

THE DIAOYU/SENKAKU DISPUTE AND CHINA'S DOMESTIC POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

China's assertiveness in its maritime disputes, especially in the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute with Japan, has prompted many to wonder if China is bidding for regional hegemony. However, China has engaged in far more serious military provocations before. One example is the shelling of the KMT-controlled Jinmen Islands with no apparent geopolitical objectives in 1958. In fact, Mao Zedong used the shelling for domestic purposes—to create a warlike atmosphere to launch his Great Leap Forward movement. For the purpose of comparison, it is useful to examine another conflict that was waged for domestic purposes: The Falklands War of 1982. The Galtieri junta initiated the conflict to divert the Argentine people's attention away from economic and political strife and towards the recovery of their sacred territory unjustly occupied by British imperialists. The Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute has diversionary effects for China as well. By instilling nationalism, which includes strong anti-Japanese elements, to replace Communism as the uniting ideology after Tiananmen, the government is trying to divert the public's attention from its legitimacy crisis. By having a closer look at the three cases, this paper intends to seek what the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute has in common with the shelling of Jinmen and the Falklands War, and what one can learn from the comparison.

I. DOMESTIC MOTIVES FOR PROVOCATIVE ACTIONS—A COMPARISON

Since 2009, tensions between China and Japan have risen dramatically mainly due to the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands dispute. With its growing economic and military capabilities, China is becoming more and more assertive in its maritime territorial claims, and the world has witnessed multiple standoffs between the two countries' forces near the uninhabited islands. Furthermore, China appears to be increasingly confident that it possesses the necessary capabilities to challenge the dominant position of the United States in Asia, as demonstrated by several dangerous encounter incidents. Indeed, a recent assessment of the Carnegie Endowment claims that the "greater and more active Chinese military and paramilitary presence near Japan" has contributed to "a level of overall contention and a risk of military conflict that was arguably inconceivable even a decade ago," posing a serious challenge to the U.S.-Japan alliance.¹

Perhaps China's behaviors seem extremely provocative and risky, yet one should not forget that Communist China has engaged in several military activities against its neighbors and has created tensions in the region. Notable examples include the

Korean War, the shelling of Jinmen Islands controlled by the Nationalists in 1958, and the massive domestic mobilization and indirect involvement in the Vietnam War. However, as renowned historian Chen Jian has argued, these hostile actions during Mao's era were "*always* for the purpose of domestic mobilization [italicized in the original]." Mao constantly needed to create international tension to "legitimate the revolution at home and to maintain its momentum."² Therefore, many Chinese hostile actions during the Cold War were not directly aimed at foreign targets. Rather, they contained diversionary effects to strengthen Mao and his colleagues' political authority at home by rallying the nation under their command to defeat foreign enemies.

It is the author's opinion that the Diaoyu/Senkaku Island dispute today contains diversionary elements as well. The Chinese government, by raising and maintaining a certain degree of tension with Japan and the United States, is shifting the public's attention away from domestic problems to the territorial disputes, thereby gathering support. Yet before one concludes that Chinese actions today are nearly identical to its Cold War behaviors under Mao, it is useful to consider another classic example of diversionary war—the Falklands War of 1982. It is

widely believed by academics that the authoritarian Argentine junta led by President Leopoldo Galtieri invaded the Falklands to counter its serious domestic legitimacy crisis. In fact, one scholar has observed that, “most accounts of Argentina’s invasion of the Falklands attribute the junta’s decision” to “a desire to restore public support for the government.”³

Coming into power after a military coup in 1976, the junta faced precarious economic and political conditions. Its orthodox monetarist policies resulted in a massive bank collapse in March 1980, and the “dirty war” against social oppositions had severely alienated the junta from society.⁴ The “dirty war” was so “dirty” that the junta was afraid of “Nuremberg-style investigations and trials” after democratization took place.⁵ As a result, the regime heated up the Falklands dispute to divert the public’s grievances because the islands held patriotic appeal to all segments of Argentinian society. But according to some scholars, the territorial dispute was aimed at not just the Argentinian public but the internal divisions of the regime as well. Having defeated the leftist insurgents and oppressed oppositions, the military lacked a sense of mission and factions within the regime appeared due to disagreements on economic and social policies and competition of bureaucratic interests.⁶ Galtieri therefore initiated the invasion of the Falklands to serve the dual purposes of increasing domestic popularity and uniting the regime behind him.

China’s domestic situation today is reminiscent of Argentina’s in many ways. Despite the robust economy, China has its own social instabilities and potential for political crisis. Although the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which constitutes the highest political authority in China, possesses far more social and military might than the Galtieri junta, it is experiencing a legitimacy crisis. With China’s opening and reform in the 1980s, communist belief has drastically faded away and with it, an ideology capable of uniting the entire nation. The arrival of investment from abroad has also brought Western liberal political ideas that have challenged the CCP’s orthodox position as the only legitimate leader of China. The call for political liberalization in China reached its peak at the 1989 Tiananmen protest. Only by resorting to military measures did the CCP avoid the fate of their counterparts in Eastern Europe and the former USSR. It is probably unlikely today that,

in the age of instantaneous Chinese social media and the high degree of internationalization, another Tiananmen Square could take place. However, grievances against government corruption, environmental pollution, enormous income inequality, and social injustice all have the potential to evolve into what the government refers to as a “mass event”—*de facto* demonstrations or civil disobedience. The CCP clearly recognized that its ruling status cannot be taken for granted when it said in a 2009 report “the advanced nature and ruling status of CCP cannot last forever by themselves...what we own today does not mean we will own them forever.”⁷

To fill the ideological vacancy, the state “launched an extensive patriotic education campaign in the 1990s to ensure loyalty in a population that was otherwise subjected to many domestic discontents.”⁸ Nationalism took the place of communism. One of the core components of Chinese nationalism is the humiliation suffered by China, which includes the loss of territory, at the hands of the West and Japan in contemporary history. The Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands issue fits in perfectly as an ideal target to divert domestic grievances, especially because of Japan’s notorious reputation in China as an extant military threat. Just like the Falklands, the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands dispute—and hatred toward Japan—appeals to all sections of Chinese society. The dispute satisfies the three factors that scholar Amy Oakes considers as major influences on diversionary conflicts—motivation (the existence of social unrest), domestic constraints (the regime is unable to perform political liberalization or extreme oppression), and opportunity (the regime is able to find a popular target).⁹

Of course, many differences exist between the Falklands War and the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute. Whereas the Argentinian junta started the war, Beijing is determined, as least for now, to avoid a war with Japan and possibly with the United States. A military defeat would not only derail China’s economic growth, which to a considerable degree relies on healthy economic relationship with Asian economies such as Japan’s, but could also instigate a political crisis. In this sense, China’s practice today is similar to many practices during Mao’s era, when foreign-targeted actions were often limited but nevertheless aroused immense domestic revolutionary fervor. Another distinction is that, while Galtieri and his colleagues enjoyed the surge of nationalism, there

are signs that the Chinese government has growing concerns about it getting out of control. A strongly nationalistic public may lead the state to lose control of the direction of nationalism. China expert Susan Shirk claims that nationalism “has boxed the CCP and its leaders into a corner,” and a recent study by the International Crisis Group concludes that Chinese nationalism is restricting the room for diplomatic mitigation.¹⁰

By discussing the shelling of Jinmen in Mao’s era, the Falklands War, and the current Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute, this paper intends to find historical resemblance between the former two and the latter. Some questions to be addressed in this paper are: Does the Diaoyu/Senkaku Island dispute inherit characteristics from both Mao’s era and the Falklands War? If so, what is unique about the current dispute and, most importantly, will China start a diversionary war with Japan over the islands? Shirk claims that when the CCP’s “political survival” is at risk, China will go to war regardless of consequences in order to prevent domestic humiliation (loss of legitimacy).¹¹ It will be devastating to the world if two crucial economic powerhouses go to war over uninhabited rocks, so what measures should China and the international community, respectively, take then to minimize the possibility that China goes to war for legitimacy reasons?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

To analyze Mao’s actions during the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis, Thomas Christensen first establishes the conceptual structure of “two-level foreign policy analysis” in his book, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958*. This structure focuses on how domestic political concerns can drive a nation’s foreign policy. In explaining why the relations between the United States and the newly established People’s Republic of China (PRC) remained hostile before Nixon’s rapprochement in the early 1970s, Christensen argues that something more than the realists’ balance of power theory was at work: the Cold War was “similar before and after 1972,” so why did the bipolarity and the common Soviet threat “not push leaders in similar directions in the 1950s?”¹² To solve this conundrum, Christensen comes up with his two-level approach by analyzing the domestic political conditions in both the United States and PRC.

He concludes that by using vitriolic anti-communist rhetoric and shelling the Jinmen Islands, President Truman and Mao Zedong created tensions short of war to gain domestic support to implement the Marshall Plan and the Great Leap Forward (GLF), respectively.¹³ In his chapter on the 1958 Taiwan Strait Crisis, Christensen refutes claims that Mao, by shelling the islands, attempted expanding the PRC’s territory, testing American resolve on Taiwan, drawing Soviet support, or defending itself from American threats. Instead, Mao used the international crisis to launch his GLF, which required extraordinary sacrifices from Chinese peasants to achieve utopian industrial and agricultural goals.¹⁴

Chen Jian reaffirms Christensen’s argument in his *Mao’s China & The Cold War*. By offering a closer scrutiny of the PRC’s domestic political movements and foreign policies during the Cold War, Chen Jian observes that Mao used tensions ranging from the Korean War and the Jinmen shelling to the Vietnam War to create momentum to sustain his domestic revolutionary programs, such as the anti-Rightist Campaign in 1957 and the GLF a year later.¹⁵ Chen attributes Mao’s anxiety about China losing its revolutionary fervor—the “postrevolution anxiety”—as the main reason why he ordered the shelling of Jinmen. According to Chen, Mao could use the tension created by the shelling to exploit the Chinese people’s “victim mentality” generated by past Western colonialism to mobilize for the GLF.¹⁶

There is a rich scholarly literature on diversionary war theory. Jack S. Levy, a political scientist, reviews the existing literature on diversionary war theory and summarizes the claims of both supporters and opponents of this theory in *The Diversionary Theory of War: A Critique*. Levy observes that, while historians and sociologists found strong correlations between war and domestic support for national governments, as demonstrated by the Crimean War, political science studies failed to reveal such a strong relationship.¹⁷ Levy, disturbed by the discrepancy between the two academic fields, conducts an examination on existing literature and identifies the shortcomings of political science research on this theory. He criticizes the political science literature for lacking a “well-developed theoretical framework guiding what are basically descriptive correlational analyses” and for paying inadequate attention to “the direction of the relationship between internal and

external conflict and to the causal mechanism driving the relationship.”¹⁸ While remaining supportive of diversionary war theory, Levy also acknowledges the reciprocal effect of internal and external conflict, noting how diversionary conflicts can ruin internal stability that elites were trying to preserve.¹⁹

One piece of literature that opposes diversionary war theory deserves special attention. M. Taylor Fravel, when explaining the PRC's past territorial concessions to its neighbors, proposes the “diversionary peace” theory, which states that authoritarian leaders “are more likely to compromise (in a territorial dispute) when confronting internal threats to regime security, including rebellions and legitimacy crisis.”²⁰ From studies of Chinese territorial concessions in places like Tibet and Xinjiang, Fravel concludes that leaders might give up certain territorial claims in exchange for outside recognition of its domestic policies and focus its power more on domestic issues, particularly when facing unrest near its borders.²¹ However, Fravel himself acknowledges that “diversionary peace” theory does not apply to the Diaoyu/Senkaku case because, unlike the often-unpublicized border dispute, it has nationalistic importance to the Chinese public and due to the islands' strategic and economic value.²² Moreover, his theory better applies to China's ethnic-diverse regions, where Beijing needs more resources to prevent ethnic separation movements than to maritime disputes. Still, his work demonstrates that Chinese intransigence on Diaoyu/Senkaku does not stem from established practices.

Amy Oakes' case study on the 1982 Falklands War further strengthens diversionary war theory. Oakes cautions against the linear relationship between domestic unrest and diversionary military actions, considering the unsupportive results from political science studies.²³ She supplements the existing diversionary war thesis by introducing the “alternative approach” and the “state extractive capacity” concept.²⁴ According to Oakes, a state will engage in diversionary actions when it cannot either reform the political system or repress the oppositions (running out of alternative approaches) because of low extractive capacity—the price of either reform or repression is too unbearable. According to Oates, The Falklands War was a “classic instance” of diversionary war because the junta could not meet the public's demand to reform—to end military rule—and the severe economic crisis, together with the unprecedented scale

of public opposition, crippled the junta's capability to conduct repression.²⁵ I will argue later in this paper that it is increasingly difficult for China to adopt alternative approaches as well.

Fravel, however, has replied to Oak's argument through his own examination of the Falklands War. He claims the reason the Galtieri junta invaded the island was “to compel British concessions at the negotiating table, not to defeat attention from the junta's domestic woes.”²⁶ If domestic crisis was really what triggered the invasion, Fravel questions, then why did the junta before Galtieri, who also faced social unrest, fail to initiate the diversionary conflict? Instead of diversionary motivations, he attributes the cause of war to realist explanations: the Argentinian's frustration with the lengthy but futile diplomacy, the perception of declining British resolve, and a short window of opportunity before Britain may harden its attitude.²⁷ Fravel's argument has its merit, and indeed the lengthy but unproductive negotiations and a preemptive strike opportunity played a hand in the junta's decision. Nevertheless, he neglects some empirical evidence that supports the applicability of diversionary war theory to this case. First of all, as late as the second half of 1980, the Argentinian government was still primarily focused on its Beagle Channel dispute with Chile, and therefore, it could not afford to antagonize two powerful players at once.²⁸ Secondly, its relationship with Britain remained vital for several important defense contracts. Thirdly, although the negotiation process was long, it was not futile: by late 1980, a possible lease-back agreement was within sight.²⁹ Last but not least, a conflict with Britain, however uncommitted to the Falklands it might be, would be a risky move and therefore a last-ditch measure for the junta. I will explore these points in detail in the empirical analyses section on the war.

In another paper co-written with Lily I. Vakili, Levy, while affirming that the junta went to war in 1982 for diversionary reasons, attributes the cause of war to the internal division of the junta. Levy and Vakili argue that, after the anti-Montoneros (an opposition guerilla group) campaign, the junta lacked a “unifying mission,” and internal divisions along bureaucratic interests began to intensify, leading Galtieri to launch the war to unite the regime.³⁰ However, Oakes repudiates this argument, claiming that the legitimacy crisis was so severe that even a cohesive regime would need to divert attention.³¹

Historians have paid much attention to the Falklands War. Sir Lawrence Freedman's *The Official History Of The Falklands Campaign*, and Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins' *Battle for the Falklands* provide a detailed overview of the war. Their works reveal some noteworthy characteristics of the Falklands crisis that apply to Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute. For example, nationalism, instead of the Falklands' strategic or economic value, was at the core of the dispute.³² Similarly, nationalism limited room for diplomatic negotiations.³³ Moreover, ultranationalists' popular yet provocative actions and miscalculations by low-level military personnel can easily menace the fragile peace without sanction from higher authority.³⁴ Lastly, Argentina's economic importance for Britain did not prevent it from going to war.³⁵

The historical literature also provides empirical support for the political scientists who uphold the relevance of diversionary war theory. Both Freedman and Hastings mention the junta's imperative for diversionary actions, and an examination of Argentina's military decisions by historian Martin Middlebrook confirms Oakes' claim that the desire to conduct diversionary actions does not necessarily equal war.³⁶

So far, there is no literature that directly compares the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute with the Falklands. However, many works have studied Chinese nationalism and the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute. One prominent work is *China, Fragile Superpower* by Susan L. Shirk. By examining Chinese social instability, Shirk observes that the Chinese state is increasingly exploiting nationalism, which is already embedded in many aspects of Chinese society, to divert the public's attention and boost support for the government. Yet Shirk warns that nationalist fervor could eventually backfire in starting an unwanted international conflict and, as the subtitle of her book suggests, "Derail Its (China's) Peaceful Rise" because "not lashing out (against Japan, Taiwan, or the U.S.) might endanger Party rule" by making the government appear weak in front of the nationalistic public.³⁷ Shirk is particularly afraid this scenario might take place over the Diaoyu/Senkaku disputes.³⁸

Shirk's argument is echoed by Zhao Suisheng, whose work, *A Nation-State by Construction*, records and analyzes Chinese nationalism from its origin in the Qing Dynasty to today. Zhao identifies three brands of Chinese nationalism: nativism, anti-traditionalism, and pragmatic nationalism.³⁹ He consid-

ers anti-Japanese sentiment to be controlled by the state-led pragmatic nationalism, yet shows that when the state fails to act forcefully on the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute, the more hawkish nativism is used to criticize the state.⁴⁰ He makes similar observations about the diversionary effect of nationalism and the erosion of state's monopoly on nationalism in his published essay as well.⁴¹

The study "Dangerous Waters: China-Japan Relations on the Rocks" by the International Crisis Group offers a history of Sino-Japanese disputes over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands and summarizes each sides' perspectives. It also mentions how Chinese nationalism is forcing the government to be assertive.⁴² James Manicom focuses on Sino-Japanese confrontation and cooperation in the disputed Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in East China Sea. His work reminds us that one should not view the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute in isolation because it lies in the background of the EEZ dispute, and that Sino-Japanese maritime cooperation is not completely impossible even when encountering hostile domestic popular opinion.⁴³

III. THE SECOND TAIWAN STRAIT CRISIS

At 5:30pm on August 23, 1958, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the coastal region of Fujian Province, under Mao's order, fired tens of thousands of artillery shells toward the Kuomintang (KMT)-controlled Jinmen Islands, only two miles off the coastal city of Xiamen (Amoy). The massive shelling caught the KMT garrison on the islands completely off guard, destroying the entire communication network.⁴⁴ In 85 minutes, the PLA fired a total of more than thirty thousands shells, killing more than 600 KMT soldiers on the islands.⁴⁵ The intense shelling continued until early October, accompanied by a naval blockade of the islands and sporadic aerial combats between the PLA air force and KMT air force in Chinese airspace.

The shelling, later known as the second Taiwan Strait Crisis, immediately raised tensions in the Asia-Pacific and could have triggered a nuclear war. President Eisenhower was afraid that the massive artillery operation was a prelude to an invasion of not only Jinmen and other offshore islands, but also the Pescadores (islets in the middle of the Taiwan Strait) and even Taiwan.⁴⁶ As a result, he reinforced the Seventh Fleet by transferring vessels from the Sixth

Fleet, which was dealing with the crisis in Lebanon and Iraq.⁴⁷ According to general Ye Fei, at the time commissar of the Fuzhou military district and hand-picked by Mao as the commander of the shelling operation, the U.S. naval presence in the Taiwan Strait included “seven aircraft carriers, three heavy cruisers, and forty destroyers.”⁴⁸ The Joint Chiefs of Staff even discussed the possibilities of using tactical nuclear weapons against Chinese airfields in the coastal areas.⁴⁹ Given that the Soviet Union had signed a defense treaty with China, the shelling indeed could easily have expanded the conflict way beyond the tiny offshore islands.

The military confrontation gradually subsided in October after Mao issued several statements announcing a four-week ceasefire. Although the shelling continued afterward, it took on a more symbolic meaning: the PLA only opened fire on odd days but not on even days, and the shells were intentionally fired on clear beaches. The KMT garrison followed likewise. In Mao's words, the pattern was meant to let Chiang's soldiers “get out to do some exercises and get some sunshine,” so that they can “stay there for long.”⁵⁰

Why did Mao suddenly decide to bombard the islands, raising the tensions in the West Pacific, only to conduct a unilateral ceasefire later and allow KMT forces to stay? An obvious geopolitical explanation would be that Mao wanted to destroy KMT's offshore bases that were frequently used to conduct harassments and sabotages against the Mainland and could serve as bases for Chiang Kai Sheik's “counter attack on Mainland.” KMT forces often conducted small-scale “surveillance and harassment” operations against the PRC's maritime transportation around Fujian Province, and the KMT air force used the Mainland's airspace for “surveillance, training, and airdropping anti-communist pamphlets.”⁵¹ By shelling the Jinmen Islands (including transferring fighter jets into Fujian Province to secure the airspace), Mao indeed could hope to destroy the KMT forces' ability to further harass the Mainland.

Nevertheless, Mao's motive was definitely not limited to geopolitical considerations. If he intended to permanently get rid of KMT bases near the Mainland's coast, why not just take the islands after the intense shelling? After all, according to general Ye Fei, one month into the shelling, the supply lines to the islands were cut off, defense fortifications were

destroyed, and the KMT garrison endured severe shortages of food and ammunition.⁵² The PLA could “easily take the islands if we launch a landing operation.”⁵³ Instead of exploiting the perfect military opportunity, Mao, under the name of PRC Defense Minister Peng Dehuai, issued a public statement on *People's Daily* on October 6, announcing that: “temporarily from seven days on from October the 6th, we will stop the shelling, you can freely transport supplies with no American escort.”⁵⁴ A week later, Mao issued another announcement: “The shelling of Jinmen will stop for another two weeks after today, to observe enemy's movement, and to let the compatriots on Jinmen to get ample supply, including food and military equipment, so that they can stay longer.”⁵⁵ These orders clearly indicate that Mao wanted KMT forces to stay.

In fact, Mao chose the worst time possible for an amphibious invasion to start the shelling. Late autumn was the typhoon season for Fujian, and the abominable sea condition made the PLA Navy's attack boats, which had light tonnage, hard to maneuver.⁵⁶ Given that the PLA Navy didn't have heavier vessels, unfriendly sea conditions basically rendered the Navy useless beyond minor scuffles. General Ye also mentions that heavy rain badly damaged transportation routs and made disease prevalent among soldiers in his memoir.⁵⁷ This evidence suggests that Mao did not plan to take the islands from the beginning.

Mao was also very cautious when considering how to deal with the Americans in the operation. Two days before the shelling, when listening to Ye Fei's report, Mao asked him if it would be possible to avoid hitting the American advisors on Jinmen Islands.⁵⁸ Throughout the campaign, Ye Fei followed strict guidelines preventing the PLA air force's aircrafts from flying beyond the PRC's airspace to avoid contact with U.S. airplanes. The aircrafts were even ordered to take off against the direction of the coast, so that they would not fly into the Taiwan Strait.⁵⁹ In late August, when American vessels began to provide escort to KMT supply ships, Mao ordered his troops to only fire upon KMT vessels but not the American ones. Much to Ye and other officers' perplexity, even if American ships fired back, they were not allowed to attack them unless given direct orders from Mao.⁶⁰ Why would Mao, who started this serious provocation, eagerly try to avoid confrontations

with the Americans? The only answer would be that he wanted to maintain the conflict on a very limited scale. In other words, his purpose was not to defeat any foreign adversaries.

Historians have attributed other reasons to Mao's actions. One of them is that Mao was trying to support the anti-colonial struggle in the Middle East by diverting U.S. forces into the West Pacific.⁶¹ Eisenhower did transfer ships from the Sixth Fleet to the Seventh Fleet, but by late July, the tension had started to calm down.⁶² Another explanation is that Mao wanted to know how committed the U.S. was to Chiang, and he tested their relationship by shelling the offshore islands.⁶³ To some extent, this statement is accurate. Mao paid close attention to the interactions between Chiang and his American allies. He was especially pleased to see that Chiang and the Americans disagreed on whether they should abandon the islands. For the Americans, the islands had little strategic value, and Eisenhower was clear that the Mutual Defense Treaty with Taiwan did not cover the islands, urging Chiang to retreat. To Chiang, however, the islands provided him the legitimacy that his government still represented China, and he openly expressed his dissatisfaction with the Americans.⁶⁴ By expanding the KMT-U.S. animosity, Mao wished to "ally with Chiang against the U.S." to prevent Taiwan from gaining independence.⁶⁵

The major reason why Mao decided to shell the islands, however, was to create a warlike, revolutionary domestic atmosphere to facilitate the launch of the Great Leap Forward. Mao had reason to feel isolated on the world stage in 1958. Under the Mutual Defense Treaty with Taiwan, the PRC-U.S. relationship did not show sign of improvement. Also, PRC-Soviet relations began to deteriorate as well. Mao had a very negative attitude toward Khrushchev's "peaceful coexistence" concept with Western nations, believing that communist revolutions should never lose their momentum.⁶⁶ He also regarded China as the legitimate world leader of revolutions. In mid-1958, when the Soviets proposed to establish a Sino-USSR submarine fleet and build a long-wave radio station on China's east coast, Mao refused angrily and held sharp talks with the Soviet ambassador.⁶⁷ When Khrushchev visited China from late July to early August to try to calm things down, Mao did not inform Khrushchev about the incipient shelling.⁶⁸ These cracks between the two socialist countries paved the

way for the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s, and reinforced Mao's fear that the Soviets may one day collude with the U.S. against China. Therefore, Mao launched the GLF to significantly bolster the PRC's national power to deter any potential foreign aggression.

Domestically, Mao had just finished the Anti-Rightist campaign in 1957 and felt that the time was right to start a new wave of revolution that could push China's "socialist revolution and reconstruction to a higher level."⁶⁹ The GLF aimed to transform China, then a still impoverished nation, to a world superpower. It set the unrealistic industrial goal of surpassing Britain and the United States in major industrial output within 15-20 years, and this was most vividly demonstrated by the mass steel production campaign, during which each household donated nearly every metal product it owned to make steel in many backyard furnaces. Food production was also given absurd goals, like "ten thousand jin [a Chinese weight unit; one jin equals to 0.5 kilogram] of rice per acre." Just to show how unrealistic the agricultural goals were, one famous mural in a commune depicted a pig as huge as an elephant, huge enough to feed an entire commune.

Other crucial aspects of the socialist transformation included rural communization and building the militia to increase productivity. Rural communes required Chinese peasants to give up what remained of their small plot of private land and household property to join the "people's commune" to work and eat together. Christensen characterizes this as "the ultimate sacrifice for the greatest percentage of Chinese citizens."⁷⁰ More excruciating for them was that the GLF focused on heavy industry, state capital accumulation, and atomic weapons, items that would not directly benefit the peasants in the short term.⁷¹ Building the militia required further sacrifices by introducing military structure and discipline into the communes, leading to even less reward for the peasants' tremendous amount of work. Although raising food production was also a goal, collectivization led the state to take most of the crops. Given that merely five years had passed since the Korean War, it would take unimaginable willingness for the peasants to sacrifice their personal welfare to build China into a superpower.

Consequently, Mao needed to persuade his people that it was worthwhile and necessary to en-

dures such huge sacrifices. He achieved this by raising the tension in West Pacific. Mao clearly understood that, by shelling the islands, he would further deteriorate Sino-U.S. relations and increase the possibility of a direct military conflict. Mao used the state of affairs that he had created to convince the people that their country was in real danger of war with the imperialists and that they needed to make extra contributions to defend it. As Christensen argues, Mao was not actually preparing China for war, but was creating a "siege mentality necessary to extract massive sacrifices from the Chinese public."⁷² Chen Jian corroborates Christensen's argument in his similar remark: "he (Mao) found that the tension emerging in the Taiwan Strait provided him with much needed means to legitimize the unprecedented mass mobilization in China."⁷³ Chinese historians agree to this conclusion as well, with military historian Xu Yan observing: "it is consistent with Mao's thought to use struggles against the enemy to stir people's revolutionary fervor to mobilize every positive factor for revolution and construction."⁷⁴ Finally, Mao himself belied his intention in a letter to Peng on July 27, 1958. In the letter, he claimed "it would be best if the enemy attacks Zhang Zhou, Shan Tou, Fu Zhou, and Hang Zhou," all important southeastern cities, so that "politics can be in charge."⁷⁵ Apparently, manufacturing warlike atmosphere was Mao's primary goal.

The shelling also aligned perfectly with building militias. During or close to the period of the shelling, Mao issued several directives to strengthen building militias. In September, Mao told journalists from Xinhua Press, the state press agency of China, that we must "establish militia units on a massive level."⁷⁶ In another speech in December, Mao said: "If the imperialists dare to invade us, then we will achieve the goal of every man a soldier ..."⁷⁷

What happened in China after the shelling is further evidence that Mao used the crisis for domestic purposes. China put its focus on socialist construction while only conducting symbolic and sporadic shelling of Jinmen. The naval blockade was lifted as well. Moreover, the decrease in military personnel and defense budget to the lowest in 1958-1959 since 1949 demonstrates that Mao focused on domestic construction first.⁷⁸

Could one categorize Mao's shelling of Jinmen as a diversionary action? Under the traditional definition of diversionary war, it would be difficult

to do so, most notably because Mao did not face any threats to his rule at all in 1958. Even though Mao was constantly afraid that his country lacked revolutionary momentum, he was not concerned that someone might take his post (it was not until 1970 when he and Lin Biao became rivals) or that the Chinese public will no longer view him as the Chinese revolution's great leader. There were no political opponents capable of voicing dissent after the Anti-Rightists Campaign, and Mao enjoyed absolute authority within the CCP. This was well demonstrated at the 1959 Lushan Conference, when Mao publicly denounced the revered Peng Dehuai in front of other CCP leaders because Peng had written Mao a letter urging him to seriously consider the negative consequences of the GLF. Banned as a "careerist," Peng lost his post as Defense Minister and other leaders concurred with Mao's decision.⁷⁹

In conclusion, Mao decided to shell the Jinmen Islands and considerably raised the tension in West Pacific largely out of domestic concerns. He needed a limited military confrontation to create a warlike domestic atmosphere necessary to extract sacrifice from the people to implement the GLF while also taking care to not let the conflict escalate into war. The shelling operation was not designed to create dramatic international event to rally up popular support for a crumbling regime, so in this sense, it was not a diversionary action. Yet it did have a diversionary effect by making the people less focused on the hardship they would endure. Mao's action was much more provocative than China's assertiveness today, yet contrary to many realist explanations, the shelling was mainly a ploy for domestic political purposes.⁸⁰ The Second Taiwan Strait Crisis reminds people that China has precedent of being provocative, and that provocative actions do not always imply a bid for geopolitical domination.

IV. THE FALKLANDS WAR

The Argentine invasion of the Falklands Islands on April 2, 1982, completely took Britain by surprise. More than a thousand Argentine Marines easily took over what they considered to be their historical territory, while the Governor of the Falklands, Rex Hunt, only had 75 Royal Marines whose major duty was to provide symbolic British military presence and to deal with minor Argentine intrusions.⁸¹ Why, all of a sudden, did the Argentine junta, led by Leopoldo

Galtieri, launch the invasion? Evidence suggests that the junta did so for diversionary purposes—to ameliorate its domestic legitimacy crisis by conducting a military operation that would be supported by the entire Argentine society.

But could it be that the junta initiated the invasion, as Fravel suggests, for strategic or diplomatic purposes? Historical evidence does not demonstrate either of them to be the primary reason for the conflict. The Falklands were of minor strategic importance to both Britain and Argentina. During the Cold War, Britain's central security focus was in line with NATO—to counter a potential Soviet intrusion into Europe. The Royal Navy's concentration was in European waters, instead of the Falklands some 8,000 nautical miles away from Britain.⁸² The only British naval presence in the South Atlantic was *Endurance*, an ice patrol ship with very limited armament that spent around five months during the Antarctic Summer in the waters of the Falklands and its dependency islands. Even *Endurance* was constantly a target for naval budget cuts, and finally, in June 1981, Thatcher's conservative government decided to put it out of service in 1982.⁸³ The insignificant status of the Falklands was also highlighted by Britain's military contingency plan of 1976 in light of a possible Argentine invasion. Because of the distance, the Navy could not afford the cost of a constant presence, and a deterrence force comprised of a frigate or a nuclear submarine was not only expensive, but also may have been viewed by Argentina as a provocation. By contrast, Argentina enjoyed military initiatives. It had ample options to harm the islands, such as a blockade, termination of supplies, and air service.⁸⁴ Therefore, the only viable option if a conflict took place was for the Navy to recapture the islands, but it would take weeks to assemble a task force and arrive at the Falklands. In addition, the amphibious strength required (including an aircraft carrier) was considered too much to be applied to the remote colony.⁸⁵ The contingency review in 1981 only reaffirmed the difficulties.⁸⁶ In short, due to the Falkland Island's distance and strategic unimportance, the British contingency plan was no plan at all.

The Falklands occupied little attention in British civil affairs as well. The prospect for long-term development was bleak, and the economy of the islands heavily depended on wool production that was constantly affected by the fluctuating international wool

price. Geographically, the islands were “distant and inhospitable,” and ironically, they relied on Argentina for many essential services and markets.⁸⁷ To address the “growing concern about the decline of the Falkland Islands' economy and the Islands' loss of population (which was about 2000),” the British government in 1976 asked Lord Shackleton to conduct an economic survey.⁸⁸ Much to the government's irritation, Shackleton's report claimed that the islands' economy could be self-sufficient provided there was enough investment. However, it also acknowledged that crucial pillars of the economy, such as tourism, were dependent “to a large extent on the establishment of commercial air links” with neighboring countries.⁸⁹ In January 1981, the new British Nationality Bill only gave Falklands residents whose parents or grandparents were not born in the United Kingdom citizenship of the British Dependent Territories, despite strong objection from the islands.⁹⁰ Nicholas Ridley, Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), when negotiating with Argentine Foreign Minister Cavándoli in April 1980, claimed that the only territorial claim he cared about was that “to Bordeaux because of the wine!”⁹¹

The Falkland Islands were of secondary importance to Argentina at best. Throughout its negotiations with Britain, Argentina was also concerned with the Beagle Channel Dispute with Chile. In fact, Argentina nearly went to war with Chile over the dispute, and only the intervention and eventual arbitration of the Vatican prevented the conflict.⁹² Argentina was actually more occupied with the Beagle Channel Dispute than with the Falklands as late as November 1980. It was not until the Vatican ruled the Channel dispute in favor of Chile that the Falkland issue “rush to the fore.”⁹³ Even during the Falklands War, the junta kept many of its best-trained troops along the Chilean border.⁹⁴ Obviously, the Beagle Channel had more strategic importance than the Falklands. There were indications that the Falklands had potential oil reserves, but Argentina viewed the oil potential “small and very long term,” and turned down British requests for joint development.⁹⁵ Thus, from a geopolitical perspective, the Falklands were insignificant, casting doubt on the applicability of the realist model. Moreover, if the Falklands were strategically important to Argentina, then why did the consecutive juntas not occupy them before 1982?

Fravel argues the invasion was the product of

Argentina's growing dissatisfaction with its futile diplomatic efforts with the British. The negotiations first started in December 1965, following a UN General Assembly Resolution pressing the two countries to peacefully solve the dispute. Yet in the seventeen years preceding the war, there was no agreement on the sovereignty issue, the core objective of Argentina. Fravel thinks the war "reflects the culmination of Argentine frustration from 1981 that continued to grow in 1982."⁹⁶ It is beyond dispute that the slow progress in negotiations made the junta impatient and therefore more likely to start a conflict. An examination of diplomatic relations between Britain and Argentina, however, suggests that the lack of progress was not the trigger of the war.

First of all, the relationship between Britain and Argentina remained cordial throughout the entire negotiation process. Argentina was much more important economically to Britain than were the Falkland Islands: "trade with the Falklands was worth a few percent of that with Argentina."⁹⁷ Freedman records British economic interest in Argentina as including at least "£240 million, as well as investment worth £60 million."⁹⁸ Meanwhile, the British government was unwilling to provide the funds necessary for extending the airfield at Stanley, the capital of the Falklands, at the cost of 3 to 5 million pounds. It even ridiculed the idea of the extension, a central recommendation from the Shackleton report, as "an expensive fantasy."⁹⁹

Ironically, Argentina was also a prominent client for British defense sales. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Britain strengthened Argentina's Navy and Air Force by selling the latter minesweepers, Canberra bombers, two Type 42 destroyers, Lynx helicopters, and secret information about Sea Wolf anti-air missiles.¹⁰⁰ Thatcher's conservative government was even less restrictive on arms sales, proposing to sell either the aircraft carrier *Invincible* or *Hermes* plus Sea Harriers (backbones of the British taskforce during the war) and even a Vulcan nuclear bomber.¹⁰¹ If Argentina or Britain became more hostile toward each other during the lengthy diplomatic process, these arms sales would not have been proposed or taken place.

Secondly, the negotiations were not completely futile. In 1971, a communications agreement was signed to increase interactions between the Falklands and Argentina, so that the stubborn islanders would see the benefits of a closer relationship with Argen-

tina. In November 1980, Britain and then Argentine dictator Jorge Videla agreed to negotiate on the basis of a lease-back, which would allow Britain to "lease" the islands before transferring sovereignty to Argentina. Ultimately, the uncompromising position of the islanders proved to be the only reason that this new initiative failed.¹⁰² In February 1982, the talk in New York, although failing to reach substantial agreement, resulted in a communiqué that stated: "The meeting took place in a cordial and positive spirit."¹⁰³ The Galtieri junta, however, was not pleased with it and replaced it with a unilateral hawkish statement.¹⁰⁴ One can observe that the consecutive Argentina governments, although not satisfied with the negotiations, did not regard them as worthless or obnoxious, and it was not until Galtieri's regime that Argentina suddenly took a harder stance. The nature of the sudden hawkishness of Argentina in 1982 thus cannot be explained by the mounting frustration, as Fravel argues, but rather by Argentina's worsening economic and political situation in 1982.

It is beyond dispute that the Galtieri junta faced extremely difficult economic and political conditions in 1982. The junta's orthodox liberal economic policies only aggravated the already plummeting economy. In Fravel's account, the peso "dropped by more than 600 percent against the dollar, national debt increased by 30 percent to 35 billion dollars, and inflation grew from double to triple digits."¹⁰⁵ Oakes observes that the Argentine government was "on the verge of insolvency" due to its debt that made up 60 percent of its GDP. Oakes even states that Galtieri's new Minister of Economy, Roberto Alemán, was more devoted to orthodox liberal measures than his predecessors, as demonstrated by the freeze of government wages.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Hastings and Jenkins describe Alemán's orthodox economic package introduced in January 1982 as one of "devastating severity" and "bold to the point of recklessness," turning economic conditions from bad to worse.¹⁰⁷

Tightly connected with the economic downturn was the increasingly challenging legitimacy crisis. Fravel is correct that both the economic and political crises were present before the Galtieri regime, but, as Oakes argues, in 1982, the junta's legitimacy was questioned unlike before. In fact, the junta faced a more difficult situation than just two years before when its annihilation of political opponents was ruthlessly effective.¹⁰⁸ The failure of economic reforms encouraged the business circle and the media

to openly criticize the government for the first time, while the Catholic Church, which used to be accommodating to the juntas, distanced itself from the regime.¹⁰⁹ Dissident political parties also formed a united opposition—the Multipartidaria and mothers of the victims of the Dirty War were also gathering in squares to demand explanation for their disappeared children, drawing international attention.¹¹⁰ Thus, the Galtieri junta faced more severe crises than its predecessors. The economic crisis reduced the government's affordability to conduct a long-term suppression operation while the political crisis induced more opponents to demand democratic reform. According to Oakes, the junta enjoyed little extractive capacity, making a diversionary action an extremely attractive solution.

The Falkland Islands were considered to be the historical territory of Argentina, and retaking them was a move that would appeal to every section of Argentine society, even to the junta's opposition. One central feature of diversionary actions for leaders facing legitimacy crisis is to "initiate or escalate a foreign crisis to demonstrate their competence to be reelected."¹¹¹ Galtieri did not face an upcoming election in 1982, yet he envisioned that the junta would one day become the pro-military party in civilian rule.¹¹² If Galtieri could successfully take the Falklands from the British imperialists and settle a historic injustice, then logically, his pro-military party would have a greater chance to win in a democratic election. Furthermore, by demonstrating competency in defending national interests and honor, Galtieri could restore public confidence in the military government and earn more time for the realization of his harsh economic policy. As Hastings and Jenkins have noticed, the recovery of the Falklands would "at least unite the nation for a time...serve as a vindication of military rule and cleanse the reputation of the armed forces after the horrors of the dirty war. It would also elevate the junta to an authority which was certainly required to enforce Alemann's economic package."¹¹³

The junta, of course, realized that a war with Britain was extremely risky. Having an ongoing dispute with Chile, Argentina risked fighting a two-front war if Britain and Chile were to collude. The Navy, the most hawkish branch of service in the Argentine military, clearly acknowledged that if Britain were to dispatch a nuclear submarine to the Falklands, then its invasion plan would be scuttled.¹¹⁴ A failure in re-

covering the Falklands would certainly mean the end of the junta's rule. Nevertheless, the junta launched the invasion to perform what Oakes described as a "diversionary spectacle."¹¹⁵ The announced withdrawal of *Endurance*, the Nationality Bill, the inaccurate assumption that the U.S. would at least remain neutral in the conflict, and Britain's focus and eventual concession on Rhodesia all convinced the junta that Britain would not seek to recapture the remote islands once they were occupied by Argentina. As a consequence, the Falklands was not only an ideal target but also an easy one. Indeed, as Fravel suggests, the junta hoped that the invasion would force Britain to concede the Falklands' sovereignty to Argentina in the ensuing negotiations.¹¹⁶ Argentina was so confident that Britain would not retaliate that the vice-admiral in charge of the invasion was not even instructed to prepare for the islands' defense.¹¹⁷ The junta did not want a war with Britain, but instead tried to create a *fait accompli* in order to gain British concessions. As such, it could create a spectacle to demonstrate to the people that it is competent in defending national interests.

One characteristic of the Falklands dispute deserves special attention—the role of nationalism in both Argentina and Britain. To Argentina, the Falkland Islands were considered sacred territory unjustly occupied by British colonialists, leaving Argentina as a humiliated victim of imperialism. Moreover, as Freedman described, "Some day, somehow, the nation would have to be completed," and such an objective is not a matter of "legal title" but a matter of "national identity."¹¹⁸ Juan Peron, the military dictator who ruled Argentina for nearly three decades after WWII, further promoted nationalism in Argentina. Schools were instructed to teach "the Malvinas are Argentine," and the slogan was even made into music.¹¹⁹ Not surprisingly, every sector of Argentine society firmly believed in the national cause, making the Falklands an ideal target for diversion. Yet nationalism, expressed in the popular press, also compelled the junta to be assertive in its negotiations because appearing uncommitted in the public's eye would damage the junta's legitimacy.

For Britain, the Falklands were initially of only minor importance. As demonstrated above, consecutive British governments attached low priority to the Falklands, which holds neither strategic nor economic importance. Thus, there was a "political imbalance"

regarding the Falklands between Britain and Argentina.¹²⁰ However, the islanders' obstinate position of refusing any negotiations on sovereignty and their mobilization of British media and Parliament proved extremely effective in blocking the governments' concessions to Argentina. Afraid of backdoor deals, the islanders wrote open letters to the Parliament and the press to criticize the "selling-out" of the British government.¹²¹ They also established the Falklands Islands Emergency Committee to lobby members of Parliament against any pressure that might be put on the islanders, especially on the issue of sovereignty.¹²² In the South Georgia crisis that immediately preceded the war, the British government was under tremendous pressure from the press to remove the Argentine personnel on the South Georgia Island, a dependency island of the Falklands.¹²³ Domestic pressure in Britain, although less fervent than Argentine nationalism, prevented Britain from reaching an agreement with Argentina on the issue of sovereignty.

Another important feature of the dispute was how ultra-nationalists, through spontaneous actions, could endanger the fragile peace. Unexpected incidents caused by provocative actions by front-line actors, unknown by the junta, easily escalated tension around the region. A vivid example was "Operation Condor." In September 1966, twenty young Argentine ultra-nationalists hijacked an Argentine commercial flight and landed in Stanley, "arresting" two British officials who approached them. Though they were quickly arrested by the Royal Marines and were sent back to Argentina, they were viewed as national heroes back home. The Argentine Foreign Minister, however, was appalled by the possibility that this incident could derail the ongoing negotiation.¹²⁴ In February 1976, an Argentine destroyer fired warning shots at a British Research Ship *Shackleton*, causing Britain to divert a frigate to the region and further hurting Argentine-British relations.¹²⁵ One can easily observe that private activists and hotheaded low-level officers could hijack the diplomatic process and force both governments into a more forceful stance. It is entirely conceivable that China and Japan today face similar risks in their maritime dispute, as will be examined below.

V. CHINESE NATIONALISM AND DOMESTIC CONCERNS

The pro-democracy protest at the Tiananmen

Square from May to June 1989 was a turning point in contemporary Chinese history. As historian Jonathan Spence notes, the 1989 protest, which called for the end of rampant economic corruption and later for the resignation of Deng Xiaoping and Premier Li Peng, reached "a scale unprecedented in the history of the PRC."¹²⁶ The CCP only maintained its ruling status thanks to PLA units loyal to Deng and his fellow hardliners who were willing to perform the not-so-honorable task of "cleaning" the Square. The Tiananmen Square incident definitely could be the worst legitimacy crisis the CCP has ever faced, and back in the early 1990s, many observers in the world logically predicted that the days of the CCP could be numbered. Nearly two decades later, however, as Chinese scholar Wang Zheng notes, the PRC has "a very patriotic and supporting populace that many governments would be envious to have."¹²⁷ It is indeed puzzling how the Chinese government, once pushed to the verge of collapse, regained its legitimacy in a period that witnessed the rapid decline of Communist ideology and growing social tensions.

When China embarked on its "Reform and Opening" period in the 1980s, Deng came up with the notion of "let some people become rich first" and then let them bring economic opportunities to the rest of the Chinese population.¹²⁸ Deng's version of Reagan's "trickle down" policy, however, did not bring "the others" to wealth as it promised to. Instead, income inequality emerged as a prime social conflict, and nepotism and grafts became prevalent in government officials, often colluding with businessmen who were very much willing to pay bribes. Granted, Chinese economic power skyrocketed following the reform, and the majority of the Chinese people, even those who did not become rich first, were better off. However, with economic achievement came the eventual demise of Communist ideology, once the CCP's source of legitimacy. Mao's utopian People's Communes were replaced by official support of free market, and the Chinese public became curious about Western liberal political thought as well. The Tiananmen incident clearly demonstrated to the government that its mobilization capacity had greatly dwindled because Communism could no longer unite the entire population as the national ideology.

The Chinese leadership also experienced a decrease of charisma and personal authority. Deng's handpicked successor, Jiang Zemin, lacked the revo-

lutionary credentials of Mao and Deng.¹²⁹ In fact, Shirk considers him to be a “compromise choice” after Tiananmen among different rival factions.¹³⁰ Jiang and his successors—Hu Jintao and his vice-president Wen Jiabao—did not command the personal authority that Mao and Deng enjoyed. As Zhao Suisheng observes, the Chinese leadership today is more accountable to the people than before due to the public’s easy access to commercialized media to instantly get information and to express their views online.¹³¹ In other words, the days when “a charismatic dictator” would have “the authority to arbitrate disputes in the leadership or personally set the country’s course” are gone.¹³²

To avoid another public backlash against the state like the Tiananmen incident and to enhance his personal authority, Jiang started a nationwide patriotic education campaign to instill patriotism as the new uniting ideology to replace Communism.¹³³ The patriotic education campaign in national education system started in August 1994 when the Propaganda Department in charge of the campaign issued the document “Outline on Implementing Patriotic Education.” This official document states: “patriotic education...is the foundation of guiding people to establish the...correct ideal, belief, life concept, and value, and a very important work for the entire society.”¹³⁴ The focus of the campaign not only included Chinese history and culture, but also the accomplishments of the CCP and the socialist modernization. Although the document states that patriotism is not “parochial nationalism,” Shirk contends that the campaign “has been single-mindedly promoting nationalism.”¹³⁵ Similarly, Zheng Wang describes this campaign as an “ideological reeducation.”¹³⁶

Contemporary Chinese history features heavily in the new patriotic campaign since the “century of humiliation,” a term referring to the period from the 1840s to 1940s when China was exploited by colonialists, highlights the CCP’s glorious efforts in defending China’s honor and making China a strong power today. Japan negatively occupies a central role in this campaign because of China’s painful historical memory of Sino-Japanese relations. Since Japan defeated the Qing Dynasty in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895, it has been the most vicious aggressor against China. Japan’s numerous atrocities in the Second Sino-Japanese War from 1937 to 1945, especially the extremely notorious Rape of Nanjing, are taught

and well-known to every Chinese citizen. A large part of the CCP’s legitimacy also stems from its anti-Japanese struggle. Japanese failure to fully acknowledge its guilt in WWII and its leaders’ visits to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine, which includes WWII Class-A criminals, keep the historical memory alive. Subsequently, the strong anti-Japan sentiments of the Chinese people make Japan-related issues ideal targets to divert attention from domestic problems.¹³⁷

Nevertheless, the patriotic education campaign has not eradicated social dissatisfaction toward the government. Problems caused by China’s rapid economic development and the instant access to information, made possible by China’s exploding number of Internet users and commercialized media, aggravated many social issues into what the government calls “mass incidents,” de facto illegal gatherings or protests. Forced seizure of farmers’ land for construction programs, corruption of law-enforcement officials, and environmental pollutions all have triggered mass incidents. In late 2011, residents in Wukan, a fishing village in Guangdong Province, started a standoff with the local government over issues of illegal land seizure and arrest of dissidents. The conflict was so serious that the villagers eventually blocked all roads leading into the village, drawing international attention.¹³⁸ In the end, the leaders of Guangdong province reached a deal with the villagers and agreed to the villagers’ demand that an election be held in the village to elect the council members of the village.¹³⁹ In 2007, 2011, and 2012, protests against petrochemical plants broke out in Xiamen, Dalian, Shifang, and Ningbo, with some of them turning violent.¹⁴⁰ One of the most recent mass incidents took place in Hainan Province in November 2014, with villagers smashing over ten government vehicles to protest against construction programs.¹⁴¹ According to the “social blue book” published in 2012 by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the number of mass incidents in recent years has reached at least “tens of thousands.” Of these incidents, half was caused by forced land seizures, 30 percent by environmental problems and labor disputes, and another 20 percent by other reasons.¹⁴²

In light of growing civil dissatisfaction, the government could choose either to conduct reform in accordance with dissidents’ wishes or to repress the protests. However, neither of the two options is ideal. As Huang Yasheng has written in *Foreign Af-*

fairs, there are more calls for democracy and “honesty, transparency, and accountability” from China’s hundreds of millions of netizens.¹⁴³ Although these wishes have not created mass pro-democracy movements like the one in 1989, they are of the same nature as the petitions of the protestors at Tiananmen, and judging from the government’s previous response, it is hard to imagine how these wishes will be addressed in a way satisfying to the dissidents today. After 1989, China “allowed maximum leeway in economic growth, both to distract the populace from making more political demands and to strengthen the nation as a whole,” and its high economic growth ameliorated many domestic criticisms of China’s authoritarian political system.¹⁴⁴ Yet as signs of China’s economic slow-down start to emerge, one can expect more dissatisfaction with the government.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, the Chinese government tends to regard pro-democracy activities as “color revolutions” instigated and used by the West for regime changes.¹⁴⁶ Of course, it is possible that the CCP will see the necessity of democratization in the future, but as Huang puts it, the process will be gradual and in a controlled manner, thus unlikely to placate the dissidents in the short term.¹⁴⁷ Like the Argentine junta, the CCP may also want to buy more time in order to let it win elections in a multi-party system. The government can also choose to repress any potential demonstrations, and so far, there has been no mass incident even close in scale to the one in 1989. Nevertheless, in the age of the Internet and globalization, another forceful government reaction like the Tiananmen incident would instantly gain attention and condemnation and pose a far more serious legitimacy challenge to the government than if it chose not to suppress it at all. The government’s compromise at Wukan has already demonstrated that mere suppression of mass incidents is no longer feasible.

The enormous difficulties with both reform and repression leave a diversionary spectacle the most viable and attractive solution for the government. Indeed, in recent years, the world has witnessed more hawkish Chinese rhetoric. More in-service PLA officers appear on TV talk shows or write opinion articles to criticize what they perceive as provocative and hostile U.S. (and its allies’) policies in Asia and argue for a more uncompromising Chinese policy. Recently, Liu Yazhou, a general of the PLA Air Force, wrote an article titled “Soul of Servicemen” in a magazine, in

which he proclaims: “For those who dare to infringe [upon China], soldiers must have the bravery and the spirit to hunt them till the end to kill them.”¹⁴⁸ As scholar Hao Yufan notes, “the voice of the PLA has grown louder in recent years as territorial disputes in the East China Sea and South China Sea have intensified” and it “always arouses nationalistic public sentiment.”¹⁴⁹ Assertive rhetoric is not limited to defending China’s interests, but has already touched upon the question of global order. Pang Zhongying, a professor of international relations at Renmin University, posted an article on the website of *The Global Times* to predict the major role China will play in creating a new world order. He argues that, by providing “global public products” such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, China is attracting more international supporters while the U.S.-led post-WWII order has been “damaged without recognition” by United States’ hegemonic practices.¹⁵⁰

Given the condition of Chinese nationalism examined above, it is not difficult to see why the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute remains a major contention in the Sino-Japanese relationship. The Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands are a group of uninhabited islands in the East China Sea, about 400km west of Okinawa, 170km north of Taiwan, and 300km east of China.¹⁵¹ Japan took the islands after the First Sino-Japanese War and currently administers the islands, while both China and Taiwan claimed sovereignty of the islands after 1972, when the United States transferred Okinawa (along with the islands) back to Japan and when oil deposits were discovered near the islands. Like how the Argentines view the Falklands, the Chinese view the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands as sacred territory unjustly occupied by Japanese colonialism and militarism.

Chinese nationalist sentiments were immediately ignited once the dispute emerged in the 1970s, but interestingly, it was the Chinese in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and North America that took the lead in holding demonstrations and protests. As scholar Chien-peng Chung notes, the PRC government “was quite content to let the Chinese outside China take the lead in expressing the Chinese people’s outrage.”¹⁵² The Chinese government did not register a formal protest before Japanese officials until September 1996, when a group of Japanese right-wing nationalists landed on the islands to repair a damaged lighthouse and when one of the Hong Kong activists drowned while trying

to swim to the islands two weeks later. But even then, the government was determined to prevent public protests or anti-Japanese demonstrations from taking place, partly because it was afraid that the turmoil might scare away valuable Japanese investment and because the government may lose control of the protests.¹⁵³ A nationwide anti-Japanese protest did break out in 2005, but it was mainly caused by Japan's controversial revision of its historical textbook, not because of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. The territorial dispute did not trigger a nationwide anti-Japanese demonstration until October 2010, when a Chinese fishing boat collided with Japanese Coast Guard vessels near the islands and its crew was detained. In Fall 2012, a larger protest broke out when Japanese right-wing nationalists landed on the islands, and the Japanese government "nationalized" the islands by purchasing them from their private owner, who was never identified. The 2012 protest was comprised of demonstrations in over eighty-five Chinese cities and included the smashing and looting of Japanese restaurants, vehicles, and products.¹⁵⁴ In one infamous incident, a protestor smashed the skull of the owner of a Japanese car in Xi'an.¹⁵⁵

So why did the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute not create large anti-Japan demonstrations in China until 2010? The direct causes of the demonstrations were Japanese provocations, such as the landing of right-wingers and the "nationalization." But Japanese actions from the 1970s to 1990s were not vastly different from actions in recent years, yet the Chinese government was determined to discourage any public protest on this issue. By contrast, in Fall 2012, the government "was complicit in tolerating" the demonstrations and fanned popular anger by providing sympathetic media coverage to the protestors.¹⁵⁶ This inconsistency should therefore mainly be explained by China's domestic motivations, and the government's desire to instigate anti-Japanese nationalism as a diversion could be a reasonable explanation.

It is important to realize that China's recent state-encouraged public upheaval about the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute took place within the context of its assertive military actions in its maritime vicinity and was part of the government's efforts to increase the region's prominence. Seth Cropsey, former Deputy Undersecretary of the U.S. Navy under both Reagan and George H.W. Bush, clearly believes that Chinese actions in recent years have been more assertive than

before. Cropsey cites Chinese standoffs with Japan around the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, its evictions of Philippine fishing boats from the Scarborough Shoal in 2012, its announcement of the Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) that covers the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands in November 2013, and its placement of an oil rig this May in the disputed Parcel Islands with Vietnam as signs of this new, systematic assertiveness, compared to China's isolated provocations in the past.¹⁵⁷ Specifically regarding the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, China made about 200 incursions into the airspace of the islands in 2013 that caused Japanese fighter jets to scramble about 300 times, compared to just two incursions in 2011.¹⁵⁸ Taking into account the state's heavy emphasis on contemporary China's suffering of external bullying and Japan's atrocities, it is self-explanatory why China's recent assertiveness both in rhetoric and actions would win domestic support for the government. The Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute is not an isolated diversion, but is instead the most prominent part of a series of issues that have diversionary effects.

Could China's growing maritime assertiveness, especially in regard to the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute, be explained through a realist model? The answer is affirmative. Both the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands' strategic importance and the shifting balance of power in East Asia contribute to the rising tension between China and Japan. The islands possess significant geopolitical value that neither China nor Japan can afford to overlook. Japan is afraid that if the islands are controlled by China, the latter will use it as a platform to monitor U.S. and Japanese military activities near Okinawa, while China sees the control of the islands as necessary to break the first island chain (which links South Korea, Okinawa, Taiwan, and the Philippines) to access the Pacific Ocean for its fledgling blue water navy.¹⁵⁹ Similarly, Dr. Arthur Herman, an East Asian specialist at the Hudson Institute, regards the islands as "potential choke points for threatening China's maritime security" like the Malacca Strait.¹⁶⁰ In the waters surrounding the islands there are also large amounts of oil and gas reserve, not a small allure given the two economic powerhouses' gigantic demand for energy and their heavy reliance on imports. Finally, China and Japan both claim a 200-mile wide EEZ, which includes the islands. Although a successful claim on the islands will not automatically lead to the recognition of their EEZ claims, there is

no doubt it can at least strengthen their respective positions.¹⁶¹ Considering that both China and Japan have maritime disputes with other countries in Asia, the outcome of the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute can have linkage effects beyond the East China Sea.

The changing dynamics of the balance of power in Asia has also toughened China's actions. Whereas during Deng's era and Jiang's era the need for continuing Japanese investment was a major factor as to why they played down the territorial dispute in the East China Sea, most clearly expressed in Deng's slogan "set aside dispute and pursue joint development", today, China no longer attaches the same economic importance to Japan. China surpassed Japan in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2010, and many predict it will surpass the U.S. in the not-too-distant future.¹⁶² Although Japan still remains an important market for Chinese exports, China no longer depends on Japanese investment for economic growth while more and more countries in Asia (including Japan) find China as their most important economic partner. China's supreme economic status in Asia provides it more leverage in dealing with neighboring countries in maritime disputes. The growing strength of the PLA diminishes the deterrence effects of U.S. forces in Japan as well. To summarize, the Chinese government clearly did not create the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute out of thin air, nor has it intensified its claim over the islands just for the purpose of diversion. Instead, realist explanations are capable of explaining more hawkish Chinese behaviors.

Nevertheless, one cannot downplay the role of nationalism in the dispute nor deny the fact that the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute serves a diversionary purpose. As shown in Manicom's work, China and Japan have engaged in negotiations about the EEZ dispute and the joint development of the oil field in the East China Sea before and reached agreements. Therefore, as crucial as the energy potential is, there should be room for diplomatic negotiations and no reason for the two to treat the dispute as a zero-sum game. As for the islands' strategic importance, it is insufficient to raise the tension to the level in recent years by itself. If the islands were of utmost geopolitical interest to China, then why didn't the Chinese government formally protest Japanese actions until the 1990s and discourage civil demonstrations until 2010, while Chinese outside of Mainland China have conducted civil actions since the 1970s? Would it not be advan-

tageous to the PRC government if it could show the world that its people genuinely and strongly support its claim? Similarly for Japan, if it is so afraid that the PRC-controlled islands will pose an extremely serious security threat, then why has it not installed any military facilities on the islands beside a lighthouse? Rather than just looking at the dispute through the geopolitical prism, one should also consider the role of domestic politics in deteriorating the stability of the region.

Since Japan occupies a central antagonistic role in the patriotic education campaign and the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute frequently appears in the press, it is no longer possible to downplay the issue in China. Together with more hawkish rhetoric, often tolerated by the state, nationalistic sentiments rose to a high level in China, culminating in the nationwide anti-Japanese riot in 2012. Because gaining the control of Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands is also a goal that appeals to all sections of Chinese society, the government benefits from acting tough vis-à-vis Japan to keep this issue an ongoing spectacle. Even if the Chinese government wants to reach a compromise with Japan, the nationalistic public and the commercialized media would guarantee another legitimacy crisis for the state for capitulating to Japan.¹⁶³ As the International Crisis Group states in their report, backdoor diplomacy is no longer feasible due to domestic pressures in China. Cropsey also thinks that nationalism "heated up the degree [of the dispute] a lot" more than if the dispute were just about geopolitics.¹⁶⁴

VI. THE DIAOYU/SENKAKU DISPUTE: COMPARISON, AND CONCLUSION

What does the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute have in common with the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis and the Falklands War, and what can such a comparison tell us about the current dispute and the broader narration of a rising China? The comparison exposes the danger of China's overplay of nationalism, highlights the need for a crisis-management mechanism between China and Japan, and questions the traditional wisdom of a rising China bidding for regional hegemony in Asia. The Second Taiwan Strait Crisis serves as a reminder that China has a precedent of deliberately creating tensions in the region for domestic political purposes. The shelling of Jinmen was not about taking over the islands, but about helping Mao launch his radical GLF movement because the

crisis could “mobilize the people and to re-create the revolutionary fervor of the civil war and Korean War days.”¹⁶⁵ It is interesting to observe that, in the eyes of the PRC leaders, both the Jinmen Islands and the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands carry tremendous domestic political significance, since they both evoke the public’s “nationalist pride and profound victim mentality.”¹⁶⁶ The Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute is viewed in China as an unsettled historical issue and an ugly legacy of Japanese colonialism, and just like the Jinmen Islands, it can arouse nationalism by reminding the Chinese people of unfinished business with its enemy.

One can find many common features shared by both the Falklands War and the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute. Both China and Argentina are challengers to the existing status quo, and both the Falklands and the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands have strong appeals to every section in their respective societies. Nationalism, instead of the islands’ geopolitical or natural resources values, is the core of the disputes that prevents Argentina and China from reaching an agreement with Britain and Japan, respectively. Both China and Argentina seized this opportunity to create diversionary spectacles, heating up nationalism sentiments domestically to draw the public’s attention away from their legitimacy crisis. However, by doing so, both governments face increasing public pressure against any backdoor negotiations or diplomatic compromises. Just as Argentine diplomats have complained to their British counterparts before the war that domestic pressure, reinforced by nationalistic media, had created tremendous difficulties for them to compromise, so did the Chinese Foreign Ministry in withstanding more and more public backlash. Shirk recalls that once a Foreign Ministry official told her that the Ministry had received mails with calcium pills in them from ordinary citizens who want them to have more “backbone” in handling foreign relations.¹⁶⁷ The strong anti-Japanese mentality of the Chinese public, as represented by the 2012 nationwide riot, has basically made any secret negotiations impossible because a leak of such actions would create another legitimacy crisis.

Radical actions taken by zealous individuals are capable of escalating tensions in a very short period of time. As detailed before, “Operation Condor” deteriorated regional stabilities and the prospect of diplomatic solutions soon after it took place, yet its

conductors were treated as heroes in Argentina. Likewise, attempted landings on the disputed islands by Chinese activists and the arrest of a Chinese fishing boat captain by Japanese Coast Guard in the islands’ surrounding waters sparked waves of anti-Japanese protests in China that worsened the already fragile Sino-Japanese relations.

More importantly, the Chinese government today faces a similar dilemma the Argentine junta faced before 1982—inability to either reform or repress. The Chinese government has attempted to cleanse out corrupt officials, but because of the lack of an independent judiciary system and little oversight in rural areas, the government cannot systematically address the corruption problem. Popular anger ignited by rogue law enforcement agents and officials are likely to continue in the future. Furthermore, the government will not possibly comply with the growing demand that there should be an end to the one-party system. State media has frequently defended the one-party system as absolutely necessary for China.¹⁶⁸ It is equally hard to imagine that, in case another Tiananmen-like mass pro-democratic movement breaks out, the government will resort to the hardline response it took in 1989. This is not because the state lacks resources to suppress or does not have the authority to use its military forces for domestic suppression, but because the consequences of doing so will be much greater than they were two decades ago. In the age of the Internet, social media, and instant message software such as WeChat and QQ, events like the Tiananmen crackdown will be known by the entire nation and the world before the government issues a blackout. A violent crackdown may spark a more serious legitimacy crisis that the government is trying to avoid, and it can send a very negative message to Taiwan and other countries worrying about the rise of China, destroying China’s “peaceful rise” image that its leaders have tried hard to maintain. Diversion, therefore, becomes an increasingly attractive option for the Chinese state.

Surely, there are many differences between the Falklands War and the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute. British population inhabited the Falklands Islands, and therefore their wishes to stay within Great Britain figured prominently in the dispute; the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands are uninhabited and “self-determination” plays no role in the dispute. China’s legitimacy crisis is considerably less severe than the one faced by

Galtieri's junta: the economy, albeit slowing down, is still performing reasonably well, and in the near future, there is little possibility (though not impossible) that any mass incidents will be similar in scale to the Tiananmen movement. The Chinese government is, at least for now, determined to avoid a war in East and South China Sea, whereas the Galtieri junta felt little danger in occupying the Falklands. The Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands also possess more geopolitical and natural resources value than the Falklands do.

Still, there are some salient lessons to be learned from the three cases. First of all, a comparison between the Falklands War and the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute highlights the danger of China's overplay of nationalism. After about two decades of patriotic education campaign, anti-Japanese sentiment in China is already hard to ameliorate and can be quickly ignited by another incident between China and Japan. Just as Anglo-Argentine economic relations did not prevent the two from going to war in 1982, one should not expect that the close Sino-Japanese economic ties will stop them from fighting over the uninhabited rocks in East China Sea. Abe clearly realized the danger when he warned in January 2014 that "China and Japan were in a similar situation to Britain and Germany before 1914," who went to war with each other in spite of close economic ties.¹⁶⁹ More worrisome is the prospect that the territorial dispute can create a dominant and uniform social discourse in China. The prevalent anti-Japanese rhetoric may silence any members of society who hold doubts about the importance of the dispute over other social problems. As examined in the Falklands War section, the political pressure created by the Falklands lobbies in Britain restrained the British government from reaching a deal with Argentina. The Chinese government is also less likely to reach an agreement with Japan if it perceives the social discourse that it helped to create in the first place as genuine wishes of the people.

Another potential hazard of China's overplaying nationalism is that a diversionary action will look more and more attractive in the eyes of the government in the future. China's steady and rapid economic growth has kept the people generally content about the existing political system. However, if the Chinese economy slows down in the future (and there are already signs of it), latent social issues will rise to the surface, and there are bound to be more people cast-

ing doubt on the government's legitimacy. By then, an act of assertiveness around the disputed islands will become an alluring option both to boost the public's support and to buy time for the government to solve its domestic crisis. This scenario is all the more possible considering that it is the CCP that controls the PLA, meaning the Party could use the military as a last-ditch effort to save its ruling status. In a meeting with military personnel in November 2014, President Xi reaffirmed that the Party has "absolute leadership" over the military.¹⁷⁰ Granted, this is a distant possibility, but it is still worthwhile to keep it in mind when predicting China's economic and political situation in the future.

The second lesson is the need to establish a crisis-management mechanism among China, Japan, and the U.S. with focus on the East China Sea. As shown by the Falklands dispute and by multiple instances in the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute, provocative actions taken by activists can deteriorate regional stability and create political turmoil rapidly. But since it is hard to keep track of all the activists' plans, China and Japan could enhance their communication mechanism so that they can keep the malicious influence of these incidents to a minimum. Chinese activists who are arrested by Japanese Coast Guard should be quickly repatriated back to China or Taiwan, instead of sitting for trial in Japan. In the long term, Japan should also discourage its activists from landing on the islands because such actions might trigger acts of revenge from Chinese activists. The United States must be ready to deal with potential incidents between China and Japan at any time. By getting first-hand information about the incidents, the U.S. can serve as a mediator to calm down the tension. When politically feasible, the U.S. should attempt to restrain Japanese provocative actions, such as the infamous visits to the Yasukuni shrine. Whenever Japanese officials visit the shrine, China and South Korea will express their outrage, and such visits will only worsen Japan's image in Asia. Stopping the visits or at least making them non-official, can eliminate a major sore point in Sino-Japanese relations.

Last but not least, a study of the three cases provokes second thoughts on the traditional wisdom that a rising China equals Chinese dominance in Asia. As prominent scholar David Shambaugh notes, "a mini-industry of 'China rise' prognosticators has emerged over the past decade" that argues "the China

juggernaut is unstoppable...¹⁷¹ One of the prognosticators is the structural (or offensive) realist John J. Mearsheimer. Mearsheimer holds that, “the best way for any state to ensure its survival is to be much more powerful than all the other states in the system, because the weaker states are unlikely to attack it for fear they will be soundly defeated.”¹⁷² Since it is impossible for China to become a global hegemon (because of U.S. power), China will “try to dominate the Asia-Pacific region much as the United States dominates the Western Hemisphere” at the cost of its neighboring countries and the United States, making its peaceful rise impossible.¹⁷³

However, none of China’s actions today have been as nearly provocative as the shelling of the Jinmen Island in 1958, and the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis reminds people today that China has a history of intentionally creating tensions in Asia for domestic purposes. Mao Zedong explicitly announced during the crisis that the “Western Pacific belongs to the people of the Western Pacific,” establishing China’s own model of the Monroe Doctrine.¹⁷⁴ China, however, only supported this doctrine in rhetoric without any serious attempt at execution. By comparing the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute with the Falklands War, it is also clear that domestic politics serve as strong incentives for China to act tough abroad. Consequently, China watchers should keep China’s domestic political dynamics in mind before concluding that China is aiming to become a hegemon. A classical realist approach, instead of structural realism, should be a better candidate in guiding future China policies. As Jonathan Kirshner claims, “classical realism also places great emphasis on politics, domestic and international, and even considers the role of things like ideas, norms, and legitimacy.”¹⁷⁵ While acknowledging China’s rising power, it is also vital to realize its weakness at home and the limits of its power so that the world can engage with China peacefully. Mearsheimer’s approach “is suspect (at best) in its logic, handcuffed by the limits of its structuralism, and, ironically, rooted in utopianism—an attempt to reshape the world as one would like to see it, rather than respecting the realities of power.”¹⁷⁶ Therefore, structural realism and the hostile policy it calls for will only create a self-fulfilling prophecy that can further destabilize East Asia. What the world, and especially the United States, should do is directly address China’s nationalism and discuss the dangers of

it directly with the Chinese leadership while taking a non-confrontational approach. Otherwise, a war between China and Japan, two strong naval powers, in the geographically important East China Sea will bring many more casualties and unpredictable political crisis than the Falklands War did in 1982.

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