indicated the administration’s discomfort with attaching political conditions to a truce.\textsuperscript{989}

China viewed this resolution calling for a three-person group to produce ceasefire proposals with suspicion. Without concrete assurances that talks would include issues vital to Beijing, such negotiations would only be a trap designed to undermine their war efforts.\textsuperscript{990}

Hoping to reassure and convince Beijing, on January 11, 1951 the three-person ceasefire working group, established by the UN in early December, put forth five principles to serve as the basis for a resolution in Korea.\textsuperscript{991} These principles were designed to credibly guarantee that if a ceasefire could be reached, then a conference would be held to settle outstanding problems in the region, “including, among others, those of Formosa (Taiwan) and representation of China in the United Nations.”\textsuperscript{992} But Mao was confident that “if we can eliminate the whole or most of the [ROK] puppet forces, we will force the Americans to fight alone, and it will be impossible for them to stay in Korea for long; if we can destroy few more U.S. divisions, it will be even easier for us to resolve the Korean conflict.”\textsuperscript{993} In a December 7 telegram to the USSR, Zhou conveyed that China’s goal was to avoid putting itself “in a disadvantageous position and having the goal of holding the initiative in our hands and also showing assertiveness on this question.” China would only be willing to negotiate an end to the conflict under six conditions, which basically amounted to the complete surrender of the western powers.\textsuperscript{994}

\textsuperscript{989} Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, 31, 32.
\textsuperscript{990} Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, 29.
\textsuperscript{991} Chen, \textit{Mao’s China}, 93.
\textsuperscript{992} Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, 29.
\textsuperscript{993} Zhang, \textit{Mao’s Military Romanticism}, 127.
\textsuperscript{994} Those conditions included: 1) The withdrawal of all foreign troops from Korea 2) The withdrawal of American troops from the Taiwan strait and from the territory of Taiwan 3) The
CHAPTER SEVEN

With these factors in mind, Mao ordered Peng Dehuai to launch the third major offensive on December 31, 1950. Soviet air power supported Chinese troops on a limited scale in early January under the assumption that if the CPV seized Seoul, it would “be in a stronger position to compel United States imperialists to withdraw from Korea.” But CPV commanders believe their forces were stretched to their limits and when they received the order to advance south of the 38th parallel, Peng expressed his alarm. Mao responded by reiterating the importance of showing strengthen, arguing “if we do not launch this offensive…it would arouse the capitalist countries to speculate a great deal [on our intentions]” only by “annihilating a few more ROK divisions or America units” will this “enhance the pessimism among them.” Mao wanted to cross the 38th to demonstrate China’s resolve and ability to stand up to external pressure; not doing so, he believed, would be construed as a sign of weakness.

The CPV succeeded in fulfilling Mao’s wish; the UN was forced to retreat to a line seventy miles below the parallel in the west to a point forty-five miles above it in the east. Public opinion in Beijing grew in response and support for a quick victory with public rally cries of “we should drive the enemy out to the sea.” This concerned CPV commanders Peng Dehuai and Deng Hua, who emphasized to Mao that the CPV were suffering from combat fatigue and shortage of supplies such as manpower, food, munitions, after three offensives in a

Korean question must be resolved by the Korean people themselves 4) The participation of a representation of the Chinese people’s republic in the UN and the exclusion of Taiwan 5) Convening a conference of the ministers of foreign affairs of the four great powers for the preparation of a peace treaty with Japan. See “7 December 1950, ciphered telegram from Roshchin conveying message from Zhou Enlai to Soviet Government,” CWIHPB, Doc. 47, 52.

995 Zhang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 121-122.
996 Zhang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 123-125.
997 Zhang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 129.
998 Zhang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 153.
999 For more on the military aftermath of Chinese intervention, see Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 163-166.
1000 Zhang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 133.
row.\textsuperscript{1001} Mao was steadfast that only by inflicting costs on the United States would the Americans lose confidence in their prospects for victory and consider withdrawal from Korea.\textsuperscript{1002}

After these victories, on January 17, Zhou Enlai rejected the UN resolution, arguing that it was “designed to give the American troops breathing space.”\textsuperscript{1003} He again put forth strict and unrealistic preconditions for negotiations, which included a seven-power meeting to be held in China, the PRC to return to its UN seat, and the withdrawal of all foreign troops from both Korea and Taiwan.\textsuperscript{1004} Only when the U.S./UN side had agreed to these terms would Beijing agree to talks.\textsuperscript{1005} A few days later, Beijing clarified that when it demanded withdrawal of foreign troops, this included Chinese troops as well, and that the broader issues could be discussed after a ceasefire was reached. The Indians saw a glimmer of hope in these clarifications, believing there was room for compromise. Encouraged, Delhi pursued another initiative, this time persuaded the Arab-Asian bloc to introduce a draft resolution requesting a seven-nation group to secure a clarification and elaboration of China’s position.\textsuperscript{1006}

By the end of January 1951, the optimism in the communist camp began to diminish. Peng had underscored the dangers of a fourth offensive, warning “if the advance of our main forces is checked [by the enemy] it is very likely that the [overall] war situation in Korea would turn on us.”\textsuperscript{1007} UN troops launch precisely such a counteroffensive on January 25th. Peng Dehuai knew that Chinese troops, exhausted and short of ammunition and food, would not be

\textsuperscript{1001} Zhang, \textit{Mao’s Military Romanticism}, 133.
\textsuperscript{1002} Zhang, \textit{Mao’s Military Romanticism}, 134.
\textsuperscript{1003} Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, 29.
\textsuperscript{1004} Chen, \textit{Mao’s China}, 93.
\textsuperscript{1005} Chen, \textit{Mao’s China}, 95.
\textsuperscript{1006} Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, 30.
\textsuperscript{1007} Zhang, \textit{Mao’s Military Romanticism}, 138.
able to hold their positions and requested permission from Mao to conduct a tactical retreat. Mao refused to give up on its objective of total victory and rejected Peng’s proposal. After a failed offensive, Mao agreed to prolong the war and wait for a better offensive opportunity, but maintained that total victory through attrition of the enemy was possible. This view was largely the result of Mao’s belief that the United States lacked the resolve to sustain heavy losses. It would take one more failed offensive to push Mao to place limitations on the scale of the CPV war effort. The next chapter explores how Chinese and U.S. thinking on wartime talks evolved during the winter and spring of 1951. As both countries abandoned the goal of total victory, the interstate ratchet effect model begins to explain diplomatic behavior and why talks did not emerge until July 1951.

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1008 Chen, *China’s Road*, 213.
Chapter Eight:

The Emergence of Armistice Talks, January 1951-July 1951

On June 23, 1951, Jacob Malik, the USSR’s UN representative, gave a radio address in which he called for “a ceasefire and an armistice [in the Korean War] providing for the mutual withdrawal of forces from the 38th parallel.”¹⁰⁰⁹ For the first time, both the United States and China responded favorably to a proposal made by an outside party and wartime talks began at Kaesong on July 10, 1951. The two sides talked while fighting on and off for the next two years until the UNC and the Communists finally signed a ceasefire agreement on July 27, 1953.¹⁰¹⁰

What changed in the seven months between the December UN resolutions for talks which were rejected and Malik’s public address? Why did China respond favorably to Malik’s proposal? What factors influenced U.S. strategic thinking, which had previously been dominated by concerns that talking would only encourage aggression? Why did China relax its preconditions that any negotiations should include political issues such as its representation in the UN? For the United States, how did the status quo ante become acceptable and no longer a symbol of providing asylum to the aggressor? If both China and the United States had abandoned the hope of total victory by late winter 1951, why did it take three months for talks to emerge?

This chapter evaluates the evolution of U.S. and Chinese perceptions of talks and how their beliefs affected the management of the war and its conclusion. The United States had abandoned its hope of total victory by February 1951 and Mao transitioned to fighting a limited war, a war of attrition by March 1951. However, talks did not emerge until July 1951. I conclude this case study of diplomatic behavior during the Korean War by evaluating the last two hypotheses of my causal model that specify the conditions under which states are the most likely

¹⁰⁰⁹ Foot, Substitute for Victory, 37.
¹⁰¹⁰ For a comprehensive chronology of the war, see Malkasian, The Korean War, 9.
EMERGENCE OF ARMISTICE TALKS

to engage in talks. I argue that the delay was the result of the belief in both Beijing and Washington that offering talks would project weakness, which was risky given that both countries perceived their ability to escalate as limited. After the successes of China’s fall offensives, the United States wanted to demonstrate toughness before agreeing to talks to reduce the communists’ incentives to escalate further. However, it was not until early 1951 that the UN experienced some operational successes proving its ability to constrain the actions of the enemy.\footnote{Christensen, \textit{Worse than a Monolith}, 110.} After heavy losses in January and February, Mao starts to become aware of China’s limitations in achieving its objectives through military force alone. By early March, Mao switches to an attritional strategy, which foreshadows the emergence of more limited goals. However, he was acutely concerned that agreeing to talks would only contribute to U.S. confidence, and instead his forces should concentrate on inflicting higher costs on UN forces to create a more favorable environment for talks.

As a military stalemate emerged in spring 1951, both sides believed the risk of escalation had been sufficiently mitigated; reunification of the peninsula under their preferred government required a degree of escalation and costs that neither side was willing to incur. The United States understood that the farther it pushed into Korean territory, the stiffer the resistance, and the higher probability of Soviet involvement. The Chinese realized their vulnerabilities in a protracted war, specifically the problems associated with extended supply lines and the ability of the United States to adapt to their strategy of luring troops deep into hostile territory before attacking.\footnote{Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, 1.} Given this, both sides were willing to make some concessions in their preconditions to allow for the emergence of peace talks. However, since both were still concerned about projecting weakness, they turned to a third party, the Soviet Union, to make the
peace talk proposal that would allow for the emergence of negotiations. I also assess the explanatory power of four alternative explanations for Chinese and U.S. diplomatic behavior during the Korean War characterized as the information approach, credible commitment approach, the realpolitik approach and domestic political approach.

**U.S. Considers Talks**

The Truman administration began to deliberate about the merits and downsides to talks in late November when the failed UN offensive created doubts that total victory was feasible. In late December, with the communist forces poised to resurrect the goal of reunification, the JCS officially recommend limited war without escalation given the prohibitively high costs associated with the alternative. Details from the report are worth quoting at length:

> Chinese Communists now appear, from estimates available capable of forcing evacuation by forces of UN... if with present UN strength successful resistance at some position in Korea without our incurring serious losses could be accomplished and apparent military and political prestige of Chinese Communists could be defaulted, it would be of great importance to our national interests. In the face of increased threat of general war JCS believe commitment of additional United States ground forces in Korea should not be made, since our view is that major war should not be fought in Korea.¹⁰¹³

It had become clear by winter 1951 that the United States could not achieve its aims militarily because its escalation options were less than ideal. Attacking China directly could compel Soviet intervention through the Sino-Soviet alliance. Furthermore, U.S. allies were opposed to fighting a general war and consequently to any strategies that could spark it. The United States did not want to unnecessarily alienate its allies, especially Great Britain, which contributed a significant amount of forces to the fight.¹⁰¹⁴ While it was debatable whether the United States could break out of the stalemate that was emerging, most agreed that regardless it would be too costly.

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EMERGENCE OF ARMISTICE TALKS

General Ridgway addressed this reality of the last two years of the war by explaining: “we never had enough men [to clear the Chinese out of Korea], whereas the enemy had sufficient manpower not only to block our offensives, but to make and hold small gains of his own. To have pushed it to a successful conclusion would have required more trained divisions and more supporting air and naval forces, would have incurred heavy casualties, and would have necessitated lifting our self-imposed ban on attacks on the enemy sanctuary north of the Yalu.” Escalation of this sort was undesirable because it then opened up Japan to attack. President Eisenhower, who came into office in January 1953, believed more decisive military force could end the war, but he too discovered his options to be limited. Eisenhower also found he had to be cautious about making any moves that would provoke Soviet intervention. Moreover, UNC did not have at their disposable the resources to escalate quickly; it would need at least six months to muster and consolidate the manpower and materiel to launch a massive offensive on the peninsula. At this stage in the conflict, military action against Mainland China was again considered and rejected. In any case, the United States was concerned that the communist camp would construe any willingness to talk as a sign of weakness and therefore it was imperative that the United States demonstrate toughness on the battlefield first.

As its position improved in January, Truman and his advisors were more receptive to allied and UN pressure to consider a ceasefire. Truman prepared a statement in response to

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1015 General Ridgway was summarizing General Clark’s assessment of the military situation. See Acheson, *The Korean War*, 128-129.
1016 Malkasian, *The Korean War*, 82.
1017 In the fall of 1952, General Clark recessed the negotiations indefinitely and brought a proposal to the JCS to escalate the war to force the communists back to the table to negotiate on U.S. terms. This plan included conducting a blockade of China, bombing targets north of Manchuria and into China, launching a ground offensive to the Yalu, and even using nuclear weapons. Both Eisenhower and the JCS rejected the plan. Malkasian, *The Korean War*, 82.
1018 Foot, *Substitute for Victory*, 34.
the January 13 resolution that there was now a basis for “restoring peace and security in the area which should be acceptable to all.” On February 2, 1951 Dean Rusk reassured the ambassadors of UN participating countries that enemy forces would be unable to carry out their objective of driving out UN forces, but also U.S./UN forces would not be pushing north of the 38th because of the realization that they did not have the wherewithal to liberate and unify the peninsula. On February 7 in a confidential memo, Rusk wrote that since the Chinese intervention, unification of the Korean peninsula was “no longer feasible.” This sentiment that total victory was no longer an option was reflected in State department memos in February as well. According to the JCS, the troops were fighting close to the limits of their capabilities and therefore should not advance north.

However, as the Eighth Army continued to achieve military successes under General Ridgway, the military’s territorial ambitions expanded. After some bureaucratic wrestling with the State department, which as primarily concerned with allied unity, it was agreed that U.S. forces would advance only twenty miles into North Korea to wage an “aggressive-defense” but the United States would continue to fight a limited war. In mid-February General Ridgway officially switched to a strategy of attrition with the hopes that heightened damage would bring the enemy to the negotiating table. This reduction from total victory to the limited aims of reverting back to the status quo was captured in NSC 48/5, finalized and approved by Truman in May. This document listed as a current objective of the United States “to seek by political, as distinguished from military means, a solution to the Korean problem” by facilitating the

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1019 Foot, Substitute for Victory, 34.
1020 Foot, Substitute for Victory, 33.
1021 Reiter, How Wars End, 81.
1022 Foot, Substitute for Victory, 33.
1023 Foot, Substitute for Victory, 34.
1024 Malkasian, The Korean War, 40.
emergence of the status quo ante. However, until that goal is attainable, the United States should “continue to oppose and penalize the aggressor.”\textsuperscript{1025} The strategy of attrition had the objective of “deflat[ing] Chinese Communist political and military strength and prestige by inflicting heavy losses on Chinese forces in Korea through the present UN operation.”\textsuperscript{1026} While the United States still stood for the political reunification of Korea, it would be willing to accept the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel as the basis for a ceasefire.\textsuperscript{1027}

While it was obvious that the war was going to end by negotiated settlement, and the benefits of escalating would not outweigh the costs, the administration still refrained from offering talks because it was concerned that doing so would be taken as a sign of weakness. In April, the argument was still being made that no proposals could be offered until after the spring offensive, again for fear of showing weakness.\textsuperscript{1028} It was crucial that the United States abstain from proposing or accepting a ceasefire while its forces were retreating or pay any price for a truce if it did come about.\textsuperscript{1029} Furthermore, peace talks should focus only on military matters because any acceptable truce could not have political conditions attacked to it. Lastly, to avoid looking eager to end the war, the proposal to talk would have to come from elsewhere.\textsuperscript{1030} Additionally, the United States wanted to be sure that China had also grown wary of war and would not chose escalation over talking while fighting. Given concerns about communicating weakness, it was important for the United States to control the process and probe China’s

\textsuperscript{1026}“NSC 48/5,” 36.
\textsuperscript{1027}Reiter, \textit{How Wars End}, 81.
\textsuperscript{1028}Reiter, \textit{How Wars End}, 80.
\textsuperscript{1029}Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, 31.
\textsuperscript{1030}Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, 31.
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position in the following months through back channels and indirect contacts. As Dean Acheson articulated:

Not being eager for further UN initiatives, it was incumbent upon us to devise our own. The only hopeful path pointed towards an armistice which might harden into an end to belligerence. An agreed settlement seemed both impossible and unreliable if achieved. One conclusion we shared unanimously: that exploration through the public procedures of the United Nations or through leaky foreign offices like the Indian would be fatal.\textsuperscript{1031}

One example of an indirect approach unfolded from January to May 1951 in which C.B. Marshall of the Policy Planning Staff at the State Department engaged in discussion with a “Third Party,” a Chinese national who identified with non-Communist elements in the Beijing government, to probe China’s position. Through these discussions, Marshall communicated coercive threats in an attempt to compel the Chinese to consider talks. Marshall warned that U.S. emotions were at an all-time high, and many were calling for naval and air attacks against the Chinese homeland. He warned that to date the United States had taken a restricted approach, but could at any time “lay waste [to Chinese] cities and destroy their industries.”\textsuperscript{1032} These attempts at talks yielded nothing, largely because the United States was simultaneously pursuing a UN resolution to label China as the aggressor. As the ‘Third Party’ articulated, after the resolution was passed it would take several weeks for Beijing to move past this action.\textsuperscript{1033}

While Truman administration officials were pursuing contacts to probe China’s position, some, such as General MacArthur, still believed the primary objective should be the reunification of the peninsula.\textsuperscript{1034} Other voices within the country stressed the necessity to

\textsuperscript{1031} Acheson, \textit{The Korean War}, 119.
\textsuperscript{1032} Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, 32.
\textsuperscript{1033} Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, 32.
\textsuperscript{1034} MacArthur tried to undercut Truman by issuing his own statement that warned the United States could expand the war at any point and completely destroy the Chinese military. Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, 34.
demonstrate toughness. At the congressional hearings called to investigate MacArthur’s dismissal on April 11, 1951, General Marshall stated publicly that Taiwan would never fall in the hands of the Communists, nor would China be allowed to regain its seat in the UN. C.B. Marshall from Policy Planning cautioned the editor of a Hong Kong newspaper known for reflecting Beijing’s views, that U.S. patience was limited. He alerted them to the fact that it was possible the “American people and their government would say, ‘To hell with it. Let’s give the Chinese what they’re asking for.” He warned that it would be dangerous to assume that U.S. determination “to withhold itself from indulgence of its emotional impulses was limitless.”

Rusk and Dulles also make uncompromising statements. Such comments hurt the peace effort because these statements did not acknowledged that the Chinese had adequately demonstrated toughness in Korea or that idea that a ceasefire at that point would be beneficial for both sides.

Because of these missteps, the Truman administration failed to credibly communicate to China that it wanted to engage in bona fide talks to end the war. Because of the lack of trust, the United States had to then turn to the Russians as an intermediary to probe China’s position on talking while fighting. Through a series of conversations between Bohlen and Vladmir Semenov, the United States learned that the USSR thought the time was not ripe for talks because the Chinese still believed they could push the United States off the peninsula. Until China abandoned its goal of total victory, which depended on the outcome of the latest offensive launched on April 22, ceasefire talks could not emerge. The next section discusses how Chinese became more open to the idea of talks as the prospects for total victory and U.S. escalation decreased.

**China Transitions to Limit War**

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Foot, *Substitute for Victory*, 35.
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As the New Year began, the communists had the upper hand on the battlefield and were still pursuing the war aim of total victory. The three communist capitals all concurred that the goal should be to drive UN forces completely off the peninsula, but they disagreed on how aggressively to pursue this goal.\textsuperscript{1037} At this juncture, Moscow, Beijing and Pyongyang were all against early armistice talks as they thought this would only provide the United States time to rest and regroup for future offensives.\textsuperscript{1038} China rejected the UN efforts to end the war, arguing that ceasing hostilities before talking was not a possibility, as this “would only serve the United States invasion strategy.”\textsuperscript{1039} Chinese leaders were convinced that the United States would only want to engage in talks to rest and regroup for another attack. It was critical that any talks that took place happened in the context of fighting; otherwise, “people could let the talks drag on forever without resolving anything.”\textsuperscript{1040}

But China’s fortunes began to turn when General Matthew B. Ridgway took command on December 23, 1950 and began to take back territory that had fallen in communist hands. Ridgway abandoned Seoul with the goal of forcing the Communists to overextend, which worked against Peng’s strategy of luring the enemy in deep. The CPV and KPA moved into the city on January 4, but as anticipated, their supply lines were stretched to the breaking point and as a result Peng called off the offensive. The DPRK, which was the most risk-acceptant party at this point, criticized the CPV in late January for this decision to not push forward at the end of

\textsuperscript{1037} Christensen, \textit{Worse than a Monolith}, 111.
\textsuperscript{1038} Christensen, \textit{Worse than a Monolith}, 110.
\textsuperscript{1039} “Zhou Enlai waijiang guanyu chaoxian “tingzhan” wenti tong lianda diyi weiyuanhui laiwan dianwen,” [the interactive telegrams concerning ‘ceasefire’ in Korea between Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai and the first committee of UN General Assembly]. \textit{Beijing Foreign Ministry Archives}, doc. 113-00068-01, January 13, 1951, 31-32.
\textsuperscript{1040} \textit{Beijing Foreign Ministry Archives}, doc. 110-00126-02.
the third offensive when UN forces were “in a helpless retreat.”

Peng, who had been against this third offensive and pushing South of the 38th parallel, articulated his alarm at the idea of launching another offensive, especially before his forces had time to recuperate and resupply. Even so, at Mao’s insistence, the CPV launched an ill-advised fourth phase offensive on February 11, 1951. The communists were halted nine days later by UN forces supplied by the air. On March 7, General Ridgway launched Operation Killer, taking back Seoul on March 15 and establishing the Kansas line North of the 28th parallel on April 9, 1951.

These setbacks encouraged Mao to reevaluate his thinking about the prospects of reunifying the peninsula under North Korean control through the use of force. In late February, Peng returned to Beijing to convey in person to Mao the seriousness of China’s military

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1041 Zhang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 136.
1043 Acheson, The Korean War, 92.
situation.\textsuperscript{1044} At this point, Mao abandoned hope for a quick victory, and switched to an attritional strategy, believing that by annihilating U.S. forces, Chinese forces could compel a U.S. retreat.\textsuperscript{1045} He proposed that after a period of rest, Peng should launch a spring offensive “with the purpose of achieving the final solution of the South Korea issue.”\textsuperscript{1046} On April 22, 1951, Chinese and North Koreans gather twelve armies to launch a fifth and final offensive designed to destroy most of the UN forces and establish communist superiority.\textsuperscript{1047} The campaign was a major failure; 17,000 Chinese troops surrendered in that fifth offensive, which up until then was a rare occurrence.\textsuperscript{1048} CPV sustained heavy losses; one Chinese division, the 180\textsuperscript{th} Division, was totally annihilated. With the offensive an obvious failure, the Chinese retreated north of the parallel, allowing the UN forces to regain their position on the Kansas line.\textsuperscript{1049}

The heavy losses suffered with the UN counteroffensive caused Chinese leaders to reconsider their aims and confidence and military force alone would allow them to achieve their goals in Korea.\textsuperscript{1050} After the costly offensives of January, February, April and May, communist leaders began to recognize that they were at a stalemate.\textsuperscript{1051} Chinese and Korean economies could no longer support the war, and the possibility of greater Soviet involvement became more and more remote. As Chinese faith in Soviet support decreased, the fear of U.S. escalation

\textsuperscript{1044} Chen, \textit{China’s Road}, 212-213.
\textsuperscript{1045} Chen, \textit{Mao’s War}, 96; Chen, \textit{China’s Road}, 213; Zhang, \textit{Mao’s Military Romanticism}, 143.
\textsuperscript{1046} Chen, CWIHPB, 90.
\textsuperscript{1047} Chen, \textit{Mao’s War}, 96.
\textsuperscript{1048} Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, 36.
\textsuperscript{1049} Acheson, \textit{The Korean War}, 115.
\textsuperscript{1050} Chen, \textit{Mao’s China}, 97. Christensen, \textit{Worse than a Monolith}.
\textsuperscript{1051} Christensen, \textit{Worse than a Monolith}, 111. Zhou Enlai gives an account of the war to Stalin in a conversation on August 20, 1952: saying that the war has been static since May 1951. See “Record of Conversation between Comrade I.V. Stalin and Zhou Enlai, 20 August 1952,” in CWIHPB, Doc. 3, 12.
After the failure of the fifth offensive the CCP CC convened in May 1951 to discuss the next steps in the war. According to then chief of staff Nie Rongzhen who was present at that meeting, “the opinion of the majority [was] that our forces should stop at the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel, continue fighting during the armistice talks, and strive to settle the war through negotiations.”

UN forces had been driven south of the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel, which had been a precondition for talks according to Mao. As then acting chief of staff Nie Rongzhen asserted,

Now that we have accomplished the political objective of driving the enemy out of North Korea, [we] should not cross the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel, [because] restoration of the status quo antebellum would be acceptable to all [the governments] that are involved [in the conflict].

Nie recalled later that Mao supported this idea of talking and fighting with the goal of achieving an armistice that would revert Korea to its prewar status. Mao began to consider talks and placing limitations on the scale of the CPV’s war effort. Mao and CCP were now ready to implement the strategy of talking while fighting, the new strategy of “preparing for a prolonged war while striving to end the war through peace negotiations.”

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1052 Malkasian, *The Korean War*, 8. Soviet military assistance proved more limited than Mao had hoped; he had wanted more aid to equip his troops as they prepared for future offensives. Though the disappointing telegram from Stalin expressing the limits of Soviet willingness to provide arms transfers to Mao arrived in June after the decision to engage in talks, this Soviet policy announcement was expected and likely influenced Mao’s decision. Christensen argues in contrast that the clear limitations of Soviet military assistance pushed Chinese to genuinely pursue a sustainable ceasefire and accept more limited objectives. See Christensen, *Worse than a Monolith*, 111-115.


1054 In his instructions to Peng Dehuai in December 1950, he articulated the precondition for talk, arguing that “we would never agree to start an armistice negotiation unless the U.S. imperialists withdraw back south of the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel.” Zhang, *Mao’s Military Romanticism*, 217.


1057 Chen, *China’s Road*, 213.

The history of Chinese involvement in the Korean War seems to support Paul Pillar’s argument that changes in the perceived possibility of direct achievement enhances a country’s willingness to engage in talks.\textsuperscript{1059} However, China did not offer talks in February when it switched to attritional limited war nor did it propose negotiations after the failed April offensive when the CCP officially declared a strategy of talking while fighting. Even though the Chinese thought the time was ripe to negotiate a ceasefire, it was important to avoid the impression that they were giving in to military pressure. Entertaining offers to talk could project an image of weakness and invite aggression. Demonstrating toughness before talks was therefore critical, and the impetus for Mao’s insistence that recovering the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel be a prerequisite to negotiating a truce.\textsuperscript{1060} The success of Chinese troops in pushing U.S./UN forces back from the Yalu to the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel allowed them to declare victory even in the face of the recent setbacks.\textsuperscript{1061} Moreover, Mao believed that the fact that China had “massed a large number of troops and already built up air and artillery forces” would impose some caution on the western powers and that “the enemy [would have] to take [our force build-up] into consideration in the negotiations.”\textsuperscript{1062} Stalin warned that “on the one hand we must carefully watch the military situation so as not to give the enemy the possibility of using this moment to his advantage, and on the other hand…[the Chinese and North Koreans] must…be prepared, in case of a demand by the enemy to begin negotiations, to send corresponding representatives to conduct negotiations.”\textsuperscript{1063} By the spring, the communists were confident that their military performance

\textsuperscript{1059} Pillar, \textit{Negotiating Peace}.
\textsuperscript{1060} Zhang, \textit{Mao’s Military Romanticism}, 157.
\textsuperscript{1061} Chen, \textit{Mao’s China}, 97.
\textsuperscript{1062} Zhang, \textit{Mao’s Military Romanticism}, 159.
\textsuperscript{1063} “30 June 1951, ciphered telegram, Mao Zedong to Filippov (Stalin),” \textit{CWIHPB}, Doc. 78, 64.
had discouraged further U.S. escalation. The CCP Central Committee in a directive explaining China’s decision to embracing talking while fighting, states:

[We] have fought for eight months in Korea and forced the enemy to recognize our strength and give up its original plans for [further] aggression so that [we] have safeguarded the security of both the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and the People’s Republic of China. These are the direct outcomes of our war to resist America and aid Korea.\(^{1064}\)

China’s concerns about projecting weakness kept its leadership from demonstrating its readiness to talk for the three months before the two sides met in Kaesong in July. While these motivations are strategic in nature, Chinese domestic politics were influential in convincing the leadership that total victory was not a possibility. Part of Mao’s motivation in the Korea war was to help the CCP consolidate control over China and mobilize the population for a total transformation of Chinese society by increasing awareness of the external threat.\(^{1065}\) Mao believed that if properly managed, he could use momentum and success on the peninsula to consolidate and strengthen his power in China.\(^{1066}\) Victory in the war could promote Chinese prestige and influence and contribute to Mao’s efforts to be leader of the communist revolution in Asia.\(^{1067}\) Mao’s pursuit of total victory was motivated in part by the new wave of patriotism and revolutionary nationalism in China. Victories on the battlefield would only serve to broaden the movement and result in the true acceptance of Mao and the CCP as the rightful leaders of China.\(^{1068}\) However, there is no historical evidence to suggest that a desire to use the war as an opportunity to “mobilize the masses as well as to inspire the comrade-in-arms” was a reason to

\(^{1064}\) Xia, *Negotiating with the Enemy*, 51.
\(^{1065}\) Chen, *China’s Road*, 218.
\(^{1066}\) Chen, *China’s Road*, 129.
\(^{1067}\) Chen, *China’s Road*, 130
\(^{1068}\) Chen, *Mao’s China*, 95.
delay talks.\textsuperscript{1069} Once the Chinese decided to talk while fighting, the leadership launched a propaganda campaign to justify the decision to end the war.\textsuperscript{1070} In other words, the CCP did not make strategic decisions about talking while fighting based on the preferences of the people; instead they were strategic about their diplomatic maneuvers during the war and carefully sold their decisions through propaganda campaigns to mobilize public support afterwards.

**The Breakthrough**

Throughout May 1951, U.S. officials put out peace feelers, “cast[ing] about like a pack of hounds searching for a scent.”\textsuperscript{1071} U.S. officials followed every lead that suggested the Soviets were interested in opening up talks, with little luck. The administration had received the recommendation from a reliable source that the Chinese may be more amenable to an agreement, but a member of the Policy Planning Staff went to Hong Kong and made himself available to contacts to no avail.\textsuperscript{1072} After China’s fifth offensive had clearly failed, the United States seized the moment to facilitate talks. On May 31 and June 5, George Kennan met with the Soviet ambassador to the UN, Jacob Malik, to discuss prospects of a ceasefire. This move followed early feelers sent out to lower-level U.S. officials by Malik.\textsuperscript{1073} The purpose of this initiative, approved by President Truman, would be to communicate U.S. intentions and desires not to escalate further, and to probe the Soviet views. Kennan offered narrow terms, a termination of hostilities in place and the establishment of a central authority to oversee compliance of any agreement signed, with no additional inducements for the Chinese.\textsuperscript{1074} After an initial meeting on May 31, the two met again and Malik communicated that the Soviet Union had been open to the

\textsuperscript{1069} Chen, *China’s Road*, 127.
\textsuperscript{1070} Chen, *Mao’s War*, 100.
\textsuperscript{1071} Acheson, *The Korean War*, 119.
\textsuperscript{1072} Acheson, *The Korean War*, 119.
\textsuperscript{1073} Christensen, *Worse than a Monolith*, 112.
\textsuperscript{1074} Foot, *Substitute for Victory*, 36.
idea of talks since early in the spring and wanted a truce at the “earliest possible moment.” At this point, Stalin, Mao, and Kim were all in agreement that “an armistice [was] now advantageous.” In June 1950, Zhou and Mao met with Kim to persuade him to accept this limited goal of the restoration of the 38th parallel as a short-term goal. Consequently, the North Koreans changed their propaganda from driving “the enemy into the sea” to driving “the enemy to the 38th parallel.”

Even though both China and the United States were open to talks, neither country was willing to offer them. China maintained a defensive position while “wait[ing] for the enemy to make an appeal [for negotiation].” Mao explained his strategy to Stalin, arguing “the position at the front in June will be such that our forces will be comparatively weaker than those of the enemy. In July we will be stronger than in June and in August we will be even stronger. We will be ready in August to make a stronger blow to the enemy.” This would only be the case “if the enemy does not send new reinforcements to Korea and does not make an amphibious landing” in the meantime. Mao requests that the Soviets bring up the possibility of an armistice and convince the U.S./UN to appeal to China.

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1076 “13 June 1951, ciphered telegram, Filippov (Stalin) to Mao Zedong re meeting in Moscow with Gao Gang and Kim Il Sung,” *CWIHPB*, Doc. 69, 60.
1078 Reiter, *How Wars End*, 82.
1080 “13 June 1951, ciphered telegram, Mao Zedong to Filippov (Stalin) via Roshchin,” *CWIHPB*, Doc. 70, 61.
On June 23, 1951, Malik gave a radio address in which he called for “a ceasefire and an armistice providing for the mutual withdrawal of forces from the 38th parallel.” The Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromkyo clarified to the U.S. satisfaction that the talks would be between military commanders for the purpose of arranging a military armistice, and would not include provisions regarding political and territorial matters. The ambassadors from the UN contributing countries met and approved the move to open negotiations, even though South Korea did not support the initiative. The Chinese were also not enthusiastic about the idea of pursuing talks under those conditions. The Chinese had argued last in December and January that they needed assurances that political issues would be discussed before talks could begin. But China relaxed some of its preconditions, agreeing to talk on July 2, 1951, even though Taiwan, PRC’s UN representation, and the removal of all foreign troops after the ceasefire were not explicitly part of the agenda. They did, however, continually stress that the Soviet proposal was only a first step, implying that they were hoping to widen the terms of discussion.

General Ridgway made the first direct move in response to Malik’s radio address. On June 30, 1951, he broadcast to the Communist Forces Commander that if they were prepared to enter into talks concerning a ceasefire and armistice as had been reported, Ridgway was willing to send representatives. Ridgway suggested that the two sides meet aboard a Danish hospital ship in Wonsan harbor to hammer out the armistice agreements and like his communist

1082 Foot, Substitute for Victory, 37.
1083 Foot, Substitute for Victory, 37.
1084 The negotiating team for the UN consisted of Vice Admiral C. Turner, U.S. Navy, chief delegate; Major General Paik Sun Yup, Republic of Korea Army; Major General Laurence C. Craigie, U.S. Air Force; Major General Henry I. Hodes, U.S. Eighth Army; and Rear Admiral Arleigh A. Burke, U.S. Navy. See Acheson, The Korean War, 121.
1085 Christensen, Worse than a Monolith, 115; Chen, Mao’s War, 98.
1086 Foot, Substitute for Victory, 37.
1087 Acheson, The Korean War, 122.
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counterparts, tried to phrase this proposal to suggest the initiative came from the other side. The communists rejected this proposal two days later, not surprisingly because Denmark was associated with the UN side; Mao was also against this proposal because Genzan was a fortified sea base of North Korea and talks there would entail an enemy landing. The communists came back with the offer of meeting at Kaesong, an ancient capital of Korea approximately midway between the two sides, and talks began on July 10.

The ratchet model predicts that states are concerned that demonstrating a readiness to talk will signal weakness that could encourage the opponent to ratchet up their war effort. The previous sections on strategic thinking in China and the United States in the lead up to the July talks outline how both countries had come to the realization that they would not be able to accomplish their goals with force alone. Both sides were seeking an end because the war was taking a great toll on them in terms of manpower, destruction of industry and military expenditures. However, as they deliberated about talking while fighting, demonstrating toughness was consistently presented as an important way to counteract the potential risk of looking weak. Both sides also refused to offer talks themselves, choosing to probe each other’s positions before July through intermediaries and then urging the Soviet Union to be the one to actually verbalize the necessity for ceasefire talks.

All sides even publicized Malik’s proposal in a way that suggested the talks were the other side’s idea. Ridgway’s statement was carefully constructed “in order to avoid a sign of weakness on the UNC side.”

On June 29 he broadcast this statement crafted to suggest that

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1088 “30 June 1951, ciphered telegram, Mao Zedong to Filippov (Stalin),” CWIHPB, Doc. 79, 64.
1089 Foot, Substitute for Victory, 43.
1090 Malkasian, The Korean War, 87.
the Communists had taken the initiative: “I am informed that you may wish a meeting to discuss
an armistice providing for the cessation of hostilities and all acts of armed force in Korea, with
adequate guarantees for the maintenance of such an armistice.”\textsuperscript{1092} Beijing responded
immediately, with statements suggesting that the United States was the side suing for peace
because it had suffered great military defeats. An article in Renmin Ribao argued that Beijing
had always supported a peaceful settlement to the Korea issue, but “it was not until
recently…[that]…severe blows to the American Army…[and]…the general demands for peace
of the peoples of the world” compelled the United States to accept Malik’s proposal to launch
talks.\textsuperscript{1093} The North Korean press focused on Ridgeway’s offer instead of Malik’s original
proposal and the Chinese broadcast Malik’s call for talks with details of a ceasefire proposal put
forth by a U.S. senator over a month earlier.\textsuperscript{1094} Therefore, while both sides believed they had
reached a stalemate, and neither side would escalate to break it because it was too costly, all
participants still tried to mitigate the costs of demonstrating a readiness to talk.

In the United States, many issued objections as soon as Malik called for talks. Some
officials, mostly military commanders in Tokyo at UN headquarters or Korea, expressed their
persistent view that increased military pressure, not talks, would allow the United States to
achieve its objectives on the peninsula.\textsuperscript{1095} The Far Eastern Air Force commander expressed
reservations about entering into talks without firm guarantees of future Communist behavior; the
Joint Chiefs Intelligence Committee concluded that a ceasefire would only serve to allow the
Communists to regain the military initiative.\textsuperscript{1096} John Foster Dulles was wary of entering into

\textsuperscript{1092} Xia, \textit{Negotiating with the Enemy}, 50.
\textsuperscript{1093} Xia, \textit{Negotiating with the Enemy}, 50.
\textsuperscript{1094} Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, 37.
\textsuperscript{1095} Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, 10.
\textsuperscript{1096} Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, 10.
negotiations, because he believed that when the opponent agreed to talks this was “a sign of weakness and/or failure.”

Though Mao believed that an armistice before the end of 1951 was possible, he clearly instructed his negotiators that they should not demonstrate excessive eagerness to end the war and be prepared for it to go on for another year. Mao advised Peng Dehuai, Gao Gang, and Kim Il Sung on July 3rd “to heighten vigilance up to the limit. Units of the first line must be prepared to repulse a possible large scale attack by the enemy and intensive bombing of our rear either before or during negotiations, which the enemy may undertake in order to force us to sign a disadvantageous agreement.” About two weeks after talks began, Mao instructed Peng to prepare the troops for more combat operations because it is unclear “whether the enemy truly intends to talk about peace.” On August 12, 1951, Mao laments that his concerns about heightened aggression were correct: “the mistaken views of the enemy have…intensified and the enemy has become even more convinced that we yearn for peace, and therefore it is possible to get concessions from us.” Throughout the next two years of negotiations, both sides continue to be cautious about displaying excessive eagerness to end the war through talks.

Throughout the talks, the Chinese continued to be cautious not to give the impression that they were giving into military pressure. When talks broke down in October 1951, the communist negotiators approached Mao about restarting the talks. He was opposed to broaching the topic, arguing, “if we initiate the resumption of the negotiation … it would leave the opponents with

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1101 “13 August 1951, ciphered telegram, Mao Zedong to Filippov (Stalin), conveying 12 August 1951 telegram from Li Kenong to Mao re armistice talks,” *CWIHPB*, Doc. 87, 67.
an impression that we are anxious to achieve peace thus suggesting a sign of weakness."\textsuperscript{1102} In November that year, Mao argued that “[although] we must apply flexibly tactics [in the negotiation], we shall never show any [sign] of anxiety to achieve peace.”\textsuperscript{1103} It was important not to seem anxious to end the war, but seem like they were ready and willing to fight a protracted war. In October 1952, Zhou wrote “discontinuing talks [as the U.S./UN side did on October 8] is an extremely unreasonable action, and the conditions he proposes for their resumption are basically an ultimatum, we refuse and cannot accept them.”\textsuperscript{1104}

The North Koreans were criticized in particular for projecting weakness and encouraging greater military pressure. During the first year of the war, Kim had been the most aggressive alliance member, arguing against talks though he had little choice but to concede to Mao and Stalin’s positions. Archival evidence from the June 13 meeting suggests Kim was reluctant and somewhat bitter towards the Chinese, who he believed were acting too eager to reach a ceasefire with the United States.\textsuperscript{1105} But by July 1951, with no prospect of uniting the peninsula under his control, Kim perceived the continued destruction of his country to be the result of a larger conflict between his allies and the United States. The economic and human costs of war had taken a toll on Kim, who in February 1952 told Mao that he had “no desire to continue the war.”\textsuperscript{1106} U.S. bombing of the country was having a significant impact; in July 1952 the bombings put out of operation all the electrical stations in Korea and in one 24-hour period of the bombing of Pyongyang, the DPRK suffered 6,000 civilian casualties.\textsuperscript{1107} It was obvious that the

\textsuperscript{1102} Zhang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 220.
\textsuperscript{1103} Zhang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 220.
\textsuperscript{1104} Beijing Foreign Ministry Archives, doc. 105-00027-06.
\textsuperscript{1105} Christensen, Worse than a Monolith, 115.
\textsuperscript{1106} Christensen, Worse than a Monolith, 118.
United States was trying to compel concessions at the bargaining table through its bombing campaigns. As Kim articulated in a telegram to Stalin, “the enemy almost without suffering any kind of losses constantly inflicts on [North Korea] huge losses in manpower and material values…the enemy, making use of this situation, makes demands in the negotiations that are unacceptable to us.”

The U.S. strategy partly worked; Kim pushed his allies to make concessions on the POW issue, which was delaying the conclusion of an armistice agreement. Kim also pushed for escalation, such as Chinese air offensives against South Korea, to increase negotiating leverage and ideally accelerating the ceasefire process. China and the Soviet Union resisted both strategies, agreeing with one another that taking a principled stance on the POW issue showed they were negotiating from a position of strength. Furthermore, while they saw some benefits in keeping the United States tied down, Stalin clearly wanted to avoid escalation that could lead to a wider war or undermine any attempts to secure an armistice. Because of this, Stalin dissuaded Kim from engaging in large offensives and advised only small-scale operations.

China and the Soviet Union also contended that the United States and its allies would exploit any perceived weakness. As Mao argues in a July 15, 1952 telegram, “accepting a provocative and fraudulent proposal from the enemy under the influence of its bombardment will place us in a disadvantageous position in political and military relations. The enemy will surely use this weakness of ours for further pressure on us, which will lead to new provocations from the side of

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1109 Christensen, Worse than a Monolith, 121.
1110 Christensen, Worse than a Monolith, 118.
1111 Christensen, Worse than a Monolith, 121.
CHAPTER EIGHT

the enemy.”1112 Three months later, Kim proposes to Stalin that they appeal to the General Assembly and Security Council to facilitate the acceleration of the resolution of the Korean problem. Stalin rejects this proposal immediately on November 19, 1952, criticizing Kim that his proposal “about making answerable those guilty of prolonging the war in Korea, could be evaluated in the present situation, in conditions of blackmail by the Americans, as a sign of weakness on the Chinese-Korean side, which is politically disadvantageous.”1113 In the end, with limited power, Kim was forced to surrender to the preferred strategies of his allies.1114

For the next two years, both sides tried to use military pressure to gain advantage at the bargaining table. Neither side believed anything positive would come of the negotiations unless they were in a position of strength on the battlefield.1115 But there were no decisive battles and neither side was able to demonstrate the ability to overwhelm the other. During the talking while fighting, Ridgway attempted to minimum the losses by not taking on any major offensives.1116 Instead the United States relied on bombing to compel the communists to give in at the negotiating table.1117 Beijing also abandoned large offensives to adopt a strategy of aggressive defense in which the prospects of increasing casualties and costs would hopefully cause the

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1113 “19 November 1951, VKP(b) CC Politburo decision with approved message from Gromkyo to Razuvaev,” CWIHPB, Doc. 96, 72.
1114 This does not mean that Kim stopped trying. As late as March 29, 1953, Kim made his case again to a USSR representative, “underscore[ing] that the time has come to show initiative from our side on the question of the conclusion of the war in Korea and achievement of peace.” See “29 March 1953, ciphered telegram from Kuznetsov and Fedoreenko in Pyongyang,” CWIHPB, Doc. 113, 83.
1115 Chen, China’s Road, 213.
1116 Acheson, The Korean War, 127.
1117 As Kim lamented, “the enemy’s bombardment of our railways is part of its strategic scheme aiming at frustrating our efforts to fight a protracted war and exerting pressure on our negotiations at Keasong. Zhang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 173.
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U.S./UN to agree to its minimum terms while decreasing its own human and material costs.\textsuperscript{1118} Mao fundamentally believed that the more costs the Americans absorbed, the more willing they would be to make concessions. In November 1951, he argued, “in view of the large losses at the front over the last two months and the increase in demands within American and outside its borders for cessation of military operations, the possibility of the American side accepting the conditions for an armistice has increased.”\textsuperscript{1119}

This chapter does not address a critical part of the war’s history, specifically how two years of negotiation finally led to a settlement. Some argue that Eisenhower’s nuclear threats were the determining factor in bringing the Korean War to an end; others contend that there is little evidence to support this hypothesis and the exhaustion of three years of fighting motivated the Communists.\textsuperscript{1120} Elizabeth Stanley argues that Stalin saw utility in prolonging the war and that his death allowed for Mao and Kim to then pursue their preferred strategies of making concessions on the POW issue to allow for the signing of an armistice agreement.\textsuperscript{1121} Though it is not the focus of this study, evaluating the conditions under which talks end in a negotiated settlement is an important topic for the war termination literature.

This study of the Korean War focuses on why North Korea, China and the United States eschewed talks for the first year of the war and why and how ceasefire negotiations emerged in July 1951. This chapter argues that the leadership in Beijing and the United States came to the conclusion that they could not accomplish their goals by force alone; the United States had

\textsuperscript{1118} Chen, \textit{Mao’s War}, 106. In October 1951, the Chinese called off sixth campaign designed to put pressure on the United States by expanding operations because of their logistical vulnerabilities. Chen, \textit{Mao’s War}, 105.
\textsuperscript{1119} “14 November 1951, ciphered telegram, Mao Zedong to Filippov (Stalin),” \textit{CWIHPB}, Doc. 93, 70.
\textsuperscript{1120} Malkasian, \textit{The Korean War}, 87.
\textsuperscript{1121} Stanley, \textit{Paths to Peace}, 100-108.
accepted this reality by February, the Chinese by March. The ratchet model explains why talks did not occur until three months after this point. Both sides had abandoned the war aim of total victory, and as a stalemate emerged near the 38th parallel, the precondition for a ceasefire of a return to the status quo ante was partly met. The fear of projecting weakness persisted, but by spring 1951 both sides were confident the other was unwilling to pay the high costs necessary to escalate to break the stalemate and gain advantage. Both sides still wanted to further mitigate the risk of the ratchet effect, and therefore never offered talks themselves, but urged the Soviet Union as a third party to make the suggestion. The next section evaluates alternative explanations for why neither side offered talks throughout the war and did not agreed to external offers to open up negotiations until July 1951.

**Alternative Perspectives on Diplomatic Behavior**

There are four possible alternative explanations of diplomatic behavior during the Korean War. The information approach contends that talks emerged in July 1951 because information asymmetries had been resolved at this point. Another possible explanation is that the credible commitment problem had been resolved and therefore all sides could finally enter into talks with the expectation of reaching an agreement that was self-enforcing. Third, a realpolitik approach posits that the dynamics of great power politics, not the strategic interaction between the warring parties, determined the timing and nature of the talks. Lastly, I evaluate a domestic politics argument that the U.S. position on talks fluctuated during the war in accordance with public opinion and elite political pressure.

**Resolved Information Asymmetries**

If countries go to war because of incomplete information about the resolve of their opponent and the balance of power, then peace talks should emerge when combat has revealed
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enough information to open up bargaining space between the two sides. If this explains the emergence of talks in July 1951, then states should be uncertain about the balance of power before July and in agreement about their expectations by the time talks emerged.

Learning is definitely part of the story (and part of my ratchet model), but cannot alone explain the process that led to talks. In his book on war termination, Dan Reiter argues that from mid-September 1950 until spring 1951, information dynamics can best explain U.S. strategic thinking about ending the war. He argues that the United States updated its assessment of the likelihood of victory once China intervened as well as the costs of conquest of North Korea because escalation might involve a general war with China or even the Soviet Union. In Reiter’s words “the key factor that causes the U.S. to abandon its pursuit of absolute victory…is a rise in the expected cost of pursuing a solution to the commitment problem.”

While this case study provides support for the argument that changes in the military situation compelled both the United States and later China to abandon the pursuit of total victory, it does not explain the timing of talks. One would expect both sides to be willing to engage in talks after this updating occurred, but neither China nor the United States ever offered talks during the war. Furthermore, the United States still refused talks in late November, early December 1950 to offer talks even after the pursuit of total victory had been abandoned. The United States was only open up to the idea of talks six months after it believed China was unlikely to ratchet in response. The Chinese case follows the logic of the information dynamics prediction a bit more closely in that the CCP leadership became open to talks after the failure of the spring offensive. But even though China was open to the idea, it still refused to offer talks, and did not accept any proposals for them until three months after Mao switched from total

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1122 Reiter, How Wars End, 64.
1123 Reiter, How Wars End, 64.
victory to a limited war. This approach cannot account for the time delay between readiness to talk and when talks actually emerged, nor can it explain why the two participants refused to offer talks at all.

A related information-oriented argument is that states agree to talks when they have learned enough to know the range of agreements acceptable to both sides. This would make the opening of talks a formality that requires coordination but not much strategic thought. In the case of the Korean War, when the two sides agreed to talks, they were optimistic that the process would quickly lead to an armistice agreement. Western newsmen allegedly set up a betting pool on the duration of the talks, with the most pessimistic estimate being six weeks; the members of the Chinese delegation only brought with them summer clothes and the first Americans to arrive at Kaesong were told to pack dress uniforms for the signing ceremony.\textsuperscript{1124} The diplomats at the UN began to consider immediately what should follow a ceasefire.\textsuperscript{1125} But it became obvious to all sides relatively immediately that there would be no swift diplomatic solution; the participants spent the first three weeks of the ceasefire talks just trying to finalize an agenda for what would be discussed.\textsuperscript{1126} At this point, when there was clearly a lack of consensus on the range of agreements that would be acceptable by both sides, both sides still continued talks. The negotiating took two years and required approximately 575 meetings.\textsuperscript{1127} Therefore, it is difficult to argue that talks are a mere formality to coordinate the drafting and signing of a peace accord.

\textsuperscript{1124} Rose, \textit{How Wars End}, 129.
\textsuperscript{1125} Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, 17.
\textsuperscript{1126} The talks would take place over four stages: the establishment of a demarcation line between the two opposing sides, arrangements for a cease-fire, arrangements for POWs, and then recommendations on the political issues. Rose, \textit{How Wars End}, 128-129. It took about 22 hours spread over 17 days, seven of which there were no meetings held, for the all sides to establish the agenda. See Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, 46.
\textsuperscript{1127} Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, ix.
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The information approach also has difficulty explaining why fighting continued throughout the negotiations if the information asymmetries had been sufficiently resolved. Fighting even escalated slightly during this period of talks. The largest bombing raid of the war, a second strike on Pyongyang, was launched on August 29, 1952 during the second attempt to reach a ceasefire agreement.\textsuperscript{1128} Even in the final days before the ceasefire was reached in 1952, both sides escalated the war. The Chinese attacked South Korean positions around Kaesong from June 10 until the ceasefire was signed on June 16. The UNC also escalated by intensifying the air war. For the first time since the beginning of hostilities, Sabre squadrons were instructed not just to ward off MiG attacks, but also to seek out and destroy the MiG-15s in MiG alley. In May, June and July 1953, Sabre sorties were doubled and over 150 MiGs were shot down equating to the greatest losses per month during the whole war.\textsuperscript{1129} Also for the first time, UNC aircraft targeted twenty North Korean dams that had been avoided in the past due to humanitarian concerns and risk of escalation.\textsuperscript{1130}

Lastly, the fact that in two years of fighting, little changed on the battlefield and at the negotiating table, “demonstrates the inefficiency of combat as a source of information.”\textsuperscript{1131} More than a quarter of the casualties occurred during the last two months of the war in which the communists launched two major offensives to try to compel President Eisenhower to agree to better terms than his predecessor. During those two months, it is estimated that the communists lost 108,458 people.\textsuperscript{1132} About 45 percent of all U.S. casualties occurred during these two years

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{1128} Malkasian, \textit{The Korean War}, 9.
\textsuperscript{1129} Malkasian, \textit{The Korean War}, 83.
\textsuperscript{1130} Malkasian, \textit{The Korean War}, 83.
\textsuperscript{1131} Reiter, \textit{How Wars End}, 64.
\textsuperscript{1132} Acheson, \textit{The Korean War}, 129.
\end{footnotesize}
of talking while fighting. In the end, the settlement signed in July 1953 was practically identical to their positions two years earlier. Moreover, both sides’ unwillingness to offer concessions in the face of defeat on the battlefield is inconsistent with the information proposition that defeat makes concessions more likely. My ratchet model provides an explanation for why states would refuse talks after a defeat for fear that this would communicate weakness and encourage escalation.

**Self-Enforcing Agreements**

A credible commitment approach argues that a main obstacle to war termination is the concern that the opponent will renege on the peace agreement once more favorable war fighting conditions emerge. This means that wars end when this concern dissipates and the participants believe that any agreement signed will be self-enforcing. If this alternative argument has explanatory power for why talks emerged in the Korean War in July 1951, then countries should no longer be concerned about potential violations of a peace agreement at this point.

But the fears of 1950 had not disappeared by 1951. When talks began, the United States was still acutely apprehensive that North Korea would attack again once the balance of power tipped in its favor. More broadly, the United States was concerned about the credibility of any communist promise to abide by a peace settlement. The invasion had solidified a belief in the United States that communism was inherently aggressive and communist countries would

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1135 Reiter, *How Wars End*, 80. Reiter seems to suggest that the mere act of offering to engage in ceasefire talks is a concession, one that would send a credible signal of weakness.
1136 Reiter argues that U.S. position changed because the costs of defection of the agreement, the occupation of South Korea, were not worth the costs of continued fighting and potential escalation to a general war with the Chinese. Reiter, *How Wars End*, 81-82.
1137 Reiter, *How Wars End*, 75.
not hesitate to use force to conquer another country if they felt it would be successful.\textsuperscript{1138} The communists were seen, therefore, to be opportunistic, likely to renege even after promises of peace when the balance of forces once again swung in their favor.\textsuperscript{1139} During the summer of 1951 at the MacArthur hearings, group of influential senators argued that North Korea would reattack "on any flimsy pretext at any convenient opportunity." In December that year, Truman revealed his concerns stating "the Communists would build up after an armistice and then come right down the peninsula to Pusan."\textsuperscript{1140} Truman writes five months later in his diary that any agreement signed with the communists "would not be worth the paper it is written on. You’ve broken every agreement you made at Yalta and Potsdam. You have no morals [and] no honor."\textsuperscript{1141}

Neither side thought the armistice would be enduring, but instead just a stopgap measure. As Acheson explained in confidence to a British colleague, both the Russians and the Chinese "wish to achieve Communist control of the peninsula…[T]he prospects of [achieving a general political settlement in Korea] are not good. I think it probable that we should regard an armistice as something with which we much live for a considerable time and that therefore it must be adapted to this end."\textsuperscript{1142} When both sides agreed to talks in July, it was obvious that the most likely outcome was a stalemate and not the permanent settlement of the Korean issue.\textsuperscript{1143} The United States tried to mitigate the threat of the communists reneging by demanding a more defensible line of demarcation. The 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel was seen as an arbitrary line and U.S. leadership believed "any peace restored on the basis of the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel was likely to be unstable, inviting

\textsuperscript{1138} Reiter, \textit{How Wars End}, 77-78.
\textsuperscript{1139} Reiter, \textit{How Wars End}, 78.
\textsuperscript{1140} Reiter, \textit{How Wars End}, 83.
\textsuperscript{1141} Reiter, \textit{How Wars End}, 84.
\textsuperscript{1142} Rose, \textit{How Wars End}, 138.
\textsuperscript{1143} Foot, \textit{Substitute for Victory}, ix.
CHAPTER EIGHT

future Communist attack at a time of their choosing.” The Defense Department in a July 31, 1950 memo echoed this sentiment that if UN forces stopped at the 38th, “the former military instability would again obtain. The USSR could rearm a new striking force for a second attempt. Thus, a return to the status quo ante bellum would not promise security.” Acheson agreed, arguing “it would be folly to go back to the division of Korea at the 38th parallel” because this would be giving “asylum to the aggressor.” While the United States did get their preferred military demarcation line, which crosses the 38th parallel on an angle, little territory was gained or lost in the end, and the North Koreans were not taught that aggression would lead to the loss of territory.

Power Politics

The third possible alternative explanation for diplomatic behavior during the Korean War is that the Soviet Union dictated China and North Korea’s position on peace talks. Leaving aside what would have motivated the Soviet Union’s beliefs about talks during this period, for this explanation to be convincing, at least three things must be true. First of all, the Soviet Union would need a sufficiently high level of influence over its communist allies. Second, Stalin would have to have been against talks until June 1951. Third, the historical evidence should describe a situation in which Stalin pushed China and North Korea into talks in July.

The historical record shows that Stalin did have a great deal of influence over his communist allies. Both countries needed military assistance to fight UN forces on the peninsula; Moscow provided air cover to the Chinese against U.S. planes along the Korean-Manchurian

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1144 Reiter, How Wars End, 76.
1145 Reiter, How Wars End, 76.
1146 Reiter, How Wars End, 76.
border and also provided supplies, military equipment and advisors to both Kim and Mao.\footnote{Weathersby, “New Russian Documents,” 32.} Before the outbreak of war, the Soviet Union had built up the North Korean army, supplying sufficient equipment for six infantry divisions, three mechanized units, eight battalions of border troops and combat aircraft. The Soviets continued to supply all upgrades and ammunition throughout the war. At the time of the armistice, there were approximately 10,000 Soviet and Soviet bloc advisors, technicians and anti-aircraft in North Korea. The USSR provided 3,000 advisors to China as early as April 1950 though armaments and materiel did not flow in until August 1951. Given the influence of the USSR, Elizabeth Stanley characterizes North and South Korea as “powerless players” instead of as primary belligerents.\footnote{For more on the critical role of the Soviet Union, see Stanley, Paths to Peace, 70-75.}

Allen Whiting argues, on the other hand, that while Mao admittedly was dependent on Stalin for military and economic assistance, Moscow influenced Beijing’s decisions but did not dictate them.\footnote{Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 152.} One could argue that while China did not take orders from the Soviet Union on the battlefield, Stalin played a central role in formulating the diplomatic strategy for the communist side during the war. Both Mao and Kim often requested instructions from Stalin before taking any major diplomatic or strategic moves.\footnote{Stanley, Paths to Peace, 73.} Telegrams between Mao and Stalin demonstrate that Mao turned to the Soviets for advice before responding to UN resolutions.\footnote{For example, when the UN asked China the terms it would accept for a ceasefire in Korea, Zhou Enlai solicited Stalin’s opinion before responding. Weathersby, “New Russian Documents,” 32.} China needed Soviet support during this period politically as well, specifically for help in

\begin{thebibliography}{99}

\bibitem{weathersby} Weathersby, “New Russian Documents,” 32.
\bibitem{stanley} For more on the critical role of the Soviet Union, see Stanley, Paths to Peace, 70-75.
\bibitem{whiting} Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 152.
\bibitem{stanley2} Stanley, Paths to Peace, 73.
\bibitem{weathersby2} For example, when the UN asked China the terms it would accept for a ceasefire in Korea, Zhou Enlai solicited Stalin’s opinion before responding. Weathersby, “New Russian Documents,” 32.
\end{thebibliography}
resolving the problem of Taiwan because Russian air power would be needed to protect the PRC if the U.S. decided to actively support the KMT.\textsuperscript{1152}

While it is possible to argue that the Soviet Union had the degree of influence necessary to influence whether its allies engaged in peace talks, the historical record undermines the last two parts of the observable implications of the realpolitik approach. The Soviet Union tried to facilitate talks on numerous occasions before June 1951. As early as August 1950, Stalin was pushing the North Koreans to abandon total victory and engage in talks when it became obvious that his assessments of U.S. resolve and DPRK military effectiveness had been incorrect. Stalin did not want to risk direct confrontation with the United States in order to save Kim Il Sung’s regime.\textsuperscript{1153}

Secondly, Stalin did not push China to accept talks in June 1951; on the contrary, the United States and China approached the Soviet Union about serving as an intermediary. Moreover, when China switched to talking while fighting in May 1951, Kim Il Sung was not in agreement. In a visit to Beijing in June, the two sides were still not able to reach a consensus as Kim was unwilling to accept the new strategy. He thought the CPV/KPA forces still had the advantage, and that they would be in a better negotiating position after they destroyed a greater number of U.S./UN forces.\textsuperscript{1154} But in the end, Kim was forced to yield to China’s position given that he did not have the combat ability to fight the U.S./UN independently because Chinese troops made up the majority of combat power in Korea at the time.\textsuperscript{1155} Once talks began Stalin preferred to prolong the process, but China’s position determined when talks actually

\textsuperscript{1152} Whiting, \textit{China Crosses the Yalu}, 51.
\textsuperscript{1153} Chen, \textit{China’s Road}, 161.
\textsuperscript{1154} Chen, \textit{Mao’s China}, 97.
\textsuperscript{1155} Chen, \textit{Mao’s China}, 98.
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emerged.\textsuperscript{1156} In short, while the Soviet Union may have had the capability to determine whether or not its allies engaged in talking while fighting, its preferences did not correspond with the timing of evading then accepting talks, and the initiative to talk stemmed from Mao, not Stalin.

Since my model presents the preferences of the United States as determining the diplomatic behavior of the UN side, there is no symmetrical alternative realpolitik argument for explaining the diplomatic behavior of the UN side. I argued earlier in this case study that the United States dominated the other UN countries, and therefore the other contributors’ position on talking while fighting had little impact. Washington exhibited such overwhelming dominance economically and militarily in this period, that it could always gain support for the positions it held firmly. For example, the United States transitioned to pursuing total victory in the fall 1950, despite the UN opposition.\textsuperscript{1157} When its partners pressed for changes in U.S. policy, Truman and later Eisenhower would remind them of their dependence and the continued popularity of isolationist views in the United States.\textsuperscript{1158} Even South Korea did not have much say in U.S. strategic moves. When the United States was ready to sign an armistice, President Syngman Rhee was vehemently opposed to it, preferring instead that Korea be unified under his control and all Chinese forces withdrawn.\textsuperscript{1159} His refusal to sign it, however, did not keep the United States from forging ahead.\textsuperscript{1160}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1156} For more on Stalin’s preference to draw out talks, see Stanley, Paths to Peace, 100-108. From the beginning of talks, Moscow and Beijing fully coordinated their positions. See Christensen, Worse than a Monolith, 115.
\item \textsuperscript{1157} During the August debates, the British, Norwegian and Indian delegates the restoration of the status quo ante bellum as a sufficient condition for a ceasefire; neutral delegations were against unifying the Korean peninsula by force and many Afro-Asian nations demonstrated their opposition to U.S. policy through abstentions. Whiting, China Crosses the Yalu, 114.
\item \textsuperscript{1158} Foot, Substitute for Victory, 6.
\item \textsuperscript{1159} Malkasian, The Korean War, 86.
\item \textsuperscript{1160} Rose, How Wars End, 136.
\end{itemize}
While the United States was the dominant player within the UN coalition, South Korea’s inflexibility coupled with western allies’ desire for a compromise to end the war did create restraints on U.S. policy. The degree to which the United States should consider its western allies’ positions was a topic of much debate in Washington, encased in a more fundamental debate about the source of U.S. power. The State Department believed the key to securing the U.S. dominant position in world politics was to obtain the consent of its allies for its policies, including those in Korea. The Defense Department tended to argue that less attention should be given to allied positions and more on signaling firmness and resolve to their communist opponents. Either way, the other UN contributors would have preferred to fight only a limited war and enable talks sooner, neither of which occurred. This suggests that they did not have the influence to direct U.S. policy.

U.S. Domestic Public

The fourth alternative explanation focuses on U.S. diplomatic behavior and posits that U.S. domestic public opinion determined the government’s position on talking while fighting. If this explanation is correct, that President Truman should have pursued policies that would enhance his popularity, and before June 1951 we should see little public support for peace talks. After the blatant act of North Korean aggression, Truman did see the benefits of the initial intervention on South Korea’s behalf for boosting his anti-communist credentials and silencing critics like Senator Joe MacCarthy who accused him of being soft on communism. Domestic politics inspired Truman’s push for a UN resolution condemning China as aggressor when it intervened. John Foster Dulles, himself a Republican but brought into the administration to

1161 Foot, *Substitute for Victory*, xi.
1163 Foot, *Substitute for Victory*, 32-34.
enhance bipartisan support, thought talks so early in the conflict would confuse the public and hurt the case of the administration’s increased defense spending program. The emergence of armistice talks in December 1950 was seen as appeasement by certain members of Congress and to a degree to the wider America public.

But Truman was also comfortable with going against the grain of public opinion if it meant better results in the war. He had responded favorably to the December UN resolution, for example, at great political cost. His decision to fire the staunchest fighter against communism, General MacArthur in 1951, for deviating from White House policy, was wildly unpopular. One newspaper even openly called for Truman’s impeachment. The American people loved General MacArthur; seven million people lined the streets of New York to welcome him back from Asia and a session of Congress gave him a standing ovation. When Truman did agree to talks in June 1951, he was criticized greatly. Senators Taft and Richard M. Nixon set the stage by arguing that any truce at the 38th parallel would be an “appeasement peace” and that talks would only allow the communists to bid time to build up their forces. Taft argued that the goal should be “complete triumph,” and anything short of that meant that “140,000 casualties and billions of dollars” had been wasted.

Additionally, talks did not come at a time of low or decreasing public approval for the war. Public opinion exhibited high support in the beginning of the war, with a drop when China intervened, and then consistent and moderate support during the remaining two and a half years. In other words, escalating casualties in the case of Korea did not erode public support for the

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1164 Foot, Substitute for Victory, 23.
1165 Reiter, How Wars End, 86.
1166 Foot, Substitute for Victory, 8.
1167 Foot, Substitute for Victory, 38.
When talks were launched, public support for the war had been roughly consistent the previous seven months. The U.S. public, though it did not quite support the group within the Republican Party that argued for an end to negotiations and to expand the war to China with the objective of reunification, was generally impatient with Truman’s strategy. The U.S. public was primarily concerned with the length of time its troops would be expected to fight on the peninsula, and therefore when the armistice talks were launched, 74 percent of respondents supported this move once the step to open up talks was taken. However, as talks dragged on for two years, the percentage of respondents that stopped supporting the talks and instead wanted the U.S. to move more towards a policy of expanded war as presented by General MacArthur increased, but Truman’s policy on talking while fighting did not change.\textsuperscript{1169}

**Conclusion**

For more than one year, from June 1950 to July 1951, the two sides fought without talking, thereby undermining any prospect for peace by negotiated settlement. Talks were not possible for the first ten months because North Korea, then the United States, and then China, were seeking the complete destruction of their opponent. Moreover, when a country was fighting a limited war, the fear of projecting weakness was so acute that none of the participants offered talks, and besides one instance in which the United States agreed to the December 1950 UN resolution (more for international political points because it did not believe talks would occur), neither side accepted outside offers until Malik’s June radio address. Only when the leadership in Beijing and Washington converged on the belief that total victory was not a possibility and the other side would not escalate because of the costs of war, was the threat of the ratchet effect sufficiently mitigated. However, because there was a residual risk that the opponent would

\textsuperscript{1168} Reiter, *How Wars End*, 87-88.
\textsuperscript{1169} Foot, *Substitute for Victory*, 9.
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ratchet up the war effort if it perceived weakness, both sides preferred to work through an intermediary, the Soviet Union, to probe each other’s positions and get talks started. Both sides compromised their previously strict positions on preconditions to allow for the emergence of peace talks; the United States no longer found it necessary to take territory as punishment for the DPRK invasion and China agreed not to discuss political conditions at the ceasefire talks.

Over the course of the three years of the Korean War, both sides experienced great destruction and loss, and none more than the Koreans themselves. North Korea lost 600,000 soldiers and approximately 2 million civilian casualties; one million South Korea civilians were killed or injured and in the military 70,000 were killed, 150,000 wounded and 80,000 captured. The United States dropped 635,000 tons of bombs (compared with the 503,000 dropped in the Pacific theater during WWII) and 32,557 tons of napalm on North Korea. Korea also lost most of its industrial base and five million of its citizens were forced to become refugees. On the American side, 33,665 soldiers were killed in action and 3,275 died of nonhostile causes; 92,134 Americans were wounded in action, while 8,176 were reported missing. UN allies lost 3,094 in battle and 16,532 were wounded; an estimated 900,000 million Chinese soldiers were killed in combat. The time it took to open and then conclude talks had a real price. The last diplomatic issue, the repatriation of POWs, took almost two years to resolve. A slow flow of concessions eventually culminated in an armistice agreement signed by three of the four primary parties on July 27, 1952, creating a two and a half mile wide demilitarized zone that still exists today.

1170 Foot, Substitute for Victory, 208.
1171 Malkasian, The Korean War, 88.
1172 Cumings, The Korean War, 35. These statistics, however, are still in dispute.
1173 South Korea did not sign.
Chapter Nine
Conclusion

This chapter evaluates and analyzes the findings concerning leaders’ strategic thinking about the potential risks involved with talking while fighting, the effectiveness of escalation, and the eventual emergence of wartime negotiations in three cases: the Vietnam War, the Sino-Indian War, and the Korean War. Throughout the dissertation I have argued that my ratchet model best explains why there is a period after a war erupts in which countries are not engaging in talks and why talks emerge when they do. However, these case studies also shed light on three auxiliary issues related to wartime negotiations that create further avenues of research: the role of domestic politics, the need for third party mediators, and how asymmetry in power may create the greatest obstacles for talks. I then address the theoretical contributions and policy implications of this dissertation to our understanding of war termination, signaling, and civil-military relations in war planning. I conclude with a synthesis of U.S. and Chinese coercive diplomacy in Asia during these conflicts and derive lessons from each of these countries’ experiences. The next section highlights similar patterns throughout the three case studies on the emergence of wartime negotiations and proposes topics for future research.

The Role of Domestic Politics

My cases demonstrate that a country’s perceived cost differential, not its domestic political system, determine whether it offers talks during the course of a war. In my three cases, India and the United States, both democracies refused to make offers during the Sino-Indian War and Korean War respectively. China, an autocracy, made offers in the Sino-Indian War but refused in the Korean War, as did North Vietnam in the Vietnam War. Through process tracing, I outline how leaders primarily considered the reaction of their opponents and how this would
impact the war effort when debating about whether to offer or accept talks. While all belligerents, democracies and autocracies, also considered the domestic implications of escalation or capitulation, talks emerged not because the domestic publics or governing coalitions demanded them, but because the ratchet effect had been adequately mitigated.

However domestic politics could impact whether talks emerge in less direct ways. If democracies can more credibly signal that they will not ratchet in response to perceived weakness of an opponent who has offered talks, then logically it should be the most difficult to start talks in wars in which the country with the larger perceived CD is an autocracy. An avenue of further research would test whether it takes longer for talks to emerge in wars in which the larger perceived CD country is an autocracy. Among the three cases in this dissertation, the Sino-Indian War is the only one that fits in this category of least likely for talks to emerge – and they never did.

While the ratchet model is dyadic and strategic in that a country is primarily concerned with how an offer to talk will influence the war fighting behavior of the other side, public opinion and the views of the political opposition played an important role within the ratchet model for all three cases. In my model I argue that the country with the smaller perceived CD has to believe it has demonstrated toughness, thereby discouraging further escalation on the part of its opponent. One way public opinion could be influential is that public discontents for the war could signal to the opponent that the country in question is unlikely to ratchet up its war effort. In a democracy, public discontents with the costs of the war could be a credible signal that the country in question faces domestic limitations to escalation, contributing to the reduction of the risks of the ratchet effect. For example, in the case of the Vietnam War, President Johnson’s offer to talk was considered genuine largely because he agreed to adhere partially to Hanoi’s
precondition of halting all bombing. But Hanoi was further reassured by the American public discontents with the war and statements made in late 1967, early 1968 by political elites arguing that the United States should extricate itself from the war.1174 I argue that the country with the smaller perceived CD believes it must demonstrate toughness to discourage escalation before talks can begin. The Tet Offensive was designed to seek maximum shock effect and achieve this goal. While tactically a failure, the offensive was a huge psychological victory because it demonstrated to the American people that the war was not going as well as their leaders had told them. The domestic political reaction to the Tet Offensive in the United States communicated to the DRV that they had succeeded. In early March, Congress demanded to be consulted on any decision to expand the war, increasing the limitations on escalation.1175 But more work needs to be done to see if domestic political opposition to a war in a democracy does help mitigate the risks of the ratchet effect by credibly signaling that escalation is unlikely, making the period of fighting without talking shorter than it would be otherwise.

Public opinion in a democracy can also influence the decisions of the country with the larger perceived CD. For talks to emerge not only must the smaller CD country believe it demonstrated toughness, but the larger CD country must come to terms with the idea that it cannot accomplish its goals through the use of force alone. In the early days of the Sino-Indian War, Chinese leaders believed that they could compel India to enter into talks. Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi articulated the view that “India cannot completely avoid talks. According to our estimates, currently India will fight for a short period, and in the end it will accept peaceful

1174 For more on this, see Herring, America’s Longest War, 248-252.
1175 For more on the psychological impact, see Herring, America’s Longest War, 232-234; 241-245.
CONCLUSION

But during the lull between the first and second phase offensives, it became clear to the Chinese that India would not be forced to the negotiating table, largely by evaluating domestic debates taking place in New Delhi. Indian Parliamentarians argued publicly against talks and the media wrote scathing critiques of any conciliatory policy. The public aversion to talks, while it did not determine Nehru’s policy, may have credibly communicated to the Chinese that India was unlikely to engage in peace talks without some concessions. China did move to adhere partially to India’s preconditions, withdrawing from tracts of occupied land in a unilateral ceasefire. But domestic politics in India may have elevated the standard for the how much China would have to adhere to preconditions before talks. Liu Shaoqi articulated his frustration at India’s refusal to meet China halfway because domestic necessity encouraged Delhi to maintain the border dispute.1177

Another area of potential research is to evaluate what factors impact how a domestic public perceives talks. In India, the people were against talks while India was losing the war; but in contrast losses in Vietnam only increased public support in the United States for a negotiated settlement to the war and had no impact on U.S. public opinion on the desirability of a negotiated settlement in the Korean War.1178 In India during the Sino-Indian War, domestic politics exacerbated concerns about the ratchet effect in that the public was concerned like their leadership that agreeing to talks would signal weakness and invite further aggression. It may also be the case that public opinion is not the main driver, but the strength and position of the

1176 “Chen Yi discussion,” 5.
1177 Liu Shaoqi zhuxi jiejian yinni fuzhuxi buzhang subandeliyue tanhua jilv (tan Liu Shaoqi fangwen Yinni, zhongyindu bianjie he yafei liuguo huiyi wenti,” [Meeting Minutes for when Chairman Liu Shaoqi receives Indonesian vice-minister (they discussed the issues of Liu’s trip to Indonesia, the Sino-Indian border, and the Colombo meeting]. Beijing Foreign Ministry Archives, doc. 105-01792-04, January 3, 1963.
1178 Reiter, How Wars End, 87-88.
opposition affects how talks are viewed within country. Nehru and Truman were both concerned that their oppositions’ would accuse them of being soft if they agreed to talks; Truman went against the grain and agreed anyway, while Nehru did not. In other words, while domestic political factors seem to exacerbate or mitigate the dynamics of the interstate ratchet effect, more research needs to be done to figure out the conditions under which either of these effects occurs.

The Role of Mediators

Third parties, in some cases at the urging of the war participants and in others independently, attempt to mediate between the warring parties to facilitate the emergence of talks in all three cases. In the Vietnam War, President Johnson personally counted seventy peace initiatives of third party individuals and countries.\textsuperscript{1179} Many of these were unwanted attempts, such as efforts made by an Italian law professor Georgio La Pira and those made by the Secretary General of the UN U Thant. However, some were directed by the United States such as MAYFLOWER and MARIGOLD; in these peace attempts the United States tried to use the Soviets and the Polish respectively as intermediaries.\textsuperscript{1180} China reached out to other countries as part of its diplomatic efforts during the Sino-Indian War. Transcripts from meetings between Chen Yi and Zhou Enlai with their counterparts in Asian countries demonstrate that China hoped these countries would use their influence with India to convince them to enter into talks. Zhou Enlai in tandem appealed to Nehru’s sensitivity toward the opinions of the developing world, arguing that Asian and African countries wanted the two sides to peacefully negotiate and they “should not disappoint their eager expectations.”\textsuperscript{1181} Of their own initiative, six Afro-Asian countries meet in Sri Lanka December 1962 to evaluate the border conflict and devise some

\textsuperscript{1179} Herring, \textit{LBJ and Vietnam}, 89.
\textsuperscript{1180} For more on these initiatives see Chapter Three of this dissertation, in particular 37-40.
\textsuperscript{1181} Whiting, \textit{Chinese Calculus}, 139.
proposals that may bring both sides together to the negotiating table. During the first three months of the last case, the Korean War, the only players that were open to talks were the noncombatants, specifically the Soviet Union and China as well as UN countries led by India and Great Britain. After China’s entrance into the Korean War, a number of countries put forth resolutions within the UN calling for peace talks and an end to hostilities. When China and the United States decided that the mounting costs of war had sufficiently discouraged escalation, they both turned to the Soviet Union and urged its leaders to propose talks.

In most cases, these attempts of third parties fell on deaf ears and were not key to the emergence of peace talks. In Vietnam, none of the dozens of attempts led to any progress towards peace talks. The Paris Peace Talks were launched when President Johnson made a public and direct appeal ordering an immediate end to the bombing of North Vietnam above the 20th parallel and the North Vietnamese responded favorably directly. China and India never engaged in peace talks during the border war in spite of the efforts of their neighbors. In the case of the Korean War, third parties proved critical; even though China and the United States had reached the conclusion that they needed to resolve the conflict through talks, neither country was willing to offer them for fears of projecting weakness. Both countries turned to the Soviet Union to serve as an intermediary. On June 23, 1951, the USSR representative to the UN Jacob Malik gave a radio address in which he called for “a ceasefire and an armistice providing for the mutual withdrawal of forces from the 38th parallel.” Both the United States and China responded favorably to a proposal made by this outside party and wartime talks began at Kaesong on July 10, 1951.

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1182 For more on this, see Chapter Six of this dissertation, in particular 106-108.
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These case studies suggest that third party involvement alone cannot bring about talks when the risks of the ratchet effect are particularly acute. Only in the case of the Korean War, in which neither country was confident it had a greater CD, did the role of a third party contribute decisively to the emergence of talks. This may be because the country with a larger perceived CD, the United States in Vietnam and China in the Sino-Indian War, are utilizing third parties to try to pressure their opponents into talks. This makes it difficult for the smaller perceived CD country to know which efforts are independent and which are probes of resolve. In the case of the Korean War, third parties went to great lengths to prove their attempts at a negotiated solution were pursued independently. For example, India stressed to Beijing that the UN resolution put forth in December 1950 was not inspired or directed by any Western power, and that they would take into account Chinese interests in any discussion if Beijing would agree to a ceasefire.1184

An additional research project could look at how third parties either create obstacles to talks or facilitate their emergence. The causal process from fighting only to talking while fighting captured in these three cases suggests that a mediator may be the most useful when there is a relative balance of power between the belligerents. Moreover, unbiased but influential third parties may be the most likely to facilitate talks. When neither has the greater perceived CD and both are still concerned about projecting weakness, indirect contacts sufficiently reduce concerns about looking too eager to talk. When the power balance is more asymmetric, the level of deniability a third party supplies is likely to be insufficient to mitigate the risks. It would be useful to evaluate additional cases to see if indeed third parties are successful facilitators of talks in conflicts between equals, but not decisive in others. Moreover, another research project could

1184 Chen, Mao’s China, 92.
look at the ways states try to probe the adversary’s position on talks. Specifically why states chose third party mediators, private individuals, or government delegations to gauge the opponent’s interest in launching peace talks.

The United States often endeavors to play the role of a mediator to help countries end their conflicts. The findings of this dissertation illuminate how a mediator like the United States could de-incentivize ratcheting through both carrots and sticks, which would mitigate the main obstacle to opening talks. If states cannot ratchet easily to gain greater bargaining leverage when their opponent agrees to talks, this could reduce the prevalence of coercive diplomacy more generally in the international system and reduce the duration and costs of conflicts that do erupt. The methods and degree to which the United States would mediate in conflicts is especially important in Northeast Asia, where the rise of China presents challenges and opportunities for the United States and its allies and friends in the region, in particular Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Crisis management projects attempt to outline how a crisis may escalate in order to identify necessary mechanisms, such as a hot line between leaders for example, that would reduce the propensity of escalation. Communication is critical during times of conflict to mitigate the possibility of inadvertent escalation due to misunderstandings or misinformation. But it does little in the case of purposeful, strategic escalation of violence. By identifying the reasons leaders may refuse to talk to their adversary during such a crucial time, experts can reduce the incentive to escalate. For example, given that China is weaker militarily, in a conflict its leaders will be more cautious about entering talks, for fear this eagerness will encourage an escalation of the U.S. war effort. Fostering deeper understanding and exchanging views about how continuing communication during conflict is mutually beneficial and will encourage the
U.S. to end the conflict, not escalate it, would have a positive impact in the case of a conflict between the United States and China.

**The Difference in Cost Differentials**

The difference in CDs of the war participants vary from a big gap between the United States and Vietnam and China and India, to less asymmetry between China and the United States during the Korean War. A hypothesis derived from the logic of the information approach posits that once countries’ beliefs about the balance of power converge, talks are more likely because there is a shared idea of the range of settlements both sides prefer to war. This convergence would logically happen more quickly when the balance of power is more asymmetric; it was clear in the first days of the Sino-Indian War that India was outmatched by China and Vietnam knew early on that the full application of U.S. military might could mean its extinction. If two countries’ military abilities are relatively similar, on the other hand, it may take more time to decipher which country is relatively more powerful. The information approach would therefore predict that talks happen more quickly in wars in which the combatants exhibit asymmetry of power.

However, this dissertation shows that the opposite is true: talks never occurred between India and China, the United States and North Vietnam fought for over three years before agreeing to talks, and talks emerged after one year of fighting during the Korean War. I propose that this is the case because the greater the asymmetry of power, the greater the risk of the ratchet effect. This means that the country with the larger perceived CD is less likely to doubt its ability to use military force alone to obtain its goals and the smaller perceived CD country is likely to be especially cautious of projecting weakness. However, but this conclusion can be reached additional research should be conducted that moves beyond the question of how a country’s CD
impacts its position of talks to evaluate how the difference in CDs within dyads impact the duration of the period in the beginning of wars in which there is fighting without talking.

Such a project may also shed light on the application of the interstate ratchet effect model to nonstate actors. While the three cases captured in this dissertation are all conventional interstate disputes, there is no theoretical reason why these dynamics should not be present in wars involving nonstate actors, such as those between the United States and insurgents in Afghanistan or Iraq. Given the likely difference in the ability and costs for state and nonstate actor to escalate, and the fact that the nonstate actor is likely to be fighting at almost full capacity, the interstate ratchet effect dynamics should be particularly acute. This suggests that as long as the United States is not trying to achieve its objectives directly through the use of military force, then reassurance, not threats and ratcheting of military pressure, are more likely to bring nonstate actors to the negotiating table.

These findings provide insights in a real world debate. In October 2010, the New York Times reported on a recent example of beliefs about the interactive effect of talking and fighting in which the United States was considering increasing airstrikes and special operations against Taliban insurgents in an effort to pressure its leaders to negotiate an end to the war. As one senior North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) official argued, “You’ve got to put pressure on the networks to get them to start thinking about alternatives to fighting.” The article argues that then Commander of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) General David H. Petraeus was “using the attacks to expand a parallel path to the end of the war: an American-led diplomatic initiative, very much in its infancy but ultimately aimed at persuading the Taliban . . .

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1185 This is assuming that neither side is pursuing total victory.
to make peace with the Afghan government.” Some experts argued in this article that attempts to bleed out the insurgency would backfire, leaving the Taliban even less inclined to negotiate. My model argues that increased military pressure created further obstacles to peace talks instead of facilitating their emergence.

Preliminary research suggests that the Taliban’s position on talks followed the same patterns identified in this project. First, there were a series of meetings between Karzai’s government and the Taliban hosted by an influential and neutral third party, Saudi Arabia, which is friendly toward the United States and was one of the only countries to give diplomatic recognition to the Taliban in Afghanistan before 2001. Secondly, the leader of Quetta Shura, the Afghan Taliban organization based in Pakistan, long insisted that talks would be impossible unless certain preconditions were met, specifically that all foreign troops withdrew from Afghanistan. There were a series of sporadic talks between Karzai and current and former Taliban leaders for two years since 2008, but this did not lead to substantive talks between the United States and the Taliban. However, the U.S. position shifted as the mounting costs of war convinced the Obama administration that its superior ability to escalate did not give it as much leverage as once thought. Until the summer of 2010, the official position of the Obama administration was that the war in Afghanistan could be won by militarily means alone. This perception began to shift as “as combat intensified with smaller-than-expected NATO gains despite the arrival of the full complement of new U.S. troops, amid rising U.S. public opposition to the war.” The complete defeat of the Taliban was seen for the first time as an unrealistic goal in 2009 and this was followed by a year in which the United States was focused on

1189 DeYoung, “Taliban in talks with Karzai government.”
mobilization of resources in Afghanistan. In early 2010, the United States started its efforts to get the Taliban to the negotiating table. Secret talks did not emerge between the United States and Taliban leaders until February 2011.

Additional Thoughts on Avenues for Future Research

In this dissertation I argue that states are concerned that offering talks project weakness, and this fear is more acute among countries with a smaller perceived CD because of their lack of confidence in their ability to counter any escalation that may result. The focus of this project was to look at how fears of communicating weakness affect countries’ strategic thinking about peace talks in wartime. In wartime, I argued that a country’s ability to escalate relative to its opponent, its CD, determines the degree to which this fear impacts policy. While the ratchet effect may only be applicable in times of war, the fear of looking weak may drive diplomatic behavior through different causal mechanism during times of peace and crises.

While my case studies did not cover the period of these wars after talks began, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that states refused to make concessions at the bargaining table when under military pressure primarily for fear of looking weak and encouraging further aggression. China and the Soviet Union urged North Korea not to make concessions on the POW issue in July 1952 as the United States escalated its aerial bombing campaign precisely for these reasons. North Vietnam avoided making concessions under pressure as well. When President Nixon ordered intensive bombing attacks against North Vietnamese sanctuaries in Cambodia to compel Hanoi to negotiate on his terms, the DRV refused to make concessions and decided to wait for a “more propitious opportunity.” This begs the question, when does escalation or threats of escalation cause the enemy to accept the peace terms and when does it harden their

1190 Herring, America’s Longest War, 278.
resolve? Scholars argue that for an escalation in violence to undermine the enemy’s willingness to fight, it usually has to consist of “an extraordinarily powerful move.”\textsuperscript{1191} In general, the examples of states exploiting their power to hurt in the literature are those losing militarily. These states are willing to introduce more risk and increase the costs associated with the conflict so as not to lose. But my case studies suggest that the obstacle to war termination through peace talks may not be the losing side gambling for resurrection, but the winning side which has an incentive to escalate to compel the loser to end the war more quickly and accept its terms of peace.

**Theoretical and Practical Policy Lessons**

The findings of this dissertation and its interstate ratchet effect model make a contribution to international relations theory and engender lessons for policy makers. The question of when states will talk while fighting and when they will evade wartime negotiations had previously been underexplored in the field of international relations. Scholars have chosen instead to focus on the causes of war, when talks lead to war termination, and the durability of post-conflict agreements. In limited wars, the emergence of peace talks is a necessary precursor to the conflict’s resolution. This dissertation evaluated the Vietnam War, the Sino-Indian War, and the Korean War – using interviews and primary and secondary sources – to better analyze how information from the battlefield and their diplomatic positions interact to shape leaders’ decisions about peace talks. The findings of this dissertation also present some policy recommendations for how to alleviate concerns that keep states for offering or accepting offers to talk.

**Signaling and War Termination**

\textsuperscript{1191} Ikle, *How Wars End*, 55.
One of the main theoretical contributions of this dissertation is to explain why there are stretches at the beginning of every war in which there is fighting without talking. In the Korean War, the United States had abandoned the hope and aim of achieving total victory in January 1951; the Chinese had reached a similar conclusion around February and March of the same year. Yet, the two sides did not agree to talks until four months later. In Vietnam, both sides fought for over three years before sitting down at the negotiation table. In the short thirty days of the Sino-Indian War, even with China’s dogged attempts at launching talks, wartime negotiations never occurred.

This project provides an explanation for why leaders may be hesitant to talk to their opponent during a war. Through process tracing, I demonstrate that one of the main obstacles to talks is that leaders are concerned demonstrating a willingness to engage in peace talks will signal weakness. Talks are seen as given into military pressure and leaders believe this action will only invite more military pressure during the course of the war. During Vietnam, the JCS argued that offers to talks “are not only nonproductive, they are counter-productive. A logical case can be made that the American people, our Allies, and our enemies alike are increasingly uncertain as to our resolution to pursue the war to a successful conclusion.”

Secretary John McNaughton articulated in a January 16, 1966 memo that any moves toward talks “requires a willingness to escalate the war if the enemy miscalculates, misinterpreting our willingness to compromise as implying we are on the run.” In response to Polish attempts to bring about talks, the DRV premier warned, “we cannot take a position which the USA might understand as a sign of weakness. We have to be very careful.” Nehru argued in the midst of

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the Sino-Indian War that agreeing to talks “would mean mere existence at the mercy of an aggressive, arrogant and expansionist neighbor.”

Nehru conveyed to his Chief Ministers the day after the Chinese attack that India needed to demonstrate it “is no weak country to be frightened by threats and military might…we will always be willing to negotiate a peace but that can only be on condition that aggression is vacated. We can never submit or surrender to aggression.”

After the failure of the November 1950 UN offensive in the Korean War, George Kennan echoed the concerns that if the United States moved to open talks now, the Communists “would correctly interpret it as weakness.”

When talks broke down on the peninsula in October 1951, Mao was opposed to broaching the topic of restarting them, arguing that “if we initiate the resumption of the negotiation…it would leave the opponents with an impression that we are anxious to achieve peace thus suggesting a sign of weakness.”

Beyond the theoretical imperative, understanding the conditions under which states are more or less inclined to engage in talks during wartime serve to inform policy as well. By assuming that countries are constantly talking while fighting, or that the lack of talks is not the result of strategic decisions, past studies have failed to paint a full picture of how wars end or why they go on longer than information approaches would predict. While talks admittedly do not guarantee a swift end to the war, there existence increases the probability that the belligerents will come to an agreed negotiated settlement. This dissertation shows that concerns about escalation make states reluctant to engage in the peace process. States with the smaller perceived CD are more reluctant in the face of a potential ratchet effect because they cannot easily counter

1195 “Letter from the Prime Minister of India, to Premier Chou En-lai, 14 November 1962,” White Paper 8, 12.
1196 Gopal, Nehru, 221.
1197 Acheson, The Korean War, 82.
1198 Zhang, Mao’s Military Romanticism, 220.
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escalate. Mitigating these concerns is the key to reducing the duration of the stretch in the beginning of wars in which there is no talking, just fighting.

To hasten the process of conflict resolution, the state with the greater perceived CD can take several steps to reduce this obstacle to talks. First, during peacetime, countries can work to decouple the signal between the readiness to talk and weakness. Signals depend on agreement on the meaning of particular behaviors, usually implicit. The conventional wisdom about the meaning of a particular action can be changed because “there is nothing in most situations to compel the adoption of particular pairings of signals and meanings.”\textsuperscript{1199} Countries should therefore work to destroy the linkage, or decouple the signal, between talks and weakness.\textsuperscript{1200} For example, if a country publicly announces a new policy to offer talks from the first day of any conflict, then the willingness to talk can no longer be interpreted as an informative signal because the country does it regardless of the progression of war.

If a state fails to decouple the signal, then it should develop ways to credibly signal a desire to engage in bona fide talks and accurately read the signals of others. One way to reassure one’s adversary about its desire to engage in bona fide talks would be to bring in a third party. A country can probe another’s position on talks with a level of deniability, and therefore without looking weak, by asking a third party to make inquiries for them. Also, a third party can serve as a guarantor that neither side will escalate once both agree to open talks. As long as it is a neutral party, the United States should consider a policy of consistently proposing talks between combatants from the first day of a conflict. Third party attempts, while not always successful, did not exacerbate obstacles to talks in any of the three cases explored. Therefore, since working as a

\textsuperscript{1199} Robert Jervis, \textit{The Logic of Images in International Relations}, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 139.
\textsuperscript{1200} For more on decoupling, see Jervis, \textit{Logic of Images}, 142-145.
mediator is unlikely to exacerbate tensions and could provide a much-needed channel if both sides are ready to talk but want to avoid the image of weakness, this should become a primary component of U.S. foreign policy.

A policy of always talking while fighting could be more easily established during peacetime and then merely extended once hostilities break out. In the case of the Vietnam War and the Sino-Indian War, the countries with the smaller perceived CDs, North Vietnam and India, were more open to talks before hostilities broke out. This makes sense because during peacetime countries are not under direct military pressure and therefore do not have to be concerned about the ratchet effect. In the case of Vietnam, the DRV Prime Minister Pham Van Dong offered to negotiate arms reductions with Saigon in December 1958. In March 1962, the DRV foreign minister Ung Van Khiem had formally requested that the co-chairs of the 1954 Geneva conference, Britain and the USSR, consult with ‘interested countries’ about how peace and the Geneva Accords could be preserved. Over two years before the war, Indian Prime Minister Nehru agreed to summit talks on the border dispute. On July 13, 1962, Nehru allegedly told the Chinese ambassador to India that he was prepared to hold talks on the basis of the officials’ report. Later that month, India sent a note to China that suggested flexibility in its longstanding insistence on withdrawal as a precondition for talks. As previously discussed, in crisis management, keeping the lines of communication open has long been considered

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1201 Perceived as a propaganda ploy, the Diem government rejected the suggestion. See Prados, *Vietnam: The History of an Unwinnable War*, 66.
1203 Zhu yindu dashi Pan zili liren shi xiang yinfang cixing baihui qingkuang,” [The situation in which Pan from the Chinese embassy leaves his post and pays an official visit to say goodbye], *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, Doc. 105-01807-01, July 13, 1962. Zhou Enlai also mentioned this in an interview years later. See Whiting, *Chinese Calculus*, 80.
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necessary for de-escalation because it helps reduce misunderstandings. As countries attempt to construct crisis management mechanisms, they should discuss and institutionalize frameworks for preserving routine and regular talks even once war breaks out.

**War Planning and Civil-Military Relations**

In strategic thought, it is widely accepted that military force is intended to serve political goals, “the war aim of strategy is to clinch a political argument by force instead of words.” Operationally, this means that an effective military strategy should condition operations on the timing and goals of a given diplomatic approach in order to exploit positive combat outcomes to the greatest ability at the bargaining table. Combat success alone may be insufficient to convince the opponent to change its war aims. Instead, an operational commander needs to develop a theory for why the adversary would engage in talks and how military force may impact this decision. In other words, to bring about war termination in an age of limited wars with limited objectives, “a change in operational objectives from those intended to secure a military victory to ones intended to influence negotiations by managing the costs of war in general” is necessary. In this way, diplomatic behavior influences operations; operational commanders want to chose kill objectives for their clarity, shock effect, and drama, and these factors are determined through diplomatic and political interaction with the enemy.

The findings of my dissertation project have implications for civil-military relations. Neither diplomatic maneuvering nor military prowess alone promises a beneficial conclusion to an armed conflict, but instead how leaders perceive combat outcomes depends on their

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opponent’s diplomatic behavior and ability to escalate to higher levels of violence. This means that military leaders and diplomats should jointly devise a strategy of fighting and talking that takes advantage of military victories to the greatest degree possible and reduces the costs of operational defeat. In informal discussions with political and military leaders involved in U.S. China policy, for example, the view that the lack of coordination in strategy during crisis and war leads to suboptimal outcomes for these reasons is prevalent. A way to bridge this research with practice would be to promote the inclusion of both diplomatic and military leaders in war games and contingency planning to learn how to best coordinate to affect adversaries actions and perceptions about talking while fighting during times of conflict. In my experience participating in war games, the ways in which diplomatic behavior impacts the course of the war are not considered. Facilitating coordination among State Department officials and military leaders, even in a war game scenario, would better train them to manage conflict. This, in turn, would reduce the costs and risks for American military and civilians deployed to conflict areas and the duration of wars if they break out.

Patterns of U.S. and Chinese Behavior

U.S. actions in the Korean War and Vietnam War, as well as China’s decision making in the Korean War and Sino-Indian War, exhibit patterned behavior. This section will highlight particular tendencies of the two countries, which can serve as lessons for future conflicts. Specifically, U.S. and Chinese leaders made two particular miscalculations in both the Korean War and Vietnam War that undermined their attempts at diplomacy. First, leaders tend to believe that the threat or implementation of escalation will effectively compel the adversary to capitulate.

1208 The closest approximation is the DIME principle, which stands for diplomacy, information, military, and economics. The diplomacy aspect focuses on using diplomatic power to achieve one’s goals but does not look at how to facilitate communication during times of conflict.
Second, both countries misperceived the role and impact of external parties. China tends to overestimate the influence of the international community on its opponents behavior. U.S. leaders, on the other hand, underestimated the ability of the smaller countries to act independently of their stronger benefactor. This miscalculation hurt U.S. coercive diplomatic attempts in Korea and Vietnam because U.S. leaders focused on sending their signals and messages to a party with limited influence. In the case of the Korean War, the United States should have paid more attention to Chinese national interests and strategic goals. In the case of Vietnam, the United States gave concessions to China in the normalization process to enlist their help in ending the war without realizing the limitations of Chinese influence on Hanoi.  

Both China and the United States made the mistake of thinking that military force would compel their opponent to come to the negotiating table. In Vietnam, holding the threat of escalation over the heads of North Vietnamese leaders was an essential part of U.S. strategy; Maxwell Taylor described the rationale of U.S. escalation strategy, arguing that “an upward trend in any or all of these forms of intensity will convey signals which, in combination, should present to the DRV leaders a vision of inevitable, ultimate destruction if they do not change their ways.” The Americans believed that “by expanding its aggression in South Vietnam and escalating its bombing in North Vietnam, they [could] bring Vietnam to its knees.” In the Sino-Indian War, Mao thought that China need only to inflict a defeat so crushing that it would “knock Nehru to the negotiating table.” The threat of even greater Chinese escalation would

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1209 Mann, *About Face*.  
1210 Pape, *Bombing to Win*, 179.  
“compel [the Indians] to negotiate to thoroughly resolve the border issue.”\textsuperscript{1213} After the first assault, the Chinese leadership planned to “firmly attack the Indian reactionaries to compel them to sit down and talk.”\textsuperscript{1214}

But because of the interstate ratchet effect, the constant threats to escalate and use of military pressure to accomplish diplomatic goals backfired for both countries. Escalating the violence to pressure an opponent to come to the negotiating table had the opposite effect because the adversary fears conceding would only encourage additional escalation. Unless conflict reaches a level at which the adversary has no choice but to completely capitulate, it is going to continue fighting when under military pressure to stop. The lesson of this project is that because of the fear of looking weak, graduated military pressure makes talks less likely.

Secondly, both China and the United States tended to overestimate the influence of external actors. In the case of the United States, its leadership believed a strong benefactor, the Soviet Union to China in the Korean War and China and the Soviet Union to Vietnam in the Vietnam War, determined the policies on fighting and talking. But Hanoi was unresponsive to Moscow’s attempts to act as intermediary and “would accept no advice” according to Chinese leaders, on “the question of whether or when to negotiate.”\textsuperscript{1215} The incorrect U.S. belief that China would not intervene in Korea was premised on the assumption that the Soviet Union was the real combatant and would not want to risk escalation with the United States. But China did intervene, not because it was ordered to by the Soviet Union, but because it had its own national interests to protect. China, on the other hand, overestimated the influence of third party pressure

\textsuperscript{1213} Xu, \textit{Lishi Zhenxiang}, 111.  
\textsuperscript{1214} Jiang Siyi and Li Hui, eds \textit{Zhongyin bianjiang ziwei fanji zuozhanshi} [History of the Self-Defensive Counterattack Operations on the Sino-Indian Borders] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 1994), 208.  
\textsuperscript{1215} Goodman, \textit{The Lost Peace}, 11-12.
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on its adversaries’ decisions about talking while fighting in two of the case studies. In the Sino-Indian War, China made appeals to Afro-Asian countries to use their influence to convince India to enter into peaceful talks.\(^\text{1216}\) In Korea, China thought that the United States would cave at different points throughout the war to allied pressure not to expand the war and later to concede on the POW issue to allow for ceasefire talks to come to an end. This assumption proved incorrect in both situations.

**Concluding Thoughts**

The United States has been at war the majority of my adult lifetime. While it is important to study the causes of war with the hope of preventing interstate militarized disputes, war is and will continue to be a part of the human experience. A better understanding of war termination should at least facilitate shorter wars, reducing the potential suffering that inevitably accompanies the use of force.

Though much has been written on international conflict, it was time for a new look. For my generation, with the exception of the first Gulf War, balance of power does not seem quite as important as balance of interests, which determines participants’ willingness to absorb and impose costs on their opponent. While U.S. trials and tribulations in Vietnam were shocking to an American public which had watched the United States defeat greater military threats such as Hitler’s Germany and Imperial Japan, for a new generation of Americans, limited wars, and

\(^{1216}\) See “Wo zhu yindu shiguan he yinni zhu yindu shiguan guanyu zhong, yindu, bianjie wenti de jiechu, gaoxu wuguan qu yinni shiguan tanhua zhongdian” [The exchange between China’s embassy in India and Indonesia’s embassy in India about the Sino-Indian border question, the important points of the defense attaché Gao Xu’s visit to the Indonesian embassy]. doc. 105-01493-06, November 19, 1962, 67; “Chen Yi fuzongli jiejian yini zhuhua dashi Sukani tanhua jilu (guanyu yafei huiyi hezhong, yindu bianjie wenti) [Record of discussion, Vice-Premier Chen Yi meets with Indonesian ambassador to China (regarding the India boundary question during the Afro-Asia meeting)]. *Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives*, doc. 105-01789-07, November 17, 1962, 3-4.
consequently the failure to achieve total military victory, against less ominous threats is the new reality. This reality, as well as the rising fiscal constraints on U.S. global power, have been particular difficult for Cold War warriors to swallow.

Every generation of scholars is affected by the world in which it lives, especially in terms of the topics it chooses to explore and the factors it considers important in international politics. During the Cold War, war termination was understudied, possibly because the idea that wars could escalate to the point of a nuclear exchange made fighting and ending such a war unthinkable. But now that most modern wars are limited conflicts that end in negotiated settlement, understanding how military outcomes transition into political outcomes, how combat outcomes and diplomatic behavior interact to affect the likelihood of conflict resolution, are of greater importance. It is to the benefit of the international community to reduce the obstacles to negotiation and to deter states from exploiting their power to harm as a means of maximizing their bargaining leverage.

The realist approach to war termination posits that wars end when the costs exceed the benefits. Empirically, time and time again leaders fail to end wars when a clear trend in military success emerges. As an American strategist, I think we need to get closer to that approximation. With that goal in mind, this project ideally shed some light on the factors, which lock countries along the path of conflict and mutual destruction and how future generations of policy makers can shape these factors for the sake of peace.
Appendix 1: Interview Questions for political and military leaders

In March 2011, I conducted approximately twelve hours of interviews with political and military leaders in Hanoi, Vietnam. These interviews were conducted in Mandarin, Chinese through an interpreter. Though the identities of interviewees will remain anonymous, the types of people interviewed include former DRV ambassadors, DRV spokesman, participants in the Paris Peace talks, an assistant to the DRV ambassador in China, former Army and Air Force officers, a member of the international commission for control and supervision of the Geneva Accords, prominent Vietnamese international relations experts, official note taker for the Paris Talks, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials.

1) What are the barriers to talking while fighting?

2) How do talks while fighting or even demonstrating the willingness to engage in talks affect the strategic environment? Either on the battlefield or the bargaining table?

3) Costs of talks: Are there costs associated with talks? Under what conditions? What type of costs? Domestic political costs? Reputational costs? Does it have an impact on the war? Its duration? The settlement at the end? Is there fear the talks will not end in a peace settlement? How is failure of talks costly?

4) Communicating resolve: Was there a concern that being willing to talk may signal weakness and then the enemy would increase demands or efforts to win the war? When does the willingness to talk while fighting signal weakness? Strength?

5) Benefits of talks: Are there benefits to talks? Why would you engage in talks even if you have no intention to offer concessions to facilitate the ending of the war? For example, can you gain
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information about the enemy’s position? Better communicate your resolve than through military means only?

6) Alliance politics: How did third parties such as the Soviet Union or China influence whether or not the DRV engaged in talks? What is the nature of this influence? For example, when Mao Zedong expressed he was against talks, did he convince the DRV that talks were bad? Or did the DRV want to engage in talks but decided not to pursue them because China would punish them somehow?

7) Intermediaries: There are a number of times that there were talks conducted indirectly through intermediaries, like the Swedes, Italians, Poles, Norwegians, Russians, and Rumanians. Why was this more common than direct talks? In other words, what are the benefits/costs of going through third parties rather than going directly to the United States and communicating a willingness to talk?

8) Negotiation channels: what channels of communicate did the DRV prefer at what times? Why are public/direct channels preferred or not preferred to indirect/private channels? Official or unofficial channels? Do they have different purposes?

9) Time before first talks: The United States first attempt to start talks was with the Seaborne mission Jun 1964-5 but serious talks did not begin until May 1968. Why did it take so long to begin formal negotiations? Did the fact that they fought years before talking create obstacles or opportunities to starting talks?

10) Initiatives: What did the DRV deduct about US intentions or the US position when the United States made offers to talk through intermediaries? Was it important to the DRV that the United States took the first move to offer talks? If so, why? (During the course of the war did the
DRV ever demonstrate first a willingness to talk while fighting?) What are some of the reasons the DRV thought it might be costly to reject US peace overtures?

11) Effect of combat outcomes: Le Duc made statements in 1966 that the DRV would not talk while fighting because the military situation had not ‘ripened’ sufficiently to consider negotiations. What does this mean? What did the DRV want to accomplish by fighting first?

How did US bombing like the Christmas bombing affect DRV willingness to engage in talks?

How did the outcome of the Tet offensive affect the willingness to talk while fighting?

12) Marigold: Historians say that in Dec 1966, the DRV came out and said they were willing to talk if the United States came out with such an initiative. Before this, there the only indicators were that the DRV refused to engage in talks. Why this change in willingness to talk while fighting? Was the North really willing to engage in talks at this time, or was it a ploy?

13) Maintaining face: In the histories, there are many quotes from Vietnamese officials saying they may be willing to engage in talks with the United States if it is done in a respectful and not arrogant manner. What does this mean, and why was this important?

14) Internal divisions: The NLF was against any talks at any time. How did this affect how the DRV felt about talks, or how they pursued talking while fighting?

15) Talking while fighting: At the 13th plenum of the VWP CC they ratified the policy of “stepping up diplomatic struggle.” What did this entail? Why did they have this policy at this time?
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