

Air Force B-1B Lancer assigned to 37th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron, deployed from Ellsworth Air Force Base, South Dakota, to Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, prepares to fly bilateral mission with Japan Air Self-Defense Force F-15s in vicinity of Senkaku Islands, August 15, 2017 (U.S. Air Force/Christopher Quail)



Reading the Tea Leaves

Understanding Chinese Deterrence Signaling

By Charles L. Carter

China's rise over the past decade as a Great Power rival to the United States has captured American policymakers' attention. The People's Republic of China (PRC) increasingly asserts its will as it perceives its growing strength in the international community. Beijing seeks, like all states, to deter other powers from harming its interests and conveys those interests

through both statements and actions. However, the United States has not always understood these signals, resulting in miscommunications that have significant consequences for both states. In 1950, for example, Washington's failure to recognize PRC deterrence signals and anticipate the People's Liberation Army's (PLA's) entry into the Korean War dramatically length-

ened the war and increased costs.¹ More recently, in 1995, Beijing's response to the U.S. issuance of a visitor's visa to Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui, and the associated damage to Sino-American relations, further exemplifies these communication breakdowns and the consequences of misunderstandings.

The stakes are higher than ever given China's military strength and the increasingly contentious relationship between Washington and Beijing. While both China and the United States wish to avoid a military conflict with each

Lieutenant Colonel Charles L. Carter, USAF, wrote this essay while a student at the U.S. Army War College. It won the 2021 Secretary of Defense National Security Essay Competition.

other, if these states exchange blows, the potential damage to their relationships and prestige and the costs of war for both the winner and loser would be severe. It would also be difficult to determine the outcome of such a conflict in advance. Washington and Beijing, therefore, prefer to protect their interests through deterrence instead of compellence.² But each state's unique culture and strategic perspective affect its deterrence signaling methods and how it interprets other states' signals. These differing deterrence languages may lead to costly misunderstandings. By evaluating Chinese statements and actions through their paradigm, U.S. National Security professionals can better understand China's approach to deterrence and interpret its signals to avoid miscalculations.

This essay seeks to illuminate Beijing's deterrence signaling by reviewing key concepts in Western deterrence theory to provide a foundation for discussion. With this foundation laid, the essay then contrasts these concepts with historical PRC deterrence practice to identify nuances and trends. Finally, the essay illustrates China's unique approach to deterrence signaling, using the ongoing Sino-Indian Ladakh border crisis as a case study.

Deterrence in Coercion Theory

Before examining how the PRC approaches deterrence, it is useful to review modern coercion theory to frame the discussion. In his classic *Arms and Influence*, Thomas Schelling identifies coercion as the use of threats to influence another entity to comply with one's wishes.³ Through coercion, an actor translates its power to inflict pain on another entity into bargaining power.⁴ While Schelling focuses on the threat of military force, the power to hurt may come from various sources, such as economic sanctions or diplomatic actions.⁵

Schelling breaks coercion into two subsets: compellence and deterrence. *Compellence* is the use of coercion to influence a targeted person or organization to either perform or cease an action.⁶ *Deterrence*, in contrast, is a coercive act through which one actor seeks to

prevent another actor from taking an action through threats of unacceptable consequences.⁷ The coercer's intent distinguishes compellence and deterrence. Although they are distinct concepts, a state may simultaneously compel and deter a target state, thereby coercing the state to take a desired action while refraining from an undesired activity. Deterrence is generally less costly than compellence because it does not necessarily require the coercer or the target to do anything other than signal. Compellence, in comparison, requires the coercer to punish a victim until the target changes behavior. Additionally, because compellence involves the use of force, it is subject to escalation, which may lead to unpredictable outcomes.⁸ As a result of these differences, deterrence is generally the dominant form of coercion between states.

Effective deterrence requires several elements. First, the threatener must effectively communicate what it does not want the threatened actor to do, and then the consequences that may occur if the target carries out the unwanted actions.⁹ Second, the target must anticipate the credibility of the threatened consequences, meaning whether the coercer has the capability and will to follow through on its threats.¹⁰ Third, the deterrence target must know how to avoid the threatened consequences by refraining from the unwelcome acts.¹¹ Fourth, because deterrence is a means of bargaining, the threatened consequences must be more painful to the target than the cost of abstaining from the undesirable actions.¹² Fifth, the deterrence target must not be able to impose sufficient costs on the threatening power to cause the latter to refrain from carrying out its threats. In other words, there must be an imbalance in the ability to hurt or the will to accept costs between the threatener and the threatened.¹³

Communication is the foundation of deterrence. It provides the means to convey what actions are not wanted and the expected consequences of taking those actions.¹⁴ To effectively coerce the target, the threatening power must convince the victim that it has the capability and

will to follow through with its threats.¹⁵ An actor can establish the credibility of its capabilities by displaying its military forces via parades and press media or demonstrations to defense attachés and other diplomats. A state may alternatively publicize information regarding its capabilities, allow foreign observers at military exercises, or ensure that other countries' intelligence services are made aware of its capabilities. Threats communicated by actions, such as military deployments or drills, are typically considered more credible than statements alone because these events demonstrate a public commitment by the threatening power.¹⁶ These actions may also position military forces to harm the threatened state, further bolstering the threat's credibility. If the target fails to comply in the face of this overt threat, the deterring power risks incurring reputational damage if it fails to follow through on its threat.

Demonstrating capability, however, is insufficient; a deterring power must also establish the will to use its capabilities.¹⁷ There are various means to executing this, such as public military exercises or carefully calibrated bellicose language from government officials in diplomatic and press channels. One of the most convincing demonstrations of the will to use military force is conducting limited military actions against the threatened power. For example, to demonstrate both capability and resolve in deterrence, a threatening state might conduct military aircraft or ship patrols close to a target state's borders or forces.

Alternatively, a deterring power may execute a short-duration campaign of military action, such as a raid or airstrikes, against specific targets within the victim state to firmly communicate its will to escalate and use force. These attacks might coincide with public readiness drills and forward deployments to demonstrate that the threatening power can bring additional forces to bear to inflict further punishment. These actions validate the threatening power's will to use force and provide a sample of the promised consequences should the target take an undesirable action.¹⁸ Similarly, if capabilities outside the threat of military force



Indian Army's 11th Jammu and Kashmir Rifles Battalion and U.S. Army's 2-3 Infantry Battalion kick off bilateral exercise Yudh Abhyas with opening ceremony, February 8, 2021, in India (U.S. Army/Joseph Tolliver)

are used to deter, the threatening power must also demonstrate the capacity and will to use them to inflict harm.

A state may also use progressive force to deter a target from taking unwanted actions, simultaneously causing harm while promising ever-increasing damage if the target does not comply.¹⁹ The use of progressive force can blur the line between deterrence and compellence. The coercer may simultaneously intend to deter a target from taking a new, undesired action while compelling the target to cease an existing unwanted activity.

In some cases, a power may lack the ability to hurt its deterrence target without incurring significant damage itself. In these circumstances, for its threats to be credible, the coercer must successfully demonstrate its willingness to tolerate this punishment.²⁰ The actor may then try to make its threats credible through policy statements indicating the interest in question is so great that the power is willing

to pay an exorbitant price to protect it. Mao Zedong's assertion that he did not fear nuclear war—even if it meant the loss of half the world's population because he was confident the resulting world order would be socialist—is an example of this type of rhetoric.²¹

However, because of the high stakes in question, it is difficult for the threatening power to convince its target that its words will be backed by action. Accordingly, the deterring state may have to demonstrate its will through activities such as limited military attacks that threaten to escalate to large-scale conflicts or by taking measures that deny the deterrer the choice not to act.²² An excellent example of this last point is the placement of U.S. troops near the South Korean border. In the event of an invasion of the Republic of Korea by North Korea, these U.S. forces would inevitably become embroiled in the ensuing war, thus functioning as a tripwire. Because these

troops would become immediately engaged in the conflict, Washington would be required to respond to Pyongyang's attack, if only because of American public opinion. This guarantee of U.S. involvement in any invasion of South Korea is a deterrent to such attacks.²³

While demonstrating credibility is vital, a threatening power must also consider the impact of reputational damage in its deterrence efforts.²⁴ While most coercion discussions focus on material harm, an actor's reputation is a highly valued asset subject to damage. A state seeking to coerce another power must consider the reputational damage the target may incur if it complies with the threatener's demands. This is a particular consideration when actions become compellence because the threatening power is actively, and often overtly, doing something to the target power.²⁵ However, this is also a consideration in deterrence if the threatening power's actions are

aggressive, such as conducting a major military exercise or deployment in proximity to the target state. In these cases, the public display of a threat means the target power will lose face if it complies with the coercer's demands.²⁶ Because of the substantial reputational damage compliance may cause the target, public threats are often ineffective coercion tools.²⁷ Similarly, because compelling actions are usually visible to outside parties, the threatening power may also incur reputational damage if viewed as an aggressor by the international community. Therefore, it is often in the coercer's interests to avoid publicizing its threats or linking its threats to specific demands.

For coercion to be an effective strategy, the threatening power must be confident that it can control any crisis's pace and direction, escalating or deescalating tensions at will.²⁸ The coercer must have the ability to inflict unacceptable harm on its target without the target possessing the capacity to inflict intolerable damage in return.²⁹ This capability provides the threatening power "escalation dominance" over its mark, as it can continue to increase the pain felt by its target and maintain the threat of future pain without fear of meaningful retaliation. This capability reinforces the credibility of the coercer's threats.³⁰

Escalation can take three forms: vertical, horizontal, or political.³¹ In vertical escalation, an actor expands the crisis by bringing more military capacity to bear against the target. For example, if the situation is a border standoff between opposing military forces, the introduction of more troops or more capable weapons would be a vertical escalation. In contrast, in horizontal escalation, an actor extends the conflict into new geographic areas not previously implicated. A historical example of horizontal escalation is the U.S. fear that the Soviet Union might seize West Berlin if Washington attacked Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis. While horizontal and vertical escalation focus on expanding military force to escalate a crisis, political escalation enlarges the conflict into new nonmilitary spheres.³² The imposition of new economic and diplomatic sanctions to deter Iran or North

Korea from conducting missile tests or nuclear weapons development activities is an example of political escalation.

The PRC Approach to Deterrence

The PRC understanding of deterrence is generally in line with Western deterrence theory, yet there are important nuances to China's approach. Chinese deterrence practice employs numerous tactics, including seizing initiatives, manipulating escalation risk, managing the publicity of threats, using limited force to enhance its own credibility, ambiguity in linking threats and actions, and using nonmilitary instruments of power to threaten and impose costs. Furthermore, the PRC demonstrates a predictable trend in how it sequences the use of its instruments of power to signal deterrence.

Seizing Initiatives. Beijing's approach to deterrence is guided by the Active Defense strategy identified in China's National Security Law of 2015 and the 2019 white paper *China's National Defense in the New Era*.³³ China describes its posture under this approach as "strategically defensive but operationally offensive."³⁴ Accordingly, if the PRC determines that another state has damaged or intends to damage China's interests at the strategic level, Beijing may act offensively to defend its interests.³⁵ Under this strategy, China seeks to control events on its terms, initiating actions to escalate or deescalate tensions to achieve its objectives.

China's 1979 invasion of Vietnam exemplifies Active Defense. This invasion followed several Vietnamese actions that threatened PRC interests. First, Vietnam's successful war with Cambodia neutralized a Chinese ally.³⁶ In November 1978, Vietnam and the Soviet Union signed a mutual defense treaty. Vietnam also made several military incursions into Chinese territory.³⁷ The PRC viewed these actions as counter to Chinese interests, as disrespectful of Beijing's primacy, and as part of a trend of Hanoi aligning itself with Moscow.³⁸ On February 15, 1979, the PRC announced it would conduct a "defensive counterattack" on

Hanoi.³⁹ Two days later, Beijing conducted a large-scale military invasion with nearly 300,000 troops positioned across its entire border with Vietnam.⁴⁰ After 2 weeks of fighting, Beijing announced it had achieved its objectives and started withdrawing its troops. Moscow did not intervene to aid Hanoi with military forces, although it did provide air transport, communications equipment, and arms. However, Beijing's invasion demonstrated the limits of Soviet security guarantees to Vietnam.⁴¹ The attack also communicated China's willingness to take military action to protect its interests.⁴² Finally, the PRC leveraged the 1979 war to deter Vietnam by periodically highlighting the threat of a second attack if Hanoi continued to threaten Chinese interests.⁴³

Manipulating Escalation Risk.

A critical aspect of China's deterrence theory is the use of risky actions that threaten to escalate a crisis unless the other side accommodates Beijing's demands.⁴⁴ This technique is similar to Schelling's concept of "threats that leave something to chance" and communicates a willingness to take actions that might lead to unacceptable consequences, such as an escalation to a major war or even a nuclear war.⁴⁵ Mao's previously discussed assertion that he would willingly risk half the world's population to defeat capitalism epitomizes this technique.

In addition, Chinese deterrence doctrine and practice emphasize Beijing's willingness to escalate conflict to deny the adversary victory, even at high costs to the PRC.⁴⁶ China's entry into the Korean War and use of mass human wave attacks to push United Nations (UN) forces away from the Chinese border and below the 38th parallel north despite high casualties is an example of this approach. The PLA's use of brute force accomplished China's immediate goal of protecting its border and securing a buffer between the PRC and UN forces. This attack also deterred the United States from conducting military operations near the Chinese border.⁴⁷

China's attack on U.S. forces in Korea also exemplified Beijing's employment of conflict in one area to create deterrence effects in other areas. The human wave



Royal Australian Navy servicemembers of HMAS *Hobart* monitor functioning of ship's 5-inch gun during firing exercise at Rim of the Pacific 2020, Pacific Ocean, August 17, 2020 (Royal Australian Navy)

attacks on U.S. forces in Korea communicated the high price the PRC was willing to pay to protect its core interests. The shock of these attacks and Beijing's demonstrated willingness to incur high casualties served as a deterrent to future American actions that might harm Chinese interests.⁴⁸

Managing the Publicity of Threats. Beijing has demonstrated a calculated approach to using overt and clandestine threats in its deterrence signaling. This approach enables China to preserve decision space and avoid reputational damage. The PRC displays a preference for using nonpublicized military deployments to support deterrence as a means to convey the intensity of its interests and readiness to use military force. The use of clandestine deployments provides a credible threat while avoiding placing the target of deterrence in a position in which backing down would result in a loss of face.⁴⁹ According to Allen Whiting,

the PRC used this tactic to deter the perceived threat of a U.S. and Taiwanese invasion of China in May 1962. By clandestinely deploying PLA forces to the Taiwan Strait, the PRC leveraged U.S. and Taiwanese intelligence capabilities to signal its readiness to defeat an invasion without bringing its deterrent actions into the public sphere.⁵⁰ This technique also provides the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) with decision space by avoiding triggering Chinese nationalist sentiment that may make it difficult for the PRC to back down from a crisis.

In cases in which the PRC deemed the clandestine deployment of forces an insufficient deterrent, China has escalated its deterrence threat through overt military exercises that often include live-fire events and deployments close to the threatened entity. For example, during the 1995–1996 Third Taiwan Strait Crisis, Beijing conducted two rounds of large-scale missile tests and live-fire

military exercises less than 100 miles off Taiwan's shore. Concurrently, China conducted an underground nuclear weapons test and multiple ballistic missile tests.⁵¹

Beijing paired these measures with a statement from the PRC defense minister warning that China "will not . . . give up the use of force and will not sit idle if foreign forces interfere in China's reunification and get involved in Taiwan independence."⁵² China intended these actions to demonstrate its capability to inflict unacceptable harm to the United States and Taiwan. In addition, the bellicose language accompanying these actions communicated Beijing's willingness to employ these threats to protect its existential interests regardless of the costs.

Using Limited Force to Enhance Credibility. Chinese deterrence practice indicates a propensity for limited force to demonstrate the PRC's capability and willingness to escalate a crisis and employ larger scale military forces to deter

adversaries.⁵³ The 1962 border conflict between China and India, discussed in greater detail later, demonstrates this technique.

During this period, and after India established military outposts in China-claimed areas along their shared border, Beijing first responded by ordering Indian forces to withdraw and then initiated diplomatic actions intended to negotiate the withdrawal of Indian troops. After negotiations failed, China threatened, and then executed, limited military incursions into the disputed areas. These incursions involved no more than three Chinese divisions against a roughly equal Indian military force. The Chinese successfully seized the North-East Frontier Agency area and all Chinese-claimed regions of Ladakh. The PLA then destroyed India's outposts in the disputed area and withdrew to the positions it occupied before the crisis.⁵⁴

These actions compelled the Indians to withdraw from the Chinese-claimed areas while deterring further Indian military advances by demonstrating Beijing's capability and will to use military force to protect its territorial integrity.⁵⁵ Additionally, the PLA's unilateral withdrawal to its preconflict positions indicated that China held the initiative to deliberately escalate and deescalate the crisis. The Chinese intended these actions to deter the Indians by signaling that Beijing was ready to fight a war to preserve its territorial claims, but was also willing to return to the status quo ante on the border if New Delhi complied with its demands.⁵⁶ Furthermore, this attack, and the PLA's subsequent withdrawal to China's preconflict positions, communicated the PRC's escalation dominance in the region by demonstrating that Beijing could inflict pain on New Delhi with little fear of retaliation. China's display of escalation dominance on the border reinforced the strength of its deterrence signaling.

Using Ambiguity and Nonmilitary Instruments of Power. China has used seemingly unrelated political escalation to increase the pressure on its coercion targets. During the 2012 Scarborough Shoal crisis, for example, the PRC

imposed trade restrictions on Philippine banana imports by claiming that agricultural inspectors had found pests on the fruit.⁵⁷ In addition, the Chinese International Travel Service, a government-owned travel agency, suspended tourism to the Philippines by citing safety concerns.⁵⁸ These collective actions significantly affected the Filipino economy and created domestic pressure on Manila to deescalate the crisis.⁵⁹ The PRC did not officially link these actions to the Scarborough Shoal crisis, but the Chinese vice minister of Foreign Affairs did imply a linkage in discussion with the Filipino ambassador in Beijing by stating that escalating tensions due to the crisis were "severely damaging the bilateral relations between China and the Philippines."⁶⁰

The PRC similarly used economic coercion in 2010 during a crisis between Beijing and Tokyo over Japan's detention of a Chinese fishing boat captain near the Senkaku Islands. The islands are claimed by both China and Japan, although Japan administratively controls them. On September 7, 2010, a Japan coast guard vessel directed the Chinese fishing trawler *Minjinyu 5179*, operating in Japanese-claimed waters near the Senkaku Islands, to stop for inspection.⁶¹ The *Minjinyu 5179* then attempted to flee and intentionally rammed a second coast guard vessel during the ensuing chase. The coast guard then detained the fishing boat's captain and 14 crew members following the incident. Shortly after Tokyo detained the boat's crew, China began delaying rare earth mineral exports to Japan.⁶² China was Japan's primary source of rare earth minerals—which are critical to the Japanese electronics industry. While the PRC never formally tied the decline in rare earth mineral exports to the Chinese fishing captain's detention, the action coincided with the crisis and placed significant pressure on the Japanese government to improve relations with China.⁶³ The export of rare earth minerals to Japan eventually returned to its normal pace following the fishing crew's release.⁶⁴ Beijing's action thus compelled Japan to release the boat crew and deescalate tensions while simultaneously deterring future Japanese

actions from threatening China's territorial claims.

In another example, in 2020, the PRC restricted Australian exports to China in apparent response to Canberra's public criticism of Chinese policy regarding Hong Kong, the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese telecommunications infrastructure, and equipment giant Huawei's business practices, along with several other topics.⁶⁵ The PRC also unofficially discouraged Chinese companies from purchasing Australian coal, cotton, and timber. Furthermore, China threatened to place high tariffs on imports of Australian wine by asserting that Canberra sells these products below cost. Because China accounts for approximately one-third of Australia's export trade, these trade barriers significantly threatened Australia's economy.⁶⁶

The PRC once more did not link these trade sanctions to specific policy demands. However, the actions appear as a response to Canberra's calls for an investigation into the origins of COVID-19; its rejection of China's South China Sea claims and continuing military patrols in the region; and its increasingly close ties with India, Japan, and the United States via the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad).⁶⁷ In formal statements, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi implied that Australia's negative public comments regarding China drove the deterioration in the countries' bilateral relationship and the associated negative impacts on trade and other areas.⁶⁸ He also highlighted that Australia had instigated the decline in relations and must take positive steps toward China in order for the relationship to improve.⁶⁹

In each of these cases, Beijing never formally acknowledged a tie between its trade restrictions and the target state's policies.⁷⁰ China deliberately avoided linking these sanctions to its diplomatic demands to allow it to achieve its coercion objectives while attempting to avoid appearing as a bullying force.⁷¹ By not openly tying these trade restrictions to diplomatic goals, Beijing enabled its coercion target to deescalate the crisis at hand and comply with China's demands while also saving face.

China has historically accompanied military and economic coercion with threats using its diplomatic and informational instruments of power. For example, during the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis, Beijing's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) "threaten[ed] severe damage to relations between the PRC and the U.S." in response to Washington's decision to issue a visitor's visa to Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui.⁷² The PRC canceled several engagements between Chinese and American officials to discuss nuclear weapons and missile technology proliferation.⁷³ The Chinese media also published editorials warning "the [United States] not to interfere in China's internal affairs."⁷⁴

Summary and Trends. Several trends become apparent in China's approach to deterrence by considering this review of historical examples. First, the PRC prefers to seize the initiative to gain escalation dominance. Second, Beijing seeks to communicate a willingness to risk extraordinarily high costs, such as high casualties or a nuclear war, to protect its core interests. Third, the PRC prefers to refrain from public threats to prevent a loss of face for itself or its target and thus preserve both parties' decision space. Fourth, Beijing utilizes ambiguity to avoid linking its coercive threats and actions with specific demands to avoid reputation costs to itself and its target. Fifth, China is willing to employ limited force, often via surprise attacks, to gain an advantage in a crisis and demonstrate the credibility of its threats. Sixth, the PRC will progressively escalate conflicts using military and nonmilitary force and threats to increase pressure on its coercion target.

In addition, Beijing's approach to deterrence follows a phased approach to communicate its objectives and threats. This approach initially leverages statements from lower level MFA officials and Chinese media editorials to express China's concerns. If these actions are not persuasive, the PRC will escalate to statements from higher level MFA officials and engagements with target nation diplomats and governmental officials. China may also impose informal diplomatic

pressure, such as delaying or denying visa requests from citizens of the target state. If necessary, Beijing will bring to bear its economic and military instruments of power, depending on the situation and the importance of the issue at stake. In each of these actions, China may seek to compel its target to perform or cease a given action in the short term while deterring unwanted future actions.

In cases in which Beijing considers military power inappropriate, China will rely on informal trade sanctions for coercion. Initially, these sanctions may be few and targeted away from the threatened entity's vital interests. The PRC uses this technique to deliberately communicate its concerns and readiness to inflict pain and to coerce its target while maintaining the threat to escalate with more damaging sanctions if necessary. However, Beijing will threaten military force for issues that China considers core or vital interests. These military threats may start with unofficial or official statements by PLA leaders and defense officials, both active and retired. China will escalate its military force threats through military deployments, exercises, and live-fire events if the target fails to respond appropriately. In cases in which Beijing perceives it has the advantage, the PLA may use limited force to demonstrate the seriousness of China's threats and communicate its willingness and ability to inflict unacceptable harm to the target if it fails to comply.

In summary, while Chinese deterrence practice is generally in line with Western coercion theory, there are important nuances in Beijing's approach. In particular, China's approach is set apart from Western deterrence patterns by its use of the initiative, manipulation of escalation risk, management of threat publicity, employment of limited force to enhance its deterrence credibility, ambiguity in linking coercive threats and actions with a specific demand, and use of nonmilitary instruments of power to threaten and impose costs. Beijing prefers these techniques because they allow it to seize and maintain escalation control, preserve decision space, and avoid reputational damage. Furthermore, the PRC demonstrates a predictable trend in how it sequences the use

of its instruments of power for deterrence. Again, Beijing follows this general escalation flow because it provides flexibility and allows China to escalate or deescalate crises on its terms. With this background in hand, the next section examines the 2019–2021 Ladakh Border Crisis and associated Chinese deterrence signaling.

The 2019–2021 Ladakh Border Crisis

India and China share an approximately 2,500-mile border. Beijing and New Delhi do not agree on the frontier in many areas—a disagreement that is a significant factor in their relationship.⁷⁵ The 1954 Friendship Treaty established relations between the two states but did not demarcate their shared border.⁷⁶ Instead, treaties and historical claims made before the creation of the PRC and India's independence guide the current boundary. While the disputed border has continually been an issue in Sino-Indian relations, its prominence as a focal point for conflict has ebbed and flowed with tensions between the two states. In 1962, India and China went to war over the boundary. However, since that time, frontier conflicts have typically been small in scale and nonlethal, except for periodic standoffs from 1986 to 1987 and from 2013 to 2020.⁷⁷

Beijing and New Delhi dispute in particular several regions in the Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau, which have been the primary points of conflict. In 1996, China and India established a de facto demarcation, referred to as the Line of Actual Control (LAC), in these regions to avoid military conflicts by providing a common understanding of the areas under each side's administrative control. While the two nations differ on the LAC location in many places, the LAC has generally proved to be an effective mechanism for avoiding conflict. There were, however, four serious border standoffs between 2013 and 2020.⁷⁸

The Ladakh region is strategically valuable to China and India. For Beijing, its control of the Aksai Chin area, which borders Ladakh, provides the only road links between the Xinjiang and Tibet provinces and is essential to China's

Map. Disputed Kashmir Region



Source: Central Intelligence Agency, University of Texas at Austin Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, 2004, altered to show rough location of conflict in Galwan Valley.

territorial integrity.⁷⁹ China's possession of the Shaksgam area of Ladakh allows Beijing to connect these provinces with Pakistan to support its Belt and Road Initiative.⁸⁰ For New Delhi, the region's rugged terrain provides a bulwark against potential Chinese attacks. Additionally, both India and China see defending their

territorial claims as vital to maintaining their states' integrity.⁸¹ As a result, both India and China have taken various steps to improve road access to their forward areas, increase the quantity and quality of outposts, and improve their forces' ability to operate in the high-altitude regions around the LAC to defend their claimed

territory. The map illustrates the disputed Ladakh area.

Beijing also views its border dispute with India as a legacy of colonialism.⁸² Because the frontier between India and China was established through treaties between the British and Qing Empires, the PRC sees the border between the



Joint Security Area and Camp Bonifas, looking north from South Korea, along Korean Demilitarized Zone (U.S. Army/Edward N. Johnson)

states as a remnant of China's Century of Humiliation. Furthermore, Beijing successfully resolved its border disputes with Russia, Vietnam, and other neighboring states, leaving the impasses with India and Bhutan as the only remaining territorial issues concerning mainland China. While resolving the border dispute with India is not as important to the legitimacy of the CCP as reunification with Macao, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, it is still a significant issue for Beijing. China's 2019 defense white paper highlights the importance of resolving the PRC's territorial issues and safeguarding its territory.⁸³ In the paper, Beijing asserts that it will use any means necessary to protect its territorial integrity and sovereignty. The CCP views any action by another power that threatens Chinese territorial integrity as a threat to the entire party's legitimacy.

More broadly, over the past two decades, Indian and Chinese relations have gradually deteriorated as New Delhi has pursued new partnerships and military

capabilities, including nuclear weapons, as a means to enhance its security in response to China's rising military and economic strength.⁸⁴ Around 2005, China began adopting a more aggressive stance toward India in response to New Delhi's growing relationship with the United States following the approval of a civilian nuclear deal and a defense framework between the two states.⁸⁵ These agreements, and American and Indian statements highlighting this new partnership, provoked a defensive reaction from the PRC, which feared India becoming a potential U.S. ally and a Great Power rival.⁸⁶ In addition, India has strengthened ties with other regional powers, such as Australia, Singapore, Vietnam, and Japan, that are concerned with the PRC's rise, and has aligned itself with the United States in opposition to China's claims in the South China Sea.⁸⁷ Moreover, India's participation in the Quad and the related 2020 naval exercises with Australia, Japan, and

the United States prompted Chinese concerns that these powers may align to contain Beijing.⁸⁸

The Crisis. Historically, New Delhi maintained its areas bordering China and Pakistan as autonomous regions. On August 5, 2019, however, India changed the status of these regions. These areas, Jammu-Kashmir and Ladakh, became Union Territories under the direct control of New Delhi.⁸⁹ The PRC viewed these actions as a significant shift in the LAC's status quo and protested the change. On August 6, the Chinese MFA released a statement opposing the creation of the Jammu-Kashmir and Ladakh Union Territories because the areas contained territory claimed by China and asserting India's action as invalid.⁹⁰ China also reportedly began denying visas to Indians seeking to travel to Tibet for religious purposes.⁹¹

Given China's public assertions that it will defend its territorial integrity using any means necessary, Beijing likely viewed

the MFA's statements as a clear signal to India that China viewed the creation of the Union Territories, with Chinese-claimed land, as a threat to China's sovereignty. Beijing likely intended this signal to deter India from taking any further steps to assert control over the Chinese-claimed areas and to compel New Delhi to remove these areas from the new Union Territories' jurisdiction.

In January 2020, China conducted major military exercises involving thousands of troops near the Ladakh region on the Tibetan Plateau. These exercises occur annually, but in 2020 the PLA failed to withdraw its forces after the drills. Instead, around May 5, it moved some troops forward to occupy four points on the Indian-claimed side of the LAC in the Galwan Valley.⁹² The forward movement of PLA forces prompted an escalation in tensions between India and China and led to threat exchanges on social media between Chinese and Indian citizens.⁹³ Beijing likely intended the continued presence of large numbers of Chinese troops in the Ladakh region and the occupation of Indian-claimed territory as signals to New Delhi of the PRC's resolve and willingness to use force to protect its territorial claims.

In late May 2020, Chinese and Indian patrols confronted each other in the Ladakh region; however, these confrontations were limited, and no casualties were reported.⁹⁴ On June 6, immediately before a scheduled meeting between Chinese and Indian military commanders to discuss the border tensions, PRC news media broadcast video of PLA maneuvers and reinforcements in the Ladakh region.⁹⁵ These news stories asserted that thousands of troops with armored vehicles had moved to the area to defend Chinese territory against Indian aggression. During the commanders' meeting, the PLA representatives asserted that the Chinese troop presence near the LAC was on PRC territory. The Chinese MFA reinforced this message with a similar statement.⁹⁶ Beijing likely considered these statements and the video broadcast as a final warning to New Delhi that its actions threatened Chinese sovereignty, and that China would use force if India

did not restore the status quo in the Ladakh region.

On the evening of June 15, 2020, Indian and Chinese troops skirmished in the disputed border territory of Ladakh (see map).⁹⁷ Chinese forces killed over 20 Indian military personnel in the fight. China confirmed its forces also took casualties but provided no specifics.⁹⁸ On June 16, the PRC's MFA released a statement accusing the Indian military of crossing the LAC and attacking Chinese troops.⁹⁹ Both India and China reinforced their forces in the region and began conducting fighter and helicopter patrols following the clash.¹⁰⁰ These clashes between Indian and Chinese troops likely were deliberate actions by the PLA, intended to further demonstrate Beijing's commitment to protect its territory and willingness to escalate the dispute with lethal military operations.

In July 2020, the PLA deployed H-6 bombers equipped with land-attack cruise missiles to Kashgar Air Base, approximately 500 miles from the Ladakh region.¹⁰¹ The bomber aircraft deployment was a significant signal that demonstrated China's willingness to escalate the conflict to a large-scale war if India did not back down. In addition, on October 13, the Indian city of Mumbai experienced a major power outage that the Indian government determined was caused by a Chinese cyber attack.¹⁰² Indian officials assert that Chinese malware was discovered in multiple parts of the Indian power grid, indicating Beijing is positioned to cause future outages at will. As of July 2021, tensions between India and China remain high, with both sides maintaining significant forces at a heightened state of readiness in the Ladakh region.

In addition to these military, diplomatic, and informational actions, in June 2020, Beijing froze several extensive infrastructure and business investment projects in India, including a \$500 million car factory.¹⁰³ On June 29, the Hong Kong-based English-language *South China Morning Post* published an article indicating that China has significant capability to inflict harm on India through trade sanctions. The report also highlighted that Beijing had chosen not

to escalate the crisis economically to date but might impose significant trade sanctions on India if New Delhi went "too far."¹⁰⁴ The PRC likely intended these political escalations to demonstrate its willingness to further punish India if New Delhi failed to restore the status quo in the Ladakh region.

At first glance, this clash appears to be simply another tactical incident between China and India over the disputed border. However, the timing and apparent deliberate preparation and execution of the incident by the PRC indicate Beijing intends to use this crisis to deter New Delhi from continuing actions that are counter to Chinese interests. Beijing has not publicly linked its activities in the Ladakh region or its recent diplomatic and economic sanctions against New Delhi with India's increasingly close ties with the United States. However, the PRC has warned members of the Quad not to attempt to create an alliance against China.¹⁰⁵ Despite China's warnings, New Delhi has increased both its engagement in the Quad and its participation in multilateral exercises with the United States over the past several years.

Deterrence Signaling in the Standoff. To deter India from increasing its security ties with the United States and its allies or taking policy positions against China, Beijing likely seized the opportunity created by the establishment of the Jammu-Kashmir and Ladakh Union Territories to amplify its signaling to New Delhi. The PRC's contested border with India provides Beijing with the ability to generate crises at a time and place of its choosing. These crises enable the PRC to coerce India while avoiding appearing as the aggressor.

In the 2019–2021 Ladakh standoff, the PRC's deterrence signaling generally followed the pattern observed in its previous coercion efforts. Beijing identified the opportunity provided by India's creation of the Jammu-Kashmir and Ladakh Union Territories to signal to India. Next, the MFA issued a statement protesting the Union Territories' creation as a violation of Chinese sovereignty. This statement created a crisis that enabled Beijing to significantly escalate tensions with India for



Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi holding All Party Meeting to discuss situation in India-China border areas, in New Delhi, June 19, 2020 (Prime Minister's Office, Government of India)

signaling purposes while also attempting to avoid being portrayed as the aggressor.

Because the Chinese did not anticipate this opportunity, Beijing likely was not ready to immediately escalate the situation militarily. China instead conducted limited diplomatic and media actions to signal New Delhi that its actions to change the border's status quo were unacceptable. To this end, Beijing used additional MFA statements, visa denials for Indian citizens attempting to visit Tibet, and press reports asserting China's concerns to place pressure on New Delhi.

In April and May 2020, China took advantage of the cover provided by its annual exercises to move forces into the Ladakh region while avoiding significant attention from India or outside powers. With these forces in place, China moved military forces into Indian-controlled territory along the disputed border. These actions precipitated a military standoff between the two states, and China then took steps to bring this crisis to a fever pitch.

To further escalate its threats to New Delhi, Beijing conducted media releases highlighting the PLA's deployment of

significant military forces to the region. In addition, the PRC asserted through military and MFA official statements that the occupied areas were Chinese land. Chinese and Indian citizens also exchanged propaganda and threats on social media regarding the Ladakh. It is unclear if either government directed this activity; however, the PRC tightly controls the expression of nationalist sentiment regarding foreign states. Thus, Beijing likely encouraged this Chinese social media activity. Because New Delhi considered the occupied areas its sovereign territory, these statements and actions constituted an existential threat to India's sovereignty.

Finally, when India predictably attempted to reassert its sovereignty over the contested area through military patrols, the PLA was prepared and aggressively attacked an Indian patrol, causing more than 20 fatalities. This lethal exchange demonstrated Beijing's capability and willingness to escalate the crisis. In addition, the PLA's deployment of H-6 bomber aircraft with cruise missiles to the region further reinforced

the message that the PRC was willing to broaden the conflict. Beijing also froze several Chinese business investments in India and leveraged its news media to threaten escalating the conflict by sanctioning Indian exports to China if New Delhi did not accommodate its interests.

Collectively, the PRC's diplomatic, informational, military, and economic actions in the Ladakh region strongly signaled Beijing's willingness and ability to inflict harm on India. Also, China's assessed use of offensive cyberspace operations to disrupt Indian electricity in Mumbai and hold portions of India's power grid at risk communicated that Beijing could punish New Delhi at any time. Because of the PRC's demonstrated capacity and willingness to further escalate the conflict, New Delhi was faced with a *fait accompli*, placing it in a situation in which Beijing was willing and able to inflict more harm on India than it could tolerate. In contrast, India was disadvantaged because it lacked the necessary capabilities to inflict significant damage on China unless it was willing to risk escalation to a larger scale military

conflict that it was unlikely to win or absorb additional economic damage from Chinese sanctions.

While this crisis focused on tactical events in the Ladakh, Beijing's deterrence signaling was broader. Through this crisis, Beijing demonstrated its ability to asymmetrically inflict pain on New Delhi with little opportunity for India to reciprocate. This position provides the PRC escalation dominance over India in the Ladakh, enabling Beijing to coerce India at a time and place of its choosing while positioning China to control the pace of escalation and deescalation.¹⁰⁶ The PRC signaled to India, from this stance, that it opposes New Delhi's attempts to balance against China and is willing and capable of inflicting pain on India if it persists.

China also demonstrated its sensitivity to being viewed as the aggressor when conducting coercion. For example, while Beijing placed several major investment projects in India on hold, it did not announce these actions or formally tie them to pressuring New Delhi to comply with its demands. Similarly, when Beijing stopped approving visas for Indians traveling to Tibet for religious purposes, it did not issue an official statement indicating this new policy. Additionally, Beijing did not broadcast its deployment of H-6 bombers and associated cruise missiles near the Ladakh. By not explicitly messaging these actions as attempts to coerce India, China likely sought to pressure New Delhi without losing face.

Conclusion

In reading tea leaves to predict the future, much is open to interpretation. Similarly, understanding China's deterrence signaling appears to be a study in ambiguity and mixed messages. However, while Beijing's statements and actions can seem challenging to understand, Beijing's signals reflect its unique deterrence approach. By studying the PRC's words and actions since its founding in 1949, American leaders can more effectively understand those messages in the future.

Chinese deterrence practice is generally in line with Western coercion theory. However, there are meaningful

nuances in Beijing's methods. Chinese deterrence signaling emphasizes seizing initiatives, using risk as a deterrence tool, avoiding public threats, and preferring ambiguity to avoid overtly linking threats and demands. In addition, Beijing often demonstrates its resolve and the credibility of its threats through small-scale military attacks and the employment of nonmilitary instruments of power. These limited uses of military and nonmilitary force impose costs on China's targets and reinforce the PRC's willingness to escalate with additional actions. Finally, history indicates a trend in how Beijing sequences the use of its instruments of power to signal deterrence.

In communication, actions and body language are often more critical in conveying messages than are verbal statements. Thus, by understanding how Beijing approaches deterrence signaling, American policymakers and strategists can better interpret China's verbal and nonverbal communications to discern its intent. This knowledge also allows U.S. leaders to anticipate potential actions the Chinese may take to signal its interests and escalate or deescalate a crisis. This understanding can enhance U.S. comprehension and anticipation of Chinese deterrence signaling and improve the quality of strategic communication between the world's two greatest powers.

Additional Research Opportunities

While this essay identifies several unique aspects of the PRC's approach to deterrence, many additional questions and sources are worthy of further research. This essay relies exclusively on English-language unclassified sources to support its analysis; the inclusion of both Chinese-language and classified materials would greatly illuminate U.S. understanding of the PRC's deterrence approach. Sources that tie China's statements and actions to its strategic intent would provide valuable insights.

In addition, while this document touches on China's use of modern media to signal deterrence, Beijing's use of new technologies to augment its coercive efforts continues to evolve. Researchers

should evaluate how the PRC employs social media and cyber operations in deterrence. China also maintains significant influence overseas through the ethnic Chinese diaspora and ties to foreign politicians and businesses. Research is needed to understand how Beijing uses these assets to support its deterrence signaling. While this essay draws on several historical case studies, this examination is limited in depth. Significant opportunities exist to expand and refine U.S. understanding of Chinese deterrence signaling through a more thorough treatment of these case studies. Finally, at the time of this essay's completion, China and India continue their standoff in the Ladakh. Beijing's actions to compel and deter New Delhi to comply with its demands persist, providing a significant opportunity to further study China's deterrence approach. JFQ

Notes

¹ Allen S. Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1960), 92–115; Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (Princeton: Yale University Press, 2020), 54–55.

² Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 69–71.

³ *Ibid.*, 2–3; Tami Davis Biddle, “Coercion Theory: A Basic Introduction for Practitioners,” *Texas National Security Review* 3, no. 2 (2020), available at <<https://tnsr.org/2020/02/coercion-theory-a-basic-introduction-for-practitioners/>>.

⁴ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 2.

⁵ Biddle, “Coercion Theory.”

⁶ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 69–72; Biddle, “Coercion Theory”; Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004), 26–27.

⁷ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 69–72; Biddle, “Coercion Theory”; Freedman, *Deterrence*, 26–27.

⁸ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 80–81.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, 4; Freedman, *Deterrence*, 27.

¹³ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 3, 13–14, 36–40.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3–4; Biddle, “Coercion Theory”; Freedman, *Deterrence*, 28.

¹⁵ Wallace J. Thies and Patrick C. Bratton, “When Governments Collide in the Taiwan Strait,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 27, no. 4 (2004), 558.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Freedman, *Deterrence*, 38–39.

- ¹⁸ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 3.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 78–79.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 36–40.
- ²¹ Frank Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958–1962* (New York: Walker & Company, 2010), 13.
- ²² Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 43–46.
- ²³ Carnes Lord and Andrew S. Erickson, eds., *Rebalancing U.S. Forces: Basing and Forward Presence in the Asia Pacific* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2014), 72–73.
- ²⁴ Alexander B. Downes, “Step Aside or Face the Consequences: Explaining the Success and Failure of Compellent Threats to Remove Foreign Leaders,” in *Coercion: The Power to Hurt in International Politics*, ed. Kelly M. Greenhill and Peter Krause (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 93–114.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Biddle, “Coercion Theory.”
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Forrest E. Morgan et al., *Dangerous Thresholds: Managing Escalation in the 21st Century* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2008), 18, available at <<https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG614.html>>.
- ³² Ibid., 18–20.
- ³³ “National Security Law of the People’s Republic of China,” Ministry of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China, July 1, 2015; State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, *China’s National Defense in the New Era* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press Co., Ltd., July 2019).
- ³⁴ *China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win* (Washington, DC: Defense Intelligence Agency, 2019), 23, available at <https://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/China_Military_Power_FI-NAL_5MB_20190103.pdf>.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Sebastien Roblin, “In 1979, China and Vietnam Went to War (And Changed History Forever),” *The National Interest*, March 2, 2019, available at <<https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/1979-china-and-vietnam-went-war-and-changed-history-forever-46017>>.
- ³⁷ Xiaoming Zhang, “China’s 1979 War with Vietnam: A Reassessment,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 184 (2005), 851–874, available at <www.jstor.org/stable/20192542>.
- ³⁸ Roblin, “China and Vietnam Went to War”; Zhang, “China’s 1979 War,” 867.
- ³⁹ Roblin, “China and Vietnam Went to War”; Zhang, “China’s 1979 War,” 860.
- ⁴⁰ Zhang, “China’s 1979 War,” 865.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 867.
- ⁴² Roblin, “China and Vietnam Went to War.”
- ⁴³ Zhang, “China’s 1979 War,” 867.
- ⁴⁴ Alastair Iain Johnston, “China’s New ‘Old Thinking’: The Concept of Limited Deterrence,” *International Security* 20, no. 3 (1995–1996), 15.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 16.
- ⁴⁷ Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*, 158–160, 163–165.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 166–168.
- ⁴⁹ Allen S. Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence: India and Indochina* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981), xvi.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid.
- ⁵¹ Thies and Bratton, “When Governments Collide,” 564.
- ⁵² Ibid.
- ⁵³ Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 212–216.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., xi, xvii.
- ⁵⁵ Sijin Cheng, “Fighting for Reputation: China’s Deterrence Policy and Concerns About Credibility” (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 2014), 93.
- ⁵⁶ Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, xi.
- ⁵⁷ Christina Lai, “Acting One Way and Talking Another: China’s Coercive Economic Diplomacy in East Asia and Beyond,” *The Pacific Review* 31, no. 2 (2018), 178–179.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 179.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid.; Jane Perlez, “Dispute Between China and Philippines over Island Becomes More Heated,” *New York Times*, May 10, 2012.
- ⁶¹ Lai, “Acting One Way and Talking Another,” 177–178.
- ⁶² Ibid.
- ⁶³ Ibid.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., 175–176; Gerry Shih, “China Sharply Ramps Up Trade Conflict with Australia over Political Grievances,” *Washington Post*, November 27, 2020.
- ⁶⁶ “China Is Curbing Imports of More and More Australian Goods,” *The Economist*, November 12, 2020, available at <<https://www.economist.com/asia/2020/11/12/china-is-curbing-imports-of-more-and-more-australian-goods>>.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.; Rob Taylor, “Australia to Continue Military Patrols in South China Sea,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 31, 2015.
- ⁶⁸ Latika Bourke, “China Wants Australia Relationship Back on Track ‘as Early as Possible,’” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 31, 2020, available at <<https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/china-wants-australia-relationship-back-on-track-as-early-as-possible-20201229-p56qr2.html>>.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid.
- ⁷⁰ Lai, “Acting One Way and Talking Another,” 172–173.
- ⁷¹ Ibid., 172.
- ⁷² Thies and Bratton, “When Governments Collide,” 563.
- ⁷³ Ibid.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid.
- ⁷⁵ Srinath Raghavan, “The Security Dilemma and India–China Relations,” *Asian Security* 15, no. 1 (2019), 62.
- ⁷⁶ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Treaty of Friendship Between the Government of India and the Royal Government of Afghanistan,” January 4, 1950, available at <<https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/6584/Treaty+of+Friendship>>.
- ⁷⁷ Raghavan, “The Security Dilemma and India–China Relations,” 66–67; Guy Burton, “The Broader Background Underpinning China-India Tensions,” China Global Television Network, June 23, 2020, available at <<https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-06-23/The-broader-background-underpinning-China-India-tensions-RyzL3tjILm/index.html>>; Alyssa Ayres, “The China-India Border Dispute: What to Know,” Council on Foreign Relations, June 18, 2020, available at <<https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/china-india-border-dispute-what-know>>.
- ⁷⁸ Burton, “The Broader Background Underpinning China-India Tensions”; Ayres, “The China-India Border Dispute.”
- ⁷⁹ Aneela Shahzad, “Geopolitics of Kashmir,” *The Express Tribune* (Karachi), November 7, 2019, available at <<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2094874/6-geopolitics-of-kashmir>>.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid.
- ⁸¹ Ibid.
- ⁸² John Cherian, “Border Disputes Between India and China: A Colonial Legacy,” *Frontline*, August 14, 2020, available at <<https://frontline.thehindu.com/cover-story/colonial-legacy/article32196398.ece>>.
- ⁸³ State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, *China’s National Defense*.
- ⁸⁴ Raghavan, “The Security Dilemma and India–China Relations,” 60.
- ⁸⁵ Brahma Chellaney, “Rising Powers, Rising Tensions: The Troubled China-India Relationship,” *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 32, no. 2 (2012), 104–105.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid., 105–107; Raghavan, “The Security Dilemma and India–China Relations,” 69.
- ⁸⁷ Raghavan, “The Security Dilemma and India–China Relations,” 70.
- ⁸⁸ Saurav Chordia, “India Begins Second Phase of Malabar Naval Exercise with QUAD Nations,” *American Military News*, November 19, 2020, available at <<https://americanmilitarynews.com/2020/11/india-begins-second-phase-of-malabar-naval-exercise-with-quad-nations/>>; Shivani Kumar, “Upset After Australia’s Participation in Malabar Exercise, China Warns of Economic Damage,” *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), November 8, 2020, available at <<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/upset-after-australia-s-participation-in-malabar-exercise-china-warns-of-economic-damage/story-2Xrd9z8R1d2zFjrfQIF-9DJ.html>>.
- ⁸⁹ Muhammad Akbar Notezai, “What Does

the China-India Standoff in Ladakh Mean for Pakistan?" *The Diplomat*, June 24, 2020, available at <<https://thediplomat.com/2020/06/what-does-the-china-india-standoff-in-ladakh-mean-for-pakistan/>>.

⁹⁰ Ankit Panda, "China Issues Statement Condemning Indian Decision to Bifurcate Kashmir," *The Diplomat*, August 7, 2019, available at <<https://thediplomat.com/2019/08/china-issues-statement-condemning-indian-decision-to-bifurcate-kashmir/>>; Press Trust of India, "Article 370: China Says Opposed to Ladakh as Union Territory," *India Today*, August 6, 2019, available at <<https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/china-reaction-jammu-kashmir-article-370-1577915-2019-08-06>>; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Remarks on the Indian Government's Announcement of the Establishment of the Ladakh Union Territory Which Involves Chinese Territory," August 6, 2019, available at <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2535_665405/t1686549.shtml>.

⁹¹ Divyanshu Dutta Roy, ed., "No Chinese Visas for Kailash Mansarovar Yatra After Ladakh Move: Sources," NDTV, updated August 6, 2019, available at <<https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/no-chinese-visas-for-kailash-mansarovar-pilgrims-from-india-sources-2081307>>.

⁹² Kuldip Singh, "China's Intrusion in Ladakh Was Not Treachery but Surprise, and It Shouldn't Have Been One," *The Wire*, July 1, 2020, available at <<https://thewire.in/security/ladakh-china-intrusion-dsdb-road-indian-army>>.

⁹³ Sneesh Alex Philip, "More 'Ladakh Clashes' Emerge as India-China Tension Turns into Social Media Battle," *The Print*, May 31, 2020, available at <<https://theprint.in/defence/more-ladakh-clashes-emerge-as-india-china-tension-turns-into-social-media-battle/432964/>>; Ajit K. Dubey, "China Continues Military Build Along LAC as Both Sides Holding Talks," *Asian News International*, updated May 31, 2020, available at <<https://www.aninews.in/news/national/general-news/china-continues-military-build-along-lac-as-both-sides-holding-talks20200531131326/>>.

⁹⁴ Philip, "More 'Ladakh Clashes' Emerge."

⁹⁵ Kinling Lo, "China Mobilises Thousands of Troops, Armoured Vehicles Near Border with India," *South China Morning Post*, June 8, 2020, available at <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3088093/china-mobilises-thousands-troops-armoured-vehicles-near-border?utm_source=Twitter&utm_medium=share_widget&utm_campaign=3088093>.

⁹⁶ Singh, "China's Intrusion in Ladakh Was Not Treachery"; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian's Regular Press Conference on June 17, 2020," June 17, 2020, available at <<https://www>>.

[fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1789509.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1789509.shtml).

⁹⁷ "India-China Clash: 20 Indian Troops Killed in Ladakh Fighting," BBC News, June 16, 2020, available at <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-53061476>>.

⁹⁸ Notezai, "What Does the China-India Standoff in Ladakh Mean for Pakistan?"

⁹⁹ "Clashes on the China-India Border Presage Intensifying Competition," *Stratfor*, June 16, 2020.

¹⁰⁰ David Axe, "As Mountain Standoff with India Continues, China Stages Bombers and Cruise Missiles," *Forbes*, August 2, 2020, available at <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2020/08/02/as-mountain-standoff-with-india-continues-china-stages-bombers-and-cruise-missiles/?sh=1a058aca2b73>>; Brian Wang, "How China and India Matchup Militarily If the Border War Escalates," *Next-BigFuture* blog, June 22, 2020.

¹⁰¹ Axe, "As Mountain Standoff with India Continues, China Stages Bombers and Cruise Missiles"; Wang, "How China and India Matchup Militarily if the Border War Escalates."

¹⁰² David E. Sanger and Emily Schmall, "China Appears to Warn India: Push Too Hard and the Lights Could Go Out," *New York Times*, February 28, 2021.

¹⁰³ Keegan Elmer, "China 'Has Scope to Hit Back' at Any Indian Economic Sanctions," *South China Morning Post*, June 29, 2020, available at <<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3091074/china-has-scope-hit-back-any-indian-economic-sanctions>>.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ "Naval Drills in the Indian Ocean Give Bite to the Anti-China 'Quad,'" *The Economist*, November 17, 2020, available at <<https://www.economist.com/international/2020/11/17/naval-drills-in-the-indian-ocean-give-bite-to-the-anti-china-quad>>.

¹⁰⁶ Biddle, "Coercion Theory."

New from NDU Press

for the Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs

Strategic Forum 309
PLA Overseas Operations in 2035: Inching Toward a Global Combat Capability

By Joel Wuthnow, Phillip C.

Saunders, and Ian Burns McCaslin



The Chinese military presence in the "far seas" beyond Asia is growing and will expand further as

the PLA moves toward its 2035 goal of fielding a fully modern military. Existing overseas activities are mostly conducted by a single service and have not involved combat. Future scenarios for overseas joint operations include larger scale military operations other than war and overseas combat. Conducting more complex overseas operations would require substantial improvements in PLA capabilities, such as a stronger overseas joint logistics system. Changes in the domestic or regional security environment or intensified U.S.-China competition could accelerate a transition toward greater emphasis on expeditionary operations, including higher end combat scenarios.



Visit the NDU Press Web site for more information on publications at ndupress.ndu.edu