

Information, Diplomacy, and Strategy: Balancing Avoidance in Limited Warfare

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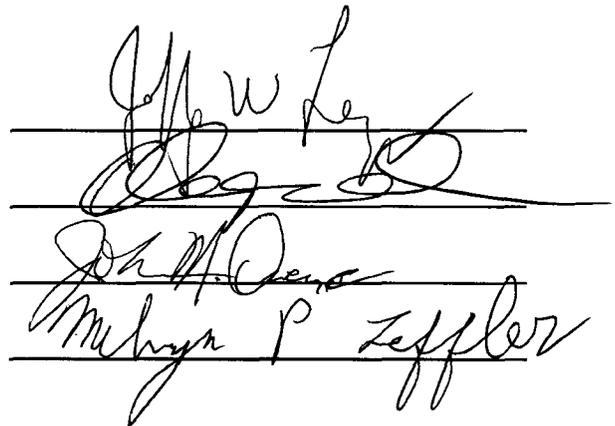
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The image shows four handwritten signatures, each written on a horizontal line. From top to bottom, the signatures are: Jeffery W. Legro, Dale C. Copeland, John M. Owen, and Melvyn P. Leffler. The signatures are written in black ink and are cursive in style.

Abstract

Despite many differences between the two conflicts, the avoidance of Chinese intervention was a critical objective sought by the United States in both the Korean and Vietnam wars. Only in the Vietnam War, however, was the U.S. able to achieve this war aim. While this variation in strategic success is an interesting empirical puzzle in its own right, the issue of preventing intervention in limited wars has broader significance for international relations (IR) theory and policy. In both cases, the U.S. attempted to prevent China from adopting the most acute and belligerent balancing strategy. Although balancing has been studied by generations of international relations scholars, the related issue of balancing avoidance has thus far escaped the analytical scrutiny of the field. This lacuna is surprising in that the incentives for *both* balancing and balancing avoidance should be strong in an anarchic and highly competitive international system. The ability of states to wield power without inducing acute balancing is critical to the success of national security policies, and to the prevention of undesired military conflicts.

This dissertation introduces a novel institutional decision making framework focusing on the ability of states to design and implement intricate strategies in an environment where information overload is a persistent problem. I argue that states with robust information management capabilities, or *information structures*, will be better able to prevent acute balancing in limited wars, than will states with meager information management capabilities. States with robust information structures can more accurately discern the interests and capabilities of potential balancers, and are better able to translate that information into their limited war strategies. States with robust information structures can design limited war strategies that accommodate potential balancers'

intentions and perceptions of threat. I test the information structure framework against two alternative approaches (realism and bureaucratic theory) in the Korean War (June-November 1950) and the Vietnam War (January 1964-July 1965), and find that the information structure framework provides a more thorough and complete explanation for balancing avoidance than the competing explanations.

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Chapter 1 Theories of Balancing Avoidance

Introduction

Among the most studied phenomena in international politics is the tendency for states to “balance” against those that pose a challenge to their security and interests. A related behavior, however, has escaped the attention of scholars of international relations: the attempts by states to avoid being balanced against as they pursue objectives that potentially threaten other states. As Robert Jervis describes, “. . . states often seek inconsistent arrangements [i.e., favorable alignments of states] in order to gain leverage over others or to avoid collecting additional enemies. . . . Statesmen are not entirely directed by outside forces: They have some success in building desired configurations and avoiding others.”¹ In other words, just as balancing behavior is a staple of international political life, so too are the efforts by states to avoid being balanced against.

The archetypal figure embodying this behavior is, of course, Otto von Bismarck. Central to Bismarck’s grand strategy was the construction of multiple, overlapping, and at times contradictory alliances with other European states after 1871 with the objective of avoiding the “nightmare of coalitions” that could strangle the newly established Second Reich in the heart of Europe.² Yet Bismarck’s attempts at avoiding balancing did not begin only after the creation of the German state. So too did the Prussian leader strive to prevent hostile military balancing during the Wars of German Unification, in 1866 and again in 1870-71. Through careful planning and coordination of his military

¹ Robert Jervis, *Systems Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 232.

² Josef Joffe, “‘Bismarck’ or ‘Britain’? Toward an American Grand Strategy after Bipolarity,” *International Security* 19, 4 (Spring 1995), 105-08. Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), ch. 5

and diplomatic offenses, Bismarck was able to avoid the military intervention by the other European states in the limited wars that established Germany as a great power.³

While Bismarck's goal of avoiding great power balancing resonates primarily because he was so successful, his efforts are not unique. The desire of powerful and ambitious states to avoid balancing is very common, and not always quixotic. For example, shortly after the end of the Cold War, the United States engaged in a long-term project to prevent the rise of any "peer competitor" that could either threaten the U.S. directly, or substantially challenge its freedom of movement in the post-Cold War world.⁴ While many nations have balked at specific American foreign policy decisions, the durability of American hegemony appears quite strong.

Irrespective of the objectives and desires of powerful and ambitious states, the ability to avoid balancing by others is an extraordinarily difficult feat to pull off. It is all the more so when such states have initiated armed conflict. In these circumstances, other great powers tend to find it in their best interests to engage in *some* form of balancing behavior: to do otherwise could allow the challenger to grow more powerful (and more menacing) still. For a great power that has initiated a limited war—the subject of this dissertation—the task at hand is to attempt to *moderate* the balancing behavior of others; to strive to avoid the most extreme form of balancing that others can adopt, direct

³ Richard Smoke, *War: Controlling Escalation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), chs. 5-6; David Wetzel, *A Duel of Giants: Bismarck, Napoleon III, and the Origins of the Franco-Prussian War* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001); A. J. P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954).

⁴ See, for example, Barton Gellman, "Keeping the U.S. First: Pentagon Would Preclude a Rival Superpower," *Washington Post*, 11 March 1992, A1. For a concise and compelling description of this effort, see James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Viking, 2004), 198-200. The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, section VII. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>; John Lewis Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

military intervention. This was precisely the objective of the United States in two limited wars waged during the Cold War. In both the Korean War and the Vietnam War, American leaders explicitly desired to avoid hostile military balancing by the People's Republic of China (PRC). Yet only in Vietnam was the U.S. able to moderate the balancing behavior of the other great power to such a degree that the PRC refrained from intervening in the war. Not only did China intervene against the U.S. in the Korean War, it did so in a manner that was exceptionally costly in terms of American blood and treasure. How can we explain this variation in balancing avoidance? Specifically, how can a great power that has initiated a limited war against a target prevent other great powers from engaging in the most extreme form of balancing, direct military intervention? More generally, how can strong and ambitious great powers successfully moderate the balancing behavior of other great powers in the international system?

Despite the long pedigree of balancing in international relations scholarship,⁵ a surprising lack of attention has been given to the subject of balancing avoidance. The primary reason for this stems from a particular bias in perspective in the balancing literature. Put simply, the vast majority of scholarly attention has been dedicated to understanding why states balance, and the motivations for engaging in one form of balancing over others. For example, prominent studies maintain that states engage in

⁵ The propensity for states to "balance" is a central dynamic in international relations and is perhaps the most intensely studied phenomenon in international relations theory. On balances of power see, Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001); and Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 5th ed., (New York: Knopf, 1973). On balances of threat, see Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); and Stephen M. Walt, *Revolution and War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996). On balances of interest, see Randall L. Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); and Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In," *International Security*, 19, 1 (Summer 1994).

different balancing strategies in response to relative power imbalances and to different manifestations of the offense/defense balance.⁶ Yet the motives, objectives, and strategies of the state against which others balance are black-boxed. What makes this lacunae all the more surprising is the fact that “balancing” is generally seen as a form of strategic interaction among states, where each actor’s ability to further its ends depends upon the behavior of other actors.⁷ Through balancing, one state attempts to prevent the actions of another from decreasing its security. Cast another way, when balanced against, a state is confronted by another who throws up obstacles to the attainment of its policies. We should thus expect the challenger to behave in ways that attempt to prevent balancing from occurring, or falling short of that ultimate objective, that seek to lessen the impacts of the opponent’s balancing behavior. The familiar logic of strategic interaction notwithstanding, balancing avoidance has yet to be studied by scholars of international relations.

To be sure, many scholars (particularly classical realists writing in a normative vein) have posited the beneficial, peace inducing effects of policies specifically tailored to achieving a stable balance of power.⁸ And, it should be noted, that many modern realists have dedicated portions of their studies to generating specific policy prescriptions

⁶ Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder, “Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity,” *International Organization* 44, 2 (Spring 1990).

⁷ On strategic interaction, see David A. Lake and Robert Powell, “International Relations: A Strategic Choice Approach,” in *Strategic Choice and International Relations*, David A. Lake and Robert Powell eds., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Arthur Stein, *Why Nations Cooperate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

⁸ Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973).

that great powers can adopt in order to succor offended states.⁹ Nevertheless, these briefs (however sage and logically consistent they may be) simply cannot substitute for direct theoretical and empirical inquiry. This inquiry should be guided by two general questions. First, do great powers *know* that they may elicit balancing reactions if they engage policies that may challenge or threaten other states? Second, *how* do great powers attempt to avoid being balanced against when they engage in such policies? The first question pertains to the perspicacity of a state as it contemplates a particular foreign policy. The second questions gets at the manner in which a state attempts to achieve its objectives, given its understanding of the international environment—in a word, *strategy*.

My objectives in the pages that follow are to reach an understanding of how great powers first acquire information about their strategic situation, and second devise limited war strategies that seek to moderate the adverse reactions of other great powers. I develop and test a novel explanation for the origins of balancing avoidance strategies in the domain of limited war. Building upon recent advances in the literatures of network analysis, industrial organization, and public policy, I argue that the *information structure* framework offers a potent explanation for the (in)ability of great powers to acquire and manage a dizzying array of information pertaining to the international political environment, and their ability to craft and implement limited war strategies that effectively moderate the balancing reactions of other states. The information structure framework views the state not as a unitary actor, but rather as a collection of entities (state leaders, military and diplomatic bureaucracies, and specialized intelligence

⁹ One example (among many that could be selected) is Stephen M. Walt, “Keeping the World ‘Off-Balance’: Self-Restraint and U.S. Foreign Policy,” in *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power* G. John Ikenberry, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 141-52.

agencies) that are charged with acquiring different types of information about potential opponents, and with accomplishing particular aspects of the broader limited war effort. The ability of these different actors and organs to share information and collaborate in the crafting and implementation of strategy, I argue, determined the content of U.S. strategy and, in turn, had profound effects on the balancing choices adopted by the PRC (the potential balancer) in both the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

As will be demonstrated in the empirical chapters below, the information structure framework provides more than simply an adequate first-cut understanding of the ability of states to avoid hostile military balancing in limited war. I found that in direct competitive tests with two prominent approaches in international relations theory—realism and bureaucratic theory—the information structure framework offers a more thorough and complete explanation for the ability of states to moderate the balancing choices of others. Realism contends that the ability of a state to avoid balancing depends on whether that state tailors its military and diplomatic policies to fit the intentions (i.e., the objectives and capabilities) of a particular opponent.¹⁰ The likelihood that a state will adopt an appropriate limited war strategy depends, in turn, on the amount and quality of information pertaining to another's intentions *at the level of the international system*.¹¹ Because realism views the state as a unitary and rational actor, it assumes that if information is openly available about another state's intentions, that information will be

¹⁰ Charles L. Glaser, "Political Consequences of Military Strategy: Expanding and Refining the Spiral and Deterrence Models," *World Politics* 44, 4 (July 1992); Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics*, 30, 2 (January 1978)

¹¹ More than any other theoretical approach, realism considers the problem of other minds—the inability to know another state's present and future intentions—to be the animating feature of international politics. Structurally, anarchy and material power considerations exacerbate the problem of other minds leading most realists pessimistic with respect to sustainable cooperation among states. Dale C. Copeland, "The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism: A Review Essay," *International Security* 25, 2 (September 2000).

efficiently translated into strategy and that the various organs comprising the state will work in concert to obtain its objectives. In neither the Korean nor the Vietnam case can realism offer a compelling explanation for the (in)ability of the U.S. to avoid hostile military balancing by the PRC. In Korea, information pertaining to Chinese intentions was widely available, yet the Truman administration failed to adopt a strategy that prevented the PRC's extreme response. And, while the outcomes of Sino-American interactions in Vietnam correspond to its expectations, realism provides at best a superficial explanation for how the U.S. was able to moderate Chinese balancing behavior.

Bureaucratic theory argues that as a result of the competition and parochialism inherent to inter-agency relations, states will be limited in their ability to ascertain a clear understanding of the strategic environment. Moreover, because bureaucratic activities are determined by entrenched standard operating procedures, states are forced to rely on limited information searches which bear a strong resemblance to extant knowledge possessed by their bureaucracies. Standard operating procedures affect how the state behaves internationally as well. SOPs are blunt instruments and tend to have consequences that are unintended and frequently unforeseen.¹² When applied to the problem of balancing avoidance, this approach fares well in Korea. Bureaucratic theory fails to explain the success of American efforts to avoid hostile military balancing in the Vietnam War, however. Not only did governmental agencies share information widely—with the effect of providing top policymakers with a remarkably accurate understanding

¹² Seminal works in bureaucratic theory are: Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999); John D. Steinbruner, *The Cybernetic Theory of Decision: New Dimensions of Political Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 75-77.

of the PRC's intentions—but the limited war strategy adopted was sufficiently nuanced enabling the U.S. to forgo actions that would have certainly provoked China's intervention in the war. In sum, neither realism nor bureaucratic theory provides a satisfactory explanation for the variation in balancing avoidance across the two cases of limited war. The information structure framework, on the other hand, offers a rich and consistent explanation for the variation in balancing avoidance in both the Korean and Vietnam cases.

My argument has important implications for both international relations theory and for policy. In terms of theory, three contributions stand out. First, existing theories of balancing suffer from a bias in favor of the perspective of the balancing state. As indicated above, the motives, objectives, and strategies of the state against which others balance have escaped the scrutiny of IR scholars. My argument corrects for this bias. By explicitly modeling how the strategy of a powerful and ambitious state interacts with those of other great powers, a far more comprehensive understanding of balancing dynamics can be achieved. By focusing on the strategies adopted by both states in the balancing equation, balancing dynamics can be better appreciated as a modality of strategic interaction, rather than as a systemically induced tendency by states in an anarchic international environment.¹³ Finally, by considering the determinants of strategy—i.e., the ability of states to acquire and manage information—my framework

¹³ According to Waltzian neorealism, balances of power “recur” but are not amenable to predictability either in terms of who will balance against whom, or when balances will emerge. Kenneth N. Waltz, “Anarchic Orders and Balances of Power,” in *Neorealism and Its Critics*, Robert O. Keohane, ed., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 124-25. A recent study of balancing by Jack Levy and William Thompson found a strong tendency for states to balance against those posing hegemonic threats on the European continent. This study's conclusions are notable because the hypotheses tested were generated from both balance of power and balance of threat theories. Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, “Hegemonic Threats and Great-Power Balancing in Europe, 1495-1999,” *Security Studies* 14, 1 (Autumn 2004-2005).

successfully bridges two levels of IR theory, the interstate and domestic level wherein strategy is actually developed. In so doing, I am able to provide insights into important political phenomena that are missed by theories operating only at a single level of analysis.

Second, the information structure framework developed here stands as a new contribution to the repertoire of theoretical approaches in IR theory. Although the subject of information management is not new, existing studies are overly pessimistic in terms of their implications for intentional foreign policy. Traditional bureaucratic theory suggests that information hoarding and bureaucratic intransigence are the norm in the crafting and implementation of foreign policy. As a result, one is left wondering how any state could actually *intentionally* accomplish anything in its relations with others. In a similar vein, political-psychological approaches leave one even less sanguine about the ability for leaders to successfully negotiate a highly competitive (and stress-inducing) international environment.¹⁴ The information structure framework does not dismiss the processes and conclusions of these approaches; far from it. What the information structure framework offers, however, is a means of putting the “normal” tendencies of bureaucracies and the limitations of human cognition in context. Through particular arrangements of information transmission within governments, it becomes possible for state leaders to get more from their bureaucracies on the one hand, and to limit the amount of time and

¹⁴ Among the most important works in the vast political psychology literature are: Robert Jervis, “Hypotheses on Misperception,” *World Politics*, 20, 3 (April 1968); Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); Deborah Welch Larson, *Origins of Containment: A Psychological Explanation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); *Psychology and Deterrence*, Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow, Janice Gross Stein, eds., (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); and Irving L. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink: A Psychological Study of Foreign-Policy Decisions and Fiascoes* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1972).

energy that any one individual is forced to expend on information processing on the other.

Third, my argument offers a much needed extension of context to studies that focus on how state leaders acquire information and policy advice. Many thoughtful, insightful, and important studies have been conducted examining the effects of different configurations of advisory systems and agency relations.¹⁵ The problem with much of this work, however, is that the outcomes under scrutiny are cast in rather insular terms, with inter-agency relations as the dependent variable.¹⁶ Foreign policy outputs and international political outcomes are thus relegated to theoretical after thoughts. By adopting international political outcomes (i.e., balancing avoidance) as the dependent variable, my argument is able to expand the empirical reach of these studies while retaining a focus on critical foreign policy process variables.

Finally, my argument has practical application in terms of American foreign policy. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, two issues have dominated the debate over American national security policy: the utility of limited war in resolving threats to national security, and the role of information management in designing and implementing security policies. It is now quite common to hear policymakers and pundits make reference to a fundamentally new era in international politics. Although the security challenges facing the United States currently

¹⁵ Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (New York: Free Press, 1990); Alexander L. George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980)

¹⁶ Two recent examples of this are: Amy B. Zegart, "September 11 and the Adaptation Failure of U.S. Intelligence Agencies," *International Security* 29, 4 (Spring 2005); and David Mitchell, "Centralizing Advisory Systems: Presidential Influence and U.S. Foreign Policy Decision-Making Process," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1, 2 (July 2005). Zegart offers a model of agency "adaptation failure," while Mitchell's primary concern is with developing an "Advisory Systems Typology." Neither author's dependent variable is cast in terms of international political outcomes.

are different than those the U.S. confronted in the Cold War, it would be a mistake to argue that the two periods have nothing in common. Quite the contrary. Just as limited warfare has long been a “policy option” for the U.S. throughout its history, so too have the repercussions that have developed in the wake of American military action.¹⁷

Following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq, a violent and determined insurgency emerged that has to this day dogged the Bush administration and the American military.¹⁸ Many are quick—and incorrect—to read the jungle of Vietnam into the desert of Iraq. I argue that a far more accurate historical analog to the war in Iraq is the American experience in the Korean War. The unforeseen and negative reactions that confronted the Truman administration have much in common with American efforts in Iraq today. Understanding the dynamics of strategic interaction in limited warfare is essential for successful foreign policy. Without such an appreciation, alternative courses of action tend to be sidelined in favor of seemingly “easy” or “manageable” solutions.

Of course, realizing that adverse political consequences can result from the launching of limited wars doesn’t itself offer clear policy guidance. Sound foreign policy can emerge only when state leaders clearly appreciate the constraints and opportunities in a given strategic context, and when the elements within the state’s foreign policy bureaucracy work in concert to achieving state objectives. In short, inter-agency communication and coordination is essential in the search for security. Following the 9/11 attacks, the vast majority of governmental reform efforts have gone toward ensuring that the American intelligence community communicates better within itself and with

¹⁷ Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

¹⁸ Additionally, the recent decision by Iran to restart its uranium enrichment program, despite significant international pressure, can be reasonably traced to the U.S. decision to launch a limited war in the region.

state leaders. While intelligence reform is of immense importance, my findings point to another problem that appears to have been missed in the reform effort. Namely, officials from across the government responsible for policy development must also be tightly integrated. In other words, just as it is vital that the National Security Agency, the Central Intelligence Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, etc. forge strong communication channels, so too is it critical that the various policy bureaus within the Defense and State departments (for example) coordinate in the development and implementation of foreign policy.¹⁹ I present a framework that demonstrates how such coordination emerged during the Cold War, along with the increasing ability to craft foreign policies that were more appropriate to the strategic environment than they were before.

In the rest of this chapter, I present the theoretical groundwork that guides this study. First, I present a model of balancing avoidance. My objective here is to combine extant understandings of the factors that induce balancing behavior with the strategic logic of balancing avoidance. In so doing, I highlight both the *goals* that a state must adopt in order to prevent balancing as well as the *means* by which a state can achieve those goals in general terms. Second, I derive hypotheses on balancing avoidance in the domain of limited warfare from three theoretical approaches: realism, bureaucratic theory, and the information structure framework. Finally, I discuss the methodology of testing these frameworks against two cases of American limited war, the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

¹⁹ For additional criticisms of the 9/11 Commission's conclusions see Joshua Rovner and Austin Long, "The Perils of Shallow Theory: Intelligence Reform and the 9/11 Commission," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 18, 4 (Winter 2005).

A Model of Balancing Avoidance

Two steps are necessary to generate testable propositions pertaining to the ability of states to avoid hostile military balancing in limited wars. The first step is the specification of the factors that induce states to adopt increasingly hard-line balancing strategies against a challenging state. The second step is the delineation of the logic of balancing avoidance and the strategic factors that challenging states must confront as they design policies intended to avoid or moderate the balancing reactions of others. Together, these tasks form a model of balancing avoidance. By incorporating factors affecting the behavior of both states in the balancing equation (i.e., the potential balancer and the challenger), the model of balancing avoidance corrects for the persistent bias in perspective common to the balancing literature.

Origins of Balancing Strategies

When confronted by a state that initiates a limited war,²⁰ how will other states select among the various balancing options available (ranging from internal balancing, to external balancing, to the initiation of war)?²¹ To answer this question, it is necessary to understand how states are likely to react to threats of varying intensity.²² The aforementioned bias in the balancing literature notwithstanding, international relations scholarship has come a long way toward understanding the factors that motivate balancing behavior of different types. An excellent place to start is with Stephen Walt's

²⁰ Limited wars are outcomes produced by the interaction of three states: the target of aggression, the challenger, and the potential balancer that has the means and, potentially, the intention to intervene in the war—the latter two actors being analytically salient. A defining feature of a limited war is the commonality of preferences held by the potential balancer and the challenger to the extent that neither state holds a top preference of direct conflict with the other.

²¹ For a previous consideration of this question, see James D. Morrow, "Arms versus Allies: Trade-Offs in the Search for Security," *International Organization* 47, 2 (Spring 1993).

²² For a similar examination of the effects of variations in the intensity of threat, see Patricia A. Weitsman, *Dangerous Alliances: Proponents of Peace, Weapons of War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

“balance of threat” theory. Walt argues that whether a state is perceived as a threat and is balanced against is determined by its relative power position, perceived intentions, and the nature of the offense-defense balance. A state will see another as a threat the more powerful it is, the more it is perceived to have offensive intentions, and the more effective offensive actions are over defensive actions.²³ Walt’s framework, however, provides little analytical leverage when applied to the problem of balancing in limited warfare because a challenger will score highly on all three measures of threat. If the challenger is a great power, then others will have reason for concern simply because great powers tend to have power in reserve to engage multiple adversaries. Because limited wars are wars of power projection, others will likely feel threatened as a challenger’s forces used in one theater may be extended to another.²⁴ Finally, because the challenger is already engaging in hostilities with the target, it is very difficult for the challenger to credibly commit to others its benign intentions. Even if it is possible to convince other powers that its aims are limited in the present, the aims of the challenger may not remain stable especially if significant battlefield opportunities open up in the future.²⁵ In short, any challenging state is likely to be seen as threat to others in the system. Yet, not all challengers pose a threat of sufficient magnitude to induce hostile military balancing.

²³ In his *Origins of Alliances*, Walt argues that threat consists of: aggregate power, perceived intentions, geographic proximity, and offensive capability (pp. 21-26). In *Revolution and War*, Walt combines proximity and offensive capability into the offense-defense balance (ch. 2)—a move consistent with the development of the literature.

²⁴ This factor will be modified by the nature the offense-defense balance. Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), ch. 6; Sean M. Lynn-Jones, “Offense-Defense Theory and Its Critics,” *Security Studies*, 4, 4 (Summer 1995); Robert Jervis, “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,”; and Charles L. Glaser and Chaim Kaufmann, “What is the Offense-Defense Balance and Can We Measure It?” *International Security* 22, 4 (Spring 1998).

²⁵ On the expansion of war aims, see Eric J. Labs, “Beyond Victory: Offensive Realism and the Expansion of War Aims,” *Security Studies*, 6, 4 (Summer 1997).

Although Walt is correct in his specification of the constituent components of threat, an additional perceptual factor—the “intensity” of threat—needs to be explicitly considered in order to understand how states assess threat levels over time. A state will evaluate the intensity of a given threat in terms of its “severity” and its “immediacy.” Severity is a function of the perceived ability of an opponent to attack and the likelihood that defeat will result, given attack. For example, as an opponent’s aggregate military power grows, so too does its ability to attack. Similarly, the more the opponent’s offensive capabilities increase, so too does the opponent’s ability to carry the war into different theaters. Furthermore, if the opponent’s aggregate power and/or offensive advantage is much higher, the state’s ability to prevail in a conflict declines. Immediacy is a function of the perceived time frame under which a given threat is manifest. This time frame is determined, primarily, by the level of hostility of an opponent’s intentions. If a state perceives that its opponent is very hostile and is likely to attack in the short run, the immediacy of the threat posed by the opponent increases. Other factors contribute to the immediacy of threat as well. If the state is currently suffering from a window of vulnerability due to an unfavorable balance of aggregate power, or due to the opponent’s military strategy and doctrine, then the likelihood of the opponent attacking in the short run increases.²⁶ In sum, although a challenger will likely be perceived as a threat to a potential balancer when it initiates a limited war, it is the perceived intensity of that threat that will provide the motivation for adopting one balancing strategy over another.

Intensity of threat is only one part of the potential balancer’s strategic equation, however. Dale Copeland has argued that, “[f]or any given level of [international] tension

²⁶ On window logic, see Van Evera, ch. 4. On connection between quick victory and strategy, see John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 29-30.

at any point in time, leaders will be reluctant to move to harder-line policies.”²⁷ States are wary of adopting increasingly hostile balancing strategies without undue cause. On the one hand, increasingly hostile balancing strategies entail increased costs born by the potential balancer. For example, the potential costs of intervening militarily against a challenger in a limited war far outweigh the potential costs of forming an alliance with another state. In alliances, states face the possibility that they will lose their autonomy and become entrapped, or forced into undesired crises or conflicts, by more reckless or threatened partners. Alternatively, due to the persistent incentive to buck pass, alliance partners fear abandonment by allies who may be loathe to pay their fair share in confronting an opponent.²⁸ The potential costs associated with war initiation, on the other hand, include: a defeat in war, a Pyrrhic victory, the loss of relative power vis-à-vis a third state, and the likelihood that through war the state appears threatening to other states. Of course, these potential costs must be evaluated by the likelihood of success of each strategy. Nevertheless, as a state considers moving beyond internal balancing to external balancing to war initiation, it must face the rising costs that each strategy potentially entails.

A second factor inducing reluctance on the part of a potential balancer to adopt increasingly hostile balancing strategies concerns the increasing risk of inducing an undesired war. The risk of war associated with internal balancing is best measured by the security dilemma. If a state elects to bolster its security by further arming itself, it runs the risk of provoking another state into taking the same action. Spirals of hostility can result from the security dilemma, with the end result being a net decrease in security for

²⁷ Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 41.

²⁸ Christensen and Snyder, *passim*.

the state. The security dilemma is also operative when a state seeks to balance externally. As Glenn Snyder argues, if a state in an alliance confronting another state in an alliance opts to “stand firm” in the face of a threat posed by the other, the result can be a tightening of the opponent’s alliance and an increase in tension between the alliance blocs.²⁹ If a state adopts this position *and* increases its own arms, then the state runs the risk of dramatically increasing the probability of war above the level that would result from internal and external balancing alone. Finally, the probability of war is 100 percent for the final balancing strategy. A state adopting war initiation as its balancing option will likely perceive itself to be in an intractable strategic situation.

In order to avoid running the undue risks and paying excessive costs associated with increasingly hostile balancing strategies, a state will prefer to adopt only the balancing strategy that matches the intensity of threat that it is currently facing.³⁰ Specifically, if a state perceives the intensity of threat to be low—that is, less severe and with a longer time frame—then it will likely adopt only an internal balancing strategy.³¹ If the intensity of the threat is moderate—either: longer time frame and severe or shorter time frame and less severe—then the state will seek allies. If the intensity of threat is high—short time frame and a severe threat—then the state will be induced to balance through war initiation. It is possible, of course, for a state to adopt a mixed strategy, but

²⁹ Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 198. Snyder refers to this as an “integrative spiral.”

³⁰ John A. Conybeare, “Arms versus Allies: The Capital Structure of Military Enterprise,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 38, 2, (June 1994); James D. Morrow, “Arms versus Allies,” 208. One of the key motivations for preemptive war is that the perceived time frame for action is dramatically reduced. See Jack Levy, “Declining Power and the Preventive Motivation for War,” *World Politics*, 40, 1 (October 1987), 90-92; and Jervis, “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,” 188-89.

³¹ Under these conditions, the state will still balance because it still faces a threat. It will adopt the least hard line form of balancing, however, because it is not confronted with a particularly high level of intensity.

the conditions that permit this are more restrictive than the literature assumes. Mixed strategies are likely only if the threat develops in intensity steadily overtime. If an intense threat emerges as a “bolt from the blue,” then we should expect that a state will quickly consider war initiation, even before it has given further internal and external balancing a chance. And, if the threat remains at a low level of intensity, we can expect a state to only balance internally in order to avoid the costs and risks associated with other balancing strategies.

Strategies of Balancing Avoidance

The above analysis suggests that the extent to which a challenger can avoid hostile military balancing in a limited war depends on its ability to design and implement strategies that refrain from posing a highly intensive threat to potential balancers in the system. Accurately calibrated limited war strategies are unavoidably complex and nuanced. They are dedicated to achieving two objectives which can easily become mutually exclusive: defeat of the target and avoidance of intervention by the potential balancer. When combating a target, military strategists prefer operations that stand the greatest chance of defeating the opponent in detail, in the shortest amount of time.³² In order to avoid intervention by the potential balancer, however, a challenger will likely have to scale back its ultimate war aims, the level at which it prosecutes its military operations, or both, so as to ensure that the potential balancer’s level of threat tolerance is

³² See Jack L. Snyder, *Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984). A recent example of this tendency is found in the so-called “Powell Doctrine.” See Eliot Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Free Press, 2002), 184-88.

not crossed.³³ Thus, limited war strategies that are appropriate to a given strategic context (referred to as “high quality” limited war strategies below) are born out of information pertaining not only to the target’s military capabilities, but also to the potential balancer’s current and possible future intentions.³⁴

From the challenger’s perspective, limited warfare can be analyzed in two consecutive phases, each posing distinctive information-related issues, or problems to be solved. In the first phase, a challenger must acquire information pertaining to the present and likely future intentions of a potential balancer, and then translate that information into a limited war strategy. The second phase is the implementation of that strategy by the challenger’s services and departments that have been assigned to accomplish different aspects of the broader war effort. In each phase, the challenger encounters different informational demands. These are, first, the parsing of signals from noise and the management of a large volume of information, and second the provision of behavioral feedback (about both the potential balancer and the challenger) to top policymakers. In other words, high quality limited war strategies are predicated on the operation of two balancing avoidance mechanisms: the *strategic design* and the *strategic integration* mechanisms.

³³ As Robert Jervis argues, in complex systems actors can never do just one thing: the actions of a state in one realm have effects in other realms. Thus, Jervis points to the necessity of strategy of “doing things in twos.” Jervis, *Systems Effects*, 10-12, 271-75.

³⁴ “Interests” are defined as the goals that a state hopes to achieve through its foreign and military policies. Interests are akin to a state’s preferences over outcomes or, the ranking of scenarios from the most to least favorable for the state. “Intentions” are defined as the means that a state plans to employ within a given international context to achieve its interests. That is, given its existing interests, a state’s intentions will determine which diplomatic and military actions it will take in order to secure its objectives. On the difference between interests and intentions, see David M. Edelstein, *Choosing Friends and Enemies: Perceptions of Intentions in International Politics*, PhD Dissertation (University of Chicago, 2000), 4-7. See also, Lake and Powell, 9-11.

The Strategic Design Mechanism

When operative the *strategic design mechanism* will provide the challenger with increasingly accurate assessments of the potential balancer's present and likely future intentions, enable the efficient translation of that information into strategy, and facilitate the challenger's adaptation to changes in strategic environment.³⁵ The first task for a challenger in a limited war is the determination of the potential balancer's intentions. The problem here is that accurate information about another state's intentions is difficult to come by. The familiar issue of "signals versus noise" in international politics is the primary obstacle facing a challenger in this regard. Typically, critical information about the potential balancer's intentions is buried underneath a mountain of superfluous and misleading information. Two factors conspire against a challenger as it attempts to ascertain a potential balancer's intentions. First, the potential balancer has an incentive to hide from the challenger information pertaining to its objectives and capabilities. A potential balancer can obscure this information by withholding what is important, and by issuing misleading signals designed to deceive the challenger.³⁶ While strategic deception is certainly a problem, it is not necessary to create the problem of uncertainty. Despite the attention that a challenger is likely to devote to a specific strategic setting

³⁵ The ability to acquire strategically relevant information and to adapt behavior based on new information is discussed in Stinchcombe, 9-17, ch. 4; Masahiko Aoki, *Information, Incentives and Bargaining in the Japanese Economy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 11-20. See also, Aoki, "Horizontal vs. Vertical Information Structures of the Firm," *The American Economic Review*, 76, 5, (December 1986).

³⁶ On the issue of private information and the incentives to misrepresent, see James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization*, 49, 3, (Summer, 1993). On the issue of "strategic denial and deception," see Abram Shulsky, "Elements of Strategic Denial and Deception," and the commentaries by Richards J. Heuer Jr. and Nina Stewart, in *Strategic Denial and Deception: The Twenty-First Century Challenge*, Roy Godson and James J. Wirtz, eds., (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002); and Michael I. Handel, "Intelligence and the Problem of Strategic Surprise," in *Paradoxes of Strategic Intelligence: Essays in Honor of Michael I. Handel*, Richard K. Betts and Thomas G. Mahnken, eds., (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 9.

when contemplating a limited war, information related to a potential balancer's intentions may arise from other theaters.³⁷ Moreover, if the challenger is attempting to acquire pertinent information by examining the potential balancer's domestic situation, then it will likely be swamped by irrelevant information intended only for domestic consumption.³⁸ Finally, as Ernest May notes, the increase in size and function of governments overtime has resulted in a concomitant increase in difficulty of states to accurately assess the intentions of others. Even strictly in the military sphere, the ability to conduct accurate net assessments has become more difficult as states develop more and more independent military services.³⁹

Given these difficulties, the most effective means of reducing the uncertainty associated with a potential balancer's intentions is the diversification of the measures employed by the challenger as it assesses its opponent.⁴⁰ David Edelstein has recently suggested that diversified "intelligence portfolios," or the reliance on many possible sources of information, enable a state to more effectively determine the intentions of an opponent than it would be able to achieve if it relied on only a few such indicators.⁴¹ While consistent portfolios are likely to be rare, the mere fact that a challenger has

³⁷ Cf. the problem that analysts faced prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor. "In 1941, for example, he [the American analyst] was confronted by trumpetings of danger from the Panama Canal and from San Diego, San Francisco, Vancouver, South America, the Caribbean, and the Philippines, to say nothing of a tremendous bulk of danger signals from the Atlantic and European areas." Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 3.

³⁸ Bernard I. Finel and Kristin M. Lord, "The Surprising Logic of Transparency," *International Studies Quarterly* 43, 2 (June 1999), 320.

³⁹ Ernest R. May, "Conclusion: Capabilities and Proclivities," in *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessment Before the Two World Wars*, Ernest R. May, ed., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 527.

⁴⁰ On the issue of accurately determining an opponent's intentions and capabilities see the seminal treatment by Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

⁴¹ David M. Edelstein, "Managing Uncertainty: Beliefs About Intentions and the Rise of Great Powers," *Security Studies*, 12, 1 (Autumn 2002), 11-12.

diversified its sources of information pertaining to another's intentions will allow the state to reduce the chances that it has drawn incorrect conclusions about the potential balancer. The bottom line is that while a challenger can never be 100 percent certain how a potential balancer will act in the future (especially the distant future⁴²), it is possible for a challenger to reduce the uncertainty in which it operates in the near term. Moreover, the incentives for a challenger to employ multiple sources of information about a potential balancer are strong: knowing that its pre-existing beliefs might be incorrect, and knowing that the stakes are high if it acts on mistaken beliefs, a challenger will be induced to hedge its bets by seeking as much information as possible about the potential balancer.

Once a potential balancer's intentions are determined, a challenger must then design a strategy that incorporates or reflects that information. While this may appear to be a commonsensical observation at first glance, the efficient translation of strategic intelligence into limited war strategy should never be taken for granted. First, by their very nature, "diversified intelligence portfolios" involve the acquisition and evaluation of information by a number of different state organs. As a result, the forum in which strategy is designed matters a great deal: that forum must be able to effectively manage a large volume of information about the target and potential balancer as the broader objectives of the challenger's limited war strategy comes in to focus. More specifically, limited war strategies involve a number of moving parts, including but not limited to the mobilization and deployment of armed forces; the timing tempo, and scope of military operations; and the nature of the diplomatic messages sent by the challenger to the

⁴² May, 535-36.

potential balancer before and during wartime. Information pertaining to all of these factors must be explicitly considered by a challenger if it is to effectively calibrate its strategy to avoid being perceived as a highly intensive threat by a potential balancer. In sum, the process of designing strategy is intimately related to that of information management. Attacking states that possess such fine-tuned information management systems are more likely to craft limited war strategies that accommodate a potential balancer's security and interests than are those lacking such systems.

The Strategic Integration Mechanism

The second phase of a limited war deals with the actual implementation of the limited war strategy. As indicated, limited war strategies are complex undertakings entailing both military operations against a target, and the careful signaling of the challenger's intentions to the potential balancer. A challenger signals its intentions to a potential balancer during a war via its military operations and its diplomatic communications. Timing and consistency are critical features in international signaling: if the verbal cues issued by a challenger's diplomats (i.e., signals of assurance or deterrence⁴³) are contradicted by the actions of the challenger's military forces, then a potential balancer is likely to discount indications that the challenger harbors benign intentions. In order for a challenger's signals to have any credibility with a potential balancer, concerted action among the military and diplomatic branches is necessary. Although a state's leaders may desire tight coordination, the ability to achieve it depends on the monitoring mechanisms available to them. In particular, if top policymakers are

⁴³ By assurance, I mean signals that are intended to convince a potential balancer that the challenger harbors no aggressive intentions toward it. By deterrence, I mean clearly articulated "if-then" statements: *if you do X, then I will do Y*. Deterrence implies future action, and the coordination among the military and diplomatic aspects of a limited war strategy is critical for accurate signaling.

able to receive information about the behavior of their own agencies during wartime in a timely fashion, then the likelihood of tactical mistakes metastasizing into strategic blunders is significantly reduced. Furthermore, because knowledge of a potential balancer's future intentions is never complete, top policymakers must have available to them information pertaining to the potential balancer's wartime activities. Such information will most likely come from the military services and diplomatic organs that have been assigned to conduct specific aspects of the broader war effort. In sum, the implementation of a limited war strategy involves two information-related features: the timing and coordination among military and diplomatic activities, and the provision of feedback to top policymakers related to how the potential balancer is responding to the challenger's behavior.

The *strategic integration mechanism* pertains to the coordination among the challenger's national security agencies tasked with particular parts of the overall limited war strategy. In limited wars, a state's agencies must take actions simultaneously, and further, the actions taken by one agency will likely affect the performance of another agency's activities. When operational, the strategic integration mechanism ensures that the objectives of the challenger's limited war strategy are fully understood and adopted by each individual agency. Ideally, this mechanism contributes to effective strategies by enabling a state's agencies to adapt to new information on their own, without imposing potentially disastrous delays on the challenger's overall effort. To the extent that a given agency can accurately interpret new information in a strategically-relevant manner, the state will avoid acting in ways that can be perceived as threatening by a potential balancer. While independent adaptation is desirable, it is far more likely that

coordination among departments and agencies will emerge when top policymakers are able to effectively monitor the behavior of the responsible agencies. With the provision of behavioral feedback, leaders' ability to monitor the compliance of a particular agency increases dramatically. In short, the operation of the strategic integration mechanism ensures that one agency will be able to act in ways that complement rather than contradict the actions of another agency.⁴⁴

Because balancing is a form of strategic interaction among states, the model of balancing avoidance explicitly incorporates the calculations of both actors in the balancing equation. In so doing, the bias in perspective common in the balancing literature is overcome. Building on extant theorizing, the model holds that states will adopt increasingly hostile balancing strategies in response to perceived increases in the intensity of threat posed by a challenger. From the perspective of the challenger, the model shows that in order to avoid hostile balancing in limited wars, a challenger must convince a potential balancer through its limited war strategy that it does not pose a highly intensive threat to the potential balancer's security and interests. Yet, the information burden inherent to limited wars is particularly high, and as such, the ability for a challenger to design and implement a high quality limited war strategy will depend on the extent to which a challenger is able to obtain and manage accurate information pertaining to the potential balancer's level of threat tolerance. Finally, because a challenger has two objectives in a limited war (the defeat of the target and the avoidance

⁴⁴ In the economic sphere, the pioneering scholar of integration among units in a multidivisional firm is Alfred D. Chandler, Jr. See his *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of the American Industrial Enterprise* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1962); *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977); and *Scale and Scope: The Dynamics of Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

of hostile military balancing), high quality limited war strategies require high levels of coordination among the departments and agencies charged with fulfilling specific aspects of the broader war effort. In sum, the model of balancing avoidance posits that a challenger will be able to avoid hostile military balancing when the *strategic design* and *strategic integration* mechanisms are operative.

Three Approaches to Balancing Avoidance

The model of balancing avoidance reveals information management as the critical obstacle to designing and implementing successful balancing avoidance strategies. The importance of information management is seen in two areas: in the design of limited war strategy and in the integration among policymakers and state agencies as the war is prosecuted. While the three approaches considered here (realism, bureaucratic theory, and the information structure framework) provide distinctive lenses through which the problem of balancing avoidance can be viewed, all provide useful analytical tools for evaluating how states respond to the limited war information burden. In this section, I derive propositions from each approach regarding the conditions under which the two balancing avoidance mechanisms will become operative.

Table 1: Three Approaches to Balancing Avoidance

Theoretical Approach	Salient Information Milieu	Level of Analysis/View of the State	Expectations of Balancing Avoidance: strategic design/strategic integration
Realism	International system	Systemic/Unitary	When the Potential Balancer's intentions are reasonably discernable/constant
Bureaucratic Theory	Intra-governmental	Nation/Decentralize	Pessimistic/When military's preferred limited war strategy coincides with Potential Balancer's intentions.
Information Structure	International System/ Intra-governmental	Nation/Decentralized	When the Challenger's information structure is "robust" (multi-sourced information flows & dense lateral connections)

Realism

Realism's focus on interstate competition in an anarchic international system leads it to be pessimistic with respect to the issue of balancing avoidance in general. When one state initiates a limited war against a target, realism expects that other great powers will be induced to adopt some form of balancing strategy. Yet, not all limited wars result in hostile military balancing. The question is: how does realism explain when a potential balancer will adopt the most extreme form of balancing—direct military intervention against the challenger?

Common to all realist approaches are the following hard-core of first principles: (1) the international system is anarchic; (2) states have survival as their minimal base-line objective; (3) self-help is the system mandated behavioral rule and states will be highly attuned to relative gains made by others; (4) states have limited resources at their disposal to provide for their security; and (5) states are unitary actors who behave rationally vis-à-vis each other.⁴⁵ From these assumptions, realism suggests that a state will be on alert when another initiates a limited war, especially one against a valued target. If the target is defeated, the on-looking state may experience a decrease in its ability to defend itself in the future. Thus, realism expects such a state to adopt measures that increase its ability to secure itself against the challenger. The specific balancing strategy adopted by the potential balancer is determined by the perceived intentions of the challenger.

⁴⁵ This "hard-core" of realist assumptions comes from Colin Elman and Miriam F. Elman, "Lakatos and Neorealism: A Reply to Vasquez," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 91, no. 4, (December 1997), 424 and their "History vs. Neorealism: A Second Look," *International Security*, vol. 20, no. 1, Summer 1995; Benjamin Frankel, "Restating the Realist Case: An Introduction," xiv-xvii and Robert G. Gilpin, "No One Loves a Political Realist," 6-8 in Benjamin Frankel ed., *Realism: Restatements and Renewal*, (London: Frank Cass, 1996); Stephen M. Walt, "Alliances, threats, and U. S. Grand Strategy: A Reply to Kaufman and Labs," *Security Studies*, vol. 1 (Spring 1992). See also, Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, "Is Anybody Still a Realist?" *International Security* 24, 2 (Fall 1999).

Specifically, if the challenger's objectives in the war appear to be highly aggressive, then the potential balancer will likely adopt the most extreme form of balancing, or direct military intervention. Alternatively, if the challenger appears to harbor less aggressive intentions, the potential balancer will likely forego intervention in favor of external or internal balancing.

Because a challenger in a limited war holds a top preference of avoiding direct military intervention, the challenger will have incentives to restrain its military behavior if it believes that a potential balancer will adopt the most extreme balancing strategy. Significantly, in the context of limited warfare, the distinctions between offensive and defensive realism blur. Irrespective of whether a state is labeled an "opportunistic expander" or as a "defensive positionalist"⁴⁶ for analytical purposes, the challenger will scale back its war aims if it has reason to believe that a potential balancer will intervene militarily against it. Writing from an offensive realist position, Eric Labs maintains that states will expand their war aims ". . . in response to strategic opportunities that may arise as a result of events on the battlefield or the belief that the costs of expansion are low."

Further,

A necessary condition of opportunity is the absence of systemic constraints. If another state threatens to change substantially the balance of power by intervening against a state that is contemplating new objectives, then such an expansion is unlikely to occur. No opportunity is present.⁴⁷

Defensive realists maintain that states are less likely to respond to strategic opportunities; it is the fear of unintended conflict spirals that motivate security seeking states. As Charles Glaser argues, inappropriately applied military strategies ". . . can alter the

⁴⁶ Joseph M. Grieco, *Cooperation Among Nations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

⁴⁷ Labs, 19-20.

adversary's need to pursue security by changing the threat to the adversary's military capability and/or by changing the adversary's understanding of the defender's goals."⁴⁸ Thus, defensive realists emphasize the importance of tailoring military and diplomatic policies to appropriately fit the nature and capabilities of a particular opponent.⁴⁹ Pre-existing and updated knowledge about the potential balancer is critical to the chances of success. Knowing whether a state is greedy or not, secure or not, and/or suffering from misperceptions will go a long way towards ensuring that an appropriate strategy is correctly designed and implemented.

How then can a challenger obtain sufficient information about the potential balancer to know the level at which it should pitch its war aims and the intensity with which it should conduct military operations? Neither of the two realisms offers deterministic explanations for success and failure in balancing avoidance; sometimes states get it wrong and must suffer the consequences. Yet the cause of such errors is instructive. Because both offensive and defensive realism assume that states are unitary and rational, they will take their cues from the pool of information available at the international level to form impressions of the strategic context. As challengers read potential balancers, they frequently find that they are not open books. As a result of the competitiveness of the international system potential balancers are wary of betraying their true intentions and of cooperating with challenging states.⁵⁰ Challengers are thus

⁴⁸ Glaser, "Political Consequences of Military Strategy," 498.

⁴⁹ Jervis argues that spiral model prescriptions should be implemented if conflict erupts among status quo states, while deterrence model prescriptions should be followed in conflicts where the opponent is an aggressor. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 100-02.

⁵⁰ Copeland, "The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism." At this level of generality, there is little to distinguish realism from "rationalist approaches" or "bargaining models" of war. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War"; Dan Reiter, "Exploring the Bargaining Model of War," *Perspectives on Politics* 1, 1 (March 2003).

forced to evaluate their great power opponents in very general terms at the start, but will keep an eye out for behavior that indicates a willingness on the part of the potential balancer to intervene. Once that information is made available, realism expects that a challenger will modify its war aims and military operations accordingly.

From realist logic the following propositions can be deduced. Regarding the strategic design mechanism: *a challenger will be able to avoid hostile military balancing in a limited war if the potential balancer indicates a willingness and capability to intervene in the limited war. A challenger will be unable to avoid hostile military balancing if the potential balancer fails to indicate a willingness and capability to intervene in the limited war.*⁵¹ With respect to strategic integration, realism expects a constant operation of this balancing avoidance mechanism in situations of limited warfare. Realism assumes that as a result of strong structural influences, state leaders will ensure that the various organs within the state charged with implementing aspects of the broader war effort will work together as the limited war is prosecuted.⁵² To the extent that my argument focuses on the domestic-level information processing capabilities of states, realism provides the null-proposition against which my argument can be evaluated.

Bureaucratic Theory

Whereas realism assumes that states are unitary and rational actors responding to international structural factors (in effect, black-boxing the inner-workings of states)

⁵¹ This proposition assumes that the potential balancer *does* in fact have the willingness and capabilities to intervene, yet for whatever reason, information pertaining to its intentions are shrouded in uncertainty.

⁵² Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 51-54. Posen maintains that tight integration between military doctrine and grand strategy occurs when the level of competition in the international system rises, or when “the system heats up.”

traditional bureaucratic theory explicitly focuses on how the constituent components of states determine foreign policy. For bureaucratic theory, large-scale organizations affect foreign policy outcomes in ways that deviate from strategic rationality. Put starkly, bureaucratic theory is pessimistic with respect to the ability of states to craft and implement limited war strategies that are able to avoid hostile military balancing. Based on the logic detailed in the model of balancing avoidance, limited war strategies require a challenging state to ascertain the intentions of potential balancers, efficiently translate that information into its limited war strategy, and then coordinate the military and diplomatic aspects of the broader war effort. On all three accounts, bureaucratic theory expects sub-optimal performance resulting in outcomes that stand a high probability of inducing hostile military balancing.

The seminal statement of bureaucratic theory with respect to international relations is Graham Allison's *Essence of Decision*. According to Allison, the manner in which states survey the international landscape, formulate policy options, and implement foreign-military policy are profoundly influenced by organizational modes of action and the manner in which the representatives of those organizations interact. These two influences, labeled the "organizational process" and the "bureaucratic politics" paradigms, exert distinct but powerful influences on how states evaluate their opponent's intentions, and design and implement war-fighting strategies.

Organizational processes (Allison's model II) affect both the manner in which governments process information and implement policy. According to Allison,

. . . . governments perceive problems through organizational sensors. Governments define alternatives and estimate consequences as their component organizations process information; governments act as these organizations enact

routines. Governmental behavior can therefore be understood. . . . less as deliberate choices and more as *outputs* of large organizations functioning according to standard patterns of behavior [or, standard operating procedures (SOPs)].⁵³

Insofar as the acquisition and assessment of information structure the “essence” of decision,⁵⁴ the manner in which bureaucracies assess potential competitors has a strong influence on state behavior. Building on Allison’s insights, John Steinbruner argues that bureaucratic routines severely bound the interpretation of new information. The information received by the state will be interpreted according to the existing knowledge within the bureaucracy. As a result of bureaucratic routines, information searches are expected to be limited, and the responses to them will be highly predictable.⁵⁵ Moreover, the policy options available to state leaders will conform to the existing repertoire of response scenarios, and will entail limited flexibility: “Rules of thumb permit concerted action by large numbers of individuals, each responding to basic cues. The rules are usually simple enough to facilitate easy learning and unambiguous application. Since procedures are ‘standard’ they do not change quickly or easily.”⁵⁶ In sum, the organizational process model is pessimistic with respect to a challenger’s ability to avoid hostile military balancing in limited wars in two ways. First, the information pertaining to the intentions of potential balancers will likely be heavily biased in its interpretation.

⁵³ Allison and Zelikow, 143.

⁵⁴ David Welch argues—incorrectly—that model II does not operate at the moment of decision. David A. Welch, “The Organizational Process and Bureaucratic Politics Paradigms: retrospect and Prospect,” *International Security* 17, 2 (Autumn 1992), 117. See also, Jonathan Bendor and Thomas H. Hammond, “Rethinking Allison’s Models,” *The American Political Science Review* 86, 2 (June 1992).

⁵⁵ Steinbruner, 74-78.

⁵⁶ Allison and Zelikow, 169.

Second, the ability for the military and diplomatic organizations within the state to work in concert is severely limited.⁵⁷

According to the bureaucratic politics model (Allison's model III), the content of foreign military policy will be determined by the "pulling and hauling" of bureaucratic players. According to this model, policy outcomes result from the political game played among actors in a hierarchical setting. Each player brings to the table distinct parochial priorities and perceptions. As a result, disagreements among the players will likely exist with respect to the objectives of specific policy questions, and the means that should be adopted to achieve those objectives. The outcome of such games can take one of two forms: either the player(s) with the greatest bureaucratic power and skill will dominate, or the players will agree to a log-rolled solution where all preferences are accommodated. The implications for efficient information processing are pathological. To the extent that asymmetric information can be employed instrumentally in the game, there are strong tendencies for bureaucratic players to hoard intelligence for their own use. Such competition over information reduces the ability of states to effectively manage large volumes of information, and decreases the chances that concerted action among the state's agencies will result. As Barry Posen summarizes, ". . . military organizations have both a proclivity for offensive operations and . . . they often resist civilian intervention in operational planning and execution. . . . Military organizations, *like all large organizations*, tend to seek autonomy from outside influences."⁵⁸ When a state's

⁵⁷ This conclusion was reached independently by Jack Snyder and Stephen Van Evera. Stephen Van Evera, "Why Cooperation Failed in 1914," in *Cooperation Under Anarchy*, Kenneth A. Oye, ed., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 97; Jack Snyder, *Ideology of the Offensive*, 24-25.

⁵⁸ Barry R. Posen, *Inadvertent Escalation: Conventional War and Nuclear Risks* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 16-17. Italics added.

objectives require integrated action between civilians and military officers both before and during a conflict, the bureaucratically-induced tendency toward isolation can be detrimental.

Traditional bureaucratic theory suggests the following propositions regarding the ability to craft high quality limited war strategies. With respect to the strategic design mechanism, *states will achieve at best a superficial understanding of the potential balancer's present and likely future intentions because information searches are likely to be limited, while the interpretation of that information will conform to the existing knowledge base of the relevant organization.* Furthermore, *states will be unable to manage the large volume of information pertaining to the target and potential balancer because of the bureaucratic tendency to hoard information.* While bureaucratic theory expects sub-rational outcomes in matters of strategic design, balancing avoidance remains possible, but under fairly restrictive conditions. In terms of strategic integration, bureaucratic theory maintains that state agencies will tend toward isolation. Nonetheless, *a state will be able to avoid hostile military balancing if its military's preferred strategy and SOPs for waging limited war coincide with the intentions of the potential balancer.* In sum, although bureaucratic theory is pessimistic regarding a challenging state's ability to avoid hostile military balancing in limited wars, that outcome remains a possibility.

Information Structure Framework

Similar to bureaucratic theory, the information structure framework examines the inner-workings of state governments to understand how states craft and implement foreign-military policy. While the two approaches both focus on state-level organizations, the information structure framework and bureaucratic theory have very

different units of analysis. The unit of analysis for bureaucratic theory is the governmental organization itself. For the information structure framework, the units of analysis are the communication channels connecting state-level organizations and state leaders. As I will demonstrate below, this distinction has dramatic implications for the types of explanations each approach offers. In this section, I first describe the state/system information environment. Second, I offer an operationalization of information structures in a manner consistent with that information milieu. Third, I offer general propositions with respect to the issue of balancing avoidance in limited wars.

Information Structures and Obstacles to Information Management

An information structure is defined as, “interconnected communications channels for receiving information from the environment, for processing that information to serve specific objectives, and for sending internal and external messages.”⁵⁹ The function of an information structure is information management—the selection and collection of essential data to provide the information which government agencies need to perform their missions. To a certain extent, a state’s information structure⁶⁰ is amenable to intentional manipulation. Once created, however, information structures tend to resist significant change. Part of the reason for this rigidity is captured by the familiar saying, “Information is power.” A given individual’s position of power in an organization is a function of the access she has to information about her own and other agencies. As such, political pressures will be brought to bear whenever information structure design comes

⁵⁹ Doris A. Graber, *The Power of Communication: Managing Information in Public Organizations* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2003), 5.

⁶⁰ Colloquially, information structures can be termed “networks.” I adopt the term “information structures,” however, to highlight the role of institutional rigidities that accompany existing communication channels within and among relevant actors (be they individuals or broader organs) in a state.

under scrutiny.⁶¹ As a result of this stickiness, at any particular time communication channels, information flows, and inter-agency connections function as structures that will resist substantial alteration in the short-run.⁶²

Two features of information structures in the state context deserve attention: hierarchy and division of labor. First in terms of vertical relationships, the higher an individual is in an organization, the more her information demands become diverse, externally oriented, and strategic in nature. The lower an individual is in the hierarchy, information demands become more specific, internally (or task) oriented, and operational or tactical in nature. In functional terms, as an individual moves up in the hierarchy, the more she adopts the role of information processor and disseminator. As opposed to those who are “productive” in the economic sense, higher-ups serve as coordinators of activity at lower levels. As an individual moves up the hierarchy, the types of uncertainties that she confronts change. At lower levels, the greatest obstacle to effective performance is “task uncertainty,” or the vagaries associated with completing specific jobs under internally derived constraints. At higher levels, task uncertainty is replaced with

⁶¹ Amy Zegart, *Flawed by Design: the Evolution of the CIA, JCS, and NSC* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). For a fascinating discussion of the role of the “information arsenal” in Nazi Germany, see Zachary Shore, *What Hitler Knew: The Battle for Information in Nazi Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). See also, C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁶² The intentional manipulation of information structures in firms is a far easier task than it is in the context of the state. Two potential reasons (among many) are the fact that formal restrictions (statutory, or otherwise) may exist pertaining to information dissemination, and that state bureaucracies wield authority and power which far outstrip that held by divisions in a firm. On the manipulation of communication channels in firms, see Rob Cross and Andrew Parker, *The Hidden Power of Social Networks: Understanding How Work Really Gets Done in Organizations* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2004).

“environmental uncertainty,” or the difficulties in determining how the organization’s objectives are being affected by outside actors and influences.⁶³

In any hierarchy, top decision makers are responsible (or are accountable) for strategic design and implementation. This is particularly the case in the context of the state where ultimate power and authority is held by national leaders. Although it is the state’s leaders who must determine foreign-military policy, the information upon which decisions are based comes from lower levels in the state hierarchy. Organs within the military, diplomatic corps, and specialized intelligence agencies deliver vital information to state leaders so that these leaders will have an understanding of the risks and opportunities in the international system. By necessity, these agencies will possess more information than a state’s leaders require at any given time, and leaders must have a means of calling forth only strategically-relevant information from their agencies. This poses a potential problem: those most in need of information will not know what specific pieces of information are required at any given time, and the suppliers of that information will not know which among the myriad of data available to deliver.

In terms of horizontal relationships, different agencies within a state are tasked with distinct functions and, as such, have unique information demands and processes for satisfying those demands. For example, the basic function of militaries is combat.⁶⁴ At

⁶³ On the difference between environmental and task ambiguity, see Duncan J. Watts, *Six Degrees: The Science of a Connected Age* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 268-69; for a related discussion, see Williamazonic, *Business Organization and the Myth of the Market Economy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 199-200.

⁶⁴ See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 11-16. “The function of a military force is successful armed combat. The duties of the military officer include: (1) the organizing, equipping, and training of this force; (2) the planning of its activities; and (3) the direction of its operation in and out of combat. The direction, operation, and control of a human organization whose primary function is the application of violence is the peculiar skill of the officer” (11).

any given time, the military confronts a discrete set of opponents on a well-delineated battlefield. While the uncertainties in combat are typically high, they are contained to that environment. The methods and procedures for dealing with the uncertainties inherent to combat are developed strictly by the organization and are modified internally.⁶⁵ Thus, when militaries are performing their function, information from other state organs becomes less essential to the completion of their task, defeating the enemy. In other words, militaries are organizations that respond to “local knowledge” and are characterized by closed circles of communication. As Arthur Stinchcombe argues, such organizations tend to develop specific sub-cultures that separate them from the broader organization.⁶⁶ While the armed forces confront unique uncertainties through internally derived standard operating procedures, diplomatic organs confront uncertainty of a different type and respond to it in very different ways. The sources of uncertainty for diplomats are far more diffused than they are for the military. Diplomatic organizations are tasked with a myriad of problems of different types, including but not limited to the physical security of the state. Because these uncertainties stem from a number of different sources, diplomatic organizations depend on information from other agencies in order to fulfill their function effectively.

The key point is that the types of uncertainty and information requirements that an individual confronts varies according to her position in the hierarchy and to the specific

⁶⁵ When they are engaged in combat, militaries prefer that their war plans entail the defeat of the enemy. The reason for this stems from the desire to decrease uncertainties (the future reaction of the enemy) and physical threats that are likely to be manifest in the future. This preference is an important source of conflict between the armed forces and their civilian masters, who may prefer not to defeat the enemy if the means of doing so entail some other political cost. On uncertainty reduction and military doctrine and war plans, see Jack Snyder, *Ideology of the Offensive*, 26-30.

⁶⁶ Arthur L. Stinchcombe, *Information and Organizations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 78-81.

agency in which she is embedded. Not only will superiors and subordinates conflict over information supply and demand,⁶⁷ but so too will the broader agencies comprising the state. For example, the more that the military is separated from the other organizations of the state—as a result of closed communication circles around localized informational bases—the more likely it will be that the military and diplomatic functions of the state will be uncoordinated. Yet, national security organizations operate in an environment of bureaucratic interconnectedness. As Amy Zegart explains, national security institutions cannot and do not function in isolation, their activities and jurisdictions overlap significantly. Foreign policy bureaucracies exhibit a high degree of “asset co-specialization,” where “the value of one agency’s work hinges, at least in part, on the work of another.” The upshot is that bureaucratic interconnectedness frequently leads to information “holdup problems,” situations where one agency imposes demands or restrictions on another agency leading to suboptimal performance.⁶⁸ When attempting to implement complex policies (such as limited war strategies), the ability for top decision makers to effectively acquire and manage information is at a premium. Only “knowledgeable” leaders can properly determine a state’s objectives and effectively monitor the activities of subordinate agencies.⁶⁹

What characteristics of a state’s information structure will allow top decision makers to effectively manage information for the purposes of accurately designing strategy and ensuring coordinated implementation? A state’s information structure is

⁶⁷ Graber, 54, 76-79; Robert E. O’Conner and Larry D. Spence, “Communication Disturbances in a Welfare Bureaucracy: A Case for Self-Management,” *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 4, (1976).

⁶⁸ Zegart, 37.; Aaron L. Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895-1905* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 282. See also, Hugh Helco, *A Government of Strangers: Executive Politics in Washington* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1977).

⁶⁹ Graber, 25.

considered “robust” when the information channels connecting top decision makers to subordinate agencies exhibit two characteristics: when they are multi-sourced and when they are supported by dense lateral communication channels among subordinate agencies.

Multi-sourced Information Flows

Information supplied by any one agency to top policymakers will pertain primarily to that agency’s function. Because state leaders and subordinate agencies are hierarchically related, the type of uncertainty to which each responds differs substantially: state leaders must be concerned with the overall performance of the state, while particular agencies will be dedicated to their functional performance. As such, information derived from a given agency will not provide state leaders with a complete picture of the external environment. Furthermore, there is a tendency for the information supplied by any single agency to be biased. As bureaucratic theory recognizes, biased information can result from a number of causes: the functional orientation of the agency, entrenched parochialism, and competition among agencies for greater bureaucratic resources and responsibility.⁷⁰ Thus, if state leaders rely too extensively on a single agency for strategic information, there is a strong possibility that decisions will be based on incomplete, inaccurate, and/or out of date information.

An example of how the exposure to only a single source of information can result in disastrous consequences can be seen in the secret negotiations between Britain and elements of Nazi Germany in the summer of 1939. At issue was a possible non-aggression pact between the two states; a pact that would have released Britain from

⁷⁰ Allison and Zelikow, 298-99.

having to fight over Poland, if certain conditions were met.⁷¹ For Hitler, this state of affairs would have been most welcome, as he could avoid a two-front war while achieving expansion throughout Europe. For Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, however, securing an Anglo-German accord offered few personal gains, while an accord with the Soviet Union over Poland was tantalizing.

Ribbentrop's own agenda involved an alliance with the Soviets and a war against the Western powers. The Nazi-Soviet pact represented the crowning moment of his career. It was the coup he had long hoped to secure, and it brought him the accolades of Hitler he coveted. The last thing he would have wanted to hear was news of Britain's willingness to sign a non-aggression pact with Germany. For this reason, Ribbentrop had to insist [to Hitler] that Britain would not fight over Poland, lest Hitler doubt the wisdom of a pact with Stalin.

To secure Hitler's consent over for his own preferred arrangement, Ribbentrop constantly fed Hitler information pertaining to British weakness, rather than London's determination to fight over Poland, if pressed. Critically, because Hitler never had access to the information that was in the possession of his own government, the führer was unable to strike a deal that would have kept Britain out of the war.⁷²

A significant benefit of a robust information structure is the ability for top decision makers to obtain information from multiple sources.⁷³ By breaking through the bureaucratic obstacles to efficient information transmission, multi-sourced information flows permit top decision makers to obtain a far more complete picture of the international environment.⁷⁴ Further, multi-sourced information flows are a means of

⁷¹ Britain's terms were: a renunciation of aggression, recognition of spheres of influence (with eastern and southeastern Europe going to Germany), agreements over arms limitations, and the resolution of colonial issues (especially with respect to Africa.) Shore, 89.

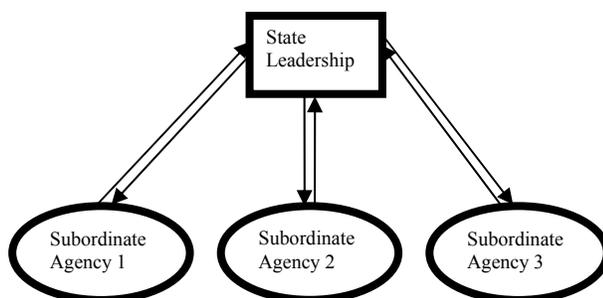
⁷² Quoted in *ibid.*, 98.

⁷³ Harold L. Wilensky, *Organizational Intelligence: Knowledge and Policy in Government and Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1967), ix-x.

⁷⁴ For an extended discussion of the importance of multi-sourced information channels in the context of presidential decision making, see Neustadt, ch. 7. Martin van Creveld argues that the most successful

providing state leaders information about the coordination of their subordinate agencies. If, on the other hand, state leaders are forced to rely on a single-source information supply, then they will likely base their decisions on a biased interpretation of the strategic environment, and further, their capacity to ensure coordination among the relevant agencies will be significantly diminished. Figure 1.1 illustrates this characteristic of robust information flows.

Figure 1.1: Multi-Sourced Information Flows



Lateral Connections among Sub-units

Significantly, the existence of multi-sourced information pathways is a resource for *leaders* to prevent poor information transmission. While this is a potentially powerful tool for state leaders, it does come at a price: information overload. When designing and executing complex strategies, state leaders cannot be overburdened with an excessive amount of information, and the sole reliance upon multi-sourced information pathways will almost certainly result in this outcome. As many scholars of political psychology have shown, the information processing capabilities of leaders is limited, and the

military commanders have been those who have operated in a multi-sourced information structure. Importantly, in none of the cases Van Creveld examines did a commander have complete or perfect information. Nevertheless, because the information that flowed from the battlefield to the commander was constantly augmented and vetted by information provided by secondary pathways, successful commanders could out perform their opponents. The information that these commanders *did* possess was of higher quality and was achieved at a faster pace. Martin Van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 268-75.

continuous flow of dynamic communications from multiple agencies will quickly swamp top decision makers' facilities.⁷⁵ To avoid information overload, information vetting processes must be in place at lower levels in the administrative hierarchy.

New research in the fields of network analysis and industrial organization demonstrates the power that lateral connections among interdependent but functionally distinct organs can bring to bear on the information overload problem.⁷⁶ Information structures characterized by dense lateral connections among agencies have the ability to “handle large volumes of information efficiently and without overloading any *individual* processors.”⁷⁷ In this sense, a key characteristic of a robust information structure is the ability to redistribute the burden of information processing, while maintaining the necessary hierarchical configuration needed to facilitate control over the broader organization, or state.⁷⁸ Locally connected information pathways, or connections among subordinate agencies, allow for this critical redistribution of information processing. Specifically, when subordinate agencies are laterally connected, the ability for top decision makers to receive properly vetted information in a timely fashion increases

⁷⁵ Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 269-70.

⁷⁶ The theoretical foundations for this proposition (that lateral connections in hierarchies reduce the information overload problem) are discussed in Watts, 277-84. For the argument that a small number of random connections reduce congestion in a system, see D. J. Watts, *Small Worlds: The Dynamics of Networks Between Order and Randomness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); D. J. Watts and S. H. Strogatz, “Collective Dynamics of ‘Small-World’ Networks,” *Nature*, 393, (1998). Random connectivity slights the realities (and purpose) of hierarchies. My argument relies on the notion that additional connections between/among independent units are beneficial, while accounting for the limitations of information processing in hierarchies.

⁷⁷ Watts, 273.

⁷⁸ These ideas were first developed in P. S. Dodds, D. J. Watts, and C. F. Sabel, “The Structure of Optimal Redistribution Networks,” Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy, Working Paper, (Columbia University, 2002).

substantially.⁷⁹ As new information enters the information system, it can be scrutinized by a number of different individuals—each of whom will interpret that information from a different perspective. While consensus on interpretation is not guaranteed, the ability to distinguish signals from noise will be enhanced through continuous debate and discussion at lower levels. Further, if the interpretation of a particular piece of information remains in dispute after this process, the ambiguity of that information may be reduced significantly thereby allowing top decision makers to assess the situation with greater speed and accuracy.⁸⁰ Finally, dense lateral connections have the ability to overcome the hold-up problems associated with state bureaucracies. As subordinate agencies interact, they are able to press their opposite numbers to provide critical information without having to force top decision makers to expend time and political capital in resolving bureaucratic disputes. In other words, coordination among subordinate agencies is significantly bolstered by the existence of dense lateral connections at lower levels.⁸¹ A dearth of lateral connections among subordinate agencies (a phenomenon known as “stove-piping”), on the other hand, will likely lead to information overload at the top, the result of which will be faulty strategic assessments. Further, as the density of lateral connections decreases, coordination among agencies will

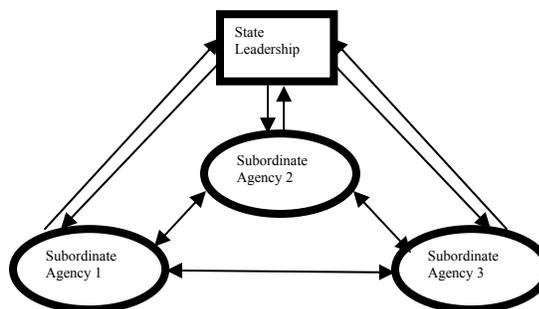
⁷⁹ On the promise of, and difficulties in achieving coordination among sub-units via lateral communications channels, see Laurence J. O’Toole, Jr., “Interorganizational Communication: Opportunities and Challenges for Public Administration,” *Handbook of Administrative Communication*, James L. Garnett and Alexander Kouzmin, eds. (New York: Marcel Dekker, 1997).

⁸⁰ Lazonick argues that one of the critical institutional features of the Japanese automobile industry that enabled it to achieve sustainable productivity advantages over its American counterpart is the *ringi* system of consensual decision making. Characteristic of the *ringi* system is the employment lateral (as well as bi-directional) information flows throughout the corporate hierarchy. Through consensual decision-making, Japanese firms have been able to design and implement superior investment strategies because of the close cooperation between managers and their corporate bosses—cooperation that ensures that high quality information will be available not only to enterprise strategists, but also to those who implement those strategies. Lazonick, 39-40.

⁸¹ Alexander George discusses the potential integrating effects of lateral connections. George, 145-47.

likely decrease due the overburdening of top decision makers with excessive information. Figure 1.2 illustrates both of the characteristics of robust information structures.

Figure 1.2: Lateral Connections—Robust Information Structure



A familiar example of how the absence of lateral connections among agencies can result in deleterious consequences occurred in the run-up to the ongoing war in Iraq. Although the rationale for the Bush administration's decision to launch the war is hotly contested, there is near consensus that the manner in which the United States waged this war had the effect of creating a series of deadly problems. Among the most significant is the indigenous and foreign insurgency combating American forces throughout the country. The conditions that permitted the insurgency to gain strength in Iraq resulted from strategic errors committed by the United States, errors that could have been avoided had the departments of Defense and State coordinated and shared vital information related to post-conflict stabilization policy. Prior to the start of the war, the State Department conducted a number of exercises over how best to manage the outcome of the war.⁸² In the absence of strong, formal, and sanctioned lateral connections between

⁸² See document collection and summaries made available by the National Security Archive at George Washington University. <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB163>.

the two departments, however, the Defense Department was not forced to confront and plan for these unwelcomed contingencies that were foreseen by American diplomats.

A potential objection might arise to the argument that greater lateral connections provide better information to state leaders and can facilitate agency integration. Won't the widespread sharing of information among lower level agencies result in collusion against the state's leaders? There are two reasons for rejecting this skepticism. First, as more and more individuals and agencies become connected, a collective action problem emerges. To the extent that collusion can produce material gains, and to the extent that those gains must be distributed widely, the incentive for any one individual or agency to risk detection and punishment decreases.⁸³ Second, lateral connections do not completely eradicate parochialism from the system. This residual parochialism can serve as a critical "whistle-blowing" mechanism whereby state leaders can become aware of potential colluders before the damage has been done. In sum, while lateral connections do not guarantee completely bias-free information transmissions and agency integration, the probability of error is significantly reduced. Furthermore, in conjunction with multi-sourced information pathways, the ability of a state to design and implement complex strategies increases dramatically when subordinate agencies are laterally connected.

When functioning, a robust information structure will efficiently provide decision makers with accurate and timely information. Essential information will neither be hoarded at lower levels in the hierarchy, nor will leaders be provided with information in

⁸³ In the terminology of principle-agent theory, lateral connections decrease the oversight burdens of state leaders and decrease the likelihood that subordinate agencies will "shirk" their responsibilities. For a recent extension of principle-agent theory into the context of civil-military relations, see Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

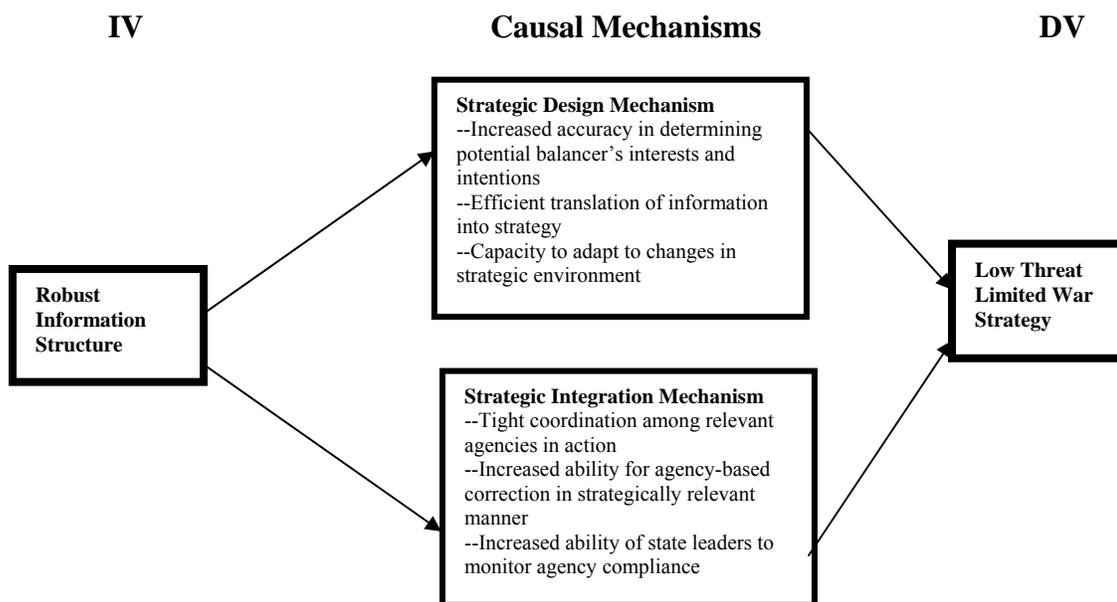
such a quantity that precludes high quality assessment. Robust information structures, in short, overcome the twin problems of information overload and of information scarcity. Truncated information structures, on the other hand are susceptible to these two information processing pathologies. The cause of each type of failure should be found in dysfunctions in the first and second characteristic, respectively. If information is too scarce, then the likely culprit will be the lack of alternative pathways from which state leaders can obtain critical information. In this instance, the strategically relevant information that leaders receive will come from one or a very few sources, and not from all of the implicated agencies. If information is too abundant, on the other hand, then the likely culprit is the lack of dense lateral connections at lower levels in the hierarchy that can reduce the information processing burden on top decision makers. In this case, leaders will be connected to a number of agencies who continually feed information up the line without the benefit of interagency vetting.⁸⁴

The information structure framework expects that a challenger will be able to avoid hostile military balancing in a limited war when its information structure is robust. Conversely, this approach expects hostile military balancing when the challenger's information structure is truncated. With respect to the strategic design mechanism, *a challenger's ability to accurately determine a potential balancer's present and likely future intentions increases when its information portfolio is diversified—or, when top policymakers receive information about the potential balancer from wide range of sources. Efficient information management becomes possible when those multi-sourced*

⁸⁴ When attempting to ascertain the cause of any particular strategic failure, it will be critical first to determine the kind of information processing breakdown (information scarcity or overload), and then second to understand which characteristic of the information structure was most likely the source of that breakdown.

information flows are supported by dense lateral connections among subordinate agencies. In terms of the strategic integration mechanism: *in the presence of new information, independent behavioral adaptation by an agency becomes possible with dense lateral information channels among relevant organs.* As noted above, however, even states with robust information structures cannot eradicate information parochialism from their subordinate agencies. It is thus far more likely that coordination among departments and agencies will emerge when top policymakers are able to effectively monitor the behavior of the responsible agencies. *When top policymakers receive information from a wide range of sources, their ability to monitor the compliance of a particular agency increases dramatically.* Figure 1.3 illustrates the causal argument offered in this dissertation.

Figure 1.3: From Information Structure to Limited War Strategy



Limitations of the Information Structure Framework

It must be stated that no state can be accurately described as possessing either a completely robust or a totally truncated information structure. These two categories are intended to serve as ideal-types which can be employed as analytical tools of comparison. As a state's information structure begins to approximate robustness, however, it should become apparent that its information acquisition and management capacities markedly increase. As those capacities increase, the ability of the state to design and implement complex strategies should similarly increase. Through the use of these two ideal types, a more precise and systematic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the state's information management capabilities can be achieved. Because no state will approach the ideal extreme, it is possible to explain both areas of strength and weakness within any particular state's information structure. In each of the cases considered below, I will employ these ideal-types as a means of uncovering how information was acquired and managed over time and of explaining the effects that information management had on strategy design and implementation.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that I am not offering a deterministic argument concerning effects of a state's information structure and the likelihood of hostile balancing in a limited war. Rather, I contend that a state with a robust information structure will be able to design a limited war strategy that reduces the *probability* of hostile military balancing. There are a number of potential factors that conspire against determinism. The most important is, of course, the difficulty that any challenger will have when it attempts to determine the intentions of a potential balancer. No state will have ability to know with absolute certainty the present, let alone future, intentions of

another state in an anarchic international system. That uncertainty is persistent in international relations, however, does not mean that it shrouds all states uniformly. The argument presented here offers a means of understanding how states can pierce the veil of uncertainty in international politics, allowing them to obtain increasingly complete information about their potential adversaries.

The second reason for rejecting determinism is that states with truncated information structures are not always doomed to suffer hostile balancing in limited wars. Simply put, “truncated challengers” can get lucky. Because the waging of limited wars is a dangerous and complex undertaking, I am strongly inclined to discount the potential role of good fortune in such cases. Nevertheless, given the research design adopted in this dissertation (see below), I cannot completely rule out the role of chance in determining the outcomes of the cases considered here. This does not mean, however, that the veracity of my claims cannot be demonstrated. Below, I outline a research strategy that is designed to minimize the influence that chance plays in determining the outcomes.

The Method

The three approaches discussed above offer distinct accounts of balancing avoidance. In this section, I will discuss how the competing explanations will be adjudicated. I will first detail the operationalization and measurement of the key variables under consideration. Second, I will discuss matters of case selection. Finally, I will lay out the testing method employed.

Balancing avoidance is a matter of strategic interaction among states. Whether and how a state balances against another is determined by its beliefs about the actions taken by the challenger. Similarly, the actions taken by a challenger depend on its beliefs about the potential balancer's intentions (i.e., beliefs about the potential balancer's willingness and capability to engage in balancing). To understand balancing avoidance, therefore, it is necessary to reach a prior understanding of the factors that influence the choices made by states, or the factors that influence how states perceive others in the international system. My dependent variable is the limited war strategy adopted by the challenger, measured according to the potential balancer's level of threat perception—ranging from low, to moderate, to intense.⁸⁵ The level of the potential balancer's perception of threat will be assessed by examining the internal discussions among that state's leaders with respect to the desirability of intervention, and the conditions under which they would find such a course necessary to their national security. In particular, I will look for expressions of concern pertaining to the severity and immediacy of threat posed by the challenger. It is important to remember that a defining feature of a limited war is that neither the potential balancer nor the challenger held military intervention as a primary preference. Thus, in cases where hostile military balancing occurred, it is necessary to understand *why* a potential balancer would adopt a course at odds with its top preference.

⁸⁵ I selected limited war strategies as the dependent variable, rather than balancing avoidance, because balancing avoidance is an international outcome, the occurrence of which is a product of state interaction. To the extent that my independent variable (information structures) is a feature found at the domestic level, it can have direct causal effects only on foreign policy outputs. By measuring that output according to how it is viewed in terms of threat by a potential balancer, I am nevertheless able to make explicit claims pertaining to international outcomes.

The causal variables of each of the three approaches to balancing avoidance also require operationalization. For realism, the key variable is the amount and content of information, reasonably discernable by the challenger, regarding the intentions of the potential balancer. In particular, did the potential balancer demonstrate through its rhetoric and behavior that it had the willingness and capability to intervene in the war, under certain conditions? In other words, did the potential balancer present a credible deterrence threat to the challenger? To answer these questions, I will focus on the potential balancer's verbal warnings (both public and private) and military behavior over time. The standard of "reasonably discernable" is met when the potential balancer explicitly threatens the challenger with hostile military balancing, *and* demonstrates through its military mobilization a clear capacity to intervene in the limited war on a dramatic scale.⁸⁶

Bureaucratic theory maintains that balancing avoidance will occur when the war aims and scale of military operations coincide with the intentions of the potential balancer. As such, bureaucratic theory's primary causal variables are the preferred strategy of the armed forces and the standard operating procedures of the relevant services for waging limited war. In each case, I will examine the historical record to determine how the military preferred to wage the war, and whether that plan was altered as a result of bureaucratic wrangling among the major state-agencies. Moreover, I will examine the existing SOPs for waging war to assess the extent to which they were implemented. In particular, were military operations conducted in ways that conformed

⁸⁶ Levy notes that superiority in military capability is not a necessary condition for the success of deterrence threats. Jack Levy, "When Do Deterrence Threats Work?" *British Journal of Political Science* 18, 4 (October 1988), 510.

to the existing military plans, or were they fundamentally reshaped as a result of civilian oversight?

Information structures are considered robust when two conditions are met: when the information flows connecting state leaders are multi-sourced, and when subordinate agencies are connected by lateral communication channels. Multi-sourcing is argued to have the effect of providing as complete a picture of the potential balancer's intentions that is possible, and of providing state leaders the ability to assess the extent to which their subordinate agencies are acting in a coordinated fashion. The degree of multi-sourcing can be measured by the types of information that leaders considered. By examining this "paper trail," it is possible to determine whether or not leaders were presented with information from a number of different intra-state sources. A second indicator is how state leaders responded to information made available to them. If state leaders actively considered information from a number of agencies in a comparative fashion, the then information structure is deemed to be multi-sourced. Alternatively, if leaders were exposed to one dominant source of information, then the information structure can be considered truncated.

Robust information structures are supported by dense lateral communication channels among the state's subordinate agencies. The effects of dense lateral connections are to reduce the information processing burden on top decision makers, and to provide an additional measure of coordination among them. Lateral connections can take a number of forms including: interdepartmental memoranda, the use of task forces, working groups, and interagency war games that comprise representatives from all affected agencies. For dense lateral connections to have the posited effects, the relations

must be viewed by the individuals involved as being mutually beneficial, and must include members who are charged with sufficient authority in the agency represented.⁸⁷

To have authority, these key individuals do not necessarily have to be the principals within an agency. Those individuals who receive and transmit the bulk of critical information are frequently not those who are not at the pinnacle of the organization. When those information managers are included in interagency communications, then the density of lateral connections increases.⁸⁸

It is important to note that my analytical focus is on the formal aspects of information structures rather than on the informal social networks that form throughout governments. By formal information structures, I refer to meetings, working groups, etc. comprising principals and/or subordinates that are formally sanctioned and charged with accomplishing specific inter-departmental objectives. Informal social networks are communication channels and relationships that exist to varying degrees in any large organization that tend to escape identification on an “organizational chart,” but which nevertheless exert significant influence on the performance of the organization. Although recent scholarship has attempted to uncover these “hidden” informational relationships,⁸⁹ I consider them only to the extent that they emerge from the historical record. There are two reasons for my focus on formal information structures. The first is pragmatic in nature: informal informational relationships are extremely difficult to uncover in any organization, and are even more so when the organization under scrutiny is half a century

⁸⁷ Edmund F. McGarrell and Kip Schlegel, “The Implementation of Federally Funded Multijurisdictional Drug Task Forces: Organizational Structure and Interagency Relationships,” *Journal of Criminal Justice* 21, 3 (1993).

⁸⁸ Graber, 103-108. Individuals who are involved in interagency communications are referred to as liaisons, boundary spanners, or bridges.

⁸⁹ See, for example, Cross and Parker, *The Hidden Power of Social Networks*.

old. Even when memoirs, oral histories, and diaries do reference informal communications among individuals, these sources are at best suggestive, and by no means definitive, as to the content of the information shared among individuals. Second, because my focus is on inter-departmental information sharing in the context of national security policy, there is strong reason to expect that individuals will refrain from revealing whom they shared information outside of the “chain of command.” It is these formal arrangements, I argue, that affect the quality of strategy design and integration, and about which historical evidence exists in sufficient quantity and quality.

The two examples of limited war I examine, the Korean War (June-November 1950) and the Vietnam War, (August 1964-July 1965) were selected according to three criteria. First, these wars provide the necessary variation on the dependent variable. In the Korean War, the Peoples’ Republic of China (PRC) intervened militarily against the United States (and United Nations) forces after the latter crossed the 38th parallel—an action that convinced the Chinese that the U.S. posed a highly intensive threat to its physical security. In the Vietnam War, although the PRC increased its level of military and political commitment to North Vietnam, and undertook costly mobilization measures that would permit it to enter the war, the Chinese never perceived the U.S. to be a highly intensive threat. As such, the PRC did not intervene militarily against the U.S. in the Vietnam War.

Second, in each of these wars, neither the challenger nor the potential balancer had a preference for direct conflict with the other at the start of the war. This criterion is important because it determines the empirical domain of limited war. As argued above, limited wars are those in which neither state has a preference for war above any other

outcome. By selecting cases accordingly, it becomes possible to ascertain the extent to which the actions of the challenger affected the intentions of the potential balancer as the war progressed. At the start of the Korean War, the case in which hostile military balancing occurred, neither the Chinese nor the Americans desired direct conflict. As the war progress, however, Chinese intentions changed, and it is the cause of this change that I will scrutinize.

Third, both of the limited wars considered here were “near misses.”⁹⁰ I consider a near miss to be a situation where the potential balancer’s decision to intervene turned on the challenger’s action at a critical point in the war. By selecting such cases, I ensure that intervention on the part of the potential balancer was in fact a “possibility”—an important standard for choosing negative cases.⁹¹ Because my argument does not explicitly incorporate notions of material power, it is incumbent upon me to select cases that control for this potentially confounding variable. In cases of significant power asymmetry in favor of the challenger, I do not expect to see the potential balancer considering hostile military balancing as a means toward achieving security. In these cases common sense and existing theory⁹² dictate that as the relative power imbalance grows significantly to the detriment of the potential balancer, it will avoid engaging in hostile balancing. By selecting cases of near misses, I have attempted to control for such

⁹⁰ On the use of “near misses” in competitive theory testing, see Christopher Layne, “Kant or Can’t: The Myth of the Democratic Peace,” *International Security* 19, 2, (Autumn, 1994).

⁹¹ On the “Possibility Principle” in qualitative research designs, see James Mahoney and Gary Goertz, “The Possibility Principle: Choosing Negative Cases in Comparative Research,” *American Political Science Review* 98, 4 (November 2004). Insofar as my proximate explanation for third-party military intervention in limited wars is “highly intensive threat,” following Mahoney and Goertz, I include the Vietnam War as being within the realm of possible cases (Rule of Inclusion). I am unaware of any existing theory which would *explicitly* rule-out war between the United States and the PRC during 19645-65. Thus, this case is not-irrelevant (Rule of Exclusion).

⁹² Walt, *Origins of Alliances*.

confounding factors in order to better assess the impact that state's information processing capacities can have on the development and implementation of strategy, and the effects that strategy can have on the likelihood of acute balancing.

When approaching each of the limited wars addressed below, it is important to keep in mind the motivating question of this dissertation: when a state initiates a limited war against a target, how can that state prevent others from intervening militarily against it? This question determines how I assess the effectiveness of the challenger's limited war strategy. In the Korean War, I argue that the U.S. designed and implemented an inappropriate strategy given the intentions of the potential balancer, the PRC. In the Vietnam War, I argue that the American limited war strategy was effective given the PRC's intentions. Because I focus on the interaction between the challenger and potential balancer, certain (though historically important) issues are not directly explored. In Korea, for example, I do not consider the causes and consequences of the North Korean surprise attack on June 25, 1950. In Vietnam, I do not seek to explain how and why the United States ultimately lost the ground war in South Vietnam. To be sure, these issues—preventing surprise attack and successfully designing and prosecuting military operations—are of vital importance in their own right, and speak to critical issues related to information acquisition and management. Yet, the exclusive treatment of balancing avoidance is warranted because of its importance in terms of international relations theory and policy.⁹³

I employ a two step process of competitive theory testing. First, in each case I engage in process-tracing to provide an account of: the preferences of the challenger and

⁹³ Critically, balancing avoidance is conceptually distinct from both surprise attack and the prosecution of military operations per se.

potential balancer before the war to ensure that neither side sought direct conflict; the information upon which the challenger developed its limited war strategy; the way in which the challenger implemented its strategy; and how that strategy affected the intentions of the potential balancer as the war progressed.⁹⁴ Process-tracing is the only means by which the information acquisition and management capacities of the state can be revealed. By carefully examining how subordinate agencies handled strategically relevant information, tracing the path that critical pieces of information followed throughout the state hierarchy, and uncovering the sources that provided the information upon which state leaders based their decisions, a clear picture of the state's information management capabilities can emerge. Toward this end, I have conducted an extensive examination of the documentary evidence related to American decision making during each war. With respect to Chinese decision making, I have consulted the growing body of translated documents and the vast body of secondary source material authored by specialists of Chinese foreign policy.

Second, I engage in structured, focused comparisons of each war to determine which of the three competing approaches to balancing avoidance offers the greatest explanatory power across the cases.⁹⁵ Further, I have adopted an approach that will enable me to increase the number of observations made, but which does not do violence to the interconnected logic of strategic decision making in each case. In each war, I examine particular decision points at which the challenger was faced with a choice of

⁹⁴ On process-tracing, see Alexander L. George and Timothy J. McKeown, "Case Studies and Theories of Organizational Decision Making," *Advances in Information Processing in Organizations*, 2, (1985); Timothy J. McKeown, "Hegemonic Stability Theory and 19th Century Tariff Levels in Europe," *International Organization*, 37, 1 (Winter, 1983).

⁹⁵ On the method of structured, focused comparison, see Alexander L. George, "Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison," in *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory, and Policy*, Paul Gordon Lauren, ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1979).

how to prosecute the war. I scrutinize both the information that informed those choices and the information pertaining to the activities of the relevant agencies once decisions were made. As King, Keohane, and Verba argue, “. . . it may be possible within even a single conventionally labeled ‘case study’ to observe many separate implications of our theory. Indeed, a single case often involves multiple measures of the key variables; hence . . . it contains multiple observations.”⁹⁶

Three critical tasks remain. First, I examine individually the two cases of limited wars in order to determine just how the information processing capacities of the challenger affected the design and implementation of its limited war strategy, and how that strategy, in turn, affected the balancing decisions of relevant potential balancers . Second, I explicitly compare and contrast the two cases in an effort to assess the causal effects of the information structure framework in explaining the variation in outcomes. Finally, in the conclusion, I will discuss in greater detail the implications of the information approach for both international relations theory and for policy.

⁹⁶ Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 218.

Chapter 2

The Korean War: Sino-American Interaction and the U.S. Information Structure

Introduction

In response to the invasion of South Korea by the forces of North Korea on June 25, 1950, the United States initiated its first limited war after the conclusion of World War II. Although the United States was responding to a perceived challenge from the Soviet Union, the U.S. ended up waging war against the Peoples' Republic of China. Top policymakers in Washington neither anticipated, nor desired conflict with China. Nevertheless, the manner in which the U.S. designed and implemented its limited war strategy on the Korean peninsula in the latter half of 1950 was directly responsible for Chinese intervention. In short, the United States failed to achieve a key objective in the war: the avoidance of hostile military balancing by the PRC. What explains this strategic failure?

In this chapter and the next, I answer this question by evaluating the relative strength of the three approaches to balancing avoidance: realism, bureaucratic theory, and the information structure framework. In this chapter, my objectives are to determine how American actions affected China's perception of threat and to operationalize the independent variables drawn from the three approaches. In the first section, I discuss the four phases of the American limited war in Korea during the June-November 1950 period and demonstrate how the prosecution of the war influenced Beijing's threat valuation and subsequent balancing choices.

In the second section, I assess the causal variables of the three competing approaches. Realism holds that the challenging state will be able to effectively calibrate

its limited war strategy when there is sufficient information available regarding the intentions and capabilities of the potential balancer. After examining the pattern of Sino-American relations prior to November 1950, I posit that there was indeed sufficient information available for top American policymakers to come to the conclusion that Chinese intervention was highly probable after U.S. forces crossed the 38th parallel into North Korea. As such, realism anticipates an absence of hostile military balancing in this case of limited war. Bureaucratic theory, on the other hand, predicts the opposite. According to this approach, bureaucratic parochialism and standard operating procedures of information processing determines how states behave in times of war. Based on an assessment of the preferences and doctrine of the armed forces at the time, I conclude that both the strategic orientation and the preferred mode of warfare were inappropriate to the strategic context of the Korean War during this period.

The information structure framework expects hostile military balancing by the PRC in the case of the Korean War. Prior to the outbreak of the war, the U.S. information structure was truncated in two profound ways: by a dearth of lateral communication channels among relevant departments and agencies in the U.S. government, and by the predominance of a single source of strategic information pertaining to the defender in the region. First, civilian and military departments in the U.S. government operated in relative isolation from each other without significant lateral communication channels among them. Although the Central Intelligence Agency was created to serve as the strategic information clearinghouse for the purpose of developing effective foreign-military policy, the CIA quickly became marginalized as a result of entrenched bureaucratic obstacles to information sharing. Moreover, because of the

formalistic manner in which President Truman arranged his advisory system, the infancy of the National Security Council system, and the intense competition between the departments of State and Defense over security policy, there was a marked absence of information coordination between these two powerful departments. Second, the dominant source of information available to top policymakers in Washington pertaining to the military disposition and political intentions of the PRC was Douglas MacArthur's Far East Command (FEC). The information monopoly held by the FEC did not simply emerge as a result of the outbreak of war in the summer of 1950. Rather, MacArthur and his intelligence chief Major General Charles Willoughby had a long history of preventing other intelligence agencies from operating in their domain. As a result, American officials were in a position of dependence on the FEC for information bearing upon that strategic situation in the Far East.

The American Limited War Strategy and Chinese Threat Valuation

Although China preferred not to intervene in the Korean War against the United States in the fall of 1950, the PRC nevertheless took that fateful step because it perceived the U.S. to be a highly intensive threat.⁹⁷ The increase in the PRC's threat perception resulted from specific actions taken by the U.S. and from the expansion of American war aims at critical points. First, immediately following the North Korean attack on South

⁹⁷ On the PRC's domestic social and economic challenges that weighed against the preference for intervention see Allen S. Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969) 15-22; William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 45-46. For an explanation for Chinese entry that incorporates ideological factors, see Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Chen Jian, "In the Name of Revolution: China's Road to the Korean War Revisited," *The Korean War in World History*, William Stueck, ed. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004).

Korea on June 25, 1950, the U.S. quickly committed its armed forces to the defense of the South and interposed the 7th Fleet in the Taiwan Strait on June 27. With this latter action, Chinese threat valuation increased as the U.S. demonstrated its willingness to become directly involved in the Chinese Civil War between the Communists and the Nationalists.⁹⁸ Second, the success of the landing at the port of Inchon by U.S. Marines and the rapid link-up of U.S./U.N. forces in South Korea put the American in a position for the first time to extend the war into North Korea. At this point, the PRC was confronted with the actual possibility that its neighboring buffer state could be eradicated. Third, the crossing of the 38th parallel into North Korea by American forces on October 7 was viewed by the PRC as a clear indication that the U.S. was intent on waging, at minimum, a protracted campaign against the new regime in Beijing.⁹⁹ Finally, after the initial clashes between Chinese and U.S./U.N. forces occurred between October 25-November 8, and as the U.S. continued its advance to the Yalu River, the PRC feared that the industrial heartland of Manchuria was subject to immediate American military harassment.¹⁰⁰ In short, China's intervention in the Korean War was driven by the perceived escalating threat posed by the United States as it waged war on the Korean peninsula and in the waters surrounding China.¹⁰¹ Significantly, at each stage the United

⁹⁸ Chinese threat estimation increased from a low point established in the spring of 1949. At that time, leaders in Beijing calculated that the chances for a direct Chinese-American clash were diminishing. Chen, *China's Road*, 101-113

⁹⁹ Sergei N Goncharov, John W Lewis, Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 157; Rosemary Foot, *The Wrong War: American Policy and the Dimensions of the Korean War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 65-66; Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 162-63.

¹⁰⁰ On the importance of Manchuria to the PRC's security, see Chen, *China's Road*, 106-113.

¹⁰¹ That is, and not by Soviet diktat. The PRC decided on intervention independent of the Kremlin and despite the Soviets parsimony in terms of military assistance. Christensen, 157-63; Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 83-84.

States made the decision to escalate the war based on calculations that considered costs and benefits with severely limited time horizons. Although each sequential step appeared to decision makers as imminently reasonable at the time, there was a general lack of appreciation for how leaders in Beijing would perceive the *totality* of the American limited war strategy.¹⁰²

1. Interposition of U.S. 7th Fleet and the Declaration of Limited War

Although intelligence assessments convinced the Truman administration that a war on the Korean peninsula was not likely in 1950, when the well-coordinated and tactically successful North Korean invasion did come it was quickly interpreted by leaders in Washington as being directed and controlled by the Soviet Union.¹⁰³

Confirming the expectations embodied in NSC 68,¹⁰⁴ officials in Washington thought that the Soviets were testing the firmness of the United States' willingness to resist communist expansion.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, administration officials considered the Northern

¹⁰² Similar situations can be found in Charles S. Maier, "Wargames: 1914-1919," in *The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars*, Robert I Rotberg & Theodore K. Rabb, eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), esp. 270.

¹⁰³ Leaders in Washington thought that any attack by a Soviet client state would come only as a pretext to the initiation of global conflict. Because the administration believed that the Soviets had neither the interest nor the capabilities for such a war, reports of an impending invasion were dismissed. P. K. Rose, "Perceptions and Reality: Two Strategic Intelligence Mistakes in Korea, 1950," *Studies in Intelligence* (Fall/Winter, 2001), 2-3 (http://www.odci.gov/csi/studies/fall_winter_2001/article06.html); "Intelligence Memorandum No. 301" Central Intelligence Agency, 30 June 1950, *Assessing the Soviet Threat: The Early Cold War Years*, Woodrow J. Kuhns, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, 1997), 396.

¹⁰⁴ By the time of the outbreak of the Korean War, American grand strategy had become more universalistic in terms of containing Soviet expansion. On the distinction between "strong-point" and "rim-land" containment, see John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 35, 55-58; John Lewis Gaddis, "The Strategic Perspective: The Rise and Fall of the 'Defense Perimeter' Concept," *Uncertain Years: Chinese-American Relations, 1947-1950* (Dorothy Borg and Waldo H. Heinrichs, eds. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 66-67. On China in NSC 68, see Gordon H. Chang, *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1948-1972* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 69-70.

¹⁰⁵ See the report conducted by the State Department's Office of Intelligence Research immediately after the North Korean attack. That report argued that the intention of the DPRK was to gain a decisive victory by seizing Seoul within a week. Moreover, the OIR contended that the Soviets were attempting to use

attack to be a ploy by the Soviets to wear down American capabilities in a non-vital area. Additional attempts could immediately follow on the heels of the North's attack, such as an invasion of Taiwan or the introduction of forces into North Korea by the Soviet's "proxy," the PRC.¹⁰⁶ Because the attack represented a challenge to the commitment made by the U.S. to an ally, Truman and Secretary of State Dean Acheson were convinced from the start that an American response was crucial.¹⁰⁷ For the president in particular, the Soviet-inspired North Korean attack smacked of Hitler's piecemeal aggression in the late 1930s. To refrain from responding would be to invite a global war.¹⁰⁸

Based upon its estimates of the intentions of the two states that had the potential of intervening in the conflict, the Soviet Union and China, the Truman administration at first adopted a strategy designed to return the peninsula to the status quo ante. The actions taken by the U.S. early on were believed to be circumscribed and cautious. Because officials in Washington were uncertain of the extent of Soviet intentions,¹⁰⁹ and because it was hoped that the South Korean Army (ROKA) would be able to thwart the Northern attack (albeit, with limited American support), the U.S. undertook modest steps

Korea as a base from which the U.S. position in Japan could be neutralized. OIR, 35 June 1950. FRUS, 1950, 7:148-54. For additional comment see, Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Volume II: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 631-32.

¹⁰⁶ Memorandum of NSC Consultants' Meeting, 29 June 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. I, 327; Draft Report by the NSC, 1 July 1950, *ibid.*, 332. See also, Foot, 61.

¹⁰⁷ For historical background on American policy regarding South Korea, see William Stueck, *Rethinking The Korean War: A New Diplomatic and Strategic History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), ch. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs, Volume II: Years of Trial and Hope* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956), 333.
¹⁰⁹ The lack of certainty regarding Soviet willingness to precipitate global conflict was a prominent feature of CIA reporting throughout June, July and August. By September, the CIA noted that while it had recently engaged in a "rapid advancement of a general war-readiness program. . . ." the Soviets were not in a position to successfully engage in "international military operations designed to defeat the US and its allies." See CIA 7-50, 8-50, 9-50, all under the title "Review of the World Situation." DDRS: CK3100376174, CK3100376181, CK3100376190.

in committing to the conflict. Two factors prompted the administration to increase its efforts in the war, however. The first was the painfully obvious fact that the ROKA stood little chance in stopping the Northern advance. The second was mounting evidence that the Soviets were not inclined to overtly support the North Koreans, at least initially.¹¹⁰

By June 27, the administration ordered the provision of air and naval forces to South Korea and the Taiwan Strait. Far East Commander General Douglas MacArthur was ordered to provide a small force to assist the South Koreans and to provide air cover for the evacuation of non-essential personnel from the South. The 7th Fleet was ordered to proceed northward from the Philippines to Japan, and units from California were to head to Hawaii. As the situation became clearer, Acheson recommended to the president that U.S. air and naval forces provide extensive support to the ROK below the 38th parallel and that the 7th Fleet be used to prevent a Chinese Communist attack on Taiwan, and vice versa.¹¹¹

On June 29, Acheson clearly defined the limited nature of the U.S./U.N. response in Korea. In a speech to the American Newspaper Guild, the Secretary of State labeled the attack “a cynical act of aggression” which posed “a direct challenge to the United Nations.” Yet, the U.N.’s support of South Korea was “solely for the purpose of restoring the Republic of Korea to its status prior to the invasion from the north and of

¹¹⁰ On June 29, Admiral Roscoe Hillenkoetter, the Director of Central Intelligence, made this clear to the NSC. No doubt this interpretation was supported by the conspicuous absence of Russian naval vessels in the waters around the peninsula and the silence of the Soviet press on events in Korea until June 28th. Even then, Soviet criticism was surprisingly circumspect. Cumings, 643-51. See also Foot, 61.

¹¹¹ Memorandum of Conversation, by Jessup, 26 June 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 178-80. Additionally, the Secretary of State recommended that U.S. military forces in the Philippines should be bolstered and that assistance to Indochina be stepped up (including a sizable US military mission).

reestablishing the peace broken by that aggression.”¹¹² Although the president soon approved the bombing of military targets north of the 38th parallel and the introduction of ground troops to South Korea, he was determined to keep the war limited and to prevent a direct U.S.-Soviet confrontation.¹¹³ Moreover, Truman and Acheson were intent on refraining from actions that would provoke hostilities from the PRC. Although the administration was concerned that the Soviets would have the PRC do the fighting for them, officials wanted to minimize the risk as much as possible (i.e., to limit the PRC’s involvement to indirect support via the return of the Koreans in the CCF).¹¹⁴ This concern led Acheson to counsel against accepting Chiang Kai-shek’s offer of 33,000 Chinese Nationalist troops for the defense of South Korea. Not only were these forces needed for the defense of the island, but the introduction of Nationalist forces would surely have provoked the direct intervention by the Chinese Communists.¹¹⁵

The 7th Fleet decision was a critical factor affecting the PRC’s decision to intervene in the conflict in October. The vast majority of Washington officialdom, however, did not perceive the move to be as provocative as the Chinese took it to be. The administration’s objective in interposing the 7th Fleet in the Taiwan Strait was to prevent the outbreak of another attack in the region, by either the Communists or the Nationalists. In the event of a general war with the Soviets, U.S. contingency plans provided for the

¹¹² FRUS, 1950, 7: 238-39. See also the statements by Ernest A Gross, June 25; Truman, June 27; and Warren R. Austin, June 27 calling for the North Koreans to withdraw north of the 38th parallel and for all nations to support the UN resolution to that effect. All in *Department of State Bulletin* 23, 574 (3 July 1950), 3-8.

¹¹³ Gary R. Hess, *Presidential Decisions for War: Korea, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 28.

¹¹⁴ William Whitney Stueck, Jr., *The Road to Confrontation: American Policy Toward China and Korea, 1947-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 181.

¹¹⁵ Acheson to Chinese Ambassador Koo, 1 July 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 276-77. Upon learning of the offer from Chiang, the JCS recommended that the offer be declined. Joint Chiefs of Staff to MacArthur, 30 June 1950. *Ibid.*, 269.

“neutralization” of the island in order to forestall the Soviets establishing air and naval bases on that strategically valuable island.¹¹⁶ Because no one in the administration was completely certain about the nature of the Soviet’s intentions on June 26, the administration moved to take that option away from the USSR. Moreover, the administration feared that should the Chinese Communists attack the island while the invasion of South Korea was ongoing, the possibility of a general war breaking out through miscalculation grew substantially. The decision to interpose the 7th Fleet was thus made in an effort to “circumscribe the area of the hostilities.”¹¹⁷

Although Truman and Acheson were clear in their desire to “neutralize” the island to prevent *both* sides from attacking each other, many in the Pentagon counseled against such an even handed stance and urged that the 7th Fleet to be deployed in order to serve operational objectives. In late July, the JCS proposed that the Fleet be allowed to render assistance to the Nationalist forces in taking preventive action against PRC on the mainland, which was believed to be capable of deploying 200,000 troops to the island.¹¹⁸ In light of the estimated threat to the Nationalists, the JCS recommended that the U.S. allow “. . . the National Government to employ its military forces in defensive measures

¹¹⁶ War plan OFFTACKLE, approved by the Chiefs on 8 December, called for a strategic offensive in Europe and a strategic defensive in the Far East in the event of a major war with the Soviets. The plan envisioned the U.S. retaining Taiwan (along with Japan, Okinawa, the Philippines and the other Ryukyus Islands) in its eastern defense perimeter. Kenneth W. Condit, *History of the Joint Chief of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy*, Vol. II, 1947-1949, (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1979), 294-302, 520.

¹¹⁷ Gaddis, “The ‘Defense Perimeter’ Concept,” 85-86.

¹¹⁸ This was not the first time that the JCS urged a military commitment to Taiwan. On 27 December 1949, a memorandum by the Joint Chiefs to Secretary of Defense Johnson was circulated to the NSC. This document stated that “A modest, well-directed, and closely supervised program of military aid to the anti-communist government in Taiwan would be in the security interests of the United States,” and that this program should be incorporated into a stepped up political, economic, and psychological program designed to buttress the Nationalists on the island. Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Walton Butterworth noted that the “proposal flies in the face” of existing intelligence estimates, would ultimately fail, and would significantly harm the reputation of the United States. Memorandum from JCS to Johnson, 23 December 1949. FRUS 1949, vol. IX, 460-67. See also, Condit, 490-91.

to prevent Communist amphibious concentrations directed against Formosa or the Pescadores.” Moreover, MacArthur calculated that the 7th Fleet, along with U.S. air power would eventually be able to destroy any attempted invasion of Taiwan by the Chinese Communists.¹¹⁹

The Secretary of State, however, insisted that U.S. policy with respect to Taiwan remain that of neutralization. As Acheson told Defense Secretary Louis Johnson on July 31, “we are not at war with Communist China nor do we wish to become involved in hostilities with Chinese Communist forces.” The Pentagon’s recommendations concerned Acheson in two respects. First, the Secretary of State feared that American commitments already outstripped its capabilities in the region. Any expansion of hostilities would jeopardize not only the effort in Korea, but would also hamstring operations in the Strait. Second, as far as Acheson was concerned, no one could provide definitive evidence that an attack was in the offing. Preventive U.S. action would only drive the Chinese Communists to retaliate, thereby making an invasion of the island all the more likely.¹²⁰ In short, despite the desires of some in the administration, the stated objective of the interposition of the 7th Fleet (and the intention of Acheson and Truman) was neutralization.

Irrespective of the intention of the President and Secretary of State to merely circumscribe the area of hostilities, the policy of neutralization was difficult to implement and sustain over time. And, irrespective of how the U.S. perceived its action in the Strait, the interposition of the 7th Fleet was, in effect, a de facto intervention in the Chinese civil

¹¹⁹ Johnson to Acheson, 29 July 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VI, 401.

¹²⁰ Acheson to Johnson, 31 July 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VI, 402-03. For further analysis, see Shu Guang Zhang, *Deterrence and Strategic Culture: Chinese American Confrontations, 1949-1958* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 62-63.

war. In the period of late June to early August, the U.S. wittingly and unwittingly took steps that would convince the Chinese that the U.S. was being disingenuous in its actions. For example, in late July, MacArthur visited Taiwan claiming, “arrangements have been completed for effective coordination between American forces under my command and those of the Chinese Government” to meet an invasion. After the meeting, Chiang Kai-shek issued a statement “indicating that the talks laid the foundations for a joint defense of Formosa and Sino-American military cooperation.”¹²¹ Although MacArthur consulted with the Pentagon and received encouragement from his superiors for the trip, the State Department received no advanced warning of the visit. According to historian William Stueck, the lack of prior consultation “reflected the horrid system of communications between the military and the diplomats while Johnson was secretary of defense.”¹²² Further, MacArthur’s prepared comments to the Veterans of Foreign Wars annual meeting, in which he openly argued for a commitment to Taiwan based on its strategic value in the American defense perimeter, no doubt solidified the PRC’s belief that the United States was bent on aggression against the new regime.¹²³ As a result of these overtures to their opponents on Taiwan, leaders in Beijing concluded that it was

¹²¹ Goncharov et al., 165.

¹²² Stueck, *The Korean War*, 68.

¹²³ According to Stueck, “The Far Eastern commander’s statements regarding the island and the Oriental mentality coincided with a number of critical events: a strafing by U.S. planes of a railroad terminal at Dalizu and an airfield at Andong, both in Manchuria; a speech by Navy Secretary Matthews advocating ‘a war to compel cooperation for peace’ and press reports of other support for the idea in high levels of the Truman administration; and at a time when the Nationalists continued their blockade of the China coast, their attacks on shipping, and their dropping of leaflets on the mainland, all of which conflicted with U.S. neutralization order of 27 June.” *Ibid.*, 69. Although MacArthur never actually delivered the address, a copy of his remarks was published in the *New York Times* on 29 August and in *US News & World Report* on 1 September. See also, D. Clayton James, *The Years of MacArthur, Volume III: Triumph and Disaster, 1945-1964* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 460-61.

necessary to step up China's preparations for the possible deployment of its forces to Korea.¹²⁴

In addition to the actions taken by the CINCPAC with respect to the Nationalists on Taiwan, MacArthur's prosecution of the war in Korea had the effect of signaling to the Chinese and Soviets that the United States was willing to directly threaten the security of these two states—even before the United States crossed the 38th parallel and began moving its forces north to the Yalu River. On August 12, American B-29 bombers attacked ground and naval forces at the port of Nanjin, seventeen miles from the Soviet border, despite the fact that the targets were obscured by heavy cloud cover. Upon learning of this operation through a press release, State Department officials complained that the DOS was forced to learn of these provocative actions days after the event took place.¹²⁵ As the air and ground campaigns in North Korea continued, the Chinese would continually protest that their security was directly challenged by American actions, and to a significant degree, these charges had merit.

Well before its critical decision to intervene in the Korean War, the PRC took a number of steps prior to mid-October that clearly indicated Chinese intentions to enter the war if provoked. Earlier in the spring, the Chinese codified an alliance with the Soviet Union, the terms of which weighed heavily in the Soviets favor and which was signed despite a long history of animosity between the two communist parties.¹²⁶

Viewing the United States as harboring aggressive intentions at this early date, China was

¹²⁴ Chen, *China's Road*, 142; Whiting, 88.

¹²⁵ Kennan to Acheson, 14 August 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 574-76.

¹²⁶ Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *Patterns in the Dust: Chinese-American Relations and the Recognition Controversy, 1949-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 28-29.

willing bear non-trivial costs to bolster its security.¹²⁷ Immediately after the U.S. 7th

Fleet decision was announced, Mao publicly declared the rationale for possible intervention:

The U.S. invasion of Asia can only touch off the broad and resolute opposition of Asian people. On January 5, Truman said in an announcement that the United States would not intervene in Taiwan. Now his conduct proves that what he said was false. Moreover, he shredded all international agreements related to the American commitment not to intervene in China's internal affairs. The United States thus reveals its imperialist nature in its true colors. . . . People throughout the nation and the world, unite and make full preparations for frustrating any provocation of American imperialism.

As a result of what was perceived to be American duplicity, Mao considered the 7th Fleet decision to be a declaration of war.¹²⁸ On July 7, Mao ordered the creation of the North East Border Defense Army (NEBDA) and began sending the PLA's best units to the Sino-Korean border. At the same time, Chinese forces that were tasked with preparing for the invasion of Taiwan were ordered to stand down and were subsequently redeployed to the northeast. By mid-September, the PRC had transferred over 300,000 of the best PLA troops to the border (with another 400,000 serving as a reserve), provided the logistical requirements of the intervention force, launched a vitriolic diplomatic offensive threatening a military response if the U.S. crossed the North Korean border, and initiated a domestic political mobilization campaign that would be essential to fighting war in a foreign country. All of these actions were known to administration officials and

¹²⁷ David Allan Mayers, *Cracking the Monolith: U.S. Policy Against the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1949-1955* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1986), 65-68; See also, Rosemary Foot, *The Practice of Power: US Relations with China Since 1949* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 116-19. Indeed, the administration was aware of the costs that China paid by signing the alliance, although it did not consider China's threat perception as a cause of the alliance. *The China White Paper, August 1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), xvi. Alternatively see, Goncharov et al., 121.

¹²⁸ Quoted in Goncharov et al., 157. Mao's speech was published on June 29 in *Renmin Ribao* and was intended for an audience in Washington. See also Zhou Enlai's speech to the United Nations, discussed in Hao Yufan and Zhai Zhihai, "China's Decision to Enter the Korean War: History Revisited," *The China Quarterly* 121, (March 1990).

occurred *before* the U.S. landing at the port of Inchon, when the reversal of U.S./U.N. fortunes on the southern battlefield was complete.¹²⁹ At this point in time, the U.S. did not pose a highly intensive threat to the physical security of northeast China. Nevertheless, leaders in Beijing clearly perceived the U.S. to be a threat of rapidly increasing intensity and began preparing for possible intervention.

2. The Landing at Inchon

Throughout July and August, the military situation in South Korea steadily worsened for ROKA and U.S. forces deployed against the advancing North Korean Army. By the end of July, the North Korean Army was bearing down on ROKA and American positions south of the Naktong River, an area commonly known as the Pusan Perimeter. For six weeks, the North Koreans launched multiple attacks against these defensive positions. At the end of August, the most violent attacks occurred all along the perimeter. Through the skillful manipulation of interior lines, however, General Walton Walker's 24th Division was able to out last the North Korean offensive. By September 10th, U.S. forces in the Pusan Perimeter had grown substantially due to the continued buildup of troops and materiel. The North Korean forces, on the other hand, were badly diminished and significantly out gunned. Moreover, the Far East Air Forces (FEAF) and the 7th Fleet had total command of the air meaning that no close air support was available to Kim's forces.¹³⁰

The fortunes of the North Korean Army ultimately changed when the X Corps successfully landed on the beach at the port of Inchon on September 15. For more than

¹²⁹ Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, 58-63; Chen, *China's Road*, 144-45, 157. On China's diplomatic warnings see, Whiting, *passim*; Christensen, 151-53; and Kuo-kang Shao, *Zhou Enlai and the Foundations of Chinese Foreign Policy* (New York: St. Martins, 1996), 182.

¹³⁰ D. Clayton James, *Years of MacArthur*, vol. III (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 446-51.

two months, MacArthur and his staff had been planning an amphibious attack in the enemy's rear, the intent of which was to envelop the North Korean army (which was vulnerable due to its badly stretched logistical supply route) and destroy it from multiple sides.¹³¹ Although MacArthur was highly optimistic that the plan would succeed, the Joint Chiefs were wary. It was only on 8 September, after MacArthur had repeatedly argued that Operation CHROMITE was possible and presented the best means of defeating the North Korean army in South Korea, that the Chiefs relented granting the CINCPAC the authority to commence the operation.¹³² Although it took sometime before the NKPA forces along the Pusan Perimeter realized that they were vulnerable in the North, by September 22 resistance in the south crumbled and General Walker ordered the breakout with the intent of linking up with the X Corp.¹³³ By the end of September, the objective of the United States and the United Nations had been obtained. As it appeared to both MacArthur and officials in Washington, the North Korean army had been destroyed and Seoul had been returned to the ROK. Only much later would it be realized that a majority of the senior North Korean officers and roughly one third of their troops escaped the double envelopment between Inchon and the Naktong River and made their

¹³¹ Although, success of CHROMITE was not predicated on the link up between the two forces. MacArthur's strategy envisioned victory via the "seizure of the heart of the North Korean distributing system in the Seoul area. . . ." The eventual link up would serve only as a symbolic demonstration of the NKPA's defeat. James F. Schnabel, *United States Army in the Korean War, Policy and Direction: The First Year* (Washington, DC: United States Army, 1972), 154.

¹³² The reluctance and doubt on the part of the Chiefs concerning Inchon is significant to the extent that once MacArthur's plans were executed brilliantly, his superiors at the Pentagon were unwilling to question any further command decisions. James, *Years of MacArthur*, 464-85.

¹³³ James F. Schnabel and Robert J. Watson, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, vol. 3, 1950-1951, *The Korean War, Part One* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Office of Joint History, 1998), 201-18.

way back across the 38th parallel in tact.¹³⁴ In the present, however, the situation appeared to American commanders to be highly favorable.

The Inchon operation had a devastating effect on the KPA and on Kim's confidence. On September 29 Kim cabled Stalin requesting an outright commitment of Soviet troops to save the North Korean army. If that were not possible, Kim asked the Soviet leader if he could arrange for a Chinese intervention.¹³⁵ Demurring from committing the Soviets to a war in Korea, Stalin immediately cabled Mao urging that the PLA "move immediately at least five or six divisions to the 38th parallel" so that the KPA could be spared total defeat and to assist the North Koreans in mobilizing a new army. Stalin suggested that the Chinese forces "could pose as volunteers [but] with Chinese command at the helm." As Zubok and Pleshakov note, in a matter of minutes after receiving the urgent pleas from Kim, Stalin "passed the buck to the Chinese, making them responsible for Kim's regime and the war."¹³⁶ Kim, however, was in no position to wait for an answer. Late in the evening on October 1, the North Korean leader called together an urgent meeting with the PRC's ambassador Ni Zhiliang in Pyongyang where in he formally requested Chinese intervention.¹³⁷

Although Stalin had "suggested" that the PRC intervene to save the fortunes of the KPA, Mao and his field commanders did not require prodding. Mao was already committed to intervention on behalf of the North Koreans should the Americans cross the

¹³⁴ D. Clayton James, *Refighting the Last War: Command and Crisis in Korea, 1950-1953* (New York: Free Press, 1993), ch. 7.

¹³⁵ Kim's letter was sent to Stalin on 29 September. Stalin received that letter at his dacha at Sochi on October 1st after midnight. Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 103; Vlasislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996) 65.

¹³⁶ Zubok and Pleshakov, 65.

¹³⁷ Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, 74-75.

38th parallel. Militarily intervention would be most effective after U.N. forces crossed the 38th parallel, but prior to their consolidating their position in the north. More importantly, despite the fact that Mao was convinced that the U.S. was bent on aggression against China, it remained necessary to determine whether the enemy would, in fact, move toward the Chinese border. Only under those circumstances would the threat to the PRC be immediately manifest and require military action.¹³⁸ On October 1, intelligence reports came in to Mao indicating that elements of the U.N.'s forces (i.e., South Korean troops) had crossed the 38th parallel. Twenty-four hours later, after a marathon meeting with other high PRC officials, Mao made his initial decision to prepare for intervention in Korea. On October 2, Mao ordered the 13th Army Corps to “end all preparations ahead of our schedule,” and to ensure that these forces were ready to cross the Yalu should the situation require it.¹³⁹

On October 3, Mao cabled Stalin detailing the PLA's military strategy for intervention. “Under present circumstances, we will begin to dispatch the twelve [infantry] divisions already deployed in South Manchuria into North Korea—not necessarily down along the 38th parallel—on October 15.” In what would become known as the First Phase Offensive, Mao indicated that these forces “will mainly be in a defensive disposition,” with the immediate goal of “fight[ing] the enemy forces which are threatening to attack the areas north of the 38th parallel but aim at annihilating small units so as to get to know each side's [combat] situation.” Mao also informed Stalin that the PRC had deployed an additional twenty four infantry divisions as reinforcements which would be deployed south of the Yalu the following spring or summer, “if circumstances

¹³⁸ Christensen, 157-63.

¹³⁹ Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, 77-79.

require.” Yet, Mao had reservations about the ability of his forces to effectively check the U.N. advance. In light of the superiority in terms of firepower and the total command of the air held by the U.S./U.N. forces, Mao requested Soviet military assistance (both in ground and air forces).¹⁴⁰

Given these lingering concerns pertaining to the ability of the CCF to prevail in a war against the United States, and Mao’s general preference not to commit his country to a war in Korea, Beijing offered Washington one final deterrent warning against sending American forces across the 38th parallel. As the U.S. stood poised to cross into the DPRK, the Chinese sent a strongly worded message to Washington warning against such a decision. On October 2, Zhou Enlai held a midnight meeting with Indian Ambassador Panikkar in which he bluntly stated that if the Americans crossed the 38th parallel, the PLA would enter the war. “The American forces are trying to cross the 38th parallel and to expand the war. If they really want to do this, we will not sit still without doing anything. We will be forced to intervene.”¹⁴¹ This diplomatic signal was not the only one received by the United States, however. In late September the U.S. received word from Indian Prime Minister Nehru and from the Dutch Charge in Beijing that the Chinese would certainly intervene in response to a crossing of the parallel by U.S. forces.¹⁴² As will be discussed below, these warnings, along with the numerous other indications of Chinese intentions, had no restraining effect on U.S. decision making.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 79.

¹⁴¹ Quoted in Chen, *China’s Road*, 180.

¹⁴² Memorandum of Conversation by Merchant, 27 September 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII 793-94; Acheson to Webb 28 September 1950. Ibid., 797-98; Ambassador in the Netherlands (Chapin) to Acheson, 3 October 1950. 858.

3. Crossing the 38th Parallel—The War for Rollback Begins

On October 8, seven days after ROK forces, the United States undertook an invasion of North Korea. MacArthur's new objective was to defeat the retreating North Korean forces as quickly as possible and to occupy all of North Korean territory. Upon returning to Tokyo after meeting with Truman on Wake Island on October 14, MacArthur learned that the intended landing point for the second amphibious assault on the peninsula (at Wonsan on the eastern coast by the X Corps) was covered with mines. MacArthur quickly changed his plan for destroying what was thought to be the remnant enemy forces in Korea. On October 17 the CINCUN moved the line beyond which non-ROKA forces were prohibited from crossing thirty miles to the north. That line was roughly forty miles south of the Manchurian border and 100 miles south of the Soviet border. Two days later he ordered a "maximum effort" by "all concerned" to seize positions along that front and to be "prepared for continued rapid advance to the border of North Korea." Unaware of the Chinese forces coming across the Yalu River, MacArthur ordered the lifting of all of the restrictions imposed on U.S. forces in Korea on October 24. His commanders were "authorized to use any and all ground forces. . . . as necessary to secure all of North Korea."¹⁴³

The PRC launched its major offensive against U.S./U.N. forces on November 25, but prior to that the Chinese did reveal that they were in North Korea in force. To be sure, the Chinese were able to cross the Yalu with 260,000 troops undetected in mid-October. Yet, from October 25-November 8, the PRC waged what is known as the First

¹⁴³ Clay Blair, *The Forgotten War: America in Korea, 1950-1953* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1987), 351-52, 363. Despite the fact that the JCS were piqued by MacArthur's actions and his justifications for them, in light of CINCUN's insistence that the war's end was near and that his order was implemented to save the lives of his troops, the JCS relented and allowed the action to commence.

Phase Offensive, the objectives of which were to test the strengths and weaknesses of its American and Korean opponents, and to lure them in deeper into the northern reaches of the peninsula.¹⁴⁴ In the west, elements of two divisions from two Chinese armies nearly destroyed two South Korean divisions, and badly mauled a third. Additionally, elements from one of the Chinese armies essentially destroyed the American 8th Cavalry Regiment. In the east, Chinese troops moved into the area near the Chosin Reservoir to conduct defensive holding operations against the advancing X Corp.¹⁴⁵ On November 8, however, Chinese military resistance evaporated completely. The First Phase Offensive ended as suddenly as it had begun, leaving the FEC no more certain of Chinese intentions and officials in Washington deeply concerned.

Significantly, while Korean and American military forces came in contact with Chinese forces from a number of different armies, U.S. military commanders nevertheless believed that these troops were isolated volunteer units supporting the remnants of the North Korean Army. By November 25, seventeen days after making their last contact with the Chinese, the U.S. faced roughly 380,000 CPV in close proximity. But no one, especially those most in need of this information in Washington, had any idea.¹⁴⁶

Among the proximate strategic effects of this dramatic underestimation of Chinese troops strength in North Korea was that limited consideration was given to the

¹⁴⁴ Zhang, *Deterrence and Strategic Culture*, 100-01. According to Peng Dehuai, the Chinese commander at the time, "We employed the tactics of purposely showing ourselves to be weak, increasing the arrogance of the enemy, letting him run amuck, and luring him deep into our areas." Quoted in Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 178.

¹⁴⁵ For a succinct summary of the First Phase Offensive, see Roy E. Appleman, *Disaster in Korea: The Chinese Confront MacArthur* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1989), 19-22.

¹⁴⁶ Patrick Roe, *The Dragon Strikes: China & the Korean War, June-December 1950* (Novato: Presidio, 2000), ch. 10.

British proposal of halting MacArthur's drive northward and establishing a strong defensive line at the "narrow neck" of the peninsula—an idea strongly detested by MacArthur. Little weight was given to the proposal in Washington because MacArthur was certain that the Chinese military action was insignificant. MacArthur explained the presence of the Chinese in North Korea in the most benign terms possible: China was attempting to provide covert assistance to the North in order to "salvage something from the wreckage."¹⁴⁷ The next day, MacArthur ordered an air assault intended to "isolate the battlefield" by bombing out the Korean ends of the bridges spanning the Yalu.¹⁴⁸ Although he warned the commander of the Far East Air Force "there must be no violation of the border," this directive violated previous instructions from the JCS to stay far away from Manchuria. Before commencing the mission, however, FEAF commander George Stratemeyer informed the Air Force Chief of Staff Hoyt Vandenberg of the order.¹⁴⁹ Upon hearing word of the impending operation, Truman cancelled the operation because, first, it violated a standing order from the JCS, and second, because Washington previously promised London that it would not act in ways that would threaten British interests in Manchuria. In the end, the decision was reached, pending further evidence of the PRC's intentions, to permit MacArthur to "continue the action" so long as there remained "a reasonable chance of success."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Blair, 391.

¹⁴⁸ Eliot Cohen argues that based on the postmortems of the war with the NKPA, the FEC was impressed with the effectiveness of US close air support and air interdiction of the enemy's forces. This faith in air power would significantly affect MacArthur and Willoughby's command decisions and intelligence assessments. Eliot A. Cohen, "'Only Half the Battle': American Intelligence and the Chinese Intervention in Korea, 1950," *Intelligence and National Security* 5, 1 (January 1990), 138-39.

¹⁴⁹ Weintraub describes this surreptitious warning to Washington as a "rare act of disloyalty." Stanley Weintraub, *MacArthur's War: Korea and the Undoing of an American Hero* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), 216.

¹⁵⁰ Blair, 400-01.

4. MacArthur's "Final Offensive"

The plan for MacArthur's "final" offensive consisted of two distinct operations. The first was the air campaign, which began on November 8, and was intended to knock out the bridges spanning the Yalu and to destroy the North Korean and Chinese forces between the U.N.'s position and the Manchurian border. Despite the fact that the campaign was largely a failure, MacArthur believed that the operation was succeeding. On November 17, the ambassador to South Korea John Muccio reported that "The General [MacArthur]. . . . was sure the Chinese Communists had sent 25,000, and certainly no more than 30,000, soldiers across the border. They could not possibly have got more over with the surreptitiously covert means used. If they had moved in the open, they would have been detected by our Air Forces and our Intelligence." MacArthur assured Muccio that the air offensive was "destroying all resources in the narrow stretch between our present positions and the border. Unfortunately, this area will be left a desert."¹⁵¹ The second operation of MacArthur's final offensive was a ground campaign with the objective of pressing on to the border. On November 15 MacArthur ordered General Edward Almond to begin planning for a westward movement toward the Chosin Reservoir to support the 8th Army's advance in the east. Almond, however, temporized. Not only did he prefer to beat the 8th Army to the border, but he was fully convinced that Chinese forces in the Chosin area were meager, estimating that at most 20,000 poorly equipped and trained CCF stood between his forces and X Corp (their actual strength was nearly 150,000¹⁵²). The 8th Army's offensive was scheduled to begin on November 15

¹⁵¹ Memorandum of Conversation, Muccio, 17 November 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 1175.

¹⁵² Roe, 268.

and end at the Yalu on the 25th. Owing to significant logistical bottlenecks, however, the 8th Army's offensive had to be delayed until 24 November.¹⁵³

In the mean time, Washington remained intent on finding a political solution to ending the crisis. Two factors affected how that "political solution" would be sought. The first was the expectation that the Chinese had no intention of launching a major attack in the short-run.¹⁵⁴ Second, believing that the only way to successfully negotiate with the Chinese was from a position of strength, neither Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall¹⁵⁵ nor Acheson was willing to urge a postponement or cancellation of the U.N. offensive. At an NSC meeting on 21 November, Marshall successfully argued that MacArthur's "end the war" offensive should commence, and only when it was proven successful, should negotiations with the Chinese begin. Acheson concurred, informing British ambassador Ernest Bevin that a pullback to the narrow neck would mean abandoning territory already under the U.N. forces' control.¹⁵⁶ On November 25th, a day after MacArthur's offensive began, the Chinese attacked in force and threw American and U.N. forces back across the 38th parallel.

Although Washington was well aware of the massive number of Chinese troops in Manchuria, it lacked an accurate accounting of the number of the CCF in North Korea itself. Strongly influenced by the estimates provided by Charles Willoughby and Douglas MacArthur that there were roughly 60,000 Chinese troops in the North, Washington held on to the belief that the small number of troops in North Korea could be

¹⁵³ Blair, 422-23.

¹⁵⁴ This was made clear in NIE-2/1, "Chinese Communist Intervention in Korea," 24 November 1950. DDRS: CK3100353110.

¹⁵⁵ At Truman's request, Louis Johnson resigned as Secretary of Defense and was replaced by George C. Marshall on 19 September 1950.

¹⁵⁶ Rosemary Foot, *A Substitute for Victory: The Politics of Peacemaking at the Korean Armistice Talks* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 26-27.

handled effectively by MacArthur's "end the war offensive." Underlying this belief was the expectation that it would take a significant amount of time for the requisite reinforcements from Manchuria to make their way into the theater of operations.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, while administration officials recognized at this time that a political solution to the war was necessary, such negotiations could only be successful if the U.S. bargained from a position of strength. Such strength could only be guaranteed by destroying what was left of the CCF after MacArthur's "successful" air campaign. Unfortunately, the U.S. had not been in a position of strength since October 19. By the time the PRC's Second Phase Offensive began, the Chinese had thirty infantry and three artillery divisions in Korea, with a total troop strength of 380,000.¹⁵⁸

American Expectations

The U.S. limited war strategy in Korea held two objectives: the defeat of the North Korean Army, and the avoidance of hostile balancing by either the Soviet Union or the PRC. The decision to expand U.S. war aims from the restoration of the status quo ante to rolling back communism on the Korean peninsula was predicated on the belief that neither state would intervene militarily in response. At worst, American officials assumed, the Chinese might release a few volunteers to fight along side the North Koreans—a negligible commitment from the American perspective. The primary reason for this presumed reluctance was the belief that the Soviets had no stomach for risking a wider war with the U.S. This rationale was extended to the Chinese: because the PRC

¹⁵⁷ The belief that there were only a small number of CPV troops in Korea, that they would require significant reinforcing before they could have a decisive effect, and that such reinforcement would take a significant amount of time, are contained in NIE-2. For analysis, see Roe, 209-210.

¹⁵⁸ For the CPV order of battle at the time, see Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism*, 264. For total figure see Roe, 268.

was subservient to the Kremlin's desires, no major commitment of Chinese forces would be in the offing.¹⁵⁹ Further, because the Chinese Communists were in the process of consolidating their power on the mainland, U.S. officials reasoned that they would be unwilling to participate in yet another conflict.¹⁶⁰ Finally, the PLA was seen as being ill-prepared for waging an industrialized, high-technology war.¹⁶¹ In short, the PRC was viewed as having neither the intentions nor the capabilities for a major clash with the U.S. This belief persisted despite the significant costs incurred as a result of massive military redeployment in Manchuria.

Officials in Tokyo and Washington were wrong in these assessments. Not only did the PRC respond to American provocations without Soviet influence, but it threw a substantial force at the U.S., prompting the largest retreat in American military history. By all accounts, the Chinese provided a number of indicators (both material and verbal) that should have made clear to the U.S. that they intended to intervene and that they had the ability to do so. How did the U.S. get it so wrong?

Explaining Hostile Military Balancing: Three Approaches

In this section I evaluate the causal variables of each of the three approaches to explaining the inability of the United States to avoid hostile military balancing in the Korean War: realism, bureaucratic theory, and the information structure framework. The critical variable for realism is the amount and content of the information, reasonably

¹⁵⁹ Stueck, *The Korean War*, 90-91; Stueck, *Road to Confrontation*, 228-31; CIA, "Possible Chinese Intervention in Korea," 20 September 1950, Kuhns, 443.

¹⁶⁰ See statement by Ralph Clough, Consulate General, Hong Kong, in *China Confidential: American Diplomats and Sino-American Relations, 1945-1996*, Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, ed., (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 87.

¹⁶¹ Cohen and Gooch, 176-82.

discernable at the level of the international system, pertaining to the intentions of the potential balancer. I evaluate this variable by examining the pattern of Sino-American interaction detailed above. For bureaucratic theory and the information structure framework, I examine the preferences and doctrines of the armed forces, and the institutional milieu in which decision making took place, in order to deduce the balancing avoidance expectations. Table 2.1 offers a summary of the expectations regarding balancing avoidance drawn from the three approaches in this case.

Table 2.1 Balancing Avoidance Expectations

Approach	Value of IV	Strategic Design/Integration	Balancing Avoidance Expected?
Realism	Sufficient information	Yes/Constant	Yes
Bureaucratic Theory	Doctrines favoring dramatic expansion	No/No	No
Information Structure	Truncated information structure	No/No	No

Realism

According to realism, the critical variable affecting a challenger's ability to avoid hostile military balancing is the amount and content of information regarding the intentions of the potential balancer at the level of the international system. Specifically, did the potential balancer present sufficient information to the challenger (both verbally and in terms of its behavior) that it has the willingness and capability to intervene in the war, under certain conditions? If the potential balancer did provide the challenger with sufficient, reasonably discernable information pertaining to its intentions, then realism expects the operation of the strategic design mechanism. Moreover, realism expects tight

integration between the military and diplomatic elements of limited war strategies in all cases of limited warfare. Because of its systemic focus—in particular, the inherent, but relative degree of uncertainty in international communications—realism offers my dissertation's null proposition.

Based on its pattern of verbal warnings and military mobilization and deployments, the PRC presented the United States with sufficient warning that it perceived the U.S. to be a threat of dramatically increasing intensity and that it would intervene in the war if the border of North Korea was crossed by American forces. Evidence of Chinese hostile intentions came quickly after the U.S. interposed the 7th Fleet in the Taiwan Strait. Immediately after the American decision, Mao issued a clear (and forthright) statement indicating that by this action the United States could not be trusted to stick with existing policy toward China. Soon after that, China began a major redeployment of its forces to the Sino-Korean border region. That the PRC viewed the U.S. as a significant threat was evident by its open transfer to Manchuria of military units opposite Taiwan. Given that the resolution of Taiwan's status was a critical objective of the new regime in Beijing, this move constituted a costly signal on China's part. After the successful landing at Inchon but prior to the crossing of the border, the PRC issued a number of credible deterrence threats to the U.S. Contrary to claims made by many in retrospect, the PRC was specific in its warnings, transmitting them both privately and publicly, and had sufficient combat power to back them up. While many have criticized China for its selection of Panikkar as the messenger of the October 2 warning, these charges ignore the fact that the PRC sent similar messages via the Dutch and others.

Finally, after U.S. forces crossed into North Korea, China initiated its First Phase Offensive. Through this action, the PRC provided concrete evidence of its presence in the North and showed that it had the ability to inflict real damage to U.N. forces. Although the PRC had intervened in geographical terms (i.e., Chinese forces had in fact entered the theater of operations), it had yet to intervene in a significant military and political sense. By calling a halt to the First Phase Offensive shortly after it began, the U.S. was presented with the opportunity to withdrawal to a far more defensible position at the narrow neck of the peninsula. To be sure, this action would have entailed a rather painful value trade-off for the U.S., specifically a sacrifice of territory already conquered. Nevertheless, realism expects this trade-off to have been made. To the extent that the PRC made good on its threat to intervene, and insofar as avoiding intervention by the Chinese was a key war aim of the United States, top decision makers in Washington had ample time to act in a way that avoided an outbreak of war with China.

This analysis contradicts an existing realist explanation for the American decision to cross the parallel and extend the war to the Chinese border. According to Eric Labbs, the U.S. expanded its war aims in the Korean War as a result of misperception of Chinese intentions. Believing that battlefield opportunities were manifest after Inchon, the United States expanded its war aims to include the rolling-back of communism on the peninsula.¹⁶² The problem with this interpretation is that sufficient information pertaining to Chinese intentions was available for the U.S. to have come to the opposite conclusion. Not only did the PRC's combat power north of the border increase over time, but the specificity of its deterrence threats matched this trend. Moreover, as the

¹⁶² Eric J. Labs, "Beyond Victory: Offensive Realism and the Expansion of War Aims." *Security Studies*, 6 (1997).

U.S. and South Korean Army came in contact with Chinese forces after the crossing of the border, sufficient information was available that should have indicated that China's intervention was substantial. In short, the particular misperception referenced by Labbs is incompatible with realism's rationalist foundations.

An additional rationalist explanation for the American misperceptions is similarly unpersuasive. Although the totality of American actions may reasonably be judged as "irrational" given the information available at the time, each sequential step taken by the U.S. came in response to specific battlefield and diplomatic opportunities. Assessed according to these steps, each American decision was reasonable on its own terms.¹⁶³ Such a critique begs the question of why a realist interpretation of American strategic decision making should expect severely bounded time horizons *a priori*. Moreover and more to the point, many of the signals sent by the PRC did in fact reference both current and past U.S. behavior as the source of China's perception of increasing threat. Given realism's focus on the availability of information at the international level, it is reasonable to expect the U.S. not to have held such a monumental general misperception of China's intentions.

In sum, realism expects an absence of hostile military balancing in the Korean case. Information was available in sufficient quantity and quality prior to key escalation decisions that the United States should have benefited from the strategic design mechanism. Realism expects the U.S. to have responded to that information in such a

¹⁶³ Maier, 270. See also, Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, "The Contribution of Expected Utility Theory to the Study of International Conflict," in *The Origin and Prevention of Major War*, 56. To be sure, Bueno de Mesquita's treatment of sequential rationality is focused on the inability of war participants to know the *future* outcome of a conflict. Significantly, this discussion ignores the possibility of an actor drawing reasonable conclusions about an opponent's likely future intentions based on its past behavior.

way as to achieve its aims of restoring the *status quo ante* on the peninsula and of avoiding hostile military balancing by the PRC.

Bureaucratic Theory

Bureaucratic theory is generally pessimistic in its expectations pertaining to balancing avoidance in limited warfare. Because of the negative role that bureaucratic politics and processes play in matters of state-level information processing, this approach foresees multiple ways in which the intentions and capabilities of the potential balancer can be misperceived. Due to persistent organizational parochialism and to the importance of standard operating procedures in determining how information is collected and assessed, bureaucratic theory expects balancing avoidance only when the preferred strategies and doctrines of the armed forces coincide with the intentions of the potential balancer.

Bureaucratic theory anticipates hostile military balancing on the part of the PRC in the Korean War for two primary reasons. First, given the lack of strategic importance that the military placed on East Asia at the time, there is little reason to expect that the armed forces would have either the past experience or information resources to come to an accurate understanding of Chinese intentions, especially in terms of how the Korean peninsula factored into Chinese strategic calculations. Second, the preferred mode of combat of the American military stood a high probability of being viewed as extremely threatening by the Chinese. This mode of war fighting—a combination of air and ground operations fought to the highest level of intensity in the shortest amount of time—could very easily contradict any signals of assurance that U.S. diplomats would send to the PRC. Moreover given the preferences of military organizations to decrease uncertainty

and to assert control over an opponent in a war, there was little chance that a viable, friendly buffer state proximate to the PRC would be kept in tact.¹⁶⁴

According to bureaucratic theory, there is good reason to expect that the military's influence in strategic design would have been dominant once the United States committed forces to the conflict. In his study of American civil-military relations during the Cold War, Richard Betts argues that the U.S. armed forces as organizations placed extreme importance on acquiring and maintaining autonomy once the military was called to combat. "Military leaders prefer poverty with autonomy to wealth with dependency."¹⁶⁵ Related to this was the strong preference for direct (and inviolate) control by the military over matters of operational command and tactics. To the extent that the application of force is a technical matter, a technician's purview should be left unquestioned. Such preferences, of course, were not always realized during the Cold War, but they were to a large extent during World War II and in the years preceding the outbreak of the Korean War. Because the Korean War began a scant five years after the end of the Second World War, all of the top military officers (and civilians) had direct and recent experiences with waging war at the highest level of intensity. Under such conditions, bureaucratic theory expects that military leaders would acquire a significant degree of influence in determining theater-level strategy, and further, that civilians would be accustomed to granting such autonomy.¹⁶⁶ Indeed a common refrain among civilian

¹⁶⁴ Jack Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 29-30.

¹⁶⁵ Richard K. Betts, *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 8.

¹⁶⁶ Jeffrey W. Legro, *Cooperation Under Fire: Anglo-German Restraint During World War II* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 25-27. See his discussion of "organizational salience" in war time.

authorities at the time was to permit “the man on the spot” sufficient leeway to get the job done.

Given the expected role that the armed services were to play in determining the content of the limited war strategy in Korea, it is necessary to evaluate both the military’s strategic focus and the information resources that were available at the time. In terms of strategic focus, the prevailing wisdom was that the critical threat to American national security was that posed by the Soviet Union to the stability of post-war Europe. Although civilian strategists were concerned primarily with Soviet exploitation of post-war turmoil brought about by socio-economic dislocation in key areas, military officers remained focused on squaring the military requirements for waging war with the Soviet Union under imposed budgetary constraints.¹⁶⁷ In response to persistent budgetary cutbacks following the war, military strategists were forced to devise an approach to waging war against the Soviets with limited resources. In other words, strategic trade-offs had to be made. In the years prior to Korea, military strategists drafted a series of plans that envisioned a strategic offensive in the west and a strategic defensive in the east. With respect to East Asia, the plan OFFTACKLE had no provisions for maintaining a foothold on the continent. To the extent that China had no naval presence in the area to speak of, the PRC was viewed as a minimal threat should major war break out.¹⁶⁸ Given the dominant role that the Soviet Union and Europe played in U.S. military strategy, and given the reduction in military budgets following World War II that demanded strict

¹⁶⁷ Keith D. McFarland and David L. Roll, *Louis Johnson and the Arming of America: The Roosevelt and Truman Years* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), ch. 12.

¹⁶⁸ Condit, 294-302.

adherence to strategic priorities, bureaucratic theory anticipates that little financial or institutional capital would be allocated to assessing the strategic context in East Asia.

In addition to the strategic perspective of the armed forces, the preferred mode of combat was inappropriate to the strategic context in 1950. The prevailing doctrine on the application of military force from the end of the Second World War to the intervention by the PRC in the Korean War called for the *annihilation* of the enemy.¹⁶⁹ For Douglass MacArthur in particular, the total exertion of ground and air power against an opponent was deemed to be the most appropriate mode of war fighting. To a significant degree, MacArthur's experience with waging island warfare in the Pacific led him to see the value of applying both branches of the armed forces to seal off and destroy an opponent's military in a given theater of operations. This strategic concept contributed to the belief that military problems could be resolved by the maximum application of all available resources with the objective of completely destroying the enemy's ability to wage war. In short, warfare, be it limited or other wise, would have no limitation on its intensity.

In the context of Korea, however, this approach would be problematic. At the time of the outbreak of the war, both Truman and Acheson had in mind explicit political and military limits to the war. In particular, both desired to avoid waging war against the PRC. From the very beginning, then, the political context of the war and the military concept for waging war were completely mismatched. It is tempting to blame MacArthur for ignoring the political context of the war. Yet doing so ignores the fact that this apolitical approach to warfare was held by the American military in general. As D.

¹⁶⁹ That is, neither the attrition of the enemy's forces nor the exertion of gradual pressure against the opponent's war fighting capabilities. A more appropriate doctrine would have entailed a judicious application of military power with a premium placed on cultivating and exploiting war-time intelligence

Clayton James notes, “Senior American officers had not been well schooled in the distinctions between military and national strategies before World War II. This failure of the curriculum and teaching of the top service schools was not corrected after 1945 and was reflected in the muddled strategy in Korea.”¹⁷⁰

Based on the preferences and approaches of the main services employed in the Korean War, bureaucratic theory does not anticipate the operation of either the strategic design or integration mechanisms in this case. Specifically, given the strategic orientation of U.S. military strategy prior to Korea, there is little reason to suspect that the armed forces would have acquired significant understanding of the East Asian strategic context. Further, because the military’s preferred mode of war fighting entailed the total annihilation of the opponent, there is little reason to expect that the U.S. military would have countenanced the survival of a communist North Korean regime. Finally, because bureaucratic theory anticipates the U.S. military to play the key role in the design and implementation of strategy in the war in Korea, this approach expects that any signals of assurance sent to the PRC would be contradicted by the behavior of the U.S. military during the war. In sum, bureaucratic theory expects the PRC to engage in hostile military balancing in the Korean War.

The Information Structure Framework

According to the information structure framework, two features of information management are of critical importance to producing well-calibrated limited war strategies: the degree to which the various agencies tasked with designing and executing the limited war shared vital information in their possession, and the extent to which

¹⁷⁰ James, *Refighting the Last War*, 6.

information reaching top decision makers was obtained from multiple sources. In both ways, the U.S. information structure was ill-designed and had little capacity to effectively manage the information burden prior to and during the Korean War.

A Dearth of Lateral Connections and Information Mismanagement

The likelihood that a challenger will achieve its objectives in a limited war depends on the ability for top policy makers to incorporate intelligence pertaining to the motives and capabilities of the defender and the target into its broader strategy. In the early part of the Cold War, the term “national intelligence” was coined to describe this type of strategic information. National intelligence was defined as “integrated departmental intelligence that covers the broad aspects of national policy and national security, is of concern to more than one Department or Agency, and transcends the exclusive competence of a single Department or Agency or the Military Establishment.”¹⁷¹ National intelligence falls outside of the parochial grasp of any particular national security agency. It is the product of combined intelligence outputs of the various functional intelligence organs and falls within the purview of top policymakers. Finally, high quality national intelligence can only be produced if the activities of the various departmental intelligence agencies are effectively directed and their outputs are coordinated.

The idea of national intelligence emerged in the United States only after the end of the Second World War. Although the need for national intelligence was recognized years prior to the outbreak of the Korean War,¹⁷² the Truman administration was unable

¹⁷¹ NSCID No. 3, 13 January 1948, FRUS, *Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment*, #426.

¹⁷² Thomas F. Troy, *Donovan and the CIA: A History of the Establishment of the Central Intelligence Agency* (Washington, DC: CIA Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1981), 220-21.

to construct an information structure sufficiently robust to produce the type of intelligence that would increase the chances that its limited war strategy would succeed. In this section, I discuss the history of the struggle within the Truman administration to develop a centralized intelligence agency that possessed the ability to produce national intelligence. Specifically, I focus on the emergence of the CIA and its relations with the existing military and civilian intelligence organs, and on the position of the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) in its capacity to efficiently direct the activities of the intelligence community and to coordinate the intelligence products into quality national intelligence. Although the CIA was originally designed to serve as the critical information clearinghouse that could produce this type of intelligence and direct the activities of the various intelligence bureaus, from 1946-1950 the CIA was incapable of doing either.¹⁷³

When Hoyt Vandenberg assumed the position of DCI in June 1946, he created the Interdepartmental Coordinating and Planning Staff (ICAPS) for the purpose of assisting him in his dealings with the intelligence chiefs of the various agencies and military services throughout the government. ICAPS was to be a staff in the Central Intelligence Group (CIG, the post-war predecessor of the CIA) comprising members of the departments' intelligence services, and was given the mission of coordinating the intelligence collection activities of the intelligence community so that broad-based assessments of national security challenges could be conducted. By incorporating members from the intelligence community into ICAPS, Vandenberg hoped the

¹⁷³ In addition to the sources cited below, see Ludwell Lee Montague, *General Walter Bedell Smith as Director of Central Intelligence, October 1950-February 1953* (University Park: Penn State University, 1992); John Ranelagh, *The Agency: The Rise and Decline of the CIA* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

intelligence chiefs would facilitate centralized intelligence planning under the CIG.

This staff, however, was never able to successfully accomplish this task as the individual military services and civilian bureaus fought tooth and nail to prevent it from exercising any authority. Rather than coordinating the activities of the intelligence community, ICAPS quickly took it upon itself to look inwardly toward planning the activities of the other staffs and offices within the CIG itself.¹⁷⁴ The reason for ICAPS immediate failure was two-fold: not only did the CIG lack the statutory authority to hold the departmental intelligence services accountable,¹⁷⁵ but military parochialism entered in to the picture as well. The intelligence chiefs appeared not to understand each others' needs, nor did they favor turning "operational" information over to civilians. Duplication in intelligence functions continued as no department was willing to forgo its programs. In the final analysis, ICAPS did not "expedite the formulation of policies and procedures by the central agency in which they [the departmental representatives] had a common concern."¹⁷⁶

In his capacity as DCI, Roscoe Hillenkoetter similarly attempted to use ICAPS as a liaison between the CIA and newly established Intelligence Advisory Committee (IAC), a body comprising the various intelligence chiefs and created in an effort to achieve cooperation in intelligence sharing. Members of this standing committee, Hillenkoetter hoped, would work closely with ICAPS as representatives of their departments'

¹⁷⁴ This behavior followed the pattern established by ICAPS's predecessor, the Central Planning Staff under the first DCI, Sydney Souers. Arthur B. Darling, *The Central Intelligence Agency: An Instrument of Government, To 1950* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), 138-39.

¹⁷⁵ The CIG was created by a Presidential Executive order on 22 January 1946. For an historical overview see Anne Karalekas, "The Central Intelligence Group and the Central Intelligence Agency, 1946-1952," in *The Central Intelligence Agency: History and Documents*, William M. Leary, ed. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1984), 24-25.

¹⁷⁶ Darling, 145.

intelligence services, “but these men as officers in the Agency would not be able to vote [strictly] according to the wishes of their departments.” As Vandenberg attempted in vain, Hillenkoetter tried to use ICAPS as the tool that would reconcile contending positions to achieve coordination in intelligence activities. However, objections arose from the military and from the State Department over the relationship of the DCI and ICAPS to the IAC. Simply put, the intelligence chiefs refused to concede that the DCI had any authority over them and their activities, but rather viewed the DCI as an equal player in the intelligence community. Following the familiar pattern, the members of the IAC continued to act in ways that permitted their departments to retain as much autonomy as possible, blocking centralized direction, and using the standing committee as a check on the DCI’s power in the intelligence community.¹⁷⁷

If the direction of the intelligence activities of the military and civilian departments was one side of the national intelligence problem, the other was the coordination of the products of those departments in reports and estimates of value to top policymakers in the administration. Among the CIA’s primary objectives was the streamlining of intelligence production with the goal of correcting what had become clearly biased analyses by individual departments.¹⁷⁸ Toward this end, the Office of Reports and Estimates (ORE) was established to review the raw intelligence produced and to transform this into objective estimates as an aid to determining future foreign-military policy.¹⁷⁹ This directive suited the president’s desires as Truman wanted to ensure that all of the intelligence pertaining to American national security policy would

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 205, 209.

¹⁷⁸ Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *The CIA & American Democracy* 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 58.

¹⁷⁹ Karalekas, 24.

be centrally coordinated in an effort to prevent an attack as that suffered at Pearl Harbor.¹⁸⁰ At the same time, Truman wanted to reduce the burden of assessing the mounds of cables, memos, and reports generated by the individual departments that came into him on a daily basis. Truman requested that an intelligence digest be delivered to him daily that would reduce his work load while keeping him on top of developments around the world. Although these two demands had merit, they resulted in a conflict in mission of the ORE—a conflict between current and national intelligence.

In neither of its tasks did the ORE perform adequately. It quickly became apparent that the production of reports and estimate based on effective coordination would be an unattainable goal. As far as the military was concerned, providing a civilian agency with critical information pertaining to the strengths and weaknesses of foreign forces was a breach of professionalism and was potentially dangerous as civilians lacked the training and expertise to understand such data. Compounding the problem was the fact that the military refused to provide information related to the capabilities and objectives of *American* armed forces.¹⁸¹ As one ORE official lamented,

The service agencies have always made a rigid distinction between operational and intelligence materials and have freely given CIA what they regard as intelligence materials but have refused to give CIA operational materials. Under this guise, they have withheld from CIA such sensitive materials as General MacArthur's reports from Tokyo, General Clay's reports from Berlin, Admiral Struble's reports from the Seventh Fleet, Admiral Badger's reports from Tsingtao, General Van Fleet's reports from Athens, etc. CIA does not receive reports made to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, many of which must, because of their origin and their subject, be worthy of the President's attention.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Michael Warner, *Central Intelligence: Origin and Evolution* (Washington, DC: CIA, 2001), 1-2. "In those days the military did not know everything the State Department knew, and the diplomats did not have access to all the Army and Navy knew. The Army and the Navy, in fact, had only a very informal arrangement to keep each other informed as to their plans." Truman, 55-56.

¹⁸¹ Karalekas, 25.

¹⁸² R. Jack Smith to Theodore Babbitt, "Contents of the CIA Daily Summary," 21 September 1950, in *The CIA Under Harry Truman*, Michael Warner, ed., (Washington, D.C.: CIA, 1994), 337.

Another example of information obstruction dealt with access by ORE analysts to communications and signals intelligence (COMINT and SIGINT). This type of intelligence had been used to great effect in the Second World War, and its use later in the Cold War would be just as critical. At the present time, however, COMINT resources were under fiscal pressure and more importantly, the take from these sources was closely guarded by the cryptanalytic departments within the military services.¹⁸³ The dissemination rules for using COMINT were highly restrictive. As was the practice during WWII, foreign signals and communications intelligence was barred from regular military communications channels and access to this data was limited only to top commanders and the most senior policymakers. This did not include the analysts of the ORE. As such, ORE reporting (including the *Daily*, *Weekly*, and intelligence estimates) did not contain any references to COMINT.¹⁸⁴

The military services were not the only organs to block information to the ORE. Information management within the CIA itself was dysfunctional as well. The information collected by the CIA's own clandestine branch, the Office of Special Operations (OSO), was highly compartmentalized, and the ORE never gained access to the raw data collected by elements within the CIA. The only information available to the ORE from within the CIA was overt in nature.¹⁸⁵ Confronted by both inter- and intra-departmental resistance, the ORE abdicated its function as a clearinghouse for

¹⁸³ For a concise description of American COMINT and SIGNIT capabilities and their organization, see Matthew M. Aid, "US HUMINT and COMINT in the Korean War: From the Approach of War to the Chinese Intervention," *Intelligence and National Security* 14, 4 (1999). As will be discussed below, FEC intelligence analysts were restricted from accessing this intelligence as well.

¹⁸⁴ Ray S. Cline, *The CIA Under Reagan, Bush, & Casey* (Washington: Acropolis Books, 1981), 130; Christopher Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 166; Kuhns, 7.

¹⁸⁵ Karalekas, 26.

information and began relying almost exclusively on its own resources to produce intelligence estimates.¹⁸⁶

The one bright spot in interagency relations was that between the CIA and State Department. Unlike the other agencies within the government, the DOS dutifully provided ORE analysts with sensitive information for inclusion in its current and national intelligence reports and estimates.¹⁸⁷ Despite such cooperation, the State Department never strayed from its position that the Secretary of State was the individual responsible for providing the President with foreign policy analysis. Thus, in addition to the ORE providing Truman with his requested *Daily* and *Weekly* current intelligence digests—which were based on information provided by the State Department—the DOS continued to prepare and deliver its own digest to the President. In short, rather than diminishing the duplication and easing the President’s workload, the competition between the CIA and DOS exacerbated both.¹⁸⁸

Two final points are essential to understanding the performance of the ORE, the entity that was charged with the production of national intelligence, during this period. The first is that under Vandenberg and then Hillenkoetter, the ORE developed and expanded its own research and analysis staff. The growth in the CIA’s in-house research capabilities, coupled with the provision in the National Security Act of 1947 stipulating that the Agency was to perform duties of “common concern as the National Security Council determines can be more efficiently accomplish centrally,” meant that the ORE was flooded with requests from all departments for analysis on a broad number of

¹⁸⁶ Amy B. Zegart, *Flawed By Design: The Evolution of the CIA, JCS, and NSC* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 190.

¹⁸⁷ This cooperation was noted in the Smith to Bobbitt memorandum cited above.

¹⁸⁸ Karalekas, 24.

political, economic, and military issues.¹⁸⁹ Overburdened with requests for research that distracted the ORE from its central mission, the Office could not fully devote itself to the production of high quality national and current intelligence that was required by the administration's top policymakers.

The final impediment to the ORE's performance was that it was charged with fulfilling the dual mission of producing both national and current intelligence. Because President Truman placed great stock in the daily and weekly intelligence digests prepared for him, the vast majority of ORE's efforts went to producing these reports. As a result, the estimating effort suffered greatly; national estimative analysis took on an "also-ran" status. This is not to imply that the *Daily* and *Weekly* digests were of the highest quality. In fact, because the editors of these reports lacked direct access to the policymakers that were purportedly reading them, the selection of topics for inclusion in each "was a shot in the dark." As R. Jack Smith notes, "The comic backdrop to this daily turmoil [the production of the *Daily*] was that in actuality *nobody* knew what President Truman wanted to see or not see. . . . How were we to judge, sitting in a rundown temporary building on the edge of the Potomac, what was fit for the President's eyes?"¹⁹⁰ The ORE's record during this period was described aptly by Ray Cline:

¹⁸⁹ As Ludwell Montague stated in February 1949, "This was a deliberate, but covert, attempt to transform the ORE. . . . into an omniscient. . . . central research agency. This attempt failed, leaving ORE neither the one thing nor the other. Since then, much ORE production has proceeded, not from any clear concept of mission, but from the mere existence of a nondescript contrivance for the production of nondescript intelligence. All our efforts to secure a clear definition of our mission have been in vain." Quoted in Kuhns, 8.

¹⁹⁰ From R. Jack Smith, *The Unknown CIA* (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1989). Kuhns notes that the reception of the ORE's current intelligence products received a mixed reaction. Truman regularly praised the *Daily* and made no negative comments regarding the *Weekly*. Marshall as Secretary of State stopped reading the *Daily* after two weeks and the *Weekly* after its first issue. Forrestal found that both were valuable, but not indispensable. Kuhns, 9-11.

It cannot honestly be said that it [the ORE] coordinated either intelligence activities or intelligence judgments; these were guarded closely by Army, Navy, Air Force, State, and the FBI. When attempts were made to prepare agreed national estimates on the basis of intelligence available to all, the coordination process was interminable, dissents were the rule rather than the exception, and every policymaking official took his own agency's intelligence appreciations along to the White House to argue his case. The prewar chaos was largely recreated with only a little more lip service to central coordination.¹⁹¹

The problems with intelligence direction and coordinate did not go unnoticed by the administration. From January 1948 to the outbreak of the Korean War, numerous official studies were conducted and plans for reforming the intelligence community were designed, the net effect of which degraded the CIA's ability to produce high quality national intelligence. In January 1949, the Intelligence Survey Group (ISG) under the chairmanship of Allen Dulles submitted a report that was highly critical of both ICAPS and the ORE.¹⁹² Most importantly, this study contained a criticism of the CIA that would have a significant impact on the ability of the Agency to perform its functions between 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War. The report baldly stated, "Since it is the task of the Director to see that the Agency carries out its assigned functions, the failure to do so is necessarily a reflection of inadequacies of direction." In other words, Hillenkoetter was personally to blame for the dysfunctional nature of interdepartmental relations within the intelligence community.¹⁹³ If at this point DCI Hillenkoetter had resigned and was replaced by someone with greater bureaucratic acumen, then this admonition would have been effective. However, Hillenkoetter would remain in his post for another year and a half. His competence had been called into question publicly, and as such, there was an

¹⁹¹ Cline, 114.

¹⁹² On the origins of the ISG see, National Security Council Resolution, 13 January 1948, FRUS, *Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment*, #336.

¹⁹³ Report From the Intelligence Survey Group to the National Security Council, 1 January 1949, FRUS, *Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment*, #358.

even smaller chance that the bureaucratic obstacles to effective information transmission would be removed.

By the spring of 1950, the situation had deteriorated so completely that little in the way of actual national intelligence was being done. By this time, Hillenkoetter's stock had fallen to a depth so low that the DCI was not invited to attend either of the Blair House meetings wherein the American response to the North Korean invasion was planned.¹⁹⁴ After Hillenkoetter requested that he be returned to active duty with the Navy, General Walter Beddel Smith took over as DCI on 7 October 1950. To his anger and dismay, Smith was discovered that even after months of fighting no current coordinated estimate of the situation in the Far East had been produced.¹⁹⁵

The CIA occupied a critical node in the American information structure prior to and during the Korean War. Theoretically, the CIA was to operate as a centralized information clearinghouse connecting the various military and civilian intelligence services. The CIA was intended to be the mechanism through which lateral connections among governmental departments were to be made. As will be discussed below, the inability for the CIA to perform this critical information management function exacerbated the breakdown in communications between top policymakers and the Far East Command, and led to the reliance on information that was either incomplete, or was interpreted incorrectly. Without the critical foundation of information management that was to be supplied by the CIA (specifically by ICAPS and the ORE), U.S. grand strategy and the American limited war in Korea were bound to suffer.

¹⁹⁴ See list of participants at the two Blair House meetings in FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 157, 178.

¹⁹⁵ Karalekas, 29.

As will be discussed in the chapter on Vietnam below, the CIA never assumed the information clearinghouse function that was the objective of its creators. Rather, the Johnson administration employed working groups and political-military war games as information vetting and strategy design mechanisms as effective substitutes. These tools, which required close cooperation among departments for success, were unavailable to the Truman administration prior to and during the early phases of the Korean War for two primary reasons. The first obstacle to efficient information sharing among the departments of State and Defense was the formalistic manner characterizing Truman's advisory system. By requiring individual department heads to report directly to him, Truman placed himself in a precarious information processing position as the sole arbiter of contending and conflicting intelligence (hence his desire for a daily intelligence digest that would assist him in making decisions).¹⁹⁶

At its inception, the National Security Council was intended to be the primary advisory body to the President. Critical to the effectiveness of this body was the recognition by the President and Council members alike that disagreements over policy should not be suppressed, but rather that they be clearly articulated at every stage in the policymaking process. Not only was this principle deemed crucial to providing Truman with multiple options, but just as importantly it was seen as a means of preventing the Council from foreclosing alternative policy avenues prematurely. In order for this advisory system to function effectively, it was incumbent upon the President to actively manage the Council and its proceedings. Because he occupied a critical node in the

¹⁹⁶ Alexander L. George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980), 151-52.

information structure, Truman had to avail himself to as wide a range of information as possible.

Nevertheless, the National Security Council failed to operate effectively. Overtime, attendance at Council meetings grew to a substantial size. In addition to the heads of the representative departments, a number of NSC consultants and lower-level departmental advisers frequently attended the meetings. As a result of the sheer size of Council meetings, open and focused discussion was easily inhibited. Council members quickly realized that their own departmental advisers were of greater value in providing them information than was to be gained at Council meetings. Furthermore, in an effort to keep discussions at the meetings from being closed off, Truman eventually quit attending NSC meetings on a regular basis. The results, however, were less focused discussions and the frequent deferment of actions that required presidential approval. Finally, Truman's absence from Council meetings prevented him from hearing Council member's own direct expression of their views. Without the ability to query and prod his advisers, Truman cut himself off from a great deal of information and advice.¹⁹⁷

This formalistic method of information delivery was only a general tendency, however, as Truman did convene a special working group to develop the most important strategic document of the early Cold War era, NSC 68.¹⁹⁸ The second, and more significant, obstacle to interdepartmental information sharing was the relative infancy and weakness of the NSC system. The impotence of the NSC system became clear when a

¹⁹⁷ James S. Lay and Robert H. Johnson, *Organizational History of the National Security Council During the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations* (Washington, D.C.: National Security Council, 1960), 3, 14-22.

¹⁹⁸ Even here, though, information sharing among the departments was poor. Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 358.

personal feud erupted between Secretary of State Acheson and Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson, a long dispute that redounded negatively at the working levels of the government.¹⁹⁹ It is important to recognize, however, that personal disputes are common and do not necessarily render administrations incapable of designing complex strategies. With formal procedures of information sharing in place, it becomes possible to transcend such bottlenecks in communication channels.

One mechanism which could have bridged the DOS and DOD at the working level was the NSC Staff. Originally designed to serve as an executive liaison among departments, the NSC Staff—in theory—had the ability to maintain State-Defense coordination irrespective of relations among departmental principals. Poorly funded and staffed, however, the NSC Staff soon proved itself to be a hindrance to achieving departmental objectives. Shortly after its inception, the Staff became irrelevant to the policymaking process as departments submitted policy papers directly to the NSC, bypassing the Staff entirely.²⁰⁰ In sum, because the CIA and NSC Staff were incapable of fulfilling their crucial function, the Truman administration's information management system fell victim to personal disputes among departmental principals.

Single-Sourced Information Flows and Flying Blind

For an attacker to avoid hostile military balancing in a limited war, it is essential that decision makers have an accurate understanding of the present and likely future intentions of potential balancers when strategy is designed and implemented. Leaders'

¹⁹⁹ Doris M. Condit, *History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Volume II: The Test of War, 1950-1953* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1988), 15; Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), 373-74.

²⁰⁰ John Prados, *Keepers of the Keys: A History of the National Security Council from Truman to Bush* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 34, 40-47.

access to information from multiple sources is critical to producing as clear a picture of the defender as possible. The dominance of MacArthur's Far East Command in matters of strategic intelligence in the theater precluded such an understanding.²⁰¹ In addition to the FEC, there were two other agencies that should have been providing leaders in Washington with information pertaining to the PRC and North Korea: the State Department and the CIA. For distinct reasons, neither had the capability of adequately satisfying top policy makers' information requirements.

That the United States did not formally recognize the PRC, and that the U.S. and China did not maintain direct state-to-state contacts, hampered the DOS from providing information about Chinese intentions. From the stand point of crisis management, this situation was certainly lamentable, though not detrimental.²⁰² Nevertheless, the State Department did at one time have a cadre of Foreign Service officers who were deeply familiar with the Chinese Communists and who possessed experience that could have been exploited in times of crisis and war. The problem was that many of those professionals had been purged years prior to the outbreak of the Korean War, and as such, were unable to assist the administration as it set out to design and implement its limited war strategy. Primarily, the Foreign Service officers who cultivated contacts with the Communists, the "China Hands," came under attack by the "China Bloc" in the U.S.

²⁰¹ Cohen argues, "For the most part, Washington depended for its basic assessments on FEC, although other sources (most notably attaché and consular reports from Taiwan and Hong Kong) came into play." Cohen, 132. As will be discussed in greater detail in the next section, while alternative assessments pertaining to Chinese intentions were made prior to their intervention, it was MacArthur's assessments and expectations that dominated.

²⁰² Christensen, 97. The effects of the absence of direct state-to-state contacts between the U.S. and China should not be overblown. While the U.S. and China did maintain ambassadorial contacts in Warsaw during the Vietnam War, these exchanges produced very little in the way of usable information about each side's intentions. Rather, the Warsaw forum was mainly one of vitriolic denunciations of the other side. James G. Hershberg and Chen Jian, "Reading and Warning the Likely Enemy: China's Signals to the United States about Vietnam in 1965," *The International History Review* 27, 1 (March 2005).

Congress and in the press. As anti-Communist passions boiled and as American support to Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists stiffened, these individuals were either ousted from the State Department or assigned positions where their influence would be minimized—actions taken by Acheson designed “. . . to please conservative critics.”²⁰³ Under these conditions, the State Department was severely limited in its ability to serve as a source of information pertaining to the intentions of the new Communist regime in Beijing. Moreover, without the experience of these individuals, the DOS's ability to offer alternative assessments of the information available was severely limited.

The CIA, in particular its covert operations activities, was another potential source of information that could have been exploited in strategic design and implementation. Yet, MacArthur and his intelligence chief Major General Charles Willoughby had a long history of excluding other intelligence agencies from their domain. During the Second World War, MacArthur effectively barred the CIA's war-time predecessor, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), from carrying out intelligence and propaganda operations. This pattern continued after the war ended. It was only after the outbreak of the Korean War that MacArthur reluctantly (and in a limited capacity) granted the CIA permission to operate on the Korean peninsula.²⁰⁴ In short, the dominant source of information pertaining to Chinese intentions and military capabilities before the outbreak of the Korean War was the intelligence organs within the Far East Command. According to General J. Lawton Collins, Army Chief of Staff, an estimated 90% of the

²⁰³ Michael Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan: The Origins of the Cold War in Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 252-53. See also, E. J. Hahn, Jr., *The China Hands: America's Foreign Service Officers and What Befell Them* (New York: Viking, 1975); *Lost Chance in China: The World War II Despatches of John S. Service*, Joseph W. Esherick, ed. (New York: Random House, 1974).

²⁰⁴ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Ike's Spies: Eisenhower and the Espionage Establishment* (New York: Garden City, 1981), 170. See also, James, *Refighting the Last War*, 43; and Troy, 280, 283.

intelligence received before and during the Korean War came from the Far East Command.²⁰⁵

Furthermore, MacArthur's responsibility over intelligence matters grew dramatically after the North Korean attack. Following the U.N. Security Council vote to grant the United States authority over the multinational forces committed to combat, Truman selected MacArthur to command the coalition. The choice of General MacArthur would frustrate the president's ability to manage the limited war on organizational grounds. When MacArthur was selected to be CINCUN, he was already saddled with the heavy burden of serving as the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) in occupied Japan, as the Commander in Chief of the Far East Command of U.S. ground, air, and sea forces (CINCFE), and as the commanding general, U.S. Army Forces, Far East (USAFFE). MacArthur's UNC headquarters, located in downtown Tokyo, was staffed by officials who, like their superior, were already tasked with a myriad of responsibilities, only one of which was waging war. As the official Army history notes, "with few exceptions, staff members of the Far East Command were assigned comparable duties on the UNC staff. In effect, the GHQ United Nations Command, was the GHQ, Far East Command, with an expanded mission."²⁰⁶ These command decisions bolstered MacArthur's authority dramatically, and as such, no other military or civilian entity could effectively compete with MacArthur's estimates of the strategic situation in the Far East.

²⁰⁵ Noted in Roe, 98.

²⁰⁶ Schnabel, *United States Army in the Korean War*, 103. For the implications on these command decision on waging coalition war, see James, *Years of MacArthur*, 440.

Put simply, information management within the FEC was dysfunctional.

Surrounding MacArthur was a small group of intensely loyal advisers who served as the General's informational Praetorian Guard. In the words of MacArthur's biographer, D. Clayton James, "MacArthur was shielded by his GHQ senior staff officers in unfortunate ways; this was part of the legacy of their adulation of him from World War II." Among the consequences of their reportage was the limited knowledge MacArthur possessed of the status of the 8th Army under his command. ". . . MacArthur's staff shielded the Far East commander from evidence suggesting the Eighth Army's progress toward combat readiness was not impressive, and he was quite shocked by the troops' poor performances early in the Korean War." Moreover,

MacArthur lived strangely isolated, apart from the activities of his Far East Command. Sadly, his trust in Willoughby was so deep by then that MacArthur's intelligence data came almost solely from his G-2, and Willoughby could be quite selective and sometimes erroneous in what he provided his commander. . . . It was as if MacArthur existed in Tokyo in a cocoon, perhaps of his own choosing by possibly created by his sycophantic staff chiefs. The price he would pay for such insularity would be tragically high.²⁰⁷

As will be discussed below, Willoughby's inability to accurately determine Chinese intentions was a contributing factor in the disaster that befell the United States in November 1950. While Willoughby's failure to accurately read the strategic situation from the evidence that was in his possession was certainly his fault, he was also hamstrung by deficiencies in intelligence collection, namely a lack of SIGINT and COMINT resources in possession by the FEC G-2. In particular, the intelligence chief lacked trained Chinese linguists to translate Chinese radio traffic.²⁰⁸ The paucity of such

²⁰⁷ James, *Refighting the Korean War*, 42-43.

²⁰⁸ Michael E. Bigelow, "Disaster Along the Ch'ongch'on: Intelligence Breakdown in Korea," *Military Intelligence* (July-September, 1992), 12.

intelligence assets, it may be recalled, can be explained by the inability for ICAPS at the CIA to effectively coordinate the intelligence activities and assets of the broader intelligence community. Irrespective, the primary point to be made is that the information that was made available to MacArthur by his intelligence chief was frequently erroneous (at times intentionally so), and often incomplete.

Finally, MacArthur's relationship with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and with other officials in Washington was itself problematic. On the one hand, MacArthur was senior to all of his supposed superiors in the JCS, and because of the tremendous authority he was granted at the time of the outbreak of the war, his ability to skew information sent to Washington to serve his own strategic objectives went unchecked. "MacArthur interpreted directives and guidance from all levels in Washington—Army, JCS, the secretary of defense, and the president—in ways that afforded him wider latitude of action and expression than intended." While his orders were frequently vague and contradictory, MacArthur's position as the primary source of information pertaining to the situation in the Far East afforded him the ability to conduct operations with only the most limited oversight.²⁰⁹ Not only did MacArthur have meager awareness of Chinese intentions (as he received inaccurate information from Willoughby), but so too was Washington in the dark about the intentions and capabilities of the PRC as MacArthur's command was the source of strategic information about the potential balancer in the Korean War upon which administration officials relied.

The major point in the above analysis is not to isolate either MacArthur or Willoughby as the sole obstacle to the effective functioning of the information system.

²⁰⁹ Condit, 516.

Rather, it was the exclusion of other agencies from the intelligence process in the Far East that enabled these two actors to matter as disastrously as he did. Without information derived from alternative sources pertaining to the Chinese military capabilities, administration officials did not have the ability to question the veracity of MacArthur's reporting, nor were they able to exert moderating influence on military operations.

In sum, the American information structure prior to the outbreak of the Korean War was clearly truncated. In terms of the two primary measures offered in Chapter 1, the agencies and departments within the U.S. government functioned largely in isolation from one another, and information pertaining to the state most likely to engage in hostile balancing was provided primarily by a single source. Despite the best intentions of its creators, the CIA was unable to assume a position of power within the American intelligence community largely because of entrenched bureaucratic obstacles to effective information sharing. The result was that high quality national intelligence products were never produced before the outbreak of war on the Korean peninsula. Without a solid informational foundation, there was a high probability that decision makers would be unable to craft a limited war strategy that was well suited to the strategic environment. The absence of strong lateral connections among relevant agencies precluded close and effective cooperation among the departments of State and Defense before the war, and barring a Herculean bureaucratic and political struggle, there was a slim chance that these two departments could have produced an effective limited war strategy in the summer of 1950.

Moreover, the ability of top policymakers to receive accurate political and military intelligence about the PRC was hampered by a near exclusive dependence on the FEC for strategic information. Even if the FEC's intelligence was of the highest quality, the inability to obtain information and estimates from alternative sources prevented officials in Washington from coming to terms with the PRC's intentions. As it was, the FEC's intelligence products were frequently biased, inaccurate, and incomplete. Thus, there was a strong possibility that top decision makers would be unable to effectively manage the limited war as it unfolded. In short, the information structure framework anticipates the operation of neither the strategic design nor strategic integration mechanism in this case of limited war.

Conclusion

The United States induced hostile military balancing by the Peoples' Republic of China in the Korean War as a result of an inappropriately designed and implemented limited war strategy. In four consecutive phases, the U.S. acted in ways that convinced the Chinese that it constituted a highly intensive threat. First, despite its pledge not to become embroiled in the Chinese Civil War, the Truman administration interposed the U.S. 7th Fleet in the Taiwan Strait on June 27, 1950. As a result of this perceived duplicity, the PRC undertook a massive redeployment of its military forces to the Sino-Korean border, initiated a vehement diplomatic campaign warning the U.S. against further escalation of the war, and began a program of domestic mobilization for possible war. Second, with the successful landing of U.S. Marines at the port of Inchon, the U.S. put itself in a position for the first time to directly threaten the existence of the North

Korean regime—a strategically valuable buffer zone between American forces and Chinese territory. Immediately following the initial incursion by South Korean forces of North Korea, the PRC issued a direct and specific threat to the U.S. against American forces following suit. Third, the crossing of the 38th parallel by American forces (in conjunction with the 7th Fleet decision) was a clear indication to the Chinese that the United States was intent on waging a protracted campaign against the Beijing regime on multiple fronts. In response, the PRC began sending its forces into North Korean and launched its “First Phase Offensive” with the intention of testing the combat effectiveness of the advancing opponent and of drawing it deeper into the northern reaches of North Korea. Finally, despite all of the available indicators suggesting that the Chinese would intervene directly in the war against it, the United States attempted to occupy all of North Korea up to the Yalu River. On the day that MacArthur’s “end the war offensive” began, the Chinese attacked in force.

Critically, neither the United States nor the PRC desired war in 1950.

Nevertheless, the United States was unable to secure the objective of avoiding hostile military balancing by the Chinese. What explains the failure of American strategy? Three approaches offer differing expectations of balancing avoidance. Realism anticipates balancing avoidance in the Korean War. Because the information pertaining to the intentions of the PRC was reasonably discernable, realism expects the operation of the strategic design mechanism. Based on the evidence presented in this chapter, realism is falsified in this case. Bureaucratic theory, on the other hand, expects the PRC to engage in hostile military balancing in the Korean War. As a result of the strategic orientation of the American military in the early years of the Cold War, bureaucratic

theory does not anticipate the operation of the strategic design mechanism in this case. Furthermore, because of its doctrine of annihilation, this approach expects hostile military balancing because the military's preferred mode of warfare was ill-suited to China's intentions on the peninsula.

Finally, the information structure framework expects hostile military balancing by the PRC because of the truncated nature of the American information structure. I argued the American information structure was truncated in two critical ways. First, there was an absence of lateral communication channels connecting the departments and agencies in the U.S. government that would be responsible for designing and implementing the limited war strategy. Although the Central Intelligence Agency was intended to serve as the mechanism through which the activities of the intelligence community would be directed and by which national intelligence estimates would emerge, the Agency's performance was significantly obstructed by powerful bureaucratic interests. Furthermore, as a result of the formalistic manner in which Truman's advisory system operated, and the relative weakness of the NSC system, no alternative mechanisms existed for bridging what had become isolated bureaucratic agencies. Second, top policymakers were forced into a position of dependence on a single source of information pertaining to the strategic context in the Far East. As a result of Douglass MacArthur's success in barring the CIA from operating in the FEC's domain along with the purge of Foreign Service officers in the State Department who had direct experience with the Chinese Communists, officials in Washington had no alternative sources of information about Beijing's interests, capabilities, and behavior. In short, the system of information management available to the Truman administration suffered from an inability to acquire

accurate information pertaining to the defender's intentions and from the absence of effective information vetting mechanisms.

With the dependent and independent variables operationalized, it is now possible to evaluate how well the two remaining approaches explain the outcomes observed in this case.

Chapter 3 **The Korean War: Provoking Acute Balancing**

The analysis in Chapter 2 demonstrated that the United States was unable to avoid the most acute form of balancing in the Korean War. Which of the three approaches to balancing avoidance best explains this outcome? Specifically which of the three approaches accounts for the absence of the strategic design mechanism in this case. I have already shown that realism's expectations are not born out in the Korean War. What remains to be accomplished is a careful comparison between the expectations of bureaucratic theory and the information structure framework. Toward that end, I subject American strategic decision making to process tracing. My objective in this chapter is to determine the causal factors that produced the ill-crafted American limited war strategy in the Korean War.

Strategy Design: From the Status Quo Ante to "Roll-Back"

Between June 25 and October 8, 1950, the Truman administration made two crucial decisions pertaining to how it would wage the American limited war in Korea. First, on June 27 the United States interposed the 7th Fleet in the Taiwan Strait in an effort to prevent expansion of the war in that area. Second, on September 11 the administration gave its approval for waging war across the 38th parallel into North Korea with the President's signing of NSC 81/1. On October 8, American forces crossed the parallel seven days after the South Korean Army's initial breach of the border. Together, these actions induced the PRC into intervening in the war, an outcome the U.S. wanted to avoid. While the initial decision was made in haste two days after the North Korean

attack, the second decision was not but rather was subject to intense discussion and debate in Washington and Tokyo. Significantly, these decisions were predicated on faulty estimates of how the PRC would likely behave throughout the course of the war. A more accurate understanding was available to American officials, one that would have prevented the U.S. from provoking hostile balancing by the Chinese. This alternative perspective of Chinese intentions was never given a proper hearing and the U.S. military found itself fighting an entirely different war than was expected. During this phase of the war, high quality strategic design was stymied by leaders' inability to receive information from multiple sources about the intentions of the defender, and a lack of lateral connections among the relevant agencies tasked with determining how the U.S. could most effectively wage war on the Korean peninsula.

The 7th Fleet Decision

Limited wars are often initiated in haste. During times of crisis information is typically incomplete, knowledge of the strategic environment tends toward uncertainty, and time is frequently of the essence. Under such situations, it is critical that effective information management procedures be in place so that policy makers can make decisions that are less error-prone and stand less of a chance of redounding negatively in the future. This conclusion did not escape the Intelligence Survey Group's final report on the problems of American intelligence community. In the section of the ISG's report pertaining to the functioning of the CIA's Office of Reports and Estimates, the following recommendation was posited

There should . . . be [a] provision for the prompt handling of major emergency situations so that, as a matter of course, when quick estimates are required, there

is immediate consultation and collective appraisal by the Intelligence Advisory Committee on the basis of all available information.²¹⁰

As discussed in the previous chapter, such collaborative procedures did not emerge in the year and a half following the report's submission.

Compounding this problem, shortly after the North Korean attack President Truman instructed his advisers "that all proposals for presidential action in the current Korean crisis were to be forwarded to him through the NSC machinery; no unilateral proposals for his action were to be sent directly to him."²¹¹ The effect of this directive was that the CIA's marginalization would be continued throughout the war. As noted, DCI Hillenkoetter was not included among the participants at the two critical Blair House meetings in late June, and there was no chance that his influence with the President could be bolstered as the war progressed. At working levels in the intelligence community, moreover, the CIA's advice and estimates would continue to be given short shrift as vital information would remain withheld from the Agency's analysts. In terms of the NSC machinery itself, Truman's order served to reify existing and pathological information management processes. The lack of consultation and information sharing that characterized interagency relations prior to the war continued throughout. As a result, the strategy adopted was not based on a foundation of coordinated diplomatic and military intelligence; a foundation critical for effective limited war strategies.

In terms of Chinese threat perception, the most important action taken by the administration immediately following the North Korea attack was the interposition of the U.S. 7th Fleet in the Taiwan Strait. The decision to "neutralize" the Strait increased the

²¹⁰ Intelligence Survey Group report, FRUS, *Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment*, #358.

²¹¹ Ambassador in the Soviet Union Kirk to the Secretary of State, 6 July 1950, FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 312.

PRC's threat valuation of the United States, and it was critical that the administration understood this as future decisions on prosecuting the war were considered. This decision was problematic to the extent that it was, from the perspective of the Chinese Communists, de facto American intervention in the Chinese Civil War—an act which prevented Communist consolidation of power and was thus a direct challenge to the long-term stability of the new regime.

While the administration was certainly justified in its fear that clashes between the Nationalists and Communists in the Taiwan Strait could widen a war that the U.S. desired to remain limited, the 7th Fleet decision did carry substantial risks. These risks, moreover, could multiply if the U.S. took additional actions that negatively affected Chinese perception of threat. To what extent did the American information management system allow Truman and his top advisers an appreciation of the inherent risks it was taking at this early stage in the war?

The initial American response to the outbreak of war on the peninsula was designed during two critical meetings in Washington at Blair House, the president's temporary residence. At these meetings, information on the current status of the PRC was scantily presented, and the possible future intentions of the PRC were barely discussed. To the extent that China was considered at all, it was viewed strictly as a pawn of the Kremlin. At the first Blair House meeting on June 25, a memorandum drafted by General MacArthur on June 14 (i.e., before the outbreak of the war) was the primary focus of attention, the effect of which was to narrow the participants' attention to the necessity of preventing Taiwan's fall and of "drawing a line" beyond which Soviet encroachments could not be allowed to cross. MacArthur posited that if the Soviets were

allowed access to the island, American freedom of action in the Pacific and the security of the U.S. defense perimeter would be placed in serious jeopardy. In a passage that has been frequently quoted, MacArthur stated

Formosa in the hands of the Communists can be compared to an unsinkable aircraft carrier and submarine tender ideally located to accomplish Soviet offensive strategy and at the same time checkmate counteroffensive operations by the United States Forces based on Okinawa and the Philippines.

Due to the island's strategic importance, MacArthur continued, "Unless the United States' political-military strategic position in the Far East is to be abandoned, it is obvious that the time must come in the foreseeable future when a line must be drawn beyond which Communist expansion will be stopped."²¹² Moreover, while preemptive action in the Strait could have provoked war with the Soviets (and by proxy, with the Chinese), the risk was deemed minimal because the Soviets were not seen as desiring war with the United States at the present time. Based on the analysis of this report, the Blair House attendees reasoned that while the Kremlin was certainly the force behind the North Korean attack, the Soviets would in all likelihood refrain from escalating if American action was swift and resolute.²¹³

MacArthur's memo was more than a routine estimate of an existing strategic environment: it was a call for a revamped and expansive grand strategy. The problems were that its consideration came at a time when pressure for military action was extreme, and that it entered a decision making framework incapable of conducting long-term forecasting. Specifically, no interdepartmental study had been conducted on the

²¹² Memorandum of Conversation by Jessup, 25 June 1950, FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 157-65.

²¹³ Kirk to Acheson, 25 June 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 139. See also CIA, Daily Summary Excerpt, 26 June 1950, in *Assessing the Soviet Threat: The Early Cold War Years*, Woodrow S. Kuhns, ed., (Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, 1997), 391; and comments by Charles Bohlen on 30 June in a meeting with his DOS colleagues in FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 258.

implications of such a grand strategic reorientation (i.e., how securing Taiwan would complicate existing major war plans), no consideration was given to the likely effects it would have on the intentions of the PRC in light of the January 1950 declarations that Taiwan lay outside of the U.S. defense perimeter, and no estimate was considered as to how the PRC would likely behave militarily given that the U.S. would soon be waging war on the Korean peninsula. Rather, those present at the Blair House meetings simply grabbed onto MacArthur's recommendations because they *seemed* appropriate. No alternate courses of action were discussed, and the downsides of the proposed course went unexplored. The decision making setting immediately after the North Korean attack was incapable of managing the massive information burden under which the President and his top advisers labored. Moreover, alternative recommendations and estimates were unavailable to top officials as a result of the absence of crisis management procedures urged by the Intelligence Survey Group.

To the extent that American actions would prevent the PRC from taking Taiwan by force, it is surprising the minimal extent to which China was considered an independent actor in the unfolding crisis.²¹⁴ Moreover, when Chinese strategic calculations were explicitly considered, they were cast in the most favorable of terms for the U.S. On the day that President Truman announced the 7th Fleet decision, the State Department's OIR disseminated a wide-ranging assessment of the developing crisis. This document is of significance because it is among the few to refer to the PRC as having some degree of decision making autonomy. According to the report, should the U.S.

²¹⁴ By June 1950, the PRC was seen as being nearly wholly subordinate to the Kremlin in terms of its ability to conduct foreign policy. CIA 6-50, "Review of the World Situation," 14 June 1950, 6. DDRS: CK3100376164. This report did indicate that Soviet control was not complete and "... transformation of the entire country into a full-fledged Soviet Satellite probably will be a long and involved process."

respond in a forceful manner (such as effective measures to forestall the PRC from capturing Taiwan) then the leaders in Beijing might come to see the Soviet's Korean adventure as a move that adversely affected Chinese interests. Further,

Effective intervention by the U.S. in Korea would produce a marked psychological reaction in the public mind and in the minds of the Chinese Communist leaders. Doubts would be created, or increased, as to the ultimate success of the Soviet camp in the cold war. In view of its public commitment to that camp, the prestige of the Chinese Communist regime would suffer, both within China and in other parts of the Far East. . . . Within the regime itself, the doubts would take the specific form of a questioning of the advantage for China of the Soviet alliance. The Chinese Communist leadership would be impressed not only by the relative weakness or ineptness of the USSR in its Korean adventure, but also by the threat of the newly militant posture of the US in the Far East, a threat that had all been created by Soviet blundering. As a consequence, the strength of the Chinese Communist ties to the USSR would be significantly weakened.²¹⁵

In other words, the Sino-Soviet alliance could be weakened through a demonstration of American resolve and strength.

Two points should be made about this estimate. First, the OIR failed to address the possible *negative* implications of preventing the PRC from taking Taiwan, in particular how the Chinese might act should they interpret the interposition of the 7th Fleet as intervention in the yet unfinished Civil War. Moreover, while it was possible that a forceful U.S. response would weaken the bonds between the two Communist countries, it was just as possible that the opposite reaction could be induced—that American actions might force the Chinese to rely more heavily on the Soviets for support. As the OIR report was among the very few formal intelligence estimates considered at the early phases of the Korean War, such omissions were problematic.

Truman and his top policy makers were never forced to confront the possible

²¹⁵ Intelligence Estimate Prepared by the Estimates Group, OIR, DOS (Dated: June 25, 1950), FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 148-54.

counteractions that the Chinese could take in response to an increasingly hostile U.S. war strategy.

The second problem with the State Department's intelligence assessment was that it did not place the proposed course of action in the broader context of American policy toward China since the beginning of 1950. In January 1950, the administration issued two major statements concerning U.S. foreign policy with respect to China, Taiwan, and Korea. On January 5, President Truman issued a press statement detailing American intentions with respect to Taiwan. That statement reads in part:

The United States has no predatory designs on Formosa or on any other Chinese territory. The United States has no desire to obtain special rights or privileges or to establish military bases on Formosa at this time. Nor does it have any intention of utilizing its armed forces to interfere in the present situation. The United States Government will not pursue a course which will lead to involvement in the civil conflict in China.

Similarly, the United States Government will not provide military aid or advice to Chinese forces on Formosa. In the view of the United States Government, the resources on Formosa are adequate to enable them to obtain the items which they might consider necessary for the defense of the Island.²¹⁶

On January 12, Secretary of State Acheson delivered his famous address to the National Press Club. After discussing the cause of the Nationalist's defeat to the Communists (i.e., the rampant corruption of the Nationalist government) and the viability of the "wedge policy," the Secretary of State detailed the military strategy recently

²¹⁶ "United States Policy Toward Formosa: Statement by President Truman," *Department of State Bulletin*, (16 January 1950), 79. Later that same day, the Secretary of State offered a few points of clarification to the President's address. Acheson's primary goal in his address was to make it clear to both internal and external audiences that President Truman had just issued the final word on US policy with respect to Taiwan. That policy, Acheson argued, was neither new nor subject to any substantial revision, save one, the phrase "at this time." In Acheson's words, "That phrase does not qualify or modify or weaken the fundamental policies stated in this declaration. . . . It is a recognition of the fact that, in the unlikely and unhappy event that our forces might be attacked in the Far East, the United States must be completely free to take whatever action in whatever area is necessary for its own security." "United States Policy Toward Formosa: Extemporaneous Remarks by Secretary Acheson," *Department of State Bulletin*, (16 January 1950), 81.

adopted by the United States. Acheson indicated that the defense of Japan, the Ryukyus, and the Philippines was the United States' primary responsibility. From that "defensive perimeter" the United States would be able to ensure that its presence in the Asia-Pacific theater was secure, and just as importantly, that it would have freedom of action in the event of a war with the Soviet Union. Neither Taiwan nor Korea was included in the defensive perimeter. Regarding the "military security of other areas in the Pacific," Acheson argued that "the initial reliance must be on the people attacked to resist it and then upon the commitments of the entire civilized world under the Charter of the United Nations which so far has not proved a weak reed to lean on by any people who are determined to protect their independence against outside aggression."²¹⁷ Put simply, Acheson's comments offered, at best, an ambiguous *American* commitment to the defense of Taiwan.²¹⁸

Irrespective of the rationale for its decision to deploy forces into the Taiwan Strait, the decision made by the Truman administration contradicted its long declared policy that Taiwan lay outside the U.S. defense perimeter. As such, the PRC was likely to view that action in the most hostile terms possible. By failing to consider China's strategic intentions explicitly (that is, apart from the Soviet's presumed influence), and by ignoring the broader pattern of U.S. policy toward Taiwan and the PRC, the State

²¹⁷ Ibid., 116.

²¹⁸ For a sampling of this debate, see Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 144-48; Kenneth W. Condit, *History of the Joint Chief of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy*, Vol. II, 1947-1949, (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1979), 520; Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol 2: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 67; and Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 367.

Department's intelligence assessment provided insufficient guidance to U.S. policy makers at this early stage in the Korean War.

Officials in Washington did eventually receive warning that 7th Fleet decision could rebound negatively as a result counteractions take by the Chinese Communists. On July 14, British officials warned the American Ambassador to the U.K. that the U.S. action in the Strait could very well prompt the Chinese to take an increasingly hard line. The British took the view that the "Soviet[s] would like nothing better than to have China and the US become entangled in armed conflict" and that the Chinese and the rest of Asia considered Taiwan to be a part of China, "quite irrespective of what sort of government China may or may not have." Despite the strategic rationale that the U.S. had for taking the island, the possibility of Chinese reaction had to be taken into consideration. Significantly, when Ambassador Douglas offered the American justification for the deployment of the 7th Fleet (i.e., the neutralization of the conflict), the British officials responded that "this statement of the case had never been made to them. They had looked favorably upon the President's statement of January 5. The statement of June 27 was quite a different one."²¹⁹ Evidently, even the strongest of American allies did not appreciate the value of neutralizing the Strait, given the attendant risks of Chinese counteraction.²²⁰

From the Rollback Debate to Inchon

The Chinese would eventually intervene in the war against the United States as a result of a regional, threat-based logic. As the U.S. undertook actions that were viewed

²¹⁹ The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Douglas) to Acheson, July 14, 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 380-85.

²²⁰ On July 19, Truman did offer a point of clarification pertaining to U.S. actions in the Strait. Ibid., 430.

as threatening to the Chinese, the belligerence of the PRC's policies increased accordingly. Unfortunately, American officials never came to terms with this logic. Rather, the Truman administration believed that Chinese intervention in the Korean War would be determined by a Soviet-centric, global logic wherein Chinese decision making was determined by Moscow, and was conditioned by the Kremlin's desire to avoid sparking a global war with the United States. Although this perspective was off the mark, it did not necessarily rule out the possibility that Communist China would intervene in the war. Specifically, there were two strands of this Soviet-centric logic. The first, proffered by the CIA (and held by the State Department's Policy Planning Staff), saw the use of Chinese forces in Korea as a means by which the Kremlin could prolong the war, draining American political, economic, and military resources in the process, and at minimal risk of sparking World War III. The second strand, explicated by the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs in the DOS, held that the Soviets would not undertake *any* action that increased the possibility of global war with the U.S. As such, the path was clear for the U.S. to impose unification of the two Koreas at low cost. Whereas the CIA's preferred logic was more accurate, it stood little chance of guiding U.S. decision making because the Agency was marginalized in the U.S. information structure.

The CIA's version of this logic emerged relatively soon after the start of the Korean War, and remained throughout the period under consideration. Its clearest articulation is found in the Agency's Intelligence Memorandum 302, "Consequences of the Korean Incident" of July 8. According to the CIA, the Soviet Union was seen as being an expansionist power, but one that not aggressively risk acceptant. Because

Moscow was not materially prepared for a global war with the United States, it would take steps to avoid provoking hostilities directly with the United States. As such, the Soviets were expected to employ mechanisms designed to wear down American military, economic, and political resources in ways that were considered to be of low to moderate risk. Furthermore, the Soviets were considered have nearly complete control over the foreign policy of the PRC. In terms of Chinese capabilities (i.e., an adjunct Soviet military power), the PRC was assessed as being capable of deploying forces in multiple arenas even before the outbreak of the war.

Pertaining to its likely intentions, the CIA expected that the USSR would attempt to localize the fighting in Korea and would refrain from initiating conflict elsewhere. Yet, in order to prolong the American involvement in the war, the Soviets would increase its military assistance to North Korea, “perhaps employing Chinese Communist troops, either covertly or overtly.” In pursuing this course of action, the Soviet Union would be able to remain uncommitted to the war while enabling it to wage a propaganda campaign against the U.S. The result of this campaign would damage the prestige of the United States (West European allies would question the wisdom of a strategically invaluable military commitment), would increase the prestige of the Soviet Union if prolonged fighting resulted without Soviet involvement and through its “peace campaign,” would severely strain the U.S. military to the point of making allies feel strategically exposed, and would ultimately give the USSR the most freedom of action in its ability to scale up

or down the level of hostility with the U.S. Finally, the course of action was considered to entail only a moderate risk of global war with the United States.²²¹

Significantly, the CIA's estimates and reports from the period July 8-October 8 were guided by the logic detailed in Intelligence Memorandum 302. For example, in its Review of the World Situation report of July 19, the CIA noted,

The efficient military performance of the invading forces in the first three weeks of battle indicates that there is little probability that the North Koreans can be quickly driven back to the 38th parallel. The USSR can supply material aid in sufficient quantities to prolong the fighting and deeply involve the US in Korean military operations. Chinese Communist troops can be brought into action covertly and, if necessary, openly. The USSR might consider that the risk of provoking a global war was not substantial so long as no Soviet forces were openly committed.²²²

Insofar as specific actions in the short run were concerned, the CIA noted on July 28 that the Soviets had available to them 40-50,000 North Korean forces in Manchuria which could be called upon to serve as reinforcements in the battle in South Korea; a move that would have little dangerous political repercussions.²²³ Three weeks later, the CIA noted that the Soviets had complete diplomatic and military flexibility in Korea. Given the military situation on the ground at the time, the Kremlin was in no hurry to introduce Chinese troops into battle. Despite the fact that action of this sort was seen as unlikely because it was unnecessary, the Chinese forces could be introduced in an effort to

²²¹ CIA, Intelligence Memorandum 302, 8 July 1950, "Consequences of the Korean Incident," in Kuhns, 409-13. Specific elements of this logic can be found in CIA, "Review of the World Situation," 14 June 1950, DDRS CK 3100376164; CIA, Intelligence Memorandum 301, 30 June 1950, "Estimate of Soviet Intentions and Capabilities for Military Aggression," in Kuhns, 396-402; CIA, Daily Summary, 6 July 1950, "Views of Hong Kong Residents on Korean Problem," in *ibid.*, 403-04 (see especially CIA comment); CIA, Weekly Summary, 7 July 1950, "The Korean Situation: Soviet Intentions and Capabilities," in *ibid.*, 406-08. It should be noted that the CIA did consider in a separate memo the potential downside to Soviet employment of Chinese troops in Korea. Significantly, these potential disadvantages were not considered to be of sufficient magnitude to cast doubt on the analysis in Intelligence Memorandum 302. See, CIA, Weekly Summary, 14 July 1950, "Communist China's Role," in *ibid.*, 419-21.

²²² CIA, "Review of the World Situation," 19 July 1950, 3. DDRS: CK 3100376174.

²²³ CIA, Weekly Summary, 28 July 1950, "Soviet/Satellite Intentions," in Kuhns, 425-27.

prolong the fighting should the need arise.²²⁴ On August 18, in response to the pressure being exerted by many in the government for an expansion of American war aims, the CIA posited,

Although an invasion of North Korea by UN forces could, if successful, bring several important advantages to the US, it appears at present that grave risks would be involved in such a course of action. The military success of the operation is by no means assured because the US cannot count on the cooperation of the non-Communist UN members and might also become involved in hostilities with Chinese Communist and Soviet troops. Under such circumstances there would, moreover, be a grave risk of general war.²²⁵

This cautionary warning became far more specific one month later—five days *after* NSC 81/1 (the enabling document permitting an invasion of North Korea) was signed by the President, but *before* American forces crossed the parallel.

While it is doubtful that either Soviet or Chinese Communist forces will be committed south of the 38th parallel, both Moscow and Peiping have the capability of sending organized military units to reinforce the North Koreans at any critical juncture. They are much more likely, however, to aid the Communist cause in Korea by releasing large numbers of trained Chinese Communist. . . . units, perhaps including small air units, for incorporation in the North Korean forces.²²⁶

In sum, while the CIA missed the regional, threat based logic that would eventually drive Chinese hostile military balancing, from late June to late September, the Agency consistently advocated a cautious approach to American policy in the Korean War as a

²²⁴ CIA, "Review of the World Situation," 16 August 1950, 4. DDRS CK 3100376181.

²²⁵ Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency, 18 August 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 600-03. Importantly, the CIA argued that the most likely method of Chinese involvement would be the deployment of troops at the 38th parallel in defense of North Korea—although the Soviets might use Chinese troops at any stage in the fighting. It is evident that the CIA had not conducted an estimate of the likelihood of Chinese intervention in response to a quick and decisive pursuit of retreating NKPA into North Korea. Rather, the CIA assumed that there would be sufficient time for the Chinese to deploy to the 38th parallel prior to the U.S. crossing the border.

²²⁶ CIA, Review of the World Situation, 20 September 1950, 4. DDRS: CK310037619.

result of a logic that saw the introduction of Chinese troops as having only a minimal impact on the likelihood of global war.²²⁷

The CIA's consistent warnings had no appreciable affect on the U.S. government's decision making with respect to crossing the 38th parallel. The primary obstacle to the CIA exerting influence on the course of strategic design was that it was largely isolated in the American information structure. The CIA would continue to suffer from the information parochialism that characterized its relations with the military prior to the outbreak of the Korean War. For example, in a report on September 8, the CIA posited that the most likely *first step* the Soviets and Chinese would take in order to achieve victory in Korea would be to release and employ in battle ethnic Koreans in Manchuria (who participated on the side of the Communists in the civil war) as reinforcements to the NKPA fighting in South Korea. According to Intelligence Memorandum 324, the CIA concluded,

Reports of an increasing Chinese Communist build-up of military strength in Manchuria, coupled with the known potential in that area, make it clear that intervention in Korea is well within immediate Chinese Communist capabilities. Moreover, recent Chinese Communist accusations regarding US "aggression" and "violation of the Manchurian border" may be stage-setting for an imminent overt move. In view of the momentous repercussions from such an overt action, however, it appears more probable that the Chinese Communist participation in the Korean Conflict will be more indirect, although significant, *and will be limited to integrating into the North Korean forces "Manchurian volunteers," perhaps including air units as well as ground troops.*

²²⁷ The consistency of the CIA's reporting ended on 12 October with the publication of ORE 58-50 where in the CIA speculated that Chinese and Soviet intervention was not likely during 1950. An explanation for this change in estimates can only be speculative. Nevertheless, two possible reasons are 1) the replacement of Roscoe Hillenkoetter by Walter B. Smith as DCI and 2) the crossing of the parallel by the U.S. in the absence of early intervention by either Communist power might have prompted the CIA to change its foundational assumptions pertaining to Chinese intentions. ORE 58-50, "Critical Situations in the Far East," 12 October 1950, in Kuhns, ed., 450-51.

According to the report, these “Manchurian volunteers” were those “40,000 trained Korean veterans who had served with the Chinese Communists in the Manchurian campaigns of 1946 to 1948.” The CIA went on to note, “It is noteworthy, however, that (1) since 1 August North Koreans have been using combat replacements with as little as two week’s training; and (2) the North Koreans would logically have committed all available organized Korean Units soon after U.N. forces had been committed because at that time the impact of 40,000 trained troops probably would have been decisive.” In the end, the CIA contended, that the ethnic Koreans had not been employed either because their effectiveness was in serious doubt, or because they had not existed in the first place. “On balance, therefore, it appears highly probable that if a Communist victory in Korea is to be achieved by the end of the year the North Korean forces must now rely on either Soviet or Chinese Communist resources for decisive augmentation.”²²⁸

It is clear from the available evidence that the CIA’s reporting on the status of this critical reserve force was based on a lack of hard evidence of its existence and movements—evidence that was in the possession of General MacArthur and his intelligence chief Willoughby. According to Chen Jian, the Chinese Communist leadership returned the ethnic Koreans in Manchuria (a force of 50-70,000 troops) and their equipment to the DPRK during late 1949 to mid-1950.²²⁹ While this augmentation of North Korean forces may not have been known at the early phase of the war, it was definitely known in August and was included in MacArthur’s Daily Intelligence

²²⁸ CIA, Intelligence Memorandum 324, 8 September 1950, “Probability of Direct Chinese Communist Intervention in Korea,” in Kuhns, 433-36. See also CIA, Weekly Summary, 8 September 1950, “North Korean Reserves,” in *ibid.*, 431-32.

²²⁹ Chen Jian, *China’s Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 110-11.

Summary.²³⁰ Significantly, the CIA's error with respect to the North Korean reserve force did not invalidate the Agency's strategic assessment. The release of this force was considered to be a likely *first step*, which would be followed by direct PRC intervention, if necessary. Yet, without access to up-to-date information from the FEC, many of the CIA's reports were ignored in Washington and Tokyo as a result of specific errors known only to the readers of the Agency's intelligence products.

While the CIA's inability to acquire the most up to date intelligence in possession by other elements of the intelligence community was damaging, more significant was the lack of direct contact that the Agency's analysts had with those specifically charged with designing the next phase of the limited war in Korea. Because the CIA was never incorporated into the process by which the American limited war in Korea was designed, its assessments could not be utilized by those in the administration who remained skeptical about an advance north of the 38th parallel. Moreover, because many of the CIA's intelligence products were forced into the "NSC machinery," adjudication of contending estimates of likely Chinese behavior was left up to the NSC principals themselves, rather than at lower levels where the broader strategic questions were being debated. As such, top decision makers were saddled with the responsibilities of squaring dynamic intelligence with finished policy proposals (proposals that had by that time acquired significant bureaucratic support). In short, the isolation of the CIA prematurely closed off debate on the merits of expanding U.S. war aims, and dramatically increased

²³⁰ FEC DIS 2948, 5 October 1950. This report lists the return of ethnic Koreans in CCF divisions as a form of *prewar* support. MacArthur complained of this augmentation in August, well before the CIA's 8 September intelligence memorandum. See Patrick Roe, *The Dragon Strikes: China & the Korean War, June-December 1950* (Novato: Presidio, 2000), 87, 113.

the information burden of top policy makers as they made decisions on the course of the Korean War.

While a number of individuals did contribute to the “rollback debate” which began very shortly after the initial American military commitment to South Korea, the primary interlocutor in the administration’s deliberation was John Allison, the Director of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs in the State Department. Allison assumed this critical position by virtue of the fact that he was ideologically close to both Dean Rusk (his immediate superior) and to John Foster Dulles (counselor to the State Department and bi-partisan accommodator). Moreover, it was Allison who most forcefully brought the issue of crossing the 38th parallel to the attention of the Washington officials at this early stage. In two critical memos, Allison argued that crossing the parallel, while potentially risky, was absolutely necessary to achieving peace and security in the region, and to punishing local acts of aggression, a course of action which would have “. . . . a salutary effect upon other areas of tension in the world.”²³¹ On July 15, Allison recommended that future contingency planning begin immediately with respect to waging war in the north, and on July 17, Allison was charged with the responsibility for guiding the effort that would eventually produce NSC 81/1.²³²

Allison’s position was most clearly articulated in response to a paper drafted by the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff on July 22. Significantly, the stance that the PPS adopted in this first paper was strikingly similar to that which the CIA adopted in its critical Intelligence Memorandum 302 of July 8. According to the PPS, it was extremely

²³¹ Allison to Rusk, 1 July 1950, FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 272, and Allison to Rusk, 15 July 1950, *ibid*, 393-95.

²³² Cumings, 709-10.

unlikely that the Soviet Union would permit the existence of a non-Communist regime in North Korea that it could not dominate. As such, “When it becomes apparent that the North Korean aggression will be defeated, there might be some agreement between the U.S.S.R. and the North Korean regime which would mean in substance the U.N. military action north of the 38th parallel would result in conflict with the U.S.S.R. or Communist China.” Given the inherent risks associated with crossing the 38th parallel, and because of the nature of existing American security commitments and military strength, the PPS concluded, “If U.N. forces were to continue military ground action north of the 38th parallel. . . . the danger of conflict with Chinese Communist or Soviet forces would be greatly increased.” In the final analysis, “The risks of bringing on a major conflict with the U.S.S.R. or Communist China, if U.N. military action north of the 38th parallel is employed in an effort to reach a ‘final’ settlement in Korea, appear to outweigh the political advantages that might be gained from such further military action.”²³³

On July 24, Allison responded with a moralistic attack on the position of the PPS. Specifically, Allison rejected the idea that any resolution to the Korean problem could be resolved through a political process based on the restoration of the status quo ante. “The aggressor would apparently be consulted on equal or nearly equal terms and the real aggressor, the Soviet Union, would presumably go unpunished in any way whatsoever. The aggressor would be informed that all he had to fear from aggression was being

²³³ Draft Memorandum Prepared by the Policy Planning Staff, 22 July 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 449-54. The PPS did not completely rule out the possibility of crossing the 38th parallel, however. The lone contingency was “In the unlikely event that there is a complete disintegration of North Korean forces together with a failure of the Kremlin and Communist China to take any action whatever to exert influence in North Korea, U.S. forces, acting in pursuance of an additional Security Council resolution, might move into North Korea in order to assist in the establishment of a united and independent Korea.”

compelled to start over again.” Among the failures of the PPS position, Allison noted, was its unwillingness to consider the fact that the North Korean regime was illegitimate in terms of international law and morality as it was a creature of the Soviet Union. Additionally, the PPS draft ignored the fact that the Soviet Union was currently in violation of the U.N. charter because it was providing aid to a regime against which the U.N. was acting. Finally, by failing to consider the “attitude of the 20 million people of South Korea who have been wantonly attacked, and the more than 2 million Koreans who fled from Soviet oppression in the North and sought refuge in the South,” the PPS draft was barren of ethical content. Allison concluded,

The paper assumes we can buy more time by a policy of appeasement—for that is what this paper recommends—a timid, half-heated policy designed not to provoke the Soviets to war. We should recognize that there is grave danger of conflict with the USSR and the Chinese Communists whatever we do from now on—but I fail to see what advantage we gain by a compromise with clear moral principles and a shirking of our duty to make clear once and for all that aggression does not pay—that he who violates the decent opinions of mankind must take the consequences and that he who takes the sword will perish by the sword.

That this may mean war on a global scale is true—the American people should be told and told why and what it will mean to them. When all legal and moral right is on our side why should we hesitate?²³⁴

Despite the fact that Allison’s willingness to run significant risks with the Soviet Union and China over Korea was completely out of step with objectives of Truman, Acheson, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, this paper had the effect of killing any hope that the U.S. would refrain from crossing the 38th parallel. At no point after July 24 did State Department officials ever forward such cautious positions as those found in the PPS’s initial draft memorandum.

²³⁴ Allison to Nitze, 24 July 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 458-61.

The primary reason for this timidity was the fact that no hard evidence could be marshaled by the PPS that pointed to an increasing likelihood that crossing the 38th parallel would result in war with the Chinese or Soviet Union. As Allison stated, the chances of global war were high no matter what course of action the U.S. adopted. This was, to repeat, not the position that the CIA adopted. Yet, because the PPS and the CIA were isolated from each other in the American information structure there was little chance of countering Allison's influence. On July 25, the PPS issued a second draft of its position that neither refuted Allison's claims—a task that could have easily been accomplished with estimates readily available from the CIA—nor retained the strong admonition against crossing the border. Rather, the PPS recommended that

Decisions regarding our course of action when the U.N. forces approach the 38th parallel should be deferred until military and political developments proved the additional information necessary to enable us: (a) to base our decision on the situation in Korea and in other parts of the world at that time; (b) to consult with other U.N. members who are supporting the Security Council resolutions in regard to measures which might be necessary or desirable once the aggression has been brought to an end; and (c) to keep our military capabilities and commitments in safe balance.²³⁵

Without the ability to counter Allison's charges, the PPS in effect retired from the bureaucratic battle, advocating that now was not the proper time to make such momentous strategic decisions.

In the August-September period, Allison's State Department team developed the strategy that would serve as the rough guide to U.S. actions in North Korea. This strategy followed a particular Soviet-centric global logic that differed from the CIA's in two primary respects. First, although it was recognized that the Soviets had critical security interests in Korea and were unlikely to permit a non-Communist regime in the

²³⁵ Draft Memorandum Prepared by the Policy Planning Staff, 25 July 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII 469-73.

North, it was believed that the Kremlin preferred to avoid a global war with the United States at all costs. Second, and following from the first, it was considered to be highly improbable that if the armed forces of the United States crossed the 38th parallel, the Soviets commit their own or Communist Chinese forces into battle as this would lead to global war. From these two propositions, it was concluded that if the Soviets were to enter North Korea in force, they would do so *prior* to the crossing of the border by U.N. forces. If there were no Soviet or Chinese troops deployed in North Korea at the point when the U.N. had the ability to cross, and if the Soviets had not indicated their intention to intervene, then it could be concluded that the Soviets and the Chinese would remain on the sidelines of the war.²³⁶

It is important to note that Allison's willingness to risk sparking global war (as indicated in his memo to Nitze) was neither shared by the Joint Chiefs of Staff nor by the majority of State Department officials. From the Chief's perspective, the decision by the Soviet Union to intervene in Korea would dramatically increase the likelihood of global war. As the United States was currently deployed heavily in a region of marginal strategic importance, the JCS stressed that if the Kremlin were to enter the war or to indicate its intentions of doing so, "the U.S. should prepare to minimize its commitment in Korea and prepare to execute war [global] plans."²³⁷ This sentiment was widely shared in the State Department. On August 25, a DOS meeting was held during which

²³⁶ Draft Memorandum by Allison, "U.S. Courses of Action in Korea," 12 August 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 567-73; Draft Memorandum by John M. Allison and John K. Emmerson, "U.S. Courses of Action in Korea," 21 August 1950. Ibid., 617-23.

²³⁷ NSC 76, "U.S. Courses of Action in the Event Soviet Forces Enter Korean Hostilities," 21 July 1950, DDRS CK3100353827; and NSC 76/1 under the same title, 25 July 1950; DDRS CK3100353831. By "war plans" the JCS were referring to the war plans in the event of global conflict with the Soviet Union. The general strategy envisioned a strategic offensive in the west, and a strategic defensive in the east. See note 19 in chapter 2.

possible restrictions to U.S. actions in North Korea were discussed. It was agreed that U.N. forces should remain well clear of the Russian frontier. Specifically, State officials recommended that the narrow neck be the agreed northern stopping point, a point that would permit the most effective defensive consolidation and would provide the Soviets a sizeable and geographically suitable buffer zone.²³⁸

In light of this consensus, Allison submitted his final position paper to the NSC on August 30. Adhering to the warnings voiced by DOS officials on the 25th, Allison noted that the “risk of provoking a clash of Soviet forces with the UN forces will be inversely proportional to the distance between the front line UN forces and the Siberian-Manchurian borders.” As such, General MacArthur should “refrain from any ground activity, either combat or occupational, in areas close to the international borders of Korea, or in any more distant areas the occupation of which might reasonably be construed as greatly increasing the military vulnerability of Vladivostok or any other strategic center in Siberia or Manchuria.” The paper went on to specifically note that operations in the area behind the narrow neck (39th parallel) were considered to be those that would likely threaten those strategic centers. Despite these warnings, Allison’s paper did provide a critical escape clause: “The UN Commander should not be denied the authority to carry out such operations in his discretion without conclusive reasons for such denial.” With respect to the possibility of outside intervention in Korea, Allison argued that “if the intelligence available to the UN Commander should indicate that there will be important organized USSR or Chinese Communist resistance, he should not advance farther without specific authorization and should immediately refer the matter to

²³⁸ Memorandum of Conversation by James Barco (Special Assistant to Ambassador at Large, Jessup), 25 August 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 646-48.

the United Nations.” In other words, critical strategic decisions were to be left to MacArthur’s judgment based on intelligence estimates conducted by the Far East Command.²³⁹

To a significant extent, this provision reflected a stark reality related to the U.S. government’s system of information management. Irrespective of the close connection between military operations and diplomatic signaling in limited war strategy, the State Department was not privy to much of the reports pertaining to the military situation on the peninsula and as such, could not have exerted a significant influence on strategic assessment during wartime (i.e., after U.S. forces crossed the 38th parallel.) One example of the military’s refusal to share information with the State Department pertained to the issue of aerial attacks in areas proximate to China’s borders. Critical to maintaining support for the American-led action by the international community, as well as to refrain from directly threatening the Soviet Union and China, was Truman’s prohibition early on that bombing operations in North Korea remain “well clear” of its international borders. On August 12, American bombers attacked ground and naval targets at the port of Najin, 17 miles from the Soviet border. The proximity of the attack to the Soviet Union, and the fact that it was well publicized in the *New York Times*, prompted State Department officials to request of the FEC information about the effects of the bombing and notification of future operations that might affect—in the State Department’s

²³⁹ DOS Draft Memorandum for the National Security Council Staff, “U.S. Course of Action as to Korea,” 30 August 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 660-63. This memo did contain specific instructions as to how the war should be prosecuted if the Chinese did intervene. Referencing NSC 73/4, Allison noted that “(1) The United States should not permit itself to become engaged in a general war with Communist China. (2) As long as action by UN military forces now committed or planned for commitment in Korea offers a reasonable chance of successful resistance, such action should be continued and extended to include authority to take appropriate air and naval action outside Korea against Communist China. The latter action should be continued pending a review of U.S. military commitments in the light of conditions then existing to determine further US course of action.”

estimation—Soviet and Chinese intentions to refrain from intervening in the war. As George Kennan noted, “Given the speed at which these planes operate, and the fact that they were bombing through an overcast [sic], it is obvious how easily they could not only have over flown the Soviet frontier but actually have inflicted damage on the Soviet side of it.”²⁴⁰

On August 21, Acheson received Secretary of Defense Johnson’s response to the State Department’s request that the Pentagon and FEC be more forthcoming with information of such a critical nature. As the Secretary of Defense put the matter,

I firmly believe in the importance of political considerations in politico-military decisions. However, I also believe that the conduct of military operations, once we are committed to such operations, are not subject to question in detail as long as they are conducted within the terms of the over-all decision and as long as our military commanders are held responsible for their successful conclusion. In short, once war operations are undertaken, it seems to me that they must be conducted to win. To any extent that external appearances are permitted to conflict with or hamper military judgment in actual combat decision, the effectiveness of our forces will be jeopardized and the question of responsibility may well be raised.

The State Department quickly realized that despite the importance of such information to preventing hostile military balancing and to maintaining international support for the war, the Defense Department would only provide information that it deemed of importance. On August 28, Acheson’s staff counseled the Secretary of State to pursue the matter no further. His staff “as a whole felt that the letter showed a lack of understanding of the important issues involved and a lack of willingness to integrate military and political

²⁴⁰ Kennan to Acheson, 14 August 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 574-76; Webb to Johnson, 14 August 1950. Ibid., 576-77.

policies. It was agreed that the Department of State should take no action which could be interpreted as interference in the conduct of military operations.”²⁴¹

On September 11, 1950, President Truman signed NSC 81/1, the enabling strategic document permitting U.S. forces to cross the 38th parallel in an effort to destroy the North Korean regime and unify the peninsula. Stated clearly, the objective of the next phase of the Korean War was to accomplish the “complete independence and unity of Korea. . . . without substantially increasing the risk of general war with the Soviet Union or Communist China.” With respect to possible intentions of the Soviet Union and China, NSC 81/1 stated that it was “unlikely that the Soviet Union will passively accept the emergence of a situation in which all or most of Korea would pass from its control, unless it believes that it can take action which would prevent this and which would not involve a substantial risk of general war or unless it is now prepared to accept such risk.” Further,

It is possible, but politically improbable, that no action will be taken by the Soviet Union or by the Chinese Communists to reoccupy Northern Korea or to indicate in any other way an intention to prevent the occupation of Northern Korea by United Nations forces before the latter have reached the 38th parallel. In this unlikely contingency there would be some reason to believe that the Soviet Union had decided to follow a hands-off policy, even at the expense of the loss of control of Northern Korea. Only in this contingency could the U.N. ground forces undertake to operate in or to occupy northern Korea without greatly increasing the risk of general war.

Despite the narrowness of the conditions under which the U.S. could advance across the border, NSC 81/1 went on to state that military action by the Soviet Union and the PRC was unlikely after the U.S. crossed into North Korea. “The Soviet Union may decide that it can risk reoccupying Northern Korea *before* United Nations forces have reached the

²⁴¹ Johnson to Acheson, 21 August 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 613-14; Memorandum by Director of the Executive Secretariat (McWilliams), 28 August, 1950, *ibid.*, 614, n. 1.

38th parallel, or the conclusion of an arrangement with the North Korean regime under which Soviet forces would be pledged to the defense of the territory of the ‘People’s Republic of Northern Korea’.” Significantly, no mention was given to the chances of Soviet action, *after* U.N. forces crossed the parallel. Moreover, the document noted that while Chinese forces might be used by the Soviets to occupy North Korea, such a course of action was deemed “politically unlikely” as the DPRK was considered to be in the Soviet sphere of influence, and was reasoned to increase the possibility of global war (the latter conclusion being the opposite of that reached by the CIA). NSC 81/1 authorized war in North Korea, “provided that at the time of such operations there has been no entry into North Korea by major Soviet or Chinese Communist forces, no announcement of intended entry, nor a threat to counter our operations militarily in North Korea.”²⁴² In short, NSC 81/1 provided strategic guidance predicated on the Soviet-centric, global logic offered by Allison, and was in consonance with the popular notion that the gains to be had in rolling back Communism on the peninsula were worth the effort given the estimated risk of Soviet and Chinese intervention.²⁴³

In sum, throughout this period of strategic decision making, it is striking that the estimates on likely Soviet and Chinese behavior produced by the CIA were barely

²⁴² NSC 81/1, “United States Courses of Action with Respect to Korea,” 9 September 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 712-21. Emphasis added.

²⁴³ It should be noted that while the Pentagon was concerned that Soviet intervention in Korea would leave the United States vulnerable, the JCS did believe that much could be gained from an attack on the North. For example, in late July the Chiefs argued that unification would provide “the U.S. and the free world with the first opportunity to displace part of the Soviet orbit.” Moreover, a “free and strong Korea could provide an outlet for Manchuria’s resources and could also provide non-communist contacts with the people there and in North China.” Finally, the Chiefs argued that strong and forceful action against the Soviet-sponsored attack could induce the Chinese to turn away from the Soviet Union. See Draft Memorandum Prepared in the Department of Defense, 31 July 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 506-07. See also, William Whitney Stueck, Jr., *The Road to Confrontation: American Policy Toward China and Korea, 1947-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 206.

considered by those directly responsible for designing the next phase of the limited war strategy in Korea. Based on the evidence examined, the CIA's pessimism was referenced *only once* by American strategists. In a meeting of the NSC senior staff on 25 August, Rear Admiral E.T. Wooldridge noted "that there was a very pessimistic CIA estimate dated August 18, regarding the dangerous consequences of any UN attempt at the military conquest of all of Korea." Wooldridge went on to state that the JCS would want to know the probable consequences of operations north of the 38th parallel.²⁴⁴ This request is significant because it illustrates that the vast majority of the CIA's estimates had not been considered by the JCS up to that point. Furthermore, it is not surprising that the JCS representative on the NSC staff was the individual who made reference to the CIA's August 18 memo. Following the strictures of the "NSC machinery," this critical estimate was provided only to NSC staff for its consideration. The exclusion of the CIA from the bureaucratic process of strategic design was debilitating in two primary regards. First, the isolation in which the various agencies and departments operated precluded consideration of all of the evidence and estimates of the intentions of potential balancers in the system. Without alternative estimates, the State Department's PPS was without the informational support required to counter Allison's proposals for extending the war into North Korea. Moreover, the JCS who continually expressed concern over the possibility that the United States would become engaged in a major war in Korea were never presented with sufficient evidence that the proposed course of action could indeed bog down the American military on the peninsula.

²⁴⁴ McConaughy to Jessup, "Rough Notes on NSC Senior Staff Meeting on Korea," 25 August 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 649.

The Decision to Cross the 38th Parallel

The second effect of the CIA's marginalization, and the general pattern of organizational isolation, was that top policy makers were saddled with a tremendous information burden at a critical period before American troops crossed the parallel. As stated in NSC 81/1, the expansion of the war into North Korea was conditioned on the absence of Soviet and Chinese intervention, or the threat of intervention. In other words, from September 11-October 8, American officials were charged with the responsibility of considering carefully evidence that the either Communist power would enter the war. During this period, the administration did receive evidence from a number of sources indicating that the Chinese would enter the war if the U.S. crossed the 38th parallel. Yet, not all of the evidence was clear cut and was at times contradictory. Without a properly functioning information management system, top policy makers were forced to make sense of this information on their own. As a result, each piece of information was weighed on its own merits. At no time during this period was new information placed in a broader pattern of U.S.-Chinese relations since the start of the war. In the end, American officials held on to their preexisting beliefs that the Chinese would refrain from entering the war, no matter what course of action the U.S. took.

In light of this perception, the available information was interpreted in generally optimistic terms or was dismissed outright if any doubt to its accuracy was evinced. Although the State Department received indications from sources in Hong Kong and Taipei that the PRC would intervene if U.S. forces crossed the 38th parallel, officials were skeptical. On 21 September, the DOS received word from New Delhi that the Indian Ambassador to Beijing K. M. Panikkar, who had just recently had a series of

conversations with Zhou Enlai and other high officials, did not believe that Chinese intervention was likely. Shortly thereafter, U.S. consul general at Hong Kong argued that because representation at the U.N. was the PRC's highest political objective, and because of the government was busy with massive internal reconstruction efforts, the Chinese Communists would only provide limited and indirect support to the DPRK.²⁴⁵

That pattern of reporting changed, however, on 27 September. According to telegrams received by State Department officials, Panikkar changed his assessment of the PRC's intentions. Of significance was Panikkar's interpretation of the U.N. representation issue. In light of Zhou's comment on 21 September that "since the United Nations had no obligations to China, China had no obligations to the United Nations," Panikkar believed that the probability of Chinese intervention had increased. Moreover, Indian Prime Minister Nehru pleaded for a halt at the 38th parallel by U.N. forces fearing the consequences of a clash between American and Chinese forces.²⁴⁶ And, from the Dutch Charge in Beijing, U.S. officials learned that the Chief of Staff of the Chinese Army stated that China "had no choice but to fight if [the] 38th parallel [was] crossed; although [it was] realized war with USA would set back China's development 50 years or more, [in the] Chief of staff opinion if no resistance [was] offered at this time, China would forever be under American control."²⁴⁷

These messages matched public statements from the PRC concerning its interest in the outcome of the war in Korea. On August 26th, in an article in *World Culture* (an

²⁴⁵ Consul General at Hong Kong (Wilkinson) to Acheson, 5 September 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 698; Wilkinson to Acheson, 12 September 1950, *ibid.*, 724-25. See also, William Stueck, *The Korean War: An International History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 90-91.

²⁴⁶ Memorandum of Conversation by Merchant, 27 September 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII 793-94; Acheson to Webb 28 September 1950. *Ibid.*, 797-98.

²⁴⁷ Ambassador in the Netherlands (Chapin) to Acheson, 3 October 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 858

official journal of the PRC) Zhou stated clearly that China was directly affected by the situation on the peninsula.²⁴⁸ On 22 September, the Chinese Foreign Ministry declared, “We clearly reaffirm that we will always stand on the side of the Korean people—just as the Korean people have stood on our side during the past decades—and resolutely oppose the criminal acts of American imperialist aggression against Korea and their intrigues for expanding the war.”²⁴⁹ In a public address celebrating the founding of the PRC, Zhou “branded the United States as China’s worst enemy and stated that China will not allow a neighbor to be invaded.”²⁵⁰ On September 30, Zhou declared that “the Chinese people absolutely will not tolerate foreign aggression nor will they supinely tolerate seeing their neighbors being savagely invaded by imperialists.”²⁵¹

Finally, on October 3, Zhou held a midnight meeting with Indian Ambassador Panikkar in which he bluntly stated that if the Americans crossed the 38th parallel, the PLA would enter the war. “The American forces are trying to cross the 38th parallel and to expand the war. If they really want to do this, we will not sit still without doing anything. We will be forced to intervene.”²⁵² Despite the clarity of the warning provided by Zhou, officials in Washington were skeptical that the Chinese had signaled their intention to intervene. Many distrusted Panikkar as he was considered to be a “fellow traveler” with the Communists in Beijing. Irrespective, this warning did prompt the DOS to request from a number of its consular offices “any info you have which [would] throw

²⁴⁸ Whiting, 86.

²⁴⁹ Quoted in Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950-1953* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 77.

²⁵⁰ P. K. Rose, “Perceptions and Reality: Two Strategic Intelligence Mistakes in Korea, 1950,” *Studies in Intelligence* (Fall/Winter, 2001), 5. See also *The New York Times*, 10 October 1950, 48.

²⁵¹ Wilkinson to Acheson., 2 October 1950 FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 852.

²⁵² Quoted in Chen, 180. See also, Chapin to Acheson, 3 October 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 858.

light on any intentions [Chinese] Communists or [Soviet] Union to intervene militarily [in] Korea or embark on other hostile course.”²⁵³

In terms of its military capabilities, the PRC had been steadily augmenting its armed forces in Manchuria, and both the FEC and CIA were keeping close watch on these developments. From July to September, the FEC continually reported on the steady build up of PLA forces in Manchuria: July, 116,000 troops; August, 217,000 troops; late September, 246,000 troops with the possible overall strength as high as 450,000 (more than the entire U.N. command strength in Korea).²⁵⁴ On September 8, the CIA reported that “certain of the Chinese Communist Military District forces in Manchuria may now be organized as field units.”²⁵⁵ Put simply, the Chinese had more than enough military power to effectively intervene in Korea.

Based on the evidence considered, at no time during this critical period was there an effort to explicitly compare the steady increase in Chinese forces in Manchuria, the political intelligence available from Panikkar and other sources, and the increasing stridency of the PRC’s public rhetoric. Rather, as time progressed, top decision makers considered each new development on its own terms. At the same time, State Department officials were attempting to build a consensus in the United Nations for a move across the 38th parallel, were under pressure from Republican officials in Congress to attack North Korea, and were attempting in vain to persuade the Indian Government to use its leadership position among Asian nations to back the American effort (the Indians, in turn,

²⁵³ Acting Secretary of State to Certain Diplomatic and Consular Offices, 5 October 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 877.

²⁵⁴ Cohen, Eliot A., “‘Only Half the Battle’: American Intelligence and the Chinese Intervention in Korea, 1950,” *Intelligence and National Security*, 5, 1 (1990), 137-38. On September 15, the CIA estimated that the total Military District strength in Manchuria stood at 505,000. CIA, “Situation Summary,” 15 September 1950, DDRS: CK3100382292.

²⁵⁵ CIA, “Situation Summary” 8 September 1950, DDRS: CK3100382287.

were attempting in vain to dissuade the U.S. from attacking the North).²⁵⁶ In short, this was a time when administration officials could have benefited most from a robust information structure. As things stood, there was little chance that China's intentions could have been discerned correctly; the information burden was simply too great for harried individuals to manage.

Despite the widely held belief that the Chinese were bluffing in late September and early October, some in the State Department did think that the PRC would intervene against American forces if the 38th parallel was breached. On October 4, O. Edmund Clubb, the Director of the Office of Chinese Affairs issued a memorandum stating

The Chou En-lai *demarche* cannot safely be regarded as mere bluff. . . His demarche must be regarded as having been made with the foreknowledge and support of USSR. The political and military stakes are considerable, and Moscow and Peiping may be prepared to take considerable risks. . . . UN movement into North Korea should be on the basis of the consideration that the Chinese Communists might in fact intervene with armed force, and that if they do so intervene, the USSR might likewise intervene, and that the hostilities might not in such case be limited to Korea. . . . In view of the pertinency in this connection of NSC 81/1, new consideration to the problem in point is perhaps merited.²⁵⁷

It is worth noting that Clubb did not state in this memorandum that Beijing would be induced to intervene by Soviet directive, only that the Soviets would "support" China in the effort. Similarly, U. Alexis Johnson, the Deputy Director of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs informed Rusk that although Zhou Enlai's warning might contain some hyperbole, "I do not feel that we can assume it is entirely bluff." Moreover,

We are not openly committed to the use of UN forces across the 38th and it may, therefore, be well worthwhile further to explore the possibility of using entirely ROK forces for the subjugation of North Korea, of course, continuing our present logistic and tactical Air and Naval support, thus maintaining the UN umbrella.

²⁵⁶ Shu Guang Zhang, *Deterrence and Strategic Culture: Chinese American Confrontations, 1949-1958* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 87-88.

²⁵⁷ Clubb to Merchant, 4 October 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 864-65.

This would maintain the UN umbrella over the operation while reducing the grave risk of calling the Chinese bluff.²⁵⁸

The authorship of these two memoranda is of particular importance. Both Clubb and Johnson were individuals who had extensive experience with the Communists in China and as such, their perspectives could have been highly valuable to administration officials in designing the next phase in the Korean War. Yet, neither was directly incorporated into the process of strategic design. The primary reason for their marginalization the fact that both were victims of the purge of the “China Hands” that occurred in the State Department years earlier.²⁵⁹ These officials were the most receptive to the regional, threat-based logic that soon induced the PRC’s hostile balancing against the United States. Because they, along with the CIA, were isolated elements within the broader information structure, neither the foundational assumptions nor the guiding strategic logic upon which the expansion of American war aims was predicated could have been called into question. Finally, without the informational and institutional support that could have been provided by these individuals and agencies, the few voices of caution that were considered by American strategists stood little chance of withstanding the bureaucratic momentum for crossing the 38th parallel that began in July. With the President’s approval in NSC 81/1, advocates of caution stood little chance of preventing the move northward.

²⁵⁸ Alexis Johnson to Rusk, 3 October 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 849. John Allison was U. Alexis Johnson’s immediate superior in the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs in the State Department. It is significant that this memo was sent directly to Dean Rusk, Allison’s superior. Evidently, Johnson’s influence with his boss was so minimal that he was forced to appeal to a higher authority.

²⁵⁹ Michael Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan: The Origins of the Cold War in Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 252-53.

Summary

As a result of the truncated nature of its information structure, the United States did not benefit from the operation of the strategic design mechanism during this phase of the Korean War. The absence of this critical mechanism had two profound effects. First, top American officials were unable to obtain anything approximating an accurate understanding of the present or likely future intentions of the PRC. Second, the strategy for rolling back communism on the Korean peninsula was predicated on a faulty understanding of the strategic context in the Far East and, unbeknown to U.S. officials, had a high probability of inducing hostile balancing by the PRC.

The inability for top policymakers to acquire an accurate understanding of the PRC's intentions at the time of the 7th Fleet decision resulted from both the lack of multi-sourced information flows and the absence of lateral connections among relevant departments and agencies. At the two crucial Blair House meetings wherein the possibility of interposing the 7th Fleet in the Taiwan Strait was considered, only scant evidence about Chinese interests and capabilities was presented. Moreover, while the two documents that commanded the principals' attention were deeply flawed (MacArthur's pre-war memo which advocated securing Taiwan and the OIR's estimate of Sino-Soviet relations with respect to the island), the decision making forum did not allow for adequate information vetting and assessment. Because of the CIA's marginalization in the U.S. information structure, the Director of Central Intelligence was not among the participants at Blair House at this early phase. As such, any cautionary evidence that the CIA could have provided pertaining to China's likely response to the 7th Fleet was simply unavailable to the President and his top advisers. Furthermore, without

effective information management processes at their disposal (i.e., the emergency interdepartmental intelligence procedures advocated by the Intelligence Study Group), top officials were unable to assess the drawbacks attendant to MacArthur's proposals and the OIR's estimates. Without the assistance of an effective interagency information management system, top officials were never forced to consider the potential negative implications of the 7th Fleet decision.

In the absence of a well-functioning interagency policymaking process, the primary responsibility for determining how the U.S. would wage war in Korea fell to the State Department's Office of Northeast Asian Affairs. The director of that office, John Allison, was ideologically committed to unifying the Korean peninsula under non-communist auspices, and was determined to "punish" those responsible for breaking the peace in the Far East. As a result of the truncated information structure, alternative strategic proposals were never given a fair hearing. For example, both the CIA and PPS were of the opinion that the Chinese would intervene in the war if the U.S. crossed the 38th parallel into North Korea. Because the PPS, which could have exerted some influence in the strategic design process, was not privy to the CIA's reports and estimates however, the Staff was unable counter Allison's charge that caution amounted to "appeasement." Furthermore, the position of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was that so long as Soviet and Chinese intervention in the war was not likely, then they would support an invasion across the border. Again, the CIA's isolation precluded the Chiefs from receiving exactly those estimates that would have induced them toward a more cautious approach in the war.

Finally, at the critical point after the success of the Inchon operation when the U.S. had the ability to expand the war northward, top policymakers were simply unable to successfully manage what had become a significant information overload problem. By the end of September 1950, sufficient information existed in the form of military intelligence (the buildup of Chinese forces in Manchuria), diplomatic intelligence (the Zhou-Pannikar communiqué among others), and the extremely hostile rhetoric coming from leaders in Beijing all pointed to a strong possibility of Chinese intervention should the U.S. cross the border. Yet, those officials who could have ordered American forces to refrain from crossing were unable to “connect the dots.” No interagency taskforce had been formed, no political-military war game had been conducted, and no ad hoc committee to review the available data had been convened. As such, the decision making burden fell on the shoulders of harried individuals who, ultimately, made the choice that provoked the hostile military balancing by the PRC.

The Failure of Strategic Adaptation

From late-June to early-October, the United States engaged in the first round of strategic design. Between October and November 1950, top American officials were presented with multiple opportunities to reassess and refine that strategy in light of Chinese intentions. The evidence below shows that as a result of the monopoly of information held by the Far East Command, officials in Washington were unable obtain a clear understanding of Chinese perception of threat and resulting behavior. As such, the strategy of roll-back was neither scrapped nor altered. As a result, not only did the

Chinese engage in hostile military balancing, their intervention had a devastating effect on U.S./UN forces.

Crossing the Parallel and the Chinese First Phase Offensive

On September 27, MacArthur received authorization from the Joint Chiefs to advance into North Korea. That directive, which had the backing of Truman, Acheson, and George Marshall (who had become Defense Secretary on September 21), stated that the U.N. forces were to destroy the North Korean army above the 38th parallel, “provided that at the time of such operations there has been no entry into North Korea by major Soviet or Chinese Communist forces, no announcement of intended entry, nor a threat to counter our operations militarily in North Korea.” Significantly, the CINCUN was given the responsibility for determining whether such intervention was likely or ongoing. “. . . . you [MacArthur] will continue to make special efforts to determine whether there is a Chinese Communist or Soviet threat to the attainment of your objective, which will be reported to the Joint Chiefs of Staff as a matter of urgency.” Moreover, the final directive stated that “it should be the policy not to employ non-ROK forces in the North Korean provinces bordering on Manchuria and the Soviet Union.” After the CINCUN submitted his plan for military operations in North Korea and received the Joint Chiefs’ approval, Marshall told MacArthur on 29 September, “We want you to feel unhampered strategically and tactically to proceed north of the 38th Parallel. . . . I regard all of Korea open for our military operations unless and until the enemy capitulates.”²⁶⁰ While not

²⁶⁰ Webb to Acheson, 26 September 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 781-82; Acheson to Webb, 26 September 1950. Ibid., 785-86; Marshall to MacArthur, 29 September 1950. Ibid., 826; James F. Schnabel and Robert J. Watson, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy*. vol. III *The Korean War: Part 1* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1979), 277. On October 1, the first ROKA units

intended by Marshall to supersede the specific directives sent on the 27th, this seemingly open-ended endorsement of operations in North Korea was interpreted by MacArthur as granting him extensive freedom as he prosecuted the war in the North. And, as the order stipulated, responsibility for determining whether or not the Chinese or Soviets would intervene in the war was placed squarely on the CINCUN's shoulders.²⁶¹

Whereas it was the absence of lateral information channels connecting departments and agencies that produced a flawed limited war strategy in late September and early October, it was the near exclusive reliance on the FEC for strategic information that precluded a reassessment of that strategy during October and November. After American forces crossed into North Korea, accurate reporting on the status of the Chinese forces was stymied by a lack of alternative sources of information reaching top decision makers in Washington. A clearer picture of the disposition of Chinese forces was critical for two reasons. First, for many in the administration, the signals being sent by the PRC pertaining to its future intentions were ambiguous. A clear understanding of Chinese military activity and deployments was crucial as it would shed increasing light on how the PRC would likely behave as American forces approached the northern reaches of the DPRK. Second, an accurate depiction of Chinese force deployments was important because it could have prompted Washington to look favorably on a plan of establishing a strong defensive position at the “narrow neck” of the peninsula—an idea supported by

crossed the 38th parallel in pursuit of fleeing KPA forces. One week later, American and other forces under the U.N. command followed suit.

²⁶¹ On October 9, the JCS cabled MacArthur with additional orders pertaining to how he should respond to a Chinese intervention south of the Yalu. “Hereafter in the event of open or covert employment anywhere in Korea of major Chinese Communist units, without prior announcement, you should continue the action as long as, *in your judgment*, action by forces now under your control offers a reasonable chance of success. In any case you will obtain authorization from Washington prior to taking any military action against objectives in Chinese territory.” JCS to CINCFE, 9 October 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 915. Emphasis added.

many in the State Department as well as by the U.K. Given that MacArthur strongly detested any military option that prevented his taking all of North Korea by force, the only means by which Washington could have exercised discretion in military operations would be through an accurate understanding of the strategic context in which the war was being prosecuted.²⁶²

Without access to alternative sources of information pertaining to the Chinese military activity, top policy makers in Washington were forced to depend on MacArthur's reporting and assessments for evidence that the strategy was succeeding or failing. MacArthur's reporting, however, was frequently contradictory and misleading. On October 15, Truman flew to Wake Island to briefly confer with MacArthur on the status of the war effort. When Truman queried MacArthur on the chances for Soviet or Chinese intervention, the General replied:

Very little. Had they interfered in the first or second months it would have been decisive. We are no longer fearful of their intervention. . . . The Chinese have 300,000 men in Manchuria. Of these probably not more than 100/125,000 are distributed along the Yalu River. Only 50/60,000 could be gotten across the Yalu River. They have no Air Force. Now that we have bases for our Air Force in Korea, if the Chinese tried to get down to Pyongyang there would be the greatest slaughter.²⁶³

This assessment was familiar to officials in Washington who had been receiving intelligence from the FEC that corroborated MacArthur's numbers and judgment of possible Chinese reactions. In the midst of the First Phase Offensive roughly two weeks later, MacArthur explained the presence of the Chinese in North Korea in the most benign terms possible: China was attempting to provide covert assistance to the North in

²⁶² Clay Blair, *The Forgotten War: America in Korea, 1950-1953* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1987), 400-01.

²⁶³ Quoted in D. Clayton James, *The Years of MacArthur, Volume III: Triumph and Disaster, 1945-1964* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 507-08.

order to “salvage something from the wreckage.” Only days later, in response to Truman’s cancellation of MacArthur’s order to bomb the Yalu bridges, however, the General’s reporting changed dramatically,

Men and materiel in large force are pouring across all bridges over Yalu from Manchuria. This movement not only jeopardizes but threatens the ultimate destruction of the forces under my command. . . . The only way to stop this reinforcement. . . . is the destruction of these bridges. . . . Every hour that this is postponed will be paid for dearly in American and other United Nations blood. . . .²⁶⁴

The striking difference between MacArthur’s reports caught the Chiefs by surprise. The JCS response illustrates their concern that the CINCUN had not been as forthcoming as their instructions demanded: “It is essential that we be kept informed of important changes in the situation as they occur. . . .”

Yet, the CINCUN had no further evidence that the Chinese had intervened in force. At no time before China’s major offensive on November 24 did MacArthur have a clear idea of the number of Chinese forces in North Korea. Willoughby’s theater intelligence estimates are largely to blame for this. During the October-November period, Willoughby continually received reports from both 8th Army and X Corp that indicated the Chinese were crossing the Yalu with full divisions. Because the FEC intelligence chief failed to accurately compare the evidence from the two sources, however, he retained belief that American forces faced only individual “units.” Although his reports to MacArthur did show a dramatic increase in the number of Chinese troops in the North overtime, Willoughby’s estimates were completely off the mark.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ Quoted in Blair, 391, 395.

²⁶⁵ The following analysis, along with references to the FEC’s Daily Intelligence Summary, is based on that found in Roe, ch. 10. The FEC DIS for the period under consideration are held at the MacArthur Memorial Library and Archives, Norfolk, VA. Record group 6: GFQ FECOM, reels 666-670.

Prior to the Chinese initiation of the First Phase Offensive, the point at which American and Chinese forces first came into contact, Willoughby was painfully aware of the substantial and growing presence of the PLA in Manchuria. From October 5-24, MacArthur's Daily Intelligence Summary (DIS), the intelligence product produced by Willoughby for MacArthur, frequently reported that the reinforcement by the PLA was key potential strength of the NKPA as it retreated northward. Additionally, while the DIS retained its focus on the NKPA, Willoughby did recognize that as the combat effectiveness of the North Korean forces continued to degrade, the probability of Chinese intervention increased. On October 20, for example, Willoughby reported that the PLA had significant combat power in Manchuria and that there was no question as to their ability to cross the Yalu.²⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the FEC G-2 was unsure as to whether that intervention would be in the offing. That decision, ". . . is not within the purview of local intelligence: it will be based on the high-level readiness of the Kremlin to go to war through utilizing the CCF in Manchuria. . . ." Because the potential for intervention was evident, Willoughby stated that precautionary measures were being undertaken, including daily air reconnaissance flights over possible points of entry. Although large-scale truck movements had been sighted, there was no definitive evidence that Chinese entry had taken place.²⁶⁷ In short, prior to the first contact between U.S./U.N. and Chinese forces, the FEC's intelligence chief was aware of the massive combat strength opposite the Yalu,

²⁶⁶ The October 24 DIS noted that there was an identified CCF strength in Manchuria of 316,000 troops in 12 armies and 44 divisions. And additional six armies and 18 divisions (147,000 troops) were reported to be in the area, though these reports were unconfirmed. The potential total, according to the FEC G-2 was 463,000.

²⁶⁷ FEC DIS 2963, 20 October 1950. See also, FEC DIS 2957, 14 October 1950 for the first indication that Willoughby was skeptical that his intelligence would shed light on the political decisions determining Chinese intervention.

understood the negative ramifications for the U.N. command should the Chinese intervene, but was unsure whether or not intervention would take place.

Despite Willoughby's concern prior to the First Phase Offensive, when evidence became available that the PRC had entered North Korea, the FEC G-2 was adamant that the Chinese had not intervened in force. His reporting to MacArthur, moreover, reflected this position. There are two primary reasons for Willoughby's persistent skepticism. The first was the inability to obtain an accurate picture of the deployment in the North as a result of the command structure that split the 8th Army from X Corp. It was Willoughby's responsibility to reconcile intelligence from prisoner of war interrogations and from frontline troops; a task at which MacArthur's intelligence chief failed. The second reason was that the manner in which the PRC intervened dramatically confounded expectations of the FEC. Specifically, the First Phase Offensive was not a full-blown assault on the advancing U.N. forces. Moreover, that offensive was not sustained, but rather was called off quickly after it began.

It should be recalled that the bulk of Chinese forces (totaling 260,000 troops) entered North Korea on October 20 undetected by the FEC's intelligence. Thus, it was only during the First Phase Offensive that American commanders obtained the first glimpse of the extent of the Chinese deployment. Evidence betraying Chinese strength came from Chinese POWs and from American and ROK combat forces directly opposite the CCF. On October 25, Chinese POWs started to fall into the hands of the 8th Army and X Corp intelligence, and their interrogations provided startlingly accurate depictions of the size of the PRC's intervention. And, as the Chinese offensive proceeded, information indicating that they had intervened in force became harder and harder to

discount. On November 6, for example, Willoughby received a report, based on a review of all of the Chinese POW interrogations by X Corp to date, indicating that there could be as many 108,000 troops in that zone of battle alone.²⁶⁸

The FEC, however, was unable to determine the nature of the deployed forces (whether they were organized in task units or in regular PLA formations), and this confusion led to a drastic underestimation of their size. On the same day that Willoughby received the report suggesting that X Corp could be facing over 100,000 CCF, he received a report from the 8th Army stating that elements from three Chinese divisions had identified. That report, however, rejected the notion that those elements were the divisions' advance forces. Rather, the estimate considered those forces as whole units, and thus not representative of a larger deployment. Willoughby adopted this explanation, rather than the alternative division-sized explanation. This smaller figure squared with the FEC G-2's preexisting beliefs about the likelihood of Chinese intervention. As he suggested on October 28, without air cover Chinese forces would be unable to intervene effectively. Moreover, "From a tactical viewpoint, with victorious UN divisions in full deployment, it would appear that the auspicious time for such intervention had long since passed; it is difficult to believe that such a move, if planned, would have been postponed to a time when the remnant NK forces have been reduced to a low point of effectiveness."²⁶⁹

In addition to information obtained from POW accounts, information was made available to Tokyo that the intervention of Chinese forces had drastically hampered the over all U.N. advance northward. After five days of fighting, the CCF had hit ROKA

²⁶⁸ Roe, 177.

²⁶⁹ FEC DIS 2971, 28 October 1950.

forces hard and had effectively halted the U.N.'s advance. The ability of the Chinese forces to stymie the American and ROKA advance did not lead Willoughby to conclude that the PRC had intervened in force, however. On November 2, he reported

Recent captures of Chinese [POWs]. . . and information obtained from their interrogation together with the increased resistance being encountered by advancing United Nations forces removes the problem of Chinese intervention for the realm of the academic and turns it into a serious proximate threat.

Despite this possibility, Willoughby argued that the Chinese had only provided a token number of forces to assist the North Koreans. The reason for such a small force, Willoughby suggested, was to enable the Chinese to save face:

One theory based on acknowledgement of Chinese subtlety and their traditional obsession with saving 'face' is that by this type of action China after a fashion can have her cake and eat it too. By labeling these troops as volunteer outfits and claiming that no recognized organizations of the CCF are in Korea, China can claim to the world that no formal intervention has occurred.²⁷⁰

With the sudden conclusion of the First Phase Offensive, Willoughby took stock of the situation confronting U.N. forces. Despite the evidence obtained from the 8th Army and X Corp POW interrogations, the significant damage done to the 8th Army (in particular ROKA elements), the inability of the U.N. to advance further north during the offensive, and reports from aerial observers of long lines of Chinese forces moving back into the North Korean hills, Willoughby estimated that the maximum Chinese presence in North Korea was roughly 33,700.²⁷¹

The FEC's intelligence organization occupied a critical point in the U.S. information structure during the period under consideration. As the primary source of information concerning Chinese military capabilities and political intentions, it was

²⁷⁰ FEC DIS 2976, 2 November 1950.

²⁷¹ As reported in Roe, 185.

imperative that the FEC G-2 had an accurate understanding of the PRC's behavior.

As a report issued by the Commander in Chief of the U.S. Pacific Fleet (CINCNAVPAF) reviewing the performance of U.S. intelligence during the Korean War stated:

A full utilization of all facilities including "covert", reconnaissance and POW's, should have permitted of more accurate and timely information of the movements of enemy forces to the south. During most of the period covered above [i.e., during and after the First Phase Offensive] naval air craft operated along most the length of the Yalu River and to the east thereof while the Air Force operated in other areas through North Korea.

The failures of Intelligence may be ascribed to:

- (a) Totally inadequate pre-war Intelligence, including that intelligence derived from political sources, covert means, and overt sources such as attaches, liaison officers, etc.
- (b) Incorrect appreciation of the time, scope, and extent of participation by outside Powers in the Korean war, on the part of FEC Intelligence, and an acceptance of those estimates by other Intelligence Agencies.
- (c) Poor utilization of the facilities for obtaining tactical Intelligence, after June, particularly aerial reconnaissance.
- (d) A failure to obtain necessary basic intelligence material in Korea, while it was occupied by the United States.²⁷²

The conclusions in the CINCNAVPAF's report are illustrative in two respects. First, it demonstrates that the resources necessary to obtain an accurate understanding of Chinese military behavior were available to the Far East Command. Second, this report acknowledges the impact of the FEC's intelligence on top policy makers in Washington.

From late October to late November, the FEC withheld a great deal of information pertaining to the disposition of Chinese forces in Korea. Furthermore, the information that Washington did receive came primarily from the FEC G-2 itself, and not from the individual intelligence branches of the two American forces on the peninsula. A review of the CIA's reporting during this period reveals a conspicuous absence of high quality

²⁷² Korean War, U.S. Pacific Fleet Operations, Interim Evaluation Report No. 1, Period 25 June to 15 October 1950, 1500. DDRS: CK3100346776.

information about Chinese forces in North Korea. For example, on October 28 the CIA reported, “The presence of independent organized Chinese Communist units in Korea has not yet been confirmed; [the reports] concerning skeleton Chinese forces, however, are consistent with *fragmentary* field reports thus far received on Chinese Communist participation in the Korean fighting.”²⁷³ On November 3, the CIA noted in its *Weekly* that “Present field estimates are that between 15,000 and 20,000 Chinese Communist troops organized in task force units are operating in North Korea While the parent units remain in Manchuria.”²⁷⁴ Finally, on November 8, the CIA (with the concurrence of the Departments of State, Army, Navy and Air Force) issued NIE-2, “Chinese Communist Intervention in Korea,” which estimated the total CCF strength in Korea to be between 30,000-40,000 troops (a range completely in line with Willoughby’s reporting).²⁷⁵

Together, these intelligence products show the extent of the FEC’s information monopoly during this phase of the Korean War. Without an alternative source of information pertaining to the activity of Chinese forces in Korea, it was impossible for officials and intelligence organs in Washington to obtain a more accurate understanding of the strategic situation into which American and U.N. force had stumbled. Put simply, had Washington been privy to the information provided by Chinese POWs and by front

²⁷³ CIA, Daily Summary, “Reports on Chinese Involvement in Korea,” 28 October 1950, Kuhns, ed., 457. Emphasis added. Oddly, in its “Daily Korean Summary” reports on November 1, 3, 4, and 7 (i.e., during the First Phase Offensive), the CIA included *no* reference to Chinese forces in Korea These reports can be found in a single file containing 179 Daily Summaries beginning on 26 June 1950. DDRS: CK3100420671.

²⁷⁴ CIA, Weekly Summary, “Chinese Communist Plans: Korean Intervention,” 3 November 1950, *ibid.*, 462.

²⁷⁵ CIA, NIE-2, “Chinese Communist Intervention in Korea,” 8 November 1950, DDRS: CK3100398564.

line units, a more accurate understanding of Chinese intentions would likely have developed.

Under what conditions would an alternative understanding of Chinese intentions been possible? Two conditions were necessary, both of which concern the manner in which information was shared among departments and agencies within the U.S. government. First, a more complete picture of Chinese forces in Korea after the First Phase Offensive could have developed had information from the 8th Army and X Corp been made available to intelligence organs in addition to Willoughby's FEC G-2. There are two reasons for optimism on this point. Initially, as the Navy study above suggests, a complete utilization of the resources and information, both of a military and political nature, "should have permitted of more accurate and timely information of the movements of enemy forces to the south." Given that this report does indicate that some strategic information was simply unknowable given the information at hand, its conclusions pertaining to Chinese intervention should not be dismissed lightly. Furthermore, by carefully examining the information available to Willoughby at the time, Historian Patrick Roe was able to ascertain with much greater accuracy the strength of the PRC in North Korea. Yet, because the FEC G-2 occupied such a critical information node in the U.S. information structure at the time, an alternative strategic perspective was impossible to obtain.

Second, had information about the PLA's previous tactical, operational, and strategic methods been considered, it would have been possible to predict how the Chinese would likely behave when confronting a conventional force like the U.N. forces under MacArthur's command. In terms of the PLA's tactical proficiency, American

observers during the Civil War reported with amazement at the ability of the Communist forces to withstand the rigors of combat. As one report noted, the PLA “is a highly effective military machine and its morale and discipline are striking compared to National Army. . . . Its equipment. . . . is first rate and Communists know how to use it. Their strategy and tactics here [in Tientsin] were excellent. . . At Tientsin Communists showed a complete refusal to compromise and also demonstrated what happens when their terms are not accepted.”²⁷⁶ Operationally, with particular reference made to how the PLA fought conventionally during the Civil War, one observer stated,

You could see exactly what Lin Biao [the great CCP military strategist] was doing. This huge enveloping movement was broken up into literally hundreds, maybe thousands of small pincer movements. Each one moving in, pinching off one group of Nationalist troops after another. . . .And when it was over—that particular campaign lasted for two months—there was no Nationalist Army left. The Communists had destroyed them all. Some they captured; there was something like 900,000 prisoners before it was all over, living prisoners, to say nothing of those who had been killed.²⁷⁷

The respect for the PLA’s combat effectiveness was not held only by State Department observers of the Civil War. Astonishingly, a DOD report of 25 July 1950 in reference to how the Chinese Communists might attempt to take Taiwan demonstrated a similar understanding of the Chinese concept of warfighting.

In mounting and invasion of Taiwan the Chinese Communists would necessarily improvise and exploit their particular capabilities in order to overcome obvious amphibious shortcomings. The operation would not be an amphibious assault in the Western concept, mounted in highly specialized craft with extensive and well-coordinated air and naval support. Rather, with large resources of manpower and improvised small craft, including rafts for landing, at their disposal, the Chinese Communists would be expected to devise an operation designed to saturate the offshore defenses and to evade those defenses under cover of darkness and

²⁷⁶ Robert L. Smith to Secretary of State, 19 January 1949. DDRS: CK2349348096.

²⁷⁷ As reported by John Melby, Political Officer, Embassy, Congquing/Nanjing, 1945-48. See, *China Confidential: American Diplomats and Sino-American Relations, 1945-1996*, Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 48.

weather and through utilization of numerous embarkation and landing points. The operation will be planned to take advantage of key defections among the defenders and sabotage of key defense installations and communications at a critical time. Heavy troop losses would be an acceptable cost.²⁷⁸

In executing its intervention in the Korean War, the CCF employed many of these operational and tactical schemes to great effect. Specifically, their use of cover of darkness, exploitation of enemy weaknesses (i.e., the division of U.N. forces as they proceeded toward the Yalu), capitalization of information asymmetries, and willingness to take heavy casualties, were all evident during and after the First Phase Offensive.

Despite the presence of information pertaining to the strengths of the PLA held by different elements within U.S. government, there is no evidence that it was considered either by MacArthur as the plans for advancing into North Korea were designed and implemented, nor by Willoughby as he took stock of the Chinese known to be in the North. Without access to alternative sources of information pertaining to the number of Chinese forces in Korea, and how they would likely be employed, top officials in Washington were forced to rely on the FEC as the single source of information as it waged war on the peninsula.

MacArthur's "End the War" Offensive

In the aftermath of the First Phase Offensive, officials in Washington were concerned that the objective of unifying the peninsula would induce Chinese intervention. On November 8 the JCS cabled MacArthur requesting his most recent assessment of the situation on the battlefield and indicating that his mission "may have to be re-examined." MacArthur's no-holds-barred response came on November 9. The CINCPAC stated "In

²⁷⁸ DOD, "Prospects for an Early Successful Chinese Communist Attack on Taiwan," 26 July 1950. DDRS: CK2349047045.

my opinion it would be fatal to weaken the fundamental and basic policy of the United Nations to destroy all resisting armed forces in Korea and bring that country into a unified and free nation. I believe that with my air power. . . . I can deny reinforcements coming across the Yalu in sufficient strength to prevent the destruction of those forces now arrayed against me in North Korea.” Furthermore, upon hearing of London’s desire to halt operations at the narrow neck, MacArthur decried that such a move would in effect “appease the Chinese Communists” in the same manner as occurred at Munich. At the NSC meeting on that day, MacArthur’s demand to seek total victory was at odds with the JCS’s desire to seek a resolution to the war by “political means.” In the end, the decision was reached, pending further evidence of the PRC’s intentions, to permit MacArthur to “continue the action” so long as there remained “a reasonable chance of success.”²⁷⁹ As General Omar Bradley would later recount in his memoirs, “. . . . we reached drastically wrong conclusions and decisions. . . . The JCS should have taken firmest control of the Korean War and dealt with MacArthur bluntly. . . . At the very least the chiefs should have canceled MacArthur’s planned offensive. Instead we let ourselves be misled by MacArthur’s wildly erroneous estimates of the situation. . . .”²⁸⁰

As a result of the information monopoly held by the FEC pertaining to the military capabilities and behavior of the Chinese Communist forces in Korea, officials in Washington labored under a pronounced scarcity of information. As William Stueck has recently written,

In the end, it was President Truman and his top advisers, especially Acheson and Marshall, who most needed to know of the massive Chinese presence in Korea.

²⁷⁹ Blair, 400-01.

²⁸⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*, 402. See also Omar Bradley, *A General’s Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 587, 594.

Unlike MacArthur, they were Europe-firsters, and they genuinely wanted to avoid a confrontation with China. Had they known the magnitude of the Chinese presence in Korea, they might well have stopped UN ground forces during the second week of November.²⁸¹

Without an accurate understanding of the extent of China's intervention in mid-November, top policy makers were forced to concede to MacArthur their acceptance of his "end the war" offensive. As a result of their concerns, however, the National Security Council submitted NSC 81/2 to President Truman on November 14. In that document, the NSC concluded, "It is of the utmost importance that the *real* intentions of the Chinese Communists be ascertained as soon as possible." Among the courses of action the NSC recommended were: continued military operations, intensified "covert actions to determine Chinese Communist intentions," and the use of "other available political channels" to "ascertain Chinese Communist intentions and, in particular, to determine whether there is any basis for arrangements which might stabilize Sino-Korean frontier problems on a satisfactory basis."²⁸² Unfortunately, by this late date, there was no room to bargain with the Chinese, given existing American objectives. That Washington did not know this was a direct result of the truncated information structure that prevented administration officials from understanding the strategic situation into which the United States had blundered in the autumn of 1950. On November 25, on day after MacArthur's "final" offensive of the Korean War commenced, the Chinese Communists launched its major offensive. Not only had the Chinese intervened in the Korean War, but as a result of American strategic miscalculations, it they had done so with devastating effect.

²⁸¹ William Stueck, *Rethinking The Korean War: A New Diplomatic and Strategic History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 114.

²⁸² NSC 81/2, "United States Courses of Action with Respect to Korea," 14 November 1950. DDRS: CK3100353850. Emphasis added.

Assessment of the Strategic Design and Strategic Integration Mechanisms

As a result of the truncated nature of the American information structure, the United States did not benefit from either the strategic design or strategic integration mechanism during this phase of the Korean War. The absence of the strategic design mechanism had two profound effects. First, American officials were unable to obtain an accurate understanding of the present and likely future intentions of the PRC. Second, the limited war strategy that the U.S. designed and implemented in the Korean War was predicated on this faulty understanding of Beijing's intentions. Not only did the broader strategy for rolling back communism on the Korean peninsula stand a high probability of inducing Chinese intervention in the war, but the information monopoly of the FEC precluded effective reassessment and refinement to that strategy after American forces crossed the 38th parallel into North Korea. With respect to diplomatic-military coordination, the Truman administration lacked the capacity to effectively monitor the activities of the military so that consistent and accurate signals of American intentions could be sent to leaders in Beijing. Moreover, as a result of the absence of alternative sources of information, officials in Washington were denied timely and precise feedback about the effects that U.S. actions were having on the behavior of the Chinese. In the end, the absence of the strategic design mechanism induced hostile military balancing by the Chinese.

Prior to the crossing of the parallel by the U.S., the process of strategic design suffered from a profound absence of information pertaining to Chinese intentions. This lack of information was caused by two factors. The first was that those officials responsible for the design of strategy, John Allison's team in the Office of Northeast

Asian Affairs in the State Department, operated in isolation from other departments and agencies within the U.S. government. The CIA, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Policy Planning Staff in the State Department harbored grave reservations about any strategy that ran significant risks of inducing hostile military balancing by China. The CIA and the PPS in particular were gravely concerned that the proposals for crossing the parallel would elicit such a response by Beijing. For their part, the Joint Chiefs of Staff feared that a major war on the peninsula (an area of marginal strategic importance) would hamper the operation of global war plans should hostilities between the U.S. and Soviet Union erupt in open warfare. While the CIA and PPS viewed the situation unfolding in Korea in similar terms, their ability to combine their bureaucratic influence was frustrated by the absence of lateral connections among them. Because the CIA's reports and estimates were forced into the "NSC machinery," these strategic evaluations were largely unavailable to PPS officials when they needed them most—at the early phase of the "roll-back debate." Moreover, while the JCS representative to the NSC did eventually receive some indication that the CIA considered expanding the war to North Korea was fraught with danger, that realization came too late to have any effect. In short, the absence of lateral connections precluded these departments and agencies from exerting a moderating effect on the design of strategy.

The second reason why information pertaining to the intentions of the Chinese was in short supply was the military's refusal to share information with civilians during war time. As Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson made clear to Secretary of State Dean Acheson in August, civilian meddling in military affairs during wartime constituted an affront to military professionalism. Despite the importance for close coordination

between the military and diplomatic activities in limited warfare, the Department of Defense maintained its right to retain information while military operations were being conducted. As such, American diplomats were unable to obtain critical information from the armed services that would have allowed for more accurate signals to the PRC.

The lack of communications among departments and agencies prior to the American invasion of North Korea had a profound effect on the process of strategic design. In the absence of a truly inter-agency policymaking setting, there was little chance that either of the pathologies to effective decision making (information scarcity and information overload) could be overcome. In terms of information overload, top policymakers were saddled with the burden of making sense of a great deal of information (relative to the limits of human cognition) as time went by. Specifically, American officials were unable to square dynamic political and military intelligence pertaining to the intentions of the PRC. Without an information management system designed to compare different types of information overtime, policymakers were forced to make sense of a complicated strategic situation on their own. Given the intense demands on their time, the necessity of making decisions quickly, and the stress associated with waging war, there was a good chance that mistakes in judgment would be made. With respect to information scarcity, the absence of lateral connections prevented top policymakers from receiving strategic options that reflected the information that was in possession by different elements of the government. Because the CIA and PPS operated in isolation, top policymakers were unable to probe the holes in the strategy that was produced by John Allison's team in the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs. In short,

the truncated nature of the U.S. information structure placed policymakers in a precarious position, and afforded them with options that were sub-optimal.

While the absence of lateral connections had a strong influence on the initial round of strategy design, the exclusive reliance on a single source of information prevented a reassessment and refinement to the strategy after American forces crossed into North Korea. Washington's inability to receive information pertaining to Chinese military behavior from sources other than the FEC had profound effects. As a result of mistakes made in the FEC's intelligence branch, the U.S. government was unable to determine the extent of Chinese intervention during and immediately after the First Phase Offensive. Had Washington been afforded with a more accurate understanding of China's intervention, then the option of a tactical retreat to the narrow neck of the peninsula (which would have afforded a strong defensive position) would likely have been agreed to. Yet, because the FEC constituted the critical node in the theater intelligence, officials in Washington were unable to exert influence during the course of the war. Moreover, in the absence of alternative sources of information, top policymakers were unable to challenge MacArthur's estimates of Chinese intentions, and were unable to effectively probe the strengths and weaknesses of his preferred strategy. In short, the absence of alternative sources of information contributed to the general underestimation of China's intervention and precluded top policymakers from exerting influence on matters of strategy prior to Chinese intervention.

From the above analysis, it is evident that the information structure framework fares well in the case of the Korean War. How do the two alternative approaches, bureaucratic theory and realism, fare in this case? As noted in Chapter 2, realism's

expectations for balancing avoidance are not born out in this case. Sufficient information was available about Chinese intentions and military capabilities that should have enabled the U.S. to avoid hostile military balancing by the PRC. Bureaucratic theory, on the other hand, finds support in this case. First, the negative expectations regarding balancing avoidance are born out. Moreover, the two mechanisms pertaining to information mismanagement (information hoarding and standard operating procedures of information management) are operative. In short, both bureaucratic theory and the information structure framework anticipate hostile military balancing, and both find support in this case of strategic design.

Chapter 4

The Vietnam War: Sino-American Interaction and the U.S. Information Structure

Introduction

The year and a half long period between January 1964 and July 1965 was pivotal in the Vietnam War. During this time, the United States established in broad strokes the manner in which it was going to prosecute its limited war in Southeast Asia. The U.S. endeavored to “save South Vietnam” by conducting offensive ground operations south of the 17th parallel, while subjecting North Vietnam to a carefully controlled bombing campaign. This period also witnessed the establishment of a pattern in the Sino-American relationship. As the U.S. became ever more involved in the war, China perceived Washington to be a threat of increasing intensity. Over time, leaders in Beijing realized that war with the United States was possible, and they took dramatic and costly steps to prepare for such a contingency. Although the Chinese elected not to engage in hostile military balancing against the United States, the PRC was willing and ready to do so should the U.S. become more threatening. Realizing that war with China was a distinct possibility, American policymakers designed and implemented a limited war strategy that sought victory in Vietnam without provoking Chinese intervention. With respect to the objective of avoiding hostile military balancing, the United States was successful in the war. How was the Johnson administration able to wage a limited war in Vietnam without inducing Chinese intervention?

In this chapter and the two following, I answer this question by evaluating veracity of the balancing avoidance propositions offered by realism, bureaucratic theory,

and the information structure framework. The objectives in this chapter are to evaluate the effects of U.S. decision making on Chinese threat perception and to operationalize the independent variables drawn from the three approaches. In the first section, I discuss the four-phases of the American approach to Vietnam during this critical period, and show how the prosecution of the war affected Chinese threat perception and behavior. Although the U.S. was perceived by the Chinese to be a threat of increasing intensity, the American limited war strategy was carefully calibrated so as to avoid provoking Chinese hostile military balancing.

In the second section, I assess the causal variables of the three competing approaches. Realism maintains that challenging states will be able to effectively calibrate their limited war strategies when there is sufficient information available regarding the intentions of the potential balancer. Based on the pattern of Sino-American interaction during the 1964-1965 period, I argue that realism expects the United States to have waged the war in Vietnam with caution and in a manner that stood a good chance of avoiding hostile military balancing. Where realism expects an absence of hostile military balancing in the Vietnam War, bureaucratic theory predicts the opposite. For bureaucratic theory, state-level organs determine how information is processed and the manner in which states behave in the international system. I examine the preferences and doctrines of the two services that were to bear the brunt of fighting in Vietnam (the Army and the Air Force) in order to ascertain how those services preferred to fight the war.

The information structure framework expects an absence of hostile military balancing in the Vietnam War. Because the American information structure was robust, this approach anticipates the operation of the strategic design mechanism. During the

years between the end of the Korean War and the escalation of the Vietnam War, the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations undertook a number of critical reforms which bolstered the effectiveness of information management within the U.S. government. As a result of these institutional changes, the information structure inherited by LBJ was, with a few notable exceptions, remarkably robust. In contrast to the relative separation of the civilian and military departments under Truman, specific procedures for increased information sharing among the State and Defense departments and the CIA had been established by the beginning of 1964. The National Security Council Staff served as the vehicle through which formal information management procedures were established and enforced. Through these enhanced NSC mechanisms, strategic intelligence was effectively vetted and coordinated, and most importantly, the evolving strategy was squared with the available information related to Chinese intentions and capabilities. Furthermore, as a result of the rise of the NSC staff's ability to manage the information flows throughout the government, officials in Washington received information and estimates from a number of different sources. In short, the density of lateral information pathways throughout the government and the availability of strategic information from a number of institutional sources afforded the Johnson administration a clear and accurate understanding of the PRC's intentions as it designed and prosecuted the limited war in Vietnam.

The Dependent Variable: American Limited War Strategy and Chinese Threat

Valuation

Although the PRC desired to avoid intervening in the Vietnam War, from January 1964-December 1965, it was prepared to do so as it perceived the United States to be a threat of increasing intensity. Because of the nature of the American limited war strategy, however, the Chinese never perceived the U.S. to constitute a security challenge so intense that hostile military balancing was the only recourse available to leaders in Beijing. During the period under consideration, the United States waged its limited war in Vietnam in four discernable phases. First, upon reaffirming the existing objectives in the war, the Johnson administration stepped up the number and tempo of its operations in Southeast Asia in the first half of 1964.²⁸³ OPLAN 34A raids along the coast of North Vietnam, covert operations into North Vietnam, and expanded intelligence over flights demonstrated to Hanoi and Beijing that the U.S. was committed to preventing the fall of South Vietnam to communism.²⁸⁴ Second, in response to the Gulf of Tonkin incident, Lyndon Johnson ordered retaliatory strikes against targets in the North and shortly thereafter, bolstered American air power in South Vietnam.²⁸⁵ Third, after the Vietcong launched a massive mortar attack on the U.S. airfield and advisory compound and Pleiku, Washington responded again with sharp retaliatory strikes against the DRV, followed soon after by the prolonged bombing campaign known as “Rolling Thunder.” It was at

²⁸³ NSAM 273, 26 November 1963,

<http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/NSAMs/nsam273.asp>

²⁸⁴ William C. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships*, Part II: 1961-1964 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 212; Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 110.

²⁸⁵ David Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2000), 330-36; Logevall, 197-205.

this point that the first deployment of American combat forces entered South Vietnam with the initial objective of providing airfield security, and then of waging offensive counterinsurgency operations in the South.²⁸⁶ Finally, on July 28, Johnson announced that the U.S. would commit 125,000 troops to South Vietnam in 1965 (at the time, an increase of 55,000), while at the same time maintaining (rather than increasing) the intensity of the air war against North Vietnam.²⁸⁷

In response to each of these phases, the PRC undertook specific steps that were designed to both deter the U.S. and to prepare for war if deterrence failed. First, Beijing stepped up the level of verbal warnings against American escalation and proffered its initial pledge of support to the DRV following the initiation of OPLAN 34A operations.²⁸⁸ In the aftermath of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, China underwent a massive military redeployment within the PRC, orchestrated the “Third Front” program of industrial relocation, and initiated the domestic mobilization campaign known as “Resist America and Assist Vietnam.”²⁸⁹ With the launching of Rolling Thunder, the PRC issued very specific deterrence warnings and formalized its alliance with the DRV.²⁹⁰ No additional increase in Chinese balancing occurred after these steps were taken, however. At this point, the U.S. had made clear its determination to focus on

²⁸⁶ Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 78-79; George Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved In Vietnam* (New York: Anchor, 1987), 307.

²⁸⁷ Brian VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

²⁸⁸ Allen S. Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence: India and Indochina* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975); Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

²⁸⁹ Qiang Zhai, *China & The Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); John W. Garver, “The Chinese Threat in the Vietnam War,” *Parameters* (Spring 1992), 79-81.

²⁹⁰ Robert D. Shulzinger, “The Johnson Administration, China, and the Vietnam War,” in *Re-examining the Cold War: US-China Diplomacy, 1954-1973*, Robert S. Ross and Jiang Changbin, eds., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

waging war on the ground in South Vietnam, rather than on escalating the air war against North Vietnam. In sum, as a result of the deliberate calibration of the American limited war strategy, the Chinese never considered the U.S. to be a highly intensive threat to its physical security.

1. OPLAN 34A and American Diplomacy

With the assassination of John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson inherited a foreign policy commitment in Vietnam that had grown dramatically over the past few years, but which appeared to have no easy solutions. In light of the crisis facing the U.S., LBJ decided to stay the course that Kennedy had set in Southeast Asia.²⁹¹ In terms of both military strategy and diplomatic policy, the Johnson administration's approach was cautious. On 16 January 1964, Johnson signed off on a set of covert action plans known as OPLAN 34A. The actions entailed in this plan ranged from minor harassing operations to larger-scale sabotage operations and were designed to have a "crippling effect on the [DRV's] potential to maintain a stable economy and progress in industrial development."²⁹² Originally conceived as an initial part of a plan that would bring increased coercive pressure on the North, administration officials doubted the ability of these covert actions to significantly alter the incentive of leaders in Hanoi. Nevertheless, the plan was approved because it provided, in Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's words, the "maximum pressure with minimum risk" to the United States.²⁹³

At the same time, American diplomats attempted to increase the level of international support for U.S. objectives in Vietnam. The State Department's "more

²⁹¹ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), 726.

²⁹² Quoted in Edwin E. Moïse, *Tonkin Gulf and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 5.

²⁹³ Gibbons, 212; Logevall 93-94, 110;

flags” campaign was designed to accomplish two critical tasks. The first was to acquire symbolic support from U.S. allies for the anticommunist effort world wide, and in South Vietnam in particular. Such support was believed to be necessary to convince both the leaders in Hanoi and audiences in the U.S. of the American commitment in combating communist expansion. Second, the “more flags” campaign was intended to fight specifically against the “neutralization” policy propounded by Charles de Gaulle—a policy that was threatening to attract more adherents in European and Asian capitals than the American counterpart. Despite these diplomatic efforts, the American campaign continued to flounder throughout the summer of 1964.²⁹⁴

Although the administration was growing anxious to attract international support, it refused to adopt a diplomatic course that would threaten the PRC. For example, in late January, during a meeting with the American Ambassador to Taiwan, Chiang Kai-shek argued that the PRC faced three interrelated war zones: South Vietnam, Korea and the GRC (Taiwan). Chiang argued that the collapse of one of these fronts to the benefit of the PRC would certainly provide the Communist Chinese with a tremendous amount of political and military leverage in the remaining two zones. Because the French were on the verge of extending recognition to the PRC, Chiang argued that the American position in Vietnam was precarious and growing worse. In an effort to forestall the collapse of this war zone, the Taiwanese president suggested that the U.S., Taiwan, South Korea, and South Vietnam form an alliance to strengthen the anti-communist forces in the Far East.

²⁹⁴ Logevall, 148-49, 182-85; Thomas Alan Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 87-88.

Chiang stated that he did not see how the “US [could] maintain [its] position in South Vietnam without some such alliance which would permit [the] use of GRC troops.”²⁹⁵

Although the need to increase international support for their foreign policy in Southeast Asia was considered a high priority, American officials were concerned that such plans would likely lead to a conflict with China. As one Chinese official stated in January, the “US seizure [of] Taiwan by armed force is [the] root of bad relations [between the U.S. and PRC] . . . if this key issue were resolved other questions would not be difficult. Converse[ly] all attempts [at] resolving side issues [are] of no avail until key issues [are] solved.”²⁹⁶ Thus, the Administration confronted a dilemma. On the one hand, it was believed that the deteriorating situation in South Vietnam required a firm response by the United States. Chiang’s suggestion to form an anti-communist alliance among key nations on China’s periphery would likely bolster the American containment effort in the Far East and would certainly add to the international face of that policy. On the other hand, the Chinese had clearly stated that the Taiwan issue was of the greatest salience to them, and that to avoid conflict between the U.S. and PRC, the Taiwan issue had to be corrected.²⁹⁷ The use of Chinese Nationalist forces in the Vietnam conflict would lead to a sharp deterioration in Sino-American relations, and would likely provoke the Chinese into taking a belligerent line with respect to Vietnam. As a result, the

²⁹⁵ Telegram From the Embassy in the Republic of China to the Department of State, January 29, 1964, *FRUS* 1964-1968, Volume XXX, #11. Unless otherwise noted, all FRUS citations are found online at the Department of State. http://www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/frus.html. For a concise history of the Sino-American ambassadorial talks, see Steven M. Goldstein, “Dialogue of the Deaf? The Sino-American Ambassadorial-Level Talks, 1955-1970,” in *Re-Examining the Cold War*.

²⁹⁶ Telegram From the Embassy in Poland to the Department of State, January 29, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968 Volume XXX, #10.

²⁹⁷ For the importance of Taiwan in the long history of the Sino-American ambassadorial talks, see Zhang Baijia and Jia Qingguo, “Steering Wheel, Shock Absorber, and Diplomatic Probe in Confrontation: Sino-American Ambassadorial Talks Seen from the Chinese Perspective,” in *Re-Examining the Cold War*, 179-84.

administration decided to forgo such an alliance. In the words of Robert Komer of the NSC, “We doubt in any case that a GRC-SVN alliance or an overt GRC troop commitment would help enough to counteract the real risk to justifying Chicom counteraction.”²⁹⁸ Although the desire for greater international support for the American effort in Vietnam was significant, the objective of denying the PRC a pretext for intervention was overriding.

By June, frustrations had mounted significantly as American objectives in Vietnam appeared to be out of reach. Although plans for taking a harder line were taking shape, American officials had come to the conclusion that a clear articulation of American determination was necessary. On June 18, J. Blair Seaborn (a Canadian diplomat) traveled to Hanoi on behalf of the U.S. Seaborn was instructed to warn the Northern leadership that LBJ’s patience was wearing thin, that the U.S. was in the war in Vietnam for the long haul, and that the Americans would rather escalate the war than withdrawal from Vietnam.²⁹⁹ Although intended to dissuade the DRV (and PRC) from continuing its support of the VC, the threats leveled by the U.S. had the opposite reaction. From the Chinese perspective, the American course in the Vietnam War had become a matter of significant concern.³⁰⁰ Beginning on June 24, the PRC offered a series of

²⁹⁸ Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Johnson, March 3, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XXX #16. In late April, Rusk informed Khanh that at most the U.S. “would favor regular consultations [with Taiwan and South Korea] to show sympathy, and also forms of aid short of combat forces, but that we did not encourage an alliance and believed particularly that the issue of Southeast Asia should not get mixed with the enormous issue of the basic Chinese conflict.” Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State, April 29, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume I #119.

²⁹⁹ Whiting, *Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 127-73; Logevall, 154-64.

³⁰⁰ On the PRC’s foreign policy at the time, with respect to the Sino-Soviet conflict and wars of national liberation, see Chen, *Mao’s China, passim*; Xiaoming Zhang, “The Vietnam War, 1964-1969: A Chinese Perspective,” *The Journal of Military History*, 60, 4 (October 1996), 734. On the relationship between the PRC and DRV prior to 1964 see, Zhai, *China & The Vietnam Wars, passim*; Zhang, “The Vietnam War,

warnings to the U.S. not to escalate the war in Vietnam. In its first official warning Foreign Minister Chen Yi declared, “. . . The United States is continuing its wanton bombings in Laos and stepping up preparations for new military adventures in South Vietnam. It has openly boasted that it would extend the war in Indochina . . . It must be pointed out that Indochina lies alongside China. . . The Chinese people absolutely will not sit idly by while the Geneva agreements are completely torn up and the flames of war spread to their side.”³⁰¹

On July 1, an editorial in *People’s Daily* warned against “intrusion into China’s territorial waters and airspace.” In a formal letter to his counterpart in the DRV Xuan Thuy, Chen Yi wrote on 6 July,

U.S. imperialism is openly clamoring for an extension of the war to the DRV and threatening to subject northern Vietnam to air and naval blockade as well as bombing. . . China and the DRV are fraternal neighbors closely related like the lips and teeth. The Chinese people cannot be expected to look on with folded arms in the face of an aggression against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

On July 10, an editorial in *People’s Daily* echoed Chen’s sentiments adding, “The Chinese people will certainly not allow the U.S. imperialists to play with fire right by their side.” An official statement from the PRC issued on the 24th, the 10th anniversary of the 1954 Geneva Accords, read:

. . . Despite the fact that the United States has introduced tens of thousands of its military personnel into southern Viet Nam and Laos, China has not sent a single soldier to Indochina. However, there is a limit to everything. The United States would be wrong if it should think that it can do whatever it pleases in Vietnam and Indochina with impunity. We would frankly tell the United States: the

1964-1969”; Yang Kuisong, “Changes in Mao Zedong’s Attitude toward the Indochina War, 1949-1973,” CWIHP Working Paper #34.

³⁰¹ Quoted in Whiting, *Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 173. Prior to both of these American signals, however, was the bombing of the Pathet Lao headquarters in Laos which hit the PRC’s mission in Kang Kay, killing one person.

Chinese people will by no means sit idly by while the United States extends its war of aggression in Vietnam and Indochina. . . .”³⁰²

Concluding the July 1964 spate of deterrence warnings, Chen Yi gave an interview to a foreign correspondent (which was later broadcast on Chinese radio) wherein he emphasized that despite the fact that China lacked the capabilities and intentions to initiate a war, it would enter the conflict if American attacks on the DRV threatened the Sino-Vietnamese border.³⁰³

These threats were not the only means by which the PRC addressed the developing situation in Vietnam, however. In light of the increased effort by the Johnson administration, North Vietnam’s chief of staff traveled to Beijing to consult with Mao in June. During this visit, Mao told Van Tien Dung that

If the United States risks taking the war to North Vietnam, Chinese troops should cross the border [and enter the war]. It is better for our troops to be [called] volunteers. We may claim that they are organized by the people, and that the [PRC’s] government has no control over them. You may also organize your own volunteers and dispatch them to the South, and you may claim that they have been organized by the people without the knowledge of President Ho.³⁰⁴

Further, from 5-8 July, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Laotian Communist leaders held a planning meeting in Hanoi at which they evaluated the international situation in Indochina and continued to coordinate their strategies. At this meeting Zhou pledged the PRC would increase its military and economic aid to Vietnam and help train Vietnamese pilots, and if the United States attacked the DRV, would provide support “by all possible

³⁰² All quoted in *ibid.*, 173-74.

³⁰³ Chen Yi was identified as a “top-ranking Chinese Government member” in that interview. Rogers, Frank E., “Sino-American Relations and the Vietnam War, 1964-66,” *The China Quarterly*, 66 (June 1976), 296.

³⁰⁴ Chen, *Mao’s China*, 208-09; Whiting, *Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 186.

and necessary means.”³⁰⁵ Thus, by the end of July 1964, the Chinese had issued a series of verbal deterrence threats to the United States, and had made concrete the terms under which it would send combat units into the war in Vietnam.

2. Gulf of Tonkin Incident and Aftermath

Just as the Chinese were making their intentions clear to the United States that it would not abide escalation into North Vietnam, significant pressures began to emanate from Saigon to do just that. In late July, General Nguyen Khanh began calling for a “march North” to liberate North Vietnam, and for an increase in American support in the military conflict.³⁰⁶ Fearing the possibility that the Saigon government would enter into negotiations with the Communists as a result of the “natural war-weariness” among the South Vietnamese, the administration decided to commit 5,000 more military advisers to the war effort. Moreover, a decision had been made by the new CINCPAC, Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, to continue intelligence gathering maritime patrols along the coast of the DRV, at the same time that OPLAN 34A operations had met with stiff North Vietnamese resistance.³⁰⁷ Although the 34A activities and the DeSoto patrols were independent operations, their concurrence appeared to the DRV as provocative.

On August 2, the American destroyer *Maddox* was chased by two North Vietnamese patrol boats into the open sea. The *Maddox* opened fire on the boats, inflicting significant damage on one of them. Two days later, in what is now an infamous event, Washington received word from the *Maddox* that Northern patrol boats were

³⁰⁵ Chen, *Mao's China*, 209. Specifically, Zhou stated, “if the United States takes one step, China will respond with one step; if the United States dispatches its troops [to attack the DRV], China will also dispatch its troops.”

³⁰⁶ Gibbons, 282.

³⁰⁷ These maritime activities were known as DeSoto patrols. See Moïse, *Tokin Gulf*, 50-52.

preparing to attack again. Although the second attack never occurred, Washington initially believed that it did, and in response LBJ ordered retaliation attacks against targets in North Vietnam on the evening of August 4 (Washington time). Additionally, Washington used the incident to bolster American air power in South Vietnam. Six F-102s and eight F-100s were sent to Da Nang, six reconnaissance air craft were sent to Tan Son Nhut, and 36 B-57 bombers were sent to Bien Hoa. Finally, on August 7, the Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution which provided support for the President to take what ever measures he deemed necessary to prevent further attacks.³⁰⁸

The American reprisal attacks, and the deployment of U.S. air craft to South Vietnam, were intended as a deterrent threat to the PRC and DRV. With these actions, the Johnson administration hoped that the patrons of the southern insurgency would decrease their support of the ongoing conflict. The administration was to be disappointed. Despite the fact that the Chinese were concerned about the developments in Vietnam prior to August 4, the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the U.S. response shook Mao and his comrades in Beijing profoundly. Mao could no longer believe with absolute certainty that his southern border was secure: the U.S. now had the power projection capability to strike from the air into the heart of China.³⁰⁹ In light of the American response to the Tonkin incident, the leadership in Beijing ordered the Kunming and Guangzhou Military Regions, as well as the air force and naval units in south and southwest China, to begin mobilizing for potential combat.³¹⁰ Four air divisions and one

³⁰⁸ Kaiser, 330-336.

³⁰⁹ Qiang Zhai, "Beijing and the Vietnam Conflict, 1964-1965: New Chinese Evidence" *CWIHP Bulletin*, 237; Zhai, *China & the Vietnam Wars*, 140-41.

³¹⁰ These Military Regions were instructed to "pay close attention to the movement of American forces, and to be ready to cope with any possible sudden attack." Chen, *Mao's China*, 212-13.

anti-aircraft division were dispatched to areas contiguous to Vietnam and were placed on high alert. Moreover, Mao agreed to the deployment of one naval fighter division to Hainan Island, and to the construction of three new airfields in Guangxi. New long-range, early warning and ground-control-intercept radar systems were installed, one of which was positioned twelve miles from the Sino-Vietnamese border. Most importantly, the PRC sent a fighter regiment with 36 MIGs to North Vietnam; a significant development given that the DRV had no combat air force prior to this.³¹¹ In August and September, the PRC dispatched an inspection team to North Vietnam to assess the situation, should the developing crisis call for the deployment of PLA support troops.³¹² Finally, on 13 August, Mao reiterated his pledge to Le Duan that if the U.S. did indeed attack the DRV, the PRC would commit troops to the war.³¹³

The Chinese public reaction to the Gulf of Tonkin reprisal strikes was strident.

On 6 August, an official statement was issued declaring

U.S. imperialism went over the ‘brink of war’ and made the first step in extending the war. . . . Aggression by the United States against the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam means aggression against China. . . . Whenever the U.S. imperialists invade the territory, territorial waters or airspace of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, the Chinese people, without hesitation, will resolutely support the Vietnamese people’s just war against the U.S. aggressors. The Chinese Government has served serious warnings on the U.S. Government on many occasions that should it dare to launch an attack on the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, the Chinese people will absolutely not stand by with folded arms or sit idly by without lending a helping hand.³¹⁴

³¹¹ Zhang, “The Vietnam War,” 740-41.

³¹² Zhai, *China & the Vietnam Wars*, 132-33.

³¹³ Chen, *Mao’s China*, 213. Mao did indicate to Le Duan that he did not believe that a major war in the DRV between the U.S. and China was inevitable. “It seems that the Americans do not want to fight a war, you do not want to fight a war, and we do not necessarily want to fight a war. Since none of the three sides wants to fight a war, the war will not happen.”

³¹⁴ Whiting, *Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 175.

Two additional post-Tonkin developments are important to understanding the seriousness with which the PRC viewed developments in Vietnam. First, the PRC initiated its “Resist America and Assist Vietnam” movement with mass demonstrations from August 7-11. Second, Mao called for the creation of the Third Front, the major relocation of industrial bases from the peripheral reaches of China to the interior. The scale of this undertaking was tremendous, entailing major economic dislocations, with the goal of providing for greater security of the PRC’s industrial capacity.³¹⁵ The relationship between the creation of the Third Front and the situation in Vietnam was underscored with the order given by Mao for the rapid completion of three new rail lines designed to provide more robust transportation links between China’s interior and the Chinese-Vietnamese border regions.³¹⁶

The period immediately following the Gulf of Tonkin incident was to date the most dangerous and held the highest probability of spilling over into armed conflict between the U.S. and the PRC. Conflict was avoided largely by the fact that after the American reprisals and force redeployment, the administration deliberately ratcheted down the level of international tension. There were three interlocking factors that determined the nature of U.S. policy during this period, all of which were significantly conditioned by the accuracy of American perceptions of Chinese capabilities and intentions. The first was the recognition of the MIG deployment to North Vietnam and the major redeployment of air and ground forces from Eastern to Southern China. The

³¹⁵ Garver argues that the Third Front initiative should be seen as “an expression of serious intent to wage a war, if necessary, with the United States. The Third Front is powerful evidence of the seriousness of Beijing’s warnings to the United States. These were not minor moves to signal messages to Washington. They were serious efforts to prepare China for a major war with America.” Garver, 79-81.

³¹⁶ Chen, *Mao’s China*, 215.

second was that the weakness of the Khanh government counterbalanced the desire of many in the American military to begin an offensive against North Vietnam. Stability of the Saigon government was seen by the Ambassador and many others to be a prerequisite should the PRC and DRV decide to escalate the level of hostilities. The third was the recognition that despite the scope of its military moves, the PRC was not going on the offensive in Vietnam and was willing to let tensions dissipate in the immediate future. This led Washington to conclude that it had the time to spare in the hopes that the Khanh government would right itself.

3. Rolling Thunder and the Deployment of U.S. Marines to South Vietnam

On February 7, 1965 the VC launched a massive mortar attack on the U.S. airfield and advisory compound at Pleiku. Although National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy and the Defense Department's John McNaughton had previously drafted a memo on the 6th advising the implementation of a graduated reprisal program of air strikes,³¹⁷ in light of the Pleiku attack they urged that a single retaliatory attack be initiated followed by "reprisal actions [which] would become less and less related to specific VC spectaculars and more and more related to a catalogue of VC outrages in SVN."³¹⁸ After receiving from the JCS an eight week plan of action against the DRV, on February 13 LBJ officially ordered into existence "Rolling Thunder." The first Rolling Thunder mission was initially scheduled for the 20th, but for a number of reasons, the first attacks

³¹⁷ The memorandum was predicated on the strategy developed during the November-December 1964 period. This period of strategic design will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

³¹⁸ Quoted in Clodfelter, 57.

did not begin until March 2.³¹⁹ On March 8, two Marine battalions were deployed to South Vietnam to serve in the capacity of airfield protection.

In response to the American escalation in the spring of 1965, the PRC's deterrent warnings became far more specific. On 25 March, *People's Daily* announced that the PRC would offer "the heroic Vietnamese people any necessary material support, including the supply of weapons and all kinds of military materials" and that, if necessary, China was prepared "to send its personnel to fight together with the Vietnamese people to annihilate the American aggressors." Zhou reiterated that statement on March 29 at a mass rally in Tirana, Albania. On 2 April, the PRC issued its most serious warning to the U.S. On a visit to Pakistan, Zhou requested that Ayub Khan convey several points to Washington during his upcoming visit:

- (1) China would not take the initiative to provoke a war against the United States;
- (2) China means what it says, and China will honor whatever international obligations it had undertaken; and
- (3) China is prepared.

Khan's trip to Washington was cancelled, however, due to the Johnson administration's displeasure with Pakistan's increasing closeness to the PRC.³²⁰ On May 28, the PRC made a second effort to convey to Washington the severity of its interests in preserving a viable North Vietnam. Meeting with Indonesian first Prime Minister Subandrio, Zhou issued a statement reiterating the three points made above, but which also included a fourth point,

³¹⁹ Ibid., 62. The reasons for the postponement of Rolling Thunder included: another coup attempt in Saigon, an unexpected British approach to the Soviets for the reopening of the 1954 Geneva Conference—which subsequently died of its own weight—and a violent monsoon which prevented air operations.

³²⁰ Zhai, "Reassessing," 103. See also, Robert K. Brigham, "Three Alternative U.S. Strategies in Vietnam: A Reexamination Based on New Chinese and Vietnamese Sources," in *Argument Without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy*, Robert S. McNamara, et al., eds. (New York: PublicAffairs, 1999), 410.

If the United States bombs China, that means bringing the war to China. The war has no boundary. This means two things: First, you cannot say that only an air war on your part is allowed and the land war on my part is not allowed. Second, not only may you invade our territory, we may also fight a war abroad.

To underscore these points, Chen Yi met with British Charge d’Affaires Donald Charles Hopson, formally asking him to deliver the same message to the U.S. Of particular importance is the fourth point, which leaders in Beijing believed would make its way to the top of the Johnson administration. To further clarify Beijing’s position, Chen drew a clear line for the U.S.: if American military operations included only air attacks over the DRV, and did not come near the Chinese border, China would refrain from intervening in the war against the United States.³²¹ As Chen Jian notes, by making sure that Washington would under no circumstances misunderstand the meaning of these messages, the PRC hoped to prevent the war’s expansion into North Vietnam and, most importantly, into China itself.³²²

On April 8, Le Duan and Vo Nguyen Giap traveled to China to meet with Liu Shaoqi. As a result of the American deployment of Marines in the South, Le Duan requested that China send volunteer pilots and fighters, as well as engineering units to the DRV. Le Duan emphasized that such a deployment would allow North Vietnam to send its own troops to the South, while simultaneously providing a buffer against U.S. bombing beyond the 19th or 20th parallels. In response, on April 17, the CMC ordered the organization of PRC troops to assist North Vietnam. On May 16, Ho met with Mao and

³²¹ Shulzinger, 250. This conclusion is further supported in Chen Jian, “China’s Involvement,” 366. The Chinese were correct in their expectation that word of this exchange would reach the highest reaches of the Johnson administration. From the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Bundy) to Secretary of State Rusk, June 5, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, volume II, 335; and *ibid.*, 339.

³²² Chen, *Mao’s China*, 217-18. See also James G. Hershberg and Chen Jian, “Reading and Warning the Likely Enemy: China’s Signals to the United States about Vietnam in 1965,” *The International History Review* 27, 1 (March 2005).

requested that the PRC assist in constructing roads so that the DRV could overcome the impositions that U.S. escalation had placed on its infiltration routes.³²³ At the end of May, the PRC and the DRV signed a formal agreement stipulating that China would deploy engineering troops to construct and rebuild twelve roads in the North and link them to the road system in China. During construction, moreover, China would be responsible for defending its units against American attacks.³²⁴

In early June, discussions were held in Beijing among leaders of the PRC and DRV to plan how, and under what conditions, the Chinese would assist the North Vietnamese in their war effort. According to their agreement: if the status quo remained in place, the DRV would fight the war on its own, while the PRC would provide material support as needed by the North; if the U.S. employed its air and naval forces to support a South Vietnamese attack on the DRV, China would reciprocate to support the DRV; and if U.S. ground forces directly attacked the North, the PRC would use its land forces as strategic reserves for the North Vietnamese forces and conduct military operations as the need arose. The terms of the PRC-DRV air force cooperation took the following form: China would either, first, send volunteer pilots to Vietnam to operate Vietnamese aircraft³²⁵; second China would station pilots and aircraft at North Vietnamese airfields; or third, the PRC would fly aircraft from bases in China to join combat in Vietnam and land on North Vietnamese bases temporarily for refueling. Chinese ground troops would be employed to either bolster the defenses of the Northern forces in order to prepare for a

³²³ Zhang, "The Vietnam War," 747-48.

³²⁴ Chen, *Mao's China*, 223.

³²⁵ It should be noted that the Chinese never provided the North Vietnamese with pilots; a factor that would contribute to the overall souring of relations between the two countries. See Allen Whiting, "China's Role in the Vietnam War," in *The American War in Vietnam*, Jayne Werner & David Hunt, eds. (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1993), 73.

counteroffensive, or would launch an offensive themselves to disrupt the American deployment and to win the initiative.³²⁶

Beginning on 7 June 1965, the PRC began sending anti-aircraft artillery, railroad, engineering, minesweeping, and logistical units across the border into North Vietnam. These actions initiated a three year period of extensive military support for the DRV, which included over 320,000 troops for the whole period (1967 was the year which witnessed the greatest number of PLA forces in the DRV at 170,000).³²⁷ The presence of these troops, in addition to the large airbase at Yen Bai that China built in northwest Vietnam, added additional credibility to the Chinese deterrent.³²⁸ The specific form of this deployment served a second purpose, however. During the Korean War, the Chinese did not benefit from pre-positioned defensive works and advance bases. Although that intervention was successful tactically and operationally, the lack of any advanced preparations in North Korea made the move a gamble. In June 1965, however, the Chinese were less inclined to gamble when they did not have to. The completion of these facilities, and the pre-positioned troops in the DRV would allow for a stronger response should the U.S. war effort threaten the viability of the Hanoi regime.³²⁹

³²⁶ Zhai, *China & the Vietnam Wars*, 133-35.

³²⁷ In general, China provided three primary forms of support: engineering troops for the construction and maintenance of defense works, air fields, roads and railways in the North; anti-aircraft artillery troops in defense of important strategic areas and targets in the far north of the DRV; and the supply of large amounts of military equipment and civil materials. For a detailed examination of the nature of the PRC's material and manpower support from 1965-69, see Chen Jian, "China's Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1964-69," *The China Quarterly* 142 (June 1995), 371-80.

³²⁸ Zhai, *China & The Vietnam Wars*, 135, 138. On the openness with which the PRC deployed its troops to the DRV, see Whiting, *Chinese Calculus of Deterrence*, 186; and Allen S. Whiting, "Forecasting Chinese Foreign Policy: IR Theory vs. the Fortune Cookie," in *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* Thomas W. Robinson and David Shambaugh eds., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 515; and Whiting, "China's Role in the Vietnam War," 75.

³²⁹ Zhang, "The Vietnam War," 753.

4. Rolling Thunder Held Constant, Concentration on the Ground War

The period of spring to early-summer 1965 was significant in the American war in Vietnam because it was at this time that the decision to move to an offensively oriented ground strategy in the South was made. Although few in the administration expected that Rolling Thunder would produce the desired outcomes in the short run, the limited effects that the bombing campaign appeared to have on the Hanoi leadership, along with new information concerning the strength of the VC in the South, combined to create a sense of deep frustration among Johnson's top advisers. Disturbed by the lack of progress in the air campaign, the decision was made on April 2 (formally issued on April 6 in NSAM 328) to change the Marines' mission from statically defensive base security to offensive counterinsurgency, to increase the size and capabilities of U.S. ground forces in the South, and to "plateau" the tempo of Rolling Thunder, at least temporarily.³³⁰ As will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, the administration ultimately decided not to increase the pressure on the DRV through American air power (the preferred option of the JCS), as a result of information pertaining to likelihood of Chinese intervention in the war.

With little progress being made toward halting the insurgency in the South, administration officials again reviewed their strategic options. Based on their understanding of Chinese intentions, it was clear that the only aspect of the American

³³⁰ Specifically, the US would: increase by 18-20,000 existing support forces and additional logistics personnel, deploy two more Marine battalions (roughly 3,500) and one Marine Air squadron (roughly 700), change the mission of US ground forces to "engage in counterinsurgency operations in South Vietnam," and continue the "ascending tempo [of air operations] directed toward varying types of targets but remaining outside of the effectiveness of the GCI [ground control intercept] range of the MIGs." From Director of Central Intelligence McCone to the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence (Carter), April 1, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume II, #230. National Security Action Memorandum No. 328, April 6, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, volume II #242.

strategy in Vietnam that was open to alteration was the intensity of the U.S. ground effort in the South. As such, the administration's primary focus between June 7 and July 28 was on the deployment of more troops to South Vietnam, specifically the extent of the total commitment and the timing of deployment. On only two occasions did proposals to significantly increase Rolling Thunder arise, and on both occasions the option was quickly eschewed. On July 23, LBJ met with his top advisers to discuss his options. Three proposals were forwarded, all of which included a 175,000 deployment by the end of the year. The primary difference between the three centered on whether reserves would be called up, and whether the President would announce only a 55,000 increase at the present time, or whether he would state that in addition to the 1965 figure, 100,000 troops would be committed in 1966. LBJ adopted a combination of the three: he would announce only a 55,000 commitment in the present and would forego a reserve call-up. The reason, McNamara stated was to minimize "the actions which might induce Communist China or the Soviet Union to take initiatives they might not otherwise undertake," an attempt to reduce the probability of provoking extreme reactions by both of the communist powers.³³¹ On July 28, LBJ announced at a press conference that he had decided to increase the American strength in South Vietnam to 125,000 men. Additional forces would be needed later, and the President stated they would be sent as requested. No mention was made of the air campaign over the North because no fundamental change in strategy had occurred.

With respect to critical objective of avoiding hostile military balancing by the PRC, the strategy adopted by the Johnson administration in the Vietnam War was

³³¹ Kaiser, 478.

successful. By choosing to focus on the ground war in the South, and by refusing to increase the air campaign against the North, the U.S. was able to prevent the Chinese from committing combat troops to the conflict and was able to avoid activating Chinese air defenses over the DRV—an action deemed most likely to lead to a conflict spiral between the U.S. and the PRC. In fact, as the CIA reported on August 11, the only reaction that LBJ's public announcement elicited from the Chinese was one of routine condemnation of U.S. actions in the war.³³² This is not to say that the administration was able to prevent further Chinese support for the DRV and VC. As the CIA's Richard Kovar noted in a memo to the NSC's Chester Cooper, the PRC was contributing a significant amount of military hardware and personnel to the DRV. Nevertheless, "evidence indicates that most, if not all, of the Chinese Communist military entities deployed in the northeast region of North Vietnam are engaged in logistic activities."³³³ As many forecasts had expected, and as intelligence reports made clear, the course of action that the U.S. adopted would likely induce a low level of Chinese involvement in the war. Given the political objectives and the perceived stakes for the U.S. in Vietnam, the administration was willing to act in ways that only risked this low level of military activity by the Chinese. In this aspect of the war, the administration succeeded. How was the United States able to successfully calibrate its limited war strategy to avoid hostile military balancing by the Chinese?

³³² CIA, "Weekly Report: The Situation in South Vietnam," 11 August 1965. DDRS CK3100022959.

³³³ Kovar to Cooper, "Chinese Communist Military and Naval Units in North Vietnam," 30 July 1965. DDRS CK3100365376.

Avoidance of Hostile Military Balancing: Three Approaches

In this section I evaluate the causal variables of each of the three approaches to explaining the ability of the United States to avoid hostile military balancing in the Vietnam War: realism, bureaucratic theory, and the information structure framework. The critical variable for realism is the amount and content of the information, reasonably discernable at the level of the international system, pertaining to the intentions of the potential balancer. Following the procedure in Chapter 2, I evaluate this variable by examining the pattern of Sino-American interaction detailed above. For bureaucratic theory and the information structure framework, I examine the preferences and doctrines of the armed forces, and the institutional milieu in which decision making took place, in order to deduce the balancing avoidance expectations. Table 4.1 offers a summary of the expectations regarding balancing avoidance drawn from the three approaches in this case.

Table 4.1: Balancing Avoidance Expectations

Approach	Value of IV	Strategic Design/Integration	Balancing Avoidance Expected?
Realism	Sufficient information	Yes/Constant	Yes
Bureaucratic Theory	Doctrines favoring dramatic expansion	No/No	No
Information Structure	Robust information structure	Yes/Yes	Yes

Realism

According to realism, the critical variable affecting a challenger's ability to avoid hostile military balancing is the amount and content of information regarding the intentions of the potential balancer at the level of the international system. Specifically, did the potential balancer present sufficient information to the challenger (both verbally

and in terms of its behavior) that it has the willingness and capability to intervene in the war, under certain conditions? If the potential balancer did provide the challenger with sufficient, reasonably discernable information pertaining to its intentions, then realism expects the operation of the strategic design mechanism. Moreover, realism expects tight integration between the military and diplomatic elements of limited war strategies in all cases of limited warfare. Because of its systemic focus—in particular, the inherent, but relative degree of uncertainty in international communications—realism offers my dissertation’s null proposition.

Based on the PRC’s pattern of verbal warnings and military and domestic mobilization efforts, it would appear that China presented clear and consistent warnings to the United States that intervention was a real possibility. As the United States engaged in OPLAN 34A operations and attempted to build international support against China and North Vietnam, leaders in Beijing began issuing verbal threats to Washington. In response to the American retaliation and deployment of air assets to South Vietnam after the Gulf of Tonkin incident, both the stridency of China’s rhetoric and its mobilization efforts increased dramatically. It was during this period that China redeployed critical ground forces, launched its “Resist America and Assist Vietnam” movement, and initiated the “Third Front” program of industrial relocation. Finally, the PRC’s deterrent threats gained specificity after the initiation of Rolling Thunder. In public and in private, Beijing went to great lengths to convince the U.S. that it was engaging in actions that could trigger Chinese intervention. Backing up those threats was the deployment of various military units to North Vietnam, the existence of which was noticed by the American intelligence community. Following these deterrent warnings, in the spring of

1965, the United States opted to plateau Rolling Thunder operations and to focus on winning the ground war in South Vietnam.

It is possible to discern from this pattern of interaction when, according to realism, the U.S. would most likely have been able to determine the critical “flashpoints” beyond which Chinese intervention was most likely. In their recent analysis of China’s deliberate signals to the U.S., James Hershberg and Chen Jian maintain that the four point message sent by Beijing through various intermediaries during the spring of 1965 provided the U.S. with sufficient information for a well-crafted limited war strategy. Although the Chinese were not completely transparent in their signaling, the messages warning the U.S. to refrain from attacking Chinese territory were specific enough that they enabled the U.S. to design a strategy based on an accurate understanding of the potential balancer’s intentions. Prior to that point, Hershberg and Chen maintain, China had issued signals but none as clear and credible as those sent during April and May 1965. This interpretation of Chinese signaling behavior and its effects on U.S. decision makers squares with a realist understanding of the events. As the Chinese revealed their preferences, leaders in Washington adopted a course that accommodated the potential balancer, and in turn avoided acute balancing in the Vietnam War.

Notwithstanding the timing of Chinese deterrent warnings to the U.S. regarding its prosecution of the war in Vietnam, the PRC withheld much information from the United States pertaining to the specific actions that would trigger hostile military balancing. As will be discussed at length in the next chapter, leaders in Beijing left it up to the United States to figure out *how* its air war over North Vietnam could induce Chinese intervention. In response to China’s four point signal in May 1965, National

Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy stated that, “The basic trouble with the message is that it does not tell us at all at what point the Chinese might move in Vietnam itself in a way which would force us to act against China. And that of course is the \$64 question.”³³⁴ Additionally (and surprisingly), China never explicitly warned the U.S. against a direct ground invasion of North Vietnam, an action that would have led to Chinese intervention given the commitments made by the PRC to the DRV in June.³³⁵

These factors aside, a realist interpretation would maintain that China did indicate to the United States that the war in Vietnam, in particular the air war against the DRV, was being perceived as a threat of increasing intensity. Moreover, Chinese military behavior suggested that the PRC was becoming increasingly capable of intervening effectively in the war. Based on its focus on the amount and content of information at the level of the international system, realism expects the operation of the strategic design mechanism in this case. Specifically, realism anticipates that the United States to have adopted a generally cautious strategy in the Vietnam War, a strategy that would *attempt* to avoid inducing further concerns related to the security of Chinese territory. Moreover, based on the record of Chinese signaling, that strategy would have come into focus in late-spring 1965. Yet, while Chinese officials did make clear to their American counterparts that the bombing of their territory would be considered an act of war, they failed to warn against other specific actions that would have prompted Chinese intervention. According to realism, such ambiguity increases the probability of action-reaction conflict spirals emerging between the two states, a situation that could result in

³³⁴ From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Johnson, June 4, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-88, volume XXX, #88.

³³⁵ Hershberg and Chen, 73.

hostile military balancing. In short, Sino-American relations during this phase of the Vietnam War were filled with tension and were potentially unstable. Given the availability of information pertaining to Chinese intentions, however, a realist perspective foresees an absence of hostile military balancing.

Bureaucratic Theory

In general terms, bureaucratic theory is pessimistic regarding a challenger's ability to avoid hostile military balancing in limited wars. As a result of the pernicious effects that bureaucratic processes and bureaucratic politics have on information processing, this approach foresees ample opportunity for strategic misperception and mismanagement. Because of its focus on extant routines and doctrines on the one hand, and entrenched parochialism on the other, bureaucratic theory does not expect that challengers will benefit from the strategic design mechanism. Nevertheless, bureaucratic theory does expect balancing avoidance to occur under one rather restrictive condition: when the preferred strategies and doctrines of the armed forces coincide with the intentions of the potential balancer.

Although a full assessment of bureaucratic theory's expectations can only occur through process tracing (a task taken up in the next two chapters), it is necessary to operationalize the doctrines of both the American Army and Air Force prior to the 1964-65 period. Understanding the content of military doctrines is important because they determine the manner in which the services acquire and interpret information, and guide the crafting of strategy by military officers. Put simply, bureaucratic theory expects hostile military balancing by the PRC in Vietnam. It does so for three reasons. First, because of the predominant Soviet-focus in the doctrines of the U.S. Army and Air Force,

bureaucratic theory predicts dramatic misperceptions of the intentions of the potential balancer—the PRC. Second, as a result of the widespread disillusionment with limited warfare among American officers in the wake of the Korean War, bureaucratic theory expects a lack of coordination of the military's strategy with diplomatic objectives. Finally, given the worst-case scenario mentality inherent to American military doctrine (in particular, that of the Air Force), bureaucratic theory expects military operations on a scale and scope that would outstrip the threat tolerance of the PRC.

It is safe to say that prior to the 1964-65 period, limited warfare was anathema to the United States military. The vast majority of uniformed officers believe that such wars, fought along the periphery of the main strategic theater of the Cold War, were a fundamental distraction in mission. Those preferences, moreover, were codified doctrinally. The two military services that bore the brunt of the fighting in Vietnam (the Army and Air Force) approached the idea of limited war in a dismissive manner. According to Andrew Krepinevich, the U.S. Army's approach to warfare could be boiled down to the following: a focus on mid-intensity conflict with a strong preference for the massive use of firepower to destroy the enemy and to mitigate American casualties. The wars of the recent past confirmed the efficacy of this approach to war. In both World War II and in Korea, the Army employed massive firepower in an attempt to substitute materiel for combat forces. In terms of the opponent in a future war, the U.S. Army focused nearly exclusively on the Soviet Union and planned extensively for general war in Europe. The predominance of the Soviet threat meant that the Army constantly planned for the worse-case scenario. Overtime, this focus was translated into a threat preference: Army officers considered planning for war with the Soviet Union to be *the*

objective of their careers. Attention to other potential opponents, and consideration of other modes of warfare, was given short shrift.³³⁶ Although the Korean War vindicated the Army's preferred approach to waging war, the scale and scope of military operations imposed by civilian leadership were deemed unacceptable. Following the Chinese intervention in the war, civilian leaders placed limitations upon the military's conduct of the war. The prolonged stalemate and eventual terms of the armistice—both of which were considered intolerable by uniformed officers—contributed to a pronounced “never again” attitude within the Army.³³⁷ This attitude meant that in the future, Army officers would go to great lengths to avoid being placed in a position of waging wars without a significant degree of autonomy.

Similar to the Army, proponents of air power approached the entire notion of limited war with distain. In particular, American air chiefs believed that their preferred approach to war, strategic bombing, was vindicated in the Second World War. Although air power was used to achieve limited objectives in the Korean War, air chiefs considered that conflict's lessons to be ambiguous at best. To the extent that a case could be made for the use of air power in limited wars, few believed that such wars would be the model of future warfare. Despite the expectations among civilian strategists that limited wars would constitute the main form of conflict in the Cold War, their influence on air strategists was marginal. American air chiefs believed that large doses of air power, focused against an opponent's *nation* rather than its armed forces per se, constituted the

³³⁶ Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 5-6.

³³⁷ Alexander George, "The Role of Force in Diplomacy: A Continuing Dilemma for U.S. Foreign Policy," in *Managing Global Chaos*, eds. Chester Crocker, Fen Hampson and Pamela Aall, (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996), 212.

best means of prevailing in any conflict.³³⁸ These perceptions became institutionalized with the rise of the U.S. Strategic Air Command (SAC) and with the publication of Manual 1-8 “Strategic Air Operations,” the guiding doctrine of the Air Force that remained fundamentally unchanged until December 1965.

Under the leadership of General Curtis LeMay, SAC’s planning was focused strictly upon the worse-case scenario of a general, nuclear war with the Soviet Union. By 1955, LeMay had acquired virtual autonomy in target selection in a future war, and in the autumn of 1960, SAC’s influence rose dramatically with the development of the Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP) for nuclear war. With the Pentagon focused on waging nuclear war with the USSR, air planners devoted sparse attention to other, more limited contingencies. In 1961, LeMay assumed the position of Air Force Chief of Staff. As this service’s top officer, the Air Force raised the profile of strategic bombing to a new level. LeMay went to great lengths to fill his office with “strategic thinkers.” As a result, tactical air planning was considered a secondary pursuit. Even in the Air Force’s manuals pertaining to limited warfare (the form of combat that one would expect a heavy concentration on tactical air power), the use of nuclear weapons to achieve strategic effects was emphasized.³³⁹ More broadly, the Air Force’s “Basic Doctrine” at the time clearly articulated the preference for general war planning. According to that document, “The best preparation for limited war is proper preparation for general war. . . . The latter

³³⁸ Clodfelter, 3.

³³⁹ Robert F. Futrell, “The Influence of the Air Power Concept on Air force Planning, 1945-1962,” in *Military Planning in the Twentieth Century: Proceedings of the Eleventh Military History Symposium*, Lt. Col. Harry R. Borowski, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1986), 269. http://permanent.access.gpo.gov/airforcehistory/www.airforcehistory.hq.af.mil/Publications/fulltext/military_planning_20th_century.pdf. See also, David Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), ch. 1.

is the more important since there can be no guarantee that a limited war would not spread into general conflict.”³⁴⁰

Based on the preferences and approaches of the main services employed in the Vietnam War, bureaucratic theory does not expect either the strategic design or strategic integration mechanism to be operative in this case. Bureaucratic theory suggests two primary obstacles to effective information acquisition and management: the centrality of the Soviet Union in military planning, and the ingrained determination on the part of military officers to avoid fighting limited wars. Both the U.S. Army and Air Force dedicated the bulk of their intellectual and budgetary capital to the planning of a total war with the Soviet Union. Should such a war breakout, there would have been few restraints placed on the prosecution of the war. To expect these institutions, the Air Force in particular, to successfully plan and execute operations with the objective *avoiding* conflict escalation in a low-priority theater would be considered unlikely by bureaucratic theory. Furthermore, as these two services bore the bulk of the operational responsibilities during the war, they possessed a significant advantage in information over other bureaucratic players. This information advantage, coupled with the general preference to avoid waging limited war, leads bureaucratic theory to expect significant breakdowns in the transmission of pertinent information to and from the armed services. Thus, in the areas of both information acquisition and information management, bureaucratic theory does not anticipate the operation of the strategic design mechanism.

With respect to the armed forces’ preferred mode of war fighting, the privileging of strategic bombing in Air Force doctrine leads bureaucratic theory to anticipate hostile

³⁴⁰ Air Force Manual 1-2, United States Air Force Basic Doctrine, 1 April 1955 (revised 1 December 1959). Quoted in Clodfelter, 30-31.

military balancing in this case. Not only would this approach have entailed a scale and scope of operations incompatible with the diplomatic signals being sent to the PRC, but the significant degree of autonomy that the Air Force acquired in target determination and operational planning prior to 1964 leads this approach to expect a mismatch in the military and diplomatic aspect to the broader war effort. And, given the autonomy achieved by the Air Force prior to 1964, the ability for the civilian leadership in Washington to effectively monitor Air Force behavior should have been meager.

The Information Structure Framework

The information structure framework expects that a challenger will be able to avoid hostile military balancing in a limited war when its information structure is “robust.” Robust information structures are characterized by two features: multi-sourced information pathways connecting state leaders to subordinate agencies, and the existence of dense lateral communication channels among those subordinate agencies. In terms of strategic design, multi-sourced information pathways enable state leaders to obtain more information about a potential balancer’s present and likely future intentions, while dense lateral connections allow for increased efficiency in managing a large volume of dynamic information.

I argue that by 1964, the information structure of the United States had become remarkably robust. Following the Chinese intervention in the Korean War, the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations undertook a number of reforms that significantly strengthened the information management capacities of the United States. The Johnson administration benefited from these reforms in a number of ways. The information structure from which the limited war strategy in Vietnam emerged was

characterized by a relatively dense pattern of lateral connections that enabled a greater degree of information sharing among departments and agencies. Additionally, as a result of these reforms, top policy makers were able to receive critical strategic information from a number of different sources.

The Increasing Density of Lateral Connections and Information Management

As mentioned briefly in Chapter 2, despite the intentions of its early supporters, the Central Intelligence Agency never developed into a centralized information clearinghouse from which diplomatic and military intelligence could be obtained in the service of foreign-military policy. Although the quality of the CIA's products did improve dramatically over time, the Agency's analytic branches became another (though important) source of information available to top policymakers in Washington. The task of creating a system of effective information management remained to be completed. In response to the disaster that befell the United States in Korea, Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy took steps to increase the White House's ability to actively manage U.S. foreign policy. Although the approaches of the two Presidents' were markedly different, their combined efforts afforded Lyndon Johnson a dramatically more effective system of information management. In particular, the institutional changes made by Eisenhower and Kennedy to the National Security Council system had the result of connecting the disparate agencies and departments within the government in a manner that more directly served the President's foreign policy needs.³⁴¹

³⁴¹ The accumulation of the White House's power over U.S. foreign policy is discussed in Amy Zegart, *Flawed By Design: The Evolution of the CIA, JCS, and CIA* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

Eisenhower made a number of contributions to the evolution of the NSC system.³⁴² The first was to increase the size and competency of the National Security Council Staff. Specifically, Eisenhower sought to rationalize the policy process through the creation of two organs within the NSC Staff. The first, the Planning Board, offered policy proposals for consideration by the Council. In this forum, policy ideas were initially considered, debated, and modified.³⁴³ Significantly, if disagreements among Planning Board members could not be resolved, they were sent to the Council for deliberation. The second, the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB), was intended to provide the president with a means of ensuring that policies enacted by the Council were in fact implemented. The OCB was charged with creating detailed operational plans that were sent to the responsible departments for implementation, and with monitoring the bureaucracy to make certain that the President's policies were being enacted.³⁴⁴ Interposed between the Planning Board and the OCB was the Council itself. The NSC was intended to serve as an advisory body to the president, a forum in which the merits of different policy options were discussed, debated, decided upon. As a result of the practice of sending disagreements among Planning Board members to the Council for adjudication, and because of the large number of participants that attended the NSC

³⁴² Eisenhower's reform plans were sketched out by Robert Cutler, the first Special Assistant for National Security Affairs on March 16, 1953. See Robert Cutler, "The Development of the National Security Council," *Foreign Affairs*, 34, 3 (April 1956).

³⁴³ In addition to the Planning Board, Eisenhower created a "Special Staff," the responsibilities of which included analysis of Planning Board reports prior to their submission to the Council. According to one history, the Special Staff offered the President an "independent source of analysis of departmental recommendations." Keith C. Clark and Laurence J. Legere, *The President and the Management of National Security* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 64-65. See also Zegart, 82.

³⁴⁴ John Prados, *Keepers of the Keys: A History of the National Security Council from Truman to Bush* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 61-85; James S. Lay and Robert H. Johnson, *Organizational History of the National Security Council during the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations* (Washington, D.C.: National Security Council, 1960)25-49; Anna Kasten Nelson, "The 'Top of Policy Hill': President Eisenhower and the National Security Council," *Diplomatic History* 7 (Fall 1983).

meetings during Eisenhower's time, the responsibility of running these meetings fell to the president himself. Presiding over the Council meetings was a tremendous burden—one for which Ike was well suited. Eisenhower has been described by some as being the “hidden hand” behind the policymaking process, actively participating in Council meetings “probing logic, examining motives, looking at proposals in terms of their long-term implications, cajoling better alternatives from the departments.”³⁴⁵

The second contribution made by Eisenhower to the NSC system was the creation of the position of the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (commonly referred to as the National Security Adviser). The creation of this position was significant for two reasons. First, the National Security Adviser was an individual without departmental ties and who had a close relationship to the president. Second, in the Eisenhower administration, the National Security Adviser chaired the Planning Board, and as such, was principally responsible for determining the content and quality of the Board's products.³⁴⁶ The ability of the president to have his adviser oversee the Planning Board was crucial, for while the members of the Board were to be responsible to the White House (and not to the agencies that nominated them), there remained the strong possibility that Board members would be unable to shed their bureaucratic allegiances, pushing their department's agenda at the expense of the president's.

An additional feature of the Eisenhower administration's policy making process was the deliberate attempt made by the president to increase his access to information

³⁴⁵ Quoted in Prados, 63.

³⁴⁶ Lay and Johnson, 26.

through mechanisms outside of the NSC machinery.³⁴⁷ For example, Eisenhower's Staff Secretary was an aide to the President responsible for keeping abreast of every national security issue facing the administration. Originally established by General Paul T. Carroll, and then assumed by Andrew Goodpaster, the Staff Secretary served as the president's eyes and ears in the bureaucracy, as well as his unofficial spokesperson. Most importantly, the Staff Secretary served as the president's national security and intelligence liaison, the information channel through which top-secret information flowed to and from Eisenhower.³⁴⁸ Moreover, while Eisenhower did strengthen the NSC's role in policymaking, he also "worked behind the scenes to presidentialize, personalize, and centralize the system."³⁴⁹ The frequent use of interdepartmental committees (which were often chaired by the National Security Adviser) was one means through which the president was able to obtain policy options in addition to those generated by the Planning Board.³⁵⁰

In sum, the manner in which information was managed was significantly bolstered in the Eisenhower administration. Through the creation of a formal policymaking process known as "Policy Hill"—where policy proposals originated in the Planning Board, were sent up to the Council for consideration and decision, and then sent back down to the OCB for implementation oversight—information about the range of options available in matters of foreign policy as well as to feedback pertaining to policy

³⁴⁷ For example, see the discussion on the "Solarium Project" in David Rothkopf, *Running the World: The Inside Story of the National Security Council and the Architects of American Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004) 69-72.

³⁴⁸ I.M. Destler, Leslie H. Gelb, and Anthony Lake, *Our Own Worst Enemy: The Unmaking of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 176-77.

³⁴⁹ Quoted in Zegart, 83.

³⁵⁰ I. M. Destler, "The Presidency and National Security Organization," in *The National Security: Its Theory and Practice, 1945-1960*, Norman A. Graebner, ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 232.

implementation was significantly increased. And, the creation of parallel staffs and interdepartmental committees outside the formal NSC system enabled greater collaboration among departments, agencies, and the White House. In short, the density of lateral communication channels was increased during Eisenhower's tenure.

Nevertheless, these reforms did not fully satisfy President Eisenhower. As John Prados noted in his study of the National Security Council, "As the Planning Board sent up the policy papers, with their frequent splits and alternative language, council meetings bogged down in arguments over the implications of words, sentences, and paragraphs with concrete meaning to the bureaucracy but rather less interest to the President." It must be emphasized that the reason for lack of productivity in NSC meetings stemmed from the manner in which the entire NSC system was structured. Because of the central role that the Council assumed in Ike's "policy hill," the representatives to the NSC were able to push for their agency's interests at relatively early phases of policy development. In order to elicit policy options that satisfied his interests, Eisenhower used the NSC meetings as a means of playing the State and Defense departments off one another. Although Ike was particularly skilled at directing such theatrics, the amount of time and energy required by the president was tremendous (so much so, that his staff frequently worried that his health was in jeopardy).

Eisenhower became even more frustrated with the performance of the Operations Coordinating Board. The OCB was created as a means by which the White House could ensure "coordinated" policy implementation. Concerned that in performing such a role the OCB would violate federal law by coming between the President and departments, however, Attorney General Herbert Brownell, Jr. insisted that the executive order

establishing the OCB be restricted to offering *advice* on implementation. In light of these restrictions, the OCB did very little coordinating, but rather devolved into a forum wherein departmental and agency representatives continued to press for their own interests, even if they had been overruled at the NSC level.³⁵¹

Where Eisenhower was frustrated, McGeorge Bundy and Walt Rostow, the two individuals who were directly responsible for reorganizing the NSC system under President Kennedy, were completely dismissive. In a memo to Kennedy explaining the limitations inherent to Eisenhower's system, Bundy noted that “. . . the Planning Board and the Operations Coordinating Board had both become rather rigid and paper-ridden organizations. Neither of them seemed likely to be responsive to a new Chief Executive and his principal cabinet officers.”³⁵² Rostow's criticisms went beyond the likelihood that these organs would be responsive to a new administration. Chief among his concerns was the efficacy of the entire system in waging the Cold War. According to Rostow, the organization of national security institutions

[l]ay in two quite distinct problems: first, how the President chose to receive advice on national security matters; second, how coordinated staff work should be generated among all the arms of national security policy at a time when diplomacy itself, in the old-fashioned sense, no longer suffices. Intelligence, foreign aid, information projected overseas, stockpiling at home and above all, military policy has to be woven together with conventional diplomacy. . . . We [Bundy and Rostow] concluded that both the NSC Planning Board and the Operations Coordination [*sic*] Board had become instruments for generating papers that did not, in fact, come to grips with the heart of the problems they addressed.³⁵³

³⁵¹ Prados, 61-68.

³⁵² Quoted in Bromley K. Smith, *Organizational History of the National Security Council during the Kennedy and Johnson Administration* (Washington, D.C.: National Security Council, 1988), 9

³⁵³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 10.

Spurred on by criticisms that had been leveled by Congress³⁵⁴ and by influential memos from Columbia University scholar Richard Neustadt, Kennedy, Bundy, and Rostow undertook a major overhaul of the NSC system. These reforms were crucial in two respects. First, together they marked the birth of the “modern” NSC system that has characterized the national security process of all administrations since Kennedy.³⁵⁵ Second, and more importantly for my purposes, they constituted the system that Lyndon Johnson inherited during the time period under consideration. The Kennedy-era reforms focused on three primary aspects of the NSC machinery: the position of the National Security Adviser; the power and role of the NSC staff; and the relative importance of the National Security Council vis-à-vis other ad hoc mechanisms for foreign policy development and implementation.

Following Neustadt’s advice in a memo on December 8, 1960, the responsibility of the National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy grew substantially compared to that of his predecessors. Specifically, Bundy’s duties included those assigned to six individuals in the Eisenhower administration, including those of the special assistants for National Security Affairs, Foreign Economic Policy, Operations Coordination, the NSC Executive Secretary, and the OCB’s Staff Coordinator.³⁵⁶ In so doing, the role that Bundy was destined to play in both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations was that of a combined policy advisor and staff secretary, putting him in charge of both long-rang planning and managing the interagency decision making process of American foreign

³⁵⁴ On the prominent recommendations of the Jackson Subcommittee investigations into the Eisenhower-era NSC system, see I. M. Destler, *Presidents, Bureaucrats, and Foreign Policy: The Politics of Organizational Reform* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), *passim*.

³⁵⁵ Amy Zegart’s terminology. See Zegart, 85.

³⁵⁶ Smith, 9; Prados, 99.

policy. Such consolidation of roles resulted in a dramatic increase in the power of the National Security Advisor, and of the president to whom he was accountable. That power accrued from two primary sources. First, Bundy served as the information conduit running from the bureaucracy to the president; a relationship that provided Bundy with significant clout in the day-to-day management of the policy process. As Andrew Preston has recently described, not only was approval for high level meetings among the president and departmental officials often granted by Bundy in advance, but the National Security Advisor soon began clearing sensitive cables from the DOS to diplomatic posts abroad.³⁵⁷

The second source of McGeorge Bundy's power stemmed from the reorganization of NSC Staff under Kennedy, a series of overhauls which dramatically increased the scope and influence of the Staff's purview. As the quotation from Walt Rostow above makes clear, both Eisenhower's Planning Board and OCB were considered to be ineffectual at serving the needs of the president in determining U.S. foreign policy. Shortly after Kennedy's inauguration, these entities were dismantled. In their place, Bundy created a powerful Staff that served as the president's eyes and ears, "no longer disinterested mediators working to push papers up to the NSC level."³⁵⁸ According to Robert Komer, the Staff served a president who desired access to "a complete flow of raw information" Moreover,

[the Staff served as a] shadow network which clued the President on what bidding was before a formal inter-departmentally cleared recommendation that got to him . . . the President had sources of independent judgment and recommendation on what each issue was all about, what out to be done about it, from a little group of

³⁵⁷ Andrew Preston, "The Little State Department: McGeorge Bundy and the National Security Council Staff, 1961-1965," *Political Studies Quarterly* 31, 4 (December 2001), 645.

³⁵⁸ Prados, 102.

people in whom he had confidence—in other words, sort of a double check. [Finally, the Staff provided] follow through [working] to keep tabs on things and [seeing] that the cables went out and the responses were satisfactory, and that when the policy wasn't being executed, the President knew about it and he could give it another prod.³⁵⁹

The Staff's ability to effectively assume this role was achieved via two institutional mechanisms. The first was the creation within the Staff of geographic and thematic sections that allowed certain individuals the ability to concentrate on specific areas of the globe or on specific aspects of U.S. foreign policy. This structure mirrored that of the State Department, leading Kennedy's press secretary Pierre Salinger to label the NSC Staff a "mini State Department."³⁶⁰ With the addition of portfolio assignments, NSC Staff members became powerful figures in the foreign policy process. The second institutional mechanism that allowed the Staff to more directly serve the president was its ability to obtain and control the information traffic in and out of Washington, D.C. In response to the disastrous Bay of Pigs incident, McGeorge Bundy established the famous "Situation Room" in the basement of the White House. The purpose of the Situation Room was to coordinate "the many information channels to the White House which sprang up in the early days of the Kennedy Administration, including those of the Central Intelligence Agency, the State and Defense Departments and the Chiefs of Staff through their aides in the White House."³⁶¹ In sum, the creation of geographic and thematic organs within the Staff, and the establishment of the Situation Room enabled Kennedy and Bundy to know in much greater detail global events and trends that could impact the

³⁵⁹ From Robert Komer's 1964 oral history interview for the John F. Kennedy library, quoted in Destler, Gelb, and Lake, 190-91.

³⁶⁰ Stephen Hess with James P. Pfiffner, *Organizing the Presidency*, 3rd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2002), 71; Preston, 646.

³⁶¹ Smith, 37-38.

national security of the U.S., as well as to keep tabs on the performance of the foreign policy bureaucracy in an unprecedented manner.³⁶²

The third aspect of the Kennedy-era reforms to the process of foreign policy process focused on the National Security Council itself, namely its downgrading in importance as a body where the content of decisions were deliberated and decided upon. As Amy Zegart argues, while both Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower did employ extra-NSC meetings and conversations to reach decisions, John Kennedy relied on these forums almost exclusively. The NSC met roughly once a month under Kennedy and those meetings seldom witnessed the debate and discussion so vital to Eisenhower's process.³⁶³ In place of Council meetings, the Kennedy team opted for ad hoc taskforces to solve particular foreign policy problems. The value of the taskforce as a means of decision making came from the "highly personalized and centralized basis of its assignment." As Dean Rusk explained, "Since the authority for the task force stems directly from the President or other high officials, there usually results added urgency and a more thorough consideration of the problems than would other wise have been possible." Furthermore, taskforces permitted more efficient interdepartmental coordination through the assignment of relevant personnel from different areas of the

³⁶² Preston, 650. An important element of this process was the ability for the Staff to monitor compliance by the bureaucracy with decisions made at higher levels. National Security Action Memoranda (NSAMs) were drawn up and circulated by Bundy, and contained specific delineations of approved national security policies. For a succinct description of the NSAM series under Kennedy and Johnson, see Jeffrey T. Richelson, "Presidential Directives and National Security Policy," Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 2004). Moreover, as an internal memo describing the NSC Staff's modus operandi made clear, Staff members were charged with the responsibilities of policy advice and of policy implementation. "[Staff] assignments . . . do not distinguish between 'planning' and 'operation,' and resistance to this distinction is fundamental to our whole concept of work." Unsigned to Kennedy, Current Organization, *FRUS*, 1961-63, volume VIII, pp. 106-07. See also, Carnes Lord, *The Presidency and the Management of National Security* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 71.

³⁶³ Zegart, 84-85.

bureaucracy. Finally, because the management of the taskforce system fell to McGeorge Bundy, presidential oversight was ensured.³⁶⁴

With only a few notable exceptions, Lyndon Johnson did not fundamentally change the manner in which the NSC system operated. Where changes were initiated by LBJ, they continued the evolutionary path set forth by his predecessors, specifically in the direction of greater presidential control over the foreign policy process.³⁶⁵ With respect to the position of the National Security Advisor, LBJ's reliance on McGeorge Bundy grew beyond that of Kennedy. On the one hand, LBJ, unlike JFK, was much less interested in foreign affairs and had less experience in that realm than did the former president. As such, Bundy's continuation in this post was considered crucial by the new president.³⁶⁶ More significantly, the importance of the National Security Advisor as a node in the information structure was bolstered as a result of the changes that LBJ ushered in regarding his relationship with the NSC staff. In particular, LBJ made it clear early on that Kennedy's practice of directly communicating with the Staff would be curtailed.³⁶⁷ This did not mean that the staff was sidelined in the foreign policy process. Indeed, "the core responsibilities of the staff and the special assistant continued . . ." under LBJ.³⁶⁸ What had changed was the manner in which LBJ received information from the Staff, indirectly via Bundy. Most critically, the Staff retained its structural configuration established under JFK, its access to information from the bureaucracy, and

³⁶⁴ Smith, 21-22.

³⁶⁵ Destler, Gelb, and Lake, 194-97.

³⁶⁶ Bundy admitted as much in a memo to LBJ after the 1964 election. "My own work load has increased in your administration." Quoted in Preston, 651.

³⁶⁷ For a description of Kennedy's advisory style and the role of the NSC Staff in it, see Alexander L. George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980), 157-59.

³⁶⁸ Quoted in Destler, Gelb and Lake, 197.

its participation and management of the ad hoc taskforce system that would be employed at critical times in the development of the American limited war strategy in Vietnam during 1964-65.

The one area in which LBJ did institute fundamental change was in the relationship of the president to the NSC principals. Although Eisenhower and Kennedy did meet with their advisors outside of the NSC setting, they did so only on an improvised basis while never completely eschewing the Council itself. Neither did LBJ, yet, his use of the (in)famous “Tuesday lunches” did mark a significant departure in the manner in which foreign policy decision were made. The Tuesday lunches were, in the words of one historian, “indisputably an important institution in the foreign policy advisory process during the Johnson presidency.”³⁶⁹ Critically, the Tuesday lunches (whose *primary* attendees were the President, Bundy, Dean Rusk, and Robert McNamara) operated with the National Security Council, but not instead of it. Often, LBJ would hold these lunches immediately following full NSC meetings in order to provide a more open and frank discussion among the individuals whose departments were directly affected by the topics considered. Because the size of the lunches was limited, and because the war in Vietnam tended to be the primary matter under consideration, many in the government at the time, as well as subsequent scholarly treatments, disparaged the institution.³⁷⁰ However, those arguing that the Tuesday lunches amounted to a dysfunctional advisory system fail to account for a number of critical facts.

³⁶⁹ Quoted in David C. Humphrey, “Tuesday Lunch at the White House: A Preliminary Assessment,” *Diplomatic History* 8, 1 (Winter 1984), 82. According to Humphrey, many others from inside and outside the government attended these meeting periodically, depending on the issues under consideration.

³⁷⁰ Among the most critical scholars are Irving Janis, *Groupthink*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983); and John P. Burke and Fred I. Greenstein, *How Presidents Test Reality: Decisions on Vietnam, 1954 and 1965* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1989), 183-85.

First, as indicated, the Tuesday lunches were not the sole organ for decision making; the NSC continued to meet throughout the Johnson presidency and more importantly, frequently during the period under consideration. Second, as recent scholarly work has demonstrated, LBJ was not a captive of truncated discussions. His ability to acquire a wide range of information from his advisers pertaining to Vietnam was not diminished by the lunches.³⁷¹ Finally, the attendees of the lunches were in fact NSC principals, leaders of the departments involved in waging the war and managers of the interagency foreign policy process. What the lunches provided was an alternative, streamlined, and effective forum for decision making.³⁷²

Multi-Sourced Information Flows and the Reduction of Uncertainty

Of course, to fully counter the claim that LBJ's informal advisory system was dysfunctional, it is necessary to demonstrate that the principals involved had access to information from a number of sources as decisions were being made. Three points stand out as being most important. First, one of the most important effects of Secretary of Defense McNamara's reforms in the Pentagon (i.e., the establishment of a new system of budgeting based on long-range planning known as the Planning Programming Budgeting System—PPBS), was the dramatic increase of information from lower levels in the military to the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD). As one scholar notes, "PPBS gave the secretary of defense greatly increased power to make decisions on lower-order questions; the upward flow of information it generated gave him the ability to make such

³⁷¹ David M. Barrett, *Uncertain Warriors: Lyndon Johnson and his Vietnam Advisers* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993); David M. Barrett, "The Mythology Surrounding Lyndon Johnson, His Advisers, and the 1965 Decision to Escalate the Vietnam War," *Political Science Quarterly* 103, 4 (Winter 1988-1989).

³⁷² According to Walt Rostow, "Clashing, exploratory, or even frivolous views could be expressed with little bureaucratic caution and with confidence no scars would remain." Prados, 150.

decisions, and McNamara's philosophy of management shows that he had the inclination to make use of his increased powers."³⁷³ In other words, McNamara brought to the table a wealth of strategic, operational, and tactical information from the Pentagon; a point missed by those charging that the Tuesday lunches suffered from a lack of quality staff work.

Second, the Situation Room, the critical information hub connecting the military, diplomatic, and intelligence agencies of the government was retained and its use increased in the period under consideration. As Michael Bohn, a former director of the Situation Room has recently noted, the Situation Room provided LBJ and his advisers timely information related to critical operations during the war. "He [LBJ] met with military planners there to select targets. The duty officers became his personal bomb damage assessment team, gathering information from afar each night in order to answer the inevitable questions from the President, usually just before he went to sleep and again as he arose."³⁷⁴ The ability for the president and his top advisers to obtain such information allowed for the unprecedented management of wartime operations from Washington. As the notes of the Tuesday lunches make clear, the "charge" that Johnson "micro-managed" the bombing of North Vietnam is definitely substantiated. As this collection shows, "Johnson clearly feared that if the U.S. bombed near its border, China would enter the war, as it had in Korea a decade and a half earlier."³⁷⁵ Access to such

³⁷³ Gregory Palmer, *The McNamara Strategy and the Vietnam War: Program Budgeting in the Pentagon, 1960-1968* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1978), 104. Palmer goes on to note, "The air war against North Vietnam was directly under the control of the Department of Defense and was therefore influenced by the PPBS" (120-21).

³⁷⁴ Michael K. Bohn, *Nerve Center: Inside the White House Situation Room* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2003), 138-39.

³⁷⁵ The collection under discussion is held at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library, and is known as "Tom Johnson's Notes of Tuesday Lunches." Tom Johnson (no relation to LBJ) was a deputy press secretary in

tactical and operational information from the Situation Room was a prerequisite for the president and his military and civilian advisers to play an active role in monitoring the performance of the military as it prosecuted the war in Indochina.

The final point pertains to the functioning of the intelligence community, in particular the role of the CIA in providing information to top government officials. In the early 1960s the intelligence community dramatically increased its technical capabilities in intelligence production. In 1961, Kennedy reinstated and bolstered the responsibilities of an Eisenhower-era board of consultants overseeing the performance of the community, renaming it the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB). Among the PFIAB's primary duties was the oversight of the expansion of American imagery and signals intelligence capabilities produced by the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) and the National Security Agency (NSA), respectively. Despite the fact that the take from these two organs placed a nearly insurmountable burden for analysts to overcome, their efforts were vital to Kennedy's (and eventually Johnson's) national security policy. For example, NRO products facilitated a reassessment of American strategic nuclear policy by providing the President a substantial amount of evidence that the "missile gap" in favor of the Soviet Union was indeed a myth. Moreover, DCI McCone's use of IMINT provided credible evidence that the Soviets had placed medium range ballistic missiles in Cuba.³⁷⁶

the administration who had the task of taking notes of the Tuesday lunch meetings. On this collection and its findings, see David M. Barrett, "Doing 'Tuesday Lunch' at Lyndon Johnson's White House: New Archival Evidence on Vietnam Decisionmaking," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 24, 4 (December 1991).

³⁷⁶ Christopher Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 272-74.

Bureaucratic control over IMINT resources in particular was the subject of a great deal of debate and conflict between 1961 and 1965. As a result of its mission, the Air Force was intent on securing access to high-resolution photographic intelligence that would allow for greater accuracy and effectiveness of aerial bombing. Yet, the CIA and Office of Secretary of Defense preferred that IMINT resources that provided broader intelligence and information. For the Agency, this meant area search capabilities—broad spectrum coverage at lower resolution—in the service of analysts who produced longer-ranged intelligence products. For the OSD, such capabilities would be useful in Robert McNamara's efforts to acquire independent assessments of weapons systems procurement and strategic planning. As such, the CIA and OSD allied to press their case against the Air Force. By August 1965, an agreement was reached that provided the CIA and OSD joint decision making authority over IMINT resources. The result of this conflict and eventual agreement substantially bolstered the position of the DCI in determining not only the utilization of IMINT resources, but just as importantly, drew the CIA and OSD into closer cooperation in other areas as well.³⁷⁷

The primary area of cooperation between the CIA and OSD was that of strategic research and analysis of a distinctly military nature. During the 1950s, the CIA at times produced military intelligence analysis, but the Agency never challenged the Pentagon in this sphere. In the early 1960s, this situation changed, and with the McNamara's approval. As Anne Karalekas argues, "the combination of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's reliance on the Agency for analysis and John McCone's insistence on the

³⁷⁷ Anne Karalekas, "History of the Central Intelligence Agency," in *The Central Intelligence Agency: History and Documents*, William M. Leary, ed., (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1984), 87-88. On the development of imagery intelligence, see Philip Taubman, *Secret Empire: Eisenhower, the CIA, and the Hidden Story of America's Space Espionage* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003).

DCI's necessity to have independent judgments on military matters resulted in the expansion of the CIA's strategic intelligence effort and the acceptance of the Agency's role as a producer of military analysis." With McNamara's introduction of new management and strategic planning procedures, the CIA (along with the newly created, but less than effective Defense Intelligence Agency), provided the Secretary of Defense with intelligence assessments that were used in the service of "long-range program decisions by projecting foreign policy needs, military strategy, and budgetary requirements against force structures."³⁷⁸

Despite the fact that McCone had McNamara's blessing in producing military strategic analyses, the CIA found that its access to the requisite information from the individual services was still difficult to obtain. It was the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 that provided the CIA with sufficient leverage to wrest control of information from the services. With the Agency's revelation of the missiles in Cuba, the DCI had the bureaucratic-political clout to obtain strategic information, and his access increased afterward. As a result, "by the mid-1960's [*sic*] the DDI [Deputy Director for Intelligence] was procuring information on U.S. strategic planning on a regular basis. Consistent access to this data increased the Agency's information base considerably and further established the CIA's claims to strategic research." With the American escalation of the Vietnam War, the Office of Research and Reports served top policymakers by conducting regular bomb damage assessments, "including information on the flow of

³⁷⁸ Karalekas, 92.

supplies and men to South Vietnam, the recuperability of supply centers, and details of shipping and cargoes.”³⁷⁹

Despite these important developments in the Intelligence Community, many have argued that the CIA’s reports and estimates had little effect on strategic development and execution in the Vietnam War. In particular, it has been charged that as a result of Johnson’s refusal to abide dissent, and the oft pessimistic tenor of the CIA’s reporting, the president turned away from the CIA, entertaining only those reports and assessments that agreed with his preferred strategic options.³⁸⁰ It certainly is the case that the CIA’s products were better received, and John McCone’s influence was much greater, with JFK than with LBJ. Indeed, the primary reason for McCone resigning in April 1965 was his frustration over his lack of personal access to the president. Following the pattern of communications with the president and the NSC Staff, much of the DCI’s access to the president was indirect, through National Security Adviser Bundy. These charges do have merit, yet they portray only part of a larger story. First, the DCI’s relationship to the president notwithstanding, the CIA was not marginalized in the interagency foreign policy process. As will be discussed below, the CIA took an active part in the critical interdepartmental war games and taskforces that produced the graduated pressure strategy for waging the war. Second, as mentioned above, the CIA did play an important role in providing the president and his top advisers with bomb damage assessments that were integral to the management of the carefully calibrated strategy. Finally, at critical times, William Raborn (McCone’s successor as DCI) provided LBJ and others key long-range,

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 93.

³⁸⁰ Harold P. Ford, *CIA and the Vietnam Policymakers: Three Episodes 1962-1968* (Washington, D.C.: CIA, Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1998); Andrew, 309, 311.

strategic estimates produced by the CIA.³⁸¹ In short, while the CIA did lose a measure of direct influence with the president, the Agency was fully incorporated into the American information structure and did play an important role in shaping the limited war strategy in Vietnam.

A Robust Information Structure

The American information structure had become remarkably robust by the early 1960s. Although there were some deficiencies in the system of information management (which will be addressed below), the principal indicators of robust information structures (i.e., the degree of multisourcing of information and the density of lateral connections among departments and agencies) were in existence. Put simply, the information structure of the early 1960s was fundamentally different than that of the early 1950s.

As argued in Chapter 1, if top policymakers are forced to rely excessively on a single source of information, then there is a strong possibility that the resulting strategy will be based on incomplete, inaccurate, and/or out of date information. When state leaders have access to multiple sources of information, policymakers are able to form a more complete picture of the international environment—specifically as it pertains to the behavior and intentions of potential balancers in the system. Additionally, multi-sourced information flows provide leaders with information related to the coordination of their subordinate agencies, information that will enable them to send consistent signals to potential balancers pertaining to their own war aims.

The American information structure of the early 1960s was characterized by the existence of multi-sourced information flows connecting state leaders to the departments

³⁸¹ From Director of Central Intelligence Raborn to President Johnson, 11 June 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #350. The covering memo indicates that the President saw the memo on June 15, 1965.

and agencies within the bureaucracy. First, by virtue of diverse departmental participation, the taskforce system that characterized the foreign policy process enabled multiple sources of information to make its way into the design and implementation of foreign-military strategy. Additionally, the institution of the Situation Room provided state leaders with valuable all-source intelligence pertaining to the behavior and evolving intentions of potential balancers, as well as to the performance of the departments charged with waging particular aspects of the limited war strategy in Vietnam. Finally, as a result of the strengthening of the CIA's technical intelligence capabilities, policymakers were afforded access to an unprecedented amount of tactical information that bore directly on the strategic objectives in the war. In short, the U.S. information structure allowed state leaders to have access to vital strategic, operational, and tactical information from a number of sources in a timely fashion.

Access to a wealth of information can have a detrimental effect on decision making if processes for mitigating information overload are not in place. Because an individual's innate information processing capabilities are severely limited, massive amounts of data can swamp any one person's facilities. Yet, when the departments and agencies providing such information to top decision makers are connected laterally to one another, the information burden is redistributed to a greater number of individuals. Redistribution at lower levels allows for more effective information vetting, and for more accurate analysis of information, and enables leaders to assess the international environment with greater speed and precision. Finally, lateral connections among departments are a powerful means of overcoming the information "hold-up" problems inherent to bureaucracies.

The U.S. information structure of the early 1960s was characterized by a density of lateral connections among departments and agencies responsible for waging distinct aspects of the broader limited war effort. In particular, the taskforce system drew both principals and lower-level officials into close contact at all phases of the decision making process. This arrangement had the effect of forcing taskforce members to consider and adapt to others' particular information demands, and to confront frames of reference that were different than their own parochially determined frames. Moreover, by facilitating wide-ranging debate at lower levels in the bureaucracy, the taskforce system enabled principal decision makers to redistribute the information burden inherent to waging limited war. Two examples of interagency collaboration (which will receive extensive consideration in the next chapter) are the SIGMA II war game conducted in early September and the November working group of 1964. These two forums allowed individuals from all of the relevant agencies to meet together to compare information on a number of different aspects of the war and to determine how the Chinese and DRV would likely react to different American strategies. Typical of the system inherited and employed by LBJ, these taskforces were overseen by the National Security Adviser and managed by the NSC staff. As such, the forums carried the presidential imprimatur necessary for the effective functioning of the interagency foreign policy process.

In sum, the information structure framework expects an absence of hostile military balancing during the 1964-1965 phase of the Vietnam War. In terms of the strategic design mechanism, the robust nature of the U.S. information structure should have enabled top policymakers the ability to acquire and manage vital information pertaining to the present and likely future intentions of the PRC. And, with respect to

strategic integration, the information structure framework anticipates close coordination between the military operations and diplomatic signals sent to the PRC by the U.S.

Conclusion

I have made two primary arguments in this chapter. First, the United States was able to avoid inducing hostile military balancing by the Peoples' Republic of China during the Vietnam War as a result of an accurately calibrated limited war strategy. In four consecutive phases, the U.S. acted in ways that convinced the Chinese that while it constituted a threat of increasing intensity, the Chinese were not confronting an attacker that posed a highly intensive threat to their physical security. First, from January-July 1964 the U.S. conducted OPLAN 34A operations in Vietnam and engaged in a balanced diplomatic campaign designed to bolster international support for the American effort in Indochina—but not at the expense of unduly threatening the PRC. In response, the Chinese issued a series of deterrent warnings to the U.S. and offered its initial pledge of support to the DRV. Second, in the aftermath of the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the U.S. launched a short series of reprisal attacks against the DRV and increased its power projection capabilities in South Vietnam. The Chinese responded by bolstering and redeploying its military forces within China, and began mobilizing its economy and population for possible war. Following the VC attack on Pleiku in February 1965, the U.S. began the Rolling Thunder campaign against the DRV and sent American Marines to South Vietnam for the first time. Following these actions, the PRC leveled harsh and specific threats against further escalation and formalized its military alliance with Hanoi.

Because officials in Washington were able to accurately determine the intentions of the leaders in Beijing, the U.S. modified its strategy. Rolling Thunder operations (which had been held at a constant tempo) were not stepped-up when it became clear that the strength of the southern insurgency had not appreciably diminished. Rather, the U.S. adopted the course of action that posed less of a risk of inducing hostile military balancing: the deployment of a significant number of American ground forces to South Vietnam with the mission of defeating the VC directly.

Although neither the U.S. nor the PRC wanted war in the jungles of Vietnam, the absence of direct conflict was not a preordained outcome. Only through careful design and implementation of the limited war strategy were American strategists able to avoid hostile military balancing. Three approaches offer differing expectations with respect to the likelihood of balancing avoidance. Realism expects an absence of balancing avoidance in this case because the information pertaining to the intentions of the potential balancer were reasonably discernable. Realism anticipates the operation of the strategic design mechanism when sufficient information about the PRC's intentions became evident—in May 1965. Bureaucratic theory, on the other hand, expects balancing avoidance by the PRC. Based on the preferences and doctrines of the two primary services (the Army and Air Force), bureaucratic theory does not predict the operation of the strategic design mechanism. Based on the evidence presented in this chapter, bureaucratic theory is falsified in this case.

Finally, the information structure framework expects the absence of acute balancing by the PRC because of the robust nature of the American information structure. Based on the analysis in Chapter 1, challengers with robust information structures are

expected to benefit from the operation of the strategic design and strategic integration mechanisms. I argued that by the early 1960s, the density of lateral connections among departments and agencies had increased to a significant degree and top policymakers were the recipients of multiple sources of information related to the strategic environment in Southeast Asia. As a result of the strengthening of the NSC system and the employment of the taskforce system in determining foreign-military policy, the problem of information overload inherent to limited wars was dramatically ameliorated. Because the governmental agencies that were responsible for waging distinct aspects of the broader war were incorporated into the taskforce system, moreover, the resulting strategy mirrored the available information pertaining to the intentions of the PRC. Additionally, as a result of the increased capacities of the OSD and CIA to acquire strategic information—along with the existing intelligence capabilities of the State Department—American officials were able to obtain a remarkably accurate understanding of China's present and likely future intentions. Finally, through the institution of the Situation Room, top policymakers were afforded with a tremendous amount of all-source intelligence in their effort to actively manage the war.

With the dependent and independent variables now operationalized, it is possible to evaluate how well the two remaining approaches explain the outcomes observed in this case. In the next chapter, I subject U.S. decision making to process tracing in an effort to uncover the causal processes that produced the well-calibrated American limited war strategy in Vietnam.

Chapter 5 The Vietnam War: Avoiding Acute Balancing

Introduction

The analysis in Chapter 4 demonstrated that the United States was able to avoid the most acute form of balancing in the Vietnam War. Which of the three approaches to balancing avoidance best explains this outcome? Specifically, which of the three approaches accounts for the operation of both the strategic design and strategic integration mechanisms in this case? I have already shown that bureaucratic theory's expectations are not born out in the Vietnam War. What remains to be accomplished is a careful comparison between the expectations of realism and the information structure framework. Toward that end, I subject American strategic decision making to process tracing. My objectives are, first, to determine *when* the strategy for waging limited war was adopted by the U.S. and second, to uncover the primary causal factor that produced that strategy.

Recall that in this case, realism expects the adoption of an accurately calibrated strategy when the potential balancer, China, revealed its intention to the U.S. in a credible fashion. As discussed in Chapter 1, realism places the burden of balancing avoidance, in effect, on the potential balancer itself. Because of its assumptions pertaining to the nature of the state, realism explains balancing avoidance by pointing to the amount and content of information about the potential balancer's intentions available at the level of the international system. Only when the potential balancer reveals its intentions in a credible manner will the challenger be able to design a limited war strategy that accommodates

those intentions. According to James Hershberg and Chen Jian, China's signaling gained credibility and had the greatest impact on leaders in Washington in the spring of 1965, when Beijing issued its four point message warning against aerial attacks on Chinese territory.

The analysis presented in this chapter will show that realism's expectations fare poorly when compared to those of the information structure framework. I argue that realism fails in two ways. First, the United States had designed an accurately calibrated limited war strategy by the end of February 1965, months before China issued its four point message to Washington. Second, American decision makers were able to uncover Chinese intentions, with a remarkable degree of accuracy, prior to the PRC's *decision* to reveal its intentions. In other words, where realism places the onus of balancing avoidance on the potential balancer, this chapter will show that the U.S. was able to determine Beijing's intentions and design an accurately calibrated limited war strategy because of the robust nature of its information structure.

In broad strokes, this chapter argues that 1964 was the year in which the broad contours of the American strategy for waging limited war in Vietnam was developed. The process of strategic design came in three phases. During the first round, which occurred prior to the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the "graduated pressure" strategy emerged and the initial planning for that concept was conducted. To a significant extent, it was the *lack* of solid information pertaining to the intentions of the PRC that caused the U.S. to refrain from implementing this strategy before August 1964. The administration was internally divided about how the PRC would likely respond to an American escalation of the war in light of the on going Sino-Soviet split, and the available information was

insufficient to resolve the debate. While the PRC's response to the Tonkin incident provided the U.S. with significant insight into Chinese intentions, a second schism emerged that dominated the debate over U.S. strategy. Although some in the administration recommended a sharp downgrading of the American commitment to South Vietnam, the key issue in the debate centered on the *degree* to which the United States would escalate the war against the DRV. The third phase occurred following the attack by the attack on Pleiku in South Vietnam in February 1965. Whereas the outlines of the American limited war strategy had been developed by the previous December, many in the administration advocated immediate, substantial, and sustained retaliation against North Vietnam in the post-Pleiku period. Ultimately, no fundamental alteration in strategy occurred, although it was agreed that the air campaign known as "Rolling Thunder" should finally commence. By February 1965, President Johnson was presented with a strategy that was well-calibrated for avoiding hostile military balancing by the Chinese in the Vietnam War.

As the U.S. waged an air war against the DRV, new intelligence emerged that called into question the ability of the U.S. to secure its objective of preserving a non-communist South Vietnam. That intelligence showed that the size and strength of the Viet Cong was far greater than the U.S. government had previously estimated. The impact of this information was significant to the extent that it affected the American perceptions of Hanoi's decision making calculus. In response to the revised estimates of VC strength, and based on information pertaining to Chinese intentions and capabilities, the U.S. refined its strategic course in the war. The new course entailed a leveling of Rolling Thunder operations and the decision to wage a ground offensive in the south.

Significantly, this decision was made *prior* to the reception of the signals sent by China that explicitly warned the U.S. against a dramatic expansion of the air war against the DRV. Although these signals did reinforce the logic of the revised strategy, they were not the cause of that revision. Insofar as these deterrent signals factor prominently in a realist explanation balancing avoidance, the evidence presented lends substantial support to the information structure framework.

January-August 1964: The Emergence of the “Graduated Pressure” Concept

Between January and July 1964, the Johnson administration’s approach to the Vietnam War was circumscribed and cautious. Militarily, the U.S. waged a low-level campaign along the lines of OPLAN 34. Diplomatically, the U.S. worked in vain to increase international support for the American (as opposed to the French) course in Indochina, yet rejected the proposal forwarded by Chiang Kai-shek to employ GMD forces in South Vietnam. In short, the course adopted was framed as offering the maximum amount of pressure on the Communists in the North and South with minimal risks to the United States. Despite the fact that during this period frustration mounted over the progress on both fronts, the U.S. was unwilling to put increasing pressures on the DRV for two inter-related reasons. First, the government in Saigon suffered from persistent weakness. Second, there was a widely-acknowledged lack of understanding on the part of the administration pertaining to the intentions of leaders in Beijing should the

U.S. expand its war effort. Still, the administration was intent on finding a way out of the impasse.³⁸²

In an effort to add greater coherence to U.S. policy toward Vietnam, LBJ ordered the formation of the interdepartmental Vietnam Coordinating Committee under the directorship of William Sullivan.³⁸³ On February 20, Johnson and his top advisers met with the members of the Sullivan Committee, after which LBJ ordered that contingency planning for “pressures against North Vietnam” be stepped up, with the goal of achieving the “maximum credible deterrent effect on Hanoi.”³⁸⁴ On March 19, the committee submitted its report (although earlier drafts were circulated on March 1 and 13)³⁸⁵, which contained the first comprehensive plan for expanding the war in Vietnam, specifically for employing overt force against the DRV.³⁸⁶ The Sullivan Committee suggested several forms of pressure that could be applied against North Vietnam: 1) covert, non-attributable

³⁸² From the beginning, OPLAN 34A was considered the first of a three phase program of putting increasing pressure on the DRV. Few, if any, thought that this first covert phase would have a dramatic effect on Hanoi’s decision calculus. See Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships*, Part II: 1961-1964 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 214; David Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 294; Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 110.

³⁸³ The Vietnam Coordinating Committee was created with the approval of NSAM 280. Its members included: John T. McNaughton, DOD; Maj. Gen. Rollen H. Anthis, JCS; Maj. Gen. Lucius Clay, Jr., USAF; William Colby, CIA; Joseph Mendenhall, DOS; Walter Stoneman, AID; William Jorden, DOS. Michael Forrestal served as the White House liaison to the committee. Gibbons, 234, n. 61.

³⁸⁴ Memorandum for the Record of a Meeting, White House, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #54. While the presidential impetus behind escalation was significant in determining how the Sullivan Committee would approach its policy search, the clearest civilian articulation of the pro-escalation orientation came from Rostow. For an extended discussion of Rostow’s influence in the Sullivan Committee’s work, see See Harold P. Ford, *CIA and the Vietnam Policymakers: Three Episodes, 1962-1968* (Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1998), ch. 2.

³⁸⁵ The March 1 draft contained an initial assessment of the “Rostow Thesis,” the idea that the U.S. should subject the DRV to attacks “on an ascending scale” with the objective of causing the North to curtail its infiltration of men and materiel into South Vietnam, stop its direction of VC activity in the South, and to withdraw its forces back to the DRV. This assessment was pessimistic about the viability of the Rostow Thesis. See Ford, ch. 2.

³⁸⁶ The study’s primary assumption was that the leaders in Hanoi were primarily concerned with the viability of their industrial centers, and moreover, these centers could only be defended against an American attack if the Chinese assumed control over them. The committee assumed further that neither the Soviet Union nor the PRC would be willing to risk their own interests for the sake of North Vietnam.

actions; 2) overt military pressure directed at the VC; and 3) overt military action directed at North Vietnam.³⁸⁷ While recognizing that increased pressures on Hanoi was worthy of an American attempt, the committee urged continued and simultaneous counterinsurgency efforts in the South. The reason for this concerted effort was important: the committee recognized that the DRV did not totally control the VC and that bombing the North alone was not likely to reduce VC activity in the South, nor would it lead to an American victory on the ground. At most, increasing the pressure on Hanoi would lead to a temporary decrease in northern support for the VC, enough to hopefully allow the Government of Vietnam (GVN) to improve and strengthen itself. Furthermore, the committee urged that the U.S. be *prepared* for the possibility of hostile intervention by the PRC, although the committee did not consider the chances of Soviet or Chinese interference likely beyond continued infiltration of equipment and supplies.³⁸⁸

In light of the Sullivan Committee's work, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara requested answers from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to a number of questions pertaining to the capabilities and intentions of the PRC and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV, or North Vietnam), and to the ability of the U.S. to deter and counter possible reactions by the Vietnamese and Chinese Communists. On the question of deterrence, the Chiefs replied that the best way of avoiding a direct conflict with the DRV and PRC was to have the administration make clear to both countries the limited nature of U.S. objectives, alert and deploy U.S. forces in the area, and increase the reconnaissance programs in "pertinent areas." Should either state intervene in South Vietnam, or in any other state in the region, the Chiefs foresaw a troubling scenario: a

³⁸⁷ Gibbons, 235-37.

³⁸⁸ This conclusion echoed that in SNIE 50-64, 12 February 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #42.

non-nuclear attack by the United States had a low probability of arresting communist aggression.³⁸⁹ As such the JCS emphasized that in initiating actions against the DRV, the administration had to be ready to follow through with appropriate contingency plans to effectively counter a possible PRC/DRV intervention in South Vietnam.

In line with previous assessments, the Chiefs did not deem it likely that the PRC would in fact intervene. According to a memo forwarded by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Maxwell Taylor, the Chinese considered Laos and South Vietnam to be the primary problem of the DRV, and not the PRC, thus making unlikely a Chinese deployment of “organized ground units in significant numbers in to the DRV, Laos, or Cambodia except as part of an overall campaign against Southeast Asia.”³⁹⁰

Nevertheless, the JCS expected that the PRC would step up its material support of its southern neighbor. In addition to providing fighter aircraft, anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) units, and volunteers, the Chiefs argued that the U.S. should assume that the PRC would increase its readiness and might even use Chinese aircraft for the defense of Hanoi.

In light of this analysis, and reflecting the preference of senior officers for a more vigorous prosecution of the war,³⁹¹ the Chiefs recommended that the U.S. immediately initiate overt military actions against the DRV in concert with a diplomatic effort aimed at deterring the PRC and preparing the world for the eventual expansion of the war.

Additionally, the Chiefs pressed for the removal of restrictions against American and

³⁸⁹ This pessimism resulted from the JCS’s analysis of the logistical capabilities of the PRC and DRV contained in the report.

³⁹⁰ From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense (McNamara), March 2, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #66.

³⁹¹ For examples of previous proposals, see Gibbons, 209-10; Kaiser, 293; and Edward J. Marolda and Oscar P. Fitzgerald, *The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict, Volume II: From Military Assistance to Combat, 1959-1965* (Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Center, 1986), 337.

South Vietnamese forces from operating against guerrilla forces in North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.³⁹²

Without any positive indications that the government in Saigon was righting itself, and with the recommendations of the Sullivan Committee and JCS clearly pointing in the direction of greater U.S. involvement, Johnson sent McNamara, Taylor, and DCI John A. McCone to South Vietnam with the purpose of drafting a report that would serve as the foundation for future policymaking. The team spent five days abroad and submitted its report on March 17. In essence, the report recommended against taking overt action against North Vietnam in the present, but suggested that plans be drawn up for both quick reaction strikes and for more sustained actions as a part of the application of increasing pressure on Hanoi. Most importantly, the McNamara report recommended that the U.S. be in a position “on 30 days’ notice to initiate the program of ‘Graduated Overt Military Pressure’ against North Vietnam.”³⁹³ There were two primary reasons for forgoing the immediate implementation of the graduated overt military plan. Initially, as Taylor reported in the March 17 NSC meeting, the military plans outlined in the McNamara report “would produce strong reactions in Cambodia and in North Vietnam including, as a final act, asking the Chinese Communists to come to their support. Risk of escalation would be greatest if we undertook the overt military pressure program, and before doing so, we would want to improve the readiness of U.S. naval forces in the Pacific.” Moreover, as McNamara indicated, General Nguyen Khanh felt that the new government in Saigon needed to be strengthened prior to any expansion of hostilities.

³⁹² From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense (McNamara), March 2, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #65.

³⁹³ From the Secretary of Defense (McNamara) to the President, March 16, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, volume 1, #84.

While all of the relevant agencies expressed their concurrence with the Defense Secretary's report, the JCS did register their pessimism concerning the effectiveness of the evolving strategy. In the Chiefs' assessment, only direct action against the DRV was likely to save South Vietnam. In response, Johnson argued that "the McNamara proposals [do] not foreclose action later if the situation did not improve."³⁹⁴ The text of the McNamara report was accepted verbatim as NSAM 288.³⁹⁵ The administration now recognized that the war in Vietnam would eventually move to the realm of overt military actions against Hanoi, in the form of graduated pressure over time, with the intent of altering the decision calculus of the Hanoi regime.³⁹⁶

With the approval of NSAM 288, and in light of the administration's desire to keep the conflict in Vietnam from expanding, McNamara ordered the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and JCS to begin preparing for the implementation of the graduated pressure strategy. On April 17, the JCS approved OPLAN 37-64. This plan envisaged three phases of increasingly hostile actions. In phase I, air and ground strikes would be directed at targets in the south, and pursuit of enemy forces would be permitted into Laos and Cambodia. Phase II would consist of "tit-for-tat" air strikes, airborne/amphibious raids, and aerial mining operations against targets in North Vietnam. Finally, "increasingly severe air strikes and other actions against North Vietnam, going beyond the 'tit-for-tat' concept" would be implemented in phase III. As a crucial part of OPLAN 37-64, the JCS drew up a list of 94 targets in North Vietnam that would be subject to air attack as American pressure mounted on North Vietnam. A primary

³⁹⁴ Record of the 524th Meeting of the National Security Council, March 17, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, volume 1, #86.

³⁹⁵ National Security Action Memorandum No. 288, March 17, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, volume 1, #87.

³⁹⁶ Gibbons, 240.

assumption behind this strategy was that a limited application of force would push Hanoi to the negotiating table from which the U.S. would be able to achieve a favorable diplomatic settlement. The defeat or destruction of the DRV was not seen as a necessary condition to victory, as negotiations would enable the U.S. to achieve the same political goals with the credible threat of more severe military action in the future.³⁹⁷

OPLAN 37-64 was not the Chief's preferred strategy. Rather, the JCS favored hitting the DRV much harder and much faster. When communist forces in Laos initiated a major offensive in May, they pressed their case. The Chiefs called for an immediate intensification of OPLAN 34A and urged the initiation of air strikes against Laos and North Vietnam. Sensing that the situation in Indochina was progressing to a point where the U.S. would be forced to act soon, LBJ ordered that he be provided both military and political plans for action. On May 22, four working groups were formed to provide options for the president—the most important of which was that forwarded by Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs John McNaughton. Predicated on the evolving punishment concept, McNaughton's plan did not contain any deniable intermediate attacks on the North. Rather, the plan involved moving immediately to substantial air strikes that would have to be acknowledged by the United States. Prior to the initiation of these strikes, McNaughton included a provision for sending an intermediary to tell the North Vietnamese leadership that the objectives of the United States were limited; that while the U.S. did not have the destruction of the DRV as an

³⁹⁷ H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies that led to Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 93-94. The Chiefs also revived OPLAN 99-64 which had been drawn up by CINCPAC nearly a year earlier. This OPLAN included overt and more serious U.S. actions, including the large scale bombing of targets in the North, naval blockade or quarantine, and ultimately, the commitment of U.S. and allied ground forces to Laos and North Vietnam. Kaiser, 322-23.

objective, it was nevertheless determined to protect South Vietnam from Northern interference.³⁹⁸

The Executive Committee of the NSC met on May 24-25 to discuss this and the other working groups' proposals. Based on the NSC's recommendation, the president accepted the McNaughton plan. In a memo to Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, the president stated that he had accepted the fact that the U.S. would likely have to engage the North militarily because time was running in the communists' favor.³⁹⁹ Prior to applying pressure against the DRV, the president agreed that the U.S. had to communicate to Hanoi, Beijing, and Moscow the limited nature of its objectives. A "diplomatic offensive" would accompany any military offensive, and on June 18, J. Blair Seaborn traveled to the DRV to impress upon leaders in Hanoi both the seriousness and limits of the American objectives in the war.⁴⁰⁰

During the two month period July-August, the current and future intentions of the PRC were the subject of serious debate among officials in Washington and Saigon. As has been mentioned, the administration heretofore waged a limited and cautious campaign in Vietnam largely out of a concern over how China would react should the U.S. bolster its efforts in the war. Significantly, this concern was ill-defined largely because officials were unsure of precisely how the DRV factored into Chinese security calculations, and how the Sino-Soviet split affected China's willingness to become directly involved in the war. In fact, one of Seaborn's objectives during his trip to Hanoi

³⁹⁸ Gibbons, 253-56.

³⁹⁹ Logevall, 147. For the JCS's revisions to OPLAN 37-64 that occurred in conjunction with the working groups proposed plans for action, see Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 46.

⁴⁰⁰ McMaster, 99. The importance of communicating the limited nature of American aims was expressed in SNIE 50-2-64, "Probable Consequences of Certain US Actions with Respect to Vietnam and Laos," 23 May 1964. DDRS CK3100381901.

was to determine how the split between the two Communist powers impacted the way in which Hanoi approached the war. Some, including Secretary of State Dean Rusk, argued that the Chinese were not about to move against the U.S. militarily if the Soviets refrained from backing them. As the Rusk argued in Saigon, “If the Chinese do not feel they can count on Soviet support, it is highly questionable whether they would want to face our power.”⁴⁰¹ Thus, the extent of the breach in the communist bloc took on great significance: if the split was indeed as wide as the rhetoric coming from the Chinese and Soviets indicated, then the U.S. actually had little to fear should it initiate military pressure against the North Vietnamese.

The effect of the Sino-Soviet split was interpreted in an opposite manner by others, notably by the Board of National Estimates at the CIA. On June 9, the CIA issued a report arguing that because of the general erosion of bipolarity and the emergence of “two warring camps” in the international communist movement, the prospect for conflict at levels lower than nuclear war had increased. With respect to Indochina, the CIA noted that “The USSR, while it has not entirely given up its efforts to retain some influence in Laos and North Vietnam, has evidently decided that its position is too weak to enable it to strive for decisive influence on the mainland; in any case Indo-China is not a good place for the Soviets to challenge Communist China.” Free from Soviet interference, the CIA argued that war between the U.S. and China was distinctly possible, although not because of clash of national interests over the DRV. According to the CIA,

. . . . the situation in most of the underdeveloped world is so disorderly that many situations are likely to develop from which the great powers will have difficulty remaining aloof or which they will have difficulty controlling if they do get

⁴⁰¹ Memorandum of Conversation, U.S. Embassy, Saigon, April 19, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, volume I, #120.

involved. . . . Once outside powers do become involved, whether by accident or design, crises can develop which will engage their prestige to a degree incommensurate with the intrinsic or strategic value of the area itself.

Simply put, the CIA argued that despite the general stability in the broader strategic relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States as a result of mutually assured destruction, the competition between the Chinese and the Soviet Union increased the potential for non-nuclear war involving the United States and China. Rather than specifying the political *contexts* in which war could be fought, the memo described the *process* through which war could emerge. Contra Rusk, even though the Sino-Soviet split precluded Soviet support for China in Vietnam, war between the U.S. and the Chinese remained possible.⁴⁰²

By June 1964, the Johnson administration did not have a clear idea as to how the Chinese would react to the implementation of the graduated pressure strategy that had been evolving throughout the spring and summer. Nevertheless, the conflict in Vietnam was considered by most to be a manifestation of Chinese belligerence. As Gordon Chang writes, “. . . the dominant assumption remained that the Chinese Communists were the vanguard of the most aggressive wing of world communism and had to be stopped. Johnson himself was convinced that if the NLF was not defeated, the world would soon face the prospect of 200,000,000 Chinese soldiers swarming down the trails into Vietnam.”⁴⁰³ Despite the intention that China “had to be stopped,” almost all agreed that war with China had to be avoided. The problem was determining how far the U.S. could press in its efforts to save South Vietnam without bringing the Chinese into the war. At

⁴⁰² CIA, “Trends in the World Situation,” 9 June 1964, 31, 37, 42-43. DDRS: CK3100353425

⁴⁰³ Gordon H. Chang, *Friends and Enemies: the United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1948-1972* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 256.

this point, the fear of Chinese intervention was real, but ill-defined. As a result, the strategic course adopted by the U.S. in this early phase was exceedingly cautious.

The Aftermath of Tonkin: Refining Graduated Pressure

The period immediately following the Gulf of Tonkin incident held the highest probability to date of a direct conflict between the United States and the PRC. In response, the U.S. struck a number of targets in the DRV and bolstered American air power in South Vietnam. The Chinese, in turn, dramatically increased their material commitment to the DRV and began mobilizing for a potential war with the U.S. The CIA carefully monitored the PRC's activity, making clear the dangers inherent to continuing the present course of action against North Vietnam.⁴⁰⁴ During this period, Maxwell Taylor (who had recently been appointed as the U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam) sent a series of memos to Washington from August 9-18 which urged the administration to continue pressuring the North Vietnamese, but not in the form of a dramatic military escalation. Noting that "[t]he best thing that can be said about the present Khanh government is that it has lasted six months and has about a 50-50 chance of lasting out the year," Taylor argued that the most important objective for the U.S. was to do "everything possible to bolster the Khanh government."⁴⁰⁵ At the same time, however, the U.S. should not forgo alternative forms of pressure against the DRV. According to the Ambassador, it was imperative that OPLAN 34A and DeSoto patrols not be curtailed

⁴⁰⁴ For a discussion of the attention given to the Chinese in the immediate post-Tonkin period, see Robert D. Schulzinger, "The Johnson Administration, China, and the Vietnam War," in *Re-examining the Cold War: U.S.-China Diplomacy, 1954-1973*, Robert S. Ross and Jiang Changbin, eds., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 242.

⁴⁰⁵ Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State, August 9, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #305; Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State, August 10, 1964, *Ibid.*, #306.

because such a move would be seen as a “retreat in the face [of the] deployment of MIGs to [the] DRV” by Beijing, Hanoi, and Saigon.⁴⁰⁶ In the final analysis, Taylor recommended that in the present, the U.S. should seek to strengthen the Khanh government politically and militarily, while being prepared “to implement contingency plans against North Vietnam with optimum readiness by January 1, 1965.”⁴⁰⁷

In response to Taylor’s memoranda, the State Department’s William Bundy circulated the most important memo during this period, entitled “Next Courses of Action in Southeast Asia.” Echoing a number of points made by Taylor, Bundy urged that for the next 10 days to two weeks, the U.S. initiate a holding phase intended to prevent any further escalation by the Communists. The solution to the problem in South Vietnam (and in Laos as well), Bundy wrote, “will require a combination of military pressure and some form of communication under which Hanoi (and Peiping) eventually accept the idea of getting out.” Only after “a clear pattern of pressure hurting the DRV and leaving no doubts in South Vietnam of our resolve” should the U.S. consider negotiations aimed at resolving the Vietnam conflict.⁴⁰⁸

As to the nature and timing of future actions, Bundy specified two categories of military operations: “limited pressures” and “more serious pressures.” Limited pressures included: the overt recognition and justification by the Saigon government of 34A operations, the reintroduction of American DeSoto patrols, the initiation of cross-border

⁴⁰⁶ Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State, August 11, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #310. See also, McMaster, 139.

⁴⁰⁷ *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #306; Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State, August 18, 1964, *Ibid.*, #319.

⁴⁰⁸ From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the President, August 13, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #313. The communication to which Bundy referred included the second Seaborn mission to Hanoi on August 10. See guidance memo from the DOS to the Embassy in Canada, August 8, 1964 in *Ibid.*, #304, and Logevall, 208-210.

operations into the Laotian panhandle on a limited scale, and the initiation of “specific tit-for-tat actions of opportunity” in response to “any special VC or DRV activity.” Accepting Taylor’s proposed timeframe of January 1 before moving beyond this scale of activity, Bundy noted that none of these actions would entail pressure strong enough to “change Hanoi’s basic actions.” In terms of more serious pressures, Bundy argued that barring a serious deterioration of the situation in the south, “systematic military actions against the DRV might start by progressive attacks keyed to the rationale of infiltration routes and facilities, followed by other selected military related targets.”⁴⁰⁹

The impact of Bundy’s “Next Courses” memo was significant. As McNamara later noted, the memo was “the focus of our attention” until January 1965.⁴¹⁰

By mid-September, the administration had reached a consensus on three key issues:⁴¹¹ first, the United States would eventually have to initiate overt military action against the DRV in order to convince the leaders in Hanoi to quit supporting the insurgency in the South; second, that in the present, the Khanh government was too weak for such operations to begin in the near future; and third, that any escalation of the conflict ran the risk of provoking the Chinese into intervening in the war (although by early September, it had become clear that the Chinese were willing to let tensions

⁴⁰⁹ *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #313.

⁴¹⁰ Quoted in Logevall, 218.

⁴¹¹ From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the President, September 8, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #342. The consensus to which McGeorge Bundy refers in this memo is important. According to the *FRUS* editors, meeting took place on September 7 and 8, and included Rusk, McNamara, McGeorge and William Bundy, Manning, Taylor, and Wheeler. McCone was present at the second meeting. The consensus “Courses of Action” memo was drafted by William Bundy after McNaughton submitted a similar memo, “Plan for Action in South Vietnam.” In that memo, McNaughton recommended different types of military actions that could be taken which would provoke a military response by the DRV. Included were, “mining of harbors. . . air strikes against North Vietnam moving from southern to northern targets, from targets associated with infiltration. . . to targets of military then industrial importance. . . . *The possibility that such actions would escalate further, perhaps bringing China into the war, would have to be faced.*” Quoted in Daniel Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers* (New York: Viking, 2002), 54.

decrease after their surge in military support to the DRV).⁴¹² This third conclusion was expressed by DCI McCone in a White House meeting on September 9. According to McCone, “a sustained air attack at present would be dangerous because of the weakness of the GVN. Such an attack might also trigger major increases in Chinese Communist participation.” Moreover, in response to a statement by Rusk indicating that the Sino-Soviet split would induce “inhibitions upon adventures by Peking and Hanoi in Southeast Asia,” McCone argued that it was likely that the PRC and DRV “believed that they were doing very well and that they were not having second thoughts about their basic policy.” The meeting concluded with the president endorsing the recommendations of the “Courses of Action” memo and the holding pattern recommended first by Taylor, and seconded by William Bundy and McNaughton.⁴¹³ On September 10, these decisions were translated into NSAM 314.⁴¹⁴

The “consensus” reported to LBJ by McGeorge Bundy in a memo on September 8 notwithstanding, the Joint Chiefs of Staff retained serious reservations about the American strategy in Vietnam. From mid-August to mid-September, the Chiefs expressed two primary objections to that strategy. Initially, the Chiefs (primarily Chief of Staff of the Air Force General Curtis LeMay and Commandant of the Marine Corps General Wallace Greene) rejected the idea that the U.S. should delay any attack on North Vietnam. As the Chairman of the JCS General Earl Wheeler noted, “these two officers now felt that the situation would continue to deteriorate unless such drastic action [i.e.,

⁴¹² Conclusion reached in the weekly report, CIA, “The Situation in South Vietnam,” 20 August 1964, 18. DDRS CK3100390402.

⁴¹³ Memorandum of a Meeting, White House, September 9, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #343. This meeting was attended by LBJ, Rusk, McNamara, McCone, Wheeler, Taylor, William Bundy, McNaughton, Robert Manning, and McGeorge Bundy.

⁴¹⁴ National Security Action Memorandum No. 314, September 10, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #345.

sustained bombing of targets in the DRV] was taken now.”⁴¹⁵ Second, and more importantly, all of the Chiefs objected to the notion propounded by Walt W. Rostow (and adopted by William Bundy) that the key to victory was to be found in altering Hanoi’s interest to continue supporting the VC in the South by a controlled bombing program of the North. As General Wheeler reported on August 14 in a memo to McNamara,

the Joint Chiefs of Staff are in general accord with the policy and courses of action contained in the paper [Bundy’s “Next Courses of Action”] provided that more serious pressures. . . be implemented as necessary along with the limited pressures. . . . This will provide for military courses of action, to include attack of targets in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), as necessary, *with the objective of destroying the DRV will and capabilities* to continue support of insurgent forces in Laos and the Republic of Vietnam.⁴¹⁶

In line with the extant air power doctrine of the Air Force, the Chiefs’ objective was denying the enemy the ability to continue support through strategic bombing, rather than punishment with the intention of altering its cost/benefit calculation.⁴¹⁷

In an effort to reconcile the emerging strategy with the Chiefs’ objections, a political-military war game was conducted from September 7-18, called SIGMA II-64.⁴¹⁸ The objectives of SIGMA II were to first, test the notion that graduated military pressures would induce the DRV to cease supporting the insurgency in the south, and second, to predict the likely changes of the PRC’s strategy in the Vietnam conflict (i.e., to determine the most plausible strategy should the war intensify).⁴¹⁹ SIGMA II took place over the

⁴¹⁵ *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #343.

⁴¹⁶ From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense (McNamara), August 14, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #316, emphasis added.

⁴¹⁷ On the differences between punishment and denial, see Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

⁴¹⁸ According to McMaster, the senior participants of the game were: McGeorge and William Bundy, McCone, McNaughton, Vance, and the JCS. McNamara, Rusk, Ball and Rostow either participated as observers and/or were briefed on the outcomes of the game. McMaster, 156.

⁴¹⁹ According to the Final Report, the “overall game approach focused on [the] development of a credible Red Chinese strategy for overt aggression within their economic/logistic constraints while concurrently

nine day period, with players meeting frequently from 4-5 hours per day; a significant commitment of time given that the senior participants were managing the actual crisis in Indochina simultaneously. The time commitment alone is an indication of the seriousness with which the players approached the exercise.⁴²⁰ Following the game, the players met to critique each others' performance during play, and to draw broader lessons that could be learned and applied to the actual crisis unfolding. Finally, because the participants in the game came from the military and civilian offices in the Pentagon (OSD), the State Department, and the intelligence community, the views and experiences of the players represented the range of institutions that had a role in determining and implementing policy in Vietnam.⁴²¹

One of the most important findings of SIGMA II concerned the signaling process employed by both the blue and red teams as the war progressed.⁴²² Both sides attempted to demonstrate to the other that further moves were futile, given what each though was a clear demonstration of its total commitment to achieving their respective objectives. The result, however, was a continued spiral of hostility, leading to a level of war fighting that

examining future US military planning.” Joint War Games Agency, JCS, “Final Report: SIGMA II-64,” 5 October 1964, B-1, D-4, D-10. DDRS CK3100220846. See also McMaster, 156; Schulzinger, 243.

⁴²⁰ This conclusion runs counter to William Bundy's assessment of the significance of SIGMA II. According to Bundy, “Essentially we must have thought that the men who ran the game (civilians from outside government. . .) were too harsh in their judgments of how the two Vietnams would respond. . . I suppose the effect may have been greatest among those who had the time to immerse themselves in it; yet I cannot recall that any of the relevant staff members ever invoked the outcome in later discussions. Perhaps this reflects one of the most basic elements in this whole story—how much of planning and policy review came in the middle of days already full, and without the chance to stop and reflect.” Quoted in Gibbons, 354. This is a curious assessment, given that Bundy himself referenced SIGMA II in an October 19 memo circulated to Rusk, McNamara, Ball, and McGeorge Bundy critiquing Ball's October 5 “devil's advocate” memo. Moreover, the majority of the senior policy makers were either observers or were briefed on the outcome.

⁴²¹ According to the report, this range of institutional perspective allowed for “. . . a further expected benefit [of SIGMA II]. . . the exchange of ideas between individuals and agencies during preparation and play.” JCS, “Final Report,” B-6-10, D-10, and Tab G.

⁴²² The red team consisted of both the PRC and DRV, except for the highest policy makers which were the control team; the blue team consisted of the U.S. and South Vietnam, except for the highest policy makers which, again, were the control team.

neither side sought. According to one participant's commentary explaining this process, "You're there, you're committed. Your honor is at stake, now you've got to do something." In the game, that "something" turned out to be an American deployment of ten-plus divisions of ground forces in Southeast Asia, and the active consideration of an amphibious invasion of North Vietnam.⁴²³ The implication of this dual failure at signaling was that to avoid a spiral of hostilities, it would be necessary to reach an understanding with the PRC that neither the destruction of the DRV nor an attack on the PRC was in the interest of the United States; an undertaking made more difficult by the concurrent necessity of signaling resolve.

Based on the game's outcome, the players concluded that when faced with bombing of North Vietnam, aerial mining of DRV ports, and the introduction of a relatively modest strength of U.S. forces in South Vietnam (six-plus divisions), the PRC would have no *need* for direct confrontation with the U.S. This conclusion was reached even after the "control team" (i.e., Mao) prodded the military to plan and prepare for a ground intervention into Burma, Laos, and Vietnam. The lack of a need to intervene directly in the war and confront U.S. forces was predicated on the lack of stability of the Saigon regime and the general strategy of having South Vietnam cave in under the feet of the Americans. Not only was this the lowest cost strategy, but it also enabled the red team to achieve its objective of ensuring that mainland China was not directly attacked by the U.S.⁴²⁴ However, a massive deployment of the PLA against U.S. forces *was*

⁴²³ JCS, "Final Report," G-8, D-15. See also McMaster, 157, n. 7.

⁴²⁴ JCS, "Final Report," D-12.

considered to be likely if the U.S. bombed China directly, if the U.S. invaded the North, or if the government of the DRV appeared to be at the point of collapse.⁴²⁵

The impact that SIGMA II had on the evolution of the U.S. commitment to Vietnam was significant in two respects. First, while many have lamented the fact that SIGMA II was prophetic and that the Johnson administration failed to heed its warnings, the game actually enabled war planners to understand the *process* by which a direct confrontation with the PRC would come about—even when both sides wished to avoid that confrontation. Given that the perceived stakes of “losing South Vietnam” were seen to be significant, cutting a running at this stage was not desirable for the administration. Yet, neither was a war with the PRC. Thus, by playing this game, participants and planners were able to get a much better sense of how the PRC would likely respond to future American escalation, and allowed the administration to better refine its strategy of graduated pressure in ways that avoided a conflict spiral with the Chinese. This conclusion, it should be noted, was reached seven months prior to the issuance by the PRC of its four point deterrence warnings against substantial escalation in the air war over North Vietnam.

Second, the structure of SIGMA II, specifically the interagency nature of the game, allowed for the military and more importantly, the civilians from different agencies, the opportunity to discuss future war plans and assess their likely implications *prior* to their actual implementation. The working groups that were formed in November 1964 included many of the same participants of the SIGMA II exercise. Such intense familiarity with the way individuals from other agencies conceived of the problems

⁴²⁵ Ibid., D-16. See also Schulzinger, 245.

attendant to the Vietnam conflict enabled a more thorough planning process to result; one that integrated all aspects of limited war fighting, and one that was dedicated to preventing Chinese intervention in the war.⁴²⁶ In short, SIGMA II was the product of a robust American information structure.

Shortly after the conclusion of the SIGMA II exercise, Walt Rostow sent a memo to Secretary of State Rusk that reflected a number of these “lessons learned.”⁴²⁷ While recognizing that the U.S. would in all likelihood escalate the war through further attacks on North Vietnam, Rostow cautioned that a critical signal be sent: that the U.S. was prepared to take serious military action against the DRV if it continued to support the war in the South, but that the objective of the U.S. was *not* the destruction of the DRV. At the same time, it should be made clear to Beijing that the U.S. was prepared to “deal with any degree of escalation they [the PRC] may mount.” In short, Rostow recommended that American escalation should serve the dual purpose of assuring and deterring the Chinese.

On October 31, the Viet Cong launched a massive attack on the Bien Hoa airfield in South Vietnam.⁴²⁸ Although top policymakers in Washington rejected proposals to respond in kind against the DRV because of a deep seated concern that such a course

⁴²⁶ A further indication of the significance of SIGMA II is that senior participants referred to the exercise either in retrospect, or in memoranda drafted after the game. See for example, McNamara’s use of the game to assess the likely affects of bombing the 94 targets list in McNamara, Robert S. McNamara with Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Times Books, 1995), 153. George Ball references SIGMA II in his famous October 5 memo, as does William Bundy in his response to Ball. See George W. Ball, “Top Secret: The Prophecy the President Rejected,” *The Atlantic*, 230, 1 (July 1972), 39; and Kaiser 352.

⁴²⁷ From the Chairman of the Policy Planning Council (Rostow) to the Secretary of State, September 19, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #357.

⁴²⁸ This mortar attack killed four U.S. servicemen and wounded 30 others. In addition, 27 aircraft were either destroyed or severely damaged. In Taylor’s estimation, the attack “demonstrated a new tactic, the employment of surprise attack my massed mortar fire, with such success that the U.S. B-57 capability in this country was knocked out in about 15 minutes.” From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State, November 2, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #398.

would trigger North Vietnamese and Chinese air and ground retaliation,⁴²⁹ this event convinced the administration that planning for the war's escalation had to begin in earnest. Toward that end, LBJ ordered the creation of a working group headed by William Bundy that would systematically review the administration's Vietnam policy and draft a complete strategy for taking the war to the North. The importance of the working group's deliberations and policy recommendations are significant for three primary reasons. First, the working group was structured so that all of the relevant agencies and top policy makers had influence on the policy that was ultimately put forward. Second, the single recommendation that was eventually produced in early December was in fact the strategy that was applied beginning in February 1965. Finally, throughout November, close attention was paid to the most up to date intelligence available concerning the probability of Chinese intervention at different levels of American actions against the DRV. Put simply, the graduated pressure strategy that was put before LBJ was the product of the robust American information structure.

Despite the fact that information pertaining to Chinese intentions and capabilities was incomplete and was the subject of intense debate, two assumptions concerning the likelihood of Chinese intervention were commonly held: 1) the risk of PRC intervention grew substantially as the U.S. approached the extreme levels of the working group's proposed military actions, and 2) the *process* of imposing increasing pressures on the DRV could itself generate pressure on the Chinese to intervene. These two assumptions were supported by the available intelligence and were confirmed by the results of the SIGMA II war game. In the end, the single recommendation proffered by the working

⁴²⁹ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Wheeler) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (Sharp), November 1, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #395.

group provided senior policy makers with sufficient flexibility to implement a coherent policy in the Vietnam War that, given the existing structural constraints, balanced the probability of Chinese intervention with the perceived need to coerce Hanoi into ceasing its support of the VC in the South.

The November working group was structured in a manner that enabled all of the affected agencies involved in the war to have some influence in the process of strategic development. The outline produced by William Bundy that directed the group's focus contained nine topics, the first three of which are the most important. Section I, the intelligence section, was prepared by the joint CIA/DIA/INR intelligence committee. Section II, "U.S. Objectives and Stakes in South Vietnam", and Section III, "Southeast Asia and the Broad Options," were prepared by William Bundy, who worked closely with John McNaughton and who was assisted by the CIA and JCS.⁴³⁰ In total, position papers were received from the OSD/ISA, JSC, Joint Staff, the combined intelligence committee, the Ambassador in South Vietnam, the Policy Planning Staff, in addition to those papers written by Bundy himself.

During August and September, the PRC took a number of steps that increased its conventional preparedness for war with the United States. Yet, China's conventional capabilities were not all that worried American officials. With the explosion of its first nuclear device in mid-October, China appeared to be on the cusp of obtaining an effective check to any American plans that would include expanding the war beyond South Vietnam. Moreover, the administration foresaw greater Chinese confidence and

⁴³⁰ According to the editors of the FRUS volumes, "the group comprised officers at the Assistant Secretary level including Vice Admiral Lloyd M. Mustin, Senior Operations Officer of the JCS; Harold Ford, Senior China-Asia Officer at CIA. . . ." *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #403.

belligerence in the future stemming from the acquisition of nuclear weapons.⁴³¹

Although the administration had rejected an early preventive strike on China's burgeoning nuclear capability, DCI McCone noted on September 15 that should the U.S. find itself in a conventional war with China, an attack on its nuclear facilities might also be necessary. On November 2, McNamara met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and raised the issue of Chinese nuclear capabilities as they pertained to war plans against the DRV. Both the Secretary of Defense and the JCS were in accord that after the 94 targets were destroyed in the North, an attack on Chinese nuclear facilities would in all probability follow.⁴³² In short, for the Pentagon, any significant escalation of the war against North Vietnam would likely entail an attack on China. As will be discussed below, this was precisely the desired strategy that the senior military commanders recommended throughout November.

The likelihood of Chinese intervention, and the American use of nuclear weapons against advancing PLA forces and nuclear facilities on Chinese territory, was not welcomed by Under Secretary of State George Ball. On October 5, Ball submitted one of the most famous documents of the entire period, in which he argued that escalation of the war to North Vietnam would result in a disaster for the U.S. Ball noted that the results of SIGMA II clearly demonstrated that the destruction of all 94 of the Chief's targets would not "cripple Hanoi's capability for increasing support for the Viet Cong." Far more likely was a DRV intervention of "roughly 60,000 men" into South Vietnam, and an increase in the likelihood of Chinese intervention as well. In order to check this

⁴³¹ An example of this concern is found in an OSD/ISA memo, "China as a Nuclear Power (Some Thoughts Prior to the Chinese Test)," 7 October 1964, DNSA: CH00020.

⁴³² Kaiser, 354.

contingency, Ball predicted that the U.S. would have to employ both ground troops and nuclear weapons against the advancing enemy. The result of this spiral of hostilities would have horrific repercussions for the U.S. that far outweighed the value of preserving South Vietnam. Ball recommended that the U.S., in effect, look for ways out of the mounting quagmire that he saw Vietnam to be through means that would lead to a neutralization of at least Vietnam, if not Southeast Asia as a whole. Although Ball's memo did not make its way to the president's desk until later in 1965, it was circulated among Rusk, McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, as well as widely in the State Department.⁴³³

As the November working group began its deliberations, it became apparent that the administration was divided as to how to proceed in Vietnam given the conventionally mobilized and fledgling nuclear power to the north of the DRV. On the one hand, the military clearly favored maintaining the option of employing nuclear weapons against the enemy should the situation require it. On the other hand, a powerful argument had been circulated that favored substantially decreasing American objectives in Vietnam in order to avoid that very contingency. At the outset, it was Ball's position that had the greater effect on the unfolding strategy. Ball's analysis on the stakes for the U.S. in Vietnam, coupled with the bleak picture in South Vietnam painted by the intelligence committee, led William Bundy to argue in his initial draft of Section II that the only way that the U.S. could achieve its objectives in Vietnam was by "committing ourselves to whatever degree of military action would be required to defeat North Vietnam and probably Communist China militarily." Such a commitment, however, would result in a ground war and would

⁴³³ Ibid., 351.

possibly require the use of nuclear weapons. With these consequences in mind, Bundy went on to question the whole notion upon which the U.S. commitment to Vietnam was based: he substantially discounted the international political fallout that would result from the loss of South Vietnam.⁴³⁴

The initial drafts of Section III, "Southeast Asia and the Broad Options" detailed three general options that the U.S. could adopt at this point. Option A, written by Michael Forrestal⁴³⁵, argued for maintaining the status quo. Option B, written by McNaughton and Bundy (but with the JCS reserving the right to make suggestions), called for "Present policies plus a systematic program of military pressures against the north, meshing at some point with negotiation, but with pressure actions to be continued until we achieve our central present objectives." Finally, option C, drafted by Bundy, argued for "Present policies plus additional forceful measures and military moves, followed by negotiations in which we would seek to maintain a believable threat of still further military pressures but would not actually carry out such pressures to any marked degree during the negotiations."⁴³⁶

Because option A held very little chance for securing American objectives, it received little attention after it was submitted.⁴³⁷ From mid-November on, the attention of the administration was squarely on Options B and C. The initial draft of option B called for an immediate and hard military response against the North, and included the deployment of Marines to Da Nang to protect the U.S. base against a counteroffensive.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 356-57.

⁴³⁵ Michael Forrestal was now Rusk's special assistant for Southeast Asia.

⁴³⁶ *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #403; Kaiser 357-58.

⁴³⁷ Although on November 9 and 11, Taylor sent a cable to Washington urging a prompt attack on infiltration routes into the South and on some targets in the DRV. The purpose of these strikes would be to give some life to the government in Saigon, and allowing for the punishment of the DRV prior to any settlement. In telegraphing early negotiations, this proposal meshed well with option A. Kaiser, 359.

Given that the potential for Chinese intervention was deemed to be the highest under option B, Bundy and McNaughton recommended that the U.S. be prepared to attack the PRC's air bases, nuclear production facilities, and other military targets. Further, because McNaughton recognized that the chances for a substantial DRV move southward would likely result with such a strong American response, option B called for both air and naval strikes against the North, a naval blockade, and "an early ground attack northward to seize, liberate and occupy North Vietnam." Should the Chinese counterattack, the U.S. would immediately go to a full-scale war footing against China. According to Bundy, option B held both the highest probability of achieving U.S. objectives, and of an expanded conflict.⁴³⁸

Bundy's option C sought a gradual and limited application of force against the North in the hopes of securing peace through negotiation. Initially, the U.S. would initiate limited air attacks against infiltration routes in Laos and North Vietnam, and would deploy ground forces to the northern portion of South Vietnam with the intent of deterring a potential DRV invasion. Should these actions fail to produce DRV capitulation, Bundy recommended bombing additional targets from the list of 94, mining Northern ports, and establishing a naval quarantine. Ultimately, option C "seemed to aim at saving American face by making a show of force but avoiding a long-term commitment even if Washington had to abandon its main objectives."⁴³⁹

On November 10 and 14, the military offered its responses to these proposals. Initially, the Joint Staff offered a biting critique of Bundy's draft of Section II. Simply put, the Joint Staff argued that the U.S. was permanently committed to the defense of

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 357-58.

⁴³⁹ Ibid 359.

South Vietnam, and that South Vietnam was just as an important symbol as Berlin was (and that militarily, it was more important).⁴⁴⁰ The Chiefs urged a major deployment of troops to South Vietnam, attacks on Phuc Yen and POL storage facilities near Hanoi, and then a prompt follow through with attacks on all 94 targets as well as infiltration targets. In an apparent belief that U.S. nuclear power would deter intervention the Chiefs argued that “DRV and CHICOMs would be unlikely to expand the conflict,” although they did note that existing military plans would permit the U.S. to meet any move made by the opposing side.⁴⁴¹

A final preliminary position paper was submitted on 16 November by the joint intelligence committee titled, “Probable Communist Reactions to U.S. Options B and C.” This comparative assessment is remarkable for two primary reasons. First, the joint intelligence committee attempted to clearly specify the conditions under which the DRV and PRC were most likely to intervene in the war against the U.S. Second, this document demonstrates a split within the intelligence community concerning the level of hostility by the U.S. that would induce intervention by the PRC. With respect to option C, the intelligence memo noted that the probability of communist intervention would substantially increase as the tempo and severity of American military actions increased. Regarding the initial, limited U.S. actions, the committee stated that the “most likely DRV course would be to hold firm,” although, “Hanoi would certainly appeal for additional Chinese Communist defensive assistance—radar, anti-aircraft artillery, combat aircraft, patrol craft, and technical personnel—which Peiping would probably supply.” As the U.S. imposed “higher-scale” military punishment on Hanoi, the North’s reactions

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid, 359-60.

⁴⁴¹ The recommendations are detailed in FRUS, #395, volume 1.

“would probably be essentially defensive in character. . . . The DRV would probably not attempt any overt invasion of Laos or South Vietnam, although they might re-deploy some units to Southern North Vietnam.” As to likely Chinese reactions at this level, the committee argued,

Extreme Chinese Communist reaction would be possible at this juncture, though unlikely. Peiping would probably make its threats of intervention stronger and more specific. If it had not already done so, it would almost certainly deploy large forces to areas near Vietnam and Laos. Peiping might commit units of its air force to defensive action over North Vietnam at this point, but in view of the magnitude of US air and naval superiority we doubt that Peiping would do so. However, Peiping could probably introduce limited numbers of Chinese Communist ground forces as “volunteers,” both to prepare for further escalation and to make clear Peiping’s commitment to assist the North Vietnamese.⁴⁴²

At the upper reaches of option C, which included “attacks on some or all of the 94-List targets, and amphibious or airborne operations to seize coastal lodgments in the DRV,” the possibility of Chinese involvement in the war was considered to be unlikely, “unless they felt it was necessary in order to prevent destruction of the Communist regime in North Vietnam.” The committee reasoned that that “there would not be high risk of the introduction of large-scale Chinese ground force combat units unless major U.S./GVN ground units had moved to occupy areas of the DRV or Communist-held territory in northern Laos, or, possibly, the Chinese had committed their air and had subsequently suffered attacks on CCAF bases in China.” All of this presupposed that the Chinese were acting rationally and were conducting strategic calculations in the way that the U.S. thought they should. “Nevertheless, there is always a chance that Peiping might so intervene either for reasons that seem irrational to us or because it miscalculated the

⁴⁴² Significantly, the INR dissented from the position that the PRC would be unlikely to commit air force units to the defense of the DRV. The DIA, in turn, rejected the notion that the PRC would likely introduce volunteers at this level of activity. NSC Working Group on Vietnam, CIA-DIA-INR Panel, “Probable Communist Reactions to US Options B and C,” 16 November 1964, 3-5. DDRS CK3100080649

objectives of U.S. moves in the area. Communist China's capability for conducting a ground war in adjacent areas of southeast Asia is formidable."⁴⁴³

Finally, in considering the likely reaction by the DRV and PRC to option B, the committee noted that "the risks of a U.S.-DRV war and of U.S.-Chinese Communist hostilities would be considerable, perhaps greater than in the case of the highest-level option C measures above." Nevertheless, the committee stated that they were inclined "to view that DRV and Chinese Communist leaders would shrink from extreme responses, and, therefore, that their reactions. . . . would tend to be similar to those described for the highest-level Option C measures." On this point, INR disagreed noting, "the Chinese Communists would be more likely to send 'volunteer' divisions in some strength into North Vietnam as a warning against further U.S. action, as a political weapon in any future negotiations, and as a means of backing up North Vietnamese forces for action in the South and against U.S. landings in the North. INR believes that, while reluctant to engage U.S. forces directly, the Chinese Communists are probably prepared to take the risk involved in the above course of action."⁴⁴⁴

By November 18, the initial round of intelligence analysis and policy proposals had been drafted and debated at the sub-cabinet level. Over the next two days, the various positions were considered by the president and his senior advisors. After William Bundy's briefing to the president on the 19th concerning the progress that had been made on scenarios A, B, and C, the principals showed a clear preference for a continued focus

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 6-7.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 2, 8.

on B and C.⁴⁴⁵ In light of the preferences of top policymakers, and based on the comments received from the JCS and Joint Staff, McNaughton and William Bundy took to reformulating options B and C.

On November 21, Bundy issued a redraft of his proposals concerning the broad options available to the U.S. which suggested a preference for option C. Although he did attempt to make B appear more appealing, Bundy added a key section that greatly concerned the JCS. In addition to downplaying the possibility of a ground retaliation by the DRV in response to massive systematic American attacks from the air, Bundy noted that prior to a decision to invade North Vietnam, the U.S. should consider lessening its objectives based on “the volume of international noise and desire for a peaceful settlement.” On option C, Bundy suggested first that the U.S. should begin with retaliation and anti-infiltration strikes, coupled with secret communications with Hanoi and Beijing. Should the DRV fail to modify its position, the U.S. would then move to attacking targets from the list of 94, aerial mining, and a naval quarantine. Most troubling for military officials was Bundy’s suggestion that, as a means of enabling it to extricate itself from the conflict, the U.S. should be willing to settle for less than what had long been the U.S.’s stated objectives. As historian David Kaiser notes, although Bundy “avoided deciding in advance whether to risk full-scale war with China by escalating the war into North Vietnam if option C failed to secure a favorable settlement, his relatively calm estimate of the consequences of losing South Vietnam, combined with his references to the serious international consequences of escalation, reinforced his

⁴⁴⁵ Memorandum for the Record of a Meeting, White House, November 19, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #417.

suggestion that the United States would have to settle for less than its preferred terms instead.”⁴⁴⁶

On November 23, the JCS issued a full-scale critique of Bundy’s proposals which began with a rejection of the idea that the U.S. settle for anything less than what was entailed in NSAM 288. According to the Chiefs, Bundy’s reworked option C failed to indicate the extent to which the U.S. would go if the DRV failed to respond to American pressures at higher levels, nor did it clearly specify the terms that the U.S. would seek in negotiations with Hanoi. In response, the Chief’s proposed option C’: graduated military pressures that would include “an advance decision to continue military pressure, if necessary, to the full limits of what military actions can contribute toward US national objectives.” Although C and C’ entailed similar military actions, two significant differences emerged in the Chiefs memo. First, under C’, the pace of the pressure applied on the DRV would be much faster than under C. Second, and far more importantly, the Chiefs were demanding that a decision be made a priori for the use of nuclear weapons should Hanoi refuse to capitulate.⁴⁴⁷ Additionally, the Chiefs rejected Bundy’s option B and proposed “a controlled program of intense military pressures against the DRV, swiftly, yet deliberately applied, designed to have a major military and psychological impact from the outset. . . [and] carried through, if necessary, to the full limits of what military actions can contribute toward US national objectives. . . .” Because option C’ failed to “eliminate DRV air and DRV facilities available to CHICOM air at the outset,” the Chiefs reasoned that their option B stood the best chance of achieving U.S. objectives

⁴⁴⁶ Kaiser, 365-66. Bundy’s November 21 redraft can be found in Paper Prepared by the National Security Council Working Group, November 21, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #418.

⁴⁴⁷ The desire for an explicit acknowledgement of the use of nukes by the Joint Chiefs was consonant with the Air Force’s extant doctrine on waging both limited and general wars. See Clodfelter, 26-37.

while diminishing the likelihood of Chinese intervention.⁴⁴⁸ Thus, while they were willing to go with option C', their option B was the preferred choice.

On the 23rd, the intelligence committee drafted a memo assessing the specific recommendations of the Chiefs' plans under options C/C' and B. Because the details of the conventional military plans did not differ substantially under C and C', the intelligence committee combined the two proposals together in their analysis. Of particular importance was the conclusion, contrary to the Chiefs' belief, that option B stood the highest chance of inducing DRV and PRC intervention—and at a faster rate—than the alternatives. At the outset of C and C', the intelligence committee did not consider it likely that extreme reactions by either the PRC or the DRV would be likely. At most, Hanoi would likely assume a defensive posture on its own territory, while both “Hanoi and Peiping would increase their threats to counterattacks and both would probably undertake force deployments designed to add to the credibility of these threats.” As the U.S. imposed increasing pressure on the DRV, however, the DRV was expected to employ “all available air defense, including aircraft, in defense of DRV territory. . . [and] harass naval blockade vessels,” while the PRC “would probably make its threats of intervention stronger and more specific.” The committee did consider it

. . . possible that Chinese Communist air units, under the guise of “volunteers,” would at this point be introduced into North Vietnam, for use from North Vietnamese airfields. It is also possible that Peiping would commit units of its air force based in China to defensive action over North Vietnam at this point, but in view of the magnitude of US air and naval superiority we doubt that Peiping would do so. There is a fair chance, however, that Peiping would introduce limited numbers of Chinese Communist ground forces as “volunteers,” both to prepare for further escalation and to make clear Peiping's commitment to assist the North Vietnamese.

⁴⁴⁸ JCSM-982-64, “Courses of Action in Southeast Asia,” 23 November 1964, 2-5, 7-11. DDRS CK3100134323

On this point, the INR registered a partial dissent, stating that as the U.S. took more drastic measures north of the 19th parallel in North Vietnam, the Chinese were likely begin employing its air power from bases in the PRC.⁴⁴⁹

As the U.S. began implementing its most aggressive measures against the DRV, the intelligence committee considered it likely that the Chinese would intervene, but only under specific conditions. In the main, the committee believed that the Chinese would be reluctant to intervene in the conflict out of the fear that this would induce the U.S. to begin attacking bases in China. Although the introduction of “large-scale Chinese ground combat units into Vietnam” was deemed unlikely, the committee argued that at this phase, “Chinese Communist aircraft operating from Chinese bases would probably assist in defending North Vietnam against the US attacks.”⁴⁵⁰ In the final conventional phase, “amphibious/airborne operations to establish lodgment on one or more coastal areas in the littoral of the DRV,”⁴⁵¹ the committee’s tenor was pessimistic, noting that “the risk of introduction of large-scale Chinese Communist ground combat units into Vietnam would materially increase. These risks would be similarly increased if the Chinese had committed their air forces from Chinese bases, and had subsequently suffered US attacks on these bases.”⁴⁵² Finally, to the extent that option B called for a quick and severe imposition of American military power against the DRV, the committee considered the “risks of further escalation in Southeast Asia would be considerable.” In

⁴⁴⁹ NSC Working Group on Vietnam, CIA-DIA-INR Panel, “Probable Communist Reactions to Option C or C-Prime Measures,” 23 November 1964, 1-5. DDRS CK3100080677

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 6. The committee further stated, in line with their previous assessment, “there is always a chance that Peiping might so intervene either for reasons that seen [sic] irrational to us or because it miscalculated the objectives of US moves in the area.”

⁴⁵¹ JCSM-982-64, 10.

⁴⁵² “Probable Communist Reactions to Option C or C-Prime Measures,” 6-7.

the end, the committee believed that option B entailed the same risk as the highest level of pressure under C and C', but at a much faster tempo.⁴⁵³

Whereas the intelligence committee's comparative assessment on November 23 considered the probability of escalation from a military perspective, the working group's "Intelligence Assessment" of the 24th focused on the political factors that would likely produce such a response. In the committee's judgment, as the U.S. imposed increasingly severe pressure against the DRV, the leadership in Hanoi would be faced with a number of crucial questions pertaining to the interests of the U.S. At issue was whether or not Hanoi believed the U.S. was intent on securing its objectives irrespective of the possibility of war with the Chinese, or whether the American escalation was designed to secure a favorable bargaining position. More fundamental to this, Hanoi would likely wonder whether American war aims were in fact limited. Based on the scenarios presented, the committee noted that "comprehension of the other's intentions would almost certainly be difficult on both sides, and especially so as the scale of hostilities mounted." In addition to Hanoi's perceptions of U.S. intent, the committee struck a pessimistic cord in its assessment of the DRV's capacity to sustain punishment over time. Noting that the interdiction of the North's imports, transportation facilities and industrial plants would in fact cripple its industry, the committee stated, "We do not believe that such actions would have a crucial effect on the daily lives of the overwhelming majority of the North Vietnamese population. . . . [nor would] attacks on industrial targets. . . greatly exacerbate current economic difficulties as to create unmanageable control problems." In short, the panel considered the DRV "willing to suffer some damage to the

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 8.

country in the course of a test of wills with the U.S. over the course of events in South Vietnam.”⁴⁵⁴

The implications of Hanoi’s willingness to suffer were significant. If Hanoi was unlikely to alter its behavior due to its capacity to sustain major damage, and the U.S. was forced to go to extreme measures in its attempt to force the DRV over the cost/benefit divide, the viability of the northern regime would be called into question. Under these conditions, any hesitancy that Hanoi might have in requesting assistance from the PRC would be overcome. In addition to the DRV’s willingness to have the PRC intervene on its behalf at this point, the PRC as well would likely find it in its interest to do so. The committee noted that should the communist regime in Hanoi be threatened with collapse, then the Chinese would likely intervene for two reasons: out of fear for the security of their southern frontiers, and because of their need to strongly support “wars of national liberation” in the continuing Sino-Soviet split. Finally, the committee noted that in the present, the Chinese did not have the capacity to bolster the DRV’s offensive or defensive capabilities, “short of [a] large-scale introduction of ground forces.” Thus, if faced with the possibility of Hanoi’s collapse, the Chinese would likely intervene in force. Overtime, however, China’s ability to augment the DRV’s fighting capabilities would grow as “Recent Chinese Communist deployments into South China indicate that improvements are being made in their defense posture which would also strengthen their offensive capabilities.” As China’s internal force re-deployment continued, more

⁴⁵⁴ NSC Working Group on Vietnam, “Intelligence Assessment: The Situation in Vietnam,” 24 November 1964, 12.

military hardware and troops could be made available to the DRV without significantly degrading China's own combat effectiveness.⁴⁵⁵

Two EXCOM meetings were held on November 24 and 26 which together winnowed the strategic options down to one. Two primary issues were settled on the 24th. First, a "consensus" was reached concerning the objectives and stakes for the U.S. in Vietnam. The participants rejected William Bundy's (and George Ball's) sanguine assessments of the "loss" of South Vietnam, noting that because the United States had a long standing commitment to Saigon, its fall to Communism would be dire to American prestige. Second, and despite having scored a bureaucratic victory over American objectives, the military's preferred course B lost out to option C/C'. While the differences between C and C' were noted in the meeting, Rusk effectively blurred their operational distinctions in stating that if C initially failed, the U.S. could follow up with C'. A number of reasons stood behind the rejection of option B; most important was the consensus view that "in the light of all factors," B did not stand the best chance of achieving "our full objectives." Although there was a divided view over whether B was "significantly more likely to lead to major escalation than Option C," the reports from the intelligence committee had a significant impact to the extent that the Chief's estimates were called into question. In light of all factors: if, as the intelligence committee argued, the Chinese were more likely to intervene in response to an American "hard knock," then the long sought after objective of a stable and independent South Vietnam would be placed in jeopardy.⁴⁵⁶ On the 26th, Ambassador Taylor joined the EXCOM in its meeting

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 14-15. DDRS CK3100066450

⁴⁵⁶ Memorandum of the Meeting of the Executive Committee, November 24, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #424.

and “urged that over the next two months we adopt a program of Option A plus the first stages of Option C.”⁴⁵⁷

On November 29, William Bundy circulated a proposal for action in Vietnam that condensed the various options into one, reflecting the consensus of the two NSC meetings. Bundy’s redraft contained plans that were very close to option C. In phase I (30 days long), the U.S. would intensify existing military actions, including armed reconnaissance in Laos and reprisal strikes against the DRV for any major VC attacks in the south. In phase II, the U.S. would withdraw its dependents in the south and conduct anti-infiltration strikes across the border. If Hanoi showed no signs of moderation, and if the stability of the Saigon government improved, then the U.S. would implement a series of air strikes of progressive intensity, but moderated according to the situation (two-six months long). Concurrently, the U.S. would watch for any indication that Hanoi was yielding and would be prepared to cease its attacks if the DRV was willing to capitulate on American terms. Bundy’s proposal reflected the bureaucratic compromise reached in the NSC meetings: although it was stated at the outset that the U.S. was committed to whatever level of violence was necessary to secure its maximum objectives, there was no specific indication that the U.S. would go to the “full limits” of its power. As such, a substantial amount of strategic flexibility was retained.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁷ Memorandum of the Meeting of the Executive Committee, November 27, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #428.

⁴⁵⁸ Kaiser, 373-74.

After LBJ approved Bundy's position paper on December 1st,⁴⁵⁹ the EXCOM met and made one additional (and major) change to Bundy's phase II. In the EXCOM's words, "Such a program [phase II] would consist principally of progressively more serious air strikes, of a weight and tempo adjusted to the situation as it develops (possibly running from two to six months) *and of appropriate US deployments to handle any contingency.*"⁴⁶⁰ In the appendix to the paper, the EXCOM spelled out in detail the number and schedule of troop deployments to South Vietnam. In addition to being assigned base protection roles, these troops were put in place to counter any intervention by the DRV and/or the PRC. As Kaiser explains,

Should the North Vietnamese move two to five divisions into South Vietnam, it [the appendix] stated, the United States would immediately initiate an air interdiction campaign; mine North Vietnamese harbors and blockade North Vietnamese ports; undertake an "early" ground offensive, with consideration of "seizing and occupying some or all of NVN"; and make major new deployments to prepare for Chinese intervention.⁴⁶¹

In short, while the NSC working group, senior advisers, and the president were dedicated to avoiding Chinese intervention in the Vietnam War, the EXCOM's additions to the final proposed strategy was designed to prepare for such a contingency. On December 7, the president approved the proposed strategy.⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁹ The president stipulated two caveats before proceeding along the lines Bundy provided: first, the South Vietnamese government had to show signs of increased stability (in line with Taylor's recommendations in a paper written by the Ambassador before his arrival in Washington); second, a greater number of allies had to contribute to the effort in South Vietnam. See Paper Prepared by the Ambassador in Vietnam (Taylor), undated, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #426; Kaiser, 376

⁴⁶⁰ Paper Prepared by the Executive Committee, December 2, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #433.

⁴⁶¹ Kaiser, 378. Kaiser notes further, "And when Johnson eventually approved Phase II bombing of North Vietnam, the initial troop movements into South Vietnam went off like clockwork."

⁴⁶² From the President to the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense (McNamara), and the Director of Central Intelligence (McCone), December 7, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume I, #440.

Implementing Rolling Thunder

Based on the NSC working group's approved plan, the first phase of military activity called for the immediate retaliation against the DRV by U.S. and South Vietnamese forces in the event of future VC attacks in the South. After thirty days, more systematic air strikes against the DRV would begin along with increasing ground deployments in South Vietnam. A crucial prerequisite for the transition to the second phase was that the government in Saigon made substantial satisfactory progress toward stabilizing its own control over South Vietnam. That the situation in the south continued to deteriorate should not have come as a surprise given the history of South Vietnamese governance over the past year and a half. From the beginning of December 1964 to the beginning of February 1965, the GVN neared collapse. As a result, LBJ demurred from agreeing to move to phase II as the deadline proposed by Taylor at the end of November passed.⁴⁶³

Despite the fact that the president had signed off on the strategy proposed by the working group in November, LBJ was unwilling to publicly announce that the U.S. was moving to a new, more deliberate phase in the war. Concerned about the manifest absence of a firm decision on the course of the war from LBJ, National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy requested a meeting with the president and McNamara on January 27. On the agenda was the "fork in the road" memorandum, in which Bundy and McNamara argued that no longer could the stability of the government of South Vietnam be considered a prerequisite for moving to phase II. Rather, the two advisers argued that

⁴⁶³ VanDeMark offers a rich description of the problems in Saigon and the continuous coup plotting by South Vietnamese generals at that time. Brian VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 42-46.

systematically bombing the North was the only means available toward achieving American objectives in the war in the South. Although they admitted that Rusk, who did not attend the meeting due to illness, did not concur with the idea of moving to phase II, they urged that the president finally move ahead with the air campaign against the North.⁴⁶⁴ In the end, the president consented stating, “Stable government or no stable government, we’ll do what we ought to do.” In addition, LBJ agreed to send McGeorge Bundy to Saigon to assess the situation first hand and to meet with Taylor to discuss future actions.⁴⁶⁵

With the president’s agreement that phase II should in principle begin, and with Taylor’s suggestion that any VC action could justify the expansion of the U.S. effort, all that remained was a precipitating event. On February 7, while the Bundy mission was in South Vietnam, the VC launched a massive mortar attack on the U.S. airfield and advisory compound at Pleiku. In response, Washington decided to finally take the next step in prosecuting the war in Vietnam. The transition period from phase I to phase II was marked by a vigilant search for information concerning the likelihood of Chinese intervention in the conflict. The ultimate decision to increase the military pressure on the DRV was made only after exhaustive analyses were conducted concerning the complicated relationship between Hanoi, Beijing, and Moscow, and furthermore, the manner in which the U.S. proceeded to the next phase was based upon those assessments.

Well before the attack on Pleiku in fact, the administration had initiated a review of Chinese and Soviet involvement in the war and had begun modifying its strategy to

⁴⁶⁴ From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Johnson, January 27, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #42.

⁴⁶⁵ David Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 391-92.

better fit the changing international political dynamics that were unfolding before it.

On January 26, for example, Deputy Ambassador to South Vietnam U. Alexis Johnson submitted a memo stating that a number of important factors had bolstered the position of the DRV/VC including the mounting political instability in South Vietnam, continued VC military success, and the fall of Khrushchev which led to a moderation in Sino-Soviet tensions thus enabling the DRV to receive increased support from the Soviets without offending the PRC. Johnson noted that the new Soviet leadership appeared to be seeking a new course with respect to North Vietnam, and the North Vietnamese were poised to capitalize on a new Soviet commitment to both deter the U.S. from further escalation and to decrease Chinese influence in the area.⁴⁶⁶

Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin's visit to the DRV exemplified the new Soviet approach to the war in Vietnam, and if the U.S. were to move to phase II, the administration would now have to ascertain the likelihood Chinese *and* Soviet intervention. On February 1, both the CIA and INR concluded (separately) that while the Soviets were seeking to increase their influence in Vietnam at the expense of the Chinese, their primary objective was to undercut the mounting pressure for escalation. Moreover, as the CIA noted, while Hanoi would probably receive material aid from the Soviet Union in the form of defensive weapons systems, the new Soviet leadership would likely press the DRV not to move to a greater level of hostility in its conduct of the war. This conclusion was based on the perceived intentions of the Soviets: given the continued deterioration of the political situation in the South, the Soviets probably thought that the

⁴⁶⁶ Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State, January 26, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #36. Johnson estimated, however, that the DRV's main objective remained the same: to win the war without major Soviet or Chinese involvement. Further, if the Sino-Soviet rift should widen again, the DRV would likely side with the PRC.

U.S. was on the ropes, and sensing an opportunity to get some credit for the victory against the Americans, the USSR would not want the DRV to act in any way that would pressure the U.S. to strike back with greater intensity.⁴⁶⁷ McCone reiterated this conclusion in a meeting with the president on February 3. McCone advised that the U.S. should work diligently to create a stable government in South Vietnam and to begin hitting the DRV from the air in a manner that proceeded deliberately, and with increasing tempo, from the southern regions of the DRV to the north. When asked by the president if such a program would induce the Chinese to come in either on the ground or in the air, McCone noted that “there was a possibility that they would come in on the ground *but they had little capability in the air.*” In either course, McCone did not believe that intervention was likely under the course of action he advocated.⁴⁶⁸

McCone’s estimate of Chinese airpower, while technically correct at that time, failed to make clear the upward trend of the PRC’s force projection capabilities since August 1964. According to SNIE 10-65 of February 4, the Chinese and North Vietnamese had been steadily conducting a military buildup of “offensive capabilities as yet unused and defensive capabilities as yet untested.” Most importantly, and in line with McCone’s statement to LBJ, these deployments “have noticeably improved . . . the air-defense of South China and North Vietnam.” More generally, the military buildup had a dual purpose of deterrence and defense. On the one hand, in supplying the DRV with military hardware—jet fighters, AAA, etc.—the PRC was attempting to deter the U.S. from escalating the war further over North Vietnam. If deterrence failed, not only would the DRV be in a better position to defend itself from attack, but more importantly, “[t]he

⁴⁶⁷ Intelligence Memorandum, February 1, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #55.

⁴⁶⁸ Memorandum for the Record, February 3, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #61. Emphasis added.

addition of air strength to the already formidable ground strength in the China/Indochina border area is also intended to strengthen Chinese/DRV defenses against the contingency that the US might ignore Communist warnings and take the war to North Vietnam and even to China.” The SNIE concluded that these forces were defensive insofar as no major augmentation of land power had occurred, nor had large, organized military units been deployed to South Vietnam.⁴⁶⁹

Although the general tone of the SNIE was optimistic to the extent that no offensive intentions had been detected on the part of the Chinese, the deployment of 50-plus aircraft into the DRV⁴⁷⁰, and the increase from 150 to 350 Chinese aircraft in the border region did warrant some concern. Because the SNIE’s authors believed that the ultimate Chinese objective was to avoid an American attack on China itself, it was projected that the PRC would avoid taking provocative steps that could lead to a direct Sino-American clash. Nevertheless, the augmentation of airpower in the region did “give the Communists a limited capability to conduct surprise raids against Laos or the northern parts of South Vietnam, especially for psychological effect.” Moreover, the report stipulated that while Chinese aircraft were not likely to be employed in Laos, “they [the Communists] would certainly attempt to use fighters against air strikes on North Vietnam, and would certainly do so in the case of an attack on China.”⁴⁷¹ Thus, while

⁴⁶⁹ SNIE 10-65, “Communist Military Capabilities and Near-Term Intentions in Laos and South Vietnam,” 4 February 1965. DNSA: SE00396.

⁴⁷⁰ It should be noted that on 12 March, the CIA concluded that 19 of those aircraft were dummies. Thus, between the Tonkin Gulf incident and mid-March, no more than 36 fighters had been deployed to the Phuc Yen air base in North Vietnam. CIA memorandum, “The Situation in Vietnam,” 12 March 1965. DDRS CK3100169267

⁴⁷¹ Ibid. With respect to the possibility of Soviet involvement in the war, SNIE 10-65 stipulated that the USSR would attempt to deter U.S. escalation through the provision of material assistance to the DRV, but would not attempt to defend North Vietnam directly. Thus, in line with the previous CIA report, the Soviets were expected to play a moderating role on Hanoi.

McCone was correct to the extent that in comparison to the U.S., Chinese air power was limited and was not their weapon of choice, his statement to LBJ that the Chinese had “little capability in the air” obfuscated what many in the intelligence community thought was just as important: a direct clash between the U.S. and PRC in the air over North Vietnam could lead to direct Chinese intervention in the war. In due time, these conclusions would be presented to LBJ by others in the administration.

On February 7, Bundy submitted his mission report which contained specific recommendations for moving to the next phase. For Bundy, the primary purpose of initiating a graduated and sustained policy of reprisal attacks against the DRV was to bolster the morale of the South Vietnamese. Moreover, Bundy argued that “it is of great importance that the level of reprisal be adjusted rapidly and visibly to both upward and downward shifts in the level of Viet Cong offenses. We want to keep before Hanoi the carrot of our desisting as well as the stick of continued pressure. We also need to conduct the application of the force so that there is always a prospect of worse to come.” With respect to the risks of adopting such a course, the National Security Adviser was optimistic:

. . . . in order to maintain the power of reprisal without risk of excessive loss, an ‘air war’ may in fact be necessary. We should therefore be ready to develop a separate justification for energetic flak suppression and if necessary for the destruction of Communist air power. The essence of such an explanation should be that these actions are intended solely to insure the effectiveness of a policy of reprisal, and in no sense represent any intent to wage offensive war against the North. These distinctions should not be difficult to develop.

Although he was willing to attack and destroy Chinese and North Vietnamese air power in the attempt to boost southern morale, Bundy was nearly silent as to the risks that such an attack entailed. These attacks, Bundy merely noted, “may even get us beyond this

level [phase II] with both Hanoi and Peiping, if there is Communist counter-action. . .

These are the risks of any action. They should be carefully reviewed—but we believe them to be acceptable.”⁴⁷²

Many of the president’s advisers did *not* consider the risks entailed in Bundy’s proposals acceptable.⁴⁷³ On February 8, INR Director Thomas Hughes submitted a memo to George Ball (who at the time was Acting Secretary of State) which made clear how the assessment of Chinese motivations on which Bundy’s proposal was based differed substantially from the “unanimously agreed interagency intelligence assessments contained in DIA-CIA-State memorandum” that informed the strategy proposed in November and from the analysis contained in SNIE 10-65. Hughes wrote, “Incomprehensibly to me, [Bundy’s] memorandum discusses the risks of sustained U.S. air strikes against North Vietnam without examining Chinese Communist responses. However, the two intelligence community products estimate Chinese Communist air intervention to be quite likely at some stage in this very process.” Hughes went on to

⁴⁷² From the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Johnson, February 7, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #84.

⁴⁷³ It should be noted that in addition to the recommendations considered below, Johnson received advice two sources that have been discussed widely in the literature. On February 17, Johnson and his advisers met with Dwight Eisenhower to discuss the former president’s views on how to proceed in the war. Among Eisenhower’s suggestions were: the U.S. should send a strong deterrence signal to the Chinese that if they were to enter the war, the U.S. would respond with nuclear weapons, and that if the Chinese did enter the war, the U.S. should make the necessary sacrifices to winning. At most, the Eisenhower meeting bolstered LBJ’s confidence in moving to phase II, but the General did not succeed in affecting the operational tempo of the war. Not only did the U.S. move slowly in the initial phases of the Rolling Thunder, and sought to moderate the intensity of attacks as the possibility of Chinese intervention increased and decreased, but it also did not overtly seek deterrence through the threat of nuclear war. For a summary of the meeting with Eisenhower, see Memorandum of a Meeting with President Johnson, February 17, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #133.

That same day, Vice President Humphrey sent a memo to LBJ recommending that the president take the opposite course advocated by Eisenhower. Fearing that nearly any move in North Vietnam posed a dire threat of war with the Chinese (with attendant domestic and international political costs), Humphrey urged LBJ seek negotiations out of the war sooner, rather than later. In response to Humphrey’s memo, the president barred him from the decision making process. For the Humphrey’s memo, see From Vice President Humphrey to President Johnson, February 17, 1965, *ibid.*, #134. See also Kaiser, 408-10.

demonstrate in a textual comparison of specific excerpts where Bundy's report differed from the two interagency studies.⁴⁷⁴

Alarmed by the apparent lack of due diligence that was being given to the China factor in the post-Pleiku deliberations, Ball wrote to Taylor in Saigon informing the Ambassador that work was being done on a refined phase II program that was "somewhat slower than some versions" of the plan in existence. For Ball, a slower tempo was crucial: "Ideally, we would like to lengthen the time before we reach a fork in the road at which negotiating pressures become extreme, or dangers of sharp Communist response become substantial, or both, while at the same time maintaining necessary pattern of response and pressure both to strengthen SVN situation and eventually to affect Hanoi attitudes [sic]."⁴⁷⁵

Based on the evidence available, the judgment of the majority of the intelligence community was that the proposed movement to phase II did indeed pose a risk of bringing the Chinese into the Vietnam War. The major task confronting the administration was how to move to phase II in a manner that mitigated that risk. Based on McCone's analysis of Chinese military capabilities and on Bundy's virtual lack of consideration given to how the U.S. and Chinese could find themselves in direct conflict,

⁴⁷⁴ From the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Hughes) to Acting Secretary of State Ball, February 8, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #90. The November intelligence report to which Hughes refers is "Probable Communist Reactions to US Option C or C-Prime Measures," 26 November 1964. See also, From James C. Thomson, Jr., of the National Security Council Staff to Chester Cooper of the National Security Council Staff, February 10, 1965, *ibid.*, #102.

⁴⁷⁵ Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam, February 11, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #110. In a similar vein, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Green wrote to his boss William Bundy on 16 February that it was imperative that in implementing phase II, the U.S. not push the Chinese into increasing its support for Hanoi. Based on his participation in the SIGMA II war game, Green was convinced that too rapid a tempo would increase Chinese involvement, and thus decrease Hanoi's willingness to negotiate. See From the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Green) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Bundy), February 16, 1965, *ibid.*, #126.

however, the administration appeared to be heading down the path to disaster. That was Ball's assessment in a critical memorandum to President Johnson on February 13. In that memo, Ball laid out a comprehensive military-diplomatic program that was designed to guide the U.S. into phase II in a manner that kept pressure on Hanoi as its primary objective, but which attempted to lessen the risk of provoking Chinese intervention.⁴⁷⁶

Ball's memo came in two parts: the first part laid bare the inherent risks associated with the strategy of gradually mounting military pressure against the DRV; the second part contained a political program designed to contain those risks. Ball was clear that despite the dangers inherent to phase II, he, McNamara, and McGeorge Bundy were all in agreement that the U.S. should move forward. The program that Ball sketched out closely mirrored option C as proposed by the November working groups. In implementing the graduated pressure strategy, however, the possibility of war with Chinese grew. Ball's memo is crucial to the extent that it demonstrates *how* that war could come about.⁴⁷⁷

The ultimate source of danger for the U.S. would arise when a consideration of engaging the 53 Chinese MIGs in the DRV would have to be faced—that possibility grew as the U.S. began striking targets above the self-imposed 60 mile cordon north of the 17th parallel. As such, Ball recommended that the administration delay moving above the 19th parallel for the next eight weeks, in order to keep American planes out of the operational

⁴⁷⁶ Ball also solicited intelligence and political analysis from Allen Whiting, a DOS expert on Asia. David L. DiLeo, *George Ball, Vietnam, and the Rethinking of Containment* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 81.

⁴⁷⁷ From Acting Secretary of State Ball to President Johnson, February 13, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #113. As DiLeo notes, although Ball (and Whiting) did present the administration with worst-case scenarios, his analysis never overestimated the Chinese threat. DiLeo, 81.

range of the MIGs in the North. Ball foresaw disaster for the U.S. if the MIGs were

engaged early on.⁴⁷⁸ The Acting Secretary of State's scenario is worth quoting at length:

Once our planes have been engaged heavily by MIG aircraft, you [the president] will be compelled—in order to prevent unacceptable losses—to face the decision to mount an air effort to eliminate the major MIG base at Phuc Yen, near Hanoi. This base is heavily defended. Some parts of the base are near populated areas. Any effective strike against it would require a massive air effort.

...
Last November, the United States intelligence community unanimously agreed that, if the United States attacked above the 19th parallel, “Chinese Communist aircraft operating from Chinese bases would probably assist in defending North Viet-Nam against the United States attacks.” Perhaps the involvement by Chinese air would first take the form of “volunteers,” but it might shortly be followed by direct engagement of Chinese planes operating from the sanctuary of Chinese territory. There are now approximately 350 Chinese jet fighters deployed in the Hainan area of South China—within striking distance of North Vietnam.

Once Chinese aircraft entered the conflict you would be under considerable pressure to order United States forces to knock out offending Chinese bases—and even to strike at Chinese nuclear production installations.

If Chinese air bases were hit, some of our intelligence experts believe it likely that China would move massive ground forces into North Vietnam, and subsequently in Laos, South Viet-Nam, and possibly Thailand. Other experts assess the chances as being lower. All agree that such a movement would be entirely possible.

If Chinese ground forces were to move into Southeast Asia, we would be compelled to make a major effort to stop them. The only way that this could be done through conventional means would be by introducing substantial United States ground combat forces into South Viet-Nam. The magnitude of the required effort would almost certainly mean that you will have to call up reserves.

Ball then noted that the estimated combined PRC/DRV logistical capacity could support nearly 22 divisions (14 PLA, 8 NVA). In order to counter a deployment of this size, the U.S. would have to bring in five to eight divisions, “with a total troops strength (including supporting elements) of 300,000 men.” Once engaged in a conflict of this

⁴⁷⁸ The chances of engaging joint Chinese/North Vietnamese air defenses became greater by January 1965, as the PRC and DRV conducted joint air exercises against “a hypothetical enemy” in an area extending approximately twelve miles below their border. Allen S. Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence: India and Indochina* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), 178.

magnitude, Ball foresaw significant pressure being brought to bear on the administration to use nuclear weapons against the adversary. “To use nuclear weapons against the Chinese would obviously raise the most profound political problems. Not only would their use generate probably irresistible pressure for a major Soviet involvement, but the United States would be vulnerable to the charge that it was willing to use nuclear weapons against non-whites only.”⁴⁷⁹

In order to reduce the likelihood of Chinese intervention, the U.S. had to ensure that the targets it engaged were well out of the reach of Chinese air power—at least for the next eight weeks. Ball’s memo did not only address the military requirements of waging limited war successfully, however. The second part of Ball’s memo recommended that the administration employ a carefully crafted diplomatic strategy which, in conjunction with the military component, would seek to pressure China in the opposite direction. The fulcrum of the diplomatic course was the newly demonstrated interest in Vietnam by the Soviet Union: if the United States failed to provide the Soviets with a political alternative, then Ball reasoned they would cast their lot with the Chinese; if, however, the U.S. did provide the Soviets with the proper incentives, Moscow would pressure Beijing into moving toward a settlement in Vietnam.

The political program that Ball outlined entailed a joint U.S.-South Vietnamese statement of aims at the United Nations Security Council. That statement would include: a reiteration of the objective of “continu[ing] to take all necessary military measures to stop the Communist aggression against the Republic of South Viet-Nam”; the declaration that the territorial integrity and political independence of South Vietnam be inviolate,

⁴⁷⁹ DiLeo, 81.

including the “cessation of the guerrilla activities in South Viet-Nam. . . . and the withdrawal of Viet Cong cadres previously infiltrated” in the South from the North; and the implementation of peacekeeping forces, under the aegis of the United Nations, with the objective of preserving South Vietnamese independence. Once peacekeeping forces were employed, the United States would be prepared to begin withdrawing its forces from the South. Ball then recommended that the administration immediately bring the Vietnam issue to the Security Council with the goal of calling a meeting among the UK, France, USSR, China, and North and South Vietnam to “discuss arrangements for a cease-fire, the cessation of infiltration, and the establishment of peace in South Viet-Nam.”

Most importantly, Ball did *not* believe that above scenario would in fact work the way that the statement intended:

It is unlikely that Hanoi would send representatives to New York. Most probably both Hanoi and Peiping would scornfully reject the Security Council proceedings—at least in the first instance. But taking the problem to the Security Council and calling for peace negotiations—while stepping up our military efforts and our military buildup—would increase the pressure on the Soviets to help put an end to the crisis by joining in a call for a cease-fire and a conference.

While Ball did believe that the United States should work toward ending the crisis through international negotiations, he was proposing in this memo a means of directly reducing the chance of Chinese intervention in the war through the skillful diplomatic manipulation of the Soviet Union, with the ultimate objective of achieving American objectives through negotiations sometime in the future.⁴⁸⁰

In submitting this memo to the president, Ball had two primary objectives. The first was to put the brakes on what he perceived was a head-on rush in to war based on

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid, 81.

mistaken notions of the risk of war with the PRC. The second was to force the administration into appreciating the need to tightly couple its military and diplomatic strategy for waging limited war. On both accounts, he succeeded. That day, LBJ agreed to the following steps in the war: 1) the intensification of the pacification program in South Vietnam, 2) the execution of a graduated pressure strategy—jointly conducted by the U.S. and South Vietnamese—against targets in the North “remaining south of the 19th parallel until further notice,” and 3) the general announcement at the UN of these next steps, along with the indication that the U.S. was “ready and eager for ‘talks’ to bring aggression to an end.”⁴⁸¹

Unfavorable political currents quickly emerged in connection with the presentation to the Security Council, and the administration soon abandoned that specific course of diplomatic action.⁴⁸² The decision to forego bringing the Vietnam issue before the Security Council did not, however, end the administration’s diplomatic effort. At the same time that officials in Washington were debating how the U.S. should present its case on Vietnam to the UN, the British and Soviets were engaged in a dialog concerning the reactivation of their responsibilities as co-chairs of the 1954 Geneva Conference. At issue was the possibility of the two countries providing a framework for negotiations for ending the conflict. For the Soviets, the possibility of securing a settlement was attractive as it would simultaneously ensure that a direct Soviet-American conflict (however remote a possibility in the present) did not become likely in the future, and would enable the

⁴⁸¹ Telegram from the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State, February 14, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #116, and Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam, February 14, 1965, *ibid.*, #117.

⁴⁸² At issue were negative comments made by U.N. Secretary General U Thant pertaining to LBJ’s forthrightness to the American people about Vietnam. *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #161; From Chester L. Cooper of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), March 1, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, 173.

Soviets to assume a greater degree of influence in Southeast Asia at China's expense. In mid-February, however, that Soviet position was not firm, and the administration reasoned that any provocative steps on its part could drive the Soviets to abandon its softer position and adopt a harder one of great support for the North Vietnam and China. In a telegram to Taylor in Saigon, Rusk outlined the administration's position vis-à-vis the Soviets: "We do not yet have Sovs response [to the British suggestion concerning the co-chair proposal] and would not wish throw Sovs off this track by drastic action before they make decision. . . . [sic]"⁴⁸³ Even though the British-Soviet framework never got off the ground, the U.S. reaction to the initial, if tentative, possibility of the USSR playing a more active and direct role in the conflict indicates that Washington was aware of the Soviet's motives with respect to Vietnam, and that it did not intend to drive the two Communist powers together.

Six days after Ball submitted his memo to the president, McGeorge Bundy forwarded to LBJ two SNIEs (10-3-65 and 10-3/1-65) with a note stating that the two documents "are important enough for you to read in full. . . . [and] seem careful and sober to me." Bundy stated further that the SNIEs "suggest the wisdom of your determination to act in a measured and fitting way."⁴⁸⁴ That Bundy should characterize these intelligence documents in this way is significant: written on February 11, SNIE 10-3-65 was the intelligence foundation for Ball's memo.⁴⁸⁵ Evidently, Ball's analysis and the

⁴⁸³ From the Department of State to the Embassy in Vietnam, February 20, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #150.

⁴⁸⁴ Special National Intelligence Estimate 10-3-65, February 11, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #111.

⁴⁸⁵ The "Scope Note" in SNIE 103/1-65, submitted on 18 February, stated, "This estimate is intended to supplement, no to superseded, SNIE 10-3-65 on the same subject. . . ." Special National Intelligence Estimate 10-3/1-65, February 18, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #139.

two intelligence products led the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs to question his own rationale for phase II.

The purpose of SNIE 10-3-65 was to estimate the likely Soviet and Chinese reactions to the initiation of phase II. Soviet objectives were determined to be: 1) to move Hanoi back to a neutral position in the Sino-Soviet dispute; 2) to attempt to obtain credit for a Communist victory against the U.S. at a time when the U.S. appeared to be nearing defeat; 3) to decrease Chinese influence in the region; and 4) to dampen down the conflict in general. The authors believed that while the Soviets were being cautious in their political moves, there was a good chance that the commitments made to the DRV would force it to assume a greater level of involvement in the war—despite the fact that the current upward trend in hostilities, and the future implementation of Rolling Thunder, would work against their interests. As such, Soviet involvement deemed likely to persist, but in a manner that would pose the least risk to Soviet interests. Nevertheless, there was a strong possibility that Soviet involvement could work in favor of U.S. interests to the extent that pressure would be exerted on the DRV to refrain from provocative moves. Such pressure, however, was expected to be resisted by both the PRC and DRV.

The Chinese, on the other hand, were seen as having the following objectives. First, the Chinese were using the Vietnam War as a means of presenting the Soviets with a stark choice—either make a strong commitment to the DRV despite the risk of sparking a war with the U.S., or withdrawal. Either option served the interests of the PRC: if the Soviets became involved in a war for national liberation, the PRC's position in the struggle for dominance in the international communist movement would be strengthened; if the Soviets withdrew, the PRC would be seen internationally (and regionally) as only

reliable Communist power. Second, the Chinese were assuming a direct role in the conflict as a means of achieving security. Third, the PRC was seeking to maintain influence in the DRV and Indochina at the expense of the United States.

With the implementation of phase II operations, the Chinese were expected to begin an increasingly militant diplomatic and propaganda program against the U.S.⁴⁸⁶ Further, the Chinese would likely introduce “volunteer units” to the DRV with the goals of increasing the specter of future escalation, underlining its commitment to the DRV, and of throwing down the gauntlet to the Soviet Union. Regarding the possibility of the PRC taking more extreme actions—including the deployment of large-scale ground combat units to North Vietnam or Laos—the intelligence community was split. Although all agreed that over time, the probability rose of the PRC making more provocative actions, most in the community thought that the PRC would hold back for fear of provoking an American attack on China.⁴⁸⁷ The INR demurred saying that the chances were “considerably higher” of direct Chinese involvement.

SNIE 10-3-65 concluded with an important point concerning the rationality of the enemy. The authors warned that there was a very good chance that the U.S. would face in the future an unpredictable and erratic opponent. Because the two Communist powers would face pressure to act in a unified manner in the face of Rolling Thunder, but

⁴⁸⁶ A steady stream of belligerent Chinese propaganda was reported by the CIA between February 11-19, although the Agency did make clear how the PRC was preserving for itself room to maneuver by not making irreversible public threats to intervene under any contingency. See CIA, “Memorandum: The Situation in Vietnam” for February 11, 13, 14, 16, and 19, 1965. DDRS CK3100365460; CK3100356133; CK3100356140; CK3100356145; CK3100356151.

⁴⁸⁷ Support for this conclusion can be found in CIA, “Special Report: Chinese Communists Brace for Possible Spread of Indochina War,” 12 February 1965. DDRS CK3100361242. Based on a detailed history of Chinese involvement in the Vietnam War to date, this report concluded that when all of the military factors associated with the Chinese buildup in China and the DRV are considered, the PRC should properly be seen as having defensive, rather than offensive intentions vis-à-vis the U.S. in Vietnam. When consideration is given to the political propaganda of the PRC, it becomes clear that the Chinese had been attempting to deter the U.S. from further escalation.

because the Soviets and Chinese were fierce competitors, coordination among them and the DRV would likely be “chronically imperfect and occasionally quite erratic. Hence, Communist policies and reactions will at times be faltering and uncertain and at others bold to the point of rashness.” As a result, any clear prediction as to how the two powers would react to mounting U.S. military pressure was impossible.⁴⁸⁸

Completed on February 18, SNIE 10-3/1-65 presented forecasts for the specific proposals outlined in Ball’s memo, namely the differentiation between attacks below and above the 19th parallel. Should the U.S. continue to attack targets below the 19th, the intelligence community expected no let up on the part of the DRV and VC, and expected the Chinese to continue to pressure the DRV/VC on in a more militant course. The Chinese were not expected to intervene with substantial military force during this phase: the authors of the SNIE saw no evidence of preparations to do so, though they expressed a lack of “full confidence” in their ability to detect such preparations. Should the U.S. fully implement phase II operations, it was believed that Hanoi would not concede to U.S. demands, although it was deemed likely that they would seek a respite from American air bombardment. At this point, the authors considered it very likely that the PRC would use “air defense from Chinese bases.” If this occurred, the U.S. would be faced with the choice of either acknowledging the privileged sanctuary of Chinese bases, or of knocking those bases out in hot pursuit of aircraft over the PRC-DRV border. If the

⁴⁸⁸ *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #111. Indication of this was reported on February 13 and 14 by the CIA. On the 13th, the CIA noted that the Soviet Union had gone to great lengths to stress the fact that the Communist powers were unified. The next day, it was noted that the PRC stated that there was still “shadows over the relations between China and the Soviet Union.” See CIA, “Memorandum: The Situation in Vietnam,” for February 13, 14, and 16, 1965.

U.S. adopted the latter course, then the SNIE predicted further military responses by the Chinese.⁴⁸⁹

The impact of the Ball memo and the two SNIEs were significant. On February 26, the president made clear precisely how the U.S. was going to proceed in Vietnam. In a telegram to CINCPAC Sharp, Wheeler stated:

It was made clear that U.S. policy is as follows:

- A. Do everything possible to maximize our military efforts to reverse present unfavorable situation.
- B. . . . increase substantially our military efforts in South Vietnam. Increase tempo and effectiveness of our strikes against DRV *being careful to avoid pushing them to the extent of forcing ChiCom intervention.*
- C. In view of lack of interest exhibited by Hanoi and Peking in negotiations at this time and the weakness of the GVN/U.S. position at the Council table, refrain from early negotiations. *In this connection it was recognized that the preliminaries to any realistic negotiations would require at least three to six months to produce results,* making it even more necessary for us to take positive action to reverse the unfavorable situation in South Vietnam by all means available.⁴⁹⁰

Two elements of this policy statement stand out. First, the United States was going to proceed with attacks against North Vietnam, but in a manner that carefully signaled to the Chinese that the U.S. was not interested in destroying the Hanoi regime.⁴⁹¹ Second, the president and his advisers fully expected a long campaign, one lasting three months to half a year, before the initial military and political conditions would appear for negotiations to begin. With those decisions made, phase II began in earnest.

⁴⁸⁹ *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #139.

⁴⁹⁰ From the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Wheeler) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (Sharp), February 27, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #170, volume II (emphasis added).

⁴⁹¹ In his meeting with Ambassador Wang in Poland on February 24, Ambassador Cabot expressly stated, "Mr. Ambassador, I wish to stress that we have made it very clear that we have no designs on territory of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam, nor have we any intentions of unseating the authorities in Hanoi." Embassy in Warsaw (Cabot) to Department of State, "Cabot-Wang Talks: Report of the 124th Meeting, February 24, 1965," 1 March 1965. DORS, CK3100292639.

Although the U.S. had in fact designed a limited war strategy that was well-calibrated to the intentions of the PRC in December 1964, the implementation of that strategy had not fully commenced by February 1965. Prior to the initiation of Rolling Thunder, international political events appeared to have grown more complicated for the U.S. and this led some in the administration to question the soundness of the agreed upon approach. Although no explanation has been found for McGeorge Bundy's advice to LBJ which urged the implementation of a dramatic bombing campaign following the attack on Pleiku,⁴⁹² the National Security Adviser's recommendations could have been disastrous. Recall that the U.S. military (in particular the Air Force) had long been in favor of a more forceful strategy against the DRV. Had Bundy advice combined with Air Force's longstanding preferences, sufficient bureaucratic political momentum would likely have forced the shelving of the agreed upon strategy. This outcome did not occur, however, as a result of the robust nature of the American information structure. Because of the widespread availability of multi-sourced information regarding the intentions of the PRC, other administration officials were able to argue effectively against Bundy's proposed course of action. President Johnson was not placed in a position of being forced to make war-time decision based on scant and faulty information.

Furthermore, the robust American information structure enabled the U.S. to proceed to phase II of the limited war strategy in such a manner that allowed for tight coordination among diplomatic signals and military operations. In the first months of 1965, the Soviet Union suddenly took a more active role in the course of the Vietnam

⁴⁹² One explanation is that Bundy saw first hand the devastation wrought by the attack and this scene could have moved him, temporarily, to advocate a course of action predicated more on emotion than on strategic calculation. This explanation is merely suggestive.

War. The introduction of Soviet influence complicated the strategic situation facing the United States. Two questions stood out. First, did the Soviets have sufficient interest in the outcome of the war that they would engage in hostile military balancing in the face of U.S. escalation? Second, what effect did Soviet involvement have on Chinese intentions? The availability of multi-sourced information showed that while the Soviet's were providing support for the DRV with the goal of achieving a political victory against the U.S., they were nevertheless not disposed to have the war escalate beyond control. Moreover, intelligence reports from the CIA made clear that as a result of the competition between the USSR and PRC, the latter might be forced into a position of even greater belligerency vis-à-vis the United States. Based on this information, the U.S. made a critical adaptation to its limited war strategy. By allowing Soviet diplomacy to run its course, the U.S. was able to avoid putting the two Communist powers in a position of competitive bidding in Vietnam. In sum, the robust information structure allowed the U.S. to transition to phase II of its strategy in a deliberate and cautious manner.

Strategic Refinement

The period early March to early April was significant in the American war in Vietnam because it was at this time that the decision to move to an offensively oriented ground strategy in the South was made. Although few in the administration expected that Rolling Thunder would produce the desired outcomes in the short run, the limited effects that the bombing campaign appeared to have on the Hanoi leadership, along with new information concerning the strength of the VC in the South, combined to create a sense of deep frustration among Johnson's top advisers. Although disturbed by the lack of

progress in the air campaign, the decision to change the Marines' mission from statically defensive base security to offensive counterinsurgency, and to "plateau" the tempo of Rolling Thunder, was not made in haste. Rather, strategic options were weighed against: first, the perceived need of combating the VC on the ground and second, the probability of Chinese intervention in the war. Ultimately, the decision to alter the American limited war strategy in Vietnam was made in response to the acquisition of new information and the course adopted was intended to avoid inducing hostile military balancing by the PRC.

The limited nature of Rolling Thunder at the outset came under immediate criticism from Ambassador Taylor. On March 8, Taylor cabled Washington stating, "I fear to date that Rolling Thunder in [North Vietnamese] eyes has been merely a few isolated thunder claps" and he recommended that operations increase in their intensity and progress northward with the objective of threatening the DRV's economic and military power bases. In response, on March 15, LBJ agreed to weekly (rather than daily) strike packages remaining south of the 20th parallel in North Vietnam.⁴⁹³ Throughout this time, the administration paid careful attention to Communist, particularly Chinese, reactions to the bombing and to the deployment of American Marines to the Da Nang airbase. As was predicted in two February SNIes,⁴⁹⁴ the PRC stepped up its propaganda and diplomatic efforts against the U.S. As Director of the Office of National Estimates Sherman Kent reported to DCI McCone on March 12, "So far, Communist reactions to

⁴⁹³ Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 63-64.

⁴⁹⁴ These two SNIes are discussed in depth in chapter 6. Special National Intelligence Estimate 10-3-65, February 11, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #111; Special National Intelligence Estimate 10-3/1-65, February 18, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #139.

such US and US/GVN military moves as have been initiated to date have been about as estimated. The Communists states have complained loudly. . . . We have no firm evidence of any major military moves or deployments on the part of either Communist China or North Vietnam.”⁴⁹⁵

On March 13, DCI McCone submitted a memo to the president covering the nature of Communist reactions to attacks against the DRV. Noting that to date, such reactions had been as predicted, McCone added that the majority of the intelligence community “concurred in my view” that “if vigorous sustained air attacks damaged some important economic or military assets in North Vietnam, as would be likely if the strikes increase in frequency and hit north of the 19th parallel . . . the Communists might try to secure a respite from U.S. air attack by some political negotiation and a reduction in Viet Cong activity.” McCone did state that he had “only one reservation in this regard. If Viet Cong military strength and capabilities are greater than we have supposed, as a review of the data now in process suggests, this factor might alter the general situation.”⁴⁹⁶ That review, a joint CIA/DIA/INR assessment of VC strength, had a profound effect on top policy makers in Washington. The report stated that there was a strong possibility that the total VC strength in South Vietnam was 150,000 (50,000 regulars and 100,000 irregulars), a full 50% greater than had been estimated for at least 18 months.⁴⁹⁷ On the 18th, McCone met with Rusk and McNamara individually to brief

⁴⁹⁵ Sherman Kent, “Memorandum for the Director: Vietnam Estimates,” 12 March 1965, DDRS Ck3100484167; see also CIA, “Weekly Report: The Situation in South Vietnam,” 3 March 1965, DDRS CK3100185866; FRUS, #190, volume II.

⁴⁹⁶ McCone, “Memorandum for the President: Communist Reactions to U.S. Air Attacks on North Vietnam,” 13 March 1965, DDRS CK3100194296.

⁴⁹⁷ See CIA, “Monthly Report: The Situation in South Vietnam,” 2 April 1965, DDRS CK3100409382.

the two secretaries on the new estimate. Both were shaken, with McNamara realizing that the U.S. and South Vietnamese forces were “simply outmanned.”⁴⁹⁸

The new estimate of VC strength had a direct affect on the U.S. strategy against North Vietnam. McCone got to the heart of the problem in his memo to LBJ: based on *previous* estimates, the DRV was expected to look for a way to avoid the fate of suffering significant punishment through some form of political negotiations, rather than intensify the struggle while “accepting the destructive consequences in North Vietnam in the expectation of early victory in the South.”⁴⁹⁹ American perceptions of the DRV’s calculations changed with the new assessment of VC strength. If the DRV did in fact believe that an early victory could be gained, or if the struggle in the South could at least be intensified over the long run, then the willingness of Hanoi’s leaders to withstand American punishment might similarly bolstered. The question confronting Washington now was how to respond to the new assessment of VC strength.

The administration had three options available: it could drastically step up its air attacks on the DRV (an option which included hitting the major military and economic targets) in an effort to get Hanoi to call off the VC in the South; it could initiate a significant ground offensive in the South with the objective of defeating the military threat to South Vietnam; or, the U.S. could do both. The two options of increasing Rolling Thunder and initiating a ground offensive were forwarded by John McNaughton to McGeorge Bundy, McNamara and others on March 10. Not only did this memo present the strategic options available to the U.S., but just as importantly McNaughton

⁴⁹⁸ For McCone’s meetings with Rusk and McNamara see Memorandum for the Record, March 18, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #205; Memorandum for the Record, March 18, 1965, *ibid.*, #206.

⁴⁹⁹ McCone, 13 March 1965, DDRS CK3100194296.

attached detailed risk assessments attending to each option. If the U.S. chose to “progressively squeeze North Vietnam” by striking north of the 20th parallel, then the likelihood that the MIGs at Phuc Yen would be drawn out rose dramatically as did the chances that China would introduce fighters from Hainan. This latter possibility made salient the question of “hot pursuit” into China and striking airfields in the PRC itself. Finally, such a strategy also entailed a risk of DRV and Chinese air and ground intervention in the South (although the probability that the PRC would take such a course was lower than that of North Vietnam). On the other hand, if the U.S. went with a massive ground effort, then McNaughton forecasted a Chinese deployment of troops into the DRV. Though the ground strategy was deemed to be less provocative, McNaughton suggested that this approach was less controllable: “Once US troops are in, it will be impossible to withdraw them or to move them . . . without admitting defeat.”

McNaughton’s suggestion was to combine the two approaches by beginning an initial progressive squeeze on the DRV, all the while being prepared to “shunt to ‘circuit-breakers’ . . . either to deploy large umbers of US forces in South Vietnam or to Thailand and Laos.”⁵⁰⁰

McNaughton offered a strategy composed of *consecutive* operations: first in the air, and then on the ground (holding the air operation constant). In response to the new estimate of VC strength however, the JCS urged that the U.S. move to a *concurrent* ground offensive in the South and a massive air attack in the North. On March 15, in a memo to McNamara discussing the conditions under which the U.S. should seek negotiations with DRV, Wheeler stated that the Chiefs were of the belief that “there

⁵⁰⁰ From Chester L. Cooper of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), March 10, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #194.

should be no attempt to negotiate a settlement until US/Government of Vietnam forces have achieved a strong position of military advantage.” Such an advantage could only come from the full implementation of the “program designed to destroy the will and capabilities of the DRV to support the insurgencies in the RVN and Laos.”⁵⁰¹ Five days later, Wheeler sent McNamara a second memo calling for the introduction of U.S. combat forces “in such strengths as to achieve an effective margin of combat power, and provide a clear indication that United States intends to support South Vietnam and intends to achieve its objectives.” In addition to increasing the pressure on the North from the air, the Chiefs urged a ground offensive in the South designed to deter Chinese intervention and to “gain effective operational superiority and assume the offensive” against the VC.⁵⁰²

Thus, by March 20, the administration had before it two strategic options. The essential difference between the two programs turned on the assessment of the risks entailed in dramatically stepping up attacks on the DRV. In the end, the president agreed to a variant of McNaughton’s plan. That decision was determined by the information provided by a number of sources pertaining to the PRC’s motives and force projection capabilities since the implementation of phase II of the Graduated Pressure strategy.

The likelihood of Chinese intervention in the war was assessed by considering three facets of the PRC’s grand strategy: its changing relationship to the NLF and DRV;

⁵⁰¹ From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara, March 15, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #198. The program that the Chiefs had in mind was that which they proposed back in November, 1964. CINCPAC Sharp and Air Force Chief of Staff McConnell were the two top military officials who were most adamant about bombing north of the 20th parallel as soon as possible. Army Chief of Staff Johnson, however, demurred on the grounds that such action would dramatically increase the chance of Chinese intervention. See Kaiser, 418.

⁵⁰² From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara, March 20, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #208.

its air and ground force projection capabilities; and its ongoing competition with the Soviet Union over influence in Southeast Asia. The first indication that the Chinese were taking on a more active interest in the fate of the NLF in South Vietnam was a March 1 intelligence memo from the Office of Current Intelligence at the CIA. This report indicated that as time went on, the percentage of weapons captured by the U.S. and GVN forces of Chinese origin had dramatically increased, that the VC was being supplied with weapons of higher fire power, and that these arms were being standardized. This trend was alarming not only because of the destructiveness of the weaponry, but also because it indicated that a reliable logistics system was firmly in place. Most significantly, the CIA stated that “There are growing indications, however, that North Vietnam is now beginning to act as a transshipment agent for Chinese arms earmarked for the Viet Cong.”⁵⁰³ In short, based solely on material assistance, the Chinese appeared to be playing an increasingly direct role in the war *in the South*.

Further evidence of this trend came from the U.S. Consul General in Hong Kong Rice on March 30. Rice reported that the Chinese had dramatically hardened their stance against the U.S. in two significant respects. Initially, it had become evident that the Chinese had begun asserting a direct relationship between the security of the PRC and the expulsion of the U.S. from the South. This amounted to a “broadening of [the] range of CHICOM interest in [the] outcome of [the] struggle to include Viet Cong victory, not merely the security of North Vietnam, which had been [the] theme of post Tonkin Gulf pronouncements . . . [sic].” Specifically, on March 28 Chen Yi stated that “China and Vietnam are closely related like lips and teeth and share each other’s security and

⁵⁰³ CIA, “Intelligence Memorandum: Chinese Communist Arms in Viet Cong Hands Increasing,” 1 March 1965, DDRS CK3100436827.

danger.” Rice noted that up to this point, the formulation “lips and teeth” had only been offered by the Chinese in the context of North Vietnam. Second, the Chinese had become increasingly vocal in their support for deploying troops, although not to the extent that they had lost all room for maneuver. In Rice’s estimation, the Chinese had begun to establish the logic for such a deployment, and as a result, were increasingly committing their prestige in support of a VC victory. In short, the Chinese were embarking on a path “in which their freedom of action is tending to become circumscribed.”⁵⁰⁴

Second, during this time a major study of Chinese military capabilities was completed, and new information became available concerning the power projection capabilities of the PRC/DRV. Formally submitted on March 10, NIE 13-3-65, “Communist China’s Military Establishment,” was a comprehensive assessment of the PRC’s military doctrine, order of battle, and combat effectiveness under various conditions. The NIE stated that the Chinese possessed an army that was dominated by infantry forces with formidable combat power. In open warfare against a modern opposition, the Intelligence Board determined that that this force would be hampered by shortages of armor, heavy ordnance, mechanical transportation, and POL supplies. But if employed in jungles or in mountainous theaters, these shortages would be far less consequential. China’s primary strategic objective was to avoid provoking the United States into attacking the PRC with nuclear weapons. As such, its military forces were oriented defensively. Despite this general disposition, and the PRC’s stated pledge that

⁵⁰⁴ Telegram from American Consul General Hong Kong Rice to Secretary of State Rusk, 30 March 1965, DDRS CK3100361000. For further reporting on the PRC’s support of the NLF call for foreign troops see, telegram from Rice to Rusk, 25 March 1965, DDRS CK3100360997; CIA, “Monthly Report: The Situation in South Vietnam,” 2 April 1965, 15, DDRS CK3100409382.

Chinese troops would not cross its borders to promote revolutions, the NIE stated that “we believe that the Chinese would cross borders in reaction to what they considered a direct threat to Chinese territory. Furthermore, their national interests almost certainly encompass the maintenance of Communist regimes in North Korea and North Vietnam.” As a result of its past provision of military equipment to North Vietnam, and the improvement of its own logistical and air defense capabilities in South China⁵⁰⁵, the PRC was deemed to be “in a good position to infiltrate large numbers of troops across China’s Southeast Asian borders. In a localized situation their presence could easily be decisive in support of a ‘war of liberation’.”⁵⁰⁶

In addition to providing air defense capabilities, the Chinese were taking an active role in developing the North Vietnamese Air Force. On March 11, the CIA reported that there were signs that the first cohort of Vietnamese pilots had completed their training under Chinese instruction, and that a second group had begun its training. The report noted that if this in fact was the case, then it was likely that some of the fighters based at Phuc Yen would “begin to play an active role in defending North Vietnamese airspace.”⁵⁰⁷

Finally, based on the intensity of the Sino-Soviet split, many saw the Chinese becoming even more bellicose toward the U.S. in Vietnam. While the Soviets made it clear to the U.S. that it preferred to extricate itself from the conflict despite being

⁵⁰⁵ On March 20, the CIA reported that additional jet fighters had been deployed to South China on the 18th. Though only a small contingent, the report noted that “Some of these aircraft may be high performance types.” CIA, “Memorandum: The Situation in Vietnam,” 20 March 1965, DDRS CK3100169293.

⁵⁰⁶ NIE 13-3-65, “Communist China’s Military Establishment,” 10 March 1965, DDRS CK3100130661.

⁵⁰⁷ CIA, “Memorandum: The Situation in Vietnam,” 11 March 1965, DDRS CK 3100361709.

compelled to take on a greater role as a result of its recent escalation⁵⁰⁸, the Chinese indicated no such preference. Rather, the PRC dramatically stepped up its denunciation of both the Soviets and the Americans⁵⁰⁹, forced Hanoi into adopting an even tougher position on possible negotiations⁵¹⁰, and even went as far as blocking Soviet shipments of military hardware destined for the DRV while on route through China.⁵¹¹ Thus, in addition to the fact that China indicated that U.S. escalation directly challenged the security of the PRC, the competition among the Communist powers itself drove the Chinese to assume a stronger, more belligerent stance vis-à-vis the United States.

On March 27, Ambassador Taylor cabled Washington with MACV's formal request for the deployment of an additional 22,000 ground troops to South Vietnam. After a lengthy discussion of the different methods of employing these forces, Taylor grudgingly recommended their deployment "in accordance with the offensive enclave-mobile reaction concept."⁵¹² The Ambassador's support for additional ground forces with an offensive mission, combined with the numerous reports on Chinese hardening motives and increased military capacity, and McNaughton's discussion of the risks associated with continued air and ground strategies (both of which added additional

⁵⁰⁸ See Yost to Ball and Cleaveland, "Dewey-Suslov Meeting," 17 March 1965, DDRS CK3100125764.

⁵⁰⁹ In one report, the CIA noted "Peiping's shrill anti-US propaganda campaign continues unabated." CIA, "Memorandum: The Situation in Vietnam," 20 March 1965, DDRS CK3100169293. This frequency and intensity of Chinese threats to the U.S. and statements supporting the DRV and NLF prompted the CIA to issue a special report on 9 April entitled "Selected Significant Communist Statements on Intervention in Vietnam." DDRS CK3100169320.

⁵¹⁰ On March 5 the Office of National Estimates noted that China had rejected the idea of negotiations "out of hand." The report stated, "Not only did Peiping slap down the idea of a conference, where Washington would try to 'grab back something in the conference hall from what it has lost on the battlefield,' but Chen Yi denounced a cease fire as 'pure drivel.' Prior to these outbursts, the Chinese had been noncommittal, reporting some suggestions for negotiations as well as US rejections." CIA/ONE, "Communist Differences Over Political Settlement in Indochina," 5 March 1965, DDRS CK3100185887. See also CIA, "Memorandum: The Situation in Vietnam," 13 March 1965, DDRS CK3100361713.

⁵¹¹ As reported by DOS/INR, "Soviet Aid to North Vietnam," 25 March 1965, DDRS CK3100187597.

⁵¹² Telegram From the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State, March 27, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #218.

support to Ball's appeal for caution conducting Rolling Thunder on February 13)

prompted the administration to modify its strategy in the Vietnam War.

A memo to the president from McGeorge Bundy explained the logic of the proposed strategic alteration. Bundy described the progress in the war in the following way:

Hanoi has shown no signs of give, and Peiping has stiffened its position within the last week. We still believe that attacks near Hanoi might substantially raise the odds of Peiping coming in with air. Meanwhile, we expect Hanoi to continue and step up its infiltration both by land through Laos and by sea. There are clear indications of different viewpoints in Hanoi, Peiping, and Moscow (and even in the so-called Liberation Front), and continued sharp friction between Moscow and Peiping. However, neither such frictions nor the pressure of our present slowly ascending pace of air attack on North Vietnam can be expected to produce a real change in Hanoi's position for some time, probably 2-3 months, at best.

Bundy then specified what was considered to be the most critical factor determining the effectiveness of U.S. military operations: whether Hanoi would continue to make significant headway in the South, or whether the situation there began to turn against them. If the DRV/VC continued to make progress against the GVN forces, "even a major step-up in our air attacks would probably not cause them to become much more reasonable" On the other hand, if the Communist offensive in the South began to sour, "the situation might begin to move on a political track," though not in the near future.

As a result of the revised estimates of VC strength and the prediction of an impending major spring offensive⁵¹³, Bundy stated that it was "crucial that the South Vietnamese and we put every possibly useful resource into the effort in the South," including an 18,000-20,000 man increase in U.S. military forces to fill out existing units

⁵¹³ See CIA, "Monthly Report: The Situation in South Vietnam," 2 April 1965, 1-8, DDRS CK3100409382.

and provide for increased logistics capabilities, the deployment of two or three divisions “to take on limited missions, to release government forces for wider use, and to deter large-scale DRV attacks on South Vietnam.” At the same time, Bundy recommended that the U.S. should plateau the intensity of Rolling Thunder operations (though remaining watchful for any positive or negative developments on the ground). Air missions should remain out of the operational range of the MIGs in the North, while limiting attacks to lines of communication (LOCs) and perhaps to rail lines north and northeast of Hanoi.⁵¹⁴ These recommendations were adopted at the NSC meeting on April 2, and formally issued in NSAM 328 on April 6.⁵¹⁵ It is at this point that the United States assumed direct responsibility of the offensive ground war against the VC in Vietnam.

At a high level meeting with the president on April 21, McNamara presented a plan for the implementation of NSAM 328. Noting that the number of U.S. forces currently deployed in the South was inadequate to the task of meeting the VC threat, the Defense Secretary pressed for the deployment of additional forces and urged that Rolling Thunder not be extended to include “industrial targets, POL centers, or anything in the Hanoi-Haiphong area” for the next six months to a year. In effect, McNamara proposed maintaining the interdiction focus of the air campaign, and Rusk concurred that this was the proper course to follow. Although he did not indicate that he was opposed to the recommendations, McGeorge Bundy noted that McNamara’s proposals amounted to a “quite different course of action heretofore considered,” and he suggested that an

⁵¹⁴ Memorandum by the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), April 1, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #228.

⁵¹⁵ National Security Action Memorandum No. 328, April 6, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #242.

estimate be conducted that would gauge the reactions of Hanoi, Beijing, and Moscow to the deployment of a significant number of U.S. combat forces.⁵¹⁶

The Board of National Estimates submitted their report the next day. The Board began by noting that it based its estimate of Communist reactions on the assumption that Rolling Thunder operations would remain at their present tempo and focus and that U.S. combat strength would be increased to 80,000, a part of which would be dedicated to ground combat. In the present phase of operations, the Board stated that “[s]o long as the trend in South Vietnam appears to the Communists to be favorable . . . we doubt that they will open new fronts in Indochina, launch an overt invasion of South Vietnam, or challenge the U.S. in the air in the southern part of the DRV.” Should the McNamara recommendations be enacted, a reexamination of the Communists’ estimates of American intentions would certainly result, however, “as it became apparent that US operations against the DRV were still being conducted on a limited basis, without maximum use of air and naval power, the Communists would be likely to conclude that U.S. determination to prevail had not yet overcome its concern to prevent a widening of the war.” The most likely line of response to the stepped up American commitment would be to counter U.S. strength by stepping up the insurgency in the South with greater reinforcements from the North. “They would likely count on time being on their side and try to force the piecemeal engagement of U.S. troops under conditions which might bog them down in jungle warfare, hoping to present the U.S. with a de facto partition of the country.” If after a period of six to twelve months, the tide had turned against the VC, the DRV and PRC would likely be faced with a decision to either initiate a large-scale ground

⁵¹⁶ Memorandum for the Record, April 21, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #266.

offensive, or attempt to secure a negotiated peace. The Board stated that it was more likely that the Communists would prefer not to run the risks entailed in a dramatically expanded war, but rather “would seek at least a temporary political solution.”⁵¹⁷

The intelligence memorandum presented a stark, but accurate depiction of how the Vietnam War would unfold. Should the U.S. refrain from increasing the scale and tempo of Rolling Thunder while at the same time begin committing more and more ground forces to South Vietnam, the U.S. could expect the Communists to attempt to bog down American forces in the jungles of Southeast Asia. At the same time, however, this course of action did not pose a direct threat of a substantially wider war with the Chinese. In a second high level meeting held on the 22nd, McNamara indicated that he agreed with the assessment, and by implication, noted that he preferred the course of action that provided room for maneuver well short of Chinese intervention. At this point, DCI McCone called to the attention of the Defense Secretary the fact that in adopting the proposed course, the United States would likely find itself in a situation that would “always confront us with an increasing demand for men, increasingly serious problems, and increasing casualties.”⁵¹⁸

Although McCone’s warning was sobering, McNamara remained steadfast in his desire to avoid a clash with the PRC in Vietnam. No doubt contributing to McNamara’s concern was the fact that the U.S. engaged Chinese MIGs for the first time and on April 9, when American fighters over flew Hainan Island. While the PRC did not “make a major issue out of the incident,”⁵¹⁹ the message from China was clear: further intrusions

⁵¹⁷ Intelligence Memorandum, April 21, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #268.

⁵¹⁸ Memorandum for the Record, April 22, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #269.

⁵¹⁹ Memo from Rice to Rusk, April 14, 1965. DDRS CK3100363071.

of Chinese air space would be met by Chinese air power. Thus, the administration had strong incentives not to further escalate the level of bombing to the point where the next logical step would be to bomb air bases in China proper. This point was made explicit in SNIE 10-5-65 of April 28.⁵²⁰ According to this study, if the United States began bombing sites in Chinese territory (a decision that would likely be made if the U.S. and China were engaged in combat in the air above North Vietnam), the result would probably be a substantial military commitment in the war by the Chinese. In so doing, the PRC would move forces to the DRV and probably Laos, while the DRV with Chinese support would open an offensive in South Vietnam. Should the U.S. expand its attacks to include other military targets in South China, then the PRC would probably begin attacking U.S. carriers or other operations bases, and would likely press the North Koreans into reopening hostilities on the peninsula in an attempt to drag the USSR into the conflict. Finally if the U.S. began extensive bombing throughout China, the PRC would probably “judge that a general showdown had arrived and would engage the U.S. with all the forces at its disposal.”⁵²¹

The most important conclusion of SNIE 10-5-65 was that the initial retaliation against Chinese bases was inherently unstable and would likely lead to a greater military response by Beijing. This assessment was predicated, of course, on the assumption of the committee that the PRC had a great deal at stake in the Vietnam War. As noted preciously, the Chinese appeared to be acting in ways that demonstrated a clear

⁵²⁰ CIA, SNIE 10-5-65, “Communist Reactions to Certain US Actions,” 28 April 1965. DNSA SE00401.

⁵²¹ Ibid. A separate study prepared by the Department of Defense on April 8 dealt with the pros and cons of mining or blockading DRV ports (most importantly Haiphong Harbor). That report concluded that the cons of mining in particular outweighed any benefits that might accrue. Among the drawbacks noted was the possibility of inadvertently sinking Chinese or Soviet merchant and war ships which might lead to “serious escalation.” DOD, “Analysis of Mining or Blockade of DRV Ports,” 8 April 1965. DDRS CK3100406671.

relationship between the fate of Vietnam and Chinese security. That conclusion was bolstered on April 21 when Ambassador Wang forcefully stated to Ambassador Cabot in Poland that “Chinese security was directly threatened by US aggression in South Vietnam. We [the U.S.] are now committing aggression not only against others but also against China.”⁵²²

If SNIE 10-5-65 demonstrated the high risks associated with taking steps to eliminate the MIGs at Phuc Yen (the likely precipitating event that would bring forth active Chinese air defense), the joint State-Defense study “Communist China (Short Range Report)” submitted on April 30 showed how a ground build up in South Vietnam entailed fewer risks for the U.S., while offering the greatest chance of securing American objectives in the war. The Short Range Report (SRR) detailed the implications of “major confrontations between the United States and Communist China” in five different scenarios “with a view to determining what political and military goals and courses of action” the two states might adopt..

The first four scenarios discussed in the SRR were predicated on Chinese reactions to different U.S. military and diplomatic moves, and were arranged in ascending order of magnitude.⁵²³ The report indicated that at the present time, the primary aim of the U.S. in the war was to “discourage Chinese support . . . [for wars of national liberation] and we have specifically sought to avoid circumstances which would lead to greater or more direct Chinese participation.” In this context, the SRR stated that at lower levels of Chinese involvement (such as the provision AAA crews or defensive

⁵²² This last reference was no doubt to the over flight by U.S. fighters of Hainan island. FRUS #84, volume 30.

⁵²³ A fifth scenario was predicated on a surprise attack by the Chinese in Southeast Asia.

ground “volunteers” to North Vietnam) “do not appear to require any significant change in these U.S. objectives” At these lower levels of involvement, the U.S. “would find it more advantageous than ever to discourage the Chinese from believing that the situation required drastic and desperate action, such as the launching of a major ground offensive in Southeast Asia.” Should the situation deteriorate to the point where the two were involved in a major military confrontation (i.e., a major Chinese offensive in Southeast Asia and/or extended American air attacks against the PRC), then the initial objectives of the U.S. would require substantial adjustment. Under this scenario, the primary question for the U.S. would be: at what level of U.S.-China confrontation would the U.S. be forced to go beyond its long-held objectives in the Vietnam War to include consideration of hostilities with China?

According to the report, the primary danger of escalation lay “in the possibility that the Chinese might somehow decide to attack U.S./GVN planes and ships from bases in South China . . . or to undertake large-scale military operations into Southeast Asia.” In order to avoid this prospect, the SRR concluded that the burden of responsibility lay with the U.S.: the administration had to be prepared to take steps which did not directly provoke the PRC into adopting a more belligerent policy. For example, the report counseled against attacking Hanoi and to “avoid amphibious or other offensive ground operations in North Viet Nam which might appear to presage an attempt to seize the country.” Additionally, the U.S. should continue to impress upon the Chinese through its diplomatic channels that the U.S. had no interest in removing the Hanoi regime. Significantly, the report made clear that the U.S. could not expect to continue the air war against the DRV without risking at least limited Chinese involvement. If the U.S. was

going to remain in the war with Hanoi, then it had to be willing to live with the Chinese presence in the war as well. Fortunately for the Americans, not all forms of Chinese support necessitated an alteration in U.S. war aims. Specifically,

. . . . the most likely forms [of Chinese involvement at lower levels] do not present the U.S. with critical military problems or serious inherent risks of further escalation. Chinese provision of AAA crews or even of Chinese-manned interceptors would not unduly complicate the defense suppression problem. The introduction of Chinese ground troops into the DRV, particularly if accompanied by threatening moves elsewhere along the Chinese borders, would raise world fears of an expansion of hostilities (and would probably be intended to have that effect) but would pose no direct military threat and would not necessarily presage their use in offensive operations.⁵²⁴

This conclusion was significant: should the U.S. continue on its present course in the air, it would be highly unlikely that the Chinese would refrain from all forms of involvement in the war. Moreover, if the U.S. should take actions that provoked active Chinese air defense of the DRV and if the U.S. responded by attacking Chinese bases, the Americans would likely find themselves quickly sliding down a slope to open war with the Chinese. Actions short of this, in particular the commitment of three divisions to South Vietnam to deter a Chinese invasion of Southeast Asia, would likely induce the PRC to commit equipment and technical personnel to the DRV, but such moves would not in themselves entail a high risk of escalation.⁵²⁵ It was thus in the interest of the U.S. to find ways of keeping the confrontation limited to its lowest levels, and the SRR implied that it could do so if attacks on Chinese bases remained unnecessary.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁴ Special State-Defense Study Group, "Communist China (Short Range Report)," 30 April 1965, I-1-8. DDRS CK3100119641.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., I-14

⁵²⁶ These conclusions were passed to McGeorge Bundy in an abbreviated form on May 26, DDRS CK3100100279. The SRR's conclusions were greeted with satisfaction by the top leadership prior to the decision to commit a large number of U.S. ground troops to Vietnam in late July. Memorandum for the Record, July 6, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume XXX, #92; From the Acting Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Thompson) to Secretary of State Rusk, July 15, 1965, *ibid.*, #94.

Although the decision to shift the strategic emphasis to waging the ground war in the south was not welcomed by some in the administration, the best available intelligence and analysis convinced the president and most of his top advisers of the benefits of that course of action. By focusing on defeating insurgents in South Vietnam, the United States was more likely to avoid inducing hostile military balancing by the Chinese. The criticisms offered by McCone (which were echoed by the air chiefs at the time, and were reiterated throughout the remainder of the year) were insufficient to change the strategic orientation adopted by the administration. By keeping the focus of the air war on interdiction, the administration successfully demonstrated to the PRC that even if the situation in the South did not go well for the U.S., it would not directly threaten the viability of the DRV in order to achieve U.S. objectives, nor would it take steps that would provoke the PRC into assuming an active military role in defense of North Vietnam. To be sure, the course that the U.S. adopted led directly to a greater level of Chinese *involvement* in the war. But, as the Short Range Report demonstrated, this was not to be unexpected. When the PRC did step up its involvement, the U.S. was prepared for the move, and as such, did not act rashly in response.

Thus, by the end of April 1965, the United States made a critical alteration to the limited war strategy in Vietnam. Rather than placing the bulk of war effort on the bombing campaign against the DRV, the U.S. opted to plateau Rolling Thunder operations and to focus instead on waging the ground war in South Vietnam. This decision was based on the acquisition of new information pertaining to the strength of VC in the South, specifically on how the revised estimate of VC combat power affected the likelihood that Rolling Thunder would achieve its objectives. The ability for the U.S. to

make this critical change in its strategy in light of new information was determined by the robust nature of the American information structure. Significantly, the evidence demonstrates that the change in strategy occurred *before* the Chinese four-point message was received by Washington officials. This sequencing is important because it shows that the U.S. was not dependent upon China's decision to reveal its intentions. Rather, the robust information structure enabled top policymakers to accurately determine Chinese intentions from a wealth of disparate information. By piecing together intelligence from a number of different sources, the U.S. was able to make a critical change to its strategy in a timely and effective manner. This is not to say that China's direct warning was of limited value to American policymakers. As we will see, China's message was important because it *reinforced* conclusions that had been made prior. Yet, this message alone did not substantially affect American behavior in the war.

As discussed in Chapter 4, in the spring of 1965 China attempted to signal to the United States four points regarding China's intentions. Those points were:

(1) China will not take the initiative to provoke a war against the United States. We have conducted negotiations with the United States for over ten years on the Taiwan issue, which can be taken as evidence; (2) China will honour what is said. The Korean War can be taken as evidence; (3) China is prepared. At present, our whole country is under mobilization; (4) If the United States bombs China, that means bringing the war to China. The war has no boundary. This has two meanings: first you cannot say that only an air war on your part is allowed, and the land war on my part is not allowed. Second, not only you may invade our territory, we may also fight a war abroad.⁵²⁷

Although China intended for this message be delivered by Pakistani President Ayub Khan during his visit to the U.S. in April, LBJ cancelled the visit as means of expressing

⁵²⁷ This is the message delivered by Zhou Enlai to Indonesian Foreign Minister Subandrio. Reprinted in James G. Hershberg and Chen Jian, "Reading and Warning the Likely Enemy: China's Signals to the United States about Vietnam in 1965," *The International History Review*, 27, 1 (March 2005), 69-70.

his displeasure at the closeness between China and Pakistan. Moreover, while China had attempted to send the message through other channels, by the end of May, they were concerned that their signal had not made its way to American officials. To rectify the situation, China requested that both Indonesian Foreign Minister Subandrio and British charge d'affaires Donald Hopson deliver the warning to the Americans.⁵²⁸

Based on the documentary record, it is apparent that the message did not make its way to top American officials until early June. American reactions to the message reveal that although the Chinese considered the message to be crystal clear, a number of pertinent questions remained. For example, while Rusk considered the message to be primarily defensive in its implications, McGeorge Bundy was less sure. According to Bundy, "The basic trouble with the message is that it does not tell us at all at what point the Chinese might move in Vietnam itself in a way which would force us to act against China. And that of course is the \$64 question."⁵²⁹ Fortunately, the United States was privy to other sources of information.

Although not privy to Chen Yi's private warning, Rice sent two telegrams from Hong Kong on June 5 and 6 which placed China's warnings in context. On the 5th, Rice noted

. . . . Chinese military and civilian populations have been gradually brought to state of noticeably greater defense readiness in last few months. Among signs of this greater alertness we would single out:

- A) Steady build-up of air defense capabilities in Southern and coastal areas including airfield construction and southward shift of higher performance aircraft;
- B) Measures which suggest effort to make PLA ground forces more limber though not so far accompanied by major redeployment;

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 69-70.

⁵²⁹ From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Johnson, June 4, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-88, volume XXX, #88.

- C) Recently increasing numbers of reports that portion of civilian population is to be shifted away from certain cities;
- D) Conditioning of Chinese populace through newspapers, radio, meetings, militia activity, etc. to much greater awareness of potential danger in Vietnam, though much of this is effort to energize routine programs and none is so far suggestive in any way of all-out mobilization of public opinion.

. . . . all these measures together with public warnings . . . strike us as fairly convincing evidence that Peiping has reappraised its assumptions of some months ago and now sees real likelihood that events may develop in manner which will entangle CHICOMS militarily. Quite logically this process of CHICOM reappraisal seems to have begun when we commenced sustained bombings of North Vietnam and subsequently introduced substantial US combat units into South Vietnam. Role of Soviets in supplying DRV with modern defense equipment has also introduced element of rivalry which Chinese must also recognize as making situation less governable—politically as well as militarily—from Peiping.

. . . . we estimate that CHICOMS are now appreciably more concerned that hostilities will spread to China.

. . . . In sum, we think CHICOMS fear and perhaps expect US attacks and have increasingly readied themselves to react [*sic*].⁵³⁰

The next day, Rice telegraphed Washington detailing how the U.S. might bring about Chinese intervention in the war.

. . . . increased Chinese Communist sensitivity and preparedness to react might prompt their entanglement were we . . . to attack Hanoi-Haiphong targets or northern areas of DRV. CHICOMS might feel they had to react against attacks so close to home or they might misjudge our intentions and order their planes into engagement as defensive measure. . . . Prospect of such occurrences seems likely become greater to extent Chinese believe we will extend air war toward North and as Soviets compete with them by providing more and more modern equipment for air defense and IL-28s—hardly weapons of passive defense.⁵³¹

In short, China's four point message was not the only source of information about the PRC's intentions that the U.S. received in early June. While these reports were significant, they did not play a significant role in shaping the American approach to the Vietnam War. At most, they served as critical reinforcements to the conclusions that the U.S. had drawn from the information that the U.S. intelligence community had been

⁵³⁰ Rice to Rusk, 5 June 1965, DDRS CK3100016735.

⁵³¹ Rice to Rusk, 6 June 1965, DDRS CK3100360291.

providing for many months.⁵³² From this information, it was apparent that the only aspect of the American strategy in Vietnam that was open to alteration was the intensity of the U.S. ground effort in the South, and this was administration's primary focus between June 7 and July 28. On only two occasions did proposals to significantly increase Rolling Thunder arise, and on both occasions the option was quickly eschewed.

In response to the initiation by the VC of a major offensive and the astonishingly poor performance of the ARVN to counter the advance, General Westmoreland sent a cable to Washington on June 7 requesting a buildup to 44 battalions of U.S. and third country troops. Given the urgency of the memo, and the clear indications that the VC offensive threatened to render the ARVN combat ineffective, there was little doubt at the highest levels that Westmoreland's request had to be granted. On June 12, the JCS approved the request and asked McNamara that he endorse the plan to send 117,000 American soldiers to South Vietnam by the fall of 1965. Five days later, McNamara agreed and in a meeting on the 18th with LBJ, McGeorge Bundy, and Rusk, the Defense Secretary secured the president's approval for the full complement suggested by the Chiefs and for 20,000 additional non-American forces by November 1.⁵³³

⁵³² On June 12, a little over a month before the president publicly committed the United States to "go big" in South Vietnam, DCI Raborn submitted a briefing paper to LBJ that provided a comprehensive summary of all SNIEs and NIEs produced since June 1964 pertaining to the war in Vietnam. While the document did not consider *all* of the possible pathways leading to war with the Chinese, it did offer a remarkably comprehensive picture of the judgments reached by the intelligence community pertaining to the possible escalation of the war. The importance of this document cannot be undervalued: nearly all of the warnings issued by the Intelligence Board were followed by the top decision makers in planning and executing the war both against the North and in the South. From Director of Central Intelligence Raborn to President Johnson, June 12, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #350. The covering memo indicates that the president saw the memo on June 15.

⁵³³ Telegram From the Commander, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (Westmoreland) to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, June 7, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume II, #337; Kaiser 445-46.

It is important to recognize that this decision did not represent a change in strategy by the United States. Not only did the plan seek to exert military pressure on VC forces solely in the South, it did not entail a change in the air campaign. In fact, Westmoreland himself urged that no alteration in the air war accompany the newest round of troop deployments. On June 11 the MACV commander sent a follow-up memo that addressed the likely consequences that would accompany any attack by the U.S. on the Phuc Yen airbase. Should the U.S. move against the Communists' air assets in the North, then "major offensive air operations in Hanoi-Haiphong area must include continuous neutralization of all DRV jet capable airfields." This, in turn, would likely result in the Communists' full employment of their SAM capabilities. Moreover, should American air operations continue to attack the Hanoi and Haiphong area—which would be a necessity "once [the] die is cast"—then the North Vietnamese would in all likelihood intervene on a large scale in the South and the Chinese would follow suit in the air. Echoing the familiar logical sequence, Westmoreland concluded that attacks on Chinese airbases would become necessary, as would the consideration of using nuclear weapons and the possibility of the U.S. mobilizing for major war.⁵³⁴

The June 18 decision to begin a major phased deployment of troops to South Vietnam was made in secret, and George Ball and William Bundy, the two second level officials who had been pressing for a program aimed at limiting the American commitment while seeking negotiations with the DRV, were kept in the dark. For Ball in particular, the path that the U.S. was taking in the war was one that concerned him deeply. Ball sent a memo to the president on the same June 18 proposing that the U.S.

⁵³⁴ Kaiser 438.

cap any deployments at 100,000 for a three month trial period. In an NSC meeting on June 23, Ball went further, suggesting that should the U.S. and South Vietnamese continue to suffer military setbacks, the administration should think hard about cutting its losses and seek a way out of the conflict.⁵³⁵ For LBJ's principal advisers, however, this position was too extreme. Rusk countered that the stakes in Vietnam were far too grave to consider even a tactical retreat. Facing the undesired prospect of publicly committing the U.S. to a ground war in South Vietnam while his counselors were so divided, LBJ pressed for consensus. The president asked Ball and McNamara to draft recommendations so that a compromise position could be reached.

The position that McNamara took in his first draft on June 26 was clearly at odds with the conclusions of the intelligence assessments received over the past weeks and months, and in fact ran counter to decisions that the Defense Secretary had himself made previously to mitigate the probability of escalation. McNamara recommended a 40 U.S. battalion (200,000 man total) deployment and the mobilization of 100,000 reservists. More drastically, McNamara proposed increasing all aspects of the air campaign against the DRV, including: armed reconnaissance against LOCs with China, bombing the war production facilities, bombing and mining Haiphong harbor, and "as necessary" bombing the SAM sites and MIGs in the North. Perhaps as a nod to reaching the consensus that the president desired, the Defense Secretary suggested opening up a dialog with Hanoi, Beijing, and the VC in an effort to achieve a political settlement and as a means of preventing the Soviets from deepening their support.⁵³⁶

⁵³⁵ From the Under Secretary of State (Ball) to President Johnson, June 18, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume III, #7, *ibid.*, #16.

⁵³⁶ Kaiser, 452-53.

Given the well understood dangers that this program entailed, there are only three possible explanations for McNamara's proposal: 1) he forgot or ignored all of the information available regarding the propensity of the Chinese to intervene against the U.S., 2) he changed his mind concerning the veracity of those estimates, or 3) the Defense Secretary drafted the memo with the intention of bargaining with Ball; an attempt to pull the Under Secretary of State on board with a program that McNamara never intended to be so drastic. McNamara does not give any indication in his memoirs that this was his intention, but rather notes that he was simply fulfilling Westmoreland's request.⁵³⁷ But this explanation does not account for the caution that Westmoreland displayed regarding the air campaign, nor does it account for McNamara's apparent change of heart from only a few weeks prior to forego attacking the MIGs and SAMs in the North.

Irrespective, the proposal drew sharp criticism from many in Washington; chief among them was McGeorge Bundy. Upon reading McNamara's June 26 draft, Bundy responded,

It proposes a doubling of our presently planned strength in South Vietnam, a tripling of air effort in the north, and a new and very important program of naval quarantine. It proposes this new land commitment at a time when our troops are entirely untested in the kind of warfare projected. It proposes greatly extended air action when the value of the air action we have taken is sharply disputed. It proposes naval quarantine by mining at a time when nearly everyone agrees the real question is not in Hanoi, but in South Vietnam. My first reaction is that this program is rash to the point of folly.⁵³⁸

⁵³⁷ Robert S. McNamara with Brian VanDeMark, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Times Books, 1995), 193.

⁵³⁸ From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to Secretary of Defense McNamara, June 30, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume III, #35.

Rusk, too, did not concur with the massive program entailed in McNamara's draft.

On July 1, the Secretary of State sent a memo to the president recommending that the U.S. commit forces in such number "as a supplement to the best the South Vietnamese can do, to deny a Viet Cong victory." In a clear reference to the deployment decision made in mid-June, Rusk noted, "even present levels of U.S. forces are not yet reflected in corresponding damage to the Viet Cong. Reinforcements now in course should open the way to a war plan to engage concentrations of Viet Cong with punishing effect." Furthermore, Rusk pressed the president not to increase the level of Rolling Thunder; that "priority should be given to any need for air strikes on targets in South Viet-Nam." Finally, in response to Ball's willingness to countenance withdrawal, Rusk argued that the "integrity of the U.S. commitment is the principal pillar of peace throughout the world. If that commitment becomes unreliable, the communist world would draw conclusions that would lead to our ruin and almost certainly to a catastrophic war."⁵³⁹

McNamara, in turn, redrafted his recommendations on July 1. In this draft, McNamara scaled back the number of U.S. troops recommended to Westmoreland's original total of 44 battalions (34 U.S., and ten 3rd country). And, although the air campaign outlined did not significantly differ from his earlier draft, the Defense Secretary noted that ". . . no decision with respect to [the proposed target list] is needed now. Actions to quarantine the ports or to intensify the strike program against the North can on short notice be made a part of an increasing-pressures program."⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁹ Paper by Secretary of State Rusk, July 1, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume III, #39.

⁵⁴⁰ From Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Johnson, July 1, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume III, #38.

That evening, McGeorge Bundy forwarded proposals from Rusk, McNamara, Ball, and William Bundy to the president. After providing a brief synopsis of the differing positions (Ball: negotiated withdrawal, McNamara: expanded military action, William Bundy: a middle course for the next two months), Bundy suggested that LBJ “listen hard to George Ball and then reject his proposal.” The reason for this suggestion was simple: no one except Ball (and William Bundy to a lesser extent) believed that the time had come to plan for a negotiated settlement. Furthermore, as Bundy’s memo makes clear, McNamara was not adamant that the U.S. implement his proposed air campaign: “McNamara and Ball honestly believe in their own recommendations, though Bob would readily accept advice to tone down those of his recommendations which move rapidly against Hanoi by bombing and blockade. Dean Rusk leans toward the McNamara program, adjusted downward in this same way.”⁵⁴¹

The next day, LBJ, Rusk, McNamara, and Bundy met with Ball to discuss the various proposals. Nothing substantive was decided at this meeting, largely because no decision was required: all of the deployments for July had been previously cleared and no further deployments needed authorization for ten days.⁵⁴² LBJ did agree to send McNamara to Saigon to discuss military planning with Westmoreland. McNamara’s proposal upon returning to Washington on July 20 corresponded closely with his July 1 position paper, with the notable exception that it did not contain any recommendations for increasing the level of the air campaign against North Vietnam.⁵⁴³

⁵⁴¹ From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Johnson, July 1, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume III, #43.

⁵⁴² Kaiser, 462.

⁵⁴³ From Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Johnson, July 20, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume III, #67; Kaiser, 472.

McNamara's proposal to dramatically increase the air pressure on North Vietnam on June 26 was, in short, disingenuous. Based on the intelligence and estimates available at the time, the decisions that McNamara had made prior to that date which specifically ruled out taking the actions he proposed, and the need to bring George Ball on board with a program entailing an expanded ground war in the South, it is clear that the Defense Secretary was attempting to a bureaucratic end-around those who were pressing the president to consider reducing the American commitment to the war. Based on the evidence available, both Rusk and McGeorge Bundy were supported McNamara's play. On July 21, the president's top advisers succeeded in their task. In response to McNamara's post-Saigon proposal, Ball attempted raise doubts in LBJ's mind that the U.S. would be successful in South Vietnam, and that the entire effort was more damaging to the American image abroad than it was supporting. Rusk, McNamara, and Lodge (who had just been re-appointed ambassador to South Vietnam) all disagreed with Ball's recommendations. With that, Ball had had his "day in court."⁵⁴⁴

The second proposal for dramatically increasing the air campaign against the DRV was put forward on July 22 in a meeting LBJ held with his military commanders. The meeting notes supplied by Jack Valenti show the president as being deeply concerned about the potential for Chinese intervention in the future. Although Chief of Staff of the Air Force General John McConnell called for an expansion of the air war in North Vietnam to include "all military targets available" to the U.S., it was Marine Corp Commandant Greene who supplied the most detailed and expansive recommendation to expand the war. Not only did he recommend an additional 80,000 Marine deployment

⁵⁴⁴ Kaiser, 475-76.

over Westmoreland's request, Greene also urged that the U.S. commit air power against POL storage, airfields, MIGs, IL-28s, and the SAMs as soon as they were operational. Further, Greene advised attacking the DRV's industrial complex and for blockading Cambodia in order to "stop supplies from coming down." When Army General Harold Johnson seconded Greene's assessment that the U.S. was in for a long war in Vietnam, LBJ asked pointedly, "If we come in with hundreds of thousands of men and billions of dollars, won't this cause them to come in (China and Russia)?" After Johnson answered in the negative, LBJ retorted, "MacArthur didn't think they would come in either." When asked what the U.S. would have to do if the Chinese did indeed enter the war, Johnson stated after a long silence, "If so, we have another ball game . . . I would increase the build-up near [North Vietnam]—and increase action in Korea." McNamara noted at this point that such an operation would require 300,000 troops in addition to what was required to combat the VC. Prior to Johnson's proposal in the event the worse case scenario occurred, Wheeler suggested that "from a military point of view, we can handle, if we are determined to do so, China and [North Vietnam]"—in historian David Kaiser's estimation, "an obvious reference to nuclear weapons."⁵⁴⁵

Put starkly, if the Chinese were to intervene with combat forces in North Vietnam, LBJ's military commanders stated that the U.S. would have to commit a massive number of additional forces, threaten the Chinese on a secondary front (Korea), and put the possible use of nuclear weapons on the table. Although he did not say so in this meeting, LBJ was disinclined to follow a path that would entail such dramatic risks. And, neither were Rusk and McNamara. In a second meeting later that day, this time

⁵⁴⁵ Notes of Meeting, July 22, 1965, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume III, #76; Kaiser 476-77.

with only Wheeler representing the armed services, Rusk stated that the U.S. should not seek to extend the war in the North, “What we do in [South Vietnam] is not of great concern to China. But a progressive step-up in bombing increases risk of Chin[ese] intrusion. . . . Both China and the Soviets have pressure on them. A commitment in [South Vietnam] is one thing, but a commitment to preserve another socialist state is quite another. This is a distinction we must bear in mind. . . . A commitment of large forces by us will lead to pressures on us to destroy Hanoi. This is the key point.”⁵⁴⁶ With that, the administration’s top officials refused further consideration of expanding the air war in the North. On July 28, LBJ announced at a press conference that he had decided to increase the American strength in South Vietnam to 125,000 men. Additional forces would be needed later, and the president stated they would be sent as requested. No mention was made of the air campaign over the North because no fundamental change in strategy had occurred.

Assessment of the Strategic Design and Strategic Integration Mechanisms

As a result of the robust nature of the American information structure, the United States benefited from both the strategic design and strategic integration mechanisms during this phase of the Vietnam War. The operation of the strategic design mechanism had two profound effects. First, overtime American officials were able to obtain a remarkably accurate understanding of the present and likely future intentions of the PRC. Second, the graduated pressure strategy submitted to President Johnson in December 1964 was predicated on this accurate perception of the strategic context in Southeast

⁵⁴⁶ Meeting Agenda, undated, *FRUS*, 1964-68, volume III, #77.

Asia. By the beginning of 1965, top policymakers were in possession of a strategic plan that both explicitly sought to avoid inducing hostile balancing by the PRC, and that if followed, had a high probability producing that result.

Prior to the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the process of strategic design suffered from a lack of information pertaining to China's intentions. The absence of information available to American strategists did not result from blocked information flows within the U.S. government, however. On the contrary, on a number of occasions top policymakers requested information about the PRC's intentions from a number of sources, and those agencies responded as best they could, given what was available. When the graduated pressure concept first emerged, the Joint Chiefs of Staff provided information (obtained from the Joint Staff and DIA) about the PRC's logistical and material capabilities should the Chinese decide to become more involved in the war. At the same time, the CIA and State Department engaged in an open debate over the nature and meaning of the Sino-Soviet split. Nevertheless, top policymakers were unable to come to a firm conclusion about Chinese intentions with respect to the war in Vietnam because of the ambiguity of the existing information.

A clearer picture of China's intentions emerged soon after the United States launched its retaliation strikes against the DRV in the aftermath of Tonkin. During the critical period of August-September 1964, the CIA provided in-depth analysis on a daily basis of the PRC's military and diplomatic activities, along with that state's internal mobilization programs. As a result of the CIA's reporting, American officials were offered strikingly clear evidence in a timely fashion of how China was responding to the American escalation. Furthermore, the SIGMA II war game was structured around the

most up to date intelligence available from political and military sources, and this information was widely shared among the participants of the exercise. The availability of multi-sourced analysis enabled the players to not only assess the potential military responses available to the Chinese, but also to probe the possible political motivations that would drive Chinese decision making. Finally, the November working group included a critical intelligence panel (made up of analysts from the CIA, INR, and DIA) that afforded American strategists with a wide range of information as they hammered out the American limited war strategy. Critically, the analysis provided by that panel did not take the form of a sloppy bureaucratic compromise. Rather, when one agency dissented on a particular point, its perspective was made clear. And, as the Joint Chiefs of Staff formulated their responses to the various proposals offered, they too were privy to this valuable pool of information. In sum, as a result of the widespread availability of multi-sourced information, U.S. strategists were able to ascertain an accurate understanding of the intentions of the PRC.

The second feature of the robust American information structure, the density of lateral communication channels, had three direct effects on the strategic design process. First, because information assessment and strategic design took place within the interagency process, the information burden on top policymakers inherent to limited war was substantially reduced. Second, as a result of the wide spread sharing of information, American officials did not foreclose their strategic options when seemingly “simple” solutions to difficult problems were presented. Finally, because the agencies providing information were brought into the process of strategic design, the administration was presented with a strategy that responded to best estimates, rather than to biased proposals.

The reduction of the information burden on top policymakers afforded by the interagency process cannot be understated. During the two phases of strategic design, American officials went from a period of relative information scarcity to information abundance. Moreover, the period in which a tremendous amount of information became available was also a period of heightened tension between the United States and China. Because of the pre-existence of the taskforce system, the administration was able to redistribute the burden of intelligence assessment and strategic design to a relatively large number of individuals within different departments. Following the existing pattern of policymaking, the SIGMA II war game and the November working group were formally sanctioned, and were intentionally designed so that many different assessments and opinions were heard and debated. At no time during the process of strategy design were top policymakers forced to make decisions solely based on their own (limited) information processing capabilities.

Both before and after the Tonkin incident, top American officials were presented with a number of strategic options, ranging from gradual disengagement in Vietnam to a dramatic and immediate escalation of the war against the DRV. Because they offered rather straightforward solutions to what was an otherwise complex problem, their relative appeal to policymakers was heightened, especially during times of crisis. Yet, because strategic proposals were debated openly in the interagency process, no strategic proposal escaped the intense scrutiny afforded by the taskforce system. As a result, when proposals were submitted to the principals, their attendant drawbacks were also made available. In short, at the same time that the information burden on top officials was reduced, their understanding of the strategic situation was increased.

Because those agencies responsible for producing estimates based on the available intelligence were incorporated into the process of strategic decision making, top officials were presented with a strategy that was relatively free from any one department's bias. A prime example of this is SIGMA II. From the outset, the Joint Chiefs of Staff rejected the graduated pressure concept, favoring instead a more belligerent posture toward the DRV. SIGMA II was initiated by the JCS with the intention of showing policymakers that only by dramatically escalating the war against North Vietnam could there be any chance of reducing the DRV's support for the southern insurgency. Because a number of agencies were represented in the war game, however, policymakers were made aware that adopting such a course would dramatically increase the probability of Chinese intervention in the war. While SIGMA II was originally intended to serve the military's objectives, that objective was thwarted by the robust information structure. The lessons learned by the participants of the war game carried over into the November working group because it too included broad representation.

The operation of the strategic integration mechanism had profound effects on the ways in which the U.S. codified its strategy in the spring of 1965. After the U.S. began the air war against North Vietnam, top policymakers received a constant stream of multi-sourced information on the actions of the U.S. armed forces, and on how the target and the defender were responding to those actions. For example, Washington received updated information on the strength of the VC from MACV, on the PRC's increased commitment to supporting the southern insurgency from the CIA and the Consul General in Hong Kong, on the PRC's order of battle and war fighting methods from the National Intelligence Board, and on the status of Sino-Soviet relations since the beginning of phase

II from State Department officials and the INR. Combined, these reports showed that the American strategy in Vietnam was not producing the intended results on the ground in South Vietnam, on Haanoi's decision making calculations, or on the PRC's involvement in the region.

In light of these reports, a number of proposals for strategic change were forwarded to top policymakers. Critically, none of the options available were free of potential negative ramifications. Because of the widespread dissemination of intelligence estimates made possible by the density of lateral connections among departments, senior officials were made aware of the attendant drawbacks of each course of action—even though advocates of those proposals may have been less than forthcoming with these details themselves. Additionally, because of the cooperation among departments and agencies, state leaders were able to adjust their strategy in a manner that accurately signaled U.S. intentions to the Chinese. As the joint State-Defense Short Range Report made clear, by changing the mission of American ground forces and by leveling the intensity of Rolling Thunder, the U.S. would be able to wage war in a manner that allowed for the possibility of making some headway against the VC, while refraining from presenting the PRC with a highly intensive threat. Still, no one was overly optimistic about the proposed course. Intelligence estimates made plain that the U.S. was embarking on a path that would likely produce few immediate results in the South. The key point is that top officials were made aware of these trade-offs, and their decision was based on a clear understanding of the risks involved.

How do the two alternative approaches, bureaucratic theory and realism, fare in this case? In Chapter 4, I argued that bureaucratic theory cannot explain the operation of

the strategic design mechanism during this phase of the Vietnam War. The primary reasons for bureaucratic theory's negative expectations lie in the preferences and doctrines of the armed services for fighting limited warfare. Throughout the period under consideration, American Air chiefs routinely urged Secretary of Defense McNamara and President Johnson to adopt a strategic bombing campaign against the DRV. In terms of its scale, strategic bombing was far more dramatic than the graduated pressure strategy that was ultimately adopted. Moreover, the Air Force either down-played the likelihood that the PRC would adopt hostile military balancing, or appeared willing to risk that eventuality, when it pressed its case to civilian policymakers. In any event, the air chiefs believed that the Chinese would be ultimately deterred from intervening in the war against the U.S. because of the American nuclear trump-card. In short, bureaucratic theory does not expect the operation of the strategic design mechanism because the preferences of armed services were clearly at odds with those of civilian policymakers, and because of the autonomy acquired by the U.S. Air Force in matters of strategic design. Based on the analysis above, it is clear that bureaucratic theory fails to explain the outcome of strategic design in this phase of the Vietnam War.

The robust information structure enabled top American decision makers to design a limited war strategy for the Vietnam War that was well calibrated to the intentions of the potential balancer, the PRC. Moreover, that strategy was in place by the beginning of 1965, months prior to the otherwise credible revelation of China's intentions and issuance of its deterrent threats. Thus, while realism does anticipate the operation of the strategic design mechanism in this case, it expects the U.S. to have been able to design its strategy at a point in time well after that when the strategy was actually designed. Because of the

robust nature of the U.S. information structure, American officials were able to piece together existing intelligence in a manner that allowed for a remarkably accurate forecast of China's intentions. In short, while both realism and the information structure framework anticipate the operation of the strategic design mechanism, they expect its operation at different times. The evidence above shows the information structure framework to be a more powerful explanation for balancing avoidance than realism.

Chapter 6

Explaining Balancing Avoidance: Information Structures Versus the Alternatives

Introduction

In chapters 2-5, I employed the information structure framework to explore how two American governments designed and implemented limited war strategies in two cases of limited wars, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. In chapters 2 and 4, I first offered an overview of the cases under consideration to demonstrate how the evolving limited war strategies affected the threat perceptions and actions of the potential balancer, the Peoples' Republic of China. Second, I offered a description of the pattern of interactions among departments, agencies and top officials with the objective of determining whether the information structure of the challenger was either robust or truncated prior to the initiation of war. In chapters 3 and 5, I conducted an in-depth examination of how information was, or was not, shared among relevant departments, agencies, and top officials to show: 1) whether the information structure functioned as expected during war time, and 2) whether the information structure produced the two critical mechanisms detailed in chapter 1, the strategic design and strategic integration mechanism. When each case is examined separately, my findings indicate that the information structure approach is highly effective in explaining the outcomes observed.

Two critical steps are necessary, however, to secure confidence in the framework. First, an explicit and careful comparison among the dependent variable, independent variable, and two mechanisms in each case is in order to assess whether the specific propositions detailed in chapter 1 hold across the two cases. Second, the alternative approaches in international relations theory which speak to the themes developed in this

dissertation must be considered to evaluate whether the putative effects of information structures are not actually caused by “lurking” variables. In this chapter, I first offer an explicit comparison of the cases under consideration to render a *prima facie* judgment on strength of the information structure framework in explaining the outcomes observed. I then discuss the relevance of the alternative approaches paying particular attention to how my argument either compliments or contradicts the expectations of extant IR theorizing.

Korea and Vietnam Compared

Scope Parameters: Cases of Limited War?

Prior to comparing the causal influence of the three approaches to balancing avoidance, it is necessary to ascertain whether or not the Korean and Vietnam wars were in fact “limited wars.” Specifically, in each case did the two states under investigation (the challenger and potential balancer) both hold a top preference for non-intervention? If the potential balancer did intervene, was this decision the result of changed intentions overtime? If the potential balancer did not intervene, was the option considered to be viable and necessary under certain conditions?

Throughout both the Korean and Vietnam wars, top American officials preferred not to have the Chinese intervene against U.S. forces. In Korea, President Truman and Secretary of State Acheson stated on a number of occasions, both publicly and privately, that avoiding Chinese hostile military balancing was of critical importance to the success of military operations and to objectives in U.S. grand strategy in general. Perhaps no better exposition of this preference came in the comment made by Acheson to Secretary

of Defense Louis Johnson on July 31, 1950, that “we are not at war with Communist China nor do we wish to become involved in hostilities with Chinese Communist forces.”⁵⁴⁷ Moreover, engaging in combat with the Chinese in the Far East was among the worst options for U.S. military strategists. Existing major war plans in 1950 envisaged a strategic defensive in the Far East in the event of war with the Soviet Union. Becoming bogged down in Korea would prevent an efficient “swing” maneuver to Europe should World War III erupt.⁵⁴⁸ In Vietnam as well, top administration officials preferred not to wage war against the PRC. As is demonstrated repeatedly in Chapter 5, the entire thrust of U.S. military operations and diplomacy was aimed at preventing the Chinese from taking the fateful step to war. Although American officials considered the war to be a means of checking “Chinese aggression” in Indochina, that war was fought to contain China, rather than to defeat Chinese forces directly.⁵⁴⁹ Despite the fact that a few American officials in 1950 and in 1964-65 did prefer to take the fight to China, they represented a minority view and their preferences were not adopted as American war aims in either case. In short, in both the Korean and Vietnam wars, top American officials preferred not to fight the Chinese directly and actively worked to avoid that outcome.

Similarly, leaders in Beijing preferred in both cases not to engage in hostile military balancing against the United States. The decision to intervene in the Korean War was a painful one for the Chinese. Not only were the Communists in the process of

⁵⁴⁷ Johnson to Acheson, 29 July 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VI, 401.

⁵⁴⁸ Kenneth W. Condit, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy*, Vol. II, 1947-1949, (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1979), 294-302, 520.

⁵⁴⁹ See also Gordon H. Chang, *Friends and Enemies: the United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1948-1972* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 256.

consolidating their regime (economically and socially) after the arduous Chinese Civil War, but their primary military focus was on completing their revolution by taking Taiwan by force. It was only after the U.S. demonstrated its willingness to rollback communist advances by eradicating the DPRK on the Korean peninsula that the Chinese elected to intervene against the advancing U.S./U.N. forces. This is not to say, however, that Beijing was unwilling to make the best out of a bad situation. Chen Jian has written extensively on the ideological factors that buttressed intervention in November 1950.

According to Chen,

. . . . early in August 1950, more than one month before the Inchon landing, Mao Zedong and the Beijing leadership [were] inclined to send troops to Korea, and China's military and political preparations had begun even a month earlier. . . . the concerns behind the decision to enter the Korean War went far beyond the defense of the safety of the Chinese-Korean border. Mao and his associates aimed to win a glorious victory by driving the Americans off the Korean peninsula.⁵⁵⁰

Two points must be made in response to this argument. First, as Chapter 2 demonstrates, I concur with Chen that the Chinese began preparing militarily for a possible intervention soon after the U.S. interposed the 7th Fleet in the Taiwan Strait. Yet, preparations for intervention are strategically prudent for a potential balancer in the face of an escalating war waged by a challenger. The key question is: under what conditions will a potential balancer actually intervene? While the Chinese took advantage of the haphazard advance of U.S. forces up the peninsula, their intervention was certainly avoidable.⁵⁵¹ Preventing intervention would have required the U.S. to signal to the Chinese that a counterattack

⁵⁵⁰ Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 3.

⁵⁵¹ See, for example, explanation of the First Phase Offensive offered by Peng Dehuai, the Chinese commander at the time. "We employed the tactics of purposely showing ourselves to be weak, increasing the arrogance of the enemy, letting him run amuck, and luring him deep into our areas." Quoted in Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 178.

against a hardened defense (i.e., either at the 38th parallel, or at the narrow neck of the peninsula) would have entailed significant costs and few benefits (however defined). Second, while Chen is certainly correct in arguing that the defeat of the U.S. would have provided significant, ideationally-based, benefits for the Chinese, it is also correct that those benefits were only manifest as a result of the *way* in which the U.S. prosecuted the war in Korea. By denying Taiwan to the PRC after declaring in January 1950 that Taiwan lay outside the U.S. defense perimeter, and through its attempted rollback of communism in North Korea, the U.S. quickly became a prime ideological target for Beijing. Nevertheless, the flip-side of that proposition must also be considered: had the Chinese decided not to intervene, the U.S. would have continued to be a highly intensive threat not only to China's physical security, but also to the very identity of the PRC. In other words, while the Chinese stood to benefit through intervention, not intervening would have permitted a significant physical and ideological threat to remain in an area proximate to China. In sum, the Chinese would have preferred not to intervene in the Korean War, but opted for this course when it became clear that the United States posed a highly intensive threat to the regime.

China's preference to not intervene in the Vietnam War is evinced by its decision not to intervene. Yet, what makes this case applicable for investigation is China's manifest willingness to intervene under certain conditions. Beijing undertook a number of critical steps, both militarily and diplomatically, that indicated its readiness to engage in hostile balancing. Among the most salient are: the creation of the Third Front (or, the massive transfer of industrial capabilities from the periphery to the interior of the country), the redeployment of major military units internally, and the extensive military

assistance provided to the DRV. Put simply, during the period under consideration, the Chinese laid the groundwork for intervention should it become necessary. Moreover, at critical times, leaders in Beijing made their intention to intervene against the U.S. clear to their counterparts in Hanoi and Washington. While declarations of future intentions by a state are not always genuine, there was sufficient evidence (from a number of sources) that accurately conveyed Chinese intentions to intervene if pressed. The specific actions taken by the PRC to prepare for intervention were both costly and significant—they were not empty gestures or bluffs. Chinese intervention was certainly “possible” thereby satisfying Mahoney’s and Goertz’s criteria for negative case selection in qualitative research.⁵⁵²

Dependent Variable: Limited War Strategies and the Potential Balancer’s Threat

Valuation

In Chapter 1, I argued that a potential balancer will engage in hostile military balancing against a challenger if the potential balancer perceives the challenger to be a “highly intensive threat.” If the potential balancer perceives the challenger as posing a threat at a lower level of intensity, the potential balancer will adopt a balancing strategy that is less costly and risky: if the challenger is perceived as constituting a “moderately intensive threat” then the potential balancer will seek allies; if the challenger is perceived as constituting a “low intensity threat” then the potential balancer will seek to bolster its own military capabilities. These propositions enable me to track not only the potential balancer’s balancing options over time, but also the ability to evaluate how the challenger’s limited war strategy affected the potential balancer’s balancing choices.

⁵⁵² James Mahoney and Gary Goertz, “The Possibility Principle: Choosing Negative Cases in Comparative Research,” *American Political Science Review* 98, 4 (November 2004).

The U.S. waged its limited war in Korea in four discernable phases: first, the interposition of the 7th Fleet in the Taiwan Strait; second, the amphibious landing at Inchon; third, the crossing of the 38th parallel into North Korea; and fourth the “final offensive” up to the Yalu River. At each successive phase, the Chinese perceived the U.S. to be an increasingly intensive threat and undertook increasingly hostile actions in preparation for its eventual intervention. Following the 7th Fleet deployment, the PRC issued a number of verbal threats to the U.S. and rapidly redeployed its military forces to the North Korean border. Following the Inchon landing, the Zhou-Pannikar communiqué was issued. After U.S./U.N. forces crossed the 38th parallel, the Chinese initiated its “First Phase Offensive.” Finally, in response to the American decision to push to the Yalu, the Chinese intervened in force, throwing its opponent south of the 38th parallel. Although Chinese threat valuation of the United States did grow throughout the summer and fall of 1950, it is important to recognize the pre-June benchmark of Chinese perceptions of the U.S. Prior to the outbreak of the war, the PRC viewed the U.S. as a “moderately intensive threat” and in response, codified an alliance with the Soviet Union. As such, Chinese balancing options were significantly winnowed prior to the North Korea attack. When the U.S. opted to rollback the communist regime in the North, the Chinese were left only with one effective balancing option—direct military intervention. Nonetheless, this option was costly and potentially risky and Beijing did not adopt this course lightly. Unfortunately, as will be addressed below, the military and diplomatic signals that the Chinese sent to the U.S. were missed because the American information structure was severely truncated.

Between 1964-1965, the U.S. war in Vietnam unfolded in four stages as well: from January to July 1964, the U.S. conducted a low intensity campaign along the lines of OPLAN 34A and engaged in a balanced diplomatic effort to win adherents to its objectives in the region; following the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the U.S. initiated reprisal air strikes against targets in the DRV and deployed air units to the South; in late-February/early-March, the major air campaign known as Rolling Thunder began and was accompanied by the initial deployment of Marines to South Vietnam; finally, in late-July, the Johnson administration decided to focus its war effort in South Vietnam by increasing the number of ground forces there while deciding against an increase in the intensity of the air war against the North. In response to the first three phases of the war, the PRC's threat perception of the United States increased significantly, and leaders in Beijing adopted increasingly hostile balancing measures. During the January-July 1964 period, the Chinese leveled a series of threats to the U.S. against its war in the South and laid the diplomatic groundwork with Hanoi for their eventual military alliance. Following the American response to the Tonkin incident, PRC began a program of significant military mobilization and redeployment measures to its southern border, launched the "Resist America and Assist Vietnam" program of domestic social mobilization, and undertook a massive project of industrial relocation from the periphery to the interior of China along the lines of the "Third Front." Finally, following the U.S. initiation of Rolling Thunder and deployment of Marines to the South, Beijing and Hanoi codified their military alliance, and the Chinese sent a number of strongly worded and specific threats to the United States warning against further escalation in the air war against the DRV. At this point, the Chinese perceived the U.S. to be a threat of moderate, but growing intensity.

Yet, the Chinese never assessed the Americans to be a highly intensive threat. The reason for this was that after it became clear to administration officials that the intensity of the Rolling Thunder campaign could not secure its intended objectives, top U.S. officials opted to focus on winning the war on the ground in the south. The tempo and severity of Rolling Thunder was plateaued, and as a result, Chinese threat perception did not escalate.

In each case, the U.S. waged its limited war in four distinct phases, and in response, China's perception of American threat changed. Thus, there are a total of eight "observable" instantiations of the dependent variable in the two case studies presented above. Table 6.1 summarizes Sino-American strategic interaction in each case.

Table 6.1

Dependent Variable	Korea	Vietnam
<i>Did Potential balancer perceive Challenger as "highly intensive threat?"/Did intervention result?</i>	<p>Yes/Yes: PRC's baseline threat valuation (pre-war) of U.S. was moderate intensity. Sino-Soviet Alliance was response. U.S. action → Chinese response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7th Fleet → verbal threats and troop redeployment • Inchon landing → Zhou-Pannikar communiqué • Crossing 38th parallel → 1st Phase Offensive • Final Offensive → full intervention 	<p>No/No: PRC viewed U.S. as a moderately intensive threat. Formal alliance with DRV and extensive provision of military support was response. U.S. action → Chinese response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OPLAN 34A/diplomacy → verbal threats & pledges to DRV • Tonkin reprisal & air redeployment → military mobilization & redeployments/ "Resist America"/ "Third Front" • Rolling Thunder/Marines → direct threats & formal alliance with DRV • Plateau Rolling Thunder/troops to south → status quo

Independent Variable: Truncated and Robust Information Structures

In Chapter 1, I argued that a challenger's ability to effectively calibrate its limited war strategy so as to avoid provoking hostile military balancing by other states is a function of the strength of its information structure. Information structures are defined as, "interconnected communications channels for receiving information from the

environment, for processing that information to serve specific objectives, and for sending internal and external messages.”⁵⁵³ I argued that information structures resist substantial manipulation in the short-run owing to their structural properties. As a result, I stipulated that it is possible to determine the characteristics of a state’s information structure prior to the outbreak of war when a state’s system of information management will be under significant strain. Moreover, I argued that such a procedure was indeed necessary so that the proposed effects of information structures could be analytically parsed from influences originating from other potential variables and processes.

A state’s information structure can be classified according to two primary characteristics: the extent to which state leaders receive information from many or few relevant sources (multi- vs. single-sourced), and the degree to which subordinate agencies share pertinent information with each other (dense lateral connections vs. “stove-piping”). Although it is quite conceivable that a number of permutations are possible among these indicators, I adopted a broader categorization schema—or, ideal types—as a means of facilitating general comparisons. A state’s information structure can be deemed “robust” if leaders benefit from multi-sourced information channels and if subordinate agencies are connected by dense communication channels. Alternatively, a state’s information structure is “truncated” when leaders rely on one or very few sources of information, and when subordinate agencies function in isolation from each other.

In each of the case studies, I offered a discussion of the institutional setting in which the system of information management was embedded prior to the periods of limited warfare that are the domain of inquiry of this dissertation. Prior to the outbreak

⁵⁵³ Doris A. Graber, *The Power of Communication: Managing Information in Public Organizations* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2003), 5.

of the Korean War, the American information structure was clearly truncated. In terms of lateral connections, there were two potential institutions that could have facilitated efficient and routine information sharing among the relevant agencies and departments within the U.S. government: the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Council. Neither, however, functioned effectively at the time. Two organs within the CIA were established to manage the flow of information within the government. The Interdepartmental Coordinating and Planning Staff (ICAPS) was created to assist the Director of Central Intelligence in his dealings with the intelligence chiefs of the various services and departments that constituted the intelligence community early in the Cold War. ICAPS was charged with coordinating the intelligence collection activities of the broader community so the broad-based national security assessments could be conducted on a routine basis. The Office of Reports and Estimates (ORE) was established to review the raw intelligence produced by the community and to generate those national security estimates that would assist the development of future foreign-military policy. Neither ICAPS nor the ORE proved capable of fulfilling its charge, however. The primary obstacle was that these two bodies (and the CIA in general) lacked the resources to counter well entrenched bureaucratic interests against information sharing. Additionally, the NSC system, which was also in its infancy in the late 1940s and early 1950s, was incapable of filling in for the CIA. Council meetings themselves were rather laborious affairs as a result of their crowded agendas and attendance. Further, because of the formalistic manner in which the President arranged his advisory system and the relative weakness of the NSC Staff, Truman lacked the requisite tools for effective management of the process of foreign policy design and

implementation. The administration had precious little experience in conducting interagency working groups, taskforces, and war games—mechanisms that could have served as the infrastructure for effective strategy creation and execution when war broke out on the Korean peninsula.

In terms of the sources of strategic information, the U.S. government was forced to rely almost exclusively on a single and highly biased source of intelligence: General Douglass MacArthur's Far East Command. For many years prior to June 1950, MacArthur and his intelligence chief, Major General Charles Willoughby, worked successfully to exclude other intelligence services (i.e., the CIA) from operating in their domain. Moreover, as a result of political pressures being brought to bear on the State Department in the late 1940s, a cadre of seasoned experts on China was purged from the ranks of the DOS—expertise that was sorely needed at the time given the lack of official state-to-state contacts between the U.S. and PRC. Thus, by the time of the outbreak of the Korean War, the FEC provided the vast majority of strategic and tactical intelligence available on countries in the Far East to policymakers in Washington. Unfortunately, as a result of particular dysfunctions within the FEC, neither the information provided to MacArthur by his subordinates, nor that made available to Washington by MacArthur was of high quality. On the one hand, MacArthur's subordinates tended to avoid passing along discomfiting information to their superior. Further, as a result of MacArthur's self-determined perspicacity at discerning the nuances of the "Oriental Mind," coupled with the fact that he was superior in rank to all of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, top officials at the Pentagon were hard-pressed to acquire timely and accurate reports from the Commander in the Far East. Finally, with the outbreak of the war, MacArthur was placed

in command responsibility for operations in Korea; a duty that he acquired in addition to those that he and his staff were already charged with fulfilling. In short, well before the outbreak of the Korean War, officials in Washington were forced to rely on a single, overburdened, and often disingenuous source of information about the strategic context in the Far East.

The American information structure underwent a long process of development spurred by the failures exhibited during the Korean War. By the time LBJ assumed office, departments and agencies within the government had been drawn together much more tightly as a result of the creation of lateral connections through which information was routinely shared. Inter-departmental information sharing emerged with the increase in power and competence of the NSC system. First, the position of National Security Adviser emerged as a pivotal figure in the information structure by virtue of the fact that the Special Assistant was responsible for both the process of foreign policy and for providing the president with policy advice. The National Security Adviser's power stemmed from two primary sources. The first was his privileged position in the information structure, an information conduit connecting the bureaucracy and the president. The second was that the NSC Staff's capabilities and purview were dramatically bolstered after a series of overhauls. At the same time, the National Security Council itself suffered a de facto degradation in power. Under neither Kennedy nor LBJ did the Council serve as the body through which information was shared and foreign policy was actually designed. Rather, the National Security Adviser and the NSC Staff directly managed the taskforce system that brought departments together to resolve particular foreign policy problems on an ad hoc basis. Thus, prior to January 1964, the

U.S. government developed a series of procedures that produced more effective information sharing among departments and agencies. And, because the system was overseen from within the White House, the results of the taskforces and working groups were of higher quality.

In addition to increasing the lateral connections among departments and agencies within the U.S. government, this bolstered system of information management benefited from the increase in the number of sources of information available to top officials in Washington. Two institutional features stand out as being critical: the reorganization of the NSC Staff and the creation of the Situation Room. The NSC Staff cum “mini-State Department” proved to be an invaluable check on both the State Department and Defense Department. With the creation of thematic and geographical divisions within the Staff, members acquired the ability to offer independent analysis to the National Security Adviser and president. The granting of specific portfolio assignments to staffers within the White House meant that the analyses offered by the DOS and DOD would not be the last word on a particular foreign policy issue. Furthermore, with the creation of the Situation Room, NSC Staff members (and the National Security Adviser and president) were not forced to rely solely on each department for raw information. Whenever it was deemed necessary, top officials and NSC staffers could obtain information almost instantaneously from around the globe. These two institutional features of the Kennedy and Johnson information management system, in short, facilitated both the sharing of information among governmental departments and enabled top officials to receive information from a multitude of sources.

Apart from the reforms instituted across departments, restructuring within particular departments further bolstered top officials' access to information. Robert McNamara's Planning Programming Budgeting System significantly increased the amount of information made available to the Office of the Secretary of Defense. The creation of this system enabled the Secretary of Defense and his staff to conduct their own analyses of strategic, operational, and tactical matters without being forced to rely solely on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This is not to say, of course, that the JCS were marginalized. They were not, as their advice on military matters (advice that stemmed from years of experience) was highly valuable. Rather, the OSD acquired the ability to supplement, and when necessary, counter the JCS with its own advice. Finally, the technical capabilities of the intelligence community expanded greatly with the growth of the National Reconnaissance Office and National Security Agency. These enhanced capabilities provided the CIA and OSD with valuable strategic (and tactical) information that had been heretofore unavailable.

In sum, the American information structure under Truman differed significantly from that under Johnson. Whereas Truman's information structure was "truncated," LBJ's was far more "robust." Table 6.2 summarizes these differences.

Table 6.2

Independent Variable	Korea	Vietnam
<p><i>Was the Challenger's Information Structure Robust or Truncated?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lateral connections or Stove-piping? • Multi- or Single-sourced information flows? 	<p>Truncated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stove-piped—ICAPS failed to coordinate intelligence activities; ORE failed to coordinate intelligence products; NSC system dysfunctional (Council meetings ineffective; Staff relatively weak); Formalistic advisory system without information management mechanisms. • Single-Sourced—FEC held information monopoly in Far East (CIA excluded; intra-FEC information dysfunctions); “China Hands” purged from DOS. 	<p>Robust:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lateral—NSC system: Adviser's dual role of policy advisor and staff secretary placed him in position of long and short range planning process; growth in power/competency of NSC Staff; creation of Situation Room, downgrade of NSC; creation of taskforce system • Multi-Sourced: NSC Staff with portfolios; Situation Room provides more information; CIA/OSD obtain more information from depts.

Strategic Design Mechanism

I argued in chapter 1 that the ability of a challenger to calibrate its limited war strategy effectively so as to prevent hostile military balancing by a challenger will depend, first, upon the operation of decision-making mechanism. The *strategic design mechanism* concerns the ability of the challenger to acquire information pertaining to the potential balancer's intentions before and during a war, and then to manage that information as strategy is crafted. The operation of this mechanism can be observed in two ways. The first deals with whether top officials are able to differentiate signals from superfluous noise in the international system. Distinguishing signals from noise is critical to effective limited war strategies. Strategies that are predicated upon incorrect information stand a greater chance of producing errors that will redound negatively for the challenger. The most effective method of parsing signals from noise is the diversification of the sources of information that a state employs as it “reads” the potential balancer. Differentiating signals from noise is only a first step, however, in designing limited war strategies that refrain from provoking a potential balancer. The

second crucial factor is the ability to actually create a strategy in response to those acquired signals. While this may appear at first glance to be a commonsensical statement, in practice this step may prove illusive if decision makers lack processes for managing the large volume of information inherent during times of war. In short, the operation of the strategic design mechanism enables state leaders to first parse signals from noise in a particular strategic setting, and second, to mitigate the problem of information overload so that the strategy adopted reflects the signals obtained. The strategic design mechanism will become operative when a state's information structure is "robust": when information reaching top decision makers is multi-sourced and when departments and agencies are densely connected by lateral communication channels.

In this section, I offer an explicit comparison between the two cases with an eye toward the process of strategic design. I examine each of the decision points discussed in chapters 3 and 5 as a means of linking the independent variable to the (non)operation of the strategic design mechanism.

The Korean War

The 7th Fleet Decision

The first decision made by the Truman administration after the North Korean attack was the interposition of the U.S. 7th Fleet in the Taiwan Strait. This decision was made in an effort to localize hostilities, to prevent both the Chinese Communists and Nationalists from attacking one another. This decision was made in the forum of the two Blair House meetings, a forum notable primarily because of whom it did not include: Director of Central Intelligence Roscoe Hillenkoetter. That the CIA was without institutional representation at these critical meetings should not have been unexpected

given the existing pattern of relations among the CIA, military services, and governmental departments. The pre-war pattern of services and departments circumventing the CIA's requests for information and of ignoring their strategic estimates held throughout the entire period of June-November 1950.

In addition to the fragmentary information on the progress of the southward advance of the North Korean Army, only a negligible amount of information pertaining to the PRC, the most likely potential balancer, was made available to top officials in Washington. The most critical memorandum of the time was offered by MacArthur and focused on the strategic importance of Taiwan—an estimate written prior to North Korea's invasion. MacArthur argued that Taiwan should be viewed as an extremely valuable piece of strategic real estate and one that that could be employed to great effect as the U.S. attempted to contain the USSR and PRC. MacArthur's memo was, in other words, more than a routine estimate of an existing strategic environment: it was a call for a revamped and expansive grand strategy. As I argued in chapter 3, the problems were that its consideration came at a time when pressure for military action was extreme, and that it entered a decision making framework incapable of conducting thorough analysis. Specifically, no interdepartmental study was conducted on the implications of such a grand strategic reorientation (i.e., how securing Taiwan would complicated existing major war plans), no consideration was given to the likely effects it would have on the intentions of the PRC in light of the January 1950 declarations that Taiwan lay outside of the U.S. defense perimeter, and no estimate was considered as to how the PRC would likely behave militarily given that the U.S. would soon be waging war on the Korean peninsula. Rather, those present at the Blair House meetings simply grabbed onto

MacArthur's recommendations because they *seemed* appropriate. The decision making setting immediately after the North Korean attack was incapable of managing the massive information burden under which the President and his top advisers labored. Moreover, alternative recommendations and estimates were unavailable to top officials as a result of the absence of crisis management procedures that had been recommended by the Intelligence Survey Group.

Only after the 7th Fleet decision was made were estimates conducted pertaining to the intentions of potential balancers, China and the Soviet Union. Despite the need for accurate, interdepartmental assessments, however, decision makers were presented with estimates representing particular views or biases. For example, the State Department's OIR put forth an estimate that cast the PRC's current and future intentions onle in the most favorable light. The OIR argued that if the U.S. adopted a strong stance in Korea, the PRC would realize the quixotic nature of the Soviet Union's adventurism. Put simply, policymakers were never forced to explicitly question their approach to the war at an early date. The existing information structure permitted single source reporting to dominate the attention of top policymakers and facilitated post-hoc support for those decisions by failing to subject evidence to greater scrutiny at lower levels.

The Rollback Debate

The absence of a coordinated interdepartmental framework for strategic design had its most significant effects during the July-October 1950 period. During these crucial months, the debate (such as it was) concerning the merits of rolling back communism on the Korean peninsula took place in Washington. This process occurred in two phases. In the first, from early July to mid-September, the debate was pitched in general terms

focusing on the potential costs and benefits of crossing the 38th parallel. At the end of the first phase, it was concluded that an advance northward by U.S./UN forces would occur, under specific circumstance. The second phase, following MacArthur's successful amphibious landing at the port of Inchon, concerned itself specifically with those conditions—i.e., whether intervention by the PRC was likely if the border was crossed. In neither phase was the strategic design mechanism operative: in the first phase, the stove-piping of departments and agencies prevented American decision makers from ascertaining the likely intentions of the PRC; in the second phase, the absence of lateral connections among those governmental organs failed to alleviate the information burden that was saddling top policymakers.

The debate over the merits of American forces crossing the 38th parallel began in early July, only to be finally settled in mid-September. During that time, John Allison, the Director of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs in the State Department, emerged immediately as the most influential person in the debate. Allison's position from the beginning was that the United States should take the lead in rolling back communist advances in Korea because failing to do so would be morally reprehensible, would give international political momentum to the Soviet Union's expansionist efforts, and would ultimately invite future attacks against South Korea once the current round of hostilities ended. Most importantly, Allison did not believe that the China or the Soviet Union would engage in hostile military balancing if American forces crossed the parallel. Allison argued that the United States would not provoke intervention for three reasons. First, Allison posited that above all else, the Kremlin preferred to avoid a global war with the U.S. Second, intervention in Korea by the USSR after the U.S. crossed the parallel

would immediately lead to the outbreak of World War III. As such, the Soviets would refrain from sending their forces to assist the North Koreans. Finally, Allison argued that because all Chinese foreign policy choices were determined by the Kremlin, and were thus subject to the same strategic calculus as the Soviet Union, the Chinese would ultimately refrain from intervening as well. At the same time (and paradoxically), Allison felt that the probability of war with the Soviet Union was high no matter what actions the U.S. took. As such, it was considered acceptable to head toward the brink with full knowledge that the U.S. was acting in a morally responsible manner.

Allison's position was logically flawed, bereft of a solid evidentiary base, and extremely dangerous. Allison won the debate because the information structure at the time failed to provide top decision makers with viable alternatives. Two possible alternative approaches existed. On the one hand, both the CIA and the State Department's Policy Planning Staff held that while the Soviets did control Chinese foreign policy decision making, the Soviets would be willing to commit Chinese troops to a war in North Korea as a means of wearing down U.S. forces in an area of marginal strategic value. Without established patterns of interagency consultation and coordination, however, these bureaus were prevented from collaborating to present a united front against the dominant (and flawed) position. Furthermore, the Joint Chiefs of Staff took the position that so long as an invasion of North Korea could be pulled off without American forces becoming bogged down, then they would support Allison's proposal. The JCS would have been valuable allies for the CIA and PPS, yet the Chiefs remained uninformed of the CIA's opposition until very late in the game. As such, Allison's bureaucratic opponents remained divided and were ultimately defeated.

The second alternative strategic perspective stood an even smaller chance of gaining a hearing by top policy makers. One feature common to Allison's, the CIA's and PPS's positions was that the Soviet Union would determine the conditions under which the Chinese would intervene in Korea. This view gave short shrift to any notion that the PRC would engage in hostile balancing against a threat that it alone deemed to be highly intensive. There were only a few individuals in government service at the time who took the idea of Beijing's autonomy from Moscow seriously. Proponents of this view (known as the China Hands, and included in their ranks O. Edmund Clubb and U. Alexis Johnson) had direct experience with the Chinese Communists, and could have offered wise counsel as Washington actively considered waging war in a region proximate to China. Unfortunately, these individuals were never brought directly into the decision making process. More generally, the China Hands (having been moved to other bureaus or purged from the ranks of the DOS altogether) were in no position to offer effective advice at the time. As such, the actual intentions of the Chinese remained a mystery to those who would approve an eventual move northward. In sum, the American information structure precluded a thorough and wide ranging debate over the current and future intentions of the PRC. Without effective communication channels among departments and agencies, the conventional wisdom was never subjected to rigorous scrutiny nor were alternative perspectives given even a modest hearing.

The Decision to Cross the 38th Parallel

The second phase of the rollback debate occurred after NSC 81/1 was signed by President Truman, and after the Inchon landing placed American forces in a position to cross the parallel with relative ease. According to NSC 81/1, American forces would be

permitted to cross the parallel only if neither the Chinese nor Soviets had intervened, or threatened to intervene in the war. It was at this point where the administration was most receptive—at least on paper—to the possibility of intervention and was most willing to forego crossing the parallel if necessary. During this period, the administration received a number of warnings from different sources indicating that the Chinese would intervene in the Americans crossed the parallel. The strongest and clearest warning came from the Chinese, via the Indian ambassador to Beijing, K. M. Pannikar. Curiously, none of these warnings prevented the U.S. from crossing into North Korea.

The reason for this failure stemmed from the fact that the information structure of the time could not effectively alleviate the information overload problem that top policy makers were forced into. By this point, China had provided the United States with a wealth of data indicating clearly that the PRC had the means and ability to intervene if the U.S. crossed the parallel. The problem was that this information did not come in the complete package that administration officials expected: a clear, concise, and public warning against invasion. Rather, the Chinese made their intentions known primarily through private communications and left it up to the Americans to square those warnings with the steady and open buildup of military forces in Manchuria. Unfortunately, the administration lacked the information management system that would have permitted a timely and accurate assessment of the steady build-up in Manchuria, the political intelligence provided by Pannikar and other sources, and the increasing stridency of the PRC's rhetoric. At no time was an ad hoc interagency committee formed during this crucial period to collect and assess all of the available intelligence. Instead, top officials were forced to draw conclusions based on their own faculties. As such, each individual

data point was evaluated on its own merits and not placed in a general pattern of increasing Chinese belligerence and capabilities. In short, officials in Washington desperately needed a way to manage the deluge of information that had been pouring in for months pertaining to the possible intentions of the PRC. On October 8, U.S. forces crossed the 38th parallel as a result of the mistaken belief that the PRC would refrain from engaging in hostile military balancing.

The Vietnam War

Strategic Development and the Search for Information

During the period January-July 1964, the manner in which the United States waged limited war in Vietnam was exceedingly cautious. The primary military activity against the DRV during this period was the set of covert operations entailed in OPLAN 34A. At the same time, the U.S. undertook a number of diplomatic initiatives, the objectives of which were to increase support for the American approach to Vietnam, while avoiding the appearance that the U.S. posed a direct threat to the PRC. Nevertheless, Johnson and his top advisers had come to the realization that more concerted and forceful actions were necessary if the war in Vietnam was to be successful. The primary questions facing the administration were: by what military and diplomatic means could the U.S. prevail in Vietnam, and just as critically, how could the U.S. step up its military effort in the war without provoking Chinese intervention?

During this phase of the war, strategic design was an interagency affair. From early January to mid-March, the interdepartmental Vietnam Coordinating Committee under the directorship of William Sullivan (known as the "Sullivan Committee") worked to produce a broad and comprehensive approach to the Vietnam War. The Sullivan

Committee offered a number of alternatives, but in the end recommended that a concerted northern and southern strategy be adopted. Based on the available intelligence estimates, the likelihood of direct Chinese intervention was considered by the Sullivan Committee to be low at this point if the U.S. were to undertake aerial attacks against targets in the North. Yet, the committee urged that these attacks remain modest as the Chinese were expected to increase their own commitment to the DRV in response. With this recommendation in hand, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara led a team to South Vietnam with the intention of refining the work of the Sullivan Committee. McNamara's report detailed an early version of the "graduated pressure" concept that the U.S. would eventually employ against the DRV. The report recommended that the U.S. be in a position on 30 days notice to implement attacks against the DRV, but that the time for doing so was not yet auspicious. Recognizing that the Chinese might respond to American escalation, McNamara recommended that American military assets be bolstered in the area to serve as a deterrent.

Upon returning to Washington, McNamara requested that the Joint Chiefs develop specific proposals for implementing the strategic concept. Although the JCS were in favor of a harder approach than that which was proposed by the Sullivan Committee, their proposals satisfied McNamara's request by providing a list of 94 targets of ascending importance to the DRV that could be engaged along the lines of the graduated pressure concept. Despite the near consensus that the U.S. had to employ increasing pressure against the North, many including LBJ were concerned that the PRC might mistakenly believe the U.S. harbored more aggressive intentions. In May, four working groups were formed to provide the president with both military and political

options. The most important proposal to emerge from this effort was John T. McNaughton's plan (which had the support of Ambassador Lodge) to communicate directly with the North Vietnamese leadership in an effort to demonstrate to both the DRV and PRC that the U.S. had the means to counter any intervention they may initiate (i.e., deterrence), but that intervention was unnecessary because U.S. war aims were limited to securing an independent and stable South Vietnam (i.e., assurance). McNaughton further noted that an emissary to the DRV might also be able to determine the extent of the PRC's involvement in the North, and by implication, the affect that the Sino-Soviet split was having on Chinese decision making.

The primary reason that the administration adopted such a limited approach during this period was that it did not believe that it had a sufficient understanding of the intentions of the PRC given the split that had emerged between the two communist powers. Some in the administration (including Secretary of State Dean Rusk) believed that without solid Soviet support, the Chinese would refrain from increasing their involvement in Vietnam. Others, most notably the CIA, argued that the Sino-Soviet split provided the Chinese with opportunities to gain international prestige via their patronage of "wars of national liberation." Critically, this debate took place openly in Washington: each side was clearly articulated, and as a result administration principals were fully aware of the limits of their knowledge. The Seaborn mission to Hanoi was an attempt to fill that knowledge gap.

During the January to August 1964 period, the Johnson administration benefited from the operation of the strategic design mechanism. With respect to identifying the potential balancer's intentions, the administration was uncertain how to differentiate

signals from noise related to Sino-Soviet and Sino-Vietnamese relations. At this point, the administration did not believe that sufficient evidence was available to know how the Chinese would react to more forceful measures against the DRV. As a result, the U.S. attempted to acquire more information when the opportunity arose. It is important to note that it was *because* the information reaching top U.S. officials originated from multiple sources that the conclusion was reached that more information was needed. Had it been the case that only one interpretation was available, officials would have been more inclined to accept uncritically the “conventional wisdom.” In terms of information management, the density of lateral connections among departments and agencies enabled a strategy to emerge that was flexible. Strategic concepts were developed in response to the available information pertaining to the DRV and PRC, and those concepts were then referred to military strategists and diplomats for further refinement. In short, strategic design from the beginning was not the purview of top officials, nor of a single department; strategic design was an interagency affair from the start.

Post-Tonkin Strategic Refinement

When information pertaining to China’s preparedness for intervention was made available to officials in Washington in the wake of the post-Tonkin reprisal strikes, the U.S. intentionally scaled back the intensity of its military operations against the DRV. This response was not uniformly accepted throughout the U.S. government, however. Many urged the President to take a tougher line against Hanoi at the present time. For example, Generals Curtis LeMay and Wallace Greene of the Joint Chiefs of Staff consistently pushed for massive attacks on the DRV with the intention of denying Hanoi the ability to support insurgents in the South. As the Chairman of the JCS Earl Wheeler

noted on August 16, the Chiefs desired, “. . .course[s] of action, to include attack of targets in the [DRV], as necessary, *with the objective of destroying the DRV will and capabilities* to continue support of insurgent forces in Laos and the Republic of Vietnam.”⁵⁵⁴ As LeMay was the Air Force Chief of Staff, his opinion mattered and had to be taken into account. Although many of Johnson’s advisers believed that a more forceful and sustained offensive against the DRV was necessary, the burden of figuring out *how* to wage an effective air campaign against North Vietnam while simultaneously avoiding hostile balancing remained unresolved. The SIGMA II war game held in early-September allowed policy makers to understand exactly how LeMay’s preferred course of action could trigger Chinese intervention. The crucial insights of this exercise dealt specifically with how the process of waging an escalating air war against the DRV could spiral out of control and lead to a direct Sino-American confrontation. To the extent that the U.S. air war threatened the existence of the DRV, or induced the Chinese to provide air defense from bases in China (an action that would force consideration of bombing those Chinese bases), then Chinese intervention was considered to be extremely likely. As SIGMA II was an interagency exercise, officials from the military and civilian departments were afforded the opportunity to discuss future war plans and assess their likely implications before their actual implementation. LeMay’s recommendations were rejected because they ran a significant risk of hostile balancing.

Moreover, the manner in which the escalation strategy was developed ensured that SIGMA II’s “lessons learned” would not be forgotten. As the November working group comprised many individuals who had participated in SIGMA II, the focus on

⁵⁵⁴ FRUS, vol. 1 Vietnam 1964, #s 343, 316 (emphasis added).

avoiding escalation spirals was retained. This is not to say that advocates of harsher measures against the North were ignored; their advice was sought at critical points during and after the drafting process. Rather, their advice was balanced by those who urged greater caution in prosecuting the war. In fact, the working group was structured in a way that took into consideration scenarios ranging from maintaining the status quo, progressively squeezing, and hitting the DRV with a “hard knock” from the air. And, with the inclusion of an intelligence panel (in which the CIA, INR, and DIA had institutional representation), each of these proposals was evaluated in light of the existing information pertaining to the PRC’s intentions. In short, the graduated pressure strategy (the progressive squeeze option) that was adopted in December was not the product of a single agency’s preferences and information. Multiple interests and a broad range of information pertaining to the PRC were considered.

Transitioning to Phase II

By December 1964, the U.S. officials had in hand a detailed and nuanced strategy for waging limited war in Vietnam. Among the explicit war aims of the graduated pressure strategy was the avoidance of hostile military balancing by the PRC. In February 1965, National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy traveled to South Vietnam to confer with Ambassador Taylor about the timing of implementation of that strategy. While in South Vietnam, Bundy witnessed first-hand the carnage produced by the southern insurgents after their attack on Pleiku. Perhaps as a result of this experience, Bundy issued a recommendation that deviated substantially from the agreed upon strategy. Bundy urged the President to attack Vietnamese and Chinese air assets in the DRV, and noted that that such attacks, “may even get us beyond this level [phase II] with

both Hanoi and Peiping, if there is Communist counter-action. . . . These are the risks of any action. They should be carefully reviewed—but we believe them to be acceptable.”⁵⁵⁵

As detailed in chapter 5, this memorandum prompted significant criticism by many in Washington. Both the State Department’s Director of the INR Thomas Hughes and Under Secretary of State George Ball circulated arguments pertaining to the dangerous course that Bundy was now proposing. It was not only that these two officials offered biting and timely critiques of Bundy’s proposals that induced the administration to reject the Bundy option. Rather, Hughes and Ball employed to great effect existing estimates generated by the CIA and DIA to demonstrate precisely how such a dramatic escalation could elicit hostile balancing by the Chinese. Following Ball’s memo, the CIA produced two additional SNIESs (10-3-65 and 10-3/1-65) that lent evidentiary support to the more cautious approach advocated. In the end, it was not only President Johnson who was persuaded to reject Bundy’s harsher course of action. Bundy too was convinced that his post-Pleiku memo was in error. The National Security Adviser forwarded the two SNIESs to LBJ noting that the two documents “are important enough for you to read in full. . . . [and] seem careful and sober to me.” And, “[they] suggest the wisdom of your determination to act in a measured and fitting way.”⁵⁵⁶ On February 26, LBJ ordered Rolling Thunder—the program of sustained bombing against North Vietnam agreed to in December—to begin at once. As a result of the widespread availability of intelligence estimates pertaining to Chinese present and future intentions, the dangers attendant to Bundy’s proposals were made apparent to top American officials. Moreover, as a result

⁵⁵⁵ Bundy to President Johnson, February 7, 1965, FRUS, 1964-68, volume II, #84.

⁵⁵⁶ SNIE 10-3-65, February 11, 1965, FRUS, 1964-68, volume II, #111.

of the density of lateral connections among departments, the administration was promptly put on notice that the National Security Adviser's recommendations could lead the United States down a path that top officials definitely wanted to avoid.

During this critical phase of strategic development in the Vietnam War, the United States benefited from the operation of the strategic design mechanism. This decision making mechanism was operative as a result of the robust nature of the American information structure. For example, at times when the administration was presented with the opportunity to dramatically escalate its attacks against the DRV, valuable information pertaining to how the PRC would act in response was made available to top decision makers by sources other than those advocating the harsher course of action. After the reprisal strikes following the Gulf of Tonkin incident and following the VC attack on Pleiku, information from the NSC Staff, the State Department, and the CIA was forwarded to top policymakers that demonstrated how leaders in Beijing might perceive the U.S. to be a highly intensive threat if the attacks were continued or stepped up. In terms of information management, the density of lateral connections among departments and agencies enabled the development of a strategy that closely matched the available information. Both the SIGMA II war game and the November working groups were mechanisms through which relevant departments could present information, advocate for their preferred strategy, and obtain a greater understanding of the perspectives of other affected agencies. Moreover, when officials felt it necessary to offer their own independent advice, their cases were made stronger by the availability of existing estimates and opinions of other agencies—most notably the

CIA. As a result, the strategy that was produced and executed arose from an information structure that was remarkably robust.

In sum, the United States developed and implemented its limited war strategy in Korea without the benefit of the strategic design mechanism, while in Vietnam the U.S. was able to both parse signals from noise and to manage the information burden inherent to limited warfare. Table 6.3 summarizes the above discussion.

Table 6.3

Strategic Design	Korea	Vietnam
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were signals and noise parsed? <i>Intentions of potential balancer determined?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>7th Fleet decision</i> (scant information on PRC's intentions provided; only MacArthur memo focus of attention)—No <i>Rollback debate</i> (Allison dominates; PPS/CIA isolated in strategic design)—No <i>Decision to Cross</i> (no thorough assessment of available information)—No 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Early strategic development</i> (multiple assessments of PRC's intentions available, though no consensus)—Yes <i>Post-Tonkin strategic refinement</i> (multiple sources of information available to U.S. strategists)—Yes <i>Transition to phase II</i> (multiple sources of information contradict Bundy's recommendations)—Yes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was information burden managed? <i>Did strategy conform to information available?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Rollback debate</i> (lack of coordinated information and analysis during strategic debate)—No <i>Decision to cross parallel</i> (information overload not mitigated after NSC 81/1)—No 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Early strategic development</i> (multiple decision making forums link departments)—Yes <i>Refinement of strategy</i> (SIGMA II, November working groups, widely distributed intelligence estimates)—Yes

Strategic Integration Mechanism

I argued in chapter 1 that the ability of a challenger to calibrate its limited war strategy in order to avoid hostile military balancing during wartime depends, additionally, on the operation of a mechanism affecting the coordination of the departments responsible for certain aspects of the broader war effort. The *strategic design mechanism* concerns the ability of a state's departments and agencies to work in concert toward achieving war aims. The operation of this mechanism ensures that the objectives of top officials are fully understood and shared by subordinate agencies. Moreover, when the

strategic integration mechanism is operational, subordinate agencies will share pertinent information with each other so that concerted action achieved. The strategic integration mechanism will become operational when a challenger's information structure is "robust." The existence of lateral connections among departments and agencies facilitates coordination at lower levels. And, the ability for state leaders to monitor the activities of subordinate agencies is facilitated by multi-sourced information flows. In this section, I offer a comparison between the two case studies in order to demonstrate how the variation in the independent variable (truncation during the Korean War, robustness during the Vietnam War) produced variation in the degree of integration among departments and agencies at critical times in each of the limited wars under consideration.

The Korean War

The War for the Status Quo Ante

The limited war strategy adopted by the U.S. in the Korean War sought, at first, to restore the status quo ante on the peninsula. On June 29, Dean Acheson clearly articulated this objective in his speech to the American Newspaper Guild. Acheson stated that the U.N.'s support of South Korea was "solely for the purposes of restoring the Republic of Korea to its status prior to the invasion from the north and of reestablishing the peace broken by that aggression."⁵⁵⁷ That message was intended to reassure leaders in Beijing that the U.S. had no aggressive designs on the PRC, the interposition of the 7th Fleet in the Taiwan Strait notwithstanding. Toward that end, the

⁵⁵⁷ FRUS, 1950, 7: 238-39.

State Department rejected Chiang Kai-shek's offer of 33,000 troops for the defense of South Korea—a rejection fully supported by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁵⁵⁸

These carefully crafted diplomatic signals to the Chinese were severely compromised by MacArthur on two occasions. The first occurred in late July after a meeting with the CINCUN and Chiang in Taiwan. Whereas State Department officials were intent on convincing the PRC that U.S. policy toward Taiwan was strictly that of neutralization, MacArthur declared that “arrangements have been completed for effective coordination between American forces under my command and those of the Chinese Government” to meet an invasion. Chiang followed this up with a comment indicating that the Americans and Nationalists were building a framework for “Sino-American” military cooperation.⁵⁵⁹ MacArthur's second occasion to upend the State Department's diplomacy toward the PRC came in late August with the unauthorized publication of the text of the General's comments to the VFW annual meeting. The impact that these signals had on the leaders in Beijing was significant. They convinced Beijing that the signals coming from the U.S. in early July meant as little as those issued in January: very little.⁵⁶⁰

The lack of coordination between the military and diplomatic branches of the limited war strategy in Korea was not solely due to MacArthur's imperiousness, however. The truncated nature of the American information structure was manifest not only in relations between Tokyo and Washington, but among departments in the U.S. capitol as

⁵⁵⁸ Acheson to Chinese Ambassador Koo, 1 July 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 276-77. Upon learning of the offer from Chiang, the JCS recommended that the offer be declined. Joint Chiefs of Staff to MacArthur, 30 June 1950. *Ibid.*, 269.

⁵⁵⁹ Quoted in Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 165.

⁵⁶⁰ Memorandum produced by Department of State, “Foreign Policy Aspects of the MacArthur Statement,” 26 August 1950. DDRS: CK2349401377.

well. In order to avoid hostile military balancing against American forces, it was absolutely critical that the State and Defense departments worked in concert to send consistent signals to the PRC and the Soviet Union that the U.S. did not hold revisionist objectives outside the peninsula. As such, State Department officials were concerned that the bombing of North Korea prior to the U.S. invasion of the DPRK remained as far from the North's international borders as possible. Truman too realized how each of the communist powers could view the U.S. as a significant threat if American bombers accidentally dropped their payloads on the territory of the PRC or Soviet Union, and among his earliest directives to Tokyo was the admonition to stay "well clear" of North Korea's international borders.

On August 12, American bombers attacked the port of Najin, seventeen miles from the Soviet border. This attack greatly troubled DOS officials, the individuals who would ultimately be responsible for explaining U.S. actions to the Soviets and Chinese. Upon requesting information from the DOD and FEC about the bombing, however, the State Department encountered insurmountable information obstacles. In a memo to the Secretary of State, the Defense Secretary was adamant in his refusal to provide the DOS with information pertaining to this incident as well as to those that might occur in the future. In Johnson's words,

. . . . once war operations are undertaken, it seems to me that they must be conducted to win. To any extent that external appearances are permitted to conflict with or hamper military judgment in actual combat decisions, the effectiveness of our forces will be jeopardized and the question of responsibility may well be raised.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁶¹ Johnson to Acheson, 21 August 1950. FRUS 1950, vol. VII, 613-14.

To the extent that military operations have the potential of sending unintended signals to potential balancers, this assertion was completely myopic. Nevertheless, Acheson quickly realized that he and the DOS were wholly dependent on the whims of the Pentagon for information that had anything to do with “wartime operations.” In sum, prior to the crossing of the 38th parallel by U.S. forces, the military and diplomatic elements of the American limited war strategy suffered from a lack of integration. No matter how determined top officials were to sending consistent signals that the United States had no aggressive intent toward either the PRC or Soviet Union, diplomats and military officers prosecuted the war nearly independently of one another. At this stage, top policymakers were prevented from effectively monitoring the behavior of the military as a result of blocked communication channels. Further, integration among departments was precluded because of the absence of lateral communication channels between the Pentagon and Foggy Bottom. Without dense lateral connections, the DOS was unable to obtain valuable information related to wartime operations. The State Department was forced to wait until relevant information was published in the *New York Times*.

From the Crossing of the 38th Parallel to the First Phase Offensive

As the invasion of North Korea by the forces of the United States and United Nations took place, top decision makers in Washington found themselves in a precarious position. Ultimately, the President and his advisers were the individuals responsible for determining the content of the war aims sought in the Far East. They quickly discovered, however, that they had precious little influence over events as a result of their extreme reliance on a single source of information pertaining to intentions and behavior of the PRC. That source, Douglas MacArthur’s Far East Command, held a near monopoly

over the information made available to Washington. This information monopoly resulted from two factors. The first was the idiosyncratic nature of the relationship between MacArthur and his “superiors” in the Pentagon. MacArthur occupied a central node in the American information structure by virtue of the vast extent of his own responsibilities in the Far East. Despite the fact that many were wary of the General’s own ambitions, his stature in the American military establishment was immense as his rank and wartime experience surpassed that of those to whom he reported. When MacArthur’s landing at Inchon succeeded brilliantly, those doubting his abilities were silenced. No one from that point on was willing to challenge his objectives or to voice any reservations about his assessment of the strategic situation louder than an inaudible murmur. The second factor that allowed the FEC to acquire an information monopoly in the Far East was that there was simply no other department or agency with an intelligence presence in the region. MacArthur and Willoughby had effectively excluded the CIA from their domain, and the State Department had only a meager presence in Korea. Without alternative, independent sources of information, officials in Washington could turn only to MacArthur for information about the war’s progress and about the likelihood of hostile military balancing by other powers. These two factors prevented the operation of the strategic design mechanism during October and November 1950.

On September 27, MacArthur received his orders from the Joint Chiefs to proceed into North Korea provided that neither the Chinese nor the Soviets had intervened or threatened to intervene. Critically, those orders placed the burden of determining the intentions of these two potential balancers squarely on the CINCUN’s shoulders. Shortly thereafter, MacArthur received a letter from Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall

which MacArthur interpreted as granting him full freedom of maneuver in North Korea. With these instructions in hand, MacArthur assumed primary responsibility for America's fortunes in the war. Among the first casualties in the war for rollback was the quality of information provided to Washington by Tokyo. As detailed in chapter 3, MacArthur's reportage was inconsistent and frequently disingenuous. Prior to the PRC's First Phase Offensive, MacArthur reported directly to President Truman that the PRC did not have the capabilities of intervening effectively in the war. In the midst of the First Phase Offensive, the CINCPAC initially dismissed the possibility that China was actively involved, only to then paint a completely different, and dire, picture of the situation confronting his forces. Yet, MacArthur never did have a clear understanding of the strength of the PLA in North Korea. Rather, his wild estimates (both positive and negative) were determined primarily by the degree of authority he believed Washington was granting him at any given time. In short, the information monopoly held by the FEC permitted multiple breakdowns in communications between Washington and Tokyo. At no time were top administration officials in a position to demonstrate to MacArthur that they had information pertaining to the Chinese other than that which the General provided.

The inability for top policymakers to know how the PRC was behaving after American forces crossed the 38th parallel was inevitable given the FEC's information monopoly. Not only were relations between Tokyo and Washington complicated by MacArthur's unique command situation, but just as significantly the dysfunctional nature of the FEC's information management system prevented MacArthur and top policymakers from ever acquiring an accurate accounting of the PLA's troop disposition

in Korea. At the time, the responsibility of determining the behavior of Chinese forces (both in Manchuria and North Korea) fell to the FEC's intelligence chief Charles Willoughby. For a number of reasons, Willoughby was unable provide MacArthur with accurate and timely assessments. Among these, however, was *not* the absence of intelligence pertaining to the strength of China's forces. As an official military inquiry noted after the war, and as subsequent historical research has demonstrated, Willoughby did have available sufficient information the extent of China's intervention in the war. The implications of the FEC G-2's failure were immense: without more or less certain knowledge that the Chinese had positioned hundreds of thousands of troops in the northern reaches of the DPRK, top officials deferred to MacArthur's judgment about the feasibility of completing his objectives. Strategic modification—in the form of halting and then defending the line at the narrow neck of the peninsula—was highly unlikely given MacArthur's assurances that the Chinese had quit the fight after the First Phase Offensive.

MacArthur's judgment won out in the end because no independent source of information was available which would have supported the case for alternative courses of action. No independent assessment of Willoughby's reports (prepared for MacArthur on a daily basis) was conducted by the DOD or CIA. None of the American observers of the PLA during the Chinese Civil War were consulted about the likely strategic, operational, and tactical schemes that the PRC would likely employ in Korea. In short, the FEC's monopoly over information put MacArthur in the position of determining how the U.S. would wage limited war in Korea. *MacArthur's "End the War" Offensive*

Where as the absence of the strategic integration mechanism prevented timely and effective responses to “mistakes” made prior to the crossing of the 38th parallel, the lack of integration following the U.S. invasion of the DPRK had profoundly negative repercussions. Put simply, the absence of the strategic integration mechanism resulted in a complete inversion of the norms of civil-military relations. This state of affairs was clearly manifest during November after the Chinese called off their First Phase Offensive. As discussed in chapter 3, accurate reporting on the status of Chinese forces in North Korea was stymied by a lack of alternative sources of information reaching top policymakers in Washington. The necessity for an accurate accounting of Chinese forces was critical for two reasons. First, such an accounting would have provided American leaders with an understanding of precisely how the Chinese had reacted in response to U.S. strategy, and further, how Beijing would likely respond if U.S./U.N. forces continued into the northern reaches of North Korea. Second, more complete knowledge of the disposition of Chinese forces in Korea would likely have induced top officials to look favorably on the proposition of halting the advance at the Pyongyang-Wonsan line, or the “narrow neck” of the peninsula. Halting the offensive at the narrow neck offered the U.S. and opportunity to establish a strong defensive position—a position from which the U.S. could have deterred further Chinese attacks.

Without such information, however, the only option available to officials in Washington was to suggest to MacArthur that his mission “may have to be re-examined.” This suggestion, one that MacArthur labeled “appeasement” with all of its negative

connotations, was dismissed out of hand by the CINCPAC.⁵⁶² MacArthur demanded that the objective remain that of complete unification of the peninsula, and assured his superiors that with the air assets under his command, the remnants of the NKPA and CCF would be destroyed. Years later, Omar Bradley offered an apologia for the JCS lack of direction: “. . . we let ourselves be misled by MacArthur’s wildly erroneous estimates of the situation.”⁵⁶³ Bradley was correct to the extent that the Chiefs were misled by MacArthur. Yet, based on the analysis offered above, it was not simply the case that the JCS let themselves “be misled.” At no time did anyone in a position of authority have an inkling of the size of the Chinese forces arrayed against those of the U.S./U.N. Neither, for that matter, did MacArthur himself. As a result of the lack of alternative sources of information, top policymakers were forced to defer to MacArthur the responsibility of strategic decision making. On November 24, MacArthur’s “final offensive” began with the objective of eradicating the remnants of the NKPA. One day later, the Chinese initiated their full-blown intervention against American forces in the Korean War.

Vietnam War

Integration Prior to Rolling Thunder

From January 1964 to February 1965, the United States waged limited war in Vietnam in a balanced manner. The primary military activities during this phase of the war against the DRV were the ongoing OPLAN 34A operations and the short series of reprisal attacks following the Tonkin Gulf incident. At the same time, the U.S. undertook a major buildup of military forces in the region that would be employed as the scale and

⁵⁶² Clay Blair, *The Forgotten War: American in Korea, 1950-1953* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1987), 397-401

⁵⁶³ Omar Bradley, *A General's Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 587, 594.

scope of the limited war strategy increased. Throughout this period, top administration officials were intent on prosecuting the war in a way that prevented the Chinese from perceiving the U.S. as a highly intensive threat to their physical security. To accomplish this war aim, it was imperative that American military operations and diplomatic activities worked in concert so that consistent and reinforcing signals were sent to the leaders in both Beijing and Hanoi. As a result of the robust nature of the American information structure, top policymakers were able to accomplish these objectives.

In conjunction with the OPLAN 34A raids, the American diplomatic strategy during the January-July 1964 period was predicated upon winning as many international supporters as possible for the American (as opposed to French) approach to the war in Vietnam. Although the “more flags” campaign was prosecuted in earnest by American diplomats, the U.S. was unable to secure widespread backing by more than a handful of states. The lack of progress in the “more flags” campaign notwithstanding, the U.S. never lost sight of the primary focus of its diplomatic tack: the dual deterrence/reassurance game that it was playing with the PRC and DRV. On the one hand, the U.S. was seeking allies in an effort to demonstrate to the Chinese and North Vietnamese that continued support of the southern insurgents would be countered by the combined efforts of the international community. Yet, the U.S. also wanted to avoid the appearance of being implacably hostile toward either state. As such, in logic similar to that employed during the Korean War, the U.S. rejected forming a military alliance with the Chinese Nationalists. When faced with a trade-off between deterrence and reassurance, the U.S. chose the latter. As Robert Komer of the NSC Staff noted, “We

doubt that a GRC-SVN alliance or an overt GRC troop commitment would help enough to counteract the real risk to justifying Chicom counteraction.”⁵⁶⁴ Unlike its performance during Korea, however, the U.S. was able to send predominantly consistent military and diplomatic signals. Moreover, at crucial times when its messages were inconsistent, the robust information structure permitted timely course correction.

Immediately following the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the U.S. launched a short series of reprisal strikes against targets in the DRV. In addition to their punitive utility, these strikes were designed to send a signal to leaders in Hanoi that the U.S. was committed to the vigorous defense of South Vietnam and that any direct attacks against U.S. forces would not be tolerated. Yet, the nature of these strikes (and the steady buildup of American forces in Southeast Asia) struck many in Washington as potentially dangerous. Both James Thompson of the NSC Staff and Walt Rostow in the DOS argued that through its actions the U.S. courted disaster by unduly threatening the PRC. This concern was supported by the CIA which issued a number of reports tracking Chinese-North Vietnamese coordination, the movement of forces in China, and the nature of the PRC’s rhetoric. Over a period of roughly a week and a half, the CIA provided a wealth of information to top policymakers that the PRC had made a significant investment in the DRV by providing jet fighters and other military equipment, that the PLA was dramatically increasing its preparedness for a direct military confrontation with the U.S., and that China was willing to ratchet up the level of hostilities with the U.S. despite (or, because of) the silence from the Kremlin over the August crisis. These reports (along with a memo from Ambassador Maxwell Taylor) prompted William Bundy to argue in

⁵⁶⁴ Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Johnson, March 3, 1964, *FRUS*, 1964-1968, Volume XXX #16.

his famous “Next Courses of Action” memo that while overt military action against the DRV would soon be necessary, the U.S. should refrain from further escalation at the current time as a result of the manifest level of tension between the U.S. and communist forces in Vietnam. On September 9, LBJ agreed to William Bundy’s proposals, and the U.S. pulled back from the brink.

In response to National Security Adviser Bundy’s hasty call for large-scale bombing on the DRV following the Pleiku attack, George Ball drafted his critical memorandum warning against the uncontrolled slide to war. In a crucial section of that memo, Ball urged that prior to the initiation of Rolling Thunder, the U.S. should lay the diplomatic ground for escalation. Specifically, Ball argued that in order to decrease the likelihood of Chinese intervention, the administration should make it known to the U.N. Security Council that the U.S. was willing to engage in ceasefire negotiations. The objective of the move to the U.N. was to increase pressure on the Soviet Union to signal its support for such talks, in a manner that further isolated the PRC internationally. LBJ agreed to the plan, but it quickly proved unworkable because of Secretary General U. Thant’s charge that the president had been duplicitous toward the American people on the chances of obtaining a negotiated peace in Vietnam. This setback notwithstanding, the U.S. continued its diplomatic course by refraining from escalation until the collapse of British-Soviet discussions on reestablishing the 1954 Geneva framework. The reason why the U.S. held back at this time was to prevent the Soviets from losing diplomatic face; an effort to ensure that the Soviets did not abandon their soft line in favor of declaring support for the PRC and DRV.

In sum, the balanced diplomatic/military strategy that emerged—a strategy that simultaneously sought to prevent the fall of South Vietnam and to avoid Chinese intervention—resulted from the robust nature of the information structure at the time. Because top policymakers received information from a variety of sources pertaining to the intentions of the PRC, they were able to monitor the effects of the dual track strategy of deterrence and assurance. Moreover, as a result of the density of lateral connections among departments and agencies military operations and diplomatic signaling could be coordinated and implemented effectively.

Integration During Rolling Thunder

From early-March to late-July 1965, the United States escalated its limited war strategy in Vietnam in two distinct stages. The first began in early-March with the initiation of the Rolling Thunder campaign against the DRV. The second began in early-May with the decision to introduce six battalion equivalents and a Marine air unit to South Vietnam and to plateau the intensity of Rolling Thunder. During each of these periods, the United States was able to maintain its coordinated diplomatic and military approaches to the war. The integration of the military and diplomatic elements of the limited war strategy resulted from the robust nature of the American information structure.

Although few in the administration were optimistic that Rolling Thunder would produce immediate effects, frustrations quickly mounted when it became clear that VC forces in the South were far stronger and more numerous than had been previously estimated. This new estimate immediately changed American officials' expectations of Hanoi's decision making calculations. If leaders in Hanoi believed that either a victory in

the South could be obtained quickly, or if the insurgency there could be intensified and sustained over the long run, then the DRV's willingness to withstand U.S. bombardment would be bolstered. By the end of April 1965, officials in Washington had come to the realization that the existing strategy of progressively squeezing North Vietnam through graduated aerial bombardment was having little effect on Hanoi's behavior. As these facts became clear, top American policymakers were forced to consider altering their strategic course in the war. Under consideration were three options. The U.S. could escalate its attacks on the DRV by extending its bombing further north against more significant military and economic targets, increase its military presence in the South and reorient its forces to offensive counterinsurgency operations, or the U.S. could do both. In the end, top officials opted to plateau the level of Rolling Thunder operations while substantially bolstering the military effort in South Vietnam. The U.S. opted for this course as a result of its (accurate) understanding of the PRC's current and future intentions.

The above options emerged in two separate memoranda presented by John McNaughton and the Joint Chiefs of Staff in mid-March. While recognizing the potential for Chinese intervention if the U.S. approached the higher levels of the air war, McNaughton recommended that the administration begin slowly climbing the escalation ladder, and be prepared to focus on the ground war if necessary. The JCS, on the other hand, recommended that the U.S. employ a concurrent strategy of hitting the DRV harder from the air and of waging a more aggressive offensive in the South. These options were then subjected to an intense debate within the government wherein a number of different sources provided information pertaining to Chinese behavior, capabilities, and likely

intentions under each scenario. In terms of the PRC's commitment to the conflict, both the CIA and Consul General in Hong Kong provided new information demonstrating how China had increased not only the level of material assistance provided to the North and to the southern insurgents, but also how China's rhetoric had become exceedingly belligerent. With respect to the PRC's ability to intervene in the war, a National Intelligence Estimate concluded that Chinese forces were "in a good position to infiltrate large numbers of troops across China's Southeast Asian borders. In a localized situation their presence could easily be decisive. . . ." ⁵⁶⁵ Finally, top American officials were warned by a number of sources that as a result of the intensity of the Sino-Soviet spilt, China was forced into a game of outbidding the Soviet Union in its anti-Americanism. This information, along with pessimistic reports on the effects of Rolling Thunder to alter Hanoi's behavior, led President Johnson and the NSC to make clear their support for the idea of leveling off Rolling Thunder operations while bolstering the offensive effort in South Vietnam.

Despite presidential support for this course, a number of officials were not convinced that a scaling back of U.S. air operations was wise. Yet, these more hawkish officials were in a distinct minority. The primary reason why the U.S. opted to alter its strategic course in the war was the fact that information and estimates pertaining to China's intentions were widely available. For example, after the NSC reached its initial decision to focus on the ground war in the South, an intelligence memo produced by the Board of National Estimates offered a sobering forecast: in all likelihood, American forces would soon get bogged down in the jungles of Vietnam. But because the air war

⁵⁶⁵ NIE 13-3-65, "Communist China's Military Establishment," 10 March 1965, DDRS CK3100130661.

against the DRV would level off, the probability of hostile military balancing by the PRC would decline. This estimate was bolstered by the conclusions of SNIE 10-5-65—an updated assessment of the chances of triggering a conflict spiral with China if the U.S. opted to attack Chinese air assets in the DRV. Finally, in a critical joint project conducted by the DOS and DOD, top policymakers were made aware that by focusing on the ground war in the South, the U.S. and Chinese could avoid direct military confrontation. Despite this optimistic conclusion, the Short Range Report also stated that following this course of action would induce the Chinese to increase its level of material support for the DRV. On April 30, the final decision was reached: the United States would focus the vast majority of its efforts on winning the ground war in the South.

Maintaining Focus on the Ground War

In response to the buildup of American forces in South Vietnam, the PRC's rhetoric and support for the DRV increased dramatically. Indeed, it was at this time that China's deterrence efforts became far more specific. Neither response was unexpected, however, and were forecasted in the Short Range Report. The ability for top policymakers to retain the adopted strategic focus resulted from the continuous feedback provided to them by a number of sources. Perhaps the most important source of feedback came from DCI Raborn in mid-June. Raborn provided LBJ with a compilation of past NIEs and SNIEs pertaining to the capabilities and behavior of the Chinese. This report enabled the President to understand precisely how the evolution of the U.S. limited war strategy in Vietnam matched the intelligence provided by the various departments and agencies comprising the intelligence community. Such feedback was invaluable: it allowed LBJ to place Sino-American relations in context, and enhanced his confidence in

a less than optimal strategy. Put simply, by the summer of 1965, the U.S. strategy in Vietnam was predicated on a painful trade-off: by focusing on the ground war in the South, many American soldiers and marines would be lost; yet any attempt to avoid that fate by expanding the war in the North would in all likelihood result in a much larger and deadlier war. Thus, by the end of July, the President faced the choice not over *whether* more American troops would be sent to the war, but over how many and on what timetable.

During the period March-July 1965, the United States benefited from the operation of the strategic design mechanism as it debated whether to alter its strategic course in Vietnam. Not only were officials able to determine the actual intentions of the PRC, but the strategy adopted closely matched the available information. As it became clear that the air war against the DRV was have a negligible effect on Hanoi's strategic decision making, Washington was given the opportunity to dramatically increase the scale and tempo of those attacks—an option that on the surface appeared to be low in cost and risk. This course was not adopted because a wealth of political and military information about the PRC made it clear that such an option stood a significant chance of inducing the China into hostile military balancing against the U.S. Moreover, the adopted strategy—a leveling off of Rolling Thunder operations with a strong focus on offensive ground operations in the South—reflected these findings. The departments of State and Defense, along with the CIA, carefully reviewed the available intelligence and offered numerous estimates as to how the Chinese would respond in turn. With a striking degree of accuracy, these forecasts were born out: as the U.S. committed more troops to the South, China in turn stepped up its provision of troops and military hardware to the

DRV. Yet, because the viability of the Hanoi regime was never threatened, the Chinese threat assessments of the U.S. remained at a relatively low level. In sum, because of the robust nature of the American information structure at the time, the U.S. was able to alter its strategy in Vietnam in a manner that avoided hostile military balancing by the PRC.

In sum, the strategic integration mechanism was inoperative during the Korean War, but was operative during the Vietnam War. Table 6.4 provides a comparative summary.

Table 6.4

Strategic Integration	Korea	Vietnam
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were diplomatic and military activities explicitly coordinated? <i>Was information shared among diplomats and military officials?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>War for Status Quo Ante</i> (absence of military-diplomatic coordination: MacArthur-Chiang communiqué, MacArthur VFW speech, Najin bombing incident)—No 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Prior to Rolling Thunder</i> (widespread sharing of information among departments and agencies: OPLAN 34A balanced by early diplomacy; February 1965 U.N. overture & delayed implementation Rolling Thunder)—Yes <i>During Rolling Thunder</i> (widespread sharing of information among departments and agencies: rejection of JCS proposals to hit DRV hard from air)—Yes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were top policymakers able to effectively monitor effects of military and diplomatic activities? <i>Was routine feedback provided to top policymakers?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>From crossing the 38th parallel to the First Phase Offensive</i> (strategy de facto determined by MacArthur: erratic reporting from MacArthur on PRC's behavior; exclusion of CIA from FEC's domain and obstacles to information sharing between DOD and DOS)—No <i>The "end the war" offensive</i> (same as above with the effect of rejecting "narrow neck" proposal)—No 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Prior to Rolling Thunder</i> (restraint following post-Tonkin reprisal strikes)—Yes <i>During Rolling Thunder</i> (Forego escalation against DRV: multiple reports on Beijing's preparations for war and conditions for intervention.)—Yes <i>Maintaining focus on ground war</i> (LBJ provided with evidence on success of strategy regarding Chinese behavior)—Yes

Alternative Approaches

The comparative analysis presented above lends substantial support to the information structure framework. At this point, it is possible to offer the following

analytical conclusions. First, prior to the outbreak of the Korean War, the American information structure was truncated. As a result, neither the strategic design mechanism nor the strategic integration mechanism was operative as the U.S. crafted and employed its limited war strategy on the Korean peninsula during the period June-November 1950. The absence of these mechanisms produced a limited war strategy that was ill-suited for the strategic context in the Far East. Through its actions the U.S. induced the Chinese to engage in hostile military balancing with the objective of countering what was perceived to be a highly intensive threat. Second, President Lyndon Johnson inherited a robust information structure. As a result, both the strategic design and strategic integration mechanisms were operative as the U.S. crafted and employed its limited war strategy in Vietnam during the January 1964-July 1965 period. The presence of these mechanisms produced a strategy that was well-calibrated and appropriate to the strategic context in Southeast Asia. Through its actions the U.S. was able to avoid inducing hostile military balancing on the part of the PRC by convincing leaders in Beijing that they confronted only a threat of moderate intensity.

How well does the information structure framework explain the outcomes observed when compared to the alternative explanations of balancing avoidance? Realism offers the null proposition that the information management capacities of states matters little in the design and implementation of accurately calibrated limited war strategies. Rather, realism maintains that it is the amount and content of information at the level of the international system (i.e., the nature of the potential balancer's signals) that influences the nature of the challenger's limited war strategy. From realism, the following propositions were deduced. Regarding the strategic design mechanism: a

challenger will be able to avoid hostile military balancing in a limited war if the potential balancer indicates a willingness and capability to intervene in the limited war. A challenger will be unable to avoid hostile military balancing if the potential balancer fails to indicate a willingness and capability to intervene in the limited war. With respect to strategic integration, realism expects a constant operation of this balancing avoidance mechanism in situations of limited warfare. Realism assumes that as a result of strong structural influences, state leaders will ensure that the various organs within the state charged with implementing aspects of the broader war effort will work together as the limited war is prosecuted.

Whereas realism assumes that states are unitary and rational actors responding to international structural factors (in effect, black-boxing the inner-workings of states) traditional bureaucratic theory explicitly focuses on how the constituent components of states determine foreign policy. For bureaucratic theory, large-scale organizations affect foreign policy outcomes in ways that deviate from strategic rationality. Put starkly, bureaucratic theory is pessimistic with respect to the ability of states to craft and implement limited war strategies that are able to avoid hostile military balancing. Based on the logic detailed in the model of balancing avoidance, limited war strategies require a challenging state to ascertain the intentions of potential balancers, efficiently translate that information into its limited war strategy, and then coordinate the military and diplomatic aspects of the broader war effort. On all three accounts, bureaucratic theory expects sub-optimal performance resulting in outcomes that stand a high probability of inducing hostile military balancing.

Traditional bureaucratic theory suggests the following propositions regarding the ability to craft high quality limited war strategies. With respect to the strategic design mechanism, *states will achieve at best a superficial understanding of the potential balancer's present and likely future intentions because information searches are likely to be limited, while the interpretation of that information will conform to the existing knowledge base of the relevant organization.* Furthermore, *states will be unable to manage the large volume of information pertaining to the target and potential balancer because of the bureaucratic tendency to hoard information.* While bureaucratic theory expects sub-rational outcomes in matters of strategic design, balancing avoidance remains possible, but under fairly restrictive conditions. In terms of strategic integration, bureaucratic theory maintains that state agencies will tend toward isolation. Nonetheless, *a state will be able to avoid hostile military balancing if its military's preferred strategy and SOPs for waging limited war coincide with the intentions of the potential balancer.* In sum, although bureaucratic theory is pessimistic regarding a challenging state's ability to avoid hostile military balancing in limited wars, that outcome remains a possibility.

How well do these two alternative approaches fare in the two cases of limited war examined? First, the expectations of neither realism nor bureaucratic theory are met in *both* cases of limited war. Realism's expectations for balancing avoidance are not born out in the Korean War. Sufficient information was available about Chinese intentions and military capabilities that should have enabled the U.S. to avoid hostile military balancing by the PRC. Bureaucratic theory, on the other hand, finds support in this case. First, the negative expectations regarding balancing avoidance are born out. Moreover, the two mechanisms pertaining to information mismanagement (information hoarding

and standard operating procedures of information management) are operative. In short, both bureaucratic theory and the information structure framework anticipate hostile military balancing, and both find support in this case of strategic design.

The analysis in Chapter 4 shows that bureaucratic theory cannot explain the operation of the strategic design mechanism during this phase of the Vietnam War. The primary reasons for bureaucratic theory's negative expectations lie in the preferences and doctrines of the armed services for fighting limited warfare. Throughout the period under consideration, American Air chiefs routinely urged Secretary of Defense McNamara and President Johnson to adopt a strategic bombing campaign against the DRV. In terms of its scale, strategic bombing was far more dramatic than the graduated pressure strategy that was ultimately adopted. Moreover, the Air Force either down-played the likelihood that the PRC would adopt hostile military balancing, or appeared willing to risk that eventuality, when it pressed its case to civilian policymakers. In any event, the air chiefs believed that the Chinese would be ultimately deterred from intervening in the war against the U.S. because of the American nuclear trump-card. In short, bureaucratic theory does not expect the operation of either the strategic design or the strategic integration mechanism because the preferences of armed services were clearly at odds with those of civilian policymakers, and because of the substantial autonomy acquired by the U.S. Air Force.

The robust information structure enabled top American decision makers to design and implement a limited war strategy for the Vietnam War that was well calibrated to the intentions of the potential balancer, the PRC. Moreover, that strategy was in place by the beginning of 1965, months prior to the otherwise credible revelation of China's intentions

and issuance of its deterrent threats. Thus, while realism does anticipate the operation of the strategic design mechanism in this case, it expects the U.S. to have been able to design its strategy at a point in time well after that when the strategy was actually designed. Because of the robust nature of the U.S. information structure, American officials were able to piece together existing intelligence in a manner that allowed for a remarkably accurate forecast of China's intentions. In short, while both realism and the information structure framework anticipate the operation of the strategic design mechanism they expect its operation at different times. The evidence above shows the information structure framework to be a more powerful explanation for balancing avoidance than realism. In sum, based on the evidence presented, only the information structure framework finds support in both of the cases of limited war examined in this dissertation.

Table 6.5

Approach	Strategic Design: Korea/Vietnam	Strategic Integration: Korea/Vietnam	Outcome confirmed: Korea/Vietnam
Realism	Yes/Yes	Yes/Yes	No/Yes
Bureaucratic Theory	No/No	No/No	Yes/No
Information Structures	No/No	Yes/Yes	Yes/Yes

Implications and Directions for Future Research

In this section, I will consider the potential contributions of the information structure framework and of the analysis of balancing avoidance offered in this project. As indicated in Chapter 1, existing treatments of balancing in international relations

scholarship have a persistent bias in focus. Specifically, the bulk of scholarly attention has centered on why and how states engage in balancing. Yet, little sustained theoretical attention has been devoted to how states attempt to avoid being balanced against in the first place. Common sense suggests that states will not passively accept the fate of balancing. States will attempt to avoid (or at least moderate) the negative reactions that other states may have to a particular security policy. My research shows how carefully crafted security policies can mitigate the intensity of balancing reactions in an anarchic international system.

For example, among the critical insights provided by scholars of the security dilemma is that a state initiating inappropriate or misapplied military policies can induce undesired reactions by an opponent that ultimately reduce the state's security.⁵⁶⁶ As Charles Glaser notes, inappropriately applied military strategies “. . . can alter the adversary's need to pursue security by changing the threat to the adversary's military capability and/or by changing the adversary's understanding of the defender's goals.”⁵⁶⁷ Thus, security dilemma theorists emphasize the importance of tailoring military and diplomatic policies to appropriately fit the nature and capabilities of a particular opponent.⁵⁶⁸ Prior knowledge about the opponent is critical to the chances of success. Knowing whether a state is greedy or not, secure or not, and/or suffering from

⁵⁶⁶ Robert Jervis, “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics*, 30, 2 (January 1978); Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), ch. 3.

⁵⁶⁷ Charles L. Glaser, “Political Consequences of Military Strategy: Expanding and Refining the Spiral and Deterrence Models,” *World Politics* 44, 4 (July 1992), 498.

⁵⁶⁸ Jervis argues that spiral model prescriptions should be implemented if conflict erupts among status quo states, while deterrence model prescriptions should be followed in conflicts where the opponent is an aggressor. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 100-02.

misperceptions will go a long way towards ensuring that an appropriate strategy is correctly designed and implemented.

The problem, of course, is that determining the intentions and capabilities of an opponent is a particularly difficult undertaking, and states frequently get it wrong. Decades-long debates persist as to whether the Soviet Union and Hitler's Germany were states ideologically driven toward expansion, or whether they were "normal" great powers responding rationally to the dictates of the international system.⁵⁶⁹ Additionally, while security dilemma theorists are correct to note the implications of the opponent's type and the degree to which it perceives the world accurately, little attention has been devoted to understanding when the first state itself is likely to have the right information *and how that information influences the strategies that are ultimately adopted*.⁵⁷⁰ The argument developed in this dissertation offers a means of understanding when a state's foreign-military policy will be more or less likely to induce desired responses by another state, a critical prerequisite to preserving peace and/or avoiding war among states. By focusing on the linkage between information acquisition and assessment on the one hand, and strategic design and implementation on the other, the information structure framework can be a powerful enhancement to security dilemma theory, one that can specify in greater detail the probability of conflict and cooperation among states.

⁵⁶⁹ For a pithy discussion of the debate between the "appeasers" and "anti-appeasers" in Britain before World War II, see Ernest R. May, "Conclusion: Capabilities and Proclivities," in *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessment Before the Two World Wars*, Ernest R. May, ed., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 520-21. On the contours of the Cold War debate, see Dale C. Copeland, *Origins of Major War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000) 146-47.

⁵⁷⁰ Although the issue of accurately determining the intentions and capabilities of others has long been a subject in the literature, far less attention has been devoted to the connection between assessment and strategy design. See Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970). On accurately determining the capabilities of others, see May, *Knowing One's Enemies*; Thomas G. Mahnken, *Uncovering Ways of War: U.S. Intelligence and Foreign Military Innovation, 1918-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

Second, my research sheds new light on the problem of signaling in international politics. Rationalist approaches to conflict and cooperation place uncertainty at the center of their theoretical enterprise. Familiar concepts such as private information, credible commitments, and rational updating all concern the availability of information to states and affect the likelihood of war and the durability of peace among them. This literature assesses the effects of uncertainty at the level of strategic interaction among states, and as such, focuses on the type of messages or signals states send to one another. For example, states frequently have incentives to issue misleading signals to others about the ultimate costs that they are willing to pay in an effort to get a better deal in international bargaining situations. Misrepresentative signaling has the effect of increasing the uncertainty of others, and is commonly seen as heightening the probability of war. Alternatively, states may issue signals known as credible commitments, or signals that can only be made by states of a certain type, in an attempt to make their intentions clear to others. Credible commitments decrease the uncertainty and have been argued to have pacifying effects in international politics. In short, explaining international political outcomes requires an understanding of how states signal their intentions as they interact in various bargaining scenarios.⁵⁷¹

Despite the importance of uncertainty in this literature, surprisingly little attention has been devoted to the issue of how states process information and thereby reduce their

⁵⁷¹ James D. Fearon, "Signaling versus the Balance of Power and Interest: An empirical Test of a Crisis Bargaining Model," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 38, 2 (June 1994); James D. Fearon, "Rationalist Explanations for War," *International Organization* 49 (1995); James D. Morrow, "Capabilities, Uncertainty, and Resolve: A Limited Information Model of Crisis Bargaining," *American Journal of Political Science*, 33, 4, (November 1989). The content of states' private information is those factors that are largely unobservable but which nevertheless affect the capabilities of a state (such as military strategy). Harrison R. Wagner, "Peace, War, and the Balance of Power," *The American Political Science Review*, 88, 3, (September 1994), 598.

level of uncertainty.⁵⁷² Because of this literature's focus is on the level of state interaction, the issue of domestic level information processing is black boxed. The argument presented in this dissertation suggests that much explanatory power is lost when information management is not given explicit theoretical consideration. The information processing capabilities of states have significant implications on their abilities to accurately interpret the signals being sent to them. Signals intended to portray benign intentions must compete with those that signal resolve should the receiver fail to respond appropriately. Furthermore, international politics is rarely a domain of dyadic interactions. A state will frequently be forced to send different types of signals to different states. As such, the ability for a receiver to parse out what is and is not relevant and to discern "carrots" from "sticks" should never be taken for granted. The strength of a receiver's information management capacities will play a significant role in its ability to understand what an opponent is offering, and to respond in a consistent and appropriate fashion. Such capabilities are most critical and exposed in calculations over the use of force because it is in these cases where information is at a premium, and where the costs of failed policies resulting from poor information processing capabilities are at their highest. By opening the black box of information processing, my argument offers a means of understanding the conditions under which states can decrease the uncertainty inherent to the bargaining process in international politics. The strength of a receiver's information management capacities will play a significant role in its ability to understand what an opponent is offering, and to respond in a consistent and appropriate fashion.

⁵⁷² An exception to this is Alexander J. Motyl, *Imperial Ends: The Decay, Collapse, and Revival of Empires* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001). See his discussion of information processing and its relationship to imperial decay, 48-53.

Third, as discussed in Chapter 1, my argument offers a much needed extension of context to studies that focus on how state leaders acquire information and policy advice. A number of studies have been conducted examining the effects of different configurations of advisory systems and agency relations.⁵⁷³ The problem with much of this work, however, is that the outcomes under scrutiny are cast in rather insular terms, with inter-agency relations as the dependent variable.⁵⁷⁴ Foreign policy outputs and international political outcomes are thus relegated to theoretical after thoughts. By adopting international political outcomes (i.e., balancing avoidance) as the dependent variable, my argument is able to expand the empirical reach of these studies while retaining a focus on critical foreign policy process variables. More generally, the information structure framework is well suited to the task of bridging the domains of theories of foreign policy and international politics. To the extent that the function of information structures is the acquisition and management of information, this variable is particularly suited to explaining both the origins of strategy (i.e., foreign policy outputs) and interstate relations (i.e., international political outcomes).

In addition to its theoretical contributions, the framework developed in this dissertation speaks to a number of critical aspects of current U.S. foreign policy. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, two issues have dominated the debate over American national security policy: the utility of limited

⁵⁷³ Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (New York: Free Press, 1990); Alexander L. George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980)

⁵⁷⁴ Two recent examples of this are: Amy B. Zegart, "September 11 and the Adaptation Failure of U.S. Intelligence Agencies," *International Security* 29, 4 (Spring 2005); and David Mitchell, "Centralizing Advisory Systems: Presidential Influence and U.S. Foreign Policy Decision-Making Process," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1, 2 (July 2005). Zegart offers a model of agency "adaptation failure," while Mitchell's primary concern is with developing an "Advisory Systems Typology." Neither author's dependent variable is cast in terms of international political outcomes.

war in resolving threats to national security, and the role of information management in designing and implementing security policies. Although the rationale for the Bush administration's decision to launch the war in Iraq is hotly contested, there is near consensus that the manner in which the United States waged this war produced a number of unintended—and undesired—consequences. Among the most significant is the continuing problem of indigenous and foreign insurgents combating American forces throughout the country. The conditions that permitted the insurgency to gain strength in Iraq resulted from strategic errors committed by the United States, errors that could have been avoided had the departments of Defense and State coordinated and shared vital information related to post-conflict stabilization policy. Faulty information management has not been limited to these two departments, however. As the 9/11 Commission's report makes clear, the inability for the FBI and CIA to effectively share information led to a number of missed opportunities to prevent al-Qaeda's attack. Perhaps, no other foreign policy issues are more pressing than those pertaining to the efficacy of limited war and the strength of the government's information management capabilities. Of course, questions pertaining to the efficacy of limited warfare and to the role and function of information management are not unique to the current era. By examining the past relationship between these two critical issue areas, a greater understanding of the challenges facing American policymakers may be facilitated.

The information structure framework holds substantial promise in terms of future research. Most importantly, this framework can and should be extended to non-American cases of limited warfare. Two sets of matched cases appear to be particularly fruitful. The first is the Crimean War (1854-56) and the Russo-Turkish War (1877). Prior to the

Crimean War, the Nicholavean information structure appears to have been truncated.

This system was notoriously incapable of conducting accurate net assessments of potential threats to the Russian Empire largely because of the dominant position that the bloated and sclerotic armed forces assumed in foreign policy. The Tsar's security policy was primarily one sided, relying on the size of the army to bully and threaten other states into submission without engaging in actual warfare. Although primary objective of Russia's grand strategy was defensive, Nicholas frequently employed his armed forces in ways that threatened other great powers. Without a robust diplomatic component to his security policy, the Tsar's actions were highly likely to induce diffusion when war did breakout. Russia's objectives in the Crimean War were defensive: the Tsar desired Turkey to remain an independent state, but one fearful of Russian power—as it had for decades. Russia was unable to achieve this objective, however, because it could not convince the other great powers that it was a status quo power. In short, because of its inability to coordinate the military and diplomatic aspects of the crisis leading up to the war, Russia's aggression against the Ottoman Empire led directly to the intervention of Great Britain and France. Russia did not have the requisite information to design effective pre-war policies that prevented diffusion.⁵⁷⁵

Russia's national security institutions underwent significant reform immediately after the disaster of the Crimean War. These reforms (including the creation of the military district system and the ministerial system) grew out of the sweeping reforms initiated by Alexander II and were a conscious attempt to increase the survivability of the

⁵⁷⁵ William C. Fuller, *Strategy and Power in Russia, 1600-1914* (New York: Free Press, 1992), ch. 6; A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe: 1914-1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) chs. 3-4; See David Wetzel *The Crimean War: A Diplomatic History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), ch. 2 for a discussion of British and French perceptions of Russia prior to the Crimean War.

Empire. An important and explicit condition for reform made by the Tsar and his top generals was the close coordination of military and foreign policy. Although the reforms were far from perfect, they did allow decision makers access to vital information concerning the military and political disposition of Turkey (the target state) vis-à-vis Great Britain (the potential balancer) in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877. Not only was Russia able to isolate Turkey from Russia politically, the military policy that Russia adopted was designed specifically not to threaten Great Britain.⁵⁷⁶

A second potential matched pair is the Wars of German Unification (1864 and 1870/71) and World War I (specifically, the decision to initiate unrestricted submarine warfare). Prussia's information structure during the period of the wars of unification appears to have been remarkably robust. While Bismarck was the ultimate arbiter of Prussian national security policy, Prussia's ability to wage both the Austro-Prussian and the Franco-Prussian wars without suffering from third-party intervention was facilitated by the tight integration between the military and diplomats.⁵⁷⁷ Prior to both wars, Prussia was able to actively thwart the alignment of the target and potential balancers and create war-winning strategies that did not provoke third parties into immediate intervention. For example, after the destruction of the Austrian army at Koniggratz in July 1866, the decision was made to not exploit the victory at hand by invading Vienna. Although Moltke and his generals were not pleased with the decision, the Prussian army was responsive to the demands of the top decision makers. The decision to forego the

⁵⁷⁶ Fuller, 295-327; John S. Bushnell, "Miliutin and the Balkan War: Military Reform vs. Military Performance," in *Russia's Great Reforms, 1855-1881*, in Ben Eklof, John Bushnell, and Larissa Zakharova eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); and George L. Yaney, *The Systematization of Russian Government: Social Evolution in the Domestic Administration of Imperial Russia, 1711-1905* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973).

⁵⁷⁷ See, for example the discussion of the drafting of the Ems Telegram prior to the Franco-Prussian War in Wetzel, 150-52.

exploitation of victory was consonant with the nature of the diplomatic face that Prussia was putting forth in its attempt to forestall French intervention.⁵⁷⁸

The entry of the United States into the World War I resulted in part from the German decision to launch unrestricted U-boat warfare against the British in 1916-17. As Dale Copeland has shown, the outbreak of the First World War resulted because Germany desired a major war; this was by no means a limited war that diffused over time. However, this does not mean that Germany desired the intervention of all of the great powers in the system—Germany preferred that the United States remain out of the war. Thus, the initiation of unrestricted submarine warfare is a puzzle that needs to be explained because it was this action that made the war one global scope. Jack Snyder demonstrates how the nature of German decision-making prior to 1914 was dominated by a military mindset.⁵⁷⁹ As the war progressed, the demands of total war further reduced the influence of the diplomats in the prosecution of the war.⁵⁸⁰ The result was an inability to balance the means of waging total war against the prospects of pulling the Americans into the war. Germany's decision to attack British merchant and naval fleets with submarines appears to have been based on a decision calculus that gave short shrift to the likely reaction of the United States. The truncated nature of its information structure prevented Germany from waging total war while keeping the remaining great power on the sidelines.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁸ See Richard Smoke, *War: Controlling Escalation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 105.

⁵⁷⁹ Jack Snyder, *Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), chs. 4-5.

⁵⁸⁰ Geyer, Michael, "German Strategy in the Age of Machine Warfare," in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, Peter Paret ed., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

⁵⁸¹ Fred Ikle, *Every War Must End* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 42-50.

An additional matched pair of cases also appears to be amenable to explication by the information structure framework. In a number of ways, the American prosecutions of the first and second Persian Gulf wars offer interesting distinctions that can be traced to differences in the American information structure. Critically, however, these two cases of limited war occurred during a unique era, that of American uni-polarity. Under uni-polarity, it is highly unlikely that any other state would adopt a balancing strategy of direct military intervention, irrespective the intensity of threat posed by the challenger. Put simply, this balancing option would stand little chance of providing security for the potential balancer because no other state could achieve greater security by attacking such an overwhelming power as that of the U.S. When employing the information structure framework in these cases, international political outcomes other than balancing should be examined. Two stand out as having interesting potential. In the first Gulf War, the United States was able to amass a substantial coalition against Iraq. What makes this case intriguing is the diverse interests of the members of the coalition, and the ability of the United States to maintain that coalition by carefully crafting its war aims. How the U.S. was able to design and implement a limited war strategy that accommodated the interests of its allies is a question worthy of attention. In the second Gulf War, the U.S. found itself confronting a significant insurgency comprising members of the former Iraqi military and radical foreign jihadist. To a significant extent, the manner in which the U.S. approached the problem of post-conflict stabilization policy in Iraq contributed to the rise of the insurgency. Although, the issues of coalition warfare and the prevention of insurgencies are conceptually distinct, there is circumstantial evidence to indicate that the manner in which the United States acquired and managed

information in the two wars differed dramatically. The information structure framework may very well shed light on these recent aspects of American foreign-military policy.

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DDRS: Declassified Documents Reference System

DNSA: Digital National Security Archive

FEC DIS: Far East Command, Daily Intelligence Summary

FRUS: Foreign Relations of the United States

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